

LOCAL ACTORS IN TOP-DOWN  
IMPLEMENTATION OF CURRICULAR REFORM IN  
BENIN'S PRIMARY EDUCATION SYSTEM

Akimi Yessoufou

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# Local Actors in Top-Down Implementation of Curricular Reform in Benin's Primary Education System

De rol van lokale actoren bij de top-down-  
implementatie van de curriculumhervorming  
in het basisonderwijs in Benin

## Thesis

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*Dedication*

To my father, late El-Hadj Imam Saïbou Y. Okoro



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## Acronyms

ABC	Appui Budgétaire non-Ciblé (Non-Project Assistance)
ACCT	Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique (Cultural and Technical Cooperation Agency)
ANR	Assemblée Nationale Révolutionnaire (Revolutionary Parliament)
AOF	Afrique Occidentale Française (French West Africa)
BID	Banque Islamique de Développement (Islamic Development Bank)
BIEF	Bureau d'Ingénierie en Education et en Formation (Think-tank in Education and Training)
CAIESG	Certificat d'Aptitude à l'Inspection de l'Enseignement Secondaire Général (Certificate of Secondary School Inspectorate)
CEP	Certificat d'Etude Primaire (Primary School-Leaving Certificate)
CFA	Communauté Financière Africaine (African Financial Community)
CFPEEN	Centre de Formation des Personnels d'Encadrement de l'Education Nationale (Training Centre for Educational Supervisory Staff)
CGNPE	Cellule de Généralisation des Nouveaux Programmes d'Etudes (Generalization Unit of the New Curricula)
CLEF	Children's Learning and Education Foundation
CNER	Conseil National de l'Education et de la Recherche (National Council of Education and Research)
CONFEMEN	Conférence des Ministres de l'Education des pays ayant le Français en partage (Conference of Ministers of Education from French-speaking countries)
CP	Conseiller Pédagogique (Pedagogic Counsellor)

CRS	Catholic Relief Service
CSTB	Confédération Syndicale des Travailleurs du Bénin (Confederation of Benin Workers' Unions)
DEC	Direction des Examens et Concours (Directorate of Examinations and Testing)
DEP	Direction de l'Enseignement Primaire (Directorate of Primary Education)
DIP	Direction de l'Inspection Pédagogique (Directorate of Pedagogical Inspection)
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ED	Education and Development
EFA	Education For All
EPT	Education Pour Tous (Education For All)
EQUIPE	Equity and Quality in Primary Education
FACEEN	Front d'Action Commun des Elèves et Etudiants du Nord (Union of Students from the North)
FENAPEB	Fédération Nationale des Associations des Parents d'Elèves du Bénin (National Federation of Parent- Teacher Associations)
FNUAP	Fonds des Nations Unies pour la Population (United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA)
GER	Gross Enrolment Rate
IBE	International Bureau of Education
IFESH	International Foundation for Education and Self-Help
INFRE	Institut National pour la Formation et la Recherche en Education (National Institute for Teacher Training and Educational Research)
INIREF	Institut International de Recherche et de Formation (International Institute of Research and Training)
JBR	Jeunes Bacheliers Révolutionnaires (Revolutionary High School Graduates)
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
JIR	Jeunes Instituteurs Révolutionnaires (Revolutionary Youth Teachers)
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MEMB	Ministère des Enseignements Maternel et de Base (Ministry of Kindergarten and Basic Instruction)

MEMGTP	Ministère des Enseignements Moyens Général Technique et Professionnel (Ministry of Lower Secondary, Technical and Vocational Instruction)
MEN	Ministère de l'Education Nationale (Ministry of National Education)
MENs	Ministères en charge de l'Education Nationale (All the Ministries in Charge of National Education)
MENRS	Ministère de l'Education Nationale et de la Recherche Scientifique (Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research)
MEPS	Ministère des Enseignements Primaire et Secondaire (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Instruction)
MESRS	Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche Scientifique (Ministry of Higher Instruction and Scientific Research)
METFP	Ministère de l'Enseignement Technique et de la Formation Professionnelle (Ministry of Technical Instruction and Vocational Training)
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPE	Nouveaux Programmes d'Etudes (New Curricula)
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OIF	Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (Francophone International Organization)
ORE	Observatoire des Réformes Educatives (Observatory of Education Reforms)
PAGE	Projet d'Appui à la Gestion de l'Education (Education Management Support Project)
PAM	Programme Alimentaire Mondial (World Food Programme)
PASEB	Projet d'Appui au Secteur de l'Education de Base (Basic Education Support Project)
PASEC	Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Educatifs de la CONFEMEN (Analysis Programme of CONFEMEN Education Systems)
PCB	Parti Communiste du Bénin (Communist Party of Benin)

PCD	Parti Communiste du Dahomey (Communist Party of Dahomey)
PI	Programmes Intermédiaires (Transition Curricula)
PRPB	Parti de la Révolution Populaire du Bénin (Party of Benin's Popular Revolution)
PRSC	Poverty Reduction Support Credit
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
RANV	Réponse Active Non Verbale (Total Physical Response)
SNIEPD	Syndicat National des Inspecteurs de l'Enseignement du Premier Degré (National Union of Kindergarten and Primary School Inspectors)
SYNACOPEMP	Syndicat National des Conseillers Pédagogiques des Enseignements Maternel et Primaire (National Union of Kindergarten and Primary School Pedagogic Counsellors)
SYNAEP	Syndicat National de l'Enseignement Primaire (National Union of Primary Instruction)
SYNAEPRIB	Syndicat National des Enseignants du Privé du Bénin (National Union of Private School Teachers)
SYNAES	Syndicat National des Enseignants du Secondaire (National Union of Secondary School Teachers)
SYNAPRIM	Syndicat National des Enseignements Public Primaire et Maternel (National Union of Public Kindergarten and Primary Instruction)
SYNECOB	Syndicat National des Enseignants Communautaires du Bénin (National Union of Community Teachers)
SYNEMP	Syndicat National des Enseignements Maternel et Primaire (National Union of Kindergarten and Primary Instruction)
SYNERAPE	Syndicat National des Enseignants Reversés ou en cours de Reversement en Agent Permanent de l'Etat (National Union of Teachers in Transition to Civil Service)
TBC	Taux de Connaissance de Base (Basic Knowledge Rate)
UGEED	Union Générale des Elèves et Etudiants du Dahomey (General Union of Dahomey Students)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

UNEB	Union Nationale des Etudiants du Bénin (National Union of Benin's University Students)
UNSEB	Union Nationale des Scolaires et Etudiants du Bénin (National Union of Benin's Students)
UNESCO	United Nations Education Science and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSTB	Union Nationale des Syndicats de Travailleurs du Bénin (National Federation of Workers' Trade Unions)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development



## Abstract

Since the 1990 Jomtien Conference on Education for All, basic education in developing countries has attracted growing attention, both globally and domestically. Many policies have been initiated to improve educational access, quality and equity. While the accrued interest in education has followed a certain rationality, context-specific realities have nonetheless imposed different turns on the planned interventions. An actor-oriented approach to policy study offers the opportunity to uncover how grassroots actors from the periphery unpack, transform and domesticate globally promoted education policies.

Using an actor-oriented approach, the current study sets out to examine policy in practice. It focuses on grassroots actors in the implementation of a competency-based curricular reform in Benin's primary education system. In Benin, the development promise attributed to the new curricular paradigm was quickly contradicted by considerable resistance from grassroots actors. Although opinions converged on the failure of the school system to yield satisfactory learning outcomes for students despite the unprecedented nature of the reform policy, actors in the system diverged on the probable causes of this shortcoming. The bone of contention in the debate was the new curricula, which had been initiated to improve Benin's school system but instead came to exemplify problems of ownership and appropriation at the grassroots level.

Bottom-up implementation scholars and normative discourse state unequivocally that front-line actors' ownership and appropriation of planned measures are prerequisites for the effective implementation of public policy. In this light, the current study examines the policy debate on the curricular reform in Benin to explore how the controversy affected implementation of the education policy. Set in the tradition of actor-oriented policy studies, the research follows a qualitative design, combining the techniques of extensive fieldwork, interviews, focus-group discussions, direct observations, documentary investigation and analytic induction.

A retrospective view of Benin's major education reforms since independence reveals that education policy has served as a double-edged sword to break or maintain political stability. Resistance to the first education policy contributed to the demise of the Presidential Council in 1972. Thereafter, the military junta legitimated its power seizure by introducing an egalitarian reform of the school system. The Marxist-inspired policy succumbed to the democratic transition in 1990 that sealed the fate of the military regime. Against this historical background, the current study found the latest education reform to be primarily externally driven, rather than fulfilling an urgent domestic need.

Empirically, the study draws data from four school districts in southern Benin to shed light on the structure of local actors' interactions with the curricular reform. Starting from the dichotomy of pro-reform and anti-reform actors, the author locates actors on a spectrum with five gradations ranging from policy advocacy to resistance. The actors spectrum is the result of analytic induction of grassroots actors' attitudes and arguments on the policy reform. 'Loyalty' is the strongest gradation of policy commitment and conviction, with 'opposition' at the far end of the spectrum; 'satisficers', 'conformists' and 'conservatives' are situated in-between. The constellation of actors along the spectrum indicates a policy paradox: actors who are more distant from the classroom generally demonstrate greater learned advocacy for the curricular reform, whereas classroom practitioners tend to exhibit resistance. Whereas educational policy convergence contributes to policy advocacy, resistance is a function of three sets of factors: contextual constraints, disappointing outcomes and the contagion effect. The study found resistance to be legitimate on the grounds that the innovative curricula facilitated grade inflation, which partly explains students' underperformance.

Satisficers' adaptation of the sophisticated curricular paradigm suggests that the reform was premature and is still in transition, pending the establishment of 'soft' enabling conditions, such as teacher training, instructional leadership and a sustained culture of school-level professional development. While 'hard' enabling conditions, such as infrastructure, textbooks, libraries and laboratories are necessary, this study maintains that they should not be provisioned at the expense of the required soft ingredients.

Key words: curriculum, implementation, local actors, policy resistance, Benin

*De rol van lokale actoren bij de top-down-implementatie van  
de curriculumhervorming in het basisonderwijs in Benin*



## Samenvatting

Sinds de internationale UNESCO-conferentie over ‘onderwijs voor iedereen’ in 1990 in Jomtien is de belangstelling voor basisonderwijs in ontwikkelingslanden toegenomen, zowel in de betreffende landen als wereldwijd. Er zijn veel beleidsinitiatieven ontplooid ter verbetering van de toegankelijkheid, kwaliteit en gelijkheid van het onderwijs. Hoewel er een bepaalde gedachte ten grondslag lag aan de toegenomen belangstelling voor onderwijs, hebben contextgebonden omstandigheden in de praktijk een stempel gedrukt op de geplande interventies. Een actorgerichte benadering van beleidsonderzoek maakt het mogelijk te zien hoe perifere actoren aan de basis hun eigen invulling geven aan onderwijsbeleid dat wereldwijd wordt gepropageerd.

Dit onderzoek bekijkt vanuit een actorgerichte benadering hoe beleid in de praktijk wordt gebracht. Het richt zich op de rol van actoren aan de basis bij de implementatie van een competentiegerichte hervorming van het curriculum van het basisonderwijs in Benin. De hoge verwachtingen van het nieuwe curriculum voor de ontwikkeling van Benin werden al snel de kop ingedrukt door aanzienlijke weerstand van actoren aan de basis. Hoewel iedereen het erover eens was dat scholieren ondanks het ongeëvenaarde hervormingsbeleid geen bevredigende leerresultaten behaalden binnen het schoolsysteem, verschilden actoren in het systeem van mening over de mogelijke oorzaken hiervan. De pijlen in het debat waren gericht op het nieuwe curriculum dat was ingevoerd om het schoolsysteem in Benin te verbeteren, maar in plaats daarvan een voorbeeld werd van eigenaarschaps- en toe-eigeningsproblemen aan de basis.

Volgens deskundigen op het gebied van bottom-up-implementatie en volgens het normatieve discours is eigenaarschap en toe-eigening van geplande maatregelen door actoren in de frontlinie een vereiste voor een effectieve implementatie van overheidsbeleid. Dit onderzoek beziet het beleidsdebat over de hervorming van het curriculum in Benin vanuit dit

gezichtspunt om na te gaan hoe de controversie de implementatie van het onderwijsbeleid beïnvloed heeft. Zoals gebruikelijk bij actorgerichte beleidsstudies is het een kwalitatief onderzoek. Er is gebruikt gemaakt van de volgende technieken: uitgebreid veldwerk, interviews, focusgroepsdiscussies, directe observaties, onderzoek van schriftelijke bronnen en analytische inductie.

Als men terugkijkt naar de belangrijkste onderwijs hervormingen in Benin sinds de onafhankelijkheid, is onderwijsbeleid een tweesnijdend zwaard gebleken dat de politieke stabiliteit ofwel verstoord, ofwel gehandhaafd heeft. Weerstand tegen het eerste onderwijsbeleid heeft bijgedragen aan de val van de Presidentiële Raad in 1972. Daarna rechtvaardigde de militaire junta de machtsgreep door een egalitaire hervorming van het schoolsysteem in te voeren. Het op marxistische leest geschoeide beleid werd verlaten na de democratische overgang die in 1990 het lot van het militaire regime bezegelde. Dit onderzoek concludeert vanuit deze historische achtergrond dat de meest recente onderwijs hervorming voornamelijk om externe redenen is doorgevoerd, en niet vanwege een dringende binnenlandse behoefte.

De empirische data zijn verzameld in vier schooldistricten in het zuiden van Benin om in beeld te brengen hoe lokale actoren tegenover de hervorming van het curriculum staan. Vanuit de tweedeling pro-hervorming en anti-hervorming wordt de hervormingsgezindheid van actoren weergegeven op een spectrum met vijf gradaties, variërend van beleidsaanbeveling tot weerstand tegen het beleid. Dit spectrum volgt uit de analytische inductie van attitudes en argumenten van actoren aan de basis ten aanzien van de beleidshervorming. 'Loyaliteit' is de sterkste gradatie van commitment aan het beleid en 'oppositie' zit aan de andere kant van het spectrum. 'Satisficers', 'conformisten' en 'conservatieven' zitten daartussenin. De wijze waarop actoren over het spectrum verdeeld zijn wijst op een beleidsparadox: actoren die verder van het klaslokaal af staan hebben over het algemeen een positievere houding ten opzichte van de hervorming van het curriculum ontwikkeld, terwijl mensen die voor de klas staan vaak weerstand tonen. De convergentie van onderwijsbeleid draagt bij aan beleidsaanbeveling, terwijl weerstand voortkomt uit drie factoren: contextgebonden beperkingen, teleurstellende resultaten en het besmettingseffect. Uit het onderzoek blijkt dat weerstand legitiem is omdat de innovatieve curricula hebben bijgedragen aan cijferinflatie, wat het onderpresteren van leerlingen gedeeltelijk verklaart.

De aanpassing van het complexe curriculum door de satisficers wijst erop dat de hervorming prematuur was en in een overgangsfase verkeert tot aan 'zachte' noodzakelijke voorwaarden is voldaan, zoals training van leraren, educatief leiderschap en een duurzame cultuur van professionele ont-

wikkeling op schoolniveau. ‘Harde’ noodzakelijke voorwaarden, zoals infrastructuur, schoolboeken, bibliotheken en laboratoria zijn weliswaar onontbeerlijk, maar dit onderzoek concludeert dat deze voorzieningen niet ten koste mogen gaan van de vereiste zachte ingrediënten.

Trefwoorden: curriculum, implementatie, lokale actoren, weerstand tegen beleid, Benin.



# 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

Since the 1990 Jomtien Conference on Education for All, basic education in developing countries has attracted growing attention, both globally and domestically. Many policies have been initiated to improve access to education, as well as its quality and equity. While the interest in education has followed a certain rationality,<sup>1</sup> context-specific realities have nonetheless imposed different turns on the planned interventions. An actor-oriented approach to policy study offers the opportunity to uncover how grassroots actors from the periphery unpack, transform and domesticate globally promoted education policies. The current study explores the characteristics, attitudes and impressions of local actors towards a school curricular renewal modelled after the competency-based approach in a context of profound structural change in the Republic of Benin.

Like many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Benin undertook to reform its primary education system in the 1990s. Although diagnostic studies<sup>2</sup> revealed an obvious need to reform the school system, the availability of technical and financial assistance from the international community gave significant impetus to the reform initiative; a model case of development aid-dependent public sector reform in developing countries. While the comprehensive reform package included measures to improve access to education, quality of instruction and equity, the curricular component, commonly known as *Nouveaux Programmes d'Etudes* (NPE), aimed to establish a contemporary educational foundation for the school system by reshaping its goals, contents and pedagogy.

As for goals, this comprehensive transformation was to prepare schools to train the youth for self-employment, for work in the private sector and for jobs in public administration. Policy documents that pro-

file the ideal citizen define overall curricular goals as follows: ‘Graduates from primary schools should be able to manage their own lives and their environment (family, social, scientific, technologic, demographic and cultural); they should be able to cope with new situations whether formal or informal in national or international contexts’ (MEN 1994a: 8). As for the contents of instruction, the reform progressively replaced the existing content-based curricula with new curricula. Behavioural approaches to teaching, learning and assessment were replaced with constructivist equivalents. The curricular paradigm shift in Benin resulted in the integration of the former 22 school subjects into six fields of study with a specified number of transversal, transdisciplinary and disciplinary competences at each grade level. Pedagogically, the initiative was aimed to transform the roles of both teachers and students. Teachers were no longer to be mere knowledge transmitters, they would become facilitators; and students would be transformed from passive receptors to active learners. The policy entailed efforts to change teachers’ pedagogical beliefs and methods; it also required a change of pedagogical materials such as textbooks, workbooks and curricular guides.

Before embracing the competency-based curricula, Benin’s educationists hastily established transition curricula, known as *Programmes Intermédiaires* (PI) to replace the existing *école nouvelle* curricula. While they were designing and putting the competency-based curricula into practice, schools used the transition curricula. Once the generalization of the new curricula began in 1999, the transition curricula were gradually withdrawn.<sup>3</sup> In each successive year, the NPE progressively reached a higher grade, until 2005 when the innovative curricula covered all grades of primary school. The following year, the transition curricula were no longer to be used in the education system.

After a decade of implementing a top-down, system-wide education reform policy, the school system seemed to have improved its performance; Benin’s primary school system recorded progress in school infrastructure, gross enrolment rate, gender equity and diversification of sources of education delivery. As for the quality of instruction, the system benefited from more inputs, such as textbooks, workbooks, teachers’ manuals, teacher training and professional development. These were needed in order to accommodate the shift from the content-based to the competency-based curricula and the subsequent change from teacher-

centred to student-centred pedagogies. Table 1.1 highlights the progress of the primary school system over a 15-year period.

**Table 1.1**  
*Indicators showing progress in the primary school system*

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>2005</i>
Enrolment (%)	45	96
Promotion (%)	58	80
Repetition (%)	27	8
Dropout (%)	15	12
CEP Success (%)	62	99
Retention (%)	26	54
Students	624,778	1,318,140
Schools	2,984	5,722
Teachers	18,064	23,270

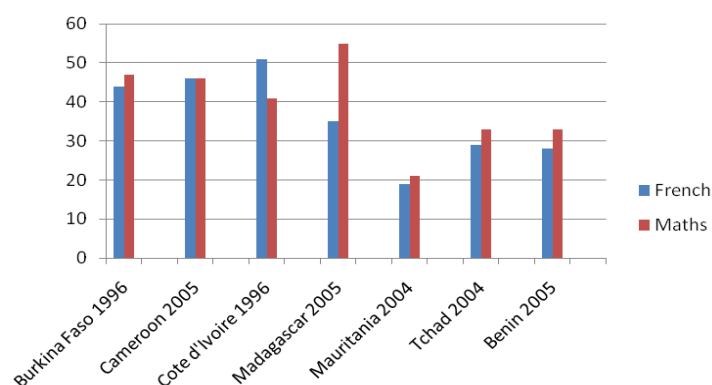
*Note:* The figure for CEP success rate in 1990 is actually for 1994. The number of teachers in 1990 is for 2000 and the number of students in 1990 is for 1994.

*Sources:* MENs (2006: 30-8); Pôle de Dakar (2007); Welmond (2002a: 88); UNESCO (2008: 289).

A peculiar situation arose, however, regarding Benin's primary school system. Despite the reform effort and the impressive records, parents, teachers and other actors lamented that most students had learned less. Many attributed this shortcoming to the reform initiative, especially the curricular component. Moreover, an international assessment of learning outcomes for second and fifth graders in French language and mathematics seemed to corroborate the commonsense perception that the unprecedented reform had not resulted in satisfactory learning outcomes for students. In 2005, Benin ranked sixth on average among the seven francophone countries in sub-Saharan Africa that were submitted to PASEC<sup>4</sup> evaluation (OIF and CONFEMEN 2005: 4-5; OIF et al. 2005: 88-95). Garnier (2008: 9) confirms this trend of students' underperformance, finding that 80 per cent of third and fifth graders in the sample submitted for assessment in French language and mathematics achieved below expected academic levels. USAID (2007: 12) came to similar conclusions assessing third, fourth, fifth and sixth graders in all subjects except physical education. In contrast to the positive image presented in Table 1.1, Figure 1.1 shows a dismal quality of instruction in Benin's

primary schools, comparing Benin's fifth graders' achievements in French and mathematics with those of their peers from other franco-phone countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Benin's fifth graders scored on average 28 out of 100 in French and 33 out of 100 in mathematics.

**Figure 1.1**  
*Cross-country PASEC scores for fifth graders (maximum grade is 100)*



Source: Adapted from OIF and CONFEMEN (2005: 5).

While actors in the school system agree on the system's inability to maximize learning outcomes for students, they profoundly diverge on the probable causes of this shortcoming. The Government of Benin and its technical and financial partners, relying on evaluation studies, attribute the problem to factors such as poor teacher qualification, lack of materials, insufficient infrastructure and equipment and teacher attrition (MENs 2006: 32; MEPS 2006a: 6). Unlike these central actors who spare the curricular reform of any culpability in the problem, many grassroots actors including classroom teachers, principals, inspectors, pedagogic counsellors and parents attribute the shortcoming to the curricular reform and demand its suspension. Actors within the system in general remain divided over the opportunity represented by the curricular reform. From top-level decision-makers down to grassroots actors, pro-reform and anti-reform actors are challenging one another on the worth of the new educational paradigm. Social tension triggered by denunciations, counter-denunciations, strikes, workshops and forums have fuelled

the controversy. In the short topsy-turvy life-span of the curricular reform, decision-makers, educators and other actors have debated and pondered the dilemma of whether to continue or just stop the initiative (Brathier 2005: 2, in Lannoye 2005: 9; Gnimassou 2005; Dovonou 2008a: 6).

The confusion is largely explained by two dimensions of curricular reform. First, school curriculum is a peculiar type of public policy given that schools never directly measure their stated goals. Rather, their objectives are futuristic. They can be achieved and evaluated only in the medium and long term in society at large: 'Will a high score on a mathematics exam mean success 10 years later? Will attaining a high standard of knowledge on a history exam mean that a student will be an effectively contributing citizen 15 years hence?' (Ornstein and Hunkins 2004: 329). An accurate empirical assessment would require examining whether a generation of students who graduated in the system had grown into independent, initiative-taking, competitive and democratic adults. Schools do assess students' learning outcomes at regular intervals to decide whether short-term instructional objectives are being met. For these assessments, school systems across the world have two options: standardized tests and classroom and school-level assessments. Benin's school system relies on classroom tests to assess learning outcomes until the sixth grade; at the end of primary education a national examination (CEP) is administered to certify successful completion of elementary schooling. It is a problem that no specific indicators of a school system address curriculum better than test scores and rates of promotion and repetition, even though these indicators measure short-term instructional aims rather than the achievement of overall curricular goals.

The second dimension of the confusion relates to the multiplicity of the variables that contribute to the quality of instruction and thus affect student performance. Brossard (2003), for instance, measured the effect of such factors as electricity, buildings, teaching materials and equipment on student success in Benin's CEP examination (in OIF et al. 2005: 20). Studies have also found factors such as distance to school, availability of tap water, women teachers, reasonable class size and accessibility of teaching materials to seriously impact student retention in schools (MENs 2006: 31). Garnier (2008) found, among other factors, teachers' qualification, the instructional time they dedicate to learners and the instructional leadership of school principals as determining factors of ef-

fective schools that maximize learning outcomes for students. Student performance is therefore a function of a combination of factors of which curriculum, teacher training, teaching materials and class size are instrumental.

As stated earlier, the curricular reform in Benin became a bone of contention among actors in the school system. The Government of Benin and its technical and financial partners commissioned a significant number of studies to evaluate the school system, after introducing the systemic comprehensive reform (Tesar et al. 2003; USAID 2005a, 2005b, 2007; Lannoye 2005; Garnier 2008). To varying degrees, these studies focused on implementation and impacts of the curricular reform, but never attributed the dismal quality of instruction and students' underperformance to the innovative curricula. Whereas these central actors relied on the evaluation studies, which spared the new approach of any direct responsibility for the disappointing outcomes, grassroots actors held the curricular reform responsible for students' underperformance. In view of the above-mentioned complexity of the curricular reform and the caution adopted by the central actors towards the attribution problem, an actor-oriented study of the implementation process should offer the opportunity to explore the extent to which students' underperformance relates to the curricular reform policy. Most importantly, by clarifying how the curricular reform survived the controversy, it addresses the problem of ownership and appropriation of the policy at the grassroots level. The emphasis of the current study is on the roles of grassroots actors, on the theoretical grounds that policy analysts consider grassroots actors' support and appropriation of planned change as prerequisites for effective implementation (Levinson and Sutton 2001: 2-3; Long 2001; Castiano 2009: 430-31). Curricularists in particular converge on the necessity to involve grassroots actors, especially teachers at the initiation stage, for an effective school curriculum change (Glickman et al. 2001: 392).

This introductory chapter provides background information about Benin and its education system followed by a justification of the research problem and conceptual clarifications. The objectives and research hypotheses pave the way for the formulation of the research questions. The final section outlines the organization of the rest of this thesis, after highlighting a few study limitations.

## 1.2 Benin and its Education System

Bordered on the north by Niger and Burkina Faso, on the south by the Atlantic Ocean, on the east by Nigeria, and on the west by Togo (Appendix 1), the Republic of Benin is located in West Africa with an area of 114,763 km<sup>2</sup>. Of its estimated population of 8,177,000 in 2007, 17 per cent is primary school age children, (Pôle de Dakar 2007). With literacy defined as the ability to write, read and comprehend a minimum of one statement in any language, the adult literacy rate was 35 per cent in 2005. In 2002, the population census counted 39 per cent of the population as urban and projected that 56 per cent would be urban by 2025 (MENs 2006: 14). Over one-third of the population lives in three of the country's twelve administrative provinces. The southern provinces of Atlantique and Ouémé have, respectively, 12 and 11 per cent of the population, and the northern province of Borgou has 11 per cent (Appendix 1). The 2002 census recorded an average population density of 59 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>, which varies significantly across the country; southern constituencies have higher population density than northern areas. The major ethnic groups include the Fon (39 per cent), the Adja (15 per cent), the Yoruba (12 per cent), the Bariba (nine per cent) and the Peuhls (six per cent) (République du Bénin 2003a: 44-5).

Benin is a low-income country, ranking 163<sup>rd</sup> on the UNDP's Human Development Index list of 177 countries in 2007 (Pôle de Dakar 2007); between 1990 and 2004, 31 per cent of its population lived on less than one dollar per day (UNESCO 2008: 249). Basic activities include subsistence agriculture and cash crop cultivation (cotton), which provide 75 per cent of all employment (Bierschenk et al. 2003: 58). As manufacturing industries are embryonic, banking, administrative and transit services make up the rest of activities in the formal sector. On the margins of the formal sector, Benin has the largest informal sector of the 27 African and Latin American countries for which data exist (Joekes and Houedete 2000: 5, in Bierschenk et al.: *ibid.*). Trans-border trading and micro-enterprises are at the heart of the informal economy and account for 50 per cent of total GDP (World Bank 1994). The highest economic growth rate ever registered was in 2002 with six per cent growth. Despite its promising economic performance, the country is international aid-dependent, especially for social services, which absorb two-thirds of international assistance.

Since independence from French colonisation in 1960, political instability has marked the country's political economy. Benin has been a multiparty democracy since 1990 after peacefully ending an 18-year military dictator-

ship inspired by Marxism-Leninism. Although the different arms of government (executive, legislative and judiciary) function relatively well based on the principle of separation of powers, the country has experienced serious threats to civil liberties and fair elections. Some scholars even prefer to speak of 'incomplete democracy' (Bierschenk et al. 2003: 59, 2006: 546), 'patronage democracy' or 'clientelism democracy' (Wantchekon 2003). Despite the 1990 democratization efforts, a thorough observation of the country's political economy indicates that 'basic elements of the political culture of the country remain unchanged. These basic elements are indicated by the terms neopatrimonialism, personalization, authoritarianism, regionalism and generationism' (Bierschenk 2009: 347). Decentralization became a reality with the first local election in 2002 and a controversial second one in 2008. Administratively, the country is divided into twelve provinces and 77 municipalities.

According to the 2003 education law, primary education is from age six to eleven (République du Bénin 2003b). A national examination confirms satisfactory completion of the six-year primary education cycle. Students attend secondary school only after passing this national exam. In 2005, 1,318,140 students attended primary school, which registered an annual growth of eight per cent. Of the 23,270 teachers in the public sector in 2005, 43 per cent were permanent civil servants, 23 per cent on temporary government contracts and 34 per cent on local community contracts (MENs 2006: 34).

Benin has a long history of centralized education, though theoretically decentralization of education dates back to the colonial period. In terms of curricula, all students at a given grade level throughout the country are to be instructed in the same official language (French), with the same content, using the same manuals and in line with the same pedagogical principles. Institutionally, different ministries of education have been in charge of formal education, depending on the political motivations of the day. From independence up to 1975, one ministry was in charge of education, youth and sports. Four ministries were in charge of education during the revolution period (1972-1989) as during the current regime (2007-2008). There are six provincial headquarters of education, each of which covers two provinces in which it supervises a number of school districts. Currently, 85 school districts administer local primary education throughout the country. Though primary education was declared free of charge in public schools in

2006, there is a current trend of expansion of private fee-paying schools, especially in urban areas.

### 1.3 Problem Justification

Differences among grassroots actors in attitudes and arguments about the contribution of the curricular reform to students' underperformance are the point of departure of the current study. By focusing on how local actors perceive and react to an education policy that has been inspired, designed and implemented in the global context of the Education for All (EFA) movement, the study critically contributes to the debate on educational policy convergence. From an implementation research perspective, it aims to uncover how development policies designed along technocratic principles yield certain sociological and political practices that turn out to challenge the causal theories of the interventions. In Benin, the curricular reform in particular has fuelled controversy, as opinions diverge on its contribution to the current situation of students' underperformance. But given that bottom-up implementation scholars and normative discourse increasingly converge on front-line actors' ownership and appropriation of planned change as a prerequisite for effective implementation, an actor-oriented implementation study should inform how the controversy affected the implementation process, and subsequently contributed to the decline in quality of education.

Various rationales underlie the research focus on grassroots actors. First, there is scant consideration of grassroots actors in policy analysis in developing countries. Following the long tradition of pioneers in implementation research, scholars who research public policy in developing countries have concentrated on the behaviour, perceptions, values and roles of top-level decision-makers, hardly alluding to end-beneficiaries and third parties (Grindle and Thomas 1991; Björkman and Mathur 2002; Björkman 1995; Galjart and Sylva 1995; Bangura 1995). The emphasis on political-administrative actors and top-level decision-making, however, does not preclude local actors from redefining, renegotiating, reshaping and transforming policy in ways often different from the technocratic rationality.

Inspired by bottom-up scholars and normative discourse, the study delves into the claim that policies lacking participation and ownership of local actors are less likely to be developed or sustained. Empirical evidence indicates that even though important decisions are taken at the top

level of the political-administrative hierarchy, local actors often make or break public action. The reason for focusing on the attitudes and roles of local actors stems from the specificity of public policy in developing countries. Generally, local actors are unaware of policy measures until the implementation stage. It is at this stage that all the bargaining and conflicts occur. A specialist in developing country policy studies described the problem as follows:

While in the United States and Western Europe, much political activity is focused on the input stage of the policy process, in the Third World a large portion of individual and collective demand making, the representation of interests, and the emergence and resolution of conflict occurs at the output stage (Grindle 1980: 15).

Next, the rationale for focusing on local actors stems from an interest in understanding how actors at the periphery perceived, treated and interacted with the paradigm of educational change in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s. Although the education crises of the late 1980s prompted individual nations to initiate education reforms, the international community nonetheless influenced this policy change by its commitment to world education culture (Bierschenk 2007: 271-78; Chisholm and Leyendecker 2008; Bianchini 2004: 43-7; Lange 2003; Resnick 2006: 173; Mundy 1998). From the 1988 World Bank policy study, *Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Policies for Adjustment, Revitalization and Expansion*, to the 1990 Jomtien Conference on Education for All, the 2000 Dakar Summit to evaluate the EFA goals, and the agenda of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a global push has favoured education reforms in developing countries in general and in African countries in particular. While this interest in education has triggered a series of evaluations, little is known about how local actors have interacted with these education reform programmes and how local initiatives are linked to global agendas. The limited implementation research available on the topic deals with top-level political-administrative actors, resources and contexts of policy execution (Moulton and Mundy 2002a: 8-9; Samoff et al. 2003). Concern for local actors in the policy paradigm only recently began to inspire research, with scholars establishing linkages between local debates and global discourses on education from a development aid perspective (Fichtner 2010) or from a teacher's perspective (Altinyelkin 2010).

The curricular reform in Benin is a good case to study the intricacies of how the local connects to the global and how local actors might react to a top-down system-wide education reform policy. At the inception of the reform was an education crisis that reached its peak in 1989 with the first invalidated academic year in the history of the country. As school may be considered a microcosm of society, the education crisis may be viewed as reflecting the social, economic and political crises the country was facing in the late 1980s. Resolution of the political crisis offered an opportunity to solve the education crisis. Thus, a series of conferences and gatherings were held to put the crisis in education on the political agenda. The National Conference in February 1990, the *Etats Généraux de l'Education* in October of that year, the Education Policy Framework document, action plans and the Education Round Table in 1997, all contributed to diagnosing the education system, recommending appropriate policy solutions, and designing and implementing ameliorative programmes.

Among the decisions taken, the curricular reform was at the heart of the effort to restructure education. It provided a blueprint for schooling the ideal citizen of a newly democratic country that had peacefully turned from its dictatorial past. Indeed, Benin's new political and economic contexts required a new type of citizen, one who was autonomous, intellectually and physically fit, capable of taking initiative and self-reliant. Policy documents portrayed this new type of citizen as a lifelong learner, respectful of humanity, society and the environment, of truth and democracy, a cooperative and critical thinker (MEN 1994a: 7-8). An international community willing to pay a reward for democracy supported Benin's effort to renew its education system. The 'bonus for democracy' (*prime à la démocratie*) aimed at stimulating other African countries to follow the Beninese model of peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy.

In 1994, the curricular reform became a reality in the form of pilot implementation in 30 schools throughout the country, five schools for each provincial headquarters of education. Initially, very few local actors knew about the reform before it became generalized in 1999; but with the generalization, controversy over the reform grew and spread. That controversy continues to this day, with advocates on the one side and opponents on the other. The current study aims to understand how this controversy is structured at the local level. Central to understanding the-

se local dynamics are the driving forces of each category of actors, their strategies and the way they have appropriated the policy. From a historical perspective, influential local actors have had a tradition of contesting all attempts to reform the education system in Benin since independence for different reasons. Despite this tradition of contesting education reforms, systematic study of the perceptions and reactions of local actors has begun only recently (Fichtner 2010).

This knowledge gap in the literature concerning the reform constitutes a major rationale for studying the role of local actors in advocating or opposing the curricular reform. Partly in response to the controversy about the reform, and following the scientific rationality behind their interventions, the Government of Benin and its technical and financial partners commissioned a series of internal and independent evaluation studies. Tesar et al. (2003) was the first to focus on learning outcomes of the reform for first and second graders in French language and mathematics. Although the study found teachers enthusiastic about the new approach, it nevertheless lamented the fact that ‘the pedagogical methods advocated by the [NPE] are hardly used by teachers who kept on teaching in a traditional way’ (ibid.: 19). The study attributed students’ underperformance to syllabus incoherence, insufficient teacher preparation and attrition. It raised the language problem of most students, who were unfamiliar with the French language before starting school. Although the evaluation had earlier identified the major problems related to the NPE, this study’s scope was limited by its exclusive focus on mathematics and French language skills and the fact that generalization was at an early stage in 2003.

In 2005, when the reform reached the terminal grade, USAID (2005a) assessed the institution’s various interventions in Benin’s primary education system and evaluated the curricular component from an implementation angle. Rather than treating learning outcomes for students as an outcome of the intervention, the study measured the actualization of intervention plans. Thus, in terms of input financing, it identified achievements such as the production of teaching materials including curricula in six fields of study, curricular guides for teachers, student assessment guides for teachers, training guides for teacher trainers, textbooks in mathematics and French language for all six grades and workbooks for first and second grades (USAIDa 2005: 13). The limit of this assessment lies in its comprehensive effort to document the various USAID inter-

ventions in the education sector (gender equity, curriculum, teacher training, adult education, HIV awareness, educational decentralization, management of the educational system, etc.). In so doing, it fails to capture local appropriation of the competency-based approach as well as learning outcomes for students. Upon completion of the countrywide generalization, and following the recommendations from Tesar et al. (2003), Lannoye (2005) evaluated the consistency and coherence of the multiplicity of documents produced during the curricular reform process. After examining the documents and interacting with grassroots actors with focus on pedagogical approaches, strategies and curricular contents, the study praised Benin's efforts, but most importantly suggested revisions to make contents simpler, evoking the metaphor of 'roofing' as the missing catalyst for the curricular reform to reach its full potential (ibid.: 6). Following a similar summative logic as the previous study, MEPS (2006a) evaluated the primary school system with a wider scope on the various reform initiatives since 1990. It assessed the inputs, the processes, the outputs and outcomes of the different interventions to improve access, gender equity and instructional quality. As a controversial policy, the curricular reform attracted particular attention on the part of the team of evaluators who used mixed methods to collect relevant data throughout the country. The study found that '60 per cent of respondents acknowledged the positive effect of the curricular reform on students' (ibid.: 95), and that 80 per cent were dissatisfied with students' reading performance. It attributed the mixed results to poor implementation, inadequate teacher training, poor communication, and inefficient distribution of materials.

Finally, an opinion poll by USAID (2005b) probed public perceptions about the curricular reform and the channels of information. It found that despite years of implementation, even teachers and parents were still poorly informed about the objectives, the contents and implications of the reform; on average, Beninese had developed a negative attitude towards the innovation. The press, mainly radio broadcasts, was the main channel of information for the common wisdom on the policy. The study found lack of communication to be the main cause of people's negative perception of the NPE. The survey recommended a communication plan. Yet, it requires more than communication to involve grassroots actors and laypersons and spur them to be proactive participants and owners of a reform defined as a public intervention. Beyond a

communication plan, it is important to identify the different trends among supporters and opponents of the NPE and find out what dynamics are at work. While these studies found weaknesses in the design and implementation of the reform and prescribed corrective measures, they barely engage with the policy debate at the grassroots level to explore how implementation of the curricular reform might have contributed to the perceived decline in student performance. Moreover, since the introduction of the corrective measures, even less is known about how the measures changed the perceptions and responses of actors at the local level.

Moulton et al. (2002), in *Education Reforms in Sub-Saharan Africa: Paradigm Lost?*, documented the implementation in the 1990s of education reforms in five sub-Saharan African countries from a comparative perspective. Benin is one of the country case studies with particular focus on the role of key political-administrative actors and their use of reform instruments to serve their political interests. However informative and innovative the study may be, the period covered for Benin (1991-1997) precludes a deep analysis of the dynamics of actors at the local level. In 1997, Benin had just begun implementation of the reform at the school-site level, though policy documents were already in place. New actors entered the policy scene when pilot projects and generalization took effect and parents started to appraise policy outcomes. While the analysis failed to cover the roles of local actors and their contributions to education policy, it has merit in that it places the wave of education reforms on the continent in the context of globalization and acknowledges the instrumental role of the international community in agenda setting and policy design. The study found the reforms in Benin to be overambitious and unrealistic in as far as the financial burden was concerned and it raised the problem of the financial sustainability of the reforms because of their dependence on foreign aid.

Recently, Fichtner (2010) examined the national controversy from the geopolitical perspective of aid intervention in Benin. While alluding to the amateurism in the policy process, calling Benin's experience of curricular reform 'a laboratory for education reform', the study wonders whether the national controversy is the result of the education sector being turned into 'a battlefield' when the United States stepped into a territory long conquered by the French. Yet, the geopolitical banner of the study provides limited room for understanding how the national con-

troversty is structured locally, as it gives priority to the voices of the national elite and development partners.

## 1.4 Concept Definition

### 1.4.1 Curriculum

Originally, curriculum comes from the Latin verb *currere*, meaning ‘to complete the course’ (O’Hair et al. 2000: 360). Though a commonsense definition of the term refers to the content of what educators intend to teach, curriculum takes on different forms and meanings. The plethora of definitions of ‘curriculum’ in the education literature converges in two major strands. An emerging group of educationists distinguish between ‘curriculum’ and ‘programmes of study’. As the guiding principles of the various choices made in the development of school programmes, the curriculum is prior to programmes of study, which relate to the actualization of curricular orientations (Jonnaert et al. 2007: 189; Jonnaert and Ettayebi 2007). While these scholars argue that such a distinction helps avoid confusion, those adopting a classic definition of the concept unite both the guiding principles and their actualization under the denomination of curriculum.

Taking a comprehensive approach, this study begins with the common definition of curriculum as ‘the content of instruction; what is intentionally taught to students in a district, school or classroom; the guides, books, and materials that teachers use in teaching students’ (Glickman 1985: 307). It adds to that the guiding principles and the formal as well as the informal processes of actualization of official orientations.

Curriculum is central to educational change because it implies fundamental changes in teachers’ and students’ patterns of behaviour. It also implies changes in parental and community expectations of schooling. More than inducing a change of behaviour, curriculum change requires alterations of established pedagogical beliefs and ideologies. For that reason, a shared vision of a given society about the purposes of education is central to curricular reform. Curricular choices are based on philosophies of life; a given philosophy of education corresponds to a particular format of curriculum for a desired school system (Rossow and Linda 2000: 90; Glickman et al. 2001: 396-97).

Predominant among the prevailing philosophies are essentialism, experimentalism and existentialism. A curricular format inspired by essentialism emphasizes the behavioural-objective approach to teaching, learning and assessment. From this perspective, what is to be learned is stated in behavioural terms. Regardless of students' contexts, teachers are required to define in advance all possible patterns of expected behaviour that students will display after a series of lessons and drills. Both teacher-centred pedagogy and objective-based curricula are inspired by the philosophy of essentialism. Experimentalism emphasizes the integration of interrelated activities and skills that a learner is supposed to develop. Student-centred pedagogy, competency-based curricula and problem-solving strategies are the major orientations and practices inspired by this curricular format. Finally, the philosophy of existentialism promotes a curricular format that is content-based: a list of sliced subject matters and concepts to be learned, without regard for relationships among them. Only the results count for this kind of curricular format; the teacher has discretionary power to decide which activities would lead to better results. While behaviourism inspires the education philosophies of essentialism and existentialism, constructivism is the philosophical basis of experimentalism. Despite this philosophical categorization imposed on the curricular phenomenon, classroom realities compel teachers to make combinations to serve the instructional purposes and situations of the moment.

Although the general public is typically unaware of the philosophical considerations underlying a particular curriculum, enlightened Beninese citizens did expect that the socio-political and economic directions that the country took in 1990 would require major changes in its education system. In fact, the curricular reform under study reflects an experimentalist philosophical orientation, due to its emphasis on the constructivist principle of 'learning by doing' and the value it accords to the socio-cultural environment of the learner in the learning process.

#### 1.4.2 Implementation

Implementation encompasses all that happens after a bill becomes a law, in the North American tradition of policy studies. It refers to all activities involving the execution of a piece of legislation, though implementation research also concentrates on such preceding processes as issue salience and agenda setting. In the current study, policy implementation is de-

defined as ‘the set of processes after the programming phase that aimed at the concrete realization of the objectives of a public policy’ (Knoepfel et al. 2007: 188).

Since grassroots actors at district and school-site levels play instrumental roles in the formulation and execution of curricular reforms in general, most scholarship on curricular reform recommends a bottom-up approach to this kind of public policy. When teachers, principals and executives at the school district level and, to some extent, community members and parents contribute to defining relevant curricular problems and collaborate to find solutions, the change is more effective and sustainable than when a curricular reform is imposed in a top-down process (McGinn 1998; Resnick and Resnick 1992; Sutton et al. 1993).

Transcending the classic dichotomy between top-down and bottom-up views of policy implementation, the current study’s perspective on implementation looks deeper into how local actors appropriate, adapt and transform structural top-down policy measures. Thus, it looks into both formal and informal processes as well as intended and unintended outcomes of public policy.

### 1.4.3 Local Actors

Theoretically, the concept of ‘policy actor’ refers to all individuals or legal entities that are directly or indirectly concerned with a policy, from its initiation to its sustainability. Scholars speak of ‘empirical actors’ in this broad sense. For analytical purposes this broad category is broken into public actors (officials, policy elites, bureaucrats) and private actors. Further classifications distinguish target groups, end-beneficiaries and affected groups (Knoepfel 2007: 39-61). Whatever the categorization applied, the term relates to individuals, institutions or social groups with the capacity for agency, for decision-making and for action (Long 1992: 22-3; Ramirez 1999: 110, in Nandigama 2009: 65). While all actors bargain for their interests, more influential actors seek to convince other actors so as to align the other actors’ interests with their own interests. The term local actors in the present study implies the existence of global actors who are not merely receivers or transmitters of a preconceived educational model but also actors whose agencies consist of producing and diffusing world educational models, thus creating the world education culture (Resnick 2006: 178).

Welmond (2002a) and other evaluation researchers amply documented the contributions of top-level political-administrative actors in the curricular reform of Benin at the meso and macro levels. Although Chapter 4 of this thesis reviews the policy roles of these top-level actors, the current research focus is more on the roles of local actors. The term 'local actors' refers to various individuals and groups of education stakeholders at the school district level who have some interest in supporting the curricular reform or opposing it. These categories are chief school district officers (who are inspectors), pedagogic counsellors and assistants, principals, classroom teachers, students, parents, local NGO activists and municipal authorities. Since Chapter 3 documents each of these categories of actors extensively, the current chapter suffices with a brief description of their expected roles in relation to policy.

The local education administration is hierarchically structured with inspectors as chief school district officers. As such, inspectors are local political-administrative actors who are expected to exercise technocratic and bureaucratic powers. Their main function is to coordinate the execution of central instructions and to supervise teachers, principals and pedagogic counsellors. Inspectors are supposed to promote change and, to that end, lead teachers and other stakeholders. But in the case of the curricular reform, a few inspectors are reported to have resisted the policy. Next in the local hierarchy are pedagogic counsellors whose main task is to assist inspectors in instructional supervision. As field workers, pedagogic counsellors are in direct contact with teachers and principals whom they train, monitor and supervise in their pedagogical zones. The curricular reform added pedagogic assistants to the supervisory staff. These are new personnel appointed by the international NGO IFESH to serve as change facilitators in school districts. They liaise with inspectors, pedagogic counsellors, principals and teachers to promote the new educational approach.

At the school-site level, principals and teachers are in daily contact with students to adapt change to school realities. While principals are appointed from among experienced teachers in the public sector, private school founders often serve as principals or delegate trustworthy teachers to assume this responsibility. Principals' main tasks are teaching, supervising teachers and managing school business. Next to principals are classroom teachers, who play an instrumental role in sustaining change. Teachers serve as the 'software' of school systems in any kind of educa-

tional change (Van Donge et al. 2002). Teachers attend in-service training aimed to allow them to implement the new approach. They thus constitute the target group whose behavioural change was supposed to benefit students.

While students constitute the end-beneficiaries in the policy chain, parents represent a third party. Indirectly affected, parents' responses to the reform reflect their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their children's schooling. Though a heterogeneous group, parents invariably complain that under the curricular reform they are no longer able to tutor their children at home and monitor their progress as before.

With decentralization, municipal authorities should now be influential in education policy. Yet being politicians, they prefer to assist schools in visible ways, such as providing of infrastructure, equipment and prizes for students' achievements.

The different types of actors are organized in unions, associations, political parties and interest groups that sometimes blur strict categorization. Only a micro-political study of schools could sort out all of the precise relationships among the different entities described.

#### 1.4.4 Public Policy

Theoretically, public policy relates to any government decision and decision-making process that addresses a collective problem politically defined as of public interest. But in practice, public action transcends decision-making and top-level actors to impinge on the worldviews, expectations, attitudes and perspectives of target groups and end-beneficiaries. This study unfolds from the position that scrutiny in policy analysis must go beyond hierarchical decision-making and top-level political-administrative actors. It thus transcends administratively oriented definitions of policy such as the following:

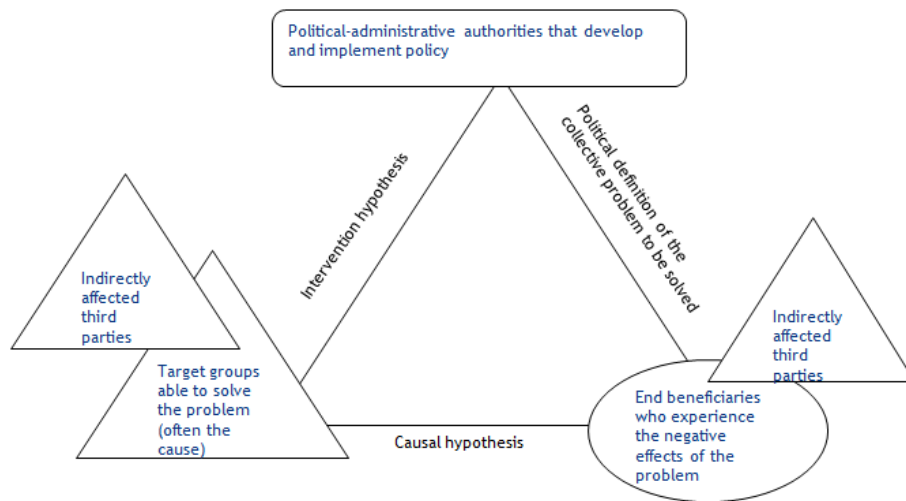
[Policy is a] series of intentionally coherent decisions or activities taken or carried out by different public – and sometimes – private actors, whose resources, institutional links and interests vary, with a view to resolving in a targeted manner a problem that is politically defined as collective in nature. This group of decisions and activities gives rise to formalized actions of a more or less restrictive nature that are often aimed at modifying the behaviour of social groups presumed to be at the root of, or able to solve, the collective problem to be resolved (target groups) in the interest of the so-

cial groups who suffer the negative effects of the problem in question (final beneficiaries) (Knoepfel et al. 2007: 24).

The aim here is to consider both formal and informal policy processes and to reflect on intended as well as unintended outcomes of policy. In short, policy is conceived as what exactly happens in a planned intervention to solve a collective problem.

This undertaking draws on the ‘triangle of actors’ as sketched below:

**Figure 1.2**  
*Triangle of policy actors*



Source: Adapted from Knoepfel et al. (2007: 57)

This integrative conceptualization of policy allows categorization and linking of the various actors. At the top of the triangle, the political-administrative actors or policy elites constitute the hierarchical decision-making body. In each of the two lower angles of the central triangle are, respectively, the target groups whose change of behaviour is instrumental in solving the problem and the end-beneficiaries whose conditions are supposed to improve as a result of the policy intervention. Indirectly affected actors make up third-party groups in the shadow of both groups

at the bottom of the central triangle. Third-party groups are individuals (or organizations representing their interests) who, though not directly targeted by the policy, see their individual or collective situations altered; they may perceive or experience policy intervention differently. Where third-party groups experience or perceive positive change, they qualify as beneficially affected third parties. Actors who perceive or experience negative change constitute the negatively affected third parties. These two sub-categories of actors tend to support or oppose policy based on their individual or collective interests, which may include satisfaction with the policy intervention. As a consequence, they form coalitions with the end-beneficiaries or with the target groups to preserve the status quo or to reshape the policy. Applying this model to a reform in a school setting, teachers qualify as the target group, students as end-beneficiaries, and parents as third parties. At the school district level, inspectors and pedagogic counsellors form the local policy elites.

### 1.5 Research Objectives, Questions and Propositions

The current study seeks to enter the national debate on the curricular reform with empirical evidence to better elucidate the perspectives of each group of protagonists. Specifically, four sets of goals are on the research agenda: (i) identify the local actors who favour the reform and those who oppose it by comparing their social, professional and political characteristics as well as their respective motivations; (ii) examine the sustainability of the curricular reform using empirical data related to local actors' degree of involvement, appropriation and ownership; (iii) build on existing documentation on the curricular reform by reflecting on the available output and outcome data (in this respect, the research expands on the study by Welmond (2002a), the commissioned evaluation studies, and other personal reflections that broadly analyse the attitudes, roles and decisions of top-level actors); and (iv) inform future education policies on the dynamics of advocacy and resistance by local actors. For this, it suggests ways to reduce, overcome or better manage resistance in future reforms.

With Benin's implementation of curricular reform, new pedagogical patterns of behaviour, practices and materials theoretically entered the professional life of teachers, students, and education supervisors. Likewise, parents' expectations of schooling were supposed to shift. Yet, while the policy intentions were homogenous and uniform, practice was

quite heterogeneous, with lots of variation depending on the actors, contexts and interests at stake. In order to capture some of these variations in policy practice, one question in particular needs to be answered with empirical data:

Why did the nationwide implementation of the curricular reform in Benin's primary education system result in division among its grassroots actors?

In order to appraise how the ambivalence in the current situation is locally structured, the study suggests that actors' cultural, political, corporatist, professional and socio-economic characteristics determine their individual or collective advocacy and opposition to the curricular reform. To confirm or disprove this proposition, empirical answers will be sought to the following series of questions:

- What historical, cultural, political, corporatist, professional and socio-economic factors determine local actors' support and favourable response to the curricular reform?
- Do pro-reform actors live in identical geographical areas (urban or rural), share any cultural heritage (language, level of education, values, and expectations of education), belong to the same political party (ruling party, opposition or neutral), militate in the same union, practice the same or similar professions, and belong to the same or similar age and status groups?
- Do different characteristics apply to those who oppose the reform?

Given that public policy implementation is also a cognitive process for local actors who interact variably with the policy, this study presupposes that policy-relevant knowledge shapes local actors' positions in the policy debate. More knowledgeable actors have authentic supportive or adverse responses whereas less knowledgeable actors strategically align with the enlightened ones or remain indifferent. Answers to the following questions should provide opportunity to confront this proposition with local actors' actual experiences:

- Why do pro-reform actors advocate and support the reform?
- What strategies do reform proponents use to facilitate change?
- Have reform proponents' perceptions and reactions shifted over time? What factors have determined their change of position?

- Why do anti-reform actors resist the reform and combat it? How has resistance contributed to improve or to weaken policy?
- What strategies do resisters use to inhibit change and maintain the status quo?
- Have resisters' perceptions and reactions shifted over time? What factors have determined any changes of position?

Since local appropriation and ownership of public policy is a prerequisite for policy sustainability, this study assumes that actors' satisfaction determines their advocacy of the competency-based approach whereas dissatisfaction triggers resistance. As a consequence, school communities where actors favour and promote change are more likely to obtain better school results than communities where actors are unfavourable towards change. By finding an answer to the following question, the study seeks to address this presupposition with empirical evidence:

- How has the curricular reform survived the constraints and resistance of grassroots actors and continued to be sustained as a national policy?

## 1.6 Research Limitations

Three sets of issues have challenged this research process: translation, lack of a students' perspective in the research design, and reliance on actors' narrated experiences rather than on systematic observation of classroom practices.

Translation occurred at two levels. Benin being a francophone country, most secondary data were originally in French. For research purposes, rendering them in English relied on the bilingual ability of the researcher. The second level of translation concerns primary data, particularly that for parents who speak only local languages. Reports were written in French first before being translated into English when necessary. While a few anthropologists perceive serious limitations in translating informants' views and prefer to quote original interviews alongside their translated versions, this study shuns this technique for redundancy, but tries to convey meaning as exactly as possible in instances of translation.

Methodologically, the research failed to directly involve students in the data collection process. Due to their young age (six to eleven years old) primary school students are not systematically targeted, though they

are the direct beneficiaries of the education reform policy. Based on the assumption that children's opinions may be easily influenced, unstable and unreliable, the study remedies this methodological weakness by targeting parents. As third parties, parents are in a good position to appraise the outcomes of the reform in terms of their children's progress or lack thereof. In addition, casual conversations with students and a close examination of students' test papers and copybooks compensated for this limitation. Students are included in the research indirectly, through the performance indicators that served as basis for many interpretations. Classroom assessments, standardized test scores and national examinations all contributed to the appraisal of official statements on students' achievement and progress.

The sample size is another methodological concern. Of the 24 focus-group discussions and about 80 interviews initially anticipated, 17 group discussions and 49 interviews actually took place due to the fact that rural school districts did not have all types of schools. However, the 17 focus-group discussions offered opportunity for exchanges with 246 parents in the various school communities (urban and rural; private, public and religious, high performing and less performing).

Finally, most of the primary data handled in the study rely on actors' narrated experiences. For a lack of systematic observation of classroom sessions, fieldwork consists of collecting actors' views on the reform and how they interact with it. Systematic observation of classroom sessions has the potential weakness of providing the observer with exemplary lesson plans and demonstrations which may completely differ from the daily classroom routine of teachers and students, as is often the case during teacher qualification examinations. As exploratory research, this study acknowledges that reliance on research participants' narrated experiences constitutes a serious limitation for which the study has tried to compensate with different qualitative research strategies that involve triangulation (diversification of actors and research sites), rapport building with research participants (frequent visits, clarification of objectives and the promise of confidentiality) and the techniques of key informant, direct observation and participatory observation.

## 1.7 Organization of Thesis Chapters

This thesis is structurally organized into eight chapters. Chapter 2 presents theoretical perspectives and methodological considerations. Chap-

ters 3 and 4 provide retrospective and contextual background on education reforms in Benin since independence. Chapter 3 documents the period before 1990, while Chapter 4 presents the political economy of the curricular reform. Chapters 5 and 6 present the empirical material related, respectively, to pro-reform and anti-reform actors. Chapters 7 and 8 consist of the analytical part of the study, providing an exposition, analysis, evaluation and synthesis of its empirical data.

Chapter 1 introduces the research problem and provides the justification for conducting research on implementation of the curricular reform from a local actors perspective. It states the research objectives and formulates a few propositions and research questions for exploration. Concept definitions and research limitations are also covered in this chapter. Chapter 2 details theoretical and methodological approaches to implementation research with emphasis on bottom-up perspectives.

Chapter 3 presents an overview of the education reforms in Benin from independence to 1990. Of the two initiatives to reform the elitist education system inherited from French colonization, only the *école nouvelle* reform was put into practice for an extended period of time. After highlighting the close link between politics and education policy, the chapter describes the major classic actors in education policy in Benin.

Chapter 4 focuses on the reasons for undertaking the NPE reform and presents the different forces present at the reform agenda setting. Through analysis of secondary data, the chapter examines key policy players, the various policy goals, and the causal theory of the reform before wondering whether the reform is viewed as a panacea for all of the country's ills.

Chapter 5 elaborates on policy advocacy. It finds that local advocacy reflects educational policy convergence. The chapter draws a parallel between actors' characteristics and their actual roles, uncovering two types of actors among reform proponents, classified as 'loyalists' and 'satisficers'. Of particular interest in this chapter are the kinds of interactions that advocates maintain with policy opponents.

While sharing a similar structure with the previous chapter, Chapter 6 focuses on resistance to the policy. After assessing various arguments against the reform, the chapter explains resistance as the combination of three sets of factors ranging from contextual constraints to the contagion effect of organized movements. The chapter categorizes resisters as 'con-

formists', 'conservatives' and 'opponents', and contrasts their image with proponents' views of them.

Chapter 7 theorizes on the sustainability of the curricular paradigm based on the patterns of change observed among local actors. Structural top-down change may be superficial without local appropriation. By the same token, incremental bottom-up change is impossible without planned intervention. Sustainable policies need to build on the advantages of both patterns of change. The chapter illustrates this grounded theory by highlighting how satisficers' attitudes are promising for the future of the curricular reform. After conceding that the curricular reform is still in transition, it reflects on whether the innovation has resulted in improved learning outcomes for students.

The concluding chapter summarizes key findings before addressing their relevance to future policy and avenues for future research.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The influence of human capital theory in the discipline of the economics of education is the scientific basis for weighing policy interventions against individual as well as collective benefits, often minimizing sociological and political rationalities (see Chabbot and Ramirez, 2000; Tikly 2004; Resnick 2006; Jakobi 2009).

<sup>2</sup> See World Bank (1988) for the dire situation of education in sub-Saharan Africa; for Benin, see the UNESCO study series (UNESCO Project BEN/89/001 (1990a), UNESCO Project BEN/89/001(1990b) and UNESCO Project BEN/89/001(1991) and MEN (1990).

<sup>3</sup> For details see Chapter 7, Table 7.2.

<sup>4</sup> PASEC is a programme to assess education quality in francophone countries across the world. While focusing on Benin's primary school system, the current reference provides data on countries like Madagascar (2005), Burkina Faso (1996), Cameroon (2005), Senegal (1996), Mauritania (2004), Chad (2004) and Côte d'Ivoire (1996).

## 2

## Theoretical Perspectives and Methodological Considerations

### 2.1 Introduction

To speak of implementation theory is ambitious because scholars increasingly diverge in their explanations of how public policy is put into practice. The difficulty has its roots in the problematic nature of implementation research, which may be summed up as theory poor and data rich (Björkman 1999; Grindle and Thomas 1991: 3-4; Winter 2003a: 212). In the absence of any grand unifying theory, findings from previous studies may provide points of departure for new studies in the field. A review of the implementation literature reveals that concerns about decision-making, the formulation of the right policy model, and policy processes have prompted pioneers of implementation research to pay greater attention to causal theories and top-level actors than to local dynamics (Pülzl and Treib 2007: 89-91; Knoepfel 2007: 3-9). Nevertheless, the roles of local actors deserve close examination, as demonstrated by bottom-up scholars and educational change theorists who consider policy as practice.

Four decades of implementation studies have seen scholars combine research strategies ranging from single case studies, qualitative and quantitative surveys and text interpretation to comparative and statistic designs (Yin 2005; Winter 2003b). Pioneers of implementation research such as Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) and Bardach (1977) favoured single case studies. Following the logic of top-down scholars, Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983) and Nakurama and Smallwood (1980), for instance, conceived of implementation as the hierarchical execution of centrally defined policy intentions, while bottom-up scholars such as Lipsky (1980) and Hjern and Hull (1982) emphasized that implementation consists of the everyday problem-solving strategies of 'street-level bureaucrats'. Robust theory building stimulated the third generation of imple-

mentation research to combine insights and research techniques from both top-down and bottom-up perspectives in their analyses (Sabatier 1986; Elmore 1985). The analytical models generated by these scholars aimed to compensate for the conceptual weaknesses emerging from the previous schools of thought. In this vein, policies – usually laws – are the units of analysis, and techniques of forward and backward mapping are used to trace implementation (looking at the actors from top to bottom or the reverse). Third-generation research claims ‘to be more scientific than the previous two in its approach to the study of implementation’ (Goggin et al. 1990: 18).

While drawing on insights from these three generations of implementation research, the current study examines the attitudes of local actors towards the curricular reform to explore how implementation might contribute to students’ underperformance. By focusing on grassroots actors, the design emphasizes policy as practice, but eventually acknowledges the interdependence between structural top-down change and incremental bottom-up change. Theoretical and methodological insights are elicited from how local actors themselves realize and interact with planned change. Methodologically, the research relies on secondary sources of data as well as qualitative techniques for primary data collection and analytic induction for data analysis.

This chapter first explores various implementation theories and the educational change literature to explain dichotomous responses to public policy, and to school curriculum in particular. Next, it presents the methodological challenges and techniques to deal with them.

## 2.2 Theoretical Perspectives

Implementation scholars acknowledge the complexity of planning and executing public policy. This explains why some scholars impose heuristic stages on the policy process to fine tune their analyses. Four to six intertwined stages, namely, issue salience, agenda setting, policy formulation, adoption, implementation and sustainability mark this analytical framework (Grindle and Thomas 1991: 4; Knoepfel et al. 2007: 32; Fullan and Stiegelbauer 1991: 47-8). This section presents a theoretical review of the policy process by evoking interest bargaining, client satisfaction, conflict of meaning and educational policy convergence to explain the differing responses of policy actors towards Benin’s curricular reform.

### **2.2.1 Interest Bargaining**

No matter the technicality of the domain of intervention, public policy results from a political process whereby actors bargain for their interests; thus scholars explain both favourable and adverse responses of actors by considering the interests at stake in a policy process. In fact, each stage of the process represents a political arena in which actors interact to advance their interests. These interactions result in conflicts and negotiations to the extent that no policy process develops in a straightforward and linear manner. At each stage new actors, interests and constraints emerge, and priorities are consequently adjusted. Even the pioneers of implementation research found policy processes seldom to be rational and linear; rather, they tend to be highly contested and reformulated series of events (Pressman and Wildavsky 1973). Likewise, Bardach (1977) describes the policy process as a game with winners, losers and onlookers. He suggests researchers pay particular attention to ‘the players, to what they consider as stakes, to their strategies and their tactics, their ways of entering into the game, and the rules of the game’ (ibid.: 56). Further, he recommends that researchers draw attention to ‘those who do not wish to participate in the game, to the motives of their abstention and to those who demand that rules of the game be changed before they will enter it’ (ibid.). Thus, the unilateral technocratic rationality behind the adoption of the competency-based approach predisposed the innovative curricula to serious political and cultural challenges in practice, due to the multiplicity of actors and interests at stake.

### **2.2.2 Street-Level Bureaucrats and Client Satisfaction**

Lack of consideration for local actors in public policy analysis stimulated the second generation of implementation researchers to pay closer attention to the grassroots actors implementing planned policy decisions. With the theory of street-level bureaucracy, Lipsky (1980) specifically points out the need to pay close attention to front-line actors due to their strategic position in the policy chain of actions. The front-line workers in charge of delivering policy are the ones whose decisions count most, because end-beneficiaries’ perception and appreciation of a policy hinges on the local performance of street-level bureaucrats. Their discretionary power confers them an important place in policy analysis; for Lipsky, street-level bureaucrats are the real policymakers. After observing the behaviour of front-line workers in various public policy domains (health

care, education, justice and housing), Lipsky concludes that policy conflict is not necessarily due to interest bargaining, as struggles between individual workers and citizens are also potential sources of policy conflict. Shortage of means, poor working conditions, contextual constraints and excessive demands are the lot of front-line workers. Due to their similar working conditions, street-level bureaucrats tend to adopt similar patterns of behaviour towards clients, whether they are teachers, police officers, nurses or social workers. Lipsky suggests that improving the working conditions of front-line workers would raise their performance to the satisfaction of clients.

From a political economy perspective, Hirschman (1970) offers an interpretative framework for understanding how clients respond to public service deterioration. He found that if the problem that a policy intends to solve persists despite policy intervention, clients have two options: exit or voice. In exit mode, dissatisfied clients withdraw in order to find better individual solutions. Target groups and end-beneficiaries thus develop various coping strategies in response to deteriorating public service. Clients also have the voice option, by which they remain in the policy arena and voice concerns until they receive complete satisfaction. Denunciations, contestations and utter criticisms of public policies can be understood from this perspective. Hirschman's framework suggests that the use of the voice option may contribute to improve public action because criticisms, denunciations and resistance are likely to contribute to policy improvement. Loyalty is a third option for clients in cases of service deterioration. Though less rational than the other two options, loyalty is a variant of voice because loyalists expect the complaints and protests of others, combined with their faithfulness, to be successful in maintaining or improving the status quo. Loyalty is more characteristic of clients' behaviour in unitary organizations such as totalitarian and terrorist groups. In circumstances of service deterioration, many loyalists will actively participate in actions to improve policies, but some may suffer in silence hoping that things will soon get better (Hirschman 1970: 38).

For planned change to take root in the practice of local actors and consequently to guarantee client satisfaction, some scholars recommend the solution of decentralizing education services. By bringing these services closer to users, reform initiatives assumedly become locally owned and sustained. Actors at the local level and those closer to the classroom

(teachers, students and parents) are arguably better able to make decisions to improve schools (King and Berk 2000). Besides, the involvement of local actors in educational change might increase efficiency, accountability, participation and responsiveness, as local people can better control their school by using their voice. A growing body of scholarship promotes a bottom-up approach to implementing educational change. De Grauwe et al. (2005) argue that the involvement of principals, teachers and the community in defining and evaluating change priorities contributes to improve the quality of education.

### **2.2.3 Curriculum Implementation and the Conflict of Meaning**

Educational change theory views the implementation of curriculum change as a platform of confrontations: a stage for conflicts of ideas, practices and interests (Ornstein and Hunkins 2004: 301; Boyer 1993). Curricularists view dichotomous responses to school curriculum implementation as the result of clashes among different perspectives on the question 'What's worth knowing?' (Postman and Weingartner 1998). Such perspectives involve the 'ideal curriculum', the 'official curriculum', the 'classroom curriculum', the 'hidden curriculum' and the 'null curriculum' (O'Hair et al. 2000: 361-66). Ideally every individual has a vision about the kinds of knowledge and skills that are worth learning at school. These visions may collide with what a nation's officials want the youth to learn in order to achieve certain goals. By the same token, classroom practices may conflict with other untaught knowledge that students acquire by going to school. The null curriculum refers to the type of knowledge that students have an opportunity to learn outside of the school system. Conflicts among these divergent perspectives are unavoidable in reforming the school curriculum.

From a normative perspective, Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) interpret conflict as a necessary clash between grassroots actors' objective and subjective meanings of change. People perceive policy change differently because of the potential conflict between the objective and subjective meanings of public policy in general and of educational change in particular. Objective meaning involves three dimensions of change: (1) the use of new or revised materials (direct instructional resources such as curriculum materials and technologies), (2) the use of new teaching approaches (new teaching strategies or activities) and (3) the alteration of beliefs (pedagogical assumptions and theories underlying particular new policies

or programmes) (Fullan and Stiegelbauer 1991: 37). All three dimensions reflect the worldviews and professional backgrounds of decision-makers at the top, but these often conflict in practice with the subjective reality of local actors, especially teachers. The subjective meaning of change refers to the uncertainty, anxiety and feeling of loss that actors might experience in the process of giving up established routines and professional practices: 'Whether the change is sought or resisted, and happens by chance or design; whether we look at it from the standpoint of reformers or those they manipulate, of individuals or institutions, the response is characteristically ambivalent' (Marris 1975: 2, in Fullan and Stiegelbauer 1991: 31). Most difficult is the realization of objective change at the local level. Accordingly, the alteration of beliefs induced by a new policy touches the core of subjectivity of individuals or groups of individuals, especially teachers whose ownership and appropriation of change is not guaranteed *à priori*. The conflict of meaning poses the problem of how education policy convergence takes into account the subjective realities of actors from the periphery.

#### 2.2.4 Neoliberalism and Educational Policy Convergence

Neoliberal supremacy, celebrated in Fukuyama (1992) as 'The Worldwide Liberal Revolution', has variably marked educational development across the world since 1990. In developing countries, education in the form of schooling changed from being perceived as a 'public good' to become a 'global good' (Bierschenk 2007: 271). Various reforms that barely hide their neoliberal orientation pervaded the field with a two-pronged effect. First, global forces spearheaded by the World Bank and a multiplicity of development agencies encouraged decision-makers to liberalize the education sector, limiting the role of governments. Following the logic that 'the market, and the market alone rules' (Thurrow 1996: 1), neoliberalism redefined the role of government in social welfare provision, shifting the state from being a welfare provider (the 'welfare state') to an enabler (the enabling state). '[In] the enabling state, social welfare policies are increasingly designed to enable more people to work and to enable the private sector to expand its sphere of activity' (Gilbert 2002: 43, in Jakobi 2009: 59). The fact that most cost-containment measures of structural adjustment programmes have targeted social welfare services illustrates this neoliberal intention. While Tooley (1996, 2001) gained a reputation for the unconditional advocacy of market principles in the education sector,

Wells et al. (1998: 326) deplore that ‘public schools, from the neo-liberal perspective operated by the state, represent a form of “big government” that nations can no longer afford if they are to remain globally competitive’.

The second effect of neoliberal supremacy on education policies relates to the economic utility of school curricula. States are encouraged to implement curricular reforms that enable students to be competitive in the job market and creative so that they can fully participate in the economy. The ideal underpinning this curricular revolution is to direct the youth to seek jobs in the private sector rather than in the public realm. Rooted in human capital theory, this perspective of global economy holds that ‘each nation’s primary assets will be its citizens’ skills and insights’ (Reich 1991: 3). Thus, a globalized modern economy will increasingly require ‘knowledge workers’ who depend much more on the market than on the state (Drucker 1993).

Policy convergence in the field of education emanates from the agency of global development organizations whose influence in policy-relevant knowledge, advice, mechanisms of diffusion and sponsorship grants certain scientific and political legitimacies to the measures that they propose to countries in need. Whether the curricula proposed are outcome-based, competency-based or problem-based, most education reform initiatives in sub-Saharan Africa during the 1990s share a financial and technical dependence on foreign aid. However innovative this wave of policy reforms may be, scholars are increasingly cautious about their local adaptation. Jonnaert et al. (2004: 668) observed that the adoption of a competency-based approach to the reform of school curricula in francophone countries solely for its utilitarian promise may be misleading. The lack of epistemological precision of the notion ‘competence’, which is a ‘pre-scientific concept’ according to De Ketele (2000: 188, in Perez 2007: 238), could generate erroneous curricular applications that claim to be competency-based while actually displaying ‘decorative competencies’ (ibid.: 242). Yet, since the approach offers convincing utilitarian arguments for generating social and economic transformations, global and domestic policy networks have embraced and actively promote it, regardless of whether ordinary parents in developing countries endorse such innovations (Bierschenk 2007: 278).

Perhaps the hidden agenda behind education policy convergence consists of a certain homogenization of behaviour and practices worldwide

with heavy production and diffusion of knowledge and images modelled according to western thought and ways of life via communication technologies. Known as ‘world education culture’, this trend of homogenization inspired Tikly (2004: 173) who mentioned ‘the new imperialism as the incorporation of low-income countries into a new regime of global governance which serves to secure the interests of the USA, its western allies and global capitalism in general’. He considers formal education to be a key policy area for multilateral development agencies and an important disciplinary institution in relation to the development project. Basing his argument on an analysis of the development discourse as formulated in the international policy arena and echoed by decision-makers in developing countries, Tikly (2004) points to the discrepancies between policy discourse that is constructed along western norms and the daily realities of people in low-income countries.

As neoliberal hegemony entails certain economic, cultural and social exclusions, counter-hegemonic movements increasingly denounce social policies that result in the marginalization of the weak in society. Whether globalization-from-below’ (Prempeh 2004: 596), ‘democracy from below’ (Tikly 2004: 191) or simply ‘participation’ (Masaki 2007: 29-31), the counter-movements aim to offer a more humane face – other than the market alternative – to development projects and to inspire resistance to neoliberal forms of social policies.

Global interest in education emanates from a conception of power as ‘thought control’, to use the term of Lukes (2005). Power relations induce aspects that go beyond the classic ‘oppression-resistance’ dichotomy; power is also manifest in knowledge and thought generation. Applied to policy implementation, this view of power requires analysts to interpret actors’ responses to policy as manifestations of power (Long 2001; Masaki 2007: 19). Even in top-down policy process, clients are not passive recipients or beneficiaries; they integrate policy measures into certain established cultural and social norms that alter policy measures, eventually resulting in policy *de facto*. All changes or alterations to policy measures that occur at the local level are instances of power manifestation, that is, local actors exercising, however small, their room of manoeuvre. ‘Target groups therefore do not passively accept policy directives from above, but exercise their human agency to rework them to suit location-specific social, political, cultural circumstances’ (Masaki 2007: 25).

This theoretical review highlights the complexity of public policy analysis, giving credence to the enigmatic question by Mosse (2004: 639), 'Is good policy unimplementable?' An actor-oriented analysis of implementation provides methodological room to reflect on outputs (patterns of behaviour or performance of street-level bureaucrats as defined by policy) as well as outcomes (intended and unintended consequences); an approach that impinges on evaluation studies (Winter 2003b: 207, 2003a: 218-19).

### 2.3 Methodological Considerations

An actor-oriented approach to implementation studies requires a thorough appraisal of different actor's agencies, the room for manoeuvre, expectations and perceptions of policy outcomes and how variably different actors respond to a nationally homogenized set of policy measures. By considering policy intervention as 'an ongoing, socially constructed and negotiated process' (Long and Van der Ploeg 1989: 228), the current study takes into account the various forms of interaction, procedures and the practical coping strategies of different actors in specific contexts. Qualitative research techniques are suitable for policy studies that target a multiplicity of actors across different geographical and cultural spheres. Masaki (2007: 26) endorsed qualitative research designs for policy studies, coining the term 'anthropology of policy' to name an approach that deconstructs the discursive process by which local actors construct and interpret policies. In that same vein, Yin (2005: 1) finds qualitative research strategies such as case studies suitable for 'how or why questions... when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context'. In order to appraise local actors' perspectives and their social construction of meaning *in situ* with regard to the curricular reform, this study relies on retrospective analysis of education policies in Benin, former Dahomey, as well as on qualitative research strategies. As actor-oriented implementation research, it emphasizes key actors in education policy processes in both its retrospective and its empirical components. Yet, the methodology presented in this section pertains to the empirical component.

To achieve a rich description of instances in action, the study relies on the techniques of key informants, in-depth interviews, focus-group discussions, direct and participatory observations and documentary investi-

gation for data collection; it uses the technique of analytic induction to manually organize the data collected at the various research sites. While quantitative data are not central in the analysis, they nevertheless provide guidelines for interpreting the qualitative observations.

### 2.3.1 Researcher Subjectivity

While conducting fieldwork in one's own society offers advantages in terms of language and ease of gaining familiarity with the social phenomenon being researched, it nevertheless presents serious challenges to the researcher (Thu Horong 2007: 23). Subjective feelings are likely to influence a researcher's methodological and analytical choices, particularly in anthropology and qualitative research. Risks of bias are higher when a certain familiarity exists between the researcher and the topic under study, as in the current case: a government agent working at the ministry of education and conducting field research in schools. Three strands of this challenge are worth mentioning at the onset of the methodology.

First, as a critical observer of how nationally planned decisions are poorly implemented in the education sector, the researcher has the potential bias of seeing a 'half-empty glass' instead of a 'half-full glass' in regards to this curricular reform. This partly explains the ontological position that local appropriation of planned change is a prerequisite for reforms to take root. The second strand relates to the power dimension that the initiative involves. Regardless of all the methodological precautions taken by the researcher, some local actors' perception of the researcher as a government intelligence agent risks influencing their responses. Fear of hierarchy provokes the display of 'hidden transcripts' that require care to decode. Third, as an insider research participant, the researcher is well aware of the potential conflict between his own subjectivity in terms of the previously mentioned ontological position and loyalty to power. Explicitly this third dilemma hinges on whether the government agent as a researcher can objectively distance himself from the position of his employer in order to critically contribute to the policy debate. In addition to the various methodological precautions taken to address these dilemmas, the most important measure was to acknowledge how subjectivity affects the research process.

### 2.3.2 School Performance Indicators and Research Site Selection

Increasing rationalization of the management of school systems makes global and national actors reliant on educational statistics for important decisions. Following the logic of quantification spurred by study of the economics of education, school systems generate a range of educational statistics with which scholars and national executives as well as global development agencies compare and monitor educational development across the world. Despite the good reasons that legitimate quantification of school system results, educational statistics pose problems of reliability that the current analysis will raise, so as to introduce the purposeful site selection scheme. A similar challenge in this study relates to the lack of indicators for measuring the attainment of overall curricular goals by school systems. In order to address these problems, and given the exploratory nature of this research, the site selection scheme relies on a few indicators that are theoretically most relevant to school curriculum. First, a discussion of considerations related to the use of gross and net enrolment rates to measure access will help to illustrate the problem of reliability. Discussed thereafter are such indicators as promotion and repetition rates, as well as standardized test scores, which are intended to measure learning outcomes for students.

Gross enrolment rate (GER) represents the proportion of all enrolled students at a given level of the education system in an academic year, regardless of age group or repetition, relative to the total number of school age children of that category within an administrative division (UNESCO 2008: 392-93). For illustrative purpose, the 2003 education law in Benin states that all children six to eleven years of age qualify to attend primary school. However, it is common to find four- and five-year-olds in primary schools; likewise, students older than eleven are found attending primary school, as well as refugees who are absent from national statistics. These 'abnormal' cases affect the GER which reached as high as 171 per cent in one district in 2006.

Net enrolment rate (NER) represents the proportion of a certain age-group of students (6-11 years for primary education in Benin) who are actually enrolled, relative to the theoretical total population of that age group projected by the national census. In 2006, while the national average GER was 93 or 96 per cent according to different sources, the NER was only 78 per cent. Though believed to be more accurate than the GER, the NER fails to capture the category of students who are younger

than the official age for attending primary school (Michaelowa 2000: 139). In Benin's urban areas, for instance, more and more students attend primary school at ages four and five, particularly in private schools; students of this age group, who are supposed to be in kindergarten, escape official statistics for the NER.

The dropout rate refers to the percentage of students who abandon school in a given academic year. However, the dropout rate is more related to access than to learning outcomes, because students may drop out due to factors other than poor internal organization of schools and ineffectiveness of instructional activities. Poverty as well as cultural beliefs and practices may cause certain schools to have higher dropout rates, as is the case in certain northern school districts in Benin where girls tend to drop out of school if they attend at all. An education system that maintains lower dropout rates over time has higher retention rates whereas higher dropout rates over time yield lower retention rates.

The promotion rate indicates the percentage of students who pass from one grade to the next in any given academic year. It summarizes the results of the different classroom and school level assessments that students undergo throughout a school year. Whether formative or summative, these tests assess learning outcomes for students in specific subject matters at specific grade levels. As a consequence of the promotion rate, repetition rate represents the percentage of students who repeat a grade in a given school year. It infers that a percentage of students failed to meet instructional goals. In principle, low rates of repetition supposedly indicate better performance in terms of learning outcomes whereas high rates indicate poor performance. In practice, however, in countries that allow schools to fail students, reliability of promotion rates is problematic in the sense that fraud and other non-instructional factors may influence test results, weakening reliability. The alternative of standardized tests seems to provide more reliable results, but its costly requirements render this solution prohibitive for developing countries to operate at each grade level, in every subject and on a yearly basis.

While promotion and repetition rates constitute in principle the most relevant indicators of learning outcomes, they are not robust enough to provide information about mid- and long-term curricular goals. Overall curricular objectives transcend the realms of schools. To learn whether a given school curriculum produced the desired effects would require generations of school graduates to be assessed later on in society. Scholars

have attempted to remedy this problem by defining basic knowledge rate (TCB) as a proxy to assess students' performance and that of school systems (Michaelowa 2001, in OIF et al. 2005: 86-8). Basic knowledge rate is a ratio of the number of students with minimal basic knowledge upon completion of primary education to the total number of that age-group of children in a country. Minimal basic knowledge may be assessed using a standardized test like the PASEC for instance; a tolerable threshold of 40 per cent of TCB has been defined for developing countries in francophone Africa. Yet these tests<sup>1</sup> never cover all school subjects and grades; the PASEC targets second and fifth graders in French language and mathematics only. For the case of Benin's primary education, promotion and repetition rates are, in principle, more inclusive than other indicators. This critical background about indicators paves the way to introduce the research sites.

The administrative organization of Benin's education system offers the opportunity to purposefully select diverse research sites for fieldwork investigation. At the top of the hierarchy are the ministries of education. Further, six provincial headquarters control education administration at the meso level, while 85 school districts supervise primary schools at the micro level. Each school district administers a number of public, private and religious schools that are networked into pedagogical units and zones. The current study's focus on local actors required the choice of the school district as the geographical unit of observation for the fieldwork. Drawing this geographical limit allowed inclusion of a multiplicity of actors from district headquarters down to the school-site level. Without claiming national representativeness of research sites, the selection scheme relied on two ranges of presupposed parameters: location of school districts and the available aggregate performance indicators. Therefore, it followed no random or stratified sampling procedure. Fieldwork focused on southern Benin owing to the higher population density there as well as the researcher's familiarity with this part of the country (accessibility and language). In addition, the expectation that rural school districts would be more disadvantaged in matters of school infrastructure as well as in quality of instruction, compared to urban school districts, guided the choice for both urban and rural districts. With regard with the novelty of the new curricular approach, urban actors would have more opportunity to be exposed to the policy discourse

than rural actors. However, one rural district and one urban district serve as counter-cases challenging these presuppositions.

As for performance indicators, the site selection scheme contents itself with the available promotion and repetition rates to identify a range of presumably high and low performing school districts. Table 2.1 displays information related to most indicators, to provide an overview of the situation in the seven school districts from which four were shortlisted for fieldwork. These were extreme performance cases in the country's educational statistics for 2006; each selected district follows one of the criteria below:

- an urban school district with a promotion rate above and repetition rate below national averages (supposed to be high achieving);
- an urban school district with a promotion rate below and repetition rate above national averages (supposed to be less achieving);
- a rural school district with a promotion rate above and repetition rate below national averages (supposed to be high achieving);
- a rural school district with a promotion rate below and repetition rate above national averages (supposed to be less achieving).

**Table 2.1**  
*School districts with indicators*

<i>School Districts</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Promo- tion (%)</i>	<i>Repeti- tion (%)</i>	<i>Dropout (%)</i>	<i>GER (%)</i>	<i>NER (%)</i>
Zogbodomey	rural	89	-	11	72	63
Akpro-Misséréte	rural	85	-	15	93	77
Cotonou	urban	85	6	9	99	75
Abomey-Calavi	urban	84	7	9	125	96
Ouidah	urban	73	14	13	171	138
Kpomassè	rural	70	15	15	147	126
Karimama	rural	67	15	18	29	24
National Average	-	80	8	12	93	78

*Note:* Aggregate rates were computed for all types of primary schools (public, private, and religious). For a municipality that has more than one school district like Cotonou or Abomey-Calavi, averages hold for all school districts in that municipality.

*Source:* Retrieved from 2006 official primary education statistics (MEPS 2007).

Applying these criteria, Abomey-Calavi, Ouidah, Akpro-Missérété and Kpomassè were shortlisted (Table 2.1).<sup>2</sup>

Underlying the selection criteria is the presupposition that actors in districts with higher rates of promotion and lower rates of repetition are more likely to be supportive of the reform than are actors in school districts with lower rates of promotion and higher rates of repetition. The same presupposition guided the choice of six different schools within each district. In order to capture diversity, the research design targeted ‘high’ and ‘low’ performing schools in the public, private and religious sectors, provided that all types of schools existed within the district. Eventually, the empirical aspect of the research covered 17 schools instead of the 24 initially envisioned because not every district had all types of schools, especially rural districts. In each school district, the researcher had the opportunity to interview the chief school district officer and the pedagogic counsellors. At school-site level, the list included principals and fifth and sixth grade teachers. In addition, parents of fifth and sixth graders took part in focus-group discussions to share their impressions and experiences of the policy.

### 2.3.3 Sociological Overview of Selected Districts

According to the 2002 population census, 76,555 people live in the 336 km<sup>2</sup> of Ouidah’s territory (République du Bénin 2003a: 49-51). The city is a beacon of western education in Benin because of its history. As a coastal place where missionaries settled in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Ouidah hosted the first western schools established in the Kingdom of Dahomey. Colonial conquest of the hinterland of the kingdom started from this place where settlers and the native *Pedah* people share a long tradition of valuing western education (Cornevin 1981; Künzler 2007: 123). As a former slave trade centre, Ouidah was long a multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural town that attracted tourists to its beach, museums and historical vestiges. Formal activities ranged from minor trading to administrative services, including an army barracks in the inner city. Fishing and subsistence agriculture have long been the main activities of the native *Pedah* who live in rural areas surrounding the main city. As of 2008, the school district registered 21,337 students in public primary schools with a teaching staff of 443.

Kpomassè is a rural municipality located west of Ouidah with a total population of 57,190 living in the 295 km<sup>2</sup> territory in 2002 (République

du Bénin 2003a: *ibid.*). Its *Xwéda* and *Xwla* population share socio-cultural features with the *Pedah* of Ouidah. With the decline in fishing activities, the active population now tends to migrate, leaving the municipality with school-age children, women and elderly. Apart from basic administrative services, the population uses subsistence agriculture to supplement the declining income from fishing. As of 2008, 55 public primary schools enrolled 16,656 students under the instructional care of 375 teachers.

Located north of the country's largest town, the municipality of Abomey-Calavi merged with Cotonou during the last two decades. The 2002 population census documents 307,745 residents living in the 539 km<sup>2</sup> territory (*ibid.*). As a residential area for Cotonou's workers and university students, Abomey-Calavi is one of the largest municipalities in terms of both territory and population. Its native *Aizô* population is distributed across both rural and urban constituencies. In the 1990s the municipality boomed with commercial and construction activities. As a new settlement area, Abomey-Calavi hosts a growing number of private schools while the number of public schools has stagnated. It also hosts the country's largest university campus (University of Abomey-Calavi). The growing number of primary school students motivated the ministry of education to divide the municipality into three school districts. This research focused on the inner city district, which enrolled 22,023 students in 69 public schools with 465 teachers as of 2008. An undocumented number of students were enrolled in 170 private and religious schools.

Located north of Porto-Novo, the political capital, Akpro-Missérété had a population of 72,652 in 2002 (*ibid.*: 53-5). It is a rural municipality where *Tori*, *Nago*, *Ouémè* and *Goun* ethnic groups practice subsistence farming, fuel smuggling from Nigeria, motor-bike taxi driving in the neighbouring capital and a variety of informal minor trades. As a residential area for Porto-Novo workers, the southern part of the municipality is more urbanized than the largely rural northern part. As of 2009, 22,160 students were enrolled in the 61 public and 17 private primary schools, under the care of 406 teachers in the public sector.

#### 2.3.4 Semi-Structured Interviews

The interview is one of the most important sources of qualitative data, particularly in research initiatives that focus on human affairs. Specific interviewees and well-informed respondents can provide insights into a

situation, shortcuts to the prior history of the situation and help identify other relevant sources of evidence (Yin 2005: 89-91). Whether open-ended, focused or structured, interviewing techniques require the researcher to follow a line of inquiry as reflected by an interview protocol, and ask questions in an unbiased manner that also serves the needs of the line of inquiry. However, interviews are 'subject to the common problems of bias, poor recall, and poor or inaccurate articulation' (ibid.: 91). To overcome these problems, interview data may be corroborated with evidence from other sources.

This study relied on in-depth semi-structured interviews to collect data from local actors who implement the curricular reform. It targeted a total of 49 front-line actors including inspectors, pedagogic counsellors, principals and teachers in all four school districts. Use of the same interview protocol enabled the same line of inquiry to be followed with all the interviewees (see Appendix 2). With the respondent's permission, each interview was recorded using a voice recorder. Intensive fieldwork note-taking supplemented the recording of interviews, which lasted on average 90 minutes each. Each interview offered the opportunity to cover the following ten rubrics: (i) identification of the respondent, (ii) exploration of respondent's awareness of the problem the reform was designed to solve, (iii) objectives of the reform, (iv) knowledge about the design and implementation processes of the reform, (v) personal experience with the reform, (vi) appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of the reform's design and implementation, (vii) personal position in the debate including any shifts in stance over time, (viii) impression of actors on the other side of the debate, (ix) appreciation of the products of the reform (e.g. training, textbooks, student performance), and (x) opinions about the history of the reform and its sustainability. Playing back the recordings, each actor's relevant statements were transcribed and categorized into seven analytical groups: (i) characteristics, (ii) reasons, (iii) knowledge, (iv) strategies, (v) criticisms, (vi) policy results, (vii) opponents/supporters. Appendix 4 provides a sample of the analytical device as completed with a respondent's answers.

Prior to the eleven-month fieldwork period (October 2008 to August 2009) and throughout the research process, five key resourceful informants provided the researcher with ample information and secondary data. These were national actors who had played an instrumental role in the policy design and evaluation, and representatives of a union confedera-

tion and the Communist Party of Benin. Similarly, casual conversations with unexpected actors intermittently occurred during the fieldwork and throughout the research process, enriching the data and analyses.

### 2.3.5 Focus-Group Discussions

Focus-group discussions targeted parents of students in the upper grades (fifth and sixth grades). In each school, the principal and teachers mobilized parents. Most group discussions took place in the schools, out of sight of principals, teachers and students. The protocol in Appendix 3 served as the frame of reference for all group discussions. Each group discussion lasted on average two and one-half hours. Participation ranged from a minimum of five parents to a maximum of 31. The 17 focus-group discussions gathered 246 parents in total, composed of elders, young women (who formed the majority) and men belonging to different socio-economic groups (according to their occupation).

After preliminary inquiries about the origin of the curricular reform, its components, and its strengths and weaknesses, the protocol presented three scenarios related to the future of the reform, and parents reacted to these in turn. Scenario 1 assessed parents' response in the event of the reform being suspended by the executive government following the growing opposition to the policy. The former transition curricula would then be reinstated, as many stakeholders wished. Scenario 2 proposed that all schools close pending the initiation of a more appropriate, uncontested school curriculum. Scenario 3 proposed retaining the current reform, despite the contestation and criticisms, but making occasional adjustments to improve it over time. The idea here was that it would be most efficient to keep the status quo since alternative initiatives would further destabilize actors. The exercise concluded with a discussion about the parents' knowledge, expectations and impressions of the reform. A research assistant took notes during these meetings, and the researcher wrote up an extensive report a few hours after each focus-group discussion took place.

### 2.3.6 Observations

Direct observation consisted of field visits to the research site with the purpose of confronting narrated experiences with the daily realities of research participants. As such, it provided an additional source of evidence about the topic being researched (Yin 2005: 93). Observation of

meetings, sidewalk activities and classroom visits are a few examples of direct observation. The passive role of the researcher in direct observation differentiates this technique from participant observation.

Participant observation is a research strategy that has gained currency in the field of anthropology. It requires the researcher to assume a variety of roles in the field for an extended period of time. The resulting close contact with the culture of the community being researched gives the researcher the opportunity 'to know the "insider's" perspective by observing participants going about their "ordinary" business in their "natural" setting - that is to say by long term immersion in the "field"' (Stark and Torrance 2005: 34).

Both types of observation enriched empirical data collection in the current study. After getting both national and local research permits (Appendix 6), the researcher established informal relationships with participants, building trust and collaboration. Living in the community for two to three months in each school district and spending hours visiting schools and district headquarters enabled the researcher to get more familiar with people. This led to opportunities to visit a few classrooms, to attend a few regular training sessions of teachers and parents' meetings and to cross-check actors' statements with daily realities in the schools. The objective was to observe the daily activities of actors in relation to the policy. Attendance at training sessions, at teacher-parent conferences and the informal discussions at the district headquarters and in selected schools were a few instances of participant observation. Other instances of observation consisted of casual interaction with students on literacy and numeracy issues as well as reading their compositions in schools where the fieldwork period coincided with student evaluation tests.

### **2.3.7 Documentary Investigation**

Researching public policy requires documentary investigation, as policies often generate a substantial array of publications in which relevant information can be found about how a policy is to be stated, planned, executed and evaluated. This study analysed secondary data from documents including mission reports, official educational statistics, newspaper articles, evaluation reports, addresses, television shows, textbooks, curricula and teachers' guides. At the district level, reports on the performance of individual schools contributed to the selection of the schools covered in the study. Some of the most relevant documents were pointed out by

chief school district officers, pedagogic counsellors and various district staff.

#### 2.4.8 Analytical Framework

Informants' responses were appraised manually using the technique of analytic induction as developed in Ragin (1994: 93-8) and de Vaus (2007: 263-66). Analytic induction is a systematic examination of similarities and differences for the purpose of theorizing on the basis of the evidence gathered; the ultimate goal is to achieve descriptive generalizations that apply to all the cases under study. It enables the researcher to challenge with empirical evidence whatever image is developing of a particular phenomenon. Challenging pieces of evidence provide important clues for altering concepts or shifting categories. However, a limit to data collection can be drawn when the whole investigation comes to a point of saturation; that is when 'the researcher stops learning new things about the case and recently collected evidence appears repetitious or redundant with previously collected evidence' (Ragin 1994: 86).

In the current study, after actors' relevant statements were grouped into the seven analytical categories, the image that emerged in terms of the spectrum of local actors nuanced the initial framework of pro-reform and anti-reform actors. Local actors were examined based on personal characteristics (education, experience, ethnic group, type of schools that children attend, religion, socio-economic status, in-service training, political affiliation, union activism), knowledge of reform issues, reasons for supporting or opposing the reform, strategies and coping behaviour, criticisms of the reform, view of reform supporters/opponents, and appraisal of policy results. Set against these categories, a scrutiny of each interviewee's statements helped to manually gauge the arguments advanced in support of or opposition to the curricular reform, and to confront the emerging trends with relevant characteristics of the actors and that of their school communities. The process further enabled the researcher to cross pieces of information from focus-group discussions, observations and semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 4 for an example of the analytical device). The limited number of policy implementers (49) allowed comparisons to be made of their statements and characteristics to find converging as well as diverging patterns. In so doing the study produced an interpretative framework to substantiate policy advocacy and resistance.

The analysis refined the initial dichotomous framework, resulting in a five-step spectrum classifying local actors as loyalists, satisficers, conformists, conservatives and opponents. Far from being a rigid categorization, the spectrum of local actors is a heuristic device to bring order to local actors' multifaceted attitudes and interactions with the innovation. It inductively derives from pieces of evidence arising from the various qualitative techniques. For instance, cynicism in the policy debate is exaggerated among many actors who assert that pro-reform actors accumulated a fortune in the policy process to build themselves luxury suites in the Tokpota area of Porto-Novo. The recurrence of this piece of information from a substantial number of actors led the researcher to visit the area for investigative purposes. Confronting empirical evidence with actors' statements, the researcher viewed conservatives as more cynical than conformists in the policy debate.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the theoretical perspectives and methodological considerations to study how implementation of the curricular reform resulted in division among actors in the school system, particularly among grassroots actors. The explored theoretical horizons reveal that implementation theory alone cannot fully account for the dichotomous attitudes of local actors in the policy debate. Insight from educational change and globalization theories too contribute to a richer interpretation of fieldwork data. The current study relied on qualitative research strategies in order to get insiders' perspectives on the various ways in which local actors experienced a homogenized set of policy measures. The net was cast wide enough to include actors in public, private and religious schools, as well as actors in urban and rural schools. The various theoretical horizons, the research site selection scheme and the multiplicity of data sources enable triangulation of the arguments developed in the rest of this study. Triangulation in social research implies the combination of more than one set of data sources and multiple theoretical and methodological insights (Downward and Mearman 2007: 81). In addition to the methodological precautions taken, the reflective nature of the doctoral research process served to further consolidate the arguments of this thesis. This consisted of critical assessments by internal as well as external discussants during the thesis design, post-fieldwork eval-

uations, and remarks on the full dissertation and at international seminars.

The fieldwork experience, despite its richness, posed a few practical challenges. Investigating actors in their daily routine exposed the researcher to the risk of being considered *à priori* an intruder. Several visits were necessary to build rapport and collaboration, though simple questionnaires could perhaps have bypassed the need for such effort. While most informants eventually became friendly and welcomed the research initiative, a few proved quite reluctant and hard to approach. Due to the sensitivity of the issue under study, a few emotional parents vexed the researcher by believing him to be a government agent. It takes courage, patience and serendipity to overcome such trials, though they are common in qualitative research. Finally, the lack of accurate and reliable indicators to assess overall school curricular objectives weakens the study in terms of statistical generalization. In light of these weaknesses, the findings of this thesis can be interpreted as exploratory, rather than conclusive in character.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The principle of selecting a few school subjects and grade levels to assess students' learning in standardized tests is not unique to the PASEC tests. UNESCO (2008: 209-17) provides ample examples of countries and various tests around the world.

<sup>2</sup> While Cotonou has the country's highest population density, it presented the complexity of having several school districts. Educational statistics for Cotonou stand for the whole municipality, and data were not available to choose a particular school district in Cotonou before fieldwork. Abomey-Calavi, which was selected instead, presented a similar complexity with its three school districts. The decision to collect data in Abomey-Calavi district 1 was made during fieldwork as this school district covers the inner city of Abomey-Calavi.

## 3

## Education Reforms in Benin before 1990: Overview and Key Actors

### 3.1 Introduction

The coincidence of major education reforms in Dahomey – today Benin – with key political turns of the country seems to confirm the theory that there is a close interconnection between education and politics. Educational change theorists and sociologists of education consider it a myth to claim the apolitical nature of education or to speak of the political neutrality of any education reform (Fullan and Stiegelbauer 1991: 17-29; Wirt and Kirst 1997: 29-62; Blakemore and Cooksey 1981: 217-55; Moulton and Mundy 2002b). Like politics, education is a major social institution that has a distributive function in answering a broad range of questions on who should go to school, what should be taught, who should teach, how teaching should be conducted and who should pay the cost of education. While education reforms propose a variety of answers to these enduring questions, the natures and contents of the answers, as well as actors' responses to them, through time impinge on politics by both legitimating and contesting political power.

In Benin, the linkages between politics and education policy are so tight that schools function almost as a barometer of political stability. Like in many newly independent African nations in the 1960s, Benin's political elites tried to balance education expansion policies with the challenges that such policies impose on the quality of education. From independence until 1990, two such policy initiatives were undertaken, each with a degree of success and failure, while sanctioning the fate of the political regimes in place.

Each reform corresponds to a specific political period in the history of the country. The period of political instability from 1960 to 1972 barely changed the elite education system inherited from French colonization. A significant education reform of this period was the *Grossetête*

*Dossou-Yovo* reform in 1971. When the country attained political stability from 1972 to 1990, the military Marxist regime initiated a radical *école nouvelle* reform erected on socialist egalitarian principles. The demise of the military Marxist regime in the late 1980s put an end to that reform. The democratic transition since 1990 has favoured the most recent education reform.

This background chapter summarizes how previous reform initiatives developed prior to the current systemic reform, of which the curricular innovation is a major component. As that last aspect is the object of the present research, it is important to review the situation that preceded this newest intervention. A historical review of education reforms in Benin further helps to identify the key actors and to assess their motives and contribution to reform efforts. In the first place, this chapter presents an overview of each period with a special focus on key actors, salient policies and outcomes. In the second place, it features the characteristics and roles of the different categories of classic actors in education policy in Benin.

### 3.2 Perpetuation of Elite Education (1960-1972)

Until the 1948 law on educational decentralization in French West Africa (AOF), schooling was considered a privilege for the ‘fortunate few’,<sup>1</sup> who were selected from among the children of chiefs and influential persons (Künzler 2007; Moumouni 1968; Cornevin 1981; Okoudjou et al. 2007). Yet despite the unprecedented step embodied by the law to promote rural schools, the urban-rural bifurcation remained sharp in the education system, with urban school children having more advantages than their rural counterparts. Religious and private schools in urban areas were entitled to public funds, while in the countryside public schools were sparse. These inequities were largely neglected during the post-World War Two colonial power contestations.

The independence of African countries brought the expectation that education systems would undergo fundamental changes to meet endogenous economic and social development needs. But France continued to control the education sector in most of its former colonies through bilateral cooperation and technical assistance (Moumouni 1968: 145-46). While the colonial education system aimed to incorporate a handful of elite to better serve the interests of the colonial power, the new vision after independence was to maintain and expand French influence in

overseas territories. The working principle of training a handful of '*cadres assimilés*'<sup>32</sup> compelled the newly independent nations to resort to France in matters of technical assistance and development expertise. As Blakemore and Cooksey (1981: 50) noted, 'large numbers of French personnel stayed on after independence. Even today these countries are still heavily dependent on French cadres; which is one aspect of neo-colonialism'. Formal education served as a powerful tool to that end.

Like most French colonies that obtained independence in the 1960s, Dahomey did little to reform its education sector. Major adjustments consisted of revising the school curricula in such factual subjects as history and geography, and introducing civic instruction as a new school subject. Yet little had changed from the colonial guidelines set by the 1948 education reform (Okoudjou et al. 2007: 8-10). Key components of that policy document included the reinforcement of educational decentralization by creation of more public rural primary schools. Upgrading the national curricula to match that taught in the French metropolitan education system was a condition for diploma equivalence. Further measures included the establishment of teacher training and vocational schools.

Thus, independent Dahomey enjoyed an expansion of education in the 1960s; Porto-Novo, its capital, hosted two secondary schools: an agriculture vocational school established in 1962 and an institute of scientific studies founded in 1965. After a number of timid attempts, the University of Dahomey eventually opened in 1970 with a few hundred students.

Educational development in Dahomey reflected the reality of education systems in most independent African nations. The need to elaborate endogenous development-oriented education policies became an early objective of pioneers of the nascent Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the international community. As early as May 1961, under the impetus of UNESCO, the Addis-Ababa Conference on Education in Africa gave African nations an opportunity to gear their education priorities towards the socio-economic development of the continent (UNESCO/ED/181 1961; MEMB 1983: 51; Thompson 1981). The general policy framework promoted at the conference was that each nation had to reorganize its education system to address their specific socio-economic needs. Participants at the conference established global plans for meeting these priority goals. In short, the Addis-Ababa Con-

ference made it clear that education in the newly independent states had to contribute to socio-economic development. One policy goal stated that each nation-state should achieve universal primary education by 1980. The conference formulated policy recommendations in matters of education finance, education planning, curricular reform and adult literacy programmes.

Dahomey was represented by its Minister of National Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Michel Ahouanmenou. But political instability in the 1960s prevented decision-makers from enacting policy measures in line with the conclusions of the Addis-Ababa Conference: 'Between 1960 and 1972, the country experienced eleven presidents (five civilians and six military men), six different constitutions, twelve coups d'états, of which five were successful' (Bierschenk 2009: 348). This endemic instability – rooted in an enduring rivalry among three political leaders, each of whom represented a major political region of the country – was a record in Africa, as the country earned the nickname '*l'enfant malade de l'Afrique*'.<sup>3</sup> The nation's political leaders eventually reached a consensus in 1968 with the Presidential Council formula.<sup>4</sup> The ensuing relative political stability made way for the first education reform efforts.

The overall perpetuation of colonial education policies promoted elite education and its corollary of increased inequalities between rural and urban schools as well as between public and private schools. Dahomey was above the average of francophone African countries for the rate of students attending private fee-paying schools in 1970, with 34 per cent private attendance in primary school and 56 per cent in secondary school (World Bank 1988: 137). School curricula were essentially content-based and western-oriented, with little relevance to learners' socio-cultural and economic contexts. By the same token, the tight selectivity of the school system made it possible for only 'the fortunate few' to get through. Some 627 children could complete primary school among a cohort of 1,000 in 1970. Selection was even stricter at secondary school level, with a total gross enrolment of just five per cent for the same year (ibid.: 132). This selectivity of the post-colonial education system marginalized the majority of children despite the promotion of rural schools. It also created a handful of Dahomean elites who were prized in most former French colonies, reinforcing the Dahomean education as the *Quartier Latin de l'Afrique*. As a consequence, frustration and social tension inherent in these inequities pressed for inclusive reform initiatives. One such initia-

tive was the promotion of rural primary schools, which contributed to some increase in gross primary school enrolment (from 26 per cent in 1960 to 36 per cent in 1970). In order to accommodate the enrolment increase, the Presidential Council took policy measures that impinged on the privileges enjoyed by advanced students.

### 3.3 Grossetête-Dossou-Yovo Reform (1971-1972): Education, but a Privilege for All

#### 3.3.1 Policy Orientations and Contents

The first major education reform in Dahomey was known for its secrecy and for the influential role of two figures in its initiation. One of these, Grossetête, was the French education inspector sent to Dahomey to help initiate, design and implement an education reform in accordance with the principles of the Addis-Ababa Conference; the other, Dossou-Yovo, was the Minister of National Education of Dahomey. Both collaborated to draft the reform in the form of a document which first became a law and then a decree in June 1971 (*République du Dahomey* 1971). In terms of policy vision, the document emphasized the instrumental role of education in preparing the youth intellectually and physically to contribute to the nation's socio-economic and cultural development. Specifically, the policy intended to break with the colonial education system by giving priority to educational expansion. The expansion of rural primary schools aimed to groom children in the culture of their milieu and entailed decentralization of education. At secondary education level, the contentious decision to limit the *lycées* to high school status, by removing the lower level, sparked the resistance of *lycée* students. Further, the agenda consisted of creating lower secondary schools for general education and vocational training. The policy package also included democratic measures such as parental freedom to choose between public and private school, provision of mass education and state neutrality in instructional matters insofar as religion and politics were concerned. Though explicitly development-oriented, the reform did very little to change the curricular format which remained content-oriented, at least in the policy documents.

The removal of the lower components of the *lycées* implied the conversion of student allowances into stipends for students to attend the newly established lower secondary schools. Part of the savings from this

policy measure was to finance school infrastructure building and equipment. Students in the newly established lower secondary schools would enjoy financial assistance and school meals, and the *lycées* would enrol fewer students. This was an attempt to differentiate between secondary schools; the *lycées* would prepare students for university and academic studies whereas the lower secondary schools would prepare attendees for entry to *lycées* or professional life. Decentralization implied that secondary school entrance examinations would take place at the provincial level using the local expertise of primary school principals and inspectors, under supervision of the National Commission of Education Reform. In fact, the limits imposed on the *lycées* resulted in part from the executive government's fear of student activism. *Lycées* were 'designed to attract the most able children (or those from the wealthiest families)... [their] boarding facilities... [aimed to] develop a sense of common identity among the pupils, and [prepare them] for metropolitan examinations' (Blakemore and Cooksey 1981: 45). Because *lycéens'* activism could contribute to the prevailing political instability, the political elites' intention to downsize the *lycées* was partly justified. Yet the reform also wanted to do justice by allowing more children to take advantage of formal education, which was viewed as a reliable path of upwards social mobility. Measures to reduce *lycéens'* privileges and benefit the lower secondary students were decreed to take effect from September 1971.

### 3.3.2 Organized Resistance

Initially, the threat of losing privileges motivated *lycéens'* pre-emptive attempt to stop the reform before it could take effect; but as the resistance developed, it took a political turn. *Lycéens* strongly opposed the top-down approach to reform design and succeeded in gaining the support of actors such as teachers' unions, youth organizations and parent-teacher associations in their resistance efforts. It is interesting to examine the key actors of the resistance and their motives.

At the forefront of the resistance were the *lycée* students; they wanted to preserve their interests, especially their allowances and the relative freedom they enjoyed in the boarding schools. University students supported them because they sensed in the reform a threat to their interests; after the *lycéens*, it might be their turn to suffer education budget cuts. Moreover, for the sake of solidarity, university students supported their *lycée* peers as both belonged to the same student union (*Union Générale des*

*Elèves et Etudiants du Dahomey*, UGEED). In a written call for a strike on 4 November 1971, the union ‘demand[ed] the vigilance and mobilization of all students, parents, workers in towns and rural areas, patriot military to turn Dahomey into an immense battlefield against the *Grossetête-Dossou-Yovo* reform’ (Okoudjou et al. 2007: 14). The union of students from the northern part of the country also gave strong support to the resistance. Indeed, these hinterland student unions had significant influence in post-colonial Africa. During colonial administration, the southern part of most coastal countries held some advantage over the inland regions in terms of infrastructure, urbanization, educational offerings and job opportunities. To catch up, elites from the more backward regions organized themselves into associations and unions to advance local interests; education then provided a powerful tool to achieve that goal, as it united them and stimulated solidarity and upwards mobility among them. In the expansion of rural primary schools, advanced northern students perceived a threat of discrimination in the promotion of higher education in southern cities to the detriment of the northern regions. Under the banner of the FACEEN (*Front d’Action Commun des Elèves et Etudiants du Nord*), students from the northern part of Dahomey joined the resistance to condemn and oppose the *Grossetête-Dossou-Yovo* reform. As the resistance took shape, other unions and organizations joined the students’ cause; it became the cause of teachers’ unions through the national union of secondary education teachers (SYNAES), the parent-teacher associations, the university professors’ unions and various youth organizations.

In general, these unions and organizations manifested their opposition to the reform on the grounds that its planning and design occurred in secrecy without any involvement of grassroots actors in the education system. These latter resented and denounced the imposition of the reform as a plot against the independent nation. They condemned the role of France at the very top level of the reform through its education inspector Grossetête. They also scorned the reform for its perceived neo-colonial motivations and alienation from the socio-economic development needs of the country. Through education decentralization, resisters argued, the neo-colonial government wanted to put the financial burden of schooling on the shoulders of parents and promote an elite education for their own children in the *lycées* and private schools. Resistance took the form of verbal protests, written condemnations, mass demonstra-

tions, strikes and the paralysis of the whole education sector. Unable to bear the public pressure, the Presidential Council decided to postpone implementation of the reform, pending negotiations with the unions. These negotiations led to the creation of a new, broader national education reform commission in October 1971.

Although the reform was never implemented, the principles of the policy message became the core values of the subsequent education reform in the country: expansion, decentralization, parent involvement, and authentic teaching. While grassroots actors continued to contest the open involvement of France in the reform and the imposition of the French school system, the *Grossetête-Dossou-Yovo* reform produced an initiative to reduce the *lycéens*' privileges so as to accommodate more students in lower secondary schools. Thus emerged the dilemma of whether education should be considered a privilege for 'the fortunate few' or a development imperative for all. Policy measures that reinforce the selective nature of schools would result in systematic exclusion, whereas popular measures were likely to jeopardize instructional quality. This dilemma, which is a colonial legacy in the sense that schooling was initially considered as a strong determinant of upwards social mobility, continually challenged education policies in the independent nations.

On the political front, the organized resistance had revealed the weaknesses of the Presidential Council in handling state affairs. It rendered the council unpopular and created suspicion among its three members. Each one of the three presidents suspected the others of nurturing regional and ethnic divisions to destabilize the incumbent's presidential term. After the incumbent President Hubert K. Maga from the northern part of the country had served his term from 1970 to 1972, his successor from the south, President Justin T. Ahomadégbé, had hardly started his term in 1972 when the military seized power on 26 October 1972 and established Lieutenant Mathieu Kérékou from the north as president, which compromised the chances for the new education reform commission to start working.

### 3.4 *Ecole Nouvelle* Reform (1972-1990): Education, a Development Imperative for All

The *Grossetête-Dossou-Yovo* reform contributed to destabilizing the Presidential Council while serving as the springboard on which the military junta found support to legitimate its coup. In a radio broadcast, Presi-

dent Mathieu Kérékou voiced strong charges<sup>5</sup> against the disorder in the education sector and promised to reform education in the best interest of all citizens. Education reform was thus one of the major popular measures announced by the junta. One month later, on 30 November 1972, the junta made public its programme and national action plans, making educational restructuring a national priority. It became urgent to establish a new authentic, democratic and patriotic education system serving the interests of all citizens as well as the interests of the nation. A national commission on education reform undertook to translate this political vision into a set of concrete and manageable actions. Though all of the ministers of the regime were military, civilians made up the majority of the commission. These were mostly education practitioners who supported the new political option. They consulted people nationwide: teachers, students, parents, school administrators and business persons. After completing a draft of the new document, the commission submitted it to the junta. The new Minister of National Education, Culture, Youth and Sport supervised this preliminary process of policy design, after which the junta approved the draft, which the one-party National Assembly (ANR) passed into law on 23 June 1975 (République Populaire du Bénin 1981).

### 3.4.1 Policy Orientations and Measures

Given the political context of its initiation and the junta's adoption of a Marxist-Leninist ideology, *école nouvelle* envisioned an end to the elitist system that had excluded the majority of children from education. Provision of education for the masses along egalitarian principles required creation of more public schools and recruitment of more teachers. The junta declared it a nation-building task and encouraged the youth to participate. It recruited lower secondary school graduates – JIR (*Jeunes Instituteurs Révolutionnaires*) – into teaching positions in primary schools and high school graduates – JBR (*Jeunes Bacheliers Révolutionnaires*) – into teaching positions in lower secondary schools. National military service became compulsory; efforts to resist amounted to an offence against the state and deserved due sanctions. All university students had to teach high school for two years to fulfil a national service obligation before completing their university studies. For ideological reasons, the junta banned private schools, together with religious schools, and took over their facilities for public instruction. By 1983, no students were enrolled

in private or religious schools in the People's Republic of Benin (World Bank 1988: 137).

Further measures aimed to reduce the number of years of instruction at specific levels of the school system, so that students could graduate sooner in order to contribute to nation-building (primary school consisted of five years instead of six and lower secondary school became three years instead of four). Inspired by UNDP's education and development project, the reform innovated by contextualizing instruction in such a way that, in addition to core basic skills, students could learn and practice some local trades. Such activities counted as school subjects and students could earn credit for them. Primary and secondary school students could thus learn farming, gardening and animal husbandry, as well as the arts, sports, music and handcrafts that were locally dominant (MEMB and MEMGTP 1975). The principal motto 'discipline, hard work' and the equation '*Ecole Nouvelle = Unité de Production*' were chanted on official occasions as revolutionary praise for the reform. Discipline, hard work and a conception of schools as production units became the core values and attitudes that the reform promoted. A vision of integrating both theory and practice is explicit in the policy documents. Article 2 of the reform law describes the *école nouvelle* as 'a catalyst for promoting the political, economic and social development, and a means for collective salvation that favours production through collective participation' (République Populaire du Bénin 1981: 16).

As for the curriculum, there was a shift from the previous subject-matter oriented format towards an objective-based format. This latter is a pedagogical approach which requires teachers to identify the behavioural patterns expected from learners prior to the lessons; fragmented contents are taught in a piecemeal fashion with no effort to integrate or establish relationships among them. Basically, instructional strategies consisted of drilling, rote memorization and recall. The teacher would write a lesson on the blackboard and students would copy it into their notebooks in order to memorize; then the teacher would ask some students to recall the lesson and so the cycle continued. In primary schools, instructional subjects remained the same as before the reform, including arithmetic, history, geography, civic instruction, algebra, geometry, reading and writing in French, grammar, vocabulary and natural science. More than 20 different subjects made up the core curricula.

Institutionally, the education sector experienced significant changes. The so-called ‘first panel’<sup>6</sup> included early childhood, primary and secondary education, and technical, vocational education and training. Higher education and scientific research made up the ‘second panel’. Though each of these divisions was under the responsibility of its own ministry, all were accountable to the National Council of Education and Research (CNER), an independent regulatory body in charge of education issues beyond the prerogatives of the ministers. In reality, while the different ministries of education became operational, the National Council of Education and Research never became functional.

### 3.4.2 Actors’ Responses

Upon its inception, the reform aroused the enthusiasm of most education actors who manifested support at different levels. Though earning very little, teachers were highly respected due to their incarnate authority. Teachers served not only as instructors, but also as local development agents. In many instances, they took charge of indoctrinating the youth in the new political ideology. Teachers controlled several divisions of the National Party, and promotion up the education administrative ladder depended on the degree of affiliation and commitment to the party, as was the case in most of the public service. The increase in student enrolment resulting from the policy of educating the masses motivated the military regime to proclaim all educated citizens as potential teachers. Teacher training schools were created in different areas of the country both for primary and for secondary school teachers. Experienced teachers attended inspectorate course and training in France and Belgium to supplement their training at the new national training centre of instructional supervision (CFPEEN).

Though schools had previously charged minimal user fees, parents were now eager to contribute materials and labour for building classrooms as well as to donate land to accommodate school facilities. Thus, the school-community partnership grew very productive. The vision of schools as production units together with community participation enabled school budgets for supplies, maintenance and social activities to be raised from parents’ financial contributions and profits from the production units of the school.

By 1980, this public enthusiasm had considerably waned, due basically to the decline in student performance. Repetition rate, which was 19 per

cent in 1970 at primary level, increased up to 27 per cent in 1990; and the 1:41 teacher-student ratio rose to 1:53 during the same period. Politically, the junta became increasingly troubled by internal contradictions. Dissension grew among the military over cases of corruption and suspicions of plots to overthrow the regime:

After 1986... military discontent became more vocal and in 1988, there were two apparent coup attempts, both involving officers and men from the presidential guard and the president's security teams, as well as officers from the 1972-75 opposition to Kérékou (Chris 1992: 47).

Turmoil in the education sector signalled the socio-political and economic drawbacks that the military junta experienced in the latter 1980s (Künzler 2007; Lalinon 1998). Disappointed with the unmet promise of a just welfare society, many parents, teachers and students developed alternative strategies to cope with the situation at hand. Most parents resented the fact that politicians and a few well-off parents sent their children to neighbouring francophone countries for a better education. Leaders seemed less concerned about mending the shaky national education system than about securing better education opportunities for their own children abroad and preserving their power.

In response to complaints from helpless parents, a national workshop was held in 1981 to evaluate the reform implementation and make adjustments. Among the major revisions was the decision to restore the school year to its initial length in primary and lower secondary schools. Schools would no longer be production units because these activities tended to divert students' attention from academic achievements. Moreover, some teachers had taken advantage of these activities to abuse students and embezzle school resources from productive activities (MEMB/MEMGTP/MESRS 1981). In addition, kindergarteners were to be instructed in French instead of the usual mother tongues, because participants viewed instruction in mother tongues as less appropriate for preparing children for primary education, in which French is the medium of instruction.

### 3.4.3 Collapse of the Marxist Regime: End of *Ecole Nouvelle*

Although the demise of the Marxist regime resulted from a conjunction of domestic and global factors, schools and education actors certainly contributed to the defeat of the military in 1989. Apart from bringing school attendance years in primary and lower secondary schools back to

normal length, which took effect in 1984, the junta could hardly afford to finance the other recommendations in the 1981 evaluation report. The international financial crisis of the 1980s, the weakening of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and the national economic crisis further ostracized the military regime to the extent that it had to accept the conditionality of a structural adjustment programme. One major condition of that programme was reduction of government expenditure, which entailed observance of severe social austerity measures.

As of 1985, education expenses represented 40 per cent of the national budget (Künzler 2007: 143), the majority of which served to pay salaries. Austerity measures entailed budget cuts particularly on teacher salary item. For example, recruitment into the civil service was suspended and civil servants, including teachers, were encouraged to retire early. Privatization of bankrupt state firms resulted in joblessness for many workers. A first signal of the socio-political deadlock occurred as early as 1985. Under the influence of their respective unions, students and teachers paralyzed the education system, which worsened the prevailing social tension. People perceived a change of political regime to be imminent. But with military repression and persecution, the regime gained control of the situation and schools resumed just to avoid wasting a whole school year for students. During the following years, things deteriorated. Social movements, masterminded by the clandestine Communist Party of Dahomey (PCD), spread throughout the country's schools and university campuses. Managing social tension became a major concern for the government, which had to open and let a few civilians enter. By 1989, the crisis was at its climax with the complete paralysis of the country: no school was open, and civil servants were on continuous strike to claim months of unpaid salaries. Military repression could no longer stop the determination of students and unions to be rid of the monolithic regime, together with its one-party National Assembly. Ultimately, the 1988-89 school year was declared academically invalid – a first in the history of the country (Lalinon 1998; Chris 1992).

Both national and international pressures on the government influenced President Mathieu Kérékou's decision to hold a national conference. In February 1990, the National Conference took place, gathering the country's political and civil society forces, including most notably, opponents who had been in exile due to political persecution. Yet, the majority of delegates were members of the national party. Issues like the

sovereignty of the conference and the applicability of its decisions were subjects of heated discussion and negotiation over the days of the gathering. Delegates who were members of the national party (PRPB) saw the conference not as a political forum; the nation had economic problems and patriotic citizens were called upon to find the right way out. On the other hand, formerly exiled elites and the nascent civil society activists wanted to seize the opportunity to give the country a new political turn. Eventually the conference gained sovereignty and its decisions became immediately applicable. With a national consensus to pursue a liberal democracy and market economy, the fate of the *école nouvelle* reform was sealed, regardless of its merits and worth. After blunt criticisms of the reform's meagre outcomes, delegates agreed to reform the education sector completely and to restore the country to its former place of pride as the *Quartier Latin de l'Afrique*. It became urgent to convene a national workshop on education for that purpose.

#### 3.4.4 *Ecole Nouvelle* Reform: Mixed Results

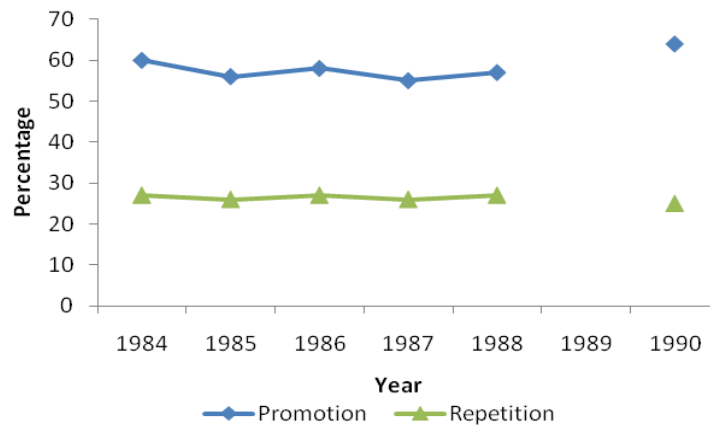
The *école nouvelle* reform produced mixed results. Its mid-way evaluation in 1981 found significant discrepancies between planned measures and their actualization in school settings. Productive activities, for instance, were found to divert students' attention from academics, and some influential actors perceived them as responsible for students' underperformance. The ensuing economic crisis prevented the military regime from implementing most of the recommendations of the evaluative workshop, and the new context of liberal democracy and market economy distracted decision-makers' attention from perceiving the initiative as of any worth. Nevertheless, the *école nouvelle* reform enabled the school system to attain unprecedented achievements in terms of access, infrastructure and teaching personnel. Primary school enrolment tripled and secondary school enrolment grew sevenfold in less than 15 years (World Bank 1988: 125-28). Between 1973 and 1989, the number of primary schools rose from 1,124 to 2,879 and secondary school numbers rose from 67 to 147 (Okoudjou et al. 2007: 23).

Qualitatively, political leaders created teacher training schools in the northern, central and western regions of the country; likewise, the National Institute for Teacher Training and Research in Education (INFRE) opened with the mission of designing appropriate curricula and teaching materials. More youths got jobs after graduation; up to 1986, all

school graduates obtained jobs in the public sector. The reform contributed to the development of a sense of national unity and patriotism among citizens. If *école nouvelle* obtained some success in the pursuit of education expansion, egalitarian access and lucrative initiatives, it nevertheless failed to meet other egalitarian objectives, considering the failed attempt to cancel examinations from the school system, the poor results obtained in national examinations and the decrease in student enrolment towards 1989. The primary gross enrolment ratio, which was only 36 per cent in 1970, reached 60 per cent in 1985 before dropping to 45 per cent in 1990 (World Bank 1988; Moulton and Mundy 2002a; Welmond 2002a). Likewise, success in primary school-leaving examinations, which was only 28 per cent in 1975, increased to 59 per cent in 1979 before dropping to 40 per cent in 1990 (Künzler 2007: 145; MEN 1994b: 75).

Yet, opinions diverged on whether the reform contributed to the shortcomings. Some intellectuals and well-off parents never approved of the radical intention to break with the prevailing elite education system inherited from colonial rule. Their exit coping strategy consisted of sending their children to neighbouring countries for a better education and their demanding kindergarten instruction to be in French instead of in national languages. The egalitarian policy intention appears to have contradicted their aspiration to obtain an elite education for their children. The failed attempt to cancel school examinations supports this analysis. Eventually, these elite education-minded actors interpreted the decline in student enrolment, students' underperformance and the inability of graduates to find jobs beyond the public sector as a failure of *école nouvelle*. They subsequently supported a liberal reform of the education system. On the other hand, scholars such as Amoussou-Yéyé (1994) and Guézodjê (1977) appreciated the reform and identified some positive elements in it, attributing the shortcomings to such external factors as the economic crisis and the deteriorating working and living conditions of teachers (in Bierschenk 2007: 270). Efforts to value local resources and contextualize learning by connecting schools with learners' milieus constituted the strength of this reform. Regardless of the dominant opinion in the controversy, promotion and repetition rates remained steady throughout the critical years of socio-political and economic unrest, which culminated into the first invalidated academic year of the country in 1989 (Figure 3.1). A decline in promotion rate and a peak in repetition rate might have suggested curriculum-related problems.

**Figure 3.1**  
Steady indicators\* despite the crisis



\* Dropout rate is the missing indicator as it has little relevance to school curriculum. A sum of promotion, repetition and dropout rates makes 100 per cent.

Source: Data retrieved from MEMB (1989: 82) and MEN (1994a: 71).

### 3.5 Classic Actors in Benin's Education Policy

Schools are complex social systems whose organization and functioning reflect the larger political economy of the country. Though schools ultimately aim to maximize student learning and achievement, they involve relationships among different groups of actors, each seeking to advance their own often divergent interests. The dominant actors at the micro level of educational organizations are students, teachers, administrators, support staff, interest groups, subject clusters, parent-teacher associations and unions. At the macro level, there is the education superstructure, represented by national education ministries and their various divisions, the legislative body with its parliamentary commission of education, and many international organizations such as technical and financial partners as well as NGOs. All school-level micro-organizations are federated at the national level and have a say in policy decisions. Between the micro and the macro levels, there is a meso level with education authorities represented at the provincial level. Education visions and agendas formulated at the macro level (international and national), have

diverse influences on practices at the district and school-site levels. So, it is interesting to explore in turn how these constituencies have influenced, shaped and redefined education policy in Benin.

### **3.5.1 Students**

Students are major grassroots actors in an education system. Education reforms are intended to benefit them; as the most directly affected by education reforms, students constitute the end-beneficiaries. Though the majority of Benin's student population is in primary school – numbering more than 1.3 million in 2005 and growing at an annual rate of some eight per cent (MENs 2006: 29) – these beneficiaries are not mature enough to actively take part in policy decisions. Neither do secondary school students actively participate, except the student unions' contestation movements in 1971, 1985 and 1989.

Each school has student representatives who are federated at the national level through university student unions. While the UNEB is more restrictive, representing university students, the UNSEB is more inclusive, as it represents both university and pre-university students. These unions are quite influential in claiming and defending students' interests, especially regarding allowances. University students have a reputation for combating any attempt to increase fees and struggling to protect students' rights. Student activism flourished before the revolution, but students were forced into silence during the Marxist dictatorship, when student union leaders suffered severe persecution and torture. Their various efforts and clandestine fights contributed to the social mobilization that brought the military regime to accept democracy in 1990 (Lalinon 1998).

### **3.5.2 Teachers**

As major direct actors in the education system, teachers constitute the target group and 'software' of change insofar as education reform is concerned. Individually, the power they exercise comes from their performance and competence. Collectively, teachers are influential through trade unions. In 2005, the public sector of the education system counted as many as 23,270 primary school teachers, composed of 10,144 civil servants, 5,267 on a government contract and 7,859 on a local contract (MENs 2006: 34). During the revolutionary period, all teachers were civil servants, although a distinction could be made between career teachers and youths in national service. Although career teachers resented the

idea that any educated citizen could teach, they were forced into silence. A few experienced teachers who adhered to the Marxist ideology were active in policy formulation and design, whereas the others got involved only at the implementation stage. Despite their well-known activism and unionism, due certainly to their poor working and living conditions, teachers could hardly oppose the top-down policy decisions taken during the revolution. A lack of freedom of association drove all teachers to affiliate themselves with the single federation of trade unions (UNSTB). Consequently, strikes and demonstrations were rare until 1985. But when student and teachers' unions decided to paralyze the education sector in 1989, this was an irreversible political turn. Note that teachers never mobilized to denounce the *école nouvelle* reform; rather, they demonstrated to claim months of unpaid salary, to oppose the suspension of career promotion, and to request more freedom.

With the advent of liberal democracy and the market economy, teachers enjoyed more freedom of association. Over 20 years, dozens of teachers' unions emerged in the primary education sector, reflecting the diversity of the corps and their multiplicity of interests. The need for more teachers at a low cost engendered the existence of many new categories in the profession: civil servants, teachers on a government contract, teachers on a local contract, teachers in the national public service and teachers working in the private sector. Today, the major teachers' unions are SYNEMP, SYNAPRIM and SYNAEP for teachers who are civil servants; SYNEC, SYNERAPE and SYNECOB for teachers on a government or local contract and SYNEPRIB for teachers in the private sector. While teachers' union activism signals their enthusiasm about the freedom they enjoy after years of dictatorship, excessive union activism may constitute an obstacle to policy implementation (USAID 2005a: 21).

### 3.5.3 Pedagogic Counsellors

Pedagogic counsellors assist the chief school district officer in instructional supervision. Previously appointed from a list of the most experienced teachers according to aptitude, pedagogic counsellors nowadays attend advanced courses after passing a national test, which confers them a degree of privilege, as they prefer to be called '*C P craie à la main*'.<sup>7</sup> In 2005, Benin's primary education system counted 222 pedagogic counsellors active in school districts and seven in other services, giving a ratio of two to three counsellors per district (MEPS 2006a: 26).

Their main task is to coordinate in-service trainings within the different networks in their zones of intervention. Though serving both public and private schools, pedagogic counsellors are civil servants. Due to their higher position in the local education hierarchy, they exert technocratic influence on principals and teachers. Quite limited in number, pedagogic counsellors are in high demand; and efforts to train more staff fall far short of covering the need. As a result, the current pedagogic counsellors as well as retired ones are overused. While serving their assigned tasks, pedagogic counsellors also get involved in curricular design and teacher training under the supervision of inspectors. They tend to be authoritative with teachers and principals but submissive to inspectors, by whom they are trained. Though belonging to a single union (SYNACOPEMP), pedagogic counsellors are less known for union activism.

#### 3.5.4 Inspectors

Inspectors constitute a powerful group of actors in Benin's education system due to their limited number and the influence they exert on decision-makers at the national level, as well as the bureaucratic power conferred upon them at the district level. In 2005 there were 85 inspectors appointed as chief school district officers and another 49 inspectors serving at various educational offices (*ibid.*). By duty, inspectors act as experts and special advisers to top decision-makers and also as chief school district officers. Very proud of their technocratic power, inspectors shape education policy. Although trained for instructional supervision, inspectors prefer to give priority to education administration than to supervision *per se*. Inspectors enjoy respect and esteem among both teachers and principals. Despite their limited number, it is not rare to find inspectors in key administrative positions at the local, provincial and national levels.

To become inspectors, experienced pedagogic counsellors have to pass a national test that entitles them to attend a two-year training programme at the National Centre for Advanced Training in Educational Leadership and Instructional Supervision (CFPEEN), supplemented with short courses in Belgium. In the past, they used to get further specialized training abroad (in Belgium, France and Canada). Like pedagogic counsellors, inspectors are scarcely involved in trade union activism even if they all belong to the same union (SNIEPD). Due to a shortage of supervisory personnel, one inspector may oversee two geographically adja-

cent school districts. At school district level, inspectors are in charge of executing centrally planned decisions, coordinating activities of the pedagogic counsellors and monitoring all the teachers posted in their constituencies.

### 3.5.5 School Administrators

Although very close to teachers, school principals and vice principals have less control over teachers than do inspectors and pedagogic counsellors. They have bureaucratic power which they exercise through the conduct of administrative affairs. Primary school principals have supervisory and instructional functions in addition to their administrative prerogatives. A constant clash among these various functions may undermine administrators' performance, for instance, when no substitute teachers are available and they must take on classroom duties. In the public sector, school administrators are supposed to be experienced teachers whom the Minister of Education appoints based on aptitude. But in practice, political affiliation to the ruling party or connections with top authorities has precedence over professional experience (Ahlé 2003). In the private sector, the school founder may serve as principal or delegate a trustworthy teacher to fulfil the role.

Although they belong to teachers' unions, most principals remain indifferent to union activism except union leaders who are purposefully promoted as principals in public schools; however, such principals are not fully active in their school, due to their frequent participation in union meetings and activities. Principals get involved in school reforms at the implementation level, especially when they have to provide data for teacher training and education planning or when their schools are required to serve as occasional training centres.

### 3.5.6 Parents

Parents are organized in parent-teacher associations (PTAs) in each school, with local coordination at district level. Nationally, PTAs are federated into two organizations. The FENAPEB represents parents of students in general education including parents of primary school children. The FENAETP serves parents of students in technical and vocational training. Traditionally, parents support school activities by contributing money, materials, land and labour. Informally, some literate parents assess school reform by monitoring student performance. Illiterate parents

must rely on the pass or fail decisions of schools to judge their children's progress. Leaders of PTA federations were consulted before the initiation of the *école nouvelle* reform to assess their expectations of the education system. Parent associations intermediate in negotiations between the executive government and teachers' unions in deadlock situations that are perceived as posing a major threat to students. Recently complaints<sup>8</sup> have surfaced that leaders of PTAs and their federations are no longer representative of parents, as most of their children had already graduated from school. Thus, many parents attribute their lack of involvement in policy decision-making to their misrepresentation.

### 3.5.7 Executive Government

In *loco parentis*, the state has constitutional legitimacy to organize and provide education to all school-age children of the nation. This constitutional responsibility is vested in the executive government through the Ministry of National Education. Among other assignments, the ministry plans and implements education reforms nationwide. Its technical directorates are in charge of the various aspects of the reform process: financial, teacher training, curricula design, textbook design, personnel management, inspection, planning, supervision, etc. These actors are involved in education reform from initiation to implementation at the school level. But given their limited number, qualifications and equipment, one might doubt whether their activities are effective at the school-site level.

### 3.5.8 Legislature

The first lasting legislature in Benin before 1990 was the one-party National Revolutionary Assembly (ANR). Its members came from the hierarchy of the national party (PRPB). They were far less accountable to voters than to the president. As such, members of parliament simply approved the executive's decisions. Democracy as a check-and-balance system of decision-making became a reality only after the 1990 National Conference, at which time members of parliament became more responsive to voters. Constitutionally, the parliament needs to approve education reform projects by passing laws, authorizing the executive to spend money and controlling the executive's activities. Parliament has a commission of education whose members receive formal complaints about

reform implementation and call the concerned ministers for explanations.

Members of parliament act as local actors when they use their resources and connections to improve education in their own constituencies. The political nature of this informal intervention causes serious distortions in reform implementation because the ruling majority tends to favour their constituencies to secure future votes, regardless of education planning. Some schools in particular regions get more staff and equipment to the detriment of regions that are under-served. Political leaders use visible education projects as well as other social services to woo voters, and sometimes this dimension of policy implementation has precedence over the technical dimension.

### 3.5.9 Technical and Financial Partners

There has been an increase in the activities of technical and financial partners in the education sector since Benin's turn to democratic transition in 1990. Before then, only UNESCO, UNDP and the French Cooperation Agency were the key actors assisting the government in education reforms. Their major concern was to help initiate reforms that positively impact the economy. To reach this goal, technical and financial partners conducted studies and provided policy recommendations to decision-makers.

With the advent of democracy, many other institutions and NGOs joined Benin's education reform efforts. Although their motives go along with those of UNESCO, instrumental to their engagement is the belief that education expansion contributes to enhance democracy and economic growth. Their activities vary from direct financial support in the form of non-project assistance to direct interventions, like provision of school infrastructure and equipment as well as targeted technical interventions.

Apart from the traditional United Nations institutions, such as UNICEF, UNESCO and UNDP, other financial institutions, like the World Bank and the African Development Bank, provide loans and grants for education projects. Through bilateral and multilateral cooperation, Benin has gained assistance from the European Union, USAID, and many other donors to support education reform (see Appendix 5). One important characteristic of these interventions is the priority they give to primary education as well as to technical, vocational education

and training. In general, this category of actors is motivated by what Resnik (2006) called the ‘world education culture’, to name the principle behind the international agenda of education expansion in most countries after World War Two. Once, the working principle was human capital as the generator of economic growth. More recently, liberalization of the education sector and the promotion of democracy and competitiveness in schools have tended to prevail as guiding principles. On this premise, developing countries under structural adjustment programmes have faced the predicament of undertaking social service reforms and cutting budgets at the same time. Benin cut its education budget from a high of 40 per cent of national expenditure in 1985 to a low of 16 per cent in 1995 (Künzler 2007: 143; Banque Mondiale 2002: 17).

### 3.6 Conclusion

Education policy priorities tend to correspond to a given political context. This chapter presented decision-makers’ attempts to balance education expansion and quality improvement imperatives over time. Ten years after Dahomey gained independence, a first attempt was made to reform the education sector along the lines set out in the Addis-Ababa Conference. However, this attempt failed due to the top-down approach of reform initiation, the restrictive measure to limit the size of the *lycées*, the aim of differentiating academic and vocational levels, and the subsequent public resistance to the *Grossetête-Dosson-Yovo* proposal. Then the *école nouvelle* reform followed in a Marxist political context, with the goal to reduce education inequalities and to promote endogenous development. Although well-intentioned and planned, the reform fell short of its objectives as far as implementation is concerned. It barely survived the late 1980s’ economic and social crises. Despite its positive outcomes, the initiative succumbed to the deterioration of the education system and the new political context of the country. The advent of democratic transition, in 1990, brought the hopeful prospect of a systemic education reform. What remains is to learn what lessons education key actors took from the previous reform experience.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The term is borrowed from Clignet and Foster (1966), which uses *the fortunate few* to refer to the few students who used to graduate from high schools and the fewer who attended university after the wave of independences in Africa.

<sup>2</sup> The objective was to provide elite education to a few endogenous people chosen from notable families and to brainwash them so that they would defend the cause of the metropolitan country.

<sup>3</sup> The term means the ‘bad guy of Africa’. Independent Dahomey held the record for military coups in the 1960s (Okoudjou et al. 2007; Chris 1992).

<sup>4</sup> The Presidential Council is a power-sharing formula that entails rotating governance based on inter-regional equilibrium of Dahomey for the sake of political stability. Three regionally representative presidents were in office, each serving a two-year term. Political consensuses like this are also known as ‘post-colonial compromise’ (Banégas 1997: 34).

<sup>5</sup> Proclamation of 26 October 1972. Radio broadcast announcing the coup.

<sup>6</sup> This is an administrative subdivision to better manage the education system in the country. While the country previously had a single ministry of education, *école nouvelle* introduced three ministries: two for the first panel ‘*premier degré*’ (MEMB, MEMGTP) and one for the second panel ‘*second degré*’ (MESRS).

<sup>7</sup> Literally the term means ‘pedagogic counsellor with a piece of chalk in hand’. It conveys the pride of trained pedagogic counsellors, who boast of better pedagogical expertise than their simply appointed seniors.

<sup>8</sup> This concern was dominant among parents who took part in focus-group discussions.

## 4

## The 1990s' Curricular Reform: A Panacea?

### 4.1 Introduction

Scholars often disagree on whether formal education contributes to significant social change. Structural functionalists like Durkheim and social reproduction theorists like Bourdieu contend that education contributes to the perpetuation of dominant social norms, values and structures rather than changing them straight away from one generation to another (Harker 1990:117-18; Nash 1990: 435-37; Thompson 1982: 61). On the other hand, development experts and political leaders nurture great expectations of formal education. They perceive educational change as a do-it-all solution for bringing about political, economic and social change, especially in crisis-ridden societies (Brock-Utne 2002; Chisholm and Leyendecker 2008: 196-97; Walters 2000; Dreze and Sen 2002; Walker and Unterhalter 2007; Zachariah 1997: 471-74).

Benin's case of curricular reform in the 1990s illustrates a belief in the transformative power of education to mould society, judging by the context of its initiation, design and implementation. The previous chapter extensively documented the socio-political and economic crises prevailing in the country by the late 1980s. The National Conference, which offered the opportunity to settle the political deadlock, also critically examined the educational crisis. Diagnosis of the education system revealed such problems as lack of teacher motivation, parental loss of interest in schooling and schools' incapacity to meet expectations in terms of social mobility for graduates. Most importantly, the country's intelligentsia strongly believed that reforming school curricula would perpetuate democracy and put a definitive end to dictatorship. Education was perceived as a magic rod for solving the political, economic and social problems of the country. How did these public concerns inspire the curricular reform?

The current chapter explores the reasons for reform and documents its objectives, content, major actors and the resources mobilized for its implementation. After highlighting some impacts, the last part explains how implementation problems rendered the policy a controversial subject.

## 4.2 Reasons for Curricular Reform in Benin

Analysts propose a number of rationales behind policymaking in the education sector. Some link education reforms to economic crises, whereas others think that times of economic growth are relatively favourable for undertaking social sector reforms due to the financial requirements of such change (Grindle 2004: 19-20). Others link reform initiatives to electoral cycles, as popular measures in the education sector are likely to attract voters for the ruling party. Evidence from the current case indicates a link between socio-economic, political and educational crises. Thus, this section examines the different reasons for reform from political, social, economic, and pedagogical perspectives.

### 4.2.1 Political Reasons

Since no reform is politically neutral, the advent of liberal democracy and market economy in Benin in 1990 shifted education priorities to the promotion and enhancement of democratic culture, free enterprise, competitiveness and tolerance (MEPS 2001: i-ii). The political origin of the curricular reform goes back to the two-week National Conference of February 1990. Delegates wanted to reinforce and perpetuate democracy, and the conference offered a unique opportunity to help establish new democratic foundations. There was a transitional executive government with the consensus Prime Minister Nicéphore Soglo, a new legislative body (*Haut Conseil de la République*), and endorsement of the principle of power separation and multi-party elections. Turning irreversibly the page of military dictatorship in the country was a major concern for delegates who singled out education as key to this fundamental political change. If students learned the basics of democracy, such as tolerance, power sharing, responsibility, voting, citizenship and the exercise of leadership at school, and if schools themselves functioned democratically, delegates argued, democracy would thrive forever, definitely sealing the fate of dictatorship.

Referring back to their educational past, delegates recommended a reform that would restore Benin's glory in elite education. They advocated reproduction of the education system that had made them successful. Considering quality education to be the promotion of excellence in schools, delegates further recommended a special workshop on education (*Etats Généraux de l'Education*), to decide the new orientations and the timeline of the reform. This was one of the major tasks assigned to the one-year transitional executive government.

As early as October 1990, the national workshop on education gathered national educational leaders, policymakers and key representatives of local-level stakeholders. However, government officials made up the majority of participants, with teachers' unions and parent-teacher associations in the minority (MEN 1990: 165-74). Once more, elite influence dominated important decisions. After critically assessing the school system and the *école nouvelle* reform, participants elaborated new directions and formulated policy recommendations. In January 1991, the Declaration of Educational Policy came out. After presenting an alarming diagnosis of the education system in terms of complete deterioration, the document defined the various stages and processes of the proposed systemic reform. The transition government adopted the document, which served as an official framework for education policy in Benin until the national education law was passed in 2003.

Though absent from the agenda setting arena, the international community played a significant role in preparation of the national workshop and in actualization of its recommendations. Most of the preparatory documents were a series of diagnostic studies conducted by UNESCO to evaluate the education sector and suggest policy alternatives (UNESCO Project BEN/89/001 1990a, 1990b). For instance, the option of a comprehensive systemic reform was one of the policy recommendations made in the UNESCO studies (Welmond 2002a). Moreover, the decision to promote democracy, participation, human rights and tolerance in post-dictatorial Benin found a favourable echo among donors, who were willing to invest in promoting education in democratic Benin. The global push for universal primary education embodied by the Jomtien EFA summit in March 1990 influenced strategic decisions during the forum. Benin's peaceful democratic transition in a war-torn Africa and its commitment to EFA goals motivated funding agencies such as the World Bank, USAID and others to contribute to education policy definition, in

line with their own agenda of promoting universal primary education, gender equity and quality of schooling. The global objective of universal primary education perhaps contradicted the desire of many delegates at the conference to restore the country's elite education system. Contradictions of this kind foreshadowed the complexity of the task of conducting policy reforms that are development-aid dependent and pose the problem of whose policy agenda prevails. Elite education in a less developed country is quite selective and compromises the opportunity of quality education for all. Being inclusive, universal primary education is more demanding and challenges education quality, which increases the financial and technical dependence of less developed countries.

#### 4.2.2 Social Reasons

Prior to the systemic education reform, it was commonly admitted that Benin's education system had failed to meet the social expectations of collective and individual development. Among the critical weaknesses diagnosed was the inability of graduates at every level to exercise responsibility, to be practical and productive. Pessimistic observers spoke of 'collective suicide' to qualify the disaster caused by the *école nouvelle* initiative (MEN 1990: 27- 30; MEN 1994a: 1). The education system did not prepare graduates to take initiative beyond public sector jobs. Yet constrained by economic restrictions and the conditionality of structural adjustment programmes, the government had to cut jobs. Laid-off workers who received compensation packages could hardly find their way in the burgeoning private sector. Moreover, the fortunate few who remained in the public administration developed poor performance practices such as laxity, absenteeism, greed and cheating. Unemployment among school graduates emerged as an unprecedented social phenomenon with its corollary of youth delinquency, deprivation and an easy-gain mentality. Demographic pressure (three per cent growth in the early 1990s) and its migratory consequences of urban congestion and rural exodus worsened the social decay. In addition to tackling these social evils, the curricular reform was even supposed to address urgent public health and environmental problems.

The various inaugural speeches at the *Etats Généraux de l'Education* expressed high expectations of the reform. Beninese youths needed practical training to address local development priorities as well as national and international challenges. According to former Prime Minister Nicéphore

Soglo, *école nouvelle* was an evil educational experience responsible for the 'intellectual misery' of the country and its products qualified as 'intellectually disabled' (MEN 1990: 9).

In short, the curricular reform was to promote core social values such as integrity, honesty, creativity, hard work and self-sacrifice. Due to the magnitude of the social decay in the late 1980s, most delegates at the national conference and participants at the 1990 *Etats Généraux de l'Education* euphorically expected the education reform to address most of the social evils of the country at the dawn of democratic transition.

#### 4.2.3 Economic Reasons

State bankruptcy meant failure of the planned economy established under the Marxist-Leninist revolution. In fact, prior to the National Conference, the weakened military junta had already opened the economy to the private sector, as a condition for its structural adjustment programme. For the education sector, the choice for a market economy implied new orientations for school curricula, for teaching and learning strategies as well as for textbook design. Schools would train students primarily for self-employment, for the private sector, before supplying human resources for the public sector.

Human capital theory as promoted in the international arena, especially by the World Bank, also inspired the 1990s education reform in Benin. The assertion of former World Bank President James Wolfensohn in 1991, '[a]ll agree that the single most important key to development and to poverty alleviation is education', influenced decision-makers in developing countries and shaped education policy accordingly (Grindle 2004: 27). In Benin, top-level political-administrative actors perceived investment in education as productive and cost-efficient. The perception of schooling as a factor in development and economic growth originated from the World Bank publication, *Le Développement Accéléré en Afrique au Sud du Sahara: Programme Indicatif d'Action*, which the prime minister extensively quoted and referenced in his inaugural speech at the *Etats Généraux de l'Education*. One such quotation goes like this:

You are asked to design, as the World Bank suggests in its publication..., an education system that incorporates schooling not only as an investment but also as a commodity. Indeed, education is one of the most costly investments whose effects transcend the conventional production sector

with spillover effects on households and on every layer of the nation (MEN 1990: 9-10).

A cost-benefit vision of education was manifest; education would contribute to economic growth not only by serving as a field of productive investment but also by generating economically capable graduates. The aim would be to train youths to become competitive in the global market with sound technical, technological and scientific training. Delegates at the national workshop welcomed and endorsed this liberal vision, which is understandable given the new political and economic contexts of the country on one hand, and the socio-economic status of most delegates (as they belonged to a public-sector-based middle class) on the other hand. But one can legitimately question how representative this liberal vision was of Benin's rural, illiterate and common people, who continued to cherish the prospect of their children getting secure public sector jobs after education.

#### 4.2.4 Pedagogical Reasons

According to Tabulawa (2003: 7), pedagogy is part of 'an ideological outlook, a worldview intended to develop a preferred kind of society and people' (in Chisholm and Leyendecker 2008: 196). In Benin, the Declaration of Educational Policy profiled the human product that the reform would contribute to shape once designed and implemented. The system would turn students into a type of citizen tailored to the new social, economic and political order. The exit profile of students after primary education portrays the ideal graduate as autonomous, intellectually and physically fit, an initiative taker, self-dependent, a lifelong learner, respectful of their fellow humans, society and the environment, of truth and democracy, cooperative and a critical thinker. Once the new profile was defined, it remained to determine which pedagogical principles and practices would help to translate this broad vision into concrete realities. Two official documents substantially informed the ideological foundations of the reform: MEN (1994a) and MENRS (2001). The second document details the life skills a graduate from primary school should display in terms of competences and cognitive abilities. Graduates should be able to manage their own lives and environment (in the spheres of family, society, science and technology, demography and culture). Moreover, they should be able to cope with new situations whether in a formal or informal context.

To concretize the new profile thus defined, Benin educationists declared obsolete the formerly used pedagogical resources, such as teacher-centred strategies, content-oriented curricula and objective-based pedagogy, all derived from behaviourism. Rather, they preferred 'novel' pedagogical theories and concepts not only by necessity but most importantly to keep in line with the global development discourse on education and pedagogy. Active learning, integrative methods, learner-centred teaching and competency-based curricula gained prominence in the professional discourse of educationists. These pedagogical ideals, inspired by the work of such constructivist philosophers and psychologists of education as Jean Piaget, John Dewey and Lev Vigotsky, were considered innovations in the early 1990s in Benin. 'Constructivism' views learning as an active process which consists of establishing links between new and past knowledge. Constructivism has pedagogical implications that differ from those of behaviourism in several aspects:

- Learning takes place in an active mind through an interaction between the sensory memory and the storage memory. The active memory serves as a driving belt and a filter between the sensory memory and the storage memory.
- Knowledge is not transmitted; it is constructed in the mind of the learner. Learning results from personal interpretation of knowledge.
- Learning is an active process in which meaning is developed on the basis of prior knowledge. Prior knowledge and experiences are determined by culture and social context (Eggen and Kauchac 2001: 9-11).

From the 1990s the competency-based discourse has inspired a great number of curricular reforms worldwide due to its perceived potential to help students address contextual and global challenges. Nonetheless, the approach is still in search of strong theoretical and epistemological foundations (Jonnaert et al. 2004; Jonnaert et al. 2007; Perez 2007). Observing a range of proclaimed competency-based curricular reforms worldwide, experts have found that most innovations remain caught in the conceptual imprecision of the concept 'competence'. Moreover, theoretical weaknesses have given a green light to erroneous interpretations and applications. 'The world of education is in the throes of a major paradigm shift, of which many of the major players have barely arrived at the threshold', so argued the experts in Jonnaert et al. (2007: 188). These au-

thors emphasize that the priority in the competency-based approach is to win the epistemological battle before giving way to appropriate application in the field of school curricula. Prospects for such epistemological grounding were to be found in constructivism, cognitive science and interdisciplinarity (Joannert et al. 2004: 684-90). While the worldwide enthusiasm around the approach in the 1990s generated a series of curricular reforms that claimed to be competency-oriented, most pedagogical practices and materials still reflected a behavioural objective-based approach. This critical observation infers that amateurism may have characterized the implementation of many proclaimed competency-based curricular reforms.

The exploration of the various reasons for undertaking curricular renewal in Benin points to a perceived necessity, but it also reveals the influence of public-sector-based middle class officials who pressed for reform, given the favourable global context of educational policy convergence. Their determination to break with the past educational experiences of the country placed them in a defensive position that compromised their ability to identify any value in the previous *école nouvelle* reform that the new reform could build on.

### 4.3 Agenda Setting: Policy Actors and Goals

The comprehensiveness of Benin's education reform makes it difficult to single out the curricular components, as reform efforts converged to improve access, equity and quality of education. However, the curricular reform is closest aligned with the broad objective of improving the quality of education. The various forums and workshops for defining policy goals generated important documents. While clarifying the objectives for school curricula, these documents also define a set of activities and steps to improve education quality. This section presents each of the key documents along with their authors and how they conceive of improving the quality of education.

#### 4.3.1 UNESCO Reports and the Prescription of a Systemic Reform

A series of sector-wide evaluation studies by UNESCO between 1989 and 1991 served as the basis for important decisions concerning the choice for systemic reform (UNESCO Project BEN/89/001 1990a, 1990b and 1991). In the late 1980s, the military regime commissioned the studies in order to meet a UNDP requirement for financing projects

in the education sector. The studies resulted in a series of reports that documented the advanced deterioration of the education system and recommended a systemic reform to rehabilitate the sector. Partial efforts to reform the system could result in complete loss, according to the studies, due to the interdependence of its components and their advanced decay. From planning and management of the system to school infrastructure, including curricula, teacher training and education finance, the need to reform was urgent. The studies discovered, among other problems undermining the sector, inefficient use of resources, misallocation of human and financial resources and lack of planning. At the primary education level, the studies found that little was being spent on textbooks and the pedagogical inputs believed to have the greatest effect on learning. The UNESCO assessment and subsequent recommendations influenced discussions during the various forums on education. Though of no legal status, the UNESCO reports served as working documents at the *Etats Généraux de l'Education*. They also had the merit of introducing the concept of systemic reform in the education sector in Benin.

#### 4.3.2 National Elites and the *Etats Généraux de l'Education*

As urgently recommended by the National Conference, a gathering of education stakeholders took place in October 1990. The objective for the 350 participants, mainly government officials, was to diagnose the education sector and devise strategies to address the current crisis. The gathering took place in an aura of euphoria and history-making as many participants cast the previous regime and the previous reform in the light of all that is evil in society, both in general and especially in the cause of the educational crisis. Yet, a few participants credited *école nouvelle* with some achievements in terms of hands-on training and innovation which they suggested the new reform should build on. But the dominant trend was to re-establish the elitist education system prevailing before the revolutionary period.

Although no funding agency representative took part in this forum, the discourse prevailing in the policy documents of funding agencies, particularly those of the World Bank, marked the inaugural speech of the prime minister, who happened to be a retiree from the World Bank. The same dialect was heard in the address of the Minister of National Education, Professor Paulin Hountondji. Expectations of education were high; political leaders urged participants to find strategies to prevent the school

system from training students who would become unemployed and a burden for society. A profile of the new citizen was defined in terms of initiative taking, problem-solving capacity, patriotism, democratic principles, competitiveness, technical competency, cultural acumen and with native language literacy.

For one week, participants worked in six commissions. Commission 2 examined kindergarten and primary education and suggested policy recommendations. Primary education, said commission members, had suffered a decline in academic standards and enrolment. There had been a loss of parental interest, and graduates were proving unable to be productive in the workplace. It was suggested to make primary education a top national priority. Urgent recommendations consisted of undoing the educational changes that had prevailed under the previous regime. Curricular reform, textbook design, teacher training and 'strategic management' of the education sector were the workshop's main recommendations. Besides, a few participants wanted to improve teachers' working conditions and school infrastructure. They attributed the current crisis to the poor living and working conditions of teachers. If the workshop was to find appropriate solutions to the crisis, they argued, proper measures had to target the improvement of these conditions. This recommendation contradicted the UNESCO sector studies, which gave priority to technical intervention with non-salary inputs. Like the UNESCO sector studies, the *Etats Généraux de l'Education* recommendations had no legal status; the Minister of National Education never considered them as mandates. Yet, they inspired most of the subsequent education policy initiatives.

#### 4.3.3 USAID and the Action Plans

The United States renewed its interest in Benin after its 1990 political turn (Chris 1992; Welmond 2002a). Assessing the conclusions of the *Etats Généraux de l'Education* in 1991, USAID decided to support primary education in Benin, as the policy recommendations put forward coincided with US foreign aid policy goals. A USAID team came to Benin in September 1991 on a one-month mission to develop action plans with officials from the Ministry of National Education. Both the UNESCO sector studies and the *Etats Généraux de l'Education* recommendations served as a springboard for designing the subsequent action plans. On its agenda, USAID had, among other objectives, promoting quality educa-

tion, increasing equity of access and improving education management and planning. Inspired by USAID's priority for basic education, Benin's officials developed action plans grouped into three broad categories: improved education quality, improved planning and reinforced institutional capacity (Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1**  
*Action plans for achieving systemic education reform*

<i>Improved Quality</i>	<i>Improved Planning</i>	<i>Improved Institutional Capacity</i>
1. Curriculum reform	1. Improve equitable access	1. Ministry of education organization
2. Teacher training and pedagogical support services	2. Fundamental Quality Level (FQL) schools	2. Financial management
3. Examination and testing	3. School map	3. Personnel management
4. Textbooks	4. Management information system (MIS)	4. Equipment
5. Pedagogical documentation		5. Administrative training
		6. Public participation and financial sustainability

Source: Reproduced from Welmond (2002a: 94).

In total, officials formulated 15 action plans to meet USAID requirements for receiving the first instalment of US \$50 million in funding in the form of budgetary support (non-project assistance). Like the UNESCO sector studies, USAID wanted to finance non-salary inputs and support policy interventions with direct impact on student performance rather than improving teachers' conditions, as suggested by the *Etats Généraux de l'Education*.

The Fundamental Quality Level (FQL) action plan was completely missing in both the *Etats Généraux de l'Education* and UNESCO findings. Unlike the previous policy documents (the UNESCO sector studies and *Etats Généraux de l'Education* recommendations), the action plans were part of a USAID agreement with the Government of Benin. That agreement had legal status and was officially adopted by the Council of Ministers. The Benin government's commitment to develop and imple-

ment the action plans was one of the conditions for disbursement of the US funding.

#### 4.3.4 The World Bank and the Education Policy Letter

Before 1990, Benin had entered into structural adjustment arrangements with the World Bank to restructure its public finance sector. The Bank's interest in education in the newly democratic Benin was revived with the adoption of the World Bank Education Policy Letter in 1994. This document specified key objectives for World Bank intervention: school infrastructure and equipment, in-service and teacher training, a pedagogical support network and institutional capacity building. It further proposed better planning and management of teacher salaries. A cost-containment intention lay behind this initiative to rationalize teacher salaries, which took the lion's share of the salary item in the national budget.

Compared to the previous policy documents, the Education Policy Letter is much more in tune with the UNESCO sector studies and the USAID objectives than with the *Etats Généraux de l'Education* recommendations. While it acknowledged objectives such as curricula revision, girls' education and the fundamental quality of schools, it put serious restrictions on government spending for teacher salaries. This discrepancy foreshadowed several points of contradiction in policy intentions. While the World Bank prioritized optimization of resources like teachers, the recruitment of less expensive teachers and the increase of non-salary inputs like textbooks and in-service training, the revalorization of teacher conditions remained dear to national actors. Ultimately, these contradictions led to social tension characterized by teachers' union strikes and demonstrations in democratic Benin (Chris 1992: 53; Welmond 2002b: 57). The government had to balance opposing intentions, sometimes at the cost of serious sacrifice, like the defeat of President Soglo in the 1996 elections.

#### 4.3.5 Education Round Table: Consensus among Policy Elites

Long planned by the initial UNESCO sector studies to coordinate the various efforts for education reform, the education round table eventually took place in 1997. The delay was partly due to the covert rivalry among funding agencies, namely USAID, the French Cooperation Agency and UNDP (Welmond 2002a). Fully aware of this constraint, former Minister of National Education Karim Dramane negotiated separately

with the funding agencies and secured enough resources to initiate education reform without convening the round table.

With the change of administration in 1996, the new Minister of National Education, Jijoho L. Padonou, resuscitated the idea of a round table to build consensus among actors on reform objectives, programmes and funding. The gathering proved fruitful in updating reform goals. Additional objectives included giving equal priority to primary education and technical, vocational training and linking primary schooling with the other levels of the education sector. These policy objectives, formerly missing from the agenda of funding agencies, emerged with the round table. Apart from the new objectives, the education round table endorsed the policy goals in the previous documents: curricular reform, institutional capacity reinforcement, and improved planning and management of the system.

#### **4.4 Designing the Curricular Reform**

The Ministry of National Education undertook to turn the new educational vision into concrete reality. Initially, the Institute of Teacher Training and Educational Research (INFRE), the pedagogical think-tank of the ministry, contributed to the design of the new curricula. It hosted the five action plans related to improvement of the quality of education. Institutional and technical support also came from the Primary Education Directorate (DEP) and the Children's Learning and Education Foundation (CLEF). The CLEF project was a US initiative to reinforce the ministry's capacity in all technical aspects relevant to the comprehensive reform. The project contracted experts to train Benin's educationists in curricular design, development and planning. The five action plans were designed to function in a systemic way, i.e. interdependently. The missions assigned to each action plan in this category were as follows:

- The curricular reform action plan had the mission of designing appropriate school curricula in line with the new educational orientation by defining grade-specific syllabi, instructional materials, teachers' manuals and support documents and by setting up student-centred teaching, learning and assessment strategies that favour knowledge construction by learners themselves.
- The in-service training and teacher support network action plan was assigned to train all primary school teachers in using the new strate-

gies and materials. This action plan was to ensure that each of the 24,000 teachers attended a minimum of 150 hours' training in a six-year period. It further was to evaluate the impact of the training on teachers' performance and to provide remedies for improvements.

- The textbook and didactic materials action plan was to design a national policy for educational textbooks. It was also charged to provide all primary schools with mathematics and French language textbooks in line with FQL standards. Finally, the action plan was to encourage national editors to produce textbooks supportive of the new curricular approach, through capacity building and incentive measures.
- The evaluation and educational guidance action plan was assigned to update the traditional guidance mechanisms in primary education. It was also to follow student performance using objective measurement tools. Finally, this action plan was to redefine the conditions and procedures for organizing the primary school-leaving certificate examination (CEP) in line with the new pedagogical approach (CGNPE 2001: 2-9).

The fifth action plan, pedagogical documentation, remained inactive. Rather, the textbook and curricular reform action plans substituted for its activities by producing and diffusing guides and other support documents to teachers (USAID 2005a: 20-1). Each action plan was headed by a 'pilot', an experienced educationist who received hands-on training and educational in-service experience abroad (in Belgium and Canada). While inspectors and secondary school teachers near retirement made up the majority of the first generation of pilots, the second generation of pilots consisted of secondary school teachers and inspectors specialized in school curriculum development. The CLEF project provided need-tailored technical assistance for all of the action plans for planning, implementation and evaluation of activities. Meanwhile, EQUIPE, another US-contracted project, succeeded CLEF in the pursuit of reform activities when the latter ended in 2003. The curricular reform action plan set up six teams of curriculum designers. Each team, or task force, was charged to define the sets of competences, abilities and skills that students should acquire at each grade level in each field of study. The previous 22 school subjects were integrated into six fields representing the disciplinary competences: French language, mathematics, social studies, science and technology, art, and physical education. Design team mem-

bers, chosen according to their domain-specific expertise, were experienced teachers, pedagogic counsellors and inspectors. While inspectors served as team leaders, university professors supplemented them in more complex fields like mathematics. In addition to the disciplinary competences, the reform promoted two sets of competences across and beyond fields of studies and grade levels: transversal or interdisciplinary competences and transdisciplinary competences.

#### **4.5 Competences for Life**

In general, the notion of life competences stems from the view that primary schools should enhance basic life skills. The three Rs (reading, writing and numeracy) constitute the core of this essentialist movement. Succinctly, the notion of life skills entails students' mastery of key skills that enable them to advance in further knowledge acquisition and to emancipate in society (OIF et al. 2005: 25). Although this common view inspired Benin's educationists, they nevertheless included more skills under the competence concept.

The quest for perfection prompted educationists to embrace the competency-based curricular model after first trying the objective-based approach for two years (in the first and second grades). The competency-based model is a new paradigm in school curriculum development that gained currency from the 1990s. It departs from the objective-based approach in its emphasis on the integration of objectives (interdisciplinarity), learners' capacity to construct knowledge in context (constructivism) and insights from cognitive science (Jonnaert et al. 2004: 672-74; Jonnaert et al. 2007; Roegiers 2001). Among the plethora of definitions of the concept of competence in pedagogical literature, Benin educationists define competence as the expertise a learner displays in reacting to a domain-specific situation which requires the mobilization and utilization of a number of resources (e.g. skills, attitudes and knowledge). A competent person not only displays the acquisition of domain-specific knowledge, procedural know-how and attitudes, but also demonstrates the ability to mobilize and combine these resources to solve a practical problem (MENRS 2001: 41-6). Curriculum designers integrated three sets of competences known as 'competences for life'.

Disciplinary competences relate to subject area knowledge and skills, aim to stimulate students to know and appraise the world around them. At each grade level, students acquire knowledge and abilities in subject-

specific domains like the French language, mathematics, social studies, arts, science and physical education. An innovation in disciplinary competences was the introduction of the English language in grades five and six. Examples of disciplinary competences for the fifth and sixth grades in French and mathematics are formulated as follows:

- French (oral communication) – demonstrate one’s own comprehension of an oral statement in basic French;
- mathematics (measurement) – perform operations of currency exchange between CFA and other foreign currencies in ECOWAS countries (MEN 1994a: 14, 18).

Transversal or interdisciplinary competences refer to intellectual and methodological procedures that occur across fields of study and life experiences. They recur in all six fields, from mathematics to social studies and French. For the six grades of primary education, a set of 18 interdisciplinary competences were identified. Here are two examples of transversal competences as stated in the fourth grade mathematics curriculum:

- transversal competence № 3 – exercise critical thinking;
- transversal competence № 8 – communicate in a precise and appropriate manner (MEPS 2001: 22, 34).

When students prove able to coordinate their intellectual resources to solve real life problems, they are displaying transdisciplinary competences. Transdisciplinary competences call for the ability to transfer disciplinary and interdisciplinary competences into real life experiences. They aim at leading learners towards self-realization, while also intending to link school knowledge with learners’ existence and interactions with other persons and the environment. Transdisciplinary competences thus serve as the bridge between school knowledge and real life. In fourth grade, for instance, a transdisciplinary competence reads as follows:

- transdisciplinary competence № 1: assert one’s personal and cultural identity in a constantly changing world (MEPS 2001: 37).

Each competence was broken into a number of incremental and interdependent abilities that guided textbook contents and instructional activities. Teaching strategies required that lessons start with brainstorming activities, followed by a concretization stage. Further steps include assessment and feedback during which learners elaborate on what they

learned from the various activities, how they learned it and what use they would make of the knowledge. Instructional activities require students to work in groups with shared responsibilities (group secretary, spokesperson and supervisor). The former frontal disposition of seats (with all students facing the blackboard and the teacher) changed; now students faced each other in groups of six to eight, some looking towards the blackboard and others in lateral positions.

The innovative curricula were designed incrementally. By 1994, documents for first grade were ready for experimentation in pilot schools. The following year, experimentation reached second grade and so on, until all six grades were covered in 1998. The small number of pilot schools (30), with five in each of the former administrative provinces, and the relative availability of resources favoured experimentation. Successful experimentation motivated educationists to involve 150 more schools in 1996, 30 in every former administrative province. A major problem at the experimental stage was that some of the teachers who received training for the new curricular approach were posted in non-experimental schools and vice versa. By the time teachers in the experimental schools actually taught the new curricula, the transition curricula were in force in all of the other schools. Although no one publicly opposed the reform at this initial stage, curriculum designers took precautions to protect their work from outside criticism. They worked in quasi-secrecy and carefully selected trustworthy persons with whom to collaborate. Belonging to the think-tank that contributed to the initial work of the curricular reform was a mark of prestige, with participants gaining access to knowledge and *per diems*.

#### **4.6 Generalization**

In February 2000, the Ministry of National Education established the Generalization Unit of the Curricular Reform (CGNPE) to serve as the ministry's satellite for all related activities. It had two bodies: the permanent secretariat and the technical support committee. As many as six representatives of technical and financial partners were entitled to a seat in the technical support committee (MENRS 2000). In an internal report on the state of affairs issued in 2001, the unit synthesized its achievements and defined the remaining activities and the timeline to the end of the generalization period. Most of the information in this section comes from this internal report (CGNPE 2001).

The school year starting in October 1999 marked the nationwide generalization of the new curricula in all first grades. In preparation for this, principals and first grade teachers received one-month in-service training in August and September 1999. Since no teacher training school was fully operational in the country, training sessions were organized by groupings of teachers based on the geographical location of their schools. The term ‘Cascade training’ designated this kind of in-service instruction masterminded and largely performed by inspectors, pedagogic counselors and experienced teachers, under the supervision of the teacher training action plan. Incrementally, the curricula reached second grade in 2000, to finally reach sixth grade in 2005 (see Table 7.2).

For better coordination of activities, the generalization unit took responsibility for the five action plans: the curricular reform, teacher training, textbook development, pedagogic documentation and evaluation action plans. Technical and financial partners continued to support the reform at the generalization stage, providing valuable advice and punctual interventions. CLEF and EQUIPE projects (under USAID contracts) were instrumental in steering the reform at critical junctures when Benin government delayed funding or lacked expertise. While the EQUIPE project relayed the CLEF project in matters of textbook design, printing contracts and materials distribution nationwide, IFESH was locally active in training teachers and providing in-service instruction at the school district level. A particular aspect of USAID’s interventions at the generalization stage is worth mentioning. To ensure the sustainability of its activities, USAID discharged responsibilities to the Benin government each year as the reform reached an upper grade. Thus, in 1999, USAID financed all costs related to first grade textbooks, workbooks and teacher in-service training; but the following year, it financed only second grade activities, leaving first grade initiatives to the government. By 2006, the Benin government had assumed responsibility for all activities related to the generalization of the new curricular approach in primary schools. After completing its mission, the generalization unit disappeared in 2006. The Pedagogical Inspection Directorate (DIP) took over reform support and sustainability in primary schools and further generalization to secondary schools.

#### 4.7 Major Implementation Problems

Structural and organizational problems occurred during implementation of the new curricula. Structural problems were inherent in the design of the new curricula, whereas organizational problems related to the school system itself. While appreciating the quality of the underlying documentation, an evaluative study nonetheless recommended the curricula be simplified and the number of competences per grade downsized (Lanoye 2005). In addition, the introduction of the English language in primary schools remained at the pilot stage; it was never generalized due to lack of teacher training and appropriate documentation. Ultimately, the initiative lacked political will at a time when reform opponents interpreted US assistance as imperialist. An innovation such as the introduction of the English language in primary schools was viewed as adding fuel to opponents' arguments.

The complexity of curricular contents clashed with the low academic level of many teachers, who were not particularly receptive to change despite the hours of in-service training. Implementation suffered another structural problem as well: the action plan in charge of student assessment remained dormant until the 2005 primary school-leaving examination. There was a lack of expertise in competency-based evaluation strategies, as children had been evaluated differently prior to 2005 CEP examination. The sudden change in 2005 confused teachers; that year, 99 per cent of candidates passed the primary school-leaving examination, partly as a result of that confusion. The communication and public participation action plans were also problematic, remaining non-functional until opponents' attacks jeopardized reform receptivity among actors.

Organizational problems challenged the appropriateness of the reform, given the initial decay of the school system (infrastructure deficiencies, low teacher morale, management and planning problems, unreliable statistics). The new approach was incompatible with large class sizes, poorly equipped schools, limited infrastructure and the short supply of qualified teachers. To these school-site realities, one should add institutional and management hurdles, such as delayed availability of financial resources at critical junctures, inadequate personnel posting, teacher attrition and resistance to change.

#### 4.8 Impacts of the Curricular Reform

Unlike the *école nouvelle* reform which had a single evaluative workshop in 1981, the comprehensive reform of the education system since 1990 benefited from a substantial number of domestic and international evaluation studies. This reflects the influence of donors' involvement in the policy process; their scientific management inspired by the New Public Management required constant evaluation to monitor progress and performance. Yet this result-oriented rationality could potentially induce counter-productive or fraudulent practices in the routines of grassroots actors. Mooij (2008: 520-21) illustrated some side-effects of such performance-orientated evaluations, which resulted in teachers and principals forging 100 per cent student enrolment in India.

As the main force driving the other components of the systemic education reform, the curricular reform enjoyed greater attention from the assessment studies. In terms of impact study, the evaluations can be grouped into two broad categories. Some studies like USAID (2005a), MEPS (2006a) and USAID (2005b) documented the actualization of the planned interventions and public perceptions about the innovation. In this respect, they assessed the activities of the various action plans to discover strengths and deadlocks, suggesting improvement recommendations. Other studies, like Tesar et al. (2003), OIF et al. (2005), USAID (2007) and Garnier (2008), focused on the learning outcomes of the various interventions by evaluating the efficiency of the primary school system. This section summarizes findings from these studies considering quantitative as well as qualitative achievements attributed to the curricular reform.

With the global push for basic education and the openness to liberal democracy and market economy, Benin's primary education gained more attention and input than ever before. Towards the late 1980s, the lift of the ban on private and religious schools allowed more private initiatives in the education sector. Quantitatively, the comprehensive reform produced unprecedented results in terms of student enrolment, school infrastructure, in-service training of teachers, workshops and seminars. Primary enrolment increased at an annual rate of eight per cent from 624,778 students in 2000 to 1,376,472 in 2004 (OIF et al 2005: 17). The same source noted an increase in teaching personnel from 18,064 to 24,797 teachers within the same period, though most new recruits were reportedly untrained. In fact, while 88 per cent of teachers had profes-

sional qualifications in 1995, only 52 per cent were formally qualified in 2002. In addition, a substantial number of inputs such as curriculum guidelines, textbooks, workbooks and teacher training guides were designed, printed and distributed locally, taking into account local realities (Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2**  
*Educational materials delivered between 1999 and 2004*

<b>Materials</b>	<b>Grade1 (1999)</b>	<b>Grade2 (2000)</b>	<b>Grade3 (2001)</b>	<b>Grade4 (2002)</b>	<b>Grade5 (2003)</b>	<b>Grade6 (2004)</b>
Training guides	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	4,000
Curricula	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	8,000	8,000
Teacher's guides	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	8,000	8,000
Textbooks (French-Maths)	170,000	170,000	170,000	170,000	100,000	90,000
Workbooks (French-Maths)	340,000	340,000				
Wall charts	5,000	5,000				

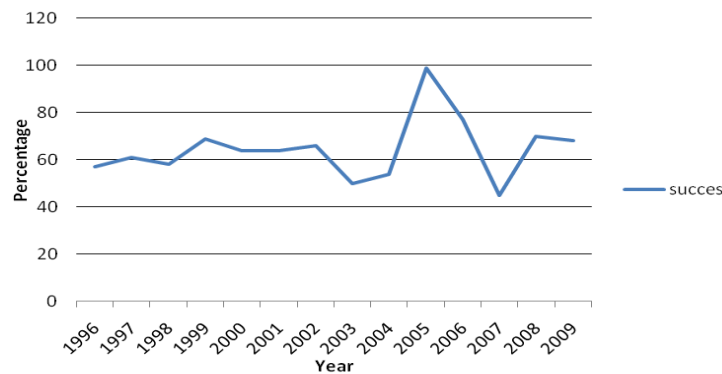
Source: Reproduced from USAID (2005a: 13-4).

French textbooks mention local names of characters while references are made to local places and historical figures in social education, and the art curricula valued oral literary genres. The mathematics curriculum provided opportunity for learners to count orally in their native languages. These were just a few of the original efforts to place instruction in the local context. As for infrastructure, MEPS (2006: 28) mentions unprecedented achievements in classroom construction, renovation and equipment with desks, tables, blackboards, chairs and benches. Between 2001 and 2005, as many as 371 new schools were constructed with a total of 1,917 classrooms.

Qualitatively, Table 1.1 highlighted the increase in most classic performance indicators of the school system. In addition to the rising promotion rate and the declining repetition rate, primary school-leaving examination results appeared relatively good following the generalization (Figure 4.1). On average, this rising trend is consistent with the percentages of success obtained at the pilot stage of the competency-based ex-

amination in 1998 (93), 1999 (83), 2000 (87) and 2001 (89) (CGNPE 2001: 8). Although no teacher training school was functioning during the pilot and generalization stages of the curricular reform, a substantial number of teachers received occasional in-service training on the new approach. IFESH supplemented the *cascade* training sessions by reviving the professional development networks of the school system. Actually, between 2001 and 2005, IFESH conducted 17,786 class visits in 1,439 schools throughout its zones of intervention across the country (USAID 2005a: 17).

**Figure 4.1**  
Success rates in CEP exams



Source: Data retrieved from MENs (2006: 38) and the Directorate of Testing and Examinations (DEC)'s yearly proclamation of national exam results. Author's personal records were kept for results after 2004.

Despite the efforts deployed in the framework of the systemic comprehensive reform and the relative improvement mentioned, Benin's primary school system continued to suffer a serious problem of student underperformance in the sense that only a limited number of students actually learned under the new curricular approach. In fact, subsequent evaluations of learning outcomes for students showed alarming results. In 2003, an evaluation of learning outcomes for first and second graders in French and mathematics found that 'less than 20 [per cent of] school children can work in French at the expected level [and that] the majority

of Grade 1 and Grade 2 students do not understand their teachers, cannot read instructions, and are incapable of participating in the class' (Tesar et al. 2003: 19, in USAID 2007: 12). In the logic of continuation of the 2003 study, USAID commissioned a large-scale evaluation of learning outcomes targeting third, fourth, fifth and sixth graders in all fields of study except physical education. The study showed that, on average, 'results are the contrary of what should be observed: instead of having a minority who do not have any mastery, it is a majority, even a very strong majority, who are in this category', with the nuance that significant variations are observed across fields of study, and according to whether students attended private or public schools (USAID 2007: 20). PASEC evaluation tests corroborated this downward trend of student learning, with fifth graders scoring an average of 28 out of 100 in French and 33 out of 100 in mathematics; the basic knowledge rate of the primary school system was only 11 per cent, far from the minimum 40 per cent acceptable among CONFEMEN countries (OIF et al. 2005: 95-6). Finally, Garnier (2008: 9), in an endeavour to identify effective schools in Benin and the determining factors, came to similar conclusions stating that 80 per cent of students in the sample could not attain the minimal mastery of competences required for their grade levels. While these impact studies converged on the diagnosis of poor learning outcomes for students, none of them specifically attributed this shortcoming to the curricular reform.

Various constraints were evoked to explain the current situation. With the requirements of structural adjustment programmes, the government closed all teacher training schools and rationalized teacher recruitment. The low academic level of new recruits either as teachers on a government contract or as teachers on a local contract and the lack of preparation that characterized the occasional training sessions was detrimental to teacher performance and consequently to students' academic achievement. Moreover, the cost-containment measures imposed by funding agencies restricted the government's room for manoeuvre to satisfy teachers' union calls for better working conditions and payment of salary arrears. This situation created permanent tension in the school system after the initiation of the reform. For more than a decade after the systemic education reform started, there was rarely any school year in Benin without a teachers' union strike paralyzing the public sector for at least one month. This reduced the timeframe available for instruction with the

new approach in public schools. But competency-based curricula are systemic with cumulative effects; failure to complete the grade requirements at any grade level affects student achievement in upper grades if no remedial action is taken. An empirical observation of the instructional time that students spent in the presence of their teachers in a few urban and suburban public secondary schools over a four-year period revealed a gap of 40 to 47 per cent between the number of hours planned for instructional activities and the number of hours that teachers actually spent with students (Yessoufou 2006). Students in the public sector accumulated these shortcomings for years. In response, parents, students and their teachers developed various strategies to cope with the situation. Consequently, alternative solutions multiplied in the school system as though the State had 'resigned' (Künzler 2007: 119).

#### 4.9 The Curricular Conundrum

After its countrywide generalization, the curricular reform became a bone of contention, instigating proponents and opponents among grass-roots actors in the education system. Parents come first on the list of opponents. They denounced the poor quality of instruction and deplored the fact that they could no longer help children learn at home. They found the contents inappropriate to students' socio-cultural realities, unfit for their cognitive development and elite biased. Some criticisms went further to expose the greed of education authorities and experts who accepted the programme on the promise of donor money to finance the reform, especially from the United States. Other parents emphasized the fact that teachers constantly required money from students for extra classes or supplementary documents. More realistic parents contested the programme on the grounds that children were passing to upper grades without such basic skills as reading, writing and simple arithmetic. Initially, key opinion leaders used specific media channels to relay parents' concerns on the policy.

In addition to parents, a few influential elites, mainly university professors and union leaders, publicly denied that the programme had any pedagogical virtue and recommended immediate suspension of its implementation. In the news and public debate, the curricular reform became an issue of general interest with the media broadcasting every development. One teachers' union confederation, CSTB, organized several public demonstrations and strikes to demand suspension of the reform

because of its supposed detrimental effects on children and the school system.

Social mobilization against the curricular reform, compounded by its implementation problems, did not leave the government and its technical and financial partners indifferent. Since 2003, different evaluative missions confirmed the validity of some of the parents' complaints but took care to spare the new approach of any direct responsibility for the dismal quality of education. Of course, they found the new approach overly ambitious, too sophisticated and quite demanding for teachers with poor training. Though they found that students were far behind the intended achievement goals at the different grade levels, the evaluative missions never recommended suspension of the programme. Instead, they suggested adjustments to simplify contents and revise textbooks. In 2005 for instance, the first and second grade curricula were revised to reduce the length of instructional activities and to make more explicit the letter combination strategies for teaching reading and writing. In 2006, corrective measures took effect for first and second grades. That same year, in an effort to increase public receptivity, educationists changed the denomination of the curricular reform (NPE), now calling it '*programmes en vigueur*', the curricula in force. Since 2005, six normal schools have become functional to provide initial professional training to secondary school graduates to become primary school teachers. The competency-based approach is now part of the formal training syllabi of teachers. Eventually, the communication action plan of the reform became active with pro-reform advertisements and media information.

The different adjustments made to the programme, however, have not squelched parents' dissatisfaction and complaints. The curricular reform was a topic of heated debate during the 2006 presidential electoral campaign. The issue was whether to stop implementation of the reform or continue. Although no candidate took a clear position in the debate, pro-civil society candidates promised they would seriously examine the question if elected. Ending the implementation of the curricular reform is a bold political decision that would be difficult for the government to take without donors' consent.

The newly elected pro-civil society president Yayi Boni wanted to keep the electoral promise. In response to a teachers' union strike demanding suspension of the curricular reform among other claims, he convened a national forum to examine the education crisis and find sus-

tainable solutions. In February 2007, the National Forum on Education was held with UNESCO's active support. Of the 400 delegates, government officials and union leaders made up the majority, though a few parents, students and donors were also represented. On the problem of the curricular reform, most delegates attributed the critical outcomes to the long and cyclic strikes organized by the teachers' unions and to poor teacher training. In response, union delegates held the government accountable for the consequences of their strikes. CSTB leaders desperately bargained for suspension of the reform; radical unionists labelled the new curricula a 'neo-imperialist conquest' by western countries, especially the United States for its active role in the policy process. This position is similar to that of the Communist Party of Benin (PCB), which had long been advocating endogenous solutions to education problems. Complete instruction in native language at basic level and popular control of education administration were two of their suggestions.

Key recommendations concerning the curricular reform were incentive measures to raise teacher morale and an exhortation to continue the curricular revision process (MENs 2007: 45-7). New components added to the reform included the incorporation of national languages as an object of study. Other general recommendations were the translation of the free primary education decision decreed by the president in October 2006 into manageable policy measures. While the forum succeeded in calming the social tension that prevailed in the education sector, it didn't change the negative public attitude toward the innovation.

#### 4.10 Conclusion

So far, the overview of two major education reforms in Benin reveals striking similarities in as far as the development discourse and curriculum ideals are concerned. Both the *école nouvelle* (in Chapter 3) and the 1990s' curricular reform have similarities concerning their contexts of birth, the enthusiasm they arouse and the development-oriented ambition they nurture. Despite their occurrence in mutually exclusive historical contexts of the country (a military dictatorship versus a liberal democracy), both reforms advocate a similar development discourse and represent state solutions to social and educational problems. In each instance of reform, decision-makers displayed high expectations of the transformative potential of formal education, which may not necessarily reflect the wish of the common people. Indeed, education of the youth is consid-

ered instrumental to political, economic, social and environmental development. Yet, given the context of education in Benin, the common people may continue to believe that individual and collective development is a function of upwards social mobility owing to schooling in terms of getting a secure employment in the public sector.

In practice, however, things change very slowly! The gap between curriculum ideals and the crude reality of their implementation legitimates the question of whether choices were overambitious and whether curricular change was necessary at all. Of course, the curricular reform differs from the *école nouvelle* in matters of format and instructional strategies. Whereas *école nouvelle* valued teacher-centred instruction and behaviourist pedagogical creeds, the new approach asserts learner-centred strategies and constructivism. In addition, the NPE enjoyed the active support of more donors due to the global context of educational policy convergence. Yet these demarcation lines have never exempted the curricular reform from fierce criticisms, resistance, controversy and uncertainty. Despite the gloomy situation thus presented at the national level, there are actors at the periphery who advocate and support change. What difference have their determination and good intention made in the implementation of the curricular reform?

## 5

## Educational Policy Convergence and Advocacy for Change

### 5.1 Introduction

How do policy ideals circulate across time and space? The dire state of the education system in Benin hardly explains the receptivity of the country's political leaders, and that of its educationists in particular, to the philosophy of constructivism and its derivative pedagogical practices, such as student-centred teaching strategies and a competency-based curricular format. Educational policy convergence offers another avenue to fully account for the conviction that adoption of these educational creeds and practices could solve the political and socio-economic problems that the country faced in the 1990s. In fact, closer scrutiny of local actors' arguments and attitudes in support of the curricular reform reveals that adoption of the competency-based approach is rooted more in the global push for particular education policies than in the fulfilment of any urgent domestic need.

Development paradigms after World War Two proposed less coercive means of controlling developing countries through the generation of knowledge, incentives, and various mechanisms of diffusion (Resnick 2006: 177-78; Tikly 2004: 190; Chabbbot and Ramirez 2000; Lange 2003: 144-45). Global actors such as international development organizations played instrumental roles in this movement which gained momentum in the field of education from the 1990s. This global interest in educational development influenced national policies, shaping local actors' construction of rationales behind education blueprints. The empirical findings of this study support the proposition that educational policy convergence influenced local actors' advocacy of the curricular reform in Benin. Despite striking implementation problems, disappointing policy outcomes and grassroots resistance, some local actors demonstrated deep convic-

tion in the progressiveness of the policy, its presumed benefits for children and the nation, and its inevitability as well as its irreversibility.

This chapter documents reform advocacy by focusing on the attitudes and arguments of reform proponents. First, it describes proponents' characteristics along two gradations, presenting them as loyalists and satisficers. It then examines what they viewed as constraints of the policy and the coping strategies they subsequently developed to deal with these. The analysis contrasts the presentation of reform proponents with images sketched of them by resisters. Finally, in order to explicitly document the rationales underlying reform proponents' attitudes, the chapter relates the local advocacy discourse to educational policy convergence by referencing major global actors, agencies and mechanisms of transfer and diffusion.

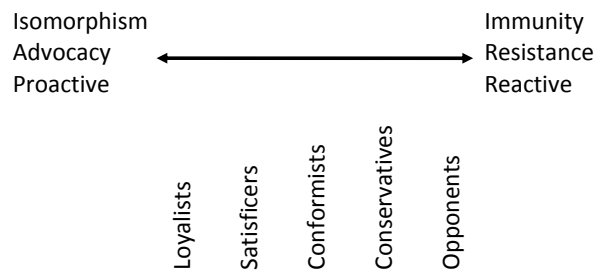
## **5.2 Isomorphism of Local Actors**

Political scientists borrow the term 'isomorphism' from the field of ecology to describe and account for how entities of different ancestries come to adopt similar patterns of behaviour. There is isomorphism when diffusion of ideas and concepts occurs across states and results in a homogenization process (Bache and Taylor 2003: 282; Chabbot and Ramirez 2000: 174; DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Isomorphism is 'the tendency to become alike' according to Radaelli (2000: 26). The global project to transform school systems in developing countries from the 1990s reflects isomorphism, given that actors from the periphery adopted similar paths of action to solve context-specific problems despite their socio-economic and political differences. The recurrence of the same normative discourse in the official policy documents on the curricular reform and among local actors indicates that not only did policy elites underwrite the development-oriented vision and educational practices promoted by the reform, but also that key local-level actors shared these convictions and actively worked for them.

To varying degrees, the knowledge, involvement, commitment and conviction of local actors provide evidence that the official policy discourse had significant influence on their advocacy of the curricular innovation. While all local actors saw school curricula as belonging in the public domain, underwrote state intervention in this area and believed in the good intentions behind the reform, they had different interpretations of implementation problems and diverging explanations of the poor out-

comes in terms of students' inability to read and write among others. In fact, this study found local actors' attitudes and impressions of the reform to differ so significantly that it became necessary to interpret them along an actors spectrum to better reflect the rationales underlying the various positions (Figure 5.1).

**Figure 5.1**  
*Actors spectrum*



**Table 5.1**  
*Reform proponents along the spectrum of actors*

<i>Actors</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Loyalists</i>	<i>Satisficers</i>
Inspectors	3	2	1
Pedagogic Counsellors	11	2	6
Principals	14	3	2
Teachers	21	1	6
Parents	246	1	66

*Note:* Figures for parents stand for those who came to focus-group discussions. In seven school communities, parents were identified as satisficers; even the single loyalist parent is from a satisficing school community.

By describing loyalists and satisficers, this chapter presents the advocacy end of the actors spectrum, leaving consideration for the other actors for Chapter 6. The latter elaborates on the resistance, viewing resisters as conformists, conservatives and opponents. The two gradations of advo-

cacy discussed here result from analytic induction of the various arguments and attitudes of local actors in favour of the curricular reform. Far from being a rigid categorization, the spectrum of actors serves as a heuristic device to bring order in the multifaceted interactions that local actors maintained with the innovation. The numerical distribution shown in Table 5.1 indicates the trends in isomorphism among the various actors.

### 5.2.1 Loyalists

Actually, the on-going educational reform in Benin has a few problems specifically in the course of its implementation... The validity of this reform is irrefutable; it is refusing development to continue to teach in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the curricula that were designed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century without integrating new contents that take into account the various changes that occurred both at national and international levels, changes which affect the cognitive development of human beings (Babagbéto 2003: 29).

As a public policy, the curricular reform compels all actors of the school system to some loyalty. The boundary of this common loyalty becomes visible by examining the characteristics, attitudes and impressions of grassroots actors. Those who manifested higher commitment to and conviction about the curricular reform, displaying sound policy knowledge, belonged mostly to socio-economic and professional categories that exposed them to the development discourse behind the innovation. Generally, they have an advanced level of academic education or professional training and attended several in-service workshops on the curricular approach either as trainers or as trainees.

As explicitly argued in the above quotation by the former basic education team leader at USAID/Benin, loyalists are progressive, normative, defensive and close to the decision-making sphere. They espouse the development-oriented ideal while minimizing the implementation problems, often considering them as normal and necessary steps to improvement. Often in positions of authority, loyalists feel compelled by duty to advance the cause of the reform in their constituencies; but faced with crude field realities, they find their room for manoeuvre limited by lack of means, teacher attrition and political clientelism. Their idealistic vision contrasts with their inability to devise local strategies to solve implementation problems. As a result, they appear defensive, accusing both higher-ups and subordinates as being responsible for the problems.

Though operating at a relatively low level of the education system, local loyalists develop arguments similar to those of top-level policy elites, as illustrated in the following statements by two different actors who advocate change for its own sake:

NPE is an absolute necessity and we should live our times... it helps to build capacity for self-employment; the new methodology makes things easier for teachers... it is for our economic development; it is much more practical; if we do not want to lag behind we ought to follow this reform (an inspector, Chief District Officer on 2 March 2009).

The curricular reform is a State policy... I belong to those who support the reform; not because I am a pedagogic counsellor. The world is advancing and we need to follow; we can no longer behave as if we were in ancient times (a pedagogic counsellor on 28 October 2008).

Loyalists' professional occupations expose them to the policy discourse and, more importantly, to a liberal vision of education, both of which seem to be determinant factors in remaining faithful to a learned advocacy of the new curricular approach. In line with the defensive argument quoted at the beginning of this subsection, inspectors, pedagogic counsellors, teachers and parents displayed loyalty. As indicated in Table 5.1, two inspectors, two pedagogic counsellors, three principals, one teacher and an influential parent qualify as loyalists. Similarly, both retired inspectors who served as key informants during a preliminary inquiry are loyalists, judging by their arguments in favour of the curricular reform. Both current inspectors are chief school district officers, and the retired inspectors were educational programme managers.

Professional and authoritative, loyalist inspectors consider themselves models of best practice or rather perfectionists. Sparing the competency-based approach of any direct responsibility regarding students' underperformance, inspectors related implementation problems to untrained teachers and to higher-ups making wrong choices. Even though they perceive many similarities between the previous *école nouvelle* reform and the current curricula in terms of policy intentions and development discourse, loyalist inspectors maintain that former curricula are obsolete and unfit for the new era of 'globalization, competition and new information technologies'. A liberal view that the reform would prepare children to seek jobs outside the public sphere and to compete globally underlies the arguments of most loyalists, as illustrated below:

We are experiencing globalization and we should not prevent our children from conquering the world. With the competency-based approach, I believe they would settle anywhere in the world because they would have acquired enough problem-solving skills, they would have controlled enough research tools to successfully handle short term situations and anticipate future problems (an inspector on 2 March 2009).

This conviction contrasts, however, with loyalists' lack of practical arguments to address context-specific problems. They devise few strategies for promoting the new approach aside from those presented at the governmentally planned training sessions, because 'the fatal mistake was to have initiated this complex reform without any functional teacher training school and to have recruited unqualified teachers'. Both loyalist inspectors excuse themselves by explaining that their priority is administrative functions; they delegate the prescribed instructional supervision to the pedagogic counsellors.

Next to inspectors in the local supervisory hierarchy are pedagogic counsellors. Though sharing common features, such as knowledge-based authority, defensiveness and normative discourse, with loyalist inspectors, pedagogic counsellors are more committed to instructional supervision than are inspectors. They had confidence in the eventual success of the reform, because of its scientific foundation, its development-generating capacity and the government's constant effort to improve. However, this commitment contrasts with the limited power and resources at their disposal to address the serious problems in schools. They are pessimistic – condemning teachers for their unproductive behaviour, berating unionists for trouble-making, and criticizing top elites for nepotism, negligence and clientelism: 'weakening the authority at the local level has caused most of the shortcomings of this innovation; our public administration is politicized!' While remaining objective in their criticisms, they provide few suggestions for improvements, as they feel powerless. Yet, their conviction prompts them to minimize their personal frustration in education administration and their exclusion from major activities in the design and implementation of the reform.

Probably due to their daily contact with school realities, few principals presented the characteristic features of loyalists. Loyalist principals have sound policy knowledge and conviction of reform ideals, but considered the involvement of the international community in the policy process as evidence of its scientific legitimacy and universality. For fear of being left

behind, loyalist principals strategically align themselves with the new approach, striving to 'implement what we can'.

Though with limited academic credentials, the loyalist teacher is dedicated to the teaching profession, which coincides with her sacerdotal vocation as a religious sister. Deaf to the on-going national debate about the new approach because 'we barely find negative things in what we love', she considered the reform to be progressive, easier to teach than the transition curricula and beneficial to children. Rather proud and satisfied with the results in her school, she vowed unconditional support for the innovation as long as the reform holds as a state policy.

Among a total of 246 parents gathered during the 17 focus-group discussions, only one parent in an affluent inner-city religious school shared the features of loyalists, arguing strongly in favour of the reform:

We are living in a global world where no single country can survive in isolation... the approach is universal; therefore it is a necessity for our country... We have to prepare our children to face new challenges of their time (focus-group discussion on 4 April 2009).

Though not an educationist, this influential parent belonged to the national elite and was well acquainted with development policies as the directress of the national representation of a global humanitarian agency.

In short, local actors who are dominantly loyalists share common policy-relevant knowledge and a conviction about the development potential of the new approach. Their normative stand in the policy debate makes them defensive and demanding on teachers, as they expect that the latter should implement policy measures as planned. Nonetheless, while some were in a position to improve policy, they had devised very limited solutions to fix context-specific problems.

### 5.2.2 Satisficers

You are caught up in a powerful water current without knowing how to swim. Instead of struggling against the adverse water current, it's safer to let yourself go in the direction of the current so that you can find something to cling on... In this approach, the students lead the teacher and I have never been disappointed. I am strongly convinced that we need to keep the reform going (a vice-principal in a religious school on 11 November 2008).

'Satisficing' describes the behaviour of policy actors who seek to maintain satisfaction with the new policy by conceding useful change (Bache and Taylor 2003: 280; Grindle and Thomas 1991: 28). As long as they find a niche of satisfaction by adapting policy in practice, most planned measures may remain at the stage of policy wishes. Satisficers purposefully embrace change by taking advantage of change to get some utility, the niche of confidence and satisfaction. Though sharing similar learned advocacy with loyalists by displaying policy-relevant knowledge, conviction and commitment, satisficers go one step further, being more straightforward, objective and pragmatic. The rationality that guides their choices consists of getting the best out of the reform and leaving the redundant.

To be selective requires knowledge, skill and organization. Most satisficers have an advanced educational background and proven professional experience. Eclectic in their procedures, they never consider former teaching approaches and materials as obsolete; rather they skilfully combine strategies to get results. While critical of policy implementation, especially the teacher training component, they devised several successful strategies to cope with problems. They admire the complexity of the competency-based approach because it reinforces their professionalism. Yet being professional has a cost. Satisficers like this pedagogic counselor expend substantial personal effort to get additional training, documents and information on the new approach:

It was during my training as a pedagogic counsellor that I got familiar with the NPE and ever since I have liked it. Our trainers warned us that teachers would laugh at us if we did not master the new approach, and this motivated me to search for more documentation, even after my training (interview on 3 March 2009).

Fluent in skilful analyses, they feel pride and satisfaction as they implement the new approach. Though critical, they prefer not to complain too much about problems; instead, they engage in a search for better solutions. Well aware of the complexity of the new approach, satisficing front-line actors consider it a privilege to have learned and mastered it. Whether they are teachers, principals, pedagogic counsellors or inspectors, satisficers use their acquaintance with the innovation to create for themselves an image of 'the expert' and reap substantial returns in terms of influence on colleagues and '*à côtés*',<sup>1</sup> which are so dear to Benin's teachers. Determinant factors of satisficing for policy implementers in-

clude a liberal vision of education and the availability of policy-related incentives. Similar factors apply to parents, but most important is the availability of alternative sources of education and the means to provide them to their children.

As indicated in Table 5.1, one inspector, six pedagogic counsellors, two principals, six teachers, and 66 parents in seven school communities have dominant characteristics of satisficing. Like loyalists, satisficers espouse the development theory behind the curricular innovation, with the exception that they take implementation problems more seriously. They assist teachers with instructional support, though they appear too authoritarian at times in their effort to serve as models. While being critical of the approach the inspector provided concrete suggestions to remedy implementation problems, namely teacher training, instructional supervision and textbook revision. According to her, corrective measures are not the solution to the reading and writing problems that children have with the curricular reform. Yet she nonetheless advocated change for its many advantages for both teachers and students: 'Now things get easier; the meal is already chewed, you only need to swallow it. Every document is available: curriculum, guides, textbooks.' Likewise, satisficers among pedagogic counsellors gave concrete suggestions for improving the policy. Rigorous and critical, they set out the appropriate conditions under which the reform could be successful. In their view, without such enabling conditions as effective teacher training, availability of materials, reasonable class size, sufficient work time and teacher motivation, the reform would be a failure. To illustrate their contention, they often pointed to certain private and religious schools as models of successful implementation. One principal in a public school and one in a religious school presented dominant features of satisficing. In all cases, they enjoyed a favourable school culture that promoted permanent professional development and collaboration. The principal in the private sector felt an obligation to achieve good results because of the perceived effect of competition in the education market. He used various strategies, including an entry test, to select promising new students. Eclectic, satisficing actors in private schools are somewhat more advanced than actors in public schools, for example, they taught English language to fifth and sixth graders – an initiative planned in the design of the curricular reform but never officially implemented. In the public sector, the personal initiative of the principal as an instructional leader made the difference. Satis-

ficers among teachers report their initial reticence about the new approach before attending in-service trainings.

As third-party actors, satisficing parents differ slightly from policy implementers. Well-informed and critically assessing their children's academic progress, they do not rely on the simple pass-or-fail school decisions. They are informed more by children's actual capabilities than by school statistics and consequently judge the innovation on the basis of what students can do with school knowledge and skills. The majority of such parents are public sector middle-class people or relatively enlightened and well-off persons who choose reference schools (private and religious schools) for their children. Though well-educated with sound knowledge about the policy, parents confess their inability to home tutor their children as before. In addition to choosing a reference school, they hire qualified home tutors and buy supplementary school materials, particularly 'old textbooks'; some even claim to have home computers with an Internet connection at the disposal of their children. These strategic choices corroborate the findings of a study on the comprehensive school reform in England which unexpectedly turned a public service such as education into 'a marketplace where success is not primarily a function of family motivation but rather of parental skill, social and material advantages' (Gewirtz et al. 1995: 189).

Satisficing parents do not oppose the curricular approach as long as teachers find successful solutions to implementation problems. They prefer the status quo because another change would destabilize children and their teachers; therefore they condemn opponents whom they consider to be 'manipulated and contaminated by corrupt unionists'. As a consequence, they cling to the curricular innovation, which they credit with positive results in terms of stimulating children's curiosity, cognitive development and oral communication in French. A substantial number of such parents were found in Abomey-Calavi school district 1 in religious, private and even public schools. In addition, only parents in an affluent private school in Missérété proved to be satisficers. Despite all commonalities, satisficers differ from loyalists by their practical attitude in domesticating the new approach.

### 5.3 Constraints, Coping Strategies and Sources of Satisfaction

A number of authors have reflected on the implementation problems of the curricular reform as if actors in every school community experienced similar constraints (Mignanhoundé 2004; David-Gnanhoui 2005; Dovonou 2008b). While the reform applies to all types of schools countrywide, most evaluation studies limited their focus on the problems in public schools, showing less concern for the private and religious sectors of education (MEPS 2006a; USAID 2005a; Lannoye 2005). All of these reflections and studies on the implementation constraints converge on the reality that the reform occurred in a critical context that favoured adverse forces, to the detriment of driving forces. Among the inhibiting factors mentioned are the extensive cyclical teachers' union strikes, the diversification within the teaching personnel (with tenured teachers, teachers on a government contract, teachers on a community contract and youths in national military service), inefficient and insufficient teacher training, incoherence and confusion in the textbooks and teachers' guides, excessive centralization of decision-making, misallocation of resources, infrastructural deficiency and resistance to innovation. While the current analysis acknowledges all these problems as serious constraints, it contends that local actors experienced them differently depending on their position as policy implementers or third-party beneficiaries, as authoritative or subordinate actors, as public or private actors and as urban or rural actors. Likewise, their positions on the actors' spectrum determined the scope of the coping strategies they developed and their degree of satisfaction with policy outcomes.

Policy implementers at the local level include the supervisory staff (district officers and their pedagogic counsellors), school principals and all categories of teachers. The supervisory staff in all four school districts, especially loyalists, mentioned important obstacles to the exercise of their role as instructional supervisors. Personnel shortages and lack of means were common in district headquarters. An illustration is the neighbouring school districts of Ouidah and Kpomassè, both of which were under the supervision of a single inspector. Similarly, pedagogic counsellors were in short supply; in three districts, the number of pedagogic counsellors fell suddenly after part of that personnel passed the national test to become inspectors. In Ouidah, two pedagogic counsellors were leaving their duties to get training as new inspectors, one in

Abomey-Calavi 1 and one in Missérété. While the increase in workload for the remaining pedagogic counsellors required increased means or incentives, the promise of posting new counsellors was the answer that the ministry of education gave to these demands.

In addition to the shortage of supervisory personnel at the district level, administrative support staff was problematic. In the two urban districts, inspectors complained about reassignments of personnel in poor health: 'If a teacher is unable to teach, he is good enough for the office, as if there is no serious work here.' Lack of means at district headquarters is another problem. Except Abomey-Calavi 1, where the district headquarters appears to offer relatively fair conditions, the other three districts have old and poorly equipped buildings. In Ouidah, for instance, personnel had to use their own mobile phones to solve urgent administrative problems, and to get official documents duplicated or typed in commercial centres. As for transportation, each supervisory staff member had a motorbike with scanty provision of gas vouchers to move from school to school.

Political clientelism was another obstacle to the fulfilment of their duty, according to the supervisory staff. In public schools, supervisors reported that teachers developed unproductive behaviour such as attrition, failure to prepare lessons and disobedience to local authorities simply because they had the protection of someone above the pedagogic counsellor or inspector. In private schools, clientelist attitudes include non-compliance with official regulations, based on connections with top elites in the administrative hierarchy. Private operators can thus get a license to establish or expand schools without informing the chief district officer, for instance.

At the school-site level, teachers and principals experience different problems depending on whether they work in an affluent private school, a less affluent private school or in a public school. Though the personnel in affluent private schools do not complain about means such as infrastructure and library, many feel less happy with their working conditions. Low salary and uncertainty push them to look elsewhere for better opportunities. But they compensate somewhat with *à côtés* in the form of home tutoring children from well-off families. The consistence of this supplementary compensation tends to stabilize their service in affluent schools. While teachers enjoy serving in affluent private schools, frequent teacher turnover in less affluent private schools with limited or

inconsistent opportunities for *à côtés*, constitutes a major obstacle that hinders students' learning. Instability, low and irregular salaries, lack of professional development and poor infrastructure are recurrent difficulties in the running of such schools. Problems that specifically undermine the proper implementation of the new approach in public schools include lack of collaboration among teachers, poor professional development, low commitment, recurrent strikes, poor infrastructure, and aging and tenured as well as young and unstable teaching personnel.

Although students' reading and writing deficiencies were generally reported as unintended outcomes of the new curricula, fewer complaints in this direction came from loyalists and satisficers. Such parents lamented that getting good results eventually had a price to pay. They did regret that, being costly, a quality education with the curricular innovation was out of the reach of the majority of disadvantaged children. While they considered the frequent spelling errors and grammatical mistakes in children's French language performance as serious problems, they attributed these problems to new technologies (the Internet and the GSM), which no longer require full spelling of words to write messages. As such, they never blamed the reform for children's low reading and writing performance. Satisficers among parents attributed such poor performance to the invasion of the media, especially television and affordable movies on compact discs, which distract children from dedicating enough time to reading. What they valued as learning outcomes for students departs from such classic expectations of schooling as legible and error-free handwriting, reading and speaking in French language. Curiosity, inquisitiveness, mastery of new technologies and public speaking are a few learning outcomes that satisficing parents attributed to the curricular innovation.

A recurrent complaint among local actors, regardless of their position in the policy debate, is the negative effect of cash payments in the implementation process. Donors certainly had good reasons to reward the extra workload consonant with implementation of the new approach through incentives to teachers and their supervisors in the form of per diems for various activities related to the policy. Yet without regard for the local salary of teachers, policy decision-makers rewarded both trainers and trainees with per diems ranging up to a tenfold of the monthly salary of an ordinary teacher for participation in a one-month in-service training. The situation created counterproductive practices of selective

exclusion and resultant frustration. Reports abounded of hairdressers selected as trainees while classroom teachers were left without training. Actors were unanimous in acknowledging that the donors' money did not serve the intended cause.

Coping strategies varied across schools depending on the positions of actors along the spectrum. Loyalist supervisors excused their lack of action by pointing to harsh field realities that forced them to limit their efforts to instructional assistance to teachers in critical need. Both inspectors and pedagogic counsellors gave priority to hierarchical administrative solicitude. Next in the hierarchy of supervisors' tasks was participation in the nationally planned in-service training sessions held in their own or in neighbouring constituencies. Limited by inadequate means, satisficers among pedagogic counsellors, like the loyalist supervisors, provided instructional assistance only to teachers who requested it, those in need being too numerous. Satisficing principals maximized the services of pedagogic counsellors by establishing a positive school culture favouring professional development of teachers. Though private actors, many urban principals established trustworthy rapport with the pedagogic counsellors in their zone for regular assistance. Where such rapport was non-existent (in religious schools in particular), school authorities recruited inspectors or pedagogic counsellors from other constituencies to assist teachers there. The high demand for experienced supervisory staff prompted such actors to contract retired inspectors and pedagogic counsellors for the professional development of their teachers.

Satisficing teachers resorted to hybridization to cope with critical flaws in the curricular design. By combining old teaching practices with new ones, these teachers resuscitated out-of-date instructional strategies such as the systematic teaching of linguistic tools, mental arithmetic, early morning dictation, use of 'old textbooks' and sometimes physical chastisement. Teachers in private schools could risk more freedom to combine approaches than their colleagues in public schools, where fear of higher-ups inhibited such initiatives. Excessive home tutoring and coaching became commonplace in most schools, whether public, private or religious. By giving remedial classes to students, teachers took advantage of extra lessons to earn *à côtés* and guarantee impressive results in the end. But the practice also resulted in harassment of students, who no longer had time to play. In a typical sixth grade, where students prepare

to take the primary school-leaving examination, classes began at seven o'clock in the morning and lasted for five hours with a fifteen-minute recess at ten o'clock; in the afternoon, some principals kept students for four more hours, not to mention Wednesday afternoon and Saturday morning revision attendance. In addition to this workload, most students in affluent schools had home tutors who taught four hours of private lessons per week.

Satisficing parents resort to various coping strategies to provide a quality education to their children in this context that they qualify as a 'national tragedy'. Relatively well-off parents select the best school based on school reputation, its infrastructure, the quality of teachers and results in previous primary school-leaving examinations. In addition, they pay regular visits to their children's teacher, if the latter is not the home tutor. Less wealthy but ambitious parents often select talented children to attend higher quality private schools, leaving less intelligent ones in public schools until they reach grade four or five before deciding whether to enrol them in private school as well. Some of these parents might even require their children to repeat a grade despite the official pass decision of the school if they feel dissatisfied with the child's performance in terms of reading, writing and basic arithmetic.

With the exception of loyalists, who remained normative and vague while mentioning sources of satisfaction with the new approach, satisficers proudly enumerate a few achievements that they credit to the reform. Pointing to successful schools, supervisors mentioned improvement in children's oral communication ability in French language, their ability to manipulate concepts formerly learned in high school and their competence in solving practical technology-related problems at home. Two pedagogic counsellors gave the example of their own children to illustrate the positive effects of the curricular innovation. Comparing the curiosity exhibited by younger children to that of their older brothers and sisters who were trained under the transition curricula, the pedagogic counsellors found today's children to be more dynamic, curious and initiative-taking. But they take the precaution of setting the appropriate conditions under which the policy produces such satisfactory results.

Satisficing principals and teachers take pride in the results of their students. They boast that their third graders cannot be compared with sixth or seventh graders in other schools when it comes to reading, writing, and mathematics. One principal said sarcastically, 'When mine are

drowning, others are already dead'. The main source of satisfaction for these teachers and principals is their academic and professional credentials (some have a university degree) and the joy of seeing their individual efforts to appropriate the new approach bear fruit. Satisficers measured results not only in terms of success percentages, but also in terms of placing students in elite secondary schools after graduation from primary school or their students winning a national prize. Satisficing parents mentioned children's curiosity and fluency in spoken French as merits of the reform. Children's interest in technical matters ranked second as a source of satisfaction. Parents viewed their children's capability to speak in public and their inquisitiveness as assets in a competitive job market. They also credited the reform of children's ability to use a calculator and to set up home electronic appliances. Other positive outcomes of the reform, according to parents, included children's ability to manipulate complex concepts such as logarithm, symmetry and equations in mathematics, and human rights, demography and the environment in social studies. These concepts were formerly introduced in high school.

#### **5.4 Change Proponents as Viewed by other Actors**

Those who support the NPE are our leaders who take advantage of the international aid attached to the policy; they know they reap plenty of benefits. In addition, they have no children in our schools. They know that only the children of the poor are innocent victims of the system. They lie to donors to sign agreements on behalf of our children but our innocent children's souls will take revenge on them. For us, poor people, the reform is a collective death (a frustrated parent during a focus-group discussion on 3 December 2008).

Policy analysts who study top-level decision-making and policy elites in developing countries acknowledge the instrumental role of bureaucrats and technocrats in issue salience, policy formulation and implementation. Factors that influence policy elites' perceptions and decisions in a policy process include personal attributes and goals, ideological predispositions, professional expertise and training, memories of similar policy experiences, position and power resources, and political and institutional commitment and loyalties (Grindle and Thomas 1991: 35-7). Policy elites' position and power resources confer upon them privileges and prestige that they enjoy as a reward of their involvement in public policy.

But the implementation literature is less informative about how policy recipients at the grassroots level perceive these policy elites.

The case of local actors in the curricular reform reflects exaggerated cynicism of actors who feel marginalized by policy. In Benin, people barely differentiate political elites from technocrats and intellectuals. This confusion is rooted in the high level of perceived public sector corruption of political leaders. Over a five-year period from 2005, for instance, Benin scored on average three points out of ten on Transparency International's corruption perception index and ranked on average 106<sup>th</sup> out of 176 countries (Transparency International, CPI 2005-09). An analogous image of political leaders as greedy rent-seekers, irresponsible and corrupt is projected onto local reform proponents, as expressed in the quotation above.

Resisters' frustration mounts when they find out that the curricular reform, in the course of its implementation, is denying their children an opportunity for upwards social mobility. The cynicism of most actors who overtly oppose the policy fuels tension between pro and anti-reform actors. As a consequence, anti-reform actors exaggerate their cynicism toward reform proponents, whom they consider to be policy entrepreneurs and rent-seekers victimizing other people's children out of greed. Providing evidence from examples in their neighbourhood, parents in less affluent schools argued that political leaders were 'wicked in accepting an innovation that they knew had failed in other countries'. This wickedness lies in the fact that leaders as well as reform proponents assumedly have the means to withdraw their own children from common schools and enrol them in elite schools in towns or abroad. In return, they promote the popular reform to level down the children of the poor while reaping benefits in terms of per diems, fat salaries and international NGO luxury cars. Doing this, argued resisters, reform proponents maximize the chance that their children will take their place later, thus structurally reproducing the elite and perpetuating social inequality.

Actors who do not side with the reform consider proponents as only paying lip-service to donors in order to maximize returns. They believed that political leaders as well as reform proponents were aware of the wrongful outcomes of this curricular approach and consequently enrolled their own children in private elite schools where teachers supposedly never teach using the competency-based approach. They backed up their arguments by pointing to reference schools and well-off parents in

their vicinities. To illustrate their claim about the greed and rent-seeking behaviour of political leaders and reform proponents, resisters frequently referred to a new settlement area in Porto-Novo (Tokpota), nicknamed after the reform *Quartier Nouveaux Programmes*. This, they said, was where most education inspectors and decision-makers invested the money they accumulated in the policy process to build 'luxury suites'. For their supposed greed, lack of sincerity and stubbornness to continue implementing the policy despite its 'obvious failure and the constant protestations', reform proponents are regarded as 'selfish public enemies and anti-patriots'. In urban areas, frustrated parents point out the prestigious elite schools where reform proponents send their own children. In rural areas, the cynicism is worse. Peasants and fishers envy teachers for their improving socio-economic status, which they attribute to the benefits that teachers supposedly earn by teaching the new approach. In villages, teachers' attire and their new motorbikes are considered signs of opulence derived from the reform, as they associate teachers' improving conditions to donor money. While this cynicism is exaggerated, it is rooted in an extraverted vision of development, which political leaders present as programmes necessarily imported with donor money. Bierschenk (2003: 565) illustrates this phenomenon, quoting a political leader during a municipal electoral campaign: 'Vote for me because I have friends abroad willing to help this city'.

A careful examination of these images of reform proponents reflects a contagion effect. Local actors would have quenched their thirst for information about the policy had the communication component of the action plans functioned as planned. In the absence of the communication activities, local actors had to rely on rumours and resistance movements led by less receptive teachers, frustrated elites and teacher unionists who gained a reputation for exploiting implementation problems to oppose the reform. For a long time, radical resisters at the national level used the mass media to relay negative opinions which prepared local actors, especially parents, for low receptivity to the policy. In addition to unionists, trustworthy and knowledgeable persons like a university professor and opinion leaders publicly formulated charges against the curricular reform targeting its intent, design, implementation and outcomes. The influence of such national level debates and positions on local actors weakened their receptivity to the policy; it produced a contagion effect

on local actors who were less prepared to accept and feel ownership of the reform.

Parents' attitudes in Abomey-Calavi school district 1 illustrated how the national anti-reform propaganda weakened their receptivity to the new approach. In a few reference schools (private and religious schools) that had relatively high quality educational services, infrastructure and better student performance, parents nevertheless complained about the reform. They simply relayed the negative views about the reform, lamenting reading and writing problems, the imperialist intent of the policy and the rent-seeking behaviour of policy initiators and implementers. This negative attitude contrasted with the pride and confidence that they felt about their children's schools. Though these same parents admitted awareness of the difference between their children's performance and that of students at other schools, they nevertheless conveyed the national complaints. Despite the fact that 'teachers in this school deserve our congratulations for the exceptional work they do to always get 100 per cent success in national exam every year', despite the fact that 'what is done in this school is very good but too costly', these same parents do not hesitate to interpret the curricular innovation as '*Nouveaux Problèmes de l'Education*', a mocking transformation of the initial acronym of the reform (NPE).

Likewise, visits to Tokpota during the fieldwork revealed that other than hosting the reform generalization unit in a building contracted by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in 2004, the Tokpota quarter in Porto-Novo is home to only a few educationists who live in their own houses. In fact, many categories of citizens live in this residential area which offered affordable settlement in the 1990s. Impressive buildings in the area belong to businessmen and women, members of parliament, former ministers and top executives. Yet the reputation of Tokpota in relation to the curricular reform has crystallized at the local level. Resisters, particularly frustrated parents who lacked means to cope with serious implementation problems, simply relay the rumours about the new settlement area. Similarly, the propaganda mentioned how educationists exited the public domain to enrol their own children in reference private schools because of the negative effects of the new approach. Most supervisory staff interviewed who sent their children to private schools admitted having done so for geographical reasons and due to instability in the public sector, but not to escape the innovation.

Rather, they would trust public schools better than many private schools, if it were not for the cyclical strikes and the reluctance of the executive government to meet unions' demands on time.

### **5.5 Advocacy as a Manifestation of Educational Policy Convergence**

Actors who support the curricular reform have good reasons for doing so. This section digs further into the reasons advanced. It examines the perceived benefits of the competency-based approach from the dual perspectives of curriculum theory and organizational science. Specifically, it explains the rationale behind reform proponents' attitudes, by evoking educational policy convergence as the global movement that legitimates these attitudes. After introducing the limitations of curriculum theory in this regard, the section resorts to organizational science to present global actors, agencies and processes of transfer and diffusion that underpin educational policy convergence.

Some curricularists interpret advocacy for a particular school curriculum by pointing to the match between hegemonic actors' ideal curriculum and the official curriculum (O'Hair et al. 2000: 380-82; Banks 1996: 19-21; Ornstein and Hunkins 2004: 186-87). When mainstream actors' cultural values, practices and expectations prevail in the official school curriculum, the likelihood for isomorphism is high. Given that mainstream actors represent in most cases a powerful minority in society, conflict theorists interpret the official curriculum as a manifestation of 'disciplinary power': the different mechanisms by which a powerful minority shapes, controls and monitors individuals' behaviour by generating knowledge (Foucault 1980: 98, in Masaki 2007: 19). In this respect, loyalists and satisficers' learned advocacy insinuates a similarity between their ideal curriculum and the official curriculum. This learned advocacy is not only attributable to their role as instructional leaders but also to their deep conviction and knowledge of the competency-based approach.

How did the development ideal of gearing schools towards producing initiative-taking citizens who will be competitive in the job market, patriotic and democratic come to be so favourably echoed among the powerful minority in Benin and also among local reform proponents? Curriculum theory is unable to account for the fact that a number of national and local actors have similar reasons for advocating the curricular re-

form. It can neither account for the fact that beyond national borders, a substantial number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa<sup>2</sup> undertook similar paths of school curricular reform at the same time. Insights from political science and organizational sociology help us to explore this parallel and to give full meaning to the synergy of responses and actions by local actors who advocate change.

Educational policy convergence refers to the establishment of similar education policies across the world for the purpose of promoting a certain world education culture (Jakobi 2009; Resnick 2006; Lange 2003). Major actors that promote a world education culture include international organizations, epistemic communities and individual states. While the epistemic communities composed of universities and scholars in the fields of social and behavioural sciences grant scientific legitimacy to the policy ideals proposed in the international arena, international development organizations provide the political legitimacy by endorsing and promoting the policy ideals. Global education policy ideals were institutionalized with the creation of the United Nations and its various branches, particularly UNESCO. The blurred distinction between the epistemic communities and international development organizations is documented in Anderson-Levitt and Ntal-I'Mbirwa (2001: 31) in a study of the processes of appropriation of pedagogical ideals in Guinea. They identified two major groups of actors among the international community: donors and technical advisers. Donors include global organizations such as the World Bank, UNESCO and UNDP, multinational organizations such as the European Union and ACCT, bilateral organizations such as USAID, the Canadian Agency for International Development, the French Cooperation Agency and JICA (these serve as government arms), and NGOs such as Save the Children, Plan International, IFESH and *Aide et Action*. Technical advisers include foreign universities (dominantly in western countries), consulting firms and independent consultants, civil servants and business corporations. These actors constitute the 'think-tank' of development policies and work closely with donors through contracts, research grants and consultancies in order to lend scientific legitimacy to development ideals. Mundy and Murphy (2001), in a comprehensive study of the changing role of transnational advocacy in the field of education, mentioned the recent rise of civil society activism and global NGOs' active involvement in educational policy priorities.

As for agencies, beyond the humanistic cause of advancing people through education, lies the power dimension of educational policy convergence. Contrary to the prevalence of military dominance in international relations prior to World War Two, the quest for international peace and the promotion of human rights and economic development influenced most of the policy ideals in post-war development discourse. But the asymmetric interdependence between developed and developing countries placed the latter in the position of recipient of such ideals, which political leaders barely submitted to critical judgement before adoption. Some scholars question the scientific and political legitimacies underlying the policy ideals proposed to developing countries. They speak of 'new imperialism' when referring to the incorporation of developing countries into the 'new world order' (Tikly 2004; Harvey 2003; Lukes 2005; Falk 1999). In fact, formal education, interpreted in human capital theory as likely to generate both individual and collective returns, became a strategic policy area in which development blueprints were swiftly transformed into policy priorities. In the four decades after World War Two, the assumed benefits of education as promoted in the international arena went beyond economic progress to embrace justice, health, rural development, adult literacy, equity, educational quality, girls' education, universal primary education and school curriculum (Chabbot and Ramirez 2000: 178). The convincing arguments and utility underlying these policy ideals barely hide the exercise of soft power by which developed nations and development organizations compete to influence development policies through various mechanisms.

One such mechanism is policy transfer. This refers to how more powerful actors shape policy goals, contents, instruments, concepts and ideas to feed to less powerful actors to advance the former's own interests. Policy transfer involves the role of agency in transferring ideas and practices from one time and place to another (Bache and Taylor 2003: 281). Coercive policy transfer occurs when political leaders in developing countries are encouraged to adopt particular paths of action upon certain conditions, or when they get incentives for compliance with specific norms. In voluntary policy transfer, countries with particular needs seek out appropriate alternative solutions and operate rational choices. Whether coercive or voluntary, policy transfer entails lesson drawing, emulation, hybridization, synthesis and inspiration (Rose 1991; Berman

1983; Meyer et al. 1993). After all, countries never adopt global policy measures without attempting to transform them.

The power dimension of policy transfer produces a synergy of behaviour among recipients, who may display strategic alignment with donors' discourse. At an individual level, common factors that increase receptivity to educational ideals in developing countries include personal exposure through education abroad, motivation in the form of intellectual conviction, status symbols such as the ability to manipulate western concepts, and strategic alignment with donors (Anderson-Levitt and Ntal'Pmbirwa 2001: 35-7). The effectiveness of policy transfer is consonant with the mechanism of diffusion which relates to the timing and sequence of the spread of ideas and practices. Concerning educational development policies, in particular, commonly used mechanisms of diffusion include international conferences with declarations, conventions, and frameworks for action that eventually result in national action plans, trainings, workshops and evaluative consultancies (Chabbot and Ramirez 2000; Jakobi 2009).

The relevance of educational policy convergence in the current case of local actors' advocacy has roots in the crystallizing effect of the competency-based approach. In theory the approach is credited with the potential to render the youth competitive, autonomous, democratic and growth generating. In terms of scientific legitimacy, the approach enjoyed the contribution of scholars from Belgium (BIEF), Québec (ORE) and the International Bureau of Education in Geneva (IBE), who actively worked to give the concept 'competence' a robust epistemological grounding for its effective application to general education curriculum (Acedo and Georgescu 2010; Rogiers 2007; Jonnaert et al. 2007; Jonnaert et al. 2004). By highlighting the circumstances and processes of introducing the competency-based approach in Benin's education system, Chapter 4 illustrated the manifestation of educational policy convergence. The adoption of the approach was not only a function of the obvious need for school reform, but most importantly, of the active involvement of the international community. From the *Etats Généraux de l'Education* in 1990 to the National Education Forum in 2007, not to mention the innumerable other forums, workshops, training sessions and international evaluative consultancies (DevTech, BIEF, Creative Associates Inc., Groupe Louis-Berger), the influence of global institutions such as UNESCO, UNDP, and USAID gave both scientific and political legiti-

macies to the new approach. This explains the deep conviction and commitment of loyalists and satisficers, who demonstrated learned advocacy of the curricular reform. Local actors identified with loyalty and satisficing gave so much credence to the competency-based approach as to clear the innovation of any wrongs in the education sector. For them, the innovation reflects recent progress in the education sciences, and the shortcomings resulted rather from poor implementation. However, even if global institutions have sufficient resources and capabilities to develop policy-relevant blueprints and to test and assess them before proposing them to countries in need, context-specific realities of recipient countries may seriously challenge the actualization of the proposed ideals. In this respect, the intentions behind the curricular reform seem relevant given the socio-economic context of Benin in the 1990s, but the readiness of the school system to accommodate such an innovation is problematic; it requires more than learned advocacy to translate policy intentions into classroom realities. Satisficers proved more realistic by adapting the competency-based approach to their context-specific realities instead of merely adopting it.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

This chapter examined local actors' advocacy for the curricular reform. Although reform proponents reiterated the urgent need for curricular reform in their arguments, educational policy convergence at the global level constituted an important force driving advocacy. Educational policy convergence reflects a 'soft' manner of imposing development ideals, and in the current case it largely relied on the acceptance and collaboration of reform proponents. Indeed, both loyalists and satisficers shared similar conviction, commitment and policy-relevant knowledge, but they diverged on how they handled implementation problems. Given the small sample size and the qualitative nature of this research, the analysis is simply indicative of advocacy trends and claims no fixed position of proponents in terms of a rigid categorization. It found loyalty and satisficing to be prevalent attitudes among supervisors and a few teachers; most parents who advocate change are also satisficers. Exposure to development discourse, training, a certain socio-economic status and a liberal vision of education constitute the determinant factors that drive advocacy in the current policy debate.

The heuristic device of the actors spectrum enables this research to dig deeper into the dichotomous framework of pro-reform and anti-reform actors. Rather than documenting policy advocacy as a single category, the analysis presented change proponents as loyalists and satisficers. Resisters will be presented as conformists, conservatives and opponents in the next chapter. In fact, all actors share similar characteristics to varying degrees; to some extent, all are loyalists and satisficers, since they all have to obey state rules and regulations, and all value schooling for good practical reasons. However, beyond this commonality, certain patterns emerge so dominantly that the description of actors as loyalists and satisficers became necessary.

Reform proponents, loyalists in particular, indicated trust in the new policy as an inevitable and irreversible process towards the educational, social and economic development of the country. Yet, their lack of collective action to address critical implementation challenges is curious. An individual solution to a public problem seems to be the approach that reform proponents, especially satisficing parents, have preferred in implementation of this policy. A retired inspector asked rhetorically, 'Who protested against the recruitment of child-sitters instead of qualified teachers in the education system in this country?' Educational policy convergence, with a neoliberal undertone drives reform proponents who quietly substitute private provision in the form of home tutoring, private school attendance, and various other coping strategies for a public good such as education. At the same time, adverse forces were collectively at work to contaminate actors at the grassroots level.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The term is used in Welmond (2002b: 53) to refer to benefits other than salary that civil servants receive both officially as part of their employment and unofficially as a result of their station (e.g. per diems, allowances and bribes).

<sup>2</sup> As many as eight francophone countries in sub-Saharan Africa undertook similar curricular initiatives in the 1990s. Those meeting in regional summits to exchange experiences were Benin, Burkina Faso, Gabon, Mali, the Republic of Central Africa, Senegal, Tchad and Togo (Aglo 2000: 14, 16). Moreover, education decision-makers from Mali reportedly visited Benin in 2004 to learn from Benin's experiences with competency-based curricula. In September 2007, under the care of the CONFEMEN, as many as 53 top-level educationists from Togo, Niger, Burkina-Faso, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritania and Senegal met in Cotonou to

exchange experiences on their respective implementation of the competency-based curricular approach (Zinsou-Ply 2007).

## 6

## Three Gradations of Policy Resistance

### 6.1 Introduction

Resistance is a reactive strategy to counter – overtly or covertly – pressures from outside a social group (Bache and Taylor 2003: 282). While most implementation research documents the effects of policy resistance, theorizing on its causes tends to be limited to client dissatisfaction, interest preservation and fear of change. This chapter argues that many grassroots actors were immune to the competency-based curricular approach for various reasons. Empirical findings explain resistance by a combination of three sets of factors: contextual constraints that exacerbated implementation problems, disappointing policy outcomes and the contagion effect of organized movements.

As a continuation of the arguments in the previous chapter, the current chapter completes the actors spectrum by presenting the three gradations on the resistance side of the spectrum (Figure 5.1). After identifying resisters as conformists, conservatives and opponents, the chapter contrasts this view with their image as constructed by reform proponents. Then, analysis of the three sets of factors that fuel resistance enables a better understanding of the rationales behind each type of response. Digging up these rationales helps in the examination of what resisters consider as constraints in the policy process, how they address these and how they interpret policy outcomes. Like in the previous chapter, analyses here are informed by insights from curriculum theory and the educational change literature.

### 6.2 Immunity of Local Actors

If isomorphism characterizes reform proponents' receptivity to the curricular approach, immunity is the concept to describe the resisters. Im-

munity refers to the attitude of actors when they are ‘not receptive to external new ideas’ (Bache and Taylor 2003: 282). In the current policy debate, the attitudes and impressions of conformists and conservatives reflect convert resistance, whereas opponents actively manifested against the curricular innovation. Before examining the characteristics of each kind of response and the rationales behind them, the following numerical summary gives an indication of the three gradations of policy resistance as observed by local actors (Table 6.1).

**Table 6.1**  
*Resisters along the spectrum of actors*

<i>Actors</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Conform- ists</i>	<i>Conserva- serva- tives</i>	<i>Oppo- nents</i>
Inspectors	3	-	-	-
Pedagogic counsellors	11	3	-	-
Principals	14	3	6	-
Teachers	21	10	3	1
Parents	246	-	179	-

### 6.2.1 Conformists

Since things are changing with time, we are growing and we need to update our needs in order to keep pace with those who progress... I can't tell more ... Honestly I support the NPE... Me, I am for both causes, teacher-centred and student-centred pedagogies (a veteran 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher on 4 November 2008).

Conformism consists of displaying formal compliance with prescribed measures while potentially behaving differently in private. It is a passive resistance strategy pertaining to power unbalance. Scott (1990: ix) called this strategy a ‘situational logic’ by which ‘[t]he poor sang one tune when they were in the preserve of the rich and another among themselves. The rich spoke one way to the poor and another among themselves’ (in Bache and Taylor 2003: 284). Similarly, Bardach (1977: 98) interpreted this compliance strategy as ‘tokenism... an attempt to appear to be contributing a program element publicly while privately conceding only a

small (“token”) contribution’. Although situated in the middle ground between advocacy and resistance on the spectrum, conformism is more closely related to covert or passive resistance than to learned advocacy, as conformists’ attitudes contribute less to policy improvement.

The mask of conformism is the safest to wear in this policy debate due to the power dimension involved in the matter. In fact the curricular reform is a high stakes innovation sponsored by the international community. Declaring opposition to the policy at the local level would equate to contesting power, the power of educationists, development experts and the education sector chain of command. Hierarchical positions in Benin’s primary education are a function of years of experience and technocratic power; no single teacher would dare to correct a principal or a pedagogic counsellor, let alone an inspector. In such conditions conformists spare themselves the risk of being identified as opposing an innovation that top-level actors of the hierarchy masterminded.

As illustrated in the introductory quotation of this subsection, conformists appear enthusiastic at first, but become contradictory in the course of discussions. They are brief, reserved, prudent or voluble, excessively accusing and complaining about their work conditions. In addition to the fear of being identified as opposing the new approach, conformists lack policy-relevant knowledge and prefer to side with the hierarchy by showing blind advocacy. As indicated in Table 6.1, three pedagogic counsellors, three principals and as many as ten teachers presented dominant characteristics of conformism. Inspectors as well as parents were absent in this mask-wearing category.

As supervisory staff, conformist pedagogic counsellors express pride in having reached a higher level of the hierarchy, given their entry point in the teaching career as JIR. But soon, this confidence gives way to endless complaints. Conformist pedagogic counsellors interpret implementation problems as the result of political interventions in the reform process, which prevents them from carrying out their duty as instructional leaders. Thus they feel powerless to take initiatives, condemning teachers for poor outcomes. Hidden behind objective criticisms and quite inspired in complaints and claims, they could hardly conceal their nostalgia for past curriculum initiatives, especially the *école nouvelle* reform. A conformist pedagogic counsellor reiterated, ‘There is nothing new with the NPE in question! We are rehearsing things that had existed since the

1900s; child-centred pedagogy is not new, it thrived with classic pedagogy.<sup>7</sup>

Both principals and teachers identified as conformist displayed similar attitudes. Their enthusiastic classroom atmosphere<sup>1</sup> contrasted with the subsequent prudence they observed during interviews. Despite all strategies to build an atmosphere of trust and collaboration with them, they continued to consider the researcher to be a government intelligence agent to whom a mask of conformism had to be presented because of the power distance between the periphery and the official decision-making centre. Conformist front-line actors were dominantly found in public schools and less affluent private schools. In public schools they were either novice teachers on government or local contracts or veteran teachers near retirement. The novice teachers had a maximum of two years of teaching experience and were lacking in sound initial professional training. The veteran teachers and principals had 25 to 28 years of experience and had benefited from several trainings. Obsolescence and the prospect of retiring in the near future probably justified their negligent attitude towards the new approach. In less affluent private schools, conformist teachers and principals lacked sound initial training, similar to the novice teachers. Their lack of conviction in the new approach and their low commitment to the teaching profession predisposed them to passive resistance.

Conformist actors hid their resistance behind an appearance of indifference and neutrality in the policy debate by relating how political the policy debate is: 'those who support know what they gain in it and those who oppose also want privileges denied to them'. The wiser of the conformist principals and teachers argued that it was too early to judge the reform: 'If the NPE were a baby, it needs time to grow teeth and grey hair.' In their assessment of the reform, conformists excused the reform of all charges, rather, targeting the media and widespread impunity as the main causes of students' underperformance.

### 6.2.2 Conservatives

I feel more comfortable teaching the transition curricula; I don't know why they brought us this NPE. Honestly, I can't understand what was wrong with the transition curricula (a public school principal on 20 April 2009).

The transition curricula are getting into the new curricula. Without saying so, teachers are combining approaches; they are coming back to the transition curricula. Pieces of evidence are the corrective measures, the return of letter combination strategies for reading and mental arithmetic... The old river is flowing gently into the new one (a parent in a rural school on 7 January 2009).

Schools are notoriously conservative institutions. The weight of tradition and stability, the comfort of routine, and the fear of change are a few main reasons. The resilience of the 'deep structure of schools', consisting of subjects, grades, timetables, classrooms, selection and sets of routines, also contribute to schools' conservatism (Cuban 1990). In school settings, change is destabilizing because it disturbs established beliefs and practices, pulling actors from their comfortable zone of routine into a zone of disturbance and instability inherent in change. Conservative resistance stems from actors' inability to abandon old habits or to integrate new habits into old ones. For these reasons,

[schools] will accommodate [change] in ways that require little or no change... [T]he strength of the status quo – its underlying axioms, its pattern of power relationships, its sense of tradition and therefore, what seems right, natural, and proper – almost automatically rules out options for change in that status quo (Sarason 1990: 35).

In the current policy debate, it is easy to confuse conservatives with conformists, given their common covert resistance strategy. But a scrutiny of their respective arguments and attitudes against the curricular reform clarifies the demarcation line between them. As exhibited in the introductory quotations of this subsection, conservatives distance themselves from the policy discourse using the indefinite 'they', 'we have been told', 'our trainers said'. Conservative teachers and principals display enough policy-relevant knowledge to enable them to appraise the worth of the innovation. Similarly, their conviction and commitment never go beyond the fulfilment of their duty. Rather proud of their former teaching practices, they tended to resist new ideas that challenged their pedagogical role as knowledge transmitters. Critical of the curricular reform, conservatives profess the value of traditional pedagogical beliefs, such as behaviourism and its derivative practices such as teacher-centeredness, systematic teaching of linguistic tools in French, the virtues of dictation, physical chastisement, discipline, error-free language usage, legible handwriting and mental arithmetic. Pointing to the limitations of the

competency-based approach, conservatives argue that it is impossible to 'construct buildings without materials'. At primary school level, they consider children to be almost *tabula rasa* or at least lacking the basics to construct knowledge by themselves. Thus they think the approach to education should be teacher-centred at this level, as children need to acquire 'the materials' before being asked 'to construct' their own knowledge later. Moreover, conservatives believe such a reform to be inappropriate for a developing country like Benin because of its ambitiousness and exigencies. They consider it appropriate for developed countries that have an enabling environment and enough means to provide qualified teachers, a limited teacher-student ratio, computer and science laboratories and school libraries.

Pessimistic about the potential for success of the competency-based approach, given the discrepancies between its current exigencies and the dire state of the school system, conservatives interpret official educational statistics as unreliable and fake. In their assessment of students' literacy and numeracy, conservatives attribute reading, writing and arithmetic deficiencies of students to the curricular reform. Rather sceptical about the potential of this reform to solve the educational and socio-economic problems of the country, conservatives explicitly accuse the innovation of propagating indiscipline, laziness and incompetence among the youth. As a solution, they suggest a return to the previous curricula, which had proven their worth by producing valuable citizens and useful literates.

Due to the asymmetric power relationships between them and the hierarchy, conservative teachers and principals at first refrained from unveiling their position. The same discretion prevents them from demonstrating publicly to voice concerns against the reform. The 'hidden transcripts' became visible through rapport building and trust. During interviews, conservative teachers and principals revealed their position after a moment of hesitation, whereas conservative parents considered the focus-group discussions as a venue of empowerment where they voiced their contempt for the new policy and, with it, dissatisfaction with the ruling elites and the educational hierarchy. On these grounds, conservatives differ from conformists, who show the same mask of compliance throughout.

As indicated in Table 6.1, six principals and three teachers presented dominant features of conservatism. The two conservative principals found in private schools were younger with advanced levels of educa-

tion; they had founded and operated their own schools. In contrast, the four conservative principals in public schools were veteran teachers each with 25 years of experience. Unlike their private school counterparts who do not actually teach, all conservative principals in public schools were tenured teachers who currently taught sixth grade. They had attended several in-service training sessions related to the innovative curricula. To legitimate their use of 'old' educational practices, conservative teachers cite the recent introduction of corrective measures to improve the curricular innovation. Two conservative teachers were found in private schools and one in public schools. The public school teacher was more reserved than the private school ones; she revealed her conservative stance only after requesting that the voice recorder be turned off.

Conservative parents are less knowledgeable about the reform than conservative principals and teachers. But unlike the latter, conservative parents directly voice frustrations and anger over dashed expectations for their children's schooling. They perceived the focus-group discussions as a venue of empowerment where truth could be told to the education sector hierarchy. In ten different school communities, as many as 179 parents identified themselves with resistance to the curricular reform. Conservative parents were found dominantly in rural schools and in a few urban public and less affluent private schools; parents in one religious school claimed to prefer the former curricula to the competency-based approach. Judging that the curricular reform produced disappointing results, conservative parents indicated a preference for the yesteryear of education, which they credit with the success of most of the country's current elites. Conservative parents rationally assess reform outcomes in literacy, numeracy and discipline against the investment they now had to make in education. While under the previous curricula they could home tutor their children themselves or get a senior sibling to do the job, they now had to hire the services of a qualified home tutor to get good results. In addition, whereas before just a few copy-books, pens and two textbooks could serve as school stationary and supplies, parents now had to spend more to buy textbooks, workbooks, copy-books and various supplies for art education. Skilled in such comparisons, conservative parents perceived the transition curricula to be less costly and more efficient than the new approach.

### 6.2.3 Opponents

Parents voiced it: stop this massacre! Virtuous teachers who are conscious of their role as instructors and educators shouted out: stop the NPE. Democrats and patriots of all social categories claimed it: stop the assassination of our children's intellect... And to conceal the crime, they do not hesitate to forge fake exam results...

Halt the NPE!

No Suspension of the NPE,

No Start of the 2008-2009 School Year!

Long Life to Popular Emancipation! (CSTB 2008).

Unlike conservatives' attitudes, opposition is an overt resistance movement. It became institutionalized with the active role of unions and the efforts of the Communist Party of Benin (PCB) to counter the competency-based approach. While the covert resistance strategy is an individual initiative of resisters, active resistance is a collective movement that is nationwide in scope, with mass demonstrations and teachers' union strikes demanding reform suspension. Both technical and ideological arguments legitimate the opponents' resistance. Technically, though acknowledging the scientific rationality of the competency-based approach, oppositional forces denounced its implementation in Benin as well as elsewhere in francophone Africa. Instruction should be carried out in native languages, instead of being in the French language, if educationists wanted a proper implementation of the competency-based curricular approach. In a conference organized to celebrate the ninth anniversary of the International Day of Mother Tongues on 21 February 2008, INIREF, PCB's think-tank, dedicated a special communication to the struggle against the NPE in Benin. This communication, presented by Essè Iko, CSTB's deputy general secretary, amply documents the main reasons for opposing the innovation in Benin. Like most education systems inherited from French colonization in Africa, argued the presenter, Benin's school system is extraverted in the sense that it deprives children of their 'soul', which is 'their mother tongues'. If the competency-based approach valued socio-cognitivism as its advocates pretend, the simple fact of continuing instruction in the French language falsifies its pedagogic merits in Benin, and insidiously perpetuates 'neo-colonialism, the domination of the French language over our national cultures, in short, the assassination of our Beninese spirit and soul' (Iko 2008: 29).

Opponents systematically attributed students' underperformance to the curricular innovation on the grounds that the approach undervalues children's socio-economic, cultural and linguistic heritage because of its implementation in the French language. As a consequence, children get confused and can barely learn, or in the better cases they get extraverted, denying their own cultures and development potentials; thus the relevance of their underperformance in reading, writing and numeracy. Opponents consider the policy a complete failure and suggest an alternative reform of the school system. In their 'project of popular emancipation', communists proposed an endogenous education system similar to the Tanzanian *Ujaama*, 'Education for Self-Reliance'. Full instruction in national languages at the basic level and valorization of endogenous cultural practices in the school system constitute the major measures of the proposed alternative reform. This suggestion stems from PCB's ideology of combating 'neo-imperialism'.

While the military regime was communist *de jure*, it is surprising to realize that its own most radical opposition was the Communist Party of Dahomey (PCD), which clandestinely fought the military regime (Chris 1992: 46). PCD activists contributed to destabilizing the military regime, which they charged with corruption, nepotism and bourgeoisie. Using mass propaganda and insurrectional tactics, they successfully mobilized students and workers against the junta in the 1980s. Yet, PCD leaders opposed liberal democracy and market economy, asserting that the super-structural choices operated by the country's intelligentsia in 1990 could but legitimate neo-imperialism and exclusion of the popular masses from benefitting in the fruits of their suffering (ibid.: 50). Behind liberal democracy, communists saw the imperialist west and privatization of the means of production. They even proposed obtaining justice by bringing to court most elites of the country, implicating them in 'economic and political crimes'. Likewise, they condemned international development partners, whom they qualified 'as imperialists who impose ineffective policies in the purpose of weakening the country to better control it' (PCB 2005). Thus opposing major policy directives of the country since the 1990s, PCB aligned its opposition to the curricular reform with the contestation option the party took as early as 1990, when they refused to send delegates to the National Conference. But the new leaders of the country soon compelled them to follow the rule of law. When communists refused to change their party's name to Communist Party of Be-

nin (PCB) instead of the initial Communist Party of Dahomey (PCD), they were denied participation in early democratic elections. Only in 1995, after changing the denomination to PCB in September 1993, did they participate in elections, winning one seat out of 79 in parliament. Thereafter, communists have had no representative in the national assembly. What Benin's communists lost in democratic elections, they gained in unionism with the placement of brave and outstanding activists as union leaders. Often highly educated, eloquent and bold, communist activists enjoyed popularity and a good reputation among university students and workers for confronting the hierarchy and successfully defending workers' interests. They were discrete, due to the torture and repression they had suffered under the revolution.

**Table 6.2**  
*Log of CSTB strikes and protests against the NPE*

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Time (hours)</i>	<i>Number of claims</i>	<i>Rank of NPE</i>
12/09/2006	Protest			
14/09/2006	Protest			
14/12/2006	Strike	24	14	1 <sup>st</sup>
30/01-1/02/2007	Strike	72	10	2 <sup>nd</sup>
6-8/02/2007	Strike	72	10	2 <sup>nd</sup>
20-22/02/2007	Strike	72	11	2 <sup>nd</sup>
5/06/2008	Strike	24	2	1 <sup>st</sup>
4/09/2008	Protest			
11/09/2008	Protest			
2/10/2008	Protest			
6/10/2008	Protest			
21-23/10/2008	Strike	72	2	1 <sup>st</sup>
23/10/2008	Protest			
28-30/04/2009	Strike	72	18	1 <sup>st</sup>
12-14/05/2009	Strike	72	18	1 <sup>st</sup>
27-29/10/2009	Strike	72	6	6 <sup>th</sup>
2/12/2010	Strike	24	9	5 <sup>th</sup>
9/12/2010	Strike	24	9	5 <sup>th</sup>

*Source:* Compiled from the available calls for strike and protest at CSTB headquarters.

*Note:* Due to rudimentary archive keeping, the author could not find earlier calls.

Most of the PCB's concerns were relayed through the call from teachers' unions for instruction in national languages and for the suspension of the curricular reform. A confederation of unions (CSTB) gained national repute by spearheading a mass campaign against the curricular reform. Opposition strategies consisted of public demonstrations and teachers' union strikes in public schools to demand reform suspension. A log of calls to strike and protest in Table 6.2 indicates the priority that unionists gave to the claim of reform suspension.

In so doing, reform opponents succeeded in paralyzing the public education sector; most public school teachers and principals, regardless of their union affiliations or their position in the policy debate, enjoyed a free ride whenever a single union or union confederation called for a strike. Whether proponents or resisters, all public school teachers systematically went on strike whenever any teachers' union protested against the reform or claimed any other benefits for workers. The following is part of a protest address by the general secretary<sup>2</sup> of the CSTB on the eve of the 2008-09 academic year:

Workers of every category, parents and students; the NPE has become the most dangerous enemy of our nation... Despite the innumerable contestations by parents and school actors, despite written protests and demonstrations by union federations, despite various protest movements before, during and after the National Forum on Education in February 2007, the so-called change government has remained deaf and unwilling to give us satisfaction on our dearest claim which is the immediate suspension of the NPE (in Kpoguè 2008).

Indeed, corporatist reasons partly motivated teachers' unions to protest against the curricular reform. But given the connections between the PCB activists and union leadership in Benin, corporatist reasons alone fail to provide the complete rationale underlying active resistance in the current policy debate. The similarity of the arguments by unionists and PCB activists to demand reform suspension suggests that political reasons, too, explain the active resistance. As illustrated in the above-mentioned call to strike and protest address, opposition cited implementation problems and appalling policy outcomes to prepare grassroots actors – especially parents – to reject the policy. Students' poor reading and writing skills, fake results in educational statistics and poor working conditions for teachers were a few key elements of their arguments in favour of reform suspension. Indeed, the unfavourable propaganda at national

level, which started with the generalization of the reform in 1999, produced a contagion effect that inhibited local actors' receptivity to the policy.

During fieldwork, however, only three actors claimed active affiliation to SYNAPRIM, one of the major teachers' unions affiliated with CSTB. Of the three, only one proved to be oppositional, as he accused the educational hierarchy of 'intellectual selfishness' and praised his general secretary and a university professor<sup>3</sup> who proclaimed himself a 'sworn enemy of the NPE' for their 'patriotic and salvation mission'. Even a principal, who was an active member of PCB, clearly differentiated his conservatism from the political call for suspension. Despite the tiny number of opponents discovered in the sample of this study, the nationwide scope of opponents' active resistance had favourable echo at the local level. Conservative parents, for instance, trusted and appreciated the communist party and its allied teachers' unions as well as knowledgeable opinion leaders for raising and spreading their concerns against the curricular reform.

### **6.3 Resisters as Viewed by other Actors**

While most resisters consider themselves to be patriots in defending children's interests, reform proponents have an opposite view of them. Loyalists and satisficers condemn resisters among teachers, principals, unionists, opinion leaders and parents. The terms they use harshly convey retaliation to resisters' cynicism towards advocates of the curricular reform.

Reform proponents excuse less receptive teachers for their 'ignorance and limited academic level', referring to teachers on a community contract – whom they never really regarded as teachers – as 'child-sitters'. Teachers on a government contract who show resistance to the policy are labelled as 'lacking vocation' or as youths who 'mistakenly chose the teaching profession expecting to make money'. Such teachers are termed 'lazy and lacking motivation'. Veteran teachers among the resisters are characterized as 'teachers waiting for retirement and whose knowledge has reached obsolescence'. Reform advocates deny such teachers' legitimacy to discuss the new approach because 'they do not really practice them'.

To distance themselves from resisters, reform proponents portrayed opposing unionists as 'dishonest and corrupt people working for political

opposition parties', 'extremist reds' and 'non-practitioners'. They argued that since most teacher union leaders are public school principals exempted from teaching, they are not qualified to discuss the new approach. To support their claims, reform proponents denounce the greed of such people 'who served as trainers in all in-service activities and pocketed the per diems' but who turned against the reform today simply because 'the generalization is over'. In response to mobilization against the reform and calls for an alternative curricular reform that enables full instruction in native languages, reform proponents emphasized that unionists wanted to create another source of revenue to replace the sinecure they lost upon completion of the generalization.

Opinion leaders who voiced criticisms against the new approach are regarded as 'frustrated intellectuals excluded from the benefits of the reform'. Proponents consider such persons as ignorant of the competency-based approach and as choosing instead to intrude into primary education affairs 'simply because they are intellectuals'. They portray conservative parents as nostalgic for the past and, to some extent, 'irresponsible for escaping their duty'. Along similar lines of reasoning, satisficing teachers and principals claim that conservative parents have failed to create an enabling environment for their children, as such an environment must include the availability of adequate school supplies, regular tuition, daily meals and care. Children would certainly get good results if parents took responsibility in offering children adequate conditions. To them, parents are not teachers and, therefore, should not interfere with children's instructional activities. They interpret conservative parents' complaints as the result of 'manipulation and contagion by unionists and opinion leaders'. A few actors in affluent private schools considered public school teachers as the real opponents of the new approach, because of their recurrent and cyclical strikes as well as their complicity in fraudulent practices during exams.

#### 6.4 Three Gradations of Policy Resistance

So far, this chapter has explained both covert and overt resistance by the attitudes and impressions of conformists, conservatives and opponents. Conformists hide their lack of policy-relevant knowledge by displaying blind advocacy. Conservatives prefer previous curricula and pedagogical practices to the innovation, which they blame as the cause of students' underperformance. Opponents mix technical and ideological arguments

to discredit the reform and demand suspension while proposing an alternative reform. This section reflects on the arguments of resisters by presenting policy resistance as a combination of three sets of factors: contextual constraints that exacerbate implementation problems, disappointing policy outcomes and the contagion effect of organized movements.

#### **6.4.1 Constraints that Exacerbate Implementation Problems**

The first range of constraints that challenged the curricular reform was the discrepancies between the poor qualifications of teachers and the sophistication of the competency-based approach. Upon the generalization of the reform in 1999, half of the teaching staff in public schools lacked professional qualifications (MENs 2006: 34). Since most of the teacher training schools were closed until 2005 due to structural adjustment measures, the few qualified teachers in the system were trained in the late 1970s and early 1980s along the lines of classic pedagogy. They learned to value teacher-centredness and received instruction in pedagogical beliefs and practices inspired by behaviourism. As a consequence, they were less predisposed to question their own authority in the classroom as a knowledge provider.

The quest for more teachers at affordable cost – as suggested by the World Bank to contain the salary item on the educational budget – occasioned some disorder among the teaching personnel. Initially, teaching was made a pre-service for unemployed school graduates, who entered teaching without any professional training and earned only nine months of salary a year. The shift to the recruitment of teachers on a government contract to solve the teacher shortage included little initial training. The precarious conditions of new recruits further complicated the situation. On the pretext of the fixed salary they earned over years, and conscious of their importance in the system, teachers on a government contract soon engaged in union activism, which seriously jeopardized the public segment of the education system on a recurrent basis. The advent of teachers on a local contract and community teachers worsened conditions for proper implementation of the new approach. Community teachers are senior students who dropped out of school or unemployed graduates recruited by the school PTAs to provide care and limited instruction to abandoned students, in return for a stipend. The most recent attempt to solve the teacher shortage is the induction of the youth in na-

tional military service into teaching, again without sound initial training. This means that a far-fetched and theoretically sophisticated instructional package was being put into the hands of people whom authorities prefer to call 'child-sitters'.<sup>4</sup> Today, a substantial number of this category of untrained teachers who later benefited from a limited amount of special training confesses to having had little understanding of the new terminologies, which 'discouraged us from reading the documents'. Many conformist teachers identified themselves with this category of teachers when they complained that the approach was 'too complicated, confusing and beyond their academic level'.

The complexity of the new approach sharply contrasts with the dismal teacher qualifications and working conditions prevalent during the generalization period. In an effort to demonstrate expertise and novelty, the curriculum designers broke sharply with past curricula of the country. Loyalists' attitudes in this study are illustrative of the zeal of such curriculum designers. Their quest for professional originality stimulated the introduction of more pedantic terminologies in the curricular documents. Examination of curricular guides, textbooks and other documents reveals a range of new terminologies for things that were once familiar to teachers and other actors, to the extent that a curricular lexicon was compiled to help the 'non-initiated' comprehend the new jargon. In mathematics, for instance, the term *equation* is used instead of the familiar *operation* and *proportionality* in place of the common *fraction*; the use of *learner* instead of the common *pupil*; the Anglicism *item* is used instead of the familiar *rubric*. Reference to sophisticated terms such as competences, capacity, ability, metacognition, diagnostic evaluation, criterion-referenced evaluation, formative evaluation, summative evaluation, socio-constructivism, objectivation, abstraction, linguistic immersion and total physical response (RANV) served as barriers between adepts of the new approach and ordinary teachers and parents, not to mention the children that the reform was intended to serve. Moreover, the reform brought complex notions that used to be taught in secondary school down to primary school level. In mathematics, for instance, the notions of superiority, inferiority and symmetry, which used to be taught in the eighth, ninth and tenth grades, are now introduced from the fourth grade. Similarly, in science and technology, the notions of electric circuits and movement, formerly studied in the ninth and tenth grades, are now introduced in the fifth grade. As an outcome of social education, primary

school children are familiar with children's rights and how to protect them, as well as the exercise of democracy, notions formerly taught in high school.

In addition to semantic opacity, the large number of documents edited in the policy process (curriculum guides, teachers' guides, textbooks, workbooks, and training packages) suggests that the reform is not meant for ordinary school actors. Lannoye (2005: 52) counted as many as 80 documents produced in the framework of the curricular reform at the primary education level. At each grade level, a teacher has to read the curriculum and teachers' guides for six fields of study, in addition to textbooks and workbooks in French and mathematics. A minimum of 16 documents is necessary for a teacher at each grade level. While this touch of expertise and creativity aimed to equip teachers with hands-on tools and children with knowledge and life skills for problem-solving, the initiative failed to consider the attributes of implementers and the environment of end-beneficiaries. While the conceptual sophistication of the competency-based curricular approach required excessive documentations, it made the innovation a 'hostage of inspectors and other specialists' who had better control of it than did front-line actors such as teachers, students, principals and parents (Bernard et al. 2007: 569).

Finally, material constraints undermined the implementation of the curricular reform. Lack of infrastructure, school libraries, science laboratories, materials and equipment was a common complaint among teachers in public schools and less affluent private schools. In science education, for instance, a fifth grade teacher lamented the fact that he had to teach children in plain words, contrary to the prescribed experimental model, simply because 'there was no means to afford fresh meat and show learners the differences among boiled meat, dried meat, fried meat and smoked meat'. Large class size constituted another constraint to the implementation of the competency-based approach. Parents with modest means – and often those with more children – enrolled children in public schools where the official teacher-student ratio of 1:50 is far from school realities, particularly in lower grades. In an urban public school in Abomey-Calavi, 84 students were enrolled in first grade in October 2008. The largest oversized class found was in a rural public school in Misséré-té with 167 students in first grade. While this interest in education signals parents' desire to take advantage of the free primary education policy, it complicates teachers' management of their classroom, especially with the

new approach. Oversized classes undermined the policy requirement to group students in work teams. While work teams of four students are easier to manage, there were as many as six to eight students in each team in both public and private schools. Moreover, systematization of instructional activities required that students have permanent access to textbooks and workbooks. But in many rural schools, parents relied on government-supplied textbooks and failed to buy them for the private use of their children. As a consequence, children had access to textbooks only at school, as it is forbidden to take them home.

Educational change literature emphasizes resistance in school settings by evoking such factors as fear of uncertainty, routine of the teaching career, common perception of schools as custodians of tradition and top-down decision making in most educational administrations (Ornstein and Hunkins 2004: 309; Fullan and Stiegelbauer 1991: 32-6; Metz 1990). While strategies to cope with these potential sources of resistance can be anticipated in planned change, these sources of resistance simply added to the contextual constraints in implementation of the curricular reform in Benin. Poor teacher qualifications and working conditions, the sophistication of the competency-based approach and material constraints were major ingredients exacerbating implementation problems at the local level. Their severity foreshadowed the disappointing policy outcomes feared by local actors.

#### 6.4.2 Disappointing Policy Outcomes

I am illiterate; one day, I asked my sixth grade son to read the names on the signposts in the field. He repeated the same name for all the four different signposts we found. From my expectation that the names should be different – and I knew the names were different –, I realized that my sixth grade son was unable to read. It's a pity! (a parent on 24 March 2009).

Conservatives and opponents converge in their disappointment with the curricular reform, as they attribute students' underperformance to the innovation. This subsection reflects on the objective reasons legitimating their feelings, considering students' reading and writing deficiencies and insidious marginalization in the school system as a few unpredictable policy outcomes.

As illustrated above, students' reading and writing deficiencies come first as the most recurrent disappointing policy outcome. This is rooted in the shift to a holistic approach of teaching writing, which differs from

the letter combination strategy prevalent under the former curricula. Based on the linguistic principle that signs have meanings in context, the holistic approach minimizes mechanical letter identification. Instead of teaching the 26 letters of the French alphabet by differentiating between vowels and consonants and by combining letters to obtain syllables in isolation as under previous curricula, teachers are now required to teach letter identification by highlighting individual letters within words and by placing the words in a meaningful sentence. The introduction of this holistic strategy at the onset of the school system in first grade disadvantaged many children who were not familiar with the French language before attending school. As a consequence, while first graders could memorize the letter “A” in “Apple” as taught in classrooms, many would fail to identify the letter in other words such as “Baby” and “Bank”, for instance. The solution of offering first graders a few weeks’ total immersion in French language speaking prior to planned instructional activities barely changed the situation. To avoid being held accountable for not completing the prescribed lesson units, many first grade teachers reportedly rushed and shorten the immersion period because curriculum designers failed to adjust the schedule to accommodate the corrective measure. Similar examples abounded for other subjects; but what conservative parents deplored most was the complicity of the school system in grade inflation. While they could accept a student repeating a grade level for insufficient work, parents lamented the fact that the system allowed children to pass to upper grades, regardless of their actual performance. They interpreted this new phenomenon consonant with the curricular reform as insidious marginalization.

The previous *école nouvelle* reform attempted to break socio-economic differentiation among schools by reinforcing egalitarian principles. However, the establishment of liberal democracy and a market economy – with their corollaries of competition and free enterprise for which the curricular reform intended to groom the youth – as well as the liberalization of the education sector worsened social inequality through educational discrimination. There is evidence that the new policy is too demanding of both the state and parents. Without the financial and technical assistance of the international community, Benin alone could not bear the cost of the policy initiative, due to the linkages of school curricula with all other educational inputs (e.g. infrastructure, teachers’ working conditions, teacher training, textbooks, professional develop-

ment and student welfare). While quality-conscious parents developed compensatory strategies, parents with modest means and those living in disadvantaged areas had limited opportunities to provide their children with compensatory measures. The fact that the state was overwhelmed by the educational burden explains the proliferation of private schools in the major cities of the country, where they came to significantly outnumber public schools. For instance, Abomey-Calavi school district 1 had 170 officially registered private schools and only 69 public schools in 2009, whereas Kpomassè, a rural school district, had no private school.

**Table 6.3**  
*Price estimation<sup>5</sup> for supplies and tuition for a fifth grader in 2008*

<i>Item</i>	<i>Price (FCFA)</i>	<i>Value in Euros</i>
French reader	2,000	3
Mathematics	2,000	3
Copy-books	2,000	3
Stationery	10,000	15
School bag	2,000	3
School uniform	5,000	8
Photocopies	3,000	5
Tuition	25,000	38
<b>Total</b>	<b>51,000</b>	<b>78</b>

The new approach imposed a number of burdens on parents that only relatively well-off and quality-minded parents can afford. In addition to hiring a qualified home tutor, buying textbooks and workbooks on a yearly basis, and supplying school materials and photocopies, parents enrolling their children in private and religious schools must pay a tuition fee that varies significantly from school to school. Parents with modest means and those living in disadvantaged areas have no choice but to use the available free public school. Despite the tuition-free primary education policy, public schools nonetheless occasionally request financial contributions from parents. Table 6.3 presents an estimation of annual financial requirements for tuition and school supplies for a fifth grader in a private school. To this initial total, one must add the cost of hiring a home tutor at 10,000F (15 euros) per month on average and the cost of

renewing school supplies throughout the year because ‘children lose them and books are easily damaged’. Despite the fact that children don’t pay tuition in public schools due to the free primary education policy in force since October 2006, parents who have children in public schools spend at least 26,000F (40 euros) per fifth grader. This amount is of minor significance to parents with means, who in fact pay more to purchase supplementary readers, computer games and comics and whose children attend more expensive schools. Parents with modest means, however, find such expenditures prohibitive in a country where the minimum wage is less than 40,000F (62 euros) per month. This is to say nothing of rural parents who rarely earn more than one euro a day.

If the financial requirements of the curricular reform marginalized less resourceful parents, it also denied many children the perceived opportunity of upwards social mobility associated with schooling. In fact, students who repeated a grade prior to the systematic introduction of the new approach in that grade level were the first victims of the policy since they had limited options to continue education. The majority of students who repeated the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth grades, respectively, in 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004 were reported to have left school because they lacked previous grade preparation in the new approach. In fact, the policy failed to anticipate this problem. No remedial plan to accommodate students who had repeated a grade level prior to the systematic introduction of the new approach was found in the policy documents consulted in this study. As the number of such victims remains undocumented at both the national and the school level, the current study must rely on grassroots actors’ reports on this shortcoming. In better cases, and often with satisficing teachers and principals, remedial strategies consisted of managing a single classroom as a multi-grade classroom, giving repeaters some chance to catch up. Some parents of second grade repeaters reportedly decided to return their children to first grade, giving them some chance to be prepared in the new approach.

Many literate parents suffered overnight obsolescence because the policy rendered them unable to monitor their children at home as they used to do with the transition curricula. The new terminologies and higher level contents in the new documents made it difficult for them to oversee their children’s education. Consequently, they became nostalgic for past curricula to the detriment of the innovation. The situation of illiterate parents was even more desperate, as their relationship with the

curricular reform was limited to schools' requests to pay fees and provide materials. In final analysis, students' socio-economic origin did matter in the outcome of the curricular reform. Not only did remedial strategies require financial means, they also demanded that parents have correct information to provide alternatives where state-provided education failed to meet expectations. In this context, applying the same curricular standard to every primary school nationwide tended to reinforce conservative parents' frustration. Comparing the advantages of the previous curricula to the shortcomings of the current innovation, such parents developed a nostalgia for the previous curricula, as one parent expressed in the following terms:

With the previous transition curricula, children of the poor could become well educated and come back to bridge the poverty gap; but with the NPE, it has become impossible because you have to buy books and materials, and enrol your children in a private school; with the former curricula, we did not have this situation... even a child without textbooks could pass and succeed in life (a parent in a rural school on 24 March 2009).

In addition to the conservative parents who felt frustrated, there were a few influential actors among teachers, principals, pedagogic counselors, and opinion leaders as well as university professors who denounced 'a closed door policy' in the policy process. In regards to the teacher training component of the reform, for instance, a pedagogic counsellor suggested a sound conversion process for teachers. He suggested that after successful experimentation with the new approach, but before generalization, all new teachers should be trained in normal schools (institutions to train primary school teachers). Then, after one year of intensive training in the new approach, the initiated teachers would move on to schools for generalization in first grade while veteran teachers would replace them in normal schools. But 'the conversion process I suggested was turned down because the hierarchy found it disturbing; they thought I came to destroy their sinecure; this suggestion caused my ejection from subsequent training activities' (interview on 8 April 2009). The 'closed-door policy' caused many typing mistakes in the initial documents as well as structural errors that curriculum designers could have corrected had they shared tasks collegially.

### 6.4.3 The Contagion Effect of Organized Movements

Contextual constraints and disappointing policy outcomes added to the resistance predisposition of actors in school settings, providing a favourable environment for propagating negative attitudes towards the curricular reform. The combination of these ingredients predisposed local actors to be less receptive to the innovation, especially when the communication and public participation action plan of the reform failed to function in due time. In fact, there was no initiative to involve parents in the policy process, simply because of the deliberate ‘closed-door policy’ of curriculum designers who ‘were resentful of any improvement suggestions by practitioners’. Decision-makers at the ministry of education chose to remain silent in the on-going debate concerning the curricular reform. During a 2004 workshop, for instance, it was decided ‘to avoid all immediate contradictory debate’ in relation to the various criticisms formulated against the policy (MEPS 2004: 55, in Carlos 2005: 25). Even UNICEF, which established advocacy units known as *Club des Mamans*<sup>6</sup> for each targeted school in a campaign to gain community support for girls’ access to school in hostile regions of the country, never directly addressed parental support for the curricular reform. Thus, substituting for political-administrative authorities in charge of implementing the policy, trade unions, the PCB and other opinion leaders took advantage of the silence to propagate their charges against the innovation. Unfortunately, most of the charges coincided with the realities of many grassroots actors, producing a contagion effect.

Nonetheless, the contagion effect never overcame the divergence between conservatives and opponents regarding the alternative of full instruction in mother tongues at the primary school level. Opponents technically and ideologically supported this alternative as a prerequisite for successful implementation of the competency-based approach, consequently demanding ‘immediate suspension’ of the on-going curricular reform. Conservatives, however, opposed this alternative. Conservative parents joined loyalists and satisficers to advocate continuing instruction in the French language, because of the perceived inherent advantages. They equated instruction in children’s mother tongues with backwardness, because of the perceived limitations in granting children opportunities for upwards social mobility. Yet, both conservatives and opponents converged on the implementation problems and the disappointing policy outcomes. By basing their arguments on implementation problems and

poor outcomes, such as marginalization, students' underperformance and deficiencies in literacy and numeracy, opponents succeeded in winning the covert support of conservative parents. While efforts were underway at the central level to address these objective concerns and to improve policy, the contagion effect continued to have devastating effects at the grassroots level.

### 6.5 Conclusion

This chapter documented policy resistance by presenting its three facets in the current case of the curricular reform. In so doing, it completed discussion of the actors spectrum introduced in Figure 5.1. The resisters' attitudes and impressions about the curricular reform qualified them as conformists, conservatives and opponents. The same circumspection about interpretation of the spectrum as in Chapter 5 applies here too; the actors spectrum is a heuristic device, not a rigid categorization. Policy resistance reflects a combination of three sets of factors that this chapter developed as the three facets of resistance: contextual constraints, disappointing policy outcomes and the contagion effect.

Indeed, there were serious challenges to the implementation of the curricular innovation, challenges that in fact legitimate most resisters' complaints. The Government of Benin and its technical and financial partners have actively worked to address these challenges. They jointly subsidized textbooks and distributed them to both public and private schools, allowing one for every two students. Increasingly, teacher training has attracted more attention than ever before. While conservatives could have contented themselves with these efforts to establish appropriate enabling conditions for the curricular reform, opponents have proven hard to please, given their alternative solution of full instruction in mother tongues. The unfavourable echo of opponents' complaints and movements has created a contagion effect among grassroots actors. What remains is to learn how the reform has survived this unfavourable publicity.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Upon entering some conformist teachers and principals' classrooms, the visitor is welcomed with students' slogans in praise of the new approach:

*Nouveaux Programmes: Objectivité, Compétence, Habileté!*

*Nouveaux Programmes: Compétence, Patriotisme, Esprit Critique!*

*Nouveaux Programmes: Rigueur, Solidarité, Esprit d'Equipe!*

<sup>2</sup> Gaston Azoua, General Secretary of CSTB, during a third mass demonstration on 27 August 2008, in *La Tribune de la Capitale*, a daily newspaper issued in Cotonou; edition published on 28 August 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Professor Félix Iroko on 23 October 2008 in a Golf TV debate from 21:00 to 22:30 on the topic 'Suspension of the NPE: Why the Controversy? Politicians' Manoeuvre or Scientific Claim?' Professor Iroko defended his opposition to the reform, while Dr. Elisabeth B. Richard, an educationist who operates a private school, acted as his challenger.

<sup>4</sup> All three inspectors referred to community teachers as 'child sitters' because of their lack of teaching qualifications.

<sup>5</sup> Only prices for school uniforms and tuition were mentioned on the list. Prices for books are from standard bookshops as of June 2009. Though textbooks are subsidized, prices vary with supply and demand.

<sup>6</sup> *Club des Mamans* is a partnership between mothers and school girls. In culturally hostile regions of Benin where girls' schooling is taboo, this partnership was instrumental in gaining community support for girls' access to school.

# 7

## Sustainable Curricula: The Past in the Present

### 7.1 Introduction

Speaking of policy sustainability poses the problem of locating stability in a dynamic process. Most policy analysts hesitate to claim policy sustainability because of the fluctuating nature of public needs and actions. Unpredictable outcomes cause new problems to emerge that force the renegotiation of policy contents, instruments and resources. For that reason, analysts regard the policy lifecycle as an evolving process, consisting of needs, issue salience, agenda setting, policy design, implementation and evaluation, that subsequently generates new needs and so the cycle continues (Fullan and Stiegelbauer 1991: 48; Grindle 2004: 17; Winter 2003b: 207; Knoepfel et al. 2007: 32). Nonetheless, there are landmarks that signal whether expected changes have been attained or at least contribute to assessment of what actually happened as a result of policy intervention. In this regard, policy sustainability warrants documentation.

Sustainable change not only depends on how effectively policy measures address the needs of target groups and end-beneficiaries, but more importantly, it requires the active involvement and appropriation of grassroots actors (Castiano 2009: 432; Hontondji 2002: 243; Levinson and Sutton 2001: 2). It is not enough to implement adequate policy. Most grassroots actors must feel ownership and appropriate policy goals and values, adapting policy measures to their own context-specific realities. In the current case, if local actors' advocacy is explained by the perceived benefits of the competency-based approach and educational policy convergence, resistance can be said to be the result of a combination of contextual constraints that exacerbated implementation problems, disappointing policy outcomes and the contagion effect of organized movements. Given the scope of resistance and the paradox that most resisters are front-line actors, the current chapter considers how the cur-

ricular reform survived constraints and resistance, and continues to be upheld as the official school curricula in Benin. Has the policy survived simply because of its *de facto* imposition on all target groups and end-beneficiaries countrywide or because of the appropriateness of the coping strategies of local actors? What kinds of change occurred across the spectrum of policy advocacy and resistance? How has the curricular reform contributed to learning outcomes for students?

Drawing insights from theories of organizational change, and reflecting on findings from previous impact evaluation studies on the curricular reform, the current chapter attempts to address these questions. Whereas section one presents the curricular reform as a structural top-down change, section two considers the innovation as an incremental bottom-up change, approving satisficers' domestication of the competency-based approach. Section three accedes that the transition to the new approach is taking longer than anticipated. The last section reflects on the contribution of the curricular reform to learning outcomes for students, indicating that local actors, in their interpretation of school performance, have come to accommodate the innovative curricula in their routine instead of completely changing previous pedagogic creeds and practices.

## 7.2 The Curricular Reform as a Structural Top-Down Change

Structural top-down change features the central role of government in planning and executing 'all new systematic and comprehensive change at all levels' (Álvarez and Ruíz-Casares 1997, in Moulton and Mundy 2002b: 211). The curricular reform reflects many aspects of structural top-down change. First, secondary data in Chapter 4 showed the disproportionate role of the central government and the international community in the policy process compared to the participation of local actors, which were formally involved only at the implementation stage. Secondly, the nationwide scope of the reform makes it, *de jure*, compulsory for all schools in the country. In this respect, the reform aims to change not only the behaviour of school children and their teachers but also parental expectations of formal education. It targets all school subjects simultaneously with the design, publication and distribution of new textbooks, teachers' guides, curricular guides and workbooks.

Further changes, such as the adoption of the competency-based curricular format, the shift from a teacher-centred pedagogy to a student-

centred approach, and the systematic cascade training of teachers, are credited with the reform on the account of structural top-down change. Likewise, unprecedented achievements pertaining to higher promotion rates, lower repetition rates and relatively improved rates of success in primary school-leaving examinations are a few outcomes of the policy, to the satisfaction of officials. In addition, the systemic nature of the reform compelled the executive government to make substantial effort to increase schools' capacity to implement the competency-based approach. Furnished primary school infrastructure doubled between 1994 and 2005, from 2,984 schools to 5,722 schools. By the same token, the teaching personnel increased from 18,064 teachers in 2000 to 23,270 in 2005 (MENs 2006: 34). To reinforce initial teacher training, six normal schools have become functional in the country since 2005. How do local actors perceive and internalize the various ingredients of structural top-down change?

While structural top-down change has the merit of reinforcing the authoritative role of the state as a major reformer, it nonetheless presents the weakness of producing superficial effects at the grassroots level. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2009: 17-20) labelled this pattern of transformation a 'boomerang change' due to its superficial impact on front-line actors. In their model of institutional change (the BEST<sup>1</sup> model) these authors describe boomerang change as a radical change instigated with claims by top-level decision-makers that a major step is being taken, but within a short time the policy system slips back to a state resembling the initial situation. Boomerang change cannot be sustained for long because it is lacking in the support and ownership of grassroots actors; it simply results in conservatism, a quick return to previous ways.

The spectrum of actors presented in chapters 5 and 6 to illustrate, respectively, policy advocacy and resistance shows that the curricular reform had superficial effect at the grassroots level. Evidence at first sight suggests that the more distant actors are from the classroom, the better learned advocacy they developed of the competency-based curricular approach, whereas many classroom teachers and principals developed resistance and blind advocacy (Table 7.1).

**Table 7.1**  
*Constellation of school-level actors*

<i>School</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Principals</i>	<i>Parents</i>
A	Private	408	Conservative	Satisficer	Satisficers
B	Private	365	Satisficer	Conservative	Conservatives
C	Catholic	486	Satisficer Satisficer	Satisficer	Conservatives
D	Catholic	602	Loyalist	Conformist	Loyalist, Satisficers
E	Private	245	Conformist Satisficer	-	Satisficers
F	Public	337	Conformist	Conformist	Conservatives
G	Private	295	Conservative Conformist	-	Satisficers
H	Public	396	Conservative Conformist	-	Satisficers
I	Catholic	195	-	Conservative	Satisficers
J	Private	223	Conformist	Loyalist	Conservatives
K	Private	273	Conformist	Conservative	Conservatives
L	Public	291	Satisficer	Loyalist	Conservatives
M	Public	425	Satisficer	Conservative	Conservatives
N	Public	407	Conformist	Conservative	Conservatives
O	Public	260	Conformist Opponent	Conformist	Conservatives
P	Public	249	Conformist	Conservative	Satisficers
Q	Public	293	Conformist	Loyalist	Conservatives

Inspectors' policy-relevant knowledge and conviction in the new approach place them first on the advocacy side of the spectrum. Their administrative role as chief district officers and their supervisory role as trainers put them in a loyal position to experience the curricular reform as a structural top-down change. As local policy elites, they received multiple training opportunities and adequate documentation, which conditioned their advocacy. Moreover, inspectors' authority as the representative of the minister of education at district level compels them to loyalty. But the distance between the inspectors and classroom routines jeopardizes the chances to translate this learned advocacy into direct benefits for students in terms of learning outcomes. Whatever their devotion and loyalty, inspectors are not committed to teaching *per se*; yet they have a

better appreciation of the change and its implications than do teachers – only one teacher among 21 could be counted as a loyalist (Table 5.1). A similar analysis holds for pedagogic counsellors, who are predominantly satisficers. Since satisficers have more pragmatic views of the curricular reform as a structural top-down change, they contextualize the paradigm by appropriating it in a fashion that best serves their interests. In fact, pedagogic counsellors assist inspectors in instructional supervision, but they do not actually teach. Even their mastery and adaptation of the approach as satisficers hardly affects the classroom, because of the hierarchical distance between the pedagogic counsellors and teachers.

Since affluent schools abound in urban areas and most satisficing teachers are found in private and religious schools, local adaptation of the curricular reform is likely only by a limited number of practitioners. The fact that most teachers, especially those in the public sector, are conformist actors (10 of the 21 teachers) provides additional evidence that non-practitioners have better appreciation of the innovation than practitioners actually have. Conformists lack policy-relevant knowledge and intellectual conviction in the new approach, yet they strategically align with the official discourse. Their blind advocacy suggests that conformists dedicate little effort to adapt the competency-based approach to their context-specific realities. Given that they are dominantly classroom teachers, conformists likely continue to teach along the lines of former practices, conceding minimal change and juggling to get results. This may partly explain the deficiencies observed in students' literacy and numeracy performances.

By the same token, the fact that parents in seven school communities are satisficers reinforces the idea that most grassroots actors perceive the new approach as ineffective. As many as 179 parents in ten school communities have this feeling and prefer former teaching practices. Even assuming that satisficing parents are sufficiently influential to exert some positive minority influence on the others, their tendency to take the exit option, enrolling their children in affluent schools, signals disappointment with the policy as a structural top-down change. Their availing of the exit option indicates not only their dissatisfaction with how the change was being implemented in the public domain, but also their approval of how a few private actors had succeeded in domesticating the change. Regardless of the conviction of satisficing parents in the liberal vision of education, they do not teach! But given the discrepancy be-

tween satisficing parents' realization of structural top-down change and the pedagogical practices of satisficing teachers, one might doubt whether satisficing parents' expectations are really being met.

### **7.3 The Curricular Reform as an Incremental Bottom-up Change**

In a study of top-down educational reforms in Latin America, Álvarez and Ruiz-Casares (1997) concluded that most comprehensively planned change fails to produce the desired results because the appropriation of change at the top has little impact on grassroots actors. Moulton et al. (2002) came to similar conclusions in their study of systemic comprehensive education reforms in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s. In view of the limitations of structural top-down change, these studies suggest incrementalism and grassroots actors' appropriation of change as promising approaches to sustainable change. Incremental bottom-up change stems from experiences in a system's periphery when grassroots actors have developed capacity to appropriate a new paradigm and adapt it to their context-specific realities. The BEST model of institutional change labels incremental bottom-up change 'tortoise change'. It consists of small and frequent changes in process which lead to small and frequent changes in results; regular but minute steps forward, backwards or sideways, like the tortoise which does not necessarily move in a straight line (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2009: 17).

Interpretation of the actors spectrum from the perspective of incrementalism requires scrutiny of the attitudes and impressions of satisficers and conservatives. Satisficers evolved from the sceptical standpoint of conservatism before discovering some utility in the new paradigm. For teachers and principals, in-service training and exposure to liberal ideas about education played a significant role in this dynamic. As for parents, professional occupation, place of residence and availability of alternative schools contribute to shifting their position from conservatism to satisficing. The adaptive behaviour of satisficing front-line actors seems to be the appropriate attitude, as suggested by Hountondji (2002: 243) when exploring solutions to the problem of 'extraversion of scientific knowledge in Africa'. Satisficing entails appropriation of planned measures for the purpose of transforming them to better fit one's needs; it implies 'not accepting everything' one is offered, but only that which is

useful for one's own condition and for the solution of endogenous problems (ibid., in Castiano 2009: 427).

Conscious of the structural impossibility to adopt a different path of action in matters of school curricula other than the official curricula, satisficing teachers and principals have 'attended the school of the competency-based approach' in order to manipulate the innovation to their own advantage. Indeed, the curricular reform is *de facto* imposed, and all actors must embrace it, at least formally, to comply with state regulations. Failure to do so exposes offenders not only to administrative sanctions but also penalizes their students, who risk failing to meet national educational standards. Conscious of this reality, satisficers, and to some extent conservatives, have come to find the innovation 'very weak' in terms of attaining maximal student performance. Therefore, such actors manage to meet official requirements to get results in national exams, but they also try to equip students with more useful skills particularly in literacy and numeracy. Knowing that national exam requirements are within reach, they fetch resources from former teaching materials and strategies to push their students beyond official requirements.

While both satisficers and conservatives converge on the weakness of the new approach, they diverge on how to eclectically select from the resources available with the new approach. Satisficers remain open to the new approach, master its subtleties and select from the available resources after submitting them to critical judgment, whereas conservatives simply teach to tests and reinforce former instructional practices. Conformists conceal their lack of such expertise and prefer to juggle with students, pretending to teach the new approach while conceding minimal change, most important being to get results. In short, front-line actors get satisfactory results only by resorting to previous behavioural pedagogic practices, regardless of whether they are satisficers, conservatives or conformists. Attempts to depart completely from this pragmatic line of action and to strictly follow the prescribed norms expose teachers and principals to disappointing results.

Conservative parents get more disappointed when they fail to identify 'the past in the present', when they cannot trace the 'old river in the new'. In ten of the school communities under study, parents resisted the curricular reform on the grounds that the new approach did not teach their children proper literacy, numeracy and discipline. They preferred teachers and principals who systematically taught French language tools

like parts of speech, typology of verbs, pronouns, grammatical analysis of sentences, and mental arithmetic. In a few cases they even praised schools that continued to apply physical chastisement. Blinded by the optimistic discourse of educational policy convergence, many satisficing parents were barely cognizant of the reality that their children's teachers and principals continued to delve into the 'old river' in order to produce the results that they so appreciated.

The analysis suggests that satisficing teachers and principals have embarked on a promising process, which is incremental bottom-up change. It is therefore important to identify the conditions that enabled progress to be made from a rigid conservative stand to flexible incremental movement. Their relatively advanced academic background, the favourable school culture in terms of professional development, the possibility of getting *à côté* rewards and the competition in the education market in the private sector, all contributed to this move forward. To these external parameters, one must add the stability in the private sector compared to the pervasive cyclical disturbances in the public sector due to teachers' union strikes. Therefore incremental bottom-up change or 'tortoise change' appears to be the more sustainable path, as it provides room for local actors to domesticate change, not exactly as planned at the top, but as a hybrid variation.

Radical change, as planned by policy elites, is unlikely to take root in Benin's schools due to the nature of its teachers. The Beninese teacher identity, as documented in Welmond (2002b: 54-5), suggests that incremental change has more chance to thrive than radical change when it comes to instructional matters such as school curricular renewal. Though the identity landscape presented by Welmond (*ibid.*) is based on data collected in only public schools, it is indicative of the predisposition of teachers in the Beninese context to change their teaching behaviour. In Benin, teachers navigate among four different identity patterns in the exercise of their function: *phare*, *fonctionnaire*, *sacerdoce* and *efficace*. As *phare*, teachers see themselves as transmitters of knowledge both at school and in the community; as *fonctionnaire* they consider themselves members of the few privileged who have access to state resources and entitlements through civil service. As *sacerdoce*, teachers perceive their role as dedicated patriots who sacrifice themselves through hard work; they constitute a role model deserving of respect and deference in society. Finally, as *efficace*, Beninese teachers are efficient in producing high success rates in pri-

mary school-leaving examinations. While the *phare* identity stands *a priori* as an obstacle to active change initiatives such as child-centred pedagogy, the *sacerdoce* and *efficace* identity patterns can be reinforced to favour incremental bottom-up change.

Incrementalism also supposes that there are elements in the proposed change that reinforce the role of the teacher as transmitter of knowledge. Implementation efforts should build on these elements, rather than suddenly shifting away from a teacher-expert pedagogy to a student-centred approach. Evidence in the attitude of satisficing teachers and principals supports this claim. After ‘attending the school of the NPE’, satisficing teachers enjoyed the moral privilege of training their peers. They rather appreciate the complexity of the approach because it marks the difference between ‘adepts of the NPE’ and novices. This attitude is the manifestation of both the *phare* and *sacerdoce* identity patterns. So, Satisficing front-line actors have the potential to stimulate resisters to embrace change.

## 7.4 The Curricular Reform Still in Transition

The discussion in the previous sections suggests that the transition to incremental bottom-up change takes longer than anticipated. Officially, the nationwide transition to the competency-based curricular approach was to cover a period ranging between 8 and 13 years, except in pilot schools<sup>2</sup> where the transition period was shorter (Table 7.2). While a teacher-expert pedagogy and content-based curricula prevailed throughout the *école nouvelle* reform until 1990, the subsequent transition to the student-centred pedagogy and competency-based curricula consisted of a mixture of content-based and objective-based curricula wrapped up in the same behavioural teacher-expert pedagogy. Transition curricula (PI) were initiated to replace the *école nouvelle* curricula, pending planning and experimentation with the competency-based approach. Given the pedagogic similarities between the *école nouvelle* curricula and the PI, the transition curricula did not challenge teachers about their role as knowledge transmitters and the role of students as passive learners. This provisional arrangement required teachers to continue using previous pedagogic materials and strategies.

**Table 7.2**  
*Planned transition to the competency-based curricula*

Grades	1990-1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
1 <sup>st</sup>	Transition Curricula (PI)	New Curricula (NPE)					
2 <sup>nd</sup>		PI	NPE				
3 <sup>rd</sup>			PI	NPE			
4 <sup>th</sup>				PI	NPE		
5 <sup>th</sup>					PI	NPE	
6 <sup>th</sup>						PI	NPE

According to analysts of school curricular reforms, the planned transition period was shorter. The novelty and subtleties of the concept of competences as applied to school curriculum in general education make it hard for practitioners of the objective-based approach to give up behavioural pedagogical practices in a short period (Jonnaert et al. 2004: 669; Jonnaert and Masciotra 2004; Roegiers 2007: 158-59). It took developed countries such as France, Canada and Belgium more than 60 years to move from objective-based forms of school curricula to competency-based approaches; yet Benin planned hardly a decade for the transition (Braïda 2009: 458). If we assume that these developed countries have proper enabling conditions (science laboratories, school libraries, computers, conducive home study environment for students, adequate teacher education and professional development), it is fair to say that Benin's transition to the new approach has been hasty with respect to the time frame. That the competency-based approach was still in transition in Benin corroborates the conclusion by these scholars that adaptive practices abound where people claim to be enacting competency-based reforms while actually pursuing objective-based goals. A scrutiny of the compatibility between the old and new approaches in terms of contents, complexity, and strategies provides further clarification of why the reform continues to be in transition despite the end of the planned transition period.

Systems in transition work along a number of principles that are worth exploring to ascertain how Benin's planned transition to the new approach is flawed. Observing several structural reforms in post-Soviet countries, Venda (1991) identified four principles guiding the dynamics of system transformation. First, transitional systems are characterized by

the co-existence of old and new structures. This coexistence, far from being neutral, involves a conflict which results in the emergence of the structure with maximal efficiency and the decline of the system with the weaker structure. The prevailing efficient structure never takes complete control without the establishment of a hybrid structure: neither completely old, nor entirely new. In this respect, phases of deconstruction, stabilization and reconstruction are necessary for system transformation (Bîrzea 1994). The second principle holds that where the new emergent structure has few elements in common with the old structure, the two structures are likely to be distant from each other and the transition will probably be more difficult than if there were more elements in common. In cases where a new emergent structure has few elements in common with the old one, Venda (1991) proposes an intermediate state consisting of elements of both the old and the new structures. The third principle stipulates that if the efficiency of the old structure declines too fast, the system may degenerate into a chaotic change process. But if the sudden decline is stopped in time to prevent collapse and erosion, the system can be sustained. Lastly, a transformation process is not one-dimensional, rather it is affected by many factors all occurring at the same time (in Polyzoi and Cernà 2001: 80-4).

The transition to the competency-based curricula is illustrative of these principles. As detailed in Chapters 1 and 4, the transition curricula (*Programmes Intermédiaires*) have more in common with the *école nouvelle* curricula than with the NPE. The transition curricula are a replication of the *école nouvelle* curricula from which designers removed Marxist-Leninist orientations. In addition, a slight adjustment hesitantly shifted pedagogical behaviours from a purely content-oriented approach to an objective-based pedagogy. Conscious of the notional distance between the two approaches, curricula designers wanted to bridge the gap between the old and the new and first introduced an objective-based curricular format in first and second grades before suddenly realizing that the competency-based approach was the best ‘scientifically proven’ approach in vogue in education worldwide (MEPS 2006b: 5). This sudden change was also a function of educational policy convergence which granted both scientific and political legitimacy to the competency-based approach (Chapter 5). The application of competency-based principles in school curricula was associated with unbounded potential for children and the nation. Yet, the rush of the world’s education think-tanks and donors to legitimate

the approach tended to limit the paradigm to its simple utilitarian assumptions and offered little guidance for its classroom actualization (Jonnaert et al. 2004: 688).

Application of Venda's principles one and two reveals that the conflict between the old and the new ended in the prevalence of the old. Effective deconstruction of the old never took place, as grassroots actors have hardly unlearned former pedagogic creeds and practices. If the ongoing process can be called a stabilization process, it favours former teaching practices. While the efficiency decline of the old was anticipated by structural top-down change, practices of grassroots actors suggest that the old is still efficient, even more efficient than the new. A piece of evidence is the attitude of conservatives and even satisficers who manage to get results in accordance with official curricular requirements, but they deploy extraordinary efforts to reinforce the new with the old (see details of coping strategies in chapters 5 and 6). This means that if incremental bottom-up change occurred at all, it is with satisficing teachers and principals. This stabilization process allows sediments of the innovative curricula to settle in the routines of satisficing actors who unpack the reform package, appropriate some of its elements which they find useful, while at the same time combining these new elements with older practices. What actually happens is a realization of the past in the present; the likelihood of the reconstruction process is minimal, at least as regards practitioners in the sample of this study. Such a situation is described as a potential trap for the competency-based approach, which requires a process of transfer of 'competences from the curriculum to competences in action', a process for which instruments were still incomplete (Jonnaert et al. 2007: 192; Jonnaert et al. 2004).

This situation of adaptive incremental, if not minimal, change with satisficing teachers and principals has been raised as a critical issue by curricularists who focus on competency-based curricular reforms. While observing that many curricular reforms preach competency-based orientations, analysts have discovered that pedagogic practices might continue to obey behaviourism simply because the concept of competence as related to school curricula lacks theoretical precision, as 'a pre-scientific concept, more or less meaningless' or rather 'a weak concept' (Cardinet 1982: 158; De Ketele 2000: 188, in Perez 2007: 238). Its polysemic nature triggers a multiplicity of understandings, interpretations and even misconceptions (Roegiers 2007; Jonnaert 2002; Jonnaert et al. 2004).

This suggests that the innovation is characterized by amateurism in its design as well as in practice, giving credence to a researcher who recently wondered whether Benin's experience of competency-based curricular reform was 'a laboratory for education reform' (Fichtner 2010: 518).

Satisficers have delayed proactive responses in favour of the competency-based approach pending their mastery of the innovation. While the ministry of education planned the transition period to last 13 years with organized training sessions, incentives and materials, the appropriation of change, or local adaptation, has been slower and longer. Given that the country's officials maintained the structural top-down change, and students continue to be assessed nationally in accordance with the new approach, chances are that more conservatives and conformists will move to gradually adopt satisficers' behaviour. Satisficers mentioned their initial conservatism or conformism before 'attending the school of the NPE', which changed their attitudes and impressions towards the policy. While this actual transitional process may take longer, it can be accelerated by elimination<sup>3</sup> of per diems for training sessions, the increase of furnished school infrastructure, the renewal of the supervisory staff and provision of other enabling conditions. But for the moment, the reform has caused local actors to have different interpretations of learning outcomes for students.

### 7.5 Improved Learning Outcomes for Students?

Have the competency-based curricula improved learning outcomes for students? Two sets of arguments contribute to the current study's appraisal of this puzzle: grade inflation and policy conflict. Given that the primary data in this study put some limitations on conclusive findings on learning outcomes, this section also draws on results from a few impact evaluation studies that focused on learning outcomes.

The curricular reform produced grade inflation in the school system; that is, students were promoted without the required grade level credentials. The competency-based assessment scheme is partly to blame for this situation. While the transition curricula perpetuated the practice, under *école nouvelle* reform, of giving core subjects such as mathematics and French language more weight than minor subjects, the competency-based assessment scheme gave all school subjects equal weight (Table 7.3). Core subjects were thus put on equal footing with art, physical education, social education, and science and technology. Whereas the previ-

ous assessment scheme required intensive efforts from candidates in the core subjects to pass the primary school-leaving examination, the new scheme requires them to have an average grade in six of the eight subjects. This levelling offered the theoretical advantage of stimulating children to develop competences in all academic fields. However, it failed to promote in-depth coverage of essential life skills to which language and mathematics contribute.

**Table 7.3**  
*Comparison of past and new assessment schemes*

<i>PI Assessment Scheme 1999</i>		<i>NPE Assessment Scheme 2005</i>	
<i>Subjects</i>	<i>Maximum Score</i>	<i>Maximum Score</i>	<i>Subjects</i>
Dictation	20	20	Writing
Text Analysis	60	20	Reading Comprehension
Mathematics	60	20	Mathematics
Writing	20	20	Science and Technology
Science & Social Studies	20	20	Social Studies
Drawing/Needle Work	10	20	Drawing/Needle Work
Recitation	10	20	Oral Performance
Reading	10	20	Physical Education
Physical Education	20		

*Source:* Retrieved from CEP transcripts of different candidates (Appendix 7)

In addition to this structural cause of grade inflation inherent in the competency-based assessment, many teachers had poor mastery of the assessment scheme. Initially, the scheme involved the identification of performance criteria and ‘perfection’ criteria. In principle, students were entitled to perfection bonus grades only if they successfully met performance criteria. But in practice, teachers got confused. Some reportedly granted perfection bonus grades without applying performance criteria. The confusion surrounding the application of the assessment scheme resulted in an abnormally high success rate for the CEP examination in 2005. In order to correct this, competency-based evaluation specialists at the ministry of education introduced the ‘two-thirds rule’. The rule stipulates that students who pass must obtain an average grade in a minimum

of six subjects out of eight. In addition to the sophisticated assessment scheme which many teachers had yet to master, the design of measurement tools (tests) provided hints of answers. Test instructions that already contained answers, made ‘things... easy... too easy to stimulate students’ preparation efforts’ (a pedagogic counsellor on 3 March 2009). As a result of the confusions around the competency-based assessment, teachers inflated grades or deflated them, often regardless of students’ actual performance (Figure 4.1).<sup>4</sup>

Policy conflict is another cause of grade inflation. Two ministerial measures to promote access and to reinforce teacher accountability weakened the propensity of the school system to attain maximum learning outcomes for students with the new approach. The first measure was in 2005, when the minister of education issued an order forbidding students from repeating first grade in Benin’s primary school system (MEPS 2005). Many first and second grade teachers in public schools reportedly took this ministerial decree as an excuse to mask unproductive behaviour, while teachers and principals in private and religious schools never put the decision into practice. The second measure concerned a decision to increase public school principals’ accountability for student performance. Principals who obtained less than a 20 per cent success rate in the CEP examination were to be discharged from their position. Unable to revert a decision that they judged to be unfair – which is to say, one person held accountable in just one year for the performances of various teachers over five years – principals were reported to comply with the measure by filtering candidates and also by ‘helping candidates during exams’. While these ministerial measures were not inherent in the competency-based curricular reform, they nonetheless contributed to student underperformance and did nothing to reinforce the new approach.

Grade inflation limited learning outcomes for students, and consequently flawed the most classic performance indicators of the school system. In principle, both internal and external efficiency indicators attempt to measure costs and benefits of school systems. An efficient school system attains better performance indicators at reasonable cost. Economists of education do such analyses by comparing unit costs across countries regarding such internal efficiency indicators as repetition, retention, promotion and dropout rates. External efficiency indicators relate to graduates’ performance in the workplace and their aptitude to put into practice the accumulated educational experience (Liechti 2000; Michael-

Iowa 2000; MENs 2006; UNESCO 2008). Traditionally, individual students' internal efficiency, as expressed in the promotion rate, predicts their external efficiency; a cohort that completes primary education is expected to possess certain intellectual, social and physical capabilities that differentiate them from their peers who failed or dropped out. But the phenomenon of grade inflation consonant with the competency-based approach distorted this association. Students' internal performance indicators no longer predicted their external efficiency. As a consequence, although more students got promoted under the new approach than with the transition curricula, fewer students had actually learned as much.

Aggregate promotion, repetition and retention rates as well as CEP success rates were relatively consistent with the selective nature of the school system under previous curricula. Table 7.4 presents relevant indicators before and after the innovation, paving the way for reflections on the findings from a few impact evaluation studies.

**Table 7.4**  
*Internal efficiency indicators before and after the new approach*

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>2005</i>
Promotion (%)	63	80
Repetition (%)	27	8
Dropout (%)	10	12
CEP Success (%)	60	99
Retention (%)	28	54

*Source:* Retrieved from MENs (2006: 29-38) and Pôle de Dakar (2007)

The apparently positive trend of the indicators in Table 7.4 sharply contrasts with findings from successive impact evaluation studies that examined learning outcomes of the primary school system. While the school system was never evaluated in terms of learning outcomes for students during implementation of the *école nouvelle* reform, it was evaluated under the transition curricula (PI) and the competency-based curricula (NPE) for that purpose. Surprisingly, though conducted in different time periods, the studies came to the similar conclusion that more students were

achieving below their grade level. Laroche (1996) assessed learning outcomes for second and fifth graders in mathematics and the French language under the transition curricula and discovered that 'at the level of Writing which was specifically focused on the production of sentences from pictures, the percentages of success noted are below 20 which means a fairly high rate of failure' (ibid.: 55, in USAID 2007: 11). The study made the same observation in mathematics in the following terms:

As regards exercises concerning length measurements, percentages of success are below 36. As for the exercise related to area measurements, the percentages of success are 37.1 for accurate conversion, 30 for the correctly formulated operation and 22.6 for the correct solution (ibid.: 92).

Over a decade later, another impact evaluation of learning outcomes for third, fourth, fifth and sixth graders came to a similar conclusion: 'the great majority of students do not show any mastery on the basis of the measuring instruments used' (USAID 2007: 6). PASEC evaluation tests corroborate these findings. Yet these impact studies deny culpability of the curricular reform in students' underperformance and point instead to a range of factors affecting the school system. The current analysis suspects the new approach of some responsibility in the stagnation of learning outcomes for students, as the new assessment scheme lifted the selective mechanisms of the school system (Table 7.3), allowing more students to pass without adequate credentials. Comparing the findings from the impact studies with the statistics in Table 7.4, one can see that the 63 per cent promotion rate in 1995 is closer to the actual learning outcomes for students than the 80 per cent in 2005. Similarly, the 60 per cent CEP success rate in 1995 is closer to the reality of the school system than the 99 per cent in 2005.

While most local actors agree that the educational expectations for children are not being met with the new approach, they diverge in their interpretations of the probable causes of this shortcoming. Conservatives view the discrepancy between the inflated official internal efficiency indicators and the external efficiency of graduates as the result of 'fraudulent practices' on the part of both teachers and students'. Given the inability of students to perform basic tasks, conservatives and opponents explain students' official promotion by political leaders' determination to conceal 'the tragedy of the curricular reform by forging fake statistics to please donors'. Satisficers on the other hand interpret this situation as the effect of the media, the promotion of children's rights which refrains teachers

from flogging students, and the enduring phenomenon of unemployment among school graduates, which discourages current students from making an effort to learn. At the parental level, divergence of opinion reflects a social class differential regarding expectations of schooling. While satisficing parents' advocacy is function of their relatively higher socio-economic situation, compared to conservative parents, the latter scorn the innovation and continue to nurture the former expectation of upwards social mobility derived from schooling. Previously, parents had high esteem for school graduates and called them '*akowé*', which means 'white collar' in *fon* and 'scribe' in *yoruba*. They could admit the fact that a child was repeating a grade level to gain a better chance of graduating, as parents associated student repetition with some virtue. Children who eventually dropped out were considered social failures who could only use their head – not their brain –, in reference to the practice of carrying luggage on the head or doing manual work. Conservative parents continued to nurture this expectation of the school system and disprove of official educational statistics that failed to reflect the reality of students' underperformance. Satisficing parents on the other hand had a liberal vision of education. They did not mind admitting that two school graduates may pass *de jure* with the same overall grade average and perform differently *de facto* in actual life.

Satisficing teachers and principals nonetheless join their conservative peers in coping strategies to reinforce students' French language and mathematical skills. Using teacher-centred strategies during remedial classes, they systematically teach such language tools as lexical items, parts of speech and grammatical rules. They continue to use operation boards, known as *cadrans opératoires*, to reinforce mental arithmetic, and the letter combination strategy, known as *méthode syllabique*, to teach writing and reading. In so doing, they give many parents some satisfaction about their children's academic performance. Beyond official statistics, conservative parents measure school performance by their children's ability to read, write and speak error-free French and to perform basic calculations. The ability to perform mental arithmetic without calculators, respect for elders, discipline and, eventually, the social mobility induced by the educational capital thus accumulated, are conservative parents' priority expectations of education, no matter what kind of school curriculum is in force. Unknowingly, satisficing parents share *de facto* this expectation while proclaiming a liberal vision of education. Effective

teachers and principals continue to reinforce core aptitudes among children, with the nuance that satisficers are more eclectic than conservatives.

To conclude this section on whether the competency-based approach has improved learning outcomes for students, it is fair to mention a certain stagnation in this sense. The assessment scheme of the new approach partly contributed to grade inflation, as it undermined the reliability of most performance indicators of the school system. Even though grassroots actors' interpretations of this shortcoming diverge, they nevertheless resort to similar coping strategies to remedy the situation.

## 7.6 Conclusion

This chapter's examination of the curricular reform from the perspectives of structural top-down change and incremental bottom-up change offered the opportunity to further interpret the spectrum of actors. Satisficers' adaptation of change made an interesting case for policy sustainability. As long as the reform continues to be a national policy, satisficers have the potential to incrementally add new aspects of change to their credentials once these serve their interests. Though it appears ineffective because of its verticality and wide scope, structural top-down change has the potential to generate incremental bottom-up change. The two perspectives on change are not mutually exclusive. For instance, in Benin very few local actors would know about the competency-based approach without this curricular reform. By the same token, without local actors' appropriation and adaptation efforts – even though they remain small in scale – the reform could result only in complete failure.

The transition to the competency-based approach is biased towards former pedagogical practices and grassroots actors' past expectations of schooling. While blurring the scope of any radical change actually occurring, the current trend predicts that the sustainability of the curricular reform will depend on the spread of front-line satisficers' adaptive behaviour and their ability to exert minority influence on other colleagues. Unable to substantially improve students' learning outcomes, which have stagnated despite the reform intervention, the new approach has also introduced flaws to school system performance indicators. Most local actors now give priority to former teaching practices to reinforce the correlation between internal and external efficiency indicators. This poses the question of whether the curricular reform was in fact opportune.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The BEST model describes four patterns of institutional change: boomerang change (radical take off, but rapid return to previous ways), earthquake change (great leap forward, radical break with past policy, a punctuation marked by windows of opportunities), stalactite change (gradual, constant, building up one upon the other) and tortoise change (regular but small steps forwards, backwards or sideways) (see Pollitt and Bouckaert 2009: 18, and Streeck and Thelen 2005: 9 for more details).

<sup>2</sup> Pilot schools started implementing the new curricula in first grade in 1994. Experimentation expanded gradually to reach sixth grade in 1999. Therefore pilot schools had less transition time than non-experimental schools.

<sup>3</sup> After realizing the counter-productive effect of giving trainees cash money as per diems, the Ministry of Primary Education decided from 2005 to offer per diems in the form of meals that trainees ate on the training site. Trainers, however, continued to get per diems as compensation for their services.

<sup>4</sup> The trend series summarizes the evolution of primary school-leaving exam results over time. The sudden peak in 2005 illustrates grade inflation when teachers misinterpreted a new evaluation scheme. Grade deflation in 2007 is consonant with the first application of the 'two-thirds rule'. The 'two-thirds rule' stipulates that students pass only if they obtain average grades in six out of eight subjects. So they must repeat a grade even if they obtained an average grade overall but did not meet the 'two-thirds' requirement.

## 8

## Conclusion

### 8.1 Introduction

The running thread in this study has been to explain why the nationwide implementation of the curricular reform in Benin's primary education system resulted in divisions among grassroots actors. It was set against the ontological background that effective implementation of public policy requires grassroots actors' ownership and adaptation of planned measures. This actor-oriented research contributes to elucidating the role and responsibility of the innovative curricula in students' underperformance. The analyses unfolded around both retrospective and empirical considerations. Beyond the retrospective analysis, which enabled a review of the political history of the curricular reform, empirically the study explored the characteristics, attitudes and impressions of teachers, parents, inspectors, pedagogic counsellors and principals in order to elaborate on the various interactions that they maintained with the policy. Set in the vein of implementation research, the study was informed by organizational theories and educational change perspectives.

Though limited in scope, the focus on Benin's curricular reform has contributed to understanding how actors from the periphery internalized the global discourse on the development potential of basic education during the last two decades. The study found that grassroots actors reacted variably across a spectrum ranging from learned advocacy at the strongest end of policy-relevant knowledge, conviction and commitment, to active resistance at the weakest end (Figure 5.1). In fact, implementation resulted in a policy paradox whereby most actors who absorbed the new approach did not actually teach. The few classroom teachers who ascribed to the policy measures did so by conceding incremental changes that served their interests.

This conclusion chapter is structured as follows. Section 2 presents a synopsis of the main arguments in the previous chapters and paves the way to a critical reflection on the research findings. Section 3 presents the curricular paradigm as a premature innovation. Section 4 highlights the contribution of this research to the body of implementation studies from an actor-oriented perspective. Policy implications of the study and avenues for future research constitute the rest of this chapter.

## 8.2 Synopsis of Major Findings

This section presents a summary of seven key findings organized along both retrospective and empirical dimensions of the study. Retrospectively, chapters 3 and 4 examined the major education reforms in Benin since independence, providing three key findings related to the political nature of education policy. Empirically, chapters 5, 6 and 7 elaborated on local actors' characteristics, attitudes and impressions towards the curricular reform, providing four key findings that pertain to policy advocacy, resistance and sustainability.

The first finding relates to the complexity of the relationship between education and politics. In Benin, former Dahomey, education policies served as a double-edged sword to break or maintain political stability at different turns of the country's history. The power-sharing mechanism of the Presidential Council, which was established to solve the problem of political instability in newly independent Dahomey, barely survived the contestation movements against the progressive Grossetête-Dossou-Yovo education reform. Similarly the military junta initiated education reforms to justify their seizure of power and to consolidate political stability. The *école nouvelle* reform served to legitimate the 1972 military coup and tuned education policy to Marxist-Leninist orientations. By the same token, student and teachers' unions played an instrumental role in destabilizing the military regime in the late 1980s. Likewise, the comprehensive systemic education reform of which the innovative curricula are the driving force had a socio-political aim. The new educational priorities were to groom free and democratic citizens who would be competitive, take initiative and think critically. Though occurring in antonymic political contexts, both reforms share striking similarities: they are comprehensive, system-wide, crises-driven, development-oriented and exhibit a central role of government in a top-down policy process. Despite the similarities, the *école nouvelle* reform differs from the comprehensive sys-

temic education reform insofar as actors' interactions are concerned. There was no social demand to suspend *école nouvelle* in the late 1980s beyond the consensus reached at the National Conference, and the competency-based curricular reform has faced widespread opposition since the start of its generalization in 1999. Mass demonstrations and protests in the late 1980s had political and economic underpinnings. Workers in general and teachers in particular marched to claim freedom of association along with months of unpaid salaries.

Secondly, the political history of education reforms in Benin reveals a structural dilemma that has long constrained educational policy measures. The dilemma is whether political leaders should consider formal education as a privilege for a fortunate few or as a development imperative for all. Policies that reinforce the selective mechanisms of schools generate systematic exclusion with innumerable socio-political consequences, whereas popular measures embed convert discrimination in the course of their implementation. This dilemma, which is a colonial legacy, continues to constrain educational policy reforms in independent Benin. At the inception of western education in colonial Africa, a positive perception emerged of schools as the stairway to upwards social mobility. This perception was reinforced by the desirable lifestyle of the few who graduated from the system (Blakemore and Cooksey 1981: 26-8). While enrolments galloped after independence, schools increasingly became unable to keep the promise of upwards social mobility to most graduates, creating the phenomenon of unemployment of school graduates. Yet, many continue to nurture the expectation of the school system in Benin as a reliable pathway to gainful employment. The tipping point of resistance against the Grossetête-Dossou-Yovo reform had its origin in this dilemma, when decision-makers wanted to restrict the *lycées* to high school status and create lower secondary schools for the purpose of accommodating more students. By the same token, the popularity of the *école nouvelle* reform never prevented some higher-ups from discrediting the initiative by withdrawing their own children and enrolling them in neighbouring francophone countries.

Thirdly, the adoption of the competency-based curricular approach in Benin was more the result of external influence, in the form of educational policy convergence, than a move to fulfil an urgent domestic need. The new context of democratic transition and the financial and technical assistance of the international community in the policy process support

this claim (Chapter 4). Indeed, the lack of grassroots demand for curricular reform and the absence of public demonstrations against the *école nouvelle* reform in the 1980s suggest that curriculum renewal was not as urgent as formulated in policy documents. Pressing problems related to the quality of instruction may perhaps have concerned other factors of the school system. Discounting the Marxist ideological orientations of the *école nouvelle* reform which became obsolete with the advent of liberal democracy, there is little evidence of any imperative for school curriculum renewal. Most of the diagnostic studies done at the time highlighted the complete deterioration of the school system in terms of school infrastructure, management of the system, and teacher morale and qualifications, as well as parents' loss of trust in the school system. Urgent necessities of the school system were infrastructure, governance, qualified personnel, teacher training, improved teacher morale, and a reshuffling of the curriculum content to remove Marxist ideological orientations. These requirements were achieved somehow with the transition curricula.

But, given the New Deal of liberal democracy, of which Benin served as a pioneer in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s, and considering the global push to experiment with 'novel' pedagogical models, the competency-based curricular approach gained momentum and credibility in decision-making arenas. In fact, the competency-based paradigm was credited with so much utilitarian potential that it was hard to resist, especially when the mechanisms of global policy transfer and diffusion were at work. In the mind of the donors who supported the reform financially and technically, the shift from behaviourism, objective-based curricula and a teacher-centred pedagogy to the educational philosophy of constructivism, competency-based curricula and learner-centred pedagogy was an 'absolute necessity'—quoting the former education team leader of USAID/Benin—for improving the quality of education and raising Benin out of dictatorship, deprivation and ignorance.

This ontological position of donors strongly influenced the diagnostic studies (especially the UNESCO series) which served as working documents in the various forums and workshops leading to the comprehensive education reform (Chapter 4). The comprehensive vision blinded key decision-makers from foreseeing that the school system offered very limited enabling conditions for effective implementation of such a sophisticated policy. Agreeing to embark on the paradigm took little ac-

count of the enabling conditions needed to accommodate the ambitious and demanding approach. The subsequent improvisation predicted the scope of implementation problems and disastrous outcomes for the weakest in society. Thus, the widespread complaints and contestations were relevant, despite the aggregate educational feats.

The fourth finding relates to the spectrum of actors presented in chapters 5 and 6 to account, respectively, for policy advocacy and resistance. To better elucidate local actors' attitudes and impressions concerning the curricular paradigm, it was necessary to devise an interpretative device in the form of a spectrum ranging from advocacy or isomorphism at the strongest end of policy-relevant knowledge, conviction and commitment, to resistance, inertia or immunity at the weakest end (Figure 5.1). Loyalists and satisficers are associated with policy advocacy, whereas conformists, conservatives and opponents stand for policy resistance. Loyalists have sound policy knowledge and strong conviction, but are lacking in practical strategies to address context-specific problems. Satisficers differ from loyalists by their adaptive behaviour; they combine approaches to get results. Conformists display blind advocacy, strategically aligning with power. Conservatives acquire enough policy knowledge to better criticize the innovation; hermetic to change, they prefer previous pedagogic creeds and practices. Finally, opponents reject the curricular reform for both technical and ideological reasons, proposing instead an alternative reform. While actors' positions in the local educational hierarchy reflect their degree of conviction in, and commitment to, the competency-based approach, socio-economic and locational factors account for parents' perspectives on the policy. Inspectors and pedagogic counsellors were the strongest proponents of the curricular reform, along with enlightened parents whose socio-economic conditions and place of residence allowed them to provide their children with enabling conditions to remedy the shortcomings of the new approach.

Fifth, the constellation of actors across the spectrum indicates the policy paradox that the more knowledgeable and committed actors are non-practitioners whereas most classroom actors develop covert resistance. While inspectors and pedagogic counsellors constitute the bulk of loyalists and satisficers, teachers and principals are in the majority among conformists and conservatives. The evidence presented in Tables 5.1 and 6.1 to illustrate the policy paradox is not collected through a process of random or stratified sampling and needs further research to be

validated. Nevertheless, the data suggests that the more distant actors are from the classroom, the better learned advocacy they developed, whereas classroom teachers and principals developed resistance and blind advocacy.

Sixth, the study found that policy advocacy is function of perceived needs and a liberal vision of education, all moulded in the global trend of educational policy convergence. Policy resistance, however, reflects the combination of three sets of factors: contextual constraints that exacerbate implementation problems, disappointing outcomes and the contagion effect of organized movements. Whereas isomorphism is consonant with the attitudes of loyalists and satisficers, resistance better describes the attitudes of conformists, conservatives and opponents. Resistance is legitimated on the grounds that the curricular reform failed to yield satisfactory accrued learning outcomes for students. Rather, the new approach contributed to grade inflation. Lifting the selection mechanisms of the school system enables more students to pass while fewer possess the level of credentials previously considered adequate. Coping strategies to fix this problem compel many front-line actors to resort to previous pedagogical resources to get satisfactory results.

Seventh, the study found that the curricular reform survived constraints and resistance in two ways. As a structural top-down change, the innovation survived by compelling all school-level actors to follow variably a similar path of action. The policy introduced significant inputs in the school system with the central role of the government and the active involvement of its development partners. But given the policy paradox described above, structural top-down change is deemed superficial at the grassroots level. The curricular reform also survived as an incremental bottom-up change when we consider the adaptive behaviour of satisficing teachers and principals, and the potential shift of conservatives and conformists towards satisficing. Front-line satisficers are making slow and small but incremental steps in the direction of the competency-based approach by adapting policy measures to context-specific realities. The scope of this adaptive behaviour among front-line actors suggests that the actual transition to complete change is taking longer than anticipated. This finding is also evidenced in the transformation of the current study which evolved from an initial bottom-up ontological position to the realization that 'top-down and bottom-up strategies are necessary, they need each other' (Fullan 1993: 21).

### 8.3 Competency-Based Curricular Reform: A Premature Innovation

Given the context of its inception, the various flaws that plagued its implementation and the disappointing outcomes it has yielded, Benin's experience of competency-based curricular reform can be termed a premature innovation. Decision-makers minimized the readiness of the school system to accommodate a sophisticated education reform package. Over-reliance on the development blueprint behind the reform superseded considerations for effective countrywide implementation. The premature vision of crafting a curricular reform that would address the educational, social, political and economic problems of the country in the 1990s fell short of local actors' understanding, ownership and appropriation of policy measures.

Benin accepted the education-development lure that credits schooling with unlimited promise at the basic level of the school system. The development potential of education is irrefutable in theory, but the argument seems to overestimate the degree to which acquisition of basic skills such as literacy, numeracy and critical thinking, takes precedence over any other utility. By putting curricular emphasis on democratic participation, self-help, competitiveness, environment and communication, the innovation overlooked the transmission of core foundation skills to many students. Schooling generates its transformative potential when literacy, numeracy and critical thinking are consolidated at a basic level.

The overall curricular goals are beyond the scope of schools alone. Moreover, no primary school system graduates eleven-year-olds to enter the job market. Thus, many expectations of the curricular reform transcended the boundaries of basic education. Schools could perhaps craft children in accordance with the prescribed exit profile only if adults in society reinforce the expected behavioural outcomes by serving as good role models for children to follow. But, observing Benin's citizens during the last two decades of liberal democracy and market economy reveals that most of the 'evils of society' attributed to the *école nouvelle* reform are still pervasive, if not worse: the easy-gain mentality, unemployment of school graduates, underperformance of workers especially civil servants, clientelism, corruption and a decline of educational standards. Far from being an apologetic plea for the *école nouvelle* of the past, this reasoning suggests that the curricular reform, though presenting convincing technical arguments, proved too weak to challenge deeper socio-economic

problems. This points to a deeper socio-economic wound whose healing cannot be achieved by educational institutions alone, especially school curricula.

As a consequence of this prematurity, improvisations prevailed until the enabling conditions were progressively put in place. The result has been a delayed proactive response, as developed in Chapter 7. Whereas the transition to the competency-based approach officially ended in 2004, this study found that many practitioners are still and will certainly continue to teach the transition to the innovative approach because of the commonalities between the previous *école nouvelle* and the transition curricula on one hand and the lack of enabling conditions on the other. Due to the prematurity of the reform, minimal enabling conditions had to be put in place after implementation. More urgent than curriculum renewal in the 1990s was provision of well-trained teachers, boosting teachers' morale and reviving the culture of professional development in schools. But, could Benin's decision-makers have taken a different path of action? Given the irresistible soft power behind educational policy convergence, political leaders and educationists had limited room to manoeuvre.

While a premature vision potentially generates unpreparedness and improvisations, it also has the merit of provoking chaos whereby new patterns and orders emerge. Fullan (1999: 18) substantiates this, taking lessons from complexity theory: 'Change is a journey, not a blueprint, it is non-linear, loaded with uncertainty and excitement and sometimes perverse.' The ability of local actors to operate from the edge of chaos and give meaning to planned change is what makes a difference. Competition and covert marginalization seem to be the patterns and order that emerged from the premature vision of the competency-based approach. Well-informed and relatively well-off actors learned to take advantage of the innovation, perhaps, to the detriment of the weakest (modest and rural parents as well as less qualified teachers). For illustrative purposes, Table 8.1 ranks all of the schools involved in this study along the pre-supposed performance variables of promotion and repetition rates as well as the rate of success in the CEP exam. The emerging top-ranked schools were affluent private and religious schools in urban or suburban areas whereas those lagging behind were predominantly public and rural schools. Given that the private and catholic schools never applied the

ministerial decision forbidding first grade repetition, one can better appraise the significance of their achievements compared to public schools.

**Table 8.1**  
*Ranking schools*

<i>School</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>Promo- tion</i>	<i>Repe- tition</i>	<i>CEP Success</i>
A	1 <sup>st</sup>	Urban	Private	408	99	1	97
B	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Suburban	Private	365	96	3	99
C	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Urban	Catholic	486	93	7	93
D	4 <sup>th</sup>	Urban	Catholic	602	91	8	100
E	5 <sup>th</sup>	Suburban	Private	245	86	7	92
F	5 <sup>th</sup> e.	Urban	Public	337	88	9	88
G	7 <sup>th</sup>	Urban	Private	295	89	11	67
H	8 <sup>th</sup>	Urban	Public	396	86	11	63
I	9 <sup>th</sup>	Rural	Catholic	195	86	14	-
J	10 <sup>th</sup>	Suburban	Private	223	76	7	64
K	11 <sup>th</sup>	Rural	Private	273	73	19	63
L	12 <sup>th</sup>	Rural	Public	291	58	8	69
M	13 <sup>th</sup>	Suburban	Public	425	70	26	51
N	14 <sup>th</sup>	Rural	Public	407	51	32	41
O	15 <sup>th</sup>	Rural	Public	260	34	31	48
P	16 <sup>th</sup>	Rural	Public	249	32	32	100
Q	17 <sup>th</sup>	Rural	Public	293	43	47	57

*Note:* 5<sup>th</sup> e. means fifth equal. The 9<sup>th</sup> School presented no candidate in 2008 CEP exam. The different rates are expressed in percentages.

*Source:* Individual schools' record in 2008; the author's ranking considers all three variables together.

## 8.4 Policy Implications

This section continues the reflection on the findings, drawing out a few consequences and suggesting future pathways and actions to improve the new approach from the perspective of grassroots actors.

Despite the unprecedented efforts to improve instructional quality and groom competitive, autonomous, initiative-taking and democratic

citizens by introducing the competency-based curricular approach, this study found that most practitioners lack ownership of the competency-based approach. Implementation lacked context-specific adaptation by most grassroots actors; McGinn's (1998: 46) 'organic reform' was missing in this policy process. The situation has its roots in the prematurity of the innovation. Most of the ingredients for applying the approach were not in place before countrywide generalization. Considering that the policy is still in transition, this study sees prospects for the curricular reform to thrive as long as it is maintained as a national policy and enabling conditions are put in place.

Indeed, the Government of Benin and its technical and financial partners are striving to establish the enabling conditions by reinforcing teacher training, building infrastructure, providing pedagogic materials and improving teachers' working conditions. While efforts in this direction need to be continued for years, this study recommends educationists to revise the competency-based assessment scheme so as to give more priority to the French language and mathematics for the purpose of increasing students' learning efforts in these subjects. This will potentially reduce the discrepancy between students' official results and their actual academic performance.

Building teacher capacity is instrumental for the necessary move from conservatism and conformism to satisficing in the classroom. Theoretical knowledge as well as practical know-how on competency-based curriculum development could spark actors' intellectual convictions so that they become what Fullan (1993: 29) called 'critical consumer[s] of innovation and reform'. Teacher capacity building starts with initial professional training and the maintenance of a culture of professional development in schools. In this respect, the existing government structures need to pursue the efforts of IFESH to revive local networks of professional development. Since the international NGO ended its mission in 2008, no domestic initiatives have substituted for its activities. This further calls for a rehabilitation of the supervisory functions of inspectors and pedagogic counsellors. The primary school system in Benin has an enviable decentralized structure (national, provincial, district level, pedagogical zones, pedagogic units, school level) that officials at the ministry of education can capitalize upon by staffing units accordingly and by providing them with adequate means to operate. Improving the governance of the education hierarchy, from the national level down to the school-site level,

could allow teachers, principals, pedagogic counsellors and inspectors to voice concerns, be critical and propose ideas. By the same token, improved governance could limit clientelism and reinforce the accountability of each actor.

Public schools are disadvantaged in relation to affluent private and religious schools as regards teacher autonomy and learning time for students. In order to improve the inhibiting environment, more effort is needed to reduce teacher absenteeism, attrition and the cyclical union strikes in the public sector. Doing this would improve equity, as it would give students in public schools as much learning time as their peers in private and religious schools. Restoring equity to the school system also requires selective interventions, providing rural schools with qualified teachers and incentives. Given the relative success of a few private and religious schools in adapting the new approach, it is tempting to suggest that actors in public schools learn from the experiences of these successful counterparts. Perhaps even public-private partnerships in the education sector could be suggested as offering promising prospects for disadvantaged areas. However, the negative lessons drawn from such partnerships in education in the past (e.g. with privatization, voucher schools and schools of choice), urge caution in suggesting such a path of action. The level of governance in Benin's education system would likely preclude it from being able to guarantee accountability and quality control when contracting alternative sources of education for disadvantaged areas. As Björkman (2008: 19) suggests, 'the first step must be to improve basic administrative systems'.

What the public sector may learn from others in terms of implementing the innovative curricula is their increased sense of adaptation, their established culture of professional development and their sensitivity to competition in the education market. Instead of prematurely risking public-private partnership, this study suggests positive discrimination for teachers as well as for students who are at risk. Positive discrimination consists of identifying actors who invent best practices and rewarding them, as IFESH used to do. Dedicated teachers and principals were identified and rewarded with incentives and promotions. The monthly IFESH bulletin published their achievements as well. Targeted zones, like rural areas, may benefit from special programmes to establish enabling conditions for proper implementation.

This study found that satisficing teachers and principals exercised more instructional leadership than others and had more autonomy to adapt planned measures. Instructional leadership refers to the autonomy that education workers have, particularly teachers and principals, in adapting or altering top-down curricular guidelines to maximize student learning. On this basis, instructional leaders could override the initial zeal of curriculum developers, who opposed the use of the competency-based approach with all previous curricular approaches. Given that each approach has its strengths and weaknesses, an eclectic teacher could demonstrate instructional leadership by selecting the strengths of each approach in the service of context-specific realities and the student body. Though often criticized in pedagogy for making students passive learners, behavioural teacher-expert pedagogy has the relative merit of accommodating large size classes and ‘allows educators to teach many students within a short period of time’ (De la Sablonnière et al. 2009: 629). By the same token, despite the positive consequences attributed to constructivist student-centred pedagogy, its effectiveness is limited in large classes and also with students from modest backgrounds.

Accepting that practices vary is the first step towards recognizing teachers’ adaptive and creative capacity in turning the ‘competence in the curriculum to competence in action’ (Jonnaert et al. 2007: 187). Though theoretically credited with offering utilitarian benefits, in fact the competency-based curricular approach lacks successful implementation models to emulate. Jonnaert et al. (2004) and Perez (2007) have realized that ‘decorative competences’ characterize most of the curricular reforms proclaimed to be competency-based, whereas actual practices continue to follow objective-oriented and behaviourist principles. Bernard et al. (2007: 566) even consider the new paradigm to be an offspring of the behavioural objective-based approach, a mixture of various contemporary pedagogic thoughts and the traditional behaviourism. Therefore, pending solid theoretical consolidation of the competency-based approach in school curriculum development, practitioners who have instructional leadership may be pragmatic in combining insights from both perspectives and ‘craft [their] own theories of change’, to quote Fullan (1993: 29). In fact, most grassroots actors, and parents in particular, worry less about the type of school curriculum being implemented, as long as school graduates display effective credentials in reading, writing, basic

mathematics, discipline and subsequently attain some upwards social mobility as the effect of their schooling.

Finally, rather than suggesting suspension of the reform, this study acknowledges that the primary school system can build on the strengths of the curricular reform by making initial training a prerequisite for embarking on a teaching career and by maintaining a culture of professional development in schools. Doing this would increase the chance of gaining teachers' ownership and their adaptation of the curricular approach to their context, as long as the latter meets teachers' needs. Teacher motivation, clinical supervision,<sup>1</sup> and effective execution of allocated teaching and learning time are a few intrinsic enabling conditions for implementing any kind of school curriculum, be it competency-based or objective-oriented. If political-administrative authorities reinforce these measures, admit that classroom practices may vary and reassess their ambition as to the overall curricular goals for primary education, resistance is likely to be weakened. Improving the policy deprives the opposition of arguments to continue gaining the support of grassroots actors insofar as conservative parents never advocated the alternative of full instruction in mother tongues at the basic education level.

### 8.5 Contribution to Implementation Studies and Future Research

Since the seminal works on actor-oriented policy study (Lipsky 1980 and Long 2001), implementation research has taken an enriching anthropological orientation. Set in this tradition, the current study reflects a third generation of implementation research as it integrates most stages of the policy process. The focus on local actors led to a reconsideration of the socio-political context of inception of the curricular reform, a restitution of its implementation process and a critical reflection on its outcomes.

The focus on local actors enabled the study to navigate through the various levels of the policy process. Units of observation ranged from school-site actors to the global discourse about the potential of schooling in development. While focusing on local actors such as teachers, principals, parents, inspectors and pedagogic counsellors, this study also highlighted the intricate linkages among the local, the national and the global. Educational policy convergence, enacted through different actors, agencies and mechanisms of policy transfer and diffusion, was instrumental

in stimulating the competency-based curricular approach in Benin and in other francophone countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

An actor-oriented perspective on policy analysis is also aware of policy spaces. These are junctures of intervention that generate new opportunities, reconfigure relations and generate new ones, and set the tone for new direction (Thomas and Grindle 1990). By involving private and religious school actors in the research process, this study gives voice to informal policy players in the landscape of education policy in Benin. Enrolment in private schools, the systematic use of home tutors for those who can afford it, and the alternative use of old textbooks and methods are a few examples of informal policy space in which alert actors compensate for the weakness of the formal sphere. Even though local actors claimed policy space only upon the generalization of the curricular reform, the continuous complaints and protests nevertheless contributed to revising policy in a direction that conservative actors approve, such as the recent introduction of corrective measures and the implied acknowledgement of the value of some former teaching practices.

This policy study presents an opportunity to access and assess actors' policy narratives and storylines. Whereas mainstream preferences consider the new paradigm to be an adequate innovation likely to provide children with hands-on training to meet the new challenges of their time (democracy, technology, work, environment), actors whose agency is constrained by regime institutions, socio-economic structures and hermetic policy knowledge continue to silently nurture traditional expectations of basic education in terms of adequate literacy, numeracy, critical thinking, discipline and subsequent upwards social mobility. Thus, where actors are structurally limited, where they have limited alternatives and preferences, 'discrimination or exclusion' become 'accepted values' (Sumner and Tiwari 2009: 84). The disappointment of conservative actors, their silent support of the national campaign against the reform, and the covert resistance of conformists are clues that limited actors feel discriminated against in the policy process and outcomes. The resultant frustration is perceptible in the verbal tug of war among reform proponents and resisters, as documented in Chapters 5 and 6.

This study is based on selected actors in four school districts in southern Benin. The criteria for selecting 'high achieving' and 'low achieving' districts and schools was seriously challenged during the fieldwork. Given the serendipitous unreliability pertaining to such criteria as promotion

and repetition rates and the limited coverage of this research, it is fair to suggest replication studies in other regions selected using different criteria in order to validate findings and contribute to generalizing results. Replication studies would gain by transcending the boundaries of schools, so as to better capture such overall curricular goals as self-help, competitiveness, environmental care and democratic participation among school graduates. The extent to which schools contribute to the attainment of such goals may also be of some research interest. Due to its emphasis on local actors' self-reported experiences, this study suggests that future researches include data from systematic classroom observations to contrast the analyses in this research. Research on Benin's experience with the competency-based paradigm could also examine the empirical limits of compatibility between objective-oriented and competency-based curricular approaches. Finally, evaluation of performance trends among primary school graduates in upper levels of the school system could enable a better assessment of the mid-term benefits of the reform as a national policy.

Cross-country impact evaluation studies of the curricular paradigm in other sub-Saharan African countries have often overlooked the implementation aspect, explaining mixed results by pointing to contextual constraints and incoherence of policy with national needs (Bernard et al. 2007; Dembélé and Lefoka 2007). Actor-oriented comparative studies of implementation processes across many countries that have embarked upon this curricular paradigm could fill this gap.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This notion refers to a developmental approach to teacher supervision, enabling supervisors to shift from being invigilators (hunting for teachers' misdeeds), to become enablers of teachers' capacity building. In this new relationship, teachers no longer fear classroom observations or inspections by supervisors. As developed in Glickman et al. (2001: 315-20), clinical supervision consists of five steps: pre-conference, classroom observation, analysis and interpretations, post-conference and critique of the previous steps.



## Appendices

**Appendix 1**  
**Administrative Map of Benin**

## CARTE POLITIQUE ET ADMINISTRATIVE DU BÉNIN



## Appendix 2

### *Semi-structured Interview Protocol (English Translation)*

#### Introduction

My name is YESSOUFOU Akimi; I am a doctoral student. My research is focused on the following topic: **Local Actors in Top-Down Implementation of Curricular Reform in Benin's Primary Education System**. I would like to thank you in advance for your collaboration. I guarantee that your opinion will be treated confidentially and will serve only for the purpose of the current research. Please, feel free to give your opinions as you experience the reform. There is no right or wrong answer; it is your experience and opinion that count most. With your permission, I would like to record this interview for future playback. Although I will be taking notes, I would prefer to record our conversation if you do not mind. The current interview is organized around the following rubrics that we will discuss in turn.

- I. Identification
  - Name, title, occupation, age, ethnic group, mother tongue, socio-economic status, religion
  - Years of experience, reason for embracing a teaching career, sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in that career
  - Affiliation with organizations (unions, professional associations, political organizations, charities)
  - Academic and professional training
  - Number of children and types of school they attend
- II. The new curricular reform, a solution to what kind of problems?
  - The educational crises of the late 1980s
  - The consequences of the former *Ecole Nouvelle* reform
  - Knowledge and appreciation of the transition curricula
  - Origins of the new curricular reform
- III. Objectives of the new curricular reform
  - Political, economic, pedagogical and social objectives
- IV. Knowledge of the design and implementation processes of the reform (personal account)
- V. Personal experience with the new curricular reform (knowledge of the competences and how they are integrated)
- VI. Appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses in the design and implementation of the reform

- VII. Personal position in the national debate over the reform (support and opposition): reasons, strategies, any shift in position over time
- VIII. Appreciation of actors on the opposite side in the national debate (unionists, parents, teachers, elites, civil society and educationists)
- IX. Appreciation of the reform products (student performance, textbooks, workbooks, teachers' guides, official statistics)
- X. Opinions about the future of the reform: sustainability and suggested conditions

Thanks.

### **Appendix 3** **Protocol for Focus-group Discussion (English Translation)**

#### **Setting**

Arrange the seats so as to minimize authority or power relations (in a circular shape under a tree in the school yard or in a classroom). Display the poster and markers. Inform participants that they can represent their ideas using the markers and the poster. Negotiate with participants on which language will be used to communicate (French or *Fon*). Make sure the school principal or any other teacher is not around. The teacher who serves as an assistant is not allowed to speak during the discussions.

#### **Introduction**

I introduce myself as an independent researcher and the teacher as a research assistant in charge of taking notes. The research assistant also helps participants fill in the attendance sheet which contains spaces for name, age, occupation, contact and signature.

Establish trust and make participants feel confident before each one introduces themselves to the assembly. Provide drinks and snacks for refreshments at the end of the discussion. Take occasional notes while monitoring discussions. Take occasional pictures with participants' permission.

#### **Issues discussed**

- Knowledge of major curricular reforms in Benin since independence (the old curricula, the *Ecole Nouvelle*, the transition curricula)
- Knowledge of the objectives of the new curricula
- Personal experience of the new curricula as a parent (how and when)
- Strengths and weaknesses of the new reform according to parents
- Individual efforts to appropriate the reform
- Personal position in the national debate on the reform (support, opposition)
- Opinions on the products of the reform (manuals, student performance, student behaviour, official statistics)
- Responses to three scenarios:
  1. Stop the reform right away and reinstate the transition curricula
  2. Stop the reform and close schools pending the design of new appropriate curricula
  3. Maintain the current reform, and use the criticisms to improve it

- What about the future of the reform? Sustainable or likely to disappear soon?

Thanks- pictures- refreshments-informal discussions.

**Appendix 4**  
*Sample of Analytical Device with Data from Actor E*

<b>Framework</b>	<b>Data/Statements</b>	<b>Observations</b>
Characteristics	5 <sup>th</sup> grade career teacher, middle class, 53 years old, Tenured (CAP), 29 years of experience, 10 <sup>th</sup> grade (BEPC) + professional training, Limited union and political affiliations, Serving at an urban public school, Has 8 children who attended public schools, Fon, Catholic	Veteran teacher near to retirement
Reasons	Things are changing over time; we have to update our needs in order to be in pace with those who advance; I can't tell more, OK? Honestly, I support the new curricula. Anyway, I share both causes because each camp has good reasons. There are those who think we should encourage children to seek their own knowledge instead of transmitting it to them. Others argue that children need minimal basics before being asked to mind their own ways. I adhere to the vision of the new curricula that children should acquire some know-how before leaving primary school. I like to see children practice after graduation. Let's wait and see!	Hesitant Reserved Confused
Knowledge	In the past, we were asked to train children to become white collars; but with liberal democracy, the vision has shifted to training citizens who are capable of self-help. Instead of being jobless with sound academic credentials as before, the new curricula includes needlework in art education, for instance. This prepares children to acquire some useful skills. As for the transition curricula, I almost forgot everything. We have experimented with every kind of curriculum in this country, which is not bad at all!	Relaying official policy discourse Appearing open for progress
Strategies	Only the regular training sessions of our pedagogic unit helped me to learn about the new approach before I was caught up with the 5 <sup>th</sup> grade generalization. I remember having unduly passed a boy to 6 <sup>th</sup> grade only because his father insisted.	Limited efforts Complying
Criticism	Instead of training teachers for every grade, level they started with 1 <sup>st</sup> grade teachers and then 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade teachers... They posted teachers without regard for their previous training. There are a few canny teachers who bargain to change grades whenever the planned training sessions reached an upper grade; They bargain for this for the purpose of pocketing per diems. I opposed this disgrace and waited until generalization reached 5 <sup>th</sup> grade. I know of a principal who unjustly assigned the 1 <sup>st</sup> grade teacher to 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade simply because he wanted his nephew to benefit from the advantages related to the 1 <sup>st</sup> grade training session. The reform suffered several weaknesses; a vivid example is that only teachers were targeted for training. Parents were forgotten, though they need sound information and training to monitor children's academic work. Now parents continue to monitor children with the previous approach. To compensate for this	Objective criticisms Appearing exemplary Accusing

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	gap, I took the initiative to offer my students after-class tutorials at 100F per student for each session. My initiative was wrongly interpreted in the PTA general assembly and my principal asked me to suspend the tutorials even though parents fully agreed. I suffered too many frustrations in this career from the hierarchy. I don't think it necessary to have workbooks for students; parents already have problems buying official textbooks and now the reform requires them to buy workbooks for 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> grades.	
Perception of Results	I do not trust official statistics about the reform. I oppose the fraudulent practice of helping children during exams. I have seen examiners copy test answers to the blackboard to help candidates in return for money. Principals know well how to organize fraud during exams; they negotiate with examiners because they are forced by law to get 20% success rate if they are to keep their position. The state too is to blame because they lower the passing grade in order to gain popularity. Worse, they request us to forge grades in certain ways for good results. I think the new curricula should be reworked; corrective measures are not enough. We must improve it and not suspend it. There are no permanent school curricula; if there is progress in science, curricula too are doomed to change.	Denunciating  Unreliable results  Contradicting  Foreseeing better future despite difficulties
Perception of Opponents	I don't think those who are agitating against can stop this reform because the state is sensitive to objective criticisms. I oppose unionists when they argue that we should stop the reform. This claim has a political underpinning. SYNAPRIM leaders are excessively zealous. They contradict themselves; even Iko who denounces the new curricula has excellent results in his own school. As for teachers, they are irresponsible in their claims against the new approach. Even if the reform is wrong, they are compelled by duty to implement it; the job contract states that you should obey your employer.	Bedeviling opponents  Conformist

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**Appendix 5**  
*Benin's Technical and Financial Partners with an Interest in Education  
as of 18 May 2005*

<i>Technical and Financial Partners</i>	<i>Type of Intervention</i>	<i>Funding Scheme</i>
BILATERAL		
DANIDA (Denmark)	PASEB Project	Grant
USAID (USA)	EQUIPE Project	Grant
French Cooperation (France)	PAGE Project	Grant
Japanese Cooperation (Japan)	Construction Projects	Grant
Dutch Cooperation (Netherlands)	Non-Project Assistance (ABC)	Grant
Swiss Cooperation (Switzerland)		
MULTILATERAL		
World Bank	Non-Project Assistance (PRSC)	Loan
European Union	Non-Project Assistance (ABC)	Grant
Islamic Development Bank	Construction (Project BID 2 & 3)	Loan
African Development Bank	Construction (Project Education 3 & 4)	Loan
UNICEF	Project EDUCOM	Grant
FNUAP	Project	Grant
UNESCO	Specific Assistance - EPT	Loan
PAM	Direct intervention - school meal	Grant
NGOs		
IFESH	Project	Grant
Plan Bénin	Project	Grant
Aide & Action	Project	Grant
CRS Cathwell	Direct intervention - school meal	Grant
CARE	Project	Grant
World Education	Project	Grant
Borne Fonden	Project	Grant

Source: Adapted from MENs (2006:42-3)

## Appendix 6

### Research Permit (in French)

<p>REPUBLIQUE DU BENIN</p> <p>MINISTRE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT MATERNEL ET PRIMAIRE</p> <p>CABINET DU MINISTRE</p> <p>SECRÉTARIAT GÉNÉRAL DU MINISTRE</p> <p>DIRECTION DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT PRIMAIRE</p> <p>SERVICE DE L'ORGANISATION SCOLAIRE ET DE LA PRÉVISION</p>	<p>Porto-Novo, le 04 novembre 2008</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p><b>AUTORISATION</b> DE RECHERCHE</p> <p>SUR IMPLANTATION DE LA RÉFORME DES NPE DANS L'ENSEIGNEMENT PRIMAIRE AU BENIN</p> </div> <p>N° 8122 /MEMP/CAB/SGM/DEP/SA</p>
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Une autorisation est accordée, à **Monsieur YESSOUFOU Akimi** préparant un doctorat à Institute of Social Studies (ISS), pour se rendre dans les circonscriptions scolaires de Ouidah, Kpomassè, Abomey-Calavi dans le département de l'Atlantique et Akpro-Missérété dans le département de l'Ouémé, au cours de l'année scolaire 2008 - 2009 dans le cadre d'une enquête sur le sujet : << **Implantation de la Réforme des Nouveaux Programmes d'Etudes dans l'Enseignement Primaire au Bénin : Rôle des Acteurs à la base** >> en vue de la collecte de données y afférant.

Compte tenu de l'importance que revêt le sujet dans notre système éducatif actuel, Nous prions tous les Chefs de Circonscription Scolaire et les Directeurs d'école des localités concernées, de faciliter à l'intéressé ci-dessus nommé le déroulement de son enquête qui ne doit pas compromettre le bon déroulement des activités pédagogiques.

Pour Le Ministre de l'Enseignement  
Maternel et Primaire et P.D.  
Le Directeur de Cabinet



AMPLIATIONS : MEMP 04 - MISP 04 - DEP 06 - DEPEMP 01 - DDEMP 06 - PREFECTURES 06 - INTERESSE 01

**Appendix 7**  
**CEP Transcripts before and after the Curricular Reform (in French)**

REPUBLIQUE DU BENIN  
 MINISTRE DE L'EDUCATION NATIONALE  
 CABINET DU MINISTRE  
 DIRECTION DEPARTEMENTALE  
 DE L'EDUCATION DE  
 L'ATLANTIQUE


CERTIFICAT D'ETUDES PRIMAIRES  
 (CEP)  
 SESSION DE JUILLET 1999  
 RELEVÉ DE NOTES  
 N° A 9455 / DDE / ATL / SEC


NOM		
PRENOMS		
DATE ET LIEU DE NAISSANCE		
CENTRE D'EXAMEN		
NUMERO D'INSCRIPTION		

Dictée	0.00 / 20	TOTAL SUR 140 (Entrée en sixième)
Etude de Texte	47.25 / 60	96.00
Calcul	48.75 / 60	
Rédaction	11.00 / 20	TOTAL SUR 210 (Sans EPS)
Int. Ecrite	14.75 / 20	142.75
Dessin/Couture	5.00 / 10	
Récitation	9.00 / 10	
Lecture	7.00 / 10	TOTAL SUR 230 (Avec EPS)
E.P.S	19.25 / 20	162.00

COTONOU, LE 27/09/99

DECISION DU JURY  
  
**ADMISE**

POUR LE DIRECTEUR DES EXAMENS ET CONCOURS  
 ET P. O.  
 LE DIRECTEUR DEPARTEMENTAL DE  
 L'EDUCATION DE L'ATLANTIQUE  
  
**Masson Claire SENOUVO**



N.B. : Toutes ratures ou surcharges annulent la validité de ce relevé

REPUBLIQUE DU BENIN  
MINISTRE DES ENSEIGNEMENTS  
PRIMAIRE ET SECONDAIRE  
DIRECTION DEPARTEMENTALE DES ENSEIGNEMENTS  
PRIMAIRE ET SECONDAIRE DE L'ATLANTIQUE-LITTORAL  
SERVICE DES EXAMENS ET CONCOURS

**RELEVÉ DE NOTES**

au  
CERTIFICAT D'ETUDES PRIMAIRES  
(C.E.P.)

SESSION DE : **JUILLET 2005**

C/AL/ 87208

N° ..... / DDEPS-ATL-LIT/SEC

NOM :  
PRENOMS :  
DATE ET LIEU DE NAISSANCE :  
CENTRE D'EXAMEN :  
NUMERO D'INSCRIPTION :

Expression Ecri	11.50 / 20	TOTAL Entrée en Sixième
Compr. Ecrit (L	13.50 / 20	63.50
Mathématique	13.00 / 20	
E.S.T	16.50 / 20	Collège d'accueil
E.S.	9.00 / 20	<b>GOLO DJIGBE</b>
Dessin/Couture	13.50 / 20	
Epreuve oral (E	14.00 / 20	TOTAL C.E.P. sans E.P.S.
E.P.S	19.00 / 20	91.00
		TOTAL C.E.P. avec E.P.S.
		110.00

DECISION DU JURY

**ADMIS**

25 Août 2005

Cotonou, le .....  
LE DIRECTEUR DEPARTEMENTAL DES  
ENSEIGNEMENTS PRIMAIRE ET SECONDAIRE  
DDEPS-ATL-LIT DE L'ATLANTIQUE-LITTORAL  
LE  
**Charles Abilade BANGBOLA**

N. B. : Toutes ratures ou surcharges rendent la validité de ce relevé



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