

A Solution or a Problem? The Bologna Process in West Africa: Views from Local Scholars

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Abstract

In the wake of the Bologna Process, West Africa implemented the 'Licence, Maîtrise, Doctorat' (LMD) system. What views of LMD are held by West African scholars who studied the stakeholders of this process? This article analyses the relevant literature available on Google Scholar and Web of Science from a perspective of policy borrowing or appropriation. The analysis shows that all the authors report the transition to the formal LMD structure, but that not all expectations of this process (e.g., improvements in teaching or management) have been realised. Further research is suggested, including a longitudinal study involving different countries and universities to obtain a clearer picture of the level of adaptation/adoption and outcomes of LMD in West Africa.

Key words: Bologna process, LMD, West Africa, policy borrowing, higher education policy, education innovation

Résumé:

Dans le sillage du processus de Bologne, l'Afrique de l'Ouest a mis en place le système " Licence, Maîtrise, Doctorat " (LMD). Quels sont les points de vue sur le LMD des chercheurs ouest-africains qui ont étudié les acteurs de ce processus ? Cet article analyse la littérature pertinente disponible sur Google Scholar et Web of Science dans une perspective d'emprunt ou d'appropriation de politiques. L'analyse montre que tous les auteurs font état de la transition vers la structure LMD formelle, mais que toutes les attentes de ce processus (par exemple, les améliorations de l'enseignement ou de la gestion) n'ont pas été réalisées. Des recherches supplémentaires sont suggérées, notamment une étude longitudinale impliquant différents pays et universités afin d'obtenir une image plus

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claire du niveau d'adaptation/adoption et des résultats du LMD en Afrique de l'Ouest.

Mots clés: Processus de Bologne, LMD, Afrique de l'Ouest, emprunt de politique, politique de l'enseignement supérieur, innovation en matière d'éducation.

Introduction

Long before the Bologna Process (BP)¹ was launched in Europe, African universities embarked on a process to harmonise higher education (HE) and recognise qualifications obtained in different countries. The Arusha Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Africa of 5 December 1981 engaged 19 of the 53 African countries and was accepted by 20 countries in 2007 (Obasi and Olutayo, 2009). However, this policy was not successful and student and staff exchange among African universities remained weak. The launch of the BP in Europe in 1999 inspired many African countries to renew their efforts to establish a more harmonised HE structure based on bachelor's, master's, and PhD degrees as proposed by the BP, with a view to becoming part of the worldwide system of learning.

This article focuses on the countries of West Africa². However, the challenge of implementing an adapted structure inspired by the BP was not the same in all these countries. On the one hand, the HE structure of those that had been part of the British colonial system (the Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone) was similar to the British one which, in turn, resembled that of the BP. On the other hand, the majority of West African countries were part of the French colonial system and consequently developed a HE system similar to that of the French (Ndoye, 2009). While the colonial system no longer exists, these

countries are still influenced by developments in France (Chouli, 2009). Accordingly, France's choice to adopt the BP raised the question of whether Francophone African universities should follow suit (Quashie, 2009). Like France, they adopted the Licence, Maîtrise, Doctorat (LMD) system as opposed to the English Bachelor, Master, PhD system.

Policymakers expected that the LMD system would address the challenges encountered by West African universities (see, for instance, Secrétariat ROCARE, 2014). These include governance-related issues (low levels of autonomy, accountability, and transparency) (Edu-Buandoh, 2014), funding constraints (African Capacity Building Foundation, 2006), a lack of effective quality assurance mechanisms (Olaniyan and Okemakinde, 2008), curriculum rigidity (Teferra and Altbach, 2004), teacher-centred and didactic pedagogical approaches (Edu-Buandoh, 2014), and "diminishing productivity" (Secrétariat ROCARE, 2014). Further issues include rapid growth in student enrollment, inadequate capacity to teach and house students, staff shortages, and a high student failure rate.

Many universities established a *comité de passage au LMD* (LMD implementation committee) (Quashie, 2009) to implement the new system. In the Francophone countries, the LMD was promoted by the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF), regional or Pan-African educational organisations such as the Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur (CAMES) and Réseau pour l'Excellence de l'Enseignement Supérieur en Afrique de l'Ouest (REESAO), and international economic organisations such as l'Union Economique et Monétaire de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (UEMOA³) and Communauté Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale (CMAC) (GTES, 2008; Ndoye, 2009).

Many scholars assert that LMD was initially externally imposed (see André, 2009; Mignanwande and Hounmenou, 2016; Chitou, 2011; Diallo, 2016; Diop, 2016; N'Doly, 2018; Goudiaby, 2009; Diarra, 2009; Ramdé et al., 2018) by foreign international organisations. These organisations argued that an international process like the BP or LMD would enable African states to align their HE systems with international standards and the continent's universities to foster integration with the

¹ The Bologna Process is a series of intergovernmental agreements aimed at creating a harmonised European Higher Education Area (EHEA). It was initiated in 1999 in Bologna, Italy, and has since involved 49 European countries. The main goals of the process include promoting mobility among higher education institutions, increasing transparency and the comparability of qualifications (among other things, by adopting the three-tier structure of bachelor, master, and PhD), and enhancing the quality and competitiveness of European higher education institutions (Bologna Follow-Up Group, 2020).

² West Africa is understood here to include Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo (ECOWAS (n.d.): <https://www.ecowas.int/member-states/>).

³ In 2007, UEMOA proposed the establishment of an African Area of Higher Education, while in 2011, CAMES endorsed the implementation of LMD in all West African universities (Eyébiyi, 2011).

global academic community. For their part, many West African scholars regarded LMD as an instrument to address poverty and unemployment (Nyamusenge, 2009; N'Doly, 2018; Kouadio, 2010; Goin Bi et al., 2018; Chouli, 2009; Chitou, 2011; Yacouba et al., 2007; Shabani, 2012; Pongo et al., 2015; Mereku et al., 2016).

The literature notes that, in general, African HE systems adopted the BP/LMD in order to modernise institutions, enhance international recognition, improve quality assurance, facilitate student mobility, address employability challenges, and enhance regional integration (African Capacity Building Foundation, 2006; Sall and Diouf, 2014; Söderqvist, 2014; Teferra and Altbach, 2004. Mvé-Ondo (2009) observes that it was regarded as strategy to mitigate the crises (in relation to their mission, thrust, funding, level of excellence, etc.) confronting these institutions. Thus, LMD was promoted as a framework to secure a place for African HE in a globalised system and as an instrument to address educational and social problems on the continent. It is against this background that the Association of African Universities (AAU) developed guidelines for its implementation (GTES, 2008).

However, implementing LMD was not without its challenges. Indeed, even in Europe, where the BP took place in a more stable political and economic milieu, it met with resistance (Ramdé et al., 2018; Broucker et al., 2019). The implementation of LMD in Francophone Africa was hindered by political problems (Makosso, 2006; Nyamba, 2007; Nyamusenge, 2009; N'Doly, 2018; Ramdé et al., 2018), protests by students and faculty (N'Doly, 2018; Diop, 2016; Dekor et al., 2011; Batchana et al., 2012; Chouli, 2009; Yacouba et al., 2007), and by the economic situation as many students struggle to pay tuition fees (Kakai et al., 2008).

In other words, LMD's implementation was counteracted by the very context which it hoped to address. Many researchers pointed to poor libraries facilities, poor and slow Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) networks, and a shortage of equipment in African higher education institutions (HEIs) (Kakai et al., 2008; Batchana et al., 2012; Modou Aïssami et al., 2014; Khan, 2015; Goin Bi et al., 2018; Diarra et al., 2011; Chitou, 2011; Diaouné et al., 2008; Dekor et al., 2011; Camara and Barry, 2008; Shabani, 2012; Mingawande and Hounmenou, 2016; Ettien, 2018). Universities also suffer from staff shortages, and low sal-

aries compel many lecturers to secure a second job in another (private) university (Mingawande and Hounmenou, 2016; Assogbadjo et al., 2016; Nyamusenge, 2009; Nyamba, 2007; Diarra et al., 2011; Chitou, 2011; Yacoba et al., 2007; Modou Aïssami et al., 2014; Goudiaby, 2009; Goin Bi et al., 2018; Éyébiyi, 2011; Chouli, 2009; Chitou, 2011, Awokou, 2012; Atitsogbe et al., 2019). Scholars (e.g., Shawa, 2008; Efonayi and Piguët, 2014; Bolu-Steve et al., 2014; Khelfaoui, 2009; Kouadio, 2010; Diop, 2016; Materu, 2007) also feared that the LMD system would stimulate brain drain from Africa to other continents, while at the same time hoping that it might stop or diminish it.

In short, implementing LMD in West Africa was a sensitive issue in a context very different from the European one in which the BP originated. While numerous studies have been conducted on the BP in Europe, there is limited research on LMD in West Africa. We aimed to contribute to filling this gap by conducting a literature review to paint a picture of its implementation process in this region. We do so from the West African perspective, that is, local scholars' views on the implementation of LMD.

This article addresses the following questions:

1. What is the focus of West African scholars' research on LMD (the whole process or a facet of it)?
2. How do they study it (theoretical background and methods)?
3. How do they assess the implementation of LMD in West Africa?
4. What steps do these scholars propose going forward?

Before addressing these questions, it should be noted that the BP/LMD framework encompasses various facets aimed at harmonising and enhancing HE across participating countries. Table 1 below lists these facets.

Table 1: Major facets of the BP/LMD framework

| Facets | Description |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Degree Structure | Adopts a three-tier degree structure, comprising bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. |
| Credit System | Allows for the accumulation and transfer of credits between institutions. |
| Quality Assurance | Introduces quality assurance mechanisms to ensure the quality and standards of HE programmes. These include accreditation processes, external evaluations, and the establishment of quality assurance agencies. |
| Mobility Programmes | Promote student and staff mobility. |
| Curriculum Development | Places emphasis on competency-based education and the development of learner-centred curricula. |
| Recognition of Qualifications | Establishes standardised frameworks for the recognition of qualifications. |
| Social Dimension | Emphasises the social dimension of HE to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion. |
| Internationalisation | Promotes the integration of global perspectives into curricula, the establishment of international partnerships, and participation in collaborative research projects. |
| Research and Innovation | Encourage research and innovation through funding schemes, doctoral training, and support for research collaboration. |

Sources: Scott, 2010; Kehm and Teichler, 2007

Theoretical Background

As noted in the introduction, HE policymakers and university managers in West Africa were aware of changes in global HE policy, and growing internationalisation and globalisation of HE and research. They realised that, if they wanted to create more opportunities for students, professors, and researchers, they had to offer a university structure comparable to that on other continents. The decision to adopt this HE innovation can thus be seen as a form of policy transfer or policy borrowing.

Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, p. 344) define policy transfer as: "... a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions, etc., in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, and institutions in another time and/or place". It is also known as 'policy borrowing' (see e.g., Phillips and Ochs, 2003; Steiner-Khamsi, 2002).

Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) map five factors that should be included in an analysis of policy transfer. The first are the important actors who transfer the policy, for instance, elected officials, political parties, bureaucrats/civil servants, pressure groups, policy entrepreneurs/experts, and supra-national institutions. Second, the questions of why (voluntary or coercive) and what aspects of the policy (policy instruments, institutions, ideology, administrative techniques, etc.) are transferred should be addressed. The third issue is the degree to which the policy is transferred; do policymakers copy the policy, emulate it, synthesise it with their policy, etc.? Fourth, who is delivering the lessons to be learned? This can come from the history of the organisation, but also from the history and current experience of other actors. Fifth, what constraints impact the transfer? This considers the complexity of the policy, and institutional and/or structural constraints experienced by the actors who transfer or accept the new policy. It should be stressed that this model is not explicitly mentioned in the papers discussed below, although all the observations made by the authors of these papers can be placed somewhere in its five factors.

The reviewed papers also make mention of the concept of 'appropriation'. It is used more in Francophone than in Anglophone papers, and as Baillete and Kimble (2008) conclude, it has a slightly different meaning in these languages. In the Francophone literature appropriation means to take "something into oneself, without the overtones of depriving others by the act of doing so" (Baillete and Kimble, 2008, p. 14), whereas in the Anglophone literature it means "something being taken from another" (Baillete and Kimble, 2008, p. 14) so that one person becomes more powerful.

This concept has been used in theories relevant to how changes in HE can be appropriated by the actors involved. To explain this educational change, Deniger (2012) highlights three key concepts: understanding, adherence, and commitment. Ramdé et al. (2018) use these concepts to construct a theory of the process of appropriation of an educational (or other social) change in which three variables play an important role, namely the interpretations, attitudes, and behaviour of the actors involved. First, social changes go hand in hand with an interpretation of a phenomenon by the actors. This means that actors receive meaning from and/or give meaning to objects or actions. To

understand an appropriation, researchers should examine the involved actors' interpretations of a change. Second, the actors' attitudes towards the change should be studied. Attitudes can be defined as "evaluative stances held toward social objects" (Buhagiar and Sammut, 2020). Faced with change, actors interpret its meaning and develop a certain attitude towards it. Third, for an actor to appropriate a change, his/her behaviour must adapt in accordance with the change. This will not always be the case: the actor could develop resistance towards the change, meaning that perfect appropriation will not be attained.

Methods

For our analysis, we searched for publicly available research sources using Google Scholar, Web of Science (WoS), and the DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals). Since West African scholars publish in French as well as in English, we conducted two searches: one used 'LMD' or 'Processus de Bologne' in combination with 'Afrique', 'Afrique occidentale' or 'ouest', and the names of all the West African countries, while the second used 'LMD' or 'Bologna Process' (BP) in combination with 'Africa', 'West(ern) Africa', and the names of all West African countries. Because the BP started in 1999 and the LMD process in West Africa commenced a bit later, we checked the data between 2000 and 2020. Only publications written by local scholars⁴ (including those written in collaboration with non-local scholars) were considered relevant to offer an overview of research on the implementation of LMD/BP framework in West Africa from West Africans' perspective. The search against these criteria yielded 46 outputs (articles, chapters in a book, conference papers, and reports) (see Table 2).

Table 2: LMD research sources based on language and type of publication (2000-2020)

| Language | Journal articles | Chapters | Conference papers | Reports | Total |
|----------|------------------|----------|-------------------|---------|-------|
| French | 16 | 6 | 2 | 10 | 34 |
| English | 9 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 12 |
| Total | 25 | 6 | 4 | 11 | 46 |

⁴ By local scholars we mean West Africans who wrote (including in collaboration with non-West Africans) about the implementation of the LMD/BP framework in their country or other West African states.

We further refined the search to focus on research outputs that employed observation of or interviews with HE stakeholders in West Africa. We included articles in journals, readers, or conference reports, but excluded reports by research units (unless published in journals or books) and articles mainly based on desk research. This search yielded 14 papers in French and six in English (20 in total). While 10 of the 14 French papers were published by single authors, five of the six English papers were published by a team. Fourteen of the 20 papers were published in a journal, five were chapters in a book, and one was part of a conference report. The oldest was published in 2007, and the latest in 2020. Overall, the quality and credibility of the texts and alignment with our research objectives were the major criteria considered in selecting the 20 papers and excluding others.

We undertook a close reading of these 20 texts in three steps. First, all texts were read as a first exploration of the content, and at the same time, an overview of the most relevant sections (i.e., problem statements, theories applied, methodology, and results) was made, followed by a short synthesis.

Second, all texts were read again in order to answer our research questions: 1) Do the researchers/interviewees see LMD as comprehensive university reform or are only particular facets addressed? 2) What research paradigms were used for the evaluation of the progress of LMD? 3) What are Western African scholars and stakeholders' perceptions of the LMD/BP framework? 4) What do the researchers/stakeholders think is needed to successfully implement LMD/BP?

Third, all articles were imported into NVivo. This programme for qualitative data analysis enables a systematic check of the content through searches in the text and supports coding.

It should be noted that the final selection of 20 papers did not cover all West African countries⁵. The selection covers Senegal (five papers), Ivory Coast and Togo (three papers each), Benin and Burkina Faso (two papers each), and Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria (one paper each). We did not consider this problematic because our intention was not to provide a complete account of LMD in each country, but rather to paint a picture of research on LMD using literature from West African scholars.

⁵ No papers were found for Cabo Verde, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.

Lastly, to assess policy transfer, we examined the texts for the important actors involved in the transfer, the characteristics of the transfer, the reasons for transfer, and the degree to which it was achieved. This was the basis for a coding scheme that roughly (although not exclusively, as more codes were used than these general categories) focused on the following themes: country, year of publication, research questions and hypotheses, LMD, ICT, theories, research methods, results of transfer assessed by interviewees and researchers, policy suggestions.

Results

What is studied?

While some scholars focus on implementing LMD as a framework, others hone in on some of its facets (e.g., adopting competency-based education and learner-centred curricula and introducing quality assurance mechanisms). Yet others focus on the consequences of LMD. French-speaking authors define LMD in accordance with the Bologna Declaration (1999). This means that LMD (the French terminology for the BP) includes easily readable and comparable degrees between countries, two main cycles (undergraduate and graduate), a system of credits (such as the ECTS system used in Europe), and promotion of mobility, as well as other components added in later stages of the process in Europe (e.g., the third cycle of studies, lifelong learning, quality assurance) (Verhoeven and Zhang, 2013).

Although all authors of the selected papers are interested in LMD in one way or another, this does not mean that it is the main focus of all their research. Quite a large group is interested in a broad study of the realisation of LMD in one or more HEIs (Nyamba, 2007; Ndoye, 2009; Eyébiyi, 2011; Modu Aïssami et al., 2014; Diop, 2016; Mignanwande and Hounmenou, 2016; Goin Bi et al., 2018; N'Doly, 2018; Ramdé et al., 2018; Teclessou et al., 2020). Most of these studies were conducted in 2016 or later, which could be expected since LMD did not start in all countries simultaneously, and the official start followed pilot initiatives in some faculties of HEIs in some countries.

Other scholars focus on some facets of LMD, for example, competence education (an educational approach that focuses on mastery of specific competencies or skills rather than simply accumulating credit

hours or completing courses) (Diaouné et al., 2011), the benefits of the Internet for LMD (Awokou, 2012), or the harmonisation of academic programmes (Bolu-Steve et al., 2014). Sangaré (2012) investigates whether math teachers should receive didactic and math training, and Pongo et al. (2015) delve deeper into quality assurance in HE in the field of fashion studies. Diallo (2016) is interested in HE's progress in light of LMD, and Diouf (2016) examines the governance modes in HEIs and their influence on LMD in these institutions. Atitsogbe et al. (2018) discuss the impact of social support on academic achievement. Two projects organised experiments within the LMD process: Ettien (2018) examined whether students who engaged in self-directed learning (a method introduced as a consequence of the introduction of LMD) obtained better results than those who attended traditional lectures. Similarly, Massata (2019) focused on the impact of online training in an ICT refresher course.

How is the object of investigation studied?

The selected papers adopted different research approaches, designs and methods (see Table 3 below).

Table 3: Characteristics of reviewed papers

| Publication period | Type of research | Number of papers |
|--------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 2007-2020 | Qualitative | 8 |
| 2012-2020 | Quantitative | 8 |
| 2014-2016 | Mixed method | 2 |
| 2018-2019 | Experimental | 2 |

Fifteen of the 20 studies were conducted in a single HEI in the respective countries. Ramdé et al. (2018) gathered data in two HEIs, Diop (2016) in three, Diouf (2016), and Pongo et al. (2015) in four, and Diaouné et al. (2011) in seven HEIs.

Thirteen papers employed interviews or observation of students. Nine involved interviews with academic staff, while five involved university and state managers. In addition to other stakeholders, Diaoune et al. (2011) included research support staff, and members of the change committee; Modou Aïssami et al. (2014) and N'Doly's (2018)

study also covered members of the student or staff unions and parents' organisations; and Mignanwande and Hounmenou (2016) solicited parents' views.

The size of the survey samples varied, with student samples ranging from 162 (Goin Bi et al., 2018) to 583 (Diop, 2016) and lecturer samples between 76 (Teclessou et al., 2020) and 200 (Bolu-Steve et al., 2014). Mignanwande and Hounmenou (2016) interviewed 100 parents of students.

Most quantitative papers describe the research results using percentages. However, some go a step further and apply factor analysis and regression analysis (Ramdé et al., 2018; Atitsogbe et al., 2019), variance analysis (Bolu-Steve et al., 2014), or non-parametric tests (Diop, 2016; Atitsogbe et al., 2019). Goin Bi et al. (2018) used 'analyse prototypique' (a prototypical analysis).

The samples for the qualitative projects were mainly small. However, some scholars interviewed a large number of people. For instance, Diaouné et al. (2011) interviewed 24 students, 20 teachers, 11 support staff, 12 programme managers, and two change committee members. Similarly, Diouf (2016) consulted 41 university managers, and N'Doly (2018) 46 students, six student union representatives, 20 lecturers, and four faculty union representatives. Regarding data analysis, one researcher (Diouf, 2016) explicitly refers to grounded theory, while the others do not disclose the method of analysis.

Since the papers address different research problems, it could be expected that the theories used would also be different, which is indeed the case. Some researchers do not explicitly mention a theory (Nyamba, 2007; Modou Aïsami et al., 2014; Diop, 2016; Mignanwande and Hounmenou, 2016; N'Doly, 2018; Teclessou et al., 2020) while others apply theoretical concepts. For instance, two papers draw on social constructivism (Diaoune et al., 2011; Ettien, 2018), and the two experimental studies rely on learning theories (Ettien, 2018; Massata, 2019). The exploratory study by Sangaré (2012) examines the professionalisation of math teachers from the perspective of employability.

In answering the question of how a university came to implement LMD, Ndoye (2009) relies on theories of planned change and innovation, with Awakou (2012) also employing these theories to examine how

ICT skills advance as a result of LMD-oriented reforms. Ramdé et al. (2018) analyse the transfer of LMD to students using the appropriation theory, which posits that interpretation, attitude, and behaviours play an important role. Eyébiyi (2011) refers to an appropriation process together with the importance of globalisation in HE. Organisational and neo-institutional theory guided Pongo et al.'s (2015) analysis of the development of quality assurance in fashion studies. Diallo (2016) relies on humanistic and progressive education theories to answer questions on progress in HE, and governance theory inspired Diouf's (2016) search for the meaning of governance modes in HEIs for the implementation of LMD. Goin Bi et al. (2018) apply a theory regarding social representations (pictures of structure, governance, and documentation in the opinion of students), and Atitsogbe et al. (2018) rely on social support theory and social cognitive career theory for their assessment of students' academic achievements and careers.

How is the Implementation of LMD Perceived?

It should be noted that since the papers pose different research questions and are mainly based on research in one country, at one HEI at a particular moment in time, they do not provide a comprehensive picture of the situation of LMD in the whole of West Africa, or describe the development of the LMD process over time. Nonetheless, ten papers that address the key targets of LMD enabled us to explore West African scholars' perception of LMD.

Although the authors of these ten papers do not explicitly use the concept, all the papers reveal a moment in a policy transfer or policy borrowing process as defined in the theory section. Similarly, N'Doly (2018) and Ramdé et al.'s (2018) papers are guided by the concept of appropriation.

The oldest paper in our selection (Nyamba, 2007) focuses on the University of Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) and offers insight into HE managers' expectations of LMD. Nyamba (2007) concludes that university managers (both public and private) cherished the hope that LMD targets (harmonisation of programmes, the LMD structure, student mobility, credit recognition) would be attained and that it would solve a variety of challenges (e.g., funding shortages, poor quality staff and staff shortages, a lack of adequate equipment for teaching

and research, and the considerable increase in student numbers) and stimulate cooperation between North and South. For these managers, LMD was mainly about the harmonisation of knowledge and preparing students for the labour market. Nevertheless, they acknowledged that there was a lack of information about LMD and the effects it could have on West African HE. They feared that implementing LMD could mean succumbing to a European project, and that stakeholders would see it as another form of colonialism. Instead, they asserted that West Africa needs a project set up “by the Africans and for the Africans” (Nyamba, 2007, p. 22). It should be noted that although Nyamba’s study focuses on one university, he also writes about observations made elsewhere (including comparing African and European implementation of LMD/BP), giving his conclusions broader relevance.

Ramdé et al. (2018) examined Burkina Faso students’ understanding of the principles of LMD. They conclude that “students have limited knowledge of the reform, and moderate adherence and low commitment to its implementation” (Ramdé et al., 2018, p. 114). The authors establish a correlation between students’ gender and field of study and their attitude toward the LMD framework, with female and humanities students showing less adherence to the LMD principles than male or science students (Ramdé et al., 2018).

In Senegal, the LMD reforms began earlier in Cheikh Anta Diop University. While its implementation was publicly announced in the 2004/2005 academic year, the first step was taken in 2003 when the university’s rector announced the reform. The second step involved sensitisation of staff and students, with debates on the pros and cons facilitated by appointed coaches and four French experts. The third step was the establishment of the principles of LMD in the structure of the university (with some leeway for departments) (see Ndoye, 2009). Ndoye concluded that most of the formal LMD principles were achieved after two years. Moreover, there were positive changes regarding faculty’s didactics, units’ functioning, openness to professionalisation and enterprises, and students’ study environment, etc. Ndoye (2009) concluded that the university was moving in the right direction because he believed LMD to be inevitable and that harmonising HE in a globalised world is necessary.

Some years later, Diop (2016) reached less positive conclusions

about the situation in Senegal. As with earlier reforms in Senegalese HE, his study found that students felt that LMD did not solve prevailing problems, although perceptions varied across departments, levels of study, and universities. On the one hand, students indicated discontent with the implementation of LMD. They stated that they lacked sufficient information and were not involved in the decision. They also did not feel that they were adequately prepared for the labour market. On the other hand, students were positive about the principles of LMD and the opportunities it offers for mobility, but were unhappy about the way it was implemented by university management and the government. They also believed that LMD reduced, rather than increased student access to university. Lastly, the study pointed to regular protest action in Senegalese universities, which shows that students and staff were not satisfied with the situation (Diop, 2016).

Problems with the supposed employability benefits of implementing LMD are also reported in Benin by Eyébiyi (2011). In this country, the principles of LMD are accepted by state and private universities. Private universities were faster in implementing LMD, but allowed themselves some leeway. Eyébiyi uses the agriculture faculty of one university in Benin to assess the implementation of LMD in West Africa. In 2007-2008, this faculty opted for the LMD structure, with a diversification of courses to adapt HE to local needs and to improve students’ professionalisation. Only a small number of ‘license’ students were allowed to go on to master’s; all others became ‘higher technicians’, with a view to achieving a ‘green revolution’ and fast incorporation of graduates into the labour market (Eyébiyi, 2011).

Mignanwande and Hounmenou’s (2016, p. 159) study in Benin found that, a decade after implementation, the cardinal LMD principles to “teach differently, study differently, evaluate differently, manage differently and professionalize” had been adopted. However, these principles “are still far from [being] mastered by the different actors” (Mignanwande and Hounmenou, 2016, p. 169). For example, 65.33% of the students that participated in the study stated that their degrees were not recognised in other universities or countries; 73.39% lacked information about LMD; and 59.82% indicated that they lacked information on how to capitalise on credits earned (Mignanwande and Hounmenou, 2016).

Modou Aïssami et al. (2014) focused on a university in Niger, where LMD started as an experiment in 2007, but was formally introduced in 2010. By 2014, most LMD innovations (LMD structure, professionalisation, the semester system, credit system, etc.) had been applied. However, implementation differed among faculties and institutions and there were many weak points. For example, the academic calendar was not followed, modern technologies were infrequently used, students were not made sufficiently responsible for their studies, staff (academic, administrative and technical) did not have appropriate qualifications, and the technological structure was too weak to support implementation (Modou Aïssami et al., 2014).

The LMD system was introduced in Togo in 2009. Teclessou et al.'s (2020) 2018 survey found that lecturers in a medical school perceived the change as positive in terms of the evaluation system, the credit system, and new ICT equipment. Nevertheless, not all the challenges confronting the medical school were solved by the introduction of the LMD framework. There was still an excessive number of students, no intermediate diplomas⁶ were offered, and there was a shortage of resources. (such as funding, and laboratory and workshop equipment/facilities). About 20% of the lecturers indicated that LMD is unsuitable for a field such as medicine.

Goin Bi et al.'s (2018) exploratory study of the 'social representations' of students at the University of Ivory Coast, revealed the situation regarding LMD after a long period of implementation, interrupted by turmoil at the university and its closure for a long period (2011-2012). The study demonstrated that while from the outside, all appeared to be well, the university confronted many challenges. For example, there was a lack of didactic equipment and lecture rooms and LMD was not properly understood and applied, although students appreciated it for the valorisation of diplomas. Access to academic resources was limited (including Wi-Fi and library material). The authors found that the 'new start' that followed the turmoil was not really new due to poor governance and political interference in the management of the university (Goin Bi et al., 2018).

⁶ The intermediate diploma is awarded to students upon successful completion of specific phases or levels of education within the BP/LMD framework. In competency-based education, students demonstrate their mastery of competencies through assessments, projects, portfolios, or other means.

The same university was the subject of a study by N'Doly (2018). His qualitative research revealed that the implementation of LMD in Africa was not yet at the same level as in Europe. The lecturers that participated in the research believed that it would promote professionalisation, but indicated that they were ill-equipped to clearly define course content, to 'teach differently', and to apply e-teaching. Lecturers and students also complained that the university's infrastructure was insufficient to serve the number of students. According to N'Doly (2018), an important reason for the lack of proper appropriation of LMD is African universities' limited freedom to adapt this European innovation to what is required in the context of Africa.

The way Forward

While many of the reviewed papers focus on one country and a single HEI, their reflections on what could be done to solve some problems could be helpful for other West African countries. Nyamba (2007) calls for HEIs to undertake strategic planning and prepare to operate in a liberalised market as well as for less political influence in HE. He also notes that the growing private education sector needs to be taken into account, a view shared by Ndoye (2009), Eyébiyi (2011), and Mignanwande and Hounmenou (2018). Ndoye (2009) recommends the design of administrative and academic structures that fit the LMD framework and that universities need to build closer ties with the professional world. He also highlights the need to devote attention to the African character of HEI.

For their part, Bolu-Steve et al. (2014) recommend that harmonisation of HE should be promoted among the Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and propose that ECOWAS provide financial support to support the follow-up process. Modou Aïssami et al. (2014) call for the quality and quantity of human and infrastructural resources to be increased, including ICT (see also Mignanwande and Hounmenou, 2016; Goin Bi et al., 2018; N'Doly, 2018; Ettien, 2018). They also note that universities should nurture an environment that enables students to take ownership of their learning process, academic progress, and personal development as a lack of resources and tensions caused by political disagreements among students, render innovation difficult, Diop (2016) stresses that the state

should seek solutions to students' problems because they are among the most important actors who pose hindrances to the implementation of LMD. In addition to arguing for improved human resources and academic and administrative infrastructure, Mignanwande and Hounmenou (2016) support the adaptation of LMD principles and conditions to address local realities (see also Eyébiyi, 2011). Goin Bi et al. (2018) suggest that in order to attain a real 'new start' for LMD, the challenges of poor infrastructure, incorrect application of LMD, weak information, and poor governance need to be addressed.

Like other scholars, N'doly (2018) notes that universities need more autonomy, more and better didactic equipment, and improved lecture rooms and ICT, etc. Ramdé et al. (2018, p. 128) state that more attention should be devoted to students' concerns, particularly female students and those "in disciplines whose competitive horizon is more limited". Teclessou et al. (2020) do not directly suggest a policy for a medical faculty but indirectly infer that intermediate diplomas be considered to link medical and paramedical training and create pathways between them, and to improve human and material resources.

Conclusion

The launch of the BP in Europe was a wake-up call for many countries to reflect on the future of HE. Its vision for the harmonisation of HE across Europe was perceived as having important consequences for student and academic exchange and the employability of HE graduates in a globalised economy. Not all countries decided to follow this process. For instance, Australia retained its HE structure (Verhoeven and De Wit, 2022). However, Africa was an eager follower, despite its colonial past. Many African countries faced economic and political challenges and regarded the implementation of LMD as an instrument to solve some of them. International organisations focused on inter-university collaboration strongly supported the process.

The LMD process has been researched by both West African and foreign scholars. This article reviewed research on LMD in West Africa undertaken by local scholars. As close observers of the innovation process, they are key sources of information on its progress.

While the reviewed papers do not cover all facets of the LMD/BP

framework and often focus on one country and a single HEI, they offer interesting views on the development of LMD in West Africa. Most of this research conceptualised the LMD implementation process as a policy transfer one (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996), while some regarded it more as an appropriation process (Ramdé et al., 2018). The studies employed different theoretical concepts, including social constructivism (Diaouné et al., 2011), theories of planned change (Awokou, 2012), organisation theory and neo-institutional theory (Pongo et al., 2015). Others focused on how HE stakeholders perceived LMD (Nyamba, 2007; Modou Aïssami et al., 2014; Diop, 2016; Mignanwande and Hounmenou, 2016; N'Doly, 2018; Teclessou et al., 2020).

The papers adopted different methodologies, including survey, qualitative, and experimental research. Most gauged the opinions of one or two stakeholder categories, mainly students (in 13 of 20 studies) and lecturers (nine out of 20). The representativeness of the samples was seldom assessed, and data analysis was usually limited to a description of the distributions in percentages, although in a few projects, scholars applied regression analysis, variance analysis, or non-parametric tests. None of the research was longitudinal. In qualitative projects, purposive sampling was applied depending on the kind of stakeholders the researchers sought to include in the study. No special reference was made to a theory underlying the interpretation of the qualitative data, except by Diouf (2016), who opted for a grounded theory approach.

Most studies did not assess the result of LMD but rather what influenced its development, for instance, online training (Massata, 2019), teaching methods (Ettien, 2018), quality assurance (Pongo et al., 2015), or social support (Atitsogbe et al., 2018).

All authors report the transition to the formal LMD structure, although it was not always correctly applied (see, for instance, Goin Bi et al., 2018). Other goals formulated by the 'Guide' (GTES, 2008), namely, that LMD would help to teach differently, study differently, evaluate differently, manage differently, and professionalise, were often not achieved (Modou Aïssami et al., 2014; Mignanwande and Hounmenou, 2016; Goin Bi et al., 2018; N'Doly, 2018). According to some researchers, an important reason was the universities' lack of autonomy (Goin Bi et al., 2018; N'Doly, 2018). Hopes (see, for instance, Nyamba, 2007) that LMD reform would deliver more and better lecture rooms,

didactic equipment, libraries, and ICT systems did not materialise. Although many students in some countries demonstrated a positive attitude towards the principles of LMD (Diop, 2014; Mignanwande and Hounmenou, 2016; Goin Bi et al., 2018), they were not happy about the way it was implemented and doubted that it has contributed to employability (Nyamba, 2007; Diop, 2014).

While the policy proposals offered by these scholars based on their research are very diverse, some general principles can be identified. The conclusions include West African HEIs' need for more real autonomy and funding, improved infrastructure, and staff that has the means and capacity to teach the huge number of students enrolled in the region. Given that the HE landscape differs across these countries, LMD should be adapted to fit local contexts, and the position of private HEIs should be considered.

Our study's limitations include the fact that only publications published by local scholars in journals, books, or conference reports reported on Google Scholar and Web of Science were selected, excluding the work of other local researchers, research by non-African researchers, and reports published by the research institute ROCARE. Some nuances might, therefore, be missing from the analysis. However, our main purpose was to bring the observations of local scholars to the fore.

The picture of LMD in West Africa painted by these scholars is very diverse and rich. On the one hand, they note that LMD was established in West Africa as a solution to existing problems and as a way to situate West African HE in global developments. On the other, they are critical observers who report on the real concerns of HE stakeholders, painting a picture of a contested reform and the challenges that still confront West African HE.

In terms of future research, a longitudinal study that includes different countries and HEIs would provide a better picture of how LMD/BP-driven reform is unfolding in West Africa, what it is achieving, or failing to achieve, and its failures and successes.

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