

## BURKINA FASO: Reforming K–6 Initial Teacher Education

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Despite facing teacher shortages, Burkina Faso has recently raised the qualification requirements for becoming an early childhood educator or primary school teacher. As of October 2020, individuals must possess a senior secondary school diploma, which involves 13 years of schooling, to enroll in initial teacher education (ITE) programs aimed at preparing teachers for kindergarten through grade 6 (K–6). This represents a significant policy shift, as the previous requirement since the country's independence from France in 1960 was a lower secondary diploma, which requires 10 years of schooling. This policy change has led to the development of new curricula for prospective early childhood education (ECE) and primary school teachers, with potential implications for teacher educators and the leaders of the new ITE institutions. The updated ITE program now consists of two academic years: one year dedicated to coursework, followed by an eight-and-a-half-month field placement (stage pratique or practicum) in a primary school setting or an ECE center.

Significant changes in the ITE system are anticipated as a result of this major policy shift. The fact that the reform is still in its early stages makes it challenging to evaluate its effects on teaching practices and student achievement. Meanwhile, a longitudinal study is currently being conducted to explore changes in the characteristics of prospective teachers and, consequently, the transformation of the teacher workforce and the overall teacher labor market.

### The Context

The origins of ITE for primary school teachers in Burkina Faso can be traced back to the École normale (normal school) William-Ponty in Saint-Louis (Senegal). Established in 1903, this institution held a "federal" status and was responsible for the education and training of primary school teachers, medical doctors, and various public officials for the region known as Afrique occidentale française (AOF) during the colonial era.<sup>1</sup> In 1944, Burkina Faso, then known as Upper Volta, founded its first école normale in Ouagadougou for the education and training of "moniteurs auxiliaires" (auxiliary educators). This school was relocated to Koudougou in 1945, approximately 100 kilometers from Ouagadougou. A second normal school was established in

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<sup>1</sup> Created in 1895, AOF was a grouping of eight French colonies. Its dissolution followed the 1958 referendum on the proposed future French community. While Guinea voted for independence, the other colonies opted to become autonomous republics, eventually achieving independence in 1960.



Ouahigouya in 1948, about 180 kilometers from Ouagadougou, followed by a third school for girls in Ouagadougou in 1952. These institutions operated until 1986, when they were replaced by the National Schools of Primary School Teachers (Écoles nationales des enseignants du primaire, ENEP), with the latest of the eight schools being established in 2017. These ENEPs are distributed throughout the country.

In 2020, these schools were abolished with the establishment of the Institut national de formation des personnels de l'Éducation (INFPE), following an unsuccessful 2015 proposal to transform them into Instituts nationaux de formation des enseignants de l'éducation de base (INAFEEB). A significant change in the ITE at INFPE compared to ENEP is the academic qualification required for entry: an end-of-secondary school diploma (13 years of general education) is now required, as opposed to a junior secondary school diploma (10 years of general education) previously. While the overall program structure remains the same—comprising one academic year of coursework at the ITE institution and a year-long field placement in designated primary schools (écoles d'application) and early childhood development centers (Centres d'éveil et d'éducation préscolaire, or CEEP)—the curriculum has been updated.

Notably, all ITE institutions, from the original normal schools to the ENEPs and now the regional directorates of INFPE (DR-INFPE), operate as boarding schools, which has implications for the cost of ITE.

## The Need for ITE Reform

Burkina Faso's education system has been facing issues of quality and internal efficiency, as highlighted by studies such as PASEC CONFEMEN (2015) and *Ministères en charge de l'éducation et de la Formation, UNICEF et Pôle de Dakar de l'IPE—UNESCO* (2017). In this context, two main reasons were identified for reforming ITE for ECE and primary school teachers: the critical role of education, and by extension teacher education, and the need to better value the teaching profession. With these considerations, the government decided to elevate the recruitment criteria for K–6 teachers to require a secondary school diploma, increase their salaries accordingly, and change the title and employment status of primary school teachers from *instituteur adjoint certifié* (certified assistant school master) to the more prestigious *professeur des écoles* (school teacher). The title “professeur” was previously reserved for secondary school and university teachers.

However, there are additional underlying factors driving this reform. One significant factor is the universitarization of the primary teacher workforce, largely influenced by labor market dynamics and shortcomings in the implementation of the Licence-Master-Doctorat (Bachelor-Masters-Doctorate) higher education reform (see Ramdé 2017). Over the years, there has been an increase in the number of practicing primary school teachers with a junior secondary school diploma (BEPC<sup>2</sup>) who have independently pursued further education to obtain a senior secondary school diploma and even attended university, all the while continuing to teach. This trend is driven by aspirations for career advancement and professional mobility. Additionally, there has been a rise in university students or graduates applying to enter ITE for primary school teaching, despite the requirement being a junior secondary diploma. This overqualification is occurring in a context where employment opportunities are limited, particularly for students or graduates from the humanities and social sciences. According to PASEC CONFEMEN (2015), over 60 percent of

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<sup>2</sup> Brevet d'études du premier cycle.

primary school students were taught by teachers with a university education, although the motivation of such teachers may not be optimal (MENAPLN 2019a).

Pressure from teacher unions to improve the status and employment conditions of teachers, including remuneration, has also been a driving force behind the reform. The necessity to raise the recruitment level for teachers was reaffirmed during negotiations between the government and the National Coordination of Education Unions, culminating in a memorandum of understanding in January 2018. These negotiations focused on enhancing access to education, elevating the status of education personnel, and upgrading the teaching profession (MENAPLN 2019a).

The need for reform was initially articulated in the quality improvement component of the Basic Education Strategic Development Program (2012–21). This component explicitly called for two major changes: extending the duration of ITE programs to prepare primary school teachers from one to two years starting in the 2012–13 school year, and considering, as of 2015, raising the academic entry requirement for ITE programs to a secondary school diploma and transforming ENEP into INAFEED for the education and training of K–10 teachers.

## Reforming ITE Programs

In 2015, an independent feasibility study on the proposed institutional transformation was conducted with technical and financial support from Global Affairs Canada. The ITE programs underwent revisions in 2017 and 2018, but the transformation project faced delays, including the postponement of raising the academic entry requirement for ITE to 2020. This decision initiated a new, entirely national process beginning in May 2019, which involved the establishment of a coordination committee and three technical commissions: administrative and institutional reform, pedagogical reform (further divided into five sub-commissions), and finance.

From August to October 2019, the commissions worked on drafting presidential decrees concerning the creation and status of the INFPE, which resulted from the integration of the eight ENEPs. Additionally, curriculum documents were developed for five profiles: early childhood teachers, school teachers, inspectors of ECE, inspectors of primary education and non-formal education, and inspectors of secondary education.<sup>3</sup> The content of ITE programs for prospective primary school teachers was finalized in October 2020.

## New ITE Program Content for Primary School Teachers

The reform of the ITE program for primary school teachers has introduced significant changes, including an increase of 270 hours compared to the previous ENEP program. Additionally, an optional bilingual module for national languages and Arabic has been added. Table 1 provides a detailed breakdown of the modules and submodules in the new program, along with their respective hours. The program is divided into two blocks: core and optional modules. Core modules constitute 83 percent of the total of 960 hours in the first year. Of these hours, 54 percent are allocated to education sciences (pedagogy and teaching methods), 31 percent to general knowledge (including administration and management, written and spoken expression, and ICT), and approximately 15 percent to subject matter content, which includes refresher

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<sup>3</sup> All three types of inspectors are trained at the École Normale Supérieure (ENS).

courses and bilingualism (see table 1). Optional modules, each comprising 160 hours, cover areas such as Arabic and national languages, vocational training, and inclusive education.

To bridge theory and practice during the first year, prospective teachers are given opportunities to observe and engage in teaching, classroom management, and other school activities at a primary school located in or near their ITE institution. To qualify for the field placement in the second year, they must achieve an overall grade point average of at least 12 out of 20 and a personal conduct grade of at least 10 out of 20.

**Table 1. ITE Program Content for Primary School Teaching**

Modules and submodules		Duration (hours)
<b>Core curriculum</b>		
Pedagogy	General pedagogy	100
	Education psychology	80
Teaching methods	French	100
	Mathematics	80
	Early learning subjects	160
	- Science	
- Arts		
- Physical education		
	- Civic and moral education	
	- Production, artistic, and cultural activities	
Administration and management	School legislation	80
	Professional ethics	
	Education statistics	
	Management	
	Civil service law	
	Administrative writing	
Bilingual education	National languages	60
Refresher courses	Mathematics	80
	French	
	Life and earth sciences	
	History and geography	
Written and spoken expression		40
Introduction to ICT		20
<b>Optional subjects</b>		
Language	Arabic	160
	National language	
Vocational training		
Inclusive education		
<b>Total</b>		<b>960</b>

Source: MENAPLN 2019b.

The field placement spans 32 weeks, with each week consisting of 30 hours, totalling 960 hours. It is designed to help prospective teachers become acquainted with the pedagogical, administrative, and material organization of schools; practice teaching; find or create teaching and learning situations; and understand the organization and functioning of the primary education sub-system and ongoing innovations. Student teachers are placed in designated primary schools (écoles d'application) or regular schools across the country, where they take full responsibility for a class. They receive supervision and support from mentor teachers (enseignants-conseillers) and their school principal (MENAPLN 2019b).

Upon completing the field placement, student teachers are required to produce a report evaluated by a jury at their ITE institution. The report should detail the field placement experience, the lessons learned, and any challenges faced. Student teachers are also observed and assessed in a classroom setting by a three-member jury consisting of a certified primary school teacher, an inspector or pedagogical advisor, and a teacher educator. This assessment is known as the practical exam (*examen pratique*). The results of this assessment, along with the report and personal conduct grade during the field placement, are used to calculate the grade point average (GPA). To be certified, a prospective teacher must achieve a second-year GPA of at least 10 out of 20 and a personal conduct grade of at least 10 out of 20. Successful completion of the program is recognized with the *Certificat d'aptitude pédagogique au professorat des écoles* (CAP-PE).

## Transitioning to the New ITE Program

The implementation of the new two-year ITE program commenced in the 2020–21 academic year, which was designated as a transition year. During this period, a reduced number of student teachers were admitted (see table 2). These student teachers were allocated across all eight ENEPs, which were transformed into regional directorates of INFPE (DR-INFPE). The first national Director General was appointed. The transition to this new program presented several challenges.

The Director General's office was located within the DR-INFPE nearest to the capital city, rather than within MENAPLN. This arrangement allowed the directorate to be closer to the realities on the ground and spares the ministry from the need to rent or quickly construct headquarters for this new national directorate. However, it may raise governance issues, as there could be perceptions of favoritism toward the host DR-INFPE among other DR-INFPEs, especially if infrastructural or other improvements are made to accommodate the Director General.

Staffing within the DR-INFPEs also emerged as a challenge. Most heads of ENEPs were experienced primary school inspectors typically with a junior secondary diploma as the highest academic qualification, raising questions about whether they could serve as heads of DR-INFPEs. While no qualification requirement was immediately put forward, all appointees hold at least a master's degree, with some former ENEP heads remaining in leadership roles, while others were replaced.

In addition to leadership changes, the reform has implications for teacher educators within DR-INFPEs. Under the reform, a master's degree is required to teach. This requirement poses a challenge, as more than half of all permanent teacher educators in ENEPs only held a junior secondary diploma. Only 28 percent possessed a three-year university degree, and a mere 6 percent held a master's degree. These teacher educators were allowed to retain their positions during the transition if they committed to furthering their education to meet the requirement. Consequently, the system has had to rely more on part-time teacher educators, many of whom come from higher education institutions. This reliance can be costly for DR-INFPEs that are not located near major university centers, as they need to cover travel, accommodation, and other associated expenses. This financial burden is exacerbated by a decline in the number of student teachers who are privately funded. Additionally, the authorized rates that ITE programs can pay their part-time instructors are lower than what some university professors are willing to accept, presenting an ongoing challenge.

Finally, there was initially no plan to systematically monitor the reform. To address this, a proposal was made by the authors of this case study to monitor the first five years of the reform. An initial survey led to a focus on the characteristics of the cohorts of prospective teachers. A continuing education and action research directorate was created within the INFPE. This directorate is tasked with promoting and supporting teacher education quality, designing innovative training schemes, monitoring ongoing reforms in the educational system, and contributing to the professional development of teacher educators in line with the requirements of the new ITE program. To date, this directorate has concentrated its monitoring activities on the implementation of new pedagogical approaches in the primary schools where prospective teachers undertake their field experiences and placements.

### The First Three Cohorts of Student Teachers

To ensure the success of the reform, implementation began with smaller cohorts over the first three years, despite the ongoing demand for new teachers. On average, from 2020–22 to 2022–24, there were 853 student teachers per year preparing for primary school teaching (see table 2). This figure is significantly lower than the average of 4,469 student teachers in ENEPs from 2015 to 2019. The size of the new cohorts is also well below the annual average of new primary school teachers hired before the reform, which was 4,186 according to data from 2017 to 2020 (INSD 2020). Furthermore, it falls short of the projected teacher recruitment requirement of 4,606 per year until 2029 (MENAPLN and Global Affairs Canada 2015). If this trend persists, the number of graduates from INFPEs will not be sufficient to meet the needs of the education system.

**Table 2. Number of Student Teachers in the First Three Cohorts of the Reformed ITE Program**

	<b>Cohort 1 (2020–22)</b>	<b>Cohort 2 (2021–23)</b>	<b>Cohort 3 (2022–24)</b>	<b>Average</b>
Primary school teacher: Traditional option	880	911	740	843
Primary school teacher: French-Arabic option	30	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>910</b>	<b>911</b>	<b>740</b>	<b>853</b>

Source: Bulletin statistique de l'INFPE.

Student teachers were predominantly males over the three cohorts, though the gender gap narrowed in the third cohort. The difference between the proportions of male and female student teachers was 36 percentage points in the first cohort, 38 in the second, and 24 in the third. In contrast, data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) shows a gender gap of only four percentage points among in-service teachers during the same period (UNESCO 2014). This suggests that the new ITE program may have future implications for the gender balance within the primary teaching profession.

The early cohorts of the reformed ITE system highlight important considerations for future teacher supply. In response to the significantly lower size of the first three cohorts, the government has been recruiting unemployed graduates of ENEPs and private ITE institutions (Écoles privées de formation des enseignants du primaire, EPFEP).<sup>4</sup> The impact of these

<sup>4</sup> Following a 2010 government decree that authorized private institutions to provide ITE for primary school teachers, these institutions experienced rapid growth. By the 2018–19 academic year, there were 156 private primary ITE institutions in the country (Sirois and others 2021). However, with the increase in the required academic qualification for admission, many of these institutions may face closure. This is because they might lack the financial resources to hire and adequately compensate teacher educators who hold a master's degree.

measures on teacher supply has not yet been studied and may be limited, as the pool of unemployed graduates of ENEPs and EPFEPs is likely to diminish quickly. These concerns, combined with low recruitment numbers, raise questions about both immediate and long-term teacher supply.

Beyond recruitment concerns, retaining future teachers may pose a significant challenge. While student teachers were generally young, with an average age of 26 across the three cohorts, survey data raises concerns about their retention. Only a small proportion (around 1 percent for the first two cohorts and 0.5 percent for the third cohort) expressed a desire to remain for their career in the field for which they are training (ECE and primary school teaching). Additionally, a significant proportion intends to leave the education sector permanently after 10 years of practice, with rates ranging from 10 to 12 percent across the three cohorts. These figures suggest a low interest in long-term careers in teaching, raising concerns about teacher supply amidst high attrition.

Most student teachers in the first three cohorts had attended university after obtaining their senior secondary diploma (between 86 and 92 percent). Over 30 percent of student teachers entering each cohort already held a bachelor's-level degree. Overqualification appears to influence prospective teachers' expectations and interest in remaining in the profession. Student teachers with a master's degree or higher were more likely to want to leave the teaching profession (23 percent of cohorts 1 and 3, 17 percent of cohort 2). Those who had previously studied law and political science were more likely to want to leave the profession than those who had studied humanities in cohorts 1 and 2 (27 and 16 percent, respectively, compared to 7 and 6 percent, respectively), although this pattern reversed in cohort 3 (with 11 percent wanting to leave in both categories/groups).

These findings regarding expected teacher attrition raise important policy questions about attracting and selecting the most suitable candidates for ITE programs to prepare primary school teachers. Burkina Faso may need to consider strategies to make the teaching profession more attractive and to select candidates who have a genuine interest in the profession.

## Enabling Factors

Several elements have contributed to the successful early implementation of ITE reform. Firstly, the challenging job market has led candidates with higher education levels to pursue ITE for primary education. These candidates typically possess educational qualifications that exceed the required senior secondary school diploma, making them more interested in the complex and demanding content of the new program compared to the BEPC-level curriculum. This higher level of educational attainment is likely to enhance their engagement and allows teacher educators to concentrate on substantive content and issues, as language skills do not hinder their ability to understand content, participate, and complete learning tasks.

Additionally, the transfer of key assets from ENEPs to INFPE played a significant role in facilitating the reform, especially concerning the field placement component. The network of associated schools (*écoles annexes*) and designated schools for field placements (*écoles d'application*) was preserved during the reform process, enabling student teachers to continue participating in field experiences throughout both years of the program. Consequently, the new system did not encounter significant challenges related to infrastructure, equipment, practice teaching, and logistical arrangements.

## Outcomes

Although a comprehensive assessment of the reform's outcomes, including its effectiveness in improving primary school teaching quality, is not yet available, there are several indicators of success. Firstly, the reform has contributed to enhancing the attractiveness of the teaching profession, serving both as an enabling factor and an outcome. The pre-salary awarded to trainee civil servants, including student teachers, is determined by the category in which they will be employed, which is linked to their entry qualification. With the entrance qualification for student teachers elevated from a junior secondary school diploma to a senior secondary school diploma, the pre-salary amount has increased accordingly. This has significantly improved the social conditions of trainees, especially in the second year of the ITE program, when rent and living expenses rise as they move out of the INFPE boarding school. These benefits are not only outcomes of the reform but also act as enabling factors, as the increased pre-salary enhances the profession's appeal, attracting candidates who might have otherwise chosen different career paths. For young adults, the higher pre-salary is motivational, offering a greater purchasing power. The increased pre-salary, along with the subsequent boost to teachers' salaries due to higher qualifications and the enhanced prestige of primary school teaching under the title *professeur des écoles*, all contribute to making the teaching profession more attractive. This is a result of the reform but also facilitates its implementation.

Generally, whether entrants possess a senior secondary school diploma or a higher qualification at the start of the ITE program, the quality of their skills at entry has improved, particularly in oral and written language skills. Staff qualifications have also seen improvement. The INFPE is actively enhancing the skills of its permanent and temporary teacher educators, with the management team now including staff with master's degrees and higher qualifications.

Finally, the new ITE program content appears to positively impact student teachers' comfort with practical teaching skills. Surveys of the first three cohorts indicate that student teachers generally felt prepared for their field placement. This suggests that the reformed program content, with over half of the total of 960 hours of coursework dedicated to pedagogy and teaching methods, effectively prepared them for practice. Over 80 percent of respondents reported feeling well or very well prepared for the field placement.

## Key Takeaways

Burkina Faso's experience with reforming ITE highlights several important insights:

- 1. Long-term planning is key.** Regrouping all ENEPs under an umbrella entity, INFPE, was part of a process started in 2019. This process was not expected to yield economies of scale in the short term. Establishing the new administrative structure, coordinating the new entities (DR-INPFEs) and making the necessary pedagogical adjustments and developments under the new program incur new costs initially. It is only in the medium to long term that the regular and effective functioning of the new ITE system can help reduce administrative and training costs.
- 2. ITE improvements need to be a part of broader system reforms.** The ITE reform occurred within a broader reform of the education system. The country has been working to promote inquiry and problem-solving practices, reduce overly teacher-centered pedagogical practices, and respond to social partners' demands to better value the

teaching profession, including better salaries (Gouvernement du Burkina Faso et Coordination nationale des syndicats de l'Éducation 2018). In this context, reforms were underway for the education and training of the entire spectrum of educators, from ECE teachers to inspectors of primary and secondary education. At least theoretically, this helps ensure system coherence. Additionally, the design of the reform began with the establishment, through a joint order, of an inter-ministerial committee comprised of experts from both the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Higher Education, tasked with proposing the institutional, administrative, financial, and pedagogical features of the reform as well as policy documents to be adopted by the government. This process led to the creation of INFPE, a public administrative institution with legal status and administrative and financial autonomy.

- 3. Well-planned reforms can have unanticipated effects.** Although Burkina Faso's reform was well thought-out, available administrative and survey data indicate that raising the entry academic qualification appears to have led to male-dominated cohorts of prospective teachers, an unexpected trend. A future gender imbalance favoring men is now more likely, whereas the country had been nearing gender parity in the primary teacher workforce in 2021, with 49 percent female teachers. This raises concerns both for gender parity and for student achievement.

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