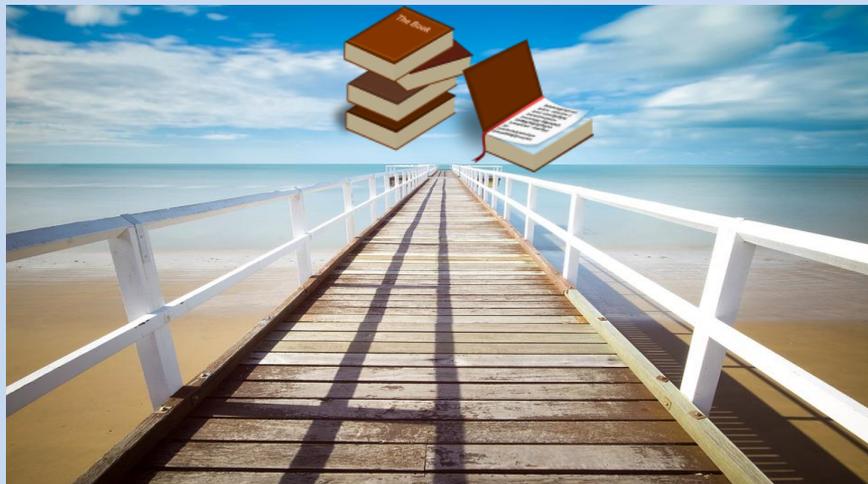




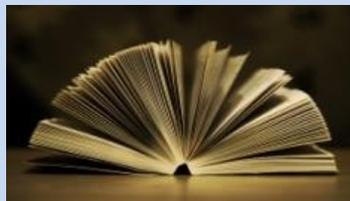
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CENTRE DE RECHERCHE SUR LA CRITIQUE LITTÉRAIRE AFRICAINE



Revue Annuelle *Horizons Littéraires*
En ligne : <http://horizonslitteraires.com>



N° 7

Décembre 2023

ISSN : 2712 - 6560

HORIZONS LITTÉRAIRES

**Revue du Centre de Recherche sur la Critique Littéraire Africaine
(C.E.R.C.L.A)**

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**Legacy of a French Colonial Language Policy and
Planning : Re-assessing its Impacts on the Current
Senegalese Language Education Policy and Planning**

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Abstract

The current language policy and planning in Senegal remains firmly rooted in the language policy and planning inherited from colonial France. Despite its accession to sovereignty in 1960, the Republic of Senegal has not made major radical changes into its educational system so that it reflects its educational, cultural and psycho-linguistic environment. The colonial system of education still reflects most of the French educational system in its types of qualifications, examinations and grading scales (*Fall 2014; Fall 2020; as cited in Diallo 2010*). Most importantly, the Senegalese educational system is so similar to the French educational system that any change made in France's educational system will have direct repercussions on the Senegalese educational system. In that regard, one of the central arguments this paper addresses is to underscore the importance of exhuming the legacy of France's language and planning and making radical changes in the Senegalese educational system so that it reflects its educational, socio-cultural and psycho-linguistic universe.

In this particular respect, this paper will first exhume the past of the linguistic crises inherited from France's early language policy and planning in Senegal. It then discusses the early internal and external resistances to the early colonial language policies and planning in Senegal. It also analyzes both Diouf's and Wade's major constitutional attempts to cut through the umbilical linguistic cord between the former colonial France and the Republic of Senegal. It ends by reassessing some of the lingering obstacles to a complete linguistic decolonization while providing a series of possible solutions to harness Senegal's rich and diverse linguistic landscape.

Key words: *decolonization; Senegal; Abdou Diouf; Abdoulaye Wade; constitution; language-policy; planning; France*

Résumé

Les politiques et planifications linguistiques actuelles du Sénégal restent fort ancrées dans celles antérieures de la France coloniale. Depuis son accession à la souveraineté en 1960, la République du Sénégal n'a pas pu opérer des changements radicaux dans son système éducatif pour mieux y refléter les couleurs de son environnement éducatif, socio-culturel et psycholinguistique. En d'autres termes, le système éducatif sénégalais reflète largement celui de la France dans ses types de qualifications, examens et systèmes de notation (Fall, 2014; Fall, 2020 ; comme cité dans Diallo, 2010). À titre d'exemple, le système anglophone de L-M-D (Licence-Maîtrise et Doctorat) adopté par la France dans les années 1990 est maintenant

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reproduit dans les universités sénégalaises. Sous ce rapport, l'un des arguments centraux de ce travail est de souligner l'importance pour le Sénégal d'opérer des changements radicaux sur son système éducatif pour qu'il reflète son univers éducatif, socio-culturel et psycholinguistique. Or, il y a un besoin pressant de bien comprendre que la non-résolution des séries de crises héritées de la France coloniale est liée aux crises actuelles notoires dans le système éducatif sénégalais. Ainsi ce travail retrace-t-il, d'abord, le passé d'une série de crises linguistiques héritées des politiques linguistiques de la France coloniale au Sénégal. Ensuite, il discute les différentes formes de résistances à la fois interne et externe contre les politiques et planifications linguistiques mises sur pied par la France coloniale, et par la même occasion, il analyse les différentes tentatives constitutionnelles initiées par des leaders politiques de la trempe de Abdou Diouf et Abdoulaye Wade pour couper le cordon « ombilical » linguistique entre la France et la République du Sénégal. Ce travail conclut sur une les séries d'obstacles persistants qui continuent de jalonner la marche du Sénégal vers une décolonisation linguistique complète et donne une batterie de recommandations pour mieux explorer et la richesse et la diversité du paysage linguistique sénégalais.

Mots-clés : *décolonisation ; Sénégal ; Abdou Diouf ; Abdoulaye Wade ; constitution ; langue ; politique ; linguistique*

Introduction

The strong wind of decolonization sweeping through Africa was not only political but also linguistic in many respects. It gained momentum when the process of “Arabisation” in most North African countries as a cohort of Arab leaders rushed to make profound and radical changes in their language education systems by maintaining the preeminence of Arabic over foreign languages. It is worth pointing out that the rehabilitation of their national language (i.e.; Arabic) was seen as a crucial step in the very process of achieving linguistic decolonization and cultural liberation of the Arab people. Although the notion of this Arab Nationalism was short-lived in many Arab states, it has significantly contributed to raising awareness and promoting the exclusive use of the Arabic language in major Arab countries (Fall, 2020 ; Fall, 2014; as cited in Diallo 2010, Grandguillaume, 1999).

It is worth pointing out that the Arab Nationalism, that led to radical reform in language policies and planning adopted by many post-independence Arab states was, notably, not positively received by most West African states. Only a handful of West African states (e.g., Nigeria, Ghana, and Burkina Faso) were able to make significant changes in their language

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education policy. Nevertheless, a vast majority of African states (e.g., Senegal, Ivory Coast, Gabon, and Mali) have kept the arbitrary and outdated language education policy of their former colonists. As a result, most African leaders have raised French to the status of their official national languages at the expense of their native languages. In Ivory Coast, Mali, and Senegal, to name only a few, French has since become the language of the presidency, the national assembly, public administration, the courts, and education (Clemons & Yerende, 2009 ; Ngabayé, 1994 ; Richmond, 1980 ; Salhi, 2002; Sall, 2009 ; Fall, 2014; Fall, 2020).

In the case of Senegal, not only was there a categorical refusal to reassess the language education policy inherited from France, but there were several attempts to simply replicate the same French language education policy in the Senegalese constitution. After independence, Article 1 of the first constitutional amendment instituted French as “the only official language of Senegal” (Dumont, 1983 ; Sarry, 2002 ; Diallo, 2010). Moreover, Leopold Senghor, the first president under the Republic of Senegal, reinforced this first constitutional amendment by stifling any efforts to promote the Senegalese national languages. For example, he imprisoned national language advocates and political leaders who dared to challenge the prominence of the French language over the national languages. Furthermore, he used the Senegalese constitution as a weapon against his rivals. His frequent constitutional amendments with the intent to maintain and reinforce the status of French as an official language of Senegal were testimonies to Senghor’s loyalty and attachment to the language and culture of the French Republic

Nevertheless, Senghor’s voluntary departure from power in 1980 helped to create new possibilities for language education policies and reforms. Following his departure, six languages were elevated to the status of national languages of Senegal. President Senghor’s successor, Abdou Diouf engaged in vast nationalization campaigns to promote the national languages and set off the linguistic engine for language revitalization. In 2000, Diouf’s successor, Abdoulaye Wade, kept the linguistic engine of policy nationalization campaigns running and subsequently went further to engage in a series of linguistic reforms starting from the elementary level.

This paper first exhumes the past of the legacy of the series of linguistic crises inherited from France’s early language policy and planning in Senegal. It then discusses the early internal resistances to the early colonial language policies and planning in Senegal and analyzes Diouf and Wade’ major constitutional attempts to cut through the “umbilical” linguistic cord between the former colonial France and the Republic of Senegal. It ends by reassessing some of the

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lingering obstacles to a complete linguistic decolonization while providing a series of potential solutions to harness Senegal's rich and diverse linguistic landscape.

1. Legacy of a Linguistic Crisis

1.1. Early Colonial Interest and Language Policies in Senegal

Geographically, Senegal was ideally situated for trade between three major civilizations: Black-African, Arab-Islamic, and Western. European explorers from several nations realized early on that Senegal would be an indispensable port of triangular trade. Colonists and adventurers were drawn to Senegal as early as 1444 and 1445 when the Portuguese first arrived and opened up commercial links between the interior of Senegal and the rest of the African continent (Ngome, 2009). The Portuguese were followed by the Dutch in 1588, the British in 1763, and finally, by the French in 1815 (Crowder, 1962 ; Diallo, 2010 ; Gaucher, 1968).

It must be noted that before becoming sovereign state in 1960, the geographic area that is now known as Senegal consisted of a collection of scattered individual kingdoms. These kingdoms, mostly known throughout history as pre-colonial empires, were given ethnic names such as Baol, Cayor, Jolof, or Walo. The Jolof Empire, ruled by the Wolof ethnic group, is considered by many historians to be the oldest of all the empires in the pre-colonial history of Senegal (Diallo, 2010). Although these pre-colonial kingdoms, for the most part, enjoyed relative peace, they were often at 14 Re-thinking the Literacy Divide in Language Education the mercy of wars and political showdowns staged in an effort to garner more land and prestige. Europe's repeated attempts at conquering Senegal, from the early fifteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century, not only contributed to a disruption of the relative peace among these pre-colonial empires, but also shook the very foundations of their social, economic, cultural, and educational structures (Ngome, 2010). Consequently, these pre-colonial empires became increasingly important as places of resistance and mediation or what McLaughlin calls the "Contact Zone" or "Lieux de Colonization." (McLaughlin, 2008, p. 713). McLaughlin further addresses this in her 2008 article by stating that: Each of the colonial cities has its own unique history. They are, to be sure, often histories of economic exploitation and slavery, but they are

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also histories of cultural métissage where new forms of identity, new cultural practices, and new languages came into being. (McLaughlin, 2008, p. 713).

In her analysis of these “Contact Zones”, McLaughlin takes a rather careful and balanced approach in her descriptions of the early cohabitation between the indigenous people and the European settlers. Historians too frequently use the expression “cultural métissage” to characterize the period of early contact between colonists and colonies during colonial times. This generic term does not accurately address the notion of a culture existing prior to colonial contact. In other words, it does not identify a period where there was no real mixing between the two groups. At the dawn of the colonial period, specifically in the context of Senegal, the “cultural métissage” suggested by McLaughlin and other historians were far from being an obvious reality.

Rather than a “cultural métissage zone”, an atmosphere of mutual hatred, defiance, demonization, disintegration, mistrust, and political calculation marked the early contact between the colonists and the Senegalese indigenous population. For example, by making Senegal the capital of Afrique Occidentale Française, also known as French West Africa, between 1895 and 1950, the French colonists intended to stamp out early resistance using an explicit policy of “cultural métissage” and assimilation. The belief of the French colonial authorities in establishing this targeted education policy was that once the first chiefs and families were assimilated, access to the remaining population would be easier, and the assimilation process would be expedited.

In fact, France’s historical method of colonization, which was known as “direct rule” vastly contributed to the maintenance of a cultural inferiority complex among the colonized. Most significantly, it has led to the cultural and linguistic alienation of the indigenous people of Senegal. The “plan of colonization” that France and its European allies crafted during the Berlin conference had mandated the suppression of culture and indigenous languages. The imposition of a “French Only” policy in all schools across Senegal for more than a century not only exemplifies this, but also acts as testimony that the French colonists were unreceptive to any idea of promoting indigenous languages. During the French colonial period, the local colonial authorities forbade any formal teaching of the Senegalese vernacular languages. The French language was the only medium of instruction in schools and the only language spoken in major government offices across the country. Schoolchildren who “misspoke”, meaning they used their native language in school, were harshly punished and often forced to carry a heavy

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wooden object for the duration of the school day. This coercive policy of making school children speak the French language at all costs continued to be implemented in various schools in Senegal even after the country's independence in 1960. Faidherbe's governorship reinforced that coercive policy with another radical policy of assimilation through which he was charged with further spreading the ways of French civilization to the local people who resided in the interior of Senegal. Faidherbe and his allies were convinced that once the school system was established, the assimilation process would be easy to complete. However, few people in Faidherbe's cabinet knew at that time that the policy of assimilation, implemented without enabling the native Senegalese to develop literacy in their mother tongue, Wolof, would have dramatic consequences on learners' acquisition of L2 French.

1. 2. Internal Responses to France's Colonial Plan for Education

Nearly a century after Descemet's push for Wolof-French bilingual programs for schoolchildren in Saint-Louis and Dard's crusade for literacy education in the mother tongue (Wolof), Cheikh Anta Diop, one of the most distinguished crusaders against the teaching of a foreign language to African children, took up the same cause. During his entire life, he fiercely argued that the teaching of any foreign language was detrimental to African identity and personality. "The use of the foreign languages," Diop writes, "is a serious obstacle in the education of the young Africans; an education in foreign languages is a waste of time because it forces learners to make double effort to assimilate the meaning of words and then, through a second intellectual effort, to capture the reality exposed by the words" (Diop & Egbuna, 1946, p. 38). Diop's bold ideas in rebutting any formal education grounded in any given European languages may have helped stir a strong national sentiment toward using Wolof across the country today, but his dream of seeing an "African Renaissance" built on a stronger development of African languages throughout the schools has never become a reality in Senegal. Nevertheless, the linguistic vernacular theoretical framework, which he laid out years ago, might have survived the test of time, because two decades after his passing, it has resurfaced.

His call for the teaching of national languages in elementary schools in Senegal has been resurrected by UNESCO experts who have major legitimate concerns over stagnant illiteracy

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rates in developing countries, urged many African countries like Senegal to support education in their own national languages. In our recent work, we have demonstrated that the best medium for teaching a child to read is his mother tongue (Fall, 2020). Psychologically, the system of meaningful signs works automatically for expression and understanding. Sociologically, it is a means of identification among members of the community to which he belongs. Educationally, he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar medium. (UNESCO, 1953, p. 11). In response to the UNESCO report and the strong political pressure pioneered by Cheikh Anta Diop, Senegal took the unprecedented step of ratifying a constitutional amendment in 1971.

Although Senegal continues to implement the carbon copy of the language policy inherited from France up to the present day, President, Abdou Diouf attempts to revitalize the national language through a nationalization campaign in which he renames building and streets to cut off the linguistic umbilical cord with France. In the subsequent section, we will assess Diouf's major efforts to reshuffle and harness the linguistic potential of Senegal through national campaigns and constitutional amendments.

2. Abdou Diouf and the Process of Linguistic Decolonization

As part of a small cohort of French-speaking technocratic elites trained in France after independence, Abdou Diouf rose to prominence in the early 1980s when he was appointed as successor of Leopold Sedar Senghor. His arrival to power was the result of an easy democratic transition when Senghor willingly handed him the reins of power on December 31st, 1980. His real proximity and early collaboration with the late Senghor earned him the title of “dauphin” [natural successor] while he was the prime minister in Senghor's government. His soft demeanor, nationalist ideology, fairness and firm character were qualities that Senghor early spotted in him. Because of these qualities Senghor depicted him as “une main de fer dans un gant de velours”[a iron fist in velour glove].

Senghor's characterization of the man was accurate. As he strongly believed that oral traditions and collective memory should be resurrected and revitalized, Diouf introduced an unprecedented policy of nationalization. Streets, roads, public places, schools and institutions, whose previous names had any colonial connotations, were simply renamed (Gellar, 2002, p. 8). Most of the policy of revitalization of the collective memory was concentrated in Dakar and Saint-Louis. For instance in Dakar, the Avenue Roume, which was named after Ernest Roume, a French colonial governor, was changed to Avenue Leopold Sedar Senghor. The Lycée Van Vollenhoven, which was named after Joost Van Vollenhoven, another French colonial governor

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became Lycée Lamine Gueye, a champion, a nationalist the first black lawyer to introduce the Lamine Gueye Law that extended French citizenship to Africans in the colonies. (Diallo 2010, p. 69, Gellar, 2003, p. 13). The University of Dakar also became Cheikh Anta Diop University.

This policy of nationalization was not only limited to Dakar, but it was also extended to the rest of Senegal. According to Diallo (2010), in Saint-Louis, most of the streets named after the French colonial settlers were renamed after Senegalese national figures. For example, Avenue Andre Lebon, named after the former French minister of the colonies became Avenue Ababacar Sy who was a very influential religious figure and leader of the Tidiane Sufi brand. In Thies, École Clemenceau, named after Georges Clemenceau, former French prime minister, became known as École Iba Caty Ba (Diallo, 2010, p. 69).

Beyond this policy nationalization what really set Abdou Diouf apart from other Senegalese leaders was his “sensitive nature to historical traditions” as Gellar beautifully described it (2002, p. 12). Unlike Senghor who understood the past as ill-suited for tasks of nation-rebuilding, Diouf was more open towards the idea of rebuilding the future of Senegal on African oral traditions and value system. This African Renaissance, as the late Cheikh Anta Diop (1946) would characterize the very process, was for Diouf also, intrinsically linked to the development of African national languages. But in order to translate this notion into reality, Diouf was compelled to distance himself from the language policy of his mentor and predecessor, Leopold Sédar Senghor. Very early on, did he accept much of the early critics leveled against Senghor’s language policy and made an unprecedented step further to call for a national forum around the thorny issues of education in Senegal. As a result of that, the *État Généraux de l’Éducation et de la Formation* was made public in 1981 one year after he took office. Gellar (2003) provides a thorough account of the nature, objective and recommendations of EGEF:

The *États Généraux*, a forum of representatives of the government, teachers’ unions, parent associations, and other groups concerned with the future of Senegal’s educational system, criticized Senghor’s favoring of French over the national languages and the adaption of a curriculum based on that of the métropole as mimetism. The forum also criticized the presence of more than a thousand French teachers in the school system after two decades of independence as a form of neo-colonialism. Their recommendations included making universal primary school a reality by 1990, accelerating the use of national languages as a medium of instruction, recognizing the importance of promoting the Arab language in the

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schools, and sharply reducing the number of French teachers in the Senegalese school system (Gellar, 2003, p. 12).

Following EGEF, the Commission Nationale de Reforme de l'Enseignement et de la Formation (CNREF; National Commission of Educational and Training Reform) came to birth in 1984. Although the main objective of CNREF was to provide operational effects to the conclusions reached at the EGEF, we would further argue that the EGEF only served as a “cahier de doléances” for the Senegalese educational system as a whole. In other words, it was a simple list containing a litany of thorny issues related to the Senegalese education system. Nevertheless, both of these documents are complementary pieces that speak volume of Senghor’s unsuccessful language policy. The academic unrest between 1980 and 1981 was a major rallying point for government departments, teachers’ unions, academic institutions, parents, religious authorities, and private business to come together in a widely publicized national forum over education in Senegal (Ndoye, 2006, Sarry, 2002, p. 17; Diallo 2010, p. 69). In the national forum initiated by Diouf, the root causes of the crisis in the Senegalese educational system were discussed. It was unanimously agreed among the participants that a speedy process of transcription of the national languages and their introduction in schools in Senegal have become an urgent necessity. In that respect, CNREF made strong and unprecedented recommendations for a three-year pre-schooling that uses the mother tongue as a medium of instruction (Sarry, 2001, p. 17).

Unfortunately, despite all concerted efforts to implement CNREF’s recommendations, Diouf’s government failed to deliver them on the ground due to the unpreparedness of the teachers to use national languages, parents’ reluctance, untrained staffs and scarcity of teaching materials in the national languages. However, when Diouf left office one single recommendation was implemented. Moreover, this recommendation was related to the radical reduction of the number of metropolitan French teachers across Senegal (Gellar, 2003, p. 12). The EGEF and CNREF recommendations were later reviewed and refined by Wade’s government in 2001 leading to the creation of the National Agency for the Young Children’s Hut. Affiliated with Ministry of National Education, this agency is responsible for overseeing issues pertaining to pre-schooling and early literacy education (Diallo 2010, p. 116).

It is worth pointing out that among all the former Heads of the State in Senegal, Abdoulaye Wade was the most aggressive in his language policy and planning mostly built around the idea of harnessing the potential of the Senegalese linguistic landscape. In the

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subsequent section, we will assess Wade's major efforts to place the Senegalese linguistic repertoire at the heart of his policy and planning education between 2002 and 2012.

3. Abdoulaye Wade and the Process of Linguistic Decolonization

After a landslide victory over the incumbent Abdou Diouf in 2000, Abdoulaye Wade became the third president of the Republic of Senegal. His long political career in the opposition party (30 years) made him one of the most charismatic political leaders in the history of Senegalese politics. Wade was among the early African elites who were at the forefront of the struggle for African independence and self-determination. He was a national language activist, and one of the first black students to form the *Fédération des Etudiants d'Afrique Noire en France* (FEANF; Federation of Black Students in France).

His early involvement and leadership within the FEANF have greatly contributed to the shaping of his political vision and informed most of the language policy decisions he took while in office. For example, he brought meaningful and radical changes in the constitution by engaging his government on a vast project of language codification. His 2001 constitutional amendment marked a significant milestone by offering the prospect of other local languages becoming codified for the first time : "The official language of the Republic of Senegal is French. The national languages of Senegal are: Diola, Mandinka, Pulaar, Serère, soninké, Wolof, and any national language that will be codified" (Sarry, 2002, p. 16).

According to Diallo (2010)'s interviews with Bathily (2007), the number of codified national languages under Wade rose from six to 17 by the year 2007. Most significantly, the codification of these national languages was sustained by major efforts from the Directorate for Literacy and Basic Education (DEAB). For example, in 2001, DEAB successfully targeted 1,501,880, many of whom were women (76%) in rural areas across Senegal (Sarry, 2002; Bathily, 2007; Gueye, 2007; Diallo, 2010). Equally significant were Wade's efforts to reform the educational system by implementing the 1984-*ommission Nationale pour la Réforme de l'Enseignement et de la Formation* (CNREF)'s early recommendation to introduce *l'École Nouvelle* (The New School). The plan suggested by the New School, as outlined in CNREF's documentation, was to introduce Senegalese local languages in early preschool education.

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Table 1. Language use in the “Cycle Fondamental” in the Ecole Nouvelle.

Levels	Dominant language of the area	National link language	Foreign languages
Preschooling	The only medium of instruction		
6 to 9 years	The only medium of instruction (focus on speaking, writing and reading skills)		
9 to 12 years	The only medium of instruction (focus on reading skills)	School subject	
12 to 14 years		Medium of instruction (focus on writing skills)	School subjects
14 to 16 years		Medium of instruction	School subjects

Source. Sarry (2018, pp. 12-13)

The tertiary education cycle may last over a seven-year period. It was subjected to major structural reforms with the recent application of the North American Bachelor- Master and Doctoral degrees) recently adopted by many European tertiary institutions including France (Sarry, 2002; Diallo, 2010).

Preschool education, which come to be known as *Cycle fondamental* in Senegal, has received particular attention in the past decades as there has been an increasing number of studies on the cognitive development associated with children’s early enrolment in preschool (Cummins, 1979). To raise awareness of the crucial importance of early literacy, UNESCO has launched vast campaigns to stress the importance of preschool for young children in many developing nations across the world. In that particular respect, UNESCO defines preschool as being for children from birth to six years of age. It must be noted, however, that Senegal is still not complying with UNESCO’s guideline, as children in Senegal may start preschool between three and five years of age. Nevertheless, preschool education, a critical stage which has completely neglected for 30 years by the previous governments, became Wade’s central focus. His government has taken credit for putting preschool education in the spotlight again, since 2001.

According to the *Direction de la Planification et de la Réforme de l’Éducation (DPRE;* Directorate for the Forecast and Reform of the Education System), before Wade took power there were only 356 *Écoles Maternelles* (Preschools) with only 1.82% of the population enrolling nationally. During his early years of presidency, overall enrolment rates in preschools

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skyrocketed to reach nearly 44% (*Direction de la Prevision et des Statistiques*, 2009.p.29). Additionally, MEN's annual report of 2001 revealed a dramatic increase in children's enrolment rate from 3% in 1998 to 25% in 2008, with a total population of 425, 000 children between the ages of three and five (DPS, p. 29).

This high percentage was received as a landmark achievement for many national and international observers of Wade's language policy and planning. With the implementation of *La Case des Touts Petits* (National Agency for the Young Children's Hut), many Senegalese children were given the opportunity to be exposed to toys and educational objects that help develop their critical thinking and enhance their logical skills. Boubacar Fall (2007) is accurate in his assessment according to which the primary goal of the Huts for Young Children was to give African children access to African toys not used in traditional settings so they learn how to "mount", "dismount", "build", "colour", and reconstruct objects acquire computer skills (Fall, 2007).

However, I argue that one of the most important objectives for the creation of this basic learning space for children was, as outlined in the MEN's 2011 annual report to prepare children for the next level of their education and reduce children's academic failure and early school dropouts (MEN Annual Report, 2011, p. 28). Moreover, children's academic failure results from the lack of linguistic foundation in their mother tongue. In that respect, during Wade's presidency, there were a wide range of speculations on the link between children's academic failure and the use of French as Means Of Instruction (MOI) for children's early education. To bring empirical evidence to bear on these speculations, Wade's government, under the direction of DALN [Directorate for the Promotion of National Languages], conducted a thorough study backed by 1,930 academic publications, according to the official figure provided by Guèye (2007), across Senegal. The government also sent out experts to neighboring Mali, Guinea and Niger, countries that have successfully implemented an early mother tongue literacy education. Motivated by the success of these countries in implementing an early mother tongue literacy education experiments, Wade's government began a gradual introduction of the national languages in 2002(Diallo, 2005; Diallo, 2010).

Beyond the external motivation from these neighboring countries, what really led the government authorities to push for the introduction of national languages in schools in Senegal

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was Ahmadou Makhtar M'Bow's (1953) groundbreaking study conducted in the region of Louga. In the study, conducted from May 11th to June 20th in 1953 in Darou Mousti (a rural community in Louga), M'Bow addressed the crucial importance of early literacy in the mother tongue for children in rural areas across Senegal. This "functional literacy", as he initially called it, would help provide opportunities for the population in the rural areas to address their local needs in the fields of agriculture, health, and the environment (M'Bow, 1953a, 1953b, as cited in Diallo, 2010).

For several decades, M'Bow's study was ignored, as the colonial political atmosphere was not conducive to acknowledge any literacy education in the mother tongue, Wolof, to the detriment of French language. Most significantly, few Senegalese political leaders like Cheikh Anta Diop supported this study as an important breakthrough for the implementation of mother tongue literacy education in Senegal. M'Bow's study would not resurface in the educational system until the independence of Senegal in the early 1960s following a series of conferences and talks on literacy education in the African continent. It then served as a blueprint for UNESCO to make strong recommendations in 1953 for the use of mother tongue in early education. M'Bow might have been the first Senegalese to advocate literacy in the mother tongue. In that regard, his work highly encouraged research and development programs to promote literacy in the national languages and their introduction in school. Nevertheless, M'Bow's study failed to tackle the whole mother tongue issue at its roots in that his study provided only functional literacy to rural children to survive in a French dominated zone. I argue that the mother tongue issue is bigger than what M'Bow imagined at that time. Perhaps what might have been unclear to M'Bow is the full implications of the national languages since the mother tongue issue in Senegal requires a complete reshuffling of the Senegalese educational system at its core, rather than addressing the issue on its surface level. That is why, nearly 50 years after M'Bow's study, Senegal, under Wade, finally woke up to the reality of introducing the national languages at the primary level. In the process, what has come to be known as *Classes Experimentales* (CEs; Experimental Classes) came to be. It began with a trial phase with 170 classes targeted, although Sarry (2002) provides a different figure of 155 classes, where children were introduced to their national languages.

Due to the unequal linguistic distribution in the country, Wolof had previously been used as the medium of instruction in Diourbel, Louga, and Dakar, where there is a high concentration of the Wolof population. The rest of the rural areas were using other minority

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languages such as Pulaar, Serère, and Mandinka. This stark linguistic disproportionality frustrated many non-Wolof speakers who started to lose faith in the *Classes Expérimentales* in the rural areas where Wolof may not be a dominant language (i.e., Fatick, Mambey, and Fouta). For these minority groups, having mostly Wolof instructors and using Wolof in these *Classes Expérimentales* became a matter of linguistic disenfranchisement. Therefore, parents had a deep fear that their children might lose their heritage language. Parents started sending their children to private schools where French is used as the only medium of instruction. Subsequently, enrolment rates in the following years in these *Classes Expérimentales* dropped significantly and have remained very low ever since, in comparison to most private schools across Senegal. Although a range of issues may explain the failure of these *Classes Expérimentales*, one of the most significant ones, in my opinion, was the lack of coordination on the part of the authorities that was needed to establish a clear and standardized curriculum plan as they introduced CE's. For example, there was no clear-cut vision or plan to inform parents about the real objective of introducing the national languages to these classes. Moreover, there was an acute dearth of educational and logistic equipment, and teaching materials along with highly untrained staff and under-qualified teachers.

Although Wade experienced a range of political standoffs, systematic corruption, and an economic crisis during his presidency, he was one of the few post-independence African leaders who made very significant steps toward rehabilitating the national languages in Senegal. The creation of the National Agency for the Young Children's Hut (*Case des Touts Petits*) along with *Classes Expérimentales* in national languages has been a landmark achievement for the promotion of literacy education in the mother tongue. For the first time in the history of Senegal, children were given the chance to experience pre-school education, but most importantly to develop their first pre-literacy in their mother tongue. However, despite these major changes, Senegal still has a long way to go in terms of implementing a literacy education program that gives children the opportunity to develop literacy in their mother tongue (Wolof). This would mean critically challenging and reassessing the colonial education legacy because the current Senegalese educational system still reflects the French system of education.

Surprisingly, nearly sixty years since the end of French colonialism in Senegal, the plan of colonization continues to affect current political decision-making, especially with regard to

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socio-economic stratification and language policy. Most significantly, Senegal has maintained a carbon copy of the French colonial education policy and planning. Several primary schools in Senegal are experiencing a host of issues including high-school dropout rates and systemic academic failure for early childhood education. Although this high dropout could be attributed to a range of factors (i.e., socio-economic status, poverty), the most important one is the continuation of the colonial educational policy and planning that no longer responds to the educational demands of the Senegalese population.

Conclusion

The wind of linguistic decolonization that swept through several African states in the early 1960s failed to bring radical language changes. The process of eradication of the cultural and linguistic vestiges of colonialism has been very difficult to achieve. Given the deep ties of the African leaders to the language and culture of their formal colonial authorities, many African leaders and politicians were led to believe that an abrupt separation from the *Métropole* would cause major socio-economic setbacks. In that respect, with the exception of some countries in North and West Africa, a considerable number of African states opted for the maintenance of the French language, and continue the same colonial language policy and planning.

Among those African nations, Senegal, however, offers the gloomiest picture given that French is the only language that is used as a medium of instruction in school even though the overwhelming majority of the Senegalese people speak a national language. This strong hold of the French language in Senegal, though it can be attributed to the successful language policies implemented by the French colonial authorities, is also the direct result of an early failure on the part of the political leadership (i.e.; *Leopold Sedar Senghor and Macky Sall*) to acknowledge the crucial importance of the national languages.

As the first Senegalese leader, Senghor's failure to raise the Senegalese national languages to the status in the constitution of Senegal has some lingering effects with immensurable consequences on current language policy and planning in the country. Yet, the current, Senegalese President, Macky Sall seems not to give priority to the language policy and planning. For instance, compared to most Francophone African nations such as Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali and Mauritania, Senegal is lagging behind when it comes to putting in place a

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rigorous language policy and planning that are in conjunction with their educational environment and cultural heritage.

Today, Senegal is left with no concrete language policy, and planning that would tackle the issue of illiteracy in the national languages and reduce the high rate of student dropouts or low performance in French. Most significantly, the national languages are still not used as a medium of instruction in schools across Senegal. We have demonstrated in many of our scientific publication on the issue (*please refer to Fall 2020, Routledge*), the issue of illiteracy in the national language and the issue of students' low academic performance in French are NOT separate issues; they are the two faces of the same coin. In that regard, addressing the issue of a low academic performance in Senegal necessarily entails tackling the issue of illiteracy in the national languages (mother tongues) because the absence of literacy in the mother tongue invariably hinders learning in any foreign language (Fall 2020).

In the end, one of the main recommendations this paper offers is to rethink the whole project of the language policy and planning inherited from France and ensure that the linguistic, socio-cultural and psycho-linguistic universe of Senegal is taken into account in any major language policy and planning taken in the country from now on. That means a rigorous language policy and planning that departs from the previous French colonial policies and planning towards a clear language vision to harness the Senegalese language potential. Thus, the task of that substantial language policy reform must be put in the very hands of linguists who are experts in the field. The stakes for language policy and planning are too high to be left with politicians who only discourse around language policy reforms in short term according to their own political agenda and seasons. *In fine*, in order to avoid more educational hemorrhages and cyclic crises in the Senegalese system of education, there is an urgent need of a radical reform to break away from the carbon copy of the colonial French system of education in place within the Senegalese school system from elementary to universities.

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