



# Multi-country study on multilingualism and bi/plurilingualism in schools

in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger

December 2021

## **Study conducted by QUALE for UNICEF.**

The UNICEF West and Central Africa Regional Office has published this study to help improve understanding of bi/plurilingual education in the central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger). The analysis and recommendations in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of UNICEF. As well as making the study available to its partners, UNICEF is assessing how to use the findings to strengthen its programmes supporting governments and civil society partners to improve the situation for children.

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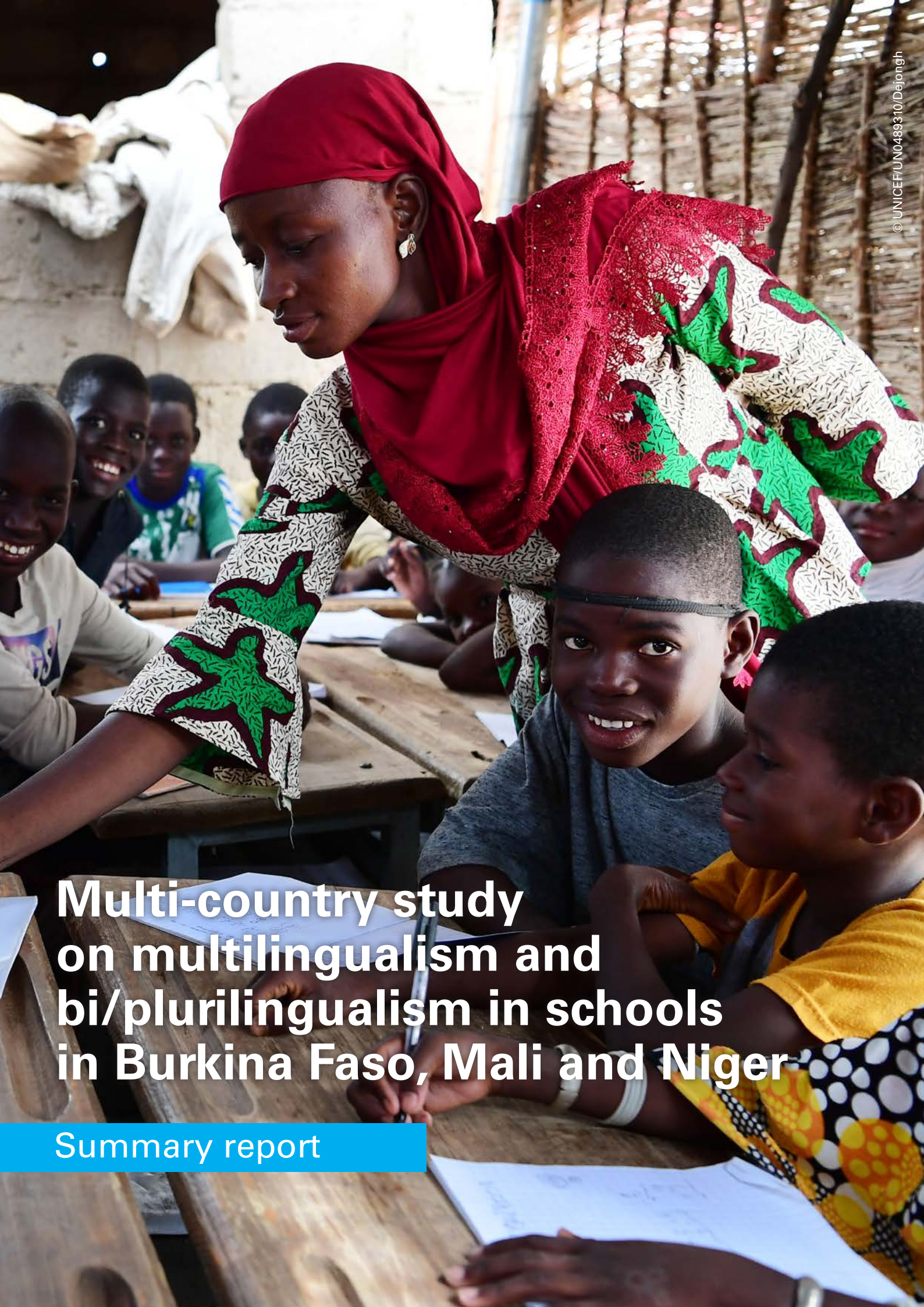
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# Multi-country study on multilingualism and bi/plurilingualism in schools in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger

Summary report

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# Objectives

Sub-Saharan countries have been working for many years to introduce local languages into their education systems, alongside the official languages inherited from their colonial history. This approach aims not only to adapt education and training to people's living environments, but also to improve the quality of education.

Critical analyses<sup>1</sup> of the 'traditional' monolingual system have highlighted that children who begin their schooling in a second language<sup>2</sup> without having acquired the basics in their first language<sup>3</sup> face significant learning difficulties in all subjects.

By contrast, studies have shown that bilingual teaching (in the students' first and second languages) presents many cognitive, identity and economic advantages for students, their families and their countries.<sup>4</sup>

In some cases, this 'bi/plurilingual' approach even seems to improve access to education, as the school is no longer perceived as a foreign entity but as an institution that values local cultures and customs.

Nevertheless, the following factors make it difficult to draw unambiguous conclusions that could more clearly guide public policy:

- A shortage of longitudinal and comparative studies of achievement in bilingual schools (local language/French) and in mainstream monolingual French schools.
- Limited use of national or regional evaluations or inability to translate their results into remedial action.
- Field reports on bilingual pilot projects that include too much narrative and too little analysis.
- Lack of use of these reports to generate instant changes in the classroom.

There is scientific consensus on the benefits of taking learners' first languages into account at school. However, although the countries of French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa have conducted bi/plurilingual pilot projects for decades, this type of teaching has rarely been rolled out more widely.

This is true in the three countries covered by this study: Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

All three countries are in the Sahelian belt, have French as their official language, have each been equipped for instruction in about 10 local languages, and **began to introduce local languages into their education systems in the 1960s and 1970s.**

**However, five to six decades later, the same thing can be observed in each country: bilingual education has not been scaled up. In many ways, it seems that this educational approach is still treated as a pilot.**

It is true that multilingualism in society is recognized in legal texts and that bi/plurilingualism in schools is also enshrined in laws and in educational policy and programming documents. But in the classroom, still only a minority of students are receiving bilingual education.

What are the reasons for this gap? What is the current status of bi/plurilingual initiatives in these three countries?

To answer these questions, national studies were conducted in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger in 2019 and 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> Dumbia, Amadou T., 'L'enseignement du bambara selon la pédagogie convergente au Mali :Théorie et pratiques', *Nordic Journal of African Studies* vol. 9. no. 3, 2000, pp. 98–107.  
Cummins, Jim, 'Bilingual Children's Mother Tongue: Why is it important for education?', *SPROGFORUM* no. 19, 2001, pp. 15–20.  
Noyau, Colette, 'Linguistique acquisitionnelle et intervention sur les apprentissages : appropriation de la langue seconde et évaluation des connaissances à l'école de base en situation diglossique', OAI, 2006.  
Maurer, Bruno, 'LASCOLAF et ELAN-Afrique : d'une enquête sur les langues de scolarisation en Afrique francophone à des plans d'action nationaux', *Le français à l'université*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> French is the second language (L2) in the three countries covered by the study.

<sup>3</sup> The first language is a local language, which may be the mother tongue or the language of the community.

<sup>4</sup> Mignot, Christelle, 'J'apprends si je comprends : pour une meilleure prise en compte des langues premières des enfants à l'école primaire. Projet de documentaire long métrage et de kit audiovisuel à l'attention des enseignants de classes bi-plurilingues', *Édition des Archives Contemporaines (in press)*.

The objectives of these studies were to:

- Evaluate the various existing bi/plurilingual education initiatives in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, analysing the effectiveness of these initiatives and the learning outcomes for children (compared to teaching and learning in monolingual French language schools).
- Evaluate the various existing bi/plurilingual education initiatives in the three countries in terms of strengths, weaknesses, lessons learned and potential for scaling up.
- Based on lessons learned, propose strategies and tools to enable the roll-out of bi/plurilingual (first language/French) teaching in each of these countries.



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This summary presents the main findings from the country reports for Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. In addition, the annex contains an explanation of certain sociolinguistic and educational concepts related to bilingualism in schools, planning for implementation of bilingualism, and training for educators in these areas.



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# Methodology

There were two complementary phases to this study.

- The first phase consisted of a literature review. This provided an overview of bi/plurilingual education in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from 2010 to 2020, and also identified certain knowledge gaps in relation to bilingualism in schools.
- The second phase, which used a qualitative approach, was conducted between September and November 2020. This involved gathering the opinions and recommendations of 241 different educators on the use of local languages<sup>5</sup> in the education systems of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

## Phase 1: Literature review

The literature review was designed to provide an overview of bilingual education initiatives in each of the three countries, and focused on the decade 2010–2020.

Conducted between December 2019 and February 2020, the literature review resulted in:

- a preliminary report for each of the three countries, including a complete bibliography of the documents consulted
- summary tables containing the information found in the documents
- an inventory of missing information for each of the three countries, which was used to determine the research objectives for the field study.

## Phase 2: Field study

The field study was conducted between September and November 2020 and used a qualitative approach. Representatives of actors and partners were asked for their opinions and assessments of the use of local languages in the education system. These opinions from the field were then compared with the research data in this area.

The country reports and the summary provide a set of recommendations to inform ministries of education and their technical and financial partners about efforts that could be introduced or strengthened.

## Challenges encountered and limitations of the study

The literature review was carried out under fairly good conditions. However, the field data were collected in the specific global context caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. In addition to the mental health impacts of the pandemic, the field research was constrained by the temporary or prolonged closure of schools, the lockdown of populations, the introduction of teleworking in public administration, and bans or restrictions on travel between cities.

In addition, reservations about the official position, lack of knowledge of the subject, or the absence of reliable data seem to have led to resistance or withdrawal by some actors, who did not answer the questions asked.

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<sup>5</sup> 111 in Niger, 65 in Burkina Faso and 65 in Mali.



# Findings

## 1. Bi/plurilingualism in schools in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger: legal, policy and pedagogical frameworks

### 1.1 Languages of instruction in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger

Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, which are all in the Sahelian belt, have French as their official language and as the main language of teaching in their education systems.

In these three countries, bi/plurilingual education is seen as a vehicle for quality education, improving student learning outcomes, and as a way of adapting teaching to children's living environments. It is also guided and motivated by a widely shared desire to promote national cultures and languages.

While the number of state-recognized local languages varies greatly from one country to another,<sup>6</sup> 10 languages are resourced in Burkina Faso, 11 in Mali and eight in Niger.

In terms of local languages that have been introduced as a medium of instruction in primary schools, there are 10 in Burkina Faso, 11 in Mali and five in Niger.

**Table 1: Number of languages and their status**

	Burkina Faso	Mali	Niger
Number of languages recorded	60	Approx. 30	Approx. 25
Recognized local languages	60	13	11
Resourced local languages	10	11	8
Local languages used as medium of instruction in schools	10	11	5

### 1.2. Laws and official guidelines to support bi/plurilingualism in schools

The three countries studied have legal, policy and institutional frameworks that are conducive to the development of bi/plurilingual education. For example, in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger there are legal texts and official guidance that confirm the commitment of the countries to integrate learners' first languages better into primary school classrooms.

The main laws and provisions adopted by each of these countries in relation to bi/plurilingualism in schools are listed in Table 2.

<sup>6</sup> Providing educational resources for teaching a language makes the language suitable to use in the design of teaching materials. Equipping a language with teaching materials/educational resources involves formalizing the rules for syntax, grammar and orthography.



**Table 2: Legal, policy and institutional framework for bi/plurilingualism in schools in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger**

	Burkina Faso	Mali	Niger
<b>Provisions in the Constitution</b>	Art. 35 of the 1997 Constitution	Art. 25 of the 1992 Constitution	Art. 5 of the 2010 Constitution
<b>Institutions responsible for multilingualism</b>	Direction du Continuum d'Éducation Multilingue [Directorate for the Multilingual Education Continuum] within the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and Promotion of National Languages	Direction Nationale de l'Enseignement Fondamental [National Directorate of Fundamental Education] of the Ministry of National Education  Malian Academy of Languages	Direction des Curricula et de la Promotion des Langues Nationales [Directorate for Curricula and the Promotion of National Languages] within the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages
<b>Provisions in law governing multilingualism and bi/plurilingualism in the educational system</b>	Law No. 013-2007/AN of 30 July 2007 on education policy (Art. 10)  Law No. 033-2019/AN of 23 May 2019, laying down procedures for promoting and formalizing the local languages of Burkina Faso	Law of 1996, defining the local languages  Law No. 99-046 of 26 December 1999 on education policy (Art. 10)	Law on educational system policy in Niger (LOSEN) of 1998 (Art. 10, 19 and 21)  Law No. 2019-80 of 31 December 2019, laying down procedures for promoting and developing local languages
<b>Legislative enactment (decrees and decisions)</b>	Decision No. 14/MEBA/SG/ENEP of 10 March 2004 on including modules on transcription and teaching in vocational training schools.  Decree No. 2008-681 of 3 November 2008 adopting the policy framework for the curriculum	Decree No. 92-073 P CTSP of 27 February 1992 establishing the framework for promoting and formalizing local languages	Decision adopting the document on policy framework for the curriculum (2006 and 2012)
<b>Provisions in planning of the educational system</b>	Programme de Développement Stratégique du Secteur de l'Éducation [Strategic Development Programme for Basic Education 2012–2021] (Programme 2, Strategic Focus 1)  Programme sectoriel de l'éducation et de la formation [Education and Training Sector Programme – PSEF] 2012–2021 (Subprogramme 3, Objective 1)	Ten-Year Education Development Programme (PRODEC 1) 1998–2010  Ten-Year Education and Skills Development Programme (PRODEC 2) 2019–2028  Communication on education policy (2010–2012)  Document on local language policy (2015)	Plan Sectoriel de l'Éducation et de la Formation [Sectoral Plan for Education and Training] 2014–2024  Plan de Transition du Secteur de l'Éducation et de la Formation [Sectoral Transition Plan for Education and Training] 2020–2022  Communication on education policy (2013–2020) (Measure 15)
<b>Strengths of the institutional framework</b>	Multilingualism is enshrined in the Constitution  Bilingual education is enshrined in laws on education policy and in programme and policy documents  There is a directorate dedicated to bilingual education within the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages	The Constitution recognizes the local languages.  The roll-out of bi/plurilingualism in schools has been a priority for the Government of Mali since 2005	Multilingualism is enshrined in the Constitution  Bilingual education is enshrined in laws on education policy and in programme and policy documents  There is a directorate dedicated to bilingual education within the Ministry of Education

Notably:

- The three countries have regulations that codify the choice of plurilingualism in schools and mention it in the strategic plans of their ministries, with some degree of ambition to expand or roll it out.
- The ministry directorates take responsibility for plurilingualism as part of their remit to develop curricula and organize training.

### 1.3. Reforms to support bi/plurilingualism in schools

In Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, two types of reforms have been undertaken in parallel:

- Curriculum reform in all subjects, with adoption of the [integrative approach](#) in Burkina Faso, the [competency-based approach](#) in Mali and the [scenario-based approach](#) in Niger.
- Bilingual reform, which consists of integrating local languages into the education system, regardless of the curricular approach adopted.<sup>7</sup>

In relation to bilingual reform, [Mali and Niger have adopted a national curriculum geared towards bilingualism](#). Mali launched its curricular reform in 2005 to introduce the new curriculum for basic education. In Niger the reform was initiated in 2012, in a small sample (500 schools) at first and then expanded to about 5,000 schools.

However, as will be explained in Table 3, the roll-out projects initiated 15 years ago in Mali and 10 years ago in Niger are still far from covering all public schools in the countries. Because of the lack of monitoring of bilingual schools, and of training and tools for teachers, bilingual schools tend to gradually revert to monolingual schools. The situation is therefore paradoxical: despite the widely held belief that bilingual education is good for both learning (including French) and the promotion of local languages and cultures, and despite the official commitments of the states to support bi/plurilingualism in schools, [reservations are starting to emerge about this approach to education because it is not gaining access to the operational measures necessary to achieve the quality that it inherently brings](#).

[In Burkina Faso, by contrast, the national curriculum for basic education is still monolingual, in French](#). The bilingual sector, which currently covers only 1.6 per cent of primary schools, is based on [two curricula](#) resulting from non-governmental organization (NGO) initiatives<sup>8</sup> and taken on board by the state in 2007.

### 1.4. Main differences between bilingual curricula in the three countries

The bilingualism models in these three countries are not explicitly defined in the regulations or programmes.

[However, it appears from discussions with teachers and principals of bilingual schools that the bilingualism at school implemented in the three countries studied is more of a transitional model, even though some educational leaders speak of additive bilingualism](#).<sup>9</sup>

For example, in all the bilingual schools in this study, the L1<sup>10</sup> is introduced at the beginning of the primary school cycle, but it is gradually supplanted by the L2, which thus becomes the sole medium of instruction from Year 3 or 4 onwards.

However, numerous studies have shown that “language education models which remove the first language as a primary medium of instruction before year/grade five will facilitate little success for the majority of learners” and, conversely, “language education models which retain the first language as a primary medium of instruction for six years can succeed under very well-resourced conditions in African settings. Eight years of mother-tongue education may be enough under less well-resourced conditions which are the reality in many African schools.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Bilingualism can be introduced into both objective-based and competency-based programmes.

<sup>8</sup> Œuvre Suisse d'Entraide Ouvrière (OSEO)/Solidar Suisse and Tin Tua.

<sup>9</sup> These models are described in the conceptual framework in the annex.

<sup>10</sup> L1 here refers to the first language (local language); L2 refers to French.

## 1.5. Difficulties in applying curricula in the classroom

To be operational, the pedagogical framework for bilingualism must be made explicit through appropriate teacher training content and the production of associated teaching and learning materials.

However, the study conducted in the three countries showed that **training for teachers and supervisory staff** responsible for implementing bilingual education is inappropriate, insufficient or even non-existent in some of the regions involved in the pilot projects. This gap applies to both pre- and in-service training for those involved in bi/plurilingualism in schools.

According to the training content and modules that have been reported to us or that we have consulted, there are certain limitations to the training topics covered, which need to be remedied:

- Insufficient training in teaching the L1.
- An absence of thinking about the transfer from L1 into French.<sup>12</sup>
- A lack of tools and techniques to enable teachers to implement bi/plurilingual teaching.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, there is a recurring lack of teaching and learning materials in bilingual classrooms in all three countries. In some cases, these materials do exist but there is insufficient production and dissemination. In other cases (for some languages or advanced grade levels), these resources do not exist.

Table 3 summarizes the main characteristics of the pedagogical framework for bilingualism in schools in each of the three countries, along with its strengths and weaknesses.

<sup>11</sup> Ouane, Adama and Christine Glanz, eds., *Optimising Learning, Education and Publishing in Africa: The language factor*, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning and Association for the Development of Education in Africa, Hamburg and Tunis, 2011, pp. 165–191.

<sup>12</sup> See annex for an explanation of the concept of transfer.

<sup>13</sup> In this study, we found that teacher training was often theoretical and detached from the reality of bilingual classrooms.



**Table 3: Pedagogical framework for bi/plurilingualism in schools in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger**

	Burkina Faso	Mali	Niger
<b>Teaching approach mainstreaming bilingual education at the national level</b>	Integrative teaching approach, combining competency-based approach and objective-based approach.	Competency-based approach	Scenario-based approach (variant of competency-based approach)
<b>Bilingual curriculum developed at the national level</b>	The current curricular reform attempts to reconcile several bilingual approaches.	The bilingual curriculum for basic education, inspired by convergent teaching, is based on bilingualism.	The national curriculum incorporates the bilingual component.
<b>Bilingual component in pre- and in-service training</b>	Since 2004, bilingual education has been addressed by the Ecoles nationales des enseignants du primaire (National School for Primary Teachers – ENEP), but this only covers the transcription of local languages, not didactics (teaching). In-service training is considered insufficient and irregular.	No reflection of bi/plurilingualism in schools in pre-service teacher training. Plans to integrate bi/plurilingual teaching at teacher training colleges and at the Ecole Normale Supérieure [Higher Institute for Teacher Training] have not been carried out. In-service training is considered insufficient, irregular and inappropriate (too theoretical).	Training in bilingual teaching at the three pilot teacher training colleges is considered inappropriate and non-qualitative by both teachers and trainers. The plan to integrate bi/plurilingual teaching at the Ecole Normale Supérieure has not been carried out.
<b>Production and availability of teaching materials</b>	Numerous resources have been developed by technical and financial partners involved in bilingual education – Solidar Suisse, Tin Tua and National Schools and Languages in Africa (ELAN) / International Organization of la Francophonie (OIF). However, there are not enough teaching materials for all classes. Moreover, they are not available in all the local languages of the country.	Teaching materials are scarce, except in the first and second years of primary school, which are supported by the Selective Integrated Reading Activity (SIRA) initiative (in local languages).	There are teaching materials in five local languages, in French and in standard Arabic for the first stage of preschool, the first four years of primary school and non-formal education for adolescents aged 9–14. There is full availability of these materials for the first and second years of primary school. There is partial availability for the third and fourth years of primary school. However, these materials have not been evaluated. A study should be undertaken to analyse the quality of these resources.
<b>Teacher supervision</b>	Supervision provided by technical and financial partners (Solidar Suisse, Tin Tua, ELAN/OIF, Enfants du Monde). Reduction in supervision when pilot projects are transferred to the state.	Teacher supervision is mainly carried out by the principal and more rarely by teaching advisers.	National supervision provided by the Directorate for Curricula and the Promotion of National Languages at the start of the bilingual pilot project, supported by inspectors, followed by a reduction in this supervision when the project was expanded. Supervision is uneven across regions, and sometimes carried out by school principals.
<b>Strengths of the pedagogical framework</b>	The Solidar Suisse and Tin Tua curricula (transferred to the state) incorporate the bi/plurilingual approach. The drive to expand bilingualism in schools is supported by four initiatives (Solidar Suisse, Tin Tua, ELAN and Enfants du Monde).	Bilingualism incorporated in the curriculum for basic education. Implementation of the curriculum supported by two initiatives (SIRA and ELAN).	The ‘Cadre d’orientation du curriculum’ [curriculum policy framework] is the ultimate reference for multilingual reform in Niger, from primary to secondary school. Implementation of the curriculum supported by the ELAN initiative.
<b>Weaknesses of the pedagogical framework</b>	No national design for a bilingual curriculum, as there are two co-existing approaches by international initiatives. Different approaches to bilingualism can be an asset if they are implemented in limited pilot projects. However, when developing a language policy and a corresponding bilingual teaching approach at the national level, there needs to be a certain level of harmonization in methodology.	The (bilingual) curriculum is not yet fully operational (not implemented at teacher training institutes), nor is it finalized for the fifth and sixth years of primary school. In the field, there are a variety of teaching approaches (in particular SIRA and ELAN) and the differences between them can be hard for teachers to understand.	The curriculum policy document (DCOC) is not accompanied by implementing legislation, which poses a problem at the operational level. The local language and French-language programmes are identical: the contents are therefore repeated and there is no transfer from L1 to L2.

## 1.6. Analysis of pedagogical framework in the three countries

In terms of pedagogical framework, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger share a number of common features:

- All three countries offer bilingual education by combining French with recognized local languages in which materials/resources are available and in use (to varying degrees).
- Most bilingual models in these countries could be considered transitional (early or late exit). The most recent scheme, ELAN, which is being piloted in all three countries, could be considered a 'developmental model', in which both languages are carried through at least the first three or four years of primary school.
- All the initiatives implemented in these countries have developed a number of pedagogical tools and resources (which in many cases need to be added to).
- All three countries have received methodological and logistical support from international partners who have helped to implement bilingual initiatives in schools.

The three countries also share certain challenges in teaching, the main ones identified during the field study being:

- Lack of clarity about the curricula.
- Limited scientific validation of the teaching tools created.<sup>14</sup>
- Lack of training, toolkits and supervision for teachers in bilingual schools.
- Lack of training, toolkits and supervision for teacher trainers and supervisors.
- Lack of bi/plurilingual resources and problems with supply of these resources.

These challenges lead to:

- Lack of motivation among teachers.
- Lack of confidence in the science or methodology among educators, who do not know how bi/plurilingual teaching works in practical terms.
- Loss of support from local government authorities.
- Rejection of bilingual schools by parents, who due to all these operational problems see them as 'cut-price schools'.

## 2. Status of current bi/plurilingual projects in the three countries

### 2.1. Number of bilingual schools in the three countries

As shown in Table 4, local languages started to be introduced into the education system in all three countries in the 1970s. Nevertheless, bilingual education has still not been widely rolled out in any of these countries.

According to the data collected in this study, there are about **240 bilingual schools in Burkina Faso, 6,000 in Mali and more than 5,000 in Niger.**

*However*, during the field studies, it became apparent that many schools listed as 'bilingual schools' were in fact monolingual – they were only using French. Due to a lack of training, tools or supervision, many teachers of bilingual classes tend to conduct their classes as they had always done, in French only.

As a result, the number of schools that truly operate bi/plurilingually is lower than the 'official' statistics (presented in Table 4).

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<sup>14</sup>There should be greater involvement of linguistic experts and educational specialists who are experts in bi/plurilingual teaching.

**Table 4: Languages of instruction in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger**

	Burkina Faso	Mali	Niger
Date local languages introduced in schools (gap from 1984 to 1993)	1979	1979	1973
Number of schools reported as bilingual (primary)	240 bilingual schools (2019)	Approximately 6,000 bilingual schools (estimate)	Approximately 5,000 bilingual schools (2019)
% of total primary schools that are bilingual	2%	50%	30%

## 2.2. Current bi/plurilingual initiatives in the three countries

As previously stated, the education system in each country is managing bilingual reform by combining it with a cross-curricular reform of all subjects.

In addition to state-led programmes, private and public, national and international partners are developing initiatives under state supervision.

Projects currently being implemented in the three countries include the following.

- Projects that form part of the roll-out of bilingualism by supporting the implementation of curricular reform. An example is the **SIRA**<sup>15</sup> project in Mali which supports no less than 4,500 bilingual schools.
- Regional projects to pilot and support the roll-out of bilingualism. An example is the **ELAN**<sup>16</sup> initiative implemented in 12 countries in sub-Saharan Africa,<sup>17</sup> including Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.
- Bilingual pilot projects at the national level, implemented by NGOs such as Plan International (Niger Education and Community Strengthening (NECS) project in Niger) or Concern International (in Niger).

## 2.2.1. The ELAN initiative in all three countries

### 2.2.1.1 Summary of the ELAN initiative

The ELAN initiative is supporting 12 countries in sub-Saharan Africa to carry out the necessary reforms for the joint use of African languages with French in primary education. It aims to create an international body within the French-speaking world to promote bilingual education in African countries by capitalizing on and sharing experience, expertise and training. The goal is to support the national action plans of the countries in specific ways that fit with their educational policies.

In educational terms, the goal of the ELAN initiative is to:

“improve the teaching and learning of basic skills (such as reading, writing and arithmetic) through equipping primary school students with better mastery of French, starting by teaching them in their first language.”<sup>18</sup>

Maintaining the learner's first language throughout primary school and enabling transfer from the learner's first language to French are at the heart of the ELAN project.

### 2.2.1.2 ELAN personnel

ELAN is piloting its approach in 110 schools in Mali, 30 in Burkina Faso and 10 in Niger.

<sup>15</sup>The SIRA initiative, funded by USAID, began in 2016 and ends in 2021.

<sup>16</sup>The ELAN initiative, financed by the Agence française de développement (French Development Agency – AFD) and OIF, started in 2013 – its third phase started in 2020. It is currently being implemented in 12 countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>17</sup> Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo.

<sup>18</sup> Source: <https://ifef.francophonie.org/node/227>



### 2.2.1.3 Analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the initiative

The ELAN initiative has a number of strengths that merit consideration in developing bilingual education, while addressing some of its weaknesses to further prove its relevance.

#### Strengths of this initiative

- + The approach is backed by an international scientific framework.
- + Partners consider the teaching supervision provided to schools to be of high quality.
- + It is a standard approach that can be adapted to any curriculum, as evidenced by its pilot projects in 12 different French-speaking countries.
- + The learning outcomes are considered satisfactory.<sup>19</sup>
- + It draws on expertise in L1 to L2 transfer.

Moreover, with a view to expanding bilingualism, ELAN has the advantage of providing varied teaching tools and training modules that can be used in training of trainers programmes.

#### Weaknesses of this initiative

- There is no consistent evaluation system. According to those interviewed for this study, this is preventing capitalization on achievements under the initiative.
- Disbursement of funds by partners is not regular, resulting in gaps in implementation of the approach.

## 2.2.2. Bi/plurilingual initiatives in Burkina Faso

The 240 bilingual schools operating in Burkina Faso include those with bilingual initiatives that have completed their pilot phase and have been transferred to the state:

- schools implementing the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages/Solidar Suisse curriculum (approximately 230 schools)
- schools implementing the Tin Tua curriculum (8 schools)

Of the former Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages/Solidar Suisse bilingual schools, 60 are hosting new bilingual pilot projects:

- schools piloting the ELAN/OIF method (30 schools)<sup>20</sup>
- other schools piloting the Enfants du Monde quality education programme (30 schools).

### 2.2.2.1 Summary of the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages/Solidar Suisse initiative

Solidar Suisse bilingual schools have the following defining features:

- During the first two years of schooling, the local languages are taught subjects and mediums of instruction, while French is only a taught subject.
- Once students have sufficiently mastered French (during the third year), it then becomes the medium of instruction.
- The local language continues to be taught as a subject throughout schooling.
- Bilingual education covers all subjects, not just 'language and communication' courses.
- The entire primary school curriculum is covered in five years in Solidar Suisse schools, compared with six years in mainstream monolingual schools.
- Solidar Suisse offers bilingual education at preschool and secondary level, creating a 'bilingual education continuum'.
- Before the Solidar Suisse schools were transferred to the state, students in bilingual schools were attaining higher grades than those in monolingual French schools.<sup>21</sup>

### 2.2.2.2 Analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages/Solidar Suisse initiative

#### Strengths

- + Bilingual basic education is seen as a continuum covering three levels of education: bilingual preschool education,<sup>22</sup> bilingual and trilingual primary schools<sup>23</sup> and specialist multilingual secondary schools.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The results of these evaluations can be found in the country reports.

<sup>20</sup> The ELAN initiative is presented in detail in the previous section.

<sup>21</sup> See details in the report on Burkina Faso.

<sup>22</sup> 'Espaces d'Éveil Éducatifs' (bilingual preschool education – 3E).

<sup>23</sup> EPB: bilingual primary schools; EPT: trilingual primary schools (French, Arabic, local languages)

<sup>24</sup> CMS: *Collèges Multilingues Spécifiques* (specialist multilingual secondary schools)

- + When bilingual schools are properly monitored and supported, there is a reduction in school dropout and an improvement in students' attainment.
- + The time taken to complete primary school is reduced by at least one year.
- + The child's first language is maintained, alongside French, throughout primary school.
- + There is renewed appreciation of local culture.
- + Students' parents are involved in the schools.

### Weaknesses

- The research reports consulted and the actors interviewed for this study indicate that the main weaknesses of the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages/Solidar Suisse bilingual primary schools are in terms of implementation in recent years (in particular since 2007–2008).
- However, some weaknesses intrinsic to the initiative have also been highlighted. In particular, the L1 is given much less focus than French from the fourth year on.

#### 2.2.2.3 Summary of the Tin Tua initiative

The Tin Tua bilingual primary schools form the other bilingual model taken over by the Government of Burkina Faso in 2007, around the same time as the Solidar Suisse schools.

In addition to the first language becoming a subject from the fourth year onwards in Tin Tua schools, the main difference from the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages/Solidar Suisse and ELAN approaches is that Tin Tua favours immersion of the learner in the target language (L1 or L2) and bans use of the source language in oral form (except in early learning, reading and writing, where harnessing similarities between the L1 and L2 is encouraged).

#### 2.2.2.4 Analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the Tin Tua initiative

The study did not collect data to evaluate this initiative, and we recommend that longitudinal and comparative studies be conducted to evaluate this methodology and identify strengths and potential areas for improvement.

#### 2.2.2.5 Summary of the Enfants du Monde quality education programme

The programme objectives are to introduce educational methods that promote theoretical and practical ownership of knowledge, to understand and transform the reality in which learners are embedded. These methods are backed by an approach developed in numerous countries over a period of more than 20 years: Pedagogy of Text.

The programme in Burkina Faso is recent: it was launched in 2017.

During our field study, we were unable to gather any opinions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this programme. As with Tin Tua, we recommend that studies be conducted to evaluate this methodology and identify strengths and potential areas for improvement.

#### 2.2.3. Bi/plurilingual initiatives in Mali

The system of bilingual schools managed by the state is supported by two initiatives by technical and financial partners:

- The ELAN project, launched in 2013 by the OIF. This involves 110 schools in Ségou, Mopti, Gao, Ménaka and Bamako, and incorporates four local languages (Bamanankan, Fulfulde, Songhai and Tamasheq).<sup>25</sup>
- The SIRA initiative, launched in 2016 by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), supports 4,500 primary schools in the southern regions of the country (Koulikoro, Ségou, Sikasso and Bamako), with a focus on Bamanankan.

<sup>25</sup> Source: Call for projects launched by Enfants du Monde quality education programme in Burkina Faso.

<sup>26</sup> Presented in the previous section. Œuvre Malienne d'Aide à l'Enfance du Sahel (OMAES), CowaterSogema International and Institut pour l'Éducation Populaire (IEP).

### 2.2.3.1 Summary of the SIRA initiative

The USAID/Mali SIRA initiative promotes a 'balanced approach',<sup>27</sup> aiming to equip students with a set of strategies and techniques to facilitate learning in reading and writing.

The SIRA<sup>28</sup> initiative – or 'path to reading'<sup>29</sup> – was launched in February 2016. It is receiving 30.5 billion CFA francs of funding from USAID over a five-year period.<sup>30</sup>

### 2.2.3.2 Analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the SIRA initiative

#### Strengths

- + Educational materials, training and supervision are considered valuable by respondents.
- + Regular student evaluation is carried out.
- + Rapid progress is made by students in reading and writing in their first language.<sup>31</sup>
- + A community aspect is included.
- + There is close collaboration with the ministry, civil society and companies.

#### Weaknesses

- The first language is only introduced as a language of instruction for the first two years of primary school.
- Students going into their third year after two years in a SIRA school feel lost in a very different system (the French monolingual system).
- French is used very little and appears sidelined.
- One dominant language (Bamanankan) appears to be prioritized over the other local languages.

## 2.2.4 Bi/plurilingual initiatives in Niger

The scenario-based approach/bilingual school system managed by the Government of Niger is supported by several initiatives led by technical and financial partners:

- NECS project (completed in 2019)
- ELAN/OIF<sup>32</sup> project
- Concern Worldwide project.

### 2.2.4.1 Summary of the NECS project

The NECS project is a continuation of another project called IMAGINE (Improve the Education of Girls in Niger) which was implemented in 2008 and interrupted in 2010 following the military coup.

Between 2012 and 2019, NECS covered 183 schools in all eight regions of the country, in two phases:

- NECS (four years)
- NECS+ (2-year extension).<sup>33</sup>

The overall goal of the project was to improve access to educational opportunities by strengthening links between schools and community and state institutions. Specifically, it aimed both to improve the reading skills of primary school students and to improve access to quality schooling, especially for girls.

The project focused on the first and second years and involved piloting a new approach to reading and writing based on the use of local languages: the systematic reading approach.

### 2.2.4.2 Analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the NECS<sup>34</sup> project

#### Strengths

- + There is an innovative approach to teaching reading and writing, with the school curriculum reflecting recent scientific theories and with a strong emphasis on reading.
- + Learning outcomes are considered highly satisfactory overall.

<sup>27</sup> An approach that works equally on decoding and encoding – comprehension and production of texts.

<sup>28</sup> Selected Integrated Reading Activity.

<sup>29</sup> *Sira* means 'road' in Bamanankan; it is a term derived from the Arabic word *sirât*, meaning 'way' or 'path'.

<sup>30</sup> Programme implemented by the Education Development Center (EDC) and its partners School-to-School International, Save the Children, Œuvre Malienne d'Aide à l'Enfance au Sahel.

<sup>31</sup> Details of the evaluations can be found in the country report for Mali.

<sup>32</sup> Project described in the previous section.

<sup>33</sup> USAID, Plan International, NECS.

<sup>34</sup> NECS: Niger Education and Community Strengthening.

- + A significant volume of reading materials have been produced in four local languages.
- + The approach is being incorporated into the overall reform package.

### Weaknesses

- The approach is limited to reading and writing and to the first two years of primary school.
- There is a lack of linkages between learning in the local language and learning in French.
- The materials produced are very expensive.
- There is insufficient ownership of the approach by state institutions.
- Activities have been suspended since June 2019, when the NECS project ended.

#### 2.2.4.3 Summary of the Concern project

The NGO Concern Worldwide Niger has been working in 55 monolingual French schools in the regions of Tahoua, Tillabéri and Diffa for more than five years, introducing the ELAN<sup>35</sup> approach to reading and writing in the first two years of primary school.

Despite the quality of the tools produced, this project is of limited use in developing bilingualism, because its tools and methods are limited to reading in the local language, and because it only covers the first two years of primary school. It does indirectly help the transition to French, although this is through its methodology and not linked to the language itself.

## 2.3. Assessment of the current status of bilingual initiatives in the three countries

This summary of bi/plurilingual initiatives currently being implemented in the three countries shows that the coverage of bilingualism in schools in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger remains dependent on the programmes of technical and financial partners.

Moreover, an analysis of the history of bi/plurilingual pilot projects in these three countries (see country reports) shows that initiatives led by technical and financial partners tend to be interrupted when donors stop funding them. This lack of continuity works against bi/plurilingual education and can lead some parents

and educators (despite being convinced of the benefits of bilingualism at school) to prefer monolingual education in French to bilingual education that may be interrupted when the donors move on.

In addition, in some countries, project management and leadership is left to the initiative of the technical and financial partners, resulting in the same type of bilingual intervention being run in different ways (this is particularly true in Burkina Faso). These sometimes competing ways of operating threaten the clarity and implementation of bi/plurilingual reforms. When several bilingual methodologies are piloted at the same time and are not rigorously evaluated, how can we capitalize on lessons learned? How can we harmonize the programmes and fill the gaps? All these difficulties slow down projects to extend and/or roll out bi/plurilingual education.

Finally, there is the issue of monitoring and financing projects after technical and financial partners have left. In Burkina Faso, evaluations carried out in bilingual schools before and after their transfer to the state showed a considerable drop in the quality of teaching and learning from the year the projects were transferred.

The fact that projects are dependent on support from technical and financial partners, the limitations of the 'project approach' and the lack of harmonization in bilingual practices in the field do not bode well for a wider roll-out, and have the following consequences:

- Many educators are demotivated. When we asked them about their perceptions of bilingual education, some replied that it was "an elephant that had given birth to a mouse" (a great effort with precious little to show for it) or "a beautiful baby that refused to be born" (a great idea that never got off the ground) (Mali).

<sup>35</sup>The ELAN initiative is presented in detail in the previous section.

- There is frustration among teachers who piloted bilingual projects that were deemed very effective and who suddenly had to change their bilingual method or go back to running their classes using the 'traditional' French monolingual approach.
- There is caution among parents, although they are convinced of the benefits of bilingualism, as they feel that the frequent interruption of these programmes affects their children's schooling too much.
- Some teachers find it difficult to manage these programme changes and to understand in practical terms what is expected of them in the classroom.<sup>36</sup>

### 3. Obstacles to implementation of bi/plurilingualism in schools

As previously stated, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger are officially committed to expanding<sup>37</sup> (Burkina Faso) or rolling out (Mali and Niger) bi/plurilingual education, as evidenced by the legal and policy frameworks in these three countries. However, those interviewed for the study in all three countries identified many institutional gaps. Table 5 summarizes the institutional weaknesses.

**Table 5: Weaknesses in the institutional framework in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger**

	Burkina Faso	Mali	Niger
Weaknesses in the institutional framework	<p>No explicit language policy.</p> <p>No implementing legislation for the principle of multilingualism stated in the Constitution.</p> <p>Insufficient implementing legislation for the 2007 policy law.</p> <p>Insufficient policy and oversight for bi/plurilingualism, resulting in inadequate ownership by the educational authorities (at central and decentralized levels), parents and communities.</p>	<p>No implementing legislation (decrees) to enforce the legislative guidelines.</p> <p>Failure to properly apply programme planning documents or sectoral policies on bilingual education.</p> <p>No dedicated body to coordinate and steer the bilingual reform.</p>	<p>No explicit language policy.</p> <p>No regulatory documents to provide a framework for multilingual education.</p> <p>No decree to establish the structure of the central administration and the responsibilities of officials.</p> <p>No independent body to scientifically validate the options selected.</p>

In addition, the survey identified other obstacles that are slowing practical implementation of these bi/plurilingual reforms in the classroom.

The analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the various initiatives has highlighted the disadvantages of what could be termed 'pilot' or 'experimental' approaches, which are often limited, particularly in time (limited duration of projects, but also initiatives limited to the first two or three years of primary school).

Where their objectives include supporting the state in implementing bi/plurilingualism, these initiatives only partially succeed in this, mostly by providing educational resources and teacher training. State initiatives are hampered by a lack of planning for language reform in schools and a lack of regulations for implementing bi/plurilingualism in schools.

<sup>36</sup> Mignot, Christelle, 'J'apprends si je comprends' : pour une meilleure prise en compte des langues premières des enfants à l'école primaire. Projet de documentaire long métrage et de kit audiovisuel à l'attention des enseignants de classes bi-plurilingues', *Édition des Archives Contemporaines (in press)*.

<sup>37</sup> Option currently preferred by the administrative authorities.

The main obstacles identified in the three countries include the following:

1. There is a shortage of educational resources in some languages.
2. There is a shortage of bilingual resources (especially in terms of knowledge transfer from L1 to L2).
3. Where resources do exist, there is a problem distributing them to bilingual schools.
4. Bi/plurilingual teaching is not sufficiently covered in pre- and in-service teacher training.
5. There are problems recruiting and assigning teachers for bilingual classes.
6. There is insufficient close monitoring of teachers in bilingual classes.
7. Initiatives/projects/innovations/pilots implemented to support bilingual education are not sufficiently evaluated to be able to capitalize on lessons learned.
8. There is no monitoring and evaluation system to demonstrate concrete learning outcomes from bilingual programmes.
9. There are obstacles to achieving transfer of powers to local government authorities as part of decentralization programmes.
10. There is no adequate and effective monitoring and support system for the scaling up of national reform.
11. There are insufficient reliable and up-to-date statistical data on bilingual schools.
12. There are no regulations designed to practically manage the implementation of bilingualism in schools.
13. There is no entity responsible for school language planning, steering, monitoring or coordination with other bodies involved in bilingual reform.
14. There is insufficient awareness raising on the benefits of bilingual education based on proven outcomes from bi/plurilingual pilot projects.

In addition, the following is lacking in Burkina Faso:

- applied curricular reform enabling achievement of a harmonized bilingual curriculum at the national level
- a procedure for transferring pilot projects to the state.<sup>38</sup>

In general, many of these obstacles are primarily due to **the absence of regulations designed to practically manage the various interventions involved in implementing bilingualism.**

The educators interviewed for the study explained that there was no administrative act requiring centralized or decentralized services to apply the laws supporting bi/plurilingualism in schools. This lack of operational capacity considerably hinders the process of expanding and/or rolling out bi/plurilingual education.

## 4. Recommendations for rolling out or expanding bilingual education

### 4.1. Establish a targeted action plan for multidimensional planning of the roll-out

Legislative and administrative texts, sectoral policies and strategies for expanding or rolling out bi/plurilingual education have been established, demonstrating a political will to commit to bilingual reform in all three countries. However, this general legal and institutional framework needs practical momentum. It cannot function effectively or deliver results without an action plan based on an objective baseline study, with clear planning of the actions to be undertaken within the various components of the roll-out project.

### 4.2. Develop and promote a clear language policy for schools

A vital first step is to promote local languages as they are conduits of national cultures. This has been achieved in all three countries.

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<sup>38</sup>The plans to expand some pilot projects that were transferred to the Ministry of National Education seem to have stalled, and the decline in the outcomes achieved by bilingual schools following transfer to the state does not encourage efforts in this direction.

With a view to expanding bilingualism in schools, what is needed now is to streamline educational language policy and make appropriate choices about which local languages to teach, based on locations, language use in these locations, school mapping and the human resources needed to provide this education. This is clearly sensitive, because it concerns the identities and relationships between the various groups that make up societies. However, it is a necessary stage. These policy decisions could be an opportunity to clarify or reframe the status and academic role of the official language, particularly in relation to the local languages taught.

A school language policy must also provide clear guidelines and standards to ensure learning in the mother tongue is an appropriate tool for addressing the learning crisis in all three countries.

This recommendation has as a corollary the need to equip languages with teaching materials/educational resources, and complete this process for others, to make them true vehicles for schooling and to allow the trainer and the teacher to choose appropriate teaching materials. This will require new or strengthened collaboration both with the national academic bodies responsible for local languages (e.g. the Malian Academy of Languages) and, at the regional level, with the Académie Africaine des Langues [African Academy of Languages – ACALAN], which contributes to developing research into African languages and to promoting their use as operating languages in the African Union.

### **4.3 Introduce or consolidate a governance body for bilingualism with a view to implementing a roll-out strategy**

Expansion/roll-out strategies or plans have been drafted as part of programming exercises and/or during curricular reforms (Niger and Mali). These should be supported and monitored by a national or regional governance body, which does not currently exist in any of the three countries.

This body should:

- Define the aims of bilingual education (which remain unclear to most educators) and oversee the achievement or updating of these aims, through evaluation and outcomes analysis.
- Confirm or adjust language choices, particularly at the regional or local level.
- Define the respective roles of the various actors: national and regional leads on bilingualism in schools, local authorities (in the context of decentralization), regional and local school administrators, and technical and financial partners.
- Undertake planning and monitoring of, and potentially make modifications to, the main activities related to implementing bilingualism in schools.
- Address the stumbling blocks or obstacles encountered in the course of the various pilot projects conducted so far in the three countries.

### **4.4. Establish a budgetary framework and planning to finance an effective roll-out of bilingual education**

The roll-out of bilingual education or of curricular reform based on bilingualism must be seen as public policy and must be reflected as such in the state budget. This is an important factor in the sustainability of bilingual reform, as it would avoid the funding risks and uncertainties that arise from the time-limited presence of donors (technical and financial partners). Thus, funding would no longer be dependent on initiatives by external partners but would derive from a country-led initiative, firmly supported by the state.

An essential step is to develop a budgetary framework that synergizes contributions by the state, the local authorities (as part of the decentralization process) and the technical and financial partners. This budgetary framework must include a funding plan, based on scheduling of the actions in the roll-out strategy, along with the stages and components to be specified in financial terms.

## 4.5. Provide educators with adequate training to meet the requirements of a bi/plurilingual educational system

In all three countries, the studies revealed a number of shortcomings that make training for teachers, trainers and supervisors an operational priority.

The lack of a formalized training policy and a clear strategy to ensure quality training reduces the chances of establishing an adequate training system. Thus, once the prerequisite policies have been established and the roll-out strategy has been developed or readjusted, a training plan and corresponding content will need to be devised for both pre- and in-service training.

Before educators can be trained, all the languages selected for teaching must be properly used, which will require educators to be equipped with teaching materials and resources (see recommendation 4.2.). There also needs to be an established and operational teacher management system that covers both language aspects (languages spoken by the teacher, languages taught in their assigned schools, etc.) and pedagogical aspects (appropriate content).

## 4.6. Design or adapt teaching materials from a bilingual perspective and ensure adequate distribution

A key issue for roll-out is bilingual design and availability of adequate tools and documentation. However, our studies have unveiled shortcomings in terms of design and provision of pedagogical tools, which threaten the implementation of bilingualism.

All actors therefore need to be provided with quality teaching materials that are tailored to requirements and relevant to the training received, in sufficient quantity and distributed on time.

This material must cover all levels in line with agreed progression, cover the subjects in the programme and meet the needs of all actors: students, teachers and supervisors.

Moreover, textbooks in local languages would benefit from being designed from a bilingual perspective and focusing on teaching in the language of instruction, rather than being a translated reproduction of foreign language textbooks. French textbooks should take into account the principle of linguistic transfer from L1 to L2.

This requires planning educational, technical, financial and logistical aspects in a way that brings together all links in the editorial chain: design, editing, printing, packaging and distribution. As appropriate and depending on the age of the textbook in each of these countries, it is recommended that the textbook either be rewritten (if it has reached its lifespan – on average eight years) or adapted if a pilot version is being reprinted.

## 4.7. Improve monitoring in schools

Monitoring establishes linkages between training of main actors (teachers, supervisors) and their delivery of expected pedagogical activities in the field. In a context of insufficient or limited use of the capacity building provided to bilingual educators, monitoring is vital to tailor the training framework to needs in the classroom. However, the studies conducted in the three countries have demonstrated insufficient or even no monitoring in some regions or institutions involved in bi/plurilingual pilot projects.

## 4.8. Develop a strategy, system and tools for evaluating the bilingual reform

It is just as important to evaluate students' learning and teacher performance. However, evaluations are currently mostly conducted under initiatives led by external partners, whereas they should be embedded in the joint framework for bilingual education, in particular as part of a reformed bilingual curriculum.

Evaluations should certainly focus on the intrinsic effectiveness of the features of bilingual education. They should assess student achievement to evaluate how far the objectives of bilingualism are being met and to draw conclusions to inform policy regulations and adjustment.



Projects can be evaluated with reference to the objectives of the bilingual programme, but also with reference to regional standards such as the Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems (PASEC) by the Conference of Ministers of Education of French-Speaking Countries or the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA). This task can be assigned to the governance body for bilingualism.

#### 4.9. Communicate to improve clarity about the effectiveness of bilingual education

The learning outcomes achieved under bilingual education initiatives led by the countries' technical and financial partners demonstrate the educational benefits of this approach. However, the general public seems insufficiently aware of these outcomes. For example, students' families are more aware of shortcomings in the implementation of bi/plurilingualism in schools than they are of the benefits. This is contributing to a negative perception of bilingual education among the population and ultimately hindering or even eroding national ownership of this educational approach.

To change this negative image of bilingual education, communication strategies will need to be developed, underpinned by a language policy and roll-out strategy driven by strong commitment from the highest levels of government.



## Conclusion

The introduction of local languages into the education system alongside French is not new in Burkina Faso, Mali or Niger, but it is a fairly recent development. The first bilingual reform in Mali dates back to 1962, while initial reforms were introduced in Burkina Faso from 1979. The first bilingual pilot project in Niger dates back to 1973.

These three countries currently remain committed to bi/plurilingualism in schools. This is demonstrated by the legislative texts advocating the integration of local languages into the educational system, with the aim of expanding bilingual reforms or rolling them out more widely.

However, despite the enormous efforts made by various national and bilateral actors to build on Mali's experience in bilingual education, much remains to be done.

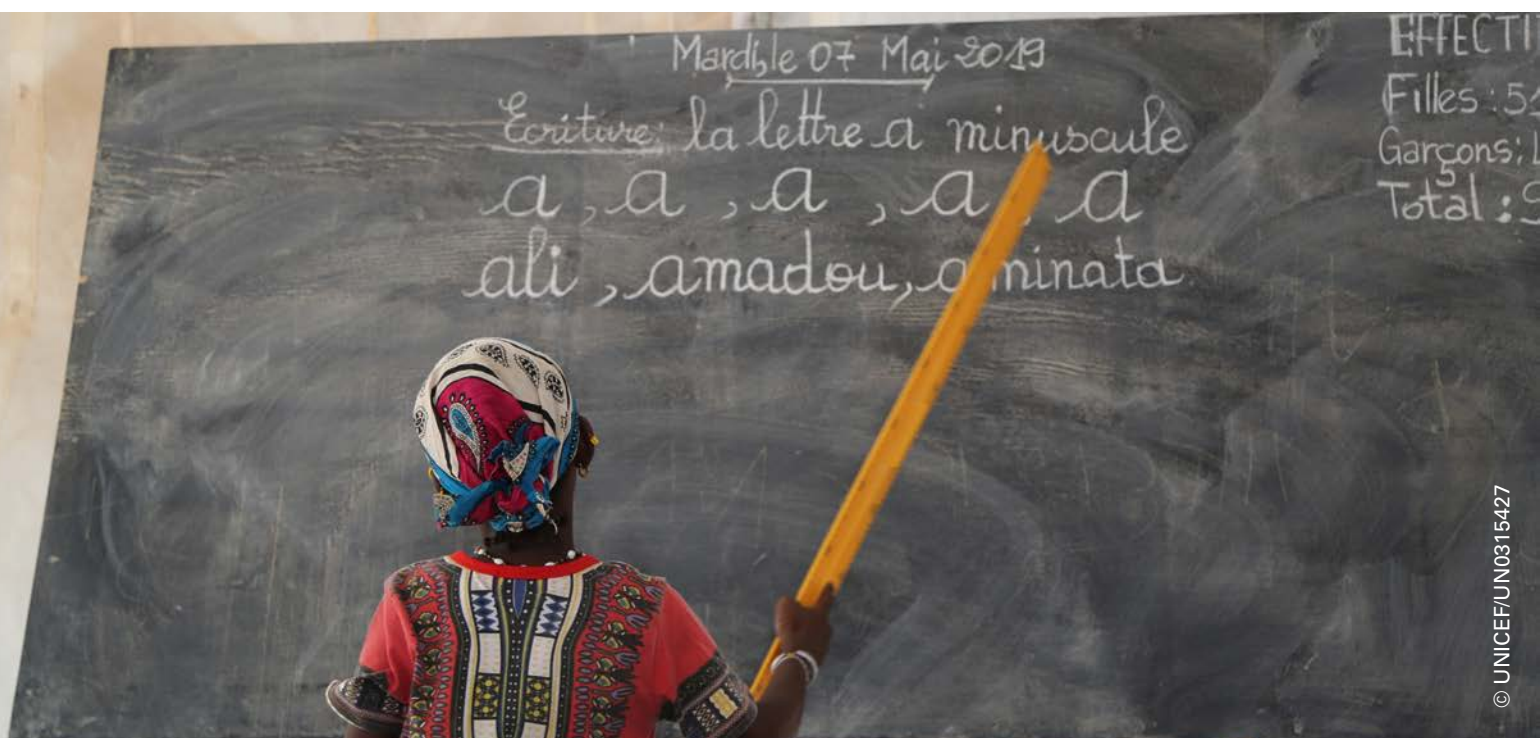
These laws are not supported by implementing legislation designed to plan the roll-out of bi/plurilingual education in practice. Consequently, there is a significant contrast between what is set out in law, on the one hand, and the reality in classrooms, on the other.

The state is also reliant on bilingual initiatives carried out by technical and financial partners. These bring real

added value at the institutional, educational, teaching and community levels, but they have limitations, not least the fact they are time-bound and do not cover all of the country's local languages.

To achieve a wider roll-out of bilingualism in schools, therefore, regulations need to be drafted at the national and regional levels, and a structure must be put in place to organize the various actions related to the implementation of bilingualism in practice. These include actions to train educators, equip languages with teaching materials/educational resources, produce educational and teaching resources for bilingual classes, manage and monitor bilingual class teachers, and evaluate, build on and harmonize bilingual practices.

There is also a need to roll out or improve communication and advocacy campaigns regarding the benefits of a truly bilingual education, targeting the various actors and in particular students' parents, since the study highlighted resistance in this group following the problems with implementing the bilingual reform. This advocacy will be most effective if it draws on objective arguments about the benefits of bilingualism, and if it is based on successful practices and positive outcomes of bilingual education.



# Annex: Clarification of operational concepts and themes in bilingualism in schools

The purpose of this terminological and conceptual clarification is to harmonize the terms used, to relate them to the analysis carried out in this study and to see their implications in the recommendations.

These concepts, presented in the form of benchmarks, are also intended to provide guidance to those involved in bilingual education in the three countries.

## Multilingualism and plurilingualism

- The term 'multilingualism' refers to the coexistence of several languages or language varieties in a sociocultural, political and institutional environment; it relates to a collective level, that of an entire society or country. These languages have varying geographic, ethnic, and functional reaches (their utility).

- 'Plurilingualism' relates to the language uses of individuals: one or more individuals are plurilingual in a multilingual country. This is the situation in the three countries covered by this study.

- The concept of 'bi/plurilingualism' refers to the point of view of the learner, for whom the school is bilingual. In the classroom, children are exposed successively and/or simultaneously to two languages (signified by the prefix 'bi'): their first or mother tongue and French. However, the children are studying in a school system characterized by the diversity of the learners' languages ('plurilingual').

## Bilingualism

The term 'bilingualism' refers to the coexistence of two languages according to the status and functions of these two languages in society or for the individual.

- At the country level, we talk about societal bilingualism (this is deemed official when both languages are official languages).

- At the speaker level, we talk about individual bilingualism (whether the speaker lives in a monolingual, bilingual or plurilingual country). Note: Bilingual individuals may use words or statements from their other language when speaking their first language. This is called 'code-switching' (see below).

Where two languages are used in school, we use the term 'bilingualism in schools'. In the three countries studied, French is added alongside one of the local languages introduced into the education system.

According to Hamers and Blanc, a bilingual education programme is "a system of education in which, at varying times, for varying durations and in varying proportions, simultaneously or consecutively, instruction is delivered in at least two languages, one of which is normally the student's first language."<sup>39</sup>

In some cases, the language of instruction may be the language most used in the child's environment (rather than the child's first language). Even if this language is, in principle, known to the child, it can pose certain challenges that the teacher will need to take into account.

We also employ the term '**bilingual education**' when both languages are used as mediums of instruction. In some contexts, and at a given stage of the programme, they split the taught subjects (for example, humanities are taught in L1, while the so-called exact sciences are taught in the second language).

The term '**trilingualism in schools**' is used in this study to refer to the situation faced by students in the Franco-Arabic education system, who enter school with a first language (L1) and learn Arabic AND French as second and third languages (L2 and L3), either as taught languages or as mediums of instruction.

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<sup>39</sup> Hamers, Josiane F. and Michel Blanc, *Bilinguisme et bilinguisme*, P. Mardaga, Brussels, 1983.

## Potential benefits of bilingualism (local language/second language)

Many research studies have highlighted the benefits of introducing first languages into schools and the positive impact of this on the quality of learning, including second language learning. This was reiterated by the actors interviewed as part of this study (bilingual education managers, trainers and so on).

Research has highlighted, in particular:

- Bilingual schools offer psychosocial advantages in terms of recognition of the community and family language as an upholder of national and local values.
- There are cognitive advantages in terms of expression and knowledge building in the child's language. This knowledge is useful for learning other languages and non-linguistic learning.
- There are educational advantages: ease of learning, better understanding of the different school subjects, possibility of comparing two linguistic and cultural systems, developing tolerance, etc.

## Code-switching

This is a sociolinguistic concept (something which has a social use). It refers to a mixture of two or three linguistic codes (a first language and a second language) used by a bilingual or trilingual speaker in the same conversation, or even in the same sentence, associated with a social and everyday communication situation. It should be noted that words from the foreign language inserted into speech in the first language discourse are not borrowed vocabulary.

### What should be the approach to code-switching in the classroom?

Teachers should be attentive to the use of this mode of communication in the classroom. It is imperative that teachers themselves do not use the two languages in a disordered manner. The use of L1 in a second/foreign language session must conform to educational practices aimed at facilitating the transfer from one language to another.

For students, the most important thing at an early stage is to promote language production, even if they switch from one language to another (code-switching). In this

context, the role of teachers will be to get learners to produce the same message in a richer way. The goal is to support learners by reducing potential language and emotional stumbling blocks.

It is worthwhile to rationalize the sociolinguistic phenomenon of code-switching and make use of it for educational purposes. The use of L1 in French sessions depends on the educational roles that can be played by this first language, which is taken into account according to the principle of transfer (see the following for more on the concept of linguistic transfer):

- A metalinguistic role: to explain a linguistic feature or compare two features in the two languages.
- A role in managing school communication, especially during the early period of learning.
- An unblocking role to help students experiencing language insecurity (when students are unable to express themselves in a second/foreign language).

## Models for bilingualism in schools

There are two models for bilingualism in schools:

- **Simultaneous bilingualism in school**, when the first language and a foreign language are acquired at the same time.
- **Delayed bilingualism**, when the learning of the foreign language occurs some time after the learning of the first language. This chronological gap varies according to the educational system.

Delayed bilingualism can take various forms.

- **Additive bilingualism** occurs when the learning of a second language does not threaten maintenance of the mother or first language, and when there is an effective transfer of knowledge between the two languages (L1 and L2).

Hamers and Blanc<sup>40</sup> set out two conditions for the development of additive bilingualism: the child must have learned to manipulate language for complex cognitive activities (both languages are therefore mediums of instruction). These activities often include metalinguistic activities (even elementary reflection on the linguistic functioning of both languages).

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

Furthermore, both languages must be valued in the child's environment. Psycholinguists also believe that most of the positive impacts of bilingualism have been achieved in this type of acquisition context, where mastery of the second language is achieved without losing mastery of the first language.

- The **late exit transitional model** (also called the 'additive model' in French-speaking countries) is when the transition from L1 as a language of instruction to L2 as an official or foreign language occurs at the end of primary school (fourth and fifth years of schooling). L1 is sometimes maintained as a taught language beyond primary school (in middle and secondary school). This model is designed to promote additive bilingualism, since children have the time needed to reach a good level in both languages.

There is also 'balanced bilingualism', when learners have developed two (or more) languages to a similar level of proficiency or richness.

Many sub-Saharan countries have adopted an approach along these lines. However, it is important to distinguish between intentions and actions. In these countries, this additive model is a goal or an ambition that struggles to become a reality because it requires a full range of human and physical resources for the two languages.

- The **early-exit transitional model** (also known as the 'subtractive model' in French-speaking countries) is when the L2 replaces the L1 in the education system. It is based on the view that the introduction of L1 is purely a way of promoting the acquisition of L2. In this system, L1 is abandoned very quickly, as soon as the conditions for developing L2 seem to have been reached.

- In the '**developmental model' or relay model**', L1 is introduced at the beginning of schooling, but is gradually supplanted by L2 as the medium of instruction, with variations from country to country. The language of instruction also varies by subject (for example, mathematics is taught in French from Year 3 and science from Year 4, while social sciences are taught in the local languages).

- In another model, known as the '**dual model' (or 'two-way model')**, L1 and L2 are treated in exactly the same way. This means that throughout schooling (usually in primary but also in secondary school), both languages receive the same time allocation (50 per cent) and students are assessed from a formative perspective in both languages. This model is the most likely to facilitate balanced bilingualism, and thus to achieve a state where the two languages being mastered by the learner support each other in the learning process (additive bilingualism). The disadvantage of this model is that it requires all human and physical resources to be at the same level in both languages, to an even greater degree than is required in the late exit and development models.

In this study, we found no implementation of a dual model in any of the three countries, but we think it is worthy of note because much of the academic literature and research shows that it is an effective model for achieving the highest levels of bilingualism in children.

## Language transfer from L1 to L2

Transfer of learning refers to a situation in which students use knowledge and skills available in their first language from their family and social environment and from what they have learned at school. Language transfer is a particular example of this transfer. Students learn L2 from the language skills built as they acquired the language via L1, both at school (in reading and writing, in speaking, in grammar) and outside school.

The transfer is considered:

- **From the institution's point of view:** as the choice of the year in which French and the corresponding areas (oral, written, and so on) are introduced, the transition from the first language of instruction (L1i) to the second language of instruction (L2i), which depends on the transition models in the various countries (for example, switching to L2i for mathematics in the third year and for science in the fourth year, keeping L1 as a taught language for the rest of the primary school programme, and so on). Some transitional arrangements refer to this as the 'transfer year', giving the concept a narrow meaning.

- **From the students' point of view:** as a cognitive process where the switch from L1 to L2 implies that students will have acquired knowledge and skills in their first language, which will be mobilized as they acquire the second language. Communicative acts have already been learned, alongside ways of doing and learning that are transferable to L2.

- **From the teachers' point of view:** in preparing and delivering their lessons in the second language, teachers can build on what students already know and can do.

The transition to L2 is made via:

- **A positive transfer of knowledge or skills acquired in L1** (for example, a narrative or argumentative structure, a grammatical concept with which the student is familiar in L1). In this case, there are similarities between the two languages (for example, the Latin alphabet used in the African language and in French).

- **A negative transfer generating mistakes** (we talk about interference where, for example, students reproduce the word order and gender used in their first language, although they are different in French).

Taking this transfer into account can lead to faster, more effective learning of French and, conversely, to better learning of L1. This is because there is no need to relearn in one language what has already been worked on in the other: the concept of chronology, reading by associating sounds with letters – these are skills that are internalized in L1 and can be used in L2. The teacher should show the student how these acquisitions can be made in L2.

The teacher will thus need a minimum level of knowledge about the two languages and their cultures to understand what is going on in students' brains when they are acquiring a first language and accessing a second. When training teachers and supervisors on bilingualism in schools, these aspects of content and the corresponding educational processes must be included (see the following for more details on training in bilingualism).

## What activities can teachers lead to facilitate transfer?

For the average student, transfer is not inevitable; it does not happen spontaneously. The teacher must facilitate and develop it using two main educational processes:

- Working on simple comparisons without prioritizing languages by highlighting:

- Linguistic and cultural similarities or convergences between the two languages: the same grammatical form, the way of describing an animal and so on.

- Differences that pose obstacles for students who are discovering different linguistic forms specific to L2: in French, this includes, for example, the position of pronouns, a particular spelling rule or the difference between masculine and feminine nouns that does not exist in some African languages.

- Using reformulation from one language to another: for example, the teacher reformulates in French what the student says in L1. In the other direction, the L1 teacher can get students to reflect on linguistic features seen in French to help consolidate learning in L1.

## Language education policy

This focuses on managing multilingualism in the country, i.e. the place and functions of local languages and the second language in the education system. It is set out in regulations, the curriculum and official guidelines. Sociolinguistic situations define language planning and adjustments in society and in the bi/plurilingual school system.

The language education policy includes equipping languages with teaching materials/educational resources at two levels:

- The description and orthographic and grammatical codification of the language, and the development of dictionaries and borrowings or neologisms.

- The design of pedagogical tools to be used in teaching as a taught language and as a medium of instruction.

The challenge for some policies is to introduce bi/plurilingual education in highly differentiated and sensitive multilingual contexts.

Language policy must therefore be clearly defined, and it must be devised as a preparatory stage before local languages are introduced into schools.

## Planning for bilingualism in schools

The use of local languages in schools must be based on a clear language policy or plan that forms part of the management of a bilingual reform of the education system. This involves analysing and taking into account certain parameters in the choice of languages to be used in schools.

- **Sociolinguistic parameters:**

- demographic and geographic factors (frequency of use by speakers and in a given region)
- use in communication outside the community and at the subregional level.

- **Educational parameters:** its capacity to be used as a language of instruction with appropriate pedagogical tools.

### Different steps to consider when planning

- **Preparation of the pilot project**

This early step involves:

- choosing the local languages to be introduced into schools according to language and educational criteria (equipping the language as a medium of instruction) and a criterion of the extent to which it is used
- advocating the introduction of local languages, using an updated argument that takes into account the successes and failures of bilingual pilot projects
- identifying a sample set of schools for the pilot project: these can be selected based on a previously conducted sociolinguistic survey mapping the schools in the pilot project
- preparing the pedagogical tools and planning appropriate training
- ensuring the necessary funding.

- **The pilot project**

The pilot project covers various aspects:

- delivering pedagogical tools to the training centres and schools included in the sample set
- training of actors
- field monitoring
- financial management of the various components
- evaluation of the pilot project followed by a regulation.

- **Expansion**

This depends on the evaluation of the pilot project and the regulation covering the tools and the system.

It requires appropriate planning, including:

- analysing the evaluation of the pilot project
- planning how the initiative will be expanded (by language, by region, by level)
- defining the sample
- preparing additional teaching tools
- organizing training for actors
- continuing and updating advocacy efforts
- ensuring that financial management is consistent with contributions from technical and financial partners.

- **Roll-out**

This depends on the evaluation of the expansion and also requires regulation of the tools and the system.

It requires the following planning:

- selecting the procedures for the roll-out (stages by region, by year, etc.)
- preparing additional tools and training
- planning funding, perhaps by seeking other technical and financial partners
- planning an interim evaluation.

## Pre- and in-service training in the field of bilingualism in schools

An important factor in the successful implementation of bilingualism in schools is the training of the main actors. However, what is often prescribed in training programmes is either content that is not appropriate for bilingual education, or training that is compartmentalized and separated in the two different languages or in their corresponding teaching.

Training in bilingualism should therefore be aimed at the following four audiences, with differentiated content:

- those responsible for managing bilingualism in education
- those designing the bilingual curriculum
- trainers
- teachers.

This implies a pyramid training model.

### Those responsible for managing bilingualism

The goal here is to train these managers to develop contextualized language education policies and to plan bilingual pilot projects.

The topics that should feature include:

- the most effective models of bilingualism in schools, based on current research
- how to advocate for bilingual education and the need to update this advocacy as pilot projects are run and initiatives are rolled out
- planning and management of a bilingual reform
- financial management of the programme
- the types of partnerships to be established in the field of bilingualism.

### Bilingual curriculum designers

Bilingual curriculum and textbook/guide designers need training in the following areas:

- the institutional and sociolinguistic aspects of language teaching in the relevant country
- the status and functions of the languages (especially French) for which they will design the teaching content
- the development of a reference document setting out the bilingual competencies and the language and intercultural profile of a bilingual student (the bilingual competency framework developed by ELAN could be a source of inspiration)
- the clarification and implementation of convergence approaches (linguistic and methodological) to be taken into account when designing a curriculum or a textbook
- techniques for contextualizing tools with reference to regional and local language and data

- how to take account of the language of instruction when developing the curriculum and the most appropriate educational approaches for promoting and facilitating transfer in situations where L1 and French (L2) are mediums of instruction in the curriculum,.

### Trainers of trainers (pre- and in-service training)

Trainers have two complementary roles: training teachers in bilingualism and providing close monitoring in schools, after the training sessions (in the case of in-service training) and during internships (in the case of pre-service training).

• To enable them to train teachers (or teacher trainees), the following training content could be offered, assuming that they have a sufficient command of French and the local language, the focus of training:

- the language and educational profile and skills to be acquired by teachers teaching a local language or French, or both at the same time
- an overview of institutional and sociolinguistic data (for French and local languages in schools) in the country
- the foundations of bi/plurilingualism teaching: guidelines and practices for teaching a local language and a second language (French), language transfer, etc
- examples of activities and materials that can be offered to teachers or student-teachers to train them on how to develop lesson plans and units of study according to bi/plurilingual approaches to teaching.

• To monitor teachers, trainers will need training in the following areas:

- planning field visits
- developing observation grids for a bilingual class
- using these observations to offer feedback and support where regulation or remedial help is required
- writing follow-up reports and using these to offer continuous support.

### Teachers

Teachers play an important role in the dissemination of bilingual teaching practices. Ahead of the training courses, a set of professional competencies must be defined. In terms of bilingualism in schools, the following skills can be included:

- Master L1/French and describe them linguistically.



- Describe, in a simplified way, the context of bilingual education in the country.
- Explain the basic concepts of bilingualism in schools: bilingual education, language status, transfer, basic comparisons of two languages (local language/French).
- Argue for bilingual education (useful when in contact with parents).
- Education supervisors and teachers should be able to understand the arguments often put forward against the use of African languages in schools and to counter them with convincing arguments informed by the results of international research and especially by good practices in the country.
- Explain the focus of the national bilingual education programme.
- Prepare learning and evaluation lessons and units of study in L1, from a bilingual perspective (oral, reading and writing, grammar and vocabulary).
- Implementing these in the classroom.
- Take into account the local language when teaching French and vice versa.
- Evaluate students' performance in French and provide relevant remedial help, taking into account, in particular, the first language and first-language learning.

Training sessions will be incorporated into the institutional framework of language education training in the country, and will be appropriately planned. Larger-scale training schemes using multiplier tools should be considered, combining in-person sessions, tutoring and distance learning.



# Multi-country study on multilingualism and bi/plurilingualism in schools

Country report: Burkina Faso



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# Acronyms and abbreviations

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<b>ALFAA</b>	Method for teaching the French language to adults based on literacy skills
<b>CBN</b>	Centre Banma Nuara [Banma Nuara Centre]
<b>CE</b>	<i>Cours élémentaire</i> (second/third year of primary school, students aged 7–9)
<b>CM</b>	<i>Cours moyen</i> (last two years of primary school)
<b>CMS</b>	<i>Collège multilingue spécifique</i> [specialist multilingual secondary school]
<b>CREN</b>	Centre de Recherche en Education [Nantes University Centre for Education Research]
<b>ELAN</b>	École et langues nationales en Afrique (National Schools and Languages in Africa)
<b>ENEP</b>	Écoles nationales des enseignants du primaire [National Schools for Primary Teachers]
<b>LASCOLAF</b>	Les langues de scolarisation dans l'enseignement fondamental en Afrique subsaharienne francophone [Languages of schooling in basic education in French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa]
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>OIF</b>	Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (International Organization of la Francophonie)
<b>ONEPAFS</b>	Office nationale d'éducation permanente et d'alphabétisation fonctionnelle et sélective [National Office of Continuing Education and Functional and Selective Literacy]
<b>OSEO</b>	Œuvre Suisse d'Entraide Ouvrière (Swiss Workers' Relief Organization)
<b>PASEC</b>	Programme d'analyse des systèmes éducatifs de la CONFEMEN (CONFEMEN Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems)
<b>PRODEC</b>	Programme décennal de développement de l'éducation (Ten-Year Education Development Programme)
<b>PSEF</b>	Programme sectoriel de l'éducation et de la formation (Education and Training Sector Programme)
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund



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# Executive summary

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## Overview

This study is a critical analysis of the evolving implementation of multilingual reform in Burkina Faso's education system over the past decade, with a view to identifying potential avenues for rolling it out.

It takes a qualitative approach and is based on a literature review and on interviews conducted with various actors and partners in the field of education, who were selected based on their role and position.

## Key findings

Burkina Faso has 60<sup>1</sup> recognized local languages. Ten of these languages are resourced and taught in school.

Under the current conditions, the roll-out of bilingual education does not seem feasible in the short term. There are still only very few bilingual schools – currently 241 throughout the country, less than 2 per cent of the total number of primary schools.

In addition, the transfer to the state of the bilingual schools built as part of two NGO initiatives did not deliver the expected learning outcomes. Up until 2007/2008, when these schools were transferred to the state, evaluations of the schools managed by Œuvre Suisse d'Entraide Ouvrière (Swiss Workers' Relief Organization – OSEO)/Solidar Suisse and Tin Tua had demonstrated better outcomes in terms of student achievement than mainstream schools (where teaching is only in French). These achievements were all the more impressive given that the students completed primary school in five years, compared with six in monolingual schools. However, from 2008 (a year after they started to be transferred to the state), these schools began to record regressive outcomes, which were worse than the monolingual schools.

These disappointing results do not bode well for roll-out, and there is also no standardized bilingual curriculum. Alongside the monolingual curriculum (used by the mainstream monolingual schools which form the vast majority in the country), there are two bilingual curricula in use: the Solidar Suisse model and the TinTua model.

Although a strategy for the roll-out of bilingual education was drafted in 2017, and the overall legal framework is supportive of bi/plurilingualism at school, much remains to be done before considering a large-scale roll-out of bilingual education.

The following are some of the key challenges that remain.

- Finalizing the local language policy.
- Drafting and validating regulations to manage the practical implementation of bilingualism in schools.
- Introducing an effective monitoring and support system for bilingual schools.
- Harmonizing bi/plurilingual teaching practices throughout the country.
- Improving both pre- and in-service teacher training.
- Producing a variety of bilingual resources to facilitate classroom practice (particularly with regard to first language teaching and the transfer of knowledge from students' first language (L1) to their second (L2)).
- Improving the availability of teaching and learning materials in schools.
- Introducing a strategy to improve ownership of bilingualism in schools by educators, parents and the general public, making a new case for it and harnessing teaching methods and tools developed by the initiatives already delivered in the country.

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<sup>1</sup> Sanogo, Mamadou Lamine, 'À propos de l'inventaire des langues du Burkina Faso', *Cahiers du CERLESHS*, No. 19, University of Ouagadougou, UFR/SH-UFR/LAC, 2002, pp.195–216.

# Introduction

Research into education in French-speaking sub-Saharan African countries has often rated monolingual schools, inherited from the colonial period, as inadequate, ineffective and costly.<sup>2</sup>

By contrast, studies have shown that bilingual teaching (in the students' first and second languages) presents many cognitive, identity and economic advantages for students, their families and their countries.<sup>3</sup>

As the historian Joseph Ki-Zerbo stated in 1990, "we cannot abandon our languages; it's impossible. No people can fully develop and thrive in a language other than their mother tongue."<sup>4</sup>

From 1979 onwards, numerous bilingual educational reforms and innovations have therefore been piloted in Burkina Faso. These have included the satellite schools, the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages/Solidar Suisse Multilingual Education Continuum, the Tin Tua bilingual primary schools and the National Schools and Languages (ELAN) and Enfants du Monde pilot projects. These initiatives have been recognized as relevant, credible and hopeful alternatives in terms of the quality of teaching and learning.

However, more than a quarter of a century after some of them were introduced, they still have only minimal place in the educational system. In addition, the country is still at risk of not achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, after failing to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for education by 2015.

## What are the reasons for this and what recommendations can be made for the future?

This study aims to answer these questions by adding to the existing knowledge about bi/plurilingual education experiences in Burkina Faso, particularly for the period from 2010 to 2020, and by reviewing the evaluations of ongoing bi/plurilingual education initiatives in Burkina Faso.

Taking a resolutely qualitative approach, for which we consulted a panel of educators in Ouagadougou, Koudougou, Fada N'gourma and Dori, the study also aims to better understand the challenges affecting bilingual education in Burkina Faso before considering strategies to reduce them and enable bilingual education to be rolled out to all schools.

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<sup>2</sup> Doumbia, Amadou T., 'L'enseignement du bambara selon la pédagogie convergente au Mali : théorie et pratiques', *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, vol. 9. No. 3, 2000, pp. 98-107.  
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<sup>3</sup> Mignot, Christelle, 'J'apprends si je comprends : pour une meilleure prise en compte des langues premières des enfants à l'école primaire. Projet de documentaire long métrage et de kit audiovisuel à l'attention des enseignants de classes bi-plurilingues', *Edition des Archives Contemporaines (in press)*.  
<sup>4</sup> Ki-Zerbo, Joseph, *Educate or Perish*, UNICEF, 1990.





# Methodology

There were two complementary phases to this study.

The first phase consisted of a literature review. This provided an overview of bi/plurilingual education in Burkina Faso from 2010 to 2020, and also identified certain knowledge gaps in relation to bilingualism in schools in Burkina Faso.

The second phase, which used a qualitative approach, was conducted between September and November 2020. This phase enabled us to gather the views and opinions of 65 educators on the use of local languages in the Burkinabe education system.

## Geographic and linguistic aspects of the field survey

Two variables were taken into account when defining the physical scope of the study: a geographic variable and a sociolinguistic variable.

Four geographic areas were selected: Ouagadougou (capital city), Koudougou (medium-sized city), Fada N'gourma (rural area) and Dori (insecure area).

As regards the sociolinguistic scope, multiple languages were selected based on their status:

- a lingua franca (Mooré)
- a vernacular language (Gulimancema)
- an intermediary language (Fulfulde).

For the insecure area, language choice was not a specific criterion.

Table 1 shows the distribution of languages in the areas targeted by the study.

**Table 1: Distribution of languages in the areas studied**

Variables chosen		Locations	Languages
Geographic	Linguistic		
Capital city	Lingua franca	Ouagadougou	Mooré
Medium-sized city	Intermediary	Koudougou	Fulfulde
Rural area	Vernacular	Fada N'gourma	Gulimancema
Insecure area	N/A	Dori	Fulfulde

## Selection of educators surveyed<sup>5</sup>

The panel of people consulted for the study was formed using purposive and quota-based sampling. This method consists of selecting individuals based on their ability to reliably answer the questions asked. The interviews covered the following:

- understanding and perception of bilingualism in schools
- levels of adoption of bi/plurilingual education as perceived by the actors interviewed
- decentralization policy and the potential to harness it in implementing bilingualism
- training of educators (pre- and in-service training)
- close monitoring of reforms and pilot projects
- availability of teaching materials.

## Challenges encountered and limitations of the study

The literature review was carried out under fairly good conditions. However, the field data were collected in the context of COVID-19. The field research was constrained by the temporary or prolonged closure of schools, the lockdown of populations, the restrictions on meetings, the introduction of teleworking in public administration, and the bans or restrictions on travel between cities.

In addition, the collection period (October to November 2020) coincided with the agricultural harvest and the presidential and legislative elections, which limited the engagement of parents during focus group sessions.

<sup>5</sup> See Annex for details of the participants interviewed.

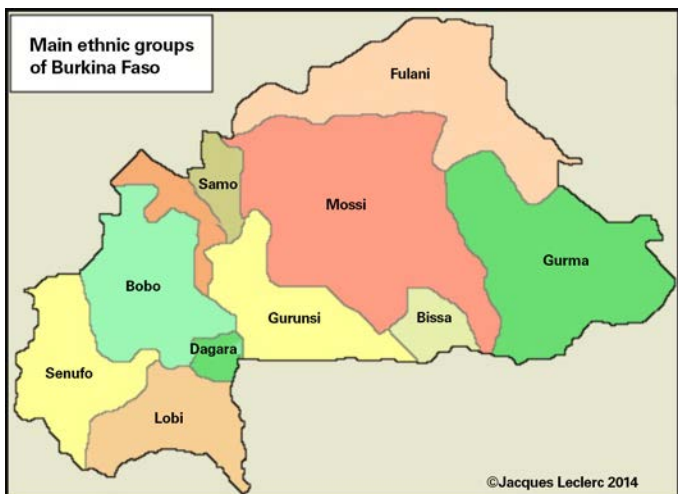
# 1. Sociological context

## 1.1 Ethnic diversity of Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso is a multi-ethnic country. The country's population of nearly 21 million includes some 60 ethnic groups. The majority ethnic group (approximately 53 per cent of the population) is the Mossi, who live in the centre of the country. Other sizable groups are the Gurma in the east (7 per cent of the population), the Fulani in the north (7.8 per cent), the Bissa (3 per cent) and Gurunsi (6 per cent) in the south, and the Samo (2 per cent), Marka (1.7 per cent), Bobo (1.6 per cent), Senufo (2.2 per cent) and Lobi (2.5 per cent) in the southwest.<sup>6</sup>

Map 1 presents a simplified distribution of the ethnic groups in the territory.

**Map 1: Geographical distribution of the different ethnic groups in Burkina Faso**



The boundaries and the names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by UNICEF.

Administratively, Burkina Faso is divided into 13 regions and 45 provinces, which are subdivided into 351 urban and rural communes. None of these administrative divisions aligns precisely with a language boundary. In fact, the languages and ethnicities are mixed and intermingled, giving rise to plurilingual speakers and multilingual territories.

This linguistic intermingling is reflected in real-life situations in classrooms, where we can observe the linguistic variety of the students, whose first languages are different to the one used as a medium of instruction

in the classroom. This poses a critical problem from an educational perspective.

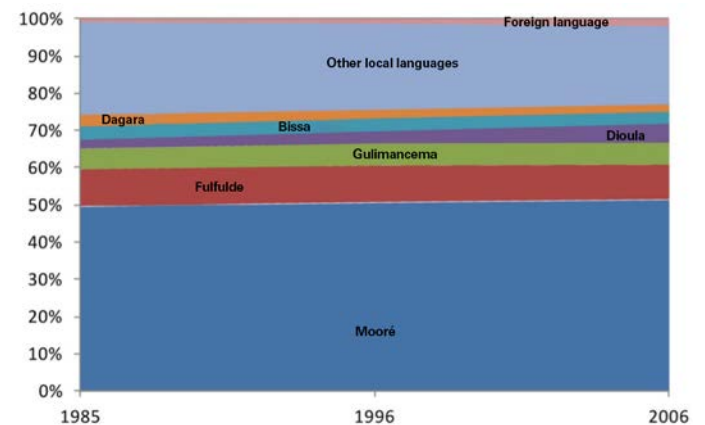
## 1.2 Linguistic diversity of Burkina Faso

In addition to French (the country's official language), Burkina Faso has about 60 different local languages. These include three major groups: the Gur group (accounting for more than 60 per cent of the languages), the Mande group (about 20 per cent), and the West Atlantic group (of which Fulfulde is the only representative). The Nilo-Saharan group is represented by Songhai and Maranse, and the Afroasiatic group by Hausa and Tamasheq.<sup>7</sup>

In terms of the population weighting of each language, a study conducted in 2010<sup>8</sup> indicates that Mooré is most commonly spoken by the majority of the population (approximately 50 per cent). It is followed by Fulfulde, Gulimancema, Dioula, Bissa and Dagara.

Figure 1 shows the trends in the languages most commonly spoken in Burkina Faso from 1985 to 2006.

**Figure 1: Languages most commonly spoken in Burkina Faso, 1985–2006<sup>9</sup>**



Source: General population censuses for Burkina Faso (1985, 1996, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Université Laval, 'Mali', Université Laval, Québec, no date, <<http://www.axl.cefan.ulaval.ca/afrique/burkina.htm>>, accessed 16 January 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Nikiéma, Norbert, 'Évolution de la question de l'utilisation des langues nationales dans le système éducatif au Burkina Faso', *Berichte des sonderforschungsbereichs 268*, Vol.7, 1996, p. 187-201.

<sup>8</sup> Bougma, Moussa, 'Dynamique des langues locales et de la langue française au Burkina Faso : un éclairage à travers les recensements généraux de la population (1985, 1996 et 2006)', *Rapport de recherche de l'ODSEF, Observatoire démographique et statistique de l'espace francophone*, Université Laval, Québec, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Table 2 presents the estimated population weighting and geographic coverage of the different languages in Burkina Faso.

**Table 2: Estimated population weighting of the different languages**

Language		Population weighting	Geographic coverage	
1	Bissa	3.71%	1 province	
2	Bobo	2.23%	1 province	
3	Bwamu	1.59%	5 provinces	
4	Dagara	1.75%	2 provinces	
5	Dafin/Marka	1.85%		
6	Fulfulde	9.04%	4 provinces	1 region
7	Gulimancema	5.07%	5 provinces	1 region
8	Dioula	4.05%	9 provinces	4 regions
9	Lobiri	1.49%	2 provinces	
10	Lyélé	2.41%	1 province	
11	Mooré	50.4%	16 provinces	7 regions
12	Nuni	1.10%	2 provinces	
13	San	2.05%	2 provinces	
14	Sénoufo	0.99%		
15	Tamasheq	0.82%	1 province	

Source: Nikiéma and Kaboré-Paré (2010).

According to 2018 statistics from the International Organization of la Francophonie, only 24 per cent of the population speak French – the only official language<sup>10</sup> and the main language of education.

### 1.3 Language policy of Burkina Faso

Article 1 of the Constitution of 27 January 1997 stipulates that all Burkinabe citizens enjoy the same language rights, as it states that "discrimination of any kind is forbidden, including discrimination based on race, ethnicity, region, colour, gender, language, religion, caste, political opinions, wealth or birth". However, although the national assembly adopted Law No. 033-2019/AN of May 2019 on promoting and formalizing the local languages of Burkina Faso, the provision in the constitution is yet to be implemented and there are no texts to clarify the country's language policy.

At the time of writing (2021), the national strategy paper and three-year action plan for Burkina Faso's language policy were in the process of being finalized by the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and

the Promotion of National Languages, through its Secrétariat permanent de la promotion des langues nationales et de l'éducation à la citoyenneté [Permanent Secretariat for the Promotion of National Languages and Citizenship Education]. These language policy documents are eagerly awaited by all those working in development and bi/plurilingual education in Burkina Faso.

This is because without these texts, which are intended to "give the local languages of Burkina Faso higher status and explicit functions",<sup>11</sup> it will be difficult to effectively integrate these languages into the country's educational, socioeconomic and social cohesion development initiatives.

<sup>10</sup> Article 35 of the Constitution of 27 January 1997.

<sup>11</sup> Source: Facebook page of the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and Promotion of National Languages.

## 2. History of bi/plurilingual education

During the French colonization of the country, which ended in 1960, school children were taught exclusively in French.

Studies<sup>12</sup> have demonstrated the following.

- When classes are taught in a language families have little or no mastery of, parents are prevented from monitoring their children's schooling and getting involved in their education.
- Monolingual French schools do not fully meet the needs of the population.
- Teaching exclusively in French leads to poor academic attainment, because the students have not mastered the language.

In addition, as the Government of Burkina Faso was aware that the exclusive use of French in classrooms affected not only the academic attainment, but also the development of children's identity, it committed to projects to promote local languages, with a view to using them in classrooms, from the 1970s onwards.

### 2.1 1970s: start of the promotion of local languages in Burkina Faso

Initially, this interest in learners' first languages was manifested in six major initiatives.

- Between 1970 and 1976: 10<sup>13</sup> national sub-committees were created for the Voltaic (Gur) languages (Mooré, Dioula, Gulimancema, Bwamu, Fulfulde, Dagara, Kasim, Bobo, Lobiri and San).
- 1973: A linguistics department was established at the University of Ouagadougou, offering studies in African languages from undergraduate level.
- 1974: The Office nationale d'éducation permanente et d'alphabétisation fonctionnelle et sélective [National Office of Continuing Education and Functional and Selective Literacy – ONEPAFS] was established to organize literacy provision in learners' first languages.
- 1978: The languages formerly known as 'indigenous' were granted the status of 'local languages'.
- 1978: ONEPAFS became la Direction d'Alphabétisation Fonctionnelle et Sélective [Directorate for Functional and Selective Literacy]; one of its roles is "to promote functional and selective literacy in local languages".

- 1979: Codification of the Burkina Faso national alphabet is officially adopted through Decree 79/055/PRES/ESRS/ of 2 February 1979.<sup>14</sup>

### 2.2 1979: first bilingual reform in education

It was not until the end of the 1970s that these local languages were actually used as a medium of instruction in the classroom.

The 1979 educational reform, known as the Aimé Damiba reform, introduced three local languages in schools, in conjunction with French: Mooré (14 pilot schools), Dioula (10 pilot schools), and Fulfulde (4 pilot schools).<sup>15</sup>

From 28 schools at the beginning, the pilot project was then extended to 164 schools, before running into several obstacles.

- There were objections from speakers of languages other than Mooré, Dioula and Fulfulde, who did not understand why only three of the country's 60 languages were being used in class.
- There were objections from the public and from some educators, who saw this as 'cut-price education'.

Besides, this reform was interrupted by the Conseil National de la Révolution [National Council of the Revolution] at the end of the 1983/1984 school year, and no evaluation was conducted.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Alidou, Hassana and Birgit Brock-Utne, 'Teaching practices – teaching in a familiar language', in Ouane, Adama and Christine Glanz, eds., *Optimising Learning, Education and Publishing in Africa: The Language Factor*, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) and Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), Hamburg and Tunis, 2011, pp. 165–191.

<sup>13</sup> There are now 26 of these committees (Source: 'Langues de scolarisation dans l'enseignement fondamental en Afrique subsaharienne francophone' ['Schooling Languages in Basic Education in Sub-Saharan Francophone Africa' – LASCOLAF]).

<sup>14</sup> Source: ELAN/OIF – LASCOLAF

<sup>15</sup> *Document de référence des innovations en éducation de base formelle au Burkina Faso*. Ministry of National Education and Literacy, Burkina Faso, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> *Étude approfondie des causes de la baisse tendancielle des résultats des écoles bilingues*. Solidar Suisse, UNICEF, Enfants du Monde, Ministry of National Education and Literacy, Burkina Faso, 2017.

## 2.3 1994: measures taken following the national forum on education

Ten years later, in 1994, a national forum on education was held to identify problems with Burkina Faso's education system.

This national forum highlighted very low internal efficiency in the system, regardless of the indicator used, as there is a low promotion rate and high rates of repetition, dropout and exclusion at all levels of schooling.<sup>17</sup>

One of the causes identified for this 'crisis in education' is the failure to take learners' first languages into account in schools.

Consequently, starting in 1994/1995, several innovations were introduced to improve the quality of teaching and learning by integrating the learners' first languages into schools.

These initiatives have included:

- Ministry of Basic Education and Literacy/OSEO bilingual primary schools.
- State satellite schools established in villages without schools, with support from UNICEF.<sup>18</sup> They are attended by children aged 6–9 years, who then transfer to a 'mother school' in their fourth year (each satellite school is linked to the nearest monolingual school, generally 3-10 km away).<sup>19</sup>
- Banma Nuara Centre 1 bilingual schools (CBN1, Tin Tua).
- Banma Nuara Centre 2 schools (CBN2, Tin Tua), which provide gateways from non-formal to formal education (aiming to provide training for out-of-school adolescents so they can re-integrate into 'traditional' schooling).

After pilot and extension phases, two of these initiatives were transferred to the Government of Burkina Faso: the bilingual primary schools (Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages/Solidar Suisse, formerly Ministère

de l'enseignement de base et de l'alphabétisation [Ministry of Basic Education and Literacy]/OSEO) and the CBN1 bilingual schools (TinTua).

Thus, there are currently some bilingual public schools implementing Solidar Suisse methodology and others implementing TinTua methodology.

## 3. Bilingual education: pilot projects transferred to the state

The two projects mentioned above – Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages/Solidar Suisse (formerly Ministry of Basic Education and Literacy/OSEO) and Tin Tua – both completed the pilot phase and were transferred to the state in 2007/2008. These initiatives, with their trajectory from the status of 'pilot project' to that of 'national project', are presented below.

### 3.1 Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages/Solidar Suisse bilingual primary schools

#### 3.1.1 Background

Œuvre Suisse d'Entraide Ouvrière (OSEO) first started working in Burkina Faso in the field of bilingual (Mooré-French) literacy, using its method of teaching the French language to adults based on literacy skills (ALFAA method).

Given the success of this method, the ALFAA approach was adapted in 1994 for out-of-school children aged 9-15 years. Under the regulations of the time, these children were 'too old' to start school but 'too young' to attend adult literacy centres.<sup>20</sup> OSEO aimed to provide these children with accelerated bilingual schooling so they could re-integrate into 'traditional' schooling.

This adaptation for children was a great success. For example, studies have shown that children taught in these 'ALFAA' bilingual schools finish their education in five years, compared with six years for children in mainstream monolingual schools (where teaching is only in French).

<sup>17</sup> Source: ELAN/OIF – LASCOLAF.

<sup>18</sup> These schools were gradually transformed into bilingual schools.

<sup>19</sup> Lewandowski, Sophie, *'Le savoir pluriel : école, formation et savoirs locaux dans la société gourmantché au Burkina Faso'*, PhD thesis in sociology, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Nikiéma, Norbert and Afsata Kaboré-Paré, 'Langues de scolarisation dans l'enseignement fondamental en Afrique subsaharienne francophone (LASCOLAF) : Cas du Burkina Faso', École et Langue Nationale en Afrique (ELAN), 2010.

In view of the savings in duration of schooling due to this bilingual teaching, the 'Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages/Solidar Suisse' approach was then piloted in Burkina Faso's public schools from 1995 onwards. It was subsequently extended to more than 300 schools in the country from 2000. Between 2008 and 2018, Solidar Suisse gradually transferred full management of its bilingual education approach to the state.

Currently, The vast majority of public bilingual schools in Burkina Faso are therefore former Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages/Solidar Suisse schools now managed exclusively by the state.<sup>21</sup>

### 3.1.2 The Multilingual Education Continuum

To complete bilingual educational provision, the bilingual primary schools were later supplemented by two other initiatives: 'espaces d'éveil éducatifs' (bilingual preschool education – 3E) and 'collèges multilingues spécifiques' (CMS).

There are thus three links in the Solidar Suisse Multilingual Education Continuum.



- At the preschool level, there is bilingual preschool education available for early years care and education.
- At the primary level, there are bilingual primary schools for the care and education of school-age

children. At this level, there are also trilingual primary schools (EPT) delivering in local languages, French and Arabic.

- At lower secondary school level, there are CMS for the care and education of young adolescents.

### 3.1.3 Solidar Suisse bilingual schools

The Solidar Suisse bilingual schools provide an early-exit transitional bilingual model. They function as follows:

- During the first two years of schooling, the local languages are taught subjects and mediums of instruction, while French is only a taught subject.
- Once students have sufficient command of French (during the third year), it becomes the medium of instruction.
- The local language continues to be taught as a subject throughout school.
- Bilingual education applies to all subjects, not just 'language and communication' classes.

In her PhD thesis, Sophie Lewandowski summarizes the Solidar Suisse methodology as follows:

"Bilingual (state-OSEO) schools have specific curricula for the first two years, include elements of the monolingual primary school curriculum from the third year onwards, and follow the mainstream curriculum in its entirety, while continuing classes in the local language, for the last two years."<sup>22</sup>

Table 3 illustrates how these schools function. Table 4 shows the distribution between learners' first language and French during primary school.

**Table 3: Solidar Suisse schools operating model**

	In the local language(s)	In French	Manual learning/culture
<b>Year 1</b>	Awareness-raising exchanges, reading, writing, arithmetic (90% of the timetable)	Oral communication	Various
<b>Year 2</b>	Reading, writing, arithmetic Local-language grammar French phonetics, history, geography, observational sciences (CE1 curriculum) (80% of the timetable)	Oral communication Reading Writing	Various
<b>Year 3</b>	Reading, arithmetic, communication skills, bilingual grammar and conjugation (50%)	CE2 curriculum	Various
<b>Year 4</b>	Reading, arithmetic, communication skills (20%)	CM1 curriculum	Various
<b>Year 5</b>	Reading, arithmetic, communication skills (10%)	CM2 curriculum	Various

Source: curricula of bilingual schools (according to Ministry of Basic Education and Literacy/OSEO, 2004 and Ilboudo, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Some of which are now hosting other pilot projects (ELAN and Enfants du Monde in particular).

<sup>22</sup> Lewandowski, Sophie, 'Le savoir pluriel : école, formation et savoirs locaux dans la société gourmantchée au Burkina Faso', PhD thesis in sociology, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, 2007.

**Table 4: Interrelation between local languages and French in Solidar Suisse schools**

Year of study Local language

Year of study	Local language Language 1 (L1)	French Language Language 2 (L2)	Hours per week (excluding breaks of 2 1/2 hours)
Year 1	90%	10%	27.5
Year 2	80%	20%	27.5
Year 3	50%	50%	27.5
Year 4	20%	80%	27.5
Year 5	10%	90%	27.5

Source: Direction du Continuum d'Éducation Multilingue [Directorate for the Multilingual Education Continuum], Direction Générale de l'Enseignement de Base [General Directorate for Basic Education] and Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages.

These two tables demonstrate that at the beginning of school the first language (L1) is the primary medium of instruction, and that it gradually gives way to French, while continuing to be used in class until the fifth year of primary school, albeit in a more limited way. We can also see that the primary education cycle in Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages/Solidar Suisse schools lasts five years, as opposed to six years in monolingual schools, at the end of which students are presented with the Certificate of Primary Education. After five years of schooling in bilingual schools, bilingual students have thus covered the same curriculum as mainstream monolingual schools (with the addition of classes on and through the first language).

With regard to the substantial reduction in the amount of time dedicated to the first language (L1) towards the end of the primary cycle, the 'Langues de scolarisation dans l'enseignement fondamental en Afrique subsaharienne francophone' ['Schooling Languages in Basic Education in Sub-Saharan Francophone Africa' – LASCOLAF] report explains:

"The reason for the drastic decline of L1 from the fourth year onwards is that at this point students begin to use the same materials (entirely in French) as in mainstream education; since the official exams do not assess the local languages or subjects taught in those languages, it is essential to ensure a good command of French to succeed. The local languages are nevertheless maintained as subjects (writing, reading, etc.)."<sup>23</sup>

### 3.1.4 Solidar Suisse trilingual schools

Trilingual education is the latest innovation initiated by Solidar Suisse in collaboration with the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages. This concept integrates French, Arabic and local languages.

The pilot phase of the project (2009–2014) involved nine trilingual schools comprised of 13 classes of 268 students, including 118 girls, which were then transferred to the state.

The Service de l'Éducation Trilingue [Trilingual Education Department], within the Direction de l'Enseignement de Base [Directorate for Basic Education], is the structure in the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages through which this innovation is implemented. This department has coordinated trilingual education activities such as support, monitoring, advice and training for teachers, social mobilization and various review meetings.

The learning process in trilingual Franco-Arabic schools spans six years of school and is based on the contents of the national bilingual primary education curricula (local language and French) as well as those of monolingual Arabic schools that are part of the Fédération des Mouvements et Associations Islamiques [Federation of Islamic Movements and Associations].

Three local languages (Mooré, Dioula, Fulfulde) are currently used in addition to Arabic and French, with a view to expanding to other languages.

The main teaching stages in trilingual schools are as follows:

- In the first year, the emphasis is on the local languages, both in spoken and written form. French and Arabic are taught only in terms of oral communication (the local language is the medium of instruction and a subject).
- In the second year, writing skills in the local language are consolidated and writing in Arabic and French begins (the local language is the medium of instruction

<sup>23</sup> Nikiéma, Norbert and Afsata Kaboré-Paré, 'Langues de scolarisation dans l'enseignement fondamental en Afrique subsaharienne francophone (LASCOLAF) : Cas du Burkina Faso', École et Langue Nationale en Afrique (ELAN), 2010.

and a subject, French and Arabic are only taught subjects).

- In the third year, the consolidation of written Arabic and French takes place through the transfer of skills acquired in the local language during the second year to French and Arabic (the local language is a medium of instruction, while Arabic and French are both subjects and mediums of instruction).
- In the fourth year, the focus is on the transfer of skills acquired in the local language to Arabic and French, with a reduction in the amount of time spent on subjects in the local language (the local language is a less-used medium of instruction, Arabic and French are both subjects and media).
- In the fifth year, the emphasis is on Arabic and French (the local language is a little-used medium of instruction, Arabic and French are both subjects and mediums of instruction).
- In the sixth year, more than 90 per cent of learning time is dedicated to Arabic and French in order to prepare students for the Certificate of Primary Education in those languages (the local language is a little-used medium, Arabic and French are both subjects and mediums of instruction).

### 3.1.5 Analysis of Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages/Solidar Suisse bilingual schools

#### 3.1.5.1 Strengths of Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages/Solidar Suisse bilingual schools

Seven advantages of the Solidar Suisse pilot project have been identified in the various studies that analyse it:<sup>24</sup>

- + Bilingual basic education is seen as a **continuum** covering three levels of education: preschool,<sup>25</sup> primary education (bilingual and trilingual primary schools) and specialist multilingual secondary schools.<sup>26</sup>
- + **When bilingual schools are properly monitored and supported, there is a reduction in school dropout and an improvement in students' attainment.**
- + **It reduces the primary education cycle by at least one year, to five years in bilingual schools instead of six years in monolingual schools.**
- + **The child's first language is maintained, alongside French, throughout primary school.**<sup>27</sup>

+ **The project demonstrates a commitment to gender equity**, by providing boys and girls with equal access to education and content and the ability to put learning into practice. The initiative has a strong focus on enrolling equal numbers of boys and girls to the extent possible. As such, according to data from the Directorate for the Multilingual Education Continuum, in 2017, there were 252 operational bilingual schools with a total of 343,982 students, 175,249 of whom were male and 168,733 female (51 per cent and 49 per cent, respectively, compared to a national average of 50.65 per cent and 49.35 per cent).<sup>28</sup>

+ **The initiative gives renewed importance to local culture**, through the introduction into school of positive African and more local cultural values, using stories and proverbs, songs and dances, music from the local area and traditional musical instruments.

+ **Students' parents are involved** in the schools.

<sup>24</sup> Ministère de l'enseignement de base et de l'alphabétisation, 'Le continuum d'éducation de base multilingue du Burkina Faso : Une réponse aux exigences de l'éducation de qualité. Évaluation prospective du Programme de Consolidation de l'Éducation Bilingue et Plan d'Action Stratégique Opérationnel 2008-2010', Rapport d'étude, Ministère de l'enseignement de base et de l'alphabétisation, Burkina Faso, 2008; and LASCOLAF report, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> According to the educators interviewed as part of this survey, "if children were to attend the Espaces d'Éveil Éducatif (bilingual preschool education) it would considerably improve their command of the local language and enable better outcomes for them in the écoles primaires bilingues [bilingual primary schools]." However, these statements need to be verified as there are no evaluations or studies that back them up.

<sup>26</sup> In Burkina Faso's three specialist multilingual secondary schools in Dafinso in Houet, Tanyoko in Sanmatenga and Loumbia, students follow the same curriculum as in monolingual secondary schools and, in addition, take writing classes in their first language, English classes and classes in another local language of Burkina Faso, "with a view to opening their minds to foreign cultures and to other cultures in the country." In terms of performance, assessments conducted by the Directorate for the Multilingual Education Continuum, the Direction Générale de L'enseignement Formelle Générale [General Directorate for Formal General Education] and the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages in 2016 and 2018 demonstrated that the lower secondary school diploma results of students attending specialist multilingual secondary schools were lower than those attending monolingual secondary schools. According to survey respondents, the reasons for these issues and for the declining results are the same as those affecting the quality of bilingual schools: a lack of teacher training and insufficient teaching resources. It should be noted that there are only three specialist multilingual secondary schools in the whole country.

<sup>27</sup> Even though in practice some teachers in the end-of-cycle classes (fourth and fifth years of primary school) say that they are "abandoning L1 because the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages sets a Certificate of Primary Education exam that is still largely dominated by tests in French."

<sup>28</sup> Ministère de L'Éducation Nationale, de l'Alphabétisation et de la Promotion des Langues Nationales, 'Annuaire statistique de l'enseignement primaire 2019-2020', 2020, p. 169.

<sup>29</sup> Ministère de l'enseignement de base et de l'alphabétisation, 'Le continuum d'éducation de base multilingue du Burkina Faso : Une réponse aux exigences de l'éducation de qualité, Evaluation Prospective du Programme de consolidation de l'Éducation Bilingue et Plan d'Action Stratégique Opérationnel 2008-2010, Rapport d'étude, 2008.



Moreover, as highlighted by Kinda (2003) and Tiendrebéogo et al. (2005), "according to the experts who conducted a study on the cost of bilingual education, five years of primary education yields a considerable annual saving in investment given that mainstream education lasts six years".<sup>29</sup>

### 3.1.5.2 Challenges

Following the transfer of the Tin Tua and Solidar Suisse initiatives, the state was faced with the challenge of better defining and implementing an approach that reflected the resources at its disposal.

However, some of the inherent weaknesses of these bilingual initiatives were also exposed.

In a study conducted by the International Organization of la Francophonie (OIF) in several countries in 2009, it was noted that in the case of the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages/Solidar Suisse bilingual initiative, "the interplay between languages in Burkina Faso's bilingual education system, as currently practiced, inevitably leads to a devaluation of the local language in the eyes of teachers and students."<sup>30</sup> Indeed, even though the first language is maintained until the end of primary school, it plays a much smaller role than the French language from the fourth year on.

According to several educators interviewed as part of the survey:

- Students need more time to acquire the basics of their first language and for transfer from L1 to L2 to be facilitated.
- Students' first language should be valued more (including in the last years of primary school), thus allowing their identity to develop.

Note: Bilingual curricula reforms in favour of valuing learners' first languages only seem feasible if the contents of the Certificate of Primary Education exams are updated. As previously observed, the French language still occupies a predominant position in these exams. As long as this is the case, the local language will tend to be confined to a supporting role in the classroom.

## 3.2 The Tin Tua pilot project

The Tin Tua bilingual primary schools are the other bilingual model taken over by the state in 2007, around

the same time as the Solidar Suisse bilingual primary schools.

### 3.2.1 Background to Tin Tua bilingual schools<sup>31</sup>

Initially specializing in adult literacy in the eastern region of Burkina Faso, in 1994 Tin Tua began to adapt its bilingual methodology (Gulimancema and French) for use with school-age children.

Thus, they opened the Banma Nuara 1 centres (CBN1) for school-age children, which are equivalent to the satellite schools founded by the state.<sup>32</sup>

The Banma Nuara 1 centres are now called *Écoles Primaires Bilingues Tin Tua* [Tin Tua bilingual primary schools]. They were transferred to the state in 2007, but continue to benefit from technical support from Tin Tua.

There are eight Tin Tua bilingual primary schools, all located in the East of the country, since these schools combine Gulimancema and French.

### 3.2.2 Background to the Tin Tua Banma Nuara 2 centres

Outside the formal education system, Tin Tua has opened 'Centres de Formation Complémentaire' (complementary education centres known as 'Banma Nuara 2 centres', or CBN2) for children and adolescents aged 9–15 years and adults.

Their goal is to enable young people who are already literate in their local language to complete the primary school curriculum in just four years and then "continue their education in formal secondary schools or deepen/expand their technical skills in small trade/professional training centres or workshops."

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<sup>30</sup> Balima, P., Youssouf Haidara and Nazam Halaoui, *L'éducation bilingue en Afrique subsaharienne (enseignement dans deux langues): Burkina Faso, Congo-Kinshasa, Guinée, Mali, Niger et Sénégal*, Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, Paris, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> See <https://www.tintua.org/wp/qui-nous-sommes/>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. Association Tin Tua (n.d.), 'L'expérience des centres Banma Nuara', Département de l'Éducation de Base, Burkina Faso.

<sup>33</sup> Source: Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, de l'Alphabétisation et de la Promotion des Langues Nationales, 'Évaluation des innovations en éducation non formelle'. Final report.

<sup>34</sup> Lewandowski, Sophie, *Le savoir pluriel : école, formation et savoirs locaux dans la société gourmantché au Burkina Faso*, Doctoral dissertation in sociology, École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS), Paris, 2007.

### 3.2.3 The Tin Tua methodology

The Tin Tua method is applied in both Banma Nuara 1 and 2 centres as well as in the state satellite schools.<sup>34</sup>

It works as follows:

"In the first and second years, the African language is a subject as well as the language of instruction for all subjects other than French, which is taught first orally and then in written form. In the third year, French gradually becomes the language of instruction while the African language is maintained as a subject. If teaching is done well during the first and second years, knowledge acquired through the African language can be transferred to the French language without any difficulty. Primary education lasts five years."<sup>35</sup>

The breakdown in the use of first and second languages in Tin Tua schools is shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: Interrelation between local languages and French in Tin Tua bilingual schools**

Year	L1 local language	L2 French	Others	Hrs/week
1	59%	34%	7%	26.25 hrs
2	40%	51%	9%	28 hrs
3	11%	82%	7%	28.5 hrs
4	10%	86%	4%	28.5 hrs
5	10%	86%	4%	29 hrs

Source: Ouoba (2016), p. 9

Apart from the fact that in Tin Tua schools the first language becomes a subject from the fourth year onwards, the main difference between Tin Tua and the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages/Solidar Suisse and ELAN approaches (the last of which will be explained in the next section) is that Tin Tua prioritizes immersion in L2 (French) and prohibits the use of L1 (the local language) in spoken communication (except at the start of school, during reading and writing, where comparison between L1 and L2 is encouraged).

The developer of this methodological approach describes it as follows:

"[...] it seems that in order to facilitate the learning of a second language, it is important for learners to immediately immerse themselves in the system of that language, scrupulously avoiding using the first language as an intermediary even if the two languages

are quite similar. Interference from the first language will be all the more frequent if teachers repeatedly make recourse to translation and to the process of understanding the structures of the second language through those of the first language at the beginning of the language class. In keeping with the principle of maintaining the separation of language systems, the Tin Tua method prohibits any recourse to the source language when speaking, as far as possible. It aims to plunge learners directly into the target language system by seeking to create a kind of linguistic bath or immersion experience. At that point, any time dedicated to the source language is considered time lost for learning the target language."<sup>36</sup>

### 3.2.4 Analysis of Tin Tua schools

Besides the analysis of the Tin Tua method that appears in the LASCOLAF report (which includes the following extract: "without wanting to appear partisan, we do not advocate the Tin Tua method [...] which espouses behaviourist theories and promotes practices that include passing through a stage of 'essential rote learning', which have long been abandoned in teaching"),<sup>37</sup> we have limited external data and evaluations relating to Tin Tua schools.

Therefore, to make the most of the initiative's achievements, we recommend conducting longitudinal and comparative studies to evaluate this methodology and identify strengths and potential areas for improvement.

## 3.3 General observations regarding Solidar Suisse and Tin Tua schools

On the whole, studies on bi/plurilingual teaching tend to agree with the analysis in the LASCOLAF report. One published by the Burkina Faso Ministry of Education in 2008 states:

<sup>35</sup> Ouoba, Bendi Benoît, 'Construction des premières compétences linguistiques en langues négro-africaines de la famille Oti-Volta comme langues premières dans une perspective de transfert vers la langue française comme langue seconde d'enseignement', in *Les approches bi-plurilingues d'enseignement-apprentissage: autour du programme école et langues nationales en Afrique (ELAN-Afrique)*, edited by Maurer Bruno, Éditions des Archives Contemporaines, Coll. 'Pluralité des langues et des identités et didactique', Paris, 2016, p. 438.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Nikiéma, Norbert and Afsata Kaboré-Paré, 'Langues de scolarisation dans l'enseignement fondamental en Afrique subsaharienne francophone (LASCOLAF) : Cas du Burkina Faso', *École et Langue Nationale en Afrique (ELAN)*, 2010.

"Kathleen Heugh (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of studies related to different models of bilingual education in Africa. Her analysis shows that when innovations are scaled up, [early-exit transitional bilingual education models are not very effective, guaranteeing only limited success and access to secondary schools for the students who attend them](#). Considering the inconclusive experiences of several African countries that have promoted bilingual education based on the early-exit transitional model,<sup>38</sup> she proposes that policymakers and education officers promote bilingual education models that continue to teach local languages throughout primary education, while ensuring that students also receive adequate instruction in the official language being taught as a subject and used as a language of instruction to an extent comparable to the local language of instruction. According to Alidou (2005), the achievements of the transitional bilingual education model seem to erode towards the end of primary education. An effective transfer of skills is only possible if students have sufficiently mastered their first language and have adequate knowledge of the official language."<sup>39</sup>

## 3.4 Evaluation of bilingual primary schools before and after transfer to the state

### 3.4.1 National evaluation mechanism

In April 2000, the Burkina Faso Ministry of Education decided to set up a permanent mechanism to monitor school learning through the Direction des Études et de la Planification [Directorate of Studies and Planning], focusing on key subjects, including French, mathematics and observational sciences. In its *Évaluation des acquis scolaires 2007 – 2008* [Assessment of school achievement 2007–2008], the ministry describes its project as follows:

"In April 2000, as part of efforts to strengthen the planning and management capacities of the basic education sub-sector, the Ministry of Basic Education and Literacy (MEBA), in conjunction with its Technical and Financial Partners (TFPs), decided to set up a permanent mechanism to monitor school learning. Like the annual statistical survey that enables the ministry to collect information on the achievement of the 10-year plan's quantitative targets, this mechanism allows the ministry to monitor the achievement of

school learning objectives through surveys that were originally annual but have been carried out every two years since 2007/2008." (p. 1).

Below, we present a comparative analysis of the results of bilingual schools and monolingual schools (where education takes place only in French) at three intervals:

- in 2005 (before the transfer of bilingual primary schools to the state)
- in 2008 (when transfer to the state began)
- in 2014 (when transfer to the state was still under way).

Data are sourced from two studies:

- The *Évaluations des acquis scolaires 2007–2008* [Assessment of school achievement 2007–2008] of the Direction Générale des Etudes et des Statistiques Sectorielles [General Directorate for Sectoral Studies and Statistics] (2009);
- The *Évaluations des acquis scolaires 2013–2014* [Assessment of school achievement 2013–2014] of the General Directorate for Sectoral Studies and Statistics (2015).

**Note:** These assessments refer to bilingual schools without making any distinction between Solidar Suisse and Tin Tua schools. It is not possible, therefore, to deduce which bilingual methodology has a better impact on students' academic performance.

### 3.4.2 2005

As shown in Table 6, in 2005, the results of bilingual school students were higher than those of students of monolingual schools in both French and mathematics and in the first and fourth year of primary school.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> A model where first languages are only used as mediums of instruction during the first years of schooling.

<sup>39</sup> Ministère de l'Enseignement de Base et de l'Alphabétisation, 'Le continuum d'éducation de base multilingue du Burkina Faso : Une réponse aux exigences de l'éducation de qualité – Evaluation prospective du programme de consolidation de l'éducation bilingue et plan d'action stratégique opérationnel 39–2010'. Study report, 2008, pp. 33–34.

<sup>40</sup> The authors conclude the ministry's study by stating that they were unable to ascertain whether the better performance of bilingual schools was related to "the language of instruction used, the resources introduced into these schools, or their organizational model." Thus, they recommend that these issues be explored in greater depth "in order to benefit Burkina Faso's education system as much as possible."

**Table 6: Comparison of monolingual and bilingual school results in French and mathematics in 2005**

Type of school	Level	French (average score out of 100)	Mathematics (average score out of 100)
Monolingual	Year 1 (CP1)	42.1	36
Bilingual	Year 1 (CP1)	43	45.4
Monolingual	Year 4	43.1	38
Bilingual	Year 4	45.2	45.8

Source: Adapted from Évaluation des acquis scolaires [Assessment of school achievement], Direction des Études et de la Planification and Ministère de l'enseignement de base et de l'alphabétisation, 2009.<sup>41</sup>

### 3.4.3 2008

In 2008, the Year 1 results of bilingual school students remain higher than those of monolingual school students, but fall below those of monolingual school students in Year 4 (see Table 7).

**Table 7: Comparison of monolingual and bilingual school results in French and mathematics in 2008**

Type of school	Level	French (average score out of 100)	Mathematics (average score out of 100)
Monolingual	Year 1	42.3	42.9
Bilingual	Year 1	43.7	54.9
Monolingual	Year 4	45.4	39.4
Bilingual	Year 4	38.1	38

Source: Adapted from Évaluation des acquis scolaires [Assessment of school achievement], Direction des Études et de la Planification and Ministère de l'enseignement de base et de l'alphabétisation, 2009.<sup>42</sup>

### 3.4.4 2014

Table 8 shows that in 2014, students in the first year of primary (CP1) in bilingual schools performed slightly better in mathematics (with an average score of 49.8 out of 100 versus an average score of 48.9 for all schools) but were weaker in French (with an average score of 38.1 in bilingual schools versus an average score of 42.3 for all schools).

In the fourth year of primary school (CE2), students in bilingual schools obtained significantly lower scores than those in other schools in French (with an average score of 40.4 versus an average score of 49.8 for all schools), mathematics (with an average score of

31.0 versus an average score of 37.5 for all schools), and science (with an average score of 38.8 versus an average score of 47.4 for all schools).

**Table 8: Results obtained in CP1 and CE2 in 2014, by type of school**

Type of school	Level	French (average score out of 100)	Mathematics (average score out of 100)	Science (average score out of 100)
Monolingual	CP1	42.5	48.9	–
	CE2	50	37.6	47.6
Satellite	CP1	42	47.8	–
	CE2	52.6	44.8	49.8
Bilingual	CP1	38.1	49.8	–
	CE2	40.4	31.0	38.8
Franco-Arabic	CP1	39.4	48.0	–
	CE2	51.0	38.1	49.9
Average	CP1	42.3	48.9	–
	CE2	49.8	37.5	47.4

Source: Évaluation des acquis scolaires [Assessment of school achievement], 2015, p.62.

### 3.4.5 Evaluation of Certificate of Primary Education results (1998–2019)

In the comparative analysis of students' Certificate of Primary Education results between 1998 and 2019 presented in Table 9, there is a marked difference starting in 2009 (one year after the bilingual primary schools began to be transferred to the state).

Indeed, the Certificate of Primary Education pass rate, which was almost always higher in bilingual schools between 1998 and 2008 (with the exception of 2003), becomes higher in monolingual schools from 2009 (except in 2012).

<sup>41</sup> Ministère de l'Enseignement de Base et de l'Alphabétisation, 'Évaluation des acquis scolaires 2007–2008', 2009, pp.39–47.

<sup>42</sup> Ministère de l'Enseignement de Base et de l'Alphabétisation, 'Évaluation des acquis scolaires 2007–2008', 2009, pp.39–47.



**Table 9: Results obtained in CP1 and CE2 in 1998–2019, by type of school**

Year	Bilingual schools*				Monolingual schools **
	No. of schools	No. of local languages	Candidates present	Pass rate	Pass rate
1998	2	1	53	52.83% <sup>1</sup>	48.6%
2002	4	2	92	85.02%	61.81%
2003	3	1	88	68.21%	70.01%
2004	10	4	259	94.59%	73.73%
2005	21	6	508	91.14%	69.01%
2006	40	7	960	77.19%	69.91%
2007	47	7	1,540	73.97%	66.83%
2008	75	7	1,852	61.66%	58.46%
2009	94	8	1,984	72.65%	73.68%
2010	91	8	2,834	60.38%	66.97%
2011	90	8	2,982	61.77%	66.01%
2012	87	8	3,051	65.32%	63.33%
2013	87	8	2,853	59.65%	60.90%
2014	98	8	3,496	81.89%	82.2%
2015	120	8	3,529	69.33%	72.20%
2016	144	8	2,418	55.8%	62.35%
2017	252	9	5,299	65.75%	73.25%
2018	271	9	2,922	56.73%	64.77%
2019	186	9	6,449	41.01%	55.11%

Source: Table provided by Yombo Gbangou from data obtained from Directorate for the Multilingual Education Continuum/General Directorate for Formal General Education/Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages.

Notes:

\* In bilingual schools, young school-age children obtain the Certificate of Primary Education in five years, while adolescents obtain it in four years, unless repetition is required.

\*\* In monolingual schools, school-age children obtain the Certificate of Primary Education in six years, unless repetition is required.

### 3.4.6 Interpretation of results

The data in these tables show that the results of bilingual school students dropped significantly from 2007–2008 onwards, when the Solidar Suisse and Tin Tua initiatives were transferred to the state.

According to interviewees, the main challenges that began to emerge once the transfer had started were:

- lack of textbooks in some schools
- inadequate monitoring of teachers
- insufficient refresher courses or in-service training for teachers and educators
- problems with teacher allocation (some teachers being assigned or transferred to schools where they do not know the language of instruction)
- lack of collaboration and communication between different educators
- overly centralized management of bilingual classes
- unavailability of educators experienced in bilingualism

These are all challenges that the state, which is now in charge of bilingual schools, must meet in order to improve the standard of these schools.

## 4. Bi/plurilingual education: The current state of affairs

### 4.1 Total number of bilingual schools in the country

The available statistics regarding the number of bilingual schools are recent, dating from 2019.

According to the Directorate for the Multilingual Education Continuum, in 2019 there were **271 bilingual schools** in the country, about 30 of which were not fully operational due to insecurity, a shortage of space, or

because parents did not want to enroll their children in bilingual schools.<sup>43</sup>

Therefore, in 2019, there were approximately 241 functioning bilingual schools.

However, according to data reported in the 'Annuaire statistique de l'enseignement primaire 2019/2020' [Statistical yearbook for primary education 2019/2020],<sup>44</sup> there were 14,863 primary schools in Burkina Faso (10,630 public schools and 4,233 private schools) in the 2019/20 school year.

That means that in 2019, bilingual schools represented only 1.6 per cent of the country's schools.

Since the ministry has not registered any monolingual schools having been converted to bilingual schools since 2019, this percentage still applies.

## 4.2 Languages used in bilingual schools

A total of 10 local languages are used in the classroom in conjunction with French: Mooré, Dioula, Fulfulde, Lyélé, Nuni, Gulimancema, Dagara, Bissa, Kasim and Bwamu.

Table 10 presents the number of bilingual primary schools in Burkina Faso in 2019 according to language and location.

**Table 10: Number of bilingual schools in 2019, by language and location**

10 local languages 13 regions	Bissa	Bwamu	Dagara	Dioula	Fulfulde	Gulimancema	Kasim	Lyélé	Mooré	Nuni	Total
Boucle du Mouhoun		1		1							11
Cascades				8							8
Centre									9		9
Centre-Est	9					1			19		29
Centre-Nord									12		12
Centre-Ouest								8	26	5	39
Centre-Sud	5				1		11		9		26
Est						22			1		23
Hauts-Bassins				1	1						11
Nord					2				23		25
Plateau Central					1				56		57
Sahel					6						6
Sud-Ouest			15								15
Total	14	1	15	28	11	23	11	8	155	5	271

Source: Direction du Continuum d'Education Multilingue (2019).

There is an unequal number of schools per language. For example, while 155 schools offer instruction in Mooré, only one offers instruction in Bwamu. This situation has provoked debate. Some educators question the efficiency of investing in a single language (in the development of tools and training in particular).

Others, by contrast, believe that respect for language rights demands that all Burkinabe citizens be able to learn in their first language (the Constitution

of Burkina Faso, for example, specifies that "discrimination of any kind is forbidden, including discrimination based on race, ethnicity, region, colour, gender, language, religion, caste, political opinions, wealth or birth") They also believe that all languages spoken in Burkina Faso deserve to be developed and resourced for use as teaching media in class.

<sup>43</sup> This will be discussed again in the final chapter.

<sup>44</sup> p. 20.

## 4.3 Methodologies implemented in these bilingual schools

The 241 or so bilingual schools operating in Burkina Faso at the time of this study are a product of bilingual initiatives that have completed their pilot phase and been transferred to the state (see the previous chapter on this subject). Several different curriculum models are being implemented in these schools:

- A total of eight schools are implementing the Tin Tua curriculum.<sup>45</sup>
- A total of 233 schools are implementing the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages/Solidar Suisse curriculum<sup>46</sup> or are based on the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages/Solidar Suisse model.

Of these, 173 schools are implementing the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages/Solidar Suisse curriculum and 60 are introducing new bilingual pilots, including:

- 30 schools piloting the ELAN/OIF method
- 30 other schools piloting the Enfants du Monde quality education programme.

Tin Tua bilingual schools:	Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages/Solidar Suisse bilingual schools: about 230 schools		
8 schools	Schools implementing the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages/Solidar Suisse curriculum:  <b>173 schools</b>	Schools implementing the ELAN method:  <b>30 schools</b>	Schools implementing the Enfants du Monde quality education programme:  <b>30 schools</b>

## 4.4 The ELAN initiative (OIF)

### 4.4.1 An overview of the ELAN initiative

The ELAN initiative is not confined to Burkina Faso. It is supporting 12 countries in sub-Saharan Africa to carry out the reforms needed to enable the joint use of African languages with French in primary education.<sup>47</sup> It aims to create an international body

within the French-speaking world to promote bilingual education in African countries by capitalizing on and sharing experience, expertise and training. The goal is to support the national action plans of the countries in specific ways that fit with their educational policies. In terms of teaching and learning, the ELAN initiative seeks to:

"Improve the teaching and learning of basic skills (such as reading, writing and arithmetic) through equipping primary school students with better mastery of French, starting by teaching them in their mother tongue".<sup>48</sup>

Phase 2 of the ELAN initiative (2018–2020) was formed of five components:

1. Strengthening the institutional framework supporting bilingual education in the first cycle of basic education.
2. Training officials at the ministry responsible for bilingual education in the first cycle of basic education.
3. Providing educators in bilingual education with pedagogic and teaching materials.
4. Running a communication campaign to promote bilingual education.
5. Monitoring and evaluating bilingual education.

The ELAN approach takes into consideration each country's chosen mediums of instruction (L1 and French) in its curriculum. It has developed L1 student booklets and guides for the first to third years of primary school.

With regard to bilingual teaching, the *'Guide d'orientation à l'approche bi-plurilingue ELAN de l'enseignement du français'* [*Guidance on ELAN's bi/plurilingual approach to teaching French*] states that "with a view to transforming bilingual teaching, teachers who teach in an L1 and an L2 no longer think in terms of compartmentalized and unconnected learning, but seek to develop students' bilingual skills" (ELAN 2014, p. 6).<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> No new Tin Tua bilingual schools have opened since they came under government responsibility.

<sup>46</sup> Solidar Suisse is continuing to pilot new bilingual methodologies in Catholic schools.

<sup>47</sup> Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo.

<sup>48</sup> Source: <https://ifef.francophonie.org/node/227>

<sup>49</sup> [https://elan-afrique.org/sites/default/files/fichiers\\_attaches/guide\\_elan\\_francais\\_final.pdf](https://elan-afrique.org/sites/default/files/fichiers_attaches/guide_elan_francais_final.pdf)

The guidance also states that:

“School children who have already been educated in their first language do not have to learn everything from scratch when starting to learn in their L2 (here French):

-They will have L1 skills to build on, so their learning of French will be supported and ‘coloured’ by the L1 they already have.

- They must become bi/plurilingual individuals, able to switch from one language to another and use their entire bi/plurilingual repertoire according to the situation.

The teacher should use the relationship between L1 and L2 as a teaching tool, i.e. by:

a. making comparisons:

- to foster the transfer of shared aspects
- to identify points of difference between the L1 and L2 for the students

b. practising and encouraging rephrasing between one language and the other.”

(ELAN, 2014, p. 5).

It is clear from these different excerpts that transferring learning and language skills is at the heart of the ELAN initiative. Furthermore, ELAN implements a late-exit transitional model. This means that, according to the bilingual competency framework that has been produced, learning progression in L1 and French continues throughout the primary cycle. The gradual transfer to French must be of equal benefit to L1 learning.

#### 4.4.2 The ELAN initiative in Burkina Faso

The ELAN model has been implemented in Burkina Faso since 2013. It is in a pilot phase, with its activities being gradually scaled up. Ten schools across the country were implementing the ELAN model in 2013 and 25 schools were implementing it in 2018.

There are currently 30 ELAN schools, including 12 in the Mooré language, five in Dioula, five in Bissa, three in Fulfulde and five in Gulimancema.

##### 4.4.2.1 Evaluation mechanism for the ELAN initiative

The Centre de Recherche en Education de Nantes [Nantes University Centre for Education Research –

CREN] was tasked with evaluating the effectiveness of the ELAN approach.

A comparative evaluation of the results of two groups of students learning Mooré together with French (a Ministry of Basic Education and Literacy/OSEO<sup>50</sup> schools group and the ELAN pilot group) was carried out between 2013 and 2015. It involved 297 students, 145 belonging to the control group from Ministry of Basic Education and Literacy/OSEO schools and 152 to the pilot group.<sup>51</sup>

Unlike in the seven other countries where this evaluation was conducted, which include Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Niger and Senegal, in Burkina Faso only two assessments were carried out: a baseline study at the start of the first year of primary school (CP1) and a summative evaluation at the end of the second year (CP2).

For budgetary reasons, the midterm evaluation at the end of the first year did not take place.

##### 4.4.2.2 Results of the ELAN initiative evaluation

The following conclusion is reached in the ELAN schools evaluation:

“There is no demonstrable positive impact associated with the ELAN method in Burkina Faso: out of the eight relationships tested [...], four show no difference between the two groups, three are linked to the progress of the control group [...], who overcame their initial learning gap with regard to the pilot group, and one [...] is linked to the progress of the control group in French vocabulary between the beginning of first year and the end of the second year. However, at the end of the second year, the pilot group outperformed the control group in L1 spelling [...] and in identification of the written word (IME) in L1 (a result not shown in the table but included in the detailed analyses), without us being able to ascertain whether these differences were due to the method, given the lack of longitudinal data.

<sup>50</sup> [https://elan-afrique.org/sites/default/files/fichiers\\_attaches/synthesecren-web.pdf](https://elan-afrique.org/sites/default/files/fichiers_attaches/synthesecren-web.pdf) p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> ELAN-Afrique-Phase-1-2013-2015-Rapport-terminal-sur-levaluation-des-acquis-des-eleves.pdf



These findings should be discussed in light of the conditions affecting the implementation of this method in the country, which include:

- the absence of a midterm evaluation due to resource constraints
- delays to school starting and to carrying out the final evaluation as a result of the events of October 2014
- control classes benefiting from bilingual teaching (the Ministry of Basic Education and Literacy/OSEO model).

Therefore, given the particular characteristics of the control classes, these findings do not indicate that the model is ineffective, but rather that it does not have any advantage over existing bilingual teaching practices."<sup>52</sup> There are, however, a few nuances in these findings, given the context. According to the external evaluators: "These findings do not appear to be related to testing conditions, which, according to the supervisors' reports, seem to have been entirely consistent with expectations. They must therefore be interpreted/discussed in the light of the conditions affecting the implementation of this method in the country. That is: on the one hand, there was no midterm evaluation due to lack of resources, and on the other, the final evaluation took place a few months after the events of October 2014, which delayed the start of the school year and prevented lessons from taking place for about two months. In addition, during monitoring of the pilot and control classes from 12 to 16 January 2015, ELAN assessors noted that the second year booklets were not yet available and that schools had not yet received teaching packs. In fact, the pilot classes were well behind schedule and the initial stage of revising the previous year's material in the first few weeks of class had not been completed as planned."<sup>53</sup>

Lastly, it is important to note that these evaluation findings are now over five years old.

Given that the project has since opened new schools, created and organized new training modules, and produced new resources, we believe it essential to plan new evaluations to analyze the current impact of ELAN bilingual schools on student learning.

#### 4.4.2.3 Analysis of the ELAN initiative during the field survey

According to the educators interviewed as part of this study, the effectiveness of the ELAN method is due to its

innovative accelerated reading and writing acquisition approach, the importance it gives to developing a literate environment, the learning games used in class and the steps it includes to support transfer from the learners' first language into French.

Furthermore, according to those interviewed, early results in reading and writing (in L1 and French) are noticeable when the approach is practiced to a high standard.<sup>54</sup>

Finally, Burkina educators welcome ELAN's recent production of a trainer's manual on bilingual teaching methods (in June 2020) for pre-service teacher training schools in Burkina Faso (as well as in Niger and Mali). This manual could be used as a training module for teacher trainees.

#### 4.4.2.4 UNICEF's adaptation of the ELAN approach

Given the benefits of the ELAN methodology in relation to reading and writing, in January 2016 UNICEF integrated ELAN's accelerated reading instruction approach in four pilot schools (child-friendly schools)<sup>55</sup> in the provinces of Ganzourgou, Namentenga, and Séno. The goal of the pilot was to improve student performance in core subject areas.

Since the pilot child-friendly schools are mainstream schools, the ELAN methodology was adapted to monolingual French instruction. Classroom practices were selected where teachers "actively coach students to read and write while understanding what they are reading and writing, making increasing connections between deciphering and comprehension" and "motivate students by putting them in situations where they understand that reading and writing serve a purpose (in society, for enjoyment, for other subjects)".<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> [https://elan-afrique.org/sites/default/files/fichiers\\_attaches/synthesecren-web.pdf](https://elan-afrique.org/sites/default/files/fichiers_attaches/synthesecren-web.pdf), p. 15.

<sup>53</sup> 2016 ELAN Report, p. 28.

<sup>54</sup> Students at the pilot schools were assessed three times over two years: (i) at the beginning of the first year of primary education (CP1) (October–November 2013) as a diagnostic assessment; (ii) at the end of the first year of primary education (CP1) (April–May 2014) as a midterm assessment; (iii) at the end of the second year of primary education (CP2) (April–May 2015) as a summative assessment. The assessment covered students' oral and written L1 and French.

<sup>55</sup> In French, these are called *EQAmE: Ecole Qualité Amie des Enfants*.

<sup>56</sup> Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de l'Alphabétisation du Burkina Faso, 'Étude évaluative de la mise en œuvre de l'approche ELAN de la lecture et de l'écriture dans les EQAmE pilotes : Amitié A – Amitié B – Nièga – Kampiti', 2017.

In order to verify the effectiveness of this method, the integration of ELAN's accelerated reading instruction approach was evaluated through a study comparing the results of students in mainstream (control) schools and the pilot child-friendly schools.

After a year of piloting the ELAN approach in these schools, the following evaluation was made:

"The analysis shows that ELAN strategies implemented in monolingual schools do contribute to improving reading and writing instruction in these schools and can help achieve the country's official curriculum goals. For example, in reading and writing, the pilot schools performed better than the control schools in terms of reading and writing efficacy. The mean number of children who achieved an average score or higher in reading and writing varied from 63 per cent in schools implementing the ELAN approach to 29 per cent in control schools. All educators observed positive changes in students and are supportive of the ELAN approach, which shows a promising ability to make a difference."<sup>57</sup>

#### 4.4.2.5 The ELAN initiative: challenges

During the survey, educators mentioned some challenges experienced when implementing the ELAN project and/or in relation to state support of the pilot, including that:

- In some years, materials were not distributed to schools on time.
- Textbooks were sometimes in short supply<sup>58</sup> (forcing teachers to spend a lot of time copying a large amount of text onto the board so that all students could practice reading).
- There were few materials in local languages from the third year on.
- In some years, monitoring of teachers was inconsistent or did not happen.

#### 4.4.2.6 The ELAN initiative: outlook

The ELAN method developers described having two main short-term goals:

1. To revise the bilingual curriculum so that it meets the criteria of balanced bilingualism, according to which the local language and French should be used in tandem in the classroom (more specifically, the local language should be used 50 per cent of the time in class up to the fifth year of primary school instead of

only 20 per cent in the fourth year and 10 per cent in the fifth year, as is currently the case).

2. To organize a seminar to [harmonize practices](#) among all actors involved in the field of bilingualism in Burkina Faso, in order to capitalize on the learning from all the approaches tested and foster the sharing of tools and the exchange of good practices among educators in the field of bi/plurilingualism in schools.

## 4.5 The Enfants du Monde quality education programme

### 4.5.1 Programme overview

The Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages, together with the Association pour la Promotion de l'Éducation Non Formelle (Association for the Promotion of Non-Formal Education) and with technical and financial support from the NGO Enfants du Monde, is implementing a programme entitled Programme d'appui à l'amélioration de la qualité des enseignements/apprentissages dans les écoles bilingues couvrant la période 2017–2020 [Support programme to improve the quality of teaching/learning in bilingual schools for the period 2017–2020]. Its overall goal is to improve the quality of education and learning for children while promoting equity and the acquisition of relevant knowledge/skills to enable them to continue learning and improve their living conditions.

The programme implementation strategy places a strong emphasis on building the capacity of actors, particularly that of the teachers responsible for applying the proposed approaches in the classroom with their students. Thus, from 2017 to 2019, three cohorts of teachers from the first to third years of primary school were gradually trained.

Currently, 30 bilingual schools with 90 classroom teachers and 30 school principals, i.e a total of 120 teachers based in the Centre, Centre-Ouest, Centre-Sud and Plateau Central regions, are involved in this programme.

<sup>57</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, 'Bilan de Mise en oeuvre ELAN', Burkina Faso, 2017.

<sup>58</sup> In this regard, it should be noted that ELAN is tasked with designing bilingual textbooks, but not publishing them.

<sup>59</sup> Source: Call for projects launched by Enfants du Monde – 'Education de qualité au Burkina Faso', 2015.

The programme seeks to introduce "educational methods that enable learners to acquire theoretical and practical knowledge that allows them to make sense of and transform the reality in which they are embedded."<sup>59</sup> These methods are backed by an approach developed in numerous countries over a period of more than twenty years: Pedagogy of Text (PoT).

The approach's background documents describe it as follows:

"PoT is not a method, but a set of scientifically developed principles informed by the most relevant contributions of different education sciences (linguistics, social interactionist psychology, etc.), which must be used and adapted for each specific context. The principles of PoT include the structuring of curricula into at least four subject areas (languages, social sciences, mathematics, life and earth sciences), interdisciplinarity, linking theory and practice, balanced bilingualism (the two languages are both mediums of instruction and taught languages throughout the entire curriculum), interculturality, the interaction between endogenous and exogenous knowledge, the development of higher intellectual capacities (such as logical, conceptual and critical thinking, mathematical language, etc.), as well as the central importance given to different genres of text (including oral ones) in teaching and learning."<sup>60</sup>

In order to enable local actors and partners in the field to take ownership of the approach, it establishes a 'training chain'.

In practice:

"The programme works to build up a team of people capable of independently addressing the various challenges of designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating quality bilingual and intercultural education.

The first link in the training chain comprises the training of trainers in education sciences, bilingualism and education quality at a Master's degree level. The curriculum for this was developed by the Université d'Abomey Calavi [University of Abomey Calavi – UAC] in Benin with the support of Enfants du Monde specialists.

The second link in the chain involves the training of mid-level trainers appointed by the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National

Languages for the purposes of the programme. The goal is to train a core group of trainers from different Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages departments, primarily those responsible for bilingual schools. This link establishing a core group of trainers responds to the need to equip a critical mass of trainers to implement the programme and eventually scale it up. The third and final link in the training chain involves those working at a local level: teachers in bilingual schools and their supervisors. Specific training modules are developed for these two groups of people based on an analysis of their training needs and the curricula in question."<sup>61</sup>

## 4.5.2 Evaluation

The literature review and surveys did not provide the necessary data to assess the impact of the Enfants du Monde quality education programme on students' academic performance.

The observation we made regarding the Solidar Suisse, TinTua and ELAN schools also applies to those of Enfants du Monde: a long-term longitudinal impact evaluation mechanism for Enfants du Monde bilingual schools must be established.

# 5. Obstacles to delivering quality bi/plurilingual education

## 5.1 Cautious attitude to bilingualism in schools among parents and educators

The study observed a downward trend in parental support for bilingual education, based on field survey data. Some of them see it as an "educational approach for poor people". This reservation seems to be due, among other reasons, "to the fact that some people in the field of bilingual education do not enrol their own

<sup>60</sup> Source: Call for projects launched by Enfants du Monde – 'Education de qualité au Burkina Faso', 2015.

<sup>61</sup> Source: Anonymous document presenting the quality approach (2020) collected during the study.

<sup>62</sup> Quote from a student's parent collected during the field survey.

children in this curriculum.”<sup>62</sup>

Other parents believe in the benefits of bilingualism in school, but prefer to send their children to monolingual schools because of the challenges in terms of supplies and teaching that bilingual schools have experienced since their transfer to the state.

The limited support from parents for bilingualism in school contrasts with the mostly positive assessments we gathered from educators about the use of local languages and the benefits of using them as mediums of instruction, which include reducing the duration of schooling by one year, facilitating learning, improving communication between students and teachers, strengthening children’s cultural identity, and valuing local languages and children’s endogenous knowledge. These positive perceptions are consistent with several studies on the benefits of bilingualism in schools.

For most educators, the issue is not whether or not to introduce local languages in schools, but rather how to overcome obstacles linked to inadequate planning to enable the delivery of quality bi/plurilingual education.

## 5.2 Main obstacles to implementing a bilingual curriculum

The field survey and literature review captured many observations and opinions on the challenges around implementing bilingual education. The main obstacles identified by interviewees related to bottlenecks in the implementation of decrees, the absence of a language policy, the lack of monitoring bilingual schools transferred to the state, a lack of educator training and educational materials, and the failure to properly resource some local languages.

### 5.2.1 Obstacles to implementing certain acts and decrees

The Government of Burkina Faso has shown clear commitment to promoting children's first languages in the classroom, as the following texts demonstrate:<sup>63</sup>

- Circular letter No. 2002-098/MEBA/SG/DGEB of 18 June 2002 authorizing parents and communities who wish to do so to request the conversion of a mainstream

monolingual school into a bilingual school.

- Circular letter No. 2003-126/MEBA/SG/DGEB of 9 June 2003, authorizing the integration of newly opening schools into the bilingual system.

- Circular letter No. 2003-127/MEBA/SG/DGEB of 25 July 2003 which sets out the procedure and conditions for converting mainstream monolingual schools into bilingual schools and opening new bilingual schools.

- Order No. 2003-226/MEBA/SG of 6 October 2003, designating a hub to coordinate the bilingual education programme (now the Directorate for the Multilingual Education Continuum) within the General Directorate for Basic Education.

- Circular letter No. 2005-078/MEBA/SG/DGEB of 14 March 2005 establishing regional education teams for bilingual education. The purpose of these teams is to strengthen local oversight and improve the quality of teaching and learning in bilingual schools.

- Order No. 2004-014/MEBA/SG/ENEP of 10 March 2006 initiating training in the transcription of local languages and in bilingual instruction in the National Schools for Primary Teachers (ENEP) and in the Centre de Formation Professionnel et Pastoral [Professional and Pastoral Training Centre].

- The 2007 Education Act, which states in Article 10 that "the mediums of instruction used in Burkina Faso are French and the local languages, both in teaching practice and in assessments" and that "other languages may be used as teaching media or subjects in educational institutions in accordance with the applicable regulations".

- The introduction of modules on the transcription of local languages and bi/plurilingual teaching at the Ecole Normale Supérieure [Higher Institute for Teacher Training] of the University of Koudougou in 2007.

- The communication on education policy adopted by Decree No. 2008-681/PRES/PM/MESSRS/MEBA/MASSN/MJE of 3 November 2008, which, within the framework of plans to develop the education system by 2015, provides for "the promotion of local languages and their introduction into new curricula."

- Décret N° 2013/PRES/PM/ MENA portant organisation du Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de l'Alphabétisation, which establishes a directorate in charge of multilingual education: the Directorate for the Multilingual Education Continuum. This directorate

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<sup>63</sup> Some of the data in this list come from the report on the languages used in basic education in sub-Saharan Francophone Africa (LASCOLAF report) (p. 17).

is part of the General Directorate for Basic Education.

- Article 44 of Decree No. 2015-0354/MENA/SG passed in 2015, which defines Directorate for the Multilingual Education Continuum's mission as the promotion of bilingual and multilingual education in the national education system's public education and teaching institutions.

- In 2019, Decree No. 2019-0344, paragraph 3, article 17 establishing the Secrétariat Permanent de la Promotion des Langues Nationales et de l'Éducation à la Citoyenneté [Permanent Secretariat for the Promotion of National Languages and Citizenship Education].

This secretariat's responsibilities include:<sup>64</sup>

- developing, coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the national policy for the promotion of local languages
- coordinating the description, codification and resourcing of local languages
- overseeing the functioning of the committee and sub-committees on local languages
- formulating a strategy to develop the literate environment for local languages and monitoring its implementation
- contributing to the validation of quality assurance tools for activities related to promoting local languages and citizenship education
- ensuring evaluation of the impact of activities related to promoting local languages and citizenship education
- promoting action research in the field of local languages
- backing social mobilization and advocacy efforts to facilitate the promotion of local languages and citizenship education
- overseeing the elaboration of legislation and regulations on the promotion of local languages.

Furthermore, "the Plan Sectoriel de l'Éducation et de la Formation du Burkina Faso 2012–2021 [Burkina Faso Education and Training Sector Plan 2012–2021 – PSEF] states that 'the promotion of local languages and their introduction into new curricula' is one of the guiding principles of country's sectoral policy."<sup>65</sup>

Finally, on a symbolic level, the ministry in charge of national education is now called the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages, a title that demonstrates the importance the state ascribes to the inclusion of local

languages in its education system.

Numerous acts, decrees and decisions confirm the state's commitment to bi/plurilingual education.

However, the implementation of these different official texts has varied.

While the establishment of the Directorate for the Multilingual Education Continuum may have been effective, implementation of the remaining laws and regulations has been slow, intermittent and lacked efficacy, which explains why in 2021, contrary to what was stated in the 2012–2021 Education and Training Sector Programme (PSEF), the vast majority of the country's schools (98.5 per cent) continued to operate according to the traditional, monolingual system, exclusively in French.

Along the same lines, the prospective evaluation report commissioned by the Ministry of Basic Education and Literacy in 2008 states:

"There is no binding administrative act that explicitly obliges the Ministry of Basic Education and Literacy (now the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages) to proceed with the gradual roll-out of bilingual education; it follows that those in charge of decentralized institutions who do not support this roll-out can undermine it or not forward on school conversion applications received at a local level. There are equally fragile legal grounds for the conversion of mainstream/monolingual schools into bilingual schools (circular letters from directors of central bodies). Consequently, legally binding regulations (orders, decrees) are needed to make the Ministry of Basic Education and Literacy's policy to integrate education a reality."<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Source: <https://bop.bf/wp-content/uploads/Organigramme-MENAPLN-De%CC%81cret2019-0344.pdf>.

<sup>65</sup> Mignot, Christelle, "J'apprends si je comprends' : pour une meilleure prise en compte des langues premières des enfants à l'école primaire. Projet de documentaire long métrage et de kit audiovisuel à l'attention des enseignants de classes bi-plurilingues', *Edition des Archives Contemporaines (in press)*.

<sup>66</sup> Alidou, H., et al., 'Le continuum d'éducation de base multilingue du Burkina Faso : Une réponse aux exigences de l'éducation de qualité – Evaluation prospective du programme de consolidation de l'éducation bilingue et plan d'action stratégique opérationnel 2008–2010', Study report, Ministère de l'Enseignement de Base et de l'Alphabétisation, 2008.

## 5.2.2 The lack of a language policy

Not having a language policy constitutes a significant disadvantage. Without clear guidelines, "innovations in language and teaching at a school level cannot spread in the best way possible, due to the lack of a legal framework."<sup>67</sup>

In this regard, we note that the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages is currently finalizing a language policy.

A post on one of the ministry's social network profile pages states that:

"On Tuesday 21 September 2021, the Minister of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages – Professor Stanislas Ouaro – led the opening of the language policy validation workshop. [...] Educators and administrative authorities are taking part in a workshop to analyse and approve the proposed language policy.

The workshop will enable four documents to be approved, on the basis of which the language policy can be drawn up. These documents include an assessment, a language policy, a strategy that supports implementation of the policy's actions and a three-year plan.

All four documents have been studied and revised by a technical committee that included members of all relevant ministries as well as other actors and resource persons involved in language promotion."<sup>68</sup>

However, the ministry does not confirm whether the policy was finalized at the September 2021 workshop, or whether further changes are needed.

## 5.2.3 Obstacles relating to the transfer of bilingual pilot projects to the state

As noted previously, bilingual school performance declined significantly when bilingual pilot projects were transferred to the state.

Obstacles to the state taking full ownership of bilingual schools may be a result of several factors.

Some educators mentioned the lack of financial support for bilingual education from the state. Thus far, bi/plurilingual education seems to have been considered "a project to be financed by external partners" and the budget allocated to bilingualism in schools has been limited.

A study published in 2018<sup>69</sup> shows that difficulties in monitoring bilingual schools could be linked to the process of decentralizing education, which envisages the transfer of competencies from the state to local authorities. Indeed, "**the process of transferring competencies is taking place in a context where communal authorities have no resources**, so they are struggling to fulfil their roles, including in relation to literacy and multilingual education." Therefore, the budget deficit at the commune level could be the reason for some bottlenecks.

The failure of the ministry responsible for education to respond to requests for bilingual education from the public since bilingual schools were transferred to the state is another weakness in the system. In fact, the 2010 LASCOLAF report revealed that most of the 300 applications to open bilingual schools submitted by communities to the ministry had not yet been approved. This situation significantly affects the support of educators and parents for the 'bilingual project'. Since the number of schools is not growing, the public tends to view bi/plurilingual education as

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 32.

<sup>68</sup> Source: Facebook page of the Ministry for National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages (message published 22 September 2021 and accessed 30 October 2021).

<sup>69</sup> Ouedraogo, Ali, *'La politique d'éducation non formelle du Burkina Faso : analyse critique des déperditions dans les centres permanents d'alphabétisation et de formation'*, 2018, p. 20.

just an experiment that is destined to disappear.

#### 5.2.4 Insufficient harmonization of curricula

As previously described, there are several 'education subsystems' in Burkina Faso: the mainstream (monolingual) education system on the one hand, and the bilingual education system on the other, which itself is composed of two approaches that comprise the bilingual curriculum based on the Tin Tua model and that based on the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages/Solidar Suisse model.

However, an evaluation report on bilingual education has shown that these parallel systems considerably hinder any scaling up of bi/plurilingualism in schools.<sup>70</sup> The existence of 'subsystems' complicates any activity related to training educators, developing teaching resources or drafting texts aimed at defining the practical implications of the 'bilingual political project'.

To prevent this situation from continuing, at a workshop on bilingualism in February 2006 in Tenkodogo, Burkinabe educators recommended "the harmonization of current bilingual approaches based on a clear and comprehensive description of practices and their rigorous comparative analysis".

However, in the 15 years since this recommendation, experiences have still not been clearly described nor have they been subject to comparative analysis. This study seeks to make a valuable contribution to this crucial analysis.

#### 5.2.5 The lack of teacher training

Training in bilingual education has been part of the National School for Primary School Teachers (ENEP) training programme since 2004.

Yet during our field survey, several educators (principals and teachers) explained that this training was neither sufficient nor tailored to the reality in their

classrooms.

According to the ENEP trainers interviewed for the study:

"The pre-service teacher training programme on bilingual education is insufficient. Teachers are offered a 60-hour module on local language transcription when they would need 100 or 120 hours to properly study the module. Moreover, training on how to teach local languages is lacking and there are no bilingual training schools where trainee teachers can undertake practical placements."

Furthermore, the teachers interviewed for our survey said they did not know how to conduct bilingual classes nor how to transfer learning in the learner's first language to their second.

This lack of training, which has become more pronounced in recent years, leads undertrained teachers in bilingual schools to teach what they know best: the monolingual approach.

#### 5.2.6 The lack of job stability for teachers

Through their various bi/plurilingual initiatives, technical and financial partners seek to improve teacher training in the schools they cover. Nevertheless, our study found that teachers' positions are not stable and that teachers adequately trained in bilingual education are likely to be transferred and could leave the bilingual school at any time. Conversely, teachers who are not trained in bilingual education are often transferred to schools with a bilingual curriculum.

This cycle of transfers weakens initiatives by disrupting the professional development of trained, competent

<sup>70</sup> Boukary, Amidou and Aime Damiba, 'Le continuum d'éducation de base multilingue au Burkina Faso : Évaluation de sa mise en œuvre par l'État depuis 2007', Solidar Suisse, Ministry of National Education and Literacy, Burkina Faso, 2015.



and experienced staff.

### 5.2.7 The lack of teaching materials

In the surveys, several educators noted “the lack of resources for certain levels”, “the lack of resources in certain languages” and “the lack of tools tailored to certain dialects”.

Relevant measures to address these gaps include:

- harnessing the experience and expertise of skilled educators to produce bi/plurilingual resources
- involving linguists in the production of textbooks and booklets to ensure their content is scientifically valid and to find solutions to challenges arising from dialectal differences.

Furthermore, sufficient materials are not available in all 10 languages officially used in formal education in Burkina Faso (Mooré, Dioula, Fulfulde, Lyélé, Nuni, Gulimancema, Dagara, Bissa, Kasim and Bwamu).

Some teachers who speak languages with less-available materials also reported that they “have to translate some texts themselves” to deliver bilingual education. Sometimes, these translations are done without taking into account the linguistic and cultural specificities of the local language, i.e. the texts are translated from French following a teaching approach borrowed from a foreign language, which negatively affects the quality of the documents.

This lack of expertise in producing educational resources poses a problem. Indeed, simply speaking a language does not make someone an expert in education in this language or in educational design. The decision to include these languages in Burkina Faso should be accompanied by specific measures and resources to produce teaching materials and design training modules and quality monitoring tools in all languages of bi/plurilingual education.

As stated by the Ministry of Basic Education and Literacy (2008) on this subject (p. 50): multilingualism can be adequately managed through linguistic planning and, above all, investment in linguistic research and development for all languages identified as languages of instruction. This shows that universities have an essential role to play in the development of bi/plurilingualism in schools in Burkina Faso.

It would also be beneficial to harness the expertise of designers who have undertaken specific training on how to design bilingual textbooks. This includes designers from Solidar Suisse or ELAN (National Schools and Languages), for example, who could be asked to share their expertise with their colleagues.

### 5.2.8 The mismatch between the bilingual curriculum and the Certificate of Primary Education

As Noyau (2011) states,<sup>71</sup> there are discrepancies between the bilingual curricula and the monolingual assessments for the Certificate of Primary Education.

During the survey, several teachers explained that they “have to focus exclusively on French from the fourth year onwards for their students to pass their Certificate of Primary Education exams.”

Indeed, as one technical and financial partner explained: “students at bilingual schools can choose their language for ‘language and communication’ tests, but all other tests are in French only. From the fourth year onwards, teachers therefore tend to conduct classes as they would in monolingual schools, to give their students the same chance of success.”

If students are assessed only in French for the Certificate of Primary Education, the bilingual education system will be inclined to prepare students in French to maximize results. If, in the future, the government wants to ensure that students’ first language (L1) and French are treated equally and that students are competent in both languages, it will be necessary to assess students in the languages that they were taught in primary school. To this end, the different local languages (L1) taught in schools must gradually be integrated into the national assessment framework.

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<sup>71</sup> Noyau, Colette, ‘Les divergences curriculum - évaluation certificative dans les écoles primaires bilingues de pays du sud : conséquences du point de vue de l’acquisition du bilinguisme’, in *Curriculum, programmes et autres itinéraires en langues et cultures (FLS-FLE), Le Français dans le Monde - Recherches et applications*, no. 49 (January), 2011, pp. 137–154.



## 5.2.9 The lack of studies, evaluations and statistics

This study found that there is a lack not only of statistical data, but also of longitudinal evaluations of the performance of bilingual schools.

# 6. Conditions for the roll-out of bi/plurilingual education

During the field survey, the participants noted the conditions that would need to be met to roll out bilingual education. Their proposals were recorded and grouped under six headings.

## 6.1 Draw up regulations on how to implement bilingualism in schools in practice

Burkina Faso has a series of laws and decrees that recommend integrating languages into the education system. However, these legal texts are not accompanied by circulars or regulations that specify how to actually plan and implement bilingualism in schools.

It is therefore necessary to draw up regulations at the national and regional levels on how to manage the various actions required to implement bilingualism in practice, including: preparing language toolkits in collaboration with university bodies working in the area of local languages and bilingualism; planning the opening of bilingual schools; delivering more targeted training and monitoring; and ensuring that budget planning takes into account the Burkinabe government contribution.

The Burkinabe language policy also needs to be finalized.<sup>72</sup>

## 6.2 Increase and stabilize funding for bi/plurilingual education

According to the educational staff from the Direction du Continuum d'Éducation Multilingue [Directorate for the Multilingual Education Continuum] interviewed for

the survey, each year only 70 per cent of the funding required for bilingual education (training, monitoring and teaching materials) is covered.

However, better coverage of the Directorate for the Multilingual Education Continuum's funding requirements would impress upon managers that they are obliged to implement the project to extend and roll out bi/plurilingual education.

Furthermore, with a larger budget, the Directorate for the Multilingual Education Continuum could ensure better pedagogic supervision of bilingual schools, in particular by strengthening the regional teams. Improving the monitoring of schools and teachers could reverse the downward trend in the performance of national bilingual schools.

## 6.3 Harmonize the different bi/plurilingual curricula

To resolve the issues arising from the existence of different national bilingual curricula, it would be worth considering how to help foster bi/plurilingualism in schools by pursuing **minimum methodological convergence at the national level**. This could be achieved using tools and arrangements that have proven effective under different bilingual projects (both those that have been transferred to government management and those that are being piloted).

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<sup>72</sup> The finalization of Burkina Faso's language policy was a major component of the 2012–2021 Strategic Development Programme for Basic Education, which set out the following objective: "The expansion of bilingualism in basic education will be adopted as a principle of this policy, which will prioritize the integration of regional languages, while planning how to describe all languages by 2025, with a view to preserving the national culture and increasing opportunities for learning these languages. The reform planned from 2015 onwards on the specialization of teachers and the harmonization of programmes will help anchor efforts to introduce learning in local languages and in French. This policy will also set out plans for teacher training in bilingual methods and language transcription. It will take into account the mobility of teachers, the development of tailored curricula and adequate teaching materials, and how to build national consensus on this issue. To reduce reservations and develop this linguistic policy, it will be necessary to organize meetings on the strategy for rolling out bilingualism or trilingualism in education from the start of the programme."

Considering different approaches to education can be beneficial:

- if they complement each other and have a common goal
- if they are not contradictory
- if they are evaluated and developed
- if their positive impact on the educational attainment of students is proven
- if they are tailored to the national and regional context.

Currently, there is a lack of data on the performance of bilingual programmes.

As already discussed, the evaluations conducted every two years by the ministry compare the performance of “bilingual schools” with “monolingual schools”, without differentiating between different bilingual school models. However, there are significant differences between these programmes.

A rigorous monitoring and evaluation system for bilingual initiatives should therefore be implemented as a matter of urgency to:

- compare different bilingual models through longitudinal studies
- highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each model
- harness relevant and positive aspects of these initiatives (tools produced, approaches to teaching, links with the community, etc.).<sup>73</sup>

Following such an evaluation, practices in bilingual education can begin to be harmonized so that the different approaches complement and enrich one another.

## 6.4 Raise awareness of the benefits of bi/plurilingual education based on proven learning outcomes

The lack of support for bilingual education – and even the negative perception of it among some stakeholders, due to a range of barriers to its implementation – significantly hinders its expansion or full roll-out. For stakeholders to actually accept bi/plurilingual education, it will undoubtedly be necessary to advocate for its adoption. However, it will only be possible to implement this approach on the basis of

proven, documented and known learning outcomes.

Indeed, only by demonstrating the effectiveness of this approach on the basis of concrete data will it be possible to shift to a positive trajectory, which will have to be driven by strong political will. Current advocacy efforts should therefore be adapted to highlight the relevance and reliability of bilingual learning and take into account successful experiences and the arrangements that should support its effective expansion.

## 6.5 Train staff on bi/plurilingualism in schools

To capitalize on the progress of bilingual education in Burkina Faso and to roll it out more widely, teachers and other staff must undertake pre- and in-service training on bi/plurilingualism in schools as a matter of priority.

This study found that teacher training at ENEP institutions was inadequate because, while it does provide basic training on how to transcribe local languages, it does not sufficiently cover how to teach African languages as first languages or approaches to bi/plurilingual education.

It is therefore necessary to update the content of pre- and in-service teacher training to include modules on how to conduct bi/plurilingual classes.

Moreover, to ensure that teachers of bilingual classes are properly supported by their supervisors, we recommend training principals and inspectors to undertake qualitative monitoring of bilingual classes.

Finally, it is also necessary to:

- update the content of university courses to give more room to bi/plurilingual teaching methods (both in teaching and in research)
- train national and regional leads on bilingualism in schools on linguistic and educational planning.

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<sup>73</sup> For example, for Solidar Suisse this could include the involvement of students’ parents in implementing bilingual facilities and their participation in running certain activities in the local language, such as manual learning and culture. For ELAN, it could include the tools for reading and writing and transferring knowledge, etc.

## 6.6 Produce bi/plurilingual teaching materials and make them available to teachers and students

We recommend that more quality bi/plurilingual classroom resources be produced, including for the later years of primary school, as this study found that most existing textbooks and booklets are mainly for the first two or three years of primary school.

To ensure the quality of resource design, an oversight and monitoring mechanism should be implemented to verify the scientific and educational quality of tools produced in local languages while avoiding the simple translation and transposition of models poorly adapted to the Burkinabe context. Linguists and educators will need to be involved in their validation.

Finally, it will be necessary to provide resources in the local languages so that they can be used as mediums of instruction, to find tailored solutions for distributing these resources in schools, and to reform the content of the Certificate of Primary Education to ensure it recognizes the learning outcomes of students at bi/plurilingual schools.



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# Conclusion

The introduction of local languages to the education system, alongside French, is widely accepted in Burkina Faso. Since the 1979 reform, through the 1994 national forum, the bi/plurilingual pilots conducted in 1994–1995 and their transfer to government responsibility in 2007–2008, the government has for decades advocated the importance for students of being able to learn in their own languages as well as in French. Burkina Faso is still committed to bi/plurilingualism in schools. Component 3 of the 2012–2021 Strategic Development Programme for Basic Education demonstrates this.

This document states that:

“Learning in a language the student has mastered before moving on to a foreign language is recognized to be more beneficial than starting to learn in a language the student has not mastered straight away. Moreover, beyond the comparative advantages in terms of educational and economic advancement, cultural integration is the foundation of all development. It is a way for the school to link itself to the whole range of extracurricular factors through an integrated curriculum that goes beyond the usual psychopedagogical dimensions to address the sociocultural and linguistic context of the learner. As the well-known adage goes: ‘a people without knowledge of their past is a people without a soul’. In light of these considerations, bilingualism and multilingualism, enshrined in the July 2007 Education Policy Law, will be strengthened [...]”

Nevertheless, despite the enormous efforts made by various national and bilateral actors to capitalize on Burkina Faso’s achievements in bilingual education, there is still significant room for improvement and a long way to go before expansion and a full roll-out.

In fact, a number of legal texts promoting bi/plurilingualism in schools are not supported by accompanying circulars setting out concrete plans for the implementation of bi/plurilingual teaching in the classroom. There is therefore a significant disconnect between these texts and the reality in the classroom.

For example, despite the added value of using local languages in schools, and even though bi/plurilingualism in schools is presented as a priority in the Strategic Development Programme for Basic Education, Burkina Faso still has few bilingual schools (under 300).

Moreover, despite the policy law advocating for the first languages of the students in the class to be taken into consideration, the performance of bilingual schools has fallen over the past 12 or so years (from 2007–2008 in particular).

For bilingualism in schools to be rolled out across the country, regulations must be drafted at the national and regional levels on how to organize practical aspects such as training educators, equipping languages with resources, producing educational and teaching resources for bilingual classes, managing and monitoring bilingual class teachers, and evaluating, developing and harmonizing bilingual practices.

Finally, communication and advocacy efforts should be increased. This advocacy should use objective arguments on the benefits of bilingualism but, above all, it should be based on examples of successful bilingual experiences in Burkina Faso.



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# ANNEX: Further information on the field survey methodology

## Survey details

In Bamako, the surveys were conducted in the two education districts: Rive Gauche and Rive Droite.

In the Rive Gauche education district, we targeted the Djélibougou and Banconi teacher resource centres. The Baben Santara primary school under the Banconi teacher resource centre was chosen for interviews with teachers and the school principal. In the Rive Droite education district, we focused the survey on the Banankabougou teacher resource centre. Interviews were conducted with the school management committee, parents, students, teachers and the school principal at the Yirimadjo primary school group under the Banankabougou teacher resource centre.

We also ran three focus groups: the first with teacher supervisors at the teacher training institutes in Bamako; the second with basic education teachers' unions; and the third with designers of bilingual textbooks at the Académie Malienne des Langues [Malian Academy of Languages].

In Mopti, we surveyed the teaching academy, the Mopti and Sévaré teacher resource centres, the teacher training institute (to conduct the focus group with the teacher supervisors) and the Boukary Ouléguem school group (to conduct interviews with teachers, school principals, parents and the school management committee).

In Koutiala, we surveyed the Koutiala teacher resource centre and the Cinzina school.

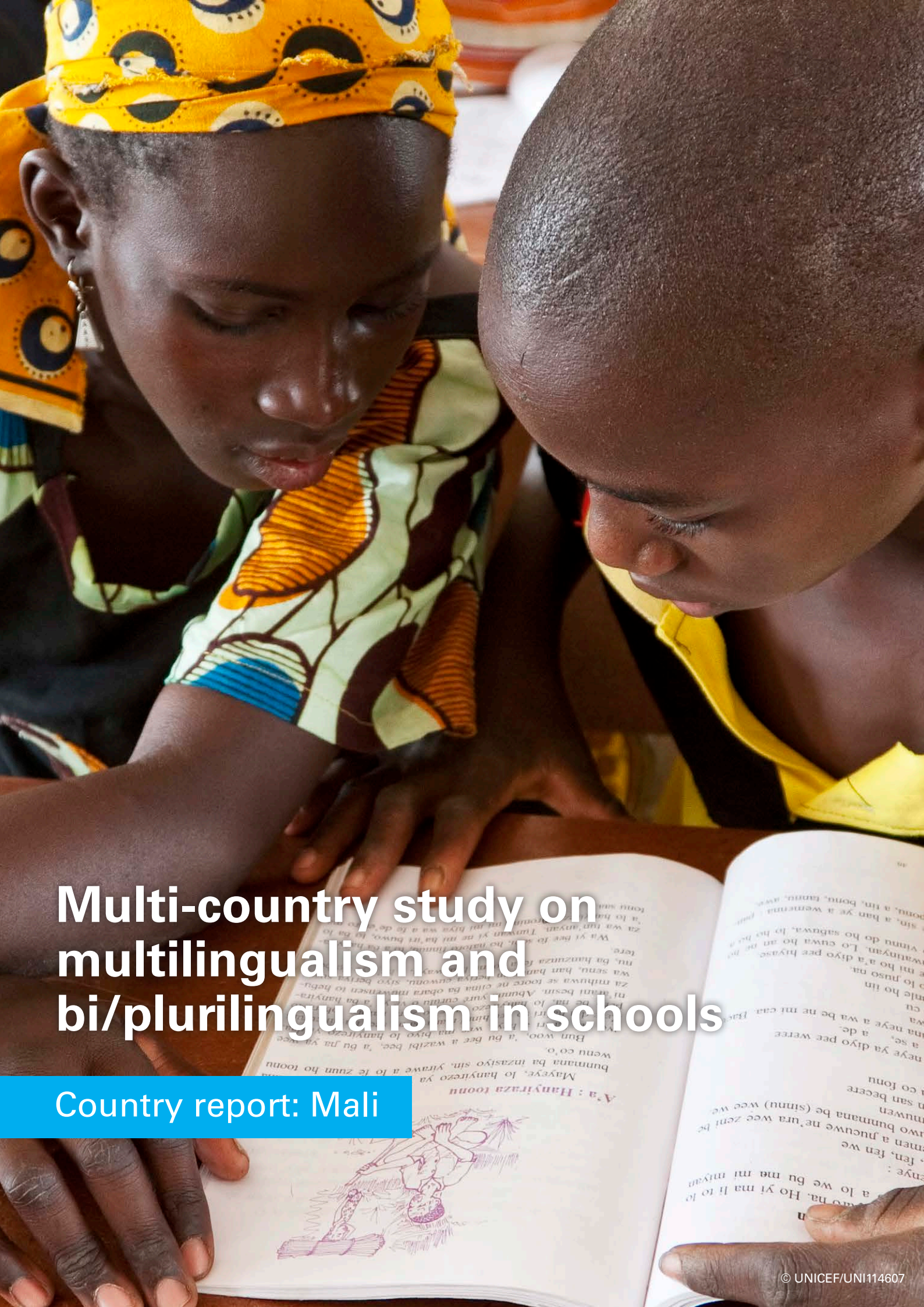
In Gao, we conducted telephone interviews with the head of the teaching academy, two teachers, and two school principals from the commune of N'chawaji working at the Djebok school.

## Number of people interviewed for the survey

The table shows the number of people consulted by role and by location.

Number of people interviewed for the survey

	Surveyed	Planned	Achieved	Bamako	Mopti	Koutiala	Gao
1	Bilingual classroom teachers, second year	5	5	1	1	1	2
2	School principals	8	8	2	2	2	2
3	Decentralized directors	3	3	1	1	-	1
4	Trainers of supervisors	2	2	2	-	-	-
5	Reform steering leads	1	1	1	-	-	-
6	Ministry for National Education evaluation officers	1	1	1	-	-	-
7	Director responsible for decentralization	1	1	1	-	-	-
8	Secretary General of the Ministry for National Education	1	1	1	-	-	-
9	Head of the Association of Mayors	1	1	1	-	-	-
10	Mayors of urban & rural communes	2	2	1	1	-	-
11	Director of local authorities	1	1	1	-	-	-
12	Local language writers association	1	1	1	-	-	-
13	Technical and financial partners/education officers	3	3	3	-	-	-
14	Technical and financial partners/monitoring and evaluation officers	3	3	3	-	-	-
		33	33	20	5	3	5
15	Students	2	2	1	-	1	-
16	Teacher trainers	1	1	-	1	-	-
17	Teaching-material designers	1	1	1	-	-	-
18	School management committees (men/women)	2	2	1	1	-	-
19	Parents	4	4	2	2	-	-
20	Teachers' unions	1	1	1	-	-	-
		11	11	6	4	1	-
21	Teachers of other classes	6	6	2	2	2	-
22	Education advisers	6	6	3	2	1	-
23	Directors of teacher resource centres	6	6	3	2	1	-
24	Director of human resources	1	1	1	-	-	-
25	Director of pre-service training	1	1	1	-	-	-
26	Director of studies and planning	1	1	1	-	-	-
		21	21	11	6	4	-
	Total	65	65	37	15	8	5



# Multi-country study on multilingualism and bi/plurilingualism in schools

Country report: Mali

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# Acronyms and abbreviations

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<b>AFD</b>	Agence française de développement (French Development Agency)
<b>AUF</b>	Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (Francophone University Agency)
<b>CFA</b>	Communauté Financière Africaine [African Financial Community]
<b>CIDA</b>	Canadian International Development Agency
<b>CP1</b>	First year of primary school
<b>CP2</b>	Second year of primary school
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>EGRA</b>	Early Grade Reading Assessment
<b>ELAN</b>	Ecole et Langues Nationales (National Schools and Languages)
<b>L1</b>	First language
<b>L2</b>	Second language
<b>MINUSMA</b>	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>OIF</b>	Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (International Organization of La Francophonie)
<b>OMAES</b>	Oeuvre Malienne d'Aide à l'Enfance du Sahel [Malian Charity for Children in the Sahel]
<b>PRODEC</b>	Programme décennal de développement de l'éducation (Ten-Year Education Development Programme)
<b>SIRA</b>	Selected Integrated Reading Activity (project)
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development



Mardi, le 30 octobre 2013

Morale: je ne m'essuie les doigts  
ni avec de la main gauche ni  
avec de la main droite ni  
avec des vêtements.  
Langage: je m'habille  
Lecture: révision

Lecture: (révision)  
Kabilou un lit un livre a  
noté. un livre qui  
qui est ce? c'est Kabilou  
qui est ce que c'est? c'est un livre  
noté un lit.  
qu'est ce que c'est? c'est un lit

# Executive summary

This study critically analyses the implementation of the bilingual reform in the Malian education system over the past decade. It aims to identify possible approaches to achieve the effective roll out of this reform. It takes a qualitative approach and is based on a literature review and on interviews conducted with various actors and partners in the field of education, who were selected based on their role and position.

## Key findings

The Government of Mali, which has 13 recognized local languages, 11 of which are documented and taught in schools, has set itself the objective of rolling out bilingual education to all schools.

The Malian curriculum has been bilingual since 2005 and is based on a competency-based approach for all subjects.

Mali has two programmes through which it aims to roll out the bilingual education reform to the whole country: i) the Selective Integrated Reading Activity (SIRA) led by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and ii) the National Schools and Languages (ELAN) initiative led by the International Organization of la Francophonie (OIF).

In total, including schools that have a formal bilingual curriculum and those supported by technical and financial partners (ELAN and SIRA), we estimate that more than 6,000 schools in Mali are meant to operate bilingually, which is around 50 per cent of all schools delivering the first cycle of basic education (primary). However, this sizing of bilingual education is still an estimate, as the lack of monitoring data on bilingual curriculum schools makes it impossible to verify these statistics.

Furthermore, the research and interviews conducted for this study revealed that among these 6,000 schools, some were only partially implementing the bilingual curriculum and some had abandoned it altogether due to a number of obstacles: lack of teacher training and tools; problems with the documentation of the languages, the lack of standardized practices in the classroom, and failure to emphasize bilingual education in the texts regulating national, regional and local efforts to implement bilingualism.

All these difficulties hinder the roll-out of the reform and mean that bi/plurilingual education is still seen as something of an experiment in Mali.

To improve the quality of teaching and learning by fulfilling the government's desire for children's first languages to be better taken into account, this study has identified 10 outstanding challenges that need to be overcome:

1. Including bi/plurilingual teaching in pre- and in-service teacher training.
2. Producing more bilingual classroom resources (particularly with regard to first language teaching and the transfer of knowledge from students' first language [L1] to their second language [L2]) throughout primary school at a minimum.
3. Improving the availability of teaching materials in schools.
4. Improving the recruitment and assignment of teachers of bilingual classes (based on the languages spoken by teachers and students in each geographic area).
5. Evaluating the bilingual education initiatives/projects/innovations/pilots implemented to capitalize on lessons learned.
6. Finalizing the transfer of powers to the local authorities by setting up sociolinguistic bodies in all regions.
7. Improving close monitoring of teachers of bilingual classes.
8. Implementing an effective monitoring and support system for scaling up the national reform. This monitoring system would include the collection of relevant data that could be used to further knowledge about bilingual schools and classes.
9. Drafting and validating regulations on how to manage bilingualism in schools in practice.
10. Raising awareness of bi/plurilingual initiatives based on proven, documented and known learning outcomes.

---

<sup>1</sup> The last study to count bilingual schools was conducted in 2011–2012.

<sup>2</sup> In 2012, for example, the only year in which data were collected on this, only 4 per cent of bilingual schools in the country were actually implementing the bilingual curriculum.



# Introduction

Critical analyses<sup>3</sup> of the ‘traditional’ monolingual system have highlighted that children who begin their schooling in a second language without having acquired the basics in their first language face significant learning difficulties in all subjects.

By contrast, studies have shown that bilingual teaching (in the students’ first and second languages) presents many cognitive, identity and economic benefits for students, their families and their countries.<sup>4</sup>

In view of this fact, in 1962, Mali announced a reform of its education system<sup>5</sup> aimed at using local languages as soon as possible in primary school to improve academic attainment. This reform was in line with the recommendations of UNESCO which, as early as 1953, solemnly declared that the best language of instruction is the mother tongue of the learner.<sup>6</sup>

Following this first law in favour of bi/plurilingualism in schools, a series of trials were conducted in Mali until the announcement, in 2005, of the roll-out of the bilingual curriculum.

In 2021, more than 15 years after the announcement of the roll-out of the reform, few schools are effectively delivering bi/plurilingual education in students’ first language and in French, despite government efforts and several trials implemented by technical and financial partners.

What are the barriers to progress? How much progress has been made? What is the status of the roll-out? What is the impact of technical and financial partners’ trials on students’ attainment?

This study aims to answer these questions by adding to the existing knowledge about bi/plurilingual education experiences in Mali, particularly for the period from 2010 to 2021, and by reviewing the evaluations of ongoing bi/plurilingual education initiatives in Mali.

Taking a resolutely qualitative approach, for which we consulted a panel of educators in Bamako, Mopti, Koutiala and Gao, the study also aims to better understand the challenges affecting bilingual education in Mali before considering strategies to reduce them and enable bilingual education to be rolled out to all schools.

<sup>3</sup> Doumbia, Amadou T., ‘L’enseignement du bambara selon la pédagogie convergente au Mali : théorie et pratiques’, *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, vol. 9. no. 3, 2000, pp. 98–107.

Cummins, Jim, ‘Bilingual Children’s Mother Tongue: Why is it important for education?’, *Sprogforum*, vol. 7, no. 19, 2001, pp. 15–20.

Noyau, Colette, ‘Linguistique acquisitionnelle et intervention sur les apprentissages : appropriation de la langue seconde et évaluation des connaissances à l’école de base en situation diglossique’, OAI, 2006.

Maurer, Bruno, ‘LASCOLAF et ELAN-Afrique : d’une enquête sur les langues de scolarisation en Afrique francophone à des plans d’action nationaux’, *Le français à l’université*, 16–01, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Mignot, Christelle, ‘J’apprends si je comprends’ : pour une meilleure prise en compte des langues premières des enfants à l’école primaire. Projet de documentaire long métrage et de kit audiovisuel à l’attention des enseignants de classes bi-plurilingues’, *Edition des Archives Contemporaines (in press)*.

<sup>5</sup> Law No. 62-74/AN-RM of 17 August 1962.

<sup>6</sup> Maurer, Bruno, ‘Aspects didactiques de l’éducation bilingue français-langues africaines au Mali’, *Revue de l’Université de Moncton*, Special edition, 2007, pp. 9–22.



# Methodology

There were two complementary phases to this study.

The first phase consisted of a literature review. This provided an overview of bi/plurilingual education in Mali from 2010 to 2020, and identified certain knowledge gaps in relation to bilingualism in schools in Mali.

The second phase, which used a qualitative approach, was conducted between September and November 2020. This phase enabled us to gather the views and opinions of 65 educators on the use of local languages in the Malian education system.

## Geographic and linguistic aspects of the field survey

Two variables were taken into account when defining the physical scope of the study: a geographic variable and a sociolinguistic variable.

Four geographic areas were selected: Bamako (capital), Mopti (medium-sized city), Koutiala/Cinzina (rural area) and Gao (insecure area).

As regards the sociolinguistic scope, multiple languages were selected based on their status:

- a lingua franca (Bamanankan)
- a vernacular language (Mamara)
- an intermediary language (Fulfulde)

For the insecure area, language choice was not a specific criterion.

Table 1 shows the distribution of languages in the areas targeted by the study.

**Table 1: Distribution of languages in the areas studied**

VARIABLES SELECTED		AREA	LANGUAGE
Geographic	Linguistic		
Capital city	Lingua franca	Bamako	Bamanankan
Medium-sized city	Intermediary language	Mopti	Fulfulde
Rural area	Vernacular language	Koutiala/Cinzina	Mamara
Insecure area	N/A	Gao	Tamasheq

## Selection of educators surveyed<sup>7</sup>

Purposive and quota-based sampling was used to form the panel of people consulted for the study.

A balanced quota was determined, taking into account linguistic, sociological and geographic considerations. The interviews covered:

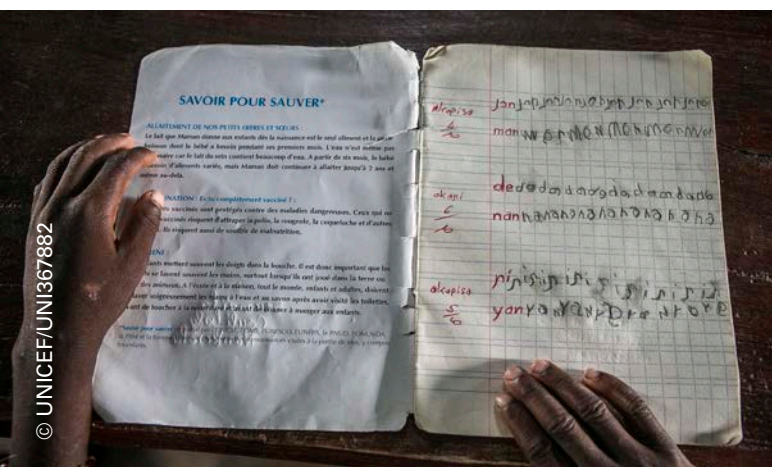
- understanding and perception of bilingualism in schools
- levels of adoption of bi/plurilingual education as perceived by the participants interviewed
- the decentralization policy and the possibility of harnessing it to implement bilingualism
- educator training (pre- and in-service training)
- close monitoring of the reforms and trial initiatives
- the availability of teaching materials.

## Challenges encountered and limitations of the study

The literature review was carried out under fairly good conditions. However, the field data were collected in the context of COVID-19. The field research was hampered by the temporary or prolonged closure of schools, lockdowns, the introduction of working from home in public administrations and bans or restrictions on travel between cities.

Moreover, reservations about the official position or a lack of knowledge of the subject seem to have contributed to resistance or withdrawal among some educators, who did not always respond to the surveyors' requests.

<sup>7</sup> See Annex for details of the participants interviewed.



# 1. Sociolinguistic context

## 1.1 Linguistic diversity of Mali

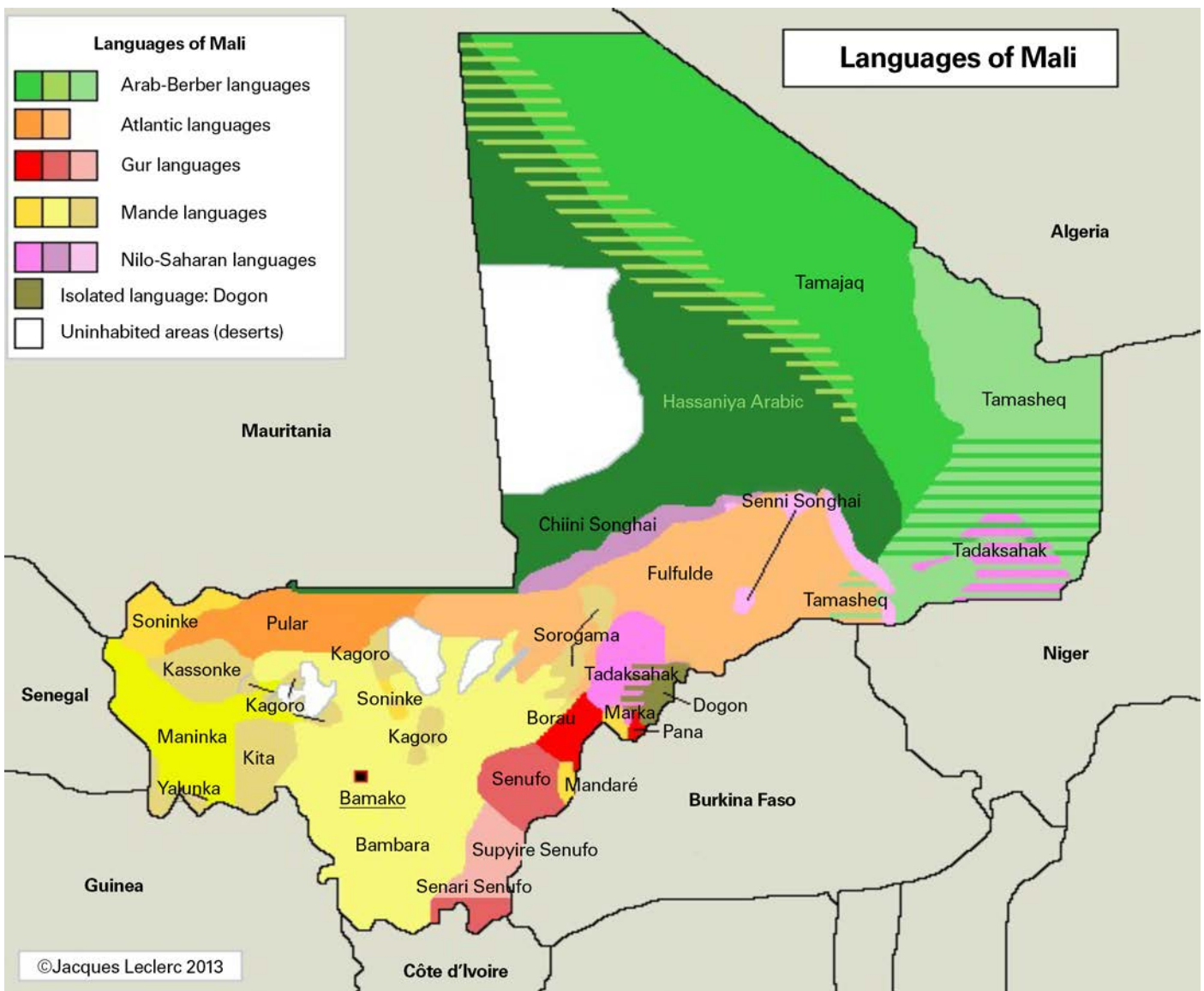
Mali is a multi-ethnic country.

As Maurer (2007, p. 10) states:

“Most of the major ethnic groups of the subregion are present here: the Mandé (Bambara, Malinke, Dioula), the Voltaic group (Mossi, Bobo, Senufo), the Sudanese group (Dogon, Songhoy, Sarakole) and the nomadic peoples (Fulani, Maure, Touareg).

This mosaic of ethnicities leads to huge linguistic diversity.”<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 1: Geographic distribution of the different language groups in Mali**



The boundaries shown and the names used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

<sup>8</sup> Maurer, Bruno, 'Aspects didactiques de l'éducation bilingue français-langues africaines au Mali', *Revue de l'Université de Moncton*, Special edition, 2007, pp. 9–22.

Mali has about 30 languages,<sup>9</sup> 13 of which have the status of local languages: Bamanankan (Bambara),<sup>10</sup> Fulfulde (Fulani), Songhai (Sonrai), Tamasheq, Soninke, Bozo, Bomu (Bobo), Siyenara (Senufo), Mamara (Minianka), Dogoso (Dogon),<sup>11</sup> Khassonke, Hassania and Malinke.

Decree No. 92-073 P CTSP of 27 February 1992 sets out a framework for the promotion and official use of local languages.

French, brought to Mali by colonization, is the country's only official language, even though more than 80 per cent of the Malian population is considered 'non-French-speaking'. Its status as the official language is recognized and formalized in article 25 of the 1992 Constitution of Mali.

## 1.2 Documents and laws in support of linguistic diversity

Since its independence, Mali has been working to value its local languages.

This is evidenced by the following texts:

- [article 2 of the 1992 Constitution](#), which states that "all Malians are born and remain free and equal in rights and duties" and that "any discrimination on the basis of social origin, colour, language, race, sex, religion or political opinion is prohibited"

- [Mali's 2014 language policy document](#),<sup>12</sup> which states that "the promotion of all local languages is a necessity for endogenous development and true decentralization"<sup>13</sup> and presents the following seven principles:

- "The local languages are the foundation of the national cultural identity.
- Respect for linguistic diversity strengthens national unity.
- Every citizen has the right to speak and be educated in their mother tongue.
- The promotion of all local languages is a necessity for endogenous development and true decentralization.
- Every citizen should be able to learn at least one local language, one or two African languages and one or two other languages of international communication, in addition to their mother tongue.

- The languages shall be established based on their dynamics.

- [Mali's linguistic policy is based on functional harmonious multilingualism within the framework of decentralization and African integration, and recognizes a matrix comprised of a language of identity, a lingua franca and a language of international communication.](#)<sup>14</sup>

However, despite these texts seeking to develop the use of local languages and defend linguistic diversity in Mali, there is "a major imbalance" between different languages.

To illustrate:

- The French language continues to enjoy a privileged position (as the only official language and the main language of instruction), even though only a minority of the population are confident speakers.
- Bamanankan, a local language with the same status as the other 12, is spoken by more than 80 per cent of the Malian population and therefore has demographic weight, unlike the other languages.
- Not all local languages have been documented.
- Some of Mali's languages that do not have the status of local languages are disappearing.

These differences in the roles, status, weight and educational resources of the languages directly influence the implementation of bi/plurilingual education (the section on the analysis of bi/plurilingual education in Mali will come back to this point).

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.axl.cefan.ulaval.ca/afrique/mali.htm>

<sup>10</sup> The term 'Bamanankan' refers to the language and 'Bambara' to the ethnic group.

<sup>11</sup> Republic of Mali, Decree No. 159 PG-RM of 1982.

<sup>12</sup> Republic of Mali, 'Document de politique linguistique du Mali', Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Here, it should be noted that decentralization is presented in Mali's language policy document as "the backbone of the democratization process begun in 1991 in Mali, a corollary of the desire to increase citizen participation in public life" (p. 10).

<sup>14</sup> Republic of Mali, 'Document de politique linguistique du Mali', Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Canut, Cécile, 'Dynamique plurilingue et imaginaire linguistique au Mali : entre adhésion et résistance au bambara', *Langage et société*, no. 78, 1996, pp. 55–76.

### 1.3 Institutions responsible for defending and promoting linguistic diversity

In 2012, Mali established the [Académie Malienne des Langues \[Malian Academy of Languages\]](#). Its composition, missions and operating procedures are established by decree.<sup>16</sup> This body, which is responsible for safeguarding and developing local language, has political and research impact. The Malian Academy of Languages collaborates with the [Académie Africaine des Langues \[African Academy of Languages – ACALAN\]](#), which is a pan-African institution. It supports research on African languages and their development for use as a language of communication in the African Union, with a view to strengthening continental unity.

The [Institut des Langues Abdoulaye BARRY \[Abdoulaye BARRY Institute of Languages\]](#), created by Order No. 01-044/P- RM of 19 September 2001,<sup>17</sup> is involved in defining Mali's linguistic policy, promotes all the local languages recognized in the different sociolinguistic areas of the country and works to promote cooperation with other African countries, in particular with those that share at least one language with Mali.

The [Centre National de l'Éducation \[National Centre for Education\]](#) promotes research on teaching methods and innovations and evaluates curricula, textbooks and teaching methods.

The Ministry of National Education does not have a dedicated body responsible for bi/plurilingual education. Bilingualism in schools falls under the responsibility of the [Direction Nationale de l'Éducation de Base \[National Directorate for Basic Education\]](#), whose main duties are to prepare the elements of the national policy, and to coordinate and monitor the implementation of policies alongside the teaching academies and the teacher resource centres.<sup>18</sup>

Since 2001, the [Centre National des Ressources de l'Éducation Non-Formelle \[National Resource Centre for Non-Formal Education\]](#) and the [Abdoulaye BARRY Institute of Languages](#) have been the two main institutions working to promote local languages. They work together with the National Centre for Education

and the National Directorate for Basic Education to support local language teaching, the development of teaching methods, teacher training and the production of relevant textbooks.

It should be noted that responsibility for literacy and primary education has been transferred to the local authorities.<sup>19</sup> These local authorities and their national, bilateral and multilateral partners advocate for the use of local languages as an indispensable tool for the development of Mali's language policy, a policy based on accessible functional multilingualism within the framework of decentralization and African integration.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. History of bi/plurilingual education

### 2.1 The 1960s: The first reforms

During the French colonization of the country, which ended in 1960, school children were taught exclusively in French.

Studies show that:<sup>21</sup>

- when classes are taught in a language families have little or no mastery of, parents are prevented from following their children's schooling and getting involved in their education
- monolingual French schools do not fully meet the needs of the population
- teaching exclusively in French leads to poor academic attainment, because the students have not mastered this language.

<sup>16</sup> Republic of Mali, Décret n°2012-693 fixant organisation et modalités de fonctionnement de l'Académie Malienne des Langues, 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Republic of Mali, Order No. 01-044/P- RM of 19 September 2001.

<sup>18</sup> Republic of Mali, Décret no00-599 déterminant le cadre organique des centres d'animation pédagogique, 2000.

<sup>19</sup> Republic of Mali, Decree No. 02-313 of 4 June 2002.

<sup>20</sup> Republic of Mali, 'Document de politique linguistique du Mali', Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Alidou, Hassana and Birgit Brock-Utne, 'Teaching Practices: Teaching in a familiar language', in *Optimising Learning, Education and Publishing in Africa: The Language Factor*, edited by Adama Ouane and Christine Glanz, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning and Association for the Development of Education in Africa, Hamburg and Tunis, 2011, pp. 165–191.

Recognizing the negative impacts of monolingualism in schools on children's attainment, Mali reformed its education system the day after it gained independence.

This reform aimed to “decolonize minds, to link school to life” (Law No. 62-74/AN-RM of 17 August 1962) and to use local languages as early as possible in children's schooling to improve learning outcomes.

## 2.2 The 1970s: The start of bilingual trials

It was almost 20 years later, in 1978,<sup>22</sup> at the second National Seminar on Education, that this political will was realized and that Mali officially announced the launch of the first trial of the use of local languages as a medium of instruction in schools.<sup>23</sup>

The teaching of Bamanankan was trialled in four schools in the regions of Ségou and Koulikoro from 1979.<sup>24</sup> Bamanankan was chosen not only because it was the most widely spoken language in these regions, but also because it had already been used as a written language since 1967.<sup>25</sup>

A year later, the project was expanded: dozens of additional schools were incorporated into the trial and three languages (Fulfulde, Songhai and Tamasheq) also began to be used as languages of instruction in schools.<sup>26</sup>

However, the initial success of this trial did not last.

According to Abdramane Diarra:<sup>27</sup>

“This trial was successful in its early stages (Calvet 1988). Repetition and dropout rates fell significantly and these schools had better results than monolingual schools [...]. This success does not seem to have lasted. A lack of monitoring led to weaker academic performance in the schools in the trial. Calvet (1988, p. 17) notes that from 1985 to 1988, the pass rate for the secondary school entrance exam fell from 47 per cent to 29 per cent.

## 2.3 1987: Convergent pedagogy

Following the initial success and subsequent failure of the first bi/plurilingual trial “due to a lack of monitoring

of the schools”, the Malian government adopted the ‘convergent pedagogy’ approach in 1987. Initially, two classes in Segou were involved in the pilot phase, in Bamanankan and French.

Convergent pedagogy is described on the Oxfam website in the following terms:<sup>28</sup>

“It [convergent pedagogy] takes a holistic approach to all expressive and communicative situations, based on the principle that communication skills must precede linguistic skills in a spiral progression. The internalization of oral expression is the beginning of learning a language. It is initiated and fostered by practising the techniques of expression and communication and, in particular, of physical and musical rhythms. These contribute to the development of affectivity, the liberation of the individual and the development of the imagination and positively influence the relationships between the different members of the group of learners.”

This approach, implemented by a Belgian institution (the Centre international audiovisuel d'études et de recherches [International Audiovisual Studies and Research Centre]), has been heavily criticized.<sup>29</sup> Some experts have criticized it for not properly equipping children and for simply immersing learners in a ‘linguistic bath’ in the hope that learning will be transferred from the first language to French naturally during “exercises in physical and musical rhythms – linguistic immersion – role-playing”,<sup>30</sup> without any effort being made to analyse the languages or transfer learning.

<sup>22</sup> Traoré, Moussa Khoré, *‘La gouvernance locale dans le secteur de l'Éducation au Mali’*, Université de Toulon, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> In the area of non-formal education, local languages had already been introduced to classrooms in rural areas as part of literacy initiatives during the rural development operations, and the beneficial results of these pilot projects on the quality of teaching and learning were already clear.

<sup>24</sup> Traoré, Samba, *‘Convergent teaching in Mali and its impact on the education system’*, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2001.

<sup>25</sup> Republic of Mali, Decree No. 85 of 1967.

<sup>26</sup> Nounta, Zakaria, *‘Éveil aux langues et conscience métalinguistique dans les activités de classe des écoles bilingues songhay-français du Mali’*, PhD dissertation in language sciences, Paris X, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Diarra, Abdramane, *‘Le Curriculum Bilingue dans l'enseignement fondamental au Mali : État des lieux de sa mise en œuvre’*, Université Grenoble Alpes, 2020.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.oxfamnovib.nl/oxfam-novib/beheer/zoeken.html?q=p%C3%A9dagogie%20convergente&zoek=bing&page=1>

<sup>29</sup> Maurer, Bruno, *De la pédagogie convergente à la didactique intégrée : langues africaines-langue française*, L'Harmattan, 2007.

<sup>30</sup> Activities that convergent pedagogy founder Michel Wambach presents as essential to the convergent pedagogy approach (<https://gerflint.fr/Base/Algerie4/wambach.pdf>).

Moreover,

“[t]he materials developed were very simple and did not raise the students' language level. The specificities of the rules of written communication were not sufficiently clear in writing in the local language: the rules for written communication were confused with the rules for oral communication.”<sup>31</sup>

Despite these criticisms, the convergent pedagogy approach was extended from 1994.

## 2.4 1998: Curriculum reform

Given the limitations of convergent pedagogy, in 1998 Mali embarked on a basic education curriculum reform that, while inspired by convergent pedagogy, **corrected its shortcomings**.

This reform was the main component of the **Ten-Year Education Development Programme I (PRODEC 1998–2010)**, as part of which Law No. 99-046 of 26 December 1999, the Education Policy Law, was enacted.

Title I, Chapter 2, article 10 of this law stipulates that **“Education shall be provided in the official language and in the local languages.”**

The goals of this curriculum reform were to:

“educate a patriotic citizen and builder of a democratic society, an agent of development deeply rooted in their own culture and open to universal civilization, with a mastery of relevant skills and the ability to apply their knowledge and skills linked to scientific and technical progress and modern technology.”<sup>32</sup>

To achieve these objectives, the basic education curriculum was rooted in a competency-based approach and bilingualism in schools.

## 2.5 2005: Rolling out the curriculum

Level I (first and second years of basic education) bilingual education began at the start of the 2002–2003 school year with a trial involving 80 schools.

The roll-out was then launched in 2005 with 11 local languages used as mediums of instruction (Bamanankan, Bomu, Bozo, Dogosso, Fulfulde, Khassonké, Mamara, Soninké, Songhai, Syenara, Tamasheq).

To this end, “from 2005 to 2008, nearly 10,000 teachers were trained on how to deliver the bilingual competency-based curriculum as part of Level I and II training modules”<sup>33</sup> In addition, 280 education advisers were trained to implement a bilingual competency-based strategy in 2,530 schools” (Haïdara 2011, p. 17). In theory, the idea was that this roll-out would increase the number of schools delivering bi/plurilingual education each year to gradually cover all primary schools (first cycle of basic education).

What happened after 2008? Was a full roll-out achieved?

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<sup>31</sup> Diarra, Abdramane, *Le Curriculum Bilingue dans l'enseignement fondamental au Mali : État des lieux de sa mise en œuvre*, Université Grenoble Alpes, 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Republic of Mali, Loi 99-046 AN RM, portant loi d'orientation sur l'éducation, 1999.

<sup>33</sup> As regards the structure of the Malian school system, the post-reform basic education curriculum is organized around four levels of learning: Level I (first and second years); Level II (third and fourth years); Level III (fifth and sixth years); Level IV (seventh, eighth and ninth years) (PRODEC, 2000).

### 3. Bi/plurilingual education: The current state of affairs

The Planning and Statistics Unit of the Ministry of National Education categorizes primary schools into four groups: public, private, community and madrasa. Table 2 shows the number of primary schools by type of school.

**Table 2: Number of schools by type of school**

Types of school	2015 2016	2016 2017	2017 2018	2018 2019	Annual growth
PRIMARY					
Public	6,937	6,049	6,939	7,375	3%
Private	1,958	2,081	2,365	2,552	9%
Community	1,841	2,483	1,837	1,764	2%
Madrasa	2,538	2,425	2,738	2,822	4%
Total	13,274	13,038	13,879	14,513	

Source: Table produced from Planning and Statistics Unit of the Ministry of National Education data

Unfortunately, as we can see in this table, there is no separate category for local language–French bilingual schools. Bilingual schools are in fact not covered by data-collection tables from the Planning and Statistics Unit of the Ministry of National Education. Therefore, no routine data are available that would allow us to determine the number of bilingual schools and their proportion in relation to ‘traditional’ (monolingual French) schools.

Yet, for the reform to be scaled up effectively as planned, the annual statistics must provide information on bilingual schools and be updated every year (the section below on "Conditions for the roll-out of bilingual education" will return to this recommendation).

#### 3.1 Mapping of bilingual curriculum schools

In recent decades, only one survey has been conducted to determine the number of schools implementing the bilingual curriculum, in 2011–2012, which found that several bilingual schools had returned to the mainstream system.

To verify this finding, the Ministry of Education, Literacy and National Languages, with the technical and financial support of the Hewlett Foundation and the Oeuvre Malienne d'Aide à l'Enfance du Sahel [Malian Charity for Children in the Sahel – OMAES], conducted a survey, published in 2013, to measure the extent of reversion to monolingual education. The results of this survey are shown in Table 3:<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Note: These data do not include schools in the three northern regions (Tombouctou, Gao and Kidal), which were not surveyed because of the security crisis.





**Table 3: Number of bilingual schools in Mali in 2011/2012**

REGION	Teaching academy	Number of schools implementing the Level I curriculum	Number of schools implementing the curriculum in years 1–6	Number of schools partially implementing the bilingual curriculum <sup>35</sup>	Number of schools that dropped the bilingual curriculum	Number of schools
BAMAKO	Bamako Rive Droite			37	14	51
	Bamako Rive Gauche		1	139	10	150
TOTAL: DISTRICT OF BAMAKO		1	176	24	201	
KAYES	Kayes		58	31	2	91
	Kita		5	45	16	66
	Nioro du Sahel		5	28	1	34
TOTAL: REGION OF KAYES		68	104	19	191	
KOULIKORO	Kati	441	91	168	184	884
	Koulikoro	279	84	89	14	466
TOTAL: REGION OF KOULIKORO		720	175	257	198	1,350
SEGOU	San		37	124	50	211
	Segou	256	137	320	103	816
TOTAL: REGION OF SEGOU		256	174	444	153	1,027
SIKASSO	Bougouni		2	367	233	602
	Koutiala			89	30	119
	Sikasso		2	237	55	294
TOTAL: REGION OF SIKASSO			4	693	318	1,015
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>976</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>1,674</b>	<b>712</b>	<b>3,784</b>

Source: The Planning and Statistics Unit of the Ministry of Education, Literacy and National Languages 2013

This table shows that a total of 3,784 schools were officially declared 'bilingual' at the start of the 2011/2012 school year in the regions of Kayes, Koulikoro, Segou and Sikasso and the district of Bamako.

Koulikoro (422 schools), represented only 4.7 per cent of all schools in these regions.

**Table 4: Number of schools, first cycle, 2009–2010**

REGION/DISTRICT	Schools in 2009–2010
KAYES	1,463
KOULIKORO	2,093
SIKASSO	2,431
SEGOU	1,690
MOPTI	1,193
TOMBOUCTOU	400
GAO	470
KIDAL	44
BAMAKO	1,172
<b>WHOLE COUNTRY</b>	<b>10,956</b>

Source: Haïdara, Issouf M., 'Étude sur les innovations dans l'enseignement fondamental au Mali', February 2011.

Of these 3,784 schools:

- 712 had in fact dropped the bilingual curriculum (and were therefore operating monolingually again)
- 976 schools were implementing the curriculum reform only at Level I (first and second year of the basic education cycle)
- only 422 reportedly bilingual schools were implementing the reform in years 1–6 in the five regions covered, i.e. only 21.24 per cent of 'bilingual' schools.

If we cross reference these data with the data presented in Table 4 (showing the number of schools in Mali in 2009–2010), we find that the number of schools applying the bilingual curriculum from years 1 to 6 in 2011 in Bamako, Kayes, Sikasso, Segou and

<sup>35</sup> The category "schools partially implementing the bilingual curriculum" refers to schools delivering the curriculum only at Levels II and/or III.

In 2010, only a very small – and declining – minority of schools were implementing bi/plurilingual education as recommended by the new basic education curriculum.<sup>36</sup> There was still a long way to go to roll out bilingualism in all schools.

What is the situation today?

## 3.2 Introduction to the ELAN and SIRA initiatives

The Malian government is currently still intent on developing the complementary use of children's first languages and French in the classroom.

The government aims to “strengthen the use of local languages in basic education to enable children to become bilingual” (Education and Training Sector Programme 2019–2028) and to “ensure the documentation of local languages and their introduction into the new curricula” (PRODEC 2, 2019–2028, p. 43)<sup>37</sup>.

The government-run bilingual school system is supported by two initiatives run by technical and financial partners:

- The **National Schools and Languages (ELAN)** project, launched in 2013 by the OIF. This initiative covers 110 schools in Segou, Mopti, Gao, Ménaka and Bamako, and four local languages (Bamanankan, Fulfulde, Songhai and Tamasheq).
- The **SIRA** initiative, launched in 2016 by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), supports 4,500 primary schools in the southern regions of the country (Koulikoro, Segou, Sikasso and Bamako), with a focus on Bamanankan.<sup>38</sup>

### 3.2.1 The ELAN initiative (OIF)<sup>39</sup>

The ELAN initiative is not confined to Mali. It is supporting 12 countries in sub-Saharan Africa<sup>40</sup> to carry out the reforms needed to enable the use of African languages alongside French in primary education. It aims to create an international body within the French-speaking world to promote bilingual education in African countries by capitalizing on and sharing experience, expertise and training. The goal is to support the national action plans of the countries in ways that are tailored to their educational policies.

In terms of teaching and learning, the ELAN initiative seeks to:

“Improve the teaching and learning of basic skills (such as reading, writing and arithmetic) through equipping primary school students with better mastery of French, starting by teaching them in their mother tongue<sup>41</sup>.”

Phase 2 of the ELAN initiative (2018–2020)<sup>42</sup> is built around five components:

1. Strengthening the institutional framework supporting bilingual education in the first cycle of basic education
2. Training officials at the ministry responsible for bilingual education in the first cycle of basic education
3. Providing educators in bilingual education with pedagogic and teaching materials
4. Running a communication campaign to promote bilingual education
5. Monitoring and evaluating bilingual education.

With regard to bilingual teaching, the *‘Guide d’orientation à l’approche bi-plurilingue ELAN de l’enseignement du français’* [*Guidance on ELAN’s Bi/plurilingual Approach to Teaching French*] states that “with a view to transforming bilingual teaching, teachers who teach in an L1 and an L2 no longer think

<sup>35</sup> The category “schools partially implementing the bilingual curriculum” refers to schools delivering the curriculum only at Level 2 and/or 3.

<sup>36</sup> Mignot, Christelle, “J’apprends si je comprends’ : pour une meilleure prise en compte des langues premières des enfants à l’école primaire. Projet de documentaire long métrage et de kit audiovisuel à l’attention des enseignants de classes bi-plurilingues”, *Edition des Archives Contemporaines (in press)*.

<sup>37</sup> The ELAN and SIRA initiatives are implemented directly in the curriculum schools.

<sup>38</sup> We note, as stated in the ELAN-Mali activity report for the first quarter of 2019, that “ELAN in Mali has entered its second phase, covering the 2018–2020 period, with its traditional key partners: the OIF, the French Development Agency (AFD), the Francophone University Agency (AUF), and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.”

<sup>39</sup> Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo.

<sup>40</sup> Source: <https://ifef.francophonie.org/node/227>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.elan-afrique.net/>

<sup>42</sup> The first phase of the ELAN programme covered the 2013–2015 period.

in terms of compartmentalized and unconnected learning, but seek to develop students' bilingual skills" (ELAN 2014, p. 6).<sup>43</sup>

It further states that:

"School children who have already been educated in their first language do not have to learn everything from scratch when starting to learn in their L2 (here French):

-They will have L1 skills to build on, so their learning of French will be supported and 'coloured' by the L1 they already have.

- They must become bi/plurilingual individuals, able to switch from one language to another and use their entire bi/plurilingual repertoire according to the situation.

The teacher should highlight the relationship between the L1 and L2, by:

a. making comparisons:

- to foster the transfer of shared aspects
- to identify points of difference between the L1 and L2 for the students

b. practising and encouraging rephrasing between one language and the other.

(ELAN 2014, p. 5)

It is clear from these different excerpts that transferring learning and language skills is at the heart of the ELAN project.

### 3.2.1.1 Assessing the impact of ELAN on students' attainment

Evaluations conducted at the end of the first phase of the ELAN programme (2013–2015) showed that the ELAN system had a positive impact on students' attainment.

The evaluation report on the ELAN pilot phase concludes that:<sup>44</sup>

"[...] the ELAN programme appears to have benefited students primarily in their knowledge of letters in their L1 and L2, phonemic awareness in French, one of the two reading indicators in French and Bambara, and spelling in both languages.

In Mali, the ELAN programme has had an impact over the two years on phonemic awareness in French, on reading and on spelling in both languages. The expected cross-language links are demonstrated through

writing. One-minute reading and spelling in French are strongly predicted by the level attained by the children for Bambara writing indicators (knowledge of letters and one-minute reading), even after controlling for their oral level in French and Bambara." (p. 131)

Table 5, as an example, compares the results of students assessed in this ELAN study at the end of the second year of the primary cycle (CP2).

Regarding this comparative study, we note that:

- the study was conducted with students in schools taught a bilingual curriculum (control group) and in schools delivering the bilingual ELAN programme (pilot group)

- all pilot and control schools were located in the regions of Bamako and Segou and used two languages in the classroom: Bamanankan and French

- in all these schools, children were initially educated only in Bamanankan in the first year, then French was introduced orally up to 25 per cent in the second year.

The assessment was conducted in three stages. As stated in the *'Rapport de l'évaluation des acquis des élèves du projet pilote du programme lecture-écriture mis en œuvre dans le cadre de l'initiative Élan Afrique 2013–2015'* [*Report on the Assessment of Students' Learning Outcomes in the Pilot Project of the Reading and Writing Programme Implemented as Part of the ELAN Africa Initiative 2013–2015'*] (p. 110):<sup>45</sup>

- the first assessment took place in February 2014 (midyear in the first year of primary [CP1])

- the second assessment was conducted at the end of CP1 (about 3.5 months after the first assessment)

- the third assessment was conducted in the second year of primary (CP2), in May 2015, 15 months after the trial started.

Table 5 shows the results at the end of CP2, comparing the level of students in the pilot and control classes.

<sup>43</sup> [https://elan-afrique.org/sites/default/files/fichiers\\_attaches/guide\\_elan\\_francais\\_final.pdf](https://elan-afrique.org/sites/default/files/fichiers_attaches/guide_elan_francais_final.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> Nocus, Isabelle, Philippe Guimard and Agnès Florin, 'Rapport de l'évaluation des acquis des élèves ELAN – Afrique Phase 1, 2013-2015', Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, Université de Nantes, Centre de Recherche en Éducation de Nantes, 2016.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

**Table 5: Learning outcomes in L1 and L2 reading at the end of CP2 for pilot group (ELAN schools) and control group (extract).**

	Mali	
	Control	Pilot
<b>1. Language tools – end of CP2</b>		
<b>1.1. Alphabet acquisition – end of CP2</b>		
Knowledge of letter names in L1	54.5%	71%
	Pilot	
Knowledge of letter names in L2	49.5%	71%
	Pilot	
<b>1.2. Developing phonemic awareness – end of CP2</b>		
Identification of the initial phoneme in L1	57%	73.5%
	Pilot	
Identification of the initial phoneme in L2	50%	71.5%
	Pilot	
<b>1.3. Developing syllable awareness – end of CP2</b>		
Syllable segmentation in L1	87%	89.5%
	Neutral	
Syllable segmentation in L2	75%	83%
	Pilot	
<b>2. Reading text conventions – end of CP1, start of CP2</b>		
<b>2.1. Use of text conventions – end of CP1, start of CP2</b>		
Familiarity with the written word	49%	56.5%
	Pilot	
<b>4. Fluency (speed, reading rhythm) – end of CP2</b>		
<b>4.1. Improved reading speed – end of CP2</b>		
One-minute reading in L1	19%	24%
	Neutral	
One-minute reading in L2	9.5%	16%
	Neutral	
Identification of the written word in L1	48%	52.5%
	Neutral	
Identification of the written word in L2	37%	41%
	Neutral	
<b>5. Comprehension – end of CP2</b>		
<b>5.1. Identifying the main elements of meaning in a text – end of CP2</b>		
Reading comprehension in L1	62.5%	61%
	Neutral	
Reading comprehension in L2	8%	18.5%
	Neutral	
<b>6. Features of written texts – end of CP2</b>		
<b>6.2. Use of the conventions of written texts – end of CP2</b>		
Spelling in L1	20.5%	36%
	Pilot	
Spelling in L2	13.5%	22%
	Pilot	

Source: ELAN report 2013–2015

Legend: “Neutral” grey boxes = No difference between the two groups

“Pilot” green boxes = Students in the pilot group performed better than those in the control group

The results presented in this table illustrate how the ELAN pilot classes (right column) outperformed the control classes (left column) in the first two years of primary school for almost all of the skills assessed.<sup>46</sup>

### 3.2.1.2 Survey participants' analysis of the ELAN initiative

During the field survey, the main strengths of the ELAN initiative identified by educators were:

- + Educational materials for teachers that are considered “qualitative and adequate”. These materials comprised bilingual textbooks, bilingual teaching guides, bilingual grammar books, reading-writing textbooks for years 1 to 4, and a kit (containing posters, games, picture books, exercises) intended to facilitate transfers from L1 to L2 and a bilingual skills base.<sup>47</sup>
- + The emphasis placed on how learning is transferred from L1 to L2 and vice versa.

Conversely, several teachers and principals who hosted the ELAN initiative noted areas for improvement, namely:

- inconsistency in monitoring the activities carried out
- the inconsistency of the assessment system, which according to survey participants “is preventing them from capitalizing on the achievements of the initiative”
- the fact that ELAN is primarily concerned with “language and communication” and less with non-linguistic subjects.<sup>48</sup>

The ELAN initiative in Mali also seems to lack a system for informing educators, parents and civil society about the existence of the ELAN initiative, its foundations and aims, and the progress of its activities.

### 3.2.2 The SIRA Initiative (USAID/Mali)

The USAID/Mali SIRA initiative promotes a ‘balanced approach’<sup>49</sup> to equip students with a set of strategies and techniques to help them develop literacy skills.

It covers nearly 4,500 bilingual schools using Bamanankan in the regions of Segou, Sikasso, Koulikoro and Bamako.

The SIRA initiative<sup>50</sup> – or ‘path to reading’<sup>51</sup> – was launched in February 2016. It received 30.5 billion CFA francs of funding from USAID over a five-year period.<sup>52</sup>

This programme falls under the supervision of the Ministry of National Education<sup>53</sup> and supports the efforts of this department to roll out the bilingual curriculum to school districts where only Bamanankan is spoken as an L1 (Segou, Koulikoro, Sikasso and the district of Bamako). More specifically, it supports the improvement of the teaching and learning of reading and writing in Bamanankan for students in the first and second years of basic education in public and community schools.

The programme has three components: educational, institutional and community.

1. The educational component focuses on improving learning strategies by providing training to managers and teachers and by producing teaching materials in Bamanankan.
2. The institutional component aims to strengthen educational policies and the capacity of the Ministry of National Education.
3. The community component seeks to involve communities and private partners through studies on perceptions, and training for parents.

In partnership with the Ministry of Education, the project also conducts studies and assessments to measure the impact of bilingual interventions on students’ learning and teacher performance.

<sup>46</sup> “For all that, let us remember that they (these results) do not mean that these differences are due to the ELAN programme itself” (Isabelle Nocus, Philippe Guimard and Agnès Florin, 2016, p. 37). It is therefore necessary to expand on these assessments.

<sup>47</sup> Some of the materials are available to download from the ELAN website (<https://elan-afrique.org/ressources/outils-pedagogiques>).

<sup>48</sup> However, on this last point (non-linguistic subjects), the ELAN initiative has recently (in 2020) produced a document on learning mathematics bilingually.

<sup>49</sup> An approach that works equally on decoding and encoding, i.e. the comprehension and production of texts.

<sup>50</sup> Selected Integrated Reading Activity.

<sup>51</sup> Sira means ‘road’ in Bamanankan; it is a term derived from the Arabic word sirât, meaning ‘way’ or ‘path’.

<sup>52</sup> Programme implemented by the Education Development Center (EDC) and its partners: School to School International, Save the Children, OMAES, Cowater Sogema and the Institut pour l’Éducation Populaire [Institute for Popular Education].

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.omaes.org/>

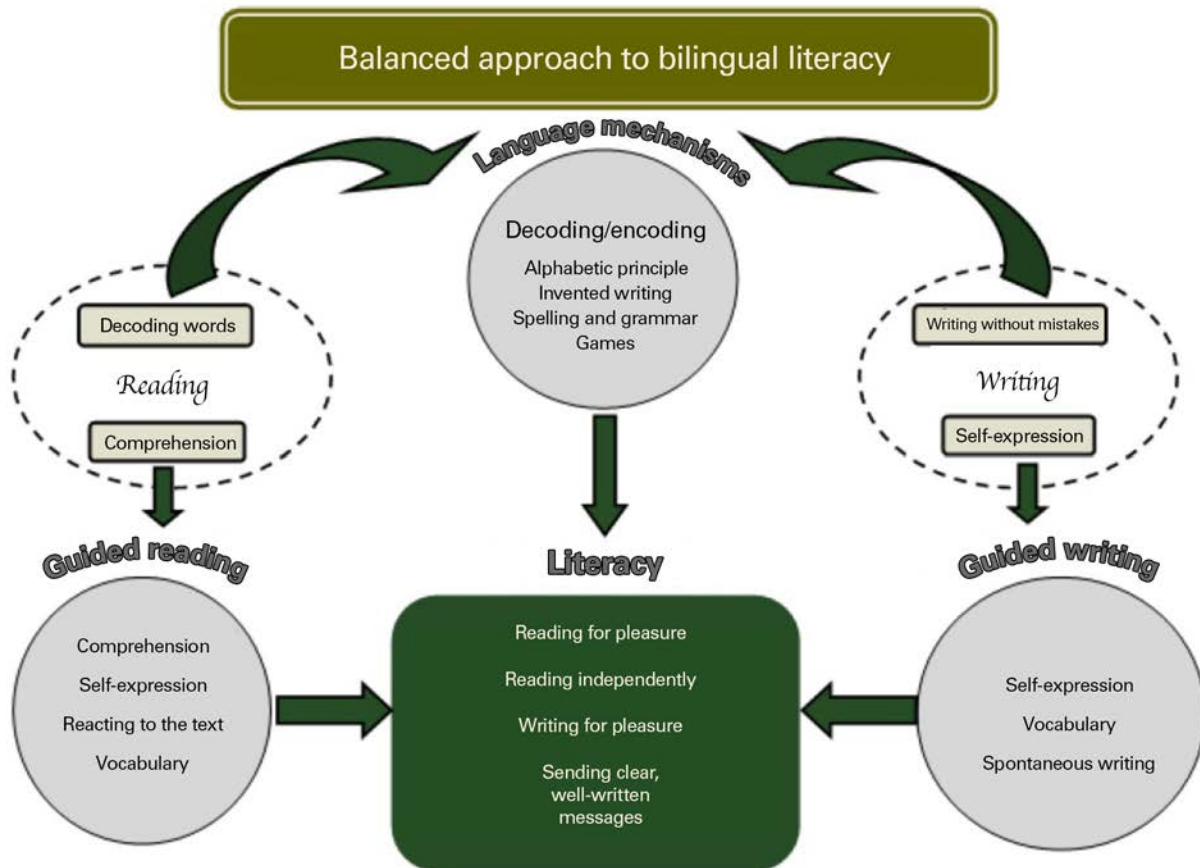
With regard to teacher training, the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP-UNESCO) website indicates that teachers in SIRA schools:

"[...] are trained in a learning-to-read approach based on phonemic awareness, word decoding and understanding, rather than relying on the traditional methods of memorization through repetition. Similarly, a range of pedagogical tools have been designed,

including textbooks in Bamanankan and a rhyming alphabet song. When students learn in their mother tongue it adds a playful dimension, which piques the students' interest and helps them feel more at ease in the learning environment, as well as encouraging them to participate more actively in the classroom."<sup>54</sup>

The SIRA initiative is based on the balanced approach, which the *SIRA teachers' guide* presents as follows:

**Figure 2:** The pillars of the SIRA balanced approach (p. 5 of the 'Guide de l'enseignant' ['Teacher's Guide'], 2017).



The three pillars of the approach are shown in this diagram:

- language mechanisms
- reading and comprehension of texts
- writing and written expression

In the classroom, this approach prioritizes tools such as classroom news, intensive learning of the alphabetic principle, games, decoding techniques and interactive radio broadcasts.

<sup>54</sup> <https://learningportal.iiep.unesco.org/fr/blog/usaid-mali-sira-enseigner-la-lecture-ecriture-en-langue-nationale>

### 3.2.2.1 Assessing the impact of the SIRA programme on students' attainment

#### 3.2.2.1.1 Evaluation at the end of the second year of SIRA

A 2018 midterm evaluation was conducted in SIRA schools after two years of project implementation to determine the “percentage of learners receiving US Government assistance who demonstrate reading fluency and text comprehension at the expected level at the end of the second year”.<sup>55</sup> The results are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6: Summary of results of the SIRA Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) 2018 Midline Report**

Subtasks	Bamako		Koulikoro		Segou		Sikasso		Total	
	Average	% zeros	Average	% zeros	Average	% zeros	Average	% zeros	Average	% zeros
Identification of the initial sound of 10 words (number of sounds identified)	5.6	15.1%	5.8	22.4%	6.1	18.5%	6	14.7%	5.9	18.1%
Grapheme reading (number of graphemes read per minute out of 100)	22.4	7.5%	29.8	7.3%	28.2	8.5%	30.1	4.4%	28.6	6.7%
Reading familiar words (number of words read per minute out of 45)	6.4	45.7%	10.5	30.6%	10.9	34.2%	10.6	31.1%	10.1	33.7%
Reading invented words (number of words read per minute out of 50)	4.4	53.0%	7.7	37.6%	8	40.6%	7.5	39.0%	7.3	40.8%
Reading a 52-word story (number of words read per minute)	6.9	58.5%	11.6	42.6%	12.2	45.8%	11.6	40.3%	11.1	44.8%
Reading comprehension (number of correct answers out of seven questions)	0.5	81.5%	0.9	69.0%	1	66.5%	0.8	71.9%	0.9	71.1%
Listening comprehension (number of correct answers out of seven questions)	4.8	1.3%	5.1	0.7%	4.9	2.0%	4.9	1.3%	4.9	1.3%

Source: Table produced from EGRA 2018 data.

This table shows a good score in reading comprehension, which indicates the acquisition of good written word decoding skills – an important skill for reading. Nevertheless, we note a weakness in oral comprehension.

According to the survey participants, this reflects the fact that the teaching methods used by SIRA are based more on reading and writing than on listening and speaking.

<sup>55</sup> All assessments were conducted in Bamanankan only. In the second year, French is only taught orally. Students do not have a sufficient level of French by the end of the second year to read a text in French, since the skills transfer to written French is mainly done from the third year onwards.

### 3.2.2.1.2 Comparison of students' attainment in SIRA schools in 2015 and 2018

Table 7 compares the reading scores at two different time periods: one before the launch of SIRA in 2015 and two years after its implementation, in 2018.

**Table 7: Comparison of SIRA schools' reading scores between 2015 and 2018.**

Indicator	Year	Region			Total*
		Koulikoro	Segou	Sikasso	
Number of graphemes per minute	2015	17.3	18.3	11.8	15.3
	2018	29.8	28.2	30.1	29.5
Number of familiar words per minute (in a table)	2015	5.4	5.9	2.1	4.2
	2018	10.5	10.9	10.6	10.7
Number of invented words per minute	2015	3.2	3.6	1.3	2.5
	2018	7.7	8.0	7.5	7.7
Number of familiar words (in a short story) per minute	2015	5.9	5.4	2.1	4.1
	2018	11.6	12.2	11.6	11.7
Number of correct answers (on the short story)**56	2015	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.2
	2018	0.9	1.0	0.8	0.9
Percentage of students who can read at least 31 familiar words per minute	2015	5.2%	6.0%	0.2%	3.2%
	2018	13.0%	15.3%	13.1%	13.7%

Source: Table produced from EGRA 2018 data.

\* : The mean differences are all significant at 1 per cent.

\*\*56: Seven questions were asked in 2018, up from five in 2015.

Table 7 shows a significant improvement in performance between 2015 and 2018 in all regions covered and in the different reading skills assessed.

### 3.2.2.2 Comparison of public and community SIRA schools

Another comparison made in this EGRA evaluation (which, as a reminder, covered only SIRA schools), concerned the average scores of public schools and community schools. Students at public schools accounted for 80 per cent of the sample tested compared with 20 per cent for community schools.

Table 8 shows that students attending community schools scored higher than their public school peers in all areas.

**Table 8: Student performance by SIRA school status**

Indicator	School status	
	Community	Public
Number of graphemes read correctly per minute	32.1	27.5
Number of words read correctly per minute (familiar words)	11.6	9.6
Number of words read correctly per minute (invented words)	8.4	6.9
Number of words read correctly per minute (short story)	12.8	10.6
Percentage of students who can read at least 31 familiar words per minute	14.9%	12.0%

Source: Table produced from EGRA 2018 data.

The higher performance of community schools compared to public schools could be explained by the lower enrolment in the former, as the community schools had an average of 24 students in second year classes, compared to 47 in public schools.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Projet USAID/Mali SIRA 2018, 'Evaluation à mi-parcours', May 2018.



### 3.2.2.3 Survey participants' analysis of the SIRA initiative

The SIRA approach has played an important role in driving the design and innovative implementation of local language teaching, through the provision of educational materials, training and monitoring, which those interviewed for the survey deemed to have made a considerable contribution.

Several educators also noted that students learn to read and write in their own language more quickly because “teachers organize many activities, including class news, intensive learning of the alphabetical principle, games, decoding techniques and, above all, interactive radio broadcasts.”<sup>58</sup>

The other strength of the SIRA programme noted by the participants surveyed relates to the inclusion of the community component. The project works to build effective partnerships with students’ parents and community organizations, including school management committees, parents’ associations and associations of mothers who educate, to encourage home- and school-based activities that will have a positive impact on the reading and writing level of students in years 1 and 2.

As stated on the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP-UNESCO) website about the SIRA project:<sup>59</sup>

“Parents are directly involved in assessing the school's performance via a performance report or a school report card. This tool fosters dialogue within the school community: notably, the parents help design a school improvement plan based on the results of their assessment.”

However, despite its undeniable benefits, some aspects of this initiative are not appropriate for a full roll-out of bilingualism in Mali.

Firstly, this initiative was limited to a single language (Bamanankan<sup>60</sup>), even though the ministry has transposed the methodology to other local languages taught in Mali.

Moreover, its approach is essentially monolingual (L1) in that it does not set out specific teaching methods for transferring skills to French, even if, through its educational approach to reading and writing, it can facilitate the transition to French.

Furthermore, it covers only the first years of education (first and second year of primary). In this sense, it offers more of an early-exit transitional bilingual education model.

For the teachers delivering the SIRA initiative, this is a major problem because students entering the third year are generally placed back in a monolingual (French) system and find themselves at a disadvantage in terms of their French language skills, especially in the first year after the switch (the third year), compared to their peers who have been educated in French.

Finally, the SIRA project came to an end in 2021, and the various stakeholders interviewed for our survey were sceptical about the project's continuation: “In our first and second year classes, we’re currently delivering SIRA. Our managers say the SIRA project has just ended, we’re worried.” (School Principal in Bamako)

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<sup>58</sup> Activity implemented to develop learners' oral comprehension.

<sup>59</sup> <https://learningportal.iiep.unesco.org/en/blog/the-usaid-mali-selected-integrated-reading-activity-teaching-reading-and-writing-in-the>

<sup>60</sup> In a multilingual country like Mali, the decision to focus on Bamanankan is problematic because it gives the impression of wanting to prioritize one dominant language over the others.

### 3.2.3 The ELAN and SIRA initiatives: What next?

The benefits of the ELAN and SIRA initiatives are undeniable. The assessment of student attainment and the surveys of educators conducted as part of this study show the institutional, teaching, learning and community benefits of these two programmes.

Nevertheless, the fact that bilingualism in schools in the country is still largely dependent on these two pilot programmes led by technical and financial partners remains a challenge, especially given that these two initiatives:

- are time limited (SIRA ended in 2021) or limited in scope (ELAN did not expand its coverage)
- are limited in the choice of local languages taught (only one local language for SIRA, four for ELAN).

This raises questions around the continuation/financing of projects after the technical and financial partners withdraw and what will happen with the roll-outs, in particular in geographic areas where SIRA and ELAN have not produced any materials in the children's first languages.

Educators fear a loss of momentum or a return to the monolingual system if the government does not intervene to ensure the continuation of these two initiatives.

## 4. Bi/plurilingual education in Mali: Analysis

### 4.1 Educators' support in favour of bi/plurilingual education

Through the surveys, we were able to collect positive statements on the use of local languages and the benefit of using them as languages of instruction, such as: the links with the students' environment and local culture, the speed of learning, the positive effects on non-linguistic learning and also on their learning of French, the development of local languages and cultures, and better motivation to learn. These positive statements are in line with several studies on the benefits of bilingualism in schools, which were recently confirmed

by the 2019 report on the CONFEMEN Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems (PASEC).<sup>61</sup>

This confirms that the problem today is not whether or not to introduce local languages in schools, but how best to do it.

### 4.2 The gaps between curriculum objectives and implementation

During the interviews, we found that educators defined and perceived bi/plurilingual education in a range of ways. For example, some teachers define bilingualism in schools as "teaching in which the local language is used as a crutch and allows students to learn French more effectively". For them, the purpose of bilingualism in schools is to benefit French language skills. Others, meanwhile, believe that the objective of bilingual education is to promote local languages at the expense of French.

This range of perceptions among the educators interviewed could be linked to two factors:

- poor understanding of education policy and the content of the curriculum among educators (due to a lack of training and/or awareness-raising on the content of the curriculum and because the Malian bilingual curriculum has not been finalized and is not easily accessible)
- difficulties implementing the curriculum that influence educators' perceptions of it.

However, contrary to what some educators believe, in Mali (as in many West African countries), the curriculum is neither "in favour of local languages" nor "in favour of French". In reality, the approach being implemented in classrooms follows an early-exit transition, rather than the late-exit transitional model advocated by the education system. The official guidance is designed to allow learners to continue their education in their mother tongue for the whole of their basic education in partnership with the French language.

<sup>61</sup> Mignot, Christelle, 'Analyse des représentations sociales des langues et de l'enseignement bi-plurilingue auprès d'enseignants et futurs enseignants en Afrique francophone subsaharienne', *Edition des Archives Contemporaines (in press)*.

In this regard, the 'Cadre général d'orientation du curriculum de l'enseignement fondamental du Mali' ['General Policy Framework for the Basic Education Curriculum in Mali'] (2000) states that:

"In view of the demands of functional bilingualism as a mode of communication in education, the obligation to maintain bilingualism – which requires affording both languages (French and mother tongue) the same status – must be strictly observed. This means that these two languages are considered languages of instruction throughout basic education" (p. 34).

When properly implemented, this approach to bilingualism enables children to achieve functional bilingualism because it allows them the time they need to reach a good level in both languages. **Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish between the stated aims and what is being done in the classroom** (which enables the objectives to be achieved).

In fact, in the classroom, in all regions of Mali, we found that bilingual education is often only offered in the initial years of primary education and that children's first language is often discontinued as a language of instruction very early in their schooling (as early as the third year), even if their first language has indirectly prepared them for this shift to a second language.

There are two main reasons why students do not have the opportunity to be educated in two languages beyond Level I of basic education:

- Some trial projects do not cover all primary levels.
- The bilingual curricula for Levels II and III have only recently been finalized and Level IV has not yet been designed.

This affects not only the impact of bilingual initiatives in the classroom, but also educators' perceptions of bi/plurilingual education (who think that the first language is just a 'crutch' or an end in itself) or those of some parents (who see bi/plurilingual education as 'cut-price').

Why is there such a large gap between the aims of the curriculum and its implementation?

## 4.3 Main obstacles to implementing a bilingual curriculum

The field survey collected many opinions on the challenges around implementing bilingual education. The main obstacles noted by the interviewees related to teacher training, the unavailability of educational materials, the lack of monitoring of teachers of bilingual classes, delays to the effective decentralization of educational policy, the lack of materials available in some local languages and the limitations of the 'project approach', which is incompatible with a system approach.

### 4.3.1 Inadequate pre-service teacher training

At present, primary school teachers are trained in mainstream education, mainly at the teacher training institutes. Teacher trainees are recruited by competitive examination from among basic education diploma graduates, who train for four years, and from among holders of the Secondary Education Certificate, who train for two years.

The quality of teacher training has been heavily criticized by a range of educators. These criticisms have focused not only on the overall content of the training provided through the teacher training institutes, **but also on the lack of coverage of bilingual teaching approaches in teacher training.**

**While the Ministry of National Education did develop a national curriculum for mainstream education that was subject to technical and political approval alongside a corresponding bilingual curriculum for basic education in 2017 (to ensure teacher training at teacher training institutes corresponds to the bilingual curriculum), this programme is yet to be implemented.**

**Moreover, pre-service primary school teacher training for teachers conducting bilingual L1 and L2 classes is the same as that undertaken by teachers conducting monolingual classes.** However, the monolingual linguistic and teaching programme does not deliver effective training for teacher trainees who will be required to teach the local languages and French as part of the bilingual educational approach.

Similarly, the project to create a training programme for teachers from the teacher training institutes within the Ecole Normale Supérieure [Higher Institute for Teacher Training] has not yet materialized. This is despite the feasibility study, which was conducted in 2018, having been followed by the development of competency frameworks for the creation of a master's degree in bilingual mother tongue/French education.

#### 4.3.2 Poor understanding of how to transfer learning from the first language to French

Given the lack of teacher training on bilingual teaching methods (lack of pre- and in-service training), the teachers, school principals, education advisers, directors of teacher resource centres and academy directors interviewed for our survey expressed regret that many teachers do not have a sufficient command of the local languages in which they are supposed to teach and/or that they lack the skills to teach these languages. These teachers therefore often do not have the requisite skills to run metalinguistic activities that can be methodically transferred from one language to another.

However, according to the National Director of Mainstream Education:

“A bilingual teacher must master both mediums; they cannot be effective if they do not know the syntactic, morphological and morphosyntactic structures of the first language. Nor can they help the children if they do not know the structures of the second language. This is the most important quality that a teacher must have, because if they don't know both languages, they can't understand the difficulties the children are facing. This is the rationale behind our work with the OIF to produce bilingual grammar books (on the local language and French), because such books aim to identify difficulties that children might have when moving to the second language. Making comparisons with what they know in their own language and being able to show how another language works differently to help them to understand is at the foundation of bilingual grammar books. **So the ideal profile of a bilingual teacher in Mali is someone who can master the grammatical structures of the first and second languages to make the comparison and help the children understand any difficulties they face.**”

This comparison between languages highlighted by the National Director refers to **language and learning transfers**, which, according to the head of monitoring and evaluation at the Ministry of National Education, “**is one of the major challenges for implementing this approach from a pedagogical point of view.**”

One aspect of teaching students to transfer between languages is to enable them to reflect on how the two languages work in the classroom (their first language and French) and to compare them, even at primary levels. According to Bruno Maurer, “if schools can offer one benefit over the wider environment, it is by providing opportunities for learners to reflect on how the language works, to discover the units it comprises” (Maurer, 2007, p. 18). Metalinguistic activities enable learners to build bridges between the L1 and the L2.

**However, the content of the national programme does not sufficiently take into account the process that learners transitioning from their first language to French go through.** As a result, due to a lack of training and materials in the area of transfers, **teachers often find it difficult to conduct their bilingual classes effectively.**

In this regard, while filming the documentary *J'apprends si je comprends [I Learn if I Understand]*<sup>62</sup> in Mali, a documentary about bi/plurilingual teaching, the Solidarité Laïque [Secular Solidarity] team noted that, due to the lack of training:

- “Some teachers of bilingual classes conducted their classes in French only, without regard to the bilingual curriculum.
- Others first stated their instructions in French, then routinely translated them into the L1.
- Others conducted their classes in French at the beginning of the week and then conducted the same classes with the same content in the local language at the end of the week.
- Those who were making these transfers were very much in the minority in the classrooms where we conducted our filming, especially from the third year of primary onwards.”

<sup>62</sup> <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-03143017>

The AFD report 'Système d'accompagnement professionnel et de formation des enseignants au Mali' ['Professional Support and Teacher Training System in Mali'] notes the same difficulties around transfer: "The transfer from first languages to the second language (third year of primary) still needs specific support." (AFD 2019, p. 9).

### 4.3.3 Discrepancy between the bilingual curriculum and monolingual examinations

As Colette Noyau stated,<sup>63</sup> there are discrepancies between the bilingual curricula and the monolingual assessments for certification. In her article, 'Les divergences curriculum - évaluation certificative dans les écoles primaires bilingues de pays du sud' ['Discrepancies in the Curriculum: Assessments for certification in bilingual primary schools in the south'], she states that:

"Nowhere in these assessments is the relationship between the L1 and French taken into account, even where the curriculum explicitly provides for the use of the L1 to develop French as a tool, and the ability to use the L1 to develop the ability to use French to learn (Mali). [...] These transfers, which are encouraged and even part of the framework, are not considered when the time comes to assess learning, which is juxtaposed with monolingual assessments."

In response to this situation, she makes the following recommendation:

"It is the responsibility of programme designers to ensure that the curriculum and the certification system are aligned and that the links between them are clear, so that students experience learning and preparation for their final assessments as a unified whole."

### 4.3.4 Lack of effective monitoring and evaluation of teachers by the learning communities

In Mali, the learning community is the main actor in monitoring and evaluating teachers and training them.

As stated in the 'Rapport pays du projet de recherche sur la formation initiale et continue des enseignants en Afrique' ['Country Report for the Research Project on Pre- and In-service Teacher Training in Africa'] (FICEA 2011, p. 5):

"The learning community refers to the community of teachers in a school, together with their principal and, in some cases, certain resource persons in the community, with the aim of analysing the teaching practices in the school, identifying the in-service training needs of the teaching team and its members, mobilizing the necessary resources and implementing the desired training activities."

These learning communities have been organized in two different ways:

- learning communities of mentors serving teachers working at a single (public) school
- learning communities of mentors serving teachers working at a cluster of schools (public, community, madrasa), based at one of the schools in the cluster.

The learning communities are part of the decentralization programme because they are linked to the decentralized education services (teacher resource centres, teaching academies and teacher training institutes) and other local stakeholders in the field of education (non-governmental organizations [NGOs], unions). Their purpose is to support teachers throughout their career and to enable them to advance in terms of their teaching and educational skills, based on peer learning.

However, the field survey revealed a lack of consideration about how bilingual classes should be supported by these networks of teachers or schools (in learning communities). Close monitoring of teachers involved in bilingual education should therefore be strengthened, in particular by strengthening these decentralized local bodies.

<sup>63</sup> Noyau, Colette, 'Les divergences curriculum - évaluation certificative dans les écoles primaires bilingues de pays du sud : conséquences du point de vue de l'acquisition du bilinguisme, in Curriculum, programmes et autres itinéraires en langues et cultures (FLS-FLE), Le Français dans le Monde - Recherches et applications, no. 49 (January), 2011, pp. 137-154.

### 4.3.5 Hopes for PRODEC 2

A range of efforts have been made and continue to be made to overcome the weaknesses described above. In particular, these address the disconnect between the content of language training at teacher training institutes and the needs of the bilingual basic education curriculum, and a linguistic and local language programme at teacher training institutes that is poorly aligned with the demands of effective training for teacher trainees who are required to teach local languages and French using bilingual teaching methods.

In response to this situation, within the framework of PRODEC 2 – which prioritizes the promotion of bilingual education – several training activities and educational design workshops have been held to improve the quality of the pre- and in-service training offered to Malian teachers by improving its coverage of bilingual education.

Moreover, several in-service training courses have recently been organized for trainers at the teacher training institutes [in the area of bi/plurilingual teaching methods](#). The survey participants cited, as an example, the training sessions held in Segou, Kangaba, Mopti, Kita and Koutiala from 16 to 21 November 2020. These were organized by the Direction Nationale de l'Enseignement Normal [National Directorate of Mainstream Education], with the support of the Programme d'appui à l'enseignement fondamental [Basic Education Support Programme]/European Union project under the direction of the Ministry of National Education, for around 30 participants per location.

Others mentioned the July 2021 workshop (11–19 July) focused on designing a training module on bi/plurilingual teaching methods for education advisers, school principals, and lecturers at the teacher training institutes responsible for language and communication. This workshop, organized by the National Directorate of Mainstream Education as part of its partnership with the Institut de la Francophonie pour l'Education et la Formation [Institute of Francophonie for Education and Training – IFEF], mobilized the various central and decentralized bodies involved in the training and management of teachers as well as research teaching

fellows. This workshop, which sought to break down the barriers between higher education and national education, aimed to produce resources to harmonize the bilingual content in the various areas of the education system. This workshop laid the foundations for another training workshop that will bring together 225 participants (including lecturers in languages and communication from three teacher training institutes in the Bambara-speaking area, school principals and education advisers from the teacher resource centres in the areas where the three teacher training institutes are located).

Finally, training sessions on the curriculum and the transcription of local languages are organized each year for teachers at teacher training institutes. This was not done before. However, the survey participants expressed their regret that these trainings are often too short and “poorly aligned with their programmes”. An objective analysis of the training on offer at these institutes could verify these statements.

### 4.3.6 Problems with the availability of teaching materials

Providing students and teachers with enough quality textbooks<sup>64</sup> in the main academic disciplines is imperative if the quality of teaching and learning is to improve. However, it is clear that students have very few textbooks. Table 9 illustrates this situation.

**Table 9: Ratio of textbooks to primary school students, 2018–2019**

Level	French	Local language	Maths
Year 1	0.76	0.66	0.62
Year 2	0.59	0.51	0.57
Year 3	0.59	0.25	0.69
Year 4	0.52	0.15	0.64
Year 5	0.51	0.11	0.59
Year 6	0.52	0.12	0.65
<b>Average</b>	<b>0.59</b>	<b>0.32</b>	<b>0.63</b>

Source: 'Rapport d'analyse des indicateurs 2014-2019' [Indicator Analysis Report 2014–2019], Ministry of National Education Planning and Statistics Unit

See Annex 1 for more information on Mali's textbook policy.

The data in Table 9 show that the average textbook-to-student ratio for French and mathematics in primary schools ranged from 0.59 to 0.63 in 2018. There is therefore **approximately one textbook for every two students for these subjects. This ratio is even lower for local languages, at 0.32 textbooks per student, i.e. about one textbook for every three students, on average. This ratio drops to one textbook for every six to 10 students in the last three years of primary education.**

### **4.3.7 The number of local languages taught and their documentation**

Delivering a bilingual curriculum at the basic education level in Mali, as in other countries in the region, faces the challenge of the **high number of languages spoken in the country.**

There is, in fact, an imbalance between the number of teachers available on the one hand and the 11 local languages taught. It is very difficult to find teachers who speak some of the first languages taught in schools, in particular Hassaniya and Malinke, and to a lesser extent Mamara and Bomu. The head of pre-service teacher training in Mali highlighted this issue: “There is not always alignment between the number of languages to be taught and the number of teachers available. For example, if you want to do bilingual teaching in Bozo or Bobo, I am not sure that there are the human resources available. It is therefore necessary to conduct a sociolinguistic study in each education district to see exactly how many teachers we have for each language and, based on that, try to implement this programme” (National Director of Mainstream Education).

Another obstacle relates to the documentation of Mali's local languages: “There is a challenge related to the systematic description of languages, which has often not been completed for certain languages. There are languages that are not well described and therefore materials haven't been produced. There are not many documents in these languages.” (SIRA initiative manager)

It is clear that decisions about which and how many languages to integrate into the education system must be based on objective sociolinguistic, educational and

institutional criteria related, among other things, to linguistic documentation, the number of speakers and country-specific logistical considerations (including the availability of appropriate pedagogical tools and adequate teacher training).

### **4.3.8 Barriers to implementing the decentralization policy**

For two decades, Mali has been resolutely engaged in a process of institutional development. Decentralization and administrative devolution, involving the transfer of powers from central government to local authorities, are key achievements of these efforts.

As regards the education system, this decentralization process has led to new practices in school management. Innovations include the creation of school management committees responsible for the daily operation of public primary schools, and the support services of the Ministry of National Education, in particular the teacher resource centres. These teacher resource centres provide technical assistance such as training and managing the allocation and distribution of certain central government resources. The Agence Nationale d'Investissement des Collectivités Territoriales [National Investment Agency of Local Authorities] was created to channel all infrastructure funding from donors to local authorities.

**However, the field survey found that there were significant gaps in education-related decision-making capacity at the local level and that the decentralized system for educational planning and delivery that has been in place since 1999 was struggling to perform as expected.**

Some of the educators interviewed for the study noted that:

- the transfer of responsibility for managing schools did not fully materialize in practice
- the mobilization of human and financial resources did not mirror this shift to the local level.

Several teachers complained that “teachers are transferred to local authority areas based on quotas” without taking into account whether they want to transfer or whether they have the right skills (particularly linguistic).

As a result, teachers are regularly transferred to areas where they do not speak the language. This makes it impossible for them to implement a bi/plurilingual approach to teaching since they do not share their students' first language.

Decentralization should, in principle, help streamline the local implementation of bilingualism in schools, in particular through the targeted assignment of teachers based on their languages and the school's needs, and through more efficient distribution of tools to schools.

#### 4.3.9 The lack of job stability for teachers

Through their various bi/plurilingual initiatives, technical and financial partners seek to improve teacher training in the schools they cover. Nevertheless, the study found that teachers' positions are not stable and that teachers adequately trained in bilingual education are likely to be transferred and could leave the bilingual school at any time. Conversely, teachers who are not trained in bilingual education are often transferred to schools with a bilingual curriculum.

This cycle of transfers weakens initiatives by disrupting the professional development of trained, competent and experienced staff.

#### 4.3.10 Coverage of bilingualism in schools dependent on technical and financial partners

As stated in the third part of this report ("The ELAN and SIRA initiatives: What next?"), we note that the coverage of bilingualism in schools in Mali remains dependent on technical and financial partner programmes and that bilingual initiatives tend to be discontinued when donors withdraw their funding at the end of a project.

This partly explains why a string of bilingual pilot projects have been run in Mali since the 1970s without any of them ever being scaled up.

This lack of continuity of bilingual initiatives in Mali (which affects several other countries in the subregion) works against bi/plurilingual education. It can lead some educators, [despite being convinced of the benefits](#)

[of bilingualism in schools, to prefer monolingual education in French to bilingual education](#) that may be interrupted when funding from technical and financial partners ends.

## 5. Conditions for the roll-out of bilingual education

During the field survey, the participants noted the conditions that they believe would need to be met to roll out bilingual education. All their proposals were recorded and grouped under 10 headings.

### 5.1 Improve training of trainers on bi/plurilingual teaching methods

To capitalize on the progress of bilingual education in Mali and to roll it out more widely, it is imperative that the country [move away from a project-based approach and prioritize teacher training](#).

This study showed how much the lack of pre-service teacher training on local languages and bi/plurilingual teaching methods impeded the use of the active teaching and learning methods that are recommended for teaching the bilingual curriculum. It also revealed a significant gap between the theoretical training undertaken by teachers and its application in the classroom.

It is therefore necessary to introduce modules on how to conduct bi/plurilingual classes into pre-service training.

It is also recommended that principals and inspectors be trained to effectively support teachers and to implement a strategy that contextualizes training and works to produce pedagogical tools. This strategy should be specifically tailored to each sociolinguistic area based on the location of the teacher training institute.

Finally, the content of the training courses at the Higher Institute for Teacher Training must be updated to place more emphasis on teaching methods and how to teach multilingual classes in practice.



## 5.2 Produce bi/plurilingual teaching materials and make them available to teachers and students

Although technical and financial partners make an important contribution to the production of materials for bilingual classes, these efforts should be taken further.

To illustrate:

“Improving the quality of bi/plurilingual programmes must as a matter of necessity involve the production of more resources, especially to facilitate transfers, including for years 3, 4, 5, and 6 and for the start of secondary school, because ‘three or four years of mother tongue instruction is not enough’ (Ouane and Glanz, 2011 *ibid.* p.31).”<sup>65</sup>

It is important to improve the quality of educational resources that build links between what students learn in the two languages.

Finally, it is crucial to improve the way resources and teaching materials are delivered to the classroom and to ensure that the objectives set out in PRODEC 2, namely “the effective implementation of the revised policy on textbook and teaching materials as well as the purchase and provision to schools by 2030 of textbooks at a ratio of two textbooks per student in the first year of basic education and four textbooks per student in the second year”, **are also applied to bilingual classes and textbooks.**

## 5.3 Lay the groundwork for the use of the local languages

The implementation of bilingualism has come up against difficulties inherent in the use of the languages, some of which are not yet sufficiently equipped to be used as a language of instruction or are not used properly by teachers (who have not mastered them or the corresponding teaching methods). It is therefore recommended that efforts to implement

the local languages chosen be continued, along three complementary lines of action:

- making more educational resources available so they can actually be used as languages of instruction, particularly in terms of teaching materials and the terminology used in class
- training teachers in these languages, both in relation to the linguistic system and first-language teaching methods
- including in the teacher training institute curriculum training modules on a local language (linguistic and teaching component) as well as a module on bi/plurilingual teaching methods that demonstrates how to transfer from the first language to French. These modules are currently missing from pre-service training institutions.

## 5.4 Implement a national assessment to measure the learning outcomes of students in bilingual classes

The study found that assessments of student learning were initiated either through regional mechanisms (EGRA and PASEC) or in connection with technical and financial partners’ initiatives (SIRA and ELAN), but that no specific assessment system has been included in the national bilingual reform.

Plans should be made to assess the learning outcomes of students in the bilingual system, before it is extended or rolled out to all schools. These assessments could take inspiration from the regional systems without, however, entirely transposing their standardized assessment approaches, but rather tailoring them to national realities.

## 5.5 Implement the decentralization policy in practice

To improve the quality of recruitment and the teacher transfers system, the decentralization policy must be implemented in practice and more power transferred to local authorities.

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<sup>65</sup> Mignot, Christelle, “J’apprends si je comprends’ : pour une meilleure prise en compte des langues premières des enfants à l’école primaire. Projet de documentaire long métrage et de kit audiovisuel à l’attention des enseignants de classes bi-plurilingues’, Edition des Archives Contemporaines (in press).

This could present an opportunity for regional and local management of the implementation of bilingualism at the different levels. It will therefore be necessary to agree on the criteria to be applied in relation to: the language to be used (which must be well documented), the material practicalities of its use (teaching materials) and the needs of the local community. Decentralization would help with assigning teachers based on their linguistic profile, and would support the delivery of teaching materials and the close monitoring of the schools by the teacher resource centres.

## 5.6. Improve close monitoring of teachers of bilingual classes

Close monitoring is the weakest link in the implementation of bilingualism, since in practice teachers are offered few opportunities to be mentored either by inspectors or by education advisers.

The bodies hosting the learning communities (such as the teacher resource centres) could be strengthened to provide a forum for sharing bilingual practices within the school or across a group of schools.

## 5.7 Set up a body responsible for managing the roll-out of bilingualism in schools

If Mali is to expand bilingualism in schools or roll it out to all schools, it will be necessary to set up a body responsible for planning and managing bilingualism in schools. The main missions of this body would be to plan out the different aspects of the implementation of bilingualism in schools, to improve how bilingualism is defined in the education policy, to recommend the development of relevant educational resources and to plan the logistics of delivering these tools.

This body would be mindful of the need to ensure the sustainability of the bilingual reform and would take responsibility for steering the local management of bilingualism, particularly in view of the objective (not yet achieved) of transferring responsibility for school management to local authorities, especially as regards the bilingual aspect.

Pending the creation of such a steering body for bilingualism in schools, the Ministry of Education could gain much from collaborating with academic bodies (notably the Malian Academy of Languages and the Abdoulaye BARRY Institute of Languages) or from drawing on their field studies to ensure languages are better equipped with resources, to define the criteria for expanding bilingualism and to choose the right schools and regions based on the languages used there.

## 5.8 Draw up regulations on how to implement bilingualism in schools in practice

As regards its language and education policy, Mali has a set of laws and decrees advocating the integration of languages into the education system, with the intention of expanding or rolling them out across the country. However, this legal framework is still not supported by circulars or regulations that specifically guide the planning and implementation of bilingualism in schools.

It would therefore be useful to draw up administrative texts at the national and regional levels to organize the various aspects of implementing bilingualism in practice.

## 5.9 Include data on bilingualism in annual school data-collection activities

To provide regular data on bilingual schools and classes, annual school data-collection campaigns should incorporate bilingualism as a dimension to at least track the number of schools and classes, the levels covered, and the number of students in bilingual education. This could be done by adding these variables to the Planning and Statistics Unit's annual data-collection questionnaire.

## 5.10 Highlight the proven benefits of bilingual education for learning outcomes and raise awareness

The lack of support among some parents for bi/plurilingual education, and even the negative perception of it among some educators, due to a range of different barriers to its implementation, significantly hinders its full roll-out. For stakeholders to actually accept bi/plurilingual education, it will undoubtedly be necessary to advocate for its adoption. However,

it will only be possible to implement this approach on the basis of proven, documented and known learning outcomes. Only by demonstrating the effectiveness of this educational approach (based on an appropriate monitoring, evaluation and data management system) and by communicating effectively with the various stakeholders will it be possible to shift to a positive trajectory, which will have to be driven by strong political will.



# Conclusion

The introduction of local languages to the education system, alongside French, is widely accepted in Mali. Since the 1962 reform, through the trial programmes of the 1970s, the convergent pedagogy approach and the subsequent curriculum reform, the Malian government has always advocated the importance of students being able to learn in their own language(s) as well as in French.

Mali is still committed to bi/plurilingualism in schools. This is demonstrated by the numerous decrees and laws advocating the integration of local languages into the education system, with the aim of expanding bilingual reforms or rolling them out across the country.

However, despite the enormous efforts various national and bilateral actors have made to build on Mali's experience in bilingual education, much remains to be done.

In fact, these legislative and regulatory texts are not supported by accompanying circulars setting out concrete plans for the implementation of bi/plurilingual teaching in the classroom. There is therefore a significant disconnect between the aims of the legal framework on the one hand and the reality in classrooms on the other.

The government is also reliant on bilingual initiatives carried out by technical and financial partners. These

bring real added value at the institutional, educational, teaching and community levels, but they have limitations, not least because they are time limited and confined to the early years of primary education.

For bilingualism in schools to be rolled out across the country, it will therefore be necessary to go further in translating the existing political will into administrative texts at the national and regional levels. This should also be reflected in the creation of a body responsible for the various aspects involved in implementing bilingualism. These include training educators, equipping languages with resources, producing educational and teaching resources for bilingual classes, managing and monitoring bilingual class teachers, and evaluating, developing and harmonizing bilingual practices.

There is also a need to roll out or improve communication and advocacy campaigns regarding the benefits of a truly bilingual education, targeting the various actors and in particular students' parents, since the study highlighted resistance in this group following the problems with implementing the bilingual reform. This advocacy would be enhanced by drawing on objective arguments about the benefits of bilingualism, and above all if it were based on successful practices and positive outcomes of bilingual education.



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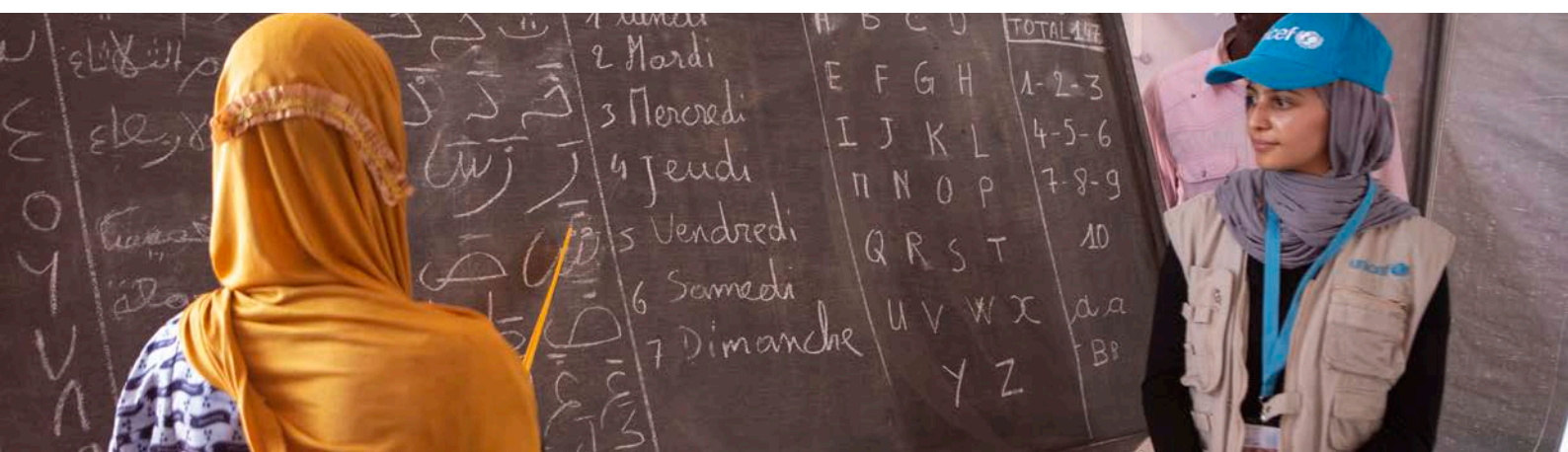
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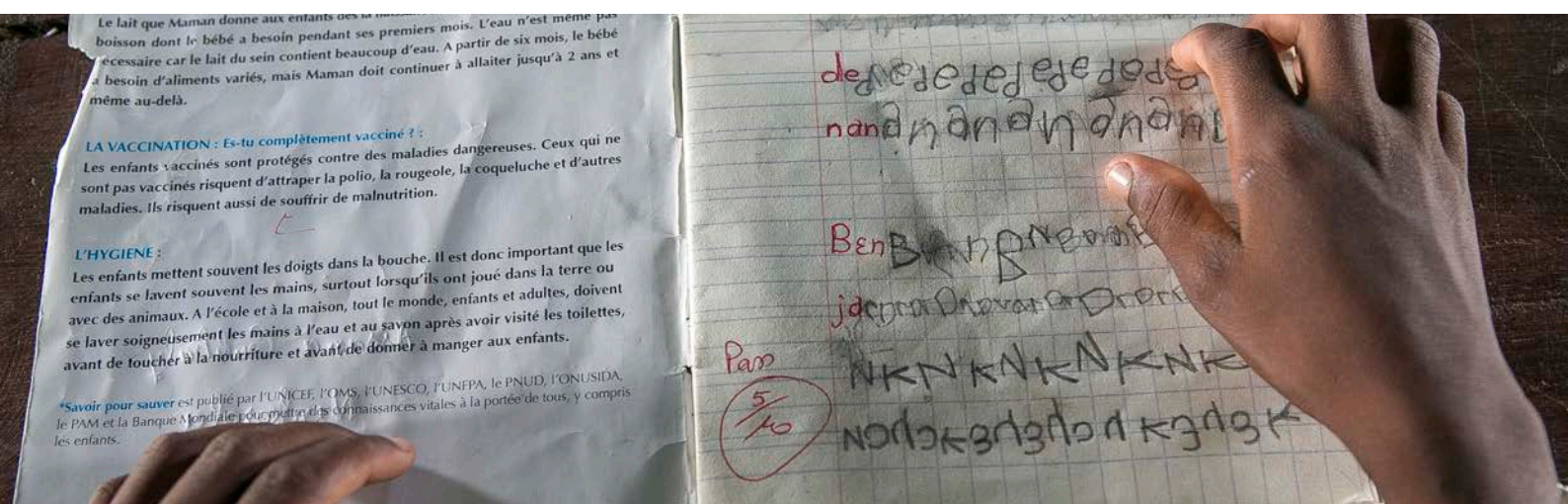
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# Annex: Further information on the field survey methodology

## Survey details

In **Bamako**, the surveys were conducted in the two education districts: Rive Gauche and Rive Droite.

In the Rive Gauche education district, we targeted the Djélibougou and Banconi teacher resource centres. The Baben Santara primary school under the Banconi teacher resource centre was chosen for interviews with teachers and the school principal.

In the Rive Droite education district, we focused the survey on the Banankabougou teacher resource centre. Interviews were conducted with the school management committee, parents, students, teachers and the school principal at the Yirimadjo primary school group under the Banankabougou teacher resource centre.

We also ran three focus groups: the first with teacher supervisors at the teacher training institutes in Bamako; the second with basic education teachers' unions; and the third with designers of bilingual textbooks at the Malian Academy of Languages.

In **Mopti**, we surveyed the teaching academy, the Mopti and Sévaré teacher resource centres, the teacher training institutes (to conduct the focus group with the teacher supervisors) and the Boukary Ouléguem school group (to conduct interviews with teachers, school principals, parents and the school management committee).

In **Koutiala**, we surveyed the Koutiala teacher resource centre and the Cinzina school.

In **Gao**, we conducted telephone interviews with the director of the teaching academy, two teachers, and two school principals from the commune of N'chawaji working at the Djebok school.

## Number of people interviewed for the survey

The table shows the number of people consulted by role and by location.



## Number of people interviewed for the survey

	Surveyed	Planned	Achieved	Bamako	Mopti	Koutiala	Gao
1	Bilingual classroom teachers, second year	5	5	1	1	1	2
2	School principals	8	8	2	2	2	2
3	Decentralized directors	3	3	1	1	-	1
4	Trainers of supervisors	2	2	2	-	-	-
5	Reform steering leads	1	1	1	-	-	-
6	Ministry for National Education evaluation officers	1	1	1	-	-	-
7	Director responsible for decentralization	1	1	1	-	-	-
8	Secretary General of the Ministry for National Education	1	1	1	-	-	-
9	Head of the Association of Mayors	1	1	1	-	-	-
10	Mayors of urban & rural communes	2	2	1	1	-	-
11	Director of local authorities	1	1	1	-	-	-
12	Local language writers association	1	1	1	-	-	-
13	Technical and financial partners/education officers	3	3	3	-	-	-
14	Technical and financial partners/monitoring and evaluation officers	3	3	3	-	-	-
		33	33	20	5	3	5
15	Students	2	2	1	-	1	-
16	Teacher trainers	1	1	-	1	-	-
17	Teaching-material designers	1	1	1	-	-	-
18	School management committees (men/women)	2	2	1	1	-	-
19	Parents	4	4	2	2	-	-
20	Teachers' unions	1	1	1	-	-	-
		11	11	6	4	1	-
21	Teachers of other classes	6	6	2	2	2	-
22	Education advisers	6	6	3	2	1	-
23	Directors of teacher resource centres	6	6	3	2	1	-
24	Director of human resources	1	1	1	-	-	-
25	Director of pre-service training	1	1	1	-	-	-
26	Director of studies and planning	1	1	1	-	-	-
		21	21	11	6	4	-
	<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>



# Multi-country study on multilingualism and bi/plurilingualism in schools

Country report: Niger



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# Acronyms and abbreviations

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<b>CE1</b>	First year of the elementary cycle (third year of primary school)
<b>CE2</b>	Second year of the elementary cycle (fourth year of primary school)
<b>CI</b>	Introductory course
<b>CM1</b>	First year of cours moyen (fifth year of primary school)
<b>CM2</b>	Second year of cours moyen (sixth year of primary school)
<b>CREN</b>	Centre de Recherche en Education de Nantes [Nantes University Centre for Education Research]
<b>EGRA</b>	Early Grade Reading Assessment
<b>ELAN</b>	Ecole et Langues Nationales en Afrique (National Schools and Languages in Africa)
<b>L1</b>	First language
<b>L2</b>	Second language
<b>LOSEN</b>	Law on educational system policy in Niger
<b>NECS</b>	Niger Education and Community Strengthening
<b>NECS+</b>	Niger Education and Community Strengthening Plus
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>OIF</b>	Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (International Organization of la Francophonie)
<b>PASEC</b>	Programme d'analyse des systèmes éducatifs de la CONFEMEN (CONFEMEN Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems)
<b>PSEF</b>	Programme sectoriel de l'éducation et de la formation (Education and Training Sector Programme)
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund



# Executive summary

This study is a critical analysis of the evolving implementation of the multilingual reform in Niger's education system over the past decade, with a view to identifying potential avenues for rolling it out. It takes a qualitative approach and is based on a literature review of recent publications on bi/plurilingualism in schools in Niger and on the perceptions collected from various actors and partners in the field of education on multilingualism and bi/plurilingual education. These actors and partners were selected based on their role and institutional position.

In Niger, the government has made rolling out bilingual education an objective, or at least a very strong option. Indeed, the curriculum reform that started in 2012 is based on bilingualism. According to official figures, this reform resulted in 5,000 bilingual schools using the scenario-based approach, accounting for about 30 per cent of primary schools in Niger. This system of public bilingual schools implementing the new curriculum is complemented by two experimental bilingual education initiatives: the National Schools and Languages in Africa (ELAN) project and an initiative run by the non-governmental organization (NGO) Concern International (whose schools are only partially bilingual).

However, the lack of monitoring data makes it difficult to see how bilingual education works in reality, because it is impossible to know precisely how much progress the government has made in implementing the reform. According to the educators interviewed for the survey, it seems that the curriculum reform is not actually being implemented throughout Niger and that many so-called bilingual schools actually operate monolingually.

Moreover, while bilingual education is defended in principle by politicians and educators for reasons that are as much cultural (promotion of local languages and cultures) as educational (better acquisition of skills and French learning), its acceptance – especially among students' parents and educators in the field – appears mixed. The difficulties affecting the implementation of the curriculum reform include inadequate teacher training that does not meet the

demands of bilingualism, the patchy availability of teaching documentation – the quality of which needs to be improved –, the unavailability of teaching materials in the classroom and the absence of monitoring and evaluation data, all of which compromise the quality of bilingual teaching. Moreover, the perception among parents that bilingual education offers little added value and the lack of support from teachers negatively impact the attractiveness of, and motivation for, bilingual education.

Consequently, although the roll-out of bilingual education has a solid legal basis, it remains fragile at the operational level.

This study has identified 10 outstanding challenges that need to be overcome in order to fulfil the government's desire for children's first languages to be better taken into account and thus improve the quality of teaching and learning. These are:

1. Including bi/plurilingual teaching in pre- and in-service teacher training.
2. Producing more bilingual classroom resources (particularly with regard to the transfer from students' first language [L1] to their second language [L2]), including beyond the early years of primary school.
3. Improving the availability of bilingual resources in schools.
4. Improving the recruitment and assignment of teachers of bilingual classes (based on the languages spoken by the teachers – and the language they were trained in – and the language spoken by students in each geographic area).
5. Planning how to scale up bi/plurilingualism in schools in practice.
6. Implementing a system to demonstrate concrete learning outcomes from bilingual programmes.
7. Evaluating the bilingual education initiatives/projects/innovations/pilots to capitalize on lessons learned.
8. Updating statistical data on bi/plurilingual education.
9. Increasing domestic funding for bi/plurilingualism in schools.
10. Raising awareness of the benefits of bilingual education based on proven outcomes.

# Introduction

Nigerien society is multilingual. Nigeriens communicate using their mother tongue and often one or more other languages, sometimes including French. French remains Niger's official language, but children are exposed to it only when they start school. People who do not attend school are likely to struggle to reach a functional level of French.

Although the Nigerien government has enshrined multilingualism in its legislation, a linguistic framework that sets out the respective roles and positions of the national and official languages has yet to be finalized. Multilingualism is most advanced in the field of education, despite the fact that the ongoing bi/plurilingual reform is in need of support from a strong driving force.

In Niger, the reform to introduce local languages to schools dates back to the 1970s and is characterized by various trial initiatives, which were sometimes complementary and sometimes competitive, run with the support of external partners.

In recent years, bilingual practices have tended to converge more so than before around the approach implemented under the curriculum reform.

How much progress has been made? Has the desire to extend and fully roll out bi/plurilingualism in schools materialized in practice? How?

This study aims to answer these questions by adding to the existing knowledge about bi/plurilingual education experiences in Niger, particularly for the period from 2010 to 2021, and by reviewing the evaluations of ongoing bi/plurilingual education initiatives in the country.

Taking a resolutely qualitative approach, for which we consulted a panel of educators in Niamey, Tillabéri, the region of Dosso and Diffa, the study also aims to better understand the challenges affecting bilingual education in Niger before considering strategies to reduce them and enable bilingual education to be rolled out to all schools.



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# Methodology

There were two complementary phases to this study.

The first phase consisted of a literature review, which allowed us to produce:

- a preliminary report, including a complete bibliography of the documents consulted
- summary tables containing the information found in the documents
- an inventory of missing information, which was used to determine the research objectives for the field survey.

The second phase, a field survey, took a qualitative approach and was conducted between September and November 2020. This phase enabled us to gather the views and opinions of 65 educators on the use of local languages in the Nigerien education system.

## Geographic and linguistic aspects of the field survey

Two variables were taken into account when defining the physical scope of the study: a geographic variable and a sociolinguistic variable.

Four geographic areas were selected: Niamey (capital), Tillabéri (medium-sized city), Dosso Region (rural area) and Diffa (insecure area).

In terms of sociolinguistic scope, multiple languages were selected based on their status:

- a lingua franca (Hausa)
- a vernacular language (Fulfulde)
- an intermediary language (Zarma).

For the insecure area, language choice was not a specific criterion.

Table 1 shows the distribution of languages in the areas targeted by the study.

**Table 1: Distribution of languages in the areas studied**

Variables chosen		Location	Languages
Geographic	Linguistic		
Capital city	Lingua franca	Niamey	Hausa
Medium-sized city	Intermediary	Tillabéri	Zarma
Rural area	Vernacular	Dosso Region	Fulfulde
Insecure area	-	Diffa	Kanuri

## Selection of educators surveyed<sup>1</sup>

The people consulted for this study represent six socioprofessional categories:

- the educators on the ground responsible for implementing bi/plurilingualism in schools
- trainers of trainers
- central-level actors responsible for designing and guiding the reform
- social partners in education
- technical and financial partners
- managers and beneficiaries of the educational measures.

There may, however, be some overlap between the different groups. For example, regional directors are both educational authorities and educational leaders in schools.

## Topics covered by the surveys

The surveys covered:

- understanding and perception of bilingualism in schools
- levels of adoption of bi/plurilingual education as perceived by the interviewees
- the decentralization policy and the potential to harness it in implementing bilingualism
- training of educators (pre- and in-service training)
- close monitoring of reforms and pilot projects
- the availability of teaching materials.

<sup>1</sup>See interviewee details in Annex 1.

## Challenges encountered and limitations of the study

The literature review was carried out under fairly good conditions. However, the field data were collected in the context of COVID-19. The field research was hampered by the temporary or prolonged closure of schools, lockdowns, the introduction of working from home in public administrations and bans or restrictions on travel between cities.

Moreover, reservations about the official position or a lack of knowledge of the subject seem to have

contributed to resistance or withdrawal among some educators, who did not always respond to the surveyors' requests.

Finally, the data collection period coincided with the election period, which limited the availability of government officials.



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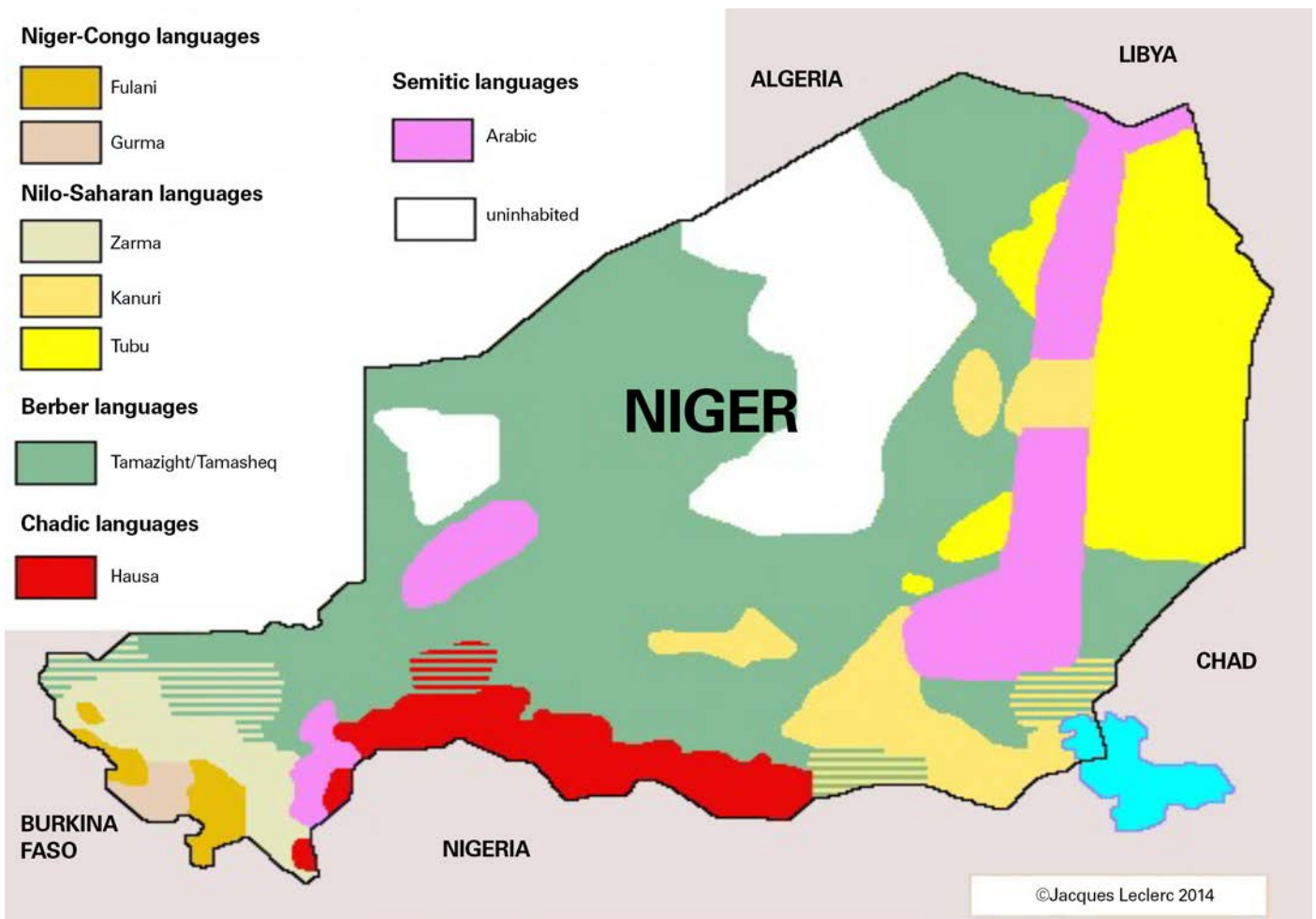
# 1. Sociolinguistic context

Niger has 11 local languages. A legacy of the colonial period, French is the only language with the privileged status of 'official language'. This makes it the main language of government, the justice system, the media and teaching throughout the Nigerien education system.

## 1.1. Ethnolinguistic map

Niger is divided into eight administrative regions including Niamey, the country's capital. These regions are in turn subdivided into 63 departments.

None of these administrative divisions align precisely with a language boundary. The languages are mixed and intermingled, giving rise to plurilingual speakers. The map provides an overview of the languages spoken in the country.



The boundaries shown and the names used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

## 1.2. Languages present and their status

The languages targeted for bilingual education, according to the current legal framework, are those with a formal status: the official language and the local languages.

To better understand the challenges affecting the promotion of local languages in Niger, Table 2 shows the language families of the local languages and indicates their use in society and in key areas of everyday life.

**Table 2: Language families and key areas of use**

	Language family	Group	Areas of use				
			Languages	School	LNFE <sup>2</sup>	Media	Press
1	Afro-Asiatic	Semitic	Arabic	No	No	Yes	No
2		Chadic	Buduma	No	No	Yes	No
3			Hausa	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
4		Berber	Tamajaq	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
5	Indo-European	Romance	French	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
6	Mixed language	Mixed	Tagdalt	No	No	Yes	No
7			Tasawaq	No	No	Yes	No
8	Niger-Congo	Atlantic	Fulfulde	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
9		Gur	Gulmancema	No	Yes	Yes	No
10	Nilo-Saharan	Saharan	Kanuri	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
11		Songhai	Songhay-Zarma	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
12		Saharan	Tebu	No	Yes	Yes	No

Source: Mallam Garba 2015, information provided at the Fête de la Science [Science Festival].

Of the 12 languages with a socially dominant status, only one is of European origin: French. The other 11 are, in terms of their historical formation, either languages that evolved in a linear fashion or languages known as mixed, i.e. composed of elements of two or three predecessor languages.

There are two languages whose classification and even their familial relationships with other languages have not been definitively established: Tasawaq and Tagdalt. Both include words from two or three of the following languages: Tamajaq, Arabic, Songhay-Zarma (also called Songhay) and Hausa.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, i.e. that considers the power dynamics between languages, only three languages are used in all areas studied: French, Hausa and Songhay-Zarma. These are the most widely used languages, including by speakers with a different first language. These vehicular languages, i.e. languages of first resort for communication between speakers of different languages, are dominant on the linguistic market. French and Hausa are vehicular languages spoken across the country, while Songhay-Zarma is spoken in the west of the country, including in the capital, Niamey. These languages are very commonly used in markets, in large meetings, in ceremonies and in the workplace, for example.

The others are reserved for communication within the family or ethnic group, hence their designation as vernacular languages.

The languages are not used equally in the media and the number of weekly programmes produced varies depending on the weight of the languages. Moreover, French tends to be used more for written communication, while local languages are used when speaking. It should be noted that Niger's literacy rate is one of the lowest on the continent, at between 27 per cent and 31 per cent depending on the source.

### 1.3. Documents and laws in support of linguistic diversity

Although Niger does not yet have an explicit language policy, legal texts do exist that provide a fairly loose framework for the use of languages in society.

Niger's current constitution, like the six that preceded it, while recognizing the status of French as the sole official language, establishes the principle of equality between local languages in these terms:

"All the communities that make up the nation of Niger shall enjoy the freedom to use their languages while respecting those of others. These languages have equal status as local languages. The government shall ensure the promotion and development of the local languages. The law shall establish the arrangements for their promotion and development. The official language is French" (article 5 of the Constitution of the Seventh Republic of 25 November 2010).

<sup>2</sup>LNFE: literacy and non-formal education

Law No. 2019-80 of 31 December 2019 lays down the procedures for promoting and developing local languages in the Republic of Niger:

“The following shall be promoted as local languages: Arabic, Buduma, Fulfulde, Gulmancema, Hausa, Songhay-Zarma, Tagdalt, Tamajaq, Tasawaq and Tebu (article 2).”

“The institutional use of local languages in the public, parapublic and private sectors is authorized by this law. Institutional use of a language is defined as the codified oral or written use of that language (article 4).”

## 2. The history of bi/plurilingual education:<sup>3</sup> 1973–2003

### 2.1 The first reforms

During the French colonization of the country, which ended in 1960, school children were taught exclusively in French.

Studies<sup>4</sup> have shown that:

- when classes are taught in a language families have little or no mastery of, parents are prevented from following their children’s schooling and getting involved in their education
- monolingual French schools do not fully meet the needs of the population
- teaching exclusively in French leads to poor academic attainment, because the students have not mastered the language.

Conscious of the negative impacts of monolingualism in schools on children’s attainment, **Niger established its first Hausa-French bilingual class in 1973–1974, in a school annexed to the teacher training college in Zinder.**

Around the same time, in 1974, the framework for the use of local languages in schools was set out in a policy brief from the Ministry for National Education.

It covered aligning training with the realities and needs of the country, and the government’s desire to democratize access to schooling on the basis of new legislative, regulatory and administrative measures. All successive regimes, whether civilian or military, have followed this same path, hence the exceptional longevity of bi/plurilingual education in Niger since 1973–74.

The documents examined for this study show that bi/plurilingual education in Niger is the result of a long process tied to the enduring desire of Nigeriens to see their education system reformed.

### 2.2. 1973–1998: Towards the adoption of the law on education system policy (LOSEN)

After this first introduction of bilingualism in the formal sector, a succession of schools piloted the approach in Niger, although it was sometimes abandoned due to a lack of oversight.

The 2010 report on the languages used in basic education in sub-Saharan francophone Africa (*titled ‘Les langues de scolarisation dans l’enseignement fondamental en Afrique subsaharienne francophone’* [*‘Languages used in basic education in sub-Saharan Francophone Africa’ – LASCOLAF*]) presents a detailed history of the main approaches trialled and the main political decisions taken in this period:

“**1973:** At the start of the 1973–74 school year, trial of Hausa-French bilingual education in a school annexed to the teacher training college in Zinder.

**1979:** At the start of the 1979–80 school year, there was at least one school for each of the country’s five main local languages. The number of schools increased from seven at that time to 42 in 1993 [...].

<sup>3</sup>See Annex 2 for a summary table showing the evolution of bilingual education and the main features of initiatives implemented in the formal sector in Niger from 1973 to 2021.  
<sup>4</sup>Brock-Utne, Birgit, and Hassana Alidou, ‘Teaching Practices: Teaching in a Familiar Language’, ch. 3 in *Optimising Learning, Education and Publishing in Africa: The language factor*, edited by Adama Ouane and Christine Glanz, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning and Association for the Development of Education in Africa, Hamburg and Tunis, 2011, pp.159–185.

**1988:** Almost simultaneous withdrawal of funding for the trials by external donors [...] despite internal and external evaluations that deemed them successful.

**1991:** Sovereign national conference held in Niger [...] This conference reaffirmed the will of the country to promote all local languages on which it conferred, for the first time, the legal status of local languages. [...]

**1992:** Completion of a sector study on basic education in Niger with the technical and financial support of the German technical cooperation agency (GTZ), which highlighted the decisive role of the language of instruction in educational attainment. The study demonstrated the need to revive bilingual education given the low level of French among teachers and the widespread illiteracy of the population.

**1997:** Launch of bilateral cooperation efforts between Niger and Germany in the sector dedicated entirely to supporting the development and roll-out of bilingual education in Niger: Basic Education Project/ Promotion of Bilingual Education (GTZ-2PEB). With three phases of three years each, this long-term project raised new hopes, as pilot schools had been somewhat neglected since 1988.

**1998:** Adoption of Law No. 98-12 of 1 June 1988 on the Nigerien education system policy (LOSEN), which for the first time since 1948 provided Niger with an institutional and legal framework for developing its education system. One of the major innovations of this law is that it provides for the possibility of bilingual education for the first 10 years of schooling, which cover basic education cycles I and II. Being taught in their community's language is established as a right for every school child."<sup>5</sup>

Three key articles of LOSEN concern the use of local languages in Niger's education system: articles 10, 19 and 21:

"The languages of instruction are French and the local languages. Other languages may be taught as subjects in schools and universities. The organic texts on the different levels of education shall specify the principles, arrangements, content and educational approaches of language teaching. (LOSEN 1998, article 10)

Basic cycle I is for children aged 6–7 years. The standard length of this cycle shall be six years. The mother tongue or first language shall be the language of instruction; French shall be taught as a subject from the first year. (LOSEN 1998, article 19)

Basic cycle II is for children between the ages of 11 and 13. The standard length of this cycle shall be four years. French shall be the language of instruction and the mother tongues or first languages shall be taught as subjects. (LOSEN 1998, article 21)"<sup>6</sup>

### 2.3. 1998–2003: Rolling out bi/plurilingual education

After 1998 and the enactment of LOSEN, pilot projects continued to be implemented, with the goal of expanding and then rolling out bi/plurilingual education across the country.<sup>7</sup>

**1999:** A comprehensive evaluation of the pilot schools demonstrated their superior performance compared to mainstream French monolingual schools, despite them having been all but abandoned as a result of diminishing external funding on the one hand and waning support from bilingual school educators and partners on the other.

**2000:** Sixteen bilingual pilot schools were opened with the aim of testing the provisions of Law 98-12 of 1 June 1998 and preparing for the roll-out of bilingual education. This included developing a bilingual curriculum; designing a training and monitoring system; producing the required teaching, pedagogical and additive reading materials; and designing a communication for development strategy for bilingual education.

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<sup>5</sup>Maurer, Bruno, 'Les langues de scolarisation en Afrique francophone : Enjeux et repères pour l'action. Études pays', Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie, Paris, 2010.

<sup>6</sup>Taken from LOSEN.

<sup>7</sup>Maurer, Bruno, 'Les langues de scolarisation en Afrique francophone'.

2003: Implementation of the Ten-Year Education Development Programme in Niger 2003–13 began. It consisted of three components: access, quality and institutional development. The ‘quality’ component included a bilingual education sub-programme that aimed to significantly scale up this form of education in order to achieve a critical mass of 1,050 schools, 3,292 teachers and 89,680 students by 2007.

2003: The GTZ-2PEB bilingual pilot schools project ended earlier than planned due to the change of government and a shift in the Federal Republic of Germany’s international development policy.

## 2.4 Progress from 1973 to 2003

Looking at these bilingual pilots from 1974 to 2003 shows that bi/plurilingual education has proven effective and the Government of Niger has always considered it a priority. However, it is also apparent that, despite their success, these pilots were repeatedly abandoned for budgetary (suspension of funding by technical and financial partners) or political reasons. Furthermore, in 2003, the wider roll-out of bi/plurilingual education had not yet begun.

## 3. Bi/plurilingual education<sup>8</sup> from 2004 to 2021

Starting in 2004, a number of strategic decisions were made in support of bi/plurilingual education. These include finalizing the Cadre d’orientation du curriculum de l’éducation de base [Curriculum Policy Framework for Basic Education] with the adoption of the **scenario-based approach and bi/plurilingualism** at the basic cycle I level in 2006,<sup>9</sup> and the initiation of the wider roll-out of bi/plurilingualism in schools (accompanied by workshops to develop educational resources, training of educators, etc.).

## 3.1 The Curriculum Policy Framework (2006 and 2012)

The **curriculum policy framework** currently in effect provides the basis for the bilingual curriculum, and includes general guidelines, programmes of study and proposed teaching methods. It was written in two stages, in 2006 and 2012. It is the definitive reference for multilingual reform in Niger. The framework guidelines are based on two sets of principles: overhauling teaching methods through the adoption of the scenario-based approach and using the language of students’ home environments, in partnership with French, as a way into learning.

The scenario-based approach puts learners at the centre of the learning experience, and requires that teachers adapt their classes to the realities of the context. To facilitate this, developers of the scenario-based approach have created a ‘scenario bank’ from which teachers can draw to contextualize their lessons.

The roll-out of this curriculum, which is based on a social constructivist epistemological paradigm, also enables collaborative learning among peers. Its application is currently limited to primary and secondary education and it is being piloted in preschool and non-formal education for adolescents.

With regard to the use of languages in the scenario-based approach/bilingualism, the first language is a medium of instruction during the first few years, then becomes a taught subject from the fourth year of primary (CE2 level) onwards, when French becomes a medium of instruction.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>See Annex 2 for a table summarizing the evolution of bilingual education and the main features of initiatives implemented in the formal sector in Niger from 1973 to 2021.

<sup>9</sup>Document rewritten in 2012.

<sup>10</sup>See the PSEF excerpt in the next section.

## 3.2 Piloting and roll-out of the scenario-based approach/bilingualism

The scenario-based approach/bilingualism curriculum reform was first piloted in 500 schools in 2014. In 2018, the Government of Niger announced that it intended to roll out the reform.

The reform aimed to improve students' academic performance by allowing them to learn in their first language AND in French.

As such, between 2014 and 2019 various measures were implemented to meet the target of 'converting' 5,000 schools into scenario-based approach/bilingual schools. These included:

- producing textbooks and teachers' guides
- training teachers, supervisors and trainers of trainers
- piloting and evaluating bilingualism together with the scenario-based approach
- raising awareness about the benefits of bi/plurilingualism in schools.

Policy documents such as the 2014–2024 Education and Training Sector Plan (PSEF) also demonstrate Niger's commitment to the gradual roll-out of bi/plurilingualism in schools.

This is evident in the following excerpt from the plan (p.11):

"Improving the quality of education is a high-priority objective. **The Government has decided to introduce and roll out bilingualism.** All children will be educated in their mother tongue for the first few years. **The official language, French, will be taught first as a subject, orally, before gradually becoming the language of instruction, with the local languages then becoming taught subjects.** The aim of this is, as elsewhere, to improve learning. Supplies (textbooks, materials, training) will support this objective, but the main innovation of the PSEF is that it provides for educational supervision interventions in specific areas or schools with the least satisfactory performance. Objective-based terms of reference will offer a framework for supervision in these scenarios, while a dedicated reporting system will enable progress and challenges to be monitored."

## 3.3 Analysis of efforts to roll out the situation-based approach/bilingualism

All teaching materials (textbooks, workbooks and guides) produced over the last decade or that are currently being produced are based on the curriculum guidance document, which aims to provide a framework for consolidating earlier achievements and an invitation to innovate in the area of teaching.

However, the lack of a regulation (such as a decree or order) underpinning this framework means it may be misused by actors throughout the education system.

Moreover, field surveys have revealed several weaknesses in the scenario-based approach/bilingual curriculum, particularly in relation to teaching, which have a direct impact on the quality of primary school instruction and learning.

These weaknesses include:

- the lack of sufficiently detailed and practical methodological guidance and tools for teachers, making it difficult for them to conduct their lessons in line with the curriculum
- the lack of connection between the first language (L1) and French (L2), resulting in a tendency to teach the two languages in isolation, the absence of transfer from L1 to L2 and the occasional repetition in L2 of what was covered in L1
- the critical importance placed on 'scenarios', without specifying which skills learners are expected to acquire.

## 3.4 Recent bi/plurilingual pilots complementing scenario-based approach/bilingual schools

Several initiatives led by technical and financial partners aim to support the scenario-based approach/bilingual school system managed by the Government of Niger:

- the Niger Education Community Strengthening (NECS) project (completed in 2019)
- the ELAN-OIF project
- the project supported by Concern Worldwide.

### 3.4.1 The NECS project and the systematic reading approach

#### 3.4.1.1 Project overview

The NECS project is the continuation of another project called Improving the Education of Girls in Niger (IMAGINE), which was launched in 2008 and suspended in 2010 following the military coup.

Between 2012 and 2019 the NECS project was extended to 183 schools in all eight regions of the country in two stages:

- NECS (four years)
- NECS+ (a two-year extension)<sup>11</sup>

The project's overall goal was to improve access to educational opportunities by strengthening links between schools and community and state institutions. Specifically, it aims to improve the reading skills of primary school students and improve access to quality education, especially among girls.

The intended outcomes of the project were:

- to enable 38 per cent of students in the second year of primary school to improve their ability to read and understand the meaning of a text for their level in the local language
- to encourage teachers and principals to adopt a 'code of conduct' to improve the classroom learning environment
- to ensure that the importance of sending girls to school is ingrained at both the school and community levels.

This educational approach is underpinned by a 'theory of change' that employs several innovative strategies to facilitate change.

These strategies include:

- mobilizing society
- promoting a culture of reading
- mentoring
- adopting a code of conduct.

The project was implemented by Plan Niger, with funding from USAID and Plan International. The non-governmental organization Action Education (formerly Aide et Action [Aid and Action]) was part of the consortium involved in implementation. Technical input was provided by American organizations Readstarts as well as School-to-School International and Mathematica for the impact evaluation.<sup>12</sup>

NECS was primarily aimed at the first and second years of schooling and did not cover higher levels or non-language subjects. In addition to promoting adult literacy and introducing mentoring and tutoring, the project tested a new approach to reading and writing in schools based on the use of local languages known as the systematic reading approach, which is similar to the accelerated reading approach promoted by ELAN.

The NECS project (like the Concern project, which will also be discussed later) operates in monolingual French schools.

As stated on page 109 of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report *Teaching and Learning to Read in a Multilingual Context* :

"The NECS and Concern projects operate in monolingual schools where instruction in the local language is strictly delimited: students learn the local language with a view to transferring it into French. The two projects focus on one single dimension of learning: reading and writing. No other discipline is taught in the local language and the teachers are not trained to do so. They master their languages orally but their writing ability is very limited, almost at the same level as that of their own students."<sup>13</sup>

With regard to its contributions to bi/plurilingual instruction, NECS has, through its systematic reading approach, introduced pedagogical and teaching methods that aim to develop reading skills in children.

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<sup>11</sup> USAID and Plan International, 'Niger Education and Community Strengthening (NECS)', 2019.

<sup>12</sup> USAID, Plan International, School-to-School International, 'Niger Education & Community Strengthening Early Grade Reading Assessment Report', United States Agency for International Development, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

This approach has the following building blocks:

- Phonemic awareness. Since words are composed of phonemes (consonants and vowels) and sounds, it is important for children to begin developing phonemic awareness.
- Phonic awareness (associating sounds with letters).
- Fluency (reading easily without syllabic segmentation).
- Vocabulary (defining words).
- Comprehension of the text.

### 3.4.1.2 Project evaluation

#### 3.4.1.2.1 Learning outcomes identified

A comparative Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) study was conducted in 2019 during the final phase of the NECS project (NECS+ phase). EGRA assesses the foundational skills required for reading.<sup>14</sup> The evaluation compared NECS schools to curriculum reform pilot schools in word-reading and reading- and listening-comprehension.

The following results were identified:

- **Overall results:** Overall, students in NECS+ supported schools performed better than students in curriculum reform schools.
- **Results by gender:** Both boys and girls in NECS+ supported schools performed better than their peers in reform schools.
- **Results by lesson progression:** The degree to which NECS+ supported schools and bilingual reform schools progressed through the curriculum did not result in significant differences in student performance.
- **Results by language:** In NECS+ supported schools, student reading performance appears to be better where the language of instruction is Hausa or Zarma compared to where the language of instruction is Fulfulde or Kanuri.

This superior performance in Hausa and Zarma can be attributed to insufficient teacher training in the use of Fulfulde and Kanuri as languages of instruction, as well as to the sample of students educated in Fulfulde or Kanuri but living in Hausa or Zarma-speaking contexts, thus depriving them of a linguistic environment related to their first language.

The following table summarizes the comparative results of NECS pilot schools and the national bilingual schools implementing the scenario-based approach:

NECS	Scenario-based approach schools
Of 544 students, 20.2 per cent were able to correctly read 30 words of a first year of primary (CP) text in local languages in one minute and understand the meaning of the text.	None of the 469 students were able to meet the minimum benchmark for reading proficiency.

#### General findings:

The evaluation used students from the national bilingual rather than the mainstream monolingual system as a control sample. It cannot, therefore, demonstrate any positive effects due exclusively to bilingualism, but it does show that a reading and writing approach that is considered effective, such as NECS, is beneficial and could have an advantage over the national bilingual system, which is experiencing a number of challenges.

However, even though the results for scenario-based approach schools were promising, only one student in five was able to read and understand texts; the vast majority of students who participated in the evaluation continue to struggle. In terms of a possible scale-up or roll-out, the education system can learn from the mechanism implemented and the pedagogical tools used for reading and writing by comparing them with other tested tools such as those of ELAN.

#### 3.4.1.2.2 Analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the NECS project

##### Strengths

- + It includes an innovative approach to learning to read and write, with the school curriculum developed around recent scientific theories and a strong emphasis on reading.
- + Its learning outcomes are considered highly satisfactory overall.

<sup>14</sup> 'Niger Education & Community Strengthening Early Grade Reading Assessment Report'.



- + A significant volume of reading materials have been produced in four local languages.
- + The approach is being integrated into the wider reform package.

#### Weaknesses

- The approach is limited to reading and writing and to the first two years of primary school.
- It has failed to link learning in the local language with learning in French.
- The materials produced are very expensive.
- State institutions do not take sufficient ownership of the approach.

- Activities have been suspended since June 2019, following the closure of the NECS project.

### 3.4.2 Concern bilingual schools

The NGO Concern Worldwide has been working in 55 monolingual primary schools in the regions of Tahoua, Tillabéri and Diffa in Niger for more than five years, where it has introduced the ELAN approach to reading and writing.<sup>15</sup>

Details of students involved in this initiative are provided in Table 3:

**Table 3: Disaggregated numbers of Concern/ELAN students and teachers**

Communes	Students			Teachers			Schools
	Girls	Boys	Total	Women	Men	Total	
Chétimari	510	390	900	23	15	93	10
Diffa	621	387	1,008	22	9	64	9
Mainé	420	315	735	20	8	77	7
Total	1,551	1,092	2,643	65	32	234	26
Bambeye	1,579	1,624	3,203	43	44	87	19
Tabaram	1,101	1,332	2,433	5	52	57	10
Total	2,680	2,956	5,636	48	96	144	29
TOTAL	4,231	4,048	8,279	113	128	378	55

Source: Data provided by Concern education programme officers (2021).

Despite their high quality, the tools and methods the project has developed and used are of limited use in furthering bilingualism, since they focus exclusively on reading in the local language and cover only the first two years of primary school. Nevertheless, the project indirectly supports the transition to French through its methodology.

### 3.4.3 The ELAN project and the accelerated reading approach

The accelerated reading approach was developed as part of the ELAN project implemented by the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF) in 12 French-speaking countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

This initiative supports States to carry out the reforms needed to enable the combined use of African languages and French in primary education. It aims

to create an international mechanism within the French-speaking world to promote bilingual education in African countries by capitalizing on and sharing experience, expertise and training. The goal is to support the national action plans of the countries in ways that are tailored to their educational policies.

In educational terms, the ELAN initiative aims to “improve the teaching and learning of basic skills (such as reading, writing and arithmetic) through equipping primary school students with better mastery of French, starting by teaching them in their first language.”

<sup>15</sup>See the detailed presentation of the ELAN programme in the following section.

This project is based on numerous studies showing that during the first years of schooling, teaching children in a common language in which their families and communities are proficient predisposes them to learning a second language (in this case French) and creates the conditions for them to perform better in school.

The ELAN project in Niger started in 2013 in 10 schools: five in Niamey and five in the Maradi region. The initiative focuses on the accelerated reading approach in the first years of schooling. In Niger, this approach is known as 'ARL ELAN'.

In addition to providing training in bi/plurilingual teaching, pedagogy, linguistic description of African languages, and first language teaching methods, ELAN focuses its support on the production of reading materials and raising awareness of its particular bi/plurilingual approach.

### 3.4.3.1 Current status of the ELAN programme

The ELAN schools are still operational and there are currently plans to integrate the accelerated reading approach into the curriculum reform, as was done with the NECS approach.

The project has produced and supplied teaching manuals and aids, including books entitled *Pour mieux apprendre et enseigner le et en français en milieu multilingue* [Better Ways to Learn and Teach French in a Multilingual Environment] and *Mieux enseigner les mathématiques en milieu multilingue au Niger* [Better Ways to Teach Maths in a Multilingual Environment].

ELAN's methodological approach focuses on using children's local languages from the first year of education and throughout primary school in the following areas:

Areas of reading competency:

- conventions of the texts being read
- knowledge of vocabulary
- fluency (speed, reading rhythm)
- comprehension

Areas of writing competency:

- characteristics of written texts
- composing a message based on a written communication scenario
- text coherence and cohesion
- style

The techniques used include 'class news' (to prompt students to verbalize their experiences), 'the alphabet song', 'nursery rhymes' (to develop an awareness of letters, phonemes and syllables in order to decipher texts), guided reading (for comprehension) and guided writing (to compose texts).

### 3.4.3.2 Learning outcomes identified

In 2015, the OIF commissioned the Centre de Recherche en Education de Nantes [Nantes Centre for Education Research – CREN] to carry out a multi-country evaluation of the ELAN-Africa programme.

In Niger, this evaluation compared the performance of mainstream bilingual schools (control schools) with the ELAN pilot bilingual schools, which were implementing the reading and writing module, approach and materials introduced by the ELAN programme.

Regarding the curriculum applied in both types of schools, the evaluation stated:

"In both cases, French is introduced into school from the first year of education in spoken form (through language lessons) and maintained as a subject taught in spoken and written form until the third year. It becomes a joint medium of instruction from the fourth year to the end of the primary cycle, which is six years in total. The local language is a medium of instruction from the first to the third year of primary and a joint medium for the remaining years of primary school. As such, it is a subject and medium throughout primary schooling."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Nocus, Isabelle, Philippe Guimard and Agnès Florin, 'Rapport de l'évaluation des acquis des élèves du projet pilote du programme lecture-écriture mis en oeuvre dans le cadre de l'initiative ELAN-Afrique 2013-2015', Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, Université de Nantes, Centre de Recherche en Éducation de Nantes, 2016, p. 132.

The evaluation was carried out as follows:

- 174 students were monitored from the beginning of the first year of primary (CP1) in October–December 2013 to the end of the second year of primary (CP2) in May 2015. They were composed of a control group of 69 students from public schools in the cities of Niamey and Maradi and a pilot group of 105 students from seven public schools in the same cities.

- For budgetary reasons (lack of funding), students could not be assessed at the end of the first year.

Table 4 compares the results of the pilot and control groups in Hausa and French language tests at the beginning of CP1 and the end of CP2.

**Table 4: Scores in Hausa and French language tests at the beginning of CP1 and at the end of CP2, by group<sup>17</sup>**

Language tests in Hausa and French	Sessions	Control N=69	Pilot N=105	F, significance of F, eta squared
Syllabic segmentation in Hausa/6	Start CP1	<b>2.48 (2.2)</b> 41.5%	<b>3.90 (1.7)</b> 65%	<b>F(1.172)=21.88, p&lt;.0001 (η2=.113)</b> <b>F(1.171)=24.70, p&lt;.0001 (η2=.126)</b>
	End CP2	<b>4.48a (.1)</b> 74.5%	<b>5.60a (.1)</b> 93.5%	
Initial phoneme identification in Hausa/6	Start CP1	<b>2.03 (2.4)</b> 34%	<b>3.12 (2.4)</b> 52%	<b>F(1.172)=8.48, p&lt;.01 (η2=.047)</b> <b>F(1.171)=8.22, p&lt;.01 (η2=.046)</b>
	End CP2	<b>5.09a (.2)</b> 85%	<b>5.76a (.1)</b> 96%	
Knowledge of Hausa letter names/40	Start CP1	<b>1.48 (4.4)</b> 3.5%	<b>7.58 (8.5)</b> 19%	<b>F(1.172)=30.13, p&lt;.0001 (η2=.149)</b> <b>F(1.171)=217.74, p&lt;.0001 (η2=.560)</b>
	End CP2	<b>10.47a (1.0)</b> 26%	<b>30.66a (.8)</b> 76.5%	
Knowledge of French letter names/40	Start CP1	<b>2.20 (5.9)</b> 36.5%	<b>4.90 (7.9)</b> 8%	<b>F(1.172)=5.86, p&lt;.05 (η2=.033)</b> <b>F(1.171)=53.35, p&lt;.0001 (η2=.238)</b>
	End CP2	<b>15.79a (1.4)</b> 39.5%	<b>29.55a (1.1)</b> 74%	
French vocabulary/18	Start CP1	3.17 (2.7) 17.5%	3.44 (3.1) 19%	F(1.172)=.325, ns (η2=.002) F(1.172)=2.59, ns (η2=.015)
	End CP2	5.58 (4.1) 31%	6.59 (4.0) 36.5%	
Syllabic segmentation in French/6	Start CP1	3.46 (1.7) 57.5%	3.92 (1.8) 65.5%	F(1.172)=2.835, p=.09 (η2=.016) <b>F(1.172)=35.35, p&lt;.0001 (η2=.170)</b>
	End CP2	<b>3.65 (2.6)</b> 61%	<b>5.40 (1.2)</b> 90%	
Initial phoneme identification in French/6	Start CP1	1.16 (1.8) 19.5%	1.52 (2.0) 25.5%	F(1.172)=1.46, ns (η2=.008) <b>F(1.172)=72.56, p&lt;.0001 (η2=.297)</b>
	End CP2	<b>1.20 (1.9)</b> 20%	<b>4.03 (2.2)</b> 67%	
French listening comprehension/6	Start CP1	.20 (.7) 3.5%	.48 (1.1) 8%	F(1.172)=3.206, ns (η2=.019) <b>F(1.172)=18.014, p&lt;.0001 (η2=.095)</b>
	End CP2	<b>.32 (1.0)</b> 5.5%	<b>1.55 (2.2)</b> 26%	

<sup>a</sup> Estimated averages after controlling for initial level

Source: Centre de Recherche en Éducation de Nantes, 'Rapport de l'évaluation des acquis des élèves', 2016.

The evaluation reveals that "in the eight tests for which two measurement periods are available, the results demonstrate the improved performance of the pilot group compared to the control group at the beginning of CP1 in the phonology tests in Hausa and in the knowledge of letter names in French and Hausa. [...] At the end of CP2, these differences with regard to the improved performance of the pilot group persist. Moreover, while at the beginning of CP1, there is no difference between the two groups in French vocabulary, syllable segmentation, identification of

the initial phoneme and oral comprehension, at the end of CP2, the scores of the pilot group in the oral comprehension and two phonology tests in French are significantly higher than those of the control group. There is no great difference between the two groups in French vocabulary either at the beginning of CP1 or at the end of CP2." (p. 135)

Table 5 compares the results of the pilot and control groups at the end of CP2 in Hausa and French writing skills.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

**Table 5: Comparison of total scores by group in Hausa and French writing proficiency tests at the end of the second year of primary<sup>18</sup>**

Written proficiency tests in Hausa and French	Control N=69	Pilot N=105	F, significance of F, eta squared
One-minute reading in Hausa/60	2.38 (8.0) 4%	14.47 (14.5) 24%	F(1.172)=39.621, p<.0001 (η <sup>2</sup> =.187)
One-minute reading in French/60	2.33 (5.2) 4%	9.34 (9.7) 15.5%	F(1.172)=30.145, p<.0001 (η <sup>2</sup> =.149)
Identification of the written word in Hausa/6	1.97 (1.6) 33%	4.14 (1.8) 69%	F(1.172)=63.403, p<.0001 (η <sup>2</sup> =.269)
Identification of the written word in French/6	1.91 (1.1) 32%	2.51 (1.1) 42%	F(1.172)=11.573, p<.0001 (η <sup>2</sup> =.063)
Reading comprehension in Hausa/6	.51 (1.4) 8.5%	2.20 (1.9) 36.5%	F(1.172)=40.077, p<.0001 (η <sup>2</sup> =.189)
Reading comprehension in French/6	.03 (.1) ~0%	.76 (1.6) 12.5%	F(1.172)=13.594, p<.0001 (η <sup>2</sup> =.073)
Spelling in Hausa/6	.41 (1.3) 7%	3.05 (2.5) 51%	F(1.172)=64.628, p<.0001 (η <sup>2</sup> =.273)
French spelling/6	.22 (.9) 3.5%	1.78 (1.8) 29.5%	F(1.172)=43.586, p<.0001 (η <sup>2</sup> =.202)

Source: Centre de Recherche en Éducation de Nantes, 'Rapport de l'évaluation des acquis des élèves', 2016.

The better results across all tests obtained by students in ELAN classes, as demonstrated by the CREN evaluation, suggest that ELAN schools are more effective in both French and Hausa teaching than mainstream bilingual schools.

### 3.4.3.3 Analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the ELAN initiative

#### Strengths of the initiative

- + The approach is backed by an international scientific framework.
- + Partners provide teaching supervision to schools.
- + It is a standard approach that can be adapted to any curriculum, as evidenced by its pilot projects in 12 French-speaking countries.
- + Its learning outcomes are considered satisfactory. Moreover, in terms of expanding bilingualism, ELAN has the advantage of providing varied teaching tools that can be used in training-of-trainers programmes.

#### Weaknesses of the initiative

- Disbursement of funds by partners is not regular, resulting in gaps in implementing the approach.
- Few schools (only 10, five of which are in Niamey) and students have been included in the project.
- Internal monitoring is limited to schools in Niamey.
- The approach is limited to one local language: Hausa.
- The project is not yet integrated into the curricular reform.

## 4. Bi/plurilingual education in Niger: Analysis

### 4.1. Bi/plurilingualism in schools from the point of view of parents and educators: support and rejection

There is unanimous consensus between partners and education system stakeholders that bilingual education has three main advantages:

1. Facilitating learning
2. Valuing local languages
3. Adapting teaching to the local cultural context.

With regard, firstly, to facilitating learning, parents and educators interviewed as part of the survey considered bi/plurilingual teaching to be a good alternative to exposing children to a foreign language when they are too young, when the risk of mental block could hinder their educational development.

According to those interviewed, "children feel at ease", "children understand things straight away, student participation is good, children successfully master the taught content: they learn faster in their own language."

With regard to the other two advantages (valuing local languages and adapting teaching to the local cultural context), interviewees asserted that bi/plurilingual education enabled "children to develop a sense of cultural identity" and the "realities of the local environment to be better taken into account in teaching."

These positive perceptions are consistent with numerous studies on the benefits of bi/plurilingualism in schools, particularly in relation to developing understanding and identity.

However, while the Niger education system stakeholders express the conviction that, in principle, bilingual education is an asset in both cultural and educational terms, the reality of its implementation tends to cast doubts over its use. Indeed, the challenges linked to fully implementing high-quality bilingual education have led some parents and teachers to question this type of education, since it appears unable to fulfil promises and expectations.

Some parents, despite their faith in bi/plurilingual education, have no qualms in removing their children from bilingual schools because of these problems. Thus, in practice many bilingual schools in Niger have very low enrolment rates compared with French monolingual schools. In general, the number of students enrolled drops when French monolingual schools are converted to bilingual schools.

## 4.2. The main weaknesses of bi/plurilingualism in schools

The field survey captured many opinions on the challenges around implementing bilingual education. The main obstacles that interviewees mentioned concerned the training of educators, insufficient teaching materials, the lack of supervision of bilingual class teachers, and difficulties in bi/plurilingual education planning.

### 4.2.1. Inadequate training and support for those involved in bi/plurilingualism in schools

The lack of appropriate professional qualifications among those involved in bilingual education is one of the major obstacles to the bilingual reform. Indeed, this affects all levels of the education system, from teachers to supervisors.

#### Teacher training

Bilingual teachers qualify either through pre-service training in teacher training colleges or through in-service training while teaching a bilingual class, or a combination of the two.

With regard to training in teacher training colleges, the three pilot colleges that have been operational in Niger for the past three years continue to implement bilingual training for teacher trainees in similarly under-resourced conditions to those of primary schools themselves. Supervisors interviewed no longer feel accountable for achieving satisfactory results, as they consider their training "laughable and collaboration with central structures lacking". The supply of materials for supervisors, as well as for primary schools themselves, remains a delicate issue. Furthermore, supervisors from teacher training colleges do not convey any sense of motivation or hope, only deep disappointment. However, all of them are absolutely convinced of the merits of bilingual education and long to see renewed impetus for it, not only within their institution but also in schools.

As regards in-service training, the most common approach is still that of French monolingual school teachers being converted into bilingual teachers. In general, teachers support their students' progress through education and achieve the required levels of qualification step by step. Qualification is supposed to be awarded annually in accordance with the level at which the teacher introduces bilingual education into the primary cycle.<sup>19</sup> This incremental approach is problematic because a single interruption to in-service training can leave teachers unprepared and oblige them to return to mainstream French monolingual teaching.

## Training of education supervisors specialized in bilingualism in schools

Those involved in bilingual education unanimously agree that there is no specific institution or guiding framework for training bilingual supervisors in Niger. However, they take modules with a focus on bilingualism during their training, including 'contrastive linguistics' for education advisors and inspectors and 'bilingualism and local languages' for principal inspectors. The first course is 20 hours in total and the second is 30 hours. Since there is no procedure for validating training tools, the quality of the content depends on the trainers responsible for delivering the course.

### Training at the Ecole Normale Supérieure [Higher Institute for Teacher Training]

The ELAN 2012–2014 action plan in Niger included a project titled Contribution au renforcement des capacités de l'École Normale Supérieure [Contribution to strengthening the capacity of the Higher Institute for Teacher Training], which aimed to help the Higher Institute for Teacher Training launch a bilingual stream. The project sought to assess the situation of bilingual supervisor training, launch an advocacy campaign to increase qualified human resource capacity in the Higher Institute for Teacher Training, provide it with appropriate resources and develop a programme of study focused on bilingual education. However, due to a lack of funding, the project has not yet begun.

There are many initiatives aimed at aligning training for education supervisors with the curriculum reform programme, but they remain isolated and lack consistent support, either for developing skills or providing tools. Bilingual schools have almost identical issues, being subject to changing circumstances and ad hoc management.

#### 4.2.2 Teacher management issues

The responsibilities of the Human Resources Directorate of the Ministry of National Education include the prospective management of human resources. The Human Resources Directorate uses a

computerized database to support the management of teachers and their professional development.

The Human Resources Directorate distinguishes between:

- civil servant (or tenured) teachers and contract teachers
- those who teach and those in administrative roles
- teachers according to the type of instruction they provide.

However, despite this system, the directorate is currently unable to confirm the number of bilingual teachers working in schools. The same is true for supervisors.

Indeed, whether they have completed bilingual teacher training college programmes or moved from the mainstream French monolingual system, bilingual teachers are assigned and transferred by the communal inspectorates of primary education or the regional directorates for primary education as new schools are opened or to fill vacant positions. **However, these teachers are more often than not assigned on a subjective or random basis, because the distinction between monolingual French schools and bilingual schools is not applied in the management of teachers.**

Moreover, in the current transitional phase during which competencies and resources in the area of primary education are being transferred from the State to communal administrations, it seems impossible to obtain reliable data on the situation of bilingual teachers, since there are so many disparate interventions and intervention approaches.

#### 4.2.3 Shortage of teaching materials

Another major obstacle to progress in bilingual education appears to be the shortage of essential bilingual teaching materials for use in class. The problem is not just the limited availability of these

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<sup>19</sup> In practice, this means that teachers of the first year of primary have one year of training. Then, the following year, they move to the next level along with their class and are trained to teach second year classes, and so on.

materials, but also the quality of any resources produced. However, without a consistent supply of good quality resources, bilingual education is put at a disadvantage and, in some cases, abandoned.

In this regard, it is worth mentioning that several educators interviewed during the survey highlighted that the shortage of materials is due to poor logistical management. They said the lack of teaching aids means bilingual classes are forced to become monolingual or learning progress is stalled. Meanwhile, the promised materials are stored in the central warehouse or by decentralized institutions at the regional or department level.

#### 4.2.4 Programmes that focus primarily on the early years of primary school

To date, no bilingual education initiative has succeeded in covering the entire primary education cycle, from the first to the sixth year. All students who begin school in a bilingual class complete their education in monolingual French classes.

There are two main reasons for this:

- The fact that bilingual pilots tend to focus on the early years of primary school (mainly the first and second year), even though all studies have shown that "three to four years of mother-tongue education is not enough" (Ouane and Glanz, 2011, p.31).
- The fact that some initiatives by technical and financial partners end before programmes can be extended to all primary school classes.

Furthermore, teaching of the first language and teaching of French are often compartmentalized. More thought should therefore be given to transfer from the first language to French.

#### 4.2.5 Failure to implement the language policy to manage the plurality of languages in the classroom<sup>20</sup>

There are no procedures currently in place for managing multiple languages in multilingual environments.

Indeed, in some schools, classes are taught in local languages that are not the first languages of all students. This puts some students at a disadvantage.

Yet, despite bilingual education being positioned as a cornerstone of the education sector development programme in official discourse, the educators interviewed during the study indicated that the 'choice of languages' was not taken into account when implementing bi/plurilingualism in schools. This oversight is a barrier. However, objective criteria (practicable and sociolinguistic) must be considered when deciding which local languages to integrate into the education system. They should be appropriately resourced for use in class, have sufficiently developed terminology to be used as a medium for teaching, and pertain to a linguistic community of a significant size.

#### 4.2.6 Lack of up-to-date statistics on bilingual reform

Currently, only three bilingual initiatives being implemented are clearly identifiable as such: schools applying the scenario-based approach, ELAN schools and schools supported by the NGO Concern Worldwide.

Table 6 illustrates in which languages and regions these bi/plurilingual initiatives are being implemented.

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<sup>20</sup> A language education policy was developed as part of the Curriculum Policy Framework, which defines the respective roles of the local languages and French.

**Table 6: Number of operational bilingual schools by language and location**

Region	Arabic	Fulfulde	Hausa	Kanuri	Sonay-Zarma	Tamajaq	Total
Agadez	18	-	49	-	-	111	178
Diffa	25	43	24	162	-	-	254
Dosso	53	70	177	-	467	-	767
Maradi	70	40	771	-	-	14	895
Niamey	28	18	64	-	60	-	170
Tahoua	59	22	646	-	-	100	827
Tillabéri	87	126	159	-	565	93	1,030
Zinder	83	27	707	98	-	29	944
Total	423	346	2,597	260	1,092	347	5,065

Sources: Direction des Curricula et de la Promotion des Langues Nationales [Directorate of Curricula and the Promotion of National Languages] , ELAN and Concern Worldwide, 2019

While it appears from this table that there are 5,065 functioning bilingual schools, caution must be exercised with regard to these data. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, some of these bilingual initiatives focus only on the first years of primary school, and only on teaching reading and writing. This is the case despite ELAN advocating to extend bilingual education beyond these years and even up to the end of primary school (for example, ELAN's bilingual competency framework includes bilingual education planning up to the sixth year of primary school). Therefore, these schools are not fully bilingual. Furthermore, they do not heed the advice of UNESCO experts that "three to four years of mother-tongue education is not enough" (Ouane and Glanz, 2011, p.31).

In addition, official statistics do not accurately reflect the reality in schools, due to a lack of monitoring and regular updates. In fact, our study found that many schools categorized or referred to on paper as bilingual turned out to be mainstream monolingual schools in practice.<sup>21</sup> Some of the educators interviewed during the survey said that a majority of bilingual schools have reverted to monolingual instruction.

#### 4.2.7 Lack of support for the reform

The lack of policy guidance and frameworks, measures to accompany the reform, and synergy between the reform and other aspects of education management or administration appear to create obstacles to promoting bilingualism in schools. Indeed, those involved in implementing bi/plurilingualism do not feel supported at the political level by a commitment with a vision or plan of action.

It is therefore necessary to develop regulations at the national and regional levels to manage the various practical actions required to implement bilingualism.

These regulations and operational decisions must enable the following obstacles to be overcome:

- insufficient state funding for reform
- the lack of a clear and comprehensive plan to roll out bi/plurilingual education
- the lack of statistical data on the real number of students in bilingual education
- the failure to evaluate the implementation of bi/plurilingual education to determine which methods are effective and which need to be improved.



<sup>21</sup> We will examine the reasons schools revert to monolingualism in the next section.



## 4.2.8 Reservations among some stakeholders regarding bi/plurilingualism in schools

As previously mentioned, the introduction of local languages in schools is seen in an increasingly negative light due to the problems implementing bi/plurilingual projects.

Such reservations about bi/plurilingual education are one of the barriers to its expansion. It would therefore be advisable to develop a fresh, more detailed and comprehensive case for promoting local languages, based on concrete examples of good bilingual practices that have proven effective.

## 5. Conditions for the roll-out of bilingual education

During the survey, interviewees noted the conditions that they believe would need to be met to roll out bilingual education. All their proposals were recorded and grouped under eight headings.

### 5.1. Ensuring that schools are provided with educational resources

For the roll-out of bilingual education to succeed, a complete and consistent supply of educational resources to schools is clearly essential.

Furthermore, the tools produced by the Directorate of Curricula and the Promotion of National Languages in local languages (several tools that show that commendable efforts were made in the areas of translation or adaptation) need to be evaluated in order to ascertain their pedagogical and teaching value. The findings of this survey suggest that instruction in first languages and French is too compartmentalized and does not enable learners to use their first language to progress in French.

Before initiating an expansion, let alone a full roll-out of bilingualism, it would be advisable to test and possibly adapt or revise the pedagogical tools used to implement the curriculum (those aimed at both learners and trainers).

This process must be managed from a truly bilingual educational perspective and must take into account the fundamental principle of transfer from the L1 to French. The tools already developed by NECS and ELAN could inform this process, provided they are adapted.

### 5.2. Training educators on bi/plurilingualism in schools

To capitalize on the progress of bilingual education in Niger and to roll it out more widely, it is imperative that the country move away from a project-based approach and prioritize teacher training.

This study showed that the training of teachers and supervisors of bi/plurilingualism in schools, whether in the teacher training colleges, at the Higher Institute for Teacher Training in Niamey or during in-service training, was insufficient both in scale and quality.

It is therefore essential not only to change the policy on pre- and in-service training of educators by including modules dedicated to bi/plurilingual class management, but also to develop content and tools for train-the-trainer programmes.

The content of university courses must also be updated to make greater allowance for teaching methods that take into account learners' first languages in the classroom.

To enable expansion, it is imperative to prioritize training that is part of a training system of adequate scale and quality. Changes to the teacher training colleges must be initiated now, starting by ensuring that the scenario-based approach is no longer limited to language subjects. If schools in Niger are to become bilingual, all teacher training colleges must progressively integrate bilingualism, without excluding any subject from bilingual instruction.

### 5.3. Managing educators implementing bi/plurilingualism in schools

Better management of data on teachers' language profiles is required to ensure they are assigned on the basis of linguistic criteria and to prevent those from mainstream French monolingual schools being transferred to bilingual schools and vice versa, or teachers being transferred to regions where they are not proficient in the languages spoken.

Government decentralization and the transfer of power to local authorities could play a part in enabling this.

### 5.4 Planning for the bi/plurilingual reform

Bilingual education has always been included as a solution for improving the quality of education in programmes developed by the Ministry of Primary Education both in the Ten-Year Education Development Programme in Niger 2003–13 and in the 2014–2024 PSEF.

However, neither programme has conducted a specific evaluation of the implementation of bilingual reform over the past 15 years.

Planning the reform and developing a strategy are prerequisites for implementation. However, each stage of the plan's implementation must be mapped out in sufficient detail, so that those involved can fully understand it.

Improved coordination between the ministerial and academic institutions involved in implementing bi/plurilingualism in schools would facilitate this.

In fact, at present there appears to be just one institution (the Directorate of Curricula and the Promotion of National Languages) responsible for managing bilingualism in schools that includes a series of actions involving different teams of people and logistics at different times. The Directorate of Curricula and the Promotion of National Languages has exclusive remit for the following tasks: designing and developing the multilingual curriculum, producing teaching materials, piloting the reform, supervision, training educators,

linguistic research, developing language policy, and supervising and monitoring implementation in schools, among others. It has three departments that support with this: one responsible for teaching materials, another the curriculum and pedagogical innovations, and another the management of language status and linguistic resources.

The Directorate of Curricula and the Promotion of National Languages' exclusive responsibility for the reform is due to the absence of an official act distributing powers between the ministry's directorates. Order No. 00348 defining how the ministry's central administration services should be organized and the responsibilities of its directors dates from 2016 and has not been updated in accordance with more recent legislation. As such, all directorates have the same responsibilities as before. This situation could have implications for the effectiveness and efficiency of the management of bi/plurilingualism in schools in Niger. Indeed, even if actions are complementary and closely interrelated, their management and implementation risk losing cohesion and being weakened by a lack of targeting of appropriate teachers.

It is therefore advisable for ministry and university institutions involved in bilingualism in schools to work together on rolling out bilingualism, even if overall steering of the initiative continues to fall to a 'project management' structure. The scientific validation of tools in different languages could be entrusted to linguists working in research centres (such as the National Institute for Teaching Materials, Research and Resourcing) or in the departments of language sciences and local languages of the country's universities.

### 5.5 Updating statistical data on bi/plurilingual education

Given the significant gap between official statistics and how bilingual schools are operating in practice, the ministry's Directorate of Statistics, in consultation with the directorate in charge of bilingual education and the Human Resources Directorate, must include 'bilingual education' in the school census. This is with a view to developing and updating the Ministry of Primary Education's statistical yearbooks. There appears to be a pressing need to conduct a survey to determine whether bilingual schools are really implementing bi/

plurilingual teaching or whether they are operating differently in practice.

If they are operating bilingually, the degree to which they are doing so must be established. For example, at what levels of instruction? In how many classes? With which tools and methodologies? With what results?

Launching a data management project of this nature would provide the decision-making information and clarity needed to manage bilingual reform.

## 5.6 Evaluating the current status of the approach

As stated earlier, the piloting and expansion of bilingualism have not been accompanied by an assessment of student achievement in the bilingual system. The only evaluations conducted have been those implemented by the CONFEMEN Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems (PASEC), which does not really have a bilingualism remit (although the 2019 PASEC evaluation did focus on Zarma and Hausa in addition to French), and NECS, which sought to evaluate the effectiveness of its own project.

Thus, an evaluation of the current system is a prerequisite for any further large-scale action. This evaluation should cover not only the teaching, pedagogical and linguistic aspects of the bilingual education approach but also how it is put into practice.

It should also include the performance of bilingual school students compared to students in the mainstream monolingual schools under the same or similar conditions, i.e. having properly trained teachers and access to all the required teaching materials in the local target language.

## 5.7 Increasing domestic funding

The lack of state ownership of the reform is an obstacle that has practical implications in funding terms.

Indeed, the activities related to bi/plurilingualism in schools implemented under the Education and Training Sector Plan have almost exclusively been financed through the Programme d'appui à une éducation de qualité [Programme to Support Quality Education], funded by the Global Partnership for Education and the French, Swiss and Norwegian development agencies, and managed by the World Bank.

However, according to many of the educators and social partners interviewed during this survey, one of the reform's weaknesses is the way in which "the funding of its activities [...] is vulnerable to variations in external financing."

Planning for a potential roll-out of bilingualism should therefore include sustainability criteria and handover considerations in the event of projects supported by technical and financial partners being transferred to the State.

## 5.8. Demonstrating the proven benefits of bilingual education for learning outcomes, and raising awareness

The lack of support among some parents for bi/plurilingual education, and even some educators' negative perception of it because of the many different barriers to its implementation, significantly hinders its full roll-out. Communicating the merits of this type of education will be crucial to increasing its acceptance. This must be based on tested, documented and established learning outcomes. Demonstrating the effectiveness of this educational approach (through an appropriate monitoring and evaluation and data management system) and communicating effectively with different stakeholders will help bring about action, which will have to be backed by planning and monitoring that are achievable and incremental.

## Conclusion

The introduction of local languages into the education system, alongside French, is an established principle in Niger. Since the trial projects of the 1970s, a series of pilot projects and reform projects supported by a range of international partners have implemented different approaches to bi/plurilingualism in schools.

The fact that bilingual education in Niger has stood the test of time shows that there is genuine determination to integrate learners' first languages as 'partners of the French language' into the national curriculum.

However, despite the efforts of national and bilateral actors to build on Niger's experience in relation to bilingual education, much remains to be done.

Indeed, though Niger has explicit policy guidelines that promote bi/plurilingualism in schools, a legislative framework that supports innovation, an operational institutional framework and a comprehensive bilingual curriculum, they are not sufficiently complemented by official communications that include concrete measures to steer and plan the implementation of bi/plurilingual education in practice. Strengthening the administrative framework would certainly help reduce the disparity between legislative provisions and what actually takes place in the classroom.

The government is also reliant on bilingual initiatives carried out by technical and financial partners. Although these bring real added value at the institutional, teaching, educational and community levels, they have shortcomings, particularly because they are time-limited.

Therefore, to enable the wider roll-out of bilingualism in schools, the bilingual pilots and associated management approaches currently being implemented in schools must be evaluated and capitalized on, new bi/plurilingual resources must be developed for all primary school classes, teachers must be better trained and equipped, and monitoring of these programmes must be improved.

There is also a need to roll out or improve communication and advocacy campaigns on the benefits of additive bilingual education, targeting the various actors and in particular students' parents, since the study highlighted resistance in this group following the problems with implementing the bilingual reform. This advocacy should draw on objective arguments about the benefits of bilingualism, but above all it should be based on successful practices and the positive outcomes of bilingual education.



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# Annex 1: Survey participants

## Educators on the ground responsible for implementing bi/plurilingualism in schools

### Teachers

**Table 7:** Main characteristics of the teachers surveyed

Region	Institution	Class	Contract status	Age	Time in post	Qualification	L1	Nat. lang. taught
Diffa	Bagara	CP	Civil servant	-	2	Teacher training diploma	Kanuri	Kanuri
Dosso	Kargui Bangou	CE2	Contract	30	8	Teacher training diploma	S-Zarma	Hausa
	Tondobon French-Arabic school	CE1	Contract	35	8	Teacher training diploma	S-Zarma	S-Zarma
	B/N'gaouaré	CE1	Civil servant	40	-	Teacher training diploma	Fulfulde	Fulfulde
	B/N'gaouaré	CM1	Civil servant	34	12	Teacher training diploma	Fulfulde	S-Zarma
Niamey	Amitié 1	CE1	Civil servant	36	-	Teacher training diploma	Hausa	Hausa
	Badia Saley	CP	Contract	45	15	Teacher training diploma	Hausa	S-Zarma
	Karadjé French-Arabic school	CE1	Contract	36	11	Teacher training diploma/French-Arabic	Hausa	S-Zarma
	Balafon2	CP	Contract	40	9	Teacher training diploma	Hausa	Hausa
Tillabéri	Tillabéri bilingual school	CE1	Contract	51	21	Teacher training diploma	S-Zarma	S-Zarma
	Daïberi bilingual school	CI	Contract	27	6	Teacher training diploma	S-Zarma	Tamajaq?
	Daïberi bilingual school	CP	Contract	31	2	Teacher training diploma	Tamajaq	Tamajaq
	Tillabéri bilingual school	CE1	Contract	32	10	Teacher training diploma	S-Zarma	S-Zarma

Source: Our survey (2020)

The bilingual teachers we met in all settings were exclusively female and the majority of them were contract teachers. All of them had the grade of 'assistant teacher'.

This interviewee sample reflects the degree to which women and contract workers dominate the teaching profession in Niger and continue to characterize the country's education system.

Of the 73,553 teachers in primary education today, 41,138 (55.92 per cent) are women.

In addition, women accounted for 71.6 per cent of the total number of students enrolled in training colleges for teachers and assistant teachers in 2017 (the most recent date for which information is available).

Meanwhile, contract teachers made up 75.5 per cent of all primary teachers in 2020. This proportion was a slight decrease from 81.3 per cent in 2017 and 78.6 per cent in 2019.

The most common qualification held by this group of teachers is the teacher training diploma, obtained after one or two years of training, following completion of the lower secondary school diploma.

Two findings emerge in relation to the linguistic profile of these teachers: they all speak at least one other local language in addition to their first language (L1) and each one is a speaker of the local language they use in the classroom as a teaching/learning medium, which is either their L1 or another local language.

The age range of teachers is between 27 and 52 years, with an average age of 36.41 years, and they spend between two and 21 years in post, with an average length of time in post of 9.45 years.

Based on this sample, the typical profile of a bilingual teacher is a young female contract teacher around 35 years old, with a teacher training diploma and around 10 years' teaching experience.



## Education supervisors

There are three key roles with an education supervision function: school principals, education advisers and inspectors. Each of these roles has management, monitoring and quality assurance responsibilities, but to varying degrees and applicable at different times. We selected eight people from each category for our study.

Most of these positions appear to be held by men, although in urban centres, women are in the majority. All education supervisors claim to be able to read and write at least in their native languages, but apart from the principals, none of them have taught a bilingual class in their working life. We assume their knowledge of the bilingual system is only theoretical or limited to a few isolated experiences.

**Table 8: Key characteristics of the supervisors surveyed**

Region	Institution	Role	Age	Gender	Years in role	Grade	Qualification	L1
Tillabéri	Tillabéri 1	Education adviser	-	M	13	Graduate from the general teacher training college	Education adviser diploma	S-Zarma
	Tillabéri 2	Education adviser	48	M	2	Grade 3	Education adviser diploma	Tamajaq
Dosso	B/N'gaouaré	Education adviser	52	M	16	-	Education adviser diploma	S-Zarma
	Kargui Bangou	Education adviser	53	M	3	-	-	S-Zarma
	Dosso urban commune	Education adviser	55	M	8	-	Diploma in primary cycle teaching, French-Arabic	Fulfulde
Niamey	Niamey 10	Education adviser	51	F	6	-	Education adviser diploma	Hausa
	Niamey 17	Education adviser	58	M	14	-	CAC	Fulfulde
	Niamey 18	Education adviser	48	M	14	-	Master's	Hausa
Diffa	Bagara	Principal	42	M	8	Assistant teacher	Teacher training diploma	Kanuri
	Boukari Sabo 1	Principal	.	M	31	Teacher	Teacher training diploma	Hausa
Dosso	Birni bilingual school	Principal	38	M	14	Assistant teacher	Teacher training diploma	Fulfulde
	Bolbol bilingual school	Principal	28	M	10	Teacher	Teaching qualification	Hausa
Tillabéri	Daïberi bilingual school	Principal	46	M	1	Teacher	Teaching certificate for special education	S-Zarma
	Tillabéri bilingual school	Principal	44	F	2	Assistant teacher	Teacher training diploma	S-Zarma
Niamey	Balafon1	Principal		F	1	Teacher	Teaching certificate for special education	Hausa
	Balafon2	Principal	42	F	1	Teacher	Master's	S-Zarma
	Karagué French-Arabic	Principal	45	F	1	Teacher	Master's	Hausa
	Niamey 10	Primary cycle inspector	55	F	6		DAI	Hausa
	Niamey 17	Primary cycle inspector	51	F	2		Primary teaching inspector/Preschool	S-Zarma
Niamey 18	Primary cycle inspector	49	F	16		Master's	S-Zarma	
Dosso	B/N'gaouaré	Primary cycle inspector	55	M	6		DAI	S-Zarma
	Kargui Bangou	Primary cycle inspector	54	M	5		DAI	Hausa
Tillabéri	Tillabéri 1	Primary cycle inspector	48	M	10		IPX	S-Zarma
	Tillabéri 2	Primary cycle inspector	56	M	22		DAI	S-Zarma
Diffa	Diffa 1	Primary cycle inspector	52	M	7	IPX	DIPX	Fulfulde

Source: Our survey (2020)

In spite of teaching staff being predominantly female, there are noticeably fewer women further up the hierarchy. Professional advancement for female teachers appears slower or more difficult than for their male counterparts.

## Regional directors

Regional primary education directors are usually drawn from the body of primary or basic education inspectors. However, sometimes teachers or lecturers with a Bachelor's or Master's qualification are appointed to this position.

The regional primary education directors in our sample are all training inspectors.

**Table 9: Key characteristics of the teachers surveyed**

Region	Role	Age	Gender	Years in role	Grade	Qualification	L1	Nat. lang. +1
Dosso	Principal	53	M	2	Primary school inspector	DAI	S-Zarma	Hausa
Niamey	Principal	54	M	2	Primary school inspector	Primary school inspector	S-Zarma	Hausa

Source: Our survey (2020)

## Trainers of trainers

The trainers of trainers are composed of two groups: trainers of teachers in the teacher training colleges and trainers of supervisors, education advisers and inspectors at the Higher Institute for Teacher Training of the University of Niamey. The first group are primary education supervisors or teachers or lecturers with a Bachelor's or Master's qualification, and the second group are university teaching and research staff, at the grade of graduate teaching assistant.

## Teacher trainers

Trainers of teacher trainees are generally experienced education supervisors (advisers and inspectors) and teachers or lecturers with a Bachelor's or Master's qualification in an area of education science (psychology, sociology, linguistics) or in particular subjects (mathematics, life and earth sciences, history and geography, physical and sports education, computer science, etc.).

**Table 10: Key characteristics of the teacher trainers surveyed**

	Role	Age	Years in role	Grade	Qualification	L1	Nat. lang. +1
1	Director of studies	58	19	Teacher/lecturer	BA in languages	Hausa	S-Zarma
2	Arts, culture and MPL supervisor	48	8	Education adviser	Education adviser diploma	Hausa	S-Zarma
3	Physical education supervisor	57	20	-	Master's in physical education	Hausa	S-Zarma
4	Hist. and geog. supervisor	48	8	Education adviser	Education adviser diploma	Hausa	S-Zarma
5	Nat. lang. sign language supervisor	-	12	Teacher/lecturer	Master's in languages	S-Zarma	Hausa
6	Hausa nat. lang. supervisor	49	12	-	Master's in languages	Hausa	S-Zarma
7	Maths supervisor	50	10	Education adviser	Education adviser diploma	S-Zarma	-
8	Psychology supervisor	55	23	Teacher/lecturer	Master's in psychology	Hausa	S-Zarma
9	Sociology and community action supervisor	52	10	-	-	Hausa	S-Zarma
10	Earth and env. sci./hist. and geog. supervisor	51	11	Education adviser	Education adviser diploma	S-Zarma	Hausa

Source: Our survey (2020)

## Trainers of education supervisors

Education supervisor training is offered by the Higher Institute for Teacher Training, in collaboration with the Institut de formation en alphabétisation et éducation non formelle [Training Institute for Literacy and Non-Formal Education] for certain courses.

Like their colleagues in the University of Niamey's other faculties, Higher Institute for Teacher Training permanent faculty staff have PhDs in their respective disciplines. However, practitioners and other experts are involved in supervisor training on a contractual basis.

**Table 11: Key characteristics of the supervisor trainers surveyed**

Role	Age	Gender	Years in role	Grade	Qualification	L1	Nat. lang. +1
University lecturer and researcher	51	F	6	Assistant	PhD	Fulfulde	S-Zarma
University lecturer and researcher	43	M	6	Graduate teaching assistant	PhD	Hausa	S-Zarma

Source: Our survey (2020)

## Central-level actors responsible for designing and guiding the multilingual reform

The multilingual reform guidelines and tools for its roll-out are developed centrally with the involvement of stakeholders from the ministry's decentralized institutions as needed.

Responsibility for steering and coordinating this complex task lies with the Directorate General for the Promotion of Quality and Standardization, within which the Directorate for Curricula and the Promotion of National Languages is charged with its management. Bilingual materials are developed by Directorate of Curricula and the Promotion of National Languages staff, the majority of whom are linguists and seasoned

teachers with extensive bilingual education experience. Staff from the Directorate for Pre-Service and In-Service Training, the National Institute for Teaching Materials, Research and Resourcing, the General Directorate for Literacy and Non-Formal Education, the Literacy and Non-Formal Education Training Institute, as well as academics and retired education practitioners are regularly called upon to help develop teaching materials for bilingual reform. All interviewees were civil servants with permanent tenure working at the Directorate of Curricula and the Promotion of National Languages and the Directorate for Pre-Service and In-Service Training.

**Table 12: Key characteristics of those involved in reform design and oversight**

Role	Age	Gender	Years in role	Grade	Qualification	L1	Nat. lang. +1
Directorate of Curricula and the Promotion of National Languages	59	F	9	PS	Master's	Kanuri	Hausa
Directorate for Pre-Service and In-Service Training	53	F	5	Primary school inspector	Primary school inspector	Hausa	S-Zarma
School Evaluation and Professional Competition Branch	55	M	3	Primary school inspector	Primary school inspector	S-Zarma	Hausa
Human Resources Directorate	54	M	7	DA	Master's	Hausa	S-Zarma
Directorate of Studies and Planning	47	M	3	DA	Master's	Hausa	S-Zarma
Designers of bilingual reform materials (curricula, guidance, manuals, reference tools and training modules). N = 8	54	M	8	Teacher/lecturer	Bachelor's	Fulfulde	S-Zarma
	58	M	12	Education adviser	Graduate from the general teacher training college	S-Zarma	Hausa
	53	F	13	Teacher/lecturer	Master's	Hausa	S-Zarma
	50	M	-	Teacher/lecturer	Bachelor's	Kanuri	Hausa
	49	F	11	Teacher/lecturer	Master's	Fulfulde	S-Zarma
	46	M	8	Teacher/lecturer	Master's	Hausa	-
	53	M	23	Teacher/lecturer	Master's	Tamajaq	Hausa
	55	M	25	Teacher/lecturer	Bachelor's	S-Zarma	-

Source: Our survey (2020)

Almost all the staff involved in reform design are bilingual and the majority are teachers or lecturers. They include more men than women. The average age of people in this group is 52.76 years, and they have spent an average of 10.58 years in their current role. Bearing in mind that the retirement age is 60, this appears to be an end-of-career role.

## Social partners in education

The social partners involved belong to the non-profit sector or are state officials responsible for issues related to decentralization and local government.

**Table 13: Key characteristics of social partners surveyed**

Institution	Role	Age	Gender	Years in role	Grade	Qualification	L1	Nat. lang. +1
National Union of Teachers of Niger	General secretary	51	M	22	Teacher/lecturer	Sociology	Hausa	S-Zarma
Association des auteurs et écrivains en langues nationales [Association of National Language Writers and Authors]	Secretary	59	F	16	Teacher/lecturer	Bachelor's	Hausa	S-Zarma
Association des municipalités du Niger [Association of Nigerien Municipalities]	Permanent secretary	59	M	8	Teacher	Bachelor's	Hausa	S-Zarma
Directorate General of Decentralization and Local Authorities	General director	59	M	-	Admin	-	Hausa	S-Zarma

Source: Our survey (2020)

The majority of survey respondents were male pre-retirees and all had the same linguistic and academic profile.

## Technical and financial partners

**Table 14: Key characteristics of the technical and financial partners surveyed**

Institution	Role	Age	Gender	Years in role	Qualification	L1	Nat. lang. +1
Bilateral cooperation	Education officer	-	F	4	Master's	French	0
NGO	Education officer	39	M	3	Master's	Hausa	S-Zarma
NGO	Education officer	-	M			Hausa	S-Zarma

Source: Our survey (2020)

## Managers and beneficiaries of educational measures

Managers and/or beneficiaries of educational measures include three categories of people: students, their parents and also mayors who, as well as being parents of students, are the people within their administrative unit responsible for school management.

### Mayors

**Table 15: Key characteristics of school managers and beneficiaries surveyed**

Institution	Role	Age	Gender	Years in role	Grade	Qualification	L1	Nat. lang. +1
Niamey Commune 5	Town hall general secretary	53	M	-	Teacher	Bachelor's	Fulfulde	S-Zarma
Tillabéri urban commune	Mayor	70	M	15	Teacher	Teaching qualification	S-Zarma	Hausa

Source: Our survey (2020)

## Students

The students interviewed in the three regions included in the field research are either currently enrolled in bilingual schools or are secondary school students who have passed through a bilingual school. The common factor among these students is that they have received prior instruction in a bilingual school setting.

**Table 16: Key characteristics of the students surveyed**

School	Region	Class	Age	Gender	L1	Nat. lang. +1	L1 literacy
Bolbol bilingual school	Dosso	CE2	10	M	Hausa		
Bolbol bilingual school	Dosso	CE2		M	Hausa		
Bolbol bilingual school	Dosso	CE2	8	M	Hausa		
Bolbol bilingual school	Dosso	CE2	13	M	Hausa		
Bolbol bilingual school	Dosso	CE2	9	M	Hausa	S-Zarma	
Bolbol bilingual school	Dosso	CE2	9	M	Hausa	S-Zarma	
Bolbol bilingual school	Dosso	CE2	9	M	Hausa		
Bolbol bilingual school	Dosso	CE2	11	M	Hausa		
General secondary school 3	Niamey	6e (Year 1 of secondary)	13	F	Hausa		1
General secondary school 3	Niamey	6e (Year 1 of secondary)	12	F	Hausa		1
General secondary school 3	Niamey	6e (Year 1 of secondary)	13	F	Hausa	S-Zarma	1
General secondary school 3	Niamey	6e (Year 1 of secondary)	13	M	Hausa		1
General secondary school 3	Niamey	6e (Year 1 of secondary)	13	M	Hausa	S-Zarma	1
General secondary school 3	Niamey	6e (Year 1 of secondary)	13	F	Hausa		1
General secondary school 3	Niamey	6e (Year 1 of secondary)	13	F	Hausa	S-Zarma	1
Tillabéri bilingual school	Tillabéri	CE2	9	F	S-Zarma		1
Tillabéri bilingual school	Tillabéri	CE2	10	F	S-Zarma		1
Tillabéri bilingual school	Tillabéri	CE2	9	F	S-Zarma		1
Tillabéri bilingual school	Tillabéri	CM2	-	F	S-Zarma		1
Tillabéri bilingual school	Tillabéri	CM2	-	F	S-Zarma		1
Tillabéri bilingual school	Tillabéri	CM2	11	F	S-Zarma		1
Tillabéri bilingual school	Tillabéri	CM1	11	F	S-Zarma		1
Tillabéri bilingual school	Tillabéri	CM1	10	F	S-Zarma		1
Tillabéri bilingual school	Tillabéri	CM1	9	F	S-Zarma		1
Tillabéri bilingual school	Tillabéri	CM1	13	F	S-Zarma		1

Students in this sample are all speakers of the country's two main languages. They consider themselves literate in their L1, which is or was their first language of schooling.

## Members of school support structures

Most members of associations of mothers who educate (AME) are stay-at-home mothers or shopkeepers. However, they all describe themselves as housewives. Male members of school support structures come from a variety of occupational categories. Our sample included only farmers and one job-seeker. They like to be known by their titles within these structures.

**Table 17:** Key characteristics of the members of school support structures surveyed

Region	Institution	Role	Age	Gender	L1	Nat. lang. +1	L1 literacy
Niamey	Balafon AME	Housewife	38	F	Hausa	S-Zarma	1
	Balafon AME	Housewife	60	F	Hausa		0
	Balafon AME	Housewife	50	F	Hausa		0
	Balafon AME	Housewife	32	F	Hausa		0
	Balafon AME	Housewife	-	F	Hausa		0
	Karadjé parents' association	Office general secretary	50	M	S-Zarma	Hausa	0
Tillabéri	Daïberi decentralized school management committee	Member	60	M	S-Zarma		1
	Daïberi decentralized school management committee	Member	46	F	S-Zarma		0
	Ti bilingual AME	Housewife	37	F	S-Zarma		
	Ti bilingual AME	Housewife	38	F	S-Zarma		
	Ti bilingual AME	Housewife	-	F	S-Zarma		
	Daïberi decentralized school management committee	Chair	60	M	Tamajaq	S-Zarma	1

Source: Our survey (2020)

Note: AME = association of mothers who educate



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## Annex 2: Evolution of bilingual education and characteristics of initiatives implemented in the formal sector in Niger 1973–2021

No.	Period	Initiative	Objectives	Number of schools	Local languages	Geographic coverage	Significant events of the period
1	1973–1988	Experimental school	Test the feasibility of bilingual education, phase 1 in the roll-out of bilingual education.	42	Fulfulde Hausa Kanuri Songhay-Zarma Tamajaq	National, aiming for at least one school per inspection area	Multi-partner external support: UNESCO, UNICEF, WFP, USAID, GTZ, SNV, Directorate for Monitoring and Evaluation (DSE) and a strong commitment from SP-CNRE-PS* and INDRAP. Excellent results for students in bilingual schools, better than for students in conventional schools; there is general enthusiasm and hope for the roll-out of bilingual education.
2	1988–1997	Experimental school	Same as above	42	Same as above	National	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. No more teacher training</li> <li>. No more monitoring</li> <li>. No materials or supplies</li> <li>. Decline in academic results</li> </ul>
3	1997–2004	Pilot bilingual school	Prepare tools for the roll-out of bilingual education based on positive evaluation of experimental schools (1999) and adoption of LOSEN (1998) and of the law on promoting and developing local languages (2001).	16	Fulfulde Hausa Kanuri Songhay-Zarma Tamajaq	4 out of 8 regions (Diffa, Dosso, Tahoua, Tillabéri)	Based on an evaluation of the education system by GTZ in 1992, bilingual education appears to be the only option for ending the crisis. Germany helps Niger set up the 2PEB project (2PEB meaning basic education/promotion of bilingual education) to kick-start bilingual education and move towards roll-out.
4	2003–2004	Experimental school Pilot bilingual school	Status quo Status quo	33 16 33		National, at random Status quo	Schools not selected for 2PEB were neglected. No external intervention
5	2004–2009	Soutéba bilingual school	Prepare primary school students to pass entrance exams for secondary school.	135	Fulfulde Hausa S-Zarma Tamajaq	All schools in 4 rural communes in 2 regions (Dosso and Tahoua)	GiZ, with part funding from the EU, establishes the Soutéba project (Soutéba meaning support for basic education), which includes bilingual education as one component.

No.	Period	Initiative	Objectives	Number of schools	Local languages	Geographic coverage	Significant events of the period
6	2009	Bilingual school	Start rolling out bilingual education.	499		National but at random	Taken over by the State thanks to support from Switzerland.
7	2010–2011	Experimental school	Status quo	33 16 135		Status quo	Between the end of 2PEB and the launch of Soutéba, activities are halted. The State retains oversight.
		Pilot bilingual school					
8	2005–2012	Soutéba bilingual school	Reform education through the skills-based approach and the introduction of local languages.	400	Fulfulde Hausa Kanuri Songhay-Zarma Tamajaq	50 schools per region	The Ten-Year Education Development Programme includes a bilingual education component and reform of the basic education curriculum.
		Competency-based approach bilingual school					
9	2012–2019	NECS bilingual school	Improve reading skills in the first two years of conventional primary schools.	183	Fulfulde Hausa Kanuri Songhay-Zarma	Random distribution in 8 regions	The Niger Education and Community Strengthening (NECS) project is funded by USAID and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and implemented by Plan Niger with other NGOs to promote reading and gender in Niger.
10	Since 2012	ELAN bilingual school	Improve reading and writing skills and promote transition from L1 to L2, including in non-linguistic disciplines.	10	Hausa	10 schools divided equally between 2 regions (Niamey and Maradi)	IOF initiative (ELAN) to develop bi/plurilingualism in schools based on the recommendations of the national forum on French teaching (Libreville, 2003)
		CONCERN bilingual school	Improving reading and writing skills in the classroom through the CONCERN approach	55	Fulfulde Hausa Kanuri	5 communes: 3 in the Diffa region and 2 in the Tahoua region	CONCERN implements a multi-dimensional programme that includes promoting reading and writing as a means to enhance learning.
11	2012–2018	Scenario-based approach bilingual school	Integrate lessons learned from NECS into the scenario-based approach	5,000	Arabic Fulfulde Hausa Kanuri Songhay-Zarma Tamajaq	National, by population weighting of the local languages	Policy guidelines on compulsory teaching of local languages and deep institutional changes with a focus on promoting local languages
		Scenario-based approach-NECS		25	Hausa Songhay-Zarma	2 regions: Niamey and Tillabéri	Following closure of NECS, the ministry commits to integrating lessons learned from NECS into reform of the scenario-based approach.
13	2018–2021	Scenario-based approach	Status quo	5,000 10 55 183	Same as above	Status quo	The Support to Quality Education Project (PAEQ), funded by the Global Partnership for Education and other agencies, expired in June 2018. Activities in connection with bilingual education stopped immediately. No take-up by the Ministry of Primary Education, Literacy, the Promotion of Local Languages and Civic Education. NECS schools returned to the scenario-based approach model due to lack of support. NECS+ scenario-based approach schools are not open.
		ELAN					
		CONCERN NECS					



## Annex 3: Teaching materials in Niger

Specialized teaching materials have been produced to support the various initiatives implemented in Niger. These materials vary according to language, learning level, subject and intervention strategy. In general, four types of materials are produced:

- curricula
- teacher's guides
- student textbooks
- reference materials (vocabulary and grammar books, dictionaries, etc.)
- additive reading materials (reading coursebook, stories, novels, poetry, etc.).

Comprehensive description of these materials requires a long view, showing how their production – which has now become relatively standard within the Directorate for Curricula and the Promotion of National Languages – has progressed or stalled over time.

### Approaches used in the production of materials

Niger's experience in relation to producing bilingual materials is unique, given that the first bilingual schools that opened in 1973 did not have any curriculum. The methodology for teaching local languages adopted at the time consisted of producing materials in situ, based on field research. Starting with a theme of interest to students chosen by consensus (for example, weaving or blacksmithing), the teacher would assess students' knowledge, plan and allocate tasks for field research, and accompany the students in data gathering. Once back in the classroom, students, guided by the teacher, would use the information to produce a written text on the board about the excursion. This text would be used to support reading, language and writing

lessons as well as all the subjects taught as part of the (mainstream) primary school curriculum. Materials from mainstream French-language schools served as a guide but did not directly influence how bilingual teaching was conducted. All texts produced were assembled and used as resources for the school.

The primary school curricula adopted in 1989 restructured teaching content according to the approach of teaching by objectives and allocated a dedicated space to local language teaching, with its own timetable. From then on, materials for use in bilingual classes were systematically produced by multidisciplinary teams, formed around core groups of linguists according to the local language in question. This approach was then rolled out to all initiatives. The only difference between them relates to the quality of the experts responsible for supervising and supporting the teams of writers.

### Sources and types of materials available in classrooms

The Directorate for Curricula and the Promotion of National Languages has produced two series of teaching materials linked to the move from the competency-based approach to the scenario-based approach. While both types of materials, alongside many others, are used in classrooms, only scenario-based learning materials are currently recommended for use in bilingual schools. For formal education, particularly at the preschool and primary levels, the table shows the materials that are currently produced.



## Materials produced in the local languages of the first scenario-based learning round and in Arabic

	Level	Title	Remarks
1	Preschool	Preschool curriculum part 1	Available in the first five resourced languages (Fulfulde, Hausa, Kanuri, Sonay-Zarma and Tamajaq)
2		Preschool maths part 1 coursebook	
3		Preschool maths part 1 guide	
4		Part 1 language guide	
5	Year 1 of primary	Programme of study	Available in the eight resourced local languages
6		Language textbook	
7		Maths textbook	
8		Language guide	
9		Maths guide	
10		Physical and sports education guide	
11		Earth and environmental science guide	
12		Moral and civic education guide	
13		French guide	
14		ES guide	
15		French textbook	French
16		Arabic textbook	Arabic
17		Arabic language guide	Arabic
18		Islamic studies guide	Arabic
19	Year 2	Programme of study	Available in the first five resourced languages
20		Language textbook	
21		Maths textbook	
22		Language guide	
23		Maths guide	
24		Physical and sports education guide	
25		Art and culture guide	
26		Earth and environmental science guide	
27		Moral and civic education guide	
28		ES guide	
29		French textbook	French
30		Arabic language textbook	Arabic
31		Arabic language guide	Arabic
32		Islamic studies guide	Arabic
33	Year 3	Programme of study	Available in the first five resourced languages
34		Language textbook	
35		Maths textbook	
36		Earth and env. sci. textbook	
37		History and geography textbook	
38		Global citizenship education textbook	
39		Language guide	
40		Maths guide	
41		History and geography guide	
42		Physical and sports education guide	
43		Art and culture guide	
44		Earth and environmental science guide	
45		Arabic language textbook	Arabic
46		Arabic language guide	Arabic
47		Islamic studies guide	Arabic
48	Year 4	Programme of study	Available in the first five resourced languages

	Level	Title	Remarks
49		Language textbook	
50		Maths textbook	
51		Earth and env. sci. textbook	
52		History and geography textbook	
53		Global citizenship education textbook	
54		Language guide	
55		Maths guide	
56		History and geography guide	
57		Physical and sports education guide	
58		Art and culture guide	
59		Earth and environmental science guide	
60		Arabic language textbook	Arabic
61		Arabic language guide	Arabic
62		Islamic studies guide	Arabic

Sources: Data provided by the Directorate of Curricula and the Promotion of National Languages (2020)

The materials produced during the first round of language roll-out, which includes the five main languages and standard Arabic, cover the two preschool classes and the first four years of primary school. There are a total of 253 titles in all languages combined, covering all subjects in the curriculum.

The NECS project also produced two sets of books, due to the shift from the accelerated reading instruction approach to the systematic reading

approach accompanied by a change in the financing organization. The materials in use until the end of the project were for language teaching and were primarily aimed at the first year of schooling.

ELAN Niger materials are based on those developed by members of the ELAN-Africa expert group, adapted for the country context. They cover French and Hausa, the only local language included in the initiative.

## Materials produced in the local language used in the ELAN Niger programme

	Level	Title	Remarks/translations
1	Year 1 of primary	Guide d'orientation à l'approche bi-plurilingue de la lecture-écriture [Guide to the bi/plurilingual approach to reading and writing] (2013)	Material aimed at teachers
2	Year 2	Guide d'orientation à l'approche bi-plurilingue ELAN de l'enseignement du français : Principes et démarche [Guide to the ELAN bi/plurilingual approach to teaching French: Principles and process] (2014)	
3	Year 2	Français2 : Un manuel d'activités, de découvertes et de jeux, venant en appui au curriculum du français [French 2: A manual of activities, discoveries and games to support the French curriculum] (2015)	
4	Year 1 of primary	Saura! Na iya karatu! Duba! Na iya rubutu! 1 Aji na farko na koyo (2013)	Listen! I can read! Look! I can write 1
5	Year 2	Saura! Na iya karatu! Duba! Na iya rubutu! 2 Shekara ta biyu da koyo (2014)	Listen! I can read! Look! I can write 2
6	Year 3	Saura! Na iya karatu! Duba! Na iya rubutu! 3 Littafin gwaji Aji na 3 (2015)	Listen! I can read! Look! I can write 3
7	-	ELAN kit (to facilitate transfer from L1 to L2)	Containing a folder for course booklets, an assortment of games and posters, day, month and year labels and phonology teaching tools

Source: ELAN-Africa Niger 2021

ELAN materials cover the first three years of schooling and, as with NECS, are limited to the field of language learning. However, ELAN also supports the country in the design and production of teaching planning and evaluation materials.

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