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Cherine Sabry

Education policy in Senegal:  
global transformation  
processes, IOs' influence  
and cultural spheres



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# EDUCATION POLICY IN SENEGAL: GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION PROCESSES, IOs' INFLUENCE AND CULTURAL SPHERES

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Cherine Sabry\*

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## COUNTRY MAP



Source: <https://ontheworldmap.com/senegal/> (Accessed June 14, 2024)

## 1. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to analyse and understand the education policy of Senegal through a post-colonial lens, and more specifically how the different global transformations Senegal has gone through have affected the inclusiveness and the scope of services covered by its educational system. We understand *inclusiveness* as the extension of public education to different groups of people who differ according to, for example, gender, religion, geographical location, or ethnic origin. *Scope of services* refers to the duration and regulatory role covered by public education programmes. To conduct this analysis, the research starts by examining the development of Senegal's education system historically since the founding of the first educational establishments, and following the different reforms that the Senegalese school has gone through. Through a historical perspective it also considers the different cultural spheres that are present in Senegal due to various influences from colonizers, and how these cultural spheres affect the inclusiveness and scope of services of the education system. Finally, this paper looks at global influences from International Organizations (IOs) and development aid organizations on education policy, and whether these actors have had a strong impact on the Senegalese education system.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative analysis was conducted through a thorough document review to understand the global transformations and the role of IOs in affecting education policy in Senegal. A total of seven official government documents

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were reviewed, including the Orientation Laws of 1971 and 1991, the Senegalese Constitution of 2001, as well as the two main education policy documents that the Senegalese National Ministry of Education has been following, namely: The Programme de Développement de l'Éducation et de la Formation (PDEF) (2001-2011) and the (PAQUET) (2015-2025). These were also complemented by the "Document of the National Integrated Policy for Early Childhood in Senegal" (2007) which focuses on the integration of early childhood education into the formal education system, therefore affecting inclusivity.

In addition, ten IO documents were analyzed to triangulate the data from the government of Senegal and to get a broader view of on the ground implementation of said policies. Six country reports about the Senegalese education system by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the UNESCO, the OECD (PISA) and the UNICEF were analyzed. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the French Development Agency (AFD) and the US Development Agency (USAID) all support the Senegalese government in implementing its policies, and examining the project reports were useful in analyzing the success of such policies on the ground.

Finally, a set of semi-structured interviews were conducted. Three interviews were conducted with key actors in the Senegalese education sector; an inspector from the Ministry of Education based in Dakar, a staff member of an IO working on the regional level thus providing a comparative perspective, as well as a local Senegalese staff member from an IO.

### 3. THE SENEGALESE EDUCATION SYSTEM: COLONIAL HERITAGE AND ISLAMIC INFLUENCES

#### a. History

To understand the current education structure of Senegal, it is important to note the cultural and colonial influences that have affected the country historically. Senegal is officially a secular state, with a predominantly Muslim population. Islam's influence in the area began in the 11th century, likely because of the Trans-Saharan trade between North and West Africa. At first it became the religion of the elites, but expanded in the 17th and 18th centuries, when it held a stronger influence due to Islamic missionary efforts in the region (Sheldon 1995, Dia 2015). In the 15th century, Europeans started trading along the Senegalese coast due to its strategic position along the Western coast of Africa, which made it a favorable base for the European slave trade (CIA, n.d.). This was only the beginning of a long-lasting influence of European powers in the country: After 1815, when France abolished slavery, it started its expansion in Senegal, and finally established it as a French colony in the second half of the 19th century. While most of French West Africa inhabitants were treated as "subjects," citizens of the Four Communes of Senegal, Saint-Louis, Gorée, Dakar, and Rufisque were recognized as French citizens in 1872 regardless of ethnicity, entitled to elect a deputy to represent them in the French parliament (Diouf 1998). Especially in these four communes, the French colony followed an assimilationist policy, integrating more Senegalese inhabitants into schools in order to educate them in the French way (Bouche 1974, Oloruntimehin 1974). In 1959, French colonies Senegal and French Sudan merged and gained their independence in 1960 as the Mali Federation, however the union only lasted a few months. Today, Senegal is a lower middle-income country in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, n.d.). Its official language is French, but many national languages are spoken, including Wolof, Pular, Jola, Mandinka, Serer and Soninke (USAID, n.d.).

Regarding the history of education in the country, the Senegalese schooling system has gone through a number of changes since the establishment of the first formal school:

#### *The Colonial School*

The first Senegalese school was a colonial school "open to free children, slaves, negroes or mulattoes" (Sow 2004), founded in Saint-Louis in 1817 by French teacher Jean Dard. Dard used Wolof to facilitate the learning of French, but this practice was condemned by colonial powers and abandoned and after that, the use of African languages was restricted to a minimum in classrooms (Skattum 2006). There was no official curriculum, and the first teachers of Dard's school put an emphasis on teaching "advanced morality, knowledge of the French language and geography" (Sow 2004). Education was then entrusted to missionaries, teaching faith and Christian

tradition, which led many Muslim parents to refuse their children attending the colonial school. In response to these concerns, the secular school was founded in the mid-1850 (Korum 2007):

The main role of the secular school was to facilitate the assimilation of the French language and the French culture. All teaching subjects, including history, were instrumentalized and put to the use of the French civilization (Korum 2007).

### *The "New School"*

In 1945, France had to respond to the demands of the colonized people, and pressures from the international community to create the *nouvelle école*, or new school (Sow 2004). Its mission was education, but above all socialization of the child; elementary school was not going to be "contented with providing fundamental notions such as reading, writing and mathematics, in order to reproduce docile indigenous populations at the service of the White man, but rather will aim to form the African man, a dignified member of his national community" (paraphrased in Korum 2007, 29, from the conference of Brazzaville 1944).

### *The Modern School*

Even with the independence of 1960, there can hardly be talk of a rupture with the French educational system until the end of the decade: in 1968, the youth took to the streets, reclaiming the creation of a "Senegalese school" (Ndao 2003). As a response, a new orientation law was launched in 1971, followed by three implementation decrees (decree numbers 72-861, 72-863, 72-864 of 1972), and the creation of a new curriculum, including a history program specific to Senegal in 1976 (Korum 2007). The orientation law (1971) promised a change that would create a Senegalese national education that provided "an African education, taking its source from African realities." It also aimed to be more inclusive; stipulating different types of education for school-aged students, professional youth and adults as well as populations outside of the formal education system, for whom literacy programs would be developed, in order to cover the largest number of students.

In the 1990s, the Jomtien Declaration (UNESCO 1991) played a decisive role in the evolution of the education sector in Senegal through the Education for All (EFA) program. After signing the Declaration, a new orientation law was developed in 1991 and the Forum mondial sur l'éducation (Global Education Forum) took place in Dakar in 1999. In 2000, the Senegalese government launched the Programme Décennal de l'Éducation et de la Formation (PDEF) (Ten-Year Plan for Education and Training), defining the government's new educational orientation for the upcoming decade (Korum 2007).

We cannot speak of the colonial history of Senegal without mentioning Léopold Sédar Senghor, Former and First President of Senegal (1960-1980). Ideologically an African socialist, he was one of the major proponents of *Négritude*, a theory that emphasizes the importance of African culture, black identity, and African empowerment within the framework of French-African ties. He advocated for the extension of full civil and political rights for France's African territories while arguing that French Africans would better stay integrated within a federal French structure than as independent nation-states (Cooper 2014, 2018).

Senghor was involved in drafting Senegal's post-decolonization Fourth and Fifth Constitutions (Duong 2021), giving himself more power and maintaining French hegemony in the country.

Despite the end of official colonialism, the value of Senegalese currency continued to be fixed by France, the language of learning remained French, and Senghor ruled the country with French political advisors. He supported the creation of *la Francophonie* and was elected vice-president of the High Council of the Francophonie (Adi and Sherwood 2003).

Senghor can be regarded as the main reason why French remains until this day the national language of Senegal, continuing to dominate as the official language of instruction in formal schools. He rejected the use of national languages in the education system for their lack of a developed grammar and lexicon, but also because of some inherited colonial feelings:

It is about choosing a language for its own virtues: its educational virtues. From this point of view, 'the language of kindness and honesty' that is French, imposes itself. Those who advocate for the replacement French as the 'official language of instruction' are [...] irresponsible romantics. Which language

do they suggest if we do not want to break the national unanimity? And how, if the Wolof does not even have a proper grammar, can we teach modern sciences or succeed where languages that have existed for thousands of years, still fail? (L.-S. Senghor, "Rapport au 8e Congrès").

Hence, Senghor has played an important role in delaying any more in-depth reforms affecting the Senegalese education system, maintaining it as an image of the French colonial system.

Today in Senegal, all children have access to free and equal education according to the latest Constitution (2001): Articles 21 and 22 of the Constitution adopted in January 2001 guarantee access to education for all children (Constitution du Sénégal 2001). The formal education sector is structured around early childhood (0-6 years), elementary education (7-12 years), middle school (13-15 years) ending with the Certificate of End of Elementary Studies (CFEE), general and technical secondary (16-18 years) and higher education (18 and over) (Salmon and Dramani 2015). While the informal education refers to any educational practices and training not structured, the non-formal education could be defined as any organized educational activity outside the formal education system (Diouf et al. 2001), both of which will be investigated for the purpose of this paper.

The latest numbers on the Ministry of Education website (academic year of 2016/2017) show that gross enrollment rate was 87.3% of all school-aged children, 16.34% of whom are accommodated in private schools, while the majority is being served by formal public schools. In 2016, around 15% of schools in Senegal were private, including Franco-Arabic schools, Daaras and Catholic schools (Department of Arabic Learning, Ministry of Education, and local NGOs), which are included in the governments' statistics and therefore are considered non-formal educational institutions.

Similar to other Western and Central African states where close to 38% of primary school-age children are currently excluded from the formal education systems, in Senegal 41% of children of primary school ages are out of school (UNESCO 2014). The biggest disparity can be seen between the poorest and the richest children and youth (EPDC, National Education Profile: Senegal, 2018). School life expectancy (primary to tertiary education) is 9 years (CIA, n.d.) and the primary completion rate is 63% (World Bank, n.d.). In terms of flows, the promotion rate is 86.07%, repeating 3.66% and abandonment 10.28%. The completion rate thus hides disparities because regions like Kaffrine and Diourbel (rural areas) respectively recorded 32.97% and 36.82% while Dakar is at 78.01%, highlighting the rural/urban divide. The ministry of education reports in 2017 a CFEE pass rate of 56.74%, pointing at a lack of quality of the system. Finally, the adult literacy rate (over 15 years old) is 58% (World Bank, n.d.), which remains low relative to global trends averaging at 87% in 2022 according to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

There is also a disparity in the proportion of students achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in reading at the end of primary education along with the proportion of students achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in mathematics. Success rates in mathematics have been higher than in reading: 70% to 80% of students do not reach the minimum proficiency levels in language and reading subjects, while around 50% reach the minimum levels in mathematics (PAQUET 2016, UNESCO 2014). One of the interpretations for this gap can be explained by the barrier that teaching in French causes for students whose language of socialization is not French, affecting their academic achievement negatively. As research suggests, children learn to read more easily in their languages of socialization (Melby-Lervåg and Lervåg 2011). Similarly, learning outcomes of children who learn in a familiar language are higher than those who do not (Kirkpatrick and Liddicoat 2019, Stone et al. 2020). Figure 1, p. 7, shows how acute the gap is:

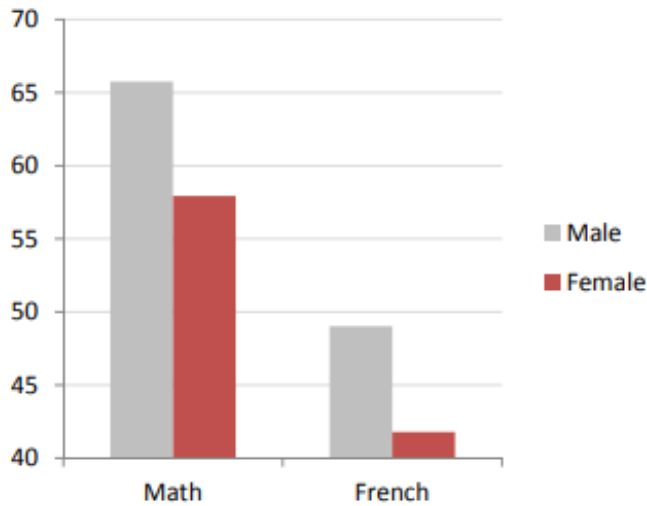
Of course, the use of French is not the only reason for low achievement rates, but according to the three interviews, it is a main contributing factor.

The Senegalese formal education system is funded through government expenditure. In 2022, education expenditure constituted 22.2% of government expenditure (World Bank, n.d.), which is 5.5% of the country's GDP (CIA, n.d.). Figure 2, p. 7, also shows a general upward trend in overall expenditure on education.

Compared to other African nations, Senegal is doing quite well in this regard, surpassing most of its neighbors: according to a UNESCO survey in 2020, of the 22 countries for which data is available, Senegal is one of only six countries that allocated at least 20% of their national budgets to education, as required under the African Union's Dakar Commitment on Education for All (UNESCO 2020). The high expenditure is also part of an upward trend triggered by the first phase of the PAQUET in 2015, which led to a significant increase in government spending on education, with an annual increase rate of 4.1 % of spending (PAQUET 2016). Currently, Senegal spends a steady 22% of total public expenditure on education, which is higher than the international standards

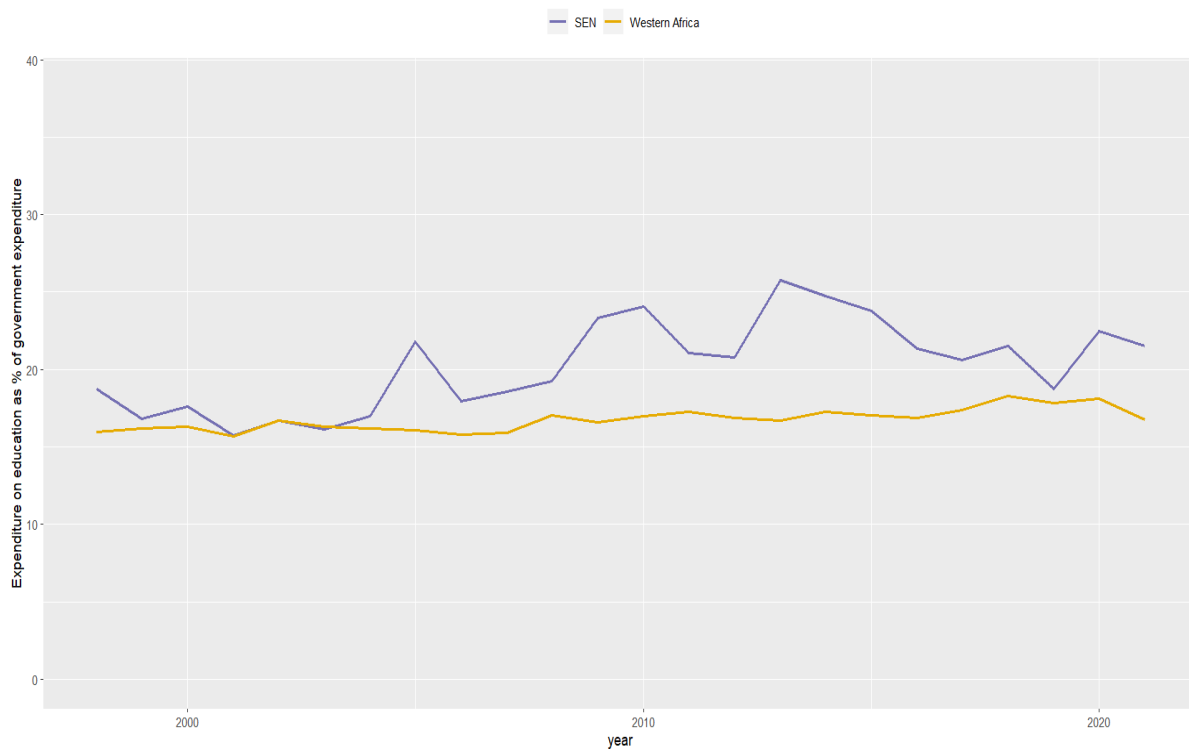


Figure 1. Share of Fifth Graders in Senegal with More than 40% Correct Answers, PASEC 2006.



Source: World Bank's SABER 2016

Figure 2. Government Expenditure on Education in Senegal



Source: World Bank Data from UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). UIS.Stat Bulk Data Download Service. Accessed September 19, 2023.

precluded in the Incheon Convention (15-20%) (PAQUET 2016). “Financial and Technical partners’ contributions do not exceed the 10% of all educational spending. So, in reality, it is Senegal itself that is funding its own educational system” (Interview 2 on Senegal, 2023).

## b. Challenges

School-aged populations in Senegal are increasing at an annual growth rate of 2,89%, putting intense pressure on the educational system, requiring a continuous construction of new educational buildings, recruitment and

training of new teachers and investment in better teaching and learning strategies (PAQUET 2016). Since 2000, and in line with its EFA commitments, Senegal has registered significant gains in terms of increasing access to education, largely as a product of infrastructure and physical expansion projects implemented throughout the country (UNESCO 2012). However, despite great advances in enrollment, in terms of quality, the results remain disappointing: dropout rates, exclusion and repetition are still high and the standards required to implement quality education are sorely lacking (Republic of Senegal 2013). Relatively low literacy rates for adults and youth (58%) reflect the low quality of education available in the system. Despite high state expenditure on education, there is no correlation between the increase in the budget and the success rate and the internal and external efficiency of the system: According to Interviewee 2, since the end of the 1990s, Senegal embarked on a mission to implement the PDEF and the focus was on Education for All: “So, between leaving a child at home, on the street or putting him in a temporary shelter with a teacher who doesn’t have training? Senegal opted for the second alternative” (Interview 2 on Senegal, 2023). And so, the state opted for universal enrollment as a first step to achieve EFA. This is not surprising, as explained by Interviewee 3: the majority of state funding is oriented towards paying for teachers’ salaries (Interviewees 1 and 3 agree that the salary budget for teachers in Senegal is around 80-90% of all education expenditure), which creates a big toll on the government (Interview 3 on Senegal, 2023). This puts a constraint on other educational needs, such as infrastructure, textbooks, digital materials, etc. There is a fine balance between providing teachers with good salaries and having enough teachers to meet a proper teacher to student ratio, and there seems to be a discrepancy still (Interviews 1 and 3 on Senegal, 2023).

As a second step, the government decided to focus on quality, with the PAQUET program and reforms that tackled educational quality, such as increasing teachers’ salaries. The Senegalese state resorted to a massification of a body called “national education volunteers.” They started by providing them with 3 months of training, then 6 months, and finally a year-long training program. The minimum requirements for their recruitment also changed from the Brevet (elementary school degree), to the Baccalaureate (end of high school exam) +1, but the effects of this massification of recruitment did nothing to improve the efficiency of the system; although the volunteers were less costly than trained teachers, they definitely lacked the proper skills and experience to raise the achievement levels in schools (Interview 2 on Senegal, 2023).

So in regards to efficiency, the government’s strategy was clear: the first step to achieve universal education and EFA, is to get all the children in schools, which the government has made great progress in according to the data, and then as a second phase, focus on quality, with much work still to be done.

### c. Reforms

“Senegal, like many countries of Francophone Africa, is in a process of evolving its educational system to respond to the realities and contexts of the country” (Interview 1 on Senegal, 2023). Since Senegal gained its independence in 1960, a number of educational reforms took place in order to set up the new educational system of Senegal. The Senegalese Press Agency published a list of them in June 2023, which is summarized below:

- » 1962: first reform after the independence. Educational syndicates accuse president Leopold Senghor of neocolonialism and blame him of supporting colonialism. They reproach Senegalese schools of being simply an extension of the French schools, serving to create individuals who reflected their old colonizers.
- » 1971: The orientation law N°71-036 becomes the text defining the new principles, orientations, objectives and programs of the Senegalese school. This law resulted from the revolts in May 68, during which bloody protests against the ruling-class turned violent, thereby marking the biggest questioning of colonial heritage and the rise of a Nationalist and Africanist aspiration. It raised the importance of including national languages, as well as adapting the history and geography curriculum to reflect the new changes taking place in Senegal (Fall 2010).
- » 1979: Decree n.79 – 1165 fixes the new elementary school programs in line with the 1971 law, developing curricula and reviewing school books.
- » 1981: After agitation in the educational sector, the General States of Education and Training were held to review and improve the Senegalese educational system, calling on the need for schools to prepare young individuals who are useful to the Nation, ready to integrate in the different sectors of national life, conscious of the values of African civilization and able to excel in the fields of Science and Technology.

- » 1991: a new orientation law n° 91-22 was adopted, which reflected the objectives of the “Education for All” (EFA) program launched at Jomtien in 1990.

According to literature and interviews (Diagne 2019, APS 2023, Interviews 1 and 2 on Senegal, 2023), the most recent and relevant educational reforms tackle 3 main changes to the system: 1) the decentralization of the Senegalese governance system in general, and in education in particular, 2) the modernization of religious Islamic education, the *Daaras*, and 3) the use of national languages in the formal education system. After the crisis of 1981, the *États Généraux de l'Éducation et de la Formation* (General States of Education and Training) gathered to discuss how to move forward, and they concluded with the 3 mentioned reforms (APS 2023, Diagne 2019).

### *Decentralization*

Since 1972, Senegal has been engaged in a decentralization process consolidated by the Decentralization Act III (2013). The first reform of 1972 constituted “the precursory act asserting more local freedoms, with the creation of rural communities, the promotion of deconcentration and the regionalization of planning.” Carried out in 1996, the second reform, “with the aim of increasing the proximity of the State and the responsibility of local authorities,” established regionalization through the creation of districts, departments, removing the “region” as a local division and replacing them with “economic development centers” in order to create a deeper transfer of powers to local authorities (Acte III, 1972). Concerning education and training, this decentralization transfers the following responsibilities:

- » to the community levels: pre-schools, primary, EBJA (*Éducation des Jeunes et des Adultes Analphabètes*), national language and oral tradition, fight against illiteracy,
- » to the department level: middle and high schools, scholarships, school/company partnerships for technical training, civic values, and active participation,
- » and to the economic development centers: professional and technical training.

These changes in the governance of the education system in Senegal are reflected in budgetary commitment. Two instruments have been developed to enable “budget transfer to local authorities, namely the Decentralization Allocation Fund (FDD), established to strengthen the authorities’ operational expenditure allocations, and the Local Authority Assistance Fund (FCCL), established to build their investment capacity, were implemented in 1996” (UNESCO 2007).

### *Daaras*

It has been found that Muslim children are less likely to attend public schools than Christians (Dramani 2012), which might explain the low levels of net enrollment despite efforts from the state to increase public education access. This is generally attributed to the fact that the formal education system is secular and based in French values, which do not necessarily fit with the Islamic traditions. It also does not teach Arabic and religion, both of which are important for Muslim families (Dramani 2012). “Senegal, before knowing colonization before knowing Christianity before knowing the French school, knew the Arab-Islamic occupation and that really left an impression on Senegalese culture” (Interview 2 on Senegal, 2023). Private education is a way for families to give their children a different type of education than the one offered by the formal education system, and in Senegal, *Daaras* are the main such service provider. The *Daaras* are Islamic schools or “Koranic schools” of the *Mouride* tradition that only teach the Koran, Arabic, and some religious studies. In *Mouridism*, a Sufi order that plays a leading religious, economic and political role in Senegal, children are placed at the disposal of a *Marabout* (Islamic religious chief and teacher) by their families for a spiritual, moral, cultural and philosophical education (Diop 2010). *Daaras* have been an integral part of Senegalese society for years (Chehami 2016, Dramé 2018). According to Interviewee 2, most Senegalese people have started their education within a *Daara*, if only in pre-school, before moving on to the formal system (Chehami 2016, Dramé 2018, Interview 2 on Senegal, 2023). However, in 2009, the government engaged in a new strategy to increase the number of children enrolled in formal education to include students from certain *Daaras* that have committed to specific standards. The government created the “*Daara Inspection*” at the Ministry of National Education in order to ensure that Koranic schools provide an education that no longer focuses solely on memorizing the Koran by turning them into modern *Daaras*

to “make available to the populations an offer responding to their inspirations” (Republic of Senegal, Inspection of Daaras).

Today, there are two types of Daaras, the modern Daaras that have undergone a modernization process and been recognized by the state, with proper school structures, trained teachers, using official textbooks, etc. and the traditional Daaras that still refuse to modernize. So as not to break fully with tradition, in these modernized Daaras, the *maître Coranic* or Koranic teacher is still present, alongside language instruction in French, Arabic, and mathematics. In many regions, it remains a crucial cultural aspect to learn the Koran as well as religious sciences, so the state has accommodated this aspect of the local culture, in order not to leave anyone behind, and to breakthrough “zones of resistance” as Interviewee 3 called them (Interview 3 on Senegal, 2023).

But the traditional Daaras that are managed by the Marabouts persist. These Daaras do not have proper educational buildings, “often work out of hangars” and have their own curricula and material that is not reviewed by any official authority, “which is also dangerous because we cannot be in a country where we have educational models that we do not master,” creating a completely parallel system (Interview 2 on Senegal, 2023). Despite strong efforts in the past couple of decades to include these private entities within the formal system and modernizing them to create a homogenous organization of the schooling within the country, these traditional Daaras refuse any public intervention in their affairs, and they are most prominent in certain more conservative areas such as the region of Diourbel, especially in Touba, the holy city where the founder of Mouridism is buried. According to Interviewee 1, “I don’t have the exact number, but I can imagine that around 90% of the Daaras are resistant and are not recognized by the state, because they don’t want the state to know exactly what goes on in there.” Consequently, when the government announces 63% achievement rates in a school year, this means that 37% of students are neither in formal public schools nor modernized Daaras, but many of them are in traditional Daaras which are not taken into consideration in the statistics, as they do not learn the same curricula and content and barely gain knowledge beyond basic Arabic language, just enough to learn the Koran.

### National Languages

One of the key challenges and sources of contentious debate concerns French as the dominant language of instruction and a compulsory subject in Senegalese schools from kindergarten to university (Clemons and Yerende 2009, Diallo 2011, Ngom 2002, Sane 2010). Not only is it a cause for debate due to the continuous use of the colonial language and its meaning for the country’s heritage, but more pragmatically, because of how it affects students’ pedagogy. For many, especially in rural areas, French is not their first language or the language they use at home. As Naumann and Wolf (2001 p.374) argue, “using French as the only teaching language constitutes a major handicap for most students, and especially in primary education.” A study conducted in 2002 revealed that 87% of the Senegalese supported the introduction of national languages into the formal education system, with 37% believing that education should be delivered using national languages (Diallo 2011). Reasons for these responses included “pedagogical benefits, effective communication, and language and cultural maintenance” (Salmon and Dramani 2015 p. 425).

While there are 14 national languages or *langues officielles reconnues* in Senegal, the official language of Senegal remains French (Ethnologue 2010). 14 of the national languages are codified and there are decrees establishing their status: Wolof, Sereer, Pulaar, Jola, Mandinka, Soniké, Balante, Mankaan, Noon, Manjaku, Bassari, Hassanya, Bédick and Saafi-Saafi (Diallo 2010). More than 85% of the population understand and speak Wolof, 67.2% of whom it is their first language (Direction de la Prévision et des Statistiques 1993). In 1971, the Senegalese government enacted a decree in which it fixed the spelling of six official languages raised to the level of national languages: Wolof, Sereer, Pular, Joola, Mandingue and Soninke. The decree affirmed the will to regulate the transcription of national languages in order to introduce them to the Senegalese education system in primary schools and universities. It was also decreed that in preparation for introducing these languages into the official schooling system, teachers had to receive formal training on teaching in these languages (Fall 2010). This was a radical shift to attempt to resolve the problematic linguistic issue. Annex II of the decree justifies this move:

As languages are the vehicle of any civilization, we think that as long as we, the Senegalese, continue to teach our children a foreign language, whatever it may be, without teaching them first their maternal languages, our people will be alienated. It is therefore, an urgent necessity for the Senegalese people to start teaching their national languages (Journal Officiel de la République du Sénégal,1973).

The latest orientation law of 1991 notes that there is still work to be done to “develop national language teaching as a tool to give the students a real contact with their culture, to root them in their history, to form conscious Senegalese [citizens], aware of their belonging and their identity” (Art. 6).

In 2018, Senegal decided to capitalize on previous experiences in adopting national languages as language of instruction from other countries and in 2018-2020, a pilot harmonized bilingual teaching model was developed; the MOHEBS (*Modèle Harmonisé d’Enseignement Bilingue au Sénégal*). “It was planned to be rolled out with the beginning of the 2022-2023 academic year, but due to COVID and some delays in the development of the materials and teachers training, the start was postponed to the academic year 2023-2024. It has now started in 9 regions, and the UNESCO is supporting the state in creating textbooks and pedagogical guides in all 6 official national languages” (Interview 2 on Senegal, 2023). The choice of languages was made through a linguistic mapping (Interview 3 on Senegal, 2023) that highlights the language spoken in the schoolyards in every region. According to Interviewees 2 and 3, in Senegal there is a dichotomy between the mother-tongue and the language of socialization: “So much so that the child, he can have Pulaar as his mother tongue and be born, evolve and live in a Wolof environment. This child, Pulaar, he only speaks it in his house, but with his playmates, in the schoolyard, in class, in the street, he only speaks Wolof.” (Interview 3 on Senegal, 2023).

In February 2023, Minister of Education declared during the International Mother Language Day celebration in Kaffrine that the Ministry is developing a program that would see the “teaching of all national languages in the curriculum by 2028” (BBC News Afrique 2023). It is planned to be a bilingual education system, “designed by Senegalese academics, education practitioners, training experts, education inspectors and teachers” according to Professor Mbacké Diagne, General Inspector of Education and Training in charge of national languages at the Ministry of National Education. This model aims that for the first two years of learning 80% of the time dedicated to the national language and only 20% to French. For the following stages, in CE1 and CE2, the two languages will have the same teaching time. “But both will be means of teaching and objects of teaching. So, the subjects are taught first in the national language and then in French in order to allow the child not to lose all the knowledge he had before coming to school,” explains Inspector Diagne, which will allow for the children a better inclusion and transition between their home environment and the schooling system (BBC News Afrique 2023).

In line with the political will to create a “Senegalese school,” the reform serves to counter the assimilationist policies of the colonizer and to help establish a truly Senegalese, African schooling system, while maintaining a global link, as being bilingual is an essential skill in today’s globalized economy. The colonial system was so entrenched until the 1970s, that even the Senegalese history books only contained French characters from the colonizer’s curriculum. The 70s saw the introduction of national heroes, 3 characters from the great Marabout tradition, as well as a woman from the South, which represented a huge leap towards independence from colonial figures (Interview 2 on Senegal, 2023). But not only that, the use of national languages in teaching can help reduce school dropout rates and improve educational outcomes, which has been a major factor affecting Senegal’s education quality and outcomes (World Bank 2021). Many students drop out of school because they have difficulty understanding the concepts being taught due to the language barrier. According to interviewees as well as pedagogical literature individuals who master their native language first have higher chances to better master a foreign language (Kirkpatrick and Liddicoat 2019, Melby-Lervåg and Lervåg 2011, Muhammadali 2023, Myles 2017, Sparks 2006, Stone et al. 2020). “The child understands the world firstly through his language of socialization, they understand their environment better, they gain more knowledge through their language of socialization. And their language of socialization is not French” (Interview 3 on Senegal, 2023). Therefore, it is important for children to study in their native language for the first few years of education before introducing a foreign language.

Since independence, several advances have been made by the different governments to incorporate national languages in the curriculum to increase literacy, including the major reform of 1971 and one in 2001, but the policies are inefficiently implemented (Diallo 2010, 5). However, there seems to be a real will: “It’s evolving. Programs are more and more adapted to the context and realities of the country than before” (Interview 1 on Senegal, 2023). “Senegal is in a place of reinvention of its own history” (Interview 2 on Senegal, 2023).

The Senegalese Constitution (2001), affirms the right of “all children, boys, girls, from all regions of the territory” to have access to schooling indiscriminately. “If we refer to the Orientation Law, it is first of all the intrinsic mandatory characteristic of the educational system. Secondly, it is the principle of neutrality, so it is for everyone. It is a secular, democratic education. It is in the heading of the principles.” (Interview 2 on Senegal, 2023).

To analyze the inclusiveness and scope of services of the Senegalese education system, we look at two main policy documents:

1) **PDEF** (*Plan Décennal de l'Éducation et de la Formation/Ten-Year Plan for Education and Training*), which has been the guiding plan for the Senegalese Ministry of Education for the period of 2001-2011.

While a range of targeted policies exist that direct action with respect to inclusive education (Aslett-Rydbjerg 2003), the PDEF has been the main reference instrument for the education sector between 2000 and 2011. The PDEF is a fully-fledged implementation plan, based on the objectives of the EFA conference in Jomtien, and sets out key targets, plans of action and the resources needed to achieve them (Ndiaye 2006). The PDEF was implemented in 3 phases, each setting out certain priorities for the period covered (2001-2004, 2005-2008, 2009-2011) (GPE 2019).

The 3 strategic objectives set out by the PDEF in 2000 were:

- » Expand access to education while tackling geographic, social and gender disparities,
- » Increase the quality of the educational offer and the relevance of learning,
- » Promote coherent, modern, decentralized, effective and efficient management of the education system as a whole (PDEF 2000).

The Directorate of Education Planning and Reform was tasked with the role of implementing the PDEF in collaboration with other government agencies as well international organizations such as USAID and UNICEF (Diop 2000). This includes piloting of plans and activities, design and apply reporting tools, and create the final evaluation of the program. PDEF-Phase I was implemented between 2000 and 2004, during which progress was made in access to primary education and in the gross enrollment ratio; progress had been made in access and equity, but work remained to be done in the areas of gender equality, retention, mobilization of public resources and management of the system as a whole (UNESCO 2007). This was followed by a three-year document, PDEF/EPT (PDEF/Education for All), covering phase II from 2005 to 2007.

2) **PAQUET-EF** (*Programme de l'Amélioration de la Qualité, de l'Équité et la Transparence-Education/Formation or Program for the Improvement of Quality, Equity and Transparency-Education/Training*). Following the end of the 10-year PDEF in 2012, the government of Senegal launched a new general policy on education and training for the period 2015–2030, the PAQUET, to focus on improving the processes and outcomes of learning, as well as school performance and equity in terms of access by the most vulnerable students in underserved areas (World Bank 2016).

The PAQUET is built around 3 main objectives:

- » Objective 1: improve learning outcomes radically and at all levels.
- » Objective 2: promote the coverage, diversification, and the integration of education and training systems at all levels.
- » Objective 3: implement a sectorial governance system that is transparent, efficient and result-oriented.

Based on the language used in both documents, we can see a strong focus on equity and access, which is obvious in the title. As part of the PAQUET program, the introduction of national languages in the educational system plays a main role in improving inclusivity. This reform is taking the forefront on the educational policy stage as “it is not only a way of reappropriating our culture, which is aligned with the African Union’s Agenda 20-63 about the continent’s African renaissance, but it is also a medium to improve the quality of teaching and learning” (Interview 2 on Senegal, 2023). The reform was introduced in 2003 as a pilot stage, and is being expanded across the country gradually (Camara 2015, PDEF 2008).

According to the PAQUET document, there is an insufficiency and lack of targeting of children in rural areas by educational and training services. This is due to a main challenge: the available offer is lower than the need, especially due to the relatively high growth of school-aged demographics. This in turns affects rural and disadvantaged populations more severely, remaining the main victims of educational exclusion, whether in terms of access or retention. Access and retention issues in the Senegalese education system are marked by major dis-

parities, as well as intersectional aspects that make it much more difficult for certain groups to access education. The gaps between rural and urban areas are clear where a rural child can expect 3.5 years of primary education, while his urban counterpart can expect 6 (UNESCO 2007). According to a study of children 7-16 years old who are out of or on the sidelines of the traditional education system in Senegal, 66% of them turned out to have disabilities, while the percentage of children with disabilities from the total number of children in Senegal is 47% (UNICEF 2016).

What is notable through the interviews, confirms what the state documents affirm: “the challenge in Senegal is not the openness of the school to the community, it is the opposite” (Interview 3 on Senegal, 2023). The state is following a strict “Education for All” policy, attempting to enroll all school-aged children into the education system, whether they are in an urban, semi-rural or even rural geography. It does so by targeting them where they are. If they are in formal schools, the state is introducing the national languages reform to increase retention rates through better achievement, and for those who are in the Daaras, the state is modernizing and formalizing them to respond to the parents’ concerns of losing their culture and religion.

As an approach to make the education system more inclusive, a number of alternative models of education were included alongside the formal Senegalese education system. These include Basic Community Schools, Functional Literacy Centers and other informal literacy classes such as the Daaras mentioned earlier and that have been modernized and formalized to expand the inclusion of these students in the formal system. These types of schools have played a big role in including young people and women who have little to no access to the formal system (UNESCO 2007). They also improve the scope of services provided to a wider proportion of the population, including illiterate adults. However, as vulnerabilities tend to be intersectional, in 2003 the percentage of women attending these alternative educational models exceeded 70% (PDEF 2005).

#### *Special focus on female education: The SCOFI project*

One of the main educational reforms to have taken place in Senegal since the 1990s is the SCOFI *Scolarisation des Filles* project for improving girls’ education. Among other factors, Islamic and religious education has previously been strictly targeted for boys and not girls. This led to lower schooling rates for girls (Angers-Sall 2009). Since the 1970s, there have been reformist movements that called for the expansion of education to a larger population and the diversification of private schools to include Arabic and Franco-Arabic schools to target more girls. Since the 1990s, establishments exclusively reserved for young girls have opened their doors (Séne 2016).

The first systemic governmental step towards the focus on girls’ education goes back to 1995 with the creation and implementation of the SCOFI project (World Bank 1995). It started out with the basics; such as reviewing school building standards to accommodate the specific needs of young girls, and especially the construction of separate latrines. Other actions included incentives for parents to enroll their girls such as granting scholarships, awards for the best girl students, etc., and teacher training activities to increase their capacities to include girls within the education system (PDEF 2008).

In the most religious zones where girls did not attend schools at all, the Ministry of Education brought in “a major innovation,” intensifying Arabic language instruction, and more recently in 2003 by creating Franco-Arabic schools. This strategy has gained a great success and enrollment trends have progressed greatly according to the national president of the CNEPSCOFI (National Committee of Teachers for the Promotion of Girls’ Schooling), wherein the gross enrollment rate for girls has increased from 41% in 1995 to 80.6% in 2005 (CNEPSCOFI 2005) while in 2022, the gross enrollment rate for girls at primary level is 91.2% (UN Women Africa 2023). In 2004, the department of Human Resources in the Ministry of Education created a gender office, aiming to take into consideration all the inherent challenges of gender barriers within the education system. Among the goals of this department are increasing women’s access to teaching and higher-level administrative positions, and the improvement of their academic and professional abilities, to serve their own professional development all the while creating a more inclusive environment for girls in the schooling system (PDEF 2008).

The timing of these reforms coincides with the launching of the Education for All in 1990 (Diagne and Diakhate 2023, Interviews 1 and 2 on Senegal, 2023), implying an influence by the UN and EFA on the Senegalese education system. The Senegalese state has very early on declared its intention of “guaranteeing the right to education, the right to be able to read and write to all citizens,” (Senegalese Constitution 1963, Article 8) and

as is obvious in the law n. 19-22 of February 1991 about the national education of Senegal that puts forward the following objectives:

- » “Prepare the conditions for an integral development of the entire nation, through forming men and women who are capable of working efficiently to build the country, and take special interest in the economic, social and cultural problems that face Senegal in its development efforts.
- » Elevate the cultural level of the population through permitting the men and women who form the population to acquire the necessary knowledge for their harmonious insertion into the community, and their active participation in the national life, by providing them with the reflection tools and allowing them to exercise judgement and contribute to the advancement of sciences” (Article 1).

Despite the lack of a strict implementation of SCOFI program activities, an increase in girls’ schooling can still be observed (Interview 1 on Senegal, 2023). “We find that historically, and that may be a cultural dimension, at a certain point, girls received less schooling than boys,” but with the SCOFI program, and after 20 years of implementation, “we can actually see some reverse effects; in some regions, you find the rates of schooling for girls are around 75%” (Interview 2 on Senegal, 2023). This can be observed in the workplaces as well, according to Interviewee 1, suggesting that women have the chance to continue their education and reach high level positions: “I can see it myself whenever I have high-level meetings with the Ministry there is a high number of women. And of course, there are still some inequalities, but they are definitely much less pronounced than in other countries of the sub-region” (Interview 1 on Senegal, 2023).

It remains however difficult to affirm that this evolution represents a significant improvement of girls’ schooling rates, as the movement seems to be two-fold: there is certainly an increase in girls’ access to education, but there has also been a stagnation, and even a decrease in boys’ access. For example, along the coast of Senegal, “there is a reverse trend in schooling whereas the boys who are sons of fishermen, tend to work in the sea and not go to school” (Interview 2 on Senegal, 2023). Therefore, it is important to further understand the root causes of lack of schooling. This trend is so strong in some areas that Interviewee 3 joked about needing “a SCOGA reform” (*Scolarisation des Garçons* or Boys’ Schooling) to counter this arising inequality (Interview 3 on Senegal, 2023). According to PAQUET 2016, even the government itself believes “the educational offer remains insufficient, unsuitable and not inclusive enough” (PAQUET 2016). However, the challenge remains in the retention of girls within the education system, as the numbers of girls is very high in primary education, but declines the older they get: Gross enrollment rate for girls in secondary education in 2022 was 37.2% (Moguéro 2009, UN Women Africa 2023). Interviewee 3 offers two explanations for the high drop-out rates: girls remain an extremely vulnerable group and, in many areas, especially in rural areas, their education is threatened due to 1) their cultural environment, as most girls are invited to marry early and 2) socio-economic level and geographical disparities. “Because most of the time, in every village [...] you can find an elementary school, but to have a middle school, sometimes the girl is forced to walk 2 to 3 kilometers. Once back at home, she is invited to do household chores while the boy is free, he goes to school, he comes back, or he rests, which is unfair” (Interview 3 on Senegal, 2023).

### Digitalization

An important reform that Senegal has recently put in place, is “distance-learning,” with the government investing in digital platforms. This process was further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic during which all presential education was halted. As part of the Ministry of National Education’s digital strategy, an Information and Management system for education (SIMEN) was set up with the purpose of improving the access, quality, and governance of the educational system, to become as far reaching and efficient as possible (PAQUET 2016). In that spirit, the ministry has developed the PROMET platform (Program of the Ministry of National Education for Distance Learning) in 2021 with the support of the World Bank, that promises that “beyond the circumstantial response that we have provided to the COVID-19 pandemic through the “learning at home” initiative, PROMET is the essential path in the reorganization of space and time in terms of education and training and in driving digital changes that connect the world more than ever. Fortunately, many achievements have already been recorded” (Minister of National Education Mamadou Talla). The announcement of the launch of the platform showed that the state is aware of the challenges to equity and balance linked, among other things, to individual and territorial vulnerabilities: Yankhoba Diattara, Minister of the Digital Economy and Telecommunications assured that “the



digital development of the country in the 45 departments will be strengthened. [...] We will work to connect all academy inspections and education and training inspections in Senegal, but also and above all strengthen connectivity at the level of schools, colleges, and high schools.” (Samabac 2021).

In order to increase the accessibility, the PADES-RR initiative was implemented to provide 4000 Flybox to 4000 schools and educational establishments in 2021; the 4G Flybox is a device that can be installed anywhere which connects to the Orange 4G mobile network to provide access to broadband internet. According to the Minister of National Education, this equipment will notably promote the reporting of data as well as the use of the various platforms of the ministry but also the standardization of the administrative of educational establishments. They also allow better communication between the school and the community. “Inclusion in the transmission of knowledge necessarily involves the development of digital technology in our teaching/learning, in the administration, steering and management of our structures,” indicated Mamadou Talla (Samabac 2021).

However, the question remains whether this digitalization of education makes the system more or less inclusive. There is a question of connectivity in remote areas, and of access to the necessary materials (tablets, smartphones, computers). In a study conducted by WeAreSocial and Hootsuite in 2021, DataReportal has published a series of reports entitled Digital 2021 (DataReportal 2021), which show that the internet penetration rate in Senegal is 46%, but quickly increasing (2.7% increase between 2020 and 2021). Most of the population has access to a smartphone, rather than other devices: in December 2020, 76% of the population browsed the internet via a smartphone compared to 23% via a laptop or desktop computer and 1.1% via tablet. According to Interviewee 2, in remote rural areas, these numbers are even less, as there are compounded issues such as the challenge of electrical connection, as not all regions have constant electricity necessary for internet access (Interview 2 on Senegal, 2023). In some areas, neither the students nor the teachers are equipped to fully rely on technology for the educational journey.

The Ministry is aware of these challenges and is trying to adapt the educational spaces towards a more digital education by providing trainings for teachers on digital literacy, and equipping schools with the necessary technological equipment (devices, connectivity, and network coverage, etc.) in remote areas, among other measures (UNESCO 2017). And then, providing teachers and learners with adapted programs and resources to support their learning (Interview 2 on Senegal, 2023).

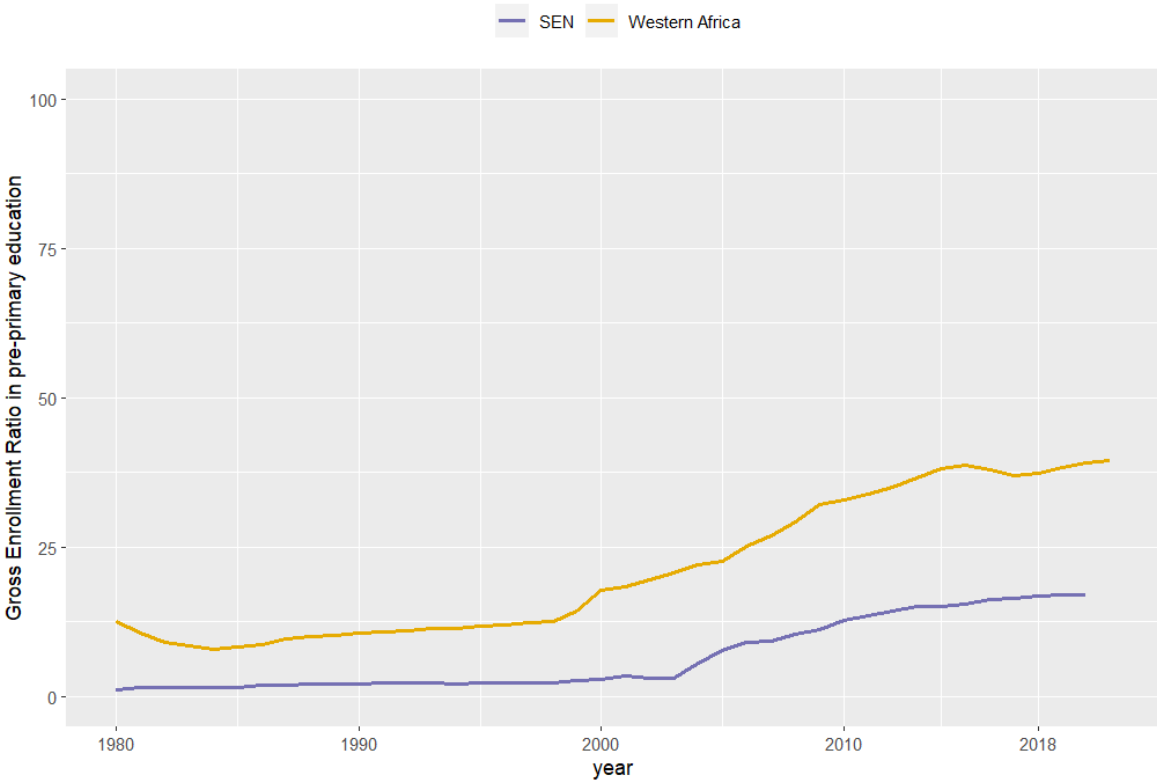
### *Early Childhood Education*

Early Childhood Education is another area of focus for the Senegalese government in recent years. In 1998, the formal pre-schooling rate was 2.7% (UNESCO 2002), and until recently, the Senegalese state had concentrated its efforts on elementary school, marginalizing preschool education (Diouf, Mbaye and Nachtman 2001). The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child marks the following decade with the adoption of children’s rights to protection and education from birth by a growing number of countries, including Senegal, which signed in 1990, the year of the Jomtien Declaration on Education for All (Combes 2000). In 1990, they also signed the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which reflects the importance of the traditions and cultural values of each country. In the texts of the Ministry of Education, the early childhood component of the PDEF focuses on optimizing the existing structures and resources to accommodate more children and aims to satisfy all their needs through the creation of specialized centers integrated into the various existing structures that need to be rehabilitated, particularly in disadvantaged areas. In 2007, the *Document de Politique Nationale de Développement Intégré de la Petite Enfance (DIPE) au Sénégal* (National Policy Document on the Integrated Development of the Little Childhood) is developed, elaborating the strategies and objectives of Early Childhood Education in the country, summarized in the aim:

Ensure all Senegalese children, from conception to 8 years old, primarily from disadvantaged backgrounds, access adequate and integrated services within families and structures, according to the broadest participatory approach, so that each of them benefits from support likely to guarantee survival, development, protection, social integration harmonious and personal achievement (Agence Nationale de la Case des Tout-Petits 2007).

The targets set by the Senegalese government aim to achieve 64.6% enrollment rate in pre-schools by 2030 (UNOPS 2024). Figure 3, p. 16, shows that efforts have been made by the government; in less than 20 years,

Figure 3. Preprimary School Enrollment Rates in Senegal



Source: World Bank Data 2022 from UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). UIS.Stat Bulk Data Download Service. Accessed October 24, 2022.

the enrollment rate went from 3% to 18%, widening the scope of services provided to a larger age group within the Senegalese population.

But although the Senegalese government is getting much support from prominent IOs such as UNOPS, which is the UN agency dedicated to implementing infrastructure and procurement projects, UNICEF and bilateral partners including KOICA, the current enrollment rate in pre-schools in 2023 remains at 18.2% according to Maimouna Cissokho Khouma, director general of the national agency for early childhood, which is quite low (UNOPS 2024).

d. Colonial Heritage

It can easily be argued that impact of colonialism is still quite visible in Senegal’s education system today. The Senegalese education system is almost the exact copy of the French system since its establishment during the colonization years; the system still follows the same format (number of years of education and division of different levels, curriculum, language of instruction and examination system): “For the Senegalese educational system, indeed like all Francophone African countries, it is a copy-paste of the French educational system: same curriculum, textbooks, structure, everything. It follows the same form and content” (Interview 1 on Senegal, 2023).

Formal schooling was first established in Senegal in 1817 by the French colonial powers (Diallo 2010), a school which was a shift from what the Senegalese people knew before. The most prominent schooling structure before that was the “Koranic schools” or non-formal Daaras, established through the Arab and Islamic influence (Sheldon 1995). The formal French school was established in the four big “communes” or departments of Senegal, namely Saint-Louis, Gorée, Dakar and Rufisque. This establishment was not without its challenges, due to great resistance based on the cultural background and religious zeal. The main ambition of this colonial formal school was the assimilation of the Senegalese indigenous population. Under the colonial rule, which ended in 1960, a true formalization of the French language took place in all official aspects, including education.

Even after Senegal gained its independence, Senghor, the first president was a strong proponent of “Francophonie” and supported keeping French as a national language, in fear of losing the “education race” if they

opted for national languages (1971 decree), as these were not ready in his point of view (Diallo 2010). Even opposition at the time was quite weak, still regarding Western supremacy and Western culture as the higher form (Diallo 2010) and saw French as a universal language due to its wider reach. Conversely, national languages remained restricted in their usage to smaller groups. This has been criticized by scholars and practitioners since the era of decolonization, and certain advancements have been made in regards to including the national languages within the curriculum, but Senghor's legacy and ideas still play an important role.

The school, under its current form, is not the product of the internal development of African societies. In the case of Senegal, the creation and development of the educational network has followed the French penetration. Fundamentally, far from reducing the distance between the dominant and the dominated, the school has more often than not contributed to making [this distance] impassable in order to maintain the colonial order (Fall 2010, p. 455).

Even if that was the only official system available to them, there was a great popular resistance to the French schooling system and the values it promoted (White 1996), and so enrollment rates were not high. And this heritage remained until the 1990s, while a strong resistance from policy makers to change the official language of instruction remained, following Senghor's ideology: "In opposition to a linguistic plurality, French is presented as a unifying language" (Fall 2010, p. 461).

As has been referred to throughout the paper, Senegal maintains strong links with its former colonizer, France. Since 1970, it is a member state of the OIF (International Organization of Francophonie), having French as its official language, used by all governmental bodies, as well as being the main language of instruction in formal schools, despite the on-going reforms. And although there are several reforms pushing to include national language into a bilingual system, there is not complete overhaul of the French education system (Interviews 2 and 3 on Senegal, 2023); the system in its structure remains the same. France is also still present through the French Development Agency (AFD), operating in Senegal since the country's independence. Since 1996, AFD financing in Senegal focused mainly on the agricultural and mining sectors, infrastructure, and education (AFD 2006). According to the AFD website, about 2.2 billion euros have been committed since 2012 in aid for Senegal through 115 large-scale projects. As bilateral aid is commonly more focused in former colonies, it can be argued that it helps maintain political influence and economic relationships that developed during colonial times (Alesina and Dollar 2000, Becker 2020, Berthélemy and Tichit 2004, Fuchs et al. 2014); this can be a form of soft power, influencing national governments through expert advice, and even hard power through provision of funding, so the presence of the French influence is undeniable.

#### 4. INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

For the purpose of this study, we define IOs as international development agencies, such as UN agencies and national development agencies, while disregarding NGOs and other non-state actors; this is not to say they are less important in the development of education practices, but the IOs concerned here are more famously known for their work with national governments to identify and design education policies worldwide (Martens and Niemann 2018). Senegal is a member of most of the prominent IOs, whether on a global or a regional level. Regarding education, it is a member of UNICEF, of UNESCO on a global level and of the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (PAQUET 2016). The UNESCO's Multisectoral Regional Office for West Africa is based in Dakar, proving the important role that Senegal plays on a regional level.

It is undeniable that IOs do play a role on most countries' education policies nowadays (Martens and Niemann 2018). They are often considered as technical partners, and in some cases, have a stronger influence through their financing of specific education projects. In the case of Senegal, according to the interviewees, IOs derive their policies and priorities from the states in which they operate. As countries are member states in these organizations, they have the power to influence their policies: for instance, the Director General of UNESCO is elected by the governments of the member states, so they need to make sure they follow the countries' priorities (Interviews 1, 2 and 3 on Senegal, 2023).

The role of IOs is mainly focused on providing expertise. As these IOs are highly considered and regarded as subject experts, they maintain strong relationships with the governments. They are appreciated for the "intellectual

dimension: the UNESCO for example is seen as an agency which creates things, which develops concepts, initiatives” (Interview 1 on Senegal, 2023).

If there is a key word in international organizations, it is really *alignment*. It is from these priorities that we implement activities with our partner departments in the ministries. It happens that often during discussions and in exchanges with ministries that we share what is going on with countries, that we show good practices, that we have noted elsewhere, and these good practices are often sources of influence (Interview 2 on Senegal, 2023).

However, what is clear through the interviews, is that Senegal is also establishing a strong role in defining its own policies and taking more control over its future. One of the interviewees who is working for an IO on a regional level shared that relative to other countries of the sub-region, the Senegalese government is showing an “increasingly strong leadership, becoming less influenceable” (Interview 1 on Senegal, 2023). According to them, this happened for two reasons. First is the political dimension of getting recognition on the international stage “Senegal always likes to be part of the initiatives at the international level and show its experience.” The second is an actual need to find better policies for the Senegalese society, reflecting its values, to convince parents to enroll their children in schools and ultimately to increase educational achievement. This shows in their resistance to certain policies generally pushed by IOs; a specific example that was cited by both Interviewees 1 and 2 is the introduction of gender and sexuality topics in the educational curricula. As a culturally Muslim country, there is a strong cultural resistance to issues of sexuality and the introduction of such subjects within the national curriculum would most certainly cause an outrage within the Senegalese society. Such trends that are not matching the societal values and the Islamic cultural sphere are refused: “Over time in fact, Senegal really gains its independence, we will say, and independence, even intellectual” (Interview 1 on Senegal, 2023).

Below are some of the main IO projects being implemented currently in Senegal by prominent IOs, in line with the reforms mentioned in previous sections:

- 1) **UNICEF** has accompanied the Senegalese government in the implementation of the SCOFI project, discussed above, and that has resulted in a strong increase in girls’ enrollment in primary education (PDEF 2008). UNICEF also plays an important role in the Early Childhood Education reform (Interview 3 on Senegal, 2023), supporting the expansion of community preschools offering at least one year of preschool education to all 5-year-old children in disadvantaged communities, in line with the National Education Strategy. In 2022, a total of 8,962 children, including 4,548 girls, were enrolled in community nurseries thanks to the support of UNICEF (UNICEF 2022).
- 2) In the year 2000, the **United States Agency for International Development (USAID)** began a pilot program entitled “Education for Development and Democracy Initiative,” known as EDDI and intended to promote girls’ education. EDDI provides scholarship recipients with tuition fees, books, and school supplies. It also offers them internet connection, as well as reinforcement courses, preparation for the baccalaureate exam, leadership training and exchange workshops (PDEF 2008). USAID, in close collaboration with its partners and the Ministry of Education, is building schools, especially in rural areas, and improving the quality of the teaching and learning environment through national training and retraining programs for teachers and principals of public and private schools, including modernized Daaras. The USAID is also heavily involved in the Education Ministry’s national languages reform, financing with up to 80 million USD since 2016 for the RELIT project (Strengthening initial reading for everyone). RELIT made it possible to consolidate the reform of the national bilingual education system in Senegal, through the Harmonized Model of Bilingual Education in Senegal (MOHEBS) which was deployed in October 2022 (Interview 3 on Senegal, 2023, USAID, n.d.).
- 3) Senegal is also part of **OECD’s PISA-D**, a new format of the large-scale international student assessment that is designed to take into consideration the diversities in the non-OECD countries. Senegal was one of the first 8 countries to participate since its launch in 2013 (OECD 2016). PISA-D aims to equip national education ministries with monitoring and evaluation tools for their education systems. PISA-D results for Senegal, as other state examinations, have served as one of the bases for the national languages reform, as results showed how Senegalese students are performing better in mathematics than in reading (OECD 2017).

- 4) The largest financial contributor to Senegal's national education projects is the [World Bank](#). Its latest project with a budget of 150 million USD in 2023, aiming to improve the capacity of Senegal's higher education institutions to produce graduates with skills that match the job market's needs (World Bank 2023).

The analysis shows that IO projects seem to match the Senegalese government's priorities: a focus on girls' education, early childhood education and digitalization. Even the nationalization of the language of instruction seems to be supported by International Organizations for its beneficial qualities in improving educational outcomes and achievement. It is difficult to identify for sure in this case which one is derived from the other and if the policies have trickled down from IOs to the government or the other way around.

As mentioned earlier, IOs tend to have a stronger influence when their funding of educational systems is significant. In Senegal, the largest contributing IO in terms of funding is the World Bank, with its latest project with a budget of 150 million USD in 2023, aiming to improve the capacity of Senegal's higher education institutions to produce graduates with skills that match the job market's needs (World Bank 2023). The UNESCO for instance is not focused on financing as much as providing technical support to the Senegalese government. In fact, the Senegalese state is financing around 90% of its educational system (Interview 3 on Senegal, 2023), and so IO participation in education financing does not exceed 10% of total educational expenditure. This amount goes mainly toward teacher training and capacity building for educational staff, as well as some construction of educational facilities (such as the Early Childhood Education classrooms). However, the state maintains complete oversight over IOs work in education: the Senegalese General Inspection of Education and Training is responsible for cooperation with NGOs and IOs, and this organ filters any proposal by these actors (Ministry of Education). "It's true, we are interested in support, we are interested in programs that perhaps allow us to strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of our system. But still, there are points on which the inspectorate manages education, so sometimes there are issues that demand its veto" (Interview 2 on Senegal, 2023). So, the focus of IOs in Senegal is more on soft than hard power.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This research has analysed the education system of Senegal through the lens of a global transformation which has impacted its educational system deeply, namely the colonisation period by the French empire, as well as through the cultural sphere of Islam, strongly present in Senegal, and which has played a resisting force to the colonial education system. And even though Senegal acquired its independence in 1960, the Senegalese educational system remained a copy of that of its French colonizer for decades afterwards. For the past three decades, Senegal has been undergoing a more prominent de facto decolonization in regards to breaking down the structures of the French education system little by little and moving towards a more Senegalese and African education system; more inclusive reforms such as the inclusion of national languages in the curriculum as well as introducing Arabic and Islamic studies, will go a long way in providing wider access to populations that previously struggled to enter the system or to achieve good outcomes. Although it is a slow process, the intention seems to be present.

The analysis shows that International Organizations play a supporting role to the Senegalese state, providing expertise and alignment on government policies and reforms, rather than a leading role in defining education policies. However, the Senegalese education system cannot be studied in a vacuum from global trends; it does ascribe to several global conferences, chiefly the Education for All convention, which has led Senegal to improve the inclusiveness of the system by introducing special programs for girls' education, formalizing national languages and introducing them as languages of instruction and by decentralizing the educational system in order to accommodate regional specificities. This had as a consequence, for instance, in the increase of the number of girls accessing education in the country since the 1990s, and although there are still some obstacles in the higher grades, it can be said that there is good progress in the right direction.

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## ANHANG

### List of Acronyms

AFD	Agence Française de Développement (French Development Agency)
AfDB	African Development Bank
ANSD	Agence Nationale de Statistique et de la Démographie (National Agency of Statistics and Demography)
APS	Agence de Presse Sénégalaise (Senegalese Press Agency)
AU	African Union
CFFEE	Certificat de Fin des Etudes Élémentaires (Certificate of End of Elementary Studies)
CLAD	Centre de Linguistique Appliquée de Dakar (Center of Applied Linguistics of Dakar)
CNEPSCOFI	Comité National des Enseignants pour la Promotion de la Scolarisation des Filles (National Committee of Teachers for the Promotion of Girls' Schooling)
CNREF	Commission Nationale de Réforme de l'Éducation et de la Formation (National Educational Reform Committee)
DIPE	Développement Intégré de la Petite Enfance (Integrated Development of the Little Childhood)
EBJA	Éducation des Jeunes et des Adultes Analphabètes (Education of Illiterate Youth and Adults)
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EFA/EPT	Education For All/Education Pour Tous
EGEF	Etats Généraux de l'Éducation et de la Formation (General States for Education and Training)
EPDC	Education Policy Data Center
FCCL	Fonds de Concours aux Collectivités Locales (Local Authority Assistance Fund)
FDD	Fonds de Dotation de la Décentralisation (Decentralization Allocation Fund)
GER	Gross Enrollment Ratio
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
IFAN	Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (Fundamental Institute of Black Africa)
MOHEBS	Modèle Harmonisé d'Enseignement Bilingue au Sénégal (Harmonized Bilingual Teaching Model in Senegal)
NAP	National Action Plan
OIF	Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (International Organization of Francophonie)
PAQUET	Programme d'Amélioration de la Qualité, l'Équité et la Transparence (Program to Improve the Quality, Equity and Transparency)
PDEF	Plan Décennal d'Éducation et de Formation (Ten-Year Plan for Education and Training)
PISA-D	Programme for International Student Assessment for Development
PROMET	Projet du Ministère de l'Éducation pour le Développement du Téléenseignement (Ministry of Education's Project for the Development of Distance Learning)
SCOFI	Scolarisation des Filles (Girls' Education)
SIMEN	Système d'Information et de Management de l'Éducation Nationale (Information and Management System for National Education)
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
USAID	United States Agency for International Development