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The Senegalese School System between “Rooting and Opening” and the Challenge of Quality and Access to Education ¹

Abstracts

EN

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the current problems and challenges of the education system in Senegal, this article contains a brief overview of its discontinuous historical development. Like in many other countries, the perspective of “education for all” is central to educational policy in Senegal. Via various reforms and programs, significant progress has been made towards achieving universal access to education. However, goals concerning the quality of education remain to be reached. Some of the factors that continue to limit the efficiency of the education system are: the as yet unresolved ambivalence of “*enracinement et ouverture*” (rooting and opening), the blurry, unsatisfactory policies regarding the role of languages in education, the disparities in the education system, the lack of initial vocational training of some educators and of an innovative and efficient teacher training program.

DE

Um die aktuellen Probleme und Herausforderungen des senegalesischen Bildungssystems zu verstehen, wird in diesem Artikel ein kurzer Überblick über die diskontinuierliche historische Entwicklung des Bildungswesens gegeben. Wie auch in vielen anderen Ländern steht das Thema „Bildung für alle“ im Mittelpunkt der Bildungspolitik Senegals. Durch verschiedene Reformen und Programme wurden deutliche Fortschritte auf dem Weg zu einem allgemeinen Zugang zu Bildung erzielt. Die Ziele in Bezug auf die Qualität der Bildung sind noch nicht erreicht. Einige der Faktoren, die die Effizienz des Bildungssystems weiterhin einschränken, sind u.a.: die bis jetzt ungelöste Ambivalenz von „*enracinement et ouverture*“ (Verwurzelung und

¹ This text was translated by Dr. Lara-Stephanie Krause-Alzaidi.

Öffnung), die unklare Politik in Bezug auf die Rolle der Sprachen im Bildungswesen, die Ungleichheiten im Bildungssystem, das Fehlen einer beruflichen Erstausbildung für einige Lehrer:innen und eines innovativen und effizienten Lehrer:innenbildungsprogramms.

PT

Para compreender os problemas e desafios actuais do sistema educativo senegalês, este artigo apresenta uma síntese da evolução histórica descontínua do sistema educativo. Como em muitos outros países, a “educação para todos” está no centro da política educativa do Senegal. Através de várias reformas e programas, foram realizados progressos significativos no sentido do acesso universal à educação. Os objectivos em termos de qualidade do ensino ainda estão por atingir. Alguns dos factores que continuam a limitar a eficácia do sistema educativo são: a ambivalência ainda não resolvida do “enracinement et ouverture” (ancoragem e abertura), a falta de clareza da política relativa ao papel das línguas na educação, as desigualdades no sistema educativo, a falta de formação profissional inicial para alguns professores e de um programa de formação de professores inovador e eficaz.

JA

本稿では、教育システムが歴史の流れのうえで非連続的につくられてきたことを概観し、セネガルの教育システムが現在抱える問題や課題を理解することをめざす。ほかの多くの国でもそうであるように、「万人のための教育」という主題はセネガルの教育政策の中心に位置している。さまざまな改革やプログラムをとoshi、教育への全般的なアクセスをめざす道のりは明白な進歩を見せている。[しかし、]教育の質に関する目標は、まだ達成されていない。教育システムの効果がいまだ限定的なものにとどまっている要因として、今日まで未解決の「定着と開放(enracinement et ouverture)」という矛盾、教育制度における言語の役割に関する不明瞭な政策、教育システムにおける不平等、一部の教師に対する第一段階教員養成の不在、核心的で効果的な教師教育プログラムの不在を指摘する。

An Introduction

Senegal is a multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual country, where “*enracinement et ouverture*” (first rooting oneself to then open up) constitutes a kind of philosophy of life. It is a guiding principle that Léopold Sédar Senghor, Senegal’s first president, endorsed in his literary activities (Senghor 1977). He strongly proclaimed the idea of the symbiosis of cultures and the building of

a 'universal civilisation' in a process of rooting and opening: rooting in the depths of the native land, using African cultures, values and languages as a starting point, and also opening up to the fruitful values of other cultures (Senghor 1977, 1993; Timera & Diouf 2021). This principle is taken up emphatically in the national education policy law (*Loi d'orientation de l'Éducation*, 91-22 of 16 February 1991), stating that:

"The national education is Senegalese and African, developing the teaching of national languages, which are privileged instruments to give the students a living contact with their culture and to root them in their history, forming a Senegalese conscious of his belonging and his identity. Providing an in-depth knowledge of African history and cultures, highlighting all their richness and contributions to the universal heritage, national education underlines the continent's solidarity and cultivates a sense of African unity. The national education also reflects Senegal's membership of the cultural community of French-speaking countries, while at the same time being open to the values of universal civilisation and in line with the major currents of the contemporary world, thereby developing the spirit of cooperation and peace between people" (Senegal 1991: article 6, own translation).

If we take a closer look at this law, we notice that it originates from the principle of 'rootedness' (national and continental), both linguistically and culturally. Only then should the process of linguistic and cultural 'opening' to the French-speaking countries and the rest of the world take place. However, this ideal proclaimed by the *Loi d'orientation de l'Éducation* does not correspond to the realities and practices of the Senegalese education system, in which, from a linguistic, curricular and structural point of view, 'openness' precedes 'rootedness'. The latter has remained the major challenge since the country's independence. This text proposes to explain this postulate on the basis of the current situation of the Senegalese education system and its historical evolution.

A heterogeneous schooling landscape: duality between laic and religious education

The structure of Senegal's schooling landscape is shaped by various providers with different and competing ideas and goals. Formal vs. informal education sectors, private vs. state institutions, non-sectarian vs. sectarian schools (Arabic, Franco-Arabic or Catholic schools) and so on can be identified. The co-existence of such different educational models is a result of historical developments in the country, like the 8th century Islamisation and the 19th century French colonisation (Adick 2013; Mbaye 2018). During the colonial period, attempts to repress the Arabo-Islamic education model were unsuccessfully

carried out by the colonial power (Mbaye 2018: 21). Due to the resistance and refusal of Muslim parents to send their children to the colonial schools run by missionaries, laic education was introduced in 1854 (Dione 2018: 80). In 1904, an absolute laicisation by the colonial power can be observed (Schelle, Fritzsche & Lehmann-Rommel 2021: 18). The principle of laicity is also maintained after the country's independence.² This is stipulated in Article 1 of the Constitution since 1960: "The Republic of Senegal is laic, democratic and social" (see Coly 2020). This is concretised in the national education law (*Loi d'orientation de l'Éducation*) by stating that "the national education is laic: it respects and guarantees the freedom of conscience of citizens at all levels" (Senegal 1991: article 4, own translation). In order to recognise the heterogeneity of the school landscape and the coexistence of different educational models in a country that is 95% Muslim and 4% Christian (see Dione 2018: 27), this article was supplemented in 2004 by the following principles: "Within public and private educational establishments, in compliance with the principle of laicity of the State, optional religious education may be offered. Parents are free to choose whether or not to enrol their children in this teaching" (Senegal 2004). Until this day, the organisation of the formal schooling system in Senegal (regarding the classification of school types and grades³) is oriented towards the French education and schooling system. There are some exceptions, however, like the duration of primary school, which takes six years to complete in Senegal, one year longer than in France. This can be explained from a language policy perspective.

The challenge of linguistic 'openness' and 'rootedness'

In Senegal children grow up with their respective home languages or national languages (*Diola, Madinka, Pular, Serer, Soninke, Wolof...*)⁴. From the first grade of primary school (*Cours d'Initiation*, absent in France), children are taught French as a subject. Simultaneously, French is also the medium of instruction in all other subjects. Due to its status as the official language, with the acquisition of French come prestige and opportunities of upward social mobility. Those with a good command of French are seen as 'educated'. In contrast to

2 For a description of the particular understanding of laicity in Senegal, see Coly 2020; Dione 2018

3 The formal schooling system features four levels: Préscolaire, Elementaire (Primary School: 6 years), Moyen (4 years), Secondaire (3 years). Schooling is obligatory for 10 years, from 6 to 16 years of age (since 2004). Yet, 36% of children in this age group are actually not in the formal schooling system and count as 'not enrolled'. However, most of these children attend the traditional Daaras (Koran schools) or institutions in other informal education sectors (Universalia 2019).

4 In addition to these six recognised and codified national languages there are about 20 minority languages in Senegal.

many other francophone countries in Africa, however, only a small part of the population in Senegal speaks this sought-after language. Even though French is being the official language and the medium of instruction in schools and universities, it is not the language of family life or of everyday communication in the informal sector. Wolof as the lingua franca (Fall 2013) is therefore often perceived to impede the further spread of the use of French in Senegal. In the Franco-Arabic schools, besides French, Arabic is also a medium of instruction. In some pilot schools the recognised and codified national languages have the status of a medium of instruction and are offered as optional subjects at primary school (Diakité & Ndiaye 2010). The acquisition of other foreign languages is considered more and more important. From the first year of the *collège* (level 2), English is compulsory as the first additional language. From the third year of *collège* or latest in the first year of *lycée* (level 3) various additional foreign languages are available as electives. Amongst them are Spanish, Arabic, German, Italian, Russian, and Portuguese (Mbaye 2018). This linguistically highly heterogenous schooling context is in line with the stated aim of the education system to raise Senegal's students to become 'citizens of the world' and is in accordance with the principle of opening ("*ouverture*").

Yet, the fact that pupils are socialised and taught in school in a language different from their mother tongue clearly shows that the principle of linguistic 'rootedness' ("*enracinement*") through the use of local languages as languages of instruction in school is not considered. Contrary to the strong emphasis in the school law on promoting and anchoring the national languages in the classroom as a means of relating to the lifeworld and one's own realities, culture and history, the linguistic "*ouverture*" (the strong orientation towards the French language and other foreign languages) is seen as an opportunity for social advancement and thus promoted more strongly in school reality. This tension between "opening" and "rooting" also reflects in the historical evolution of the education system and in the different educational reforms.

Reforms of the education system as an ongoing struggle for rootedness

In addition to French as the official language and the language of instruction, the Senegalese government, after the independence (1960), adopted the school system established by the French colonial power with all its components. In the years that followed, the school landscape was marked by many social and political crises and national general strikes, such as the 'events of May 1968', where school actors denounced, among other things, the 'neo-colonialism' and the 'pseudo-independence' of their own government (Gueye

2018). Above all, the inadequacy of the education system was (and still is) highlighted, and the orientation of the school towards Senegalese reality and culture was demanded and continues to be demanded (Mbaye 2018). As a result, a new school law was passed in 1971. This had the particular goal of giving the Senegalese school a new orientation and distinguishing it from the school designed by colonisation for the purpose of the so-called “civilizing mission”. In retrospect, this school law has been criticised for not achieving this goal and for keeping the school strongly oriented toward the French model, without taking into account the reality and infrastructures of the Senegalese school context (Mbaye 2018).

Due to the persistence of these problems in the following ten years after the adoption of the school law from 1971, in 1981 the government convened a special conference called “*Etats Généraux de l’Education et de la Formation*”. Subsequently, a commission for the reform of the education system (CNREF: “*Commission Nationale de la Réforme de l’Education et de la Formation*”) was established with the aim of diagnosing the problems of Senegalese schools and proposing, among other things, possible improvements with regard to the adaptation of educational programs to the socio-cultural realities of the country (Mbaye 2018). The CNREF submitted its conclusions after three years. As with the proposals arising from the ‘events of May 1968’, the CNREF’s conclusions were hardly implemented (Fall 2013). This was followed in 1991 by the adoption of the second *Loi d’orientation de l’Éducation* (Law 91-22 of 16 February 1991). This law stipulates that the mission of the national education is to “prepare the conditions for integral development, assumed by the entire nation”. At the same time, it states that education must take a “particular interest in the economic, social and cultural problems encountered by Senegal in its development efforts” (ibid.: article 1, own translation). With regard to what can be called the process of ‘rooting’ or returning to the source and the living environment, the national education is expected to provide “training that links school to life, theory to practice, teaching to production”. In order to achieve this objective, it is then necessary to adapt “contents, objectives and methods to the specific needs of the pupils, according to their age, stage of education, and the most suitable fields of study for the optimal development of their potential” (ibid.). It is important to underline, however, that this law is enacted in a context of significant international ‘opening’ to respond to the basic learning needs adopted at the World Conference on Education in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990. In addition to the goals of “*enracinement*” (‘rooting’) set out in this *Loi d’orientation de l’Éducation*, Senegal, like many other countries, faces the challenge of internationally adopted education goals and programmes (“*ouverture*”) (see Mbaye 2018; Timera & Diouf 2021).

Ongoing reforms in response to international education goals

The further reforms and changes that have come about in Senegalese education policy are linked to various national and international education forums and conferences. The global action program “*Education for All*”, introduced by UNESCO during the conference in Jomtien (1990) constitutes an important turning point in the reforms of the Senegalese school system. As part of the implementation of the EFA goals, the education program “*Programme Décennal de l’Éducation et de la Formation*” was developed by the Senegalese Government in 1996 (see Senegal 2018a). In the year 2000, this education program was modified and renamed into “*Programme de développement de l’éducation et de la formation*” (PDEF). This change coincides with the adaptation of Senegal’s education policy to the new EFA goals (2000-2015) from the World Education Forum in Dakar (2000). The PDEF aims in particular to expand access to basic education, improve the quality of educational services and learning processes, and make the management of the school system more efficient (Mbaye 2018). Since 2013, the Government of Senegal has introduced the *Plan Sénégal Emergent* (Sénégal 2018b). In order to face the emerging challenges (sustainable development and economic growth), the government has implemented the “*Programme d’Amélioration de la Qualité, de l’Équité et de la Transparence*” (PAQUET 2013-2025). Education and formation are thus considered as human resources capable of producing a competitive economy (Sénégal 2018; Universalia 2019). To take into consideration the engagements made by the Government at continental and international levels (for example, the United Nations 2030 Agenda for sustainable development), the PAQUET program was subsequently revised and renamed “*Programme d’amélioration de la Qualité, de l’Équité et de la Transparence de l’éducation et de la formation*” (PAQUET-EF) (ibid.). Orienting itself to the Global Goals for sustainable development (specifically the SDG 4: Quality Education), the PAQUET-EF (2018-2030) is articulated around three objectives which are quality improvement, equitable access and inclusive and effective management (Senegal 2018).

The challenge of quality and access to education

Senegal’s education sector is regionally and inter-regionally well connected and receives support from international financial institutions⁵ (World Bank, BOAD, USAID...). The state invests 40% of its budget in education policy (see Begue-Aguado 2021: 11). Despite all this, the education system is characterised by low efficiency (Universalia 2019), and, due to the various reforms

5 Since 2006, Senegal has been a member of the “Partenariat mondial pour l’éducation” (Universalia 2019: 8).

and repeated interventions that have been partly contradictory, the schooling landscape resembles a big “experimental field” without its own identity (see amongst others Adick 2013; Mbaye 2018). With these reforms and programs, however, the focus was on quantity – i.e., on increasing general access to education – which impacted negatively on the quality of teaching and learning. The issue of quantity was e.g. addressed by the hiring of education volunteers (“*volontaires*”) for primary school and temporary teachers (“*vacataires*”) for middle and secondary school. The “*vacataires*” and “*volontaires*” are non-tenured teachers, hired for a period of 2 years. This teaching personnel did not have any formal teacher training before starting the job. At the end of the 2 years, they can become contractual teachers. On the one hand, this reduced the need for educators, but on the other hand, it is also identified as one of the reasons for the declining quality of teaching and learning (Niang 2014; Universalia 2019). The lack of a clear educational policy formulated on the basis of the needs and requirements of the local context (specifically with regard to the role and function of languages and the tension of ‘openness’ and ‘rootedness’ shown above) as well as the shortcomings and disruptions in the management of the institutions and structures continue to be identified as fundamental factors that reduce the efficiency of the education system. In addition to the lack of human and material resources at schools and the often overcrowded classrooms, many strikes have contributed to the declining quality of teaching and learning (Mbaye 2018). In the same vein, drop-out rates and class repetitions have been increasing (Universalia 2019).

Conclusion

From the description of the historical development of the Senegalese educational system, it can be seen that educational policy is discontinuous and constantly characterised by national and international educational reforms and trends. The school system is also criticised for still remaining (in terms of its language policy and its structural organisation) strongly oriented to the system introduced by the French colonialists. Contrary to the declarations of democratisation of national education in the sense of giving everyone equal opportunities for success (Senegal 1991: article 5), the education system strongly reproduces already existing inequalities (social, linguistic etc.), is highly selective, performance-oriented and still not adapted to Senegalese realities (Mbaye 2018).

The philosophical ideal postulated by its first president in his literary career (first rootedness and then opening) is certainly a guiding principle in everyday life activities (e.g., clothing, alimentation). Although this is also clearly formulated in the *Loi d'orientation de l'Éducation*, it has not yet materialised in the

educational context. The principle of openness and top-down processes still prevail dominant in educational policy. The rooting, the return to the source and to the “national languages” (Senghor 1993) demanded since the ‘events of May 1968’, through the “*Etats Généraux de l’Education et de la Formation*” (1981), are doomed to failure or have had very timid results.

From the World Declaration on *Education for All* (Jomtien, 1991), through the World Education Forum in Dakar (2000) and Incheon (2015), significant progress has been made towards general access to education. How to improve the quality of teaching and learning, how to establish a productive work climate conducive for education and how to develop efficient and innovative teacher training programs, how to orient the educational system to local needs and realities are the big questions that Senegalese schooling has to face today (Mbaye 2018, 2020). Reconstructive school and teaching research can help to approach these questions via systematic and cooperative research in the Senegalese schooling context, where qualitative research has so far been rare. First steps have been taken (see for example Mbaye 2018, 2020; Schelle 2013; Schelle et al. 2020) and in this edited volume we continue along that road.

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