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15. MODULES TO TRAIN TEACHERS TO TEACH READING AND WRITING IN NIGER

From an Analysis of the Current Situation to a Collaborative Production of Tools for Teacher Education

INTRODUCTION

This contribution is rooted in the project Improving learning outcomes in early grade reading: integration of curriculum, teaching, learning materials, and assessment of the UNESCO’s International Bureau of Education (IBE). We begin by clarifying the underlying objective for this case study: through integration of knowledge stemming from international research, and based on the current situation in Niger, we seek to enable specialists from Niger to develop tools for the training of teachers in reading and writing instruction during the first three school years. The statement of such an objective shows the complexity of the task and the challenges of the approach in this particular context. Admittedly, knowledge on literacy instruction exists, but it is biased in that it is inextricably linked with the cultural context in which it is developed, the languages to which it refers, available resources, goals pursued, and national history, amongst other factors. The educational policy, particularly in regard to language, plays a decisive role, just as does the pedagogical choice that is made.

The starting point of this work was, therefore, the study of the reality in the country. The study, although not exhaustive, was carried out through systematic research designed to produce a strong foundational understanding of the regional context. From a methodological point of view, this study was made up of two components: a study of official documents, and an analysis of teaching practices in classrooms.

The documentary study was focused on the three sources representative of the curriculum of Niger:

- official documents on education and school programmes;
- documents on teacher education;
- textbooks and reading guidelines.

The analysis of the practices in class focused on video recordings of reading lessons in about 10 classes selected for their contrasting characteristics.
In our account of our documentary study, first we present the main results of our analysis of the official documents and the school curricula. We then describe the system for initial training of teachers and supervisors. Next, we present the analysis of the textbooks and the guides for teaching French in bilingual settings. We then describe the results of the analysis of the reading and writing lessons. We conclude with a summary of our main thoughts and impressions, and proposals of tools for teacher education deriving from our research.

**OUR STUDY OF OFFICIAL REGULATIONS AND TEACHER TRAINING: A NEED TO CONCRETIZE AND HARMONIZE INTENTIONS AND REFORMS**

*The General Context and the Documents Analysed*

At the outset, it is important to point out that our study was carried out in a context of political transition. Specifically, following a diagnosis of its educational system between the years 2003 and 2013, Niger embarked on a curriculum reform directed towards the ‘approche par les situations’ [the situational approach to learning theory] (hereafter APS). This reform embodies a strong resolve to recast the basic education curriculum and emphasizes the need to replace the ‘pédagogie par les objectifs’ [the objective-based approach to learning theory] (hereafter PPO) with a new approach. Niger had previously experienced an experimental period, followed by the introduction of the ‘approche par compétences’ [the competence-based approach to learning theory] (hereafter APC). Many difficulties had appeared in implementing this approach, and since the same experiment in Madagascar and in Tunisia produced few convincing positive results (according to the analysis of the Observatoire des Réformes Éducatives; see also Cros et al., 2009), by 2010 Niger decided to adopt the APS. The APS does not completely abandon the importance of competence. Since ‘situation’ is one of the components of the APC, its use becomes essential to develop the ‘competence’ within the new (APS) approach in Niger.

Taking into account preceding reforms, and with an affirmed determination to avoid the mistakes of the previous experiments, the Ministry of Education intends to base this new reform on bilingualism. Henceforth, any initiative or any partnership project, including the current IBE’s project, would have to fit into the mould of this reform, for which approximately 500 teachers have received initial training. Subsequent training is planned, focused on the following two areas: a linguistic training in national language (currently involving five languages: Hausa, Fulfulde, Zarma, Kanuri, and Tamajak) and a pedagogical training on the APS approach and tools.

This important reform aims at raising the quality of education in the core school subjects in accordance with the principles enacted in the ‘Cadre d’Orientation du Curriculum’ [Guiding Framework for the Curriculum] (COC) (see MEN, 2012b) and within the framework of the ‘Programme Sectoriel de l’Éducation et de la Formation 2014–2024’ [Sectoral Programme of Education and Training] (MEN, 2012c).

In addition to the general principles embodied in the above two documents, taking a position in favour of bilingualism is another important principle regarding the teaching of reading and writing. This idea finds its roots in the 1973–74 school year, when Niger decided to experiment with bilingual teaching, that is, national language/French. During this experimentation, there were no official resources regarding teaching curriculum, bilingual content or specific bilingual books for teaching. Starting in 1987, with the development of a new programme of primary education, a framework for bilingual teaching (national language/French) was elaborated. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, reference documents to accompany teaching in national languages were created and many texts for bilingual classes published (see, in particular, République du Niger and SOUTEBA, 2009; for detailed analyses, see Mallam Garba, 2004; and Hamidou, Mijinguini, Amani, and Salley, 2010; for the history of bilingual teaching in Niger, see Seydou Hanafiou, 2015).

Given this complex and changing context, we judged that it was necessary to widen our analysis by including other documents on curriculum in Niger, as used by education officials or teachers, stamped by an official seal, and/or quoted by our interlocutors. These are the documents that we looked at, which underlie and support our analyses and which we retained for closer study:


The analysis of the above-mentioned documents confirms, at least partially (this point will be returned to later), the orientation of Niger towards the conception of teaching on the basis of the APS. These documents recommend a sociocultural anchoring of teaching. The following quotation of the COC focuses on the need for prioritizing situations and activities that are meaningful for learners:

Learning activities are no longer oriented towards a set of integrated knowledge necessary for the resolution of problems in school and of everyday life ... by giving sense to the contents of the training of the pupils: competencies are focused upon only in situations meaningful for the child and not used as artificial structures serving as a pretext for the recitation of memorized knowledge. (MEN, 2012b, pp. 6–7)

The PEP indicates that the programmes have above all the goal of being at the same time utilitarian and educational. The PEP specifies the sense given to ‘utilitarian’: ‘by utilitarian, it should be understood that more and more our teaching has to influence behaviours and not just build elements of theoretical knowledge’, because
"when leaving the elementary school, the child must be able ... to communicate, get information, know how to use devices, tools, but to also make artisanal, traditional products" (MEN, 2013a, p. 7).

Official Instructions and Reading-Writing

With regard to teaching reading and writing, the official instructions in the PEP recommend a preparation of 'the child to the adult reading', which is closely related to a communicative purpose. Not only must the child feel that 'to read is to decipher signs that are charged with thoughts that translate life' (MEN, 2013a, p. 12), but even more, teachers must acknowledge that 'for many of these pupils, writing is not a familiar reality. Therefore, [the teacher] will not fail to use all means to encourage and develop the desire to read' (p. 13). In light of what precedes, one can conclude that in addition to the concern with communication, there is an intent that this teaching be anchored in a general culture of writing.

Generally, the official instructions recommend expanded production of teaching materials. They strongly emphasize that besides literature, teaching should also take into account "authentic documents (identity cards, ads and newspaper announcements, ordnances, invoices, telegrams, cooking recipes, etc.)" (MEN, 2013a, p. 10). The fact that reading lessons are frequently thematic allows, and even forces, the creation of ways to teach with diversified text genres, directed towards communicative purposes, and this approach supports the students' entering into the culture of writing.

On the other hand, this push for diversification, highlighted in the discussion on teaching materials, does not apply when it comes to the modes of reading (UNESCO IBE, 2017). Indeed, the official texts recommend putting 'a special emphasis' on silent reading. Very often associated with a technique called 'Procédé de La Martinière' (hereafter PLM), silent reading occupies a central place both in the official instructions and in the textbooks, ignoring what is said in the teachers' guides. The PEP makes silent reading 'one of the main goals of the elementary school [which is] to prepare a child to read like an adult'. To strengthen this objective, the PEP answers the question 'What is reading?': "It is the act of grasping meaning by the eyes, i.e., to discover, organize, and interpret the meaning of what is written" (MEN, 2013a, p. 12). The 'Teacher's Guide - Reading and Writing' says, 'A good reader is somebody who reads quickly, drawing the maximum information from his reading and retaining what is read. It is rare to read aloud in life. Most of the time, reading remains a silent and individual activity' (MEN, 2013b, p. 2). Our analysis of the practice of the 10 teachers observed in Niger tends to show, however, that the use of silent reading does not help pupils to discover, independently, the meaning of the texts. The practice of reading aloud is typically confined to individual sentences and metaphors (i.e., isolated replies from the characters displayed in the textbook), without any specific link to its context meaning. When text comprehension is encouraged, it leads to general discussions which never highlight the fact that any text conveys a message that needs to be understood.

The textbook for reading in the first grade (MEN, 2009) seems to relegate reading aloud to the service of dictation, namely 'Reading aloud is, however, necessary during learning for the control of dictation'. The textbook goes further: 'The reading aloud, slow and linear, slows down the movement of the eyes enormously. This deceleration quickly becomes an obstacle: the eyes only require to run on the page in search of graphic information but the pronunciation of each word delays them and paralyses them' (p. 5).

As discussed in previous chapters in this book, introducing activities around reading aloud supports the development of the ability to understand texts in their diversity. With this principle in mind, it seems important to reinforce the two methods of reading (silent reading and reading aloud) by proposing various texts which are short, simple, and adapted to the level of the pupils concerned.

Teacher Training: Some Outstanding Elements

The discrepancy between actual teacher training and the policy articulated in official guidelines and instructions is stark and must be noted. This discrepancy is highlighted by looking at selected documents (in particular MEPA, 2011a, 2011b; MEPA, 2012a) and especially by way of the interviews carried out with teacher supervisors and the directors of some Ecoles Nationales d'Instituteurs [National Teachers' Schools] (ENI).

With respect to the initial training of teachers, the reading training module proposed by the ENI shows a certain endorsement of curricular alignment. However, it is important to underline a temporal gap in the circulation of information between the authorities of the Ministry of Education and the ENI. In 2003 the Programme Décentral de Développement de l'Éducation [10-Year Education Development Plan] (MEPA, 2012a) was implemented, which defines the 'main guidelines for reactivating the curriculum of Niger'. Later, in 2012, the Council of Ministers adopted the 'Education Policy Letter for the Decade 2013-2020', which recommends the revision of the techniques of initial training in the teacher training schools' (MEPA, 2012b, p. 6).

According to our analysis, the study programmes of the ENI of October 2008, which were re-examined in June 2011 (MEPA, 2011b), have not yet been updated as part of the initial teacher training. The use of the document 'Module de formation des enseignants des Écoles Normales d'Instituteurs en didactique du français' [Module for training supervisors of teacher training colleges in didactic principles for teaching French] (MEPA, 2009) still recommends didactic methods based on APC. The guidelines in the new 'Programme de Formation pour les Enseignants des Écoles Normales d'Instituteurs' (MEPA, 2011b) are based on the APC (now obsolete), whereas the newer COE refers to APE. An even more surprising fact has been found: focus-group interviews (with supervisors of the ENI of the Dosso region and with student teachers) reveal that in several schools of internship, the approach still rests on the APC's predecessor, PPO.

With respect to continuing education for teachers, some results from the analysis deserve comment. The ongoing administrative organization is integral to
the circulation of new information, ideas, and instructions from the smallest to the greatest administrative unit. However, upon review of all actors who intervene in this structure of continuing education, the absence of the supervisors of the ENI was noted. It is believed that it would be important to incorporate them, even in advanced stages of the professional careers of the teachers. Since directors, advisors, and inspectors evaluate teachers, the presence of ENI supervisors could strengthen the training ideas on which continuing education is based (but which teachers are sometimes reluctant to adopt in the face of people in charge of evaluating them). A collaboration between teacher educators and persons in charge of internships would enhance the understanding of the link between experiential knowledge and knowledge resulting from research.

With respect to teacher educators, it is important to stress that their own training should be considered in this study as it has an impact on teaching activity. Even if the link is not direct, the fact that the supervisors of the ENI have never been trained as teachers deserves attention. Here it is suggested that the system should emphasize the importance of their training. This could be done by encouraging them to prepare master’s degrees on didactics or pedagogy, by increasing the number of opportunities for them to train each other, by creating research teams, and by encouraging educators of teachers to participate in scientific congresses, symposia, conferences, and so on.

Another problem is the fact that although supervisors are not trained in bilingual teaching, many are asked to supervise bilingual student teachers. Mismatch with regard to trainers and the content of the teaching should be addressed.

OUR STUDY OF TEXTBOOKS AND GUIDES FOR READING: (ABOUT THE DIFFICULTY OF) GIVING AN ACCOUNT OF A COMPLEX REALITY IN PERPETUAL CHANGE

The research analysis began by pointing out that the textbooks the research team reviewed are bound to be replaced by ‘new textbooks’. Accordingly, the research was limited to a synthesis of the main ideas on selected topics, in order to give an account of a complex and perpetually changing reality. The framework used to carry out this analysis is developed in detail in Aebey Daghé et al. (2015); see also the framework of analysis presented in Goioux (2016).

Bilingual Textbooks: Interesting Openings

The majority of the textbooks in bilingual teaching, and/or in national languages, result from international partnerships and NGOs, which propose approaches that seem complementary. All these approaches do, indeed, agree on the use of local language as an instrument for improving pupils’ reading and writing skills. Yet, their implementation and their operational strategies diverge. Some are devoted to teaching reading and writing in monolingual schools, with a later transfer to French. This is particularly the case with NECS and CONCERN projects. These projects necessitate extra efforts in teacher training: since teachers often lack proficiency in writing the local language, they will be offered substantial training in local languages. There are also multilingual schools. These correspond to the ELAN (École et Langues Nationales en Afrique [School and National Languages in Africa]) schools, which fit well with the recent programmes based on the APS.

There are plans to incorporate the benefits of each of the innovations that the partner projects display in the field of reading and writing. As an example, our field interviews show that, despite its weaknesses, the experimental NECS approach to ‘Rapid Reading Learning’, which is a small component of the vast NECS programme, should also underlie curriculum reform. This complementary module is not supposed to call into question the APS; its role is to add value to the curriculum reform, in particular in the 500 schools whose teachers will also be trained in APS approaches. For the transformation of these NECS schools into APS compatible schools, the training of the concerned teachers will go beyond the didactics of teaching reading to give them the tools to teach all subjects (except French) in a national language.

As noted through the above example, the main idea to be implemented is to use national languages during the first three years of primary school as the dominant instructional language, with the corollary objective of gradually replacing these national languages from the second cycle and beyond, in the role of instructional language (i.e., a language used by teachers to teach).

For the bilingual schools using APS handbooks (developed in the aforementioned five national languages, plus literary Arabic), which were analysed by the research team’s local expert (Seydou Hamidou Hanafiou, researcher at the University of Niamey), lessons are constructed following an approach which goes from sentence to word, then to syllable, and finally to letters. By means of substitution exercises, new words are built. Little place is given to the invention of words, and no more than one sound is studied at a time. Students start with the lower-case letters in the first year, and approach capital letters later on. The progression is thus slow, and little emphasis is placed on meaningful units like texts, even short ones.

Textbooks to Learn How to Read in French: Focus on Code; Little Work on Comprehension

In relation to teaching reading in French, we shall focus on the series of textbooks entitled ‘Pour lire et pour écrire’ [To Read and Write], known as third-generation textbooks, because they were in use at the time of data collection. The foreword of each textbook specifies that their contents meet the needs of the new programmes and regulations of the PEP, which gives a precise idea of the degree of curricular alignment that is desired. They are analysed as to the following three categories: teaching of code; the culture of writing; and text comprehension.
For code teaching, the textbooks set out a series of seven activities:

- to identify the sound by hearing it;
- to discover the letter representing the sound in various activities;
- to read the worked parts (i.e., the parts or sentences displaying the sounds that have just been practised) and the text below;
- to read (silently) the page on the right-hand side in order to locate the words containing the studied sound;
- to propose exercises to consolidate what has been learned;
- to read the two pages of the textbook aloud;
- to consolidate what has been learned.

These lessons are connected in a mechanical way, helped by the identical layout and the linear and consistent way in which the textbook is organized. It is not recommended that teachers stray from the proposed framework; however, they are encouraged to exploit elements of the sociocultural context when the studied sound lends itself to do so. Teachers, because of a lack of guidance, stick closely to the linear and mechanical sequence of the lessons, as was demonstrated by the classroom data we collected.5

In the above-mentioned lessons, the textbooks aim to train pupils ‘to recognize the studied letter’. The words are broken up in order to make it possible for the child to discriminate the letters’. It is worth noting that the section of the textbook entitled ‘You write’ offers a different type of exercise: writing other words with different spelling but containing the same sound (homophones). Therefore, as far as possible, the textbook proposes words with letters and combinations of letters with the same sound. The goal is to train pupils to be used to recognizing the difference between the sound code of the spoken language and the graphic code of the written language’. The teaching thus starts with the discovery and the vocalization of the words, before work starts on the phoneme-grapheme correspondence. This graphophonemic correspondence becomes much more complex as time goes on.

For instance, the textbook ‘Pour lire et pour écrire’ for the first grade (MEN, 2009) recommends beginning reading in January with two sounds each week. At that point in the year, there are only simple sounds representing vowels and consonants [i/ë/ k/ë/d], whereas in May, the sounds suggested represent a majority of nasal vowels, nasal consonants, and diphthongs [i/ë/ S/saw/], followed in June by all articulated consonants [bl, pl, fl, cl, gl, rt, etc.]. For the progression between first and second grade, for simple consonants, work starts with the use of one or two letters corresponding to the same sound (the second letter being very often the double consonant). The study progresses systematically towards the end of the first grade into two letters, and from the second grade into a minimum of two letters for the same sound. Such is the case for the sound /f/ for which the textbook for the first grade proposes only one spelling (F), but which evolves in the textbook for the second grade (MEN, 2013) into three spellings (f-F-fF-ph) of the same sound. According to the authors of the textbook, the selection of the sounds takes into account the difficulties related to the pronunciation of the sound and the different ways of representing it. The selection also takes into account ‘the frequency of each appearance of sounds and graphemes in the oral or written communications’. From what precedes, we note that these textbooks both foster the learning process of the pupils and allow them to develop skills to discover correspondences between sounds of the language and spellings, thus meeting the need expressed in the official instructions for students to develop phonemic awareness.

With regard to the culture of writing, the textbooks authors clearly seek to enlighten students about the many uses of writing, which are demonstrated by pictures and illustrations. Indeed, each page offers illustrations of scenes drawn from the sociocultural environment of learners and diverse images that represent authentic documents (for example, in the first grade textbook, the identity card). The same desire to enlighten students about written culture can be observed in the page layout and in the size and type of text. The authors justify their choice of page layout as follows: ‘Reading is not only deciphering words, it is also being able to understand a page layout: reading columns as in the newspapers, double-entry tables in mathematics, diagrams and legends in the sciences. These various presentations:

- prepare pupils to understand the significant role of the way the signs are presented, on a page or a map, a poster or a screen;
- avoid reducing the act of reading to merely approaching literary texts;
- open the door, ultimately, to the other school subjects’.

The textbook presentation thus makes it possible to discover some aspects of the culture of writing. The efforts made in these textbooks should be echoed in the teachers’ guides. Additionally, the culture of writing should be further present in the classroom, with displays of texts written by the pupils, texts coming from everyday life, newspapers, books, and so on. To complement the textbooks, training should be made available to teachers on ways to encourage a culture of writing for their students.

With regard to comprehending texts, the analysis shows that the exercises contained in the textbooks aim mainly to teach silent reading. There are no specific exercises to develop skills of text comprehension, as though understanding a written text is implicit and does not need to be taught. Indeed, with the aid of the illustrations, the silent reading is intended to make pupils quickly understand the main information. For that, various strategies are frequently used to ascertain from pupils their level of text comprehension, in particular by using the PLM. The exercises and the recommended activities are not oriented appropriately to teach students to absorb the content and the communicative aim of the proposed texts.

A frequently used activity in the textbooks is identification, by pupils, of words that contain the studied sounds. The first grade textbooks do not offer sufficiently complex texts, which, according to the analysis, would allow interesting work on text comprehension. Generally, only two phylacteries that represent two sentences are offered, and unfortunately, these texts do not lead to academically rigorous comprehension practice. In the second grade textbooks, despite the presence of texts, there is no suggestion of activities directed towards text comprehension.
Identification is emphasized, in that pupils have to search for specific words or passages in the texts, or they have to find letters or groups of letters representing the studied sounds. The only activity that questions the content is the ‘true or false’ exercise. This exercise offers various sentences intended to give an account of the text, and pupils must answer ‘true or false’ in order to test their degree of comprehension. The overall meanings of the texts are not, however, systematically studied, nor are they presented in a way that brings out the communicative purpose of which the PEP speaks (MEPA, 2013a).

In summary, there are text-specific activities, but they test the ability to identify only certain elements or to understand only isolated fragments, such as those that ‘true or false’ exercises test. The texts are focused on the mechanical functioning of a text, following the example of the series of exercises first mentioned in this section, exercises directed towards deciphering rather than text comprehension, which is a key component of reading.

Moreover, the texts do not truly represent the variety of existing text genres. They are artificial products whose communicative ends are not clear at all.

To Go Further

Our suggestions for further improvements include the following:

- Official regulations recommend varying text genres. It is necessary to reinforce this aspect in the textbooks, but also to encourage the use of varied aids for reading in the classroom that reinforce engagement with the world of writing.
- These texts should give students opportunities to work systematically on text comprehension to counterbalance the great importance given, rightly, to the construction of the code.
- As we saw, reading aloud should also play a more important role. The place granted to the PLM, for obvious reasons, seems to relegate reading aloud to a secondary status.
- When activities are proposed to work on a ‘sound’, the guide for the teacher should encourage more flexibility concerning the sequence of the lessons. For example, the multilingual context gives the opportunity to make comparisons between the first and second languages. Above all, work on texts produced by pupils (for instance those dictated to the teacher), or coming from outside of the school context, or read by the teacher should be integrated into the teaching of reading.

Analysis of Reading and Writing Lessons

To build a knowledge of reading and writing instruction in the first classes in Niger, reading and writing was observed in 10 lessons in nine schools, according to the following distribution:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area/languages spoken</th>
<th>Type of class</th>
<th>Grade/no. of pupils in the class</th>
<th>No. of pupils in the school</th>
<th>No. of classes in the school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban/Hausa, Fulfulde</td>
<td>NECS bilingual</td>
<td>1st/55</td>
<td>443 (209 girls; 234 boys)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural/Hausa, Fulfulde</td>
<td>ELAN bilingual</td>
<td>1st/25</td>
<td>179 (83 girls; 96 boys)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural/Hausa, Zarma,</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>1st/31</td>
<td>367 (172 girls; 195 boys)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfulde</td>
<td>bilingual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural/Zarma</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>3rd/29</td>
<td>392 (179 girls; 213 boys)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfulde</td>
<td>French</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural/Hausa, Zarma,</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>1st/40</td>
<td>503 (253 girls; 250 boys)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hausa</td>
<td>bilingual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban/Zarma, Hausa,</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>2nd/26</td>
<td>691 (353 girls; 338 boys)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hausa</td>
<td>bilingual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>3rd/54</td>
<td>942 (471 girls; 471 boys)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfulde</td>
<td>French</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is apparent that Hausa is the language spoken most commonly. In seven out of 10 classes, the reading lessons were given in students’ mother tongue. The lessons were transcribed and translated for the analysis. The analysis of the lessons was carried out according to the methodology described in Schneuwly and Dolz (2009): after the integral transcription and translation, a synopsis of the lessons was established; this allowed the defining of the macrostructure of the lessons. Through this preliminary analysis, four essential aspects were looked at: (1) teaching of the code; (2) text comprehension; (3) presence of the culture of writing; and (4) teaching of formal oral language.

First Grade: Nearly Exclusive Work on the Code; Absence of Text Comprehension

Overall, in first grade classes, there is an intense concentration on teaching the mastery of the code. Varied and subtle techniques are used to ensure that pupils build a strong foundational knowledge necessary to break words down initially.
into syllables, then into sounds. This understanding allows students to identify the studied sounds and later to form syllables. The same applies to exercises set up to enable students to form strong understanding of letter-sound correspondence and to recognize these letters in various forms (in particular lower case and capital, script and cursive). Occasionally, students are instructed to recognize words in a text, and even to observe effects of meaning through the displacement of syllables.

Students seldom write; if they do, it is only to reproduce letters on the blackboard, or sometimes on slates. Pupils write words infrequently and never write or copy sentences. They never spontaneously produce pieces of writing.

This strong focus on code, also facilitated by the fact that the code is transparent in national languages, goes hand in hand with a quasi-lack of teaching text comprehension. With some rare exceptions, reading is limited to deciphering, mapping between sounds and letters, and recognizing syllables and words. Deciphering can be done in the form of repeated reading of sentences, which one can suppose also implies comprehension. Unfortunately, students are not encouraged to discover independently, and spontaneously, the meaning of a text.

Consequently, the culture of writing is essentially limited to the code study. It arises for the pupils in the form of correspondence between letters and sounds, syllables and words, as a kind of puzzle, but almost never as a complete text that conveys meaning. A notable exception is present in an ELAN class, during which the teacher shows the pupils a book on flies and their danger, displays each page, and then reads it to the whole class. This ‘guided reading’ is followed by a recapitulation of what was seen by these pupils. This activity is performed twice; in other words, text comprehension is systematically taught. Then a more general discussion develops on what attracts the flies and on what occurs if one eats food on which there were flies, and the lesson shifts towards hygiene, for which the text is only a pretext. It is noted that the teacher does not return to the guided reading activity.

Second Grade: Revision of the Code and Recognition of Word ‘With the Eyes’; Absence of Text Comprehension and Writing

The two fieldwork sequences collected in second grade classes show a phase of transition. On the one hand, one of the teachers still works on the recognition of letters and sounds. Yet, contrary to the instruction applicable to first grade, the teacher proceeds as if the principle of the correspondence (sounds-letters) is taken for granted: the focus is rather on review. The emphasis is placed on the recognition of words, but also on the two types of writing: cursive and script. On the other hand, the other teacher works with reading ‘with the eyes’ and expressive reading. Additionally, there is an exercise on word recognition in the text that, according to our analysis, is at the code study level. Indeed, it should be noted that even if reading ‘with the eyes’, that is, silent reading, is declared as being favourable to work on text comprehension, none of the activities carried out confirm this. As texts do not seem to be commonly used in lessons, this implies that students are not encouraged to learn to understand and comprehend texts. Similarly, it is noted that in first and second grade little attention is devoted to training in writing and text production. Creative writing or text production in the first grades of primary school, when children have not yet mastered autonomous writing, could be achieved by dictating a text to an adult. Not only would this increase access to the culture of writing, but it would also contribute to the communicative orientation recommended by official texts.

Third Grade: Recognition of Word; Reading Aloud; Lack of Comprehension

In third grade lessons, the texts presented in textbooks constitute the core of reading teaching. These texts function as pretexts for all types of activities, for identification of words, sounds, and letters and also for location of sentences. The most important task, contrary to official instructions, is reading aloud. Initially, the teachers read the text, as an example; then several pupils successively read the same short text. Text comprehension, however, is not explicitly worked on, for instance with questions, comments or thoughts about the text. Above all, the objective seems to be the one of ‘deciphering’. The text is accordingly not a unit of meaning nor a unit of communication here, and therefore, it should be noted, text comprehension is not yet central in third grade classes.

To Go Further

Our suggestions for further improvements include the following:

- Instead of attention’s being given almost exclusively to the mastery of code, attention could also be given to working with a variety of texts to engage with the real sense of reading, which is not deciphering but text comprehension.
- The culture of writing should be more evident in the classroom: books and texts of different types should be present, and student written texts must be on the wall.
- It is paramount to devote significant time to writing in various forms: text copy, production of short sentences, word exchange among pupils, and so on. This activity facilitates expanded access to the alphabetic principle. One could also produce written texts by way of dictation to an adult.
- More flexible and more varied teaching must be carried out on phonological consciousness, by various techniques, which must go beyond the ones practiced in the classes, which are often centred on isolating a sound from a word or a small sentence.
- Reading aloud is an interesting way to give access to writing, but it should be more varied in its functions: presentation of a text to others; reading of a text by several pupils in front of the class; and so on.
- Progression from one grade to another should be more consistent: reading of texts should be present in the first grade.
- Text comprehension should be the systematic object of class teaching, with texts read in the textbooks, but also with texts read or recounted from other books that are present in the classroom, or even written by pupils.

**MODULES FOR TEACHER EDUCATION IN TEACHING READING AND WRITING**

The recommendations that were made following the analysis of regulations, textbooks and practices made it possible for a team of six specialists in Niger, chosen by the authorities, to develop modules for the initial and continuing education of teachers in reading and writing in the first three grades of school. This work was undertaken in close collaboration with the team from the University of Geneva, which carried out the research project described above. This material is based on a conceptualization of literacy instruction. It is resolutely directed towards beginning education in a national language (in this context, the five most prominent languages) before gradually moving to the official language, French. This material takes the following form:

- a guide for supervisors: it contains a theoretical part, which gives the basis of the approach suggested, and a practical part, which helps the supervisors to carry out the modules proposed for teacher training during the year (planning lessons in time; systematic progression from modules for first and second grade to the modules for the third grade);
- two modules of teacher training: they outline a series of lessons for training student teachers that the supervisors can implement.

The modules are divided into three parts. Each corresponds to a general objective that student teachers must achieve:

- to be able to teach oral expression through varied types of texts: role-play games, dialogues, debates, narratives;
- to be able to teach the code in the first three grades of primary school;
- to be able to teach (a) reading-with-comprehension of texts and (b) production of various kinds of text.

Each of these general objectives is subdivided into specific objectives. We take as an example the objectives laid out regarding the teaching of the code in the first and second grades in the national language:

- to be able to teach how to identify the letters of the alphabet (discovery of the letters);
- to be able to teach how to identify a sound in the national (first) language (systematic training of the code – stage 1);
- to be able to teach the letters which make the sound (systematic training of the code – stage 2).

- to be able to teach how to identify (decode and encode) the letters which make the sound in the syllables and the words (systematic training of the code – stage 3);
- to be able to teach how to read syllables, words, sentences, and small texts with the known letters (systematic training of the code – stage 4);
- to be able to teach how to write letters, syllables, words, and sentences with the known letters (systematic training of the code – stage 5);
- to be able to teach how to recognize words directly.

For each specific objective, corresponding closely to a lesson, precise guidelines as to the intermediate objectives, the activities and exercises to be carried with the students and teachers and necessary equipment are provided. Each specific objective explicitly refers to a subchapter of the guide for the supervisors, who thus play a significant role in locating the various objectives in a more general design of the teaching of reading and writing.

**NOTES**

1. For an official definition of the APS, see COC (MEN, 2012); for an operationalization of the concept, Charland and Cyr (2013). Elements of the theoretical base can be found in Ettafebi, Joanneau, and Opretti (2008).
2. The PLM is a technique with the use of the slaves which is employed to teach mental arithmetic collectively. The approach is also used in certain classes in Niger and Burkina Faso to evaluate the correct orthography of the words learned during reading and to answer questions about text comprehension after silent reading. Each pupil has in front of him or her a slate and chalk. The teacher gives the instructions aloud (for example to write a word), then gives the signal to write (by a blow of a rod on the desk). The pupils start to write; the teacher once again gives a blow of the rod to signify that time is over. The pupils raise their slates, and the teacher passes along the rows to check the answers on slates. He or she announces any errors. The correction is done collectively: a pupil will write the word on the blackboard and may be helped by comments of other pupils or the teacher. The pupils who made an error correct it individually on their slates.
3. Administratively, the smallest unit of training is organized in the school and is called 'Mini Cellule d'Animation Pédagogique' [Mini-cell for pedagogical animation] (or Mini-CAPE). Then, there is the CAPE (cell of pedagogical animation) which is the pedagogical sector above it. Higher, one finds by ascending order, the Pedagogical Sector which is controlled by a pedagogical adviser ('commissaire pédagogique'), then the pedagogical inspection, which is directed by an inspector and his assistant. A CAPE consists of 10 to 40 teachers of neighbouring schools and a pedagogical sector of four CAPE in general. The standard of framing is: 144 teachers for a pedagogical adviser and 300 for an inspector.
4. The Project of USAID entitled 'Niger Education and Community Strengthening in English' intervenes in 150 localities. The Concern project is implemented by OCN Concern International in 33 schools in Niger.
5. The lessons we observed confirm that teachers follow the sequence. We can in addition point out that the analysis of the material used in the initial training of student teachers reveals that the materials stress the importance of granting absolute respect to following the stages of the textbook. Much time is devoted to checking that the sequence of lessons is followed, and the approach recommended by the textbook is adhered to.

**REFERENCES**

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16. SENEGAL

Improving Training to Bolster Reading and Writing Skills in French as a Second Language

INTRODUCTION

This chapter, focusing on teaching reading and writing in Senegal, is part of the Improving learning outcomes in early grade reading: Integration of curriculum, teaching, learning materials, and assessment of the UNESCO IBE project.

As in Burkina Faso and Niger, Senegal is marked by the widespread practice of multilingualism, which characterizes most families. But following decolonization, French was chosen not only as an official language, but also as the language of instruction. After Senegal became independent in 1960, the various educational reform movements that guided the choice of the language of instruction did not always ascribe the same status to French and to the national languages.1 Thus, in the 1970s, French was defined as the official language of instruction, whereas teaching in the languages spoken by students remained little developed. In the early 1990s, with the aim of providing universal enrolment for children and combating adult illiteracy, the Education Orientation Law No. 91-22 instituted instruction in national languages (and of national languages) alongside instruction in French. Bilingual education projects—primarily École et langues nationales (ELAN) and Associates in Research & Education for Development (ARED)—were piloted in classes in the early grades of primary school.

A number of experiences were accumulated, tipping the debate in favour of bilingual education and in favour of publishing teaching materials in several languages; yet, French essentially remained the language of instruction. This choice had a bearing on students’ academic performance and represented a real challenge for the teaching of French and reading, as French was seldom spoken in everyday family life. Evaluations showed that at the end of Grade 2, little more than one third of the students tested knew how to give meaning to what they were writing or reading (Genet, 2014). However, improvements have been made in recent years. Enrolment equality between girls and boys has been achieved, thanks to compulsory schooling from ages six to 16, introduced by law in 2004, as well as to the opening of Franco-Arabic schools. Admittedly, not all targets have been met, particularly with regard to student outcomes and enrolment levels, but the completion rate of primary
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