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Learning through National Languages: the Case of the Senegalese Educational System

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Abstract

This study examines the use of national languages in the Senegalese educational system, highlighting their role in promoting inclusive and quality learning. The Senegalese Government, through its sectoral program PAQUET/EF, aims to ensure quality basic education for all by 2030. Despite significant efforts, challenges in pedagogical management and teaching quality persist. Research shows that instruction in the mother tongue significantly improves student learning outcomes, particularly in bilingual school settings. Students develop reading and writing skills more effectively when they can connect sounds and symbols to words in their mother tongue. UNESCO emphasizes that mother tongue-based education fosters social inclusion, cultural preservation, and sustainable development, while also enhancing academic performance and student engagement. In Senegal, programs such as “Ndaw Wune” and the forthcoming generalization of primary education in national languages demonstrate early success, with notable improvements in reading and mathematics. However, several limitations exist, including linguistic diversity, insufficient teaching materials, inadequate teacher training, abrupt transitions to French, and limited budgetary support. This study proposes practical recommendations to address these challenges, such as inclusive language planning, enhanced production of pedagogical materials, teacher training, gradual introduction of French, community sensitization, sustainable financing, and systematic monitoring and evaluation. Overall, this research underscores the critical importance of mother tongue instruction in fostering equitable, high-quality, and culturally responsive education, and provides actionable strategies to strengthen its implementation in Senegal.

Keywords: Mother Tongue Education, Bilingual Education, Inclusive Learning, Senegal, National Languages