The Road to Perpetual Stagnation: An Overview of the Senegalese Education System Since 1960

THESIS

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By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the different ways in which the Senegalese education system has been epistemologically limited and has had difficulties changing the colonial education system, put in place by France, despite attempts to provide major educational reforms.

The thesis starts with a brief overview of the post independence Senegalese education system, refers to major shifts and then provides a chronological overview of the literature trends for each decade since 1960s and examines the ways in which thoughts on culture and identity have shaped the educational system. Finally, the piece ends with an analysis of the contemporary education system, its successes along with its failures and concludes that a metissage of formal (or western) education and local Senegalese knowledge could be an excellent way to provide a meaningful education to the modern Senegalese youth.
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INTRODUCTION

The Education For All (EFA) movement, launched in 1990 and coordinated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO), is a program that aims to provide a basic education system to all disadvantaged individuals around the world. According to UNESCO the goals set for the project could statistically reduce inequality and ensure that children, youths and adults live healthy and productive lives. The EFA goals are broad and seem to be created so that the implementation process could fit any particular context. Words similar to “equality”, “development”, “elimination of poverty”, “active citizens” are prevalent in the Dakar for Framework Action document\(^1\) (UNESCO). The involved partners of the movement strongly believe that developing countries can only be up to par with the rest of the world if their citizens acquire“[b]asic learning needs . . . comprise…essential learning tools . . . and the basic learning content”(UNESCO). Since the inception of the movement in the 1990s these outcomes have been difficult to achieve, particularly in Africa south of the Sahara. The EFA’s and the Framework’s goals have not been met because of the manner in which the ideal school is imagined. The way the formal and the informal education system are

\(^1\) The Dakar Framework for Action is a document, drafted for the 2000 EFA meeting, that vows commitment to action to ensure EFA goals’ sustainability in every society.
perceived leads to a Eurocentric understanding of the ideal education system which does not work in Senegal.

The postcolonial era has created a dichotomy in the educational setting in Africa. Western education is often labeled as “formal education” and non-western education as “informal”. Framing educational systems in such a way, some scholars explain, “can oversimplify discussions of key issues, occlude important similarities” (Diouf, W., Sheckley, B. G., & Kehrhahn, M., 2000: 33) and become problematic in attempting to support and improve an education system using the resources available. Such a dichotomy can make the difference between getting an education for practical purposes or simply acquiring knowledge that will never be utilized.

In Senegal, being academically successful is extremely important to citizens who have the opportunity to attend school. Education gives people a sense of pride and recognition. The dilemma, however, rests on the fact that, while Senegal has succeeded in expanding access to education since independence, the quality of it has deteriorated. According to the *Programme decennal de l’education et de la formation*\(^2\) (PDEF), because of exam failure, only a small percentage of students continue on to higher education. Moreover, more than half of children who start primary schools do not make it past the sixth grade (PDEF). Some argue (Sylla, 1993; Brock-Utne, 2001) that these high dropout and failure rates come from policies that deliberately limit access to “the brightest” or to those who can afford tutoring. There are, however, issues that supersede this argument.

\(^2\) A 10 year program on Education and training based on the goals of EFA.
In the case of Senegal, there are two main issues that surround the lack of educational success: the ways vocational schools are perceived and the language of instruction in the classroom. There seems to be little sense of practicality in the twenty-first century Senegalese educational system regarding the country’s need. Indeed, although the country’s economy is largely based on agriculture there is a shortage of vocational schools (Daun, 2005). Rural citizens acquire their agricultural skills through non-formal vocational training but those skills are not given merit in mainstream education because of their perceived lack of modernity and progress (Diame, 2011).

Meanwhile, the desire to keep French as a medium of instruction after independence has prevented the majority of the Senegalese population from acquiring a quality education that can provide them with the tools to contribute to their society. This language policy in education is of vital importance in Senegal because it not only creates a wider inequality gap but it also creates a false dichotomy by representing French as a language of power, and economic and social mobility and presents other Senegalese languages as second class.

As globalization and new technologies transform the world, western education is taking on the role of a “universalizing” education system without taking into consideration the citizens of developing countries (Broadfoot, 2000). This thesis looks at the ways in which the lack of vocational schools and the continuation of elitist language policies have hindered the educational system of modern Senegal. It also examines the
“Cultural Politics of Education”³ (Rizvi and Lingard, 2006) in post-modern Senegal, through a critical overview of various African and non-African authors before finally assessing the contemporary state of education in Senegal, and the ways in which it limits its modern citizens.

³ Rizvi and Lingard define “Cultural Politics of Education” as a way to understand issues of identity, representation, culture and, knowledge and power through the investigation of Edward Said’s analysis of colonial and neocolonial discourses.
A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE SENEGALESE EDUCATION SYSTEM SINCE INDEPENDENCE

During the first decade following Senegal’s independence in 1960, access to education was largely limited to and set up for the children of the Senegalese elite. The proliferation of basic education was one of first president, Leopold Sedar Senghor’s stated goals but it seems that in reality the priority was to train the first administrators, civil servants and leaders of the new republic (Ndiaye, 2010). In 1971, in a presidential executive order, Senghor made his position clear regarding the usage of French as the language of instruction in the school:

_Tout d’abord remplacer le français, comme langue officielle et comme langue d'enseignement, n'est ni souhaitable, ni possible. Si du moins nous ne voulons pas être en retard au rendez-vous de l'An 2000. En effet, il nous faudrait au moins deux générations pour faire d'une de nos langues nationales, un instrument efficace pour l'enseignement des sciences et des techniques. Et à condition que nous en eussions les moyens financiers et humains, c'est-à-dire des savants et des techniciens assez qualifiés. Or, en cette seconde moitié du XXe siècle, quarante à cinquante ans de retard, cela ne se rattape pas._

(Senghor as quoted in Qotb, 2009:79)

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4 “First of all replacing French as the official language and as the language of instruction is neither desirable nor possible. If indeed, we do not want to be behind by the year 2000. In fact, we would need at
Senghor was clearly determined to establish French as an official language to help ensure Senegal’s development and economic stability. His pro-French position was often criticized by opposition leaders and African politicians who deemed his political and economic ties to France as accommodationist (Crowder, 1967). Although, the first president’s educational policies were strongly based on the importance of French as the language of instruction, he attempted to reform the colonial system under the guideline of *l’enracinement* and *l’ouverture* (Sylla, 1993). This reform was presented as a multicultural policy that would “ensure an awareness of firm roots [and] simultaneously incorporate universal values and civilization” (Sylla, 1993:376). This new law was also meant to be democratic in the sense that it was meant to provide all citizens with free education, recognize their rights to equal educational opportunities (Sylla, 1993) and ensure that the curriculum would be relevant to the citizens’ lived experiences. This also corresponds to the first attempt to decentralize the school system and allow rural citizens to create community based-schools (Clemons, 2009:158). Despite all the efforts behind the reform, the curriculum was not extensively modified and attempts to create more scientific and technical subjects failed because of the lack of financial resources (Berthélemy, Seck and Vourc’h, 1996). Senghor’s heart was not in the construction of community-based schools and the education of the elite was sustained.

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last two generations to turn one of our national languages into an efficient tool of instruction for science and technology. And, this would be under the condition that we had the financial means and the manpower, in other words rather qualified scientists and technical experts. However, we are in the second half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century and a lag of forty to fifty years cannot be made up for” (my translation).
The introduction of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) by the Bretton Woods institutions in the early 1980s further hindered the economy of Senegal and diminished the chance to provide a better education for its citizens, although Abdou Diouf, second President of the republic of Senegal, was determined to provide “a countrywide democratic schooling for the people” (Ndaiye, 2006:224). President Diouf wanted to steer away from the old and elitist educational system (Sylla,1993) and create a new educational framework that would be “national and Senegalese in character, democratic and popular in orientation, secular in its inspiration but still sensitive to local socio-cultural realities” (Sylla, 1993: 377). Unfortunately, for the bulk of its population, Structural Adjustment Policies became economically detrimental to Senegal. They engendered the forced liberalization of the markets and consequently negatively impacted such social programs as education and led to a higher illiteracy rate (Harrison, 2002).

In 1990, Senegal experienced one of its biggest reforms through the Jomtien’s Education For All world conference that took place in Thailand. The goal of the conference was to encourage developing countries to create an educational strategic plan that would allow children, youths and adults access to basic “universal”\(^5\) education (Reagan, 2000). As far as educational leaders were concerned, this international movement was especially needed in Senegal because of the low enrollment of rural children in schools. Indeed, Berthélemy et al (1996) explain that

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\(^5\) Timothy Reagan explains that the term ‘universal education’ is epistemologically ethnocentric and a paradigm that must be shifted because “when we discover that there are several cultures instead of just one and consequently at the time when we acknowledge the end of a sort of cultural monopoly […] we are threatened with destruction by our own discovery. Suddenly it becomes possible that there are just others, that we ourselves are an ‘other’ among others”
The type of teaching, income differences and the disparity in availability of schools have done nothing to correct the inequality between urban and rural areas that already existed at independence. On the eve of independence, it was estimated that more than 50 per cent of school-age children attended school in large cities [...] while only 12 per cent of children in rural villages attended school. At the beginning of the 1990s, children in rural areas represented 60 per cent of the primary school-age population, but only 38 per cent of them attended school, compared to almost 100 per cent in the cities. [...] On the other hand the farmers’ attitude towards schooling was rather mixed. First, schooling often made it necessary to migrate to a town. Second, schooling of youth in rural areas [...] most often had the effect of encouraging them to migrate to the towns afterwards. Inappropriate training, too theoretical and unrelated to their environment, led to a rural exodus, depriving villages of their strata. This observation from the beginning of the 1960s [...] does not seem to have changed fundamentally (p.69).

Berthélemy et al (1996) demonstrate that the system focused on educating people who were not contributing to the agricultural economy of the country, despite numerous attempt to restructure it. Moreover, the lack of relevancy of the schools leads civil society to be skeptical of the government’s capability to provide for its citizens (Cooper, 2002). The Jomtien conference brought to education leaders’ attention the importance of
rendering basic education available for every citizen and supporting citizens in acquiring an education that would respond to their needs and reflect their lived experiences. In 1990s Senegalese leaders used the goals set by the conference and attempted to put in place policies that would meet the needs of the society. As a result, because of the need of a skilled workforce, there was an attempt to strengthen and expand secondary education (Acedo, 2002). There was also a need to give stability to primary and basic education because of the low literacy rate (Acedo, 2002).

Literacy became a major goal under President Diouf and this concern resulted in the creation of a ministry of literacy and the promotion of national languages (Diallo, 2010). This was not the president’s only attempt to cut ties with the former colonial system. In fact, he vowed to define clear guidelines that would protect teachers’ rights and ensure that the education personnel were mostly composed of Senegalese nationals rather than expatriates (Sylla, 1993).

In 2000, when Abdoulaye Wade became president, he took the promotion of literacy in native languages even further and codified many local languages which led them to become recognized as national languages (Diallo, 2010). President Wade went as far as creating newsletters, aimed at providing information on governmental activities, in French, Wolof and Pulaar.

Despite all these attempts to break away from the colonial system and create a more Africanized educational system there remained issues related to the development of a system that would allow the future generation to contribute to the prosperity of the country. Indeed, since independence the number of students attending technical schools
has been alarmingly low compared to the number of students who attend general education schools (Sylla, 1993). Not only is there a lack of teachers in the vocational field but also “the system trains very few technically qualified persons to serve a developing country” (Sylla, 1993:395). The educational reforms that have been enacted since independence have had little impact on large sections of the population. They have led to no significant economic growth or measurable development for the people of Senegal as a whole (Berthélemy et al., 1996).
REVIEW OF LITERATURE TRENDS ON POSTCOLONIAL EDUCATION

The 1960s

Three major themes relating to Senegal - assimilation, language and the role of the elite - emerge in the literature on African education in the immediate post colonial era. These themes are connected by the ways in which they relate French power to privilege within Senegal and reveal the lack of educational access for the mass of the population. In the wake of the achievement of its independence scholars critically observed the ways in which Senegal began to construct its society.

Assimilation is one of the major trends discussed in the literature of the 1960s. In his book *Senegal: a study of French Assimilation policy*, Michael Crowder (1967) explains the ways in which France used education as a strategy to proliferate French culture and the ways in which the policy has had an impact on the postcolonial Senegalese state. He argues that the French created a homogeneous society in Senegal in that those who have been impacted by assimilation do not perceive themselves as part of an ethnic group but rather as Senegalese first and foremost. Crowder (1967) believes that this was a way to introduce the idea of nationalism to the Senegalese population. The author, however, contradicts himself when talking about the goal of assimilation. He first states, that unlike other European powers that were attempting to divide ethnicities, “the
French positively encouraged the creation of a Senegalese identity” (p. 99). This statement presents the French as benefactors. Nevertheless in the same breath the author states that the tactic was put in place to give children in schools “a common meeting ground from the earliest age” (Crowder, 1967:99) and demonstrate the importance of having a common language (French) and common ancestors (the Gauls). Although many of Crowder’s arguments would lead the reader to believe that the French managed to assimilate the Senegalese population, he concludes that the policy was a failure because of the strong sense of unity and nationalism the French instilled in the Senegalese population. The dichotomy presented is rather interesting in that it allowed for a postcolonial Senegal that was content to maintain strong ties with France and to reject anti-western Marxist ideology that would characterize many independent African nations in the 1960s and 1970s. This particular bond with France continued alongside national pride and black pride (Négritude) and explains the continuance of the French education system immediately after independence.

Jerry Bolibaugh (1964) also talks about assimilation and explains that the former colonizer was interested in such a policy because it meant “wholesale induction into the French language and the realization of a long sought goal, the creation of a Franco-African popular culture” (p.185). The strategy of focusing assimilation in education was a way to promote France’s “historical grand strategy of employing language and culture as an instrument of international power and politics” (p.186). As far as Bolibaugh (1964) is concerned, “the French policy in the field of education clearly remains one of assimilation” (p.176) even after Senegal achieved independence. While the author came
to this point of view after interviewing many highly placed French officials and very few Senegalese citizens, his conclusion explains the continuation of the French education system in the immediate post-colonial period. Senegal required civil servants who could make the transition to independence as smooth as possible.

Cary B. Hutchinson, (1963) has a different approach in analyzing the ways in which France attempted to assimilate Senegal through education. In effect, the author is detailed on his explanation and provides clarification on how the curriculum was set up to acquire such a result. The author maintains that the French standards were limiting to the majority of the Senegalese pupils and that, rather than leading to cultural assimilation, mass education merely led to high dropout rates. This occurred because, not only was the French language a barrier for students who spoke only Senegalese languages, but also “the study of African history, geography and culture in the curriculum” (American University, 1963:144) was largely restricted or non-existent. This phenomenon continues to be the case in the new millennium (Bunyi, 2008; Brock-Utne, 2001) although many attempts, under President Abdoulaye, promoted national languages and rendered them more prestigious (Diallo, 2010).

Hutchinson’s “Area Handbook” also differs from Crowder’s (1967) and Bolibaugh’s (1964) work because it contrasts the impact of colonial education with that of traditional education. In doing so, the authors allow the reader to make his or her own assessment on whether assimilation to French culture was necessary in order to claim educational success. Although the piece provides all the information necessary for the reader to make his or her own conclusions, it does not shy away from criticizing the tools.
used to establish a French education system in Senegal. The major criticism surrounds the usage of the French language as a tool for assimilation in the schools: “The language and ideas which the French children absorb from the infancy are encountered by most Senegalese children for the first time when they enter school” (American University, 1963:144). Utilizing French as a medium of instruction for universal education, explains the author, is the reason most children are not able to succeed academically. This is an issue that still lingers in the current Senegalese educational system. Such policies made sense immediately after independence as Senegal was in the early stage of creating a stable society but for today’s society such policy is outdated.

Throughout the literature on French colonial education, many authors (Bassey; 1999; Cooper, 2002; Farine, 1968; Johnson, 1987) mention that the main reform in the post World War II era was the creation of an educational system that would serve the children of African elites. According to Bolibaugh (1964) the French were concerned with the state of primary and secondary education and wanted to ensure that Senegal would be the next best thing to French civilization. Consequently, the former colony rendered mandatory “a metropolitan type education for the children of the French colonials and of the assimilated natives as well as for the sons of chiefs and other native notables.” (Bolibaugh, 1964:92). Bolibaugh seems to believe that the intentions of the French educational strategies in Senegal backfired as the indigenous elite’s political role grew. In essence, although Senegalese leaders believed that education for the masses was the path to modernization for a post independent society (Bolibaugh, 1964), they strongly disagreed with the ways in which the system was implemented because most “of the
secondary schools remained unfilled [...] because of the inability of the Africans to pass the secondary school entrance examinations.” (Bolibaugh, 1964:66). This dilemma comes from the fact that during colonialism the structure of the secondary school system was created to meet the needs of the children of French colonials and assimilated natives. According to Bolibaugh (1964), African leaders demanded the reformation of education along with “the temporary easing of the entrance requirement to secondary education” (p.166) because they deemed it unfair “to expect the native child to assimilate the French language and the other educational requirements on the same time table as the French child” (Bolibaugh, 1964:166). In spite of the fact that this concern has been a policy issue since independence, the Senegalese leadership is still struggling today in providing a mass and equal education to all its citizens and ensuring a high rate of exam success as French remains the language of educational instruction.

Hutchinson (1963) has a rather different view of the role of the Senegalese elite in education. As far as he is concerned the Senegalese leadership is only apprehensive about maintaining power to prove to the former colony that it could create and preserve a civil society on its own. Hutchinson criticizes the role of the elite in education as submissive to the French and out of touch with the laypeople of Senegal because “they tend to become removed from the rest of the population whose culture and heritage they discard in favor of the highly esteemed French culture.” (p.166). This is a phenomenon that will manifest itself into a more serious problem in the future as educated elites leave Senegel and the mass is not provided with adequate vocational education to contribute to the development of the country.
In *L’Afrique Noire est mal partie*, René Dumont (1963) also sees the African elite as a group that has too much privilege in a context where the mass population is struggling. He contends that there is a necessity to reduce the luxury given to the new elite and that educational leaders must create a system that fits the needs of newly independent states by creating schools that will emphasize technical skills related to agriculture and other practical industries. In the short term, Senegalese fortunes would be tethered to France; however, after over fifty years of independence the education system needs to be radically modified to address the needs of the bulk of the population.

While many observers viewed the educational system of 1960s Senegal in highly critical terms, by underlining the three major themes discussed above, the literature was produced by authors who were not directly involved in African society during this period of astonishing transformation. The new independent government was forced to struggle with the tremendous task of steering the education system of the country with minimal resources and little sense of what facilities the country would need for its future. It is hardly surprising that Senegal's leaders chose to maintain the French system during these transitional years. Assimilationist policies were part of the legacy of colonialism and post-colonial Senegal was not about to sever its ties with the mother country. As in the past, elites were required to operate the government and build the economy and were thus essential for the life of the new nation. Lastly, the French language was still regarded as the language of culture and status. It remained the language of instruction in schools for these reasons and for the more practical reason that the native languages had no written
form. The education system was, therefore, not about to be reconstructed in the 1960s.

The government justified its position and addressed criticisms in a number of ways.

Leopold Sedar Senghor was the first president of post independence Senegal and was viewed by many as a moderate politician with regard to French policies (Crowder, 1967). While many scholars in his era argue that African children were left behind in schools because they were being instructed in a language that was not part of their daily lives, Senghor (1964) contends that using French as a medium of instruction is beneficial for his people. He adamantly argues for the need of a cultural paradigm shift. In essence, he expresses that Africans must avoid equating language and race and that all people, no matter their culture, have the capacity to learn a language different from their own. His logic was as follows:

"Les Gaulois ont abandonné leur langue, d'origine celtique, pour adopter le latin. C'est le français issu du latin, qui exprime, par les chefs d’œuvre de sa littérature un des plus beaux monuments de l’humanité, la génie des descendants Gaulois. […] Dans le choix de la langue, la question n’est pas de savoir si la langue de l’enseignement sera autochtone ou non, mais quelle elle sera. En d’autres termes, il s’agit de choisir une langue […] pour ses vertus d’éducation." (Senghor, 1964 :229)

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6 “The Gauls abandoned their language, which was of Celtic origin, to adopt Latin. It’s French, which originated from Latin, that expresses by its literature masterpiece, one of the most beautiful monuments of humanity, the genius of the Gaul descendants. […] Concerning the language choice, the question is not whether the language of instruction will be autochthonous or not, but what type would it be. In other words, it’s a matter of choosing a language for its educational virtues” (my translation).
He adds that he is not advocating for the eradication of indigenous languages, to the contrary, he believes that there should be a certain balance between them and the European language. Moreover, he explains that completely eliminating the French language from schools would merely slow down Senegal’s progress because the French language teaches literature and science in ways that no native language can (Senghor, 1964). This stance can be perceived as an elitist position and makes little sense in practical terms for most of the Senegalese population. The policy should have been regarded as a bridge policy during a transitional period rather than one that can permanently accommodate the needs of the Senegalese educational system.

To those who claim that indigenous languages are being neglected in education because of the use of French as a medium of instruction and criticize him for continuing the French legacy (Dia, 1961), Senghor replies that in Ghana, for example, students are exposed to “Mother Tongue education” (Clemons and Yerende, 2009) in their primary years and introduced to English in upper primary schools. As far as he is concerned, this is an excellent way to create “[une] complémentarité, [un] métissage qui est le but de toute culture digne de ce nom […] le jeune Ghanéen […] plonge, par ses racines, dans l’humidité de la tradition, tandis que sa tête respire […] l’air du monde contemporain.”7 (Senghor, 1964:230).

Senghor has been criticized for being more French than France itself and for creating the dichotomy that “French equal reasons; African languages equal emotions” (Adotevi, 1998:45). Moreover, many criticized him for operating “within the

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7 “[a] complimentary, [a] mixture that should be the goal of all cultures […] the young ghanian […] dives, through its roots, in the humidity of tradition, while his head breathes […] the air of the modern world”
assimilationist framework” (Crowder, 1967:37) even after independence. To the charge that he advocated for French assimilation Senghor is the first to retort that he is one of the creator of the Négritude movement and acknowledges

*that as Negro students in the years 1930-4 we were only an obstruction. I admit that we were racialist; we were intoxicated by the banner of Négritude. At that time no intercourse was possible with Europeans. But since then, because this racialism betrayed our African-Negro humanism, because it led deadlock by imposing cold war between races and continents, between man and man, we decided upon reflection to make an extra effort. Today we have accomplished this-The results of European decolonisation [sic] have contributed to it- we have left behind us the period of denial to embark with you upon the period of construction”* (Senghor as cited in Crowder, 1967:49).

This discourse demonstrates that Senghor is not an advocate of complete acculturation but rather is interested in a “cultural metissage” of France and Senegal. He posits that the French legacy cannot be forgotten or erased and that the most efficient way to transition into modernity and ensure academic success of future generations is to achieve a “Franco-African symbiosis.” (Crowder, 1967:116). The mélange that Senghor talks about

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8 “Negritude is a cultural movement created by black intellectuals converged around issues of race identity and black internationalist initiatives to combat French imperialism. They found solidarity in their common ideal of affirming pride in their shared black identity and African heritage, and reclaiming African self-determination, self-reliance, and self-respect. The Négritude movement signaled an awakening of race consciousness for blacks in Africa and the African Diaspora. This new race consciousness, rooted in a (re)discovery of the authentic self, sparked a collective condemnation of Western domination, anti-black racism, enslavement, and colonization of black people. It sought to dispel denigrating myths and stereotypes linked to black people, by acknowledging their culture, history, and achievements, as well as reclaiming their contributions to the world and restoring their rightful place within the global community.”
could have become an excellent way to transition from a colonial to a post colonial education system and more importantly it is a policy that could fit the generation of the new millennium as the world is becoming more cosmopolitan. Unfortunately for Senegal, Senghor was too fond of the French language and was more interested in having his people master its vocabulary and syntax rather than provide them with the practical tools to contribute to Senegal’s economy. If Senghor was as passionate about African languages as he was about French, Senegal, today, would have an array of codified and established languages that could be used as vehicles of instruction.

**The 1970s**

In this era, although some of the recurrent educational problems of the 1960s resurface, scholars are more focused on the dichotomy of non-western education vs. formal (mainstream) education and the needs of rural children. In addition, the lack of teacher quality becomes apparent and French, as a medium of instruction is not merely perceived as a French strategy for assimilation but as a serious problem that needs an adequate solution for the well being of the Senegalese population.

In *Non Formal education and Education policy in Ghana and Senegal*, Babacar Sine (1979) proposes the creation of what he calls a “non-formal” education based on grassroots initiatives. He describes this type of education as a “training given within the community without outside interference and […] without recourse to the formal school system” (p.13). The author presents a Senegalese region as an example and explains that non-formal education policies in rural regions are becoming more and more necessary. He contends that in those parts of Senegal the family serves as the educational unit and
system of production but that, unfortunately, “the traditional family is breaking up and the part it used to play in the teaching of vocational skills […] has greatly diminished.” (Sine, 1979:13). The author contends that the lack of interest in traditional schooling comes from the belief that mainstream schooling is more prestigious and leads to a more successful life. Sine (1979) does not argue that Senegal must eradicate its formal education from its policies but rather condemns the fact that formal education has created a “cultural dichotomy [with] on the one hand, a privileged, alienated, imitative culture and, on the other, [a] neglected, national, culture of the people” (Sine, 1979:30). The lack of overlap between the two types of education limits the country tremendously.

Sine concludes by suggesting that community-based education systems are an excellent way to ensure that the rural mass contributes to the country’s development effort. He warns, however, that in creating policies around non-formal education, educational leaders must take into account and respect the people’s cultural identity; otherwise there will be a lack of investment in the politics and a lack of civil participation.

In his piece, Bolibaugh (1972) also writes about the inefficiencies of elementary and secondary formal schools and the ways in which they slow down Senegal’s economic development because they do not adapt to the rural needs. The author explains that the government made an effort to adapt the curriculum to target audiences. For example, the goal of elementary education in rural Senegal was to provide reading and writing skills without deracinating them. There was also a conscious effort from the government to provide an education that could fit the need of the country’s economy (in the case of
Senegal this was agriculture). While Sine (1979) compliments traditional teachers in the community based school piece, Bolibaugh (1972) is reluctant to be as generous. He expresses that no matter how well education leaders meet the need of the rural mass through the curriculum, there is not only a major problem with the medium of instruction being French but, most importantly there is an issue with the quality and choice of instructors. He explains that an elementary teacher merely needs a high school diploma to be considered qualified and an assistant teacher had to complete a *College d'Enseignement General* (equivalent of eighth grade) along with a year of pedagogical training. The low standard for elementary education is alarming in itself but Bolibaugh’s (1972) biggest criticism is aimed at the secondary level. Indeed, he explains that, although the leadership attempted to be culturally responsive to children, most of the teachers at the secondary level were French. This was a result of the lower qualification requirements for elementary school teachers.

As Sine mentions in his article, the newer generation was becoming more interested in general education and it was finding ways to avoid non-formal schooling and vocational schools. Bolibaugh’s piece provides evidence of that phenomenon. The reason was that since the system was still similar to that of France, obtaining a *baccalauréat* was recognized by the former colony and provided opportunities to higher education abroad (Bolibaugh, 1972). This phenomenon is still an issue in contemporary Senegal, especially since French President Nicholas Sarkozy introduced a selective immigration policy (*immigration choisie*) where only the highly skilled are allowed to
immigrate to France. This may encourage students to attend vocational schools but with the intention of leaving the country rather than contributing to its development.

The 1980s

The aforementioned phenomenon regarding formal education is a subject that is extended in the literature of the 1980s. Indeed, some authors (Bassey 1999; McNamara, 1989) blame the lack of economic development on students who deem themselves too educated to become anything else but civil servants. The 1980s also happens to be the time when Senegal felt the repercussion of the Structural Adjustment Programs. These policies may have led citizens to believe that there was no future in agriculture because of the land reforms and trade policies imposed by the international community.

Twenty years after independence, scholars (Mungala, 1985; Niane, 1985) were wondering why there still was a strong tie between France and Senegal, especially when it came to education.

Djibril Tamsir Niane (1985) questions whether independent Africa is playing a different role in education than colonial Africa. He attests that the goal of the French colonial system was to form an elite able to govern its country. However, he wonders if “l’école post-independence a-t-elle réussi à former le citoyen, l’homme nouveau?” (Niane, 1985:127) or did it only imitate the goal of the colonial system?

The predicament in place, as a result of mirroring the colonial system after twenty years of independence, is that the newly educated students were only interested in political administrative jobs (civil servants) which were highly valued (Niane, 1985) as

9 “has the post-colonial school succeeded in forming the citizen, the new man?” (my translation)
they were a symbol of social and political mobility as well as power. Niane (1985) argues that these jobs were perceived as prestigious in the colonial era and that the new generation is attempting to replicate those days. The author also trusts that there has been a devalorization of the teaching profession and that students were more interested in acquiring power than cultural knowledge. He proposes to render the education profession prestigious and valuable by providing such incentives as higher pay to attract the most talented teachers. Niane’s proposition, although a valid one, is not practical given the lack of resources of Senegal in the 1980s. The first step in rendering the teaching profession more respectable would be to provide high quality pedagogical training to future educators and ensure that only the top students instruct in the classroom.

A.S. Mungala (1985) takes Niane’s (1985) point further and asserts that there is a complex of inferiority among Africans when it comes to education. He strongly believes that traditional education is the best way to reassert the African identity but he emphasizes that it does not mean that Africa should ignore the modern world. On the contrary the identity should be revived by finding a way to marry traditional and western education. Such components as oral tradition are excellent ways for formal schools to be culturally responsive to children, according to Mungala (1985). The problem, he articulates, is that oratures are not respected by the West and this leads the new African generation to believe that traditional education is not of high quality because, as far as the West is concerned, “là ou il n’y a pas d’écriture, il n’y a pas de culture.”10 (Hampaté Bâ as cited in Mungala, 1985: 132). Mungala (1985) concludes that the inferiority complex

10 “Where there is no writing, there is no culture”
must be eradicated in order to improve African education systems and that can only be achieved through the creation of an education “qui soit a la fois enracinements dans les valeurs ancestrales de civilization et une ouverture aux valeurs des autres civilizations”\textsuperscript{11} (p.137) but also one that is “fondé sur les réalités et les besoins culturels de l’Afrique”\textsuperscript{12} (p. 138). Through the proliferation of technology and social media, the youths of contemporary Senegal have demonstrated that, although national language literacy in the formal education has failed, Wolof is a language that can still be used in written form for communication purposes. This mix of ancestral values and the values of other civilizations that Mungala talks about is already being practiced in the social lives of many Senegalese people. The solution to improve the education system in Senegal is to integrate written Wolof in the literacy programs and prove that the language is capable of providing knowledge acquisition and critical thinking skills to children.

McNamara (1989) also argues that the brightest African students are not interested in technical professions, let alone agricultural ones. The lack of economic development, according to him, does not just lie in the lack of vocational skills but most importantly in the fact that “French technicians and skilled workers [from abroad] enjoy the employment” (McNamara, 1989:86) that is rejected by Senegalese citizens. One can suppose that the money earned by those foreign workers does not go back into the Senegalese economy just as the money invested in elites is also funneled out of the country.

\textsuperscript{11} “that is rooted in the ancestral values of civilization and at the same time open to values of other civilizations” (my translation)
\textsuperscript{12} “based on the realities and the cultural needs of Africa” (my translation)
It is interesting that in most of the literature encountered, no author has linked the Structural Adjustment Programs with the stagnant development of education as the policies impacted the social welfare of most African countries. Maybe the impacts of such policies were only felt in the 1990s.

**The 1990s**

Although it is present in earlier decades, the literature on language instruction displays a different approach in the 1990s. Essentially, authors (Ka, 1993) do not merely wonder why French is the language of instruction but rather strongly suggest that Wolof should be part of the classroom as it is the *lingua franca* of Senegal. This is also the decade in which the Education For All movement is prominently featured and for that reason many of the articles stress the importance of adults, women and girls’ education.

In *Adult learning in a non-Western context: the influence of culture on a Senegalese farming village* Waly Diouf, Barry Sheckley and Marijke Kehrhahn (2000) conduct a study to debunk the beliefs that adult learning based on Western society’s educational practices is useful to rural adults in Senegal and find out, that instead, the “community’s social-cultural norms and values exert a powerful influence” (Diouf et al., 2000:32) on their education. With this study, Diouf *et al.* (2000) attempt to reduce the ethnocentricity that elevates western education as the only valuable and useful system for the Senegalese population. They make clear that adults like to learn skills that will be useful to their community and will help them with the development of their land. According to the study, they receive those skills from elders in their village rather than in
a classroom. Diouf et al.’s article demonstrates the difference between the practical needs of rural adults’ society and elite youths, many of whom obtain an education to acquire power and status (Bassey, 1999). The article clearly demonstrates the necessity of adult and continuing education in the economic development of rural Senegal. Nevertheless, to ensure educational success, the instructional practices should not be based on western methods but rather on informal practices of the community (Diouf et al., 2000).

Some authors (Bassey, 1999; Bunyi, 1999; Reagan, 2000) welcome the return of traditional education in order to reestablish African identity; while others believe that a mixture of traditional and formal education will improve Senegalese education (Diagne, 1993; Ka, 1993). When one looks at the literature in gender education (which is prominently featured in the 1990s), feminists and advocates of gender equality in schools, contend that African tradition is the reason women and girls lag behind boys in education. Catherine Kitetu (1998) states that “[t]o explain the fact that more boys than girls participated in education, a host of constraints were identified. ‘African tradition’ was named as top of the list. ‘African tradition’ was explained as (what is generally observed in most parts of Africa) one that attaches higher value to a man than a woman, whose place is believed to be the kitchen. The imbalance in boys’ and girls’ participation in schooling was therefore linked to the age-long belief in male superiority and female subordination” (p.3). The interesting part about Kiketu is that she criticizes teachers for employing the wider society’s culture within the classroom, while most authors are trying to find ways to restore African traditions through education (Mungala, 1985; Niane, 1985; Reagan, 2000). Kiketu’s point is important in demonstrating the reasons a mixture
of Western education and local knowledge is paramount in establishing a successful system. Western education has created many quality elements in African education including gender equality and access. Concerns such as the one Kiketu (1998) expresses can be avoided by implementing some Western ideas in the African educational system.

In the book, *In my Father’s House*, Appiah (1992) rejects the idea that being African results in one identity. Not only is the identity constructed to diminish the legitimacy of the existence of several cultures within the continent but it also promotes racism. Appiah clearly states that he does not believe in the usefulness of nationalism and racial solidarity because they cannot “do the good that they can do without the attendant evils of racism.” (Appiah, 1992:175). The author instead suggests an African identity that is not rooted in race or in history but rather one “we can choose within broad limits set by ecological, political and economic realities” and that will help us determine “what it will mean to be African in the coming years.” (p.176). Is it, however, possible to accomplish a cultural self definition without being judged by fellow countrymen and women?

Regarding the issues surrounding language of instruction, Appiah strongly believes that “there is no longer a fully autochthonous […] African culture” (Appiah, 1992:155) and that scholars must stay away from writing about providing Africans with an education that fit their cultural need. It is true, Appiah (1992) explains, that “the instrument of pedagogy was [the colonizers’] most formidable weapon.” (p.55). However, when it comes to language in education or in literature “the problem is not […] the English or the French or the Portuguese language” but rather “the cultural imposition
that they each represent” (p. 55). In other words, Appiah argues that rather than rejecting the languages, African scholars should be motivated to utilize the legacy to feature the African identity from their point of view, universalize it and eradicate “Eurocentric hegemony” (p. 58).

When it comes to culture Appiah (1992) powerfully states that if one “postulate[s] an either or choice between Africa and the West, there is no place [for one] in the real world […] and [his or her] home must be otherworldly, the monastic retreat” because we are “all contaminated by each other [‘s]” cultures (p.58). This point of view reflects President Senghor’s idea of bilingual education as the ideal as it embraces practical concerns.

Appiah’s argument regarding the “contamination of culture” can be seen today in the ways in which the young Senegalese population is reconceptualizing its identity. Indeed, in a more cosmopolitan world, to be a modern Senegalese citizen is to know how to fuse the American, French and other cultures with one’s own. If it is possible for a new generation to create a *metissage culturel*, in their social lives, it should be possible to attempt a similar “reconceptualization” in the educational system.
ANALYSIS OF THE CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION SYSTEM

Many novels have been written about the education system in French speaking West Africa in a postcolonial context. Such authors as Aminata Sow Fall (1982), Camara Laye (1953) and Cheick Hamidou Kane (1961) demonstrate in their narratives the barriers their respective protagonists surmount because of the system imposed by France. These struggles often revolve around characters’ confusion of identity since, within the educational context, the French culture promotes values and morals quite different from that of the indigenous culture.

As noted above, the French education system in Senegal was specifically intended to educate a small elite that would become the leadership of the country after the departure of the Western state. This elite was educated to assimilate to French culture and to ensure that once the French left the colony, its loyalty would always lie with the Motherland. As far as the French were concerned, school molded the chosen leaders to French cultural and moral values (Hardy, 1917: vii).

Another reason this assimilation was important to the French was that the process demonstrated that they were the world’s “bearers of civilization” (Locraft, 2005: 15). Michael Crowder (1967) explains that “the surest means of action by which a civilizing nation could transmit its ideas to people who were still primitive” (Crowder, 1967:35) is
through education, and the French ensured that the “barbarians”’ new identity was ingrained through French literature and traditions.

Ethnocentric reasoning and the desire for global power are evident reasons that led the French to implement an education system solely based on their culture. Why though did Senegalese leaders let such a system prevail after independence? Why have postcolonial leaders not tried to “rethink the colonial school, restructur[e] it and readapt[…] it to the new needs of the modern African” (Samba Gadjibo cited in Amadou Koné, 1992)?

Crowder (1967) contends that the French trusted that “there [was] no racial or cultural difference that education could not eliminate” (p. 2). In history textbooks for example, the French were portrayed as heroes to Senegalese pupils. In essence, it was taught that Senegal was fortunate to have encountered the French because now they were blessed with civilization. Moreover, in elementary schools children learn about their “ancestors the Gauls” (Crowder, 1967:99) and some authors wondered how Senegalese children are supposed to relate to such a history (Farine, 1969).

After Senegal achieved independence in 1960, President Senghor, wanted to ensure that Senegal’s indigenous local knowledge was recognized, respected and placed at the center of Senegalese politics. Senghor did not want to eradicate the French legacy but rather desired that his people incorporate that legacy into Senegalese culture. This was a way to prominently feature the indigenous culture while maintaining diplomatic relations with France. Keeping close ties with a former colonizer can be perceived as a strategic move and a way to ensure that Senegal remained active in the global arena.
Nevertheless, since independence, Senegal has relied on French financial aid which in turn became detrimental for its educational system. For instance, the University of Dakar (now known as Université Cheick Anta Diop) was extensively supported by French money. In effect, most professors were remunerated by the French government and building renovations were subsidized by France (Crowder, 1967). The main dilemma associated with French contribution to this particular establishment is that France demanded extensive control over the educational system and, more specifically, over the content of the Senegalese curriculum. Lack of direct (economic) control of the curriculum by the new sovereign State meant that the language of the former colonizer (which was eventually established as the official language) would prevail.

The lack of emphasis on indigenous language at (at least) an early age in Senegal is a major educational problem and also one of the reasons that students drop out of school. Pai Obanya (1980) expressed it best when he stated:

*It has always been felt by African educators that the African child’s major learning problem is a linguistic problem. Instruction is given in a language that is not normally used in his immediate environment, a language which neither the learner nor the teacher understands and uses well enough* (Obanya as cited in Bunyi, 2008: 27).

The issue related to the teachers’ lack of understanding of the language can be perceived in Senegal when education leaders introduced the *volontaires* and *vacataires* program in the 1990s. The program aimed to provide educational institutions with non
licensed teachers because of the shortage of well trained, licensed ones. According to Maguette Diame (2011), *volontaires* and *vacataires* are not only untrained teachers but “they have also had a negative impact [on the educational system] because” of the incompetency of some of them, “and […] they very often paralyze the system with […] strikes demanding better pay.” (p.37). As of 2009, these educators represent 60% of the teaching body in Senegal (Seneweb, 2009). These underpaid and untrained teachers usually have no incentive to do well as they are treated by the government as long term “gap fillers” with no merit. Education leaders must find a way to revalorize the teaching profession by at least providing the newer generation with well trained educators.

While the upper class citizens of Senegal can avoid poorly trained educators by paying for private schools, tutors, and summer schools, most students do not have that luxury. The majority of the population is impoverished and its needs revolve around basic economic necessities. Thus, there is a need to concentrate more on vocational training, or “practical education” (Johnson, 1987) that will not only aid the youth in attaining employment but also motivate them to finish school. Robert Johnson explains that although the need for an educational system based on Senegalese knowledge and culture is evident:

> Many observers have noted the alienating effects of this type of education [meaning colonial education] on the students going through these institutions. A vicious circle is really created because it is those who are or were trained in this type of system who insist most upon maintaining it or who permit only slight modifications of it. It appears as
if the system breeds an attachment to it in those who pass through it. The ability to rethink Senegalese education in a creative and local fashion is sorely missing among most of those who are products of the French-oriented schools, regardless of their political persuasion (Johnson, 1987:269).

The International Bureau of Education (IBE), a centre supported by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and focused on the improvement of curricula in the world, wrote a report about the Senegalese education system and its objectives. According to a law enacted in 1991, secondary education has three main objectives:

- “To give students a solid basis in the fundamental disciplines of science, technology and culture
- To ensure that they have a sufficient mastery of the scientific methods and its techniques
- To familiarize the students with the art of universal cultures.”

According to Holger Daun (2005), 80% of the Senegalese population makes a living in the agricultural sector. When looking at the aforementioned goals of the country’s education system, one can perceive a major discrepancy between the current system in Senegal and a system that caters to the needs of the majority of the population.

The objectives that are described in the UNESCO report are goals that do not reflect the need of the African country. Rather it is evident that the proposed system is meant for a western population but educational leaders are trying to make it fit within

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13 My translation from French
Senegalese society. These objectives are typical of a western style education and target a country in which formal sector\textsuperscript{14} employment is easily attainable (Daun, 2005). While these goals may be worthy, it seems that literacy programs as first goals would be more appropriate in a country where less than 40% of the population is able to read (CIA Fact book, 2012).

Similar to many other developing countries the Structural Adjustment Programs imposed by Western entities has led to a decline in formal employment in Senegal. In essence, the high rate of high school dropouts, for example, is not only a result of the economic imposition but also relates to the fact that the main education system in place does not adapt to the situation of the moment. As Daun (2005) explains, “a high non completion rate in [the Senegalese main education system] is because of the lack of formal jobs and the rise of informal ones…which are acquired through traditional network” (p. 213)

In 2011, less than 50% of the students who took their *Baccalauréat* passed the exit exam (IBE, 2010/2011). These low rates can undoubtedly be blamed on the state of the economy but some of the responsibility must also fall on a curriculum that is not considered relevant to the lived experiences of students and does not cater to their “sociolinguistic reality” (Alidou *et al.*, 2006)

Cheikh Badiane (2007) explains in his PhD thesis that in Senegal there is a prevalence of native languages in the media. Indeed, in the last few years, the country has been training anchormen and other TV personalities to present the news in Wolof and

\textsuperscript{14} Daun calls the formal sector the jobs that are not only in the public sector but also that require the mastery of the French language.
other indigenous languages rather than in the official language. Exposing the youth to such a phenomenon reinforces the need for a curriculum that emphasizes native languages as well as French. This is especially necessary in an era when information travels fast and the media has a large influence on young citizens. The leadership of the country, for one reason or another, felt the need to produce television and radio programs delivered in Senegalese languages. This same urgency should be given to the education system.

Emphasizing a curriculum based on Senegalese local languages is important for two reasons: 1) a language that is not used at home is of little use to a student in primary school. A Senegalese student should learn French after acquiring strong reading skills in his or her native language. This is a better pathway to literacy and educational success. 2) Education is supposed to empower students and bring about personal pride along with the desire to succeed and to contribute to one’s society. Maintaining French as the medium of instruction in Senegalese schools undermines all the aforementioned goals. It is rather difficult for a child to feel any sense of pride when the hidden curriculum emphasizes the superiority of a culture to the detriment of their own.

Khalidou Diallo, the current Minister of Education in Senegal, recently stated that French is “the spine of Senegalese schools” (Seneweb, 2011) and that the only way for Senegal to continue its development is if the Romance language is mastered by the younger generation. This statement could be perceived as inspiring and useful if the curriculum at least catered to the cultural and linguistic needs of local students. Unfortunately, this view simply reinforces the idea that the only way to be perceived as a
developing country is to master a European language. As discussed in Mungala (1985), such comments from the leadership are the reasons feelings of inferiority emerge among contemporary Senegalese citizens.

Every year, students from the class of Troisième (the equivalent of eighth grade in the U.S.) take what the Ministry of Education calls le Brevet de Fin d’Etudes Moyennes (an exit exam for Junior High students that determines whether pupils have the level to go to High School; also known as BFEM). This exam consists of the following subjects: French composition, Earth and Life Sciences, English, Math, History and Geography and Civic education. According to Seneweb, in 2010, 80% of the students who took the exam failed the French composition portion of the exam. Failure in the French segment does not mean that a student is held back from going to High School. As long as the student does well in the other subjects and obtains an average score he or she can still pass. This demonstrates that many students who make it to High School have a low mastery of the French language. Failure in this particular subject demonstrates that French may not be the right language to use as a means of instruction and is not a relevant component in students’ lives. The Senegalese leadership should not expect their students to succeed when the majority does not use the official language as their mean of everyday communication in social settings and at home.

The Senegalese education system today seems to carry out the same elitist process as the French during colonialism. It is fair to point out, however, that since the beginning of his presidency, President Abdoulaye Wade has attempted to address the problem by introducing a program called case des tout petits or children’s hut (Agence National de la
Case des Tout Petits, 2010). This initiative, which officially started in 2004, is a community based structure that allows educators, especially in rural areas to integrate cultural traditions in early childhood development while ensuring that they are prepared for the modern world. Indeed, the program introduces children to computers and other modern pedagogical tools. Moreover, mothers are educated on the importance of health, nutrition and education for young children to ensure adequate development. This initiative is an excellent start for policy makers in Senegal to demonstrate that although the French legacy cannot be erased, it can be supplemented and implemented with local knowledge (Diame, 2011).

In Diourbel, a rural town in Senegal, only 17% of the population has acquired basic French literacy (Daun, 2005: 199); however that population has a higher rate of employment than the urban population. In rural Senegal, Arabic and Koranic schools prevail. Students relate and succeed in those institutions because they relate to their faith and to their community. Students who go to those schools often end up in the traditional sector (artisan, tradesmen, craftsmen, farmers) which is possibly the most needed sector in the country (Daun, 2005:202). Moreover, Arabic (although technically a foreign language) is not only more relevant to the student (because of Islam) but also still makes him or her marketable in the Arab speaking world. Despite the fact that diplomas from religious and Arabic schools are not accepted by the main Senegalese education system, many Arabic speaking countries recognize the instructional practices of these non-formal schools (Daun, 2005). This can provide evidence that French is not the only way to acquire social and economic mobility.
Some scholars (Senghor, 1964) argue that having an education system that can sustain and be educationally favorable to all the native languages - twenty-four as of today in Senegal - (Diallo, 2010) of a country is economically impossible. It is true that such an effort would be economically unviable; on the other hand, Senegal is fortunate to be able to assign one of its languages as the language of instruction. Undeniably, although the people who are ethnically Wolof encompass less than 50% of the population, the Wolof language is spoken by most Senegalese people (Diallo, 2010; Maglaughlin, 2001). Despite its multiculturalism, the country has a lingua franca that it can use to develop a curriculum that is based on local indigenous knowledge especially when only a very small portion of the population is literate in French.

Katharina Michaelowa (2001) studied five francophone African countries and assessed the knowledge of fifth graders in French and Math. One of her main findings revolved around the language of instruction in Madagascar. Unlike many Francophone countries in her study, Madagascar uses Malagasy to teach students Mathematics in primary school rather. Michaelowa found that students from Madagascar had better success rates in Math than students from the mainland where French was the language of instruction.

The use of French in Senegalese culture outside of the school system is not as prevalent as people may think and those (often upper class) who do master the language speak a type of French that is highly sophisticated but not spoken in France. Using a

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15 I also encompass those who use the language as their native tongue although they may not have Wolof parents.
means of instruction that is irrelevant “to the lives, hopes and cultures of the people” (Apple, 2001) is useless and inadequate for the country and its students.

It is rather evident that the French legacy cannot be erased from Senegalese history. Despite the fact that Europeans invaded, controlled and exploited African countries, in the guise of civilization and under the assumptions that those they conquered had no history, education is one of the few positive legacies that came out of colonization. African leaders, however, must find a way to make education relevant to the modern youths of their countries. Some of the literature on African culture and identity reveal the importance of reshaping European legacies to mirror African identity (Appiah, 1992; Bassey, 1999; Dlamini, 2008).

Educational leaders need to think about how they can empower students and fit their needs given the current political context. For example, instead of maintaining a system that was put in place in the early twentieth century by an outside entity, it may be effective to ask oneself what is the best strategy to keep students in school and also reduce illiteracy. Fallou Ngom (2010) did a remarkable fieldwork study on Wolofal.\textsuperscript{16} He explains that those who are illiterate in French often use the non-Arabic writing to communicate because they obtain an education in the Koranic schools. To the author’s despair, these particular people are still considered illiterate by international organizations and their knowledge is completely dismissed. Ngom (2010) concludes that “[b]ecause of the cultural and historical connection that people have with Wolofal in rural parts of the country, the scope of its usage, and the pride associated with it in rural

\textsuperscript{16}“an Ajami writing (a generic term commonly used to refer to non-Arabic languages written with Arabic scripts) used to transliterate Wolof in Senegal”
communities, opening secular modern Wolofal classes both in rural and also urban areas of Senegal would undoubtedly be successful” (p. 19) and would be an excellent way for policy makers to demonstrate that the literacy rate is improving in the country.

Interestingly, as it is the case in the United States, vocational schools are stigmatized in Senegal. In effect, many parents see vocational training as a second class education. However, vocational schools could allow students who are economically disadvantaged to go to school while working as apprentices. Moreover, since African leaders often worry about progress and technology in a world that is becoming more cosmopolitan, an emphasis on computer science and engineering could be featured in technical schools.

Another major policy that can be amended is teacher education training. Teachers must be taught how to best be aware of students’ cultural needs and ensure that children are interested in the material and that it is relevant to their environment and to their future. Professional development in informational technology may be a good place to start. In an era where social networking and rapid information sharing are significant to modern citizens, learning how to incorporate technology in schools may be a way to keep students interested and may in turn be profitable to society. Moreover, technology may also be an excellent way to render indigenous languages visible amidst the imposed western education.

Since French was established as the mean of instruction in schools generation after generation of people knew only how to speak (rather than write) their native languages. The social network Facebook® has many Senegalese users and it seems that
those users write in Wolof rather than in French. The Wolof utilized is phonetically written and may not be grammatically correct but it is interesting to see how technology has made prevalent the usage of people’s indigenous language. This example proves that African traditions can be part of progress and development without being overshadowed by western ideologies and languages.

For students in rural settings, the best way to ensure that they do not drop out of school is to provide a relevant education to them and their mothers. Mothers can be perceived as the backbone of the family in Africa and by providing them with basic literacy skills they can embody the importance of education and spread the mindset to their children. Basic literacy skills and knowledge are needed for people to have the confidence to question the leadership and empower their children to challenge those in power.

The French education system in operation in today’s Senegal is not only inappropriate for the majority of the population because its curriculum has barely changed since 1960 but also irrelevant because it fails to provide a clear identity to its students. High School students (in any culture) are confused teenagers who need guidance when it comes to finding their identity. Many of them live in households where indigenous traditions are emphasized, then in the school setting a French education is highlighted and, to add to the confusion, the culture of American films and music is also part of their world. The current French education system cannot deal with young modern Africans and another direction must be taken to make school relevant to their lives and their future.
CONCLUSION

The Senegalese education system is in dire need of reconstruction. Instead of focusing on an all western education or an all traditional education, the leadership must come up with a combination of systems that will provide a future for the modern Senegalese citizen. As mentioned above, the lack of focus on culture and identity is an immense factor in the school dropout and grade repetition rates. There are, however, many other elements that contribute to this phenomenon. Inequality within the education system has a major impact on dropouts. Indeed, women are not as well represented in Senegalese education and have the lowest rate of literacy in the country (CIA factbook, 2002).

Moreover, a curriculum based on historical and local cultural knowledge is necessary to provide a relevant education to the modern youth. Some may argue that culturally relevant pedagogy is not a primary concern for educational institutions when they are barely provided with enough material to teach properly. Many rural communities have, nevertheless, surmounted the issue of resources through innovation. In fact, some teachers have created what they call “multigrade teaching” (Mulkeen, 2009) in which one teacher instructs different grades at one time and, because of the lack of resources the teacher uses the students from the higher grade as peer learning assistants. This process is often perceived as a low class style education but it has many advantages. Not only does
multigrade teaching allow poor communities to have access to schools, it also provides older students with the skills to teach others, the ability to make a difference and to feel empowered.

Historically, getting an education under the French system during the colonial period was a path to upward social mobility and was politically symbolic. Indeed, the natives who were educated under this system were not only perceived as elite and promised economic success but were also granted French citizenship. The only way to acquire such a social status was through assimilation. The system established in that era was not meant to educate natives and ensure their self-sufficiency, rather it was to have control over the masses and fulfill the French desire to maintain its empire.

The Senegalese leadership has an obligation to guarantee to students that they can become self-sufficient individuals who can contribute to society. There is an urgency to render schools suitable to the Senegalese of the twenty-first century and understand that the colonial system was not put in place for the benefit of the African people but rather to feed the ethnocentricity of a Western entity.

The following quote reiterates the point of this paper and the feelings of many scholars of the new millennium (Brock-Utne, 2005; Bunyi, 2008; Clemons and Yerende, 2009; Diouf et al. 2000, Reagan, 2000). It explains the original purpose of the French education system and helps clarify the reasons why the paper argues that the system is not beneficial to the modern Senegalese student:

“Frenchification was never a brutal process. It was an opportunity, so the French see no reason why the same method should not be extended to their vast colonial empire
[...] one of the main assets of greater France, within the colonial empire and beyond, is the French language. Whoever reads French anywhere in the world, whatever his race or flag may be, becomes in some degree a part of the French cultural group” (Guerard, 1946).

Appiah is absolutely correct when he stated that one must self-define one’s meaning of being African. It may, however be difficult for a Senegalese student to thrive in school and form his or her own identity when policy makers are adamant about maintaining an obsolete system that, since independence, caters to a small portion of the population.
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