

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE PRACTICE OF *LA CA DES MAÎTRES* IN CURRICULUM SCHOOLS: AN ALTERNATIVE TO IN-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING IN KORO

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Abstract

This study analyzes in-service teachers' preparation through the learning community for teachers "La CA des Maîtres" in six schools of the municipality of Koro. Needs for teacher training in bilingual curriculum were identified and analyzed. Using a mix-method methodology, this research consisted of a series of interviews with the educational authorities (Cap advisors, school principals, and teachers). It also included focus group discussions, surveys, and educational policy documents. The findings indicate that, la CA des Maîtres, an alternative to in-service teacher training, is temporarily stopped. As a result, teachers are poorly trained in the mother tongue instruction methodology; they also lack adequate instructional teaching materials. Even so, a good number of bilingual teachers (83.3%) overtly expressed satisfaction about the implementation of la CA des Maîtres. The implication for this research suggests that the government is called upon to relaunch la CA des Maîtres in bilingual curriculum schools.

Keywords : *La CA des Maîtres, Initial training, Continuous professional development training, bilingual curriculum, Dɔɔɔɔ.*

Résumé

La présente étude se propose d'analyser la formation continue des enseignants à travers la communauté d'apprentissage des Maîtres « La CA des Maîtres » dans six écoles du cercle de Koro. Les besoins liés à la formation des enseignants en matière du curriculum bilingue ont été identifiés et analysés. Combinant une méthodologie mixte (qualitative et quantitative), nous avons procédé à une série d'entretiens avec les autorités éducatives (conseillers pédagogiques des CAP, directeurs d'école et

enseignants). Mieux, nous avons organisé des groupes de discussion, mené des enquêtes quantitatives et consulté des documents de politique éducative. Les résultats révèlent que la CA des Maîtres, une alternative à la formation continue des enseignants, est temporairement arrêté. En conséquence, les enseignants sont mal formés à la méthodologie d'enseignement en langue nationale ; ils manquent également de matériel didactique adéquat. Néanmoins, bon nombre d'enseignants pratiquant le curriculum bilingue (83,3 %) se sont déclarés ouvertement satisfaits de l'initiative de la CA des Maîtres. L'implication de cette étude révèle que le gouvernement doit encore fournir des efforts afin de relancer la CA des Maîtres dans les écoles à curriculum bilingue.

Mots-clés : *La CA des Maîtres, Formation initiale, Formation continue, curriculum bilingue, Dago.*

I- Introduction

It is no secret that the teacher's role in educational success is essential. For this reason, Mali has developed and implemented policies involving recruitment and training. The issue of in-service teacher training has always been a major concern for school authorities, technical and financial partners. This is rightly so, because successful education depends strongly on teachers' professional qualifications and professional development which have real value and impact. In this context, Henson (2004:3.) remarks, "The success of students in classrooms hinges on the competency levels of their teachers. Teachers have always been known for their high level of dedication, an attitude that has brought a high level of satisfaction." That is, good teachers make teaching effective so that students can learn at their maximum potential. In support of the above account, Linda Darling-Hammond (1998) cited in Henson (2004:6) recognizes that successful classrooms depend on two variables: what teachers know and how they use that knowledge. She said, "What teachers know and do is one of the most important influences on what students learn". So, preparing *teachers* to be full-fledged *educators* should be a *priority of our government*.

In Mali, the educational orientation law of 1999 has placed education in a context of functional bilingualism which is simultaneous teaching of the mother tongue and French (CONFEMEN, 2010). This educational orientation law of 1999 which gave pride of place to bilingual education is yet to meet its expected goals (Skattum, 2010). *CA Schools* were meant to be strengthened through the training of their in-service teachers in order to enable them to effectively play their role of teaching profession. In other words, there can be no successful school without the

implementation of an appropriate professional development training policy. In support of the foregoing, MEALN (2003), provides the main objectives of *CA des Maîtres*, which include but are not limited to the following: gradually establish a culture and autonomous management practices for continuous professional development training of teachers within the school; allow teachers to develop, as a team, in-service training strategies focused on academic performance; promote cooperative learning and skills development.

The problem of this research is the lack of professional development training for in-service teachers who are willing to implement the bilingual curriculum but are not adequately trained. We need not to recall that quality education goes hand in hand with qualified teachers. The initial training teachers were provided with at the Institute of Teacher Training (IFM) did not prepare them for the bilingual education. Therefore, in order to better manage this new context of functional bilingualism, greater emphasis is placed on the need for training teachers in the teaching of French as a second and foreign language.

Teachers who graduated from the Institute of Teacher Training (IFM) are placed at curriculum schools without having adequate training in teaching using national languages. The educational authorities simply assume that if a teacher speaks a local language, then he or she can use it to teach. Such an assumption is denied by Awoniyi (1982: 46) when he says, "However enthusiastic a teacher is, he or she must be trained and be introduced to modern techniques of teaching a particular subject." Notwithstanding, the assumption that the ability to speak a language is taken to mean teaching proficiency is still a reality in our country.

Commensurate with the teacher preparation, Traoré (2010:1) states, "The effectiveness and scope of the teacher's action, of the treatment to which he submits his students, are related to the training he has received, to the experience he has acquired, to the possibilities of continuous professional development training sessions which are offered to him." In other words, effective teachers are those who are adequately trained. They should believe in themselves and their ability to lead their students to succeed.

Within the same scope, "As John Steinbeck so clearly stated", Henson (2004:4) reports, "Good teachers make a difference." Good teachers are dedicated to their job and believe in themselves. Even so,

bilingual teachers can hardly implement their mission of teaching at a desired level if they are poorly trained. Instead, they need regular upgrading in their teaching profession in general and in pedagogical innovations in particular.

This research investigates the implementation of *CA des Maîtres* as an alternative strategy to continuous professional development training in bilingual curriculum schools in Koro. The learning community (*CA des Maîtres*) is used to describe the community of teachers of a school. Together with their Principals and experienced colleague teachers, they analyze the pedagogical practices in their schools, identify the needs for continuous professional development training of the teaching team and its members, mobilize the necessary resources and implement the desired training actions. There are three reasons for creating *CA des Maîtres*: first, it is fully geared to better learning and success of students; then it allows teachers to learn from one another and improve their pedagogical practices; finally, it is intended to create within the teaching team a lifelong learning dynamics and continuous improvement (MEN, 2003:23). However, *CA des Maîtres* is not held regularly due to the lack of funding. The language of instruction for the bilingual curriculum in the Dogonland (Mopti region) is Dɔgɔsɔ, concomitantly used with French. Dɔgɔsɔ is the fifth national language of Mali. Most significantly, the implementation of the curriculum through *CA des Maîtres* in the municipality of Koro has not yet been the subject of in-depth research. This study attempts to bridge that gap.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the practice of *CA des Maître* in Curriculum Schools as an alternative to in-service teacher training in Koro.

Specific objectives of the research are: i) to analyze the perception of bilingual curriculum teachers on *CA des Maîtres*; ii) identify the issues related to the holding of *CA des Maîtres* in the bilingual schools of the municipality of Koro. The following research questions are appropriate to guide the study: i) How do in-service bilingual teachers perceive the use of *CA des Maîtres*. ii) What are the main problems of in-service teachers and the reasons behind the holding of *CA des Maîtres* in bilingual schools in Koro?

II- Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a QUAL-QUAN Model, in which qualitative and quantitative data are equally weighted and are collected concurrently (Gay and Airasian, 2003:184). In this case, qualitative data are collected first and are more heavily weighted than quantitative. Structured interviews and focus group discussions are used in the qualitative portion to gather data; and to complement the qualitative data, a cross-sectional survey was used to collect the quantitative data.

The area of investigation of this study is the municipality of Koro in the Mopti region. There are four curriculum schools in the city of Koro namely: Guru Anaye, Djibril Barry, Siaka Dama I & Siaka Dama II.

2.2. Sample and Sampling Procedure

The participants of this research are classroom teachers, school Principals and education support center's advisors (CAP advisors). The researchers have purposively selected the participants from six schools implementing the curriculum in the municipality of Koro. They include the School Siaka Dama A and Siaka Dama B, School Djibril Barry I, School Gourou Anaye, school K. Barthelemy Togo in Dangatene, and School of Madougou. From these schools, 46 participants were selected including four CAP advisors. The participants of this study include both men and women who were sampled according to status and experience as detailed in the table below.

Table 1: *Sample selection and gender*

Schools and CAP	Gender		Status
	Men	Women	
K. Barthelemy Togo of Dangatene,	5	2	Conventional teachers Contractual teachers Civil servants
Madougou	4	3	Conventional teachers

			Contractual teachers Civil servants
Siaka A	3	4	Conventional teachers Contractual teachers Civil servants
Siaka B	3	4	Conventional teachers Contractual teachers Civil servants
Gourou Anaye	5	2	Conventional teachers Contractual teachers Civil servants
Djibril Barry I	6	1	Conventional teachers Contractual teachers Civil servants
CAP Madougou	1	1	Civil servants
CAP Koro	1	1	Civil servants
TOTAL	28	18	
	46		

Source: Field data

2.3. Research tools

Three main research tools were used in this study to collect data: Interview, Focus Group and Survey. In fact, ten school Principals and CAP advisors were interviewed. Interviews allowed us to get important information that could not be obtained otherwise. Four focus group discussions were organized with classroom teachers in four schools.

Each focus group discussion comprised of six participant teachers. It was conducted with the participants in four schools (School Siaka Dama A, Siaka Dama B, Gourou Anaye, and school of Madougou). The Focus Group Discussion (FGs) session started with an introduction of the members and the different topics for discussions. Then, the researchers reviewed the main points for informants to make comments on. Focus Group discussions are useful when the occasion to meet separately with every participant is difficult. The survey questionnaire was designed and administered to all the 46 participants. It helped us to supplement and corroborate the data gathered qualitatively. All the participants were first briefed and were then explained the purpose of the study by the researchers. The participant consent was a prerequisite step to their participation and we assured them that all information collected will be kept confidential. Both the FGs discussions and interviews with the participants were mainly focused on the practice of *CA des Maîtres*.

2.4. Data Analysis

The data were collected in French. The audio recordings of the interviews and focus group discussions were first transcribed, and then translated into English. The data from the survey questionnaire was processed with the Software Sphinx. The use of multiple data collection methods is aimed at strengthening the validity of the research.

3. Results and Discussions

This research seeks to analyze the implementation of *CA des Maîtres* as an alternative to continuous professional development training in bilingual curriculum schools in Koro. The following results are analyzed and discussed following the attitudes of teachers and multitudes of problems affecting the conditions of bilingual teaching.

3.1. Results relating to the first research question: How do in-service bilingual teachers perceive the use of CA des Maîtres?

3.1.1. Attitudes of in-service curriculum teachers

This portion explores the attitudes of the bilingual curriculum teachers in relation to the implementation of *CA des Maîtres*. It is therefore essential to delineate what attitudes mean. E.G. Lewis (1981:262) cited in M. Minkailou (2020:12) observes: “Any policy for language, especially in

the system of education, has to take account of the attitude of those likely to be affected. In the long run, no policy, which does not do one of three things, will succeed: conform to the expressed attitudes of those involved; persuade those who express negative attitudes about the rightness of the policy; or seek to remove the causes of disagreement.” In other words, understanding attitudes helps to get an insight into the success or failure of an education program and to determine how it may be addressed. The table below portrays the in-service teachers’ attitudes about the implementation of *CA des Maîtres*.

Table1: *Attitudes of in-service curriculum teachers*

Attitudes of curriculum teachers	Nb. Cit.	Freq.
No response	0	0.0%
Favorable	40	83.3%
Unfavorable	08	16.6%
TOTAL OBS.	48	100%

Source : Field data

The great majority of teachers surveyed 40 (83.3%) out of 48 teachers overtly expressed their motivation for *CA des Maîtres*. The great number of teachers who support *CA des Maîtres* shows that the innovation is helpful if adequately implemented and regularly organized. *CA des Maîtres* allows them to learn from each other and improve their practices in order to enhance students’ success. Only eight teachers or 16.6% said they are not favourable to the new innovation. The teachers who are not favourable may be the ones who did not receive any refresher courses on *CA des Maîtres*.

In the field, the lack of professional development training opportunities for teachers is a big issue.

Interviewers: Now, given these problems, which action have you taken to improve the teaching of the curriculum?

Mr. Dara, CAP advisor, Madougou, says, “I think if we want to continue with the teaching of the curriculum, we must first generalize it and encourage the training of teachers. We have to bring back *CA des Maîtres*, which is a self-training opportunity for teachers.”

Interviewers: What is the problem with *CA des Maîtres*?

Mr. Dara: “The government used to provide financial support to educational authorities for the implementation of *CA des Maîtres*. It was a learning community where teachers used to meet and discuss about issues relating to teaching.” Mr Dara further opines that a teacher already trained in the curriculum or a CAP advisor, who has expertise in this area, would come to train teachers at any time of the year. That was the retraining strategy called *CA des Maîtres*, but it temporarily stopped due to the lack of funding.

In addition, teachers’ attitudes of *CA des Maîtres* differ from the status they hold. In that respect, status may be considered as a good predictor of the relationships between teachers’ attitudes and performance. This research shows that all the curriculum class teachers do not have the same status. A significant number of teachers 30 (62.5%) are civil servants; 10 teachers i.e. 20.8% are contractual teachers; and five teachers corresponding to 10.4% are conventional teachers. In Mali, the educational authorities had to resort to several kinds of teachers in order to fill the need for teachers at a given time. So, concepts like conventional and contractual have emerged to particularly categorize teachers.

3.2. Results relating to the second research question: What are the main problems of in-service teachers and the reasons behind the holding of CA des Maîtres in bilingual schools in Koro?

This section analyzes and discusses the issues affecting in-service teachers’ performance in their capacity of implementing the bilingual curriculum and examining the rationale behind the holding of *CA des Maîtres*. In particular, this section investigates the level of in-service teacher training in the curriculum through *CA des Maîtres*, the participation to training in the mother tongue instruction (Dɔgɔsɔ), difficulties in lesson planning in curriculum, and teachers’ difficulties of switching from Dɔgɔsɔ to French (L1 to L2).

3.2.1. Level of training in the curriculum through CA des Maîtres

CA des Maîtres covers teaching and learning strategies in the initiation, aptitude, and consolidation classes. The different levels of training in the curriculum through CA des Maîtres is presented in the table below.

Table3: Levels of curriculum

Levels of curriculum	Nb. Cit.	Freq.
No response	2	4.1%
Level 1 Curriculum - Initiation classes	29	60.4%
Level 2 Curriculum - Aptitude	15	31.2%
Level 3 Curriculum - Consolidation	4	8.3%
TOTAL OBS.	48	100%

Source: Field data

The teachers who responded the questionnaire stressed the imperative need to train the stakeholders responsible for implementing the curriculum. The above table shows that 29 (60.4%) of teachers are trained in level one curriculum. 15 or 31.2% of teachers have received level two curriculum training. Only four teachers representing 8.3% are trained in level three. In the foregoing, the distribution of data in the curriculum training level is disproportionate. For teachers to master the three levels of the curriculum, they need to receive several *CA refresher* courses. Each level includes teaching units corresponding to the six classes of the primary education. Level 1 (initiation classes): 1st grade (100% National language), and 2nd grades (75% National language and 25% French). Level 2 (aptitude): 3rd and 4th grades (50 % National language and 50 % French). Level 3 (consolidation): 5th and 6th grades (25% National language and 75% French). Both national language and French are used concomitantly. Teaching start in the national language first, then French is introduced progressively and becomes again the sole medium of teaching after the primary school.

3.2.2. Participation to training in the mother tongue instruction through CA des Maîtres

It appears from the interview extract below that the teachers did not receive adequate training in the use of national languages at school through *CA des Maîtres*. Policies are set up, but the conditions for their implementation are not met. This is illustrated in what Baba Kane, advisor, CAP of Koro, says, “The large majority of our teachers are IFM graduates, and I’ll tell you there was a time when our teachers participated in *CA* training at the academy, and the officials of the academy were very happy with the level of the teachers in Koro.” At that time, education

stakeholders were taking initiatives to train teachers whenever the opportunity arose. Mr Kane adds, “Once they are hired, we make sure that everyone participates in the training sessions we organize.” *CA training* sessions are rarely organized for teachers. This is sustained and summed up in the table below:

Table 4: *Participation to training in the mother tongue instruction (Dogɔɔ)*

Teacher training	Nb. Cit.	Freq.
No response	3	6.2%
Yes	29	60.4%
No	16	33.3%
TOTAL OBS.	48	100%

Source: Field data

A significant number of teachers 16 (33.3%) asserted they have not received any training in the curriculum. This explains their difficulties coping with the specific content area and teaching method and assessment. A great number of teachers 29 i.e. 60.4% admitted to have received training in the curriculum. The high number of teachers 29 (60.4%) who have been trained can be explained by the fact that some experienced teachers or school Principals volunteered to train them at their respective schools through *CA des Maîtres*. Few teachers (three representing 6.2%) among them, who did not answer the questionnaire, might not benefit from any training sessions.

The duration of professional development training gradually decreased from 20 to less than 10 days (Mathieu Ongoiba, advisor at the CAP of Koro). This is felt by almost all the informant teachers to be insufficient because it does not allow them to master the contents of both French and National language at all the levels.

Teachers who are not able to read and write in the national language are introduced to curriculum development, transcription, and writing in the national language in level one. In level two, they are introduced to the teaching of receptive skills; and, their productive skills in the relevant national language are strengthened through creative writing. In addition, in level three, they are trained to consolidate all previous learning in the program. Because none of the teachers received initial training in national

language pedagogy at IFM, *CA des Maîtres*, which is an invaluable initiative of retraining, should not be halted halfway.

3.2.5. Difficulties in lesson planning in the curriculum

All the teachers complained about the inadequacy of didactic and pedagogical materials, which makes planning very difficult. Teachers have difficulty accessing textbooks and using the teacher's guide. *CA des Maîtres* was initiated to address the lack of teacher's initial training in the curriculum. Below are teachers' responses to the question whether *CA des Maîtres* helped them to overcome difficulties in lesson planning.

Table 5: *Difficulties in lesson planning in the curriculum*

Has <i>CA des Maîtres</i> helped you to overcome difficulties in lesson planning?	Nb. Cit.	Freq.
No response	2	4.1%
No	9	18.7%
Yes	37	77.0%
TOTAL OBS.	48	100%

Source: Field data

A few teachers, nine (9) out of forty-eight (48), said the strategy did not help them. It might be that these teachers were retrained in the curriculum. So *CA des Maîtres* did not have much impact on their planning. A great majority thirty-seven (37) or 77% of teachers confessed that *CA des Maîtres* helped them overcome difficulties in lesson planning. These data call for maintenance and support of *CA des Maîtres* in order to better facilitate teaching tasks and their execution.

Moreover, during the focus group discussion held at School Siaka Dama A and Siaka Dama B, Gourou Anaye, and school of Madougou, the teachers think that there are too many repetitions in the selected subject areas in the teachers' guide and often the same content can come up several times. That is, a content of unit 1 can be found in unit 2, 3 or even unit 4. To overcome this inadequacy of documents, *CA des Maîtres* composed of curriculum teachers meet twice a month to develop a work program and prepare their colleague teachers with little

or no prior teaching experience. This allows all the classes to progress together and provides each teacher with a model of program and a teacher's orientation guide. The findings from the Focus group discussion with teachers specify that school Principals organize *CA des Maîtres*, but this initiative is not enough to address the issue related to documentation faced by the curriculum schools.

3.2.6. Difficulties of switching from Dɔ̀gɔ̀sɔ̀ to French (L1 to L2)

A professional development program taking account of both the didactics of French and national languages might help those teachers in delivering their lessons. The data from the survey with teachers show their difficulties in transition. The great majority of teachers surveyed, thirty-six or 75% out of forty-eight teachers admitted that they have difficulties switching from Dɔ̀gɔ̀sɔ̀ to French. Only 11 teachers or 22.9% said they did not have transition problems. The great number of teachers (36 or 75%) facing difficulties with transition from L1 to L2 proves the lack of *CA sessions* to address transition issues.

In support of the above, Moussa Niangaly, Principal of School “Djibril Barry I” points out, “the source of the problem is due to the fact that mother tongue instruction is not included in the program of study at IFM.” Even so, the Ministry of Education make teachers’ placement at random. The proof that national languages are not included in the teachers’ training institutions is reflected in the interview below:

Interviewers: Did your teachers receive courses of Dɔ̀gɔ̀sɔ̀ at IFM? Mr. Niangaly responds with, “None of my teachers has taken Dɔ̀gɔ̀sɔ̀ courses at IFM. I myself am a graduate from IFM, but I have not been taught courses in Dɔ̀gɔ̀sɔ̀. Before going to IFM, I had some notions in Dɔ̀gɔ̀sɔ̀, and that's what helped me a lot.” In other words, the mother tongue instruction not being included in the program of IFM, actions are taken to retrain in-service teachers through *CA des Maîtres* in order to help them cope with the teaching situation on the field.

The data from the interviews, both with teachers and school Principals as well as CAP advisors showed that many education stakeholders emphasize the need for bringing back *CA des Maîtres* for in-service teachers. The way teachers cope with their professional development training in the curriculum classes can be found in their own

words. Mr. Seydou Niangaly, 6th grade curriculum teacher, Djibril Barry I, states, “We have had round tables around in-service training issues. There is *CA des Maîtres*, which is organized in schools. It is during these *CA sessions* that the Principal and teachers try to do their best to identify and assist those who have problems.” To put it differently, during their meetings concerning school issues, the training issue is often mentioned. The attention of the educational authorities is drawn in order to take into account Dɔ̀gɔ̀sɔ̀ teachers' training needs.

To date, *CA des Maîtres* seems to be stopped. Mrs. Yalè Doumbo, 4th grade curriculum teacher at Madougou A, says, “When I arrived in 2010, there was *CA des Maîtres*; I got in touch with experienced teachers in Dɔ̀gɔ̀sɔ̀ to help me in switching from French to Dɔ̀gɔ̀sɔ̀. That's how I coped with the teaching situation”. Though *CA des Maîtres* is no longer funded and rarely organized, some teachers recognize it as a good initiative and alternative to professional development training. Mrs Lormé Douyon, Principal at Siaka Dama A witnesses, “Among the initiatives the school has undertaken there is *CA des Maîtres*, although this year nothing has yet been done.” For her, during *CA sessions*, teachers exchange knowledge and experience about the curriculum, how to prepare lessons, how to teach and evaluate, etc. Even so, despite the initiative of *CA des Maîtres*, the duration of the training sessions is too short and the time allocated to learning national languages in bilingual initiation (1st and 2nd grades) classes are cause for satisfaction.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in-service teachers' preparation is key to what happens in the classroom and school performance. 40 (83.3%) out of 48 teachers expressed their motivation for *CA des Maîtres*, which shows that the innovation is supportive if adequately implemented and regularly organized. The study shows that the implementation of the bilingual curriculum could be a reality with the holding of *CA des Maîtres*. The findings revealed that there is a disproportionate distribution of data in the curriculum training. 29 (60.4%) of teachers are trained in the initiation classes; 15 or 31.2% of teachers have received training in the aptitude classes; and the consolidation classes recorded only 8.3% of teachers trained. In addition, *CA training* sessions are rarely organized for teachers. A significant number of teachers 16 (33.3%) asserted they have

not received any training in the curriculum. The interview data confirmed that the duration of teacher training gradually decreased, which is felt by informant teachers to be insufficient to master the contents of both French and National language at all the levels. A great majority thirty-seven (37) or 77% of teachers confessed that *CA des Maîtres* helped them overcome difficulties in lesson planning. These data call for maintenance and support of *CA des Maîtres* in order to better facilitate teaching tasks and their execution. Furthermore, a significant number of teachers surveyed, thirty-six or 75% out of forty-eight teachers admitted that they have difficulties switching from Dɔ̀gɔ̀sɔ̀ to French. The situation of teachers who face difficulties in switching from L1 to L2 proves the lack of *CA sessions* to address transition issues. The findings revealed that continuous professional development training and its alternative strategy (*CA des Maîtres*) must be a blueprint for teacher preparation. Finally, regular continuous professional development training for in-service teachers and the funding of the activities of “*CA des Maîtres*” need to be supported if the successful teaching and learning of the curriculum is to be achieved in the municipality of Koro.

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