

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF THE 2026 “TOTAL BILINGUALISM” EDUCATION REFORM IN CHAD: A QUALITATIVE DIGITAL ETHNOGRAPHY

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Résumé

Perceptions publiques de la réforme éducative du « bilinguisme total » de 2026 au Tchad : une ethnographie numérique qualitative. Cette étude examine les perceptions du public, des médias et des acteurs de terrain concernant la réforme éducative soudaine du « bilinguisme total » imposée par le ministère tchadien de l'Éducation nationale à tous les niveaux d'enseignement. S'appuyant sur l'approche critique de la planification linguistique de Tollefson et sur le modèle tripartite de politique linguistique de Spolsky, la recherche a adopté une méthodologie ethnographique numérique qualitative. Les données ont été systématiquement recueillies après la publication de la circulaire d'avril 2026 auprès de quatre médias numériques tchadiens indépendants de premier plan, ainsi que de soixante commentaires d'acteurs du public extraits de forums de discussion communautaires sur Facebook et YouTube. L'analyse thématique du contenu révèle un profond décalage entre les ambitions politiques d'« équité linguistique » et les réalités éducatives concrètes. Les médias indépendants doutent de cette réforme et déplorent le temps limité accordé au comité pour les études de terrain. Parents et élèves expriment leurs inquiétudes face au manque d'enseignants formés à l'arabe et de matériel pédagogique, ce qui pourrait entraver l'apprentissage de cette langue. L'étude conclut que la loi, à elle seule, ne peut résoudre ces problèmes institutionnels. Il est recommandé aux parties prenantes d'accorder suffisamment de temps au comité chargé de la réforme pour qu'il puisse effectuer un travail de terrain approfondi, former les enseignants d'arabe et mettre en œuvre la réforme progressivement en commençant par les écoles maternelles.

Mots-clés : *bilinguisme total, réforme de l'éducation, politique linguistique, bilinguisme arabe-français, ethnographie numérique.*

Abstract

This study investigates the public, media, and grassroots perceptions surrounding the sudden “Total Bilingualism” education reform mandated by the Chadian Ministry of National Education for all educational sectors. Anchored in Tollefson’s critical language planning approach and Spolsky’s tripartite model of language policy, the research adopted a qualitative digital ethnography design. Data were systematically gathered following the April 2026 circular from four prominent independent Chadian digital media outlets, alongside sixty public

stakeholder comments extracted from grassroots Facebook and YouTube discussion forums. The thematic content analysis reveals a profound discrepancy between top-down political ambitions of “linguistic equity” and practical educational realities. Independent media doubt this reform and lament the limited time given to the committee for fieldwork diagnostics. Parents and students express concern over the lack of trained teachers in Arabic and pedagogical materials, which could hinder the learning of Arabic. The study concludes that government law alone cannot solve these institutional challenges. It is recommended that stakeholders provide sufficient time to the committee in charge of the reform to conduct thorough fieldwork, train Arabic teachers, and implement the reform progressively starting from nursery schools.

Keywords: *total bilingualism, education reform, language policy, arabic-french bilingualism, digital ethnography.*

1. Introduction

Language-in-education policy refers fundamentally to the formal regulations, administrative documents, and institutional frameworks governing language acquisition within a state’s educational ecosystem. Historically, early research in language policy and planning (LPP) was deeply tethered to modernization and development theories. Operating from an optimistic, top-down perspective, and early scholars believed that centralized government policies inherently benefited minority language groups and that academic experts could seamlessly design efficient systems for implementation at the nation-state level.

However, contemporary sociolinguistics has exposed several critical shortcomings in these early practices. First, early top-down approaches routinely ignored the sheer complexity of social and political systems, failing to recognize that the relationship between policy text and actual execution is highly non-linear. Second, centralized planning frequently overlooked the localized attitudes, identities, and linguistic habits of the everyday participants within the education system. Because language policies inherently possess strict regional, temporal, political, and social limitations, a guiding ideology that seems feasible in one era often loses its operational value when applied blindly to another “here and now.”

When modern LPP emerged as a problem-driven discipline in the 1960s and 1970s, it focused heavily on the sociolinguistic dilemmas

faced by newly independent nations in Asia and Africa grappling with national unity, language standardization, and curriculum choices. Upon gaining independence, the majority of African countries maintained colonial languages to navigate these educational and administrative hurdles. Following this trajectory, Chad adopted the French language as a medium of communication, formal education, administration, and commerce. Some years later, the Constitution of 1996 was amended in 2005, officially making Arabic the country's second official language. Despite this double constitutional status, the two official languages never achieved the same functionality.

This delicate linguistic cooperation was fundamentally interrupted in April 2026, when the Minister of National Education issued Circular No. 004/PR/MMENBPC/SEENBPC/SG/2026. This official mandate announced the instantaneous implementation of "Total Bilingualism" across all education sectors. Under this announcement, the teaching and learning of literary Arabic is no longer optional; rather, it has become compulsory with the same hourly volume as French across all educational cycles, overtly appealing to the political principles of linguistic equity and equality. To operationalize this far-reaching mandate, the Chadian government simultaneously enacted Decree No. 1984, creating a centralized Strategic Reflection Committee on the Education System led by the Rector of the Western Academy and tasking it with delivering a comprehensive systemic diagnostic.

While offered by Chadian authorities as an instrument for linguistic equity, this rapid institutional directive has generated strong socio-political reactions and divided Chadian society. The implementation of compulsory Arabic in a legally secular education system has revived deep-seated apprehensions. For some stakeholders, the Arabic language is associated with an Islamic religious identity rather than official educational development because many existing Arabic-medium schools require faith-based uniforms, creating cultural barriers for non-Muslim students. In addition, independent media, parents, and students raised crucial

anxieties regarding severe pedagogical deficits, shortages of Arabic teachers, and an unfeasible reform timeline.

Research regarding bilingualism policy has a long history in Chad. For example, Djarangar (1998), one of the pioneers in language studies in Chad, described the linguistic landscape and raised the problem of functional bilingualism. For the researcher, declaring two languages official does not automatically guarantee the production of bilingual speakers; functional bilingualism requires deliberate planning and heavy resource investments. This argument remains highly relevant today, as the 2026 mandate directly confronts the structural gaps first identified by Djarangar (1998).

In addition, Al-habo (2004) pushed the discussion further by questioning whether bilingualism in Chad is a myth or a reality. The researcher found that there is a serious gap between Arabic and French, with French dominating formal social discourse and the education system, while Arabic remains largely confined to religious and informal settings. Al-habo's (2004) research emphasizes that the bilingual bottleneck is not simply pedagogical but deeply social and economic. Any reforms that fail to touch these structural inequalities risk exacerbating regional divisions rather than correcting them.

Years later, Chidi (2019) examined language policies and education systems in Chad. His work anticipated the very tensions the 2026 mandate has now triggered. The current study identifies the same structural challenges that Chidi (2019) documented, arguing that without thorough fieldwork and substantial funding, the new policy reform risks becoming a missed opportunity to foster authentic bilingualism.

Furthermore, Moussa et al. (2024) pointed out the persistent need for qualified Arabic teachers. Their findings revealed that even in N'Djamena, the capital city, there exist serious structural deficiencies in school infrastructure. Moussa et al.'s research provides an empirical ground for the concerns raised by the media, parents, and students in this study. The lack of qualified Arabic

teachers and pedagogical materials remains unresolved, and the 2026 mandate does not present an immediate plan for resolving the problem. This study confirms that the structural gaps highlighted by Moussa et al. (2024) are now visibly manifesting in national discourse through digital media criticism and parental concern in online forums.

Lately, Ndoubangar and Issa's (2025) findings on the impacts of language policy on bilingualism in Chadian schools revealed that top-down language policies often have counterproductive impacts on the teaching and learning of Arabic. They also observed conflicting perceptions among Arabic teachers and students alongside an insufficient supply of pedagogical materials in Arabic. These findings align closely with the reactions to the new policy reform. If different parties present negative attitudes toward Arabic due to implementation constraints, imposing it across all educational levels may put the reform at risk of failing.

Ndoubangar and Issa's (2025) work essentially warns that the problem is not the language itself but the top-down manner in which it is introduced and managed institutionally. The present study builds directly on Ndoubangar and Issa's (2025) conclusions by examining how those pre-existing tensions have surfaced publicly in media discourse and grassroots digital spaces.

From the literature reviewed above, it is evident that the challenge lies in the friction between institutional mandates and the sociopolitical and pedagogical realities of the Chadian education system. The majority of actors are unprepared to face this reform due to a shortage of qualified bilingual teachers, a lack of authentic materials, and insufficient public awareness. Mandating the Arabic language as compulsory in a secular setting without a clear institutional framework may risk failure. This study explores the perceptions of Chadian stakeholders towards the 2026 mandate and evaluates the structural action plan established by the government to manage the reform.

This study draws on two complementary theoretical frameworks to analyze the 2026 bilingualism mandate in Chad: Tollefson's

(2008) critical approach to language planning and Spolsky's (2004) tripartite model of language policy. Tollefson's framework helps this study look beyond the policy text itself to ask a more critical question: whom does this reform actually serve, and whose practical concerns have been left out? Spolsky (2004) adds an analytical layer through his tripartite model, which deconstructs language policy into three distinct dimensions.

The first is language beliefs (or ideology) — what people think and feel about a language. The second is language practices — how people actually use language in real life. The third is language management — the formal decisions and regulations that governments and institutions put in place. These dimensions illustrate that the “Total Bilingualism” mandate introduces ideological and practical problems that a ministerial circular cannot solve on its own.

Through Tollefson's critical lens, we can see the real political motives driving this reform — moving past the official rhetoric to understand why the government acted so abruptly. First, it exposes the intense “political rush” behind Decree No. 1984. Expecting the Strategic Reflection Committee to overhaul an entire national education system in just 30 days is practically impossible. Tollefson's theory helps us see this timeline for what it really is: a performative political display of readiness rather than a thoughtful, classroom-first plan. Second, this approach allows us to challenge the state's manufactured “linguistic equity”. While Circular No. 004 uses the language of fairness, simply passing a law cannot instantly erase decades of socioeconomic dominance that French holds in Chad's job markets and NGO sectors.

While Tollefson analyzes the state's power play, Spolsky's tripartite model is relevant because it provides the exact diagnostic tools to categorize why the public is resisting and panicking in online spaces. Spolsky breaks down the policy ecosystem into two misaligned nodes: the rules versus real life, and the rules versus identity. Regarding the first, the state demanded that everyone switch to Arabic overnight, but it largely ignored the reality on the

ground: schools lack the necessary resources, and in the countryside, only about five teachers cover a hundred schools, leaving instruction to untrained staff. Regarding the second, language is deeply personal, and the state's failure to keep its messaging neutral reawakened old religious apprehensions; non-Muslim families now perceive mandatory Arabic as a threat to secular schooling, especially since existing Arabic-speaking schools already require religious uniforms.

It can be said that Tollefson's theory guides this research to comment on the state's aggressive authority, while Spolsky's theory allows it to categorize and account for the public's backlash. Together, they show that the policy raises concerns from both a human-rights perspective and a practical, logistical perspective.

There remains a critical empirical gap regarding how these official pressures manifest in the modern digital sphere following an instant reform. Utilizing a qualitative digital ethnography design grounded in Tollefson's (2008) critical approach to language planning and Spolsky's (2004) tripartite model of language policy, this study seeks to investigate this friction. Specifically, it explores the grassroots, media, and public perceptions of the reform alongside the structural mechanisms established by the state. To achieve this objective, this paper addresses the following two research questions:

1. What are the systemic perceptions and socio-cultural anxieties of online independent media, parents, and students regarding the "Total Bilingualism" education reform announced in April 2026 in Chad?
2. How does the Ministry of National Education structurally plan to execute and succeed in this reform given the operational frameworks established by Decree No. 1984?

2. Methodology

This study employs qualitative content analysis to understand how texts operate within specific sociocultural environments. This

approach helps the researcher scrutinize the data closely enough to capture both the obvious, explicit arguments and the more delicate, underlying themes running through different data streams. Beyond that, the approach provides a clear, methodical protocol for converting unstructured digital conversations into an organized and reliable thematic matrix.

Data collection began immediately after the April 2026 mandate. The data sources comprised digital sites of independent press outlets and public community discussion networks. Among the media platforms in Chad, four prominent independent outlets were selected: *Alwihda Info*, *Tom le Tchadien*, *Salam Info*, and *Chrono Media*. Public discussions on Facebook and YouTube were monitored using the targeted search terms “*Problème du bilinguisme intégral au Tchad*” and “*réforme éducation au Tchad 2026-2027*”.

These platforms were selected based on their editorial independence, their engagement with urban and grassroots Chadian populations, and their consistent coverage of national education and language policy issues. They represent a cross-section of the Chadian Francophone digital press. Social media spaces were selected because they are actively utilized by Chadians to analyze and debate new civic and legislative events.

A purposeful selection of 25 online media articles was initially identified, of which 20 substantive entries were retained for thematic analysis. Five articles were excluded because they merely reproduced the text of the government mandate without providing analytical commentary. In addition, a purposeful corpus of 60 public comments and discussion posts was collected from Facebook and YouTube.

As a lecturer at the University of Doba, the researcher brings contextual linguistic and cultural familiarity with both Chadian Arabic and French. However, this insider positionality carries an inherent risk of interpretive bias, which was strictly managed through researcher reflexivity and by consistently returning to the raw data throughout the coding process.

This research relies heavily on online digital spaces, thereby excluding the viewpoints of Chadians who do not have stable internet access. Given that this study is exclusively qualitative, further grounded research combining qualitative and extensive quantitative methods across different regions in Chad is needed.

Given the unique context of conducting qualitative inquiry into digital spaces, a sound ethical code was employed, which had to carefully navigate the balance of public availability of information versus protecting individual privacy. As the intent of posting public comments online by members of the public, including grassroots individuals, to be collected for academic inquiry was not explicit and often unforeseen, this researcher conscientiously abided by the AoIR ethical guidelines when conducting digital ethnography.

Firstly, all direct identifiers — full names, handles, profile pictures, and precise location information — were removed from the data to protect the identity of grassroots individuals from potential deductive identification and to prevent potential real-world harm, digital violation, and harassment; and secondly, the data from the Facebook and YouTube public comments underwent light paraphrasing at the point of translation and analysis, which prevents researchers from “reverse-searching” and identifying participants via public profiles that may otherwise result in backlash against an individual concerning views on this sensitive national reform.

Finally, any information collected from standalone digital media outlets — e.g., Alwihda Info and Salam Info — was confined strictly to the data that was publicly and openly available in the format of articles and editorials. Data was not sourced from private groups, forums, or other restricted digital communities. The researcher’s work kept a clear separation between published journalistic opinions/viewpoints and individual and private opinions and views in private digital communities.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Online Media Perceptions: Systemic Skepticism and Structural Feasibility

The digital ethnography of Chad’s independent press reveals a profound discrepancy between the top-down political ambitions of the state and the functional, material realities of the classroom. Rather than rejecting bilingualism as an ideological goal, the selected media outlets acted as critical watchdogs, challenging the state’s administrative methodology and rushed implementation timeline.

Table 1: Media Perception of the Total Bilingualism System in Chad (2026-2027)

Media Platform	Media Theme / Headline	Main Sociolinguistic & Pedagogical Issue
Chrono Media	“Top-down Bilingualism: A Reform that Raises Questions”	Highlights the gap between political discourse and functional reality. The problem is not granting Arabic equal weighting to French on paper, but building functional equality on the ground.
Salam Info	“An Ambitious Reform Facing Ground Realities”	Focuses on the critical shortage of qualified bilingual teachers and the lack of updated textbooks tailored to this immediate transition.
Alwihda Info	“Total Bilingualism 2026: Accelerated Plan or Political Rush?”	Critiques the one-month mandate given to the strategic committee, calling it insufficient to perform serious, grounded diagnostic work.

Media Platform	Media Theme / Headline	Main Sociolinguistic & Pedagogical Issue
Tom le Tchadien	“The Secular School System on the Test of Compulsory Arabic”	Analyzes the risk of institutional polarization and the lack of a clear secular framework for language implementation.

A core theme across the 20 analyzed articles is the critique of using “administrative decree” as a substitute for pedagogical infrastructure. For instance, Chrono Media structurally questioned the timeline of establishing immediate linguistic parity:

“Decreeing that Arabic holds equal weight to French in our exam halls by the next school year does not instantly build a bilingual brain. French holds an unaddressed socioeconomic hegemony in our job markets and NGO sectors; forcing structural equality through a circular ignores the massive systemic ladder that must be built first.” (Art-02)

This finding aligns directly with Tollefson’s (2008) critical framework, which notes that top-down policies often disregard existing linguistic hierarchies, inevitably resulting in profound execution gaps for local stakeholders. Furthermore, media outlets heavily criticized the mandate of the Strategic Reflection Committee under Decree No. 1984, noting that a thirty-day deadline to overhaul a national curriculum is counterproductive. An editorial excerpt from Alwihda Info captures this administrative overreach:

“The Ministry is treating a profound civilizational and educational transition as a political sprint. Giving a committee exactly thirty days to diagnose, restructure, and deliver an operational roadmap for thousands of schools is not a reform — it is an institutional rush designed for political display, methodologically doomed to be superficial.” (Art. 11)

By highlighting these impossible timelines, the media consensus implies that the state is fundamentally confusing linguistic equity

(the political ambition) with pedagogical feasibility (the practical execution).

3.2 Parents’ and Students’ Perceptions: Logistical Anxieties and Identity Friction

While independent media focused their attention on macro-level policy critiques, the analysis of the 60 gathered public comments from Facebook and YouTube revealed highly localized, pragmatic anxieties. Parents and students were less concerned with policy text and deeply worried about daily academic survival, economic costs, and identity friction.

Table 2: Parents’ and Students’ Perceptions on Digital Public Forums

Stakeholder	Digital Discourse Theme	Core Sociocultural & Logistical Grievance
Parents	Logistical and financial anxiety	Fear of a drop in overall student performance due to sudden shifts in exam formats. Anxiety over the extra cost of private tutoring for Arabic.
Parents	Confessional and identity anxieties	Reluctance from non-Muslim families who associate the Arabic language strictly with Islamic religious education and faith-based uniforms.
Students	Pedagogical overload	Complaints regarding the sudden increase in weekly credit hours. Fear of failing official exams due to a lack of foundational training in literary Arabic.

Stakeholder	Digital Discourse Theme	Core Sociocultural & Logistical Grievance
Students	Lack of representation	Expression of feeling excluded from the decision-making process, highlighting that they are the primary “experimental subjects” of the 2026 mandate.

Pedagogical and Regional Teacher Deficits

A primary sub-theme extracted from parental comments is the severe shortage of pedagogically trained Arabic instructors. Parents pointed out that raw language proficiency is being conflated with teaching competence, raising concerns about the quality of instruction:

“We are setting our children up for failure. Most Arabic instructors available are ‘Quranophones’ — they possess religious literacy from theological institutions but have zero training in modern second-language pedagogy. They teach Arabic as an ideology, not as a functional, secular language tool.” (Com-14)

This qualitative sentiment supports the empirical findings of Ndoubangar and Issa (2025), who noted that many under-trained Arabic teachers focus on ideological engagement rather than classroom language pedagogy. Furthermore, commenters underlined that teacher deficits deteriorate sharply outside urban centers, creating severe regional disparities:

“In N’Djamena, you might find a teacher. But come to the rural public schools in the south. There are literally five Arabic teachers for every one hundred schools. How can the Minister make an exam mandatory nationwide when my village school hasn’t seen an Arabic textbook or teacher in five years?” (Com-29)

Sociocultural and Confessional Polarization

Spolsky's (2004) model underscores language beliefs — how people feel about a language — as a primary driver of policy outcomes. The digital ethnography captured a powerful undercurrent of confessional tension, where the secularity of the school system is perceived to be under threat due to historical associations between Arabic and Islam:

“If this reform is advantageous, why do the vast majority of schools specializing in Arabic require girls to wear faith-based uniforms? For non-Muslim families, mandating this language without a strict secular boundary feels less like a bilingual curriculum and more like cultural colonization.” (Com-44)

Student Voices: Academic Overload and Lack of Agency

Students utilizing Facebook and YouTube discussion spaces expressed a distinct sense of alienation, viewing themselves as defenseless subjects of a rushed top-down mandate:

“They are changing the entire rules of the Baccalaureate exam while we are already in the middle of our cycles. Forcing us to master a completely new alphabet and equal credit hours in literary Arabic within months is an impossible pedagogical overload.” (Com-07)

Conversely, some student commentators recognized the geopolitical and economic value of Arabic literacy, noting its utility for regional integration within the Arab League and Gulf markets. However, even these optimistic viewpoints highlighted a structural hierarchy that the reform fails to address:

“Learning Arabic is great for doing business with Chad's neighbors and the Gulf. But the government is delusional if it thinks this solves our future. In the global economy, English is still dominant, yet it is completely sidelined in this new curriculum layout. Why are we overhauling everything for a political gesture?” (Com-55)

Ultimately, the public extracts demonstrate that without an extensive communication strategy, a gradual transition timeline, and massive infrastructural investments, the reform risks

transforming a positive linguistic opportunity into a source of academic anxiety, institutional gridlock, and systemic resistance.

3.3 The Institutional and Structural Framework of Decree No. 1984

Research Question 2 investigates the structural mechanisms established by the Chadian state to execute the “Total Bilingualism” reform. Institutional data reveal that the state’s blueprint relies entirely on centralized, top-down administrative bodies formalized under Decree No. 1984. Chief among these is the Strategic Reflection Committee on the Education System, an elite body chaired by the Rector of the Western Academy and tasked with conducting a rapid national diagnostic.

However, an institutional analysis of this framework exposes severe structural vulnerabilities that threaten its execution. In Spolsky’s (2004) tripartite model, successful language management requires a well-resourced operational pipeline that bridges the gap between state directives and grassroots realities. Instead, the framework mandated by Decree No. 1984 functions primarily as a bureaucratic insulation layer. By centering the diagnostic authority within a highly centralized committee in N’Djamena, the Ministry has effectively decoupled policy creation from the regional educational actor networks (inspectors, pedagogical advisors, and localized teacher unions) who understand the actual material limits of the schools. This structural disconnect is manifested in two major operational gaps.

The Timeline Contradiction and Artificial Diagnostics

The working agenda established by the decree imposed a rigid, impossibly compressed one-month deadline for the Strategic Reflection Committee to deliver its comprehensive diagnostic roadmap. From a Tollefsonian critical perspective, this extreme temporal restriction serves an ideological purpose: it prioritizes political optics and immediate legislative display over empirical validity. A one-month window makes an authentic, mixed-

methods sociolinguistic audit of Chad's diverse educational landscape structurally impossible. The committee cannot accurately map geographic inconsistencies in teacher readiness, assess the pedagogical status of remote public schools, or audit regional printing capacities for secular Arabic textbooks within thirty days. Consequently, the execution plan relies on an imagined, standardized educational landscape rather than the fragmented reality documented by researchers on the ground, such as Ndoubangar and Issa (2025).

The Centralized Financial and Resource Vacuum

Furthermore, while Decree No. 1984 outlines the administrative hierarchy of the committee, it remains strikingly vague regarding the mobilization of structural resources. The state's execution plan relies on a top-down assumption that simply commanding "Total Bilingualism" will naturally stimulate the production of secular pedagogical materials and teacher re-training programs. However, because the decree establishes a *reflective* committee rather than an *independently funded executive authority*, the policy remains trapped in a financial vacuum. The Ministry expects local public and private schools to absorb the immediate costs of equalizing credit hours — such as hiring private Arabic tutors or procuring new bilingual curricula — without providing state-backed subsidies.

Ultimately, the structural framework established by Decree No. 1984 reveals that the Ministry of National Education is attempting to achieve educational success through the illusion of bureaucratic mobilization. By substituting deep structural funding and long-term, decentralized field diagnostics with a centralized, time-bound committee, the state's execution plan remains fundamentally performative. It creates the legal appearance of structural readiness while leaving the actual operational chaos of implementation completely unresolved.

Taken together, the media, parents', and students' reactions to the April 2026 "Total Bilingualism" mandate in Chad transcend mere logistical anxiety; they reveal deep-seated structural conflicts

regarding political authority, national identity, and systemic inequality. The following subsections interpret these results through Tollefson's (2008) critical language planning approach and Spolsky's (2004) tripartite model of language policy, deconstructing how top-down state management collides with bottom-up social and material realities.

3.4 Tollefson's Critical Approach: Hegemony, Ideology, and the Political Rush

Tollefson's (2008) framework posits that language policies are never neutral administrative exercises; instead, they are institutional mechanisms that inherently create, maintain, or challenge structured inequalities within the nation-state. The immediate enforcement of Circular No. 004 and Decree No. 1984 serves as an elite ideological apparatus attempting to manufacture linguistic equity by executive fiat. As observed in the media analysis, independent outlets like *Chrono Media* and *Alwibda Info* identified the stark gap between the state's political discourse and functional, classroom-level realities (Art-02, Art-11).

The Chadian state's decision to mandate equal hours and equal weighting for Arabic and French ignores what Tollefson defines as historical and institutional hegemony. French has enjoyed decades of systemic dominance as the primary language of administration, higher education, and lucrative employment sectors. By suddenly forcing Arabic into an identical structural position without establishing the requisite infrastructural scaffolding, the state is not resolving inequality — it is amplifying it, as students are held accountable for an exam format they are unprepared to navigate (Com-07).

Furthermore, assigning only one month to the Strategic Reflection Committee under Decree No. 1984 illustrates Tollefson's critique of the "political rush" in top-down planning. The data indicate that this timeline was driven by short-term political objectives rather than empirical, long-term pedagogical planning. When a state forces immediate curricular transformations without a gradual

transition or localized diagnostic research, it creates an operational vacuum. Elite ambitions completely override grassroots capacities, transforming what could be a progressive language policy into an instrument of systemic frustration.

3.5 Spolsky's Tripartite Model: The Friction between Management, Beliefs, and Practices

Spolsky's (2004) model breaks language policy down into three interacting dimensions: language management, language beliefs/ideology, and language practices. The digital ethnography reveals a profound misalignment across all three nodes within the Chadian educational ecosystem.

Language Management vs. Language Practices

The most acute operational rupture occurs between the state's management and the country's actual classroom practices. Spolsky (2004) argues that management techniques (such as government decrees) are fundamentally toothless if they do not align with existing linguistic habits and institutional capacities. While the state mandates that Arabic must be a compulsory core language across all sectors, historical practice reveals a catastrophic material and human resource vacuum. This mismatch forces an immediate reliance on what digital commentators termed "Quranophones" (Com-14) — instructors possessing religious or theological literacy but completely lacking qualifications in modern second-language pedagogy. This directly replicates the structural failures documented by Ndoubangar and Issa (2025). When management demands a curriculum change that outpaces realistic instructional practices by a ratio as severe as five teachers for every one hundred schools in rural areas (Com-29), the policy ceases to function as constructive education planning and instead becomes an institutional hazard.

Language Management vs. Language Beliefs

Spolsky's model on language beliefs explains why the Chadian public reaction to the 2026 mandate is so divergent. In Chad, language choices are deeply intertwined with socio-political, ethnic, and confessional identities. For many non-Muslim families, literary Arabic is associated with Islamic religious conversion rather than being viewed as a secular educational tool. This belief is continuously reinforced by the fact that many Arabic-medium institutions require faith-based uniforms, culturally isolating students of other confessions (Com-44).

The Ministry's top-down management completely failed to anticipate or mitigate these ideological anxieties. Because the government did not implement a rigorous, secular communication strategy to dissociate Arabic language acquisition from religious assimilation prior to the announcement, the policy reawakened pre-existing socio-cultural friction. As a result, students perceive the compulsory language not as a valuable tool for economic access to regional markets, but rather as an arbitrary, demotivating academic burden imposed upon them without their representation or consent (Com-07, Com-55).

4. Conclusion

This research investigated the public perceptions of the educational reform announced by the Ministry of Education in April 2026, which implements a "Total Bilingualism" system (Arabic and French) across all educational sectors beginning in the 2026-2027 school year. Through qualitative digital ethnography, the research captured socio-political discourses from independent digital media, parents, and students, analyzing them through Tollefson's (2008) critical language planning approach and Spolsky's (2004) tripartite model.

Regarding the first research question, the findings reveal a massive gap between the government's decisions and grassroots perceptions of that reform. Independent online media pointed out

the structural problems that the reform has not adequately addressed. Meanwhile, parents and students expressed opinions in digital forums that go beyond logistics by touching on the problems of identity, belonging, and socioeconomic opportunities. Furthermore, the findings highlight a volatile confessional tension, wherein the compulsory enforcement of literary Arabic in a legally secular system is perceived by non-Muslim stakeholders as a threat to secularity — an anxiety exacerbated by the faith-based uniform requirements of existing Arabic-medium institutions.

Regarding the second research question, an institutional analysis of the execution framework established under Decree No. 1984 reveals that the state's blueprint for success relies on highly centralized, bureaucratic mobilization. By restricting the Strategic Reflection Committee on the Education System to an impossibly compressed 30-day timeline to deliver a national diagnostic roadmap, the execution framework functions as a performative insulation layer. It prioritizes short-term political display over empirical consultation with inspectors, teacher unions, parent associations, and pedagogical advisors. Taken together, these findings confirm that neither Tollefson's critique of top-down hegemony nor Spolsky's diagnosis of misaligned management, beliefs, and practices can be resolved by executive decree alone; genuine bilingual equity in Chad will depend on the state's willingness to align political ambition with the material, human, and institutional realities of the classroom.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the research recommends the following:

1. The Ministry of Education should implement progressive reform, introducing the compulsory curriculum at the nursery level and gradually advancing it through primary and secondary cycles. This temporal adjustment will prevent academic overload and mass failure currently

- feared by secondary students facing sudden modifications to official state examinations like the Baccalaureate.
2. The framework established under Decree No. 1984 must be structurally modified. The Ministry should extend the mandate of the Strategic Reflection Committee from 30 days to a minimum of six to twelve months to formally associate teacher unions, parent-teacher associations (APEs), and pedagogical inspectors with the process. Additionally, emergency bilingual re-training subsidies should be provided to existing monolingual French-medium teachers to build a long-term, sustainable pool of internally certified bilingual educators.
 3. The government should establish an independent National Fund for Educational Bilingualism tasked with financing the rapid printing and free distribution of secular Arabic and French textbooks to rural and economically marginalized public schools, ensuring that public and private institutions operate on a level playing field.

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