



L ALPHABET  
MANDINKA



# Senegal's Education Middle Tier: Support to Early Grade Learning, Data Use, and Implementation of Bilingual Instruction

## STUDY BRIEF

---

### Study Objective and Design

Senegal is one of the latest West African countries to fully and systematically adopt national language instruction in the early grades as a pathway to full multilingualism, with the transition to French as the main medium of instruction in upper primary. Implementation of the new MOHEBS (Modèle Harmonisé de l'Enseignement Bilingue du Sénégal) policy encompasses six national languages and has been implemented in stages across regions, shaped by differences in timelines and partner support. To inform national-level efforts by the Ministry of National Education and partners, this study focuses on the priorities, activities, and experiences of Senegal's middle tier: the regional and district-level actors responsible for policy implementation and school support (the Inspections d'Académie (IAs) and Inspections de l'Education et de la Formation (IEFs), respectively). It seeks to answer three questions:

- 1. How does the middle tier support early grade teaching and learning in Senegal?**
- 2. How do region, district, and school staff collect, analyze, and use data and information for decision-making and support to early grade learning?**
- 3. How do early grade bilingual instruction implementation experiences and practices compare between regions?**

The research uses mixed methods to triangulate findings. Qualitative and quantitative data collection took place in May 2025. It included over 130 education stakeholders across three regions. Two regions started implementation of bilingual instruction in grade 1 in the 2024–25 school year, with government and World Bank support. The third region began implementing MOHEBS in grades 1 and 2 earlier, with USAID and government support. Within each region, the sample consisted of one urban and one rural district (6 total), and within each district, one urban and rural elementary public school (12 total). It

included in-depth interviews, focus groups, document and tool collection, and surveys with regional, district, and school staff, as well as municipality and parent representatives. A social network analysis was carried out to understand the flow of information between the district and school levels. The subnational data collection was complemented by ten interviews with Ministry of National Education officials and partners. A Ministry of National Education Research Task Force approved the study plan before data collection. The research was funded by the Gates Foundation.

---

## Summary of Findings

### 1. Middle-Tier Support to Early Grade Teaching and Learning

In Senegal, early grade teaching and learning is not consistently prioritized by regional (IA), district (IEF), or school actors. Regional offices focus primarily on secondary education and ensuring that data flow to and from the national level. Within elementary education, regional staff tend to emphasize end-of-cycle examination results, reflecting their performance contracts and regional strategies. Yet regional offices are strategically positioned to reinforce foundational learning and bilingual instruction, given their supervisory role over districts and links to regional teacher training colleges.

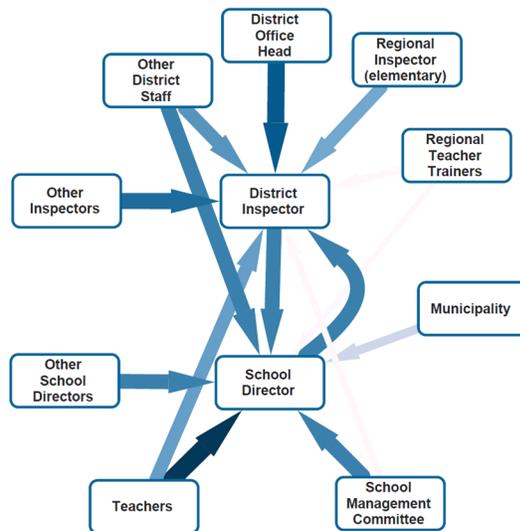
At the district level, though early grade reading is acknowledged as important, it often takes a back seat to competing reforms in mathematics or end-of-cycle exam performance. District office staff have strong pedagogical expertise and willingness to support schools, but the team of school-facing inspectors faces major constraints for school visits. District inspectors juggle multiple roles—as circuit supervisors, department leads, and reform and partner focal points. While this distribution of responsibilities has created a pool of inspectors that work in a coordinated and highly flexible manner, it also constrains their ability to visit schools. These multiple roles, combined with competing education priorities and significant transportation constraints, result in infrequent classroom visits, especially for the early grades. Three-quarters of the early grade teachers surveyed (n=29) said that they had not received a district classroom observation in the past year. Inspectors rely mostly on WhatsApp groups and phone calls to engage with schools, but school actors call for more in-person district support.

In this context, school directors are the primary source of day-to-day teacher instructional support, which they provide by organizing classroom observations and professional learning sessions. Voluntary school director networks—known as CODECs—have emerged as vital platforms for peer learning and coordination, helping organize joint instructional activities, pool resources, and serve as problem-solving gatherings. Despite not having official funding or status, they act as essential connective tissue between districts and schools and have strong potential to further strengthen instructional support and bilingual instruction. Lastly, community engagement in education varies widely. In some schools, local governments and school management committees provide resources such as notebooks and photocopies, which is crucial given that schools do not receive operational funding; however, there is no systematic coordination between municipalities and districts to ensure that support is targeted to schools most in need.

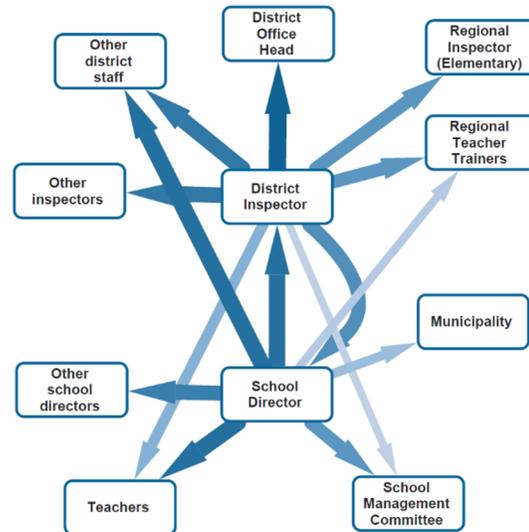
The adapted social network analysis results in Figures 1 and 2 reflect the strong relationships among district inspectors, and among school directors (as part of CODEC networks), but weaker relationships between these actors and regional or local political actors. Figure 1 shows that district inspectors rely on early grade learning advice primarily from staff within their office: their supervisor, other inspectors, and other district staff. Relationships with outside actors—such as school actors or regional office or teacher training centers—are notably weaker. School directors, on the other hand, rely strongly on their teachers, other school directors (through the CODEC), and district inspectors and other staff. When it comes to influence on time and priorities, Figure 2 shows that inspectors are shaped most by the IEF

chief, other inspectors, and school directors. This reflects both supervisory structures and the interconnectedness between inspectors. School directors are shaped most strongly by teachers, reflecting findings from interviews that emphasize their work as pedagogical teams. Regional actors, including the IA elementary focal point inspector and the regional pre-service teacher training centers, as well as municipalities, have comparatively little influence on the priorities and time of inspectors and school directors.

**Figure 1. Who do district inspectors and school directors rely on for technical advice on early grade learning?**



**Figure 2. Which actors do district inspectors and school directors report as having the most influence on their priorities and time?**



## 2. Early Grade Data Collection, Analysis, and Use

The study noted a strong foundation of early grade data collection and analysis practices in its study regions: schools regularly gather a wide range of assessment data by grade and subject, including pre-tests, trimester evaluations, post-tests, and end-of-cycle mock exams. Director-led school networks (CODECs) also play an essential role in consolidating and transmitting these data, easing the burden on district offices and enabling efficient communication through WhatsApp. Schools report using these data at the start of the school year and each trimester to orient remediation sessions, instructional strategies, and school director support. At the district level, IEF staff regularly analyze student assessment data and report using them to target school visits and remediation and training activities. However, because district staff time and resources are limited, competing priorities such as the grade 6 end-of-cycle exam often pull attention away from the early grades. Regional offices have minimal engagement in early grade data use, focusing instead on secondary education and broader system reporting. While actors across the system expressed confidence in the reliability of data, technical and logistical barriers—such as paper-based reporting in rural areas and low digital literacy of some school directors—results in inconsistencies and delays that occupy much of district statistics officers' time, diverting attention from the use of data for instructional improvement. School directors and district staff expressed interest in more training in data management and analysis to strengthen instructional support.

### 3. Implementation of and Support for Bilingual Instruction

The MOHEBS bilingual instruction reform is welcomed by education staff across system levels in Senegal, but middle-tier prioritization and support for the reform remains uneven. In the regions studied, middle-tier support for bilingual instruction is more fully institutionalized in the region with a longer history of the reform, where initial and frequent refresher trainings were provided to grade 1 and 2 teachers implementing bilingual instruction, and most have enough physical teaching and learning materials. Despite the withdrawal of USAID support (through the RELIT program) in February 2025, bilingual instruction is supported by regular teacher coaching visits by district inspectors and school directors, discussed in professional learning communities, and integrated into pre-service curricula in the regional teacher training center. Although many planned support activities have paused due to the disruption in partner support, and district staff experience ongoing workload and transport constraints, district leaders expressed their commitment to continue implementation. Schools in this region also reported that student performance has improved due to bilingual instruction but requested continued refresher trainings in the approach and in national languages. Municipalities acknowledged awareness of MOHEBS but emphasized the need for deeper engagement.

In contrast, regions and districts in their first year of implementation have yet to prioritize MOHEBS in their planning, instructional support, and monitoring efforts. In these regions, the mapping of national languages for each school is complete, and an initial cascade training was conducted in the first months of the school year. However, grade 1 teachers expressed many challenges in implementation. Schools have received only partial sets of the reform's teaching and learning materials, some in electronic form only, and only several months after the training. In these regions, MOHEBS is not a priority for regional and district office support. Regional focal points, district inspectors, and school directors reported lacking guidance and coaching tools to support bilingual teaching observations. Combined with the challenges of district inspectors' existing workload, competing priorities, and logistical constraints, teachers receive little district support for MOHEBS. However, early grade teachers reported that MOHEBS WhatsApp groups and school directors do provide some instructional support. Unlike in the region with longer experience, in these regions CODECs are not widely mobilized to support bilingual instruction in professional learning communities or joint inspection. Not all school directors prioritize bilingual instruction or feel equipped—linguistically and pedagogically—to provide meaningful support. Local engagement by municipalities and school management committees in MOHEBS is also weak. Community members could provide crucial support to schools by identifying national language speakers to support teachers who have not mastered the language of instruction.

Across all regions, staff in planning, human resources, and monitoring and evaluation roles are often aware of MOHEBS but lack orientation and tools to integrate it into their work. Especially in rural areas with high levels of teacher turnover, ongoing training in bilingual instruction is needed to ensure effective implementation. While language mismatch between schools' language of instruction and teacher skills is a major issue of concern, this study also revealed that instructional support for these teachers is further hindered by language mismatch between school directors, district inspectors, and the language used in the schools they are responsible for.

---

## Recommendations

- **Prioritize early grades and bilingual instruction** in region, district, and school planning documents, performance contracts, and regional teacher training centers.
- **Deliver refresher trainings and** materials on bilingual instruction and national languages and integrate MOHEBS into initial teacher training programs.

- **Equip regional and district staff** in planning, monitoring and evaluation, and human resources roles with role-specific guidance and tools to embed the MOHEBS reform into core functions (e.g., language considerations for teacher allocation; integrating MOHEBS into planning routines; data collection tools on MOHEBS implementation).
- **Systematically leverage CODEC support for early grade learning:** expand good practices from CODECs, such as resource pooling, external professional learning communities, data and information sharing, and joint classroom observations.
- **Strengthen school-level support for early grade instruction** through more frequent, targeted inspector and school director visits, using tools to guide the observation of bilingual instruction.
- **Provide essential resources** (e.g., sufficient working vehicles for districts; regular operational funding for CODECs and schools) to overcome transportation barriers for school visits and to enable CODEC activities and basic school operations.
- **Optimize MOHEBS WhatsApp groups** to provide practical guidance on the reform, collect feedback for decision-makers, and share national language resources.
- **Engage and coordinate** community actors (municipalities and school management committees) to provide national language support in schools. The language match study by Science of Teaching found that in many schools, teachers have not mastered the national language of instruction (for more information on this study please visit <https://scienceofteaching.site/language-of-instruction/>).