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## **PARENTS' PERCEPTION ON THE USE OF BAMANANKAN NATIONAL LANGUAGE IN MALI: A CASE STUDY OF THE DISTRICT OF BAGUINÉDA**

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### **Résumé**

Le Mali est une nation constituée de nombreux groupes ethniques. Chacun a sa propre langue, sa culture et ses coutumes. Il y a 13 langues nationales parlées au Mali. Elles comprennent le Bambara, Soninké, Hasanya, Bomu, Tamasheq, Songhay, Fulfulde, Bozo, Maninkakan, Dɔgɔsɔ, Syenara, Mamara et les élèves sont enseignés dans la langue la plus utilisée dans la région. L'objectif de cet article est de démontrer la perception des parents dans l'utilisation des langues nationales maliennes (bamanankan) dans le système éducatif comme support d'instruction, dans le district de Baguinéda. Il vise également à promouvoir le Bamanankan, dans les différentes écoles du district de Baguinéda afin de maintenir la langue maternelle à l'école comme langue d'enseignement. Dans cette étude, les populations cibles sont les élèves des écoles bilingues et leurs parents dans la « commune de Baguinéda ». Les instruments de recherche qui ont été utilisés pour collecter les données sont des questionnaires adressés aux parents des élèves et des entretiens. Les résultats montrent que la majorité des parents préfèrent le bamanankan comme langue d'instruction car c'est la langue la plus communément comprise dans la commune de Baguinéda.

**Mots clés : Bamanankan, dialectes, groupes ethniques, Langue nationale, Valeurs socioculturelles.**

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Abstract**

Mali is a nation made up of many ethnic groups. Each has its own language, culture and custom. There are 13 national languages spoken in Mali. They include: Bambara, Soninké, Hasanya, Bomu, Tamasheq, Songhay, Fulfulde, Bozo, Maninkakan, Dɔgɔsɔ, Syenara, Mamara, and the students are taught in the most used language in the region. The aim of this article is to demonstrate the parents' perception in the use of Malian national languages (Bamanankan) in the educational system as the medium of instruction in the district of Baguinéda. The study also aims to promote Bamanankan in the different schools in the district of Baguinéda in order to maintain the home language at school as the language of instruction. In this study, the target populations are the bilingual school students and their parents in the "District of Baguinéda". The research instruments that were used to collect data in this study are questionnaires addressed to the students' parents and interviews. The findings show that the majority of parents prefer Bamanankan as the language of education because it is the most commonly used and understood language in the district.

**Key words : Bamanankan, dialects, ethnic groups, National language, sociocultural values.**

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## Introduction

Bambara is spoken throughout Mali as a lingua franca; it is one of the 13 national languages. In addition, it is the most widely spoken language in the East, South areas and north of Bamako, where native speakers are most densely populated. These regions are also usually considered to be the historical geographical origin of Bamanankan people, particularly Segou, after diverging from other Manding groups. Bamanankan is taught in many regions in Mali according to its dialects. Some local dialects are : Kaarta, Tambacounda (West); Beledugu, Banamba, Mesekele (North); Jitumu, Jamaladugu, Segou (center); Cakadugu, Keleyadugu, Jalakadougou, Kurulamini, Banimɔncɛ, Cɛmala, Cɛndugu, Baninkɔ, Shɛndugu, Ganadugu (South); Kala, Kuruma, Saro, dialects to the northeast of Mopti (especially Bɔrɛ); Zegeɗugu, Bɛndugu, Bakɔkan, Jɔnka (Southeast), these dialects make the popularity of the Bamanankan language.

The justification of the use of Bamanankan as a means of instruction in the different schools in Mali dates back to the international conference organized by UNESCO in Bamako (Mali) in 1966. The choice of harmonized alphabets for the transcription of six languages of Francophone Sahelian Africa was made. Thus, Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso), Mali and Niger adopted the same alphabet to transcribe Fulfulde, Songhay, Hausa, Tamasheq (Tuareg), Kanuri and Mandinka. Following this choice of alphabet, Mali began literacy in National language (NL) in 1968 with Bambara (Bamanankan), the language spoken by the majority in southern Mali. Literacy in other languages followed in the 1970s. These include: Fulfulde (Peul), Dɔgɔsɔ (Dogon), Soninke (Soninke), Soŋoy (Songhoy), mamara (minyanka), tamašāyt (tamasheq), syenara (senoufo), bomu (bobo) and bozo (bozo). The period between 1968 and 1978 was marked by major literacy campaigns with the support of several NGOs and UNESCO. Thanks to the success of literacy, Mali, with the aim of providing appropriate solutions to the didactic difficulties posed by the teaching of French, opted for the use of NL in its formal education system: in 1979 creation of four experimental schools in Bamanankan (Bamanankan) in the Koulikoro (Kossa and Djifina) and Ségou (Banankoroni and Zanabougou) regions (Traoré, 2009).

Many of the Malian languages and cultures are in danger of disappearing, because they aren't taught in the schools as the language of instruction. The language taught in our school is different from our language and culture. It is well known that colonial powers imposed their languages in each territory they governed. These languages were used in administration, commerce and education. This adoption of the ex-colonizers' languages as the official languages of Mali does not allow the students and administration to freely and appropriately verbalize their thoughts. Besides, it disconnects them from their society and culture because language is the key medium, which conveys the socio-cultural values and stories of the people who use it. The problem is that the use of the ex-coloniser's language in educational system in West Africa suddenly puts the learner in a situation of regression. That is why in Mali the national languages' reforms have been done and they aimed at introducing one or more national languages as a medium of instruction. It is in this dynamics that the present study seeks to account for "Parents' perception on the use of Bamanankan national language in Mali: A case study of the district of Baguinéda"



Traore (2009) expounded that Mali's language policy is essentially based on seven main principles as follows:

- NL constitutes the base of the national cultural identity;
- Respect for linguistic diversity consolidates national unity;
- Citizens have the right to speak and be educated in NL;
- The promotion of all NL is a necessity for the development of endogenous and real decentralization;
- Every citizen should be able to learn at least one NL, one or two African languages and one or two other languages of international communication, in addition to its mother tongues;
- Languages impose themselves by their dynamism;
- Mali's language policy is based on functional and convivial multilingualism, having as a matrix an identity language, a vehicular language and a language of international communication.

These fundamental principles of Mali's language policy are set out according to three objectives: Guarantee cultural identity in the diversity and national unity of Mali through the promotion of all certified NL in the different sociolinguistics areas of the country; ensure genuine endogenous development at the level of all social strata by using NL as a medium of communication and working tool in all spheres of public life, in partnership with the French language; contribute to the strengthening of sub-regional, regional and Africa through the development and enhancement of cross-border NL and by promoting the languages of communication in African and non-African international community.

To support the above ideas, theoretically, the rationale for bilingual education is grounded in common sense, experience, and research (Garipov & Knutova, 2011). Common sense says that children will not learn academic subject materials if they cannot understand the language of instruction. Experience documents that students from minority-language backgrounds historically have higher dropout rates and lower achievement scores.

Finally, there is a basis for bilingual education that draws upon research in language acquisition and education. Research done by Cummins, Baker, Hornberger (2001) supports a basic tenet of bilingual education: children's first language skills must become well developed to ensure that their academic and linguistic performance in the second language is maximized (p. 18). In fact, this theory is in line with that of the curriculum which gives priority to the mother tongue of the learner. Cummins's developmental interdependence theory suggests that growth in a second language is dependent upon a well-developed first language, and his thresholds theory suggests that a child must attain a certain level of proficiency in both the native and second language in order for the beneficial aspects of bilingualism to accrue (Cummins et al. 2001).

Garipov & Knutova (2011) in a conference on bilingual and multilingual education, mentioned that Cummins (2000) also introduced the concept of the common underlying proficiency model of bilingualism, which explains how concepts learned in one language can be transferred to

another. This means that the common underlying proficiency provides the base for the development of both the first language (L1) and the second language (L2).

To attain the overall objective of the study, the paper is actually divided into two salient sections. The first one presents and describes the type of methodology used to collect the research data while the second section which constitutes the last section of the study presents and discusses the findings of the study.

## **1. Methodology**

This investigation took place in the district of Baguinéda situated at 30 kilometres on the main road of Segou from the capital city Bamako. This section deals with the process of collecting the information or data for the purposes of solving the underlying research problem. It has various sub-sections involved in carrying out the research including the research design, the population, the samples and sampling procedure, and instruments used.

### **1.1. Research Design**

Research design refers to the overall strategy which was used by the researcher to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical way when carrying out the research study, (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). In this study, the researcher used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to collect data from the respondents and it dealt with opinions from them in a descriptive way. The researcher used the design to collect the data on the use of Bamanankan in the municipality of Baguinéda precisely in the fundamental schools where Bamanankan is used and taught as the language of instruction. The advantages of this design were that the information collected can be statistically inferred on the target population that are the students' parents.

Besides, interviews were used. Interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation (Mertens, 1998).

Precisely, the researcher used a cross sectional survey design. The researcher identified essential components of a population and randomly selected a cross-section of research subjects from which the required data were collected. Therefore, the researcher used interviews in order to get detailed information from any students' parents in the municipality of Baguinéda, particularly the parents whose children are in the bilingual schools.

### **1.2. Sample and Sampling Procedures**

The research was conducted in the area where the Bamanankan is used as a medium of instruction. There are at least 33 primary schools in the municipality of Baguinéda in which Bamanankan is taught. It was decided to deal with a study sample of 7 students' parents. Gay, Mills and Airasian (2009) observe that in sampling, 20% of the target population is adequate for a population size of between 501-1000 Therefore, with a target population of 33 schools, the researcher used a sample of 40 parents. This number has been chosen because many researchers suggested that the sampling must be large. The larger the sampling is the better it is. Some of them give an approximate number of sampling.

### **1.3. Data Collection Procedures**

The data of this research were collected by using questionnaire and interview. Questionnaire was conducted in French and English because the writer of this paper is multilingual. They were given the freedom to answer the questions in national language or in French, because these parents do not speak French and English. The researcher used the interview in order to get personal information. According to Kothari (2004), interview schedule is a research methodology technique which allows probing and helps to get in-depth information to answer research questions.

The interview is an important qualitative data collection approach. It is commonly used in collecting data for descriptive study, action research, evaluation studies, etc. Agyedu, Donkor, Obeng (2011) affirm, "The interview approach has several advantages that stem from personal contact. Response rate is high and issues can be clarified. The interviewer can probe for specific meanings of responses (p.122). An interview is a purposeful interaction between two or more people focused on one person trying to get information from the other person (Gay and Airasian, 2003, p. 209). Interviews allowed us to get important information that could not be obtained otherwise.

#### **1.4. Data analysis and interpretation**

This part of research reports and interprets the findings of the research in line with the study's specific objectives. First, it provides a background analysis of the use of Bamanankan language within the framework of the curriculum implementation in the primary schools of the municipality of Baguinéda. The organized data from the various sources of information are interpreted using an interactive model (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The qualitative researcher is thus able to use a variety of techniques for gathering data, and there is no single recommendation for which data gathering instruments to use as well. However, analysis and interpretation of data are closely related in order to reach a good conclusion.

#### **1.5. Questionnaire return rate from parents:**

The researcher administered a total of 40 questionnaires given to the parents in the municipality of Baguinéda, contrary to the total number of school which is 33. All the questionnaires were returned representing a return rate of 100 percent which was very appropriate for this study. Hence, the researcher analysed a total of 40 questionnaires. 30 (75%) were male while 10 (25%) were female and therefore both genders were well represented.

## **2. Results and Discussion**

The purpose of this study is to analyse parents' perception in the use of national language (Bamanankan) in the district of Baguinéda. It also aims to see if the national language Bamanankan is the language of instruction in the District of Baguinéda. It is therefore claimed that the use of the national language Bamanankan for instruction will encourage and favour the child's best practice of his/her culture, costume and values in order to achieve the development. The use of national languages Bamanankan in educational system will be therefore appreciated by the population. While a lack of education in a first language was a significant reason for children dropping out, learning and teaching the child's first language allow him to stay in the classroom. Children learn to read faster if they speak the language of instruction, because they already have a repository of vocabulary, knowledge and culture of the linguistic construction

of the language, and the ability to pronounce the sounds of the language. The review of literature explored parents' perception of the use of national languages as means of instruction and as subject of education system. An evidence that learning in the mother tongue validates and reinforces children' home culture and traditional knowledge is presented in the table below:

Table 1: What is the language of instruction in the District of Baguinéda?

Languages	Nb. Cit.	Frequency
Bamanankan	35	87.50%
French	05	12.50%
Total	40	100%

Source: Field data

It is clear now that children gain more and have a strong sense of their own identity with the national language at school. According to the parents' responses, 35 or 87.5% of parents demonstrated that the language of instruction in the municipality of Baguinéda is Bamanankan. Five (5) or 12.5% of parents who indicated the French language have their children in the private schools, where Bamanankan is not taught as the language of instruction. This demonstrates that the national language or Bamanankan is not taught in private schools. In the district of Baguinéda, the national language teaching in the primary education is as follows: The 1<sup>st</sup> grade: 100% National language, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade: 75% National language and 25% French, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades: 50 % National language and 50 % French, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades: 25% National language and 75% French. In the next table, we will see the preference of parents' language as the language of instruction.

Table 2: Which one do you prefer?

Languages	Nb. Cit.	Frequency
Bamanankan	38	95 %
French	02	05 %
Total	40	100%

Source: Field data

The analysis in table 2 shows that 38 or 95% of the parents prefer Bamanankan as the language of instruction instead of French. They prefer Bamanankan because who controls your mind controls your language and culture. The use of Bamanankan as language of instruction results in increased access and equity, improved learning outcomes, reduced repetition and dropout rates, sociocultural benefits and lower overall costs. The use of local languages for instruction often leads to inclusion of more local content in the curriculum and greater participation of parents and community members as classroom resources. Parents are better positioned to become involved in the school and to feel that their knowledge and their culture are valued. The legitimization of local languages that comes from their use in schooling can strengthen children', families' and communities' sense of inclusion in schooling. The use of local languages in formal education has a positive impact on adult literacy as well. As parents see

their children successfully learn to read and write in their own language, the parents are often motivated to attend literacy classes as well.

Table 3: What language do you want as official language?

Languages	Nb. Cit.	Frequency
Bamanankan	40	100 %
French	00	00 %
Total	40	100%

Source: Field data

According to the responses from parents, 40 or 100% of the parents affirmed that they want Bamanankan as Malian official language. According to them it is the language mainly spoken in Mali from Kayes to Kidal. In addition, whether you are Fulani, Tamasheq, Senoufo, Miankan, or Dogon, any ethnic groups in Mali refer to Bamanankan to transfer their message. They prefer this language as the official language because it is spoken everywhere in Mali. It contributes to the development of the country for the simple reason that one thinks better in one's language than in foreign language. When we take the school environment, the child leaves home to come to school with a certain level of vocabulary and a skill which is the mastery of the national language.

Table 4: Do you want your children to learn Bamanankan at school?

Yes/ No	Nb. Cit.	Frequency
Yes	34	85 %
No	06	15 %
Total	40	100%

Source: Field data

As the data indicate, 34 or 85% of the parents want their children to learn Bamanankan and seven (6) or 15% of the parents want their children to learn French. Using the home language or mother tongue in the early stages and schooling in multilingual contexts supports child-centric policies. It starts with what is familiar and builds in new knowledge. It creates a smooth transition between home and school; it stimulates interest and ensures greater participation and engagement. This prepares children for the acquisition of literacy and encourages fluency and confidence in both the mother tongue and, later, in other languages, where this is necessary.

In an interview with students' parents, it has been illustrated the ways in which one can keep the children' culture in the schools.

Interviewer: According to you, what is your opinion on keeping culture in school.

Souleymane Coulibaly, parent: "We can keep our culture in the school by learning our national language as a language of instruction in the education system. When we know our language, at least, we cannot lose our culture". Obviously, one who does not know his language, loses

much of his culture, and becomes another person. Therefore, we should always advise people to learn to read and write in their native languages. Thus, they will be safe from acculturation and its damaging effect in the long term. In one word, I can say that the development of a country and the adoption of its cultures depend on the use and the teaching of these national languages in the educational system. Language and culture go together, and development is related to language.

Another parent states that the reasons of dropping out of schools are due to the fact that the school language is foreign to the students.

Interviewer: Why do many children drop-up school?

Bouram Togola, parent: Because the language used in the school is an unfamiliar language and that has a strong negative effect on children's school attendance and achievement. The child understands better in his/her mother tongue than in the language of the colonizers; each one is better in his own language than the language of others. The child is very happy if the teaching is done in his mother tongue or the language that he/she masters since his childhood. In many countries of the world, large numbers of children start school. In other places, teachers start by communicating with children in their own language, but as soon as written words and numbers are introduced, teachers use a language children don't understand. Children learn to copy and often memorise the words and numbers, but don't understand them and can't apply them usefully. In these situations, many children drop out of school all together, while others fail their examinations and spend years repeating grades.

Interviewer: What can we do, to keep the children' culture in the school?

By Coulibaly: In my opinion, to maintain culture in schools, all schools, cultural centres, and libraries must be provided with the documents that can be used for their true culture, it must not be erroneous documents; it is necessary to review the school system and give back to the school its authority and autonomy.

As a matter of fact, In this study, 87.5% of the parents confirmed that the language of instruction in the district is Bamanankan, similarly the teachers repeated that they do everything in the national language. Meanwhile this method is appreciated by the parents, because they are better positioned to become involved in the school and to feel that their knowledge and their culture are valued. Consequently, all the parents like Bamanankan as official language than French which learning permits to uproot our culture and value.

Last but not least, 34 or 85% of the parents want their children to learn Bamanankan and only six (6) or 15% of the parents want their children to learn French.

In order to maintain our culture in the school, we must learn our national language as a means of instruction in the education system. Many of our children drop-up school because the language used in the school is an unfamiliar language. In one word everyone is good in his/her language.

## **Conclusion**

A condition for a true development is a piece of research which objectives is to promote the national languages Bamanankan so that they can be used in Malian educational system as the

medium of instruction in order to keep Malian culture, custom and identity in their educational system and social life for students and their parents. Language being a means to communicate with each other. It enables to exchange knowledge, beliefs, opinions, wishes, threats, commands, thanks, promises, declarations, and feelings. The problem is that the Malian students are learning the French language from the first year to the University. Yet, the findings show that everybody is good in his language than foreign language. Language reflects culture, custom and identity of one's community as well as an individual's ethnic identity. All of the parents affirmed that they want Bamanankan as Malian official language. Psychologically, it is the system of meaningful signs that in the mind of children works automatically for expression and understanding. Sociologically, it is a means of identification among the members of the community to which he belongs, it is in this language that they can express their thought and enrich their culture.

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