Objective-Based Literacy: A New Approach To Consider In Ivory Coast

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Abstract
Ivory Coast is a West African country aspiring to sustainable development. This ambition seems to be based on a committed policy, a dynamic population, and aligns with the African Union's Agenda 2063 perspective. However, the country has a high illiteracy rate. Estimated at 47% in 2021 by UNESCO, the illiterate population should be addressed through an inclusive educational policy, adapted to the Ivorian context, and capable of ensuring access to education for all social strata, without exclusion. Moreover, the current literacy policy aimed at resolving this situation by 2030 is problematic both in its approach and state actions. This reflection, therefore, questions the current literacy approach. It starts from the idea that the current approach to literacy needs improvement by incorporating Ivorian national languages as a medium of teaching and learning: language being the quintessential reflection of each population's values, world knowledge, and self-expression. So, our study is based on a dual theoretical and methodological approach: descriptive (structuralism and generativism) and didactic (language didactics). Moreover, achieving such an ambition relies on the unwavering commitment of African political actors, particularly Ivorian leaders, to develop and implement innovative literacy policies that align with the social realities of their learners.
Key Words:*Literacy, Ivory Coast, generativism, pedagogy, structuralism.*

I.   Introduction

"We once again commit ourselves to a sustainable pan-African vision for an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens, representing a dynamic force on the global stage." In this perspective, as envisaged by the African Union in its Agenda 2063, the African Union Commission has designed a Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) for the decade 2016-2025. This strategy aims to promote a new African citizen capable of efficiently contributing to the continent's sustainable development. In the ambition to make Africa a prosperous continent based on inclusive growth and sustainable development, it would be appropriate for African states, particularly Ivory Coast, to adopt an education policy that is "holistic, inclusive, and equitable, supported by lifelong learning conditions." Moreover, the achievement of the Agenda 2063 objectives requires Ivory Coast, specifically its leaders, to "revitalize the education and training sector and launch ambitious and effective literacy programs to eradicate the scourge of illiteracy."

Furthermore, Ivory Coast is a state with a rich and diverse linguistic landscape. The country has about sixty "national" languages, which are divided into four linguistic groups, namely the Kwa, Kru, Mande, and Gur language groups. However, political authorities seem not to have perceived the usefulness, otherwise the participatory and significant nature of "national" languages in the country's development, particularly in the field of education. Officially, the only language recognized as a medium of instruction remains French. Yet, it is well known that humans learn and communicate better in their native, national language. This maxim is fully reflected in the 2019 report of the CONFEMEN Education System Analysis Program. This report notes that "as it stands, with French as the only medium of instruction, 59.5% of students at the end of primary school in Ivory Coast do not have the expected level in reading and 82.8% in mathematics." This alarming observation led the Ivorian government, specifically the Ministry of National Education and Literacy, to organize the General States of National Education and Literacy (EGENA) from July 19, 2021, to April 13, 2022. The assessment highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of the Ivorian education system. The analysis of indicators revealed

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the absence of a reference documentation, insufficient support for vulnerable populations or those with specific needs due to insufficient human, material, and financial resources, low appropriation of pedagogical approaches by teachers, and above all, concerning this reflection, a weakly implemented literacy program despite a high and persistent illiteracy rate, among other things. If the authorities seem, since 2016, to have perceived the necessity of considering national languages in primary school teaching, with the "Integrated School" initiative, which aimed to be a pilot phase of bilingual education experimentation in thirty-six (36) primary schools using about ten national languages, including Baoulé and Dioula as teaching languages, we are tempted to question the literacy issue, which remains a very important aspect of Ivory Coast's educational policy. According to UNESCO, in 2021, Ivory Coast had an illiteracy rate estimated at 47%. In addition, "literacy consists of learning to read, write, and calculate for social groups and accompanying them in acquiring knowledge and skills necessary in everyday life and more active engagement in political, social, cultural, and economic life." We note that this definition does not specify that these skills are closely related to the French language. In other words, these competencies to be transmitted to certain categories of people can be done through other languages, particularly our "national" languages. Insofar as national languages are supposed to be more representative of linguistic habits, given the speakers' skills, already having ease in calculating and communicating through them, wouldn't it be desirable, as it could be the case for initial education learners, for the authorities to consider a literacy approach related to using our national languages? Consequently, a definitional and methodological approach to literacy, in the Ivorian context, is imperative. This contribution aims to question the concept of literacy within the Ivorian framework. It seeks to reaffirm the necessity of equality between "national" languages and French. Ultimately, this work will lead to the outline of a new literacy approach using our "national" languages as the medium of learning: objective-based literacy.

II.   Material And Methods

This scientific reflection on the literacy issue in the context of African countries with national languages and oral traditions, particularly in Ivory Coast, is justified by the need to consider them in the teaching-learning system, particularly at the level of the literacy policy to be implemented. It is based on a dual descriptive and didactic approach. At the descriptive level, we rely on the principles of structuralism, specifically the functionalism of André Martinet, to highlight the linguistic characteristics (phonological, morphological, syntactic, etc.) of our "national" or mother tongues, and on Noam Chomsky's generativism.

Moreover, didactics is a science that studies all the processes, methods, and engineering aimed at teaching specific knowledge to a learner. The term didactics takes on its full meaning when associated with a specific discipline. It is in this perspective that we speak of didactics of French, didactics of mathematics, didactics of languages, etc. So, to initiate a new approach in the field of adult education for illiterates, we will resort to language didactics in literacy. According to Koffi (2017), the inclusion of didactics in literacy should be considered a revolutionary phase to significantly improve adult literacy and writing learning. This means that it is necessary to consider the linguistic needs of the beneficiary learners. Among these needs, let's emphasize the question of the choice of the literacy language. This parameter is crucial for the understanding and assimilation of knowledge.

III.   Theoretical And Methodological Approach To The Current Literacy Process In Ivory Coast

In this section, we will highlight the specificities of the literacy approach as envisaged today. It is important to understand what literacy is in our context, identify the targets, and highlight the learning and teaching approach.

Definition of Literacy

According to the Petit Robert dictionary: "literacy is the teaching of writing and reading to illiterate people in a population or people unfamiliar with a given alphabet." This definition immediately gives a social dimension by situating the considered individuals within a population and implying an organized learning. Also, literacy is a learning method leading to the acquisition of primary knowledge and skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic, essential for any illiterate person in a rapidly evolving world and a fundamental human right.

The Tehran Congress, which brought together Education Ministers in 1965 to eradicate illiteracy, built on this definition and introduced a new concept that has profoundly marked recent decades: the economic functionality of education. The concept of literacy began to take on a new dimension. It moved away from traditional or classical literacy to a nearly functional approach. This more recent notion of functional literacy would also undergo variations but was defined in 1970 by UNESCO as a literacy process "integrated into specific training, usually technical in nature." Directly linked to development, it is part of the social and economic priorities of developing states. It aims to achieve socio-economic objectives.

The Targets
Functional literacy, in its conception, is intended for various social strata. In Ivory Coast, this sub-sector of learning mainly targets:
- school-age children in localities without primary schools;
- children aged 9 to 16, early school leavers, or those who have never had access to school;
- children attending Islamic educational structures (Koranic schools, madrasas, Franco-Arabic schools, and Islamic faith schools);
- young and adult illiterates or those with little schooling;
- neo-literates and all citizens to promote lifelong learning culture.

Didactic Approach to Learning
In its ambition to improve the education level of its populations, the Ivorian government, with the support of local authorities and civil society organizations, is making significant efforts. In 2021, the country had 3,578 literacy centers and 78,258 learners. (Source: official portal of the Ivorian government) In its functional literacy policy, through the Group of Literacy by Information and Communication Technologies (GA-TIC) project, the Ivorian government has opted for two (2) literacy approaches: classical literacy (in person) and mobile literacy. This latter approach aims to improve literacy skills and acquire knowledge in health, nutrition, women's rights, and entrepreneurship to enable impacted populations to better conduct their income-generating activities.
In sum,
"all these initiatives reaffirm the Ivorian state's commitment to ensuring that by 2030, all young people and a significant proportion of adults (men and women) can read, write, and count. To achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4); namely, ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."
(Source: official portal of the Ivorian government, 2022)
What about using national languages as a learning medium?
Without risking being wrong, we can affirm, based on our research, that very few literacy projects related to using our local languages in conjunction with French or as the sole medium of instruction in a national literacy process exist. Therefore, referring to the diverse definitions and evolution of literacy, it seems that no "developed" country uses a language other than its local languages as a medium of instruction or learning. What could then justify Ivory Coast's obstinate use of French as the sole medium of instruction and learning since its independence? Could the numerous national languages be the cause? Could the non-codification of these languages justify this fact? In sum, is the Ivorian state's commitment to ensuring that by 2030, all young people and a significant proportion of adults (men and women) can read, write, and count achievable?

IV.   Result: The Need To Adopt A New Approach: Objective-Based Literacy
The evolution of the literacy approach, from traditional literacy to functional literacy, demonstrates the need for specialists to consider the specificities of the people to be literate. If the economic dimension seems essential to motivate some categories of illiterate people to follow a literacy program, what about considering their cultural characteristics, values, and identity, specifically their language?

Sociolinguistic Characteristics of Learners
According to Kouamé (2007), the linguistic situation in Ivory Coast, marked by the domination of the French language and the confinement of Ivorian languages to informal domains, is the result of the linguistic policy pursued in Ivory Coast since independence. Indeed, this policy has centered education and training, in general, around the French language. Yet, in training rooms, not all learners master this language, which is not always the case for their mother tongue, even without grammatical knowledge and codification of it.
Similarly, in a literacy project, it is essential to see the characteristics of the people to be literate. Thus, from Koffi's (2017, p. 131) perspective, any didactic approach to literacy likely to integrate these attitudes into teaching suggests the following proposals: (1) consider learners' linguistic needs; (2) pre-literacy; and (3) the actual literacy phase. So, linguistic needs should be the primary parameter to consider in a situational literacy project.
Overall, Ivorian populations are bilingual, meaning they practice two languages: a locally acquired language intuitively from a young age and the official language, French, "the language of teaching and learning." This reality should not be minimized, as it contributes, more or less, to the success of a learning and teaching program, specifically literacy. This is why "bilingual education reforms (African language/French

language) are due to the fact that the language spoken and best understood by the learner is an asset for school learning" (Djihouessi and Cruz, 2014).

Language Psychology

Several theories related to various disciplines exist on language and its mechanism. Without dwelling on theoretical positioning issues, our understanding of "language psychology", as much as possible, is based on Noam Chomsky's concept of generative grammar. Holistically, psycholinguistics deals with "language behaviors" within the individual's overall functioning. As a related discipline, psycholinguistics seeks to establish a link, in the language acquisition process, between language and thought. For Chomsky, all humans have a thinking mechanism (grammar) that allows them to produce and understand a number of new sentences in one or more languages. For the author, grammar is a finite mechanism that generates an infinite number of grammatical sentences. In Chomsky's perspective, the manifestation of language is based on two parameters: competence and performance. The former can be defined as the learner's intuitive linguistic knowledge in their language and the latter as the learner's particular use of their language in a specific communication situation. Moreover, any learning process is based on the intuitive linguistic knowledge of a language, specifically Baoulé, Senoufo, Bété, etc. In the Ivorian context, most illiterate people seem to handle their language better than French, without necessarily knowing the grammar of their language. This is why the notion of "intuitive" knowledge makes sense in Chomsky's conception. This grammatical competence or intuitive knowledge relates to the structure of the language. It constitutes the set of innate, automatic grammatical knowledge of phonology (alphabet), morphology, semantics, syntax... that the native speaker (learner) has of their language. Furthermore, literating a speaker of an Ivorian language in their language could be summarized as giving them the necessary tools to codify or write their language, as they already have supposed competencies (in expression and calculation) in their language. The question of the language acquisition process, at the learning level, is essential for any knowledge transmission activity to any human being. The language acquisition process is universal in all languages. Indeed, it follows a uniform chronology in all languages. Language is built and developed in early childhood, as the child has the neurological capacities to learn a multitude of knowledge and languages. This is not always the case for adults, especially in the field of languages.

Specificities of "National" or Mother Tongues

At the outset, it should be noted that most Ivorian languages remain undescribed or at least little described, even codified. This reality can partially justify their non-inclusion in the education system as a medium of learning. Ultimately, only Ivorian authorities, in synergy with researchers, including linguists and teachers, can change this situation through their actions. Thus, a linguistic policy by linguistic area or region would contribute, if implemented, to better consideration, according to the linguistic weight and extent of a previously chosen language, to promote this new objective-based literacy approach. In addition, these actions are summarized in dual engineering: management, specific to the authorities, and pedagogical, related to the teacher. According to Koffi (2017), literacy training should begin by using the learners' mother tongue or the dominant mother tongue of the region or locality. This means that considering the target population's language is crucial for implementing a state literacy project. Following Ivory Coast's new approach to development planning, specifically the realization of National Development Programs and particularly Program Budgets, the Ivorian state would benefit from developing prospective programs considering the description of languages at the District (14 Districts) and/or Regional levels. Indeed, the policy of decentralization and local development to strengthen the effectiveness of government action, monitoring, and proper implementation of these programs at the district and regional levels must necessarily consider the issue of promoting, describing, and codifying the vehicular languages of community spaces. This would contribute to using these languages as a medium of instruction in a national, regional, and local literacy project.

Research Achievements in Linguistics

In the field of research, numerous linguistic description works have been carried out by researchers at the Applied Linguistics Institute (ILA) and the Department of Language Sciences at Félix HouphouëtBoigny University in Cocody, formerly known as the University of Abidjan. Upon Ivory Coast independence, various projects for the development and publication of atlases were assigned to the ILA. This mission met significant success in the 1980s with the creation of atlases for different linguistic groups in the country, namely the kwa, kru, mande, and gur groups. These atlases constitute valuable sketches for any descriptive study of Ivorian languages. Furthermore, many theses related to the description of Ivorian languages have been completed. These include languages such as Baule, Bété, Akyé, Dan, Koulango, Senoufo, Lobiri, Bron, Agni, Djimini, Degha, Birifor, Ebrié, Dioula, and Tagbana. It should be noted that all research were conducted on researchers' own funds, meaning these description works were not initiated by the government. The results of these different

research efforts have contributed practically to the creation of syllabaries (Senari, Baule, Koulango, Dan, Mahou) and specialized works (dictionaries and translated Bibles, particularly in Baule).

The syllabaries, as designed, should serve literacy purposes, using the learners' mother tongues as the medium of instruction. All these research and application activities demonstrate the invaluable and sustained contribution of researchers, particularly Ivorian linguists, in describing and codifying our various languages. It is also evident that these activities took place without any explicit linguistic policy from the authorities and were predominantly undertaken by some researchers and private organizations, either for research purposes or to achieve specific objectives. The concept of lifelong learning, specifically literacy, deserves recognition and consideration by African policymakers. Indeed, "it took decades for this form of education and training to be recognized as an important sector contributing to the development of education and training in Africa," and that "with few exceptions, most African governments invest only 1% of their total education budget in the development of informal and non-formal education and training: the majority of activities are carried out by local and international NGOs, through funding from development agencies," it remains that African states in general, and Ivory Coast in particular, must adopt a significant linguistic policy promoting the description and codification of Ivorian languages, aiming to use them not jointly with French, but as the sole medium of instruction and learning in a national literacy project. This initiative is not utopian. Indeed, the 1984 literacy project in the mother tongue for adults in the agricultural area of northern Côte d'Ivoire is a convincing example.

V. Conclusion

Africa's ambition to take charge of its own destiny, as defined by Agenda 2063, rests on the availability of competent and qualified human resources capable of imagining, creating, proposing, and implementing innovative development actions based on African values" (CESA, 16-25). The ability to imagine, create, propose, and implement innovative actions, we believe, lies in language, whose community manifestation is the language. Language is a tool for learning, transmitting knowledge, achieving, and asserting oneself. Thus, referring to the concept of functional literacy, we can assert that in practice, functional literacy programs have been limited to economic priorities, relegating social ones to the background. Indeed,

"adult literacy, an essential element of general development, must be closely linked to economic and social priorities, as well as to the present and future needs of the workforce. Consequently, all efforts must aim towards functional literacy. Far from being an end in itself, it must be designed to prepare individuals for social, civic, and economic roles, far exceeding the limits of rudimentary literacy focused on teaching reading and writing […] learning to read and write should not only lead to basic knowledge but also to preparation for work, increased productivity, greater participation in civic life, better understanding of the surrounding world, and ultimately open up to human cultural heritage."

This is why we believe in the necessity of developing a new literacy approach that takes into account the language of the populations to be literate as the medium of instruction, as language reflects each people's values and cultures. Achieving such an ambition relies on the unwavering commitment of political actors in African states, particularly Ivorian leaders, to develop and implement innovative literacy policies that align with their learners' social realities.

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