

Blueprint for the Use of evidence In Language of Instruction (LoI) Decisions (BUILD) Evidence Review

Côte d'Ivoire Report

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Acronym List

ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
AIR	American Institutes for Research
AMPL	Assessments for Minimum Proficiency Levels
BUILD	Blueprint for the Use of Evidence in Language of Instruction Decisions
CAFOP	<i>Centres d’Aptitude et de Formation Pédagogique</i>
CE1 / CE2	<i>Cours Élémentaire 1 / 2</i>
CM1 / CM2	<i>Cours Moyen 1 / 2</i>
COGES	<i>Comités de Gestion des Établissements Scolaires</i>
CP1 / CP2	<i>Cours Préparatoire 1 / 2</i>
DESPS	<i>Direction des Études, des Stratégies, de la Planification et des Statistiques</i>
DPFC	<i>Direction de la Pédagogie et de la Formation Continue</i>
DSPS	<i>Direction de la Stratégie et de la Planification Scolaire</i>
DVSP	<i>Direction de la Veille et du Suivi des Programmes</i>
EGMA	Early Grade Mathematics Assessment
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
ELAN	<i>École et Langues Nationales en Afrique</i>
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESP	Education Sector Plan
FLN	Foundational Literacy and Numeracy
FLIP	Foundational Learning Improvement Program
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HLO	Harmonized Learning Outcome
IFEF	<i>Institut de la Francophonie pour l’Éducation et la Formation</i>
ITAP	Independent Technical Advisory Panel
JSR	Joint Sector Review
KIX	Knowledge and Innovation Exchange

L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
LMICs	Low- and Middle-Income Countries
LoI	Language of Instruction
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MENA	Ministry of National Education and Literacy
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
MILO	Monitoring Impacts on Learning Outcomes
MPL	Minimum Proficiency Level
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OIF	Organisation internationale de la Francophonie
PAPSE	<i>Projet d'Amélioration de la Prestation des Services Éducatifs</i>
PASEC	<i>Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Éducatifs de la CONFEMEN</i>
PD	Professional Development
PEC	<i>Programme d'Enseignement Cibl�</i>
PEI	<i>Projet d'�coles Int�gr�es</i>
PNAPAS	<i>Programme National d'Am�lioration des Premiers Apprentissages Scolaires</i>
PND	<i>Plan National de D�veloppement</i>
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SNAPAS	<i>Strat�gie Nationale d'Am�lioration des Premiers Apprentissages Scolaires</i>
SoBR	Science of Bilingual Reading
SoR	Science of Reading
TARL	Teaching at the Right Level
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TLMs	Teaching and Learning Materials
TRECC	Transforming Education in Cocoa Communities
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Executive Summary

The *Blueprint for the Use of Evidence in Language of Instruction (LoI) Decisions (BUILD)* Côte d'Ivoire report presents a comprehensive evidence review and actionable roadmap to support efforts to improve foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) outcomes through more effective language of instruction policies and practices. Developed by the American Institutes for Research® (AIR), in collaboration with the Gates Foundation and national stakeholders, the report applies the BUILD framework to assess the extent to which language considerations are systematically integrated across Côte d'Ivoire's education system and to identify priority actions for strengthening bilingual and multilingual foundational learning.

Côte d'Ivoire is a linguistically diverse country, with more than sixty national languages spoken across four major language families. Yet French remains the sole official language of instruction (LoI) throughout the education system, despite being spoken and understood by a minority of children when they enter school—particularly in rural areas. National and international assessments consistently show that while access to primary education has expanded substantially, learning outcomes remain alarmingly low. By the end of primary school, only a small fraction of students achieve minimum proficiency in reading, and large disparities persist between urban and rural learners. Evidence reviewed in this report demonstrates that language mismatch between students and the language of instruction is a central driver of low learning outcomes in Côte d'Ivoire.

At the same time, Côte d'Ivoire has made notable progress in recognizing the role of language in learning and experimenting with bilingual education models. Since the early 2000s, the Ministry of National Education and Literacy (MENA) has supported bilingual education pilots through the *Projet d'Écoles Intégrées (PEI)* and, more recently, through participation in the regional *École et Langues Nationales en Afrique (ELAN)* initiative. These programs represent important steps toward integrating national languages into early-grade instruction and demonstrate growing political openness to bilingual education. However, bilingual initiatives remain limited in scale, uneven in quality, and insufficiently institutionalized within national systems.

Using the BUILD framework, this report assesses Côte d'Ivoire's progress across core system components, including FLN goals and policy, evidence and data, teaching and learning (curriculum, materials, and teacher workforce), community engagement, and monitoring and evaluation. Overall, Côte d'Ivoire demonstrates emerging commitment to bilingual education and foundational learning reform, but system readiness remains uneven. While policy

documents increasingly acknowledge foundational learning challenges and the potential role of national languages, goals are often not language-specific or results-focused. The evidence base is dominated by French-only assessments, limiting the system's ability to diagnose students' true foundational skills in languages they understand best. Teacher recruitment, placement, and professional development do not systematically account for language competencies, leaving many teachers unprepared to support multilingual learners. Curriculum and materials remain largely monolingual, with few structured mechanisms to support transition from national languages to French. Monitoring and evaluation systems are active and institutionalized, but they rarely incorporate linguistic variables, constraining their usefulness for guiding LoI reform.

Drawing on national data, secondary analyses, stakeholder consultations, and global evidence on the science of bilingual reading, the BUILD Côte d'Ivoire report highlights a critical insight: low learning outcomes in Côte d'Ivoire are not solely a function of instructional quality or time on task but are deeply intertwined with the languages in which children are expected to learn. Addressing the foundational learning crisis therefore requires treating language not as a peripheral issue, but as a central design feature of education reform.

The report concludes with a Côte d'Ivoire-specific BUILD Blueprint that outlines high-priority actions to strengthen the integration of language into efforts to improve FLN outcomes. Key recommendations include formalizing a national bilingual LoI policy aligned with the science of bilingual reading; setting clear, language-specific FLN goals; strengthening the national evidence base by incorporating language variables into assessments and education management information systems; developing and scaling a coherent bilingual curriculum and aligned teaching and learning materials; investing in teacher recruitment, placement, and professional development that reflect linguistic realities; and embedding language considerations into monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement processes.

The BUILD Côte d'Ivoire report emphasizes that effective bilingual and multilingual education requires more than pilot programs or policy statements. It requires sustained political commitment, investment in teacher capacity and materials, robust data systems that make language visible, and meaningful engagement with communities.

Introduction

Foundational learning—the ability to read and do basic arithmetic—has a profound influence on lifelong learning and earning potential.¹ However, millions of children across low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are nowhere near acquiring foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) skills.² While this problem includes many facets, language plays a central role. At least half—and in some countries over 90%—of all children in LMICs are being taught in languages they do not use and understand.^{3,4} Most children will have to learn to read at least two languages in their schooling years, making **bilingual and multilingual foundational learning** the norm across LMICs.

The fact that students need to learn in their own language to acquire foundational skills is not only intuitive but backed by evidence from across the world and from across disciplines.^{5,6,7} The benefits include better cognitive and learning outcomes in *both* the first language (L1) and in the second (or later acquired) language (L2);^{8,9} prolonged school attendance, more engagement from parents and communities;¹⁰ and some evidence of cost efficiency.^{11,12}

At the same time, education stakeholders increasingly demand access to education in a child's L2, often a post-colonial language, earlier in their educational trajectory, given the strong relationship between skills in these languages and socioeconomic mobility.^{13,14} Governments often opt to educate children *only* in the post-colonial language. In addition, varying political agendas cause the sociopolitical milieu affecting language of instruction (LoI) choices to constantly shift.¹⁵ Therefore, decisions related to which language(s) to teach in, for how long, and to what end must be both politically palatable and empirically effective to improve FLN outcomes.

To support these decisions, there is an urgent need to treat FLN goals through the lens of bilingualism and multilingualism—not by framing the question of the acquisition of one language against another but by promoting learning outcomes in bilingual and multilingual education contexts. Decision makers need a systematic framework that politically and empirically reconcile this tension between the need to teach children in a familiar language for as long as possible and the need to teach children in an unfamiliar language as early as possible.

To meet this need, American Institutes for Research® (AIR), in collaboration with the Gates Foundation, has developed the **Blueprint for the Use of evidence In LoI Decisions (BUILD)** to provide an *empirically grounded and politically workable* framework to guide decision makers to improve bilingual and multilingual foundational literacy outcomes across LMICs. We are working closely with education decision makers and stakeholders across four countries in sub-

Saharan Africa—Côte d’Ivoire, Mozambique, Rwanda, and Senegal—to apply the BUILD project framework and create actionable blueprints in each country to help leaders improve foundational learning outcomes.

Objectives

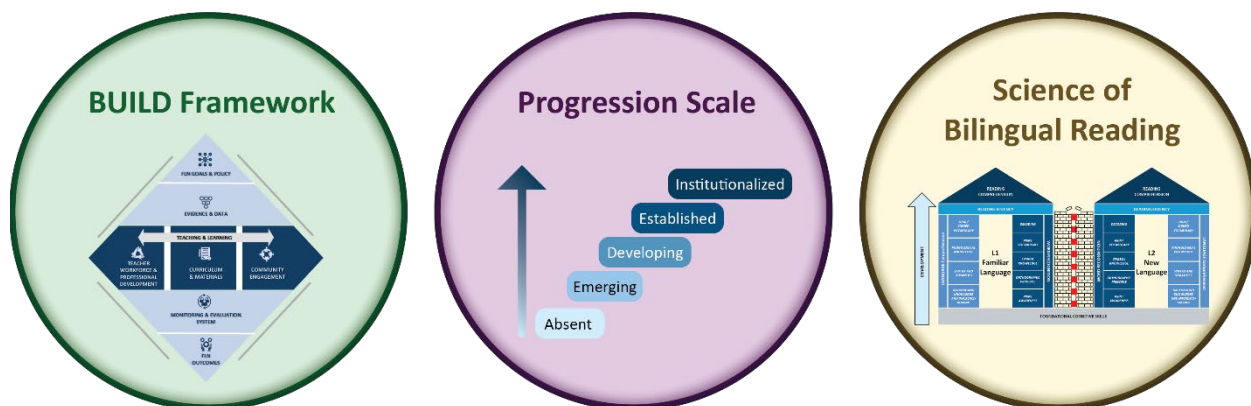
The main objective of the BUILD project is to support governments and education stakeholders to make effective LoI decisions to improve foundational literacy outcomes in their countries. BUILD aims to bring holistic understanding about how language is at the heart of improving foundational learning outcomes, including empirical, practical, and political considerations at key levels of the education system. The BUILD project specifically focuses on the question: *What language(s) are educators going to use to overcome the foundational learning crisis in a specific country, and—once that is decided—how?*

This perspective allows us to overcome the consistent and prevalent issue of either advocating for instruction solely in children’s familiar languages without much foresight into the transition process or focusing solely on the post-colonial language without much planning for the integration of the familiar languages to better support foundational learning outcomes. The BUILD project also aims to support decision makers to get a better sense of how different bilingual education models¹⁶ may be effective given all aspects of a country’s education system.

Overarching BUILD Approach

Our approach to this work includes the development of three components (see Figure 1) – the BUILD framework, the BUILD progression scale, and the theoretical model for the science of bilingual reading (AIR’s Biliteracy House Model). The **BUILD framework** (Figure 2) encompasses the components of the educational system that will influence the relationship between language and learning. The **progression scale** (Table 1) helps track a country’s progress on the path toward effective integration of language considerations into solving learning poverty. The **theoretical model** (Biliteracy House; Figure 3) outlines the scientific underpinning of reading acquisition in bilingual contexts, which is central to all other decisions. Bringing these together, the BUILD project provides stakeholders with a blueprint for achieving the desired foundational literacy outcomes in bilingual and multilingual contexts.

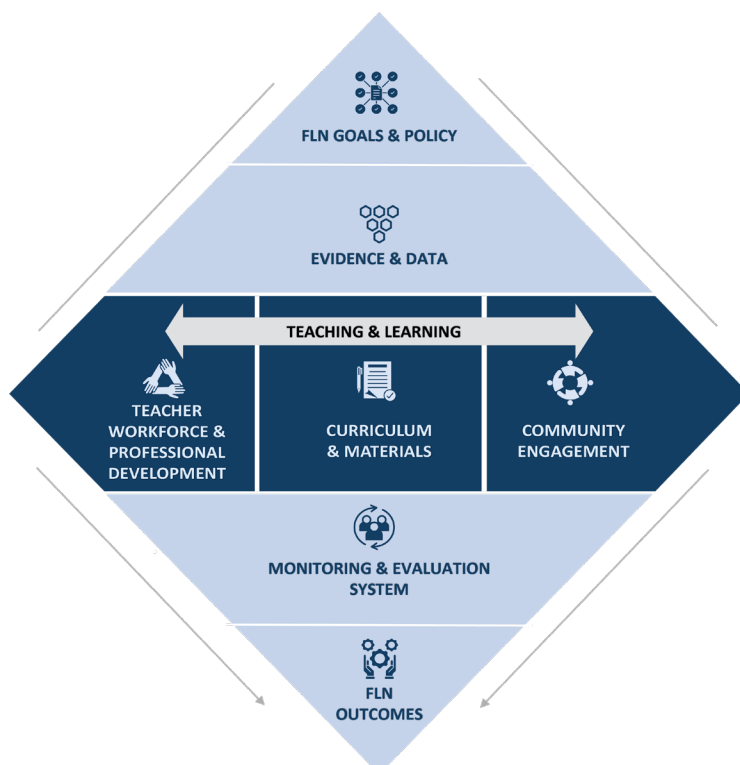
Figure 1. BUILD Approach



The BUILD Framework

The BUILD framework is designed as a series of tiers, representing the core components of the education system that are likely to influence the relationship between language and learning. The tiers are arranged in a diamond shape from top to bottom, with arrows indicating improvement of FLN outcomes as the overall goal. The top tier and the bottom tier are narrower than the center as they represent more focused topics: the FLN goals (topmost tier) and FLN outcomes (bottommost tier). These are presumably the most important components but the least “expansive” in terms of the components and concepts they cover—and thus are represented as taking up less space. As we work down the model toward the middle, the conceptual coverage increases, with the center of the model being the widest, as it represents the largest sections of the system together. These pieces work in tandem conceptually and temporally and are therefore represented next to each other as opposed to above or below each

Figure 2. BUILD Framework



other. In other words, curriculum and materials, teacher professional development (PD), and community components are all pieces of the education system that must be effective and functional at the same time. Each represents a large swathe of ideas, people, and materials involved, justifying its central and wide space in the model. In the following sections, we discuss each tier and present a set of questions that guide us in unpacking and understanding that tier in each country.

FLN Goals and Policy

The top tier, FLN goals and policy, represents the key objectives and policies that guide national education decision making at the primary-school level in terms of foundational learning. While foundational learning itself may or may not be part of the policy, there is an increasing presence of the term (or similar terms such as “early reading,” “early math,” or “basic education outcomes”) in policy documents and policy dialog, propelled in large part by evidence for its centrality in lifelong outcomes.¹⁷



The reason the BUILD framework uses “FLN goals” rather than “LoI goals” or another term that focuses solely on language is that the separation of language policies and FLN policies is part of the problem with identifying how to improve FLN outcomes (the top of the diamond) across the remaining systemic components of an education system. Decision makers need effective tools and guidance to articulate and define a country’s FLN goals *through language*. In other words, national FLN goals (e.g., “the objective of all children reading”) should clearly state the language(s) in which students should achieve learning goals (e.g., “all children will be reading in X language[s]”). At a minimum, policymakers must understand and articulate the language(s) in which students should achieve their goals.

In addition, each BUILD country report will provide a brief historical analysis of the LoI policies, stakeholder analyses, and key roadblocks in its implementation. FLN goals and policies are not static concepts. They are rooted in deep historical, cultural, and sociopolitical realities that constantly shift and influence each other over time.¹⁸ The key questions that we aim to answer under this tier are:

What are the country’s language-specific FLN goals?

What is the LoI policy (if there is one)?

What are the pertinent political realities that might affect the LoI policy’s implementation and future sustainability?

Evidence and Data

The second tier of the BUILD framework represents evidence and data on the status of learning and language use in the country. It represents a compilation of and secondary analysis of the extant data that our team could access at the time of publication of this report. It incorporates, for example, results on students' early grade reading or math scores, language abilities of students and teachers, empirical information on when children are best able to transfer from learning in one language to learning in another (if available), and the orthographic and linguistic properties of the languages students are expected to learn. This information helps us understand various aspects of the transfer of language and reading skills and timings of learning trajectories.



Too often, the generation, analysis, and application of evidence occurs in a vacuum, wherein the linkage to actual implementation and practice remains untapped. Filling this gap between the production of rigorous evidence and policymakers' use and demand of evidence is one of the bedrocks of the BUILD approach. By incorporating this step within the framework, stakeholders can see multidisciplinary results (or gaps in the evidence) for the most pertinent questions to developing and successfully implementing an Lol policy that is likely to improve FLN scores.

The following questions guide this section:

What are learners' current FLN levels across different languages, and how are these assessed?

What languages do teachers and learners understand best, and how do these align with the current Lol?

What factors influence first language (L1)–second language (L2) transfer and transition processes?

Data on the first question will allow stakeholders to assess whether and to what extent they are on track to achieving their FLN goals, get a better sense of indicators they need to measure for bilingual students, and help determine in what language(s) they should test students' FLN skills.

The second question helps us understand the *degree of proficiency* both students and teachers have in various languages. Most reports and available information tend to focus on children's FLN skills in a single language (most often the Lol). This makes it impossible to determine whether they have better skills in another language, whether they have skills in two or more languages, whether the level of their skill is strongest in the measured language, etc. Measuring

skills in only one language also makes it difficult to judge the extent of linguistic heterogeneity across students in a class. Furthermore, the lack of rigorous evidence on teacher skills—in terms of their own linguistic proficiency levels in the language they are teaching, as well as their pedagogical competence in teaching that language—is a serious impediment to effective teacher placement and training processes. Ultimately, classrooms should have as close a match as possible between the LoI, the proficiency levels of the teachers in both speaking/using that language and teaching that language, and the language proficiency of the majority of students (ideally *all*).

The third question focuses on the evidence that exists on L1–L2 transfer in the languages of the focus country and the impact of this evidence on the development of curricula, teacher training materials, and teaching and learning materials (TLMs). Most early learning programs treat L1 and L2 as separate entities, with many focused on improving national language education and others focused on supporting governments to implement a program in the post-colonial language. In the evidence and data tier, we aim to draw on the evidence of transfer between languages, orthographic and phonological processes that may affect such transfer, and other cognitive and linguistic processes (such as thresholds for transfer, thresholds for vocabulary, etc.) that may be necessary to plan and implement a program that accounts for bilingualism and multilingualism from the beginning.

Teaching and Learning

The central tier focuses on the heart of the education system in many ways—the teachers, curriculum and materials, and parents and communities—all of which support foundational learning outcomes in tandem.



In terms of teacher workforce, it is vital that teachers are placed in schools where they have high levels of proficiency in the language(s) they are expected to teach, as well as high levels of pedagogical skills to teach the language(s) they are expected to teach. In addition, teachers need training to teach bilingual children, in line with the bilingual science of reading (SoBR). This requires a deep analysis of existing pre-service and in-service professional development (PD) opportunities regarding multilingual teaching.

At the classroom level, learning outcomes are only as good as the teachers and the teaching and learning materials (TLMs) they use. Growing evidence specifies some of the key elements that support good teaching and learning in LMICs. For example, education systems need a

strong link between policy expectations and classroom realities.¹⁹ To be effective, systems also need a combination of teacher trainings, high-quality student learning materials, and clear teacher support for teaching and learning.²⁰ What is less clear, however, is how educators should design and implement these materials in bilingual or multilingual programming. In the BUILD framework, we closely examine the TLMs in light of the science of bilingual reading and ensure that the curriculum, scope and sequence of skills, pacing guides, and all materials in the classroom align with this theoretical foundation.

The role of communities in supporting literacy is well established, especially the role of parents and caregivers and the home language and literacy environment.^{21,22,23} However, the conceptualization of the home literacy environment and parental involvement (especially in cases of nonliterate parents and mismatches between home and school language) needs careful consideration.^{24,25} As such, for any policy framework to connect with student-level outcomes, it is important to consider community-level engagements and perceptions toward bilingual education. The BUILD framework considers issues such as parental perceptions, especially in terms of demand for language education vis a vis post-colonial language education, the language mismatch between schools and homes, and the degree of parental literacy skills. Together, these dimensions can help leverage resources for nonliterate community members (e.g., by using transferable skills from oral language storytelling) and for places of language mismatch (e.g., by supporting the transfer of home language skills to school language skills).

The following questions guide this tier:

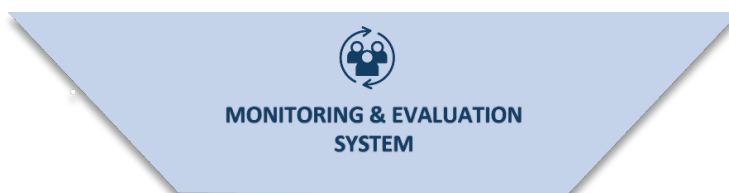
How are language considerations integrated into teacher recruitment, placement, and training (both pre-service and in-service)?

To what extent are the curriculum and TLMs designed to support bilingual and multilingual learners?

How are parents and community members involved in decisions about the LoI?

Monitoring and Evaluation System

In a previous tier of the BUILD framework, we covered evidence and data – which represented an analysis and understanding of the evidence at any given moment in time. In addition, an education system must be able to track, understand, improve, and sustain FLN outcomes over time. A functioning measurement and evaluation (M&E) system ensures that each tier of the education system functions as intended and progresses toward the overarching FLN outcomes.



We conceptualize the M&E tier as a continuous process of data collection, analysis, and data use by system actors to inform programs and interventions to improve learning outcomes. This tier explores whether the country's M&E mechanisms effectively assess the clarity, dissemination, and implementation of FLN goals and policies. It also examines if the M&E systems evaluate the effectiveness of teacher PD, the appropriateness and use of curriculum and materials, and the extent of community engagement. These assessments help identify areas for improvement and inform iterative adjustments to program implementation. Importantly, M&E also supports accountability by providing stakeholders with timely, actionable insights that can guide decision making and resource allocation.

This tier will be guided by the following questions:

Does the country have a regularly updated M&E plan, and are there national or subnational mechanisms to use these data for continuous improvement in FLN outcomes?

To what extent does M&E incorporate linguistic considerations, including data on teachers' and learners' Lol?

How are M&E findings used to inform and revise curriculum, teacher training, and Lol policies?

By embedding M&E within the BUILD framework, the model promotes a culture of evidence-based practice and continuous improvement, ensuring that all components respond to the dynamic needs of learners and the education system.

The BUILD Progression Scale

Within each tier, BUILD will support countries to determine their level of development and lead that into an action plan through the BUILD Progression Scale, as shown in Figure 2. The purpose of this scale is to consider each BUILD tier within the country context and—based on the analysis of the available evidence—decide the level at which countries are prepared to institutionalize their FLN goals.

The **BUILD Progression Scale** serves as a diagnostic and planning tool that enables countries to assess their readiness to improve FLN goals through their Lol policies and systems. Organized into five developmental stages—Absent, Emerging, Developing, Established, and Institutionalized—the scale reflects a country's journey from fragmented or nonexistent efforts to full integration of Lol within national education systems. Each stage highlights progress across key system components: policy, teacher workforce, professional development, curriculum and materials, community engagement, and monitoring and evaluation. Countries

may be at different stages for different criteria; for example, a country may be at the “Institutionalized” stage for its FLN goals and Lol policy but at the “Absent” stage for its teacher recruitment and placement practices.

At the **Absent** stage, countries lack an official Lol policy to support FLN goals. Teacher recruitment and placement practices do not consider language skills, and educators receive no training to accommodate Lol to understand and improve FLN goals. Instructional materials in relevant languages do not exist, and the curriculum fails to reflect linguistic realities. No systems exist for monitoring learning or evaluating language-related teaching practices. Communities do not engage in conversations about language in education, and parents do not know which languages schools use or why they matter for learning.

The **Emerging** stage marks the beginning of awareness and early action related to language. An Lol policy may exist, but it is often fragmented or poorly aligned with FLN goals. Teacher recruitment practices may acknowledge, but not yet operationalize, language dynamics. Training on multilingual instruction is minimal and insufficient for teacher preparedness. Some instructional materials begin to reflect language considerations, but they are inconsistent and limited in scope. Community engagement is largely one-way, consisting of awareness campaigns or information sharing, with minimal opportunities for parent or community input. Monitoring systems, where they exist, focus on outputs rather than learning outcomes.

At the **Developing** stage, countries demonstrate increased commitment to incorporating evidence related to language needs. Countries have more clearly defined Lol policies, which they back by government action. Teacher recruitment and placement practices begin to consider language backgrounds more systematically, though gaps remain. Pre-service and in-service training become more robust, incorporating both theoretical and practical strategies for teaching in multilingual classrooms. Instructional materials and curricula begin to reflect the SoR and students’ language contexts. Education systems consult communities through activities such as language mapping or early reading initiatives but do not fully consider their input for decision making. Policymakers monitor student learning outcomes, although they do not consistently use data to refine strategies.

The **Established** stage is characterized by coherent and systematic implementation of evidence-based practices related to bilingual and multilingual learning. Clear operational guidelines and implementation structures accompany the Lol policy. The linguistic context informs teacher placement practices, and training systems integrate comprehensive professional development related to L1 teaching and transition. Instructional materials and curricula align with multilingual pedagogy and the science of bilingual reading. Monitoring and evaluation systems produce data on learning outcomes, which decision makers use to adapt and improve policies

and practices. Education systems engage communities strategically by empowering families to support learning in home languages. Local leaders may contribute to school governance or teacher support, thus reinforcing Lol implementation.

At the **Institutionalized** stage, national systems deeply embed evidence-based Lol considerations. Education leaders routinely review and adapt all components of the education system, from policy to practice, in alignment with FLN goals. Teacher training is dynamic and responsive to shifting linguistic and demographic realities. Educators regularly update high-quality, evidence-based instructional materials. Monitoring and evaluation systems track both immediate outcomes and long-term impacts of Lol policies, thus supporting data-driven decision making. Community engagement is no longer a peripherality, a formalized and valued part of the education ecosystem. Parents and community members actively shape curriculum, materials, and school governance, ensuring that language choices reflect and support learners' needs.

Ultimately, the BUILD Progression Scale underscores that effective implementation of Lol policies requires comprehensive system-level reform. It depends on sustained political commitment, investment in teachers, high-quality resources, strong accountability systems, and genuine partnerships with the communities that schools serve.

Table 1. BUILD Progression Scale

Component	Absent	Emerging	Developing	Established	Institutionalized
FLN goal(s) and Lol policy	No official Lol policy is in place to reach the FLN goal(s).	A Lol policy exists, but it is vague, fragmented, or not aligned with the FLN goal(s).	An Lol policy is defined, with growing government commitment and early implementation to achieve the FLN goal(s).	An Lol policy is applied in practice and supported by implementation structures in support of the FLN goal(s).	An Lol policy is embedded in national education systems and reviewed regularly in alignment with the FLN goal(s).
Evidence and data	Education stakeholders do not use or have access to evidence related to student language skills to inform and adapt policies and practices.	Education stakeholders have access to some data related to student language skills, but the data are only available on a limited scale or have suboptimal quality.	Education stakeholders have access to student language mapping on a large scale, some evidence on language transfer between some L1s and the desired L2, and some other Lol indicators.	Education stakeholders have access to student and teacher language mapping data on a national scale, language transfer data between the most prominent L1s and the desired L2, and data on additional Lol indicators.	Education stakeholders not only have access to language mapping, language threshold data, and other Lol indicators aligned with all BUILD tiers but also regularly use and update those data to inform policies and practices.
Teacher recruitment and placement	No official teacher recruitment or placement plan is in place that accounts for teachers' language skills.	A teacher recruitment and placement plan that accounts for teacher language skills exists, but it is vague, fragmented, and not operationalized.	A teacher recruitment and placement plan exists with a focus on Lol, though it is in early implementation and not fully operationalized.	A strong teacher recruitment and placement plan exists with a focus on Lol and is supported by implementation structures.	A strong teacher recruitment and placement plan that focuses on Lol exists, is embedded in national education systems, and is reviewed regularly in alignment with FLN goal(s).
Teacher PD	Teachers receive no pre-service or in-service training on teaching in multilingual contexts or using national languages for instruction.	Teachers receive limited training on teaching in multilingual contexts or using local Lol, but that training is not sufficient for teachers to feel prepared to teach in local languages.	Teachers receive more notable trainings on teaching in multilingual contexts and using Lol, yet these trainings are not yet comprehensive and system-wide. Some gaps exist in teacher preparedness.	Trainings on teaching in multilingual contexts and using national Lol are integrated extensively into in-service and pre-service teacher training.	Ongoing, adaptive training responds to demographic and linguistic shifts among teachers and learners.
Curriculum and materials	The curriculum does not address multilingual teaching. Instructional materials in local languages are unavailable.	The curriculum addresses multilingual teaching to a minimal extent. Some instructional materials integrate language considerations.	The curriculum and materials incorporate the science of reading for multilingual learners, reflecting students' linguistic contexts. Instructional materials increasingly integrate language considerations.	The curriculum and materials are fully aligned with the science of reading for multilingual learners, reflecting students' linguistic contexts.	A high-quality, regularly updated curriculum and corresponding materials support evolving FLN and Lol goals.
Community engagement	Communities are largely unaware of the benefits of multilingual education. Little or no sensitization efforts are in place. Communities have no tools to support children to read in school languages. Communities are not engaged in supporting education in school languages.	Information-sharing efforts such as awareness campaigns may be in place, but they are not yet at scale with proven effectiveness. Families and communities have limited involvement in supporting multilingual education.	Families and communities are generally aware of the benefits of multilingual education. Communities are somewhat engaged in decisions and/or implementation of multilingual education through, for example, language mapping, focus groups, materials development, or supporting student language and literacy development at home.	Families and communities are largely aware of the benefits of multilingual education. Parents and communities actively support learning in the home language and/or the transition to the L2.	Community engagement and commitment to multilingual education is deep and sustained. Families and community members are continually involved in governance, curriculum feedback, material development, and home language and literacy support.
Monitoring and evaluation	No systems are in place to monitor student learning or assess Lol-related practices.	Some basic monitoring of outputs occurs (e.g., enrollment, textbook distribution) but not of student learning outcomes.	Student learning outcomes are tracked but not yet used to refine or inform Lol strategies.	Outcomes are continuously monitored; early evidence of what works is used to adjust approaches.	Robust systems track learning outcomes, assess the impact of Lol policies, and inform iterative policy adaptation.

The Science of Bilingual Reading

As mentioned above, the BUILD framework is grounded in the science of learning to read. Decades of research have led to several influential theoretical frameworks on learning to read (and reading to learn). Given that our current focus is foundational literacy, we rely on the theories of early reading development. We incorporate well-established theoretical models as well as emerging empirical trends from learning to read across languages and scripts and from across monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual models of learning.

First, in terms of the earliest stages of learning to read, the Universal Grammar of Reading²⁶ posits that all writing systems, regardless of language, fundamentally map orthographic (written) to phonological (auditory) information. However, the nature of this mapping varies across languages, influencing how children learn to read. Key dimensions that affect the reading process include:

- orthographic depth (how consistently letters map to sounds),
- symbol set size (the number of unique symbols or graphemes a learner needs to recognize and identify in order to decode words),
- phonological unit size (e.g., syllables vs. phonemes),
- visual complexity of the script, and
- tonality in tonal languages.

These factors are critical in shaping the scope, sequence, and timing of reading instruction.

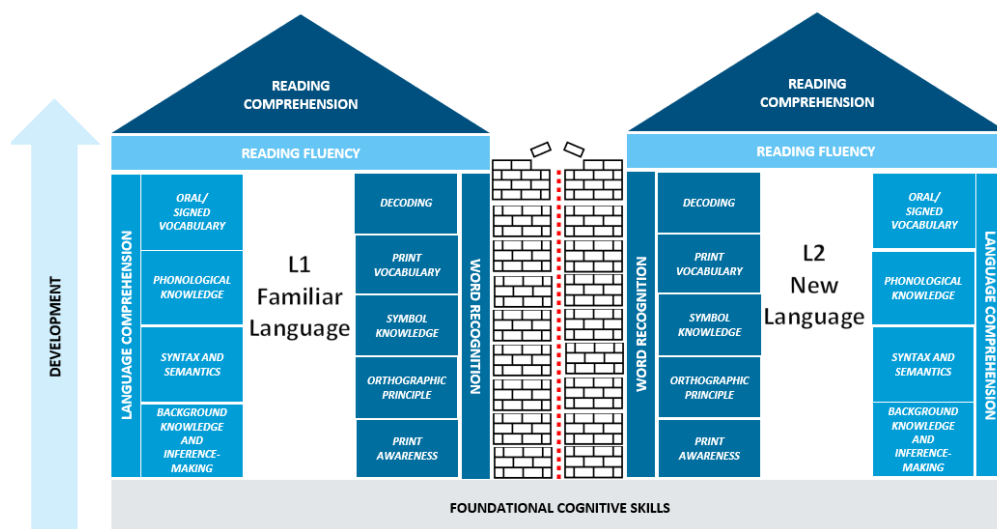
As students' ability develops beyond initial mapping of sounds and symbols toward basic reading comprehension abilities, the Cognitive Foundations of Reading Acquisition Model, articulated by Hoover and Tunmer, provides one of the most influential models of reading comprehension development.²⁷ This model, previously articulated by the authors as the Simple View of Reading, emphasizes that reading comprehension in any language depends on the integration of two core skill sets: language proficiency and decoding (or word recognition). Through a review of multiple studies across language types, it is clear that language proficiency includes a series of subskills such as background knowledge and inference making, knowledge of syntax and semantics (including morphological and other skills), phonological knowledge (i.e., understanding of sounds and sound patterns), and oral or signed vocabulary.²⁸ Word recognition also includes a series of subskills, including print awareness (i.e., understanding of the basic principles of text), knowledge of orthographic principles (i.e., understanding of *how*

sounds and symbols correspond with each other), symbol knowledge (i.e., understanding exactly *what* sounds correspond with specific symbols), and decoding (i.e., the ability to sound out words and symbols).^{29,30,31} Language proficiency and decoding then support the acquisition of reading fluency, which is the automatic (quick and accurate) sounding out of words and passages. Altogether, these abilities support reading comprehension—the overall goal of reading comprehension (or foundational literacy).

In bilingual settings, the Transfer Facilitation Model³² offers a framework for understanding how L1 and L2 abilities influence reading skills in L2. According to this model, predictable and significant patterns of transfer, cross-linguistic cognitive resource sharing, and transfer facilitation affect literacy acquisition. This means that skills acquired in one language can support and enhance reading development in another, highlighting the interconnected nature of bilingual literacy acquisition. Children who learn to **read two** or more languages develop a metaphorical “house” for each language, as illustrated in AIR’s Biliteracy House Model (see Figure 3). The model provides an intuitive and metaphorical representation of the skills and subskills (pillars and bricks) and transferable skills (shared walls) needed to support the development of biliteracy acquisition. In these cases, the child’s L1 impacts the development of reading in second or later-acquired languages in significant and predictable ways, namely the transfer of decoding skills from an L1 to an L2 when an empirically defined threshold level is reached.^{33,34,35}

The BUILD framework will apply the biliteracy house as its theoretical underpinning for the science of bilingual reading, and as such, the model will guide all aspects of our analyses and the development of the country Lol blueprints.

Figure 3. AIR Biliteracy House



These theoretical models provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding how children learn to read in bilingual and multilingual contexts. By integrating insights from the Universal Grammar of Reading, the Cognitive Foundations of Reading Acquisition, and the Transfer Facilitation Model, the BUILD framework offers a robust, evidence-based approach to biliteracy development. The Biliteracy House model operationalizes these theories into a practical structure that highlights both language-specific and transferable skills. As the guiding framework for BUILD, it will inform all aspects of our analysis and the design of country-specific Lol blueprints, ensuring that our work is grounded in the science of how children learn to read and read to learn across languages.

Côte d'Ivoire Evidence Review

Côte d'Ivoire's Lol of policy is French throughout the nation. However, there have been notable bilingual education experiments and policy dialog in the country beginning in the 1980s, initially led by Professor Khaled Aït Hammou and the NGO *Savane Développement*. Since 2001, Côte d'Ivoire has implemented the *Projet d'écoles intégrées* (Integrated School Project, or PEI) to test bilingual education in select schools. Ongoing bilingual experiments use 10 Ivorian languages in the classroom from preschool through the end of primary school in 22 schools. These 10 languages cover all four linguistic groups in the country. Since 2016, the *Ecole et Langues Nationales en Afrique* (ELAN), a regional initiative promoting the use of national languages in education has been active in Côte d'Ivoire and is currently leading bilingual education experiments in an additional 30 schools in the country. A 2021 evaluation jointly carried out by the CONFEMEN and the IFEF on the ELAN schools showed that students in the bilingual programs performed slightly above the national average for reading, math, and primary school completion.

After decades of hesitation to adopt coherent language and education policies, there is a growing shift in attitude among Ivorian decision-makers towards the effective integration of local languages into the school system. The Ministry of National Education and Technical Education (MENA-ET) recognizes the Lol issue in Ivorian schools, noting that the inability of many children to understand the Lol hinders the completion of primary education, particularly for children in rural areas. In recent years, the MENA-ET has demonstrated interest in bilingual education. For example, a 2021 general assembly recommended the development of a multilingual education policy and the MENA-ET hosted a 2022 symposium on the theme of improving the quality of education through bilingual education.

As the Ministry aims to expand its bilingual education pilot, the BUILD project supports Ivorian education stakeholders in considering larger-scale Lol policy reform. We present evidence on

different Lol models, their effectiveness for student learning outcomes, and their relevance and feasibility for the social and political context. Furthermore, we provide input to education authorities to identify key research needs, such as mapping student language skills throughout the country and diagramming the orthographic similarities and differences among the languages used throughout the country. Lastly, the support of our team to Ministry stakeholders will consist of planning ongoing support to bilingual programming, including developing teaching and learning materials that integrate the science of reading and language acquisition, training teachers on their use, and engaging communities to gain support for bilingual programming.

Methods

To address the key questions guiding the BUILD framework, we conducted an in-depth desk review of pertinent documents related to basic education and Lol policies and programming, consulted with key stakeholders, and conducted secondary quantitative data analysis on aspects of the BUILD framework related to Lol and foundational learning outcomes.

Document Review

Our evidence collection process involved aggregating documents and data available from prior AIR projects related to Lol and bilingual education, as well as working closely with our national consultant, Director of the Institute of Applied Linguistics at Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny, Dr. Jean Martial Kouame, with deep expertise in Côte d'Ivoire's linguistic and education context to identify additional key documents for desk review. The resulting document set spanned all tiers of the BUILD framework and included, for example, national policy and strategy documents related to basic education, academic literature on multilingual education and language use, reports from governmental and nongovernmental organizations on education programming and outcomes, and curricula and teaching and learning materials used in bilingual education initiatives.

After compiling the full document set, we reviewed each document for potential inclusion in the evidence synthesis. A member of the review team—comprising an AIR researcher, research assistant, and project associate, all fluent in French and English—assessed whether each document contained information relevant to the guiding questions and whether it was sufficiently recent to provide pertinent evidence related to BUILD framework topics. Relevance assessment involved an initial review of the title and abstract or introduction (where available), followed by targeted scanning of the document content to determine its applicability. Each document was reviewed independently by two team members. In cases of uncertainty regarding relevance, documents were retained for further analysis.

Throughout the review process, we drew on AIR’s broader institutional knowledge of the Ivorian education system developed through prior research and technical assistance activities in the country, including work related to bilingual and multilingual education, foundational learning assessments, and teacher professional development.

Documents were then categorized by tier within the BUILD framework. For example, documents addressing teacher recruitment, deployment, or training policies were tagged to the “Teacher Workforce and Professional Development” tier, while reports on the implementation or outcomes of bilingual education programs were tagged across multiple relevant tiers, including “Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) Assessment Data,” “Teacher Workforce and Professional Development,” and “Community Engagement.”

For each document retained in the evidence synthesis, the review team produced standardized analytical summaries using OpenAI GPT-4.0, including translated key findings where necessary. Two members of the review team independently reviewed these summaries to verify accuracy against the source documents. In cases where inaccuracies or hallucinations were identified, AI-generated summaries were discarded and replaced with human-generated analyses.

The research team then manually synthesized evidence across all included documents to produce a comprehensive and coherent review. Using the AI summaries as a support tool, AIR analysts conducted additional in-depth human review of the most salient documents—those providing critical evidence directly relevant to the guiding questions—to ensure accurate interpretation and integration of findings. Where gaps in the evidence base were identified, we conducted targeted online searches and requested additional documentation from national experts and stakeholders.

This approach enabled the efficient processing of a large body of French- and English-language literature while maintaining analytical rigor and consistency. Overall, the methodology balanced breadth and depth, ensuring a robust synthesis of the evidence base to inform analysis across all tiers of the BUILD framework.

Stakeholder Consultations

Ivorian education expert, Dr. Jean Martial Kouame, and AIR team members with experience working in Côte d’Ivoire’s bilingual education space identified a variety of key stakeholders in each country, including Ministry of Education officials, advisors, linguists and other academics, implementing organizations, and others. We selected stakeholders to ensure coverage of expertise across elements of the BUILD framework. Using the BUILD consultation guide (shown in Annex A), Dr. Kouame conducted interviews with the following stakeholders to gather their insight related to Lol issues in the countries and obtain additional evidence:

- Dr. Aguikouadio Rodrigue Yoffo, Teacher-Researcher at the Alassane Ouattara University of Bouaké, specializing in Sociolinguistics and Language Didactics
- Dr. Otchoumou Affoué Alix Manuella Koua, French as a Foreign Language teacher educator, specializing in Primary Language Didactics
- Kouakou Eloi Noël Kouassi, Chief Inspector of Education, Technical Advisor to the MENA-ET
- Ouattara Lacina, Inspector of Primary Education, Head of the Bouaké District
- Dr. Happy Rosalie Lolo-Monney, Teacher-Researcher at the Ecole Normale Supérieure d'Abidjan
- Nestor Ferréol Dji, PEI/ELAN Coordinator
- Massingo Sanogo, National Trainer for PEI/ELAN
- N’Faly Cisse, National Trainer for PEI/ELAN
- Abia Alain Laurent Aboa, Professor of Sociolinguistics and French Linguistics, Technical Advisor to the MENA

Secondary Quantitative Data

We identified and analyzed data from multiple quantitative data sources to address the questions guiding each tier of the BUILD framework, including questions related to student foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes across languages, oral language competencies, and cross-linguistic relationships in reading subskills. In particular, we examined relationships between students’ first-language (L1) and second-language (L2) reading skills, including potential transfer dynamics between L1 and L2 decoding, aligned with the theoretical foundations of bilingual reading development.

We analyzed the most recent nationally representative foundational learning data available for Côte d’Ivoire, including Programme d’Analyse des Systèmes Éducatifs de la CONFEMEN (PASEC) assessments, Monitoring Impacts on Learning Outcomes (MILO) Assessments for Minimum Proficiency Levels (AMPL), and World Bank education indicators. Additional sources included national assessments administered by the Ministry of National Education and Literacy (MENA), such as Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA) and Early Grade Mathematics Assessments (EGMA), as well as regionally focused foundational learning data drawn from development program evaluations and academic studies.

We also conducted new analyses using a dataset compiled by AIR as part of its role in the GPE-KIX Strengthening Multilingual Education Systems study. This dataset provides detailed information on student learning outcomes, student and teacher language abilities, and classroom language practices. We selected three regions—Abidjan, Gbêkê, and Poro—to capture variation across urban and rural contexts, linguistic environments, and exposure to

bilingual education initiatives. Across these regions, we sampled approximately 70 schools, spanning urban and rural districts.

Within each school, we sampled students from Grades 2 and 4, recognizing that these grades represent a critical window for foundational literacy development and the period in which students are expected to begin acquiring proficiency in French, the official LoI. Grade 2 is also an internationally recognized benchmark grade for measuring foundational literacy. From each school, we randomly selected approximately 12 students per grade level, yielding a total sample of 1,682 students; in schools with fewer than 12 students in the target grades, all students were included.

These data enabled analysis of language use and proficiency, mismatch between students' known languages and the LoI, and relationships between oral language comprehension and reading subskills in French. Although these data are not nationally representative, they provide important insights into how linguistic context and instructional language relate to foundational learning outcomes in Côte d'Ivoire and complement the nationally representative evidence base used across the BUILD framework.

FLN Goals and Language Policy

All educational programming and policy decisions in a country should ultimately be founded on the goals for student learning. To assess the extent to which each of the core components of the education system aligns with the FLN goals, we first need to define those goals. Therefore, in this section, we detail the stated goals for student learning in Côte d'Ivoire, the existing LoI policy in the country, and the current policy environment—the top tier of the BUILD framework shown at the right.



Country FLN Goals

We take each question in the first tier of the BUILD framework by turn, beginning with the first question:

What are the country's language-specific FLN goals?

Faced with a crisis in the quality of basic education in Côte d'Ivoire, the national education authorities have set several goals to transform the education system. These measures include a laudable refocus on foundational learning, although they contain somewhat vague or incomplete objectives.

Several national policy documents outline the general objectives for the education system, which primarily focus on social and cultural integration and workforce preparedness. The 1995 education law, for one, sets out the following objectives for primary education:

- The integration of the child into his or her social, cultural and economic environment with a view to preparing him or her to take charge of himself or herself and to be useful to his or her society;
- The moral, civic and cultural training of young children and practical training with a view to getting them interested in various trades and manual work;
- Preparing the child for the secondary education cycle.

Key Takeaway

Côte d'Ivoire has an optimistic vision for improving national education. Nonetheless, some gaps in the national goals include a lack of focus on national languages and a lack of SMART, results-focused objectives.

The vision of the *Plan national de développement* (National Development Plan, or PND) is that “citizens are capable of contributing to socio-economic development of their communities and to Ivorian society, of promoting social cohesion and assuring its capabilities for competitiveness and technological innovation.” The plan also notes that primary education should emphasize the relationship of the students with their national cultural heritage. Similarly, the country’s 2016-2025 Education/Training Sector Plan set out to obtain the following: “By 2025, the Ivorian education system will ensure all children and adults with quality, equitable and inclusive education that takes into account the transformation needs of citizens, enables them to contribute to the socio-economic development of their communities and Ivorian society, promotes social cohesion and ensures capacity for competitiveness and technological innovation.”

To achieve this vision, the Ivorian government has set several goals for improving the education system. Many of these goals focus on improving literacy, based on somewhat vague parameters. For instance, the 2016-2025 Sector Plan addresses basic learning by diagnosing the education system and defining strategic objectives for the pre-primary and primary literacy sub-sectors. The Plan’s diagnosis reveals several major challenges with primary school literacy, among others. To ameliorate this, the sector review highlights specific actions, in particular increasing the overall score of elementary school students in French. Although the Plan focuses on improving primary school competencies in French, it also prescribes the use of national languages in preschool to better promote learning.

Several other sector planning documents outline goals for children to obtain foundational literacy and numeracy skills, although they fail to mention the languages in which children should obtain these skills. The 2023 Partnership Pact, for instance, envisions that at the end of the primary level, pupils will be able to proficiently read, write and calculate. To operationalize the Pact and respond to the persistent crisis in foundational learning, the MENA has adopted

the *Stratégie Nationale d'Amélioration des Premiers Apprentissages Scolaires* (National Strategy for the Improvement of Early School Learning, or SNAPAS). Driven by a strong political vision, SNAPAS has set an ambitious goal for 2030: to ensure that every student has full mastery of reading, writing and mathematics by the end of the primary cycle, although, like the Partnership Pact, it does not specify in which language(s) students should achieve this mastery. However, because several indicators focus on students' French reading skills, one can assume that the goal focuses on French.

These policy and planning documents describe detailed plans by which to improve foundational learning, notably by focusing on improving pedagogical strategies, increasing school access, and promoting early childhood education, among others. However, the objectives and indicators that these documents set forth are often not SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) nor results-focused. For example, the PND set a goal of "increasing the overall score out of 100 of elementary school students in mathematics and French from 50 to 60," likely in reference to the system diagnostic for teaching and learning. Yet, the planned actions to achieve that goal focus on construction of classrooms and teacher recruitment and training, rather than direct actions to improve student math and French skills. The SNAPAS sets a key objective to achieve a success rate of at least 80% in reading, writing and mathematics by 2030, but does not define what is required for "success." The SNAPAS includes a comprehensive annual workplan, budget, and results framework for improving foundational learning; however all the indicators are activity indicators (e.g., number of teachers trained, etc.), not outcome indicators (e.g., improvement in teacher and student skills).

Language Policy

Next, we address the question:

What is the LoI policy, if there is one?

Côte d'Ivoire's language policy has historically oriented towards monolingualism, giving exclusive primacy to French.³⁶³⁷ Despite the presence of more than sixty languages, the government's language policy has been one of non-intervention, wherein the state has refrained from promoting a specific Ivorian language to the detriment of others. Rather, Côte d'Ivoire's language policy has granted privileged status to the French language, persistently marginalized local languages, and only meagerly promoted initiatives in favor of Ivorian languages.³⁸ As soon as the country gained independence, Côte d'Ivoire enshrined French

Key Takeaway

Côte d'Ivoire has historically oriented towards a unilingual French national language policy, which has become increasingly criticized in recent years. French, as the official language of instruction, presents a barrier to learning for many students. Recognizing this challenge, the MENA is seeking to extend its bilingual education programming, as detailed in the SNAPAS and PNAPAS strategy documents.

as its official language, a choice ratified by the constitution.³⁹⁴⁰ Today, French plays an essential role in all areas of public life as the language of administration, justice, the media, and, crucially, as the exclusive medium of teaching at all levels of the education system. This last function is a direct legacy of colonial policy, which had explicitly forbidden, by a 1924 decree, the use of local languages in schools.

The choice of French as an official language has been described as a means of neutralizing local particularities and merging often rival ethnic groups into a single nation.⁴¹ In a prevailing multilingual context, French is perceived as a solution of neutrality and an instrument of national unity, since it is not the language of any Ivorian ethnic group. It is also seen as a tool for cross-border communications and social advancement.

Nonetheless, the country's monolingual language policy is increasingly criticized; although it seems to be a simple solution to the plurality of languages in the country, it presents an injustice to the fundamental rights of Ivorian linguistic communities (Traoré, 2022). Although local languages play a decisive role in the daily lives of the population, they do not enjoy real official recognition and are confined to informal sectors of activity. Even though the constitution has mentioned the promotion of national languages since 2000, there has been a lack of a clear language policy and a real political will to integrate them into education.

While the 1960 Constitution established French as the only official language without any mention of local languages, the second Constitution of 2000 stipulated, in article 29, that "the law shall set the conditions for the promotion and development of national languages." Similarly, a 1995 law related to the right to education mentions the teaching of national languages. Recognizing the value of national languages in improving learning and preserving culture, the MENA set a goal in its 2022 plan for national education to define a language education policy based on multilingualism. While the official texts have notably transformed the stance toward language and authorities are showing a more open attitude towards the research and codification of Ivorian languages carried out by researchers at the Institute of Applied Linguistics in Abidjan, the government has done very little to make the promotion and development of national languages a reality.⁴² Dr. Lolo Monney, teacher and researcher at the École Normale Supérieure d'Abidjan with well-known work related to Lol, noted that while national languages are recognized by the Constitution, they do not have an official role in education. She argues that until recently Côte d'Ivoire has not had a clear political will for the use of national languages in schools, as it has remained for many years in a state of experimentation.

In the realm of education, the SNAPAS clearly identifies the role of the Lol as a factor in the low level of educational achievement. French, although the official Lol, often represents a barrier

for many Ivorian students, particularly those in rural areas, where children often have little knowledge of the language before they go to school. To remedy this problem, the SNAPAS and PNAPAS propose to integrate national languages into the education system through a bilingual education approach. Promising results from bilingual education experiments (described in the following section) have convinced the national education authorities to gradually generalize the bilingual approach, with the objective of extending bilingual education to 2,000 schools in 2027-2028 through the use of a dozen national languages. The MENA plans to extend to other national languages in the future. Anchored in the principle of inclusion, the bilingual education strategy recognizes the equal value of the child's language of first socialization (L1) and the official language (L2). Yet, even though the government outlined comprehensive plans to integrate bilingual education in Pillar 8 of the SNAPAS, it is already far off track from the planned activities for the 2024-2025 school year. Furthermore, although the PNAPAS claims to place a value on national languages, it only accounts for the provision of teaching and learning materials in French and outlines a plan to teach French reading as early as preschool, before children even know the language.

Policy Context

Here, we trace Côte d'Ivoire's history related to bilingual education and outline its present political reality in fulfillment of the final question in the FLN Goals and Policy tier:

What are the pertinent political realities that might affect the LoI policy's implementation and future sustainability?

Despite the predominance of French in Côte d'Ivoire's policy landscape, several notable experiments in national language education have taken place in the country over the past few decades. In the 1980s, Professor Khaled Aït Hammou led a trial of bilingual education in the north of the country, then an organization called *Savane Développement* experimented with some classes in Dioula and Sénoufo in the 1990s. Beginning in the early 2000s, the MENA developed the *Projet Ecole Intégrée* (Integrated School Project, or PEI), to experiment with the use of national languages in government schools. In parallel, the country has participated in the regional *Ecole et Langues Nationales en Afrique* (School and National Language Program in Africa, or ELAN-Afrique) initiative since 2016. Today, 22 schools are implementing bilingual

Key Takeaway

Efforts to integrate Ivorian languages into education at a larger scale have largely stalled due to institutional inertia, sociopolitical ambivalence, and insufficient funding. Meanwhile, meagre instructional time in schools, large class sizes, and poor infrastructure create structural challenges for educational advancement more generally.

education programming in nine national languages¹ through PEI and 30 schools are implementing bilingual education in Dioula through ELAN.

Representatives from ELAN, as well as Dr. Manuella Koua, a teacher trainer, noted that the Ivorian government seems quite favorable to scaling bilingual education, as demonstrated through actions such as the creation and ongoing support of the PEI, the inclusion of bilingual education in policy documents such as the SNAPAS, and discussion of the issue at the General Assembly of National Education and Literacy, along with other political symposia. However, the country has yet to undertake substantial regulatory, financial, or technical measures to pursue bilingual education more formally. The texts creating the PEI are now considered incomplete and obsolete and the PEI does not have an official document of procedures detailing its objectives, its operating bodies, or its evaluation tools. In addition, the funds allocated to the initiative are considered insufficient and the existing budget lines are not adapted to actual pedagogical activities. Representatives from the MENA and partner organizations have articulated some concerns about implementing national language education on a large scale, namely the extent of resources that would be required to train teachers and produce classroom materials and how to handle a mismatch between teachers' and students' language abilities. Other implementation challenges also persist, including limited availability of trained teachers, insufficient teaching materials, and inconsistent orthographic standards across different educational programs and regions.⁴³ Legal and institutional shortcomings, pedagogical and training problems, and operational and financial deficits thus limit the institutionalization and scaling of existing bilingual initiatives.

In addition to challenges with institutionalizing bilingual education, the Ivorian education system faces several structural constraints. Primary school students receive only 625 hours of instruction per year, far below international norms.⁴⁴ Teachers in primary schools work an average of just 14.2 hours per week.⁴⁵ Class sizes, while improving, remain high: the average dropped from 43.5 students in 2014 to 31.1 in 2019, a rate which is still larger than in most other PASEC countries.⁴⁶ A principal component analysis of school conditions grouped Côte d'Ivoire with countries characterized by poor infrastructure, limited support for high-performing students, and low levels of reading at home.⁴⁷ These conditions are particularly pronounced in early primary grades and in rural areas.⁴⁸ In contrast, higher-performing countries tended to have better-equipped classrooms, more homework practices, and higher rates of preschool attendance and private school enrollment.⁴⁹

¹ These include Agni, Akye, Abidji, Baoulé, Sénoufo, Koulango, Yacouba, Toura, and Bété.

Evidence and Data

In the next tier of the BUILD Framework, we conduct an analysis of secondary data and existing evidence of students' FLN and language abilities, as well as a review the linguistic properties of the languages students are expected to learn in order to better inform the programmatic design of the curriculum mirroring the science of reading. We also describe any data on the threshold points at which children learning to read in the target languages are best able to transfer their literacy skills to French for optimal learning.



Foundational Learning Skills

In this section, we address the first question in the Evidence & Data tier:

What are learners' current FLN levels across different languages, and how are these assessed?

Across various data sources, nearly everyone—from national education representatives to academics and teachers—agrees that student levels of learning are not sufficient. Many stakeholders lamented students' current levels of French language skills. In rural areas, students have a good level of understanding of local languages, contrary to urban areas where students often speak a vernacular of French different from that learned in schools. In any case, many feel that the use of French in schools is an impediment to student learning.

While school participation has improved in recent years, learning outcomes remain alarmingly low, particularly in early primary grades. For instance, Côte d'Ivoire ranked in the 31st percentile for net enrollment rate (86%) but only in the 7th percentile for youth literacy (15-24 years old; 53%), according to figures retrieved from 2017 and 2014, respectively.⁵⁰ Though the youth literacy rate has since improved by 16%, reaching 69% in 2021,⁵¹ the Harmonized Learning Outcome (HLO) scale displays persistent challenges in improving student learning, particularly in the French LoI among primary school students. The HLO scale is a standardized global metric used to compare learning across various international assessments. After converting the 2019 PASEC results to the HLO scale, the Center for Global Development found that Côte d'Ivoire is not only among the lowest PASEC performers, but also among the bottom 30 countries globally, while other PASEC countries, such as Senegal and Benin, are above the HLO global median.⁵² A critical gap therefore exists between enrollment and actual learning.

Enrollment, Grade Repetition, and Out-of-School Youth

Côte d'Ivoire has made notable progress in expanding access to education, but participation remains uneven across gender and socioeconomic lines as youth get older. Primary school enrollment rose from 55.8% in 2009 to 90.3% in 2018, and the number of out-of-school children dropped from over 1.4 million to just under 250,000 in the same period.⁵³ Among youth of primary and lower secondary age, the percentage of out-of-school students are relatively similar across gender, rural/urbanicity, and wealth (with both the richest and poorest youth having the highest out-of-school percentages).^{54,55} When youth reach upper secondary school age, there is a larger percentage of rural youth out-of-school (62% vs. 45% urban) and the poorest youth out-of-school (71% vs. 50% average among all income quintiles).⁵⁶ Grade repetition is also a persistent issue: 12.6% of students repeat Grade 2, and over half (52.3%) of late primary students have repeated a grade at least once in their educational career.⁵⁷ These patterns suggest that while more children are entering school, many are not progressing smoothly through the system, and dropout remains a significant risk, especially for marginalized groups.

Regionally, Denguele, Woroba, and Savanes have a higher percentage of children who have never been to school (ranging from 37-40%), compared to the overall average of 18%, with all other regions more closely clustered to the average.⁵⁸ These regions neighbor each other in the North, and unsurprisingly have the lowest youth literacy rate among 15 to 24 year olds as well.⁵⁹ Regarding the percentage of children of primary school age who are out of school, Abidjan is by far the highest, at 59%.⁶⁰

Learning Outcomes: MILO AMPL, PASEC Report, and Development Partner Evaluations

Côte d'Ivoire has participated in a range of national and international learning assessments to monitor student achievement and inform education policy, however the majority of these are conducted in French only.

The Ministry of Education and UNESCO Institute for Statistics conducted the MILO project in 2021 to assess learning progress during the COVID-19 pandemic. This assessment followed closely after the country's participation in PASEC 2019, the previous international assessment in foundational learning. The project found that only 10.8% of end-of-primary students reached or exceeded the minimum proficiency level (MPL) in Reading, and just 8.9% did so in Mathematics.⁶¹ When comparing national averages and gender-disaggregated data, there was no statistically significant difference between the 2019 PASEC scores and the 2021 MILO (AMPL) scores.⁶² At the regional directorate level, Bongouanou and Mankono stood out: both recorded 0% of students reaching Reading MPL in 2021, and Mankono also had 0% of students meeting the Mathematics MPL.⁶³ A major finding in the report is that learning outcomes

remained steady between 2019 and 2021, however the percentage of students achieving MPL was extremely low to begin with.⁶⁴

It is important to note that both MILO and PASEC assessments are conducted entirely in French, which removes their ability to capture students' foundational skills in national languages. This limitation also applies to national assessments administered by the Ministry of National Education (MENA), such as the annual EGRA and EGMA exams. Between 2019 and 2021, the average EGRA score increased from 24 to 28 among CE1 students, and in northern regions targeted by the *Projet d'Amélioration de la Prestation des Services Éducatifs* (PAPSE) intervention, scores rose from 11 to 22 between 2020 and 2022 among CP2 students.⁶⁵ However, these figures also lack sufficient granularity for deeper analysis.

Despite being conducted in French, past PASEC reports offer detailed insights into student performance in reading and math, including variation across geographic regions and demographic subgroups. Notably, when comparing PASEC 2014 and 2019 results, scores improved for Grade 2 students but declined for Grade 6 students, suggesting that gains in early primary education were not sustained through the end of the cycle.^{66,67}

In early primary, 66.9% of students in Côte d'Ivoire were found to lack the foundational skills necessary to continue their education without difficulty. PASEC scores students on a 4-level Lol proficiency scale, with scores at level 3 or above meeting the minimum proficiency level. Only 33.1% of the early primary students tested reached the minimum proficiency level (i.e. levels 3 or 4) in reading, significantly below the average (44.6%) among countries that participated in the 2019 PASEC assessment. These students have perfected their listening comprehension and decoding skills and are developing links between spoken and written language. However, a notable proportion of students were clustered at level 2, suggesting that many are on the cusp of proficiency. Encouragingly, only 4.7% of students performed below level 1—indicating a smaller share of students with extremely limited literacy skills compared to the regional average of 8.7%.⁶⁸

Regarding reading subskills, nearly 30% of students were unable to read a single word correctly in one minute, and only 6% could read more than 20 words, compared to the average of 16.5% in the 2019 PASEC assessment. These figures point to widespread difficulties in decoding and fluency, subskills that are essential for comprehension and further learning.⁶⁹

In late primary, 30.4% of the grade 6 students attained minimum proficiency, lower than the regional average of 47.9%. These students are able to combine explicit pieces of information, extract implicit information, and make inferences from text. 7% of students were below level 1, compared to the regional average of 5.9%.⁷⁰

While early primary results showed relatively low variability in student performance, late primary assessments revealed a high degree of heterogeneity.⁷¹ This shift suggests that as students progress through the system, disparities in learning outcomes widen, and the system fails to support struggling learners effectively. The high proportion of students who do not reach minimum proficiency by the end of primary school confirms that foundational learning deficits are not being addressed over time.

With only 33% of the Ivorian population speaking French,⁷² data from all PASEC countries demonstrates that students perform better in both reading and math when they are taught and assessed in their first language (L1) rather than in a second language (L2).⁷³ In Côte d'Ivoire specifically, students who speak French at home are significantly more likely to meet minimum proficiency in early and late primary, with gaps of 23⁷⁴ and 20⁷⁵ percentage points respectively, highlighting persistent language barriers.

Rural areas face particularly acute challenges. By the end of primary school, only 11% of students in rural areas achieve minimum reading proficiency, compared to 36% in urban areas.⁷⁶ From a school quality perspective, rural schools are more isolated from central government support, resulting in limited access to educational resources, age-appropriate curricula, and infrequent visits from pedagogical advisors for teacher development.⁷⁷ From the individual student lens, rural students face economic insecurity more often, engage in child labor or hazardous work, and struggle to balance school with household or farm responsibilities—further hindering their learning outcomes.⁷⁸ Among child laborers who attend school, particularly those working in hazardous conditions, poor educational attainment persists. While work-related injury accounts for only 14% of the mediation effect, other factors, such as mental and psychological health, likely contribute to their academic struggles.⁷⁹

There is evidence of targeted interventions that have boosted student learning in Côte d'Ivoire across various geographies. Spearheaded by the Jacobs Foundation, the Transforming Education in Cocoa Communities (TRECC) partnership among the Government of Côte d'Ivoire, civil society organizations, cocoa and chocolate companies, and philanthropies has invested heavily in the Ivorian education system, measuring outcomes of various TRECC initiatives since its start in 2015.⁸⁰ One such initiative is Save the Children's Literacy and Numeracy Boost Program, which was originally piloted in 2015 in bridging classes within cocoa-growing communities. The program leveraged instruction in local languages in addition to French and demonstrated strong gains: by the end of the intervention, 70% of girls in the program could sound out 10 out of 20 words, compared to only 30% in a control group.⁸¹ The Jacobs Foundation has since supported Save the Children in incorporating these approaches into pre-service teacher training curricula and collaborating with the Ministry to build their capacity in scaling Literacy and Numeracy Boost programming as a part of TRECC.⁸²

Also a part of the TRECC partnership is the adaptation of the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) initiative to the Ivorian context, known locally as *Le Programme d'Enseignement Ciblé (PEC)*. In a 2018 pilot across 50 schools in two southwestern regions, the PEC program achieved notable improvements: the percentage of children unable to recognize even a single letter dropped from 38% to 6%, while the proportion able to read at least a paragraph rose from 14% to 51%.⁸³ Encouraged by these results, PEC was expanded to 200 schools. Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, which limited the sample size to 15% of students, the proportion of students at the beginner reading level fell from 23% to 14.8% in just three weeks after the program resumed.⁸⁴ PEC is being nationally scaled through MENA with support from TRECC and TaRL Africa.⁸⁵

In addition to these classroom-based interventions, Côte d'Ivoire is also exploring the potential of educational technology. The Jacobs Foundation-funded Allô Alphabet program, for example, delivers a French-language literacy curriculum that incorporates local language phonological structures via simple mobile phones using interactive voice response.⁸⁶ Designed for low-literate users, the program allows children to practice phonemic awareness and letter-sound correspondence at home, with support from parents.⁸⁷ Because it uses widely available 1G and 2G networks, the program is accessible even in remote rural areas.⁸⁸ A randomized control trial involving 1,200 fifth-grade students in the Adzopé region is currently underway to evaluate its impact.⁸⁹ A similar technology-based intervention titled Eduq+ sends twice-weekly behavioral nudges to parents and pedagogical tips to teachers, aiming to increase student attendance and achievement in rural, cocoa-growing communities where there are high rates of child labor. A randomized control trial of 100 schools in Aboisso and Bouaflé regions during the 2018-2019 school year found modest reductions in dropout rates but mixed effects on learning outcomes, with variations among subgroups.⁹⁰ Thus, behavioral nudges may boost engagement but are not enough alone to significantly improve literacy.

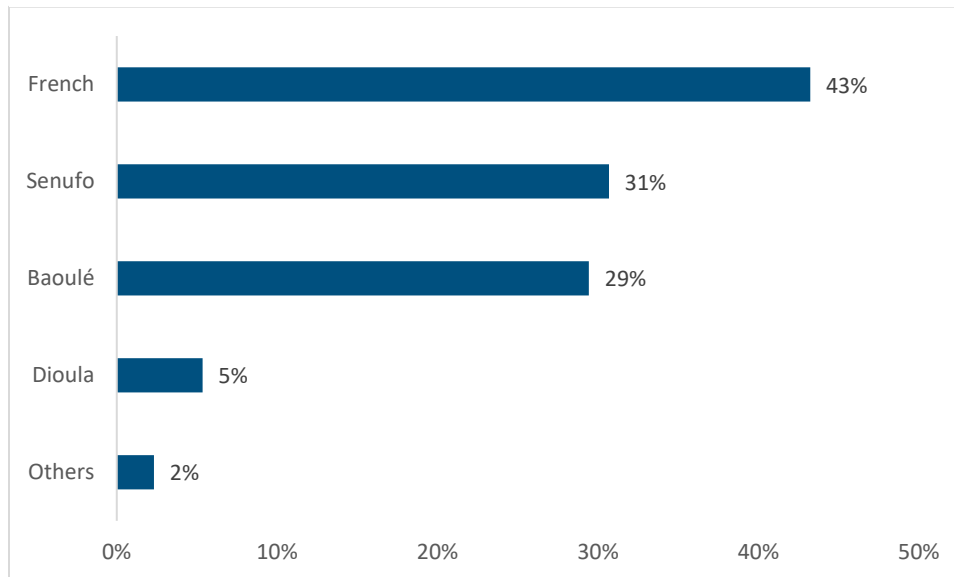
AIR conducted a large-scale study in Côte d'Ivoire to generate evidence to strengthen bilingual and multilingual learning, which focused on language mapping and cross-linguistic decoding transfer threshold analysis. To study multilingual teaching and transition in this setting, we collected data in both urban settings (which are likely to have more languages spoken) and rural settings (which are likely to have more predominant local languages) across Abidjan, Gbêkê, and Poro.

Languages Students Use and Understand

As shown in Figure 4, as of 2021-2022, only 43% of the sample can speak and understand French (whether they are monolingual in French or speak French in addition to another language). In other words, of all the children in our sample, about 57% cannot speak or understand French as well as they can understand another language (or they cannot speak or

understand French at all). Around 31% of the students speak Senufo as a dominant language (i.e., a first or second language), and 29% speak Baoulé. Dioula and other languages are spoken by a mere 5% and 2% of our sample, respectively, as their dominant language.²

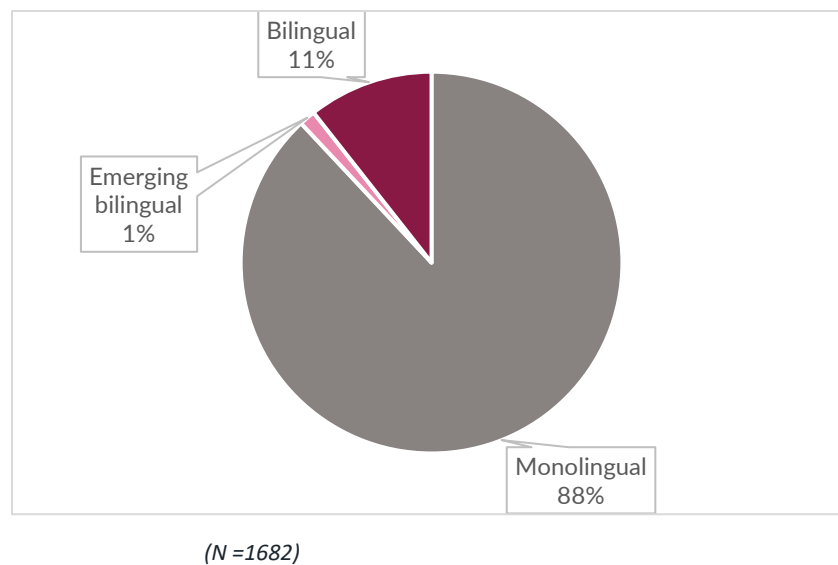
Figure 4. Languages spoken by students in the sample



According to semantic fluency assessments, we found that 88% of the students are monolingual, while a small fraction (11%) are bilingual (see Figure 5). These figures are similar across Grades 2 and 4, with students in Grade 4 demonstrating some slight increases in bilingual abilities; 90% of Grade 2 students and 86% of Grade 4 students are monolingual, while 8% of Grade 2 and 13% of Grade 4 children are bilingual.

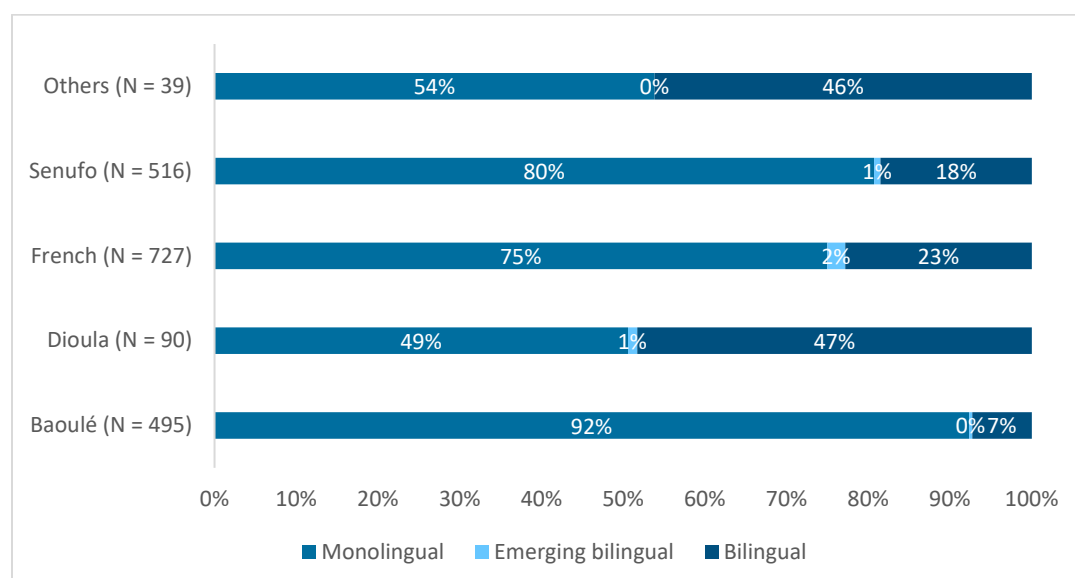
² Note that since a child can speak more than one language, the percentages do not add up to 100.

Figure 5. Distribution of language skills among students



When we look at student language abilities across languages, we see large differences between the languages spoken by children and the likelihood that they are monolingual or bilingual (see Figure 6). French, Senufo, and Baoulé are the languages most spoken by children in our sample. French-speaking students are more likely to be bilingual (23%), followed by Senufo (18%). Among the main languages of Côte d'Ivoire, students who have Baoulé as a dominant language are most likely to be monolingual. 92% of Baoulé-speaking students are monolingual, as are 80% of Senufo-speaking students and 75% of French-speaking students. While larger proportions of Dioula and other language speakers are bilingual, the actual number of students in our sample who fit into these groups is small (<100 students).

Figure 6. multilingual distribution of languages



As expected, qualitative respondents reported that students speak French outside of school much more often in Abidjan than in other regions. This is borne out by quantitative data as well; 65% of students who have French as a dominant language are from Abidjan. Moreover, 75% of students who are monolingual and have French as a dominant language are from Abidjan. Respondents in Abidjan reported that students speak a greater variety of other languages outside the classroom. Respondents also reported Gbêkê and Poro as more bilingual (Baoulé and Senufo, respectively, with French) rather than multilingual. Across all regions, teachers and students made some reports of significant numbers of children unable to speak the mother tongue of the majority. We see that approximately 15% of the students in each of the regions do not speak the regional language (e.g. Senufo in Poro).

Using our student assessment data, we determined whether students' familiar language—coded as either the one language known to monolingual children or any of the languages known to multilingual children—matched with the Lol. Resulting data showed that students in Abidjan are likelier to be French speakers, and thus, more likely to be in classrooms in which they understand the Lol. In each of the sampled schools in Abidjan, at least 60% of students are in a classroom where they can understand the Lol.

Yet, there are schools in both Poro and Gbêkê in which none of the children know French. In both these regions, children are more likely to be at a disadvantage, since they do not speak the Lol. Only 20% of children in Poro and 33% of children in Gbêkê classify as being able to speak the Lol. The level of mismatch between the languages students know and the Lol level ranges from 48% to 100% in Gbêkê and from 31% to 100% in Poro. In other words, there are some schools in each region where none of the children know French but are being taught in French.

There is a huge disparity in mismatch between Abidjan and the other two regions. While in Abidjan only 15% and 6% of students in Grades 2 and 4, respectively, are in classrooms where they do not know the Lol (French), this figure is upwards of 85% for all grades in Gbêkê and Poro.

Figures 7-9 map the percentage of mismatch between the languages of students and the languages of instruction in our research sample, with the darker colored dots representing the schools with the higher percentages of mismatch.

Figure 7. Mismatch percentage in Abidjan schools

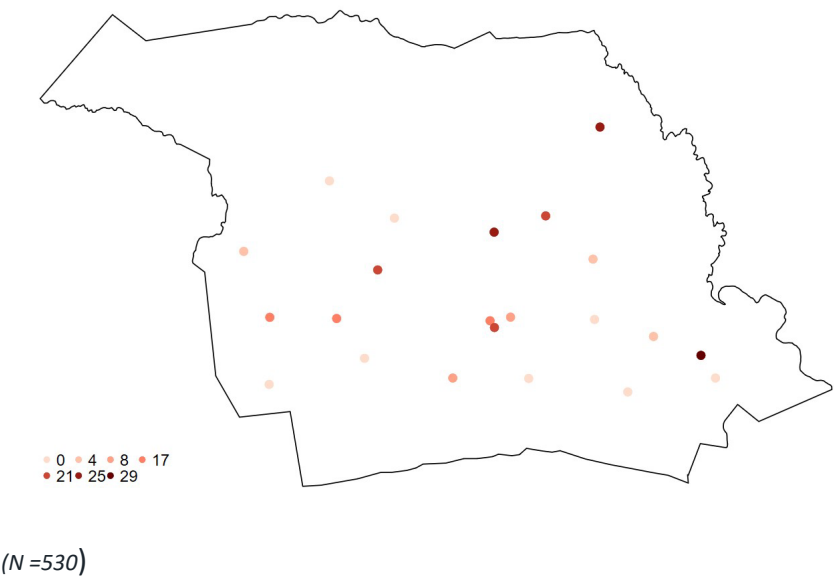


Figure 8. Mismatch percentage in Poro schools

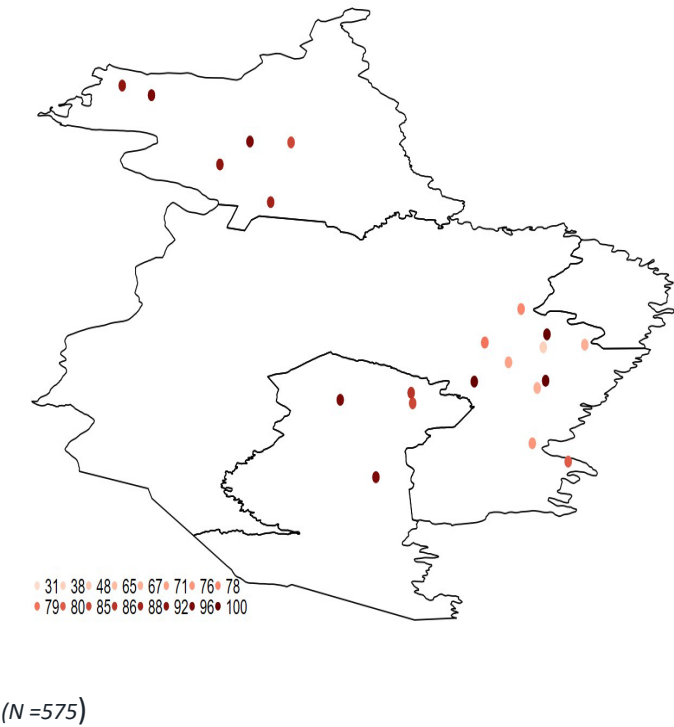
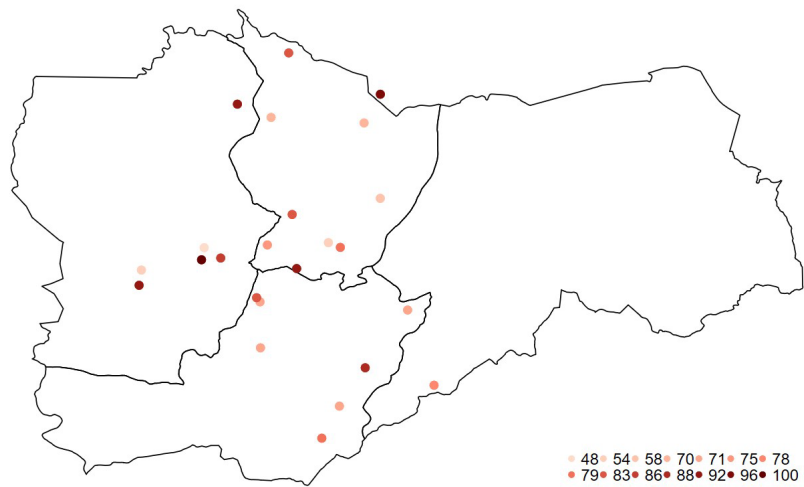


Figure 9. Mismatch percentage in Gbêkê schools



(N =577)

In addition to differences by region, we also see that the level of mismatch drops slightly between Grades 2 and 4. While 77% of the children in Grade 2 are in a classroom that doesn’t use a Lol that they know, this numbers falls to 72% in Grade 4. This implies that children are learning French language skills in school, but a large fraction of children still are not learning these skills by Grade 4.

In addition, our data found that students who know French have better achievement in French decoding and reading comprehension when compared to those who do not know French (see Table 2). Furthermore, students who are bilingual and know the Lol (French) have better decoding and reading comprehension scores than non-French speakers.

Table 2. Differences in sub-skills by mismatch in the Lol

Sub-task	Monolingual students who know the Lol (French)	Bilingual students who know the Lol (French)	All students who know a language other than French (including bilingual French speakers)	Difference in means between students who know the Lol and students who do not
French Decoding Score (%)	31%	37%	21%	12.19***
French Reading Comprehension Score (%)	29%	30%	16.1%	16.20***

Note: Differences in means is the difference in scores between all students who know the Lol and all students who do not know the Lol. *** denotes p-value < 0.01.

Language Skills

In this section we provide results from analyses of reports and datasets on the linguistic landscape of Côte d'Ivoire in terms of student and teacher language proficiency and orthographic properties as they pertain to the cognitive and linguistic skills required to acquire those languages and design biliteracy curricula accordingly. We also look at evidence on degree and nature of cross-linguistic transfer to get a sense of what reading and linguistic subskills are needed to support introduction to literacy instruction in French – and thus the design of an evidence-driven biliteracy curricula, teaching and learning materials, and teacher professional development materials. In doing so, we respond to the following questions:

What languages do teachers and learners understand best and how do these align with the current LoI?

What factors influence L1 – L2 transfer and transition processes?

Demographics and Regional Distribution

The sociolinguistic reality in Côte d'Ivoire indicates that most children enter school from households where local languages constitute the primary medium of interaction rather than French. National assessment data demonstrate this clearly. For example, the 2012 PASEC report shows that only 22% of Grade 2 students and 22.3% of Grade 5 students come from families where French is spoken regularly at home. This pattern is corroborated by data from the Direction de la Stratégie et de la Planification Scolaire,⁹¹ which reports that more than two-thirds of primary schools are located in rural areas and that these institutions serve 55% of the primary student population. Together, these findings confirm that a majority of Ivorian pupils are embedded in sociolinguistic environments dominated by Ivorian languages, despite the prevailing policy orientation that continues to privilege French as a de facto mother tongue within the education system.⁹²

Côte d'Ivoire is characterized by significant linguistic diversity, with approximately 60 indigenous languages distributed across four major language families: Mande, Kru, Akan, and Voltaic/Gur. Among these, Baule is the largest single first language, while many Senoufo subgroups employ distinct languages. These local languages function not only as first languages but also as lingua francas in markets, religious practice, and cultural exchange (Djité, 1989a,b). At the same time, multiple varieties of French have emerged and coexist with local languages. For instance, it is estimated that 36% of children under six years of age use “Français Populaire Ivoirien,” while more than one million illiterate Ivorians communicate through pidginized forms such as “Français de Moussa” or “Français de Dago,” which remain largely incomprehensible to non-Ivorian francophones. More recent studies further identify the emergence of a codified

“Standard Ivorian French,” now used in official newspapers, broadcast media, and in formal schooling contexts.

Efforts to integrate local languages into the education system have historically been limited in scope and sustainability. Pilot projects introducing Dan, Cebaara, and Attié as languages of instruction up to Grade 5 demonstrated pedagogical effectiveness, particularly in mathematics and science learning outcomes. Nonetheless, these initiatives failed to gain national traction due to political and social concerns that instruction in local languages might hinder the acquisition of spoken French. This dynamic highlights the enduring tension between, on the one hand, the standard French variety promoted through formal education, and on the other, the localized and endogenous forms of French (“français endogène”) that predominate in everyday communication.

Linguistic Properties

French, Baoulé, Dioula, Bété, and Sénoufo represent the most prominent languages in Côte d'Ivoire, each with distinct orthographic systems that significantly influence literacy acquisition and educational outcomes for students.

French, as the official language of Côte d'Ivoire, employs an alphabetic writing system based on the Latin script with 26 letters and various diacritical marks. The French orthography demonstrates moderate transparency in its grapheme-phoneme correspondence, though it contains numerous inconsistencies that challenge learners.⁹³ French orthography includes silent letters, context-dependent pronunciations, and complex morphological spelling patterns that preserve etymological relationships rather than phonetic accuracy. Research comparing French to other European languages places it in an intermediate position regarding orthographic depth, being less transparent than Spanish or Italian but more transparent than English.⁹⁴ For Ivorian students learning French as a second language, these orthographic irregularities present particular challenges, as they must master both the language's phonological system and its complex spelling conventions simultaneously.

Baoulé, the most widely spoken indigenous language in Côte d'Ivoire, uses a standardized Latin-based alphabetic writing system developed through collaborative efforts between linguists and community representatives. The modern Baoulé orthography employs 26 letters from the Latin alphabet plus several additional characters and diacritical marks to represent tones and vowel qualities specific to the language.⁹⁵ Baoulé orthography demonstrates relatively high transparency in its sound-symbol relationships, with most graphemes corresponding consistently to specific phonemes. However, the representation of tone, which is lexically and grammatically significant in Baoulé, presents orthographic challenges. The standardized system includes systematic tone marking using diacritical marks, but this creates a more complex visual system that beginning readers must master.⁹⁶ The high degree of phonemic transparency in

Baoulé potentially facilitates initial literacy acquisition for native speakers, though the additional complexity of tone marking may slow early reading development.

Dioula (also called Jula), serving as a major lingua franca in northern Côte d'Ivoire, utilizes a standardized Latin-based alphabetic writing system developed through regional harmonization efforts across West Africa. The Dioula orthography consists of 27 letters, including standard Latin letters plus the additional character 'ŋ' to represent the velar nasal sound.⁹⁷ This writing system exhibits high orthographic transparency, with nearly one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds. Unlike Baoulé, Dioula orthography does not systematically mark tones in standard texts, representing a compromise between phonological completeness and orthographic simplicity. This decision reduces the cognitive load for beginning readers but may create potential ambiguity in distinguishing tonal minimal pairs, particularly for learners who are not native speakers of the language.⁹⁸

Bété languages, spoken primarily in central-western Côte d'Ivoire, employ various orthographic systems depending on the specific variety and standardization efforts. The most developed orthographic system is for Bété-Gagnoa, which uses a Latin-based alphabet with 32 letters including several digraphs and special characters to represent the language's complex phonological system.⁹⁹ Bété orthography demonstrates reasonable transparency in consonant representation but faces challenges in vowel representation due to the language's complex vowel system, which includes phonemic nasalization and advanced tongue root harmony. The orthographic representation of these vowel distinctions requires multiple diacritical marks, creating a visually complex system that may present challenges for beginning readers. Additionally, standardization efforts remain incomplete across different Bété varieties, leading to orthographic inconsistencies that complicate educational material development.¹⁰⁰

Sénoufo languages, spoken in northern Côte d'Ivoire, utilize Latin-based alphabetic writing systems that vary somewhat across different Sénoufo varieties. The Senari variety, which has received the most attention in orthographic development, employs a 31-letter alphabet including several digraphs and modified letters.¹⁰¹ Sénoufo orthography demonstrates high transparency in most sound-symbol relationships, with consistent representation of consonants and most vowels. However, the orthographic treatment of tone remains problematic, as tonal distinctions are lexically significant but are typically not marked in standard orthography. This creates potential reading difficulties for non-native speakers and may complicate the transfer of literacy skills between Sénoufo and other languages. The relatively recent development of standardized Sénoufo orthography means that consistency across educational materials and regions remains a challenge.¹⁰²

The orthographic properties of these languages significantly impact student learning outcomes in Ivorian classrooms. Research in literacy acquisition demonstrates that orthographic transparency generally facilitates faster initial reading development, with students learning in

more transparent systems typically achieving basic decoding skills more rapidly than those learning in less transparent systems.¹⁰³ In the Ivorian context, this suggests that students initially learning to read in Baoulé, Dioula, or Sénoufo may develop foundational decoding skills more quickly than those learning primarily in French. A small-scale study conducted in central Côte d'Ivoire found that children receiving initial literacy instruction in Baoulé demonstrated significantly faster letter-sound correspondence acquisition compared to peers learning exclusively in French.¹⁰⁴ While orthographic transparency may play a part in this speed of acquisition, it is also possible that language knowledge itself hinders French acquisition. In addition, the complexity of tone marking in some indigenous language orthographies may make the process slightly more challenging.

Bilingual education contexts in Côte d'Ivoire reveal complex interactions between orthographic properties and literacy transfer. Students transitioning from indigenous language literacy to French literacy must navigate significant differences in orthographic depth and complexity.¹⁰⁵ Research conducted in schools implementing mother tongue-based bilingual education found that students initially demonstrated stronger reading accuracy in their first language but required explicit instruction to successfully transfer decoding strategies to French due to orthographic differences.¹⁰⁶ The study noted that students who had mastered tone reading in their first language showed particular difficulty adapting to French orthography, where tonal information is absent but morphological and etymological patterns become more important for spelling accuracy.

Cognitive processing demands vary significantly across Ivorian language orthographies. Studies of reading acquisition have established that transparent orthographies generally place lower cognitive demands on working memory during reading tasks compared to opaque systems.¹⁰⁷ In educational contexts, this means that students reading in Dioula or Sénoufo may experience lower cognitive load during decoding tasks compared to those reading in French, potentially freeing cognitive resources for comprehension and higher-order thinking. However, languages with complex tone-marking systems like Baoulé may increase cognitive demands in different ways.⁹⁶ This differential cognitive demand has important implications for instructional design and learning material development.

Standardization and materials development remain ongoing challenges for indigenous language orthographies in Côte d'Ivoire. While official orthographic standards exist for major languages, their implementation across educational contexts remains inconsistent.⁹⁶ Regional variations in orthographic practice persist, particularly for languages with multiple dialects or those spoken across different administrative regions. A content analysis of educational materials found significant orthographic inconsistencies across different publishers and regions, with variation particularly pronounced in tone marking practices for Baoulé and vowel representation for Bété

languages. These inconsistencies potentially confuse learners and complicate the development of reading automaticity.

Student Language Mapping

Côte d'Ivoire is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in West Africa, with over 60 local languages spoken across the country.¹⁰⁸ These languages are grouped into four major ethnolinguistic zones: Mandé, Gour, Krou, and Kwa. French serves as both the official language and an urban vernacular, while Dioula is a major vehicular language in markets and transport hubs.¹⁰⁹

The MENA-ET is currently pursuing a national language mapping to better understand the languages students use and understand throughout the country. A 2024 student assessment study by Nakamura et al. among nearly 1,700 grade 2 and 4 students in Abidjan, Gbêkê, and Poro found that 88 percent of sampled children were monolingual.¹¹⁰ French-speaking students were more likely to be bilingual, as were students whose mother tongue is not the majority language of the region. Notably, however, 15% of the students in each of the regions did not speak the majority language of the region.

Survey results show that most Ivorians are bi- or plurilingual: in the *Translanga* survey, 52.98% of children and 57.32% of adults reported speaking two languages; substantial portions reported speaking three or more.¹⁰⁹ A separate 2010–2011 field study of 240 primary and secondary students in Daloa, San Pedro, and Yamoussoukro¹⁰⁹ reported students speak 2–4 languages, with older students reporting 6 languages due to the addition of English, Spanish, or German at school.

According to the study, 43% of the sampled children could speak French. Students in Abidjan were likelier to be French speakers (60%), and thus, more likely to be in classrooms in which they understand the LoI. Yet, only 20% of children in Poro and 33% of children in Gbêkê classified as being able to speak the LoI. Furthermore, there was only a 5% increase in French language acquisition between students in grade 2 and those in grade 4, demonstrating that most students are failing to learn French in school by that time.

The *Ivorian Children's Language Assessment Toolkit* study () further highlights that most children are L1 speakers of an Ivorian language and begin learning French (L2) at school between ages 6 and 9.¹¹¹

Currently in Côte d'Ivoire, French is the only language officially prescribed for use in most schools. In recent years, Ivorian policymakers have indicated a desire to promote bilingual education in schools in view of the evidence demonstrating the positive outcomes of learning in local languages.¹¹²

Ivorian children's learning may also be affected by the languages spoken at home and school. School instruction occurs primarily in French and, for children in deprived rural areas, this is typically when children learn French.¹¹³ Prior to attending school, children speak one or more Ivorian languages as their mother tongue(s); those in urban areas may have greater exposure to French, but this is less common for those in rural areas. Slightly less than one quarter of pupils speak French, the *Lol*, at home. The proportion ranges from 41% in urban areas to only 11% in rural areas.¹⁰⁸ This leads to two important deviations from the majority of existing literature, the first is that these children are learning literacy and numeracy in their second language. Additionally, when the age at which children begin school varies, so does the age at which they are exposed to French. While the majority of the sample had first exposure to French at school; approximately 0.07% of children reported speaking only French at home and approximately 0.13% were bilingual or multilingual at home including French prior to the start of school.

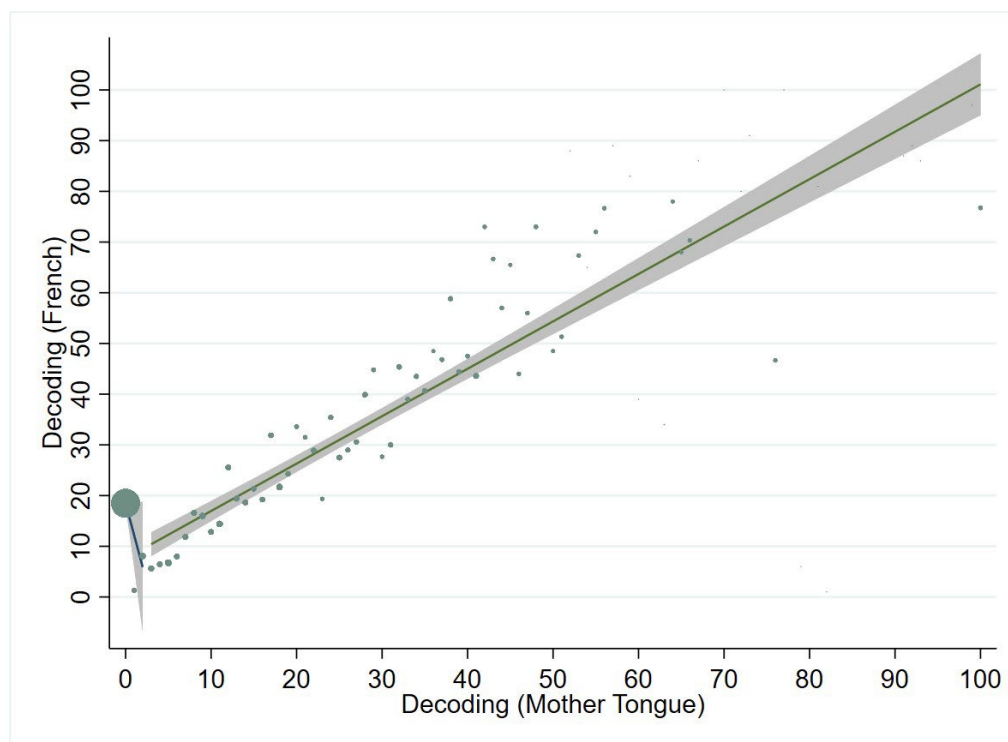
Decoding Transfer Thresholds

Research suggests that two skills—language comprehension of an L2 (French in this case) and decoding skills of the L1—are positively correlated with reading skills in an L2.¹¹⁴ In general, we expect to see an increase in a student's decoding and reading comprehension abilities in French as their French language comprehension (LC) skills improved. We found that this correlation held true for students in both Grade 2 (Decoding-LC $\rho = 0.33$; Reading Comprehension-LC $\rho = 0.54$) and Grade 4 (Decoding-LC $\rho = 0.25$; Reading Comprehension-LC $\rho = 0.71$).

We then explored whether there is a threshold above which there is a stronger relationship between decoding in the L1 and decoding in French. In other words, do children acquire French skills at a higher rate once they have reached a certain level of decoding skills in their native languages?

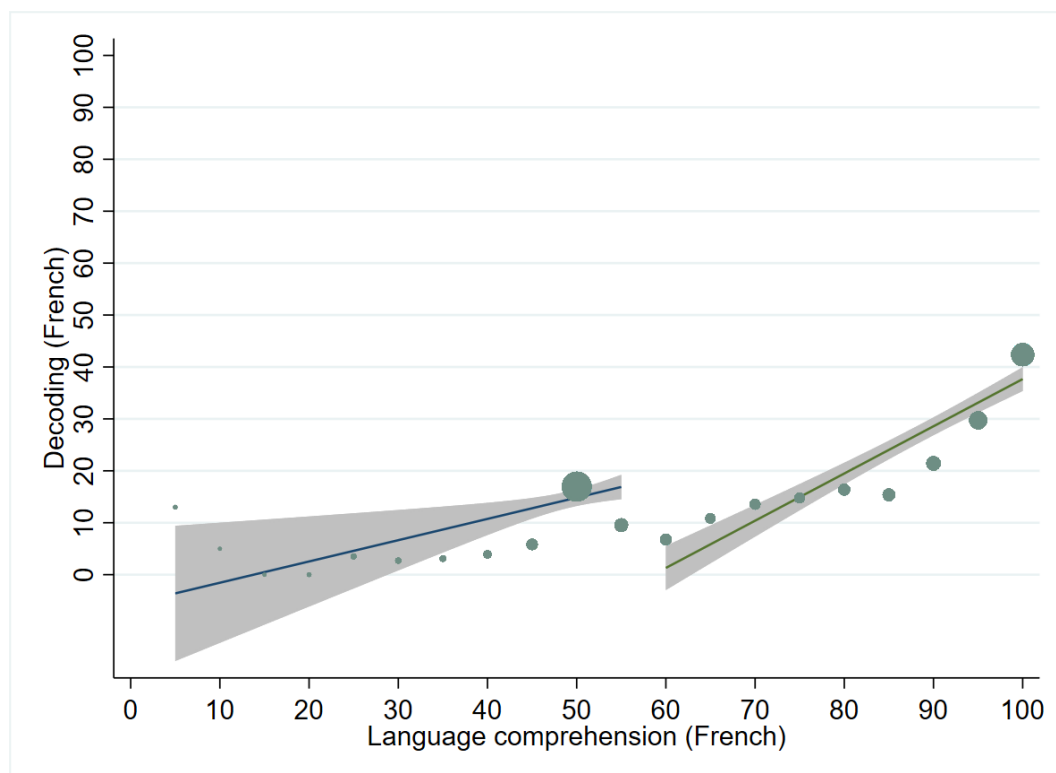
As shown in Figure 10, there does not appear to be a threshold point for mother tongue to French decoding skills in this sample. While this result was not entirely as expected, it is not surprising in the country context. As discussed, students enter Grade 1 in Côte d'Ivoire and immediately begin learning in French. Therefore, they do not officially learn to read and write in their mother tongue, and thus they are likely not developing the literacy subskills, such as decoding, in that language. In other words, students are likely to possess little to no decoding skills in their mother tongue even if they can decode in French. This helps explain why we do not observe a threshold in this case.

Figure 10. Threshold analysis for L2 decoding-L1 decoding



Next, we assessed whether there is a break in French language comprehension skills, the other skill for which there was a positive correlation with reading in French, as related to French decoding. As shown in Figure 11, we also did not find a threshold for language comprehension in French. While the graph may appear to show a break, the results are not significant and the slopes of the lines on either side of the break are not substantially different from each other. This result aligns with our conceptual framework and initial hypothesis that there is no definitive level of language comprehension in the L2 above which the relationship between language comprehension and decoding in L2 is greater. This finding is in line with the conceptual model that oral language skills are unconstrained and therefore may not appear to present a point at which a person reaches sufficient “mastery.” Rather, language comprehension is a significant predictor – and thus important to teach and learn – throughout the development of L2 reading comprehension.

Figure 11. Threshold analysis for L2 decoding-L2 language comprehension



Teaching and Learning

In the central tier of the BUILD framework, we focus on teaching and learning practices, broadly. This includes first taking stock of the curricula and materials used in public schools throughout the country to see how French language and literacy instruction is introduced, how national language instruction is integrated, what resources are available, and what assessments are included in the curriculum. We also assess teachers' language skills and the professional development opportunities they receive to support bilingual learning. Lastly, we consider existing practices for engaging family and community members in Lol decisions.



Curriculum and Materials

In our assessment of Côte d'Ivoire's curriculum and materials, we first examine how the national curriculum addresses French reading and language acquisition, then assess the bilingual curriculum used in the ELAN pilot schools. In doing so we respond to the following question:

National Curriculum

Côte d'Ivoire last updated its national curriculum for primary and pre-primary learners in 2013.¹¹⁵ The guidance documents note that French is the official LoI, although the disconnect between the French-only curriculum and the multilingual realities of learners in the classroom has long been noted.¹¹⁶ The curriculum does acknowledge that some experimentation with local language instruction has been taking place, however, it does not indicate that the findings from these pilots might eventually be integrated into the mainstream curriculum.

The 34-week curriculum dedicates 50% of instructional time in the primary grades to French language reading, writing, and language acquisition, reflecting its importance as a subject. The curricular documents include structured weekly plans for proficiencies including phonological awareness, alphabetic principle (i.e., decoding), vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. As aligned with the Science of Reading, the curriculum positions oral language development as the foundation for reading, comprehension, and later writing.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, each lesson includes defined pedagogical phases—presentation, development, and evaluation—designed to build and assess learner competencies.¹¹⁸

The framework document claims that the curriculum observes a competency-based approach, guided by constructivist and socio-constructivist educational theories.¹¹⁹ However, evidence does not seem to support this claim. Although a constructivist approach, as stated by the curriculum framework, emphasizes the role of the learner, the lessons included in the curriculum heavily rely on teacher-led approaches with activities like scripted recitation and memorization which inhibit spontaneous language production and limit learners' linguistic development. Furthermore, while a competency-based approach should depend on students' mastery of skills and adapt instruction based on student progress,¹²⁰ the Ivorian curriculum specifies the number of hours that teachers should dedicate for instruction on specific skills. The curriculum does include regular formative

Key Takeaway

Although the Ivorian curriculum purports to utilize a competency-based approach, it emphasizes teacher-led strategies without adaptation to student competencies. It does not make any provisions for bilingual support, transitional language scaffolding, or adaptation to learners' home language backgrounds. It lacks bridging mechanisms between learners' L1 and the language of instruction and offers no differentiated strategies for language support.

Key Takeaway

The Ivorian curriculum includes several strengths, in alignment with the Science of Reading. These include:

- A focus on oral language development as the foundation for French reading, comprehension, and later writing
- Pedagogically sound, well-sequenced activities for oral and written French acquisition
- The inclusion of play-based activities in the pre-primary curriculum, and
- The inclusion of regular formative evaluation.

assessments and states that, for students in *maternelle* (Kindergarten), the first two weeks should be dedicated to observing students and evaluating how well they meet the prerequisites, but it does not include guidelines for adapting instruction if students do not meet the expected competencies.³

In a country where 60% of children do not use or understand French,¹²¹ the curriculum does not make any provisions for bilingual support, transitional language scaffolding, or adaptation to learners' home language backgrounds. It lacks bridging mechanisms between learners' L1 and the L2 and offers no differentiated strategies for language support. The PNAPAS accounts for the role of the L1 in bilingual contexts and prescribes that teachers should use students' national languages to compare and contrast the languages to facilitate language acquisition. It also stipulates that teachers initially introduce math concepts in the L1 then later transition to French. Nonetheless, the curriculum does not yet reflect this guidance.

Key Takeaway

Côte d'Ivoire experiences a significant disconnect between the French-only curriculum and the multilingual realities of learners in the classroom. Curricular activities and expectations, especially for pre-primary learners and established primary learners, often do not realistically align with the student language levels.

Even the pre-primary curriculum focuses on instruction in French, with occasional use of the L1. While it does, appropriately, include a significant focus on oral language acquisition through repetition and guided expression, it does not align with the skill levels children might reasonably be expected to achieve based on their linguistic background and developmental stage. At the end of pre-primary, students are expected to be able to communicate both orally and in writing—an ambitious goal even for pre-primary learners in their L1. It also includes tasks like memorizing and creating poems and recommends that teachers introduce vocabulary that seems advanced for beginner learners. While the pedagogical approach is play-based and age-appropriate—for example, in a unit on the human body, the curriculum asks learners to sing songs about body parts and name them using dolls and images—it assumes that all children arrive at school with functional comprehension of French. In another example, a lesson on hygiene asks children to describe the characteristics of clean clothing and elaborate their points of view on wearing clean clothing—a difficult task for children who are just beginning to learn the language. There are no tools for teachers to assess or address comprehension barriers

³ Côte d'Ivoire does promote a remedial learning support system structured around three complementary strategies, often referred to as the "3 Rs": reinforcement aimed at all learners in the classroom for students to practice and deepen their knowledge, recovery for learners facing moderate difficulties, and remediation for learners who have accumulated a significant academic delay (more than two years). However, this system does not appear to be integrated into the curricular guides to account for and adapt to student competencies.

linked to unfamiliarity with the L₁, nor are home languages leveraged as scaffolds for concept development.

For primary learners, however, the curriculum includes pedagogically sound, well-sequenced activities that occasionally includes some tasks beyond students' expected language levels. In CP1 (i.e., grade 1), the year begins with an 8-week pre-reading phase that includes topics like vocabulary and auditory/visual discrimination before using the syllabic method to introduce phonemes and graphemes. In the middle and upper grades, reading instruction focuses on reading comprehension and fluency. For example, the CP1 (grade 1) curriculum introduces reading skills by beginning with letters and their corresponding sounds (i.e., symbol knowledge, according to the House Model) and explaining that words are made of letters, which in turn, make up sentences (i.e., orthographic principle). These skills build on skills developed in pre-primary that introduce the concept of print, such as distinguishing words and pictures. Related to oral expression, the first lesson begins with simple introductions (e.g., "Je m'appelle...", "Je suis..."), then in the second lesson introduces basic questions and answers (e.g., "Qu'est-ce que c'est ?", "C'est un.../une ...", "Ce n'est pas..."). The curriculum continues to introduce and build on oral language skills in a progressive and appropriate manner. Yet, the curriculum also pairs these lessons with poetry exercises, with the expectation that students should understand presented poems and write poetic phrases. Such exercises demand both fluency and meta-linguistic awareness, which would not be appropriate for learners who are still in the early stages of acquiring French phonology and vocabulary.

By the time students reach CE1 (grade 3), learners are expected to complete tasks such as constructing descriptive paragraphs and complete dictation tasks with correct spelling and syntax. While the assigned tasks would be appropriate for fluent French speakers, the level of complexity would be cognitively demanding for students who are still in the process of acquiring French as an L₂.

Throughout the curriculum, teachers are not given guidance on how to adjust instruction for learners with varying levels of French comprehension or assess their linguistic entry points. Although evaluation criteria are embedded in each weekly module, these focus solely on academic mastery of French without any differentiated pacing or scaffolding for learners with limited language proficiency. Furthermore, the curriculum provides no diagnostic mechanisms for teachers to detect whether a child who is failing to meet the expected competencies may be struggling due to language unfamiliarity or developmental delay.

ELAN Curriculum

There are 30 ELAN schools in Côte d'Ivoire, which utilize a Dioula-French curriculum based on the ELAN model used across Francophone African countries.

The ELAN model emphasizes literacy development in the early grades exclusively in the L1 with oral introduction of French. This model begins in the first grade with 90% of classroom time prescribed in the national language and 10% dedicated to an oral introduction of French.¹²² Once children obtain foundational reading skills in the L1 and language comprehension skills in French, teachers introduce French reading and writing skills in grade 2, with French language taking on an additional 10% of the curriculum. In grade 3, the national language and French make up equal time the curriculum, with a progressive reduction in national language each year until students in grades 5 and 6 spend 90% of their time in French. Under the ELAN model, teachers use the L1 as an object and medium of instruction throughout all 6 years of primary school; they teach French as a subject all 6 years, but only as a medium of instruction beginning in grade 3.¹²³ A strength of this approach is the amount of time children spend learning in their L1, as research shows that students who have at least six years of education in their L1 have better academic outcomes and are better able to transfer their learnings to the L2.^{124,125} ELAN's emphasis on oral introduction of French also benefits student learning.

Key Takeaway

Key strengths of the ELAN model include its progressive approach to bilingual education and its focus on early grade literacy development in the early grades exclusively in the L1 with oral introduction of French.

Table 3. ELAN's approach

French grade level	English grade level equivalent	Time in national language, according to curricula	Time in French, according to curricula
<i>cours préparatoire</i> (CP)1	1	90%	10% (oral only)
CP2	2	80%	20% (oral and written)
<i>cours élémentaire</i> (CE)1	3	50%	50%
CE2	4	20%	80%
<i>cours moyen</i> (CM)1	5	10%	90%
CM2	6	10%	90%

The ELAN model also emphasizes metalinguistic transfer of student competencies from the L1 to French. The pedagogical guidance for literacy promotes transfer by comparing the phonology

and orthography of the two languages in a progressive manner.¹²⁶ As stated in the ELAN orientation guide:

“The learning of oral and written L2 will be facilitated by the awareness of the relationships between L1 and L2. The learner can reuse similar aspects (for example, letters existing in both languages and pronounced in the same way, such as a, o, l, d, will allow from the beginning, by transfer, to read words in L2).”^{127,128}

Key Takeaway

ELAN emphasizes metalinguistic transfer of student competencies from the L1 to French by comparing and contrasting elements across languages and drawing on student skills in the L1 to support learning in French.

ELAN’s Ivorian curriculum supports teachers in facilitating this transfer by providing in-depth information on the Diola orthography and morphology, as well as linguistic similarities and differences between Diola and French. With curriculum strands in each of the languages designed to be parallel and mutually reinforcing,¹²⁹ the Diola curriculum introduces the same written competencies for French as for Diola in CP1.¹³⁰ When introducing competencies in French, the curriculum advises fewer sessions, assuming that students will readily transfer some learning. For example, Lesson 1 in the curriculum suggests five sessions to teach and reinforce the Diola alphabet song but later suggests 3 sessions to teach the alphabet song in French.¹³¹ Overall, the curriculum and approach emphasize that students do not start at zero when learning French but rather have competencies in L1 that support French learning. The pedagogical guidance encourages teachers to compare and contrast L1 with French and encourage students to draw on their full repository of language skills across languages (i.e., translanguageing).¹³²

The ELAN model uses a similar approach to transfer when teaching math. Teachers first introduce core math concepts such as counting, measurement, spatial reasoning, and problem-solving in the L1 using oral explanations and physical manipulatives. By CP2, teachers should introduce corresponding French terms and symbolic notation, using contrastive tasks and reformulation routines.¹³³ Rather than repeating previous lessons in French, teachers should take stock of students’ pre-acquired knowledge, then, introduce the French competencies based on principles of transfer.¹³⁴ For example, a lesson may introduce a number in the L1, including its representation, composition, and decompositions. Then, teachers may only present the verbal designation of the number in the L2 later.

Key Takeaway

ELAN has a variety of rich materials available for teachers and students to support learning. Despite the numerous strengths of these materials, they are not always pedagogically relevant and coherent with the curriculum.

Like the Ivorian national curriculum, ELAN encourages a competency-based approach, although it does support more student-centered instructional methods than the national curriculum. Not only does the ELAN curriculum account for student skills by providing supports for students to

acquire French language, but all ELAN lessons consider student competencies in the lesson structure, which includes recalling and reinforcing previously learned material, developing new skills, and conducting formative assessment.¹³⁵ Activities in the curriculum include songs, riddles, and oral questioning tied to students' lived experiences. The lessons are also highly iterative. For example, the previously described lesson to learn the Dioula alphabet song suggests five sessions, which include hearing the song, learning and repeating the song, singing as a group, and playing games related to the song.¹³⁶ Lessons also strongly encourage game-based pedagogies to reinforce concepts.

In terms of materials, ELAN has a variety of rich materials available to support classroom teaching and learning. For example, ELAN emphasizes creating a print-rich environment and provides a rich variety of materials to help teachers create that. These include culturally relevant storybooks and posters for use in the classroom (see some examples in Figure 12). ELAN also provides strong teacher guidance on how to facilitate transfer from L1 to L2, as well as ideas of activities to do with children such as with educational poems, songs, and games. Student books that include a variety of reading materials and writing exercises for students are also available. The student and teacher guides provide strong content for student learning, across key student literacy competencies. For example, they include reading passages to support decoding and fluency, along with corresponding questions and vocabulary exercises with photos to support language comprehension. Activities also include grammar and writing exercises, as well as games to reinforce activities. Lessons also support learning across subject areas: for example, there is a lesson focused on parts of an egg and another on history of the telephone.

Key Takeaway

ELAN encourages a competency-based approach, using student-centered instructional methods and iterative, skill-focused lessons.

Despite the numerous strengths of the ELAN materials, some gaps do exist, namely related to alignment with the curriculum and availability of materials in local languages. While the materials and activities are visually appealing and age-appropriate, including color photos and/or illustrations, large print text, and space for writing and/or tracing, the materials do not always have a clear alignment with the curriculum.

Figure 12. Examples of ELAN classroom materials



For example, while the CP2 competencies include a focus on concepts of print, vocabulary knowledge, and transfer of basic reading skills from L1 to French, among others, one of the CP2 reading activity books solely includes reading passages with comprehension questions. Another CP2 guide includes student activities that are not pedagogically relevant, such as mazes and tracing activities that do not align with the national curriculum and seem to serve more for student entertainment value. Similarly, in the CE1 student book, a lesson on parts of a book (a concept that would be better to introduce in an earlier grade) includes a game in which students should count how many times they can find the letters in the word “livre” within a table of letters. This activity supports letter recognition, which does not align with the rest of the lesson. Students should also have already mastered letter recognition by that point. In general, the activities in the student and teacher guides for each grade do not align with the sample lessons in the pedagogical guide; teachers may therefore feel unclear about how to use the pedagogical guide. Furthermore, while ELAN strongly encourages game-based learning and has a variety of game ideas and materials such as picture cards and playing boards available for teachers, those materials seem to be solely available in French, rather than national languages. Those games do not necessarily align with the competencies in the curriculum where games are suggested and there does not seem to be enough games to cover all those competencies.

While ELAN shows promising descriptive evidence and strong alignment with the science of bilingual reading, publicly available causal impact and cost-effectiveness analyses remain limited, constraining decisions about large-scale national adoption.

PEI Curriculum

Curricular development poses a formidable challenge for Côte d'Ivoire's PEI initiative, considering that it encompasses a total of ten national languages of instruction distributed across 22 schools throughout the country and often lacks sufficient funding and institutional support. While the PEI curriculum exhibits a number of strengths, including initiating students' literacy skills in the L1, including locally relevant materials, and providing specialized terminologies in the L1, it also displays several weaknesses, including a misaligned pedagogical approach and a lack of formal bridging to French literacy.

Key Takeaway

Some strengths of the PEI curriculum include a focus on L1 literacy skills, the inclusion of locally relevant materials, and the provision of academic terminology resources in various national languages. Nonetheless, the curriculum uses an objective-, rather than competency-based approach, and faces some challenges related to the transition to French. With these drawbacks and unsatisfactory learning outcomes in PEI schools, the initiative has been turning toward the ELAN curriculum instead.

Unlike the monolingual French curriculum which begins teaching French decoding in the first weeks of CP1 (grade 1), the PEI curriculum extends the teaching of L1 decoding across several months, using methods such as songs, narratives, and phoneme-syllable practice.¹³⁷ It also includes locally relevant texts, picture aids, and blackboard templates for teachers to use in the classroom.¹³⁸ Furthermore, the PEI initiative has produced a series of L1 terminology resources to support teachers with relevant vocabularies. These include words like “short vowel” or “fraction” that might be more specialized if someone is not used to using the language in an academic setting.

Despite the clear advantages of these curricular resources over a monolingual curriculum, some drawbacks of the PEI curriculum include the use of the objective-based pedagogical approach formerly used in the country, rather than the current competency-based approach.¹³⁹ In addition, PEI employs a subtractive bilingual approach, in which students learn a new language to progressively replace the L1, rather than the preferred additive bilingual approach in which students maintain the L1 and reap better cognitive and social benefits. The curriculum also lacks a formal bridging module to guide the transition to French literacy.¹⁴⁰ This absence poses challenges for learners when they enter grades where national learning benchmarks and assessments assume French proficiency.¹⁴¹ With these drawbacks and with unsatisfactory learning outcomes in recent years in PEI schools, the initiative is reportedly deferring to the ELAN curriculum more extensively.

Teacher Workforce and Professional Development

Teachers are key to enacting LoI policies and programming, and the success of educational initiatives depends on their competencies. Here, we describe teacher language skills and the teacher recruitment and placement practices used by the MENA. Then, we elaborate on some of the professional development opportunities provided to teachers to enhance their language skills and competencies for bilingual/multilingual teaching. In doing so we respond to the following question:

How are language considerations integrated into teacher recruitment, placement, and training (both pre-service and in-service)?

Teacher Recruitment, Placement, and Language Skills

Our evidence review shows that teachers in Côte d'Ivoire are currently unprepared to teach in multilingual contexts, as they lack both skills in national languages that their students may use and understand, as well as skills to facilitate transfer and acquisition of French. Overall, Côte d'Ivoire's teaching workforce is relatively well-qualified—87.8% reached proficiency in French reading comprehension in the 2019 PASEC assessment, the highest among PASEC countries.¹⁴² However, this strength has not translated into improved student outcomes, suggesting that additional gaps continue to affect student learning, such as language mismatches and deficiencies in multilingual pedagogy.

Key Takeaway

Teachers in Côte d'Ivoire are currently unprepared to teach in multilingual contexts, as they lack both skills in national languages that their students may use and understand, as well as skills to facilitate transfer and acquisition of French.

According to our team's 2024 study,¹⁴³ teachers in Abidjan, Gbeke, and Poro reported a low level of knowledge of their students' L1, since they often originated from other regions of the country where other languages are more prominent. The Ivorian national recruitment process emphasizes academic qualifications (e.g., Baccalauréat) but does not assess teacher language proficiency, particularly in local languages widely spoken in rural communities. As a result, teachers are often placed in environments where they do not speak the students' L1, and no systemic mechanism ensures language alignment between teacher and learners.

Not only do teachers often lack an ability to speak and understand the languages of their students, but they often do not know how to read and write national languages, even if they do know how to speak them. A survey of primary teachers found that only 23% felt confident in their knowledge of standardized orthographies for local languages, with many reporting that they learned these systems informally rather than through formal training.¹⁴⁴ Many teachers lack adequate training in the orthographic systems of indigenous languages, limiting their ability to provide effective literacy instruction in these languages if Côte d'Ivoire were to integrate bilingual instruction into the curriculum more systematically.

Côte d'Ivoire's teacher training system also fails to prepare teachers to provide French instruction in a multilingual environment.¹⁴⁵ Pre-service training provided through the *Centres d'Aptitude et de Formation Pédagogique* (CAFOPs, Centers of Pedagogical Aptitude and Training) lacks coursework in linguistic theory, multilingual pedagogy, or strategies for bridging oral home languages with written French. Teachers also often demonstrate various shortcomings French (i.e., in spelling, conjugation, grammar), which further hinders their ability to properly teach their students.¹⁴⁶ They also frequently use simplified or hybrid forms of French and are ill-prepared to scaffold academic French.¹⁴⁷ Teachers therefore often lack knowledge of general and applied linguistics that would equip them to effectively help their students learn an additional language.¹⁴⁸

Key Takeaway

Despite a national decree specifying responsibility to train teachers in the use of national languages, most teachers do not receive any training or resources to support multilingual education among their students.

Ongoing Teacher Professional Development

Since 2004, the *Direction de la Pédagogie et de la Formation Continue* (Direction of Pedagogy and Ongoing Training, DPFC) has been Côte d'Ivoire's formal entity for teacher education and pedagogical oversight.¹⁴⁹ In addition to overseeing pre-service training through the CAFOP, the DPFC also manages continuous professional development and supervises teachers from the pre-primary through secondary levels. Interestingly, the decree that established the DPFC over 20 years ago specifies that the Direction holds the responsibility for developing, experimenting, and promoting programs for teaching in national languages.¹⁵⁰ Yet, to date, most teachers do not receive any training related to teaching in national languages.

Survey responses from teachers indicated that they do not feel well equipped to teach in their students' L1 or in a multilingual environment.¹⁵¹ Promotion of oral language development, which is key for successful bilingualism, provides teachers with particular challenges. Community norms often discourage children's oral expression and teachers usually receive no formal training on how to bridge that divide.¹⁵² Training programs typically fail to emphasize oral communication techniques—such as modeling, questioning, and interactive strategies—which, as a result, undermines student participation and narrows opportunities for linguistic development.¹⁵³

Not only do teachers lack skills to support bilingual education among students, but they are also often hesitant to do so. Interviews with teachers showed a strong bias for French and a reluctance to integrate local languages into classroom instruction, as teachers indicated believing that Ivorian languages were informal and incompatible with formal education.¹⁵⁴ According to another, more recent study, some interviewed teachers and school directors feared that teaching in Ivorian languages would negatively affect French language learning and overburden teachers.¹⁵⁵ Nonetheless, many teachers do indicate some openness toward

bilingual education that proper training could further encourage. In the same study, some teachers and school directors indicated awareness of potential benefits of teaching in Ivorian languages; namely, increasing student engagement, motivation, and comprehension. According to survey results, around 80% of surveyed teachers agreed that it is important for students to learn to read in their native languages and around 70% of teachers agreed that, if students learned to read in their L1, it would improve their reading skills in French.

Monitoring and Evaluation

We conducted a document review of information related to Côte d'Ivoire's systems for tracking and decision-making around student learning to answer the key questions:



Does the country have a regularly updated M&E plan, and are there national or subnational mechanisms to use this data for continuous improvement in FLN outcomes?

To what extent does M&E incorporate linguistic considerations, including data on teachers' and learners' Lol?

How are M&E findings used to inform and revise curriculum, teacher training, and Lol policies?

National M&E Mechanisms

Côte d'Ivoire has a formal and institutionalized M&E architecture anchored in the Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2016-2025, which is government-approved, partner-endorsed, and elaborates on sector priorities outlined by the National Development Plan 2016-2020. It includes eight strategic outcomes for each sub-sector, each with their own theory of change with causal links covering access, quality, and governance. Embedded in these outcomes are product items, key indicators, and strategic actions. Among tracked yearly targets, the only FLN-related indicator that leverages data is tracking score out of 100 for S.D.G 4.1.1 in mathematics and French (E2.7 – p. 92 & 109). The ESP is operationalized through annual performance reviews and subnational verification cycles,¹⁵⁶ as well as integrated monitoring and indicator systems that assess operations and ESP achievements.^{157,158}

Key take-away:

Côte d'Ivoire lacks community engagement efforts to sensitize parents and other stakeholders about the benefits of multilingual education, which could help shift public attitudes and secure the political will needed for systemic

The technical body of the Interministerial Committee for the Coordination of the Education/Training Sector serves as the task force responsible for monitoring sectoral policies and plans, leading the sectoral dialogue, and organizing the annual Joint Education-Training Sector Reviews (JSRs).¹⁵⁹ The 7th edition, held in July 2025, brought together the three education ministries, civil society, and development partners to assess progress during the 2023-2024 school year and set future priorities.^{160,161} A 2023 report from GPE'S Independent Technical Advisory Panel (ITAP) notes that while Côte d'Ivoire produces annual performance reports that inform the Joint Sector Reviews, these reports often contain repetitive content and lack strategic depth.¹⁶² Moreover, ITAP did not receive any information on the content of the JSRs themselves, raising concerns about the transparency and level of true monitoring, reflection, and refining done during the review process.¹⁶³

National and international assessments provide feedback on student performance and are tracked by the Directorate for Program Monitoring and Surveillance (DVSP) within MENA. Since 2019, annual national assessments have measured CE1 student progress in reading and mathematics using EGRA and EGMA tools, with similar primary-level assessments having been conducted in certain target zones (i.e. *Projet d'Amélioration de la Prestation des Services Éducatifs (PAPSE)*) for CP2 and CE1 students since 2018.¹⁶⁴ National assessments at the secondary school level have been conducted,¹⁶⁵ though GPE's Independent Technical Advisory Panel expresses that secondary education learning assessments do not exist in the nation's regular learning assessment framework.¹⁶⁶ Internationally, Côte d'Ivoire participates in PASEC every five years, MICS every 5-10 years, and joined TIMSS 2023 to assess math and science skills in Grade 8.^{167,168} To monitor the impact of COVID-19 on reading and math outcomes for students at the end of primary school, DVSP also administered a national study as part of the MILO project in 2020, which reported against SDG indicator 4.1.1b in six African countries.^{169,170} These assessments provide system-level data but lack granularity on language use, instructional practices, or student comprehension in multilingual contexts.

The poor results of primary students on these assessments, along with promising pilot intervention evaluations, motivated MENA to create the PNAPAS program (*Programme National d'Amélioration des Premiers Apprentissages Scolaires*) in 2023.¹⁷¹ This program synthesizes strategies and tools from successful pilot projects into a national initiative to improve early-grade reading and math.¹⁷² The Guide for Monitoring and Educational Support for Teachers in the Implementation of PNAPAS represents a major effort to institutionalize classroom-level monitoring by assigning differentiated roles to regional actors such as Chefs de Circonscription, Conseillers Pédagogiques, and Directeurs d'Ecoles to conduct recurring classroom observations, organize pedagogical meetings, analyze class data to identify teacher training needs, and train teachers.^{173,174}

Regarding Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), MENA's planning & statistics directorate (DESPS) runs the annual school census across all education levels and produces annual Statistiques de Poche that highlight longitudinal trends and disparities among vulnerable groups and regions.^{175,176} These data are publicly available and support resource and policy planning in pursuit of national education goals. MENA has piloted a new cohesive EMIS, developed in partnership with Catalyseur de Développement and funded by the Millennium Challenge Corporation, in the Gbêkê and San Pedro regions that aims to modernize how educational data is collected, analyzed, and used.¹⁷⁷ It supports the Department of Monitoring of Programs in conducting national and international student assessments and focuses on five key areas: human resources, school data, school management, examinations, and assessments.¹⁷⁸ Officially handed over to MENA the 10th July 2025, the EMIS enables real-time tracking of student enrollment, infrastructure planning, equitable resource allocation, and policy evaluation.¹⁷⁹

Key Takeaway

Côte d'Ivoire has an institutionalized, annually reviewed ESP (2016–2025) M&E architecture plus strengthened feedback loops via PNAPAS monitoring roles, COGES (98% coverage), and an Embedded Evidence Lab.

An agreement with Innovations for Poverty Action and the Ministry of Education in 2024 helps the Ministry of Education and its partners use data more effectively to inform decision-making through establishing the Embedded Evidence Lab. It supports the design and interpretation of evaluations and diagnostic studies, building capacity for evidence-based planning and adaptive management.¹⁸⁰

Community-level monitoring of schools is well integrated in Côte d'Ivoire's educational ecosystem through School Management Committees (COGES), which offer parents and community members tools and platforms to oversee and facilitate education reform at the local level. They have access to grants, regularly meet to report grant activities, discuss student outcomes, and monitor school dashboards that flag teacher attendance and necessary school environment and infrastructure changes – enabling direct feedback to the central education system on school performance.¹⁸¹ 98% of schools across the country (both public and private) have COGES, and the most common feedback topics in the 2019 Survey on the Education Service Performance Indicators report were about school infrastructure, lack of teaching materials, and enforcement of internal regulations.¹⁸²

Use of M&E

M&E findings in Côte d'Ivoire have played a growing role in shaping curriculum and teacher training, particularly in response to poor foundational learning outcomes revealed through national and international assessments. The creation of the PNAPAS program in 2023 is a direct result of these findings as it consolidates lessons from pilot interventions such as PEC, PAPSE,

and other TRECC interventions, and introduces structured pedagogy, formative assessment tools, and differentiated teacher support mechanisms.¹⁸³ Over 7,000 teachers were trained in its first phase, with regional pedagogical advisors conducting classroom observations, organizing feedback sessions, and identifying training needs based on student performance data.¹⁸⁴

However, while PNAPAS reflects a data-informed approach to improving early-grade reading and math, LoI policy remains weakly integrated into the program and in broader M&E processes. The Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2016–2025 includes strategic actions referencing bilingual instruction and the use of local languages in early education, but these are vaguely defined and lack measurable targets or indicators. For example, *Action Stratégique* AS.1.1.4ii encourages preschool educators to interact with children in the most widely spoken local language, and AS.2.3.1 suggests coupling French with local languages in linguistically predominant areas.¹⁸⁵ Yet, these provisions have not translated into systematic curriculum revisions or teacher training modules focused on multilingual pedagogy.

The 2001 order No. 0108/MEN/CAB/ promoting mother tongue instruction¹⁸⁶ remains largely unimplemented, and accompanying measures have not followed. Despite the evidence that teachers report feeling ill-equipped to teach in students' native languages, there is no formal guidance or support for managing transitions from mother tongue to French. As a result, while M&E has informed pedagogical improvements, its influence on LoI policy and curriculum adaptation remains limited and underdeveloped.

Linguistic Considerations

Despite Côte d'Ivoire's rich linguistic diversity, M&E systems do not systematically incorporate linguistic data related to teachers' and learners' LoI. National assessments such as EGRA, EGMA, and PASEC are administered exclusively in French, without collecting data on students' home languages or the language used during instruction. This omission limits the ability to analyze how LoI alignment affects learning outcomes, particularly in early grades where comprehension is closely tied to language familiarity.

Classroom observation tools and teacher evaluation frameworks also lack indicators on language use. For instance, while PNAPAS encourages teachers to use language that students can understand, this guidance is not operationalized through measurable indicators or tracked in classroom monitoring systems. However, Fund for Innovation in Development is funding the expansion and adaptation of the existing TaRL approach/PEC being scaled as part of PNAPAS specifically related to "language differences and regional governance systems."^{187,188}

The ESP acknowledges the challenge posed by French being the official LoI, despite being read and written by less than half the population (as of 2012), but does not propose a robust framework for integrating linguistic data into M&E. The lack of granular data on language use in classrooms, teacher language proficiency, and student language backgrounds represents a significant gap in the country's education monitoring architecture.

One area where LoI intersects with education delivery is in Islamic schools, many of which use Arabic as the primary medium of instruction. These schools operate outside the formal education system, with the exception of private Islamic faith-based schools, and are not consistently included in national M&E frameworks.¹⁸⁹ The government has undergone efforts to integrate all Islamic school models to the formal education system.¹⁹⁰ Their language practices, which may align more closely with students' home languages, offer potential insights into alternative LoI models. However, the absence of systematic data collection on these institutions further limits understanding of how language affects learning across different educational settings.

Summary and Assessment of System Progression

This section analyzes evidence across each tier of the BUILD framework to determine Côte d'Ivoire's current stage of development on the BUILD Progression Scale. The scale categorizes system readiness into five stages reflecting the extent to which LoI considerations are integrated into policies, practices, and systems for improving FLN outcomes.

The BUILD Progression Scale does not assess whether a country has adopted bilingual or multilingual education per se. Rather, it assesses the degree to which language considerations—whatever the de facto or de jure language(s) of instruction—are intentionally aligned with FLN goals, supported by evidence, embedded in system components, and used for continuous improvement.

In Côte d'Ivoire, this means distinguishing between (a) the high degree of institutionalization of a French-only system and (b) the much more limited institutionalization of language-responsive approaches aimed at improving FLN outcomes, including bilingual education. While there is growing political recognition of the role of language in learning, and while promising bilingual pilots are underway, language considerations are not yet systematically embedded in national policy, curriculum, teacher systems, or monitoring mechanisms.

FLN Goals and Language Policy

Côte d’Ivoire’s FLN goals and Lol policy are best characterized as Emerging. The country exhibits a dual reality at the level of FLN goals and language policy. On the one hand, the French-only language of instruction regime is highly institutionalized, with clear curricular expectations, assessment systems, and administrative structures. On the other hand, the explicit integration of language considerations, particularly bilingual or multilingual approaches, into FLN goals and policy remains at an Emerging stage. Historically, the education system has been oriented toward a monolingual French language policy, with limited institutional support for national languages in formal schooling. Efforts to integrate Ivorian languages into education at scale have been constrained by sociopolitical complexity – notably the challenges of selecting linguistic groups as well as by insufficient and largely externally dependent funding.

More recently, however, the MENA-ET has acknowledged language as a contributing factor to low learning outcomes and has articulated intentions to expand bilingual education through key strategy documents such as the SNAPAS and PNAPAS. These plans, along with ongoing pilot programs, signal movement in the right direction. Nonetheless, Côte d’Ivoire does not yet have a formally codified, results-oriented national Lol policy aligned with FLN goals. Policy guidance remains fragmented, objectives are often not language-specific or SMART, and implementation relies heavily on pilots rather than system-wide structures. According to the BUILD Progression Scale criteria, these conditions place Côte d’Ivoire at the Emerging stage for FLN goals and Lol policy.

Table 4. Progression criteria for Lol policies

Absent	Emerging	Developing	Established	Institutionalized
No official Lol policy is in place to reach the FLN goal(s).	A Lol policy exists, but it is vague, fragmented, or not aligned with the FLN goal(s).	A Lol policy is defined, with growing government commitment and early implementation to achieve the FLN goal(s).	A Lol policy is applied in practice and supported by implementation structures in support of the FLN goal(s).	A Lol policy is embedded in national education systems and reviewed regularly in alignment with the FLN goal(s).

Evidence and Data

Côte d’Ivoire’s use of evidence and data related to language and learning spans the Emerging to early Developing stages. The country has access to multiple national and international learning data sources, including EGRA/EGMA, PASEC, and MILO, that consistently document very low levels of foundational learning. These data have informed national dialogue and contributed to the prioritization of FLN improvement.

However, the evidence base remains dominated by French-only assessments, which significantly limits the system’s ability to diagnose students’ foundational skills in the languages they understand best or to quantify the effects of language instruction mismatch on learning outcomes. This is a critical gap; as demonstrated in previous research conducted in the country, approximately 57% of students in the sample could not speak or understand French as well as another language. Yet this reality remains invisible within the country’s routine assessment and monitoring systems.

While recent studies and emerging language-mapping efforts provide valuable insights into students’ linguistic environments and Lol mismatch, these data are not yet institutionalized within routine assessment frameworks, EMIS, or policy decision-making processes. As a result, although Côte d’Ivoire is moving beyond a complete absence of language-related evidence, the system has not yet reached a stage where language data are systematically generated, used, and updated to inform Lol policy and practice.

Table 5. Progression criteria for evidence and data use

Absent	Emerging	Developing	Established	Institutionalized
Education stakeholders do not use or have access to evidence related to student language skills to inform and adapt policies and practices.	Education stakeholders have access to some data related to student language skills, but the data are only available on a limited scale or have suboptimal quality.	Education stakeholders have access to student language mapping on a large scale, some evidence on language transfer between some L1s and the desired L2, and some other Lol indicators.	Education stakeholders have access to student and teacher language mapping data on a national scale, language transfer data between the most prominent L1s and the desired L2, and data on additional Lol indicators.	Education stakeholders not only have access to language mapping, language threshold data, and other Lol indicators aligned with all BUILD tiers but also regularly use and update those data to inform policies and practices.

Teaching and Learning

Curriculum and Materials

At the national system level, Côte d’Ivoire’s curriculum and materials are best characterized as Absent with respect to institutionalized integration of language-responsive approaches into the official curriculum, and this despite the existence of high-quality pilot material and demonstrated technical capacity. . the national curriculum does not provide guidance on bilingual instruction, transitional language scaffolding, or differentiated strategies for learners who do not understand the Lol. Bridging mechanisms between learners’ first languages and French are absent from official instructional frameworks, and national-level instructional materials in Ivorian languages are largely unavailable.

Importantly, this rating does not reflect an absence of technical capacity or pedagogical innovation. Côte d'Ivoire has a well documented history of piloting and developing multilingual and language-responsive materials through initiatives such as ELAN, PEI, and TaRL/PEC, and more recently through the FLIP project co-developed with the MENA-ET by AIR. These initiatives collectively demonstrate that the primary constraint is not material development capacity, but rather political authorization, system-wide adoption, and curricular integration into official frameworks. While materials have been developed, according to the BUILD criteria, the absence of multilingual or language responsive considerations embedded *in the national curriculum* places this tier at the Absent stage, despite more advanced practices demonstrated in pilots.

Table 6. Progression criteria for curriculum and materials

Absent	Emerging	Developing	Established	Institutionalized
The curriculum does not address multilingual teaching. Instructional materials in local languages are unavailable.	The curriculum addresses multilingual teaching to a minimal extent. Some instructional materials integrate language considerations.	The curriculum and materials incorporate the science of reading for multilingual learners, reflecting students' linguistic contexts. Instructional materials increasingly integrate language considerations.	The curriculum and materials are fully aligned with the science of reading for multilingual learners, reflecting students' linguistic contexts.	A high-quality, regularly updated curriculum and corresponding materials support evolving FLN and Loi goals.

Teacher Workforce and Professional Development

Teacher recruitment, placement, and professional development related to multilingual education are also best classified as Absent. Teachers are generally unprepared to teach in multilingual contexts and receive little to no pre-service or in-service training on bilingual pedagogy, national language literacy, or evidence-based strategies for facilitating transfer to French. This gap is not incidental- it is structural: the current teacher preparation system was designed around a monolingual French only instructional model and has not been updated to reflect the linguistic realities of Ivorian classrooms. Teacher recruitment and placement processes do not assess language proficiency, particularly in national languages widely spoken in rural areas, resulting in frequent mismatches between teachers' language skills and students' linguistic needs.

It is worth noting that isolated in-service training initiatives- such as those delivered through ELAN and PEI have demonstrated that teachers can develop bilingual instructional competencies when adequately trained and supported. However, these efforts remain project-dependent and have not been incorporated into the national pre-service teacher education frameworks or CAFOP curricula.

Table 7. Progression criteria for teacher recruitment and placement

Absent	Emerging	Developing	Established	Institutionalized
No official teacher recruitment or placement plan is in place that accounts for teachers' language skills.	A teacher recruitment and placement plan that accounts for teacher language skills exists, but it is vague, fragmented, and not operationalized.	A teacher recruitment and placement plan exists with a focus on Lol, though it is in early implementation and not fully operationalized.	A strong teacher recruitment and placement plan exists with a focus on Lol and is supported by implementation structures.	A strong teacher recruitment and placement plan that focuses on Lol exists, is embedded in national education systems, and is reviewed regularly in alignment with FLN goal(s).

While some teachers express openness to bilingual education and recognize its potential benefits, there are no systematic mechanisms to translate this openness into practice through training, deployment, or instructional support. Under the BUILD Progression Scale, the lack of formalized language-responsive teacher systems places Côte d'Ivoire at the Absent stage for this component.

Table 8. Progression criteria for teacher professional development

Absent	Emerging	Developing	Established	Institutionalized
Teachers receive no pre-service or in-service training on teaching in multilingual contexts or using national languages for instruction.	Teachers receive limited training on teaching in multilingual contexts or using local Lols, but that training is not sufficient for teachers to feel prepared to teach in local languages.	Teachers receive more notable trainings on teaching in multilingual contexts and using local Lols, yet these trainings are not yet comprehensive and system-wide. Some gaps exist in teacher preparedness.	Trainings on teaching in multilingual contexts and using national Lols are integrated extensively into in-service and pre-service teacher training.	Ongoing, adaptive training responds to demographic and linguistic shifts among teachers and learners.

Community Engagement

Community engagement related to Lol in Côte d'Ivoire is best characterized as Emerging. Although COGES are widespread and provide platforms for community involvement in school governance, there are no systematic efforts to sensitize parents and communities about the benefits of multilingual education or to engage them meaningfully in Lol decision-making. Community input on language issues remains limited, and public understanding of bilingual education is uneven. These conditions align with the Emerging stage, where information sharing may occur but community voice and influence on Lol remain constrained.

Table 9. Progression criteria for community engagement

Absent	Emerging	Developing	Established	Institutionalized
Communities are largely unaware of the benefits of multilingual education. Little or no sensitization efforts are in place. Communities have no tools to support children to read in school languages. Communities are not engaged in supporting education in school languages.	Information-sharing efforts such as awareness campaigns may be in place, but they are not yet at scale with proven effectiveness. Families and communities have limited involvement in supporting multilingual education.	Families and communities are generally aware of the benefits of multilingual education. Communities are somewhat engaged in decisions and/or implementation of multilingual education through, for example, language mapping, focus groups, materials development, or supporting student language and literacy development at home.	Families and communities are largely aware of the benefits of multilingual education. Parents and communities actively support learning in the home language and/or the transition to the L2.	Community engagement and commitment to multilingual education is deep and sustained. Families and community members are continually involved in governance, curriculum feedback, material development, and home language and literacy support.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Côte d'Ivoire's M&E system for multilingual education presents a notable internal tension that warrants careful characterizations. At the level of general learning outcomes monitoring, the country has moved beyond basic output tracking and demonstrates Developing characteristics: student learning outcomes are regularly assessed through national instruments and international participation, supported by an institutionalized review architecture (e.g., annual performance reviews, Joint Sector Reviews, and subnational verification cycles). Recent initiatives such as PNAPAS have further strengthened classroom-level monitoring and implementation support.

However, when assessed specifically against the criterion of language, responsive M&E- that is the degree to which monitoring systems capture, analyze and act upon linguistic variables to inform Lol decisions- the pictures shift considerably. . Assessments are administered in French without collecting data on student's home language, classroom language use, or extend of language instruction mismatch. Monitoring tools do not operationalize Lol-related indicators. As a result, while student learning outcomes are tracked, they are not disaggregated by linguistic background or consistently used to refine or adapt Lol strategies at any level of the system.

This dual reality – strong general M&E infrastructure alongside an absence of language-sensitive indicators – is consistent with the broader pattern observed across BUILD tiers in Côte d'Ivoire. According to the BUILD progression scale criteria and applying the same distinction between

general system capacity and language-specific institutionalization that underpins this analysis, these conditions place Côte d'Ivoire at the Emerging stage for M&E in multilingual education.

Table 10. Progression criteria for M&E

Absent	Emerging	Developing	Established	Institutionalized
No systems are in place to monitor student learning or assess LoI-related practices.	Some basic monitoring of outputs occurs (e.g., enrollment, textbook distribution) but not of student learning outcomes.	Student learning outcomes are tracked but not yet used to refine or inform LoI strategies.	Outcomes are continuously monitored; early evidence of what works is used to adjust approaches.	Robust systems track learning outcomes, assess the impact of LoI policies, and inform iterative policy adaptation.

In summary, Côte d'Ivoire's position on the BUILD Progression Scale reflects a system at a critical juncture: one where emerging political intent and developing accountability structures coexist with substantial gaps in the institutionalization of language-responsive policies, practices and system. Across the tiers analyzed, a consistent pattern emerges- the country demonstrated strong capacity within its French-only institutional framework, while language-responsive approaches remain largely confined to pilots, external initiatives, and advocacy documents rather than embedded in national systems.

This pattern is not indicative of indifference or a lack of technical capacity. As documented throughout this report, Côte d'Ivoire has a rich history of bilingual education experimentation and a growing body of empirical evidence — including our previous research findings on language-instruction mismatch, decoding thresholds, and teacher preparedness — that provides a robust foundation for more ambitious system-level reform. The primary bottleneck lies not in what is known or what has been demonstrated, but in the translation of that knowledge into binding policy, adequately resourced implementation, and sustained institutional commitment.

Advancing toward higher stages on the BUILD Progression Scale will require progress across five interconnected areas: formalizing a results-oriented LoI policy explicitly aligned with FLN goals; embedding language considerations into national curriculum frameworks and instructional materials; integrating bilingual and multilingual pedagogy into pre-service and in-service teacher preparation systems; strengthening the language-responsive evidence base through institutionalized language mapping and disaggregated assessments; and incorporating LoI indicators into routine monitoring, evaluation, and decision-making processes.

Côte d'Ivoire Blueprint

In this section, we draw on the BUILD framework to present high priority and urgent actions (empirically, politically, and practically) for integration of language to improve FLN outcomes (in both national languages and French) for children across Côte d'Ivoire. Following this, recommendations are organized tier and rated according to three criteria: political feasibility, likelihood of near- versus long-term impact, and sustainability and cost. Where relevant, recommendations build directly on empirical findings from our previous research conducted in Côte d'Ivoire and on the country's extensive experience with bilingual education pilots. To further refine this roadmap, we recommend complementary implementation studies, rigorous impact research, and cost-effectiveness analyses to inform future prioritization.

Tier 1: FLN Goals and Policy

Formalize a national bilingual Loi policy. We recommend that Côte d'Ivoire develop a legally codified decree or framework for Ivorian national language based-multilingual education. While existing sectoral plans such as the SNAPAS and PNAPAS acknowledge bilingual education as a priority, a concrete, legally backed framework is necessary to ensure follow-through in implementation and to protect progress from political transitions or shifts in ministerial priorities. This policy should explicitly draw on Côte d'Ivoire's extensive experience with bilingual pilots (e.g., PEI, ELAN, TaRL/PEC), using these models as the empirical and operational foundation for scale. It should also be grounded in the science of bilingual reading: specifically, it should support an additive bilingual model that allocates sufficient instructional time for students to develop foundational literacy in their L1 before or alongside the introduction of French literacy — consistent with the transfer threshold findings from the KIX 1 research.

A formal policy can also provide schools and teachers with clear guidance on language instruction and support nationwide implementation of bilingual education principles, despite possible political and other policy shifts. The MENA has hired a consultant to draft such a policy and we recommend taking the necessary actions to formally adopt the policy with a high level of political buy-in. We also recommend ensuring that the policy produced is feasible and evidence-based (i.e., supports an additive bilingual model with sufficient time for students to learn to read in their L1, based on the science of bilingual reading). This action is likely low cost, politically challenging, but likely to have a long-term sustainable impact.

Set SMART, results-focused goals for the education system. In tandem with the formal policy, we recommend that education leaders set SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) goals as a measure of accountability for improving education outcomes. National education documents should include explicit targets for reading, writing, and

mathematics by grade level in French and in the national languages. Aligning sectoral policies with foundational learning objectives will allow for more effective monitoring of student progression in both languages and support the scaling of bilingual education initiatives. This action is likely low cost but moderately challenging politically to widely accept targets.

Increase funding dedicated specifically to developing bilingual programming. Successfully implementing bilingual education in Côte d'Ivoire does not require starting from scratch. The country can build strategically on the substantial body of materials, curricula, and pedagogical models already developed and tested through long-running pilots (e.g., PEI, ELAN, and language responsive adaptations of TaRL/PEC) and recently the FLIP project. The principal challenge and cost do not lie in initial design, but in adapting, harmonizing, and scaling these resources across a linguistically diverse system. We therefore recommend that the Ivorian government earmark dedicated budget lines for bilingual education within the national education budget, complemented by targeted external financing to support language prioritization, material adaptation, teacher preparation, and phased rollout. Over time, these investments are likely to yield high returns by improving learning efficiency, reducing repetition and dropout, and strengthening human capital. While this action is high cost and politically challenging, it is essential for moving from pilots to system level change.

Tier 2: Evidence and Data

Build an integrated bilingual FLN “evidence spine” that consolidates and quality-controls national, international, and program data into a single, decision-ready learning narrative, and then use it to set realistic learning targets and prioritize remediation. Côte d'Ivoire has multiple learning data streams (PASEC, MILO, annual EGRA/EGMA), that consistently document very low foundational learning outcomes. The country would benefit from (i) defining a small set of “anchor” FLN metrics that can be tracked annually (EGRA/EGMA combined with aligned equating to SDG/HLO reporting), (ii) standardizing reporting units (national, regional, priority-zone, rural/urban), and (iii) requiring structured interpretation focused on “what is failing” (decoding, fluency, comprehension) and “where,” including explicit attention to rural underperformance (e.g., 11% minimum reading proficiency in rural areas vs 36% urban by end of primary). This is moderate cost (mostly analytical capacity, standardization, and dissemination) and highly sustainable if embedded in annual sector review cycles and tied to programmatic prioritization (e.g., where to intensify coaching, TaRL/PEC expansion, and structured pedagogy supports).

Make Lol an explicit dimension of the FLN evidence base by adding language variables to every major data stream and by generating “transfer-ready” evidence through targeted bilingual measurement. The current learning evidence base is dominated by French-only assessment, which systematically limits what the system can conclude about children’s actual foundational

skills in the languages they understand best- and about how languages instruction mismatch drives slow learning outcomes. As our previous research demonstrated, a significant proportion of students in the country are being assessed and taught in a language they do not yet understand, making it impossible to distinguish between “low learning” and “low comprehension of the testing and instructional language”. We recommend two complementary priorities. First, institutionalize an “Lol alignment” module within routine data collection capturing a minimum set of language variables (home language, language understood best, classroom language used, teacher language proficiency, and a simple mismatch indicator). These additions are low-burden if standardized and integrated into existing instruments rather than administered as standalone surveys. Second, piloting bilingual measurement in a small set of high-burden regions- building on the long history of pilot by adding L1 oral language and emergent literacy/decoding measures for the most prevalent national languages alongside French EGRA/EGMA, s. This would generate the first system-level evidence on L1 foundational skill development in cote d’Ivoire and enable initial estimates of realistic transition pathways from L1 to French literacy instruction.

Tier 3: Teaching and Learning

Develop a national bilingual curriculum by consolidating, evaluating, scaling existing models and materials. Rather than designing an entirely new system, g, we recommend that Côte d’Ivoire develop a national bilingual curriculum by strategically consolidating, evaluating, and scaling the that builds on the substantial body of curricula, teaching and learning materials, and pedagogical approaches already developed and tested through pilots (e.g., PEI, ELAN, and language responsive adaptations of TaRL/PEC as well as materials developed through the FLIP project). This approach is both more cost-effective and more technical and credible than from scratch, as it builds on models whose feasibility has already been demonstrated in the Ivoirian context. The national curriculum should begin instruction in languages students understand best and then progressively transition to French. For optimal student outcomes, it should adopt an additive, late-exit bilingual approach that introduces early reading skills in students’ L1 while simultaneously building oral French language skills from earliest grades- consistent with the transfer facilitation model. Ideally, the curriculum would also apply a true competency based approach with differentiated instruction and include clear bridging mechanisms to support L1 to French transition, and a modular design that can be adapted across the multiple national languages spoken in Cote d’Ivoire - acknowledging that linguistic diversity is one of the most significant operational challenges to national curriculum development at scale.

Invest in developing a rich library of national language materials to support teachers and students in the classroom. Supporting students in learning to read in their L1 requires access to appropriate, leveled and linguistically validated texts and instructional resources – materials

that are currently largely absent from Ivoirian classrooms at scale. We recommend that Côte d'Ivoire invest in developing a national library of teaching and learning materials (TLMs) in the national languages students speak and understand, designed to support cross-linguistic transfer and to reflect both the orthographic specificities and the metalinguistic similarities between each L1 and French. TLMs should be tailored to the decoding and spelling needs of each language and focus on phonological, and grapheme-phoneme correspondence challenges that students face at early literacy stage. They should also include a variety of inputs – leveled readers, oral language resources, illustrated cards, play based tools- to provide engaging and appropriately differentiated French oral language experiences alongside L1 literacy development, consistent with the supplementary materials approach piloted through FLIP in Senegal and being adapted for Côte d'Ivoire.

We recognize that national language TLM development at scale is a perennial challenge for education budgets. We therefore recommend exploring a set of cost-reducing strategies in parallel: leveraging AI tools to accelerate materials development and translation, with rigorous validation by native speakers and language specialists, establishing centralized digital archives to reduce duplication across programs, ensuring long-term physical storage of materials at school level, and fostering active collaboration among the multiple programs currently developing language-responsive materials in Côte d'Ivoire. These approaches, if coordinated, could dramatically reduce per-unit costs while expanding coverage and quality.

Recruit and place teachers with appropriate language skills that align with the languages students use and understand at respective schools. Students, especially those in rural areas, often begin school with little or no knowledge of French. Teachers therefore need language skills in the L1 of their students so that they can use that language for instruction and help develop initial reading skills in the L1 before transitioning to French. To match students' language skills with those of their teachers, the MENA should systematically collect data on the language proficiencies of all teachers they recruit – and ensure that placement processes formally integrate language alignment as a criterion ensuring that teachers are deployed to school where students speak and understand the languages in which the teacher can provide effective instruction.

Invest in large-scale in-service teacher training to support the roll-out of a bilingual curriculum and integrate multilingual teaching into pre-service training. Teachers in Côte d'Ivoire are currently unprepared to teach reading in national languages and lack skills to facilitate the transfer for those skills to French - a gap documented in qualitative data collected from schools across Abidjan, Gbêkê, and Poro. Closing this gap requires investment at two levels simultaneously.

At the pre-service level, we recommend integrating bilingual pedagogy — including the science of reading in multilingual contexts, strategies for L1 literacy instruction, and evidence-based transition approaches — into the CAFOP curriculum and other initial teacher preparation frameworks. At the in-service level, we recommend investing in large-scale, structured professional development aligned with any curricular updates. This in-service training should be supported by sustained classroom coaching and follow-up, rather than one-off workshops, to ensure that pedagogical shifts are durable and that teachers can apply new competencies in the complex linguistic realities of their classrooms. The FLIP professional development model currently being implemented in Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal provides a ready-made, evidence-based framework that can be adapted and scaled for this purpose. **Develop and fund a plan to sensitize parents and other stakeholders about the benefits of multilingual education, which could help shift public attitudes and secure the political will needed for systemic change.** Parental and community support is crucial and frequently underestimated enabler of national language education. Previous qualitative data from Côte d'Ivoire consistently showed that parents, while attached to French for economic and social mobility reasons, are open to bilingual education when its benefits for French language acquisition are clearly explained. This openness represents a strategic entry point that has not yet been systematically leveraged at the national level.

We recommend that Côte d'Ivoire develop and implement a structured communications and sensitization strategy targeting parents, community leaders, school directors, and local education officials. This strategy should be grounded in evidence and framed around the message that mother tongue-based multilingual education is a pathway to French proficiency, not an alternative to it. Engagement mechanisms should be culturally appropriate, delivered in national languages where possible, and coordinated across implementing partners to ensure message consistency.

Tier 4: Monitoring and Evaluation

Institutionalize an “FLN data-to-action” cycle linking national assessment, EMIS, and classroom support into one performance architecture. Côte d'Ivoire has made meaningful investments in learning data infrastructure — including DVSP's annual CE1 EGRA/EGMA assessments, DESPS's annual school census, and the new EMIS piloted and handed over in July 2025 — but these components currently operate in relative isolation, limiting their collective utility for strategic decision making. We recommend consolidating these streams into a single, coherent FLN M&E results chain built around three operational pillars. First, defining a small set of core FLN indicators, aligned to SDG 4.1.1 but disaggregated by region, school type, and rural/urban status, to be tracked annually and reported consistently across all data sources. Second, developing standardized dashboards for use in Joint Sector Reviews (JSRs) and

subnational verification cycles, enabling education managers at all levels to read, interpret, and act on the same information. Third, establishing explicit response protocols that translate assessment results into concrete operational decisions: curriculum pacing adjustments, teacher support priorities, targeted resource reallocation, and remedial planning triggers. This should be operationalized through PNAPAS's existing differentiated roles (regional inspectors/pedagogical advisors/school directors) to ensure classroom observations data and student progress data routinely trigger targeted coaching, remedial planning, and teacher training needs analyses. This action is moderate-to-high cost but politically feasible because it leverages existing structures (JSRs, PNAPAS supervision) and is sustainable if embedded in annual planning and budget cycles; it also directly addresses ITAP concerns by increasing strategic depth, transparency, and decision-focus in annual sector reviews.

Close the system's biggest blind spot by integrating language/Lol variables into routine FLN monitoring and embedding them in implementation support. Côte d'Ivoire's current FLN evidence base — dominated by French-only EGRA/EGMA and PASEC data — lacks the classroom-level granularity needed to understand why learning outcomes are so persistently low, and for whom. In a multilingual system where a significant share of students are being taught in a language they do not yet understand, the absence of language variables from routine monitoring is not a minor technical gap — it is a structural blind spot that prevents the system from targeting interventions effectively or evaluating the impact of language-responsive approaches. We recommend embedding a minimal, standardized linguistic module across three existing data collection points, in a "thin layer" approach that adds decision-relevant language information without requiring wholesale redesign of current instruments. In the school census and EMIS, this means adding fields for school catchment languages, teacher language proficiency in national languages, and the language of instruction practiced by grade level. In classroom observation tools under PNAPAS, this means incorporating observable indicators of language used for instruction, comprehension check practices, and teacher code-switching behaviors. In early-grade assessments, this means systematically collecting home language and instructional language metadata for each student — even where the assessment itself initially remains in French — to enable disaggregation of learning outcomes by linguistic background. The data generated through this module should feed directly into subnational review meetings, enabling inspectors and pedagogical advisors to identify schools and classrooms where language mismatch is most acute, refine coaching scripts accordingly, and flag where teachers report being ill-equipped to teach in learners' languages. This approach also extends to Islamic and non-formal education contexts, which are currently inconsistently captured in FLN monitoring despite serving a significant share of early-grade learners.

Annex A. Consultation Guide

Here is a list of guiding questions that can be used with education decision-makers, assessment experts, linguists or other key stakeholders involved in national decisions about the language of instruction. AIR will tailor these questions to each country targeted for consultations as part of the development of national roadmaps, as well as to each interlocutor.

Review of the language policy

For use with: All stakeholders

- In order to prepare children in Côte d'Ivoire to live and work successfully later on, which language(s) do you think it is important for them to learn to acquire fundamental literacy and numeracy skills?
 - Which language(s) are important for children to succeed later in higher education and the labor market?
 - In which language(s) would it be ideal for children in your country to be literate at the end of high school?
 - What skills should children ideally acquire in local languages such as Dioula, Baoulé, Bété, or Senufo in Côte d'Ivoire?
 - i. Follow-up question : Do they only need to speak the local languages, without necessarily reading them? Should they learn fundamental skills like reading, writing, or math in these languages? Should they have a professional command of these languages? Are there other skills to consider?
- What is your view of the current language skills of children/students in French and the national languages? Are these children's skills in line with your expectations?
- What is your understanding of the current results of children's learning in the different languages? Are these children's results in line with your expectations?
- I know that the current language of instruction in Côte d'Ivoire is French. What do you think of this policy? In your opinion, what are its weaknesses and strengths?
 - Would you like to see the policy on languages of instruction change in any way?
 - If so, how would you like it to evolve? If not, why not?
 - How do you think a change in the language of instruction policy could affect fundamental learning outcomes? (from a positive or negative point of view)
 - Why do you think that?
- What is the general position of the Ivorian government regarding bilingual French/national language education?

- (In other words, are policymakers generally in favour of introducing Ivorian languages into the school system as languages of instruction alongside French?)
- Can you provide a brief description and also indicate whether the government is generally: (a) Very hostile to the use of the student's native language (L1) as a medium of instruction, (b) Not in favor of using the student's L1 as a medium of instruction, (c) Neutral, (d) In favor of using the student's L1 as a medium of instruction, (e) Very supportive of the use of the student's L1 as a medium of instruction
- The direction in which the education system is evolving, and is it towards more mother tongues/bilingualism or towards fewer mother tongues/bilingualism?
- In what ways do stakeholders disagree on decisions related to the language of instruction? Who has a different opinion?
- In Ivorian schools, is French sufficient for the mediation of knowledge? What for?
 - Is French sufficient for verbal interactions in the classroom? What for?
- In your opinion, which languages are necessary to follow school learning properly? What for?
 - In your opinion, should Ivorian languages be used in classrooms in Côte d'Ivoire?
 - If so, which language(s)? And why?
- In your opinion, can Ivorian languages be used in education in Côte d'Ivoire?
 - If so, how can we do it?

Assessment/mapping of multilingual oral language skills

For use with: All stakeholders

- To your knowledge, what is the most complete and up-to-date data available on the foundational learning outcomes (basic literacy and numeracy) of elementary school students?
 - Where and how could we access this information?
- Do you know if there have been large-scale reading assessments in students' home languages and in French?
 - If so, where or how could we access this information?
- To your knowledge, what kind of data is available regarding students' language skills in different languages, for example, through language mapping studies, census data or any other source?
 - Where or how could we access this information?

Spell mapping

For use with: Linguists

- As far as you know, what kind of information is available regarding the "depth" (degree of coherence between sounds and symbols) and "width" (possible graphemic combinations, phonemes in each syllable, etc.) of the languages used in Côte d'Ivoire?
 - Where or how could we access this information?
- Do you have any information on the phonological and orthographic distance between the local languages in Côte d'Ivoire and French?
 - Where and how could we access this information?

Evidence base

For use with: All stakeholders

- How many language(s) are there in the country?
- How many language(s) are actually used in schools in practice? How do you know?
 - Are you aware of any studies being conducted on what works to help children read in French in Côte d'Ivoire? If so, what can you tell me about it?
 - i. What are the main conclusions of these studies?
 - To your knowledge, what evaluations have been carried out on specific reading programmes in Côte d'Ivoire? What can you tell me about these programs?
 - i. What are the main characteristics of these programs?
 - ii. At what scale have these programs been implemented (e.g., pilot project in some schools, community level, provincial level, national level)?
 - iii. What has been effective and what has not?
 - Where and how could we access the results of these studies?

For use with: The Decision-Makers

- How, if any, has the evidence been used for decision-making regarding languages of instruction in Côte d'Ivoire?
 - Can you give some examples?
- What are the top 2-3 barriers to using evidence for policy decision-making about languages of instruction?
 - What proof would you like to have?

Program and Evaluation Analysis (Scope and Sequence)

For use with: Educators at all levels, curriculum experts.

- Are there different reading programs for different languages?
 - For example, are the steps, scope and order, and reading and language proficiency goals different for different languages? If so, how?
- How is the language of instruction integrated into the curriculum to teach reading?

- When and how is the introduction to teaching a new language / teaching in a new language as a language of instruction (LoI) carried out (if applicable)?

MLT inventory analysis

For use with: Policy makers, bureaucrats, educators at all levels, curriculum experts

- What teaching and learning materials (e.g. teacher guides, student manuals, supplementary materials) are currently being provided to schools?
 - Are technology-based teaching and learning materials available for teachers or students? If so, please describe them.
 - In which language(s) are the materials?
- When was the last time the current teaching and learning materials were updated?
- In general, how often are they updated or are they updated on an ad hoc basis?
- What is the process of developing teaching and learning materials?

Professional development of teachers

For use with: Educators at all levels, bureaucrats, policy makers

- I know that the initial and in-service training of teachers is given in French. In your opinion, how effective is it to offer training in this language?
- There are several pedagogical issues that interest us and for each one we would like to know: a) what kind of support is available, b) what methods are taught to teachers to deal with these problems, c) to what extent teachers implement these methods, d) how useful these methods are.
- What support, if any, do teachers receive to teach in multilingual classrooms where children use and understand different languages? (If necessary, specify that support may include training, mentoring, how-to guides, etc.)
 - What methods are available to teachers for teaching in multilingual classrooms?
 - To what extent do you think teachers implement these methods?
 - How helpful do you find these methods and the support provided?
- What support, if any, is provided to teachers to help students with concepts they struggle to understand?
 - What methods are taught to teachers for remediation?
 - How do teachers implement these methods?
 - How helpful do you find these methods and the support provided?
- In your opinion, what are the gaps in teacher training and support?

Teacher assignment and language proficiency

For use with: Policy makers, bureaucrats, educators at all levels

- What data, if any, are available on teachers' language competences?
 - Where and how could we access this information?
- What data, if any, are available on teachers' pedagogical competences?
 - Where and how could we access this information?
- What data, if any, are available on teachers' pedagogical competences specifically for bilingual/multilingual contexts?
 - Where and how could we access this information?
- To what extent do current teacher assignment practices take into account teachers' language skills before assigning them to schools?
- To what extent do administrators consider teachers' strengths and weaknesses before assigning them to specific schools or classrooms?

Harmonization of the Language of Instruction Policy (LoI) with Classroom Implementation / Fidelity of Implementation

For use with: Policy makers, bureaucrats, educators at all levels

- To what extent do you think language of instruction policies are implemented in the classroom? For example, is French used as the main language of instruction in the same way and at the same time as what is specified in official policy?
 - How does classroom practice differ from official politics ?
 - Why is classroom practice different from official politics? (What makes it difficult to comply with the policy?)

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¹²⁸ Translation: "L'apprentissage de la L2 orale et écrite sera facilité par la prise de conscience des relations entre la L1 et la L2. L'apprenant peut réutiliser des aspects semblables (par exemple, les lettres existant dans les deux langues et se prononçant de la même manière, comme a, o, l, d, permettront dès le début, par transfert, de lire des mots en L2)."

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¹³⁰ Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de l'Alphabétisation, République de Côte d'Ivoire. *Document pédagogique CP1 de linguistique en dioula. Module de linguistique et exploitation de texte dioula* (version 2024). Abidjan : Direction de l'Alphabétisation des Adultes, des Jeunes et des Enfants, 2024.

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