

# Critical Reading of the D.R.C. Framework Law on National Education of 2014 in Relation to the Sustainable Development Goal4

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## ABSTRACT

This paper provides a critical analysis of the D.R.C. framework law on national education of 2014 in relation to the sustainable development goal4. After the framework law promulgation in 2014 by the D.R.C. government to align the country to the sustainable development goals, it can be noticed that its practical implementation has failed : French remains the only education medium in primary education and at secondary and university education, national and child environmental languages are not practically studied as required by the framework law. This paper examines therefore the possible causes and effects of that implementation failure and provides appropriate solving ways. Critical Discourse Analysis has been applied to the examined extracts of the framework law. The results indicate, in terms of causes, the lack of a specific language policy in D.R.C. leading to a groping - based language policy ; the lack of necessary documentary resources in vernacular and national languages of D.R.C.; the lack of adequate practical implementation and accompanying measures of the framework law and the community low motivation in vernacular education. These causes lead to the reinforcement and perpetuation of linguistic discriminatory laws and practices; exclusive and inequitable education and imbalanced language perceptions and attitudes of congolese favoring foreign languages and defavoring Congolese languages. The paper ends by suggesting the creation of a national language policy body by the government to (re)define and regularly monitor the country language policy basing on the sustainable development goals requirements ; the promulgation of promoting and reinforcing laws of linguistic and cultural diversity ; and the reinforcement and promotion of real linguistic pluralism discourses among Congolese.

**Key words :** Democratic Republic of Congo, education, sustainable development, equity, inclusive.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper provides a critical reading of the D.R.C. framework law on national education of 2014 in relation to the sustainable development goal4 to reflect on the causes of the framework law implementation failure in D.R.C., its effects in relation to the SDG4 attainment and on the solving ways. In 2014 the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo promulgated the Framework Law N°14/004/2014 on National Education. The framework law aligns the county to the Sustainable Development Goal 4 requirement about quality education. Goal4 is one of the 17 sustainable development goals as provided by the United Nations Development Programme. It aims at ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. It is structured into the 10 following targets: (1) free primary and secondary education ; (2) equal access to quality pre-primary education; (3) equal access to affordable technical, vocational and higher education ; (4) increase the number of people with relevant skills for financial success ; (5) eliminate all discrimination in education; (6) universal literacy and numeracy ; (7) education for sustainable development and global citizenship ; (8) build and upgrade inclusive and safe schools ; (9) expand higher education scholarships for developing countries ; (10) increase the supply of qualified teachers in developing countries. The goal states, in its 5<sup>th</sup> Target that by 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations, (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/sustainable-development-goals>, Advocates for International Development 2022,

Friedrich Huebler 2018, Marija C., Vesna S. and Kristina D. 2023, UNDP 2015, UNESCO 2024, United Nations 2025).

To respond to the sustainable development requirement, especially on quality and equitable education for all, the framework law institutes national and child environmental languages as medium of primary education and as subject in secondary, university and in non-formal education. And for economic, political and diplomatic relations, the law also recommends the learning of important foreign languages for the country.

Despite the D.R.C. government effort to draft and promulgate the framework law to align the country to the sustainable development goals, its implementation has failed in the country : in the primary education French remains the education medium at all levels, in secondary and university education national languages are not generally disciplines as required by the framework law, etc. National and child environmental languages are unfortunately not given the space of being the education medium in primary education and subject at secondary, higher and university levels. In addition, linguistic discrimination are still prevailing in the D.R.C. education system at all the levels. Such discrimination is observable in everyday language practices at school through internal school laws forbidding the use of national and child environmental languages, giving them no or little opportunities of use; providing punishments to those speaking another language at school apart from French and English, etc. These discriminatory laws and practices limit, not only the equal access to education at all the levels but also shape negatively Congolese language perceptions and attitudes.

For this, the study seeks therefore to respond to the following three questions : (1) What are the causes leading to the implementation failure of the D.R.C. framework law on national education of 2014 in the country ? (2) How does that failure limit the attainment of the SDG4 in D.R.C. ? (3) What mechanisms should the D.R.C. government set as solving way to the problem ?

Structurally, this paper is divided into the introduction, methodology, results, discussion and conclusion.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This provides the study design, approach and its application to the data (corpus) and the data presentation.

### **Research design**

This is a qualitative research for it promotes the validity of subjective thought about the D.R.C. language policy in education. Also qualitative for it is a case study exploring the causes of the framework law implementation failure, its effects in relation to the SDG4 attainment and the solving ways of a particular space of D.R.C. and in a particular sector of education.

### **Research approach**

This paper adopts the Critical Discourse Analysis Approach. The approach is applied to the extract of the D.R.C. framework law on national education of 2014. Before the approach application to the texts, relevant information allowing the global understanding of the Critical Discourse Analysis Approach is first provided here. Such relevant information is related to the meaning of CDA, its development, its major domains and concerns and its application to the framework law.

### **Meaning of Critical Discourse Analysis /Critical Discourse Studies**

Initially, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) or Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) can simply be defined as the analysis of written, spoken or visual texts to uncover power structures, ideologies and social representations within them. It is an approach to social research that combines detailed analysis of texts with theoretical informed account of the phenomena under investigation in order to identify the processes by which language (re)produces social practices and helps privilege certain ways of doing and being over others. It investigates how language figures in the constitution, contestation and transformation of social problems, and thereby processes of social change. The terms CDA and CDS as research approaches are mostly used interchangeably.

They are regarded as approaches aiming at critically investigating social inequalities as it is expressed, signaled, constituted, legitimized by language use or discourse. The primary focus of CDS is power, inequalities, and the way discourse constructs and reinforces power differences. Researchers taking a CDA/CDS approach aim to raise awareness about the way that discourse is used in different contexts and to help bring about change where this use reflects inequalities and discrimination (Ruth and Michael 2001; Bernadette 2023; Nicolina, Michael and Jane 2019).

### CDA Approach development

Critical Discourse Analysis or Studies grew out of earlier approaches within British linguistics which had begun to explore issues of power and ideology. Five people are generally regarded as being the founders of Critical Discourse Studies: Norman Fairclough, Teun Van Dijk, Ruth Wodak, Theo Van Leeuwen and Gunther Kress. The 1970s saw the emergence of a form of discourse and text analysis that recognized the role of language in structuring power relations in society. Initially, these researches were mainly working independently on similar issues and developing their own individual approaches. These approaches have developed over the years and are still all influential today. These researchers have at times collaborated, both as editors and as co-researchers.

Norman Fairclough is one of the founders of the CDS within sociolinguistics. He was concerned with how social practices are discursively shaped and how power is exercised through language, as well as the subsequent effects. Along with other areas, Fairclough has scrutinized the language of the mass media as a site of power and struggle as well as the discourse of politicians. His approach is referred to as the **Dialectical – Relational Approach**.

Teun Van Dijk has taken a CDS approach since the 1980s, focusing especially on the study of the discursive reproduction of racism by what he terms the ‘**symbolic elites**’ (journalists, scholars, writers and politicians). He has studied press news, and developed theories of ideology, context and knowledge. His approach is known as **the Socio- Cognitive Approach**.

Ruth Wodak is another key figure in CDS. Wodak’s approach advocates an interdisciplinary, problem – oriented approach to analyzing the change of discursive practices over time and in various genres. Along with her colleagues, she has explored data highlighting many issues from many countries, genres and using a range of methods. Her approach is called the **Discourse – Historical Approach**.

Theo Van Leeuwen and Gunther Kress focused on the approach of analyzing visual forms of communication. Their book ‘*Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*’, originally published in 1996 and updated in 2006 and 2021, is one of the most influential books on this topic. Their approach is known as **the Social – Semiotic Approach** (Bernadette 2023; Ruth and Michael 2001).

### The domains and concerns of the CDA/CDS

Because of an interest in power and ideologies, there are some key domains that are mostly explored in CDS research: political discourse and media discourse. CDS research tends to focus on discourse in these two types of public domains since this is where power and ideologies can be readily seen to be produced and reinforced.

**Political discourse:** Political discourse has been a central focus in CDS. This is a domain (politics) where language gains power by the use powerful people make of it. Therefore, it is an important context in which to explore power.

**Media discourse:** Media discourse has been another central focus in CDS research. This includes a range of media types from newspapers to movies and television programs and social media such as Twitter, YouTube, and so on. New reporting is an area where language is widely assumed to be transparent and reporting on newsworthy items is generally considered unbiased. Media institutions often maintain that they are neutral. CDS research demonstrates the inaccuracy of such assumptions. Forms of media, as public engagement, are obvious places where ideologies are created and produced, and power inequalities reinforced and maintained.

Researchers taking the CDS as their research approach are carefully concerned with the examination of power, ideologies, history and the critical aspect in their investigations as provided by Bernadette 2023, Ruth Wodak & Paul Chilton 2005 and by Ruth and Michael 2001.

**Power:** Power is central concept in CDS approaches with close analysis of the language used in light of who holds power, how is evident, and what this says about society. Power can be related to a range of factors, such as job role or status, gender, race, or ethnicity. This may be individual or group power. At the basic level, a person in a powerful position can control and constrain the way less powerful participants communicate.

**Ideologies:** In CDS, ideologies is another important concept. They are systems of beliefs and values shared by a group of people in society. Reality is constructed and interpreted on the basis of people's beliefs and values. So, ideologies may influence what is understood and accepted as true or false. This is relevant when considering aspects to religious, political and social life. Ideologies are produced and reflected in discourse. Unequal power relations between social classes and ethnic groups can therefore be produced through the ways in which discourse represents and positions people. Discourse may, for example, be racist, or sexist, and try to pass off assumptions (often falsifying ones) about any aspect of social life as mere common sense. Ideological assumptions and underlying power relations may often not be clear to people. CDS provides ways to explore ideology and challenge the social, cultural and political ideologies and values often covertly encoded with texts. Analysts seek to uncover ideologies, whether explicit or implicit. Different types of ideologies can be explored in CDS investigations: gender ideologies, cultural or racial ideologies and political ideologies.

**History:** History is important in CDS because discourse is historically produced and interpreted. Time and place shape discourse. Ideologies have developed over time, and the effects of power often become obscured and part of the status quo. Resistance requires raising awareness, breaking conventions and challenging accepted ways of doing things.

**The critical aspect in the CDS researches:** To be critical can have different meanings but in CDS research, it relates to the fact that it is not enough to highlight and describe discourse practices which construct and reinforce power differences and ideologies. They must also be critiqued, and feedback (where possible) should be given. This is particularly important when there is an abuse of power, or lack of awareness about an issue, which causes inequalities and injustice. Researchers using a CDS approach explicitly position themselves on the side of those being dominated, typically examining the discourse of the more powerful participants or group involved. Critique may highlight positive aspects as well. Being critical does not mean being only negative.

### **The CDA application to the D.R.C framework law on national education of 2014 and the corpus selection criteria**

In this paper, the Critical Discourse Analysis Approach is applied to the D.R.C. framework law on national education of 2014 in relation to the sustainable development goal4. The analysis bases on Fairclough's Three Dimensional Model : textual, discursive practice and social practice dimensions. The analysis at these three dimensions contributes to the understanding of the related causes to the law implementation failure, related social effects and the mechanisms to be set as solving way by the D.R.C. government.

The extracts or corpus as data for this study were all extracted from the D.R.C. Framework Law N° 14/004 of 2014 on National Education. Their collection techniques consisted of reading and rereading the entire framework law and then extracting all language regulation – related articles. Every article related to language regulation in the law has been considered as part of the study data and corpus. Then, all those articles have been associated with their headings in terms of section, chapter and title except the explanatory memorandums which have been presented in terms of explanatory memorandums – innovations - and paragraph. Since the framework law was produced in French and still available in French, before the analysis the selected corpus has been translated from French into English.

## RESULTS

This point presents the corpus and analyses it basing on Fairclough's Three Dimensional Model: textual, discursive practice and social practice. At the textual level, an overview of the formal features of the framework law is provided. At the discursive practice level, the focus is on the context of production, distribution and consumption of the framework law. The social roles and norms involved in drafting the law are also examined here. At the social practice level, the broader social, cultural and historical contexts of the law are examined. It looks at power and ideology ; examining how the law reinforces or challenges social power structures and ideologies to reveal the social values represented in the law, explain how the law reflects societal concerns and finally, explain how it perpetuate and /or challenge dominant ideologies.

### Corpus presentation

The extracted corpus for analysis is presented below as follows:

#### *"EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUMS*

*Innovations; paragraph 17: The use of national or environmental languages as a medium for teaching and learning in the elementary and junior primary cycles and as a subject at the secondary and higher levels. It also recommends the learning of foreign languages that are important to our economic, political and diplomatic relations.*

#### *TITLE I: General provisions*

#### *CHAPTER III: Fundamental options*

*SECTION 16: The use of national languages and/or local languages as a medium and disciplines of teaching and learning;*

*Article 38. National education shall use national and environmental languages as a tool in primary education and as a subject in secondary, higher and university education as well as in non-formal education.*

#### *TITLE III: About the organization and functioning of the national education*

#### *CHAPTER 4: Common matters to all education levels*

#### *SECTION 6: Languages of instruction*

*Article 195: French is the language of instruction. National languages or child environmental languages are used as teaching and learning medium and as discipline. Their use at the different levels and cycles of the national education is set by regulation. The most important foreign languages for the country economic, political, and diplomatic relations are instituted as disciplines to be studied."*

### Results presentation

#### Textual analysis

Structurally, the corpus is made of three major components: the explanatory memorandums about the framework law innovations, Title I about General provisions and Title III about the organization and functioning of the national education.

The explanatory memorandums states (1) the functions of national or environmental languages as learning and teaching medium in the elementary and junior primary cycles and as discipline at secondary, higher and university levels and (2) the learning recommendation of important foreign languages for country. The recommendation implies foreign languages introduction and integration into the D.R.C. education, considering them as relevant for the country external communications, openness and diplomacy.

Title I about the General provisions provides the fundamental options among which the use of national and local languages as teaching and learning medium and as disciplines. Article 38 institutionalizes national or child environmental languages across all levels of the D.R.C. education. This consolidates multilingualism in the D.R.C. education and institutionalizes the functional use of national and child environmental languages as both mediums of instruction and subjects of study depending up on the level, extending their role across all the D.R.C. education levels: primary, secondary, higher, university and non-formal education.

Title III about the organization and functioning of the national education: the common matters to all education levels and more particularly languages of instruction, Article 195 institutionalizes French as the instruction language in D.R.C. It also emphasizes the functions of national and child environmental languages as teaching and learning medium and as discipline by delegating their use at different levels by regulation. The article ends by the institution of foreign languages in the D.R.C. education for economic, political and diplomatic relations.

Thematically, the corpus builds on D.R.C. educational multilingualism balancing child-environmental and national languages, French as the official language and unspecified international foreign languages for the country economic, political, and diplomatic relations.

### **Discursive practice analysis**

The law was produced by the D.R.C. government of 2014. It was mainly influenced and motivated by external pressure on mother – tongue education as a right and for inclusive and equitable quality education for all. The framework law aligns the D.R.C. education to the sustainable development goal 4 and 10 by ensuring that all children have equal access to quality education with no linguistic barrier and that the education sector is out of all kinds of discriminations ; including linguistic discrimination. In addition to the mother – tongue education, the framework law contains a recommendation and institution of important foreign languages learning in the D.R.C. education. This recommendation and institution has its roots in external globalization pressure of that time. The purpose was to institutionalize a multilingual education policy in D.R.C. where national and child environmental languages are maintained for identity and inclusion, French for legal legacy continuity, and foreign languages for global communication and competitiveness. The framework law was intended to educators responsible of implementing school regulations ; students and parents ; international partners such UNESCO to indicate that D.R.C. is aligning with Education for all and multilingualism agenda. The reception of the law varied. Teachers and schools faced practical challenges of lack of teaching materials in local vernacular languages. Some parents and communities welcomed the law on mother-tongue education while others did not at all, fearing that French reduction could disadvantage their children socially and economically at the international level. Human rights organizations could positively welcome the law considering it as a step forward to human rights respect including linguistic rights and educational equity.

### **Social practice analysis**

The period of 2010s was characterized by globalization pressures, regional integration, and strong international cooperation in education. The framework law therefore comes to respond to the sustainable development requirement on inclusive education and the UNESCO multilingual education recommendation. It does not only recognise national and child environmental languages but it also institutionalizes them as mediums and subjects in the D.R.C. education depending on the level by maintaining French as the D.R.C. instruction language. Although French remains central in the D.R.C. education, this framework law challenges the French supremacy over other languages in the D.R.C. education by giving a strong role to local and national languages and to foreign international languages as well. The promotion of foreign languages such as English, Chinese, etc. reflects globalization ideology regarded here as D.R.C. linguistic westernization (universalization and spread of modern social structures across all the globe by destroying pre-existent cultures and local autonomy). This learning recommendation and institution of foreign languages provided within the framework law open the door, not only to the spread of those foreign and international languages in the country but also, to the progressive endangerment and extinction of existing Congolese endogenous and national languages. Using national and child environmental languages in primary education makes schooling more accessible to all children, reducing barriers created by French-only education. It also strengthens Congolese identity by positioning local languages as legitimate tools to vehicle knowledge. It facilitates literacy acquisition in

children's mother tongues, while preparing them for global participation through French and other foreign languages. However, despite the recognition of child environmental languages in the national education, French remains the predominant language in the D.R.C. national education. The framework law carries a socially transformative shift in Congolese language policy regarded as vernacularisation and internationalization. It responds to both internal and external needs (inclusive and equitable education accessible for all and to globalization pressures for international cooperation and diplomacy). While challenging the colonial linguistic order by elevating national and child environmental languages, the framework law reinforces, at the same time, that colonial linguistic order by empowering French and instituting other foreign languages in the D.R.C. national education.

## DISCUSSION

The discussion here interprets the results, compares and relates them to the other available discourses, provides its challenges and suggests some solving ways.

The 2014 framework law establishes the education language policy shift in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The shift from the assimilation language policy centered on French to the vernacularization language policy centered on national and child environmental languages and from French to foreign international languages. This shift aligns the D.R.C. education to the sustainable development goals and particularly Goal 4 target 5 and Goal 10 targets 2 and 3. Linguistic discrimination is one of such discriminations in the D.R.C. education where linguistic diversity prevails but only very few languages (French and English) are allowed and given the opportunity of use in the D.R.C. national education. This does not only discriminate the other languages but also their speakers, thing that even negatively impact on the learners school and academic performance. Goal 10 aims at reducing inequality within and among countries. Its 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> targets focus on promoting universal inclusion by ensuring equal opportunities and ending discrimination. The two targets respectively provide : By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status. Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including the elimination of discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard.

The recommendation and institution of foreign languages in the D.R.C. education provided within the framework law comes to respond to the requirement of the 2<sup>nd</sup> target of Goal 10 on empowering and promoting the social, economic and political inclusion of all. The inclusion of universal languages learning in the D.R.C. education curricula opens the D.R.C. pupils and students to the international inclusion and mobility.

While the framework law vehicles the ideology of human right respect and promotion, inclusive and equitable education and of globalization, its implementation on the ground has failed in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The major causes of that failure are :

- The lack of a defined language policy for the multilingual D.R.C. and a specific language regulation body. From its independence in 1960 up to now, there is a total absence of a specific language regulation body in D.R.C. This has led to a national groping - based language policy where language decisions and laws are taken depending, on one hand, on external pressure and, on the other hand, on the politicians will and attitudes with no or little internal planning. The 2014 framework law is one of such promulgated laws basing on external pressures with very little internal (national) planning, causing many other aftermaths and lacking appropriate accompanying measures on the ground.
- The lack of necessary documentary resources in vernacular and national languages : D.R.C. vernacular languages are not codified and standardized to respond to the need of the current modern world. Deciding on vernacular education in D.R.C. should primarily imply vernacular languages codification and standardization.
- The lack of adequate implementation and accompanying measures of the law on the ground: it is not enough to promulgate the law. It is equally very important to monitor and evaluate the success and

effectiveness of the implementation. Such evaluation must constitute an ongoing process, and must be designed in such a manner as to provide constant feedback so that the implementation strategies can be corrected where necessary.

- Community low motivation in vernacular and national languages education : in a study on ‘what language policy model for the D.R.C. sustainable development : A case of Bukavu’ the author examined the attitudes Bukavians have towards the different spoken languages in Bukavu. Bukavu is the capital city of the South – Kivu province which is one of the 26 provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The results indicated negative attitudes towards all vernacular languages including Kiswahili (the national language spoken in the area) but positive attitudes were shown towards French and English. This language attitude test is one of the indications that vernacular education in D.R.C. is not welcomed, particularly in the eastern part of the country, (Ntabala 2023). Vernacular and national languages are perceived as limiting pupils and students to access to international life opportunities while French and English open them to such opportunities.

The implementation failure of the framework law continues to reinforce and perpetuate the ‘French-only Policy’ increasing discriminatory laws and practices in the D.R.C. education. Such laws and practices impact negatively on the attainment of the sustainable development goals in the country, shaping of language perceptions and attitudes and on learners’ school performance. French-only education does not respond to linguistic equity in the multilingual D.R.C. ; it makes the national education exclusive and inequitable. This shapes in turn the congolese language perceptions and attitudes. As provided by Bambi, Kathryn and Paul (1998), attitudes and ideologies do not simply arise without foundation. They are based on deep – seated dispositions and strongly held beliefs and perceptions concerning both language practices (what people do) and policies (what people should do). These dispositions are acquired through a gradual process of inculcation in which early childhood influences are particularly important. Such received ideologies often go unchallenged because they help organize the tremendous complexity of human experience into fairly simple, but distorted, images that serve as guide and compass for social and political action. In D.R.C., however, such linguistic discriminatory school laws and practices have shaped the Congolese language perceptions and attitudes in favor of foreign international languages to the detriment of Congolese indigenous and national languages.

Despite the failure, there are still some possible ways for the D.R.C. to succeed in the attainment of inclusive quality education with no linguistic discriminatory laws and practices. One of such ways is the D.R.C. government creation of a national language policy service to (re)define, implement and monitor the country language policy basing on the sustainable development requirements. Also, draft and promulgate linguistic pluralism and cultural diversity reinforcing laws in the country (laws forbidding linguistic and cultural discriminatory practices within all the national life sectors including education, public administration, governance, etc). Furthermore, the government spread, reinforcement, and promotion of linguistic pluralism discourses and inclusive communication within communities by discouraging linguistic discriminatory practices in communities and consequently spread and promote linguistic equity and tolerance ideology.

## CONCLUSION

After the observed implementation failure of the D.R.C. framework law on national education of 2014, this paper has critically examined the causes and effects of that failure on the national inclusive quality education as provided and required by specific sustainable development goals and then provided some solving ways. As a critical study, Critical Discourse Analysis approach has been applied to the copus extracted from the framework law. In terms of causes, the results indicate the lack of a defined language policy in D.R.C., leading to a groping - based language policy ; the lack of necessary documentary resources in vernacular and national languages of D.R.C. ; the lack of adequate practical implementation and accompanying measures of the framework law on the ground ; and the community low motivation in D.R.C. vernacular and national languages education. These causes drive to the reinforcement and perpetuation of linguistic discriminatory laws and practices in the national education ; exclusive and inequitable education ; and imbalanced language perceptions and attitudes of congolese favoring foreign languages and defavoring Congolese indigenous and national languages. The suggested solving ways are the creation of a national language policy service by the government to (re)define, implement and monitor the country language policy basing on the sustainable

development goals requirements ; draft and promulgate laws promoting and reinforcing real national linguistic pluralism and cultural diversity ; and the reinforcement and promotion of linguistic pluralism discourses within the national community by the D.R.C. government.

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