



Language planning and English as a foreign language in the Democratic Republic of Congo: A scoping review

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Abstract

The aim of this scoping review is to investigate the language policy's ideological basis which mandates the learning of English as a foreign language in secondary schools all over the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It also aims to reveal the current state of affairs with regard to English as a foreign language in the Congolese curriculum. Using the approach proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), several published articles, books, journals and dissertations were consulted for our scoping review. Spanning a period between 1960 to 2020, the main focus was on educational language planning and policies in the DRC. After analyzing the selected publications, the results indicated that until today there is no language institution to regulate linguistic practices and teaching. The DRC's state-owned schools still use the old national curriculum, which was left by the Belgian colonizers with some modifications. Foreign language teacher education and production of academic materials need to be integrated in the budget planning and implementation processes to accompany the policy regarding the teaching of English language at secondary schools. There is also an expressed need for a language institution engaged in research and training of different languages such as French, English and recognized national languages.

Keywords: Language planning & policy, Education system, English as a foreign language, National Curricular, Language Institution

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1. Introduction

The language situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is unarguably multilingual in nature. Having over 200 active languages, the DRC operates a national

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language policy that upholds French as an official language along with four other indigenous Congolese languages, namely Lingala, Kikongo, Swahili and Tshiluba (Luba-Kasai). The explicit language policy in DRC is hardly transferred to the nation's language policy on education. However, there exist some implicit educational language guidelines in the ministry of national education. The language practices in the DRC's educational system indicates that the country is working hard to help students get quality education in the language they understand, hence, the teaching of Lingala, Kikongo, Swahili and Tshiluba (Luba-Kasai) in the first two years of DRC primary education while French is designed to gradually gain entrance into the nation's academic setting from the third year of primary education and retained through secondary education and university learning. English language holds the place of a foreign language, taught at secondary school as a subject.

The current study is a scoping review of the current state of English language learning which is taught in DRC as a foreign language. The aim of undertaking this research is to investigate the language policy and its ideological basis that mandates the learning of English as a foreign language (national curricular) in secondary school all over the country. Being a former Belgian colony, the DRC has all along had French as its most prestigious language and has been used as language of the media, trade, internet and education. The inclusion of English language as a foreign language in academic curriculum may introduce issues as prestige language challenge, student preferred language, and teacher training. To address these issues, the research methodology considered relevant research publications which on language planning and educational policy in the DRC. Thus, this study aims to reveal the importance of English language in the DRC curriculum and its future.

1.1. Aim and Research question

Our aim is to investigate the language policy and its ideologies that mandate the learning of English as a foreign language in secondary education all over the DRC. The second aim of this paper is to reveal the importance of English in the DRC curriculum. Finally, we hope that by reviewing the existing literature systematically, we will be able to identify all the reforms that took place during the development of the national education program. In this regard, the questions below guided our inquiry:

1. What is known from the existing literature about the national English program of the DRC?
 - a. What is the objective of national English language program?
 - b. What are the main threads of findings in the latest research on the English as a foreign language instruction in the DRC?

1.2. Current Situation

In DRC, there is a project that was planned from 2015, named “Stratégie Sectorielle de l’éducation et de la Formation 2016-2025” (Strategy for Education Sector and Training 2016-2025) to meet the needs of education at primary and secondary levels. Another important document called the “Directory of Official Manuals”, where all the official textbooks for English language teaching are also listed. This manual (Repertoires de manuels agrees (2015) contains one book published in 2010, one in 2012, one in 2015 and two textbooks in 2017. These manuals are considered official textbooks to be used as teaching materials for English as a foreign language in secondary schools. However, these textbooks are not designed by language planners. They are the result of work carried out by certain professors at universities. In reality, however, the books mentioned in the official document have never been printed in large quantities to reach the state-owned schools. To this day, many schools considered to be of high standard continue to use the national program of 1997 with other didactic materials, such as example "GO FOR ENGLISH" (a series of books by Steve Elsworth & Jim Rose, (1997-1998).

When it comes to the question of knowing whether a language institution exists or not in the DRC, theoretically the answer is yes. This institution is called the Department of School Programming and Teaching Materials. There are workers in this department but practically nothing is produced. This office exists on the organizational chart. Yet, the national curriculum is not revised and the teaching materials are only printed as was the case of 2010 to 2017 textbooks.

Among the different projects that the Congolese state has undertaken so far, the World Bank has financed millions of dollars to support the educational system of the DRC in order to improve the quality of education. Among the objectives of these projects, there is free primary education, which is currently being implemented at about 60%, and the improvement of the quality of learning across the country. With regard to language teaching and learning, in the April of 2021, the Ministry of Education proceeded with the distribution of teaching materials (textbooks) of national languages. This is also part of the “PAQUE” project (a project for improving the overall quality of education). This project is viewed by many scholars of languages as a positive point because, for years, there was only one manual for the teaching of one of the national languages (Lingala) and the other three did not have an official manuals or textbooks. This shows that there is a desire to remedy concerns over the planning of language courses across the country. But the results of these efforts are yet to be observed.

2. Method

In this current climate in the DRC, the current scoping review uses the approaches proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) in their framework “Scoping studies: towards a methodological framework.” This scoping review uses a qualitative/descriptive research design. Arksey and O'Malley (2005) proposed six stages in their initial proposal, one of

these being an optional stage. These were a) identifying the research question; b) identifying relevant studies; c) study selection; d) charting the data; d) collating, summarizing; e) reporting the results; and the optional stage was f) consultation. We used a systematic search strategy across a range of published articles, theses and journals in library databases. Two main search terms which were used in this systematic review were “language planning and policy,” “English as a foreign language and DRC education system.” ProQuest, EBSCO, JSTOR and GOOGLE Scholar were used to review the published work between 1960 to 2020. Because of the absence of a language institution since the country gained political independence, 1960 was an important date to start our review.

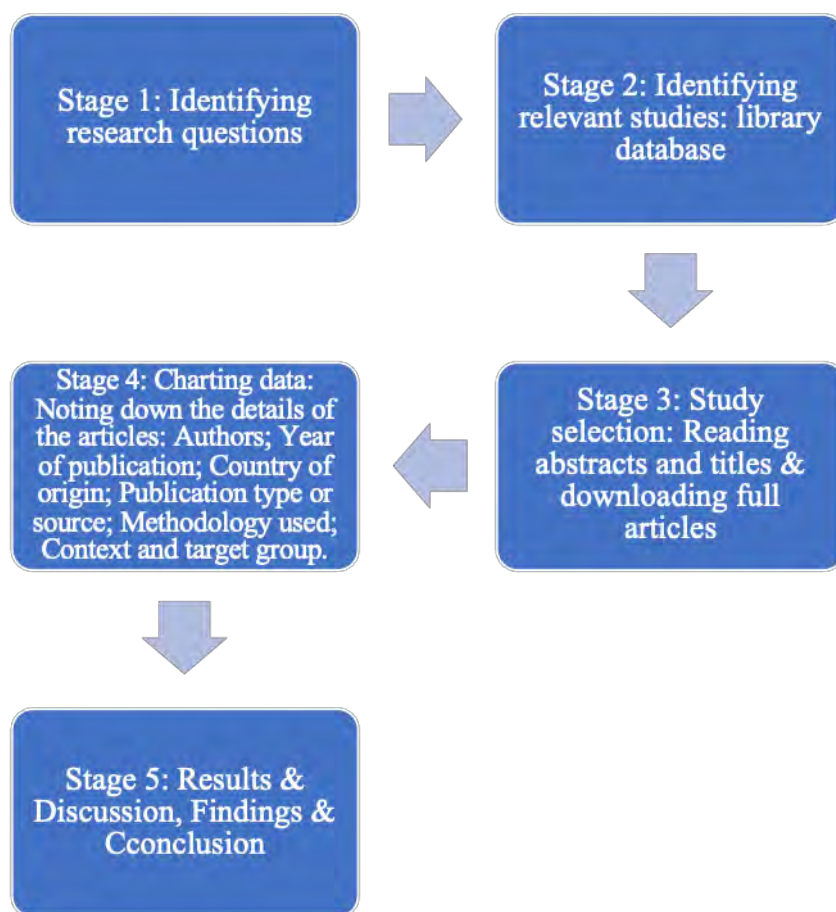


Figure 1. Five stages that were followed in order to complete the scoping review as proposed by Arksey and O'Malley

Although our initial search provided us with a large number of publications, the first criteria we applied for the selection of articles was date of publication. We selected only publications that represented a time period from 1960 to 2020 because there is no existing language institution in DRC and we wanted to get what scholars have accomplished from the year of political independence until today concerning language planning and policies, the educational system and more specifically about English as a foreign language.

We collected in total 25 publications from our databases and four from other sources such as a part of a speech by Willy Bakonga, (minister of education, 25 June 2020), part of news in a journal. Our selection criteria included taking into account publications with language planning and policy (Africa, priority for DRC) in focus, educational system/planning of DRC or English as a foreign language in the DRC. After removing duplicates, we were left with 21 publications among which six were excluded because they were not relevant to any of the criteria of selection we determined. Among the 15 remaining articles, four articles were not considered because there were no accessible full text and one other was also excluded because it was part of a speech, and therefore not scientifically oriented. Thus, only 10 articles were considered and used in this scoping review.

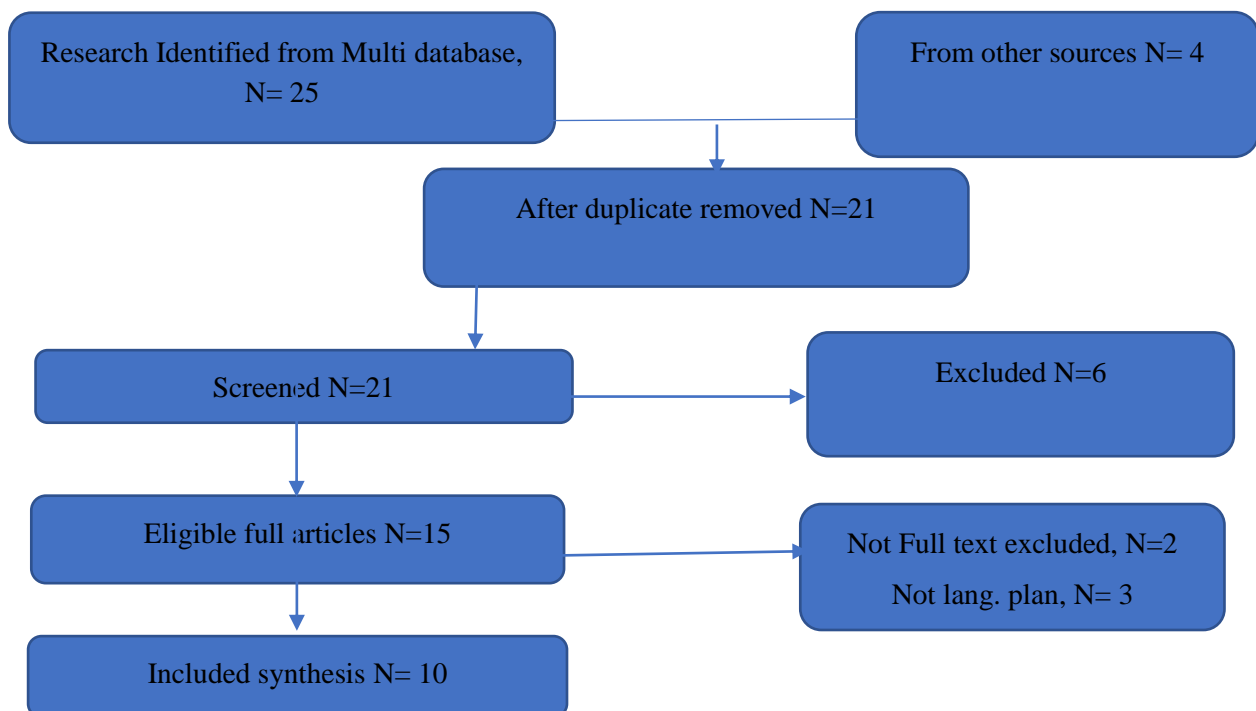


Figure 2. A short summary of the data collection procedure and evaluation done in respect to the inclusion and exclusion criteria

3. Results

The articles in the scope were written by scholars coming from different backgrounds but the dominant group was from the target country, the DRC (n=3). There were also articles from Nigeria (n=1), Kenya (n=1), Netherlands (n=1), the UK (n=1), the USA (n=1), China (n=1), and one article where we could not locate the country of origin (the author was affiliated with Bahrain University). There was also a book by the World Bank which represented an international collaboration. Of the 10 articles, only one adopted mixed-research methodologies and the rest of our publications used qualitative research methods. Table 1 provides the details of the sources which were included in this scoping review for the purposes of identifying the current situation of English language teaching and language policies in general in the DRC.

Table 1. List of selected articles

Author	Year of publication	Country of origin	of Publication type	Methodology	Context	Target group
Arksey & O'Malley	2005	UK	Framework Article	Qualitative	Research	International
Ayo Bamgbose	1999	Nigeria	Article	Qualitative	LPP	Africans
James C. Ching	1968	China	Article	Qualitative	Congo LPP	Congolese
Luanga A	2012	Bahrain	Article	Qualitative	Congo LPP	Congolese
Michael Meeuwis	2011	Netherlands	Article	Qualitative	Congo LPP	Congolese
Abdulaziz	2003	Kenya	Article	Qualitative	Congo LPP	Congolese
Ndolo M	1992	DRC	Dissertation	Qualitative	Congo LPP	Congolese
Nyembwe N & Matabisi S	2012	DRC	Book	Qualitative	Language (French & English)	Congolese
Rideout Williams	1970	USA	Article	Qualitative	Congo LPP	Congolese
Ungina N	1977	DRC	Dissertation	Qualitative	Congo LPP	Congolese
World Bank	2005	International	Book	Mixed-method	Education system	Congolese

In our scoping review, 10 publications were examined because of their eligibility/relevance to the topic (see Table 1). As a result of our detailed review of these sources, the following information emerged.

3.1. Historical Developments and Foreign Language Teaching

Along the history of educational planning in the DRC, three major reforms have marked the primary and secondary education:

1. The one of 1948 was a response to the concern of training personnel necessary for the increase of the production in big private companies
2. The 1958 reform, which imposed the plan of study and the metropolitan program, corresponding to a Belgian political evolution in the direction of social emancipation
3. The 1961 reform, which marked the resistance to the conventional education networks

There was also a reform that started in 1974 has remained unfinished and in 1981, the political authority launched a fourth reform. In the history of the Congolese educational system, Rideout (1970) notes that the early educational system was developed after the entry of missionaries in 1878. As the missionaries faced challenges in settling down, they needed Congolese assistance, thus resulting in the need of educating/training Congolese people in order to accomplish their work. Historically, this appears to be the beginning of a formal educational system. Later, the education system was oriented towards mass primary and vocational education. In this system, the focus was not on quality education. According to Rideout (1970), the Congolese were not allowed to be educated before the independence (during the colonial period). They were only trained for local needs through vocational schooling.

During the colonial period, education was an elite matter. Primary education was divided in two levels. In the first level, for first two years, schools were located everywhere and known as bush/rural schools. The second level of primary education started from grade three and continued until grade five. Here, the schools were located in urban areas. Only the best students from the first level in primary could join or continue their studies in these schools. Its curricula were academically oriented. The graduates from the second level could go to special schools for becoming teachers, clerks, and so on. Those students studying at special schools were known as the “Elite,” hence the elite status of those who were educated there and those who had access was forged even deeper.

The Congolese secondary school system began serving after World War II. This was after the reforms of 1948 and 1955 respectively. These schools were related to religious training schools. The first Lay secondary school (non-religious school) or the first

government school was set in 1955, with a complete Belgian secondary curriculum. The introduction of the official Belgian secondary school curricula brought “English” as foreign language, along with Latin, Spanish, Dutch, Germany, Italian. After the independence, English became available everywhere as a second language in secondary schools. German was taught as the third foreign language in some sections and Dutch as the fourth language in the modern economic section (Ndoma, 1977). In the DRC, from third Form to sixth Form, classes are divided in what are called sections. In each of these sections, there is one main domain with specific subjects. When the new national curricula were inaugurated in 1961, under the new policy, only English and Latin remained as foreign languages in secondary schools. Latin was taught in one specific section whereas English was taught in all classes/sections.

According to James Ching (1968), emergence of public schools and UNESCO sponsored trainings to raise teacher quality gained pace between 1960 and 1963. The reason for this was that after the independence, there was a need for qualified personnel in the classrooms. Seven years later, there was still lack of teacher quality and the DRC was still dependent on foreign teachers in education. English was taught intensively with French in the oriented cycle, which is the first two years of secondary school. This situation still continues to be the case.

3.2. Foreign Language Policy in the DRC Education System

Among all the foreign languages, English is the one which was most widely taught, and there was no place where teachers of other European languages were trained, except English in the DRC (Ndoma, 1977). Language preoccupation shifted after the country became independent, and there existed no systematic policy on the use of languages in the country. There were still educational planning problems, administration problems and problems with the quality of education.

Ndolo (1992) states that when decisions are made on language use in education, language planners have several goals to invoke. Language can be introduced in educational system for literacy purposes, to serve as a medium of instruction and may also be a subject of study, which is the case of English in secondary schools in the DRC. However, as can be seen from the previous descriptions, there was no consistent language planning during and after the colonial period. Ndoma (1977) argues that the major problem in the DRC for foreign language teaching is not the planning but the implementation of the plan.

Of the nine countries that share borders with the DRC, five have English as an official language or as one of the official languages. Nyembwe and Matabisi (2012) discuss the importance of English in the DRC and argue that the rise in demand for English is perceived by some as a threat to French. According to them, there have been an increasing contact with English-speaking countries. Since October 2010, the MONUSCO (the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) have settled the eastern part of the DRC and their staff, the

military personnel, various offices use English and are mostly from English-speaking countries. MONUSCO prefers to recruit people who are fluent in English. In reading their job adverts, one can notice that fluency in English combined with computer skills is now considered an asset. When looking at the company/organization names operating in the country, one can confirm that English fluency is a necessity. For example, The International Rescue Committee (IRC), Save the Children, War Children are some non-governmental organizations taking part in social issues. Nyembwe and Matabisi (2012) also note that young Congolese who are fluent in English earn a good living, often being used as interpreters.

Almost all traders in the DRC nowadays are buying their supplies from English-speaking countries and everyone tries to learn and speak English to be comfortable in transactions. Even the goods imported have labels in English and a significant number of electronic devices and pharmaceutical products come from English-speaking countries. Therefore, the rise of English in the country continues. The advancement of English in the country in general and in the eastern part of the country in particular has made students and their parents realize the importance of studying English in school and in professional centers. The National English program of DRC states that, English is taught first of all to make students capable of understanding, speaking, reading and writing correctly in order to make them aware of the culture and civilization of English-speaking countries. The first two years of learning English (in first and second form of secondary school) are devoted mainly to the acquisition and practice of the spoken language. Programme national d'Anglais (1997, p6).

4. Discussion

In this scoping review we have found out that there never existed any language institution or any language policies in the DRC to regulate the development or preserving of different languages. Along the discussion of different authors, they have not proved the existence of an institution where language issues are handled, even for local or national languages. The government planning office was only established in June 1961(after the independence) to tackle education problems. Rideout (1970) notes that “the Congo never had a history of educational planning” and that “the process had never been institutionalized and neither sufficient colonial or Congolese personnel had been trained to assume national educational planning tasks but educational planning per se remains to be accomplished” (p. 13). Until today there is no language institution or academy which regulates or plans and produces policies for language teaching and learning in the DRC, apart from the French Institute which is directed by the Belgian.

After the independence, there was an increased number of students enrolling in schools although there were education planning problems. We have also found that there was a lack of qualified teachers and insufficient materials for teaching. In addition, in the

DRC's education system, state-owned schools still use the old national curriculum, which was left by the Belgian colonizers, with some modifications.

Today English is taking an important place in the DRC and it is used in many sectors of national life. For example, in legislation, administration, education and media English is needed as a second foreign language. One of the significant reasons why English continues to be taught as a foreign language in DRC schools is that: - English is becoming a prestigious language and is considered as an international language spoken everywhere in the world (Nyaboke, Kereri & Nyabwari, 2021). In addition to this practical need, we have also observed that the start of English language instruction is due to political issues/negotiations and partnerships since the colonial times. English came to be part of DRC's top selected languages, and during the civil wars, some of the rebels were supported from the neighboring countries which speak English. Although there is no specific language planning agenda, Congolese people have showed interest in learning English. Therefore, a bottom-up process, where the society's values are promoting it and forcing the language to be part of schooling is underway. (A.J. Liddicoat and K. Taylor-Leech 2014, 243)

There are certain problems too that the DRC faced in the past and is still facing today. The World Bank (2005) has found out that the outdated curriculum and the "lack of qualified teachers in subject areas, limited facilities and equipment, lack of books and educational materials" (p. xxvii & p.118 para. 2 & 5) are the most important of these challenges. This is the reason why after the independence more than seven ministers of education were removed from office in less than ten years (James Ching, 1968).

We also noticed that for language planning and implementation to succeed, it partly depends on the heads of the state and how they consider the value of education. If French which is the official language for education is not properly planned and there is no language institute, will it be possible to create a powerful and efficient planning for English? Ayo Bamgbose (1999) states that:

It is unfortunate, but perhaps not surprising, that governments often give low priority to language planning in comparison with other types of planning. One reason for this is that the consequences of failure in language policies do not become immediately obvious. Failure in economic planning, for instance, is immediately felt in such indices as growth rates, capacity utilization, unemployment, inflation, trade imbalances, exchange rates, external reserves, debt burden, etc.... (p. 20).

The DRC government does not really pay attention to language learning, which has consequences as Ayo Bamgbose enumerates. This failure in language planning which may lead to consequences like underdevelopment, inefficiency in administration, and so on may take years to be noticed and attributed to language.

Finally, from the Directory of Official Manuals, we recognized that only the Minister of Education and sometimes inspectors (but not language planners) introduce English

textbooks for state-owned schools to be used. Yet these are never reproduced sufficiently. Via a personal interaction with one senior English teacher in a state-owned school, we also confirmed that the Ministry of Education does not have any language planners working under their auspices currently.

5. Conclusions

English is considered as a prestigious language and everyone who wants to work in a good company and make a living is invited to learn the language. Students appreciate English and are eager to learn, but learning is not really effective because of the absence of teaching materials in the context of the DRC. The DRC does not have language planners and it is observed that as there is an updated national English language plan, leaving private schools responsible to plan their own curriculum. Even some of the state-owned schools do not have the official materials and teachers are left to design their own teaching plan according to their capacity/knowledge. With regards to language of education, parents prefer international schools where their children can get good quality education as well as literacy knowledge in foreign languages.

After all the discussions and findings of our scoping review, we can conclude that there is a need to train teachers. In other countries, there exist assessments conducted before one can practice the teaching profession to ensure that one masters the content and skills necessary for the task. The development of such a system would help in the training of qualified teachers. This also related to the implementation problem mentioned earlier. The DRC should consider increasing the funding for education in its annual budget. Implementation requires a lot of sacrifices in areas such as the cost for materials, trainings, and so on. Abdulaziz (2003) points out that the implementation of a language policy requires big financial investment, trainings, and creation of a new culture and tradition of intellectual practices.

The National Curricula and Programs should be revised. Production of textbooks, materials, teacher training and language planners are the basics for improving the quality of the educational system in the DRC. Focusing only in teacher's salary and free education will not address the problems observed in the Congolese education system but trainings for teachers, policies and planning implementation, a regular revision of the curriculum and establishment of a language institute that will deal with all the languages taught at school, whether English, French or national languages would be a way to the develop the education sector in Congo (DRC). Finally, we can say that theoretically the Department of School Programming and didactic material exist but it also appears that this establishment lacks funding, language planners and even the willingness on the part of the government to make it work. Re-organizing the department should be considered, shift of pivots and responsibilities for agility in the sector is critical.

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