

# Impacts of Language Policy on Bilingualism: A Case Study of Arabic Use in Public Institutions in Chad

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## ABSTRACT

Over the decades, human languages have been studied in terms of community preferences for one language over another (Alshahrani, 2019; Anderson, 2008; Aziber, 2021). These studies fall under the framework of language planning and language policy (LPLP) (Shohamy, 2006; Spolsky, 2004, 2007). This paper investigates language policy in Chad, a French-speaking country that adopted Arabic as a second official language in the 1970s (Collelo, 1990; Coudray, 1996). The emphasis is on how language policy has been implemented and the extent to which the two official languages are used in public institutions and schools, where English presents additional challenges (Safotso & Ndoubangar, 2018, 2020; Ndoubangar & Etuge Apuge, 2023). Special attention is given to the teaching and rapid growth of English in Chad (Rosni et al., 2016). The data come from government institutions and public schools, as well as official and instructional documents (Fadoul, 2017). The analysis is based on Spolsky's (2004) theory of language policy and management. The findings indicate that Chad's top-down language policy has generated negative attitudes toward the teaching and learning of Arabic, even as English is steadily gaining prominence (Aziber, 2021; Cameron, 2006). They also reveal conflicting perceptions of Arabic and insufficient preparation of Arabic teaching materials across different education levels (Alshahrani, 2019; Schiffman, 2006). Furthermore, the results show that use of Arabic in Chad remains very limited, despite its status as a compulsory subject in primary schools in the early 1960s and its designation as an official language in the 1996 Constitution (Collelo, 1990; Coudray, 1996). These findings suggest that, for Arabic to develop effectively as an official language, the government's language policy must be reconsidered to promote stable bilingualism in Chad (Shohamy, 2006; Spolsky, 2007).

**Keywords:** language policy, bilingualism, English, Chad, French–Arabic.

## INTRODUCTION

This study examines language policy in Chad, a highly multilingual country where French and Arabic serve as official languages alongside over 100 local languages. The research focuses on the implementation of bilingualism in public institutions and schools, the sociolinguistic realities, and the growing role of English in education and globalization. Chad's top-down language policies have created social and cultural tensions, particularly due to the imposition of Arabic in regions with predominantly Christian or animist populations, while French remains dominant in administration. The study is framed using Spolsky's (2004, 2007) theory of language policy, which emphasizes language management, beliefs, and practices, as well as the influence of government, communities, schools, and families. The introduction highlights the gaps between policy intentions and actual language use, illustrating that while management mechanisms exist, beliefs and practices often undermine policy goals. The sociolinguistic situation is further complicated by cultural divides, limited recognition of minority languages, and the rise of English as a language of socioeconomic opportunity. This research aims to investigate how Chad's language policy affects bilingualism, the status of Arabic and French in society, and the factors influencing the teaching and learning of these languages, with a view toward informing more effective and socially inclusive language planning.

## An overview of language communities in Chad.

Chad is a highly multilingual country in which three categories of languages coexist: national languages, official languages, and vehicular languages. The country has approximately 130 local languages (RGP, 2016), which fall into three major linguistic families: **Chamitic–Semitic**, **Nilo-Saharan**, and **Niger–Congo**. Only 18 of these 130 languages are spoken by at least 50,000 people (Collelo, 1990).

These 18 widely spoken languages correspond largely to the country's twelve major ethnic groups. The largest of these include:

- **Sara (27.7%)**
- **Arab (12.3%)**
- **Mayo-Kébbian (11.5%)**
- **Kanem-Bornou (9%)**
- **Ouaddaian (8.7%)**
- **Hadjerai (6.7%)**
- **Tandjilé (6.5%)**
- **Gorane (6.3%)**
- **Fitri-Bathaian (4.7%)**
- **Peul (2.4%)**
- **Baguirmian (1.5%)**
- **Iro (0.5%)**

These national languages are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: National Languages in Chad

Nº	LINGUISTIC GROUPS	PERCENTAGES	LANGUAGES
1	<b>Chamito-semitic</b>	<b>16,8 %</b>	Arabic, Musei, Marba, Massana, Nanchere.
2	<b>Nigero-congolese</b>	<b>4,11 %</b>	Moundan, Peulh, Tuburi,
3	<b>Nilo-saharian</b>	<b>30,7 %</b>	Sara, Kanembou, Daza, Maba, Naba, Kanuri, Zagawa, Gor, Masalet, Mongo

Chad is a highly multilingual country, with Chadian Arabic (Chamitic–Semitic) and Sara (Nilo-Saharan) being the most widely spoken languages, each representing about 10.3% of the population. While only 10% speak Chadian Arabic as a mother tongue, nearly 50% use it as a vehicular language, particularly in the northern regions. French dominates administrative functions, whereas Arabic is closely associated with Islam, creating cultural and political tensions. To promote linguistic balance, President Idriss Déby made Arabic instruction compulsory in all schools starting in 2010–2011, but critics argue that the policy's implementation, rather than Arabic itself, has been problematic. Chad's two main lingua francas, Chadian Arabic and Sara; illustrate that official language designation without accounting for sociolinguistic realities may hinder effective bilingualism.

## The Arabic, French and English language situation in Chad

Arabic has been present in Chad since shortly before the 14th century, introduced by Arab groups such as the Tunjûr and Judhâm, who used Literary Arabic in the Sultanates of Bornu, Ouaddaï, and Baguirmi (Coudray, 1996). Over time, Arabic became associated with administration, religion, and elite identity, particularly in northern urban centers, while French gained prominence in the south during colonial rule. Post-independence, political tensions elevated Arabic to official language status, reflecting both historical influence and sociopolitical compromise (Coudray, 1996).

English was introduced through Christian missionary activity in the late 19th century and later expanded via organizations like the American Peace Corps (Anderson, 2008). Its role has grown with globalization and the oil industry, offering educational, vocational, and international opportunities. Although English remains unofficial, it is increasingly competing with French and Arabic as a language of professional and international engagement, motivating many Chadians to learn it for career advancement (Anderson, 2008; Safotso & Ndoubangar, 2018).

### Teachers of Arabic and English in Chad

The early teaching of English in Chad relied heavily on oral accounts, as no formal records exist. In the period surrounding independence, French soldiers and Christian missionaries introduced basic English instruction (Anderson, 2008). Teachers from Ghana, Benin, and West African universities, supported by organizations such as the British Council and the American Peace Corps, contributed to early English-language education. Many Chadians also became English teachers after studying abroad, although unqualified community teachers and part-time instructors long constituted about 70% of the workforce. The training of English teachers has since improved through universities in Chad and neighboring countries, with many now holding Bachelor's, Master's, or PhD degrees.

Arabic instruction initially came from Islamic instructors in Quranic schools and was later strengthened through formal training in Arab countries and the recruitment of native Arabic-speaking teachers. Cooperation with these countries facilitated the establishment of an Arabic department at the University of Chad in the 1990s. Overall, Chadian teachers of French and English gained professional advantages earlier than their Arabic counterparts, reflecting historical, educational, and international influences on language instruction.

### Learners of Arabic and English in Chad

English is taught at all levels of the Chadian education system, and learners show high motivation to acquire the language (Safotso & Ndoubangar, 2020). At the tertiary level, full English departments exist at the Universities of N'Djamena and Doba, while numerous language centers in the capital offer English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, particularly for students aiming to work with multinational companies or pursue opportunities abroad. In primary, secondary, technical, and vocational schools, pupils choose between two foreign languages; Arabic and English; alongside French.

Arabic is similarly taught at all levels of primary and secondary education (Aziber, 2021), but French–Arabic bilingualism studies indicate persistent imbalances in the use of Arabic in official documents and classroom instruction. Public perception of Arabic as an official language, limited teaching resources, and inconsistent completion of teaching activities contribute to slower progress in Arabic education compared with other languages. Most learners of Arabic come from Islamic cultural backgrounds, and technical challenges, including the scarcity of pedagogical materials, further hinder effective instruction.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Bernard Spolsky (2004) theorizes that the language policy of any nation is shaped by four co-occurring conditions: **national ideology**, **the role of English in globalization**, **the sociolinguistic situation**, and **the international movement for linguistic rights of minorities**. *National ideology and identity* refer to the collective beliefs and principles that influence a nation's linguistic decisions. The *role of English* concerns what

Spolsky (2004) calls the “tidal wave of English that is moving into almost every sociolinguistic repertoire,” reflecting its status as the global language of mobility and socioeconomic advancement.

The sociolinguistic situation refers to the number and types of languages present in a society, the number and types of speakers of each language, and the communicative value of each language both within and outside the community (Spolsky, 2004, p. 219). This includes not only factual linguistic realities but also subjective perceptions of linguistic importance. The final factor is the growing global interest in linguistic pluralism and the recognition of the linguistic rights of individuals and minority groups. Of these conditions, only a few are met in the Chadian sociolinguistic context.

Schiffman (2006) argues that the real language policy of any community consists of both overt (de jure) and covert (de facto) policies, which emerge from a community’s unique linguistic culture. While overt policies are created and implemented by authorities, covert policies consist of unwritten sociolinguistic norms that function like policy. As such, language policies cannot be universally theorized; they arise from the cultural “ideas, values, beliefs, attitudes, prejudices, myths, religious strictures, and all other cultural ‘baggage’ that speakers bring to their dealings with language” (Schiffman, 2006, p. 173). Shohamy (2006) similarly calls for a broader interpretation of language policy that includes these covert mechanisms and ideologies shaping language behavior.

Spolsky (2004), however, does not claim that his four motivations constitute a comprehensive theory. Language policy is not produced solely by governments; communities, schools, and families also play crucial roles. For this reason, Spolsky (2007) proposed a tripartite conceptualization of the determinants of language policy, widely used in language policy research. He identifies three components:

- **Language management**, which concerns explicit and observable efforts by authorities “who have or claim to have authority over participants in a domain to modify their practices and beliefs” (Spolsky, 2007, p. 4). In national contexts, this typically refers to legislation, official programs, and policy documents.
- **Language beliefs or ideology**, which concern what communities believe should happen regarding language. Language ideology reflects broader cultural, social, and political principles (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994; Cameron, 2006).
- **Language practices**, referring to how language is actually used in daily life. These are habitual societal norms that are “regular and predictable” (Spolsky, 2007, p. 3), rather than occasional or non-habitual language choices.

Applying Spolsky’s theory to Chad reveals clear limitations. With regard to national ideology, Chad has little resembling a unifying national vision. Instead, military-backed ethnic groups in power, often aligned with Islamic culture, assume they can impose their preferred language on the entire country. Concerning the role of English in globalization, this condition is indeed relevant: English increasingly challenges both French and Arabic in their domains of influence (Ndoubangar & Apuge, 2023). English, as a global language, provides socioeconomic and mobility opportunities for many Chadians.

However, Spolsky’s third condition—the sociolinguistic situation—is problematic in the Chadian context, where the coexistence of French and Arabic remains conflictual (Aziber, 2021). The fourth condition—international interest in the linguistic rights of minorities—is also not applicable, as the Chadian government offers little recognition or protection for linguistic minorities. Thus, among the four key conditions for an effective language policy, only the role of English in globalization is clearly present in Chad.

Furthermore, when considering Spolsky’s three determinants—language management, beliefs, and practices—only language management appears to function in Chad’s language policy, while language beliefs and practices remain inconsistent with policy goals. This section has examined the relevant theoretical frameworks and literature informing the study. The next section discusses the research methodology employed.

## METHOD

This study adopted a **mixed-methods approach**, drawing data from multiple sources, including official government documents, teaching and learning materials for Arabic in primary and secondary schools, and university-level curricula. Data were collected through a **questionnaire, observations**, and the review of official documents.

A **questionnaire** was administered to a sample of **310 participants**, including learners of Arabic and other language users across various public and private institutions. Observations were conducted in classrooms to examine interactions between Arabic instructors and learners, as well as in workplaces to observe language use in professional and social contexts. The review of official documents aimed to determine whether French and/or Arabic speakers can access information without requiring translation.

**Observation sites** included three cities: **N'Djamena** (the capital), **Moundou**, and **Doba**. Within each city, observations were conducted in public services such as schools, universities, ministries, cultural centers, hospitals, media outlets, banks, and insurance companies. This allowed for an assessment of language practices across diverse institutional and social settings.

The **questionnaire** was then administered to users from various public and private institutions, including students learning Arabic. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality, reducing potential response bias.

Finally, **official documents** were collected from public and private sectors, including ministerial orders, public and internal notices, textbooks, teaching materials, newspapers, and signage. These documents were analyzed to assess their adherence to bilingual standards—specifically, whether they were produced in both French and Arabic or only in one of the two languages. **Table 1** below shows the distribution of participants by institution.

Table 1: Distribution of participants per institutions N= 310

Institutions	Gender: Male	Female	Total
Ministries	75	17	92
Schools	57	38	95
Universities	88	18	106
Banks	12	05	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>310</b>

Tale 1 above shows males as the majority of participants in different institutions randomly selected. Women in Chad do not continue their studies to higher levels, which is linked with early marriage and may other social factors. The section that follows discusses findings in turn.

## RESULTS

Data were derived from official documents, course content, questionnaires, and observations, with the aim of assessing the frequency of Arabic use compared to French and other languages.

### Cultural variables

Demographic variables from the questionnaire provide insights into the linguistic background of participants. These include **language proficiency, length of Arabic study, gender, mother tongue, and overall educational level**. **Table 2** below summarizes the results for these demographic variables.

Table 2: Cultural background of participants N =310

Variables	French	Arabic	Other
Mother tongue	0	12	298
Proficiency	199	33	78
Language of study	211	56	43

Findings from **Table 2** above show that only twelve participants reported Arabic as their mother tongue, whereas 298 participants indicated other languages as their first language. Regarding language proficiency, French has the highest number of proficient speakers (199 participants), compared to only 33 participants who reported fluency in Arabic, and 78 who were proficient in other languages.

Furthermore, 211 participants completed their studies with French as their language of instruction, while only 56 reported having studied through Arabic. Forty-three participants stated that they did not study in either French or Arabic. These results clearly illustrate a considerable imbalance in the use of Chad's two official languages, with French overwhelmingly dominating as the primary medium of instruction. English also appears within the category of "other languages," reflecting its increasing presence and frequency of use among Chadians.

The following section analyses findings related to the **Arabic teaching programme**.

### Arabic Teachers in Chad

The Arabic teaching programme constitutes another important variable in this study. This part examines who the Arabic instructors are, their academic and linguistic backgrounds, and the languages they use in delivering instruction. **Table 3** below presents the distribution of fifty (50) Arabic teachers working in schools and universities in Chad who were sampled for this study.

Table 3: distribution of teachers of Arabic per cultural background N=50

Religion Nationality	Muslim	Christian	L1 French	L1 Arabic
<b>Chad</b>	29	1	1	29
<b>Egypt</b>	15	0	0	15
<b>Sudan</b>	5	0	0	5
<b>Total</b>	49	1	1	49

**Table 3** above indicates that nearly all the Arabic teachers who participated in this study are Muslims, with only one Christian respondent. All of them reported Arabic as their first language (L1), except for one teacher whose L1 is French. The data also show that the majority of Arabic teachers are Chadians, meaning that most received their training from universities in Chad. Nevertheless, Chad continues to benefit from international cooperation, particularly from Egypt and Sudan, which provide support in the training and deployment of Arabic instructors.

It is important to note that several trained teachers of Arabic do not consistently fulfil their pedagogical responsibilities as expected. Some teachers appear more invested in promoting Arabic through political or ideological engagement than in prioritizing classroom teaching. This situation may partly explain why Arabic teaching and learning in Chad have not achieved the anticipated outcomes.

The following section examines participants' attitudes toward Arabic and French.

## Attitudes of participants toward Arabic and French

Participants' attitudes were assessed through observations and interviews conducted with workers and students across institutions and schools. A two-point Likert scale—*strongly prefer* and *strongly reject*—was used to measure their preferences regarding the two official languages. **Table 4** below presents the general trends observed in participants' attitudes.

Table 4: Distribution of attitudes towards Arabic and French N=310

Languages	Strongly prefer	Strongly reject	Percentages	
Arabic	114	206	36,77%	66,45%
French	196	104	64,23%	33,55%
Total	310	310	100	100

**Table 4** above shows that the majority of participants (196) prefer using French for workplace communication, while 114 participants prefer Arabic. Those who reject Arabic for workplace communication represent 206 respondents (66.45%), whereas those who reject French account for 104 respondents (36.77%). These findings suggest the presence of sociolinguistic tension, illustrating how a top-down language policy may generate divisions among populations with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The following section examines the teaching and evaluation of Arabic in schools and universities.

## Teaching Arabic in schools and universities

The teaching of Arabic as a second language should ideally follow the same pedagogical principles used for teaching French or English as a second language. In other words, it should employ methods specifically designed for learners for whom Arabic is not a native language. According to Alshahrani (2019), the process is eclectic, integrating functional and communicative approaches and linking language learning to real-life and workplace contexts. Rosni et al. (2016) emphasize two main components for effective Arabic teaching and learning: the use of appropriate Arabic teaching materials and the implementation of structured language activities.

In the Chadian context, however, teachers and scholars of Arabic tend to focus primarily on the acquisition of basic elements—alphabet, nouns, pronouns, verbs, determiners—at all school levels, often without following a specific or coherent pedagogical approach. Alshahrani (2019) points out the difficulties of adapting a “TESOL-like” framework to Arabic, and the absence of such an adapted model, along with the challenges highlighted by Rosni et al. (2016), partly explains why the expansion of Arabic remains limited in Chad.

Another problem identified by participants concerns teachers' attendance and commitment. Many teachers reportedly come to school only sporadically and leave after a few days. Evaluation practices are also irregular: in some cases, teachers send exam topics to the school administration, which manages the invigilation, and scripts are later returned to teachers for marking while they remain elsewhere for personal or professional engagements. Such practices indicate a lack of professional investment in the teaching of Arabic, which negatively affects learning outcomes.

The next section discusses the frequency of Arabic and French use in official documents.

## Frequency use of Arabic and French in official communication

A country that claims bilingualism must reflect this status in both oral and written communication across government and public institutions. Citizens should be proficient in both languages, in speaking and in writing, for bilingualism to function effectively. Findings from this study show that only a small number of participants

are able to speak and write Arabic at a level adequate for official communication. In recent years, some official documents—such as decrees and ministerial orders—have begun to be produced in both French and Arabic. **Table 5** below presents the distribution of language use in various official communication contexts across different workplaces.

Table 5: Distribution of language use in official communication. N=310

Language of Communication	Teaching	Reports, acts	Meetings	Total	Percentage
Arabic	12	2	22	36	11.61
Arabic and French	11	10	39	60	19.35
French,	99	30	85	214	69.04
Total				<b>310</b>	<b>100%</b>

The table above shows a clear disequilibrium between the use of Arabic and French in official workplace communication. Only thirty-six participants (11.61%) use Arabic for teaching, report writing, and workplace communication. This indicates the low use of Arabic in official domains, despite its status as an official language with equal legal value to French. Furthermore, sixty participants (19.35%) use both French and Arabic for teaching, report writing, and workplace communication. This outcome raises concerns regarding the nature of bilingualism in Chad. Instead of reflecting balanced proficiency and functional complementarity between the two official languages, the pattern points toward a diglossic situation (Ferguson, 1959), in which one linguistic variety assumes a high-prestige role while the other occupies a low-prestige position. This reflects a broader sociolinguistic issue tied to language policy and language planning. As Spolsky (2004) argues, effective language management is essential for achieving the goals of any language policy; without solid management mechanisms, neither language planning nor language policy can be successfully implemented. The table also shows that 214 participants (69.04%) use French for teaching, report writing, and workplace communication. This clearly demonstrates the dominant use of French over Arabic in official settings, even though political discourse advocates for equality between the two languages.

## CONCLUSION

This research investigated how Chadian language policy influences the development of French–Arabic bilingualism. Spolsky (2004) identifies four core actors whose involvement is essential for the success of any language policy: government authorities, community groups, schools, and families. He further proposes a tripartite conceptualisation of language policy, consisting of language management, language beliefs, and language practices (Spolsky, 2007).

In light of the findings of this study, families, schools, and community groups have not been meaningfully involved in the decision to adopt Arabic as an official language. Rather, this decision was taken solely by political elites in the years immediately following independence. The data also reveal that all Arabic teachers are Muslim, use Arabic as their L1, and prefer that Arabic—often without distinguishing between the colloquial and the standard variety—be used by all Chadians. However, they do not consistently attend or ensure regular instruction of the language. Participants from the south, whose L1 is French, tend to reject Arabic, perceiving it primarily as the language of Islam. Consequently, they demonstrate low motivation toward learning it, treating Arabic as a compulsory school subject pursued merely for academic credit.

These findings point to a significant sociolinguistic issue that must be addressed by the Chadian government if its language policy is to succeed. Government-driven language management, even when heavily financed, cannot achieve its objectives if it excludes the grassroots population, whose cultural diversity is central to the country's

linguistic landscape. A sustainable and inclusive language policy requires the active engagement of all stakeholders—not only political leaders but also families, educational institutions, and community groups.

## Limitations of the Findings

Although the study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of French–Arabic bilingualism in Chad, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the research sample—while diverse—may not fully represent all sociolinguistic communities, particularly remote rural areas where language practices and beliefs may differ. Second, the study relies primarily on self-reported data, which may be influenced by perceptions of identity, religion, or political sentiment. Third, the analysis focuses mainly on formal educational and institutional contexts; informal language practices within households, markets, and social networks were not investigated in depth. Finally, the study captures the current sociolinguistic climate but does not track long-term changes over time, which limits its ability to predict future trends in bilingualism and language attitudes.

## Contributions to the Chadian Education System

Despite these limitations, the study makes several important contributions to the Chadian education system. It highlights the need for a more balanced and culturally sensitive approach to bilingual education, one that recognizes the diverse linguistic identities of Chadian learners. The findings underscore the importance of involving families, teachers, and community leaders in language planning to ensure broader acceptance and implementation of Arabic instruction. The study also reveals gaps in teacher training, instructional consistency, and curriculum design, providing evidence-based recommendations for improving the quality of Arabic teaching. Moreover, it offers policymakers clear insights into why Arabic continues to face resistance in certain regions, thereby informing more inclusive and pragmatic language policies. Ultimately, the research contributes to ongoing debates on linguistic equity and aims to support the development of a more cohesive and contextually grounded bilingual education system in Chad.

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