

# Language and the Sustainable Development Goals

Selected proceedings of the 12th Language and  
Development Conference

Dakar, Senegal, 2017

Edited by Philip Harding-Esch with Hywel Coleman

## 7. LILIEMA: Language-independent literacies for inclusive education in multilingual areas

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### Abstract

This chapter introduces the innovative educational programme LILIEMA, a repertoire-based and language-independent method for achieving and nurturing culturally anchored literacy in multilingual contexts. Unique in kind, LILIEMA is the first programme that introduces literacy not based on a particular language but by drawing on the entire repertoire of learners present in the classroom. The flexible and adaptive design principle underpinning the method is inspired by multilingual oral and written communicative practices that are widespread throughout West Africa. LILIEMA has been jointly created, piloted and further developed by us – a team of teachers, trainers, researchers and community members from the Global South and the Global North. We introduce the motivations for developing LILIEMA, present the syllabus and teaching materials of the method and describe its implementation in the Casamance region in southern Senegal, drawing on examples from LILIEMA classrooms. We end the chapter by making a case for its potential to contribute to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals in the domain of education in multilingual settings characterised by mobility and migration.

### Introduction: The case for language-independent literacies

#### Paradoxes of literacy

In most African countries, literacy is characterised by a paradox: the formal education system, based on the teaching of the official languages of colonial provenance, is struggling and plagued by stagnating enrolment and high dropout rates. In Senegal, the country in the focus of this chapter, 81 per cent of children are enrolled in primary school, but only 51 per cent complete the primary cycle (UNESCO, 2016a). Additionally, even learners who complete primary education are frequently unable to read and write or lose the literacy and language skills acquired at school because they have little occasion to use them in their daily lives. French, the official language of the country and sole medium of instruction in the majority of state schools, is only needed for formal employment, which is an option for a minority of the population (World Bank, 2018).

Thus, the school system is based on a language and associated knowledge system which are irrelevant for most learners, while not providing them with the skills they require to succeed. Because of the linguistic and cultural obstacles learners face at school, even those that strive for formal employment are ill prepared for participation in the formal economic sector.

This paradox is of long date and widely recognised (Brock-Utne & Skattum, 2009; Ouane & Glanz, 2010; Ouane, 2003; Wolff, 2016; Brock-Utne & Hopson, 2005; Alexander, 2008) and has therefore yielded numerous calls for mother tongue-based multilingual education (for instance Ouane & Glanz, 2010). As a result, in some areas of Senegal, languages with larger speaker bases and recognised as national languages,<sup>1</sup> such as Wolof, Pulaar and Seereer, are taught to some extent in their standardised varieties in primary schools, although their use remains limited in scope and has low uptake. This situation mirrors that of local languages in many African countries, regardless of their status as being recognised as national languages or not. The reasons for the limited attraction of national and local language education are multiple; a central dilemma remains that local language education proposes a linguistic solution to problems of a political nature (Mufwene, this volume). As long as there is no real space for local languages in the highest echelons of the political system, formal economy and state education sector, learners and parents will remain committed to the language that allows full participation in these domains, however elusive it may be for them or their children to access them. For most of Sub-Saharan Africa, this language is the official language of the country, of colonial origin.

Another problem is often overlooked: the discussion around mother tongue education is based on the assumption that the respective languages exist as objects ready to be used in education, and that more or less homogeneous language areas where particular languages can be implemented can be identified. In reality, local language education relies on the teaching of an often fictional standard variety which either is nobody's 'mother tongue' or is only the 'mother tongue' of the fraction of a larger and internally diverse linguistic group, thus alienating all those speaking varieties more distant from the selected one. This factor is compounded

1. In the case of Senegal, the Senegalese Constitution names six languages as 'national languages': Jola, Mandinka, Pulaar, Seereer, Soninke and Wolof. It also recognises 'any other national language to be codified'.

by the important roles played by standard varieties in social selection. All epistemes of education in Western-inspired formal education rely on elite closure being achieved, alongside other means, through the creation of a standard language that is intended to be mastered by few. Even in monolingual environments, becoming the native speaker and writer of a standard language is a time-consuming and resource-intensive process. It is naïve to expect graduates of the under-resourced African education systems to master even one standard language culture – let alone several – when this goal is not achieved for one language in many resource-rich Western contexts. In this respect, a cynical interpretation of the *status quo* is to see African education systems, often analysed as flailing, as actually fulfilling their role of maintaining national elites through their adherence to official languages. Furthermore, the official languages are often not taught as foreign languages but introduced as if they were languages that learners already count in their repertoires, which is only the case for urban elites.

Additionally, and importantly, there are no homogeneous language areas on the African continent. Mobility, migration and social exchange beyond imaginary linguistic borders, and often across the colonially imposed borders of African states, are an old and deeply engrained African reality (Lüpke & Storch, 2013). Selecting any language would always exclude fostered children, in-married women (i.e. women who enter this community from another one, through marriage), economic migrants, civil servants posted outside their areas of origins, refugees, and many others. Larger languages, which have a realistic chance of maintaining standard language cultures, are often associated with colonial expansion and owe their standardised versions to colonial activities (regarding Wolof in Senegal, see McLaughlin 2008a, 2008b), so are similarly ambivalent in terms of instruments of oppression vs. instruments of wider communication as the official languages.

This situation is exacerbated in highly multilingual settings. In Africa, not only urban areas are highly multilingual. Rural multilingual areas, in which languages are nominally confined to villages or small geographic areas but where multilingualism is intense, are widespread, although under-researched and underrepresented in public imagination (Cobbina, 2019; Di Carlo, 2018; Di Carlo & Good, 2017; Good & Di Carlo, 2019; Good et al., 2019; Goodchild, 2019; Lüpke, 2016b, 2017, 2018c; Lüpke & Watson (2020); Weidl, 2018). In many multilingual areas, exographic writing practices (i.e. writing in (a) different, typically larger, language(s) than the one(s) used orally) have a long tradition, because writing needs to transcend the scope of the local and connect writers and readers over great distances, therefore necessarily crossing language boundaries in the case of locally confined languages (Lüpke, 2011; Lüpke & Bao-Diop, 2014; Lüpke, 2018a).

Parents and learners therefore have many compelling reasons, the prestige of the official languages notwithstanding, to reject education in local languages. These reasons need to be understood and respected as rational and informed decisions in the light of sociolinguistic settings whose complexities are often underestimated by outsiders (see Anderson & Ansah, 2015; Barasa, 2015; Gafaranga & Torras, 2016), rather than being misunderstood as misguided incarnations of a linguistic inferiority complex alone.

### Western solutions for African problems?

There is unanimity in scholarly research in diagnosing these factors as the ones that turn inclusive language planning in Africa into a seemingly insurmountable challenge. There is now also a large body of research on the colonial origins of ethnolinguistic groups and their associated imaginary territories, on the birth of standardisation efforts in Africa at a time when the romantic idea of the ethnolinguistic nation state had its heyday in Europe, by European missionaries and colonial linguists, on the resulting linguistic misappraisal of sociolinguistic settings and on the exclusion of speakers of non-standard varieties (Blommaert, 2004, 2010, 2011; Lane et al., 2017; Lüpke & Storch, 2013).

Education planners are often not reached by this body of research in sociolinguistics and anthropological linguistics, but remain subject to unquestioned language ideologies that create a favourable bias towards standardisation. At the same time, advances in language planning have been stopped in their tracks by the road block present in the dominant imagination of multilingual education as language-based, and hence of conceptualising multilingualism as a multitude of monolingualisms, now widely criticised in socio- and applied linguistics (Cummins, 2007, 2008; García & Wei, 2014; Heller, 2007).

Language-based approaches to multilingual education turn multilingualism, especially in small languages, into a burden and are entirely unsuited to maintaining linguistic diversity. This holds for the richest nation-states, which struggle adequately to resource all nationally recognised languages, even if they are as wealthy as Switzerland and only count four languages of education. It is simply an illusion that a language-based approach will be implemented in the foreseeable future in African countries such as Senegal, with more than 30 languages, or Nigeria, counting more than 400, alike. Introducing standard languages would necessitate a drastic standardisation and reduction of the number of languages and varieties prior to the implementation of such a programme, a measure that would give room to enormous political conflict and would result in the ironic effect that nobody's 'mother tongue' would be taught – a situation very similar to the one holding at the moment.

It appears that Western solutions of language management (relying either on the exclusive use of one standard language or on the, equally problematic, co-existence of a small number of standard languages) are simply inadequate for the situations of high linguistic diversity that hold on the African continent and in other areas worldwide that have remained at the margins of European imperial linguistic interventions (Lüpke, 2017, 2018c).

### **The true dilemma: Western solutions for what is not an African problem**

If multilingualism remains a problem that needs to be regulated through costly means in the West, it seems more promising to look to Africa itself for solutions for what perhaps is not even a problem in indigenous practice.

The first step of such an endeavour needs to be an investigation of African writing practices in languages other than the official ones. In contrast to widely held assumptions, Africans do read and write, but often in forms of literacy that are not recognised as such by linguists and education planners or even visible to them, and that are also discounted by the readers and writers themselves. The grassroots literacies Africans practise across the continent are old, such as the writing of African languages in Arabic characters (also called Ajami, or for Wolof, Wolofal) for personal literacy, religious and literary purposes; or new, such as the writing of Facebook posts, text messages, graffiti and signage in the linguistic landscapes using the Latin alphabet. What these practices have in common is that they are as mono- or multilingual as their writers and readers. This flexibility entails that writers do not uphold strict boundaries between languages, as done in standardised writing practice. Repertoire-based writing is similar to fluid oral language use described as 'translanguaging' (García & Li, 2014).

Language-independent or repertoire-based literacies are well known to scholars of literacy and multilingualism. In these fields, a growing body of research investigates the fluid and adaptive nature of West African grassroots writing, both in Ajami schools of religious and literary writing and in informal writing practised on mobile phones and social media (for case studies on Senegal, see Lexander & Alcón (forthcoming); Lexander, 2010; Lüpke & Bao-Diop, 2014; Lüpke, 2018a; McLaughlin, 2014, forthcoming). Oral and reading translanguaging is being promoted in South Africa as a means of inclusive communication flanking the standard languages of higher education (Childs, 2016; Heugh, 2015; Makalela, 2015; Probyn, 2015; Sefotho & Makalela, 2017).

In the subsequent parts of this chapter, we describe the setting, research and writing practices that inspired LILIEMA, particularly in Casamance, Senegal; and consider why the established approaches to education described above are not appropriate there. We then go on to describe the LILIEMA method, syllabus and materials in more detail, including examples and a consideration of why key choices have been made. Finally, we discuss how language-independent literacies, such as that championed by LILIEMA, can contribute to sustainable development, and identify areas for further research and action.

### **The LILIEMA model of language-independent literacies**

#### **The setting, research and writing practices that inspired LILIEMA**

Inspired by existing African grassroots literacies, we propose the LILIEMA<sup>2</sup> model to complement standard language-base approaches to literacy. The case study discussed here is situated in the Lower Casamance region of Senegal. Located in the South of Senegal, the natural region of Casamance comprises the three provinces of Ziguinchor, Kolda and Sédiou. The area has 1,664,000 inhabitants on a surface area of over 11,000 square miles (RGPHAE, 2014) speaking approximately 30 languages. The Casamance is separated from the rest of Senegal by the country of The Gambia, and shares another border with Guinea-Bissau. It forms part of a zone very different from the north of Senegal for climatic, historical, political and cultural reasons that has suffered from a longstanding secessionist conflict led by the MFDC (Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques) demanding the independence of this region since 1982 (WANEP, 2015). In particular the Lower Casamance area that forms the province of Ziguinchor is characterised by:

- its status as a cross-border region shaped by three different colonial powers, and a legacy of three different official languages (French in Senegal, English in The Gambia, and Portuguese in Guinea Bissau)
- its high concentration of frontier communities, that is, of small-scale, clan- and family-based settlements spanning national and linguistic borders and populated by inhabitants with high mobility and intense social ties to neighbouring villages and regions
- its high incidence of internal and external migration, for reasons ranging from social exchanges, child fostering and marriage exchanges to economic mobility and seeking refuge from conflict (the Casamance conflict and the Guinea Bissau independence war being the most recent).

2. The acronym LILIEMA stands for language-independent literacies for inclusive education in multilingual areas. Its French equivalent is *libre pratique de l'écrit pour une éducation inclusive dans les zones plurilingues*.

Many of the smaller languages of the area have only one village or a group of villages as their nominal home base; these languages include the clusters of Baïnouk, many Joola, and Bayot languages. These and larger languages and language clusters such as Balant, Mankanya, Manjak, Pepel and Pulaar co-exist with a Portuguese-based Creole (Kriolu), Wolof and Mandinka, which are also used as languages of wider communication. Repertoires span closely and remotely related languages of the Atlantic family, but also include genealogically unrelated languages (see Lüpke et al., 2018 for details). Every inhabitant of Casamance is multilingual, either through internal and external migration and the languages acquired during personal trajectories, or because of deeply rooted social exchanges resulting in small-scale multilingualism (Cobbinah et al., 2016; Lüpke, 2016a, 2016b, 2018b). Marriage links often transcend linguistic and national borders, child fostering is widespread and brings children with very different linguistic repertoires together in one household, and ritual, economic and religious mobility is pervasive.

Formulating an efficient and inclusive language policy for multilingual areas like Casamance poses an insurmountable challenge for language-based approaches. It is unrealistic to standardise the region's many languages, develop mother tongue teaching materials, train teachers, create a stable learning environment and provide the literacy materials and written environment needed to make literacy sustainable for the many small languages with speaker numbers ranging in the hundreds or thousands. SIL, the only major language development actor in the region, has withdrawn literacy activities from the area. Any language choice would result in the exclusion of a part of the local population: if the patrimonial language<sup>3</sup> of a place is selected, in addition to the high costs for a small target group, many of its inhabitants will be excluded, since they do not speak this language, do not identify with it, or are still learning it. If a larger language is chosen, the local languages become invisible, and local culture is completely marginalised. In the area, opinions are divided on which indigenous languages could be used in mother tongue teaching: while the most liberal respondents are open to teaching in Wolof, there is also vocal opposition

to this choice, since it invokes the threats of northern Senegalese domination and Wolofisation that have played a central role in the Casamance conflict. In addition, and as observed in other African contexts, parents and learners often make rhetorical commitments to initiatives involving literacy in indigenous languages but do not follow suit in practice, because proficiency and literacy in the official language are seen as the main learning goals of formal education, for the reasons outlined in the first part of the introduction, above.

In response to this complex situation, and in a team of trainers, teachers and learners from the Global South and North in the Crossroads project, we jointly developed the LILIEMA method or *l'alphabet sans frontières* (the alphabet without borders). LILIEMA stems from the transcription practices in the Crossroads project,<sup>4</sup> during which a team of multilingual local transcribers made thick transcriptions of multilingual speech data<sup>5</sup> from three neighbouring villages in the Lower Casamance, using the official alphabet for Senegalese languages. We decided on a language-independent transcription model rather than using the standard orthographies for those named languages for which these are available, because this model mirrors the actual existing grassroots literacies of Senegal. Our transcription model, just like grassroots literacy practice, retains the variability present in speech, which is erased through standard-based transcriptions, thus eliminating the variation that offers insight into socially motivated variation in oral language use and that reflects speakers' indexical choices in speaking and writing. Most language-independent grassroots writing in Senegal is based on French as the lead language, i.e. it employs French orthographic conventions for the writing of local languages. Out of respect for Senegalese language policies we replaced French lead-language writing in which most of this informal writing takes place with a language-independent strategy using the official alphabet of Senegal. The Senegalese alphabet shares many characters and sound-grapheme associations with the official alphabets for neighbouring countries and therefore has the added advantage of overcoming colonial language boundaries which are perpetuated in informal lead-language writing in the ex-colonial languages.

3. Named languages are connected to particular places as their territorial languages (Blommaert, 2010), often as the language(s) associated with the remembered (in virilocal societies, male) founder, and serving to socially index this particular affiliation with a place. Not all the inhabitants of a place are ideologically represented according to this logic, termed 'patrimonial language ideology' by Lüpke (2018b). Strangers remain linked to their remembered place of origin, and in-married women (i.e. who have entered this community from another one, through marriage) and fostered children (and formerly, slaves and captives) from outside the patrimonial language area are likewise excluded or subsumed under the identity of the male head of the family.
4. The Leverhulme Research Leadership Award Project 'At the Crossroads – investigating the unexplored side of multilingualism', led by Friederike Lüpke, investigated rural multilingualism in three villages in the Lower Casamance. See [www.soascrossroads.org](http://www.soascrossroads.org) for details of this project.
5. Inspired by Geertz (1973), thick transcriptions here mean fine-grained, non-standardised transcriptions of multi-participant conversations, complemented by data on self-reported repertoires and transcribers', speech participants' and researchers' perspectives on the circumstances, motivations, and intentions relevant for the interaction.

LILIEMA is a complementary educational programme that valorises local knowledge, particularly those parts of learners' repertoires that are not represented in the formal school curriculum or in fact anywhere in the public sphere, while also including larger languages. In the highly multilingual context of Casamance, we do not focus on literacy in a particular language, as this would turn multilingualism into a burden, exclude many learners, and would not connect to the social literacy practices used informally. Grass-roots writing spans writers' multilingual repertoires, since they connect with interlocutors who speak and write different languages, often not separating codes but using appropriate linguistic resources in translanguaging fashion.

Acknowledging this flexible nature of African multilingual writing, LILIEMA is based on the teaching of sound-letter associations that can be applied to entire repertoires rather than being taught for a particular language. It

allows inclusive literacy teaching in areas where participants are highly multilingual, particularly in small, non-standardised languages. Just like spoken discourse, which oscillates between more and less mono- and multilingual contexts of interaction, and between code interaction and fusion, LILIEMA allows the maintenance and transcendence of separate codes in writing. This adaptivity makes it ideally suited for an educational programme that sees literacy as a social practice that has direct relevance for readers' and writers' culturally anchored literacy needs, in line with UNESCO's vision of literacy (UNESCO, 2016b).

Figure 1 shows an illustration of the method. The drawings to the left represent a chair (*eramun*) and a well (*ekolon*), words shared by a number of Joola languages.<sup>6</sup> The drawing of a house to the right features the words for 'house' in Baïnouk Gujaher (*adig*) and Kriolu (*kasa*).

**Figure 1:** LILIEMA classroom examples illustrating monolingual (left, in Joola) and multilingual uses (right, in Kriolu and Baïnouk Gujaher) of the method



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6. Joola languages form dialect linkages that are often only minimally differentiated in a number of emblematic areas of phonetics and lexicon, another compelling reason for a 'translanguaging' approach to literacy that does not build separate literacies for them but allows the flexible expression of socially significant sameness and difference in writing.

LILIEMA is not conceived as a literacy programme for illiterate learners. Aiming local language literacy campaigns mainly at illiterate learners has turned them into *de facto* second tier programmes not attractive to writers of the official languages, and therefore, our intention is to develop an inclusive cultural enrichment programme for all learners.

LILIEMA classes are taught in two levels: Level 1 for beginners, and Level 2 for learners with previous experience of the method. LILIEMA learning goals respect the variable multilingual nature of every-day interaction and are based on the attested purposes of existing grass-roots literacies throughout Africa.

- Level 1: At the end of Level 1, learners will be able to read and write personal names and words for instance for shopping lists and inventories, numbers, phone numbers, names and short phrases.
- Level 2: At the end of Level 2, learners will be able to read and write personal messages and texts (for instance text chat messages, Facebook posts and letters). They will be able to do simple book-keeping, write personal notes and compose longer texts like the description of local events and procedural texts capturing local knowledge as well as stories.

Currently, we are preparing follow-up activities for locations in which several LILIEMA courses have taken place. In order to allow course participants to practise their skills and create tangible and sustainable outputs of relevance for local contexts, we are organising a number of study days around topics of interest, for example on local history and recipes for food and soap preparation. These study days will culminate in the production of booklets that will be circulated in all the villages where classes have been held.

### The LILIEMA method in detail

LILIEMA is based on sound-letter correspondences codified in the official Alphabet of National Languages of Senegal, which is a phonetically based alphabet designed to be applied across all Senegalese national languages (with very minor variations to account for certain phonological differences). Rather than teaching this alphabet based on a specific language, as in all mother tongue literacy programmes, LILIEMA introduces the sound values of letters based on examples from all languages present in the classroom. LILIEMA learners learn to recognise letters and their sound values and to read and write words and short texts not just in one language, but in all the languages in their repertoires. LILIEMA is based on official alphabets, but not on official orthographies. It does not introduce a standard version of a language or insist on standard spellings. Variation is tolerated, and it is expected that conventions will develop through use over time, as they have in indigenous writing in other contexts in Africa, for instance in Ajami writing or digital writing practices.

LILIEMA was piloted, in 2017–18, in two villages in the Lower Casamance area of Senegal and since then has been taught in eight successful courses in four different villages in 2019–20. All classes have been developed and taught by community members familiar with the multilingual environments of their villages, under the leadership of the authors – linguists, local trainers and supervisors with extensive experience as multilingual transcribers for the Crossroads project. Teachers from all course sites participated in several training workshops. During the first workshop in January 2017, they learned the official alphabet of Senegal, experienced language-independent writing and developed their own learning resources. During the second workshop in November 2017, and based on the first teaching experiences, the two course levels and their syllabi and progression were determined, and worksheets for both levels were created. In 2019, based on feedback and evaluations of the pilots, we revised the method, including the syllabus and teaching materials and trained additional teachers. An association has been founded and partnerships with the Baïnouk cultural organisation BOREPAB and the Université Assane Seck in Ziguinchor have been set up. BOREPAB was instrumental in the codification of Baïnouk, recognised since 2005 as a national language of Senegal. Baïnouk speakers are seen as a single ethnic group at national level, but the different Baïnouk languages, which are not mutually intelligible, reflect the internal heterogeneity of this group. In the codification document, which needed to demonstrate that the language to be codified is to be written in the national alphabet, BOREPAB members therefore presented one text written in three different Baïnouk languages. With LILIEMA, there is now a teaching method available that reflects this internal diversity along with the different multilingual environments in which Baïnouk languages are spoken.

### Syllabus and teaching materials

Initially, the two LILIEMA course levels each consisted of 38 course units. In the revised programme, both levels are taught in ten course units (see Table 1) which are taught over ten to 15 lessons, organised in a way that is adapted to the progress and availability of participants and scheduled to take place two to three times per week. This new timetable allows for flexibility regarding social obligations of participants and is adapted to the seasonal flow of activities. Teaching is scheduled during the dry season, when there are fewer agricultural activities, and avoids times of important (religious) ceremonies and shared social obligations.

The sequence of letters is independent of sound or syllable frequencies in particular languages and does not introduce letters with the same sound values in French first, because of the multilingual character of the method and the different sound-grapheme associations of the three official languages (French, Portuguese, and English) used in the cross-border region where LILIEMA is being taught.

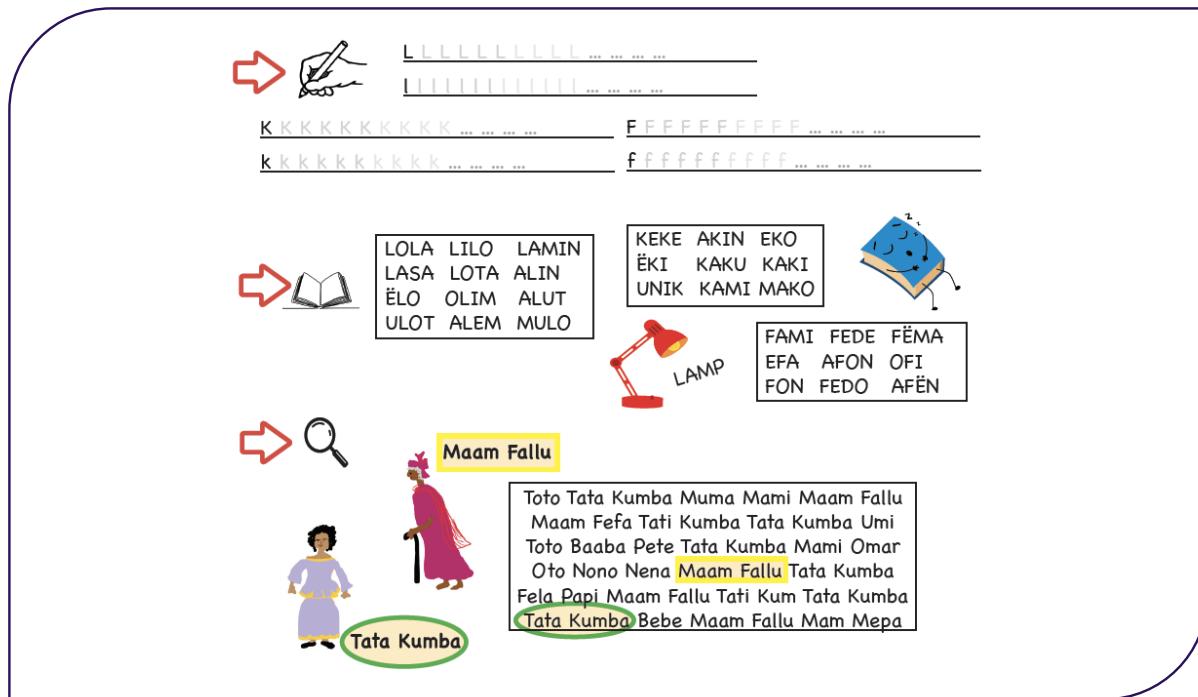
Not all phonological contrasts of the languages covered in the pilot so far are represented, nor is this intended, as LILIEMA teaches literacy through an alphabet, not through phonetic or phonological transcription (see Lüpke, 2011). However, if desired by learners, it is possible at any time to use symbols used for particular languages – for instance <ð> used for the [+ATR]<sup>7</sup> vowel /ø/ in Joola languages, or <b>, an implosive part of the alphabet for Pulaar – which are not taught as part of the syllabus so far, as the method is designed to flexibly respond to learners' repertoires and existing literacies.

Four worksheets per course unit have been created for Level 1. These worksheets introduce letters and illustrate their sound values with numerous multilingual examples. Diverse reading, writing, sorting and matching exercises are offered on the worksheets to create diverse and engaging classroom interaction. In addition, teachers work with letter and photo cards and a number of props, such as shells with letters and numbers on them to allow for a wide variety of exercise types and games. Teachers have a separate manual explaining the exercises.

**Table 1:** Progression for Level 1

Unit	Letters introduced	Unit	Letters introduced
1	A-a; O-o; I-i; B-b	6	R-r; S-s; Y-y; Ñ-ñ
2	M-m; N-n; E-e; U-u	7	G-g; Q-q; H-h; Ð-ñ
3	J-j; C-c; P-p	8	V-v; Z-z; ſ-ſ
4	D-d; T-t; W-w; Ë-ë	9	Revision
5	L-l; K-k; F-f; X-x	10	Revision

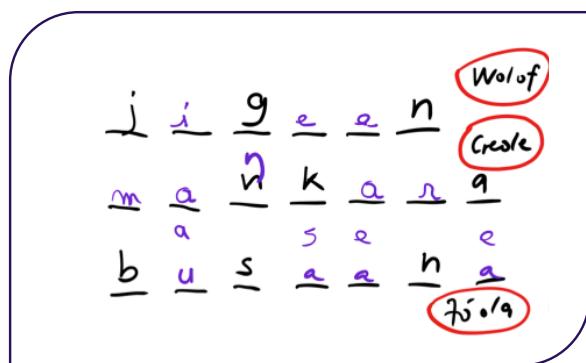
**Figure 2:** Extract of a Level 1 worksheet



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In the worksheet exercise shown in Figure 2, participants have to write the letters that are discussed in the unit. This helps the teachers observe whether everybody is able to read and write them. Examples given further down the worksheet are intended to help learners practise their reading skills and are either names or lexemes widely shared across languages (for example, *maam* for 'grandmother' and *tata* for 'aunt').

**Figure 3:** Extract of a Level 1 whiteboard gap exercise using examples in Wolof, Kriolu and Joola



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The examples in the whiteboard gap text exercise in Figure 3 illustrate orthographic variation. The Wolof word *jigeen* (woman) has been recorded with one spelling only. The Kriolu word *mankara* (peanut) can be spelled either with the grapheme for the alveolar nasal [n] or with the velar nasal [ŋ]. The two spelling variants reflect deep vs. shallow orthographic choices: <n> / [n] represents the input of regressive phonetic assimilation to the following velar consonant, while <ŋ> / [ŋ] constitutes the output of nasal assimilation in front of a velar consonant. This variation is not only tolerated, but actively taught in the classroom, since learners will encounter both options in the written environment. The superscript letters <a>, <s>, <e> and <e> above the word *busaana* (dugout canoe), yield the common family name Bassène (in French spelling), if replacing the corresponding letters in *busaana*.

The example lexemes of the worksheet in Figure 4 are multilingual. The phonemes /ʃ/ and /z/ and their graphemes are introduced with words from Joola Eegima (*gaejo*, to braid) and Bayot (*azunguru*, girl). For typing on portable devices, we also introduce alternative spelling avoiding special characters and using digraphs instead, e.g. <sh> for <ʃ>. The examples promoting reading skills below include several more local languages. Exercise 4, in which participants have to prepare dictations for their peers, is open to any language.

**Figure 4:** Example of the first page of a student worksheet (left) with the corresponding instructions to the teacher in French (right)

**Leçon 4**

Révision: L'enseignant(e) écrit des mots avec les lettres n, ñ et ñ dans le tableau et les élèves doivent les lire.

1. Introduction des sons Z, et ñ suivi d'une explication claire de la prononciation l'enseignant doit faire répéter aux élèves les sons.
2. Reconnaissance et prononciation : Les élèves doivent savoir lire les lettres et les reconnaître.
3. Souligner les bons mots !
4. Dictat entre les étudiants

**Jeux:** Parmi les groupes d'élèves lequel va trouver plus de groupes de mots: Chaque groupe de mots doit contenir un mot avec Z, un mot avec ñ et un mot avec W pour avoir un point.

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**Figure 5:** Example of the first page of a student worksheet (left) with the corresponding instructions to the teacher in French (right) – more advanced level

**Devoir :**

1. Lisez les petits dialogues.
2. Écrivez un dialogue.
3. Trouvez les mots dans le cadre à gauche qui répond aux lettres dans le cadre à droite.

**Exercise 1 (Musa and Faatu):**

M: Faatu yaa ngl ci wañ bi?	F: Waaw, maa ngl ni !
M: Looy togg tey ?	F: Dama togg Yassa Jén.
M: Na neex de !	F: Waaw, dina neex koy !
M: Maa ngl dem. Ba ci kanam.	F: Waaw baax na, demal te riëw!

**Exercise 2 (Momo and Damas):**

M: Boy unig! sue gëëgen?	D: Sue anq?
M: Barselon anga Reel.	D: Negri amén llamoot daneg ha sue.
M: Man fi unateli, sue aillot basen!	D: Nee gamuki?
M: Real indegi alaor!	

**Exercise 3 (Letters):**

ranodoëdk	xnosa
ramanka	ilibn
aumurñf	enolk
odojo	kbtumoeo
aamujuf	1. <b>aisj</b>
fuara	ubşrgaan

**Exercise 4 (Word search):**

1. <b>iasj</b>	7. uraaf
2. fumaru	8. basangru
3. bilni	9. joodo
4. koloj	10. dékkandoor
5. soxna	11. mankara
6. janufula	12. uboketom

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In the worksheet in Figure 5 an exercise for more advanced students is shown. The two reading examples represent two dyadic conversations (between Musa and Faatu, who talk about food in Wolof; and Momo and Damas, discussing a football match in Bâinounk Gubëeher). In Exercise 2, learners are asked to write a dialogue, with free language choice. Exercise 3 requires learners to find letter sequences in the columns on the left-hand side that correspond to words in several languages on the right-hand column.

## Contributions of language-independent literacies to sustainable development

LILIEMA has a number of immediate and long-term benefits. For one, this method reflects the linguistic realities of learners in highly multilingual settings. Learners in these complex language ecologies are socialised into speaking different languages and lects based on their trajectories. Their unmarked discourse mode in many settings is fluid and multilingual and often described as unmarked code-switching or mixed discourse (for example by Barasa, 2015; Gafaranga & Torras, 2002). The prescriptive monolingual context of the school is at odds with these learners' lived

multilingualism. Additionally, mother tongue-based multilingual education programmes complementing the official language context can only cater for a limited number of languages and always exclude parts of the intended audience, particularly in highly multilingual contexts where many small and locally confined languages co-exist.

LILIEMA allows teachers flexibly to integrate the repertoires of all learners. By using the official alphabet of Senegal (compatible with many letters of official alphabets for indigenous languages of West Africa), LILIEMA is compatible with more resource-intensive standard literacies developed and sometimes taught for larger West African languages. LILIEMA creates cultural and linguistic awareness based on actual practices and recognises African languages, regardless of their speaker numbers, as a central form of cultural expression and an important part of intangible cultural heritage. Through this, LILIEMA increases consciousness of the lived multilingualism in heterogeneous societies. Crucially, the programme recognises and instrumentalises indigenous multilingual practice as a resource and departs from a notion of education as development from the outside. By valorising diversity, LILIEMA provides strategies for conflict prevention and resilience building in frontier societies.

LILIEMA is inspired by the acknowledged need to develop inclusive and multilingual literacy strategies (UNESCO, 2016b) in order to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the domain of education. LILIEMA addresses the following SDGs.

- SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
- SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
- SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development; provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

LILIEMA makes all of the languages in an individual's repertoire usable for personal literacy, thus contributing to personal autonomy and development relevant to local economy, the scope of SDG 4. By reaching women, who often marry into different linguistic environments and are excluded from formal education, and fostered children, a majority of whom are girls fostered for domestic reasons, it is central to the achievement of SDG 5. LILIEMA reaches groups excluded from language-focused literacy activities. LILIEMA uses local means and is training and employing local teachers, relevant to SDG 8. All language-centred literacy programmes struggle to cope with mobility; by reaching marginalised mobile learners, LILIEMA contributes to SDG 16.

## Suggestions for further research and action

We strongly recommend investing in and further developing the LILIEMA method as an alternative to mother tongue-based literacy in highly multilingual areas that is compatible with standard literacies but that is adaptive to every linguistic context and entirely reliant on local resources and valorising local sociocultural knowledge. LILIEMA can be transferred at low cost to other multilingual contexts in Africa and beyond.

We recommend evaluating the potential of LILIEMA as a translanguaging-based basic literacy programme in the following contexts:

- hotspots of rural multilingualism and linguistic diversity such as Western and Northwestern Cameroon, Nigeria, the Horn of Africa, the entire Upper Guinea Coast of West Africa, and South Africa
- hotspots of urban multilingualism: cities throughout Africa
- hotspots of mobility: border regions, refugee settlements and diaspora communities.

LILIEMA has the great appeal of initiating a sea-change in basic literacy while not requiring revolutionary changes in language policies or infrastructure investments of great magnitude. It is ideal for achieving inclusive, culturally anchored education in areas where resources for cost-intensive activities are not available and where language issues are not seen as central to development activities (Taylor-Leech & Benson, 2017).

Since LILIEMA teaching is designed as complementary, it remains secondary to the formal education systems, but nevertheless has the potential to create new visions for multilingualism as a resource in African societies that in turn may contribute to a radically new imagination of multilingualism and education, from the bottom up.

## Acknowledgements

The research presented in this chapter was funded by the Leverhulme Trust through a Research Leadership Award Grant to Friederike Lüpke. LILIEMA activities are supported by the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) Impact Acceleration Fund and through a postdoctoral fellowship of the University of Helsinki to Miriam Weidl. We express our gratitude to the funders.

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