

# Decolonizing French Language Education: Inclusion, Diversity, and Cultural Representation in Teaching Materials

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## ABSTRACT

This explores the imperative to decolonize French language education through the integration of inclusion, diversity, and cultural representation in teaching materials. Historically, French language instruction has centered on metropolitan norms, privileging Parisian French and Eurocentric cultural references while marginalizing the voices, linguistic variations, and histories of the broader Francophone world. Such practices perpetuate a narrow, colonial legacy that obscures the richness and plurality of global Francophone identities. In response, this proposes a framework for decolonial pedagogical transformation grounded in postcolonial theory, critical pedagogy, and sociolinguistic research. Drawing on a multidisciplinary review and case studies from secondary and tertiary education settings, this examines how textbooks, curricular content, and instructional strategies can evolve to include diverse Francophone perspectives from Africa, the Caribbean, the Maghreb, North America, and Southeast Asia. Key principles include the integration of authentic literary and audiovisual materials, recognition of regional linguistic variations such as creoles and vernacular Frenches, and the promotion of critical discussions around colonial history, cultural hybridity, and identity. The findings underscore the pedagogical benefits of this shift, including increased learner engagement, enhanced intercultural competence, and the development of critical literacy. Challenges such as institutional resistance, lack of teacher preparedness, and limited access to decolonial resources are also addressed, with recommendations for inclusive curriculum development, teacher training, and open educational resource adoption. Ultimately, decolonizing French language education is not merely a curricular revision but a transformative approach to language teaching that affirms diverse voices and dismantles epistemic

hierarchies. This research contributes to a growing call for a more equitable and culturally responsive model of language education—one that reflects the realities and aspirations of learners in a postcolonial, multilingual world.

**Keywords:** Decolonizing, French language education, Inclusion, Diversity, Cultural representation, Teaching materials

## 1.0 Introduction

French language education has historically been shaped by the cultural and linguistic norms of metropolitan France, with particular emphasis on Parisian French as the ideal standard (Adenuga and Okolo, 2021; Adenuga *et al.*, 2020). This dominant model has long been exported globally through colonial and postcolonial education systems, influencing language curricula in Africa, the Caribbean, Southeast Asia, and parts of North America. As a result, French language instruction has often reinforced a monolithic view of Francophone identity—one that centers whiteness, elite culture, and Eurocentric history, while minimizing or ignoring the rich linguistic and cultural diversity of the wider Francophone world (Adenuga *et al.*, 2019; Oyedele *et al.*, 2020; Oyedele *et al.*, 2021).

This imbalance reflects a deeper issue within global language education: the perpetuation of epistemic hierarchies in which the knowledge systems, histories, and voices of colonized or peripheral societies are devalued or omitted (Oyedele *et al.*, 2022; Ayobami *et al.*, 2023). Textbooks and curricula typically emphasize canonical authors, standardized grammar, and cultural references from France, while marginalizing regional varieties, contemporary global Francophone literature, and oral traditions (Githinji and Nyangoma, 2022; Ayobami *et al.*, 2023). Such practices sustain linguistic imperialism and deny learners the opportunity to engage with the lived realities of millions of Francophones worldwide.

In recent years, scholars and educators have increasingly critiqued this Eurocentric orientation, calling for more inclusive, representative, and decolonized approaches to language pedagogy (Githinji and Nyangoma, 2022; Nyangoma *et al.*, 2023). The concept of decolonization, as applied to education, involves dismantling colonial structures of knowledge production and affirming the legitimacy of marginalized perspectives (Githinji and Nyangoma, 2023; Nyangoma *et al.*, 2023). In the context of French language teaching, this means challenging the supremacy of metropolitan French and actively incorporating diverse linguistic registers, identities, and cultural narratives into classroom materials and discourse (Githinji and Nyangoma, 2023; Nyangoma *et al.*, 2023).

The purpose of this review is to examine how decolonial frameworks can be applied to French language education in order to produce more inclusive and culturally responsive teaching materials. It aims to move beyond surface-level multiculturalism to a deeper transformation that questions power dynamics in language, identity, and curriculum design. By integrating critical pedagogy, postcolonial theory, and sociolinguistic insights, this offers both a critique of existing practices and practical strategies for reform.

The scope of the review focuses on curriculum content, pedagogical strategies, and material development within secondary and tertiary educational contexts, where language instruction has the potential to shape learners' worldviews and linguistic identities. At these levels, students are increasingly capable of engaging with complex sociocultural issues and benefit from exposure to texts that reflect the realities of global Francophone communities (Githinji and Nyangoma, 2023; Nyangoma *et al.*, 2022).

This investigation is particularly relevant in an era of increasing global migration, multicultural classrooms, and heightened awareness of systemic inequities. Decolonizing French language education is not merely a corrective to historical exclusion; it is a pedagogical imperative that aligns with broader efforts to create more equitable, representative, and socially just learning (Nyangoma *et al.*, 2022; Nyangoma *et al.*, 2023). By centering diverse Francophone voices and promoting critical engagement with language and culture, educators can foster deeper linguistic competence, intercultural empathy, and critical thinking—essential skills for global citizenship in the 21st century.

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

The PRISMA methodology was employed to systematically review scholarly literature on decolonizing French language education with a focus on inclusion, diversity, and cultural representation in teaching materials. An extensive database search was conducted across JSTOR, ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The search strategy utilized Boolean operators and included keywords such as “decolonizing language education,” “Francophone literature in curriculum,” “French language pedagogy,” “cultural representation in textbooks,” “critical pedagogy,” and “inclusive curriculum in language teaching.” The initial search yielded 784 records.

After the removal of duplicates ( $n = 152$ ), 632 unique records were screened based on titles and abstracts. Inclusion criteria were: (1) peer-reviewed articles or book chapters published in English or French; (2) focus on French language education in secondary or tertiary settings; (3) discussion of decolonial, postcolonial, or diversity-oriented pedagogy; and (4) relevance to curriculum content or teaching material design. Exclusion criteria eliminated articles that focused exclusively on language acquisition without cultural or ideological analysis, or those dealing solely with European French contexts without engagement with the broader Francophone world.

Following this screening process, 124 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. Of these, 48 studies met all inclusion criteria and were selected for qualitative synthesis. The final set of sources includes theoretical analyses, empirical classroom studies, and curriculum evaluations from diverse Francophone regions including Sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, North Africa, and Francophone Canada.

Data were extracted and coded for themes including: curricular representation of Francophone diversity, textbook analysis, language variation, integration of marginalized voices, and teacher training for inclusive pedagogy. The synthesis revealed consistent gaps in representation across mainstream French language curricula and highlighted promising strategies for integrating culturally responsive materials and decolonial practices into instruction. These findings informed the study’s theoretical model and practical recommendations.

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

A critical rethinking of French language education through a decolonial lens requires a robust theoretical foundation that interrogates power, identity, and linguistic legitimacy (Despaigne, 2020; Porto and Zembylas, 2020). This review is informed by three intersecting frameworks: postcolonial and decolonial theory, critical pedagogy, and sociolinguistics. Together, these perspectives provide a basis for understanding how historically entrenched hierarchies in knowledge and language shape educational practices and how these can be dismantled in favor of a more inclusive and just pedagogy.

Postcolonial and decolonial theory interrogate the lingering cultural, epistemological, and linguistic legacies of colonialism. Within French language education, these theories shed light on how curricula and teaching materials often perpetuate epistemic injustice—the privileging of metropolitan French knowledge and cultural narratives at the expense of other Francophone perspectives. Epistemic justice demands the inclusion and validation of diverse

ways of knowing and being, particularly those of historically colonized populations (Bhambra, 2021; Dutta *et al.*, 2022).

Cultural hegemony, as theorized by Antonio Gramsci and further elaborated by postcolonial thinkers such as Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, is evident in the dominance of Parisian French and its associated cultural symbols in global language instruction. The valorization of metropolitan norms as “standard” or “neutral” contributes to a linguistic hierarchy in which regional Frenches, creoles, and mixed registers are often viewed as deficient, informal, or irrelevant. Decolonial theorists challenge these hierarchies by advocating for pluriversal perspectives that reflect the lived realities and linguistic diversity of the global Francophone world.

Rooted in the work of Paulo Freire, critical pedagogy emphasizes education as a practice of liberation rather than domination. Central to this approach are the concepts of dialogue, conscientization, and learner empowerment. In the context of French language education, critical pedagogy encourages learners to question whose voices are represented in textbooks, whose histories are told, and which forms of language are deemed legitimate (Gounari, 2020; Uzum *et al.*, 2021).

Dialogue promotes reciprocal communication between teachers and students, allowing space for learners to articulate their experiences and perspectives. This is particularly important in multicultural classrooms where students may have personal or ancestral ties to the broader Francophone world. Conscientization involves developing a critical awareness of social and linguistic inequalities, empowering learners to recognize and challenge the dominance of Eurocentric narratives in their education. Finally, learner empowerment means equipping students with the linguistic and cultural tools necessary to navigate and transform the social realities in which they are embedded.

By applying Freirean principles, educators move away from a transmission model of teaching toward a more reflective and participatory process that values student agency and critical thinking. This is particularly significant when teaching texts that engage with themes of colonization, resistance, diaspora, and identity—central concerns in contemporary Francophone literature.

The field of sociolinguistics provides essential tools for understanding language variation and the socio-political forces that shape language ideologies. Traditional French language curricula often ignore or marginalize non-standard varieties such as Maghrebi French, African French, and creole languages, reinforcing a narrow and hierarchical view of linguistic legitimacy (Yağmur, 2020; Walsh, 2021).

Sociolinguistic research supports the recognition of language variation as a natural and valuable aspect of linguistic ecosystems. By integrating vernaculars and regional Frenches into instruction, educators affirm the linguistic identities of speakers from across the Francophone world and promote plurilingual competence (García and Otheguy, 2020; Wernicke, 2021). This approach not only mirrors real-world communication more accurately but also challenges students to engage with the sociocultural dimensions of language, including issues of prestige, stigma, and code-switching.

Moreover, sociolinguistics aligns with decolonial goals by validating linguistic diversity and countering the erasure of minority languages and dialects. It offers a framework for critically analyzing how language policies, media representations, and educational norms reinforce or resist colonial power structures.

Together, postcolonial and decolonial theory, critical pedagogy, and sociolinguistics form a comprehensive theoretical framework for reimagining French language education. They illuminate the ways in which power, culture, and language intersect in the classroom and provide the tools for dismantling exclusionary practices (Locke *et al.*, 2022; Wilt *et al.*, 2022). Grounded in these frameworks, educators and curriculum designers can work toward

a more equitable and culturally responsive pedagogy that centers diversity, affirms marginalized voices, and prepares learners for critical engagement with the Francophone world.

## 2.2 Colonial Legacies in French Language Education

The influence of colonial legacies on French language education remains profound, shaping curriculum content, pedagogical approaches, and learner perceptions globally. Rooted in a history of imperial expansion, the French language was not merely a medium of communication but a central tool in the ideological project of colonization. This historical trajectory has left enduring marks on contemporary French language education, where a narrow and Eurocentric focus continues to dominate, often at the expense of diverse Francophone perspectives.

French colonial policy, particularly during the Third Republic, framed the French language as a vehicle of “mission civilisatrice” (civilizing mission). Language instruction was instrumental in extending French culture, values, and governance to colonized populations in Africa, the Caribbean, Indochina, and the Maghreb (Michalopoulos and Papaioannou, 2020; Vergès, 2020). Schools became instruments of assimilation, where indigenous languages and knowledge systems were systematically devalued or banned, and French was positioned as the language of progress, reason, and modernity.

This ideology entrenched the belief in the superiority of metropolitan French, especially the Parisian norm, as the only legitimate and desirable form of the language (Weng, 2020; Walsh, 2021; Vartija, 2021). It also cultivated a hierarchical model of linguistic value, relegating regional and creole varieties to positions of inferiority. The goal was not merely linguistic fluency but cultural transformation, as mastery of French was equated with access to civilization, citizenship, and moral refinement.

Though colonial administrations have since dissolved, these ideological structures persist in how French is taught and represented today. The reverberations of this legacy are especially visible in teaching materials and curriculum content, which continue to reflect and reinforce colonial hierarchies.

Contemporary French language textbooks reveal a significant overrepresentation of Parisian norms in both linguistic and cultural content. Textbooks frequently focus on standard French grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary drawn from metropolitan usage. Cultural references are dominated by Parisian landmarks, holidays, cuisine, and literary figures, reinforcing a monolithic image of “Frenchness” tied to the capital and its elite institutions (Demossier *et al.*, 2020; Lederman, 2021).

A comparative analysis of widely used textbooks, such as *Alter Ego*, *Saison*, and *Édito*, shows that topics such as the Eiffel Tower, French Revolution, and metropolitan art museums are featured regularly, while the contributions of Francophone communities outside of France are either tokenized or omitted. When Francophone regions such as Senegal or Quebec do appear, they are often depicted through exoticized or simplified narratives, rather than as integral and equal parts of the global Francophone community.

This cultural narrowness not only distorts learners' understanding of the French-speaking world but also privileges a single variety of French as “correct,” thereby stigmatizing non-standard or pluricentric usages. Students are rarely exposed to linguistic diversity, such as Antillean Creole, Maghrebi Arabic-French code-switching, or West African French idioms, limiting their ability to engage authentically with diverse Francophone populations.

Beyond textbooks, national and institutional curricula often replicate these exclusionary practices. Educational syllabi typically center canonical authors from France—such as Molière, Hugo, and Camus—while overlooking major literary figures from the wider Francophone world. The works of Aimé Césaire, Maryse Condé, Assia Djebar, or Sony Labou Tansi remain underrepresented, despite their critical contributions to Francophone literature and thought.

This curricular exclusion sustains a Eurocentric worldview that marginalizes the cultural and historical experiences of formerly colonized societies. The absence of African, Caribbean, Maghrebi, and Southeast Asian voices in curriculum design perpetuates a form of cultural erasure, where students are denied the opportunity to explore themes of colonization, resistance, diaspora, and identity from non-metropolitan perspectives (Hiddleston and Lyamlahy, 2020; Wimbush, 2021; Quesada, 2022).

Moreover, the lack of representation impacts student identity and engagement, particularly for learners from diasporic or multilingual backgrounds. When their linguistic repertoires and cultural heritages are not reflected in educational content, learners may feel alienated or undervalued (Antunes, 2021; Wang *et al.*, 2021). This undermines efforts to foster inclusive classrooms and equitable access to language learning.

Colonial legacies continue to shape the structure and content of French language education through the promotion of metropolitan norms, exclusion of diverse voices, and reinforcement of cultural hierarchies. Recognizing and dismantling these legacies is a crucial step toward a more equitable and representative pedagogy. By critically examining textbook content, revising curricula, and incorporating Francophone perspectives beyond France, educators can begin to challenge inherited biases and create a language education system that reflects the true diversity of the Francophone world.

### 2.3 Principles of Decolonial Curriculum Design

Decolonizing French language education requires a deliberate rethinking of curriculum content and pedagogical strategies to address historical exclusions and center marginalized voices as shown in figure 1. Traditional curricula often present an idealized, metropolitan version of the French language and culture, marginalizing the vast linguistic, historical, and cultural diversity of the global Francophone world. A decolonial approach to curriculum design must be guided by three interrelated principles: inclusion, diversity, and cultural representation (Parson and Weise, 2020; Shahjahan *et al.*, 2022). These principles aim to challenge colonial hierarchies and affirm pluralistic and equitable understandings of language, identity, and knowledge in educational settings.

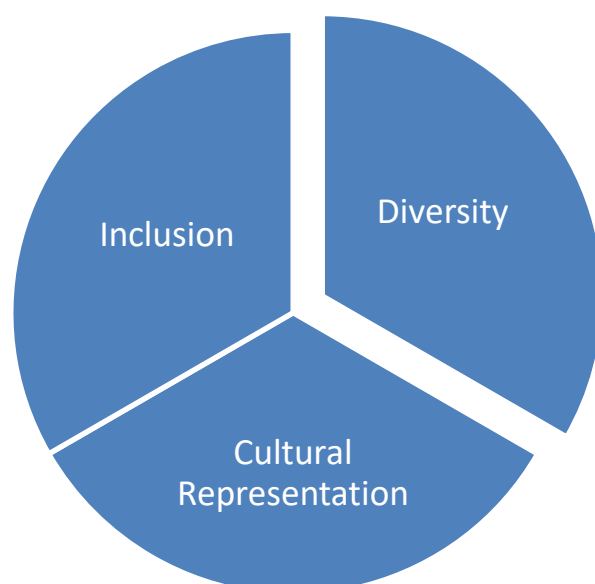


Figure 1: Principles of Decolonial Curriculum Design

Inclusion involves the active representation of diverse Francophone identities, histories, and geographies within teaching materials. This principle counters the longstanding emphasis on France as the sole or primary locus of the



French language and culture. A decolonial curriculum recognizes that Francophonie extends across multiple continents—spanning Africa, the Caribbean, the Maghreb, North America, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific. Each of these regions contributes unique linguistic practices, cultural traditions, and historical experiences that merit full integration into French language education.

To operationalize inclusion, curricula must incorporate authors, thinkers, and cultural texts from underrepresented Francophone communities. This might include literature by writers such as Patrick Chamoiseau (Martinique), Fatou Diome (Senegal/France), and Dany Laferrière (Haiti/Canada), or non-literary materials such as documentaries on the Algerian War, music from Congolese artists, and interviews with diasporic youth in Belgium or Québec. Through such texts, students encounter a broader spectrum of perspectives, which enhances their understanding of global Francophone realities and fosters a more inclusive classroom discourse.

While inclusion emphasizes who is represented, diversity addresses how language is portrayed and taught. A decolonial curriculum acknowledges the multilingual, pluricentric nature of French by integrating language variation into teaching practices. This includes creoles (e.g., Antillean Creole, Réunionnais), hybrid registers, and code-switching patterns that reflect the linguistic creativity of many Francophone communities.

Traditional French instruction tends to prioritize “standard” Parisian French, presenting it as the correct or most prestigious form. Such practices reinforce linguistic hierarchies rooted in colonial ideologies and stigmatize non-standard varieties. In contrast, a decolonial approach affirms that linguistic variation is a normal and valuable component of language use. This can be reflected in curricula by including texts and dialogues that feature regional lexicons, creolized syntax, or informal speech patterns, along with critical discussions about language ideologies and power (Smith, 2021; Nero, 2022).

Incorporating linguistic diversity also allows students to better understand sociolinguistic dynamics such as diglossia, register shifts, and language discrimination. For heritage learners or those from multilingual backgrounds, it validates their linguistic identities and fosters greater engagement. For all learners, it prepares them for real-world communication across diverse Francophone settings.

The third principle, cultural representation, focuses on integrating themes that are historically and politically significant to Francophone communities, particularly those shaped by colonialism and its aftermath. These include resistance, diaspora, colonial memory, and postcolonial realities. Rather than limiting cultural content to surface-level celebrations of food, holidays, or monuments, a decolonial curriculum engages students in critical reflection on issues such as migration, systemic inequality, identity negotiation, and cultural hybridity.

For example, classroom discussions can explore the legacy of the slave trade in the Caribbean, the politics of veiling in Francophone North Africa, or the experience of exclusion faced by African immigrants in Paris. Such themes encourage learners to connect language with social justice, memory, and lived experience. Moreover, they cultivate critical cultural literacy, enabling students to analyze how narratives are constructed, whose voices are heard, and whose are silenced.

Cultural representation also involves a shift in the selection of classroom texts—from canonical French literature to decentered narratives that highlight the experiences of colonized, displaced, and diasporic populations. This may involve pairing texts from different regions or periods to examine how historical events like colonization and independence are remembered differently across the Francophone world.

The principles of inclusion, diversity, and cultural representation form the foundation of a decolonial curriculum in French language education. Together, they challenge the colonial legacies that have long shaped language teaching and offer a more equitable and representative vision of Francophone studies. By embedding these

principles into teaching practices, educators can foster not only linguistic proficiency but also intercultural empathy, critical awareness, and social responsibility in their students—hallmarks of a truly transformative language education (Ouedraogo, 2021; Nguyen *et al.*, 2022).

#### 2.4 Pedagogical Strategies for Decolonization

Decolonizing French language education involves more than diversifying content—it requires a transformation in how knowledge is constructed, shared, and interpreted in the classroom. This shift must be supported by pedagogical strategies that empower learners, decenter dominant narratives, and validate multiple linguistic and cultural realities. Key approaches include critical content selection, dialogic and inquiry-based learning, and collaborative material development. These strategies move beyond tokenistic inclusion to foster genuine engagement with the complexities of the global Francophone world and the power dynamics embedded in language education.

A foundational strategy in decolonial pedagogy is the critical selection of content that challenges traditional Eurocentric frameworks. This involves prioritizing contemporary Francophone literature, film, and oral traditions that reflect diverse voices, sociopolitical contexts, and linguistic practices as shown in figure 2. Rather than focusing exclusively on canonical French texts, educators can incorporate works by authors from Africa (e.g., Fatou Diome, Alain Mabanckou), the Caribbean (e.g., Maryse Condé, Patrick Chamoiseau), and the Maghreb (e.g., Assia Djebar, Kamel Daoud), alongside audio-visual resources like Francophone cinema and music (Lindberg, 2020; Migraine-George, 2021).

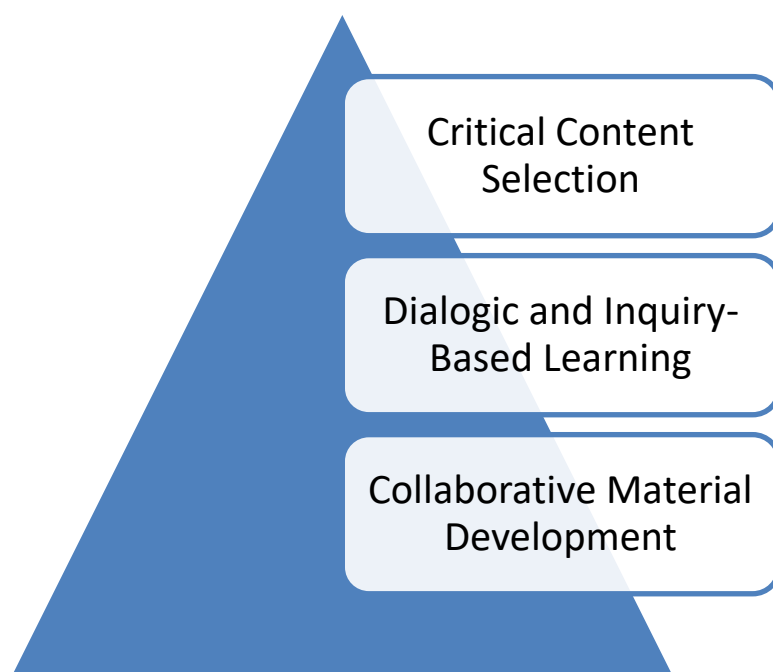


Figure 2: Pedagogical Strategies for Decolonization

These texts provide entry points into discussions of migration, colonial memory, identity, and resistance. For example, using a film such as *La Noire de...* by Ousmane Sembène can prompt critical engagement with themes of postcolonial disillusionment and systemic racism. Similarly, oral traditions and storytelling forms, often marginalized in formal education, serve as legitimate and culturally embedded modes of expression. Their inclusion affirms non-Western epistemologies and supports linguistic variation, such as creoles and regional dialects. When selected carefully, such content helps students connect language learning with social justice issues, while offering a more comprehensive and authentic understanding of global Francophone cultures.



Dialogic and inquiry-based learning methods align with decolonial pedagogies by disrupting top-down models of instruction and fostering student agency. Dialogue, as conceptualized by Paulo Freire, emphasizes mutual learning and the co-construction of knowledge between teachers and students. In the language classroom, this can take the form of student-led discussions on cultural texts, where learners critically analyze perspectives, make connections to their own lives, and raise questions about identity, history, and power.

Cultural comparison tasks also support inquiry by encouraging students to examine similarities and differences between various Francophone contexts and their own cultural frameworks (Nugent, 2020; Uzum *et al.*, 2021). These activities foster critical thinking and intercultural literacy.

Reflective writing is another important tool, allowing students to process their learning, articulate their responses to complex issues, and explore their own positionalities. Assignments such as journals, cultural critiques, or autoethnographic essays invite learners to link language acquisition with personal and societal reflection. These reflective practices emphasize learning as a dynamic, ethical, and transformative process.

To sustain a decolonial approach, teachers must also engage in collaborative material development that draws on community voices, multilingual resources, and open educational content. This strategy moves away from rigid, publisher-driven curricula and toward more flexible, context-sensitive practices that reflect local needs and global realities.

Involving community members—such as immigrant storytellers, heritage speakers, or local artists—in the creation or adaptation of materials ensures that diverse perspectives are embedded in instruction. These collaborations can generate authentic learning resources, including oral histories, interviews, and place-based narratives that connect the classroom to lived experiences beyond the academic setting.

Multilingual resources acknowledge the translanguaging practices common in many Francophone regions, challenging the dominance of standard French and affirming the linguistic repertoires of students. Incorporating bilingual texts, subtitles, glossaries, and code-switching exercises enables learners to engage with the fluidity of real-world communication (Godwin-Jones, 2020; Karamitroglou, 2022).

Finally, open educational resources (OER)—such as online repositories of Francophone literature, podcasts, and culturally responsive lesson plans—expand access to inclusive content and support teacher autonomy. These tools allow educators to tailor materials to their specific learner demographics while avoiding the limitations of commercial textbooks that often reinforce colonial perspectives.

Decolonizing French language pedagogy requires intentional, equity-oriented teaching strategies that center marginalized voices, embrace linguistic plurality, and foster critical consciousness. By implementing critical content selection, dialogic and inquiry-based learning, and collaborative material development, educators can transform the language classroom into a site of cultural affirmation and social engagement. These strategies empower students not only to learn French but to understand the complex histories, identities, and power structures that shape its global use—laying the foundation for a more just and inclusive vision of language education.

## 2.5 Practical Application

The practical application of decolonial principles in French language education is gaining traction in various academic contexts. From African universities to North American secondary schools, educators are experimenting with inclusive pedagogies that reflect the diversity of the Francophone world (Benaglia and Smith, 2022; Bouamer and Bourdeau, 2022). This examines select case studies and innovations that demonstrate effective approaches to integrating decolonial strategies through classroom implementation and curricular redesign.

In African institutions, such as the University of Dakar (Senegal) and University of Yaoundé I (Cameroon), educators have adopted pedagogical models that center local Francophone realities. These programs integrate contemporary African Francophone literature, including works by Mariama Bâ, Boubacar Boris Diop, and Mongo Beti, into language instruction. These texts provide students with narratives grounded in familiar socio-political contexts—such as postcolonial governance, gender roles, and identity struggles—allowing for more relatable and meaningful engagement with the French language. Furthermore, classroom discussions often occur in a mix of French, Wolof, or other local languages, promoting plurilingualism and challenging the hierarchy that privileges metropolitan French.

In North America, particularly in Francophone schools in Québec and French immersion programs in multicultural Canadian and U.S. cities, similar efforts are being made. At Université Laval and McGill University, revised syllabi now include Francophone literature from the Caribbean and Maghreb, such as works by Dany Laferrière and Assia Djebar, alongside traditional French authors. Classroom activities encourage students to critically analyze themes of colonial history, diaspora, and bicultural identity. In some American public schools offering French immersion, teachers have integrated West African folk tales and Haitian poetry to reflect the heritage of many students while supporting linguistic and cultural exploration.

These implementations demonstrate how strategic content choices and dialogic pedagogy foster engagement and critical thinking. Students gain insight not only into grammatical structures but also into the lived experiences of diverse Francophone communities, developing both linguistic competence and intercultural empathy (Protacio, 2021; Dieumegard *et al.*, 2021).

Beyond individual classrooms, systemic curricular innovations have emerged that institutionalize decolonial approaches. In South Africa, the French Department at the University of the Western Cape has restructured its curriculum to foreground African Francophone literature, oral traditions, and socio-political histories. Language learning is framed within broader discussions of colonialism, race, and multilingualism. Assessments include reflective essays on postcolonial identity and student-led projects examining the status of French in African nations. In North America, Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) frameworks are being applied to French language instruction. For example, the Toronto District School Board has implemented guidelines encouraging educators to include texts by Francophone authors from underrepresented backgrounds and to assess language learning through varied, inclusive formats. These might include oral storytelling, multimedia presentations, or comparative cultural analysis projects, rather than exclusively written exams based on metropolitan standards.

Similarly, in U.S. universities such as Howard University and San Francisco State University, departments of modern languages have introduced courses specifically titled “Francophonie and Decolonization” or “Postcolonial French Literatures.” These courses utilize a combination of literary texts, documentary film, music, and digital media to provide students with a multidimensional understanding of the Francophone world. Assessment methods in these programs are adapted to emphasize critical analysis and cross-cultural synthesis, often involving multilingual research or engagement with diasporic communities (Acree and Chouinard, 2020; Ronderos *et al.*, 2021).

Curricular innovations such as these move beyond tokenism by embedding decolonial content and principles throughout the learning experience. They challenge linguistic purism, diversify representations of Francophone identity, and equip students with tools for critical inquiry into the sociohistorical dynamics of language use.

The case studies presented highlight the growing body of good practices in decolonizing French language education across varied global contexts. Through targeted classroom implementation and systemic curricular redesign,

institutions in Africa and North America are demonstrating how French can be taught not as a monolithic European language, but as a dynamic, pluricentric mode of communication embedded in diverse cultural experiences (Gardelle and Jacob, 2020; Christie and Lingard, 2020). These examples offer compelling evidence of the pedagogical, cultural, and cognitive benefits of decolonial approaches, providing a valuable roadmap for other educators and institutions seeking to align their teaching with principles of equity, diversity, and social justice.

## 2.6 Challenges and Considerations

While the imperative to decolonize French language education is increasingly acknowledged, translating theory into practice presents several complex challenges. Implementing inclusive, culturally responsive curricula demands a critical reconfiguration of institutional norms, teacher roles, and resource infrastructures as shown in figure 3 (Worthington *et al.*, 2020; Datnow *et al.*, 2022). Key obstacles include resistance to change, teacher preparedness, and access to diverse resources. Understanding and addressing these challenges is essential for sustainable and equitable reform.

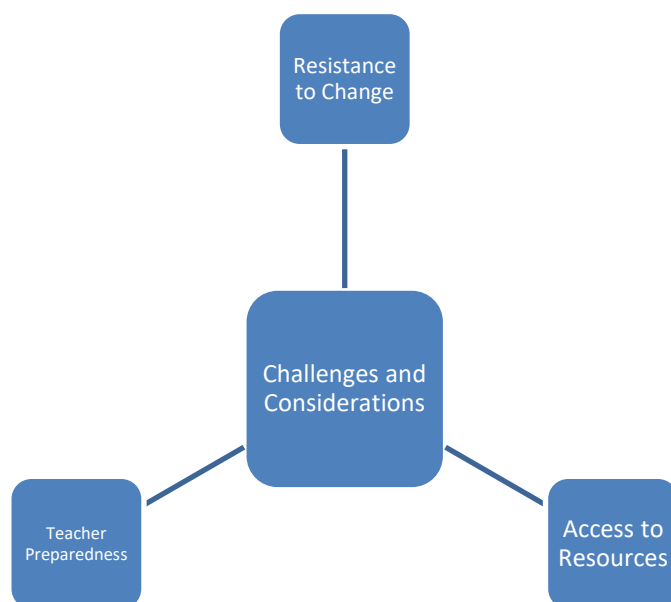


Figure 3: Challenges and Considerations

One of the most persistent barriers to decolonial transformation is institutional resistance, often rooted in curricular standardization and historical inertia. Language programs in both secondary and tertiary education are frequently governed by rigid syllabi, standardized examinations, and prescriptive learning outcomes. These frameworks prioritize mastery of standard Parisian French and canonical cultural content, leaving little room for alternative voices or pedagogical experimentation.

This resistance is often compounded by the perception that standard French is a neutral and universal language. Such ideologies overlook the colonial roots of language hierarchies and obscure the sociopolitical dimensions of curriculum design. As a result, initiatives to incorporate creoles, vernaculars, or postcolonial themes may be viewed as politically charged or academically “non-essential (Singh, 2020).” Instructors and administrators may fear compromising linguistic rigor or assessment consistency, particularly in contexts where performance metrics dominate educational priorities.

Furthermore, existing accreditation standards and textbook adoption processes can reinforce the dominance of Eurocentric materials, limiting opportunities for curricular innovation. Overcoming this inertia requires

institutional commitment to diversity and equity, as well as policy changes that recognize the legitimacy of non-metropolitan French varieties and culturally diverse learning goals (Svynarets *et al.*, 2022; Degiovanni and Uriarte, 2022).

Another major challenge is the lack of training and preparedness among teachers to effectively implement decolonial pedagogy. Many educators were themselves trained within Eurocentric frameworks and may not have been exposed to postcolonial theory, sociolinguistic variation, or culturally responsive teaching strategies. As such, even those who are sympathetic to decolonial goals may lack the tools to enact them meaningfully in the classroom. Effective decolonial teaching requires more than curriculum substitution; it demands critical reflection, cultural competence, and dialogic engagement. Teachers must be equipped to guide nuanced discussions on race, identity, colonial history, and linguistic marginalization—topics that may provoke discomfort or controversy. They also need the ability to contextualize and scaffold complex texts from diverse Francophone contexts to support learners at varying proficiency levels.

Addressing this gap calls for targeted professional development programs that integrate decolonial theory with practical teaching methodologies. Workshops, interdisciplinary collaborations, and access to inclusive teaching resources can support educators in adapting their practices. Additionally, teacher education programs must embed these perspectives at the pre-service level, ensuring that new language instructors enter the field prepared to teach with equity and critical awareness (Lauwo *et al.*, 2022; Liao *et al.*, 2022).

A third challenge lies in inequities in access to decolonial educational resources, particularly in underfunded or remote educational settings. Many of the texts, films, and media produced in or about non-European Francophone regions are not included in mainstream language learning materials and may be difficult to obtain in digital or print formats. Even when such resources exist, they are often available only in limited editions, specific regional markets, or behind academic paywalls.

Moreover, open educational resources (OER) focused on decolonial French pedagogy remain relatively scarce, particularly in comparison to standardized teaching packages. Schools with limited funding may struggle to procure diverse materials, while teachers with heavy workloads may lack the time to curate and adapt supplementary content independently.

To mitigate these challenges, governments, educational publishers, and cultural institutions must invest in the development and distribution of multilingual, culturally diverse, and accessible materials. Collaborative digital platforms, resource-sharing networks, and inclusive textbook publishing initiatives can help democratize access and promote pedagogical equity across diverse educational contexts (Tella *et al.*, 2021; Ponte *et al.*, 2021).

The movement to decolonize French language education is vital but not without significant challenges. Institutional resistance, teacher preparedness, and resource access each pose substantial barriers that must be addressed through coordinated efforts at multiple levels. By fostering institutional flexibility, enhancing teacher training, and promoting equitable resource development, educators and policymakers can begin to dismantle the structural constraints that perpetuate exclusion in language education. A sustained commitment to these considerations will be critical in realizing a truly inclusive, culturally responsive, and socially just French language curriculum (Lamb *et al.*, 2020; Masson, 2021).

## Conclusion

Decolonizing French language education is both a pedagogical imperative and a transformative opportunity. By re-centering diverse Francophone voices, linguistic varieties, and postcolonial perspectives, educators foster a more inclusive and reflective learning environment. The implementation of decolonial curriculum principles—such as

inclusion, linguistic diversity, and critical cultural representation—has demonstrated clear benefits for learners. These include enhanced engagement, critical thinking, and intercultural literacy, as students are encouraged to connect language learning with global realities and personal identities.

To advance this transformation, policy and research innovations are essential. Curriculum reform must prioritize the integration of non-metropolitan authors, themes of resistance and hybridity, and multilingual materials. Teacher education programs should incorporate cultural competence training and decolonial pedagogical theory to prepare instructors for inclusive, dialogic teaching. Furthermore, longitudinal studies are needed to assess the sustained impact of decolonial strategies on student outcomes, identity formation, and language retention across diverse contexts.

The long-term vision for decolonized French language education is rooted in pluralism, equity, and social justice. Rather than reinforcing colonial hierarchies and linguistic purity, this model embraces the richness of the global Francophone community and promotes learner empowerment. It envisions classrooms where all linguistic and cultural identities are respected, where critical inquiry is central, and where language instruction serves not only communicative goals but also ethical and civic ones. In this way, a decolonized pedagogy can reshape language education as a space for transformative learning and global citizenship, aligning with broader goals of educational equity and intercultural understanding in the 21st century.

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