

SECONDARY EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENT IN SENEGAL: COMPARING RURAL
AND URBAN PERSPECTIVES ON A MIDDLE SCHOOL EXAM

By

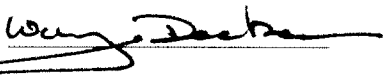
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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the urban bias in educational progress through examining the perceptions surrounding a government mandated exam at the end of middle school in Senegal. Data from a rural middle school, CEM de Leona, and an urban middle school, CEM Amadou Fara Mbodji was collected to understand from a qualitative research view the value and perceptions of preparing for Brevet de Fin d'Etudes Moyennes (BFEM – Certificate of the End of Middle School Studies). There are four actors who play a role in the preparation of students for the exam: the administration, the teachers, the students themselves, and the students' families. While the variables existent within this framework determine the individual success of students on the exam, urban and rural differences maintain the largest polarity in perspectives and passing rates.

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Introduction

Secondary Education Achievement in Senegal and the BFEM

The West African nation of Senegal is well known in sub-Saharan Africa for its stable democracy and considerable gains in development since independence from France in 1960. Peaceful transitions in power, a strong national Muslim identity, and high primary enrollment rates among other historical accomplishments reveal Senegal's unique climate for development reforms. However, Senegal's education system falls victim to a drastic rural-urban education divide. 94% of the rural poorest aged 15-24 years old have less than a lower secondary education, as compared to 79% of the urban poorest. 59% of the urban richest youth have the same reported education level (Education For All Global Monitoring Report, 2012). There are two key points found in these statistics. The first observation is that urban students tend to complete more levels of education than rural students. However, this pertains to lower secondary education: while the completion of primary school is at a high of 63%, this success does not continue into subsequent levels of education (World Bank, 2011). As reported by the World Bank in 2011, the gross enrollment in secondary education, or total enrollment regardless of age as a percentage of secondary school-aged youth, was 39.6% compared to the percentage of the population enrolled in tertiary, or higher education at 6.8%. Primary school in Senegal boast a 75.5% net enrollment ratio in 2011 and a 99.7% gross enrollment ratio.¹

The disparity between elementary school and middle school enrollment reveals a need for analysis in a cultural context. While elementary education is considered to be compulsory in Senegal, this is difficult to enforce. Those students who manage to complete all seven years of

¹ The gross enrollment ratio (GER) can exceed 100% due to the inclusion of students who are not considered the correct age to be attending that level of education. This is the result of early or late school entrance and grade repetition.

secondary education move to larger cities in pursuit of better jobs, resulting in the drain of educated citizens from Senegal's rural regions. There are significant barriers to continuing past primary school including limited access to resources and funding. Exit and entrance exams are the official gatekeepers to higher levels of education. The Brevet de Fin d'Etudes Moyennes (BFEM) exam, which translates literally as the certificate of the end of middle school studies, is a standardized Senegalese exam obligatory for students in their final year of middle school. Secondary education within the Senegalese school system is divided into two cycles, the first cycle of which is roughly similar to an American middle school. The exam tests a student's knowledge of materials covered in middle school and certifies their eligibility to continue on to the second cycle. Students who pass the BFEM have a higher chance of continuing their education or securing a steady job, as the exam reveals French mastery (the test is not given in any of the country's native languages) and is the minimum requirement for certain government work.

Over the past decade there has been a downward trend in the percentage of students passing the BFEM nationally, though this value fluctuates between 20.2% (2005) and 53.2% (Ministère de L'Education Nationale, 2011). During the most recent testing session in July 2012, the passing rate was 44.4% of students, resulting in a declaration by the Minister of Education for a second testing opportunity in October due to the especially politically turbulent 2011-2012 school year. The reason for the low success rate may be found by analyzing the perceived value and importance of the exam maintained by teachers, students, and their families. By comparing rural and urban middle schools, we can see how the responsibility is shared and how each group understands their obligations within a different setting and context. This has the possibility of revealing targeted differences between the urban and rural education experience.

The BFEM is hotly debated in terms of its importance, value within the life of a student, and worth in terms of student evaluation. The aim of this study is to show the urban bias in educational progress through investigating how students prepare for the exam in varying contexts and what are the perceptions and opinions surrounding this practice and the exam itself. There are four actors who play a role in the preparation of students for the exam: the administration, the teachers, the students themselves, and the students' families. While the variables existent within this framework determine the individual success of students on the exam, urban and rural differences maintain the largest polarity in perspectives and passing rates.

Chapter One

Why Education?

Education is the process in which one comes to understand the balance of cultural and intellectual elements of society. Education is necessary to:

“...transmit from one generation to the next the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the society, and to prepare the young people for their future membership of the society, and their active participation in its maintenance or development” (Hossenjee, 1978, p. 41).

According to Senegal’s first president, Leopold Senghor, education is an assurance of the sum of knowledge acquired by previous generations, for it is at the root of all historical evolution (Senghor, 1964, p. 93). The preservation of a society depends on the contextual education of the children, and the ultimate need for education globally remains uncontested.² Ballantine and Hammack (2012) assert that education fulfills specific functions: socialization, transmission of culture, personal control and development, and training and placement of individuals into society (p. 29-30). In order to be considered a productive member of society, new generations of students are socialized into upholding the ideals and values of their community. The macrosystem, or ideologies and attitudes of the central culture, is then filtered through the education system affecting the individual’s perspectives in relation to learning about their environment (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Education is often considered the panacea of society’s

² One must carefully consider the term “education” and in which circumstance the word it is being utilized and what it is referring to. For the purpose of this paper, the term “education” will be used to describe formal institutionalized schooling and carefully planned learning programs as opposed to acquiring skills and knowledge through the observation of elders or older generation. Labels or distinctions of “education” or “schooling” utilized in this paper refer to the idea of knowledge being transferred in an officially recognized, institutional setting.

issues; topics such as responsibility and civic virtue are communicated through the schooling process, preparing students for an appropriate position later in life. For this reason, education is seen as the platform through which significant reform and societal expectations are introduced.

Education is accepted as a central component of international development. Officially recognized as a right by the United Nations in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1949), the concept of access to schooling has inspired the creation of such institutions as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and programs such as Education for All and the more recent Global Education First Initiative through the Secretary General. The notion of education as a right has been included in the charters of several international organizations such as the African Union and is a leading mission of many non-governmental organizations (NGOs). World leaders acknowledge the necessity of education as the process of acquiring knowledge is fundamental to individual and community success. Such consensus is seen in the establishment and adaptation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). A “blueprint agreed to by all the world’s countries and all the world’s leading development institutions,” the United Nations instituted these MDGs as guidelines for improving social and economic conditions in the world’s poorest countries by 2015 (United Nations, 2000). There are eight goals, and the second – to achieve universal primary education – reveals the importance of education to world leaders. The significance of providing educational access to all is demonstrated by the recognition that education is a requirement to a healthy, productive life and the many countries struggling to provide this right to their citizens. Global scale acknowledgment of ensuring access to education shows that education must be put at the forefront of development discourse.

However, controversy and inequality can result when required pedagogy and evaluative measurements are established, for recognizing all individual or community needs within an overarching education structure is not always feasible. The nature of bureaucratically constructed education systems often has a “hidden curriculum” with a variety of evaluations that act as gatekeepers (Ballantine & Hammack, 2012). The term “hidden curriculum” refers to the reproduction of social class of students in that it is informally instilled within the school system for some students to achieve and others to fail (Ballantine & Hammack, 2012, p. 212). The ability for students to achieve and utilize the benefits of education depend on a variety of factors including but not limited to socioeconomic status, familial background, and cultural values. Certain segments of society are generally favored throughout all societal structures, and education is no exception. Despite this, a formal educational system is a necessary component to all national institutions.

The geographical divide between urban and rural settings provides one such large disconnect in terms of access to resources and education throughout the world. The 2012 Education For All Global Monitoring Report reveals that the percentage of 15-24 year-olds leaving schooling before completing lower secondary school is generally higher in rural areas than urban sectors throughout the developing world. In many cases the rural poorest are at a greater disadvantage than the urban poorest. Possible explanations for this urban bias include a greater access to qualified teachers and adequate resources within urban areas. The Global Monitoring Report (2012) concludes that many rural youth “have missed out on basic literacy and numeracy skills” and suggests offering another chance to acquire these fundamental skills in order to improve and enhance their future livelihoods (p. 308). Because 70% of the world’s

population who live in extreme poverty is located in rural areas, attention to education outcome disparities based on region is critical for improving education in general (p. 315).

This paper will cover urban and rural perspectives on high-stakes secondary education assessment in Senegal. Understanding how Senegalese people view and interpret a particular educational element, such as a milestone exam, will shed light on the apparent urban bias as it relates to preparation and attitudes of future success. Because both urban and rural students are held to the same testing evaluation standards, a study dedicated to qualitative information regarding the outlooks on the same exam will show how regional differences affect the likelihood of passing and going on to the next level of education.

Theoretical Framework

Senegalese Education System

Before the imposition of the French education system during colonialism, instances of organized instruction existed in the form of Koranic schooling, the education of young males in the teachings of Islam and Arab literacy. Today, religious education is officially separate from the public system, but Koranic school still remains a ubiquitously acknowledged structure. From informal village schools to more formal private Franco-Arab schools, Koranic education is often seen as closer to Senegalese tradition and a more relevant alternative to the often lacking Senegalese state system (Huet-Gueye & De Léonardis, 2009). Despite controversial elements such as the treatment of young boys forced to become beggars in some schools, the high regard for Koranic education can be seen in its persistence and fortitude in Senegalese society for several centuries. Muslims account for 94% of the Senegalese population, so the secularism in state education has been shown to affect enrollment in public education when an Islam-based

program is desired (Huet-Gueye & De Léonardis, 2009; CIA, 2013). This is also affected by the view that the education system is a legacy of French colonization.

The French system has had a lasting impact on how Senegalese children are educated today. According to Bernard Mouralis (1984) in “Littérature et développement,” there are four stages in the evolution of organized European education within Western Africa. During the end of the 19th century, such education was principally the domain of the Catholic missionaries who were broadly independent of the colonial administration. Yet from 1903 to 1944, a uniform doctrine and colonial policies became much more definite and consistent as Europeans began to actively exploit Africa’s natural resources (p. 64). To meet its new need of human resources, the French colonial administration found it necessary to establish a uniform pedagogic system in its colonies.

The third stage of education began in 1944 when French officials met at the Brazzaville Conference to redefine and reevaluate France’s relationship with its colonial empire. Reform measures for colonized people included equal rights as French citizen and the establishment of semi-autonomous assemblies. A new education system was introduced that separated school into primary, secondary, and higher education levels, mimicking that of the French system. While this sparked a slight change in how school was conducted, the colonial school in Western Africa proved to be unable to adapt to the policy of assimilation and the pedagogical changes did not reflect the needs of Senegalese or West African people. The new system aimed to modify society and transform the ideas and culture – it was a question of politics and coercing colonies to be a part of “Greater France” (p. 64). Mouralis’s four stages of education timeline conclude with the current stage: 1960 to present (p. 59). After Western African countries received independence in

1960, education systems in each country took on a variety of paths. In Senegal, the French education model has been maintained in terms of organization and academic levels.

Preschool education is the first form of instruction for Senegalese youth, commencing at age three and lasting until age six. It is not obligatory and usually considered to be an option for only the rich minority of the Senegalese population. While there is not a specific standardized national program for educational structure in Senegalese preschools, the aim of “jardin d’enfants,” or kindergarten, is to prepare students for the reality of life learning within a group and begin with basic French language instruction (National Agency for Early Childhood 2011). In some regions of Senegal, language instruction is expanded to Wolof as well, the most widely spoken indigenous language in Senegal. The importance of pre-elementary education for the future success of Senegalese youth remains unrealized and generally inaccessible to the majority of the population. This is because preschool institutions within Senegal are located in large cities, with few preschool resources available to rural areas. According to the Global Monitoring Report (2012) the total enrollment of preschool-aged children in pre-primary education was 9%. In 2000, President Abdoulaye Wade launched an initiative with the National Agency for Early Childhood known as “Case des Tout-Petites.” This new style of preschool education is a community-based structure that ensures the healthy development of young children. The idea of integrating academic and health education while offering information about early childhood development to parents and the community about health, nutrition, education, and protection demonstrates a desire to make awareness and development a priority (National Agency for Early Childhood 2011). Yet this is generally concentrated in Dakar or other urban areas – it is the rural areas that would benefit most from such an initiative, but the resources for such a project are widely sought after and preschool education remains extensively out of reach for a majority of

Senegalese families. Senegal spends less than 0.02% of Gross National Product on preschool (Global Monitoring Report, 2012, p. 68).

Elementary education is mandatory for all Senegalese children and in this particular sector Senegal has made large strides in effectiveness and accessibility. The prevalence of elementary schools throughout Senegal demonstrates the growing access to primary education. Elementary or primary education generally begins at age seven and lasts for a duration of six years. There are three cycles, or stages, and two levels for each stage: the preparatory course (CP1, CP2), the elementary course (CE1, CE2), and the middle course (CM1, CM2). In order to enter into secondary school, students are encouraged to pass an exam known as the Certificat de Fin d'Etudes Élémentaires (CFEE – certificate of the end of elementary studies). However, in many cases the CFEE is being phased out, or is not required for entrance into secondary school. See Figure 1.1 for a breakdown of the education system.

Once students successfully complete elementary education, they enter into the first cycle of secondary school, Collège d'Enseignement Moyen (CEM – college of middle instruction). This four year cycle consists of four levels in ascending order: sixième, cinquième, quatrième, and troisième. Students in each level are required to take a total of seven subjects: French, English, history, family studies, mathematics, biology, and physical education. Depending on the school resources and teacher base, quatrième and troisième level students are offered physical science and other languages such as Spanish, German, Arab, Portuguese, Italian or Russian. Normally, students who attend CEM are ages 13 through 16, but the ending age statistic has increased over the years as repeating, the incidence of students failing and retaking a certain year in school, is very common at this level. At the end of CEM, students must take the BFEM to be considered

for admission to the second cycle of secondary school known as lycée (similar to high school in the United States).

Figure 1.1 – Senegalese Education System

		Year	Exam	Age	
SECONDARY	SECOND CYCLE	Terminale/T ^{le}	BAC	18	
		Première/1 ^{re}		17	
		Deuxième/2 ^{nde}		16	
	FIRST CYCLE	Troisième/3 ^e	BFEM	15	
		Quatrième/4 ^e		14	
		Cinquième/5 ^e		13	
		Sixième/6 ^e		12	
		CM2		CFEE	11
		CM1			10
CE2	9				
CE1	8				
CP2	7				
CP1	6				

However, the number of available institutions for students is a hindrance to guaranteed attendance. Lycée locations generally only coincide with larger cities. Distance and access for the rural community remains one of the largest obstacles for secondary education. Lycée may often be considered as the highest level of education for most Senegalese. The three years of lycée for students ages 17 through 19 are titled deuxième, première, and terminale; the terminale year being the final and concluding year of secondary education in which students prepare to take the Baccalaureate exam (BAC). The BAC permits entrance into university. Students preparing for it choose between three series: the literature series “L” with two options, L1 for intensive study of French and English, and L2 for subjects such as geography, philosophy, or French; the scientific series “S” with S1 focusing on mathematics and experimental sciences such as biology and physics, and S2 for economics and administrative studies; and finally the

technology series. The strict structure of the BAC prepares students for a future in a particular occupation, with little room for variation or modification depending on job markets or student interests.

The Importance of the BFEM

Middle school students who pass the BFEM will generally continue onto lycée and further their secondary education. Thus, the BFEM is a turning point for a majority of young students – if they do not succeed, they may abandon school if they do not have the grades or means to attend lycée. This exam is extremely important within the life of a young student, especially for those who face a reality of relocation for attending lycée. A change in education legislation in 2004 determined that the BFEM is not required for entrance into lycée – before this a student needed a final grade in troisième of 12/20³ without the BFEM in order to pass onto the second cycle of secondary education, a grade extremely difficult to obtain. Now it is possible for a student with a grade of 10/20 to progress onto lycée without the BFEM. They will also be accepted into lycée if they have a 9.5/10 in addition to the BFEM, but an 8/10 is not acceptable even with the BFEM. At present, a mounting problem of students who are unprepared for the rigor and academic stress of lycée are entering with what may be considered an insufficient mastery level. Thus, how students prepare for the exam determines their performance and their attitude toward the BFEM.

³ The Senegalese grading system is synonymous with the French grading system, which is based on a 0-20 number scale, with 20/20 being the highest grade. Receiving a 20/20 is relatively impossible, and it is rare for high-achieving students to score above a 16/20. A 10/20 might be similar to a low B letter grade in the United States.

The Structure of the BFEM

There are five options available to the students enlisting for the exam. Depending on their class choices throughout middle school and their perceived specialties, they can choose from Moderne Langue Vivante II (MLV – Modern Living Language), Moderne Science Physique (MSP – Modern Physical Science), Technique (Technology), or two types of “Classical” exams (Table 1.1). The exam is offered in French or Arabic and there are three separate parts regardless of the option. A student must complete a series of common tests on the core subjects such as French, math, history-geography, and English. Afterward, the particular test or subject tests are determined by the exam option. For example, if a student chooses to take the Modern Langue Vivante II BFEM, they may select a German, Spanish, Arabic, Russian, Portuguese, or Italian test. If they choose the Moderne Science Physique BFEM, a physics test is required instead of a second language test. The third part of every BFEM is an optional section in which a student may choose drawing, music, or Economie Familial (Eco Fam), a civic education and family studies class.

Table 1.1 – Exam Choices Available for Students

SECTIONS	Langue Vivante I	Required Tests	Optional Tests
MODERNE (LV2)	English or German	English/German/Russian/Arab/Spanish/Portuguese/Italian	Drawing or Music or Eco Fam
MODERNE (SP)	English or German	Physical Sciences	Drawing or Music or Eco Fam
TECHNIQUE	English or German	Physical Sciences + Technology or Eco Fam or Introduction Economics	Drawing or Music or LV2 or Eco Fam
CLASSIQUE (A1)	English	Latin + Greek	Drawing or Music or Eco Fam
CLASSIQUE (A2)	English	Latin + LV2 (classic) or Arab + LV2 (classic)	Drawing or Music or Eco Fam

Source: Ministère de L'éducation, DEXC

Lasting for three days, the exam for the first group is rigorous and abides to a strict schedule. All students taking the BFEM participate in these three days of testing. Students take the exam at a designated center located as close as possible to their place of residence. Centers are generally located at varying schools generally equipped to handle a large number of students. The jury in which the student is placed is determined by the BFEM option they choose. The first and second days of testing are the same for each student with the afternoon on day two and day three varying depending on the student's BFEM choice (Table 1.2). Each subject receives a number coefficient, and a student's score is calculated by points received multiplied by twenty (Table 1.3). If the student achieves a total score above 200, they are admitted in the first group of test-takers. However, if a student scored between 160 and 200, they are placed on the *Liste des candidates proposes a l'admission définitive après les épreuves du deuxième groupe*, or a list of students eligible to take a second exam. This second group allows for students to have a second chance at receiving their BFEM if their score was not sufficient after the first attempt. A score under 160 does not allow a student another chance. The second group of exams is entirely written and reinforces only key material. The second group of tests usually occurs about two weeks after the first group since professors must correct the first set of exams to determine if they are to be considered for the second group. Table 1.4 shows the breakdown of testing for the second group. If a student attains an 80/160 during the second set of testing, the student is admitted and will successfully receive the BFEM certificate.

Table 1.2 – Calendar of Tests for First Group

First Day	Second Day	Third Day
8:00-10:00 French Composition	8:00-10:00 Mathematics	8:00-9:30 Technology or Eco Fam or Introduction Economics
10:15 Dictation & Text followed by Questions	10:15-12:15 History and Geography	8:00-10:00 Latin/Greek/LV2/Arab/LV2

15:00-16:30 Science of Life and Earth (Biology)	15:00-16:00 Civic Education	10:15-11:15 Drawing/Music/Eco Fam/LV2 (Technique)
16:45-18:45 LV1	16:15-17:45 LV2 or Physical Sciences	

Source: Ministère de L'éducation, DEXC

Table 1.3 – Breakdown of Coefficients by Tests

Obligatory Tests	Coefficient	Duration (hours)
French Composition	2	2
Text followed by Questions	1	1
Dictation	1	1
Mathematics	4	2
Science of Live and Earth	2	1.5
History and Geography	2	2
Civic Education	1	1
Langue Vivante	2	2
Orale Language Test	1	2
Physical Education	2	

Particular Subject Tests

Section Classique	Coefficient	Duration (hours)
Latin or Arab	1	1
Greek or Langue Vivante 2	1	1

Section Modern	Coefficient	Duration (hours)
Physical Sciences or Langues Vivantes (LV2)	2	1.5

Section Technique	Coefficient	Duration (hours)
Physical Sciences	2	1.5
Technologie or Eco Fam or Introduction Economics	2	1.5

Section Modern	Coefficient	Duration (hours)
Physical Sciences or Langues Vivantes (LV2)	2	1.5

Optional Tests	Coefficient	Duration (hours)
Drawing or Eco Fam or LV2	1	1

Source: Ministère de L'Enseignement Elémentaire, du Moyen Secondaire et des Langues Nationales, DEXC

Table 1.4 – Calendar of Tests for Second Group

Hours	Test
8:00-10:00	Text followed by Questions
10:15-12:15	Mathematics
15:00-16:30	LV2/Physical Sciences/Latin (A1 or A2)/Arab (A2)

Source: Ministère de L'éducation, DEXC

Completely separate from the French option is the Franco-Arab option for certain schools. Not nearly as common, the Franco-Arab option generally receives less attention as less students choose to take it due to the smaller number of Franco-Arab schools. The exam functions the same way regarding points, yet with major differences in material. Obligatory tests regarding Arab include a composition in Arab and a religious education section. The second half in French consists of history-geography, mathematics, biology, dictation, and text followed by questions. The oral language test portion of the exam is given in French instead of another language (Ndiaye, 2012). All subjects within this research project have chosen the French option so the Franco-Arabe option will not be discussed further.

Methodological Framework

Objectives

The purpose of this research project is to discover the perceptions and views surrounding the BFEM exam and how varying factors affect a student's preparation and future success in passing the exam. By comparing a rural middle school, CEM de Leona in the region of Louga, and an urban middle school, CEM Amadou Fara Mbodji in Saint-Louis, I will be able to show how the responsibility is shared and how each group understands their obligations within a different setting and context. This information is then situated into the larger scheme of urban and rural educational differences. The logistics involved in the creation and organization of the

exam at the administration level, the efforts teachers make to orient their students to the BFEM, the methods students use to prepare, and the encouragement the student's family provides all determine the educational future of Senegal. Understanding the connection or disconnection between these actors and the appropriate distribution of responsibilities will give insight to the place education has within the lives of the Senegalese people.

Sampling

This study is a comparison between two middle schools in two different regions of Senegal located in extremely diverse locales and serving a diverse set of needs. With so many inconsistencies, a strict framework and sampling must be adhered to. Research at the administration level was done in the region of Saint-Louis at the Inspection d'Académie (IA – Academic Inspection). There are 14 regions in Senegal meaning there are 14 IAs. This level of governmental administration was created to handle the management of schooling and all scholarly affairs in each region. A response to assure the continuity of education from preschool until lycée, each IA is constituted by regional and departmental structures working together to develop possibilities for the school children of Senegal. Each IA is made up of a variety of offices, organized to fulfill separate needs within the framework of the education system. It is the Bureau d'Examens et Concours (BEXC – Office of Exams and Competitions) that specifically controls the organization of the BFEM. Gathering information at this level involved holding informal interviews with the IA personnel as well as interning in the office for three months.

To understand the opinions of the teachers, I decided to interview two teachers of each discipline with a troisième class, meaning that they are currently teaching students preparing to take the BFEM. Choosing two from each school for each discipline allowed me the chance to

view a variety of opinions from each establishment and analyzing the information by variables other than a rural or urban setting. By spending much time helping and volunteering at each school, I was able to establish rapport and respect with the teachers, which allowed me to easily approach them for interviews. Variables include how long they have been teaching and what level of teacher training they have had.

I structured student interviews around which BFEM option they decided to take and gender, as I believed these variables would influence the student's study preferences and how they viewed the exam. In Senegalese culture, young women often experience setbacks that inhibit their education due to the perceived role of women in society. If the means to send all of their children to school do not exist, often a family will chose to send the son to school over the daughter. In more rural areas, middle school aged girls are forced to abandon school for reasons such as early pregnancies or taking care of the younger children in the family. I can speak of this reality from experience: my host sister of 15 years of age was forced to drop out of CEM cinquième due to a pregnancy from an early marriage. For this reason I was curious to see if the girls and boys of troisième had different views and different methods of study.

Also important in this grouping was the choice of BFEM option. A student choosing to take the MLV Espagnol, or Modern Living Language Spanish, has different educational motives and strengths than a student taking the Technique SP, or Physical Science Technology Exam. Someone with language and literature strengths may prepare differently than someone preparing for a technology intensive exam. Taking these observations into consideration, I decided to interview of quarter of the girls and a quarter of the boys enrolled for each exam, rounding up if the total was an odd number. For example, if 9 girls and 16 boys were registered through one of

the selected middle schools to take the MSP Eco Fam, or Modern Physical Sciences with Eco Fam as choice for the optional test, than I would speak with 3 girls and 4 boys.

In terms of family interviews⁴, I originally chose to speak with eight families: four representing a higher overall level of education and four representing a lower level. This was determined by the occupation of parents as stated by students during the student interviews or by school records. A household headed by a father who is a French teacher or a mother who works at bank would be considered in the higher wrung. If one of the parents is deceased, the mother stays at home, and/or the father is employed as a fisher or a vendor at the informal market for instance, the household would be considered to be lower education and income level. Interviews were conducted in the comfort of interviewees' homes and compensated with tea leaves and sugar, staples of Senegalese society.

School Profiles

CEM Amadou Fara Mbodji is located on the mainland portion the Northern city of Saint-Louis, set in a residential area. The two-story building is in close proximity to another CEM and the bottom floor serves as an elementary school. What used to be an old government office has been "renovated" to reflect the needs of a middle school for the most part. Students take science and technology classes at another institution, the Bloc Scientifique et Technologique (BST –

⁴ When speaking of families and family interviews, the term is very open. While it seems that identifying a family by a father, mother and siblings would be efficient and regulated, it is impossible to do so within Senegalese culture. The reason I have said for example that the fourth group who plays a major role in student preparation is the student's family, not solely the parents, because Senegalese families are communities. Oftentimes there are situations in which an older sister or a grandmother has taken over the role of mother in the family or the older brothers play a more important role in the life of a student than his parents who work in Dakar. For this reason, interviews conducted with a family could be anyone in the household – a father, a sister, the three cousins, etc. All opinions toward the BFEM were taken and valued.

scientific and technology unit). This design is common in a few larger cities in Senegal. The BST was created in the 1980s as a response to the need for improved quality of technologic and scientific schooling. Students of quatrième and troisième level from several middle schools in Saint-Louis go to the BST for the following classes: physical sciences, biology, technology education, and économie familiale. The BST is thus a hub for technological information sharing and instruction (Coordination Nationale des Blocs Scientifiques et Technologiques, 2011). Students attending CEM Amadou Fara Mbodji take their Physical Education class at a nearby wrestling club and football terrain. The school's location in the city of Saint-Louis makes available more opportunities for the students; they have access to resources that further enhance their learning.

855 students currently attend CEM Amadou Fara Mbodji. There are three classes of troisième, which attributes for 133 students of the school population and only 3 of these students are repeating the level. In 2011, the rate of success for the students who passed the BFEM was 70%. Most of the students are from the city of Saint-Louis and live with their birth-families to go to school.

The CEM de Leona is located about 35-40 km away from the city of Louga. It is located in the village of Leona and serves as the middle school for the surrounding region. Young students come from over sixty different villages to attend the CEM de Léona, many walking several kilometers every morning or are forced to seek housing during the school week. The African Development Bank and the Senegalese government funded the construction of the CEM de Leona and the school opened its doors in October 2011. In the 2010-2011 school year at the CEM de Léona, 49 students who took the BFEM passed out of 60 candidates; 81.66% of

possible students were admitted to lycée from CEM Léona. With 590 students placed into one middle school and only 20 teachers, the classes are often overcrowded.

Chapter Two

The Administration

The logistics and organization of the BFEM take place at the regional administration level. There are fourteen regions in Senegal – Dakar, Diourbel, Fatick, Kaffrine, Kaolack, Kédougou, Kolda, Louga, Matam, Saint-Louis, Sédhiou, Tambacounda, Thies, and Ziguinchor – and each region has an Inspection d'Académie, or Academic Inspection, to handle the BFEM preparations. The responsibilities are delegated to the BEXC in which I interned. The first step in BFEM planning is to create a list of faculty eligible to sit on a correction jury, or grading board, in addition to the list of faculty eligible to serve as the president of a jury. The principal of each middle school establishment of the region sends in by mail or e-mail a list of teachers under their direction to be considered as correctors for the BFEM. The principal decides which teachers or faculty he finds to be most qualified to correct certain tests on the exam. For example, English teachers grade the English part of the BFEM and conduct the English oral test. The principals usually nominate themselves or one or two other teachers with considerable experience to serve as the president of a jury, someone who oversees the events throughout the testing and correction to ensure that the exam process at their particular center runs smoothly. It is the BEXC that formulates these correction juries for each center where the BFEM is given. Teachers should not be placed to correct in the same city or the same center in which they teach for anonymity reasons – any possibility to encounter their own student's work is carefully averted.

In order to formulate these correction juries, the person in charge at the BEXC writes out and organizes by hand the juries. In the region of Saint-Louis there are over 100 middle school establishments to select juries from. There are less centers of examination, and the number of correctors present at a jury must coincide with the number of students who will be present at the

center. Organizing the centers in which the exam is offered to best meet the locational needs of each student proves to be difficult in the rural regions. The inscription of students, which exam option they want to take, how many specific juries and correctors are needed as a result of number of students signed for the exam is all the work of one person.

The amount of work required of one person in a region leave much room for error. There is not a method of work and process transmissibility – it is this sole person who has been assigned organizing the structure of test day and is the only one who understands his own system. The inefficiencies counteract the hard work put forth by this individual to make for a confusing system still not understood by most. Every year after the exam, all of the paper results are brought to the regional office. This creates mounds of unorganized paper waste. Because none of the grading or testing is done electronically, the hand-calculated scores by various jury presidents are not always uniform. If there happens to be a miscalculation, or a single paper was lost in the transition to another office, there is the risk that a student who actually passed their exam will be listed as failed and not receive their BFEM Attestation.

Interviews held with IA personnel revealed their exasperation with the system. They appeared to be at a loss on how to improve the efficiency of the system. The Minister of Education stationed in the capital city of Dakar signs and finalizes the BFEM Diplomas recognizing each student who passes the exam. Teachers of every discipline from around the country submit questions for consideration to the Ministry of Education in Dakar. Only a few are chosen, and these are utilized for the national test that every student in every region takes. The BFEM Diplomas signed by the Minister of Education in Dakar have only been finished through year 2006. Students who passed the test in 2007 through 2011 still have not received their Diplomas – they only have received a temporary Attestation prepared by the BEXC after the test

results arrive. Oftentimes, these Attestations are fraught with errors or are never received by testing center for distribution to the students, leading to another circle of inefficiency in which a student must send in a request with documentation to receive another Attestation. Many of my questions that drew attention to disorganization or general ineffectiveness were met with shrugged shoulders and sighs of disappointment in the system. It is not up the personnel who work at IA to make national suggestions for improving efficiency.

The Teachers

The teachers of middle school are possibly students' only connection to the BFEM. In order to understand what role they play in the study habits of their students, I asked each interview subject a series of questions covering topics such as how often they discussed the exam with their students, their perception of the exam as an evaluation of a student's knowledge, the value of in-class preparation, their views on correcting the exam, and possible ameliorations to the current process.

The teachers in Saint-Louis working at the urban CEM Amadou Fara Mbodji can be characterized as having a high level of experience as well as high levels of training. This was determined by inquiring after their credentials. For a teacher to be considered an official permanent teacher for middle school, they must have completed three years of university and then one year of teacher training to receive their Certificat Aptitude Enseignement Moyen (CEAM – Certificate of Middle School Instruction Skills). Therefore, a teacher with a title of Professeur d'Enseignement Moyen (PEM – Teacher of Middle School Instruction) means they have spent a few years at teacher training school with their university license and CEAM. One step below PEM is the Professeur de college d'enseignement moyen (PCEM – Teacher of

Middle School), which authorizes a teacher to teach at the CEM level even though they only attended two years of teacher training and have no university experience; PCEM teachers have received their BAC but did not attend university in addition to teacher training school. If teachers are in the process of completing their training, they are considered to be Professeur Contractuel (PC – Contracted Teachers) employees. A “vacataire” refers to a teacher who was recruited to teach before finishing or university – often they only have their BAC degree. After three years of serving as a “vacataire,” one can be considered PC. PC teachers are rated by experience and paid in ascending increments based how many years they have been teaching (Samb, 2011; Sourang, 2003).

At CEM Amadou Fara Mbodji, a majority of the teachers can be considered to be permanent teachers: they have titles such as PEM or PCEM with varying degrees. The average number of years of teaching is 11 years of experience; teachers at CEM Amadou Fara Mbodji thus are knowledgeable and have been a part of the Senegalese education system for several years.

In terms of aiding their troisième students study in class for the BFEM, there was a definite difference depending on the discipline. Professors of History-Geography and the languages such as Spanish, English, or German, were more inclined to help their students study and prepare for BFEM by discussing the exam in class, giving BFEM specific exercises, and motivating their students. A select number used this strategy because they felt that students needed to be constantly reminded of the presence of a large exam at the end of the school year or else they would forget to study. Other teachers had a more positive and supportive view of their students, saying that in-class preparation and individual preparation are both necessary for students to be well-prepared. However, the French and math teachers believed there was not the

time or the means to offer BFEM specific preparation in class, and that students are solely responsible for the material. This viewpoint could originate from the idea that subjects such as French should already be common knowledge by the end of middle school; a subject such as French should not need to be reinforced specifically for the BFEM. However, a subject such as History-Geography or German requires more instruction and fortification.

When asked if the BFEM was a good evaluation, or an effective measurement of a student's knowledge, the teachers of Amadou Fara Mbodji had a variety of opinions. In general, most believed that the evaluation was relatively effective because it measured a student's knowledge of the entire cycle: sixième through troisième. Teachers who believed this were not in full support of the legislative change of 2004 stating that with a final grade of 10/20 a student could continue to lycée without the BFEM. They felt a barrier is necessary to prevent students with a low level of subject mastery from continuing without the project knowledge base. The other view was that the test was just a one-time exam. A three-day long test cannot in anyway be compared to four years of middle school: there is too much pressure for a young student. In some cases, a normally very intelligent and capable student could make a mistake and score poorly on the exam. Teachers on this side of the BFEM effectiveness continuum argued that such an occurrence should not keep typically high-achieving students from continuing to a higher level of education. If a student were allowed to continue to lycée and then attempt the exam again the following year, they would be better prepared and have a higher chance of success. An argument against this particular loophole in a child's education from the teachers supporting the BFEM is that students who have good grades should also have the BFEM. However, teachers generally agree that both high grades and the BFEM are extremely important for ensuring that a child has appropriate mastery of the subject.

The professors of Amadou Fara Mbodji suggested several improvements for the BFEM. These range from splitting it up into an exam after each of the four years of middle school to placing more of an emphasis on oral testing. Every teacher had their own idea after several years of teaching what they would like to see changed. For example, the professors of History-geography both believed that the HG portion on the exam should be larger than it is currently. Students are apparently learning such large amounts information about history that choosing one or two questions to answer does not do justice to the subject and the teachers who painstakingly help their student's prepare. One of the English teachers suggested that for the English test, listening, writing, and speaking must be more heavily weighted and emphasized. However, the most common suggestion was for teachers to have increased participation in the development of the questions and the BFEM itself.

Most of the teachers at Amadou Fara Mbodji had previously served on a jury to correct the portion of the BFEM for their particular discipline. From their experience grading the exam, I asked the teachers how prepared the students seemed. For the most part, teachers agreed that student preparation for the BFEM was about half and half: students were either well-prepared or not prepared at all. Some teachers reported that students seemed to do very well, while others believed that certain subjects were not well tested. Most tended to agree that depending on the location of your center you would notice a different in the achievement level; teachers preferred serving on juries in urban areas because the tests were easier to grade and received higher scores.

As a whole, the teachers employed at the CEM de Leona had a very different view of the BFEM. Unanimously they agreed that the BFEM was a good evaluation and they all devoted some portion of their class time to BFEM preparation, regardless of their discipline. They integrated more in-class preparation for the BFEM into their lesson plans, reasoning that students

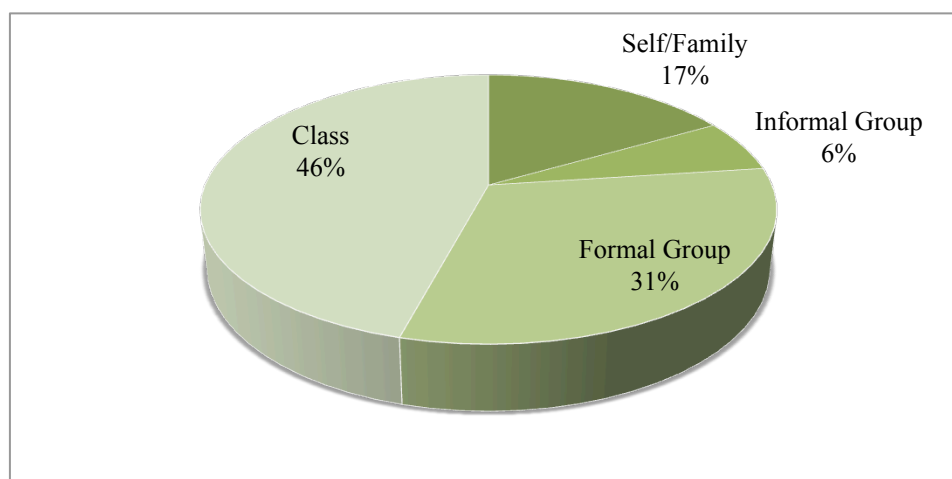
needed help orienting themselves around the exam. Most were also firm supporters of the idea that one can continue onto lycée without the BFEM at first because it will give them the chance to try again. This year at the CEM de Leona there are 65 students of troisième, yet 14 of them are repeating students. Three of the students already have their BFEM but were forced to repeat the troisième level to achieve the appropriate final grade of 10/20. Seeing several examples like this would significantly affect how a teacher views student opportunities. Only three of the teachers at CEM de Leona can be considered permanent employees, while the rest have only PC or “vacataire” status. Oftentimes, younger, newer, and less qualified teachers will be sent to teach in villages such as the case in Leona. This creates a problem since there is not one teacher harboring grand experience and ideas to share with the others – these teachers have not spent long enough in education to be able to understand completely the BFEM test and all that it entails. For this reason, the young teachers’ default view of the BFEM is a positive one. They may have just finished school themselves and have not had enough experience to formulate their own opinion regarding the actual effectiveness of the BFEM in relation to their students.

The Students

Surprisingly there was the least amount of variation amongst the students of all the groups interviewed. The BFEM option they chose or their gender made no difference in how they chose to study or perceived the exam. The sole difference between how rural and urban students chose to study was affected by the presence of a preparatory class or not. In Leona, students are spread further apart, many lodging for free during the week in Leona since they live in distant peripheral villages. They are only in Leona for school, but they have found other

formal groups to study within their home villages since there is not a preparatory class offered.⁵ In Saint-Louis, students have the option to take a Course de Renforcement, or reinforcement class, which costs 4000CFA a month.⁶ The different methods of study are: preparing on one's own or with some help from one's family, an informal group – students who said that they sometimes studied with friends or peers –, a formal group without a professor that students agreed to meet twice a week at certain times, or a formal, paid class. In Saint-Louis, students chose to take reinforcement classes at a variety of different CEMs depending on location and class preference. See Figures 2.1 and 2.2 for percentage study habits based on percentage of total students interviewed.

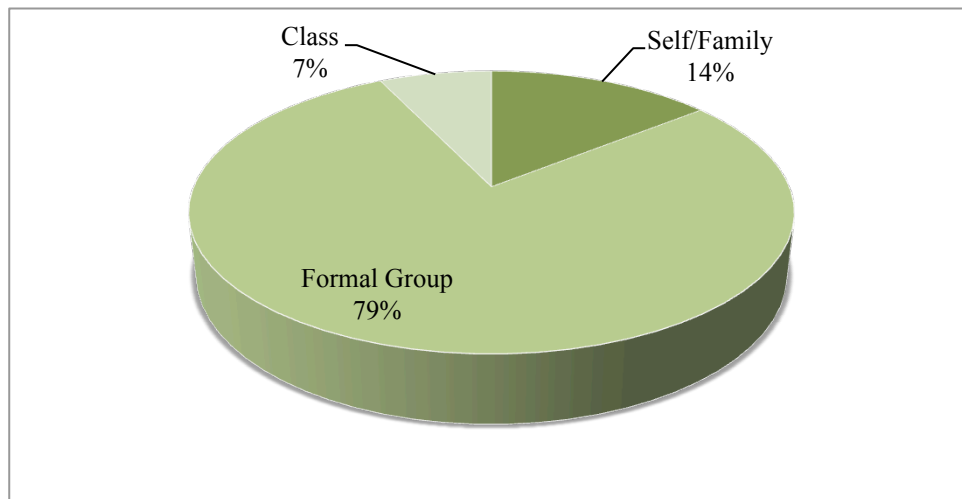
Figure 2.1 – CEM de Leona: Preferred Study Methods



⁵ One student from a more affluent family who attended CEM de Leona was able to take a preparatory class offered in a nearby city.

⁶ 4000 CFA is equivalent to about 8 USD. In 2011, Senegal's gross domestic product per capita was 1,119 USD, meaning that such an expense seriously cuts into the family's living expenses (World Bank, 2011).

Figure 2.2 – CEM Amadou Fara Mbodji: Preferred Study Methods



The perception of the exam and how students felt about the approaching BFEM had no correlation to gender or exam option either. Students of all genders and discipline specialties had different ideas about the exam. For the most part, students appeared very confident saying that the BFEM would not be difficult if they were well-prepared and they continued to study. There were some who believed that the exam would prove to be very difficult as it was an extremely large and important exam. Others nonchalantly declared it would be easy, while some thought of it as just another exam that they had to take. A small minority believed the test to be a complete chance saying, “Inshallah, je vais réussir.” (God willing, I will be successful.) See Figures 2.3 and 2.4 for a breakdown of BFEM expectations based on percentages of students interviewed.

Figure 2.3 – CEM de Leona: Perception of upcoming BFEM

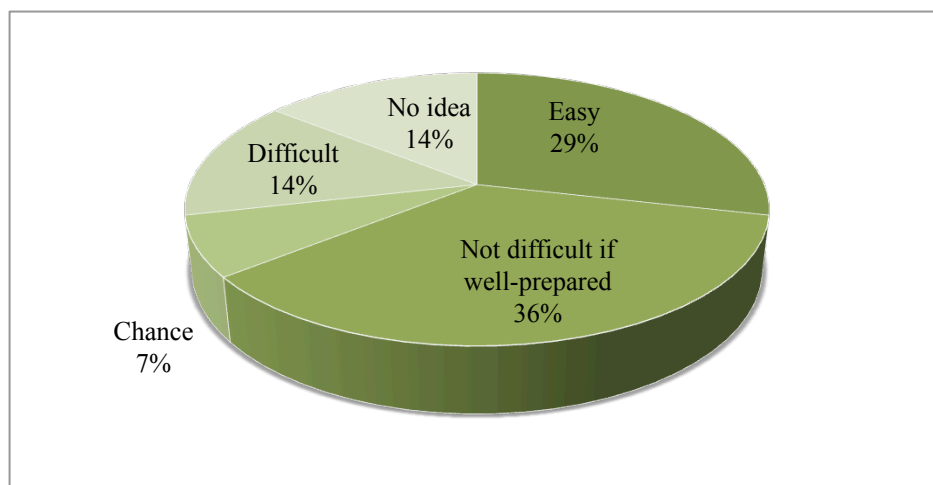
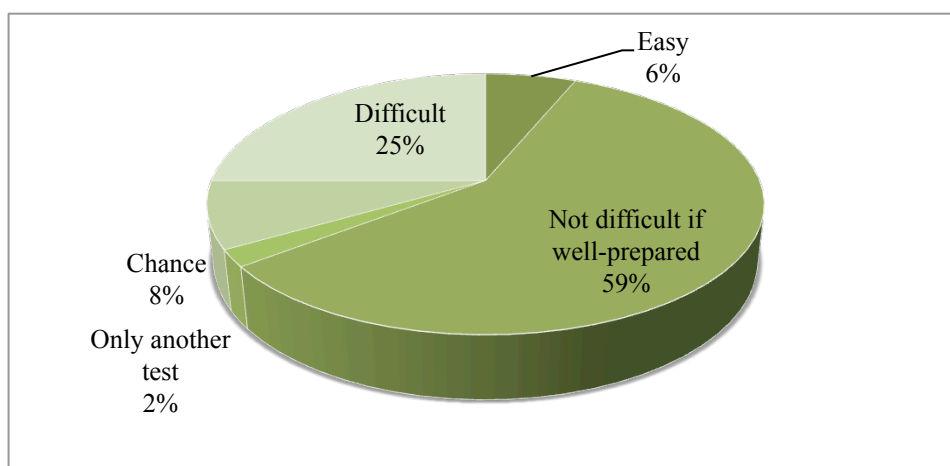


Figure 2.4 – CEM Amadou Fara Mbodji: Perception of Upcoming BFEM



Distance from school and type of family situation they had no effect on their study habits for both student groups. The only largely apparent difference was the reason for choosing the BFEM exam they had signed up for. The BFEM choices for the students of CEM Amadou Fara Mbodj were the MLV Espagnol, MLV Allemande, Technique: SP + Eco Fam, or Technique: SP + Technologie. In Leona, students chose from MSP Eco Fam, MLV Arab, or MLV Espagnol.

Table 2.1 – CEM de Leona: Test Choices

	MLV Espagnol	MLV Arabe	MSP Eco Fam
Girls	1	7	9
Boys	0	16	31

Table 2.2 – CEM Amadou Fara Mbodji: Test Choices

	MLV Espagnol	MLV Allemande	Technique : SP + Technologie	Technique : SP + Eco Fam
Girls	25	9	6	19
Boys	38	9	17	10

When asked about their decision to take a certain exam, students choosing German or Spanish usually had such reasons as they enjoyed the language, it was an easy subject, or they wanted to play football for Barcelona. The students choosing the Technology or Physical Sciences option thought more about their future. They had chosen this exam because it was a more difficult but would set them up on the Scientific Track in lycée so they could go into medicine or work in technology in the future. In this way these students appeared to be more practical, demonstrating drive and ambition. Students in Leona who chose the Arab exam explained that they had already taken several years of Arabic at Koranic school in their villages.

I also took the quatrième grade for all of the students; however there was no relation between the standard variation of previous grades and methods of study. School performance did not indicate any overall study habits.

The Families

The family interviews were by far the most diverse and offered the most insight to the perception behind the exam. In Saint-Louis, the families of the troisième students knew about the structure of the exam and the significance it had in the life of the student. Out of all of the families I interviewed in Saint-Louis and Leona, there was only one family in which both the mother and the father had their BFEM and another family in which the father had his BFEM and was French teacher. Otherwise, mostly older siblings had the BFEM, but in some cases the

troisième student would be the very first person in their household to receive the BFEM if they are to succeed in the upcoming test in July. The families in which a parent or several older siblings had already achieved the BFEM had a different opinion of the importance of the BFEM. They tended to believe that the BAC and beyond was more important than only receiving the BFEM. Even though the BFEM diploma does allow work and entrance into certain government jobs, those who already have achieved their BAC indicated that while the BFEM had significance, it was just another exam that was necessary to take.

In many cases in Saint-Louis, the father had dropped out of school early and participated in some sort of formational school that allowed for certification for certain skilled government jobs or they spent time in the army or police force. In these cases the father was still doing very well for himself and his family, as formational schools seems to allow a second chance. In one instance, the father works for a real estate agency in the capital of Dakar and is head mechanic of the ships at the Dakar port. In this class of family, the mother usually only has some elementary school background and no BFEM but has managed to find a career by different means. Parents from this income group know the power of education and they are extremely enthusiastic and encouraging to the troisième student in the household.

In one case, I met a family who had originated from Mauritania. In Mauritania there are only Arab and Koranic Schools, so the children of the family were given the chance to receive a valuable education. They had moved their whole lives to Senegal just so the kids of the family could receive an education – for this reason the troisième student was under a lot of pressure to pass the BFEM and his sister was working toward her BAC. In yet another case, the older sister of the troisième student had attempted the BFEM five separate times without succeeding. Afterwards, she dropped out of school and went to formation school to learn how to be a

hairdresser. In this family the father believed that staying in school and getting the BFEM was important, but there was less pressure on the student in the house to pass her BFEM. This was because she would be the very first person in her family to receive it, yet if she fails, they cannot blame her for trying like the other members of the family.

In Leona, I encountered several families that did not know what the BFEM really was. They understood it was important and someone should have it, but in most cases, no one in the family had finished elementary school. One man I spoke grew angry that I was asking him questions about his education and the education of his son for the only thing he knew about was his cattle. One conversation with a Marabout, or religious leader, brought to light the difficulties of staying in school in Leona. The father had four wives and twenty-four children, two of which already received their BFEM and were attending lycée in Louga. However, the father/Marabout informed me that he had to pay 200,000 CFA a month for lodging for his two sons to attend lycée. He wants all of his children to have the BFEM and go on to university, but it will not be possible to continue like he is now. In a Pro-Poor Livestock Policy Initiative Report (2006) the annual average income for rural households in Louga – the region in which Leona is located – was 1,082,322 CFA (p. 4). This means that the average rural family would not be able to afford a full year of schooling if they must send their children to the city.

Chapter Three

Analysis of Findings

The inaccessibility and disorganization of the administration creates a problem of miscommunication and transparency between those in charge of national educational proceedings and those forced to execute these rules. Thus teachers do not always receive the appropriate information to adequately prepare their students for the BFEM. IA is very far removed from the schools, especially the rural schools. This lack of communication inhibits how the teachers prepare their students for the BFEM and the role the teachers themselves play in exam development. Currently, the system is too centralized for adequate efficiency. As the Ministry of Education resides and operates only out of the capital city, the authorities may have limited knowledge of the needs of other localities.

Rural schools are at the largest disadvantage in receiving instruction and information from regional education centers due simply to the lack of proximity. Without easily accessible ways to share information such as through e-mail or a regularly updated website, teachers and principals in rural areas often struggle to stay connected to education officials. I recall times spent shadowing teachers when we traveled to the regional city center from Leona for a teaching workshop, only to discover that the date had been changed. Such experiences between rural school faculty and regional urban administration can lead to distrust and exasperation. Equally frustrating are workshops and teaching seminars advocating the use of the Internet and other resources for BFEM preparation relatively accessible to urban faculty, but out of reach for rural teachers. Urban bias is thus seen at the administration level in that the centralized nature of the system prohibits effective communication between varying facets of the education system.

In terms of teacher qualifications, newer instructors lacking in experience are ironically sent to teach in rural villages, often the more difficult teaching job. This is due higher drop out rates and a sense of disillusionment among students related to learning. Many teachers in Leona, were passionate about their job, but wished that the students shared a similar interest. Since all of the teachers in Leona originated from larger cities or other urban areas, they often had a difficult time being welcomed and accepted into the rural village. Hundreds of kilometers from home, the teachers sent to rural areas confided that they often felt lonely or alienated from the tight-knit village community. Such feelings affected their teaching and motivation. Teachers from CEM de Leona reported being frustrated with rural students, as school often competes with agricultural work. Teachers everywhere must connect their students to the seemingly abstract world of learning within a structured setting. However, in rural areas, a Senegalese teacher's job is to connect their rural students with the government mandated education and testing despite cultural and language barriers. Because rural schools are detached from education administration located in urban areas, securing resources for effective teaching becomes a challenge.

Urban schools are able to provide their teachers with more resources such as computers, printing and copying services, and even electricity to light the rooms. At CEM Amadou Fara Mbodji, a janitor cleans the school so that class time does not have to be devoted to teachers and students sweeping the floors and cleaning the chalkboards. Living in a city allows for access to more personnel, as rural schools often fall short of faculty. Many teachers in Saint-Louis were able to live with their families and thus felt more integrated into the community. Besides having more experience, the secondary school teachers at CEM Amadou Fara Mbodji seemed to enjoy their jobs more. This would enable them to be more effective as instructors. Whether they individually addressed preparation in for the BFEM in class or not, increased levels of

qualification and motivation can be correlated to student achievement. Urban teaching is thus beneficial for students in general and for the BFEM.

Student differences as related to perceptions and preparation for the BFEM varied the least between rural and urban schools. Urban students were more confident that the BFEM would not be difficult since they would be well-prepared at 59% versus 39% of rural students. Also, urban students had access to preparatory or reinforcement classes for the BFEM. Otherwise, the rural and urban students differed the least from the other groups interviewed. This points to the important conclusion that it is the environment and uncontrollable situations that account for lower achievement, not a lack of initiative on the student's part as the teachers stipulated. For both groups, the BFEM is an exam that will determine whether or not they continue to lycée and go on to pursue higher education.

Families better understood the significance of the BFEM within the life of their student in Saint-Louis as contrasted with Leona where many families proved to be disconnected completely from their son's or daughter's education. As I discovered in Leona, there were six students in the past year who had their BFEM but were unable to go to lycée due to financial restraints. These students abandoned school not because they did not have the BFEM, but because lycée was not accessible. When asked which lycée their child would attend if they successfully obtained their BFEM, many families had no idea and had not planned for their student's future because there simply were not the means to. In Saint-Louis on the other hand, urban students knew exactly which lycée they would attend if they passed the BFEM. This was the greatest indication of urban bias found in this study as relates to higher education and the BFEM. The exam serves as a gatekeeper to the second cycle of secondary education, but not simply due to academic achievement. Accessibility to institutions of higher learning is available in urban areas and not

rural. The students were the most constant of the study groups in their fortitude, however on the rural students' geographic location served as a major deterrence to secondary education achievement.

BFEM in the Context of Development

Structural constraints related to urban and rural dichotomies significantly impacts general perceptions related to the BFEM, a major middle school exam. This exam is a considerable milestone in a Senegalese student's life due to its difficulty and the immense pressure and responsibility associated with passing the exam. Upon comparing statistics of urban and rural students who complete secondary school education, there is a large gap favoring urban students. 94% of rural students have less than a lower secondary education and with only about half of middle school students passing the BFEM countrywide, there is an issue for Senegalese youth related to accessing their future (Education For All Global Monitoring Report, 2012, p. 273). This study investigated the perceptions surrounding the BFEM as maintained by administration, teachers, students, and families. Understanding the interconnectedness between these actors and sheds light on the importance of education within lives of the Senegalese people and what can be done raise educative achievement in the country.

Currently a qualitative and cultural approach to understanding the education system is needed, which contrasts the typical quantitative studies. By talking to Senegalese people about education, this study established that accessibility to general resources, qualified teachers, and a nearby lycée were the largest barriers in rural areas for students to pass the BFEM and continue their education. Also, customs encouraging young boys to work in agriculture and allowing for early marriage of young girls are more widely practiced in rural regions. Possible reasons this

does not occur in urban areas are the availability of other activities to pursue in a city and a general focus on education. Saint-Louis is unique: because it used to be the capital of French West Africa during colonialism, many schools were originally instituted in the city. Today this support of education and future success lingers, providing urban youth from Saint-Louis with a different mindset toward schooling than rural youth from Leona.

Development in the Senegalese education sector tends to focus on enrollment rates, and within the past few years there has been a shift toward bettering the quality of instruction. However, effective evaluation has yet to be considered. In order to ensure that students have achieved full comprehension of the material, the L'Inspection Générale de l'Éducation Nationale (IGEN – General Inspection of National Education), which oversees and establishes national curriculum standards, suggests that teachers evaluate their students regularly (IGEN, 2003). Even though the curriculum report forewarns teachers about adequately preparing students for the BFEM, it does not offer guidelines or specific suggestions to accomplish this task. In general, teachers are required to enter three grades each semester per student, totaling them for the student's final grade for the school year. The current requirement of only having six yearly evaluations of student comprehension does not properly instill a healthy learning pattern, nor does it adequately measure a student's grasp of the subject. The pressure for young students to perform well on isolated exams further destroys the idea that learning is an exploration of knowledge and gaining perspective. Without smaller and frequent evaluations of student understanding, it becomes easier for particular students to become lost, and eventually fail the class altogether. This style of teaching is analogous with that of the national testing system.

After performing this study, I suggest that future qualitative research into assessment be conducted in order to fully understand the implications of rural-urban success rates.

Difficulties Encountered and Personal Reflections

In terms of staying with the same research structure at both schools and locations, I encountered several unexpected difficulties. Firstly, while my internship at the Inspection d'Académie in Saint-Louis allowed me to view all that occurred on the administration level in the region of Saint-Louis, the other chosen middle school CEM de Leona is located in the region of Louga. It would have been useful thus to spend time at the Inspection d'Académie of Louga in order to complete the comparison between two different information sources. It is true that the end result, distribution of the exam to the region, is the same, but the process and communication between the administrators and middle school establishments could have been distinctive to the region.

Interviewing the desired number of teachers at each institution also proved to be problematic. In several cases, certain disciplines were not offered at the CEM or there was only one teacher per subject. I made the decision that it was more important to speak with at least all of the teachers of troisième than two of each subject. At CEM Amadou Fara Mbodji in Saint-Louis, troisième level students went to the Bloc Scientifique et Technologie center for classes in biology and technology. Due to the inaccessibility of the staff and time constraints it was not possible to arrange to speak with professors at this completely separate institution.

While students were selected on the basis of BFEM option and gender, I feel as though introducing another variable such as arranging interviews with students who were repeating troisième would have been beneficial. Because the selection of students was voluntary, and I did not specifically ask if the student was repeating the level, this important group and how exactly they perceive the exam was left incomplete. Also, I underestimated the enthusiasm with which students would respond to my requests for interviews. For certain groups, specifically the boys of

MLV Espagnol in Saint-Louis, I was being requested to do the interviews! I could have increased my sample size to more than a quarter of each group.

Family interviews presented a challenge due to the language barriers I faced. My elementary knowledge of Wolof allowed me to introduce myself and ask basic questions, but anything more complicated was out of my range. As discussed in the definitions section, I was interested in just understanding the household's general perception of the BFEM. In Saint-Louis, usually one or both parents or another family member spoke French and could help me with the interview. In Leona the interviews took on a slightly different procedure as a Senegalese colleague accompanied me to help with the Wolof translation, since finding French speakers in the older generation of a village population was extremely rare.

The largest disparity in research between the two schools/communities was the number of family interviews in Leona. In Saint-Louis I was able to travel around to various neighborhoods within the city for interviews. However, there were very few families with a troisième student in their house who actually lived in Leona. Otherwise, students of troisième came from outlying villages to attend the CEM de Leona. I was thus only able to do six family interviews in Leona since resource and time constraints kept me from traveling to far villages to conduct family interviews. Additionally, wealth is less apparent amongst families in a village – it was difficult to choose three upper educated families versus lower educated families in Leona since almost everyone in the region farms for a living.

One of the largest barriers other than language to doing a research project in education is the fact that I was attempted to do research within the context of a presidential election. There were teacher syndicates who were on strike for nearly five months hoping to receive better work conditions. This made it exorbitantly difficult to meet up with certain teachers. Also from time to

time it was the students who were on strike, often with a reasoning that the teachers were on strike. Due to the elections, there were several vacations for students. However, there are several vacations for students in general especially during the spring semester. School may be rigorous when it is in session, but unfortunately that is very rare.

Glossary and Abbreviations

BAC: Baccalaureate exam, permits entry into university

BEXC: Bureau d'Examens et Concours, Office of Exams and Competitions

BFEM: Brevet de Fin d'Etudes Moyennes, certificate of the end of middle school studies; exit exam for middle school

BST: Bloc Scientifique et Technologique, scientific and technology unit

CEAM: Certificat Aptitude Enseignement Moyen, certificate of middle school instruction skills

CEM: Collège d'Enseignement Moyen, college of middle instruction, first cycle of secondary school

Sixième, 6th grade, the first grade of CEM

Cinquième, 5th grade

Quatrième, 4th grade

Troisième, 3rd grade, the final grade of CEM in which students take the BFEM

CFEE: Certificat de Fin d'Etudes Elémentaires, certificate of the end of elementary studies

IA: Inspection d'Académie, academic inspection

IGEN: L'Inspection Générale de l'Education Nationale, General Inspection of National Education

Lycée: second cycle of secondary school

Deuxième: first grade of lycée

Première: second grade of lycée

Terminale: final grade of lycée

MDG: Millennium Development Goal

MLV: Moderne Langue Vivante, modern living language

MSP: Moderne Science Physique, modern physical science

NGO: Non-governmental Organization

PC: Professeur Contractuel, contracted teacher

PCEM: Professeur de college d'enseignement moyen, teacher of middle school)

PEM: Professeur d'Enseignement Moyen, teacher of middle school instruction

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

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