



French Language and Foreign Policy Coordination in Ecowas: A Comparative Analysis of Senegal and Côte D'Ivoire, 2000–2025

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Abstract

The increasing intricacy of democratic crises, military coups, and regional security issues has heightened the necessity for foreign policy coordination within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). While French is one of the primary working languages of the organization and acts as a common diplomatic medium among various member states, its impact on regional foreign policy coordination has not been extensively explored in academic literature. This article investigates the influence of the French language on foreign policy coordination within ECOWAS through a comparative analysis of Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire from 2000 to 2025. Utilizing Social Constructivism and New Regionalism as guiding frameworks, the study employs a qualitative comparative case study approach, relying on documentary analysis of ECOWAS treaties and protocols, official publications from the governments of Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, reports from the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, policy documents, and pertinent scholarly works. The results reveal that French facilitates diplomatic communication, institutional consultation, policy dialogue, and administrative coordination among Francophone member states. Nevertheless, the comparative evidence suggests that language alone does not dictate foreign policy behavior. Instead, effective foreign policy coordination is primarily influenced by domestic political stability, institutional capacity, leadership orientation, and aligned national strategic interests. The differing diplomatic experiences of Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire demonstrate that states with a shared linguistic and administrative background may pursue distinct regional diplomatic strategies in response to evolving domestic political circumstances. The research concludes that the French language serves mainly as a strategic diplomatic and institutional asset that promotes collaboration within ECOWAS. However, the success of regional foreign policy coordination is ultimately contingent upon robust institutions, ongoing political dedication, and the harmonization of national and regional interests.

Keywords: *French language; foreign policy coordination; ECOWAS; Senegal; Côte d'Ivoire; regional diplomacy; West Africa.*

Introduction

In contemporary international relations, regional organizations have gained increasing importance as nations strive for collective solutions to transnational political, economic, and security issues. In Africa, entities initially formed to foster economic collaboration have gradually broadened their roles to encompass democratic governance, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, constitutional order, and regional security. As a result, the efficacy of these institutions relies not only on the willingness of member states to collaborate but also on their capacity to coordinate foreign policy in pursuit of shared regional goals (Bach, 2016; Tieku, 2017). In this framework, communication has emerged as a crucial element of regional governance, as diplomacy depends on ongoing negotiation, consultation, and the exchange of policy ideas. Consequently, official working languages fulfill roles that go beyond mere communication, aiding in bureaucratic coordination, legal interpretation, institutional interaction, and consensus-building among member states. While a common language enhances diplomatic interactions, foreign policy ultimately remains influenced by domestic political realities, leadership preferences, institutional capabilities, and national strategic interests.

The importance of language is particularly clear within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a multilingual regional organization that includes Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone countries, each with distinct colonial and administrative histories.

Following the adoption of the Revised ECOWAS Treaty in 1993 and the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security in 1999, the organization has progressed from mere economic integration to becoming a prominent regional body for democratic governance, peacebuilding, conflict management, and collective security (ECOWAS, 1993; ECOWAS, 1999). As ECOWAS took on more extensive political duties, the need for effective foreign policy coordination grew increasingly vital to address electoral disputes, constitutional crises, terrorism, humanitarian emergencies, and regional instability. Within this institutional context, French holds a significant role as one of the three official working languages of the organization, acting as the primary language for diplomacy, legislation, public administration, and policy discussions in various member states, such as Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire. The ongoing use of French within ECOWAS and the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) promotes administrative collaboration, diplomatic negotiations, and institutional communication among Francophone governments. However, while language enhances interaction and diminishes communication obstacles, it does not inherently lead to identical foreign policy preferences or consistent diplomatic conduct.

The cases of Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire exemplify this complexity. Both nations are founding members of ECOWAS, part of the OIF, and utilize French as their official language and primary means of diplomacy. However, despite these

commonalities, their foreign policy paths from 2000 to 2025 have varied significantly. Senegal's relatively stable democratic institutions have allowed successive administrations to maintain a coherent foreign policy focused on multilateral diplomacy, mediation, democratic governance, and regional peacebuilding. In contrast, Côte d'Ivoire faced extended political instability after the 2002 civil war and the 2010–2011 post-election crisis, which limited its regional diplomatic influence until political stability and economic recovery enabled its resurgence as a key regional player (Nugent, 2018; Hartmann, 2017; Piccolino, 2018). These differing experiences indicate that while a shared language can enhance diplomatic relations, the internal political landscape and institutional robustness are more critical in determining the effectiveness of foreign policy coordination.

The significance of this matter has become increasingly evident following the succession of military coups in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger from 2020 to 2025, along with the subsequent exit of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from ECOWAS to form the Alliance of Sahel States. These occurrences have highlighted divisions regarding sanctions, democratic governance, and regional intervention, while also raising broader concerns about the organisation's institutional unity and its ability to coordinate collective diplomatic actions (Aning & Edu-Afful, 2023; Eizenga, 2023; International Crisis Group, 2024). While existing research has explored ECOWAS in the context of regional integration, peacekeeping, conflict management, and security governance (Aning & Bah, 2010; Bach, 2016), there has been relatively

little focus on language as a significant factor in foreign policy coordination. Similarly, studies concerning Francophone Africa have predominantly concentrated on colonial legacies and bilateral ties with France, rather than the institutional significance of the French language in regional diplomacy (Chafer, 2002; Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, 2022). This article seeks to fill these gaps by investigating how the French language impacts foreign policy coordination within ECOWAS through a comparative analysis of Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire from 2000 to 2025. Guided by Social Constructivism and New Regionalism, it posits that while French enhances diplomatic communication, institutional engagement, and the establishment of shared regional norms, successful foreign policy coordination fundamentally relies on political commitment, institutional capability, domestic stability, and aligned strategic interests. In this manner, the study contributes to ongoing discussions regarding language, regional diplomacy, and governance in West Africa.

Conceptual Clarification

A comprehensive understanding of the key concepts that form the basis of this study is crucial for elucidating the connection between language and foreign policy coordination within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The notions of foreign policy coordination, the French language, ECOWAS, and regional diplomacy serve as the analytical framework upon which this study is built. By clarifying these concepts, the research delineates its conceptual parameters and positions the discussion

within the wider context of literature on international relations, regional integration, and diplomacy.

Foreign Policy Coordination

Foreign policy coordination is defined as the process by which two or more states align their external policies, diplomatic stances, and strategic actions to achieve shared goals within the international arena. This concept goes beyond sporadic consultations, encompassing ongoing collaboration, policy synchronization, information exchange, joint decision-making, and collective responses to both regional and global challenges.

As noted by Christopher Hill (2016), foreign policy encompasses the totality of official external relations managed by an independent entity, typically a sovereign state, in its dealings with other international actors. Hill posits that effective foreign policy increasingly necessitates collaboration with other states, as modern international issues often cross-national borders. Thus, foreign policy coordination has emerged as a vital element of regional governance, especially within organizations that aim to achieve collective political and security objectives.

In a similar vein, Valerie M. Hudson (2014) argues that foreign policy should be viewed as a result of decision-making processes by governments functioning within particular domestic and international frameworks. She asserts that the coordination of foreign policy is indicative of the interplay between institutional structures, leadership decisions, domestic political circumstances, and external strategic factors, rather than being driven by a singular influence. This viewpoint implies that

effective regional cooperation relies on the willingness of governments to align national priorities with wider regional obligations.

From a different angle, K. J. Holsti (1995) characterizes foreign policy as the array of actions and decisions through which governments seek to advance national interests in their interactions with other nations. He posits that states often synchronize their foreign policies via regional organizations and multilateral institutions to enhance collective bargaining power, foster political stability, and tackle shared security issues that individual states are unable to manage effectively on their own.

Similarly, James N. Rosenau (1969) highlights that foreign policy behavior arises from the interplay between domestic political contexts and external systemic pressures. His linkage politics framework illustrates that the external actions of states are inextricably linked to internal political realities, leadership dynamics, and institutional capabilities. This viewpoint is especially pertinent to regional organizations, where member states consistently navigate the tension between national interests and collective regional duties.

Operationally, this study characterizes foreign policy coordination as the process by which ECOWAS member states engage in consultation, harmonization, and the implementation of shared diplomatic positions, policies, and strategic responses to regional political, economic, and security challenges through the institutional mechanisms established by the organization. In this context, coordination entails ongoing diplomatic engagement, negotiation, policy consultation, and

collective decision-making, rather than the absolute uniformity of national foreign policies.

French Language

In the field of International Relations, the French language is recognized not only as a tool for communication but also as a significant diplomatic, administrative, and institutional asset that promotes international collaboration. Historically, French became the dominant language of diplomacy in Europe during the seventeenth century and continues to hold a significant role in multilateral diplomacy, despite the increasing prominence of English. Its ongoing importance is indicative of both historical trends and the lasting impact of Francophone institutions throughout Africa and the broader international community.

French is one of the official and working languages of numerous major international organizations, including the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, and ECOWAS. Within these entities, it functions as a medium for diplomatic negotiations, treaty formulation, policy discussions, administrative correspondence, and multilateral decision-making. Consequently, the use of French enhances effective institutional interaction by allowing governments, diplomats, and technical experts to engage fully in international discussions.

In Africa, the French language serves an additional administrative role as it continues to be the official language for government, legislation, education, and public administration in numerous former French colonies. Nations such as Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire primarily utilize French for governmental

administration, judicial processes, diplomatic correspondence, and official communications. This common administrative heritage enhances bureaucratic collaboration and policy discussions among Francophone countries while fostering continuity within regional institutions.

For the purposes of this study, the French language is understood as a diplomatic and institutional asset that aids in communication, negotiation, policy alignment, and administrative collaboration among Francophone member states within ECOWAS. Its importance extends beyond mere communication; it plays a crucial role in facilitating diplomatic engagement and enhancing institutional effectiveness within a multilingual regional framework.

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is widely acknowledged as one of the most significant regional organizations in Africa. While it was initially founded to advance economic integration, modern academic perspectives increasingly regard ECOWAS as a multifaceted regional entity that merges economic collaboration with political governance, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, democratic consolidation, and collective security.

As a regional entity, ECOWAS offers an institutional framework that enables member states to coordinate policies concerning trade, infrastructure, migration, investment, and regional development.

In addition to these economic duties, the organisation has gradually broadened its mandate to

tackle issues such as political instability, unconstitutional government changes, electoral conflicts, terrorism, violent extremism, and humanitarian emergencies. This expanded role has established ECOWAS as one of the most proactive regional organizations on the African continent.

ECOWAS can also be viewed as an emerging regional security community. Despite ongoing political instability and security challenges in the region, the organization has created institutional mechanisms that promote collective responses to conflicts and constitutional crises. Through diplomatic mediation, peace support operations, sanctions, election monitoring, and preventive diplomacy, ECOWAS aims to foster political stability and enhance regional peace and security.

Simultaneously, ECOWAS operates as a political institution that promotes dialogue, negotiation, policy alignment, and collective decision-making among its member states. Its institutional bodies provide consistent platforms for consultation, allowing governments to develop coordinated responses to regional issues while upholding the sovereignty of individual member states.

In this study, ECOWAS is conceptualised as a regional political and security institution that establishes the organisational framework through which member states align foreign policies, enhance diplomatic collaboration, and pursue shared regional goals. Its institutional structures create an environment where linguistic interaction, political commitment, and diplomatic engagement come together to facilitate regional governance.

Regional diplomacy encompasses the methods by which neighboring countries engage in ongoing

consultation, negotiation, dialogue, and collaborative action to tackle shared political, economic, and security issues within a specific geographical area.

Unlike conventional bilateral diplomacy, regional diplomacy is carried out through multilateral institutions that promote policy coordination, consensus building, and cooperative decision-making among member nations.

In the realm of modern international relations, regional diplomacy has emerged as a vital mechanism for addressing transnational challenges such as armed conflict, terrorism, democratic instability, migration, economic integration, and climate-related security issues.

Regional organizations offer institutional platforms for governments to share information, negotiate common stances, and coordinate collective responses to matters that cross national boundaries.

In West Africa, regional diplomacy is chiefly conducted through ECOWAS, where member states participate in regular consultations regarding peace and security, constitutional governance, economic collaboration, electoral processes, and regional integration.

The success of these diplomatic efforts relies on ongoing communication, institutional trust, political commitment, and the readiness of governments to align national interests with broader regional goals.

For the purposes of this study, regional diplomacy is defined as the institutionalized process through which ECOWAS member states engage in consultation, negotiation, and coordinated foreign policy actions aimed at fostering peace, democratic governance, regional security, and economic

integration.

In this context, the French language plays a significant role as a diplomatic tool that enhances communication and institutional interaction among Francophone member states while bolstering wider regional cooperation.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical basis of this research is grounded in two interrelated theories that effectively elucidate the connection between language and foreign policy coordination within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). These theories are Social Constructivism and New Regionalism. Social Constructivism elucidates how language, collective identities, and norms shape state behavior and diplomatic relations, while New Regionalism sheds light on the institutional framework through which regional organizations foster cooperation among member states. Collectively, these theories provide a thorough framework for comprehending how the French language aids in foreign policy coordination, while also acknowledging the impact of political institutions, leadership, and national interests.

Social Constructivism

Social Constructivism emerged as a significant theoretical viewpoint in International Relations in the late twentieth century. Although Nicholas Onuf first introduced the concept of constructivism in his work, *World of Our Making* (1989), it was Alexander Wendt who further developed and popularized the theory through his influential publication, *Social Theory of International Politics* (1999). Wendt contested the tenets of Realism by asserting that international politics is influenced not

solely by material capabilities but also by shared ideas, norms, identities, and interaction patterns among states. According to this theory, state interests and foreign policy preferences are socially constructed through ongoing interactions, rendering cooperation and conflict as products of shared meanings rather than as unavoidable results of an anarchic international system.

Relevance to the Study

- i. **Shared diplomatic identity:** The French language offers Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire a mutual linguistic and administrative heritage that enhances their interactions within ECOWAS.
- ii. **Promotion of shared norms:** As one of the official working languages of ECOWAS, French facilitates policy discussions, diplomatic negotiations, and the establishment of common regional standards.
- iii. **Enhancement of diplomatic communication:** The employment of French diminishes communication obstacles among Francophone member states, thus improving consultation, negotiation, and coordination of foreign policy.

While the theory acknowledges the significance of language, it also recognizes that foreign policy decisions are shaped by domestic political circumstances, leadership perspectives, institutional capabilities, and national priorities. This accounts for the fact that Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, despite having the same official language, have occasionally adopted differing diplomatic strategies within ECOWAS.

New Regionalism

New Regionalism surfaced in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a reaction to the evolving landscape of international cooperation following the Cold War. This theory is primarily linked to the contributions of Björn Hettne and Fredrik Söderbaum, who contended that regional organizations have progressed beyond mere economic integration to encompass political collaboration, democratic governance, peacebuilding, security, and institutional advancement. In contrast to previous theories of regional integration, New Regionalism perceives regional organizations as dynamic political entities through which states collaboratively tackle shared challenges and foster regional stability.

Relevance to the Study

- i. **Institutional framework for cooperation:** ECOWAS serves as the institutional platform enabling member states to coordinate their foreign policies and tackle regional political and security issues.
- ii. **Promotion of policy harmonisation:** The organization advocates for member states to establish unified diplomatic stances on matters concerning peace, security, democratic governance, and regional integration.
- iii. **Role of language within regional institutions:** The use of French enhances communication, policy discussions, and administrative coordination among Francophone member states, thus fostering effective engagement in ECOWAS decision-making.

However, New Regionalism asserts that the success of regional cooperation relies not solely on institutional frameworks but also on the political dedication of member states, strong leadership, and the readiness of governments to execute collective decisions.

Integration of the Theories

The two theories work in tandem to elucidate the connection between the French language and the coordination of foreign policy within ECOWAS. Social Constructivism illustrates how language influences diplomatic interactions, fosters shared identities, and establishes regional norms, while New Regionalism clarifies how ECOWAS serves as the institutional framework that organizes and sustains such cooperation.

Together, these theories highlight that the French language transcends mere communication; it acts as a vital diplomatic asset that promotes dialogue, negotiation, and policy alignment among Francophone member states. Furthermore, they acknowledge that successful foreign policy coordination is ultimately contingent upon domestic political stability, institutional capacity, leadership orientation, and national strategic interests. Collectively, these theoretical viewpoints offer a suitable analytical framework for exploring the comparative experiences of Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire within ECOWAS from 2000 to 2025.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative comparative case study design to investigate the impact of the French language on foreign policy coordination within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), specifically focusing on

Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire between 2000 and 2025.

A qualitative approach is deemed appropriate as the study aims to comprehend the interplay between language, diplomacy, and regional cooperation through the analysis of policies, institutional practices, and political developments, rather than relying on statistical measurements. The comparative case study design facilitates a thorough examination of the similarities and differences in the foreign policy experiences of the two Francophone nations, thereby offering a more profound understanding of the role of language within the larger framework of regional diplomacy.

The research is based solely on secondary data sources. Documentary materials were sourced from the Revised ECOWAS Treaty, ECOWAS protocols and communiqués, official publications from the governments of Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, reports from the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), documents from the African Union, journal articles, books, policy reports, and other reputable scholarly works pertinent to language, foreign policy, and regional integration.

Data were examined through qualitative content analysis. The gathered documents were meticulously reviewed and interpreted to uncover recurring themes related to diplomatic communication, foreign policy coordination, institutional collaboration, and the significance of the French language within ECOWAS. The results from Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire were subsequently compared to assess the degree to which a shared linguistic heritage impacted regional diplomatic conduct and how domestic political circumstances, institutional capabilities, and national strategic

interests influenced their foreign policy coordination during the specified period.

The integration of a qualitative methodology, documentary evidence, comparative case analysis, and thematic content analysis establishes a robust methodological framework for addressing the study's aims and research inquiries while ensuring a balanced and contextually informed interpretation of the issues being examined.

Results And Discussion

French Language and Foreign Policy

Coordination within ECOWAS

The analysis reveals that the French language holds a pivotal role in the institutional and diplomatic activities of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). As one of the three official working languages of the organization, alongside English and Portuguese, French serves as a crucial medium for member states to negotiate policies, share information, develop collective decisions, and execute regional programs. The multilingual nature of ECOWAS mirrors the varied colonial and administrative backgrounds of its member states while ensuring that linguistic diversity does not hinder regional collaboration (ECOWAS, 1993). Within this institutional context, French plays a role that transcends mere communication, bolstering administrative coordination, diplomatic dialogue, and policy alignment among Francophone member states.

A review of official ECOWAS documents and institutional practices shows that French is regularly utilized during sessions of the Authority of Heads of State and Government, the Council of Ministers, the ECOWAS Commission, and specialized

technical committees. It is also employed in official statements, legal documents, policy frameworks, and negotiation papers. These arrangements allow Francophone states to engage effectively in discussions concerning democratic governance, regional security, economic integration, constitutional order, and peace support operations. The presence of French as a working language thus improves administrative efficiency, diminishes communication barriers, and promotes the exchange of ideas among policymakers and diplomats.

These observations bolster the argument put forth by Aning and Bah (2010), who assert that ECOWAS has increasingly depended on institutional consultation and collective diplomacy to tackle political and security issues throughout West Africa. In a similar vein, Bach (2016) argues that the enhanced effectiveness of regional organizations is largely contingent upon the robustness of their institutional frameworks and the quality of interactions among member states. This study builds upon this body of research by illustrating that language serves as one of the institutional resources that sustains such interactions. Rather than merely acting as a technical means of communication, French plays a significant role in the routine practices of diplomacy by enabling dialogue, negotiation, and policy consultation among governments that share a common linguistic heritage.

Concurrently, the analysis reveals that the presence of a shared language does not inherently lead to unified foreign policy positions. While French promotes diplomatic engagement and institutional

interaction, it does not dictate the policy decisions of member states. Choices regarding regional diplomacy continue to be influenced by national interests, political agendas, security factors, and the domestic situations of individual governments. This conclusion diverges from interpretations that primarily emphasize shared colonial backgrounds or linguistic connections as the main reasons for cooperation among Francophone African nations (Chafer, 2002). Instead, the findings indicate that language should be viewed as a facilitating institutional resource, the effectiveness of which is contingent upon the broader political and institutional context in which regional diplomacy occurs.

A comparative analysis of the foreign policy coordination between Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire from 2000 to 2025 reveals both significant similarities and distinct differences in their approaches within ECOWAS. As founding members of the organization, both nations utilize French as their official language for government and diplomatic affairs, and they actively engage in the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie. These shared traits have fostered a conducive environment for ongoing diplomatic interactions and effective involvement in ECOWAS institutions. However, the experiences of these two countries demonstrate that a common linguistic background alone cannot account for the differences in their regional diplomatic behaviors.

During the period under consideration, Senegal exhibited a notable level of political continuity and institutional stability. Successive governments have consistently endorsed multilateral diplomacy and

maintained a proactive role in ECOWAS initiatives focused on democratic governance, mediation, conflict prevention, and election monitoring. The diplomatic stance of Senegal reflects a long-standing dedication to constitutional order and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, thereby enhancing its reputation as one of the region's most reliable proponents of collective security and regional collaboration. As noted by Adebajo (2002), Senegal has often positioned itself as a constructive participant in regional peace efforts, while Nugent (2018) similarly attributes the nation's diplomatic credibility to the relative stability of its political institutions.

Côte d'Ivoire's experience illustrates a distinctly different path. The civil conflict that erupted in 2002, along with the post-election crisis from 2010 to 2011, severely disrupted domestic governance and limited the nation's capacity to assert regional diplomatic leadership. During these tumultuous times, the government's focus was primarily on restoring internal security, rebuilding state institutions, and fostering national reconciliation. Consequently, Côte d'Ivoire's involvement in regional initiatives was overshadowed by that of Senegal. However, following the political stabilization post-2011, the country gradually regained its diplomatic clout, re-emerging as a significant economic and political player within ECOWAS. Hartmann (2017) and Piccolino (2018) similarly observe that enhancements in domestic governance and economic recovery bolstered Côte d'Ivoire's ability to re-engage with regional institutions and contribute more actively to collective security and economic integration.

A comparison of these two cases highlights the critical role of domestic political conditions in shaping foreign policy coordination. Although both nations shared a common linguistic and administrative heritage, their regional diplomatic influence was more reflective of variations in political stability, institutional effectiveness, and leadership priorities than of linguistic differences. This analysis thus supports Nugent's (2018) broader assertion that domestic political realities and state capacity primarily influence African foreign policy. By incorporating language into this discourse, the current study expands upon existing scholarship and illustrates that linguistic affinity can enhance diplomatic interactions without diminishing the impact of national political contexts.

Domestic Political and Institutional Factors Influencing Foreign Policy Coordination

In addition to language, the research highlights domestic political and institutional factors as the key elements influencing foreign policy coordination within ECOWAS. Political stability has emerged as the most crucial factor for sustained regional involvement. Stable political institutions afford governments the necessary continuity to develop long-term foreign policy goals, fulfill regional obligations, and engage consistently in multilateral diplomacy. The case of Senegal exemplifies this connection, as the continuity of democracy enhanced both institutional effectiveness and diplomatic credibility during the analyzed period.

Conversely, the situation in Côte d'Ivoire illustrates a contrasting dynamic. Times of political instability undermined state institutions, shifted governmental

focus towards internal issues, and diminished prospects for regional leadership. Diplomatic effectiveness only improved after domestic political conditions stabilized and state institutions restored their operational capabilities. These trends indicate that foreign policy coordination is intricately linked to the quality of domestic governance, rather than being solely dependent on linguistic factors.

Institutional capacity is another critical factor influencing regional engagement. Competent foreign affairs ministries, seasoned diplomatic staff, and cohesive policy-making frameworks enhance governments' abilities to negotiate regional agreements. The implementation of ECOWAS decisions and active participation in collective initiatives are essential. The orientation of leadership significantly affects how governments prioritize regional cooperation. Administrations that are dedicated to multilateral engagement typically exhibit a greater willingness to endorse collective responses to regional political and security issues compared to those whose focus is primarily on domestic political matters.

These insights bolster the arguments put forth by Hettne and Söderbaum (2000), who assert that the success of regionalism relies not only on formal institutional frameworks but also on the political commitment and administrative capabilities of the involved states. Similarly, Aning and Bah (2010) contend that the effectiveness of ECOWAS is ultimately influenced by the willingness and capacity of member states to execute decisions that have been collectively agreed upon. This study adds to the existing literature by illustrating that while language plays a role in facilitating institutional

interactions, its practical importance is largely contingent upon the robustness of domestic political institutions and the efficacy of national governance systems.

Linguistic Affinity versus Political and Strategic Interests

A key focus of this study was to assess whether shared language or political and strategic interests have a more significant impact on foreign policy coordination within ECOWAS. The comparative evidence suggests that although French undoubtedly enhances diplomatic communication and institutional collaboration, it is not the primary factor influencing regional diplomatic behavior.

French improves mutual understanding among policymakers, lowers communication costs during negotiations, and aids in the effective operation of regional institutions. Through these functions, it aids in the advancement of shared diplomatic practices and promotes policy discussions among Francophone governments. This observation aligns with Wendt's (1999) constructivist perspective, which posits that collective ideas, identities, and communicative practices shape patterns of interstate relations by influencing mutual understandings and institutional norms.

However, the comparative experiences of Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire clearly illustrate that governments primarily develop foreign policy in response to domestic political circumstances, national security issues, economic priorities, and strategic considerations. Despite their shared linguistic background, the two nations sometimes adopted divergent diplomatic stances due to significant differences in their domestic political contexts and

national priorities. Consequently, these findings challenge interpretations that attribute regional policy alignment mainly to a common linguistic identity or colonial histories. Rather, they suggest that while language facilitates collaboration, it does not dictate the content of foreign policy decisions.

The analysis also supports the principles of New Regionalism by demonstrating that regional cooperation is maintained through effective institutions, political dedication, and shared strategic goals, rather than solely through linguistic similarities (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000). Language remains a vital institutional resource as it enhances communication and fortifies diplomatic relations; however, its impact is ultimately shaped by broader political realities.

In summary, the findings of this study indicate that the coordination of foreign policy within ECOWAS arises from the interplay of various interrelated factors. The shared language fosters communication and institutional collaboration, while elements such as political stability, effective governance, institutional capacity, and aligned national interests shape the extent and durability of regional cooperation. Thus, the French language should be viewed not merely as an isolated factor driving foreign policy coordination but rather as a strategic diplomatic asset that bolsters the overarching processes of regional integration and collective political action in West Africa.

Conclusion And Recommendations

Conclusion

This research investigated the impact of the French language on foreign policy coordination within the Economic Community of West African States

(ECOWAS) through a comparative analysis of Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire from 2000 to 2025. Anchored in Social Constructivism and New Regionalism, and utilizing a qualitative documentary research approach, the study aimed to ascertain whether a common linguistic heritage significantly affects regional diplomatic behavior or if political and institutional factors are the primary influences on foreign policy coordination.

The results reveal that the French language holds a significant role within the institutional and diplomatic framework of ECOWAS. As one of the official working languages of the organization, it facilitates diplomatic communication, policy discussions, negotiations, and administrative coordination among Francophone member states. The utilization of French enhances engagement in regional decision-making by minimizing communication obstacles and fostering effective interactions among government officials, diplomats, and policy experts. Therefore, language plays a crucial role in institutional collaboration and the achievement of shared regional goals.

The comparative analysis indicates that while Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire both recognize French as their official language and actively engage in Francophone institutions, their approaches to foreign policy coordination have varied significantly during the examined period. Senegal's enduring democratic stability has allowed it to maintain steady diplomatic relations and play a proactive role in regional mediation, peacebuilding, and initiatives for democratic governance. In contrast, Côte d'Ivoire's extended political crises limited its influence in regional diplomacy until the

restoration of political stability allowed it to re-establish itself as a prominent political and economic player within ECOWAS.

Consequently, the study concludes that the French language primarily serves as a facilitator of diplomatic interactions rather than acting as an independent factor in foreign policy coordination. Although linguistic similarities enhance communication and institutional collaboration, the success of regional diplomacy fundamentally relies on domestic political stability, institutional capacity, leadership direction, and national strategic interests. These conclusions support the tenets of Social Constructivism and New Regionalism by illustrating that effective regional cooperation is maintained through the interplay of shared norms, robust institutions, and political commitment.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the following suggestions are proposed:

1. ECOWAS ought to enhance its multilingual institutional framework by broadening translation, interpretation, and language support services to facilitate effective communication and equal involvement among Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone member states.
 2. Member states should allocate resources towards diplomatic language training, particularly through ongoing professional development programs for officials in foreign affairs and diplomats, to enhance communication, negotiation, and policy coordination within regional institutions.
 3. Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire should strengthen their bilateral and regional diplomatic collaboration by utilizing their common linguistic heritage to foster peacebuilding, democratic governance, regional security, and economic integration within ECOWAS.
 4. ECOWAS should focus on institutional enhancement and policy alignment, acknowledging that effective foreign policy coordination relies more on robust institutions, political commitment, and sound governance than merely on linguistic similarities.
 5. Member states should bolster democratic governance and political stability, as stable domestic institutions are crucial for sustained engagement in regional diplomacy and the effective execution of ECOWAS decisions and protocols.
- i. Future research should expand the comparative analysis by investigating additional Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone ECOWAS member states. Such inquiries would yield a more thorough understanding of how language, domestic political dynamics, and institutional capacity collectively influence foreign policy coordination and regional integration in West Africa.
 - ii. West African nations, both Francophone and Anglophone, should focus on aligning policies in critical sectors such as migration, trade liberalization, and counterterrorism by fully executing ECOWAS protocols to enhance regional integration and minimize policy discrepancies.

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| <p>iii. National foreign ministries and diplomatic entities should allocate more resources towards diplomatic training, language skills (in English and French), and professional development to boost efficiency in negotiations and international representation.</p> | <p>International development partners and regional donors should assist in West African integration by financing infrastructure, institutional development, and regional security projects while promoting reduced dependency and encouraging sustainable economic self-sufficiency among member states.</p> |
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