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# International Affairs Committee Member Spotlight: Dr. Yatma Diop

AUTHOR

Dr. Yatma Diop

Assistant Professor of Human Development and Family Science
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**Q: What is your current position and research agenda?**

*A: As an assistant professor, I teach courses, mentor students, conduct research, and contribute to university, departmental, and professional service. My research broadly examines how caregivers support child language and literacy development in Senegal and how culture influences parenting. My current projects focus on language development, home literacy environments in Senegal, as well as acculturation among Senegalese immigrant parents in the U.S. and Canada.*

**Q: What interested you in becoming a developmental scientist?**

*A: My interest in developmental science began somewhat unexpectedly. In 2007, I entered Université Gaston Berger in Saint-Louis, Senegal as a freshman. From my first days in a Linguistics course, I became interested in language development. What struck me was that much of the research I read focused on children in Western societies and cultures. This gap in the literature was my first motivation to write a thesis on the language*

*competence of Wolof-speaking children, the first in the department to focus on language development*

*After graduation, I had the opportunity to work on a project for evaluating a parenting education program in rural Senegal with researchers from Stanford University's Department of Psychology. This experience was an eye-opener for me, as it allowed me to interact with parents and made me even more aware of the lack of representation of African parents and children in the developmental science literature. So, I decided to expand my early research interest in language development to include literacy, parenting, and culture. I needed extra training to do this work, so I applied for and received a Fulbright scholarship to pursue a Master's and a PhD in Human Development and Family Studies at Michigan State University. My goal in studying these topics was not merely to study an under-researched population, but to produce culturally relevant evidence from my research that can be used to design interventions and policies for the benefit of Senegalese families and their children.*

**Q: Do you have a mentor or mentors who have been instrumental to your career and, if so, whom and how?**

*A: People who know me well enough know that Professor Anne Fernald, Emerita Psychology Professor at Stanford University, is very instrumental to my career. Anne has been more than a mentor to me, and I learned so much from her. I was one of the last students she mentored, and I consider myself the luckiest, given how closely I worked with her and how much she shaped my intellectual growth. I will always be grateful to Anne Fernald for all she did for me.*

*I also want to heartfully thank my former academic advisor, Professor Lori Skibbe at Michigan State University, whose training, mentorship, and guidance have shaped my career in many ways. Lori taught me to think critically about my research and gave me the intellectual freedom to develop my own identity as a scholar. I am very proud to be part of her legacy.*

**Q: What does SRCD mean to you?  or what is your favorite aspect of SRCD membership? As an international scholar, what interested you in becoming part of SRCD?**

*A: To me, SRCD means interdisciplinarity and international representation. I have been going to SRCD since 2017, and sometimes I joke that the SRCD meetings should happen yearly, not every two years! It is a great place to showcase my Senegal-focused scholarship to the broader developmental-science field.*

**Website – or organizations – where people can learn more about your research:**

https://www.uvm.edu/cess/profile/yatma-diop

https://scholar.google.com/citations?hl=en&authuser=2&user=zEqYkG0AAAAJ