



# Madagascar

**The impact of language policy  
and practice on children's learning:**  
**Evidence from Eastern and Southern Africa**  
2017

## 2.9 Madagascar

### 2.9.1 Background information

Malagasy was the language of instruction in most Madagascan schools prior to the French colonization in 1897; after that point, all schools that did not use French for instruction were shut down (see, for example, Boswell, 2008, p. 73, and Dahl, 2011, p. 52<sup>1</sup>). Madagascar gained independence from the French in 1960.

Ethnologue lists 18 languages for Madagascar.

### 2.9.2. Current language policy

Malagasy and French are the official languages of Madagascar; Malagasy is the national language with some variety of the language spoken by 77 per cent of the citizens (Lewis et al, 2014; Article 6 of the Draft Constitution, September 2010<sup>2</sup>). As of 2008, the Government of Madagascar reviewed its languages policy and “Malagasy will be from now on the means of instruction for primary education while French as a second language will be reinforced” (World Bank, 2008). This policy revision was prompted by the inability of many graduates of the primary school system to function in a system that utilized French as the medium of instruction. In 2009, however, political upheaval in the country brought this policy discussion to a halt (see below); since then, little progress has been made towards its implementation

### 2.9.3. Education policy and practice

According to Antal and Ndrianjafy (2013), a primary school curriculum revision designed in 2007 called for clustering lessons around themes including Malagasy, English and French. The use of Malagasy as a language of instruction would be extended from the first three grades to the first five grades; French would be taught as a subject from Grade 1, and English would be introduced in Grade 4.

Madagascar’s education sector suffered great setbacks following the unconstitutional government takeover in March 2009. This put many reforms on hold, including those in the education sector. Malagasy has remained the language of instruction in the early primary grades; French is the medium of instruction thereafter, and the secondary leaving exam is in French.

The political situation in Madagascar led to international sanctions of various kinds (Antal and Ndrianjafy, 2013, p. 92). However, a grant from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)<sup>3</sup> for the period 2009 to 2013 aimed to help minimize the impact of the political and economic crisis. GPE notes that the grant “kept partners mobilized and coordinated at a time when support to other sectors became fragmented, and it secured core funding when the economic consequences of the crisis reduced education funding significantly.” In 2013, the GPE allocated another large education grant to Madagascar, and other education partners are also involved, most notably UNICEF, which is playing a significant role in maintaining international funding for the education sector and ensuring that this funding goes directly to schools and teachers.<sup>4</sup>

Current education reform efforts include a draft Education Sector Plan (ESP; 2018-2022), in which the first three years of schooling would be dedicated to the acquisition of reading skills in Malagasy, and the first six years of schooling carried out with Malagasy as the language of instruction. The reform under development would provide flexibility for schools to accommodate and draw on local varieties of Malagasy during the first 3 years of primary, with the goal of attaining basic literacy skills in the official Malagasy variety at the end of Grade 3. The official variety of Malagasy would then be the medium of instruction for Grades 4 to 6.<sup>5</sup>

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1. [http://brage.bibsys.no/xmlui/bitstream/id/136832/OD\\_Linguistic\\_policy.pdf](http://brage.bibsys.no/xmlui/bitstream/id/136832/OD_Linguistic_policy.pdf). Accessed 11 March, 2016.

2. [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Madagascar\\_2010.pdf](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Madagascar_2010.pdf). Accessed 11 March, 2016.

3. <https://www.globalpartnership.org/country/madagascar>. Accessed 11 March, 2016.

4. [http://www.unicef.org/madagascar/5559\\_6489.html](http://www.unicef.org/madagascar/5559_6489.html). Accessed 11 March, 2016.

5. UNICEF Madagascar, 2017

The ESP also makes provision for the adoption of a new language policy, in preparation for a major curriculum review. Along with the studies described below, the French embassy has organized a national seminar on the language policy in education.

#### 2.9.4. Studies

Studies of core competencies among pupils and teachers have been carried out in the past few years, as a way to inform the new Education Sector Plan. EGRA and PASEC studies carried out in 2015 indicated low reading ability in both French and Malagasy.

A 2016 Service Delivery Indicators study commissioned by the World Bank found low mastery of core competencies in French among teachers. UNICEF, in collaboration with USAID and other partners, has led discussions on the implications of these results and how to address them.

Teshome (2007, p. 54) mentions a study on language and learning, reported by Komarek (1997). Malagasy language textbooks and teachers' manuals for reading and writing instruction were introduced in twenty experimental schools. The next year, pupils showed enhanced learning achievement by 15 per cent over pupils in twenty control schools.<sup>6</sup>

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6. UNICEF Madagascar, April 2017.