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# Education In Madagascar

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## Introduction

Madagascar, an island nation of unparalleled biodiversity and vibrant culture, stands at a critical juncture in its development journey. Central to this trajectory is the state of its education system – a complex tapestry woven from historical legacies, diverse linguistic influences, and the persistent aspirations of its people. *Education In Madagascar: A Comprehensive Overview from Early Childhood to Higher Education* embarks on a detailed exploration of this vital sector, offering readers an in-depth understanding of its evolution, current landscape, and future potential. This book delves into the multifaceted challenges and remarkable resilience that define Malagasy education, providing a holistic perspective that transcends simplistic narratives.

The promise of education in Madagascar is immense, holding the key to unlocking individual potential, fostering economic growth, and strengthening social cohesion. However, realizing this promise requires navigating a terrain marked by significant hurdles, including issues of access, equity, quality, and funding. From the foundational stages of early childhood development to the specialized pursuits of higher education, each level of the Malagasy system presents its own unique set of opportunities and obstacles. This book aims to illuminate these complexities, offering a nuanced examination of the policies, practices, and external factors that shape educational experiences across the island.

Our scope is intentionally broad, encompassing the full spectrum of educational provision within Madagascar. We will journey through the historical underpinnings that have shaped the current system, dissect its structural components, and analyze the specific dynamics of early childhood, primary, and secondary education. The critical roles of technical and vocational training, higher education institutions, and robust teacher development programs will receive dedicated attention. Furthermore, we will delve into the intricate interplay of educational policies, financial mechanisms, and the crucial contributions of international aid that together define the operating environment for Malagasy schools and universities.

The tone of this book is analytical and informative, yet infused with an underlying appreciation for the dedication of educators, policymakers, and communities striving to improve educational outcomes in Madagascar. While acknowledging the persistent challenges, we also seek to highlight innovative solutions and areas of progress. Readers will gain valuable insights into critical debates surrounding curriculum development, language of instruction, and the profound disparities between urban and rural educational opportunities. We will also confront sensitive issues such as gender inequality, inclusive education for students with disabilities, and the pervasive impact

of poverty on educational attainment, as well as the unique challenges posed by emergencies and crises.

Ultimately, *Education In Madagascar* offers substantial value to a diverse readership. Policymakers, researchers, educators, and development practitioners will find a rich source of data, analysis, and recommendations to inform their work. Students of international development, comparative education, and African studies will gain a comprehensive case study of an education system in a unique context. For anyone interested in understanding the intricate relationship between education and national development, this book provides an essential and timely resource. By presenting a thorough and balanced overview, we hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of Malagasy education and inspire concerted efforts towards a brighter future for all learners on the island.

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## CHAPTER ONE: Historical Foundations of Malagasy Education

Madagascar's educational journey is as rich and complex as its ecological landscape, shaped by centuries of cultural evolution, external influences, and internal reforms. To truly appreciate the current state of its education system, one must delve into its historical foundations, tracing the threads from traditional informal learning to the formal structures introduced by various external forces. These historical layers have profoundly impacted the development of educational policies, practices, and disparities across the island, creating a unique context that continues to evolve.

### Traditional Malagasy Education

Before the advent of formal schooling, education in Madagascar was an integral part of daily life, deeply embedded within the social fabric of communities. It was an informal, community-based process focused on transmitting cultural knowledge, social norms, and practical skills from one generation to the next. This traditional approach emphasized the importance of maintaining one's place within a hierarchical society, adhering to an intricate web of *fady* (taboos), and, above all, showing profound respect for ancestors, known as *razana*.

Children learned by observing and participating in community activities, absorbing the wisdom of elders and authority figures (*ray aman-dreny*). This form of education prepared them for their roles in a society where respect for established order and ancestral guidance was paramount. Boys would learn skills befitting future *ray aman-dreny*, while girls focused on domestic mastery and cultivating the qualities of a good wife and mother. This informal transmission ensured cultural continuity and social cohesion, albeit within a system that reinforced existing social hierarchies and gender roles.

### Early Formal Education and Missionary Influence

The earliest glimmer of formal schooling in Madagascar appeared with the arrival of medieval Arab seafarers. Their influence, particularly on coastal communities, dates back to at least the 11th century. These seafarers introduced a limited number of *kuttab*, or Quranic schools, which taught basic literacy and numeracy, and they also developed a transcription of the Malagasy language using Arabic script, known as *sorabe*. However, these early Islamic schools were short-lived, and *sorabe* literacy eventually became the domain of astrologers, kings, and other privileged elites.

A more significant and lasting introduction of formal education began in the 19th

century with the support of the Kingdom of Madagascar. King Radama I (1810–1828), keen on fostering ties with European powers, invited missionaries from the London Missionary Society (LMS) to establish schools. The first formal European-style school was founded in 1818 by LMS members on the east coast, in Toamasina. Subsequently, on December 8, 1820, LMS missionary David Jones established the "Palace School" within the Rova palace compound in Antananarivo, the capital, to educate the royal family in literacy, numeracy, and basic subjects.

King Radama I was convinced that Western schooling was crucial for the political and economic advancement of Madagascar. In 1825, he declared primary schooling compulsory for the *andriana* (nobles) throughout Imerina. Schools were built in major towns across the central highlands and staffed by LMS and other missionary organizations. By the end of Radama I's reign in 1829, there were 38 schools providing basic education to over 4,000 students, in addition to the 300 at the Palace School, imparting both loyalty to Radama's rule and fundamentals of Christian theology. This period saw a notable spread of literacy, with an estimated 15,000 people knowing how to read and write the new Malagasy language by 1835.

Despite a period of significant retrenchment during the reign of Queen Ranavalona I, the missionary school system, encompassing both Protestant and Roman Catholic institutions, continued to grow. By 1881, under Prime Minister Rainilaiarivony, who married successive queens and dramatically expanded the school system, schooling was declared compulsory for all Malagasy children, irrespective of ethnicity or class. By 1883, 1,155 mission schools were educating 133,695 students, making the Malagasy school system the most developed in precolonial Sub-Saharan Africa. However, formal schools largely remained concentrated in the central highlands around Antananarivo and were primarily attended by children of the noble class. This early geographical disparity in educational access and standards between the central highlands and coastal regions would later become a significant divisive factor in national life.

## **The Colonial Era: Frenchification and Dual Systems**

The landscape of Malagasy education underwent a profound transformation with the arrival of French colonial authority in 1896. The French colonial administration established a public school system designed to serve colonial interests and produce a workforce aligned with their objectives. This system was markedly divided into two distinct tiers.

The first tier consisted of elite schools, directly modeled after those in France and primarily reserved for the children of French citizens. Few Malagasy citizens had the privilege of accessing these institutions. The second tier comprised "indigenous schools" specifically for Malagasy children. These schools offered practical and vocational education, but their curriculum was explicitly not designed to train students

for positions of leadership or responsibility within the colonial administration. Middle-grade Malagasy civil servants and functionaries were trained at *écoles régionales* (regional schools), with the *École le Myre de Villers* in Antananarivo being the most prominent.

Colonial schooling aimed to instill basic skills and French language fluency in most Malagasy children. Particularly strong students were selected for civil servant training at the secondary level. This emphasis on French language and culture, often at the expense of Malagasy traditions and language, became a cornerstone of the colonial educational policy, contributing to what some scholars describe as "Frenchification." The French also imposed stringent restrictions on mission schools in 1906, forcing many students out as the public system lacked adequate capacity to accommodate them.

Despite the limitations and inherent inequalities of the colonial system, it did contribute to the gradual expansion of education into more remote and rural communities, although under increasing state control. National education objectives during this period reflected the changing priorities of the colonial government. Reforms designed to offer Malagasy citizens more educational opportunities were initiated after World War II. By the time Madagascar gained independence in 1960, its education system closely mirrored that of France. However, this legacy also meant that the education system largely ignored Malagasy history and geography, with students sometimes learning about "their ancestors the Gaulois" instead.

## **Post-Independence: Malgachization and Shifting Priorities**

Upon achieving independence in 1960, Madagascar inherited an education system heavily influenced by its French colonial past. The First Republic (1960–1975), under President Philibert Tsiranana, largely maintained this strong French influence, with textbooks and teachers often of French origin. However, a growing frustration with the colonial legacy in education eventually led to significant changes.

The post-colonial backlash that ushered in the Second Republic (1975–1992) under Admiral Didier Ratsiraka brought about a policy of "Malgachization." This reform aimed to reintroduce Malagasy as a language of instruction alongside French and to restore Malagasy traditions and culture within the educational framework. During this period, schools were also used as vehicles for citizen indoctrination into the socialist ideology of the Ratsiraka regime.

The 1980s, however, presented significant economic challenges that severely impacted educational funding and infrastructure development. This period also saw a strengthening of a primarily two-tiered education system. The elite and well-off middle class often enrolled their children in private French-language schools, which remained highly prestigious. In contrast, the majority of the relatively poorer population had

little choice but to send their children to increasingly disadvantaged public schools.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 triggered a wave of democratization across Africa, leading to the establishment of Madagascar's democratic Third Republic (1992–2010). This era saw renewed international cooperation and significant foreign aid for the education sector. The country adopted numerous reforms promoted by organizations such as the United Nations, notably the Education For All (EFA) goals, which aimed to expand access to primary education. While public spending on education relative to GDP declined in the 1990s due to increased external debt payments, it began to recover towards the end of the decade as the debt burden eased.

Despite these efforts, challenges persisted. By 1991-92, a stark contrast remained: while over 200,000 students were enrolled in private French-sponsored or Roman Catholic schools, the public system often struggled with resources. The central highlands continued to have more schools and higher educational standards compared to coastal regions, perpetuating a disparity that would continue to fuel national debate. The legacy of language policy, with both Malagasy and French serving as national languages and languages of instruction, also presented ongoing complexities, as explored in later chapters.

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