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**Adapting other countries' instructional materials  
for  
teacher training in Madagascar**

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**Abstract**

This paper briefly explores the problematics of using teaching and learning resources developed in other countries for education, and teacher education in Madagascar. The paper initially overviews educational development and reform in Madagascar. It then explores different ways of adapting overseas developed resources for teaching and teacher education in the Madagascar context. Finally the paper provides suggestions for future practice.

**Introduction**

Madagascar has a long history in education, including teacher training and materials development to support teaching in general. In developed countries, many books

connected to the country's local realities, with the teachers, the students and the teacher trainers' needs have been written.

Despite the fact that many Malagasy teacher trainers can have access to some of these overseas developed materials, they still encounter problems using them. This is due to the fact that those teaching materials designers have produced tools for people living and working in developed countries, whose educational context is completely different from that of the countries in the South. However, since Madagascar is among the poor-resourced countries of the world, teachers and teacher trainers have to sue those materials.

In the first part of the paper, an overall background context of education in Madagascar will be developed. This part will be followed by details on the educational reform that has been implemented recently by the Ministry of Education in Madagascar. Finally, the paper will outline the challenges of instructional materials development and present some reflections to assist approaches to design appropriate materials that could meet Madagascar's educational objectives.

## **Background and context**

Madagascar gained its independence in 1960, but French still dominated education. Till 1972, the language of learning and instruction in schools and teacher education was French, and the teachers' guides were printed in French. Children studied the French context at school.

From 1972 significant reforms were attempted in education, and a few years later, the Malagasy government implemented the use of the mother tongue as the language of learning, although this was not without its problems. Under the "Malgachisation" policy, the use of the mother tongue at school (Malagasy) was mandated, and an attempt was made to change the content of the syllabus to reflect the local culture and social heritage. The intention of this reform was positive but, since the teacher educators and the teachers were not trained accordingly, it did not reach expectations. Accordingly, a new education policy was adopted. In the 1980s and 1990s different programs, such as PRESEM (1), CRESED (2) and UERP (3) were established by the Ministry of Education. Their mission was to provide quality education in from a local cultural perspective.

Different approaches, like PPO and APC were also adopted to meet national reform objectives. After working for many years with pedagogy by objectives, during the last five years, a competency based approach has been used in primary education and in the first year of junior secondary education. Pedagogy by objective refers to a behaviourist approach to learning, whereas a competency based approach reflects constructivism in the current reform framework (Jonnaert Philippe 2007).

From 2008, another new approach to education was introduced. It is the "Situational Approach," in which students learn from situations, and build their own knowledge through discovery. With most schools in Madagascar having large classes in excess of 50 students, it is not always possible for students to work in small groups to build their knowledge. In most cases, teachers use repetition and drills, or role play activities.

### **Further educational reform**

In 2008, after various attempts to improve education, the government sought to implement lasting and radical reform. This educational reform (the Madagascar Action Plan, 2008) places great importance on L1, which is spoken by all Malagasy people throughout the country, and which will be used at school. This decision has been taken, because it has been proven that young children can learn successfully in their mother tongue. The subtractive approach has been adopted by the Ministry of Education. It consists of the use of the children's mother tongue as a language of learning and teaching up to a certain level, after which it is replaced by another language.

“In programs that teach L1 literacy, where one student has basic communicative skills in L2, they can begin reading and writing in the L2, efficiently transferring the literacy skills they have learned through the mother tongue. In sum, schooling in the L1 offers the student the benefits of communicative competence and higher-level cognitive skills, which can then be applied to learning in the L2.” (Dutcher, 1995)

From this school year (2008), Malagasy will be the language of learning till Grade 5, and French will be studied as a foreign language from Grade 1 till Grade 5. After five years of schooling, the children are expected to have a strong grounding in L1 and enough knowledge of L2 so that, from Grade 6, school subjects will be taught in French.

Since the Madagascan Government is placing increased importance on English, and has launched it as an official language, it is to be introduced into primary school after French, and is studied as a foreign language as well. To reach all the objectives stated in the Madagascar Action Plan (MAP), and to allow as many children as possible to go to school (EFA Plan), 2800 teachers are recruited every year to cover the needs of all the schools spread across the country.

### **Different ways to adapt instructional materials**

Since cultural and social contexts for each school in each region and in each country are different, it is not always easy for teachers and teacher trainers to find, in one textbook or item of teaching material, all the necessary information needed to conduct lessons. Hence the idea of materials adaptation, which not only occurs in developing countries, but even in developed nations rich in printed materials. “Changes of some sort are inevitable if you want a book to fit your aims, your setting and most of your learners.” (Tasks for Teacher Education – course book)

There are different ways of adapting materials to one's needs, so each teacher or teacher trainer should know the one, or ones, that best suit requirements. Here are some examples to illustrate this problem of adaptation. When teaching “Giving Directions,” the teacher must change many things in the material written in Europe or America, because this text talks about motorways and traffic lights, which do not exist in Madagascar. The same sort of adaptation should be made when teaching the different seasons in a year. There are only two distinct seasons in Madagascar, whereas in Europe, for example, there are four. These are adaptations connected to different realities, so it is necessary to change some facts to meet the learners' needs as a key aspect of adapting materials for local conditions.

Some parts of suggested activities can also be removed. Still on the subject of weather, if a suggested activity involved the learners being asked to write a paragraph about the best ski competition they have witnessed, or the last snow fall in their area, it would be better to replace this activity with a more appropriate one. The teacher could also add an extra activity, not mentioned in the book, but relevant to the lesson's content and local context.

### **Challenges for developing local teacher training materials**

We all know that establishing an effective teacher training program is a difficult task. It involves not only developing a curriculum to suit a country's needs, choosing an appropriate approach and changing education policy, but also a recognition of its importance to the nation. Important too, is the development of the right instructional materials, and this remains a challenge in Madagascar.

Although Malagasy teacher educators have opportunities to meet foreign experts in education and receive training from time to time, and although material is available to help them build their capacity, a lack of the right instructional materials remains a problem. Why? Because firstly, there is a lack of people qualified to develop the right instructional materials. During pre-service training, future teachers are taught how to design lesson plans; how to teach (in the case of future language teachers) the different skills required in language learning; how to manage a classroom; how to develop pedagogical materials that will help them deliver effective lessons that enhance students' understanding; and how to handle large classes. Additionally, their studies cover knowledge of the subjects they will later teach. There are, however, no courses on how to design textbooks or teaching guides, so graduates will not be qualified to design instructional materials.

Secondly, experienced teacher educators have the ability to teach their students the art of developing effective instructional materials, however, there is no time and no space to include this in the program. The teacher trainers themselves suffer from a lack of effective teaching and learning material and devote much time to adapting available material to meet their objectives.

Finally, it goes without saying that materials development requires funding and investment. In developing countries, priority is given to supplying schools with textbooks, a very expensive exercise for the Ministry of Education. Supplying all Malagasy schools with the sufficient textbooks is another significant problem.

For all the reasons mentioned above, teacher educators must adapt materials from other countries; not an easy task considering the differences between the cultural and social context in these counties and those of Madagascar.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, because materials can be adapted in various ways, teacher trainers should be able to choose the most suitable means to fulfil a desired objective. The problem is: Do all teacher trainers have sufficient ability to accomplish this task effectively?

### **Suggestions**

To solve these problems, I suggest we consider a combination of our past experiences in Madagascar; an analysis of the overseas experience; and the creation of working groups

to work towards the implementation of a new strategy around the development of instructional materials.

A first step could involve Malagasy people working with foreign experts. It is essential that those chosen to work in this field should be professionals, that is, they would be trained and would work as full-time materials developers.

Those chosen for this work should include teacher trainers from the different regions of Madagascar, where educational realities and needs differ. By working together, materials could be developed to be used throughout the country. After a time, the foreign experts could withdraw, and leave it to the local groups to continue with the project.

## **Conclusion**

The objective this paper has been to make people aware of the different issues and challenges faced by teachers and teacher educators, because of the lack of instructional materials needed for quality education in Madagascar.

Some suggestions have been made, but a number of questions still need to be answered:

- Who is the right person to convince the country's educational authority that the development of quality instructional materials is a priority in education?
- How can professionals in instructional materials development be recruited?

Perhaps we will have the answers to these questions in the future but, as has already been mentioned, this task needs time, expertise and investment. It is, I think, high time we started because what is needed is not adapted materials, but new material designed and developed to suit local Madagascan contexts.

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