

Evaluation of French Language Teaching in the Analamanga Region: Current Status and Opportunities for Improvement

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Abstract:

Education professionals are increasingly concerned about the level of French proficiency among Malagasy students. This article aims to assist teachers in refining their classroom practices to maximize outcomes. On-site observations were conducted in various public primary schools, middle schools, and high schools, including the primary schools of 67 ha Nord-Est and Antanimena Est, the middle schools of Betsimitatatra and Antanimena, as well as Lycée Moderne Ampefiloha, Lycée Analamahitsy, and Lycée Ivato. The investigation focused on two main aspects, emphasizing that the quality of teaching largely depends on the teachers' methods. The results show that half of the primary and middle school teachers lack a solid foundation in French, partly due to their initial training. Additionally, they lack suitable teaching materials, and their teaching methods lack rigor.

Keywords:

Language proficiency; Teaching methods; Pedagogy; Teaching materials; Education.

I. Introduction

Teachers play numerous essential roles, including interacting with students and communicating with parents. They are also key players in the smooth operation of the educational system. Teachers' professionalism, defined as a system of enacted norms and values, is tied to the history of the profession, the state of socio-political expectations, working environments, and changes in prescribed standards (Lantheaume & Simonian, 2012). However, they are often criticized because society tends to attribute academic success or failure to their performance. Despite these criticisms, researchers in didactics and pedagogy continue to work on improving the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

Due to its French colonial past, the French language is deeply ingrained in the history of Madagascar. According to Hassan Kindo, *"Teaching French in the context of francophone African countries means opting for a language imposed by colonization that became the country's official language after independence. Most Africans have retained the language of the colonizer as the official language and language of instruction after independence"* (2022).

Although French is the official language of education in Madagascar, a bilingual education system has quietly emerged since the promotion of the French language following the *"malgachization"* period. This situation reflects a balance between respecting the national language (Malagasy) and the need to master the colonial language (French) for access to international knowledge and opportunities (Bloch, 2023). According to Babault (2006) « *The French language remains a marker of belonging to a social elite* ».

Teaching French remains a persistent challenge, despite initiatives to improve it. The decline in French proficiency negatively affects the quality of education (Ralitera, 2020). The continuing education programs aimed at developing teachers' French skills reflect this commitment. However, current teaching methods may restrict progress in mastering the language.

This issue raises the following research question: *"How do training programs play a crucial role in improving French proficiency?"* Two hypotheses emerge from this question:

- a. Training programs can enhance teachers' language skills.
- b. Using pedagogical practices tailored to the subject matter and the students' level can optimize the quality of teaching and learning.

This article aims to identify the causes of inefficiency and propose solutions to address them. Surveys and classroom observations were conducted to examine teachers' practices during French lessons. The results primarily focus on teachers' profiles, their linguistic habits, and their teaching methods. Teachers' profiles include their degrees and educational backgrounds, from primary school to the end of high school. The surveys and classroom observations reveal that, for teachers, bilingualism is unavoidable. They also highlight a lack of rigor in their pedagogical methods.

II. Research Methods

To collect and analyze data, survey and classroom observation methods were employed. A sample of 40 teachers was selected, including 10 instructors from two public primary schools (6 from EPP 67 Ha Nord-Est and 4 from EPP Antanimena Est), 10 teachers from two general education colleges (5 from CEG Antanimena and 5 from CEG 67 Ha Nord-Ouest), and 20 teachers from three public high schools (13 from Lycée Moderne Ampefiloha, 4 from Lycée Analamahitsy, and 3 from Lycée Ivato). Data on teachers' linguistic practices, knowledge, and pedagogical approaches were collected through a questionnaire. The survey was conducted during the first half of February 2023. The interview guide for teachers had two sections: the first with three questions about their training, and the second with 10 questions about their linguistic practices, knowledge, and pedagogical approaches, as well as the textbooks used.

Classroom observations were conducted in two public primary schools (EPP 67 Ha Nord-Est and EPP Antanimena Est), two general education colleges (CEG Betsimitatatra and CEG Antanimena), and three public high schools (Lycée Moderne Ampefiloha, Lycée Analamahitsy, and Lycée Ivato). A quantitative approach was adopted for data processing.

Along of this research, two approaches were followed:

- a. The functionalist approach: This approach aims to examine all interdependent and complementary pedagogical phenomena. Each phenomenon is analyzed to identify the positive or negative aspects of teaching.
- b. Jacques Tardif's approach in 1992 (Marcotte,1993): Outlined in his book "Pour un Enseignement Stratégique" ("For Strategic Teaching"), this approach views teaching as an act of communication, emphasizing that it is impossible for a teacher not to communicate with students.

III. Results and Discussion

3.1 Language skills

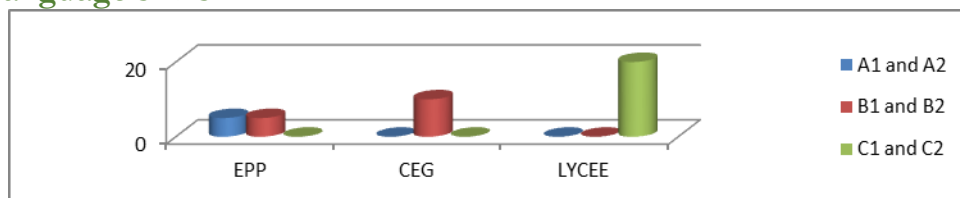


Figure 1. Teachers' level of language skills

The graph reveals that most primary school teachers do not possess outstanding linguistic competence. Half of the teachers believe they have an intermediate level. Similarly, middle school teachers do not feel fully confident in their linguistic competence. Only 20% of them claim to have a satisfactory level of linguistic competence. In contrast, high school teachers overwhelmingly report having excellent French language skills. However, during classroom observations and according to the survey, their use of "Vary amin'anana" was noted. Primary and middle school teachers also use it, likely due to their own limitations and those of their students.

3.2 Teaching practice

a. Teaching materials

Teachers do not restrict themselves to the resources provided by the ministry of education (MEN); instead, they conduct personal research to enhance existing documents. However, none of them use audio materials or new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as teaching aids. Only two high school teachers occasionally use films as teaching materials.

b. Organization of the teaching team

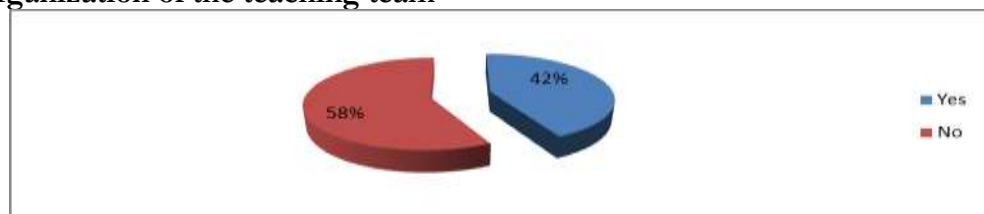


Figure 2. Monthly Meeting of the Teaching Team

About 42% of teachers stated that there are monthly meetings in their schools, while 58% claimed there are none. All the teachers interviewed indicated that their work focuses on the progress of the curriculum, text study, and exchanges between teachers.

c. Knowledge of curriculum approaches.

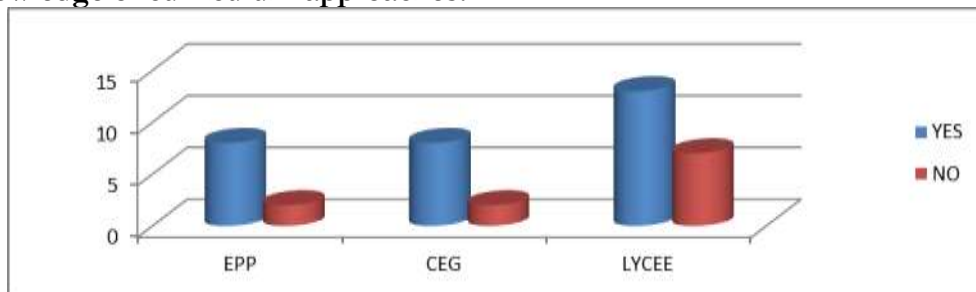


Figure 3. Distribution of teachers according to their understanding of curriculum approaches

Nearly half of the teachers surveyed are unaware of the definition of the curricular approach, especially those who have left the faculty without pedagogical training.

Those who come from prestigious schools or pedagogical training institutes such as CRINFP or ENS, as well as primary school teachers who hold a CAP, have a partial and superficial understanding of the subject.

d. Application of the teaching approach

Although half of the teachers have some experience with teaching approaches, none of them apply them during their classes. Furthermore, those who have not received pedagogical training are unable to apply these approaches.

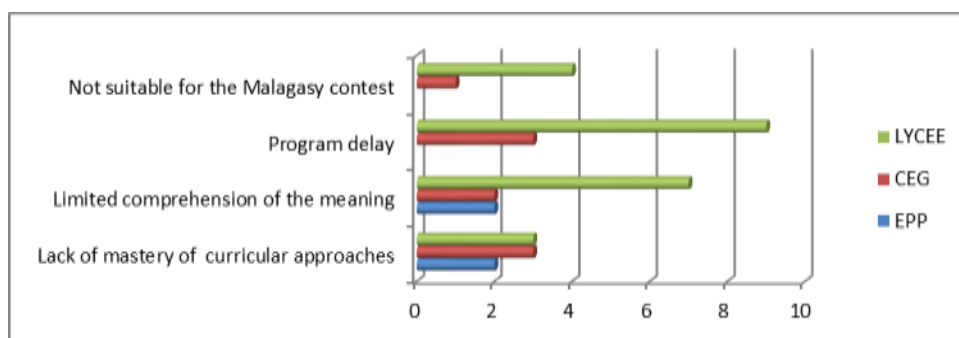


Figure 4. Reasons for the lack of application of curricular approaches among teachers

This graph highlights the obstacles that prevent teachers from applying curricular approaches. Among the teachers who have knowledge of this subject, they believe these approaches slow down the curriculum. In particular, 27.5% admit they do not know the definition, 20% do not know how to use them, and 12.5% find them not suitable for the Malagasy reality. Additionally, 10% of teachers consider that these factors make implementation impossible.

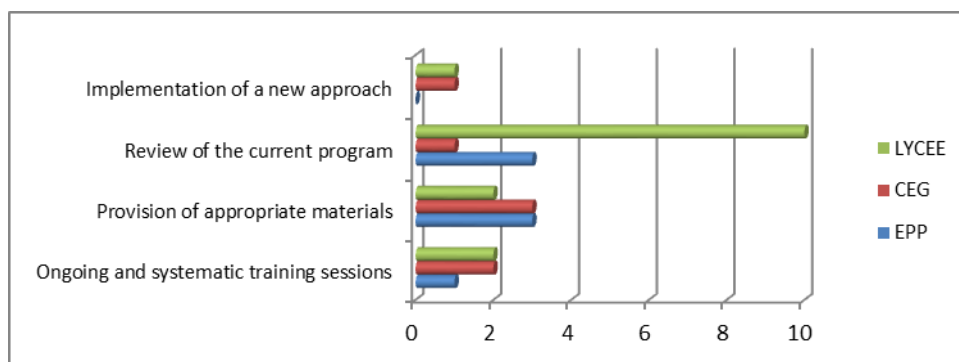


Figure 5. Teachers' suggestions for improving teaching

37.5% of teachers request a revision of the current curriculum, 20% wish to have better equipment, and 12.5% believe that continuous and systematic training would be beneficial. Additionally, 5% suggest the adoption of new teaching approaches. Finally, the remaining 25% support some of the mentioned solutions.

3.3 Classroom observation

Classroom observation revealed the linguistic competence level of the teachers, particularly in terms of pronunciation and language practice. Many teachers, especially in primary schools, struggle with pronouncing French correctly. For instance, some pronounce "je" as "ze" or "raisonnement" as "resonemà." Mistakes were also observed in both oral and written use, such as saying "les enfants jouent dans la cours" instead of "la cour" or "un garçon et un fille."

Since the course focuses on the French language, it is expected that the lessons and exercises be written and conducted in French, including the date, titles, and instructions. However, survey results show that teachers do not exclusively use French, and this was confirmed by classroom observations. In primary schools, for instance, 80% of the language used is Malagasy. The teacher speaks in Malagasy or mixes both languages (vary amin'anana) during explanations, as in the example "*rehefa inona no mampiasa temps présent? Ahoana ny conjugaison an'ny verbe finir?*".

This phenomenon has also been observed in general education colleges, where teachers rarely speak in French except when reading texts or lessons. The case of high schools is different: teachers make efforts to use only French but often re-explain in Malagasy to ensure a better understanding among students. Generally, the mother tongue is used to reprimand students or discuss topics not related to teaching.

Most teachers usually rely on traditional teaching methods that are more teacher-centered and emphasize the teacher's knowledge and skills. During classroom observations, it was noted that teachers favor the explicit method. For instance, rather than explaining the meaning of a word by contextualizing it in a sentence, using gestures, or providing a synonym or antonym, they opt for immediate translation. According to them, this approach prevents delays in students' understanding, which would hinder the progress of the curriculum.

3.4 Discussion

a. Language Skills Difficulties Among Teachers

According to the results obtained, only high school teachers admit to having good linguistic skills and ease in using French, which was confirmed by classroom observations. In

contrast, primary and middle school teachers lack linguistic exposure and familiarity with the French language, hindering their communication and interactions with students. They have not been trained to use French as the language of instruction. This gap also stems from a complete lack of linguistic immersion in their teaching practice (Rabarijaona, 2005).

Furthermore, few teachers practice French in their daily lives. According to Sophie Babault, *“phenomena of vernacularization [...] that is, the appropriation of the French language by a population or social group as its own means of expression, are limited to a few families of the urban bourgeoisie who have chosen French as the medium of family communication. However, there is currently a fairly frequent reliance on family strategies for using French in middle-class families, often for learning purposes, in a more or less consistent manner, with Malagasy still playing the most significant role in interactions”* (2006).

According to Tirvassen (2010), teaching provided in a language that teachers are not proficient in and that is inadequately supported by the school has exponential negative effects on learning effectiveness. The mother tongue is often not sufficiently recognized in the education of children in developing countries, with schools neglecting these primary languages in terms of identity and cognitive functions. Recent initiatives aimed at incorporating mother tongues to enhance fundamental teaching are also examined.

b. Language Use During Classes

Due to its colonial history, Malagasy society is marked by a complex linguistic situation characterized by diglossia. This diglossia is evident in the coexistence of the colonial language (French) and the national language (Malagasy), as well as a more ancient and stable diglossia between the national language and the vernacular languages (Bibauw, 2006). French, despite its lower level of proficiency, is actively utilized within the country. This phenomenon is intricately linked to the prevalence of the French language (diglossia) and the historical context of French colonization in 1894 (Matthey, 2021). This results in a functional distribution of the use of French, Malagasy, and various Malagasy dialects within society. However, since few Malagasy people fully master both Malagasy and French, there is also the presence of code-switching, where these two languages blend and are used simultaneously in the same contexts (Rafitson, 1992).

Given the low success rate of education in Madagascar, language has often been cited as one of the blocking factors in knowledge transmission (Rapanoël, 2021). According to teachers, being monolingual is unfeasible due to students' linguistic shortcomings. Therefore, it is necessary to also speak in Malagasy to facilitate understanding of the taught material. Moreover, classroom observations have shown that some teachers face challenges in expression, further confirming that monolingualism is far from feasible.

Bilingualism is commonly observed in all primary schools.

Andriamaharomanana's work revealed the presence of language mixing and borrowing during French classes in CM2 (2016). During an interaction between a teacher and a student, the teacher used a mix of French and Malagasy ("*fran-gasy*") without realizing it, asking a question: "Je suis i?" She also borrowed words when giving an instruction: "*Conjugena kely aloha io au passé composé.*" These language habits, though seemingly harmless, could have consequences on students' language skills.

Class observations show that teachers often use students' mother tongue, Malagasy, to make them more comfortable and encourage them to actively participate in the learning process, thereby facilitating their understanding. Despite this, the mother tongue plays important roles in the learning of a foreign language. In fact, the majority of linguists advocate the use of the mother tongue as a teaching and learning language (Andriamaharomanana, 2016). Additionally, numerous global studies and experiments examining the influence of family dynamics on learning French as a second language have established that, beyond the classroom setting, familial and socio-cultural surroundings significantly contribute to the language acquisition process. (Boutarfa, 2020).

Although most secondary and university teachers delivered science instruction exclusively in French, they estimated that only about one-third of students could fully understand the language. Additionally, disparities existed between urban and rural areas, as well as between public and private schools. Teachers in urban settings were considerably more likely to use French for instruction compared to those in rural areas, while public schools often had significantly larger class sizes than private institutions (Wills et al., 2014).

1) Utilization of educational resources

The pedagogical tool or support is defined as an educational means used by a trainer or teacher to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge in a specific field. Its use is essential for effective teaching and contributes to the student's learning. Using computer technologies in foreign language learning enhances traditional methods and significantly boosts the effectiveness of the educational process. Some literature reviews suggest that effectively utilizing new technologies enhances language learning skills in students. (Ahmadi, 2018). These tools provide interactive resources, personalized learning experiences, and instant feedback, making language acquisition more engaging and efficient. Teaching a language effectively requires the adoption of specific techniques. The methods and approaches used in language education, particularly in teaching French, heavily rely on the teacher who implements the curriculum (Chukwu, n. d.)

Kupchyk and Litvinchuk highlight the immense potential of ICT in creating Personal Learning Environments (PLEs) for both classroom activities and informal learning (2021). They outline various practical activities for students that encourage active engagement both inside and outside the classroom, fostering a flexible, personalized learning environment that is independent of time and space. By integrating technology, learners can access a wider range of materials and practice their skills in real-world contexts, ultimately leading to better outcomes in language proficiency.

Thus, technologies can support the processes required in the French curriculum by providing access to information (such as relevant and reliable web content) and enhancing communication and collaboration (for example, by working in teams on a shared document or exchanging with experts or teachers). Additionally, assistive technologies are essential for enabling some students with particular needs to access the curriculum equitably and fully engage in their learning, as well as participate in classroom activities, in accordance with their individualized education plan (IEP) if necessary. The use or practice of foreign languages in listening (music, TV, radio, internet) greatly influences its learning (Atlan, 2000).

The essential pedagogical resources for a school include slides, images, DVDs, laptops, and projectors. Teachers should use at least one of these tools. However, during observations, it was found that all teachers limit themselves to using only didactic textbooks. Some would

like to use other resources, but sometimes the school does not have them. In other cases, even though the schools have these resources, the teachers do not always think to use them. In addition, their linguistic environment is very limited and their skills in foreign languages such as French and English are extremely weak (Rakotoanosy, 2007). Leveraging technology, such as televisions, radios, music videos, the internet, and diverse social media platforms, significantly impacts language learning for students, offering an effective solution (Andrianjary, 2023).

Foreign language teaching methodologies are increasingly focused on two key benefits provided by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Firstly, ICT facilitates the use of authentic language in the classroom by offering a wide variety of accessible resources. Secondly, ICT fosters connections and enables fast, easy communication, which is essential for effective language use and a primary objective of language teaching and learning (Kromidha, 2015).

2) Knowledge and Practices of Pedagogical Approaches

Despite the growing emphasis on sustainability in education, there has been limited exploration of effective teaching strategies. Understanding the relationship between pedagogical approaches and student outcomes is crucial for fostering sustainability competences. There has been limited research on the connection between how courses are delivered (pedagogical approaches) and how they may affect sustainability competences (Lozano *et al.*, 2017). The pedagogical approach is the method or strategy that teachers use to facilitate students' learning. It encompasses a variety of teaching techniques, communication and assessment methods, and instructional materials designed to meet the specific needs of learners. This approach aims to optimize the acquisition of knowledge and skills, to foster student engagement, and to adapt teaching to their level and learning style. The five pedagogical approaches to teaching are Constructivism, Collaborative, Inquiry-Based, Integrative, and Reflective approaches. Despite the importance of those approaches, most teachers do not use them. They believe they are not suited to the Malagasy context and slow down the pace of the curriculum. Some also acknowledge that they are unable to put them into practice. To achieve educational objectives, teachers must seek out and adopt effective approaches. To enhance pedagogical approaches, the creation of the Sectoral Education Plan by the Ministry and the establishment of a Pedagogical Support & ICT Cell advocate for strengthening teachers' pedagogical skills. Through a series of awareness and training sessions, provision of educational broadcasting equipment, ICT workshops, and pedagogical days, the foundations for pedagogical support have been laid (Rafanomezantsoa *et al.*, 2022).

The analysis of the results obtained allowed for answering the initial research question. Indeed, the problem does not necessarily lie in the methods used by the teachers, but rather in the pedagogical environment in which they work. First and foremost, the linguistic gaps among teachers, resulting from inadequate schooling backgrounds, pose a major obstacle. These gaps must be addressed. If a teacher finds themselves struggling, they should consider taking French courses at a language institute such as Alliance Française. However, the current low salaries and pay scales of Malagasy teachers may not always cover these costs, suggesting that the state could potentially fund training expenses for the affected teachers.

Moreover, large class sizes can lead to an excessive workload for teachers, causing them to neglect their responsibilities. For instance, they may be overwhelmed by grading exam papers. Overcrowded classrooms also hinder effective pedagogical follow-up with students. Thus, while the "*Education For All*" project is a significant initiative, it is essential to limit

class sizes to a reasonable level.

"Human beings need space and calm, especially when they must exert intellectual effort. Imagine, as adults, working several hours a day confined in a small room overcrowded with 30 people... That seems unacceptable. The physical proximity, caused by overcrowding and limited space, creates an environment not conducive to concentration. The more students there are, the more speech and movement increases, heightening the noise level which continuously causes stress and fatigue. In an overcrowded classroom, there are not many moments of silence! To this, we add the heat, the lack of space to place one's belongings, and the lack of room to move and relax, all of which intensify the feeling of discomfort. All these obstacles clutter the mind and do not create ideal conditions for effective learning." (Disant, 2023).

The linguistic situation in Madagascar, with emphasis on French as the language of power, functions as a stabilizing factor for the elite in power and excludes the majority of the population (Dahl, 2011). This results in limited access to quality education and resources in French for many individuals, leading to low proficiency levels. As a consequence, students struggle to fully engage with the curriculum, which is often delivered in French, exacerbating issues of inequality and hindering overall educational development in the country. Rakotomalala (2016) stated that the challenge of learning an allogène language, which is integral to daily life, is the reliance on a pedagogy aimed at teaching a foreign language primarily to assist individuals in difficulty.

The goal of teaching French can sometimes raise questions among educational stakeholders. According to Ait Amar Meziane (2016), "The purposes of teaching the French language are primarily aimed at the intellectual development of learners to help them become responsible citizens, capable of reasoning and possessing critical thinking skills, while also facilitating their integration into social and professional life."

According to Hameline (1979), a goal is a statement of principle through which a society or social group identifies and promotes values. It provides guidance for an educational system and helps shape the discourse on education. Consequently, a student should be able to express themselves clearly and in detail on a variety of topics, formulate an opinion on current issues, and present the pros and cons of different options (Robert, 2009). To achieve this goal, it is necessary to adopt effective teaching methods and tools. It is often said that the presence of teaching tools such as books and new technologies enhances teaching and learning.

However, due to the current economic situation in Madagascar, the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) is challenging, especially in remote areas, despite the recommendations of the educational system orientation law. In the absence of these tools, teachers are compelled to rely on traditional methods without mastering or applying a curricular approach.

According to Mbouli, *"The school must turn to a teaching method that lays the foundation for lifelong learning and is adapted to this constantly changing world"* (Mbouli, 2016).

Therefore, it is essential to find an approach suited to the Malagasy reality, such as the grammar translation method. This method focuses on analyzing grammatical rules and their

exceptions, allowing the teacher to guide the learning of a second language through the translation of sentences and texts while applying the knowledge acquired (Cabrera, 2014).

Cabrera lists the main characteristics of this method:

- a. It emphasizes learning grammatical rules and applying them to the translation of words or sentences from one language to another.
- b. Learning foreign language vocabulary is done through lists of isolated words.
- c. Instead of reading texts in the foreign language, they are translated directly and discussed in class.
- d. Little or no attention is given to pronunciation.

Based on experience, adopting the grammatical translation method is often more effective because learners more easily assimilate information when it is translated into their mother tongue. It is therefore recommended to offer training on this method to teachers. This training will enable them to recognize exclusion and discrimination while adapting inclusive teaching methods for students with diverse learning needs.

IV. Conclusion

This article highlights teachers' practices during French language lessons. Observations conducted in the field showed that teachers play a significant role in learners' mastery of the French language. This research revealed the challenges teachers face in their classroom practices. In general, it appears that the problems encountered are linked to fundamental gaps in teacher training. Therefore, the proposed solutions must be tailored to this reality. It is not that the teachers' teaching methods are ineffective, but rather that the foundations of their learning of the French language are inadequate, as demonstrated by the results of this research. Linguistic training is therefore essential for them. Moreover, it is important to emphasize that all projects to be undertaken must align with the country's socio-economic reality. This will ensure a practical and relevant application of the recommendations from this research.

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