Comoros

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

2017
2.4 Comoros

2.4.1 Background information
The Union of the Comoros is a four-island archipelago nation of less than 900,000 people, located at the northern end of the Mozambique Channel. Mayotte, one of the four islands, is claimed by Comoros but remains under French administration.

Ethnologue lists six languages for Comoros: French, Arabic, three Comorian languages and Malagasy.

2.4.2. Current language policy
Comorian is spoken by more than 95 per cent of the population and is classified as an official language along with French and Arabic (Laval, 2009). The 2001 Constitution of Comoros (Constitution of the Union of the Comoros, Title 1, Art. 1) lists Shikomor (commonly called “Comorian”) as the official language, and French and Arabic as the national languages. However, the use of Comorian remains primarily oral, largely because of the lack of development of a stable written form of the language. Walker (2007) argues that the Constitutional support for Comorian is actually misleading.

“In the Comoros, not only is there no accepted orthography, but both Latin and Arabic scripts are in use. There is no consolidation of national identity, as opposed to sociocultural unity, in the language.” (Walker, 2007, p. 586) However attempts have been made since the 1970s to standardize the language. Comorian linguists from the University of Comoros Department of Modern Languages are currently involved in discussions on the standardization of Comorian.

2.4.3. Education policy and practice
Although Shikomor is one of the official languages, education is primarily carried out in French and Arabic. Comorian can be found in pre-school classrooms, but from early primary, French is the language of instruction (Baker 2009, p. 218). Arabic and English are taught in later grades (Laval, 2009).

Current revision of the national education policy is reinforcing the role of French and Arabic as languages of instruction from primary through tertiary education, while Comorian is permitted at the preschool level. Furthermore, debate has been ongoing since 2009 regarding a move away from French and toward the of Comorian and Arabic as languages of instruction in primary school.