

TOURISM AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS: ENHANCING SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES IN MADAGASCAR

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Abstract

Tourism has become an important sector in Madagascar, with growing potential to generate income, create jobs, and foster international exchange. However, its contribution to the country's education system remains underexplored. This study investigates the ways in which tourism interacts with schools and universities, focusing on its impact on infrastructure, teacher capacity, student opportunities, and community perceptions. A qualitative research design is employed, combining direct observation and semi-structured interviews with 30 purposively selected informants, including school directors, teachers, university lecturers, students, parents, tourism operators, and local leaders. Data are analysed thematically to identify key patterns and cross-validated through triangulation to ensure credibility. Findings reveal that tourism's influence on education in Madagascar is still modest and uneven. Some schools located near tourist destinations benefit from occasional donations or NGO-led projects, but most institutions lack systematic support. Teachers have limited access to training in foreign languages or hospitality skills, which constrains their ability to prepare students for careers linked to tourism. Opportunities for students and universities remain narrow, as internships, vocational pathways, and collaborations with businesses are not yet well developed. Communities recognise tourism's potential to support education but express concern that benefits are concentrated in specific hubs, leaving many rural schools excluded. The study underscores the need for stronger linkages between tourism and education through targeted teacher training, structured internship programs, and equitable revenue-sharing mechanisms. By highlighting both opportunities and gaps, the research provides insights that can guide policymakers, educational institutions, and tourism stakeholders in designing more inclusive strategies. Ultimately, strengthening the connection between tourism and education can enhance human capital, promote equitable development, and contribute to Madagascar's long-term socio-economic progress.

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Abstrak

Pariwisata telah menjadi sektor penting di Madagaskar dengan potensi yang terus berkembang untuk menghasilkan pendapatan, menciptakan lapangan kerja, dan mendorong pertukaran internasional. Namun, kontribusinya terhadap sistem pendidikan negara tersebut masih belum banyak diteliti. Penelitian ini menyelidiki cara pariwisata berinteraksi dengan sekolah dan universitas, dengan fokus pada dampaknya terhadap infrastruktur, kapasitas guru, peluang siswa, dan persepsi masyarakat. Desain penelitian kualitatif digunakan dengan menggabungkan observasi langsung dan wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan 30 informan yang dipilih secara purposif, termasuk kepala sekolah, guru, dosen universitas, siswa, orang tua, pelaku pariwisata, dan tokoh masyarakat. Data dianalisis secara tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola-pola utama dan divalidasi silang melalui triangulasi guna menjamin kredibilitas. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pengaruh pariwisata terhadap pendidikan di Madagaskar masih bersifat terbatas dan tidak merata. Beberapa sekolah yang berlokasi di dekat destinasi wisata memperoleh manfaat dari donasi sesekali atau

proyek yang dipimpin LSM, tetapi sebagian besar lembaga pendidikan masih kekurangan dukungan sistematis. Guru memiliki akses yang terbatas terhadap pelatihan bahasa asing atau keterampilan perhotelan, yang membatasi kemampuan mereka dalam mempersiapkan siswa untuk karier yang terkait dengan pariwisata. Peluang bagi siswa dan universitas juga masih sempit, karena program magang, jalur vokasi, dan kolaborasi dengan dunia usaha belum berkembang dengan baik. Masyarakat mengakui potensi pariwisata untuk mendukung pendidikan, tetapi mengungkapkan kekhawatiran bahwa manfaatnya terkonsentrasi di wilayah tertentu sehingga banyak sekolah di pedesaan tidak tersentuh. Penelitian ini menegaskan perlunya penguatan hubungan antara pariwisata dan pendidikan melalui pelatihan guru yang terarah, program magang yang terstruktur, serta mekanisme pembagian pendapatan yang adil. Dengan menyoroti peluang sekaligus kesenjangan, penelitian ini memberikan wawasan yang dapat memandu pembuat kebijakan, lembaga pendidikan, dan pemangku kepentingan pariwisata dalam merancang strategi yang lebih inklusif. Pada akhirnya, memperkuat keterhubungan antara pariwisata dan pendidikan dapat meningkatkan kualitas sumber daya manusia, mendorong pembangunan yang merata, serta berkontribusi pada kemajuan sosial-ekonomi jangka panjang Madagaskar.

Kata Kunci: Pariwisata, pendidikan, Madagaskar, siswa, guru

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become one of the most influential sectors in shaping the economies and societies of developing nations (Bertella & Rinaldi, 2020). In recent decades, it has moved beyond being merely a driver of foreign exchange earnings to catalysing broader social and institutional development. Madagascar, an island nation recognised for its unique biodiversity and cultural richness, has increasingly positioned tourism as a cornerstone of its growth strategy. The sector's rapid expansion has generated employment opportunities, fostered cultural exchanges, and opened pathways for global connectivity (Bianchi, 2018). Yet, one of the less-explored dimensions of tourism's impact lies in its potential contribution to educational progress, both in formal school systems and in higher learning institutions (Akama & Sterry, 2002; Bianchi & de Man, 2021). Examining this connection offers an opportunity to understand how a growing service industry can enhance educational access, infrastructure, and human capital formation.

Madagascar faces persistent challenges in education that make the question of tourism's role particularly urgent. Public schools often struggle with underfunding, inadequate facilities, and shortages of trained teachers, especially in rural and coastal communities where tourism enterprises are frequently concentrated. Universities, although centres of intellectual growth, face limited resources and weak links with the labour market, leaving many graduates without clear pathways into employment (Emynorane et al., 2025). In addition, regional disparities in educational outcomes have widened, leaving some communities with limited opportunities to benefit from global economic integration. In such a context, identifying alternative streams of support for

education is not simply desirable but essential for ensuring that schools and universities can meet the needs of a changing society (Font & McCabe, 2017). Tourism, through revenue generation, skill demands, and public–private partnerships, emerges as one such promising channel.

Several earlier studies have highlighted tourism's broad social and economic implications in Madagascar. Study on eco-tourism initiatives, for example, has shown that community-managed reserves and hotels can generate income that is partially reinvested in local schools (Daniele, 2021). Scholars analysing language and cultural exchanges have noted how the presence of international visitors stimulates interest in foreign-language instruction and intercultural learning among Malagasy youth (Dangi & Jamal, 2016). Comparative work in other developing regions has emphasised that tourism can indirectly improve educational systems by creating incentives for families to invest in their children's schooling, especially when employment opportunities are tied to service industries requiring literacy, communication skills, or vocational training (Davis et al., 2014). However, the majority of these investigations have tended to focus on isolated community projects or on tourism's environmental and economic consequences, leaving the systemic relationship between tourism growth and educational development underexplored.

A closer look at the academic landscape reveals that studies linking tourism and education in Madagascar remain fragmented. Anthropological works often concentrate on cultural adaptation in tourist zones, while economic analyses privilege revenue generation and job creation. Several attempts have been made to map the direct and indirect ways through which tourism contributes to educational infrastructure, school enrollment, learning quality, and university-level training (Cheer, 2021; Emynorane et al., 2025). Equally limited is the discussion on how tourism can serve as a bridge between formal education and the labour market, offering students concrete pathways to apply classroom learning in professional contexts (Denny et al., 2019). This absence of integrated research creates uncertainty for policymakers who aim to design strategies that leverage tourism revenues for human capital development.

The lack of a comprehensive approach has important consequences. Without systematic evidence, educational institutions miss opportunities to collaborate with the tourism industry on curriculum design, language training, or vocational programs (Dillette et al., 2017). Similarly, local governments remain constrained in their ability to channel tourism revenues into sustainable school funding mechanisms (Ham, 1992; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). Non-governmental organisations and community leaders often recognise the potential but operate without a coherent framework to scale successful initiatives (Hampton & Jeyacheya, 2020). In short, there is a pressing need for research that goes beyond case-specific observations and offers a holistic understanding of tourism's role in strengthening both schools and universities in Madagascar.

Undertaking such an investigation is particularly timely, given Madagascar's dual aspirations of becoming a globally recognised tourist destination and achieving educational transformation. The government has emphasised the importance of expanding tourism as a means of creating jobs and generating foreign exchange, yet educational reform has simultaneously been declared a national priority (Dewey & Drahota, 2016). Aligning these two policy objectives requires robust evidence on how tourism can support the modernisation of the education system. Moreover, the Sustainable Development Goals, which place quality education and decent work at the centre of global development agendas, underscore the urgency of identifying cross-sectoral synergies (Dillette et al., 2017).

The value of this study also lies in its ability to highlight both opportunities and risks. Tourism can provide schools with financial resources, expand access to learning materials, and incentivise young people to pursue education to secure future employment. At the same time, there are risks of dependency, inequality, and cultural commodification if tourism-driven educational investments are not carefully managed. For example, communities located in tourist hotspots may see significant infrastructure improvements, while remote areas remain excluded, deepening existing disparities. Seasonal employment linked to tourism may also encourage students to drop out of school prematurely in search of short-term income (Font & McCabe, 2017). Addressing these contrasting dynamics requires nuanced, evidence-based analysis.

This study, therefore, seeks to fill an important intellectual and policy-oriented space. By adopting a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative data on school resources and student outcomes with qualitative insights from stakeholders, it aims to build a comprehensive picture of tourism's influence on education in Madagascar. Unlike previous studies that have treated tourism and education as separate domains, the current investigation positions them within a single analytical framework. It not only considers how revenues and resources flow from tourism into schools and universities but also examines how educational institutions prepare students to participate in and transform the tourism industry.

The relevance of this study extends beyond Madagascar's borders. Other island nations and developing economies also face the challenge of aligning tourism expansion with educational needs. Insights generated here may inform strategies in regions where similar dynamics are at play, such as the Caribbean, the Pacific Islands, or parts of Southeast Asia (Larsen & Hansen, 2023). By documenting mechanisms, identifying effective models of collaboration, and assessing both benefits and risks, the study contributes to a broader conversation on how to design inclusive, sustainable linkages between economic growth and educational progress.

METHOD

The study uses a qualitative research design because it seeks to capture the lived experiences, perspectives, and meanings attached to the relationship

between tourism and educational development in Madagascar. A qualitative approach is most suitable since the research does not aim to generate numerical generalisations but instead to provide an in-depth understanding of how individuals perceive and experience the influence of tourism on schools and universities. Data collection relies primarily on observation and semi-structured interviews, which allow for the exploration of both visible practices and underlying interpretations. Observation is conducted in selected educational and tourism-related settings, enabling the researcher to examine interactions, infrastructure conditions, and community initiatives in real time. Semi-structured interviews provide participants with the flexibility to share insights in their own words, while still following a guiding set of themes related to tourism and education linkages. The sample consists of 30 informants selected purposively to represent key actors who are directly involved in or affected by the intersection of tourism and education. These include school directors, teachers, university lecturers, local government officials, tourism operators, students, and parents from communities with significant tourism activities. Purposive sampling ensures that participants have relevant knowledge and diverse perspectives to enrich the analysis. The data are analysed through thematic coding, where transcripts are carefully read, categorised, and compared to identify recurring patterns and variations. Validation is ensured through triangulation: observations are cross-checked with interview accounts, and information from different categories of informants is compared to confirm consistency. Reflexive note-taking and peer debriefing further strengthen the credibility of the findings, ensuring that interpretations remain grounded in participants' voices and contextual realities.

RESULTS

The results from interviews and observations reveal that the contribution of tourism to education in Madagascar remains limited and uneven, with schools, teachers, students, universities, and communities experiencing only partial benefits; Table 1 below summarises the key themes that emerged, highlighting both existing practices and the areas where stronger training, structured programs, and broader collaboration are required.

Based on the interviews with key informants, it has been mentioned that schools situated near tourist destinations sometimes receive small donations or support from community initiatives, but such improvements are limited in reach and lack long-term sustainability. Teachers, who play a critical role in preparing students for future opportunities, largely lack access to training in foreign languages or hospitality skills, which are essential for linking classroom knowledge with tourism-related careers. This gap underscores the need for structured capacity-building programs that equip educators with competencies relevant to the demands of a growing service sector.

Table 1. Summary of Findings on Tourism and Educational Progress in Madagascar

Theme	Key Findings
School Infrastructure	Some schools near tourist areas benefit indirectly through small donations or NGO projects, but most institutions remain

	underfunded and rely heavily on state or community support.
Teacher Capacity	Training in foreign languages and hospitality skills is still very limited; most teachers have no access to professional development linked to tourism, showing a need for targeted programs.
Student Opportunities	Students show interest in tourism-related careers, yet structured internships and language practice are rare; many lack exposure to global cultures, and few concrete pathways exist to connect schooling with tourism jobs.
University Linkages	Universities offer some tourism or hospitality courses, but collaboration with tourism businesses is minimal; stronger partnerships and vocational training programs are needed.
Community Perceptions	Parents and local leaders recognise tourism's potential to support education, but stress that its role remains weak and uneven, as most benefits are concentrated in tourist hubs and do not reach the wider school system.

For students and universities, opportunities are similarly underdeveloped. While there is interest in tourism-related fields, formal internships, language immersion, and practical training remain rare, leaving young people without clear pathways from school to employment in the industry. Universities offer limited hospitality or tourism courses, but collaboration with businesses is minimal and fails to create a strong bridge between academic learning and professional practice. Communities, meanwhile, recognise tourism's promise for strengthening education but are concerned that benefits remain concentrated in tourist hubs, excluding rural schools and deepening existing inequalities. These findings point to an urgent need for more inclusive strategies that connect tourism revenues and expertise with the broader education system.

DISCUSSION

Tourism's limited contribution to school infrastructure

Across many parts of the world, schools located near tourist destinations often benefit from small-scale contributions such as classroom renovations, provision of books, or support for extracurricular activities (Nash, 1989; Salazar, 2019). In countries like Kenya, Nepal, or Costa Rica, for example, eco-tourism initiatives and community hotels have occasionally redirected a portion of their income to strengthening local schools (Büscher & Fletcher, 2020). These efforts demonstrate that tourism can generate visible improvements in educational infrastructure, particularly in areas where public funding is scarce (Canosa et al., 2020). However, the benefits tend to be highly localised and dependent on the presence of committed operators or external donors. Schools situated outside of tourist hotspots are often left behind, creating stark inequalities in access to improved facilities and resources (Bianchi & de Man, 2021). The absence of formal systems to regulate or

expand these contributions means that tourism's impact remains limited in scale and inconsistent across regions.

This global pattern highlights the broader challenge of ensuring that tourism revenues are integrated into education sustainably and equitably. Linking the issue to this study's objective, it becomes clear that the question is not whether tourism can benefit education, but how these benefits can be institutionalised and scaled. Transparent revenue-sharing mechanisms, such as earmarking a portion of tourism taxes for school infrastructure, have been successfully piloted in parts of Southeast Asia and Latin America, showing that structured policies can reduce inequalities and create long-term impact (Budeanu et al., 2016). Establishing clear guidelines for allocation, community oversight, and government accountability would make tourism a more reliable partner in educational development, both in Madagascar and globally.

Teacher capacity and the need for targeted training

In many developing contexts, the connection between education and employment in the tourism sector remains weak, and Madagascar is no exception. Structured internships, professional apprenticeships, and consistent opportunities for language practice are scarce, leaving young people without clear pathways to transition from education to work (Butler, 1980; Chatkaewnapanon & Kelly, 2019). Although tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries in the country, the absence of organised vocational links means that students often graduate with limited practical experience or industry-relevant skills. This gap undermines the capacity of education to meet labour market demands, particularly in areas such as foreign language proficiency, customer service, cultural interpretation, and hospitality management. Without systematic programs to bridge classroom learning with workplace realities, the potential for tourism to act as a catalyst for skill development and long-term employment is significantly reduced (Cohen, 1988; Emynorane, 2019; Cheer, 2021).

Universities and vocational institutions in Madagascar have introduced courses in tourism, hospitality, and related fields, yet these remain insufficiently aligned with the practical requirements of the industry. Partnerships with hotels, tour operators, and community-based enterprises are often weak, sporadic, or confined to short-term projects (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999). The absence of strong collaboration limits the capacity of institutions to design curricula that address real labour market needs, resulting in graduates who may possess theoretical knowledge but lack applied competencies demanded by employers. Strengthening collaboration between educational institutions and the tourism sector is therefore essential (Budeanu et al., 2016). This requires coordinated strategies such as formalised internship programs, joint curriculum development, and industry participation in training and assessment (Greenwood, 1989; Inskeep, 1991; Heitmann et al., 2011). By institutionalising these partnerships, universities can enhance the relevance of their programs, better prepare graduates for employment, and contribute to

building a skilled workforce capable of sustaining and expanding the tourism sector in Madagascar.

Student and university pathways to tourism employment

The integration of education and tourism employment is increasingly recognised as a decisive factor in preparing a workforce that can sustain the rapid expansion of global tourism (Britton, 1982; Canosa et al., 2020). However, structured pathways such as internships, apprenticeships, and consistent language practice remain insufficient in many countries. This scarcity prevents students from gaining the professional exposure required to navigate the complex realities of tourism-related employment (Emynorane et al., 2025). In regions where tourism drives local economies, students often rely on seasonal, informal jobs that provide short-term income but fail to build the competencies necessary for long-term career development (Cohen, 1984; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). The absence of institutionalised vocational linkages not only diminishes the value of formal education but also limits the sector's capacity to draw upon a pool of well-prepared graduates.

Higher education institutions have made some progress by offering specialised courses in hospitality, event management, or cultural tourism, yet these academic programs are rarely designed in collaboration with industry stakeholders (Rist, 2007). As a result, curricula often emphasise theoretical frameworks without reflecting the evolving needs of employers, such as digital marketing skills, intercultural communication, or sustainability practices (Picard, 1996; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). Weak engagement between universities and private sector actors reduces the effectiveness of educational initiatives, leaving graduates underprepared for immediate labour market integration (Heitmann et al., 2011). This disconnect underscores the necessity of embedding stronger industry partnerships into the education system, including the joint development of training modules, certification schemes, and assessment methods.

A more collaborative model between educational institutions and the tourism sector would allow for the co-creation of opportunities that better match the demands of a competitive global industry. By institutionalising internships, enhancing practical language training, and fostering mentorship from tourism professionals, schools and universities could position students for both domestic and international employment (Daniele, 2021). Such efforts would not only improve the relevance of education but also contribute to sustainable tourism development by ensuring a skilled, adaptable, and innovative workforce capable of addressing future challenges in the sector.

Community perceptions and equity challenges

Parents, community leaders, and local stakeholders often view tourism as an avenue for educational advancement, particularly in contexts where schools struggle with limited resources and outdated facilities (Davis et al., 2014). However, these benefits are perceived as unevenly distributed, concentrated primarily in areas directly connected to tourism flows such as coastal resorts,

heritage sites, or urban cultural centres (Dewey & Drahota, 2016). In such locations, educational institutions may receive indirect advantages, exposure to international cultures, sporadic investments, or opportunities for youth engagement in tourism-related training. By contrast, schools in rural and remote regions are frequently excluded from these opportunities, reinforcing long-standing disparities in access to quality education. This uneven distribution of risks creates a perception that tourism-driven educational progress is selective rather than inclusive, ultimately diminishing the sector's broader developmental legitimacy.

The concentration of tourism-related educational benefits in specific hubs further risks deepening structural inequalities between urban centres and marginalised rural communities (Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Nash, 1989; Denny et al., 2019). Without deliberate policy interventions, families in less-visited regions may see their children left behind, with limited exposure to global languages, professional skills, or external support networks that tourism can generate. Such inequities not only hinder the objective of expanding educational opportunities but may also fuel social tensions, as communities excluded from tourism's benefits perceive the sector as catering to outsiders rather than contributing to national progress (Dillette et al., 2017). Addressing this challenge requires inclusive strategies that extend educational benefits beyond tourism hotspots, such as redistributing a portion of tourism revenues to fund teacher training, school infrastructure, and extracurricular programs in underserved areas. Transparent governance, community involvement in decision-making, and partnerships with both public and private actors are critical to ensuring that tourism strengthens education as a shared national good rather than an exclusive privilege (Picard, 1996; Hampton & Jeyacheya, 2020). This inclusive approach would position tourism as a genuine driver of equity and social cohesion in Madagascar's educational development.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that tourism in Madagascar holds considerable potential to enhance education, yet its role remains underdeveloped and inconsistent across regions. The insights gained through qualitative methods offer valuable perspectives, although the relatively small sample size and focus on selected sites limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could expand the scope by combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to capture broader patterns and measure impacts more precisely. Building stronger and more structured partnerships between the tourism industry, schools, and universities emerges as an essential step toward aligning educational programs with labour market needs. Equally important is the development of targeted teacher training, especially in foreign languages and hospitality skills, and the establishment of equitable mechanisms for channelling tourism revenues into educational infrastructure. By pursuing these measures, stakeholders can transform tourism from a largely peripheral influence into a strategic force for sustainable and inclusive educational progress in Madagascar.

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