

Francophone Africa

French is an official language in 21 countries in Africa. The status of French as an official language is a result of French colonization of these African countries. Thus present-day attitudes about learning and speaking French are mixed.

Language

- French is spoken as a home language in all of these countries, with percentages varying between **8% and 68%**.
- French is the official language at school, but teachers may often use the home language while teaching.
- Wealthier people tend to speak French at a higher rate due to more time in school, access to private schools, and living and working in urban areas.

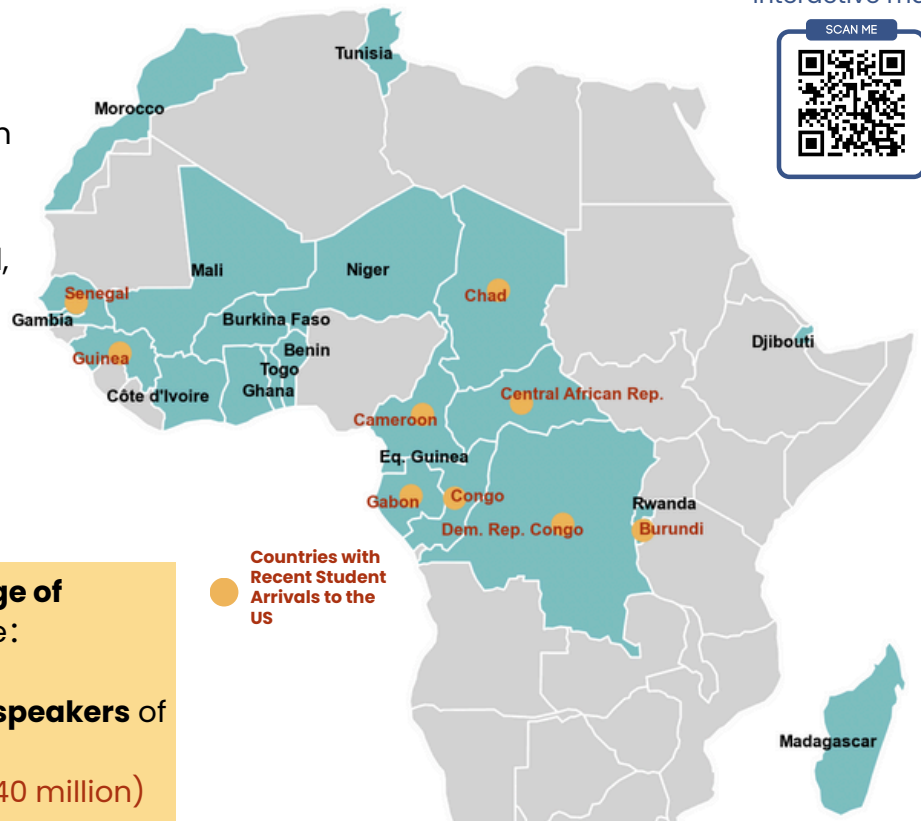
The countries with the **largest percentage of speakers** of French as a home language:

Gabon and Congo

The country with the **largest number of speakers** of French as a home language:

Democratic Republic of the Congo (40 million)

Africa Francophone Countries



Check out our interactive map



[Check Country-Specific Data for detailed information](#)

“ **The varieties of French spoken in Africa are quite different from Standard French spoken in Europe, especially in pronunciation and vocabulary.** ”

- These variations can be broadly categorized into **West African, Maghreb, Eastern African, and Horn of Africa varieties**.
- New language varieties have emerged from **the mixing of local languages and French**, such as Camfranglais in Cameroon, and Nouchi in Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire).



Check below for the example of the Kinshasa variety of French spoken in Democratic Republic of the Congo versus European French

French Variety Example

VARIATION IN LANGUAGE	KINSHASA FRENCH	EUROPEAN FRENCH
Oral variation	quatre-vingt-et-un (eighty-one) <i>*used in spoken contexts</i>	quatre-vingt-un (eighty-one) <i>*used in written contexts</i>
Grammatical variation	Je veux du banane (I want a banana) <i>*banana is a masculine noun</i>	Je veux de la banane (I want a banana) <i>*banana is a feminine noun</i>
Language blending	Merci mingi (thank you very much) <i>*Mingi, meaning "very much" is borrowed from Lingala</i>	Merci beaucoup (thank you very much)

Many Congolese languages do not have grammatical gender, so multilingual speakers may mix French masculine and feminine articles.

Kinshasa French (Democratic Republic of the Congo) vs. European French

Communication notes

Communicating effectively with French-Speaking Africans doesn't just require language proficiency, but also a better understanding of the relationship between language and culture.

Respect for authority is deeply ingrained in many Francophone cultures, and it is customary to use formal titles such as "Monsieur" or "Madame" when addressing someone who is older or in a position of authority.

In many Francophone countries, non-verbal communication is as important as verbal communication. For instance, maintaining eye contact during a conversation is a sign of respect and attentiveness.



In Francophone Africa, relationships are essential, and building trust and rapport is crucial for effective communication.

Therefore, it is important for educators to take the time to **build relationships with parents** in order to lay the groundwork for effective collaboration.

Digital connectivity for school-aged children in these countries is between **1-6%** and is especially low in rural areas and midsize cities due to limited financial resources and unreliable internet.

Students may need support with computers and laptops but are often familiar with smartphones due to social media use.



Additional tips for teachers

People in Africa follow a range of beliefs, with large numbers of Christians, Muslims, and people following indigenous beliefs. Mixing traditional and modern beliefs is not uncommon.



In many of these countries, and especially in remote, rural areas, teenage girls are married and removed from schools. However, in big cities, young girls are increasingly attending schools, and the new generation is not as affected.



Students coming to the U.S. as refugees will need additional social-emotional support. Most refugees have faced or witnessed violence.



Country-Specific Language and Education Data

The table below shows a selection of Francophone countries with high immigration rates to the US. French is the national language for official government and business writing and is emphasized in schools in these countries, though many students speak different home languages.

**Note: The National Literacy Rate indicated in the chart refers to literacy in any language.*

	Prevalence of French spoken at Home	Other Languages Spoken at Home	School Attendance	National Literacy Rate
Burundi	8.7% of population. First language for 0.02% of population.	Rundi is the national language. Spoken by majority of population.	Primary: 82% Lower Secondary: 24% Upper Secondary: 12%	68%
Cameroon	43% of population. Overwhelmingly as second language.	278 other languages. Cameroonian Pidgin English: 45% English: 38% Adamawa Fulfulde: 20%	Primary: 84% Lower Secondary: 52% Upper Secondary: 28%	77%
Central African Republic	29% of population. Majority as second language.	72 other languages. Sango: over 90% as language of government and trade.	Primary: 66% Lower Secondary: 13% Upper Secondary: 5%	38%
Chad	14% of population. Overwhelmingly as second language.	128 other languages. Chadian Arabic: 10% and rising.	Primary: 43% Lower Secondary: 14% Upper Secondary: 7%	22%
Congo (Congo-Brazzaville / Republic of the Congo)	63% of population. Overwhelmingly as second language.	61 other languages. Kituba: 32%; Language of media and trade.	Primary 97% Lower Secondary: 36% Upper Secondary: 36%	80%
Democratic Republic of the Congo	43% of population. Majority as second language.	214 other languages. Lingala: 43% Kituba: 13%	Primary: 78% Lower Secondary: 32% Upper Secondary: 34%	77%
Gabon	68% of population. Majority as second language.	42 other languages Fang: 16% Punu: 7%	Primary: 98% Lower Secondary: 55% Upper Secondary: 16%	85%

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Country-Specific Language and Education Data

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	Prevalence of French spoken at home	Other languages spoken at home	School Attendance	National literacy rate
Republic of Guinea	29% of population. Overwhelmingly as second language.	36 other languages. Maninkakan: 27% Pular: 32%	Primary: 66% Lower Secondary: 32% Upper Secondary: 13%	30%
Senegal	27% of population. Majority as second language.	Wolof: 70%; Half as first language and half as second language.	Primary: 61% Lower Secondary: 31% Upper Secondary: 17%	52%

Data Sources: Ethnologue (www.ethnologue.com) | Unicef datasets (<https://data.unicef.org/>)

Sources: Consultations with cultural experts | African Union (<https://www.africanunion-un.org/post/african-culture-versatile-approach-to-realize-the-africa-we-want>) | Baghana J. 2004. Language Interference in the Conditions of The French Congolese Bilingualism | Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange (CORE) (<https://coresourceexchange.org/congolese-background>) | Ethnologue: Languages of the World. Twenty-seventh edition (www.ethnologue.com) | Map: Natural Earth (naturalearthdata.com/downloads/110m-cultural-vectors) | Morphological and syntactic interference in the context of Franco-Congolese bilingualism, Jerome Baghana, Tatiana G. Voloshina, Katarina Slobodova Novakova, DOI: 10.18355/XL.2019.12.03.18 (https://www.xlinguae.eu/2019_12_03_18.html) | World Bank data: (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.NENR>) | UN Women Africa (<https://africa.unwomen.org/en>) | UNICEF Child Marriage in West and Central Africa (<https://www.unicef.org/chad/media/246/file/Child-Marriage-in-WCA-At-a-Glance.pdf>) | UNICEF datasets (tinyurl.com/unicefdataedu)

