

ENGLISH AND THE SOCIO-PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION OF LEARNERS IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE.

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Résumé

Cette recherche a pour but, de voir dans quelles mesures, l'Anglais qui la langue mondiale par excellence, peut faciliter l'insertion socio-professionnelle des apprenants dans un Etat francophone comme la Côte d'Ivoire. Pour ce faire, une enquête a été menée au département d'Anglais de l'UAO. Les résultats de cette étude, mettent en relief, la disparité entre la formation et le monde du travail. Les données quantitatives recueillies à partir d'un questionnaire, prouvent que l'anglais peut constituer un atout pour l'intégration socio-professionnelle des apprenants au sein des pays francophones.

Mots clés : *Anglais, Côte d'Ivoire, insertion, socio-professionnelle*

Abstract

This work aims at verifying the extent to which, English, the global language par excellence, can facilitate the socio-professional insertion of learners in a Francophone country like Côte d'Ivoire. For that to be possible, a survey has been conducted to the English department of AOU. The findings bring to light the gap between education and the social life. The quantitative data from a questionnaire prove that the English language can be an asset for the socio-professional integration of learners in Francophone countries.

Keywords: *Côte d'Ivoire, English, insertion, socio-professional.*

Introduction

Learners in Côte d'Ivoire are more and more confronted with the challenge of joblessness, over time. The Ivorian school system, inherited from the French colonizers, mainly promotes French to the detriment of the other languages. Thus, international languages like English have just been taken as foreign languages. Although, the English departments of Ivorian public universities have been implementing English for decades, few graduates are performant in it. In this context, the implementation of ESP aims at bridging the disparity between education and the society.

Unfortunately, the model of ESP, experimented in Côte d'Ivoire, is not always in conformity with the world of work. Accordingly, a significant number of the English language learners are faced with the challenge of socio-professional integration.

However, English, the major international language, provides its learners with further job opportunities in all the socioeconomic domains. It is in this perspective that, (Brooker, 2018:4) assumes: "the English based-instruction can be taken as a tool for development, a provider of opportunities for mobility and employability". That is, the English language can offer learners lots of job-opportunities, all over the world.

In this context, this paper consists in addressing the following research question: to what extent can English, facilitate the socio-professional insertion of learners in Côte d'Ivoire, a Francophone country. Indeed, the research aims at showing the contribution of English to the creation of job opportunities in the Ivorian context.

To achieve this goal, a questionnaire has been administered to 293 students at the AOU, in order to gather their opinions about the relevance of English in their professional insertion. The basic theory that underpins the study is the theory of language planning and policy. This theory has been selected because it can enable the stakeholders to reconsider the status of English, the most powerful language of the world in education, media and administration to fully draw much advantages from it in the Ivorian multilingual setting.

1. English and job opportunities: the current situation in Côte d'Ivoire

K. Koaténin (2016) underlines that the ambitions of the national policy for education is to allow Ivorians to

be able to communicate with any person who speaks English orally or in writing; to be skillful in ESP for more proficient, that is to be able to use the writing and/or listening texts in a specific which is English to their field of activity; be able to operate successfully in the professional situations where English is used as language of communication (2016, pp. 16-17).

That is, English in the Ivorian curriculum aims at equipping learners academically, for more proficiency at the end of the studies. Thus, they can use it, in any context with their co-speakers, namely in the professional world so as to create and enhance job opportunities from anywhere in the world. As the most world widespread language, English will help the Ivorian businessmen go beyond their traditional borders, to cooperate with the non-francophone partners, as soon as they are skillful enough in ESP.

In this perspective, J. Kouassi (2010) argues that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a key agent of local development in the sense that, it influences development. Therefore, ESP allows specialists to reinforce their capacities by enabling them to read and understand written ideas about their specific domains. They can draw benefit from innovative ideas in different domains. Professionals can also take advantage of this ability to read and understand in the field to acquire knowledge for their personal improvement and efficiency at work. Then, English being the world language, ESP can help interact with foreign specialists who come to visit the country. ESP will facilitate the in-service training of workers about innovative technology in their field of interest as soon as it is closer to the world of work.

For G. Assamoi (1983): “If learners, in Côte d’Ivoire, do not know much about the use of English when learning it, once they are in the everyday life, those in need find out its usefulness”. In other words, most of the students are not aware of the importance of English in Côte d’Ivoire. But, once they apply for a job or integrate the professional world, they notice that, it is quite inevitable in the society. She adds: “to take part in a set of conferences, English is explicitly required because the participant must clearly express himself in it, of course in addition to French; when this condition is not fulfilled, the request is rejected. This situation represents a serious handicap”. Hence, one of the main criteria to participate in international conferences, is to be good at English, the major tool of communication for international institutions. Therefore, the lack of proficiency in English may prevent many Ivorians from several job opportunities, especially within international institutions such as WHO, and the UN.

G. Assamoi (1983:276) goes further assuming that “45.1% of the Ivorian professionals who have learnt English in Côte d’Ivoire consider that it is compulsory for them in the social life whereas 42.7% do not

share this opinion”. That is, in general, the English language learners in Côte d’Ivoire argue that, it is required in the world of work. Indeed, scientific, technological works are completed in English, as the major tool of communication at the international scale. This position is reinforced by the statistics in the table below.

Items	Agree				Disagree			
	Students		Professionals		Students		Professionals	
	Abso lute value	%	Abso lute value	%	Abso lute value	%	Abso lute value	%
English is important to get a good job	478	52%	53	44.70%	195	21.2%	24	29.3%
Many people do not use English at work	453	49.3%	62	75.6%	242	26.3%	14	17.1%
Would like to do job requiring English	554	60.3%	54	65.9%	178	19.4%	6	7.3%
Many good jobs which do not need English	408	44.4%	51	62.2%	272	29.6%	17	20.7%

Table 1: Statistics about the use of English in the world of work in Côte d’Ivoire (Translation mine)

In this table, it can be observed that, 52% of the students learning English and 44.70% of the professionals estimate that the English language is quite useful to get a good job. About 60% of the English language learners in Côte d’Ivoire would like to do a job requiring English. Indeed, as the major international language of communication in the key socio-professional sectors like computer-science, scientific and technological researches, English provide learners with lots of vocational and in-training opportunities.

2. Methodology

This work is a case study in the sense that, it is concerned with the specific case of the graduates of the English department of AOU. Accordingly, both probability and randomization have been resorted to, for the selection of the sample. In fact, the participants have been given the same chance to be selected for the survey. About 305 out of 2153 students of the English department of AOU during the academic year 2020-2021, have been chosen for the questionnaire. 293 responses have been collected. The questionnaire is composed of 02 parts. It comprises four (04) close and open-ended questions. From December 9th to December 14th, 2001, it has been administered to Licence, Master, and doctorate students.

The first question is related to the qualification of the informants. The second question about the status of English in the world today. The third question aims at verifying if English, the global language par excellence, can be an asset for the socio-professional insertion of learners. The fourth question is concerned with the key socioeconomic sectors in which English is needed for the socio-professional insertion of graduates in Côte d'Ivoire. The study is grounded in the theory of language planning and policy, given that it will show the importance of English in the Ivorian socio-professional areas and then, possibly, influence decisions taken as regard its status in Côte d'Ivoire.

3. Presentation and Analysis of Data

Data taken from the questionnaire, are quantitative ones. A survey has helped the participants, give their position about the contribution of English to the socio-professional integration of learners in Côte d'Ivoire. The data of the survey are about the qualifications of the informants; the global status of English; English as an asset for the socio-professional insertion of learners; and the sectors in which, English is mostly required for the socio-professional integration of graduates.

3.1. Qualification of the Participants

3.1.1. Data presentation

Question 1	Items	Absolute value	Relative Value
What is your qualification?	Licence	213	72.70%
	Master	63	21.50 %
	Doctorate	17	5.80%
Total		293	100%

Table 2: Qualification of the Respondents

3.1.2. Data Analysis

It can be noticed that, among 305 questionnaires which have been administered to the students of the English department of AOU, 293 have been collected. As to the data related to the level of the participants, 213 in 293 respondents are in Licence, that is 72.70% whereas 63 informants are in master which equals 21.50%. There are 17 participants doctorate students who have also filled in the questionnaire, representing 5.80%.

All of the respondents are either in Licence, Master or doctorate at the English department of AOU. The majority of them are Licence or Master students because they always do courses or take examination at the English department. On the contrary, doctorate students only go there to take part in seminars, and colloquia.

3.2. Status of English at the global scale

3.2.1. Data Presentation

Question 2:	Items	Absolute value	Relative value
According to you, what does English represent in the world today?	The most widespread language	293	100%
	The strongest business language	293	100%
	The major vocational tool of communication for international institutions	293	100%

Table 3: International status of English

3.2.2. Data Analysis

All of the 293 participants that is, 100% stipulate that English represents the most world widespread language. 100% of the informants also consider that English is not only the strongest business language but also the major vocational tool of communication for international institutions.

The participants advocate that English is the most widespread language throughout the world. As such, it provides individuals with many socioeconomic advantages from Anglophone countries like the USA. In Côte d'Ivoire, English can increase the economic and diplomatic relations with the neighboring Anglophone countries that are Liberia and Ghana. The effective use of English in Côte d'Ivoire can therefore attract more British, Chinese and American investors so as to help create further job opportunities for young men. Indeed, Countries are more and more gathering their forces to face the socio-professional challenges within regional and international organizations, in a context of globalization. The mastery of the English language can enable individuals to apply for job anywhere in the world in the sense that it deletes any linguistic barriers between employers and employees. English can therefore allow Ivorians to face the challenge of joblessness by attracting a large number of foreign investors in any domains, to foster businesses. The English department can also diversify partnerships with the professional world at the international scale to equip students with lots of training opportunities. These partnerships can permit the Ivorian authorities to adapt the existing model of ESP, to the professional world.

The participants of this research conceive English as the strongest business language. Hence, the mastery of English can permit the Ivorian administration to attract further anglophone companies because of the deletion of any linguistic barrier between civil-servants and investors. This policy can also constitute a cradle of job and business opportunities for the English language learners. Some of them can therefore take competitive examinations to integrate the administration. The effective use of English, the global language par excellence, orally and scripturally can enable the Ivorian population to reinforce their business cooperation with partners from the neighboring Anglophone countries like Ghana, Liberia and Nigeria. Thus, the Ivorians can largely draw profits from the Nigerian business market, the biggest one in West-Africa.

The business advantages drawn by Ivorians from the use English goes beyond the regional scale, to open new business perspectives

anywhere in the world. Hence, English is seen as the main tool of communication for all the international institutions caring for health, education, peace and human rights. The use of English by a significant number of the Ivorians, can be a factor of socio-professional integration within multinationals and international institutions like UNICEF, WAEMU, ECOWAS, IMF and WHO. Côte d'Ivoire, a developing country, needs to diversify the socio-professional opportunities for learners because they are so numerous that, all of them cannot work for the public services. The stay of the Ivorians within these international organizations can permit them to be abreast of new professional expertise. These foreign experiences can be a professional asset for them, at the national and international scales.

3.3. English, an Asset for the Socio-professional Integration in Côte d'Ivoire

3.3.1. Data Presentation

Question 3: Does English represent an asset for your socio-professional insertion?	Items	Absolute value	Related value
	Yes	92	31.40
	No	201	68.60
Total		293	100%

Table 4: English, a Provider for job-opportunities

3.3.2. Data Analysis

In this table, it can be seen that 92 respondents, that is 31.40% consider that the English language facilitates their socio-professional integration. On the contrary, 201 out of 293 representing 68.60% do not share this assertion.

These data show that few informants consider that, the English they learn, is advantageous for their socioeconomic insertion. They may base themselves on the fact that at the end of their studies, the English language learners can take the competitive examinations of ENS to be teachers of English. Every year, the Ivorian Ministry of National Education recruits many teachers to teach English at secondary school. Therefore, in almost all the public and private secondary schools, the

graduates of the English department are offered many job opportunities. Beyond the opportunity offered by English in the public sector, it can also be advantageous for the private sector. Once in Licence 3, graduates often start teaching in the private schools. Many companies already use the English language to raise up their productivity or income. Thus, the students of the English department can take advantage of the great socioeconomic opportunities offered by the private sector. Further trainings in English, afforded by parents can give them the occasion to be proficient enough, so as to be employable anywhere in the world.

The main problem is that the students of the English department are not always skillful in English because the teaching of English is highly theory-based in the Ivorian public universities. Students often learn it to get degrees which help them become civil servants. Although they are at the English department, some of them remain shy, hesitant when it comes to speak or use English. This situation is worsened when they are faced with the native speakers. Accordingly, the majority of the respondents are pessimistic about their future because of the gap between education and the social life. They have the impression that the English language learners are exclusively destined to teaching. For more efficiency, English must be used in specific domains like agriculture, administration and tourism in Côte d'Ivoire to impact on the development.

3.4. Domains of Intervention of English and Employability for learners

3.4.1. Data Presentation

Question 4:	Items	Absolute value	Relative value
What can be the areas of intervention of English to contribute effectively to employability in Côte d'Ivoire?	Administration	89	30.40%
	Agriculture	75	25.60%
	Tourism	129	44%
	Total	293	100

Table 5: Domains of intervention of English to favour socio-professional integration of learners

3.4.2. Data Analysis

There are 89 informants, representing 30.40% who estimate that, it is through administrative reforms that English can contribute effectively to the socio-professional integration in Côte d'Ivoire. Seventy-five informants which equals 25.60% support the view that, it is through the usage of English in the agricultural domain that, it can give learners many jobs opportunities. One hundred and twenty-nine students that is, 44% consider the implementation of English in the sector tourism as a vital key for the development.

The use of English in the Ivorian administration will attract a considerable number of non-francophone investors who can deal with their administrative tasks easily, as soon as they are permeated with all the procedures. If the Ivorian administrators master English, the most dominant language of the world, the administrative tasks will be achieved by foreigners without any linguistic barrier. Accordingly, they can feel at ease with the administrative processes. As a significant number of the international seminars and conferences are achieved in English to touch a large audience, local administrators can draw benefit from these training opportunities that poor countries are often offered. These international meetings permit trainees to be skillful in the key sectors of economy, technology, health, education and information. In fact, it is through the sharing of experiences and information that a developing country like Côte d'Ivoire can set up a more dynamic administrative system. It is quite hard for Côte d'Ivoire to perform the administrative tasks without cooperating with the powerful countries like the USA, the most powerful country of the world, in a context of globalization.

As soon as Ivorians use English correctly, it will be beneficial for the sector of tourism. A large number of the graduates of the English department can stop considering the competitive examination of ENS, as the only response to their socio-professional challenges. In fact, English as the global language par excellence, can be a vital tool for tourism in Côte d'Ivoire so as to attract sightseers from anywhere in the world, be them, Francophones, Lusophones, Chinese or Anglophones. In the framework of tourism, the use of English, can provide the students of the English department with bilingual skill, which is an enabler of job-opportunities in the sector of transport, hotel, and food. For that to be possible, graduates must be good at English to respond to the socio-professional needs in the framework of regional and international integrations. Much efforts must be done by stakeholders to

reconsider the status of English at the national scale to promote a model of ESP which is closer to the social life. Thus, learners will be employable in the domains of media, art, music, sciences, business and transport, as soon as they are practical enough in English.

The promotion of English in Côte d'Ivoire can enable Ivorians to take profit from the agricultural sector, the backbone of the national economy. The expertise of the USA can be helpful for the Ivorian farmers to mechanize the local agriculture. As a matter of fact, the U.S. long tradition of farming can be shared with farmers in Côte d'Ivoire. Côte d'Ivoire can raise up its productivity in the sector of cocoa, coffee and cashew-nuts because the local experts can be offered a set of trainings abroad which may be duplicated locally in favour of a more qualitative manpower. The Anglophone investors can share partnerships with the Ivorian to develop the agricultural sector, namely in the terms of manufacturing. One cannot minimize the large consuming market of the Anglophone world, namely the U.S. one. As the world strongest economy, the USA is the best exporters of the Ivorian cocoa. A proximity to Americans can help Côte d'Ivoire do some educational reforms, which take into account the new requirements of the agricultural sector. In this perspective, some agricultural grammar-schools and colleges can be created to provide the agricultural and industrial sectors with enough experts who are skillful in English. The local farmers can therefore diversify new partnerships from anywhere in the world so as to raise up productivity. The mastery of English can permit them to promote the raw materials like cocoa as much as possible.

4. Summary of the Findings and Discussion

The findings of the study show that English, the global language par excellence, can play a potential role in the socio-professional insertion of learners. In a context of globalization, there is for countries, the needs to grant much more interest to English to give learners the opportunity to integrate the socio-professional world.

As far as the perception of English as a vocational language is concerned, 100% of the informants consider that, it can play a key role in the process of socio-professional insertion of the learners in Côte d'Ivoire. The respondents think that English is the most world widespread language, the strongest business language, and the major tool

of communication for international organizations. About 31.40% of them assume that, it is a provider of the socio-professional insertion of learners in Côte d'Ivoire. On the contrary, 68.60% of the participants do not share this opinion because of the lack of proficiency of learners in English. To settle this problem, 30.40% of the participants have suggested the experimentation of English in the administration. 25.60% of them also think that the use of English in the agricultural sector can be a cradle of employability for students in Côte d'Ivoire. At last, 44% of the respondents have opted for the implementation of English in the sector of tourism.

The study shows that, English is the most world widespread language. This view is shared by R. Nishanthi (2018), for whom, it is the most common foreign language. This means that two individuals who come from different countries (for example, a Mexican and a Sri Lankan) usually use English as a common language to communicate. That is why, everyone needs to learn it in order to be in touch with the rest of the world. The fact of speaking English it can help individuals communicate with people from different countries all over the world, not just English-speaking ones.

The data prove that, English is the world business language, par excellence. This opinion is also defended by S. Reddy (2016, p. 181) who thinks that “English is used widely by international business community. To communicate across national borders and maintain correspondence with overseas business parties or professionals, English is essential”.

The research suggests the implementation of English in the key socioeconomic sectors like tourism. In this perspective, N. Negash (2011, p. 7) posits that “English is an important tool of communication between Africans and visitors from all parts of the globe. The importance of English can therefore increase as African countries gear up to attract the growing tourist numbers from Asia”.

At last, the results show that English is the major vocational language at the global scale. This view is also referred to by Brooker (2018:4) for whom, English is now considered critical for national participation in the globalized economy, a means of providing the individual with access to knowledge, skills and employment opportunities and also an enabler of social mobility. As a result, investment in English language education is increasing worldwide as

Ministries of Education, schools and universities seek to maximize the economic, social, cultural and political returns of English language proficiency.

Conclusion

This work highlights the relevance of the English language in the process of the socio-professional integration of graduates in Côte d'Ivoire, a Francophone country. A quantitative method of data collection procedure has been used to have the opinion of the graduates of the English department of AOU, on this issue. The investigation has permitted to respond to the following research question: to what extent can the English language contribute to the process of socio-professional insertion of learners in Francophone countries like Côte d'Ivoire? As a matter of fact, the main findings of the study show that a significant number of the Ivorians consider that, the English language can play a potential role in the socio-professional integration of the graduates in Côte d'Ivoire where, learners are more and more confronted with vocational challenge, at the end of their studies. For that to be possible, the survey has shown that, it urges to implement English, effectively in the key socioeconomic sectors like administration, agriculture, tourism. The study proves that, for 31.40% of the respondents, the English language is useful for their socio-professional integration. Although about 68.60% of them do not share this point of view, they do not deny the potential role, that the English language can play in the process of their socio-professional insertion. They rather denounce the lack of proficiency which prevents them from drawing much profits from the power of English in the social life. They assume that English will only be a cradle of job-opportunities in Côte d'Ivoire if Ivorians are skillful in it. All these findings prove that the hypothesis of the study has been justified.

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