

The Status and Use of English as a Foreign Language in DRC

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the status and use of English as a foreign language in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In order to collect data, a questionnaire on language use and status was used following the Likert scale. The researcher randomly selected a sample of Five hundred and sixty informants. Then, the data were analyzed quantitatively using SPSS. The findings of the study mainly showed that the use and status of English as a foreign language in DRC is very low that is why their wish is to implement English in the country as an official language.

Keywords: Status and Use of English, Democratic Republic of Congo, Official Language

INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

These days, English is taken as the common language in all parts of the world. It may be a foreign language, but international in its significance. English language is spoken, read and understood in most parts of the world. Because of this language, people of the world communicate and belong to the whole shares of the world. It is widely accepted that English has become the language of choice for many international scholarly journals. According to Crystal (1997), conversation without a common language between academicians from different nationalities, both in the virtual and real world would prove impossible. English language is now the most spread of the entire world's language since it is spoken by both non-natives and natives.

For the context of DRC, it is a multilingual country with Kikongo, Kiswahili, Lingala and Tshiluba officially recognized as national languages in Article 1 of the 2005 national constitution. French is declared the official language (Article 1), continuing a colonial policy that dates back to the early 1900s.

The Democratic Republic of Congo is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, with over 200 languages spoken in the country. While French is the official language and widely used in education and administration, there are four national languages: Kikongo (Kituba), Lingala, Swahili, and Tshiluba but there is also English

which is spoken by neighboring countries such as, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia and this cannot exist without an impact on people around those countries.

With the integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the Eastern Community, where most of the country members use English as an official language, it is a great need for the DRC to think about its future with the English language considered as the language of the Eastern Community.

The language practices in the DRC's educational system indicates that the country is working hard to help students get quality education in the language they understand, hence, the teaching of Lingala, Kikongo, Swahili and Tshiluba (Luba-Kasai) in the first two years of DRC primary education while French is designed to gradually gain entrance into the nation's academic setting from the third year of primary education and retained through secondary education and university learning. English language holds the place of a foreign language, taught at secondary school as a subject.

Although English as a foreign language (EFL) was introduced in the Congolese education system in the early years of independence, its teaching was so far confined to secondary and tertiary education. Ever since, English is taught as a compulsory school subject in all sections of secondary school. In higher education, students study towards a degree in English as a scientific discipline. Almost all the institutions of higher learning across the country organize a department of English. Following the promulgation of the Law no 14/004/ of 11 February 2014 on the national education relative to the use of national languages in primary school, the ministry of primary, secondary and vocational education (Enseignement Primaire, Secondaire et Professionnel (EPSP) has recently issued an official ministerial order MINEPSP/CABMIN/1180/2018 of 23/04/2018) to establish a technical commission to investigate into the teaching of English and computer science in primary school. This innovation paves the way to the official advent of English in government primary school in the DRC.

Until today there is no language institution or academy which regulates or plans and produces policies for language teaching and learning in the DRC, apart from the French Institute which is directed by the Belgian.

Problem statement

The complex macro-sociolinguistic environment in which is the Democratic Republic of the Congo makes English not imposing its value and role it plays in the world nowadays, that is why its use in daily activities is not noticed due to the linguistic environment in which the country is situated.

Changing perceptions of the place of English in the world led to favorable attitudes and responses to English role in the country.

Graduates increasingly felt the need to improve their English skills to cope with requirements of the ever globalizing job market, to compete for jobs requiring the use of English at various degrees, and participate in the global scene in transglossic situations. English is increasingly becoming a " a must learn" subject for those who hope to use above low level employment in the world. English has been constructed as a tool for

development throughout the world; fluency constitutes a huge step forward in many people's personal struggles for self sufficiency, and this is not less the case in DRC.

The problem of language is complex in the DRC. It has been noticed that French occupies the highest place in the country with more privilege than local languages and other international languages. English is used as a foreign language in DRC, language which has low influence and use in the country. A part from that the DRC government does not pay attention or interested in language planning as it is the case in other sectors of the country. This failure in language planning may lead to consequences in the development of the country on many years.

The language policy's ideological basis mandates the learning of English as a foreign language in secondary schools all over the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and high education as a simple subject. The current state of affairs with regard to English as a foreign language in the Congolese curriculum fail because English is not taken as a language needed today.

The main problem with English today is on educational language planning and policies in the DRC. After analyzing the selected publications, the results indicated that until today there is no language institution to regulate linguistic practices and teaching.

Research question and Hypothesis

RQ. What is the status and use of English language today in the DRC?

Hyp: English has a low status and use in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Objectives

- Examine the most language used in the different areas or sectors of life in Congo but also outside the country by them.
- To explore the status of English language today in Congo and show their needs relating the latter.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The status of English in RDC

The historical foundations of English instruction in the DR Congo are traced from the colonial period. But it is from 1998 with the civil wars, English language started its strength in the country because of the presence of Rwandan and Ugandan troops in the country and the presence of the UN troops in the country most of them speaking English.

The status of English as a major means of communication is a fact that is agreeable on an international scale.

The reach of English worldwide, said to have extended to "nearly every corner of the earth" (Sonntag 2003: xi), is perhaps better exemplified by its display in public than its macro-acquisition and everyday use.

DR Congo is an Expanding Circle country (in Kachru's, 1986 nomenclature) where English is rarely used, even by those who know it.

The status of English in fact, contrasts sharply with the situation in of the global situation the world is facing today. English is considered as the language of world expanding or communication which is not the case in the DR Congo since that language displays a negligible consideration among Congolese and even the government. Urban and rural settings in DR Congo, where English at school and in public display very weak use and educational setting it is not used. Taking into account the reality of this period of globalization, the case the Democratic Republic of the Congo needs a remedy so that Congolese can also be able to express themselves in English.

In DR Congo, however, English has not penetrated the society extensively. It has remained an exotic school subject and has not given rise to national enthusiasm that French has enjoyed. Indeed, 'both language policy and practice reaffirm the supremacy of French' (Kasanga, 2012b, p. 50) which explains the exclusion of English. In fact, English for academic purposes (EAP) is the mainstay of English instruction in DR Congo (for science, technology, academic and scientific communication), merely enabling learners to access information in English. Although some change of perceptions of the place in the world and attitudes toward English boosted the learning of English somehow in the mid-1980s, the persistence of the monolingual dominance of French did not allow more inroads in these efforts.

Kasanga (2019) examined how English has managed to intrude into local languages which interact in their relevant social contexts where they are selected for use. DR Congo, 'Francophone' by virtue of its official language policy and the pervasive use of French for high functions, shows a triglossic structure. At the top is French, the official language and language of choice and wider communication; then come four national languages, so-called because they represent a group of provinces and people having the language in common. Finally ethnic or in-group languages, used by groups of people for intra-ethnic communication. Strong loyalty to French especially among the educated urban elite exposed and attracted to English has, in contrast, prevented them from using English massively except for special-purpose needs (mostly academic and international communication) and remains a distant choice for the overwhelming majority, notwithstanding the awareness of its status as the language of modernity acquisition of English is negligible in DR Congo, in contrast to the phenomenal rise for internal use (notably in linguistic landscape) elsewhere in the Expanding Circle. English remains a symbol of and is a potent vehicle for globalization.

The talk of replicating the Rwanda model by adding English to French as an official language remained a pipe dream when the huge costs to promote and implement the new policy were considered. In fact, 'loyalty to French as the medium of internal high functions is perhaps the clearest cause of the poor penetration and acquisition of English' (Kasanga, 2012b, p. 51). In DR Congo, the hunger for the English language has not yet been perceived by the middle class and the rising business community as essential and critical. English remains 'the preserve of a privileged minority among the highly educated, the

upwardly mobile, the widely travelled and the diasporic returnees' (Kasanga, 2012b, p. 51). Even the purported booming 'market for English teaching products' (Whitehead, 2011, p. 332), the perceived 'growing prestige of English' (Bokamba, 2008, p. 232), and its popularity (Buhendwa, 2009) have not diminished the primacy of French, contrary to what may have been believed (Whitehead, 2011), this being merely anecdotal evidence and a set of phenomena gripping the urban elite. Globalization and the influx of foreign investors and fortune-seekers have remained ineffective for the learning of English by the masses

Language planning in DR Congo

Kaplan (1977.3) shows that language planning is a body of ideas, laws and regulations (language policy), change rules, beliefs, and practices intended to achieve a planned change (or to stop change from happening) in the language use in one or more communities. Language planning is a matter of country authorities, they are the ones to choose which language to use as official language, language of education, administrative or business. But most of the languages used in Africa they are languages which were used by the colonizers

The Democratic Republic of Congo is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, with over 200 languages spoken in the country. While French is the official language and widely used in education and government, there are four national languages: Kikongo (Kituba), Lingala, Swahili, and Tshiluba. French takes prime on local language since it is that which used in education, administration, business, the government.

Language use in the Democratic Republic of the Congo shows that even the national languages are not used at school since it is French which is used in different communications at school.

English as a foreign language in the Democratic Republic of Congo is just a subject matter at school and this starts from the secondary school.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Study design

This study uses quantitative method to collect the data. The choice of this method is explained by not only the fact that it facilitates statistical measurements but also it helps to the establishment of relations between variables using data collected by a survey questionnaire.

Sampling

The target population for this study consisted of the population of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Kivu Province, in the city of Bukavu from all the sectors of the human life. People who mostly use English and who occupy positions (education, diplomacy, health, politic, business...) which could probably have influences on the perceptions and attitudes towards English in DRC.

In order to select the sample, we used the random method which consists at selecting randomly elements from a given population which are able to be representative of the entire population. A sample size of 570 respondents was randomly selected. Using probability proportional to size a number of respondents were selected from each of the sectors of the human life activities. Some questionnaires (10) were disqualified because they were incomplete and they could bring about bias in the results. The final data maintained for the analysis are answers of 560 respondents.

Variables measurement

A multi-item scale questionnaire adapted to “Multi-item levels” was used. It has the advantage of allowing measurement errors to cancel out against each other while improving the validity and reliability of the instruments. The variables are measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “1: strongly agree” to “5: strongly disagree” for attitudes and perceptions towards English.

Perceptions and attitudes were measured by fifteen items scale adapted to the research of other researchers, the answers of each item varied from “1: totally agree” to “5: totally disagree”. These items included for example: «English is very important for the development of the DRC and it increases opportunities », to know more on the other items, do visit the questionnaire in appendix. These items had the objective of examining the perceptions of Congolese towards English.

Data processing and analysis

We used MS Office Excel software (13th version) to encode and get our data base. The analysis of the data was performed by the software PSS Statistics (the 2.1 version) to draw representation graphics and make statistical calculations of the variables.

Controlled variables are often used in order to avoid bias in the estimation of the parameters of the interest and thereby reduce endogeneity. The average induce of the variables were analyzed to examine the perceptions and attitudes of Congolese towards English.

DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents the data of this study which will be analyzed in this chapter according to the research questions asked initially.

Demographic data

The socio-demographic data of this study are made of the sex, the age, the profession and the educational level of the respondents.

Table 1. Demographic data

	Variables	Effective	Percent
Sex	Female	182	32,5%
	Male	378	67,5%
	Total	560	100,0%
Age	18-22 years	187	33,4%
	22-26 years	257	45,9%

	26-30 years	74	13,2%
	30-35 years	22	3,9%
	35-40 years	14	2,5%
	45-50 years	6	1,1%
	Total	560	100,0%
Educational level	Without diploma	62	11,1%
	State diploma	211	37,7%
	Undergraduate	146	26,1%
	Graduate	123	22,0%
	Master	6	1,1%
	PhD	12	2,1%
	Total	560	100,0%
Profession	Medical professionals	22	3,9%
	Student	281	50,2%
	Teachers	65	11,6%
	ONG workers	69	12,3%
	Business people	14	2,5%
	Jobless	109	19,5%
	Total	560	100,0%

Source: *Compilation in SPSS 2.1*

According to Table1, among 560 respondents, it can be found that among the interviewed population, there are 378 "Male" people, Accounting for 67.5% of the total interviewed population, and "Female" 182 people, Accounting for 32.5% of the total number questioned.

In summary, nearly 67.5% of the questionnaire respondents are male versus 32.5% of them are female. This percentage of male is high because they were most activated to respond than the female.

Looking at the above table, it is shown that more respondents for this study were 22-26 with 257 (45%), followed by respondents from 18-22 with 187 (33.4%), then follows the other respondents from 30-35 with 22 (3.9%), 35-40 with 14 (2.5), from 40-45 with 0 and from 45-50 it is 6 (1.1%).

For the variable of education; it is observed that 271(37.7%) informants had a certificate, 146(26.1%) were undergraduate, 123(22%) were graduate, 62(11.1) without a certification, 12(2.1%) were PhD, and 6(1.1%) with master degree. This study has more respondents of 22-26(45%), they were courageous for answering the questionnaire whereas those of 40-45 (1.1%) were not interested for give expected answers.

The variable of profession is characterized by 281 (50.2%) were university students, 109(19.5%) jobless, 69 (12,3) business professionals, 65(11.6%) University students, 22 (3.9%) medical professionals, 14(2.5%) drivers. The university students were more motivated to respond to the questionnaire.

Table 2. The status and use of English in DRC

No	Statements	Scales	Responses' effective	Percentage (%)
4.1	English is well taught at school in DRC	Totally false	106	18,9

		False	131	23,4
		No opinion	99	17,7
		True	126	22,5
		Totally true	98	17,5
Total			560	100
		Totally false	259	46,3
4.2	The government contributes to the improvement of English skills in the DRC	False	177	31,6
		No opinion	61	10,9
		True	24	4,2
		Totally true	39	7,0
Total			560	100
		Totally false	138	24,3
4.3	French impacts negatively the English learning in DRC	False	155	27,7
		No opinion	107	19,7
		True	67	12,0
		Totally true	93	16,3
Total			560	100
		Totally false	269	48,0
4.4	English is very well learnt and used in DRC	False	167	29,8
		No opinion	38	6,8
		True	43	7,7
		Totally true	43	7,7
Total			560	100
		Totally false	117	20,9
4.5	English occupies a considered position in DRC	False	142	25,3
		No opinion	109	19,5
		True	116	20,7
		Totally true	76	13,6
Total			560	100
		Totally false	163	29,1
4.6	English is used in all the sectors in DRC	False	180	32,1
		No opinion	81	14,5
		True	71	12,7
		Totally true	65	11,6
Total			560	100
		Totally false	106	18,9
4.7	The government is trying to improved the program of English in DRC	False	103	18,4
		No opinion	88	15,7
		True	142	25,4
		Totally true	121	21,6
Total			560	100
		Totally false	117	20,9
4.8	English is effectively used and considered in DRC	False	142	25,4
		No opinion	109	19,5
		True	116	20,6
		Totally true	76	13,6
Total			560	100

Source: *Compilation in SPSS 2.1*

From the table descriptions of the use and status of English in DRC, it can be noticed that English is not a common language and has no massive use in DRC, and it is still a foreign language.

According to the above table, different statements have been made by the researchers and it was up to the respondents to choose either the statement was true or false; from the respondents' viewpoints, it is as follows:

Statement 4.1 English is well taught at school, 106(18.9%) said that it is totally false, 131(23.4%) said it is false, 99(17.7%) have no opinion, 126 (22.5%) said it is true and 98(17.5%) were totally with the statement.

Through this table, it is clearly explained by the respondents that English is not well taught at school in DRC, 42.3% show that the statement is false, 17.7% had no opinion and 30% agreed with the statement.

Item 4.2, it was about to know if the government contributes to improve English in DRC, as indicated in the above, this table shows that 259 (46.3%) of the respondents said that it is totally false, 177(31.6%) said it is false, 61(10.9%) have no opinion, 24(4.2%) accepted and 39(7.0%) of them showed that it is totally true.

This means that, from that table, it can be deduced that most respondents about 77.9% refused that the government do not do anything to improve English in the country.

Statement 4.3, the population were asked to show whether French as an official language in the country impacts negatively the learning of English as a foreign language, and 138(24.3%) of the respondents reported that it is totally false, 155(27.7%) said it is false, 107(19.7%) of them have no opinion, 67(12.0%) of them agreed and 93(16.3%) of them said that it is totally true.

Therefore, (52%) of the population do not accept that French can impact negatively the learning of English.

Item 4.4, the population were asked to assert that English is very well learnt and used in DRC, as indicated in the above, this table shows that 269(48.0%) of the respondents said that the statement is totally false, 167(29.8%) said the statement is false, 38(6.8%) have no opinion, 43(7.7%) accepted that it is true and 43(7.7%) confirmed that it is totally true.

This means that, from that table, it can be observed that most respondents about 78.8% show that English is not well learnt and well used in DRC.

Statement 4.5, Informants were requested to show whether English occupies a considered place/position in DRC, 177 respondents(20.9%) indicated that it is totally false, 142(25.5%) said it is false, 109(19.5%) have no opinion, 116(20.7%) for them it is true, and again 76(13.6%) of them said it was totally true. Most Congolese (46.2%) said this statement is false because English does not occupy a considered position in DRC.

Table 4.6, the statement was "English is used in all sectors in DRC", 163(29.1%) asserted that it is totally false, 180(32.1%) showed that it is false, 81(14.5%) have no opinion, 71(12.7%) said it is and 65(11.6%) have shown that it is totally true. Therefore from this, it is noticed from that statement that English is not used in Congolese sectors, 62.2% asserted that it is false to say that English is used in Congolese sectors. English is not a favorite language in Congolese sectors.

Item 4.7 verified the statement saying that the government has done something to improve the programme of English in DRC, 106(18.9%) declared that the statement is totally false and 103(18.4) said it is false while 142(25.4) showed that is true and, 121(21.6) accepted totally. In addition 81(14.5%) had no opinion. Therefore from this, it is fair to say that the government has tried to take some mechanisms to improve the acquiring or learning of English as a foreign language, about 46% said it is true that the government is improving the English programme and they are convinced by the different strategies that are being taken by the government to improve the English programme in DRC whereas 37.3% did not recognize the strategies of improving English language learning in DRC and 15.7% of the respondents had no opinion.

The last statement in this table 4.8 was to assert if English is effectively used and considered in DRC, 117(20.9%) said it is the statement were totally false and 142(25.4%) said it is false at this other side 116 (20.6) said is true and 76(13.6) accepted that is totally true. And 109 (19.5) had no opinion. From this, it is noticed that 46.3% showed that it is false to say that is effectively used and considered in DRC while 34.2% accepted that it is effectively used.

According to the above table, it has been noticed that English status and usage is very low in the Democratic Republic of Congo. On the statement relating to the teaching of English in the country, respondents showed that it is not well taught, for the statement about the government contribution to improve the English language, the respondents showed there is a positive contribution of the government even its effectiveness is still very low in the country. For the impact of French on learning of English, French cannot be a problem for learning English. In addition, English do not occupy a considerable place in DRC and showed that it not is not used in all the sectors of life

DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1: English has a low status in the Democratic Republic of Congo

The study reveals that English is not taking a place needed by the population. Through this study, it has been found that English has a low status and use in DRC. In school they always speak and teach French the population do not have opportunity to practice English either at home or other domains of life. Besides English is well structured at school and that what makes it to be less interesting to learners. The participants recommended that learning English should start from the primary school to make it at the same level with French which is spoken in most of the domain of life in the country. Apart from inserting English at the primary school, certain events or regions can be created to gather people to speak it on a regular basis inside and outside home.

The degree of using English in the speakers of community needs to be increased in order to develop the use of that language. One of the reason why English is not dominant in our community is because it is not practiced and well taught and have less contact with the speakers of it.

Interpretation of the results

Table 8 contains eight statements regarding the status and use of English in the DRC. The population were asked to show whether English is well taught in DRC (item 8.1), 43.3% it false to accept that English is well taught in DRC, 40% of the respondents reported that it is true, and the rest had no opinion.

For statement 8.2, was about to if the government contributes to improve English skills; 78.9% said that the statement was false because whereas 13.2% said the contrary.

The next statement 8.3, was about to know if French impacts negatively the learning of English; 52.0% showed that French cannot impact negative and 28.3% said that French impacts the English language negatively in the DRC. This statement shows that a language cannot be an obstacle for learning more languages but it depends upon the language policy makers of the DRC.

For statement 4.4, it was about the way English is learnt and used in DRC, 77.8% that the statement was false and 15.4% accepted that it was true.

Item 4.5, English occupies a considered place in DRC, 46.2% said it is false while 34.3% it is true. This statement tries to show that till now English status in DRC is low and it needs to be reshaped.

The following item 4.6, it was about to know if English is used in all sectors of life in DRC, 61.2% did agree because the mentioned that the statement was false while 24.% agree with it saying that the statement was true. Thus, English is not a predominant language in DRC.

Statement 4.7, the population were asked to say if the government has tried to improve English program in DRC, 37.3% see it as a false statement while 46.0% said it is true. Regarding the background of English in DRC today, it can confirm this statement since the government is trying to examine the strategies which could improve that language in the DRC context.

The last statement 4.8, the population had to say choose if the English language is effectively used and considered in DRC, here 46.3% disagree showing that it is false whereas 34.2% accepted saying it is true.

Therefore, the statements above show that the police makers do not give emphasis in encouraging their population to improve English although their attitudes towards English is positive. The low status and use of English may be due to the lack of good English model and encouragement by the government.

CONCLUSION

English is essential for development as has been noticed in answering the first question of this study. People should be given every opportunity to learn English. One way to do this would be to give English a new upgraded status in DRC.

We think that policy should be sensitive to the actual situation and act wisely in the best interests of the country by promoting English in the country as it has been expressed by the majority of the informants.

As a matter of fact, the new relationship that emerges between English and the world reflects an orientation that aims to amplify and to enlarge the Congolese political linguistic for a sustainable development, and to create additive bilingualism and multilingualism in Congolese education.

In the emergence of the world we can observe a dynamics of integration and repositioning of the English language, which bears upon cultural integration (educational, scientific, business and linguistic relations as a whole). At the same time these relations constitute a centerpiece of integration itself. A number of policies and specific proposals have appeared over the short time in the world to make this connected. The implementation of common strategies to make the world smaller than before are being taken by researchers. That is why, taking into account the population observations especially through this study, political determination to think about a common linguistic in the country and in the relation to the world linguistic vision would be of much interest. That is why it has been noticed through this study (population attitudes and perceptions of English) that only the English language INTEGRATION in the community that could promote such objective nowadays in DRC.

This study reflects a phenomenon that may happen to Congolese who have to use English in life but they live in a country where English is not used as a lingua franca but through the views of the population it is possible to remediate to that problem if the responses given to the different questions which were raised in this study are taken into account by the policy makers.

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