

Dreams and Realities: Developing Countries and the English Language

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Paper 7

Student perceptions of English as a developmental tool in Cameroon

by Gladys Ngwi Focho

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Introduction

The central concerns of this chapter are to describe the ways that students in a Francophone context in Africa look at the English language and to see whether it is possible to influence those perceptions.

The chapter consists of five sections. It begins with a general overview of the role of English in the developing world. This leads into a detailed discussion of four significant roles which English may be expected to play in developing countries. These are as a key to academic success, as a means of obtaining international job opportunities, as a way of facilitating international communication and as a medium for achieving global education leading to global understanding. The following section discusses the position of English in Cameroon. Next, the method used in the research reported here is described and this is followed by a detailed discussion of the research findings. The chapter ends with a summary and conclusions.

English in the developing world

The teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in many developing countries has always been problematic because students may fail to see its relevance to their immediate and future needs except for examination purposes. And because many students continue to sail through different levels of their educational career without proficiency in English, the tendency is to pay little attention to the subject. Generally, English is viewed as a subject imposed on the school curriculum for reasons undefined to them; after all, all the other subjects necessary for their future careers are taught in another language in which they are proficient. Approaches to the teaching of EFL seem to perpetuate this perception; recent trends, however, strongly indicate that proficiency in English is linked to development.

Although the perception of what development is differs across nations and cultures, the general consensus is that it is the reduction of poverty which incorporates the

enhancement of human rights, universal freedom and self-esteem (Markee 2002, Coleman 2010). This implies the general wellbeing of the individual, economically, physically, socially and psychologically. The above is emphasised by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs; see Appendix 3 for a summary) which target the reduction of extreme poverty, through education, gender equality, health, the environment and international co-operation. In analysing why the MDGs matter, Fukuda-Parr (2004) posits that these goals address the central objectives of human wellbeing. He sees a common vision between the MDGs and human development such as freedom, dignity, tolerance and solidarity.

The notion that education as a whole contributes enormously to the development of individuals and nations is not contested. Each subject in the school curriculum contributes to that, including English, which has its own particular role to play in the development process. This view is stressed by Ekpoki (2009) who observes that the target beneficiaries of the MDGs are underdeveloped countries, many of which prioritise English as a common communication tool because of the multilingual nature of their societies. He observes too that English plays an important role in enabling nations to become engaged with the MDGs and to achieve them.

In view of the above, the place of English in development can hardly be minimised. It has been established that development is sustained by technological and scientific advancement. According to Seidlhofer (2003), English is the language of science, technology and economics worldwide. It is also acknowledged to be the working language of medicine and aviation. Graddol (2000) pointed out that English is the language of the global economy, most scientific publications, international banking, advertising for global brands, internet communication, technological transfer and international law. Looking at the last of the eight MDGs – developing a ‘global partnership for development’ – we can see that English has a central role to play here for it is considered an international language for international communication, collaboration and co-operation (Coleman 2010).

Even though some researchers like Iman (2005) and Rogers (1982) dispute the claim that proficiency in English guarantees economic development, or a better future, it is obvious that it has a great contributory effect. For instance, Grin (2001) demonstrates that salaries increase with proficiency in English. Globalisation encourages migrant workers to look for decent or better paying jobs abroad, notably in the USA, UK, Australia, South Africa and Canada, which are all English-speaking countries. Moreover, many multinational companies open branches in developing countries (whose national language may not be English) due to cheap labour and this demands workers to have some proficiency in English. Even in non-English-speaking countries where job migration is high like Saudi Arabia, Oman, UAE and Malaysia, English is often a shared language among migrant workers.

The role of international bodies like the United Nations (UN) and the Commonwealth in development cannot be underestimated. The fact that English is one of the official languages of the UN and of many international bodies and conferences underlines the hypothesis that it has a positive correlation with development. As Hasman states (2004), English has a very important role in the 21st century since governments, industries, corporations and international organisations need

it to progress. Coleman (2010) perhaps best summarises the role of English in development under these main categories: English for employability, English for international collaboration and co-operation, English for access to research and information, English as an impartial language and English for facilitating international mobility of students, tourists and workers.

Four roles for English

For the purpose of this study, four areas in which English may have important roles to play are examined in detail here. These are English for academic success, English for international job opportunities, English for international communication and English for global education leading to increased global understanding.

English for academic success

In many countries the world over, English is either taught as a school subject or used as a medium of instruction across subjects. Its importance lies not only in success in examinations (Fakeye and Yemi 2009, Graham 1987) but also in research through books and the internet. Hasman (2004) contends that English has been established as the language of science and technology. He further states that, at the beginning of the 21st century, 90 per cent of information in electronic retrieval systems was stored in English, which was generally recognised as the language of the internet. This trend has since weakened, according to Coleman (2010, quoting Crystal 2006), but compared to other languages English still has a dominant role.

There is also the increasing phenomenon of student migration. Forty-five per cent of the world's international students are in four English-speaking countries: USA, UK, Australia and Canada (Coleman 2010). Dickson and Cumming (1996) indicate that even in non-English-speaking countries, English is the most popular foreign language as a subject for students worldwide. Furthermore, all over the world, the number of universities using English as a medium of instruction is increasing. Foreign students going to these countries and universities necessarily need to be proficient in English. As proof of this, they usually have to take an international English language test such as TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) or IELTS (International English Language Testing System) before registering at the overseas university.

Students who seek to study in English medium universities despite language difficulties must be convinced of the potential gains. Proficiency in English thus seems to be an important gateway (though not the only one) to an education that is easily recognised and valued internationally (especially in the job market). For example, it is a common occurrence for employers to request that certificates be translated or their equivalences given in English.

English for international employment opportunities

The relationship between English and employability is a significant one. Employability can be viewed as the ability to get a job, maintain it or get a new one (Kirubahar et al. 2010). In some cases, this will depend on ability to speak English fluently and to effectively communicate one's ideas orally. Coleman (2010) argues that several early studies have failed to find convincing evidence linking English to the economic development of the individual or nation. However, some

recent studies are starting to show that there may indeed be a positive relationship between English and employability.

From the economic point of view, the 21st century is characterised by globalisation of economies and high job mobility. Millions of non-native speakers of English work in foreign countries where the use of English in the workplace is a necessity. Even in newly industrialised nations like China, Japan and India, English is becoming more and more necessary at work. As Warschauer (2000) observes, many non-native speakers of English need to use English daily in workplaces for presentations, negotiations and international collaboration. Besides, migrant working is a common phenomenon of this age and English plays a central role because it acts as a shared or link language among migrant workers from other countries (Coleman 2010).

International companies, industries and organisations pay the best salaries in many countries. They often seek to hire those who are bilingual in the indigenous language plus English. In China, for example, proficiency in English helps in getting well paid jobs, especially those with international connections (Cortazzi and Jin 1996). Similarly, Kossoudji (1988) demonstrates that in the United States deficiency in English has a negative impact on migrant workers; they tend to have lower earnings and less job mobility compared to those with greater competence in English. Today, the job market, for both migrant and international workers, is more competitive due to the large number of people who are proficient in English. Moreover, there is increasing emphasis on English for the workplace, necessitating the design of language courses for various professionals (businessmen, medical doctors, nurses and those working in technology, agriculture, aviation, etc.) The growing demand for proficiency in English opens thousands of job opportunities for English language teachers worldwide. Take the case of a multilingual country like Uganda, where English is a preferred language because parents believe that it provides wider opportunities for their children in the future (Tembe and Norton 2011, Chapter 6 this volume). Similarly, Hailemariam et al. (2011, Chapter 11 this volume) report that in Eritrea English plays no official role in the workplace, for professional promotion or for business; yet the demand for the language is high because people are convinced that it is important for job mobility worldwide, travel and socialising.

English for international communication

English is an international language used by many people across the world as a native language (ENL), second language (ESL), foreign language (EFL) or lingua franca (ELF). Jenkins (2003) refers to Kachru's categorisation of the use of English into the inner, outer and expanding circles (Kachru 1992). The inner circle is made up of those who use English as a native language or mother tongue like the UK, USA, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, part of Canada and some Caribbean Islands. The outer circle includes Commonwealth nations who use English as an official language though it is a second language to its citizens. This includes countries like India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Philippines and South Africa. In the expanding circle, English has no official role but is important especially for business. China, Japan and the rest of the world fall into this category.

It is thus obvious that in every continent of the world English is spoken in one form or other, giving rise to many models such as native speakers, nativised speakers or lingua franca users (Kirkpatrick 2006). This justifies its status as a world or global language. Moreover, as Seidlhofer (2003) points out, bilingualism is a popular trend and English has a stabilisation role in bilingualism since most people speak their language and English.

In terms of the global spread of English, Hasman (2004) postulates that one out of five people in the world speak English and 85 per cent of mails are in English. According to him, pilots, physicists, executives, tourists and pop singers who speak other languages use English to communicate with colleagues in other countries. This transcontinental use of English is succinctly illustrated by Hasman thus:

When Mexican pilots land their airplanes in France, they and the ground controllers use English. When German physicists want to alert the international scientific community to new discoveries, they first publish their findings in English. When Japanese executives conduct businesses with Scandinavian entrepreneurs, they negotiate in English. When pop singers write their songs, they often use lyrics or phrases in English. When demonstrators want to alert the world to their problems, they display signs in English. (Hasman 2004:19)

The above underlines the point made by Jenkins (2006) that English is a means of international communication across linguistic boundaries. It is a shared foreign language used by people of different nations and languages to communicate with each other. Whitehead (2011, Chapter 16 this volume) points to the fact that even in fragile states like the Democratic Republic of Congo, where reconstruction seems axiomatic, attention is still given to the teaching of English to the military. This aids communication with peace-keepers and facilitates effective participation in peace-keeping missions abroad.

From Hasman's (2004) point of view, this international spread in the use of English is facilitated by the fact that 80 per cent of English vocabulary has foreign origins and has cognates from all over Europe. It continues to borrow from Spanish, French, Hebrew, Arabic, Hindu-Urdu, Bengali, Malay, Chinese and West African languages.

In this communication age, audio-visual products abound in English (Graddol 2000). The most popular international films and pop music are in English. Many films in other languages have subtitles scripts in English. Such international television channels as CNN and Eurosport are in English. The development of 'net English' has spread worldwide and has been incorporated into other languages. Many radio stations, magazines, newspapers and journals in English have gained international readership. For safety purposes, instructions and warnings on drug leaflets, processed food and in airplanes (to name a few) have an English version.

The point has already been made that English as a language for international communication is one of the main languages of the United Nations, other international organisations and conferences. The emphasis here shifts from the employability factor to that of interpersonal communication and understanding.

English for global education

Development incorporates personal empowerment. Knowledge, which is often equated to power, is a catalyst for gaining positive self image and confidence. A global education is key to such knowledge gain since it empowers students with information in the following areas synthesised by Focho (2010) as constituting the global curriculum: cross-cultural awareness, global issues, universal values, critical thinking/leadership skills and experiential learning.

According to Roux (2001), students must be aware of traditions and beliefs which are different from their own. Such understanding fosters cross-cultural co-operation, tolerance and peace and helps minimise hatred, tribalism, racism and violence which inevitably lead to war. Kennett (2011, Chapter 15 this volume) reiterates that teaching conflict resolution, the value of dissent and the importance of consensus in the English class are especially relevant in multicultural countries with ethnic tensions. There can be no development without peace.

Awareness of the state of the world (or global issues) is important in pricking the student's conscience on such global concerns as:

environmental protection and sustainable development, globalisation and world economies, human rights and social justice, gender and discrimination, conflict resolution and peace building, population and food security, democracy and good governance, health, sanitation and HIV/AIDS, rural development and poverty reduction, war and natural disasters, uses and misuses of ICTs, volunteering and community service ... (Focho 2010:138)

Such concern for the state of the world will provoke the building of a culture of peace and respect for human rights (Mansilla and Gardner 2007, Osler and Starkey 2005). All of the above touch on the MDGs and students need to be sensitised on what it takes to achieve these goals.

Universal human values include truth, honesty, love, sacrifice, hard work and striving for excellence. These factors also contribute to peace and development by reducing social ills like fraud, oppression and apathy. Proponents of global education hold that the goal of education should be to develop social responsibility and global citizenship (Merrifield and Kai 2004). Experiencing learning in various forms of interaction and community service leads to greater understanding of the state of the world and the living conditions of others. In Schattle's (2008) opinion, this will build a culture of responsibility for the welfare of others and the planet. Besides, global education in general builds self-confidence and a feeling of being well informed since the student is able to participate in discussions on global issues. This all relates to personal empowerment and development.

The English class is an ideal location for developing such knowledge because there are few constraints on the subject matter discussed during language learning activities. Interesting topics from the global curriculum can be used to teach listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary. Regular classroom activities like dialogues, role plays, debates, speeches, essay writing, group work, interviews and projects improve proficiency in English. A further incidental benefit of learning English in this way is that students are prepared for interaction in the workplace.

To summarise, there are many reasons for considering that English is valuable for students. It helps them to achieve academic success, makes it easier for them find employment, enables them to communicate internationally and gives them a broader perspective on the world in which they live. There is only a minimal risk of raising unrealistic expectations in the minds of students regarding the importance of English because what is being emphasised is not only the economic benefit of mastering the language but also a wide range of other social and personal advantages.

English in Cameroon

As documented by Breton and Fohitung (1991), Cameroon is a multilingual entity with over 247 local languages, two official languages (French and English) and one lingua franca (Cameroon Pidgin English). Historically, Cameroon was divided into two and ruled by the French and the British. These colonial powers imposed their languages as the official languages in the two parts of the country. After reunification in 1961, both French and English were adopted as official languages, thus earning Cameroon the title of a bilingual country.

In the Francophone part of the country, French is the main language for school, work and communication generally. The reverse is true in the Anglophone regions. Because the Francophone region is larger, many more Cameroonians speak French than English. This situation is often referred to as state bilingualism with French being the first official language and English the second. To encourage individual bilingualism, the government language policy is for both languages to be taught in schools at all levels. English is taught to Francophones as a foreign language (EFL) and to Anglophones as a second language (ESL) and vice versa with French. Language centres have also been opened all over the country for the same objective. These language centres were created by the government to promote the learning of both French and English by the general public and are open to all categories of people.

In Francophone secondary schools, students study English as a foreign language for three to five hours per week depending on their level. Tamba (1993) and others observe that many Francophones are resistant to the study of a second official language. (The same is true of Anglophones and their attitude to French.) One of the reasons, according to Tamba, is that Francophones do not envision any material gains in learning English. Given that French is spoken by the majority of Cameroonians and is a more popular working language, Francophones in general and Francophone students in particular have no intrinsic motivation to be proficient in English. Because Anglophones are in the minority, English has a lower status than French. For example, all official decrees and communiqués are initially prepared in French before being translated into English. From the standpoint of Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Ushioda (2008), the socio-cultural context – including attitudes to and the perceived status of particular languages – influence motivation to learn those languages. This view is confirmed in the Cameroonian situation by research carried out by Dyers and Abongdia (2011). Moreover, German and Spanish are also taught as foreign languages to Francophone students, which they consider more useful since many of them travel to Europe. Thus it is not uncommon to hear students ask *On part ou avec l'anglais? (Where will English take one to?)*.

Another factor which contributes to the lack of motivation is the nature of examinations in Francophone schools. Because their curriculum is geared towards a comprehensive education, students study all the subjects offered and an average of all the subjects is the minimum required to be considered successful. Students can always pass without necessarily having a pass mark in English. Besides, there is no test for oral proficiency and many test items are written in multiple-choice format. This situation encourages many students to depend on chance in the examinations; the popular impression is that *C'est Dieu qui donne l'anglais* (It is God who can make you pass in English).

An additional factor that can hardly be ignored is the teaching approach. A good number of teachers fail to be creative in making English language teaching (ELT) dynamic and related to real-life experiences. They are still glued to the textbook, moving from one unit to the next without any attempt to integrate experiential learning or global issues to make learning interesting. Besides, the large class size is a real handicap to the use of various activities, individual attention and effective evaluation. Furthermore, there is little emphasis on oral skills and this discourages many students who are more interested in speaking English. There are some students who believe it is more important to speak fluently even with very little accuracy in writing. So they lose motivation when they can neither speak nor write English, nor pass tests and examinations.

Francophone students are unaware of the potential of English as a developmental tool because teachers fail to educate them about this. Teachers hardly ever explain to students why they should study English (beyond success in examinations). Probably the teachers themselves know no better. The Inspectorate General of Pedagogy for Bilingualism (1994) signed an order defining the English syllabus for Francophone secondary general schools which states as general objectives the acquisition of the four language skills, communicative skills and extensive reading skills. Nothing is mentioned about the long-term gains of proficiency in English.

However, it is obvious that, even in Cameroon, the stakes are changing. The fact that the government is putting more emphasis on bilingual education indicates its renewed interest in individual, not only state, bilingualism. In some universities and all professional schools there is a significant number of Anglophone lecturers. With regards to the civil service, the government policy now is to post workers to any part of the country irrespective of linguistic orientation. Students should be made to understand that they could be sent to work in an interior part of Anglophone Cameroon where nobody understands a word of French. Moreover, Francophones are being appointed ambassadors, governors (and to other posts of responsibility) in purely Anglophone countries abroad or regions within the country.

There are indications that in the future, as Tamba (1993) proposed, appointments to posts of responsibility (ministers, governors, directors, etc.) in the country will be reserved for those proficient in both official languages. A lot of companies, industries and non-government organisations in Cameroon now tend to hire workers who are bilingual. And, as will be discussed below, the global trend indicates that English is becoming an international language with immeasurable opportunities for those proficient in it. One pertinent example is the fact that today

many Francophone Cameroonian students are going for further studies in the USA, UK, Canada and South Africa. There are many Cameroonians working with international organisations needing people who are bilingual.

Conscious of the need for Cameroonians to be bilingual, the government has created a special bilingual education programme for secondary schools which is in its second year of experimentation in some pilot schools (50 schools across the country). Beginning from 2009, one class of first year students in both the Anglophone and Francophone sections are chosen and are taught intensive French and English respectively. Furthermore, the content and language integrated learning (CLIL) model is used where some social studies subjects like history and citizenship education are taught in the other official language. In this partial immersion programme, Francophones are taught these subjects in English and Anglophones in French. This programme has some similarities with the International Standard Schools in Indonesia as described by Coleman (2011, Chapter 5 this volume) but with the difference that, in Cameroon, the programme is imposed by the government on all schools; it is therefore not an elitist innovation as appears to be the case in Indonesia.

While waiting for this project to go fully operational at some point in the future, the Ministry of Secondary Education has instituted the 'Bilingual Game' which requires teachers of all subjects to use the other official language within the last ten minutes of their lessons. This implies that the Francophone teacher of Mathematics, for example, will use the last ten minutes to explain the key concepts of his lesson in English to his Francophone students. The reverse holds for the Anglophone teachers.

A further perspective is that English language teaching should empower people to survive in, respond to and influence the context in which they find themselves. For example, Ayuninjam (2007) recommends that ELT in Cameroon should equip speakers to exploit the technological age. Mutaka (2008) also suggests that the course content of EFL in Cameroon needs to be reshaped to address the immediate needs of students, which include economic, health and environmental education. He says emphasis should be put on oral skills, which are presently neglected.

Method

The survey examined the perceptions of a class of 70 Francophone science-oriented students who study English as a foreign language. This class consists of 30 girls and 40 boys ranging from 17 to 21 years of age. These are final year science students of a seven-year secondary school programme who have two hours of English a week. Being in a purely Francophone school in a Francophone town, the students have limited opportunities to speak English out of the classroom.

Box 1: Questionnaire on student perceptions of English as a developmental tool

Section I: Biographical data

Name of school: _____

Student name: _____

Class: _____

Sex: _____

Age: _____

Level of English: Oral (Poor, Average, Good); Written (Poor, Average, Good)

Future Profession: _____

Section II: English for academic success

Please indicate the degree to which you perceive English to be important for academic success. Use the rating scale below:

VGE = Very Great Extent (4 points)

GE = Great Extent (3 points)

LE = Little Extent (2 points)

VLE = Very Little Extent (1 point)

No.	Items	VGE	GE	LE	VLE
1	English is important for promotion to the next class				
2	English is important for university studies in Cameroon				
3	English is important for university studies abroad				
4	English is important for library research				
5	English is important for internet research				

Section III: English for international job opportunities

Use the same rating scale above to indicate your perception of the importance of English for international jobs.

No.	Items	VGE	GE	LE	VLE
1	English helps you get an international job in Cameroon				
2	English facilitates your appointment to work in a diplomatic service				
3	English helps you get an international job abroad				
4	English helps you get a job in an English-speaking country				
5	Being bilingual in English/French helps you to get promoted at your job				

Section IV: English for international communication

Use the same rating scale above to indicate your perception of the importance of English for international communication.

No.	Items	VGE	GE	LE	VLE
1	English is important for communication with non-native English speakers (e.g. tourists)				
2	English is important for watching popular TV stations				
3	English is important for listening to popular international musicians				
4	English is important for watching popular movies				
5	English is important for reading popular international newspapers and magazines				
6	English is important for playing favourite video games				
7	English is important for social networking like Facebook or Twitter in English				

Section V: English for global education

Use the same rating scale above to indicate your perception of the importance of English for global education.

No.	Items	VGE	GE	LE	VLE
1	The English class gives the opportunity to know much about other cultures				
2	The English class gives the opportunity to learn a lot about global issues				
3	From the English class, one can learn a great deal about universal human values				
4	The class provides a lot of opportunity to experience learning through varied projects.				

Section VI: Global perception (for post responses only)

Give your opinion on the following by stating 'yes' or 'no':

1. Generally, do you think English is important for development?

2. Are you willing to make a conscious effort to be proficient in English?

Data on student perceptions of English as a developmental tool were collected using a structured questionnaire designed by the investigator with input from the available literature. Because development is a multifaceted concept, items for the questionnaire were generated under four different facets of English and development: English for academic success, English for international job opportunities, English for international communication and English for global education. (The questionnaire can be seen in Box 1.) The purpose was to find out students' perceptions of the importance of the English language to the different aspects of development. The questionnaire used a Likert scale requiring respondents to choose from four options to indicate the degree of their perception. Responses were graded from 4 to 1 (Very Great Extent, Great Extent, Little Extent, Very Little Extent). The mean for each item for all respondents was obtained by summing the numerical value of each and dividing by the number of respondents. Contrary to the general practice of anonymous respondents, students were required to write their names for the purpose of subsequent individual follow up. Other biographical data such as age, expected future profession and self-perceived level of English were requested for the same purpose. After whole class, group and individual discussions plus inspirational activities, further data was collected by monitoring class participation, attitude towards homework and scores in class tests.

Validation of the questionnaire was done by colleagues in this area. Reliability was tested using the Cronbach alpha technique with a sample of ten students from another final year science class. The results for Sections II, III, IV and V of the questionnaire are 0.75, 0.69, 0.81 and 0.85 respectively.

The study took place during the 2009–2010 academic school year from September 2009 to June 2010. According to the school programme, the first test normally takes place in early October. The results were very poor with an average score of 42 per cent. Student engagement in class activities up to this point was quite timid. There was reluctance to ask or answer questions or to be fully engaged in oral or written tasks. This gave us the idea for an action research study to try to find out students' views about English and to look for ways to motivate them. The questionnaire was initially administered in mid-October and then during the year student motivation was monitored through observation of class participation, attitudes towards homework and performance in tests. The same questionnaire was given again at the end of the school year in June 2010 to see if there had been any changes in students' perceptions of English as a developmental tool. The mean was used to analyse the questionnaires and percentages used to assess the other aspects of student motivation.

Meanwhile, extra activities were designed to increase student motivation in the learning of English. Attempts were made to integrate experiential learning. Such activities included discussions (group and plenary), internet searches, exposés, debates, interviews and essays on the four main research questions identified above. Some of the topics for these activities are shown in Box 2.

Box 2: Topics for activities

- Why are Francophone students not interested in English?
- Many Francophone parents now send their children to Anglophone schools. Find out why.
- Apart from being one of the official languages, how else is English useful to Francophones in Cameroon?
- If you were given an American scholarship and a Russian scholarship, which would you prefer and why?
- From the internet, find out the following:
 - i. the most widely used languages in terms of number of speakers and their international spread;
 - ii. why English is acclaimed as an international language;
 - iii. Obama's inaugural speech and Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' and identify at least two catch expressions;
 - iv. what the MDGs are;
 - v. at least ten UN organs, their full names and principal activities.
- What inspiration do you draw from Obama's election as the first black president of the US?
- Dramatisation of excerpts from 'I have a dream'.
- Interview teachers on one of the following:
 - i. their dream for Cameroon;
 - ii. their view on gender equality;
 - iii. environmental pollution in their town;
 - iv. democracy in Cameroon

In order not to deviate too much from the school curriculum, these activities were integrated with the teaching of the various language skills and were used as an opportunity to contextualise grammar and vocabulary. The focus, however, was to lead students to the realisation that English is important in many more ways than one, while helping them to learn the language simultaneously.

Results and discussion

The responses to the questionnaires – before and after awareness raising about the importance of English as a developmental tool – were analysed and are presented below.

English for academic success

Analysis of data on student perceptions of English as a tool for academic success is presented in Table 1.

The results indicate that students' views of English as important for academic success strengthened on all the items. The most important role of English for the students was success in examinations, enabling promotion to the next class, both before (mean 3.54) and again after (mean 3.75) the awareness-raising activities. In terms of the degree of change, however, students' views on this point increased by under six per cent.

Table 1: Student perceptions of the importance of English for academic success N=70

English is important for:	Mean (scale 1–4)		Change (%)
	Pre	Post	
... university studies in Cameroon	2.75	3.64	+32.4
... university studies abroad	2.41	2.89	+19.9
... library research	2.26	2.63	+16.4
... internet research	2.53	2.88	+13.8
... promotion to the next class	3.54	3.75	+ 5.9
Cluster	2.69	3.15	+17.1

The largest change in views occurred with regard to the importance of English for university studies in Cameroon (2.75 before, 3.64 after, an increase of 32 per cent). Further discussions with students revealed that before the programme they had been unaware of the fact that up to a quarter of university lecturers in Cameroon lecture in English.

With regards to studying abroad many students at first dismissed the possibility because of the poor economic status of their parents but, after discussions, they recognised that they might be eligible for scholarships to study in universities abroad where English would be the medium of instruction; views here strengthened by almost 20 per cent. In relation to library and internet research, students still felt that they could get most of the information they needed in French, but as science students they came to understand that English has been acclaimed as the language of science and technology; views strengthened by 16 per cent (library research) and nearly 14 per cent (internet research). Generally, students expressed a need for more hours for the study of English and more emphasis on enabling students to speak the language.

English for international employment opportunities

Table 2 summarises students' perceptions of English as a means of gaining international employment.

Item:	Mean (scale 1–4)		Change (%)
	Pre	Post	
English helps you get a job in an English-speaking country	1.22	2.55	+109.0
Being bilingual in English/French helps you to get promoted at your job	1.51	1.98	+31.1
English facilitates your appointment to work in a diplomatic service	1.63	2.13	+30.7
English helps you get an international job in Cameroon	2.15	2.50	+16.3
English helps you get an international job abroad	1.47	1.56	+6.1
Cluster	1.59	2.14	+34.6

The results show that by the end of the programme students were not convinced about the contribution that English might play in helping them to find employment abroad. For example, by the end of the course the mean score regarding competence in English helping people to find a job in an English-speaking country was still only 2.55. Nevertheless, it is important to note that at the beginning of the programme the average perception had been extremely low, only 1.22. In other words, there had been a dramatic increase of more than 100 per cent with regard to this item.

The likely reason for students' general lack of conviction regarding the value of English in seeking employment is that, living as they do in a rural area, they do not yet envisage having international jobs. Their responses about their likely future professions showed that no student expressed a desire to be a diplomat, an international businessman or businesswoman or to work with an international organisation such as the World Bank or the UN. From their oral responses, the students' immediate plans were to pass their final examinations, enter university, graduate and then get whatever job they could find to earn a living. Some said that, when the time came to look for international jobs, they would study some more English to improve on their proficiency. Awareness raising or sensitisation here dwelt on the fact that opportunity favours those who are well prepared.²

English for international communication

Table 3 summarises student perceptions of the importance of English for international communication and the changes in those perceptions which took place during the programme.

Table 3: Student perceptions of the importance of English in international communication N=70

English is important for:	Mean (scale 1–4)		Change (%)
	Pre	Post	
... watching popular TV news stations	1.54	2.11	+37.0
... communication with non-native English speakers	2.78	3.64	+30.9
... playing favourite video games	2.42	2.76	+14.0
... reading popular international newspapers and magazines	1.10	1.25	+13.6
... watching popular movies	3.19	3.57	+11.9
... listening to popular international musicians	3.22	3.52	+9.3
... social networking like Facebook or Twitter	2.45	2.57	+4.9
Cluster	2.38	2.77	+16.4

For this group of students, it appears that English is significant for them for communicating with non-native English speakers (mean score 3.64 at the end of the programme), for watching popular movies (mean 3.57 at the end of the programme) and for listening to popular international musicians (mean 3.52 at the end). But the largest increase in perceptions took place regarding television news stations (an increase of 37 per cent).

In discussion, students expressed the view that Standard English was more important in employment contexts than in informal or entertainment contexts (where it was likely that it would be replaced by a lingua franca such as Pidgin English). Students indicated that they regularly watched only music, sports and movie channels in English (MTV, Eurosport and Africa Magic respectively). Their reason for not reading much in English was that it was more difficult to understand the printed word than the spoken language. As for social networking, many students revealed that they used the English-named sites but even when using them they actually communicated mostly in French. By the end of the year, though, they had discovered that a lot more communication through the media and interpersonally is done in English worldwide; overall their mean score in this area increased from 2.38 to 2.77 (a small change of +16 per cent).

English for global education

Results regarding students' perceptions of English as a way of gaining access to global education are presented in Table 4.

The results suggest that, initially, students had been largely unaware of the contribution that English could make to a global education. For example, at the start of the course the idea that one might learn about universal human values in the English class was given an average score of just 1.43, while the suggestion that an English class could provide a chance to learn through a variety of projects received an average of 1.51. By the end of the course, however, students'

perception of being able to learn about universal human values in the English class had risen to 2.17 on average (an increase of nearly 52 per cent). Meanwhile, students' view that English could be delivered through a variety of projects jumped to 2.88, an increase of almost 91 per cent.

Table 4: Student perceptions of the contribution of English to global education N=70

Item:	Mean (scale 1–4)		Change (per cent)
	Pre	Post	
The class provides a lot of opportunity to experience learning through varied projects.	1.51	2.88	+90.7
The English class gives the opportunity to know much about other cultures	1.54	2.62	+70.1
The English class gives the opportunity to learn a lot about global issues	1.63	2.74	+68.1
From the English class, one can learn a great deal about universal human values	1.43	2.17	+51.7
Cluster	1.52	2.60	+71.1

During discussions, students explained that apart from some global issues which they occasionally came across in textbooks, other global issues were hardly ever part of English lessons. Besides, previously they had felt that they could get such information from other subject areas or the media, although at the same time they confessed that they almost never watched, read or listened to the news (even in French). The students also admitted to never previously having experienced a class project in English; however, by the end of the programme they recognised the value of having such activities within the framework of the language class.

After the innovative approach to teaching English in this class – which integrated a global curriculum with the teaching of English – many students felt the impact, such that their overall perception increased by over 70 per cent (from an average of 1.52 at the start to an average of 2.60 at the end). Nevertheless, it should be noted that students still had some reservations and expressed the view that English does not have a prerogative over other languages. Since Francophones in Cameroon study English, French and either German or Spanish, they felt that the other international languages could play a similar role of raising awareness of global issues.

Motivation

To monitor student motivation through class participation, a checklist was used to record the number of students who participated orally, who finished written tasks in class and who handed in assignments and projects on time. Table 5 shows the results term by term.

From Table 5 it is clear that at the beginning of the academic year, student motivation was very low. Oral participation and engagement in assigned tasks

in and out of class were limited. Low motivation was reflected in their poor performances in class tests.

Table 5: Student participation in activities N=70

Type of activity	per cent participation			Increase in percentage points over one year
	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	
Oral participation	26	64	91	+65
In-class written tasks	48	78	86	+38
Assignments	69	75	93	+24

However, gradual improvements took place. For instance, students making spoken contributions in class increased by 65 percentage points from 28 per cent in Term 1 to 91 per cent in Term 3. These improvements can be attributed to students’ increasing awareness of the importance of English in various domains and to the student-centred approach to teaching which was adopted. Activities such as exposés, dramatisations, the use of the internet, television and radio, interviews and personal experiences helped to boost student motivation. Students participated more in oral than in written tasks. Students themselves reported that it was more important or ‘necessary’ for them to speak than to write and, besides, they found speaking easier (even if they made a lot of errors).

Conclusions

Students’ perceptions of English became more positive after awareness raising had taken place. A summary of the results can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6: Overall student perceptions of the importance of English for development N=70

three items with which students agreed most strongly plus three with which they agreed most weakly at end of course	Mean	three items showing largest change plus three showing smallest change during course	Change (%)
English is important for promotion to the next class	3.75	English helps you get a job in an English-speaking country	+109.0
English is important for university studies in Cameroon	3.64	The class provides a lot of opportunity to experience learning through varied projects	+90.7
English is important for communication with non-native English speakers	3.64	The English class gives the opportunity to know much about other cultures	+70.1
Being bilingual in English/French helps you to get promoted at your job	1.98	English helps you get an international job abroad	+6.1
English helps you get an international job abroad	1.56	English is important for promotion to the next class	+5.9
English is important for reading popular international newspapers and magazines	1.25	English is important for social networking like Facebook or Twitter	+4.9

By the end of the experiment, the three areas in which students could see most clearly that English was valuable were for promotion to the next class (mean score 3.75), for studying in university in Cameroon (mean score 3.64) and for communicating with native speakers (also 3.64). However, discussion with students revealed that 'communicating with native speakers' was widely interpreted to mean communicating with Anglophone Cameroonians using Pidgin English! Nevertheless, students came to understand that one person in every five in the world speaks English (Hasman 2004); as they graduate and move out of the confines of their small town they will need English more and more for interpersonal communication within the country and abroad.

The three areas in which students' views had developed most markedly were the perception that English language competence may help in looking for work in English-speaking countries (an increase of 109 per cent), an awareness that English language lessons can provide a range of different learning opportunities (increase of 91 per cent) and an understanding that it is possible to learn about other cultures through English lessons (increase of 70 per cent). Students appreciated the fact that the English class could host any subject matter, especially current trends and issues not anticipated in the official curriculum of the various subjects. This open space was also experienced as ideal for multiple and varied activities, the result being that learning the language and global knowledge gain took place simultaneously.

By the end of the experiment, the areas where students were still least convinced of the value of English were the ideas that being bilingual in French and English can lead to promotion (mean score 1.98), being competent in English can lead to 'international' employment abroad (mean 1.56) and English is valuable for reading international newspapers and magazines (mean 1.25).

Meanwhile, the areas where the smallest changes were observed lay in English helping to gain 'international' employment abroad (a small increase of six per cent; the students remain unpersuaded about this), English being important for promotion to the next class (almost six per cent increase; they are already very aware of this and can hardly become more aware) and English helping students to participate in Facebook and Twitter (less than five per cent increase; they already use these social networking media but use French rather than English to participate).

It was interesting to note that students in this study were realistic and were conscious of the fact that proficiency in English was not a guarantee for getting an international job or a bright future on a global basis. They expressed the view that the best jobs were more accessible to the children of the rich whose parents lobby and guarantee these jobs for them. Thus, contrary to the fears of Iman (2005) and Rogers (1982), the danger of raising false hopes and eventual disillusionment is minimised. Students debated whether there was hope for those who excel academically and have dual or multiple language proficiency.

Generally, discussions on the various issues surrounding English and development increased student motivation. By the end of the programme the majority of students were positive that English has a significant positive role to play in their future development and were committed to taking up the challenge to become

proficient in it. Furthermore, the role of the teaching approach in raising motivation cannot be ignored. This approach was experimental in the fact that there was a deliberate effort to ‘teach’ the importance of English to development and a conscious use of various activities often ignored by teachers due to difficult teaching conditions.

In conclusion, one can say that, in many cases, the teaching and learning of English in schools has been viewed mainly as a means of immediate academic advancement. Learners are not informed about other potential gains resulting from proficiency in the language such as access to jobs, international communication and global education. The purpose of studying English should go beyond success in examinations. Apart from course objectives, teachers should come up with general goals and educate students on the contributions of English to development in all its ramifications. More emphasis should be laid on spoken English and, if possible, the number of hours for studying English should be increased. Coupled with creative teaching methods and experiential learning approaches, students will be highly motivated to learn English. Wedell (2011, Chapter 13 this volume) also proposes that teachers should view the communicative approach to ELT as an opportunity to try out new ideas, techniques and materials.

The case for English for development is a compelling one. According to Seargeant and Erling (2011, Chapter 12 this volume), simply viewing English as an international language for communication across linguistic and cultural barriers is outmoded. The big questions should be these: As a pre-eminent global language, what does this entail for the users of English? Of what benefit is it? Even though Seargeant and Erling suggest that there are inequalities perpetuated by the promotion of English for economic progress in poor countries, they also affirm that English helps people build their capacity to fight poverty and increases people’s choices for increased participation in world economies and sustainable development.

Therefore, if English helps students to progress academically, this will lead to good jobs (even at the local level) and improved standards of living. If it leads them to international jobs the impact is even greater. Those who can use English to acquire more knowledge and information and to relate with others all over the world become personally and socially empowered. However, Coleman (2010) cautions that the importance of English to development should not be exaggerated, especially for those who have little access to it. Evidently, English is by no means the only route to development but it definitely plays a significant role.

Notes

1. Thanks are due to Adrian Odell for comments on an earlier version of this chapter.
2. Respondents appear to be able to make a distinction between ‘getting a job in an English-speaking country’ and ‘getting an international job abroad’. The first seems to be interpreted as migrant work and is within the bounds of probability for the respondents. The latter is interpreted as gaining employment with an international agency such as the UN or the World Bank and remains inconceivable for them.

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