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A Case Study of Workplace Language Use Within Micro, Small, Midsize, and Large Companies: Insights from Language School Students in Abidjan, Ivory Coast

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Introduction

Africa is “the continent of the future” according to French president Emmanuel Macron (BBC News, 2019). Africa is experiencing explosive economic growth that will continue unabated into the next decades. EY Global (2020) calls Africa “one of the last frontier markets with a growing middle class and disposable income.” The Brookings Institute, Goldman Sachs, McKinsey, and the Council on Foreign Relations concur (Coleman, 2020). The World Bank’s Business Score reports Sub-Saharan Africa growing from 45 out of 100 in 2004 to 75 in 2020. Africa’s leading cities, like Abidjan, Ivory Coast, account for 80% of consumers with sufficient disposable income to purchase a variety of consumer products. Coleman (2020) reports that “if Africa sustains and accelerates structural reforms, some believe the continent can emulate China’s rapid rise of the last 50 years.” In French-speaking Africa, over 200 million people live in 21 of 54 countries. Growing at birth rates twice that of other Africans, economists predict that the number of French-speaking Africans will surpass 800 million by 2050 (Savana, 2021).¹

Despite Africa’s economic ascendance and a plethora of native French speakers, Business English as Lingua Franca (BELF) researchers have largely bypassed it, focusing instead on Europe and Asia. BELF researchers such as Crystal (2003), Feely & Harzing (2003), Neeley (2012, 2017), and Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen (2013) have anointed English as the world’s language of business. ‘Ready or not, English is now the global language of business,’ Neely announced in a *Harvard Business Review* article (2012). Despite Neeley pronouncement, multilingual workplaces still dominate global business as reflected by the research of Ehrenreich (2009), Janssens & Steyaert (2014), Lønsmann (2014), Angouri (2014), Lüdi, Meier & Yanaprasart (2016), Sacco (2017 & 2019) among others.

At the pinnacle of BELF is “Englishnization,” coined by Rakuten CEO Hiroshi Mikitani to describe the imposition of a single-language policy within a company or corporation.² Mikitani’s goal was to get his employees worldwide to work in English, waving the standard “all English, all the time.” Even in Japan, the home of Rakuten, Japanese native speakers were compelled to work with each other in English. According to Neeley (2017) who documented

¹ EY Global also lists other factors making Africa an attractive market. They include increasing diversification, a focus on infrastructure, and “the maturation of politics and monetary systems.”

² “Englishnization” is not a word but yet is used worldwide to denote a single-language policy within a company or corporation. Neeley purposely capitalized REQUIRING to make her point.

Mikitani's mandate, Mikitani gave his workers two years to demonstrate professional proficiency via the TOEIC, the Education Testing Service's world-renown Test of English for Intercultural Communication. Neeley points out that "[g]lobal companies from nearly all the major industries—Audi, Atos, DB, IBM, Lufthansa, Microsoft, Nokia, Nestle, Samsung, SAP are already REQUIRING employees to use English" (p. 61).³

Kelm (2014) studied "Englishnization" in Latin America, featuring a Korean company operating in Peru. Kelm, who is not a BELF researcher per se, cited this example of "Englishnization" due to its potential negative impact on the value of Americans learning foreign languages. At the Korean plant in Peru, Kelm found that Korean and Peruvian managers communicated only in English. Despite having lived in Peru for several years, the Korean managers never spoke Spanish with their Peruvian colleagues. Kelm did not mention, however, whether the Peruvian colleagues communicated in Spanish or in English with each other when their Korean colleagues were not present. It may have been the case as Sacco (2019) reports that most French-speaking engineers speak French when their English-speaking colleagues are not present.

English is far from mounting the lingua franca throne *even in the U.S.* Sacco (2017) discovered dual-language zones within a corporation where English is the official lingua franca. English is spoken in the office and Spanish in the rice mill owned by a corporation espousing a single-language policy. Limited English proficiency (LEP) is the major reason why Hispanic mill workers defy the corporate language policy, but the unintended consequence is that, over time, Hispanic mill workers have honed a well-crafted and compact Spanish as they communicate with decibel levels surpassing 130. Sacco (2017) informed the agribusiness giant that tampering with the code might end a perfect nine-year-long safety record⁴. Hispanic workers know, however, that they must speak English in the office where English is the official language. In U.S. agribusiness where Hispanic workers dominate in rice mills and poultry plants, dual-language zones are the norm, not the exception.

After the rice mill study, Sacco informally tested the English-only policy of the same U.S.-owned global agribusiness in its overseas operations via LinkedIn. Sacco interviewed non-native English-speaking engineers working in 11 countries on 4 continents. Engineers, managers, and agronomists from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Cameroon, Chile, Germany, Ivory Coast, the Netherlands, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Vietnam participated in the LinkedIn interviews. Mixed language use also takes place in overseas operations like it does at the rice mill in the northwestern U.S. One respondent admitted: "few of us work with English in our day to day." Another respondent working in Germany stated: "The main language is German for local

³ Despite Neeley's statement, Nestle engineers, surveyed in (Sacco, 2019a) admitted speaking French 30% of the time.

⁴ Rice, corn, wheat, and sorghum mills are among the most dangerous work zones in the U.S. During my week-long research study, two workers died from accidents at other rice mills in town. Communication within the context of safety procedures is critical to success. The strict imposition of "Englishnization" could lead to major injuries, even death.

communication, but if more than one other employee or country non-German speaking is involved, English is the language.”⁵

So, how does Africa fit into the debate? In the first major study of Francophone African workplace language use, Sacco (2019) researched French-speaking engineers and managers employed at multinational corporations, 85% of which boast English as the official corporate language. The 66 respondents represented 20 multinational corporations operating in Francophone Africa. They included Nestle, General Electric, Cargill, Unilever, DHL, Deloitte, and Schlumberger. Despite the English-only company policy in these corporations, the 66 respondents reported that they used French at work between 26% and 95% of the time. Table B shows that English dominated workplace language use in 7 of the 17 MNCs while French dominated in 10.⁶ Despite disobeying the English-only policy, all respondents admitted using English with global teams during videoconferences and other joint activities. Additionally, all 66 respondents emphasized the importance of English as a prerequisite for employment and promotion.

Table A: Studies on Workplace Language Use in Francophone Africa

Study	Subjects	Companies	Primary Language
Sacco (2019)	Engineers	20 MNCs	French
Sacco & Ohin-Traoré (2022)	Logisticians	79 SMEs/MNCs	French
Sacco & De Koffi (2022)	Managers	21 SMEs/MNCs	French

Given the conflict between the competing theories of unilingual and multilingual franca, Sacco & Ohin-Traoré (2022) decided to examine workplace language use within, perhaps, the two most global of business disciplines: logistics and global supply chain management. They hypothesized that the distribution of goods and services throughout a global network might mandate the use of English, thereby limiting the use of French. For their study, they had access to a large group of French-speaking experts in logistics and global supply chain management: Women in Logistic-Africa with its 261 members on LinkedIn.⁷ Most are talented speakers of English who could work exclusively or in large part in English. Many work for corporate giants where English is the official corporate language.

In the Sacco and Ohin-Traoré study, the 124 subjects, representing from 9 Francophone African countries, responded to a 14-question survey and several subjects participated in follow-up interviews. The results indicates that English is highly valued among the vast majority of companies and is mostly used in exchanges between the French-speaking employees and their English-speaking bosses, clients, and suppliers. French, however, remains the dominant workplace language used overall as the 124 French-speaking professionals communicate almost

⁵ The authors speculate that same native-language use phenomenon is probably even taking place within Mikitani's Rakuten and the Korean company in Peru cited by Kelm (2014).

⁶ Insufficient data from three of the 20 MNCs included Cargill, Shandong, and Deloitte.

⁷ Women in Logistics-Africa also includes native speakers of English.

exclusively in French with co-workers and French-speaking clients and suppliers. More studies are needed to determine whether Francophone Africa is bucking the trend of English workplace dominance as it is taking place in Europe and Asia or is it simply moving at a more gradual pace toward BELF and “Englishnization?” The current study is designed to fill that gap.

Table B: Percentage of Time Speaking English Versus French (Sacco, 2019)

MNC (Headquarters)	English	French
1. Ericsson (Sweden)	74%	26%
2. Nestle (Switzerland)	70%	30%
3. Schlumberger (France)	70%	30%
4. Caterpillar (USA)	70%	30%
5. Unilever (Neth/UK)	68%	32%
6. FrieslandCampina (Neth)	60%	40%
7. Aggreko (UK)	50%	50%
8. GE (USA)	45%	55%
9. Louis Dreyfus (Switz)	37%	63%
10. Olam (Singapore)	33%	67%
11. Yara Int'l (Norway)	30%	70%
12. MTN (South Africa)	23%	77%
13. Orange (France)	16%	84%
14. Schneider Electric (France)	16%	84%
15. Barry Callebaut (Switz)	13%	87%
16. Société Générale (France)	10%	90%
17. DHL	5%	95%

The current study (Sacco & De Koffi, 2022) is designed to research workplace language use at key small-to-midsize enterprises (SMEs) in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. Abidjan is one of the largest city in Africa with 4.7 million people and it is one of the largest commerce ports on the African continent. Abidjan is global and many of its SMEs trade with companies throughout Africa and the world. Given these data points, what is the current role of English and French in conducting business? The researchers know that French, not English, is the lingua franca of SMEs in Abidjan, Yamoussoukro (the capital of Ivory Coast), throughout Ivory Coast, and throughout French West Africa. The goal of the study is to discover current language use within SMEs and reveal their predictions on the role of English in the future.

We selected a language school located in Abidjan for several reasons. First, private language schools serve as the gatekeepers of strengthening the English-language skills, especially for early and mid-career professionals. Continuing education colleges, prevalent in American higher education, are less frequent in Francophone Africa. Second, language schools provide a wide variety of professionals representing the spectrum of economic activity. In the current study, students reported positions as ranging from a biotech scientist, a sales representative, engineers, agronomists, and global supply chain manager. Third, participants at

language schools come predominantly from SMEs, which are the linchpin of the African economy.

We selected Dialektos because of its unique teaching style. Dialektos is an online English Coaching firm founded by junior author Steven De Koffi in 2018. As a former manager at Siemens in Abidjan, where he worked almost exclusively in English, De Koffi brings with him first-hand knowledge of the needs of nonnative speaking managers. He recently resigned from Siemens to dedicate his time at Dialektos where he offers customized Business English instruction to individual students and small groups. His customized courses help students transition quickly from A to B to C. Hundreds of professionals are reaching out for information knowing that English may be the most important professional tool in their skillset.

The Study

In the present study, the authors invited Dialektos students to participate in the survey. The authors surveyed 22 students to ascertain workplace language use, current work activity, information about their company, and the need for English. All students work in Ivory Coast, except one who works in both Togo and Ivory Coast. The 21 companies and corporations are represented by only one respondent, except for one company. French is the native language of each respondent. The students completed a 12-item survey via SurveyMonkey. Specifically, the authors were seeking to:

1. Determine the percentage of time subjects worked in English versus French,
2. Identify the work-related tasks they regularly complete in English,
3. Ascertain the global activities taking place at each SME,
4. Identify the percentage of students whose SMEs encouraged them to improve English via a language school,
5. Determine the percentage of students whose SMEs will provide professional incentives for increased English proficiency;
6. Compile predictions from SMEs whether English will become their lingua franca by the end of the decade.

After completing the survey, we interviewed a CEFR A2 elementary-level class to discuss the survey and to ask them to describe their relationship with working in English. Additionally, we interviewed a CEFR C1 advanced-level student to better understand his typical work day in English as scientist employed by a biotech firm headquartered in Sunnyvale, California.

Findings

As illustrated in Table C and D, 55% of the 21 companies represented in the study are a combination of SMEs, plus micro enterprises, which consist of one to nine employees. Forty-five percent represented large companies. Among the multinational corporations are two American

firms (Cepheid and Prudential), one major French bank (Société Générale), one Australian mining company (Allied Gold) and Swiss pharmaceutical giant Roche. The World Health Organization, headquartered in Switzerland and Fair Trade Africa, headquartered in Kenya are the two NGOs. Nearly two-thirds of the companies represent the third economic sector (commerce, transportation, banking, services), while 21% represent the second sector (manufacturing, transformation, construction, etc.), and 15% represent the first sector (agriculture, fishing, forest, mines, etc.).

Table C: Company Data

Industry Sector ⁸		Company Size	
First	15%	Large (250+)	45%
Second	21%	Medium (50-249)	35%
Third	64%	Small (10-49)	5%
		Micro (0-9)	15%

Table D: Examples of Participating Companies

Company	Headquarters	Employees	Industry
Société Générale	France	196,000	Banking
Cepheid	USA	1,700	Biotechnology
Prudential	USA	41,671	Insurance
Fairtrade Africa	Kenya	----- ⁹	NGO
Allied Gold	Australia	-----	Mining
Roche	Switzerland	101,200	Pharmaceuticals
Orabank	Nigeria	-----	Banking
World Health Organization	Switzerland	-----	Health

The key question in the present study was to determine the percentage of time the 22 subjects worked in English versus French. The average workplace language use rate is 40.5% in English and 59.5% in French.¹⁰The data is more revealing when broken down by the size of company: the larger the company, the more English used. As featured in Table E, subjects in micro, small and medium companies primarily work in French. Managers in micro companies (1-9 employees) stated that they and their teams work in English 8.3% of the time; managers in small companies (10-49 employees) reported that they work only 20% of the time in English, while managers in midsize companies (50-249 employees) revealed that they work 30.3% of the time in

⁸ The first sector consists of agriculture, fishing, forest, mines, etc. The second sector: manufacturing, transformation, construction, etc. The third sector: commerce, transportation, banking, services, etc.

⁹ Blank spaces in Table D exist because of the absence of information on the number of employees.

¹⁰ These numbers are nearly identical to the numbers in Table B among multinational corporations reported in Sacco (2019).

English. However, the subjects employed in large companies (250+ employees) work primarily in English 55% of the time.

Table E: The Respondents' Use of English Versus French in the Workplace

	English	French
Micro:	8.3%	91.7%
Small:	20%	80%
Midsize:	30.3%	69.7%
Large:	55%	45%

How did the 21 companies view English in terms of importance? In Table F, overwhelmingly, 85.7% of companies view English as important, even in companies where French is still the dominant workplace language. In addition, companies of all sizes viewed English as important. Table F also shows the breakdown: 75% of micro companies, 100% of small companies, 75% of midsize companies, and 86% of large companies view English as important despite their location in the heart of French West Africa.

Table F: The Importance of English

Overall		Breakdown by company	
Important	85.7%	Large	86%
Not important	14.3%	Medium	75%
		Small	100%
		Micro	75%

Despite the importance of English, none of the companies sent their managers to English classes in Abidjan. All 22 managers enrolled themselves in English classes to enhance their communication skills. This unfortunate finding concurs with Cambridge Assessment's *English at Work Report* (Cambridge, 2016) finding about the lack of support for English instruction on the part of 5,300 employers. When asked "What percentage of employers are planning to improve the English skills of their employees?" only 4% of employers stated yes.

We then asked managers if enhanced English skills would result in a salary raise or a promotion. Despite their company's reluctance in promoting English classes, Table G shows that 56.8% of managers reported that their company would reward their increase in English skills; 4.8% of managers reported that enhanced English skills would not lead to a salary raise or promotion.

Table G: English Proficiency and Salary Enhancements/Promotion

English Proficiency (CEFR ¹¹)		Salary/promotion	
A1 Beginner	40.9%	Yes	56.8%
A2 Elementary	22.7%	Neither Yes nor No	38.4 %
B1 Intermediate	18.2%	No	4.8%
B2 Upper Intermediate	9.1%		
C1 Advanced	9.1%		

CEFR A2s Striving to Work in English

Why would elementary-level English professionals push themselves at mid-career to strengthen their English? That is a question we wanted to know as a part of this study. The Ivorian educational system has failed these professionals despite a decade or more of English instruction.¹² The A2 professionals all possess superb technical skills as engineers and business managers, but the lack of working proficiency in English is currently their Achilles Heel. We interviewed an A2 Dialektos class via Zoom to find out. The senior author expected to conduct the interview in French, but the students insisted on English which was maintained throughout the interview.

De Koffi informed me that there are a certain number of lower-level tasks that A2 English speakers can perform in English, but that promotions and job mobility are rare without C1 proficiency.¹³ To summarize our interview, here are the key findings provided by the A2 class:

- B., a program coordinator at Fair Trade Africa, revealed that she lost a promotion because of her weak English proficiency. Gaining access to the rest of the world is a major motivation for investing in her English.
- Ad., a Wave Mobil Money territory supervisor, lost an opportunity to work in Singapore. All of his managers work in English. Consequently, he continues to manage 476 network agents, for the time being, in his sales territory in Northern Ivory Coast—in French.
- Al., a cost project manager and civil engineer, revealed that English is now the official language of his mining company.
- Am., a project manager for Prudential Belife Insurance, is comfortable with writing but struggles in Zoom meetings conducted in English. She informed us that no promotions will

¹¹ CEFR refers to the Common European Framework of References for Languages.

¹² The system has failed for several reasons: classrooms jammed with 50-60 students, the lack of English native speaking teachers nationwide, and the lack of English as a medium of instruction in Ivorian universities are among the reasons. In Sacco (2020), he describes how INP-HB, Ivory Coast's premium polytechnical institute, requires only B1 Intermediate in English for graduation. Most companies in Cambridge's English (2016) Cambridge English (2016), require *advanced to native ability* or C1 in English.

¹³ To protect the subjects' identity, we have used B, Ad, Al, and Am instead of their real names.

be forthcoming without stronger English skills; her French-speaking colleagues with C1 skills now serve in English-speaking countries.

In our final question, we asked about their English proficiency ambitions. Nearly all stated C2. “English is the future” was an oft-repeated statement. Fortunately, their instructor, Steven De Koffi, a former Siemens manager, possesses industry knowledge and C2 English skills. De Koffi was the instructor for all 22 respondents.¹⁴

Working in English for an American biotech firm

At the other end of the proficiency spectrum is AK at C1 Advanced. AK, a male biologist in his mid-30s, works for a large American biotech company headquartered in Sunnyvale, CA. The company manufactures Covid-19 tests among other diagnostic tests. His company is currently advertising for a manager in southern France, a position designed for a native French speaker who is “fluent” in English. The biotech provided no definition of fluency.

AK works from home in Ivory Coast or Togo and spends his work day participating in Zoom calls in English which usually emanate from the biotech’s European center in Toulouse, France. The biotech firm mandates English for all calls even when his native French-speaking colleagues are the only ones on the call. He understands the need for English when non-French-speaking colleagues from Singapore, for example, are on the call, but he and his French-speaking colleagues express frustration working in English when there are no English speakers present.

AK has invested a couple of years increasing his proficiency from B1 to C1 as his instructor has customized his pandemic-era blended instruction. AK has never studied or worked in an English-speaking country to provide him with the fluency he and his firm desire. His study of English follows the typical Francophone African trek of primary and secondary courses, followed by a handful of courses at the university level. Grammar is the major theme in most of those classes. None of his university science courses were taught in English as the medium of instruction (EMI) which has become popular in Europe and Asia. He might have graduated with C1 skills had EMI been a major feature at the University of Lomé in Togo.

AK has mastered the English-language terminology in his field which makes him capable of successfully participating in his Zoom calls. When making proposals and arguments in English, his skills are adequate, but AK has admitted that he still needs to feel more comfortable when making them. He admits that translation from French into English takes place in his head during his Zoom meetings. Working in French when his French-speaking colleagues are present would make his job easier. Listening comprehension issues also comes into play when AK has to decipher English accents from colleagues from Singapore, Japan, and China. Intense work and determination to strengthen his English through his classes at Dialektos have made him

¹⁴ Even though De Koffi is not a native English speaker, he is, however, a near-native speaker of English. In Ivory Coast, the senior author has yet to meet a native English-speaking professor of English or instructor at a language school.

competitive as a manager at his biotech firm. Because AK is a native speaker of French, his firm will probably limit his promotions to countries where French is spoken despite his C1 skills.

Discussion

The authors conducted the study to determine the dominant lingua franca in Francophone Africa. Is English the dominant lingua franca of global business in Francophone Africa as it is in Europe and Asia? Is Neeley's declaration in a *Harvard Business Review* article (Neeley, 2012) 'Ready or not, English is now the global language of business,' applicable to Francophone Africa? The answer is a resounding no.

As Sacco (2019) and Sacco & Ohin-Traoré (2022) found, we found in the current study that French is the dominant language of global business in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, one of Francophone Africa's largest city and port. French is generally spoken with customers and other French-speaking colleagues; English is the dominant language of communication with superiors and non-French speaking customers and colleagues. "Englishnization" (Rakuten's all English all the time) does not take place in any of the 21 companies, in the 20 multinational corporations surveyed in Sacco (2019) or in the 79 companies studied in Sacco & Ohin-Traoré (2022); the closest link to "Englishnization" is the American biotech firm where English must be spoken among managers in all Zoom meetings. AK, the biotech manager featured in a profile, still speaks French with his employees in Ivory Coast and Togo. In addition, all 22 managers from the 21 companies surveyed, reported working in a multilingual franca as respondents reported in Sacco (2019) and Sacco & Ohin-Traoré (2022).

So why is French so predominant in this study and others focused on Francophone Africa? Africa is a continental economy; enough business exists for African companies to keep their primary focus on doing business in Africa. The authors would argue that Francophone Africa is close to existing as a continental economy. Most customers and clients from Morocco to Madagascar and from Senegal to Djibouti are native French speakers and, as the Japanese proverb states, "The most important language in the world is the language of our customer." In Francophone Africa, that means French. Despite the presence of "Englishnization" elsewhere, French-speaking customers in Africa will continue in perpetuity to conduct business in French.

French West Africa seems to defy the hegemony of BELF for another major reason: limited English proficiency (LEP). To illustrate, the IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook evaluates English proficiency as one of its 340 criteria using TOEFL scores. Magoosh (2016) reported that French West Africa ranked as the lowest of any region in the world in TOEFL scores. That includes southeast Asia, central Asia, and even countries like Haiti and Mongolia. The countries under study in the three Francophone African workplace language studies mentioned above include Ivory Coast (60), Guinea (61), Mali (63), Senegal and Burkina Faso (64), Togo (66), and Benin and Niger (70). These TOEFL scores contrast dramatically with those of France (88), Denmark (98), and the Netherlands and Austria (100). Neeley & Kaplan (2014) reported that Japan's TOEFL score was the lowest in the world. In 2015, Japan scored 71, higher

than any of the French West African countries (Magoosh, 2016). The overall mean for TOEFL scores worldwide in 2015 was 82.¹⁵ Given these scores, LEP impacts workplace communication and overall corporate operations.

Despite French's dominance in global business in Francophone Africa, the role of English is growing quickly, even among micro and small companies. In the present study, the 22 managers reported that nearly all companies view English as important and most companies are willing to promote or financially reward managers with proficient English skills. All 22 managers admit that English is now the major factor in job hiring and promotion. Several even reported losing promotions because of insufficient English proficiency. These factors contribute to managers spending time and money at a language school like Dialektos.

Limitations of the current study

Survey responses and a limited number of follow-up interviews comprised the data collection in the current study as it did in Sacco (2019) and Sacco & Ohin-Traoré (2022). These two sources of data alone do not meet the triangulation standard in a traditional qualitative study or a hybrid quantitative-qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The use of limited data collection was due to the pandemic which prevented the authors from embedding within the 21 companies and corporations. As a result, the authors had no opportunity to confirm the percentage of time Dialektos students work in French and English through direct observation or input from immediate superiors. We were also not able to interview human resources directors or immediate superiors to gain their perspectives on workplace language policy and use in their respective companies.¹⁶ Finally, the data provided in the study are respondents' perceptions. Despite these limitations, the survey and interview data in the present study revealed interesting insight into workplace language usage and confirmed the respondents' perception of working in a multilingual setting.

Conclusion

The key question we asked at the beginning of the present study was whether Francophone Africa is bucking the trend of English as the dominant workplace language or is it simply moving slowly toward English dominance? French is the dominant language as of this writing, but we predict that the use of English will increase and even surpass French in the next decade or two. Separate from the current paper, Sacco (2017), and Sacco & Ohin-Traoré (2022), the senior author queried LinkedIn users in an informal survey: "Will English dominate as the primary workplace language in Francophone Africa by the end of the decade?" A total of 74 respondents participated

¹⁵ To put these low scores in perspective, Magoosh states: "Less than 80: This is generally not a good TOEFL iBT score. If you below on 80 on the TOEFL, it will be hard to get into an English language university, unless you go for conditional acceptance." The minimum average score recorded on the TOEFL for students applying to U.S. colleges and universities is 66. The maximum is 105 (Papageorgiou, 2015).

¹⁶ We are currently contacting a group of human resources directors to participate in a future study.

and 81% said yes. Despite the rising importance of English, the multilingual workplace will most likely continue to exist. French and English will co-exist in most Francophone countries; in other countries like Mauritania and Senegal, Arabic and Wolof will continue to compete with French and English. “Englishnization” has not taken hold, nor will it most likely in our lifetime.

Unconcerned with Hiroshi Mikitani’s English-language mandate at Rakuten or Neeley’s declaration, 200 million French-speaking customers will continue to purchase goods and services in French.¹⁷ Furthermore, English-language education in Francophone Africa will continue to impede English dominance in the workplace. Despite nearly a decade of English instruction in primary, secondary, and tertiary education, instructional method, class size, nonnative instructors, and poverty are the biggest challenges to producing work-related proficiency in English. Class size of 40 to 60 in English classes constrains any focus on communication and most instructors we have encountered are nonnative speakers of English. During the senior author’s semester as a visiting professor at a leading polytechnical institute, he and his wife were the only English native speakers on campus. Sacco (2020) has pushed for English as a medium of instruction (EMI), but public universities in French West Africa must see policy changes at national ministries of education. EMI has not taken root as it has in many European and Asian universities. Dual-language instruction, which is becoming increasingly popular in the U.S. has also not taken root in Francophone Africa. Study abroad or internships abroad in English-speaking are available, but poverty plays a role of preventing most tertiary students from benefitting from them. Sacco & Ohin-Traoré (2022) found that only a handful of the 124 subjects have studied or worked abroad. Most have worked hard to improve their English while remaining in Francophone Africa. Language schools serve as a major source to strengthen one’s English.¹⁸

Finally, let us look at the English proficiency levels reported by respondents. First, the authors need to mention that Cambridge English (2016), in citing data from over 3,000 corporations worldwide, reports that nearly 50% of corporations require *advanced to native ability* in English. That translates to C1 – Advanced English and C2 – Proficiency English. In the study, only 9.1% of respondents meet this level of proficiency. In Sacco & Ohin-Traoré (2022), only 17.7% met this desired level of proficiency.

Cambridge English queried transportation and distribution companies worldwide:

What level of English do employers require for tasks at work?

A total of 35% of respondents require advanced or native level (C1, C2) for writing emails and letters, 42% for delivering presentations, 33% for participating in meetings, and 47% in reading reports. As the use of English increases in the workplace in Francophone Africa, companies will need to invest in English-language training and hire more C1 and C2 job

¹⁷ It is ironic that Rakuten’s “all English, all the time” employees advertise in French on the Rakuten website and communicate in French with French-speaking customers and probably with each other.

¹⁸ In the current study, none of the 22 respondents studied or interned abroad in an English-speaking country.

candidates. In the Cambridge English study, only 4% of transportation/distribution companies plan to invest in English instruction.

As we have demonstrated in the present study, companies are eager to hire professionals with intermediate to advanced English skills, but it is up to these professionals to invest their own time and money to strengthen their English. It is too late for dual-language immersion or English as a means of instruction, but what if companies financed managers who work while visiting friends in an English-speaking country? The women in the logistics study and the participants in the current study all have friends in English-speaking countries. Given the pandemic-based work environment in which many participants in both studies are working from home, what if a manager could stay with friends in the UK or in the US for a month or more where they would work, live in English, and attend English classes in their free time? This immersion-related work experience is possible in the UK where the UK and French West Africa share the same time zone. The manager would work the shift while in London and strengthen his or her English the rest of the day through immersion if the company perhaps paid for the transportation, a month's rent, and a per diem. Is it not worth the effort to make this proposal to companies that desire C1 skills. It may be a win-win for both companies and managers.

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