

The Impact of the Economical – Technological Development in Sudanese Labor Market and English Language Teaching, (ELT).

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ABSTRACT :

This study aims to shade the light on the impact of the recent economic - technological development on the Sudanese labor market and English language teaching (ELT). Traditionally, it is essential for language planners and course materials designers to consider the importance of the sociopolitical factors to syllabus and course materials design. However, the unprecedented economical – technological development in the Sudanese labor market has superseded the sociopolitical factors, particularly after the oil exploration and production in 2005 that led to sweeping reforms in the language policy. More specifically, course materials designers are adhered to produce materials that can work concurrently and effectively to meet the needs of the current situation. Although the English language status in Sudan has fluctuated positively and negatively throughout the successive political regimes, it still maintains neutral popular attitude and social prestige. Although the educational language policy of Arabization that has stated in the 70s has weakened the standard of English language and the students' competence, the status of English kept neutral in the society. Furthermore, the higher education institutions are rapidly undergone structural and administrative change due to political factors. Consequently, course materials designers have to account all these variables when producing course materials to equip the students with the current labor market needs.

المستخلص :

تهدف هذا الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على تأثير التنمية الاقتصادية والتكنولوجية على سوق العمل وتدريب اللغة الإنجليزية في السودان. قد جرت العادة دائماً أن يأخذ مخطى اللغة ومصممي المواد الدراسية في اعتبارهم العوامل الاجتماعية والسياسية عند وضع وتصميم المناهج التعليمية. إلا أن التطور الاقتصادي والتكنولوجي الغير مسبوق قد حل محل العوامل الاجتماعية والسياسية خاصة بعد اكتشاف ونتاج النفط عام 2005 وقد أدى ذلك إلى إصلاحات شاملة في السياسة اللغوية. وبشكل أكثر تحديداً، فإن مصممي المواد الدراسية ملزمون بتصميم مناهج تعليمية قادرة على سد احتياجات الوضع الراهن. ظل وضع اللغة الإنجليزية في السودان محايداً ومرفوقاً اجتماعياً برغم تقلب السياسات اللغوية حيث إن سياسية التعريب قد بدأت في السبعينات وادت إلى ضعف مستوى الطلاب اللغوي إلا إن مكانة اللغة الإنجليزية في المجتمع ظلت مرموقة. وعلاوة على ذلك فإن العوامل السياسية

ظلت تغير بشكل دائم على هيكله وإدارة المعاهد العليا والجامعات. وبالتالي فإن على مصصمي المناهج والمواد الدراسية اذ تلك المتغيرات لمقابلة احتياجات سوق العمل .

INTRODUCTION :

This study aims to shade the light on the impact of the recent economic - technological development on the Sudanese labor market and English language teaching (ELT). Since the mid-1950s of the 20th century, English language teaching and learning was limited for those who were regarded as elites and sophisticated Sudanese classes who were taught and educated by colonised native teachers. With the growing importance of English as a lingua franca for global communication, the need for English expanded significantly in Sudan despite the imperial background people have in mind. The huge demand for acquiring English language skills increased intensively particularly among the fresh graduates and ambitious professionals. They need English for many crucial factors, however, the most important factors either to get a job or climbing up the managerial promotional ladder. The present economic and technological development that have started to blossom in Sudan due to the oil exploration and production created a huge role and demand for Business English communication skills. Certainly, the vast majority of higher education graduates and ambitious professional employees do not meet the newly established market needs that have emerged. However, it is estimated that the vast majority of them lack the skill of Business English for communication that is highly required and demanded in the

labor market. Due to this, they find difficulties to be hired or getting professional promotions. On the other hand, English Language teaching, teachers training and curriculum development have been deliberately ignored through the on-going language planning policy. Consequently, the general standard of English language has declined and unable to equip the fresh graduates and ambitious professional employees with the skill of Business English for communication they need to meet the newly market needs.

Statement of the Problem

Over the last 3 decades, the Sudanese educational system in general and the language planning and policy in particular, especially at the tertiary level, did not exert enough efforts and attention to the curriculum development and English Language Teaching, (ELT) and teachers training. On the contrary, ELT planning and policy has been fluctuated either positively or negatively, unstable to improve the quality and output of the educational system in Sudan. Although English is taught from grade 3 of primary level to grade 3 of the secondary level, yet the learning outcome does not meet the demands of higher education institutes and the labor market needs. Complains are always reported about the weak standard of secondary school students from higher educational institutes. However, for

remedial purposes, some universities enroll the newly joint students for 1 year preparatory English program aiming to improve their English language standard and skills. Similar complaints are reported yet seriously, when the fresh graduates are employed.

Significance of the Study

Business English for communication that is used in the workplace is very demanded and greatly needed by graduate students and professionals. As a result of the emerged economic and technological development in Sudan, teaching and learning English has become a potential business, yet there are some variables we have to consider such as the course materials design, the teaching methodology to ensure positive learning outcomes and the evaluation system. However, this paper will demonstrate the miss match or the gap between what the actual labor market needs and the lack of the required skills that fresh graduates and professional employees really have.

Paper questions

1. Is there is a gap between what graduates and professionals acquire and what is actually needed in the workplace?
2. If yes, what are the main factors that led to this gap?
3. How to bridge the gap?

The Status of English Language in Sudan

In the present chapter of Sudan, English has a new status, function and important role to play. After the comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA, 2005) English

and Arabic have become since the independence in 1956 for the first time official languages (Sudan Tribune, 2005). As a result of oil exploration and production business opportunities have boomed suddenly to open the door widely for foreign investment companies. In addition, local and international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) extended their sustainable development projects in Sudan. Consequently, newly categorized bilingual personnel who are able to communicate fluently in Arabic and English are needed to fill in the current gap. On the contrary, syllabus and course materials design are far away to meeting the demands of the labor market. Moreover, course materials writers and designers do not produce the specific type of English that is needed and used in the workplace. thus, it is clear that the gap between the real needs of the labor market and the higher education language learning outcomes is quite big compared to the past few decades when English language teaching and learning was at the top educational priority (Hurreiz and Beell, 1975) Therefore, what are the reasons behind the lower standard of English language in Sudan? Why English language teaching and learning deteriorated recently? To what extent does the status of English affected? Is it positive or negative? To answer these questions, we have to trace the previous and present on-going language planning and policies in Sudan.

Historical Background

English was first brought in to Sudan at the Condominium rule or the Anglo-

Egyptian colonization (1888 – 1956). The Christian missions that had settled in Southern Sudan helped the spread of English from the 1920s onwards. The Closed Areas Ordinance (1920 – 1948) that had been declared by the British authorities gave special privilege to the Christian missions and strengthens the role of English in the region (Bashir, 1969). For many reasons, English has become the official language in Southern Sudan. Firstly, the religious factor as English resembles the Christianity which most of the southerners believe on it. Secondly, English has become the medium of instruction in all the educational levels and that is why English is well spoken and communicated in the South. Finally, the southerners were aware that acquiring English would give them higher prestige and the opportunities to work in the civil services, (Yousif, Fadle, 2003). However, English spread in the northern part of Sudan from the 1930s as it had become the medium of instruction from grade 7 i.e. the intermediate level and also the key factor to get a post at the civil service (Bashir, 1969). The demand for English expanded expensively in northern Sudan when the British government opened the first higher educational institute, Gordon Memorial College (1934). Thus, the role of English in the northern Sudan has become very vital as English becomes the vehicle for getting education and an employment in the civil services, (Bashir, 1969). Although during the 1930s and 1940s English has got high status and role in the north, in 1948 the British government announced Arabic not English is the official language of the

country, (Hurreiz and Bill, 1975). However, both locals who were not fluent in English could find great difficulties to obtain higher education or to be recruited in the civil service (Bashir, 1969).

CONCLUSION :

After the Independence, 1956

Sudan is one of the richest countries in Africa in terms of its cultural and linguistic diversity: it is estimated to have 134 living languages (Gordon, 2005). In the first Population Census carried out by the newly Independent Sudan in 1956 identified over 100 languages spoken within its territory, (Markee, 1986). Of these, Arabic is the dominant, official national and the most widely spoken language (Abu-Bakr & Abu-Manga 1997). In some parts of the country, including southern and western Sudan, Arabic is used as a lingua franca for economic, political, religious, cultural and social reasons. Hence, Arabic is both an official and a national language. However, this fact is important in 2 reasons. Firstly, languages in contact are potentially languages in conflicts. Therefore, the selection of one language over another language as an official language is politically of great importance to the different language groups in a country (Haugen, 1966). Second the degree of linguistic diversity that exists in Sudan has important implications for the country's economic development since it is thought that extreme multilingualism correlate with underdevelopment (Pool, 1969). Hence, the linguistic diversity and the multilingual feature of Sudan has

affected negatively and led to many cultural, social and political conflicts. Therefore, Sudan can be divided into a Muslim / Arab northern region and a Christian – pagan / African southern

region. Consequently, the political, economic and educational policies of the northern and southern regions were, and still are different (Holt and Daly, 1979). For these mentioned reasons the north and south should be considered separately. Unfortunately the gap between the two parts has found a miss match and led to the secession in 2011. However, English thrived and reached the peak shortly after the independence, 1956. Although General Ibrahim Abboud had come to power with the first military de coup (1958 – 1964), his language policy towards English was very positive. Firstly, he maintained English as the medium of instruction and introduced Arabic language as merely a subject in the south. Secondly, he changed the educational schooling system from (6-3-3) into (4-4-4) and introduced the Reader Series of Longman at the intermediate level. Finally, he attempted to sustain Arabic as a national language and English as a medium of instruction (Beshir, 1977)

National Islamic Front, 1977

The status of English has changed again when Brigadier Gaafer Numeiry came into power following another military de coup. During Numeiry's regime (1969 – 1985) the status of English began to decrease gradually, (Hurreiz, 1968). Even though Numeiry kept English as the medium of instruction in the higher education institutes, he implemented

Arabic as the medium of instruction in the intermediate and secondary school levels. Numeiry's regime intended to diminish the role of English in the north as well as in the south when Numeiry insisted to implement Arabic as the medium of instruction in the south in the basic, intermediate and secondary schools. Along with the Sharia Laws, these decisions were received fiercely in the south and led to the longest civil war (1983 – 2005) in the African continent.

However, Numeiry succeeded to introduce and implement the Arabic language as the medium of instruction in the south Sudan for the first time since the British colonization in 1898 (Idris, 2006). Consequently, the fluctuated language policy has played a crucial role on the ongoing conflict between the south and north. The popular attitude towards English has become even worse when the National Islamic Front headed By Dr. Hassan Al-Torabi joined Numeiry's government in the 1980s. There was a widespread tendency that Arabic is the national, cultural language of Sudan and it is the language of Islam. Furthermore, the Islamic elites, educated and politicians claimed that English symbolizes the British colonization and the Christian religion; therefore, it should be eliminated from the education (Abu Manga, 1992). As a matter of fact, we cannot ignore the fact that Arabic is a lingua franca and (Arabi Juba) emerged as L1 where all the ethnic southern and western groups use Arabic for communication even after the secession of 2011. However, there was another complain urging the falling standards of English language teaching that effected the competence of English usage in

general (Abu baker, 1975). Therefore, it is clear that the national official languages Arabic and English have been concerned more than the other local indigenous languages L1s and are responsible to endanger or diminish some of them in the north and south Sudan (Idris, 2006)

National Salvation Revolution, 1989

In 1989 the Islamic Military Junta took over the power, following yet the third military de coup that exists up-to-date. The Islamic educational concept of Arabicization immediately revived and introduced. This meant that Arabic is used as the sole medium of instruction in all the educational levels, even in the tertiary level. The Islamic Military Revolution aimed not only to introduce Arabic as a national, cultural and religious language but also to create a negative attitude towards English (Useem, 1998). Of course, the civil war in the South as well as the international sanctions led by the USA and the global capital system were further elements which helped the Islamic government in their efforts to change the popular attitudes towards English (Abu Manga, 1992). The government tried hard to stop the war in the South. They succeeded to mobilize a huge number of young people under the revolutionary Islamic term of Jihad. For almost 15 years, the mass media, cultural events and the educational curriculum were directed against America (an English spoken country) which is responsible for the economic sanction in Sudan. Meanwhile, Islamic political oratory flourished, and public mobilization for Jihad was the priority. In 1991 the government

changed the educational system from (6-3-3) to (8-3) i.e., the elementary level with 8 grades and the secondary level with 3 grades which exists up to date and they eliminated the intermediate level. At the beginning of the Islamic Military revolution English was introduced as a curriculum subject in the 5th grade of the elementary level. There was popular complain towards the standard of English skills and the parents started to realize the disadvantages of the language policy (Useem, 1998).

Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), 2005

At the beginning of the millennium, the Islamic government began to show signs of flexibility. This led to the advent of peace negotiations and, eventually, the Interim Peace Agreement between the North and the South in 2004. The Islamic government and the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) headed by Dr John Garang signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) which conceded for the first time that English is an official language along with Arabic language. Once again, English became the medium of instruction in some of the higher education institutes although not yet fully implemented (Sudan Tribune 2004). With the CPA, English has thrived again and it has an essential and effective role to play after the post-peace era of development of Sudan. As a result of the parents complains, also to send a flexible message to America, they introduced English as a curriculum subject in the 2nd grade of the elementary level. During the interim peace of (2004-2005) English reached the peak

with Dr. John Garang's speeches which were in English. Although the vast majority of the young Sudanese did not understand his conceptual mottos, they admired his English oratory skills. John Garang who was appointed as a vice-president was proclaiming a New Sudan of unity and solidarity, and a New Generation of Peace between the North and the South. Dr. John Garang's speeches helped to revive the use of English after a long period of absence (Dardig, 2007). Another factor that has revived the status of English in Sudan is the ongoing relief assistance in Darfur. The chaotic situation and the tribal disputes in Darfur have attracted the attention of international organizations. Many foreign social workers have arrived to offer relief assistance for the miserable situation in the western area of Sudan. Darfur has become the focus of attention of the world's mass media. Many non-governmental organizations have hired many local employees. As a result, many Sudanese graduates have enrolled in intensive English courses to improve their English language skills, (UNDP, 2007). Similarly, many foreign oil exploration companies rushed to invest in Sudan after the discovery of oil reservoir in the western and southern parts of Sudan. However, these companies announced the vacancies in national and international oil companies in the English language, despite the fact that they were published in the local Arabic Sudanese newspapers and magazines. The demand for English becomes greater than before and the public attitude towards English changed radically because English has become the language of development and a

means of living, not the language of colonization any more (Markee, 1986)

The Interim Peace Period, 2005 - 2011

The situation during the six years interim peace period (2005 – 2011) witnessed many tribal conflicts in the western Sudan as well as some political disputes in the east part and regular misunderstanding between the Congress National Party (NCP) and the Sudanese Public Liberation Movement (SPLM). Predictions and speculations abound. Investment opportunities are vigorously sought after because of the multiple natural and human resources which are available, (Republic of Sudan, 1998). Recent oil exploration in Sudan also indicates that there are reserves which, if properly exploited, could lead to major improvement in the living conditions and English has a major role to play in the economic development process (Hutchinson & Waters, 1978)

North & South Sudan Secession, 2011

Although many English language professionals and educators expected the role and status of English diminishes after North South secession of 2011, the public attitude towards English has shown positive response. Teaching and learning English has become a great business for many higher education graduates who are hunting for jobs, (British Council, 2012). Similarly, many ambitious professionals who seek promotional positions in their workplace have started to improve their Business English communication skills for professional development. Business English for communication skills is greatly needed as result of the newly

emerged economic and technological development. However, it is the responsibility of the government as well as the higher education institutes to reconsider and design new English course materials that bridges the existing gap of the labor market.

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