

## The Quest and Rush for the English Language in Cameroon: The Case of UCAC-ICAM

Dr. Forchap Justine ([jforchap@yahoo.com](mailto:jforchap@yahoo.com))

Assistant Professor, University Institute of Central Africa, Cameroon



Copyright: © 2022 by the authors. Licensee [JRSP-ELT \(2456-8104\)](http://JRSP-ELT (2456-8104)). This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the **Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International License**. (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>). Crossref/DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54850/jrspelt.6.30.004>

**Abstract:** *This study looks into the reason why after so many years of neglecting the English language, there has suddenly been an astonishing quest and rush for English. The results showed that Many Cameroonians have come to realized the importance of English for the following reasons according to interviews and observation and data from questionnaire: Firstly, without the English language they are lost in the world of business, secondly, there is the element of complex; if you can speak English, something is added to your personality. Another reason is that, you would be able to communicate with people of different cultures wherever you are in the world. Students on the other hand, want to continue studies, graduate and work in big companies nationally and internationally. Others may never obtain their diploma without a good score in an international English language test in English, as is the case in UCAC-ICAM. They have no choice. From data collected, 100% of the engineering students who participated in the exercise said they needed the TOEIC to obtain their end of course certificate.*

**Keywords:** ELT, English for specific Purposes, UCAC-ICAM

### Background

Cameroon is a bilingual country with French and English as official and national languages as a result of re-unification in 1961. This situation has evolved over the years bringing us to the present situation of 10 regions in Cameroon. Only 2 are English Speaking although it is difficult to draw a clear cut line since both French -speaking and English- speaking Cameroonian are dotted everywhere in all the regions for various reasons. Some for work, others deliberately to learn the other official language and the language in question is the English language. It is important to go back into history to understand the place of each of the official languages and the atmosphere to appreciate the reason for this sudden change of attitude.

In the 60s, 70s, 80s and even into 90s, the English language was considered inferior to the French language. In the University of Yaounde the then lone university in Cameroon, if you were English speaking you earned the derogatory word 'Anglo or Anglose' for female students. English -speaking students had tough times making it through the university. The University of Yaounde was a nightmare for Anglophones as most of the courses were taught in French reflecting the dominant population of the country (Forchap, 2016).

All English- speaking students had to make an effort to speak and write French. Students spent sleepless nights learning French in order to make it at the end of the course. Some English-speaking students had to make friends with French -speaking students in order to have their notes or course work translated even into broken English or '*frac-angalais*' (a slang in Cameroon for a mixture of French and English). Sometimes gestures were used provided the Anglophones who had to do business or follow up documents. Those who worked or lived in any French speaking town had to learn French as well. The reason for which, most Anglophones are able to express themselves in French. The French language was present everywhere and English was eclipsed or relegated to the back page and the speakers likewise. Globalization has turned the tables.

---

## Effect of Globalization in Cameroon

The awareness of the importance of the English language in the world has had a great impact in the history of Cameroon (Forchap, 2016).

Other state universities have been created including 2 in the Anglophone zones- South West and North West regions respectfully. Decree No. 92/074 of 13 April 1992 transformed the university centre of Buea into a full-fledged university and of Bamenda opened in 2011 as the second English language university in Cameroon. Students in the francophone regions started registering in the University of Buea and later in The University of Bamenda. This happened simultaneous with Francophone parents sending their children to English –speaking nursery, primary and secondary schools to make them speak the English language. The question is, ‘why now’? The world today speaks science and technology in English. If you can speak a language when you travel to any part of the world, it is English. For your voice or opinion to hear, state the problem in English.

All in all, the English language has become a prestigious language. It is now common in Cameroon to hear Francophones say ‘Il roll l’anglais’ in admiration of those who speak the English language. English language centers have sprung up like mushrooms in response to this demand.

### Introduction to UCAC-ICAM

There must be a motivating factor in this sudden interest and rush for the English language. The awareness as to the importance of the English language in the University Institute of Science and Technology is now evident. A number of factors have contributed to this. A technician needs to be highly trained; for which, he needs knowledge of the English language which should not only be credible but communicative as well. He needs the English language to feed the machines with instructions. He needs the English language to teach the users of the machines. This is the language that crosses all boundaries in the field of science and technology. Scientists who do not know English may face a handicap (Forchap, 2016). In UCAC-ICAM (Université Catholique de L’afrique Centrale et Institute de Art et Matier) students can be seen in different English language centers just to take courses in English for different reasons; some to speak fluently; others to go abroad to study. Most admissions in schools abroad require an English language proficiency test-IELTS (International English language Testing System), TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication), TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). These English learners have different objectives, and so are their needs, teaching materials and methods. This is where English for, Specific purposes comes into play. English for general purposes has to do with everyday life and activities whereas English in preparation for Exams is oriented to meet the exam requirements.

UCAC-ICAM, for example obligates students to have at least a score of 785 on 990, without which an engineering certificate cannot be obtained at the end of the fifth year.

### Methodology

#### The Sampling Population

The questionnaire was administered to UCAC-ICAM students from different countries in Africa and France. It is important to know that the Institute has students of French nationality. These countries are Cameroon, Gabon, Congo Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central Africa, Burkina Faso and France as earlier mentioned. In all there were 100 students selected from all the classes. Data collection was got from interviews to have a clue as to the type of questionnaire to design, the questionnaire itself and observation.

#### Nature of Questionnaire

I am learning English

No	Reason/ Question	yes	%	No	%
1	To speak English fluently for prestige.	60	60	40	40
2	My admission into a school abroad requires TOEFL	40	40	60	60
3	My job opportunity abroad requires TOEIC	10	10	90	90
4	My admission into a school abroad requires IELTS	40	40	60	60
5	To graduate as an engineering certificate	100	100	00	00
6	Do you go to a language Center to learn English?	75	75	25	25
7	If you go to a language center, state your reason.	<p>a. I am French-speaking and must work extra hard to learn English.</p> <p>b. I'm English-speaking but I need to prepare for the exam because I have problems with the accents.</p> <p>c. I don't</p>			

**Analyses and Discussion**

60% of the students said they wanted to learn English so as to speak it fluently when questioned orally, some said they admired the way Americans speak the language while others simply said English sounds good in their ears. There were others who said they want to be able to express themselves in English as it is the language spoken all over the world.

Al Asmari,( 2015 ) carried out a similar study regarding attitudes of students towards English and results confirmed a positive attitudes towards English language, native speakers and the culture of English-speaking countries indicating that they bear intrinsic motivational orientations along with strong extrinsic ones.

40% of the participants affirmed they needed the TOEFL (Test of English as a foreign language) certificate to fulfill the conditions for admission into a university aboard. This is a test that measures the English language ability of students who need to study in an academic environment. This is not limited to English speaking countries; 20% need the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication).

The exam is an English language proficiency test for non-native speakers. It is a test for people who use English in their every day working lives. Students who want to be in an international working environment for businesses or work for an organization in all parts of the world need this certificate to communicate with others in English.

40% of the participants said they needed IELTS certificate (International English Language Testing System). The IELTS exam is becoming more and more popular for people who need to use English for work or study. In many countries such as the UK, Ireland, Canada, South Africa, Australia and New

Zealand, IELTS scores are used to assess people's suitability for jobs and for university and college places Pearson (Longman Exam Coach).

All the participants-100% said they needed the TOEIC certificate to (Test of English for International Communication) to graduate as engineers.

This is a proficiency test for non-native speakers. It measures the English language ability of people who use English in their everyday working lives. The score indicates how well you can communicate with others in English in an international working environment. Businesses and organizations all over the world use these scores to help them make decisions about who to employ, who to promote, and who to offer training to Pearson (Longman Exam Coach). Students in UCAC-ICAM take English courses seriously because their end of course certificate is awarded only and only if they obtain the required score- at least 785/990.

## Results

This study has demonstrated that there are many reasons; why there is this awareness to learn the English language. Apart from learning English for business, for employment and for studies, there is the interesting reason that it is a prestigious language and people feel good when they are able to express themselves in English.

On an individual level, it improves personality and increases sense of self-worth. In simple words, learning a foreign language makes the brain stronger and more versatile. Learning English is not only useful, but it also gives a lot of satisfaction and making progress will make you feel great. Considering that there are specific needs, the teaching of English has to be geared towards those specific needs. This calls for ESP (English for specific Purposes) Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987).

## Conclusion

The rush to learn the English language has created jobs for many. In Cameroon English language centers are fast springing up and so the demand for qualified English language teachers is high. This does not go without its downside. Many of these teachers are not qualified. They can barely speak English. French speaking teachers who did the bilingual course are now 'specialists' in the English language. English speaking teachers who studied history, geography, computer science and so on are now English teachers (Forchap, 2016).

Anybody who can utter a few words in English has become an English teacher. If the teaching of English has to be meaningful, ESP is the answer. Language Centers and schools should draw up a curriculum to meet the specific needs of the learners. Gatehouse K (2001) emphasizes the fact that the Key Issues in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is Curriculum Development. This will go a long way to identify teachers who are qualified and disqualify teachers who are not competent. Thus, the quest and rush for the English language is for specific purposes and this should be taken seriously.

## References

Al Asmari,( 2015 ). Communicative Language Teaching in EFL University Context: Challenges for Teachers. Journal of Education and Practice. [www.iiste.org](http://www.iiste.org). ISSN 2222-1735 (Paper) ISSN 2222-288X (Online), Vol.6, No.18, 2015.

ETS Global (<https://www.etsglobal.org/pl/en/blog/news/importance-of-learning-english>)

Forchap J. (2016) *English Through Science and Technology*. LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing.[www.lap-publishing.com](http://www.lap-publishing.com). <https://www.amazon.com/English-through-Science-Technology>.

---

Forchap J (2016) The Implications of Integrating Science, Technology and English in a Bilingual University: The Case of the University of Dschang. The International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention. Volume 3 issue 1 2016 page no.1816-1827 ISSN.

Gatehouse K (2001) Key Issues in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Curriculum Development. The Internet TESL Journal, Vol. VII, No. 10, October 2001 <http://www.hanteslj.org/Articles/Gatehouse>.

Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A (1987). English for Specific Purposes: A learning-centered approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tulasi and Rao (2021). A Review of Humanistic Approach to Student Centred Instruction. The Review of Contemporary Scientific and Academic Studies. ISSN: 2583-1380 Vol. 1 | Issue 1 | December 2021 [www.thercsas.com](http://www.thercsas.com)