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## Re-evaluating the Hegemony of the English Language in Western Africa: A Critical Review of the Research (2003 to 2018)

Oris Tom-Lawyer<sup>1\*</sup>, Michael Thomas<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of English, Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>School of Education, Liverpool John Moores University, IM Marsh Campus, Liverpool, L17 6BD, United Kingdom

**Corresponding Author:** Oris Tom-Lawyer, E-mail: bemigho2004@gmail.com

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### ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to analyse the hegemony of the English language in Western Africa. The originality of the approach stems from its reading of hegemony through the lens of educational policies and the socio-economic functions of the language and its examination of the premise that there is a positive link between English and development contexts (Coleman, 2010). The study aims to fill a gap in existing research on the role of English in the development of Western Africa by exploring the usefulness of English's linguistic hegemony in the region, and to counter the negative connotations that it has always attracted. Based on a critical review of the research literature between 2003 and 2018, the paper concludes that the hegemony of English has resulted in the development of anglophone countries in Western Africa, while in the francophone/lusophone regions, industrial backwardness and low literacy rates have been consequences of English language marginalisation. In conclusion, it recommends, amongst other implications, the need for the early introduction of English into French curricula.

**Key words:** Linguistic Hegemony, English Language, West Africa, Developmental Tool, Educational Policies

### INTRODUCTION

English is a global language that has defied all the odds to attain the highest status a language can achieve, namely, integration into the educational systems of most countries in the world. As a subject of study, it is the most taught foreign language in nearly all countries globally and a medium of instruction in approximately 55 countries (Dearden, 2015). Previous research has justified the hegemony of the English language as a global phenomenon (Ammon, 1992; Tsuda 1992 & Ortiz, 2011) and among second language English speakers in general (Tietze & Dick, 2012 & Mustapha, 2014). Over the last century English has become a global language due to complex interconnections between colonialism, neo-colonialism, capitalism, migration and immigration (Guo & Beckett, 2008). Following Gramsci (Mustapha, 2014), the hegemony of English has been enabled by its adoption as an official language by anglophone Western African leaders following independence in the period since the early 1950s (Phillipson, 1996; cited in Negash, 2011). The main contribution of English to Western Africa lies in its use as the language of mainstream education (Negash, 2011). English has an integrating (Loomba, 1998), unifying nature and the language has become widespread as a result (Verghese, 2007).

The imbalance in the educational sectors of the English and French/Portuguese speaking colonies in Western Africa

needs to be addressed. More so as the imbalance is a result of the languages spoken in such areas. The aim of the study is to re-evaluate the consequences of the hegemony of English in the Western African region. Its objective is to demonstrate that English is a tool for development in the region. The peculiar structure of Western Africa has informed the study in that there are five anglophone, nine francophone and two lusophone countries in the region. In classifying English users in Western Africa, two categories emerge: the former British and American colonies (in which English is studied as a second language) and the users of English as a foreign language - the francophone and lusophone countries, where they are encouraged to use English. However, in this context English is seen as a threat to the French language (BBC, 2007). Indeed, Plonski, Teferra and Brady (2013) predict that French may become extinct in Western Africa within twenty years. The linguistic hegemony of the English language in anglophone countries can easily be justified. However, the socio-economic roles of English in the other parts of the region indicate that English is gradually making in-roads into the francophone countries and it has been estimated that there are only 67,000 native speakers of French in the whole region (Coleman, 2013). Arising from this complex linguistic context, this study has identified four main research questions:

1. What are the socio-economic functions of English in francophone/lusophone countries?  
The question aims to understand the hegemony of English in the francophone/lusophone countries by exploring its socio-economic functions.
2. What factors promote the hegemony of English in anglophone countries?  
The factors that promote the hegemony of the English language in the anglophone countries will be explored, to enable us to determine the development in the region.
3. To what extent is English hegemonic in Western Africa?  
This question provides a balance between the hegemony and non-hegemony of the English language in the region.
4. What are the implications of the non-hegemony of the English language in Western Africa?  
This question aims to explore the disadvantages of the non-hegemony of English language in the region.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a critical review of research studies dealing with the linguistic hegemony of English, particularly in the Western African (five anglophone, nine francophone and two lusophone countries) region. The key terms searched for were ‘linguistic hegemony of English language’ and ‘linguistic hegemony’. Journal articles, blogs, news media, review reports and research papers at international conferences were used. The indexes used were Google Scholar, Researchgate, Academia and Research4life. Most of the studies cited were conducted in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century between 2003 and 2018 and thus the scope of the research spans more than a decade. These studies were considered in order to provide a contemporary understanding of the status of English and French. The literature cited in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was necessary for the presentation of factual information; thus, they are included. The year 2019 is not recognised as a full year. Table 1, Columns 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 show that approximately 23 (40%) journals, 15 news media (26%), 14 books/monographs (25%), 3 blogs (5%) and 2 conference papers (4%) were reviewed. The journals (see Column 1) had themes including the teaching and learning of English as a Second Language, the hegemony of English and the status of English. The news media reports (see Column 2) consisted mainly of narratives needed to complement the study; these narratives provided factual information. The news media reports also had themes such as the standard of English and the status of English. Most of the studies in the monographs and some books (see Column 3) were studies commissioned by the British Council and included themes on English language and development and English as a medium of instruction. They also cantered on language planning and policies. The books provided an insight into the status of English in francophone countries and the lapses of the French language. The blogs (see Column 4) had instructive articles addressing the theme of the necessity of English. The thesis and conference papers (see Column 5) considered the status of English in Africa and the francophone region and provide

a broader picture of this study. The themes gave rise to the research questions guiding the study and these are shown on Table 1.

## BACKGROUND

Western Africa has a population of 389,222,366 (Worldometers, 2019). The nations in the region (excluding Mauritania) are also known as the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS) (Kennedy, 2002). They were colonised by the British, French, Portuguese and Americans (Camara, 2001). Most countries in Western Africa gained independence in the 1960s. There are 16 countries in the region and English, French and Portuguese are their official languages. The countries in which English is an official language are Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. The countries where French is the official language are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d’voire, Mali, Guinea, Niger, Mauritania, Senegal and Togo. The Portuguese countries are Cabo Verde and Guinea Bissau. These nations are also known as anglophone, francophone and lusophone countries. The research literature reveals that the francophone countries cannot be considered ‘French speaking’ as the language is only spoken by a minority in the countries (Coleman, 2013). Most countries in Western Africa are multilingual despite their populations (Bamgbose, 1991). A further line of demarcation is the origin of language education policies in these countries as noted by Bamgbose (2002): firstly, countries where local languages are functional in classrooms (Ghana, Nigeria and Gambia), countries, where they are non-functional (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d’voire, Gabon, Mali, Guinea, Mauritania, Senegal and Niger, Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau) and countries without a mother tongue teaching policy (Liberia and Sierra Leone). A list of the countries in Western Africa, their population and languages is shown in Table 2.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### English as a Developmental Tool

Currently, research suggests a correlation exists between English skills and the economic development of countries (Coleman, 2010; McCormick, 2013). A report in the Harvard Business Review (2013), for example, identified several findings linking English with development both individually and nationally. These include a boost in Gross National Income (GNI) and Gross National Product (GDP), an increase in per capital income as a result of proficiency in English, higher incentives (30-50%) for job seekers with proficiency in English skills, and general quality of life as English is necessary for global business (McCormick, 2013). From the perspective of linguists, English for development entails the following functions: it facilitates employment; it is a tool for mobility and development; it is a channel for unlocking development opportunities/accessing crucial information; and an impartial language (Coleman, 2010). In a report by Euromonitor International (2010) that was commissioned by the British Council, the benefits of being proficient in

**Table 1.** Themes for the Study

| Themes  | Journals  | News Media Reports   | Books and Monographs                                   | Blogs                 | Theses and Dissertation/Conference Proceedings                            |
|---|---|--|--|-----------------------|---|
| The status of English                                       | Djigo (2017); Asante (2017); Mahlool (2009); Focho (2011)   | BBC (2007); Legit (2017)   | Coleman (2013); Makoni & Makoni (2009); Crystal (2003) | UK Essays Blog (2018) | African Studies Association Annual Conference                             |
| English Language Teaching and Learning as a Second Language | Genc & Bada (2010)  |  | Verghese (2007)  | UK/Blogs/TEFL (2002)  |   |
| Hegemony of English Language                                | Altbach (2015); Guo & Beckett (2007); Mustapha (2014); Shannons (1995); Yoo & Namkung (2012); Galloway (2017) | The Guardian, UK (2018); ISA Global Dialogue (2007)  |  |                       |   |
| Language Policy in Education                                | Ansah (2004); Igboanusi (2013); Laitin & Ramachandra (2015); Mukama (2007)                                    | ADEA Newsletter (2005)   | Bamgbose (1991); Ouedraogo (2000); Calderbank (2013)   |                       |   |
| Linguistic Hegemony   | Eriksen (1992)  | Culture Trip (2017); Modern Ghana (2009)   | Ives (2004)  |                       |   |
| English as a Medium of Instruction                          |   |  | Dearden (2015); Nyika (2015); NPE (2004)               |                       |   |
| French as a Medium of Instruction                           | Hamid, Nguyen & Kamwangamalu (2014)   |  | Alidou (2003)  |                       |   |
| Portuguese as a Medium of Instruction                       | Spolsky (2017)  |  |  |                       |   |
| English Language and Development                            |   | Harvard Business Review (2013); Euromonitor International (2010); Jakarta (2012)                 | Negash (2011); Coleman (2010)                          | Kaplan Blog (2019)    |   |
| Languages in Africa   | Bamgbose (1991)   |  |  |                       |   |
| The Standard of English                                     | Alexander & Ola-Busari (2014); Akeredolu-Ale (2007)   | The Point (2017); Ghana Web (2008); The Informer (Liberia) (2012); Daily Graphic, (Ghana) (2008) |  |                       |   |
| Language and Culture  | Quarcoo & Dako (2017)   |  |  |                       |   |
| Francophone Region  | Oduro & Aryee (2003)  |  |  |                       | Francophone Regionalism and its impact on West African Integration (2001) |

English in some developing countries (Nigeria, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Cameroon and Rwanda) were highlighted as: investments from English speaking countries accounted for 33% to 41% of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) (Rwanda and French speaking Cameroon missed out); increases in

measurements of the quality of life; it benefits the elites in the urban areas; and it attracts new in-country investment. Other benefits include higher salaries, access to information via the internet, and a positive effect on tourism (Kaplan International English, 2019).

**Table 2.** West african countries

| Country       | Population  | Languages   |
|---------------|-------------|---|
| Benin         | 11,801,595  | Aja, Batonwa/Bariba, Dendu, Fon, Ditamari and Yoruba  |
| Burkina Faso  | 20,321,560  | African languages of the Sudanic family   |
| Cabo Verde    | 560,349     | Crioulo   |
| Cote d'ivoire | 25,531,083  | 60 native dialects, Dioula, most widely spoken  |
| Gambia        | 2,228,075   | Madinka, Wolof, Fula and other languages.<br>English Language (40,000)  |
| Ghana         | 30,096,970  | Asante, Ewe, Fante, Borong, Dagomba, Dangme, Dagarte, Kokomba, Akyem, Ga and others.<br>English Language (18,000,000)                       |
| Guinea        | 13,398,180  | Pular, Mninka, Susu, other native language.   |
| Guinea-Bissau | 1,953,723   | Crioulo (lingua franca), Pular, Mandingo  |
| Liberia       | 4,977,720   | English 20% (official) some ethnic group languages, few of which can be written or used in correspondence.<br>English Language (3,100,000). |
| Mali          | 19,689,140  | The country has 13 national languages   |
| Mauritania    | 4,661,149   | Arabic (official and national) Pular, Soninke, Wolof (all national languages) French  |
| Niger         | 23,179,691  | Hausa and Djerma  |
| Nigeria       | 200,962,417 | Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Fulani and over 500 additional languages.<br>English (79,000,000).   |
| Senegal       | 16,743,859  | Wolof, Pular, Jola, Madinka, Serer, Soninke   |
| Sierra Leone  | 7,883,123   | Mende, Temne, Krio  |
| Togo          | 8,186,348   | Ewe, Mina, Kabiye, Dagomba.<br>English Language (4,900,000)   |

Source: World Factbook 2019 and Wikipedia 2019

### Hegemony of the English Language

The hegemony of English is a subject that has been extensively explored by scholars. Research shows that the definition of terms such as 'linguistic hegemony', 'hegemony of the English Language', and 'hegemony' abound (Shannon, 1995; Ives, 2004; Yoo & Namkung, 2012; Mustapha, 2014). Hegemony is a Greek derivation which means 'leadership' or 'internship'. Gramsci described hegemony as the adoption of the language of a category of people by another class of people through power, conflict or consent (Ives, 2004). Previous research has concentrated on the negative impact of the hegemony of English in Africa, as it is perceived as endangering local languages; how it portrays the development of African languages as a mirage; how non-English speakers face discrimination; how Anglicisation may cause division

in the world (Stutnab-Kangas 2000, Sonaiya 2007 cited in Mustapha, 2014); how the dominant status of English is neo-colonialism that creates inequality (Tsuda, 1992); and how it leads to loss of identity and/or the dominance of a first language (Guo & Beckett, 2008).

In contrast to this view, this paper foregrounds the positive implications of English language hegemony. The hegemony of English in anglophone Western Africa was established through consensual rule as English was willingly adopted as an official language at independence by the post-independence leaders of various anglophone countries (Negash, 2011) such as Nigeria and Ghana. The paper adopts the view of Gramsci on hegemony, in terms of his redefinition of hegemony driven by consent (Ives, 2004). In the same vein, language as a political issue in this context shows that due to the multilingual nature of the Western African countries, English was adopted to prevent the development of acrimony among the various ethnic groups. In this respect, the benefits of the hegemony of English are numerous: English is a pre-requisite for communication in the business world; English speaking universities' degrees are well-recognised worldwide; and English is a pre-requisite for growth in the economy of any nation (Euromonitor, 2010). In addition, as a worldwide language (Trimono, 2012), English can be viewed as a tool for individuals/nations that helps to create network links vital for developing economies.

### English as a Medium of Instruction

English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) has been defined as "the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English" (Dearden, 2015, p. 4). Similarly, according to Macaro, Curle, Pun, An and Dearden (2018, p. 37) it is "the use of English ... to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English". In Africa, English is the main medium of instruction (Nyika, 2015). Conversely, in Western Africa, French is the prime medium of instruction. A number of reasons have been provided for the rapid growth of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), including the mistaken belief that English enables graduates to be upwardly mobile and that 94% of quality academic publications are in English (Galloway, 2017). In addition, research has demonstrated that EMI is supported by parents in countries such as Nigeria and Senegal (Dearden, 2015).

### The Decreasing Standard of English in Western African Anglophone Countries

In the Western African anglophone countries - Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, Sierra Leone and Liberia - the use of English as a medium of instruction has been opposed by a variety of stakeholders. In 2015 and 2016, the Minister of Education in Ghana - Prof. Jane Naana Okpoku Agyemang - was reported to have associated the problem of Ghana's educated work force to the non-use of native languages in schools. However, in 2017, a retired Ghanaian diplomat, Dr K. Asante

**Table 3. Current Language Educational Policies in Western Africa**

| Country       | Educational Policy  |
|---------------|---|
| Benin         | The official language of instruction at all levels in Benin is French (Spain Exchange Country Guide, 2018). Article 1 of the constitution stipulates that French is the medium of instruction at all levels and there is the unofficial use of local languages in rural primary schools, with French being introduced later (Coleman, 2013).  |
| Burkina Faso  | The medium of instruction is French as well as the local languages (Hamid, Nguyen & Kamwangamalu, 2014). Article 4 - Blue Print Law on Education (Law 013/96/ADP) 1996 - states that the medium of instruction is French and the national languages (Coleman, 2013).  |
| Cote d'voire  | Article 1 of the constitution declares French to be the sole medium of education (Coleman, 2013).   |
| Cabo Verde    | The official language of instruction in Cabo Verde is Portuguese (Global Academic Evaluators, 2012).  |
| The Gambia    | During the first three years of basic education (grades 1-3). The medium of instruction will be predominantly the Gambian language of the area in which the child lives and English will be taught as a subject from Grade 1 and used as a medium of instruction from Grade 4, whereas Gambian languages will be taught as subjects from Grade 4 (DOSE 2004, 11.1.6, Van Camp and Juffermans 2009, 2; cited in Igboanusi, 2013).                                |
| Ghana         | The medium of instruction in Kindergarten and Lower Primary will be a Ghanaian language and English, where necessary; English is the medium of instruction from Primary 4 in the school system. This means that success in education at all levels depends to a very large extent on the individual's proficiency in the language (Ministry of Education, Science and Sports Teaching Syllabus for English Language September 2007; cited in Ansah 2014, p. 5). |
| Guinea        | The medium of instruction is French as well as the local languages (Hamid, Nguyen & Kamwangamalu, 2014). French is the medium of instruction at all levels. In 1984, French was declared the medium of instruction in primary schools (Coleman, 2013).  |
| Guinea-Bissau | The language of instruction is Portuguese (State University.com).   |
| Liberia       | Liberia has no language policy and English is the medium of instruction (Burrowes, 2017).   |
| Mali          | The country uses French and one of the national languages as media of instruction in schools (grades 1-6), where Convergent Pedagogy has been introduced and French at all other levels of education (Skattum). French is the medium of instruction at all levels of education and the official language (Coleman, 2013).   |
| Mauritania    | The languages of instruction in Mauritania are French, Arabic and other local languages. At the primary level, Arabic is the sole medium of instruction, while French is introduced in the following year. English is given priority at the college level (Spain exchange, 1999-2020). French and Arabic are the languages of instruction and local languages are not used in education (Coleman, 2013).  |
| Niger         | In Niger, French is the medium of instruction though experimentation with African languages has occurred as a result of educational reforms (Bamgbose, 2002).   |
| Nigeria       | The medium of instruction in the primary school is the language of the environment for the first three years. During this period, English is taught as a subject from the fourth year and is progressively used as a medium of instruction as the language of the immediate environment shall be taught as subjects (NPE, 2004).  |
| Senegal       | The main medium of instruction is French in public schools. It is also used at all levels of education (Djigo, 2016). However, there has been an introduction of indigenous languages for instructional purposes, although this has not been widely implemented (Speciale, 2013). English is taught as a second language and it is a compulsory subject in Senegalese secondary schools (Djigo, 2017).  |
| Sierra Leone  | The community language of the child is the medium of instruction at the lower primary classes, while English is used in the upper classes (State University.com).   |
| Togo          | French is the medium of instruction at all levels of education though two national languages are also taught as subjects in secondary schools "with the sole exception of a mother tongue initiative known as EDIL (Ecole d'Initiative Locale) in which communities develop their own primary level community schools" (Coleman, 2013, p. 91).  |

and Dr Matthew Okpoku Prempeh appealed for the maintenance of English as a medium of instruction based on the premise that the choice of English was "favourable and practical". Other reasons were that English was "the language of modernisation and of Ghana's social elite" (Asante, 2017, p. 1). However, English is still the medium of instruction in Ghana.

It is necessary to note that in Western African anglophone countries, a current trend showing a fall in the standard of English has been observed. In Gambia, for example, a drop in the standard of English has been demonstrated in the media; the decrease has also been noticed at all levels of education in general (The Point, 2017). In Ghana, a former

Director-General of Ghana Education Service (GES) argued in this respect that "the fallen standard of education in the country was a result of the downward trend in the use of English language" (Ghanaweb, 2008, p. 1).

The same is applicable to Nigeria where a growing amount of academic research has indicated a systematic decline in the standard of English language teaching (Alexander & Ola-Busari, 2014), particularly in the spoken and written English of Nigerians (Akeredolu-Ale, 2007). In Sierra Leone, there is a dearth of literature on English language education (Berry, 1961; Fyle, 1975; Pemagbi, 1989 cited in Conteh- Morgan 1997). However, Conteh-Morgan (1997, p. 3) notes that English "in Sierra Leone exhibits

certain patterns, which are becoming entrenched, setting it aside from Standard British and other varieties". In Liberia, a consequence of the war experienced in the country has led to a decline in the standard in education (The Informer, 2012).

In diagnosing the problem, teachers in these Western African anglophone countries have often been held responsible. This critical view of teachers may not fairly depict the actual situation considering the number of hours students spend in school in a day. In Ghana, it has been noted that parents have a responsibility with regard to raising the standard of spoken and written English of students. A platform under the aegis of the Ghana Education Service has recommended the need for effective cooperation between parents, teachers and academic services to remedy the problem (Daily Graphic, 2008). Despite these flaws, the level of development relative to English language usage in the countries is commendable.

Several reasons have been provided for the rapid growth of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI); they are the mistaken belief that English enables graduates to be upwardly mobile and that 94% of quality academic publications are in English (Galloway, 2017).

### Language Education Policies in West Africa

Language Education policies in Western Africa encompass the languages used at all levels in an educational system. This points to the fact that language education policies are the prerogative of the ruling class of each nation (as earlier mentioned, the description of hegemony adopted in this paper refers to the adoption of the language of a class of people by another). Therefore, the ruling class of Western African countries have adopted English language as their official language through the machinery of consent in such a way that hegemony has been achieved in a consensual fashion. The subject of language education policies cannot be discussed in Western Africa without the classification of languages into mother tongue, national languages, language of instruction, local languages and colonial languages. The language education policies usually spell out the functions of the aforementioned languages hierarchically. These policies in anglophone countries follow the same course. The British policy was more accommodating as native languages were used as a medium of instruction in the lower primary schools and English was usually introduced as a subject at this stage. At the upper primary level, it becomes the language of instruction. The introduction of English in Western Africa has been traced to the advent of Christian institutions and the status of English has been enabled by the quest for education in English by West Africans (Makoni & Makoni, 2009).

In the discourse of language education policies language has been a central theme. Language development goes *pari passu* with the development of a nation and language development determines global development (Gnamba, 1981). Language plays a major role in the progress of any nation. Linguistically, the progress of a language is determined by its fusion into the system of education of a community and learning a language is associated with 'instrumental'

and 'integrative' motivation (Mahlool, 2009). The origin of language policies in Western Africa can be traced to its division by European countries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and these policies have impacted negatively on education (Chiatoh, 2005). The factors that determine language education policies in Western Africa are the multilingual nature of the countries, the attitude of their governments, the legacy of their colonial masters and the complex nature of the requirements of a modern society (Bamgbose, 1991). Africa has the largest number of languages in the world and therefore multilingualism has been a major factor in the choice of a language education policy. This view was corroborated by Ouedrogo (2000, p. 89), when he asserted that "Education and language issues are very complex in Africa because of the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual situation". It is necessary to note that multilingualism is perceived as a hinderance instead of a resource in Africa (Chiatoh, 2005). However, workplaces often demand multilingualism from potential employees (Savage, 2018). The disposition of the government of each Western African country towards the various languages will determine their attitude to the languages. A visible legacy bequeathed to the colonies by the various colonial governments is the language. However, these distant languages serve as gatekeepers for the allocation of education in African countries (Laitin & Ramachandran, 2015). The fulfilment of the social needs of a society are inherent in the languages of the community. A language of instruction can create a divide among the citizens of a country along social lines (Mukama, 2007). The existing language in education policy in each Western African country has been largely determined by the colonial heritage of such a country. The anglophone countries give pupils the opportunity to learn in their mother tongues in the early years before the transition to English in upper primary. This policy has been critiqued on the grounds that the pupils at that stage do not possess the required basic knowledge in English that would aid the transition to English in upper primary (Calderbank, 2013). Moreover, 5 to 7 years of English language study and dual-language education are needed for successful transition into regular subjects (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013). According to Alidou (2003), UNESCO and World Bank reports show a 25% primary school dropout rate and primary school pupils are also excluded from classrooms due to their inability to understand French. This state of affairs shows the inadequacy of the French policy.

### RESULTS/FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

An insight was given by Coleman (2013) into the status of English in French speaking countries, while most of the studies commissioned by the British Council have concentrated on the function of English in English and French speaking countries. The studies revealed that there is a growing interest in the English language in Francophone countries amongst French students. The status and hegemony of English language were considered by Crystal (2003), Coleman (2011, 2013), Dearden (2015) and other British Council commissioned projects. They reveal the dominant status of English

in most countries and particularly Western African countries. English was also identified as a tool for development in some countries. The language question in Africa was examined by Bamgbose (1991), while Makoni and Makoni (2009) appraised the status of English as a postcolonial language in Africa. Language policies in the region were also assessed by Alidou (2003). The Journals (see Table 1) also corroborated the information by demonstrating the hegemony of the language in various countries. The following research questions and their findings demonstrate that the hegemony of English has a positive connotation in the region, when contrasted with the negative view that is dominant in research literature.

### **What Socioeconomic Functions does English Perform in Francophone/Lusophone Countries?**

French and Portuguese are the mediums of instruction in the francophone/lusophone areas of the region. However, the analysis of the data demonstrates that English performs the following socioeconomic functions:

- i. Unofficial International language in francophone countries: English is not an official language in francophone Western Africa; however, it is needed in certain respects as French speakers require English to be able to access publications in the language (Negash, 2011). English is the prime language of the internet and therefore French speaking communities will be denied access to vital information if they do not have competence in the language.
  - ii. English as a foreign language: in Mali, Cote d’voire and Senegal, English is the first compulsory foreign language to be learnt in schools. In addition, French speakers in Western Africa have shown the need for knowledge of English for various reasons (Negash, 2011). Moreover, English is learnt at the junior and senior secondary schools in these countries (Coleman, 2013). The data shows that in 2012, the President of Gabon, Ali Bongo, announced the promotion of English as a second language in Gabon, and this has become a growing trend in Western Africa more generally (Look & Shryock, 2012). Accordingly, researchers have advocated increasing the number of periods devoted to English language instruction in the Republic of Benin schools as well as French students in the country who enrol in English teaching schools (Bello, Ogundele, Agboola & Akande, 2015).
  - iii. Language used in the commercial and industrial sectors: research has shown the importance of English in the commercial and industrial sectors and evidence that companies operating in various francophone countries have English as their working language, use documentation in English and French, and thus English has become a pre-requisite for employment as it serves as the language of communication on their websites (Coleman, 2013). Reports also show that Cote d’voire has benefitted from direct foreign investments (FDI) because of its growing economy. The French language would have been a barrier to such developments but it has been asserted that
- currently most businessmen in Western Africa are bilinguals in French and English (CNBC Africa, 2013).
  - iv. Working language of regional organisations: the francophone countries are members of some international organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and CEDEAO (Communauté Economique des Etats de l’Afrique de l’Ouest). These have English and French as their working languages (Coleman, 2013, ECDPM, 2017). English is also an official language of the African Union, of which all Western African countries are members.
  - v. Language used during peace keeping missions: the research shows that during the Liberian (1989-1997) and Sierra Leone (1991) crises, peacekeepers from Guinea, Ghana and Sierra Leone had to work together despite their language barriers (Kohou, 2000). However, currently, francophone countries that participate in peacekeeping missions have to learn English in order to function effectively and the British Council runs programmes that aid peacekeepers with the language barrier (Coleman, 2013).
  - vi. Language of commerce: one of the challenges facing traders in anglophone and francophone countries is the ‘French and English divide’ as countries who have a common lingua franca experience a 30% boost in trade (Prempeh, 2019, p.1). English is needed by francophone countries in Western Africa. The same is applicable to anglophone countries. Therefore, according to Coleman (2013, p. 40) there is “growing interest in English” in Benin “because people feel that they need the language for work and travel.” This demonstrates the fact that English is a global language. Trade between Gambia and Senegal, for example, has exposed the Senegalese to English (Djigo, 2017). It is evident from the above that these functions depict a ‘partial linguistic hegemony’ in the francophone/lusophone areas of the region.

### **What Factors Promote Linguistic Hegemony of English in Anglophone Countries?**

The dominance of the English language in the world today is unrivalled (Miknowski, 2018). Its hegemony as a global language has been traced to the status of America as a super power (Altabach, 2015) and its promotion through its culture and technology (Crystal, cited in Genc & Bada, 2010; Guo & Beckett, 2008). Similarly, its linguistic hegemony in the Western African region is partially rooted in the position of the British Empire (with the exception of Liberia, which was an American colony). All the anglophone countries in the region have English as an official language. There are nine francophone countries in the region, who have French as their medium of instruction, while five anglophone countries have English. The data reveals that the following functions serve as a basis for the hegemony of English in the anglophone countries:

- i. Official language: an “official language is defined as one or more languages that a country utilizes as an official form of communication in education, government, or commerce” (Plonski, Teferra & Brady, 2013, p. 4).



- English is the official language in approximately 59 countries in the world (Miknowski, 2018), the Western African anglophone countries inclusive. In Ghana, approximately 67% of the population speak English (Agu, 2017). An official language is usually the language of government, education, commerce and trade, the judiciary and media/entertainment. An official language is different from a national language in that its functions are broader, while a national language has limited functions.
- ii. Medium of instruction: “language of instruction (LOI) is defined as the language in which the subject matter is taught in a public or private school setting” (Plonski, Teferra & Brady, 2013, p.5). In anglophone states, English is the medium of instruction. A general feature of such policies is the introduction of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction at the lower primary school and English at the upper primary schools. In Nigerian urban private schools, English is the medium of instruction from kindergarten onwards. There are various reasons for the adoption of colonial languages for instructional purpose. They are the non-development of African languages, the non-suitability of Western African languages for tertiary university learning (Wolff, 2018), the marginalization of minority languages by such educational policies, the need for a lingua franca in various Western African countries. It is interesting to note that there have been several high profile predictions regarding the status of English and French by the mid-point of the twenty-first century, according to which half the world’s populace would be English language proficient and French would be extinct in Africa (The Triumph of English, 2011 & Plonski, Teferra & Brady, 2013). As a global language approximately 1.75 billion people speak the language. The reasons given for its prominence in the world are that it is the most preferred foreign language; it is the language of the European Union; it generates significant income as a result of English language teaching and it has become a pre-requisite for better job opportunities (Ostler, 2018). Therefore, the ascendancy of English has been associated with the hegemony of the United States (The triumph of English cited in Plonski, Teferra & Brady, 2013). The concern of Anglophone countries with English as a medium of instruction in the future would be the quality of provision for learning English as a second language (ESL) (Emerging Strategy, 2015) as competence in English is required for Africans who desire higher education in countries such as the UK and America.
  - iii. Scholarly and academic publications: English obtained its status as the medium of academic communication in the 1950s (Altbach, 2015). Academics in Western Africa disseminate their publications in English and they benefit regionally and globally as a result of the volume of publications in the language. In addition, according to Ortiz (2011; cited in Mustapha, 2014, p.88) “between 1980 and 1996 in the Social Science Citation Index Database, English publications account[ed] for between 85% and 90% of all articles”.
  - iv. Language of international organisations in the region: some of the international organisations in the region that possess English as a working language include the African Union (AU) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). They have English and French as their working languages. These countries also belong to the Commonwealth and United Nations whose roles cannot be overemphasized as English is also their working language (Focho, 2011).
  - v. Lingua franca (Symbol of Unity): It has been “argued that humans are on the way to a pre-Babylonian state; yet most feel the need for a lingual franca” (Genc & Bada, 2010). In this context, English may be classified as a second language due to its status as an educational language. The anglophone countries are multilingual states, therefore, English is a lingua franca within the countries. It is a symbol of unity in the various countries as a result of their multilingual status. The absence of English in the anglophone countries would mean the presence of political sentiments, distrust and acrimony. English as a lingua franca symbolises English language communication among various first language speakers (Seidlhofer 2005 cited in Mustapha 2014) and thus English is also considered as an impartial language (Coleman, 2010; cited in Focho, 2011).
  - vi. Language of politics: in government circles in the anglophone countries, the language of administration is English and it is therefore the language of diplomacy and international communication.
  - vii. Cultural language: most users of the language in the region identify with the life styles and social attitudes of the English people (Garret, 2010; Coupland, 2009 cited in Quarcoo & Dako, 2017). This can also be seen in the desire of most youths in anglophone countries to travel abroad to study.
  - viii. English for media and entertainment: most newspapers in anglophone countries are printed in English. In Nigeria and Ghana, the presence of Nollywood and Ghallywood respectively have also promoted the English language as most film makers produce English medium films. According to Negash (2011), Western Africans watch the English Premier league, which is aired in English. It has been asserted that the most desired films in the international scene are in English (Focho, 2011). Conversely, the most popular advertisements are in English. A list of English newspapers in anglophone West Africa are shown on Table 4.
  - ix. Language of commerce: in anglophone countries, English is the language of commerce. Trade within and outside the countries is conducted in English. Even, traders from neighbouring francophone countries have felt the need for the acquisition of English in order to boost transactions (Coleman, 2013). English as an academic language is a pre-requisite for employment, development tool, link to the world, trade and commerce language, foreign investors’ language, and unifying a factor (Negash, 2011, Goldsmith, 2011, McGreal, 2009; cited in Plonski, Teferra & Brady, 2013). English also enables participation in trade and commerce globally (Mustapha, 2014).

**Table 4.** English medium Newspapers in West Africa

| Country      | Newspaper         | Founded   |
|--------------|-------------------|-----------|
| Liberia      | 1847 Post         | 1847      |
| Liberia      | Daily Observer    | 1980      |
| Ghana        | The Chronicle     | 1990      |
| Ghana        | Today Newspaper   | 2007      |
| Nigeria      | The Punch         | 1971/1973 |
| Nigeria      | The Guardian      | 1983      |
| Gambia       | Foroyaa Newspaper | 1987      |
| Gambia       | The Point         | 1991      |
| Sierra Leone | Concord Times     | 1992      |
| Sierra Leone | Cocorioko         | 1973      |

Source: Webpages

- x. Channel for development: English is a veritable tool for development in anglophone countries. It has been linked to modernisation (Negash, 2011). English has broadened the horizon of anglophone countries in Western Africa. Research has chronicled experiences of Africans who migrated to European countries to gain expertise as a result of their proficiency in English and returned to Africa to contribute to its development (Negash, 2011). Four roles of English in development are employability, international mobility, unlocking development opportunities and assessing information (Coleman, 2010). A positive relationship has been established between English and development as a consequence.

#### To what Extent is English Hegemonic in Western Africa?

While the hegemony of English in anglophone Western Africa has been described, it is evident that there are pertinent factors that contribute to its non-legitimacy in some areas in the region. The following factors show the hegemony of English is still a mirage in francophone/lusophone regions:

- i. French language: the main factor that impedes the hegemony of English is the French language. It is the official language in francophone countries as well as the medium of instruction. In francophone Western Africa, English as a subject is introduced in junior and senior secondary schools. Most students are not able to learn English as they drop out of school before completing the class. In consequence, students are denied the benefits of the language (Coleman, 2013). Eriksen (1999, p. 8) in this respect has suggested that “an unspeakable amount of suffering and humiliation was-and is still-being inflicted by colons of every phenotypical shade both within and outside France, against non-fluent speakers of the standard ‘educated’ French”.
- ii. Portuguese language: the Lusophone countries in Western Africa are Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau. The platform for the countries is known as the Community of Portuguese Language Community (CPLP). The Portuguese language plays the same role as the French

language in francophone countries. It is also the official language and the medium of instruction in lusophone countries. Its adoption as an official language as well as a medium of instruction has also established the hegemony of the Portuguese language in the lusophone countries (Spolsky, 2017). The language ranks sixth in the order of most spoken languages in the world (Marshall, 2017).

- iii. The French culture: the dominance of France in francophone Western Africa resulted in the erosion of Western African culture as most countries in the region have been westernised. In francophone Western Africa, the culture of the French people is pervasive, therefore, adopting English would mean adopting the culture of the English people. In addition, dominance of a culture is enabled “when a culture demonstrates advanced postures over the other due to its highly developed techniques and media of expression” (Okorie, 2001; cited in Iwara, 2015, p. 124). Therefore, the French people will have to assimilate “new cultures, ideologies, attitudes and values” (Iwara, 2015, p. 124). Cultural hegemony will have to take its course. However, the integration of Western African francophone states may hinder the process (Camara, 2001).
- iv. Neo-colonialism: neo-colonialism has been viewed as a continuation of colonialism (Sappor, 2009). The French President, Emmanuel Macron, who speaks English fluently, is seeking to make French a ‘world language’ (Kenney, 2018). In addition, he has asserted that “French should become the language that creates tomorrow’s world” (p.1). He desires to make French a lingua franca in the African continent. However, this has been viewed as neo-colonialism. It is very obvious that this could prevent the hegemony of English in the French colonies. Therefore, with the francophone countries being controlled politically, economically and culturally, English is still a strong contender to establish hegemony (Chidozie, Felix & Abiodun-Eniayekan, 2013). Neo-colonialism has also been linked to resolution of conflict and peace keeping missions (Sappor, 2009).
- v. Level of poverty: it has been stated by Sappor (2009) that the return of the colonial masters to Africa has resulted in the poverty of the African continent. For example, the persistent dependence of Cote d’voire on France has resulted in continuous poverty. Furthermore, “French partnership with francophone (Western) Africa is maintained through the promotion of French language, culture and the spectacularly lopsided external financing and debt rescheduling provided by France” (Sappor, 2009, p.2). Due to the fact that these Western African countries still depend on France and are poor, the hegemony of English may not be within easy reach. In addition, Seargent and Ering (2011, cited in Focho, 2011) maintain that English is a capacity building tool against poverty and increases participation economically and developmentally.
- vi. Economic ties of French to its former colonies: according to Sappor (2009, p. 1), France maintains deep

economic, military and administrative ties to almost all its former colonies. This impedes the hegemony of English language in the region.

### **What are the Implications of the Non-hegemony of English in Western Africa?**

The data demonstrates the implications of the non-hegemony of the English language in the francophone/lusophone countries as follows:

- i. Low literacy rates: the literacy rate in the francophone region is low. There are no equal opportunities for girls and boys to be educated. Most of the francophone countries in Western Africa are among the countries with the lowest literacy rates in the world - Burkina Faso 28.7%, Mali 33.4%, Guinea 41. %, Cote d'voire 56.9%, Mauritania 58.6%, Senegal 49.7%, Niger 28.7%, Togo 60.4% and Benin 42.4% (World Atlas, 2017). The low literacy rate may be linked to the medium of instruction used in schools in the region (Kone, 2010). French as a medium of instruction limits the opportunities of students and the "traditional French system has been described as been too theoretical" (Wilson, 2015). In a country such as Cote d'voire, the need for English has been felt. It has been asserted that the low literacy rates in countries like Mali and Burkina Faso could be a direct consequence of the medium of instruction used in the two countries - individuals over the age of 15 in Burkina Faso and Mali are 21.8% and 46.4% respectively (World Fact Book, 2009). Ministry of Education statistics for francophone countries since 1965 show that 655 of sixth graders annually fail the achievement tests administered in French even though most of them have had six to eight years of instruction in the language (Alidou, 2003, p. 108).
- ii. Poverty rates: according to Coleman (2013, p. 37) "there are very high levels of poverty (defined as living under the equivalent of US\$1.25 per day) in countries of the region, ranging from about a quarter of the population in some countries to more than half the population in others". Proficiency in English leads to a boost in Gross National Income (GNI) and Gross National Product (GDP), increase in per capital income, higher incentives (30-50%) for job seekers with excellent English skills and quality living (McCormick, 2013). Moreover, the CFA franc, has been perceived to be a burden in Western and Central Africa (Faujas, 2012)
- iii. Industrial backwardness: most of the francophone countries are industrially backward, this could be a reason for their low use of English and most students drop out of school before they have the opportunity to learn English (Coleman, 2013). This corroborates the view that English speaking Western African countries experience a faster development (Look & Shrylock, 2012). In addition, most people in this region are "employed in the agricultural sector" (Oduro & Aryee 2003, p.6). The francophone nations in the region have their economies mainly dependent on agriculture.
- iv. Lack of social mobility: francophone citizens in Western Africa are restricted in their communication with other people from different parts of the world. In other words, people who use English from any part of the world can easily communicate, while the French speaking individuals would depend on translations. The countries experience a high rate of drop outs and lack of social mobility (Lallou, 1998 cited in Kone, 2010).
- v. Drop out of school rate: students drop out of school before they have the opportunity to learn English. The need for English has been reported in the region in terms mainly of travel and work. English is introduced in the curriculum in secondary school.
- vi. Lack of employment mobility: Fanon argued that "To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture to support the weight of a civilization" (Fanon, 1952; cited in Kone 2010, p.9). In other words, language is linked to civilization, which gives a global perspective. This confirms the assertion of Faujas (2012) that "countries with Anglo-Saxon culture are more oriented towards business and entrepreneurship and people in those countries are less inclined to yearn to become civil servants than their counterparts with French culture". The French system of education has failed to boost the self-respect and self-confidence of Africans (Dei, 2008; cited in Kone, 2010). By implication, the French language creates a divide between the social strata groups in francophone Western Africa (Kone, 2010).
- vii. Growing interest in English: this is a rather instructive implication. The non-hegemony of English in the region has the consequence of developing a growing interest in English. This reveals the importance of English in the region and the world as a whole. Reports reveal that there is a growing interest in English in francophone Western Africa (Look & Shryock, 2012).
- viii. Access to limited Internet information: one of the benefits of English is accessing crucial information (Coleman, 2010). Much of the information on the Internet is transmitted through English. Knowledge is power and to achieve this power, the acquisition of English skills is a pre-requisite.
- ix. Lack of extensive career opportunities: francophone/lusophone students cannot easily access educational materials in English. In addition, the students will have limited access to international universities in the world. The best universities in the world are often considered to be English medium universities.

### **CONCLUSION**

This paper has examined the linguistic hegemony of English in the Western African region. The hegemony of English has traditionally been viewed from the negative perspective. However, in conclusion, the paper shows that the linguistic hegemony of the English language has had several benefits to the anglophone countries that have been unacknowledged or marginalised in the research literature to date. For example, it has sped up their development, while the francophone/lusophone countries have recorded backwardness in many aspects - such

as low literacy rates, poverty rates, industrial backwardness, lack of social mobility, school dropout rates, lack of employment and mobility and lack of extensive career opportunities. In other words, these countries do not benefit from the global status of English. While there is a hegemony of English in the anglophone countries, there is a partial/non-hegemony of the language in francophone/lusophone countries. The hegemony of the French language cannot be fully ascertained in the francophone/lusophone regions as a minority speak the language in the region. The hegemony of English is at a developmental stage as there is a growing interest in the language by some in francophone countries. Arising from this analysis the paper identifies the following recommendations:

- i. In anglophone countries, there should be quality teaching of English. Competent teachers should be allowed to teach the language and the appropriate pedagogical methodologies should be utilised.
- ii. A common trend in most anglophone countries is the poor usage of the language. This has been noted in all the countries studied. The problem should be addressed and the mass media can be utilised in this respect.
- iii. There should be a longer period of education in the mother tongue before the transition to English language in anglophone countries. This will develop the cognitive ability of the pupils.
- iv. In francophone/lusophone countries, the global status of the language should be recognised by its early introduction in the curriculum.
- v. French students should be informed of the potentials of English to keep pace with the growing interest in the language.
- vi. The French policy should accommodate the use of the mother tongue in primary schools.
- vii. The French curricula should be reviewed and more appropriate pedagogies should be adopted to teach the language.

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