

Teaching English in vocational education and training in Senegal

Résumé

Au Sénégal, aujourd'hui, l'enseignement technique et professionnel prend le devant dans le système éducatif en général mais surtout dans l'enseignement supérieur. De plus en plus d'écoles de formation professionnelle et technique sont créées aussi bien dans le secteur public que dans celui privé. Ce changement de paradigme dans un système éducatif du 21^e siècle donne à l'anglais une place de choix au cœur de tout processus d'enseignement/apprentissage d'autant plus que cela permet aux apprenants avec un statut professionnel de développer des compétences et une expertise utiles pour leur future carrière. Cet article se propose de discuter des alternatives susceptibles de juguler les problèmes liés aux méthodes actuelles d'enseignement de l'anglais en proposant une approche pertinente ainsi que des activités pratiques pour une pédagogie efficiente de l'anglais dans la formation professionnelle et technique.

Mots-clés : Compétences communicationnelles, enseignement/apprentissage de l'anglais, enseignement professionnel, méthodes pratiques.

Abstract

In Senegal, today, vocational education also known as Career and Technical Education or professional training is taking the lead in the general educational system particularly in higher education. More and more training and technical schools and institutes are being created both in the public and private sectors. This paradigm shift in the 21st century education has placed the English language at the heart of the teaching/learning process as it helps learners to develop skills and expertise useful for their future careers. This paper attempts to address the discrepancies in current teaching methods by proposing a relevant approach as well as practical classroom activities for vocational technical training ELT programs.

Key words: Communicative Skills, ESL teaching/learning, practical methods, vocational training.

INTRODUCTION

Vocational education also known as career and technical education focuses more on preparing learners for careers. In this perspective, English plays an important role both as a means of communication and as the language used in the teaching-learning process. The change of paradigm and vision in 21st century education has placed the English language at the heart of the teaching/learning process as it helps learners to develop skills and expertise useful for their future careers. Therefore, many vocational schools and institutes, which promote the competence-based approach, are now using English also as a tool for instruction to boost interest and integrate it as an asset to the learners' future career. In this context, the questions that come to our mind are the following: Is English always taught to participate in the learners' professional careers? Does the teaching of English in vocational schools help learners acquire skills and competences useful in finding a job after their training?

Our hypothesis is that even though various methods of teaching English are implemented in vocational and technical schools, many of them are not appropriate, due to striking discrepancies between the content and the learners' competences and field of expertise. Many scholars have conducted research on these discrepancies, among which Yonglong Zhang in his article "A Practical English Teaching Mode of Vocational Education", Lei Zhang "Vocational College English Teaching" and Chunhua Ji "Combining English and CTE courses: A case study on curricular integration in vocational education of China" to name but a few.

This article attempts to address those discrepancies by proposing relevant and significant classroom activities meant for students in vocational training schools. This paper is divided in three main parts. The first part highlights the place of vocational education in the Senegalese context and exposes the problem. The second part explores the rationale and the theoretical principles of English teaching in vocational schools. The last part provides exemplification through competence-based activities.

1. Vocational Education in the Senegalese context

In Senegal, French is used as the medium of instruction in mainstream education whereas English is taught as a foreign language. However, the importance of English throughout the world and its place in the labour market make it be an essential language in the teaching/learning process in vocational training schools. Vocational education differs from general and academic education. In Senegal, vocational education has seen significant changes over the last 10 years. Indeed, the government is investing in the future of vocational education and increasingly promoting the development of vocational training schools or institutes in the private sector. With the outgrowing number of students passing their Baccalaureate exam, many of them are today sent to private vocational training institutes as an alternative.

The public universities are full and can no longer receive those students and to solve the problem, an agreement is found between the Senegalese government and the private vocational training schools or institutes to provide the students with qualitative education and degrees. In addition, an increasing number of students who get their university degrees find it difficult to get a job as they are not qualified or trained in a specific domain. This situation makes the government realize that alternatives should

be found to enable students to be trained in technical or vocational schools or institutes that will help them find work in the labour market once they get their diplomas. And technical or vocational institutes provide students with skills acquisition or the acquisition of skills for self-employment or career skills education.

However, it is worth mentioning that the change in vocational education is not something new and dates back to the year 2000 with the Ten Year Programme on Education and Training (Programme Décennal de l'Éducation et de la Formation) which describes the following objectives for technical and vocational education and training :

- To develop a qualified workforce in accordance with the needs of the labour market ; developing workers, employees, technicians, supervisors and senior technical staff ;
- To promote the development of knowledge, employability and creativity among youth and prepare them to become the important actors in the workforce; and
- To increase the number of people with professional and technical qualification. (UNESCO-UNEVOC 2015: 6).

In order to improve access and the quality of Technical and Vocational Education and Training, the reform has specified the introduction of new teaching methods such as:

- Competence-based approaches in the development and implementation of curricula, and
- Alternance training teaching methods. (7)

All the changes brought about by the Senegalese educational authorities go along with English Language Teaching (ELT) and the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language.

Until recently, English, though taught, has been a neglected subject in vocational schools or institutes in Senegal. This situation reflects both the educational authorities' and the students' perception of the inferiority of English among other subjects especially those in relation to vocational competences. Another possible explanation can be drawn from the fact that English is taught as a second language or a foreign language in the Senegalese educational system.

Yet, this situation has changed with the place of English in today's global world. Graduates need English when seeking job in so far as it has become one of the major languages used for communication in working places and in the society as a whole. Today, many vocational schools or institutes resort to the teaching of English as part of the curricula. In this sense, efforts to improve and promote the teaching of English have been made in developing students' competences needed when applying for jobs.

2. The rationale and the theoretical principles of English teaching in vocational schools

*Data collection

This data collection is based on a survey of teachers of English in vocational schools and a survey of a wide range of students in a few vocational schools in Dakar. The data covers various domains of vocation ranging from financial accounting, agriculture, tourism, management, computing, hotel and restaurant services to all fields of business. We established two different questionnaires; one addressing students another addressing teachers of English in vocational schools.

*Questionnaire for students

1. Do you like English?
2. Is English important for your professional career?
3. What do you think are the obstacles to your learning of English?
4. What motivates you to be more engaged in the teaching/learning process?
5. What do you expect the teacher to teach you that will make you interested in English-learning?
6. Which materials does your teacher use to teach you English?
- 7 How often do you practice speaking and listening in real professional context?
8. How often do you work in pair or group?

The analysis of the students' data shows the following statistics. 80% of the students we interviewed like English and just 20% don't. 100% acknowledge the importance and necessity of English for their future professional career and 60% state that their low level of English is an obstacle to their learning of the language, 40% defend that their environment doesn't allow them to practice English very often. All students (100%) agree that the use of Information and communication technology such as video projections, audios, computer rooms etc. motivates them a lot because with those materials they feel more interested in the teaching/learning process, thus they are eager and more motivated to participate in class activities. They also say that they learn a lot with ICT tools. According to 80% of the students we interviewed, most of the time teachers in vocational schools use ICT such as video projections, audios, computer rooms to teach them English, which effectively impacts their communicative competence acquisition. 60% say that their teachers practice speaking and listening very often and 30% say that they seldom practice speaking and listening and just 10% defend that they never practice speaking. 60% of students agree that they practice pair and group work very often, 20% rarely practice group and pair work and 20% say that they never do.

*Questionnaire for teachers

1. What obstacles are you confronted with?

2. What materials do you often use in your class to practice communicative activities?
3. Have you been trained in vocational or professional English teaching?
4. How often do you practice pair work or group work?
5. Are the activities you teach related to the profession of the learners?
6. Do you achieve your objective in every lesson?
7. Do you work with other colleagues in English cells?

After analyzing the data collection on teachers' questionnaire, we have the following results: 70% of teachers have mentioned the lack of materials and documents. They have also noted that they hardly have enough time to achieve their curricula in professional school, according to them, English is not given much importance in vocational schools even if it is included in the curricula. Just 30% have got the required materials they need to teach communicative lessons. The interview with colleague teachers of English in professional school has also revealed that 60% of them use information and communication technology in their teaching of English and 40% declared that they have difficulty using ICT in their class activities. Yet 100% acknowledged that the use of ICT (video projections, audios, computer rooms...) in the teaching of English in vocational education is compulsory nowadays. Therefore it seems necessary to train English teachers in teaching through ICT. The other important revelation from the teachers' interview is that 60% of vocational education teachers acknowledged that they have never had any pedagogical training in teaching English for specific purpose (business English, English for agriculture, technological English,...). Indeed, few of them are certified teacher of English who have been effectively trained in pedagogy. They are mostly graduate student of English part-timing in private institutes. 65% of the interviewed teachers of English responded that they practice group and pair work very often, 20% said they do it sometimes and 5% acknowledged that they seldom do it. Most of the teachers (80%) also responded that they design interesting activities tightly linked with life, profession of learners as the English they learn should allow them to carry their future jobs properly even in an English speaking country. Even though 30% acknowledged that sometimes they don't reach their objective, 60% of the teachers we interviewed defended that they always achieve their pedagogical objective in every lesson. However, the biggest problem almost all of them underlined is that in vocational schools there are no English cells where teachers can exchange and help one another because they are almost all part-timers who come to the school for a little moment just once or twice a week and that's all. So, the colleagues may even not meet the whole academic year except when the school is celebrating something.

The data analysis shows that a new paradigm shift is badly needed. Very often, teachers face difficulties in finding the appropriate language learning materials when designing activities. In addition, the availability of learning facilities makes it hard for the teacher to design relevant and significant activities to meet the needs of the students or to boost interest in their field of competence. Consequently, selecting the appropriate materials for effective classroom activities is very often overlooked, as teachers are free to use the materials they want or have.

However, the objective of teaching English in vocational schools or institutes should be to develop students' communicative competence and skills in English through the competence-based approach in order to train them to be more competitive and more incline to find job in the labour market.

It is also noticed that it is not easy to find out the appropriate teaching materials for a good teaching/learning process or to improve the language proficiency of the learners. According to Brown, Techniques consist of the things you 'do' in the classroom, but only a few techniques do not in some manner involve the use of materials to support and enhance them... much of the richness of language instruction is deprived from supporting materials (2001: 136).

Brown asserts through this above-mentioned quotation that materials from which the content of the teaching process is drawn, is of a paramount importance and neglecting to find the appropriate materials is depriving the language from supporting materials.

The materials appear to be the main resources which serve as a support for the teacher who can draw from them all the necessary and essential activities or assignments to be exploited and done by the students. Therefore, they should be appropriately chosen, with great care to foster the teaching/learning process. It is then observed that the lack of using such materials can impede vocational training achievement and educational quality. Richards points out that:

Teaching materials are a key component in most language programs... instructional materials generally serve as the basis for much of the language input learners receive and language practice that occurs in the classroom (2006: 251).

The objective to be reached when teaching English in vocational training schools depends greatly on the selected materials which can provide students with language practice and exposure through communication. In addition, appropriate materials and content help the teacher to take advantage of the learners' great potentials as they are competent and active in a specific domain in the one hand. In the other hand, they can bring positive effect in teaching English as a foreign language in a context of vocational training. In vocational training schools, the problem of content or materials when teaching English is a ticklish one as school libraries are very often poorly equipped and do not offer many possibilities to teachers to design relevant and significant activities to meet students' needs and interest.

The teaching of English in vocational schools focuses more on the building of skills in terms of speaking, listening, writing and reading in the expense of theoretical development (Harmer, J. 1984). So, the teacher of professional English has to design authentic and relevant activities in the context of the learners' professional field. It is clear that English for specific purpose, as name indicates it, is English taught only in relation with the professional domain the learners are supposed to work in after their training.

The main task of vocational school English teachers is to construct learners' abilities to face their professional English environment without difficulty. That is to say their ability to interact easily in conversation with a customer, a colleague, a manager or even with an NGO on issues regarding their professional activities. For instance, a

member of an enterprise or industry or company may attend a meeting, with foreign NGOs agents who intend to fund their company, in which the discussions are conducted in English.

In vocational education and training, the essential function of language is to help the future professionals to be able to communicate in the professional domain. Thus, learners are supposed to acquire the necessary skills in terms of communicative competence so as they should use the English language in real professional and life context. This is the reason why teachers have to insist on the fundamental skills such as speaking, listening, without only focusing on reading and writing activities or on theories of EFL teaching/learning.

In their book *Teaching Oral Communication in Grades K-8*, Chaney and Burk define the Speaking skill as “*The process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts*” (Chaney 1998: 13). It is obvious that teaching speaking is a very important part of second language learning, particularly for professional learners. Indeed, the ability of the latter to communicate in English as a second language greatly and efficiently contributes to his professional success as well as to success in every phase of life (Celce-Murcia 2001).

Therefore, it is essential that English language teachers pay great attention to teaching speaking (Staab 1992) rather than leading students to pure memorization. Designing authentic and contextual activities and lesson plans with a rich environment where meaningful and professionally-oriented communication takes place is compulsory in today’s vocational and training schools. With such an objective, the teacher will have to design various speaking activities which are communicative enough to allow and contribute a great deal to professional learners developing basic interactive skills necessary in their daily professional use of English. These activities make them more active in the teaching/learning process and at the same time make their learning of the language more meaningful and fun for them.

The teacher could design an activity where a professional learner will be put in the following situation: An NGO organized a meeting to discuss issues regarding the challenges of the agricultural sector. So, your agribusiness firm sent you to attend the meeting on its behalf. Once you come back, you report all that was said there. Such an activity will focus on the reported speech but in real professional situation. The activity could be designed as follow:

Situation: You attended a meeting on behalf of your agribusiness firm. Here is the discussion in the meeting:

The NGO representative: We’ve come here to see what we can do together to face the challenges regarding the agricultural sector in your country. You can tell me the kind of problems you are facing and what solution we can find.

Modu: Good morning everybody! I’m Modu Ndiaye and I’m here on behalf of my firm SODAGRI. We are specialized in the production of rice. And, as you may know, the objective of Senegalese authorities is to produce all the rice the population needs in a very near future. But the main problem is that we don’t have the necessary machines but we also don’t get enough rain to achieve that goal.

Mary: We work in the agribusiness field and we're facing a lot of problems regarding the transformation and packaging of our products. So we would like you to help us in training and logistics.

Task1: In groups of three, each student representing one of the above characters, read the discussion aloud.

Task 2: report the discussion (you write the report).

Task 3: One of you read the report loudly at the front of the class.

Task 4: learners react to the reports.

Thus, to encourage learners' efforts to practice speaking, the teacher will make them answer questions such as "What did you say? Why did you say that? What do you mean? How did you reach that conclusion?" In addition to these questions, teachers will provide encouraging and reinforcing appreciations such as: "Great! Wonderful! Excellent! Yes! Perfect! Very good! Very interesting! to increase learners' motivation.

While dealing with reading comprehension, teachers could also integrate writing activities. They could for instance teach professional learners how to write a résumé, a cover letter, an application letter, a complaint letter, a business letter, documentary letter of credit, a sales contract, after-sale service, industrial dispute, etc.

By so doing we integrate English language learning and CTE (Career and Technical Education) courses in vocational school. That is to say, The English courses should help develop learners' skills and competences in their fields of expertise and reflect their professional domains. This practice is also known in pedagogical language as integrated curriculum. However, setting the goal of the integrated curriculum should consider the key capabilities or competences that the career development requires. "The key capabilities are also called general capabilities or core capabilities. It refers to a kind of general, transferable ability. It will play a key role in it's owners career development in the future. Somebody also calls it 'portable skills'" (Duan 2008: 5-9).

Besides specialty skills, the portable skills (core skills) and personalities are more and more important for a worker because "Modern vocational education aims at developing these qualities of the students and cultivates their abilities of solving the problems from the real world" (Guan 2003: 32-35).

3. Practical applications

Business English:

Text 1:

Do we need more control over credit?

They say money makes the world go round. But it isn't money: it's credit. For (1) when the corporations of the world buy, they buy on credit. And if your credit is good, no one asks to see the colour of your money. Indeed, if everybody were to demand immediate payment in cash the world would literally go burst. But as Trevor Sykes points out in his book, *Two centuries of panic*, "there are few faster ways of going broke than by buying goods and then passing them on to (2) customers who cannot pay for them". (3) As if getting orders wasn't tough enough, these days getting paid

is even tougher. And with the amount of cross-border trade increasing every day, credit is rapidly going out of control.

Pre-reading activity

a. Match the words in column A with their corresponding ones in column B.

Column A	Column B
1. corporation	a) be bankrupt
2. pass on to	b) grow
3. amount	c) give
4. cross-border	d) commerce
5. trade	e) transnational
6. increase	f) ungovernable
7. out of control	g) sum
8. go broke	h) company
9. customers	

While reading activities

a. True or false and justification:

1. According to the author, money makes the world go round.

2. The world would shut down if everyone demanded immediate payment.

3. Getting paid isn't tough enough.

b. Complete the sentences with information from the text.

Big _____ don't buy their goods cash, they often do it _____ . This is the reason why the author defends that it is not _____ that makes the world _____ it's rather _____ .

c. What or who do the words below refer to in the text?

They (They say money makes) = _____

They (they buy on credit)

Post-reading activities

d. Complete the summary below with the following words: lend - invest - credit - customers – money.

If you want to get good profits you must ----- your ----- in good projects. You must also ----- your money to ----- who can pay back.

e. This is a recording of a conversation between a company manager and the representatives of a bank. Listen carefully and answer the questions below.

How many people are talking in the conversation?

What are they talking about?

How many women and men are there?

f. Listen to the conversation again and complete the sentences below.

The name of the company is _____ and it is located in _____. The manager's name is _____ and he wants _____ to _____ him _____.

But _____ wants him to provide _____

g. Expressing opinion: Is a world without credit possible? Give your opinion.

Text 2:

Bad debt does not necessarily mean bad business. Ninety years ago, the legendary Tokushichi Namura was racing round the streets of Osaka in a rickshaw to escape angry creditors. They are not angry now, for today Namura is the biggest securities company in Japan. *Namura knew all what financial directors know: that what distinguishes the effectively managed commercial operation from the poorly managed one is the way it manages its money.* And increasingly a key feature of successful money management is the skill with which a company can stall its creditors and at the same time put pressure on its debtors.

Pre-reading activity

Vocabulary

a. What do the following words mean?

1. debt: _____

2. creditors: _____

3. debtors: _____

4. skill: _____

While reading activities

b. Give a title to this text: _____

c. Find in the text the contrary of:
effectively managed commercial operation: _____

d. True or false and justification

1. Namura is a bad debtor. _____

2. Tokushichi is a successful business man. _____

3. Tokushichi works in a bank. _____

e. Complete the sentences with passages from the text:

1. One central feature of money management is _____

2. _____ does not always equal to poor business.

Post-reading activities

Activity 1: (role play) You are Namura’s creditor and your neighbor is Namura. Write your conversation using the words in the box. Then play the roles on the board.

Pay me back - you are – my money - a bad debtor-
can’t pay now – more time – give me – please – just
two months – I’ve been waiting for so long

Activity 2: Complete the text below with the appropriate words

If you want to get good profits you must ----- your ----- in
good projects. You must also ----- your money to ----- who can
pay back.

Activity 3: Expressing opinion: Would you like to be Namura or not? Why?

English for agriculture

Text 3:

Tissue culture is used widely in the horticulture industry in order to produce a large number of identical individuals quickly. An example of this is with the many cultivated varieties of plants used in ornamental garden beds. Popular species of orchids used as houseplants are often germinated in sterile conditions using tissue cultures because their seeds are extremely small and fragile.

Tissue culture is also used in research that involves experiments on seeds. Scientists easily observe which plants possess desired or unusual characteristics. This is common in transgenic plant research. Transgenic plant research is research involving genes from one plant specifically inserted into another different plant. Tissue culture helps scientists quickly see which plants have successfully expressed these translocated traits. It is also useful to observe plants that have been exposed to unusual environmental conditions, like radiation or a chemical treatment.

While-reading activities

Activity 1: Find in the text words with the same meaning as:

Plant tissue culture = _____

Cells = _____

Species = _____

Germinated = _____

Translocated plant = _____

Activity 2: Complete the sentences below with information from the text.

1. We call plant tissue culture _____ which is also named _____.
2. The tissues which are grown on an artificial growing surface use _____.
3. In the horticulture industry scientists widely use tissue culture so as to _____.

Activity 3: Read the text and say whether the statements are true or false. Justify with relevant quotations from the text.

Plant tissue culture is the natural growing of plants. _____

Micropropagation grows in environment full with microbes. _____

Activity 4: Complete the table below with information from the text.

Cause	Effect
	Popular species of orchids are germinated in sterile conditions
Scientists easily observe which plants possess desired or unusual characteristics	
	This is common in transgenic plant research

Post-reading activities

Activity 1: This is a recording of a person presenting his company.

Task 1: Listen carefully and complete the identity card of the speaker:

Sex: _____

Age: _____

Name: _____

Profession: _____

Physical appearance: _____

Name of the company: _____

Task 2: Listen again to the recording and Identify the person/people the speaker is addressing and quote the passage that justifies your choice.

- a. adults b. a journalist c. a girl d. a boy

Justification: _____

Task 3: Listen again and say whether the statements are True or false? Justify each answer with information from the recording.

- a. The speaker is feeling happy. True/False _____
- b. He regrets investing in this domain. True/False _____
- c. The speaker criticizes the government. True/False _____

CONCLUSION

In Senegal, today, vocational education also known as Career and Technical Education or professional training is taking the lead in the general educational system, particularly in higher education. More and more training and technical schools and institutes are being created both in the public and private sectors. This new paradigm needs new approaches in the teaching of English in vocational schools in the sense that it has become a central language for communication in working places. And professionals who have English communicative skills are more and more privileged in the expense of others no matter how valuable their technical skills are.

Therefore, it is essential for teachers to provide as many learning opportunities as possible to learners of English for specific purpose. They should not only focus on constructing learners' reading and writing competences but they have to build solid speaking and listening skills to the target language by providing a rich environment with communicative and collaborative activities; authentic materials and tasks, and shared knowledge. Involving learners in practical and pragmatic activities enhances their will to participate in the teaching/learning process and strongly develops their communicative skills, which remain the number one goal of English for specific purpose. Knowing the importance of English in today's professional life, in addition to the Senegalese government policy to send more and more students to vocational schools, isn't it central to emphasize the training of teachers in teaching English for specific purpose ever than before?

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