

# The role of English in an emerging economy: the case of the ICT-BPO sector in Mauritius

PhD in Education

Institute of Education, Faculty of Art, Humanities and Social Science

Patricia Norah-Day Hookoomsing

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## **DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP**

Declaration: I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

PATRICIA NORAH DAY-HOOKOOMSING

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## **References**



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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis is a case study on the relationship between economic performance and second language learning and use in the context of an emerging economy, Mauritius. The study seeks to investigate the perceptions and experiences of employers and employees in the ICT-BPO sector in Mauritius regarding the level of English language proficiency required in the workplace and the challenges this presents with respect to education and corporate training.

A case study approach was chosen with a mix of research tools, including a desk study of official documents, reports and research articles, a preliminary broad-sweep questionnaire to employers in the ITC-BPO sector followed by interviews of executives heading some of the larger outsourcing platforms in Mauritius and three focus groups with employees from two major platforms to enable a richer understanding of the role of English in the multilingual context of Mauritius. Two Mauritian linguists and a lecturer working in one of the private sector tertiary institutions were also interviewed for their insights on the medium of instruction in the Mauritian education and training system.

The main findings concern the mismatch in interpersonal skills of which English language proficiency is an important component with respect to the requirements of the ICT-BPO sector to be able to compete in the global market. Many employees experience great difficulty in handling telephone communication with dissatisfied customers, as English is not their preferred spoken language. Teaching methods throughout the education and training system need to be reviewed and reoriented away from rote learning for examinations towards a more dynamic approach that fosters the acquisition of not only the appropriate language but also the necessary interpersonal skills such as assertiveness and empathetic understanding of different cultures.

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH PROJECT**

### **1.1 Aim and objectives of the study**

This study concerns the relationship between economic performance and the use of English as a second language in the context of an emerging economy. The country in question is Mauritius, an island republic in the South-West Indian Ocean. The study focuses on one element of the country's skill set that has contributed to its continued progress, namely its multilingualism and in particular its continued use of English, the language of the former colonial power and now its main means of communication with the global economy. In particular, the study seeks to investigate the perceptions and experiences of employers and employees in the Information and Communications Technology-Business Processing Outsourcing (ICT-BPO) sector in Mauritius regarding the use of the English language in the workplace and the opportunities and challenges this presents.

### **1.2 Origin of the research project**

The origin of this study lies in my wide and varied experience of teaching English as a Second Language to both children and adults in the multicultural and multilingual environment of Mauritius for over 40 years, during which time I have often had cause to reflect on how multilingual persons handle the languages at their disposal. More specifically, the training programmes in Business English and customer service that I have run for employees in all sectors of the Mauritian economy have revealed many recurrent issues concerning the use of English in a professional context. My interest in the particular business activities chosen for this study, information and communications technology and business process outsourcing, the ICT-BPO sector as it is labelled in Mauritius, first arose from my experience as an external trainer for one of the early international BPO companies in 2006. At that time, the common assumption on the part of the authorities, investors and employers looking to develop the sector was that the level of bilingual skills which had stood Mauritius in good stead in the development of its tourism would be enough to embark on opening up this new sector. The reality was

to prove quite different, as I discovered in my training sessions. At the same time, articles on recruitment issues in the ICT-BPO sector, including the need for high-level communication skills in both English and French, started to appear regularly in the local press, and still do. These articles focus on the scale of the persisting mismatch between the needs of the industry and the level and nature of the skills available on the job market, and its current and potential impact on the performance and growth of the sector. Furthermore, in 2005-2006, I carried out a small research project on *The Use of English in International Business in Mauritius* funded by the Mauritius Research Council (MRC) (Day-Hookoomsing, 2006) which showed that the overall level of proficiency in English was inadequate in all sectors of business and that the expectations concerning employable language skills are not being met by the Mauritian education system. Thus, in 2012, when I enrolled to study for a PhD, I decided that I would use the opportunity to reflect further on the relationship between economic development, language and education. The present study aims to contribute to understanding the reasons for the perceived gap between the expected levels of proficiency, that is, the ability to use English for a particular purpose (Davies, 2006) and the actual use of the language in the workplace through a case study approach focussing on the use of English in the ICT-BPO sector, and to identify ways in which the education and training sector in Mauritius can better respond to closing this gap.

### **1.3 Researcher's profile and motivation**

After graduating in 1971 with a BA Joint Honours in Latin and French at the University of Reading, I followed a 6-month intensive course for language graduates in secretarial skills at the then City of London Polytechnic with the aim of a career in administration. However, my departure for Mauritius in January 1972 changed the course of events. Four years after Independence, the Mauritian economy was still fragile, unemployment was high and jobs for female graduates other than teaching were very few (Hein, 1988; Burn, 1996). The élite private French-medium school run by the local Alliance Française with the support of the French Coopération through the French Embassy needed a bilingual language graduate with some knowledge of business processes to teach the Business English courses for their new 6<sup>th</sup> form Baccalauréat section, Accounts, Business Studies and Secretarial Duties. I was

offered the post, and so embarked on my teaching career, with absolutely no training whatsoever, a situation that most teachers contended with in those days. My Curriculum Vitae in Annexe 1 gives the full details of my various posts and assignments in teaching and training, as well as the professional qualifications that I subsequently acquired, including a PGCE in the teaching of English as a Second Language. With respect to this study, my work at the Francophone Institute for Entrepreneurship (IFE, *Institut de la francophonie pour l'entrepreneuriat*), a joint initiative set up in Mauritius by the *Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie* (AUF) and the Government of Mauritius, gave me valuable experience and insights on how English as a global language is viewed in the developing world because the students came from the French-speaking countries in Africa, the Indian Ocean region, the Caribbean and South-East Asia.

My motivation for studying for a PhD at this late stage of my career is partly for personal achievement, the pleasure of being able to reach this level of academic study, and partly to share my experience through a formal structured reflection in the hope that it may prove useful to others in the language teaching field, particularly in Mauritius.

#### **1.4 Areas of inquiry and scope of study**

The language situation in Mauritius is complex, with two major world languages, English and French, in daily use alongside the local language, Mauritian Kreol, and several Asiatic languages used mainly for cultural and religious purposes. As a result, Mauritians are multilingual with varying degrees of proficiency in two or more languages. Maintaining a balance between the various languages is a crucial element in many aspects of national policymaking, especially in education and training. Therefore, the study is organised around three broad areas of inquiry: (1) Mauritius in the global knowledge economy, (2) the use of English in the multilingual environment in Mauritius, and (3) the proficiency in and use of English as a second language in the Mauritian education system.

The specific context of the field study, Business process outsourcing (BPO), concerns the contracting out by a company, for example a chain of retail clothing stores, of non-core business activities and functions to a third-party provider, not necessarily in the same country. By contracting out such tasks as payroll, human resources (HR), accounting and customer service relations the company can then focus its human, financial and production resources on its core activity, for example, selling clothes, thus gaining in efficiency and cost effectiveness. BPO activities are based on the extensive use of information technology and are thus part of the larger grouping known as Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES). The site of work is called the platform, which comprises the physical work area, usually a large open-space office in which the individual computer work stations are set up in lines or clusters, and the computer network and software linking the individual workstations to the main server and thus to the external customers abroad (Bharadwaj & Saxena, 2010).

The original plan was to carry out an in-depth case study of one or perhaps two leading ICT-BPO companies in Mauritius that are working on the English-speaking international markets and thus produce a deeper understanding of a particular entity in a defined closed context (Mabry, 2008; Hamilton, 2011). The choice of company would rely on my extensive experience in corporate training in Mauritius. Unfortunately, gatekeeping by employers throughout the ICT-BPO sector in Mauritius severely hampered the field work and considerably constrained the actual response rate to the preliminary exploratory questionnaire and the access to the employees. As a result, the scope of the study was revised to an exploratory case study of English language use in the ICT-BPO sector in Mauritius, with individual contact being limited to interviews with key employers who were willing to participate and three focus groups of employees, and the information thus obtained embedded in the overall analysis. A full explanation of the methodology used for this study in Chapter 4.

## **1.5 Research questions**

The main research question for this study is:

*What are the experiences and perceptions of both employers and employees in the ICT-BPO sector in Mauritius concerning the use of English in the context of the global knowledge economy?*

The question thus encapsulates the two complementary dimensions of the macro context of the global knowledge economy and the micro reality of the functioning of individual proficiency, between which the education and training system occupies the intermediary position of enabling the individual current and future employees to acquire the necessary skills to perform their work to the required standards.

With reference to the three areas of inquiry listed above, the following sub-questions are explored:

1. What factors influence the user's choice of language in a multilingual environment such as Mauritius, with particular reference to the use of English in (1) everyday discourse and (2) the business context?
2. How do employers and employees perceive and experience English language use in the ICT-BPO sector of the Mauritian economy?
3. What are the views of employers and employees on how effectively schools and higher education institutions prepare students to work in English?

## **1.6 Structure of the study**

The thesis contains nine chapters including this Introduction (Chapter 1), followed by two sections that present the actual study and the concluding chapter (Chapter 9). Section 1 containing Chapters 2, 3 and 4 sets the conceptual and methodological framework of the study, while Section 2 containing Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 presents the context, Mauritius, and the case study focussed on the role of English in the ICT-BPO sector as mentioned in the thesis title. Chapter 9 gives the conclusions and original contribution of the study, together with suggestions for future research. The text is thus structured as a funnel that moves down from the broad concepts underpinning the position of a small

island developing state within the global economy to the daily reality of the individual customer service agent within the framework of interpretivist constructivism.

Section 1 on the conceptual and methodological framework of the study starts with Chapter 2 on the presentation of the theoretical framework which is divided into three main concepts: (1) globalisation, with particular reference to the development of knowledge-based economic activities in the context of a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), (2) the use of English as a global language in a multilingual environment and (3) the role of education in development. The literature review in Chapter 3 focusses on the role and use of English in the post-colonial development context. It examines the use of English from the international business perspective, and in the global ICT-BPO sector. It presents the context of the SIDS by exploring their overall characteristics and the challenges they face with respect to education and human resource development. Chapter 4 presents the methodological framework of the study: the choice of research paradigm, namely interpretivist constructivism, the pragmatic approach to data collection and analysis using a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods within the base structure of a case study, the ethical dimension of the study, and finally the role and position of the practitioner/researcher. It also explains the issues and constraints encountered during the data collection, in particular the difficulties in obtaining data due to the reluctance of the companies contacted to take part in the study because of concerns about confidentiality, and the resulting low response.

Section 2 is devoted entirely to Mauritius. Chapter 5 *Mauritius, the making of an island hub* relates the country's history and economic development to the current time with focus on the challenges faced by a small island developing state with no natural resources in the increasingly globally connected world economy. Chapter 6 *Overview of the Mauritian education and training system* presents how the provision of education and training has evolved as an integral part of the country's overall development. The account is based on a literature review of historical and contemporary specialist articles and reports, and reports from various international agencies. Chapter 7 *The role and use of English in Mauritius* looks at the role and status of English in the multilingual context of Mauritius by



first giving an overview of the languages present in the country, the legal requirements concerning the appropriate choice of language in the various spheres of activity and the use of English in daily life. It then reviews the language policy and practice in education and training with respect to the medium of instruction, the respect of home languages and the acquisition of the language skills necessary for gainful employment. Chapter 8 *The Role and Use of English in the ICT-BPO Sector: Findings and Discussion* presents and analyses the findings concerning the use of English in the ICT-BPO sector obtained from the answers to the questionnaire, interviews and focus groups. The conclusions in Chapter 9 focus on identifying ways and means of closing the gap between the current level of performance and that required to carry out higher value-added activities through an appropriate sharing of responsibility between the parties concerned, the state, the employers and the employees.

The detailed mapping of the thesis is given in Annexe 2.

### **1.7 Significance of the study**

This study concerns a topic on which much research has already been carried out, the role and status of English as a global language. However, many of the existing studies concern large countries such as India and continents, such as Africa, with a whole range of native languages that existed prior to the arrival of the colonial traders and armies. The Commonwealth Secretariat, of which Mauritius is a member since independence in 1968, was among the first international networks to recognise that the small states have their own distinctive ecology, and that more local research was needed for these states to be able to engage more effectively in global agendas (Crossley, 2009). Thus, the originality of this study lies firstly in the specific context, that of an independent small island state, a direct product of the colonial period that was previously uninhabited and with no natural resources. The colonial experience has thus created and shaped all aspects of the country's subsequent organisation and development, and as such remains the constant starting point of reference. Remoteness and smallness are two other defining characteristics that determine the country's ability to progress. All questions and issues concerned with the country's social and economic development, including language policy,

are thus constrained by the pressure of having to fend for oneself and by the nation-wide immediacy in impact of any initiative undertaken by the government (Lamusse, 2001; Baldacchino, 2011). This study is thus an attempt to understand the mechanisms that have helped Mauritius move from an underdeveloped country to a middle-income emerging economy, with focus on its language practice and education system. To this end, the three components of the study, namely the country's economic development, the review of its education and training system, and the presentation of the evolution of language use in the country are each viewed first historically and then in their current situation, before the presentation of the findings from the field work.

The second source of originality is the focus in the field work on the end-users of the education and training systems, the employers and the employees. By adopting the basic approach used in customer service satisfaction surveys, that of asking the end-user what makes them happy or unhappy with respect to the product or service on offer, the study enables an evaluation of the gap between expectations and actual experiences, which can then be used to make recommendations for appropriate corrective action depending on the issues identified and proactive policies to enable Mauritius keep pace with the requirements of the global market in ITC-BPO services. Furthermore, although the study is focussed on the use of English, the spontaneous feedback obtained in the interviews and focus groups gives some interesting insights into the pragmatic attitude displayed by the informants concerning the handling of their personal multilingualism, particularly with respect to the second international language in common use in Mauritius, French, and the language of the home, Mauritian Kreol. In this respect the case of the third focus group was of particular interest in that it concerned the employees working on a French-speaking platform owned by an American company that had a mandatory single language policy with respect to internal communication throughout its global network, that is English.

Finally, the thesis aims to give due recognition to the resilience and persistence of an island nation during its fascinating journey from a remote colony to a vibrant, multifaceted player on the international scene, which I have witnessed over the past 48 years.

## **SECTION 1: THE CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1 Introduction: three key concepts**

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework of this study. It identifies three key concepts underpinning the broad areas of inquiry listed in the Introduction and discusses them with reference to the particular case of language use in a multilingual emerging economy. The concepts are (1) globalisation, with particular reference to the development of knowledge-based economic activities in the context of a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), (2) the use of English as a global language in a multilingual environment and (3) the role of education in development.

#### **2.2 Globalisation: a diversely defined concept**

Several leading academics draw attention to the difficulty in defining exactly what is meant by the term 'globalisation' as *"it lacks precise definition"* and is *"in danger of becoming the cliché of our times"* (Held *et al*, 1999, p.1). Held and McGrew (2003, p.2) consider that *"no singular account of globalisation has acquired the status of orthodoxy"*. Rees and Edwards (2006, p.6) talk of *"a common failure to clearly define what globalisation means"* and of it being *"a very slippery concept"*. They note that the term is often used interchangeably with other major concepts such as internationalization, liberalisation, universalization, westernization and modernisation, and in a number of areas, such as global communications, global markets and global finance, to name but three. They are in fact drawing on Scholte's earlier discussion regarding the lack of a sufficiently tight definition of the concept. Scholte (2002) considers that using globalisation only as a synonym for pre-existing concepts does not add any new insight and is therefore redundant. In his view, globalisation entails a shift in the nature of social space towards transplanetary relations between people located anywhere on earth and supraterritorial connections transcending territorial geography based on the concept of globality which defines the world as a single social space. The distinctive feature of globalisation today is the

large-scale spread of supraterritoriality as shown by three every-day examples of time-space shrinking technologies: Internet, global credit card systems and satellite television. The corresponding rise of the finance, information and communication industries, all of which are highly dependent on the new technologies, has been accompanied by the relative decline of primary production and traditional manufacture, thus occasioning a major shift in the focus of economic activity worldwide. (Scholte, 2002).

Held *et al* (1999) also pinpoint spatiality as being central to understanding globalisation as a set of processes transforming the spatial organisation of social relations and transactions, generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction and power and leading to a blurring of the boundaries between domestic and global affairs, the latter being an extremely important point when assessing the impact of the dismantling of the preferential trade agreements such as the EU-ACP Lomé Convention on small island emerging economies.

Furthermore, Dicken (2004) puts forward the notion of shallow and deep integration to differentiate between the international economy prior to 1914 and that of today. Before 1914, international economic integration was shallow in that it was transacted through traditional trade in goods and services between independent firms and through international movements of portfolio capital and relatively simple direct investment. Trade today is characterised by an increasingly pervasive deep integration transacted through geographically extensive and complex transnational production networks using a diversity of mechanisms.

However, globalisation does not just concern economic transactions; it permeates all aspects of human existence, political, social and cultural, again in the two-stage process noted above consisting of the pre-1914 colonial period and the current period. The colonial period saw not only the economic expansion of the European powers, but also the spread of technological innovations, notably mechanical transport and the telegraph, which in turn speeded up the diffusion of Western secular philosophies that were to transform the cultural context of practically every country touched by the

colonial experience. The distinguishing feature of the current period is the previously unheard-of scale and speed with which global cultural communication systems expose people all over the world to other cultural values, a process facilitated by the widespread use of English, now a global language reaching far beyond its former colonial territories (Held & McGrew, 2003).

The far-reaching changes linked to globalisation leads to the conclusion that the world is actually experiencing a paradigm crisis and shift, as defined by Kuhn (1970). The dualist post-World War II framework of developed/developing countries, North-South divide, which shaped policy and strategy formulation for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as defined for instance in the Brandt Report of 1980, is now being replaced by a more nuanced analysis which recognises extreme poverty and the attendant social exclusion as being present in both the so-called developed countries and the poorest ones (Castells, 1999).

### **2.3 Globalisation: a force for inclusion or exclusion**

It is precisely the growing divide between the haves and have-nots of this world that Stiglitz (2002) pinpoints in his quest to explain why globalisation, which has the potential to do so much good, has not brought the promised economic benefits to the developing world. The very title of his first book on the subject *Globalisation and its discontents* is in itself a clear statement of the state of play. The word 'discontent' resonates with other difficult experiences in economic development, for example, the Winter of Discontent in the UK in 1978-79, during which the clash between the Labour Government and its traditional voter base, the trade unions, was, and still is, a clear reminder that perceived economic hardship will always take precedence over customary political allegiance. In the volatile political arena of the developing world this is an ever-present risk factor.

The need to consider the emotional reactions of those with least power in the face of monumental change is also aptly expressed in the injunction about '*winning the hearts and minds of the people*' from General Sir Gerald Templer, the British commander posted in Malaya from 1952 to 1954 as

Director of Operations in the Emergency, as is known the very troubled period prior to the inauguration in 1963 of the Federation of Malaysia (Keay, 2005). Processes by themselves do not win wars or change the way things happen; the people creating and using the processes do, and the way they express themselves on their experience provides valuable information on the way forward, hence the importance of language in the development process.

In his later, more optimistically titled opus, *Making Globalization Work* (2006), Stiglitz reminds us of the gap between the hope offered by globalisation of more opportunity to poor countries, through greater access to overseas markets, freer inflows of foreign investment to develop their economic activities and easier migration for education and/or employment abroad, and its realisation. The problem is not globalisation in itself, but the way it has been handled. The economic process of globalisation has been shaped by the political considerations of the advanced countries, who have set the rules to their advantage with little or no regard for promoting the sustainable well-being of the poorest countries.

This is not a new criticism of the way our world is run, unfortunately. When presenting the direct link between development and the expansion of individual freedoms enjoyed by all people, Sen (1999) makes a similarly pessimistic assessment of the current state of affairs in which the enormous increases in overall wealth have been accompanied by a continued denial of elementary economic, political and social freedoms to vast numbers of people the world over.

Sen thus advocates *“the need for an integrated analysis of economic, social and political activities, involving a variety of institutions and many interactive agencies”* (Sen, 1999, p.xii). It should be noted that both Sen and Stiglitz wrote from first-hand experience of working in one of the major international institutions responsible for driving global development, the World Bank.

Castells (1999) also sees the trend towards increased integrated action between technological innovation and human values leading to a new socially and environmentally sustainable development

model. He defines the functioning of contemporary society in terms of networks and networking, which he considers to be the critical organisational form in the information age (Castells, 1999). He prefers the term *network society* to *information society* or *knowledge society* on the grounds that both knowledge and information have always been a central part of all historically known societies. In his view, the new element is “*the microelectronics-based, networking technologies that provide new capabilities to an old form of social organization: networks*” (Castells, 2005, p.4). He sees networks as “*the appropriate organization for the relentless adaptation and the extreme flexibility that is required by an interconnected, global economy*” (Castells, 1999, p.6) He identifies the following strengths of networks: their overall flexibility and variable geometry, with a capacity for decentralised coordination, based on interactions, not instructions, all of which enable them to adapt to new tasks and demands without destroying their basic organisational roles or changing their overarching goals. With the support of information and communication technology, a network can handle much higher levels of complexity without major disruption (Castells, 1999).

However, the one drawback of networks is their selectivity, that is, the ability to include or exclude actors depending on the needs of the activity being undertaken. As Castells admits: *The network society diffuses in the entire world, but does not include all people. (...) it excludes most of humankind, although all of humankind is affected by its logic, and by the power relationships that interact in the global networks of social organization* (Castells, 2005, p.5).

The ‘exclusion’ factor is not one that can be taken lightly. Notwithstanding Scholte’s view that globalisation and westernisation are not synonyms discussed earlier in this chapter, the common perception among the developing countries is that globalisation is a Western phenomenon, constructed and promoted for the benefit of the firms predominantly based in the core G8 grouping of highly developed sovereign states, which the post 2007-2008 financial and economic crisis G20 grouping does little to allay.

The notion that globalisation is a Western construct aimed at benefiting a select group of countries is not without precedent. Edward Said (1978) demonstrates how *orientalism*, the banner under which the Orient and all things oriental have been described, conceptualised and grouped together is in fact a construct of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> European scholars and travellers, diplomats and entrepreneurs included, in their search to understand and control what was, and possibly still is for many, a totally alien culture, with the ultimate aim of using it to their own and their country's benefit.

Many of the countries that today feel excluded from the positive effects of globalisation have experienced *orientalism* and similar colonial constructs from the receiving end. For instance, Stiglitz (2006) reminds us that historically Africa is the region most exploited by globalisation starting with the colonial period and is currently faced with a debt burden beyond its ability to pay, having been stripped of its assets, that is, its natural resources. It is thus not surprising that these countries have felt the need to group themselves into regional networks to defend their interests, be they political, economic, social, cultural or whatever. In the African region alone, there are the African Union (AU), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), all of which Mauritius is a full member.

Another international grouping of specific interests is that of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), of which Mauritius is also a member. The SIDS initiative emanated from the United Nations Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States held in Barbados in 1994, at which 111 Governments adopted the Barbados Declaration and Plan of Action. Two more conferences have been held since. The second conference was held in Mauritius in 2005 at which the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of SIDS was adopted. The third and most recent was held in Samoa in 2014, at which the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway was adopted. Currently 57 countries are listed as member states of SIDS (UN SD 2016). The 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development recognises that while the SIDS have valuable resources and potential, they are not only confronted with economic difficulties and development imperatives similar to those of developing countries



generally, but that they also have peculiar vulnerabilities and characteristics that make the difficulties in pursuing sustainable development particularly severe and complex (SIDS Barbados, 1994). The characteristics and challenges of small islands with particular reference to Mauritius will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3, *Literature Review*, and Chapter 5, *Mauritius: the making of an island hub*.

## **2.4 English as a global language in a multilingual environment**

Language is viewed in this study from two perspectives, language in the global economy and language in its multiple forms. Notwithstanding Castell's (1999, 2005) preference for the concept of 'network society', that of 'knowledge society' also remains relevant to this study, given that the use of information technology (IT) requires specialised knowledge in the use of the necessary equipment and that one of the primary functions of IT is the storage, transfer and exchange of data, that is information or codified knowledge, between people all over the physical world. Information can thus be considered to be a commodity that can be bought and sold (UNESCO, 2005). In particular, the activities undertaken by the BPO industry involve the exchange, processing, storing and transferring essential data about the targeted organisational activities, preferably in a common language with global status, the use of which transcends the multilingual reality of many countries today in Africa and South Asia (Crystal, 2003).

UNESCO (2005, p.30) is mindful of the risk of exclusion identified by Castells (2005) when it warns that language is "*a major obstacle to the participation of all to knowledge societies. The emergence of English as the lingua franca of globalization leaves little room for other languages within cyberspace*". This rather pessimistic statement concerning the fate of the world's linguistic diversity stems from the notion of linguistic death, which refers to the continuing disappearance of indigenous languages caused mainly by distinct ethnic groups being assimilated into a more dominant society and subsequently adopting its language. According to Crystal (2003) this loss could reach at least 50 per cent of the world's 6000 or so languages within the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But he finds the impact of a global language on the eventual survival or loss of minority languages to be quite limited. He considers that

*“the emergence of English as a truly global language has, if anything, had the reverse effect – stimulating a stronger response in support of a local language than might otherwise have been the case”* (Crystal, 2003, p.21). Crystal identifies two basic human needs, which are usually seen as antagonistic but which he considers complementary; namely, achieving mutual intelligibility by using a global language and thus gaining access to the world community, and asserting national or cultural identity by using a well-resourced regional language and thus gaining access to a local community. He considers the current process of globalisation to be much more deep-rooted and thus transcending individual language situations in which the ‘colonial’ languages, in particular English, have come under attack as being manifestations of linguistic imperialism in the unequal power relations between the former colonial masters of the ‘old world’ and the new nations of the ‘third world’. He advocates a more functionalist standpoint towards language choice and use, which recognises global interdependence, satisfies the desire of individual countries to have a voice in world affairs and promotes the value of multilingualism in attracting trade markets, while preserving and promoting the expression of local identity. In such a holistic linguistic framework, English opens the door to the global stage, and the local languages ensure the proper expression of individuality and difference. (Crystal, 2003).

While adopting such a functionalist approach may seem to be basic common sense, its successful implementation is often problematic. As with all human development, previous experience and the resulting attitudes and prejudices cannot be ignored. The historical perspective discussed earlier with reference to understanding globalisation also applies to language choice and use. In this context, the three-circle model proposed by Kachru since 1985 is still a convenient starting-point to understanding how the current predominance of English worldwide came about. In his discussion on World Englishes (1990) Kachru reminds us that the model was defined with reference to the historical, sociolinguistic and literary contexts, with the Inner Circle representing the traditional bases of English, dominated by the ‘mother tongue’ varieties of the language, the Outer Circle showing English as an institutionalised, additional language and finally the Expanding Circle covering the rest of the world where English is used as the primary foreign language. Although it is not listed, Mauritius comes in the Outer Circle

since the English language was formally introduced as the official administrative language of the colony when the British took over the island from France in 1810 during the Napoleonic Wars. Mauritius is included in the list proposed by Crystal (2003) showing the countries where English has held or holds a special place, a combination of Kachru's Inner and Outer Circles.

Furthermore, Hymes' observation (1964) in the much less pluralistic context of the final decade of post-war colonialism that functional relativity with respect to how languages are used occurs in both monolingual and multilingual contexts is still relevant in today's diverse and multiple linguistic and cultural landscapes. It should encourage observers and players to exercise even more caution in matters concerning language policy at whatever level, local, national, regional or international. To this end, Spolsky (2009) identifies three interrelated elements in language policy: practices, beliefs and management. Language practices are "*people's observable behaviours and choices*" concerning the languages present and their individual features and varieties. Beliefs about language are "*the values and statuses people give to named languages, varieties and features*". Finally, language management refers to "*the explicit and observable effort by someone or some group that has or claims to have authority over the participants in the domain to modify their practices or beliefs*" (Spolsky, 2009, p.4).

However, people do not develop beliefs, make choices or exercise authority in a vacuum: they do so in relation to the surrounding context which may or may not be expressed explicitly in terms of a set of rules or laws. In the case of language policy and practice, the French Constitution, for instance, states in Section 1, Sovereignty, Article 2, that the language of the French Republic is French. The French preoccupation with the state of their language goes back much further with the founding of the Académie française in 1635 by Cardinal Richelieu. The principal function of this much revered institution is stated in Article 24 of its Statutes as being "*to work with all the care and diligence needed to endow our language with certain rules and render it pure, eloquent and capable of treating the arts and sciences*", a function which Ostler describes as being "*a concern that transcended the practical*" (Ostler, 2005, p.409). On the other hand, in the English-speaking world, a less prescriptive standpoint is observed. While some countries define the status of English by law, for example, India, others,

starting with the UK, do not explicitly state that English is the official language (Crystal, 2003). One gathers that it is so through the predominate use of English in the official institutions of the country in question, such as the parliament, the law courts and the education system. There is no institutional equivalent of the Académie française. The role of repository and guardian of the English language has devolved on the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) through its painstaking and on-going efforts to document the language which started over 150 years ago in 1857 (<http://www.oed.com>). Ostler describes the spread of the English language as being “*remarkably informal*” with little or no state intervention, more “*a sense of do-it-yourself*”. He sums up the process as follows: “*The actual activity of spreading English settlement, British business and indeed the Anglican word of God around the world was left up to private initiative.*” (Ostler, 2005, p.519). Such a contrast in attitude and approach has influenced language choice and use in the various colonies in which these two imperial languages coincided, the case of Mauritius being an excellent example.

In response to the question *What makes a global language?* Crystal (2003) tersely reminds us that it has little to do with the number of speakers or the perceived aesthetic or practical qualities of a language, but that it is a question of power, at first usually military and then economic, technological, cultural, even ecclesiastical as was the case of Latin through Roman Catholicism. He identifies three major factors underpinning the global status of a language since the nineteenth century: the expansion on a global scale of economic development, the advent and rapid growth of the new communication technologies and the drive to make progress in science and technology. The language used to carry out and express this unprecedented level of international activity would thus find itself with global status more by circumstance than by deliberate intent.

Ostler concurs with Crystal. In his aptly named work, *The Empires of the Word* (2005), he gives a fascinating historical account of the rise and fall of the major world languages throughout history that leaves no doubt as to the direct link between the status of a language and that of its speakers, irrespective of their number or the size of their country. For both Crystal (2003) and Ostler (2005), what is peculiar to the current status of English as a global language is the scale and predominance of

its hegemony. In addition to the historical reasons for the worldwide spread of the English language, in particular, the setting-up of the overseas trading stations, Britain being the source and centre of the Industrial Revolution, and the new technologies that transformed and drove industrial progress in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries being invented or at least developed by speakers of English, more recent reasons include the need for a lingua franca in running the post-WWII international institutions, such as the UN system, and in handling international communications and transport, such as air traffic control. Then there are all the new economic activities connected to the technological revolution in worldwide communications, notably advertising and media activities, entertainment and outsourcing. Ostler (2005) sums up the current global status of English in three words: population, position and prestige. In other words, the sheer numbers of people using the language of which the native or first-language speakers are now a minority, the global coverage of the language by which English enjoys special status in countries on every continent and finally the conscious association of English with technical progress and popular culture the world over all make the language currently unavoidable in many spheres of modern life. Ostler also points out, in a slightly tongue-in-the-cheek manner, that the global status of English has given rise to a flourishing worldwide industry. He writes: *“And the English-speaking world, with its characteristic eye for a business opportunity, has converted this into a paying proposition; English Language Teaching (ELT) has become not only a field of education, but [...] a commercial service industry in its own right”* (Ostler, 2005, p.513).

In a similar vein, Ferguson (2004) coins the term ‘Anglobalization’ to express the extent with which the first phase of globalisation was directly linked to the expansion of the nineteenth-century British Empire. When identifying the nine most distinctive features of the British Empire, a delightfully disparate list that has land tenure systems alongside team sports, he puts the English language at the top of the list as being *“perhaps the most important single export of the last 300 years”* (Ferguson, 2004, p.366).

For his part, in an earlier analysis of the global position of English, Kachru (1996) identifies three types of linguistic power: crude linguistic power such as the imposition of Japanese on the Koreans,

Singaporeans and Malaysians during World War II, indirect psychological or 'spiritual' power through the language being used for rituals such as recitations of prayers and religious writings and finally pragmatic power through the language gaining control over a wide range of functionally crucial domains – political, religious, caste, class and commercial. He considers that English has abundant pragmatic power across cultures. Thus, Crystal's later suggestion of a functionalist approach, discussed earlier, can be considered as a response to the widespread pragmatic power of English.

The continuing global spread of English has given rise to two other interrelated phenomena. Firstly, there is the shift in the demography of English-language speakers whereby the monolingual native, mother tongue or first language (L1) speaker is no longer the majority, and so dominant, profile, due to the constant increase in the number of bilingual or multilingual speakers of English in the Outer and Expanding Circles of Kachru's three-circle model. The estimated figures for the two profiles vary somewhat, given the difficulty in obtaining coherent and reliable statistics. For instance, Crystal (2003) talks of 329 million L1 speakers, 430 million L2 speakers and another 750 million foreign language speakers. Ostler (2005) gives 375 million for L1, another 375 million for L2 and 750 million for foreign language speakers. In both cases, the total equals about one quarter of the world population. Similarly, Ferguson (2004) considers that roughly one in every seven people on the planet are either L1 speakers (350 million) or L2 speakers (around 450 million). The only other comparable language in terms of number of speakers is Mandarin, but English remains unmatched for global coverage (Ostler, 2005).

In his analysis of the future of English in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Graddol (1997) updates Kachru's three categories of English speakers as follows: (1) first language (L1) or native speakers who are often monolingual and live in countries with a predominantly English-based culture; (2) second language (L2) speakers who use English, including perhaps a local form of English, as part of their repertoire of languages; and (3) the growing number of speakers who are learning English as a foreign language (EFL).

To capture the current dynamics in the composition of the English-speaking world, Graddol (1997) shows Kachru's three-circle model not as concentric but overlapping circles, in which L2 and EFL speakers will move into the adjacent circle as they improve their mastery and widen their use of the language. He considers that the future of English is now in the hands of the bilingual or multilingual non-native speaker, whose use of any language is determined by the context. He writes: *"many of the world's bilingual and multilingual speakers interact with other multilinguals and use each of their languages for different purposes: English is not used simply as a 'default' language because it is the only language shared with another speaker; it is often used because it is culturally regarded as the appropriate language for a particular communicative context"* (Graddol, 1997, p.12). English is now seen as being part of a multilingual hierarchy in which the component languages are not equal in terms of political and social status. This change in the role and status of the multilingual speaker of English was noted earlier by Kachru (1996), when he observes that *"it is the non-native users who are now responsible for its spread and teaching, and uses. Interactions involving English in non-Western countries are mostly carried on by non-native users with non-native users not, as one would suppose, by non-native users with native users"* (Kachru, 1996, p.139). For his part, Ostler (2005) notes that *"most people in the world are still bilingual; this points to the fact that global languages have seldom established themselves as anything more than second languages, useful as a lingua franca where long-distance communication is important, but not particularly commanding as vehicles for everyone's daily life"* (Ostler, 2005, p.543). We are reminded of Crystal's distinction between the need to communicate on the global stage and the ability to preserve and express local, individual identity and difference, as well as of Hymes' observations concerning the functional relativity of languages. In this context, Trudgill's seminal study (1974; 2000) on the relationship between language and society still has much to tell us about how the language performance of speakers, be they monolingual or otherwise, is influenced by their social class, ethnic background and gender. Thus, we can see that understanding how people use the languages at their disposal to suit their communication and social needs is fundamental to developing appropriate educational and training strategies with respect to language learning and proficiency.

Secondly, there is the appearance of several distinct varieties of the language, diversely referred to as 'New Englishes' (Foley, 1988; Macrum, 1992), 'World Englishes' (Kachru, 1992, 1996; Bhatt, 2001; McArthur, 2001) or 'global English' (Phillipson, 2001; Crystal, 2003), which poses the question of what sort of English should be adopted and so taught, and for what reason. The historical divide between British and American English, as presented by Crystal (2003), is becoming perhaps less relevant in the presence of such strong regional varieties as Caribbean English, Indian English, Nigerian English and Singapore English to name but a few. Moreover, in today's post-colonial world, one can understand the spirited defence of the regional varieties by the Guyanese writer, John Agard, in 1985 (Crystal, 2010), and continue to appreciate Chinua Achebe's reasoned position as expressed in his oft-quoted statement made in 1964, four years after Nigeria's independence (Crystal, 2003).

However, the word 'variety' itself needs closer examination as Quirk (1990) points out in his discussion on language varieties and standard language. He makes the difference between use-related and user-related varieties, whereby use-related concerns the role or roles adopted by the speaker, for instance legal English goes with lawyers, while user-related concerns either the speaker's ethno-political identity as in American or British English or the speaker's linguistic relationship with the language, as being native or non-native, and the status of the native variety as being institutionalised or non-institutionalised. In his defence of Standard English as being the norm on which to base all teaching of the language be it to native speakers in Britain or foreign language learners in non-English speaking countries, such as the Philippines, he warns against what he terms as tolerant pluralism. In his view, *"Filipinos, like Indians, Nigerians, Malaysians, are learning English not just to speak with their own country folk but to link themselves with the wider English-using community throughout the world"* (Quirk, 1990, p.9). Putting himself in the shoes of the foreign student who is paying good money in Tokyo or Madrid to be taught English, he goes so far as to say that he *"would feel cheated by such tolerant pluralism"* and *"particularly annoyed at irrelevant emphasis on the different varieties of English when I came to realise they mattered so little to native speakers of English, [...] that the best grammars and dictionaries similarly related to a Standard English that was freely current throughout the world"* (Quirk, 1990, p.10).



Identifying what constitutes a Standard English that is mutually intelligible and acceptable to the wide kaleidoscope of English speakers in the global economy is certainly easier said than done. Variety has been an inherent feature of the English language throughout its history as the various tales of its progress testify, for example, Bryson (1990). Another salient feature of the language is its wide and ever-increasing vocabulary range. The OED website currently gives 600,000 published words that are considered to be in widespread use. Furthermore, the contrast in range between two contemporary literary masterpieces, the King James Bible, with its minimal simplicity of 8,000 words, and Shakespeare's plays, a wealth of 30,000 words, has become the reference point for both writers and speakers throughout the world (McCrum, 1992). Knowing how and when to use such a range of expression remains a challenge for even the most talented and dedicated of writers and speakers, be it for business and technical reports, political speeches or just everyday emails responding to customer complaints. Hence the need for a systematic and reliable benchmark and tool with which to guide and measure one's attempts to formulate ideas, opinions and feelings in an acceptable manner to one's audience, a role that started with Samuel Johnson (1755) and which the major dictionaries of the modern English-speaking world, notably the OED in the UK and the Merriam-Webster in the USA, have continued. A cursory visit to the website of either dictionary is ample proof of the complexity of the task, and consequently of the challenge faced by any teacher and learner of the language in the L2 and EFL contexts identified by Kachru and Graddol as discussed earlier.

Thus, however fascinating the study of such richness and variety in the use of the language may be, the fundamental question that needs to be answered by anyone involved in teaching the language, ranging from the policy-makers at the top of any country's education and training system to the individual teacher preparing their lessons, remains: *Why are these students learning English?* Or to put it even more prosaically: *What advantage do these students expect to gain from learning English?* which brings us back to Quirk's remarks on the need for Standard English discussed earlier. In today's global world, studying literature is not very high on many people's agendas. Getting a job or a promotion, or migrating to an English-speaking country to study or work are much more likely reasons.

Consequently, this study of the use of English is situated in the economic and professional context, with the specific focus being on the performance requirements of the English-speaking ICT-BPO sector, as determined by the customers being serviced. `

## **2.5 The role of education in development**

The third component of the theoretical framework of this study concerns the link between education and development, that is, between improved knowledge and greater progress for both the individual and their country, which has long been recognised, not least by Adam Smith (1723-1790). In his discussion of the link between a country's capability to provide its population sufficiently with the necessary goods and services and the ability of the labour force to do so, he shows great belief in the human capacity for improvement through learning (Sutherland, 1993).

When exploring the link between the development of human capacity and the increase in a country's wealth in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Schultz considers that the standard analysis offered by many economists misses a vital point. In a text originally published in 1961 and reprised in 1993, he observed that the productive capacity of human beings is much larger than the sum of all other forms of wealth quite simply because people invest massively in themselves, and that the product of such investment, namely knowledge and skill, accounts for the superiority of the technically advanced countries. In the case of poor countries, he criticises the view often expressed by international funding agencies that these countries show a low absorption rate in relation to the capital made available to them. He then makes an important distinction in pointing out that the capital in question is usually in form of physical capital, that is money for the formation of structures and equipment, with very little, if at all, set aside for the development of the human capabilities needed to make good use of the newly acquired physical infrastructure. As a result, human capabilities are unable to keep pace with the increased availability of physical capital and so become limiting factors in economic growth (Schultz, 1993).

The importance of the human dimension in the development process in terms of both quality and quantity, cannot be emphasised too strongly. Brandt (1980, p.23) reminds us that economic growth is not synonymous with development and that *“the prime objective of development is to lead to self-fulfilment and creative partnership in the use of a nation’s productive forces and its full human potential.”*

Sen (1993) takes the analysis one step further when he makes the distinction between ‘human capital’ and ‘human capability’. He attributes the success of the East Asian economies to the fact that these countries, starting with Japan, focussed on human resource development, through massive investment in education and later health care, before they actually managed to break out of poverty. The combined effect of universal access to health care and basic education is two-fold: the direct enhancement of the quality of life, with increased life expectancy in better health, and the improvement of people’s productive abilities with its concomitant impact on economic growth on a widely shared basis. Education cannot be considered as simply a means to improve human capital in commodity production. *“If a person can become more productive in making commodities through better education, better health and so on, it is not unnatural to expect that she can, through these means, also directly achieve more – and have the freedom to achieve more – in leading her life”* (Sen, 1993, p.294).

When talking of his Asian experience as the last Governor of Hong Kong (1992-1997), Lord Patten (1999) identifies the three crucial elements in globalisation, people, money and technology, and emphasises the notion of mobility underlying all three. He notes, in particular, the role of the individual and the importance of enthusiasm, self-belief and belief in a better future, all of which drive the commitment to education that is so prevalent in Asia. All of these issues are relevant to the Mauritian experience, historically a settler colony like Hong Kong, situated on the major maritime trading routes to India and the Far East.

The numerous reports and policy statements of the relevant international institutions also confirm the link between education and human development, starting with Article 26, Section 2, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

*Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.*

Following on from that all-encompassing statement, a more recent document of particular interest to this study is the Dakar Framework for Action, 2000, which brought together the findings of the six regional workshops that assessed the progress towards the goals expressed in the 1990 Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All. The Dakar Framework committed the signatory countries to six main goals covering comprehensive early childhood care and education, free and compulsory primary education of good quality for all children by 2015, equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes that meet the learning needs of all young people and adults, a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, the elimination of gender disparities and the achievement of gender equality in education by 2015 and finally the overall improvement of the quality of education and the achievement of recognised and measurable learning outcomes, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills. However, the same document noted that the challenge of education for all is greatest in sub-Saharan Africa, in South Asia and in the least developed countries (UNESCO, 2000). The section on the progress made in the sub-Saharan Africa highlights the considerable regional variations and cites the Indian Ocean countries as having achieved over 70 per cent enrolment of both boys and girls. It considers “*investment in quality education as prerequisite for the empowerment of Africans to fully participate in and benefit from a globalized economy and modern communications technology*” (UNESCO, 2000, pp.25-26).

However, the UNESCO World Report *Towards Knowledge Societies*, 2005, shows that achieving basic education for all is not enough to meet the challenges of handling the exponential growth in the quantity of knowledge produced. It talks of the need to reduce not just the 'digital divide' but also the 'knowledge divide' and warns that *"(t)raining in the new information and communication techniques requires a high level of education, knowledge of English and the art of navigating in an ocean of information"* (UNESCO, 2005, p.96). Similarly, the World Bank lists a wide range of required skills that go far beyond universal basic primary education:

*Performing in the global economy and functioning in a global society require mastery of technical, interpersonal, and methodological skills. Technical skills include literacy, foreign language, math, science, problem-solving, and analytical skills. Interpersonal skills include teamwork, leadership, and communication skills. Methodological skills include the ability to learn on one's own, to pursue lifelong learning, and to cope with risk and change. (IBRD, 2003, p.22)*

The need to move from the limited, albeit necessary, focus on universal access to basic education to a wider view is also reflected in the change of scope between the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Under the MDGs the focus was on getting all children to complete primary education (Goal 2), whereas Goal 4 of the SDGs is: *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*, which involves:

*Achieving inclusive and quality education for all reaffirms the belief that education is one of the most powerful and proven vehicles for sustainable development. This goal ensures that all girls and boys complete free primary and secondary schooling by 2030. It also aims to provide equal access to affordable vocational training, and to eliminate gender and wealth disparities with the aim of achieving universal access to a quality higher education. ([www.undp.org](http://www.undp.org)).*

However, the concept of 'lifelong learning' is not a new idea born of the growing awareness that the ability to survive and thrive in the global world requires a constant upskilling and reskilling to keep pace with the technological advances in everyday life. It was first mooted in the Faure Report of 1972, *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow*, which was written in the wake of the student revolts of the late 1960s, another time of lasting paradigm shift in determining the aim and role of education in society. In 2013, UNESCO re-issued the Faure Report *"to inspire a new generation of educationalists with the wisdom of past thinking"* as stated in the Message from the Director-General of UNESCO, Ms Irina Bekova, in the new edition. She concludes her Message by saying: *"We need today a new big push in education and a new strategic vision of education's central importance for human dignity and for sustainable development in every society."*

Faure (1972) noted that the developing countries needed urgently to review the education systems inherited from the colonial period so as to be more inclusive and responsive to their present context and future development. Although his examples are now outdated, Faure presciently saw the increasing impact of the scientific-technological revolution on the daily lives of the masses. He underlined the link between the individual's responsibility in the destiny of the human race and the collective practice of democracy, both of which are strengthened by *"an education readily available to all"* (Faure, 1972, p.xxviii). Furthermore, he stressed the universal nature of the issues concerning education, hence the stand taken in the report that both industrialised and developing countries needed to take action, in different ways and with different means, but to the same end, the democratisation of education. With regard to the specific issues of employment and economic progress, he saw the aim of education *"not so much as to prepare young people and adults for a specific, life-time vocation, as to 'optimize' mobility among the professions and afford a permanent stimulus to the desire to learn and to train oneself"* (Faure, 1972, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv). Hence the report's essential proposal of *"lifelong education as the master concept for educational policies in the years to come for both developed and developing countries"*, which is perhaps even more relevant in today's fast-moving global environment.

The Delors Report of 1996, *Learning: the treasure within*, also written at a time of impending change with the rise of the global village at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, broadened the concept into '*learning throughout life*' in which education should be flexible, diverse and available at different times and in different places, and thus capable of adapting to changes in the nature of work while offering a continuous process of forming whole human beings in terms of not just knowledge and aptitudes but also critical thinking, the ability to act, self-awareness and environmental awareness, thus enabling people to play their social role at work and in the community. Delors emphasised "*the need to advance towards a 'learning society'*" and "*for each individual to learn how to learn*". Education itself was to be based on four pillars, for which the Delors Report is possibly best known: *learning to live together, learning to know, learning to do and learning to be*, the latter continuing the concept from the Faure Report. Another key concept in the Delors Report was "*a learning society founded on the acquisition, renewal and use of knowledge*". The Delors Commission foresaw that the 'information society' would increase "*opportunities for access to data and facts*" and so "*education should enable everyone to gather information and to select, arrange, manage and use it*". Therefore, education should not only constantly adapt to changes in society, but also "*pass on the attainments, foundations and benefits of human experience*" (Delors, 1996, pp.22-24).

More recently, Nussbaum (2006) also underlines the need for a multicultural approach to the challenges of meeting the educational demands of the pluralistic societies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that goes beyond the narrow requirements of technical knowledge for employment. She cautions against the dangers of over-emphasis on science and technology and calls for a more holistic multicultural approach that would include language learning, history, economics and political science for a better, more empathetic understanding and appreciation of the multi-faceted world in which we live and of our individual role and responsibility therein.

## 2.6 Conclusion

The preceding discussion has highlighted the key characteristics of globalisation that are relevant to the emerging economies of the SIDS such as Mauritius, in particular, the supraterritorial nature of global business that is driven by the extensive use of time-space shrinking information and communication technologies, and as a result favours the development of knowledge-based activities, such as business process outsourcing. Secondly, it has presented the importance of networks and networking as the critical organisational form of global business, with the attendant dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. The concept and grouping of the SIDS is a direct response to counter the overriding influence of the group of the larger developed industrial economies known as the G20. It is in this context of economic power that the role of English as a global language has been explored, in particular, its functional role in facilitating international communication in global business. Finally, the role of education in the development process of the emerging economies has been underlined, with the importance of a holistic approach of a liberal education in which the humanities, especially languages, are given as much importance as the sciences and technical subjects. In the case of a country whose only resource is its population, such as Mauritius, such insights are of prime importance. Universal access to education at all levels is an essential prerequisite to a country's economic and social progress. How Mauritius has tackled this issue and with what success will be discussed in Chapter 6, *Overview of the Mauritian education and training system*, while the language question will be examined in Chapter 7, *The role and use of English in Mauritius*.



## CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3.1 Introduction

The literature review presented in this chapter aims to give a sharper and deeper focus on the central issue of this study, namely, the role and use of English in the professional and economic life of a post-colonial, emerging economy. It examines the use of English from the international business perspective, and in the global ICT-BPO sector. It presents the particular context of the SIDS by exploring their overall characteristics and the challenges they face with respect to education and human resource development for knowledge-based economic activities.

### 3.2 English in the post-colonial development context

While few people will quibble with the argument that universal access to quality education is an essential factor in the development process, the contribution of language proficiency is subject to a more varied and contrasting range of opinion. For example, we may consider the standpoint of two of the major international development agencies, the British Council and UNESCO. The British Council, as the United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities, is unsurprisingly wholly devoted to the promotion of English as a crucial factor in economic and social development both on the global, international level and in the individual countries with which it is currently working. Its manifesto *The English Effect* (British Council, 2013) is a compilation of examples and initiatives that illustrate the currently apparently unassailable position of English as the lingua franca of international development. It does, however, draw attention to the need for monoglot English speakers to learn other languages to avoid being left behind by their multilingual English-speaking counterparts in the global economy. For its part, while acknowledging the importance of English in the global knowledge economy, UNESCO (2005) also takes a clear stand in favour of linguistic diversity and the preservation of local languages as vectors of indigenous traditional knowledge. In particular, it draws attention to how what it calls the "*great divide*" between the visible codified

knowledge at the heart of the knowledge-based economies and the invisible traditional knowledge is made more acute in the emerging knowledge societies because the supremacy of English in expressing scientific and technical knowledge and the criteria of economic visibility governing the exchange of required information combine to marginalise, even exclude, traditional knowledge expressed in other languages.

This assessment goes beyond the issue of linguistic diversity to touch on the nature of the content thus expressed. Brown and Lauder (2006) also underline the importance of codified language in global economic activities. They talk of the need to standardise knowledge to ensure its rapid processing and reproduction at lowest cost as being part of the competitive strategy of many multinational companies to achieve not only greater control over their products but also a reduction in costs by off-shoring activities to countries where labour costs are significantly lower. Local diversity has little or no place in such a business strategy. We are reminded of Crystal's argument in favour of a functionalist approach in the choice and handling of multiple languages, with English as the door to the global economy and the local language(s) being the expression of individuality and difference.

Furthermore, the on-going language-of-instruction debate is a constant reminder of not just the complexity of the issues concerning language choice and use in multilingual societies, in particular in sub-Saharan Africa, but also the economic and social consequences of the choices made. The continued widespread use of the ex-colonial languages, namely English, French and Portuguese, as the language of instruction from primary school upwards, for whatever reason, results in the disastrously low levels of not just basic literacy acquired but also overall educational achievement for the simple reason that most children in the sub-Saharan countries have no exposure to these languages outside the classroom (Williams, 2002; 2011). The situation is compounded by the low level of teaching due to the inadequate mastery of these languages by the teachers themselves (Williams, 2011; Brock-Utne, 2012).

Research in these countries has shown repeatedly that initial basic literacy is best acquired through a language that is already familiar to the learner (Williams, 2002; Brock-Utne, 2010). However, identifying the appropriate familiar language is not as easy as it may first seem, for instance, in places where bilingualism can be considered as a first language or where the varieties in everyday use, be they rural or urban, differ so much from the standard version used in school that the learners do not recognise their own language (Williams, 2002). Yet, such technical difficulties can be overcome with sufficient commitment and effort on the part of the education authorities concerned, as the examples of Malawi and Rwanda given by Williams show (Williams, 2011).

The original historical reasons for retaining the colonial languages in education and as official languages in administration, the judiciary and government were the drive for rapid growth and societal modernisation, even though this choice was to the detriment of the development and mainstreaming of the local African languages (Rassool, 2007; 2013.). These same reasons can now be considered as being part of the globalisation process, with one major change, the growing predominance of English in the global market. As will be shown later in this study, the language situation in Mauritius is an excellent example of this shift in motivation for using English. Yet, despite all the empirical experience of English in daily life, Coleman (2010) highlights the difficulty in determining just how far English language skills impact individual employability in general and overall national development, due in large part to the many different interpretations and definitions of development, which in turn involve numerous variables. He concludes that focussing on specific types of economy and sectors of activity is possibly a more effective approach on the basis that service economies will most likely need widespread English language skills, while in manufacturing economies only those employees involved in international trade will need English and in rural economies even fewer still. This hierarchy of needs with regard to proficiency in English can be seen in Mauritius. The employees working in the hotel resorts and on the outsourcing platforms need a high level of proficiency, whereas in the textile industry and in agriculture only those involved in export marketing and sales, and perhaps procurement, are concerned.

In an earlier analysis, Bruthiaux (2002) had already urged for a similar nuanced approach. In his view, language education for economic development is not synonymous with English language education. For the vast majority of the populations in the developing countries English is of little or no use in their daily struggle against poverty and other hardships. Their economic activity is almost exclusively based in the local informal economy which is expressed in the local language or languages. Thus, the priority should be the acquisition of basic literacy, that is, the ability to read and write, in the appropriate local language, with specific, practical user-driven needs in mind, supported by the proper allocation of the scarce funds available. On the other hand, he argued that English language education should be carefully targeted for specific populations that have a realistic chance of participating in international exchanges.

However, while such a targeted approach to learning English may be commended on the grounds of efficiency and functionality, it can be criticised in terms of equity and aspirations, especially those of the poorer communities in a developing country, for instance in sub-Saharan Africa, for whom English language skills are an instrument, albeit flawed and uncertain, for accessing a better life (Ferguson, 2013). Williams (2011) makes a similar observation about parents in South Africa who, despite having a choice of 11 languages as media of education, overwhelmingly prefer the 'strong' language, English, for their children. This parental preference for English-medium instruction cannot be considered as misguided since it is motivated by the realisation that having no proficiency in English at all would mean being automatically excluded from a great many employment opportunities, particularly white-collar jobs, for which English is a required skill.

Any experienced teacher of English in such a context, including the one writing this thesis, will concur with this assessment and add that it is an uphill, even at times doomed, task to convince these parents of the wisdom of at least starting their child's education in their mother tongue. As Brook-Utne (2010) points out, the misconception that the best way to learn English is to have it as the language of instruction is held by a great many parents. Furthermore, in the case of sub-Saharan Africa, Stroud (2001, p.340) notes that the negative attitudes towards African languages being used as teaching

media may be “*due to precolonial prejudice, or because of speakers’ postcolonial perceptions that the languages lack value on important social and economic markets*”. Thus, the perceived symbolic power of a language is ever present: “*the power ascribed to words and the instructions they express, the power to maintain or subvert order, is entirely dependent on the belief in the legitimacy of these words and of the speaker, a belief that the words cannot themselves create*” (Bourdieu, 2001, p.210).

This perception of the symbolic and economic power of English is not peculiar to sub-Saharan Africa. Another area in the world where the English language has had a long and influential career is the Indian sub-continent, comprising Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, which together form the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), to which Mauritius was granted Observer Status in 2008. The Indian experience with respect to English is of particular interest to Mauritius, given that over 60% of its population are descendants of the Indian indentured labourers and traders that came to the island in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, as will be explained in greater detail in Chapter 5, *Mauritius: the making of an island hub*.

Throughout the administration of the East India Company of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the colonial era of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, up to the independence of India in 1947, the use of English was confined in the public sphere to the government administration, the judiciary and the offices of the private business in the main sea-port cities, notably Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, and in the private sphere to the social intercourse of the Europeans, mainly British, on station in the country. Thus, English-language education was much sought after because it gave access to career prospects in the colonial administration and private business houses (Ostler, 2005). However, the gloomy prediction of a contemporary writer, Reverend David Allen (1854), that the supply of educated English-speaking clerks would outstrip the demand and so seriously diminish the economic value of an English education on the Indian job-market has yet to happen. Graddol (2010) notes that India’s economic growth has spread beyond the export-oriented sectors, such as ICT-BPO, to the domestic economy, for instance, in the retail sector with the opening of modern shopping malls that attract English-speaking expatriate employees, and in the hospitality and tourism industry with the increase of 5-star business hotels

needing English-speaking front-line personnel such as drivers. Some level of proficiency in English is now a requisite for not just for first-level employability but also career progression: *“the glass ceiling for non-English speakers who have got their first jobs is very low, even in trades, the retail sector and hotels”* (Graddol, 2010, p.103). English has moved from a ‘library language’ associated with higher education and an educated elite to a means of progress and the key to a better life for all levels of the Indian population (Graddol, 2010; Meganathan, 2011). Graddol goes as far as to consider the progression of English in modern India as being a powerful agent for change that has impacted government policies, electoral dynamics and economic growth (Graddol, 2010).

### **3.3 The international business perspective**

Since the global expansion of the multinational corporations (MNCs) and the concomitant emergence of the transnational corporation (TNC) in the 1990s, language management has become a strategic issue as an essential component of knowledge management. Thus, *“flows of communication, information, and knowledge take on strategic importance, and these flows need to traverse, more than one, and often many, languages. Ensuring that these flows are not distorted, diverted, or blocked by language factors becomes essential to the development and maintenance of core competencies”* (Maclean, 2006, p.1381). Consequently, a critical issue for global business is the availability of sufficient numbers of employees with the appropriate language skills, in this case, English, in order to get the work in hand done according to industry specifications and requirements.

Seen from this perspective India has done remarkably well in creating a competitive edge over another major contender in the world economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China. Both have a large supply of educated workers capable of high-quality work at low cost in ICT-BPO activities, with one major difference in India’s favour, widespread English language proficiency (Rassool, 2013). The World Bank had spotted this crucial factor in its earlier assessment of India’s capacity to leverage its strengths and opportunities. The World Bank considered that by 2005 India already had developed the critical mass of skilled, English-speaking knowledge workers, particularly in the sciences and engineering, to become

a leader in knowledge creation and use (World Bank, 2005). The rise of Bangalore as both the IT business centre of India and an outstanding training centre of excellence for human capital from its original colonial vocation of major military base exemplifies the importance of long-term continuity as a key success factor in elite talent development (Collato, 2010). However, in 2012 *The Economist* produced a more nuanced appreciation of India's talent pool, when it stated that the country produced 500,000 engineering graduates each year, but only 17% had the necessary basic skills to make them immediately employable. Even so, that 17% still meant around 100,000 new engineering graduates available each year to work in its IT and other engineering-related activities (Economist, 2012). From the perspective of smaller economies such as Mauritius wishing to compete on the global ICT-BPO market, numbers like these are well-nigh impossible to meet head on, let alone beat, hence the need for them to adopt a more nuanced niche-based strategy to succeed.

Graddol (2010) notes that the interpersonal skills required by employers in India's ICT-BPO sector are not specifically related to any particular language, be it English or a language spoken locally, but are more concerned with ensuring effective and appropriate communication to fit the circumstances, such as explaining ideas patiently and clearly, handling telephone calls well, and communicating well with other employees who may be more or less senior, or with people from different cultures or social backgrounds. The choice of language used depends on whether the business activity is export- or domestic-oriented. This observation is in line with the set of broad skills identified by the World Bank mentioned in the previous chapter, *Theoretical Framework* Section 2.5.

Thus, it would appear that for all the historical reasons discussed earlier that have led to the current global predominance of English, the business case for maintaining this situation is based more and more on pragmatic expediency, as expressed by the title of an articles on language strategy in business published in Harvard Business Review "Global Business Speaks English" (Neeley, 2012). The list of MNCs given in the article that have mandated English as their common corporate language shows that the choice has more to do with facilitating communication and performance across functions and business endeavours located in different parts of the world than with national identity. The business

case in favour of a defined single language strategy, as justified by its proponents in the MNCs, considers that “*unrestricted multilingualism*”, as they term it, is inefficient and ineffective, since it occasions in their view difficulties in communication which in turn hinder the accomplishment of business goals through loss of sales, delays in merger integration and productivity slowdowns, while single language policies help companies to overcome and even avoid these issues. English is seen as the natural choice because of its dominance as the language of business. Three main reasons are driving the move towards English as a corporate standard, namely: (1) competitive pressure, (2) globalization of tasks and resources and (3) merger and acquisition (M&A) integration across national boundaries (Neeley, 2012). The first two are of direct interest to this study.

### **3.4 The native speaker/non-native speaker interaction**

However, implementing a single-language policy is not just a practical matter of learning the technical vocabulary or publishing the corporate literature in one language. Research into language use in the MNC context has repeatedly shown that language standardization does not necessarily ensure meaningful communication when operating in multiple foreign language environments (Marschan *et al.*, 1997). Welch *et al.* (2005) notes that senior management in the global corporations may still view language differences too simplistically as being a mechanical translation problem that can be overcome by using translation software packages. Such an approach does not recognise the importance of tacit knowledge in effective information sharing and knowledge transfer. Language use in the workplace context is a complex and multi-faceted activity, in which three layers constantly interconnect and intermingle: (1) normal, social, everyday spoken and written language used for interpersonal communication at all levels of the organisation, (2) company ‘speak’, that is the collection of acronyms, special terms and management process terminology specific to the company that evolves over time, and (3) the technical or professional language peculiar to a specific industry or profession. The second two layers can and must be learned by all new recruits. It is the first layer, normal face-to-face social intercourse, with its implicit communication of essential meaning through unspoken cues such as a look or a gesture that is often taken for granted. Meyer (2015) cautions that



such implicit communication is lost when a company becomes geographically dispersed and so culturally diverse. Misunderstanding and inefficiency increase as people from different cultures can understand even the simplest message in very varied ways. As a result, employees often adopt a distinctive coping strategy of creating networks based on their own language, not for cultural reasons, but because of their need to find informal ways of getting round the linguistic barriers imposed by the use of the common corporate language in order to access critical information and knowledge.

An important underlying factor that can lead to success or failure depending on how it is handled is the language profile of the participants in a communicative event, for which there are three possible combinations: (1) native speaker to native speaker (NS <> NS), (2) native speaker to non-native speaker (NS <> NNS) and (3) non-native speaker to non-native speaker (NNS <> NNS). Of the three it is the second combination that can be the most problematic. The first and third are both homogeneous, albeit in different ways, that is, the participants involved are on an equal footing as regards their individual relationship to the target language, here English. The second is anything but equal and gives rise to some rather negative behaviours on both sides, as has been noted in several studies. For instance, Louhiala-Salminen *et al.*, (2012) report:

*Overall, communication with other NNSs of English was typically considered easier and more equal than that with NSs. In particular, the informants pointed out how communication with NSs could be intimidating because they were able to use English in such a skilful manner that they gained the upper hand automatically and could not be trusted at face value (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2012, p.266).*

Yamamoto and Sekiguchi (2015) note the occurrence of “negative emotional responses by non-native English speakers toward their English native colleagues’ sense of superiority and their complacency for learning foreign languages” Yamamoto and Sekiguchi, 2015, p.169). This situation is not peculiar to the EFL environment, Kachru’s third circle, the Expanding Circle. In his discussion of the use of English as a

business lingua franca in Hong Kong, historically an Outer Circle environment, Evans (2013) notes a similarly negative reaction:

*Communication with native speakers, however, raises another concern: the advantages that native speakers and other highly proficient professionals enjoy in meetings and negotiations, a source of power [...] that such speakers are apt to exploit* (Evans, 2013, p.247).

Unsurprisingly, Yamao and Sekiguchi (2015) suggest that “[e]mployees with high proficiency in English may have greater confidence in coping with a multilingual work environment that occurs with the globalization of their firm” (Yamao & Sekiguchi, 2015, p.169). Their two principal conclusions, namely (1) “the perception of non-native speakers of their own English-language proficiency is important for them to feel committed to the globalization of the operations in their employing firms”, and (2) “HR practices that facilitate the learning of English, such as language training and setting language skills as a criterion for recruitment and promotion, may influence the commitment of employees to their firms’ globalization” (Yamao & Sekiguchi, 2015, pp.176-177) show that, from the business perspective, managing and nurturing employees’ language skills is an HR issue.

When addressing language skills as part of a company’s HR strategy, the question of standards in language use becomes a central concern. In the goal-oriented business world, accurate communication of data and sharing of task-oriented experience are vital to the eventual success of any undertaking. Thus Quirk’s (1990) distinction between use-related and user-related varieties of English with his insistence on Standard English discussed earlier is a useful starting-point. Since the 1990s the focus on the use of the language as a tool to achieve other non-language targets, without having to worry much, if at all, about the cultural and literary dimensions, has seen the emergence of first English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and more recently English as a Business Lingua Franca (BELF). The term ‘lingua franca’ owes its origins to the merchants on the great trading routes of the Middle Ages in the Levant, the eastern Mediterranean today, who developed a common language through which to sell their wares (Ostler, 2005). Today, a lingua franca is defined as a ‘contact language’ used between speakers of

different mother tongues and different cultures, without specifying its purpose or domain of use, be it business or otherwise (Seidlhofer, 2005; Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2012). Thus, ELF refers to the use of English as a contact language in lingua franca communication usually between non-native speakers of English, though interactions including native speakers and non-native speakers are not excluded.

The concept of BELF responds to the need for a purpose-specific, use-oriented framework within which to analyse the use of English in business and corporate communication, and which would thus mirror the goal-oriented approach that characterises business activity in general. Charles (2006) lists three key characteristics which define the nature and scope of BELF as opposed to ELF: (1) its domain being solely business, the frame of reference and the culture that has created BELF and within which BELF evolves that of the global business community; (2) the 'owners' of this diverse and dynamic global business culture the 'International Business Discourse Community'; and (3) the shared values such as doing profitable business, shared purpose and shared business background that enable BELF speakers to understand each other, in spite of their great diversity.

English is thus seen as a necessary tool for getting the work done in the international context. Effective written communication in English for an NNS focusses first on clarity in expression so that the main idea can be found easily, directness so that the main point comes early on in the message and finally the non-business factor, the interpersonal factor, politeness (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010). Given such a pragmatic approach to language use, BELF has developed three distinctive features: absence of complicated structures and idiomatic expressions, highly specialized vocabulary and content, and hybridity in discourse features. NNS users of BELF are much less concerned about grammatical correctness than full mastery of the specialised vocabulary and genres of their specific field of expertise. They are also very tolerant of differences in communication styles due to the various mother tongues in the background, as these are not considered to be hindering communication (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2012).

However, Nickerson (2015) suggests that a distinct framework is needed to analyse and understand the language issues at play in NS<>NNS interactions in English. She considers that BELF should refer only to communication taking place in a business context between two speakers, neither of whom is an L1 speaker of English, whereas interactions involving one or more L1/NS speakers is not a lingua franca situation, but English being used as an international business language, termed International Business English (IBE). Nickerson's view that *"the presence of native English speakers in multilingual interactions can often cause more difficulties for everyone involved"* (Nickerson, 2015, p.392) is perhaps a somewhat harsh appraisal of the situation until one considers that in addition to their mastery of wider range of vocabulary and colloquial expressions, NS tend not to use any accommodation strategies with respect to the NNS present. The traditional position of the NS as the ideal communicator thus reasserts itself. This lack of accommodating behaviour by NSs had also been noted by Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) in an earlier study conducted in several Europe-based MNCs. They argue that *"(e)ven if NSs occasionally attempted to simplify their language use or slow down their speech rate, they tended to quickly change back to their normal level of complexity and speed"* (Kankaanranta and Planken, 2010, p.390). Nickerson (2015) proposes that the NS should be considered as an equally accountable communicator, and as such should learn how to accommodate the lingua franca speakers, NNS, so as to make themselves more comprehensible, a suggestion also made by Neeley (2012). The IBE framework would thus allow for a more nuanced understanding and handling of the NS<>NNS interaction. With respect to this study, the distinction between BELF and IBE is of particular interest, given that the NS<>NNS interaction is most prevalent in the daily work of an offshore platform, in which the NS is usually the customer and the NNS is the overseas service provider. The ultimate outcome of the interaction is not a demonstration of language proficiency, but the satisfaction of the customer's requirements and expectations.

Consequently, the performance challenge is the successful handling of the most critical point in efficient customer service, the moment when the customer service agent comes into contact with the customer. It is the *'moment of truth'*, one of the fundamental concepts underpinning excellent customer service, originally defined by Jan Carlzon (1987), one of the early proponents of unflinching

levels of customer service, in his eponymous book describing the successful turnaround of Scandinavian Airlines System, now known as SAS. It is the moment of instantaneous perception and judgement on the part of the customer, which cannot be recalled, replaced or rewound. The situation can only be recovered by suitably informed and responsible behaviour on the part of the service provider, a difficult undertaking when assertiveness and self-confidence are lacking, and proficiency in the language used, in this case, English, is inadequate.

### 3.5 English in the global ICT-BPO sector

However, customer satisfaction is not the ultimate aim of an offshore platform, or of any business for that matter, but rather the means by which to ensure profitable outcomes, and so achieve capital accumulation and profit maximisation. Taylor and Bain (2005) point out that the driving factor behind the origins and growth of the call centre, first on-shore in the UK and USA and then off-shore in the developing world, has always been *“massive cost reduction consequent upon the centralization of previously dispersed customer service and sales operations”* (Taylor & Bain, 2005, p.264). In their analysis of the relationship between the labour process in the Indian call centre industry and globalisation they consider that *“[f]undamentally, the Indian outsourced sector emerged as a dependent niche market for developed nations’ requirements”* thanks to two key attributes, cost advantage and the ability to speak English (Taylor & Bain, 2005, p.270). Thus, given that most of the firms choosing to outsource their customer service platforms are historically located in the UK and the USA, the two main actors in Kachru’s Inner Circle, the benchmark for appropriate language use is quite logically that of the NS. The attitude towards English is resolutely pragmatic as being the necessary communication tool with which to accomplish the work in hand and which needs to be mastered and controlled to achieve this end. Hence the emphasis on standardisation in the handling of interactions with customers through tightly scripted calls, an approach which is consistent with the drive towards standardised and codified knowledge in transnational business as observed by Brown and Lauder (2006).

However, standardisation of contacts between humans has its limits. The fundamental contradiction between the need for sustained cost reduction and the focus on customer satisfaction, quantity versus quality, is a source of constant tension in the performance of the BPO platform as a whole, and of each of its individual customer service agents. However carefully scripted, a prescribed dialogue does not allow for truly sensitive handling of the customer service interaction in the unequal pairing of NS customer with an NNS service agent. Taylor and Bain (2005) summarise the situation concerning required performance standards as follows:

*Contradicting the received wisdom, it cannot be assumed that 15 years of English language education at school and university necessarily equips Indian graduates with the ability to communicate to customers, whose mother tongue is English, to standards deemed acceptable to Indian providers and their overseas clients (Taylor & Bain, 2005, p.274).*

To meet the required standard of communication, Taylor and Bain note that recruitment, selection and training practices give more importance to identifying and fostering positive attitudes and communication skills, including controlling personal feelings towards the customer, than to technical competencies and product knowledge. Language and cultural training, with particular focus on accent training or more precisely, accent neutralisation (the term used in the ICT-BPO sector as noted in all the studies reviewed here) to eliminate thick local accents, have become central priorities. However, success in achieving the required standard is often much less than expected as the trainees' linguistic ability remains insufficiently developed and so not flexible enough to handle anything more than routine calls. Taylor and Bain (2006) report that some UK companies consider accent and language problems together with cultural differences and mistakes through misunderstanding as being the major disadvantage experienced when outsourcing to the Indian platforms.

The heavy emphasis on accent neutralisation, or reduction of mother-tongue influence (MTI), in order to make the NS customer feel at ease in the interaction with the NNS service provider has been noted repeatedly in other studies on language practice in the call centres, not just in India but also elsewhere

in other Asian and Pacific countries, including Pakistan and the Philippines. Cowie's (2007) study of private training centres offering language and culture training for call centre employees and future recruits in Bangalore highlights the intensive efforts to eliminate MTI and regional influence in the way the trainees use English and to encourage them to adopt a suitably 'neutral' accent. However, Cowie identifies three unresolved issues that could be impacting the successful outcome of the training. Firstly, what exactly counts as a desirable 'neutral' accent is not clear, though judging from the training materials in use, the trend would appear to be more towards American English than British English. Secondly, nor is it very clear how far this dedicated training actually helps the trainees to adopt the desired new accent and professional identity. It is highly likely that watching American films and TV programmes, listening to Non-Resident Indians (NRI) in their local environments and, if already working on a platform, real-life interactions with American customers enable the trainees to pick up the targeted American-like accent. Finally, there would also seem to be a generation gap between the trainers and trainees, which may be affecting the effectiveness of the training programmes. Many of the older trainers are former teachers of English, and as such are more inclined towards accents ranging between British Received Pronunciation (RP) and educated Indian English, and thus reluctant to teach American English. Their reluctance can also be interpreted as resistance to the wider trend in Indian society towards American English. On the other hand, the trainees and the younger trainers show a much more positive attitude towards adopting an American accent, mainly because their role model is the high-profile, high-status, American-sounding NRI population. (Cowie, 2007). The importance of individual employee engagement in the successful adoption of a corporate language policy as identified by Neely (2012) is clearly to the fore in the distinctive language setup of the global BPO activities.

Rahman's (2009) study of language use in the Pakistani call centres confirms the importance of the individual employee's commitment to adopting a language identity for work that is completely divorced from their personal and local context. Appropriate mastery of the target 'neutral accent' has become a highly saleable commodity. As with the Indian call centres, the definition of 'neutral' depends on the target market, in this case, America. So 'neutral' equates with a near-native standard

American accent that the in-company training programmes strive to develop in their trainees' use of English. Rahman (2009) also notes that part of the personal motivation to acquire a new language identity is due to the prestige which young people in Pakistan in the target age group of late teenage to early twenties attach to the job of customer service representative (CSR) because it means that they can negotiate the globalised labour market. The generation gap noted in the Indian context is also present, as the older English-speaking elite in Pakistan society identify with the RP of British English that came with the colonial administration and consider the 'neutral' Americanised accent of the call centres as being phoney. Thus, in both cases, the young people employed in the call centres experience some degree of disconnection with their national cultural base as noted by Welch (2008) and Marschan *et al.* (1997). However, treating language and culture as separate variables when assessing the role of language in international business as suggested by Welch (2008) would appear more difficult to achieve in the NS<>NNS relationship, in which the NS as customer is the dominant partner than in the NNS<>NNS relationship where the focus is on getting the job done irrespective of cultural differences. At the heart of this dilemma is Bourdieu's notion of *"the profit of distinction derived from using the legitimate language, which is based on the social context and the relations of domination structuring this society, despite the fact that one of the components of this profit, and not the least important by far, is the personal attributes of the individual user"* (Bourdieu, 2001, p.108).

Blommaert's analysis (2010) of the American websites selling accent reduction training also emphasises that the commodity on sale is not a language in its entirety, but just a specific bit of language, a register, that is tailored to the immediate needs or desires of the customers, something that gives the impression of language, with the aim, not of learning American English, but of sounding like an American. This is an important distinction, in that these future employees of the ICT-BPO platforms, who already speak English, are being trained to background the distinctive identity that their home accent communicates in favour of a supposedly neutral American accent, which makes them socio-linguistically inconspicuous and thus acceptable to their future American customers. Blommaert also notes that the promise being sold by these dot-com businesses goes far beyond the acquisition of a professionally acceptable accent, and in fact projects an updated version of the



American dream in which the hard work to change oneself and the money thus invested will be rewarded by both material and symbolic gains, comprising personal happiness and self-confidence, job satisfaction, business opportunities, and upward social mobility.

In his study of English language training in the outsourced call centres in the Philippines, Friginal (2007) also highlights the unequal relationship inherent in the service industry due to the two opposing factors mentioned earlier, the drive for maximum cost efficiency and the unrelenting focus on meeting the needs and demands of the customers. Thus, the NNS needs to acquire not only high-level proficiency in English but also intercultural competence to avoid any miscommunication and misunderstanding that would be detrimental to the outcome of the service transaction. He mentions in particular the inability of NNS to express specific instructions without confusing the NS as a source of errors and misunderstanding. Although he expresses the wish that the NS should learn to accommodate the language and culture-based limitations of the NNS CSRs, a point also made in later studies such as the one by Neely (2012), he concedes that the onus for the success of the transaction remains with the NNS CSR *“because of the inherent dynamics of customer service and the political and economic implications involved in the outsourcing of US jobs”* (Friginal, 2007, p.335). Thus, the issue at stake is not just the micro-level of the immediate satisfaction of the individual customer calling the platform, but also, and perhaps more importantly, the macro-level of the country’s stability and prosperity.

Friginal’s assessment of the education and training provision for English language learning and proficiency in the Philippines makes a clear and necessary distinction between the goals of the macro-level language programmes concerning bilingualism and English-in-education as implemented in the school and university system and those of the micro-level targeted training programmes set up to meet the specific requirement of the call centre industry for ‘native-like’ level of proficiency. Whatever criticisms may be made concerning the achievements of the bilingual education system in the Philippines, the aim of the system is not to produce native-like proficiency in English, for which in any case it is not equipped to do since it could not possibly provide sufficient contexts for interaction with

NS of English. The industry itself needs to provide substantial targeted training for CSRs to meet the required level and expectations concerning language proficiency. However, Boussebaa *et al.* (2014) note the paradoxical position expressed by the client firms of the Indian call centres. While holding *“the view that the successful outsourcing of their services to India was vitally dependent on the operatives’ mastery of ‘pure’ English [...] they were, paradoxically, unwilling to become directly involved in the messy business of selection, training and socialization at the local level”* (Boussebaa *et al.*, 2014, p.1161). The overall impression arising from the various studies discussed here, Cowie (2007), Friginal (2007), Rahman (2009) and Boussebaa *et al.* (2014), is that the local training providers are left very much to their own devices with respect to determining what the desired ‘neutral’ accent should be and how their trainees can acquire it. To make matters worse, Boussebaa *et al.* (2014) note that the overseas client firms tend to offer only limited financial support toward the training of operatives, and at the same time, show a readiness to move their voice-related services to cheaper and more pliant alternatives.

Friginal (2007) also warns that high-level English is not enough to ensure success in transaction handling and accuracy. He goes beyond the general requirement for intercultural understanding and gives a detailed list of tangible performance factors to be included in the targeted CSR training programmes, namely, the ability to establish rapport, personalisation of support, comprehension and correctness of information, to be achieved through the interplay of product knowledge, intercultural communication skills, service personality and language skills. The need for an HR orientation in handling corporate language issues as suggested by Neely (2012) is apparent here.

Furthermore, the repeated references in all of the studies presented in this overview to the need for intercultural skills as part of the skill set to ensure successful communication between the NS customer and the NNS service provider should also attract the attention of the HR executives responsible for recruiting and training the NNS CSRs. The British Council report *Culture at Work* published in 2013, with its subtitle *The value of intercultural skills in the workplace*, notes that employers are under strong pressure to recruit employees who are technically proficient, culturally astute and able to thrive in the

increasingly globalised and competitive workplace where communicating with customers, colleagues and partners across international borders is an everyday occurrence. Although the report does not single out any one business activity, the findings are directly relevant to the ICT-BPO sector. Intercultural skills are defined by the respondent employers as the ability to understand different cultural contexts and viewpoints, supported by the ability to demonstrate respect for others, the acceptance of different cultural contexts and viewpoints, and openness to new ideas and ways of thinking. The emphasis is on the employees' ability put themselves in the other person's shoes, and not bring any personal value judgement of the other person's culture into the interaction. Being multilingual is seen as a distinct advantage as this implies already an ability to see the world through different lenses. Consequently, employees working in global business activities should be flexible, able to tolerate ambiguity while working in diverse teams, and willing to listen, observe and learn. In the results-oriented business world, employees with this set of intercultural skills create both monetary and reputational benefits for their organisations, as they are able to gain the trust and build lasting relationships with both new and existing overseas customers and colleagues. The main risks resulting from employees not having any intercultural skills are the loss of customers, global reputational damage, and cultural insensitivity to customers and partners overseas. However, despite the obvious importance of intercultural skills to the eventual performance of their organisations, the respondent employers expected the education system in their respective countries to take on the responsibility of developing these skills in their future employees. Given the distinct business orientation of these skills, such an expectation, with the attendant absence of any specific corporate training programme, is questionable, in the same way as Friginal (2007) and Boussebaa *et al.* (2014) criticise the lack of involvement in developing the required employees skills on the part of the employers in the Philippines and India.

### 3.6 The particular context of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

The discussion so far in this chapter has not made any distinction concerning the geographic size or economic importance of the countries mentioned. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, globalisation has given rise to regional and special interest networks as a means of preserving specific identities and addressing local concerns. Of particular interest to this study is the concept of small states and small island developing states. One of the most frequently used definitions of small states is that provided by the Commonwealth, of which Mauritius is a member since independence in 1968:

*populations of around 1.5 million or less and which share several characteristics including: vulnerability to external events such as natural disasters; vulnerability to external economic shocks such as world trade fluctuations; limited market diversification; limited capacity in public and private sectors: and limited access to external capital. (Commonwealth, 2014, p.1)*

The Commonwealth has a particular interest in the future of the small states as 31 of its 52 members are thus classified, that is, two thirds of the world's small states, which together account for one quarter of the vote at the UN General Assembly. Among these 31 states are also a few member states with larger populations that share similar characteristics to those listed above, notably Singapore and Sri Lanka. Moreover, 25 of the Commonwealth small states are islands, of which 22 are listed among the 57 Small Island Developing States (SIDS) recognised by the United Nations (UN SD, 2016).

An analysis combining three country listings in which the SIDS countries are included, namely the World Bank Ranking list of economies for 2016, the UN list of Small Island Developing States 2016 and the 2016 list of Commonwealth Member States, gives the following results: 41% of the SIDS are in the high income group, 33% in the upper middle income group, 20% in the lower middle income group and only 6% in the low income group.

| World Bank ranking <sup>1</sup> | All listed SIDS <sup>2</sup> | Independent SIDS<br>UN members<br>Commonwealth<br>Members | Independent SIDS<br>UN members<br>Non-Commonwealth<br>Members | Non-independent SIDS |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|---|---|----------------------|
| High income                     | 21                           | 8   | 0   | 13                   |
| Upper middle income             | 17                           | 10 <sup>3</sup>   | 6   | 1                    |
| Lower middle income             | 10                           | 6   | 4   | 0                    |
| Low income                      | 3                            | 0   | 3   | 0                    |
| Total                           | 51                           | 24  | 13  | 14                   |

**Table 3.1: Ranking of SIDS according to income group and political status**

**Sources: World Bank, United Nations and Commonwealth Secretariat**

These figures would seem to run counter to the profile of small states given in the Commonwealth definition, which could easily be read as a hopeless case scenario with the repeated references to ‘vulnerability’ and ‘limited’. In fact, research has shown that compared to other, much larger developing countries, many of these small states actually manage to generate a relatively high GDP per capita despite their exposure to exogenous economic shocks. This counter-intuitive finding is known as the ‘Singapore Paradox’ in which economic vulnerability, that is, the inherent conditions affecting a country’s exposure to exogenous shocks, is counterbalanced by economic resilience, that is, the actions undertaken by policy-makers and private economic agents that enable a country to withstand or recover from the negative effects of shocks, as exemplified by the continued success of the eponymous small nation state. (Briguglio *et al.*, 2009). Based on this finding, countries can be classified according to four possible scenarios according to their vulnerability and resilience characteristics, namely best-case, worst case, self-made and prodigal son. Best-case countries, although not inherently vulnerable, adopt resilience-building policies, whilst worst-case countries show a high level of inherent economic vulnerability which they make worse by adopting policies that

<sup>1</sup> Ranking based on 2015 gross national income (GNI) per capita, using the World Bank Atlas method, in which *high income* = \$12,476 and more, *upper middle income* = \$4,036-12,475, *lower middle income* = \$1,026-4,035, and *low income* = \$1,025 or less.

<sup>2</sup> Excluding 2 British Overseas Territories, Anguilla and Monserrat, 2 French *départements d’outre mer*, Guadeloupe and Martinique, and 2 territories linked to New Zealand, Cook Islands and Niue

<sup>3</sup> Figure includes Belize and Guyana, 2 coastal states members of SIDS

run counter to economic resilience. Self-made countries are those showing the 'Singapore Paradox', whilst the 'prodigal son' countries, although enjoying a relatively low degree of inherent vulnerability, adopt policies that damage their economic resilience and so expose themselves to the adverse effects of exogenous shocks. Mauritius, with its on-going efforts to diversify its economy and strengthen its institutions, comes under the self-made category (Briguglio *et al.*, 2009).

Baldacchino (2011) challenges the tendency towards negativism which the term 'vulnerable' often implies, preferring to talk of volatility with respect to the 'boom and bust', and 'peak and trough' cycles typical of the impact of external events on small economies. In his view, the smallness and openness of their economies forces the island states to be flexible and resourceful in seeking opportunities to transcend their size even in what could be considered a most negative external situation, colonialism. Many of the SIDS, including Mauritius, are a direct result of the maritime and trade history of Europe. He notes that the global network of their administrative overlord opened up multiple opportunities in trade, culture, education, employment, language and religious belief which they continued to nurture after independence. As a result, their citizens have not only tended to adopt Western culture but also become disproportionately avid travellers, confident users of international languages, keen transnational brokers and traders who are well represented abroad and active in various regional and international forums. Such a pronounced disposition towards the outside world has been and still is a defining factor in their endeavours to transform their economies and enter new sectors, such as ICT-BPO in Mauritius, be it at the level of the country, the private firm or the individual customer service agent on a BPO platform.

In a more recent analysis of how these apparently vulnerable island states manage to survive, Baldacchino (2014) puts the following rhetorical question as its title: *"Small island states; vulnerable, resilient, doggedly perseverant or cleverly opportunistic?"* He describes them as bobbing up and down, neither moving forward nor backwards, by using a combination of strategies, as the opportunity arises, to generate revenue and support livelihoods. The small island states are seen to be playing *"a 'strategy game' by which [they] play out their international relations, especially with respect to one particular,*

*larger and richer country (typically, their current or former colonial power, and/or the regional hegemon) and to the federal and regional entities and agreements of which they form part*” (Baldacchino, 2014, paras. 8 & 9). Mauritius is cited as one of the more successful players. Yet, the largest group, the middle-income countries, including Mauritius, enjoy only limited access to debt and shock financing facilities on the part of the international funding agencies, which hampers their ability to undertake long-term capacity-building projects that would reduce their vulnerability and enable them to move forwards and upwards into the high-income group (Commonwealth, 2014).

The other commonly used indicator of level of development is the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI), “(a) composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development – a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living” (UNDP, 2015, p.211). Table 3.2 below shows the ranking of the 37 independent SIDS. In the majority of cases including Mauritius, their relatively high economic performance has been translated into a high level of human development, in which education is a major component.

| UNDP HDI 2015                      | All independent SIDS | Independent SIDS Commonwealth Members | Independent SIDS Non-Commonwealth Members |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Very high human development</b> | 1                    | 1                                     | 0   |
| <b>High human development</b>      | 21                   | 16                                    | 5   |
| <b>Medium human development</b>    | 7                    | 3                                     | 4   |
| <b>Low human development</b>       | 5                    | 2                                     | 3   |
| <b>Other countries not ranked</b>  | 3                    | 2                                     | 1   |
| <b>Total</b>                       | <b>37</b>            | <b>24<sup>4</sup></b>                 | <b>13</b>                                 |

**Table 3.2: HDI Ranking of SIDS: Source: UNDP HDI 2015 ranking**

Meisenhelder (1997) and Sandbrook (2005) articulate their respective studies of Mauritius around the concept of the democratic developmental state, in which democracy combines with sustained state intervention in the economy to achieve the twin goals of economic growth and social equity. A complex

<sup>4</sup> Figure includes Belize and Guyana, 2 coastal states members of SIDS

interplay of institutional mechanisms underpins and propels progress towards these twin goals. Thus, in addition to having the will to do so, government needs a substantial degree of autonomy from capital together with sufficient bureaucratic capacity to design and implement market-conforming industrial and social strategies, supported by the development of strong democratic institutions based on a vibrant civil society which can then play a pivotal role in motivating politicians to seek equitable socio-economic development, provide the mechanisms for managing societal conflicts, and build consensus on a broad strategy for socio-economic transformation. In such a dynamic structure, the various actors and stakeholders involved, in particular, public officers, private enterprise employers and employees and civil society activists, gradually build up, layer after layer, wide-ranging and solid expertise in how to seize opportunities as they arise or create openings as needed to further their country's progress. Thus, underpinning the pronounced disposition towards the outside world, and in particular towards maintaining a dynamic relationship with their former colonial masters identified by Baldacchino (2011; 2014), is this complex, managed interplay between various key institutions on the domestic front. Consequently, the usual discussion concerning the path from colony to independent state is shown to be inadequate in that it tends to restrict its scope to the political domain, with some consideration of the administrative bureaucracy needed to support whatever form of government finally emerges post-independence. The combination of the approaches used by Baldacchino (2011; 2014) on the one hand and Meisenhelder (1997) and Sandbrook (2005) on the other provides a wider perspective with which to understand the specific circumstances of the SIDS, especially, the immediacy of the interaction between political decisions and economic actions, together with the need for a sustained continuum of consensus on fundamental issues that transcends partisan politics. In such a scenario, the individual and collective calibre of the persons involved becomes a key success factor in enabling and supporting the dynamic developmental process as observed by Schultz (1993). Education and language proficiency in turn become essential contributing factors in this process.

However, the globally positive picture of development in the SIDS masks a very important issue with respect to the actual education provision in the individual states, the necessary distinction between quantity, that is, access, and quality, that is, content and outcomes, which was highlighted in the



previous chapter when discussing the shift in scope from the more quantitative focus of the MDGs to the broader, more inclusive, qualitative orientation of the UN SDGs. In his analysis of the education challenges facing the small states at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Bacchus (2008) reminds us that, despite being '*takers*' and not '*makers*' of world economic policies, small states need to focus on not just the level of education attained but also the nature and quality of education received to ensure that their populations develop the qualities, skills and outlook required to cope more effectively with the emerging realities of the connected global village and its focus on the continued integration of science and communication. The splendid isolation of the tropical paradise island is perhaps still an attractive image in holiday brochures but is certainly not an option when considering development strategies. However, Crossley (2010) warns against context insensitivity when trying to implement any educational reform in a small state. He noted that small states were being increasingly marginalised not just from engagement in the shaping of international agendas, but also from access to international research and development funds. In particular, he considers that the international emphasis on the quantitative targets of universal access to primary education and gender parity as expressed in the Education for All (EFA) initiative and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) did not respond sufficiently to the development priorities of many small states since many of them including Mauritius achieved these targets in advance of their bigger continental neighbours, in particular in the African and Indian Ocean regions. He notes that qualitative issues together with improved secondary and tertiary provision to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge and technology-based economy were thus already major concerns of these small states well before the end of the MDG cycle in 2015. Yet, because of the then focus on access to basic primary education, obtaining international support for higher level initiatives in education development remained difficult.

The essential motivation underpinning the SIDS network is their need for the international community as a whole to recognise the specific nature of the SIDS and the challenges that they face in achieving sustainability, in the widest sense, not just with respect to environmental issues. For instance, the long-term sustainability of Mauritius's current efforts to diversify its economy and build up a strong ICT-based service sector is very much dependent on the quality of its human resources, both present and

future. The subsequent official declarations from the three SIDS international conferences, Barbados 1994, Mauritius 2005 and Seychelles 2014, make the point with increasing insistence and detail that the 'one-size-fits-all' approach to international aid and support is just not appropriate, particularly with respect to human resource development and to full and equal access to quality education at all levels for all sections of their populations.

Moreover, this need for recognition and appropriate support is not something new. Over the years, the Commonwealth Secretariat has voiced the concerns of the world's small states and has engaged in many initiatives aimed to support resilience-building. As early as 1977, the meeting of the Commonwealth Finance Ministers drew attention to the special characteristics that render small states vulnerable to external shocks and urged the international community to adopt a more flexible approach to the needs of the small states together with special measures to assist them. The Commonwealth Secretariat (2014) reminds the reader that the 1985 report of the Commonwealth Consultative Group entitled *Vulnerability: Small States in the Global Society* was the first to note the inherent vulnerability of small states to external interference. The 1985 report outlined the characteristics of smallness, the vagaries of vulnerability and the threats to small states and identified measures to reduce vulnerability. A much more recent Commonwealth initiative is the Global Biennial Conference on Small States. The theme of the fourth meeting held in Seychelles in 2016 was *Achieving a Resilient Future for Small States*. The Outcomes Statement leaves the reader in no doubt as to the "significant challenges in achieving sustainable development and internationally agreed development goals" (Paragraph 2). The small states not only "struggle to withstand or recover from adverse shocks that often erode social and economic gains", but they are also "grappling with the impact of climate change which is disproportionately affecting their development" (Paragraph 2). They strongly urge development partners to provide greater levels of support, the more so as they "face governance challenges, particularly in strengthening institutions and development coordination" (Paragraph 4). All of these actions and initiatives require considerable financing. Yet, the Outcomes Statement notes the downward trend of traditional sources of finance such as foreign direct investment (FDI) and official development assistance (ODA) (Paragraph 12), in addition to the increased uncertainty of post-disaster

financing through grants, loans and remittances (Paragraph 5) and the continuing middle-income trap noted earlier (Paragraph 6).

Another important Commonwealth grouping that has also been focussing on the specific challenges of small states is the Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM). By pure coincidence, the meeting that started the Commonwealth's work on education in small states was held in Mauritius in 1985. The conference report became the basis for the subsequent work and advocacy carried out by the Commonwealth Secretariat in this domain. The report stressed the fundamental standpoint that *"small states should not be seen simply as scaled-down versions of larger states: they have an ecology of their own, which requires local research to supplement and perhaps modify the insights that can be obtained from larger countries"* (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1986, as quoted by Crossley *et al.*, 2009, p.743). In 2012 Mauritius hosted the CCEM a second time for its 18<sup>th</sup> meeting. Among the recommendations listed in the subsequent Mauritius Communiqué, the Ministers acknowledged the importance of the core work carried out by the Education Section of the Commonwealth Secretariat which they felt should be expanded in the lead-up to 2015 and beyond, *"in view of the serious challenges in access and quality faced by many of its members"* (CCEM Mauritius, 2012, Paragraph 10). They also acknowledged *"the benefits of using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction, especially in early years, [as well as] the benefits of learning English as a language for communication"* (CCEM Mauritius, 2012, Paragraph 13). Thus, they agreed that *"education should remain a core priority of the Secretariat's work, given the central role of education in development programmes throughout Commonwealth countries, especially its key role in nation building, developing economies, citizenship, personal aspiration, and meeting the needs of the very high number of people aged under 25 in many Commonwealth countries"* (CCEM Mauritius, 2012, Paragraph 23b). The 19<sup>th</sup> CCEM held in the Bahamas in 2015 continued to emphasise the fundamental importance of education in development. In particular, in the Nassau Declaration 2015, the Ministers committed to *"focus on the core purpose of education, to serve the needs of their diverse populations, furthering international drives for sustainable development, and equitable, high quality provision, while recognizing the continued role of*

*education in supporting efforts for economic growth and poverty eradication, as well as acting as a tool for socialization” (CCEM Nassau, 2015, Paragraph 8). More specifically, Paragraph 5 notes:*

*The 19th CCEM also saw the official inclusion of a specific forum for small states; Ministers celebrate this as a significant and positive step in ensuring that the voice of small states continues to be heard on the world stage, given that 31 of the 53 Commonwealth nations are small states. Likewise, the role of education for building resilience is championed by Ministers as a key factor in combating issues of vulnerability, particularly those faced by small states, such as climate change, migration, mobility, and financing.*

The 19<sup>th</sup> CCEM also endorsed the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030 (CCEM Nassau, 2015, Paragraph 3), which set out the framework for action for implementing the UN SDG4-Education 2030 “*Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*”. The prescience of Faure’s Preamble concerning the future impact of science and technology and the importance of the foundational concept of the Delors report of “*learning throughout life*” are recognized in the affirmation that *[t]here is an urgent need for children, youth and adults to develop throughout life the flexible skills and competencies they need to live and work in a more secure, sustainable, interdependent, knowledge-based and technology-driven world”* (Incheon, Paragraph 6, p.26), and confirmed in “*[t]he renewed attention to the purpose and relevance of education for human development and economic, social and environmental sustainability*” (Incheon, Paragraph 7, p.26). Within the over-arching aim to provide “*a single, renewed education agenda that is holistic, ambitious and aspirational, leaving no one behind*” (Incheon, p.7) can be found specific recommendations to meet the needs of the SIDS, in particular Targets 4b on the availability of international scholarships and 4c on increasing the supply of qualified teachers.

Concerning the funding of education, in addition to recommending increased domestic funding, the Incheon Declaration “*notes the importance of development cooperation in complementing investments by governments*”, and “*calls upon developed countries, traditional and emerging donors,*

*middle income countries and international funding mechanisms to increase funding to education and to support the implementation of the agenda according to countries' needs and priorities"* (Incheon, p.10). This general recommendation may seem at first reading to be going counter to the need for funding help expressed by all the SIDS, given that many of the SIDS are in the middle-income category. However, the section on *Financing* states that education partners need to improve the equity of external financing to better target support for, among others, *"vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in middle income countries"* and to *"pay particular attention to the needs of vulnerable countries such as small island developing states"* (Incheon, pp.68-69).

We thus see that over the years the two major international networks focusing on the SIDS, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the UN SIDS network, have adopted similar coherent positions on the priority issues facing the SIDS concerning the role of education and the financing of development initiatives, and on the need to move away from the classic 'one-size-fits-all' approach typical of international development programmes to specific, properly targeted responses to these issues. Their endeavours to achieve universal recognition of the particular situation of these small island states in the continued spread of globalised economy have thus borne fruit. However, such recognition does not remove the responsibility of the individual state to protect and further its interests through the respect of law and proper governance in its own jurisdiction. The final outcome and impact of any external aid programme is directly dependent on the recipient government's ability to use it properly, a major factor in Mauritius's continued progress from an underdeveloped subsistence mono-crop economy in 1968, the year of its independence, to its current ranking of upper middle-income diversified economy.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the continuing predominant role of English in the global economy, particularly in the knowledge IT-based activities. It has presented historical background that has led to this economic hegemony and the resulting parental preference for education in a language that has

economic value. It has also discussed the issue of the typical communication situation in the ICT-BPO sector, between the native speaker customer or counterpart and the non-native speaker service provider. Finally, the specific characteristics and challenges of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) with reference to Mauritius were presented. This study aims to respond to the observation by the Commonwealth Secretariat concerning the lack of local research into the specific situation of the small states as exemplified by Mauritius. Chapter 5 *Mauritius: the making of an island hub* presents the economic and social context of this study, in particular, how Mauritius handles its colonial heritage, the diversity of its population which is the root of its multilingual reality as will be discussed in Chapter 7, and its current situation as a SIDS as it continues to make its way in the global economy. The role of education and training in the country's progression will be examined in Chapter 6, from the viewpoint of capacity building to reinforce economic performance and development, followed by a review in Chapter 7 of the country's multilingualism and the particular position of English with respect to the other former colonial European language in common use in Mauritius, namely French, and the main local language in daily use, Kreol. The findings from the field work on the use of English in the ICT-BPO sector will be presented and analysed in Chapter 8, to ascertain how far the assumption commonly held in the country that Mauritians are sufficiently proficient in English to meet the performance requirements of the international customers using the services of the ICT-BPO firms based in Mauritius, and whether the education and training system is providing appropriate and sufficient capacity-building to meet these requirements.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological considerations of this study. It discusses the research paradigm in relation to the philosophical underpinnings of the study. This is followed by a discussion of the choices made during the research process with respect to methodology, data collection, data analysis, quality data criteria and their rationale and finally the ethics of the research.

### 4.2 Research paradigm

In his work on the development of scientific knowledge, Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996) defined 'paradigms' as being *"accepted examples of actual scientific practice – examples which include law, theory, application and instrumentation together – [that] provide models from which spring particular coherent traditions of scientific research"* (Kuhn, 1970, p.10). By basing their research on a shared paradigm, researchers commit themselves to the same rules and standards for scientific practice, thus producing a consensus that enables the genesis and continuation of a particular research tradition. However, a 'paradigm' when applied to scientific discovery and research is not a static object for replication. Using the analogy of *"an accepted judicial decision in the common law"*, Kuhn defines a paradigm as *"an object for further articulation and specification under new or more stringent conditions"* (Kuhn, 1970, p.23).

In their discussion on how the concept of paradigm choice is used in qualitative research in the social sciences, Guba and Lincoln define a paradigm as being *"the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways"* (1994, p.105). The paradigm therefore *"represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the 'world', the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts"* (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.107). However, the usual order of inquiry, namely, ontology,

epistemology and methodology, does not imply any sort of hierarchy but rather a logical progression between these three components that are so closely connected that the answer given to one, taken in any order, limits how the two others may be answered (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Each researcher, however, needs to define the nature and limits of their inquiry paradigm.

#### **4.3 The ontological choice**

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality and what can be known about it. The choice lies between objectivism and constructivism, two contrasting schools of thought, each with its own history and sphere of influence.

The objectivist school of thought can trace its roots far back in the history of Western thought, to the ancient Greek philosophers' discussions concerning philosophy and poetry, which in more recent times became the debate opposing the sciences to the humanities. The modern form of objectivism which underpins much of scientific research today was first developed by the French philosopher, Auguste Comte (1798-1857). In his "*Cours de philosophie positive*" (1830-1842), he set out the fundamental principles of a world-view based on the observation of external reality, in which the only true knowledge is that which is based on observed facts, and in which all observed phenomena can be explained by a few general laws. His references to Francis Bacon (1561-1626), the creator of empiricism and founder of the inductive methods in scientific inquiry, and Isaac Newton (1642-1727), in particular to Newton's theory of gravity, clearly situate objectivism in the realm of all things measurable and quantifiable which are 'out there' and over which the observer/researcher has no influence and takes no part in their construction.

However, as Comte pointed out, this observation of the world around us is an ongoing, unfinished undertaking. In his view, the aim or perfection of the positivist system was to be able to explain all the observable phenomena as being the examples of a single universal law, an aim which he conceded was most probably unachievable. The emphasis is on the *What* and the *How*, and not on the *Why* (the



motivation, the cause) nor on the *When* or the *Where* (the context) nor even on the *Who* (human agency). Issues that involve some form of human agency, of subjectivity, notably aesthetic and moral considerations, are not considered.

The application of the objectivist stance in modern scientific research is clearly set out in the writings of Hawking (1988) when he defines a scientific theory as being *“just a model of the universe, or a restricted part of it, and a set of rules that relate quantities in the model to observations that we make”*. He also underlines the iterative and fallible nature of any scientific inquiry given that all physical theories are in fact provisional hypotheses which can be disproved by some new observation or result that contradicts the currently accepted theory, leading to the latter’s modification or even abandonment. (Hawking, 1988).

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.109) reality is defined in modern-day positivist objectivism as being *“driven by immutable natural laws and mechanisms”* and *“conventionally summarized in the form of time- and context-free generalisations, some of which take the form of cause-effect laws”*. But as social researchers they consider this stance to be *“reductionist and deterministic”*, a point of view shared by Cresswell (2003) when he talks about causes probably determining effects or outcomes and the reductionist intent to identify and test only a small, discrete set of ideas such as the variables making up hypotheses and research questions.

When applied to the social sciences, the ontological position of objectivism also considers that reality existed outside and before human cognition. Thus, the social phenomena that we experience in our daily lives exist independently of all social actors and should be thus observed as being part of a distinct external reality (Bryman, 2004). This notion is not new; in fact, it reaches back to Durkheim’s definition (1895) of social phenomena as being real things, since all things real have their own specific existence, which they impose on their surroundings. Durkheim considers that common or collective ways of behaving, and thinking, have a reality outside that of the individual members of any group. He talks of the notion of constraint that these collective behaviours exert on the individual who then feels obliged

to conform. He considers that these social phenomena or social facts (*faits sociaux*), as he calls them, combine to make up the material and moral supremacy that society has over the individual. These social facts are not easily changed; at best they can be neutralised by the individual, but they never disappear. In his view, past human behaviour can be reduced to a relationship of cause and effect, which can then be expressed as a rule for future behaviour. He also recognises that the inquiry process is on-going and incremental and that as reality is in constant flux, it may never be completely understood or explained.

Constructivism, on the other hand, sees reality as being multiple and varied. There is not one universal reality, but diverse realities which are in fact the mental constructions that people develop in their minds as they seek to understand the world around them (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.110). These realities are, thus, specific and context bound as they are the products of social interaction between individuals or groups in discrete cultural and historical contexts. In this world view, the researcher is an active participant, as their own background and values will inform and shape their understanding of the reality that they are observing (Cresswell, 2003). Thus, as Bryman states, *"the researcher's own accounts of the social world are constructions"* that present *"a specific version of social reality, rather than one that can be regarded as definitive"* (Bryman, 2004, p.17).

The constructivist stance developed as a response to the dominance of the impersonal positivist approach in the wake of the 1970s social upheavals. It was seen as a means of giving 'voice' to hitherto 'silent' sectors of society, the feminist and women's liberation movements, the black movement, disability groups and gay/lesbian/transgender rights. Through its focus on specific human experience, the various protagonists could tell their story, construct their reality and so express their particular form of agency and autonomy (Oakley, 1999).

When considering the appropriate ontological position for this research that is concerned with language choice and use in a multi-lingual society, it could be argued that language is a distinct observable phenomenon with specific stable characteristics, namely its vocabulary, syntax,

pronunciation that can be observed objectively in the manner of Durkheim's social facts described earlier. In this case objectivism would be the appropriate ontological choice.

However, as discussed in Chapter 2, *Theoretical Framework*, the work of Quirk, Hymes, Crystal, Kachru, Graddol and Ostler has shown that language is much more than an assemblage of objectively recognizable elements. It is the expression of context-related human behaviour and as such takes many different forms that have evolved in specific environments and are not necessarily mutually intelligible. It is the external expression of how individuals understand and react to the world around them, of how they construct their personal reality and of how they seek to construct the reality in which they find themselves. The multilingual situation in Mauritius could be described as work-in-progress as the positioning of the various languages used on the island changes with the country's continued development from a post-colonial third world country to a middle-income developing nation. It is a very dynamic context in which personal and group choices are constantly evolving. These interrelated issues form the basis of inquiry in this study.

My own position as the researcher behind this study is consistent with that of the active participant whose experience in the field has led to the research topic chosen. Originally from the mono-lingual environment of south Northamptonshire, where French was essentially a school subject, since arriving in Mauritius in 1972 I have learned to cope with a multi-lingual environment where code-switching and language preferences are everyday occurrences. French is the preferred European language and learning Mauritian Kreol is key to successful integration into Mauritian society (Baker, 1972; Stein, 1982).

Thus, for all these reasons, the ontological position chosen for this research on language choice and use is that of constructivism.

#### 4.4 The epistemological choice

Epistemology is concerned with knowledge, about what it is or can be, and about the relationship between the knowledge thus defined and the knower. As stated earlier, the choice here is conditioned by the one made at the ontological level. It is between the positivism of the objectivist school and the subjective interpretivism of the constructivist school.

Given that objectivism considers that reality and the observer are two separate entities, the corresponding epistemological position of positivism requires the researcher to adopt a dualist approach in which they remain neutral with respect to the phenomenon being studied. In other words, the researcher neither influences nor is influenced by what is being studied. If any influence should occur, one way or the other, or is suspected to have occurred, then the validity of any findings subsequent to the inquiry comes under question and the researcher must take steps to reduce or remove it. In the same vein, the researcher must actively keep in check all personal beliefs, values and so biases throughout the whole inquiry process. Rigorous conformity to prescribed procedures and research protocols can be said to be mandatory. Any breach, intended or not, will be considered as a threat to the validity of the whole inquiry and must be corrected. The aim is to produce replicable findings, in other words, findings that can be reproduced by any other researcher using the same research protocol (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), in other words, Kuhn's "*coherent traditions of scientific research*" and Hawking's iterative use of a model and a set of rules to interpret observations discussed earlier in this chapter.

In direct contrast is the subjective interpretivism of the constructivist school, which aims to respect the difference between people and the objects of the natural sciences, and so to apprehend and understand the subjective dimension or meaning of social interaction (Bryman, 2004). The neutral objective stance of the researcher observing some external phenomenon gives way to the empathetic gaze of the participant researcher as they observe the social reality built on the common-sense thinking of the people living their daily life as individuals within the social world (Schutz, 1962-66).

Thus, qualitative research undertaken from the standpoint of interpretive constructivism must take into account two sets of characteristics: those pertaining to the people, that is, both the people on whom the research is focused and the researcher, and those pertaining to the contexts or observed social situations covered by the research (Gialdino, 2011).

Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p.21) talk of the “*biographically situated researcher*” and define qualitative research as “*a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. [...] involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world*”. The role of the qualitative researcher is to “*study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them*”.

As stated earlier, this thesis concerns language use and preference in a specific social context. It aims to shed light on the impact that individual choice and practice can have on both the individual's performance and that of the work group and the context of the workplace. In other words, it aims to explore the relation between the social construction of a multilingual country and the language practices and behaviours of employees in the course of their work. Thus, the epistemological position chosen for this study is that of subjective interpretivism.

#### **4.5 The methodological choice**

Following on from the choices made at the ontological and epistemological levels, the choice of methods with respect to inquiry strategy, data collection and data processing is between the objective numerical, statistical measurement processes and the interpretative assessment of texts, interviews and field observations, that is, between the quantitative and the qualitative.

However, it is not just a question of how far the analysis is based on figures. Brannen (2005, p.7) points out that “*the researcher's choice of methods is said to be chiefly driven by the philosophical*

*assumptions- ontological and epistemological – which frame the research or the researcher's frame of reference". Bryman talks of "the contrasting epistemological and ontological positions that characterize quantitative and qualitative research and their various synonyms" (Bryman, 2008, p.13).*

This basic opposition between the quantitative and qualitative approaches to research has been the subject of much discussion for several decades now, with the term, 'the paradigm wars', being used by several eminent writers to express the intensity of the debate (Bryman, 2008). Brannen considers that *"qualitative and quantitative research are seen to be intrinsically different beasts underpinned by different philosophical assumptions"* (Brannen, 2005, p.7). Cresswell for his part talks of a continuum between the two opposites along which research practices can be situated as being more quantitative or qualitative as the case may be (Cresswell, 2003). All three writers add a third option to the debate, that of mixed methods research, which is commonly defined as being a combination of the quantitative and qualitative approaches (Cresswell, 2003; Brannen, 2005; Bryman, 2008).

#### **4.5.1 Pragmatic approach**

In recent years, particularly in the applied fields of the social sciences, *"an attitude of pragmatism"* (Bryman, 2008 p.19) has emerged not as an attempt to resolve the paradigm debate, but more for reasons of expediency in how to best carry out the research and get tangible results. The focus is on 'what works' and 'to what effect/impact/outcome'. Bryman describes this stance in unequivocal terms. *"Essentially, the pragmatist position either ignores paradigmatic differences between quantitative and qualitative research or recognizes their existence but in the interests of exploring research questions with as many available tools as possible, it shoves them to one side."* (Bryman, 2008, p.19) Thus *"issues to do with the mixing of methods become matters of technical decisions about the appropriateness of those methods for answering research questions."* (Bryman, 2008, p.19)

In their discussion on the role of mixed methods research in educational research, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) consider it as a third research paradigm that opens the door to more effective

research. As interdisciplinary research becomes more widespread, the need for a more nuanced and varied approach to the research process increases. The epistemological and methodological pluralism contained in mixed methods research provides such an approach in that it can draw on the strengths of one paradigm to minimise the weaknesses of the other and so provide better responses to specific research questions. They thus define mixed methods research as *“the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, approaches, concepts or language into a single study”* (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.17).

Although their aim is not to solve the differences between the two purist extremes of the paradigm debate, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie thus invite researchers on both sides to consider pragmatism. As a worldview, pragmatism *“recognises the existence and importance of the natural and physical world as well as the emergent social and psychological world that includes language, culture, human institutions, and subjective thoughts”*. It shows *“high regard for the reality and influence of the inner world of human experience in action”* and so views knowledge *“as being both constructed and based on the reality of the world we experience and live in”* (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.18).

This thesis concerns language choice and use in the specific context of a multilingual country. The individual choice and use of the languages present in the Mauritian linguistic reality depends in some measure on the external constraints of official policy and regulations about language use, as well as accepted practice concerning the appropriate choice of language in any one situation. There is, therefore, an external independent social linguistic reality over which the individual has limited influence and control. However, at the same time language is an inherent part of an individual's identity, the use of which conveys the expression of one's unique personality and worldview. In this way, each individual constructs their interaction with the world around them.

This dual nature of language choice and use requires the nuanced approach in methodological choice identified by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, (2004) in order to capture and present a sufficiently rich picture of the complex issues pertaining to the research topic. Therefore, while this thesis remains

firmly based in the interpretivist constructivist paradigm, it also takes advantage of the pragmatist attitude of “*what works*” when choosing the methodological tools best suited to exploring the various issues.

#### **4.5.2 The case study approach**

Yin defines a case study as being “*an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context*” (Yin, 1994, Introduction). In his view, the case study is the method to choose when (1) the phenomenon to be studied cannot be easily distinguished from its context and (2) the interaction between the phenomenon and its context is complex and problematic in definition. Moreover, as there is no preferred form of data collection, a case study can be either qualitative or quantitative (Yin, 1994).

Gerring (2004, p.341) defines the case study as being “*an intensive study of a single unit (a relatively bounded phenomenon) where the scholar’s aim is to elucidate features of a larger class of similar phenomena*”. The single unit in this definition refers to “*a spatially bounded phenomenon – e.g., a nation-state [...] – observed at a single point in time or over some delimited period of time*”. (Gerring, 2004, p.342). Although Gerring’s main focus is on research in political science, he considers that the case study approach is relevant for exploring many social science questions, since in both cases the phenomenon under study is often experienced by only one or just a few “*units*”. Among the examples given in support of this view is that of “*democratization in Africa (Botswana, Mauritius, South Africa)*”. This may seem a rather serendipitous coincidence with respect to this thesis, but in fact Mauritius has been cited as an example in several analyses on post-colonial societies and nation-states. From its isolated position in the South-West Indian Ocean the island is a self-contained, spatially bound single unit that illustrates all the elements of the development process. One example is the comparison made between Mauritius and Egypt on the theme of *Globalisation, extremism and violence in poor countries* to illustrate the diverging effects of globalisation on emerging economies, either “*sporadic growth or*



*stagnation, inequalities and turmoil” or “a broadly-based prosperity, peace and democracy”* (Sandbrook & Romano, 2004, p.1007).

According to Mabry (2008), the overall aim of case study research is to achieve deep understanding of particular instances of phenomena, which is not easily achievable because social reality is created by people and thus complex, dynamic and context dependent. However, when positioned in the interpretivist constructivist paradigm, through its intense and profoundly respectful focus on cases of interest, their contexts and complexity, the case study approach can contribute substantially to social science. The interpretivist methodology encourages the case study researcher to be constantly alert to patterns of activities and the variety of meanings participants ascribe to their experiences. Thus, Mabry underlines the importance of contextuality in case study research:

*Contextuality is an aspect of the dynamism and complexity of a case. Case study researchers recognize that cases are shaped by their many contexts – historical, social, political, ideological, organizational, cultural, linguistic, philosophical, and so on. (Mabry 2008, p. 217)*

Hamilton (2011, p.1) talks of the *“rich picture of an entity”* and *“rich data”* obtained through the case study approach and notes that *“the use of multiple perspectives and different kinds of data collection is characteristic of high-quality case study and lends weight to the validity of the findings”*.

The case study approach was chosen for this thesis as the issue to be studied is specific to a definite context and can only be explored with relation to that context. Thus, the overall context is the multi-lingual and multicultural environment of Mauritian society, while the issue concerns language choice and behaviour within that environment. In other words, the issue cannot be considered separately from its context, which is consistent with Yin’s notion of non-distinguishable elements and Mabry’s emphasis on contextuality.

However, the scope of this study was narrowed down further for two reasons: firstly, the complexity of the linguistic situation in Mauritius and, secondly, the degree to which the Mauritian economy has diversified across four main sectors, namely sugar, textiles, tourism and global business. Therefore, the focus is on one language, namely English, in the more specific sub-context of global business activities. As English is the official administrative language of Mauritius, some degree of proficiency in the language is needed in most areas of Mauritian life, including public administration, education and business. The degree of proficiency in English required varies depending on the product or service offered. However, the development of knowledge-based services for the global market requires a higher level of proficiency in English than do the other sectors of the Mauritian economy. Therefore, the specific context is that of the knowledge-based service activities in the ICT-BPO sector.

#### **4.6 The research population**

A research population is a defined group of individuals who share a common binding characteristic that is pertinent to the research topic. The research population for this study comprises all the companies and individuals working in the ICT-BPO sector in Mauritius. At the time when the questionnaire survey was set up and carried out, that is September to December 2015, the number of people working the ICT-BPO sector was about 19,000 (BOI website, 2015). The ICT-BPO sector counted around 400 firms of all sizes, ranging from small companies with 2 or 3 employees to the big platforms with 1000 or more employees, according to the *Online Directory of ICT Companies in Mauritius* published by the National Computer Board (NCB) and available on the NCB website (NCB, 2015).

#### **4.7 Sampling**

A sample is a smaller group or subset of the research population that the researcher has identified for the purposes of data collection. Focusing on a subset becomes necessary when the research population is too big to be covered completely due to any or all of the following factors: lack of time,

money, resources and access (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). The sampling strategy used depends on the nature of the research paradigm.

For research based on the interpretivist constructivist paradigm, where the aim is to explore and interpret issues relating to people's unique experience within their specific context, the sampling strategy will aim to cover only a specific named group or section of the wider research population. Since the aim is not wide generalisation but deep or rich understanding of a specific issue, the sample size will be much smaller and can only represent the group from which it is taken. This qualitative approach is called non-probability sampling since the researcher makes a deliberate choice concerning which group to include in or exclude from the sample and thus renders the chances of inclusion of each member of the wider population unequal (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Two of the main ways with which the sample can be chosen are convenience sampling, that is, choosing people to whom the researcher has easy access, and purposive sampling, that is, choosing a group from within the wider research population that will best fit the purpose of the research. However, since it is entirely dependent on the researcher's judgement, purposive sampling runs the risk of being not just deliberately selective but also biased (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Nevertheless, given that case study research is very much focused on specific issues in unique environments, purposive sampling is the strategy usually chosen, with due care being exercised in identifying the target group for the sample as being typical for a particular population. Mabry (2008) adds the criterion of informativeness, by which the sample, and so the case, may not produce any generalizable result but would contribute to existing theory (Mabry, 2008).

Purposive sampling was thus used to identify the most representative and informative group of respondents for this study based on the following three criteria: companies that are (1) partially or fully export-oriented; (2) working partially or exclusively on the English-speaking market; and (3) offering ICT-based services, in particular back office operations, business processing operations, call centre/telemarketing, software development, web design and hosting. Around 180 of the 400 companies on the NCB list were described as export-oriented, with the main markets being Europe

and the United States of America (USA). However, very small firms with personal, non-corporate email addresses and postal addresses that implied home-based activities were eliminated from the mailing list for the questionnaire. The members' list for the Outsourcing and Telecommunications Association of Mauritius (OTAM), the main association for the ICT industry which regroups ITOs, BPOs, International Long Distance (ILD) operators and Internet Service Providers was also consulted. The final list that was used as the base sample for this study contained 188 companies.

#### 4.8 Data collection methods and underlying approach

As said earlier, the choice of methodological tools was guided by the pragmatist attitude of *what works* to ensure enough depth and richness in the study. Thus, within the overall structure of a case study, a mix of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were used, namely, documentary review, questionnaire, interviews and focus groups.

**Table 4.1: Data collection calendar and participation**

| Collection method          | Period carried out          | Number and profile of respondents/participants   |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Documentary review         | July 2014 to July 2020      | Not applicable   |
| Questionnaire              | September to December 2015  | 188 sent out, of which 50 returned undelivered by the Post Office, 18 completed questionnaires and 1 polite refusal because not working in English   |
| Interviews: first series   | December 2015 to March 2016 | Five interviews: head of recruitment agency, head of HR in bank, 3 heads of ICT-BPO platforms  |
| Interview: additional      | March 2018                  | Head of platform opened in September 2017  |
| Interviews: additional     | July 2020                   | Three interviews: 1 linguist/educationist/creative writer in English and Mauritian Kreol, 1 university professor in Language Studies, 1 university lecturer in Marketing and Media   |
| Focus groups: first series | February 2016               | Group 1: participants recruited by the company after 2008: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 (3 female and 5 male)</li> <li>• Qualifications ranged from HSC/GCE 'A' Level to MSc</li> <li>• Age group: 20 to 35 years old</li> </ul> Plus interview with Communication Coach.  |
|                            | March 2016                  | Group 2: participants recruited by the company before 2008 and had followed the initial customer service training in 2006 and 2007: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 (all male) out of the 11 employees still working on the platform</li> <li>• Qualifications ranged from HSC/GCE 'A' Level to MSc</li> <li>• Age group: 20 to 35 years old</li> </ul> |
| Focus group: additional    | March 2018                  | Group working on the platform opened in September 2017: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 11 (4 female and 7 male)</li> <li>• Qualifications ranged from HSC/GCE 'A' Level to MSc</li> <li>• Age group: 20 to 35 years old</li> </ul>   |

#### **4.8.1 *Documentary review***

According to Prior (2011), documentary study can be seen in terms of resource or topic and approached in four ways: (1) as a non-dynamic source of content; (2) as a source of understanding how people use documents to suit their purposes (resource focus); (3) as a topic that focuses on how documents come into being; and (4) as a topic that focuses on how documents function and impact on social interaction and organisation. The first approach, content analysis, was chosen for this research. The choice of documents and the purpose for which they were analysed follow the five specific functions of documentary material identified by Bowen (2009), namely, (1) providing background and context, particularly historical insight; (2) identifying additional questions to be asked; (3) providing supplementary data; (4) a means of tracking change and development; and (5) verifying findings from other sources to strengthen the convergence of information from different sources and thus the trustworthiness of the findings. The five criteria for choosing the various documents and identifying meaningful sections within the documents, as suggested by Bowen (2009), were (1) the relevance of the content to the research question; (2) the content fitting the conceptual framework of the study; (3) the completeness or comprehensiveness of the content with respect to the specific theme being highlighted, as opposed to (4) the selectiveness of the content in that it covers only some aspects of the theme in question; and (5) due attention to ensuring the authenticity, credibility, accuracy and representativeness of the chosen documents.

The aim of this documentary review was twofold: (1) present the official standpoint and institutional context with respect to the country's developmental needs and progress, in particular concerning language use and the education and training system, and (2) identify issues concerning the general use of English in the business sector, and more specifically, the required skill levels and actual performance of employees in the ICT-BPO sector, which would help inform the areas of inquiry for the field work. Given that the ICT-BPO sector in Mauritius is fast-moving with a constant need to adapt to changes in the global business environment, the documentary review was a continuous process throughout the preparation of this study. The review is split into two distinct parts that correspond to the two sections of the study, as shown in Table 2.2 and Table 2.3.

**Table 4.2: Documentary review: Section 1 Setting the overall conceptual framework**

| Chapter                                    | Key themes   | Key words  | Type of document chosen with examples  | Function with respect to the study   |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| Chapter 2:<br><i>Theoretical framework</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Globalisation</li> <li>• Small Island Developing States (SIDS)</li> <li>• English as a global language in a multilingual environment</li> <li>• Role of education in development</li> </ul>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusion/exclusion</li> <li>• Networks and networking</li> <li>• Global language/local language</li> <li>• Quality education</li> <li>• Lifelong learning</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historical analyses: Patten, Ferguson, Keay, Stiglitz, Ostler</li> <li>• Historical documents: Adam Smith, Samuel Johnson</li> <li>• Official reports: Brandt, Graddol, Dakar 2000, UNESCO, UNDP SDGs, Faure, Delors</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Background and context</li> <li>• Historical insight</li> <li>• Additional questions</li> </ul> |
| Chapter 3:<br><i>Literature review</i>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of English in (1) international business and (2) the global ICT-BPO sector</li> <li>• SIDS: specific characteristics</li> <li>• SIDS: challenges in education and human resource development</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language of instruction</li> <li>• Interpersonal skills</li> <li>• Native speaker (NS)</li> <li>• Non-native speaker (NNS)</li> <li>• BELF versus IBE</li> <li>• English language training</li> <li>• Quality education</li> <li>• Sustainable development</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historical analyses: Ostler</li> <li>• Historical documents: Allen</li> <li>• Official reports: British Council, Commonwealth, United Nations, UNDP&lt; UNESCO, World Bank</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Background and context</li> <li>• Historical insight</li> <li>• Additional questions</li> </ul> |

**Table 4.3: Documentary review: Section 2 Mauritius**

| Chapter  | Key themes  | Key words   | Type of document chosen with examples   | Function with respect to the study  |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| Chapter 5:<br><i>Mauritius the making of an island hub</i>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>General presentation of Mauritius today</li> <li>Transition from colonial, mono-crop economy to independent diversified economy</li> <li>Mauritius as a SIDS</li> <li>Mauritius in the global knowledge economy, ICT-BPO sector</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social democratic compromise: equity, inclusion, tolerance</li> <li>Bureaucratic capacity</li> <li>Activist developmental state</li> <li>Pillars of the economy</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Institutional documents: Constitution and other legal documents, official government websites, Statistics Mauritius</li> <li>Historical accounts: Addison and Hazareesingh, Allen, Benedict, Bulpin, Emmanuel, Jackson, Simmons, Storey, Toussaint</li> <li>Analytical accounts of contemporary events in Mauritius: Carroll and Carroll, Houbert, Lamusse, Sandbrook, Subramanian and Roy,</li> <li>Reports by international agencies on economic and social development in Mauritius: ITU, Meade, Titmuss, UNDP</li> <li>Reports prepared by local experts and institutions</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Background and context</li> <li>Historical insight</li> <li>Supplementary data</li> <li>Tracking change and development</li> </ul> |
| Chapter 6:<br><i>Overview of the Mauritian education and training system</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education and training system: (1) current objectives and structure, and (2) evolution over time as part of the country's social and economic development</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elitism</li> <li>Equal access to education</li> <li>Capacity building for development</li> <li>Academic performance</li> <li>Examination success</li> </ul>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Institutional documents: Constitution and other legal documents, official government websites, Statistics Mauritius</li> <li>Historical accounts: Manrakhan, Ramdoyal, Simmons, Storey, Toussaint</li> <li>Analytical accounts of contemporary events in Mauritius: Carroll and Carroll, Lamusse, Sandbrook, Subramanian and Roy</li> <li>Reports by international agencies on economic and social development in Mauritius: Meade, Titmuss, UNDP</li> <li>Reports prepared by local experts and institutions</li> <li>Non-institutional documents as starting points for identifying potential issues, such as local press articles on the match/mismatch of educational performance and the soft skills needed for employment in the service sector</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Background and context</li> <li>Historical insight</li> <li>Supplementary data</li> <li>Tracking change and development</li> </ul> |

| Chapter  | Key themes   | Key words   | Type of document chosen with examples  | Function with respect to the study   |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| Chapter 7: <i>The role and use of English in Mauritius</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of English in (1) international business and (2) the global ICT-BPO sector</li> <li>• Individual choice of language</li> <li>• Use of English in the Mauritian education and training system</li> <li>• Language policy in place with respect to the choice of language of instruction and the number of other languages to be taught.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Official language</li> <li>• Multilingualism</li> <li>• Colonial languages</li> <li>• Local languages</li> <li>• Loss of Englishness</li> <li>• Language of instruction</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutional documents: Constitution, laws and regulations governing language use in Mauritius, Statistics Mauritius</li> <li>• Reports prepared by local experts and institutions</li> <li>• Historical accounts: Beaton, Durrell, Pike, d'Unienville, Toussaint, Vaughan</li> <li>• Analytical accounts of contemporary events in Mauritius: Baker, Eisenlohr, Eriksen Stein, Chan-Meetoo</li> <li>• Corporate and media websites</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Background and context</li> <li>• Historical insight</li> <li>• Supplementary data</li> <li>• Tracking change and development</li> <li>• Verifying findings from the interviews and focus groups</li> </ul> |

#### **4.8.2 The direct contact methods: approach and aim**

The basic approach underpinning the three direct contact methods, namely the questionnaire, interviews and focus groups, is that used in customer service satisfaction and complaint handling surveys, that of asking the end-user what makes them happy or unhappy, satisfied or dissatisfied with respect to the product or service on offer. This approach allows the evaluation of the gap between expectations and actual experience, which can then be used to define appropriate corrective action and proactive policies to ensure the required improvement in performance (Goodman, 1991; Goodman and Newman, 2003). With respect to this study, there are two end-users, first and foremost, the employers and secondly the employees, while the product or service on offer is the education and training system that prepares current and future employees to assume their role in the world of work.



#### **4.8.3 The questionnaire: aim, design, distribution and response**

##### *Aim*

The overarching aim of the preliminary informative exploratory questionnaire sent out in October 2015 was to identify issues and concerns to be explored in greater depth during the interviews and focus groups scheduled for 2016.

##### *Design and distribution*

The questionnaire was designed in a semi-structured format to allow for optimum collection of the more quantitative context data such as size of company, products and services offered and markets together with more flexible questions offering a choice of possible answers on the main research theme and ending with two open questions asking for the respondents' opinion. This mix of question type was based on the advice given by Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2018).

In the light of the advice given by Gehlbach and Brinkworth (2011) concerning the need for careful wording of items, particular attention was given to the formulation of the individual questions, including the listing of possible answers expressed in words and not numbers to enhance the reliability of the data thus obtained.

The peer review was in two parts, firstly in Reading and secondly in Mauritius. In Reading two academic reviews of the preliminary questionnaire that was submitted for the Ethics Approval process were obtained. The questionnaire was revised accordingly in the light of the comments and corrections received. Then in Mauritius, the questionnaire was reviewed by two researchers, one being a specialist in marketing and survey design, and the other having extensive experience in applied research design. The practitioner's review was carried out by a highly experienced executive who is a language graduate with a long and varied career at in the corporate world, including the setting-up and running a call

centre platform for one of the major conglomerates in Mauritius. A final check concerning the readability and ease of replying was carried out with the help of my secretary. All their comments and suggestions were included in the final questionnaire.

A pilot run was not carried out, for two reasons. Firstly, given the limited number of target respondents identified in the sampling process, this would have reduced even further the number of actual responses obtained. Secondly, given the amount of comments and suggestions received during the peer review it did not seem necessary,

Online distribution of the questionnaire was not used, for two reasons, namely, the prohibitive cost of the online service providers, and the high risk of the online questionnaire being automatically spammed by the receiving servers as more and more companies in Mauritius are installing tighter security measures on their IT systems. The questionnaire was distributed in hard copy, with the sender's address given on the despatch envelope and a stamped addressed envelope included with which to return the completed document, and by email as a Word attachment. In both cases it was addressed to the contact person given in the *Online Directory* mentioned earlier, or, if no name was given, to Human Resource and/or Training (Talent) Director or Manager. One of the peer reviewers in Mauritius had in fact mentioned that in her experience potential respondents were still very appreciative of receiving a formal hard copy document.

### *Response*

Of the 188 questionnaires sent out, 50 were returned with the comments *Gone away* or *Not known* written on the despatch envelope. Only 19 replies were received of which one kindly stated that they could not answer the questionnaire because they were not in the BPO sector. This low response was at first both disappointing and puzzling. However, when asked what they thought the reasons were, all the persons interviewed said that they received so many questionnaires from both undergraduate and postgraduate students that they would only answer if the topic really concerned them. Another

factor concerned the confidentiality and possible misuse of the information provided. This latter factor was confirmed in a meeting with the person who had written up the 2017 report on the ICT sector published in by the Board of Investment. It would appear that the great difficulty in gaining the cooperation of companies in such surveys was not confined to academic research. As a result, the idea of running a second questionnaire was abandoned.

A closer look at the batch of undelivered envelopes showed that 46 out of the 50 returned employed less than 50 people. One may surmise that the classic vulnerability of start-ups and small enterprises to closure, irrespective of their sector, may be at work here, a hypothesis that was shared by those interviewed. With respect to the completed questionnaires returned, three of the small companies, that is with less than 50 employees, identified their main market orientation as being domestic only, despite the fact that they were included on the export-oriented list in the official directory on which the mailing was based. The option *domestic Mauritian market only* had in fact been included as a precautionary measure based on empirical knowledge of how small businesses function in Mauritius, in that they often include the export option in their registration for incorporation to allow for future expansion while actually remaining only on the domestic market. A blank copy of the questionnaire is given in Annexe 3.

#### **4.8.4 *The interviews: sampling, aim, design and response***

##### ***Sampling***

The original target audience for the interviews was composed of the following three sets of major stakeholders: (1) senior management representatives from the larger firms in the NCB list; (2) the representatives of the professional associations representing the key players in the ICT-BPO sector, namely, the Outsourcing and Telecommunications Association of Mauritius (OTAM) and the Mauritius IT Industry Association (MITIA); and (3) the management of the individual firm that had accepted to organise the focus groups.

Unfortunately, the issues of cooperation and confidentiality were recurrent obstacles in trying to get a more focussed and richer data set to build up the case study. Finally, a more opportunistic approach became the only way of making any progress. All the persons who were interviewed accepted because of either a long-standing professional relationship in the HR and training fields or a recommendation from a mutually trusted colleague. One person did say outright at the start of the interview that he never usually accepted such interviews and only did so because he knew me from other professional contexts.

### *Aim and Design*

Of the four kinds of research interview, namely, structured, unstructured interview, non-directive and focused, identified by Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2018), the focused interview was the best suited to this research. It not only combines the advantages of the structured approach that provides for adequate control by the researcher through a set of predefined questions with the opportunity for the respondent to share spontaneously pertinent information that would have otherwise remained unsolicited, but it also has a definite focus, namely a particular situation in which the respondent is known to have been involved. Given that the persons interviewed were all experienced, and very busy professionals, the focused interview approach helped reassure them that their shared time and experience would be put to good use.

The necessary advance preparation for the interviews as advised by Kvale (1996) involved visiting the websites of the companies represented by the interviewees to understand their general context and activities. As the initial aim was to get more detailed data on the main themes raised in the questionnaire, the guide for the interviews with the four heads of the ICT-platforms focussed on (1) the company profile and activities (2) languages used, in particular, the use of English (5) recruitment process (6) specific job-related training provided by the company, (7) employees' attitude towards their work and (8) evaluation of employees' performance. The interviews with the two HR

professionals, at the recruitment agency and the bank, were more focussed on (1) recruitment processes, (2) job applicants' motivation for joining the ICT-BPO sector and (3) proficiency in using English for professional purposes, and (4) the labour shortage due to a general mismatch of skills as reported in the local press, the aim being to build a wider picture of the HR issues prevalent in the sector.

### *Response*

Five interviews were carried out between December 2015 to March 2016, and a sixth in March 2018, the latter concerning a platform that had opened in September 2017. Three of the executives interviewed in 2015-2016 were each heading a major international ICT-BPO platform. They also responded to the questionnaire. The other two interviews concerned people with wide experience in handling HRM/HRD issues in Mauritius. One was head of HR for a leading bank in Mauritius, which had an extensive IT-based customer service operation for its account and card holders. The other headed one of the leading recruitment agencies in Mauritius that provided recruitment and selection services to firms working in the ICT-BPO sector. All of the interviews lasted longer than the requested 45 minutes to one hour and were very informative in that those interviewed were seasoned executives and professionals with a breadth and variety of experience that enabled them to paint a bigger picture than just the immediate experience of the Mauritian-based operation that they were currently managing.

In July 2020, as the final corrections to the text were being carried out, it was felt necessary to validate again the documentary evidence concerning the language in education policy discussed in Chapter 7 on language use in Mauritius, given that some of the key official documents in question date back to the post-WWII colonial period and the most recent one was published in 1997. The decision to undertake these additional interviews was motivated as being part of the response to the comment in the viva report concerning the selection of relevant historical background. One of the interviewees was a Mauritian linguist, writer and translator who has considerable experience in not only studying

but also handling issues concerned with the choice of medium of instruction and bilingual literacy in English and Kreol, in addition to his work as a creative writer in Mauritian Kreol and a translator of literary works from English to Kreol. The second interviewee was also a Mauritian linguist, Professor in Language Studies and, at the time of the interview, outgoing Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, at the University of Mauritius. He is the author of the first monolingual dictionary in Mauritian Kreol. The third interview was with a lecturer in Marketing and Media at the Mauritius branch of a UK university that opened in 2009. The Mauritius branch offers BSc and MSCs programmes that are market oriented, including accounting and finance, advertising with PR and media, business management, computer science and information technology, education, law and psychology. This institution was mentioned favourably several times in the interviews with the executives heading the ICT-BPO platforms as being more attuned to the needs of the employment market and so producing recruits who are more ready for employment than their counterparts from the public tertiary institutions in Mauritius. The aim of this interview was to gain some insights into how this institution handles the issue of adequate proficiency in English to meet the requirements of the UK university in question.

#### **4.8.5    *The focus groups: organisation and participation***

In the corporate world, '*focus group*' is the term used most often to cover all forms of group interview and was used thus for this study. Strictly speaking, in a group interview, the interaction is led by the researcher and most of the time is directly between the researcher and the participants, whereas in a focus group the interaction is between the participants themselves with the researcher being more in the role of an observer. Both formats enable the collection of a wide range of responses concerning the shared experience of people who have been working together for some time and so share a common purpose. However, there is a risk that the respondents will tend to say what the employer wants them to say, especially if a member of the senior management is present. Two other possible distorting factors are the state of relations between the employer and the employees and the nature of the issue being discussed, that is, whether the issue is a matter of contention between the two.

None of these three distorting factors were present in the focus groups held as part of the field work for this study. On the practical side, data collection through both formats is faster, less disruptive and more time-saving than a succession of one-to-one interviews (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018), which makes it a more attractive choice in the eyes of the employers whose cooperation in releasing their employees is fundamental to the whole exercise. This latter consideration was certainly true for both firms who allowed their employees to take part in the study.

However, the confidentiality issue came to the fore again. The first company that had accepted to organise the focus groups required that a non-disclosure agreement be signed before releasing the completed questionnaire and arranging the focus groups. As the company only allowed restricted access to its employees, the desired profile for the focus groups was submitted to the HR Department, who then contacted the employees concerned. Participation in the focus groups was entirely voluntary, and so the actual attendance was dependent on two external factors, the personal motivation to participate of the targeted employees and the real availability of those interested in participating with respect to their actual workload on the day. The first group was held in February 2016 and the second in March 2016. Recording of the discussion on smart phone was not allowed. The main points were noted down on a flipchart during the session, then transcribed and expanded into full working notes and saved in the digital research notes folder the following day. By way of contrast, in March 2018 a third focus group was set up at the company mentioned earlier that had started operations in September 2017. Signing a non-disclosure agreement was not required and recording on smart phone of the actual discussion was allowed. All three focus groups lasted an hour each. The main points were transcribed and expanded into full working notes and then saved in the digital research notes folder the following day.

The list of set questions used for all three groups is shown in Table 4.4 below.

**Table 4.4: List of questions for the focus groups held in 2016 and 2018**

|   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 | Overall aim  |
|   | Talk about your experience with using English in your work at XXXX.  |
| 2 | <b>Specific topics</b>   |
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you feel about using English when you first started at XXXX? Why?</li> <li>• How do you feel now? What has changed?</li> <li>• What have you done to improve and/or maintain your level of English since you started at XXXX? What worked best? Least? Why?</li> <li>• What sort of professional training have you had to improve your English in XXXX? Elsewhere?</li> <li>• How well do you think the Mauritian education system prepares young people for employment in the English-speaking ICT-BPO sector?</li> <li>• What do you suggest to improve the level of English for today's new recruits?</li> </ul> |

The interaction in all three focus groups was mainly researcher-led, not just because of the set list of questions proposed, but also because of the need to encourage the less assertive participants to voice their opinions. Moreover, the discussions during the focus groups also gave the opportunity to assess the employees' ability to communicate effectively in English.

#### **4.9 Data analysis**

The data analysis was carried out on a thematic basis, with the items in the questionnaire being the starting point for an iterative review of the responses to the questionnaire and of the discussions in the interviews and focus groups to establish the links between the respondents' experience of how English is used in their work context and the theoretical concepts concerning language use in international business activities. This iterative approach followed the 6-step process presented by Lichtman (2013) to interpret the raw data obtained in the fieldwork in terms of the three C's of codes, categories and concepts. However, as this study explores the gap between required and actual performance, Step 1, *Initial coding*, took place as part of the questionnaire preparation, in that it focussed on the indicators used to assess language proficiency as identified during the documentary review. This 'coding down' process was aimed to give the necessary controlled framework through which essential data would be collected in a systematic way (Fielding, 1995). It did not, however, close the door to unexpected responses which were duly codified in Step 2, *Revisiting the initial coding*. An *initial categorisation*, (Step 3), was also carried out as part of the questionnaire preparation to group



the various items into distinct themed sections. This categorisation was revisited during the initial analysis of the data collected from the questionnaire and used to set up the interview guides and focus group questions. Step 4, *Modifying the initial list of categories*, and Step 5, *Revisiting categories*, enabled the categorisation of the unexpected data collected from the interviews and focus groups. The tables below give the coding lists for the questionnaire, interviews and focus groups.

**Table 4.5: Initial listing based on the questionnaire**

| Codes   | Categories                      | Concepts   |
|---|---------------------------------|--|
| Company's IT related activities   | Company profile                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SIDS in global business</li> <li>• International business networks</li> </ul>                                 |
| Main market orientation   |                                 |  |
| Overseas markets: countries   |                                 |  |
| Number of employees   |                                 |  |
| Employees' level of qualification   | Employee profile                |  |
| English-speaking expatriate personnel                                     |                                 |  |
| International languages used  | Language use                    | • Functionalist approach to language use   |
| Amount of business conducted in English                                   |                                 | • International Business English (IBE)   |
| Languages used by Mauritian employees                                     |                                 | • Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF)   |
| Frequency of use of spoken English by employees                           |                                 | • Native speaker/Non-native speaker (NS/NNS interface)   |
| Frequency of use of written English by employees                          |                                 |  |
| Employees' fluency in using English                                       | Employee proficiency in English | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer service skill requirements</li> <li>• Customer perception of service provided</li> </ul>             |
| Employees' difficulties in using English                                  |                                 |  |
| Customer feedback on employees' spoken English                            |                                 |  |
| Customer feedback on employees' written English                           |                                 |  |
| Use of English in the recruitment process                                 | Recruitment requirement         |  |
| Steps taken to improve employees' level of English                        | Language training               |  |
| Importance of English in future development of Mauritius                  | Use of English in Mauritius     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language policy in Mauritius</li> <li>• Role of education and training system in language learning</li> </ul> |
| Level of English used in Mauritius  |                                 |  |
| Exposure to English in Mauritius  |                                 |  |
| Role of school qualifications in preparing for use of English in business | Language learning               |  |
| Suggestions to improve English used in Mauritius                          |                                 |  |

**Table 4.6: Interviews: Supplementary listing**

| Codes  | Categories                  | Concepts                                 |  |
|--|-----------------------------|--|--|
| Language used to carry out work                        | Corporate language strategy | International Business English           |  |
| Employees' attitude to employment in ICT-BPO sector    | Employee work culture       | Employee expectations in global business |  |
| Families' attitude to employment in the ICT-BPO sector |                             |  |  |
| Rate of employee turnover/churn                        |                             |  |  |
| Employee maturity/sense of responsibility              |                             |  |  |
| Assertiveness  | Soft skills                 | Customer service skill requirements      |  |
| Intercultural awareness and empathy                    |                             |  |  |
| General knowledge                                      | Labour market               |  |  |
| Labour shortage  |                             |  |  |
| Skills mismatch  | International business      | SIDS in global business                  |  |
| Competition: current and future                        |                             |  |  |
| Future of ICT-BPO activities in Mauritius              |                             |  |  |

**Table 4.7: Focus groups**

| Codes  | Categories   | Concepts   |
|--|--|--|
| Attitude towards using English on starting work  | Language use   | Functionalist approach to language use                     |
| Change in attitude towards using English after gaining experience  |  |  |
| Personal action taken to improve/maintain level of English   | Personal development   | Customer service skill requirements                        |
| Most successful action   |  |  |
| Least successful action  |  |  |
| Professional training received to improve English inside company   | Language learning  | Role of education and training system in language learning |
| Professional training received to improve English by outside training provider   |  |  |
| Views on how well the Mauritian education system prepares young people for employment in the English-speaking ICT-BPO sector | Language learning  |  |
| Suggestions to improve level of English of new recruits  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soft skills acquisition</li> <li>• Intercultural awareness</li> </ul> | Customer service skill requirements                        |
| Interaction with overseas customers  |  |  |
| Interaction with overseas colleagues   |  |  |
| Handling hostile customer feedback   |  |  |
| Difficulties in handling customer service issues   |  |  |
| Coping strategies  |  |  |
| Coping with intercultural differences  |  |  |

The actual analysis of the three data sets was split into two by the nature of the data collected, namely, (1) a quantitative compilation of the responses to the questionnaire based on frequency or degree of occurrence and (2) a qualitative evaluation of the relevant issues as experienced by the two sets of respondent, the employers and the employees, and organised around an overall thematic framework.

Collecting three distinct but linked data sets thus enabled a richer picture to emerge, which went beyond the descriptive factual and static data collected through the impersonal closed lists of the questionnaire to reach the individual ongoing real-life experience of the two main protagonists in the provision of the required customer service, the social reality built on common-sense thinking as identified by Schutz (1962-66).

#### **4.10 Reliability and validity of data**

Reliability concerns the process, whether the appropriate research techniques were chosen and properly used, that is: *“the extent to which the same measurement technique or strategy produces the same result on different occasions, for example when used by different researchers* (Hammersley, 2008, p.43). As mentioned earlier, in the case of quantitative research, standard procedures for designing, running and controlling experiments in the laboratory or in the field exist, which researchers are expected to know and follow. In the case of qualitative research, with its focus on understanding and interpreting people’s individual and so unique experiences, it is obviously more difficult to ensure reliability in quantifiable terms. The term ‘trustworthiness’ is often preferred as being less numerically oriented. However, as Oakley points out, *“all methods must be open, consistently applied and replicable by others.”* (Oakley, 1999, p.252)

Validity concerns the outcomes, or the findings obtained. It concerns the criteria of accuracy, generalizability or transferability, and control of variables. In the case of quantitative research, these criteria can be assessed through objective standard calculations and protocols for experiments and trials (Oakley, 1999; Hammersley, 2008). However, in the case of research on language attitudes, such as this study, Johnson and Saville-Troike (1992) *“urge particular caution in the use of quantitative measures when studying people of different cultural backgrounds”*. In their opinion, validity problems may arise if a self-reporting questionnaire does not make the distinction between *“ideal”* and *“real”* culture or the effects of the interviewer’s ethnicity are not considered (Johnson, 1992). These are examples of variables that cannot be quantified as such, because their source is the unique perception

and experience that each participant has of culture and ethnicity. Closed lists of options for answers, even if they include the option “*others*”, will not capture this uniqueness in enough depth to control the impact of these variables on the validity of the findings thus obtained. Other, more open and exploratory approaches are required, such as in-depth interviewing and *in situ* observations, which are essentially qualitative.

Moreover, the samples used in qualitative research are often criticised for being too small and too context specific to consider any generalisation of the findings to be valid (Brannen, 2005). Qualitative researchers usually respond to this criticism by saying that their aim is to produce rich data about a specific experience in a given context, in which case the criterion is that of credibility (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The sample for this study could be criticised for being too small, but, as explained earlier in this chapter, the over-riding concern for confidentiality on the part of the employers severely hampered all attempts to widen the scope. On the other hand, the credibility factor can be successfully applied to the choice of senior executives for the interviews, because all of them are recognised and respected leaders in their field, whose views are regularly sought by the government officials, international aid agencies present in Mauritius and the press as being true and balanced assessments of the sector. The opinions that they shared in the interviews for this study were consistent with their previous standpoints.

The tendency to assess all research using the quantitative criteria of positivist objectivism often results in qualitative research being assessed negatively, that is, in terms of what it does not manage to do, rather than what it does achieve. As a result, social science researchers have tried to work out an alternative set of criteria that would cater for the open-ended, exploratory nature of the findings of qualitative research. To this end, Guba and Lincoln (1994) proposed two sets of criteria as an attempt to resolve the quality issue for constructivist –based research, namely the trustworthiness criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability and the authenticity criteria of fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity and tactical authenticity.

For the purposes of this study on language use, the first set based on the notion of trustworthiness provided the base on which to anchor the required standards of quality in both the application of the chosen methodology and the interpretation of the data collected. The 'credibility' criterion was applied to the choice of interviewees, as stated earlier, that of 'transferability' concerns only the specific sector under study, the ICT-BPO sector, in keeping with the focussed case-study approach discussed earlier, 'dependability' concerned the data sources which comprised official institutional reports and statistics, as well as recognised reputable academic research, with which to set the context for the field work, and finally 'confirmability' refers to the fact that the same issues occurred independently across all the three parts of the data collection, the questionnaire, the interviews and the focus groups.

#### **4.11 The ethical dimension**

The ethical dimension of this study has two components: the underpinning of the academic research process and the requirements of the business world.

##### **4.11.1 *The underpinning of the academic research process***

Oakley considers that all forms of research, must respect the same fundamental criteria: "*the need for adopting methods appropriate to research questions, for choosing methods which are sensitive to power relations, and for the ethical conduct of research (which also means well designed research able to answer the questions it is set up to answer)*" (Oakley, 1999, p.252).

Robson (2002) adopts a similar point of view when he talks of the need for research to be carried out in respect of the scientific method, that is, systematically, sceptically and ethically.

Thus, both Oakley and Robson demonstrate that ethics is fundamental to the proper respect of the scientific method in research. Guba and Lincoln (1994) consider ethics to be intrinsic to the constructivist paradigm because the participants' values are included in the inquiry as part of the co-

construction process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In all cases, the underlying generic ethical principle is the age-old golden rule *“Do unto others as you would have done unto yourself”*. This concern for the ‘other’, the participant in or respondent to the research process, has gained enormous momentum with the increase in medical research requiring testing on live subjects. The principle of *“do no harm”* has come under serious pressure in the trade-off between the individual participant’s right to be informed and to decide whether they want to be part of the experiment and the necessity of testing the new medicine on a small sample of persons before releasing it on the open market.

Hammersley and Traianou (2012) identify five main ethical principles that are relevant to social research, in particular research in education, namely, minimising harm, respecting autonomy, protecting privacy, offering reciprocity and treating people equitably. They also warn against the probability of conflict among the principles and of varying interpretations of the principles, especially in situations presenting cultural variation. Each of these principles requires careful consideration both at the design stage and during the actual research activities. For instance, minimising harm does not refer only to physical harm: it can also mean psychological harm such as the distress felt when the respondent sees that they have been portrayed in the research more negatively than they expected. Another potentially sensitive issue in education research is the contact with under-age persons, that is, children and adolescents. They cannot decide autonomously whether they wish to participate in the research; this decision is made on their behalf by their responsible party.

For this study, these issues were relatively straightforward to handle because the research population was composed only of adults in employment. Also, the principle of minimising harm did not give rise to any major issues, as the topic in question did not directly affect their work situation. Regarding the participants’ right to information about the research topic and right to refuse participation, again this did not pose any particular problem as full details about the topic of the research were released to their management representatives beforehand and was subsequently forwarded to the employees who had accepted to take part in the focus groups.

#### **4.11.2 *The requirements of the business world***

The ethical issue that proved difficult to handle was the confidentiality barrier that affected the response to the questionnaire, the granting of the interviews and the access to the employees, as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

The response received for all three parts of the data collection depended entirely on my personal contacts in the HR and training field in Mauritius. All the participants were willing to share their views and experience on the express condition that only an anonymous account would be written up. Verbatim transcripts, even anonymised, of the recordings that I was allowed to make were not authorised. Given that two of the interviews and two of the focus groups were not recorded, equal treatment requires that no transcripts be published in any form. In the same vein, since the HR Departments for the two firms which accepted to arrange the focus groups did not release the details about the participants, such as age and qualifications, for reasons of data protection with respect to external third parties, then only general characteristics about the participants obtained in the focus groups can be published.

This gate-keeping stance on the part of the target firms is not peculiar to Mauritius. A similar situation is noted in the Indian call centre business, which served as the model and starting point for Mauritius as will be shown in Chapter 5 *Mauritius, the making of an island hub*. Taylor and Bain (2005) report that while they were able to conduct semi-structured interviews with senior management in the companies selected for their research on Indian call centres, they were not allowed to interview workers directly on site for reasons of corporate confidentiality. Cowie (2007) states that, despite being granted a 6-month placement in a soft skills training agency for call centres in Bangalore to provide assistance with curriculum design and development in return for the opportunity to observe training and talk to the managers and trainers, she had limited opportunities to interview individual trainees at length. In their research on call centres in Noida, Bousseba *et al* (2014) also mention the

difficulties in gaining access due to the concerns about data protection expressed by the offshore outsourcing organisations contacted.

Such wariness towards collaborating in any academic research by an outsider having no tangible connection with the industry is not only understandable but also justifiable given the legal framework in which they operate. As ICT-BPO activities are essentially focussed on exporting services on the worldwide market, the companies are required to comply with not just their local legislation and regulations but also, and more importantly, those in force with respect to international transactions, which are often more stringent.

In the case of Mauritius, the right to privacy is protected first and foremost in the Constitution and the Mauritian Civil Code. The framework legislation concerning private companies, the Companies Act (2001) Section 160 (1b) requires that *“(e)very officer of a company shall exercise the degree of care, diligence and skill that a reasonably prudent person would exercise in comparable circumstances”*. The National Code of Corporate Governance for Mauritius (2016), under Principle 5 *Risk governance and internal control*, requires, among other things, the safeguarding of the assets and data of the organisation. The original Data Protection Act of 2004 was replaced in 2017 by a stronger enactment to bring Mauritius data protection into line with international standards, namely the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Regulation (EU) 2016/679), concerning the protection of the privacy rights of individuals in view of the developments in the techniques used to capture, transmit, manipulate, record or store data relating to individuals (Appleby, 2018). It is in this context that I was required to sign the non-disclosure agreement before the first two focus groups could be held, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. The company also requested a feedback summary report of the discussions in the two focus groups to ensure that the required level of anonymity of participants and the non-disclosure of sensitive information such as names of their clients or products were respected. The report was submitted and was found to be compliant with their requirements. As the owner and managing director of a Mauritian training company offering services to the companies responding to the field work tools used for this study, the questionnaire, interviews and focus groups, I am bound by



the same legal requirements, which, perforce, override my status as a doctoral student in this particular context. However, this situation does leave the study open to criticism about lack of transparency in the collection and analysis of the data presented. I can only hope that the future readers of this study will give due consideration to this reality of conducting case study research.

#### **4.12 The practitioner-researcher**

An important factor that may impinge on the reliability and validity of the data collected is that of my dual position of insider/outsider, as both practitioner and researcher in the field. My implication and interest in the field of English language teaching in Mauritius have been described in detail already in Chapter 1.

Given that the study is based on the case study approach in which focus groups and interviews were the main methods for qualitative data collection, the handling of the interaction between the researcher and the respondents was crucial to the success of the undertaking. Kvale (1996) considers the interviewer as a research instrument who *“is an expert in the topic of the interview as well as in human interaction”* (Kvale, 1996, p.147). He identified ten qualification criteria for the interviewer, of which the first is being knowledgeable. Thus, the interviewer will know which questions to ask, which issues to pursue and which answers to interpret in order to obtain the required rich knowledge (Kvale, 1996).

Being a practitioner in the field means that the researcher has acquired the specialist knowledge identified by Kvale as a necessary requisite for successful interviewing. Robson (1993) also considers that relevant professional experience in working with people gives the case study investigator *“a firm grasp of the issues being studied in a particular case study”* (Robson, 1993, p.162) Without such a grasp, the investigator may *“miss clues, not see contradictions, requirement for further evidence, etc.”* (Robson, 1993, p.163).

Robson (1993) defines the practitioner-researcher as *“someone who holds down a job in some particular area and at the same time carries out systematic enquiry which is of relevance to the job.”* (Robson, 1993, p.446) He considers that this dual role carries both advantages and disadvantages. He notes three advantages in particular: (1) *insider opportunities*, that is, *pre-existing knowledge and experience base about the situation and the people involved*; (2) *practitioner opportunities*, that is, *a substantial reduction of implementation problems*; and (3) *practitioner-researcher synergy*, that is, *the practitioner insights and help in the design, carrying out and analysis of useful and appropriate studies*. On the other hand, he identifies four disadvantages: (1) *time*, which he considers to be probably the main disadvantage; (2) *lack of expertise*; (3) *lack of confidence*; and (4) *insider problems*, such as *preconceptions about issues and/or solutions* (Robson, 1993, p.447).

The first three disadvantages can be overcome with a determined effort on the part of the practitioner-researcher through systematic planning and prioritisation and willingness to learn and try. It is the fourth one which requires constant attention. The mass of knowledge acquired through practising in the field and the attendant familiarity can lead to lack of sensitivity or even failure to see pertinent data or issues. The close involvement in the field can make it difficult to distance oneself sufficiently to be able to take an objective, dispassionate view of the target situation. In other words, the active involvement in the situation which very often motivates the desire to carry out the research can be an obstacle to achieving the necessary validity that makes the study credible. It is an issue that I was particularly concerned about throughout the entire conduct of this research.

As a solution to this dilemma, Gobo (2011) talks of *“reflexivity, the self-aware analysis of the dynamic between researcher and participants, the critical capacity to make explicit the position assumed by the observer in the field, and the way in which the researcher’s positioning impacts on the research process.”* (Gobo, 2011, p.22) Buscatto (2011) offers similar advice when she suggests constant reflexivity as being the best way of ensuring the scientificity of an ethnographic study. In her view given the flexibility, fluidity and unpredictability of the ethnographic method *“researchers are well advised to unceasingly question the way they reach and interpret their observations”* (Buscatto, 2011, p.49).

Given that the case study method can be equally flexible, fluid and unpredictable, the advice given by both Gobo and Buscatto was most valuable when conducting the field work. This is not a new debate. For instance, Mason (1996) considers that all qualitative researchers should adopt a thinking, reflexive stance and actively construct their research process out of situated and contextual decisions and actions, particularly in view of the high level of trust that can develop between the researcher and the researched, with the attendant issues of respect of confidentiality and privacy concerning the information obtained.

#### **4.13 The research paradigm chosen**

To conclude this chapter, the research paradigm chosen for this study is, therefore, interpretivist constructivism, using the case study approach and a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis.

## SECTION 2: THE CONTEXT AND THE CASE STUDY

### CHAPTER 5: MAURITIUS: THE MAKING OF AN ISLAND HUB

#### 5.1 Introduction

In line with Mabry's observation (2008) on the importance of contextuality in the case study approach and the need to render the multifaceted and dynamic nature of the specific context (Chapter 4, *Methodology*, Section 4.5.2), this chapter presents the detailed context of this study, Mauritius, a small island republic in the South-West Indian Ocean. The presentation of the country's geographical location, history, population profile, constitutional structure and economic activity aims to show how Mauritius moved from a colonial, mono-crop economy to an independent diversified emerging economy. The discussion highlights Mauritius's ability to leverage its presence in multiple networks, political, economic and diasporic, to support its development process, in line with Castell's view (2005) of the central importance of this essential form of social organisation (Chapter 2, *Theoretical Framework*, Section 2.3). It then discusses how Mauritius, a SIDS, has followed the changes in economic activity occasioned by the supraterritorial nature of global business as defined by Scholte (2002) (Chapter 2, *Theoretical Framework*, Section 2.2) and positioned itself in the global knowledge economy with particular emphasis on the country's ICT-BPO sector. Throughout the chapter, emphasis is laid on the capability of the country's sole resource, its human population, in line with Schultz' observation (1993) on the need for a country's human capabilities to stay abreast of physical capital to ensure lasting economic growth (Chapter 2, *Theoretical Framework*, Section 2.5). The presentation thus shows that the successful move into the international BPO-ITC activities relied on the successive layers of experience gained as Mauritius gradually diversified its economy away from the exclusive reliance on the more traditional activities for a remote island settler colony, namely ship chandler and sugar plantations.

## 5.2 The Republic of Mauritius

The Republic of Mauritius, as defined by the Constitution of Mauritius, Section 111, is constituted of the islands of Mauritius, Rodrigues, Agalega, Tromelin, Cargados Carajos, and the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia, and is located in the South-West Indian Ocean, still one of the more remote parts of the globe. The main island, Mauritius, with an area of 1,864 km<sup>2</sup>, is situated just north of the Tropic of Capricorn, in latitude 20° south and longitude 57° east, 2,000 km off the east coast of Africa and 855 km east of Madagascar. Rodrigues, the second largest island with an area of 108 km<sup>2</sup>, is situated 560 km to the east of Mauritius. The twin islands of Agalega have a total land area of 2,600 hectares and are situated about 1000 km to the north of Mauritius. The Cargados Carajos or Saint Brandon (the usual name of the archipelago in Mauritius) is an uninhabited archipelago comprising a number of sandbanks, shoals and islets, some 430 km to the north-east of Mauritius, which is mostly used as a fishing base. The total population of the Republic numbers about 1,263,500, of which more than 1.2 million live on the main island of Mauritius, only 42,300 live in Rodrigues and some 300 in Agalega. Economic activity in Rodrigues is mainly based on fishing, cattle rearing and a developing tourism sector, while in Agalega it is primarily coconut exploitation (Statistics Mauritius, 2016; Government of Mauritius website). The official motto of the Republic is *Stella Clavisque Maris Indici* (*Star and Key of the Indian Ocean*), which was granted to the then colony by King Edward VII in 1906 (GIS, 2017). A map of the Republic of Mauritius is given in Annexe 4.

## 5.3 From a remote settler colony to Crown colony

The various modern-day accounts of Mauritius's early development all emphasise the remoteness of its location and its strategic importance on the trading routes to the East. Toussaint (1974) considers that the various islands and archipelagos scattered over the vast expanse of the Indian Ocean, namely the Mascarenes, Seychelles and Chagos, make up a unique island world with a distinct unity and specific characteristics that have profoundly marked it and set it apart from the neighbouring countries

and peoples. The title of Bulpin's history of the Sea of Zanj, the modernised version of the ancient Arab name of *Bahr-al-Zanj*, in other words, the Indian Ocean, *Islands in a Forgotten Sea*, evokes the isolation of this island world (Bulpin, 1969). Thus, 'remoteness', one of the defining characteristics of the modern-day SIDS, has in fact been an integral part of Mauritius's history and development. Throughout its history, in its struggle to not just survive but also prosper, the country's response to the constraints linked its remote location, notably its vulnerability to exogenous events and facts, calls upon all of Baldacchino's (2014) list of attributes characterising the small island states, namely resilience, dogged perseverance and clever opportunism. Thus, we realise that these are lessons learned much earlier than is often thought today.

The three Mascarene Islands, Reunion, Mauritius and Rodrigues, remained uninhabited until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, though they had been sighted and perhaps visited several centuries earlier by Arab merchants who were already trading with the East African coast as far south as Mozambique. They appear on medieval Arab maps as Dina arabi (Rodrigues), Dina mozare (Mauritius) and Dina margabim (Reunion). The name of Mascarene comes from the 16<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese navigators who had also sighted these tiny remote islands, while they were protecting their new trade routes to the East (Bulpin, 1969). As trade with the East expanded, the strategic importance of the geographical position of the island of Mauritius became increasingly apparent to the European countries trading in the area, the more so as the island had two safe natural harbours, one of which would become the modern-day capital, Port Louis. Mauritius experienced three successive occupations, starting in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the unsuccessful attempts by the Dutch who named the island in honour of Prince Maurice of Nassau, the Stadtholder of Holland. The Dutch are remembered for having introduced sugar cane and Java deer but also for having exhausted the island's sole commercial product, the ebony trees, as well as exterminating the dodo, the only indigenous source of meat, although apparently not very appetising or digestible (Addison & Hazareesingh, 1993). Next, in 1715, the French claimed Mauritius, then unoccupied, under the name of Ile de France. During the French administration which lasted to 1810 the island prospered mainly thanks to the port activities, in particular privateering as the base for the French corsairs whose prime targets were the British merchant ships plying the East India route, a

convenient and lucrative means for the French authorities of wearing down the British without engaging in a full blown war. The intensity of the struggle for supremacy in the Indian Ocean was such that William Pitt the Elder remarked in 1761 that as long as the French held Ile de France, the British would never be masters of India (Addison & Hazareesingh, 1993; Toussaint, 1974; Storey, 1997; Jackson, 2001). Finally, in 1810, after an ill-fated naval attack to the south of the island, the Battle of Grand Port, the only French naval victory mentioned on the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, the British landed 10,000 Indian troops under British officers in the north and took over Mauritius, with little or no resistance on the part of the French (O'Brian, 1977; Jackson, 2001; Taylor, 2007).

The generous terms of the 1810 Act of Capitulation, confirmed by the 1814 Treaty of Paris, that allowed the French colons to keep their property, laws, customs and religion, and, if they so desired, to leave the island within the following two years, taking their property with them, together with the initial minimal impact of the change of colonial master on the domestic life of the island, were key to not only the peaceful transition of power, but also the island's subsequent development (Toussaint, 1972; Addison & Hazareesingh, 1993). The British retained permanent control over Mauritius, the former Dutch name having been restored, and Rodrigues, for just over 150 years until 1968, the date of Mauritius's accession to independence. Mauritius became a Crown Colony with a Governor and other senior administrative staff sent out from Britain, with trade, foreign affairs and defence coming under the Colonial Office, while internal domestic affairs remained in the hands of local politicians and organisations (Storey, 1997). During that time, the island of Mauritius underwent fundamental changes in its two main poles of activity, shipping and agriculture, that were to shape its post-independence development and destiny.

#### **5.4 Garrisons and plantations: the twin pillars of British Mauritius**

Toussaint's account (1972) of the effects of the change in sovereignty talks of a radical change in orientation that saw the island move from a maritime-based economy to one based on agriculture. Since then, the Mauritian economy has always been export-oriented, starting with sugar in colonial

times, then diversifying into textiles and tourism as from the 1970s and now developing the global service sector. Yet, this does not explain sufficiently how and why Mauritians see their island as a hub in international economic and political affairs, a notion that has been a driving force behind their determination to develop the global financial and BPO sectors. The explanation lies also with the original reason for the British taking over the island, the defence of what were to become the international shipping lanes across the Indian Ocean. Jackson (2001) gives a vivid and detailed account of the role played by Mauritius, as one of the imperial fortress garrison colonies, during the various tussles in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in keeping the Indian Ocean open to first the British Empire's naval activities and then to the Western Allies in WWII and afterwards. In both of the 20<sup>th</sup> century World Wars, as British subjects, Mauritians served in the imperial forces as soldiers, sailors and pilots, and, in WWII, as Pioneers in the Royal Pioneer Corps, the logistics support section of the land army mobilised in the Middle East (Jackson, 2001). Even today, many Mauritian families will proudly show the photos of their great-grandfathers and grandfathers in their Pioneer uniform. Also, in WWII, some of the white Franco-Mauritians served in the Special Operations Executive (SOE) in occupied Europe and beyond as well as in Madagascar, thanks to their special advantage of being both British subjects and natural French speakers (Jackson, 2001). Mauritius was also a fully-fledged Royal Navy communications shore base and was heavily involved in the secret war of censorship, radio propaganda and codebreaking, as part of the worldwide network linked to Bletchley Park. Many of the clerical and support staff at the base were Mauritian civilian volunteers (Jackson, 2001). Thus, being an active part of a bigger picture beyond the coral reef surrounding the island is well embedded in the Mauritian psyche, in other words, the pronounced disposition towards the outside world as identified by Baldacchino (2011).

The radical reorientation of the peacetime economy from shipping to agriculture mentioned earlier was, like the military activities, in response to external circumstances about which the island had little or no say, let alone control. After 1814, the island's shipping activities declined for two external reasons, firstly the Navigation Laws which prohibited British colonies from trading with foreign merchants, and secondly the introduction of steam shipping that ended the era of the clippers and other merchant sailing ships, for which the local ship chandlers were ill-prepared (Addison &



Hazareesingh, 1993). Toussaint (1972) also suggests that the British had no desire to encourage maritime activities in an island where privateering had been a major industry for a long time, nor did they want the island to become a financial burden. Thus, in an address to the Scottish Geographical Society in 1908, Sir Charles Bruce, 18th Governor of Mauritius from 1897 to 1903, while talking glowingly of the services provided to ships docking at Port Louis, was quite clear that the island's permanent economic future depended on the development of its local resources (Bruce, 1908). Thus started the ongoing search for new avenues of economic activity, the 'pillars' as they are termed locally, a dynamic that would characterise the country's quest for a better life till the present day.

Although Mauritius enjoys a generally pleasant tropical climate, it also receives periodic visits from potentially devastating cyclones, the Indian Ocean variety of tropical storms, during the summer months of November to April. The choice of revenue-earning commodity was in fact limited to one, sugar cane, being the only cash crop that grows well in the island's tropical climate, while being able to withstand the onslaught of the cyclonic rains and winds, a lesson that the French colons (settlers) had learned well before the arrival of the British (Storey, 1997). In 1825, in response to pressure from the Mauritian planters and the British sugar merchants, the higher rate of duty on East Indian, that is Mauritian, sugar was replaced with the lower rate imposed on West Indian sugar, which allowed direct competition between Mauritius and the West Indies. As a result, sugar production in Mauritius boomed and the slave labour was moved massively from the port to the plantations (Storey, 1997).

Two major local factors underpinned the rapid expansion of the Mauritian sugar industry up to the 1860s and ensured its continued survival through the leaner years of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the face of stiff competition from the European beet producers and the devastation caused by several terrible cyclones. Firstly, most of the producers were the resident French colons who had come to the island in search of a better life, unlike the Caribbean, where absentee landlords were the norm (Storey, 1997). The Mauritian planters' determination to defend their interests went as far as sending a representative to London in 1830 (Toussaint, 1972), and in 1853 setting up a Chamber of Agriculture that would become one of the main private sector institutions in modern-day Mauritius.

Secondly, in the late eighteenth century, a vibrant intellectual life had developed among the French colons, many of whom took a strong interest in botany and natural history and some even earned international reputations as botanists. Furthermore, several world-renowned naturalists visited the island. This sustained interest in botany was the start of serious research to identify and produce new varieties of cane that would be more resistant to cyclones and other natural hazards (Storey, 1997). This research effort culminated in the setting up of the Station Agronomique in 1893 that was later absorbed into the government Department of Agriculture in 1913 (Storey, 1997). A College of Agriculture followed in 1922, which in turn would become the founding entity of the University of Mauritius in 1965 (Manrakhan, 1992). Finally, in 1953 the Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute, now known as the Mauritius Sugarcane Industry Research Institute, (MSIRI) was established (Storey, 1997). Thus, the Mauritian planters moved from an initial opportunistic approach to their economic vulnerability to a more long-term perseverant and resilient stance through which they built up the scientific knowledge needed to sustain their activity and, in so doing, laid the foundations for higher education and scientific research in Mauritius.

### **5.5 Slaves, indentured labourers and alien immigrants: the makings of a plural society**

However, there was a more sombre side to this achievement, which concerned the human resources needed to make things happen, namely the slaves imported by the French colons to work in the port and the fields, and later the indentured labourers from India. Through their uninterrupted control of the island's economy, the French colons had built up considerable power over practically every aspect of daily life and were quite adept at choosing which regulations from the colonial administration, be it French or British, they would follow or ignore, including refusing to adhere to any law abolishing slavery. Thus, in 1794 the colons quite simply expelled the French officials sent to enforce emancipation (Benedict, 1965). The early British governors who were wary of provoking any open conflict with the plantation owners, as the latter, if they so wished, could bring affairs in the colony to a halt, preferred to ignore the continuance of the slave trade into Mauritius, together with the harsh conditions of labour on the plantations due to the persistence of the infamous Code Noir originally

promulgated in 1723. In 1834 the colons forced the recall of John Jeremie, the Procureur Général of Mauritius since 1832 and a prominent member of the anti-slavery movement. The 1833 Abolition of Slavery Act, which emancipated slaves throughout the empire, was not promulgated in Mauritius until 1835 and full emancipation only achieved in 1840. (Simmons, 1982; Addison & Hazareesingh, 1993; Storey, 1997). Unsurprisingly, all subsequent attempts to get the freed slaves to stay on the estates, including offering competitive wages, failed. Their flight from the sugar estates was certainly motivated by their understandable desire to leave a place that was associated with so much hardship and pain, but not solely. The main reason was that they could find better work in a thriving non-estate agricultural economy that was in the hands of a sizeable, well-established and economically important smallholder class made up of the free coloured population (*les gens de couleur*) (Allen, 1983). Even so, the collective bitter memories of slavery on the sugar estates have passed down the generations and continue to not only haunt the modern-day descendants of the slaves but also hinder social and economic relations on the island (Storey, 1997).

The subsequent shortage of labour to work in sugar estate fields and factories forced the estate owners to find an alternative source of cheap labour, for which they did not have to look far. Already in the 18th century, Indians had been brought to Île de France either as free skilled craftsmen under contract, many of whom stayed on the island and became part of the free coloured population, or as slaves from the French possessions in India, in particular Pondicherry. Then, in the early years of British rule, some Indian convicts were sent as labourers (Allen, 1983). In 1825, a first batch of Indian indentured labourers arrived to fill the gap in labour needed to increase sugar production following the reduction in import duty on East Indian sugar. Finally, in 1834 began the period of regular immigration of Indian indentured labourers on five-year contracts that continued until 1909, followed by a brief revival in the 1920s. During that time, some 450,000 immigrants came to Mauritius, of whom only 160,000 returned to India. Such a sizeable influx radically and durably changed the composition of the island's population, and consequently its social, cultural, religious and linguistic structure. From being only a minute proportion of the population in 1835, Indians made up two-thirds of the population in 1861, thus breaking up the three-tier hierarchy typical of colonial creole societies, which had a small number

of European whites at the top, large numbers of black slaves at the bottom, and a group in the middle, both in size and colour, the free coloured. Initially, the Indian immigrants found themselves at the bottom of the pyramid as replacement labourers in the cane fields. Slowly, in addition to the hard work in the fields, they found other ways to supplement their meagre earnings, such as market gardening and sharecropping small parcels of the marginal, less productive land on the estates and dealing in livestock. In this way, many of them managed to save enough money to buy land in and around the villages that were growing up near the estates and at the end of their indenture period leave the estate housing, commonly known as a 'camp'. This gradual acquisition of land for residential and economic purposes was the first lever enabling wide-scale social mobility for a large part of the island's Indian population. Some of the 'old immigrants', as they were called once their indenture was finished, became contractors hiring out labourers to the estates as required. A few of them became quite prosperous either as large and rich sugar-estate owners in their own right or shareholders in the large estates that had factories, while many others became 'small planters' owning anything from less than one to several hundred acres of cane. (Benedict, 1965; Houbert, 1981). The second lever was, and still is, education, which will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Life as an indentured labour was hard. Tinker (1974) described the whole indenture system throughout the British Empire as being '*a new system of slavery*' under which the labourers were subject to much mistreatment on the sugar estates. However, more recent research work has shown that in many ways indentured labour was better than slavery. Carter (1995) reminds us that "*indentured labourers were not chattels, nor did they suffer the natal alienation of the slave*" (p. 296). Moreover, since India was relatively close, some immigrants to Mauritius could afford to pay both their own passage and that of their family, and so family migration became more common with indenture being seen as a prelude to settlement (Carter, 1995).

Thus, we see that the first generation of what was to become the largest ethnic group in Mauritius gave a pioneering example of the attributes identified by Baldacchino (2014), the dogged perseverance and resilience coupled with clever opportunism needed to overcome any initial vulnerability while

working towards a better life on a small remote island bereft of any natural resources having some commercial worth. However, yet again the collective memory passed down through the generations is not a happy one. Benedict (1965) talks of a persisting legacy of distrust and dislike between Franco-Mauritians and Indo-Mauritian which affected the social, political and economic life of the island.

The movement of indentured labourers between India and Mauritius encouraged traders mainly from Bombay (today Mumbai) and Gujarat, with some from Pondicherry, to come to the island during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They imported the basic commodities and foodstuffs needed by the indentured population. As they were mainly based in the capital, Port Louis, they became the wholesalers to the village shops (Benedict, 1965). Unlike the indentured immigrants, they were free to come and go as they wished, and so kept contact with their family and origins. Many of them would return to India to marry and then come back to Mauritius to raise their family (Benedict, 1965).

Throughout both the French and British administrations came another distinct but much smaller group of migrants in search of a better life, the Chinese. However, the early attempts to import Chinese immigrants as agricultural labourers failed, due to the ill treatment and discrimination meted out to them by the colonial administrations and the estate owners, which reinforced the negative impact of slavery on the collective mentality of both the freed and immigrant populations (Ly Tio Fane-Pineo & Lim Fat, 2008). Thus, by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most of the Chinese immigrants came from the trading class that had been heavily affected by the various upheavals in China. Under the regulations governing aliens in Mauritius, their choice of revenue-earning activity was restricted to retail trading. They moved from being itinerant hawkers to shopkeepers whose general store would become a focal point in the little villages springing all over the island as the indentured labourers moved off the sugar estates into their own homes. However, while the shop provided accommodation and occupation for the members of the usually large family, it did not guarantee a life of fortune. As soon as they acquired the aptitude for another field of activity, they would move out of the shop and the retail trade in

general (Ly Tio Fane-Pineo & Lim Fat, 2008). Education was for them also the lever towards attaining the better life that they sought.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, all the components of the multiracial, multicultural and multilingual population of Mauritius were in place. In 1901, out of a total population of 371,023, the General Population composed of the European settlers, the coloureds or persons of mixed descent and the descendants of the slaves numbered 108,422 (29.2%), the Indo-Mauritian population 259,086 (69.8%) and the Chinese 3,515 (1%) (Statistics Mauritius, 2017). An article published by *The Economist* in October 2008 (p.48) quoted the then prime minister, Navin Ramgoolam, as saying, “*All of us came on different ships from different continents. Now we’re all on the same boat.*”

However, this dynamic mix of races, cultures and religions lacks one component that one could logically expect to be present, a sizeable English-speaking group of settlers. Given that the British took possession of Mauritius purely for reasons of imperial military strategy, hence the particularly benevolent terms of the capitulation mentioned earlier, the British made no real attempt to colonise the island in the full sense of the term. Toussaint (1972) talks of a passive imperialism, in comparison to the attitude of the French towards Île Bourbon, as Reunion Island was then called, another isolated speck of land in a vast ocean under British rule that would later become the starting-point for a French renaissance in the Indian Ocean. For the British, the jewel in the crown was India for which Mauritius guarded the route and provided safe haven to ships needing repairs on their way through tropical storms and the Roaring Forties.

Throughout the 150 years of British rule, in addition to the troops stationed on the island, the English-speaking population was essentially a transient succession of 29 colonial governors, 11 Anglican bishops and other clergy, various colonial administrators, schoolteachers and technicians, their families and Irish Roman Catholic priests and nuns (Roy, 1960; Benedict, 1965; Simmons, 1982; Emmanuel, 2014). Those traders who did come out often went into joint ventures with their local counterparts to set up companies in port activities, shipping and trade. Toussaint in his book *Harvest*

*of the Sea* (1966) gives a fascinating account of these joint ventures that were to form the basis of the island's major conglomerates covering all the main pillars of economic activity, with their founders' names still recognisable in the modern corporate name. Gradually, by marrying into the French colon families, these English, Irish and Scottish traders took on a new identity and language. Their descendants today may carry their English-speaking ancestor's family name, but they are no different in language and behaviour from the descendants of the French colons. This gradual loss of an English identity is an important factor in understanding the position of the English language in modern day Mauritius, to which we will return later.

## **5.6 From Crown colony to democratic developmental state**

When compared to nearly all the sub-Saharan states, Mauritius is seen to be atypical in its ability to maintain steady progress towards its developmental goals, irrespective of the government in power. *"This underdeveloped and racially stratified country has achieved not only sustained growth but also a degree of equity, a remarkable welfare state, and a consolidated democracy"* (Sandbrook, 2005, p.550). Put in these terms, it is not surprising that the Mauritian story is often described in mass media articles in such glowing terms as *"success story"*, *"poster-child"* and *"miracle"*, which imply an element of transience and a dose of unexpectedness. A more measured approach shows that a long, gradual and on-going learning process has enabled the country to build up the capacity and capital to not only take in hand its current affairs but also seize opportunities to move forward as they appear (Stiglitz, 2011).

Mauritius followed the path of most British colonies, moving from full-blown control by the colonial government in 1812, to increasing self-government of domestic issues, and, finally, in 1968, full independence that received immediate uncontested international recognition. Several broad factors stemming from its peculiar dual colonial history provided the impetus for the country to move forward and find the necessary consensus on fundamental issues that would facilitate the development initiatives taken by the post-independence governments. As shown earlier in this chapter, the

progressive settlement of this remote uninhabited island gave rise to a very diverse population, of which no component could claim precedence as being the original native dweller. Profit was the sole reason for settling there, with both land and labour being treated as commodities. The potential confrontation of a landed aristocracy with an impoverished peasantry was avoided with the emergence of an aspirational educated middle class of small landowners, merchants and civil servants amongst the numerically dominant component, the Indian immigrants. This emergent middle class also included the educated coloureds who were employed in commercial activities and administrative posts, while the Muslim traders and Chinese shopkeepers formed the beginnings of a non-European business class (Sandbrook, 2005). The original activism of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century for better working and living conditions on the sugar estates morphed into a full-blown struggle by the 1930s for constitutional reform and universal suffrage under the colonial administration, obtained in 1958, and then for full independence that came in 1968 (Simmons, 1982).

Since the long-standing antagonism between the sugar plantation oligarchs and the British colonial administration was joined by the antipathy felt by the descendants of both the slaves and the original Indian immigrants towards these same estate owners, the risk of protracted violent confrontation remained present throughout the whole process. Fortunately, this did not happen. Although there were three general strikes in 1937, 1938 and 1943, and then in the 1960s in the final run-up to independence some outbreaks of communal violence that were quickly brought under control, all sides eventually realised that they had more to gain by finding a *modus vivendi* based on compromise and consensus. By the time independence was gained in 1968, the necessary separation of economic from political power had come about. Sandbrook (2005) describes the social-democratic compromise that evolved as follows:

*The local capitalists who chose to remain in Mauritius (at least half) accepted an implicit bargain. They yielded their political dominance and accepted some redistribution from growth in exchange for the legitimacy that a modest social democracy would generate – provided that social reform was limited to a tax-supported welfare state, and excluded asset redistribution.*



*This consensus has prevailed ever since [...]. Hence, the Fabian-socialist ideas, imbibed during lengthy stays in Britain, united the leaders of the major parties and provided the ideological basis for a welfare capitalism that drew support from the descendants of slaves and indentured labourers. (p.572)*

The bureaucratic capacity required to maintain this accommodation of interests was also developed over the same period. The aspirations of the educated offspring of the mainly Hindu small planters were satisfied by employment in the public service. According to Sandbrook (2005), by the 1920s ninety-three percent of the employees of the civil service, police and judiciary were Mauritians, and by 1932 sixty-five per cent of officer-level positions were also held by Mauritians, the Britons retaining only the very top positions. More job opportunities for the educated youth would be provided by the considerable expansion of the public service departments after WWII to meet the urgent needs of the colony with respect to education, health and social services that the official reports prepared throughout the war years had recognised (Jackson, 2001). The motivation for this flurry of activity on the part of the colonial government in London came from the realisation that *“the 60 million inhabitants of the British colonial empire, like the populations of the dominions and India, had shared in the common struggle, and their expectations too had been raised by British wartime promises of a better life to come”* (Butler, 1999, p.29). As a result, the career bureaucrats in the Mauritius Public Service developed an esprit de corps and managerial tradition decades before independence (Sandbrook, 2005).

During this prolonged apprenticeship and practice of public governance and intervention, the Mauritian bureaucrats gained first-hand experience of how to create a macro-environment conducive to the development of private enterprise. The radical transformation from an economy based on shipping to a mono-crop plantation economy discussed earlier in this chapter was in fact orchestrated by the colonial government. In addition to providing the reliable replacement labour force through the indentured labour system, the colonial administration granted incentives to the planters, mobilised investment capital, built the necessary transport infrastructure in the shape of roads, railway and port

facilities and amended the legal code to establish limited liability companies. This was a lesson well learned as it gave rise to the directive, developmental stance and activism of the island's post-independence governments that would structure the country's successful transition from seriously underdeveloped to middle-income status (Sandbrook, 2005).

At the same time, the foundations for a robust and vibrant civil society, another essential characteristic of the developmental state as identified by Sandbrook (2005), were laid. The British colonial government encouraged a free press and allowed the organisation of trade unions and the setting-up of cooperative credit societies, the first one being set up in 1913 (Cooperatives Division, 2017). Over the years, the island's tightly knit communities have set up a wide variety of other civil voluntary non-governmental associations that cater to the cultural, religious or social needs of their members (MACOSS, 2017).

In the same way, the business community realised the need for a dedicated collective structure through which to defend and promote its interests. In 1850, the oldest non-profit making institution representing the private sector, the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) was set up and over the years has developed into a major dynamic actor in the socio-economic development of Mauritius. ([www.mcci.org](http://www.mcci.org)). In 1908, the Chinese traders followed suit and set up the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, the second oldest overseas Chinese Chamber of Commerce, the first one being Singapore in 1906. It too has been a major institutional player in the diversification of Mauritius's economy (<http://cccmauritius.org> ).

Caroll and Caroll (2000) note how important this diverse network of civic organisations has been in the country's development since independence by fostering a sense of equity and inclusion at all levels of the population. As the policy-making process evolved from a top-down corporatist model to a wider pluralist model, a consultation process developed whereby the various ministries would embark on broad-based discussions on any major issue with a wide range of ethnic, religious, environmental, social welfare, economic and labour groups, on their 'consultation list'. Although many of their leaders

realise that these consultations have little direct practical effect on their members' lives, they value the process as they feel that at the very least, they can make their views known to the government. More importantly, on the symbolic level, the right of each organisation and each ethnic community to be included, to be heard and to participate is affirmed. Finally, the personal talents, skills and status of the group leaders themselves are recognised, which enhances not only their self-esteem but also their prestige among their members.

Underpinning the individual will to nurture constantly these essential levers of compromise, equity, inclusion and tolerance in all aspects of daily life in Mauritius is the institutional legitimacy provided by the country's Constitution, first promulgated in 1968 and subsequently updated as and when required following the evolution of Mauritian society and legal practice. Detailed provisions protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual, including the freedoms of conscience, thought, expression and assembly without discrimination based on race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex, but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for the public interest (Constitution, 2016). A simple example of how this works in practice is the list of the 15 public holidays that includes three secular days, three historical celebrations, and the remaining nine, a panache of the major ethnic and religious festivals celebrated by the relevant sections of the population.

At independence in 1968, Mauritius became a democratic parliamentary monarchy on the Westminster mode, with the Queen as Head of State represented by a nominated Governor-General. In 1992, following a majority vote in the Mauritian National Assembly, the country became a democratic republic with a President as Head of State elected by the Mauritius National Assembly, but with no executive powers. The legislative powers remain vested in the National Assembly and the executive powers with the Prime Minister. A modified first-past-the-post election system with universal suffrage and based on 21 multi-member constituencies prevents the monopoly of legislative power by the numerically dominant Hindu population. Voters are free to vote as they please, along political party, electoral coalition or ethnic lines, or a mix of all three. In practice, most people vote

block with a propensity towards ethnic identity. A corrective mechanism, known as the Best Loser System (BLS), allocates up to eight additional seats to ensure that the three minority ethnic communities are represented in the National Assembly. The Constitution recognises four communities, Hindu, Muslim, Sino-Mauritian and General Population, the latter being defined as *“every person who does not appear, from his way of life, to belong to one or other of those 3 communities”* (Constitution, First Schedule, Section 3 (4), 2016). Based on the 1972 Housing and Population Census, the last one requiring ethnic affiliation, the percentage share of each community is the Hindus 51.8% of the population, the Muslims 16.6%, the Chinese 3% and the General Population 28.6%. Although doubts are regularly expressed as to whether these statistics still reflect the ethnic composition of the population, the simple fact remains that all components are recognised and included in the democratic process. Over the years, the BLS has been much criticised because it can be said to ‘constitutionalise’ ethnicity and thus encourage communal stereotyping and divisions in Mauritian society, instead of fostering a national identity. However, since no viable alternative has yet been found and the BLS has not yet caused any serious problems, the status quo prevails (Srebrnik, 2002). Recognition of diversity, balancing of interests, consensus and inclusion are thus part of the constitutional setup of the country, and so firmly embedded in the Mauritian way of running their affairs.

Within this balanced framework, Mauritians engage in a complex multi-party system that is very volatile as party discipline and loyalty are weak. In kaleidoscope fashion, electoral alliances form and break up to suit the immediate situation, while individual politicians, be they elected, defeated or aspiring, move between parties or found new ones. As a result, all the governments since independence have been coalitions of parties, with every one of the four major political parties having served with each of the other three at one time or another (Srebrnik, 2002). Bräutigam observes that *“(t)he extraordinary ability of Mauritian political parties and ethnic groups to forge a consensus and build coalition governments has its roots in necessity”* (1997, p.53). Extreme positions on economic policy have thus been avoided, an important factor in building and maintaining the consensus needed to push forward socio-economic reform and strengthen the democratic process. Since independence in 1968, Mauritius has held 11 general elections together with the concomitant local government

elections at district, municipal and village level, all of which have been considered free and fair both locally and abroad. The assessment given in the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) Observers' report for the 2005 General Elections is most indicative:

*The general view of the EISA Mission is that Mauritius is reaping the benefits of having held regular and credible elections, using the same system, since its independence in 1968. As a result, in contrast with most countries in the SADC region during the last decade, Mauritius has become accustomed to the peaceful and democratic alternation of governing parties and coalitions. (EISA, 2005, p.41).*

Sandbrook (2005) notes another very important consequence of these constant efforts to govern by consent, irrespective of the coalition in power, namely that *“political rulers have eschewed a standing army, thereby avoiding the debilitating military coups afflicting other African countries”* (Sandbrook, 2005, p.574). Not only that, the absence of a defence budget has meant that public funds, be they plentiful or scarce, are not diverted from more deserving social needs.

## **5.7 The developmental state in action**

Maintaining the consensus on the country's broad developmental goals, while catering to the more immediate constraints of social equity, is thus fundamental to the country's overall stability and success. The more so because, in addition to the latent historical antagonisms between the various components of the population, non-Hindus tend to be wary of Hindus due to the latter's predominance in government employment. Sandbrook (2005) sums up the equation for success in these terms. *“Redistribution of growth, principally in the form of good jobs and an expansive welfare state, assuages the underlying tensions, maintains social peace and retains a government's electoral support”* (Sandbrook, 2005, p.563). Thus, the post-independence welfare state that evolved from the post-war measures taken to alleviate the dire living and social conditions in the island *“commands such overwhelming public support that politicians tamper with entitlements at their electoral peril”*

(Sandbrook, 2005, p.573). However, the wide range of policies concerning education, employment, health and social services are more than just targeted side payments to keep coalition partners loyal and make disgruntled voters happy again. They are, in fact, a key factor in making the country's open, trade-dependent economic model sustainable (Bräutigam, 1997).

The developmental state is thus essentially activist and successive Mauritian governments have been particularly adept at applying the model, in which the elected government counters faltering growth or increasing unemployment by launching a new development initiative, a new 'pillar' of the economy, as it is termed, aimed at exploiting some niche within the global markets. The government supports the new activity by crafting incentives to redirect resources from declining industries and attract foreign investors, and by providing the necessary infrastructure, training and education (Sandbrook, 2005).

This has been most fortunate, given the state of the economy at independence, as shown by the following stark contemporary description highlighting the island's remoteness and vulnerability.

*Mauritius is a small isolated island lying far out in the Indian Ocean off the east coast of Africa. It is the outstanding example of a monocrop economy. No less than 99% of her exports are sugar or direct by-products of sugar; and she relies upon imports for the vast majority of her foodstuffs, clothing, other consumption goods, raw materials and capital equipment (Meade, 1961b, p.521).*

In the 1960s, as part of the ongoing process towards independence, two major reports on the economic and social state of the country, commonly known as the Meade and Titmuss reports, after the names of their respective lead investigators, were commissioned. Both reports have accompanied the various post-independence governments and international aid and funding agencies in their endeavours to prevent the Malthusian equation of rapid population growth and persistent underdevelopment from taking permanent hold of the country's future. Admittedly, they painted a

gloomy picture, but they also gave hope in proposing measures and solutions aimed at ensuring the prosperity and well-being of the whole country. Notably, the Titmuss report (1960), which was focussed on the social policies and population growth in Mauritius, emphasised the need to set up a nation-wide family planning service including the availability of reliable birth control methods, within the framework of major improvements to the existing health and social welfare services. The Meade report (1961a), which analysed the island's economic and social structure, urged the development of manufacturing activities to generate employment and new sources of revenue through appropriate fiscal and infrastructure measures to respond to the needs of the fast-growing population.

Shortly after independence, another much harsher assessment of the country's prospects that is often mentioned came from the renowned Trinidadian writer, V S Naipaul. He entitled both the account of his visit to Mauritius in 1972, originally published in the *Sunday Times Magazine* on 16 July 1972, and the subsequent collection of travel writings in which the account was re-published, "*The Overcrowded Barracoon*". Not surprisingly, the government of the day took a dim view of his opinion and promptly banned the book. They could not do much about the original newspaper version, despite the rather negative publicity that it occasioned momentarily. Yet, however upset one may feel about such a blunt characterisation, Naipaul's account pinpointed the widespread sense of hopelessness and the dreams of emigration that remoteness and the lack of local prospects occasioned in much of the population. However, the Meade report had been equally blunt in its assessment of emigration as being only a marginal solution to the problem of surplus population, not least because many Mauritians would have had difficulty in migrating on grounds of colour, race, language and lack of skills (Meade, 1961a).

Although over the years Mauritians have successfully emigrated to the UK, France, other European countries, USA, Canada, Australia and South Africa, to name but a few destinations, most have preferred building local pillars to hunting for castles in some faraway land. While analysts often express some wonderment at the "*boldness*" displayed by successive Mauritian governments in their on-going efforts to diversify and expand the country's economy (Sandbrook, 2005) or try to explain the Mauritian miracle (Subramanian & Roy, 2001), the standard Mauritian response is more low-key and

grounded in the relentless challenge of standing on one's own feet. The resilience born of necessity as identified by Baldacchino (2014) comes repeatedly to the fore as a basic mechanism ensuring success. Thus, the initial overpopulation problem of the 1960s was overcome because the family planning education campaign orchestrated by the Mauritius Family Planning & Welfare Association (MFPWA), founded in 1957, with financial assistance from the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), responded to the vital needs of the target audience, Mauritian women (Dinan, 2002). Faced with declining living standards and increasing unemployment and spurred on by rising social aspirations, Mauritian women across the board defied the strongly pro-natalist gender, religious and cultural norms common to all sectors of the population, as well as much overt resistance and hostility, and adopted birth control as part of their survival and coping strategies. At the same time, they took up the challenge of employment in the unfamiliar and harsh environment of the newly opened export-manufacturing factories. Thus, the most rapid decline in fertility, which occurred from 1962 to 1972, coincided with the first phase of what was to become the second pillar of the Mauritian economy, the Export Processing Zone (EPZ), a major turning point in the country's economic and social development (Burn, 1996). Since then, improved female health, better and longer education opportunities for both boys and girls, together with increased employment prospects for women have resulted in a growing trend towards later marriage for both men and women. With the continued widespread use of family planning methods, the total fertility rate for Mauritius has dropped to 1.4, that is, to below replacement level (Statistics Mauritius, 2011 and 2016). However, population issues are complex as, despite all these efforts, Mauritius is ranked as the 18<sup>th</sup> most densely populated country out of the 233 countries listed by the United Nations Population Division (2017) with a density of 620.4 persons per km<sup>2</sup>. It may not seem so as the plane flies over the expanses of green sugar cane fields, mountain slopes and water reservoirs when coming into land at the island's international airport. Although several major land reconversion schemes have been recently implemented to create new commercial and residential zones, most of the population still lives in the towns and villages that grew up clustered around the main roads in colonial times, and the extended family structure remains widespread. The pressure on the government in power to build new pillars of the economy remains constant.



Despite Meade's advice to introduce export-oriented manufacturing activities, in 1963 the colonial administration in Mauritius decided to encourage import-substitution through a Development Certificate (DC) Scheme that gave local manufacturers tax holidays on their profits and protection from competition by imported goods by increasing import duties on items that could be manufactured locally, while duties on the necessary raw materials were greatly reduced or abolished. Privately owned local small and medium industrial enterprises started producing a somewhat eclectic range of goods for home consumption that went from edible oil and margarine through soap and cosmetics to rolled steel, using varying degrees of foreign technology and knowhow. In the transitional and post-colonial decades of the 1960s and 1970s, the aspiration of attaining self-reliance and self-sufficiency was a recurrent theme in the economic discourse of several newly independent African states, notably Tanzania (Lal, 2012). However, in the case of Mauritius, by the end of the 1960s, the realities of a small remote economy devoid of natural resources had come to the fore, as the levels of employment and economic growth that could be generated by these new activities remained limited and so insufficient for the country's development needs (Hein, 1968; Hein, 1988; Durbarry, 2001). That being said, domestic manufacturing has since grown in both size and diversity far beyond the original expectations to become an essential sector in the Mauritian economy. It is now not just a major employer of labour, both skilled and unskilled, but also the supplier of the many foodstuffs, household commodities and construction materials that Mauritians today want with the continued rise in the country's general standard of living. Moreover, these domestic manufacturers have gradually taken on an important support role with respect to the activities of the Export Processing Zone (EPZ) set up in the early 1970s, namely providing essential ancillary products such as buttons, thread and woven labels, as well as packaging materials. However, in the mid-1990s the government had to eliminate the various protective import duties to comply with the requirements of the regional preferential economic blocks of the COMESA and the SADC. Furthermore, since the introduction of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules concerning free trade and open markets in 2005, these local industries have been facing stiff competition from imports from such low-cost countries as China and India. Consequently, successive governments have re-engineered the existing support schemes to encourage these local

industries to restructure their activities and reorient their marketing strategy towards export while continuing to satisfy the Mauritian market (Ly Tio-Fane Pineo & Lim Fat, 2008).

Thus, faced with the need to find a bigger response to the country's dire economic situation, the post-independence government decided to open up two new sectors, export manufacturing and tourism, while preserving and consolidating the sole earner of the foreign currency needed to pay for the country's imports and development, the sugar industry. To achieve the latter objective, Mauritius would need all the administrative, negotiating and relation-building skills honed during the post-war years and the preparations for independence that the various public service officials, politicians and private sector representatives could muster. Close cooperation between the private sector and the government was an absolute necessity, as Mauritius would need to play the "*strategy game with its former colonial powers*" as identified by Baldacchino (2014). Mauritius played a pivotal role in the negotiations between the EEC and the newly independent African, Caribbean and Pacific states that led to the conclusion of the Sugar Protocol under the Lomé Convention I signed in 1975 (Addison & Hazareesingh, 1993). The importance of the four Lomé Conventions that spanned the period 1975-2000 and the subsequent Cotonou Agreement for the period 2000-2020 in the economic development of Mauritius cannot be over-emphasised. They have provided the foundational framework for relations in all domains between the European Community (EC) and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, including preferential access to the EC for the commodities produced by the ACP countries at guaranteed prices ([ec.europa.eu](http://ec.europa.eu)). Although in 1975 the EEC guaranteed price for sugar was lower than that offered on the world market, Mauritius chose the long-term certainty of the EEC offer and negotiated the largest single sugar quota granted to an ACP country. When the world prices for sugar plummeted in the late 1970s, that choice proved to be most fortunate, because between 1977 and 2000, the EEC guaranteed price was on average around 90% higher than the market prices (Subramanian & Roy, 2001; Sandbrook, 2005). For the government, it anchored a stable and revenue-generating industry that could continue providing large-scale employment while paying the taxes that in turn would finance the large, relatively well-paid civil service staffed mainly by the majority Indian community, as well as the generous system of social protection covering education, health and

pensions. At the same time, it gave the estate owners the financial means to renew and expand their activities. Finally, the much-needed compromise between the country's political and economic elites was assured (Storey, 1997; Subramanian & Roy, 2001).

Nevertheless, life in Mauritius in the two decades after independence remained difficult, with a series of political tussles and economic strife that the devastation caused by several major cyclones did nothing to assuage. The necessary austerity of the joint IMF/World Bank stabilisation programme, initiated at the government's request in 1979, which included wage restraint, the introduction of a Sales Tax (later replaced by a Valued-Added Tax (VAT) that is still in force today), reduction of food subsidies, a curb in education and welfare benefits, and two devaluations of the Mauritian rupee, occasioned such discontent that two general elections were held in quick succession in 1982 and 1983. The government elected in 1983 adopted an attitude of dogged pragmatism and perseverance that pushed the country through recovery to prosperity and full employment by 1995, having progressively reimbursed all the debts incurred, capital and interest, with the IMF/World Bank as quickly as the economy would allow (Bräutigam, 1997; Lamusse, 2001). Relations with the IMF, World Bank and the other international financial institutions would be henceforth on a completely different and more positive footing. The comment by Pierre Dinan, a Mauritian economist, is most apposite:

*The turnaround of the country's economy was carried out properly, thanks to the consensus shown by the entire population and the leadership of politicians convinced that the required recovery measures were sound. The positive and active behaviour adopted by all Mauritians enabled the country to bounce back. Calling this success a "miracle" fails to do them justice, as it would imply that it happened by chance with the help of a few invisible actors, without any prior reflection or contribution by the Mauritians themselves. (Dinan, 2011, p.14)*

As shown throughout this chapter, the "*positive and active behaviour*" noted by Dinan has been the default mode for Mauritians seeking a better life for themselves, their family and by extension the country. From the constant search for new avenues of economic activity emerged a pattern for

developing future economic pillars, that is, a dynamic mix of government and institutional initiatives, entrepreneurial vision and involvement on the part of the local business community, predominantly locally backed investment, supported by the necessary financial and ancillary services that are also in Mauritian hands, and the leveraging of the island's ethnic diversity to develop overseas business contacts through diasporic links, such as Hong Kong investors first learning about the island's prospects from the Sino-Mauritians, and French investors joining forces with the Franco-Mauritians (Hein, 1988; Subramanian & Roy, 2001; Ly Tio Fane-Piseo & Lim Fat, 2008). The Export Processing Zone (EPZ) activities were driven by the vision of individual Mauritian entrepreneurs who, inspired by the industrial growth in spite of serious constraints shown by Puerto Rico, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong, were convinced that Mauritius, with its political stability, literate workforce with low salaries and dynamic business community, could do just as well. The 1970 Export Processing Zone Act contained three far-reaching features that were crucial to not only the successful uptake of the new sector, but also the future development of other sectors, namely (1) declaring the entire Mauritian territory an EPZ zone, (2) offering an attractive fiscal package to investors, including a 10-year tax holiday on profits, and (3) introducing flexible labour laws for EPZ workers (Ly Tio Fane-Piseo & Lim Fat, 2008). While the overseas investors brought in the much-needed technical knowhow of industrial production and marketing overseas, ownership remained mixed, since the historic private sector of the sugar estates was quick to see the opportunity for reinvesting their gains from the Lomé Sugar Protocol. As the Mauritian entrepreneurs were *"good pupils who learned their lessons"* (Dinan, 2011, p.10), they were able to carry on whenever a foreign investor withdrew, thus reducing the impact of any subsequent factory closure and avoiding the sudden collapse of the sector.

In the context of globalised free trade, the real vulnerability of the Mauritian EPZ is not volatile foreign ownership, but its continued heavy reliance on knitwear and garment making, 80% of the sector. Mauritius had followed the classic pattern of industrialisation in developing countries, introducing the labour-intensive, low technology processes of mass-produced knitted and cloth apparel, which, despite their lack of industrial experience, a literate workforce desperate for work could learn relatively quickly. Attempts to diversify into higher value-added goods, such as electronic assembly,

leather goods and jewellery, have met with diverse fortunes, due mainly to the lack of suitably qualified employees able to keep up with the speed of change in products and processes (Hein, 1988; Ly Tio Fane-Piseo & Lim Fat, 2008). By the mid-1990s, the Mauritian textile firms started to show severe signs of strain. Periodical wage increases and mandatory annual wage compensation pushed up labour costs, without an equivalent increase in productivity. The impending dismantling of the Multi-Fibre Agreement and other preferential access arrangements forced the Mauritian textile firms to start restructuring, upgrading and even relocating their operations, mainly to Madagascar, in order to meet the competition from a worldwide proliferation of low-cost suppliers, such as Bangladesh, China and India (Lamusse, 2001; Grégoire, 2011). Meanwhile, the government and the various private sector institutions continued their efforts in economy diplomacy, with one major success being the introduction of the US African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) in 2000 thanks to the sustained lobbying by the Mauritian Embassy in Washington that put forward a cogent case on behalf of the sub-Saharan African states, with which Mauritius is included (Jesseramsing, 1999). Under AGOA, the USA through Congress recognises *“the mutual interest of the United States and the countries of sub-Saharan Africa to promote sustainable economic growth and development in sub-Saharan Africa”* (AGOA, 2000, Section 102 [1]).

Despite all these difficulties, the creation and sustained development of the EPZ has been crucial to the country's economic success. By achieving its original objective, namely providing steady jobs and income for the mass of low or unqualified unemployed Mauritians, quasi-full employment had been attained (Lamusse, 2001). At its peak at the end of the 1980s, the sector employed some 90,000 people, almost a third of the then active population (Meisenhelder, 1997). Moreover, the impact of the EPZ went far beyond the quantitative dimension of export and employment figures, due to its unique positioning as a legal concept that concerns the whole territory, and not as a specific restricted physical area within the national territory. Although the government built the early EPZ industrial parks in the outer suburbs of the capital, Port Louis, and thus relatively near the port facilities, over time private investors set up other parks and individual factories throughout the island to reduce building delays and capital expenditure by tapping into existing infrastructure such as electricity and water

supplies. This meant that industrialisation spread out of the urban area and into the rural areas, bringing employment and social change to the doorstep, thus reinforcing the sense of social equity and inclusiveness in the development process throughout the population (Ly Tio Fane-Piseo & Lim Fat, 2008), and, as a major purveyor of female employment, initiating profound change in the status of Mauritian women (Hein, 1988; Burn, 1996).

Meanwhile, the third pillar of the Mauritian economy, namely tourism centred on the development of luxury beach resorts, was taking shape and in the mid-1990s took over from the EPZ the position of leading source of new export income. It was again built on a mix of institutional backup, investment at first from local entrepreneurs only and more recently foreign hotel chains, and visionary pioneering businesspeople with diasporic links, one of whom, having served as a SOE in WWII, saw the need to strengthen another key success factor, local control over air access. The subsequent creation and development of the national airline, Air Mauritius, is another example of the public and private sector combining forces to play and win the “*strategy game*”, which would not only bring in revenue but also reduce the island’s dependence on external providers and so give the country the means to develop and diversify its external contacts in line with its economic development. As with the other key pillars, Mauritians remain firmly in control (Grégoire, 2011).

## **5.8 Moving into the global knowledge-based business world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

The combined generally positive experience of setting up two very different economic activities emboldened both government officials and local entrepreneurs to see where they could move next. They wisely felt that setting up new lines in manufacturing was just not viable and so turned to another service sector where considerable experience had been built up at least on the domestic front and in support of the existing export activities, namely financial services. The Preamble to the White Paper on the setting up of the Stock Exchange reminds us that the then existing Chamber of Brokers (*Chambre des Courtiers*) went back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Ministry of Finance, 1987). In 1836, Ordonnance No 11 regulated the activities of the Chamber and the various categories of brokers

(Rouillard, 1867). The leading commercial bank, Mauritius Commercial Bank (MCB), was set up in 1838 by a group of traders (MCB website), whilst the first foreign banks opened branches in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the HongKong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Ltd (HSBC) in 1916 and Barclays Bank Ltd in 1919 (Mauritius Bankers Association Limited website). The central bank, the Bank of Mauritius (BOM) was set up in 1966 (BOM website), while the modern Stock Exchange of Mauritius (SEM) was founded in 1989 (SEM website).

As early as 1981, government policy on providing facilities and incentives for export-led development was already being extended to include the service sector activities such as management and engineering consultancy, re-exports, insurance and reinsurance, translation and offshore banking. The primary goal was yet again job creation, this time white-collar posts for the increasing numbers of 'educated' unemployed (Hein, 1988). With the successful end to the World Bank/IMF structural readjustment programme in 1987, the economy was stable enough for the government to launch the offshore banking and business centre in the late 1980s. It used the well-tried triple mechanism of building the necessary institutional framework, using the diasporic contacts to obtain the expertise, mainly from Hong Kong and Singapore, and encouraging foreign and local private investment through a package of monetary and fiscal incentives. At the time, Mauritius was the only international offshore banking centre in the African region. The apartheid regime in South Africa was still in force and so Johannesburg had yet to emerge. The promotional literature published by the Ministry of Finance and the Bank of Mauritius made full use of the first-mover opportunity. It portrayed the nascent centre as a very attractive proposition to potential foreign investors as it offered political stability, a strong economy, a strategic location and time zone midway (GMT+4) between the European and East Asian time zones, excellent telecommunication facilities, comprehensive technical and other support services, a well-educated bilingual labour force, and pleasant living conditions. It was thus positioned as being well-placed to play a complementary role with major financial centres in the Far East, Europe and America (Bank of Mauritius, 1989; Ministry of Finance 1991). Building on the initial framework law, the Offshore Business Activities Act, promulgated in 1992, successive governments have reinforced the legal and institutional framework not only to keep pace with developments in the global

business sector but also to prevent money laundering and other prejudicial activities and so counter any accusations of Mauritius being a tax haven. Thus, currently, a dedicated ministry, the Ministry of Financial Services and Good Governance oversees the sector, while a specialised public body, the Financial Services Commission (FSC), set up in 2001, is the integrated regulator for the non-bank financial services sector and global business within the framework of the 2007 Financial Services Act (FSC website). After a first decade of rather slow growth, the sector has gradually become an important component of the Mauritian economy. In 2017, the sector generated 10.8% of the GDP (MUR49,853 million out of a total MUR 459,365 million), with an average growth rate for the period 2014-2017 of 5.5%, while providing well-paid employment for local accountants, lawyers and other professionals, about 13,500 people out of a total work-force of 582,800 (MCCI 2018).

However, by the end of the 1990s, as the end of the preferential agreements for sugar and textiles came closer, overall economic growth slowed down considerably, which in turn occasioned a worsening of the country's tax revenues and a persistent increase in unemployment from almost full employment at the start of the decade to nearly 10% by 2001. Mauritius's inherent vulnerability in the face of major changes in external market conditions was again brought to the fore. The move into Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES) may have seemed bold, and even somewhat fanciful, to many outsiders, given the country's total lack of experience in handling the new technologies on a broad scale. Inside the country, the need to survive and preserve Mauritius's competitiveness on the world market was again paramount. In-depth re-engineering of the existing revenue-generating activities, however much needed, would not be enough. A new source of revenue had to be found, one that would fit with the fast-changing global environment in which three major transforming processes were beginning to converge: namely, the emergence of services as the most dynamic growth sector, the globalization of telecommunications including data traffic and the rise of the network as the mode of both the distribution of goods and the production of services. (Sandbrook, 2005; Tolnay, 2007)



The 1997 White Paper on the Telecommunications Sector shows that the Government had clearly grasped the need to embrace information technology as quickly as possible, not just for revenue generation but also as a key factor underpinning the other economic sectors to maintain the country's competitive position in the new global marketplace by overcoming the barrier of geographic remoteness from its markets and enabling better customer information gathering and analysis, market data analysis and information processing as well as better telecommunications infrastructure.

The White Paper also gives four cogent reasons why the Government considered transforming the country into an information-based economy a perfectly feasible target: (1) falling costs that would make remoteness less important and possibly even immaterial in the near future; (2) as a small island country, the ability to move more quickly than many of its competitors to acquire and disseminate the most recent computer-based technological innovations in telecommunications and across all related sectors such as information technology; (3) a highly educated workforce capable of being trained in the required new disciplines and skills; and (4) the ongoing successful development of the banking and financial services sector since it is a major user of information technology.

The triple mechanism of building the institutional and legal framework, calling on the diaspora networks and encouraging private investment was again brought into play, piloted by the then Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology, now styled as the Ministry of Technology, Communication and Innovation. Existing legislation governing telecommunications was updated and other laws brought in, starting with the Information and Communication Technologies Act, 2002, to cover such new pressing issues as computer misuse, cybercrime data protection, as well as electronic transactions and ensure compliance with overseas regulations, in particular those of the European Union (MTCI website, 2018). The National Computer Board that was set up in 1989 was joined by the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (ICTA) in 2002 as the main regulatory and supporting bodies. The diaspora connections with India were called upon to start the Cyber Island Initiative based on the Bangalore experience (Sandbrook, 2005). In 2001, the Government of India granted a \$100 million credit line to help finance the construction of the first 'intelligent' building in

Mauritius, Cyber Tower 1, as the starting point for the country's first IT park, Ebène Cybercity, and also promote IT education (High Commission of India website, 2018). Situated in the centre of the island, Ebène Cybercity was built on 152 acres of agricultural land that had been cleared for the purpose and was equipped with the necessary fibre optic cables and power supply for it to become the island's cyber hub. The twelve-storey Cyber Tower 1 was opened in 2004 and by 2005 was completely full, housing 40 companies of international repute and 3000 employees. This success prompted the government to build a second tower, this time using local funds and construction companies. As was the case for the EPZ, the private sector developers and investors, both local and international, soon followed the government's lead and started building their own towers either entirely for their own use, for example, the major banks operating in the domestic and overseas financial services markets, or partly for rent or sale. Fifteen years later, all the available space has been taken up with 45 multi-storeyed office towers that support more than 25,000 direct jobs in financial services, offshore management companies, IT/BPO and IT enabled services (Landscape, 2018). Other business centres and parks have been set up or are in the pipeline, the majority of which are being developed by the local Franco-Mauritian conglomerates that are seeking to convert the less profitable land on the sugar estates into other more lucrative uses, such as business parks, hotels, residential estates and shopping malls.

The other major infrastructural component that the government needed to provide was optimal connection to the global information highway. It achieved this in 2002 when Mauritius was connected to the SAFE (South-Africa-Far East) submarine fibre optic cable system, which in turn is linked to the SAT-3/WASC (South Atlantic Telephone-West African Submarine Cable) in Cape Town. The SAT-3/WASC/SAFE network links Europe to Africa and the Far East, as it goes from Portugal to Malaysia, connecting along the way India, Mauritius, Reunion, South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal and the Canaries. For Mauritius, the SAFE connection provides an alternative reliable high-speed link to that provided by the existing satellite routes. In addition to the overall impact of reducing the digital divide between Africa and the developed countries, this linkage strengthened Mauritius's position as kingpin in the region for European companies wishing to outsource certain IT-related

activities such as data entry and processing, call centres, fund administration and disaster data backup and recovery centres (ICTA, 2004). In 2009, Mauritius further reinforced its position when it connected to the Lower Indian Ocean Network (LION) that links Mauritius with Reunion Island and Madagascar. As a result, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), when assessing the progress made by Mauritius to join the global digital economy, stated in its 2017 report *Measuring the Information Society*: “The Indian Ocean Island State is successfully leveraging ICT as a strategic pillar with one of the most advanced digital economies in sub-Saharan Africa.” (IUT, 2017, Vol 2, pp. 118-119). The country has certainly come a long way since the first inland telephone was set up to link the Governor’s Residence in Réduit and Government House in Port Louis in 1883, and the overseas operator-based telephone service provided by the Cable and Wireless Limited right up to 1985 (ICTA. 2004).

In 2007, the Government published its first comprehensive National ICT Policy to cover the period 2007-2011 with the explicit vision of making the ICT sector the fifth pillar of the economy and transforming Mauritius into a regional ICT hub. To do so, it identified seven objectives that would work towards achieving the twin goals of economic development and social inclusiveness: (1) providing an enabling framework for ICT to contribute towards achieving national goals; (2) developing the export markets for ICT Services and BPO/ITES; (3) positioning Mauritius as a regional ICT centre of excellence and knowledge hub; (4) ensuring that ICT infrastructure and capacity are utilised effectively, in compliance with regional and international standards, and are internationally competitive; (5) establishing a trusted and secure information infrastructure and a culture of cyber security at all levels of society; (6) enhancing the exploitation of ICT across the economy for increased productivity and efficiency; and (7) transforming Mauritius into an information-based society where everyone has equitable and affordable access to ICTs (MITT, 2007).

Although in subsequent policy documents such as the *National Information & Communication Technology Strategic Plan (NICTSP) 2011-2014: Towards I-Mauritius*, the wording has changed to keep pace with developments in ICT activities worldwide, these seven pragmatic objectives have formed the base from which the succeeding governments have organised their efforts to continue developing

the ICT sector. The current mission statement of the Ministry of Technology, Communication and Innovation reads as follows: *“A well-connected, knowledge-based, high-income society, through a culture of innovation and the adoption of technology”* (MTCI, 2018). While that may still seem like a walk in some faraway wonderland to some sceptics, at least it gives a clear choice of direction with which to start. In an interview for one of the main newspapers in Mauritius, the Managing Director of one of the largest ITC platforms, who was also interviewed for this study, summed up the challenge facing Mauritius quite simply: *“Mauritius cannot become a high-income country without undertaking its digital transformation”* (L’Express, 28 September 2017, p.6). However, this is not such a new insight as the discussion paper *“Competitiveness Foresight: What orientations for Mauritius?”* published by the National Productivity and Competitiveness Council (NPCC) in 2004 noted: *“ICT/BPO is changing the work scene and creating job location shifts and opportunities that Mauritius can capture or be bypassed”* (NPCC, 2004, p.16).

In December 2018, the Government updated its strategy to further the use of ICT throughout the country’s economy with the publication of new plan entitled *Digital Mauritius 2030 Strategic Plan* articulated around five themes, digital government, ICT infrastructure, innovation, talent management and cybersecurity/cybercrime. The overall aim of the plan is to push the digital transformation process to make the public sector more innovative, more effective and thus more sustainable on the one hand, and on the other, create an enabling environment for business facilitation development. The ultimate aim for the Government is to gain sustainable competitive advantages to continue positioning Mauritius as a regional leader while strengthening its position on the global market, thus enabling the country to become a high income and inclusive economy. The SWOT analysis presented in the document identifies the country’s ICT-BPO sector as one of the opportunities for achieving the targets with respect to both e-Government and business facilitation, while its compulsory education system, high literacy rate and multilingualism are cited as strengths on which to build the strategy. However, under the recommendations for talent management, there is no specific mention of the need to improve and upgrade current language skills to meet these targets, nor of the languages required. In addition to several recommendations specifically oriented towards ICT skills, the plan just makes two

general recommendations to (1) enhance teaching programmes to satisfy industry needs by building bridges between educational institutions and industry, and (2) ensure the integration of digital and data literacy as well as critical thinking and problem-solving courses into the educational curriculum (MTCI, 2018). At the time of concluding the final version of this thesis in July 2020, no indication of the state of implementation of this latest strategy has been published. In the meantime, the country has had to deal with more pressing issues, a General Election in November 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic, including a 10-week total lockdown from mid-March to end of May 2020. More long-term fundamental initiatives have, perforce, been put on hold.

As mentioned earlier, the ICT/BPO sector has grown quite substantially since the opening of the 'intelligent' office tower in Ebène, as shown by the figures given in the *'Industry Review for the ICT/BPO Sector'* published in 2016 by the Board of Investment (BOI), now styled the Economic Development Board (EDB). The sector expanded from 90 companies in 2005 to 750 in 2016, with an average annual increase in number of 7%. The number of employees consequently rose from under 10,000 to around 23,000, while the range of services offered widened considerably into four main segments: (1) IT Services such as data centres, disaster recovery, and business continuity process, representing 18% of the sector, with some 2300 employees; (2) ITO, including software development, web development, mobile applications and E-commerce, representing 47% of the sector, with around 4200 employees; (3) ITO/BPO, representing 3% of the sector, with around 4300 employees; and (4) BPO, including call and contact centres, BPO Non Voice and Back Office, KPO and finally BPO Voice and Non Voice, representing 32% of the sector, with around 12,100 employees.

The BOI report also notes that 35% of the firms are start-ups offering digital marketing, social media and web development services and employing less than 10 persons. As seen in the EPZ and tourism sectors, Mauritian-owned companies are in the majority, with 56% of the sector. Foreign investment comes from Europe (excluding UK) with 27%, of which France counts for 85%, UK with 5%, Africa with 4% of which South Africa counts for 90%, US & Canada with 3% and finally Asia-Pacific with 3% of which India counts for 50%. Given that outsourcing is the primary mechanism underpinning the sector, the

main markets are Europe, primarily France and UK, USA and Canada (BOI, 2017). The ICT sector is now well established as the fifth pillar of the Mauritian economy, representing 4.9% of total employment and contributing 5.7% to the country's GDP (Statistics Mauritius, ICT, 2017).

## **5.9 Conclusion**

The discussion in this chapter has focussed on the very distinctive context of a small island with no natural resources and on its journey from an isolated and uninhabited speck in a huge ocean to a recognised player on the international scene. It has shown how much the country's success has depended on the ability of its diverse population to come together and work for an individual and collective better future. The success of their endeavours has been built on the successive layers of hands-on experience in keeping things going against all odds, and in so doing earning the respect and support of the international aid and funding institutions. Two crucial factors underpinning this success have been the ability to communicate with overseas suppliers and customers and the ability to learn new and higher skills to supply the required level of products and services on the world market. However, the increasing speed with which the already complex global market is evolving requires a similarly constant increase in the skill levels of the product and service suppliers. The evolution of the education and training system throughout the different phases of the country's progress will be presented next in Chapter 6, followed by the language situation in Mauritius in Chapter 7. The specific experience of the employers and employees in the ICT-BPO sector in meeting the expectations of their overseas customers will be the focus of the presentation and analysis of the findings from the field work in Chapter 8.

## CHAPTER 6: OVERVIEW OF THE MAURITIAN EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents how the evolution of the education and training system throughout the different phases of the country's progress. The account makes explicit the various references in Chapter 5 to how universal access to education has been instrumental in the country's sustained progress over the years. It is based on desk research into official laws and regulations governing education and training in the Republic of Mauritius, historical and contemporary specialist articles and reports, and reports from various international agencies.

### 6.2 The current mission and structure of education in Mauritius

The current full name of the Ministry of Education (MOED), the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, shows the wide range of sectors and activities under its purview. Its Vision *"To create the next generation of forward-looking and innovative leaders contributing to the transformation of the Republic of Mauritius into a high ranking, prosperous nation"* ( <http://ministry-education.govmu.org/> ) responds directly to the economic and social ambitions and challenges discussed in Chapter 5. The Mission statement also published on <http://ministry-education.govmu.org/> shows four clear areas for action to achieve the vision. The first one, *"Re-engineer the education and skills development system to construct a cohesive, inclusive and productive society"* concerns the fundamental obligation to meet the UN SDG 4 *"ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"* (UNESCO, 2015), as discussed in Chapter 3, Literature Review. The second area, *"Foster a holistic education that makes of learners upholders of values and resilient, globally-minded citizens"*, responds to the challenges of living in a global world, with the key characteristic of the SIDS, as defined by Baldacchino (2014), resilience, well to the fore. The third area, *"Create an enabling environment for a higher education system that both generates and equips learners with innovative, cutting edge knowledge and deep skills for increased*

*competence in a dynamic work environment*”, concerns the pressing need to equip young Mauritians with the breadth and level of skills required to be an active part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The concept of *“learning throughout life”* as expounded by the Delors Commission in 1996 finds its place here. The fourth and final area, *“Sustain existing and motivating conditions towards the recognition of Mauritius as a major regional and Continental Education Hub”* looks towards giving Mauritius a new dimension to its role as an island hub.

In addition to the internal dedicated departments, the Ministry is assisted in its mammoth task by a range of specialised parastatal bodies that have been progressively set up, in particular, the Private Secondary Schools Authority (PSSA) (1976), the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate (MES) (1984), the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) (1989), the Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA) (2001), and Human Resource Development Council (HRDC) (2003). The annual budget allocated to the Ministry averages 11% of the national budget, one of the largest allocations, with expenditure for the current financial year 2018/2019 estimated at MUR17,237 million out of total government expenditure of MUR159,488 million (Statistics Mauritius, 2018).

The core structure is the standard progression: kindergarten (3 to 5 years, non-compulsory) > primary (5 to 11 years, compulsory) > secondary (11 to 18 years, compulsory to 16 years) > post-secondary professional training/academic studies. A pre-vocational (11 to 16 years) and vocational (16 +) training system runs parallel to the secondary level for those wishing to enter the trades or unable to meet the standards for general secondary or higher education. The school year runs with the calendar year, January to December. Up to December 2016, formal summative assessment took place first at the end of the 6-year primary cycle, Standard 6, the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE), then at the end of the 5-year compulsory secondary cycle, Form V, the Cambridge School Certificate/GCE ‘O’ level examination (SC), and finally at the end of the 2-year 6<sup>th</sup> form cycle, the Cambridge Higher School Certificate/GCE ‘A’ Level examination (HSC). The core structure is currently in a major transition phase with the introduction in January 2017 of the Nine-Year Continuous Basic Education (NYCBE) which covers the primary level (Grades 1 to 6) and first three years of the secondary level (Grades 7 to 9).



The aim is to ensure that all Mauritian children receive a basic education in the core skills up to their early adolescence and are thus better equipped to complete the full secondary education cycle up to Grade 13 (MOED, 2016). The transition will be completed in 2021. For the purposes of this study, the discussion will focus on the standard cycle prior to 2017 as the current work force, including the respondents to the field work, went through it. It is also far too early to comment on the impact of the nine-year cycle on the performance of the education system.

### **6.3 Overview of the history and evolution of education in Mauritius**

As has been mentioned several times in the preceding chapter, education has played an important role in the social and economic development of Mauritius in all periods of the country's history. The setting up and development of the education system has been a gradual process that has had to accommodate the diverse interests and priorities of the various components of the multiracial mix, while furthering the overall development of the country. Understanding how the colonial experience has shaped education in Mauritius is essential to achieving any success in re-engineering the system, including language policy, to meet the very different context and needs of a small island developing state aspiring to stay afloat in the choppy waters of the global sea, as seen in Chapter 5.

#### **6.3.1 *Educating the local elite***

From its beginnings during the French period and throughout most of the British period, the education system was aimed first and foremost at producing a professional male elite to staff the local administration and run the private businesses. The model adopted was first that of the French *lycée* and then the English grammar school (Prithipaul, 1976; Ramdoyal, 1977). With the concomitant change in the language of instruction from French to English and the appointment of both the rector and most of the teachers from Britain, the sole government secondary school, the Royal College, would thus play a major role in the attempts to anglicise the colony in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries by nurturing the colony's English-speaking intellectual *élite*. After World War I, its modern-day

descendants, the Royal College Curepipe (RCC) and the Royal College Port Louis (RCPL), educated practically all of the political and professional elite that staffed the local public administration, directed the burgeoning private sector, and were, thus, ready to take over the country's destiny in 1968, as we have seen in Chapter 5. Post-independence, these two elite schools have continued to be the ultimate target for aspiring young boys, and their families, in what has become a fiercely competitive and elitist education system (Ramdoyal, 1977). The girls would have to wait until 1951 for their college, named by royal assent the Queen Elizabeth College (QEC) (<http://qec.edu.govmu.org/>).

The reason for such fierce competition is the national scholarship scheme for university studies that dates back to 1813, that is, the beginnings of the British administration, whereby each year the two most distinguished scholars graduating from the Royal College would be sent to England to study at university (Ramdoyal, 1977). Originally known as the English Scholarship, since it was funded by the British government as part of the education provision for the colony, after independence the scheme was re-styled the State of Mauritius Scholarships, when the funding was taken over by the Government of Mauritius. While the number and source of scholarships have increased over the years, the ultimate prize remains the 18 scholarships awarded to the top-ranking students In Science, Economics, Arts and Technical, with equal numbers for boys and girls. The day on which the results from the Higher School Certificate examinations, together with the names of the 18 laureates, as these scholarship winners are known, are published is an occasion for lively celebrations in the schools which the laureates attended. The results and the list of laureates are headline news in the local press, both online and paper version, such is the importance of winning one of the scholarships to their future career, and thus adult life.

While arguments in favour of elitism based on academic performance may be found, elitism based on ethnic or racial exclusion is another matter. However, establishing the provision of free universal access to education irrespective of creed or colour in the colony was an arduous task. Under French rule, the free coloured population had been excluded from any form of formal education beyond that of the basic skills needed for the manual trades. Given the terms of the capitulation, the French colons

hoped that they could maintain the strict control on access to education as means of ensuring their continued hegemony over the colony's domestic and economic affairs. Mindful of the need to avoid a head-on clash with the colons, the Colonial Office adopted at first a laissez-faire approach in allowing various non-government initiatives provide education to both the free coloureds and the emancipated slaves, mainly the missionary societies. The aspirational role of education in the developmental society of Mauritius began here, and with it, the middle class of office workers, since the coloured population soon realised that education opened the doors to subordinate clerical posts in the colonial administration and the offices of notaries and solicitors, and so to a better life (Ramdoyal, 1977).

However, the colons' persistent obstructive attitude to any initiative in favour of the coloured and freed slave populations forced the Colonial Office to take a more interventionist stance by repealing all existing discriminating laws and decrees and stopping any new ones being enacted by the local administration, while establishing the unrestricted right to establish schools (Ramdoyal, 1977). This right is maintained in Section 14 of the Constitution whereby: *"No religious denomination and no religious, social, ethnic or cultural association or group shall be prevented from establishing and maintaining schools at its own expense"*. The principle of inclusion is again present and with it the means for the colony and later the newly independent state to overcome the twin hurdles of limited funds and resources.

The imperial belief in the civilising mission of education to foster loyalty to the imperial government, while creating a class of educated intermediaries between the rulers and the masses, was also brought into play (Patterson Smith, 1995). Thus, from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century up to World War II, the colonial authorities in London and Mauritius, with the help of the various Christian missionary societies already present, concentrated on responding to the quantitative aspect of providing universal access to primary education by building more schools throughout the island. Real concern for the qualitative aspects concerning content and teaching would come later. The subsequent development of the education system was thus based on a mix of government institutions, grant-aided confessional

schools (the term used in Mauritius for denominational or faith schools) and privately-owned fee-paying establishments.

### **6.3.2    *The challenges of the transition from colony to independent state***

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the two newest sectors of the population, the Indian labourers and the Chinese immigrants, were becoming increasingly aware of the importance of education in the quest for a better life, more specifically Western education, as they saw the Royal College laureates who had started their education in the local government or grant-aided primary school returning from Europe as doctors, lawyers and professionals. In both cases the early arrivals had been more concerned with earning their living and providing for their dependants. Sending a child to school meant the loss of much-needed income as even a small child could help pick up sticks in the fields or put things away in the shop (Benedict, 1958; Ramdoyal, 1977; Ly Tio Fane-Pineo & Lim Fat, 2008). Ward, the Director of Education in Mauritius from 1941 to 1945, summed up the dilemma facing the colonial administration of how best to use the limited funds available as a choice between achieving the ideal of a balanced education system offering primary, secondary and technical instruction by trained teachers, albeit with limited capacity at least in the early years, and responding to the practical politics of popular parental demand for quantity over quality in the belief that a little schooling is better than none, even if most of the teachers had had little or no training. In this line of reasoning, *“primary schools were so much more easily built and staffed than secondary schools, and bookish education so much more easily provided than technical”* (Ward, 1959, p.35). The 1944 Education Ordinance embodied the various changes made to strengthen the overall control of the system, together with policy-making and implementation by the central Education Committee, while leaving the everyday running of the non-government schools in the hands of denominational or lay governing bodies known as Education Authorities. A proper external examination at the end of the primary cycle was also introduced, along with regulations concerning teacher training, the staffing of primary and secondary schools, and the English Scholarships (Ward, 1959; Ramdoyal, 1977). In 1957 a new Ordinance incorporating the 1944 provisions and all subsequent developments laid the foundations for the

education system in post-independence Mauritius. Now restyled the Education Act 1957, it forms part of the overall set of framework legislation that ensured the proper continuity in the transition from colony to independent country and is updated as and when required. The original 1957 Ordinance established the two fundamental principles which underpin the system to this day: (1) *“all Government schools and all schools in receipt of a regular grant-in-aid from Government funds shall be open to pupils of any race or religion”* (Section 35) and (2) *“no tuition fees shall be payable for school children attending Government or aided primary schools”* (First Schedule, Section 25 [1]).).

In 1976, another major turning point in the development of the country's human resources occurred when the government decided to grant free secondary and university education in government-funded institutions to all Mauritian children as from January 1977, that is the start of the new school year. This decision with far-reaching consequences for not just the education system but also the country's future came as a complete surprise as it was taken not for ideological or pedagogical reasons, but as a successful vote-catching measure which enabled the government to remain in power after the 1976 general elections, the first to be held after independence, a clear indication of how much importance Mauritians give to education in their quest for a better life. The number of admissions for Form 1 quadrupled during the following two years (Jagatsingh, 1979). The explanation is very simple. The social norm that gave preference to boys being educated, particularly the eldest son who would become the guardian of the family heritage, meant that fewer girls went beyond primary school, especially if money was scarce. With free education, the girls could stay in school too, while those boys who had had to interrupt their secondary schooling for lack of money could now enrol again and finish their studies. Gender parity in secondary education was reached by 1990, and in post-secondary/tertiary education by 2006 (MOED, 2006). This early achievement of gender parity meant that all of the country's unique resource had equal access to education, as acknowledged in the favourable observation in the Dakar report (UNESCO, 2000) concerning the Indian Ocean area.

Even in the poorest areas, most Mauritians perceive the importance of education in breaking the poverty spiral and attaining a better standard of living. The various newspaper reports on the pockets

of extreme poverty in the country always include some interviews of the mothers who bitterly regret not being able to send their sons and daughters to school to get out of poverty for lack of money to pay for the necessary uniforms, books and stationery. This attitude is all the more encouraging, as compulsory education was not enforced until 1991 for primary education and 2005 for secondary education up to the age of 16, that is, not until the required number of places could be guaranteed in government-funded schools that complied with the education regulations (<http://attorneygeneral.govmu.org>).

The implementation of such a fundamental decision with no prior logistical planning put enormous pressure on admission capacity as nearly 80% of the places available were in the grant-aided and privately-owned secondary schools (Parsuramen, 2001). The grant-aided schools are all non-profit-making institutions whereas the privately-owned schools are profit-making businesses. Since the 1976 decision, the government meets all the operational costs of both categories of schools, while paying their staff directly. Despite repeatedly insistent lobbying from the private school owners who considered that the government decision had unilaterally deprived their businesses of the means to generate revenue, the government refused to take over the schools completely, not only because this would create a very awkward precedent for future development projects in any sector, but also because of issues concerning the title to property and in many cases the generally run-down state of the buildings. The long-term approach of building fully equipped new schools and renovating existing ones thus causing the natural closure of the more decrepit schools through lack of enrolments was preferred, whereby avoiding a huge waste of public funds. The drawback was that the inequalities in access due to the lack of good quality secondary schools, particularly in the rural areas, would drag on for another two decades, thus aggravating the competitive nature of the whole system (Parsuramen, 2001). The geographical distribution of the various educational institutions between the rural and urban areas has since become more balanced. while the government has also established a firm presence throughout the system (Statistics Mauritius, 2018).

### 6.3.3 Capacity building for a knowledge society

The initial focus on universal primary education paid dividends as it provided the semi-skilled workforce needed for the two post-independence economic pillars, namely the EPZ textile industry and tourism. However, for Mauritius to achieve meaningful and sustainable development, a higher order of skilled employees would be needed. As early as the 1960s, when Mauritius was preparing for independence, the developmental challenge was summed up as follows in the report drawn up to support the creation of a university college:

*Mauritius is highly unlikely to be able to solve her manifold development problems without substantial investment in resources for development research, planning and consultation, educational reform and the like. Since this investment is essential, it should be made to yield the maximum return by yielding essential training facilities too, wherever this is possible. (Leys, 1964, p.3, para.17)*

Thus, the developmental approach to economic development discussed in Chapter 5 was supported by an equivalent approach in education. The mandates given to the two pioneering institutions, the University of Mauritius (UOM) and the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE), set the tone for the future development of the tertiary education sector. The UOM was first created by Ordinance in 1965 with the power to organise and supervise courses specifically in agriculture, development sciences and education (Manrakhan, 1992). The University of Mauritius Act of 1971 laid down the permanent constitution and objectives including: *“to provide facilities for and to engage in teaching and research, and thereby to promote the advancement of learning and knowledge and, in particular to provide a university education responsive to the social, administrative, scientific, agricultural and technological needs of Mauritius;”* (Act 17, 1971, section 4).

This developmental ethos has guided the UOM in its choices of fields of study, with the emphasis remaining on agriculture, sciences and technology, followed by law, management and social sciences.

The humanities and language studies were not offered until the early 1990s. In its early days, the UOM adopted the 'down-reach approach' to the country's development needs by providing training largely on an in-service, non-graduate basis in technology, administration and agriculture, while conducting applied research in consultation with government departments. As the need for such middle level training was taken over other dedicated bodies such as the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development (MITD), formerly the Industrial and Vocational Training Board, the UOM phased out its non-graduate activities to concentrate on first degree and post-graduate degree courses and research (Manrakhan, 1991). A member of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), it has benefitted from a wide range of external expertise, such as external examiners, including from the University of Reading.

In 1973, the Teacher Training College set up in 1942 under Ward was joined by the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE), with which it later merged. The developmental mandate of the MIE is clearly stated in the Mauritius Institute of Education Act, 1973, Section 4, Objects of the Institute, subsection 1:

- (a) provide facilities for and engage in educational research, curriculum development and teacher education in order to promote the advancement of learning and knowledge in the field of education;*
- (b) provide teacher education responsive to the social, linguistic, administrative, scientific, agricultural and technological needs of Mauritius;*
- and (c) do all such things as are incidental or conducive to the attainment of those objects.*

The tertiary sector now counts a range of publicly funded tertiary education institutions (PFIs), all of which have been aligned on the country's developmental needs. Several foreign universities have either set up their own Mauritian branch campus or joined forces with one of the Mauritian private training firms wanting to offer recognised tertiary qualifications to their clients (<http://www.tec.mu>).

The table below shows the enrolment figures in tertiary education for 2017. Notwithstanding the dream of studying abroad nurtured by the scholarship race, the reality of international competition for



admission and the actual cost of the undertaking puts overseas studies out of range for most Mauritian families. This is on a par with the realities of migration and emigration discussed in Chapter 5.

|   | Number of students | Percentage of total population 20 to 24 years | Percentage of GER |
|---|--------------------|---|-------------------|
| Local public-funded institutions (PFI)        | 21,902             | 21.2  | 46                |
| Local private institutions                    | 16948              | 16.5  | 35                |
| <b>Total local TEIs (public and private)</b>  | <b>38,850</b>      | <b>37.7</b>                                   | <b>81</b>         |
| Overseas institutions                         | 9,157              | 8.9   | 19                |
| Gross enrolment rate (GER): 20 to 24-year old | 48,007             | 46.6  |                   |
| <b>Total population aged 20 to 24 years</b>   | <b>103020</b>      |   |                   |

**Table 6.1: Tertiary education enrolment 2017: Source: Statistics Mauritius, Education Statistics 2018**

The UOM, which is the main source of graduate recruits for the ICT-BPO sector, counts the highest number of total enrolments, 8,722 students, that is 18.2% of the GER for 2017). With respect to the specific subject areas of interest to the ICT-BPO sector, the total enrolments for 2017 at local tertiary institutions in Information Technology numbered 3349, of which 977 at the UOM, and in Mathematics 628, of which 422 at the UOM. These figures show clearly the basic numerical constraint of available human resources with the right level of qualification to compete on the world market. As mentioned in Chapter 3, *Literature Review*, Section 3.3, Mauritius can never compete with India or the Philippines in terms of numbers. As identified by Bacchus (2008), the challenge is qualitative, that is building up a highly skilled workforce which will enable the country to provide high value niche activities in the ICT-BPO sector, as suggested by one of the executives interviewed.

At the same time, capacity-building of the existing workforce also needed attention. Thus, in the 1980s when Mauritius embarked on developing its EPZ and tourism sectors, corporate in-service training run by private firms for both private and public sector employees started to take hold. In 1989, the government introduced a training levy-grant system funded by the private sector employers, with the amount due calculated as a percentage of the basic monthly wage bill, currently 1.5%. The contributing employers could then claim part of the cost of an approved corporate training programme from the

fund on a cost-sharing principle, whereby the grants paid out of the fund are meant to give partial support and not full subsidies, currently up to 75% of course fees depending the amount of annual levy paid by the company. The fund has been revisited several times to widen the scope of in-service training eligible and improve the range and scale of refunds payable to make the system more strategic in its support of training. This incentive has fostered a huge increase in corporate training of all types and has greatly contributed to the general upskilling of the Mauritian workforce in all sectors (Dubois, 2010). The National Training Fund is administered by the HRDC while the approval of the training centres, programmes and trainers is carried out by the MQA. ([www.hrdc.mu](http://www.hrdc.mu) ; [www.mqa.mu](http://www.mqa.mu)).

Thus, Mauritius has gradually built up a complete education and training system to meet its developmental needs, while at the same time satisfying the population's aspirations to better themselves through education. The quantitative goal of access to education has been systematically addressed by the successive post-independence governments within the constraint of available resources. The provision and maintenance of adequate buildings and equipment is an on-going challenge which is certainly an expensive item in the education budget, but it is no longer a critical issue. The issue now is whether the education given matches the social and economic needs of the country and its inhabitants, the qualitative aspect which the UN SDG 4 emphasises.

#### **6.4 The ultimate goal: a university scholarship**

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, primary and secondary education in Mauritius is highly competitive with the ultimate goal of winning a scholarship for university studies abroad. The persistent lack of enough places in good quality secondary schools exacerbated matters. Thus, a major qualitative issue is the degree to which competition takes over the whole system and the effect that it has on the teaching and learning process. Already in 1947, the Nichols report severely criticised both the system of awarding scholarships to attend the Royal College because it encouraged cramming in young boys, and the selection process for the English Scholarship because of the unhealthy competition for two scholarships between fifty equally able boys, the work of the school being just

centred on the examination and the pressure on the boys from parents and private crammers. Consequently, Nichols viewed the Mauritian attitude to education as being utilitarian, as solely a means for the children to get certificates to secure employment, with no attention to other domains such as citizenship or an appreciation of goodness or beauty.

In its various forms since 1944, the final assessment at the end of the primary cycle had the dual function of testing the children's level of attainment on completing the 6-year cycle and selecting the most able to enter the 'star' state secondary schools. Admission was decided by a strict ranking of both schools and pupils. By the 1990s, competition was so stiff that a decimal place in the marks awarded would make the difference in ranking. Around 18,000 children passed the CPE each year, of whom 4,500 obtained the 4 Grade A's required for admission to the 'star' schools where only 1000 places were available (MOED, 2001). The annual failure rate in the CPE for the same decade averaged around 36% (CSO 2011). However, various attempts to abolish the ranking and introduce some form of regional non-competitive admission to secondary level failed due to stiff opposition from both the parents and teachers. For the parents, admission to one of the 'star' schools was seen as a guarantee of success in the Form V Cambridge School Certificate (SC) examination and then the Form VI Cambridge Higher School Certificate (HSC) with the hope of winning the ultimate prize, a scholarship for an overseas university. For the teachers, any reform abolishing the CPE would also remove the need for a very lucrative activity, after-school tuition. Miles (2000, p.219) described the entire education system as *"an elaborate, lengthy weeding out process that through competitive examinations selects a tiny elite from the mass of children with which it starts"*.

In 2001 the MOED embarked on a major construction plan to increase the number of state secondary schools and the capacity of the existing ones to eliminate the CPE hurdle. The state secondary schools were split into two groups, the regional schools offering Forms I to V and the high demand 'star' schools becoming national Form VI colleges (MOED 2003). The new system worked quite well until the change of government after the 2005 general election, when it was abolished, and the ranking system reintroduced, with a new grade added, A+, to single out the elite for admission to the reinstated 'star'

schools (MOED, 2006). Thus, after three years' respite, the "*rat race*" (MOED, 2001) started up again and with it the marathon of private tuition. According to the ADEA Peer Review (2006), 90% of the children who passed the CPE had had private tuition, whereas 50% of those who failed had not. Since the tutors are normally the class teachers, one may wonder whether it is necessary. One thing is certain, however. Given the cost of the hourly lessons which are normally attended by most of the pupils in the class, private tuition negates one of the fundamental principles underpinning universal access to education, that of enabling children from deprived backgrounds to combat their socio-economic status and rise above it (ADEA, 2006). Similarly, Bunwaree *et al* (2005, p.172) considered that the ranking made the examination system not just ineffective but also "*destructively competitive*". The ADEA Peer Review (2006) even wondered whether the CPE ranking had not become a tool for social exclusion (ADEA, 2006). The educational policy stated unequivocally in the challenging period following the 1976 decision, namely "*to provide for the harmonious development of each and every Mauritian in the context of the delicate fabric of our plural society*" (Jagatsingh, 1979, p.1) would seem to have been forgotten. The percentage pass rate for the period 2005 to 2016 ranged from 73.2% in 2005 to 81.17% in 2016, with an average of 76%, with thus a worryingly persistent rate of failure for a small country entirely dependent on its human resources of all capabilities to sustain its present and future level of development.

The situation at the secondary level is not much better. The pressure on the pupils eases temporarily in the first two or three years. It builds up again in Form IV, now Grade 10, when they embark on the 2-year syllabus leading to the Cambridge School Certificate (SC) examinations, and becomes again very intense in Lower and Upper 6, now Grades 12 and 13, in preparation for the Cambridge Higher School (HSC) examinations thanks to the competition for the university scholarships. Private tuition is again seen by the interested parties, that is, parent, pupil and teacher, as a necessary companion. Thus, the whole teaching and learning process is geared to competitive summative assessment that in turn encourages rote-learning and heavy reliance on 'model' answers to past examination papers, in other words, a quest for the 'right' answers to get top marks. Several recent reports on current skills development strategies in Mauritius have commented on how such an individualistic system does not

foster problem-solving, learning how to use failure as a means to improve, working collaboratively and all the other interpersonal skills that today's employers are looking for (PROMAN, 2015; HRDC, 2017; WBG, 2017).

The current transition to the nine-year cycle of continuous basic education, the NYCBE, mentioned at the start of this chapter is yet another attempt to remove the unwarranted pressure on Mauritian youngsters, at least in their early formative years. However, a careful look at the new structure reveals that academic elitism reappears in the secondary cycle. The National Certificate of Education awarded at the end of Grade 9 (Form III) will determine admission to the 12 national academies, the former 'star' schools, from Grade 10 onwards, while the School Certificate awarded at Grade 11 will determine a second intake for Grades 12 and 13 from the regional secondary schools (MOED, 2016). How successful the new structure will be in changing teaching and learning processes that have been rigidly examination-oriented for so long remains to be seen. The more so, as there is no guarantee of longevity. The yo-yo swings of governments from one general election to the next since the 1990s is another factor negatively impacting the efficiency of the education system, as it causes a similar flip-flop in educational policy to suit voters, but not necessarily the children.

In January 2018, the Ministry of Education launched an *ICT Strategy for Mauritius's Education Sector* with four ICT areas of focus or clusters: (1) infrastructure and connectivity; (2) enhanced teaching/learning and pedagogical development; (3) education management; and (4) capacity-building and professional development. However, the only published information is the overview given in the news bulletin published on the Ministry's website following the press conference launching the strategy. The bulletin summarises the actions taken so far to equip primary and secondary schools with the necessary equipment, such as computers and tablets, and connect the schools to the country's IT network and mentions the various steps taken to produce the necessary teaching materials, all of which were to be continued in 2018, together with the necessary training of education staff, both teaching and administrative and the setting-up of an Education Management Information System. (EMIS) (MOED 2018). However, no detailed text setting out the plan has been published, nor has there

been any update concerning the progress of the strategy. So, it is impossible to gauge the eventual impact of the strategy from the information available.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

Mauritius has had a fully-fledged education system with universal access since the early years of independence. This has been a major factor underpinning the country's economic and social development, as it has provided the literate workforce needed to carry out the clerical duties in the public administration, follow the instructions to operate the machines and copy the sample models in the textile factories, work on the hotel reception desks or in the accounts and administrative departments of the burgeoning private sector firms. However, recent technical reports have expressed concerns that the elitist colonial model with its overriding emphasis on rote learning and examination success is now seen to be limiting the country's human capital development to meet the technological challenges of the global world, which require not just technical skills, but more importantly high level creative reasoning and empathetic communication skills, as would be nurtured within the holistic liberal education proposed by Nussbaum (2006). Just how far these concerns are shared by the respondents in the sector targeted for this study, ICT-BPO, will be examined in the analysis of the field work in Chapter 8.

## CHAPTER 7: THE ROLE AND USE OF ENGLISH IN MAURITIUS

### 7.1 Introduction

The chapter discusses the role and use of English in the multilingual context of Mauritius, beginning with an overview of how Mauritius became multilingual, followed by a review of the languages currently present in the country. It then considers the legal requirements concerning appropriate choice of language in the various spheres of the country's activities, followed by an overview of the use of English in daily life in Mauritius. Finally, it then considers the language policy in education with respect to the choice of language of instruction and the number of other languages to be taught.

The specific question that this chapter addresses is:

*What factors influence the user's choice of language in a multilingual environment such as Mauritius, with particular reference to the use of English in (1) everyday discourse and (2) the business context?*

### 7.2 The use of English in the multilingual environment of Mauritius

The evolution of the language situation in Mauritius has been and continues to be very dynamic. The reasons underpinning this evolution are perforce complex given the multi-layered composition of the population. They can be aspirational, cultural, emotional, identity-bound, nostalgic or pragmatic, in a variable geometry of combinations that can at times leave the non-Mauritian observer, be they resident or visitor, somewhat bemused to say the least. Therefore, to understand how the current position and role of English came to be, the historical, statistical and legal dimensions need to be considered first.

The discussion in Chapter 5 highlighted the following four characteristics concerning the population of Mauritius, which are crucial to understanding how the various languages are positioned: (1) there is

no indigenous population that could claim linguistic hegemony, either partial or exclusive; (2) the population is the result of several waves of immigration, both forced and voluntary, which in turn introduced new languages to the country; (3) the country is a product of the colonial expansion in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries of two main protagonists, France and Britain, in that order; and (4) revenue-earning activities have always been export-oriented, and thus governed by the trends and requirements of the world market.

### **7.3 How Mauritius became multilingual**

As with the rest of its development process, the multilingual landscape of Mauritius did not come into being overnight. It evolved and emerged gradually, following the arrivals of the various immigrants, be they forced or voluntary. During the French period, the standard French of officialdom and elite society mingled with the Breton and other regional dialects of the soldiers and sailors together with the nautical patois of the French merchant and navy crews. A local lingua franca, *Île de France Creoles* emerged, born of the sheer necessity for a common meeting-point for everyday communication between the French-speaking masters, the Indian artisans and the African, Malagasy and Indian slaves (Vaughan, 2005). By end of the French period, the African, Indian and Malagasy languages had disappeared, but not before they had endowed *Île de France Creole* with a rich lexicon to express the varied facets of Mauritian life, as attested by the fascinating etymological dictionary of the French-based creoles of the Indian Ocean islands compiled by the research team led by Annegret Bollée (Bollée, 1993).

After the British took over Mauritius in 1810, three major developments in the language situation took place. The first and obvious one was the introduction of English as the official administrative and judicial language in the place of French. The second came with the arrival of the indentured labourers and traders from India, namely the reintroduction of the Indian languages, of which the main ones were Bhojpuri, Gujrati, Hindi, Hindustani, Marathi, Tamil, Telegu and Urdu. Given the sheer number of Indian immigrants that came to Mauritius in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the variety of



languages that they brought with them, a lingua franca developed within the Indian community, again out of the basic need to communicate with one's fellows. As many of the indentured labourers came from Bihar, the base language for this Indian lingua franca was Bhojpuri, one of the main languages spoken at the time in western Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. Over time, the Bhojpuri spoken in Mauritius adapted itself to the local context by borrowing many words from Isle de France Creole. Today mutual comprehension between the Bhojpuri spoken in Bihar and the Mauritian variety is at best very difficult, if not impossible (Stein, 1982). The third development was the arrival of the languages of the Chinese immigrants, Cantonese and Hakka. Although much fewer in number, these immigrants brought with them a rich and vibrant culture (Siew, 2016). Mandarin would come to the fore in post-independence Mauritius with the rise of China as an international power. Meanwhile, Île de France Creole continued to develop and consolidate its position as the link language between all sectors of the population, with further borrowings from the latest additions to the linguistic landscape, a process which has continued up to the present time.

#### **7.4 A statistical overview of language use in Mauritius**

The statistics published over the years under the British colonial administration and up to the present day give a detailed picture of how language use in Mauritius has evolved and is continuing to evolve. The data on language, literacy and education are comprised in the decennial Housing and Population Census. The way that the data is classified has changed, gradually becoming more complex and detailed to reflect the evolution of the population together with that of the information needs of the country. Such a repository of continuous detailed and reliable data since the colonial period has been of utmost importance in the elaboration of government policy and requests for funding and other international support for the country's developmental needs. The tables below give a summary of the figures concerning language heritage and current use, based on the Censuses from 1952 to the most recent, 2011. While the figures themselves tell a very interesting story about how language use has evolved over the years, the information given in the guidelines for completion of the questionnaires

concerning the category definitions and criteria used to record the data collected is equally important to understanding how Mauritians view their omnipresent multilingualism.

**Table 7.1: Language use in Mauritius 1952 to 1983**

**Data sourced from Housing and Population Censuses of 1952, 1962, 1972 and 1983**

***Central Statistical Office (CSO) / Statistics Mauritius***

| Census Year<br>→                 | 1952           |                  | 1962           |                  | 1972                    |                         | 1983                    |                         |
|----------------------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Language                         | Mother tongue  | Currently spoken | Mother tongue  | Currently spoken | Language of forefathers | Language usually spoken | Language of forefathers | Language usually spoken |
| Creole                           | 166,370        | 197,706          | 216,810        | 305,176          | 296,146                 | 452,848                 | 312,780                 | 554,739                 |
| English                          | 615            | 656              | 1618           | 1,833            | 2,421                   | 2,299                   | 1,903                   | 2,028                   |
| French                           | 31,566         | 36,227           | 47,383         | 53,910           | 36,922                  | 39,456                  | 32,796                  | 36,218                  |
| Bhojpuri                         | --             | --               | -              | --               | --                      | --                      | 181,045                 | 197,076                 |
| Gujrati                          | 1,167          | 796              | 1,328          | 734              | 2043                    | 407                     | 1,733                   | 531                     |
| Hindi                            | 182,612        | 174,474          | 248,369        | 206,978          | 320,965                 | 262,216                 | 208,509                 | 111,134                 |
| Marathi                          | -              | -                | 11,533         | 7,420            | 16,553                  | 12,036                  | 20,412                  | 12,420                  |
| Tamil                            | 19,695         | 9,481            | 44,045         | 17,970           | 56,758                  | 29,094                  | 66,182                  | 35,646                  |
| Telegu                           | 6,160          | 3,564            | 16,181         | 6,721            | 24,244                  | 17,634                  | 25,619                  | 15,364                  |
| Urdu                             | 24,612         | 11,795           | 92,299         | 40,667           | 71,714                  | 23,470                  | 55,367                  | 23,572                  |
| Arabic                           |                |                  |                |                  |                         |                         | 68,056                  | 1,813                   |
| Chinese languages                | 12,791         | 11,262           | 19,758         | 13,767           | 20,876                  | 9451                    | 20,750                  | 6,156                   |
| Other and not stated             | 1,926          | 1,501            | 630            | 44,778           | 2,300                   | 2,057                   | 5,280                   | 3,735                   |
| <b>Total resident population</b> | <b>447,462</b> | <b>447,462</b>   | <b>699,954</b> | <b>699,954</b>   | <b>850,968</b>          | <b>850,968</b>          | <b>1,000,432</b>        | <b>1,000,432</b>        |

**Table 7.2: Language use in Mauritius 1990 to 2011**

Data sourced from Housing and Population Censuses of 1990, 2000 and 2011

*Central Statistical Office (CSO) / Statistics Mauritius*

| Census Year →                       | 1990                    |                         | 2000                    |                         | 2011                    |                         |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Language                            | Language of forefathers | Language usually spoken | Language of forefathers | Language usually spoken | Language of forefathers | Language usually spoken |
| <b>Single language reported</b>     |                         |                         |                         |                         |                         |                         |
| Creole                              | 379,288                 | 652,193                 | 454,763                 | 826,152                 | 500,699                 | 1,069,874               |
| English                             | 888                     | 2,240                   | 1,075                   | 3,512                   | 1,351                   | 5,573                   |
| French                              | 22,367                  | 34,455                  | 21,171                  | 39,953                  | 20,099                  | 51,214                  |
| Bhojpuri                            | 343,832                 | 201,618                 | 361,250                 | 142,387                 | 238,451                 | 65,289                  |
| Gujrati                             | 2,181                   | 290                     | 1,975                   | 241                     | 1,029                   | 253                     |
| Hindi                               | 38,181                  | 12,848                  | 35,782                  | 7,250                   | 13,256                  | 8,690                   |
| Marathi                             | 17,732                  | 7,535                   | 16,587                  | 1,888                   | 7,310                   | 490                     |
| Tamil                               | 47,953                  | 8,002                   | 44,731                  | 3,623                   | 19,166                  | 1,134                   |
| Telegu                              | 21,033                  | 6,437                   | 18,802                  | 2,169                   | 8,584                   | 1,600                   |
| Urdu                                | 45,311                  | 6810                    | 34,120                  | 1,789                   | 7,253                   | 814                     |
| Arabic                              | 1,686                   | 280                     | 806                     | 82                      | 560                     | 36                      |
| Chinese languages                   | 17652                   | 3653                    | 22,715                  | 8,748                   | 12,077                  | 3276                    |
| <b>Two languages reported</b>       |                         |                         |                         |                         |                         |                         |
| Creole + Bhojpuri                   | 34,371                  | 48,579                  | 65,868                  | 64,105                  | 228,729                 | 7,104                   |
| Creole + English                    | -                       | -                       | -                       | -                       | 798                     | 340                     |
| Creole + French                     | 15,023                  | 21,387                  | 18,181                  | 33,795                  | 29,361                  | 7,001                   |
| Creole + Urdu                       | 10,119                  | 6,479                   | 11,164                  | 3,536                   | 13,198                  | 110                     |
| Creole + Chinese languages          | 2,439                   | 2,069                   | 3,473                   | 1,506                   | 5,661                   | 303                     |
| Creole + other languages            | 12,858                  | 15,385                  | 24,444                  | 20,176                  | 54,635                  | 1,361                   |
| English + other languages           | -                       | -                       | -                       | -                       | 3,046                   | 417                     |
| French + other languages            | 1,498                   | 1794                    | 2,007                   | 2,149                   | 745                     | 32                      |
| Bhojpuri + Hindi                    | 32,922                  | 20,976                  | 22,977                  | 7,298                   | 36,505                  | 238                     |
| Bhojpuri + other oriental languages | 5,082                   | 977                     | 6,232                   | 347                     | 10,962                  | 7                       |
| Other pairings                      | 1241                    | 993                     | 3,896                   | 2,691                   | 4,505                   | 334                     |
|                                     |                         |                         |                         |                         |                         |                         |
| Other and not stated                | 3003                    | 1660                    | 6,829                   | 5,451                   | 18,837                  | 11327                   |
| <b>Total resident population</b>    | 1,056,660               | 1,056,660               | 1,178,848               | 1,178,848               | 1,236,817               | 1,236,817               |

The splitting of the data sets into two groups coincides with the moment when Mauritius moved on from the immediate post-independence struggle for economic survival to the quest for economic diversity and expansion, which has been presented in detail in Chapter 5. From the statistical point of view, the split corresponds to a major change in the level of detail sought. In the first four Censuses

listed, the answers collected for the questions on language use required only one language. For the 1990 and subsequent Censuses, the instruction for the question on the language of forefathers (CSO, Census 1990, Question 17, Linguistic Group) states *“If the language of the paternal forefathers is different from that of the maternal forefathers, write both.”* (CSO, 1991). While the reason for the change is not given, the result is very evident, with a detailed list of pairings that has more symbolic value than statistical weight in many cases. This is a clear example of the mechanism of inclusion, if only symbolic, of diverse ethnic origins and identities that was discussed at length in Chapter 5. For the purposes of this study, this detail in data gives a clearer idea of the complex multilingualism present, if not always immediately apparent, in all aspects of life in Mauritius.

The grouping in Table 6.1 illustrates an earlier important shift in describing the country’s linguistic heritage and reality that took place in the first Census after independence, the 1972 edition. The colonial censuses talked of *“mother tongue”* which was defined in the guide for completion and the subsequent data report for the 1952 Census as *“the language spoken in the individual’s home in his early childhood”*, with the added precision in the 1962 Census *“although not necessarily spoken by him at the time of the Census.”* (CSO, 1953: CSO, 1963). This definition obviously needs refining with respect to the scope of the notion of *mother*. The change to linguistic group based on the language of a person’s forefathers in 1972 clarifies the issue. While *mother* can and does refer to the respondent’s real birth mother, in the Mauritian context, it also refers to the historical mother, meaning that of the original immigrants. Thus, the instruction for Question 12, Linguistic Group, in the 1972 Census says: *“State the language spoken by this person’s forefathers.”* (CSO, 1974). The 1990 Census adds an important detail, namely, *“It does not matter whether the person himself (herself) speaks the language or not.”* (CSO, 1991). However, the 2000 and 2011 Censuses leave out the issue of whether the present generation uses their forefathers’ language and just say: *“State the language spoken by the person’s ancestors.”* (Statistics Mauritius, 2001; Statistics Mauritius, 2012).

The second question on language is a straight-forward request for the *“language usually or most often spoken by the person at home”* that has hardly altered (CSO, 2012). The supplementary instructions

for special cases have over the years become more detailed and now stipulate: “*For children not yet able to speak, write the language spoken by the mother*” and “*For a person who cannot speak, write the language usually spoken in the person’s home*”. (CSO, 1990).

Another major instruction concerns the two local languages of wider communication, Creole and Bhojpuri. The notes to the 1952 Census report give the following clarification:

*Creole has been quoted as a language, although it is essentially a local vernacular, derived originally from the French and almost peculiar to Mauritius alone. The Creole language, however, assumes in Mauritius and its dependencies a great importance, as will be gathered from the proportion of the population in all ethnic groups making current use of it.*

The instructions in the 1972 Census questionnaire state: “*For the purposes of the census only, ‘**creole patois**’ should be considered as a language*”. The 1983 Census adds Bhojpuri to this instruction, which was restated more simply as “*Consider Creole and Bhojpuri as languages*” in the 1990 and 2000 Censuses. However, the 2011 Census does not even mention the issue, which meant that at least in the eyes of the CSO these two locally created link languages are officially recognised as proper languages, and not just some pidgin version of French or Hindi.

From a statistical point of view, several of the figures reported in the summary tables 6.1 and 6.2, including the ones concerning English, would normally be considered insignificant, and so not retained in a general situation overview. However, such a strict application of the principle of mathematical relevance would be missing an essential aspect of understanding how a multi-faceted reality such as that of Mauritius works. As explained in Chapter 5, official recognition of belonging has been one of the major levers keeping the country on the right track. When an entire population is made up of people coming from elsewhere be it by choice or force, the ensuing process of forging a new identity that is balanced and respectful of all is at the very least a delicate undertaking, in which being allowed to openly conserve one’s language heritage is a key success factor.

The very low figures concerning the use of English in daily life confirm the absence of any sizeable permanent settlement by the British during the colonial period, as discussed in Chapter 5. In terms of percentage, the figure remains well below 1% for both language of forefathers and languages usually spoken. Thus, English is perceived by almost all the population as not being a language in which to express the comings and goings, the ups and downs or the emotional ebbs and flows of everyday life. Acknowledging this absence of English as a vehicle of personal emotions and experiences is crucial to deciding what communicative competencies the average recruit on an English-speaking BPO platform in Mauritius may need help with. The participants in all three focus groups, irrespective of whether they were handling American, British or European customers, were unanimous in saying that correctly gauging their English-speaking customer's feelings over the telephone was one of the hardest challenges to master as a beginner, and even as a more seasoned operator if the new product or service being offered was particularly complex for the customer to handle. This issue ties in directly with the debate about the unequal customer service relationship that arises between the NS customer and the NNS service provider discussed in Chapter 3, Literature Review, Section 3.5.

Careful reading of the statistics, even in the abridged form presented here, shows that the language issue in Mauritius has been debated from a completely different perspective than that of the business imperative. The issue has been and still is fair representation of the diverse linguistic heritage present in the country. The emphasis put on the concept of *language of the forefathers* is indicative of this concern. The explanation given on Page 4 of the guidance notes for the 2000 Census leaves the reader in no doubt as to the real intention of this part of the data collection exercise:

***Religion, linguistic group, language usually spoken:*** These questions together with others help to determine the size and geographical distribution of different religious and socio-cultural groups. The information is useful to both public and private institutions in the planning of facilities for the religious and socio-cultural development of the different components of the population. (CSO, 2000).

Since the 1972 Census was the last one to request ethnic identity, language use and religion have since become the proxies by which to express belonging and monitor fair and equitable treatment of all sectors of the Mauritian population. The 1983 Census was carried out at a particularly acrimonious time in Mauritian politics as discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.7. The run-up to the Census exercise in July 1983 saw some very vigorous campaigning through adverts in the local press by the various Hindu, Muslim, Rajput, Tamil and Telegu socio-cultural associations aimed at telling those concerned how to complete the questions on religion and language to ensure not only the continued respect of their specific identity but also the continued payment of the State subsidies to all duly registered socio-cultural associations. So, interestingly, most of these adverts were published in French and the rest in English. None were published in the relevant Indian language. The obvious intent was to ensure that the entire population was aware of the issue at stake. A repeat exercise happened with the 1992 Census, when the situation in the country was much calmer thanks to the fact that the benefits of the economic development were now more widely felt. Their efforts to give tangible official proof of the country's very diverse linguistic heritage were rewarded, as the 1983 Census registered over fifty forefather languages, of which half were spoken by fewer than 20 persons each, and the subsequent Censuses, with the possibility of dual responses, confirmed it. However, there was one somewhat unexpected result in the 1983 Census which shows the degree of influence that these socio-cultural associations can have on local politics and policy formation, namely, the sudden appearance of Arabic (68,056 respondents) to the detriment of the other Indian languages, notably Urdu (a drop from 71,714 respondents in the 1972 Census to 55,367 respondents in 1983) as the language of the forefathers. Given that the Muslim population is descended from either the indentured labourers or the traders that came in the wake of the indentured arrivals, both of whom came from colonial India, it is impossible to justify such a massive change in response on historical grounds. The subsequent Censuses confirm that this was an exceptional occurrence, as the figures for Arabic for both heritage and current use show a swift decline to practically nil. This is another example of the importance of acknowledging symbolic presence in the handling of Mauritian affairs, not least in policy formation concerning languages in education, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

## **7.5 Current language use by the younger generations**

However, while the desire to conserve and respect the heritage languages is understandable in a plural society such as Mauritius, the need to communicate in the languages used daily in personal and professional activities takes precedence. Thus, the comparison between the figures for the languages of forefathers and those concerning current use tells another very important story, the increasingly rapid decline of the Chinese and Indian languages, particularly since the late 1990s. The reason for this is very simple, namely, the gradual natural passing of the older generations who had a living contact with the immigrant generation. Most Mauritian families have now reached their fifth generation, including that of the original arrivals. The younger generation, the under 35's who are now employed in the more modern pillars of the economy, luxury hotel resorts, financial services and all things IT, or are still pursuing their education, do not show the same emotional attachment to their ancestral culture. The modern digital version catches their attention. Bollywood films and songs at the cinema, on TV and through live streaming on their smart phones are very popular, as are the latest fashions thus portrayed. Religious activities, cultural festivals, official receptions, weddings and other family social events provide ample occasions for dressing up. Everyday attire is much more westernised for both men and women, ranging from formal business suits and town shoes to t-shirts, jeans, sneakers and athleisure wear. The participants in the focus groups were no exception. It would have been very difficult to determine the ethnic origin of most of the participants just by their appearance without the list of names. No audible influence of the Indian languages, be it pronunciation, syntax or vocabulary, nor any mention of their use was noted during the discussions. Side-talk between themselves was in Kreol.

The statistics also show a notable change in attitude towards the two local link languages, Kreol, which is now the official designation of Mauritian/Île de France Creole, and Bhojpuri, which has impacted on the positioning of all the other languages currently in use in some way or form in Mauritius. Up to the 1983 Census, Bhojpuri was considered a variant of Hindi and thus counted as Hindi, especially as many



Bhojpuri speakers did not even know the name of their language and would just say that they were speaking Indian, which resulted in an inflated view of the importance of Hindi in the country (Stein, 1982). The ensuing correction to the relative positioning of the Indian languages brings to light another aspect of multilingualism that requires attention, the number of people using just the two local link languages, both of which at the time were only used orally, in the conduct of their daily lives. In 1983 that amounted to 554,739 speakers for Kreol and 197,076 for Bhojpuri, that is just over 55% and 18% respectively, in other words, 751,815 respondents, 73%, of the total population of 1,000,432. This basic reality in language use in the country has had and continues to have enormous consequences on not just the acquisition of the two global languages of wider communication, English and French, but also the overall level of academic achievement and employment readiness attained by the student population.

The linguistic complexity that the statistics convey has since decanted somewhat in favour of the major local link language, Kreol. Bhojpuri has been affected by the overall decline in the use of the Indian languages discussed earlier, with a particularly sharp fall, again mainly for generational reasons, from 142,387, to 65,289 respondents, 12% to 5%, in just over a decade, 2000-2011. Kreol has become *de facto* the national language, with 88% of the respondents to the 2011 Census naming it as their usually spoken language. Mauritians would appear to have overcome at long last their reticence to recognise the language born of the harsh reality of master/slave relationship as being the language that truly expresses their identity and reality. The attitudes displayed by the participants in the focus groups were indicative of the young generation that they represented. They had no problems in saying that they use Kreol for everything meaningful in their lives, and that both English and French are for business and official occasions, with a preference for English when it comes to education, IT and technical matters.

## 7.6 The legal and administrative status of English

The detailed legal status of English and all the other languages in current use in Mauritius is not set out in a single explicit dedicated statement. The main references as to the legal precedence of English are required by the nature of the activity in question. The text which serves as the statement of the official language of Mauritius is found in Chapter V of the Constitution, *Parliament*, Part II *Legislation and Procedure in National Assembly*, Section 49 *Official Language*, which says: “*The official language of the Assembly shall be English, but any member may address the chair in French*”. This is usually taken to mean that the official language of the country is English as in the following statement on the Government website in its section *Explore Mauritius: People and Geography: Language*: “*English is the official language. French is extensively used, and Creole is widely spoken. Asian languages also form part of the linguistic mosaic*”.

The Constitution also stipulates in Chapter V, Part I *The National Assembly*, Section 33 *Qualifications for Membership*, Subsection (d) that to be qualified for election as a member of the Assembly a person “*is able to speak and, unless incapacitated by blindness or other physical cause, to read the English language with a degree of proficiency sufficient to enable him to take an active part in the proceedings of the Assembly.*”

The Local Government Act (2011) has a matching language requirement, with an important modification, in Part II *Local Authorities*, Sub-Part B: *Qualifications and Disqualifications as Councillor*, Section 15 *Qualifications for election as Councillor*, which stipulates: “[...] *a person shall be qualified to be elected as a Councillor where he is [...] (b) able to speak and, unless incapacitated by blindness or other physical cause, to read the English and French languages with a degree of proficiency sufficient to enable him to take an active part in the proceedings of the respective Council.*” At the level of national government, English takes precedence over French while at the local level, which goes down to the village councils, English and French are on the same footing.

The judiciary presents a similar approach of accommodation with Mauritius’s dual colonial past, not for reasons of nostalgia but for reasons of continuity and stability. As shown in Chapter 5, the two major transitions in the country’s history, from French rule to British rule in 1810 and then from colony to independence in 1968, were relatively peaceful affairs in that they did not provoke any domestic conflagration or rebellion that would have caused a complete rupture with all previous practice. As discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.3, the 1810 Act of Capitulation in fact set the tone for the future management of the colony and is key to understanding the country’s unique relationship to its dual colonial linguistic heritage. The entire text was drawn up like a table in two parallel columns, French on the left and English on the right, as shown by the extract concerning the civil rights of the French settlers taken from a collection of facsimiles of constitutional documents published during the decade of constitutional reform leading up to independence (Napal, 1962, p.80) and reproduced in Table 7.3 below.

**Table 7.3: Extract from the 1810 Act of Capitulation**

| Article 8 <sup>th</sup>  | Article 8 <sup>th</sup>  |
|--|--|
| Que les habitans conserveront leurs Religion, Loix, et Coutumes. | The inhabitants shall preserve their Religion, Laws and Customs. |

The term *coutumes*, translated as *customs*, was taken to mean above all the retention of their language, French. The resulting mix of the French legal codes promulgated by the last French Governor, General Decaen, and thus still in force at the time of the Capitulation, namely the *Code Civil Mauricien* (1808), *Code de Procédure Civile* (1808) and *Code de Commerce* (1809), and the subsequent statutes based on English common law have produced an “*interesting amalgam*” that becomes an “*operative reality*” that is “*not a confused patchwork but an entity with a unity and a character all its own*” thanks to the professional cohesion existing between the barristers, attorneys, notaries and judges (Angelo, 1970, pp.228-229). Anyone wishing to take up legal practice in Mauritius, be it as a barrister, attorney or notary, must complete the required training in English and French depending on the laws being studied, either abroad or in Mauritius, with a period of pupillage as laid down by the 1984 Law Practitioners Act. Moreover, the 1974 Interpretation and General Clauses Act, Section 10, explicitly

accommodates the continued use of French terms as and when necessary, including the provision that *“the interpretation of the enactment shall be in accordance with that of the French term or expression”* (Glover, 2018).

The two texts that govern court procedures, namely the Constitution and the 1945 Courts Act, also make provisions to position English as the prime language of proceedings while accommodating the ever-present linguistic plurality. Section 14 of the Constitution states: *“(1) The official language to be used in the Supreme Court of Mauritius shall be English”, and “(2) Where a person appearing before the Court satisfies the Court that he does not possess a competent knowledge of the English language, he may give his evidence or make any statement in the language with which he is best acquainted.”*

Section 57 of the Constitution concerning jury service stipulates that jurors should know English and that any person who made an oath or affirmation that he is not sufficiently acquainted with the English language to serve as juror should not be included in the Jury Book, that is the list of persons registered to be jurors.

In the Courts Act, Section 131 makes three provisions: *“(1) The language to be used in the Intermediate Court or in any District Court shall be English, but any person may address the Court in French; (2) Where any person who is required to give evidence, satisfies the Court that he does not possess a competent knowledge of English or French, he may give his evidence in the language with which he is best acquainted; and (3) Where any person gives evidence in a language other than English or French, the proceedings shall, if the Court so directs, be translated.”*

These texts embody the prime institutional role of English in Mauritius, as discussed in Chapter 2 with respect to the Kachru Three-Circle model. However, the introduction of English into the practice of the colony’s affairs did not happen overnight and was even met with some vigorous opposition particularly with respect to the conduct of legal proceedings. Among other things, the rather tense relations between the new colonial administration and the descendants of the original French colons required

careful handling as discussed in Chapter 5. So, it was not until 1831, some twenty years after the capitulation, that the Colonial Office in London issued explicit instructions as to the format and language to be used in all official correspondence. The first missive simply requested that all official texts written in French should be accompanied by a translation in English done by a competent person, the reason being that however well a person may master the spoken conversational version of a foreign language, fully understanding the more specialised technical usage peculiar to legal documents required a much higher level of proficiency. As Toussaint (1969) remarks in his account of the linguistic vicissitudes of the British colonial administration in Mauritius, this was a logical request in the interests of judicial accuracy and fairness. In 1847 the exclusive use of the English language in the Supreme Court was ordained by an Order in Council (d'Unienville, 2009). Moreover, the whole issue of the extent to which English should become the sole language to be used in official correspondence and documents depended also very largely on the personal convictions of the incumbent Governor. They ranged from unconditional proponents of anglicising the whole administration to a laissez-faire attitude that considered the exclusive use of English in the Supreme Court tempered by English and French co-existing in other domains of the administration as being the most appropriate way of handling Mauritian affairs. In the end, the more tempered approach prevailed (Toussaint, 1969). In 1891, the enactment of an Ordinance *"To dispense with the translation into English of evidence given by witnesses in certain cases before the Supreme Court"* opened the way to the use of other languages in legal proceedings as stipulated in the Constitution and the other modern-day laws cited above, thus ensuring in particular the appropriate use of French and Kreol, as being the languages understood by all. (d'Unienville, 2009). This systematic endeavour to respect the original undertaking of the 1810 Act of Capitulation leads us to question the oft-expressed view in support of the supposedly neutral role of English in post-colonial administrations that allows all and sundry to conduct their affairs equitably without any underlying communal bias or emotional charge. The Mauritian experience in handling the country's multicultural identity clearly shows the need for legal and administrative systems that encapsulate its hybrid linguistic reality, the inclusion factor at work again.

## 7.7 English in daily life

English is present in all the administrative forms that need to be filled in to be counted as a bona fide member of the Mauritian population and enjoy the benefits of the welfare state. It is present in all the official announcements and notices published in the local press and the notices pinned up on the boards in the various government offices, hospitals, police stations, community centres and so on, though the latter are often accompanied by hand-written notes in French and increasingly in Kreol that some practical public officer has put up to make sure that the population knows exactly what is required before they start queuing up. It can be accompanied by French, for instance in the Census instructions and forms, or by French, Hindi and more recently Kreol for the cyclone warning bulletins read out on the TV and radio. It is present in the place and street names, and road and traffic signs. Yet very rarely if ever do you hear Mauritians speaking English between themselves for the conduct of their daily business, be it in the supermarkets, shopping malls or the street. The best example that every visitor to Mauritius experiences is the arrival at the airport. The ground staff, tourist agency representatives and taxi drivers will speak in English to the visitor whom they have identified as being English-speaking and yet immediately switch to French or Kreol when talking to a colleague, even if the poor visitor is still in front of them. This can be quite disconcerting for the monolingual English speaker or the visitor who uses English as their second language and knows no French, not an ideal customer service situation. It is, however, not a new situation as several accounts by English-speaking visitors to Mauritius over the years attest (Beaton, 1859; Pike, 1873; Malim, 1953; Durrell, 1977, Schnepel, 2011).

The lack of a sizeable permanent English-speaking section of the population, as explained in Chapter 5, Section 5.5, coupled with the continued strong presence of French, has been a determining factor in the reduced presence of English in everyday discourse, which the statistics have repeatedly confirmed beyond doubt.

## 7.8 English in the media

The other major area of interest with respect to language use is the media, that is, the printed press, radio, television, cinema and their online equivalents. The printed press sector is dominated by two big media houses, *La Sentinelle Ltd*, founded in 1963, and *Le Défi Media Group*, founded in 1996, and a smaller one, *Le Mauricien Ltée*, founded in 1908. As their names suggest, French is their primary language, with the oldest one, *Le Mauricien*, being entirely in French. Over the years their close links with the Mauritian corporate world have been strengthened through the continued substantial financial backing that has enabled the two big ones to extend their activities into pre-press, printing, publication, distribution, events management and billboard advertisements (Chan-Meetoo, 2018). All three have built up a considerable online presence through their dedicated websites, while the big two have also radio and web TV channels ([www.lasentinelle.mu](http://www.lasentinelle.mu) ; <https://defimedia.info/> ; [www.lemauricien.com](http://www.lemauricien.com) ). The biggest one, *La Sentinelle*, with a keener eye towards its English-speaking corporate readers at home and abroad, has increased the amount that it publishes in English, going beyond the usual reprinting of articles published by the international press agencies such as Reuters in its daily edition, *L'Express*, to publishing in English a weekly current affairs magazine called simply *Weekly* and annual compendiums on the business world, such as *The Top 100 Companies*, *The Directory of Financial Institutions*, *Business Leaders* and *Directory of Education and Career*. Its flagship weekly magazine for business, *Business Magazine*, remains mainly in French, but does now publish interviews of English-speaking personalities in English, whereas before the published text would be a French translation of variable accuracy peppered with quotations of the original English conversation. Its website is bilingual English/French. The only newspaper linked to the Indian community is the *Mauritius Times*, founded in 1954, a much smaller operation that continues to publish a weekly print version and has also built up a lively online presence through its website, <http://www.mauritiustimes.com> . As its name suggests, its main language is English, but it does also publish articles and interviews in French.

Up until the advent of satellite communications in the 1990s, radio and television services were provided solely by the national broadcaster, Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation (MBC). Airtime was strictly allocated based on fair representation of the various languages in common use, with French and Hindi having the lion's share. English was largely confined to the weekly English film on Sunday evenings and some major international sporting events, particularly English football, relayed live or deferred. American and British serials would be shown in the dubbed French version (Baker, 1972). Since the 1990s, although the two major suppliers of paid satellite television packages are French, namely Canal Plus and Parabole, the amount of original English programmes has greatly increased as they offer major news channels, such as BBC News, CNN and Bloomberg, together with showing the original English version of most of the American and British films in addition to the French dubbed version. Information technology has broadened the choice of programmes and languages even further, with YouTube, Netflix and other online streaming services. The same progression has been noted with respect to the cinema. For as long as the films were projected from reels, only the French dubbed version would be available. With the new computer-based projection equipment, the original English version is also on offer, however usually at the rather inconvenient time of 18:00, to keep the prime screening time of 19:30 or later for the cinema-goers who still prefer to watch the French version, that is, most people.

## **7.9 English use in the business sector**

The pragmatic reality of the small island developing states (SIDS) such as Mauritius of the need to survive at all costs by keeping all options open (Baldacchino, 2014) has considerably tempered the post-colonial discourse on the need to replace the ex-colonial languages by the indigenous languages of the newly independent states, particularly in the sub-Saharan region, to foster the inclusion of all the components of the population in the subsequent nation-building process and economic development (Rassool, 2007). Thus, in the case of Mauritius, the other main reason for the continued predominance of English in the running of the country's affairs is the need to communicate with its international customers, suppliers and other stakeholders either directly or through the various



predominately English-speaking regional and international networks, membership of which is essential to maintaining a meaningful presence on the world stage, the UN System, the Commonwealth, the African Union and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to name but four of the most important for Mauritius. As mentioned earlier, the post-independence legal framework is based on Anglo-Saxon common law and case practice and aligned on international practice. It is performed expressed in English. Thus, all official documents published by companies incorporated in Mauritius are in English, even those coming from the sector with the closest links to the French language, sugar, such as official prospectuses for incorporation, annual reports and financial statements, and minutes of shareholder and board meetings. Corporate websites are either English or bilingual English/French in that order. This means that prospective foreign investors from the main global markets can easily decide whether Mauritian firms comply with international regulations. On the other hand, how much a company uses English in the course of its daily activities and exchanges with its employees, customers, suppliers and other stakeholders all depends on the sector in which it operates.

#### **7.10 The language of instruction**

The current policy concerning the language of instruction was laid down in the 1957 Education Ordinance, First Schedule, Regulation 43 (pp34-35), which reprised the provision made under the 1944 Education Ordinance. Regulation 43 (pages 34-35), which concerns all Government and aided primary schools, stipulates: (1) in the early years, up to Standard III, *“any one language may be employed as the medium of instruction, being a language which in the opinion of the Minister is most suitable for the pupils”*; (2) in the remaining 3 years, Standards IV, V and VI, *“the medium of instruction shall be English, and conversations between teachers and pupils shall be carried on in English: provided that lessons in any other language taught in the school shall be carried on through the medium of that language”*; and (3) provision may be made for the teaching and study of languages other than English which are current in Mauritius.

Given that the national examinations at the end of Form V and Form VI were, and still are, respectively the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (SC) and Higher School Certificate (HSC), there is no special mention of the language of instruction for secondary education for the Government and aided schools. It is *de facto* English. Furthermore, the Education Act, 1957, Section 3, *Powers and duties of Minister*, sub-paragraph 2(d) stipulates that “*he shall ensure the more effective teaching of English and the spread of the English Language in Mauritius*”.

As with the laws concerning the use of English in the judiciary discussed earlier in the chapter, the primacy of English is thus asserted, while accommodating the multilingual reality of the Mauritian child. This came after a century of hesitant anglicisation on the part of the British colonial administration and sustained efforts on the part of the defenders of all things French, to which the question of the status of the Indian languages in education added another complication (Ramdoyal, 1977). At the very least, the 1957 Ordinance gave a much-needed regulatory framework within which the diplomatically flexible notion of “*most suitable language*” has allowed all parties to find some space.

### **7.11 Cultural preservation, economic needs and social aspirations**

For the Franco-Mauritians, the defence of their cultural and linguistic heritage remained a major preoccupation throughout the 1940s and 1950s as witnessed by de Sornay’s vibrant newspaper articles later published as a collection in 1959, under the title of *Défense de notre Patrimoine (In Defence of our Heritage)*. Eventually, by opening private fee-paying French-medium schools that follow the French curriculum from primary to secondary leading to the Baccalauréat, and are duly registered with the French authority for French education overseas (AEFE *Agence pour l’enseignement français à l’étranger*), of which there are now five, the Franco-Mauritians found their own solution to their problem, as nearly all of their children are educated there. These schools are open to any Mauritian child provided their parents can pay the fees (Ambassade de France, 2019).

At the same time, as their standard of living improved, the Indians became more concerned about giving their children, particularly the boys, an education that opened opportunities for better paid jobs and more prestige, such as entering the Government service. At first, they felt alienated by the exclusion of their languages and culture from the government and aided schools. Thus, the various cultural-socio-religious associations linked to the temples and mosques started individually to provide some form of vernacular education. However, government attempts to set up vernacular schools were not pursued, not just because of low attendance, but also due to the gradual realisation that such schools would favour segregation between the Creoles, that is the ex-slaves and coloureds, and the Indians which would have been most detrimental to social harmony, given that most of the Indians chose remain at the end of their indenture (Ramdoyal, 1977). Moreover, the Indians themselves eventually preferred the western style of education given in the government schools as being necessary for getting a Government job and so leaving the fields for good. Thus, the aspirational role of education took precedence over cultural preservation. However, by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the struggle for universal suffrage and independence began, the various Indo-Mauritian leaders campaigned successfully for the recognition of Oriental languages and culture within the formal school curriculum, hence the provision for the teaching of other languages under Regulation 43(3) in the 1957 Ordinance (Ramdoyal, 1977).

At the same time, several leading Indo-Mauritians took up the defence of English. While acknowledging the importance of a multilingual education policy in Mauritius, in which oriental languages should be examinable subjects, they advocated that the primacy of English and French should be maintained as they were two compulsory languages for the final examination of the primary curriculum and for the English scholarship. With respect to the secondary school curriculum, they argued that more attention should be given to English, as it was not only the language of the Commonwealth, but also a language that was becoming more universal, and therefore that English should remain the language of instruction (Hazareesingh, 1979). Others felt that English should be the prime compulsory language in education on the grounds of equal competition for all since English was not the home language of any Mauritian (Roy, 1960), a paradoxical situation which prompted the oft-quoted comment by Benedict

(1958) that if Creole could be said to be unifying because nearly everyone spoke it and yet no one wanted to, English could be said to be unifying because hardly anyone spoke it, and yet nearly everyone wanted to. As the analysis of the statistics for language earlier in this chapter has shown, in Mauritius today Kreol has at last been recognised as the primary language of Mauritian homes, while the position of English as an extraneous language with specific formal functions has been confirmed.

Baker (1972) noted how in the early post-independence years the different languages had become associated with specific functions and values, English with knowledge, French with culture, Kreol with egalitarianism and the Oriental languages with ancestral heritage, and were thus used as appropriate to the circumstances. Yet, nearly 15 years after the introduction of free secondary and tertiary education, when Mauritius was starting to promote the bilingualism of its workforce as a strong selling point for its nascent offshore banking and business centre, the forerunner to its global business activities, Eriksen (1990, p.4) made the following sobering observation with respect to the proficiency in the two international languages composing this bilingualism:

*The language situation in Mauritius is much more complex than in virtually any African or Asian country. The official language is English, but it is as a rule poorly learnt and rarely spoken except on formal occasions. French is by far the most widespread European language in Mauritius. Most Mauritians speak it, many very well, and it is almost invariably the first language in which one acquires literacy. [...] However, English is a language many Mauritians wish to master.*

More recently, Eisenlohr (2006, p.83) reports on the linguistic juxtaposition of two distinct realms of human activity as described by one of his Hindu informants, a school inspector: “*We learn French and English for our material development and Hindi for our spiritual development.*” Both Hymes’s functional relativity in language use and Spolsky’s notion of individual language practices and beliefs are manifest here. However, while this seemingly rational division of roles in language use may seem quite acceptable to an adult, especially one involved in education as is this informant, it does not diminish the basic reality of the continuing heavy intellectual burden placed on young children from the very

start of their journey through primary school caused by having to learn and cope with two, if not three, languages having no tangible link with their home environment, which Sonck (2005) underlines.

## 7.12 Managing multilingualism in schools

Therefore, the issue is not whether Mauritian children should learn several languages at school but how this learning should be organised. Both the 1944 and 1957 Ordinances gave no guidance about the order in which the various languages should be introduced. The general interpretation was, and still is, all at the same time, that is, on starting primary school at 5 years old. All Mauritian children are thus confronted with English and French from Day 1, as well as an optional language chosen from Arabic, Hindi, Marathi, Modern Chinese, Urdu, Tamil and Telegu, none of which are the children's home language, as shown by the statistics presented in Section 7.4 of this chapter. Under the former CPE evaluation, the optional language counted for the award of the CPE, but not the ranking, despite much lobbying by various interested socio-cultural-religious associations. Although the regulations have never stipulated that the choice of optional language was conditional on a child's ethnic origin, in practice the whole thrust of the various lobbies was the preservation of ancestral cultures and so a Hindu child would choose Hindi, a Muslim child Urdu, or more recently Arabic, and so on. Kreol was added in 2012 and was examined for the first time in 2017 under the NYCBE framework. When one considers the participation statistics and pass rates for the CPE examinations, one notes the considerable presence of the Oriental/Asiatic languages. The latest detailed figures available are for 2015, the last but one year of the CPE examination, as shown in Table 7.3 below.

| Language                    | English | French | Hindi | Marathi | Tamil | Telegu | Arabic | Urdu  | Modern Chinese |
|-----------------------------|---------|--------|-------|---------|-------|--------|--------|-------|----------------|
| <b>Number of candidates</b> | 20426   | 20411  | 6615  | 197     | 892   | 270    | 1028   | 1627  | 122            |
| <b>Percentage pass</b>      | 73.04   | 78.67  | 66.89 | 70.56   | 73.09 | 85.93  | 72.46  | 69.33 | 70.49          |

**Table 7.4: Number of candidates per language for the 2015 CPE examination**  
**Source: Mauritius Examinations Syndicate (MES)**

The number of children enrolled Grade 6 (Standard 6) in the government and aided primary schools for 2015 was 19,141. The discrepancy between the overall enrolment figure and the figures for the two compulsory languages, English and French, is due to the participation of repeat candidates who needed to take just one subject again to be awarded the CPE. The total number of children taking an optional third language was 10,751, that is, 56% of the Standard VI candidates, and equal to 52% of the total number taking English. If one adds 26% to represent the non-white General Population who would not be taking any optional language, only 18% of the Asiatic population does not take a third language.

|            | 2006  | 2007  | 2008  | 2009  | 2010  | 2011  | 2012  | 2013  | 2014  | 2015  | 2016  |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| English    | 76.70 | 76.40 | 76.62 | 74.74 | 76.48 | 72.51 | 73.14 | 73.45 | 73.73 | 73.04 | 77.58 |
| French     | 77.70 | 73.30 | 75.31 | 76.86 | 76.62 | 76.27 | 78.59 | 78.35 | 77.43 | 78.67 | 76.61 |
| Difference | 1.00  | 3.1   | 1.31  | 2.12  | 0.14  | 3.76  | 5.45  | 4.90  | 3.70  | 5.63  | 0.97  |

**Table 7.5: Percentage pass rates for English and French in CPE examination 2006-2016**

**Source: Mauritius Examinations Syndicate (MES)**

When one considers the pass rates for English and French for the period 2006—2015, one notes that failure rate for English fluctuates between 22% and 28%, averaging at 25%, while for French it ranges from 21% to 27%, averaging at 24%, and that the difference is mostly in favour of French. However, for both languages be it the language of instruction, English, or the more familiar European language, French, the figures are cause for concern with respect to future performance at secondary level and beyond.

Since the implementation of the Regulations attached to the 1957 Education Ordinance concerning language instruction, both social commentators and technical analyses and reports have repeatedly commented on the effects of the language burden on Mauritian primary-school children, without any effective solution being found. Benedict (1958) preferred just to tactfully point out the inordinate amount of teaching time consumed by language instruction. Meade (1961a) considered that the multiplicity of languages in use was the greatest handicap to successful education in Mauritius. Irrespective of the arguments for preserving the children's cultural heritage, Meade could not accept

a system that required children aged 7 and 8 to learn three languages at once from teachers who themselves did not master the languages enough with the result that many of them left school without acquiring literacy in any one language, despite having spent “*an intolerable amount of time dabbling in all three*” (op.cit, p.209). Ramdoyal (1977, p. 139) concurs: “*Starting three foreign languages at the same time at age five places an enormous burden on the child. For many children this has led to poor standards in oracy and to functional illiteracy in English.*” The 1979 Richard Report, *Laying the Foundations*, on primary education in Mauritius, considered that, although 58% of class-time was taken up with language study, not only was language badly taught, and too many languages taught at the same time, but also the children had no time to master the mechanics of reading while teachers were in too great a hurry to start reading and did not devote enough time to oral acquisition. The more recent CPE results analysed earlier in Chapter 6, Section 6.4, indicate that the situation has not improved very much in the intervening 40 years. However, the literacy rate for the resident population of 10 years and above is more optimistic, having risen from 85% in the 2000 Housing and Population Census to 89.8% for the 2011 Census (MOED, 2017). In answer to the question *Languages read and written* for the 2011 Census, 59% answered European, 24% European and Oriental, 3% Kreol only and 2% Oriental only. The influence of formal schooling is clearly shown, but how many Mauritians have a sufficiently high level of functional literacy in English and French to contend with the knowledge-based and IT enabled activities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century remains open to question.

Yet, once the pupils have successfully got through the CPE, they manage to achieve encouraging results in the SC and HSC examinations. The results for the standard syllabus for Mauritius (Code 1125) of the compulsory English Language examination show a pass rate of 88.4% for both 2017 (17,635 candidates) and 2018 (17557 candidates). For the HSC, the pass rate for 2018 for the compulsory General Paper, which tests candidates on “*their understanding and use of English, and the extent to which they are able to think maturely as appropriate for this level*” but “*not primarily on their general knowledge*” (Cambridge, 2015, p.6), was 91.6% for 10,218 candidates.

On the other hand, the 2017 HRDC survey on skills in the ICT sector considers that there is room for improvement, as shown in Table 7.5 below. Unfortunately, the report did not disaggregate English and French, nor define clearly what was meant by basic literacy for each of the three levels of recruitment.

|                | Fully satisfied (%) | Neither satisfied<br>nor dissatisfied (%) | Not satisfied at all<br>(%) |
|----------------|---------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| School leavers | 32                  | 59  | 9                           |
| TVET*          | 39                  | 56  | 6                           |
| Graduates      | 56                  | 38  | 7                           |

**Table 7.6: Enterprise satisfaction with the basic literacy and use of English and French**

**Source: HRDC Skills Study Report for the ICT Sector**

\* Technical and Vocational Education and Training

### 7.13 The home language as medium of instruction

As the preceding discussion has shown, multilingualism in Mauritius is both the product of its multicultural roots as a settler colony and a powerful expression of the principle of inclusion of the diverse components of its population. Any attempt at changing the status quo is liable to be interpreted as going counter to this principle, as a sort of proxy for an outright power grab in the running of the country's affairs by one component of the population over the others. Thus, the 1997 White Paper on educational reform at pre-primary, primary and secondary levels conceded that language policy was *"a very sensitive and very controversial issue [arousing] considerable passion and emotion"* which should be addressed urgently in an honest and sincere manner and for which a national consensus was needed. The Paper proposed *"to update existing studies to establish whether some flexibility in the medium of instruction at classroom level was needed and to what extent the present approach to languages needs to be revised to live up to the national aspirations"* (MOED, 1997, p.29). The interesting point here is the acknowledgement that the language issue concerns all levels of the system. Unfortunately, this was yet another attempt to modernise the system thwarted by parental and teacher opposition. Parsuramen, who was Minister of Education from 1984 to 1996, also mentions the lack of consensus which led to the choice of *"middle of the road policies in a spirit of compromise, rather than a policy based on sound pedagogical and social considerations"* (Parsuramen,



2001, p.49). He then underlines how the political dimension overrode the pedagogical dimension in the *struggle to place the ancestral languages on the same footing as English and French*” (Parsuramen, 2001, p.49). Since then, the language issue has taken the back place in subsequent educational reforms as if the general consensus is to let the situation evolve naturally, even if it means a continuing sizeable number of children not being able to reach the higher levels of academic or technical education.

However, some twenty years later, Mauritius can no longer ignore the issue if the country is to successfully meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> knowledge-based networked global economy as discussed in Chapter 2, *Theoretical Framework*. The statistics presented earlier in this chapter show beyond doubt that Mauritians have at last acknowledged Kreol as being their national home language, and that both English and French are languages functioning outside the home environment. Thus, advice about scaffolding language learning in Grade 1 while respecting multicultural practices such as given in the 2014 Foundation Year Programme is a step in the right direction:

*Equally, in keeping with the multicultural practices in Mauritius, instructions to the young learners are given in both English and French, while it is also recommended for teachers to start a number of activities in the mother tongue of the learners as a scaffolding for the learning of the second languages. (MOED, 2014, p.32)*

The continued resistance to the recognition of Kreol as an official national language is due to deep prejudices rooted in its origins as the lingua franca between master and slave. It is seen as a low status language linked to the Creole ethnic group, that is, the slave descendants, a poor, context-bound idiom, incapable of expressing abstract concepts. In this view, its wider official use would threaten the use of English and French and so reinforce Mauritius’s isolation in the international community (Eriksen, 1990 and 1999). More recent studies on language choice and use in education by Rajah-Carrim (2007) and Sauzier Uchida (2009) have confirmed the continued negative perception of Kreol, despite the fact that it is used daily in both primary and secondary classes as a support language to ensure that the pupils have understood the lesson. Given the excessively competitive nature of the

Mauritian education system. Mauritian parents display the same linguistic preference for the perceived 'strong' languages as their counterparts in sub-Saharan Africa as well as the misconception that the best way to learn these 'strong' languages is by having them as languages of instruction or at least taught as a compulsory subject, as discussed earlier in Chapter 3, *Literature Review*, Section 3.2.

In 2012 Kreol was introduced into the primary curriculum at Grade 1 in the group of optional languages and thus will be taught up to Grade 9 under the NYCBE framework. Its introduction culminated a long period of academic research by Virahsawmy (1967), Baker (1982), Stein (1982) and Hookoomsing (1987), to name but a few of the pioneers in the field, and private initiatives, notably Ledikasyon pu Travayer (LPT) (*Education for Workers*), to give full recognition to this truly Mauritian language, that started in the post-independence agitation of the 1970s, to which various artists, poets, singers and writers have added their contribution over the years. It is important to note, as does Rajah-Carrim (2007), that, contrary to popular belief, no-one suggested replacing English and French entirely. Even in those pre-globalisation days, everyone was fully aware that Mauritius needed to communicate with the outside world as seen in Chapter 5. In 1985, Ledikasyon pu Travayer published the first bilingual Kreol/English dictionary, in 1987, Baker and Hookoomsing published the first trilingual Kreol/English/French dictionary and in 2009, Carpooran published the first monolingual dictionary in Kreol. In 2011, the Akademi Kreol Morisien, a dedicated Technical Committee set up in 2010 under the aegis of the Ministry of Education, published the necessary teaching supports in preparation for the introduction in the primary curriculum in the school year 2012, the official grammar and orthography, thus ending all arguments that Kreol lacked proper structure and spelling. The next step, full recognition as an official language and language of instruction will come in due course. In the meantime, the Minister who had overseen the introduction of Kreol as a subject stated in the National Assembly in response to a Parliamentary Question on 30 March 2010 that "*Kreol Morisien can be used as a support language to facilitate teaching and learning at all levels, whether at primary and secondary school*" (MOED, PQs, p.4). Mauritius is well on the way to respecting paragraph 13 of the Mauritius Communiqué of the 18<sup>th</sup> CCEM of 2012 whereby the Ministers acknowledged the benefits

of using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction and of learning English as a language for communication, as discussed in the Literature Review, Chapter 3, Section 3.6.

A report published in 2014 by the British Council on the growing global phenomenon of English as a medium of instruction mentions that the British Council office in Mauritius was one of the 55 respondents out of a targeted 60 countries. However, beyond a short, rather laconic quote to the effect that public opinion is in favour of keeping English as a medium of instruction (EMI) no other information about the situation in Mauritius is given (Dearden, 2014). On enquiring with the current team at the British Council office in Mauritius, unfortunately no explanation could be found for this lack of attention given to what is an interestingly complex and possibly unique language situation in that both former colonial languages are still very much present, in different ways, in the country, and more particularly in its education system. Moreover, there does not seem to have been any follow-up to the report, although it is described as being an initial study. This is possibly a missed opportunity to benchmark Mauritius's experience in EMI with other countries with similar historical ties with English.

#### **7.14 Conclusion**

The country's multilingual situation continues to evolve as a pragmatic coexistence and sharing of roles between Kreol, the Mauritian link language par excellence, and the two former colonial languages, French and English, both of which have distinct and yet complementary roles to play in modern Mauritius, with space for the heritage languages to continue their role of transmitting the ancestral cultures to the future generations. In covering the presence and use of English in Mauritius from the time of the British colony to the present day, this chapter has shown that the identification of English as a colonial language which should be replaced by a language more in tune with the country's culture has never been a real issue for concern. On the contrary, English has retained its primacy as the official administrative language in Mauritius in both the public and private sectors, and thus exercises much pragmatic power as defined by Kachru (1996) in both the everyday administration of the country's affairs and its ongoing economic development.

In their daily life, Mauritians display the deft handling of their language repertoire to suit their cultural, emotional, functional and identity needs that is typical of multilinguals the world over. With respect to their use of English, Mauritians who have completed their secondary education to at least School Certificate/GCE 'O' Level, such as the young people employed in the ICT-BPO sector, come in Graddol's second language (L2) category of speakers (1997). However, in line with Crystal's (2003) and Ostler's (2005) observations, their relationship with English is functional, not emotional. As the statistics have shown, Kreol is the language of the Mauritian home and heart. Another important development in the workings of this multilingual landscape is the change in attitude and relationship towards the heritage languages of the Indian sub-continent and Asia. The younger generations who were born in the 1980s and later relate to these languages in a less nostalgic manner and see them as expressions of their present cultural background through the fashion, films and music relayed on the social media.

Furthermore, the discussion concerning the language of instruction has shown that the position of English as the primary language of instruction has never been seriously questioned. The education system has accommodated the need for the preservation of the heritage languages and is now addressing the issue of recognition and status of the primary home language, Kreol, while maintaining English as the language of formal educational attainment. The pragmatism of parents noted in Africa and India with respect to the choice of language for their children's education is equally prevalent in Mauritius for the same reasons, employment and social betterment.

The language issue of concern is whether, as L2 speakers, young professional Mauritians master English sufficiently to meet the specific communication requirements of the ICT-BPO platforms, that is the supra-territorial networks through which global business is conducted, as defined by Scholte (2002) and discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2. This concern will be addressed through the analysis of the field work in Chapter 8.

### 8.1 Introduction:

This chapter presents the final stage in the case study approach adopted for this thesis, the study of the “*spatially bound phenomenon*” (Gerring, 2004), namely the role and use of English in the ICT-BPO sector, which exemplifies the wider area of inquiry, the role and use of English in the emerging economy of Mauritius. Within this framework, the findings from the answers to the questionnaire, interviews and focus groups are presented and analysed. The research questions that this chapter addresses are:

- How do employers and employees perceive and experience English language use in the ICT-BPO sector of the Mauritian economy?
- What are the views of employers and employees on how effectively schools and higher education institutions prepare students to work in English?

The detailed presentation of the findings is thus organised under two main themes, the use of English in the ICT-BPO sector, Sections 8.2 and 8.3, and English language training, Sections 8.4 and 8.5, with a summary of the findings in Section 8.6, followed by the presentation of the three additional interviews carried out in July 2020 in Section 8.7, and finally discussion of the issues identified in Section 8.8.

### 8.2 English in the ICT-BPO sector: *the employer’s perspective*

This section brings together the information gained from the preliminary questionnaire and the interviews with senior executives. The analysis aims to identify the areas of agreement and shared opinions on the use of English in ICT-BPO sector, as well as the points of divergence.

### 8.2.1 The broad view: the results from the questionnaire

In addition to the contextual information about company activities, market orientation and employee profile, the answers to the questionnaire gave several interesting insights to the overall language use in the ICT-BPO sector.

#### 8.2.1.1 Company activities and main market orientation

The data concerning the activities, market orientation and employee numbers is presented in Tables 8.1, 8.2, 8.3 and 8.4 below which correspond to the first four questions of the questionnaire.

**Table 8.1: Question 1: IT-related activities and market orientation**

| Activity                              | Number of replies | Market orientation |    |      |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|----|------|
|                                       |                   | D*                 | E* | D+E* |
| Software development                  | 9                 | 1                  | 4  | 4    |
| Hardware sales                        | 7                 | 2                  | 1  | 4    |
| Back office operations                | 6                 | 0                  | 5  | 1    |
| Software sales                        | 5                 | 0                  | 2  | 3    |
| Business process outsourcing          | 4                 | 0                  | 3  | 1    |
| Networking/cabling                    | 4                 | 0                  | 2  | 2    |
| Call centre/telemarketing             | 2                 | 0                  | 2  | 0    |
| E-commerce                            | 2                 | 0                  | 2  | 0    |
| International telephony               | 2                 | 0                  | 2  | 0    |
| Telecom operator                      | 2                 | 0                  | 2  | 0    |
| Internet service provider             | 1                 | 0                  | 1  | 0    |
| Mobile telephony                      | 1                 | 0                  | 1  | 0    |
| Other: Security operations centre     | 1                 | 0                  | 0  | 1    |
| Web design and multimedia development | 1                 | 0                  | 0  | 1    |
| Web hosting                           | 1                 | 0                  | 0  | 1    |
| Digital broadcasting                  | 0                 | 0                  | 0  | 0    |

**\* Key:** D = domestic only; E = export only; D+E = domestic and export

The range of activities is essentially service-oriented with only two physical products offered, namely hardware and networking/cabling. Of the seven companies offering hardware and cabling, two are on the domestic market only, four are mixed-orientation exporting mainly to the African and Indian Ocean regions, and the last one is entirely export-oriented, with its sole markets being metropolitan France and the French overseas territory in the Indian Ocean, Reunion Island.

**Table 8.2: Question 2: Main market orientation**

| Market orientation                | Number of replies |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| Domestic Mauritian market only    | 3                 |
| Export-oriented only              | 7                 |
| Both domestic and export-oriented | 8                 |

**Table 8.3: Question 3: Countries with which Mauritian-based ICT-BPO companies do business**

| Region               | Country                  | Number of replies |
|----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Africa</b>        | Botswana                 | 2                 |
|                      | Ethiopia                 | 1                 |
|                      | Ghana                    | 2                 |
|                      | Kenya                    | 3                 |
|                      | Namibia                  | 1                 |
|                      | South Africa             | 3                 |
|                      | Tanzania                 | 2                 |
|                      | Uganda                   | 1                 |
|                      |                          |                   |
| <b>Indian Ocean</b>  | Comoros                  | 1                 |
|                      | France (Reunion Island)  | 2                 |
|                      | Madagascar               | 5                 |
|                      | Seychelles               | 4                 |
|                      |                          |                   |
| <b>Europe</b>        | France (metropolitan)    | 5                 |
|                      | Italy                    | 1                 |
|                      | Spain                    | 1                 |
|                      | United Kingdom           | 2                 |
|                      |                          |                   |
| <b>North America</b> | Canada                   | 2                 |
|                      | United States of America | 3                 |
|                      |                          |                   |
| <b>Asia</b>          | India                    | 1                 |
|                      | Pakistan                 | 0                 |
|                      |                          |                   |
| <b>Australasia</b>   | Australia                | 1                 |

**Table 8.4: Question 4: Number of employees**

|        |           |            |            |         |
|--------|-----------|------------|------------|---------|
| <50: 9 | 51-100: 1 | 101-200: 2 | 201-500: 2 | >500: 4 |
|--------|-----------|------------|------------|---------|

Overall, there is a clear link between company size in terms of employees (Table 8.4) and choice of market (Table 8.2), which in turn governs the choice of language for spoken and written activities. The three domestic-oriented companies each employ less than 50 employees, while the eight mixed orientation of domestic plus export count six respondents employing less than 50 employees, and one each for the 51-100 and the 101-200 categories. The seven purely export oriented companies split

between one respondent in the 101-200 category, two respondents in the 201-500 category and four in the over-500 category.

The markets for the mixed orientation group (Table 8.3) are essentially regional, that is, the South-West Indian Ocean islands, all members of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), and the English-speaking African countries, all members of the African Union (AU) and, except for Ethiopia, the Commonwealth. Several of these countries in both regions are also members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Furthermore, the coastal states come together in the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). Finally, Australia, another market for the mixed group, is a member of the Commonwealth and the IORA. The economic importance of the regional groupings as discussed in Chapter 2 *Theoretical Framework* is clear to see for the small and medium-sized companies. It is also important to note that, despite the importance of French in daily discourse in Mauritius, the French-speaking countries in Africa were not mentioned at all. The markets for the purely export-oriented group are the developed countries in the northern hemisphere, Canada, Europe, UK and USA, to which Mauritius is linked through the United Nations, the Commonwealth and the European Union, in addition to the historic ties dating from the colonial period. The importance of international networks is again evident, with the added strength that these larger companies are all operations incorporated in Mauritius but as part of a bigger international entity. Their markets are thus assured, provided they meet the performance standards of their respective international parent company.

#### **8.2.1.2 Employee profile**

The profile of employees focusses first on the level of educational qualification attained (Table 8.5) to ascertain the recruitment patterns and second on the number of companies employing English-speaking expatriate personnel (Table 8.6) and the posts that they hold (Table 8.7) to identify at which level of the organisation the expatriate personnel, if any, are present.



**Table 8.5: Question 5: Highest level of qualification held by each category of personnel**

|                             | Below<br>School<br>Certificate | School<br>Certificate | Higher School<br>Certificate/<br>Baccalauréat | Diploma | First<br>Degree<br>BA, BSc,<br>Licence | Masters<br>MA, MSc,<br>MBA,<br>Maîtrise or<br>higher | Professional:<br>(ACCA, CIMA,<br>ICSA) |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|---|---------|--|--|--|
| Directors/Senior Executives |                                |                       |   | 3       | 3                                      | 10   | 6                                      |
| Operation/middle managers   |                                |                       | 2   |         | 8                                      | 5  | 1                                      |
| Supervisors/Team Leaders    |                                | 1                     | 2   | 5       | 5                                      | 2  |  |
| Administrative/secretarial  |                                | 2                     | 8   | 5       | 3                                      |  |  |
| Telephonists/receptionists  | 1                              | 6                     | 8   | 2       |  |  |  |
| Technicians                 |                                | 2                     | 4   | 5       | 3                                      |  |  |
| Customer contact            |                                | 3                     | 7   | 3       | 1                                      |  |  |
| Call centre personnel       |                                | 1                     | 3   |         |  |  |  |
| In-house trainers           |                                |                       |   | 2       | 3                                      | 2  |  |
| Others: <i>IT Lead</i>      |                                |                       |   |         | 1                                      |  |  |

The employee profile that emerged from the answers to Question 5 on highest qualification showed several notable features. Most highly qualified staff, diploma and above, are found in the upper echelons of corporate hierarchy, that is, operational/middle management and above. The supervisory/team leading level has a wider range of qualifications from School Certificate (SC) to Masters, which is interesting given their key role of running the daily operations at ground level. The degree-holders among the supervisors are found in the mixed orientation and export-oriented firms. The technicians show a similar profile to that of the supervisors. The administrative posts, secretaries, telephonists and receptionists, are mainly in the middle range of Higher School Certificate (HSC), with a trend towards diploma and degree level among the secretaries, irrespective of the size or market orientation of the company. The customer contact and call centre personnel, in other words those posts requiring direct contact with the end-users of whatever product or service is being sold, tend also toward middle-level qualifications, again irrespective of the size or market orientation of the company. The companies employing inhouse trainers are all export-oriented, either partially or entirely, with 3 of the 7 respondents concerned having between 100 and 500 employees, another 3 with over 500 employees and just one small company of less than 50 employees.

**Table 8.6: Question 6: Number of companies employing English-speaking expatriate personnel**

|               |               |
|---------------|---------------|
| <b>Yes: 7</b> | <b>No: 11</b> |
|---------------|---------------|

**Table 8.7: Question 7: Post held by English-speaking expatriate personnel**

| <b>Post</b>                 | <b>N° of replies</b> | <b>N° of employees</b>    |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Directors/Senior Executives | 3                    | 1 + Not stated in 2 cases |
| Operation/middle managers   | 1                    | Not stated                |
| Supervisors/Team Leaders    | 3                    | 1+2+Not stated in 1 case  |
| Others: Consultants         | 1                    | 2                         |
| Software engineer           | 1                    | +/-10                     |

The number of English-speaking expatriate personnel is very low and found either at managerial level or in specialist functions. This means that most of the Mauritian employees have no immediate direct contact with an English-speaking colleague that would give them the opportunity to use English in a more relaxed and social register.

### **8.2.1.3 Use of international languages**

This section of the questionnaire aims first to identify which international languages are being used by ICT-BPO companies operating in Mauritius (Table 8.8) and second how much of their business is actually conducted in English (Table 8.9).

**Table 8.8: Question 8: International languages used by respondent companies in their business activities**

| <b>Language</b> | <b>Number of replies</b> |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| English         | 14                       |
| French          | 14                       |
| German          | 1                        |
| Italian         | 1                        |
| Mandarin        | 0                        |
| Russian         | 0                        |
| Spanish         | 1                        |

At first reading, English and French come equal, with 14 mentions each. However, when checked against the factors of size of business and main markets, the deciding factor is again market orientation. The three domestic-oriented firms all gave French, but only one gave English as well. The mixed orientation group all gave English, but two did not give French. In the export-oriented group,

one firm gave only English, as it does not work on the French-speaking markets at all, while conversely, the two French oriented firms gave only French, and the remaining four gave both.

**Table 8.9: Question 9: Amount of business is conducted in English**

| Business activity               | <10% | 10-25% | 26-50% | 51-75% | >75% |
|---------------------------------|------|--------|--------|--------|------|
| Face-to-face meetings           | 6    | 2      | 0      | 4      | 3    |
| Telephone contacts              | 6    | 2      | 1      | 4      | 3    |
| Audio conference                | 4    | 1      | 1      | 4      | 6    |
| Video conference                | 4    | 1      | 1      | 5      | 4    |
| Back office work and processing | 2    | 3      | 2      | 3      | 5    |
| Data capture                    | 2    | 2      | 0      | 3      | 6    |
| Brochures                       | 3    | 0      | 3      | 1      | 8    |
| E-mail                          | 2    | 0      | 1      | 3      | 11   |
| Fax                             | 3    | 0      | 0      | 2      | 9    |
| In-house magazines              | 3    | 1      | 1      | 1      | 6    |
| Letters                         | 2    | 1      | 0      | 2      | 11   |
| Memos                           | 2    | 1      | 0      | 4      | 10   |
| Minutes                         | 2    | 1      | 0      | 3      | 11   |
| Reports                         | 2    | 1      | 0      | 3      | 11   |
| Staff manuals                   | 2    | 1      | 0      | 2      | 10   |

The answers concerning the amount of business conducted in English were equally clear. All three market orientations, irrespective of the size of the individual companies, showed a majority using written English, that is email and other more formal documents, for more than 50% of their business. On the other hand, two of the companies that gave a low rating work exclusively on the French market, while the third is a small domestic-oriented company. Similarly, the choice of written language for more specialised technical uses, such as back office work and data processing, depends entirely on the target market. With respect to spoken English, that is, meetings, telephone contacts and audio and video conferences, except for the two firms working on the French market that obviously gave a low rating, the export-oriented firms gave ratings of over 50%, as did the three domestic-oriented firms. The mixed category firms gave ratings spread over the range, depending on their markets.

#### 8.2.1.4 Use of English by Mauritian employees

The questions in this section focus on the use of English by Mauritian employees, firstly among themselves in comparison to other languages commonly used in daily discourse (Table 8.10) and secondly in the course of their work with respect to spoken English (Table 8.11) and written English (Table 8.12).

**Table 8.10: Question 10: Languages used by Mauritian employees to communicate among themselves during their daily work by order of frequency from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating the most frequently used language**

| Language | Frequency of use by number of replies |    |   |   |
|----------|---------------------------------------|----|---|---|
|          | 1                                     | 2  | 3 | 4 |
| English  | 1                                     | 3  | 6 | 0 |
| French   | 4                                     | 11 | 2 | 0 |
| Kreol    | 13                                    | 3  | 0 | 0 |
| Hindi    | 0                                     | 0  | 0 | 1 |

The pragmatic, non-emotional choice of international language to suit market and formal legal requirements notwithstanding, the linguistic reality of daily discourse in Mauritius reasserts itself within the work teams, the more so, as noted earlier, the number of English-speaking expatriate personnel is far too low to have any real impact. The dominant position of Kreol, with French in second place and English a distant third place, is thus no surprise given the trends shown in the national statistics discussed in Chapter 7. Moreover, in the interviews and focus groups there was no mention of any policy requiring the exclusive use of the appropriate international language on the platforms, and thus forbidding the use of Kreol. It would have been anyway a lost cause, as shown by the research by Welch (2008) on the informal coping strategies to access critical information and knowledge set up by employees working under a common corporate language culture.

**Table 8.11: Question 11: Use of spoken English by Mauritian employees in their work**

|                             | Never | Not very often | Quite often | Often | Most of the time | Always |
|-----------------------------|-------|----------------|-------------|-------|------------------|--------|
| Directors/Senior Executives |       | 6              | 2           | 6     | 2                | 1      |
| Operation/middle managers   | 1     | 6              | 1           | 6     | 2                | 0      |
| Supervisors/Team Leaders    | 2     | 5              | 4           | 2     | 2                | 0      |
| Administrative/secretarial  | 0     | 7              | 4           | 4     | 1                | 0      |
| Telephonists/receptionists  | 1     | 8              | 3           | 3     | 1                | 0      |
| Technicians                 | 2     | 9              | 3           | 1     | 1                | 0      |
| Customer contact            | 1     | 7              | 1           | 2     | 2                | 1      |
| Call centre personnel       | 1     | 4              | 1           | 1     | 2                | 1      |
| In-house trainers           | 1     | 4              | 1           | 1     | 3                | 0      |

**Table 8.12: Question 12: Use of written English by Mauritian employees in their work**

|                             | Never | Not very often | Quite often | Often | Most of the time | Always |
|-----------------------------|-------|----------------|-------------|-------|------------------|--------|
| Directors/Senior Executives | 0     | 2              | 1           | 2     | 5                | 6      |
| Operation/middle managers   | 0     | 3              | 0           | 2     | 6                | 5      |
| Supervisors/Team Leaders    | 2     | 1              | 1           | 2     | 4                | 5      |
| Administrative/secretarial  | 0     | 1              | 5           | 1     | 7                | 4      |
| Telephonists/receptionists  | 1     | 3              | 1           | 1     | 5                | 4      |
| Technicians                 | 1     | 2              | 3           | 2     | 4                | 4      |
| Customer contact            | 2     | 1              | 0           | 2     | 4                | 4      |
| Call centre personnel       | 2     | 1              | 0           | 1     | 1                | 3      |
| In-house trainers           | 2     | 1              | 0           | 2     | 2                | 3      |

The answers to Question 11 on the use of spoken English and Question 12 on written English follow the same trends as noted for Question 9 on the overall use of English in the respondent companies, with market orientation being the deciding factor, irrespective of size of company, and written English being more prevalent than spoken English. The reason for this apparent redundancy in questions was the need to cater for the possibility of enough expatriate personnel employed in the sector that would then require the singling out of the Mauritian contingent. In the end, given the scarce number of expatriate employees, this assumption did not prove relevant.

### 8.2.1.5 Employers' assessment of the standard of English demonstrated by their employees

Table 8.13 shows the compilation of answers to Question 13 which was aimed to give a first indication of the employers' views as a starting point for the interviews with the senior executives that were carried out after the questionnaire had been circulated and returned.

**Table 8.13: Question 13: Employers' assessment of their employees' level of fluency in English**

| Post                        | Not fluent at all | Somewhat fluent | Fluent | Very fluent | First language |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|--------|-------------|----------------|
| Directors/Senior Executives | 1                 | 2               | 5      | 7           | 1              |
| Operation/middle managers   | 1                 | 3               | 5      | 6           | 1              |
| Supervisors/Team Leaders    | 2                 | 3               | 7      | 4           | 0              |
| Administrative/secretarial  | 1                 | 3               | 10     | 4           | 0              |
| Telephonists/receptionists  | 1                 | 4               | 10     | 3           | 0              |
| Technicians                 | 1                 | 6               | 7      | 1           | 0              |
| Customer contact            | 2                 | 2               | 5      | 3           | 1              |
| Call centre personnel       | 1                 | 2               | 4      | 2           | 1              |
| In-house trainers           | 1                 | 3               | 0      | 4           | 0              |

The overall response is quite positive with companies in all categories ticking 'Fluent' and other companies in export, partially or entirely, checking 'Very fluent'. At the lower end of the scale, the companies ticking 'Not fluent at all' and 'Somewhat fluent' were working more or even exclusively with French-speaking markets. However, the respondent ticking 'First language' is possibly slightly generous. The company in question, which works entirely on the UK and USA markets, accepted to run two of the focus groups. While most of the participants showed an excellent mastery of the language during the discussion, none of them were first language speakers or at an equivalent level, and there was no mention of any first language speakers among the personnel at whatever level. However, as will be discussed in the analysis of the interviews, such positive assessments are not necessarily shared by the overseas customers in Europe and the USA.

### 8.2.1.6 Difficulties that employees have when using English

This group of questions examines the issue of difficulties in using English by juxtaposing the supplier's view with that of the end-user, the customer, the aim being to identify shared issues that could then

be considered priority areas for both corrective and preventive action on the part of the supplier. Thus

Table 8.14 gives a general overview of the difficulties commonly noticed by employers.

**Table 8.14: Question 14: Difficulties that Mauritian employees have in using English**

| Difficulty  | Number of replies |
|---|-------------------|
| Afraid of saying things the wrong way                           | 9                 |
| Do not speak clearly enough through lack of confidence          | 9                 |
| Lack appropriate vocabulary for business transactions           | 8                 |
| Make basic language mistakes (for example, grammar, vocabulary) | 8                 |
| Cannot cope with different accents in English                   | 7                 |
| Articulate poorly   | 4                 |
| Have difficulty in recognising the other person's feelings      | 3                 |
| Cannot cope with general conversation face-to-face              | 3                 |
| Cannot understand complicated written texts                     | 3                 |
| Cannot understand what is being said                            | 2                 |
| Have difficulty in remembering oral instructions                | 2                 |

The focus then moves to customer feedback on how employees express themselves in spoken and written English (Tables 8.15, 8.16, 8.17 and 8.18).

**Table 8.15: Question 15: Feedback from English-speaking customers about how the employees express themselves in English**

|        |        |
|--------|--------|
| Yes: 7 | No: 11 |
|--------|--------|

**Table 8.16: Question 16: If yes to Question 15, was the feedback about spoken or written communication?**

|           |            |
|-----------|------------|
| Spoken: 7 | Written: 5 |
|-----------|------------|

**Table 8.17: Question 17: Feedback received concerning employees' spoken communication**

| Issue   | Number of replies |
|---|-------------------|
| Did not speak clearly                                 | 4                 |
| Did not ask clear questions                           | 4                 |
| Could not explain the action to be taken clearly      | 4                 |
| Seemed to lack confidence                             | 3                 |
| Did not show empathy towards the customer's situation | 3                 |
| Did not use the right technical terms                 | 3                 |
| Kept asking the customer to repeat information        | 3                 |
| Did not seem to understand the issue at stake         | 3                 |

**Table 8.18: Question 18: Feedback received concerning employees' written communication**

| Issue   | Number of replies |
|---|-------------------|
| Did not ask clear questions concerning further information required       | 4                 |
| Did not use the right technical terms                                     | 4                 |
| Document or message received not clear                                    | 3                 |
| Did not seem to understand the issue at stake                             | 3                 |
| Document or message received by the customer lacked information requested | 2                 |
| Did not show empathy towards the customer's situation                     | 2                 |
| Could not explain the action to be taken clearly                          | 2                 |

The main issue with respect to spoken English appears to be a general lack of confidence on the part of the employees in their ability to use English correctly and appropriately, with the attendant fear of saying things in the wrong way. This in turn would seem to cause a lack of clarity in the manner of speaking as well as in the questions asked and explanations given. A second shared issue is difficulty in understanding what the customer says, due at least partly to being unable to cope with different accents, which leads to requests for the customer to repeat what they have just said. As regards written English, the lack of clarity in expression manifests itself in an inability to ask clear questions concerning further information required or clearly explain the action to be taken. Thus, the document or message received by the customer is either unclear or lacks the information requested. In both spoken and written English the lack of appropriate vocabulary for business transactions and technical activities is another shared issue, which in turn may at least partially cause an inability to understand the customer service issue at stake, and certainly contribute to the general lack of clarity mentioned earlier. An overall lack of empathy and difficulty in recognising other people's feelings are also shared issues in both spoken and written communication. The employers' perspective (Question 14) pinpointed specific language issues, namely, making basic language mistakes and being unable to understand complicated written texts, as well as difficulty in remembering oral instructions. In short, a catalogue of difficulties guaranteed to make the average customer feel unsure of the quality of service on offer, and so unlikely to buy the product or continue the business relationship.



### **8.2.1.7 English as a recruitment requirement**

Tables 8.19 and 8.20 present the responses concerning the importance given to English language proficiency in the recruitment process.

**Table 8.19: Question 20: Does your company include competency in English in its recruitment profiles?**

|         |       |
|---------|-------|
| Yes: 12 | No: 6 |
|---------|-------|

**Table 8.20: Question 21: If yes to Question 20, how do you judge applicants' proficiency in English?**

| Assessment method   | Number of replies |
|---|-------------------|
| Use of English in interview   | 10                |
| Results in examinations (for example: SC English Language, HSC General Paper) | 7                 |
| Written test as part of interview procedure                                   | 2                 |
| Role plays as part of interview procedure                                     | 2                 |

When one considers that the individual customer experience of the service offered by an ICT-BPO company working on the global market is dependent on the virtual reality of a telephone call, an audio or a video conference, or an email, the importance of appropriate language and communication skills becomes all too apparent. It is, therefore, somewhat surprising that although the majority of respondents said that they included competency in English in their recruitment profiles, only four of the larger export-oriented companies used the more focussed selection tools of written tests or role plays, but not both, in addition to the usual examination results and job interviews. More detailed information on this issue was obtained during the interviews with the senior executives, which will be discussed below in Section 8.2.2 *The key issues and challenges*.

## **8.2.2 The key issues and challenges: the interviews with the senior executives**

### **8.2.2.1 Respondent company profiles**

The companies headed by the four senior executives interviewed for this study are positioned in different areas of the ICT-BPO sector and thus together give an interesting overview of the

requirements in terms of not just the language and communication skills, the focus of this study, but also the complete skill set and necessary work attitude. Two of the companies specialise in multi-channel customer experience and relationship management, which goes far beyond the classic call centre activity based on rigid scripted telephone dialogues delivered by tele-agents with a 'neutral' accent, typical of the huge platforms in India, Pakistan and the Philippines as discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.5. One of these two is a French company with platforms in France, the French Antilles and since 2004 in Mauritius. The Mauritian platform counts around 1000 employees, working 24/7 in flexible staggered shifts depending on the volume of work. The other one is part of a major American global company with platforms all over the world. It currently employs in Mauritius around 400 people with plans to expand to 600 by 2020. The platform is open from 10:00 to 22:00 (Mauritian time, GMT+4) which will be extended to 9:00 to 3:00 if the planned expansion of activities goes ahead. The third operation, which was launched in 2002 as an offshore delivery centre with entirely foreign customers, is part of a global professional services company offering management services, technology and outsourcing services. One of the biggest platforms on the island with more than 2000 employees, it has two main activities, IT services on a 24/7 shift basis, and non-voice BPO, working on two shifts up to 23:00, Mondays to Fridays. The fourth company is part of a global human capital management technology company. Although it is listed under the BPO sector in Mauritius, strictly speaking it is an overseas operation serving the other business units in the company since its launch in 2000. It currently counts around 1000 employees working from 10:00 to midnight or later in flexible shifts depending on the workflow, Mondays to Fridays.

#### **8.2.2.2 *Chosen language strategy***

In all four cases, the initial reasons for setting up their platforms in Mauritius was the availability of an English/French bilingual, educated work force capable of learning how to work in a technology-based environment at lower cost in a politically stable country. However, none of these platforms work in a fully bilingual mode. As seen in the questionnaire, their choice of work language is entirely dependent on the market being served and their positioning with respect to the competition from the other major

English-speaking competitors, namely India and the Philippines. For example, although the Mauritian platform is the only bilingual one in their network, the French-owned customer service platform chose not to compete on the English market and instead orient all its activities on the French-speaking European market. In 2010, when the events now known as the Arab Spring erupted, it was able to redirect some of the business handled by its Moroccan platform to Mauritius and so ensure continuity of service to its customers. It offers services in English to its existing customers as required, those in the airline industry. Some of its tele-agents also speak German for which they receive a bonus. French is seen as a stepping-stone to other opportunities with a potentially more tolerant attitude towards performance in these second language offerings on the part of its customers. Thus, an acceptable international variety of English used between multilingual non-native speakers as the most appropriate language for the specific interaction, as identified by Graddol (1997) would be the target level of performance, which the CEO considers to be attainable for most Mauritian recruits given the right training. At the same time, this strategic choice neatly avoids the potentially tense interaction between the monolingual native speaker (NS) of English, the customer, and the multilingual non-native speaker (NNS), the service supplier, identified by Friginal (2007), which can be a most discouraging experience for even the most outgoing youngster.

The other customer service platform, while being part of an American company, is for the moment working entirely in French. It was opened in September 2017 as an alternative location to the sites in the Maghreb, notably Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia, due to the persisting insecurity in North Africa following the upheaval of the Arab Spring in 2010. Its expansion plan includes opening a smaller English-speaking section, with the French-based operation remaining the main activity. The potential clash between the customer as a native speaker of French and the service supplier, as a non-native speaker of French, very rarely happens. When told that the agent serving them is from Mauritius, most French people react very positively, due to the country's very favourable image on the French tourism market. The third platform with its two distinct activities, IT services and non-voice BPO, has consequently two very different sets of language requirements. The IT services section works in both English and French, with its main markets being Europe and the USA. Historically, for IT contracts, the

Mauritian platform is linked to the French-speaking group of platforms in Europe, namely France, Belgium, Luxemburg and the Netherlands. The BPO section provides services in finance and accounting ranging from basic book-keeping data entry to invoicing in six languages, English, French, German, Italian, Polish and Spanish, of which English and Italian are the main ones. The fourth platform, which is in human capital management, works entirely in English. Initially it was linked to the UK operation for payroll management, with a smaller section working with the USA. When the interviews and focus groups were being carried out, the platform was strengthening its position as support to the operations in the USA, while maintaining its commitments to the UK units. This company was purposively targeted because in 2006 and 2007 I had run training sessions there in customer care that included writing emails in English as part of the customer service process. A few months after the field work had been carried out, support activities for the UK operations were transferred to a European unit, not because the Mauritian platform was unable to handle the business, but because of a general restructuring of the company's European activities. The Mauritian platform now works mainly with the US units. These last two platforms are confronted with the native speaker/non-native speaker issue in their English-speaking customer/supplier relationships, as identified by Louhiala-Salminen *et al* (2012) and Yamao and Sekiguchi (2015), which they must attend to through appropriate recruitment and training strategies,

#### **8.2.2.3 The required skill set**

All six interviews, that is, the four executives working in the ICT-BPO sector plus the head of the recruitment agency and the head of HR for one of the leading banks, confirmed that the required skill set splits into the two standard components, (1) technical knowledge and skills of which the nature and level required depends on whether the post is in IT-based services or BPO voice or non-voice, and (2) soft skills, which include language and communication skills. IT-related activities and services, that is, software and network development, implementation, support and troubleshooting, require at least a first degree in computer science, information technology or another related subject, but not exclusively. One interviewee mentioned that a good degree in mathematics is just as pertinent, if not

more, for all levels of software development and support from basic coding to developing software to solving new problems, as well as troubleshooting and updating existing systems, on the grounds that a good generic degree lays the foundation but not does shut the person's mind into a set format. It is a point worth considering, as it would increase the number of potential recruits, which in turn would strengthen Mauritius's potential to respond to the higher value niche markets.

In the case of the BPO voice/non-voice sector, the level of technical knowledge and skill is much lower and can be learned as part of the induction training, because the employees are handling routine data entry or customer service issues on existing products and systems, in other words, the already codified knowledge identified by UNESCO (2005). Thus, a good set of results in the Cambridge Higher School Certificate (HSC) examination, the final examination in the Mauritian secondary school system and equivalent to GCE 'A' Level, is usually enough. However, as one of the interviewees heading a customer service platform remarked, a motivated school-leaver with a good School Certificate (SC), the examination taken at the end of the fifth year in secondary school and equivalent to GCE 'O' Level, can learn to do the work equally well.

With respect to the second component, soft skills, the general minimum requirements for language use, be it in English or French, are determined by the economic reality of customer service on the global markets, namely the expectations of the overseas buyer, as noted by Taylor and Bain (2005) and Frigal (2007). Since the main markets for the Mauritian-based ICT-BPO platforms, including the ones responding to this study, are Canada, UK, USA and France as shown in the answers to Question 3 of the questionnaire (Table 8.3), the standard required is that of the NS, who is very often monolingual with no motivation to make any concessions, particularly the English-speaking monolingual, the first category of speakers in Graddol's updated version of Kachru's 3-circle model (Graddol 1997), namely, basic accuracy in grammar, in both spoken and written communication, correct spelling and punctuation, as moderated by the relevant standard corrector computer software in written texts, and clear pronunciation when speaking, with a reasonably pertinent choice of vocabulary and a logical presentation of the content. However, in the case of the American-owned BPO platform working

currently in French, competent mastery of English is an explicit mandatory requirement, as the whole operation worldwide, that is their website, operating instructions and database, is in English. All recruits, wherever they are in the world, must be able to understand the content on the company internet system, hold a conversation and write emails. The potential to get on in their career within the company depends on their overall proficiency in English. This language policy is in line with the common corporate single language policy of MNCs as described by Neely (2012). The other platforms covered in this study are less stringent in this respect. In all cases, the competitive edge comes at a higher level of communication proficiency, that of sufficient cultural awareness to enable an appropriate degree of empathy with the overseas counterpart, who could be any one of a wide range of persons, such as the individual end-user who is confused by or unhappy with the product or service on offer, a software technician wanting an update to some existing programme or the Chief Financial Officer of a client firm querying the issues with the software application that is running their payroll. Consequently, for all of those export-oriented platforms whose main markets are the UK and the USA and Canada, the customer-supplier relationship is mostly that of native speaker to non-native speaker (NS<>NNS), using International Business English (IBE) as defined by Nickerson (2015), and not the more flexible lingua franca situation of two non-native speakers using a common third language. The NNS Mauritian service provider is thus often faced with a NS customer making little or no concessions to ensure mutual understanding, as discussed in Taylor and Bain (2005), Kankaanranta & Planken (2010) and Nickerson (2015). One of the executives interviewed summed up the situation by saying that the real issue at stake was understanding the customer's culture and way of thinking and then correctly gauging the performance standards required, a point of view that was echoed by all the other interviewees. Language proficiency is thus one aspect, albeit a major one, of a bigger issue. If the service provider does not feel comfortable using the target language within the framework of the customer's culture, then how can they handle difficult business discussions with persons who are hierarchically much more senior, the CFO, or smooth tense service issues with someone who is much older, such as a retired person having issues with their pension payments? Consequently, high level language skills need to be supported by a sufficiently broad range of general knowledge about the target country, including geography, economy, customs and daily life, all of which can be learned if the

employee is sufficiently curious to learn and is given the opportunity to do so. Thus, the situation on the Mauritian platforms parallels that observed in the Philippines by Friginal (2007). Whether this should be taken care of by the mainstream education system or targeted in-company training will be discussed in the section on education and training in Mauritius.

Another aspect of the cultural challenges at play in the customer-supplier dialogue that came to light during the interviews is that of correctly positioning oneself in the dialogue. The service provider needs to be first a patient listener and then a confident and thus assertive proposer of possible feasible solutions based on their knowledge of the product or service offered. Both roles require language and interpersonal communication skills that go beyond the routine exchange of courtesy greetings and standard emails. This higher level of performance is in line with the required generic skill sets identified by the World Bank (IBRD, 2003), Friginal's observations (2007) and Graddol's assessment (2010), none of which are linked to any particular language or restricted to either domestic or international business situations. The World Bank's trio of technical, interpersonal and methodological skills covers all aspects of professional performance, including the very necessary aptitude to pursue lifelong learning independently and so cope with risk and change, two inevitable characteristics of the global market driven by technological innovation and expansion. Within the World Bank framework, Friginal and Graddol both focus on the tangible performance factors peculiar to the work on the ICT-BPO platforms, namely the ability to establish personalised rapport with people of different social backgrounds, age groups or hierarchical levels within the same or different cultures, accuracy in understanding what information is needed and in transmitting the information based on thorough product knowledge supported by patience and an overall service attitude to fit the circumstances. Thus, the performance requirements described by the executives interviewed are consistent with those applied on ICT-BPO platforms worldwide.

#### ***8.2.2.4 Employers' views on the standard of English demonstrated by their employees and other performance issues***

The interviews revealed the following six performance Issues, five of which go far beyond the initial concern about linguistic proficiency in any one language: standard of English, intercultural awareness, lack of confidence and the need for assertiveness, work attitude and parental influence, handling tough customer interactions and potential loss of competitive advantage.

##### *(i) Standard of English*

All the interviewees were less positive about the standard of English demonstrated by employees than the answers to the questionnaire. They felt that it was acceptable for the Mauritian context but needed much improvement to meet the standards of the international market, where the benchmark is the expectations of the NS customer who is unwilling to make any concessions. However, one of the interviewees did say quite candidly that it was unreasonable to expect employees coming from such different cultures as Mauritius to be completely American, English or French. The essential aim should be to provide service of an acceptable quality in clearly expressed, grammatically correct English, without any need for playing on words or making half-stated inferences typical of the implicit communication in NS discourse as discussed by Welch (2005). He felt that there should be a compromise somewhere, especially if one is paying 3 to 5 times less than the rate in the customer's country. But, as he said himself, in the real world where quality service is the key driver, the same level of performance is required irrespective of where the BPO platform is situated. Friginal (2007) makes a similar concession to the business imperative of achieving a successful business transaction in accordance with the expectations of the NS customer. First impressions count, one of the basic tenets of effective human communication skills, and more recently by extension, of excellent customer service. As another interviewee explained, most of the spoken interaction with their overseas counterparts and customers is by telephone, very rarely by video conference. The exchange is thus entirely dependent on the quality of the speaking, particularly articulation, speed and tone, the basics



of efficient telephone communication. Thus, according to this interviewee, after the usual welcoming phrases, the caller explains why they are calling and then listens to silence, while the Mauritian service agent takes the time to gather their thoughts and find their words. Not being used to conversing in English on a normal everyday social basis, the first layer of workplace communication as identified by Welch *et al.* (2005), the agent is scared of not speaking properly and so does not respond immediately, while at the same time, the caller is wondering what is happening, which is not an ideal customer service situation. The immediate solution to this performance problem, according to the interviewee explaining the issue, is to 'put the employee on the spot', get them to handle calls once, twice, and so on until they get used to handling exchanges confidently and eventually can coach other newcomers. The preventive measure comes much earlier, in the person's initial education and training, of which more will be said later in this chapter.

(ii) *Intercultural awareness*

The intercultural dimension was not mentioned explicitly in the preliminary questionnaire as the latter was focussed on language proficiency, the central element in the main research question. However, Questions 17 and 18 asking for details on customer feedback concerning employees' spoken and written communication in English, gave as one option "*Did not show empathy towards the customer's situation*". As shown in the compilation of answers to these two questions (Tables 8.17 and 8.18, pp.186-7), an overall lack of empathy and difficulty in recognising other people's feelings were noted in both spoken and written communication. All four interviewees considered that this lack of empathy and understanding was caused by limited language proficiency in both English and French which led to a general inability to decode cultural nuances in behaviour correctly. The examples of the type of behaviour that they recognised as 'typical' of one nationality or another were based on their extensive experience in handling foreign customers both in person and at a distance with no intention of disrespectful cultural stereotyping. They were solely concerned with the mismatch between the expectations of their employees, many of whom have never travelled abroad, and the behaviour of their customers. In particular, recognising the signs of when a customer is starting to show negative

emotions is crucial to successfully managing a potentially difficult interaction. Thus, the use of irony and sarcasm in English and French, the cold shutdown reaction of an angry customer who is waiting for a solution or the rather brutal start to an exchange adopted by a customer wanting to intimidate the service agent were cited as behaviours they said do not fit what the young Mauritian employee expects. In their view, as Mauritians are generally nice and welcoming, they expect other people to be the same. Such an expectation of reciprocal niceness can be attributed to the migratory flows discussed by Baldacchino (2011), in that many Mauritian families are in contact with foreigners, because one or more of their family members have migrated temporarily for studies or work, or settled abroad or work in the tourism industry, and thus have experienced positive friendly contacts. As a result, the youngsters on the BPO platforms find handling such hard attitudes difficult and can even take the reproaches about the service provided personally. Moreover, it would appear that the sense of superiority displayed by the NS of English over the NNS as described by Yamao and Sekiguchi (2013) and the feelings of intimidation expressed by NNS noted by Louhiala-Salminen *et al* (2012) are also present in these negative service encounters. Given their initial lack of experience with such negative encounters, the employees concerned find themselves unable to give the appropriate professional response and so keep control of the interaction, with the attendant risk of losing the trust of either the customer or the colleague on the other side of the world, as discussed in the 2013 British Council report.

*(iii) Lack of confidence and the need for assertiveness*

One of the other interviewees talking about the cultural expectations in the software development sector also said that Mauritians are perceived as being too nice and not willing to challenge their overseas counterpart quick enough. In this case, the perceived lack of confidence is not restricted to their language skills. It also concerns their ability to put forward their technical knowledge in response to a customer service issue. Apparently, the new recruits, and even some of the more experienced ones, tend to think that whatever comes from abroad is better. Yet, the executive who shared this issue also stated that the Mauritian personnel often have a better idea of what to do when things go

wrong but dare not say so. They pick up confidence when they see that, once their suggestion is finally adopted, the issue is solved. He said that they must learn to position themselves not as being inferior in the dialogue, but as professional equals with experience and knowledge that are just as valid as that of their overseas counterparts, without offering any indication as to how the employees would acquire such assertiveness. Unsurprisingly, the combination of hesitant language skills and lack of trust in one's own professional capability can have dire consequences on the interaction with the NS counterpart, for not just for the individual Mauritian employee but also the contract itself. While this situation is concerning, it is not entirely unexpected. In addition to the continued relationship with the former colonial power and the general openness towards the world abroad characteristic of the mindset of the SIDS populations, as described by Baldacchino (2011), such deference to the external model shown by young Mauritians is reinforced by the education system through the continuing use of an external examination syndicate for the final summative assessments at secondary level as discussed in Chapter 6 on the education system in Mauritius. However, despite the employers' apparent preference for 'learning by doing', remedying the lack of confidence in one's professional abilities and learning how to adopt a suitably assertive stance in customer service interactions in international business does require some degree of structured guidance through formal assertiveness training and/or individual coaching, as noted by the 2013 British Council report on culture at work discussed in Chapter 3.

#### *(iv) Work attitude and parental influence*

All six interviewees mentioned that the need for appropriate assertiveness does not come naturally to many young Mauritians, unless they have studied or lived abroad for some time, which is not the case of most youngsters. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the extended family remains the dominant social structure, which means that nearly all young people live with their parents, and, after marriage, most couples live with or near the husband's family. The overall culture remains quite deferential in which a sense of individual responsibility and the attendant ability to stand up for oneself are not actively encouraged, as exemplified by the prevailing acceptance of parental approval of one's future spouse and the closely knit kinship and ethnic networks which foster strong relations of trust and mutual

obligations (Eriksen, 1998; 2018). While there is nothing inherently wrong in practising such deference, it becomes an issue when having to deal with customers and colleagues showing superiority and dominance as NS of English as described by Louhiala-Salminen *et al* (2012) and Yamao and Sekiguchi (2013). In the early days of ICT-BPO activities in Mauritius, this issue was not immediately apparent as the platforms were generally the typical call centre using pre-ordained set dialogues and suggested alternatives. However, such routine transaction-processing is now being automated more and more while the demand for more personalised higher-end specialised services is rapidly increasing, which in turn requires employees capable of handling more complex interactions with their overseas customers (HRDC, 2017).

Furthermore, all the interviewees expressed concern about the pervasiveness of parental influence over their children's choice of career and their attitudes to work, both of which impact their performance as employees. To support their concern, they all mentioned that at the various open days, job fairs and presentations organised by the tertiary education institutions and where the ITC-BPO companies are invited to present available employment opportunities, parents are often heard discouraging their child from choosing a course in an IT-related domain as they do not consider it to be a high-flying prestige career, such as being a doctor or a lawyer, even if the young person is attracted to the sector. The BPO sector is seen to be a source of temporary employment to help pay for one's post-secondary studies or to have some money while waiting for a better job opportunity. This is the complete opposite of the situation in the ITC-BPO sector in India and Pakistan, where, as mentioned in Chapter 3, Section 3.5, much prestige is attached to the opportunity of acquiring a new language identity and so being able to work in an international context (Cowie, 2007; Rahman, 2009). Furthermore, two reports by the HRDC on the availability and shortage of required skills in ICT sector, the first one in 2012 and the second one in 2017, have identified this negative perception of employment in ICT held by both young job-seekers and those who influence their career choices, namely parents, teachers and peer groups, as being a major hindrance to employing skilled and talented recruits. The sector is perceived as lacking clear and attractive career prospects, which the odd and often unsocial working hours make even less appealing. The trainee recruits are thus seen to

be lacking in long-term commitment. While the two HRDC reports did not go into detail about this lack of commitment, the six interviewees for this study gave a very clear picture of its extent. In their experience, losing their job because the platform downsizes or even shuts down is not a problem for these youngsters, as the parents will let them stay at home and even give them pocket money until they find something else. When they are employed, as they are living at home, their salary goes on clothes and gadgets. As one executive put it, the net result is a lack of social responsibility which in turn hampers the development of mature professional behaviour. This can have serious consequences, particularly in software development and maintenance, due a considerable gap in age and work experience. The employee turnover of between 10% to 30% in both the BPO and the IT-related sectors means that the average age of the Mauritian employee remains under 30, while software engineers in the USA and UK can have as much as 25 years or more experience.

*(v) Handling tough customer interactions*

The issue of correctly positioning oneself in the technical conversation as a fully trained professional is another constant concern cited by the interviewees, especially as Mauritians must prove that they are as good as their overseas counterparts and can be trusted to do the work up to the required standard. 'Getting a foot in the door', as the saying in sales goes, is not a given. On the other hand, the interviewees acknowledged that Mauritians are very good at courteous, gentle persuasion which, in the BPO sector, is ideal for getting people to take part in surveys or handling inbound customer service calls from upset airline customers who have lost their luggage. However, when it comes to outbound cold-selling and cross-selling, at the outset they are not 'pushy' enough. Moreover, although they will have received specific training and so built up the necessary confidence to handle the prickliest of potential customers, many of the experienced agents ask to be taken off the marketing and sales contracts. The interviewees felt that the employees' unwillingness to continue these more high-value activities is understandable, as they have become wary of the reception that they will get. According to the interviewees, people in the USA and Europe are fed up with unsolicited telesales calls and let it

be known in rather hostile terms to the unfortunate telesales agent. Handling inbound service calls is a much less risky undertaking as the customer has a reason for calling and so leads the exchange.

*(vi) Potential loss of competitive advantage*

In the light of the issues discussed so far, all the interviewees expressed concern that Mauritius risks losing its competitive advantage of being bilingual English/French. Among the direct competitors, India has more and more people able to speak French, China is starting, and the Philippines might be. All three are already very strong in English. In sub-Saharan Africa, Botswana and Rwanda are moving fast, while nearer to home, Madagascar is gaining strength in the French market, and Seychelles is moving up as a financial centre. Moreover, Mauritius is often more expensive. The need to move into higher value, higher technology, niche services requiring a higher level of both technical and soft skills is beginning to make itself felt, as two of the executives interviewed for this study have warned in recent interviews in the local press. One of the interviewees also questioned the wisdom of offering services in a third or even more languages as Mauritius is already having difficulty in meeting the international standards for English and French. In his view, the opportunity is to seriously upgrade the level of both English and French to become the strongest bilingual platform in the world, staffed by people highly conversant in both English and French and capable of dealing with very complex problems and highly technical issues with very high-level people in organisations, though he did not say how this could be achieved. Such a vision may seem somewhat fantastical, but it does have the merit of being very focussed, while its degree of fantasy is on a par with similar statements of intent in the other economic sectors that have driven the development of Mauritius over the years, as shown in Chapter 5 of this study. Yet, operationalising such a vision would take a considerable change in attitude towards how languages are handled in Mauritius since it would require some overt language planning in favour of two languages, one of which, namely English, is generally accepted in its formal administrative and educational role but no more than that, while the historical association of the other, that is French, with the economically powerful minority, the descendants of the French colons, could give rise to a more forcibly expressed opposition. The prevailing *laissez-faire* approach that the 1957 Education

Ordinance has engendered seems to suit everyone in that it does not cause any particular conflict or power struggle between the various components of the Mauritian population, as mentioned in Chapter 7, Section 7.10. However, at the same time, *laissez-faire* very often leads to a degree of complacency with the performance achieved, which does not encourage rising to the challenge of meeting a higher level of proficiency.

#### **8.2.2.5 *The recruitment process as an indicator of the gap between desired and actual performance***

While the answers concerning proficiency in English as a recruitment criterion in the questionnaire remained rather sketchy, the recruitment process as described by all six interviewees is quite detailed and does in fact succeed in eliminating the many candidates who do not meet the basic entry requirements. The usual format is a two-stage process, with the first stage being carried out by the HR Department of a BPO or IT platform or an external recruitment agency on behalf of the BPO/IT platform and the second stage by the overseas client using the Mauritian platform. Stage 1 is split into two parts. Contact is made through an initial telephone interview to test the candidate's language and communication skills in the required language(s), as well as their overall attitude and dynamism. Most of the candidates fail at this point. The second part is a face-to-face interview with the candidates short-listed from the telephone interview. Most of these fail because of their lack of general cultural knowledge and their work attitude. As very few have travelled overseas, they cannot answer 'simple' questions such as "What are the four seasons called in the UK?" or in French "What product is Bordeaux famous for?" Their ability to hold a general social conversation is often poor. They may also be asked to take a personality test to see how they may react to taking two calls at once, as well as doing a dictation and a keyboarding skills test. The eventual short list of successful candidates is then sent to the overseas client for the Stage 2 test on the required technical knowledge and validation of the soft skills tested in Stage 1. There is no guarantee that the skill level found acceptable locally meets the overseas requirements. Often, most of the candidates short-listed from Stage 1 are refused as not having an acceptable standard of performance, particularly with regards to language skills and cultural empathy. On average, out of 100 initial candidates, around 15 to 20 will be short-listed for Stage 2, of

which around 5 will be finally successful. However, sometimes none of the short-listed candidates are accepted. Both the parents and the youngsters have difficulty in understanding just how much higher and more stringent the international standards of performance are. For their part, the platforms cannot take any risks by allowing some leeway in performance standards accepted because of the conditions contained in the Service Level Agreements (SLAs) that they have signed with their overseas customers. As discussed in Chapter 6, page XXX, Mauritius cannot compete with either the Philippines or India in terms of numbers. The country has to compete qualitatively in offering high quality niche services, and is thus in the position of “taker” not “maker” of the rules of the game as noted by Bacchus (2008) in Chapter 3, Section 3.6.

While one may want to sympathise with the disappointed candidates and their parents, and at the same time express concern at the seemingly high entry level of performance, far beyond that attainable by most candidates, in terms of language proficiency, general knowledge and work attitude, one must remember that this situation is not peculiar to Mauritius. Both Friginal (2007) and Boussebaa *et al.* (2012) describe a similar situation in the call centres in the Philippines and in India, respectively. In both cases, the call centres are entirely dependent on meeting the stringent expectations of their US customers, more precisely their Anglo-American customers, monolingual NS with no desire to make any concessions to their overseas multilingual NNS service providers. The conditions set out in the relevant SLAs include quantitative measures such as call handling times and call volumes, as well as qualitative criteria concerning the type of English to be used, a ‘pure’ English that is grammatically correct and devoid of any Indian influence in terms of accent and idioms (Boussebaa *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, Boussebaa *et al* (2012) describes a five-step recruitment process that parallels the one typically used in Mauritius: Step 1, a preliminary interview based on open-ended informal conversational questions aimed at identifying grammar and pronunciation mistakes, in which many candidates are rejected: Step 2, screening for accent and diction by reading out sentences including trap words intended to capture prominent mother tongue influences and strong regional accents, which again many of the successful candidates from Step 1 fail; Step 3, a written test to check grammar, sentence structure and logical reasoning; Step 4, a telephone interview by a line manager to screen



for telephone etiquette, listening skills and voice clarity; and Step 5, an interview with the HR department informing the remaining successful candidates of the pay structure, and the nature and conditions of work.

#### **8.2.2.6 *The employers' views on the future of the ICT-BPO sector in Mauritius***

All the interviewees emphasised the increasing speed of change within the sector and the rising competition from other countries in the African and Indian Ocean region, especially Madagascar. Mauritius cannot afford to be complacent about its success in establishing the latest pillar of its economy. Infrastructural issues, such as increasing the capacity and speed of the fibre optic cable network and the connections with the international networks were crucial but also manageable. They showed much greater concern about the quality and the quantity of the current and future work force. As mentioned in Chapter 3 *Literature Review*, Mauritius cannot compete on numbers. One of the directors interviewed illustrated the point with his experience at a conference on IT in India ten years earlier. When talking to participants from India, he realised that a small call centre for them meant around 3000 employees. At the time, the platform that he was heading had only 400, which was a big platform for Mauritius at the time, and with its current number of around 1000 is still one of the biggest on the island. Another interviewee with a slightly smaller operation of 800 employees said that Mauritius needed to change its business model for ICT-related activities and aim for higher value-added niche activities that can be handled by much smaller units. In his view, it would be more scalable and so less risky to have 200 companies employing 50 people each than two or three big companies employing 2000 each. If such a big one was to close, the economic and social impact would be very severe and difficult to contain. A third interviewee felt that 500 to 600 employees was the ideal largest size for Mauritius. Beyond that, the operation needs to be split into several units, with the attendant difficulties of coordination and coherence. However, whatever the size of the operation, the issue now is how to move towards more specialised, higher revenue-earning activities, which would be less easy for competitors to copy, which explains their concern about the linguistic and technical capabilities of the Mauritian work force.

### **8.3 English in the ICT-BPO sector: *The employees' experience as relayed through the focus groups***

This section analyses the information gained from the focus groups with the employees about their shared experience and opinions concerning the use of English in ICT-BPO sector at the operations level. All three focus groups were aimed at (1) understanding how the employees felt about using English in their work context and (2) finding out about the difficulties they experienced when using English. The two focus groups held in 2016 were set up on a contrast and comparison basis, in that the participants in the first group had been recruited after 2008, that is after a change in management of the Mauritian platform, and those in the second group had attended the customer care training sessions held in 2006 and 2007. The aim was twofold, (1) To see how the older group had evolved in the intervening ten years and (2) whether the issues and difficulties encountered in those early days were still present or had given way to other concerns. The third group, held in 2018, was set up on a purely voluntary basis and was aimed at exploring the participants' views and experience on their own merits. The comparison with the 2016 groups came in at the analysis stage.

All three groups were extremely enjoyable and interesting to run as the participants were very willing to talk and share their experience and views. They also showed strong commitment to their work and their respective companies.

#### **8.3.1 *The 2016 groups***

##### **8.3.1.1 *Attitude towards English and other known languages***

The participants perceived English as the language of education and professional activities, and Kreol as the language of feelings, friendship, identity and socialisation. French did not seem to have a very big role in their language landscape, and the Asian or ancestral languages even less. Consequently, all the participants preferred working in English as all their education and training had been in English.

Those participants who had worked on French-speaking platforms before joining the company talked of the difficulties experienced in having to learn all the technical vocabulary in French in addition to handling a very different business environment, and the subsequent relief they felt at being able to use just English in their present work.

Furthermore, one of the other participants, who had always worked on the English-speaking platforms, said that he has now got so used to using English all the time on the platform that sometimes when he is out shopping, he says ‘thank you’ without thinking. It is only when he gets a funny look back from the shop assistant that he realises that he has spoken in English. He said that he immediately switches to French or Kreol depending on the shop.

#### **8.3.1.2 *Experience in using English in their current post***

They all recalled feeling apprehensive about not being able to use English correctly, or as they said “properly”, and so getting into trouble with customers and thus receiving a bad customer report. They worried that the customer was assessing their English and other soft skills, and would complain about that afterwards, even if they had managed to solve the issue with the customer. When asked how they lessened their anxiety, the participants, in particular the more experienced group, said that over the years they had gradually built up confidence in their ability to speak English ‘properly’ through the practice and exposure gained from talking with and emailing their colleagues in the UK and US. However, from the examples that they gave it seemed that they equated ‘properly’ with UK-based English that was considered acceptable in the formal education context of school and university. For some participants, normal American spoken English was equated with slang, and therefore not good English. It would seem that they were not always aware of the perfectly acceptable differences in grammar, word order and even choice of words between UK and US English.

The more experienced participants also made the difference between those people who can build rapport with almost anyone quite easily and those who find it very difficult, irrespective of the

language used or the context. In their opinion, the customer-oriented employees are not bothered about what the customer thinks of their language skills. They are more focussed on the result, namely customer satisfaction with the problem solved, or at least with the fact that they are trying to help, and so they just carry on with the conversation as best as they can.

#### **8.3.1.3 *Coping strategies***

All the participants cited in-depth product knowledge acquired while doing the job as the best way to increase confidence in their ability to handle a customer issue, and so reduce even further the anxiety about using 'proper' English. Other practical coping strategies included taking notes while listening, reformulating in their own words the customer's request or issue and then asking for the customer for confirmation, and if need be, particularly with a more complex or contentious issue, following up by email. Using templates for emails helped reduce errors, omissions and inappropriate style, which could have provoked unpleasant comments from their customers.

The more experienced group showed a more proactive approach to keeping control of a telephone interaction with a customer. When proposing work to a customer, they sent samples of documents to be used, which would then become the starting point, if not the whole base, for the telephone negotiation. However, they were not so confident about handling customer complaints as easily because they could not control beforehand. This was particularly true of those participants who were not systematically front facing, that is, talking directly to the customer. They all agreed that good product knowledge was the solution, even if the English was not always as exact as needed.

One team leader also mentioned that some team members were occasionally criticised for having a 'heavy accent' by both UK and US counterparts. Such criticism was handled on a one-to-one basis to manage better the impact on the employee's sense of worth and sensitivity, as they were all trying their best to do good work and so took very hard any criticism of the way they spoke. However, most of the participants in both groups felt that accent was not really a problem. It was more a question of

speaking clearly. It would appear that in some cases the criticism 'heavy accent' was a euphemism for a more negative and controversial attitude, namely that the customer just did not want to be served by someone perceived to be non-English-speaking. Such reactions have given rise to some insistence by the employers on the need for accent neutralisation but fortunately not on the scale observed by Cowie (2007) in India.

#### **8.3.1.4 *Understanding and handling cultural differences***

In fact, the underlying and so more pervasive issue was not so much high-level language proficiency as understanding and handling the cultural differences between the two main sets of customers, the UK and the US. The older, more experienced participants were very concerned by this, possibly because of their longer and more wide-ranging experience of the company's activities and products. They said that the transition from one market to another, either way, was not easy to make.

The differences between the two markets that were mentioned included the time taken for each call, which apparently was much shorter and more direct with the US caller, while there would be some social interaction, such as small talk about the weather, with the UK caller. There was also the need to 'guess' what the UK person wants, in other words, recognising and decoding the UK tendency towards understatement and reading between the lines. The US caller was perceived as more action-oriented in both spoken and written communication. However, the newer recruits tended to perceive the more direct approach of the US customer as being somewhat rude and over-bearing and needed help in learning not to take it at face value. Finally, both experienced and newer recruits were more than a little puzzled as to why attempts by the Mauritian employees to adopt the shorter, more direct style in their emails did not go down too well with their US counterparts. Two possible explanations were suggested to them: (1) it is a very particular native-speaker competency that needs deft handling of the language so as not to appear curt, and (2) the US counterpart did not expect the Mauritian to use it and so felt that this was "stepping out of line". Whatever the actual explanation may be, the more experienced team leaders participating in the groups were advised to work together to review the

emails sent to the US and then set up appropriate templates to ensure the correct tone and degree of conciseness.

Another very specific and rather unusual example about understanding customer expectations concerned the section of the platform handling not only payroll and pension administration in liaison with the UK office, but also direct customer service with the pensioners themselves. Apparently, some pensioners would ring just to talk to someone who would be nice to them, not because they had any problem with their pension payments. The Mauritian employees working on this platform said that they had got used to this and so gave these lonely callers the attention and kindness that they were looking for, which was most heartening to learn. It is in fact an excellent example of the courteous and gentle approach that Mauritian service employees tend to adopt, which was acknowledged in the interviews with the employers.

It should be noted that none of these comments about the ‘typical’ attitudes and behaviours of the various callers on both sides of the Atlantic were made in a judgemental manner or aimed at some sort of cultural stereotyping. The participants’ concern was quite simply how to handle these situations to the best of their ability and so ensure that the caller felt satisfied with the interaction, which is in line with the findings of the 2013 British Council report discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.5.

#### **8.3.1.5 Participant language proficiency**

Overall, the participants showed an excellent mastery of English, with little or no hesitation in finding their words. The criticism concerning ‘heavy accent’ mentioned earlier certainly did not apply to any of them. Lack of confidence and assertiveness would seem to be a fairer assessment, particularly in the post-2008 group. Some of them were not speaking clearly or loud enough, particularly at the beginning of the session, as if they were afraid of being judged if they made a mistake or forgot to use “proper” English. In fact, the initial shyness shown by some of the post-2008 group was reminiscent of the sessions held in 2006 and 2007. On the other hand, the more experienced and thus more mature

group had no longer any problems of confidence or assertiveness. However, they remained wary of misunderstanding cultural differences and thus provoking unwittingly a hostile reaction from a customer that they were trying to help.

In fact, none of the issues mentioned in the two groups were new. The concern about using ‘proper’ English, the difficulties in understanding and handling two very different markets, and the need for extensive and deep product knowledge had been noted in the 2006 and 2007 training sessions. What had changed was the presence of the more experienced colleagues who were able to help the newer recruits directly on the platform, and a greater awareness of the need to keep a constant eye on these issues to prevent any unnecessary clashes with their customers on both sides of the Atlantic.

### **8.3.2     *The 2018 group***

The third focus group added another dimension to the data collected, as it concerned the recently opened French-speaking BPO platform that is part of the American-owned technology-enabled global business services company with a mandatory single corporate language for internal communication, English. Their head of operations was one of the six senior executives interviewed for this study. Thus, the main topics for this discussion were how the employees handled this dual language situation, and how they coped with differences in culture with respect to their overseas colleagues and customers.

#### **8.3.2.1   *Handling the interface between English and French***

As regards the interface between the internal corporate language, English, and the external language for communication with customers, French, the situation was easier to handle than it had appeared at first. None of them had any difficulty in using the corporate website, as they were all used to formal written English since their school and university studies. The video conference meetings with colleagues from platforms in other countries concerned mainly non-native speakers of English like themselves, from such countries as Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, El Salvador and India, which meant the

more tolerant NNS<>NNS dialogue with respect to level of competence in English. They expressed some initial concern about understanding the different accents, including American, which they eventually overcame by concentrating hard on what was being said and through the recurrent interactions with their overseas counterparts. They said that they were more familiar with the British accent with their benchmark, according to one participant with whom the rest of the group quite clearly agreed, being the Harry Potter films. They all agreed that using English in a conversational, less formal register did not come easy as they usually used either Kreol or French depending on the context as their social language. However, they did not display any anxiety at not being able to converse in English as naturally as they would have liked, unlike the 2016 groups. They were all willing to talk in the focus group, which was in English, even though sometimes they had to look for the right word and did not always speak very clearly. Some did seem a little hesitant and shy at first, but that was most likely due to a lack of self-confidence as they did eventually join in the discussion. With respect to French, they said that they had had little difficulty in adopting the right level of conversational language, partly because when they were children, they had read lots of comics and seen plenty of cartoons in French, and partly because they learned by doing. The more calls they took from customers, the more they learned what to say and how to say it. However, one of the more experienced participants who had worked on both English- and French-speaking assignments on another platform for several years said that constantly going backwards and forwards between the two languages in the same day was not easy. He had learned by experience that spontaneous translation of technical terms from one language to another did not work, as often the terms did not translate directly. He felt that switching from one language to another depending on the incoming call required targeted preparation and training to be truly professional.

The team leaders mentioned two situations in which they had been required to show a higher level of competence in English, (1) their recruitment interview and on-boarding procedures as team leaders, which had been carried out online by staff from other locations and (2) leading a training session on the corporate website. Both situations required considerable thought and preparation as in the first case their level of competence would be assessed to see if they met the language requirements to be



a team leader, and in the second case, they had to give a good example as part of the training experience for those participating in the online session. One of the team leaders had just led his first training session and was feeling quite relieved that it had gone well. On the other hand, the recruitment and onboarding of the ordinary team members on the Mauritian platform had been carried out in French by these team leaders, which everyone approved of.

### **8.3.2.2 *Coping with cultural differences***

This issue concerned particularly the customers requiring the services offered by the platform. Although they were handling mainly French-speaking callers, at times they would also receive calls from the UK. The focus group participants were able to recognise the differences in attitude and behaviour between French and UK customers in much the same way as the 2016 groups had noticed the differences between the UK and US customers. Their comments concurred with those made by their head of operations during his interview. They also expressed the same concern of wanting to be able to handle these various situations efficiently and professionally without any judgemental positioning on their part as the participants in the 2016 focus groups. They considered that French customers were more demanding and at times lacking in respect, even aggressive, towards the service provider when compared with the UK customers. The participants added that the French customers preferred talking to the Mauritian platform than to the Moroccan or Tunisian platforms, but they did not say why. On the other hand, they found the UK customers generally calmer, more respectful and more willing to listen to what the service provider had to say. Yet, like the 2016 groups, they were unable to decode the cold shutdown attitude and the use of silence on the part of the UK caller. They found the silence, or lack of reaction as they also termed it, rather unsettling and did not know what to do beyond asking whether the caller was still there. They did not realise that the caller was waiting for them to propose some sort of response to the query or issue and was not going to make any more effort to further the conversation. When it was suggested that a more helpful approach to get the conversation moving again would be to ask if the caller had any more queries, some of the participants said that they did that in French but never thought of doing so in English. This somewhat puzzling lack

of transfer of service tactics from one language to another could be a sign that they do not relate closely enough to English to realise that the tactic is appropriate in both languages. Whatever the reason, this was an issue that needed following up by the team leaders.

Another group of customers that the participants had difficulty in understanding were the callers that they recognised as being French-speaking Africans due to their accent. However, they were not sure where these customers were calling from, France or somewhere in Africa. They realised that sometimes when these callers became angry, they could not find their words in French and would slip into some sort of English. The participants found this change of language a little surprising and were not always sure in which language to continue the conversation. Their knowledge of African geography was somewhat lacking as they did not realise the proximity between the French-speaking countries and the two English-speaking powerhouses in West Africa, Ghana and Nigeria. Nor did they seem aware of the extent of movement between all the countries there, nor of the existence of West African English. This is yet another example of the lack of essential general knowledge that was noted in the recruitment process discussed earlier as being one of the reasons why candidates failed to be selected.

#### **8.4 English language training: *the employer's perspective***

This section brings together the information gained from the preliminary questionnaire and the interviews with senior executives on the topic of English language learning at school and at work. The analysis aims to identify the areas of agreement and shared opinions, as well as the points of divergence, on how effective the current English language teaching provision is, and their suggestions for improvement.

#### **8.4.1 The broad view: the results from the questionnaire**

The answers to the questions on improving their employees' English language skills and on the general situation of learning English in Mauritius showed reasonable satisfaction with the current situation, with some concern for the lack of opportunity to use English naturally in everyday life.

##### **8.4.1.1 Steps taken to improve the level of English within the company**

**Table 8.21: Question 19: Steps taken by employers to improve the level of English in their company in the past 2 years**

| Steps taken   | Number of replies |
|---|-------------------|
| None  | 8                 |
| Use of Internet   | 5                 |
| Organising language courses in Mauritius                            | 5                 |
| Circulating magazines and other reading material in English         | 1                 |
| Setting up a resource library                                       | 1                 |
| Sending personnel abroad for training in English-speaking countries | 1                 |

Concerning the steps taken to improve the level of English used by their employees, out of eighteen questionnaires, eight replied 'None' and three left the question blank. For the remaining seven providing some form of learning support to their employees, correlation with respect to size and market orientation of the individual firms is again apparent as five of them employ over 100 persons and are partially or wholly export-oriented. Among these five, only one of the over-500 export-oriented category uses a variety of resources, Internet, circulating magazines and other reading material, resource library, and organising language courses in Mauritius. Another one in the same category organises courses in Mauritius and sends people abroad. The remaining three organise language courses in Mauritius. For the smaller companies, the Internet was the only resource named. As discussed in Chapter 6, all corporate training, including language training, is eligible for the HRDC training levy refund if approved by the MQA. Therefore, the low level of support given to employees is cause for concern. English language training is not a priority for most companies who rely then entirely on the education system.

#### 8.4.1.2 Importance of the use of English to the future development of Mauritius

**Table 8.22: Question 22: Employers' view on the importance of the use of English to the future development of Mauritius**

| No answer | Not important at all | Somewhat important | Important | Very important | Essential |
|-----------|----------------------|--------------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|
| 1         | 0                    | 1                  | 2         | 2              | 12        |

However, the answers to this question would seem to go counter to the attitude shown under Question 19, since twelve respondents ticked 'Essential' including two that had not answered Question 19 and three that had answered 'None'. The five answers ranging from 'Somewhat important' to 'Very important' had all ticked 'None' under Question 19, as had the respondent not answering here. The overall response to these two questions points to a passive expectation that language training is for schools.

#### 8.4.1.3 Overall level of English in Mauritius

**Table 8.23: Question 23: Employers' assessment of the level of English used in Mauritius generally**

|         | No answer | Very poor | Poor | Somewhat inadequate | Adequate | Good | Excellent |
|---------|-----------|-----------|------|---------------------|----------|------|-----------|
| Spoken  | 1         | 0         | 4    | 2                   | 7        | 3    | 1         |
| Written | 2         | 0         | 1    | 3                   | 4        | 7    | 1         |

The answers show that proficiency in written English is rated higher than spoken English, which is consistent with the predominantly formal, administrative role of English in Mauritius as discussed in Chapter 6. This overall perception is also consistent with the answers to Questions 11 and 12 on the use of spoken and written English at work, Question 13 on the level of fluency and Questions 14, 17 and 18 on the difficulties in using English, all of which were analysed in Sections 8.2.1.4, 8.2.1.5 and 8.2.1.6. Given the range of 'Poor' to 'Adequate' for spoken English for 13 respondents, which covered all categories of respondent companies, there is room for improvement as noted in the HRDC report on skills in the ICT-BPO sector (HRDC, 2017).

#### **8.4.1.4 Exposure to English in daily life**

**Table 8.24: Question 24: Employers' view of whether Mauritians receive enough exposure to English in their daily lives**

| No answer | Very insufficient | Insufficient | Sufficient | More than enough |
|-----------|-------------------|--------------|------------|------------------|
| 2         | 3                 | 7            | 6          | 0                |

The overall rating of 'Insufficient' is also coherent with the discussion on the absence of English in normal daily intercourse discussed in Chapter 7 and is obviously the major reason for lack of proficiency in spoken English.

#### **8.4.1.5 Effectiveness of secondary education qualifications**

**Table 8.25: Question 25: Employers' assessment of whether the various secondary qualifications available in Mauritius prepare young people to use English adequately in their professional life**

|                                 | No answer | Not at all | Not enough | Enough | Quite well | Very well |
|---------------------------------|-----------|------------|------------|--------|------------|-----------|
| Cambridge SC/HSC                | 2         | 0          | 3          | 3      | 10         | 0         |
| International Baccalaureat (IB) | 3         | 0          | 3          | 6      | 6          | 0         |
| French Baccalauréat             | 3         | 1          | 8          | 2      | 3          | 1         |

The three choices of qualification cover the programmes offered by both the state system and the private fee-paying institutions, that is, the five French-medium schools offering the French Baccalauréat and two English-medium fee-paying schools offering the International Baccalauréat. This question was included to cover all recruitment possibilities. However, in the interviews with the senior executives there was no mention of recruits from these private schools, possibly because their pupils come from local well-off business and professional families and expatriate diplomatic and professional families, who would have other career aspirations. The answers themselves correspond to the actual importance given to English in the programmes. However, again there is room for improvement for the state system with no answers ticking 'Very well'.

#### 8.4.1.6 Suggestions to improve the level of English and other comments

The suggestions under Question 26 can be grouped under four main themes: increased use of media, increased use of English throughout the education system, fun language competitions and increased use of English by public authorities. It is interesting to note that, bar one comment for increased exposure to Business English, there is no suggestion implying any significant involvement by the business community. Yet, as seen in Chapter 7, the main reasons for keeping English concern directly business activities, notably, consistency and continuity in the administrative and legal infrastructure supporting business and the need to communicate with the international stakeholders and markets to ensure the continued inward flow of money to fund the country's current and future needs.

**Table 8.26: Question 26: Employers' suggestions to improve the level of English used in Mauritius**  
(Answers typed verbatim and grouped separately for each respondent)

|   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four <i>No answers</i></li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should have more newspapers in English</li> <li>• Should encourage children to watch films in English</li> <li>• Should encourage more English medium in teaching in primary and secondary school</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage reading and writing</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People use to watch TV in French, need more channel in English</li> <li>• People use French as their main language</li> <li>• Student should use English in primary school so that it become a habit</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen to good spoken English</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To invest more on oral and written English in school (primary and secondary)</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attend schools like Lighthouse primary and secondary schools</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The use of multi-media</li> <li>• Information / news</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More exposure to English language via various types of media – TV/movies/newspapers etc.</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use more videoconferencing solutions</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youngsters should do more lecture (<i>sic</i>)</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competition for example: Drama Festival, English songs, debates, poems writing</li> <li>• British Council approach should be more aggressive. Alliance Française is very dominant</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More local reading materials should be made available to youngsters in schools, universities as well as to young job seekers and university graduates</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oral examinations should be introduced at school</li> <li>• Increase exposure to Business English</li> <li>• More English movies and TV shows on TV</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There should be more communication in English from Authorities</li> <li>• More advertisement in English</li> <li>• More incentive to people to speak English e.g. National competition on English speaking open to the public, not only to school</li> </ul> |

The increased use of English in both traditional and IT-enabled media should be encouraged as it will then cover all aspects of daily life, and not just the formal administrative or educational fields. However, the comments on the predominance of French should not be taken as an excuse to revive the antagonistic positions of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The suggestions concerning education may seem quite basic in their emphasis on teacher/pupil interactions and reading, but the preceding discussion on the inadequate teaching methods and the lack of general knowledge has shown the need to review the basics. The suggestions concerning fun competitions remind us that language learning can and should be fun. The Mauritius branch of the English-Speaking Union (ESU) runs a very successful annual public-speaking competition for schools sponsored by the private sector, the winner of which competes in the international ESU competition, often with some success, as well as an equally successful national spelling bee competition, again sponsored by the private sector ([www.esumauritius.org](http://www.esumauritius.org)). Drama festivals and creative writing competitions have also been run by the Ministries of Education and Culture, but not recently. The comparison between the British Council and the Alliance Française is often made, based more on individual perception than on hard facts. The British Council runs various English language courses including preparation for the IELTS examinations, all of which are fee-paying. It also provides technical assistance to the MOED with respect to English language teaching in schools ([www.britishcouncil.mu](http://www.britishcouncil.mu)). The suggestion concerning more use of English by the public authorities is not feasible, given that the authorities must deal with people of all levels of literacy. The ad hoc solutions of sticking up parallel notices in French and Kreol and then using whatever language suits when talking to a member of the public are still very necessary, as mentioned in the discussion on the use of English in daily life in Chapter 7.

The general comments under Question 27 reinforce the suggestions under Question 26 concerning English in schools and the media.

**Table 8.27: Question 27: Further comments (*Answers typed verbatim and grouped separately for each respondent*)**

|   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Twelve <i>No answers</i></li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most employees have been selected according to their technical know-how which doesn't depend so much on a good standard of English</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different 'classes' of Mauritians have different levels of exposure (<i>comment written under Q.24</i>)</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With social media and on-line connection, the pro-efficiency (<i>sic</i>) in speaking and written English is getting better</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English books should be given free of charge at primary school level</li> <li>• Encourage pupils to address their teachers in both English and French during school hours (mandatory)</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It would have been very interesting to watch and listen to debate programmes about local and international news on the local television and radio channels</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For people to be motivated to speak English, their interest to do so should be aroused. It is important to show to them that international trade is done in English. For example, in China, mostly all the young generation are fluent in English though it is not their natural language ...</li> </ul> |

The comment about recruitment based on technical know-how is certainly true, but the last one in the list about the need for fluency in international trade, with the very pertinent example of the young Chinese, should be food for thought. As mentioned earlier, the overall impression from the questionnaire is that of a general expectation by businesspeople that language learning is a school and home activity. The question that remains is how these companies expect their new recruits to acquire the required language and approach to handle their business transactions. This was precisely what the interviews with the senior executives aimed to find out.

#### **8.4.2 Key issues concerning corporate inhouse training: the interviews**

##### **8.4.2.1 Current inhouse training provision**

Despite having very different orientations and activities, the four platforms have experienced similar issues concerning the provision of appropriate corporate training, which pushed them into setting up extensive inhouse training facilities. The main motivation for what is an expensive item in a company's budget is compliance with the Service Level Agreements (SLAs) governing their relations with their customers, which very often require targeted content-specific training to produce the right skill set. Another issue is that the training must be available when the platform is open, for which external



providers are not always available or willing to work the same shifts as the platforms. All four platforms provide formal face-to-face induction programmes and training in specific skills, supported by individual on-the-job coaching as needed on the platforms, and pay a stipend during training and internships. Induction training in the necessary cultural and background knowledge is mandatory to ensure that all new recruits, irrespective of the length or nature of their prior experience, know exactly what is expected of them as soon as they start working. The manager of one of the customer service platforms explained that language proficiency is not the only issue. Since most new recruits have never travelled abroad and have little or no knowledge of geography, they have no idea of appropriate culture or attitudes. Consequently, whereas in Europe for the same post, a 3-hour information session or a programme of up to 3 days usually suffices, the induction training on the Mauritian platform stretches over 6 or even 7 weeks. The first week covers the necessary general knowledge about the target country, such as geography and climate, the second week covers specific culture and attitude training and the third covers speaking and writing, including diction, grammar and spelling. The fourth and fifth week are spent on the platform under guidance to become familiar with the work. As from the sixth or seventh the new recruits start working alone, with one supervisor for ten to twelve operators. Moreover, to ensure a proper understanding of the sector, for example, the car industry, and of the specific brand within the sector, the team leaders are often sent to the country in question for an extended stay of up to six months at the customer's production site. In other words, nothing is left to chance. The induction programmes of the other platforms cover similar issues of core values, respect of others, appropriate and inappropriate reactions towards colleagues both in Mauritius and overseas as well as towards the customers abroad, and dress code with the overall aim of moving the employees from their local culture to the specific corporate culture of the employing platform. The period of induction is also much longer than the international norm for the sector, at least three months. To counter this, the platform working in human capital management has introduced a rolling one-year programme during which time the new recruits follow classroom training, spend time sitting next to someone doing the job and then when they are ready, actually start doing the job. The same platform takes part in the international rotation system of employees within the network of platforms in the global group whereby the Mauritians go for work experience on, for example, the Toronto

platform and people from the Toronto platform come to Mauritius. It is a very positive experience for all concerned as each can see the context in which the other platform works, how people work there and how they react and talk. It creates better mutual understanding and helps the Mauritian platform to align more closely with the others. For the Mauritians, this scheme is a major learning opportunity, particularly for those who go to the other offices in the group, very often for very basic issues such as understanding what a deadline or a promise to get back to the caller really means.

The most recently opened customer service platform has access to the parent company's central e-learning platform set up and run in association with an outside provider. This dedicated e-learning facility offers a huge list of programmes on all possible issues to be encountered in the course of work, as well as programmes aimed at improving the employees' knowledge, skills and eventually performance. The programmes are arranged in terms of career path progression. Employees can consult the website whenever they want and follow the programmes at their own speed. On successfully completing the training programmes linked to their specific post, the employee is awarded an official certification which enables them to work on any platform in the company's network worldwide. According to the manager interviewed, the young recruits aged 18 to early 20's really like this individual approach to training and development as they are already IT literate with their smart phones and tablets and so want to do things by themselves.

#### **8.4.2.2 *The skills gap and mismatch***

All the interviewees, including the two from HR and recruitment, felt that the private sector firms are compensating for skills which employees should have acquired at school or university. They must also manage the very high expectations of the youngsters, especially the graduates, and their parents with respect to required skills and attitude, and status linked to the post. Some graduate recruits feel offended when told that they must do more training before they can be employed on a permanent basis. They think that they are ready for work and that their technical training fits with the industry

requirements. Their parents get equally upset as they have invested in their children's education and so do not accept that their child should do yet more training. Very often, these recruits go elsewhere.

#### **8.4.2.3 Views on the role of the Mauritian education system with respect to industry needs**

The consensus was that the education system is not in tune with industry requirements, be it technical or soft skills and that the system is just not listening. All the interviewees deplored the lack of dialogue between the government and the private sector which would have greatly helped to achieve better alignment. The tertiary and professional training institutions are producing general IT degrees and diplomas with little or no specialisation in the fields in which the ICT-BPO sector is working, such as network and systems development. The public tertiary institutions were particularly criticised for being out of date by at least two or three generations of software and for the lack of practical industry experience among their lecturers. Many of the lecturers have gone from being a student to becoming an academic and so just teach what they have learned. Various attempts over the years to develop a dynamic public/private partnership in IT education have failed because of the unwillingness of these institutions to open up and accept being challenged by the end-users of their qualifications, the employers. Suggestions for an IT academy run on a public/private partnership basis which would prepare the youngsters to be immediately operational on the platforms have been discussed with the government on several occasions but with no tangible outcomes. The suggestion that the government offers specific conversion or top-up programme lasting six to nine months for IT graduates, and other graduates such as mathematics, to make them industry employable has not produced any reaction either. Instead, various general youth employment programmes (YEP) funded through the HRDC have been set up. The general feeling expressed by the interviewees was puzzlement mixed with frustration at this inertia on the part of the government authorities, particularly as the other competitor countries in the Indian Ocean region and elsewhere are busy improving their skill development initiatives. Meanwhile, the inhouse training centres set up by these platforms have become a major source of professional training in the ICT-BPO sector for school-leavers and fresh graduates. Two of the centres have themselves set up intensive induction and training programmes for young people enrolled on the

current YEP scheme, with encouraging results. The aim for the two companies in question is to build up a pool of software engineers and other trained personnel to enable them to continue their growth and diversification of products and services. Those trainees who are not kept on after completing the YEP training usually manage to find good employment in another ICT-BPO company.

The interviewees felt that the soft skills, language skills, have received no special or priority attention either from the education and training authorities, beyond the standard school programmes. All were very critical of the entire education system as being far too focussed on rote learning and model answers to past examination papers, and thus stifling creativity and critical thinking in most Mauritian pupils, which are essential in both innovative software development and the effective handling of customer service issues. Their assessment is consistent with that of the international agency reports discussed in Chapter 6. One interviewee compared the performance of the graduates from the publicly funded universities with that of the graduates from the private sector universities as seen on his company's YEP training programmes. The publicly funded universities usually attract students with better HSC results, but after three years' studies, their thinking is muddled and aimed at finding the right answer while the students from the private universities are better trainees as they keep asking questions and challenging things. The same interviewee also pointed out that the problem with English in the IT sector was twofold in that firstly, unlike lawyers, engineers and other technical people do not read a lot whatever the language and secondly, English has only a weak presence across the board in Mauritius,

#### ***8.4.2.4 Suggestions for improvements to the education system to better meet employers' needs***

Three of the interviewees had also replied to the questionnaire in which the suggestions referred more to English at school and in daily life. The suggestions in the interviews were more focussed on corporate needs. It is interesting to note here the willingness for collaboration and partnership between public institutions and private enterprise, a mechanism that has been so successful in developing the different pillars of the Mauritian economy, as discussed in Chapter 5. The most

important specific suggestion is the setting up of an IT Academy to provide the basic generic training for school-leavers and upskilling programmes to enable experienced employees to keep abreast of technological progress in the sector. A successful example that was cited by all interviewees is the Hotel School of Mauritius that was set up in 1971 and has provided the basic training for all the occupations and trades in the hotel and tourism industry ever since (MITD, 2019).

The suggestions for remedial action concern the existing education system, to improve the level of English used by teachers in general and not just teachers of English language and Literature. Both these suggestions and the comments concerning the teaching methods and lack of openness in the publicly funded universities need immediate attention if Mauritius is to keep abreast of advances in technology. More specifically, university lecturers should be encouraged to do work placements to keep in touch with real requirements. The whole education system should focus on responding to industry needs, not student demands for the currently popular subject.

The lack of a proper career guidance service was also noted with respect to the misperceptions about working in the ICT-BPO sector. There is a definite need to educate both parents and pupils about the opportunities coming up in the sector and so change the perception of it being a place for short-term or temporary work while waiting for something ‘better’ to turn up.

## **8.5 The employees’ experience of improving the level of English: *the focus groups***

### **8.5.1 *The 2016 groups***

#### **8.5.1.1 *Personal solutions and formal training to improve the individual level of English***

The most cited personal solutions included watching films, particularly US films and DVDs in English, surfing on the internet in English (YouTube, Google and other search engines), and watching sporting events, particularly football, with the English commentary.

The more experienced participants said that as they have gained in maturity and experience, they have also learned not to take things personally but to focus on how to put matters right. They have also learned to take more care when writing emails.

With respect to formal language teaching, they all preferred the one-to-one coaching on the platforms, preferably with native speakers, as this is focussed on the work and its context. The newer recruits appreciated the on-line training through the Carnegie Speech online programme, but the more experienced ones seemed less enthusiastic, probably because they were now sufficiently confident that their accent and pronunciation were acceptable to their UK and US counterparts. Formal training on writing emails was also mentioned as being most useful. Section 8.5.1.4 presents the Carnegie Speech online programme in greater detail.

The more experienced group emphasised the need for the language coaches to be native speakers not because of accent issues, which, as said earlier, was no longer a problem for them, but because of the cultural dimension. The various native speakers that have coached them over the years have always added the cultural dimension to their explanations through telling real-life anecdotes on attitudes and behaviour, gestures and manners, which then come back to mind when handling a call from a counterpart or customer. This cultural information increases their confidence in being able to handle the caller appropriately.

#### ***8.5.1.2 The role of the Mauritian education system in preparing young people to work in the ICT-BPO sector***

Overall, the participants felt that the Mauritian education system gave them a good grounding in technical vocabulary and formal written language, but little or no preparation with regards to social communicative proficiency, that is, conversational interaction with people in general. Therefore, they all found it so hard to handle direct interaction over the telephone at the start of their careers.

Moreover, the emphasis on 'correct', 'proper' English, for which an acceptable definition remains problematic, came from the school environment where the aim was to pass the examinations. From primary school onwards, classes in all subjects were taught in a mix of English and Kreol, with little or no French. The teachers, particularly in mathematics and sciences, would explain the concepts and technical terms in Kreol and then write on the blackboard or dictate the essential definitions and explanations ready for use in the examinations, this time in English. In their experience, French was just a school subject, and not used very often to explain things in the other subjects. They all thought it normal that they should use Kreol to understand concepts and processes first before preparing their notes in English for the examinations. So English was associated with school and homework in their minds from an early age.

#### **8.5.1.3     *Suggestions to improve the level of English for today's new recruits***

Concerning English language teaching for new recruits, both groups felt that the best solution was the one-to-one coaching on-the-job with native speaker tutors. They perceive Carnegie Speech as being essentially a tool for improving accent and rhythm which is perhaps useful as a starting point for inexperienced new recruits. There was no specific mention of any formal training at the company's inhouse learning centre.

#### **8.5.1.4     *Use of Carnegie Speech online programme***

Carnegie Speech Company is an American company which develops software for assessing and teaching spoken language skills in English, using state-of-the-art speech recognition and artificial intelligence technologies licensed from Carnegie Mellon University, for clients all over the world (<http://www.carnegiespeech.com/>). From the list of references on the website, one gathers that its programmes all focus on American English. It is similar to the dotcom companies analysed by Blommaert (2010) in that it promotes language learning success as being a tool for career success.

The Communication Coach responsible for the Carnegie Speech programme attended the first focus group and afterwards stayed behind to talk more about how they used the programme as part of the corporate training provision. He was totally focussed on language performance in terms of accent, flow and vocabulary, and did not mention cultural aspects at all.

He explained that the choice of programme was between Rosetta Stone, TellMeMore and Carnegie Speech. The first two have merged and are focussed on language learning from scratch. The company needed something to improve existing proficiency, which Carnegie Speech does cater for, with the main emphasis being on accent neutralisation and voice clarity. The original certification was after ten hours personal study, but when that was found to be too easy, the programme was extended to thirty hours over one year. There was a dedicated room with computers and on-line connection available all the time. Employees could use the facility whenever they wanted.

He said that he did not encourage 'spoon-feeding', but wanted the employees to take the initiative, learn for themselves, be curious. However, he felt that many new recruits are not aware of the gap between their level of English and that required by the work on the platform. They think that they use English well and are quite shocked when they are told to improve. He added that individual motivation to improve is not a given since some recruits show little or no tenacity or desire to move forward. He too had noted that very often these recruits have over-protective parents and so it does not matter if they have lost their job, as they can stay at home until they find something else. In his opinion, the ICT-BPO sector suffers from a negative image in the eyes of general public, and more particularly the youngsters and their parents, with respect to career opportunities. No excitement or dynamism surrounds the activity and there has been little or no showcasing to create interest in working in the sector. Thus, his assessment of the new recruits' attitude and motivation mirrors that of the employers presented earlier in this chapter and concurs with the observations in the HRDC 2012 and 2107 reports discussed in Chapter 6.



However, in the same way that Blommaert (2010), Cowie (2007) and Rahman (2009) question the real impact of such programmes, it is difficult to see how an online training programme focussing on a limited number of language performance items with near-native proficiency in one variety of English, namely American English, being the benchmark, can satisfy the need for language proficiency that is sensitive to a wide range of English-speaking customers and situations. The lack of enthusiasm shown by the more experienced employees with respect to the Carnegie Speech training programmes would appear to find its explanation in this narrow focus. Given that on all four platforms covered by this study, the customers calling from UK, USA, Canada, Europe or elsewhere are told that the platform responding to their call is in Mauritius and that if they wish, they can be transferred to another platform, the employees do not need to take on a 'westernised' identity, unlike many of the platforms in India, Pakistan and the Philippines observed by Cowie (2007), Frigal (2007), Rahman (2009) and Boussebaa *et al.* (2014). The motivation to sound as nearly as possible like an American is consequently much lower.

#### **8.5.2     *The 2018 group***

Their experience in developing their language skills since working on the platform was conditioned by their individual use of the e-learning platform discussed earlier in this chapter. Although there were mandatory programmes to be completed within a certain timeframe, not everyone was consulting the facility at the same rhythm. Some of them said that they were impressed by the amount and variety of training materials available on the e-learning platform. Most of them were obviously more used to standard face-to-face training in groups, and probably needed more encouragement and guidance on how to use on-line self-development tools more efficiently. They agreed with the 2016 groups that accent neutralisation, irrespective of the target language, was not the main issue. Empathetic understanding of the other person's culture was the crucial element. They also concurred with the 2016 groups concerning the role played by the education system in preparing young Mauritians for work in the ICT-BPO sector with respect to technical English and formal writing, but with little or no help in developing the necessary communication skills, be it English or French.

## 8.6 Summary of issues identified from the questionnaires, interviews and focus groups

### 8.6.1 Performance issues

The combined data set obtained from the questionnaire, interviews and focus groups has identified several critical performance issues that could seriously handicap Mauritius's efforts to move into higher-level and thus higher-value-added niche activities. Table 8.28 links these issues to the required competence and the relevant underlying concepts involved in improving current performance levels to enable the ICT-BPO sector to move into higher-end more value-added activities. It also signals which category of respondent showed concern, the employers, the employees or both.

**Table 8.28: Performance issues, required competencies and underlying concepts**

| Performance issue  | Required competence                                 | Underlying concept   | Respondent expressing concern  |
|--|---|--|--------------------------------|
| • Meeting the more stringent standards of the international market   | • Compliance with industry standards                | • SIDS in global business  | • Employers                    |
| • Potential loss of competitive advantage of being English/French bilingual  | • Language use to enable meeting industry standards | • SIDS in global business  | • Employers                    |
| • Mastering the basics in using English, in both spoken and written communication, accent, pronunciation, tone, vocabulary                 | • Language use in a professional context            | • Functionalist approach to language use<br>• International Business English (IBE)<br>• Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF)<br>• Native speaker/Non-native speaker (NS/NNS) interface | • Both employers and employees |
| • Difficulty in understanding the culture of the overseas customer or counterpart due to overall lack of general knowledge                 | • Intercultural awareness                           | • Diversity in global business   | • Both employers and employees |
| • Providing the appropriate empathetic response to the customer's need or request, in particular when handling tough customer interactions | • Communication skills for customer service         | • Customer perception of and satisfaction with the service provided  | • Both employers and employees |
| • Lack of confidence and the need for assertiveness  | • Interpersonal skills: self-esteem, assertiveness  | • Native speaker/Non-native speaker (NS/NNS) interface   | • Both employers and employees |
| • Negative work attitude and parental influence leading to a lack of social and professional responsibility                                | • Autonomous taking of responsibility               | • Professional commitment and responsibility   | • Employers                    |

Table 8.28 shows a high level of convergence between the two sets of respondents, the employers and the employees, concerning the issues in the immediate daily operations of the ICT-BPO sector in Mauritius, notably, their shared awareness of the most critical point in efficient customer service, the moment when the customer service agent comes into contact with the customer, Carlzon's '*moment of truth*'. With respect to developing the necessary skills, focussing on accent neutralisation is not enough since it is just responding to what could be considered a surface problem, which can be solved with sufficient practice and effort if it is really necessary. As the more experienced employees participating in the focus groups pointed out, their real need is to understand the cultural background of their customers sufficiently to be able to pitch their response in an acceptable manner, hence their appreciation of working with NS trainers.

The employers also show their concern for the long-term strategic impact of these shortcomings in performance when they focus on the need to comply with international standards and the potential loss of competitive advantage due to non-compliance. Since these shortcomings can be corrected, if not entirely eliminated, by appropriate remedial action in terms of information and inhouse training, two questions now arise: (1) how much the employers are actually doing; and (2) how far the high rate of employee turnover mentioned earlier in this chapter is affecting the lasting acquisition of needed skills and technical knowledge.

However, the issue that was not immediately apparent at the start of the fieldwork but is very pervasive in its effect is that of the somewhat negative attitude displayed towards working in the ICT-BPO sector by both the parents and their youngsters discussed earlier in the chapter. Such negative perception does not foster any strong commitment or desire to improve one's performance to meet the stringent international performance standards, and so can hinder any initiative to improve both the individual and team performance levels. Moreover, the attendant high turnover of employees mentioned earlier in this chapter results in an equivalent loss of investment in training and an added expense because of the need to run the training again for the new recruits.

### 8.6.2 Education and training issues

Table 8.29 shows the main issues concerning education and training with their consequences on current performance, and the underlying concepts. Unlike Table 8.28, there is much less convergence of views between the employers and employees, mainly because the issues concern human capacity development seen from the perspective of the strategic level of organisational sustainability, which is not the concern of the young recruits. Also, the recruits in question have all succeeded in their studies, be it up to Higher School Certificate or further, and as a result have obtained gainful employment which satisfies their more immediate time frame. Furthermore, in line with the main research question, the detailed questions shaping the focus group discussions were aimed at the participants' experiences in doing their daily work, that is the operational level. Their opinion on more long-term strategic issues was not sought, and they did not volunteer any. What is more important to note is that the gap between the academic skills acquired at school and university and the inter-relational communication skills needed on the customer service platforms can be clearly seen, which is exacerbated by the unwillingness of numerous recruits to accept that additional training is required for them to meet the performance standards attached to their post.

**Table 8.29: Education and training issues and their consequences**

| Education or training issue  | Consequence  | Underlying concept   | Respondent expressing concern                                 |
|--|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School and university curricula too academic, not sufficiently focussed on current and future employment or industry needs</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of interpersonal skills</li> <li>• Technical training outdated</li> <li>• Difficulty in recruiting suitable employees</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human capacity development</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employers</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly competitive, elitist education system</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not conducive to developing team working or problem-solving skills</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Networks and networking</li> </ul>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employers</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excessive importance given to examination success resulting in inflated expectations as regards employment opportunities</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unwillingness to accept the need for further training in required professional skills</li> </ul>                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning throughout life</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employers</li> </ul> |

|  |  |   |  |
|--|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of career guidance in schools and universities</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorrect perception of employment in ICT-BPO sector as not a good career choice</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social aspirations in an emerging economy</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employers</li> </ul>                    |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English language constrained as an official administrative language and medium of instruction</li> </ul>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inability to use English appropriately in customer relationship building</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of English in international business</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both employers and employees</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English language learning and mastery perceived as the responsibility of the mainstream education system</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial reluctance of employers to provide necessary language training</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human capacity development</li> </ul>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employers</li> </ul>                    |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of general knowledge</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prolonged induction period needed to acquire necessary technical and background knowledge</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional skill development</li> </ul>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employers</li> </ul>                    |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-house training too focussed on accent neutralisation and not enough on cultural background of customers</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wariness and reluctance to handle complex interactions with overseas counterpart or customer, on the part of both new recruits and experienced operators</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional skill development</li> </ul>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees</li> </ul>                    |

## 8.7 Feedback from the additional interviews carried out in July 2020

As stated in Chapter 4, Methodology, three additional interviews were carried out as part of the response to the comment in the viva report concerning the selection of relevant historical background. The interviews with the two linguists were articulated around the following questions: (1) *The language policy for education as defined by the 1957 Ordinance would appear not to have evolved in any great measure since its introduction. What are your views on this?*; and (2) *How well do you think the education and training system equips young people with the necessary language skills for a successful entry into the world of work?* The main questions for the interview with the lecturer working at the Mauritius branch of a UK university was: (1) *What are the entry requirements concerning English language proficiency for Mauritian applicants?*; and (2) *What measures does the institution you work for take with respect to improving the English language proficiency of the students enrolled at the institution?*

### **8.7.1 *The language policy for education from the linguists' point of view***

Both linguists interviewed confirmed that the provisions of the 1957 Education Act are still in force as the overall language policy for education as they stand. In their view, while these provisions could be considered as being outdated in the light of the evolution concerning language use in Mauritius as shown by the statistics, there is no real appetite for change, be it on the part of the government or that of the various socio-cultural associations promoting the heritage languages. The text allows all the languages recognised in Mauritius to have place in the school system, which is the essential concern of all the various stakeholders. Problems would start if there was any attempt to remove a language, irrespective of how few people actually use it.

However, they both said that the law would need changing if and when Kreol becomes the medium of instruction, even if only at primary level. English would most likely stay at secondary level and upwards. But they felt that this was not going to happen any time soon. Since getting Kreol introduced as an examinable subject in 2012 was already a big step forward, it would therefore be best to let the situation evolve slowly in its own good time. The more so as there is also the fear of upsetting the position of English, as the elite needs to master English for their aspirational and professional purposes. So pragmatically there is no desire to “rock the boat”, despite the persistently high failure rate of around 25% in the summative assessment for the end of primary cycle, as already noted in the discussion in Chapter 6, Section 6.4 and Chapter 7, Section 7.12.

They were also unanimous in their response to the second question. In their view, the current education and training system does not equip young people with the necessary language skills for a successful entry into the world of work because the system is far too focussed on passing examinations at all levels, thus on formal written English for school and academic purposes. They were not convinced either that the move to the NYCBE would bring about much change, as examinations remained the major form of assessment, and would still act as the main tool for determining admission to the national academies as from Form IV, Grade 10. For both of them, the entire question of effective

language learning for whatever use, be it educational, professional or cultural, or a mix of all three, can only be durably addressed in the interests of all Mauritian youngsters by revisiting the question of the medium of instruction to meet the dual needs of fostering the children's cognitive and emotional development through the use of the home language, and enabling the acquisition of the language of formal educational attainment, professional development and economic activity, English. In this new learning structure, French would remain a subject, as it is in the current system. In the light of the findings from the main case study concerning the pervasive inability of the Mauritian employees to communicate in English in an appropriately confident and empathetic manner, such a proposal from these two specialists makes sense. However, the general inertia present throughout the education and training system, as shown by the lack of appetite for any change and the fear of "rocking the boat", does not augur well for any major change in the foreseeable future.

#### **8.7.2 English language proficiency requirements for higher education study**

The third interview was with a lecturer in Marketing and Media at the Mauritius branch of a UK university that opened in 2009. She has been in corporate training for 15 years, including the past five years in her current post. As a student, she had worked on a BPO platform part-time and during vacations to help finance her studies. So she was well aware of the issue of expected English language proficiency in international business. In response to the first question about entry requirements concerning English language proficiency for Mauritian applicants, she said that as the local branch is a fully integrated part of the UK university, the entry requirements are those of the UK university for international applicants, thus appropriate GCE 'A' level or equivalent qualifications for the degree course chosen plus IELTS Band 5 score, which is defined as: *"Modest user: The test taker has a partial command of the language and copes with overall meaning in most situations, although they are likely to make many mistakes. They should be able to handle basic communication in their own field."* (<https://www.ielts.org/>). Given that the Mauritian applicants will have passed the Cambridge Syndicate HSC/A Level examinations, it is at first sight somewhat surprising that the Band score chosen is 5, Modest User, and not 6, Competent User, which is defined as *"The test taker has an effective*

*command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriate usage and misunderstandings. They can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations."* (<https://www.ielts.org/>). However, when one considers that the test covers the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, the choice of Band score 5 does seem a more appropriate level of assessment, given that much of the teaching in the mainstream Mauritian schools is conducted in a mixture of English and Kreol, as the participants in the 2016 focus groups had said, and so speaking skills are not well developed by many students.

In response to the second question about the measure aimed at improving the students' proficiency in English, she said that all the staff, both academic and administrative, are required to use English in their interactions with the students. The fact that the Mauritius branch welcomes overseas students from both English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries does make it easier to use English as it acts as the common language between all the different nationalities present. In their first year, the Mauritian students are often reluctant to use English and so tend not to take an active part in the class discussions. However, as their studies progress, they gain confidence and by the third year they are quite happy to communicate in English on a par with everyone else. That being said, if they are among themselves, then the Mauritians will speak mostly in French or Kreol, as they would do at home. So their choice of using English remains a sort of engineered choice, imposed by the context.

The lecturer also mentioned that the university in question offers an International Foundation Programme (IFP) lasting 6 months for both Mauritian and foreign students who do not have the required UCAS points to start their undergraduate degree and who want to strengthen their personal and academic skills. The IFP comprises several modules, including academic writing, and researching and presenting, both of which help build up the students' proficiency in using English for not just their studies, but also their future professional activities. Also given that all the courses offered are geared towards market needs, students come to realise themselves the importance of improving their English language and other soft skills to improve their level of employability.



Thus this third interview was interesting as it gave several insights concerning practical actions that could be taken to improve the level of English on the platforms; for instance, using the IELTS to assess English proficiency of job applicants, and then making a definite effort to use English more as the social language on the platforms.

## **8.8 Discussion**

### **8.8.1 *Inadequate response of the education system to industry needs***

The main finding is that the education system is not responding to the needs of business activities based on information technology, such as the ICT-BPO sector, including the required language skills. The speed with which the use of information technology in all spheres of business, institutional and personal life is spreading and changing requires operators who are equally quick in learning how to use it, which Patten (1999) predicted, and Castells (1999) analysed in detail as the essential motor enabling the international networks to handle much higher levels of complexity and increased decentralised coordination, without major disruption. Creativity and initiative-taking are key skills, together with assertiveness and empathetic understanding of what the other person wants. Unfortunately, an education system focussed on giving the 'right' answers to examination questions, that is, formatted for rote learning, does not nurture such skills. Moreover, the individualistic competition for a few prized scholarships does not foster the necessary team spirit and sense of belonging to a bigger structure requiring collaboration and sharing to make the networks function properly. The employers were very clear about this huge gap between expectation and supply.

Moreover, an education system based on elitism and its attendant characteristic of exclusion as witnessed by the persistently high failure rates in the key examinations as shown in Chapter 6, risks worsening the existing divide between the haves and the have-nots with respect to ability to take up new employment opportunities in the increasingly technologically driven workplace, thus exemplifying Castell's warning (2005) about the selectivity of the global networks with respect to individual human

capacity. Yet the calibre of the country's human resources is one of the main selling points in the government campaigns to attract overseas investors.

Furthermore, none of the participants in either the interviews or the focus groups expressed any serious apprehension about meeting the performance requirements. They saw it more as a necessary challenge that would certainly take some effort to master, an attitude which is consistent with the country's overall positioning as self-made in its ongoing efforts to counter the 'Singapore Paradox' in which economic vulnerability is countered by economic resilience (Briguglio *et al.*, 2009). Throughout its history, Mauritius has exemplified the position of 'taker' and not 'maker' of world economic policies (Bacchus, 2008), and is thus used to meeting someone else's terms of reference, specifications or instructions, be it for textiles, hotel accommodation, financial transactions, software development or payroll management. It was for this reason that business was transferred to Mauritius from a very troubled area, the Maghreb, by both the French-owned customer service platform and the newly implanted American-owned platform, a definite indication of the confidence that international investors have in Mauritius's ability to provide the required level of service.

#### **8.8.2 *English language proficiency***

All the data sources, starting with the documentary review, have clearly shown that the main issue with the use of English in Mauritius is that the language has remained constrained in its original colonial functions as an official administrative language and medium of instruction and thus is mostly used for written communication, filling in forms, sending emails and letters, drafting and reading reports, minutes, brochures and all the other documents used in business. The focus group discussions clearly showed that at the outset none of the young people, most of whom were degree-holders, felt at ease when using English. They have no affinity with the language and so find it difficult to gauge the exact feelings of the person on the telephone. In addition, their knowledge of foreign cultures is limited to say the least, mainly because many of them have not travelled abroad. Their assumption based on the Mauritian culture of welcome and gentleness that the European or American customer will be nice to

them is often disappointed and they are confronted with a difficult customer service situation for which they have no immediate response.

Consequently, the language issue which is the focal point for this study now appears as a big and essential piece of a bigger puzzle. In the interviews, in particular, given the more strategic long-term standpoint of the executive, it acted as a lead-into much wider areas of concern, notably the ability to understand and empathise with the vastly different cultures of their overseas counterparts and customers, while knowing how to respond to the rapid advance of technology. Thus, one of the interviewees who headed a customer service platform mentioned the increasing use of automated replies to customer service issues, such as FAQs (frequently asked questions), improved Help databases and chatbots programmed to answer most of the routine service issues. In his opinion, the traditional call centres using set dialogues will soon disappear as the new technologies take over. The challenge will be to upskill the employees to handle more complex and more technical issues that for the moment the chatbots and FAQs cannot handle. This will imply a much higher level of proficiency in the required language, in this case, UK or US English, depending on the market being served, given that most of the major ICT-BPO platforms driving this transition are entirely English-speaking, while the French-speaking ones are setting up services in English.

### **8.8.3 *Responsibility for appropriate language training***

As the documentary review in Chapter 7 has shown, language learning and management in multilingual Mauritius are geared more towards responding to identity and heritage needs and scholastic prowess than to the practical requirements of earning one's living. Mauritian children are confronted with two if not three foreign languages as soon as they start school, while their home language is not the language of instruction. In terms of educational ethics, this is a serious situation, in that the children are refused the right to learn about their surroundings and express their feelings in the language which they associate with human interaction, their mother tongue. The explicitly rights-based Incheon Declaration states the need for "*language policies to address exclusion*" (Incheon, Paragraph 19, p.32)

and advocates “[i]n multilingual contexts [...] teaching and learning in the first or home language should be encouraged” (Incheon, Paragraph 33, p.37). However, the same Declaration is also mindful of the global world in which today’s children are growing up, when it recommends that at least one foreign language is offered as subject “[g]iven the increased global, social, environmental and economic interdependence” (Incheon, Paragraph 33, p.37). As discussed in Chapter 7, a rather timid start has been made with the introduction of Kreol as a subject in the primary school syllabus. However, for the young people now employed in ICT-BPO sector, upskilling and remedial training in the necessary interpersonal language skills focussed on industry needs are essential. Given the need to comply with international performance standards, it is hard to understand the employers’ reluctance to provide such training and their persistence in considering language learning and training as being the responsibility of the school system, as shown in the answers to the questionnaire. Even those platforms that do cater for such training, of which four major ones were represented in the interviews, do not seem to be sufficiently targeting the more complex, in-depth levels of language mastery that would help the recruits to align more closely to the cultural dimensions of international communication. The participants in the focus groups were clear on this point, and equally so in their lukewarm opinion concerning accent neutralisation programmes. Unlike their Indian and Pakistani counterparts (Cowie, 2007; Rahman, 2009), Mauritian youngsters show no equivalent social aspiration to emulate an overseas role model that is perceived as being high-profile and high-status, a Mauritian equivalent of the NRI. Their approach is purely functional, that of being equipped to do their job properly.

## **8.9 Conclusion**

The various data sources used in this study have all confirmed that the role of English in the continuing economic and social development of Mauritius has been one of formal, examination-oriented acquisition and use which does not prepare the young people for the cut and thrust of handling customer service issues or for the flexibility and critical thinking needed when creating innovative solutions to customer needs. Thus, for Mauritius to continue its transition into the global knowledge-based economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, following Bourdieu (2001), the legitimate competency that

produces the necessary profit of distinction with each use requires a linguistic capital that is much richer and more wide-ranging in its scope than originally thought. The implications for language policy in education and professional training and suggestions for action will be presented in the next and final chapter of this study.

## **CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **9.1 Introduction**

This final chapter starts with a summary of the study with respect to the three main areas of inquiry: (1) Mauritius, a small island developing state seeking to position itself in the global knowledge economy through its ICT-BPO sector, (2) the use of English in the multilingual environment in Mauritius and (3) second language learning and use in the Mauritian education system. It then lists the main conclusions to be drawn from the findings from the desk study and field work and proposes actions to be taken so that Mauritius can continue to move forward in its developmental journey. The discussion then moves on to reflect on how the research process evolved during the study and on the personal learning that was gained. Finally, it identifies the new knowledge and contribution to research and the possible areas for further research.

### **9.2 Summary of the study**

The starting point for the study was the unique position of Mauritius in the global economy, a small island state in a remote stretch in the southern half of the Indian Ocean, a product of the colonial trading routes with no revenue-earning natural resources. The continual struggle for survival fostered a mindset of resourcefulness and resilience which would underpin the country's continual quest for new ways of earning its keep, and be the lever pushing it to develop not just the economic activities normally associated with a tropical island, namely resort hotels and tourism, but also textile production in export processing zones, offshore financial services and ICT-BPO activities. Success was not guaranteed particularly after the dismantling of the various international trade agreements that had protected Mauritius and many other small island developing states (SIDS) from the distinctly uneven battlefield of an open world economy. Mauritius's journey from a poor underdeveloped monocrop economy to a diversified middle-income economy has shown the importance of networks, even before the modern conceptualisation of the term by Castells (1999; 2005) and Dicken (2004), through its

position on one of the main imperial trading routes and its role as a garrison colony. The historical overview in Chapter 5 has shown that much of the country's success was in fact due to lessons well learned over time, particularly with respect to providing the right administrative environment to support new business ventures. Its insistence on maintaining a comprehensive welfare state despite the advice of international funding agencies concerning the financial viability of the undertaking went counter to accepted development credos. As Sen (1999) has conclusively shown, a healthy, secure and educated population is productive and stable, two vital requirements for attracting foreign trade and investment. Universal access to health services, social security payments and education is thus a key factor to Mauritius's success and that of Singapore, another SIDS born of the imperial expansion of trade, as both Bräutigam (1997) and Sandbrook (2005) have shown.

The study then showed how the other two areas of inquiry, the use of English in the multilingual context of Mauritius and second language learning in education in Chapter 7, support the social and economic development of Mauritius. The multilingual context in Mauritius is particularly complex with the two major ex-colonial languages, English and French, now forming part of the contemporary human capital that Mauritius can use for its economic development. However, English has remained largely confined to the formal administrative and legal role that it took on under the British colonial rule, and is not readily used in daily casual discourse, as it is nobody's mother tongue. French is the mother tongue of the descendants of the original French colons, a minority group in the ethnic landscape of Mauritius, but very powerful economically. A number of Asiatic languages are maintained as part of the country's cultural and religious heritage, while the real language common to all Mauritians is Kreol, the language born of the contact between master and slave, hence the persisting prejudices against its formal use in education and administration. Yet, Kreol is used everywhere to facilitate the good conduct of the country's affairs; the clerk in the social security office explains in Kreol the application forms written in English, the teacher presents the maths equation in Kreol and then dictates the lesson notes in English, and so on. Kreol is the language of local reality and identity, while English, and to a lesser extent French, gives access to the global community and international

trade. Hence the choice of sector for the field study, the ICT-BPO sector, where high level of proficiency in English, the global language of business, is a must.

The discussion on the education system and the language policy therein showed how Mauritius has succeeded in gradually building up an education system that goes from kindergarten up to postgraduate university studies, with a parallel system for professional corporate training that has produced the elite needed to run the country's public administration and private business. However, the system is currently at a crucial juncture in its development as it must replace the traditional competitive race for university scholarships fuelled by rote learning by a more collaborative and supportive approach to teaching and learning that welcomes diversity in abilities, interests and talents through which Mauritius can nurture the participative interpersonal skills that the global business networks require in order to function well.

### **9.3 The approach and originality of the study**

The case study approach enabled the required focus on a discrete context with identifiable boundaries, that of an independent island state, and within that context, an equally distinguishable sub-context, that of the ICT-BPO sector, the success of which activity depends entirely on an educated and articulate work force capable of using the new technologies efficiently to achieve business targets. The mix of four standard research tools, namely a desk study of relevant documents, a questionnaire, interviews with representatives of key employers in the sector and focus groups of employees working on the platforms, together with interviews with language and education professionals, produced a multi-faceted data set. By comparing and contrasting the component data sets, the scope and validity of the issues identified could be better ascertained. All the components of the data set concurred on the constrained role of English as the official administrative language of the country, and its role as the main language of wider communication in international relations and business, as well as on its absence in everyday discourse. At the same time, none of the data set components showed any advocacy for replacing English with the other major international language used in Mauritius, French,



nor for reducing the position of the heritage languages in the school system. Mauritians are rightly proud of their multicultural and multilingual heritage which they endeavour to preserve. However, the need for more in-depth language training which would address the intercultural issues involved in the efficient handling of overseas customers and colleagues has been identified in all the components. The major difference noted concerns the time frames of the two main groups in the sample, namely the employers and the employees. The employers are concerned with not just the immediate specific situations where the lack of mutual understanding between the customer and the customer service agent is due to difficulties with the language used, in particular English, but also with the long-term cumulative effect of such incidents on their company's performance and sustainability. On the other hand, the employees are concerned with just the short-term necessity of getting the work done to the best of their ability. This difference is the normal consequence of each group's hierarchical position and scope of responsibility with respect to the operational and strategic levels of their companies, and as such should be seen as being complementary and not antagonistic, particularly when setting up skill development programmes to enhance individual and organisational performance.

As stated in Chapter 1, *Introduction*, the originality of the study has two components, the context of the study and the choice of sample. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, the context of a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) is now recognised as a distinct category in international relations and development, firstly by the Commonwealth followed by the United Nations and then the major international funding agencies, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). The research, in particular by Baldacchino (2011; 2014), (Briguglio (2009) and Sandbrook (2005)), has sought to define the particular characteristics of this distinct ecology and the implications for the sustainable development of the various countries classified as SIDS. The focus has been essentially on their inherent vulnerability in the face of climate change and growing issues with the natural environment. However, as recognised by the Commonwealth Secretariat (Crossley, 2009), since sustainability pertains to all aspects of development, more research is needed into the mechanisms that have led to the overall success of the SIDS in developing their economies and societies to reach middle-income status and beyond. Mauritius is considered to be one of the more successful SIDS as shown by its

positioning in the international rankings as an upper middle income country with high human development (Chapter 3, *Literature Review*, Section 3.6), not least because of its achievements with regards to economic diversification, thus strengthening its prospects for long-term sustainability. This thesis has attempted to respond to this need for greater understanding of the key success factors underpinning the SIDS continued progress, as exemplified by Mauritius, by focussing on language in development within the framework of the global knowledge economy, and the attendant key success factor of education, in line with Sen's advocacy for universal education that equips all individuals to lead autonomous and fulfilling lives (Sen, 1999).

The second component of the originality of the study stems from the choice of context, namely the choice of sample and the subsequent orientation of the research questions. Instead of asking the suppliers of education, that is, the people from inside the system, the teachers, administrators, the parents and the pupils, the study targeted the end-users, the employers and the employees, who need the skills taught at school and elsewhere to do their jobs properly and create wealth. By adapting the base methodology of the customer satisfaction surveys so common in businesses of all types that focus on customer experience and perception, first the questionnaire and then the discussion guides for the interviews and the focus groups aimed at discovering the gaps between customer expectations and supplier performance. The main research question encapsulates this approach by asking firstly about the experiences and perceptions of the employers and employees with respect to the efficiency of a key success factor, the use of English, in the global environment, and secondly for their views on implications on language policy. In customer service terms, this really means asking what would make the customer happy.

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#### **9.4 Conclusions and recommendations**

The younger generations of Mauritian adults, that is, those born in the 1980s onwards, who are today employed in the newer economic sectors of financial services and ICT-BPO activities, have a completely different attitude towards their multilingualism. Their functional approach to choosing which language

to use is devoid of any colonial considerations of power and deference. As the analysis and discussion in Chapters 7 and 8 have shown, English is confined to the non-emotional spaces of formal study and professional activities, while Mauritian Kreol vehicles their identity, cultural values and beliefs and emotions. This change in attitude to a more functional stance could be an interesting lever with which to adjust the aim of second language learning within the education system. Thus, the teaching and learning of English, the former colonial language, now the global language of business, would be in terms of a necessary professional skill, and not as a threat to local heritage cultures and languages.

Such a substantial change in the positioning of English has huge implications throughout the education and training system, starting with the lower primary grades with respect to the positioning of the various languages included in the school curriculum and the choice of medium of instruction. The interviews with the two linguists were very clear on this point. The NYCBE should make this change easier, except for the fact that there is no mention of language reform in the new structure. In line with Nussbaum's plea for a holistic approach in which science, technology and the humanities are given equal space and attention in the education system, Mauritian children should continue to enjoy the opportunity of learning several languages, but not all together, as the presentation in Chapter 7, Section 12, *Managing multilingualism in schools* on has shown. However, overcoming the cultural, religious, and social lobbies that are afraid that the Asiatic languages will be marginalised will be no easy task, as the discussion in Chapter 7 on the statistics for languages has shown. Thus, further studies should focus on interviewing key stake holders in education about how the teaching and learning of second languages throughout the education and training system can be enhanced with respect to the broad linguistic requirements of the country's continued economic development, particularly in the newer IT-related sectors of activity where English is the predominant language.,

In the meantime, the employers must also assume their responsibility and provide the targeted training in the language needed for their business activity. Schools are not equipped to teach all the different uses and contexts in which any language can be used. They are responsible for the laying the generic foundations onto which the specialist and technical terms can be grafted in the context in

which they will be used. For instance, we do not expect schools to teach English for medical purposes to all the children. They will need it if they decide to study medicine and will soon pick up the terms because they need to. The inhouse corporate training centres have the specific function of getting recruits ready to do the job for which they have been hired, and so should be specifically tasked with providing appropriate in-depth training and coaching in (1) the use of English for professional and technical purposes with a wider focus than is currently the case, and (2) the efficient handling of intercultural issues to ensure consistent optimum customer satisfaction by all employees. Preparing the trainees for the IELTS certification would provide an explicit and recognised benchmark of proficiency level attained that could reassure the overseas counterparts involved in the recruitment process of the new customer service agents. At the same time, the current emphasis on accent neutralisation online training programmes should be reviewed and reduced, since their 'one-size-fits-all' approach aimed at producing a formatted language performance on the part of the trainees does not correspond to the needs of the Mauritian ICT-BPO platforms given the more diverse composition of the latter's overseas counterparts and markets.

As regards the IT Academy, this is certainly a proposal that needs closer study. However, a stand-alone academy might not be necessary as the government has recently embarked on a scheme to set up a set of Polytechnics, one of which is dedicated to Information Technology, to provide professional and technical training to those students who do not wish or do not qualify for a more traditional academic field of study. It is too early to comment more on the impact of the scheme. This new initiative does not obviate the need to review the standard of teaching in the existing publicly funded tertiary institutions, starting with the University of Mauritius, given the severity of the opinions expressed by the employers. A dynamic public/private partnership should be worked out to enable the introduction of state-of-the-art knowledge and techniques into the university curricula for IT-related courses. It would also remove the need for the constant updating of equipment as work experience in the partner firms for the students could be arranged as part of their cursus.

Finally, the excessive focus on examination success and the resulting elitist orientation of the education system needs much more in-depth attention than that provided under the new NYCBE programme. As stated in Chapter 8, this is one of the main issues affecting the entire system. Although this issue is outside the scope of this thesis, it cannot be ignored, as the interviews with two linguists clearly showed. Suffice to say here that the Government, through the parent ministry, the Ministry of Education, should address the issue as being a persistent factor of exclusion which impacts both the quantity and quality of the country's human resources.

## **9.5 Research process and personal learning**

As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4 on the methodological base for this study, the research process met with one major obstacle that severely hampered the data collection, namely widespread gatekeeping on the part of the employers that rendered the field work more difficult than expected. This reaction was quite unexpected, mainly because during my long career in education and training I have never been confronted with such reticence. Having discussed the issue with the representatives of the employers interviewed, it became clear that the lack of cooperation was due to fear of poaching their employees and the Service Level Agreements which forbid any disclosure to third parties. Nevertheless, although such gatekeeping is not peculiar to Mauritius, as other studies carried out in India have shown, for example, Cowie (2007), I found the situation initially rather unsettling as it did reduce the scope of my study with respect to exploring individual experience, in particular with respect to the second sub-question: *How do employers and employees perceive and experience English language use in the ICT-BPO sector of the Mauritian economy?*

As regards personal learning, having the opportunity to understand better the interplay between the various languages present in Mauritius, a kaleidoscope of sounds and patterns, was most interesting. It was equally enriching to delve more deeply into the history of Mauritius and see how the country has slowly but surely made its way to a better life. It was also fascinating to learn more about the

military history of the area. Honing my research skills was another challenge that I welcomed, and I hope to find more opportunities to continue doing so.

## **9.6 New knowledge and further research possibilities**

By focussing on the experiences of the employers and employees working in the ICT-BPO sector in the newest sector of Mauritius' economy, , this study has underlined the crucial role played by education in general and proficiency in the major international business language, English, in particular in the successful development of this new sector.

At the same time, this study has shed further light on the complex interplay between the former colonial languages and the languages of everyday discourse in the context of a small island developing state. It has also shown that learning a language does not necessarily mean that cultural understanding automatically accompanies the acquisition of the new language, as shown in the way that technical English is used by non-native speakers to get the work done irrespective of the actual location. It has thus emphasised that today's generation of new recruits have a more functional relationship with the former colonial languages which they see only as a tool with which to communicate with their peers either in the country or abroad. As a result, English is no longer seen in terms of antagonistic power, but as a facilitator for their careers and further education.

It would thus be interesting to compare the Mauritian experience and see how other small multilingual states have tackled the question of balancing local context with global needs with respect to language learning, such as the Seychelles and Singapore. Both countries are listed as SIDS and have been part of the same colonial history as Mauritius. Their ethnic mix is different, as are their political systems which should add another interesting dimension to any comparative research project.

Research into how to stagger the introduction of several languages into the school curriculum, and also on how to improve the English language proficiency of the non-language teachers so that they can

encourage the children to use English more naturally in the science, maths or other classes could also be explored.

## **9.7 Concluding remarks**

As already mentioned several times during this study, Mauritius has always emphasised the need for inclusion of all the stakeholders in its multicultural, multilingual reality in any of its endeavours to develop the country and improve the life of its inhabitants. Language is one of those mechanisms which Mauritians have succeeded in managing with care so as not to alienate any one party. Mauritians are rightly proud of their plural culture in which so many distinct components can express themselves in a climate of mutual respect, without fear of reprisal. It is to be hoped that the young generations will continue to nurture their rich cultural heritage while playing a fully active role in the global economy, in which English will continue to facilitate their access.

## **Annexe 1: CURRICULUM VITAE: PATRICIA DAY-HOOKOOMSING**

### **PERSONAL DATA**

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>Date of birth</b>        | 23 July 1949                                     |
| <b>Place of birth</b>       | Taunton, UK                                      |
| <b>Country of Residence</b> | Mauritius (since 1972)                           |
| <b>Nationality</b>          | British (by birth), Mauritian (by registration)  |
| <b>Current Post</b>         | Managing Director, Consultancy Company Ltd (CCL) |

### **CONTACT DETAILS**

#### **Business**

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| Postal Address | Consultancy Company Ltd (CCL)<br>1 <sup>st</sup> Floor Regency Square, 4 Cnr Conal & McIrvine Streets, Beau Bassin,<br>Mauritius   |
| Telephone      | ██████████   |
| Fax            | ██████████   |
| e-mail         | <a href="mailto:patriciadayhook@ccl.mu">patriciadayhook@ccl.mu</a><br><a href="mailto:patriciadayhook.ccl@intnet.mu">patriciadayhook.ccl@intnet.mu</a><br><a href="mailto:patricia.dayhook@gmail.com">patricia.dayhook@gmail.com</a> |
| Website        | <a href="http://www.ccl.mu">www.ccl.mu</a>   |

#### **Home**

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| Postal Address | 62 Sir Virgil Naz Avenue, Quatre Bornes, Mauritius |
| Telephone      | ██████████   |
| Mobile         | ██████████   |

### **PROFILE**

Ms Patricia Day-Hookoomsing is a qualified lecturer, trainer and tutor with a long and varied career in education and training in Mauritius. She is currently the owner and Managing Director of Consultancy Company Ltd (CCL), an independent private firm offering training courses in administrative and office skills, customer care, Business English, management and supervisory skills for all sectors of the Mauritian economy. She is registered with the Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA) as a trainer in the fields of Communication: Business English, Corporate Governance and Ethics, Entrepreneurship, Human Resource Management and Development, and as Manager and Programme Officer for the CCL training centre.

Since joining CCL in 1989, she has acquired extensive experience in designing, setting up, running and monitoring training programmes, both open and in-company, in all the fields covered by CCL. She is an English/French bilingual and speaks fluently Mauritian Creole.



She is currently studying part-time for a PhD in Education at the University of Reading, UK. Her research topic is *The role of English in an emerging economy: the case of the ICT-BPO sector in Mauritius*.

Her other academic and research activities include:

- consultancy and research work on education, training, women entrepreneurship and gender issues, for the Mauritius Research Council (MRC), the Mauritius Employers' Federation (MEF), and UNDP Mauritius.
- lecturing at various tertiary education institutions in Mauritius, including the Open University of Mauritius (OUM), the MCCI Business School, the Institut de la francophonie pour l'entrepreneuriat (IFE).

Her work as translator (French to English, English to French) covers a wide range of topics, in particular:

- for the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), texts related to the ISLANDS project on biodiversity, disaster reduction and rainwater harvesting, the coral reef monitoring project, SWIOFISH and diverse administrative and HR issues
- the Education for All project for UNESCO-IBE, Geneva
- corporate and consultancy reports for private sector organisations.

She is also currently serving as independent Director of the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) Business School. A Fellow of the Mauritius Institute of Directors (MIoD) since June 2010, she served a five-year mandate as non-executive Director of the MIoD from 2012 to 2017.

An active member of the Association Mauricienne des Femmes Chefs d'Entreprises (AMFCE) since 1999, she served as the AMFCE President for the period 2010-2011. In May 2012, she was appointed Commissioner for recruitment of the worldwide business-women's network, Femmes Chefs d'Entreprises Mondiales (FCEM), of which the AMFCE is a full member.

She is also a Fellow of the UK Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM), and Honorary Fellow of the Mauritian Institute of Management (MIM).

## EMPLOYMENT

### Full-time posts

| Date                          | Post                     | Institution in Mauritius      |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| January 1997 to date          | Managing Director        | Consultancy Company Ltd (CCL) |
| July 1991 to December 1996    | Training Director        |                               |
| July 1989 to June 1991        | Training Manager         |                               |
| September 1975 to June 1989   | Secondary Teacher        | Lycée La Bourdonnais          |
| September 1974 to August 1975 | Administrative Assistant | University of Mauritius       |
| October 1972 to August 1974   | Secondary Teacher        | Lycée La Bourdonnais          |

### Other part-time activities in higher education and professional training

| Date                        | Post   | Host Institution in Mauritius   |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| January 2014 to date        | Course Writer, Tutor and Examiner in Business English, Customer Care and Secretarial Skills          | Open University of Mauritius (OUM)  |
| April 2013 to date          | Trainer in Corporate Governance, IFC GCG Forum   | Mauritius Institute of Directors (MloD)   |
| October 2010 to date        | Certified Ethics Officer and Trainer in Corporate Ethics, Ethics SA                                  | Mauritius Institute of Directors (MloD)   |
| October 2009 to June 2015   | Tutor in HRM, Master in Business Administration, University of Poitiers                              | Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) Training Centre                       |
| January 2003 to June 2014   | Lecturer and Academic Tutor, Master 2 in Entrepreneurship  | AUF Institut de la Francophonie pour l'Entrepreneuriat (IFE)                            |
| January to December 1996    | Lecturer in English for Specific Purposes (ESP)  | Department of Textile Technology, Faculty of Engineering, University of Mauritius (UOM) |
| March 1986 to June 1989     | Lecturer in Business English and Communication Skills  | CCL   |
| September 1988 to June 1989 | English for Special Purposes (ESP) Course Tutor, BTS Gestion et Informatique, Académie de la Réunion | Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) Training Centre                       |
| September 1985 to June 1989 | TOEFL/TESOL Tutor for the staff training programmes  | French Embassy, Port Louis  |
| January 1975 to August 1984 | Course Designer and Course Tutor in Business English   | Mauritius College of the Air  |

## EDUCATION

| Date                 | Qualification  | Awarding Institution   |
|----------------------|--|--|
| <b>Tertiary</b>      |  |  |
| October 2012 to date | PhD in Education: research topic: <i>The role of English in an emerging economy: the case of the ICT-BPO sector in Mauritius</i> | University of Reading, UK<br>Expected completion date: February 2019       |
| December 1978        | Postgraduate Certificate in Education in TOEFL/TESOL, Distinction  | Mauritius Institute of Education   |
| June 1971            | BA Joint Honours in Latin and French, Second Class, Division One   | University of Reading, UK  |
| <b>Professional</b>  |  |  |
| April 2013           | IFC Global Corporate Governance Forum Board Leadership Train the Trainer Programme   | IFC Global Corporate Governance Forum                                      |
| February 2012        | Ethics Officer Certification Programme Training of Trainers  | Ethics Institute of South Africa   |
| July 2000            | Postgraduate Diploma in Entrepreneurship (Diplôme d'Etudes Professionnelles Approfondies)  | AUF Institut de la Francophonie pour l'Entrepreneuriat (IFE), Mauritius    |
| December 1996        | ACCA Certified Diploma in Accounting and Finance   | ACCA, UK   |
| August 1989          | COSEC Training of Trainers Programme   | National Productivity Board Institute for Productivity Training, Singapore |
| December 1971        | Diploma in Secretarial Studies for Bilingual Postgraduates   | City of London Polytechnic, UK   |

## RESEARCH AND CONSULTANCY PUBLICATIONS, REPORTS AND ARTICLES

### 1 Education and training

| Date          | Title   | Agency/Institution   |
|---------------|---|--|
| December 2011 | Aspects institutionnels et sociaux de l'éducation à l'île Maurice<br>Published in <i>Maurice : de l'île sucrière à l'île des savoirs</i> (Editions Le Printemps) – book awarded the <i>Prix FFA-Turgot du livre d'économie francophone</i> , March 2012 | Agence universitaire de la francophonie (AUF) / Institut de recherche pour le Développement (IRD) / Institut français de Maurice (IFM) |
| February 2004 | The Twilight Constituency in Training   | "Business Week" magazine, number 605. Mauritius  |
| December 2003 | Benchmarking Best Training Practices in Mauritius<br>(member of research team)  | Mauritian Institute of Management / Mauritius Research Council   |

|                |   |   |
|----------------|---|---|
| September 2002 | Training and Development Strategies for Promoting Female Entrepreneurship in Mauritius<br>Co-authored with Ms Vedna Essoo<br>Published as ILO WEDGE Seed Working Paper No 58, 2003  | Mauritius Employers' Federation (MEF) / International Labour Organisation (ILO) |
| April 2000     | Leadership Training for Improved Quality in a Post-Colonial, Multicultural Society<br>Awarded <i>Best Paper in Subtheme Category</i> , published in the International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy, Vol. 20 No. 8, 2000 | 5 <sup>th</sup> International Conference on ISO 9000 and TQM, Singapore         |
| April 1999     | Introducing Quality Practices: the Mauritian Experience   | 4 <sup>th</sup> International Conference on ISO 9000 and TQM, Hong Kong         |
| March 1998     | UN Education Project for Mauritius  | UNDP Mauritius  |
| January 1998:  | Training Cannot Compensate for Education  | "Management in Mauritius" magazine  |
| October 1993   | Closing the Quality Gap   | "Industry Focus" magazine, Mauritius  |

## 2 Entrepreneurship

| Date          | Title   | Agency/Institution  |
|---------------|---|---|
| February 2009 | Comment être un entrepreneur créatif, innovant ?<br>Les instruments innovants pour un environnement d'affaires favorable  | Les rencontres entrepreneuriales de l'IFE, Mauritius                        |
| March 2008    | L'entrepreneuriat féminin: facteur clé pour soutenir le développement durable dans les petits pays émergents du sud: île Maurice<br>Published in <i>L'entrepreneuriat francophone : évolution et perspectives</i> , Collection Mouvements Economiques et Sociaux, L'Harmattan, 2009 | Colloque AUF/Université de Laval, Quebec,                                   |
| May 2007      | La contribution de la petite entreprise au développement durable dans les pays du sud: le cas de l'île Maurice<br>Co-authored with Gérard Lemoine, Directeur de l'IFE<br>Published in <i>Les mutations entrepreneuriales</i> , Editions Tsipika, L'Harmattan, 2009                  | 10ème Journées Scientifiques du Réseau Entrepreneuriat de l'AUF, Madagascar |
| June 2003     | Creating an Enabling Environment for Women Entrepreneurs in Mauritius   | ICSB 48th World Conference, Belfast, Northern Ireland                       |
| February 2003 | Discussion paper on project to assist women entrepreneurs to export services  | International Trade Centre, UNCTAD/WTO                                      |

|              |   |   |
|--------------|---|---|
| October 2002 | La situation de la femme entrepreneur face à la nouvelle donne économique à l'île Maurice | 6ème Congrès international francophone sur la PME, Montréal, Canada |
| March 2000   | L'entrepreneuriat au féminin, contraintes et perspectives: le cas de l'île Maurice        | Colloque International, IFE/INSCAE, Madagascar                      |
| May 1998     | Running a Small Business - The Way to Crack the Glass Ceiling: The Mauritian Experience   | ABSA SAEBSA 11th Annual Conference, South Africa                    |

### 3 Gender

| Date          | Title   | Agency/Institution  |
|---------------|---|---|
| November 2009 | La femme mauricienne dans la vie publique de son pays : une participation active en devenir<br>Published in <i>Alizés</i> , number 34, January 2011 | Colloque international : Genre et Gouvernance, Mauritius                        |
| April 2001    | Women and the New World Economy: an island's experience<br>Published in the <i>Women in Management Review</i> , Vol.17 No.7, 2002                   | 6 <sup>th</sup> ICIT Conference on ISO 9000 and TQM, Scotland                   |
| November 2000 | Les femmes et le pouvoir décisionnel au travail: le cas de l'île Maurice  | Colloque international, Université de la Réunion                                |
| December 1997 | Report on Women and Gender Issues in Mauritius  | UNDP Mauritius  |
| December 1995 | Women in Management, Presence or Role   | "Management in Mauritius" magazine  |
| March 1994    | White Paper on Women in Development (First Draft)   | Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare/UNDP Mauritius |
| February 1994 | The Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies in the Mauritian Context   | UNDP Mauritius  |
| October 1993  | La présence des femmes d'affaires dans le développement économique de l'île Maurice   | 4ème Forum Francophone des Affaires, Mauritius                                  |

### 4 Language

| Date          | Title   | Agency/Institution                              |
|---------------|---|---|
| October 2006  | Assessment of the Use of English in International Business in Mauritius | Mauritius Research Council                      |
| June 2000     | Translation in the Business Sector                                      | Workshop on Translation Studies, MGI, Mauritius |
| May 1997      | A Tale of Two Languages: from Classroom English to Business English     | British Legacy Conference, MGI, Mauritius       |
| December 1996 | Sonnets and Surfing: the importance of English in the business world    | "Management in Mauritius" magazine              |

## **DIRECTORSHIPS, BOARD STANDING COMMITTEES AND OTHER COUNCILS**

- Director (independent) of the MCCI Business School (January 2015 to date)
  - Member of Audit and Risk Committee
- Director (non-executive) of the Mauritian Institute of Directors (MIoD) (September 2012 to December 2017)
  - Member of Audit and Risk Committee (2016--2017) and Education Committee (2012 to 2014)
- Council Member of the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry (1998 to 2000, 2010 to 2011, 2012 to 2015)
- Council Member, Human Resource Development Council (HRDC), Mauritius, (2003 to 2014)
  - Member of Corporate Governance Committee (2012 to 2014)
- Council Member of the Mauritius Employers' Federation (2010 to 2011)
- Council Member of the English-Speaking Union (Mauritius Branch) (2009 to 2014)

## **VOLUNTARY MEMBERSHIPS**

- Fellow of the UK Institute of Leadership and Management
- Fellow of the Mauritian Institute of Directors
- Honorary Fellow of the Mauritian Institute of Management
- Certified Ethics Officer, Ethics Institute of South Africa
- Commissioner for recruitment, Femmes Chefs d'Entreprises Mondiales (FCEM) (2012 to date)
- President of the Association Mauricienne des Femmes Chefs d'Entreprises (AMFCE) (2010 to 2011)
- President of the Association of Training Professionals (Mauritius) (2003 to 2005, 2007)
- Vice-President of the Association des Diplômés de l'Institut de la Francophonie pour l'Entrepreneuriat (Maurice) (2003 to 2005)

## **OTHER ACTIVITIES**

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| 1993 to 2014 | Competition Official, Mauritian Swimming Federation  |
| 1993 to 1997 | Executive Committee Member, Mauritian Swimming Federation  |
| 1993         | Ladies Team Captain for Mauritian Swimming Team,<br>4th Indian Ocean Games, Seychelles               |
| 1994         | Head of Delegation for Mauritian Junior Swimming Team,<br>Junior African Championships, Cairo, Egypt |

## ANNEXE 2: MAPPING OF THESIS

| Thesis title: The role of English in an emerging economy: the case of the ICT-BPO sector in Mauritius |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|---|
|   | Main Topic                                 | Sub-topics and questions   | Evidence  |
| 1   | Introduction: Overview of research project | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Origin of project: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Researcher's experience in teaching English for professional purposes in private and public sector organisations in Mauritius</li> <li>▪ Anecdotal evidence of the issue through press articles on recruitment issues in the BPO sector including the need for high-level communication skills in English and French</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Researcher's profile and motivation</li> <li>• Three broad areas of inquiry: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mauritius in the global knowledge economy</li> <li>▪ The use of English in the multilingual environment in Mauritius</li> <li>▪ Second language learning and use in the Mauritian education system</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Main research question: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What are the experiences and perceptions of both employers and employees in the ICT-BPO sector in Mauritius concerning the use of English in the context of the global knowledge economy?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher's CV</li> <li>• Press articles</li> </ul>   |
| 2   | Theoretical framework                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Globalisation with particular reference to the development of knowledge-based economic activities in the context of a Small Island Developing States (SIDS)</li> <li>• English as a global language in a multilingual environment</li> <li>• The role of education in development</li> </ul>  | <p>Desk research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• specialist articles and reports, historical and contemporary</li> <li>• reports by international agencies, for example, Commonwealth Secretariat. UN system, World Bank</li> </ul> |
| 3   | Literature review                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English in the post-colonial development context</li> <li>• The international business perspective</li> <li>• English in the global ICT-BPO sector</li> <li>• The particular context of the SIDS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Characteristics</li> <li>▪ Challenges with respect to education and human resource development</li> </ul> </li> </ul>   | <p>Desk research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• specialist articles and reports, historical and contemporary</li> <li>• reports by international agencies, for example, Commonwealth Secretariat. UN system, World Bank</li> </ul> |

|   |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|
| 4 | Methodology:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>theoretical considerations</li> </ul> actual data collection | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choice of research paradigm: ontological, epistemological, methodological</li> <li>Data collection methods used <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the questionnaire</li> <li>sample used for the questionnaire</li> <li>Interview guides: one-to-one and group interviews</li> <li>Profile of interviewees: one-to-one and focus group interviews</li> </ul> </li> <li>Time frame and conduct of data collection process</li> <li>Issues and barriers encountered during the data collection, their impact on the research and solutions/alternatives used</li> <li>Data analysis</li> <li>Reliability and validity of data</li> <li>The ethical dimension</li> <li>The practitioner-researcher</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Desk research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>specialist articles and reports</li> </ul> </li> <li>Documents prepared for data collection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Questionnaire</li> <li>Interview guide</li> <li>Information sheets to interviewees and focus group participants</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>UOR Ethics Clearance</p> |
| 5 | Mauritius: the making of an island hub  | Mauritius: general presentation: history, geography, population profile <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How did Mauritius move from a colonial, mono-crop economy to an independent diversified, emerging economy?</li> <li>How has Mauritius, a SIDS, positioned itself in the global knowledge economy? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Mauritian ICT-BPO sector</li> </ul> </li> </ul>  | Desk research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>specialist articles and reports, historical and contemporary</li> <li>reports by international agencies, for example, Commonwealth Secretariat. UN system, World Bank</li> </ul>   |
| 6 | Overview of the Mauritian education and training system   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Mauritian education and training system <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How has it evolved over time?</li> <li>What are the present objectives and structure?</li> </ul> </li> <li>What happens in practice?</li> </ul>  | Desk research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>official policy: laws, government website, ministry decisions, examination syllabi: Cambridge SC and HSC</li> <li>national statistics and censuses</li> <li>historical and contemporary analyses and research papers</li> </ul>  |
| 7 | The role and use of English in Mauritius  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The use of English in the multilingual environment in Mauritius: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What factors influence the user's choice of language in a multilingual environment such as Mauritius?</li> <li>Where and when is English used in (1) everyday discourse and (2) the business context?</li> <li>The language policy in the Mauritian education system</li> </ul> </li> </ul>   | Desk research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>official policy: laws, government website, ministry decisions</li> <li>national statistics and censuses</li> <li>historical and contemporary analyses and research papers</li> </ul>   |



|   |                                       |   |  |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| 8 | Findings and discussion               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation and analysis of findings from the questionnaire, interviews and focus groups in answer to the following questions:</li> <li>• How do employers and employees perceive and experience English language use in the ICT-BPO sector of the Mauritian economy? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Which English language skills and levels of communicative competency do employers in the ICT-BPO sector expect?</li> <li>▪ What are the employers' views on the standard of English demonstrated by their employees?</li> <li>▪ How do employees experience using English in their work context?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What difficulties do employees have when using English?</li> <li>• How do employees improve their mastery of English to meet workplace requirements?</li> <li>• What support do employers give to enable employees to improve their standard of English?</li> <li>• What are the views of employers and employees on how effectively schools and higher education institutions prepare students to work in English?</li> </ul> <p>Feedback from additional interviews carried out in July 2020</p> | <p>Empirical research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• questionnaire sent by email and normal post to the Admin/HR Manager of the BPO firms on the list published on the government website by the Ministry of Technology, Communication and Technology, and those listed on the 2 industry professional associations, OTAM and MITIA</li> <li>• focussed interviews with key senior HR executives with experience in recruiting for BPO and customer service platforms</li> <li>• 2 focus groups with employees on one of the major platforms after interviewing the MD</li> <li>• 1 focus group with employees on one of the newer platforms after interviewing the Head of Operations</li> <li>• 3 additional interviews in July 2020</li> </ul> |
| 9 | Conclusions and original contribution | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New knowledge brought by this thesis</li> <li>• Contribution to research</li> <li>• Personal learning</li> <li>• Reflections on the research process</li> <li>• Possible further research</li> </ul>   |  |

### **ANNEXE 3: FIELD WORK DOCUMENTS**

- Questionnaire: covering letter
- Questionnaire: blank copy
- Interviews: Participant information sheet
- Interviews: Participant consent form
- Focus groups: Participant information sheet
- Focus groups: Participant consent form
- Focus groups: Questions
- Ethics Approval Form: approval dated 23 July 2015



October 2015

Dear Sir/Madam

**ENGLISH IN THE MAURITIAN ICT-BPO SECTOR**

I am currently studying for a PhD in Education at the Institute of Education of the University of Reading, UK, under the supervision of Professor Nazima Rassool. My research topic is:

*The role of English in an emerging economy: the case of the ICT-BPO sector in Mauritius.*

The overall objectives of my research are to:

- ♦ Assess the needs in terms of communicative competency in English of the ICT-BPO sector in Mauritius in the context of the global knowledge economy
- ♦ Make a critical review of current educational policies and practices with respect to second language acquisition in Mauritius, in particular English, and
- ♦ Identify appropriate measures to improve the acquisition and fluency of English in the educational and professional development process.

This study has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. The University has the appropriate insurances in place, full details of which are available on request.

All information provided by you will be treated confidentially and no direct reference to your organisation will be made in the analysis and write-up of the findings as part of my thesis. The collection and storage of all information will comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2004.

If you wish to have more details about my professional activities please visit my Linked-In page or my company website [www.ccl.mu](http://www.ccl.mu) .

I would, therefore, be most grateful if you could spare the time to fill in the attached questionnaire on the use of English in your organisation. Please return your completed questionnaire by **Friday 6 November 2015**.

My contact details are:

- ♦ e-mail on [P.N.Day-Hookoomsing@pgr.reading.ac.uk](mailto:P.N.Day-Hookoomsing@pgr.reading.ac.uk) or [patricia.dayhook@ccl.mu](mailto:patricia.dayhook@ccl.mu)

I hope that I can count on your collaboration in my research.

Yours faithfully

Patricia N Day-Hookoomsing  
PhD student  
Institute of Education  
University of Reading UK

## PhD Research Study

### The role of English in an emerging economy: the case of the ICT-BPO sector in Mauritius

October 2015

#### COMPANY ACTIVITIES AND MAIN MARKET ORIENTATION

**1 Which of the following IT-related activities does your company do? Please tick ✓ all that apply.**

- ☐ Back office operations
- ☐ Business process outsourcing
- ☐ Call centre/telemarketing
- ☐ Digital broadcasting
- ☐ E-commerce
- ☐ Hardware sales
- ☐ International telephony
- ☐ Internet service provider
- ☐ Mobile telephony
- ☐ Networking/cabling
- ☐ Software development
- ☐ Software sales
- ☐ Telecom operator
- ☐ Web design and multimedia development
- ☐ Web hosting
- ☐ Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**2 Which is your company's main market orientation? Choose one answer only.**

- ☐ Domestic Mauritian market only
- ☐ Export-oriented only
- ☐ Both domestic and export-oriented

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**3 If your company's activities are partially or wholly export-oriented, which countries does it do business with? Please tick ✓ all that apply.**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Australia                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Madagascar               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Botswana                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Pakistan                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> France (metropolitan)         | <input type="checkbox"/> Seychelles               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> France (Reunion Island)       | <input type="checkbox"/> South Africa             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ghana                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Tanzania                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> India                         | <input type="checkbox"/> United Kingdom           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kenya                         | <input type="checkbox"/> United States of America |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____ |   |

#### EMPLOYEE PROFILE

**4 How many employees does your company have? Please tick ✓ as appropriate.**

- ☐ <50
 ☐ 51-100
 ☐ 101-200
 ☐ 201-500
 ☐ >500

**5 What is the highest level of qualification held by each category of personnel? Please tick ✓ as appropriate.**

|                             | Below<br>School<br>Certificate | School<br>Certificate | Higher<br>School<br>Certificate/<br>Baccalauréat | Diploma | First<br>Degree<br>(BA,<br>BSc,<br>Licence) | Masters<br>(MA,<br>MSc,<br>MBA,<br>Maitrise)<br>or higher | Professional<br>(for<br>example:<br>ACCA<br>CIMA, ICSA) |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|--|---------|---|---|---|
| Directors/Senior Executives |                                |                       |  |         |   |   |   |
| Operation/middle managers   |                                |                       |  |         |   |   |   |
| Supervisors/Team Leaders    |                                |                       |  |         |   |   |   |
| Administrative/secretarial  |                                |                       |  |         |   |   |   |
| Telephonists/receptionists  |                                |                       |  |         |   |   |   |
| Technicians                 |                                |                       |  |         |   |   |   |
| Customer contact            |                                |                       |  |         |   |   |   |
| Call centre personnel       |                                |                       |  |         |   |   |   |
| In-house trainers           |                                |                       |  |         |   |   |   |
| Others (Please specify)     |                                |                       |  |         |   |   |   |

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**6 Does your company employ any English-speaking expatriate personnel?**

Please tick ✓ as appropriate:

☐ Yes

☐ No

**7 If yes to Question 6, please complete the table below.**

| Post                        | Number |
|-----------------------------|--------|
| Directors/Senior Executives |        |
| Operation/middle managers   |        |
| Supervisors/Team Leaders    |        |
| Administrative/secretarial  |        |
| Telephonists/receptionists  |        |
| Technicians                 |        |
| Customer contact            |        |
| Call centre personnel       |        |
| In-house trainers           |        |
| Others (please specify)     |        |

## USE OF INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGES

### 8 Which international language(s) does your company use in its business activities?

Please tick✓ all that apply.

- ☐ English
- ☐ French
- ☐ German
- ☐ Italian
- ☐ Mandarin
- ☐ Russian
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

### 9 How much of your company's business is conducted in English? Please tick ✓ as appropriate.

|                                 | <10% | 10-25% | 26-50% | 51-75% | >75% |
|---------------------------------|------|--------|--------|--------|------|
| Face-to-face meetings           |      |        |        |        |      |
| Telephone contacts              |      |        |        |        |      |
| Audio conference                |      |        |        |        |      |
| Video conference                |      |        |        |        |      |
| Back office work and processing |      |        |        |        |      |
| Data capture                    |      |        |        |        |      |
| Brochures                       |      |        |        |        |      |
| E-mail                          |      |        |        |        |      |
| Fax                             |      |        |        |        |      |
| In-house magazines              |      |        |        |        |      |
| Letters                         |      |        |        |        |      |
| Memos                           |      |        |        |        |      |
| Minutes                         |      |        |        |        |      |
| Reports                         |      |        |        |        |      |
| Staff manuals                   |      |        |        |        |      |
| Other: please specify:          |      |        |        |        |      |

### USE OF ENGLISH BY MAURITIAN EMPLOYEES

**10 Which languages do your company's Mauritian employees use to communicate among themselves during their daily work? Please rate in order of frequency from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating the most frequently used language.**

- ☐ English
- ☐ French
- ☐ Kreol
- ☐ Other (please specify)

**11 How often do your company's Mauritian employees use SPOKEN English in their work? Please tick ✓ as appropriate.**

|                             | Never | Not very often | Quite often | Often | Most of the time | Always |
|-----------------------------|-------|----------------|-------------|-------|------------------|--------|
| Directors/Senior Executives |       |                |             |       |                  |        |
| Operation/middle managers   |       |                |             |       |                  |        |
| Supervisors/Team Leaders    |       |                |             |       |                  |        |
| Administrative/secretarial  |       |                |             |       |                  |        |
| Telephonists/receptionists  |       |                |             |       |                  |        |
| Technicians                 |       |                |             |       |                  |        |
| Customer contact            |       |                |             |       |                  |        |
| Call centre personnel       |       |                |             |       |                  |        |
| In-house trainers           |       |                |             |       |                  |        |
| Others (Please specify)     |       |                |             |       |                  |        |



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**12 How often do your company's Mauritian employees use WRITTEN English in their work? Please tick ✓ as appropriate.**

|                             | Never | Not very often | Quite often | Often | Most of the time | Always |
|-----------------------------|-------|----------------|-------------|-------|------------------|--------|
| Directors/Senior Executives |       |                |             |       |                  |        |
| Operation/middle managers   |       |                |             |       |                  |        |
| Supervisors/Team Leaders    |       |                |             |       |                  |        |
| Administrative/secretarial  |       |                |             |       |                  |        |
| Telephonists/receptionists  |       |                |             |       |                  |        |
| Technicians                 |       |                |             |       |                  |        |
| Customer contact            |       |                |             |       |                  |        |
| Call centre personnel       |       |                |             |       |                  |        |
| In-house trainers           |       |                |             |       |                  |        |
| Others (Please specify)     |       |                |             |       |                  |        |

**13 How fluent in English do you consider these employees to be? Please tick ✓ as appropriate.**

|                             | Not fluent at all | Somewhat fluent | Fluent | Very fluent | First language |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|--------|-------------|----------------|
| Directors/Senior Executives |                   |                 |        |             |                |
| Operation/middle managers   |                   |                 |        |             |                |
| Supervisors/Team Leaders    |                   |                 |        |             |                |
| Administrative/secretarial  |                   |                 |        |             |                |
| Telephonists/receptionists  |                   |                 |        |             |                |
| Technicians                 |                   |                 |        |             |                |
| Customer contact            |                   |                 |        |             |                |
| Call centre personnel       |                   |                 |        |             |                |
| In-house trainers           |                   |                 |        |             |                |
| Others (Please specify)     |                   |                 |        |             |                |

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**14 What difficulties do your company's Mauritian employees have in using English?**

**Please tick ✓ all that apply.**

- ☐ Afraid of saying things the wrong way
- ☐ Do not speak clearly enough through lack of confidence
- ☐ Cannot understand what is being said
- ☐ Cannot cope with different accents in English
- ☐ Have difficulty in remembering oral instructions
- ☐ Have difficulty in recognising the other person's feelings
- ☐ Cannot cope with general conversation face-to-face
- ☐ Lack appropriate vocabulary for business transactions
- ☐ Cannot understand complicated written texts
- ☐ Make basic language mistakes (for example, grammar, vocabulary)
- ☐ Articulate poorly
- ☐ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**15 Have you received any feedback from your English-speaking customers about how your employees express themselves in English? Please tick ✓ as appropriate.**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**16 If yes to Question 15, was the feedback about spoken or written communication?**

**Please tick ✓ as appropriate.**

- ☐ Spoken
- ☐ Written

**17 If the feedback was about your employees' SPOKEN communication, which of the following apply? Please tick ✓ all that apply.**

- ☐ Did not speak clearly
- ☐ Seemed to lack confidence
- ☐ Did not ask clear questions
- ☐ Did not use the right technical terms
- ☐ Did not show empathy towards the customer's situation
- ☐ Kept asking the customer to repeat information
- ☐ Did not seem to understand the issue at stake
- ☐ Could not explain the action to be taken clearly
- ☐ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

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**18 If the feedback was about your employees' WRITTEN communication, which of the following apply? Please tick ✓ all that apply.**

- ☐ Document or message received not clear
- ☐ Did not seem to understand the issue at stake
- ☐ Document or message received by the customer lacked information requested
- ☐ Did not ask clear questions concerning further information required
- ☐ Did not use the right technical terms
- ☐ Did not show empathy towards the customer's situation
- ☐ Could not explain the action to be taken clearly
- ☐ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**19 What steps have you taken to improve the level of English in your company in the past 2 years? Please tick ✓ all that apply.**

- ☐ Use of Internet
- ☐ Circulating magazines and other reading material in English
- ☐ Setting up a resource library
- ☐ Organising language courses in Mauritius
- ☐ Sending personnel abroad for training in English-speaking countries
- ☐ None
- ☐ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

#### ENGLISH AS A RECRUITMENT REQUIREMENT

**20 Does your company include competency in English in its recruitment profiles? Please tick ✓ as appropriate.**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**21 If yes to Question 20, how do you judge applicants' proficiency in English? Please tick ✓ all that apply.**

- ☐ Results in examinations (for example: SC English Language, HSC General Paper)
- ☐ Use of English in interview
- ☐ Written test as part of interview procedure
- ☐ Role plays as part of interview procedure

## USE OF ENGLISH IN MAURITIUS

**22 How important do you consider the use of English to the future development of Mauritius? Please tick ✓ as appropriate.**

- ☐ Not important at all
- ☐ Somewhat important
- ☐ Important
- ☐ Very important
- ☐ Essential

**23 How do you assess the level of English used in Mauritius generally? Please tick ✓ as appropriate.**

|         | Very poor | Poor | Somewhat inadequate | Adequate | Good | Excellent |
|---------|-----------|------|---------------------|----------|------|-----------|
| Spoken  |           |      |                     |          |      |           |
| Written |           |      |                     |          |      |           |

**24 Do you consider that Mauritians receive enough exposure to English in their daily lives? Please tick ✓ as appropriate.**

| Very insufficient | Insufficient | Sufficient | More than enough |
|-------------------|--------------|------------|------------------|
|                   |              |            |                  |

**25 How well do you think that the various secondary qualifications available in Mauritius prepare young people to use English adequately in their professional life? Please tick ✓ as appropriate.**

|                                 | Not at all | Not enough | Enough | Quite well | Very well |
|---------------------------------|------------|------------|--------|------------|-----------|
| Cambridge SC/HSC                |            |            |        |            |           |
| International Baccalaureat (IB) |            |            |        |            |           |
| French Baccalauréat             |            |            |        |            |           |

Institute of Education, University of Reading,  
London Road campus, 4 Redlands Road, Reading RG1 5EX, UK

**26 What suggestions do you have to improve the level of English used in Mauritius?**

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**27 Have you anything else that you wish to add?**

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**28 Would you be interested in taking a further part in this study?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

**29 If yes to Question 28, please give the name of your company and contact details.**

**Name of company:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone:** \_\_\_\_\_

Please return your completed questionnaire to **Patricia Day-Hookoomsing** by **Friday 23 October 2015**

- Email: [P.N.Day-Hookoomsing@pgr.reading.ac.uk](mailto:P.N.Day-Hookoomsing@pgr.reading.ac.uk) or [patriciadayhook@ccl.mu](mailto:patriciadayhook@ccl.mu) , or
- Fax: 464 0744, or
- Post using the enclosed stamp addressed envelope.

**Thank you for replying to this questionnaire.**

## **Participant information sheet: Admin/HR and Operations managers**

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study about the use of English in the ITC-BPO sector in Mauritius. The title of study is *The role of English in an emerging economy: the case of the ICT-BPO sector in Mauritius*.

### *What is the study?*

The study is part of a PhD thesis that I am undertaking at the Institute of Education, University of Reading. The study has three main aims: (1) assess the needs in terms of communicative competency in English of the offshore service sector in Mauritius in the context of the global knowledge economy; (2) make a critical review of current educational policies and practices with respect to second language acquisition in Mauritius, in particular English; and (3) identify appropriate measures to improve the acquisition and fluency of English in the educational and professional development process.

### *Why have I been chosen to take part?*

You have been invited to take part in the study because your organisation has been identified as regularly using English with overseas customers as part of its normal operations. As a manager responsible for staff administration, recruitment and development your views on the use of English and its impact on the performance achieved by the employees will be most valuable for this study.

### *Do I have to take part?*

It is entirely up to you whether you participate. You may also withdraw at any time during the study, without any repercussions to you, by contacting the researcher using the details above.

### *What will happen if I take part?*

An interview will be conducted with you at a time convenient to you, lasting about an hour, in which you will all be asked about your experiences and opinions concerning the use of English and its impact on your organisation's performance. With your permission, this discussion will be recorded and transcribed.

### *What are the risks and benefits of taking part?*

The information you give will remain confidential and will only be seen by the researcher and her supervisor. You will not be identified in the final thesis, although some of your responses will be used in it in an anonymised form. Information will not be shared with your employers.

Participants in similar studies have found it interesting and useful to reflect on how they use languages. I anticipate that the findings of the study will be useful for both employers in the ITC-BPO sector in Mauritius in deciding how to enhance the level of English currently used in the sector, and also the national education authorities, in particular those concerned with developing the school curriculums and setting the examinations. A summary copy of the findings of the study can be made available to you by contacting the researcher.

*What will happen to the data?*

Any data collected will be held in strict confidence and no real names will be used in this study or in any subsequent publications. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet and on a password-protected computer and only the student researcher, Ms Patricia Day-Hookoomsing, and the researcher's supervisor, Professor Nazima Rassool, will have access to the records. The data will be destroyed securely after 5 years.

The data will be presented in my dissertation and possibly in subsequent academic publications. I do hope that you will agree to take part in the study. If you do, please complete the attached consent form.

This study has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct.

The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

Thank you for your time.

## Participant Consent Form

I have read the Information Sheet about the study.

I understand what the purpose of the project is and what you want me to do. All my questions have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

I understand that it is my choice to help with this study and that I can withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

I have received a copy of this Consent Form and of the Information Sheet.

### Please circle as appropriate:

- I am willing to take part in an interview. YES / NO
- I am willing for the interview to be recorded. YES / NO
- I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in the thesis being prepared by Ms Patricia Day-Hookoomsing and in any subsequent publications that she may prepare. YES / NO

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Post: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## **Participant information sheet: Focus Groups**

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study about the use of English in the ITC-BPO sector in Mauritius. The title of study is *The role of English in an emerging economy: the case of the ICT-BPO sector in Mauritius*.

### *What is the study?*

The study is part of a PhD thesis that I am undertaking at the Institute of Education, University of Reading. The study has three main aims: (1) assess the needs in terms of communicative competency in English of the *ICT-BPO* sector in Mauritius in the context of the global knowledge economy; (2) make a critical review of current educational policies and practices with respect to second language acquisition in Mauritius, in particular English; and (3) identify appropriate measures to improve the acquisition and fluency of English in the educational and professional development process.

### *Why have I been chosen to take part?*

You have been invited to take part in the study because you have been identified by your company as an employee who regularly uses English with overseas customers as part of their normal work. A sample of employees representing the main areas of work which require contact with overseas English-speaking customers has been identified for the purposes of this study.

### *Do I have to take part?*

It is entirely up to you whether you participate. You may also withdraw at any time during the study, without any repercussions to you, by contacting the researcher using the details above.

### *What will happen if I take part?*

A group discussion in which you have been chosen to take part will be conducted at a time convenient to you and your colleagues, lasting about 1 hour, in which you will all be asked about your experiences in using English in the course of your work. With your permission, this discussion will be recorded and transcribed.

### *What are the risks and benefits of taking part?*

The information you give will remain confidential and will only be seen by the researcher and her supervisor. You will not be identified in the final thesis, although some of your responses will be used in it in an anonymised form. Information will not be shared with your employers.

Participants in similar studies have found it interesting and useful to reflect on how they use languages. I anticipate that the findings of the study will be useful for both employers in the ITC-BPO sector in Mauritius in deciding how to enhance the level of English currently used in the sector, and also the national education authorities, in particular those concerned with developing the school curriculums and setting the examinations. A summary copy of the findings of the study can be made available to you by contacting the researcher.



*What will happen to the data?*

Any data collected will be held in strict confidence and no real names will be used in this study or in any subsequent publications. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet and on a password-protected computer and only the student researcher, Ms Patricia Day-Hookoomsing, and the researcher's supervisor, Professor Nazima Rassool, will have access to the records. The data will be destroyed securely after 5 years.

The data will be presented in my dissertation and possibly in subsequent academic publications. We do hope that you will agree to take part in the study. If you do, please complete the attached consent form.

This study has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct.

The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

Thank you for your time.

## Participant Consent Form

I have read the Information Sheet about the study.

I understand what the purpose of the project is and what you want me to do. All my questions have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

I understand that it is my choice to help with this study and that I can withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

I have received a copy of this Consent Form and of the Information Sheet.

### Please circle as appropriate:

I am willing to take part in a focus group. YES / NO

I am willing for the focus group to be recorded. YES / NO

I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in the thesis being prepared by Ms Patricia Day-Hookoomsing and in any subsequent publications that she may prepare. YES / NO

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

University of Reading

Institute of Education  
**Ethical Approval Form A (version September 2013)**

Tick one:

Staff project: \_\_\_\_ PhD ☒

Name of applicant (s): Ms Patricia Day-Hookoomsing

Title of project: *English as a key success factor in an emerging economy: the case of the offshore service sector in Mauritius*

Name of supervisor (for student projects): Professor Nazima Rassool

**Please complete the form below including relevant sections overleaf.**

|   | YES                                 | NO |
|---|-------------------------------------|----|
| <b>Have you prepared an Information Sheet for participants and/or their parents/carers that:</b>  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |    |
| a) explains the purpose(s) of the project   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |    |
| b) explains how they have been selected as potential participants   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |    |
| c) gives a full, fair and clear account of what will be asked of them and how the information that they provide will be used  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |    |
| d) makes clear that participation in the project is voluntary   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |    |
| e) explains the arrangements to allow participants to withdraw at any stage if they wish  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |    |
| f) explains the arrangements to ensure the confidentiality of any material collected during the project, including secure arrangements for its storage, retention and disposal  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |    |
| g) explains the arrangements for publishing the research results and, if confidentiality might be affected, for obtaining written consent for this  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |    |
| h) explains the arrangements for providing participants with the research results if they wish to have them   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |    |
| i) gives the name and designation of the member of staff with responsibility for the project together with contact details, including email . If any of the project investigators are students at the IoE, then this information must be included and their name provided                                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |    |
| k) explains, where applicable, the arrangements for expenses and other payments to be made to the participants  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |    |
| j) includes a standard statement indicating the process of ethical review at the University undergone by the project, as follows:<br><br>‘This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct’. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |    |
| k)includes a standard statement regarding insurance:<br><br>“The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request”.  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |    |

|  |     |    |      |
|--|-----|----|------|
| <b>Please answer the following questions</b>   |     |    |      |
| 1) Will you provide participants involved in your research with all the information necessary to ensure that they are fully informed and not in any way deceived or misled as to the purpose(s) and nature of the research? (Please use the subheadings used in the example information sheets on blackboard to ensure this).            | ✓   |    |      |
| 2) Will you seek written or other formal consent from all participants, if they are able to provide it, in addition to (1)?  | ✓   |    |      |
| 3) Is there any risk that participants may experience physical or psychological distress in taking part in your research?  |     | ✓  |      |
| 4) Have you taken the online training modules in data protection and information security (which can be found here: <a href="http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/imps/Staffpages/imps-training.aspx">http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/imps/Staffpages/imps-training.aspx</a> )?   | ✓   |    |      |
| 5) Have you read the Health and Safety booklet (available on Blackboard) and completed a Risk Assessment Form to be included with this ethics application?   | ✓   |    |      |
| 6) Does your research comply with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research?  | ✓   |    |      |
|  | YES | NO | N.A. |
| 7) If your research is taking place in a school, have you prepared an information sheet and consent form to gain the permission in writing of the head teacher or other relevant supervisory professional?   |     |    | ✓    |
| 8) Has the data collector obtained satisfactory DBS clearance?   |     |    | ✓    |
| 9) If your research involves working with children under the age of 16 (or those whose special educational needs mean they are unable to give informed consent), have you prepared an information sheet and consent form for parents/carers to seek permission in writing, or to give parents/carers the opportunity to decline consent? |     |    | ✓    |
| 10) If your research involves processing sensitive personal data <sup>5</sup> , or if it involves audio/video recordings, have you obtained the explicit consent of participants/parents?  |     |    | ✓    |
| 11) If you are using a data processor to subcontract any part of your research, have you got a written contract with that contractor which (a) specifies that the contractor is required to act only on your instructions, and (b) provides for appropriate technical and organisational security measures to protect the data?          |     |    | ✓    |
| 12a) Does your research involve data collection outside the UK?  | ✓   |    |      |
| 12b) If the answer to question 11a is "yes", does your research comply with the legal and ethical requirements for doing research in that country?   | ✓   |    |      |
| 13a. Does the proposed research involve children under the age of 5?   |     | ✓  |      |
| 13b. If the answer to question 12a is "yes":<br>My Head of School (or authorised Head of Department) has given details of the proposed research to the University's insurance officer, and the research will not proceed until I have confirmation that insurance cover is in place.   | ✓   |    |      |
| <b>If you have answered YES to Question 3, please complete Section B below</b>   |     |    |      |

<sup>5</sup> Sensitive personal data consists of information relating to the racial or ethnic origin of a data subject, their political opinions, religious beliefs, trade union membership, sexual life, physical or mental health or condition, or criminal offences or record.

PLEASE COMPLETE **EITHER SECTION A OR B** AND PROVIDE THE DETAILS REQUIRED IN

SUPPORT OF YOUR APPLICATION, THEN SIGN THE FORM (SECTION C)

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <p><b>A:</b> My research goes beyond the ‘accepted custom and practice of teaching’ but I consider that this project has <b>no</b> significant ethical implications.</p>  | <p>✓</p> |
| <p>Give a brief description of the aims and the methods (participants, instruments and procedures) of the project in up to 200 words. Attach any consent form, information sheet and research instruments to be used in the project (e.g. tests, questionnaires, interview schedules).</p> <p>Please state how many participants will be involved in the project: 30</p> <p><i>This form and any attachments should now be submitted to the Institute’s Ethics Committee for consideration. Any missing information will result in the form being returned to you.</i></p>  |          |
| <p>The study has three main aims: (1) assess the needs in terms of communicative competency in English of the offshore service sector in Mauritius in the context of the global knowledge economy; (2) make a critical review of current educational policies and practices with respect to second language acquisition in Mauritius, in particular English; and (3) identify appropriate measures to improve the acquisition and fluency of English in the educational and professional development process. Data in the field will be collected in two main ways: (1) a preliminary exploratory questionnaire sent to about 180 firms named on the official listing of export-oriented ITC/BPO firms, and (2) a case study of 2 firms identified from the questionnaire responses with individual interviews of the Admin/HR manager and Operations manager in both firms, followed by 2 to 3 focus groups of about 8 persons each for both firms, and finally 3 or 4 one-to-one interviews with individual employees. The maximum total number of employees involved per firm is 30.</p> <p>The following documents are attached to this form:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Preliminary exploratory questionnaire to export-oriented ITC-BPO firms</li> <li>2. Covering letter for Item 1</li> <li>3. Permission letter (email) to carry out study in a company</li> <li>4. Information sheet and consent form: Admin/HR Manager and Operations Manager</li> <li>5. Information sheet and consent form: focus groups</li> <li>6. Information sheet and consent form: individual employee</li> <li>7. Interview guide: Admin/HR Manager and Operations Manager</li> <li>8. Interview guide: focus group</li> <li>9. Interview guide: individual employee</li> <li>10. Risk assessment form.</li> </ol> |          |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>B:</b> I consider that this project <b>may</b> have ethical implications that should be brought before the Institute’s Ethics Committee.</p> |  |
|--|--|

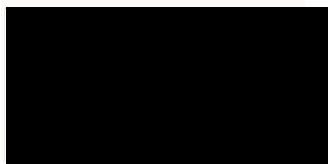
**Please provide all the further information listed below in a separate attachment.**

1. title of project
2. purpose of project and its academic rationale
3. brief description of methods and measurements
4. participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria
5. consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing (attach forms where necessary)
6. a clear and concise statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them.
7. estimated start date and duration of project

*This form and any attachments should now be submitted to the Institute's Ethics Committee for consideration. Any missing information will result in the form being returned to you.*

**C: SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT:**

I have declared all relevant information regarding my proposed project and confirm that ethical good practice will be followed within the project.



Signed: ..... Print Name PATRICIA DAY-HOOKOOMSING Date: 19 July 2015

**STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL FOR PROPOSALS SUBMITTED TO THE INSTITUTE ETHICS COMMITTEE**

This project has been considered using agreed Institute procedures and is now approved.



Signed: ..... Print Name Andy Kempe Date 23.7.15

(IoE Research Ethics Committee representative)\*

\* A decision to allow a project to proceed is not an expert assessment of its content or of the possible risks involved in the investigation, nor does it detract in any way from the ultimate responsibility which students/investigators must themselves have for these matters. Approval is granted on the basis of the information declared by the applicant.



ANNEXE 4: MAURITIUS: Mauritius island, Rodrigues island and position in South-West Indian Ocean



<http://ontheworldmap.com/mauritius>



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