

GLOBAL ENGLISH, EDUCATION, AND YOUTH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: LINGUISTIC AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE IN SERBIA

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Abstract: English, as a global language, has expanded rapidly since the late 20th century, profoundly impacting local languages and cultures. Today, English fluency is regarded as essential for success, especially among young professionals and emerging leaders. The widespread adoption of English as a foreign, second, and global language is particularly evident in education and business, where it drives socio-economic transformation worldwide. In countries with minor languages like Serbian, this transformation raises critical questions about linguistic identity and cultural sustainability. The increasing reliance on English as a lingua franca shapes industrial, scientific, and technological development in small nations. Simultaneously, young people's adaptability and innovative perspectives contribute significantly to evolving standards of business professionalism.

This study investigates how English language education shapes the professional competencies of young people in Serbia within the broader context of European linguistic and economic integration. The European Union requires both member and aspiring member states to align with EU standards across education, economic development, and the exchange of knowledge in scientific and productive sectors.

Drawing on theoretical frameworks from linguistic ecology, globalization studies, and entrepreneurship research, this article examines how English proficiency, educational policies, and entrepreneurial development shape a new generation of globally competent young professionals. Statistical data on foreign language learning, English as a lingua franca, and youth entrepreneurship in Serbia are combined with academic research on language policy, education, and youth professional development. The study proposes a conceptual model of the Serbian linguistic ecosystem, highlighting the interaction between the Serbian language, as the national linguistic core, and English as a global communicative tool. Additionally, the article introduces a model describing the development of business professionalism among young people in Serbia. The model emerges from the interaction of education, institutional support, and global economic influences. The findings highlight that balanced linguistic and educational policies are essential for enabling young professionals to participate successfully in international economic and academic networks while preserving national linguistic and cultural identity.

Keywords: Global English; linguistic ecology; language education; youth entrepreneurship; business professionalism; Serbia; globalization

1. INTRODUCTION

Language has become a key factor shaping international communication, economic development, and educational policies in today's globalized world. Among the world's languages, English has emerged as the dominant global lingua franca, serving as the primary medium of international communication across science, technology, business, and higher education (Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 2006). Serbian, a minor language, is under constant influence of internationalism and global perspectives through English, a global lingua franca. Globalization is the new policy, and the world is moving towards better living conditions. This is the phrasing we hear from the media and politicians, and read in the daily printed news. They all convince us of the quality of life on earth if globalization becomes the leading principle for the good of humanity. The problem arises with small nations and the language used within the narrow ecosystem of their population. Consequently, the protection of the national language core, Serbian in our perspective, from the excessive influence of globalization through English is born. Forces from the world are very strong, and the protection of the Serbian linguistic ecosystem becomes weak. Small nations fear losing their national identity if letting the global language serve as a communication tool for business professionals in most business activities.

This expansion of English has profound consequences for the national education system and linguistic policy. Educational institutions increasingly highlight English language proficiency as an essential speaking and writing competence for students' participation in global academic and professional networks. This transformation is particularly visible in Europe, where language policies promote multilingualism while acknowledging the dominant role of English in international communication.

Serbia represents an interesting case in terms of language and cultural heritage within this global linguistic environment. As a country undergoing economic transition and seeking deeper integration into European institutions, Serbia has adopted educational policies for English language competence and proficiency alongside the preservation of national linguistic identity. Young generations in Serbia face challenges regarding

employment opportunities, professional development, and participation in global economic processes. English is one of the major challenges. Entrepreneurship and professional skill development have therefore become central priorities within national youth strategies.

This article explores the relationship between three interconnected processes: the global spread of English, the role of education in linguistic competence development, and the emergence of business professionalism among Serbian youth.

2. GLOBAL ENGLISH AND LINGUISTIC ECOLOGY

Global English, with its widespread use as an international language, is a positive concept because it connects speakers of diverse linguistic backgrounds to do business together as allies and business partners. Success in business development is of prime interest for businesspeople, and misunderstandings are avoided through the correct interpretation of the language used in business. Scholars argue that English functions today as a lingua franca of globalization, facilitating communication in diplomacy, international trade, higher education, and digital communication (Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 2015). Business is maintained digitally and globally. The digital world makes people's work easier, but at the same time, it changes the language ecosystem with multiple abbreviations, new terms, and words borrowed either in their original forms or in accordance with the norms of the Serbian language. This role of English in its global expansion raises concerns regarding linguistic diversity and national language preservation. This is overcome by multilingualism and multiculturalism. The field of linguistic ecology, originally introduced by Haugen (1972), provides a theoretical framework for understanding interactions between languages within social and cultural environments.

Global language policy has its place in the coexistence of languages within ecosystems in which global and local linguistic forces interact. English functions as a global communication layer, while national languages maintain cultural identity and local communicative functions. Such environmentally positioned languages can exist, survive, and complement each other.

The concept of the Serbian linguistic environment can be conceptualized as an ecosystem in which Serbian represents the central national language, while regional languages are used within local communication networks, and English is a lingua franca that paves the way to access global communication and knowledge systems from diverse ecosystems.

3. THE ROLE OF ENGLISH IN EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG LEARNERS IN THE EU AND SERBIA

The European Union voted for the prevalence of one language – English. One vote brought victory to the English language and not to the German, French, or Spanish. English consolidated its position in the EU and became the most studied foreign language, a language for business and commerce, and a central medium of educational and professional communication. According to Eurostat data, more than 96% of upper-secondary students in the EU study English. This is the percentage that significantly exceeds the uptake of other major European languages such as French, German, and Spanish. English as a key instrument of global interaction among UN members has managed its realization of institutional policy of language learning throughout all stages, starting from elementary, via secondary, to university level. With English connecting and allying nations, socio-economic realities are challenged to change.

European educational policies promote multilingualism to preserve language diversity and a core value of cultural heritage. Language development is enforced while enhancing intercultural competencies. This is evidence of the instrumental value of the English language, which takes on an important role in higher education, scientific research, and projects, also at the level of global labor markets. The influence of English is particularly visible in the expansion of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) programs, where subject matter is taught through English, thereby reinforcing both language proficiency and disciplinary knowledge.

A significant trend across EU member states is the early introduction of English language instruction. In many national systems, such as Serbia in the early seventies, English has been introduced in the pre-school educational program, at the primary level, often beginning in the first years of formal schooling. Pedagogical experience is based on research findings that early exposure of students to learning a foreign language emphasizes the advantages for phonological acquisition, fluency development, and long-term communicative competence. Digital literacy and knowledge of English as a foreign or second language, or the language of lingua franca, develop simultaneously. The world of knowledge exchange is supplemented by digital learning environments, online resources, and transnational educational platforms, all of which predominantly operate in English.

By adopting the perspectives of socio-political, socio-economic, and scientific development within the context of European commitments, Serbia demonstrates a strong alignment with EU educational trends, despite its status as a non-member state. English remains a compulsory subject throughout both primary and secondary schooling. At most universities, English is compulsory in the first two years. This continuity enables Serbian

students to progressively develop comprehensive linguistic competencies, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills, which are essential for academic and professional advancement.

The role of English in Serbian education extends beyond language acquisition itself. It serves as a gateway to global knowledge systems while granting students access to international academic literature, scientific publications, and digital educational resources. In higher education, English-medium instruction is increasingly present, particularly in fields such as business, information technology, and engineering. This trend contributes to the internationalization of Serbian universities and enhances the global competitiveness of graduates. Serbian students, therefore, are equal to students in EU member states.

Furthermore, proficiency in English significantly enhances employability among young people. This is particularly present in Serbia, where employment depends on knowledge of English. In an increasingly globalized labor market, employers value candidates who communicate effectively across linguistic and cultural boundaries. English competence facilitates participation in multinational companies, remote work environments, and international entrepreneurial ventures, thereby directly contributing to the development of business professionalism among youth.

From a cognitive and developmental perspective, research indicates that early and sustained exposure to foreign languages, especially English proficiency skills, positively influences intellectual growth. Studies such as Patsy M. Lightbown and Nina Spada (2013) demonstrate that second language learning enhances cognitive flexibility, problem-solving abilities, metalinguistic awareness, and intercultural competence. These skills are particularly relevant in contemporary educational paradigms that emphasize critical thinking, adaptability, and lifelong learning.

The integration of English into education supports the development of intercultural communicative competence, enabling learners to engage with diverse perspectives of national development and cultural contexts. This dimension is important within the European framework, where mobility programs such as Erasmus+ encourage student exchange and cross-border collaboration. Serbian students participating in such initiatives benefit from English proficiency for academic and social integration in Serbia.

The dominance of English raises important questions about linguistic balance and the preservation of national and regional languages. English serves as a powerful enabler of global participation; educational systems continue to support multilingual competencies to ensure that linguistic diversity remains a vital component of cultural identity.

To sum up, the role of English in education across the European Union and Serbia is multifaceted, encompassing linguistic, cognitive, economic, and cultural dimensions. Its widespread adoption reflects both pragmatic needs and global realities, positioning English as a medium in shaping the development of young learners and their future professional trajectories.

4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF BUSINESS PROFESSIONALISM IN SERBIAN YOUTH

The development of business professionalism among young people in Serbia represents a critical dimension of the country's ongoing socio-economic transformation. The Serbian government is funding young entrepreneurs to start their own businesses. There are incentives available, and they also come from the EU for educated young professionals. With approximately 1.07 million individuals aged 15–29, Serbian youth constitute a significant segment of the national labor force. Despite this demographic potential, youth unemployment remains disproportionately high, nearly 18%, which underscores persistent structural challenges in the transition from education to employment.

Within self-employment, entrepreneurship has emerged as a pathway for professional integration and economic participation. Recent governmental data suggest that approximately 39% of newly registered entrepreneurs are in the 18–35 age group, indicating a growing inclination among young people toward self-employment and business creation. This trend reflects not only economic necessity but also a gradual shift toward innovation-oriented professional identities. Inventors emerge with innovations applicable in various productive fields. The unity of knowledge received through education and innovative products makes a foundation for successful startup business entrepreneurship.

Educational institutions play a key role in facilitating this transformation among Serbian youth. Universities and vocational schools across Serbia have begun to integrate entrepreneurship education into their curricula, offering courses in innovation management, digital entrepreneurship, and business development. These initiatives aim to equip students with the leadership competencies for local and global markets, where adaptability, communication skills, and digital literacy are becoming increasingly essential.

However, the development of business professionalism is not without constraints. Empirical studies highlight several persistent barriers, including limited access to financial capital, insufficient mentorship opportunities, and underdeveloped professional networks. These structural limitations often hinder the successful implementation of entrepreneurial initiatives, despite high levels of motivation and interest among youth.

5. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF LANGUAGE ECOSYSTEM

The dynamics of educating youth and developing business professionalism are best understood through the linguistic and socio-economic dimensions of a nation. The development of business professionalism among Serbian youth can be interpreted through a dual conceptual model in which two components, linguistic and socio-economic dimensions, play a crucial role.

The first component, the Serbian Linguistic Ecosystem, is represented as a system of concentric circles. This model was first applied to world languages by Kachru (1985). At the core of the Serbian ecosystem lies the Serbian language, functioning as the primary medium of national identity and internal communication. The Serbian language carries within the cultural and civilizational component of the Serbian people, through which it acquires the characteristic of uniqueness of both the nation and the language. Language defines the identity of a people, and that is also the case with Serbian. That marks the unique identity of the Serbian people. The intermediate layer consists of regional languages that facilitate interaction within Balkan socio-cultural and economic networks. The outer layer is occupied by English, which functions as a global lingua franca and serves as a key instrument for international business communication and professional mobility.

The second component of the model conceptualizes the development of business professionalism as a dynamic interaction between multiple interconnected factors. These include the global economic environment, which shapes market demands and opportunities; the education system, which provides foundational knowledge and skills; institutional support structures, such as governmental programs and entrepreneurial initiatives; and individual professional competencies, encompassing both hard and soft skills. The interaction of these elements ultimately produces broader societal outcomes, including increased employment, economic growth, and enhanced global competitiveness.

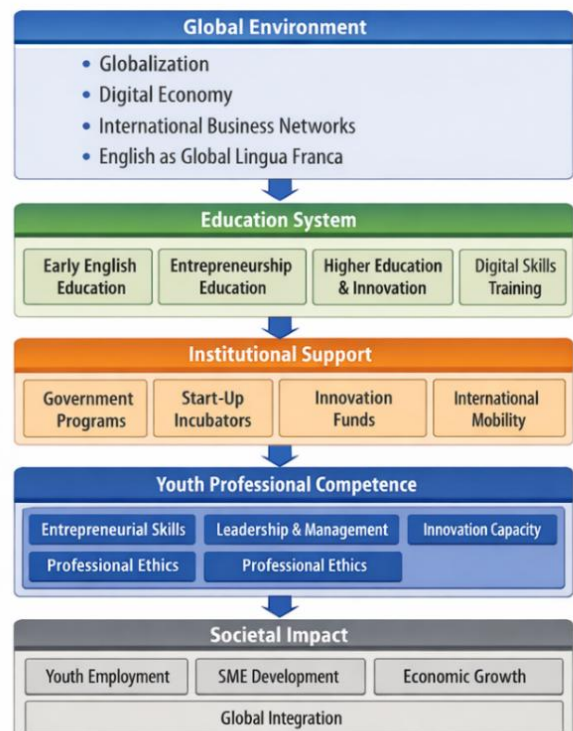
Together, these two interrelated frameworks provide a comprehensive understanding of how linguistic competencies and structural conditions jointly influence the formation of business professionalism among Serbian youth.

6. CONCEPTUAL MODELS

Figure 1. The Serbian Linguistic Ecosystem



Figure 2. Conceptual Model of Business Professionalism Development in Serbian Youth



Source: Author's research

7. FIGURE EXPLANATION

The left diagram illustrates the **Serbian Linguistic Ecosystem**, structured as concentric circles:

Core layer: Serbian language as the national linguistic foundation

Middle layer: regional languages within Balkan communication networks

Outer layer: English functioning as a global lingua franca

The right diagram illustrates the **Development of Business Professionalism among Serbian Youth**, showing the interaction between:

1. Global economic environment
2. Education system
3. Institutional support structures
4. Individual professional competencies
5. Societal outcomes such as employment and economic growth.

8. DISCUSSION

The analysis demonstrates that English language competence, education, and entrepreneurship development form an interconnected system shaping the professional future of young people in Serbia.

English proficiency increasingly functions as a gateway to global knowledge networks, international business communication, and digital innovation ecosystems. Young professionals equipped with strong English skills are better positioned to participate in multinational companies, international academic collaborations, and global start-up networks.

Educational institutions, therefore, play a crucial role in developing these competencies. By integrating language learning, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship education, schools and universities help a new generation become globally competent professionals.

At the same time, linguistic ecology reminds us that global linguistic integration should not undermine national linguistic identity. Serbian remains the primary medium of cultural expression, intellectual life, and public communication.

The conceptual model presented in this article demonstrates that youth professionalism emerges at the intersection of global economic forces, educational systems, and linguistic competence.

9. CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between English language education, youth entrepreneurship, and professional development in Serbia. The findings indicate that English plays a major role in enabling young professionals to participate in global academic and economic networks. It has also been proven that young Serbian people are knowledgeable enough to innovate their startup entrepreneurship by introducing new products and new techniques to modernize their jobs.

At the same time, entrepreneurship and professional skill development represent pathways for improving youth employment opportunities and supporting national economic growth.

Educational institutions, on the other hand, face the important task of balancing two complementary goals: strengthening English language competence and preserving national linguistic identity. Achieving this balance will help Serbian youth to participate successfully in global professional environments while maintaining strong cultural and linguistic roots.

The development of internationally competent young professionals capable of combining linguistic skills, entrepreneurial abilities, and technological knowledge will remain a key factor shaping Serbia's future economic and social development. It is not an empty phrase that the future and progress lie with the youth. Young people are indeed the drivers of change in the nation's socio-economic and political sense, but it is equally true that the shape of society in the future depends on the level of knowledge and education acquired in youth. Therefore, educational programs must be implemented in educational institutions to be modern and provide young people with a broad perspective on developments in the surrounding world, as well as open space for self-improvement and continuous contact with new forms of knowledge and skills, enabling them to manage both knowledge and skills effectively.

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