

ABSTRACT

Communication is vital in all aspects of life, and language is the foremost manner in which people communicate with each other on a daily basis. English is considered to be a universal language, implying that it may be viewed as a dominant language that is widely spoken. This study explores English language proficiency as a labour market determinant. It investigates whether South African Black men who are English proficient have a comparative advantage in the labour market. The sample analysed represents Black African men aged between 15 and 65 years. The methodology in this study firstly estimates a probit model on labour force participation likelihood and then a Heckprobit model on employment likelihood, followed by a Heckman Ordinary Least Squares regression model on log monthly earnings, using data from the third wave of the National Income Dynamics Study 2012 data. This study defines English language proficiency as the ability to read and write English well. The results show that South African Black men who are English proficient do have a comparative advantage within the labour market. The empirical findings indicate that high levels of English language proficiency are associated with greater labour force participation likelihood, greater employment likelihood and higher earnings. In order of importance, the results suggest that reading ability is deemed to be more important than writing ability.

KEYWORDS: Language proficiency, labour force participation, employment, unemployment, earnings, South Africa, probit, Heckprobit, Heckman