Assessment of English Language Tests in Upper Classes of Secondary School: A Teacher's Practical Model in Use in Rutshuru Secondary School.

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Résumé

Cette dissertation développe l'évaluation des tests de la langue Anglaise dans les classes supérieures des écoles secondaires. La principale question que cette recherche a soulevée était de savoir comment les enseignants des 5e et 6e années du secondaire construisent, administrent et notent des tests qui sont cohérents avec leurs objectifs pédagogiques et qui répondent aux critères de fiabilité, de validité et de praticabilité. Mon objectif à travers cette étude est de pointer certaines lacunes des enseignants dans la construction, l'administration et la notation des tests, de les sensibiliser à la cohésion entre enseigner, apprendre et tester, d'amener tous les partenaires de l'éducation impliqués dans l'évaluation des enseignements à reconnaître leur part de responsabilité dans l'échec des élèves dû à des erreurs de test , et proposer des suggestions et des solutions à ces problèmes pour un apprentissage efficace des langues. Conçues comme une recherche parallèle convergente à méthodes mixtes, les données proviennent de 16 écoles secondaires, d'entretiens semi-structurés avec certains élèves et enseignants et d'un questionnaire administré aux enseignants des 16 écoles secondaires de Rutshuru.

Les résultats montrent qu'un test et une évaluation linguistiques uniques ne suffisent pas à couvrir les connaissances et compétences théoriques et pratiques requises pour développer efficacement l'acquisition d'une langue. En général, les tests de la langue anglaise reflètent les caractéristiques de l'évaluation sommative plutôt que de l'évaluation formative mettant fortement l'accent sur les outils de test traditionnels. Les résultats révèlent également que les principaux objectifs des tests de la langue anglaise sont liés au contenu des tests et aux types de tests, à l'évaluation des compétences linguistiques et des domaines linguistiques, et aux principes d'un bon test en mettant davantage l'accent sur

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l'aspect théorique des tests et de l'évaluation de la langue et moins sur son aspect pratique notamment en raison de la limitation du temps.

Mots -clés : Test d'anglais, Evaluation, Enseignement des langues, Performance.

Abstract

This dissertation studies the assessment of English language tests in upper classes of secondary schools. The main question that this research raises is how the teachers of the 5th and 6th forms of secondary schools construct, administer and grade tests which are consistent with their teaching objectives and that meet the reliability, validity and practicability criteria. My aim in dealing with this study is to point out some lacunae of the teachers in constructing, administering and scoring tests, to raise their awareness about the interrelationship between teaching, learning and testing, to bring all the partners of education involved in teaching evaluation to recognize their part of responsibility in the failure of pupils due to mistesting, and provide suggestions and solutions to these problems for effective language learning. Designed as a convergent parallel mixed-method research, the data came from 16 secondary schools, semi-structured interviews with some pupils and teachers and a questionnaire administered to the teachers of the 16 secondary schools.

The findings show that one single language testing and assessment is not sufficient to cover the required theoretical and practical knowledge and skills to effectively develop language acquisition. In general, English language testing reflects the features of summative assessment rather than formative assessment heavily emphasizing traditional testing tools.

The findings also reveal that major objectives of English language testing are related to contents of tests and testing types, assessing language skills and language areas, and principles of a good test with more focus on theoretical aspect of language testing and assessment and less emphasis on its practical aspect especially due to time limitation.

Keywords: English language testing, Assessment, Language teaching, Performance, Evaluation.

1. Introduction

English language is taught for six years in secondary schools of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in general and Rutshuru in particular. It is taught for two to five periods per week in the 5th and 6th forms of both general and technical sections. Along this, English language teaching is constantly evaluated and assessed through tests for its mastery and continuous adjustments. These school tests in the English teaching-learning process consist of quizzes and exams which cover all the main material learnt along a given period of time (at the end of a unit, course, term, during or at the end of teaching and learning processes). Tests exert a great deal of influence on the teaching- learning process. Thus, they play an important role in the success or failure of the English language teaching-learning process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. When the issue of language testing and assessment in the DRC is taken into consideration, it is observed that the educational system in the DRC is very exam-oriented because almost at every level of the educational system, students take different types of exams. For instance, their knowledge and skills are measured by means of both compulsory classroom-based exams such as quizzes and midterms, or national tests.

The problem, however, is that English language teachers do not cope with the challenges of testing and assessment because their assessment literacy is generally weak due to the fact that they have not obtained sufficient knowledge to do so. This issue is pertinent in Rutshuru because it shares the limits with English speaking countries such as Uganda and Rwanda and people are very close in businesses and other activities. As people are obliged to socialize in English, they resort to English learning centers in order to develop communicative competence in English although they have finished the normal secondary school studies. This reveals naturally that ELT is a failure rather than a success. Among the factors which contribute to this failure, testing is pointed out. As a researcher, I need to avail empirical data to confirm or reject this lacuna in the English language teaching process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and this justifies the choice of the above-mentioned topic.

My assumption is that English language tests administered in upper classes are not consistent with the language teaching-learning and that they do not cover the overall language areas and skills in assessing the ability of the pupils in the use of the target language. In addition, the way the tests are designed, constructed, administered and

scored may have harmful outcomes on the pupils' minds, which can therefore decrease their interest in the learning process. Perhaps the lack of knowledge on the language skills and the teachers' unawareness of language testing requirements might hinder their progress and lead to the failure of the ELT situation in the advanced level classes of secondary school in Rutshuru.

2. Methodology

I carried out investigations resorting to the inductive method in order to examine the issues about English language testing. The findings from some individual schools led to the conclusions that were extended to all the schools which organize both general and specialized sections for I assume that all of them operate under the same conditions.

In order to verify my hypotheses, I resorted to documentary technique to collect reliable data about English language examination items that were submitted to the 5th and 6th form pupils for the first semester exams during this school year 2021-2022 in Rutshuru secondary schools.

In addition, an enquiry questionnaire was submitted to the teachers to get further information about their awareness of the language testing requirements. Since the testees play an important role in the program evaluation, an oral interview was performed with the pupils of upper classes in order to get information about their problems and their needs for the improvement of the issues.

2.1. Sample

Out of 69 schools in the research field, a non-random sample (Cohen Louis et al. 2007) of 16 schools was selected. For the sake of representativeness, the sample was selected so as to cover the different characteristics of the schools in the area. So it included both public and private schools. The selection of public schools, in turn, included both denominational and official schools. The selection criteria and techniques are explained in details in the methodology chapter.

In fact, the combination of observations, field notes, questionnaire and interview enabled us to study the issues qualitatively.

As the data were collected from different schools and were needed to be analyzed through charts, statistic techniques were used.

2.2. Collection of data

Survey questionnaires were submitted to teachers of English in the sampled schools. The goal of the questionnaires was to find out how the teaching- learning process is impacted by testing. Individual and group interviews were also resorted to, to get clarification of some of the respondents' answers. The documentary method was used not only to have an idea of the school test items but also to countercheck teachers' and students' responses to the questionnaires and interviews.

2.3. Presentation, analysis and interpretation of data

Collected data consisted of teachers' answers to questionnaires. The data were analyzed and interpreted both qualitatively and quantitatively and it appeared from the analysis that the backwash of the English language test was a fact and that it affected teachers' and pupils' behaviors or attitudes in different ways. The analysis proved that the principles and practices of constructing, administering and scoring tests and assessments are indispensable for language teachers to engage effectively in the language assessment policy and practice in order to promote language learning and learners' language production. The analysis of responses to questionnaires made it possible not only to determine the language areas and skills that are mostly tested but also to establish similarities in terms of testing procedures and test contents. A comparison of the testing procedures and test contents with the ELT objectives showed that the backwash effect of the English language tests on teaching and learning is negative rather than positive.

3. Theoretical background

Research in the field of language testing has shown that there is not a consensus as to the definitions of key terminology such as "testing", "assessment", and "evaluation" since different researchers sometimes utilize these terms interchangeably or consider "assessment" as an umbrella term for the rest.

According to Dean Brow quoted by Keith Johnson (1988:224), testing refers solely to procedures that are based on tests, whether criterion-referenced or norm-referenced in nature. This definition is more highlighted by Professor Tembue (2009) for whom testing is viewed as any of the various techniques that capture what a person knows in response to a question with regard to correctness.

As far as teaching evaluation is concerned, a test is an instrument that informs both the teacher and pupils about the extent to which they have succeeded in achieving their goals. At a classroom level, testing takes mostly the form of quizzes and examination. The SERNAFOR outil CTN (E.S/OUT. 13 et 14/10 ET 11.1986 gives a clear distinction between a quiz and an examination as follows:

- **A quiz** is a brief, rapidly administered test, (at the beginning of a lesson, or at the end) covering the subject-matter that was learnt in the immediately preceding lesson:

- **An examination** is a combination of subtests. Examinations do not normally consist of objective testing techniques only. They demand the pupils to achieve a pass mark.

- **Language tests** as a device of learner's performance assessment at classroom level can be included in quizzes and examination items. According to J.B Heaton (1988:8) the language tests are intended to measure the language skills.

In fact, the term testing applied to language and learning covers a wide range of activities which are intended to measure the pupil's mastery of language components.

- **Evaluation** is a systematic gathering of information for the purpose of making decisions (Bachman, 2007 p20).

- **Assessment** refers to all those activities undertaken by teachers, and by the students in assessing themselves, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged(Black and William,1998,p2)" gradually shifting its connotation to something more like a kinder, gentler sort of testing(......) and applied not only to tests, but also all the other things we can do to learn about someone's ability" (Hamp-Lyons,2016,p.14).

- **Summative assessment** is used to evaluate student learning, skill acquisition and academic achievement at the conclusion of a defined instructional period - typically at the end of a project, unit, course, semester, program, or school year. Summative assessment is in line with assessment of learning (Cheng and Fox, 2017, p5).

- **Formative assessment** is «assessment for learning in part of everyday practice by students, teachers and peers that seeks, reflects upon and responds to

information from dialogue, demonstration and observation in ways that enhance ongoing learning "(Klenowski, 2009, p.264). It is also referred to as dynamic assessment (Inbar-Louri, 2008).

- **Categorization of items in Bloom's taxonomy**

Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives lists six levels of intellectual understanding: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. These levels of understanding assist in categorizing test questions. Ben Clay (2001:7) explains these levels of understanding as follows:

- Knowledge   This level of understanding involves recognizing and recalling information previously learnt including dates, events, persons, places, terms, definitions, facts, principles, theories, methods, and procedures. The following sample question frames fall into the category of knowledge questions.   Who did such a thing? Eg . who invented the steam engine? Who wrote the book entitled …? What is meant by …? Where is the …?

- Comprehension
  This involves understanding the meaning of information including restating in own words, translating from one form to another, or interpreting, explaining and summarizing. E.g. Restate in your own words…; write in letters the following hours (written in figures); Explain why Bola arrived late? Give the summary of the first paragraph of the text, change the following sentences from affirmative to interrogative form, etc.

- Application: This involves ability to apply rules, methods or principles to a new situation including classifying something as a specific example of a general principle, using a formula to solve a problem or a given grammatical structure to make sentences. E.g. Why can we say that Bola's late arrival is due to laziness? What can you do to avoid being punished by the teacher like Bola? Use the new words in your own sentences, etc.

- Analysis **:** This includes the ability to identify the organization and patterns within a system by identifying its components, parts and the relationships among the components. E.g. Arrange the following scrambled sentences into a logical and

coherent paragraph; use appropriate conjuncts to join the following sentences; what are the main parts of the text? Etc.

- Synthesis: It involves the ability to discover/create new connections, generalizations, patterns, or perspectives, to combine ideas to form a new whole. E.g. Complete the following unfinished story; this rule of word plural formation is incomplete, how could you complete it?

- Evaluation: This involves the ability to use evidence and reasoned arguments to judge how well a proposal would accomplish a particular purpose, to resolve controversies or differences of opinion. E.g. Do you agree with X when he says that …? Between X and Y, who do you think is right? Why? Do you think X was right to….? Etc.

According to Ben Clay (2001:8), teachers tend to ask only questions in the knowledge category which is the lowest level of understanding in Bloom's taxonomy. As he points out, "these questions are not bad, but using them all the time is." Jeyamahla Veerangu et al.(2010) seem to be in synch with Ben Clay. In a study intended to gauge students' reading comprehension performance , they realized that students performed better on lower understanding level questions than on higher level ones. This, they say, may be a handicap to the students' intellectual progress in their higher studies. They conclude that "there is a recognized need to have higher-order thinking practice in the classroom."

- **Testing language areas**

    An item can test vocabulary, grammar, reading or listening, comprehension, phonology, spelling, the ability to write and oral production. In attempting to isolate the language areas, a considerable number of tests include sections on each of them.

- Test of vocabulary**:** A test of vocabulary measures student's knowledge of meaning of words as well as the patterns and collocations in which they occur. It tests either active vocabulary (words currently used) or passive vocabulary (words less used). Whatever choice the teacher has made; active vocabulary should cover the most amount of space in testing the ability to use language items.

- Test of grammar: Tests of grammar measure student's ability to recognize appropriate grammatical forms and to manipulate structures. Items testing the pupil's productive mastery are more useful than recognition type tests.

Recognition can be predicted from production but not the other way round. In grammar, transformational and completion items are likely to measure the actual mastery of knowledge rather than multiple choice items which only assess recognition.

- Listening comprehension tests: They consist in measuring the ability of the respondents in getting a message embodied in short utterances, dialogues, talks and oral text reading aloud…

- Reading comprehension tests: These tests aim at assessing the reading ability of the learners.

- Oral production tests: They are the most important aspect of listening. They consist in testing the speaking ability. Oral production tests form an important part of many language testing programs and include some of the different types of tests such as reading aloud, retelling a story that was read, conversational exchange, oral interview, short talks, and comments on pictures…

- Tests of phonology: Phonology tests items attempt to assess the following subskills:

- Ability to recognize and pronounce the significant sounds of a language;

- Ability to recognize and use the stress patterns;

- Ability to hear and produce the melody or patterns of tunes of a language.

- **Testing the writing skills components**

These tests consist in assessing the pupils' ability to write. These include teaching activities such as composition, dictation. They help to know the extent to which the students have mastered various language sub skills. Thus they are integrative test and need to follow criteria for scoring for more objectivity.

In short, the language skills and element that have been mentioned above should be tested taking into account the teaching objectives that are consistent with each particular area. Grammar, vocabulary and phonology which require the use the discreet point tests are likely to have a higher rate of reliability than integrative tests of listening and reading comprehension, oral interview tests and letter writing which assess the language skills used in real life communication.

The question to answer is to know whether the test constructor should concentrate on assessing the students' ability to handle the language elements rather than

on testing integrated skills. J.B Heaton (1988: 10) has pointed out that test constructor's attitude towards such a question should depend on the level and the purpose of the test.

4. Findings

According to Tembue Zembele (2021-2022), the results section, that many researchers use as the starting point to write a scientific manuscript, lists the findings and their logical order which are not necessarily written in chronological order. Data collected through teacher questionnaire confirm the inconsistency of tests administered in upper classes with the English language teaching-learning process. Analysis of collected data led to the following results:

a. Teachers' awareness of language testing

It is quite abnormal to carry out a task without knowing what it consists of and how it can be performed efficiently. The teachers as implementers of the teaching programme at classroom level need to be aware of English language testing components since the assessment process is an integrative part of their teaching activities. They do not implement adequate and appropriate tests promoting language production with much ease. They spend their time testing structures and language accuracy rather than resorting to tests compelling students to perform the language, favoring linguistic accuracy and language production. Teachers of English in Rutshuru have insufficiencies in designing, constructing, administering and scoring tests following testing procedures. Collected data reveal that 6 out of 10 teachers which represents 60% of the sample administer quizzes to pupils for the only objective of " getting the marks for scoring" in order to rank them at the end of the marking period rather than to help the pupils overcome their difficulties in communication. Note that the teachers' awareness of the test objectives is low.

As far as designing tests is concerned, 50% of teachers of English in upper classes resort to the state exams items which makes use of multiple choice items. They do so simply because it is an efficient way to prepare their pupils for success and because using multiple choice items is an easier way to score and to get marks. The washback of the state examination affects teachers not only in the choice of the grammar notions to teach, but also in the importance accorded to different language skills. Teachers affirm that they focus their teaching on grammar, vocabulary and text reading. Oral production,

listening and writing are given little importance in the teaching process. This may also affect negatively the teaching methods and the content of the course which are adjusted to the type of tests their pupils are to be submitted to.

b. Unawareness of the teaching program prescription.

The ELT national program prescribes all the language areas including dictation and composition. The two types of activities are tested for the examination and the pupils do not have good marks at them. The problem relating to pupils' poor performance in these activities when used for testing may be tackled since they are not prepared for them. If teachers appreciate composition and dictation as testing activities and need to improve their pupils' performance in them, they should exploit the program prescriptions fully and thus include those activities in their teaching. This could contribute to making teaching consistent with testing.

- Ignorance of official instructions regarding testing: Lacunae in the ELT national program prescriptions concerning testing are often overcome thanks to official instructions. Unfortunately, a number of teachers also ignore what these instructions include. The teachers were asked which documents they resort to for the construction of English tests and many of them recognized that they exclusively resorted to the hand-book that they use for teaching. Test construction based exclusively on such documents is likely not to result in valid and reliable tests since the hand-book used for teaching does not give sufficient information about testing.

According to the official instructions in SERNAFOR outil CTB /ES/OUT.13 et 14/10 et du 14.1986, « Both teachers and headmasters need a pedagogical justified idea about what should be included in examination or comprehensive tests ». The fact that these instructions are not at the teachers 'disposal may harm both teaching and testing processes.

- Testing skills that have not been taught: The teachers have become more testers than educators. They assess the pupils 'listening and writing skills through those activities. This clearly appears from answers like « I don't teach composition or dictation as activities but i give them to test the pupils' level ». The teachers should

know that writing from dictation and composition writing are two skills that need to be developed through sufficient training. Testing the pupils' strengths and weaknesses in activities that have not been taught is not valid. It is worth noting that the inconsistency of testing with teaching concerning composition and dictation was confirmed by the pupils. When asked about these activities, most of them affirmed that they have composition and dictation only when there is an examination. This is a serious deficiency with regard to test validity. If the teacher is not aware of this, alarming outcomes are likely to occur.

- Teacher's awareness of language areas to be tested: Language skills can be developed and integrated in communication through various teaching. Since both teaching and testing are interrelated, all the activities that are carried out should be assessed, but taking into account contribution to the teaching goals. I am going to examine whether these issues are taken into consideration in the examination submitted to Rutshuru schools 5th and 6th form pupils.

- Language areas tested in the examination: As it has been said earlier, the ELT national program prescribes the teaching of all the language areas. These should be tested consistently. We have attempted to investigate the issue resorting both to the examination sheets that we got from different schools and to the questionnaire submitted to the teachers. From the examination sheets, we noticed that the examinations include grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension items, composition writing and dictation. All these are relevant to the national curriculum prescriptions. However the test format and the validity of some of these remain questionable.

c. Language areas tested in the examination

As it has been said earlier, the ELT national program prescribes the teaching of all the language areas. These should be tested consistently. I have attempted to investigate the issue resorting both to the examination sheets that I got from different schools and to the questionnaire submitted to the teachers. From the examination sheets, I noticed that the examinations include grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension items, composition writing and dictation. All these are relevant to the national curriculum

prescriptions. However the test format and the validity of some of these remain questionable.

In most teaching situations testing is not consistent with teaching. Indeed, as we said it earlier, teachers assess their pupil's composition and dictation writing abilities while they never teach these activities. Teachers' and pupils' affirmations are also confirmed by the analysis of teachers' questionnaire's notebooks' contents. Instead of minimizing the impact of tests by submitting communicative-type tests, teachers tend to reinforce it. For most pupils' concern is to gain marks, this tendency is rather harmful than beneficial. Its shortcoming is that instead of focusing on the development of communicative competence, the ELT goal prescribed by the national programme, pupils concentrate on vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension, to the detriment of communicative skill development. What is alarming is that from the very beginning of the English language study, this discrete-point testing of vocabulary and grammar dominates the evaluation system in Rutshuru secondary schools.

Testing the pupil's ability in language areas for which they do not receive sufficient training is not valid. In their responses to the question « Does the teacher give you a dictation lesson during the classes? » and « do you succeed in dictation? » the pupils gave the following answers:

1) The teacher gives dictation when he needs marks ;
2) We don't succeed in dictation because there are difficult words in it ;
3) English is difficult to write
4) The teacher gives us dictations, but doesn't correct it ;
5) The teacher doesn't teach how to write new words and wait for the examination to intimidate us.

The pupils' responses reveal that the teachers do not devote time to dictation during the classes. They do not train pupils for dictation. Instead, it is resorted to when the grades are needed. What they know and probably what they aim at, is to punish pupils when they fail.

The lack of oral production tests has also been noticed in most schools and yet testing the ability to speak ought to be regarded as the most important aspect of language

teaching and testing. We have realized that the teachers simply ignore the value of oral activities. Teacher's responses to the question how often per year they test oral production were as follows: All the three responses seem to indicate that oral production of the language is given little importance in evaluation.

d. Appropriacy of weight allocation to different skills and areas

It is assumed that a fair evaluation should take into consideration the importance of the different language skills and areas in the achievement of the teaching goals. According to the national program, the development of communication abilities is the upmost goal of English language teaching. Yet as shown above, language production is granted little importance in evaluation. Teachers in our schools do not take into account the relative importance of each language area. An emphasis is put on vocabulary and grammar. This is fair since vocabulary and grammatical items cover a large space in the curriculum prescription. Unfortunately teachers tend to test only the pupils recognition of the vocabulary and grammatical points and not their production. Also the national program prescriptions give more importance to the oral skills than the written ones, but in evaluation, it is the contrary; teachers tend to focus on writing.

e. The lack of authentic materials reflecting learners' real need

Authentic texts are resorted to for real world purposes and audiences: to entertain, to inform, explain, guide, document or convince. They are defined as "written by members of a language and culture group for members of the same language and culture group"(Galloway,1998). With authentic texts, learners are provided with words and expressions used in real-life contexts. When learners are confronted with similar situations, they manage better in informal, face-to-face communications. Real-life materials are more informal, socially-centered and widely used.

From the analysis of collected data, it is revealed that teachers of English in Rutshuru Secondary Schools do not take into account the use of authentic language. Many of the texts they teach do not meet their learners' real needs. They very little contribute to the development of learners' speaking skill. Teachers, here, ignore that authentic materials provide real-life examples of language used in everyday situations. They are used to add more interest for learners. They, thus serve as a reminder to learners.

Authentic materials also help prepare learners for the 'real' world of communication; guide learners toward the language they need for their particular context; motivate learners to communicate, because they help make communication real. Using authentic materials increases learners' motivation and reflects positively on the learning process. In other words, learners learn the language better when teachers use authentic materials as a teaching aid.

5. Discussions

This point discusses the results investigated with regard not only to the hypotheses verification but also to their reliability. The discussion revolves around the inconsistency of tests with the teaching-learning process leading to pupils' failure and discouragement, negative backwash effect on learning and teaching, hatred for tests, negative attitude vis-à-vis teachers, fright for tests and implications. In view of the different ways in which tests are constructed, administered and scored in Rutshuru secondary schools, the inconsistency of tests with the teaching-learning goal was confirmed. It appears from this work results that the ignorance of tests procedures leads to harmful outcomes. We have attempted to give some of them.

- **Presence and direction of inappropriate testing**

In view of the different ways in which testing influences teachers and pupils in Rutshuru secondary schools, the presence of inappropriate testing was confirmed. As acknowledged by test experts (Shohamy 1996, Hughes 2003, Fulcher 2007, Khaniya 2007), testing can be beneficial or positive when the test incites teachers and learners to work towards the achievement of the course objectives and harmful when it impedes or works against those objectives. It appears from this work results that the impact of testing on teachers and learners is rather harmful than beneficial. As shown and explained in the preceding chapter, the inappropriate English testing deviates teachers' and learners' efforts from course objectives to testing. On the one hand teachers are anxious of their learners' success on the state exam and so they tailor their teaching and testing to the state exam; on the other hand, learners are obsessed by their desire to succeed, and thus they focus their learning on the language aspects tested by the state exam. The consequence of this is that both teaching and learning focus on vocabulary, grammar structures and

reading comprehension so that listening, speaking and writing are overlooked. That this situation is counterproductive need to be demonstrated. Habasikiyake(2015:208) points out its consequences when he says that in Goma as well as in Rutshuru schools, learners are assessed in reading comprehension and in grammar only. Skills such as listening, speaking and writing are completely ignored and unexploited. … it follows therefore that learners who are not trained in listening, speaking and writing skills cannot communicate in English because these skills constitute the main frame and foundation on which the other skills hinge.

This is a serious problem since the development of learners' communicative competence is the goal assigned by the government to English language teaching in the Democratic Republic of Congo. By impeding the learners' communicative competence, testing contributes to the failure of ELT to achieve its objectives which are generally frowned upon. Negligence of the skills not tested, however, is not the only consequence of inappropriateness of testing on teaching and learning. The English testing also urges some teachers to manage to teach all textbook material. One could assume this aspect of testing to be positive since the textbook content is supposed to reflect the national curriculum requirements and thereby the course's objectives. Unfortunately, such is not the case due to the convergent reasons. Firstly, the organization of the national curriculum and the textbook content diverges from the course goal. While the course goal stresses the communicative aspect of the language, the curriculum and the content of Mill's textbook –the one in use in most of the schools- are organized under a structural syllabus. Teachers, most of whom do not have a clear vision of their teaching objectives; they teach the syllabus grammar items merely as linguistic components of the language and not as communication facilitators. Secondly, the textbook material is so broad that obsession to entirely cover its content causes teachers to run after the time and overlook their students' communication needs. Habasikiyake (2015:226) complains about this situation saying:

> *Programme covering constitutes another factor which urges Goma teachers to devise a great deal of teaching material. What is unacceptable in teachers' attitude is that they have a tendency to run after the time in order to cover as many materials as possible, overlooking the development of language skills… teachers tend to teach all the material contained in the programme textbook. Teachers*

testified during the research investigation that inspectors tell them that twenty to thirty texts contained in the textbook must be covered within a year.

The result of this tendency, Habasikiyake(2015:226) says regretfully is that "a lot of material is taught without being mastered and practiced for communicative usage." Since course notes constitute the elements which students' learning is mostly based on, not only teaching is affected by this situation; but learning also suffers from it. This confirms hypotheses 1 and 2 according to which English language tests administered in upper classes are not consistent with the language teaching-learning and that they do not cover the overall language areas and skills in assessing the ability of the pupils in the use of the target language and this impacts negatively teaching-learning process.

- **Negative backwash effect on learning and teaching**

Class time is dominated by vertical interaction about the language as a system. Class observation and experience have shown that most Rutshuru English teachers devote more time to theory than to practice. Lessons end in disaster because after having spent too much time on theory teachers devote less time to practice. Sally Burgess and Katie Head (2008) characterize "teaching for exam methodology": the exam exerts a great deal of influence in planning the course content, teachers manage to familiarize students with the exam format, the focus in teaching is on the language areas tested by the exam, and language areas or skills not tested are overlooked. In Habasikiyake's (2015:118) investigation, for instance , on the one hand, respondent teachers mentioned the following reasons for not teaching listening, speaking and writing and favouring vocabulary, grammar and reading comprehension:

- Vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension are easier to teach than listening, speaking and writing;
- Teaching listening, speaking and writing requires a lot of time;
- Teaching listening, speaking and writing efficiently requires the use of technical aids while electricity is not available in most secondary schools
- Students are not able to express themselves in English and so teaching listening,

speaking and writing requires a thorough preparation which unmotivated teachers can hardly afford .But on the other hand, 100% of the respondents asserted that

the main explanation for limiting teaching and testing to vocabulary, grammar and reading comprehension is the fact that these skills and language components constitute the "central focus of the English state exam. Hence Habasikiyake's(2015) following conclusion:

> *Despite the teachers' various views on the issue, the truth is that 100% of the respondents admit that they- the taught and tested skills and components – are the most relevant for the English state exam and this general view confirms the fact that the other components are neglected because they are not part of the English state exam.*

Habasikiyake's conclusion concurs with the present research respondents 'view. Although their answers to a similar question were formulated differently, the underlying idea seemed to be the same; "vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension are the essence of the programme and this is why the English language testing focuses on them." These concurring views are an indication that the English language test is to some extent accountable for teachers' tendency to focus on vocabulary, grammar and reading comprehension, hence the confirmation of hypothesis 4 according to which the teachers' unawareness of language testing requirements and testing procedures might hinder their progress and lead to the failure of the ELT situation in the advanced level classes of secondary school in Rutshuru.

Another teaching aspect that is affected by this inappropriate English language testing is teaching methodology and pace. Concerning teaching methodology, genuinely communicative activities are devoted little time if any. Class time is dominated by vertical interaction about the language as a system. This is what Habasikiyake means when he says:

> *Class observation, and experience have shown that most English teachers devote more time to theory than to practice . Lessons end in disaster because after having spent too much time on theory teachers devote less time to practice.*

The reason for this, teachers clearly explained, is that communicative practice takes a lot of time while it is not relevant to students' preparation for the state exam. Teaching methodology, particularly in the 6th form , reflects the following features which, according to Sally Burgess and Katie Head (2008) characterize "teaching for exam methodology ":

- The exam exerts a great deal of influence in planning the course content

- Teachers manage to familiarize students with the exam format
- The focus in teaching is on the language areas tested by the exam
- Language areas or skills not tested are overlooked

As far as teaching pace is concerned, coverage of the textbook material is favored by many teachers to the detriment of the development of communicative competence. In the present investigation, this tendency mainly characterizes less experienced and lower classes' teachers of English together with technical sections teachers. While upper classes' and long experienced teachers tend to lean heavily on the preparation of their pupils to the state exam, less experienced teachers, lower classes' ones and teachers of English in technical sections classes manage to cover all textbook material. Upper classes teachers in general sections are more informed about state exam items than their lower classes colleagues. Their awareness of the state exam items may be justified by the inspection service's instruction requesting them to initiate students into the multiple-choice question mechanisms. The magazine *Revue de l'Inspecteur de l' Enseignement No 13 bis/2016* explicitly says:

> *Une fois que le premier trimester est bien engagé, i lest bon de rappeler aux préfets, par une circulaire, l'obligation qu'ont leurs professeurs de 6è d'initier leurs élèves aux mécanismes de la question à choix multiple de meme q'à la question traditionnelle à caractère objectif.*

Aware of the responsibility imposed on them to initiate students into the state exam format, upper classes' teachers become more familiar with state exam items than their colleagues who teach in lower classes. Due to their long experience, teachers also rely on their predictions about the state exam items and so they indulge in routine teaching practices. In grammar and vocabulary teaching, the essential for them is developing students' recognition ability and memorization of usage rules.

There is regressive evolution of students' interest in the target language oral aspects and progressive evolution of their interest in grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension due to the state exam's washback, if not directly, at least indirectly. If a direct link were to be established between the state exam and the learners' learning focus, it could be said that the more the students advance towards the state exam, the more they adjust their learning focus to the state exam content focus. But it seems more reasonable to assume that the link is indirect: the state exams influences the teaching content and

thereby school testing; the teaching content and school testing, in turn, influence students' learning focus.

Moreover, while teachers continuously complain about students' lack of motivation and think they do not know the importance of English in the country, the latter affirm to like this language and to aspire to the development of communicative competence in it. Most teachers assume that students' affirmation to like English is only a claim and even Habasikiyake(2015) seems to be in synch with this view.

- **Hatred for tests**

Everything that is pleasant brings joy and strengthens our psychological state for the achievements of our goals without boredom. However unpleasant facts hinder one's progress and lead to boredom and dislikes. If the tests such as examinations and quizzes are often administered by teachers to punish the pupils, the latter will finally associate testing with punishment. As no one likes punishments, the consequence for pupils will be to hate tests. This is mostly noticed when teachers happen to give tests under a great anger due to pupils' failure on a particular language item during the teaching-learning process. Tests used in such conditions often lead to dislikes for each kind of tests. Note that at the beginning, most of the pupils aspire to developing communicative competence in English, but their motivation soon disappears as they realize that the English course will not allow them to achieve their aspirations. Many do not participate in the English class; and at the end of each school year they go up to higher classes without succeeding in English. Some others succeed in English quizzes and exams but without being able to communicate in English.

- **Learners' feelings**

That students' feelings are affected by state exam is undoubtful for the following reasons:

- Most of the learners would prefer succeeding in the state exam without developing any communicative competence in English to knowing English but failing the state exam.
- At the beginning, most learners aspire to developing communicative competence in English, but their motivation soon wanes as they realize that the English course

will not allow them to achieve their aspirations. Many no longer participate in the English class; and at the end of each school year they go up to higher classes without succeeding in English. A few others adjust their learning focus to the state exam requirements; they succeed in English quizzes and exams but without being able to communicate in English.

- Technical sections' learners have little interest in the English course due to its allotted time (two periods per week) and its little weighting in the state exam's overall percentage.

In conclusion, respondents' concurring answers to convergent questions, similar findings from other researchers and the fact of reaching similar results using different techniques seem to testify the present research findings.

6. Pedagogical implications

In medical field, treatment includes both diagnostic of illnesses and fighting them. Diagnostic would be worthless without the effort to cure. Likewise, in the educational field, identification and description of a problem would be worthless if no attempt of solution were undertaken. The impact of inappropriate English language test on ELT is a serious problem in Rutshuru secondary schools. If the situation is identical in other areas of the country, ELT will continue   to be a failure.

- **Improving testing through formative evaluation**

As it has been said earlier, the evaluation system can have either a positive or a negative impact on teaching and learning. Regular tasks gives the pupils the opportunity to measure the extent to which they have mastered the lesson and the teacher the possibility to evaluate his own teaching. This explains the importance of quizzes which should be given regularly, not only to seek for grades, but also to help the teacher identify learning problems, and to increase his effectiveness by making adjustments in his teaching. As Raja. T. Nasr (1973: 174) puts it,

''Students' work and progress must be evaluated and measured from time to time in order to reduce waste, to increase the benefit from the teacher's efforts, direct student's study, to guide the teacher in the selection of the teaching materials and methods''

If the pupils notice that quizzes are submitted not to allow the teacher to get marks at the end of the marking period or to punish them but to help them identify their learning problems and adjust their learning strategies, they will not develop negative attitudes towards quizzes, and the quizzes can have a positive backwash effect on learning.

- **Planning a test lesson**

Plan to assess student provide opportunities for students to demonstrate and practice the knowledge and skills articulated in the learning objectives, and for instructors to offer targeted feedback that can guide further learning**.**

Planning for assessment allows you to find out whether your students are learning. It involves making decisions about:

- The number and type of assessment tasks that will best enable students to demonstrate learning objectives for the lesson.

  o Examples of different assessments
  o Formative and/or summative

- The criteria and standards that will be used to make assessment judgements.

  o Rubrics

- Student roles in the assessment process

  o Self-assessment
  o Peer assessment

- The weighting of individual assessment tasks and the method by which individual task judgements will be combined into a final grade for the course.

  o Information about how various tasks are to be weighted and combined into an overall grade must be provided to students.

- The provision of feedback

   o Giving feedback to students on how to improve their learning, as well as giving feedback to instructors how to refine their teaching.

- **Plan to sequence the lesson in an engaging and meaningful manner**

Robert Gagne proposed a nine-step process called the events of instruction, which is useful for planning the sequence of your lesson. Using Gagne's 9 events in conjunction with Bloom's Revised Taxonomy of Educational Objectives aids in designing engaging and meaningful instruction:

- **Gain attention**: Obtain students' attention so that they will watch and listen while the instructor presents the learning content.

   o Present a story or a problem to be solved.
   o Utilize ice breaker activities, current news and events, case studies, YouTube videos, and so on. The objective is to quickly grab student attention and interest in the topic.
   o Utilize technologies such as clickers, and surveys to ask leading questions prior to lecture, survey opinion, or gain a response to a controversial question.

- **Inform learner of objectives**: Allow students to organize their thoughts regarding what they are about to see, hear, and/or do.

   o Include learning objectives in lecture slides, the syllabus, and in instructions for activities, projects and papers.
   o Describe required performance.
   o Describe criteria for standard performance.

- **Stimulate recall of prior knowledge**:

   o Help students make sense of new information by relating it to something they already know or something they have already experienced.

o Recall events from previous lecture, integrate results of activities into the current topic, and/or relate previous information to the current topic.

o Ask students about their understanding of previous concepts.

- **Present new content**: Utilise a variety of methods including lecture, readings, activities, projects, multimedia, and others.

    o Sequence and chunk the information to avoid cognitive overload.

    o Blend the information to aid in information recall.

    o Bloom's Revised Taxonomy can be used to help sequence the lesson by helping you chunk them into levels of difficulty.

- **Provide guidance**: Advise students of strategies to aid them in learning content and of resources available. With learning guidance, the rate of learning increases because students are less likely to lose time or become frustrated by basing performance on incorrect facts or poorly understood concepts.

    o Provide instructional support as needed – as scaffolds (cues, hints, prompts) which can be removed after the student learns the task or content.

    o Model varied learning strategies – mnemonics, concept mapping, role playing, visualizing.

    o Use examples and non-examples.

- **Practice**: Allow students to apply knowledge and skills learned.

    o Allow students to apply knowledge in group or individual activities.

    o Ask deep-learning questions, make reference to what students already know or have students collaborate with their peers.

    o Ask students to recite, revisit, or reiterate information they have learned.

    o Facilitate student elaborations – ask students to elaborate or explain details and provide more complexity to their responses.

- **Provide feedback**: Provide immediate feedback of students' performance to assess and facilitate learning.

  o Consider using group / class level feedback (highlighting common errors, give examples or models of target performance, show students what you do not want).
  o Consider implementing peer feedback.
  o Require students to specify how they used feedback in subsequent works.

- **Assess performance**: To evaluate the effectiveness of the instructional events, test to see if the expected   learning outcomes have been achieved. Performance should be based on previously stated objectives.

  o Utilise a variety of assessment methods including exams/quizzes, written assignments, projects, and so on.

- **Enhance retention and transfer**: Allow students to apply information to personal contexts. This increases retention by personalising information.

  o Provide opportunities for students to relate course work to their personal experiences.

- **A concrete sample of a test lesson plan**
  - **Classroom test.**

Concretely, for each learner the test could consist of three stages and run as follows:

First stage (in the classroom): each learner is received in the class where pieces of paper with the text and questions to discuss in groups are already displayed on a large table. He is then given the sheet of paper and sits with his mates in groups of 4 for discussions. **Second stage** (the test itself): the learner reads the text and answers to questions on a sheet of paper.

 Note: The questions will test both intensive and extensive reading in order to incite secondary school learners not to limit their reading to classroom reading of texts in the

textbook but to extend it to literary works outside the classroom. Intensive reading will consist of text reading comprehension.

Third stage: Learners' presentation and discussion of results followed by the correction if possible.   **Instructions**:

Read the following text and then prepare answers to the questions asked under it.

Examples of texts and questions for learners:

1ˢᵗ example: Title of the text: A son to be proud of

Last week, Rahman's wife had an accident. Rahman's youngest child, Yousof, was at home when it happened. He was playing with his new toy car. Rahman had given it to him the week before, for his birthday. Suddenly, Yousof heard his mother calling **"Help! Help!"** He ran to the kitchen. His mother had burnt herself with some hot cooking oil. She was crying with pain and the pan was on fire. Rahman had gone to his office. Both the other two children had gone to school.

Yousof was too small to help his mother, and she was too frightened to speak sensibly to him. But he ran to the neighbour's house and asked her to come and help his mother. She soon put out the fire and took Yousof's mother to the clinic. When Rahman came home, his wife told him what had happened. He was very proud of his son. " when you are a man, you will be just like your father," he said.   (From Christine Nuttal, 1988:200)

PREPARATION SHEET No 1

NAME:

Date	Class	Period
24ᵗʰ June2023	5 H.P	10:05'-10:55'

SCHOOL: BUTURANDE INSTITUTE

REVIEW TOPIC: Structure: A son to be proud of: Reported speech

MATERIAL : A son to be proud of: Test

REFERENCES: Go For English

TEACHING OBJECTIVES: At the end of the lesson, the learner should be able to:

      Answer : questions related to the text

- Predict from pictures what the text is about

- Answer questions about the text by skimming and scanning it

- Retell the story in proper words

ESTMATED TTT: 25%

ESTIMATED LTT: 75%

TIMING	TEACHER'S ACTIVITIES	LEARNERS' ACTIVITIES	OBS
4'	**1. WARM UP** a) **Review** ❖ After greeting learners, the teacher revises the previous lesson. b) **Motivation**	Teacher greets the learners and asks them questions about the previous lesson Learners read the text	
6'	T. asks each learner to select at random a piece of paper with a text found on the table and asks them to read the text silently. T. Do you think the text contains words not clear to understand and hindering you to fully grasping what it is about? P. Yes teacher T. Revising the vocabulary lesson c) **Announcement:**	Leaners' answers Leaners' answers	

| 10 | Today the test will concern the discussion of the text for its better understanding.

2. DEVELOPMENT

Presentation of the text: The teacher asks learners to guess from the title of the text (Brainstorming).

T: Look at the title of the text and tell what you think it is about.
P. Guessing and speculating on the content of the text. | Learners guess from the title what the text is about

Learners read the text then answer to the question | |
| 25' | a) **First stage**: Pre-test
    The teacher invites learners to read the text silently and work in groups of four. He clearly asks them to discuss questions relating to the text:
- Look at the title of this text (A son to be proud of) and tell what it is about.
- How old was Yousof? Where was he when his mother called for help?
- Why did his mother cry? | Leaners read, then answer | |

- How many children did Rahman have? Where were the other children and Rahman when Yousof's mother called for help? - How did Yousof help his mother? What would have happened if he hadn't done so? - What would you have done if you were Yousof? - What kind of accidents do we often have in Rutshuru? What are their their causes? - Suggest solutions to avoid them. **b) Second stage**(test itself): Extensive reading -The teacher asks learners to take a sheet of paper, read the text and retell the story in brief using his own words. -He asks learners to tell the tense which is mostly used in the text and why? **c) Follow-up:** After the teacher has collected the sheets of paper, he asks each learner to present the outcome of his work to the class for discussion and correction.	Leaners read, then answer Learners present the result	

5

Conclusion

The present study was carried out under the title « Assessment of English Language Tests in Upper Classes of Secondary School: A Teacher's Practical Model in Use in Rutshuru Secondary School". The study aimed at investigating and analyzing different issues relative to the assessment carried out at classroom level in the light of the existing theories and approaches to testing. In other terms, the main concern of this study was to find out how English language tests affect the English teaching-learning process. The purpose of a test varies depending on the testees' needs and the program. Testing has a main role in teaching thus everybody shoul comprehend the goal of the test. The test type should be well-decided before and the principles should be followed properly. Preparing and taking a test regardless of its aim brings about demotivation and anxiety rather than motivation and self-esteem. In that event, testing creates reverse effect on teaching instead of supportive one. So, foreign language tests are devices that back up learning. Appropriate and well prepared tests let learners develop their competence in foreign languages and show better performance in the tests. After all, it should be noted that all these efforts are done to make foreign language teaching efficiently. I have attempted to analyze different issues relative to the assessment carried out at classroom level in the light of the existing theories and approaches to testing. In other terms, the main concern of this study has been to find out how English language tests affect the English teaching-learning process.

Throughout the paper, I have diagnosed test-related problems in Rutshuru secondary schools. The outcomes of our research have revealed that English language tests administered in upper classes are not consistent with the language teaching and they do not cover the overall language areas and skills. Furthermore, most teacher-made tests have insufficiencies in design, administration and scoring. The possible consequence of these is the lack of validity and reliability in testing which may make testing worthless in the English language teaching and learning process. In addition, the assessor's unawareness of testing procedures is a lacuna that has been pointed out and for which illustrations and guidelines have been given in this work as means to overcome the issue.

This work has been designed as convergent parallel mixed method research study focusing on gathering, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data enabling the researcher to gain rich and detailed understanding of the phenomenon understudy. In this study, different data were gathered thanks to a questionnaire to gather data from teachers of English, semi-structured interviews with pupils, and documents to collect qualitative data. The investigation results reveal a need for substantial innovations in the English language test. There is a need to change it from" system-referenced testing " to "performance-referenced testing". In order to have a positive washback, the English language test has to be based on the goal of language teaching, i.e. development of communicative competence and not on knowledge about language as a system. It will also be necessary to incorporate the changes into the national program of ELT by changing it from a structural syllabus type to a communicative functional one in virtue of the alignment principle.

Being a human endeavor, this study is far from being perfect or exhaustive since it may include some shortcomings. Nevertheless, we hope we have opened the way to further research about the English language testing misuses and the teachers' awareness of this issue. Therefore, we deeply call upon other researchers' awareness and we encourage them to investigate the same field to complete us.

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