# SOME PROBLEMS OF TESTING PUPILS IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: CASE OF KANANGA SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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**Abstract:**

Knowing a language is being able to use it in the daily speech LADO (1961: 17). This means, being capable of listening. Reading and writing. These four skills should be taught and tested by the teacher in order to know if learners have mastered lessons previously taught or exchange their thoughts, feelings and ideas.

**Keywords:**

Language, daily speech, secondary schools.

## Introduction

Our study deals with the analysis of English language questions composed and administered by English teachers in 5th form secondary schools from 2007 to 2009 in the following schools:

1. Institut Pédagogique Cilejelu.
2. Institut Scientifique de Kele-Kele.
3. Institut Lumière des Nations.
4. Institut Normal.
5. Institut Tshibandilu.
6. Institut des Beaux-Arts.
7. Institut Technique Industriel de Katoka.
8. Institut Technique Commerciale de Kele-Kele.
9. Collège St Pie-X.
10. Lycée Buena Muntu.

Our purpose in this work is to examine how English questions are composed at the end year examinations by English teachers and know if all the skill/sub skills are considered; with reference to the English National Programme.

To achieve our task, the following questions arise in our mind:



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1. What is testing?
2. Are pronunciation and phonetic transcription taught in 5th form secondary school?
3. How are the 5th form's English end year Exams composed?
4. Do they allow teachers to judge their teachings with reference to the English National Programme?

The above questions may lead us to the following hypothesis: By Examining 5th form learners at the end year examinations, some useful skills/subskills are neglected and seen very important, for both the teacher and learners in the testing of English as a foreign language.

In the elaboration of this work, we have used the descriptive method in order to describe some concepts related to testing in general and particularly pupils 'English language testing. The documentary method has se hop useful to collect material from different books we have read.is for technique we have made intervenes with 5th form secondary school learners.

We conducted our investigations from 2007 to 2009 in order to ferret out skills/subskills requested at the English end year Examination which are likely to be important so far as English language is concerned.

## SECTION ONE: GENERALITIES ON LANGUAGE TESTING

In this first section, we will define the term "test" and discover the importance of the language test for both learners and teachers as well as the principles of language testing without a glance at test criteria.

### 1. Definition of the term "test".

The term test has been defined in different ways by different authors. Box (1974: 69) thinks that: "Testing includes assessing the learners progress toward linguistic objective determining but judging the results of the methodology and the material in use", testing helps language teachers discover their learners' problems, weakness or strengths and ascertain their progress toward the goals of the programme.

On his part, LUMBALA, D. (2002: 4) defines the word test as: A test of questions which show the teacher and learners how the knowledge was produced and received through the teaching/learning methodology in order to reinforce or change for grading the learners.

### 2. Importance of language test.

MADSEN (1983: 3) says that: "Testing is an important part of every teaching and learning experience". Thus, it is helpful to not only teachers but also learners. It helps them in at least two ways:



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a) Tests can help to create positive attitudes among learners, that is to say, learners will be active, almost every learner will like to react to any question from the teacher. From these questions' learners develop a sense of accomplishment in the interest of motivation and producing directions.

b) English language tests can benefit learners by helping them master the language. When they prepare themselves in advance for a quiz or an exam. And after having sat for it, they will check in their notebooks to know if really answers they gave were right. By so doing, rules, sentences structures, vocabulary … remain in their mind.

**3. Principles of language testing**.

These are some critical questions that should arise in the teacher's mind while designing and administering tests to the learners MADSEN (1983:15):

a) **What is the test?** Cfr Definition of the term test.

b) **Why do we test?** We test to check the learner's comprehension to see, judge the progress of the learners by mastering rules, vocabulary… In short, the teacher tests to verify if the content of his lessons taught were mastered.

c) **When to we test?**

According to MUBENGA (1999): "A teacher should know the moment of testing comes after teaching. And adds, that the principle is: "teach then test".

On his part, Box (1975: 70) states that: "there are usually mid-year and end year examination in which the proficiency of students is tested.

d) **What do we test?**

As for as this principle is concerned, we can say that: teaching and testing walk together. We cannot teach the language without testing it. Or we cannot test without having taught.

Box (1975: 35) says that:

a) We should test every thing we consider important enough in language learning to teach; that means, we should test the students' knowledge of the phonemic, structural and lexical systems as well as their insight into any cultural aspects we have given them.

e.g. 1. What is the plural of the word "Quiz"?

2. What is the French for: "hand shears"?

b) We should test the students' ability to understand, speak, read and write. Within these listening and speaking skills, we should judge their ability to understand the formula of language.

c) How do we test?



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Nowadays, a good teacher who knows to teach should also know to test. He must know whether he is dealing with an oral test or a written one.

As shown by Box (1975: 70):

a) Written tests are of two kinds: short answers tests and essay tests:

– Short answers tests may need the practice activities. They may be of multiple choice, completion, substitution or transformation type. These tests have many advantages:

a) They are objective.
b) They can be scored easily and quickly.
c) They permit the testing of a wide area of knowledge.

– Essay tests are tests which do not have part in a beginning language plan. Since learners are limited at the beginning of language learning. It is possible for them to analyze, develop, discuss a topic in their second language learning. Therefore, these tests are very important and desirable for the advanced levels. They consist of judging or examining the students' use of varied structures, the richness of their vocabulary and their ability to express their ideas, thoughts, feelings… with clarity and precision.

b) Oral tests are very important and unique toll for judging oral production of sounds, stress, rhythm and intonation patterns, fluency, automatic responses to oral or written stimuli.

**4. Test criteria**.

Every teaching activity has obviously its criteria on which it relies in order to succeed. Following MADSEN (1983: 178) a test is said to be good if it is at the same time valid and reliable.

a) **Test reliability**.

As far as test reliability is concerned, a good test should reflect the stability of the tests 'scores, according to MADSEN (1983: 179). Any test is reliable if it produces essentially the same results consistently on different occasions when the conditions of the test remain the same.

b) **Test validity**.

Following MUBENGA (1999: ), a test is valid if it measures what it must measure, i.e., if the test, is to measure any language skill we wanted it to evaluate and if there is a correlation between the scores and the ability learners have in the skill which we supposed to measure.



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Then, we can assume that the test we have made is valid if the purpose or objective we have assigned ourselves while selecting that test is to be sure of the validity of the test.

**SUMMARY**

Through this section, we have tried to define the term "test", secondly, we have presented the importance of language test for both the teacher and the learner.

Some principles of language testing have been presented by showing the relevance of tests in the foreign language teaching and learning process. And we have ended by showing the test criteria.

**SECTION TWO: TYPES OF LANGUAGE QUESTIONS IN USE AT THE SECONDARY SCHOOL EXAMINATIONS**

In assessing pupils' knowledge, second types of items may be used. DE KETELE (1984: 6-8) proposes two main categories of questions: The items of production and those of selection.

**2.1. Questions of production**.

Items of production ask for the individual answer (be short or long). DE KETELE (op. cit: 15) says: "Parmi les items de production, on distingue classiquement les items de production à réponse courte où il s'agit pour le répondant de produire le complément attendu et les items de production à réponse longue où la part de « création » et de formulation personnelle est généralement plus grande.

As we can see it though the quotation above, items of production are classified into two kinds: Those that need answers and those that ask for a long answer formulated by the pupils. Here, pupils can resort to creativity.

a) **Short answer items**.

e.g. In the text: "THE MAGIC CALABASH" How did Ayo get information about the witch?

She was informed in a dream.

b) **Long answer items**.

Are questions that ask for long answers. Here, pupils asked to summarize a text, to describe the school, to demonstrate a formula …

**2.2. Questions of selection**.

Here, pupils have an opportunity to make a choice among a list of solutions imposed by the teacher. It should be specified that the pupil may select the correct



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choice or the best solution among several solutions given in this category which we are going to talk about:

a) True or False items.
b) Matching items.
c) Multiple choice items.

**1. True or False items**.

According to HEATON (1975: 108) "True or False test" is one of the most widely used tests of reading comprehension; not only is the scoring if such test straight forward and quick but scores obtained by the testes can be a very reliable indices of reading comprehension provided that items themselves are well constructed and that there are enough of items".

However, we can say, they are items which are easily and quickly constructed and much used in reading comprehension because of their clearness in composition, they are scored in a short period of time.

**2. Matching items**

Following OLIER JOHN (1979: 16) Matching items are questions of selection in which several lists If corresponding elements are presented to the respondent. The operation of selection consists in choosing, the correct matching among the possible matching without difficulties.

They are classified into two categories:

1) Arrowing.
2) Letter and figure (number)association.

**3. Multiple choice items**.

They are items of selection too. They are composed by: a stem, the key and distractors (SCHOLLAER) quoted in *Revue de l'inspecteur*, n° 5 & 6 (1986: 132-135).

❖ Stem: It is the first part of the item containing the main idea and introduces the five (5) options of the questions;

❖ The key: Is a correct answer inserted among 5 options of the question proposed to the test for a choice.

❖ Distractors: They are four wrong options part together with the best option with the idea. That the test finds or chooses the correct option (key).

**SUMMARY**

Through this section, we have presented different types of questions used in language teaching/learning nowadays among which.



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**SECTION THREE: SOME PROBLEMS IN THE COMPOSITION OF END-YEAR ENGLISH EXAMINATION IN 5TH FORM SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

Through this section, we have not only to know that all skills/subskills (listening, speaking, reading and writing, phonetics, vocabulary, grammar language usage, composition…) are taught in the 5th form this sentence is not asked. But also, to analyze different questions composed by 5th forms secondary school English teachers at the end of the school year teaching/learning, to evaluate knowledge taught/learned along the school year. i.e. We want to know according to the English Programme if all skills/subskills (phonetic, vocabulary, grammar, reading, comprehension, composition and language usage questions) are considered while composing these exams, how and the way they are dispatched. And this is made possible with a sample of the secondary schools (general and technical options) of Kananga.

## I. GENERAL OPTIONS

### 1. INSTITUT PEDA CILEJELU

| Skills / Year | Questions on phonetic | Questions on vocabulary | Questions on grammar | Questions reading comprehension | Questions on composition | Questions on language usage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2007 | – | – | 4 | 4 | – | – |
| 2008 | – | 1 | 4 | 4 | – | – |
| 2009 | – | 1 | 3 | – | – | – |

**Comment:**

– In the year 2007, we have noticed that 8 questions are given among which 4 questions come from grammar and 4 others from reading comprehension while the remaining skills/subskills had not any question.

– In 2008, nine questions subdivided as follows: 1 question vocabulary, 4 in grammar, 4 reading comprehension. No question phonetics, composition language usage.

– In 2008, five (5) questions: 1 vocabulary, 3 grammar and 1 language usage.

**Notice**: Some questions were not at the level of the tests.

e.g. 1. Criticize your English course.

2. What is the importance of English in your life.

3. Why do you present this examination?

### 2. INSTITUT SCIENTIFIQUE DE KELE-KELE

| Skills / Year | Questions on phonetic | Questions on vocabulary | Questions on grammar | Questions reading comprehension | Questions on composition | Questions on language usage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2007 | – | – | 4 | 5 | – | – |
| 2008 | – | 1 | 3 | – | – | – |
| 2009 | – | 1 | 4 | 3 | – | – |



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**Comment** :

–2007, 9 questions: 4 grammar and 5 reading comprehension.

–2008, 5 questions: 1 vocabulary, 3 grammar and 1 in language.

–2009, 7 questions: 4 grammar and 3 reading comprehension.

We can say that, for these 3 years almost all questions are confined in two skills and others are neglected. And we have also found the following questions in mathematics in 5th form chemistry while the teacher never taught.

Write in full letters:

1. $\sqrt{36} = 6$
2. $\sqrt{100} = 10$
3. $45 : 5 = 9$
4. $75 + 25 = 100$
5. 9 x 4 = 36

**3. INSTITUT LUMIÈRE DES NATIONS**

| Skills / Year | Questions on phonetic | Questions on vocabulary | Questions on grammar | Questions reading comprehension | Questions on composition | Questions on language usage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2007 | – | 1 | 3 | 4 | – | – |
| 2008 | – | – | 4 | 3 | – | – |
| 2009 | – | 1 | 4 | 4 | – | – |

**Comment** :

–In the year 2007, learners received 8 questions in which 1 question vocabulary, 3 questions grammar and 4 others in reading comprehension, when phonetics, composition and language usage miss questions.

–In 2008, 7 questions are found 4 questions grammar and 3 reading comprehension. Other skills/subskills were not considered.

–In 2009, 9 questions: 1 question vocabulary, 4 grammar and four others reading comprehension.

**4. INSTITUT NORMAL**

| Skills / Year | Questions on phonetic | Questions on vocabulary | Questions on grammar | Questions reading comprehension | Questions on composition | Questions on language usage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2007 | – | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | – |
| 2008 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | – | – |
| 2009 | – | 1 | 4 | 4 | – | – |

**Comment**:

– In the year 2007, 9 questions: three questions vocabulary, 3 questions grammar, 2 reading comprehension and one question composition while phonetics and language usage miss questions.



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– In 2008, 7 questions: one question in phonetics, 3 grammar and three others reading comprehension when vocabulary, composition and language usage have no questions.

– In 2009, 9 questions: 1 question vocabulary, 4 grammar and 4 others reading comprehension and language usage.

## II. TECHNICAL OPTIONS

### 1. AGRO ALIMENTAIRE (INSTITUT CIBANDILU)

| Skills / Year | Questions on phonetic | Questions on vocabulary | Questions on grammar | Questions reading comprehension | Questions on composition | Questions on language usage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2007 | – | – | 5 | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| 2008 | – | – | 4 | 3 | – | – |
| 2009 | – | – | 4 | 4 | 1 | 1 |

**Comment:**

– In 2007, 12 questions: 5 grammar, 4 reading comprehension, 2 composition and 1 language usage.

– In 2008, 7 questions: 4 grammar and 3 reading comprehension.

– In 2009, 10 questions: 4 grammar, 4 reading comprehension, 1 composition and another language usage.

**Notice**: We have not found any question both phonetics and vocabulary. While, they teach phonetics and vocabulary lessons in 5$^{th}$ & 6$^{th}$ forms. And, another thing is that. One exam for 2 different classes (5$^{th}$ form of technical options and that of general one) and options. And we have also remarked that this exam is almost the same for these three (3) years and no question related to the feeding or option matter.

### 2. ARTS OPTION (I. DES BEAUX-ARTS)

| Skills / Year | Questions on phonetic | Questions on vocabulary | Questions on grammar | Questions reading comprehension | Questions on composition | Questions on language usage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2007 | – | – | 3 | 2 | – | – |
| 2008 | – | – | 1 | – | – | – |
| 2009 | – | – | 2 | 1 | – | 1 |

**Comment** :

– During these three years in this school, questions phonetics, vocabulary and composition there totally for neglected. While their knowledge help learners to discriminate the sounds; to known and use the technical words in their daily speech and write well.



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## 3. PHYSICAL ÉDUCATION OPTION (COLLÈGE S$^{T}$ PIE-X)

| Skills / Year | Questions on phonetic | Questions on vocabulary | Questions on grammar | Questions reading comprehension | Questions on composition | Questions on language usage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2007 | – | 1 | 3 | 2 | – | – |
| 2008 | – | – | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| 2009 | – | 2 | 2 | 3 | – | 1 |

**Comment:**

–In 2007, 6 (six) questions: 1 (one) question vocabulary, three (3) on grammar and two on reading comprehension.

–In 2008, seven (7) questions on grammar, two (2) questions on reading comprehension, two (2) on composition and one (1) question on language usage.

–In 2009, seven (7) questions: two (2) on vocabulary, two (2) on grammar, three (3) on reading comprehension and one (1) on language usage.

As it can be seen in the above chart, questions on phonetics are totally neglected as elsewhere. And each year, there is one exam for two different options (physical education option and commercial one). The teacher doesn't think of technical side of the option while compositing the exam.

## 4. ELECTRICITY AND ELECTRONIC OPTION (ITIKA)

| Skills / Year | Questions on phonetic | Questions on vocabulary | Questions on grammar | Questions reading comprehension | Questions on composition | Questions on language usage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2007 | – | – | 2 | 5 | – | – |
| 2008 | – | 2 | 3 | 3 | – | – |
| 2009 | – | 1 | 2 | 3 | – | 3 |

**Comment**:

–In 2007, seven (7) questions: two questions on grammar and five ones on reading comprehension (only two skills are considered).

–In 2008, eight (8) questions: two questions on vocabulary, three (3) on grammar and three (3) others on reading comprehension. Questions on phonetics, composition and language usage were totally forgotten.

–In 2009, nine (9) questions: one (1) question on vocabulary, two (2) on grammar, three (3) on reading comprehension and three others on language usage (phonetics and composition are totally neglected).

While analyzing these exams, we have found that the two first years had one exam i.e. the same text and the same questions and the same number of questions and skills, not any question dealing with the option matter. The same exam for the learners of electricity and electronic (two different options).

As far as the third-year exam is concerned, we have found that the teacher has too much approached the exam to the option followed by tests. That is to say,



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he has used the technical words in all most each question, even though other skills miss questions.

## 5. COMMERCIAL OPTION (ITC KELE-KELE)

| Skills / Year | Questions on phonetic | Questions on vocabulary | Questions on grammar | Questions reading comprehension | Questions on composition | Questions on language usage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2007 | – | 1 | 3 | 3 | – | – |
| 2008 | 1 | – | 3 | 5 | 1 | – |
| 2009 | 1 | – | 2 | 5 | 1 | – |

**Comment**:

–In 2007, seven (7) questions: one question on vocabulary, three on grammar, three on reading comprehension while phonetics, composition and language usage miss questions.

–In 2008, ten (10) questions: one (1) question on phonetics, three (3) on grammar, five (5) on reading comprehension and one (1) question on composition. No question on vocabulary and language usage.

–In 2009, nine (9) questions: one (1) question on phonetics, two (2) on grammar, five (5) questions on reading comprehension and one on composition. No question on vocabulary and language usage.

While analyzing these exams, we have discovered that almost all skills are taken into consideration except the language usage skill. As far as commercial matter is concerned, we cannot treat them here since they constitute another field of investigation.

## 6. DRESS MAKING OPTION (LYCÉE BUENA MUNTU)

| Skills / Year | Questions on phonetic | Questions on vocabulary | Questions on grammar | Questions reading comprehension | Questions on composition | Questions on language usage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2007 | – | 1 | 2 | 3 | – | – |
| 2008 | – | 2 | – | 4 | – | – |
| 2009 | – | 2 | 2 | 3 | – | – |

**Comment:**

–In 2007, seven (7) questions: one question on vocabulary, two on grammar, three on reading comprehension. No question on phonetics, composition and language usage.

–In 2008, six (6) questions: two questions on vocabulary and four on reading comprehension. When phonetics, grammar, composition and language usage have no questions.

–In 2009, seven (7) questions: two (2) questions on vocabulary, two (2) on grammar and three on reading comprehension. No question on phonetics, composition and language usage.



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**SUMMARY**

In this section, we have shown that all skills and subskills are programmed and taught in 5th form secondary schools. Further more noticed that while composing the exams any English teachers do not take into account (all) different skills/subskills taught/learned along the year i.e. They concentrate questions two or three subskills and others full down while they are more important in the language learning.

**SECTION FOUR: SOME COMMENTS, SUGGESTIONS AND REMEDIES**

This section is built by referring to the second section data, that is, it focuses on some failures found in the composition of 5th form secondary school English exams.

1.A. Some teachers never think about the material taught while composing their exams. These go behind the learners' level.

e.g. 1. Criticize your English course?
2. What is the importance of English in your life?
3. Why do you present this examination?

1.B. While in full letters:

1. $\sqrt{36} = 6$
2. $\sqrt{100} = 10$
3. $45 : 5 = 9$
4. $75 + 25 = 100$
5. $9 \times 4 = 36$

2. If there is one English teacher in a school where two different options are organized. This teacher composes only one exam for these two options. He does not take into consideration both the objectives of English in these options and the material taught in technical classes and general ones are different.

3. In some schools, almost the same exam is considered every year. No question related to the option or technical words studied.

4. The lamentable omission of important skills/subskills in all exams, options, almost every year while composing the exams, such as: (pronunciation phonetics transcription), composition, language usage… While these tests are called not only to sit for the state examination after 10 months of the following school year but also to apply the language in their everyday social life.

5. No marks foreseen for each question.

6. In some schools, the exams are composed in a language which is not English i.e. no respect of rules, grammatical structures or questions structure.

By referring to the above problems, we suggest the following remedies:



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1. Some seminars are necessary for teachers so as to make them aware of the importance of any skill or subskill programmed for the secondary language learning by the National Programme.

2. Each skills/subskills must be into account while composing the exam with reference not only to the course outline used along the year but also to the National Programme of English. Then the teacher will be sure of the level of learners in English.

3. Each option, each class members should have their own exam even though the school has one English teacher with two different options.

4. Pedagogical inspectors should have a look at the exams with reference to the course outline and also the English National Programme before their administration.

5. The training of language teachers each school year and their permutation each period of 3 years is too much important.

6. The mastery of all the skills/subskills will be helpful for learners to achieve the objectives of teaching English, the speaking, writing, listening and reading skills are concerned.

7. To augment number of English language inspectors to help teachers stay not to go behind of that school be done.

**CONCLUSION**

All our effort though this study was to evaluate the way questions on all skills/subskills are being (constructed) considered at the examinations in 5$^{th}$ form secondary schools of Kananga.

To be complete in the composition of English year end examination in 5$^{th}$ forms, teachers should refer both to the course outline and to the English National Programme (1977: 17) which sustains that at the end of secondary school studies our learners learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) should be capable of communicating orally and by writing (speaking and listening; writing and reading) with reasonable ease. So, composers should take into consideration the testing of all the skills/subskills or almost every point foreseen by the National Programme in order to be sure of the knowledge/level of the learners.

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