



## Results from the National Examination before and after 2012-2013 Education Reforms: Lessons and Perspectives

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined comparatively scores in eight National Examination of English done upon the completion of Junior high school level and the students' scores in them. The examinations concerned are four of grade 9 at Basic school and the others four of the former education system. In conducting it, we sought to answer two research questions. While the first was set to understand students' performance in the first four editions in basic education system compared to their counterparts' performance in the last four editions in the former system, the second intended to draw lessons from the two categories of students. Document/content analysis was used for data collection. The collected data were the scores in eight national examinations and they were analyzed quantitatively. Microsoft Excel and SPSS were used to this end. After analyzing the collected data, it was found that students evolving in basic education system perform better than their counterparts in the former system. However, it was remarked that their performance generally is low, which calls for better strategies to improve it. It was, therefore, suggested that designing more adequate National Examinations and capitalizing results in them, redirecting the teaching to reflect the National Examination, as well as changing students' attitudes and the learning environment would help to improve students' performance in the National Examination.

*Keywords: national examination, education reforms, lessons and perspectives*

## Hasil Ujian Nasional sebelum dan sesudah Reformasi Pendidikan 2012-2013: Pelajaran dan Perspektif

### ABSTRAK

Studi ini meneliti secara komparatif nilai dalam delapan Ujian Nasional Bahasa Inggris yang dilakukan setelah menyelesaikan pendidikan SMP dan nilai siswa dalam ujian tersebut. Ujian yang dimaksud adalah empat ujian kelas 9 di Sekolah Dasar dan empat ujian lainnya dari sistem pendidikan sebelumnya. Dalam melakukan penelitian ini, kami berupaya menjawab dua pertanyaan penelitian. Pertanyaan pertama adalah untuk memahami kinerja siswa dalam empat edisi pertama di sistem pendidikan dasar dibandingkan dengan kinerja rekan-rekan mereka dalam empat edisi terakhir di sistem sebelumnya, sedangkan pertanyaan kedua bertujuan untuk menarik pelajaran dari kedua kategori siswa tersebut. Analisis dokumen/konten digunakan untuk pengumpulan data. Data yang dikumpulkan adalah nilai dalam delapan ujian nasional dan dianalisis secara kuantitatif. Microsoft Excel dan SPSS digunakan untuk tujuan ini. Setelah menganalisis data yang dikumpulkan, ditemukan bahwa siswa yang berkembang di sistem pendidikan dasar berkinerja lebih baik daripada rekan-rekan mereka di sistem sebelumnya. Namun, dicatat bahwa kinerja mereka secara umum rendah, yang membutuhkan strategi yang lebih baik untuk meningkatkannya. Oleh karena itu, disarankan bahwa merancang Ujian Nasional yang lebih memadai dan memanfaatkan hasil di dalamnya, mengarahkan kembali pengajaran agar mencerminkan Ujian Nasional, serta mengubah sikap siswa dan lingkungan belajar akan membantu meningkatkan prestasi siswa dalam Ujian Nasional.

*Kata kunci: story impressions, video animasi, keterampilan memirs, teks narasi*

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## INTRODUCTION

Educational reforms take place in all countries of the world. According to Claudio-Raphael, Graciela, De-La-Luz-Arellano, and Ayon-Banuelos (2000), they consist of changes and transformations in the school system involving factors such as educational philosophy, student policies, curriculum, pedagogy, didactics, organization, management, finance, and their links with the development of the nations. According to her, the objective of educational reform is to fulfil the world-wide commitments made on the subject of education. These reforms are always on the political agenda of countries and the international organizations involved in their design and application, in relation to one's view of development and the world-wide conception of education.

In Burundi, since the beginning of colonial education, there have been various reforms in education. At first, the language policy was to teach in French from primary education to higher education (Ndura & Nimuraba, 2012). The authors state that with independence, Burundi struggled to continue teaching in French until a new language policy known as the "Kirundization policy" was implemented in 1973. It suggested that the teaching should be done in Kirundi until Grade 5.

The recent reforms in education, which introduced basic education system, came within the perspectives of bringing solutions to the country's challenges (Ndura & Nimuraba, 2012). The same source provides that among these solutions are to re-build national unity; curb demographic growth and insure food security; address crucial problem of unemployment and increase household income; diversify and promote a competitive and healthy economy; develop appropriate infrastructure to support manufacturing/production; increase the literacy level and to prepare competitive personnel to the world and especially to the region. This is a dream and it is hard to achieve in the context of Burundi. In the area of testing, these reforms have not had much effect on the test purpose and quality. The national examination has remained with its format

as an objective one. However, the maximum score has been reduced from ninety to thirty. Among the thirty, twenty is for English and ten for Kiswahili. This reduction of the maximum score has had an impact on the amount of the content to be included in the national examinations. That is why the current national examinations of English are shorter than the latter.

Apart from the reforms in education which were established before, the set of educational reforms that were initiated in Burundi in 2012-2013 school year encountered various problems that affected both teachers and students. Teachers and learners in general were rather apprehensive about the reforms. Some among the university degree holding teachers felt that they were 'degraded', as this level was generally allocated to teachers with lower degrees. Some other teachers felt that they were overloaded because only two teachers were assigned to teach in a grade, one being responsible for languages and another for sciences.

Students and their parents, on their part, did not see much added value from the new curriculum contents and teaching approaches. Concerning test scores, teachers and test designers are not interested in analyzing them for subsequent improvement of the tests themselves and the teaching methods. Also, many teachers think of the test score as an end in itself. They see scores as numbers to be entered in the school transcripts. However, it is known that any test must have a specific purpose; so it is necessary to analyze the results to see whether the teaching has helped to achieve the learning goals.

Since there is a new education system, analyses of this kind are necessary in order to draw lines for improving the testing and the teaching methods in particular and the education system in general. So far, there has been no study of these results to find out how students have been performing in basic education system compared to their counterparts in the former system.

This study is, therefore, aimed to analyze scores in the national examination of English for junior level completion so as to draw lessons



underlying any differences or similarities between arrangements in basic education system and the former system. It seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How do students' performance in the national examinations of English compare before and after the 2012-2013 education reforms that established formal basic education system?
- 2) What lessons are there to learn from the two categories of scores in the English national examinations?

The English national examinations concerned are those counting for the 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 editions for the former system and the 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 editions for the basic education system. The 2016 national examination edition is repeated because there were two different categories of students (one evolving from the basic education system and another from the former system) who sat for the national examination at the same time. However, the examinations that they did were different from each other.

We believe that the results from this study will be beneficial to both teachers and test designers in that they will be provided with procedures to analyze test scores. Also, teachers with a negative perception of basic education system may benefit from insights arising from such a comparative study, which would help to improve their students' performance in the national examination of English.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Tests are not just tasks that teachers give to their students. Whether taken on a small-scale (classroom test) or large-scale (external test), a test has to be conducted with specific objectives including gathering information about the students' knowledge about the language as well as their performance in order to take some decisions. Those decisions are like (i) placing people in class levels, (ii) granting certificates and prizes, (iii) determining whether a person will be allowed to continue in future studies, (iv) deciding on a

profession or entering special education classes, (v) participating in honour classes, (vi) getting accepted to higher education or obtaining jobs (Shohamy, 2001).

Scrutinizing tests before and after their implementation is of paramount importance. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) observe that: We need to see test results less as an end in themselves and more as the starting point for genuine negotiation and interaction between the teacher and the learners, and among the learners themselves. A grade, however good or bad, is in itself significant: its real meaning lies in understanding the reasons why it was given and what it tells the students about how they might improve their future work.

The above quotation highlights the importance of analyzing test scores and learning their meaning for learning and teaching process. It emphasizes that testing does not take an end at administering and scoring a test. Once the scoring is finished, Bachman (2004) suggests that the next procedure is to summarize and analyze test scores. Statistics provides tool for this. Test statistics are then procedures for describing characteristics of test scores of a group of students.

Calculating these statistics provides testers with useful information that may be interpreted in order to make decisions about tests and test results. Statistics are traditionally divided into two types (Bluttman & Aitken, 2010). Descriptive statistics help you to summarize and understand data, whereas inferential statistics are used to draw conclusions about data comparisons.

Interpreting test statistics involves analyzing them to set the way next. It may affect positively education. According to Bachman (2004), statistical analyses are meant to show where tests fall short of expectations and provide guidance for improving them. Heaton (1988) additionally argues that interpreting test scores provides testers with information concerning (1) the performance of students as a group (in the case of classroom test) informing the teacher about the effectiveness of the teaching; (2) the performance of individual

student and (3) the performance of each of the items comprising the test. According to him, this information is very important for teaching purposes because test results can show not only errors most frequently made, but also the actual reasons for making them. On the other hand, the performance of test items helps in the construction of future tests.

This section then explores ways of calculating test statistics and their interpretation. According to Heaton (1988), there are various ways of getting test statistics. Those ways are: frequency of distribution, measure of central tendency (mode, median score, mean score), measure of dispersion (range, standard deviation), item analysis (item difficulty or facility value, distribution index, extended answer analysis). For the sake of this study, we calculated the mean, the standard deviation and the frequency distribution. We also computed the success rate for each national examination edition. It is believed that these tools are enough to provide the researcher with useful information needed to draw accurate conclusions and to suggest ways on how the performance of students in the national examination of English could be boosted.

Extended answer analysis consists of analyzing reasons behind scores obtained by students on a whole test. After calculating the facility value, the item discrimination index and the distractor index for multiple choice questions, the next step is to try to understand realities about students' scores on those items. According to Heaton (1988), extended answer analysis helps to analyze items in detail particularly in cases where they fall short. This is done in order try to understand why these items haven't performed according to expectations and why certain testees have failed to answer a particular item correctly. In doing this, there are no other calculations needed. In short, item analysis gives information on how each item has performed on a test. It helps teachers to find out which items have been difficult to students and which ones have been easy.

The teacher can decide to maintain the test if items have performed well, rewrite the test if items in it have performed poorly, or not to consider items that have had a poor performance. More specifically, the teacher can use this information for future construction of good items. Students, on the other hand, can make effort to improve their performances on language components related to items on which they failed to answer correctly. Item analysis is not common in Burundi educational system because teachers are not familiar to it. In general, all the standard statistics for test score analysis and interpretation are not applied in Burundi since it seems that teachers are not aware of some of these standard statistics. That is why we have decided to include all the techniques used for test statistics for the teachers who will read our work to understand them. As explained above, three of them (that is the mean, the frequency distribution and the standard deviation) have been used in this study due to the fact that it consisted of a large number of research population.

Test statistics can be manipulated with manual calculation or with a calculator when the concerned data are not large. However, with large data, there are computer software that can be used to calculate them and help in their interpretation and that can make this process as smooth and as easy as possible. The main of them are Microsoft Excel, SPSS, R and Stata. Each of them offers something slightly different to the user and the choice of one of them will depend on a range of factors, including your research question, knowledge about statistics, and experience of coding. It is, therefore, important to keep in mind that while there might be advanced statistical software (and the knowledge to use it) available, the results will not mean much if data were not processed in a valid way. This study has relied on Microsoft Excel and SPSS, which we can easily manipulate, and given their availability. However, for other testers especially those who can get access to a computer, we may recommend the use of Microsoft Excel because few of them may get access to SPSS and few of them might not know how to manipulate it.



The existing literature focused on testing and assessment notions which include purposes and functions of testing, test types, characteristics of good tests, and how to design good tests. Examples include Agwagah (1997); Ezeudu (1997); Agbaegbu (1997); Bachman and Palmer (1996); Bachman (1990); Davies (1968); Dougras (2004); Ebel (1972); Harmer (2007); Heaton (1988); Henning (2012); Hutchinson and Waters (1987); McCormick and James (1983); Shohamy (1985); etc. some of them (Bachman and Palmer, 1996; Heaton, 1988; etc.) discussed notions about techniques to test score analysis and interpretation in their writings.

Locally, most researchers, especially students writing their undergraduate dissertations, have been writing about notions related to teaching English and/or testing and marking techniques. Some like Bashingwanubusa and Niyintunze (2017); Banzubaze and Ciza (2018); Marinkumbu and Irankunda (2018), Niyonzima (2002), etc. have dealt with factors influencing students' success in English and/or causes of students' failure in English. Nsengiyumva and Bigirimana (2016) made a comparative study of public and private

primary school on speaking skills. However, to the best of our knowledge, no one of them has made such a comparative study based on test score analysis and interpretation. Hence the pertinence of this topic "Results from the National Examination of English for Junior High School Level Completion before and after 2012-2013 Education Reforms: Lessons and Perspectives" is to bridge this gap.

## METHOD

The research population for this study is made up of three types of documents. They consisted of examination results appearing on the examination copies for Grade 9 in basic education system and for 4<sup>th</sup> Form in the former system respectively.

To appraise the performance of students in the national examinations of English, the results of the students who all sat for eight consecutive national examinations were analyzed altogether. Four of the eight editions belong to the basic education system and the other four to the former system. The table below shows the total number of candidates who were registered for each national examination of English.

Table 1  
The Number of Testees in the Study Sample

Edition	Basic system education(Grade 9)	Total number of candidates	Former system (4th Form)	Total number of candidates	Percentage
2013	-	-	65.344	65.344	100
2014	-	-	72.052	72.052	100
2015	-	-	79.682	79.682	100
2016	118.619	118.619	91.680	91.680	100
2017	123.445	123.445	-	-	100
2018	93.614	93.614	-	-	100
2019	92.527	92.527	-	-	100

The above table shows that the students in basic education system started to sit for the national examination in 2016. Their counterparts in the

former system did their last national examination in the same year. Concerning the size of the data, the basic education system has got more testees.

This is because of the government education policy of free education for all which has made it possible for many children to attend primary schooling.

Given the comparative nature of this study, we decided to take an equal number of editions for both education systems. This implies that we picked the first four editions in the basic education system (2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 editions) and the last four in the former system (2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 editions). The sampling procedure was purposive where a quota sample was used. According to Dawson (2009), “a quota sample is used when we want to make sure that all the groups are represented”. We thus took the first four generations which had sat for the national examination in the new system and the same number of editions in the former system by taking into account the recent ones.

As far as research instrument is concerned, considering the kind of research problem, and our research questions, content/document analysis was selected for use as the instrument most suitable for data collection. The analysis was focused on the scores obtained by students therein using quantitative method. To get the results, formal steps were taken by the researcher to obtain them from the national Bureau of Education where they are usually kept. They then were sorted out to select those concerned with English. The results were compiled, then treated with Microsoft Excel and later imported to SPSS for their analysis and then their interpretation followed. The purpose of the analysis was to appreciate the quality of the performance of students in the basic education

system compared to that of students in the former system. It was expected that the results from these analyses would help in the formulation of appropriate ways to boost the performance of students in the national examination of English.

With regard to data analysis procedures, the results in the national examination of English were analyzed and interpreted quantitatively, while also comparatively. In so-doing, we calculated the mean as the measure of central tendency, the standard deviation as the measure of dispersion, and the frequency distribution. Taking into account the mean scores in each school system, we drew the line of regression.

We also calculated the success rate in each edition. The information resulting from this analysis was presented in the form of tables (for the mean and standard deviation) and histograms (for the frequency distribution). The Microsoft Excel and SPSS software were used to this end.

## RESULT

### 1. Students’ Scores in Basic Education System

This section presents the scores for students in basic education system. Firstly, the summary of the scores is presented and commented. The summary has been obtained by calculating the mean score and the standard deviation of the editions understudy. Secondly, a graph that shows the progression of students’ performance in basic education system has been given. Lastly, figures that show how the students’ scores in each edition are distributed have been provided with comments on them. Table 2 gives this summary.

Table 2  
Summary of Students’ Scores in the National Examinations for Basic Education System

Designation	2016 Edition	2017 Edition	2018 Edition	2019 Edition
Number of test-takers	118,618	123,388	93,613	92,526
Mean	17.975	16.447	11.951	11.909
Standard Deviation	44.435	35.410	37.988	36.803

The above table shows that the mean score is higher in the first two years in basic education system than in the recent years. Hence, it can be said that the 2016 and 2017 classes performed well in the national examination of English with a mean of 17.9 and 16.4 out of thirty and that the 2018 and 2019 classes performed less well, with a mean under 15 (which is the maximum average score), that is 11.9 out of thirty for both of them. The figure below illustrates how students' performance in the national examination progressed.

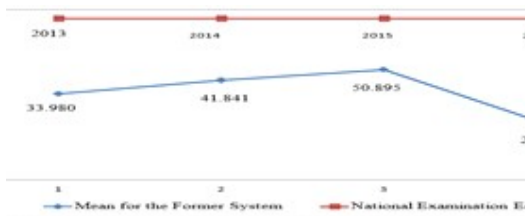


Figure 1  
 Progression of Scores for Students in Basic Education System

From the above graph, one notes that students' performance went decreasing. Thus, it needs to be improved. As far as the standard deviation is concerned, it shows how the score of students generally deviates from the mean. The first edition has a higher standard distribution index, which means that this class was more heterogeneous than the others.

## 2. Students' Scores in the Former System

This section presents the students' scores in the former system. It provides the summary the scores which have been obtained by calculating the mean score and the standard deviation of the editions understudy. It also shows how the students' scores in each edition are distributed and how the students' performance in the former system progressed. Table 3 gives this summary.

Table 3  
 Summary of Students' Scores in the National Examinations for Former System

Designation	2016 Edition	2017 Edition	2018 Edition	2019 Edition
Number of test-takers	65,343	72,051	79,681	91,679
Mean	33.98	41.841	50.895	23.739
Standard Deviation	13.656	125.016	142.846	110.914

The above table shows that only the students who took the 2015 edition had performed well in the examination with a mean of 50.8 out of ninety. The performance of students was poor in the other editions and the 2016 edition has had the poorest performance with a mean of only 23.7 out of ninety. The figure below presents how students' performance in the former system in the editions under study was.

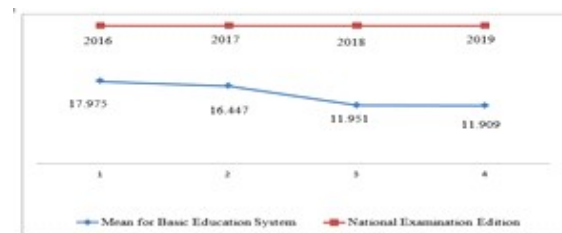


Figure 2  
 Progression of Scores for Students in the Former System

The above graph shows that the students' performance in the former system increased from 2013 to 2015. It strongly decreased in 2016. The standard deviation in this system shows that the classes were heterogeneous. It means that there is a big gap between the performance of one student and the mean when this is taken generally.

## DISCUSSION

The statistics resulting from our analysis on the students' results in the eight examinations under study show that the mean score of the four years in basic education system is 14.56, representing 48.53%. That of Grade 10 in the former system is 17.53, corresponding to 41.78%. If the two systems are compared, we deduce that students evolving in basic education system perform better than the counterpart in the previous system. This comes to respond the first research question of comparing the students' performance in the national examinations of English before and after the 2012-2013 education reforms that established formal basic education system.

Concerning the second research question of what lessons to learn from the two categories of scores in the English national examinations, we learnt that the students' performance in both systems is lower than the average. Of all the students enrolled to sit for the analyzed eight national examinations, only 48.53% for basic education system and 41.78% for the former education system scored the average. This shows that the number of those who succeeded in them is lower than those who failed. This calls for appropriate strategies to improve the students' performance in this examination among which are the following:

- 1) Making sure that items designed for the national examination of English are valid, clear and reliable. When there are items in a test that do not match with the content and the objective of the course, this causes ambiguities to pupils who take the test. Also, unclear items might result in

students' failure, thus causing validity and reliability concerns (Heaton, 1988).

- 2) The teaching as well as ordinary tests and examinations have to reflect the national examination (Shohamy, 2001; Heaton, 1988). In other words, teachers have to make sure that they prepare well their students to the national examination of English. So, teachers have to use the tests as a "road-map" to the national examination. According to Davies (1968), tests have a great influence on the teaching and learning methods employed from beginning to end of a course. Also, as discussed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), testers have to analyze and interpret test scores. Any test score is informative and analyzing them could help to take appropriate measures to improve students' performance.
- 3) Students have to be guided to have positive attitudes towards learning. In the introduction section, it was stated that some parents and students had bad perception over the basic education system. Thus, teachers need not only to advise them to consider learning as their own, but also to provide them relevant information which can get them to change their attitudes towards the system and the national examination itself (Naimon, et al, 1978). According to them, "good language learners" must do more than just being present at school.

## CONCLUSION

Test scores analysis and interpretation has not interested many researchers especially in Burundi. This work has then been carried out to highlight how test scores can be conducted, serving as an example to teachers and test designers. In relation to this study, it was found out that both students in the basic and former education systems did not perform better since their mean score was under



50% meaning that the number of students who failed in the tests out passed that of those who succeeded in them. It was, however, noticed that students evolving in the basic education system had a better performance compared to their counterpart in the former education system. Nevertheless, the results call for improvement strategies since the students' performance in both systems is low. So, designing valid, clear and reliable test items, redirecting the teaching to reflect the national examination, computing test results to learn from them and thus take appropriate decisions as well as raising the students' motivation and inspiration have been suggested as ways to boot learners' performance in the national examination of English.

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