



The English Curriculum Continuity and Pos Basic Learner's Linguistic Performance in Burundi

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ABSTRACT

Using the descriptive-correlational research design, this study examined the basic and post basic programs used to teach English in Burundi education system in order to find out the extent to which curriculum continuity is ensured across the 2 levels. Curriculum continuity was therefore assessed following Ornstein and Hunkins' (1988) bidimensional model. The study further aimed to determine the relationship between curriculum continuity and post basic learners' linguistic performance. In this way, two research instruments were used to collect data, mainly the document analysis and a likert scale questionnaire which was administered to a population sample of 32 learners of languages section from some selected schools in Ntahangwa communal Directorate of Education. Frequency distribution and Pearson's r correlation were the statistical tools used to treat the data from the questionnaire while the data from document analysis were analyzed qualitatively. Findings reveal that the curriculum continuity across the two levels is ensured to a little extent. Additionally, the majority of the respondents view the continuity of curriculum at a very low level. Results further demonstrate that there is a very strong and positive relationship between curriculum continuity and learners' linguistic performance. The study finally recommends the government of Burundi, through the Ministry of Education, to assure a smooth junction across different levels of education especially in terms of curriculum design and its implementation. Teachers are also recommended to be more creative by helping their learners be able to use the target language in and outside the classroom.

Keywords: *English curriculum continuity, post basic school, linguistic performance*

Kontinuitas Kurikulum Bahasa Inggris dan Kinerja Linguistik Pembelajar Pasca-Dasar di Burundi

ABSTRAK

Menggunakan desain penelitian deskriptif-korelasional, studi ini memeriksa program dasar dan pasca dasar yang digunakan untuk mengajar bahasa Inggris dalam sistem pendidikan Burundi untuk mengetahui sejauh mana kontinuitas kurikulum dijamin di kedua tingkatan tersebut. Kontinuitas kurikulum kemudian dinilai mengikuti model bidimensional Ornstein dan Hunkins (1988). Studi ini juga bertujuan untuk menentukan hubungan antara kontinuitas kurikulum dan kinerja linguistik pelajar pasca dasar. Dengan cara ini, dua instrumen penelitian digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data, terutama analisis dokumen dan kuesioner skala Likert yang diberikan kepada sampel populasi sebanyak 32 pelajar dari bagian bahasa dari beberapa sekolah terpilih di Direktorat Pendidikan Komunal Ntahangwa. Distribusi frekuensi dan korelasi Pearson r adalah alat statistik yang digunakan untuk mengolah data dari kuesioner, sementara data dari analisis dokumen dianalisis secara kualitatif. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa keberlanjutan kurikulum di kedua tingkat terjamin dalam tingkat yang sedikit. Selain itu, sebagian besar responden melihat keberlanjutan kurikulum pada tingkat yang sangat rendah. Hasil lebih lanjut menunjukkan bahwa ada hubungan yang sangat kuat dan positif antara keberlanjutan kurikulum dan kinerja linguistik pelajar. Studi ini akhirnya merekomendasikan kepada pemerintah Burundi, melalui Kementerian Pendidikan, untuk memastikan hubungan yang lancar di berbagai tingkat pendidikan, terutama dalam hal desain kurikulum dan pelaksanaannya. Para guru juga disarankan untuk lebih kreatif dengan membantu pelajar mereka agar mampu menggunakan bahasa target di dalam dan di luar kelas.

Kata kunci: *kesinambungan kurikulum, bahasa Inggris, pasca sekolah dasar, kinerja linguistik*

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of learning English language has been growing in the last thirty years (Doughy, 2013). Around the World and especially in Europe, English is seen as the lingua franca because it is a medium of communication for speakers of different first languages and it is believed that English will become even more dominant in the future. Similarly, English has spread far and wide to the extent that it is often referred to as the “World Language,” hence the World’s lingua franca (Baker, 2009; Jenkins, 2006). Burundi, therefore, has not been spared from the irresistible incursion of English. Many Burundians are significantly attracted to English, which they now use in some of their activities, including education. Though it was not inherited from colonization, as French was, one can say that its presence in the country is the outcome of transformations and innovations in post-colonial Burundi.

Language teaching, therefore, lays emphasis on communicative ability and problem solving so that after instruction, the individual is capable of conveying and interpreting meaning using all language skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This need for communicative ability has led to the birth of the term “communicative competence.”

Furthermore, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was born as a revolutionary approach to language teaching by enabling learners to be at the center of learning, by learning language for communicative purposes. Traditionally, learners were viewed as passive participants in the classroom and the teacher was viewed as the primary knower and the only source of knowledge. This situation resulted in learners’ failing to communicate in the target language since they were not given time to express themselves during the classroom activities.

This approach of CLT gave idea to curriculum designers to revise school programmes by designing more likely communicative curricula and at the same time by conducting the needs analysis of language learners, their expectations,

motivations, to mention but a few. Curriculum is thus seen as something not to ignore as far as acquiring communicative competence is concerned. In fact it must be designed with respect to a number of aspects such as age of the learners, their level of study, their aims, their background, and so forth. In this perspective, the curriculum designers have to assure that there is curriculum continuity in different levels of study.

There are three aspects of curriculum continuity that must be analyzed (Huang, 2003; Lin, 2005):

- 1) Continuity of written curricula,
- 2) Continuity of operational curricula, and
- 3) Continuity of learning experience

Concerning the continuity of written curricula, it incorporates the continuity of curriculum guidelines, teaching materials, teaching plans and so forth. The Continuity of operational curricula comprises the continuity of teaching approaches and assessments and the continuity of learning experience, finally, involves teachers’ experience and academic achievements (Huang, 2003; Lin, 2005). In the broader sense, curriculum continuity involves two dimensions: horizontal continuity and vertical continuity (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1988). The former refers to the integration and coherence of curricula, while the latter comprises the continuity and sequence of curricula (Chen, 2002).

In Burundi, pupils learn English from primary education to university. In fact, the recent educational reform in Burundi has resulted in the introduction of new programs so that Burundian learners can be able to compete with others worldwide. Since we learn any language for communication purposes, learners are expected to be good communicators and solve real life problems. However, Post Basic learners of English struggle much to use English in meaningful situations while they learn English in the classroom settings under the supervision of teachers of English. On one side, this failure to communicate in the target language, English in this case, is associated to the kind of curricula learners are exposed to as learning materials in the basic school.

It can be assumed that there exists a gap somewhere in the programs being delivered to learners of the basic and post basic schools which results into learners 'failure to use the language in communicative situations and meet the desired goals of the program.

The present research aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1) To what extent does the English curriculum ensure continuity across the basic and post basic school levels?
- 2) Is there any statistically significant relationship between curriculum continuity and learners' linguistic performance?

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Curriculum Continuity

Curriculum continuity seems to be an issue to be taken into account while designing school programmes. Recent research on transfer and transition (Galton et al, 2003) has pointed out the need for schools to work more on curriculum continuity and to pay attention to academic transfer and the specific strategies which help sustain pupils' progress. According to the above scholar Curriculum continuity refers to:

- 1) knowing which topics have already been covered;
- 2) knowing what skills and understandings have been well established;
- 3) knowing the pace and style of previous lessons in the subject.

This knowledge is then used to launch pupils' secondary education in a way that reassure them, challenge them and rapidly take them forward.

As a minimum, it is essential that the upper-class levels know which topics have been covered by lower-class levels.

In the broad sense, curriculum continuity involves two dimensions: **horizontal** continuity and **vertical** continuity (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1988). These two forms of curriculum continuity are very important because they well define how the curricula of one level or from one level to another should be designed. The former refers to

the integration and coherence of curricula, while the latter comprises the continuity and sequence of curricula (Chen, 2002). In other words, the horizontal continuity, i.e., the integration of curricula, indicates combining associated notions of various disciplines to develop a specific learning topic.

As for the vertical articulation, the continuity of curricula means the repetition of essential curriculum elements, ensuring that, the sequence of curricula is related to, yet surpasses the scope of the continuity. It has to make emphasis on the importance of building the curricula upon the students' previous learning experience as well as requiring a gradual increase in curriculum complexity (Tyler, 1949).

There are three aspects of curriculum continuity that can be analyzed: the continuity of written curricula, operational curricula and of learning experience (Huang, 2003; Lin, 2005), and each corresponds to one of three forms of curricula.

a) The continuity of written curricula

It deals with the planned curriculum, and it incorporates the continuity of curriculum guidelines, teaching materials, teaching plans and so forth (Huang, 2003; Lin, 2005).

b) The continuity of operational curricula

It tackles created curriculum, and it mainly comprises the continuity of teaching approaches and assessments (Huang, 2003; Lin, 2005).

c) The continuity of learning experience

It takes care of the understood curriculum and it involves teachers' understanding of the Students' learning experience and academic achievements (Huang, 2003; Lin, 2005). It concerns whether the students' actual learning experience connects to the written curricula, or the individuals' learning experience is well-linked under the teachers' instruction. Therefore, adjusting the teaching to meet individuals' needs is considered as much more significant (Huang, 2003).

2. Components of Curriculum Continuity

First, *Learning Environment*. A learning environment plays a key role in the process of attempting to make continuum curricula. Learning environment is a learning setting consisting of the physical environment, psychological factors and social relationships (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004).

Ahmad (2013) said that the classroom environment also influences the learning and teaching process. For him, the physical aspects (size and shape, space, interior light, colour, thermal conditions, noise levels, furniture and seating arrangements, technological facilities) and psychological aspects (interaction between students, students and teachers, students and environment) of classroom contribute to teaching and learning satisfaction and have a significant impact on students' learning.

Second, *Teacher- Students' interaction*. The interaction between the teacher and the students is of paramount importance in the teaching and learning process since it may impact both the classroom activities and atmosphere. The peaceful and comfortable school atmospheres are very important to students and teachers to ensure effective teaching and learning. This is because students spend most of their time in school. Then teachers need to be more creative and innovative in carrying out teaching and learning approaches or strategies so that students could acquire knowledge effectively.

Akçay and Doymus (2014) highlights that the selection of appropriate teaching methods and techniques is vital to ensure students' understanding of issues and concepts at the highest level. In the classroom, there are various factors that determine the success of students' learning. Teachers, students and environment are among the determining factors that contribute to the success of the learning process in the classroom. Thus, good interaction between teachers and students will create positive relationships in the classroom and contribute to effective learning. In fact, effective teachers assess changes in students' behaviour and understand the needs of students in the classroom.

Third, *Curriculum content and design*.

Previous studies have shown the significant role that teaching or instructional materials play in prompting learners' academic achievement (Ndayimirije, 2015; Irambona 2023). Moreover, Carl (2002) adds that the nature and content of relevant curricula should be determined before selection and classification can take place. Selected content is applied to achieve goals and objectives. So, the course outline or syllabus often reflects core content, while textbooks or articles reflect learning content. Design features, according to Richards and Rodgers (1986), include:

- 1) what the objectives of a method are;
- 2) how language content is selected and organized within the method;
- 3) the types of learning tasks and teaching activities the method advocates;
- 4) the roles of learners;
- 5) The roles of teachers; and
- 6) the role of instructional materials

Fourth, *Parents' Support*. Reglin (2002) asserts that the parent support describes the process in which parents or guardians responsible for a child promote actions that supplement and reinforce the knowledge, skills, competencies and interactive styles that the school intends to develop. In this way, parents complement the didactic practice by:

- 1) Providing assistance or support to the students for homework;
- 2) Providing time and adequate study space; and
- 3) Maintaining regular communication with the staff of the school

Fifth, *Language Skills*. Any language is mastered after the four language skills are sufficiently used. The language skills are broadly divided into two main categories, which are receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing). Those skills are related to each other and cannot be independent. This is supported by Uma and Ponambala (2001) who state that mastering language skills will determine the students' communicative competence in the target language. Curriculum designers are therefore there to ensure



if while designing new curricula, all language skills are focused on and dealt with to let learners be able to develop their linguistic competence in a way to perform in the language.

Sixth, *Assessment*. Jayne Moon (2000) sees assessment as “something that most teachers spend a lot of time doing” Because of this fact we have to define assessment, realize its importance and, according to Moon “consider what kinds of information it provides, and the decisions that might be taken based on that information.”

In other words, without assessment the teacher can provide feedback neither to the students nor to himself. Ioannou (2003 defines assessment as “a general term which includes all methods used to gather information about children’s knowledge, ability, understanding, attitudes, and motivation.” Thus, the form and types of activities learners are given may constitute a handicap to the learners’ developmental stage in terms of language learning.

Seventh, *Teachers’ Qualification*. Teachers’ qualification may have an impact to the students’ level of linguistic competence and even on the curriculum continuity. Loughran (2014) argues: “There is growing interest in the professional development of educators as the demands, expectations, and requirements of teacher education increasingly come under scrutiny.” Additionally, what the teacher does, influences, the whole process of learning. Effective teacher produces better performing students (Akiri, 2013). Richardson (2008) indicates that measures of teacher preparation and certification are by far the strongest correlates of student in reading and mathematics. The poor qualifications of teachers are a major problem in African schools.

Unanma et al. (2013) asserts that there is a relationship between Teacher’s academic qualifications and academic achievement. In this way, all teachers must possess instructional/ intervention skills to maximize the learner’s outcomes. When talking about curriculum continuity, the issue of teachers’ qualification is very important to be raised.

METHOD

The present study used both qualitative and quantitative data at approximately the same time, analyzing each type independently, contrasting or combining them, and then interpreting the results before drawing possible conclusions. It used some selected schools from Ntahangwa communal directorate of education, in Bujumbura municipality. As a sample size, eight post-basic schools which are: Lycée Municipal Ngagara; Lycée Municipal Kinama; Lycée Municipal Cibitoke; Lycée Municipal Kamenge; Lycée Reine de la Paix de Ngagara; Lycée Sainte Famille de Kinama; Lycée Municipal Gasenyi I were purposively chosen, of which thirty two post-basic school learners in the second year of the languages section were randomly selected to constitute the sample.

To increase the credibility and validity of the study’s findings, the triangulation method was employed. A questionnaire was designed to gather quantitative data from learners. Concerning qualitative data, they were collected through document analysis by comparing the teaching materials of grade 9 in basic school to that of grade 2 in languages section in post basic school. To validate these research instruments, expert professional judgment was made by experts in the curriculum studies field. As a result, some amendments of the data collection tools were made to align them well with what they were intended to measure.

As far as the analysis is concerned, quantitative data were descriptively analyzed by calculating the mean, standard deviations, and percentages using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. The mean verbal interpretation that the researcher used was the following:

- 1) 00–1.79 = Very Low,
- 2) 80–2.59 = Low,
- 3) 60–3.39 = Moderate,
- 4) 40–4.19 = High, and
- 5) 20–5.00 = Very High.

The qualitative data were analyzed thematically. It involves transcription, reading and

familiarization, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finalizing the analysis.

RESULT

This study sought to establish the extent to which the English curriculum ensures continuity across the basic and post basic school in Burundi Education system and how it influences the learners' linguistic performance in the post-basic level. The tables below show the results of the study, and they are presented in the form of document analysis, standard deviation, means, and percentages.

Table1
Content of the Teachers' Book of the 9th Grade in Basic School vs. the One for 2nd Grade of Languages Section in Post Basic School

| Grade level | Number of themes per year | Lessons/activities per each theme | Language skills focused in practice |
|--|---------------------------|--|---|
| 9 th grade (basic school Teacher's Book) | 10 themes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ General and detailed comprehension. ✓ Increase your word power ✓ Language patterns ✓ Reading practice ✓ Role –playing ✓ Assess your progress (on vocabulary and grammar) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Speaking 2. Reading |
| 2nd grade of Languages section (post basic school Teacher's Book). | 10 themes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reading comprehension (1&2) ✓ Vocabulary (1&2) ✓ Grammar (1&2) ✓ Oral expression (1, 2&3) ✓ Writing practice (1&2) ✓ Reading practice (1&2) ✓ Listening practice (1&2) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Listening 2. Speaking 3. Reading 4. Writing |
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Situations of integration | Speaking and writing skills development |

The above table clearly shows that the types of activities/tasks students are expected to do differ at the level of writing and listening tasks. In fact, in the basic school, students practice reading and speaking skills only and to a limited extent; the remaining skills such as listening and writing are not clearly focused on. However the content analysis of the post basic documents clearly shows that students practice all the language skills such as reading, listening, writing and speaking. These findings contradict those

by Uma and Ponambala (2001) who stated that language skills are related to each other and cannot be independent, and that mastering language skills will determine the students' communicative competence in the target language. It was also analyzed that in the post basic school there is another book called "cahier des situations d' integration" (book for situations of integration) that is designed to help learners develop the competences acquired in a period of time while this book is not used in Basic school. As a result, this make post basic students face challenges as they use a new book they have never met before, which negatively affects their language performance.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Curriculum Continuity and Linguistic Performance Items

| Items | SD | D | N | A | SA | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|--|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1. English programs are well linked from basic to post-basic school | 18 56.25 % | 8 25% | 1 3.13% | 2 6.25% | 3 9.37% | 1.594 | 0.837 |
| 2. What I learned in earlier classes is helpful in my current lessons | 12 37.5 % | 8 25 % | 5 15.63% | 2 6.25% | 5 15.63% | 1.750 | 0.950 |
| 3. There is a clear progression in English topics across levels | 7 21.87 % | 14 43.75% | 2 6.25% | 1 3.13% | 8 25% | 1.656 | 0.745 |
| 4. Changes in the Curriculum do not affect my ability to perform well in English | 10 31.25% | 10 31.25% | 6 18.75% | 3 9.37% | 3 9.37% | 1.688 | 0.780 |
| 5. Teachers follow the curriculum sequence consistently | 12 37.5 % | 8 25.00% | 2 6.25% | 3 9.38% | 7 21.87 % | 1.656 | 0.971 |
| 6. I easily get the information when listening to the teacher in class | 18 56.25 % | 6 18.75 % | 2 6.25% | 5 15.63 % | 1 3.13% | 1.688 | 0.589 |
| 7. I am able to use English in daily conversations | 10 31.25% | 8 25 % | 4 12.5% | 6 18.75 % | 4 12.5 % | 1.813 | 0.640 |
| 8. My performance in English has improved when I started post-basic school | 10 31.25% | 15 46.88% | 2 6.25% | 1 3.13% | 4 12.5 % | 1.688 | 0.742 |
| 9. I am able to write down more than 100 words on a given topic | 5 15.63 % | 13 40.63% | 4 12.50% | 3 9.38% | 7 21.87 % | 1.656 | 0.700 |
| 10. I enjoy doing oral presentation activities in an English class | 13 40.63% | 8 25% | 6 18.75 % | 5 15.63 % | 0 0% | 1.781 | 0.752 |
| Overall Mean and Standard Deviation | | | | | | 1.696 | 0.833 |

Legend: (SD) = Strongly Disagree, (D) = Disagree, (N) = Neutral, (A) = Agree, (SA) = Strongly Agree, Std. Dev. = Standard Deviation, (M) = Mean

From the above table, we can read that the majority of the respondents (81.25% of students) disagreed that the English programs are well linked from basic to post-basic school. With a mean of 1.594, it means that the learners regarded the continuity of English programs from the basic to the post basic level at a very low level. These results are comparable to those of Tyler (1949) whose study indicated that continuity of curricula means the repetition of essential curriculum elements, ensuring that, the sequence of curricula is related to, yet surpasses the scope of the continuity. It has to make emphasis on the importance of building the curricula upon the students' previous learning experience as well as requiring a gradual increase in curriculum complexity.

The table also indicated that over half of the respondents (62.5 %) reported that what they learned in earlier classes is not helpful enough in their current lessons (mean = 1.750 SD = 0.950). That is related to what the researcher concluded while making his document analysis. He realized that most of the activities about oral presentations, essay writing, listening tasks are not dealt with in basic school while they are much more focused on in post basic school, which can limit their motivation to learn and hinder their linguistic performance.

According to Huang (2003) and Lin (2005) the continuity curricula incorporates the continuity of curriculum guidelines, teaching materials, teaching plans, teaching approaches, assessments, and concerns whether the individuals' learning experience is well-linked under the teachers' instruction.

Concerning whether there exists a clear progression in English topics across levels, 65.62% of the respondents disagreed on the issue with a mean score of 1.656 and SD = 0.745. In other words, in the eyes of the learners, the progression

in English topics across levels is very low. These findings don't fall in line with what was observed in document analysis where the main themes developed in basic school have some similarities to the ones dealt with in post basic school.

In addition, it was noticed that a good number of respondents (62, 5%) revealed that changes in the curriculum affect learners' ability to perform well in English (mean = 1.688 and SD = 0.780).

All the above findings concur with the ones of Irambona (2023) in his study Instructional materials and their influences on students' academic performance. His research found that instructional materials play a significant role in academic success for learners. Additionally, these findings corroborate with the ones of Ndayimirije (2015) in her study appraising the adequacy and implementation of the English Language Curriculum for State Primary Schools in Burundi. Her research found that there was a lack of instructional tools, including audio teaching aids which causes curriculum discontinuity in some cases and finally results in into learners' poor linguistic performance.

Lastly, it was established from the table that the overall mean of the curriculum continuity is 1.696 with a standard deviation of .833. This suggests that the learners perceived low curriculum continuity in their journey to learning and they considered it as a factor predicting their low performance.

As a summary, the findings presented above and the literature review illustrates how learning and teaching materials play a significant role in enhancing learner's linguistic performance. They influence learners' academic achievement to a great extent.



Table 3
Correlation Analysis

| Correlations | | Curriculum_Continuity_Score | Linguistic_Performance_Score |
|------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Curriculum_Continuity_Score | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .993** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | 0 |
| | N | 32 | 32 |
| Linguistic_Performance_Score | Pearson Correlation | .993** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed)) | 0 | |
| | N | 32 | 32 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A correlation analysis was conducted to see if curriculum continuity affects students' language performance. The test results showed a positive and significant statistically relationship between curriculum continuity and the learners' linguistic performance, $r(32) = .993$, $p < .001$. This highlights that the relationship is likely to happen not by chance. Therefore, it implies that when the English curriculum is smoothly continuous and connected from one level to the other, learners are likely to perform well in the language.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher can conclude that teaching materials are important factors to develop and improve learners' linguistic performance. It has been realized through this research that learners realize low curriculum continuity across the basic and post basic schools and as a consequence their language performance is also very low. In order to enable learners to reach their maximum potential in English use, there is, therefore, a need for the government of Burundi, through the Ministry of Education, to ensure a smooth junction across different levels of education especially in terms of curriculum design and implementation. Teachers are also recommended to be more creative by helping their

learners be able to use the target language in and outside the classroom.

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