

# REB Assessment of Lower Primary English October 2019



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# **Comments on the REB National English Examinations October 2019 for P1, P2 and P3.**

This is the first time, as far as I am aware, that REB has written and administered the end-of-year examinations for all classes in all schools.

The initiative is a bold one, in order to gain some comprehensive assessment of learning.

The examination papers were sent electronically, or soft-copy, to the schools.

Each examination paper for English for P1, P2 and P3 was based on gap-filling of blanks set out in the printed examination papers and on writing sentences and words in spaces provided on the printed examination papers.

The expectation must have been for each pupil to have a printed examination paper on which to write his or her answers. That would be easy for the pupils to read and see each question, and to work on their own to complete the answers. That, too, would be easy for marking.

However, in some rural schools there was no budget or ability to print a copy of the examination paper for each pupil. The English examination for P1 was 4 pages (sides), for P2 was 7 pages, and for P3 was 5 pages. The actual cost of paper and the print for all examinations might have come to about 300Rwf per pupil, but with no parental contributions and no other budget the task to print the examination papers for lower primary was not possible in many schools.

The consequences of this are not insignificant. The teachers wrote the examination papers on the blackboard. It is not clear if all of the teachers would have reproduced correctly the many pictures used in the examination papers. For P2 and P3 in one school, the examination papers filled the blackboard at the front of the class and the blackboard at the back of the class, and there was still not enough room, and so questions 1 and 2 were eventually rubbed off to make space for the last questions on the paper. The teachers' handwriting is variable, and is not necessarily easily read by all pupils. The blackboards themselves are not necessarily easily seen by all pupils, with the combination of darkness and daylight playing on the surface of the blackboard.

Not only that, but the pupils were writing in their exercise books, and were copying everything on the blackboard. This means that pupils were not concentrating properly on answering the questions. Marking would be more difficult as teachers would not easily see the required letter, word or sentence of the answer.

**The overall result of this is that those schools which could not afford to print examination papers put their pupils at a very great disadvantage compared to those schools which had a budget for printing examination papers for each pupil.**

**Another important point at the outset is that the P3 examination was out of 60 marks, and yet the question paper only had 50 marks allocated to the questions.**

**The P2 examination was blank for a question carrying 10 marks, and so 10 marks were missing, making the examination effectively out of 50 marks and not 60.**

## Comments on the layout, content and assessment-value of the examination papers:

### *English examination for P1*

#### *Layout:*

The examination paper for P1 was divided into two parts; reading and grammar.

The layout of the paper was clear.

There was, however, some odd punctuation in two of the questions. In question F the pupils were to, '**Complete with:** on , in under , in front of , behind' That is not clear, and each comma should come immediately after the last letter of the word. With no comma between 'in' and 'under' pupils could have been confused.

In question G, similarly, pupils were asked to, '**Complete with:** **is** , **am** , **are**'. There should be consistency on the paper, and so those words to be used to fill in the gaps should be shown in a consistent manner in all questions which give words to use to fill gaps. A decision should be made whether those words are to be shown in bold with double underlining, or in non-bold with no underlining, or how it is best to show them.

#### *Content:*

Most of the questions were good, and provided a basis for assessment. However, whether P1 pupils should be doing a written examination is debatable, and probably an oral examination would be more fitting for pupils in P1.

In question D pupils were to complete a table which had two columns headed 'ONE' and 'MANY'. Some words were given and others had to be filled in. All words started with a small letter apart from 'Cups'. There must be consistency. The pupils' answers should all be in small letters, and so the given words need to reflect this. The words given in the 'ONE' column were not consistent, being, 'ball', 'boy', 'a tree'. All three should have had the indefinite article.

In question F the pupils had to use prepositions of place to fill in blanks in five given sentences, each of which had a picture by the side of it. The fourth sentence showed a ball on an armchair, and yet stated, 'A ball is ..... the sofa'. This should have been corrected.

Within the grammar part was a question for the pupils to fill in ten missing letters from two sequences of alphabet letters. Of the alphabet letters which were given, eight were in upper case and two were in lower case. There should have been consistency. Were the pupils then to fill in the missing letters using capital letters or small letters? This needs to be clear.

In any event, writing alphabet letters is not a test of English. Indeed, the two letters which are in the English alphabet which are not in the Kinyarwandan alphabet (q, x) were not part of the test. Ten marks were allocated to this task, and so one sixth of the examination total, was not a valid assessment of pupils' learning or understanding of English.

Also in the grammar section, was a question asking the pupils to 'Write in capital letters', both single letters and words. This is not a test of learning and understanding of English. This could be done in Italian, French or Spanish as the alphabet is the same, and the meaning of the words is irrelevant if the only task is to write them in capital letters. This task was allocated 5 marks.

**Those two questions (writing alphabet letters, and writing letters or words in capital letters) carried 15 marks which is a quarter of the total marks, and they are not a valid assessment of pupils' learning or understanding of English.**



### *Assessment:*

The teachers are given a paper with the correct answers filled in. That is the 'marking scheme'. That is not a marking scheme. A marking scheme guides the assessor how to allocate marks. So, there will be marks for the correct answer so that nearly correct answers can be allocated some of those marks, and also marks for spelling, handwriting, and neatness.

The marks allocated to each question should reflect the difficulty of the task for the pupils.

With the exception of question F which used prepositions of place, and question D which tested the singular and plural, each question carried 1 mark. Questions D and F had 2 marks for each part of those questions.

Allocating one mark per question does not give scope for proper assessment. For instance, in the first question which was reading, each part of the question had the indefinite article followed by the object. If a pupil could read the indefinite article but not the name of the object, is there a mark allocated or not? What if the pupil can read the word but with bad pronunciation?

Even the question of writing letters and words in capital letters, with one mark being allocated to each one, there is no scope for marking neatness or the uniform size of the letters, or letters/words which are written on the line.

Question D which comprised completing the table of 'ONE' and 'MANY', and Question F which tested the use of prepositions of place, were harder tasks and allocated two marks for each part of the questions. However, that, again, gives no scope for marking neatness of handwriting, or correct copying of the words to put in the gaps.

**As mentioned above, two questions, and so a total of 15 marks (25% of the total), were not a test of any knowledge or understanding of English.**

### ***English examination for P2***

#### *Layout:*

The examination paper was divided into four sections; reading, grammar, vocabulary and handwriting, but only 'grammar, vocabulary and handwriting' were numbered sections. Therefore, the paper had 3 numbered sections, but actually had four sections. In addition, some of the vocabulary questions were really grammar questions.

The letter size for 'READING' was not the same size as for the other section headings, and nor was the font in bold, as it was for the other section headings. There should be consistency so that the pupils are more easily guided around the examination paper.

The layout was confusing as the heading of each of the four parts had the total marks in brackets next to it e.g. 'I. **GRAMMAR (20 marks)**'. Then the questions within each part had their marks in brackets next to each question, e.g. 'A. **Complete with:** am/ is/ are **(3 marks)**'. There was no need put the total marks next to the section heading. It would have been better to have the four parts listed on the front of the examination paper with the total number of marks for each part. The assessor would write in the results for each part on the front of the examination paper. That would aid the assessment process, as then, at a glance, the areas of strengths and weaknesses could be seen.

The instructions were not consistent. Three questions provided words which were to be put in the blanks within sentences. One question instructed, '**Fill in the blanks with:** my / your / our / their'. The other two questions instructed in the form of: '**Complete with:** a or an'

There should be consistency, and the first instruction's use of slashes (/) rather than the word 'or' was much clearer for young pupils.

One question required pupils to fill in whole sentences next to pictures, and those sentences were provided. However, the box containing those sentences had 'jumped' and so was not easily identifiable as connected to the question. That is the danger of using Word documents. Any Word document should be converted to pdf to prevent such occurrences.

#### *Content:*

Question F of the grammar section showed printed hands pointing to objects and the pupils were to fill in 'This' or 'That'. Some of the printed pointing hands were near to the objects and some of the pointing hands were further away from the object. However, not one printed pointing hand was touching the object. Therefore, the answer for all four pictures is 'That'. However, in the marking scheme the two printed pointing hands which were near the object had the answer 'This'. Unless you are touching something, the correct word to use is 'that'. If you are touching the object the correct word is 'this'.

**The examination paper was not correct.**

Question G of the grammar section, had three sentences with words in the incorrect order, and the pupils were to write the sentences with the words in the correct order. This is very difficult, and is not a very satisfactory method to adopt in assessment. **The sentences expose the pupils to incorrect English and this is not to be recommended. It is unnatural, as in real life a pupil will not come across a sentence**

**with the words in the wrong order.** However, this question only carried 3 marks.

Question C of the vocabulary section, consisted of the outline of shapes, with the names of colours written next to them. For instance, the outline of a heart had 'Red' next to it, the outline of a circle had 'pink' next to it. The mix of initial capital letters and initial small letters is regrettable, and there should be consistency with all being in small letters. There were six words of colours each written next to a different shape. The question asked the pupils to, 'Read the 'colour' then shade using a colour pencil' and the question carried 6 marks. That is one mark for each word 'read' and each shape coloured correctly.

**However, in the rural schools there were no colouring pencils.**

The question would have been better had all the shapes been the same. There seems to be no reason for mixing shapes with the concept of colour. In most schools the 6 marks would have been awarded for reading, with no test of meaning.

Part 3 of the paper was 'Handwriting' and the pupils were to, 'Re-write these sentences'.

Lines were provided on which the pupils were to write. **However, no sentences were provided!**

This carried 10 marks, or one sixth of the total paper. I am not sure what the schools decided to do.

**This means that there were 10 marks missing from the examination paper.**

#### *English examination for P3*

The examination paper was divided into Section A and Section B. Section A comprised a short reading passage with 5 questions carrying a total of 5 marks. Section B had nine questions, each carrying 5 marks. That means that there were a total of 50 marks. However, the front of the examination paper states clearly that the examination is out of 60 marks.

**There are 10 marks missing from the examination paper.**

This is a serious mistake and, if the teachers do not notice this mistake, then all pupils are losing 10 marks through no fault of their own.

### *Layout:*

The layout could have been improved by a consistent two-line space before each new question with its bold, italic heading. Some questions had no space between the end of one question and the beginning of the next; this is not clear enough for young pupils.

### *Content:*

The reading comprehension referred to a dog as 'tall'. That is not a usual way to describe a dog; more fluent would be to use 'big' or 'large'. The passage also used the verb to 'let loose' which is quite advanced vocabulary for P3.

Question number 3 asked, 'What is the color of the dog?', and so used the American spelling of 'color'. It is assumed that English-English is taught in the schools, and not American-English and so this should have been corrected in the proof-reading stage.

I saw the 'marking scheme' at one of the schools, which was the examination paper with the correct answers filled in. For question 3 the answer was given as, 'He is a black and brown dog'. That does not actually answer the question exactly. That answer would be to the question, 'What sort of dog is he?'. The answer to question 3 is, 'It/He/The dog is black and brown'.

Question 5 asked, 'Where do they keep him during the day?' The answer given, merely repeated the text of passage, and was, 'We keep him in the kennel'. That is incorrect, as in order to answer the question, the answer must be, '**They** keep him in the kennel.'

In order to keep the answers more straightforward for the pupils, it is the questions which needed to have been changed, or the passage itself. For instance, the passage could have stated, 'He is black and brown', and question 3 would then lead to the correct answer.

In Section B the instructions for the questions were not as clear as they could have been. Also, it is advisable to have the questions in both English and Kinyarwanda so that what is being assessed is the answer to the question, and not whether the instructions have been understood.

Question I instructed, '**Use a/an to complete the sentences**' It would have been better to show 'a/an' more clearly as the options to be used.

Question II instructed, '**Arrange the words in a correct order to make a good sentence**'. Correct English is, 'Arrange the words in the correct order to make good sentences'.

The five sentences which followed each started with a capital letter, even though that initial word was not necessarily the first word of the correct sentence. The first word of each sentence should have had the initial capital letter. For instance, on the examination paper it was written, 'Brushing is he teeth his', whereas it should have been written, 'brushing is He teeth his'.

Question III was not a well-formed question. It instructed the pupils to, 'Fill in the missing letters to form a correct word'. With such a question it must be certain that there is only one word which can possibly be formed. It would, therefore, have been better to have drawings so that the pupils were prompted to the word. Two words were given as follows:

T\_bl\_ F\_th\_r.

The expected answers were 'Table' and 'Father', but there are the words, 'Tabla' and 'Fother' which are both accepted English words. So, if a pupil by design, or even by accident, filled the gaps with those letters to form 'tabla' or 'fother' they should have been awarded a mark.

Setting an examination paper needs to ensure that the expected answer is the **only possible answer**.

Question IV instructed the pupils to, '**Match the animals to their young ones**', and then there were two columns of names of animals. It was not clear how the pupils were to 'match'. Were they to write the name of the young alongside the name of the adult animal, or to draw lines linking one to the other? This should be clear in an examination paper.

Question V instructed the pupils to, '**Choose the best answer from the brackets**'. In each case the brackets contained two words; one correct and one incorrect for the sentence. Therefore, the pupils were to choose the **correct** answer, and not the 'best' one.

Question 5 of this Question V, was written, '**You.....The homework well yesterday (do/did)**'.

The unwanted capital 'T' in the middle of the sentence should have been corrected in the proofreading of the paper.

Question VI merely asked, '**What time is it?**' and then there followed five clock faces with blank lines by the side. There was no guidance as to how the answer was to be written. Was the full form, 'It is seven o'clock' required, or just 'seven o'clock' or even 'seven' or '7'. All would be correct.

Question VIII was testing adjectives and their opposites. The pupils were required to know the opposites of 'small' 'big' and 'short' (as in a short ruler). The opposite of 'small' is both 'big' and 'large' and the opposite of 'big' is both 'small' and 'little'. The opposite of 'short' can be 'long' or 'tall' but a ruler can only be 'long' and not 'tall'. It is not known whether the marking scheme took account of this.

Question IX was not a well-worded question. That pupils were instructed to, '**Fill the gaps with: towel, bed, garden, food, classrooms**'.

However, two of the sentences could use either of two of the words given, and still make sense and be grammatically correct sentences:

Pupils are in their .....(both 'classrooms' and 'garden' would be correct)

There are flowers in the .....(both 'garden' and 'classrooms' would be correct)

Unless the marking scheme had taken account of these possibilities, then it is essential that any examination question of this sort has only one possible answer.

### *Assessment*

The use of 'a' or 'an' was tested in P1, P2 and now P3.

The use of 'is' 'am' 'are' was tested in P1, P2 and now P3.

They have been tested with exactly the same method of using a gap-fill exercise.

This does not evidence progression of assessment of learning. By P3 the pupils could have been asked to complete a sentence without being given the missing word, if the sentence was chosen or written with care.

For each task to carry one mark does not enable the paper to be marked properly. There is no scope for marking partly correct answers, nor for marking handwriting, neatness and spelling. Also allocating one mark for each task makes no distinction between the tasks; on any examination paper there should be some gradation of questions in terms of difficulty. For instance, the question testing 'a' and 'an', has been tested since P1 and so should be easy for a P3 pupil, whereas the reading comprehension was a test of understanding and meaning.

Question II, which had sentences with words in the incorrect order, is not a satisfactory assessment of learning. This is a difficult task for native speakers, and it is artificial as pupils will not come across such sentences in real life.