

## ASSESSMENT OF BUKAVU FINALIST PUPILS' ENGLISH ACTIVE VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE

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**Abstract:** The Congolese national program of English instructs that secondary school pupils be equipped with 2,000 active words in the four years of English training (based on 500 active words per year), so that they can be able to communicate effectively in English. However, the Congolese State Exams do not evaluate finalist pupils' level of English active vocabulary knowledge to check whether this objective is reached or not. Consequently, the finalist pupils' actual level of English active vocabulary knowledge at the end of their secondary school education remains unknown. To have an idea on the level, this study aimed at assessing Bukavu finalist pupils' English active vocabulary knowledge. After a random sampling of 35 (10%) Bukavu secondary schools with the final year, the data were collected from 1506 Bukavu finalist pupils of the scholar year 2021/2022 through a test of English active vocabulary knowledge, which comprised multiple choice and traditional questions. The data, compiled in Excel for easy handling, showed the following English proficiency levels among Bukavu finalist pupils: below elementary 4.1%, elementary 69.9%, pre-intermediate 22.8%, intermediate 2.8%, upper-intermediate 0.4%, and advanced 0.0%. In summary, most pupils in Bukavu secondary schools end their English training with an "elementary level," possessing an average of 594 (29.7%) active words instead of the expected 2,000. Finally, relevant recommendations were made to the Congolese legislator, teachers of English and Bukavu secondary school pupils for the increase of the level.

**Keywords:** Assessment, English active words, secondary school finalist pupils, Bukavu town, Congolese program of English

### To cite this paper (in APA style):

Trésor, M.B. (2024). Assessment of Bukavu finalist pupils' English active vocabulary knowledge. *Journal of English Education Program*, 5(1), 18-33. <http://dx.doi.org/10.26418/jeep.v5i1.70643>

## INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary was neglected by linguistics and education scholars for many decades, as the English Language Education Section in Hong Kong (2009:1) puts it, "For many years, it was believed that vocabulary would be 'picked up' by learners without their teachers having to devote much classroom time to it. The place of lexis tended to be peripheral rather than central." In recent decades, vocabulary has been given special attention as it is testified by the emergence of several books and articles on vocabulary, such as *Vocabulary: Applied linguistic perspectives* by Carter (1987), "Is there a core vocabulary? Some implications for language teaching" by Carter (1987), *Vocabulary* by McCarthy (1990), *Vocabulary: Description, Acquisition and Pedagogy* by Schmitt & McCarthy (1998), *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary* by Nation (1990), *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language* by Nation & Nation (2001). The special attention is also testified through the following declarations by some scholars:

- 'Using a second language, one is better served by vocabulary than grammar.' (Krashen & Terrell, 1983)
- 'Vocabulary knowledge is central to language acquisition and use.' (Schmitt 2000)
- 'Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed.' (Wilkins, 1972:111)
- 'Vocabulary, not grammar is the heart of a language.' (Nunan, D., 2004:182)

Similarly, the Congolese national program of English in secondary schools instructs English teachers, in the DR Congo in general and in Bukavu in particular, to equip Congolese secondary school pupils with 500 active words per year, for a total of 2,000 active words in four years, in order to help them develop capacity to listen, understand, speak, read and write English (SAMAFOS 1982:3) so that they can be able to communicate effectively in English. However, the Congolese State Exams do not evaluate Congolese secondary school finalist pupils' level of English active vocabulary knowledge to check whether this objective is reached or not. Consequently, we do not know the finalist pupils' actual level of English active vocabulary knowledge at the end of their secondary school education.

To have an idea on the level, the present study aimed at assessing Bukavu secondary school finalist pupils' level of English active vocabulary knowledge at the end of their secondary school education.

The study intended to answer the following main question: "What level of active vocabulary knowledge do Bukavu finalist pupils have at the end of their secondary school education in Bukavu town?". The subsidiary questions were: 1) Are Bukavu finalist pupils equipped with 2,000 active words as stipulated by the Congolese national program of English? 2) Is Bukavu finalist pupils' active English vocabulary knowledge below elementary, elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate, or advanced? 3) Do Bukavu finalist pupils master different aspects of vocabulary knowledge, namely spelling, pronunciation, meaning, synonymy, antonymy, polysemy, homonymy, homonymy, homonymy, homophony, etc. (McCarten, 2007:18; Schmitt, N. 2008:334)

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### **Sampling of Active Words to Evaluate:**

Many lists of active words in English have been put forward by researchers going from the top 100 to over the top 5,000 active words. For the present study, I selected the Oxford 3000 given by Hornby (2006: R99-113) in the *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary* (7<sup>th</sup> Edition) as the reference list for the top active words in English for four reasons, the first three of which are given by Hornby himself, as follows: (1) The Oxford 3000 includes the words that are used most frequently in English. This means that the effort in learning the words is well repaid by the number of times learners have a chance to encounter or use them. However, just being frequent in the corpus is not enough for a word to be chosen as a keyword. Some words may be used very frequently, but only in a limited area, such as in newspapers or scientific articles. To avoid including these restricted words, (2) the Oxford 3000 includes only those words that are frequent across a range of different types of text were included as keywords. In other words, keywords are both frequent and used in a variety of different contexts. In addition, (3) the Oxford 3000 includes some important words that are very familiar to most users of English, even though they are not used very frequently. These include, for example, words for parts of the body, words used in travel, and words that are useful for explaining what you mean when you do not know the exact word for something.

These words were identified by asking a group of experts in the fields of teaching and language study. (4) The Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary in which the Oxford 3000-word list is given is one of the most trusted and recommendable dictionaries of English throughout the world.

It is worth mentioning here that despite the name "The Oxford 3000", this list of active words comprises 3509 active words. As it is practically too demanding and too much time consuming to evaluate all the 3509 words at once, I calculated a represented sample of these words to evaluate with the following standard formula to calculate sample sizes:

$$n = \frac{z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1-p)}{e^2} \cdot \frac{1}{1 + \left( \frac{z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1-p)}{e^2 \cdot N} \right)}$$

n : sample size

N: population (total) size

z : z-score

p : standard deviation

e : margin of error (percentage in decimal form)

The z-score is the number of standard deviations a given proportion is away from the mean. To find the right z-score to use, one can refer to the table below:

Table 1. Z-Score for Desired Confidence Level

Desired confidence level	Score
80%	1.28
85%	1.44
90%	1.65
95%	1.96
99%	2.58

For the present study, I used:

- N= 3509 (The total number of "people", which are replaced by "words" in present case)
- The z-score of 1.96 (with the sampling confidence level of 95%): A percentage that reveals how confident you can be that the population would select an answer within a certain range.)
- e = 5% (The margin of error: a percentage that tells how much one can expect his survey results to reflect the views of the overall population.
- p: 0.5

The calculation of the sample then went on as follows:

$$n = \frac{z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1-p)}{e^2} \cdot \frac{1}{1 + \left( \frac{z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1-p)}{e^2 \cdot N} \right)} = \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.5 \cdot (1-0.5)}{(0.05)^2} \cdot \frac{1}{1 + \left( \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.5 \cdot (1-0.5)}{(0.05)^2 \cdot 3509} \right)} = \frac{3.8416 \times 0.25}{0.0025} \cdot \frac{1}{1 + \left( \frac{3.8416 \times 0.25}{0.0025 \times 3509} \right)}$$

$$= \frac{0.9604}{0.0025} \cdot \frac{1}{1 + \left( \frac{0.9604}{8.7725} \right)} = \frac{384.16}{1 + (0.1095)} = \frac{384.16}{1.1095} = 346.2 = 346$$

Thus, I randomly sampled 346 active words to test from the 3509 active words of the Oxford 3000 to be part of the active vocabulary test for this study.

## Conception of the Test of Active Vocabulary for This Study

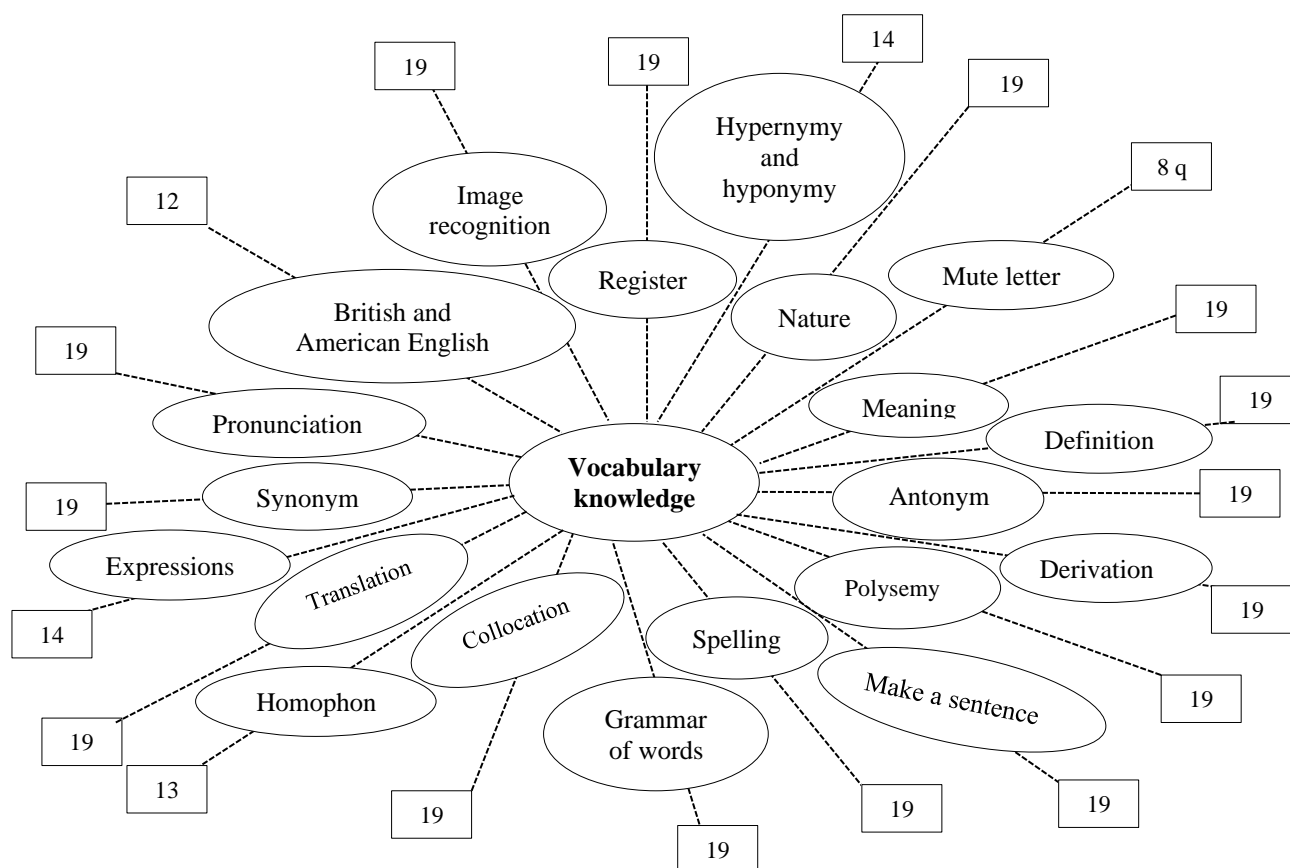


Figure 1. Aspects of Vocabulary Knowledge Concerned with This Study

The active vocabulary knowledge test conceived for this study was based on evaluating the pupils' knowledge of 20 aspects of vocabulary knowledge into which the 346 randomly selected active words from the Oxford 3000 were grouped, as follows.

For every vocabulary knowledge aspect, there were multiple choice and traditional questions. To reduce the chance factor for the pupils, 1/4 (that is 87 questions) of the total number of questions were traditional questions, while 3/4 (that is 259 questions) were multiple choice questions.

### Six Levels of Active Vocabulary Knowledge by the Test

The active vocabulary knowledge test for this study places the pupils into 6 levels depending on the scores they get for the 346 questions based on the knowledge of the 346 randomly sampled active words, as follows:

Table 2. The Six Levels of Active Vocabulary Knowledge of the Test Used for This Study

No	Levels	Scores/346	In percentage
1	Below elementary	1 - 58	0.0 % - 17.0 %
2	Elementary	59 - 117	17.1 % - 34.0 %
3	Pre-intermediate	118 - 176	34.1 % - 51.0 %
4	Intermediate	177 - 235	51.1 % - 68.0 %
5	Upper-intermediate	236 - 294	68.1 % - 85.0 %
6	Advanced	295 - 346	85.1 % - 100.0 %

## **School Sampling**

I randomly sampled 35 (10%) Bukavu secondary schools from the 4 educational zones of Bukavu town (Bukavu I: Ibanda: 10 schools, Bukavu II: Kadutu: 7 schools, Bukavu III: Bagira: 9 schools and Bukavu IV: Panzi: 9 schools) depending on their total numbers of schools. The finalist pupils of the sampled schools were concerned with this study.

## **Field Work**

The active vocabulary test was administered to the finalist pupils in the 35 schools at the end of the 2021 - 2022 scholar year immediately before the start of the second semester exams.

For data analysis, I proceeded as follows:

### **Compilation of the Collected Data on Excel Spreadsheets**

The finalist pupils' answers were compiled on Excel spreadsheets for automatic corrections and easy handling of the data. During the compilation, the pupils' answers for traditional questions were coded as "correct", "incorrect", "half" or "empty" depending on whether the answer was correct, incorrect, partly correct or if the pupils left the question unanswered.

### **Automatic Marking of the Pupils' Answers as "0" (Zero), "0.5" or "1" With the Excel Filter Option**

With the help of the Excel filter option, all the correct "numbers of the pupils' chosen answers for multiple choice" and all the pupils' answers coded as "correct" for the traditional questions were filtered and transformed into the mark "1". All the answers coded "half" were then filtered and transformed into the mark "0.5". Finally, all the answers coded "incorrect" and "empty" answers were filtered and marked "0". This coding and marking system aimed at transforming all the pupils' correct and incorrect answers into numbers so as to make it possible to do different calculations with the Excel spreadsheets.

### **Comparative Approach**

The finalist pupils' scores were compared per (1) aspect of vocabulary knowledge, (2) multiple choice questions versus traditional questions and (3) sex.

## **RESULTS**

### **Statistics from Field Work**

During the analysis of the data, it was found that:

- ✓ Though the total number of the expected finalist pupils to test in the 35 randomly sampled schools was 2078 from the statistics given by the headmasters of the 35 randomly selected schools, 1506 (72,47%) finalist pupils participated in this study and answered the questionnaire. The other 572 (27,53%) were not present at school when the questionnaire was administered because some were ill, others had been asked to return home for having come to school very late, others were in their exclusion period for discipline matters, etc.
- ✓ The study involved 743 (49,34%) male finalist pupils and 763 (50,66%) female finalist pupils.

### Test Results of Bukavu Finalist Pupils' Active Vocabulary Knowledge

The test of Bukavu secondary school finalist pupils' active vocabulary knowledge revealed the following results per level. The results are presented in Figure 2 and Table 3.

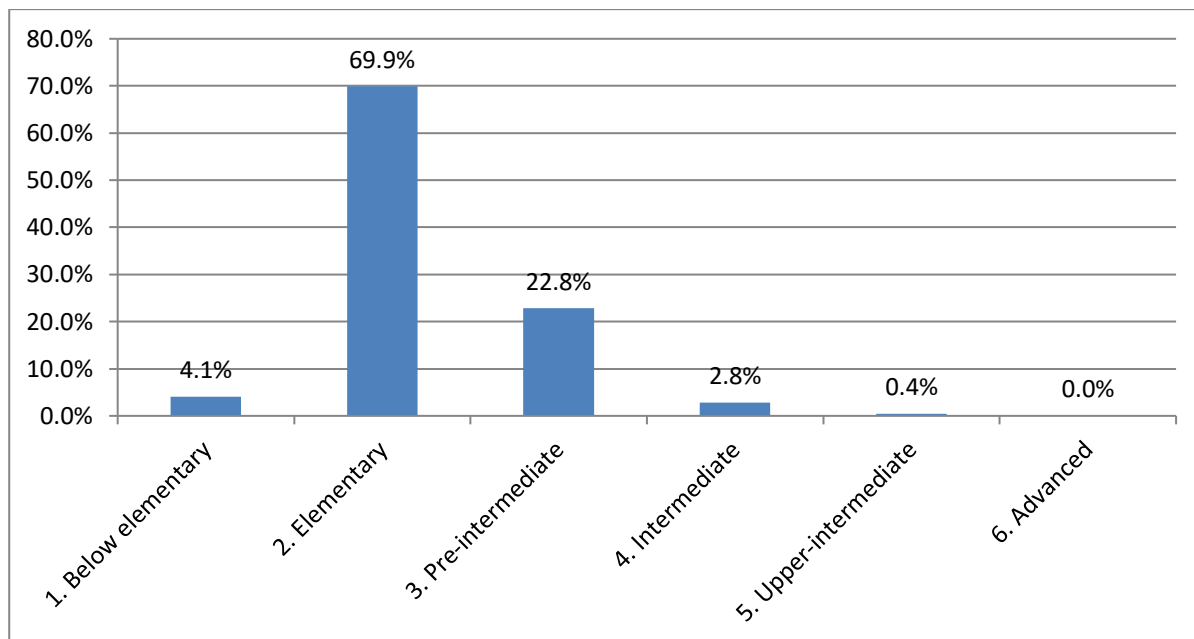


Figure 2. Bukavu Finalist Pupils' Level of Active Vocabulary Knowledge

## Average results of Bukavu finalist pupils' active vocabulary knowledge levels

Table 3. Average Results of All the 1506 Respondent Finalist Pupils

	Expected pupils	Present pupils	1. Image recognition	2. Mute letters	3. Homophones	4. Synonyms	5. Antonyms	6. Spelling	7. Pronunciation	8. Meaning	9. Translation	10. Expressions	11. Register	12. Grammar of words	13. Hyponymy and hyponymy	14. Nature	15. Definition	16. Make a sentence	17. Derivation	18. Polysemy	19. British and American English	20. Collocation	Total / Average	Level
Maxima			/19	/8	/13	/19	/19	/19	/19	/19	/19	/14	/19	/19	/14	/19	/19	/19	/19	/19	/12	/19	/346	
Bukavu finalists	2078	1506	9.9	2.4	5.4	6.3	5.9	5.8	5.2	5.5	6.8	5.3	5.1	4.8	3.9	4.6	4.9	6.5	3.9	4.4	2.9	3.2	102.68	Elementary

Table 3 shows that Bukavu finalist pupils scored **102.68/346** on average, which corresponds to the **elementary level** (59 - 117) of the test.

## Average Scores of Bukavu Finalist Pupils per Aspect of Vocabulary Knowledge

A critical look at the average scores of the respondent finalist pupils for every one of the 20 evaluated aspects of vocabulary knowledge reveals the following situation:

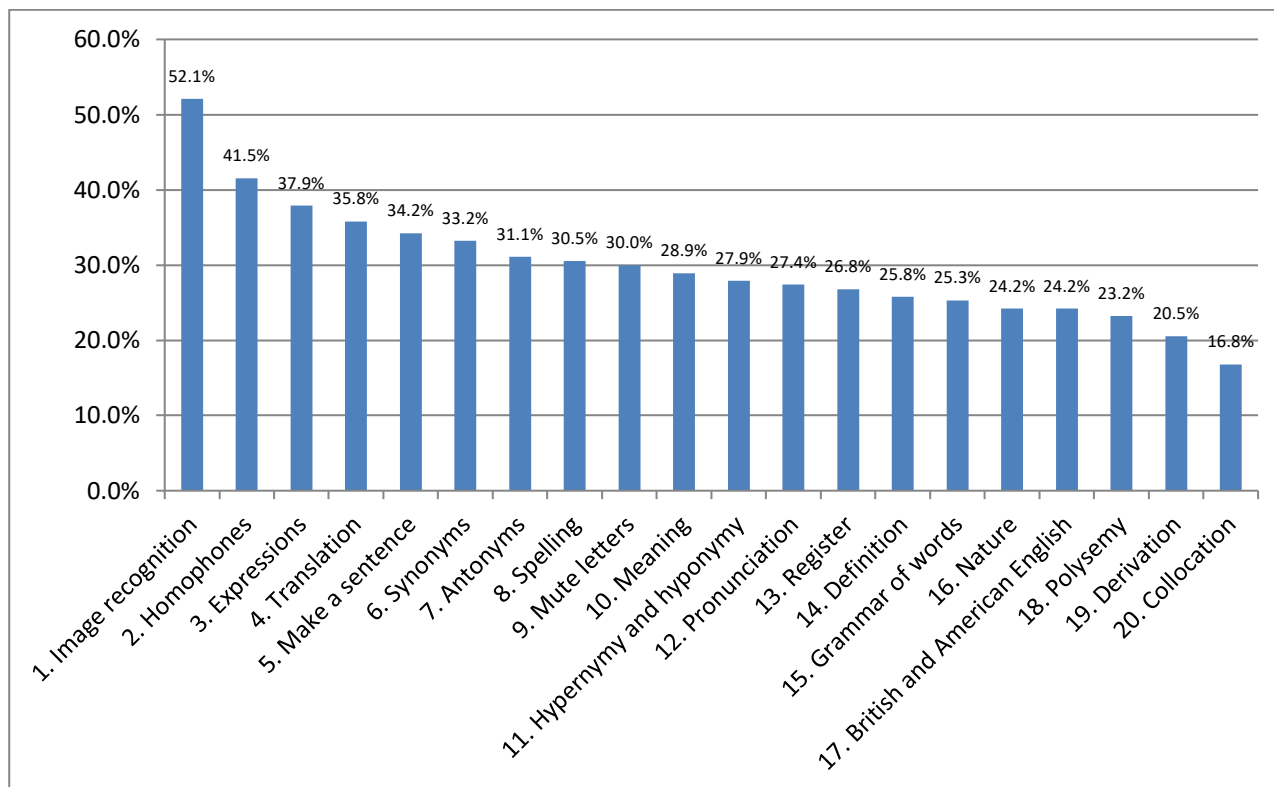


Figure 3. Average Scores of Bukavu Finalist Pupils per Aspect of Vocabulary Knowledge

## Comparison of Bukavu Finalist Pupils' Test Results per Question Type and Sex

### *Multiple Choice Questions Versus Traditional Questions*

It is worth reminding here that  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the active vocabulary test questions (that is 259 questions) were made up of multiple-choice questions to make it easy for the pupils to answer and to facilitate the correction of their answers. The other  $\frac{1}{4}$  was made up of 87 traditional questions which aimed at reducing the "chance factor" in the multiple-choice questions. The test results showed that the finalist pupils scored  $\frac{93.4}{259}$  on average, that is **36.07%**, for multiple choice questions, while they scored  $\frac{9.3}{87}$ , that is **10.65%**, for the traditional questions.

### *Male Versus Female Finalist Pupils' Scores*

The average result for the male finalist pupils is  $\frac{104,9}{346}$  while that of the female finalist pupils is  $\frac{100.5}{346}$ . There is a slight difference of 4.4 marks.

## DISCUSSION

### **Bukavu Finalist Pupils' Level of Active Vocabulary Knowledge**

As an answer to the main question of this study, which is "What level of active vocabulary knowledge do Bukavu finalist pupils have at the end of their secondary school education in Bukavu town?", Bar chart 1 shows that most Bukavu finalist pupils (**69.9%**) finish their secondary school education with the *elementary level* of active vocabulary knowledge. This is the reasons why most of them are not able to communicate effectively in English. They



cannot hold an effective conversation in English and generally shy away from even trying to do it. And for the few who try to speak, many hesitations and interruptions are observed in their speech because of lack of words. Their active vocabulary knowledge of the English language is generally not sufficient to make them efficient language users. It is worth mentioning here that this 'elementary level' result of most Bukavu finalist pupils' active vocabulary knowledge echoes the level that Tembue (2016:38) attributes to Congolese secondary school pupils in communicative terms when he states: "*Group psychology, years of passive learning and the grammatical syllabus under attack here, ensure that **most 15 to 25 year olds in our schools remain at the false beginner/elementary level in communicative terms.***"

The test results also show that a few pupils (4.1%) have the *below elementary level*, even after four years of formal English training in Bukavu secondary schools. It can be assumed that such pupils do not like English, are completely not interested in it, pay no attention when it is taught, make no effort at all to know it and skive off from English classes at school. The results also show that 22.8% of Bukavu finalist pupils have the *pre-intermediate level* of active vocabulary knowledge. These could be the few pupils who take English studies seriously but who do not do much research to increase their active vocabulary knowledge level. They only limit themselves to learning and studying what is taught at school.

The test results also show that 2.8% of Bukavu finalist pupils have an *intermediate level* of active vocabulary knowledge. These could be the rare Bukavu pupils who love English and study what they are taught at school seriously, listen to songs in English and watch films in English in addition to doing some personal research to increase their active vocabulary knowledge level.

The test results also show that 0.4% of Bukavu finalist pupils have an *upper-intermediate level* of active vocabulary knowledge. These could be the very rare secondary school pupils who, in addition to doing what intermediate level pupils do, buy English books, and read them regularly; they have bilingual dictionaries, go to centers for the improvement of their English in general, frequent English clubs and look for opportunities to practise their English.

Together with the 2.8% intermediate pupils, the 0.4% upper intermediate Bukavu finalist pupils are the few pupils (a total of 3.4%) who can successfully engage in a conversation in speak English. Yes, there are such Bukavu secondary school pupils after their secondary school education, but they are rare and very few, as reflected by their low percentage.

### **Number of Words with Which Bukavu Finalist Pupils Are Equipped**

The finalist pupils' average score of 102.68/346 in Table 3 represents only 29.7% of what the pupils are supposed to know. This elementary level on average is greatly influenced by the fact that most Bukavu finalist pupils (69.9%) have this level. As the Congolese national program of English instructs that secondary school finalist pupils be equipped with 2,000 active words at the end of their secondary school education, and as the pupils are revealed by the administered test to know only 29.7% of active words, it can be projected that they know 29.7% of 2,000 active words, which is 594 active words on average. It is now clear that, on average, Bukavu secondary school finalist pupils are equipped with only *594 active words instead of the 2,000 stipulated by the national program of English* at the end of their secondary school education. This figure reflects the failure of the teaching of English active words in the Bukavu secondary schools.

## **Bukavu Finalist Pupils' Non-Mastery of Aspects of Vocabulary Knowledge: A Reason Behind their Elementary Level**

Bar chart 2 indicates that, on average, Bukavu finalist pupils do not master 19 (i.e. 90%) of the 20 aspects of vocabulary knowledge that were evaluated by the test in this study. Their average scores for every one of the 19 aspects are under 50%, i.e. a failure. The only 1 aspect for which they reached 52.1% is 'image recognition', i.e. they can associate words to their images. And their percentage for this aspect shows that their mastery of this aspect is very minimalistic. Thus, from the analysis and discussion of the results of the administered test, it is noticed that *Bukavu finalist pupils' non-mastery of many aspects of vocabulary knowledge is one of the major reasons why their active vocabulary knowledge level is elementary, i.e. low.*

It can be assumed that Bukavu finalist pupils do not master these aspects because their teachers of English do not teach them or insist on them, whereas all these aspects are to be taught even at the elementary level, as As McCarten (2007:19) puts it:

*Even from the elementary level, it is important to include in vocabulary lessons not just single words, but also larger "chunks" such as collocations, phrases, or expressions, even whole sentences, as well as strategic vocabulary. By building up a stock of expressions as well as individual words, students can assemble the language they need to communicate more fluently.*

Maybe Bukavu teachers of English generally tend to teach only three aspects of vocabulary knowledge, namely the spelling, pronunciation and meaning. Unfortunately, the respondent finalist pupils' average scores for even these three aspects are 30.5%, 28.9% and 27.4% respectively, which, being less than 50%, are failures as well. It can also be assumed that Bukavu finalist pupils themselves do not do enough research to learn these aspects on their own.

## **Multiple Choice Versus Traditional Questions: Bukavu Finalist Pupils' Performances**

The results in point 3.5.1. show that, on the one hand, the finalist pupils did not perform well in both groups of questions. Their average scores are less than 50% for both groups. This could be because of pupils' elementary level of active vocabulary knowledge as it was revealed by the global test results. On the other hand, the difference of 25.42% between the two average scores could be because of the presence of some correct answers among the proposed ones for the multiple-choice questions and the chance factor for a pupil to pick the right answer even when he or she does not actually know the right answer, or he or she is unsure of it. In addition, the low percentage of the finalist pupils' average score for the traditional questions could be indicative of either their difficulty remembering the words they know or the complete lack of active words in their memories. Therefore, teachers of English should help their pupils in this by planning to teach them vocabulary learning strategies and techniques that help to remember words, such as having 8-20 contacts with a word that one is learning to become very familiar with it and be able to remember it easily.

## **Bukavu Finalist Pupils Results per Sex**

If projected on the scale of 2,000 active words, the results in point 3.5.2. mean that, on average, Bukavu male and female pupils are generally equipped with around 606.3 and 580.9 active words respectively at the end of their secondary school English training. This is

approximately the number of words the pupils are supposed to learn in only one scholar year according to the Congolese national program of English, which instructs that secondary school pupils be equipped with 500 active words during every one of the four years of formal secondary school English training. Unfortunately, according to the test results, in four years, Bukavu secondary school pupils are equipped with almost the number of active words they are supposed to learn in only one year.

The difference of 4.4 in the scores of male and female pupils equals 25.43 active words on a scale of 2,000 active words. This difference is insignificant, because it does not make either male or female pupils move into a higher level or fall into a lower level. Both remain at the elementary level of active vocabulary knowledge. This could be because they are both put in the same context and study the same materials under the same conditions with the same English teachers in their schools. Thus, sex does not seem to influence pupils' advancement positively or negatively in the learning of active vocabulary significantly. This seems to indicate that a pupil's progress depends on other factors, that could be pupils' determination to know English, their personal hard work, personal documentation, etc.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To increase Bukavu secondary school pupils' active vocabulary knowledge level, which has been revealed to be elementary, different recommendations are made to different education agents, as follows:

### The Congolese Legislator

The following recommendations are made to the Congolese Ministry of Primary, Secondary and Professional Education:

- ✓ *Revisit and improve the size of the active words to teach/learn in the Congolese national program of English from 500 to 1,000 words per year to make the Congolese pupils reach 3,000 to 5,000 active words instead of 2,000 active words in a formal context.*

One of the weaknesses of the Congolese national program of English is the total quantity of 2,000 active words to teach/learn (on the basis of 500 words per year). Unfortunately, this quantity is significantly less than the quantity of 3,000 to 5,000 high-frequency words put forward by many scholars including Goulden, Nation, and Read (1990), McCarthy (2004); O'Keeffe, McCarthy, and Carter (2007); Katalin, D. (2008); McCarthy, M., and F. O'Dell (1994); Richards (2008); and especially Hornby (2006) with his Oxford 3000 wordlist.

- ✓ *Increase the hours for the English course for all the options.*  
More hours for the English course mean more exposure to the language and more chance to improve the secondary school pupils' level, if the added hours are usefully capitalized.
- ✓ *Install the teaching of English in Congolese primary schools.*  
The Congolese national curriculum of English instructs the teaching/learning of English to start from the 1<sup>st</sup> (former 3<sup>rd</sup>) year of secondary school education. So, it gives only four years to English training. A consequence of this is that pupils finish their sixth form with a low level of active vocabulary knowledge. Starting to teach English from primary school, as it is the cause for the French course, would make it easier for the Bukavu teachers to equip their pupils with 3,000 to 5,000, and why not 6,000 words,

because it would considerably increase the number of hours for the English course, as it can be increased from four to twelve years.

- ✓ ***Insert English in the oral evaluation of the State Exams and evaluate all the 4 linguistic skills.***

The format of the State Exams at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> (former 6<sup>th</sup> form) must be improved by inserting an oral examination of English, which would imply testing how the learners express themselves orally in English. This can be a way of motivating pupils to increase their English active vocabulary knowledge because vocabulary is directly linked with the listening, speaking, and writing skill, as well as the reading and understanding skills, which is the only skills that the current State Exams format examines.

### **Bukavu Teachers of English**

The following recommendations are made to Bukavu teachers of English:

- ✓ ***Prioritize the teaching of vocabulary and aim at equipping the pupils with 1,000 active words especially in each of the first two years because "Vocabulary, not grammar is the heart of a language." (Nunan, D., 2004:182)***

- ✓ ***Inform the pupils about the size of 3,000 - 5,000 active words they are supposed to learn.***

It is very crucial to make the pupils aware of the demanding work of learning 3,000 to 5,000 words that await them so that they can brace up for the work. Schmitt N. and D. Schmitt (1995) say, "Let the pupils be aware of the minimum number of words they need to know to be able to communicate effectively." This can be a motivating factor for ambitious pupils. It can also help them in the choice of the methods to use for vocabulary acquisition.

- ✓ ***Teach learners vocabulary learning strategies.***

Pupils need to become self-sufficient learners, because, as Kambale (2014:60) puts it, "They (pupils) will be taught the skills of how to be independent in vocabulary learning." It is unlikely that teachers can cover in class the huge number of vocabulary items that students will need to use or understand, so it is equally important to help students with how to learn vocabulary as well as with what to learn (Oxford, R. 1990). In addition, learners build up more specialized vocabulary related to their own needs and fields of interests, whether these are academic, occupational, or social. See Ostovar-Namaghi, S.A. and Malekpur, A. (2015:238) for vocabulary learning strategies that successful learners use because of their importance.

- ✓ ***Teach different aspects of vocabulary progressively and repeatedly.***

Since there are so many things to learn about every new word (meaning, spoken/written forms, collocations, connotations, grammatical behavior, etc.), it is important that teachers of English only introduce a little information at a time, starting with the most frequent, useful, and learnable vocabulary, and returning later to more difficult vocabulary and less frequent uses of previously learned items (McCarten 2007:26). Bukavu teachers of English usually teach only three elements, namely the word spelling, its phonetic transcription (for its pronunciation) and a model sentence. While it is important to give these three elements, they are not sufficient and do not allow the teachers to expand pupils' active vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, in the preparation of their vocabulary lessons, Bukavu teachers of English should remember

to include and later on teach a word including a combination of any of these things (depending on its necessity and high frequency):

- **Meaning:** Sometimes a straightforward definition
- **Synonyms:** Similar words
- **Antonyms:** Opposites
- **Connotation:** The emotion a word conveys
- **Spelling:** Self-explanatory, hopefully
- **Collocation:** Words that fit together
- **Syntax:** An explanation of how a word fits into a sentence grammatically 'To like' is followed by a noun, an infinitive or a gerund: to like something, to like to do something and to like doing something.
- **Register:** How (in)formal it is.
- **Pronunciation:** This can include transcription into phonemes, marking the stressed syllable and drilling (repeating).
- **Word families:** You can introduce other words that come from the same root. For example:
  - to inherit (verb)
  - inheritance (noun, thing)
  - hereditary (adjective)
  - heir (noun, person)
  - heiress (noun, woman only)
- **Visuals:** Pictures, mimes, realia, board work and so on.
- **Part of speech:** A noun, a verb and so on.

✓ **Use techniques that allow teaching 12+ words per vocabulary lesson.**

Teachers should let the students have their texts (either in groups or individually) while teaching them vocabulary lessons. After reading the texts loudly in front of the pupils, the teachers should ask them to point out the words that are difficult for them in the text, and then teach them the meanings of the words they point out. An advantage of this is the teaching of the real words that the pupils do not know rather than coming from home with words that the teacher himself guesses the pupils do not know. This would make the teacher teach the unknown words, and not the guessed ones. Generally, pupils even point out more words than the teachers could have prepared at home. More interestingly, pupils often point out words that the teacher could have left out thinking his or her pupils know them. In the same way, they often leave out some words that the teacher could have selected to teach.

### **Bukavu Secondary School Pupils**

As education is presently said to be "learner-centered", Bukavu secondary school pupils should be very actively involved in their English learning process through personal studies, research, and documentation. The following suggestions are highly recommended to Bukavu secondary school pupils as far as their learning of active vocabulary and the English language in general are concerned:

- ✓ Be active to learn many active words because their development (i.e. their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills) in English depends on the number of words they know.

- ✓ Learn lists of confusing words to have precision and expand your active vocabulary knowledge. Confusing words include homonyms, homophones, and false cognates. You should take your time to learn these words meticulously to avoid confusing them in your speech.
- ✓ Be curious to know the English words for everything around you. Be constantly asking yourself the English words for things around you wherever you happen to be (at home, on a bus, in a road, etc.). This will help you not only discover the many real-life words that you do not know yet and that you need to learn but also recycle the previously studied words.
- ✓ Do research: do not limit yourself to learning what is taught in the classroom only. Learn to research and make documentation to increase your vocabulary knowledge to reach a level where you can be able to speak fluently and without much hesitation.
- ✓ Have self-discipline: make a plan to read vocabulary and do your best to respect it. "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven," states the Bible (in the book of Ecclesiastes 3:1).
- ✓ Learn different aspects of every new word you learn (progressively and repeatedly). Do not limit yourselves to the study of the word spellings, pronunciations, and meanings only. In addition to these three basic aspects, you should also learn: 1) image recognition, 2) mute letters, 3) homophones, 4) synonyms, 5) antonyms, 6) translations, 7) expressions, 8) register, 9) grammar of words, 10) hypernymy and hyponymy, 11) nature, 12) definition, 13) sentence formulation, 14) derivation, 15) polysemy, 16) British and American English varieties and 17) collocation.
- ✓ Have determination and decision: Take your time to read and memorize new words at your speed. We learn well and fast things we really want to learn.
- ✓ Have self-confidence and belief: Believe that like many other people who were successful in learning and using the Oxford 3000+ words, you too can make it. Thinking the other way around will only make you conclude that learning that number of 3,000 active words is too demanding, impossible, and not even worth trying.
- ✓ Be ready to sacrifice your money: Accept to spend your (1) money to buy English books (such as monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, grammar books, etc.), (2) time to read and memorize new words, (3) time to expose yourself to English through watching English lessons on or downloaded from YouTube, (4) energy to read English books, (5) time and energy to go to English clubs or other English speaking groups, etc.
- ✓ Increase your exposure to the English language and create opportunities to use the words that you learn so as not to forget them. In addition to the maxim "Practice makes perfect", language also respects the maxim "use it or lose it", especially a second or foreign language. While practicing, remember that (1) To err is human and (2) We learn through our mistakes. Do not be afraid of making mistakes.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed at assessing Bukavu secondary school finalist pupils' level of English active vocabulary knowledge at the end of their secondary school education because it is not known as the State Exams do not test it. The test results revealed the following levels of Bukavu finalist pupils' active vocabulary knowledge: below elementary: 4.1%, elementary: 69.9%, pre-intermediate: 22.8%, intermediate: 2.8%, upper-intermediate: 0.4% and advanced: 0.0%. This is indicative that most of Bukavu finalist pupils (69.9%) have the

“elementary level” at the end of their English training in Bukavu secondary schools. On average, they are equipped with 29.7% (that is 594 active words) instead of the 2,000 active words put forward by the national program of English. These results cover the gap of ignorance of Bukavu finalist pupils’ active vocabulary knowledge level and could be the reason why most Bukavu pupils are unable to communicate effectively at the end of their secondary school education.

The pupils’ scores were then compared per (1) aspect of vocabulary knowledge, (2) multiple choice questions versus traditional questions and (3) sex. The test results showed that (1) Bukavu finalist pupils do not master aspects of active vocabulary as testified by their average scores of less than 50% in 19 (i.e. 90%) of the 20 aspects of vocabulary knowledge that were evaluated by the test in this study. (2) The finalist pupils scored 93.4/259 on average, i.e. 36.07%, for multiple choice questions while they scored 9.3/87, i.e. 10.65%, for the traditional questions, maybe because of the chance of selecting the correct answer from the suggested ones. This also proves that Bukavu pupils have difficulty recalling English words from memory. And (3) male and female finalist pupils scored 104,9/346 and 100.5/346 respectively. The difference is not significant maybe because they study in the same conditions.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My sincere gratitude is addressed to the headmasters of the 35 randomly selected Bukavu secondary schools for having allowed me to test their finalist pupils, to whom I am also grateful for having participated in this study.

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