

## Analysis of students' perceptions of the evaluation methods for the written and oral baccalaureate exam in Gabon

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**Abstract :** The purpose of this study is to analyze students' perceptions of the evaluation procedures for the Baccalaureate exam in Gabon. First, we present the literature review that underlies this study. It is based on surveys conducted by the Programme for International Student Assessment, which assesses "the extent to which students approaching the end of their compulsory schooling possess some of the knowledge and skills essential for full participation in modern society. To this end, external evaluation such as the Baccalaureate must give rise to knowledge negotiated between the various social actors in order to take into account socio-cultural representations and the needs of the local context. The practical study then focused on the perceptions of students and examiners. Through their respective reactions, several responses were collected. Some respondents felt that "the results of the Baccalauréat in the second round are more important than in the first round. The conditions for taking this exam were also mentioned. Respondents have a good perception of the Gabonese Baccalauréat.

Finally, in terms of the paradigm of docimology, this exam fulfills the criteria of reliability and fidelity for a good measure of the degree of acquisition of a certain number of objectives of a training program from the sixth grade to the final year.

Thus, the organization of the Baccalaureate in Gabon obeys the requirements of Order No. 000902/MENETP/CAB of June 25, 2014.

**Keywords:** Perception, evaluation, baccalaureate, education, didactics, docimology, Gabon

### I. Introduction

For more than ten years, the results of the first round of the baccalauréat have not exceeded 15% (source: DGEC). That is, a high rate of catch-up success in the second round 78% (DGEC). The speech of the Head of State on August 16, 2018, challenges the educational community in these terms: "In Gabon, Education, I am not afraid to say, is disaster-stricken. In this area, we are going from Charybdis to Scylla or, if you prefer, from bad to worse. Examples? No mention très bien and no mention bien in the baccalauréat this year. In general, the 2018 Baccalaureate results are barely less catastrophic than those of 2017." (Ali Bongo Ondimba, 2018).

It should be noted that Decree No. 450/PR/MENESETFPCJS of April 19, 2013 sets the terms of preparation, organization and delivery of the Baccalaureate. And the mode of passing this second round, is the oral presented before a jury. Why the choice of the oral exam over the written exam?

The Baccalaureate is the diploma that crowns the end of secondary education in the Gabonese educational system, which is structured around pre-primary, primary, general secondary, technical and vocational secondary and higher education. The Baccalaureate opens the door to higher education or to a higher school for professional training. In the past, obtaining it was enough to hope to be inserted into the civil service. More than a ritual, it is a challenge for each family to have a bachelor; it is socially rewarding.

The Baccalaureate is part of an external summative and certifying evaluation. The Gabonese Baccalaureate uses the written mode in the first round, and the oral mode in the second round, known as the catch-up mode. In terms of clarifying the concepts of oral and written, very little research or work has been done on the Gabonese education system. Internationally, Iannone and Simpson (2011) studied assessment methods in England and Wales for university mathematics and found that the written exam is a closed book assessment and that this exam contributes 72% to the final grade of the diploma. For oral assessment, there is also very little literature, although this method is widely used in many countries (Kehem, 2001). It is therefore a dialogic

assessment modality. Joughin (2010) distinguishes three types: presentation; application; and questioning. These examinations may elicit different reactions (perceptions) from students.

The purpose of this study is to analyze students' perceptions of the different evaluation methods (written and oral) of the baccalaureate exam in Gabon. More specifically, we examined the results of 11 interviews with students who obtained the baccalaureate in the second round and 5 examiners. To this end, we submitted a set of 14 questions to each student. The same questions were also submitted to the 5 examiners who had to answer orally. The recording was re-listened to in order to extract the units of meaning to be coded and analyzed to determine these perceptions.

## II. Methodology

We have chosen a mainly psychological approach since the variables investigated are related to the participants' perceptions. It is a qualitative approach, because we simply used exploratory questions that allow us to understand our subject.

Thus, we chose to conduct our study in a school context by first addressing the students (n=11) of different sexes who had already taken the baccalaureate in the second round at the oral exam. Then on the examiners (teachers) (n=5). These are teachers who participate in this exam and have proven experience. Thus the choice of a contrasting sample allowed for the expression of diverse opinions. Some interviews took place at the beach, others at home, face-to-face and then remotely because of the social distancing due to Covid-19. Respondents were from different schools. The amount of time given to each respondent is related to the proximity of the respondent. Some took a little longer than others. The clarification of concepts will be based on an examination of the epistemological statements and postures that these authors hold in relation to the external assessments of the baccalaureate. The interview took place from February to March-April 2021. The parameters that were measured using this sampling being perceptions. The methods of analysis used are related to Thomas' approach: an inductive analysis of what is in the data (themes, categories). Then a deductive analysis of the concepts that make it possible to answer the research questions. We combine the two moments of analysis to bring out the theory.

We chose to interview the students who took part in the review about their experience. Then examiners who live the situation of the baccalaureate upstream and downstream. The phenomenological approach is used as a source of inspiration in this process. This leads us to a good understanding of the reality of the subjects as experienced and perceived by the students and the examiners. In this context we have given them the opportunity to express themselves freely. We believe that these interviews will allow us to build an interesting interpretation of the subject. With the agreement of the students and the examiners, we recorded the interviews because we considered that it has more advantages that the interview is preserved so we could consult it later. In order to carry out the analysis of the collected testimonies, we are going to use the phenomenological reduction which consists in reducing, summarizing, processing, synthesizing and finally giving shape to the information by cutting the pieces of speech in order to make sense of the 14 questions that have been identified in this study.

## III. Results

The questions that gave rise to the responses we will present were grouped into three categories: factors that promote student success in writing and speaking, factors that hinder student failure in writing and speaking, and the value of the Gabonese baccalaureate in relation to international quality.

### 3.1 Factors Favourable to Student Success in Writing and Speaking

During these exchanges, various factors favored the success of the baccalaureate in the second round. Of the eleven students and five teachers interviewed, opinions were divided between those who believed that writing and speaking had equal advantages. Then with those who think that students are favored in the second round.

The conditions for preparing for the exams are a factor that favors student success in both contexts (written/oral). Indeed, in order to treat all candidates equally, students must be informed of the specific objectives to be covered by the exam. Also, this information must be given at the time the course is conducted in a classroom situation. Most respondents agreed with this.

At the time of the baccalaureate proclamation, the high rate of eligibility encourages teachers to become increasingly committed to student success, in order to enhance the image of their respective institutions.

As parts of the curriculum are often pointed out to students at this level of assessment, they use their memory to get through it.

In the teaching-learning process, students must be offered remedial instruction if they do not have a minimum of one competency. The choice of subjects for second-round remediation is a factor in success on the post-eligibility exam, the grade for which varies from year to year.

Depending on the context of a particularly strike-ridden year, eligibility scores may vary considerably below the prescribed grade.

Following the announcement of the Baccalauréat results, two situations may arise: either the candidate is automatically admitted with an average of 10 or more, or he or she may find himself or herself at the second round oral exam with an average of between 8 and 9. In this case, the candidate must take the make-up test, which takes place over two to three days. Since they do not have enough time to prepare, they must first choose two subjects according to the number of points they need to make up. Let's take the case of a candidate whose specialty is life and earth sciences. He is short of 38 points, he had 8/20 in mathematics coefficient 7 then 9/20 in physical sciences and chemistry coefficient 6 in the first round. He should avoid choosing subjects where he had a lot of difficulty in class. At the end of the year, he had 13/20 in physical sciences and chemistry and made real progress in mathematics. He must therefore choose both subjects. If he obtains 10 in mathematics (+2 points  $X 7 = 14$ ) and 13/20 in physical sciences and chemistry ( $4 X 6 = 24$ ), that is to say 38 points in total. The choice of subject linked to the low marks obtained in the first round leads the student to choose one subject to the detriment of the other.

Once this choice has been made, the candidate is more confident and reassured for success in the second round. For example, student E3 said, "You are more aware and confident after you have identified the subjects that you have failed. You get ready to tackle the tests and the teachers are less demanding in the second round. It seems that good preparation would explain the results recorded in the second round.

Is it a question of mastery of the subjects or rather favoritism?

The students are favored in the second round, the examiners do not find reasons to fail the candidates.

The teacher, on the other hand, thinks that the students "are less subject to the stresses of the baccalauréat in the first round.

Finally, we can see from the statement of student E3 that there is a difference between what is prescribed (the student presents and discusses with the jury, which evaluates him or her according to a grid that allows the jury to assign an objective mark based on the candidate's performance) and what is practiced.

The second round oral exam is a factor in the success of the baccalauréat. We can see that the two written and oral exams are different. How are they different?

First of all, oral expression lacks preparation and training exercises. Most often, the myth of the student's natural gift is considered, which means that the emphasis is not placed on the teacher's preparation of the oral. So when the learner is faced with an oral test, he/she experiences difficulties, because the oral takes place live in a time-space in front of a jury. So when one has used a term that is not correct, there is no time to go back to it. In writing, it is the brain that intervenes, one can come back to it, the corrector has a support on which he can read and reread to try to grasp what the student wants to express. In the case of oral expression, in addition to the brain which is solicited, the whole body intervenes (breathing, movement, reflection, facial expression through the smile, the fearful glance). All this must be coordinated. Thus, the voice is the support of the speech, the channel, it must be developed to be pleasant to listen to. During the oral test, the candidate must be able to make an impression by modulating the voice, giving life to the jury and using a little humor to make the audience smile, which makes the oral exercise particularly difficult.

For our study, everything seems to be the opposite, because the questions asked by the examiners are basic skills. The types of questions asked in the baccalaureate exam are a factor of success.

Compared to the questions in the first round, things look tough. The first round is tougher. Then, they say, "the first round is more rigorous. The chapters are mixed for one test. In the second round, there is only one question that is asked of the student.

In conclusion, it can be said that the written exam in the first round and the oral exam in the second round are not the same. The forms of the questions are different. In the second round the candidate has less time to present his answers, the questions are less extensive and the candidates are never evaluated in the same way.

### **3.2 Factors contributing to student failure in the written and oral exams**

Exam stress is common among candidates. This natural constraint, stress, can be a founding element of success. It can be called a motivator or a trigger.

Respondents acknowledge the presence of stress during the baccalauréat exam. For some it is very present in the first round, while for others the stress is pronounced in the second round because of the uncertainty of the second round. However, it is a destabilizing situation according to some students. For them, the stress of exams is a source of nervousness and agitation. Indeed, it leads to the secretion of hormones in the hypothalamus. It is a situation that we have not learned to cope with. It manifests itself physically through increased blood pressure, sweating, the need to urinate or diarrhea, shaking hands. Stress can also affect the cognitive mechanisms to the point of forgetting everything you have learned for the exam. It is therefore a factor of failure.

In conclusion, both situations can occur. For some, stress is a source of motivation, and for others, it is destabilizing.

### **3.3 Value of the Gabonese baccalaureate linked with international quality**

The value of the education system, of which the baccalaureate result can be one of the indicators, can be appreciated by the percentage that is less than stellar. But also by the international opinion which qualifies it as average. Indeed, the report on the Evaluation of Poverty in Gabon March 2020 World Bank Group states that "Gabon is ranked 116th out of 138 countries in terms of quality of education, which highlights the deterioration of the education system as a whole.

We want to check what teachers and students think about the possibility that a Gabonese graduate has to integrate other educational systems of other universities. For the teacher, the Gabonese baccalaureate has its value in the concert of nations.

The perception that is the subject of our study is worth considering. Also, when we take into account what the docimology prescribes in terms of the examination "the paradigm essentially oriented towards the fidelity or reliability of evaluations". It seems that the Gabonese Baccalaureate meets the criteria of reliability and fairness. In this case, it seems that the failure of students in Gabon's universities and colleges is not related to the quality of the baccalaureate, but rather to the quality of the facilities and the lack of professionalization of some higher education teachers.

The conduct of the second round of examinations may be a factor in determining the value of this exam. As a reminder, the results obtained in the second round are more important than those obtained in the first round. For the teachers, we note that this exam is based on two disciplines where the candidate makes his choice. It has a preparation time of 20 minutes to be presented in 25 minutes. The exchange is done with the jury which marks according to the evaluation grid. It is the same baccalaureate which is divided into two rounds. The same rigor is required since there are students who also fail the second round. There is no favoritism.

In view of what is prescribed on this subject, it seems that the oral exam follows a process that is respected.

Concerning the validity of the two exams, the two written and oral productions present a guarantee of rigour, the opinions are divided between the respondents.

The assessment of respondents suggests that the results obtained in the first round of the baccalaureate below 50% (17% in 2018) reflect the level of the real state of the Gabonese education system. The second round being according to some students, just to improve the percentage.

Other factors not to be overlooked include the high number of supervisors and students. It is always the comparison of the two baccalaureates and their value that it is about.

To try to explain why there is so much failure at the university and the grandes écoles, we wanted to know if, apart from the educational system disrupted by strikes, the delay in the programs, the lack of professionalism of some teachers, if there is an articulation between the program of the class of terminale and that of the university and grandes écoles.

The difficulties of university studies are notable. The fields of study are decisive: "It depends on the field of study, for example in psychology, one discovers everything, the psychology of development. The link that can be established is perhaps the dissertation, the technique of which was initiated in the second year of secondary school. Except in statics.

#### IV. Discussion

This work allowed us to interview both the students who took their Baccalauréat in the second round and the examiners involved in this external evaluation. Thus, several expected responses were produced to express the different perceptions. From this perspective, several points of view were observed. Some respondents felt that the results of the baccalauréat in the second round were more important than in the first round because of the more thorough preparation on the part of eligible candidates. Considering that they no longer have any other chances in case they do not pass. Others point to the more accessible entrance requirements. During the first round (written tests), there were more of them in the examination room, with the stress that this entails, can lead candidates to failure. On the other hand, during the oral exam, the candidate faces a jury that asks questions about the chapters and concepts previously chosen and established. In addition, the jury can guide the candidate in case he or she wants to go off topic.

Some examiners believe that the correction of candidates' papers in the first round is done anonymously in the absence of the candidates. However, they specify that the rigor that prevails during this phase is also found in the second round, because it is based on an evaluation grid. Others mention the social character that may be involved because they are faced with a candidate who has struggled to reach eligibility in the second round. A candidate who may also be an acquaintance. This character may lead the examiner to rephrase questions to bring back the lost candidate.

Examiners and students have a good perception of the Gabonese Baccalaureate since the holder of this certification can adapt to all educational systems throughout the world. This would mean that this exam meets the criteria of reliability and fidelity due to a credentialed assessment exam as provided by the docimology. This exam is administered by external teachers according to a national assessment of student learning that covers the

entire educational process from the sixth grade to the final year. The baccalaureate exam measures the degree of acquisition of a certain number of objectives or competencies throughout the course of study.

The baccalaureate examination in the second round is oral, involving a vertical interaction between the teacher and the learner. It is therefore a production that requires learners to be able to express themselves in the most diverse situations. According to Betton, it is a means of communication that favors the personal development of the learner: in particular, the communication of his/her identity. The didacticians also encourage oral evaluation.) It is an activity that allows the student to produce an argumentative statement to defend his point of view in order to convince. It is carried out with the help of the voice, gestures, mimics so that the message is transmitted (Cuq, 2013)

There are, however, the unexpected results expressed by some respondents who believe that the government should give the same value to the second round Baccalaureate as the first round Baccalaureate. By granting one or the other the scholarship for foreign study. Indeed, only the candidate who has obtained his or her Baccalaureate in the first round with at least a mention *assez bien* (12/20) can benefit from a scholarship for study abroad.

Overall, the organization of this test obeys all that is prescribed by Order No. 000902/MENETP/CAB of June 25, 2014. Of which the smooth running of this examination is the objective assigned to all concerned. Thus, it is done throughout the Gabonese territory according to a schedule established by the Ministry of National Education. The test is administered on the same days and at the same times under the same ergonomic conditions. The reactions of the respondents also allow us to verify this reality.

For our part, we agree with the various respondents regarding the different opinions mentioned and we specify that the oral evaluation must be used more and more because of its deepening learning character. In this regard, Paola Iannone, Christoph Czichowsky and Johannes Ruf (2020) note that "students perceive the oral assessment as an exercise that requires deep conceptual understanding and learning, making it more likely that they will use revision strategies for deep learning that will result in a higher performance than in the written exam" (Paola Iannone, Christoph Czichowsky and Johannes Ruf, 2020).

## V. Conclusion

We observe in the respondents' reactions a concern to improve the organization of the Gabonese baccalaureate, and it is in this perspective that social moderation is called for. This is a live issue, where the authors talk about the certification evaluation in the same way as the Baccalaureate, which must present a mechanism to be put in place to encourage moderation practices between teachers. It must also expose the main collective knowledge negotiated by the participants. In terms of assessment practices, which should be common to all classes. In this perspective, the voice of all the actors in education must be consulted, listened to and taken into account in this process which consists of confronting a referent with a referential in order to take a decision. Secondly, in terms of teaching/learning, give priority to multiple and varied learning activities provided for in the school programs. By obeying Bloom's taxonomy of learning, of which the restitution or reproduction of knowledge is the first level of the scale of measurement of cognitive capacities, to move slowly towards comprehension, analysis and synthesis, which constitute other levels. To this would be added an evaluation contract that would contain, in the form of learning objectives, everything that would be expected at the exam in each subject. Thus, the learner would be able to check by himself if his teacher had achieved all the learning that would allow him to be ready for the exam at the end of the year.

For the management of stress during the exam, it is necessary to identify the origin at the level of psycho-affective factors, and in this case, the lack of self-confidence and the bad memory of a failed exam. There are actions that the candidate must carry out and those that are the responsibility of others. For the candidate, sleep is an important weapon during the revision. Eat a balanced diet and drink plenty of water. Oxygenate yourself through exercises such as walking through the undergrowth. Eating a good diet of sugar, etc. Other actions are related to informational support from others. There is instrumental or material support. Finally, there is esteem support, which consists of showing empathy towards the candidate by encouraging him/her for his/her own sake.

In short, this study has enabled us to compare the writings and actual practices of evaluation experts. In this regard, we noted a congruence between practice and what is prescribed.

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