

Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language) 2004 (September)

Assessment Report

Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to consolidate the Chief Examiners' observations of the performance of candidates who sat the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language) 2004 (September).

General Observation

2. Candidates achieved different *proficiency attainment** rates in different papers. The proficiency attainment rates for individual papers were: Reading, 66%; Writing, 28%; Listening, 71%; Speaking, 43%; and Classroom Language Assessment, 90%.

Paper 1: Reading

3. This paper consists of two parts, namely Part 1: Multiple-choice Cloze and Part 2: Reading Comprehension. The attainment rate of the 1494 candidates who attempted this paper was 66%.

There is still evidence of candidates not managing their time well, with questions for the second reading comprehension passage sometimes not attempted. In some cases, scores in Part 1 and Part 2 differed greatly enough to suggest that an inordinate amount of time had been spent on one or the other of the two parts, penalising performance in the other because of lack of time. There was also evidence of some mis-reading of questions, which led to wrong answers being submitted where the candidates might in fact have been able to answer correctly had they read the question carefully.

Part 1: Multiple Choice Cloze

4. Candidates performed reasonably well in this part, generally making appropriate choices when selecting from verb forms, verb tenses or independent vocabulary items. Items which required the selection of appropriate phrasal verbs (e.g. 'pin down', 'browse through', 'came around') proved to be more difficult. Candidates also appeared to have difficulty in sorting out the timeframes amongst the choices 'since then', 'until then', 'only until' and 'only then', where 'only then' was the correct choice.

* Scoring Level 3 or above in the Reading and Listening papers, and Level 2.5 or above on any one scale and Level 3 or above on all other scales in the Writing, Speaking and Classroom Language Assessment (CLA) papers.

Part 2: Reading Comprehension

5. As noted above, not all candidates completed the questions to both passages, with many blanks left to questions in Passage B. Overall, candidates in this cohort showed slightly more strength than earlier cohorts in responding to questions about global meaning, although questions requiring an interpretation of the writer’s point of view, or the sorting through of information in a paragraph or larger section of a passage, remained challenging. Specific areas to note regarding candidates’ performance are described below.
- 5.1 Most candidates responded well to the first questions in Passage A. The exception was the question asking ‘The Chinese genre of what?’ where candidates often responded ‘Chinese music’ instead of ‘music’, or ‘classical music’. Candidates can consider the common sense of their responses – how would it be possible, for example, to have a ‘Chinese genre’ of ‘Chinese music’? Most candidates were able to handle other questions requiring specific referencing (e.g. Passage B Question 15 ‘The first of what?’ and Question 19 ‘The result of what?’) reasonably well.
- 5.2 Candidates who performed strongly were able to recognise that the use of ‘whom’ in Question 10 Passage A refers to other institutes or departments, not to people. They were also able to respond well to Question 16 Passage B, describing the mentioning of Spanish to highlight the misconception that only English is an international language.
- 5.3 There was some evidence of candidates not reading questions carefully, or not checking their own assumptions about what the questions asked. Examples include:
- Question 7 in Passage A, where the question asked for ways in which the various groups contributed to *underdevelopment*, not what the groups should do to promote development.
- Question 8 in Passage A, where information in the cause and effect diagram must refer to Dr Yu’s statements, not to general information derived from the passage overall.
- 5.4 Questions asking for inference or an understanding of the writer’s viewpoint were again handled unevenly. As an example, Question 14 in Passage B asks first ‘According to the writer, how do most people view the English spoken by non-native speakers?’ A reading of the passage tells us that the writer says that most people think there is something wrong with that kind of English, that it is faulty. Then the question goes on to ask ‘What word does the writer use to express her own attitude toward this viewpoint?’ Many candidates responded ‘faulty’. However, ‘faulty’ does not describe *the writer’s attitude*; rather, it describes the view held by ‘most people’. The question is asking how *the writer feels* about that view, and her feeling is expressed by the word ‘unfortunately’.

6. Candidates should note the following advice:
- 6.1 Pay attention to time management. It is in your best interests to allocate sufficient time to each task in the overall paper, so that you have the opportunity to respond to all question items.
 - 6.2 In Part 1, read through a cloze passage before attempting the responses, so that you have a general idea of the meaning of the passage and can begin to guess at some of the missing words and phrases.
 - 6.3 In Part 2, read through a passage quickly before attempting the questions, in order to get a general sense of the meaning and, most importantly, a feel for the attitude or approach of the writer/s. Then read the passage more closely as you attempt the questions.
 - 6.4 In Part 2, take time to read the questions carefully, so that you can be sure that you are responding as required. There is sufficient time allocated to the paper overall to allow you to read the questions with care.
 - 6.5 If the best response to a question is contained in words from the passage, use those words. If you do choose to use your own words, check that you have expressed your meaning clearly.
 - 6.6 Remember that your first answer to a question is the one that is marked. Multiple answers will not help; the marker will mark only the first answer.
 - 6.7 Take the time to proofread your answers. Although errors of spelling and grammar will not detract from the marks given, your answers must be understandable to the markers. Include a re-reading of the question in your proofreading process, to ensure that you have responded as requested.
 - 6.8 Continue to read for pleasure to expand your language skills overall, and read for general knowledge and within your professional field to develop familiarity with the modes of expression common to such literature.

Paper 2: Writing

7. This paper consists of two parts, namely, Part 1: Task 1, Expository Writing, and Part 2: Tasks 2A & 2B, Correcting and Explaining Errors/Problems in a Student's Composition. Candidates are tested on five scales of performance, namely, (a) Organisation and Coherence, (b) Grammatical Accuracy, (c) Task Completion, (d) Correcting Errors/Problems, and (e) Explaining Errors/Problems. Descriptors of each scale are set out in the Syllabus Specifications published in November 2000. The proficiency attainment rate of the 2145 candidates who attempted this paper was 28%.

Part 1: Expository Writing

8. The expository writing task required candidates to describe their observations about the reading habits of students or young people, and discuss ways of motivating students to read for pleasure. Markers found the topic ‘interesting’, ‘easy’, ‘straightforward’, ‘clear’, ‘accessible to candidates’ as it is ‘familiar and relevant’ to language teaching. The suitability of the topic was also reflected in candidates’ general ability to fulfil the task. As one marker put it, most candidates ‘managed to think of various ways of motivating reading’.
9. Around one-third of the candidates failed to attain a score of 3 or above for Organisation and Coherence. There are four major reasons for this: (i) faulty paragraphing; (ii) pronoun confusion, e.g. using both ‘they’ and ‘you’ to refer to the same group of people; (iii) writing much more than the suggested word limit using repetitive phrases and long-winded clauses which affected succinctness; and (iv) incorrect use of connectives that disrupted the flow of the text. Candidates need to keep the reader in mind as they write to keep themselves focussed on the task.
10. Grammatical Accuracy continued to be the most serious problem. A large number of candidates demonstrated a lack of overall control of grammar. One marker remarked that the ‘majority wrote in non-standard English’. The most common errors made included:
 - Basic grammatical structures like singular and plural forms; e.g. ‘hate to read many book’.
 - Subject-verb agreement; e.g. ‘They loves to play games’.
 - Simple, past and perfect tenses; e.g. ‘Do you see the movie Harry Potter?’
 - Sentence fragments; e.g. ‘Once have content in his mind. Will easier be to read.’
 - Modal verbs; e.g. confusion between ‘must’ and ‘should’.
 - Double subjects; e.g. ‘The students they do not read’.
 - Incorrect discourse markers; e.g. ‘on the contrary’ instead of ‘in contrast’
 - Comma splices; e.g. ‘Is reading a torture, obviously not, many ways to help you to discover the pleasure to read.’

In addition to grammatical errors, there were also many instances of stilted phrases, overuse of clichés, repetitions of words, and inappropriate collocation, that ironically showed that while candidates wrote about the lack of reading among students, they themselves need to read more to improve their own knowledge and control of the language.

11. Candidates are advised to:
 - 11.1 Make sure they read the task instructions carefully.
 - 11.2 Improve their language accuracy through such methods as self-access learning or taking language courses.
 - 11.3 Spend more time reading English so as to increase their vocabulary.
 - 11.4 Practise their writing.

Part 2: Correcting and explaining errors/problems

12. Markers opined that the level of difficulty of Part 2 was appropriate. While around 86% of candidates attained Level 3 or above for correcting the errors/problems, only 28% reached this level for explaining the errors/problems.
13. Candidates are reminded that in Task 2B, they need to *explain the error(s)/problem(s)* and demonstrate their *understanding of the underlying rules or generalisations, using grammatical terms where appropriate*. It is not enough to repeat stating the error, but it is necessary for candidates to clarify why that was wrong, how it should be corrected and why.
14. The problems shown in candidates' performance in this administration were very similar to those of the last two administrations. Some of the major problems are outlined below.

14.1 Wrong explanation of error, for example:

(9) the old lady next door is frightening every time

The correct answer is that the -ing adjective should be replaced by an -ed adjective, but some candidates described this as a tense problem, which would score no marks.

(6) my sister complaint that Fluff

After successfully stating that 'complaint' was wrongly used, many candidates incorrectly contended that it was a tense error instead of a problem with part of speech.

14.2 Description of the correction made without explanation, for example

(3) I give her carrot to eat

A number of candidates wrote 'Should be carrots, not carrot', without giving any explanation for the additional 's'; and scored no mark.

14.3 Failure to detect the problem, for example

(8) On the contrary, Mr Chan,

Many candidates failed to see that the problem here was one of incorrect use of discourse marker. The writer intended to make a contrast between the 'cute rabbit', and the 'big dirty dog' and so a discourse marker such as 'In contrast' or 'On the other hand' was needed instead of 'On the contrary', which indicates a contradiction. Other candidates felt that no discourse marker was required, however, this would be contrary to the intention of the writer and so could not be considered a correct answer.

(9) Blackeye always to bark and

Many candidates believed that the problem in this item was with the unnecessary 'to'. They were unable to explain that the infinitive should be replaced by a main verb, which was missing in the sentence.

(12) If Fluff is a big pet, I do not keep him

A number of candidates thought that the verb 'do' in the main clause was the problem, without realising that the whole sentence presented an imaginary, hypothetical situation, which meant that instead of the first conditional, the second conditional should be employed.

14.4 Correct identification but wrong explanation of the error, for example

(6) my sister complaint that Fluff

Some candidates successfully stated that 'complaint' was wrongly used, but contended that it was a tense error instead of a problem with part of speech.

14.5 Incomplete explanation, for example

(3) she likes eat lettuce

It is insufficient to simply identify the problem of double verbs and state that 'eating should be used'. Instead, candidates need to explain that the verb 'to like' takes a gerund (or an infinitive) after it.

(11) I think Hong Kong government should

A few candidates wrote that an article was missing but failed to explain whether the article should be a definite or indefinite one, and why; and so could not score full marks.

14.6 Ambiguous answers, for example

(8) Mr. Chan, lives upstairs, has a big dirty dog called Blackeye.

Answers such as 'There has no relative sentence and so a pronoun should be used' are confusing and do not indicate enough understanding of the problem presented in the item to warrant any mark.

15. A large number of answers contained spelling errors. Some of them were fairly common ones, such as 'describle' for 'describe'; 'from' for 'form'; and 'infinite' for 'infinitive'. Other spelling errors or careless mistakes included 'determinative' and 'determined' for 'determiner'; 'omittion' for 'omission'; 'cause' for 'clause'; 'grund' for 'gerund'; and 'agreameat' for 'agreement'. Spelling errors occurring in candidates' explanations are generally ignored so long as they do not interfere with the markers' comprehension of the explanation. However, spelling errors in the testing items themselves in Task 2A will render the answers incorrect.

16. The occurrence of candidates writing their answers to Parts 1 or 2 in the wrong answer book were fewer in this administration due to the redesign of the answer book for Part 2. However, some candidates still managed to do this. Candidates should read the instructions carefully.
17. It should also be made clear that the explanations that candidates provide should be addressed to the examiners and should be worded in a similar way to the examples given on the question paper, in the Guidance Notes for Candidates and in this and previous reports.
18. The problems exhibited in the answers given in Task 2B indicate that there is a great need for many pre- and in-service teachers to strengthen their foundation in English language, including lexis, syntax and semantics. It is strongly recommended that those candidates who do not obtain a high attainment rate in this paper actively seek ways to improve their English through regular reading, self-access language learning on the Internet or by taking language courses.

Paper 3: Listening

19. This year's paper was based on an interview with two health educators giving their views on health education in Hong Kong. Topics in previous listening papers all focused on language education or applied linguistics. The HKEAA wish to avoid giving the impression to prospective candidates that the listening paper is always about language teaching issues.
20. The discussion starts with the two interviewees briefing the audience about their personal occupational records as health education professionals. They then talk about drug abuse and how the problem has been tackled in Hong Kong schools. They then move on to argue that the crux to health issues in Hong Kong is the needs of a holistic approach to health related issues, and an emphasis on providing health education in schools and qualified teachers to do so. The interview ends with the speakers sharing their views on the impact of SARS on Hong Kong people's awareness of cleanliness, and the requirements and benefits of good health education. The contents of the discussion were substantial, thus very unlikely to allow candidates to rely on world knowledge or background knowledge about health education to give the right answers.
21. Altogether three speakers participated in the interview, all English native speakers, one female and two males. The recording was natural and language was delivered at a natural, normal speed in standard accents. The speech rate of the interview was 149 words per minute, a rate very close to the average speech rate of all the previous five rounds of the LPAT-E Listening papers (153 words per minute).
22. A wide variety of task types were included in this paper. These included blank-filling, true-false, table-completion, listen-and-check, multiple choice, and open-ended questions. They in turn made possible the testing of a variety of micro listening skills.
23. The HKEAA directed their continued attention to a number of facets when vetting the paper. These facets included the inclusion of pauses at appropriate places, further

standardisation of the length of pauses and disambiguating open-ended questions, and giving ample time for the handwriting, including the time for the writing mechanism.

24. A total of 1801 candidates took this paper with 71% of candidates obtaining a Level 3 or above (Language Proficiency Requirement).

25. Points regarding candidates' performance are listed below.

25.1 Listening in English as a second or foreign language sometimes require the abilities to handle cross-cultural transactions, which in turn requires the understanding that language works with cultures and cultural beliefs. Some of the questions caused problems to weaker candidates because these candidates over-rely on their own cultural beliefs or background knowledge (top-down processing). Communication may fail because the listener lacks the skills to decode the aural text using appropriate linguistic knowledge and skills, and/or because the listener is not aware of the beliefs systems associating with each of the two languages.

This situation is particularly obvious with Question 8(a), which asks for the two reasons George gives for the current relatively low levels of HIV/AIDS in Hong Kong. A typical, good answer to 8(a)(i) is 'The different attitude towards sexual behaviour (in Hong Kong)'. For 8(a)(ii), a typical good answer is 'Less injecting drug use in Hong Kong'. These answers are embedded in the following excerpt:

[Answer to 8(a)(i) begins] *I mean I think one of the reasons we don't have a bigger HIV/AIDS situation in our population of 7 to 8 million is because the attitudes towards sexual behaviour are rather different here compared to some other countries which do have a more problematic situation. ... [Answer to 8(a)(ii) begins:] And also one of the reasons in Hong Kong is because we've moved away from injecting drug use and very much towards oral drug use and therefore the problems that we have for instance compared to Thailand are not as significant. But you see these are all...*

What the markers saw as a typically wrong answer to either one of these items reads like these:

8(a)(i): 'HK people have better attitude towards sexual behaviour.'

8(a)(ii): 'Hong Kong people have stopped using drug injecting.'

It can be seen from the excerpt above that what George did was to state the fact that the situation with AIDS/HIV in Hong Kong is not as bad because people here in general have a different attitude towards sexual behaviour than people in some other countries. Hence careful listeners would learn that what George compared was the *situations* in different countries, and not which attitude was more commendable, or whether Hong Kong people's attitude was better. (As a matter of fact, George's rhetorical intent is that we should not be complacent despite this situation.) Nevertheless, it seems that the erroneous interpretation that George was commending Hong Kong people's sexual

attitude had actually impacted some candidates' interpretations of the answer to the next question.

In 8(a)(ii), George's point is that Hong Kong has reduced the use of injection (a way of drug use which tends to spread AIDS) and relied more on oral drug use. Some candidates, however, were led to the wrong impression that George actually reported Hong Kong as having less drug use, and hence less of a drug problem, which is not what George says. Some candidates also misheard the word 'injection' as 'infections' and gave answers such as 'Hong Kong people have less (AIDS) infections.'

- 25.2 Question 13(a) asks 'At what stage of the education system should health education be introduced into the Hong Kong school curriculum?' The suggested answer is 'Primary 1'. The corresponding text runs like this:

I would advocate mandatory personal & social education from Primary 1 to Secondary 6, with at least 2 periods per week of allocated time in secondary schools....

This is an item which requires some inferencing; retrieving the utterance verbatim would only yield incorrect answers. A typically incorrect answer reads like this: 'Primary 1 to Primary 6'. Some candidates were obviously not careful enough in giving their answers, and in the belief that all that was needed was to write down the section of speech verbatim related to the question. The other possible cause of difficulty is that this is an item with an answer located at the front position of a longer piece of language.

- 25.3 There is some evidence for the observation that questions that are cued by language in the front position (as against the middle and the rear positions) of a text tend to create greater difficulty for weaker candidates. Question 13(b)(i) can be used as an example. Question 13(b) asks how health education should be introduced. The suggested answer to part (i) is 'thematically', and this part of the text reads as follows:

Tom: How should health be included in the school syllabus?

George: Thematically and related to lifestyle education, it's good...

This is a question requiring local retrieval of information, but it proved to be very challenging. There were other items that had cues in the front position of the text, e.g. Questions 13(a) and 17. Candidates should note that answers do not always come at the end of a piece of text; they can also come at the beginning of a speaker's turn.

26. Advice to candidates taking this paper is given below.

- 26.1 In order to perform well in this examination, candidates should aim to use global and local processing interactively.

- 26.2 Candidates should also work against the over-reliance on top-down guessing based on general background knowledge. This is because a text is worth listening to and worth being used, in testing and teaching or any other context, only if it is making a point. This is often a point which deserves attention because it is different from common sense and what most people would expect to hear. It is in this sense that good listeners must focus on improving linguistic competence and practicing bottom-up processing.
- 26.3 Finally, a proficient second or foreign language user should develop, along with his or her language proficiency, an awareness of the different beliefs, assumptions and knowledge systems of different languages, particularly those of their own language and that of the target language (i.e. English). Such awareness will help them as a user of the languages and benefit them in their language teaching.
- 26.4 Candidates should note that during the listening test they must **switch off their mobile phone**. Even when set to silent or vibration mode, the signal can interfere with the broadcast of the recording. This will affect the performance of both the candidate himself/herself as well as other candidates. Any candidate failing to abide by this rule will be liable to incur a severe mark penalty.

Paper 4: Speaking

27. This paper consists of two parts. There are three tasks in Part 1, namely, Task 1A: Reading Aloud a Prose Passage, Task 1B: Reading Aloud a Poem and Task 1C: Telling a Story/Recounting an Experience/Presenting Arguments; and one task in Part 2, namely, Group Interaction.

Candidates are tested on six scales of performance, namely, (a) Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation; (b) Reading Aloud with Meaning; (c) Grammatical Accuracy; (d) Organisation and Cohesion; (e) Interacting with Peers; and (f) Explaining Language Matters to Peers. Descriptors of each scale are set out in the Syllabus Specifications published in November 2000.

The proficiency attainment rate of the 1770 candidates who attempted this paper was 43%.

Part 1: Tasks 1A, 1B and 1C

28. The following are specific comments on Part 1 of the speaking assessment:
- 28.1 In this part of the paper, assessors observed that candidates performed best in Task 1C (i.e. Telling a Story/Recounting an Experience/Presenting Arguments), followed by Task 1A (i.e. Reading Aloud a Prose Passage) and Task 1B (i.e. Reading Aloud a Poem).

- 28.2 The major weakness of candidates in Part 1 was found in ‘Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation’ when reading aloud the prose passage and the poem, with stress and intonation a particular problem for many. It is recommended that prospective candidates spend time reading suitable English texts and listening to the ways that such texts are read aloud by competent speakers. Candidates also need to think more about the audience that they are meant to be speaking to, i.e. a class of students, and try to project the meaning of the poem or prose to that audience through appropriate stress and phrasing.
- 28.3 In general, Task 1C was carried out well by most candidates, who were able to talk on the given topic for the time required. A small minority of candidates did appear to read from a ‘script’ that they had prepared during the preparation time. Such candidates were marked down for this as the assessors usually found that once the candidate had completed their ‘reading’, they had nothing else to say, or what they did say either repeated what they had said already or even contradicted it, making the whole ‘monologue’ incoherent. Candidates are advised to make brief notes during the preparation time and to work from these, such that their talk has a clear structure and is relevant to the topic. Candidates should try to present different aspects of the topic to demonstrate to the assessors that they are able to organise their thoughts and present them coherently. Candidates should talk for about 2 minutes and will be told by the assessors when to stop their presentation.
- 28.4 Assessors also found that many candidates demonstrated a poor control of grammatical structures and so were unable to score highly on ‘Grammatical Accuracy’ when performing their presentation in Task 1C. Assessors are looking for the ability of candidates to use a range of grammatical structures accurately. Again, more exposure to English in the form of reading would help instil in candidates a firm grasp of grammar.

Part 2: Group Interaction

29. For Part 2, Group Interaction, candidates should note the following:
- 29.1 In Part 2 of the paper, candidates were able to make use of conversational strategies; hence, on the whole they did quite well in this part of the paper, especially on the scale of Interacting with Peers. A weakness observed was the use of incorrect grammatical terms and/or erroneous grammatical explanations. Candidates should try to become more familiar with basic grammatical terminology so that they are able to identify errors.
- 29.2 In a number of cases, candidates talked about certain categories of errors that did not feature in the text. This would indicate that they had rehearsed a ‘speech’ prior to the assessment. In such cases candidates were marked down on Explaining Language Matters to Peers, as they had not shown an ability to discuss the errors in the text provided.
- 29.3 Another weakness of some candidates in the group interaction was the tendency to talk about irrelevant matters such as the characteristics of their

own students or problems with the education system. This showed an inability to interact with peers, which should involve not only speaking to others but listening to them and responding appropriately. Again, candidates should prepare for this part of the assessment by practising speaking in English with colleagues rather than memorising sections of speech in advance.

- 29.4 When discussing strategies or activities to help remedy the language problems of the writer of the composition, candidates must focus on the particular needs of that writer and make relevant suggestions. General or non-specific suggestions such as 'read more' or 'do more drills' will gain no credit, as they do not indicate the ability to discuss language matters.
30. Candidates should understand that the nature of the speaking test is that the candidate's performance at the time of the assessment is the one that is taken into account. Whilst there should be some degree of correlation between the ability shown by each candidate on the different components of the LPATE, such as Speaking and Classroom Language Assessment, it does not follow that a candidate will automatically score the same on each test, or on similar scales across the different tests.
31. As the speaking test is not recorded, there is no opportunity for candidates to appeal against their result after the announcement of results, other than to have their scoresheets checked for technical errors. If candidates consider that they may have been unfairly assessed for any reason, they should report to the Chief Examiner on duty at the Assessment Centre immediately.

Paper 5: Classroom Language Assessment

32. Classroom Language Assessment started in mid-September and was completed in mid-November 2004. Of the 1005 candidates assessed, 90% attained Level 3 or above in all the four scales of Grammatical Accuracy; Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation; Language of Interaction; and Language of Instruction.
33. Grammatical Accuracy
- 33.1 Many candidates were careful with their grammar, as in the use of indirect questions. The ability to instantly recognise and correct simple errors was also evident among many candidates. In most cases, grammatical errors hardly impeded communication.
- 33.2 Notwithstanding this, grammatical inaccuracy was still a concern. Omission of the final 's' for plural nouns, and 'ed' for past tense verbs was common. Confusion over subject-verb agreement, verb forms and parts of speech was also frequently encountered. A number of candidates struggled with basic sentence structures, as in 'I'll let you to choose', and 'I want you come out'. Such errors, though not impeding communication, did reflect badly on the candidates' language proficiency. In many cases, these errors were the result

of L1 interference, as was apparent in the following sentences: ‘Which one you want?’; ‘How to say?’; and ‘Don’t see it.’ (meaning ‘Don’t look at it.’)

- 33.3 Another problem was the incorrect use of prepositions and phrasal verbs, which was common even among the more proficient. One teacher said ‘Cross it’ to mean ‘Cross it out.’ Instead of saying ‘Do it on your own’, one teacher said, ‘Do it by your own.’ When asking one pupil to pick someone to answer the next question, one teacher said, ‘You pick up one girl.’
- 33.4 Wherever appropriate, candidates are expected to display a range of vocabulary, expressions and sentence structures. Quite a few candidates proved incapable of handling complex sentences, as in ‘He wants to know that what do Lily do at home.’ and ‘I am looking at which group which is talking.’ In some cases, complexity was confused with verbosity, resulting in something like ‘This is the cause of the reason why I am bored’, to cite one example.
- 33.5 Other teachers failed to see the difference between variety and complexity. This was especially true in junior classes where variety and complexity were both absent. Often, the language used by the teacher mainly or only featured the ‘reuse, recycle and repeat’ characteristics. Young learners might not be able to cope with complexity, but they do have a right to, and can certainly benefit from variety, particularly if it is carefully introduced.

34. Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation

- 34.1 Performances in general indicated that teachers were paying attention to their articulation to ensure clarity of speech, as in the extra care some candidates took to deliver the final consonants. However, problems surfaced among some candidates and at times, communication could be rather seriously impeded.
- 34.2 The final consonants and consonant clusters remained problems to contend with. While natural everyday speech could be somewhat clipped and cut off, appropriate emphasis on enunciation is expected of teachers, especially when pronunciation itself is the focus. Teachers who turned a ‘roast’ chicken into a ‘rose’ chicken, a ‘wild’ animal into a ‘why’ animal, a ‘goat’ into a ‘go’, a ‘boat’ into a ‘bow’, a straight ‘line’ into a straight ‘lie’, a big ‘pile’ into a big ‘pie’ certainly should pay more attention to the final consonants as these sounds do make a difference.
- 34.3 Problems with consonant clusters often led to communication being impeded as when ‘fruit’ ended up as ‘foot’, ‘clouds’ as ‘cows’, and ‘phrases’ as ‘faces’. Some consonants proved difficult for some candidates, most notable of which were /n/, /l/, /v/ and /r/. ‘Don’t walk (rock) the chair’; ‘I forgot to lumber (number) the picture’; ‘It is a no (low) building’; ‘Let’s have the worse (verse) speakers’ and ‘Put a tick in the blankets (brackets)’ all proved rather intriguing.
- 34.4 Candidates seemed to have fewer problems with vowels, but long/short vowel distinction still required some attention. ‘Where is the bean in the classroom?’

asked one teacher looking for the bin in the classroom. 'We don't want to hurt other people's fillings,' said another, obviously more concerned about 'feelings'.

- 34.5 Rather disconcerting perhaps was the mispronunciation of common words like 'bacon', 'glove', 'onion', 'watermelon' and 'stapler', all incorrectly pronounced by the teachers and repeated just as incorrectly by the pupils. One teacher actually turned 'beard' into a 'bear'.
- 34.6 Less conspicuous were problems with stress and intonation. The very common question 'What is it?', for example, was often asked with inappropriate stress and intonation. A majority of the candidates also proved rather weak in 'linking' and some had problems identifying syllable stress as with words like 'creature' and 'miniature'.

35. The Language of Interaction

- 35.1 Good interaction encourages class participation and renders learning effective, smooth and pleasurable. In practically every class observed, interaction did take place, but the quality and quantity of interaction could greatly vary. In many lessons, there was only interaction of the superficial and mechanical kind. The teachers perfunctorily followed the routine, using language that lacked vigour and enthusiasm. The questions they asked were bland, usually the 'yes/no' type. Their responses were predictable, usually the 'yes, you're right /no, you're wrong' kind. Most teachers made some reasonable attempts at probing and eliciting, but mostly in the same old form of 'what else' (and its variations like 'Anything else?'), which they kept on repeating. Extended stretches of questioning were few and far between.
- 35.2 It was noted that many teachers failed to respond appropriately. More often than not, students who failed to give the 'right' answers were immediately dismissed. Little effort was made to probe or explain the errors. Sometimes, the errors were not even corrected. In the giving of praise and acknowledgement, teachers tended to perform better. Still, the range of expressions could be broadened and enlivened.
- 35.3 Spontaneity was lacking in much of the interaction observed. Some teachers could not handle anything 'unexpected' or 'unscripted'. Their inability to move away from scripted speeches discouraged discussion and class participation. In one lesson, for instance, a pupil raised a question that was not only clever but also relevant. Since the teacher was caught unprepared, all she could manage was: 'I think not really actually', an answer most uninspiring to say the least. Other situations often called for spontaneous reactions in order to deal with classroom discipline and management issues. Many teachers seemed to have problems dealing with such realities linguistically.
- 35.4 In terms of quantity, quite a few lessons actually failed to provide enough evidence of interaction. These were usually lessons dominated by rhetoric thus rendering little time for interaction.

36. The Language of Instruction

- 36.1 Most candidates could give clear explanation and instructions in language appropriate to the level. Their discourse was generally coherent and proper signalling was often successfully employed to indicate the different stages of the lesson.
- 36.2 Occasionally, however, some explanations could prove rather inadequate. One teacher explained 'tamagotchi' as 'a pet chicken that lives inside a machine.' The inability of some teachers to give even simple everyday classroom instructions was also evident. One teacher, for instance, said 'Pass this back' instead of 'Pass this to the back' when giving out worksheets to the pupils. Furthermore, some candidates failed to fully display their skills by substituting (and not complementing) verbal expressions with pictorial representations or theatrical performances.
- 36.3 As for interaction, some activities proved rather ill chosen as they gave little opportunity for the candidates to demonstrate their ability. Some typical examples were lessons largely spent on listening to tapes or students doing presentations or writing.
37. Future candidates are advised to plan their lessons sensibly to allow a full display of all four aspects, i.e. the four scales. Particular attention should be given to a good balance between instruction and interaction. Candidates are also advised to utilize the lesson time fully. An unreasonable amount of time spent on putting up pictures or giving out stickers would prove rather unproductive for assessment purposes.
38. Finally, the best performing candidates are always those who combine careful planning with good proficiency to foster genuine communication in the English classroom.