

Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language) 2005 (March)

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) 2005 (March).

General Observation

2. Candidates achieved different *proficiency attainment** rates in different papers. The proficiency attainment rates for individual papers were: Reading, 71%; Writing, 41%; Listening, 62%; Speaking, 45%; and Classroom Language Assessment, 89%.

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 1115 candidates who attempted this paper was 71%. Candidates performed at a reasonably strong level, with results generally consistent with those achieved by recent cohorts.
4. Performance in the multiple choice cloze and the reading comprehension sections was generally even; however there was once again evidence of candidates not managing their time well, with questions on reading Passage B left unanswered by a number of candidates.

Part 1: Multiple Choice Cloze

5. Overall, candidates performed just slightly better on cloze Passage A. Candidates were quite successful in selecting appropriate vocabulary items and expressions indicating idea relationships. They were less successful in items requiring the selection of prepositions or appropriate verb forms/tenses.

Part 2: Reading Comprehension

6. Candidates attempted most questions in both passages; however as noted earlier, there was some evidence of candidates running out of time while doing the second passage. There was an improvement in performance on questions of global understanding and

* 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.

a continuing difficulty with questions asking for an understanding or interpretation of the writer's viewpoint. The key points to note about candidates' performance in Part 2: Reading Comprehension are outlined below.

- 6.1 Candidates generally performed well on questions requiring the retrieval of specific information (e.g. 'What are the writer's purposes in using objective comment as feedback?', 'What shapes the "look" of a classroom other than its physical environment?', 'What examples of general abilities are mentioned as part of "this spectrum of abilities"?').
 - 6.2 There was some evidence that candidates had not read the questions carefully. Sometimes questions asked for an example mentioned by the author, but candidates used their own examples or a question might ask about conditions (in the plural) meaning that more than one condition needed to be included in the response.
 - 6.3 Some candidates appeared to be confused by the structure of the passive voice, interpreting 'needs can be met' in a normal classroom as 'children can meet' in a normal classroom. Such confusion appeared to make it difficult for these candidates to respond adequately to the question.
 - 6.4 There was relatively little evidence of indiscriminate copying, with candidates who performed strongly able to select information appropriately. Most candidates understood that questions asking for a phrase or expression were not asking for wholesale copying of sentences or parts of the paragraph beyond the specific phrase.
 - 6.5 Some candidates misread questions about the writer's intention and point of view. For example, in response to the question 'What do the writers consider to be the aim of traditional education?', some candidates responded by saying what the writers wished education to aim for. To the question asking where in the passage the writers provided the answer to the question 'Why should gifted education be supported?', some candidates answered the question 'Why', rather than the question 'Where'.
 - 6.6 Questions of reference posed problems for some candidates. Responses to the question 'On line 65, what does "that" refer to?' varied significantly, with many candidates elaborating on the reference unnecessarily.
7. Candidates should note the following advice:
- 7.1 Take the time to look over the paper and understand it generally before beginning. Decide on time allocation for each of the sections and manage your time accordingly.
 - 7.2 Consider quietly reading each multiple choice cloze passage aloud to yourself before selecting cloze items, to get a feel for how the passage's meaning is unfolding.

- 7.3 Look over each reading comprehension passage quickly before attempting the questions. When you start to tackle the questions, read each one carefully to ensure that you have understood what is being asked. Check that your answer makes sense in light of the information in the passage.
- 7.4 Remember that all questions refer specifically to the passages, not to general assumptions or situations. You must find the answers in the passages themselves.
- 7.5 When you read each passage, consider the viewpoints of the writers – their approach, their contentions, their suggestions. Taking these viewpoints into consideration will help you to respond to questions testing global understanding.
- 7.6 If the best response to a question is contained in the words from the passage, use those words. If you choose to use your own words, check that you have expressed your meaning clearly. While the marking scheme does not include the deduction of marks for grammatical or spelling mistakes, marks cannot be awarded if the marker cannot understand the answer.
- 7.7 Read on a regular basis to improve your overall English language skills. Read for pleasure and read materials related to your profession. As you read, ask yourself about the writer’s opinions; check that you understand the references being made (i.e. what do ‘it’, ‘they’, ‘that’ refer to) and familiarize yourself with the conventions of good writing. These include the use of summarizing statements, the ways in which arguments unfold, the clues in the passage to the writer’s point of view.

Paper 2: Writing

8. 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 1804 candidates who attempted this paper was 41%.

Part 1: Expository Writing

9. The expository writing task required candidates to respond to some of the points raised in the given article and make suggestions for promoting personal responsibility in students. Markers found the task to be suitable and effective, and the topic appropriate, relevant and provided an adequate basis to distinguish between different levels of performance. Markers were pleased to see a range of answers, with some candidates agreeing and others disagreeing with the main points stated in the article. Generally speaking, the task was handled satisfactorily.

10. Although the majority of candidates attained Level 3 or above in Grammatical Accuracy, a fair number displayed a lack of syntactic control. Common errors included:
- Misuse of tenses; e.g. ‘Therefore, gradually the community become result-oriented.’
 - Incorrect singular / plural forms; e.g. ‘the society give[s] too much guidelines’.
 - Subject-verb disagreement; e.g. ‘Most of the parents has two children.’
 - Double verbs; e.g. ‘They are have more pocket money.’
 - Double subjects; e.g. ‘As parents, they can take some courses’.
 - Faulty sentence structure; e.g. ‘Therefore, I support that my students who are interested in the lives of music and sporting celebrities. As each child has his/her different talent.’
 - Misuse of discourse markers; e.g. the overuse of ‘Besides’ as a marker to introduce an additional point or argument.
 - Incorrect participle phrases; e.g. ‘Due to the socio-economic changes resulted from the IT development’.
11. Candidates are reminded of the following points when attempting the expository writing task.
- 11.1 Do not copy from the given passage; instead candidates should use their own words and ideas.
- 11.2 Many candidates had difficulty writing concisely and wrote far too much. As a result, many paragraphs were long-winded in that they (i) reiterated basic ideas without further elaboration, and (ii) failed to maintain a clear focus. It is strongly advised that candidates train themselves to write cogently and succinctly.
- 11.3 Attention should be paid to the context of the writing task, including the purpose and the readers, which affect the choice of register, format and use of vocabulary.

Part 2: Correcting and explaining errors/problems

12. Markers were of the opinion that this section of the paper contained a fair spread of unambiguous grammatical, vocabulary and discourse errors that are often made by Hong Kong students. The test items were set at an appropriate level of difficulty, demanding a reasonable level of language knowledge of the candidates. As such, the paper enabled discrimination of the strong candidates from the weaker ones.
13. Candidates are reminded once again that they need to demonstrate their *understanding of the underlying rules or generalisations, using grammatical terms where appropriate* when explaining problems in Task 2B. It is important that they state clearly why a certain item is wrong, how it should be corrected and why.
14. As in previous years, candidates’ ability to identify errors was generally greater than their ability to explain errors, although some candidates managed to score higher in

Task 2B than in Task 2A. The unsatisfactory performance in explaining errors/problems can be attributed to a number of reasons, as elucidated below.

14.1 Failure to detect the problem, for example:

(6) First we went on Drop Star, it is a ride that

Many candidates thought that ‘First’ should become ‘Firstly’ and that there should be an article before ‘Drop Star’; they failed to realise that the error was in the comma splice. A suitable correction for this error was:

‘First we went on Drop Star, which is a ride that’

14.2 Description of the correction made without explanation, for example:

(13) this was the most great day.

A number of answers stated that the correct form should be ‘the greatest’ because ‘the most great’ does not exist. This answer was not acceptable since it did not fulfil the test requirement of showing *understanding of the underlying rules or generalisations, using grammatical terms*; and so scored no marks. Candidates needed to state that the problem concerned the use of the superlative form of the adjective ‘great’.

14.3 Incorrect explanation of error, for example:

(12) My mother and father was also laughing and singing.

Stating that there is a tense or a verb error here was wrong. The correct answer was that there should be a plural verb (‘were’) to agree with the plural subject (‘My father and mother’).

14.4 Correct identification but incorrect or incomplete explanation of the error, for example:

(10) ... to the park what had a beautiful lake.

After successfully identifying the incorrect use of the pronoun ‘what’, some candidates gave explanations such as (i) ‘what’ is only used in questions, or (ii) ‘what’ could be replaced by ‘where’, but without stating that the verb ‘had’ would need to be changed as well. Neither explanation showed enough understanding to warrant any marks.

(2) ...and I was too exciting to eat...

A number of candidates wrongly assumed that the –ing adjective can only be used to describe objects or events. In fact, the –ing adjective can be used to

describe people, as in ‘an interesting professor’ or ‘a charming speaker’. To gain full marks, candidates needed to explain that the –ed adjective form ‘excited’ is needed as it describes the feeling or emotion of the writer at the prospect of going to Wonder World.

14.5 Ambiguous answers, for example:

(2) I woken up early...

Some candidates wrote that the tense was used wrongly. Such an answer did not show understanding of the distinction between a main verb and a participle (‘woken’), or that between the various tenses.

(5) My father said we would choice ten rides and...

Answers such as ‘the verb should be changed’ and ‘the verb should be choose’ were unclear because (i) there was more than one verb in the original sentence; and (ii) the candidate had failed to identify and explain the wrong use of the noun ‘choice’.

(12) My mother and father was also laughing...

Some candidates gave incorrect and ambiguous explanations such as ‘My father and mother are two subjects, so it should be plural’. Here ‘two subjects’ was an erroneous concept and the reference for the pronoun ‘it’ was unclear.

15. As in previous years, the confusion in some answers was further aggravated by spelling errors. Examples include ‘model’ instead of ‘modal’; ‘superative’ instead of ‘superlative’; ‘particle’, ‘principal’ or ‘participant’ instead of ‘participle’; ‘infinite’ for ‘infinitive’; and ‘coma’ for ‘comma’. 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. 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. It was observed that a number of candidates had problems with understanding common language problems as well as difficulty in explaining what they do understand in clear and accurate English. Candidates who attained Level 2 or below are strongly advised to actively improve their proficiency and knowledge of the English language.

Paper 3: Listening

19. The paper was based on an interview with two English Language Teaching (ELT) experts giving their views on language training. The focus was on language experts' role in and contribution to language training and communication in the workplace. The topic was related to language education and yet allowed meaningful listening as it covered areas that are not familiar to the majority of the language teachers in local schools.
20. Altogether three speakers participated in the interview, all English native speakers, one female and two males. The recording was natural and the language was delivered at a normal speed in standard accents. The speech rate of the interview was 158 words per minute, a rate very close to the average speech rate of the previous rounds of the LPATE Listening papers (153 words per minute).
21. A wide variety of task types were included in this paper. These included blank filling, table-completion, cloze procedures, multiple choice, flow-chart, and open-ended questions. They allowed for the testing of a variety of micro listening skills.
22. In response to the comment from some candidates that the listening paper tends to be testing memory and speed writing rather than comprehension, the committee, while on one hand, continued to ensure that memory is not made the testing focus in the paper and that candidates are given ample time for the handwriting process, on the other hand, noted that contemporary cognitive scientists all recognize the role that memory plays in comprehension theory.
23. Grammar and spelling mistakes in candidates' answers in general were not penalised. However, if they were grave errors which hindered communication or distorted meanings, marks were deducted.
24. A total of 1,132 candidates took this paper this time with 62% of candidates obtaining a Level 3 or above (Language Proficiency Requirement).
25. Points regarding candidates' performance are listed below.

25.1 Lexical Knowledge

There is evidence from the candidates' performance that some candidates stumbled over items that demanded appropriate lexical knowledge, which can be reasonably expected from a teacher of English. For example, for Question 4, a table completion task, the question required that the candidates listen to a conversation engaging all three speakers, Jim, Sheila and Nick, and then jot down the focus of English language teaching in various regions of the world. The required answers to these items were short, and most candidates performed well on all the items except 4 (iii), which only 23% of candidates answered correctly. The correct answer to this item was 'Immersion', which should NOT be an unfamiliar term to many teachers of English in Hong Kong. The answer to this item came from the following extract, spoken by Nick:

People are also going on immersion courses in places like Malta now. Not necessarily in an English speaking country but it may be somewhere... perhaps much nicer... to go and spend a few weeks and study English.

Some of the incorrect answers given by candidates included: ‘to enjoy the place’, ‘some place nicer to go than UK’, ‘beautiful place’, etc. While these anomalous answers given by the candidates were more or less what Nick said in the above text, they were definitely not the focus of the English Language teaching in Malta. Other incorrect answers included ‘social English’, ‘academic English’ and ‘career English’, which were all correct answers to neighbouring items but not to this one, indicating a degree of guessing by candidates.

Another lexical term which seems to have caused difficulties to some candidates but should not be very unfamiliar to experienced language teachers is the term ‘needs analysis’, which was the answer required to Question 21 (i). Only about 21% of the candidates got this item correct

The text containing the answer to this item was:

Well... yeah. I think that workplace training is one of the most demanding from a curriculum development point of view because for workplace training you really need people who can do everything in the curriculum cycle from needs analysis right through to programme evaluation at the end.

The answer to this item came at the point when a candidate would be expecting it and it is therefore surprising that many candidates did not get this correct, especially as the term ‘needs analysis’ is a very common, basic term in English language teaching.

25.2 Interpreting Language Over Several Turns

In order to achieve successful comprehension, being able to interpret language at the discourse level is crucial. Question 12 proved difficult for many candidates. The text that involved this question was as follows:

*Ten years ago when I first started talking to the training managers about language courses, I would ask **them all** my questions. And of course the larger the organization the more unlikely it was that **they** were aware of what was happening in other departments. But nevertheless, in my naivety I asked **them all** the questions and rather than say “I don’t know”, **they** came forward with some answers. Therefore, we would end up with a solution like it was going to be a speaking course and it would be difficult for them to then retract what they had already said.*

The question (Question No. 12) asked ‘What mistake did Nick make when he began designing courses for companies ten years ago?’ The suggested answers for these two items were: (i) ‘He asked the training managers’ (ii) ‘all his questions.’

Getting the correct answers to this question required a candidate to have the ability to understand language beyond the sentence level and interpret referents appropriately across several conversational turns. Specifically, answering this question correctly involved recognising that

- ‘talking to and asking the training managers questions’ is the topic of this conversational turn;
- The pronouns ‘them’ and ‘they’ in this turn all refer to the ‘training managers’;
- ‘in my naivety’ is a different way of saying ‘I made a mistake’;
- the words ‘all’ were stressed by the speaker’;
- the word ‘answers’ refers to training managers’ answers to Nick’s questions, but NOT ‘good answers’ to Nick’s identified problem. These answers, provided by the training managers, were in fact considered by Nick as misinformation;
- the ‘speaking course’ in Nick’s expression is in fact a term he borrowed from Sheila, and in reality he was NOT really talking about a speaking course for the problem he identified; he was using the term metaphorically;
- the word ‘solution in Nick’s expression (‘a solution like it was going to be a speaking course’) is in fact a distracter, and NOT a genuine solution. Nick is using ‘a speaking course’ to refer to a mistake because in Sheila’s example (in a previous turn), the speaking course was mentioned as a mistake. In other words, the metaphorical meaning of the term ‘the speaking course’ which Nick exploited actually came from Sheila’s turn.

Some samples of incorrect answers are given below:

‘Nick asked all questions and it ends up to be a speaking course.’

‘Speaking, the solution is speaking course.’

‘Ask all the questions to staff, because staff tends to respond they need training on speaking skills, rather than listening skills.’

‘He asked all sorts of questions in large companies. However, they usually don’t have communication with other department.’

‘He said I don’t know. The course turned out to be a speaking course.’

‘He asked more questions rather than saying I don’t know, it became a speaking course.’

In sum, a candidate who answered this question correctly has succeeded in interpreting a stretch of language that extends over a few conversational turns.

25.3 Drawing a Link but also a Distinction Between a Key Concept and its Example

An important comprehension sub-skill, be it of reading or listening, is to see the relationship (and the distinction) between a key point and its supporting idea, or a key point and the example that serves to illustrate it. An examination of the candidates’ performance suggests that some weaker listeners seem to have just failed to do this when they responded to Question 14 (vi). The

answer to this item is the last box of a flowchart which illustrates, in a generic manner, Sheila's description of what often happens to multinational companies in overseas locations. The suggested answer to this item was 'Language experts help the company to (vi) devise ways to get the right kind of people.'

The text that is related to this question was:

Then they see that there is a role for English language experts like us, going in and helping them to devise ways of getting the right kind of people for the different job functions within the organization. So for example, we might run workshops for recruitment staff on how to help them develop better ideas on assessing speaking.

Sheila's main point was that language experts can help by suggesting to a company the different ways of getting the right persons for the different jobs. This key point is clearly given in the first sentence of the text. When Sheila says 'So for example', she is only trying to give an example of ONE of these ways. What the flowchart provides is a generic description, and it therefore demands a generic solution, not a specific instance or an example. Hence, the example itself cannot be an adequate answer.

Some weaker candidates, however, failed to see that it is the key concept that the question is asking for (as a solution to the problem), i.e. they confused the concept with the given example and put down the example as the answer. Some sample incorrect answers were:

'Set up workshop to assess the speaking.'

'Run English workshop.'

'Provide workshops in recruiting staff.'

'Run English workshop for communication.'

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

26.1 Listening is a complex process. Listening to a second language is a difficult skill, and arguably the most difficult of the four skills. Having good lexical knowledge facilitates comprehension, but a good listener also needs to develop the ability to see how language works at discourse level. One important sub-skill is to develop the ability to draw distinction between a concept and the example a speaker uses to illustrate or explain the concept.

26.2 A dialogue differs from a monologue in that it adds complex dimensions to the messages conveyed. A good listener is also one who understands that in listening to a conversation, which necessarily involves more than one speaker, relying on a transmission model of communication by decoding information locally is not enough. A good listener is aware that the meaning one speaker makes is often contextualized by a different speaker. In other words, meaning can be created and re-created in real time as the conversation progresses (e.g. the use of the term 'a speaking course' by Nick). A speaker may appropriate

the voice of another speaker to give his or her own voice. Meanings are therefore the results of the negotiation and co-operation among different participating speakers.

- 26.3 Advanced language learners who wish to seek further improvement in listening may want to practice analyzing authentic conversation transcriptions. Doing so will allow a language learner to see how meaning is contextualized throughout the same dialogue, and to see how meaning is constructed, re-constructed and co-constructed.
- 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 or even disqualification**.

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 1541 candidates who attempted this paper was 45%.

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 typical problems exhibited by candidates while reading aloud a poem and a prose passage were attempting the pronunciation of unfamiliar words (such as 'palette' or 'jaunty'), pronouncing consonant clusters (such as 'stopped' or 'drive') and conveying appropriate meaning through word or sentence stress and intonation. 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 look 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 instill 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. The Classroom Language Assessment started in mid-March and was completed in mid-November 2005. Of the 1079 candidates assessed, 89% 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. A number of candidates demonstrated a very high level of language proficiency. For most of the candidates, a keen sense of language awareness was evident as many errors were instantly self-corrected. Common mistakes previously pointed out appeared to be less common, pointing to effort and improvement. In any event, most candidates proved capable of using accurate and appropriate language for classroom instruction and interaction.
34. Grammatical Accuracy
- 34.1 Many candidates demonstrated a high level of self-monitoring that enabled them to instantly recognize their mistakes like subject-verb agreement and tenses and to self-correct. Many of the grammatical mistakes in fact did not impede communication.
- 34.2 One major area of weakness was prepositions/phrasal verbs as in: 'Listen me.'; 'Look at here.'; 'Lower down your voice.'

- 34.3 Some candidates had problems with sentence structures at the basic level. Missing object was one such problem, as in ‘cross out with a pencil’. Mistakes like ‘I’ll let you to pick.’; ‘I want one student come out.’; ‘Would you mind to come out?’ were also common. As for more complex sentences, mistakes like ‘Do you know what is it?’ remained a regular feature as were those resulting from first language interference.
- 34.4 As explained in previous reports, variety is one important element of grammatical accuracy. It was good to see that a number of teachers demonstrated not only accuracy but also variety as reflected in their vocabulary and sentence structure. ‘Good’, for instance, picked up strength as it was reinforced with a variety of other words like ‘Great’, ‘Fabulous’, ‘Brilliant’, ‘Lovely’ and ‘That’s a nice one’, to cite just a few.

35. Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation

- 35.1 It was pleasing to note that a number of candidates did display great ease with the language. The flow of their speech was smooth, the rhythm natural, the pacing appropriate, and the stress and pronunciation almost always accurate.
- 35.2 Problems with stress and intonation were usually relatively minor and constituted no major obstacles to communication. One common problem was giving stress to the weak vowel sounds as in ‘chocolate’, ‘carrot’ and ‘ceremony’.
- 35.3 On a number of occasions, teachers’ pronunciation problems did lead to ambiguity. Long/short vowel distinction was still rather poor with some candidates as in their confusing ‘filling’ with ‘feeling’ and ‘heater’ with ‘hitter’. Some consonants also proved difficult for the weaker candidates, especially /l/, /n/ and /r/. So ‘night sky’ was turned into ‘light sky’, and ‘correct’ became ‘collect’. Final consonants and consonant clusters quite often posed similar problems as a ‘straight line’ turned into ‘a straight lie’ and a ‘blackboard’ became a ‘backboard’. Simple words like ‘grape’, ‘chef’ and ‘dad’ also proved tricky for candidates who were not careful with their pronunciation.
- 35.4 Candidates are advised to guard against intrusive sounds. One case in point was a ‘caring’ mother being transformed into a ‘carrying’ mother. Incidences of candidates placing an inappropriate and unnecessary sound between words were also common as in putting a /t/ between ‘tell’ and ‘you’, thus producing an utterance that resembled ‘tell tyou’.

36. The Language of Interaction

- 36.1 Most candidates displayed good skills in eliciting and prompting to generate responses from the students. Efforts at positive reinforcement like acknowledging, praising and encouraging also proved effective. Teachers totally at ease with the language actually managed to bring in a good dose of

gentle humour when interacting with their students: 'That sounds awful but I like your imagination.' Student: 'I'll remember it.' Teacher: 'Forever?' (Laugh). Student: 'Until tomorrow?'

36.2 Another encouraging sign was that in more classes, interaction moved beyond the mechanical. One teacher made an attempt at reasoning when a pupil misbehaved. 'Are you ready (for the game)?' 'Yes?' 'But you are reading your book. I don't think you can read a book and play (the game) at the same time.' The language was kept simple; yet it succeeded in removing from the teacher's speech much of the peremptory element usually present in commands like 'Stop reading' and 'Pay attention'.

36.3 Candidates are advised to ensure that interaction is 'displayed' verbally and audibly. Smiles, nods, and stares would not provide evidence for assessment. When interacting with groups and individual students, it is incumbent upon the candidates to make their speech audible.

37. The Language of Instruction

37.1 Instructions and explanations were generally clear and given in language appropriate to the level. There was always proper signaling to mark the various stages of the lesson and to help focus attention.

37.2 In some cases, however, clarity of instructions and explanations left much room for improvement. 'A cap is a hat with something out.' 'Dialogue is just talk and talk and talk.' 'Not yet begin!' (Don't start yet.) 'Let's talk from the left.' (Let's start by looking at the left side of the picture.) 'Don't open it.' (Don't turn over the worksheet.) One could imagine the confusion brought to the students.

37.3 As a reminder to future candidates, some practices to avoid include excessive reading from scripts/prepared notes and substituting verbal explanations with non-verbal means like pictorial representation. Inviting translations from the students without providing proper explanations is also to be avoided.

38. Candidates should ensure that they are well-acquainted with the requirements and the general procedures of the assessment to avoid unnecessary problems. Careful reading of all the notes and documents intended for candidates is therefore of utmost importance. Candidates should also plan sensibly to allow a good display of all the skills required. As the four scales carry equal weighting, a good balance between interaction and instruction is desirable.