

Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language) 2010

Assessment Report

Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to consolidate the Chief Examiners' observations on the performance of candidates who sat the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language) in 2010.

General Observations

2. Candidates achieved different proficiency attainment¹ rates in different papers. The attainment rates for individual papers were: Reading 66.2%; Writing 42.7%; Listening 71.9%; Speaking 43.7%; Classroom Language Assessment 93.9%.

Paper 1: Reading

3. The paper included three reading passages, with a number of multiple choice items included amongst the questions for each passage. The multiple choice items tested understanding of lexical items in the context of the passages and of meaning portrayed in the texts.
4. Candidates' performance
 - 4.1 Paper completion
Most candidates completed the questions for all three reading passages. Unanswered questions were most evident in the third passage, suggesting that candidates had run out of time to complete the paper.
 - 4.2 Identification of expressions/literary devices
Candidates generally understood what was wanted when a question asked for a metaphor or similar expression as an answer. Strong performances were recorded in answers to Passage A Question 11 ('bear the cost') and Passage B Question 29 ('virtual brick and mortar').
 - 4.3 Understanding what the questions required in a response
 - 4.3.1 Candidates who understood the requirement in Passage A Question 13 to identify the contradiction as the contrast between A: the claim that water quality has improved and B: the evidence of filth and bad smell,

¹ 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.

included both A and B in their responses. Both were needed in a correct answer.

4.3.2 With reference to Passage B Question 31, candidates needed to identify the impact on the difference between production cost and retail price. Candidates who were awarded the mark for this question were able to identify the percentage increase in mark-up; that is, the difference between cost and price. Answers which referred only to the price being 'higher' were not awarded a mark.

4.3.3 In Passage B Question 22 the requirement was to produce a phrase, not just a single word, which contrasted with the expression given. Answers which contained just one word were not awarded the mark.

4.4 Relating general terms to their specific meaning in the passage

4.4.1 Some candidates responded to Passage A Question 4, which asks which classes are 'higher', by writing 'classes four and five'. While these numbers are 'higher' than one or two, candidates should recognise that in the passage, 'higher' refers to higher quality; thus the correct answer is classes one and/or two.

4.4.2 Similarly, in Passage A Question 18 the meaning of 'approach' in the passage is not the common synonym 'draw near to' but, in the context of the passage, refers to the 'perspective' taken.

4.5 Identification of referents

4.5.1 Overall, candidates performed well on questions asking for references to information in the passages; for example, in Passage A Question 1 and Passage C Question 35.

4.5.2 There is some evidence that candidates need to take care when identifying references that require recognition of contextual clues. For example, in Passage C Question 43, 'Which country?' the reader needs to consider the meaning contained in the sentence 'It is easy to assemble lists of American expressions that are barely intelligible to people in this country'. The evidence that Burchfield is referring to Britain is found first in the contrast between 'American expression' and 'this country' and again in the writer's reference to Britain several lines later 'That may be true (though in point of fact, most Britons could gather...').

- 4.6 Recognition and use of English structure/forms/spellings
 - 4.6.1 Candidates generally wrote comprehensible responses. However, markers continue to note that uncertain structures and grammatical errors make some answers difficult to understand, in which case no mark can be awarded.
 - 4.6.2 In Passage B Question 32, answers in which the first word ‘scouring’ (‘scouring the globe’) was instead written as ‘sourcing’ were not awarded the mark because these are two different words with different meanings.
- 4.7 Grasping global meaning and selecting information from more than one place in the passages
 - 4.7.1 Candidates who performed strongly in questions like Passage A Question 14, and Passage C questions 40 and 48 were able to derive overall meaning and locate information from different parts of the passage.
- 4.8 Appropriateness of responses
 - 4.8.1 Strong performers identified the material that was relevant to the question being asked and presented it either by quoting the relevant part of the passage or in their own words.
 - 4.8.2 Overall, there was relatively little evidence of indiscriminate copying, although where this did take place the response was often inappropriate and attracted no marks. It is important for candidates to recognise that each question is looking for specific information which must be clearly identified in the response.
- 5. Advice to candidates
 - 5.1 Plan, monitor and use your time carefully so that you can respond to all questions in the paper. Note that the length of passages and the number of questions for each will vary.
 - 5.2 Skim the passages quickly to get a sense of their content. Remember that you may tackle the passages in any order; start where you feel most confident and aim to work reasonably quickly so that you have time to review questions in which you are least certain of your responses.
 - 5.3 To focus effectively on each passage and its questions, read the passage quickly first, noting the title and getting a sense of the writer’s point of view. Then skim through the entire set of questions before beginning to respond.

- 5.4 When you tackle the individual questions, read each carefully to ensure that you understand what is being asked and that you take into account the context of the passage.
- 5.5 Read backwards and forwards in the passage as you attempt to answer each question, to ensure that you have captured information which is relevant and appropriate to the question and that you understand the construction of the ideas in the passage.
- 5.6 Check to see how many marks are awarded to the question. If two marks are awarded, you may need to provide two parts or points in your answer.
- 5.7 Be aware that your first answer to the question is the one which will be marked; there is little point in copying out a list of items or answers in the hope that one of these will attract a mark.
- 5.8 When a question asks for the identification of an expression, specific word or metaphor/simile, aim to write only that information as the response, thus making it clear that you have understood what is asked for. Marks cannot be awarded when a long piece of text has been copied which may include the expression asked for but does not identify it.
- 5.9 Pay attention to the grammatical structure of your responses. While errors in grammatical structure are not taken into account in the mark scheme, you should recognise that markers cannot give credit to responses that are not intelligible or to misspellings which create a different word from that you wish to use.
- 5.10 If the best response to a question is contained in words from the passage, use those words. If you choose to use your own words, check that you have expressed your meaning clearly so that the marker can understand your answer. In making your decision and producing the answer, note the advice given in points 7 and 8 above.
- 5.11 Aim to strengthen and make deliberate use of reading comprehension strategies such as skimming and scanning, locating key sentences, identifying clues to writer attitudes, and identifying referents as a part of your ongoing English language development.
- 5.12 Read on a regular basis. Aim to read different types of material and genres so as to become familiar with various writing styles, with the conventions of good writing and with the use of literary devices such as metaphor. Read both within and outside your professional field. Read what you enjoy so that regular reading is a pleasure, not a burden.

Paper 2 (Writing)

6. This paper consists of two parts, Part 1: Task 1, Composition, and Part 2: Tasks 2A & 2B, Correcting and Explaining Errors/Problems in a Student's Composition.

Part 1: Composition

7. In Part 1 of the paper, candidates are required to write a text. The 2010 task was to write a letter to the Editor responding to a previous letter proposing the promotion of Parkour in Hong Kong to help people become fitter. Candidates were asked to give their opinion on whether Parkour should be promoted and also 'give two other suggestions, with justifications, of suitable activities to improve the (physical) fitness of Hong Kong people.' Markers commented that the test paper was well designed; the topic of Parkour would have been new to many candidates, thus minimising any prior-knowledge effect, but the background information provided in the given text was very clear and informative. The task allowed candidates to demonstrate their English language ability.
8. Candidates' performance is graded on three scales for Part 1: (1) Organisation and Coherence, (2) Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range and (3) Task Completion. While most candidates completed the task successfully, some candidates performed less well, particularly in scales (1) and (2).
9. For scale (1) Organisation and Coherence, some markers found that ideas and information did not always flow in a smooth and natural way and that some answers appeared to lack planning, with links between ideas often missing. In some cases there was an overreliance on anecdotal evidence, which interrupted the logical flow of the answer.
10. In terms of scale (2) Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range, it was quite common for scripts to contain expressions which were inappropriate in the formal context of a letter to the editor. Grammatical problems were also identified, some of which were intrusive and impeded understanding. Below are some common problem areas.
 - Subject-verb disagreement, e.g. "Hong Kong people is unhealthy"; "Different types of sports is available to the Hong Kong public".
 - Inappropriate use of full infinitives when bare infinitives or gerunds should have been used, e.g. "let... to do"; "make ... to do"; "avoid ... to do".
 - Inappropriate spelling, which sometimes impeded understanding.
 - Misuse of cohesive devices. Candidates are reminded that cohesion and coherence are achieved not simply by inserting one or two lexical connectives, such as "moreover" or "besides", but by making sure that the ideas themselves follow on from each other clearly and logically.

11. Markers felt that the task rubric and the background information for the task were clearly worded and laid out. Some candidates made too much use of the given information on Parkour in their answers, however, and some indiscriminately copied sections of the information into their answers. Candidates are reminded to refer to the information provided but not to copy sections of the text.
12. In scale (3) Task Completion, markers felt that most candidates successfully provided two other suggestions of activities that could improve the fitness of Hong Kong people but that sometimes there was inadequate explanation of the suitability of the activities. Below are some common problems on this scale:
 - Candidates did not always justify their suggestions for how Hong Kong people can keep fit.
 - Inconsistency was a problem in some answers. Candidates sometimes agreed that Parkour was not a good idea for Hong Kong at the start of the essay but then recommended it at the end of their answer. Some suggested that Parkour was too dangerous for Hong Kong but then proposed equally dangerous activities like mountaineering and diving.
 - Candidates included suggestions that were not always suitable, e.g. some candidates wrote that elements of Parkour such as jumping over obstacles could be incorporated into regular marathons, with roads being blocked off by walls etc.
 - There was sometimes minimal/insufficient elaboration when providing suggestions and justifications. Candidates could have supported their ideas with, for example, a discussion of the value of their suggested activities.
13. Candidates are reminded to follow the instructions, write within the word limit and not write in the margins.

Part 2: Correcting and explaining errors/problems

14. Part 2 of the Writing Paper is divided into two parts: Task A, correcting errors/problems and Task B, explaining errors/problems. Candidates were given a composition that contains errors/problems and were asked to correct those that appeared in the first part of the composition for Part 2A of the Writing Paper, and to fill in incomplete explanations of some of the errors/problems in the remainder of the composition in Task 2B.
15. Markers felt that the instructions for Part 2 were clearly stated and the composition contained a balanced and fairly comprehensive range of testing items.
16. Markers noted the following common problems in responses to Task 2A:
 - Incorrect spelling of “advertisements” (Item 5(b))
 - Confusion about the use of “seldom” (7(a))

- Inappropriate use of “about” after the verb “discuss” (7(b))
 - Inappropriate use/choice of collocations (e.g. “bring”, “draw”, “gain”, “catch”) to complete the “to... attention” structure (10(a))
 - Inappropriate choice of prepositions to complete the “stand... from” structure (e.g. “up”) (10(b))
17. In Task 2B, candidates were given incomplete explanations of errors/problems. Candidates were asked to fill in the blanks with one or more words so as to make the explanations complete. Here are some examples of the problems in 2B answers:
- Difficulties with explaining the difference between “Is concerned about” and “concerns” (15)
 - Missing meta-language, such as “possessive determiner or adjective / pronoun” in 14(d) and “to/full infinitive” for 16(a)
 - Incorrect spelling of the following words: “quantifier” (12(a)); “noun phrase” (16(b)); “possessive” (14(d)); “conjunction” (19(a))
18. The biggest problem seemed to be Item 12(b), which required candidates to explain the implication of ‘few’, as in ‘almost none’, by indicating that this carries a negative meaning in this context. Many candidates simply wrote “small number” or “not many” which were not deemed to be precise enough for this context. Candidates are strongly encouraged to consider errors/problems from both syntactic and semantic perspectives.
19. Candidates are reminded to check their spelling and to review their answers to make sure that they are logical and grammatically accurate, and that appropriate terminology has been used. Candidates are reminded that they should refrain from using abbreviations and short forms (e.g. prep., adj., vt) in answering Task 2B. They are advised to demonstrate their understanding of the linguistic problems with full spellings of words and terms.

Paper 3 (Listening)

20. This year’s paper consisted of three sets of items on three different listening texts. The first text was a discussion on autism, the second a dialogue on happiness and the third an interview with a teacher who had been teaching in Nepal.
21. As usual, the paper went through a rigorous moderation and pre-testing process. The Moderation Committee considered the content of the three texts to be appropriate, allowing for interesting listening and for meaningful questions of varied types.
22. A variety of task types were included in this paper, which allowed for a range of micro-listening skills to be tested. The paper included blank-filling, table-completion and open-ended questions. There was no evidence that any of these formats was more difficult or easier than others for candidates.

23. There were male and female speakers in the test, with a variety of accents, speaking at normal speed for the types of interaction. The questions on each text demonstrated a range of difficulty.
24. The easiest items
 - 24.1 The easiest item in the first text was Question 12 (i), which was answered correctly by almost all candidates.
 - 24.2 Question 14, the first question of the second text, also proved to be very easy, which is understandable given that the answer required was a basic vocabulary item ('trees').
 - 24.3 Question 23 (iv) ('new things') was answered correctly by 90% of candidates and was the easiest item in the third text.
25. The hardest items
 - 25.1 The hardest item in the first text was Question 6(i). The answer, 'pediatrician', is a low frequency word which proved difficult for candidates to spell.
 - 25.2 Question 16 (vi) was the hardest item in text 2, with only about one third of candidates answering it correctly. Most candidates failed to infer the idea of *transformation*.
 - 25.3 In the final text, the most difficult question was the last one (Question 28), answered correctly by about a quarter of the candidature. Most probably, the problem for candidates was that 'tweak' is an unusual word and could be easily confused with others, such as 'treat'.
26. These easy and difficult items all yielded satisfactory discrimination indices, implying that they were able to distinguish between more and less able candidates.
27. Fixed expressions

It appears that weaker candidates failed to appreciate that some of the answers were fixed expressions. For example, the correct answer to Question 17(ii) was 'peace of mind'. However, many candidates wrote 'piece of mind'. This reveals unfamiliarity with the expression rather than a failure to decode what was said.
28. Discourse structure
 - 28.1 Questions which required the candidates to listen to a stretch of text, and then extract answers only from specific chunks of this text, proved challenging. For example, Question 20 asked why getting from 25 to 35 was a miserable process. The speaker said that people of this age are "scared stiff that, when it's all said and done, they're

not going to achieve anything in life”. The answer was ‘interrupted’ by the aside (‘when it’s all said and done’), which made the task of identifying it correctly more challenging.

- 28.2 Speaker fronting (or emphasis) of information also proved to be a listening challenge for some candidates. For example, Question 26 (ii) required candidates to fill in the blank in the following: ‘things that she used to value, such as a haircut’. The speaker actually says, “while I will always still love a nice haircut, I won’t hold it as one of the most important things”, which has a different information structure and uses a different tense from the phrasing in the question.
- 28.3 Question 24 asked the candidate to complete the sentence beginning ‘According to Judy, it takes a big person to’, and the answer was ‘question their values’. The speaker said: “To come out here and really question your values and question things you used to believe in, it takes a big person to do that”. The challenge is provided by the anaphoric referent (‘that’) coming at the end of the utterance.
29. Many candidates seemed to have been able to understand what the speakers said in general, and wrote something that made sense in the context, even if this was not always precisely the correct answer. An example was Question 6 (iv) where many candidates wrote ‘psychiatrist’ instead of ‘psychologist’.
30. As in previous years, some candidates did not write anything in answer to some of the questions, which meant that there was no chance of getting a mark. Candidates are reminded that there is nothing to be lost by writing down what they think they have heard as this may turn out to be correct: the mark will be awarded as long as the candidate’s answer is considered to be a misspelling of the required answer rather than a completely different word.
31. Advice to candidates
- Read the tasks carefully in the time allowed and consider exactly what it is that you are being asked to listen for.
 - Check the number of marks allotted to a particular question as this will give an indication of the number of points you are expected to make.
 - Make sure responses are comprehensibly written and that spelling is as accurate as possible.
 - Pay attention to discourse markers such as ‘however’ to mark contrast and ‘previously’ as a time marker.
 - Listen to a wide variety of source materials in English in order to increase your awareness of different genres and text-types.

Paper 4 (Speaking)

32. Paper 4 consists of two parts. There are two tasks in Part 1, Task 1A Reading Aloud a Prose Passage and Task 1B Recounting an Experience/Presenting Arguments; and one task in Part 2, Group Interaction.
33. Candidates are tested on six scales of performance: (1) Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation; (2) Reading Aloud with Meaning; (3) Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range; (4) Organisation and Cohesion; (5) Interacting with Peers; and (6) Discussing Educational Matters with Peers. Five minutes are given for both Tasks 1A and 1B, with Task 1B beginning immediately after Task 1A finishes. After Task 1B is over, candidates are asked to go back to the preparation room where they wait for a short while before returning to the assessment room for Part 2 – Group Interaction, in which they discuss a topic of relevance to the educational context of Hong Kong. The Group Discussion lasts for either 10 minutes (if there are three candidates in a group) or for 13 minutes (if there are four candidates in a group).

Part 1: Task 1A Reading Aloud a Prose Passage

34. In this task, candidates are assessed on two criteria, ‘Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation’ and ‘Reading Aloud with Meaning’. The passages that the candidates were required to read were extracted from a wide variety of sources, reflecting types of reading candidates would likely encounter in a teaching job. The passages were chosen to allow candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to convey meaning. Care was taken to ensure that each passage was linguistically appropriate and contained elements of narration, dialogue/conversation and description.
35. The passages were long enough for accurate assessment to take place, but short enough to ensure that candidates had adequate time for Task 1B. Some candidates, however, read the passages very slowly and, as a result, had problems with time management in the following task. Occasionally, candidates would ‘perform’ the prose passage by adding in extra, unnecessary, pauses, thus slowing down their reading, or by intentionally reading too dramatically and using more time than necessary. Candidates are advised to make sure that they pay attention to the timer so that they leave themselves adequate time for all the assessment tasks.
36. Pronunciation of individual sounds was generally accurate. Pronunciation problems occurred at the word level, however. Problems occurred with stress being misplaced as well as with the transposition of letters and even larger elements of a word, such as affixes. This was more in evidence with unfamiliar words. Issues of vowel substitution occurred where candidates used the wrong vowel in a word. Consonant clusters, particularly those at the end of words, were problematic for many candidates. Words that end in ~ed were often poorly pronounced.
37. At the sentence level, misunderstanding of areas such as stress and intonation were core problems and created communication difficulties. Candidates occasionally stressed the wrong words, or used too much stress

and/or inappropriate intonation, or spoke all words with the same degree of stress. This meant that the meaning of the phrase or sentence was often not adequately conveyed. Stress and intonation continue to be areas of weakness for many candidates.

38. Many candidates were not successful in capturing the tone of the passages; mood, action or dramatisation required by the texts were not transmitted in their readings, and this often seriously affected the transmission of meaning. As many texts require candidates to handle different registers, candidates are advised to pay attention to how different voices, tones, moods can be used to emphasise meaning.
39. Some candidates did not link words effectively enough and this led to a breakdown in understanding because candidates were using a word-by-word style of delivery.
40. It is recommended that candidates make themselves aware of the importance of word, phrasal and sentence stress as well as how tone, register and intonation affect meaning and that they spend time identifying and practising these elements.

Part 1: Task 1B Recounting an Experience/Presenting Arguments

41. In this task, candidates are assessed on two criteria, 'Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range' and 'Organisation and Cohesion'. Most of the topics were opinion questions about issues in Hong Kong. In general, candidates were able to talk on the given topic for the time required and were able to demonstrate their competence by producing accurate, cohesive, spontaneous and meaningful discourse.
42. In terms of organisation, some candidates relied upon a 'script' that they had written during the preparation time. This led them into the problematic area of speaking in a more written form than a spoken form of English, with full forms used, rather than contractions, for example. This may have happened because candidates misunderstood that semi-formal speech means adopting the vocabulary and structures of formal, written English, which is perhaps the form most familiar to candidates.
43. After the scripted portion of the talk, candidates often went on to talk about other issues with little or no relationship to what had been said before. The organisation of the scripted pieces was usually overreliant on simple connectors such as 'and' to move from one point to another.
44. Candidates who relied solely upon a scripted piece usually had substantial time remaining at the end of Task 1B. Examiners frequently asked these candidates to continue their talk. Candidates who did so often stumbled and ended up simply repeating themselves. It is suggested that rather than writing complete sentences or paragraphs, candidates make brief notes, preferably bullet points, during the preparation time and refer to these when talking. In this way, they are likely to have enough material to allow them to speak for the allotted time; but, more importantly, their talk is more likely to

have a clearer structure, remain relevant to the topic throughout, and be in the right register.

45. General coherence is an area that could also be improved. The importance of sequencing cannot be over-stressed; to express ideas clearly, information could be ordered thematically, developmentally or chronologically.
46. Candidates should not be overly concerned by time as the examiners will allow them to conclude their topic if necessary. There is no pressure to use all of the time available either; the aim of the assessment is to sample a candidate's English in a particular discourse mode. If examiners ask if they would like to continue talking, candidates can decline.
47. Candidates appeared unaware of the importance of using complex sentences in Task 1B. There were times when candidates did not use complex structures, such as conditional sentences, for example, nor did they use a variety of structures. In these cases the examiner cannot know if the candidate simply prefers to use simple structures or is a relatively weak candidate who can only use simple structures.
48. Of some concern was the limited use of tenses. Some candidates did not take the opportunity to demonstrate a range of tenses. In questions that required presentation of an argument, for example, many candidates used the present tense only. With questions that asked candidates to recount an experience (where the past tense is needed) a lot of the candidates were not able to use this tense correctly. It is suggested that candidates develop an understanding of the importance of tenses as communication tools in English.

Part 2: Group Interaction

49. In Part 2 of the paper, candidates discuss an education-related topic or situation and are assessed on the criteria of 'Interacting with Peers' and 'Discussing Educational Matters with Peers'. Candidates often performed better on this task than Task 1A or Task 1B.
50. For 'Discussing Educational Matters with Peers', candidates are expected to provide ideas and/or suggestions that are relevant to the topic under discussion and are internally coherent so that both the examiners and the other candidates can understand them. The topics were all related to the school context and designed to generate talking points. On the whole, candidates were able to contribute relevant ideas in a manner that could be understood.
51. Generally, candidates were able to take part in a conversation, as opposed to just giving their own opinions, and so did quite well in terms of the criterion 'Interacting with Peers'. As is often the case, candidates were generally able to express opinions and agree/disagree with others. However, formulaic responses, such as "I agree with you", should be used carefully: often, candidates would just say "I agree with you" without saying why, qualifying or adding to the previous contribution. Candidates should try to become more aware of the natural flow of conversations, in which topics are

explored and expanded upon.

52. Another area of concern was the lack of conversational strategies. Areas such as interrupting, clarifying and asking for clarification were used infrequently. It could be that candidates believed that a sequence of individual responses was a more appropriate way of having a group discussion, as frequently the first 5 minutes consisted solely of turn-taking of this kind. Candidates and groups who relied solely upon this strategy rarely entered into a 'natural' conversation. As a result, conversations tended to be stilted and stayed on one or two points only.
53. Pleasingly, only a few candidates attempted to dominate the conversation, behaviour which is neither courteous nor professional. There were candidates who remained quiet for long portions of the group discussion, which made it difficult for examiners to make fair judgements about their range of conversational strategies. Occasionally, groups drifted away from the topic under discussion.
54. Conversational strategies such as giving acknowledgement, clarifying, agreeing or disagreeing, interrupting, confirming and summarising are characteristic of professional discussions and candidates are advised to take every chance to engage in this kind of discourse.

Paper 5 (Classroom Language Assessment) ²

55. A total of 310 candidates were assessed between December 2009 and April 2010. The attainment rate was high, with 93.9% of the candidates achieving the proficiency level.
56. Candidates are assessed on four scales: (1) Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range; (2) Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation; (3) Language of Interaction; and (4) Language of Instruction.
57. Overall, candidates' performance was satisfying, with the majority of candidates demonstrating a strong sense of language awareness as well as a good understanding of the descriptors. Some in fact achieved a very high standard in both accuracy and fluency and showed a good level of confidence and competence in using the language. Comments on the individual areas of assessment are given below.
58. Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range
 - 58.1 Candidates in general demonstrated a good grasp of basic grammar and were able to use language that was appropriate to the level of the students. The outstanding candidates also provided a good language model for their students, using a wide range of structures, vocabulary and idiomatic expressions.

² Administered by the Education Bureau, which contributed this section of the Assessment Report.

- 58.2 While a higher degree of grammar accuracy among candidates was noted in recent years, some complex structures still proved to be tricky for candidates whose use of structure was less precise. In particular, indirect questions remained a prevalent problem and questions such as “Do you know what is a priest?” and “Can you tell me how do we change active voice to passive voice?” were just as common. Sometimes, when direct questions were needed, teachers asked questions like “How many verses there are?” and “Why she came so late?”
- 58.3 Other common mistakes made by the weaker candidates mainly involved missing/redundant articles and prepositions, confusion over singulars and plurals, inconsistent/wrong use of tenses and subject-verb disagreement. First language interference and inadequate mastery of correct usage also accounted for a number of grammatically inaccurate utterances. These errors might appear as a wrong choice of word, as in the following sentences: “A new character is introduced in this chapter. How [What] is she like?”; “You don’t want a receding hairline. I don’t want one also [either].”; at the start of the lesson, the teacher asked, “How did you go [come] to school this morning?”; or as faulty structures like “Think about what are the points you would share with your classmates.”

59. Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation

- 59.1 Pronunciation of sounds, sentence stress and intonation patterns were generally accurate. There were in fact an encouraging number of candidates displaying not only accuracy but also an excellent command of the fine variations in tone to convey the intended meaning.
- 59.2 One cause for the unnatural-sounding patterns in the speech of average candidates was the inappropriate stress placed on the weak and unstressed syllables/words. This often involved the schwa /ə/ being stressed in words like “pencil” “method” and “correct”; and in sentences such as “I bought this present for my mother.”
- 59.3 Some recurring errors among the weaker candidates included the weak distinction between long and short vowels as in words like “wheel/will”; “feel/fill”; and the articulation of particular vowel sounds including /æ/ in “bag”, /e/ in “berry” and “beg”, and /u:/ in “cute”. Some consonant sounds like /v/, /dʒ/ and /ð/, consonant clusters such as /bl/, /pl/ and /fl/ and final consonants as in “line”, “chill”, “music” and “sing” also proved tricky for them. These individual errors alone might not cause too big a problem in communication but if more than one appeared in the candidate’s speech, meaning was occasionally impeded and it put strain on the listener.

60. Language of Interaction

- 60.1 Most candidates were able to employ appropriate language to interact with their students and the process of eliciting and acknowledging students' responses was generally done in a timely and natural manner. The stronger candidates also demonstrated an ability to use a range of interactive language with ease, giving concrete feedback on students' responses, using prompting and probing questions to negotiate teaching and learning and engaging in extended dialogues with students on a range of topics. Sometimes, however, noted among the less confident candidates was the tendency to use the formal written form of the language instead of the natural spoken form. In some lessons, teachers clung so much on to formal written English that they sounded a bit pompous and unnatural, particularly in daily informal exchanges with students. As a result, some utterances, though grammatically correct, might sound awkward. For example, on one occasion, when the teacher told the class what they would do in the second half of the lesson, he announced "A dictation will be conducted...", adopting a register far too formal for the situation.
- 60.2 Candidates also showed a stronger awareness of asking open-ended questions. However, on some occasions, the candidates failed to respond appropriately to unexpected responses from students and, as a result, interaction came to a halt, as illustrated in the following example: "Today we'll talk about Ocean Park. Do you like going to the Ocean Park?" "No," replied the students. This negative response was not properly followed up and the teacher just went on with the prepared notes. In some cases, candidates' inability to handle spontaneous interaction, especially one that was unrelated to classroom routine or the candidate's prepared topic, also led to some valid questions from students being ignored and dismissed.

61. Language of Instruction

- 61.1 In most lessons, the language used was appropriate and the discourse was coherent. Most candidates were able to give clear instructions on classroom routines and conduct learning activities using natural language. When explaining new words and language items, the stronger candidates also made commendable efforts to give clear and precise presentations characterised by a logical flow of ideas and suitable examples. There was also the appropriate use of signalling devices to draw students' attention to various stages of the lesson in general.
- 61.2 Occasionally noted among the weaker candidates was the lack of spontaneity in their speech as they tended to rely too much on the textbook and handouts and read from prepared notes or even scripts. In these lessons, very often, valuable language teaching opportunities were not exploited to the full.