3.0 PART ONE: ANALYSIS OF DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

3.1 ENGLISH (101)

3.1.1 GENERAL CANDIDATES PERFORMANCE

The table below shows the performance of candidates in the three papers offered in 2014 in the KCSE English Examination. Data for the years, 2011, 2012 and 2013 is also given for comparison.

Table 9: Candidates' Overall Performance in English (101) in the last four years

Year	Paper	Candidature	Maximum Score	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
2011	1	410,949	60	25.73 (42.88%)	8.41
	2		80	28.53 (35.66%)	12.46
	3		60	18.60 (31.0%)	7.04
	overall		200	72.84 (36.42%)	25.14
2012	1	434,127	60	28.88 (48.13%)	9.20
	2		80	28.77 (35.96%)	12.91
	3		60	18.11 (30.1%)	7.61
	overall		200	75.76 (37.88%)	27.34
2013	1	445,757	60	21.67 (36.12%)	5.42
	2		80	17.98 (22.48%)	11.20
	3		60	15.30 (25.50%)	6.16
	overall		200	54.94 (27.47%)	20.31
2014	1	482,499	60	29.02 (48.37%)	8.80
	2		80	28.70 (35.88%)	11.26
	3		60	19.97 (33.28%)	6.30
	overall		200	77.68 (38.84%)	24.28

From the table above, it can be observed that:

(i) Performance in 2014 was better than that of 2013. A glance at the means column indicates that all the papers registered significant improvement. However, overall performance still falls short of the ideal mean of 100 (50%), calling for creativity and innovation in teaching and preparing candidates for examinations.

(ii) Performance of candidates in Paper 1 improved by 7.35 points from 21.67 in 2013 to 29.02 in 2014.

(iii) Performance in Paper 2 improved by 10.72 points from 17.98 in 2013 to 28.70 in 2014.

(iv) In Paper 3 candidates' performance improved by 4.67 points from 15.30 in 2013 to 19.97 in 2014.

The section that follows looks at the performance in individual papers and highlights the difficulties encountered by candidates in the questions that were poorly performed.

3.1.2 English Paper 1 (101/1)

The paper was reported to have been well set and appropriate for the target candidates. Observations on the candidates' performance are as follows:

Question 1

Question 1 tested the candidate's ability to write accurately using the right format and style. Majority of the candidates were at ease with writing an informal letter but some included elements of an official letter. The question afforded the candidates an opportunity to showcase their ability to express themselves in the language but some wrote too briefly to display their mastery of the language. The key to better performance is providing the candidates with plenty of practice in all types of functional writing.

Question 2

The cloze test was rated as accessible to the target candidates but as usual, many were unable to supply appropriate words to convey intended meaning. The test requires the candidate to read through the passage with understanding, predicting the missing words using contextual, syntactic and discourse clues provided. Unfortunately, candidates' answers reveal that a majority of them were unable to make intelligent guesses as they treated each gap as a discrete item. Some candidates failed to score because instead of filing each gap with an appropriate word as required, they provided two responses one of which was incorrect.

Teachers should train candidates to read a passage severally without supplying the words to get the gist of the topic and grammatical flow. Only then should they fill the gaps with the appropriate words. They should also advise students and candidates especially, to read instructions carefully as they form part of the examination.

Question 3e

The question tested turn taking in conversation. The candidates were expected to complete the given conversation by filling in the blank spaces. Some candidates got the correct responses and so scored highly. However, the weaker candidates failed to anticipate the turns and supplied irrelevant responses. In addition, many candidates found it difficult to communicate clearly because they could not avoid gross errors of grammar, spelling and punctuation.

3.1.3 English Paper 2 (101/2)

The paper was reported to have been the right level for the candidates and to have tested all skills in a balanced manner. Although the performance was better than that of 2013, it is still disappointing as it falls short of the percentage mean of about 50%.

Question 1& 2: Comprehension skills

Question 1

Majority of the candidates performed well in this question but many were unable to handle the vocabulary items: some gave alternative words with little attempt to explain the meaning of the items. Candidates should be encouraged to explain the meaning using their own words. Often, many give alternative words that do not quite capture the meaning of the given words as used in the passage. An analysis of candidates' work revealed many errors of punctuation, spelling and grammar. Given this is a language paper, these mistakes attracted penalties.

Question 2

The second Comprehension was based on the novel, *The River and the Source.* Candidates were required to not only use the information in the extract given but also to use their knowledge of the set text.

Majority of the candidates had not read the novel well enough to place the extract in its immediate context as required in 2(a)

Questions 2(c) and 2(g) were the worst performed. Both required candidates to infer information but most of them were unable to reason beyond what was presented in the passage. Some candidates merely lifted chunks of information from the passage to answer the questions. This attracted penalties.

Again, vocabulary items proved difficult to most candidates.

Teachers should train their candidates to make inferences and deductions from clues given in comprehension texts. They should also encourage reading with understanding and train students to respond to questions in a manner that displays an understanding of the demands of the given tasks.

Question 4

Section *(a) and (d)* proved difficult to most candidates. Section *(a)* required candidates to rewrite sentences according to given instructions. Besides the comprehension of the input sentence, the candidates were needed to be conversant with the rules of grammar governing the changes. This was evidently lacking in the work of most of the candidates.
Section (c) required candidates to replace the underlined idiomatic expressions with words of similar meaning. Many candidates scored zero on the two items of the test.

Teachers should cover all the grammar topics and encourage learners to use language in different contexts.

3.1.3   English Paper 3 (101/3)

The paper was reported to have been appropriately pitched with the language being within the level of the candidates. There was a significant improvement in performance but the paper mean of 33.28% is still below the ideal.

Question 1: Imaginative Composition

Both questions 1(a) and 1(b) required creativity, originality and imagination. Question 1(a) required the candidates to write a story beginning with the input sentence: "When we arrived at the crime scene..." Some candidates produced interesting pieces but then there continued to be those who wrote their compositions without using the input sentence or those who wrote unrelated stories and then simply tagged on the input sentence. Question 1(b) required knowledge of the saying "Charity begins at home", and the capacity to compose a story illustrating the meaning. Some candidates failed to interpret the saying well and wrote irrelevant pieces. Memorized pieces were also treated as irrelevant. Such accounts were penalized accordingly.

Teachers should teach composition writing skills and provide learners with ample practice.

Essays Based On Set Texts

The questions proved quite demanding because the candidates lacked both the essay development skills and the content to illustrate their claims. Many candidates displayed little knowledge of the texts by giving scanty illustrations. There were also some who failed to interpret the tasks correctly leading to irrelevant narrations.

Question 2

Candidates were required to write an essay illustrating that though Natella abashwili is the biological mother of Michael, she does not act in a manner befitting a mother. In contrast Grusha though not a biological mother puts Michael's needs before her own; thus, being a biological mother is only a first step. The real moral challenge is to be motherly. Most candidates failed to develop the contrast. Illustrative detail was painfully weak and many lacked essay development skills.

Performance in this paper remains depressed. Once again teachers are called upon to teach composition writing and ensure that learners know their texts well. Candidates should also be given ample practice in essay writing.