



3.0 ENGLISH (101)

The KCSE English language examination papers test the candidates' knowledge of the language. They test the candidates' ability to comprehend the input, mainly the written word, their mastery of grammar and communicative skills as elicited in their written work as well as their ability to respond to literary cues and to express such response in writing. In addition, the papers test listening and speaking skills in written form. Such things as *pronunciation, stress and intonation, conversation and performance aspects of language* are covered as required by the new syllabus.

Three papers were offered in the year 2007 KCSE English language examination, namely: -

Paper 1 (101/1) : Testing functional skills.

Paper 2 (101/2): Testing Comprehension, Literary Appreciation and Grammar.

Paper 3 (101/3): Testing Conventional Composition and Essays based on Set Texts.

3.1 CANDIDATES' GENERAL PERFORMANCE

Table 3 below shows the performance of candidates in the three papers in the year 2007 KCSE English language examination. Data for the year 2006 is also provided for comparison.

Table 3: Candidates' Overall Performance in English in the Years 2006 & 2007

Year	Paper	Candidature	Maximum Score	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
2006	1		60	30.71 (51.18%)	7.83
	2		80	29.88 (37.35%)	12.66
	3		60	18.93 (31.55%)	7.95
	Overall	241,983	200	79.53 (39.76%)	25.00
2007	1		60	26.11 (43.51%)	6.86
	2		80	34.95 (43.69%)	12.76
	3		60	18.34 (30.57%)	7.34
	Overall	273,066	200	79.40 (39.70%)	24.00

From the table above, the following observations can be made:

- 3.1.1 The subject recorded a percentage mean of **39.70%** in the year 2007 compared to that of **39.76%** in the year 2006.
- 3.1.2 The mean for *paper 2 (101/2)* improved by **5.07** points from **29.88** (representing **37.35%** of the total mark) to **34.95** (representing **43.68%** of the total mark), a percentage increase of **6.33%**.
- 3.1.3 *Paper 1 (101/1)* recorded a percentage mean of **43.51%** in the year 2007 down from **51.18%** in the year 2006, while *paper 3(101/3)* recorded a mean of **30.56%** in the year 2007 against **31.55%** in the year 2006.

An examination of the individual papers and what they entailed as well as the performance of the candidates showing the problems encountered and the weaknesses displayed in the candidates' work is given here below.

3.2 PAPER 1 (101/1)

This is the paper that displayed the greatest drop in performance as attested by the drop of 7.67 percentage points. This was attributed to some loss of marks in question 1 and the dismal performance on the cloze test question (question 2).

Question 1

You are the Chairperson of the Creative Writing Club in your school. The club would like assistance in publishing the winning entry in a recent competition. Write a letter to a publisher asking them to consider the book for publication. Remember to write through the Headteacher.

In your letter, include the following:

- the title of the book and name of author;
 - a brief description of what the book is about;
 - why it is important for the book to be published.
-

This question required candidates to write an official letter to a publisher requesting them to publish a winning entry in their creative writing club adducing convincing reasons why the entry merits publication. The candidate was expected to display mastery of the official letter format and use the right tone and exercise originality in thinking up the title, themes and plot of the entry. This latter task proved difficult for majority of the candidates.

Weaknesses

While many candidates were at ease with the format, except for the requirement that they write through the head teacher, almost as many candidates used the friendly letter format. Most compositions were sketchy, unconvincing and could not create a 'text'. Some simply wrote synopses of their set texts or texts already in existence, that is, already published works.

Advice to Teachers

In addition to teaching letter formats, teachers need to train candidates in the ability to be creative by use of ample practice in hypothetical but probable situations they are likely to meet in the course of their student or later life.

Question 2

Read the passage below and fill in each blank space with an appropriate word.

Good conversationalists are not born that way. They 1 their skill through patience, preparation and practice 2 a long period of time. Some people find it 3 to talk than others, but do not confuse talk with conversation – that is, good conversation.

There are all kinds of conversations, 4 from poor to excellent.

Unfortunately, some of the worst conversations come from those who find it easiest to

talk. 5 the very ease with which some people talk may make them
 6 to what they say and unaware that they may say 7
 much.

It lies within the power of each one of us to develop quality in our conversational ability.
 However, one has to take some 8 You may need to force yourself to take
 part in conversations, even though you have 9 to contribute at first. If
 you cannot talk, listen. If you don't understand, ask questions. Secondly, enlarge your
 storehouse of knowledge every day. Never let a day go 10 without
 learning something new: talk more with people; read; listen to the radio; watch television; be
 more observant of everything and everybody around you; travel as much as you can; start a
 hobby or two; develop common interests with friends and classmates.

This was a cloze text question requiring of the candidate integrated *grammatical, vocabulary* and *comprehension* skills, called into play at once. To be an accomplished reader, one has to have the grammar and ability to predict the structure and the vocabulary in accordance with the collocation of words.

Weaknesses

Candidates continue to find this task difficult. Majority of the candidates could not perform in this task. Indeed, many scored zero on this item. Like in the previous year, candidates could not read with understanding and supply the missing words. Primary school examinations have this task. In fact, the KCPE examination task is made more difficult by provision of distractors requiring more analysis of context and grammar.

Expected Responses

1	acquire/develop/perfect	6	indifferent
2	over	7	too
3	easier	8	steps/initiative/measures
4	ranging	9	little
5	but	10	by

Advice to Teachers

Teachers should advise candidates to read the passage severally without supplying the words to get the gist of the topic and grammatical flow. Only then should they attempt to complete the task with the appropriate words with regard to the *grammatical, semantic* and *discourse aspects* of the passage.

Question 3(a)

(a) Read the story below and answer the questions that follow:

Once upon a time, there lived a young woman who ran away from home to secretly marry her warrior lover out in the wilderness. The warrior directed the young woman to a place in the forest where he would meet her. He said to her, "When you get to a fork along the path take the right path." Then the warrior went ahead to await her arrival in the forest.

The young woman took off, and when she got to the fork that the warrior had mentioned, she followed the left path, forgetting which path the warrior had instructed her to follow.

As the girl walked on, she came upon an ogre who said to her, "Hey, young woman, where are you going? Do you have anything to say, now that I'm going to eat you?" The girl answered in song:

Not here my dear
Let us go to the water hole
Where you can eat me
And have a drink
Oh my dear warrior, where was it?

And so it happened that this was very bushy country. The ogre led the young woman on, and when they got to another spot, he said to her, "I am now going to eat you here." The girl again broke into song, urging him not to eat her.

They went farther on, and the young woman kept hoping that the warrior would hear her voice. As they walked on, the ogre asked the young girl: "Shall I eat you here?" The girl sang again:

Not here my dear
Let us go to the water hole
Where you can eat me
And have a drink
Oh my dear warrior, where was it?

But the warrior had still not heard her. When they got to a cave by a river, the ogre collected branches and leaves on which to place the young woman's flesh after he had slaughtered her. When he brought one type of leaf, the girl objected to having her flesh laid on ordinary leaves, preferring the sweet-scented leaves of the *matasia* plant. The ogre brought another kind of leaf, but the girl also rejected it, until eventually the sweet-smelling leaves of *matasia* plant were brought. When the ogre asked the girl whether those were the right type of leaves, she said: "Yes, these are the ones." The ogre then laid the leaves down on the ground and lit a big fire. All this while, the girl was continuously singing the same song.

Just when the ogre was about to jump on the young woman, the warrior suddenly emerged from the bush. The young woman said to the ogre, "It is now your skinny flesh that will be laid on those leaves." The warrior killed the ogre and placed him on the bed of leaves and took the girl away. And that is the end of the story.

(Adapted from "A Young Woman and an Ogre" in *Oral Literature of the Maasai*, by Naomi Kipury. Nairobi: EAEP 1983.)

- (i) If you were performing this story, how would you say the words of the warrior?
- (ii) What could the warrior lover have done to improve on his giving of directions.
- (iii) How would you deliver the first speech of the ogre?
- (iv) The song is sung for both the ogre and the warrior lover. How would you perform it to show this?
- (v) As the story teller, how would you say the sentence: "Just when the ogre was about to jump on the young woman, the warrior suddenly emerged from the bush."?
- (vi) How do you think the audience would react when the warrior lover arrives?

This question tested various performance aspects of the oral literature narrative given as well as the involvement of the envisaged audience of the narrative.

Weaknesses

The candidates who did not do well in this question simply listed the various devices without attempting to neither explain nor relate them to the narrative.

Expected Responses

- (i) In a low, conspiratorial tone; and use a pointing gesture with the right hand.
- (ii) Considering the excitement in the girl, he should have given more landmarks, including types of trees, to assist her, just in case she forgot to turn right.
- (iii)
 - In a deep, guttural, evil-sounding tone.
 - The first question in a falling intonation (question starts in a wh-word).
 - The second question in a rising intonation.
 - With finger-pointing, threatening gestures.
- (iv) The first four lines in a soothing tone to lull the ogre into waiting and the last line in a higher pitch so that the warrior's lover can hear.
- (v) The first part before the comma said in a lower, more subdued tone; the second-part said more quickly, more forcefully and at a higher pitch - to show that the rescue has come.
- (vi) With a sigh of relief, clapping, celebration, jubilation, applause.

Advice to Teachers

Teachers should expose candidates to all types of oral genres and in addition to explaining the features, encourage live performances and relate the performance aspects to actual features arising from the performances and genres. In this way, the candidates will learn the applications and avoid stock generalization.

Question 3 (b)

Identify and number any five pairs of words that are pronounced the same.

plane	mad	plain	mourn
burrow	cat	berry	mud
bury	you	bred	cut
pull	father	pool	ewe
bread	moan	fool	farther
further	see	full	sea

This question tested the ability of the candidates to pronounce words. Various words were given and candidates asked to identify only five of the six pairs of words pronounced in a similar way.

Weaknesses

Few candidates were able to handle the task as required, that is, identify only five pairs. Those who correctly identified five pairs scored in all. Those who identified correctly all the six still scored five marks. Those who went beyond the five and had incorrect ones lost as many marks as they were deemed to be guessing.

Expected Responses

plain	bury	you	father	see	bread
plane	berry	ewe	farther	sea	bred

Advice to Teachers

Teachers should impress upon the candidates the necessity of obeying the instructions given in a question as they form part of the examination. Apart from supplying the correct responses, the candidates that pass examinations or those that do not suffer penalties keep to the instructions.

Question 3 (e)

The following is a conversation between a father and his daughter. Identify eight shortcomings in the father's listening skills. (8 marks)

DAUGHTER: (*Shortly after having arrived home from school*) Good afternoon, Daddy.

FATHER: (*Sitting complacently in the sofa, reading a newspaper. Looking up . . .*) Good afternoon. (*Resumes reading*)

DAUGHTER: (*Holding out her school report form*) Daddy, I'm excited. My class-teacher said I was the best improved. I was . . .

FATHER: Oh, you were? Me, I used to be number one. I was absolutely unbeatable.

DAUGHTER: Chemistry has been a particular headache (*now looking at the report form which she thought her father would want to see*), but this time . . .

FATHER: (*Stretching his arms, looking preoccupied*) Chemistry for me was particularly easy. I never scored anything less than 90%.

DAUGHTER: Dad, I was going to tell you that this time . . .

FATHER: (*Absent-mindedly*) By the way, where is your mum?

DAUGHTER: Mum is in the garden picking vegetables. But Dad, you're not listening to my story. I was telling you about Chemistry.

FATHER: You mean you have a story about Chemistry? Chemistry is not about stories. It is hard science.

DAUGHTER: It's about my improvement . . .

FATHER: (*Laughing*) Me, it wasn't a matter of improvement. I was always at the top of the class.

DAUGHTER: Daddy, I give up. You're not listening.

FATHER: (*Looking surprised*) Listening? I heard you: you were talking about improvement in Chemistry, weren't you?

DAUGHTER: Anyway, Dad. Thank you for paying attention. Enjoy your newspaper.

FATHER: Oh, yes. I'm reading an interesting story about politics.

This question required candidates to identify shortcomings in listening skills of an interlocutor in a conversation between a father and a daughter. The question is specific and all the candidate was to do was to recognize the flaws in each of the eight responses as pertains to conversational etiquette.

Weaknesses

Candidates seemed not to understand the principle of good conversation. Some did not even know the word "shortcomings" and so did not address the task.

Expected Responses

- Does not prepare to listen; does not adopt a listening posture.
- Interrupts several times; does not adhere to the rules of turn-taking in the conversation.
- Does not empathize or put himself in the shoes of his daughter in order to appreciate where she is coming from.
- Full of his own self-importance; this prevents him from reaching out to his daughter.
- Absent-mindedness; changes the topic abruptly, thereby interrupting the flow of the conversation.
- Preconceived ideas about chemistry; doesn't give daughter chance to explain.
- Unwilling to see his own shortcomings as far as listening skills are concerned; when he says "I heard you". He believes he was listening.
- Insensitive; does not realize he has hurt his daughter by not listening to her.

Advice to Teachers

Teachers need to teach the four skills of English including speaking. Listening and speaking aspects cover a large section of the syllabus and need to be given the emphasis they deserve in teaching time and coverage. Etiquette and turn taking in conversation need to be emphasized.

3.2 PAPER 2 (101/2)

Performance in this paper improved greatly from a mean of 29.88 (representing 37.35%) to 34.95 (representing 43.68%). The standard deviation for the paper however remained more or less the same.

Question 1

Read the passage below and then answer the questions that follow.

You may think that expecting food to change your life is too much to ask. But have you considered that eating the right food at the right time will increase your energy, help you manage weight and ward off major illnesses?

Researchers have found that eating a meal with plenty of protein leaves you feeling more satisfied for longer when compared to a meal loaded with low-quality carbohydrates. Your body takes longer to digest protein, leading to a gradual increase in blood sugar. The high-protein breakfast will therefore carry you through the morning and, more importantly, through your tea break. Many high-carbohydrate meals are absorbed quickly and send blood sugar on a roller coaster ride, taking your appetite with it and depleting your energy.

Many foods contain antioxidants, but fruits and vegetables may be the richest source. Behaving like chemical warriors, antioxidants neutralise molecules known as free radicals before they damage arteries and body cells. This protects you from heart diseases, high blood pressure, cancer and diabetes. You can now see why antioxidant foods should be consumed in generous portions.

Actually, forget pills – antioxidants work best when consumed in foods. In fact, nutritionists recommend that we eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. It's less daunting than it sounds: a portion equals a piece of fruit, three tablespoons of cooked vegetables or a glass of fresh juice.

And do you desire to relieve yourself of some **baggage**? Calcium is the latest weight-loss star to appear on the scene. Scientists stumbled on its magic by accident. From a study that measured the blood pressure of obese people, it was discovered that those who took one large tub of yoghurt a day in their diet lost an average of eleven pounds of body fat in one year, even though they did not eat less.

A follow-up study found that people on a high-calcium diet lost more weight and fat than did people on a low-calcium diet – and again, both consumed the same number of calories. Researchers believe calcium encourages fat cells to stop “getting fatter”. Instead, the cells burn extra fat without you having to go anywhere near a gymnasium.

It probably sounds strange to say that you can eat more in order to lose weight. Obviously, the question you should ask immediately is, “Eat more of what?” We are talking about foods rich in fibre. They have what is referred to as low-energy density; that translates to few calories relative to weight. This means that you can **down a mountain** without fear of calorie overload.

Fibre also aids weight loss because it’s filling. Most high-fibre foods take a lot of chewing, triggering your body’s fullness sensors. Moreover, you absorb the food more slowly so you feel full longer.

Will the wonders of food ever cease? Not if researchers in nutrition keep up their pace. Let them keep the good news flowing – such as the fact that we don’t have to starve ourselves to lose weight and keep diseases at bay.

(Adapted from *Reader’s Digest*, January 2004.)

Question 1 (c)

Explain how free radicals contribute to the occurrence of high blood pressure and cancer.

This question required candidates to relate the occurrence of high blood pressure to free radicals – that is, the role they play in causing the condition. Some candidates could not see the connection.

Expected Responses

Free radicals, if not neutralized, damage arteries and body cells. It is these damaged arteries and body cells that cause high blood pressure and cancer.

Advice to Teachers

Teachers should train candidates to read contextual clues. The word “*This*” refers back to the activity of the antioxidants which neutralize free radicals.

Question 1 (e)

“In fact, nutritionists recommend that we eat five portions of fruit and vegetable a day.”

Rewrite the sentence above as a question without changing the meaning, beginning: Don’t . . .

This was a grammar item requiring candidates to rewrite the identified sentence in the positive declarative to negative interrogative.

Weaknesses

This proved rather tricky to the poor students.

Expected Responses

Don't nutritionists, in fact, recommend that we eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day?

Advice to Teachers

Teachers should teach all aspects of grammar and sentence construction.

Question 1 (f)

What is the attitude of the author towards calcium as a weight-cutting measure?

This required candidates to infer the attitude of the author from the information presented. Candidates had to use attitudinal adjectives as well as illustrate their claims to get awarded the full marks.

Weaknesses

Some candidates could not read the attitude from the information. Some got the attitude right but did not illustrate their answers. Some lost marks by leaving out parts that were integral to the meaning, such as, "*in fact*".

Expected Responses

The attitude of the author is one of admiration, marvel/fascination/wonderment. He is highly impressed by the effectiveness of calcium as a weight-cutting measure for he refers to it as a 'star' and says it has some magic.

Advice to Teachers

Teachers should teach all aspects of sentence reconstruction and provide ample practice.

Question 1 (h)

Identify an instance of irony in the passage.

This question required candidates to identify an instance of irony in the passage.

Weaknesses

Most candidates are simply put off by the sight of the word "*irony*". The author clearly signals the irony by stating, "*It is probably strange to say....*" Yet many candidates were not able to notice the fact that one could "*eat more in order to lose weight!*"

Expected Responses

The irony is that you can actually eat more in order to lose weight. Usually, eating more leads to weight gain.

Advice to Teachers

Candidates get scared of such literary terms simply because such terms are never explained and illustrated by adequate examples in use and practiced enough.

Question 1 (i)

Explain the meaning of the following expressions as used in the passage.

daunting

baggage

down a mountain

This was a vocabulary in use test. Candidates were tested on their ability to infer meanings of words and phrases in context.

Weaknesses

Most candidates were unable to get the meaning of the word “*daunting*”.

Expected Responses

- *daunting*: difficult, challenging.
- *baggage*: excess weight.
- *down a mountain*: eat a huge amount of food.

Advice to Teachers

Teachers should train candidates on how to derive meanings of words and phrases from the context.

Question 2

This question was based on the excerpt below taken from Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice.

Read the excerpt below and then answer the questions that follow:

ANTONIO: I am as like to call thee so again,
To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too.
If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not
As to thy friends – for when did friendship take
A breed of barren metal of his friend? –
But lend it rather to thine enemy,
Who, if he break, thou may’st with better face
Exact the penalty.

SHYLOCK: Why look you how you storm!
I would be friends with you and have your love,
Forget the shames that you have stained me with,
Supply your present wants, and take no doit
Of usance for my moneys, and you’ll not hear me.
This is kind I offer.

BASSANIO: This were kindness.

SHYLOCK: This kindness will I show.
Go with me to a notary; seal me there
Your single bond, and, in a merry sport,
If you repay me not on such a day,
In such a place, such sum or sums as are
Expressed in the condition, let the forfeit

Be nominated for an equal pound
Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken
In what part of your body pleaseth me.

ANTONIO: Content, in faith. I'll seal to such a bond
And say there is much kindness in the Jew.

BASSANIO: You shall not seal to such a bond for me!
I'll rather dwell in my necessity.

ANTONIO: Why fear not, man; I will not forfeit it.
Within these two months – that's a month before
This bond expires – I do expect return
Of thrice three times the value of this bond.

SHYLOCK: O father Abram, what these Christians are,
Whose own hard dealings teaches them suspect
The thoughts of others! [TO BASSANIO] Pray you tell
me this –
If he should break his day, what should I gain
By the exaction of the forfeiture?
A pound of man's flesh taken from a man
Is not so estimable, profitable neither,
As flesh of muttons, beefs or goats. I say
To buy his favour I extend this friendship.
If he will take it, so; if not, adieu.
And for my love I pray you wrong me not.

ANTONIO: Yes, Shylock, I will seal unto this bond.

SHYLOCK: Then meet me forthwith at the notary's.
Give him direction for this merry bond,
And I will go and purse the ducats straight,
See to my house, left in the fearful guard
Of an unthrifty knave and presently
I'll be with you. [Exit

ANTONIO: Hie thee, gentle Jew
The Hebrew will turn Christian, he grows kind.

BASSANIO: I like not fair terms and a villain's mind.

ANTONIO: Come on. In this there can be no dismay;
My ships come home a month before the day.
[Exeunt

Question 2 (a)

What is Antonio referring to when he says:
I am as like to call thee so again?

This question required candidates to place the excerpt in context. The candidates needed to know who said those words, to whom and what the occasion was and so what was being referred to.

Weaknesses

A good number of candidates did not know the answer, indicating lack of familiarity with the text.

Expected Responses

Antonio is referring to Shylock's accusation that he calls him a dog/a cur.

Advice to Teachers

Teachers should ensure that candidates have read the text before any discussion of the text begins. They should also ascertain that reading had actually taken place and advise candidates to read and reread the set texts as many times as possible before they present themselves for the examination. As it is, many candidates simply rely on synopses of the texts given in study guides and notes given by the teachers. This situation is untenable.

Question 2 (b)

Why does Antonio hate Shylock?

This question required candidates to account for the hatred Antonio has for Shylock.

Weaknesses

Most candidates simply gave the issue of Shylock being a Jew and never even explained it further. Those who went on to say he was a usurer too did not explain what was wrong with it.

Expected Responses

- Because Shylock is a Jew.
- Because he lends money at an interest; he practices usury.
- Antonio apparently thinks usury is bad business, that is, those who practice it get easy money.

Advice to Teachers

Teachers should impress upon the candidates the necessity to illustrate/explain whatever claims they make to avoid unnecessary loss of marks.

Question 2 (c)

Rewrite Shylock's first speech in this excerpt in your own words without changing its meaning.

This item required candidates to paraphrase a section of the excerpt. In other words candidates were asked to render the Shakespearean language into the current English. This is necessary to check understanding.

Weaknesses

Many candidates could not do as the task required. A good number gave literal translation and not the sense conveyed indicating that the task had not been taught.

Expected Responses

Why are you so nasty? I really desire to be your friend and to win your love. I am willing to forgive and forget your insults and even give you the loan you want without interest. All I ask for in return is respect and understanding from you.

Advice to Teachers

In teaching a text in a language removed from the candidates' own, an attempt must be made to render the message in a form acceptable to them. This should include involving them to work out meaning for themselves which is then checked and agreed with the class/teacher's version. Difficult rendering needs to be explained with specific reference to the textual notes provided.

Question 2 (e)

What do we learn about the friendship between Bassanio and Antonio in this excerpt?

Explain your answer.

Candidates were asked to infer the kind of friendship between Bassanio and Antonio from the excerpt provided.

Weaknesses

Most candidates once again made assertions they did not substantiate, mostly that they were good friends.

Expected Responses

- The friendship is genuine, apparently selfless.
- Bassanio does not want Antonio to sign the bond just in case Antonio loses his life in the process. He would rather do without the money.
- As for Antonio, he is ready to sacrifice for his friend and is optimistic that he will get his money in time.

Advice to Teachers

Teachers should advise candidates to be sensitive to the demands of the task as elicited by the mark allocation. The higher the mark the more the demands of the task and vice versa.

Question 2 (h)

Explain the irony in the last speech by Antonio in this excerpt.

This item required the candidates to comment on the contradiction between the optimism expressed and the fact that the goods he had put his hopes in were lost at sea. This required thorough knowledge of the text plot. Majority of the candidates got this correctly even though the term "irony" is used in the question.

Expected Responses

The last speech is ironic because in spite of the optimism expressed, rumor arrives that there was a shipwreck and his merchandise is lost. This then creates a problem for him and precipitates the conflict in the play.

Question 3

Read the poem below and then answer the questions that follow.

"Sympathy"

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!

When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;
When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass
And the river flows like a stream of glass;
When the first bird sings and the first bud opes,
And the faint perfume from its petals steals –
I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing
Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
For he must fly back to his perch and cling
When he rather would be on the branch a-swing;
And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
And they pulse again with a keener sting –
I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,
When he beats his bars and would be free;
It is not a song of joy or glee,
But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings –
I know why the caged bird sings!

(Adapted from the poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar in *American Negro Poetry*,
edited by Arna Bontemps. New York: Hill and Wang, 1974.)

Question 3 (a)

Explain briefly what the poem is about.

This question required candidates to give a brief synopsis of the plot as well as the underlying meaning of the poem.

Weaknesses

Most candidates were only able to give the literal rendering of the poem.

Expected Responses

The poem is about a bird that is caged. It is confined and denied freedom. It cannot enjoy the ordinary pleasures of nature – the sunshine, the breeze or the perfume from flowers. The bird struggles to liberate itself and hurts itself in the process. At another level, the poem is depicting the misery of those who are denied freedom. They suffer physical and psychological torture. The persona sympathizes with the victims and condemns those who conspire to subject others to a life of slavery/detention/imprisonment/confinement.

Advice to Teachers

Poems, mostly, use *economy of expression* and *symbolic presentation* of information. The surface meaning may not be all the meaning. The deeper meaning is usually more profound and candidates who unravel it score higher marks.

Question 3 (b)

What does the poet focus on in each of the three stanzas? Give your answer in **note form**.

This item required candidates to make notes on the key points in each of the stanzas of the poem.

Weaknesses

Many candidates were not able to isolate the key concepts of each of the three stanzas and write the same in note form.

Expected Responses

- (i) In the first stanza, the poet focuses on the feelings of the prisoner; feelings of alienation from all that is natural and desirable; feelings of nostalgia for days he or she enjoyed freedom.
- (ii) The second stanza describes the attempts by the bird (or prisoner) to escape. The struggle is bloody. It seems that efforts to escape are met with brutality. Words like "*blood*", "*pain*" and "*scars*" reflect the torment undergone by the victim.
- (iii) The third stanza focuses on prayer. Other means have not yielded results, so the bird (or prisoner) appeals for intervention from other sources. Perhaps a superior force will step in and liberate the bird.

Question 3 (c)

How would you describe the persona's feelings towards the caged bird?

This question required the candidate to infer the persona's feelings for the caged bird using the clues presented in the poem. The candidates were able to get this, although most did not use apt descriptive terms.

Expected Responses

The persona sympathizes with the caged bird. A word like "*alas*" expresses pity. The persona also graphically describes the feelings and sufferings of the bird. This elicits pity from the reader. The persona also seems to empathize with the bird. He/she keeps saying, "*I know what the caged bird feels...*" He/she has put himself/herself in the shoes of the bird. The persona speaks as if he/she shares the pain experienced by the bird. The persona says, "*... a pain still throbs...*" as if he/she can feel the pain. The persona also has feelings of hope; hope that the caged bird will one day experience freedom.

Question 3 (d)

What can we infer about the persona's own experiences?

This question required candidates to infer the persona's own personal experiences as revealed by the assertions made in the poem.

Weaknesses

Most candidates fumbled with this question and earned less than they ought to.

Expected Responses

From the poem, it is possible to infer that the persona has had a very tough life. He/she has probably suffered at the hands of cruel oppressors, been denied freedom and tortured. This is why the persona says, "I

know....” The persona probably fought and prayed for freedom. He/she may have suffered physical and psychological injury.

Advice to Teachers

Teachers are urged to advise candidates to be precise and definite about what they say by illustrating it.

Question 3 (e)

Identify a simile in the first stanza and explain why it is used.

This item required candidates to identify a simile from the first stanza of the poem and explain its usage.

Weaknesses

While most candidates were able to identify the simile, they were unable to explain how aptly it is used.

Expected Responses

The simile in the first stanza is: “...*the river flows like a stream of glass*”. The simile is used to show what the bird yearns for but cannot have. The river represents a life of freedom, flowing without obstruction. It stands for natural beauty that the caged bird is denied.

Advice to Teachers

Poetic devices are employed to further the purposes of the poem and the poet. Every attempt should be made to elicit the role played in advancing the purposes of the message by the rendering of it. The form is as part of the message as the content.

Question 3 (f)

Explain the meaning of the following lines:

- (i) *And the faint perfume from its petals steals.*
- (ii) *And they pulse again with a keener sting.*

This question required the candidates to comment on the meaning of the two lines quoted. In other words, the candidates were to unpack the meaning – elaborate in prose what the condensed verse form represented. This goes beyond paraphrase and is difficult.

Weaknesses

Most candidates were able to explain the meaning of question 3 (f) (ii), but not question 3 (f) (i).

Expected Responses

- (i) *And the faint perfume from its petals steals:* this means that the flowers produce a sweet smell that gives much joy. However, in its cage, the bird cannot have such a luxury, while other birds out there enjoy the perfume.

- (ii) *And they pulse again with a keener sting*: this line refers to the excruciating pain suffered by the bird as it tries to free itself. Every time it beats its wings, the old wounds become sore and cause much pain.

Advice to Teachers

Teachers should provide candidates with more opportunities to handle poetry and to do intensive dissection of poems to enhance their appreciation.

3.3 PAPER 3 (101/3)

The mean for this paper dropped slightly from 18.93 (representing 31.55%) to 18.34 (representing 30.56%). Performance remains low even when the confusion reported in the previous year regarding interpretation of requirements of questions two and three had been addressed.

Question 1 (a)

Write a composition beginning with the following sentence:

When I left home that bright Sunday afternoon, I did not realise that the events of the next few days would completely change my life.

This was a conventional composition question requiring the candidates to write an imaginative piece arising from and beginning with the given sentence.

Weaknesses

Apart from the low level of language mastery on the part of most candidates, some did not adequately interpret the task, fit in and compose credible and interesting accounts. Some wrote irrelevant pieces and made crude attempts to attach the given sentence.

Advice to Teachers

The secret is in giving candidates adequate preparation by actual teaching of composition writing and ample practice.

Question 1 (b)

Write a story to illustrate the saying:

“Experience is the best teacher.”

This question too was a conventional composition task. Like in question 1 (a), it arose out of the given sentence. The only difference was that this was based on a saying. Candidates had to illustrate the lesson. The protagonist learnt through the experience they went through. It was the more popular question and elicited better compositions and better marks for those who chose it.

Question 2

Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, *Coming to Birth*

Using the story of Martin and Paulina, write an essay on how intolerance and suspicion can ruin relationships.

This was based on the compulsory set text, that is, the novel. Candidates were required to illustrate how the relationship between Paulina and Martin as evidenced in the novel can be attributed to intolerance and suspicions. Many candidates who had read and analyzed the text were able to handle the task.

Weaknesses

A few candidates had problems with the interpretation of the word “*intolerance*”.

Advice to Teachers

In discussing set texts, every attempt must be made to bring up words that describe the situations, personalities and themes found in the texts.

Question 3 (a)

The Short Story

Macmillan (Ed), *Half a Day and other stories*

Drawing your illustrations from the life of Mme. Lady in Wangui wa Goro’s “Heaven and Earth” write an essay on the saying “**All that glitters is not gold**”.

Candidates were expected to understand the proverb “*All that glitters is not gold*” and apply it to the life of Mme Lady in the short story. They were to determine whether the glitter in her life is for real or is masked by another life unknown to those she interacts with. Does the true Mme Lady come through? In a way, the whole story is rife with hypocrisy and this is what the candidates were required to unravel and comment on.

Weaknesses

Most candidates who chose this question failed to distinguish between the “*glitter*” and the “*gloom*”, “*the hypocrisy*” and “*the reality*”. The irony of the lives presented – protagonists, Mme Lady, the Pastor, Mme Lady’s husband, the Church, all have their glitter that is not gold. This was missed and with it the marks.

Advice to Teachers

Teachers are advised to teach all the stories and elucidate all the aspects of the short story.

Question 3 (b)

Drama

John Ruganda, *Shreds of Tenderness*

Illustrating your answer with examples from *Shreds of Tenderness*, write an essay entitled: “**The effects of coups d’etat**”.

Candidates were expected to write an essay on the effects of coup-d’états as illustrated in *Shreds of Tenderness*. This was the most popular of the options and those who chose it were able to do justice to the topic and score high marks.

Question 3 (c)

The Novel

Velma Pollard, *Homestretch*

Write an essay illustrating the following saying: **"In love, all is well that ends well."** Refer to *Homestretch* for your examples.

Candidates were required to use the truism given: **"In love, all is well that ends well"** to apply to the relationships that are covered in the novel *Homestretch*. The task involved identifying the challenges the relationships faced and assessing whether or not at the end of the novel the relationships were back on course.

Weaknesses

Majority of the candidates were put off by the saying and gave dismal accounts. This was the worst done of the options.

Advice to Teachers

Once again teachers are called upon to teach all aspects of set texts and to give candidates adequate practice in answering all types of questions.