

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 2013 in the KCSE English Examination. Data for the years, 2010, 2011, and 2012 is also given for comparison.

Table 8: Candidates' Overall Performance in English (101) in the last four years

Year	Paper	Candidature	Maximum Score	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
2010	1	354,935	60	28.12(46.86%)	9.17
	2		80	31.07(38.83%)	11.61
	3		60	18.64(31.06%)	8.42
	Overall		200	77.36(38.68%)	26.82
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	434127	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	445757	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

A glance at the means column indicates a drop in mean performance across all the papers.

- (i) Performance of candidates in Paper 1 dropped from 28.88 in 2012 to 21.67 in 2013.
- (ii) Performance in Paper 2 improved minimally by 0.24 points from 28.53 in 2011 to 28.77 in 2012 and then dropped drastically to 17.98 in 2013.
- (iii) There is a consistent drop in mean performance in paper 3. The means of 18.60 (2011), 18.11 (2012), and 15.30 (2013) indicate a worrisome trend that must be arrested.
- (iv) Overall performance in the English language remains unsatisfactory. The combined overall means of 77.36 (2010), 72.84 (2011), 75.76 (2012) and 54.94 (2013) indicate an

erratic performance that falls short of the ideal mean of 100(50%). What could be the problem? Is it inadequate teaching or simply the inability of candidates to perform any better in their written work? Do we lay blame for the poor performance at the teachers' door or is this a multifaceted problem that requires a close examination of the curriculum, its implementation, and the way the English language is taught/examined?

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 Chief Examiners' report rated the Question Paper as very appropriate for the target candidates; nevertheless, candidates' performance fell short of the expectations. Observations on the candidates' performance in the various questions are as follows:

Question 1

This question had two parts. Part (a) required the candidates to write a notice while part (b) required them to write a thank you note. Both questions tested the candidate's ability to write accurately using the right format and style. Unfortunately, many candidates missed on the format of a thank you note probably because this format has never been tested before.

Teachers are advised to teach all the aspects of functional writing as opposed to training the candidates on formats that are frequently tested.

Question 2

The cloze test was rated as accessible to the target candidates but as usual, the performance was disappointing. The test requires a variety of integrated reading and grammatical skills. It tests the learner's ability to read with understanding, predicting the missing words using the contextual, syntactic and discourse clues provided.

Analysis of candidates' answers revealed that a majority of them did not read through the passage for contextual and other clues; they treated each gap as a discrete item and gave far-fetched answers that revealed grammatical ineptitude and limitations of vocabulary. Consequently, most of them scored below average marks.

To perform well in this test one has to have the grammar and ability to predict the structure and vocabulary in accordance with the collocation of words. Together with the guidance provided by punctuation, a candidate is enabled to make intelligent guesses and to confirm them once the passage has been covered. The key to better performance is providing the candidates with plenty of practice using a variety of passages.

Question 3

Question 3(a) tested performance aspects of poetry. Candidates' weaknesses included giving stock answers to questions without attempting to either explain or relate them to the given poem.

Question 3(b) was poorly done. The question was straight forward and required the candidates to identify pairs of homophones from the given list. Majority of candidates could not identify the expected pairs.

Question 3(c) was the worst performed. The question required candidates to underline the stressed syllables in each of the given words. The list contained familiar words that are commonly used in the candidates' environment, and the dismal performance is a pointer to the fact that stress is still a big problem among Kenyan speakers of English. A considerable number of practicing teachers are not good at it; hence, most learners lack a model for emulation!

3.1.3 English Paper 2 (101/2)

This paper recorded the greatest drop in performance. The Chief Examiners' report on candidates' performance reported that the questions testing inference and higher order skills made the paper a little higher pitched for the majority of the candidates.

Question 1

Majority of the candidates performed well only on questions that demanded recall and comprehension skills (1(a) and 1(b)) and were indeed at a loss in questions testing inference(c, f, and g) as they were unable to reason beyond what was presented in the passage. Many candidates were not able to write notes as required in question 1(h) and it appears that they did not understand the passage.

Question 2

The second passage was based on the play, *An Enemy of the People* by Henrick Ibsen. 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 play well enough to take advantage of even recall questions like 2(a) and (b).

Question 2(d) required candidates to infer information. Most of them could not do this.

Candidates also performed poorly in questions that required them to identify or explain the writer's style. For instance, the question on foregrounding (2g) was rated as high pitched for most of the candidates. Majority of them could not figure out what foregrounding meant and ended up losing all the marks on the question which further depressed their score on this passage.

Question 2(g) required candidates to pick out a phrase from the passage. Candidates' responses indicated that they could not differentiate a phrase from a clause, concepts that are clearly covered in the syllabus under Parts of Speech.

Teachers should train their candidates to make inferences and deductions from clues given in comprehension texts. Teaching should aim at enabling the candidates to make their own reader responses and to express their opinions with the teacher guiding, clarifying and explaining the difficult points. Candidates can only become responsive readers through a lot of practice on a variety of texts. In addition to teaching appropriate comprehension skills, teachers should expose the students to the various aspects of style that authors use to communicate effectively.

Question 4

Candidates traditionally perform well in grammar. It is not clear what the problem was this time round. Section *a c* and *e* proved difficult. Section *a* required candidates to construct sentences according to given instructions. Section *c* required them to replace the underlined words with an equivalent phrasal verb while section *e* required them to fill in the blank spaces with the appropriate conditional form of the given verbs.

The poor performance in grammar could be an indicator of the low proficiency levels in the language, which is also evident in the dismal performance in the cloze test and in the candidates' inability to interpret given tasks.

3.1.3 English Paper 3 (101/3)

This paper tests Candidates' creative and essay writing skills. The essays based on the set texts were reported to have been a little demanding for the candidates.

Question 1 Imaginative Composition

Question 1(a) required knowledge of the saying and the capacity to compose a story to illustrate the meaning of the saying. The question was very unpopular but most of the candidates who attempted it interpreted it well. Question 1(b) required the candidates to write a story ending with the input sentence: 'This is when I realized that it is worthy to have and keep friends.' In some cases the candidates did not understand the concept of nobility in friendship and were unable to compose relevant pieces. Candidates work displayed lack of creativity, for instance, quite a number of them 'killed their parents' to show how helpful friends can be! Instead of writing on the input leads some candidates wrote about anything and made unsuccessful attempts to tag on the leads to their irrelevant essays. Some wrote memorized pieces without even attempting to relate them to the input leads.

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 wrote empty narrations that showed that they had not interpreted the given tasks correctly.

Question 2

Candidates were required to write an essay on the inevitability of change and the attendant challenges. Many candidates merely narrated the concept of change as a theme with some focusing on character change. Also, many candidates displayed little knowledge of the texts by giving scanty illustrations. A majority of them also lacked essay development skills with some of them writing in point form which was penalized heavily.

Question 3(a)

The candidates were required to use evidence from Haruki Murakami's short story, *The Mirror*, to explain the problems associated with superstition. The philosophical leaning of the story gave problems to many candidates. It also appeared that the story had not been studied in some schools as

some candidates from such schools did not have anything to write about. Again many candidates lacked the necessary textual knowledge to illustrate their points. Weak essay development skills were also evident; some candidates wrote in point form and many could not develop an essay according to the demands of the level.

Question 3(b)

The question was said to have overshot the KCSE level. Many candidates did not understand the word 'prologue' and were unable to provide the relevant social commentary. The vocabulary used, some of which is found in the text was alien to the candidates who had not read the text.

General comments on 101/3

The consistent poor performance in this paper is worrisome. Again every effort needs to be made to improve performance in this paper by teaching composition writing in its entirety and developing better approaches to teaching the set books.

Candidates should be advised to read questions carefully and understand the demands of the questions so as to ensure that all the aspects of the questions are carefully addressed.

It is evident that many candidates simply rely on synopses of the set books given in study guides instead of reading and interpreting the texts as required. Candidates should be exposed to all aspects of the texts. They should be made to read the texts, and understand the techniques the authors employ to enhance their works: plot development, themes, characterization, style- mastery of all these, and other pertinent concerns of the texts cannot be overemphasized as there is no way students can write good essays without the content to illustrate their claims.

Deliberate efforts should be made to teach critical and creative thinking skills because poor thinking skills bear on the learners' performance. Suhor, and Charles (1984) note that teachers of English have a special role in the teaching of thinking skills not only because of the centrality of language in the curriculum, but also because there is a close relationship between thinking and language as established by Piaget, Vygotsky, Luria and others .