

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 2019 in the KCSE English Examination. Similar Data for the years, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 are also provided for comparison.

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

Year	Paper	Candidature	Maximum Score	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
2015	1	525621	60	29.37(48.95%)	8.28
	2		80	31.86(39.82%)	12.43
	3		60	19.35(32.25%)	6.13
	overall		200	80.58(40.29%)	24.40
2016	1	571644	60	29.15(48.58%)	8.15
	2		80	20.39(25.49%)	10.86
	3		60	18.52(30.86%)	5.23
	overall		200	68.06(34.03%)	22.03
2017	1	610084	60	25.89(43.30%)	7.12
	2		80	28.24(35.30%)	11.73
	3		60	19.42(32.37%)	5.92
	overall		200	73.55(36.77%)	22.57
2018	1	659953	60	29.15(48.58%)	8.51
	2		80	24.78(30.98%)	9.42
	3		60	18.85(31.42%)	6.58
	overall		200	72.78(36.39%)	22.27
2019	1	659953	60	29.00(48.00%)	8.23
	2		80	33.00(41.25%)	11.08
	3		60	20.00(33.33%)	5.70
	overall		200	82.00 (41.00%)	

From the table above, it can be observed that:

- Performance of candidates in 2019 improved significantly by 9.22 points from 72.78 (36.39%) in 2018 to 82.00(41 %) in 2019.
- There was an increase in the mean performance of learners in both Paper 2 and Paper 3.
- The mean performance of candidates in Paper 2 improved significantly from 24.78% in 2018 to 33% in 2019.
- Performance in Paper 1 was comparable to that of 2018, 2017, 2016 and 2015.
- As the table indicates, the overall performance in the subject for the five years still falls short of the ideal mean of 100(50%). This is indicative of low proficiency in the subject.
- The data reveals that performance in paper 3 has remained dismal over the years with low means of 32.25%, 30.86%, 32.37%, 31.42% and 33.33% in 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 respectively.

This worrisome trend calls for an investigation into the current composition writing pedagogy in order to put in place necessary intervention measures.

The section that follows focuses on the candidates' areas of difficulty and gives suggestions on how such areas can be better taught.

3.1.2 English Paper 1 (101/1)

The paper was reported to have been appropriate for the target candidates. It tested the syllabus adequately and candidates' performance was comparable to that of 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018. Observations on candidates' performance are as follows:

Question 1

Question 1 tested the candidates' ability to write an informal letter using the right format and style. Further, candidates were guided on the content of the letter. Most of the candidates used the correct format and style but a good number of them lacked the creativity to infer the expected content from the given situation.

The key to better performance is providing the candidates with plenty of practice in all types of functional writing. Teachers should as much as possible use real life situations in creating contexts for practice.

Question 2

The cloze test was rated as accessible to the target candidates but as usual, performance on the test fell short of expectations. 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. 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.

Analysis of candidates' answers revealed that majority of them did not make use of the provided clues.

The key to better performance is providing the candidates with plenty of practice using a variety of texts and contexts. A good point to start is to determine the grammatical class of the missing word, then use the contextual clues to arrive at the appropriate answer.

Question 3 (a)

The question which was based on a poem assessed aspects of performance. Notably, many learners were unable to identify features of an oral song in the given poem. Quite a number of learners were also unable to identify which words would be stressed in the second line of the second stanza as per the demands of the question.

Teachers should provide adequate opportunities for recitation of poems and help learners to read the selected poems with understanding and expression.

Question 3b

The question assessed pronunciation whereby the candidates were expected to provide another word pronounced in the same way as the ones given. A majority of the candidates performed very poorly on this test.

This calls for innovation in the teaching of pronunciation. For instance, the use of mobile phones and computers to listen to the correct pronunciation of words. Audio cassettes are also a good aid in teaching and learning pronunciation of words.

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. However, an analysis of candidates' work revealed poor comprehension skills. Candidates also made many errors of punctuation, spelling and grammar. Given this is a language paper, these errors attracted penalties.

Question 1

This question tested the conventional unseen comprehension. Generally the candidates performed well in this section. However, many missed the marks for section 1(f) which required them to explain the meaning of words as used in the passage.

Teachers should teach vocabulary in context and provide adequate practice for the learners.

Question 2

The second Comprehension was based on the play, *A Doll's House*. Candidates were required to not only use the information in the given excerpt but to also use their knowledge of the set text. Majority of the candidates had not read the play well enough to place the extract in its context as required in 2(a).

Candidates also performed poorly in question 2 (h) which required them to describe the tone of the excerpt.

Students should be encouraged to read with understanding and express such understanding in their own words in answering comprehension questions. They should also read the set books well enough to recall needed information and make necessary inferences as per the demands of the test.

Teachers should also teach learners how to identify and describe tone in a text.

Question 3

Question 3 was based on an oral narrative. Majority of the students did well in the section.

Question 4

Performance in this section was generally good but a good number of learners performed poorly in section 4 (a) which assessed rewriting sentences with multiple meanings. This is an indication of poor mastery of grammatical structures and constructions.

Teachers should cover all the grammar topics in the syllabus and provide adequate practice in rewriting sentences.

3.1.4 English Paper 3 (101/3)

It was reported that the paper tested the syllabus adequately. It was also well balanced in terms of skills tested and comprised both challenging and easy questions. In addition, the time allocated for the paper was adequate. It was further reported that none of the questions was ambiguous and open-ended.

Question 1 Imaginative Composition (Compulsory)

Imaginative compositions require candidates to showcase their creativity and originality in the use of English Language.

Question 1 (a)

In this question, candidates were expected to create a story beginning: *I was mistaken to have thought that the night would be like other peaceful nights.* The candidates were expected to come up with a story that brings out a situation of an unpleasant encounter at night.

Weaknesses

Many candidates failed to bring out an unpleasant encounter. Grammatical mistakes and weak paragraphing were noted in many scripts. It was also noted that many candidates lack good writing skills. They do not know how to organize their work. They therefore exhibited weak use of mechanics of writing. Generally, they lacked creative use of language.

Advice to Teachers

Learners need to be taught creative writing skills. In creative writing, candidates should aim at making their compositions be easily understood. In addition, they should not make their readers bored or disinterested. They should strive to engage the reader's imagination by giving images and showing things in an awesome way. Candidates should always use language creatively to trigger the reader's emotional response.

Question 1 (b)

The question tested candidates' competence in discursive writing. They were asked to write a composition on *the advantages and disadvantages of the internet.* The candidates should have not only established their own opinion on the topic, but they should have also persuaded the reader to adopt a stance. So, they were supposed to explore both the advantages and disadvantages of the internet.

Weaknesses

Creative use of language is still a powerful tool in discursive compositions yet many candidates ignored it. It was noted that many candidates dwelt much on points at the expense of creativity in the use of language.

Advice to teachers

In a discursive essay, arguments should be clearly presented in a pleasant language. Learners should also be reminded to begin each paragraph with a powerful issue sentence followed by reasons and supporting examples. Ambitious learners can even write their essays using facts based on research reports while presenting both sides of the issue. Learners should be guided on the appropriate use of linking words to create cohesion. The learner's opinion should be restated or summarized in the conclusion.

Question 2

The Compulsory Set Text

H.R Ole Kulet, *Blossoms of the Savannah*

The candidates were required to write an essay based on the set text illustrating how *irresponsible decisions can lead to serious consequences*. They were supposed to identify specific instances of irresponsible decisions in the novel and explain how they lead to serious consequences.

Weaknesses

Many candidates were not able to identify specific instances of irresponsible decisions by characters in the novel. They also failed to explain how these unpopular decisions lead to serious consequences. This was a strong evidence of poor grasp of the novel.

Question 3

The Optional Set Texts

The Optional Set Texts comprise the Short Story, Drama and The novel

(a) The Short Story

Chris Wanjala (Ed.), *Memories We Lost and Other Stories*

The candidates were asked to write a composition on *evils of war* as depicted in Mariatu Kamara's short story "The President". They were supposed to draw relevant illustrations from the short story to support the argument that war brings about suffering to people.

Weaknesses

Candidates' responses lacked the expected details and illustrations. Many candidates reproduced the short story without making conscious effort to select relevant information on evils of war as brought out in the short story-a reflection of weak interpretation of the text.

(b) Drama

David Mulwa, *Inheritance*

The candidates were asked to use illustrations from the play to write an essay to support the assertion that *ill-gotten wealth can never bring true happiness drawing illustrations from Lacuna Kasoo's life*.

Weaknesses

Some candidates could not link the source of wealth to unhappiness. There were many cases of weak essay development and mere narrations of the story.

(c) The Novel

John Steinbeck, *The Pearl*

The candidates were supposed to use illustrations from the novel, *The Pearl*, to support the assertion that *desire without limits can be a source of agony both to ourselves and our family members*. The task required the candidates to explain how Kino's desire brings agony to himself, his wife and his son.

Weaknesses

Many candidates could not link desire without limits to the main character, Kino, and to his eventual agony that almost destroyed his entire family. Many candidates presented weak essays without textual evidence.

General Advice to Teachers on Essays Based on Set Texts

Teachers should remind students that in essay questions, students are required to analyse or synthesize information. They should do more than memorize facts. In addition, students should always endeavour to arrange ideas in a series of clear, logically connected sentences and paragraphs. For this reason, taking essay exams requires effective writing skills just like in functional or imaginative compositions.

Teachers should advise students to read each essay question carefully to write effective answers. As they read the questions, students should look carefully at the wording of the questions and, where necessary, underline key words to address the demands of the question sufficiently.

Teachers should also impress upon students that quality of an essay is not proportional to its length. They should be concise. Students should always aim to make the reader understand the points. An essay can communicate clearly if unnecessary words that are not directly required to bring points home are eliminated.

General Comment on the Paper

Candidates' performance in English Paper 101/3 is still displeasing. Relentless effort is still required in the teaching and learning of imaginative compositions and essays based on set texts. In order to enhance learners' language proficiency levels, teachers should encourage them to read both intensively and extensively. Most candidates still do not write essays in a way that demonstrates their understanding of literature set texts. They should always aim at writing their compositions with proper spelling and grammar.