

3.0 PART ONE: ANALYSIS OF DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

3.1 ENGLISH (101)

3.1.1 GENERAL CANDIDATES PERFORMANCE

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

The table below shows the performance of candidates in the three papers offered in 2018 in the KCSE English Examination. Similar Data for the years, 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 is also provided for comparison.

Year	Paper	Candidature	Maximum Score	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
2014	1	482499	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
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

From the table above, it can be observed that:

- Performance of candidates in 2018 was comparable to that of 2017. The subject mean dropped minimally by 0.77 points from 73.55 with a standard deviation of 22.57 to 72.78 with a standard deviation of 22.27.
- There was a drop in performance in both Paper 2 and Paper 3.
- Performance of candidates in Paper 2 declined significantly from 28.24 in 2017 to 24.78 in 2018.
- Performance in Paper 3 dropped minimally by 0.95 points from 19.42 in 2017 to 18.85 in 2018.
- As the table indicates, the overall performance in the subject for the five years falls short of the ideal mean of 100(50%).

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. Observations on candidates' performance are as follows:

Question 1

Question 1 tested the candidate's ability to write a formal letter using the right format and style. Most of the candidates had no problem in the matter of format and style but a good number of them failed 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 also impress upon the learners the importance of taking time to understand the demands of each question before writing their responses.

Question 2

The cloze test was rated as accessible to the target candidates but as usual, performance on the test was dismal. 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 a majority of them did not make use of the provided clues.

Learners need a lot of practice using different types of texts.

Question 3b

The question was a test of pronunciation of a number of vowel sounds. The candidates were provided with lists of words and required to pick the odd one out based on the pronunciation of the vowel sounds of the words in each list. Most of the candidates performed very poorly on this test.

This calls for innovation in the teaching of pronunciation. For instance, there are many ways that teachers can use technology to teach pronunciation. These include familiar technological resources such as audio and video recorders and computer technology which offers possibilities such as pronunciation software, vocal message exchanges, and chat rooms among others.

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. Candidates' answers revealed that a majority of the responses were directly lifted from the passage and that most of the candidates were unable to interpret facts and ideas. This implies that many candidates are unable to read with understanding. Also, it was noted that many candidates could not handle questions that tested higher order skills; they performed dismally in questions that required analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

Question 2

The second Comprehension was an excerpt from the novel *The River and the Source*. Candidates were required to not only use information in the given excerpt but to also use their knowledge of the entire set text. It was evident that majority of the candidates had not read the set book well enough to respond to the various issues raised in the questions; hence, the performance was unsatisfactory in most of the questions.

Students should be encouraged to read with understanding and express such understanding in their own words where necessary. Further, teachers should take learners through various comprehension strategies to enhance their comprehension of a variety of comprehension texts.

Teachers should also find ways of helping learners start enjoying reading widely and studying the set books as required.

Question 3

Candidates performed dismally in this question. The question tests either Poetry or Oral Literature. As usual, performance in Question 3 plummets when the question is based on a poem. This results in a drop in overall candidates' performance in the subject in the years when the choice is poetry.

Section (c) proved difficult to most candidates. The candidates were required to appreciate the poem and relate it to real life experiences. Many candidates missed the marks because they had no idea of the demands of the question.

Candidates also performed poorly on the test items based on style, and particularly the identification of the tone of the poem.

Poetry needs to be taught using activities that make it interactive and engaging to enhance learners' enjoyment. The basics of poetry including its characteristics and the stylistic devices employed by poets should also be taught using poems that are accessible to the learners.

Question 4

Candidates performed poorly on the grammar test.

Noteworthy, major weaknesses noted in candidates' work in this section included poor punctuation, gross spelling errors, sentence construction errors, errors in subject-verb agreement and inability to explain the meaning of given idiomatic expressions.

Teachers should cover all the grammar topics in the syllabus and encourage learners to pay attention to punctuation and spelling to avoid losing marks needlessly. Further, teaching grammar in context can help learners understand how grammar works in real texts and situations.

3.1.4 English Paper 3 (101/3)

Candidates' performance in English Paper 101/3 still falls below the expected standard. As such, unrelenting effort is still required in the teaching and learning of writing 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.

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

1. Low scores in imaginative compositions due to lack of competence in grammar and mechanics of writing.
2. Dismal scores were noted in essay questions based on set texts, which were attributed to weak illustrations and insufficient grasp of literature set texts.
3. Candidates work also revealed lack of critical thinking and interpretive reading because most of them were only giving the story line of the set texts.

Specifically, the following observations were made on performance in the various test items:

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 wondered why the principal had summoned me.* It was expected that candidates would make deliberate efforts to bring out an initial apprehension that later yields a pleasant or an unpleasant outcome.

Weaknesses

Grammatical mistakes and weak paragraphing were noted among candidates. Many candidates were unable to use language creatively because of limited linguistic abilities; the compositions were rather flat. It was also discovered that many candidates did not understand the meaning of the word "summoned".

Advice to Teachers

Learners need to be taught creative writing skills. They are supposed to be taken through the process of writing sparkling sentences and how to choose flavoured words that match the context of the writing task. They are supposed to make readers glide from sentence to sentence and from paragraph to paragraph.

Question 1 (b)

The question tested candidates' competence in descriptive writing. They were asked to imaginatively describe *the estate or village they live in.* The candidates were expected to compose pieces of writing through detailed sensory observation by employing the power of language to bring the subject to life for the reader.

Weaknesses

It was noted that many candidates were unable to create a picture in the reader's mind. They did not engage the senses of smell, sight, touch, taste and hearing. The candidates did not employ the power of vivid description so that the reader can see, feel, or hear the *village or estate* the candidate is talking about.

Advice to teachers

Descriptive writing skills should be effectively taught and learners guided appropriately on how to create mental pictures in the reader's mind. This can be achieved by reminding learners to use relevant metaphors and similes. These figures of speech paint more detailed pictures for the reader making him or her understand what the learner has in the mind's eye.

Question 2

The Compulsory Set Text

Bertolt Brecht, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*

The candidates were required to write an essay based on the set text illustrating how *self-centeredness does not pay*. They were supposed to explain how certain characters in the play are self-centred and how they ultimately pay the price or simply lose at the end.

Weaknesses

A good number of candidates were able to identify the self-centred characters in the play. They also understood what *self-centeredness* is, but they could not explain how self-centred characters in the play become ultimate losers. This was the missing link that cost many candidates good scores.

Question 3

The Optional Set Texts

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

The Short Story

Chris Wanjala, *Memories We Lost and Other Stories*

The candidates were asked to write a composition in support of the statement: *some people keep making one bad decision after another*. They were supposed to draw relevant illustrations from Barry McKinley's short story "Almost Home". The task required candidates to explain how Ali's (the main character) one bad decision is followed by a series of other bad if not worse decisions.

Weaknesses

Candidates' responses lacked the expected details and illustrations. Many candidates reproduced the short story without making conscious effort to select relevant information—a reflection of weak interpretation of the text.

Drama

Francis Imbuga, *Betrayal in the City*

The candidates were asked to use illustrations from the play to write an essay to support the assertion that *there is a direct link between oppression and weaknesses in a leader's character*. Specifically, the candidates were required to explain how Boss' bad actions are consistent with his personality. In other words, they were supposed to identify Boss' character traits and explain how they inform his unpopular actions in the play.

Weaknesses

Many candidates simply identified Boss' traits with illustrations but did not explain the link between these traits and the oppression in Kafira.

The Novel

John Steinbeck, *The Pearl*

The candidates were supposed to use illustrations from the novel to explain *the evil nature of greed*. The task required the candidates to identify and explain characters whose actions in the play are influenced by greed and further explain how this vice destroys human relationships or causes pain and suffering.

Weaknesses

Many candidates discussed the theme of greed in isolation. They did not show how greed negatively affects human relationships or how it brings about pain and suffering in La Paz, Kino's neighbourhood.

General Advice to Teachers on Essays Based on Set Texts

Teachers should use the integrated approach in the teaching and learning of English language.

Teachers should encourage learners to effectively read set texts several times because practice makes perfect.

Teachers should facilitate critical thinking during classroom teaching and learning of English language.

Teachers should assist learners to discover the feelings and intentions of the author (author's message) and question characters thoughts, actions, and motivations.

Learners should practice intensive reading with specific aims and tasks.