

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 2020 in the KCSE English Examination. Similar Data for the years, 2017, 2018 and 2019 is also provided for comparison.

Year	Paper	Candidature	Maximum Score	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
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	69549153	60	29.00 (48.00%)	8.23
	2		80	33.00 (41.25%)	11.08
	3		60	20.00 (33.33%)	5.7
	overall		200	82.00 (41.00%)	
2020	1	743984	60	25.38 (42.3%)	7.7
	2		80	26.69 (33.3%)	12.08
	3		60	20.66 (34.4%)	5.38
	overall		200	75.71(37.86%)	23.51

From the table above, it can be observed that:

- i) Performance of candidates in 2020 dropped significantly by 6.29 points from 82.00(41%) in 2019 to 75.71(37.86 %) in 2020.
- ii) There was a drop in the mean performance of learners in Papers 1 and 2.
- iii) The mean performance of candidates in Paper 3 improved slightly by only 0.66 points. However, candidates' performance in the paper continues to be far below expectations with comparable low means of 32.37%, 31.42% 33.33% and 34.4 % in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 respectively. There is therefore need to interrogate the issues that contribute to the perpetual poor performance in the writing tasks in order to help learners improve on their writing skills.
- iv) As the table indicates, the overall performance in the subject for the four years still falls short of the ideal mean of 100 (50%). This is indicative of low proficiency in the subject.

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 all the questions were within the candidates' experiences.

Observations on candidates' performance are as follows:

Question 1

Question 1 required candidates to write an application letter in response to the given advertisement. It assessed the candidates' ability to analyze information, identify the content of the letter and then write using the right format and style. Most of the candidates used the correct format and style but some lacked the ability to creatively address all the demands of the question.

The key to better performance is providing the candidates with plenty of practice in all types of functional writing. Teachers should also guide students on identifying the demands of the questions to ensure that all the issues are addressed as expected.

Question 2

As usual, most of the candidates performed poorly in the cloze test. The test assesses a variety of integrated reading and grammatical skills. It tests the learners' 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.

The key to better performance is providing the learners with plenty of practice using a variety of texts and contexts. Learners should also read widely to enhance their knowledge of language use in various contexts.

Question 3a

The question was based on a riddle. Notably, many learners were unable to describe the stages of a riddling process. The Chief examiners report on candidates' performance noted that teaching of the short forms in Oral Literature is not being given the attention that it deserves perhaps because teachers were not expecting that it would be assessed. This is a classic case of teaching to the test, consequently denying learners the opportunity to participate fully in planned for learning experiences.

Teachers should teach all the aspects of the syllabus and provide learners with opportunities for performance of Oral Literature genres.

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, teachers should direct students to the use of mobile phones and computers to listen to the correct pronunciation of words. Audio cassettes, which are available at KICD, 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 and 2

Question 1

This question tested the conventional unseen comprehension. Generally the candidates performed well in this section. However, many missed the marks for questions which required higher order thinking skills like making inferences and integrating information from different parts of the passage to answer a question. In addition, instead of thinking critically and paraphrasing information to indicate comprehension, many students simply presented chunks of lifted information as their responses. Such responses do not score as they are not an indication of comprehension. Question 1(d) which tested summary writing requiring learners to order points according to a particular sequence was performed poorly by most of the students because they failed to sequence the events as required.

The key to better performance in reading comprehension skills is consciously teaching learners comprehension skills including selecting information, paraphrasing, identifying major and minor points, making inferences, drawing conclusions, integrating information from different parts of the passage to answer a question, note making and summary writing. For instance, instead of asking students to answer all the questions set on an a particular passage in a course book, the teacher can focus on specific comprehension skills at a time with a view to assisting the learners to gain mastery in the intended skills.

Question 2

The second Comprehension was based on H.R Ole Kulet's *Blossoms of the Savannah*. Comprehension based on literary texts requires candidates to not only use the information in the given excerpt but to also use their knowledge of the set text. Most responses indicated scanty knowledge of the text.

Students should be encouraged to read the set books well enough to recall needed information and make necessary inferences as per the demands of the test. Further, teachers should advise against over-reliance on guide books. Creating a reading culture is essential for good performance in the language.

Question 3

Performance in Question 3 has been fluctuating based on what is tested in a particular year. Usually, the candidates perform better when a question is based on Oral Literature, and dismally when Poetry is assessed. This time round the pithy nature of the sonnet and the language used proved difficult for most of the candidates.

Teachers should teach all categories of poetry and provide learners with adequate opportunities for practice. They should also work on debunking the myth that poetry is impossible by engaging learners in poetry writing, and in reading and reciting poems for enjoyment.

Question 4

Performance in this section was generally good but most of the candidates performed poorly in section 4 (e) which required them to provide two different meanings of a given sentence. This is an indication of poor mastery of grammatical structures and constructions.

It is worth noting that in this section candidates are also penalized for incorrect spelling and punctuation. Teachers should cover all the grammar topics in the syllabus, provide adequate practice in all aspects of grammar, and impress upon learners that proper spelling and correct use of punctuation is an essential element of grammar.

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 or open-ended.

Question 1 Imaginative Composition (Compulsory)

Imaginative compositions requires 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 ending: *That was when I realised that a genuine friend is one who walks in when the rest walk out on you.* The candidates were expected to come up with a story that illustrates a situation where the writer is abandoned by all his friends except one.

Weaknesses

Many candidates failed to bring out a situation where a genuine friend comes to his or her rescue at a time people considered to be friends walk out on him or her. Grammatical mistakes and weak paragraphing were noted in many scripts. Many candidates were unable to use language creatively because of limited linguistic abilities.

Advice to Teachers

In creative writing, candidates should aim at making their compositions be easily understood. For this reason, 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 expository writing. They were asked to write a composition on *how we can conserve our forests*. The candidates were supposed to present an objective description of how forests can be conserved. In other words, they were expected to deposit information on this topic. Expository essays should be simply informative.

Weaknesses

Many candidates did not present clear and logical explanation on how forests should be conserved. They did not bring out compositions that remained focused on the topic. Some essays did not list events in chronological order. It is important to note that creative use of language is still a powerful tool in expository compositions yet many candidates ignored it.

Advice to teachers

Learners should be advised to present clear and logical information on the topic given. They should also remain focused on the topic and list events in chronological order. Learners should be guided on creative use of language. Teachers should also remind learners that appropriate use of linking words makes their compositions cohesive.

Question 2

The Compulsory Set Text

A Doll's House, Henrik Ibsen

The candidates were required to write an essay based on the set text to support the idea that *sometimes quitting a relationship may be the only option but it hurts loved ones*. Candidates were expected to identify characters who quit relationships, give reasons for their exits and explain how their actions affect loved ones.

Weaknesses

It was noted that many candidates were unable to bring out strong illustrations from the set text to support the idea that *sometimes quitting a relationship may be the only option but it hurts loved ones*. They could not identify characters who quit relationships, give reasons for their exits and explain how these actions affect loved ones. This was a strong evidence of poor grasp of the text.

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 to support the assertion that *children growing up in urban slums today face many challenges*. They were supposed to draw relevant illustrations from No Violet Bulawayo's short story "Hitting the Road".

Weaknesses

Many candidates' responses lacked the expected details and illustrations from the short story. Some candidates reproduced the short story without making a conscious effort to select relevant information on the numerous challenges that face children growing up in urban slums.

(b) Drama

David Mulwa, *Inheritance*

The candidates were asked to use illustrations from the play to write an essay to support the assertion that *many African problems are caused by ineffective leadership*. They were supposed to demonstrate understanding that poor leadership is a recipe for problems.

Weaknesses

Some candidates could not plausibly illustrate how African problems are caused by ineffective leadership. They failed to identify and use appropriate illustrations from the text.

The Novel

John Steinbeck, *The Pearl*

The candidates were supposed to use illustrations from the novel, *The Pearl*, to support the assertion that *good families are built on love and teamwork*. They were expected to anchor their illustrations on the relationship between Kino and Juana.

Weaknesses

Many candidates were unable to select relevant illustrations from the novel to support the assertion. The essays lacked textual details to build a case that the relationship between Kino and Juana thrives on love and teamwork.

General Advice to Teachers on Essays Based on Set Texts

Teachers should advise learners to read each question carefully to write effective responses. As they read the questions, learners 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 assist learners to discover the feelings and intentions of the author (author's message) and question characters thoughts, actions, and motivations. Learners should also be guided in practicing intensive reading with specific aims and tasks.

General Comment on the Paper

Candidates' performance in English Paper 101/3 is still dismal. Relentless effort is still required in the teaching and learning of imaginative compositions and essays based on set texts. Teachers should engage learners in frequent essay writing exercises to improve their grasp of textual information. In order to enhance learners' language proficiency levels, teachers should also encourage them to read both intensively and extensively.