

ENGLISH LANGUAGE 2

1. GENERAL COMMENTS

The standard of the paper compared favourably with that of previous years. The questions were well crafted and topical enough to elicit favourable responses from the candidates. Except for a few scripts which showed brilliance in expression, the performance of the majority of candidates fell below expectation.

2. A SUMMARY OF CANDIDATES' STRENGTHS

- (1) **Language:** The good candidates wrote remarkably good English. They showed a reasonably good control over grammar, tense, punctuation and spelling. Sentence construction was also good. Some of the candidates wrote fluid, idiomatic English and paid attention to register, that is, appropriate choice of vocabulary in the essays.
- (2) **Subject Matter:** The good candidates attempted to discuss the points advanced to an appreciable level to score good marks for the content aspect of the essays. They drew on their own experience of life and their readings. There was also evidence of transfer of knowledge from other subject areas such as Social Studies and I. C. T.
- (3) **Length of Essays:** Most of the good candidates wrote full length essays. Unlike in previous years when candidates lost marks because of paucity of content and unusually short essays, this year saw a great deal of improvement. Essays were full and content was adequate.
- (4) **Rubrics:** In most cases, rubrics were correctly interpreted unlike in previous years when candidates would not pay close attention to instructions or would write essays which were off the point.

3. A SUMMARY OF CANDIDATES' WEAKNESSES

- (1) The majority of candidates wrote very poor English. There were instances where you could not tell whether the candidate was writing English or some other language. Most candidates simply lacked the ability to construct simple readable sentences.
- (2) Most of the candidates showed that they did not have a good grasp of basic grammar such as tenses, concord, complementation, etc. which made most of the scripts quite unreadable. Tense usage was particularly chaotic as well as punctuation and spelling.

- (3) Most of the candidates did not have an adequate vocabulary repertoire and therefore used words indiscriminately, unmindful of their contextual implications. Some candidates copied long stretches of irrelevant material from the comprehension passages as answers.

4. SUGGESTED REMEDIES

- (1) The teaching and learning of the English Language should be approached with more seriousness than is the case now.
- (2) Schools should encourage more oral and written exercises and a lot of homework on basic grammar, tense and spelling should be done.
- (3) More library-reading activities should also be incorporated into the curriculum at the basic and senior secondary school levels.
- (4) Vocabulary enhancing activities should be stepped up. Activities such as quizzes, dictation, debates and reading competitions should be encouraged actively among the students.
- (5) Candidates should be taught to desist from copying the comprehension passage for answers.
- (6) Efforts should be made to equip candidates with the relevant skills such as understanding of paragraph structure and things that signal the main points in a passage or paragraph.

5. DETAILED COMMENTS

Question 1

Write a letter to the Presiding Member of your district assembly telling him or her about two of the achievements of your community over the last five years and the plans for the future.

This was a test in formal letter-writing. The candidate was expected to write to the Presiding Member of his/her district assembly reporting two of the achievements of his/her community and the plans for the future. The question was in two parts. The candidate was to demonstrate knowledge of the format and linguistic characteristics of this type, such as, formality of language, politeness in choice of expression, etc. Some of the pertinent issues centred on developmental projects and infrastructural activities undertaken such as rehabilitation of roads, old classroom blocks, erection of electric poles, etc.

Most candidates who attempted this question did quite well bringing out salient points. The problems noted in two folds: not paying equal attention to both parts of the question and inability to produce the formal tone and politeness of expression the official letter requires. Some candidates veered into long winding pleasantries, chit-chat and colloquialism that are not appropriate for a formal letter.

Question 2

Your friend has informed you that his or her uncle has decided not to look after him or her in school anymore. Write to your friend's uncle giving him at least two reasons why he should change his mind.

This question was intended to test candidates in informal letter writing. It was, by far, the most popular question. The candidate was expected to show his/her knowledge of the features of this type of essay and organize these in such a way as "to bring out the reasons why his friend's uncle should rescind his decision".

Most of the candidates did well with a good narration of reasons why the uncle should rescind his decision of not wanting to look after his ward anymore. The language used was chatty enough with flowery pleasantries and flavour of language that matches the theme. Most of the essays were long which was understandable because the situation warranted some emotion, which some of the candidates portrayed.

Question 3

Write arguments for or against the topic: It is more advantageous to live in the village than in the city.

This was an argumentative essay which demanded an argued position in support of one's stated stance. The candidate was expected to advance arguments why it is more advantageous to live in the village than in the city.

This was not a very popular question. However, those who attempted it came to grips with the essential issues, which generally should extol village life as against living in the city. Some of the salient points raised centred on the simplicity of rural life as against the hustle and bustle of city life, the serenity of the countryside as against the noise in the city, etc.

Section B: Comprehension

The comprehension passage has a high interest level for candidates at this level. Consequently, the performance, in most cases, was very encouraging with most candidates scoring above average mark.

The challenge was how candidates handled the vocabulary substitution and the explanation of given phrases. Since these exercises demand having a large vocabulary, (which the candidates lacked) items provided could not fit the contexts of the words and phrases and so these sections were badly done. Vocabulary items provided could not fit the contexts in terms of grammar, tense and collocation.

It is suggested that reading lessons should include exercises aimed at increasing the vocabulary repertoire of the students.

