Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language) 2014

Assessment Report

Introduction

1.   The purpose of this report is to consolidate the Chief Examiners' observations on the performance of candidates who sat the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language) in 2014.

General Observations

2.   Candidates achieved different proficiency attainment[1] rates in different papers. The approximate attainment rates for individual papers were: Reading 84%; Writing 53%; Listening 83%; Speaking 52%; Classroom Language Assessment 98%.

Paper 1: Reading

3.   The paper comprised three reading passages on different topics.

4.   Candidates' performance:

   4.1   Paper completion
         Most candidates completed the questions for all three reading passages; however there were a number of cases of questions being left blank. In a few cases, no attempt had been made to answer any of the questions for a particular passage, suggesting that those candidates may have run out of time to complete the paper.

   4.2   Understanding what a question was specifically asking and therefore what was required in a response.

      4.2.1   Passage A, Question 6 asked for a phrase meaning 'prevent poor people from becoming even poorer', to which the answer was '*provide* a floor of protection'. Candidates who answered this question correctly demonstrated that they understood that the action 'provide' needed to be included in the response, to address the verb 'prevent' in the question.

      4.2.2   Passage B, Question 20 asked what the 'standard fare' in guidebooks consisted of. Candidates who responded correctly with 'answers to the questions…' recognised that 'cultural and experiential insights' were *additions* to the standard fare, not *part* of it.

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[1] Scoring Level 3 or above in the Reading and Listening papers, and Level 2.5 or above on any one scale and Level 3 or above on all other scales in the Writing, Speaking and Classroom Language Assessment (CLA) papers.

4.2.3 Passage B, Question 30 asked candidates to identify the phrase meaning about the same as 'homogeneity', which was 'endless variation'. Candidates who wrote 'endless variation of humanity' were not awarded a mark because the word 'homogeneity' makes no reference to humanity.

4.2.4 Passage C, Question 45 asked 'What does the writer assume her female student wants?' The answer must also refer to the female student, thus 'some power over *her life*', not 'their lives' as written in the passage.

4.3 Drawing inferences from the writer's words

4.3.1 Passage A, Question 4 asked 'What does the phrase "of course" suggest?' The use of the word 'suggest' signalled a need to examine the writer's viewpoint, to understand the *implication* of the use of 'of course'. The correct response was that the writer was indicating an understanding that most readers would expect education to be an important element in lifting people from poverty. Candidates who performed poorly in this question simply explained the literal meaning of the phrase 'of course'.

4.3.2 Passage A, Question 13 asked what the writer implied by using 'go so far as to'. Candidates who answered this question correctly recognised that the implication was that the action was unusual and forward-looking, taking an exceptional effort. The paragraph in which the sentence appears is structured to point out first that systems of social safety nets are benefiting even very poor countries and then to give ever-stronger examples of how these may work. It ends with the strongest example, in which Kenya and South Africa *even* [go as far as to] 'include the right to social protection in their constitutions.'

4.3.3 Passage C, Question 35 asked what the sentence 'I'll admit that part of the reason I smile when I read this is because it's spelled and punctuated correctly' suggested about the written English of the writer's students. Why would the teacher smile at seeing correct spelling and punctuation? The suggestion – the implication – is that most of the time, for most of the students, spelling and punctuation are *not* correct.

4.4 Identification of referents
Candidates' performance on questions asking for references to information in the passages was mixed.

4.4.1 Passage A, Question 5 asked 'What does "these" refer to?' Candidates who performed well on this question recognised that 'these' referred to something in the plural and responded correctly with 'social safety nets'. The common answer 'the increased, global scope [singular subject] of social safety nets' was incorrect.

4.4.2 Passage A, Question 16 asked '"just over the brink"…The brink of what?' This refers to the statement in the passage that 'The fight to end extreme poverty means ensuring that those who are lifted just over the brink…'. Candidates who performed well on this question understood that the 'brink' being referred to was that of *extreme poverty*, not simply *poverty*.

4.4.3 Passage B, Question 23 asked 'What way?' about 'For millennia it has been this way'. The reference here is to what follows 'this way' in the passage, signalled by the use of a colon after that phrase. Candidates' correct responses indicated that they had understood the cataphoric reference.

4.4.4 Passage C, Question 33 asked 'What room?' Many candidates correctly identified the reference to the bathroom. Some candidates mistakenly took the reference to be to the 'eastern-most toilet stall'. Reading the following sentence – 'The room is decrepit, the soap dispenser is often empty and the stall doors don't latch' – provides additional clues about which location is being referred to.

4.5 Grasp of global meaning – reading beyond the sentence level
Candidate performance in this area was mixed.

4.5.1 Passage A, Question 18 (multiple choice) asked candidates to summarise the main message of the passage, which was contained in option A 'implement social safety nets'. Candidates who chose the more limiting response in D, 'develop social safety nets that save people from droughts, famines and sickness' may not have recognised that 'droughts, famines and sickness' are only examples of what social safety nets can address.

4.5.2 Passage C, Question 46 (multiple choice) asked for 'accurate reflections of the writer's attitude'. Many candidates correctly identified option C, 'She recognises that they face problems and she worries about them, but she remains hopeful for them' as one of the correct responses. Candidates who chose option D may have mistaken the teacher's viewpoint that most people want freedom and power over their lives for a concern that students be given those things. That concern is not described or implied in the passage.

4.6 Appropriateness of responses
Strong performers identified either in parts of the passage or in their own words, the material that was relevant to the question being asked. Overall there was relatively little evidence of indiscriminate copying, although where this did take place the response was often inappropriate and attracted no marks.

5. Advice to candidates:

In general:

5.1 Plan your time so that you can respond to all questions in the paper. Note that the length of passages and the number of questions for each will vary. Remember that you may tackle the passages in any order; start where you feel most confident and aim to work reasonably quickly so that you have time to review any questions where you are not initially certain of your responses. Check your progress at intervals to ensure that you are most effectively demonstrating your competence within the time available.

5.2 Pay attention to how ideas are constructed in a passage. You may need to read back and forth in a passage to build your understanding of the points being made by the writer.

5.3 Be aware that your first answer to a question is the one which will be marked; do not copy out a list of items or information in the hope that something within that list or information will attract a mark.

5.4 Be aware that if more than one mark is awarded to a question you may need to provide more than one point in your answer.

Specifically:

5.5 Where questions in a sequence seem to be asking for the same information, check them again to find what, specifically, is being asked. Each question is different and will require a unique response.

5.6 When responding to a question about the *meaning* of something in a passage, make sure that you take into account the *context* of the passage, not simply your own experience or general understanding. The paper does not test vocabulary or meaning without reference to the context.

5.7 Remember that each question is looking for specific information which must be clearly identified in your response. Marks cannot be awarded when a long piece of text has been copied which may include the answer to the question but does not identify it clearly. Note that 'phrase' does not refer to a complete sentence; if a whole sentence is copied as a response then it will not attract a mark. 'Phrase' also means more than one word; a single word will not serve as a correct response.

5.8 Pay attention to the grammatical structure and spelling of your responses. While errors in structure and spelling are not taken into account in the mark scheme, you should recognise that markers cannot give credit to responses that are not intelligible or to mis-spellings where they create a different word from the one you wish to use.

5.9 If the best response to a question is contained in words from the passage, use those words. If you choose to use your own words, check that you have expressed your meaning clearly so that the marker can understand your answer. If you choose to paraphrase something from the passage, ensure that your meaning is the same as suggested by the passage. In this paper, for example, in Passage C, Question 45, the correct response includes 'a free country'. Paraphrasing this as 'freedom' is an incorrect response because 'freedom' has a much broader meaning.

Finally:

5.10 Enhance your reading skills by reading on a regular basis. Choose first to read what you enjoy and then expand the range of your reading both within and outside your professional field. Doing so will broaden your comprehension of lexis, structure and meaning and thus your appreciation and understanding of the nuances of written English.

5.11 Reading fiction provides an opportunity to 'hear' English as it is spoken, in the dialogue within the text, and to appreciate descriptions of character and emotion. Reading expository writing builds an appreciation of the ways in which points of view unfold in a text and a stronger understanding of cohesion and coherence. The opportunity, appreciation and understanding provided by engagement in extensive reading can, in turn, positively inform your teaching and, most importantly, your students' learning.

Paper 2 (Writing)

6. This paper consists of two parts, Part 1: Task 1, Composition, and Part 2: Task 2A Detection and Correction of Errors/Problems, and 2B, Explanation of Errors/Problems in a Students' Composition.

Part 1: Composition

7. In Part 1 of the paper, candidates are required to write a text. The 2014 task was to write a short article for a school website raising awareness about a summer homestay programme to either Korea or Japan. In the article candidates were asked to raise awareness of the influence of Japanese or Korean culture on young people in Hong Kong and to include at least one positive cultural influence, along with an explanation of why that particular influence is so important.

8. Markers noted that the test paper was well designed; the topic of Korean and Japanese culture in the context of a homestay programme should have given candidates enough scope to combine their knowledge of experiential learning in schools with their understanding of popular culture locally, which has been greatly influenced in recent years by Korean and Japanese trends. To help candidates who may not have had that knowledge, a notice giving background information was included in the question. The task allowed candidates to demonstrate their English language ability and markers commented that candidates were able to show a good understanding of Korean and

Japanese cultural influences. Candidates wrote knowledgably about such things as the influence of TV programmes, popular music, technology, food, comics, films, and traditions in the two cultures.

9. Candidates' performance is graded on three scales for Part 1: (1) Organisation and Coherence, (2) Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range and (3) Task Completion. Most candidates completed the task successfully, with a very pleasing number of candidates attaining Level 3 or above.

10. The performance in scale (1) Organisation and Coherence was the best among the three scales, with almost all candidates achieving Level 3 or above. However, some markers found that ideas and information did not always flow in a natural and smooth way and that some answers appeared to lack planning. Some candidates seemed unsure of how to organise their ideas and what information to include or leave out. It seemed that candidates could not always prioritise their points and ideas, meaning that many answers were overly long and lacking coherence.

11. In terms of scale (2) Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range, it was quite common for markers to find expressions which were inappropriate to the task. Grammatical problems were also identified, some of which impeded understanding and there were some incorrect colloquial phrases like 'the Korean wind' (instead of 'wave') and overuse of clichés, e.g. 'Every coin has two sides'. This was the weakest of the three scales.

12. In scale (3) Task Completion, markers felt that most candidates were able to provide appropriate examples of Korean or Japanese cultural influences and successfully provided an explanation for their suggestions. There were some problems with the focus of the task in a number of scripts, however.

   ● Some candidates chose to discuss both Korean and Japanese cultural influences. Although this was acceptable, the task only asked candidates to choose one of the two countries. Some candidates who wrote on both countries tended to write too much or produced an unbalanced answer.

   ● Some candidates appeared to misunderstand the task and the purpose of the website article. Instead of responding to the positive cultural influence, they discussed positive and negative influences. Some candidates only wrote about negative influences, which was not a requirement in the instructions. Other candidates spent too much time describing Korea and Japan as holiday destinations instead of linking the cultural influences of the two countries to HK young people. The task did not require promotion of Korea or Japan as countries or as destinations for vacations.

13. Candidates are reminded to follow the instructions, write within the word limit, use other names when referring to schools as well as themselves, and not write in the margins.

Part 2: Correcting and explaining errors/problems

14. Part 2 of the Writing Paper is divided into two parts: Task 2A, Detection and Correction of Errors/Problems and Task 2B, Explanation of Errors/Problems. Candidates are given a composition that contains errors/problems and are asked to correct those that appeared in the first part of the composition for 2A, and to fill in incomplete explanations of some of the errors/problems in the remainder of the composition in 2B.

15. Markers felt that the instructions for Part 2 were clearly stated and the composition contained a balanced and fairly comprehensive range of testing items.

16. Candidates generally performed very well on the 2A task, but a significant minority struggled with the following questions:

   - 2(a): plural noun 'The Elderly'
   - 3(b): subject-verb agreement of 'Recent statistics show…'
   - 11(b): part of speech of 'heat' when describing 'summer'
   - 12(a): collocation of 'use' with 'the computer/computers'

17. In Task 2B, candidates were given incomplete explanations of errors/problems. Candidates were asked to fill in the blanks with one or more words so as to make the explanations complete. Many candidates did this successfully, but below are some common problems in responses to Task 2B:

   - Few candidates were able to label the 'existential' structure [Question 18(a)].
   - In Question 21(a) many candidates seemed to miss the problem in the sentence, which was that the main clause and the subordinate clause had different subjects.
   - Many candidates mistook the error in Question 21(b) as one of tense or present participle when the answer was 'verb form'. Candidates are reminded to read the context provided carefully to understand what is required in the answer.

18. Candidates are reminded to check their spelling and to review their answers to make sure they are logical and grammatically correct, and that appropriate metalanguage/terminology has been used. Candidates are also reminded to demonstrate their understanding of the linguistic problems with complete linguistic terms, not abbreviations.

Paper 3 (Listening)

19. This year's paper consisted of three sets of items relating to three different listening texts. The first text was a podcast discussion between the host and his guest on the topic of the influence of technology on dating; the second was a discussion between the host and her three guests on the topic of village houses in Hong Kong; in the third, the host interviewed an expert about the global seed vault located in the north of Norway. There were male and female speakers in the test, with a variety of accents, speaking at a speed normal for the type of interaction.

20. As usual, the paper went through a rigorous moderation and pre-testing process. The Moderation Committee considered the content of the three texts to be appropriate, allowing for interesting listening and for setting meaningful questions of different types. Markers generally felt that the assessment overall was effective in identifying different levels of candidate comprehension. They expressed satisfaction with the texts, which they generally found to be of an appropriate and fairly equal level of difficulty; with the topics, which were varied and interesting; and with the marking schemes and the marking process.

21. A variety of task types were included in the paper, which allowed for a range of micro-listening skills to be tested, focusing both on gist and intensive listening. The paper included blank-filling, table-completion, multiple-choice and open-ended questions. There was no evidence that any of these formats was generally markedly more difficult or easier than others for candidates.

22. The easiest items

    22.1   Five items were answered correctly by more than 90% of candidates, but these items were generally shown to have discriminated between weaker and stronger candidates.

    22.2   For Text 1, Question 1 required the listener to identify the overall topic of the text, romance. Since this information framed the entire text and since it was the first question of the entire test, the item was designed not to be too challenging.

    22.3   Question 2(vii) was the last in a series of items relating to the romantic 'story of a couple called Josh and Padma'. That may well have mentally prepared candidates for the conventional happy ending.

    22.4   In Text 2, Questions 8(iii) and (iv) were items that occurred in relation to the earlier part of the text and, while not difficult, were included to ensure that candidates understood an important aspect of the background to the issue under discussion.

    22.5   In the final text, Question 25(iii) (correct response 'name') was perhaps made easier to answer by the signposting provided by the strongly collocating preceding expression '…didn't even have a…' and followed by the confirming statement 'it only had a number'.

23. The hardest items

    23.1   Overall, few items were found to be particularly hard, with only one item answered correctly by fewer than 10% of candidates and only five by fewer than 20%.

    23.2   The hardest item, 'Independence Day party', (Question 2 (ii)) was found in the first text. A number of candidates wrote 'Independent Day' instead of 'Independence Day' which would suggest they were not familiar with the term. Some also, perhaps because of the preceding adjective 'virtual', confused the word 'day' with 'state' – as in 'virtual state'.

23.3 Two other hard items were also in Text 1. Question 4, 'a formal expression of their relationship', required candidates to correctly interpret the reference pronoun 'it' which occurs some time after the speaker has indicated the referent – 'getting married inside the game'. Statistics indicate that it discriminated effectively. Question 6(iii) was third of five consecutive, related open-ended items. The item, while fairly clearly expressed, is embedded in the middle of the text and candidates may have missed it while processing the preceding or following item. The item discriminated fairly well.

23.4 In text 2, candidates found two items to be particularly challenging – Questions 11(ii) and 13(ii). Question 11(ii) required candidates to have picked up on the word 'say', thus indicating that the statement was a claim rather than a statement of fact and this was required in the candidates' answer. For Question 13(ii), which discriminated effectively, candidates had to recognise that the reference pronoun 'that' used by Michael refers back to all of Helen's preceding point about inheritance and that Michael's utterance carries the function of agreement.

23.5 The final item of the test, Question 26, discriminated very effectively. The relatively low number of candidates getting the answer correct may have to do with the fact that the speaker presents the information in the opposite order than is required in the answer.

23.6 Overall, while none of the three texts stand out as having proven very markedly more difficult for candidates, the first two texts had fewer difficult items but seem to have been more challenging in terms of some of the lower frequency lexical items used.

24. Vocabulary

24.1 Although lexical knowledge does not seem to have been a major issue for candidates, some lower frequency lexical items ('audit', 'zoning' and 'legislation', for example) may have made comprehension difficult for weaker candidates. Candidates misheard a number of words, not all of which were lower frequency lexical items. For example, 'code' was confused with 'cold', 'extinct' with 'distinct', and 'review' with 'reveal'.

24.2 When addressing items that required only short answers (the majority of items), some candidates struggled to express themselves coherently but succinctly. As in previous years, some candidates did not write anything in answer to some of the questions, which meant that they had no chance of gaining a mark. Candidates are reminded that there is nothing to be lost by writing down a word or phrase that they think they have heard as this may turn out to be correct: the mark will be awarded as long as the candidate's answer is considered to be a misspelling of the required answer rather than a completely different word.

25. Advice to candidates

As in previous years, candidates are reminded to:

● Check the number of marks allotted to a particular question as this will give an indication of the number of points to make.

● Make sure responses are comprehensibly written and that spelling is as accurate as possible. Candidates should be aware that if a proper noun is required (as in Question 17, for example) the spelling needs to be correct to gain a mark.

● Pay attention to discourse markers such as 'however' to mark contrast or 'previously' as a time marker.

● Listen to a wide variety of source materials in English in order to increase your awareness of different genres and text-types.

Paper 4 (Speaking)

26. Paper 4 consists of two parts. In Part 1 there are two tasks; Task 1A: Reading Aloud a Prose Passage and Task 1B: Recounting an Experience/Presenting Arguments. There is only one task in Part 2: Group Interaction.

27. Candidates are tested on six scales of performance. Task 1A assesses candidates on two scales: (1) Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation and (2) Reading Aloud with Meaning. Task 1B assesses candidates on two different scales: (3) Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range and (4) Organisation and Cohesion. Finally, Task 2 assesses candidates on two different scales: (5) Interacting with Peers and (6) Discussing Educational Matters with Peers.

28. Five minutes are given for both Tasks 1A and 1B, with Task 1B beginning immediately after Task 1A finishes. After Task 1B is over, candidates are asked to go back to the preparation room where they wait for a short while before returning to the assessment room for Part 2 – Group Interaction, in which they discuss a topic of relevance to the educational context of Hong Kong. The Group Discussion lasts for either 10 minutes (if there are three candidates in a group) or for 13 minutes (if there are four candidates in a group).

Part 1: Task 1A Reading Aloud a Prose Passage

29. The passages that candidates were required to read for Task 1A were drawn from a wide variety of sources and covered a range of topics. Care was taken to ensure that the texts presented candidates with an opportunity to read aloud a combination of narration, description, and dialogue/conversation.

30. During the test setting process, passages were chosen that contained words and phrases that would effectively discriminate between all levels of candidates in terms of clarity and effective use of pronunciation, stress and intonation. Passages generally included description of setting, character and mood, and included a range of voices: narrative voice, reported speech, and direct as well as indirect speech modes. The chosen passages were long enough for accurate assessment to take place, but short enough to ensure that candidates had adequate time to complete the tasks.

31. Overall, candidates performed quite well in the Reading Aloud task, although this was the task in which fewest candidates achieved Level 3 or above. Many displaying the ability to establish the meaning and mood of the passages through effective use of intonation and tone to differentiate narration from dialogue. Most candidates were also able to chunk language into meaningful units, use strong and weaker forms in context and to link items.

32. Less successful performances usually resulted from candidates not being able to produce language sufficiently well across a range of features. Some particular issues were: problems articulating vowel length (e.g. using short vowels where a long vowel was needed), problems articulating consonant clusters and the pronunciation of individual phonemes. Occasionally candidates substituted word(s) in the text for alternate and inappropriate words.

33. Candidates encountered problems in transmitting meaning because of weaknesses in chunking words and phrases meaningfully into thought groups through the use of linking, pitch and intonation. Weaknesses in these areas led to difficulties guiding the listener meaningfully through a passage.

34. With regard to pacing, less successful readings occurred when candidates read the passages either too slowly, which resulted in loss of meaningful grouping of ideas, or too quickly/dramatically. Very quick/dramatic readings had a negative impact on the clear articulation of thought groups, pronunciation and the meaningful use of intonation, pacing and volume in terms of establishing the mood of the passage.

35. Candidates who attained a Level 3 or above were those who were able to attend to the needs of a listening audience by consistently correct pronunciation of easy-to-recognise sounds. Their readings conveyed meaning through clear pronunciation, stress, intonation and chunking of thought groups, as well conveying the correct mood and tone of a passage by using effective changes in volume, pitch and pacing. Sensitive readings came from candidates who were able to pace and vary their reading to capture appropriate feelings and attitudes, for example, through narration and dialogue.

Part 1: Task 1B Recounting an Experience/Presenting an Argument

36. Task 1B takes place immediately after candidates complete Task 1A and both tasks are completed in the assessment room within 5 minutes. Task 1B assesses candidates' ability to speak spontaneously or semi-spontaneously on a given topic. The task provides candidates with the opportunity to use their own language resources to produce meaningful, flowing spoken English.

37. In order to provide candidates with accessible tasks, the topics chosen for Task 1B were intended to be relevant to the candidates' personal and professional experience.

38. The two scales for this task are Organisation and Cohesion, and Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range. Candidates performed well on these scales, with more than two-thirds attaining Level 3 or above.

39. Candidates had different ways of approaching Task 1B: informal, unstructured and conversational or as one might approach formal public speaking.

40. As the tasks largely involved presenting a cogent argument, clear topic shift and/or signposting was seen in more successful performances. Candidates who relied on the use of the connective 'and' to string their ideas together tended to produce more 'list-like' spoken texts, and any point was difficult to follow as there was little sense of argumentation that comes from relating ideas to each other.

41. Candidates who made use of organising phrases to indicate priorities ('The main point is…'), for example, or the way in which ideas were related to each other ('as well as this…'; 'equally…'; 'you could also argue…') or were in some way contrastive or concessive ('having said that…'; 'that said…'; 'despite that…'), tended to produce more successful flowing speech in that the sequence of views was more accessible to the listener.

42. Less successful performances occurred when candidates read aloud from a script or extensive notes they had written during preparation. The purpose of the preparation time in this task is to allow candidates a few moments to think in general about the organisation of what they will say, as a preface to spontaneously producing language to fill in this general structure.

43. This task also assesses Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range. More successful performances were by candidates who were able to make use of language that demonstrated sensitivity to the topic at hand and also conveyed their own views on it.

44. Less successful performances were from candidates who relied on a limited range of vocabulary or grammatical resources to introduce or convey their ideas. There were issues with, for example, subject-verb agreement, reference, cohesive items, use of grammatical phrasing and tense in context, and confusion of singular and plural forms.

Part 2: Group Interaction

45. In Part 2 of the paper, candidates engage in a group discussion based on an education-related, school-based issue, plan or project. The task is designed so that candidates have an opportunity to take part in a professional discussion during the course of which they contribute their own views and ideas, extend, develop, consider, investigate or challenge the ideas of others, working constructively with each other from the task agenda. The vast majority of candidates were able to take part in this collaborative discussion in a way that was focused and relevant.

46. The scales for Part 2, Group Interaction are Interacting with Peers and Discussing Language Matters with Peers.

47. Stronger performances came from candidates who were able to take part fully in a meaningful professional exchange by using a wide variety of discussion strategies. Such strategies include: making claims and suggestions; asking for the views of others; constructively elaborating on the points made by others; and demonstrating an ability to keep the discussion focused and on-track.

48. Stronger performances were those which were able to clarify or justify ideas being raised, relate them to context, summarise, and collaboratively move the conversation on.

49. Less successful discussions came from candidates who remained quiet (unless asked to contribute), took shorter turns and provided ideas and suggestions seemingly irrelevant to what others were discussing. The lack of strategies such as follow-up questions or comments that show one is part of purposeful professional discourse, coupled with an absence of conversational resources to keep the discussion, were indicative of weak performances.

50. Where less successful candidates came together in a group, the group dynamic tended to be typified by sequential turn-taking, where points were made without candidates taking on board what others were saying. There was little collaborative professional action, and an inability to establish or maintain a professionally vibrant exchange. The flow of conversation was obstructed by phrases such as 'I agree' without any follow up, engagement or extension offered of the point just given.

51. In preparation for Part 2, candidates are encouraged to take part in meaningful professional exchange and dialogue by discussing learning and teaching issues with their colleagues.

Paper 5 (Classroom Language Assessment)[2]

52. A total of 276 candidates were assessed between November 2013 and March 2014. The attainment rate remained very high, with 97.9% of the candidates achieving the proficiency level on all four scales: (1) Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range; (2) Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation; (3) Language of Interaction; and (4) Language of Instruction.

53. Overall, the performance of most candidates was satisfying. Most lessons were appropriately prepared and candidates demonstrated a good level of confidence and competence in using the language to conduct the lessons. The strongest candidates displayed an outstanding level of competence in all aspects and were able to exhibit exemplary language skills as good classroom models of spoken English.

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[2] Administered by the Education Bureau, which contributed this section of the Assessment Report.

Comments on the individual areas of assessment are given below.

54.   Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range

54.1   Overall, candidates demonstrated a firm grasp of grammar necessary for handling the teaching content in primary and secondary classrooms. Accuracy in basic grammar was evident among most of the candidates and instances of communication being impeded as a result of grammatical inaccuracy were not common.

54.2   Problem areas generally included the omission of articles and object pronouns (e.g. 'Can you hear (me)?' 'I think you know how to do (it).'), inconsistent agreement across clauses/sentences and inaccurate use of tenses. Faulty question structures such as 'Why (do) you think this one is better?', 'How much (do) you understand…?' and 'How to spell/pronounce…?' were also noted. Other lapses included confusion between singular/plural forms and wrong prepositions. The problem with subject-verb order in indirect questions (e.g. 'Can you remember what have we learnt?') as mentioned in previous reports was still present, though to a lesser extent.

54.3   Apart from grammatical accuracy, syntactic complexity and lexical range were also factors differentiating candidate abilities. While the weaker candidates tended to use mostly simple and repetitive language, the stronger candidates often stood out with an extensive range of vocabulary and appropriate use of idiomatic expressions, providing students with rich language exposure. They were also more confident in using complex structures and were able to quickly recognize errors and correct them.

55.   Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation

55.1   Pronunciation of sounds, sentence stress and intonation patterns were generally accurate. The majority of candidates were able to speak with clarity and communication was mostly clear. The stronger candidates also displayed a sensitivity to the use of fine variations in tone, pitch and voice to differentiate emotions and convey the intended meaning.

55.2   Intonation was generally well used. However, some candidates tended to use a terminal rise for all question types and, on occasion, for statements. Another cause of unnatural sounding patterns was the inappropriate stress placed on weak syllables. This often involved the schwa /ə/ being stressed in words such as 'he_re_' and 'di_no_saur', or weak syllables in disyllabic and polysyllabic words like 'book_shop_' and '_e_laborate'.

55.3   Confusion sometimes arose when candidates failed to distinguish between long and short vowels as in 'f_ee_ling/f_i_lling'. Other mispronounced vowels included /ʌ/ in 'w_o_n' (often pronounced as /wɒn/), /ɔɪ/ in 'p_oi_nt' and 't_oy_' and /aʊ/ in 'c_ou_nt'. Some consonant sounds like /v/, /ʃ/, /ʤ/ and /ð/, and consonant clusters, such as /bl/, /pl/ and /kt/, also proved tricky for the weaker candidates.

56. Language of Interaction

    56.1   Most candidates were able to interact fairly naturally and smoothly with their students, making use of functional language that was appropriate to the students' level. There was always a clear effort to elicit responses from the students, acknowledge their responses and praise them. However, it was noted that the interactive language used by the average and weaker candidates was rather restricted at times. The questions asked often aimed to get simple, mechanical answers as required by the handouts used or the heavily guided language tasks. Stronger candidates were able to employ a wide range of interactive language to respond to students' answers or to engage them in extended dialogues. These candidates successfully promoted meaningful, communicative classroom interaction.

    56.2   Weaker candidates in general lacked the appropriate language for handling spontaneous interaction and responding to students' errors. In some cases, some valid questions from students were not fully addressed and students' problems were left unsettled.

57. Language of Instruction

    57.1   On the whole, instructions, especially those on classroom routines, were clear and the language was always comprehensible. The stages of the lesson were also indicated using appropriate language signals. When explaining new words and language items, the stronger candidates demonstrated full confidence and competence in their use of language of instruction. Their presentations and explanations were clear and precise, marked by excellent cohesion.

    57.2   Occasionally noted among the weaker candidates was a lack of spontaneity as they tended to keep to a limited set of prepared questions/ language items when explaining the tasks or topics. Their speech might appear to be quite fluent and natural in the more predictable parts of the lesson, but not so when dealing with unexpected occasions where further explanation and elaboration were needed.