Language Proficiency Assessment
(English Language) 2024

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 (English Language) in 2024.

General Observations

2.   Candidates achieved different proficiency attainment[1] rates in different papers. The approximate attainment rates for individual papers were: Reading 82.7%; Writing 51.1%; Listening 78.6%; Speaking 64.9%; and Classroom Language Assessment 93.4%.

Paper 1 (Reading)

3.   The paper comprised three reading passages on different topics suitable for advanced readers. Passage A was on the influence of genetic factors on elite performance; Passage B was on emotion regulation; and Passage C was on parents' overuse of social media to share content about their children. The attainment rate for correctly answering the questions on each text did not vary greatly and was in the 67% - 72% range, showing that the questions were set at an appropriate level.

4.   Candidates' performance

   4.1   <u>Paper completion</u>

   The vast majority of candidates completed the questions for all three reading passages although there were a few questions left blank, possibly reflecting time management issues.

   4.2   <u>Appropriateness of responses</u>

   Strong candidates identified the material that was relevant to the question being asked. In general, there was relatively little evidence of indiscriminate copying. Although where this did happen, the response was often inappropriate and attracted no marks.

   In the sub-sections to follow, candidate performance is analysed in respect of the sub-skills of reading comprehension.

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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.

4.3 <u>Interpreting a word or phrase as used by the writer</u>

This means using the context and language knowledge to understand words or phrases as used by the writer.

4.3.1 Passage A, Q.2 asked candidates to 'identify a phrase that is similar in meaning to "innate talent"'. Possible answers were 'genetic factors' or 'genetically prescribed characteristics'. The examiners were looking for candidates to understand the meaning of the term given and that it was related to genetic factors. This proved to be a straightforward question for candidates as they had to locate the answer rather than generate it themselves and 75% answered correctly.

4.3.2 Passage B, Q.33 asked, 'Which word is closest in meaning to "undermine" (line 41) in this context?' This was a multiple-choice question and the correct answer was option B 'weaken'. This was chosen by only 52% of candidates, so it was a relatively difficult question. Candidates were distracted by options A 'reduce' and C 'prevent'. Those who answered correctly may have been aided by their knowledge of collocation as 'weaken' collocates commonly with 'efforts'.

4.3.3 Passage C, Q.41 was also a multiple-choice question that asked, 'What word best represents the meaning of "curated" (line 25) in this context?' The correct answer was option D 'managed'. The word 'curated' means arranged, organised or taken care of and so 'managed' is the closest in meaning of the options given. Many candidates chose option B 'created', but in the passage the sense is that parents do more than just create an online presence for their children. As 'curated' may be an unfamiliar word to candidates, just 12% answered correctly, making this the most difficult question on the whole paper.

4.3.4 In Passage C, Q.47 candidates were asked, 'What is implied by personal details being called "a treasure trove" (line 35)?' The answer required was that 'data brokers (or others) can make money from them' or that 'they can be valuable.' An understanding of the term 'treasure trove' as being related to financial gain would have facilitated comprehension. Many candidates did not seem to be familiar with the term as just 34% answered correctly.

4.4 <u>Understanding information and making an inference</u>

This means understanding information that is not explicitly stated and using that understanding to make predictions about missing information.

Passage A, Q.6 asked candidates, 'In the two studies mentioned in paragraph 2, what was similar about the way the participants improved their performance?' The expected answer was, 'They both involved many hours of training' or something similar. An answer such as 'hard work' or just 'training' did not fully reflect the point made in the passage. This had to be inferred from information such as 'over 230 hours of practice' or 'a training programme'. The question was answered correctly by just 22% of candidates.

4.5 <u>Understanding grammatical relationships of words or phrases across text</u>

This means understanding the use of cohesion in a text (e.g. referencing).

4.5.1 Passage A, Q.9 asked the candidates, 'Consider the phrase "aspects that are known to be influenced by genetic factors" in lines 27-28. Which aspects are being referred to?' The required answer was 'music aptitude and music interest', which was answered correctly by 76% of candidates.

4.5.2 Passage B, Q.24 candidates were asked, 'Consider "this effort" in line 14. What effort is being referred to?' The correct answer was 'emotion regulation' or 'regulating their emotions', which were both stated earlier in the sentence. The question was relatively straightforward given that the reference and referent were close together in the text and was answered correctly by most candidates (94%).

4.5.3 Passage C, Q.42 asked, 'what TWO identities do 92% of American children already have at age 2?' The question required candidates to provide the two answers (underlined) from the text: 'unique <u>digital identities</u>' and 'their more <u>private ones</u>'. Most candidates (88%) were able to answer 'private ones', but not 'digital identities'. Instead, they opted for the description of 'those created by others', which is an elaboration on this type of identity presented later in the text. Just 36% of candidates were able to make this distinction.

4.6 <u>Understanding main ideas and supporting ideas</u>

This means distinguishing main ideas from supporting details, including points of view, arguments and opinions. It also means following topic development and identifying relationships between ideas.

In Passage C, Q.35 candidates were asked, 'What does "oversharing" (line 5) suggest about the writer's attitude towards the parents' behaviour?' Candidates may have inferred from the prefix 'over' that the writer held a negative attitude (the required answer) but a reading of paragraph 1 makes this clear through the use of vocabulary such as 'embarrassing', 'complain', 'mortifying' and so on. The question was answered correctly by 77% of candidates so did not prove too difficult.

5. Advice to candidates

5.1 The passages can be tackled in any order. They typically vary in length. Candidates may wish to quickly survey the paper to establish a test-taking strategy.

5.2 Candidates are reminded to pay attention to the mark allocation for each question as a general indicator to the length or number of points to include in the answer.

5.3 Each question is different and will require a unique response. Candidates are advised to read the questions and the text carefully to investigate any nuances in meaning.

5.4 Similarly, candidates are advised to carefully consider the context of any unfamiliar vocabulary (such as 'treasure trove', in Passage C, Q.47) and think about what the writer's intended meaning is.

5.5 Candidates are advised to pay attention to the requirements of each question. In some cases the required answer might be one word (e.g. Passage B, Q.27) or a phrase (e.g. Passage A, Q.2). In such cases, answers that are misspelled will not be accepted.

5.6 In some cases, the best response to a question can be expressed using words or phrases from the passage. If candidates choose to paraphrase the passage, they should make sure that the meaning is as similar as possible to the original. For example, in Passage B, Q.22 a correct response was 'Deep acting is trying to change how you feel inside', which is taken directly from the passage. Rephrasing and simplifying to 'changing how you feel inside' would miss the key idea of 'trying to change'.

5.7 Candidates are advised to enhance their language skills by reading widely across a broad range of genres. Leisure reading in English is particularly fruitful in introducing and reinforcing knowledge of lexis, grammatical structures and nuances in meaning of written English. The benefits of this approach extend across all English skills, receptive and productive, and entail a positive effect on confidence in teachers' language ability, their teaching, and their 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 student's composition.

Part 1: Composition

7. In Part 1 of the paper, candidates were required to write a coherent text using accurate grammar. The task given for the 2024 assessment was for candidates to write a short article for the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) Newsletter about students' common fears. Candidates needed to discuss at least two common fears that Hong Kong students have and suggest strategies that schools and families can adopt to help students alleviate the fears. They also needed to explain why the suggested strategies are appropriate. The text length was to be about 400 words. To help candidates, some background information about the most common fears such as fear of death and fear of developing a disease were included in the question. These fears stated in the given text are not necessarily related to students' fears specifically, but they were meant to help candidates frame their response and consider what common fears Hong Kong students have and the relevant strategies to alleviate those fears. The task not only allowed candidates to demonstrate their English language ability, but to show their understanding of students' common fears

within the current educational context and the roles of schools and families to help students tackle their fears. Having said that, this was not a requirement of the task *per se*, as candidates were required to simply write a response from a consistent perspective.

8. Markers noted that the paper was well designed, the wording in the question was easy to understand and unambiguous, and the theme is relevant to the education setting with which candidates should be familiar. The given text provided some common fears in the broader context, and the candidates were expected to come up with fears specifically related to students in Hong Kong. Markers commented that, because of the different scopes between the given text and the task, candidates did not copy as much from the text and were more able to express their own ideas.

9. Markers commented that many candidates were able to show good understanding of the typical features of the genre of an article for the PTA Newsletter. Stronger candidates were well aware of the context of writing as a teacher in the sense that when providing strategies that schools could implement to help students alleviate the fears discussed, the proposed actions were presented as school policies to be implemented instead of general advice to schools. Some also included a call for parents to work closely with the school on specific measures. Weaker candidates provided general suggestions which did not directly address the fears discussed earlier in their writing. Some wrote in a tone which was too informal. Candidates were expected to write in a professional manner and the content was expected to be relevant and convincing.

10. Candidates' performance was 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 many candidates attaining Level 3 or above on all three scales.

11. The performance on scale (1) Organisation and Coherence was the highest of the three scales. Candidates typically wrote two common fears followed by two strategies, one adopted by schools and one by families; and some wrote the strategy immediately after discussing each fear. Candidates occasionally focused more on the paragraph level and as a result did not devote enough attention to the sentence-level organisation. Markers noted that some candidates included too many ideas and the writing seemed to be more of a list than a well-thought-out response. This resulted in ideas that were not clearly connected or explained and as a result could be hard to follow. The reverse would also occasionally happen where candidates focused too much on the details and paid less attention to the larger structure of an article in a PTA newsletter. In these cases, markers commented that while some individual paragraphs were well written, there may have been limited connection between these larger ideas. Some candidates wrote too much about what common fears Hong Kong students have, leaving them with less time or space to write about how to alleviate the fears. Candidates would have benefitted from starting with an overall organisation plan so that they could integrate and develop their arguments with appropriate examples and elaboration. Some weaker answers relied too heavily on a limited number of sentence-initial connectives (e.g., Firstly, Secondly, Moreover, Furthermore, etc.), which made their writing appear mechanical and rather formulaic. Stronger candidates used other types of cohesive devices (e.g., lexical chains, pronouns, synonyms, ellipsis, etc.) to organise their ideas in a more natural manner.

12. The performance on scale (2) Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range was slightly lower than that in previous years. Markers commented that some weaker candidates

attempted to express simple ideas in overly complex sentence structures, resulting in a high density of grammatical errors. Markers reported errors in such areas as: the spelling of reasonably high frequency words (e.g., * 'victum' instead of 'victim', * 'intemedating' instead of 'intimidating'), part of speech (e.g., 'fear' used as an adjective), the use of articles, subject-verb agreement and verb patterns. Markers commented that there were examples of candidates obviously proofreading and correcting their text after they had finished writing. In these cases, at least some of the simple grammatical mistakes listed above seemed to have been avoided or eradicated.

13. The performance on scale (3) Task Completion was also slightly lower than that in previous years. The majority of candidates demonstrated their awareness of what they were expected to include in the article for the PTA newsletter. Many started with the common fears Hong Kong students have, and proceeded to propose strategies that could be adopted by schools and families to alleviate these fears. However, markers observed that some candidates discussed poor academic skills or the pros and cons of online learning or using social media without specifying how they are related to the fears students face. Some strategies proposed tackled other issues rather than the fears mentioned. This often resulted in irrelevant content. A few weaker candidates only mentioned one fear or did not elaborate on their strategies proposed, resulting in unsatisfactory task completion.

14. Several markers observed that some candidates appeared to believe that going beyond task requirements would give them extra credit. Specifically, some went well beyond the 400-word requirement and wrote as many as 700 words, resulting in repeated ideas, unconcise elaboration, and a higher volume of grammatical and lexical errors. Time could have been spent on more careful planning and proofreading.

Part 2: Correcting and explaining errors/problems

15. 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. For Part 2A, candidates are given a student composition that contains errors/problems and are asked to correct those that appear in the first part of the composition. For Part 2B candidates are asked to fill in incomplete explanations of some of the errors/problems in the remainder of the composition. Markers considered the instructions for Part 2 to be clearly stated and felt that the composition contained a balanced and fairly comprehensive range of testing items.

16. Candidates performed quite strongly overall in Part 2A. Nevertheless, some candidates struggled with the following items:

- 8(iii): Candidates were tested on the use of the verb 'ensure' in a clause in this item. In the latter part of the sentence, 'ensure students and staffs to perform well' should have been changed to 'ensure students and staff (will/can) perform/are performing well'. While many candidates correctly changed 'staffs' to 'staff' in item 8(ii), fewer than half were able to change 'to perform' to a finite verb. The verb 'ensure' should be followed by a direct object or a that-clause, although 'that' is optional in this part of the sentence.

- 12(ii): In this item, the main clause 'our performance is suffered' is grammatically

incorrect because it misuses the verb 'suffer' in a passive construction. Candidates needed to change it to 'our performance suffers' or 'our performance will/can/could/may/might suffer'. Passive voice requires a transitive verb and 'suffer' is not used as a transitive verb in this context.

- 14(i): This item tested candidates' awareness of redundancy in a sentence. In the sentence 'For both students and teachers, improving the school environment will benefit them.', the phrase 'For both students and teachers' already indicates who will benefit from the action, making the pronoun 'them' redundant. One way to correct it was to make 'both students and teachers' the object of 'benefit', making the sentence 'Improving the school environment will benefit both students and teachers.' An alternative was to use the adjective 'beneficial' to form 'will be beneficial to both students and teachers'. Another way to correct the sentence, while keeping 'For both students and teachers', was to write 'For both students and teachers, improving the school environment will be beneficial.'

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 examples of common problems in Task 2B:

- 15(iii): This item was an open-ended item, in which candidates were expected to provide a clear explanation regarding when future perfect 'will have spent' should be used. Many candidates merely mentioned that future perfect is used to indicate the future, but failed to explain that it is used to talk about an action or event that will be completed at a certain point in the future. Only slightly under 20% of candidates were awarded a point for this item.

- 20(iii): Many candidates were seemingly unaware that the verb 'reply' in the sentence is followed by the preposition 'to' because it is an intransitive verb. Some candidates simply wrote 'intransitive' instead of 'intransitive verb'. Missing the word 'verb' in the answer made the answer incomplete and ungrammatical, and thus was not awarded a point. A few candidates noticed that this item was related to transitivity, but they seemingly confused 'transitive verb' and 'intransitive verb' and wrote 'transitive verb', which was not correct. Only 29% of candidates were awarded a point for this item.

- 21(ii): This proved to be another challenging open-ended item. In this item candidates were expected to explain why a gerund or a present participle 'hearing' should be used instead of 'hear' after 'looking forward to'. A number of candidates simply gave the explanation that the gerund 'hearing' should be used after 'looking forward to' without pointing out that it is because of the preposition 'to'. Only 24% of candidates were awarded a point for this item.

18. Candidates are reminded to check the spelling in their responses very carefully and to review their answers to make sure they are logical and grammatically correct. It is crucial that appropriate meta-language/terminology is used. Candidates are also reminded to demonstrate their understanding of the linguistic problems with complete linguistic terms and not abbreviations.

Paper 3 (Listening)

19. This year's paper consisted of three sets of items, totalling 67 items, relating to three different listening texts. The first text was about the life and work of Friedrich Froebel, a German educator and founder of the kindergarten. The second was a conversation about updating classic children's books for modern readers. The third was a panel discussion about a newly released film. There was a balance of male and female speakers, talking at normal to near-native speeds for the type of interaction involved.

20. The moderation committee selected the texts to represent a range of interlocutional patterns for the setting of meaningful questions of different types and at different levels of difficulty.

21. A variety of items tested a range of listening skills, both when listening for specific details and more holistically. Item types consisted of multiple-choice questions, short-answer questions, gap-fill tasks, completion of charts, diagrams, tables and longer summaries of sections of the texts. Items which required candidates to extract key ideas from an extended monologue (e.g. questions 2 and 26) were answered correctly by less than 30% of candidates and proved to be relatively more challenging.

22. The overall mean score of the paper was 56.8%, with a standard deviation of around 19.9%, which is considered acceptable for a paper of this nature. The mean scores for individual items ranged from around 14% to around 92%.

23. Items in Part 2 (a dialogue about changes made to popular children's book author Roald Dahl's books) proved to be the most challenging in terms of level of difficulty. Items in Part 1 proved to have the widest range of mean scores among its items. Q2 was answered correctly by 25% of candidates in contrast to Q5ii, which was answered correctly by 92%. Three questions from different sections of the paper are highlighted below for further analysis.

   23.1 Question 9 asked candidates to identify four reasons for the enduring popularity of Dahl's books. The fourth reason 'illustrations are timeless or classic' proved to be the most difficult item in the paper with a mean of around 14%. Candidates may not have understood the meaning of the word 'illustrations' or 'illustrating' and some weaker candidates may have found it hard to parse a real time utterance, 'And it doesn't hurt when you have a talent like Quentin Blake illustrating your books'. Whilst this item had a low mean, it was found to discriminate well between strong and weak candidates.

   23.2 Question 16 was another item which proved to be relatively difficult, with a mean of 34%. In this item, candidates were required to identify the writer's views towards sensitivity readers before and after working with them. Many candidates simply wrote the word 'censorship' for 'Views before'. However, 'censorship' *per se* was not considered a sufficient answer as it does not express an attitude. A more complete response such as 'fear of censorship' or 'afraid of being forced to make changes' was required to be awarded marks. This item also proved to discriminate well.

   23.3 Another highly discriminating item was question 24i, with a mean of 40%. This question asked candidates to identify why one of the four panel members

disliked the film. On the recording, Robert started his turn by agreeing with the many positive things that another panelist mentioned in the previous turn about the movie. What he did not like about the movie was later expressed in a rather subtle and implicit manner ('All of that was great. But I found that when the movie ended, it felt a little abrupt to me'). Some candidates may have been listening for more salient markers of dislike (e.g. 'What I don't like about…') or they may have been unfamiliar with the word 'abrupt' and therefore were not able to identify and give this particular reason for Robert not liking the film.

24. Advice to candidates

24.1 Candidates are reminded to proofread their answers carefully. It was rather surprising to see the number of candidates who misspelt high frequency words such as 'turtles' (Q22i) and 'disaster' (Q22ii). Wrong spelling for key words may result in candidates not being awarded the point for an item.

24.2 Idiomatic expressions may be an area that candidates could usefully focus on. The use of idiomatic expressions such as '… fell quite naturally into …' or '…which would have dovetailed well with … ' (Q2) frequently appear in natural spoken texts and becoming familiar with such expressions can help improve one's listening skills.

24.3 As in previous years, candidates are reminded to read the questions carefully. As mentioned in 23.2, partial answers such as 'censorship' would not be deemed acceptable and candidates should pay attention to the context in which the question is set. In this connection, candidates should always re-read their answers and consider whether the answer they have written actually answers the question that has been set.

24.4 Some candidates may need to familiarise themselves with different communication strategies used in spoken interactions. As pointed out in 23.3, the indirect nature in which the speaker expresses his dislike of the movie is an example of hedging which is used to soften the impact of delivering unpleasant information. Similarly, features of spoken interaction such as the use of vague language, dysfluencies and co-constructed meanings between two or more speakers can all potentially negatively influence comprehension if candidates are not exposed to natural spoken language.

24.5 Prospective candidates are recommended to listen to as wide a range of English language texts as possible, to help sharpen their listening skills and expose themselves to a variety of accents, cultures, genres and colloquialisms. It is also strongly recommended that they pay attention to global issues that have currency and relevance as this will facilitate the learning and use of English as an international language.

Paper 4 (Speaking)

25. Paper 4 consists of two parts. In Part 1 there are two tasks, Task 1A: Reading Aloud and Task 1B: Recounting an Experience/Presenting an Argument. In Part 2 there is one task: Group Interaction.

Part 1: Task 1A Reading Aloud

26. Task 1A: Reading Aloud, was the task where candidates' performance appeared to be the weakest of all the tasks candidates were required to undertake. The two scales for this task are scale (1) Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation and scale (2) Reading Aloud with Meaning. The passages selected included a range of lexis and sentence structures, allowing the accuracy and clarity of pronunciation of individual sounds, word stress, phrasal stress as well as stress and intonation over stretches of text to be assessed reliably. The passages also allowed candidates to demonstrate their ability to read with meaning through employing pitch and tone, varying speed, and breaking text into appropriate 'thought groups'.

27. Less successful candidates in scale (1) frequently experienced problems in articulating individual phonemes such as distinguishing between long and short vowel sounds, omission of final consonant sounds, as well as problems with pronunciation of consonant clusters. A slow laboured delivery would negatively impact sentence stress, rhythm and connected speech, with weaker candidates often reading the text word by word, with frequent phoneme errors. In terms of scale (2) weaker performances were characterised by a failure to communicate effectively the mood / ideas in the text due to inappropriate thought groups or an overly dramatic rendition inappropriate to the mood of the text and the characters.

28. Those candidates who demonstrated a stronger performance in Task 1A scale (1) were able to produce and sustain a more 'natural' rhythm and sentence stress over longer stretches of text. This incorporated weak forms and other features of connected speech. Such candidates made fewer errors when articulating phonemes and were more accurate when confronted with less frequently used lexis. In terms of scale (2) these candidates could show a very high level of sensitivity to the text expressing connections across longer stretches of the text. Stronger candidates expressed a deeper understanding of the mood of the text and of the characters and the characters' attitudes. Such candidates could express more subtle, nuanced meaning by effectively manipulating speed, pausing, volume, pitch and tone, beyond a simple differentiation between narration and dialogue.

29. To help candidates prepare for Task 1A with regard to scale (1) Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation, candidates are recommended to develop an awareness of their own weaknesses in relation to those common issues highlighted above. In particular, candidates are recommended to avoid over-articulating every sound and to consider incorporating features of connected speech to improve the pace / fluency. With regard to scale (2) Reading Aloud with Meaning, candidates are recommended to start with a closer reading to develop an understanding of the tone / mood of the text by looking at the setting, characters, details and word choices. Listening to good models of reading aloud may help candidates understand how to read clues within the text such as punctuation, referencing and word choices.

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

30. The prompts for Task 1B reflected a range of issues, topics and themes relevant to contemporary life in Hong Kong or to education matters in general. Candidates were asked to either recount an experience or present an argument using their own language resources to produce a coherent and cohesive response to the prompt. The two scales for Task 1B are scale (3) Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range, and scale (4) Organisation and Cohesion. The scales assess the candidates' ability to organise ideas and demonstrate lexico-grammatical range and accuracy in spontaneous or semi-spontaneous spoken English.

31. In Task 1B, candidates seemed to perform relatively well in both scales of assessment. With less successful candidates in Task 1B scale (3), candidates produced frequent errors in both simple and, when attempted, in more complex structures. In addition, such candidates produced a more limited range of vocabulary to express their ideas resulting in a repetition of lexis and / or a lack of ability to paraphrase any gaps in their lexicon. Ultimately, this resulted in a lack of precision in their responses. In terms of scale (4) weaker performances involved either an incoherent discourse resulting in confusion for the listener or a limited development of ideas. Such candidates produced short responses with a lack of relevant ideas with which to develop their response. Weaker candidates also relied on a more restricted range of connectives such as high frequency connectives such as 'and', 'so' and 'then'.

32. Those candidates who demonstrated a stronger performance in Task 1B appeared to work from brief notes or bullet points with a general outline of their ideas rather than a prepared 'script'. Stronger performances in Task 1B scale (3) incorporated a wider range of grammatical structures and lexis with a greater degree of accuracy. In terms of grammar, this would involve more complex verb forms such as continuous or perfect tenses, modal verbs and appropriate use of active and passive forms. They incorporated more complex clauses such as embedded clauses to express more complex ideas. In terms of lexis, stronger performances incorporated a wider range of lexis to add greater precision to the ideas.

33. Those candidates who demonstrated a stronger performance in Task 1B scale (4) were able to structure their responses with less overt, formulaic signposting. They were able to incorporate a wider range of strategies to help the listener follow the flow of the discourse. This involved some overt organising phrases ('It cannot be denied that…', 'This was a significant point in my life because…') along with less overt strategies such as parallel structures and pronoun referencing, and the development of lexical chains. Their response would often involve referring back to and adding to their previous statements ('similarly', 'yet this was not the case', 'at the same time') in order to develop the ideas further.

34. To help candidates to prepare for Task 1B with regard to scale (3) Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range, candidates should develop an awareness of their own inaccuracies and deficiencies in their lexico-grammatical range in order to improve in these areas. With regard to scale (4) Organisation and Cohesion, candidates should avoid just listing out their ideas when presenting an argument and instead consider the complexity of arguments and counter-arguments or consider the elements of a narrative arc when recounting an experience. Candidates must be conscious of the time allowance for completing both Tasks 1A and 1B. Candidates have 5 minutes in total to complete both tasks. Therefore, candidates should be mindful of how much can realistically be said in

Task 1B in a period of approximately two to three minutes, and plan for the time accordingly.

Part 2: Group Interaction

35. Generally, this discussion task was well handled, with candidates achieving greatest success on Task 2 of the three components of the assessment. Candidates generally demonstrated an acceptable ability to participate in a collaborative, professional discussion. The two scales for Part 2 are scale (5) Interacting with Peers and scale (6) Discussing Educational Matters with Peers.

36. The overall impression of the weaker candidates in Part 2 was a general lack of engagement and confidence with the topic involving limited frequency of contributions and producing more limited contributions in terms of development of their ideas and opinions. In terms of scale (5) this would involve contributions that were tangential to the discussion focus of the group. Such candidates appeared to lack active listening skills and the conversational skills required to interact effectively with the other group members to develop or build on the ideas of others. Such a lack of engagement was often characterised by sequential turn-taking with little collaborative professional exchange or 'genuine' interaction and as such the exchanges appeared more mechanical and superficial. In terms of scale (6) weaker candidates lacked the professional lexis and the ability to express clear, precise and focused contributions.

37. Those candidates who demonstrated a stronger performance in Part 2 scale (5) were able to demonstrate a more engaged and meaningful exchange with the other candidates. This would involve a wider range of 'discourse moves' such as making claims and suggestions; asking for and constructively exploring the views of others; facilitating collaboration by accepting and conceding others' views; and demonstrating an ability to keep the discussion focused. These candidates were able to more sensitively encourage any quiet members of the group to contribute or develop the ideas of others as well as seek clarification from others when contributions were ambiguous.

38. In terms of scale (6), stronger candidates were able to draw on their understanding of language learning and teaching in order to produce professional reflection and insight into the education-related, school-based issues, plans or projects under discussion. They possessed a familiarity with and an understanding of more precise lexis related to language learning and teaching which resulted in candidates justifying their ideas with relevant pedagogical reasoning in order to ensure that discussions were meaningful and focused on practical outcomes.

39. To help candidates prepare for Part 2, they are encouraged to practise meaningful professional exchange and dialogue discussing learning and teaching issues with their colleagues as well as reflecting on their own learning and teaching experience and knowledge. Candidates should demonstrate more 'naturalistic' interaction by considering the functional language needed to produce such discourse moves. Candidates are advised to avoid producing lengthy 'monologues' and are advised to listen closely to the other group members' ideas and to incorporate these into their own contributions. Candidates should not be afraid to revisit ideas expressed earlier in the discussion if it is useful to do so and are encouraged to seek clarification from group members should any points raised be unclear.

Paper 5 (Classroom Language Assessment)[2]

40. A total of 454 candidates were assessed between November 2023 and April 2024, with 93.4% of candidates attaining Level 3 or above. Candidates were graded on four scales of performance: (1) Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range; (2) Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation; (3) Language of Interaction; and (4) Language of Instruction. Comments on candidates' performance on each of the four scales are given below.

41. Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range

    41.1   Grammatical and lexical competence of candidates was generally adequate for maintaining effective communication in the English classroom. The majority of candidates demonstrated an acceptable range of grammatical structures and vocabulary with reasonable accuracy. There were incidences of syntactic errors and inappropriate lexical choices but communication was unimpeded and remained comprehensible on the whole. While the use of complex structures was more prevalent among the more competent candidates, candidates are encouraged to further utilise their linguistic repertoire appropriately to address various communicative purposes, such as paraphrasing, rephrasing and making clarifications with precision and flexibility. This would maximise their students' exposure to a variety of language patterns and lexis.

    41.2   In respect of grammar, for the most part, candidates have a good grasp of simple and compound structures. Their use of complex structures involving conditionals, modality, and time clauses was mostly accurate. This enabled them to achieve clarity and coherence in communication. Nevertheless, their ability to employ a wider spectrum of complex structures or to self-correct their grammatical mistakes still varied. The most common mistakes included subject-verb agreement, missing plural endings and wrong/inconsistent use of tenses. The erroneous use of subject-verb inversion in indirect questions remained a challenge for some candidates. Strong candidates spoke fluently and spontaneously in natural-sounding English, demonstrating an extensive vocabulary and a good mixture of syntactic structures such as relative clauses, tense variety and voice.

    41.3   With regard to vocabulary, candidates were able to use sufficient vocabulary suited to their students' levels. More competent candidates were adept at applying precise vocabulary choices, utilising appropriate collocations and idiomatic expressions, and paraphrasing their language to convey meaning with clarity and effectiveness. In contrast, weaker candidates tended to use a relatively narrow range of vocabulary mostly based on their prepared set of teaching materials. This affected the level of spontaneity and naturalness in their speech.

42. Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation

    42.1   Of the four scales, performance on this scale continued to be the strongest. Overall, candidates manifested the ability to speak with clarity and fluency, with

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

accurate pronunciation of sounds and words and appropriate use of stress and intonation patterns.

42.2 Articulation of individual vowel and consonant sounds was generally accurate, but final consonant sounds (e.g. /k/ as in 'desk', /t/ as in 'right', 'finished' uttered as 'finish') and consonant clusters (e.g. 'between', 'front', 'problem') proved to be tricky for some candidates. Confusion over long/short vowels (e.g. /i:/ as in 'feeling', 'read' and 'seat' mispronounced as the short vowel /I/) was also discernible in weaker performances.

42.3 Candidates' speech was characterised by the use of natural-sounding stress and intonation patterns appropriate for conveying the intended meaning. Candidates who exhibited commendable performance had a good command of various prosodic features in connected speech, including pausing, tone and linking features for nuanced expressions of emotion and emphasis, aside from demonstrating excellent pronunciation and enunciation. Their speech was marked by a high level of fluidity and naturalness. However, first language interference remained an issue for less successful candidates, with a small number of them placing undue emphasis on the final syllable of most words or stressing almost every word in a sentence.

43. Language of Interaction

43.1 Candidates, in general, were able to make use of appropriate functional language including eliciting, responding and providing feedback to maintain smooth interaction with their students. The stronger candidates showcased an array of functional language and good sensitivity to students' responses and managed to sustain a natural, spontaneous and meaningful interaction with the class throughout. However, the use of a restricted range of functional language was a typical problem among those who performed less well.

43.2 Competent candidates distinguished themselves by employing a wide repertoire of interactive language to respond to students' answers or to engage them in extended dialogues effectively. They demonstrated an ability to give constructive feedback on students' responses and use a range of prompting and probing questions flexibly to encourage elaborated responses from students. The most outstanding candidates were capable of responding eloquently to students' spontaneous contributions, addressing students' unexpected answers adequately, and paraphrasing or reformulating students' speech wherever appropriate to enhance clarity and thus students' understanding.

43.3 There was a tendency among less successful candidates to use repetitive language and display questions which only required very short and simple answers, reflecting a narrow range of functional language at their disposal. In some cases, interaction lacked spontaneity and appeared to be unnatural as candidates failed to address unanticipated questions or answers from students. Instead, they limited themselves to providing perfunctory feedback or they carried on delivering their prepared lesson. As a result, the quality and quantity of meaningful dialogues in the English classroom was less satisfactory.

44. Language of Instruction

    44.1   In general, candidates managed to display clear and appropriate instructional language, in terms of presenting and explaining lesson content, giving instructions on learning activities as well as using signalling devices to signpost different stages of the lesson. Extended explanations or elaborations were found wanting in some lessons of the less competent candidates.

    44.2   The instructional language of the more proficient candidates was smooth, spontaneous and natural. Such candidates were capable of delivering detailed explanations or additional information through use of paraphrasing and examples to accommodate the diverse needs of their learners. They used discourse markers effectively, contributing to the natural flow and spontaneity of their instructions.

    44.3   Weaker candidates' instructional language was restricted to a limited range or was sometimes ambiguous, especially when explaining some grammatical structures, like conditional clauses, indirect speech, phrasal verbs, etc. In some lessons, the instructional language was mainly confined to the prepared notes on the PowerPoint slides, leading to a lack of spontaneity and brief and unclear explanation/elaboration. Excessive use of 'okay' and 'so' as cohesive devices in classroom communication continued to be commonly observed over longer stretches of speech.