

'O' LEVEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE (1122/1/2)

PRINCIPAL MARKING SUPERVISORS' NATIONAL REPORT

NOVEMBER 2011

1122/1 COMMENTS ON THE QUESTION PAPER

The question paper provided a wide variety of genre topics. Candidates had no problems with choice. The questions were lucid and dealt, to a large extent, with issues within the reach of the experiences of the candidates. This is indeed highly commendable. However, a few questions still presented problems of interpretation or were slightly challenging to the below average candidates. A case in point was question 7: 'What benefits has Information Technology brought to your school?' or question 6: 'How is tradition the backbone of human existence?' Candidates, particularly the weak ones, produced very thin accounts which were far from being convincing. Candidates from rural centres found question 7 particularly difficult. Such candidates' knowledge of Information Technology did not extend beyond computers and the simple tasks they perform. Similarly, question 5: 'Health is more important than wealth' was not well handled, with weak candidates failing to debate the issue convincingly and in good language. On the whole, candidates were given a fair chance as a number of topics in Section A did not present any problems.

As for Section B, it was very fair as question 8 was accessible indeed and also very refreshing – a most welcome change from report writing. I am afraid we were getting to a stage whereby report writing was becoming monotonous giving a dangerous false impression to the 'young' teacher and candidates that Section B only deals with report writing. The obvious danger of this is to throw candidates off balance. Some examiners felt that pegs such as 'applaud team spirit' and 'precedent set' were challenging. What must be appreciated is that while an examination should be fair and manageable, it

should retain that quality that enables it to 'screen' candidates, according to their true abilities. In this particular examination, the two pegs cited as difficult ones did not necessarily make the examination something above ordinary level standards. The good candidates perfectly understood the pegs and had no problems using them in their responses. Considering all this, it can be argued that the 2011 examination was fair and left no candidate disadvantaged. The question paper setters managed to come up with thought provoking questions and should be commended for doing a god job.

Comments of each question

The popularity of questions was as follows.

Most popular



4

1

2a

3

2b

5

7

6



Least popular

Question 1

The question was among the most popular topics. It was well interpreted though some candidates failed to bring out the element of admiration. Others failed to explore the enmity. In a number of cases, the enemy just arrived at a function such as a wedding party, beauty contest or even at school and no reference was made to admiration or to an act of admiration. In the unfortunate cases, writers admired their friends and not their enemies. The bulk of the answers were pedestrian, failing to describe vividly the enmity part of it and action performed by the enemy that resulted in admiration. Another issue of concern was candidates' failure to 'write about an occasion.' Instead, they tended to write about a number of episodes and in the end, failed to bring out admiration as required by the question. On the whole, candidates who attempted the question tried to write relevantly and meaningfully with varying degrees of success.

Question 2 (a) and (b)

Straightforward narrative topics which provided candidates with opportunities to tell lively stories. Question 2 (a) was quite a popular question which, in most cases, was treated adequately. Focus was on a 'lost' boyfriend, husband, male member of the family or father. The pain resulting from a long period of absence and lack of communication was clearly described. In most cases, the forgotten person came at last or got in touch which ended the untold suffering. This was a very successful topic.

Question 2(b)

One of the fairly popular topics on the paper. Accounts mostly focused on disappointment resulting from failure to catch a train to a very important event that could have transformed life. Feelings of disappointment were captured and in most cases, alternative means of transport were sought and all ended well. Candidates did not have problems in understanding the demands of the question; that explains why candidates were generally able to give satisfactory responses to the question.

Question 3

This was another fairly popular question. It was evident to notice that most good candidates were scared to tackle the open-ended discursive topic. The question required candidates to examine situations and processes bordering on jealous that undermine relationships. Most answers were thin and unconvincing. They tended to be limited to boyfriend-girlfriend relationships with very little insight into the problem. Some candidates took the topic as a narrative descriptive one and in this case, focus was on the consequences of being jealous. Weak candidates simply described what jealousy is and ignored how it affects relationships. Generally, most of the candidates who answered this question did not fair very well. Some candidates told stories that illustrated jealousy. Confusion of 'jealous' and 'jealousy' was a common feature and in some cases, the terms were used interchangeably. Candidates also had problems with prepositions with common examples of errors being 'jealous to', 'jealous on', 'jealous for or about'. It was glorifying to note that all the candidates who attempted the question recognised that jealousy is retrogressive and very undesirable. Answers were generally

predictable as candidates chose to write about jealousy in marriages and love relationships. Candidates could have explored other areas such as relationships at workplaces or at national and international level.

Question 4

A very popular question. A variety of interpretations in narrative and descriptive form were given. Areas covered included what they dreamt while asleep, their hopes for the future and how some dreams come true. Some candidates managed to come up with interesting and truly captivating work that was however, often marred by common errors of grammar. The majority employed pedestrian language, greatly lacking in linguistic proficiency. Most candidates ended their essays with: 'It was just a dream'. On the whole, candidates interpreted the question fairly well and many produced work of acceptable standard.

Question 5

This was the second least popular questions on the paper. Most candidates who attempted the question were unconvincing proving that it was somewhat difficult. Essays were mostly repetitive, especially in terms of the given statement. Discussion lacked scope and so conclusions were unconvincing. It was a badly done topic.

Question 6

This was the least popular question on the paper. It is probable that most candidates were not sure if they understood what 'traditional' or 'existence' meant in the question. In some centres, the question was not attempted by any candidate. A very weak treatment of the topic was given by the candidates who attempted to answer the question.

Question 7

Not one of the popular questions. This is quite surprising given the fact that technology is no longer a foreign concept in many schools. The topic was a favourite for a few candidates especially from the privileged centres and schools where candidates enjoy the benefits of Information Technology. The few candidates who wrote on this topic displayed vast knowledge of the subject and were able to use appropriate terms, outlining the advantages of Information Technology. Those candidates thoroughly enjoyed writing on the subject and naturally performed well. On the whole, this was not an attractive choice of question.

Question 8

As alluded to in an earlier part of this report, question 8 was quite accessible to the candidates. They are used to congratulatory messages at assembly and therefore did not struggle to compile speeches. The question was school based and so most candidates did not experience problems in answering it. Candidates displayed

knowledge of the appropriate register to use and evidently drew knowledge from their own experiences. Amplification was done well in most cases although a sizeable number of candidates displayed ignorance of the format for presentation of speeches. Some candidates wrote letters or reports. It is imperative that teachers of English teach according to the syllabus. Some candidates wrote poems eulogizing their teams in very bad language, while the worst were dialogues which, for the most part, were poorly punctuated. It was pleasing that most candidates used the first narrative mode correctly and were quite aware that they were addressing an audience. Most candidates were also able to use the pegs but 'applaud team spirit' and 'precedent set' were a nightmare for the weak candidates. However, on the whole, this was a very successful question.

Common Errors

In previous reports examiners have indicated that the same type of errors feature in every examination session. Does this mean that no change is taking place in our schools in respect of these areas of concern? A mere listing of these errors does not, therefore, seem to help although it is necessary. Perhaps what needs to be done is to carry out research and through it, attempt to eradicate them through workshops with language teachers.

The following common errors were made

- (a) **Sentence construction** – unfinished sentences particularly at the beginning of composition e.g. "It was on Friday."

(b) **Punctuation** - misuse of the comma, omission of the comma and omission of the full stop.

(c) **Articles** - misuse of 'a' and 'the' particularly 'the'

(d) **Faulty expressions e.g.**

'Wash my body' for 'took a bath

'Put on' for 'wearing'

(e) **Spelling**

ernemy for enemy

govement for government

truely for truly

stollen for stolen

student for student

recieved for received

gowing for going

intrest for interest

neybour for neighbour

occassion for occasion

accomodation for accommodation

comitted for committed

suprise for surprise

athelete for athlete

congradulate for congratulate

meal-meal for mealie-meal

allwise for always

writting for writing

because/becoz for because

(f) **Word Division**

Inorder for in order ; whole heartedly forwholeheartedly

Infront for in front ; Infact for in fact ; No-one/ no one for noone

Ofcourse for of course

(g) Tense errors

I go ... for I went ; runned for ran

cutted for cut ; putted for put; costed for cost

waked up for woke up ; breaked for broke

(h) Ridiculous idiom

People who died long ago saw nothing.

There was no space to spit saliva.

She did not look at people because of her beauty.

He had a heart of a stone.

(i) Confusion of basic words e.g.

Leave and live

Healthy and health

Jealousy and jealous

Represent and present

Apologise and forgive

They and there

Where and were

Their and there

(j) Subject – verb agreement e.g.

Jealousy are bad in a relationship.

My enemy were not talking to me.

The last train are gone.

(k) Confusion of pronouns

Her wife, his husband

She went to his house and he saw her in the garden.

(l) Wrong use of links

Candidates don't seem to understand what the following links imply:

In addition, moreover, finally, lastly, furthermore, conclusively and moreso.

Candidates use these haphazardly in Section B.

(m) Use of shorthand e.g.

Mie for me ; B4 for before ; U for you ; w̄ for with

CONCLUSION

Belt Marking proved to be the most transparent and most effective way of marking. ZIMSEC should be applauded for this change which carries several advantages.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

1. While teaching, emphasise on quality rather than quantity. There is a disturbing feature of long, racy scripts with unbelievable carelessness and inaccuracy.
2. Teach basics of grammar to eradicate the many errors encountered at marking.
3. Teachers should desist from giving pupils vocabulary to memorise as it stifles creativity. The strategy is to encourage the candidates to read widely to widen their vocabulary.
4. Teach situational compositions of different types, that is, speeches, letters, pie-charts, tables, graphs, pictures etc.
5. Teach appropriate use of discourse markers.
6. Teaching of English should emphasise on skills and the communicative aspects of language.

1122/2 COMMENTS ON THE QUESTION PAPER

The Passage:

Many examiners reacted differently to the passage. Some felt the passage was simple, straight forward and captivating. Some felt the passage was technical and required competent candidates to pick on specific details as required by the questions. Two groups of examiners reacted differently to the length of the passage with one group saying it was rather too long while the other felt the length was fair. However, examiners concurred that the language of the passage was generally within the expected 'O' level vocabulary range. Perhaps, owing to the nature of the passage, the wide-ranging comments suggested a fair paper which made different candidates react differently to the questions.

QUESTION BY QUESTION ANALYSIS

Question 1

- 1 **(a)** **(i)** A very intelligent question which had an aspect requiring candidates' inferential skill on the word 'trio'. Candidates disturbingly drew blanks on this question having failed to simply interpret the meaning of the word 'trio'.
- (ii)** This question was accessible to most candidates but some tended to include excess material which led to loss of the mark in the end.

- (b)** This was a simple recall question which was easily comprehended by the majority of candidates. Some candidates, however, substituted “on call” with the word “work” thus getting the answer wrong.
- (c)**
- (i)** Candidates were able to identify the required word although a few either misspelt it or included excess material.
 - (ii)** Weak candidates could not use their own words to recast “warning”.
 - (iii)** There was a fair distribution of candidates who got the answer correct and those who failed it. Though the marking scheme allowed three options for an answer, the candidates found the question problematic in that they failed to realise that the ‘hole’ should cause danger.
- (d)**
- (i)** The word “catastrophe” was closely linked to others like “warning” and “alert” hence candidates were confused and found the question difficult, thus the majority drew blanks.
 - (ii)** The word ‘void’ is rarely used and as a result it was a difficult question for average candidates. Some candidates failed to read the question closely and gave the word ‘chasm’ from paragraph 3 as an answer.

- (iii) This was an own word question that required candidates to first correctly identify the answer from the text then paraphrase that answer. Focus of the answer was on the phrase 'crushing sensation' and the majority of the candidates failed to recast this phrase.

Question 2

- 2 (a) The idiomatic expression 'stopped dead' was inaccessible to the majority of the candidates. The question required candidates to state the manner in which the engine stopped working i.e. suddenly/abruptly/instantly/there and then/immediately
- (b) (i) A fair question which had four options as alternative answers.
However, some overlooked the importance of the word 'prior' in the question and some did not understand its meaning hence they gave incorrect responses.
- (ii) An accessible question which was done fairly well.
- (c) Most candidates failed to identify the correct limbs for the answer to score - the fact that he was disoriented and it was dark.

- (d) Most candidates found the vocabulary items challenging. However, hauling, plunging, stunned and maniac were accessible to some candidates.

Question 3 (summary)

- 3 The question was a straight forward one but surprisingly most candidates failed to identify and select the specific details needed for points to score. Candidates failed to note that there was no agent in the first ten words given and they missed out on the first seven points if they did not correctly identify the agent. Candidates were required to use their selective skills in identifying the relevant points using the language of the text and using specific agents for various actions. A feature that continues to worry examiners in this section is that some centres continue to instruct their candidates to express the points in their own words (précis). The thrust in summary writing is on selection skills and the English summary question is very specific on what the candidates should include in their summary. There are questions, elsewhere in this paper component, that require candidates to paraphrase ideas. In most cases, candidates who attempt to paraphrase the summary points end up changing the meaning of the text and hence lose out on points.

Question 4

4 The situations set were generally familiar to candidates' experiences. However, candidates did not respond to the questions as expected showing candidates' lack of understanding of the demands of the questions.

(a) A simple question and most candidates got this one correct.

(b) A difficult question for most candidates. Most candidates focused on the diver instead of the passenger.

(c) Most candidates found the question challenging.

(d) A simple and straight forward situation yet surprisingly most candidates got d (i) correct and failed to get d (ii) correct.

(e) An interesting item. Most candidates struck the correct combinations despite the fact that there were some distracters e.g. church – institution/ marriage- institution.

Recommendations

1. Teachers should encourage candidates to read widely so as to enhance their vocabulary.
2. Candidates should carefully read instructions.
3. Candidates should desist from using the word 'and' to separate responses in the question 2 vocabulary questions and Section B of the paper.

Conclusion

On the whole, this was a fair paper in that it was able to separate good candidates from weak candidates. Marks ranged from 40s to zeroes.

Candidates should note the specific demands of the questions, be it in Section A or Section B of the paper.

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