



THE MALAWI NATIONAL EXAMINATIONS BOARD

2024 PRIMARY SCHOOL LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT

ENGLISH (P052)

General Comments on:

A. Quality of the Paper

The paper was fair. It adequately covered work from the Primary School English curriculum and tested all the skills. This comprised speech writing, composition, reading comprehension, sentence construction, sentence transformation (direct and indirect speech) and some aspects of grammar. The paper required candidates to demonstrate, knowledge, imagination, understanding and critical thinking.

B. Overall Performance

The overall performance of candidates was generally average. Some candidates managed to earn high marks while others performed poorly. Candidates who did very well were the ones who fully demonstrated knowledge, imagination, understanding and critical thinking.

Candidates who performed poorly had challenges in expressing themselves in grammatically accepted language. They also failed to follow rules of punctuation. The highest score observed in the paper was 94 and 0 was the lowest score.

C. Comments on Candidates' Performance on Individual Questions

Section A

Question 1 – Speech

Candidates were required to write a speech on an imagined outbreak of an infectious disease in their area. Fewer candidates attempted the question as compared to those who attempted question 2. The challenge though, was that the majority of those who attempted the question wrote it as a business letter. As such, very few candidates followed the layout of a speech as commented below.

Title

Most candidates successfully wrote the correct title from the question, for example; ‘An outbreak of an infectious disease’. However, some failed to come up with an appropriate title. For example, they wrote ‘Disease on that day’ or ‘DHO coming to inspect an area’.

Salutation

Few candidates followed the proper hierarchy of the people usually addressed in a speech. Besides, others addressed individuals outside the focus of the question. The proper way of recognising hierarchy is mentioning individuals from the most senior to the lowest. For example; in this question one would write, ‘The District Health officer, chiefs present here, ladies and gentlemen....’. Those who failed addressed irrelevant issues. Some, for example, wrote ‘The headmaster, all teachers, my fellow pupils....’.

Format

Both styles of salutation were used by candidates. However, those who used the linear style had problems in separating the salutation from the introduction. Most candidates who lost marks in this area failed to punctuate properly. The best style to be used to avoid all these challenges is the block style. For example;

The District Health Officer

Chiefs present here

Ladies and gentlemen

Introduction

Few candidates managed to come up with two or so sentences to introduce their speech. Therefore, those who did not introduce their speech lost marks. A good example of an introduction is ‘Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak to you....(expressing gratitude)’; ‘I stand to speak on the outbreak of an infectious disease.... (highlighting the topic)’.

Bullet 1 of paragraph 1

Candidates were asked to name the infectious disease. Most of them did. However, those that failed did not understand the meaning of the word ‘infectious’. They were giving

incorrect responses such as malaria, polio, marasmus, and etcetera. Examples of accepted responses were cholera, Covid 19, influenza etc.

Bullet 2 of paragraph 1

The question demanded candidates to tell when the infectious disease broke out. Almost all the candidates who attempted the question were able to mention the date. However, some understood ‘breakout’ as to mean ‘collapse’. This led them to give irrelevant answers such as a cup being broken.

Bullet 3 of paragraph 1

Candidates were asked to give any two symptoms of the infectious disease. There was average performance. However, those candidates that gave incorrect examples of infectious diseases consequently gave wrong symptoms. For example, those that chose malaria wrote symptoms such as fever, body pains etc. Furthermore, others gave signs of a disease instead of its symptoms. As such, they lost marks.

Bullet 1 of paragraph 2

Candidates were required to provide any two causes of the infectious disease. Most of them performed well. Much as it depended on the disease chosen to determine the acceptable response, it was generally observed that those who lost marks did so by confusing between causes of a disease and how to prevent it. For example, some talked about washing hands as one of the causes of cholera. They were supposed to state that failure to wash hands is one of the causes of cholera.

Bullet 2 of paragraph 2

Candidates were asked to provide the number of people that were affected by the disease. Most candidates did very well by providing credible numbers. However, some lost marks by exaggerating figures such as 100,000 people. Others lost marks by writing figures from 1 to 99 in figures instead of words.

Bullet 3 of paragraph 2

The question demanded candidates to state what people had been doing to help the affected people. Most candidates failed to come up with responses. Some were giving questionable

responses such as ‘we were building houses for the sick people’. They were supposed to talk about taking the affected people to the hospital, providing food to them, etc.

Bullet 1 of paragraph 3

Candidates were asked to explain what people were doing to prevent further spread of the disease. Most candidates presented good answers. For example, some said that people have learnt to wash their hands after visiting the toilet. Some candidates did not write anything under this bullet, as such, they lost marks.

Bullet 2 of paragraph 3

The question asked candidates to describe any two ways in which the District Health Office could help people. Most candidates did not write anything on this bullet because they had no idea about the work of the District Health Office. As such, they provided wrong responses such as ‘building a health facility’. Expected responses included educating people about infectious diseases, provision of first aid, etc.

Conclusion

Most candidates failed to properly conclude their speeches. For example; ‘This is all I wanted to tell you about an infectious disease.’ The best way of concluding a speech is recognising the hierarchy once again and then sign off. For example a good conclusion should read; ‘The District Health officer, chiefs, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for listening’.

Question 2 - Composition

Candidates were asked to imagine that there was a birthday party in their village and so they were demanded to write a composition entitled ‘The unforgettable birthday party’

Title

Most candidates wrote the title correctly. However, a few wrote it wrongly. They misspelt some of the words in the title. They also cut words unnecessarily. For example, some wrote ‘an un forgettable birthday party’. Others combined capital letters with small letters. They wrote, for example, ‘an UnforGetaBle BirthDay Party’.

Introduction

Most candidates wrote correct introductions although a few had grammar challenges. For example, some wrote ‘In this composition, I will imagine the birthday party in your village’.

Bullets 1 and 2 of Paragraph 1

Candidates were asked to name the person who was celebrating their birthday and then tell their age. Almost all candidates who attempted this question obtained full marks in these bullets. Very few candidates lost marks through mentioning more than one person. Others lost marks through mixing tenses and writing some numbers in Arabic figures. For example, some wrote ‘The person who was celebrating the birthday on that day is 12’ instead of ‘The person who was celebrating his birthday on that day was twelve’.

Bullet 3 of Paragraph 1

Candidates were asked to mention groups of people that were invited to the party. Most candidates presented correct answers although a few lost marks because of writing people’s names and some went to the extent of mentioning people’s tribes. Expected responses were friends, parents, schoolmates, classmates, church members etc.

Bullet 1 of Paragraph 2

The question demanded candidates to mention any two things that people ate at the party. Most candidates answered correctly. They mentioned common food items such as rice, ‘nsima’ etc. Some lost marks by mentioning more than two things. Learners must learn to adhere to the instructions throughout the paper.

Bullet 2 of Paragraph 2

Candidates were asked to mention any two gifts that the person celebrating his/her birthday was given. Most mentioned money, shoes, clothes etc. Some fell into the trap of mentioning more than two things thereby losing some marks. Learners must follow the instructions throughout the paper.

Bullet 1 of paragraph 3

Candidates were asked to describe any two interesting things that happened on the day. Some candidates tried to come up with convincing descriptions though they mostly used wrong vocabulary and tense. Others thought the word ‘interesting’ in the question meant interest as used in mathematics. For instance, they talked about interest made on the gifts given in Bullet 2 of paragraph 2. They were expected to tell some exciting things that took place on the day.

Bullet 2 of paragraph 3

The question demanded candidates to explain any two ways in which people showed happiness on the day. Some candidates misunderstood the bullet as they repeated points in Bullet 1. They were expected to state what people actually did to show that they were happy. Some wrote dancing, ululating, hugging the person celebrating, etc.

Bullet 3 of paragraph 3

The question demanded candidates to state any two things that could have been done to make the party even better. This was a high order item in the question, requiring critical thinking and high levels of imagination. Most candidates failed to imagine what could have been done to improve the party. They should have mentioned issues of inviting more dancers, taking pictures, improving decoration, buying more food stuffs, etc. A few, though, correctly imagined what was needed to improve the party.

Section B Question 3 – Comprehension

- a. Candidates were required to mention where Taonga lived. Many candidates got the question right. They mentioned Tsambe. However, those who did not present the answer in a complete sentence lost marks. The best answer was, ‘Taonga/She lived in Tsambe village.’
- b. Candidates were asked to give one reason why Taonga’s parents loved her. Many candidates managed to come up with the correct answer, ‘It was because she was well-behaved.’ However, some candidates lost marks because of presenting the answer as a phrase. For example, some wrote ‘because she was a well-behaved girl’.

- c.** Candidates were demanded to state how Taonga managed to move around different places in the village. Many candidates presented correct answers that ‘She relied on her mother and her brothers.’ Those who lost marks failed to fully understand the demands of the question. They wrote, ‘She failed to walk properly.’
- d.** The question demanded candidates to state two ways in which Mtendere helped Taonga. Most candidates answered it correctly. However, some candidates lost marks because they just combined the two answers in one sentence, instead of separating them. The expected answers were (i) She asked her parents to buy a wheelchair for Taonga and (ii) She also pushed Taonga’s wheelchair.
- e.** The question demanded candidates to give one reason why Tionge could not play volleyball. Many candidates attempted the question and got it right. The only challenge with some who lost marks was starting a response with ‘because’. The accepted response was ‘She had difficulties with her legs.’
- f.** The question asked candidates to give any two reasons why Khuluchi was introduced to Taonga. Although many candidates attempted the question, most of them got it wrong as they focused on Khuluchi’s potential instead of focusing on his potential to Taonga. For example, some wrote ‘a graduate from Umodzi College’. The expected answers were (i) He was introduced to counsel Taonga and (ii) He was introduced to train Taonga on how to play chess.
- g.** Candidates were asked to give two reasons why Taonga was angry with herself when she had a dream. Only a few candidates got the question right as most of them lost marks due to poor sentence construction and giving one reason instead of two. The expected answers were (i) She thought that such a thing could not happen and (ii) She did not believe in dreams.
- h.** Candidates were asked to give two ways in which Mtendere encouraged Taonga when she had a dream. A few candidates managed to get the question right. Most candidates failed because they copied their responses from the passage without

understanding. For example, some wrote ‘That is a miracle to you Taonga! Let’s pray to make the dream come true.’ The expected answer was ‘Mtendere encouraged Taonga to pray for the dream to come true’.

- i. The question demanded candidates to give two ways in which Taonga was affected when Mtendere moved away. Many candidates failed to provide the correct answer because they lacked comprehension skills as they just lifted sentences from the passage. For example, ‘Taonga’s parents shifted to another district’. The correct answer was ‘She could no longer move around.’ and ‘She could no longer train or play chess’.
- j. Candidates were asked to state two ways in which the school authorities helped Taonga do well at the competition. A few candidates managed to get the question correct. Most of those who failed showed that they did not understand the demand of the question because they just lifted irrelevant sentences from the passage. For example, some wrote ‘Khuluchi accompanied her to Lilongwe for the national competition’. The expected answers were (i) They paid all the expenses for Mtendere and Khuluchi and (ii) They called Mtendere and Khuluchi to stay close to Taonga.
- k. The question demanded candidates to find a word in the passage that meant (i) **well** and (ii) **happy**. While some candidates came up with correct answers, others failed because they gave words from outside the passage. For example, the word **good** was given for **well** instead of **properly** which was in the passage.
- l. Candidates were asked to give the title for the passage. Most candidates gave relevant titles, thereby earning full marks. For example, ‘Taonga, the disciplined girl’, or ‘Disability is not inability’, etc. A few candidates lost marks because of presenting their titles as sentences. For example, some wrote ‘Taonga was the last born girl in a family of five’.

Section C (Changing sentences from direct to indirect speech)

Questions 4 and 8

Candidates were asked to change ‘We did not go to the lake yesterday, the grandmother said’ in **4** and ‘We were not happy to see him again, the students said’ in **8**. The two items were similar in that candidates were demanded to change the pronouns and the adverb while considering the verb tense. Many candidates did well. Those who lost marks did so because of poor sentence construction and breach of transformation rules. The expected answers were, ‘The grandmother said that they did not go to the lake the day before’ and ‘The students said that they were not happy to see him again.’

Question 5 and 7

Candidates were asked to transform ‘Were you present in class last night? Mphatso asked’ in **5** and ‘Where did you buy this dress? Kachingwe asked,’ in **7**. Performance was average. Some lost marks because of failure to follow transformation rules. For example, some wrote ‘Mphatso asked, were you present in class last night.’ The secret was for candidates to change the questions into statement form while considering the verb tense. Thus, the expected answers were, ‘Mphatso wanted to know/asked if we/they were in class the previous night’ for **5** and ‘Kachingwe wanted to know/asked where I/she/he had bought the dress.’

Question 6

Candidates were asked to change ‘Don’t go outside the hostel, ordered the boarding master.’ This item was a command and it has its own rule of transformation. Most candidates did not get it right because of confusing transformation rules. Some of them wrote, ‘Ordered the boarding master don’t go outside the hostel.’ The expected answer was ‘The boarding master ordered me/us/them not to go outside the hostel.’

Questions 9 – 13 (Making Sentences)

Question 9

Candidates were asked to make a sentence using the word ‘until’. Performance was average. Those that lost marks did so because of confusing the word with ‘unless’. For example, ‘I will not go to school until you give me money.’

Question 10

Candidates were asked to make a sentence using the word ‘start’. Most candidates did not perform well because of lack of knowledge on subject-verb agreement. For example, ‘She start classes at half past seven in the morning.’

Question 11

Candidates were asked to make a sentence using the word ‘clearly’. Many candidates failed to get full marks because they did not understand the meaning of the word. For example, some wrote, ‘She mopped the room clearly.’

Question 12

Candidates were asked to make a sentence using the word ‘cloud’. Performance was average. Those that lost marks did so because of confusing it with other words such as **could** and **crowd**. For example, some wrote ‘There was a big **cloud** of people’.

Question 13

Candidates were asked to make a sentence using the word ‘away’. Performance was average. Some candidates lost marks because of confusing it with ‘a way’. For example, I saw him far **a way**.

In Section C, many candidates faced the following challenges:

- Lack of knowledge of rules of transformation. For example, they did not know how ‘yesterday’ is transformed. Instead of **the day before or previous day**, some wrote **before day, next day** etc.

- Failure to know the demands of a command. For example, some- failed to change the verb into infinitive form. For example, ‘Do not go’ was changed ‘did not went’ or ‘to not go’ instead of ‘did not go’ or ‘not to go’ respectively.
- Replacing the nouns given as direct speakers with the pronouns. For example, in question 5 where Mphatso was changed to he/she and in question 7 where Kachingwe was changed to he. The correct way was to use the names given in the items.
- Wrong use of punctuation marks in the reported sentences. Some put punctuation marks in the reported sentences. For example, **The grandmother said that ‘They did not go to the lake the day before’.**

Section D

Questions 14 – 26

Candidates were asked to choose correct prepositions, adverbs conditional sentences, collective nouns and verb tenses in the sentences. Most candidates found the subsection challenging most likely because of lack of exposure. For example in question 17, they failed to realise that C (look into the issue) was the best option. Candidates did better in prepositions than in conditional sentences.

Questions 27 – 39

Candidates were demanded to express their knowledge regarding **parts of speech**. Most candidates performed well. It was an indication that teachers prepared their learners very well. The few candidates that failed did so because they lacked knowledge or understanding of how a particular word was functioning in the sentence. For example, in question 29 the word ‘that’ was not functioning as a pronoun but as an adjective.

Questions 40 – 44

Candidates were demanded to demonstrate their knowledge in the use of question tags. Candidates did very well. The subsection was fairly done by most candidates where they obtained full marks. However, a few of them failed question 42 mostly because they lacked

knowledge on sentences in the imperative mood. In this case, D ‘shall we’ was the correct answer.

Questions 45 – 48

Candidates were asked to show their knowledge in **similes** and **proverbs**. Most candidates who attempted the questions performed poorly. The most likely reason could be that a few of the proverbs and similes in the subsection are not commonly used in daily conversations. The only way out is for teachers and learners to read widely so that they acquire many such sayings.

Questions 49 – 53

The subsection was based on types of clauses and their functions. Most candidates got full marks. However, a few of them were confused with ‘object of the verb’ and ‘subject of the verb’ particularly in question 50. According to the item, D ‘complement of knows’ was the correct option.

C. Recommendations to:

(i) To Schools

- Schools should intensify preparation of learners before time for national examinations. Areas of particular focus should include:
 - making it clear to learners on the layout of a speech
The block style should be used.
 - use of verb tenses
If a question demands them to use the past tense, they should do just that. There must be no mixing of tenses.
 - rules of professional writing
Numbers 1 to 99 should be written in words while from 100 and above, they should be written in figures.
 - responding to comprehension questions
Candidates must always present their answers in simple but complete sentences.

- practice

There should be ample practice for writing (Section A) and other exercises. Supplementary reading materials should be given to learners to help them deepen their vocabulary. Learners must be taught rules of sentence transformation and how to properly punctuate sentences.

(ii) **Ministry of Education:**

Schools should be supplied with adequate teaching and learning materials.

(iii) **Malawi Institute of Education:**

There is a great need for more grammar work in the senior primary section. This will help learners to have ample practice before writing national examinations.
