

CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL

**REPORT ON CANDIDATES' WORK IN THE
SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION**

JANUARY 2010

**SPANISH
GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION**

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GENERAL COMMENTS

Candidate entry increased by almost 200 per cent from 2009 to 2010 with the majority being from Trinidad and Tobago. However, almost half of those originally registered did not complete the three papers which comprised the examination. Even so, the actual number of candidates who actually completed the examination was 68 per cent more than in 2009.

Overall performance on the examination compared favourably with previous years. There were the usual high levels of linguistic competence, spontaneity, fluency and accuracy displayed by candidates. Teachers are encouraged to continue being innovative and creative in their teaching strategies, using a variety of activities to make language learning relevant, personal and meaningful to students.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Paper 01 – Multiple Choice

This paper, which comprised two sections, tested the ability of candidates to listen to and understand a number of aural items in the target language and to read and understand a number of written items. Both sections required candidates to have sufficient mastery of essential grammar and vocabulary. The good performance on this paper was comparable to that of previous years.

Paper 02 – Free Response

Section I – Directed Situations

In this section candidates were presented with 10 situations to which they were required to provide written responses in Spanish. The situations demanded that the candidates recognize the function they were required to perform, all within the scope of their experience at this level. The candidates were assessed on the appropriateness of their responses and quality of language used. With regard to quality of language, candidates were expected to demonstrate their control of appropriate grammatical structures and knowledge of relevant vocabulary, both expressed in clearly worded concise responses. In assessing appropriateness, each response was categorized as fully or partially appropriate and was awarded marks accordingly. Inappropriate responses were awarded no mark, even if the language of expression was flawless.

In general, candidates' performance on this section was quite good. There were very few candidates who did not attempt this section. While most responses were appropriate, performance by candidates highlighted a number of weaknesses in both grammar and vocabulary. In many cases, the wrong verb form was used, especially if candidates attempted the imperative.

Situation 1

Your mother has written you an e-mail giving you some advice while you are in Caracas. What does your mother write? (Function: Giving Advice)

(Suggested Response: *Debes hablar mucho español./Habla mucho español.*)

Most responses were appropriate. However, some candidates opted to make a wish, *buena suerte*, rather than give advice. Others wrote what the mother hoped for, omitting the use of the subjunctive, for example, *Espero que* trabajas mucho*.

Candidates seemed to have difficulty expressing the Imperative and instead used the Present Tense **estudias bien*. The more capable candidates however exhibited competence with the subjunctive and the command form: *Sugiero que vayas a la biblioteca. Es aconsejable que ahorres...*

An asterisk () indicates an incorrect form, spelling or structure.

Situation 2

You are spending Christmas holidays in Puerto Rico. You send an e-mail to your best friend expressing your opinion about Christmas in Puerto Rico. What do you write?

(Function: Expressing Opinion)

(Suggested response: *Me gusta/me encanta la Navidad en Puerto Rico.*)

While this was an easy situation for most candidates, there were repeated errors in the agreement of the adjectives describing Christmas, for example, *La Navidad ... es *fantástico*. Few candidates displayed knowledge of the change from *y* to *e* before words beginning with *i/hi*, for instance, *La Navidad es espléndida *y interesante*. Surprisingly, many candidates used *Feliz Navidad* in their translation of Christmas, as opposed to *La Navidad*. This was therefore used as the subject in responses such as **Feliz Navidad en Puerto Rico es interesante*. When *Navidad* was used, many candidates omitted the article before *Navidad*. In a few cases candidates described Puerto Rico instead of giving their opinion on Christmas. The use of *bien* for *buena* was also duplicated by several candidates.

Situation 3

You are applying to a college overseas and must submit a statement expressing the reason you have selected that particular college. What do you write? (Function: Providing Information)

(Suggested Response: *Este colegio ofrece una variedad de cursos/Es un buen colegio.*)

This situation posed little difficulty. Although it was well done by the majority of candidates, most of them who wanted to express the superlative used *en* instead of *de*, for example, *Yo creo que su colegio es el mejor *en el mundo*.

Vocabulary items ‘choose’ and ‘apply’ presented problems for some candidates who attempted to use these terms in their responses. *Selectar* and *aplicar* were used by many candidates, for example, *Selecté esta escuela*. The weaker candidates showed a lack of understanding of the semantics of Spanish and used inappropriate vocabulary such as *el campo* rather than *el país*, or *esta* instead of *que*, and *quieren me* for *como yo*.

Situation 4

You need to see the school’s counsellor. Write an e-mail requesting an appointment to see him/her. (Function: Requesting)

Suggested Response: *Quisiera hacer una cita con el consejero por favor.*)

There were errors of vocabulary in many responses, especially with the words for “appointment” and “counsellor”. These were often omitted, written in English or with an *a* or *e* added to the English word, or replaced by another word such as *director*, *jefe*, *conserje*. However, many candidates showed their capability by using simple phrasing where the use of the word for “counsellor” was unnecessary and asked for the person by name. In some instances where this was done, candidates omitted the use of the article *el/la* before *señor/señora*.

The expression *por favor* was often misspelt or written as one word while structurally, many candidates opted to use *poder/querer* + infinitive.

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Situation 5

Your Spanish class is planning a trip to a Spanish-speaking country. Write the e-mail you send to your teacher stating why you will not be able to go on the trip. (Function: Explaining)

(Suggested Response: *No puedo ir porque mis padres no tienen dinero.*)

This situation was relatively well done with most candidates opting to use the ‘safe’ *estar enfermo* as the excuse. However, some of them omitted to indicate that they could not go and only gave a reason.

Candidates are still having difficulty with the use of *ser* and *estar*, for example, *No puedo ir al viaje porque mi hermana *es muy enferma*. Also, they tended to confuse *mal/malo*, that is, the adjective and the adverb.

Again, there were candidates who failed to make the noun/adjective agreement as seen in *mi mama está *enfermo*. However, some idiomatic expressions were noted in the work of the more capable candidates, for example, *ando mal de dinero/mis padres están sin blancas*.

Situation 6

Your school is participating in an inter-school football competition but your school team is not doing well. A supporter sends an e-mail encouraging the players to do better. What does the message say? (Function: Expressing Encouragement)

(Suggested Response: *No se preocupen, todo saldrá bien.*)

This situation presented a challenge to several candidates, as many had difficulty expressing encouragement. In many instances candidates did not realize that the e-mail was directed to players, and used *tú* instead of *ustedes* to talk to members of the team, for example, *no te preocupes*.

Situation 7

You were very rude to your father this morning and you are now ashamed of your conduct. Write the e-mail you send to his office. (Function: Apologizing)

(Suggested Response: *Siento mi conducta esta mañana.*)

While this situation was handled competently by many candidates, those who chose to expand on *lo siento* encountered problems with the verb *sentir*. *Sentir+ infinitive/Lo siento/sentir que...*

The use of *lo siento por* was often seen.

Situation 8

You take a phone message for your sister about a change of plans for the weekend. What message do you write? (Function: Providing Information)

(Suggested Response: *Marta ha cambiado sus planes./ Juan dijo que no va(n) al cine sino al parque.*)

Candidates found difficulty in writing a message. Many of them offered a response to only a part of the situation and used the first person singular and plural rather than reported speech appropriate for the message taken.

Common errors here were (1) the use of *en* instead of *el* to express on Saturday, *en sábado* (2) use of “cinema” for *cine*, (3) failure to contract *a+el*, *a el cine*, (4) use of *con tú* instead of *contigo* for example, **Susan no puede ir al centro comercial con tú el sábado*.

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Situation 9

You send an e-mail to your aunt who lives overseas reminding her of a promise she made to you last week. What does the e-mail say? (Function: Reminding)

(Suggested Response: *No olvides enviarme el vestido que me gustó.*)

There were several errors in responses to this situation. Candidates had difficulty with the vocabulary item “promise”, rendered as *promisar* (verb) and *tu prometo* (noun).

Many candidates did not use *olvidar* or any of the words for ‘remember’. When used, it was sometimes incorrectly replaced by the adjective *inolvidable* or misspelt, as in *olvidades*, for example, **no olvidades*, *no olvidable*. Some problems were noted in candidates’ use of the negative command form, for instance, **no olvida/s que tienes que ir al cine conmigo*.

There was also some inconsistency in the way candidates used both *tú* and *usted* in the same response.

Situation 10

You have received your end-of-term report and are disappointed about a particular grade. What do you write in a note to your teacher? (Function: Expressing Disappointment)

(Suggested Response: *¡Qué lástima que saqué/obtuve esa nota!*)

This was one of the more challenging situations. Many candidates were unable to competently perform the function and opted for an apology-*lo siento*. In addition, vocabulary deficiency was evident in substitution of the words such as *nota*, *punto* by *marco*, *mark*, *marques*, *grado*, *resulta*, *gol*.

Recommendations

- Candidates need to read the situations carefully before attempting a response.
- Candidates should familiarize themselves with **all** the functions outlined in the syllabus in preparation for this section.
- Every effort should be made to encourage the use of Spanish in the teaching /learning process. Instructions and comments should be in Spanish.
- Students should be encouraged to interact with the Spanish-speakers in their community.
- Teachers should ensure that students develop an adequate command of essential grammar and wide vocabulary in keeping with the demands of the syllabus.

Section II – Letter/Composition

This section is intended to assess candidates’ ability to produce written language within the parameters set out by the syllabus. In addition to mastery of relevant vocabulary, idiom and language structure, the ability to express ideas clearly and coherently is emphasized. The two options given were the letter and the composition, each of which was marked out of 30.

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Both questions, letter and composition, fell well within the range of the demands of the syllabus as well as within the expected range of skills required of a candidate at this level of examination. The majority of candidates attempted the question, the weaker ones using whatever limited vocabulary or knowledge of grammar they knew to produce an answer of the required length. The questions this year demanded the use of varied tenses, thus testing the ability of the candidates to manipulate such tenses. In addition, the themes of both questions were practical and were ones to which candidates could easily relate. Candidates generally interpreted the questions well and the majority respected rubric and paid attention to format.

Candidates' Strengths

- Most candidates adhered to the format and content of the letter. The opening and closing lines were often well written with language that flowed easily.
- Vocabulary was used appropriately.
- Candidates demonstrated good knowledge of tenses, especially the perfect and future tenses. The more competent candidates used the subjunctive well.
- The better candidates used a wide range of idioms and vocabulary. A few candidates were quite poetic in their use of language.
- The weaker candidates bravely attempted to answer despite their limited scope.

Examples of Good Performance

Subjunctive: *Espero que te halles bien.*
Deseo que todo vaya bien en la fiesta.
Espero que la fiesta quede un secreto.

Good use of tenses: *Hoy he planeado . . .*
Hemos sido amigos . . .
Durante la fiesta bailaremos, comeremos y nos divertiremos . . .
Grité, salté de alegría . . .

Appropriate use of vocabulary and idioms: *Al oír las noticias salté y grité.*
No paré de gritar.
Lo difícil fue ...

Candidates' Weaknesses:

Many candidates continue to write the date for the letter in words. They should use digits (*el 15 de agosto de 2010*):

**El quince de agosto de dos mil diez.*

Also, re dates:

Barbados el 15 de agosto is **incorrect**. The article should be omitted.

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The future tense was required in the composition but often the past tense was used.

**Había muchas personas.
La fiesta *tuvo lugar.*

There was poor use and positioning of object pronouns.

**Dijo me.
*Conoce me.
Espero que tú escribasme.

Poor agreement of adjectives.

**Persona aplicado.*

Poor verb and subject agreement.

**Todo el mundo me abrazaron.
La fiesta *tuve lugar.*

The present participle was used after prepositions.

**En organizando la fiesta.
Gracias por escuchando.

‘Tener’ was used to form the perfect tense.

**Tuve gané.*

The verbs ‘tener’, ‘haber’, and ‘hacer’ were often conjugated incorrectly in the future tense.

**Teneré la fiesta.
Mi madre *hacerá sándwiches.*

Errors with ‘ser’ and ‘estar’.

*La fiesta *estará en mi casa.
Ha estado mi amiga.

Omission of the personal ‘a’.

**Invitaré sus amigos.*

Poor knowledge of the use of the possessive in Spanish.

**En mi padre’s casa.
Ella amigo.

‘Ser’ being used to express age.

*Mi amiga *es doce años.*

Radical changing verbs were spelt incorrectly in the past tense.

**Empiezó*

‘Por’ was used instead of ‘para’

*Una fiesta *por ella.*

‘Conocer’ was used instead of ‘saber’

*Yo *conozco que le gusta.*

‘A’ was omitted with the use of ‘gustar’.

**Mi amiga le gusta bailar.*

An asterisk () indicates an incorrect form, spelling or structure.

Poor translation of the word ‘like’.

**Las comidas gusta arroz, pollo . . .*

**Juegos gusta el ajedrez . . .*

Confusion with similar sounding English words.

‘*Precio*’ was used to mean ‘prize’.

‘*Partido*’ was used to mean ‘party’.

‘A’ was used to translate ‘at’ a place.

**La fiesta es a mi casa*

**Estaba al colegio*

There was confusion among candidates over the use of:

‘*sorpesa*’ and ‘*sorprendida*’

‘*que*’ and ‘*esa*’

‘*tan*’ and ‘*así que*’

‘*amor*’ and ‘*amar*’

‘*dólar*’ and ‘*dolor*’

‘*cien*’ and ‘*ciento*’

The word ‘challenge’ in the composition also posed difficulty for some candidates.

Suggestions for Teachers

- Much practice leads to success. Students may understand a concept when it is taught but it is constant practice of the concept that will enable them to render the concept accurately. Review of past papers is recommended.
- Students need practice in writing the date in numerals.
- Repeated errors such as those outlined in the present report need to be reviewed just before the examination.
- Spanish should be spoken more often in the classroom so students can experience the language being used in a natural setting and not just through grammar exercises or through the writing of answers to questions.
- Vocabulary could be introduced and practised through the use of songs, games and puzzles. Students tend to remember words when they are linked to exciting activities.
- Writing practice for this section can be encouraged by incorporating journal writing even from the lower levels.
- Students may need to brainstorm topics before the actual writing.
- Teachers can consider peer correction as a useful learning activity in writing.
- Teachers need to be *au courant* with ways to teach writing — departmental mini workshops is a way to start.
- Wherever possible, trips to Spanish-speaking countries ought to be organized to give students the opportunity to experience the language and culture in a different yet more real setting than that of the classroom.

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Section III – Contextual Announcement /Contextual Dialogue

This section required candidates to choose to write either (i) a contextual announcement or (ii) a contextual dialogue completion. Cues given in English were provided for both options.

Performance on this section clearly revealed that the questions were not beyond the capability of the average candidate. They were relevant to candidates' experiences and allowed for flexibility and manipulation of the Spanish language.

Candidates' responses revealed that many of them understood the requirements and they responded appropriately. They demonstrated the ability to use the different tenses well and displayed a good command of vocabulary and idiomatic structures. Several candidates were able to use the present subjunctive with ease. This was particularly apparent in the contextual dialogue. There was evidence of creativity as many candidates adequately used the cues to develop the contextual announcement.

Performance on the Contextual Announcement

Strengths of Candidates

- In the contextual announcement many candidates used '*se ofrece*' along with good use of the time '*de nueve de la mañana a cuatro de la tarde*'.
- Candidates who produced high standards of work displayed great mastery of the language, often using the subjunctive mood ... '*podemos regalarle un fin de semana a un hotel con su familia para que se relaje...*'.
- Some good phrases included:
 - ▶ *un sueldo de*
 - ▶ *... su solicitud*
 - ▶ *de acuerdo*
 - ▶ *conocimiento de*

Weaknesses of Candidates

Candidates' weaknesses were very evident in the area of grammar. Some candidates often misinterpreted the first cue and did not recognize that a business was making the offer rather than the school.

- There was constant use of English.
- There was regular use of '*ser*' with age: ... **debe ser dieciséis años*.
- Use of incorrect register: **'la oportunidad de tu vida'* and **'manda tu solicitud'*.
- Misuse of adjectives: **'lugares de interesantes'*.
- The adjective 'interested' also proved difficult to express and candidates often used '*interesantes*' instead of '*interesadas*'.

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- Cue No. 5 — ‘How can one take advantage of this opportunity’ — was misinterpreted by many candidates.
- Words were frequently misspelled and misused, for example, **oportunidad*, **a son las ocho*.

Performance on the Contextual Dialogue

Candidates used large chunks of the dialogue to formulate their answers. They rewrote parts of the teacher’s responses for their own thereby causing the responses to be quite distorted. This practice often caused them to be penalized as their responses made little or no sense.

Noted errors included:

- Omission of personal ‘a’:
 - ▶ **regalar el director*
 - ▶ **invitar los profesores*
 - ▶ **informar los padres*
- Incorrect use of register: use of informal instead of formal when responding to the teacher who was one of the persons in the dialogue.
 - ▶ **no te preocupes*
 - ▶ **¿qué piensas?*

Adjectival as well as subject/verb agreement posed a problem

- ▶ **Tú puedo*
- ▶ **el restaurante favorita*
- ▶ **un baila y cantar competición*
- ▶ **la director*

The third response was often misunderstood and candidates had difficulty formulating a proper response. An adequate response could have been ‘*Es verdad. Pero si se les informa sobre esta actividad de antemano no van a organizar nada para esa noche.*’

Suggestions to Teachers

1. Dedicate more time to and engage in extensive practice on contextual dialogues/ announcements.
2. Enforce basic grammatical and sentence structure.
3. Practise and drill verbs such as ‘*querer*’, ‘*poder*’, ‘*pensar*’ and other irregular verbs.
4. Caution students against regurgitation of structures acquired directly from the cues in the dialogue itself.
5. Encourage students to respect the rubric.

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Section IV – Reading Comprehension

This section tested candidates' ability to read and comprehend a short passage in Spanish and respond in English to 10 questions set on the passage. The marks allocated per question ranged from 1 to 3, based on the demands of the question. The majority of the candidates understood the passage and were able to respond appropriately. The theme was age appropriate and appealing.

Question 1: When did Lucita celebrate her birthday?

(Suggested Response: Day before yesterday.)

This question was correctly answered by most candidates. However, some candidates interpreted '*anteayer*' as 'last year', 'yesterday' or 'today'.

Question 2: How old was Lucita?

(Suggested Response: Seventeen years.)

Although this question posed few problems to candidates, some translated '*diecisiete*' as 'twenty-seven', and a few offered 'sixteen' as the response.

Question 3: What gift did Lucita receive and from whom?

(Suggested Response: A large box of chocolates from her grandmother.)

This question was generally well understood. Nevertheless, some candidates did not mention that it was a box of chocolates that Lucita had received. Some translated/understood '*caja*' as 'bar'. Additionally, some candidates wrote 'grandparents or grandfather' rather than 'grandmother'.

Question 4: Why did Lucita take her gift to school?

(Suggested Response: To share it with her friends)

The answers to this question were commendable. Candidates fully grasped the meaning of *compartir*, although a few translated it as 'to show off' or to 'show' rather than to share.

Question 5: What did Lucita observe at the end of the class?

(Suggested Response: That the chocolates had disappeared.)

For the most part, candidates understood that the chocolates were not where Lucita had left them. It was commendable that the candidates understood the verb '*dejar*' and were able to appropriately express its meaning in this context.

Question 6: How did Lucita react?

(Suggested Response: She became angry and began to cry.)

Most candidates gave a partial response to this question. They understood '*llorar*' — to cry — but did not recognize '*se enfadó*' to mean 'she became angry'. However, appropriate substitutions were made such as 'she became upset'. Also, lack of vocabulary was shown on the part of the candidates as they interpreted '*preguntó*' to mean 'pregnant'. In addition, the candidates tended to look at some words and phrases in isolation and produced their responses, for example: 'Lucita was crying because she was pregnant and told Domingo about it.'

Question 7: What information did Domingo have?

(Suggested Response: That two boys were planning to hide the chocolates.)

The candidates' interpretation of this question varied significantly. The very good candidates correctly translated '*planeando hacerle una broma*' but others were unaware of the expression.

Question 8: Where did Domingo go?

(Suggested Response: To the cafeteria/in search of Lucas and Alkino.)

This question was very well answered by the majority of the candidates although some did not indicate place (where Domingo was going) but the purpose intended (what he was going for).

Question 9: What was Domingo's reaction when he saw Lucas and Alkino?

(Suggested Response: He grabbed the chocolates and ran.)

Familiarity with certain words such as '*correr*' and '*rápidamente*' prompted the candidates to guess the response — although not in its entirety — and therefore made meaningful substitutions. Some responses were a little distorted, for example, 'Domingo became mad/angry and wanted to fight.'

Question 10: Why did the guard react in the way that he did?

(Suggested Response: He thought that Domingo had stolen Lucita's gift.)

Candidates answered this question according to their experience and not to the information in the passage. For example: The guard went to stop a fight / the boys/ bullies were rude and making a lot of noise.

Recommendations

Teachers of Spanish need to expose students to a wide variety of passages for reading comprehension exercises. These exercises will expose the students to a variety of idiomatic expressions and vocabulary. There are many websites where the teachers can find reading passages appropriate to the students' interests. Furthermore, these passages can also be used as listening comprehension exercises in the classroom or language room.

Reading and understanding are skills that must be developed and it is important for teachers to dedicate quality time to this practice.

Paper 03 – Oral Examination

This paper tested candidates' ability to: (1) produce appropriate responses in the target language to a variety of situations which demand specific functions, (2) read aloud a short passage in the target language on topics of general interest to the candidates and (3) carry on a conversation in the target language via answering questions based on topics set out in the syllabus.

In this paper the candidates have the opportunity to highlight their speaking skills, giving the entire examination a balance between receptive and productive skills in the Spanish language.

Section I – Responses to Situations

This section requires the candidates to respond orally in Spanish, to situations and or instructions given in English.

Many candidates were able to provide responses which were appropriate to the situations presented to them. Most of the candidates found something appropriate to say without delving too much into complex grammatical structures. The stronger candidates were not intimidated by the situations which sought the use of the subjunctive mood while others simply manoeuvred around the situations by providing less complicated responses. The candidates were able to improvise when necessary.

Candidates' main weakness in handling this section was in the quality of language used to express their responses. There were several grammatical errors, ranging from the use of incorrect verb forms to poor agreement: noun-adjective, noun-article, subject-verb. There were also problems with regard to the correct placement of the direct and indirect object pronouns. The limited vocabulary and knowledge of sentence structure of some candidates hindered their performance. Some candidates lost marks because they did not attempt to answer both parts of the questions while others gave inappropriate answers.

The candidates' **major strength** was mainly in the good use of basic Spanish. They used it when the situations allowed for it. For example:

Lo siento, Pedro.
El ladrón es ...
Vivo ...

Some of the most salient **shortfalls** were:

- No confidence in the use of the formal and familiar forms “*Usted*” and “*tú*.”
- Confusion in the use of the verbs: *Ser* and *Estar*, for example:
 - *‘*Estoy muy inteligente*’, instead of ‘*Soy muy inteligente.*’
 - *‘*Mi mamá es en el hospital*’ instead of ‘*Mi mamá está en el hospital.*’
 - *‘*Esté es en la biblioteca.*’
- Confusion in the use of *ser* and *tener* as in:
 - *‘*Soy once años*’ instead of ‘*Tengo once años.*’
- Difficulties with noun-adjective agreement:
 - * ‘*Mi hermano enferma*’ instead of ‘*mi hermano enfermo.*’
 - *‘*El otro clase*’ instead of ‘*la otra clase.*’
 - *‘*Cuántos dinero tienen?*’ instead of ‘*cuánto dinero tienen?*’
- Subject–Verb agreement in cases as for example:
 - *‘*Nosotros llega*’ instead of ‘*nosotros llegamos.*’
- Difficulty in using the reflexive verb *llamarse*...
 - *‘*Me llamo es...*’, *‘*Soy es...*’
- Problems with sentence structure as in: ‘*¿Que llamo?*’, ‘*tengo lavar*’.
- Difficulty in using the expression ‘*no hay problema*’ and instead using ‘*no problema*’.
- Confusion in the use of ‘*cien*’ and ‘*ciento*’, for example, ‘**tengo ciento dólares*’ instead of ‘*tengo cien dólares.*’
- Use of *Estar* + *past participle* in sentences such as:
 - *‘*Está celebremos mi cumpleaños*’ instead of ‘*está celebrando mi cumpleaños.*’
- Inability to conjugate the verb ‘*querer*’.
- Incorrect use of *para* and *por*.

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- Incorrect use of ordinal adjectives: ‘**es primo día*’ instead of ‘*es el primer día.*’
- ‘*Soy responsabilidad*’ for ‘*soy responsable.*’ This indicates the need for revision of the use of adjectives and the relationship between words or word roots.
- Wrong use of vocabulary items, for example, ‘*zapatos*’ for ‘*calcetines.*’

Recommendations

It is recommended that teachers use situations in every Spanish class. It would be good practice to incorporate this as an activity featuring prominently in the classroom. Sometimes the situations could be transformed into tasks that the students will enjoy doing if a sense of humour is attached to each situation. This practice will give the students the confidence needed to adequately handle the oral examination. This activity can be turned into an acting situation where students can become performers. It can become an enjoyable one in which students would eagerly participate. Furthermore, it affords students an opportunity to expand their vocabulary, and to learn to use idiomatic expressions. These exercises will prepare them not only for the exam but for ordinary everyday life when the candidates may find themselves in similar situations.

Section II – Reading Passages

In this section, the candidates’ ability to read Spanish fluently using correct pronunciation and appropriate intonation was tested. There were four short reading passages (125–130 words) in Spanish of general interest to the candidates.

The reading component of this examination continues to present candidates with great challenges. It must be pointed out that a positive feature in this oral examination was candidates’ ability to self-correct their errors. This is indeed a good sign in the language acquisition process. It indicates that the candidates are so motivated in the acquisition of the Spanish language/pronunciation that they are becoming more aware of the pronunciation errors and are making the effort to correct the errors themselves.

Some candidates’ weaknesses in pronunciation were still apparent and teachers are encouraged to address the following features in their attempt to remedy the situation.

Pronunciation problems which emerged as the candidates encountered the following phonemes:

- There were challenges in the pronunciation of words such as *nostalgia, juguetes, jóvenes, cuchillería, escoger, utilizar, utensilios, distinguir, criollo, buñuelos and fieles.*
- The grapheme /letter h is not pronounced in Spanish. It is a silent h: that is, no phonetic value is attached to it. Candidates nevertheless, pronounced it in words such as: *carbohdratos* and *hojuelas.*
- The English phoneme /z/ was transferred onto Spanish in the word ‘*azúcar*’.
- The letter c was pronounced as K as in ‘*satisfacen*’ instead of ‘*satisfacen*’.
- The English phoneme /g/ was transferred into Spanish in the word ‘*escoger*’.
- Candidates experienced difficulty pronouncing the word ‘*criollo*’. They rendered the word ‘*criollo*’ as ‘*corolo*’. Again this relates to: (a) the pronunciation of the diphthong [io] which in this case disappeared completely and (b) the pronunciation of the letter ‘*ll*’ which candidates may not have had much practice producing.

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- Articulating the Spanish letter /ñ/ in the word *buñuelos* was problematic for some candidates.
- The word '*riesgo*' was pronounced as '*resago*' and '*ricocio*'.
- Candidates experienced problems in the pronunciation of diphthongs as in the word *utensilios*. They did not pronounce the diphthong in one syllable as it should be done but instead broke the diphthong into two syllables. The candidates also experienced problems pronouncing the Spanish vowels.
- Challenges relating to the placement of stress made the reading passages in some cases very difficult to follow. Words such as '*salían*' and '*vivían*' were rendered as '*salián*' and '*vivián*'.
- Some candidates had problems reading long words such as *preempaquetada*, *instantáneamente* and *desafortunadamente*. This challenge is very closely related to the placement of the stress.
- There was also omission of syllables, for example:

**pertencen*' instead of '*pertenecen*'

**oportunides*' instead of '*oportunidades*'

**absolumente*' instead of '*absolutamente*'

Recommendations

Teachers need to incorporate much practice in their lessons of the correct production of the Spanish sounds for **j, g, ñ, z, s** and **c** and the combination of **gue, gui, ge/je and gi** and **ji** as early as possible in the delivery of the Spanish programme. Teaching pronunciation is not an easy task and lots of imagination, use of devices and consistency in the correction of pronunciation errors are needed. This is an integral part of the foreign language teaching/learning process.

The students of Spanish should be taught how to pronounce diphthongs in one syllable. Some repetition drills with words which have diphthongs will help to improve the students' pronunciation.

Exercises on syllabification will strengthen students' pronunciation. Using modern songs sung by modern singers will motivate the students to sing in Spanish as they try to imitate these models. Reading poems in Spanish will also help to improve the students' pronunciation and intonation.

It is important that students of Spanish understand how stress works in the language. The students should be introduced to the rules that govern the placement of stress in Spanish from very early in the language acquisition process so they will improve as they progress in the language. The earlier the students become familiarized with these rules, the easier it will be for them to apply such rules.

Generally, the interference from the students' native language, (English) in the production of Spanish is hampering the production of the target language. This is a normal situation when two languages enter in contact and foreign language teachers must be very much aware of this. It is recommended that teachers of Spanish equip themselves with Spanish pronunciation exercises (available on the internet). There are many sites on the teaching of Spanish pronunciation and grammar available on the net which can be of tremendous assistance to the teacher as he/she executes the task.

Section III – Guided Conversation

This section of the Oral Paper seeks to assess the ability of candidates to respond appropriately to questions based on certain themes.

An asterisk () indicates an incorrect form, spelling or structure.

Performance varied in this section. Stronger candidates understood the questions and responded promptly and appropriately, while weaker candidates had problems as a result of lack of comprehension and poor expression. These deficiencies affected the spontaneity, fluency and quality of their responses. These candidates had limited vocabulary and showed great difficulty in producing grammatically sound sentences.

It was heartening to see that the stronger candidates managed to use the subjunctive mood appropriately as in: '*Recomiendo que leas un libro.*'

The guided conversation revealed the following weaknesses in candidates' performance:

- Some candidates did not exhibit comprehension of the questions, some did not make an effort to respond to them, and others gave inappropriate responses.
- Some candidates who initially had problems understanding the longer questions understood after the questions were repeated to them.
- Pronunciation errors as stated in previous Sections I and II of this paper resurfaced.
- Confusion in the use of '*ser*', '*estar*' and '*tener*' i.e., '*ser ... años*' was evident.
- The correct use of prepositions by the candidates proved challenging, especially with regard to '*por*' and '*para*'.
- Some candidates showed little knowledge of subject-verb agreement; article-noun and noun-adjective agreements, for example: **ella es tranquilo*; **mi favorito ingredientes*.
- Candidates experienced problems as they could not identify the reflexive verbs, did not know when to use the reflexive pronouns, nor how to conjugate reflexive verbs, for example, **Me hago los deberes*, **me prefiero*, **no me gusta lavo* and **cepillarse mi pelo*. It is recommended that reflexive verbs and the use of reflexive pronouns be revised so candidates would feel more confident in using them in the future.
- Candidates need to become acquainted with the word order in Spanish so as to avoid errors like **roja corbata*. This is an interference feature from English, their native language.
- The verb '*gustar*' in the negative form was used with another conjugated verb for example: *No gustar estudiar*.
- Candidates did not know the difference between '*padres*' and '*parientes*'. The following words were also unfamiliar to them: *divertirse, gastar, instalaciones, actividades, recreativas*.
- Candidates showed difficulties in the conjugation of verbs. The conjugation of the verb '*jugar*' in a response was rendered as '*yo *jugo fútbol.*'

An asterisk () indicates an incorrect form, spelling or structure.

- Candidates responded to the questions without paying sufficient attention to them, resulting in responses that did not make sense. From the candidates' performance the examiners doubted whether the candidates understood the question as a whole, or did not recognize the interrogative words. Examples:

¿Con qué frecuencia usas tu teléfono celular?

Response given: *'Mi abuelo llamo.'*

¿Con quién te entiendes mejor en tu familia?

Response given: *'Mi papá es pescador.'*

These responses are inadequate and signal complete lack of comprehension of the question.

Recommendations

It is advisable that the teachers of Spanish use a communicative approach in the teaching of Spanish. This will help to introduce conversation and interaction between students and teachers.

Teachers of Spanish need to practise guided conversation in Spanish with their students. This activity will allow the students to get acquainted with the interrogative words, and will build their confidence when responding to questions. The interrogative words signal the student towards the response he/she should provide. Role play activities, for example, doing interviews with celebrities, can awaken students' interest in participating in Spanish conversations. The more such activities are done in class the more confident the students will become in responding to questions.

Teachers must also try to conduct as large a percentage of their classes in the target language. This has implications for teachers' own access to practise in speaking.

It will be interesting also to have native speakers of Spanish as a special guest in the classroom. This will motivate the students to try and communicate. Although initially students might be a bit shy, they will eventually try to speak with the native speaker. There are also resources on the internet that teachers should be able to access which will facilitate the listening, comprehension, speaking and writing of the Spanish language.

Here are some of the websites which could be helpful to Spanish teachers:

www.ver-taal.com (audio y videos, reportajes TVE, noticias TVE, canciones de diferentes artistas hispanoamericanos, ejercicios de gramática sobre todos los temas)

www.bbc.co.uk/languages/spanish/mividaloca (serie en video en varios capítulos para aprender español... muy buena!)

www.esaudio.net/recordings (Audio)

www.elearnspanishlanguage.com (Audio e historias)

www.123teachme.com/learn_spanish (Ejercicios para practicar gramática)

www.aprenderespanol.org (Ejercicios de gramática, videos, juegos.)