

Common Educational Proficiency Assessment (CEPA)

Retrospective and Prospective Views

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Main Points:

- CEPA-English: Background of change
- Exam Items
- What are the CEPA-English teaching/learning requisites?
- CEPA-English on the WEB?
- Is CEPA-English a proficiency test?
- Teachers/students' views towards CEPA-English
- Can the CEPA-English Programme be improved?

CEPA-English: Background of change

- The Common Educational Proficiency Assessment (CEPA) began in 2006.
- The stakeholders of the project were the National Admission and Placement Office (NAPO) in the MoHE and the UAEU, the HCT, & ZU.
- The CEPA-English became a requirement for UAE nationals who plan to join any of these three educational institutions.
- The score of the exam besides the overall score of the General Secondary Certificate (GSC) are used by the stakeholders as a criterion to determine the eligibility for placement into higher diploma and Bachelor's degree courses.

Cond...

- The CEPA-English was created for grade 12 students to bridge the gap between secondary education and tertiary level.
- National students are required to achieve a minimum score of 150/240 on CEPA- English, in addition to a minimum average of 70% on the GSC exam, or equivalent, to be eligible for Bachelor programmes or higher diploma programmes.
- National students scoring less than 150 on CEPA-English are automatically transferred to the HCT diploma if they plan to join such colleges.
- The CEPA-English exam is administered to all students, nationals & expatriates, completing grade 12 of the MOE English curriculum.

Cond...

- For expatriate students, the total mark is (100) and is treated as end-of-term 2 final grade.
- The score of the CEPA-English is not a requirement for joining the other local or private universities and is not considered as a substitute to the other proficiency tests.
- Having high grades in CEPA-English is not a guarantee for applicants to be exempted from university requirements and other foundation courses.
- Students in private schools who do not study the MOE curriculum are not required to have CEPA-English since they have their own assessment criteria.

Exam Items:

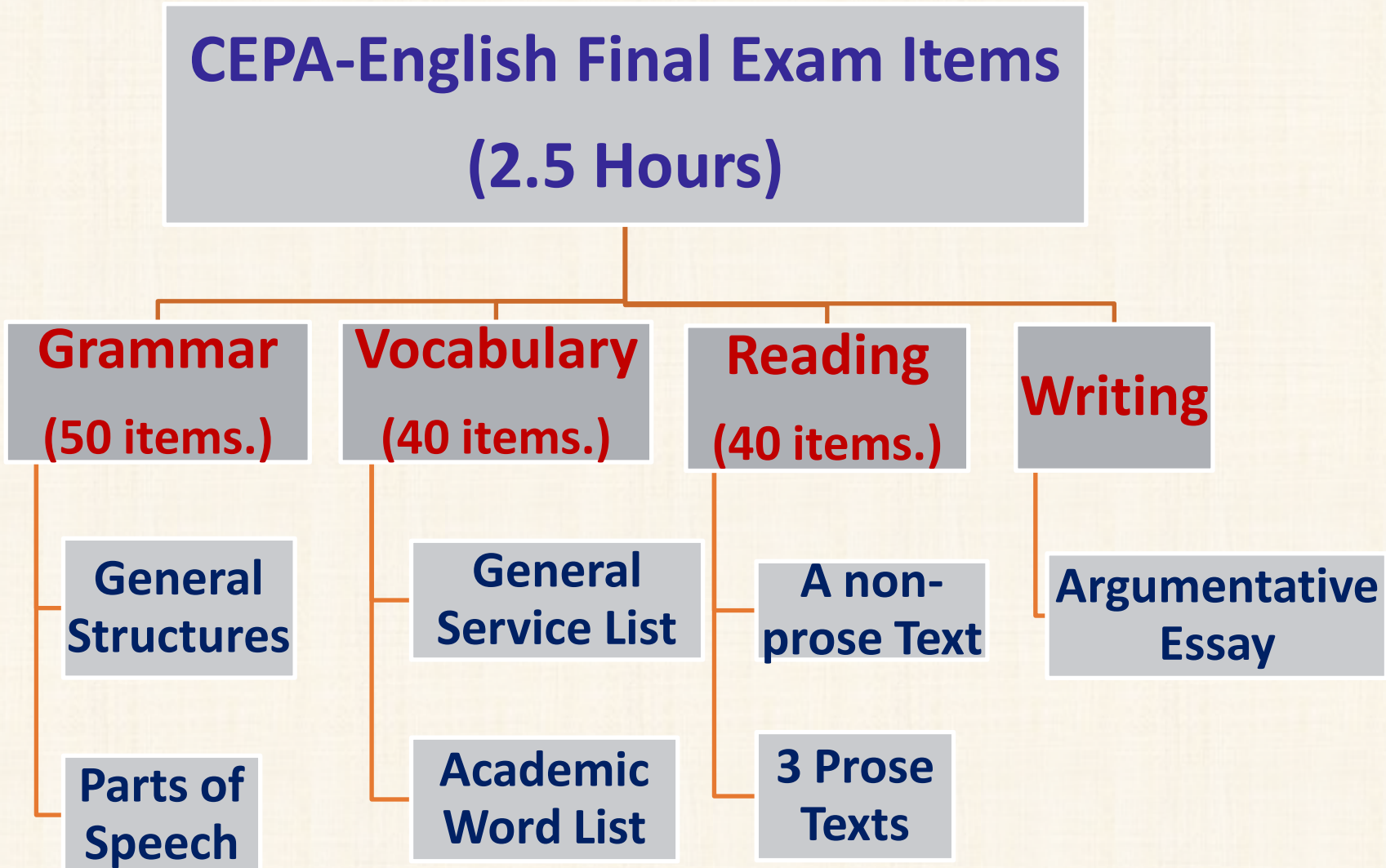
- The CEPA-English exam only tests the written language skills; reading and writing, besides grammar and vocabulary.
- The aural-oral skills are practised in regular classrooms, yet they are not assessed in the CEPA-English final exam.
- The whole exam items are based on the objective testing technique (MCQs), whereas transformational sentences are not included in all exam items.
- The grammar section has 40 grammar items, in addition to 10 parts-of-speech items to measure students' ability to recognise common *grammatical patterns* besides their knowledge of *word forms* in English.

- The vocabulary section has 40 items from the *general service list* (K1 + K2: 301-2284), and the most common *academic word list* (sub lists: 1-5).
- The reading section consists of *three prose reading texts* of between 200 and 400 words in length, and *one non-prose text*, with a total of 30 MCQs across the four texts.
- Students are expected to have descriptive, narrative, social and scientific texts.
- True/false, gap-filling, or questions of general comprehension are tackled under the objective testing umbrella.

Cond...

- The writing section has one argumentative essay in which students are asked to express their opinions on a controversial issue such as *junk food, smoking in public places, the impact of tourism on the society, city live Vs country life, travelling abroad for study, etc.*
- Assessing the writing task is based on very strict criteria to check the degree of coherence, cohesion, use of relevant lexis, and orthographic accuracy.

Table 1.1 Exam Items



What are the CEPA-English teaching/learning requisites?

For CEPA-English teachers, they should:

- create their own materials since there is no specific CEPA-English syllabus.
- diversify sources of language input and classroom facilities.
- enhance their own autonomy.
- motivate learners to be more interdependent and critical thinkers.
- Encourage peer/self evaluation.
- adapt the content of the traditional *Grade 12* textbook to meet the requirements of the CEPA-English exam. *Cond...*

For CEPA-English learners, they should :

- Know that English can be boosted outside the borders of the classroom.
- be more autonomous and proactive.
- make use of the various learning strategies in their SLA.
- implement both intensive and extensive reading strategies to increase their reading speed & rate of comprehension.
- make use of the context to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar items.
- avoid rote-learning of pre-set essays.
- identify essay organisation patterns.

CEPA-English on the WEB?

- The NAPO provided teachers and students with a number of CEPA-English exercises on the web. Some of these sites are:
 1. **<http://fs.napo.hct.ac.ae/CEPAlearn/>**
 2. **<http://www.napo.ae/cepatp://esl.about.com>**
 3. **www.learn4good.com/languages/evr_grammar.htm**
 4. **www.usingenglish.com**
 5. **<http://grammar.ccc.comment.edu/grammar>**
 6. **<http://www.collins.co.uk/Corpus/CorpusSearch.aspx>**
 7. **<http://www.englishforums.com>**
 8. **<http://www.drgrammar.org>**
 9. **<http://puzzlemaker.school.discovery.com>**
 10. **<http://www.ego4u.com/en/cram-up/grammar>**

Is CEPA-English a proficiency test?

- Almost all educational institutions do not consider the CEPA-English exam as a proficiency test because not all language skills are involved in the assessment process.
- The exam uses one type of questioning (MCQs) which cannot measure all sides of comprehension with the same efficacy.
- The exam is not accepted by private educational institutions as a criterion of English language competence.
- It has different score ranges between UAE nationals and expatriates; therefore, it is confined to the UAE society.
- The table overleaf shows the CEPA-English scores when juxtaposed to IELTS & the three TOEFL types.

Table 1.2 CEPA-English Scores Vs IELTS & TOEFL

| TOEFL Paper | TOEFL Computer | TOEFL IBT | IELTS Equivalent | CEPA-English Nationals | CEPA-English Expatriates |
|----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 625 - 680 | 263 - 300 | 113 - 120 | 7.5 - 9.0 | 220-240 | 9-100 |
| 600 | 250 | 100 | 7.0 | 211 | 88 |
| 575 | 232 | 90 - 91 | 6.5 | 202 | 85 |
| 550 | 213 | 79 - 80 | 6.0 | 194 | 81 |
| 525 | 196 | 69 - 70 | 5.5 | 185 | 77 |
| 500 | 173 | 59 - 60 | 5.0 | 176 | 73 |
| 475 | 152 | 49 - 50 | 4.5 | 167 | 69 |
| 450 | 133 | 39 - 40 | 4.0 | 158 | 66 |
| 425 | 113 | 29 -30 | 3.5 | 150 | 60 |
| less than 425 | less than 113 | less than 29 | less than 3.5 | less than 150 | less than 60 |

Teachers/students' views towards CEPA-English:

- The change was not incremental and created a mismatching between novelty and tradition.
- The change was so rigorous that it deprived EFL teachers of their right to choose for themselves what they will spend their many hours doing.
- The absence of a watertight syllabus created discrepancies among teachers on what to teach and how to teach it.
- The CEPA-English exam is not a proficiency test and is accredited only by the three UAE universities; therefore, some students consider the effort exerted in passing it worthless.
- Using it to only stream national Students in the UAEU, HCT & ZU limits its function to the least.

Cond...

- EFL teachers work as trainers of the CEPA-English Exam to ensure that their students will attain high grades.
- The programme requires constant proficiency development on the most effective teaching techniques.
- It requires independent EFL teachers who should consequently empower learners to be autonomous in their learning.
- EFL teachers, in practice, focus on reading, writing, grammar and lexis on the account of listening and speaking.
- The absence of context in presenting the 2300 CEPA lists makes them solid, difficult and unpalatable for Ss to learn.
- It entails variable teaching facilities which are not always available in language classrooms.

Can the CEPA-English Programme be improved?

The CEPA-English programme can be improved if:

- It stretches to involve students in grades 10, 11 & 12.
- It provides integrated development of language skills as well as constant assessment of the rate of achievement.
- There is a well-designed syllabus to guide teachers in the instruction process.
- Textbooks are supported with narratives to encourage extensive reading & contextual vocabulary acquisition.
- All the criteria of proficiency tests are attained to increase learners' motivation and to make the exerted effort worthwhile.
- The CEPA-English got the international accreditation as a substitute of the IELTS and TOEFL.

Thank you