Common Educational Proficiency Assessment (CEPA)
Retrospective and Prospective Views

Dr. Fawzi Al Ghazali
Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics
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.
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.
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.
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

CEPA-English Final Exam Items
(2.5 Hours)

- Grammar (50 items)
  - General Structures
  - Parts of Speech
- Vocabulary (40 items)
  - General Service List
  - Academic Word List
- Reading (40 items)
  - A non-prose Text
  - 3 Prose Texts
- Writing
  - Argumentative Essay
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.
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/
3. www.learn4good.com/languages/evr_grammar.htm
4. www.usingenglish.com
5. http://grammar.ccc.comment.edu/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

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