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# Common Educational Proficiency Assessment (CEPA): Retrospective and prospective views

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# **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.

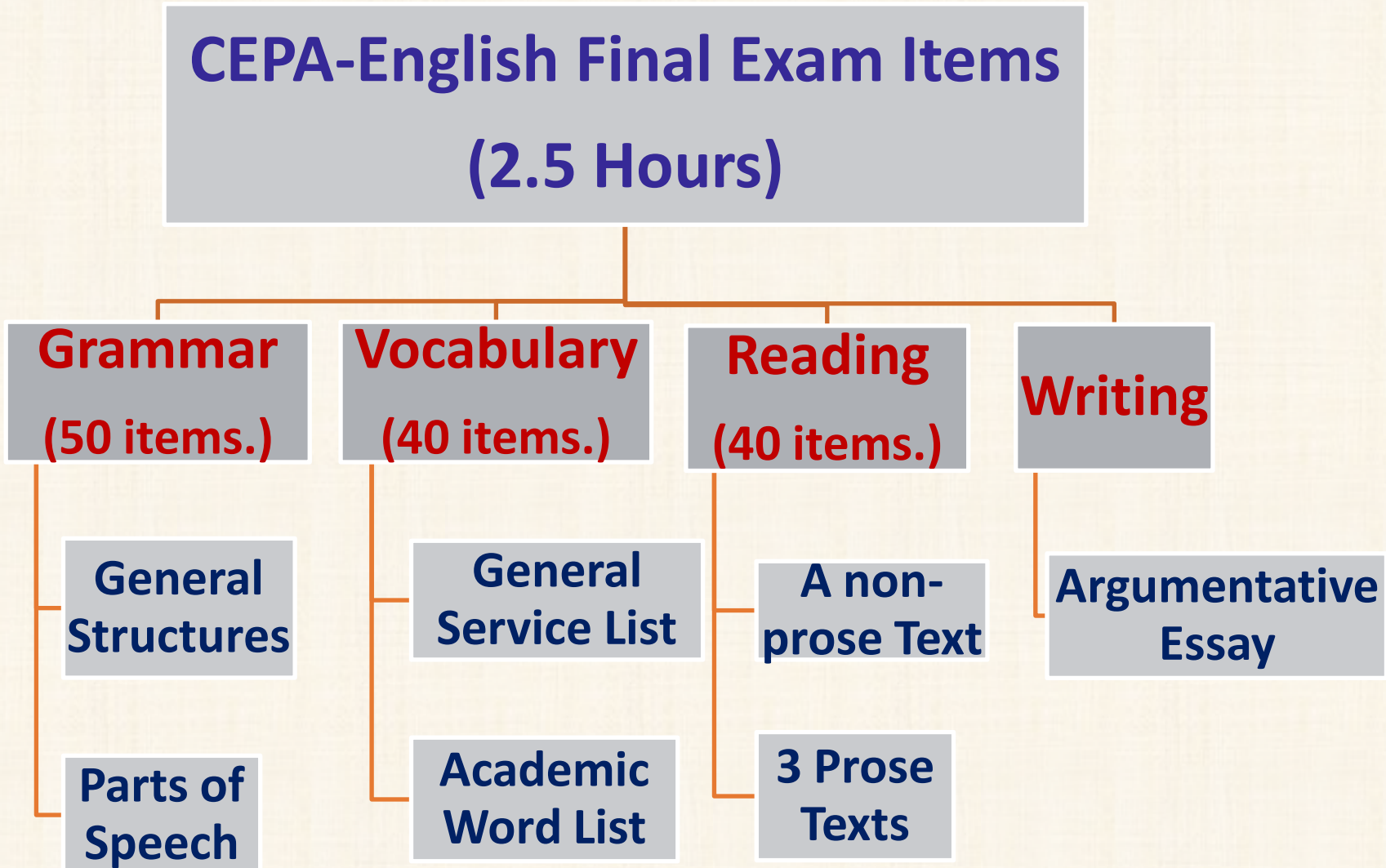
- The vocabulary section has 40 items from the *general service list* (K1 + K2: 301-2284), and the most common *academic word list* (sub lists: 1-5).
- The reading section consists of *three prose reading texts* of between 200 and 400 words in length, and *one non-prose text*, with a total of 30 MCQs 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](http://www.learn4good.com/languages/evr_grammar.htm)**
  4. **[www.usingenglish.com](http://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

<b>TOEFL Paper</b>	<b>TOEFL Computer</b>	<b>TOEFL IBT</b>	<b>IELTS Equivalent</b>	<b>CEPA-English Nationals</b>	<b>CEPA-English Expatriates</b>
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
<b>less than 425</b>	<b>less than 113</b>	<b>less than 29</b>	<b>less than 3.5</b>	<b>less than 150</b>	<b>less than 60</b>

## 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