

Daniel Xerri

High Stakes English Testing

Factors Contributing to Candidates' Performance

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To my family

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Preface

One of the key motives behind this study was the issue of the low success rate in a high stakes English examination in Malta over a number of years. This research identified the reasons for this low success rate and a number of issues were encompassed in the analysis of the learning, teaching and testing of English at Advanced level. This case study investigation aims to show how significant it is for all those involved in high stakes English examinations to adequately address those factors that are most likely to contribute to candidates' poor performance if left unchecked.

By means of semi-structured interviews with lecturers of English at a Maltese sixth form, the teaching methodology employed at postsecondary level was scrutinised in an attempt to understand any possible relationship between the methods employed in the classroom and student achievement at Matriculation Certificate level. Correlational research was conducted in order to explore the predictive validity of the Secondary Education Certificate English examinations and the entire Advanced level English student population was surveyed in order to gauge students' attitudes towards the subject and motivation for choosing to study it at postsecondary level. Assessment issues played a fundamental role in this study's attempt to understand the practices adopted by paper setters and markers when testing Advanced level English and for this purpose a semi-structured interview was conducted with the chairperson of the Matriculation English examination board.

The results indicate that candidates' poor performance in the MC English examination mostly originates from two primary sources: the teaching and learning of the subject; the examination syllabus and aspects of the testing process. Contingent on its results, this study encourages the concerned stakeholders to revise problematic practices and introduce necessary reforms. By extension it also throws light on those factors that have the potential to play a part in determining candidates' performance on other high stakes English examinations.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

This study attempts to identify the reasons why students sitting for the Matriculation Certificate examination in English over the past few years have been largely unsuccessful in their efforts to obtain a good grade. The different factors that contribute to this problem are explored in an effort to better understand the factors at play and make recommendations thereon. Hence it was necessary to take into account the candidates' examination grades over the last five years, the students' attitude towards the Matriculation English course and examination, the lecturers' opinion of the examination and the methodology they employ to teach the subject, as well as the assessment practices currently in place as part of the Matriculation English examination. This chapter provides the contextual backdrop to the study, discusses the current situation regarding the national examination of English at Advanced level, and identifies a problem. The factors that could be contributing to the problem are also indicated and these will form part of the focus of this study.

1.1 Background

Since this study focuses on candidates' performance in the Matriculation Certificate English examination it is indispensable to first provide some background information on the Matriculation Certificate and the examination itself. Given that this study focuses solely on the examination grades obtained by students attending the Matriculation English course at the University of Malta Junior College some information about this institution is also provided.

1.1.1 The Matriculation Certificate

McNamara points out that 'test development involves a cycle of activity' and the circle starts turning due to the emergence of 'New situations...usually associated with social or political changes, which generate the need for a new test or assessment procedure' (23). One such political change occurred in 1997 when the Matriculation Certificate examination was first held in Malta. Up to that year Maltese students sat for British A-level examinations. Grima et al. explain the genesis of this examination:

Given the changes that were being implemented in both the British system and the local curriculum, educational policy makers decided that Malta should have its own

assessment and certification system. The intent was to provide a local certification system that would be more consonant with Maltese educational objectives and the needs and aspirations of students and parents (1).

Just as in the United Kingdom, in Malta A-levels are usually studied over a two-year period at a sixth form college that in most cases is independent of secondary education institutions. Those students who choose to continue their education after secondary schooling may opt to follow a Matriculation Certificate course. The Matriculation Certificate is a student's passport to tertiary education. In excess of 2000 candidates each year register for Matriculation Certificate examinations and a high percentage of these sit for the Matriculation Certificate English examination (henceforth referred to as MC English), which is the focus of this study. Students hoping to continue their studies at university need to obtain a pass in two Advanced level subjects and in four Intermediate level subjects.¹

1.1.2 The Matriculation Certificate English Examination

The MC English examination is a nine-hour examination made up of three papers. Paper 1 consists of Drama and Poetry and candidates are expected to answer a question on a play, a question on a collection of poems, and a question based on an unseen poem. In Paper 2 candidates answer two questions based on different novels and a question based on an unseen prose passage. Paper 3 consists of a comprehension passage, a selection of language essay titles, and three questions based on set linguistics texts. In the case of the language essay component and the linguistics component candidates are expected to choose one title from each selection. Hence candidates are expected to write a total of eight essays and to answer a set of questions based on a reading comprehension passage. The latter component also asks candidates to write a summary.²

The MC English examination is a relatively popular examination as shown by the number of registered candidates over the past few years. Table 1 shows the number of registered candidates for the five most popular examination subjects whereas Table 2 shows the number of registered candidates who sat for the Advanced level English examination as part of their Matriculation Certificate and the number of candidates who sat for the examination as a single subject. In both cases the figures shown are those for the May session. In the period 2004-2007 English was the

¹ Appendix 1 provides information on the grouping of subjects as part of the Matriculation Certificate and on the points assigned to each grade.

² Appendix 2 consists of the Matriculation Certificate English Examination syllabus and this provides further information on the exam's nine components, grading and content.

subject with the highest number of registered candidates and it was only in 2008 that Pure Mathematics overtook it.

Table 1 – Most popular subjects at Advanced level: All candidates

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
English	803	790	819	676	600
Pure Mathematics	614	656	744	668	710
Accounting	606	597	591	532	549
Physics	452	475	533	571	565
Biology	372	500	583	638	586

Table 2 – Advanced level English registrations

	Matriculation Certificate registrations: English	Single Subject registrations: English
2004	497	306
2005	552	238
2006	592	215
2007	455	212
2008	399	196

1.1.3 Junior College

In Malta there are a total of six postsecondary institutions, the largest of which in terms of student and teaching staff population is the University of Malta Junior College. This study focuses on the results obtained by Junior College students in their MC English examination. Students attending Junior College are typically aged between 16 and 18 and the institution's mission statement clearly emphasises the fact that it is geared towards preparing students for tertiary education.

In order to take up English at Advanced level the only requirement expected of students is a minimum Grade 5 in their Secondary Education Certificate English Language examination (henceforth referred to as SEC English Language), which is typically held at the end of secondary education on a national level. Even though the MC English syllabus largely consists of English Literature, students wishing to enrol for the MC English course at Junior College are not expected to hold a pass in the SEC English Literature examination.

1.2 Problem and Rationale for the Study

The problem identified by this study is that of candidates' poor performance in the MC English examination. This problem was formally pointed out in a paper published by Farrugia and Ventura and in a letter written by teachers of English forming part of Malta's two largest postsecondary

institutions. Besides these two documents, this section also discusses the grades obtained by candidates sitting for the MC English examination on a national level and the grades obtained by Junior College students. A comparison of the two sets of grades shows that the latter's performance is relatively poorer and hence this acts as part of the rationale for this study.

1.2.1 Predictive Validity

Part of this study focuses on the performance of five different cohort groups in an attempt to measure the predictive validity of the SEC English Language and SEC English Literature examinations for the MC English examination. As shown in the next chapter, Farrugia and Ventura report that the predictive validity of SEC English Language and SEC English Literature for MC English is rather low when compared to that of other subjects at SEC level. Farrugia and Ventura do not attempt to provide a reason for such a low correlation and claim that further research is necessary in order to better understand students' progression from studying a subject at SEC level to studying it at MC level. This is what prompted the present study not to restrict itself solely to measures of predictive validity but to investigate the factors that could be contributing to such a low correlation. Moreover, whereas Farrugia and Ventura focused on a single national cohort (2004-2006), the present study focuses on five different cohorts all of them made up of Junior College MC English students.

1.2.2 Disgruntlement with MC English Grades

Over the past five years various individuals voiced concern in the press³ at the low grades obtained by candidates who sat for the MC English examination. Moreover, even those teaching these students felt dismayed with the results. A letter dated 25 February 2008 and addressed to the chairperson of the MATSEC Examinations Board manifests the level of concern expressed by teachers of English at Advanced level, especially in relation to the May examination sessions for the period 2004-2007. Thirty-six teachers forming part of the Departments of English at Junior College and Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School signed this letter and in it they complain about a number of matters concerning the Advanced level English examination, including the skew in the distribution of grades, the small number of Grades A to C awarded to candidates, and 'examiners' reports that are anything but helpful to those using them as guidelines to prepare the next set of

³ These are some of the letters and articles that appeared in various local newspapers: Mifsud, Michaela. 'No answers yet on dismal MATSEC performance.' *Malta Today* 7 August 2005; Caruana, Clifton. 'At Junior College...Shameful Results.' *L-Orizzont* 3 October 2005; Pavia, Sara. 'Failings in MATSEC System.' *The Sunday Times* 6 November 2006.

candidates better' ('Letter to MATSEC' 1-2). In their letter these members of staff point out that when one compares the distribution of grades for A-level English, Biology, Physics and Pure Mathematics for the May sessions of 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007 one realises that 'obtaining grades A, B and C in English has now become much more difficult than doing so' in the other subjects 'even though these are definitely not supposed to be easy options' ('Letter to MATSEC' 1). In the letter MATSEC is asked to explain 'What happened to the normal distribution of results we had only some years back?' and to confirm whether 'Is it acceptable that in these last four years not more than a total of 34 candidates managed to obtain a Grade A or B in each of the Advanced English sittings compared to a minimum of 100 (but even going up to 160) in Advanced Biology, Physics and Pure Mathematics?' ('Letter to MATSEC' 3). The petitioners wish 'to ensure that we are not blamed for what has now become a recurring failure by our students' ('Letter to MATSEC' 3).

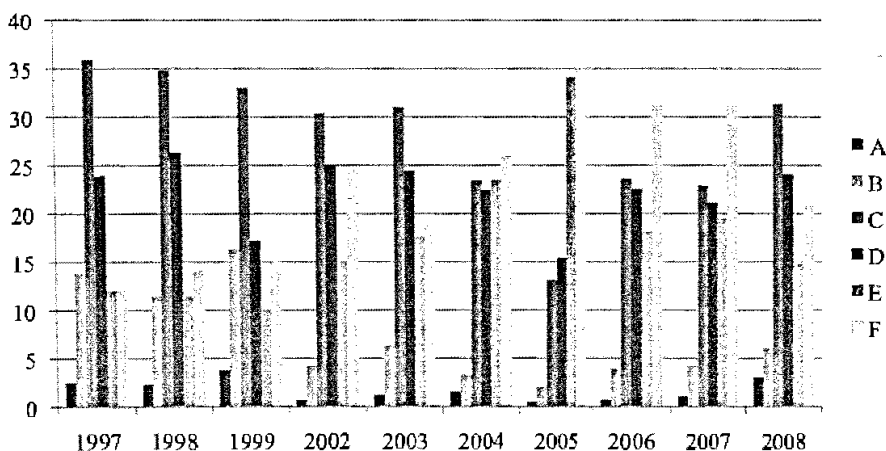
1.2.3 Low Grades

Table 3 and Figure 1 show that over the twelve-year stretch since the inception of the Matriculation English examination, candidates' performance dipped severely in the period between 2004 and 2007.⁴ Even though the percentage of Grades A and B started to decrease severely in 2002, between 1997 and 2003 the majority of candidates obtained a Grade C and hence their performance forms a normal curve when plotted on a histogram. However, between 2004 and 2007 the majority of candidates obtained a Grade F and hence the distribution is negatively skewed. In 2008 the majority of grades obtained by candidates were once again Cs, restoring the normal distribution that existed prior to 2004. This study attempts to investigate the reasons why performance deteriorated so anomalously in the 2004-2007 period.

⁴ Data for the May 2000 and 2001 sessions was not made available by MATSEC even though it was formally requested.

Table 3 – All candidates' grades in the Advanced level English examination

%	A	B	C	D	E	F
1997	2.5	13.8	35.9	23.9	12.0	12.0
1998	2.3	11.4	34.8	26.3	11.4	14.1
1999	3.8	16.3	33.0	17.2	9.9	15.0
2002	0.7	4.2	30.4	25.0	14.9	24.8
2003	1.2	6.3	31.0	24.4	17.6	19.4
2004	1.5	3.3	23.4	22.4	23.5	26.0
2005	0.5	2.0	13.1	15.4	34.1	35.0
2006	0.7	3.9	23.6	22.5	18.2	31.2
2007	1.1	4.2	22.9	21.1	19.5	31.2
2008	3.0	6.0	31.3	24.0	14.8	20.8

**Figure 1 – All candidates' grades in Advanced level English 1997-2008**

The breakdown of grades for those candidates who sat for the May session of the Advanced level English examination as part of the Matriculation Certificate in 2004-2008 is illustrated by Table 4. A cursory look at this table shows that a low percentage of candidates managed to obtain a good grade in English, that is, a grade that allowed them to further their studies at tertiary level.

Table 4 – MC English results

		A	B	C	D	E	F	Total
2004	<i>N</i>	7	14	114	122	127	113	497
	%	1.4	2.8	22.9	24.5	25.6	22.7	100.0
2005	<i>N</i>	2	11	77	77	184	195	546
	%	0.4	2.0	14.1	14.1	33.7	35.7	100.0
2006	<i>N</i>	4	22	135	129	113	173	576
	%	0.7	3.8	23.4	22.4	19.6	30.0	100.0
2007	<i>N</i>	4	21	110	101	86	124	446
	%	0.9	4.7	24.7	22.6	19.3	27.8	100.0
2008	<i>N</i>	11	22	136	102	57	61	389
	%	2.8	5.7	35.0	26.2	14.7	15.7	100.0

Table 5 shows the breakdown of grades for those Junior College students who sat for the Advanced English examination as part of the Matriculation Certificate. Once again the results show that a relatively low percentage of candidates managed to obtain a good grade in English. The numbers in this table derive from the data used for the correlational research aspect of this study and hence only the results of those candidates who started their studies at Junior College in a particular year and managed to sit for the MC English examination after a two-year course without repeating a year were taken into consideration.

Table 5 – Junior College MC English results

		A	B	C	D	E	F	Total
2004	<i>N</i>	2	5	45	72	73	45	242
	%	0.8	2.1	18.6	29.8	30.2	18.6	100.0
2005	<i>N</i>	0	1	34	28	105	91	259
	%	0	0.4	13.1	10.8	40.5	35.1	100.0
2006	<i>N</i>	3	10	68	67	65	60	273
	%	1.1	3.7	24.9	24.5	23.8	22	100.0
2007	<i>N</i>	3	10	48	55	47	46	209
	%	1.4	4.8	23	26.3	22.5	22	100.0
2008	<i>N</i>	4	12	73	66	34	29	218
	%	1.8	5.5	33.5	30.3	15.6	13.3	100.0

Given that a number of courses at the University of Malta expect candidates to have a pass in MC English at Grade C or better, the grades were grouped as A to C and D to F in an effort to understand how many candidates obtained grades that allowed them to enrol on such degree courses as B.A. (Hons) English, B.Ed. (Hons) Secondary Education English, B.A. Law and others. Some courses at the University of Malta require applicants to choose a second area of study besides their main area. If English is chosen then a pass at Grade C or better is mandatory. Table 6 presents the number and percentage of candidates who managed to obtain grades that allowed them to pursue

tertiary education and the number and percentage of those who obtained grades that severely dampened their ambitions.

Table 6 – MC English results grouped as A-C and D-F

		A-C	D-F	Total
2004	<i>N</i>	135	362	497
	%	27.2	72.8	100.0
2005	<i>N</i>	90	456	546
	%	16.5	83.5	100.0
2006	<i>N</i>	161	415	576
	%	28.0	72.1	100.0
2007	<i>N</i>	135	311	446
	%	30.3	69.7	100.0
2008	<i>N</i>	169	220	389
	%	43.5	56.5	100.0

When the same exercise was conducted for Junior College students the results show that with the exception of May 2008 the percentage of candidates who obtained Grades A to C in 2004 to 2007 is very low as well. Moreover, with the exception of 2006, in the years 2004-2008 the percentage of Grades A to C is lower than the national one for candidates who sat for the Advanced level English examination as part of the Matriculation Certificate. This shows that the problem of low MC English grades is even more worrying for Junior College students than it is for candidates from some other institutions.

Table 7 – Junior College MC English results grouped as A-C and D-F

		A-C	D-F	Total
2004	<i>N</i>	52	190	242
	%	21.5	78.5	100.0
2005	<i>N</i>	35	224	259
	%	13.5	86.5	100.0
2006	<i>N</i>	81	192	273
	%	29.7	70.3	100.0
2007	<i>N</i>	61	148	209
	%	29.2	70.8	100.0
2008	<i>N</i>	89	129	218
	%	40.8	59.2	100.0

As can be seen hereunder the examiners' solution to the problem of candidates' poor performance in the MC English examination is rather simple. However, it is probably not a highly constructive one since it does not really seek to address the most pressing issue but is merely

concerned with effortlessly decreasing the percentage of low grades awarded during each examination session:

In the circumstances, the examiners cannot but express concern at the possibility that the Advanced Level examination in English might be devalued if such high numbers of weak candidates continue to register for it. They feel it is therefore not beyond their remit to advise that manifestly weak candidates be gently, but responsibly advised on the appropriateness or otherwise of the decision to study English at this level (*Examiners' Report 2005 13*).

This study attempts to probe deeper into the reasons for candidates' poor performance in an effort to fully understand the various ramifications of the issue and point towards possible solutions. This study examines in detail such factors as the teaching methodology employed at Junior College, the facilities for, and organization of, the teaching of the subject, the students' motivation for studying English at postsecondary level, the way in which students prepare for their examination, and the assessment procedures currently employed by MATSEC when assessing English at Advanced level.

1.3 Structure of Study

The next chapter reports what the literature says in relation to each one of the above factors while Chapter 3 explains what research tools were used in this study and for which purpose. Moreover, given that this study focuses on just one institution and hence possesses the characteristics of case study research, fuller information on Junior College and the research participants is also provided in this chapter. Chapter 4 presents and analyses the research findings while Chapter 5 sums up the discussion on these findings and proposes a number of recommendations for policy and practice.

Chapter 2 — Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature that is directly related to this study's research questions. Given that this study attempts to pinpoint the possible causes for students' poor performance in the MC English examination over the past few years, it was necessary to present what the literature says about the following issues: the teaching of language and literature in a sixth form institution, the assessment of language and literature, student motivation, and correlational studies. As regards teaching methodology this chapter investigates the different approaches that exist to the teaching of literature, the communicative language teaching approach, the process approach to the teaching of writing, and the different approaches to the teaching of reading skills. The section focusing on assessment reviews material discussing the examination practices to be adopted when assessing literature, writing and reading skills. The section on student motivation allows one to better understand why students actually choose to study a particular subject rather than another. The section on correlational studies contains information regarding the usefulness of such studies as well as data that was gathered locally by other researchers and that formed part of the bedrock of the current study. The reviewed literature is crucial in helping to devise the data gathering tools used in this study as well as in aiding the analysis of the data once the latter was collected.

2.1 Teaching Approaches

Besides seeking to shed light on the experience of learning English in Maltese postsecondary schools, this study discusses the effectiveness and suitability of the teaching approaches employed by lecturers at Junior College. The teaching methodology employed at postsecondary level is placed under scrutiny in an attempt to understand whether one of the possible causes for students' poor performance in their MC English examination is due to the teaching approaches currently employed in the classroom.

2.1.1 Literature Teaching Methodology

Given that six out of the nine sections in the MC English examination are based on literary texts, a review of the literature on the teaching of English literature at postsecondary level was felt

necessary in a bid to better understand the theoretical paradigm within which this teaching takes place.

Arens states that between the 1950s and 1970s the teaching of literature 'was constructed as a largely exclusive enterprise, stressing its own structure of knowledge: the period, genre, and formal features of written texts judged to be fine art or fine writing' (1). New Criticism and the systematic pedagogy it championed were highly popular. However, in the 1980s and 1990s the ESL students' experience of studying literature 'shifted radically' as concepts such as 'cultural authority, reader empowerment, and the ethics of hegemonic culture' (Arens 1) undermined traditional literature teaching methodology. Contemporary approaches stress the importance of student-centred methods, critical writing and critical reading.

In the 1991 plenary talk entitled 'The Death of the Method', Allwright spoke of 'the relative unhelpfulness of the existence of 'methods'' (79). The method concept 'is built on seeing differences where similarities may be more important, since methods that are different in abstract principle seem to be far less so in classroom practice' (Allwright 85). In spite of this Rodrigues and Badaczewski state that teachers should specify a rationale for the teaching of literature and should be able to justify the methods they employ (4). Lazar identifies three main approaches to the teaching of literature: the language-based approach, the content-based approach, and the personal enrichment approach (23-25).

2.1.1.1 Language-based Approach

The MC English examination syllabus specifies that a course preparing students for this examination should help them achieve the following aims amongst others:

- an understanding of the way in which writers use form, structure and language to shape meanings;
- knowledge of various aspects of style, and the ability to apply this knowledge;
- the ability to respond to, describe, explain and comment on language;
- the ability to understand written English in terms of its ideas, expression and appropriateness ('AM Syllabus English' 2).

One of the assessment objectives found in the syllabus specifies that candidates will be assessed on their ability to 'understand the ways in which writers' choices of form, structure and language express meaning, tone and attitude' ('AM Syllabus English' 2). The above aims and objectives show that teachers need to employ the language-based approach to the teaching of literature if they hope to enable their students to be competent enough to face the examination's demands.

A language-based approach operates on the methodological principle that literary studies combine language and literature syllabi by encouraging students to focus on the language of a

literary text. A close analysis of the language of the literary text allows students to 'make meaningful interpretations or informed evaluations of it' as well as 'increase their general awareness and understanding of English' (Lazar 23). The students' knowledge of the language will allow them to 'make aesthetic judgements of the text' (Lazar 23). Besides its literary merit, the text to be studied in class is selected for the stylistic characteristics of the language used. The main advantage of the language-based approach is that the students use the literary text in order to improve their knowledge of English. The students are armed with the necessary analytic tools to help them come up with their own interpretations and they 'develop a response to literature through examining the linguistic evidence in the text' (Lazar 25). This approach serves the purpose of allowing the students to revise their knowledge of the language and to be exposed to the language in 'interesting new contexts' (Lazar 25). For this reason this approach 'is a way of justifying the inclusion of literature in the language syllabus' (Lazar 25).

According to Hill there exist 'good psychological and linguistic reasons for teaching literature' (7). Besides providing a range of texts to choose from and a means of exposing language students to a wide assortment of English varieties, Hill lists the following reasons for literary studies in the language classroom:

- the possibility of internalising the language and reinforcing points previously learned;
- a genuine language context and a focal point for the students in their own efforts to communicate;
- motivation (7).

Literature provides students with 'language in action, a living context and focal point for them in their own efforts to communicate' (Hill 108) and in dealing with the text the students will find the stimulus to engage in language production.

Some exponents of the language-based approach concentrate on literature as a means of practising the language and they appreciate a literary text as a resource that has the potential to generate enlivening language activities (Maley; Duff and Maley). Literary texts are valued because they are rich in styles, registers and topics and they stimulate classroom discussions by being open to a variety of interpretations. Other proponents of the language-based approach are geared towards enabling their students to make use of the tools they need to evaluate texts critically. Hence students are trained in the use of those techniques that allow them to study a literary text in a more direct fashion. According to Lazar stylistic analysis 'involves the close study of the linguistic features of a text in order to arrive at an understanding of how the meanings of the text are transmitted' (27).

As part of the language-based approach to the teaching of literature, stylistics has two main goals: firstly, that of enabling students to meaningfully interpret the text; secondly, that of enhancing the students' knowledge of the language (Lazar 31). Traditional practical criticism has failed to present students with a set of strategies by means of which they can form critical judgements but has on the contrary relied on the students' intuition and this 'seems to imply that understanding or appreciating literature is the result of a kind of mystic revelation, which is not available to everyone' (Lazar 31). Obviously this has had the effect of making students feel 'bored, mystified or demotivated' (Lazar 31). Stylistics seeks to foster an aesthetic appreciation of the text by bridging its linguistic features and the intuitions that students form about its meaning. Stylistics investigates the way meanings are communicated by a text by means of a method that 'uses the apparatus of linguistic description' (Leech and Short 74).

For Widdowson the study of literature provides the student with a 'heightened awareness of the way language can be used to explore and express realities other than that which is communally accepted as the most socially convenient' (74). Given that the signs and clues of literature are linguistic in nature, Widdowson is of the opinion that

the sensitivity must initially be a sensitivity to language and the intelligence and precision of response can only be developed as general qualities through literature if they are first shaped by practice in interpreting the unique language use of literary discourse (74).

Widdowson rejects the practice of presenting students with an interpretation of a literary text or that of exposing students to literary texts and expecting them to come up with an appropriate response without any form of guidance. Both practices are extremist and he suggests that the teacher's role should be that of guiding the student to come up with a response to a literary work after having encouraged 'the individual's direct experience of it' (Widdowson 75). The gains derived by means of the literary studies mentioned by Leavis 'can only be realised if the student develops an awareness of the way language is used in literary discourse for the conveying of unique messages' (Widdowson 76). Widdowson states that 'literature as a subject has as its principal aim the development of the capacity for individual response to language use' (76). This entails viewing literary works as forms of discourse and literary studies become in a way comparable to a linguistic subject: 'an enquiry into the way a language is used to express a reality other than that expressed by conventional means' (Widdowson 80). Widdowson considers the prime advantage of this system to be the fact that students will be able to acquaint themselves with the way the language shaping literary messages is different from that shaping other instances of communication. This is especially fundamental for second language learners of English. For Widdowson the divide that exists between

the teaching of English language and English literature can best be bridged by means of stylistics. The latter helps counter the effects of this separation which usually entails teaching literature to students 'whose knowledge of the system and use of English is so limited as to make the work being presented to them almost incomprehensible' (Widdowson 81). This develops a resistance in the learners towards literature that is very difficult to surmount.

The study of literature in a stylistic fashion demands that a text is linguistically appropriate for the students and that they are presented with 'other forms of discourse, of a conventional type, with which the literary discourse can be compared' (Widdowson 81). For Widdowson stylistic analysis allows for the 'systematic teaching of literature' and allows students to relate literary concepts and aesthetic effects with their experience of language: 'To adopt a linguistic approach to literature, then, is not to prevent the acquisition of benefits of a cultural or moral kind but on the contrary to provide for their promotion in a systematic way' (82). Widdowson is of the opinion that literature must seem 'relevant' and students must feel that they are learning 'something useful' (83).

As regards the Maltese educational context this issue of relevance is commented upon by Micallef and Galea who feel that 'the situation is not so positive and the future of English Literature as a subject in the school curriculum is very bleak' partly due to the fact that it 'is losing its importance...to other new, more modern and utilitarian subjects' (157). However, this claim is refuted by the MATSEC statistical reports for the SEC English Literature examination for the years 2004-2007, which show a slow but steady increase in the number of candidates who register for this particular examination: 2004: 2774; 2005: 2861; 2006: 2887; 2007: 2968 (*Statistical Reports* 9; 10; 10; 10).

Widdowson maintains that the study of literature is not separate from a study of language but they are two aspects of the same activity. Stylistic analysis can aid literary criticism by allowing the learners to make connections between a text and their linguistic experience. Stylistic analysis hence prepares the way for literary criticism and allows it 'to operate more effectively' (Widdowson 116). In relation to this it is helpful to examine one of the conclusions of a study investigating the teaching of literary criticism in Maltese sixth forms. In her study Bartoli associates the lack of appreciation towards literature felt by students at G.F. Abela Upper Lyceum and at St. Aloysius College with the lecturers' apprehension at using stylistics in the classroom (39).

Seemingly in agreement with Widdowson, Thumboo believes that 'linguistic concepts can only be useful' when applied to the study of literature, however, he demands that they 'be applied with discrimination and sensitivity' so that in the process they 'add substantially to our understanding of literature by throwing light on how language works, on how it behaves and

misbehaves' (60). Linguistic concepts allow students to be more precise in their analysis of a text and in explaining how certain effects and language features function in the text. An analysis of the language allows one to understand the literary text in a more comprehensive manner. Hill too agrees with Widdowson's conception of literature teaching and states that 'a study of literature and a study of language can be mutually supportive' and 'that literature study can contribute to the students' command of the language generally as well as to their personal, social and moral development' (106).

The value of literature in language teaching is that of providing a varied and fertile source of reading material; however, literature can only aid advanced language teaching if the 'content... is in itself worthwhile' (Brumfit 105). This means that 'A true literature syllabus will not be simply the use of literary texts for advanced language purposes, but an attempt to develop or extend literary competence' (Brumfit 106). Hill seems to agree that even though literature study is inextricably linked to language study 'it is hoped that students will acquire more thereby than just a knowledge of the language' (108). The study of literature enriches the language lesson by engaging the students' 'intellect and emotions in a way that study of the language alone can not' (Hill 108). According to Culler without literary competence students would be unable to make sense of a literary text given that their linguistic knowledge would only enable them to understand the meaning of the phrases and sentences but not to 'convert [these] linguistic sequences into literary structures and meanings' (114).

Parkinson and Reid Thomas claim that the linguistic analysis of literary texts (or 'linguistic criticism') 'predicates, not that all responses are equally valid, but that any analyst who has made correct linguistic statements about a text... and who has linked these to suggested purposes or effects, deserves to be taken seriously, and cannot be refuted merely on grounds of sensibility' (33). As an approach it is also 'particularly useful in a foreign language' because thanks to it 'a student can become more aware of, and take steps to solve, his or her problems as a non-native reader' (Parkinson and Reid Thomas 33).

Despite its merits, the risks posed by a too stringent application of the principles of the language-based approach are that all opportunities for personal interpretation are stifled and the whole exercise becomes 'very mechanical and demotivating' (Lazar 25). Moreover, if students are not equipped with the necessary information concerning a text's historical, social and political background their ability to effectively interpret the text is hampered since they do not possess 'valuable cultural knowledge' (Lazar 25) regarding it.

2.1.1.2 Content-based Approach

According to Lazar in postsecondary and tertiary education the approach that is commonly used in order to teach literature is the one focusing on content (24). This approach is concerned with a careful investigation of a text's genre and rhetorical devices, the literary movement a text might be characteristic of, and the political, social and historical background to a text. Such an approach makes use of set texts and students are encouraged to read literary criticism related to them. Decisions concerning text selection are influenced by a text's role as part of a literary canon or tradition. This approach exposes students to 'a wide range of authentic materials' (Lazar 25) and has the added advantage of bolstering the students' understanding of the text by means of the literary and historical contexts surrounding it. The MC English examination syllabus alludes to this approach in its list of assessment objectives when it says that candidates will be assessed on their ability to do the following:

- demonstrate understanding of the content and purpose of previously unseen material, drawn from a wide variety of sources;
- respond with understanding to texts of different types and periods;
- demonstrate knowledge of the contexts in which literary works are written and understood ('AM Syllabus English' 2).

O'Sullivan affirms that literature acts as an agent of 'cultural enhancement' and she sees this as one of the reasons why literary studies are valued by present-day teachers. This is a view echoed by Zhang who states that English literature is studied in Chinese universities primarily because it 'play[s] an important role in cultivating students' cultural accomplishment' (52). According to Rodrigues and Badaczewski, those teachers who feel that teaching literature allows students to develop an awareness of their cultural heritage usually use two approaches: the chronological and the thematic (2). The chronological approach is related to historical events and movements while the thematic approach 'may enable students to perceive universals throughout historical periods and to develop a sense of today's indebtedness to the past or differences from its thinking and attitudes' (Rodrigues and Badaczewski 3). The main flaws of the cultural heritage approach are its disregard for the multiethnic reality of contemporary classes and 'that it often fails to involve the students with the literature' (Rodrigues and Badaczewski 3).

For Parkinson and Reid Thomas the rationale behind the teaching methods associated with the reading for content approach 'seem to be that they help to widen cultural horizons, to reduce the imprisonment of learners in the worldview and values of their own time and place' (31). Teachers who adopt this approach seem geared towards developing the "right attitude" in their students, 'perhaps conceived as a willingness to explore, relativise, suspend or refrain from moral and

aesthetic judgement or recognise multiple moral and aesthetic standards, so that the study of literature will enable class members to understand and empathise with each other' (Parkinson and Reid Thomas 31-32). Besides this cross-cultural awareness-raising purpose, the content-based approach seems to have another 'subtype', that of 'wish[ing] to foster general cognitive skills' (Parkinson and Reid Thomas 32).

Brumfit's proposed pedagogical model for literature teaching outlines the view that literature teaching does not operate linearly but the student's 'response to the text in all its aspects must develop simultaneously' (108). Effective literature pedagogy manages to hone a student's 'ability to generalize from the given text to either other aspects of the literary tradition or personal and social significances outside literature' (Brumfit 108).

Brumfit thinks that at sixth-form level it is particularly important for students not only to read the set texts but to support the latter 'by the reading of a wide range of other works' since it is only in this way that students can develop 'a mature approach' (111) to the act of reading. He feels that as teachers 'we do not actually ask students...to read in the same ways as we would expect to read ourselves' (Brumfit 111) and the most effective course identified by Brumfit is the one that helps students to discuss texts in relation to other texts and to the world outside literature. He is of the opinion that 'we need to give students with a particular interest in literature the experience of reading and discovering not isolated texts but a whole body of literature—and of discussing this in relation to their experience both inside and outside literature' (Brumfit 111). For Brumfit the ultimate goal of a literature course should be that of making everyone feel 'intensively involved in some form of creative engagement with literature' (114). The practices of isolation currently in operation in many schools dampen students' appetite for literature later on in life.

Commenting on the effectiveness of the Australian model of teaching English literature, Zhang claims that as a constructivist approach it has proved to be more effective than other approaches because of innovative differences in three main areas: 'In method, it combines lecturing and group discussion, with the latter being the main part of the class. In content, it combines literature reading with critical writing. In assessment, it stresses students' involvement and language use' (52). In relation to teaching method Zhang says that lecturing is symptomatic of the 'duck-feeding method' (53) by means of which lecturers relay to their students a surplus of literary facts and the interpretations of established critics. By combining lecturing and group discussions Zhang finds the Australian method 'enlightening' (53). Even though lecturing is sometimes necessary 'The teaching process should feature interaction between the instructor and his students, between students themselves, and between students and what they are being taught' (Zhang 53). Zhang talks

about the benefits of co-operative learning which not only bolsters academic abilities but is also effective in enhancing the students' communicative skills, skills which it is hoped the students will make use of in their non-academic life. As regards content, Zhang exhibits displeasure with the heavy focus on literary history as opposed to critical writing. Like Carter and Long, he claims that we need to distinguish between 'knowledge of literature' and 'knowledge about literature' (Carter and Long 4) when teaching students. Students' critical abilities are not developed merely by learning literary facts but they need to be engaged with a variety of texts and encouraged to practise critical writing. Zhang also says that when it comes to assessing students examination questions should be designed to test students' ability to think about literature critically and write skilfully instead of their ability to memorise literary facts and comments by critics, as is typical of traditional examination papers (55).

The main disadvantage associated with the content approach is that the lesson risks becoming teacher-centred due to the need for a great amount of teacher input. Since the texts used tend to be 'very difficult linguistically, and therefore demotivating for the average student' (Lazar 25), student participation is heavily curtailed. Parkinson and Reid Thomas warn against transforming literature lessons into mere avenues for cross-cultural awareness since this 'also belongs in other parts of the curriculum' (32). They also affirm that the content-based approach has the added 'danger...of attempted indoctrination' and 'it seems possible that a heavy-handed political correctness which pays lip service to a party line of intercultural respect might produce a generation of hypocrites' (Parkinson and Reid Thomas 32). Moreover, as an approach it tends to be mostly appropriate to 'a fairly select group of "literary-minded" students' (Lazar 25). This goes counter to Brumfit's idea that the teaching of literature should be conducted in such a way that as many students as possible will be able to appreciate great literary masterpieces. Not having access to these texts 'is to be deprived of a valuable educational and human experience for anyone who is brought up within the western educational tradition' (Brumfit 103). For Brumfit not all reading is 'equally valuable' and hence the purpose behind the teaching of literature is that of 'steering a path towards the best...accounts of human predicament' (103).

However, there exist theorists who feel that encouraging students to read only the classics is too restrictive especially if coupled with the adoption of only one interpretative approach. Delanoy proposes a dialogic model for literature teaching in response to the ineffectiveness of unidimensional teaching methods. Students are encouraged 'to explore a multitude of responses rather than look for a single interpretation' (Delanoy 53) and they do this by exploring and relating a number of positions towards a text. Delanoy's dialogic model 'bring[s] together aesthetic and

socio-cultural text-approaches to both acknowledge literature's specific qualities and its embeddedness in socio-cultural contexts' (54). His model takes into account both those literary texts that have been recognised as worthy of being part of the official canon and those texts that have been excluded from it. It is hoped that students manage to 'create a multitude of potentially unexpected links with a text' and the 'adoption of a holistic reader stance' (Delanoy 53).

Those teachers who feel that the content approach is much more suited to the literature teacher working with 'learners who have a specialist interest in the study of literature' do not take into account that 'there are important elements in this approach which can be usefully applied to the teaching of literature in the language class' (Lazar 35).

2.1.1.3 Personal Enrichment Approach

The last approach discussed by Lazar is the one that considers literary studies as an avenue for personal enrichment (24). The MC English examination syllabus refers to it when it states that students should be encouraged to develop the following abilities:

- the development of critical sense, personal response and independent judgement;
- the enjoyment and appreciation in a disciplined and critical way of literary...texts ('AM Syllabus English' 2).

This approach 'encourag[es] students to draw on their own personal experiences, feelings and opinions' and 'it helps students to become more actively involved both intellectually and emotionally in learning English, and hence aids acquisition' (Lazar 24). The personal enrichment approach to literary studies supposedly stimulates group work. Since personal involvement is one of the chief goals behind this approach, texts are selected on the basis of how appropriate they are for the students and on how interesting the students are likely to find them. The use of non-literary materials is encouraged especially if they deal with the same thematic issues as those present in the literary text. This is beneficial because it 'demystifies literature' (Lazar 25). The main advantage of this approach is that the student is involved holistically and hence the whole process is 'potentially highly motivating' (Lazar 25). The pleasure derived from the act of reading is 'simultaneously individual and communal' and this is because literature allows us to make connections with other texts we have read and with the experiences we undergo as human beings:

Our response to literature is part of our response to history, to ethics, to politics, to understanding what we are and what other people are. In other words, we do not *have* knowledge of books, we *use* our knowledge: our response is both active and shared (Brumfit 111).

The issue of pleasure is significant and as Parkinson and Reid Thomas indicate one of the benefits of reading for pleasure is that of improving one's linguistic proficiency: 'Considerable anecdotal evidence and experienced teachers' opinions strongly suggest...that, in a wide variety of situations, learners who read in quantity...improve more rapidly than those who do not; this improvement usually extends to all areas of language, including speaking' (30).

Brumfit considers it a 'tragedy' that 'literature remains inaccessible to so many people' and this is because 'there is no more easily available source for personal growth than serious literature' (124). He argues that the 'only honest justification for any kind of [literature] teaching' is that as teachers we wish to communicate our own personal need to partake of the experience of reading an 'imaginative literature for the light it sheds on [us] and [our] position as human beings' (Brumfit 122). He is of the opinion that 'the key criterion for a literature course is the accessibility for serious discussion and personal experience of the books being read to a particular group of students' (Brumfit 123). Our choice of texts should enable our students to 'have an initial reaction unmediated by the teacher' (Brumfit 123). Rather than imposing the students' response we should strive to guide it. The students' intellectual level, social and cultural baggage and prior literary experience need to be taken into consideration when we invite students to read specific texts. Brumfit believes that as teachers of literature we should not consider our task to be strictly that of teaching these specific texts, but more importantly we should feel that 'we are teaching attitudes and abilities which will be relevant to the reading of any major works of literature' (123). This kind of 'concern with literature as an attitude to texts rather than as a body of texts' allows us to initially 'draw upon the widely recognized tradition of "serious" literature' but then 'encourage students to introduce into the discussion any books which they themselves perceive to be relevant' and which 'are directly needed by students at that stage of their literary development' (Brumfit 124). We should cultivate readers who are 'willing and able to read the literature of many traditions, for only thus will it be an educational and value-challenging activity' (Brumfit 124). The idea of cultivating positive attitudes towards literature is supported by Sammut's claim that 'poor performance' in a literature examination could be due to the 'students' unfavourable attitudes towards this subject which is consequently not allotted the attention and study time it deserves' (56).

Teachers should not expect students to duplicate their responses to a literary text but 'to develop their own, to move towards the kind of responses we would expect of any sympathetic and reasonably knowledgeable adult reader' (Brumfit 119). Even though this cannot be *taught* but only *caught*, students need a teacher's 'direct intervention to clarify what might otherwise remain inaccessible for so long that they will give up literature in frustration if they are not helped'

(Brumfit 119). Encouraging students' personal response is beneficial because as Parkinson and Reid Thomas point out

if students know that their opinions about a book are considered important and actually make a difference to what happens, both the act of reading and the act of talking about the book should be more real, authentic and communicative, and hence more likely to promote language learning (and perhaps also learning of facts and literary skills) (34).

Rodrigues and Badaczewski claim that if teachers approach literature as a series of facts that need to be learnt at all costs they are going to implant the idea in their students' heads that literature is 'an obstacle—something to be "learned" rather than experienced' (4). On the other hand, those teachers who justify the teaching of literature by means of the individual development it generates feel that their approach 'involve[s] students as active learners' and helps them 'achieve a sense of self-identity and clarify their values' (Rodrigues and Badaczewski 3). This outcome is a direct result of the student's 'very personal act of relating literature to oneself' (Rodrigues and Badaczewski 3). By allowing students to interpret literature and relate it to their personal lives and backgrounds, 'the teacher enables students to perceive literature as meaningful to them as individuals, not as an artefact of the educational monolith' (Rodrigues and Badaczewski 4).

Cutajar and Briffa feel that literature as a subject 'illuminates different areas of human life so that the learner might deepen his/her views on the quality of living. It contributes to the business of living and may alter a person's outlook of the world' (20). Cutajar and Briffa feel that by studying literature 'The learner is educated in modes of thought that equip him/her with a cognitive disposition that may be transferred to other areas of human behaviour and may eventually transform his/her view of life in general' (20). However, Gribble somewhat disagrees with this and maintains that literary studies should not set 'the *general* emotional development and psychic health of the individual [as]... a primary objective' but they should be 'concerned to develop the adequacy and appropriateness of students' emotional responses to literary works [and]... this necessarily entails the development of the adequacy and appropriateness of their perceptions of literary works' (108).

The downside to the literature for personal enrichment approach is that if the text is not chosen carefully students will experience problems when it comes to responding to it given that the text might be alien to the students' experiences. The importance of choosing appropriate set texts and involving teachers in the selection process is corroborated by Micallef and Galea (158), Sammut (58) and Ebejer and Vella, who affirm that 'Teachers should be more vociferous about this and claim the right to be consulted about the choice of books' (170). Moreover, a further drawback is that if the students tend not to enjoy discussing personal feelings and opinions the whole literary interpretation exercise will be unsuccessful.

Another problem elicited by the personal enrichment approach concerns the students' inability to 'cop[e] with the linguistic intricacies of the text' (Lazar 25) if not provided with adequate guidance. This means that unless students are guaranteed a minimum of linguistic access they cannot be expected to cope with the text in question.

Even though at sixth form level literature is most often taught and studied according to the principles of the literature as content approach it still makes sense to employ 'a combination of the three approaches' as a means of 'ensuring that students become enjoyably involved in using literature in the classroom' (Lazar 43).

2.1.2 Communicative Language Teaching

One of the most influential approaches to the teaching of languages to have emerged over the past few decades is Communicative Language Teaching (Beale 12). This section reviews the basic tenets of CLT and provides a backdrop against which the teaching of language skills at sixth form is evaluated. CLT is considered to be the 'default approach to English language teaching since the 1970s' and it was 'Promoted by predominantly western academics and educators as a developmental advance on previous traditional grammar-translation and structural approaches' (Burns 2). Being 'Reflective of western, progressive movements in education' it has been 'Adopted increasingly in education policy and mandated curricula for English language teaching in most parts of the world' (Burns 2). Harmer claims that 'the communicative approach has left an indelible mark on teaching and learning, resulting in the use of communicative activities all over the world' (86).

According to Berns 'Language teaching is based on a view of language as communication. That is, language is seen as a social tool that speakers use to make meaning; speakers communicate about something to someone for some purpose, either orally or in writing' (104). CLT is built on the principle that activities that involve real communication promote learning. Learning is also achieved once language is used to carry out meaningful tasks and once the language used is meaningful to the learner. CLT uses almost any activity that engages learners in authentic communication, chief among these being functional communication activities and social interaction activities. Some of the objectives of this approach are that students will learn to use language as a means of expressing their values and judgments and the functions that best meet their own communication needs. For Berns 'It is essential that learners be engaged in doing things with language—that is, that they use language for a variety of purposes in all phases of learning' (104).

For Harmer the overall purpose of the communicative approach is that of 'improv[ing] the students' ability to communicate, in stark contrast to teaching which is aimed more at learning bits

of language just because they exist and without focusing on their use in communication' (86). The communicative approach 'included not only a re-examination of what aspects of language to teach, but also a shift in emphasis in how to teach' (Harmer 84). According to Brumfit and Finocchiaro 'Communicative competence is the desired goal' (92).

Allwright's research proves to be highly authoritative when one discusses the methodology of the communicative approach. For Allwright exposure, motivation and opportunities for language use are the three fundamental elements that one requires when learning a new language. Allwright came to the conclusion that when motivated students are provided with the opportunity to solve communication problems in the target language after sufficient exposure to it then the students' progress is much better and 'language learning will take care of itself' (170).

The communicative approach takes into account the genuine needs of different pupils. Savignon claims that 'The selection of methods and materials appropriate to both the goals and the context of teaching begins with an analysis of learners' needs and styles of learning' (4). Traditional academic syllabi had assumed that the learners' goal was in-depth mastery of the target language rather than communicative ability in the real world outside the artificial confines of the ESOL classroom. The communicative approach is much more learner-oriented because activities are dictated by the pupils' needs and interests (Savignon 11-12).

The communicative approach engages learners in activities that allow them to make more meaningful and authentic language use (Savignon 12). It focuses on language as a medium of communication and it recognises that all communication has a social purpose – the learner has something to say or find out. Communication embraces a whole spectrum of functions and notions and that is why it spawned a great number of functional-notional syllabi (Savignon 1-2). The communicative approach focuses on the importance of language functions when teaching a language. Students are instructed in how to use different language forms in different contexts for different purposes.

The communicative approach stresses the importance of providing students with sufficient exposure to the target language and the opportunities to use it for a communicative purpose (Savignon 12). Hence the significance of fluency equates, if not overrides, that of accuracy. When learners are engaged in fluency work they are asked to focus on communicating or receiving content and producing appropriate language in context (Richards 13). The teaching of the four skills usually entails an emphasis on fluency with the purpose of honing skills that will be highly useful to the learners in real-life communication scenarios. It is important for the learners to make

themselves understood and to understand the messages conveyed to them. In order to achieve this a substantial amount of classroom activities should be biased towards fluency.

Different authors have sought to define the characteristics of CLT. Nunan lists five basic elements:

1. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
2. The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.
3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on the language but also on the learning process itself.
4. An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
5. An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom (279).

When talking about the communicative approach, Harmer provides a list of features that characterise a communicative activity and distinguish it from a non-communicative one. These two kinds of activities are at opposite ends of what he calls the communication continuum:

Non-communicative Activities	Communicative Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · No communicative desire · No communicative purpose · Form not content · One language item only · Teacher intervention · Materials control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · A desire to communicate · A communicative purpose · Content not form · Variety of language · No teacher intervention · No materials control

Figure 2 – Communicative and non-communicative activities (Harmer 85)

What is important to understand is the fact that some activities do not fall neatly into either one of these opposite ends of the communication continuum. However, one can always identify to which end they are closer in terms of design and purpose.

According to Brumfit and Finocchiaro 'Intrinsic motivation will spring from an interest in what is being communicated by the language' (93). The communicative approach encourages teachers to engage students in authentic learning tasks and to use authentic resources because they are more interesting and motivating. Richards claims that in CLT 'Classroom materials typically make use of authentic texts to create interest and to provide valid models of language' (21). The

communicative approach also accentuates the importance of student collaboration as a means of enhancing communicative competence and in fact 'Students are expected to interact with other people, either in the flesh, through pair and group work, or in their writings' (Brumfit and Finocchiaro 93). In relation to this Richards asserts that 'The classroom is a community where learners learn through collaboration and sharing' (20).

Savignon points out that 'The concern of CLT is not exclusively with face-to-face oral communication. The principles apply equally to reading and writing activities that involve readers and writers in the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning' (22). Richards recommends 'link[ing] the different skills such as speaking, reading and listening together, since they usually occur so in the real world' (12). A study by Yu and Ren on the teaching of intensive reading in a communicative manner discovered the benefits of skills integration. By integrating reading skills with the practice of other skills they managed to boost their students' motivation (43). Hence the communicative approach gives primacy to all four skills and it would be fallacious to emphasise the significance of one or two skills at the detriment of the others. Such a practice would contradict one of the most crucial tenets of the communicative approach, this being that students should be trained for the real communicative needs of the world outside the classroom. Currently the MC English examination only tests candidates' reading and writing skills.

2.1.3 Teaching Writing

In addition to the principles discussed above it is important to pay extra attention to some further aspects of teaching writing methodology, especially those underlying the process writing approach. This is fundamental given the fact that more than any other skill writing possesses a special kind of magnitude in the MC English examination. The syllabus specifies that students preparing for this examination should be encouraged to develop 'the ability to write accurately, clearly and effectively for different purposes and audiences' because one of the examination's objectives is that of assessing candidates' ability to 'write lucidly, fluently and accurately on one of a number of subjects using appropriate vocabulary and style' ('AM Syllabus English' 2).

The MC English examination tests candidates' knowledge of literature and language via written essays and the only other skill students are expected to employ is that of reading. The 2008-2010 syllabus makes no reference to listening and speaking skills and hence for the time being candidates' proficiency in these sets of skills will remain unassessed.

2.1.3.1 The Process Approach

The process approach to the teaching of writing is considered by some to possess the same rationale as many of the teaching methods of CLT. In fact, Bruton affirms that 'Process writing and communicative-task-based instruction both assume productive tasks that prompt self-expression to motivate students and as the principal engine for developing L2 proficiency in the language classroom' (1). Harmer points out that 'a process approach aims to get to the heart of the various skills that should be employed when writing' (257) and this makes it different from an approach which focuses solely on the final product without any consideration for the various stages that a piece of writing goes through.

While the different stages of planning, drafting, composing, and revising seem to imply a linear and clear-cut approach to writing, gaps in the L2 indicate that this is not the case. This is because 'there are constant interruptions between each phase and constant movements back and forth between the phases identified as the writer proceeds towards her final goal' (Peacock 24). One of the most influential process writing models is that proposed by White and Arndt (4). It is made up of six interrelated and recursive stages that can be represented in the following manner:

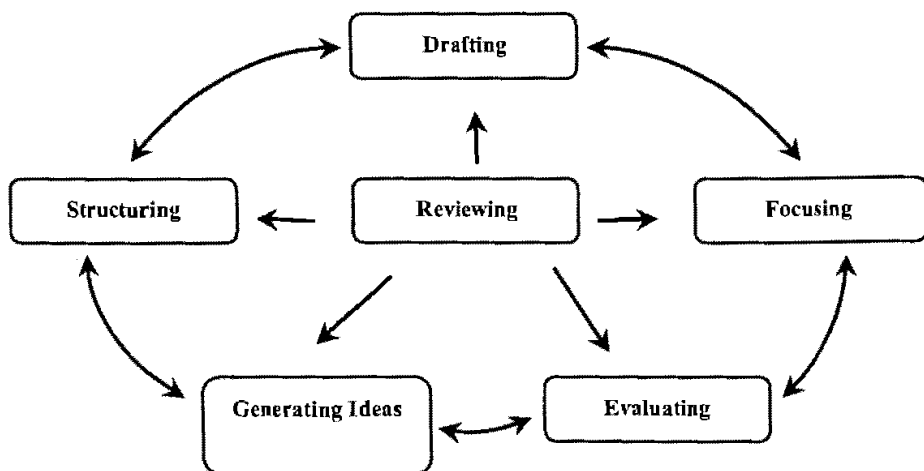


Figure 3 – The process writing cycle

Instructing students to follow a writing process is advisable because if we are to review effectively when we are engaged in a writing task, then it follows that we will need to have created appropriate cognitive plans to act as templates against

which we can make judgments...while we compose and transcribe our written text (Peacock 26).

Frederiksen and Dominic's writing process model comprises the stages of composing, transcribing and reviewing (68). The stage of composing includes planning and thinking about vocabulary and grammatical structures whereas it is in the transcribing stage that students actually write the text. It is finally checked in the reviewing part, in which the clarity of the message is ensured. This three-pronged development was extended to include feedback, which according to Peacock came to be considered as 'an essential and integral influence at each stage...a constant process affecting all stages of the act of writing' (25).

The stage of planning is there to help students monitor the organisation and development of ideas. Harris suggests a number of 'assembling strategies' (46) that act as a framework for writing and enhance the sequencing of ideas. Harris proposes making use of 'listing questions', 'brainstorming', 'diagrams' and 'planning grids' (47-50) as assembling strategies. The use of questions 'helps writers get a sense of the task at hand and provides a focus for research which can include reading and simple fact-finding activities' (Harris 47). According to White and Arndt 'questions are an important prompt for writers. Indeed, one of the skills of a good writer is to think of interesting questions to ask because these yield interesting answers' (22). Furthermore, questions 'stimulate thinking, [help writers] to draw on their experience and to develop and share their ideas' (White and Arndt 22).

As regards brainstorming, Harris cautions that the latter is not an end in itself but should be followed by other strategies 'to ensure a reasonable chance of a successful outcome' (49). So 'a simple, but effective second-stage procedure is to review the product of a brainstorming session and invite pupils to create links between ideas/keywords' (Harris 49). Harris also suggests using illustrations such as diagrams and grids that are useful to 'sort out ideas' and help in 'developing points of views and arguments' (49-50) respectively. The second stage forwarded by Harris is that of 'creating and developing the text' whereby 'writers proceed with creating a text [and] redefine ideas, perceive a different and more significant way of sequencing their ideas, think of new ideas and new linkages between ideas and, indeed, even change their minds over a point of view or argument' (55). The final stage of 'editing involves the careful checking of the text to ensure that there are no errors that will impede communication – errors of spelling, punctuation, word choice and word order' (Harris 59).

Byrne suggests that 'students should be taught a set of procedures which will help them not only when they are writing about topics ...but also with any kind of 'free' writing' (122). Byrne

classifies six procedures, starting with listing of possible ideas. After selecting and expanding one idea, the students then proceed to create an outline and write a draft. The last two stages would be devoted to correcting and improving the draft and writing the final version. Tribble's writing process model is composed of four stages: during the *prewriting* stage students engage in 'specifying the task, planning and outlining, collecting data and making notes' (38); the *composing* stage comes next and the stages of *revising* and *editing* serve to complete the task. In the revising stage students engage in 'reorganising, shifting emphasis, focusing information and style' whereas during the *editing* process 'grammar, lexis and surface features' (Tribble 38) are checked.

2.1.4 Teaching Reading

This section reviews what the literature recommends as best practice when teaching reading skills and acts as a backdrop against which to evaluate the teaching of such skills at postsecondary level. For Nuttall during a reading lesson the student should not be perceived as a passive recipient of a text's meaning but as a participant who 'is actively involved and will very often have to work to get the meaning out' (9). Nuttall proposes a general aim for a reading development programme and each phrase 'carries some fairly specific implications for teaching': 'To enable students to read without help unfamiliar authentic texts, at appropriate speed, silently and with adequate understanding' (21). She emphasizes the fact that 'reading involves skills that the student must learn for himself, and that the measure of the teacher's success is how far the student learns to do without his help' (Nuttall 22). The teacher's job is that of 'providing, first suitable texts and second, activities that will focus the student's attention on the text. The student must develop his own skills, but we must make him aware of what he is doing, and interested in doing it better' (Nuttall 22).

When discussing intensive reading Harmer maintains that the teacher adopts four different roles when asking students to read intensively: organizer, observer, feedback organizer, prompter (213). As an organizer the teacher 'needs to tell students exactly what their reading purpose is...and give them clear instructions about how to achieve it, and how long they have to do this' (Harmer 213). When the students are reading on their own the teacher adopts the role of an observer and refrains from interrupting the reading. As an observer the teacher will check on the students' progress and decide on whether to provide them with more time or start organizing feedback. When acting as a feedback organizer the teacher 'lead[s] a feedback session to check that they have completed the task successfully' (Harmer 213) and asks the students to answer the questions individually or in pairs. Harmer points out that students enjoy paired answers since 'by sharing their knowledge, they are also sharing their responsibility for the answer' (213). It is highly important to

ask students to support their answers by means of information from the text. The last role mentioned by Harmer is that of a prompter and when acting in this way the teacher 'prompts them to notice language features in that text' (213). Closely bound to this is the teacher in the guise of a controller directing students 'to certain features of text construction, clarifying ambiguities, and making them aware of issues of text structure which they had not come across previously' (Harmer 213).

According to Nuttall during an intensive reading lesson the teacher has a number of responsibilities:

- Finding out what students can do and what they cannot, and working out a programme aimed at giving them the skills they need.
- Choosing suitable texts to work on.
- Choosing or devising tasks and activities to develop the required skills.
- Preparing the class to undertake the tasks.
- Making sure that everyone in the class works productively and extracting maximum effort and best results by encouraging the students; and by prompting and probing until they produce the answer, instead of telling them what it is.
- Making sure that everyone in the class improves steadily according to his own capabilities (148).

The teacher guides the students prior to the reading, while the reading is underway and when the reading is completed. Before reading the teacher provides the students with a reason for reading, introduces the text, breaks up the text, deals with new language and asks signpost questions (Nuttall 152). Nuttall affirms that the guidance the teacher provides the students with while they are reading depends on class organization. If the teacher adopts the 'individualized approach' then the student has to seek 'guidance from the text', whereas the teacher would play a much stronger role if the 'whole class approach' (Nuttall 160-161) is adopted. The last available approach is 'the group approach' in which students rely on 'guidance from fellow students' (Nuttall 162). Even though Nuttall recommends using the latter she claims that 'these three approaches do not have to be mutually exclusive; they can be readily combined during the sequence of a reading lesson' (160).

Nuttall underscores the fact that even though in the classroom the teacher is expected to engage the students in intensive reading this needs to be complemented by extensive reading and one other role that the teacher needs to adopt is that of promoting the latter:

We need an extensive reading programme that will actively promote reading out of class. Class time is always in short supply and the amount of reading needed to achieve fluency and efficiency is very great – much greater than most students will undertake if left to themselves (23).

Up to this point this chapter has reviewed what the literature says in relation to the teaching of language and literature as well as examined the literature concerning the teaching of writing and

reading skills. The next part of this chapter will report what the literature proposes as good practice for the assessment of language and literature.

2.2 Assessment

One of the main issues dealt with by this study is that of the examination practices currently being used by MATSEC when it comes to assessing students' performance in the Matriculation English examination. For this reason it is imperative to review the literature on assessment so that one can extrapolate a number of benchmarks against which to evaluate the examination practices employed by MATSEC.

2.2.1 Syllabus-content Approach Versus Course-objective Approach

Students hoping to be awarded the Matriculation Certificate need to sit for two Advanced level examinations and four Intermediate level examinations. According to Grima et al. 'The aim of the two Advanced levels is to induce students to deepen their knowledge of two subjects required for admission to a University course of their choice' (14). Various sixth form institutions in Malta offer their students the opportunity of studying English at Advanced level and all these courses gravitate towards one examination. The Matriculation English examination is offered by an independent examination board that acts as a guarantor of standards. As an examination it measures the candidates' success in their two-year course of study and enables them to gain admission to university and therefore its nature is that of a selective test.

According to Hughes a test may either adopt a syllabus-content approach or else a course-objective approach (13). The former is 'based directly on a detailed course syllabus or on the books and other materials used' whereas the latter's content is based 'directly on the objectives of the course' (Hughes 13). While the syllabus-content approach might be considered a 'fair test' due to the fact that 'the test only contains what it is thought that the students have actually encountered' the main drawback 'is that if the syllabus is badly designed, or the books and other materials are badly chosen, the results of a test can be very misleading. Successful performance on the test may not truly indicate successful achievement of course objectives' (Hughes 13).

If one of the objectives of Matriculation English course is that of preparing students for university study in English then is essential for 'students...to improve their communicative skills and be proficient in...English' (Grima et al. 17). Grima et al. feel that 'it is recommended that the oral component is introduced in [English] at this level as well. The content of such a component needs to be thought out carefully since good communication skills are important for tertiary study'

(17). Grima et al. report that 'there are widespread complaints at University that students lack the necessary communication skills' and that 'Teachers suggested that the oral/aural component should be present in all languages at both Intermediate and Advanced level and that it is to be given more weighting' (17-18). Notwithstanding all this none of the seven aims prescribed for a Matriculation English course based on the current syllabus require students to develop oral/aural proficiency and none of the eight assessment objectives specify that candidates' oral/aural proficiency will be assessed. In relation to this it can be pointed out that the SEC English Language examination has also been accused of shortcomings when it comes to assessing oracy and listening skills. Baldacchino found that 'the examination appeared not to be clearly measuring a single overall language ability, but rather two specific language abilities: one ability consisting mostly of reading and writing, and a second ability, consisting mostly of listening and speaking' (112). As regards the latter she claims that 'more focus by the MATSEC Board and teachers needs to be placed on this particular component' (Baldacchino 112).

2.2.2 The Syllabus and Assessment

Given that the MC English examination adopts a syllabus-content approach it must be pointed out that 'Tests based on objectives work against the perpetuation of poor teaching, something which course-content-based tests, almost as if part of a conspiracy, fail to do' (Hughes 13). For Hughes

to base test content on course objectives is much to be preferred; it will provide more accurate information about individual and group achievement, and it is likely to promote a more beneficial backwash effect on teaching... The long-term interests of students are best served by...tests whose content is based on course objectives (13-14).

Hughes underlines the importance both of having tests based on course objectives and of having course objectives on which tests can be based.

Currently the Department of English at Junior College relies by default only on the aims specified by the syllabus and the situation is one in which the teaching is based entirely upon the syllabus and not one in which the test is governed by a set of course objectives agreed upon by all the relevant stakeholders. Even though when compared to a language syllabus, 'literature and cultural studies syllabuses may be very much more open' and 'fairly dry documents' (Parkinson and Reid Thomas 159) it is to be borne in mind that in the case of the MC English examination there is no test handbook or supplementary documentation to guide teachers and students preparing for this examination. The syllabus is made up of three printed pages and contains information on aims, assessment objectives, quality of language, subject content and grade descriptions. Whether this is sufficient is one of the things that the present study aimed to discover. Other local studies have

complained about this dearth of information and in fact, while discussing the backwash effect of the SEC English Language examination, Baldacchino calls for 'More details in the syllabus and markers' reports' on such things as 'the objectives...performance conditions and assessment criteria...and...the analysis and interpretation of student errors' (111-112).

Abety affirms that 'the students' competence in each subject can be measured by a clearly spelt out notional syllabus to be covered by teachers and learners' (93) and this also applies to literature. He feels that a 'notional syllabus serves as the best guide for teaching, testing and evaluation of course materials' (Abety 93). Traditional literature syllabi 'state general objectives of the course followed by a list of literary texts to be studied. In the final analysis, teachers and learners take the syllabus to mean only the set texts... The course content, vaguely stated in the general objectives, is either not understood or just ignored' (Abety 93-94). Such vague statements are 'too imprecise to be of any use to a learner preparing for the A-Level Literature examination' (Abety 94). Abety is of the opinion that 'the various concepts of literary criticism which should preoccupy the students...should be clearly outlined' (94). A notional syllabus is helpful for teachers because by referring to it they know 'what aspects of a literary work [they] should treat at any given level' (103). The syllabus is also helpful for examiners since by means of it they 'will be guided...to keep their tests within the competence of the students they set out to examine' (103).

In order to show that a syllabus needs to be as thorough as possible, Spiro provides an exhaustive checklist of assessable areas of knowledge about literature and the skills needed for literature and then explains why this is so necessary:

There is little chance of the test constituting a 'representative sample of the materials and skills with which it is meant to be concerned', if those materials and skills are not clearly identified. The more precise these areas, the more likely it is that the test will measure what it aims to measure, and not a hidden agenda personal to each examiner and mysterious to both teachers and learners (22).

This need for clarity on the part of the syllabus is crucial given that its absence might lead to 'a communication breakdown between the three participants in the test: examiner, teacher and examinee' (Spiro 54). Spiro also lists a number of 'uneasy relationships' that might be particularly disadvantageous for the candidates:

- The relationship between the goals of the examiner and the performance of examinees;
- The relationship between the stated goals of the examiner, and the actual goals when it comes to marking scripts...
- The relationship between explicit instructions in the test question, and implicit expectations of examiners;
- The relationship between what is explicit and clear to examiners, and what is explicit and clear to examinees (54).

2.2.3 Norm-referenced and Criterion-referenced Measurement

Linn and Miller see norm-referenced tests and criterion-referenced tests 'as the ends of a continuum rather than as a clear-cut dichotomy' (38). Whereas a norm-referenced test 'Emphasises discrimination among individuals in terms of relative level of learning', a criterion-referenced test 'Emphasises description of what learning tasks individuals can and cannot perform' (Linn and Miller 39). Linn and Miller point out that 'norm-referenced tests...measure the students' level of achievement in various content and skill areas by comparing their test performance with the performance of other students in some general group' (394). Even though norm-referenced tests are 'useful for decisions based on relative achievement, such as selection, grouping, and relative grading' (Linn and Miller 38), making testing criterion-referenced helps achieve beneficial backwash and assures the students that 'if they do perform the tasks at the criterial level, then they will be successful on the test, regardless of how other students perform' (Hughes 55).

McNamara claims that even though 'the procedures for investigating the reliability and aspects of validity of norm-referenced scores are well established and well known...from an educational point of view its dependence on comparisons across populations has been seen as being inappropriately competitive, and discouraging for the 'average' student' (63-64). Parkinson and Reid Thomas assert that in literature tests 'Assessment should not be comparative between students; all students should be compared with outside criteria... Rank ordering should not be necessary' (150).

Criterion-referenced testing provides students with 'a clear picture of what they have to achieve' because the 'test specifications make clear just what the candidates have to be able to do, and with what degree of success' (Hughes 55). Linn and Miller point out that 'In an attempt to capitalize on the best features of both, test publishers have attempted to make their norm-referenced tests more descriptive, thus allowing for both norm-referenced and criterion-referenced interpretations' (39). This is leading to 'an increasing trend that will move many tests more toward the centre of the continuum' (Linn and Miller 39).

2.2.4 Stages of Test Development

In order to help one understand the assessment practices currently used by MATSEC when designing the MC English examination, the next three subsections will report what the literature suggests as good practice in test design and construction. This will allow one to determine whether the design of the current examination is in any way partly responsible for the candidates' poor performance.

2.2.4.1 Test Specifications

Hughes begins to outline the stages of test development by underscoring the importance of 'Mak[ing] a full and clear statement of the testing 'problem'' (58). This stage seeks to answer a set of questions related to the kind of test it is to be, its purpose, the abilities to be tested, the accuracy and detail of the results, backwash, and possible constraints. In the next stage 'A set of specifications for the test need to be written at the outset' and 'This will include information on: content, test structure, timing, medium/channel, techniques to be used, criterial levels of performance, and scoring procedures' (Hughes 59). Test specifications are 'The result of the design process in terms of test content and test method...they are a recipe or blueprint for test construction. Their function is to force explicitness about the design decisions in the test and to allow new versions to be written in the future' (McNamara 31).

For Linn and Miller content is 'How well the sample of assessment tasks represents the domain of tasks to be measured and how it emphasizes the most important content' (72). According to Hughes 'The fuller the information on content, the less arbitrary should be the subsequent decisions as to what to include in the writing of any version of the test' (60). Since 'content should be as fully specified as possible' (Hughes 60) such elements as operations, types of text, length of text, topics and structural and vocabulary range need to be included. McNamara points out that the test domain can be defined either 'operationally, as a set of practical, real-world tasks' or else 'in terms of a more abstract construct, for example, in terms of a theory of the components of knowledge and ability that underlie performance in the domain' (25).

Test specifications facilitate the job of those responsible for actual paper setting. Before writing test items one needs to 'sample widely and unpredictably' (Hughes 63) from the content. This ensures 'content validity and...beneficial backwash' (Hughes 63). Test items need to be moderated by someone not connected to the writing of the items and this allows the moderator to 'find weaknesses in the items and, where possible, remedy them' (Hughes 63).

2.2.4.2 Test Method

The next area of focus in test design is that of test method and for McNamara 'There are two broad approaches to understanding the relation of test method to test content. The first sees method as an aspect of content, and raises issues of authenticity; the second, more traditional approach treats method independently of content, and allows more obviously inauthentic test response formats' (26).

'Trialling...test materials and procedures prior to their use under operational conditions...involves careful design of data collection to see how well the test is working' (McNamara 32). Hughes recommends trialling the test on native and non-native speakers of English so that necessary changes can be made based upon the analysis of the trial (63-65). This analysis involves both statistical and qualitative means. Questionnaires provide us with test-taker feedback and allow 'Materials and procedures...[to] be revised in the light of the trials' (McNamara 32). Such data is not only collected prior to the operational use of the test but 'Periodically, the results of this data gathering may lead to substantial revision of test design, and the testing cycle will recommence' (McNamara 32). The MC English examination differentiates by outcome, that is, it all depends on what the examinee delivers; the presence of an examination panel plus the reviser is considered to be enough for this kind of examination.

Another important stage in test development is the calibration of scales: 'Where rating scales are going to be used for...the testing of writing, these should be calibrated by collecting samples of performance...which cover the full range of scales' (Hughes 65). These samples act as 'reference points for all future uses of the scale, as well as being necessary training materials' (Hughes 65). The calibration of scales is followed by the validation of the final version of the test, which is most especially recommended 'For a high stakes, or published test' (Hughes 66).

2.2.4.3 Test Manuals

McNamara is of the opinion that 'Ethical language testing practice...should work to ensure positive washback from tests' (74). He affirms that 'Minimally, accountability would require test developers to provide test-takers with complete information on what is expected of them in the test' (73). For Linn and Miller carefully constructed tests are always accompanied by 'A test manual and other accessory materials [which] are included as guides for administering and scoring the test, evaluating its technical qualities, and interpreting and using results' (396). Before training 'all staff who will be involved in the test process' (Hughes 66), handbooks need to be written for the test takers, test users and staff. These handbooks will include the following: the test's rationale, details on how the test was developed and validated, test specifications, sample items, advice on studying for the test, information on test scores, training materials, and details of test administration (Hughes 66). These handbooks are crucial since 'However good the potential backwash effect of a test may be, the effect will not be fully realized if students and those responsible for teaching do not know and understand what the test demands of them' (Hughes 55). Somewhat in relation to this issue, Parkinson and Reid Thomas maintain that in a literature test 'All outcomes considered important

should be tested...over a period' and that 'students should be told in advance...what types of outcomes will be tested' (150).

The ethical language testing approach recommends 'limiting the social responsibility of language testers to questions of the professional ethics of their practice' (McNamara 75). Hence it is appropriate for 'Professional bodies of language testers...[to] formulate codes of practice which will guide language testers in their work' with the overall aim of 'tak[ing] responsibility for the development of quality language tests' (McNamara 75).

2.2.5 Ensuring Reliability

Linn and Miller affirm that 'An estimate of reliability always refers to a particular type of consistency' (105). Hence it is important to note that one of the main characteristics of a carefully constructed test is that 'Directions for administering and scoring are so precisely stated that the procedures are standard for different users of the test' (Linn and Miller 396). When it comes to scoring procedures 'The test developers should be clear as to how they will achieve high reliability and validity in scoring' (Hughes 62), especially so where scoring is highly subjective such as when scoring written tasks, the latter constituting eight of the nine components of the MC English examination. Test developers need to take into account the rating scale to be used, the number of markers involved in scoring a task, and how to resolve disagreements between markers. Hughes points out that 'While the perfect reliability of objective tests is not obtainable in subjective tests, there are ways of making it sufficiently high for test results to be valuable' (43). Scorer reliability and test reliability are closely connected and 'If the scoring of a test is not reliable, then the test results cannot be reliable either' (Hughes 43). There exist a number of ways by means of which one can increase the reliability of scoring and achieving consistent performances from the test candidates.

The reliability co-efficient of a test can be increased primarily by providing candidates with a sufficient number of 'fresh start[s]', that is, additional items that are 'independent of each other and of existing items' (Hughes 44). In relation to this Parkinson and Reid Thomas insist that in a literature test 'There should be a mixture...of questions about 'set books' or other texts already studied in class, and questions which require the application of ideas to new texts' (151). Hughes affirms that items which do not discriminate well between weaker and stronger candidates should be excluded since these 'contribute little to the reliability of a test' (45). The practice of assigning students a set of essay titles and then giving them a huge amount of freedom in how to go about the task 'is likely to have a depressing effect on the reliability of the test' since 'The more freedom that

is given, the greater is likely to be the difference between the performance actually elicited and the performance that would have been elicited had the test been taken, say, a day later' (Hughes 45-46). Hence if it is impossible to deprive students of choice, at least 'the range over which possible answers might vary should be restricted' (Hughes 46). However, Parkinson and Reid Thomas claim that 'Because response to literature is very personal, it is important to offer choices in assessment tasks' (151). These choices can extend to the texts to be discussed, the text aspects to be discussed and the form of the answer. Despite their claim Parkinson and Reid Thomas recognise the significance of 'guid[ing students] ever closer towards playing the examination game' (151).

2.2.5.1 Marking and Reliability

Other means of guaranteeing reliability are those of writing unambiguous items, providing candidates with clear and explicit instructions, ensuring that tests are well laid out and perfectly legible, and making candidates familiar with format and testing techniques (Hughes 46-47). Paper setters should also provide a detailed scoring key to scorers and the latter should be 'provide[d with] initial and ongoing training' since this is 'An important way to improve the quality of rater-mediated assessment schemes' (McNamara 44). According to McNamara 'Moderation meetings have the function of bringing about broad agreement on the relevant interpretation of level descriptors and rating categories' (44). At the outset of scoring scorers should agree amongst themselves on acceptable responses and appropriate scores and this is usually achieved by scoring a sample of scripts immediately after the test has been administered. Parkinson and Reid Thomas suggest that in a literature test 'Marking should be 'positive', emphasizing what students can do rather than trying to catch them out' (150). Hughes affirms that 'As a general rule, and certainly where testing is subjective, all scripts should be scored by at least two independent scorers' (50). Linn and Miller consider it advisable to 'obtain two or more independent ratings' when 'important decisions are to be based on the results' (247). Each scorer is not informed of how the other scorer has scored a script and the chairperson of the scorers' panel usually investigates discrepancies and engages in reconciliation. To show the importance of inter-marker reliability one can quote a study conducted by Sammut whose analysis of candidates' performance in the SEC May 1997 English Literature Paper 1 examination led her to discover 'discrepancies...evident even in one-word, one-mark responses' and to conclude that 'paper-markers did not follow rigidly the marking scheme proposed and this led to inconsistent marking practices and unreliability' (58).

2.2.6 Ensuring Validity

A test possesses content validity if its content is 'a fair reflection' (Hughes 27) of the test specifications. Content validity is important because 'the greater a test's content validity, the more likely is it to be an accurate measure of what it is supposed to measure, i.e. to have construct validity' (Hughes 27). Moreover, a test that lacks content validity 'is likely to have a harmful backwash effect' (Hughes 27). Linn and Miller point out that 'Whenever we wish to interpret assessment results in terms of some individual characteristic...we are concerned with a construct' and in construct validation it is highly important to identify those factors that lead to 'construct underrepresentation' and 'construct-irrelevant variance':

When we interpret assessment results as a measure of a particular construct, we are implying that there is such a construct, that it differs from other constructs, and that the results provide a measure of the construct that is little influenced by extraneous factors (78-79).

Despite the fact that the combined testing of language and literature in the MC English examination leads one to question its construct validity, Butler's research on courses and tests that combine language and literature together, leads him to conclude that 'The integrated approach was seen to be especially appropriate for students who used English as a second language since it did not take either literary or linguistic competence for granted but attempted to address and meet the actual needs of the students' (283). He basis his conclusion on a 'carefully theorised base, expressed as fourteen statements on the benefits to be derived from the integration of language and literature' (Butler 283).

Criterion-related validity 'relates to the degree to which results on the test agree with those provided by some independent and highly dependable assessment of the candidate's ability' (Hughes 27). The test is validated against this criterion measure. For Linn and Miller validation is achieved if one 'Compare[s] assessment results with another measure of performance obtained at a later date (for prediction) or with another measure of performance obtained concurrently (for estimating present status)' (72). One form of criterion-related validity is predictive validity and this will be examined in relation to the correlation between the SEC English Language and English Literature examinations, and the MC English examination.

There exist a number of ways of ensuring validity in testing. First of all one must consider validity in scoring. Hughes points out that 'if we are interested in measuring...writing ability, it is not enough to elicit...writing in a valid fashion' (33). The rating needs to be valid as well and this means that an 'overemphasis on such mechanical features as spelling and punctuation can invalidate the scoring of written work (and so the test of writing)' (Hughes 33). Writing explicit test

specifications and 'includ[ing] a representative sample of the content of these in the test' (Hughes 33) boosts validity, as does direct testing. Making sure 'that the scoring of responses relates directly to what is being tested' and 'do[ing] everything possible to make the test reliable' (Hughes 34) also increases validity. According to Hughes high stakes tests need to publish details of the test's validation since 'Tests for which validity information is not available should be treated with caution' (34).

2.2.7 Testing Reading and Writing

The MC English examination is a nine-hour examination in which students are asked to make use of two fundamental skills: writing and reading. Eight of the nine sections in the examination entail writing essays and these are complemented by a reading comprehension exercise. Moreover, the two literary criticism sections obviously demand highly adept reading skills.

The syllabus specifies that 'In all papers continuous prose answers are required and the marks awarded will take into account the quality of the language used by the candidate' ('AM Syllabus English' 2). This means that candidates are 'assessed on their ability to organise and present information, ideas, descriptions and arguments clearly and logically, taking into account their use of grammar, punctuation and spelling' ('AM Syllabus English' 2). The aims and objectives of the syllabus clearly state that reading and writing skills are of crucial importance and students are expected to be able to 'communicate clearly the knowledge, understanding and insight appropriate to literary studies' ('AM Syllabus English' 2). The syllabus sees the MC English course as being a continuation and refinement of the skills, knowledge and attitudes students should have developed during their SEC English Language and SEC English Literature course. However, despite the fact that the first sentence of the aims section of the syllabus for Matriculation English states that 'The syllabus assumes knowledge of English Language and English Literature at SEC level' ('AM Syllabus English' 2), in order to gain admission to the Matriculation English course at Junior college students do not need a pass in SEC English Literature. This disparity implies that students who do not hold a pass in SEC English Literature but who still opt for the MC English course will need to develop all the necessary reading and writing skills specified by the syllabus over a two-year period.

2.2.7.1 Testing Writing

In the MC English examination candidates are expected to write a total of eight essays and a summary. Written essays are of great value when it comes to assessing 'significant instructional

outcomes for which no satisfactory objective measurements have been devised' due to the fact that 'Such outcomes require less structuring of responses than objective test items' (Linn and Miller 227). However, in order for essay questions to measure complex achievement they need to 'be as carefully constructed as objective test items' (Linn and Miller 231). Specific learning outcomes are essential since these define those course objectives related to complex achievement. One of the main advantages of the 'extended-response essay' is its emphasis on the integration and application of thinking and problem-solving skills' and 'the ability to integrate and apply these skills in a general attack on a problem is best measured by extended-response essay questions' (Linn and Miller 232).

Linn and Miller maintain that 'essay questions must be phrased in a way that will require students to engage in the targeted thinking skills' (232). Moreover they point out that 'When a table of specifications is used in planning for the assessment, it is simply a matter of structuring the questions in accordance with the specifications' (Linn and Miller 232). Hughes agrees with this when he points out that when testing writing we should first of all specify all possible content in the test specifications so that 'the tasks we set are representative of the tasks that we expect students to be able to perform' (83). The test specifications should contain information about 'operations, types of text, addresses, length of texts, topics, dialect and style' (Hughes 83). When creating a writing test it is important to include a representative sample of the specified content since this bolsters content validity and generates a 'beneficial backwash effect' (Hughes 86). With respect to criterial levels, Hughes says that 'For...writing...one can expect a description of the criterial levels to be much more complex' (62).

In order to 'Elicit a valid sample of writing ability' one needs to 'Set as many separate tasks as is feasible' and to 'Test only writing ability, and nothing else' (Hughes 89-90). Hughes also maintains that 'Another ability that at times interferes with the accurate measurement of writing ability is that of reading' (90).

When it comes to constructing essay questions Linn and Miller suggest 'Restrict[ing] the use of essay questions to those learning outcomes that cannot be measured satisfactorily by objective items' (234). Essay questions need to 'call forth the skills specified in the learning standards' (Linn and Miller 236) and this means that when designing the question one makes clear which skill or form of conceptual understanding one requires candidates to utilise or display. The question should clearly indicate the task that the candidate needs to accomplish and the time limit in which to do so and paper setters need to 'Avoid the use of optional questions' (Linn and Miller 238). Hughes is in concordance with these suggestions and in fact he advocates the importance of

restricting candidates by setting writing tasks that are 'well defined' since this stops them from 'go[ing] too far astray' (93). He also suggests making writing tasks in language examinations as authentic as possible (Hughes 93). Popham's guidelines for creating essay items underscore the importance of 'Convey[ing] to the students a clear idea regarding the extensiveness of the response desired' and of 'Construct[ing] items so that the student's task is explicitly described' (159). Moreover, he suggests 'Provid[ing] students with the approximate time to be expended on each item as well as each item's value' and 'Precursively judg[ing] an item's quality by composing, mentally or in writing, a possible response' (Popham 159).

In order to ensure validity and reliability in scoring writing, only tasks which can be 'reliably scored' need to be set and candidates need to complete 'as many tasks as possible' (Hughes 94). By imposing a number of restrictions on candidates 'the more directly comparable will be the performances of different candidates' and this is even more so if candidates are 'Give[n] no choice of tasks' (Hughes 94). Popham agrees with this and recommends 'not employ[ing] optional items' (159). Furthermore, 'The samples of writing that are elicited have to be long enough for judgements to be made reliably' (Hughes 94). Linn and Miller suggest that prior to scoring essays scorers should 'Prepare an outline of the expected answer' and 'Decide how to handle factors that are irrelevant to the learning outcomes being measured' (245). Scorers should 'Prepare a tentative scoring key in advance of judging students' responses' and 'Make decisions regarding the importance of the mechanics of writing prior to scoring' (Popham 163). Scorers are also advised to 'Evaluate all responses to one question before going on to the next one' (Linn and Miller 246). This is echoed by Popham when he suggests 'Scor[ing] all responses to one item before scoring responses to the next item' (163).

Appropriate scoring scales need to be created and these may either involve holistic or analytic scoring. Holistic scoring 'involves the assignment of a single score to a piece of writing on the basis of an overall impression of it' and it 'has the advantage of being very rapid' (Hughes 94-95). This facilitates the process of multiple marking and 'acceptably high scorer reliability' ensues 'when writing is scored four times' (Hughes 95). Analytic scoring is much more time consuming and might obfuscate 'the overall effect of the piece of writing' (Hughes 103), however, it is particularly important when one needs to focus on a set of sub skills. Moreover, 'the very fact that the scorer has to give a number of scores will tend to make the scoring more reliable' (Hughes 102). The choice between holistic and analytic scoring depends on whether it is being carried out by a well trained 'small, well-knit group at a single site' or 'by a heterogeneous possibly less well trained group...in a number of different places' (Hughes 105). If the former is true then holistic

scoring is 'most appropriate' and if the latter then 'analytic scoring is probably called for' (Hughes 105). However, in both instances multiple scoring is always the best means of ensuring 'high accuracy' (Hughes 105).

2.2.7.2 Testing Reading

Eskey points out that 'Reading is the hardest language skill to assess because so much depends on what is being read by whom' (172). He claims that any passage selected for testing will favour some readers and disadvantage others, since no two readers have exactly the same proficiency in language or exactly the same funds of knowledge' (Eskey 172). It is also difficult to determine 'what constitutes reading comprehension for particular texts' (Eskey 172).

Since reading tests involve having candidates read a text and then using a variety of skills in order to understand different aspects of the text, 'The selection of text type, then, becomes a major issue for developing tests of reading ability' (Lynch 48). The fact that the MC English syllabus specifies that material for the reading comprehension component of the paper 'may originate from contemporary newspapers, periodicals or other non-literary sources' ('AM Syllabus English' 4) is laudable since this generates positive backwash by encouraging teachers to use authentic texts in the classroom. As Nuttall points out 'The reading skill is of no practical use unless it enables us to read texts we actually require for some authentic purpose' (21). Lynch puts forward a number of recommendations on how to decide on the type of text to use:

- Include a representative sample of texts, drawing upon the range of text types within the reading skill or skills being tested.
- Choose a text with appropriate length, a length that requires the skills or construct to be tested and that will provide enough opportunity to test the skill across several items...
- Have a number of texts presented within each test, in order to provide variety and to avoid having a single content that favours certain test takers over others.
- Select text content that matches the skills being tested...
- Select content that is interesting and engaging without being distracting or disturbing for the intended test takers.
- Choose content that tests reading skills, not previous content knowledge.
- Avoid content that is overly familiar... (48).

When using reading texts to assess language competencies it is important to once again ensure that the test specifications outline what the candidates are expected to do in terms of operations, texts ('type, form, graphic features, topic, style, intended readership, length, readability or difficulty, range of vocabulary and' grammatical structure' (Hughes 140)), reading speed, and criterial levels of performance. When selecting texts it is advisable to 'select as representative a sample as possible'; 'Choose texts of appropriate length'; 'include as many passages as possible';

choose texts which allow you to test scanning, skimming, knowledge of text structure and other sub-skills; choose texts that will interest the candidates and leave them unperturbed; 'Avoid texts made up of information that may be part of the candidates' general knowledge'; avoid 'texts that are too culturally laden' and 'texts that the students will have already read' (Hughes 142-143). When writing test items 'The aim must be to write items that will measure the ability in which we are interested, that will elicit reliable behaviour from candidates, and that will permit highly reliable scoring' (Hughes 143). The language used for test items should not be more difficult than the text itself and the expected responses should 'make minimal demands on writing ability' (Hughes 153). When scoring reading 'errors of grammar, spelling or punctuation should not be penalized, provided that it is clear that the candidate has successfully performed the reading task which the item set' (Hughes 155). Lynch points out that 'the more 'constructed' the response format, the more the test will include writing skills as well as reading' (48) and Hughes claims that testing writing when scoring reading 'makes the measurement of reading ability less valid' (155).

The above sections have presented what the literature recommends as good practice when it comes to test design and construction, and the testing of reading and writing skills. Even though the principles discussed by these researchers can be transferred to one's understanding of the MC English examination it needs to be pointed out that most of these authors had in mind the testing of language not that of literature. However, given the combined nature of the MC English examination the issue is rather complicated, most especially when it comes to writing skills. It must be borne in mind that since candidates' knowledge of literature in the MC English examination is assessed solely via written essays and given that markers penalise students for purely linguistic errors when marking literature essays, the aforementioned principles to some extent do apply to one's understanding of the testing of literature. Having said that, it is still necessary to compound these principles with what specific authors have proposed as good practice when assessing literature *per se*.

2.2.8 Testing Literature

Gribble asserts that 'One factor which tends to strongly undermine the belief that reading literature might be of consequence for the way we view our lives and those of others is that it has become an examinable "subject" taken by millions of students throughout the world' (3). Examinations tend to 'encourage an approach to the teaching of literary criticism which is stereotyped, formulaic and sterile' (Gribble 96) and this breeds disillusionment in the students and makes them question the value of literary studies. Parkinson and Reid Thomas mention that 'many people learn, and even

teach, for pleasure, especially in a subject such as literature, and attempts to impose formal assessment structures will be resented' (140). They point out that any assessment or evaluation provide us with information about the learners, the teachers and the curriculum and affirm that when it comes to literature rather than teaching to the test we should primarily 'establish good learning habits' and to subsequently 'move slowly towards the content and the exercise types which...[the examination] demands' (Parkinson and Reid Thomas 142).

2.2.8.1 The Literature Test

Spiro claims that whereas 'In the language test, the fully-operational native speaker can provide a model for target competence... The literature test...lacks such a model' (16). She also affirms that it is not 'always clear whether skills, knowledge or something quite other is the goal of the literature test' (Spiro 16). For this reason 'the literature test cannot always be measured by the criteria of the language test. It has qualities unique to its genre (Spiro 16). Spiro reports that even though most literature tests favour either a "knowledge about literature" orientation or a "skills for literature" orientation, 'teachers feel that what really works in the classroom is a balance of the two' (19).

For Spiro a test has beneficial backwash when testing and teaching go hand-in-hand:

The ideal scenario is that teaching methods and testing methods match; that teachers prepare learners for the test by following all the procedures they know to be effective. Ideally, the test evolves from this classroom experience, and draws its methods and materials from there (27).

Spiro admits that most teachers change their methodology to suit the test. She says that this is not what should happen but rather 'test procedures should be reshaped by the strategies and goals of the classroom (Spiro 29). Test-writers have the power to affect teaching and hence they should keep in mind a very important question: 'How can I devise tests that both derive from, and generate, effective teaching?' (Spiro 29). Spiro lists seven criteria that characterize a 'good literature test' and says that it is meant to:

1. Measure what it aims to measure and not a hidden agenda undefined by both examiners and examinees.
2. Cover a balanced and appropriate sample of areas that have been taught, and not random areas or texts that leave the success of a candidate's performance to pure chance.
3. Meet the expectations of teachers and candidates, since those expectations will be made explicit and integrated into the curriculum.
4. Ensure learners are familiar with test materials and procedures; firstly because they have been made explicit; and secondly because they have informed, and been informed by classroom practice.
5. Provide a 'balanced diet' of question types, content and skill areas so that a rounded profile of each candidate can be gleaned from the test.

6. Make clear the criteria for progress and development between tests set over a period of time.
7. Set tasks and texts which are feasible in length and scope for the time allotted (31).

For Spiro good literature tests typically go through the following stages: identifying target competence; identifying target skills (selecting texts and analyzing the syllabus); grouping skills; matching texts to tasks; writing test items; clarifying marking criteria; planning the overall shape of the test (68-76).

2.2.8.2 Assessable Outcomes

In outlining the 'typology of potentially assessable outcomes' Parkinson and Reid Thomas start by focusing on affective outcomes and this is 'because literature is inherently affective in a way which perhaps applies to no other subject' (142-143). It can be said that 'feelings are central to literature' and that 'good literature' engages the reader in 'an 'education of the sensibilities', an enhanced awareness and understanding of one's own emotional life' (Parkinson and Reid Thomas 143). Even though assessment of affective outcomes usually does not feature in tests if 'included in 'test' questions...this must be done with extreme care' and 'learners have to believe...that they are not being tested on the rightness of their tastes, or whether they like what they should like' (Parkinson and Reid Thomas 143).

Parkinson and Reid Thomas claim that traditionally literature tests assessed students' knowledge of facts about a given text. Even though they agree with those 'writers on teaching [who] would probably give low priority to this kind of learning' they do so with the 'obvious reservation that you need some facts before you can do anything else of value. In particular, you need a good knowledge of the relevant primary text(s)' (Parkinson and Reid Thomas 145). Besides factual knowledge traditional literature tests also seek to assess the Leavisite concept of delicate sensibility, which entails sensitiveness and precision of response. Such tests have the advantage of moving 'the learner away from mere acquisition of factual knowledge to genuine and detailed engagement with literary texts, and ability to explain his or her response' (Parkinson and Reid Thomas 145). However, the main drawback is that 'the learner/testee has to read the mind of a privileged elite and to acquire or pretend to acquire their values' (Parkinson and Reid Thomas 145). Parkinson and Reid Thomas advice writers of literature tests that 'A balance is needed between assessing students' learning of 'facts', including other people's opinions, and their ability to produce their own ideas' (151).

Parkinson and Reid Thomas claim that 'the skills of literary criticism are probably the most important domains for testing' especially since 'teaching skills is more important than teaching

facts' (146). However, traditional literature tests 'often seem...more skewed towards factual knowledge' and even though such forms of assessment are important 'for the more 'academic' kind of literature in a foreign language, the ultimate test would be something more analogous to the language unseen' (Parkinson and Reid Thomas 146). In the latter kind of test candidates are tested on a range of concepts pertinent to the different literary genres and 'their ability to apply these to a new text' (Parkinson and Reid Thomas 146). In relation to this Bartoli reports that lecturers at G.F. Abela Upper Lyceum and at St. Aloysius College complain about the fact that 'One of the limiting factors' of the literary criticism papers in the MC English examination 'is that in two hours a passage of prose and a poem cannot be analysed deeply and therefore, the exercise becomes quite artificial' (31). Dixon echoes this point when he says that expecting students to write an essay in one hour 'seems such a travesty of the appropriate conditions for *anyone* to try to express what they have gained' from reading a text 'that I must reject it for the moment as indefensible' (222).

Language competencies are another assessable outcome and Parkinson and Reid Thomas point out that there exist 'certain kinds of knowledge about a target language, or perhaps rather skills or even areas of awareness, which language-through-literature may in favourable circumstances promote more effectively than would 'general' language teaching' (147). These include, for example, recognising the norm and the deviant variety, recognising polysemy and recognising cohesion. Parkinson and Reid Thomas maintain that 'in developing awareness of and ability to find for oneself certain features in a *text*, one also becomes aware of these features in a *language*, especially a foreign language' (147).

In addition to the above, literature tests can be used to assess not only students' writing and reading skills but also their speaking and listening skills. Initiation, turn-taking and turn-giving, negotiation of meaning and other skills can all play part in our assessment of literature learning (Parkinson and Reid Thomas 148-149). Coupled with this is the students' functional range, which is closely akin to their ability to speak and write about a text (Parkinson and Reid Thomas 149). Parkinson and Reid Thomas suggest that in the initial stages of a course of study there should be single-skill tests of each one of the four skills so that teachers are provided with 'more precise diagnostic information' (150). It is only gradually that students are trained for integrated tests, which 'have greater authenticity and real-world validity than single-skill tests' (Parkinson and Reid Thomas 151). In relation to this Bartoli proposes the idea of assessing students' literary criticism skills not by means of writing but by means of a viva voce examination (95).

2.2.8.3 Essay Writing in Literature Tests

Spiro points out that one of the most common question types in literature test papers is 'The essay that requires evaluating and presenting an argument' (47). She says that this essay is highly demanding in terms of the complex skills expected of the candidate and hence 'The candidate who has the literary ability to evaluate texts, may fail on the grounds of inadequate self-expression, or incoherent argument. Here language abilities may become confused with literary abilities: the former are needed, to do justice to the latter' (Spiro 48). This kind of essay question is highly popular in the MC English examination as is the discussion question, which Spiro considers to be the 'most prolific essay question' (49). The latter 'has no clear agenda. The candidate must make his/her own decisions about what is expected. These decisions may be highly text-dependent... It may be a matter of chance or good luck whether the candidate's decisions about expectations match the examiner's decisions' (Spiro 49). Critical appreciation questions also form part of the MC English examination and Spiro claims that the benefits of such questions when combined with unseen texts are that 'there is no danger of the learner drawing on 'learnt' notes. Working with an 'unseen' is the clearest way of determining whether the learner can indeed apply his/her skills and respond independently to unfamiliar texts' (50). However, the second language learner might find the text 'linguistically inaccessible, even if its concepts are not' (Spiro 50). The candidates' literary skills can be made manifest if they are offered 'explicit language guidance' (Spiro 50).

When evaluating the questions in literature test papers Spiro explains that these questions have ingrained within them a number of serious problems:

- Some of the questions require linguistic, rather than literary skills, to answer successfully...
- Many of the questions do not require contact with texts themselves...
- Some question types develop skills which are not transferable to other texts...
- Many of the question types are highly subjective to mark; since their aims and objectives are unclear...
- Several questions do not correspond to tasks that teachers would choose to use in the classroom. This is particularly true of the essay question type, which fits uncomfortably in the active classroom. The essay has little genuine communicative purpose, and it requires a protocol all of its own, that is a complex skill in itself to master. This skill is likely to have its own development, that is quite separate from the development of literary competence (51).

Spiro also talks about the practice of inserting quotations within literature essays as a means of showing the examiner familiarity with the text. She asserts that 'the quotation must be handled with care. Examinees should not 'unload prepared material' and twist the question 'around prepared quotations'. Quotations which 'do not explain themselves' serve no useful function' (Spiro 54). Every year's *Examiners' Report* for MC English repeatedly points out that 'when quotations are

inserted they tend to be disconnected from what is being said' (*Examiners' Report May 2006* 3; *Examiners' Report May 2007* 3). Spiro advises candidates to 'demonstrate background knowledge, but selectively and only where appropriate; memorise quotations – but only refer to them where relevant; and develop informed arguments without obviously relying on prepared notes and teacher opinions' (54).

Dixon affirms that when students write in response to literature they are reined in by two main constraints. He claims that 'The first of these concerns social relations' between the writer and the reader. The student needs to be aware of the intended audience since 'Writing is...part of a broader process of interaction' (Dixon 223). Secondly, the student needs to be asked to use 'an appropriate form for the further articulation of thoughts and feelings' (Dixon 223). Keeping in mind these two elements allows us to avoid regurgitating 'naïve models of writing' which lead 'to an impoverishment of what the student has to offer' (Dixon 225).

2.2.8.4 Alternative Literature Testing

Spiro affirms that in a second language context 'test items need to be written to meet student level... This means that, where students are failing to meet standards in a test, the test items rather than the students need to be re-evaluated' (56). Hence test items should preferably be 'guided or controlled, rather than wholly open-ended' (Spiro 56). To avoid dependence on lecture notes 'Test items should require contact with the actual text' (Spiro 56). Moreover, 'Test items need to give abstract concepts a practical and concrete focus' and 'Linguistic support needs to be provided, where linguistic difficulties may conflict with the literary skills being tested' (Spiro 57). Each 'test item should test one skill, or cluster of skills' and 'encourage the learner to transfer skills from familiar texts to unfamiliar ones' (Spiro 58). Spiro also underscores the importance of writing test items that 'encourage examinees to identify with, and personalize the texts they meet' (59) and of translating motivating strategies in the classroom into the test situation. Her 'final message to the test-writer is the need for balance, in order to obtain a balanced profile of the student' (Spiro 60).

2.2.8.5 Literature Coursework

Parkinson and Reid Thomas feel that when assessing literature 'There should be a mixture of in-class work with time limits, like traditional examinations, and out-of-class assignments' (150). This issue of incorporating coursework within the assessment of literature is also mentioned by Micallef and Galea 'who feel that more students would be encouraged to take an interest in the subject' (159) by means of this. The value of coursework is also commented upon by Baldacchino:

while the introduction of written coursework is still subject to questions of reliability, training class teachers in this regard would make this a possibility in the foreseeable future. Its introduction in due course will help reduce current emphasis on examinations and enhance activity-based learning, motivating students towards increased participation (110).

2.2.8.6 Local Studies on Literature Testing

As already shown by some of the above references a number of local studies have been conducted in relation to the testing of literature in Malta and by reviewing these studies one can form a better portrait of what is known about the issue so far and what the present study can add to the field.

Bartoli reports that the lecturers she interviewed at G.F. Abela Upper Lyceum and at St. Aloysius College all confirm the idea that 'the examination manipulates the students in a way that they are not able to grow to love literature for what it is' (30-31). Examination pressure engenders a situation in which 'the amount of ideal literary criticism and stylistic analysis is partially ignored' and 'Students have not yet grasped the proper tools for the enjoyment and appreciation of literature' (Bartoli 93).

MC English currently combines the testing of English Language and Literature in one examination. A number of local studies have discussed the issue of combining two examinations together or making a particular subject compulsory for all students enrolled in a course. Commenting on the SEC English Literature examination, Micallef and Galea suggest combining this examination together with the SEC English Language examination so that the former 'regains importance because it becomes compulsory to almost any future career the students may choose' (158). Sammut affirms that one of the factors for candidates' poor performance in SEC English Literature is 'the fact that English Literature is not a compulsory subject for entry into Post-Secondary Education' (56). Austin considers it to be 'a wise decision, if courses in English Language were to be compulsory even at sixth form level. This would ensure that all students would have a minimum of exposure to higher levels of English language instruction' (63).

2.3 Motivation and Second Language Learning

Given that this study is concerned with Advanced level students of English and their performance in the MC English examination, it is important to take into consideration such issues as why do students choose to study a particular subject and what will motivate them to achieve success in their studies.

MC English students typically start their studies at the age of sixteen and they typically originate from secondary schools that have a very different identity from the postsecondary institution they join after passing their SEC examinations. Even though in secondary school

students have between five and six forty-minute lessons per week, in a postsecondary school the number of tuition hours is that of six and the course they follow is much more intensive and requires the students to engage in a higher degree of autonomous learning. Graham points out that 'becoming an advanced language learner involves in many cases the ability to adapt to new demands and approaches. Managing this change has a cognitive component, with some students developing new learning strategies and patterns of working to help them adjust to their new situation. Yet equally important are the demands this change makes on students in the affective domain' (92). For Graham the term affective 'is taken to refer both to inborn characteristics...and to more specific attitudes and reactions to learning the foreign language' (92). For her motivation is an essential aspect of the affective domain and its role is of crucial importance when learning a language.

Liuliënė and Metiūnienė contend that 'Learning motivation is a driving force in learning a foreign language' and that 'Students' wishes and needs to work independently depend on their motivation...attitude and responsibility' (97). Their research in relation to second language learning motivation led them to find a 'Statistically significant correlation between learners' motivation and the sense of responsibility' and 'Statistical significance between learning motivation and students' need for autonomous studies' (Liuliënė and Metiūnienė 96). Their conclusion is that 'students' wishes and needs to work independently depend on their motivation, attitude and responsibility. The higher motivation, the more autonomous learning students want to have in this learning process' (Liuliënė and Metiūnienė 96). Moreover, they point out that 'Students' ability to study independently has a positive influence on their higher EFL achievements' (Liuliënė and Metiūnienė 96).

Wlodowski explains that motivation is constituted of 'the processes that can (a) arouse and instigate behavior, (b) give direction or purpose to behavior, (c) continue to allow behavior to persist, and (d) lead to choosing or preferring a particular behavior' (2). The models discussed below focus on the specific factors that influence learners' motivation to learn a second language.

Gardner defines motivation as 'the effort, want (desire) and affect associated with learning a second language' (147). Desire is associated by Gardner with the learners' goals in learning a second language, the orientation of their motivation. His goal-directed theory of motivation identifies two distinct orientations: integrative and instrumental. An integrative orientation is the learners' desire to achieve affiliation with the target community and learn more about its culture. An instrumental orientation is the learners' desire to achieve proficiency for a utilitarian purpose, such examination success or career advancement. However, it is suggested that achievement is more

closely bound to an integrative orientation than to an instrumental one. In his studies Gardner found that 'that subjects who select integrative reasons over instrumental ones as indicative of themselves evidence higher levels of motivational intensity' (53). Besides orientation, the learners' attitudes towards the learning situation also play an important role in influencing the learners' motivation. A positive attitude towards the different variables that form part of the learning situation will lead to a boost in the amount of enjoyment and effort.

Unlike Gardner's theory, which focuses on the social aspect of motivation, Dörnyei's framework focuses specifically on motivation in the language classroom. As opposed to Gardner's emphasis on integrativeness, Dörnyei was of the opinion that in a second language learning context instrumental orientation is much more influential on language learners. However, according to Dörnyei a student achieves a high proficiency in a language if an instrumental orientation is combined with an integrative one. His tri-level model takes into account not only orientations but also the specific situations that concerned learners and their surrounding contexts. In his taxonomy one finds three levels: the Language Level, the Learner Level, and the Learning Situation Level. The Language Level is concerned with 'orientations and motives related to various aspects of the L2' (Dörnyei 2001, 18) and these determine the language studied and the learners' goals for studying that language. It embraces both integrative and instrumental orientations. The need for achievement and self-confidence play an important role in the Learner Level and this level encompasses different cognitive theories of motivation. In the Learning Situation Level motivation is influenced by course specific, teacher specific and group specific motives. Course specific motives are related to the syllabus, the set texts, the teaching methodology used and the learning tasks set. These elements are all described in terms of the learners' interest, relevance to their lives, their expectations of success and feelings of being in control, and satisfaction with the outcomes. Teacher specific motives are concerned with the teaching style employed and with the teachers themselves. Group specific motives are bound to the influence exerted on the learners by the social groups they form part of. Dörnyei specifies that 'each of the three levels of motivation exert their influence independently of the others and have enough power to nullify the effects of the motives associated with the other two levels' (1996, 78).

2.4 Predictive Validity

This study attempts to chart the type and amount of continuity that exists between SEC English Language and English Literature and Matriculation English and it focuses on whether the SEC grades currently accepted by the receiving institutions for studying the subject at Advanced level

are permitting the students to follow the programme with profit. Given that this study seeks to analyse the correlation between students' performance in SEC English Language, SEC English Literature and their performance in Matriculation English, the relevant literature on predictive validity was taken into consideration.

Predictive validity is a form of criterion-related validity and it 'concerns the degree to which a test can predict candidates' future performance' (Hughes 29). For Popham, criterion-related evidence of validity 'helps educators decide how much confidence can be placed in a score-based inference about a student's status with respect to an assessment domain... Moreover, criterion-related evidence of validity is collected only in situations where educators are using an assessment procedure to predict how well students will perform on some subsequent criterion variable' (62). A predictive test's relationship with a criterion is one in which the former is predictive of performance on the latter. According to Popham the main value provided by a predictor test that is working efficiently is that its results can be used to help one 'make better educational decisions' (63).

The statistical correlation of two sets of scores is capable of describing the degree of relationship between two tests. Linn and Miller assert that 'The resulting correlation coefficient provides a numerical summary of the degree of relationship between the two sets of scores. A correlation coefficient provides a concise, quantitative summary of the relationship' (85). Linn and Miller point out that 'validity coefficients are large or small only in relation to one another. When prediction is important, we will always consider more favourably the test with the largest validity coefficient' however, even 'tests with rather low validity may be useful if they are the best predictors available and if the predictions they provide are better than chance' (89).

In Malta, Farrugia and Ventura investigated the predictive validity of Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) examinations and sought to determine whether the SEC level in a subject is a good foundation for the study of the same subject at Matriculation level. The individual results of students sitting for the Matriculation certificate examination in May 2006 were compared with the results for the SEC examination in the corresponding subject in the 2004 session. The predictive validity of the SEC results was calculated by means of the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient. Farrugia and Ventura claim that 'A correlation between two results does not indicate that the achievement of one leads to the achievement of the other but is simply an indication of how one result may be related to another' (25). By means of expectancy tables Farrugia and Ventura sought to express how by obtaining a particular grade at SEC level there is the 'likelihood' (25) of obtaining a certain grade at Matriculation level. By comparing their correlation coefficients with the

results of studies reported in research literature, Farrugia and Ventura found that the range of predictive validity scores yielded by their study is within 'normally expected ranges' (28).

Farrugia and Ventura decided to include Maltese and English in their analysis 'because of the concern that has been expressed in recent years about the students' achievements in these subjects' (26). Farrugia and Ventura found that 'The predictive validity of SEC English Language results for Advanced level English is 0.56 while that of English Literature is slightly lower at 0.51' (27). When they compared SEC English language and Matriculation English, Farrugia and Ventura found 'a rather low correlation between student performance at the two levels' and they assert that 'Students tend to obtain low grades at Advanced level irrespective of the grades obtained at SEC level with the exception of Grade 1, where 72.5% of the students with that grade at SEC level obtained grades A to C at Advanced level' (31). Only 19.5% of those students starting with a grade 3 in SEC English language manage to obtain grades A to C at Advanced level (Farrugia and Ventura 32). English registered the lowest level of probability when compared with fourteen other subjects. For Farrugia and Ventura this means that English is one of the 'hardest' (41) subjects and when compared to the results of foreign studies such as that conducted by the Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring we see that there exists a huge contrast in terms of the classification of English. Whereas in Malta the country's second language perplexingly occupies the lower end of the spectrum, in the UK it is understandably classified as one of the 'easiest' subjects (Farrugia and Ventura 41). For Farrugia and Ventura it is somewhat problematic to predict results and advise students who get a high grade at SEC level in English language but much easier to do so with students who get lower grades.

Farrugia and Ventura claim that the low correlation between students' grades in SEC English literature and Matriculation English is 'rather unexpected' (27) considering the fact that two thirds of the Matriculation examination in English focuses on literature. They assert that one would expect that skills attained in SEC level English literature would be useful at Advanced level. Only 48% of students starting with a grade 3 in SEC English literature are likely to obtain grades A to C in English (Farrugia and Ventura 40). Even though it might appear as if writing skills play a bigger role than knowledge of literature in predicting students' performance in Matriculation English, Farrugia and Ventura affirm that the reasons for the low correlation between SEC English literature and Advanced English are to be found elsewhere. The chief reason is the relatively good performance of those students who after getting a grade in SEC English literature sat for the Advanced English examination. In contrast to those students who obtained low grades in SEC

English language and who subsequently fared badly in Advanced English, even students who got low grades in SEC English literature managed to perform well in Advanced English.

Farrugia and Ventura's study leads them to conclude that for the majority of the subjects they analysed, students with grades 1 to 3 in their SEC examination obtain grades A to C at Advanced level. One of the two exceptions to this is English 'where it is rather difficult to obtain grades A to C at Advanced level even when starting with grade 2 at SEC level' (Farrugia and Ventura 39).

This chapter has reviewed the literature that is directly bound to this study's research questions. The different sections in this chapter have presented what the literature says about the teaching of language and literature in a sixth form institution, the assessment of language and literature, student motivation, and correlational studies. The reviewed literature played a crucial role in the design of the data collection tools discussed in the next chapter, tools that serve the purpose of helping one to understand which are the possible factors responsible for candidates' poor performance in the MC English examination over the past few years. The reviewed literature also allows one to better understand the collected data, guides the discussion of the study's findings and helps shape its conclusions.

Chapter 3 – Design and Methodology

This research study attempts to identify the possible causes for the low success rate in the MC English examination over the past few years and in the process the students' entry qualifications, reasons for studying English at Advanced level, the teaching methodology employed at Junior College, and the examination itself amongst other things were evaluated. This chapter discusses the different tools used during the data gathering process and the reasons for which these tools were used.

3.1 Case Study Research

Established in 1995 Junior College forms part of the University of Malta and 'prepares students specifically for the Matriculation Certificate which serves as a passport for University degree courses' (*Look Before You Leap* 6). Its 'mission is to provide a holistic quality education to young men and women who seek to join the University by preparing them to develop the attributes needed for tertiary level studies' (*Look Before You Leap* 6). The English Department at Junior College prepares students for two MATSEC examinations, one at Advanced level and one at Intermediate level. The course description for the MC English course underscores the fact that students should not embark on this course with any mistaken assumptions:

This is an intensive two-year course leading to a searching nine-hour examination, a positive result in which is a prerequisite for entry to many University courses. The standards expected are very high, and students should preferably have a Grade 3 at the SEC examination in English Language and English Literature. They should also possess a solid background of reading, flair for the subject and a good grasp of the fundamentals of the language. Please note that English is not an 'easy option', contrary to what some people are led to believe (*Look Before You Leap* 9).

The Department of English prides itself on the fact that it 'delivers over three hundred fifty hours of lectures, seminars, tutorials and personal contact time per week to about two thousand three hundred students' ('Department of English Website'). Moreover, the department affirms its faith in 'the academic and pedagogical strengths of the members of staff' ('Department of English Website') it is composed of:

The different study programmes are managed by eighteen members of staff specialising in both Language and Literature and with varied teaching histories. The staff brings to the Department experiences of teaching English abroad; at Secondary and Tertiary level

and in ESL, EFL and ESP contexts. The specific academic interests within the fields of Language and Literature of the staff are varied. Presently, ten members of staff are working on their PhD ('Department of English Website').

Since this study focuses on the biggest sixth form college among similar institutions in Malta, it possesses the nature of a case study. For Brown and Rodgers 'Case study research comprises an intensive study of the background, current status, and environmental interactions of a given social unit' and usually it goes hand-in-hand with research on the 'development of the language competence' (21) of the research subjects. Given that the present study seeks to chart the type and amount of continuity and progression that exists between SEC English and MC English as experienced by five different cohorts one sees that it may be called a development study especially since the latter 'comprises an investigation of patterns and sequences of growth and change as a function of time' (Brown and Rodgers 21).

According to Cohen et al. 'Case studies can establish cause and effect, indeed one of their strengths is that they observe effects in real contexts, recognising that context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects' (253). This is particularly pertinent to this study since one of its main purposes is that of identifying the factors that are leading to the students' poor performance in their MC English examination. These factors could be connected to the learning context itself and hence by focusing on the learning experience of those students attending Junior College it is hoped that a clearer picture is formed of whether context is in fact 'a powerful determinant of both causes and effects' (Cohen et al. 253). Case studies 'involve looking at a case or phenomenon in its real-life context, usually employing many types of data' (Cohen et al. 254). They in fact 'combin[e] subjective and objective data' (Cohen et al. 254) as occurs in the present study which merges qualitative and quantitative forms of data collection.

Brown and Rodgers point out that 'the key threats to the usefulness of case study research are the threats to internal and external validity' (44). When it comes to internal validity one needs to question whether 'the researchers have really observed what they set out to observe and have reported all the critical observational data, or just samples that most strongly support their hypotheses' (Brown and Rodgers 44). Case studies 'are not easily open to cross-checking, hence they may be selective, biased, personal and subjective' (Cohen et al. 256). One way of avoiding this pitfall is by using case study research together with other research techniques in order to achieve methodological triangulation. The present study seeks to provide the reader with 'an accurate and comprehensive picture of the participants and the situations in which the study took place' and it refrains from reporting 'only hypothesis-confirming data' (Brown and Rodgers 44). The other problem facing case study research is that of external validity and 'Here the question is whether the

researcher can legitimately generalise from the case study participant(s) and situation to other people and situations' (Brown and Rodgers 45). Even though one of the main strengths of case study research is that it 'provide[s] insights into other, similar situations and cases, thereby assisting interpretation of other similar cases', case study 'results may not be generalisable' (Cohen et al. 256). The present study attempts to resolve this problem by focusing on five different cohorts attending the biggest sixth form college in Malta. It seeks to ensure that the subjects that constitute this case study are 'typical of those about whom we wish to generalise' (Best and Kahn 92), however, it must be pointed out that other sixth form colleges in Malta possess their own identity and hence their students and teaching staff are not easily comparable to this study's participants. Another reason for which Junior College was chosen as a case study is that I am actually employed there. According to Munn and Drever

One of the strengths of teachers researching their own practice or school policy is that they already know a good deal about the school, the subject department, the staff, and the pupils. These are areas which an outside researcher needs to spend time becoming familiar with (3).

Cohen et al. claim that one of the possible advantages of case studies is that 'They begin in a world of action and contribute to it. Their insights may be directly interpreted and put to use; for staff or individual self-development, for within-institutional feedback; for formative evaluation; and in educational policy-making' (256). It is hoped that by seeking to explain the reasons for students' poor performance in MC English this study will lead to some form of amelioration. In the eventuality of discovering any problems identified by means of the research carried out, this study will suggest ways of improving the situation. The results of this study will lead to a number of recommendations whose ultimate purpose will be that of addressing the possible causes for students' poor performance in the MC English examination, be they the teaching of English at postsecondary level, the students who choose to study English at Advanced level, the current practices for testing English, as well as other variables.

3.2 Semi-structured Interviews

The teaching methodology employed at postsecondary level falls under scrutiny in an attempt to understand any possible correlation between the methods employed in the classroom and student achievement at MC level. The present study sought to identify the pedagogical methods that need to be employed in order to teach English Language and Literature effectively. Moreover, it sought to establish the kind of input that lecturers provide syllabus developers with and whether the former are engaged in any kind of consultation process when it comes to drafting a new syllabus. This

study also asked lecturers to pinpoint those factors that may be contributing to the students' poor performance in their MC English examination and information regarding what they consider to be acceptable standards and practices when it comes to learning and assessing English at MC level. In addition, lecturers were asked to present their views in relation to the skills and abilities that their students enter postsecondary education with and what they expect out of their students when it comes to learning English at MC level. In order to help answer these research questions ten lecturers were interviewed in a face-to-face style.

Assessment issues play a fundamental role in this study's attempt to understand the reasons for which students fare poorly in MC English. In order to better understand the examination practices of MATSEC when it comes to assessing MC English and in order to shed some light on the relationship between the criteria adopted by syllabus developers and those adopted by paper setters and markers, the semi-structured interview was also used with the chairperson of MC English examination board.

According to Cohen et al. the use of the interview in research values 'the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasises the social situatedness of research data' (349). The interview is intersubjective since the data is generated by means of the interaction between interviewer and interviewee and it 'enable[s] participants...to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view' (Cohen et al. 349). The main advantage of using an interview for research purposes is that 'it allows for greater depth than is the case with other methods of data collection', however, the direct interaction involved also entails a level of 'subjectivity and bias on the part of the interviewer' (Cohen et al. 352). The response rate is usually higher than that of a questionnaire because the interviewees are much more involved in the research process and interviews are best-suited 'for handling more difficult and open-ended questions' (Cohen et al. 352). Interviews also allow the researcher to 'elicit additional data if initial answers are vague, incomplete, off-topic, or not specific enough' (Mackey and Gass 173).

3.2.1 Interview Guide

Semi-structured interviews are 'probably the most popular format for interviews' because they 'combine a certain degree of control with a certain amount of freedom to develop the interview' (Wallace 147). Mertler puts forward a number of reasons for the suitability of semi-structured interviews for qualitative research purposes:

When gathering truly qualitative data, interviews are probably best conducted following semi-structured or open-ended formats. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher

asks several "base" questions but also has the option of following up a given response with alternative, optional questions that may or may not be used by the researcher, depending on the situation (96).

According to Mackey and Gass in semi-structured interviews 'the researcher uses a written list of questions as a guide, while still having the freedom to digress and probe for more information' (173). The main characteristics of the interview guide approach are that the 'Topics and issues to be covered are specified in advance, in outline form' and that the 'interviewer decides sequence and working of questions in the course of the interview' (Cohen et al. 353). In a semi-structured interview 'The outline increases the comprehensiveness of the data and makes data collection somewhat systematic for each respondent. Logical gaps in the data can be anticipated and closed. Interviews remain fairly conversational and situational' (Cohen et al. 353). On the other hand, the weaknesses of this approach are that 'Important and salient topics may be inadvertently omitted' and that 'Interviewer flexibility in sequencing and wording questions can result in substantially different responses, thus reducing the comparability of responses' (Cohen et al. 353).

Mertler advises that 'When developing interview guides, it is best to keep your questions brief, clear and stated in simple language' (96). In terms of the interview schedule used, the present study employs open-ended questions because 'they are flexible; they allow the interviewer to probe so that she may go into more depth if she chooses, or to clear up any misunderstandings; they enable the interviewer to test the limits of the respondent's knowledge; they encourage cooperation and help establish rapport; and they allow the interviewer to make a truer assessment of what the respondent really believes' (Cohen et al. 357). The answers yielded by such questions might also lead to new hypotheses or unthought-of relationships. In a semi-structured interview it is perfectly acceptable for 'Additional questions [to] be asked and some may be questions that have not been anticipated in the beginning of the interview' (Kajornboon 6). When asking questions it is noted that 'by making the purpose of the questions less obvious, the indirect approach is more likely to produce frank and open responses' (Cohen et al. 358). This is further assisted by means of non-specific questions that avoid alarming the respondents (Cohen et al. 358).

Prompts and probes also need to be considered when framing questions for a semi-structured interview. Kajornboon points out that one of the strengths of a semi-structured interview is that 'the researcher can prompt and probe deeper into the given situation' (6). By means of prompts the researcher is able 'to clarify topics or questions' while probes 'ask respondents to extend, elaborate, add to, provide detail for, clarify or qualify their response, thereby addressing richness, depth of response, comprehensiveness and honesty that are some of the hallmarks of successful interviewing' (Cohen et al. 361). One of the main drawbacks of semi-structured

interviews is that 'inexperienced interviewers may not be able to ask prompt questions. If this is the case, some relevant data may not be gathered. In addition, inexperienced interviewers may not probe into a situation' (Kajornboon 6).

3.2.2 Interviewing Skills

It is recommended that before asking questions the interviewer should inform the interviewee about the nature of the study 'without risking biasing responses, and should strive to put the participant at ease' (Cohen et al. 361). The interviewer should avoid being judgemental and refrain from communicating personal biases and values when asking questions. One essential skill is that of keeping the conversation on track and discouraging the interviewee from going off on a tangent.

3.2.3 Analysis

After transcribing the interview the researcher needs to analyse the data and this is 'almost inevitably interpretative' (Cohen et al. 368). Therefore it is crucial to 'cod[e]...responses in interviews, partially as a way of reducing what is typically data overload from qualitative data' (Cohen et al. 369). This involves 'the translation of question responses and respondent information to specific categories for the purpose of analysis... Coding is the ascription of a category label to a piece of data, with the category label either decided in advance or in response to the data that have been collected (Cohen et al. 369). In the present study grids were used to organise the different response categories yielded by the interview data.

3.3 Survey

This research study also serves the function of an attitudinal study in that it tries to gauge the attitudes of students towards studying English at MC level. It tries to determine the motivation behind the students' choice to continue studying English at Advanced level and their perception of its value and significance for future academic success. Students were asked to provide feedback about how they are coping with their MC English course and information about how much they study and in what way. This information was sought via a questionnaire distributed to all 437 students currently studying English at MC level at Junior College.

Cohen et al. affirm that the main 'attractions' of using questionnaires for data gathering purposes are that it can 'be administered without the presence of the researcher' and the fact that the data is 'structured' and 'often...comparatively straightforward to analyse' (317). Munn and Drever claim that questionnaires offer teacher-researchers four main advantages: 'an efficient use of time,

anonymity (for the respondent), the possibility of a high return rate, standardised questions' (2). Since the researcher does not need to be present during the time in which the respondents fill in the questionnaire the latter can be completed in the respondents' own time. The present study made use of a questionnaire that was first supplied to the lecturing staff at Junior College who distributed it to their students and asked them to fill it in at home, after which they were asked to return it to my office. Since the questionnaire was made up of closed questions the analysis was relatively 'straightforward' (Munn and Drever 2). Munn and Drever point out that the most time consuming aspects of survey research are the design and piloting of the questionnaire rather than administration and analysis since if the former are conducted thoroughly the latter will be much 'less time consuming' (3). Besides being the ethical thing to do, guaranteeing your respondents' anonymity, especially in a situation in which some of them know you, allows your respondents to be 'frank' (Munn and Drever 3) in their responses. Questionnaires conducted by teacher-researchers in their own school have the possibility of a high return because 'there are opportunities to remind respondents to complete the questionnaire' (Munn and Drever 4). Since the researcher is not present to negotiate or clarify meaning, 'all respondents are presented with the same questions' and this is 'why so much care is needed in drafting questions and why piloting is essential' (Munn and Drever 4). Standardised questions are an advantage because 'you are strictly controlling the stimulus presented to all respondents' (Munn and Drever 4).

Cohen et al. point out that the 'attractions' of using questionnaires 'have to be counterbalanced by the time taken to develop, pilot and refine the questionnaire, by the possible unsophistication and limited scope of the data that are collected, and from the likely limited flexibility of response' (317). For Munn and Drever the main shortcomings of using questionnaires are the following: 'the information collected tends to *describe* rather than *explain* why things are the way they are'; 'the information can be superficial'; 'the time needed to draft and pilot the questionnaire is often underestimated and so the usefulness of the questionnaire is reduced if preparation has been inadequate' (5). In comparison to the 'rich' information yielded by an interview, 'questionnaire data can be superficial' and Munn and Drever make the point that 'using a questionnaire to discover why things are the way they are has limitations' especially since by asking 'Why?' questions the researcher is faced with 'a good deal of time to be spent analysing the answers' and 'explanations which are often superficial' (6).

3.3.1 Survey Design

Brown and Rodgers point out that 'If large-scale information is needed from a great many people, questionnaires are typically a more efficient way of gathering that information' (142). The first part of the questionnaire used in the present study asked for bio-data information in the form of open-response items whereas the rest of the questionnaire was made up of selected-response items. The type of survey used was partially in the form of a four-point Likert scale, which is 'generally useful for getting at respondents' views, judgements, or opinions about almost any aspect of language learning' (Brown and Rodgers 120). A four-point scale was used since this demands a stronger level of commitment on the respondent's part than that entailed by a more finely tuned five-point scale giving the 'No Opinion' option. Besides Likert-scale questions, this survey made use of multiple-choice, dichotomous, rank ordering and open-ended questions.

In designing the questionnaire that formed part of this study a number of recommendations put forward by the literature were taken into account. Cohen et al. make a number of suggestions on how to 'Avoid...pitfalls in question writing' (334). They urge researchers to avoid the following: leading questions, highbrow questions, complex questions, irritating questions or instructions, questions that use negatives and double negatives, too many open-ended questions on self-completion questionnaires, extremes in rating scales, questions that pressure/bias by association, statements that have built-in skewedness, ambiguous or easily misconstrued questions (Cohen et al. 334-335). According to Munn and Drever 'A questionnaire should be: attractive to look at, brief, easy to understand, [and] reasonably quick to complete' (19). They point out that researchers should focus only on those questions that they 'need to ask' and they should take the following elements into consideration when drafting a questionnaire: respondents' language level; clarity of questions and categories of response; knowledge base of opinions; ease of access to factual information; need for detailed bio-data information; avoidance of leading questions (Munn and Drever 19-23).

In addition to the above Brown and Rodgers' list of 'Things to avoid in writing good survey items' was also taken into account:

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- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1. Overly long items | 12. Embarrassing items |
| 2. Unclear or ambiguous items | 13. Biased items |
| 3. Negative items | 14. Items at wrong level of language |
| 4. Incomplete items | 15. Items that respondents are incompetent to answer |
| 5. Overlapping choices in items | 16. Assuming that everyone has an answer to all items |
| 6. Items across two pages | 17. Making respondents answer items that don't apply |
| 7. Double-barrelled items | 18. Irrelevant items |
| 8. Loaded word items | 19. Writing superfluous information into items |
| 9. Absolute word items | |
| 10. Leading items | |
| 11. Prestige items | |

Figure 4 — Checklist of things to avoid in a good survey (Brown and Rodgers 143)

In relation to question order, Munn and Drever suggest beginning with open questions to avoid the problem of trapping respondents in the framework you have set when asking closed questions (25). The first few questions should be 'straightforward and easy to answer' and 'questions about personal circumstances are better placed towards the end' (Munn and Drever 25) so that your respondents will not feel intimidated. They also point out that 'there is merit in ending with an open question as a sweeper' since 'This can encourage respondents to give you a new angle on the topic' (Munn and Drever 25). Cohen et al. affirm that 'A common sequence of a questionnaire' is to 'Commence with unthreatening factual questions... Move to closed questions...about given statements or questions, eliciting responses that require opinions, attitudes, perceptions, views... Then move to more open-ended questions...that seek responses on opinions, attitudes, perceptions and views, together with reasons for the responses given. These responses and reasons might include sensitive or more personal data' (337).

3.3.2 Piloting

Cohen et al. affirm that 'A pilot has several functions, principally to increase the reliability, validity and practicability of the questionnaire... In short...*everything* about the questionnaire should be piloted; nothing should be excluded' (341). When putting forward their suggestions on how to design an effective survey, Brown and Rodgers' first recommendation is that of 'pilot[ing] the

survey instrument with participants similar to the ones you will eventually be surveying' (Brown and Rodgers 143) and in fact the present study conducted a pilot survey with twenty Advanced level English students, ten first-year and ten second-year students, attending Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School, a parallel institution that offers courses leading to the same MATSEC examination under study. These students were chosen because when piloting an instrument it is important not to send it to anyone forming part of your sample but distribute it to someone who at the same time is 'broadly similar and who has access to the same kind of information and experiences that you are interested in' (Munn and Drever 31-32). Munn and Drever affirm that 'small-scale piloting is essential' because it allows you to 'find out roughly how long the questionnaire takes to answer and if there are any features of it that are likely to put people off and so reduce the likely response rate. Second, you want to 'de-bug' the questions' (31). In the present study after the survey was piloted with students who were 'sympathetic but critical' (Munn and Drever 35) the questionnaire was re-drafted and adjustments were made to ambiguous and misleading terms and phrases.

3.3.3 Sampling

Cohen et al. claim that 'the larger the size of the sample, the more structured, closed and numerical the questionnaire may have to be' (320). The present study surveyed the entire Advanced level English population at Junior College, which in the academic year 2008-2009 stood at 437 students (225 1st Year students, 212 2nd Year students). When talking about sampling Munn and Drever advocate the value of sampling an entire population where it is feasible to do so: 'If the numbers involved allow you to cover the whole of your target population rather than just a sample, then it is always worthwhile to do so' (15). They claim that 'If possible, include the whole of your population in your survey, so that you can speak with certainty about their answers' (Munn and Drever 18).

3.3.4 Administration

In the present study the questionnaire used was distributed to the students by their lecturers and the latter were given clear instructions on what to say when distributing the questionnaire to their students. Since one of the main aims of a researcher when administering a questionnaire is 'to get standardised information by offering everyone the same stimulus' it is essential to make sure to provide colleagues who have offered help with distributing the questionnaire with 'guidance on how to present it' especially since 'the spoken presentation and the attitude of the presenter can have a marked effect on how questionnaires are completed' (Munn and Drever 33).

3.3.5 Analysis

The questionnaire used in this study was helpful because it yielded a substantial amount of numerical data, which was subsequently analysed by means of descriptive statistics. The latter were 'used to characterise or describe a set of numbers in terms of central tendency and to show how the numbers disperse, or vary, around the centre' (Brown and Rodgers 122). Given that 'The overall aim in data preparation is to make the mass of information you have in your questionnaires more manageable' in the present study grids were used 'to translate the 'raw' data' (Munn and Drever 37). The closed questions that formed part of the survey used in this study were coded by means of numbers and letters. Cohen et al. explain that 'Pre-coding is appropriate for close-ended questions... For questions such as those whose answer categories are known in advance, a coding frame is generally developed before the interviewing commences so that it can be printed into the questionnaire itself' (348).

Munn and Drever acknowledge that 'Coding open questions is more time consuming than coding closed questions because you need to spend time developing the coding system and checking its reliability' (43). The open questions in the survey were inspected and the responses were coded according to specific categories derived from the data. Munn and Drever point out that when it comes to coding the responses to open questions it is up to the researcher to decide how many codes to create: 'In making a judgement, you need to remind yourself about the research questions and how you intend to use the information' (41). The data yielded by the open questions forming part of the survey led to the creation of a 'framework to organise a fairly miscellaneous set of answers' (Munn and Drever 41). The main advantages of using categories derived from the data rather than pre-set categories are that 'you have not imposed your own interests on the data' and that 'you can aim to include everything that is in the responses' (Munn and Drever 42). Cohen et al. point out that after the completion of the questionnaire a coding frame is devised 'by taking a random sample of the questionnaires...and generating a frequency tally of the range of responses as a preliminary to coding classification. Having devised the coding frame, the researcher can make a further check on its validity by using it to code up a further sample of the questionnaires' (348). When coding both closed and open questions missing answers were taken into account, as were answers that clearly showed the respondents' disregard or misinterpretation of the instructions.

3.4 Correlational Research

In its attempt to chart the type and amount of continuity that exists between SEC and MC English this study focuses on whether the SEC grades currently accepted by Junior College for studying

English at Advanced level are permitting the students to follow the programme with profit. Hence this study explores the degree of correlation between the SEC English Language and SEC English Literature examinations (typically taken at the end of secondary education) and the MC English examination.

This study focuses on the SEC and MC results of five different cohort groups: 2002-2004, 2003-2005, 2004-2006, 2005-2007, and 2006-2008. All the students forming part of these cohort groups attended Junior College for a period of two years and were enrolled in the MC English course. The SEC English Language, SEC English Literature and MC English examination grades for each cohort group were obtained so that correlational research could be conducted. According to Brown and Rodgers data compiled for this purpose allows one to calculate the correlation coefficient, which

indicate[s] the degree of relationship between two sets of numbers represented as the ratio of go-togetherness to total score variation. Thus correlation coefficients can range from 0.00 (if the ratio is zero, indicating absolutely no relationship) to 1.00 (if the ratio is perfect, indicating that there is a 100% relationship and that both sets of numbers are going in the same direction)... Correlation coefficients can also range from 0.00...to -1.00 (for a perfect relationship with the two sets of numbers changing together but in opposite direction) (166-167).

Brown and Rodgers state that when conducting correlational research the first step to follow is that of 'figur[ing] out what kind of scales you are dealing with' (167). In the case of the present study the examination grades were converted into ranks such that SEC grades 1 to 7 were ranked 1 to 7 respectively. Grade U was converted to rank 8. MC English grades A to F were ranked 1 to 6 respectively. The next step to follow is that of 'decid[ing] what kind of correlation coefficient to calculate' (Brown and Rodgers 167). The present study used the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient since this can 'be used to analyse two sets of numbers if they are both rank-ordered scales' (Brown and Rodgers 170). The assumptions underlying the Spearman rho are that 'the scales are rank-orders...and [it] requires independence and linearity' (183).

Cohen et al. affirm that 'The correlation coefficient may be seen...as an indication of the predictability of one variable given the other: it is an indication of covariation' (531). However, this does not imply causality. Brown and Rodgers explain that 'coefficients are useful for understanding the degree of relationship between the numbers involved' (184). They stress the fact that correlation coefficients are not an indication of causality:

Correlation coefficients are no more than estimates of the degree to which two sets of numbers are related. The fact that a moderate or strong relationship exists between one set of numbers and another does not mean that the first set caused the second set, or vice versa (Brown and Rodgers 190).

Cohen et al. agree with this when they advise researchers 'not [to] assume that correlations imply causal relationships' (531). This is especially important given the fact that 'many alternative explanations can be imagined for almost any relationship that is found' (Brown and Rodgers 191). Cohen et al. claim that 'There are invariably other factors influencing both variables under consideration. Suspected cause-and-effect relationships would have to be confirmed by subsequent experimental study' (536). It is important to point out that by calculating the Spearman rho this study attempted to indicate the degree of relationship between two independent sets of grades and not to indicate that the achievement of one grade necessarily leads to the achievement of the other. However, by means of a triangulation of research methods this study attempts to shed light on suspected causal relationships.

The present study focuses on five entire cohort groups and in relation to this it can be pointed out that when discussing statistical significance Cohen et al. maintain that 'the greater the sample size, the lower the coefficient of correlation has to be in order to be statistically significant, and, by contrast, the smaller the sample size, the greater the coefficient of correlation has to be in order to be statistically significant' (531). They claim that 'a statistically significant correlation is indicative of an actual relationship rather than one due entirely to chance' (Cohen et al. 535). Notwithstanding this, however, it is to be borne in mind that 'the degree to which it is interesting or meaningful is an entirely different matter best determined by examining the magnitude of the coefficient within the particular context and research purposes involved' (Brown and Rodgers 190).

3.5 Research Ethics

Since this study engaged the participation of Junior College lecturers and students, the research was only conducted once the necessary authorisation had been issued by the institution's administration and by the University Research Ethics Committee. The chairperson, lecturers, students and the students' parents were informed about the study's research purpose and asked to give their consent in writing to form part of this study.

3.6 Conclusion

The above discussion overviewed the research tools used in this study and how they aid with the investigation of the teaching of English at postsecondary level and the MATSEC examination to which it is directly bound. By means of these research tools this research study sought to identify the possible reasons for the low success rate in the MC English examination and it makes a set of

recommendations that are most likely to address this problem.

Chapter 4 – Analysis of Data and Discussion of Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the data gathering process carried out in this study. It reports the results of the different methods of data collection used, namely correlational research, the survey carried out with Junior College students studying English at Advanced level, and the semi-structured interviews with Junior College lecturers and the chairperson of the Matriculation English examination board. It also evaluates the MC English examination paper and syllabus. Moreover, this chapter analyses this data and discusses the main findings in the light of the literature reviewed in relation to each aspect of the study.

4.1 Correlational Research

Farrugia and Ventura calculated the predictive validity of all the subjects offered at SEC level and their paper was highly influential in determining the focus of this study. Their research showed that the predictive validity of SEC English Language and SEC English Literature for MC English is of 0.56 and 0.51 (27) respectively. They claim that 'The results show a rather low correlation between student performance at the two levels. Students tend to obtain low grades at Advanced level irrespective of the grades obtained at SEC level' (31). Given that Farrugia and Ventura recommend further research so that the reasons for such a low correlation are explored, the present study made this its chief objective. In order to determine whether this low correlation between the SEC English grades and MC English grades was consistent over the past few years rather than being a one-off phenomenon it was felt that the number of cohort groups forming part of this study needed to be more than one. Hence rather than focusing on one cohort group it was decided to calculate the predictive validity of SEC English Language and SEC English Literature for MC English for a total of five consecutive cohort groups. The other difference between the present study and that conducted by Farrugia and Ventura is that whereas the latter focused on a national cohort the former focuses on the grades of Junior College students only.

The five cohort groups that form part of this study are the following: 2002-2004, 2003-2005, 2004-2006, 2005-2007, and 2006-2008. The grade obtained by a student sitting for the SEC English Language/SEC English Literature examination in a particular year was compared with the grade obtained by the same student sitting for the MC English examination two years later. Just as in

Farrugia and Ventura's study only the MC English examination grades obtained in the May session were computed. Similarly, in the present study only matching results were used, that is, only the grades of those students who actually sat for both the SEC and MC examinations were taken into consideration. Students who were absent for the MC English examination or who dropped out of the MC English course or who were doing the MC English examination after repeating a year of study were not taken into account. This yielded groups of homogenous students since each student started his or her studies at Junior College with a grade in SEC English Language/SEC English Literature and after a two-year course left Junior College with a grade in MC English. By means of frequency and distribution tables it was possible to take each grade at SEC level and count the number of students who obtained a particular grade at MC level two years later. For example, the first row of each table shows the number of students who entered Junior College with a Grade 1 in SEC English Language/SEC English Literature and who went on to obtain a grade at MC level. The Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient was used to calculate the predictive validity of the SEC English Language/SEC English Literature examination results as the data were in the form of categories. The grades were converted into ranks so that SEC grades 1 to 5 were ranked 1 to 5 respectively and MC grades A to F were ranked 1 to 6 respectively. By means of expectancy tables the frequencies were converted into percentages and these show the likelihood of obtaining a particular grade at MC level having obtained a particular grade at SEC level. A correlation between two results indicates the presence of a relationship between two particular grades but it does not indicate that a student who obtained a certain grade at SEC level will necessarily obtain a corresponding grade at MC level. The next sections present the findings of this study's correlational research in terms of frequency tables, expectancy tables and the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient.

4.1.1 Predictive Validity of SEC English Language

Farrugia and Ventura show that an examination's low predictive validity makes it very difficult to predict a candidate's future performance when sitting for an examination at a higher level:

When the predictive validity is low, the relationship between SEC grades and grades at higher levels is less strong and it becomes more risky to predict the likely performance in the subject at the higher level from the grade achieved at SEC level (26-27).

While Farrugia and Ventura found a low correlation of 0.56 between SEC English Language and MC English, this study found an even lower correlation for all five cohort groups.

Table 8 shows the distribution of candidates' Grades 1 to 5 in SEC English Language on enrolling at Junior College.

Table 8 – Distribution of SEC English Language grades

Grade		2002-2004	2003-2005	2004-2006	2005-2007	2006-2008
1	N	7	21	22	24	21
	%	2.9	8.1	8.1	11.5	9.6
2	N	84	74	99	69	86
	%	34.7	28.6	36.3	33.0	39.4
3	N	85	84	102	59	72
	%	35.1	32.4	37.4	28.2	33.0
4	N	59	66	42	40	28
	%	24.4	25.5	15.4	19.1	12.8
5	N	7	14	8	17	11
	%	2.9	5.4	2.9	8.1	5.0
TOTAL	N	242	259	273	209	218

For all five cohort groups the percentage of candidates who enrolled at Junior College with Grades 1 to 3 is substantially higher than that of candidates who enrolled with Grades 4 to 5. In fact, 72.7% of students in 2002 enrolled with Grades 1 to 3, 69.1% in 2003, 81.8% in 2004, 72.7% in 2005, and 82% in 2006. This shows that the majority of students who choose to study English at Advanced Level at Junior College in fact possess a satisfactory level of proficiency in the English Language.

Tables 9 to 18 show the predictive validity of SEC English Language for MC English and the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient for each cohort group is displayed beneath the frequency and expectancy tables. Tables 9 and 10 clearly show that a low correlation exists between the two levels.

Table 9 – Distribution of matched grades in English Language for the May 2002 SEC and May 2004 MC examination sessions

		Grades at MC level						TOTAL
		A	B	C	D	E	F	
Grades at SEC level	1	1	0	3	2	1	0	7
	2	1	5	27	30	17	4	84
	3	0	0	7	29	31	18	85
	4	0	0	8	9	22	20	59
	5	0	0	0	2	2	3	7
	TOTAL	2	5	45	72	73	45	242

Table 10 – Expectancy table for English (May 2002 SEC and May 2004 MC examination sessions)

		Grades at MC level						TOTAL
		A	B	C	D	E	F	
Grades at SEC level	1	14.3	0.0	42.9	28.6	14.3	0.0	100.0
	2	1.2	6.0	32.1	35.7	20.2	4.8	100.0
	3	0.0	0.0	8.2	34.1	36.5	21.2	100.0
	4	0.0	0.0	13.6	15.3	37.3	33.9	100.0
	5	0.0	0.0	0.0	28.6	28.6	42.9	100.0
	TOTAL	0.8	2.1	18.6	29.8	30.2	18.6	100.0

Spearman Rank Correlation = 0.443

Whereas 57.2% of those students with a Grade 1 in SEC English Language manage to obtain Grades A to C in the MC English examination, only 39.3% of those starting with a Grade 2 manage to do so and only a meagre 8.2% of those with a Grade 3 manage to obtain a Grade C at Advanced Level. Only 13.6% of those candidates with a Grade 4 managed to obtain a Grade C and no candidate with a Grade 5 managed to get a grade higher than D. While no candidate starting with a Grade 1 obtained a Grade F, 42.9% of those candidates with a Grade 5 failed their MC English examination in May 2004. The most disconcerting fact of all is that 78.6% of the total number of candidates obtained Grades D to F in their MC English examination in 2004.

Tables 11 and 12 once again show that a low correlation exists between the grades obtained at SEC Level and the ones obtained at Advanced Level for the next cohort of students.

Table 11 – Distribution of matched grades in English Language for the May 2003 SEC and May 2005 MC examination sessions

		Grades at MC level						TOTAL
		A	B	C	D	E	F	
Grades at SEC level	1	0	0	12	4	4	1	21
	2	0	1	13	11	36	13	74
	3	0	0	8	11	30	35	84
	4	0	0	1	2	32	31	66
	5	0	0	0	0	3	11	14
	TOTAL	0	1	34	28	105	91	259

Table 12 – Expectancy table for English (May 2003 SEC and May 2005 MC examination sessions)

		Grades at MC level						TOTAL
		A	B	C	D	E	F	
Grades at SEC level	1	0.0	0.0	57.1	19.0	19.0	4.8	100.0
	2	0.0	1.4	17.6	14.9	48.6	17.6	100.0
	3	0.0	0.0	9.5	13.1	35.7	41.7	100.0
	4	0.0	0.0	1.5	3.0	48.5	47.0	100.0
	5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	21.4	78.6	100.0
	TOTAL	0.0	0.4	13.1	10.8	40.5	35.1	100.0

Spearman Rank Correlation = 0.457

In line with the results for the 2002-2004 cohort, the results for the 2003-2005 cohort show that 57.1% of the candidates starting with a Grade 1 in SEC English Language managed to obtain a minimum of Grade C at Advanced Level. However, for this particular cohort we see that no candidates with a Grade 1 managed to obtain Grades A or B in the May 2005 session of the MC English examination. In fact, the percentage of the total number of candidates who managed to obtain Grades A or B was just 0.4%. In May 2005 4.8% of those students with a Grade 1 obtained a Grade F and 78.6% of those with a Grade 5 obtained a Grade F. Only 13.5% of all candidates managed to obtain Grades A to C and 86.4% obtained Grades D to F.

The results for the 2004-2006 cohort present an equally grim picture but the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient for this particular cohort is the lowest of the five cohorts forming part of this study. This is most noteworthy given the fact that for this particular cohort – but on a national scale – Farrugia and Ventura found a correlation coefficient of 0.56.

Table 13 – Distribution of matched grades in English Language for the May 2004 SEC and May 2006 MC examination sessions

		Grades at MC level						TOTAL
Grades at SEC level		A	B	C	D	E	F	
	1	3	4	11	2	0	2	22
	2	0	4	34	27	21	13	99
	3	0	1	19	28	30	24	102
	4	0	1	4	9	13	15	42
	5	0	0	0	1	1	6	8
TOTAL		3	10	68	67	65	60	273

Table 14 – Expectancy table for English (May 2004 SEC and May 2006 MC examination sessions)

		Grades at MC level						TOTAL
Grades at SEC level	%	A	B	C	D	E	F	
	1	13.6	18.2	50.0	9.1	0.0	9.1	100.0
	2	0.0	4.0	34.3	27.3	21.2	13.1	100.0
	3	0.0	1.0	18.6	27.5	29.4	23.5	100.0
	4	0.0	2.4	9.5	21.4	31.0	35.7	100.0
	5	0.0	0.0	0.0	12.5	12.5	75.0	100.0
TOTAL		1.1	3.7	24.9	24.5	23.8	22.0	100.0

Spearman Rank Correlation = 0.407

The percentage of candidates starting with a Grade 1 in SEC English Language who obtained Grades A to C in MC English is somewhat higher than that registered for the previous two cohorts but so is the percentage of those candidates who obtained a Grade F. In fact, 81.8% of candidates

with a Grade 1 obtained Grades A to C and less than a tenth of them obtained Grade F. Once again the highest percentage of candidates with a Grade F was registered by those starting with a Grade 5 in SEC English Language. Less than a third of the total number of candidates managed to obtain Grades A to C and 70.3% obtained Grades D to F. The latter figure is lower than those registered in 2002-2004 and 2003-2005.

The correlation between SEC English Language and MC English in the 2005-2007 cohort was the highest one out of the five cohorts under investigation as shown by Tables 15 and 16.

Table 15 – Distribution of matched grades in English Language for the May 2005 SEC and May 2007 MC examination sessions

		Grades at MC level						TOTAL
		A	B	C	D	E	F	
Grades at SEC level	1	2	5	13	2	2	0	24
	2	1	3	18	27	15	5	69
	3	0	2	12	17	14	14	59
	4	0	0	4	7	10	19	40
	5	0	0	1	2	6	8	17
	TOTAL	3	10	48	55	47	46	209

Table 16 – Expectancy table for English (May 2005 SEC and May 2007 MC examination sessions)

		Grades at MC level						TOTAL
		%	A	B	C	D	E	
Grades at SEC level	1	8.3	20.8	54.2	8.3	8.3	0.0	100.0
	2	1.4	4.3	26.1	39.1	21.7	7.2	100.0
	3	0.0	3.4	20.3	28.8	23.7	23.7	100.0
	4	0.0	0.0	10.0	17.5	25.0	47.5	100.0
	5	0.0	0.0	5.9	11.8	35.3	47.1	100.0
	TOTAL	1.4	4.8	23.0	26.3	22.5	22.0	100.0

Spearman Rank Correlation = 0.523

While 62.5% of candidates with a Grade 1 at SEC Level obtained Grades A to C, nearly a third of those with a Grade 2 and less than a quarter of those with a Grade 3 managed to do so. In this particular cohort the highest percentage of candidates with a Grade F was not registered among those with a Grade 5 but among those with a Grade 4. In contrast with the previous three cohorts, in 2005-2007 a higher percentage of candidates with Grades 4 and 5 managed to obtain a grade higher than D.

The Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient for 2006-2008 was the second highest out of all five cohorts.

Table 17 – Distribution of matched grades in English Language for the May 2006 SEC and May 2008 MC examination sessions

		Grades at MC level						TOTAL
		A	B	C	D	E	F	
Grades at SEC level	1	3	5	9	4	0	0	21
	2	1	7	36	26	11	5	86
	3	0	0	24	25	12	11	72
	4	0	0	3	9	10	6	28
	5	0	0	1	2	1	7	11
	TOTAL	4	12	73	66	34	29	218

Table 18 – Expectancy table for English (May 2006 SEC and May 2008 MC examination sessions)

		Grades at MC level						TOTAL
		%	A	B	C	D	E	
Grades at SEC level	1	14.3	23.8	42.9	19.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
	2	1.2	8.1	41.9	30.2	12.8	5.8	100.0
	3	0.0	0.0	33.3	34.7	16.7	15.3	100.0
	4	0.0	0.0	10.7	32.1	35.7	21.4	100.0
	5	0.0	0.0	9.1	18.2	9.1	63.6	100.0
	TOTAL	1.8	5.5	33.5	30.3	15.6	13.3	100.0

Spearman Rank Correlation = 0.481

This particular cohort is striking because it registered the lowest percentage of candidates with a Grade F and hence the highest percentage of passes. Moreover it is the cohort with the highest percentage of candidates who managed to obtain Grades A to C. While the previous cohorts register percentages lower than 30%, the 2006-2008 cohort registers a total of 40.8%. However, Grades A and B account for only 7.3% of the figure. No one with Grades 3 to 5 managed to obtain Grades A to B but the percentage of candidates with Grades 3 to 5 who managed to obtain a grade higher than D was the highest out of the five cohorts.

Figure 5 presents the predictive validity of SEC English Language in a graphical form. It can clearly be seen that the predictive validity of this particular examination is not sufficiently high to confidently predict a candidate's performance in the MC English examination. If the predictive validity had been high the presence of a strong relationship between SEC grades and MC grades would have been clearer because candidates with a high SEC grade would have obtained a high MC grade and candidates with a low SEC grade would have obtained a low MC grade. However, since this is not so it is not safe to predict a candidate's performance in the MC English examination from the grade obtained at SEC Level.

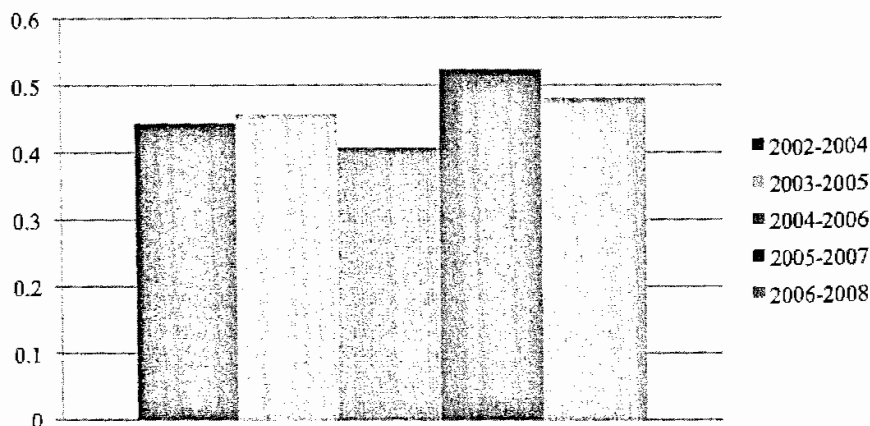


Figure 5 – Predictive validity of SEC English Language

The results show that the correlation between SEC English Language and MC English is lower for the Junior College cohorts than for the national cohort studied by Farrugia and Ventura. They also confirm Farrugia and Ventura's conclusion:

These observations clearly indicate that while it is difficult to predict results and advise students with the higher SEC level grades, it is much easier to advise students with lower SEC level grades in English language about whether they are likely to be able to follow the course with profit (32).

4.1.2 Predictive Validity of SEC English Literature

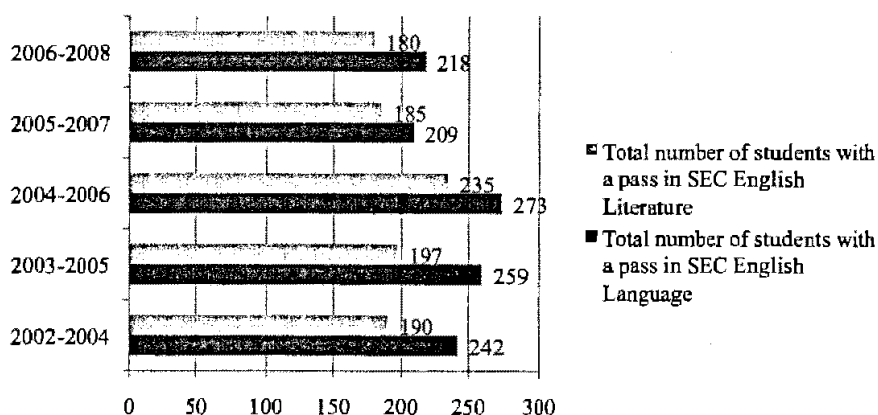
This study also examines the predictive validity of the SEC English Literature examination since students sitting for the MC English examination are expected to master a substantial amount of literary content. Farrugia and Ventura found that the predictive validity of SEC English Literature is 0.51 and they feel that this is a 'rather unexpected result' (27) considering the fact that two thirds of the MC English examination paper tests literature. For all five cohort groups in the present study, the correlation between SEC English Literature and MC English is lower than that reported by Farrugia and Ventura. However, as shown further on, in tune with their findings this study found that the correlation between SEC English Literature and MC English is lower than that between SEC English Language and MC English.

Table 19 shows the distribution of candidates' Grades 1 to 5 in SEC English Literature on enrolling at Junior College.

Table 19 – Distribution of SEC English Literature grades

Grade		2002-2004	2003-2005	2004-2006	2005-2007	2006-2008
1	N	5	8	7	5	4
	%	2.6	4.1	3.0	2.7	2.2
2	N	17	25	23	17	17
	%	8.9	12.7	9.8	9.2	9.4
3	N	42	50	77	53	55
	%	22.1	25.4	32.8	28.6	30.6
4	N	67	62	72	67	58
	%	35.3	31.5	30.6	36.2	32.2
5	N	59	52	56	43	46
	%	31.1	26.4	23.8	23.2	25.6
TOTAL	N	190	197	235	185	180

Contrary to what was reported in relation to the distribution of SEC English Language grades, when it comes to SEC English Literature for all five cohort groups the percentage of candidates who enrolled at Junior College with Grades 1 to 3 is lower than that of candidates who enrolled with Grades 4 to 5. In fact, only 33.6% of students in 2002 enrolled with Grades 1 to 3, 42.4% in 2003, 45.6% in 2004, 40.5% in 2005, and 42.2% in 2006. Table 19 shows that the majority of students who choose to study English at Advanced Level at Junior College commence their studies with low grades in SEC English Literature. It must also be kept in mind that since a pass in SEC English Literature is not mandatory, a number of students enrol on the MC English course without having sat for or passed the SEC English Literature examination. Figure 6 shows the number of students with a pass in SEC English Language and the number of students with a pass in SEC English Literature for each one of the five cohort groups under investigation.

**Figure 6 – Number of students with a pass in SEC Eng. Language and SEC Eng. Literature**

As shown by Table 20 the percentage of students with a pass in both examinations was high in all five cohorts, confirming the fact that most students enrol on the MC English course at Junior College with some form of literary competence.

Table 20 – Percentage of students with a pass in both SEC English Language and SEC English Literature

2002-2004	2003-2005	2004-2006	2005-2007	2006-2008
78.5%	81.4%	97.1%	76.4%	74.4%

Tables 21 to 30 show the predictive validity of SEC English Literature for MC English and the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient for each cohort group is displayed beneath the frequency and expectancy tables. Tables 21 and 22 clearly show that a low correlation exists between the two levels, lower than that reported between SEC English Language and MC English. However, this particular cohort registered the second highest Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient out of all the five groups when it comes to the predictive validity of SEC English Literature.

Table 21 – Distribution of matched grades in English Literature for the May 2002 SEC and May 2004 MC examination sessions

		Grades at MC level						
Grades at SEC level		A	B	C	D	E	F	TOTAL
	1	1	2	2	0	0	0	5
	2	0	2	7	7	0	1	17
	3	0	1	15	15	8	3	42
	4	0	0	14	21	21	11	67
	5	0	0	4	23	21	11	59
TOTAL		1	5	42	66	50	26	190

Table 22 – Expectancy table for English (May 2002 SEC and May 2004 MC examination sessions)

		Grades at MC level						
Grades at SEC level	%	A	B	C	D	E	F	TOTAL
	1	20.0	40.0	40.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
	2	0.0	11.8	41.2	41.2	0.0	5.9	100.0
	3	0.0	2.4	35.7	35.7	19.0	7.1	100.0
	4	0.0	0.0	20.9	31.3	31.3	16.4	100.0
	5	0.0	0.0	6.8	39.0	35.6	18.6	100.0
TOTAL		0.5	2.6	22.1	34.7	26.3	13.7	100.0

Spearman Rank Correlation = 0.405

While no candidates with a Grade 4 or 5 managed to obtain a Grade A or B, 20.9% of those with a

Grade 4 managed to obtain a Grade C and 6.8% of those with a Grade 5 managed to do so. These two figures are relatively higher than those of candidates with a Grade 4 or 5 in SEC English Language who managed to obtain a grade higher than D. Grades D to F were mostly obtained by candidates starting with a low grade at SEC Level, 79% of those with a Grade 4 and 93.2% of those with a Grade 5. However, 61.8% of those with a Grade 3 also obtained Grades D to F at MC level.

The 2003-2005 cohort registered the second lowest Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient.

Table 23 – Distribution of matched grades in English Literature for the May 2003 SEC and May 2005 MC examination sessions

		Grades at MC level						TOTAL
Grades at SEC level		A	B	C	D	E	F	
	1	0	0	4	2	2	0	8
	2	0	0	10	2	9	4	25
	3	0	0	8	6	23	13	50
	4	0	0	4	9	27	22	62
	5	0	1	2	4	24	21	52
TOTAL		0	1	28	23	85	60	197

Table 24 – Expectancy table for English (May 2003 SEC and May 2005 MC examination sessions)

		Grades at MC level						TOTAL
Grades at SEC level	%	A	B	C	D	E	F	
	1	0.0	0.0	50.0	25.0	25.0	0.0	100.0
	2	0.0	0.0	40.0	8.0	36.0	16.0	100.0
	3	0.0	0.0	16.0	12.0	46.0	26.0	100.0
	4	0.0	0.0	6.5	14.5	43.5	35.5	100.0
	5	0.0	1.9	3.8	7.7	46.2	40.4	100.0
TOTAL		0.0	0.5	14.2	11.7	43.1	30.5	100.0

Spearman Rank Correlation = 0.306

When compared to the previous cohort only half the candidates with a Grade 1 managed to obtain a grade higher than D and none of them managed to obtain Grades A or B. In fact, there were no candidates who managed to obtain a Grade A and just one candidate managed to obtain a Grade B, surprisingly a candidate starting with a Grade 5. This might partly explain why the correlation between the two levels is so low for this particular cohort. Only 40% of candidates starting with a Grade 2 managed to obtain a grade higher than D and only 16% of those with a Grade 3 managed to do so. This time round only a very small percentage of candidates with a Grade 4 or 5 managed to obtain a Grade higher than D and 35.5% of those with a Grade 4 and 40.4% of those with a Grade 5 obtained a Grade F. 85.3% of all candidates obtained Grades D to F and only 14.7% obtained Grades A to C.

The 2004-2006 cohort is made up of the largest number of candidates and this is why the

percentage of difference between the number of candidates with a pass in SEC English Language and the number of candidates with a pass in SEC English Literature is particularly low for the group. However, this cohort registered the lowest Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient out of the five cohorts under investigation. This fact is even more interesting given that for the same cohort but on a national scale Farrugia and Ventura found a correlation coefficient of 0.51.

Table 25 – Distribution of matched grades in English Literature for the May 2004 SEC and May 2006 MC examination sessions

		Grades at MC level						
Grades at SEC level		A	B	C	D	E	F	TOTAL
	1	1	0	5	0	1	0	7
	2	1	3	9	5	2	3	23
	3	0	3	29	12	22	11	77
	4	1	2	11	26	16	16	72
	5	0	2	8	12	17	17	56
TOTAL		3	10	62	55	58	47	235

Table 26 – Expectancy table for English (May 2004 SEC and May 2006 MC examination sessions)

		Grades at MC level						
Grades at SEC level	%	A	B	C	D	E	F	TOTAL
	1	14.3	0.0	71.4	0.0	14.3	0.0	100.0
	2	4.3	13.0	39.1	21.7	8.7	13.0	100.0
	3	0.0	3.9	37.7	15.6	28.6	14.3	100.0
	4	1.4	2.8	15.3	36.1	22.2	22.2	100.0
	5	0.0	3.6	14.3	21.4	30.4	30.4	100.0
TOTAL		1.3	4.3	26.4	23.4	24.7	20.0	100.0

Spearman Rank Correlation = 0.296

The percentage of candidates with a Grade 1 who obtained Grades A to C was 85.7% and the percentage of those with a Grade 2 who managed to do so was 56.4%. The percentage of candidates with a Grade 3 who obtained a grade higher than D is also relatively high, standing at 41.6%. However, despite these high percentages the correlation between the two levels is the lowest for all five cohorts. One of the reasons for this is that a relatively high percentage of candidates with Grades 4 and 5 also managed to obtain a grade higher than D. In fact, 19.5% of candidates starting with a Grade 4 managed to obtain Grades A to C, one student even managing to obtain a Grade A. Even though no candidates with a Grade 5 managed to obtain a Grade A, 17.9% of them managed to obtain Grades B to C. Another reason for such a low correlation is that 43.4% of candidates with a Grade 2 managed to obtain Grades D to F and 58.5% of those with a Grade 3 managed to do so. The percentage of all candidates who obtained Grades D to F was 68% and this is lower than the percentage registered by the previous two cohorts. One of the reasons for this is that a higher

percentage of candidates with Grades 4 and 5 managed to obtain Grades A to C.

The 2005-2007 cohort registered the highest Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient out of all five cohorts forming part of this study.

Table 27 – Distribution of matched grades in English Literature for the May 2005 SEC and May 2007 MC examination sessions

		Grades at MC level						TOTAL
		A	B	C	D	E	F	
Grades at SEC level	1	0	2	3	0	0	0	5
	2	2	2	7	3	3	0	17
	3	0	4	21	12	12	4	53
	4	1	1	12	22	10	21	67
	5	0	1	5	10	14	13	43
	TOTAL	3	10	48	47	39	38	185

Table 28 – Expectancy table for English (May 2005 SEC and May 2007 MC examination sessions)

		Grades at MC level						TOTAL
		%	A	B	C	D	E	
Grades at SEC level	1	0.0	40.0	60.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
	2	11.8	11.8	41.2	17.6	17.6	0.0	100.0
	3	0.0	7.5	39.6	22.6	22.6	7.5	100.0
	4	1.5	1.5	17.9	32.8	14.9	31.3	100.0
	5	0.0	2.3	11.6	23.3	32.6	30.2	100.0
	TOTAL	1.6	5.4	25.9	25.4	21.1	20.5	100.0

Spearman Rank Correlation = 0.420

As for the 2002-2004 cohort, in this particular group of candidates all those candidates with a Grade 1 managed to obtain a grade higher than D, however, none of them managed to obtain a Grade A. On the other hand, 11.8% of candidates with a Grade 2 and 1.5% of candidates with a Grade 4 managed to obtain a Grade A. The percentage of candidates with a Grade 2 who managed to obtain Grades A to C was quite high, standing at 64.8%, and so was the percentage of those with a Grade 3, standing at 47.1%. The fact that a high percentage of those candidates with Grades 1 to 3 managed to obtain of Grades A to C somewhat mitigated the effect on the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient of those with a Grade 4 and 5, a relatively high percentage of whom also managed to obtain Grades A to C, 20.9% in the case of those with a Grade 4 and 13.9% of those with a Grade 5.

The 2006-2008 cohort was made up of the smallest number of candidates when compared to the other five cohorts and the percentage of difference between the number of candidates who had a pass in SEC English Language and the number of those with a pass in SEC English Literature was the highest for this particular group of candidates.

Table 29 – Distribution of matched grades in English Literature for the May 2006 SEC and May 2008 MC examination sessions

		Grades at MC level						
Grades at SEC level		A	B	C	D	E	F	TOTAL
	1	2	0	1	1	0	0	4
	2	1	3	8	3	2	0	17
	3	1	4	26	14	8	2	55
	4	0	4	23	21	6	4	58
	5	0	0	10	17	7	12	46
TOTAL		4	11	68	56	23	18	180

Table 30 – Expectancy table for English (May 2006 SEC and May 2008 MC examination sessions)

		Grades at MC level						
Grades at SEC level	%	A	B	C	D	E	F	TOTAL
	1	50.0	0.0	25.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
	2	5.9	17.6	47.1	17.6	11.8	0.0	100.0
	3	1.8	7.3	47.3	25.5	14.5	3.6	100.0
	4	0.0	6.9	39.7	36.2	10.3	6.9	100.0
	5	0.0	0.0	21.7	37.0	15.2	26.1	100.0
TOTAL		2.2	6.1	37.8	31.1	12.8	10.0	100.0

Spearman Rank Correlation = 0.368

More than 70% of those with a Grade 2 managed to obtain Grades A to C two years later and none of these candidates and those with a Grade 1 managed to obtain a Grade F. More than half the candidates with a Grade 3 managed to obtain Grades A to C and a relatively high percentage of those with Grades 4 and 5 managed to obtain a grade higher than D, 46.6% and 21.7% respectively. The percentage of all candidates who managed to obtain Grades A to C was 46.1% and this is the highest for all five cohorts.

Figure 7 presents the predictive validity of the SEC English Literature examination. It is clear that the predictive validity of this particular examination is far too low for one to confidently predict a candidate's performance in the MC English examination. The relationship between SEC grades and MC grades is weak and the results show that even though a substantial proportion of candidates with Grades 1 to 3 managed to obtain Grades A to C, a sizeable proportion of those with Grades 4 to 5 also managed to obtain a grade higher than D. This seems to show that the lower predictive validity of SEC English Literature when compared to SEC English Language is not due to a slide in performance of those candidates starting with Grades 1 to 3, but to an actual amelioration in performance of a number of candidates starting with Grades 4 to 5. This seems to confirm Farrugia and Ventura's findings in relation to the predictive validity of SEC English Literature:

Close inspection of the results shows...that the low value of the correlation coefficient

is not a result of a high performance at SEC level being followed by a low performance at Advanced level. In fact candidates with Grades 1, 2 and 3 in SEC level English Literature were able to obtain better grades at Advanced level than students with similar grades in SEC level English Language. The lower correlation (compared to SEC English Language) is a result of the relatively good performance at Advanced level observed for some candidates with low SEC level English Literature grades (32).

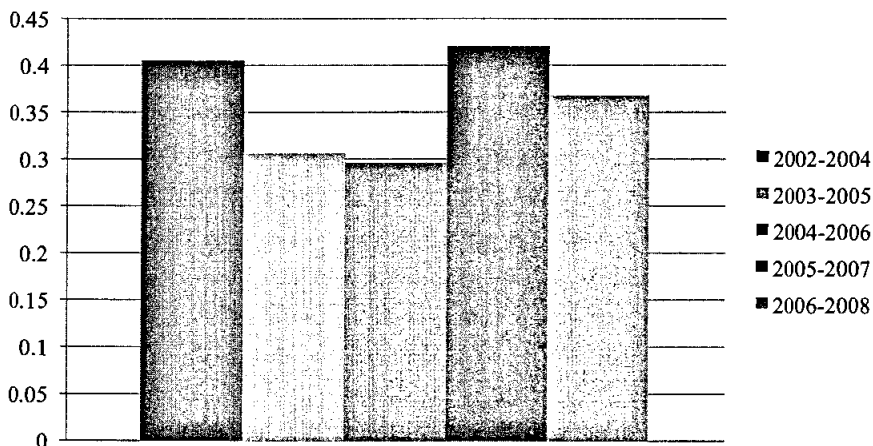


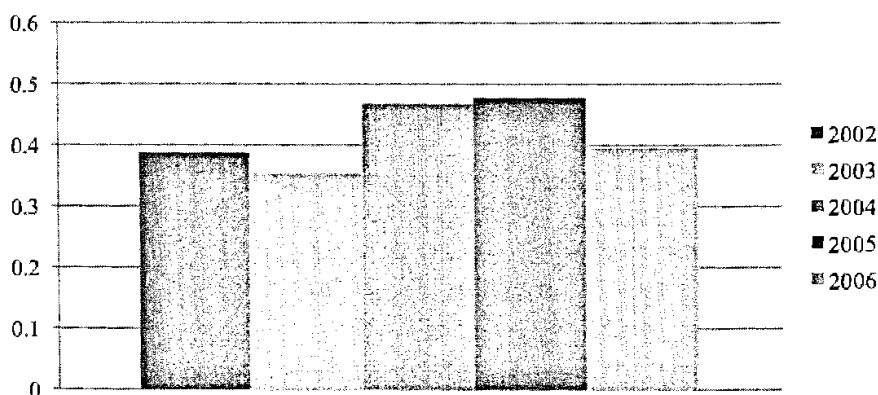
Figure 7 – Predictive validity of SEC English Literature

However, Farrugia and Ventura's suggestion that students with Grades 1 to 3 in SEC English Literature were able to get better grades in MC English than those with similar grades in SEC English Language was tested by calculating the correlation coefficient between Grades 1 to 3 at SEC level and the grades obtained at MC level. The results show that despite the fact that the correlation coefficient between Grades 1 to 3 in SEC English Language and the grades obtained at MC English is lower than the correlation coefficient between Grades 1 to 5 and MC English, it is still higher than the correlation coefficient between Grades 1 to 3 in SEC English Literature and MC English. In three particular cohorts the correlation coefficient between Grades 1 to 3 in SEC English Language and MC English is even higher than the correlation coefficient between Grades 1 to 5 in SEC English Literature and MC English. This shows that the predictive validity of SEC English Literature remains very low irrespective of the grade a candidate actually obtains.

Table 31 – Predictive validity of Grades 1-3 in SEC English Language/Literature

	SEC English Language and MC English	SEC English Literature and MC English
2002-2004	0.435	0.377
2003-2005	0.381	0.315
2004-2006	0.351	0.247
2005-2007	0.396	0.313
2006-2008	0.363	0.233

In order to fully explore the issue, the correlation coefficient between SEC English Language and SEC English Literature was also calculated and it was found that on average this is lower than that between SEC English Language and MC English but higher than that between SEC English Literature and MC English. Figure 8 shows the correlation between SEC English Language and SEC English Literature.

**Figure 8 – Correlation coefficient between SEC Eng. Language and SEC Eng. Literature**

The results show that the predictive validity of SEC English Language and SEC English Literature for MC English was lowest for the 2004-2006 cohort, the same cohort that Farrugia and Ventura analysed. For this particular cohort the correlation coefficient for grades obtained by Junior College students is much lower than that for grades obtained by the entire population of MC English candidates. However, in 2006 the percentage of Junior College students who obtained Grades A to C was higher than the national average. This was not the case in 2004, 2005, 2007 and 2008, in which years the percentage of Junior College students who obtained Grades A to C was lower than the national average for candidates who sat for the Advanced level English examination as part of the Matriculation Certificate. In 2006 29.7% of Junior College students managed to obtain Grades A to C whereas 28% of all candidates managed to do so. As shown by Table 32 the

percentage of candidates who enrolled at Junior College with Grades 1 to 3 in SEC English Language and SEC English Literature was relatively higher in 2004 than in 2002, 2003 and 2005.

Table 32 – Total Grades 1-3 SEC English Language and SEC English Literature

%	2002- 2004	2003- 2005	2004- 2006	2005- 2007	2006- 2008
SEC English Language	72.7	69.1	81.8	72.7	82.0
SEC English Literature	33.6	42.2	45.6	40.5	42.2

Irrespective of the correspondence between high grades obtained by Junior College students at SEC level in 2004 and at MC level in 2006, the correlation coefficient for this particular cohort is still the lowest for all five cohorts. As shown above this can be explained by the fact that in 2006 a relatively high percentage of candidates with Grades 1 to 3 in SEC English Language obtained a Grade F in MC English and a relatively high percentage of candidates with Grades 4 and 5 in SEC English Literature managed to obtain Grades A to C.

Table 33 and Figure 9 summarise the results of the correlational research conducted in this study and they primarily show that the correlation between the SEC English examinations and the MC English examination is too low for one to confidently predict candidates' performance in the latter examination based on their performance in the former.

Table 33 – Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient

	SEC English Language and SEC English Literature		SEC English Language and MC English	SEC English Literature and MC English	Grades 1-3 SEC English Language and MC English	Grades 1-3 SEC English Literature and MC English
2002	0.387	2002- 2004	0.443	0.405	0.435	0.377
2003	0.353	2003- 2005	0.457	0.306	0.381	0.315
2004	0.467	2004- 2006	0.407	0.296	0.351	0.247
2005	0.477	2005- 2007	0.523	0.420	0.396	0.313
2006	0.395	2006- 2008	0.481	0.368	0.363	0.233

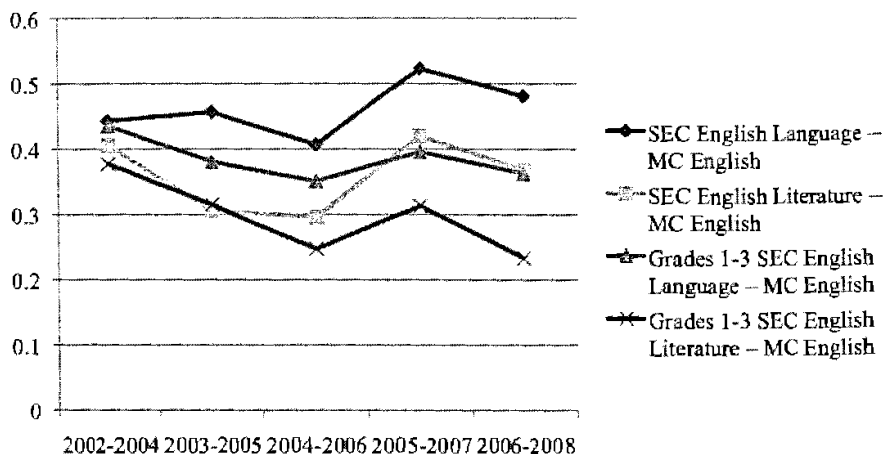


Figure 9 – Correlation coefficient between SEC English Language/SEC English Literature and MC English

4.2 Student Survey

As part of this study's attempt to explore reasons for candidates' poor performance in the MC English examination it was necessary to survey the Advanced Level English population at Junior College in an effort to understand the students' motivation for choosing to study English at MC Level, their study routines and their attitudes towards the subject. A questionnaire (Appendix 3) composed of twenty questions was distributed by lecturers amongst the 437 students currently studying English at Advanced level. Students were asked to complete the questionnaire at home and to return it to their lecturer. The return rate was that of 404, that is, 92.4% of the total Advanced level English student population. Tables and graphs were created in order to present the students' responses.

4.2.1 Reasons for Choosing to Study English at MC Level

The first question the students were asked concerned the reasons for which they chose to study English at Junior College. The question was in the form of a four-point Likert scale and the students were asked to tick only one out of a choice of four options for each one of the twenty-three reasons presented. Table 34 shows the percentage of students who ticked one of the four options for each one of the twenty-three reasons and the data is sorted according to the highest percentages for 'Strongly Agree' followed by 'Agree' followed by 'Strongly Disagree' and 'Disagree'. The shaded areas represent the highest percentages registered for each one of the four options and hence the

reasons that the respondents consider to have been the most important motivating factors behind their decision to study English at Advanced level.

Table 34 – Reasons for choosing to study English at Advanced level

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
N=404				
I chose to study English at Junior College because:	%	%	%	%
I love reading in English	58.4	29.7	8.4	3.5
I need a pass in English for the University course I intend to follow	33.2	38.1	19.8	8.9
I love literature	27.2	45.5	17.8	9.4
I got a good grade in my SEC English Language exam	26.2	66.8	5.9	1.0
English is a global language	26.2	46.0	20.3	7.4
I'm good at it	21.3	70.8	6.9	1.0
I got a good grade in my SEC English Literature exam	20.3	53.5	18.3	7.9
I want to continue studying the subject	19.8	57.9	19.8	2.5
it is Malta's second language	16.8	46.0	30.2	6.9
I'm not so good at sciences	14.9	32.7	34.2	18.3
I want to teach English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)	14.4	41.6	33.7	10.4
I want to become a teacher	13.1	7.4	50.5	29.0
I want to become a lawyer	11.9	6.4	32.7	49.0
I want to continue studying English at postgraduate level	11.4	46.5	36.6	5.4
I consider it to be my native language	5.9	9.9	62.4	21.8
I felt that the other subjects were more difficult	3.0	18.3	39.1	39.6
I felt there was nothing else to choose	3.0	9.9	31.7	55.4
it is not a difficult subject	1.5	13.9	40.6	44.1
my parents influenced my decision to choose English	1.5	5.9	30.2	62.4
it does not require a lot of studying	1.5	2.5	29.7	66.3
it provides me with a lot of free time	1.0	6.9	34.7	57.4
it is easy	0.0	13.9	44.1	42.1
my friends influenced my decision to choose English	0.0	2.5	21.8	75.7

Gardner's goal-directed theory of motivation explains that second language learners adopt either an instrumental or an integrative orientation when choosing to learn a second language,

however, Dörnyei found that a student achieves a high proficiency in a language if an instrumental orientation is combined with an integrative one. Table 34 shows that both an instrumental and an integrative orientation play a role in the students' motivation for studying English at Advanced level. In fact, the top three reasons for choosing English are made up of instrumental and integrative reasons. More than 88% of the respondents claimed that they chose to study English because they love reading and 72.7% declared that they did so because they love literature. Both of these manifest an integrative orientation. However, 71.3% claimed that their choice was influenced by the fact that they need a pass in English for the University course they intend to follow and this is most evidently a sign of an instrumental orientation. Dörnyei's tri-level model embraces both instrumental and integrative orientations as well as the situations in which learning takes place. The Language Level, for example, has to do with orientations and motives concerning various aspects of the L2 and these determine the learners' choice of language and their goals for studying that language. This probably explains why 93% of the respondents said that their motivation for choosing English consisted of the fact that they did well in the SEC English Language examination. Nearly three quarters of the respondents confirmed that they chose English because of their good performance in the SEC English Literature examination and 92.1% did so because they feel they are good at the subject. Since these students chose to study a subject that they consider themselves good at, these reasons for choosing to study English at Advanced level also manifest a need for achievement and self-confidence, both of which play an important role in Dörnyei's Learner Level. Other popular reasons chosen by a high percentage of the respondents that have to do with Dörnyei's Language Level are related to the role English plays in Malta and on an international scale. More than 72% of the respondents agreed that they chose to study English at Junior College because it is a global language and 62.8% chose to do so because English is Malta's second language.

Dörnyei affirmed that in a second language learning context instrumental orientation is much more influential on language learners and in fact Table 34 shows that another two reasons that registered high percentages of agreement were instrumental in nature. More than half of the respondents claimed that they chose to study English at Advanced level because they want to take up TEFL and a roughly equal number of respondents did so because they want to continue studying English at postgraduate level. However, only 20.5% and 18.3% of the respondents declared that what determined their choice of subject was the prospect of becoming a teacher or a lawyer respectively. These instrumental reasons form part of Dörnyei's Learning Situation Level, in which motivation is influenced by course specific motives among others. Course specific motives are all described in terms of the learners' interest, relevance to their lives, their expectations of success and

feelings of being in control, and satisfaction with the outcomes. Related to this level of motivation as well is another frequently chosen reason for studying English at Junior College – not being good at sciences – with which nearly half of the respondents expressed agreement.

The main reasons that respondents disagreed with can also be elucidated by means of reference to theories of motivation. Group specific motives form part of Dörnyei's Learning Situation Level and these are bound to the influence exerted on the learners by the social groups they form part of. Almost none of the respondents agreed with the idea that they chose English because they were influenced by their friends and only 7.4% declared that they were influenced by their parents. Course specific motives also inform some of the reasons that the respondents disagreed with. For example, only around 15% agreed with the suggestion that their choice was motivated by the idea that English is not difficult, around 14% with the idea that it is easy, around 4% that it does not require a lot of studying, around 8% that it provides one with a lot of free time, and around 21% that other subjects were more difficult. Moreover, only around 18% and 20% agreed with the idea that they chose to study English because they want to become lawyers or teachers respectively. Somewhat related to the course specific motives of Dörnyei's Learning Situation Level is another reason that a high percentage of students disagreed with, that is, the suggestion that they chose English because they felt there was nothing else to choose, refuted by 87.1% of the respondents.

I chose to study English at Junior College because:

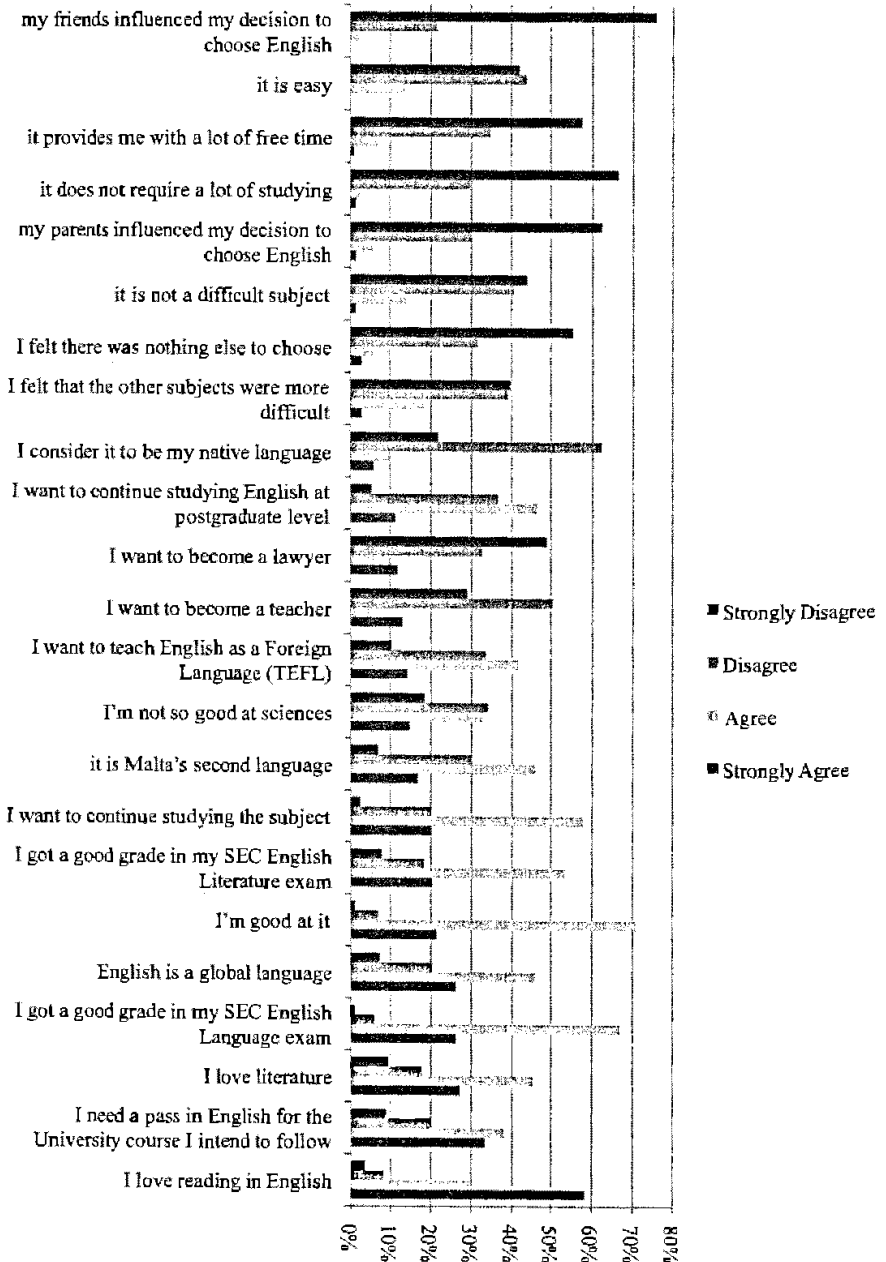


Figure 10 – Reasons for choosing to study English at Advanced level at Junior College

Just over 84% of the respondents disagree with the suggestion that they chose to study English at Junior College because they consider it to be their native language and this comes as no surprise when considering the fact that more than 80% of the respondents claimed that Maltese is their native language. This shows that for the majority of students English is a second language and hence learning and teaching methods need to reflect this reality.

Which is your native language?

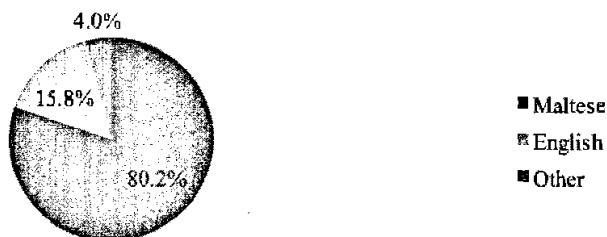


Figure 11 -- Respondents' native language

4.2.2 Study Habits and Language Practice

In order to form a better picture of the students' attitude towards English and their relationship with the subject they were asked a number of questions concerning frequency of spoken English, study habits, reading preferences and writing practice. When asked about how often they speak English, the majority of the respondents claimed that they speak it at least sometimes. As shown by Figure 12 even though they are not formally assessed for oral proficiency when they sit for the MC English examination, students studying English at Junior College still find themselves in situations in which they have to make use of their speaking skills.

How often do you speak English?

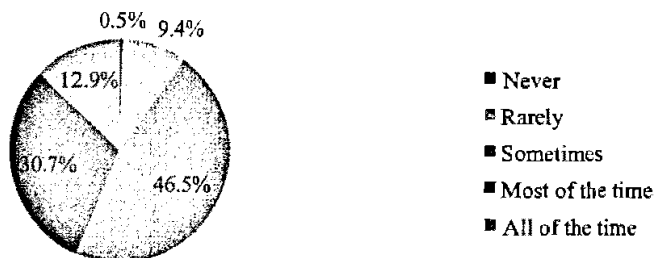


Figure 12 -- Frequency of spoken English

When asked about the amount of time they spend studying English at home each week the vast majority of the students replied that they spend more than three hours studying the subject. In fact, 72.2% spend between 3 and 10 hours per week and only 26 respondents out of a total of 404 claimed that they do not study the subject at all.

How many hours do you spend studying English at home per week?

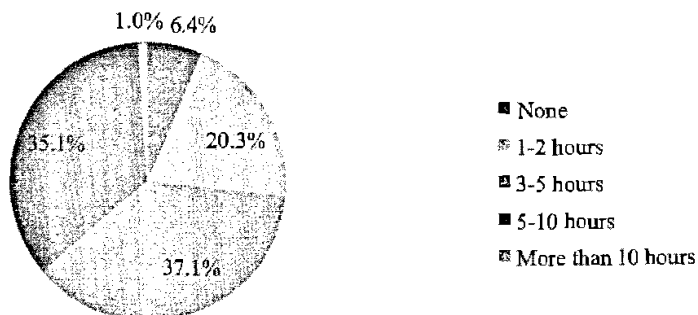


Figure 13 – Number of hours spent studying English at home per week

Respondents were also asked to rank a choice of eight different forms of reading material in terms of which they read most and least. Table 35 shows that the majority of students mostly prefer reading novels, magazines and websites in that order. Nearly a half of the respondents ranked novels as their first preference when it comes to reading material while more than a quarter ranked magazines as their second most preferred reading material. Digital media are currently vying with the print media and the data shows that 28% of sixteen- to eighteen-year-old Advanced level English students consider websites as the third most preferred form of reading material. Comics are the least read material and in fact 47.8% ranked them at the bottom of the list.

Table 35 – Ranking of reading material in English in terms of ‘read most’

N=404									
%	(read most) 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	(read least) 8	TOTAL
Magazines	19.8	25.7	14.4	14.1	18.1	4.0	2.0	2.0	100.0
Websites	24.0	20.3	28.0	17.8	4.2	4.0	1.7	0.0	100.0
Novels	48.3	17.8	9.9	11.9	6.2	4.0	2.0	0.0	100.0
Non-fiction books	5.9	10.4	15.8	24.0	20.0	15.8	4.0	4.0	100.0
Poetry	0.0	8.2	2.0	8.2	5.9	25.7	26.0	24.0	100.0
Drama	0.0	5.4	4.2	11.9	13.9	22.0	34.4	8.2	100.0
Newspapers	2.0	10.1	15.8	6.2	23.8	9.9	18.1	14.1	100.0
Comics	0.0	2.0	9.9	5.9	7.9	14.6	11.9	47.8	100.0

Table 36 shows that despite the fact that one of the staple features of the MC English examination is considered to be the most preferred form of reading material, students seem to read poetry and drama only for examination purposes and not as part of their extensive reading.

Table 36 – Final ranking of reading material in English in terms of ‘read most’

Novels	1 st
Magazines	2 nd
Websites	3 rd
Non-fiction books	4 th
Newspapers	5 th
Poetry	6 th
Drama	7 th
Comics	8 th

Figure 14 depicts the ranking of the eight different forms of reading material in English.

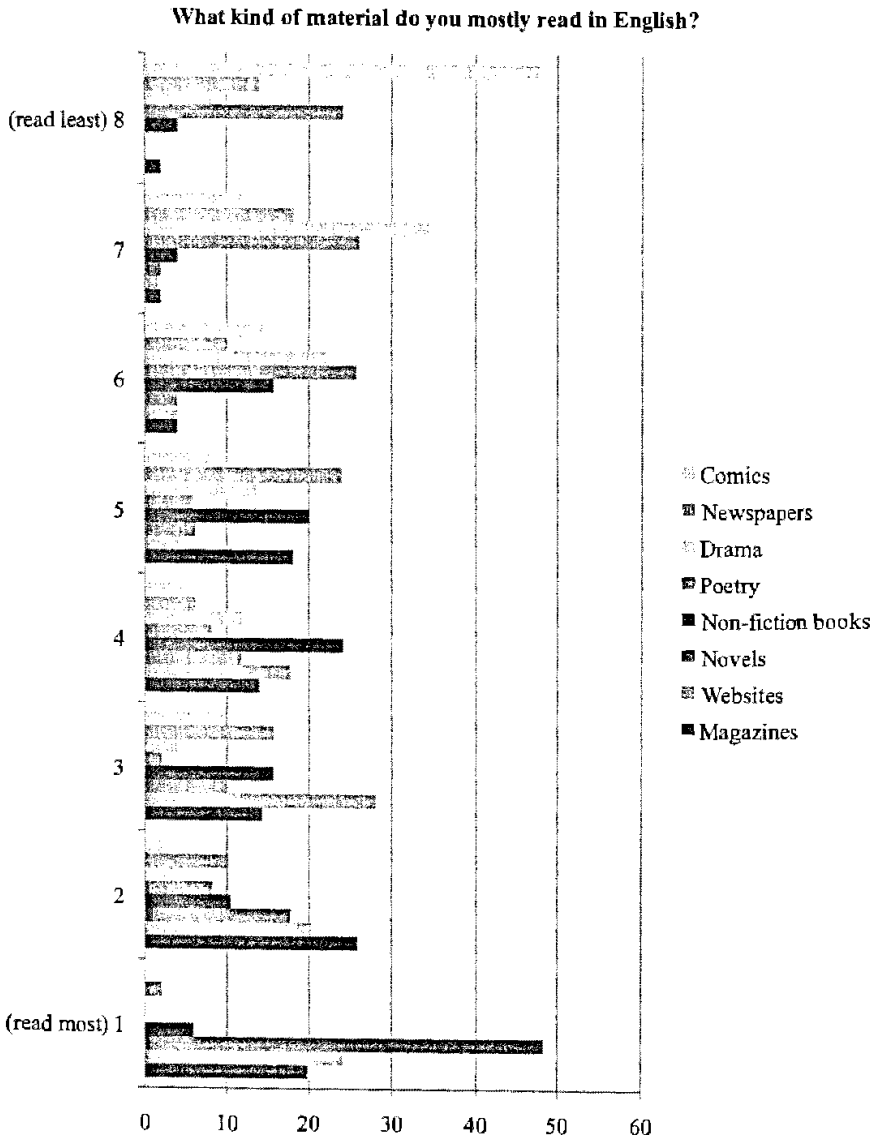


Figure 14 – Ranking of reading material in English in terms of ‘read most’

When respondents were asked about the amount of books they read in English every year it was found that in excess of 65% of the students read more than five books in English per year and

this compares very well with recent European and national statistics.⁵ Only 40 out of the 404 respondents claimed to read between one and two books or none at all. Figure 15 shows that the majority of students studying English at Advanced level enjoy reading in English and read a reasonable number of books every year.

How many books do you read in English per year?

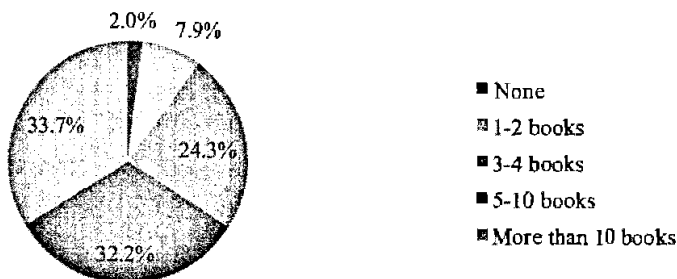


Figure 15 -- Number of books read in English per year

The respondents were asked to report how many essays they write in English per week and the majority indicated at least one essay every week. At Junior College all Advanced level students are assigned an essay on a weekly basis and students are obliged to write this essay and present it to their tutorial teacher in order to receive an assessment mark at the end of each term. The fact that more than half of the respondents write more than one essay per week indicates that a number of students attend private tuition classes after school hours and that a number of lecturers assign essays during language and literary criticism seminars. The fact that the majority of students engage in a minimum of writing practice every week shows that writing skills are given considerable importance by both students and lecturers. This reflects the weight that is given to writing skills in the MC English examination.

⁵ A September 2007 Eurobarometer survey reports that 71% of EU27 citizens read at least one book a year, with 37% of the sample being 'high frequency' readers, that is, 'they read a book more than five times a year' (13). 45% of Maltese citizens read at least one book per year and 19% read more than five. Source: *Special Eurobarometer 278: European Cultural Values*, September 2007. European Commission. A 2007 National Statistics Office survey found that 38% of the Maltese population consider reading to be one of their main hobbies. It was also reported that '59.8 per cent of the adult population with a tertiary level of education indicated reading as one of their hobbies while among the adult population with no schooling, only 9.4 per cent indicated that reading is one of their hobbies' (1). Source: 'Lifestyle Survey 2007 - Newsletter'. 3 December 2008. National Statistics Office; 'World Book and Copyright Day 2009 - News Release'. 22 April 2009. National Statistics Office.

How many essays in English do you write per week?

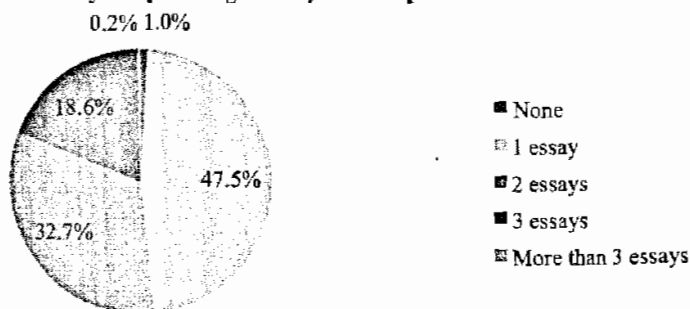


Figure 16 – Number of essays written in English per week

4.2.3 Attitude towards Essay Types and Examination Components

As shown by Tables 37 and 38, 36.9% of the respondents claimed that the narrative essay is the type of essay they prefer writing most. This is followed by the descriptive essay, which is the second most preferred essay type for 37.1% of the respondents, and the argumentative/discursive essay type, which was ranked third in order of preference by 28.7% of the respondents. Therefore it is clear that the three essay types that registered the highest percentages are all essays that the respondents would have learned to write in secondary school. Even though those respondents who enrolled in the MC English course at Junior College with a pass in SEC English Literature would have gained some practice in the writing of essays based on set literary texts, what is expected of students at SEC level is much more basic than what is expected of them at Advanced level. Students ranked literary criticism essays at the bottom of the list and this is probably because students learn to write such essays when they start their studies at Junior College.

Table 37 – Ranking of essay types in terms of 'prefer most'

N=404						
%	(prefer most) 1	2	3	4	(prefer least) 5	TOTAL
Narrative essays	36.9	14.1	20.0	14.6	14.4	100.0
Argumentative/discursive essays	24.3	20.3	28.7	17.3	9.4	100.0
Descriptive essays	12.1	37.1	19.8	20.3	10.6	100.0
Literary criticism essays	14.9	12.1	19.1	16.6	37.4	100.0
Essays based on set literature texts	11.9	16.3	12.4	31.2	28.2	100.0

Table 38 – Final ranking of essay types in terms of 'prefer most'

Narrative essays	1 st
Descriptive essays	2 nd
Argumentative/discursive essays	3 rd
Essays based on set literature texts	4 th
Literary criticism essays	5 th

Figure 17 depicts the ranking of the five different essay types.

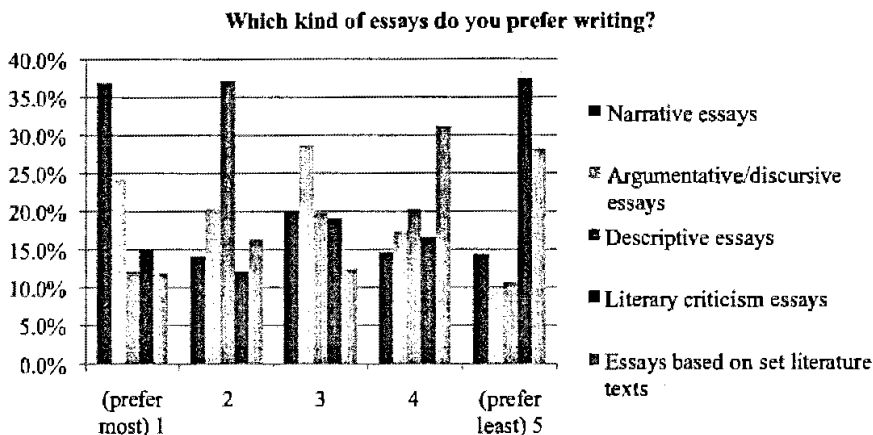


Figure 17 – Ranking of essay types in terms of 'prefer most'

When respondents were asked to rank the same essay types in terms of which they consider the most challenging and the least challenging it was predictably found that those essay types which students prefer writing most are the ones they find least challenging and vice versa. Tables 39 and 40 show that the essay type respondents claimed to be the most challenging is the literary criticism essay, considered so by 53.5% of the respondents. The least challenging essay on the other hand is the narrative essay, considered so by 55.9% of the respondents. This shows that for students preference and amount of challenge seem to go hand in hand. They enjoy writing essays that are not so challenging and are discouraged by essay types that they find challenging to master. Once again it is seen that most probably literary criticism essays are perceived so negatively by students because they are not familiar with this essay type and its particular demands prior to their enrolment on the MC English course. Another reason for this negative attitude could be the nature of this essay type and its particular demands. Nonetheless, this negative attitude in relation to literary criticism is

translated into poor performance and even failure in the examination as is evidenced by the examiners' remarks about this component:

As regards literary criticism (prose), a feature of this year's Advanced Level examination in English was the dispiritingly high number of very weak scripts, which in turn led to a high number of failures... The declining standards remarked upon above were reflected in the essays written in response to the Literary Criticism question devoted to analysis of the prose passage (*Examiners' Report 2005/9*).

If students fare so badly in the literary criticism components, one must question whether it is absolutely necessary to have two almost identical components that are making it excessively hard for candidates to pass the examination even if they do well in the other components.

Table 39 – Ranking of essay types in terms of 'most challenging'

N=404						
%	(most challenging) 1	2	3	4	(least challenging) 5	TOTAL
Narrative essays	11.9	7.9	12.1	12.1	55.9	100.0
Argumentative/ discursive essays	14.6	19.8	30.0	17.8	17.8	100.0
Descriptive essays	7.9	22.3	19.8	37.9	12.1	100.0
Literary criticism essays	53.5	22.0	10.1	8.2	6.2	100.0
Essays based on set literature texts	12.1	28.0	28.0	24.0	7.9	100.0

Table 40 – Final ranking of essay types in terms of 'most challenging'

Literary criticism essays	1 st
Essays based on set literature texts	2 nd
Argumentative/discursive essays	3 rd
Descriptive essays	4 th
Narrative essays	5 th

Figure 18 depicts the ranking of the five different essay types in terms of how challenging the respondents find them to be.

Which essays do you find the most challenging to write?

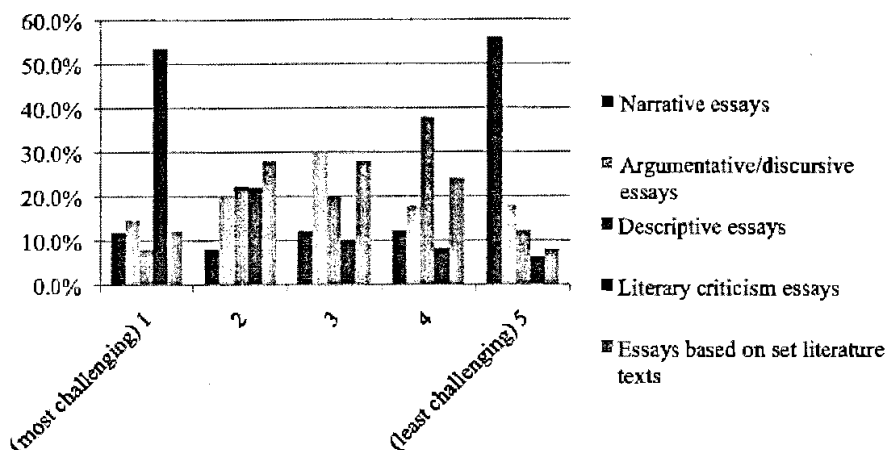


Figure 18 – Ranking of essay types in terms of ‘most challenging’

In an effort to understand the students’ relationship with and opinion of the MC English examination, the questionnaire contained two questions that asked the respondents to rank the nine components of the examination in terms of two different criteria. The first required the respondents to rank the nine components in terms of which components they consider themselves to be most good at. Tables 41 and 42 show that the majority of the students studying English at Junior College consider themselves to be most good at those components with which they were already familiar when they started their Advanced level studies, hence the language essay and the comprehension and summary. In fact, these were ranked in first and second place by 37.9% and 31.7% of the respondents respectively. Shakespeare’s *King Lear* was ranked fourth and this betrays the fact that a large number of students are already familiar with Shakespeare’s work via their secondary education studies since Shakespeare is a staple component of the SEC English Literature syllabus. Linguistics was ranked seventh by 18.1% of the respondents and this reflects the strong dislike to the subject that most students expressed when answering other questions forming part of this survey.

Literary criticism occupies the two bottom places in the list and this shows that students do not consider themselves to be so good at a subject of which they have no prior experience. In fact, the examiners attest to the fact that candidates’ essays on unseen poems are ‘marked by poor use of English and by the tendency to present formulaic essay structures’ and they also criticize ‘the tendency to paraphrase the poem, often to the extent of indulging in a line-by-line “commentary”

that states the obvious without contributing anything to an understanding of the text' (*Examiners' Report 2007* 3). As regards critical essays on unseen prose passages, the examiners affirm that 'The inability to analyze a text critically by paying attention to issues relating to content, as well as form, coupled with a very poor command of the English language inevitably led to a substantial amount of essays that were below average' (*Examiners' Report 2007* 6). The student's poor performance when writing literary criticism essays seems to show that for these particular components they are entirely dependent on their own writing skills and thus unable to rely on lecture notes and other material, which they tend to 'regurgitate' (*Examiners' Report 2006* 2) in the other components.

Table 41 – Ranking of examination components in terms of 'most good at'

N=404									
%	(most good) 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	(least good) 9
Shakespeare's <i>King Lear</i>	2.0	22.3	7.9	17.8	11.9	20.0	5.9	4.0	8.2
Wilfred Owen's Poetry	2.0	2.0	7.9	12.1	16.1	11.6	15.8	16.3	16.1
Literary Criticism: poetry (unseen)	7.9	4.0	6.2	5.9	10.1	10.1	11.9	23.8	20.0
Margaret Atwood's <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>	4.0	5.9	2.0	4.0	9.9	22.0	6.2	22.3	23.8
John Steinbeck's <i>Of Mice and Men</i>	26.5	8.2	23.8	15.8	11.9	2.0	9.9	2.0	0.0
Literary Criticism: prose (unseen)	2.0	4.0	5.9	6.2	11.9	13.9	10.4	19.8	26.0
Language Essay	37.9	16.1	7.9	12.1	8.2	5.9	7.9	2.0	2.0
Comprehension and Summary	9.9	31.7	16.3	13.9	11.9	2.5	13.9	0.0	0.0
Linguistics	7.9	5.9	22.0	12.1	8.2	11.9	18.1	9.9	4.0

Table 42 – Final ranking of examination components in terms of 'most good at'

Language Essay	1 st
Comprehension and Summary	2 nd
John Steinbeck's <i>Of Mice and Men</i>	3 rd
Shakespeare's <i>King Lear</i>	4 th
Wilfred Owen's Poetry	5 th
Margaret Atwood's <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>	6 th
Linguistics	7 th
Literary Criticism: poetry (unseen)	8 th
Literary Criticism: prose (unseen)	9 th

Figure 19 shows the ranking of the nine components forming part of the MC English examination in terms of the components in which respondents consider themselves to be most good at.

Which of the nine examination components do you consider yourself to be most good at?

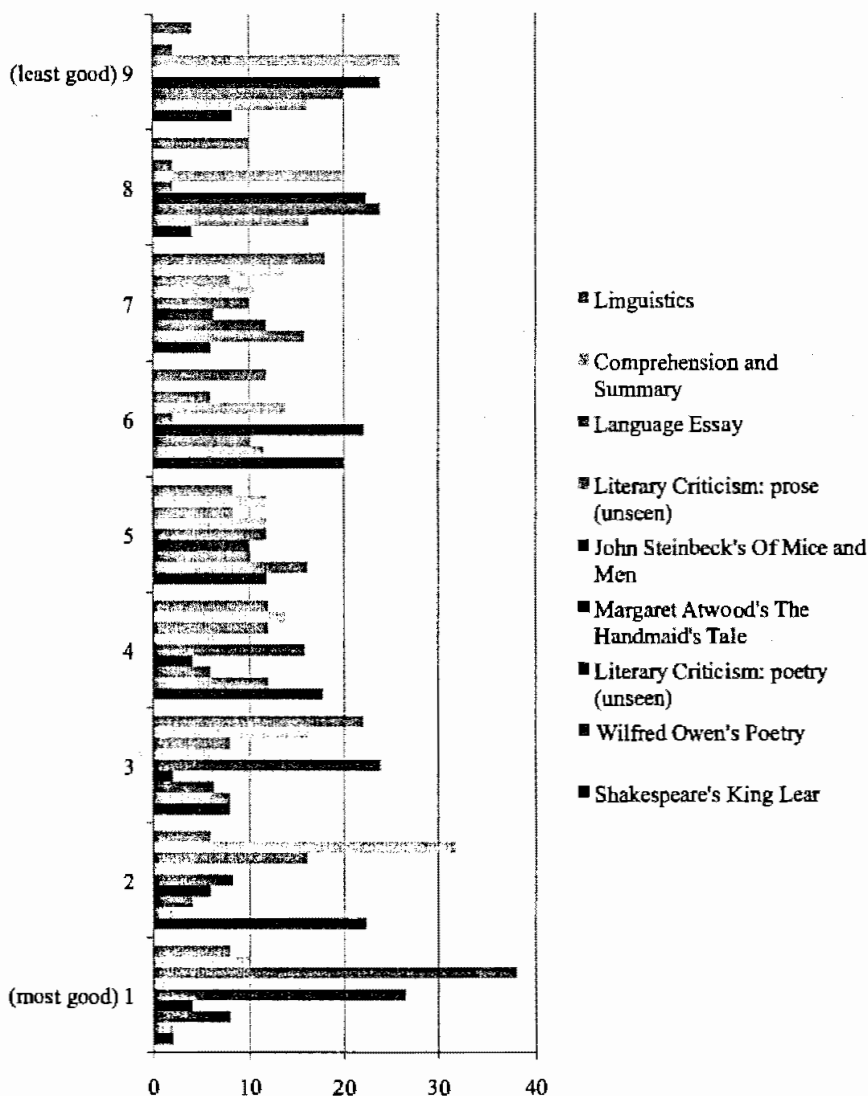


Figure 19 – Ranking of examination components in terms of 'most good at'

When the respondents were asked to rank the nine examination components in terms of which they find the most challenging the majority of them answered that literary criticism and linguistics are the most challenging components. In relation to this the examiners point out that 'Very few students managed to write a 400-word critical essay, which seemed to be a challenging task' (*Examiners Report 2006 3*). Besides showing that the students lack the necessary writing skills to tackle this particular task satisfactorily, this also shows that what the students do not feel familiar with they also consider to be rather more challenging than what they have plenty of experience in. In fact, the language essay and the reading comprehension and summary were ranked eighth and ninth respectively by 30% and 42.1% of the respondents.

However, even though 17.8% of the respondents ranked Shakespeare's *King Lear* as being the fourth component they consider themselves to be most good at, when asked to rank it in terms of how challenging it is they still ranked it in fourth place rather than sixth. This shows that it is not necessarily a rule that what students reckon themselves to be quite good at they find less challenging. In fact, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* was ranked in sixth place in the previous question but when respondents were asked to rank it in terms of how challenging they find it to be they still ranked it in the sixth position, showing that they regard it to be less challenging than *King Lear* even though they consider themselves to be much better at this particular component. The examiners maintain that whereas 'Paper Two, particularly the section regarding novels, is usually the area where most candidates fare best' (*Examiners Report 2007 3*), 'Paper One poses serious difficulties, since students tend to find poetry and drama less accessible than prose' (*Examiners Report 2006 2*).

Table 43 – Ranking of examination components in terms of 'most challenging'

N=404	(most challenging)									(least challenging)
	%	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Shakespeare's <i>King Lear</i>		5.9	5.9	14.1	21.8	14.1	13.9	16.1	4.0	4.2
Wilfred Owen's Poetry		10.1	5.9	10.4	14.1	17.8	14.4	5.9	2.0	19.3
Literary Criticism: poetry (unseen)		20.3	34.2	5.9	15.8	7.9	4.0	5.9	4.0	2.0
Margaret Atwood's <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>		7.9	14.1	9.9	17.8	12.1	21.8	8.4	5.9	2.0
John Steinbeck's <i>Of Mice and Men</i>		2.0	0.0	4.0	7.9	15.8	14.1	20.0	20.3	15.8
Literary Criticism: prose (unseen)		31.9	26.0	14.1	4.2	7.9	9.9	4.0	2.0	0.0
Language Essay		2.0	7.9	7.9	6.2	8.2	6.2	17.8	30.0	13.9
Comprehension and Summary		0.0	2.0	5.9	2.2	7.9	5.9	11.9	22.0	42.1
Linguistics		19.8	4.0	27.7	9.9	8.2	9.9	9.9	9.9	0.7

Table 44 – Final ranking of examination components in terms of 'most challenging'

Literary Criticism: prose (unseen)	1 st
Literary Criticism: poetry (unseen)	2 nd
Linguistics	3 rd
Shakespeare's <i>King Lear</i>	4 th
Wilfred Owen's Poetry	5 th
Margaret Atwood's <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>	6 th
John Steinbeck's <i>Of Mice and Men</i>	7 th
Language Essay	8 th
Comprehension and Summary	9 th

Figure 20 depicts the ranking of the nine components forming part of the MC English examination in terms of which components the respondents consider to be most challenging.

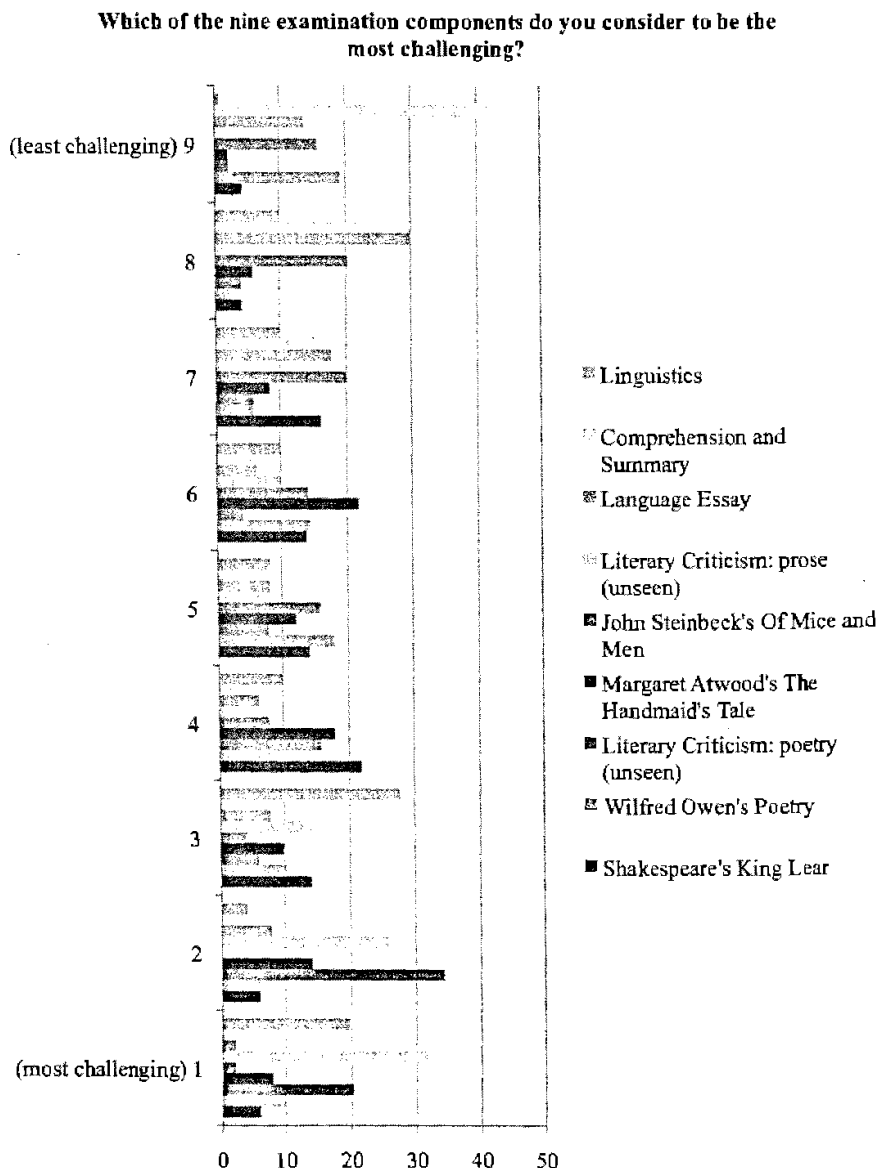


Figure 20 – Ranking of examination components in terms of 'most challenging'

4.2.4 Attitude towards Proficiency and Four Skills

In an attempt to understand what Advanced level English students believe to constitute proficiency in a language they were asked an open question that was answered in a variety of ways by the respondents. The vast majority of students listed more than one element and these were grouped together as shown in Figure 21.

The results show that speaking and reading are regarded as being the defining qualities of a proficient user of a language. In fact, just over a third of the respondents consider speaking to be the main characteristic of proficiency in a language while 33.9% consider reading to be so. The fact that speaking skills registered the highest percentage of references shows that most probably students feel that the MC English examination is not really assessing them as holistically as possible. Reading plays a crucial role in the students' preparation for the examination since most of the knowledge they will derive during their two-year course will be derived via reading a variety of texts. Writing was mentioned by less than a quarter of the respondents and this shows that students are fully aware of its fundamental role both when it comes to sitting for the examination and in the world beyond the classroom. Fluency was the fourth most mentioned element and this shows that for most students a proficient language user is someone who can speak and write the language as fluently as possible. While the MC English examination demands a high degree of written fluency it entirely neglects spoken fluency. The examination also gives a lot of importance to accuracy but for the majority of the respondents this is not one of the defining components of language proficiency. Listening was mentioned by only 3% of the respondents and this shows that when compared to the other three skills, students do not consider it to be as important as one of the defining qualities of a proficient language user. However, 6.4% mentioned comprehension and this element might encompass both reading and listening skills.

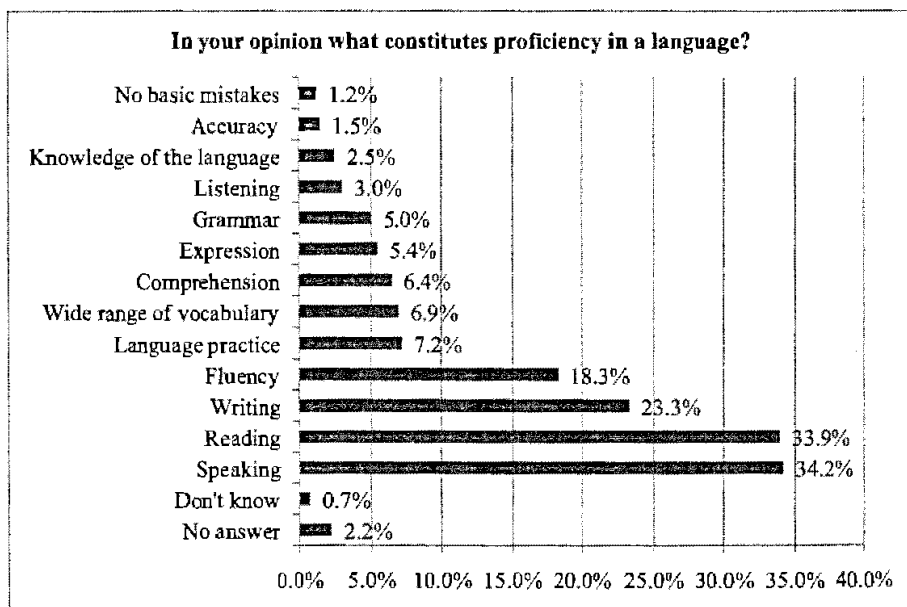


Figure 21 – Elements constituting proficiency in a language

The respondents were asked to rank the four skills in terms of which skills they consider themselves to be most good at. As shown by Tables 45 and 46, 43.6% of them claimed that they are mostly good at reading English while a third of the respondents feel that they are least good at speaking English. Here we see that what the respondents identified as being the two main elements constituting proficiency in a language in the previous question now stand at the extreme ends of the continuum. Hence students regard themselves as being most competent when it comes to one of the main elements of proficiency and lacking when it comes to the other main element. Obviously the MC English examination is enabling them to bolster their reading skills by requiring them to reach a high level of proficiency when it comes to these skills, however, by not assessing their oral proficiency the examination is basically depriving them of the opportunity of honing their speaking skills in a formal classroom environment. Both speaking and writing are considered to be productive skills and this is probably one of the reasons why students felt that they needed to rank them as being the skills in which they are least competent. The fact that 30% of the respondents ranked writing in third place is somewhat worrying given the nature of the MC English examination.

On the other hand, reading and listening occupy the first two positions and one of the reasons for this is that they are receptive skills. It must be pointed out that even though listening

was ranked in second place, in the previous question it was not considered as one of the main elements of what constitutes proficiency in a language. This seems to expose the misconception that listening is considered to be a skill that an individual develops effortlessly and that formal mastery needs not be engaged in, a misconception that is reinforced by the absence of the assessment of listening skills as part of the MC English examination.

Table 45 – Ranking of four skills in terms of ‘most good at’

N=404					
%	(most good) 1	2	3	(least good) 4	TOTAL
Listening to English	18.3	31.2	25.7	24.8	100.0
Reading English	43.6	30.2	16.3	9.9	100.0
Speaking English	24.3	14.4	28.0	33.4	100.0
Writing in English	13.9	24.3	30.0	31.9	100.0

Table 46 – Final ranking of four skills in terms of ‘most good at’

Reading English	1 st
Listening to English	2 nd
Writing in English	3 rd
Speaking English	4 th

Figure 22 shows the ranking of the four skills in terms of which skills the respondents consider themselves to be most good at.

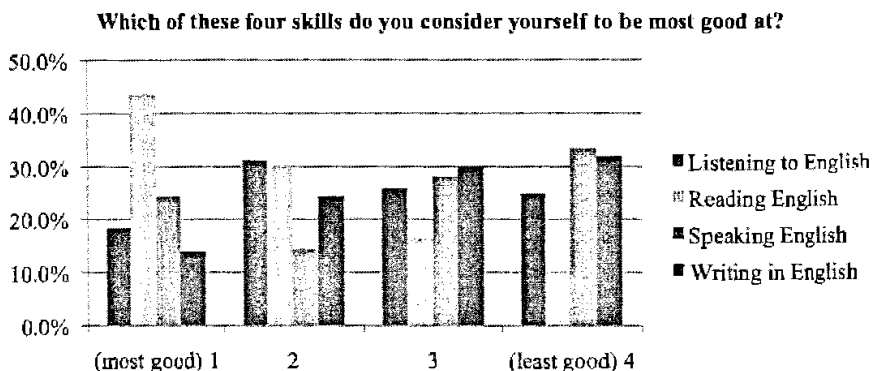


Figure 22 – Ranking of four skills in terms of ‘most good at’

4.2.5 Feedback on the MC English Course

In order to determine whether the students studying English at MC level at Junior College are actually satisfied with their course of studies, the respondents were asked to tick one of four options that expressed different degrees of satisfaction. The absolute majority of the respondents claimed that they are satisfied with the MC English course at Junior college and only 12.4% of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the course. This shows that the majority of Advanced level students are on the whole quite satisfied with the course as it is currently stands.

How satisfied are you with the MC English course at Junior College?



Figure 23 – Satisfaction with MC English course at Junior College

This overall sense of satisfaction is also confirmed by how the respondents answered an open question asking them to indicate the changes they would like to see being implemented in the MC English course at Junior College. The majority of the respondents claimed that the course is satisfactory as it is. However, Figure 24 shows that a number of suggestions registered relatively

higher percentages, primarily those related to teaching, the syllabus and linguistics. In fact, 15.8% asked for more interesting and interactive lessons and this is echoed by another three suggestions, one asking for better teaching, one asking for consistency amongst lecturers, and one asking for more support from lecturers.

A significant number of respondents made suggestions in relation to the syllabus and course content. For example, 15.3% asked for a better choice of set books and 14.4% for the inclusion of oral practice and assessment. A total of 68.8% of the respondents made suggestions in relation to the linguistics component and this seems to show that the students are not highly satisfied with this component and that linguistics is the chief course component in which students wish to see major changes happening. Moreover, a noteworthy amount of respondents asked for increased practice in writing and this shows that for nearly a quarter of the respondents writing is a skill that they wish to receive further assistance with.

**What changes would you like to see being implemented in the
Matriculation English course at Junior College?**

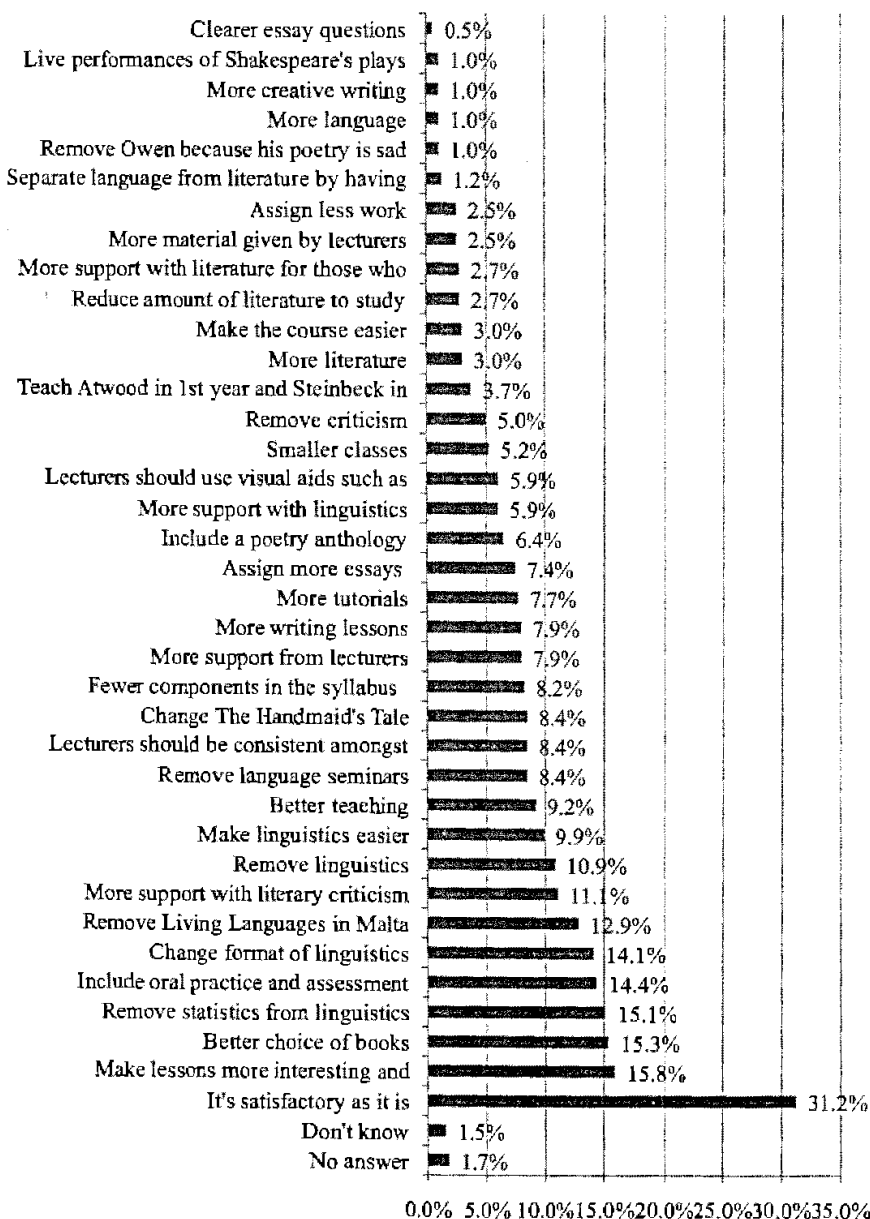


Figure 24 – Changes to be implemented in the Matriculation English course at Junior College

4.2.6 Future Aspirations

In an attempt to understand what Advanced level English students intend to do after they finish their studies at Junior College the respondents were asked a number of questions about their future aspirations in relation to work and study. When asked whether they intend to continue their studies at university once they receive their Matriculation Certificate the vast majority of the respondents answered in the affirmative. Only 4% said that they do not intend to do so while the remaining 13.9% do not know yet.

In 2007 Malta's 49 licensed E.F.L. schools⁶ received an intake of 86, 593 students⁷ from all over the world. Given that Malta's population in July 2008 was estimated at approximately 403, 532,⁸ the number of E.F.L. students is roughly comparable to 22.2% of the local population. Due to the fact that the E.F.L. industry in Malta is worth €80 million⁹ and given that one of the possible routes to becoming a T.E.F.L. teacher is by obtaining a pass in the MC English examination, the respondents were asked to indicate whether they intend to teach English as a foreign language if they obtain a pass in the Advanced English examination. While 43.1% claimed that they intend to do so, 37.1% declared that they do not know yet. This shows that most of the Advanced level English students at Junior College perceive the MC examination as a means of earning income as well as of furthering their studies at university.

The respondents were asked to indicate which university course they intend to follow once they finish their studies at Junior College and as shown by Figure 25 the majority of them wish to read for a Bachelor of Education or for a Bachelor of Law. The former stipulates that a pass in the MC English examination is needed if students wish to specialize in the teaching of English. As shown by other results collected during this study not all those students who wish to read for a B.Ed. degree intend to become teachers of English and not all of those who wish to read for a B.A. degree intend to specialize in English. Hence this raises a number of questions about the content of the MC English course and whether it is fully addressing the needs of those students who choose to study Advanced level English for a variety of other purposes and not just those of studying English or the teaching of English at undergraduate level.

⁶ Source: 'English Language Schools.' English as a Foreign Language Schools' Monitoring Board.

⁷ Source: 'Policy Guidelines.' English as a Foreign Language Schools' Monitoring Board.

⁸ Source: *The 2008 World Factbook*. Central Intelligence Agency.

⁹ Source: Ripard, Joanna. 'English Language Teaching Industry Targets Higher Standards.' *The Times* 11 December 2008.

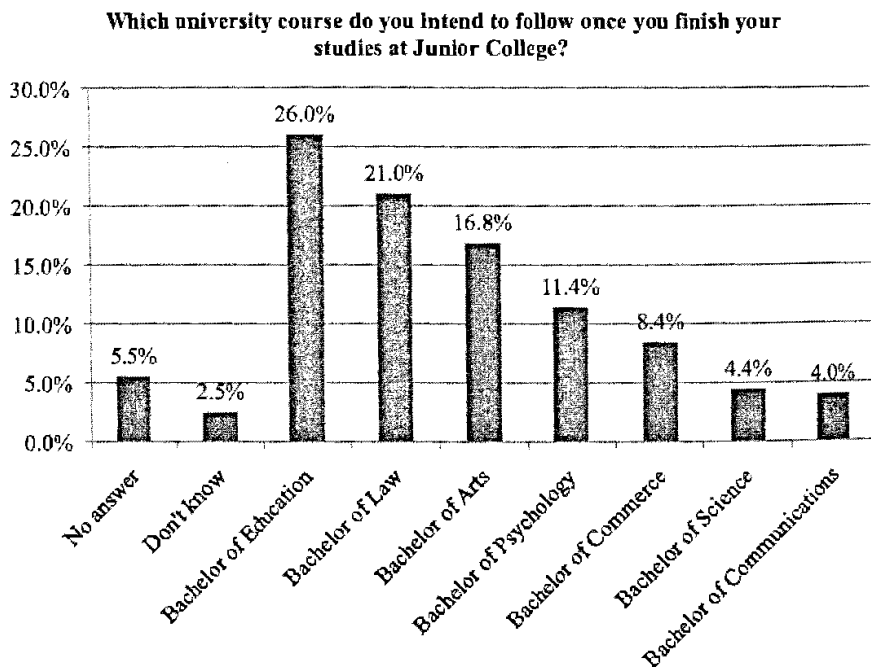


Figure 25 – University course respondents intend to follow

Figure 26 shows that the students who choose to enrol for the MC English course at Junior College intend to study a large variety of different subjects at university and they do not feel at all compelled to continue studying the subject just because they spend two years studying it in order to obtain a pass in the MC English examination. The fact that the MC English course is acting as a stepping stone to a large number of other subjects forming part of different undergraduate degrees should lead to serious reflection about the ultimate purpose of the examination and its content. The results show that 21% of the respondents intend to study law and slightly more than half that figure wish to take up English. An equal percentage of students wish to study psychology and subjects such as marketing, Italian, ICT and journalism registered relatively high percentages. For all these subjects only English as part of a B.A. degree will require the students to go into great depth when it comes to knowledge of English Literature. Hence we see that the current strong bias in the MC English examination towards literature as well as the fact that there is only one Advanced level English examination rather than two specific ones might not be fully addressing the students' diverse needs.

Which subject do you intend to study at university once you finish your studies at Junior College?

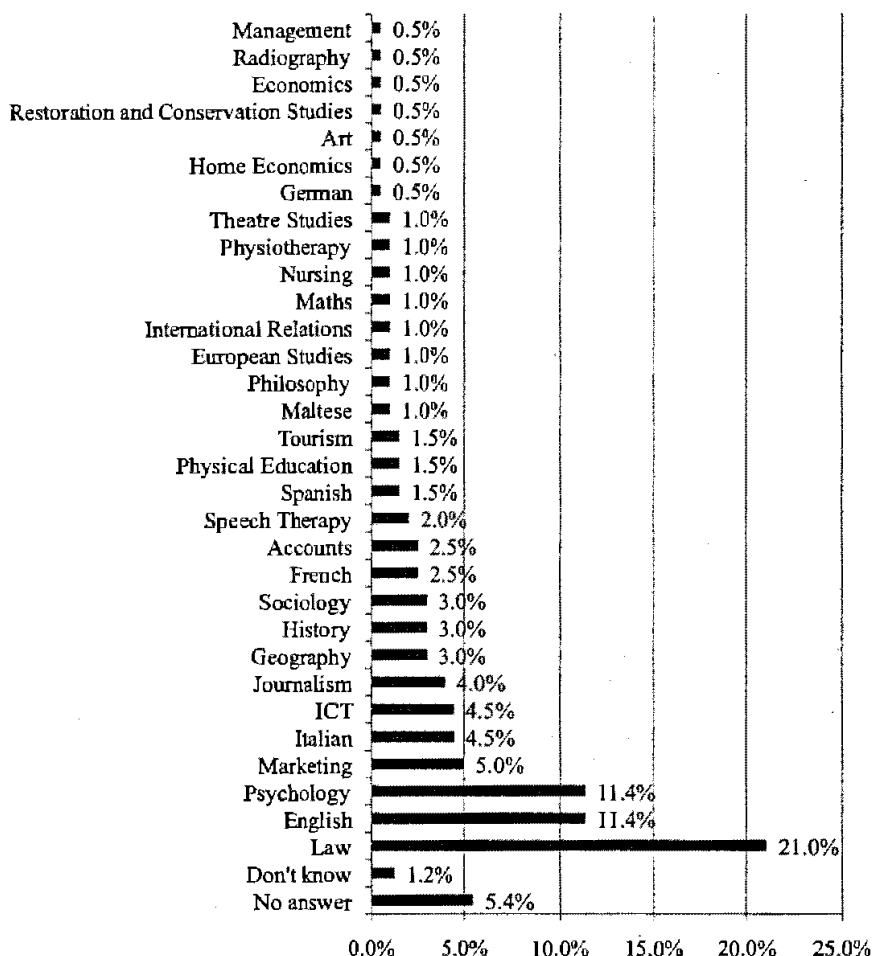


Figure 26 – Subject respondents intend to study at university

The above findings are further corroborated by data from the University of Malta Registry office. Table 47 shows the total number of students who enrolled on a university undergraduate course and chose English as a main or secondary area of study in the period 2004-2008 and it also

shows the total number of students who enrolled on any undergraduate course with a pass in MC English.

Table 47 – Undergraduates' choice of English as main or secondary area

Course	Route	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total	%
Bachelor of Arts	Anthropology and English	1	1	0	2	0	4	0.2
Bachelor of Arts	Archaeology and English	0	3	0	0	0	3	0.2
Bachelor of Arts	Classics and English	0	1	0	0	0	1	0.1
Bachelor of Arts	Communication Studies and English	3	4	6	5	9	27	1.4
Bachelor of Arts	English and French	2	8	7	6	4	27	1.4
Bachelor of Arts	English and Geography	0	1	1	1	0	3	0.2
Bachelor of Arts	English and German Studies	0	1	0	2	1	4	0.2
Bachelor of Arts	English and History	0	0	1	0	0	1	0.1
Bachelor of Arts	English and International Relations	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.1
Bachelor of Arts	English and Italian	3	5	3	4	0	15	0.8
Bachelor of Arts	English and Linguistics	2	0	5	0	2	9	0.5
Bachelor of Arts	English and Maltese	0	2	1	1	1	5	0.3
Bachelor of Arts	English and Near Eastern Studies	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.1
Bachelor of Arts	English and Philosophy	5	2	1	0	8	16	0.8
Bachelor of Arts	English and Psychology	7	1	10	9	10	37	1.9
Bachelor of Arts	English and Theatre Studies	0	1	0	2	3	6	0.3
Bachelor of Arts	History of Art and English	0	4	2	2	1	9	0.5
Bachelor of Communications	Communication Studies with English	10	5	6	3	6	30	1.5
Bachelor of Education (Hons)	Education with Art and English	0	1	2	1	2	6	0.3

Bachelor of Education (Hons)	Education with English and French	0	2	2	3	1	8	0.4
Bachelor of Education (Hons)	Education with English and Geography	1	0	0	0	0	1	0.1
Bachelor of Education (Hons)	Education with English and German	0	0	3	0	0	3	0.2
Bachelor of Education (Hons)	Education with English and History	0	1	1	0	1	3	0.2
Bachelor of Education (Hons)	Education with English and Italian	1	1	1	2	2	7	0.4
Bachelor of Education (Hons)	Education with English and Religion	1	1	0	0	1	3	0.2
Bachelor of Laws	Law with English	3	10	5	8	10	36	1.8
	Total number of students who chose English as a main or secondary area	39	55	57	51	64	266	13.3
	%	10.0	13.4	13.4	13.6	16.2	13.3	
	Total number of students who enrolled on any undergraduate course with a pass in MC English	390	411	426	376	396	1999	100.0

Out of the 1999 students who enrolled by means of a pass in English at Advanced level only 13.3% chose to continue studying the subject. This shows that for the vast majority of students English is only a means to an end and not a subject that they will continue specialising in. This calls for a reassessment of the MC English syllabus and assessment procedures so that the needs of all students are genuinely addressed. Subjects at Advanced level offered by MATSEC Board are closely linked with the corresponding subject department or faculty at university. This link needs to be re-evaluated particularly in this case when the subject department concerned represents only 9.1% of the total number of students who enrolled on an undergraduate programme by means of a pass in English at Advanced level in the period 2004-2008. This perhaps underlines the need for the

active involvement in the decision-making process of all those faculties, institutes and centres that are ultimately tutoring those students who enrol on their programmes by means of a pass in English at Advanced level.

The final question forming part of this survey asked the respondents to indicate which career they intend to pursue once they finish their studies at university and here we see that the majority of students studying Advanced level English at Junior College wish to pursue a variety of careers. Once again the results show that not all the students who enrol on the MC English course do so because they wish to continue studying the subject or because they will take up an occupation that is directly bound to undergraduate studies in English. Figure 27 shows that only 7.4% of the respondents claimed that they wish to become English teachers, however, 12.4% claimed that they wish to become teachers and hence it is to be expected that a number of them do actually wish to teach the subject. A third of the respondents pointed out that they intend to take up teaching as a career and a number of different subject were mentioned. Since Malta's accession into the European Union in 2004 there has been a growing demand for the services of translators and interpreters. The latter two occupations registered figures of only 5.2% and 2.7% respectively and this means that a total of 32 students are actually considering translation and interpreting as a career after they finish their university studies.

Which career do you intend to pursue once you finish your studies?

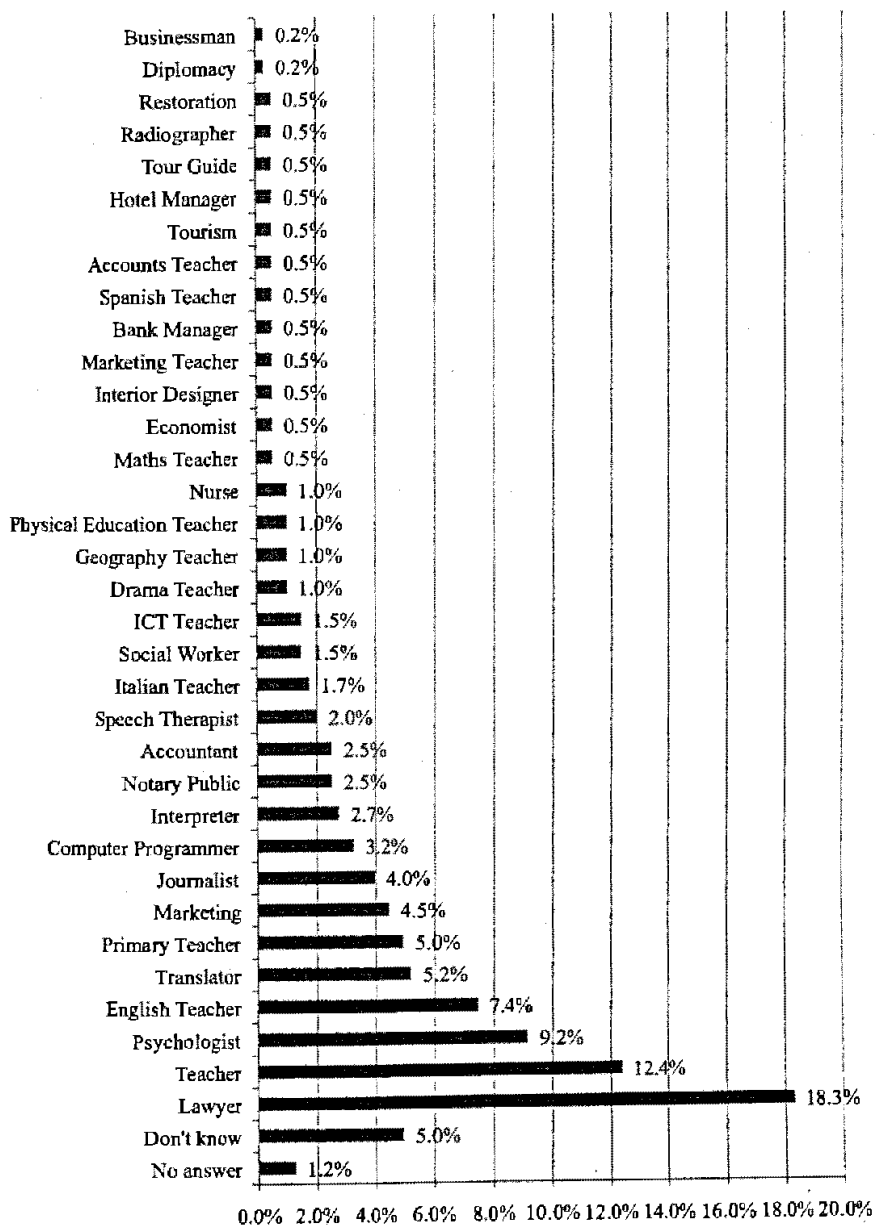


Figure 27 – Career respondents intend to pursue once they finish their studies

4.3 Semi-structured Interviews with Lecturers

When speaking about the May 2005 session of the A-level English examination the Chairperson of the Board of Examiners for MC English declares that 'It is really inconceivable to imagine, far less believe, that the standard attained in these scripts is the one required for Advanced Level since the quality of English in a large number of scripts was extremely poor' (*Examiners' Report 2005 12*). It is also stated that 'The examiners find it somewhat difficult to believe that a good percentage of these candidates have had two years schooling at sixth-form level' (*Examiners' Report 2005 12*). In an effort to understand the teaching methodology used by Junior College lecturers and whether this is leaving an impact on candidates' performance in the MC English examination, a set of ten semi-structured interviews were held with a blend of highly experienced lecturers and recently appointed members of staff. The lecturers were also asked a number of questions in relation to the examination's content and format because their feedback is considered to be highly constructive in this regard given that their direct contact with students makes them highly attuned to the needs and abilities of candidates at this level.

The interview guide (Appendix 4) was divided into three parts. The first set of questions dealt with the content and format of the MC English examination, the syllabus, entry requirements, and candidates' performance in the examination. The second and third sections dealt with the methodology employed by lecturers when teaching literature and language respectively. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using an annotation system (Appendices 5-15).

4.3.1 Matriculation English Examination

The first question fielded to the interviewees tried to determine whether the lecturers are satisfied with their students' performance in the examination. The majority of lecturers were unanimous in their comments and they felt that on the whole they are not satisfied with their students' performance. Their dissatisfaction is due to a variety of reasons:

- students deserved a better grade than the one they actually obtained;
- whereas the 2008 results seem to reflect students' actual performance while at Junior College, this is not so for the results of the previous four years;
- lecturers expected much more from their students, who did not do so well because of lack of effort;
- the examiners have unrealistically high expectations;
- more students should obtain a Grade B;
- the quality of the teaching and the quality of the students at Junior College has remained largely constant but so has the low pass rate over the past five years and

this can possibly be attributed to the actual team of markers responsible for the MC English examination.

A number of lecturers claimed that they are satisfied with the 2008 results but highly unhappy with the results of the previous few years. Only one lecturer mentioned that she is satisfied with her students' performance and the reason she gave was that given the examination conditions, the amount of course content and the course structure, students are actually giving their best.

Closely related to the first question and one of the most important questions that the lecturers were asked to answer concerned the factors responsible for candidates' poor performance. There was complete consensus on the lecturers' part that one of the leading factors is the student's attitude towards the subject and their limitations when it comes to the language. The lecturers mentioned things like student apathy, lack of exposure and practice, lack of effort, students' level, and their perception of the subject as being a soft option. Two lecturers mentioned that the students have too many distractions and this affects their studies and an equal number of lecturers pointed out that the students' main weakness lies in their writing skills. A number of other equally important reasons were mentioned:

- the pedagogical techniques employed from primary level all the way up to postsecondary level could have left a negative impact on the students' proficiency in English;
- the gap between what is expected of students at Ordinary level and what is expected of them at Advanced level is huge and it is very difficult to bridge in the two years that students spend at Junior College;
- the current large size of classes is not helping lecturers and students to give their best;
- over the past five years the examiners' expectations were raised too high and what they require of the candidates is not sufficiently clear;
- the way examination essays are being marked is too rigid and unreasonable and hence hampering students from obtaining the grades that they actually deserve.

This study has shown that on average 75.7% of the students who enrol on the MC English course at Junior College do so with Grades 1 to 3 in the SEC English Language examination and 81.6% of all those students who choose to study English at Advanced level do so with a pass in the SEC English Literature examination as well. 40.8% of the latter enrol with Grades 1 to 3. Moreover, this study has shown that students choose to study English because of a variety of integrative and instrumental goals and not because they consider it a soft option.

When the interviewees were asked to comment on those students who choose to study English at MC level the majority of them claimed that the Advanced level English population is made up of a mixture of students who chose the subject because they truly love it, students who chose the subject because of practical goals and reasons, and students who chose to do so without fully knowing what they were letting themselves in for. The latter might have thought that English is easy and they end up faring pretty poorly according to the lecturers. These lecturers claimed that such students should not be studying English at this level because they do not have the right attitude towards the subject and the necessary proficiency. Three lecturers affirmed that the majority of students who chose to study English at Advanced level are quite able and they enrolled with Grades 1 to 3 at SEC level and hence have a good claim to form part of the programme. According to these lecturers most students are enthusiastic about the subject and they make an effort. Another lecturer expressed his frustration at the fact that even though some students are on the whole quite proficient and even enrol with a Grade 1, when they sit for the Advanced level examination they end up obtaining Grades C or D even though they actually deserve a B.

Since currently the only entry requirement imposed on students wishing to study English at Advanced level is a minimum of Grade 5 in the SEC English Language examination, the interviewees were asked for their opinion regarding this state of affairs. The majority maintained that they disagree with this minimum requirement. They feel that a Grade 5 is too low because it does not allow the students to profit from the MC course and creates problems both for them and the lecturers. One of the interviewees claimed that since the A-level examination is heavily based on writing, a Grade 5 in the O-level is unacceptable, especially since students in the previous years were even able to obtain a pass in the SEC English Language examination without passing the writing component. Most of these lecturers would prefer it if only students with a minimum of Grade 3 or 4 were allowed to enrol. Three of the lecturers felt hesitant about how to answer the question. One of them pointed out that given the low proficiency of most Advanced level English students, it is either the entry grade that has to be pushed up or the SEC examiners' standards. The other two lecturers claimed that it is difficult to answer the question because they are not aware of any correlation between a Grade 5 and poor performance at MC level. Moreover, based on their experience the situation is even more complex given that the correlation between Grades 1 to 3 and Grades A to C is very low.

Currently the entry requirements of the MC English course at Junior College do not stipulate that students need a pass in the SEC English Literature examination. When the interviewees were asked whether a Grade 5 in SEC English Literature is sufficient to complete the course successfully half of the lecturers exclaimed that they disagree with this because a Grade 5 would impede the students from doing well on the course given that it exposes the fact that they possess serious

weaknesses in the way they express themselves in English. They feel that a higher grade would be more profitable for the students. One of the lecturers shook her head in disagreement but then answered that at least a Grade 5 would serve as a foundation for the A-level syllabus given its strong bias towards literature. Three other lecturers agreed with her on this and they claimed that most students choose to study English without being aware of the heavy volume of literature in the MC syllabus. Hence a minimum of a pass in SEC English Literature would already be highly beneficial as it would tackle the problem of having students who are overwhelmed by all the literature they need to study and who find it extremely difficult to cope due to their lack of experience in literature. One of the interviewees disagreed with this opinion and affirmed that even though a Grade 4 would be much better than a Grade 5, a pass in SEC English Literature is not really important as long as a student has a good grade in SEC English Language and possesses first-rate writing skills.

The majority of lecturers expressed satisfaction with the way the different components are tested in the examination, however, only two of them did not feel they needed to make any recommendations. The other interviewees mentioned a number of changes that they would like to see being implemented in the examination:

- unambiguous essay titles;
- more language task-based components to complement the literature components;
- one of the literary criticism tasks should be made up of a number of guided questions focusing on different aspects of an unseen text whereas the other should continue being assessed by means of an essay;
- the current linguistics component should be replaced with topics related to general linguistics and assessed by means of a number of questions rather than by the essay type question.

The majority of lecturers singled out the linguistics component as the area that requires most changes. The lecturers claimed that this component is unexciting for the students and requires a lot of memory work. They also affirmed that it is too specific and not related to major issues that can contribute to a development of the students' awareness of language.

Currently the MC English examination does not assess candidates' oral proficiency or listening skills and the interviewees were asked whether they feel that these two skills should start being assessed. All of the lecturers feel that speaking skills should be assessed because ultimately oral communication is highly important and it does not really make sense for a student to obtain a pass in the Advanced level English examination without ever having been assessed in terms of oral proficiency. In this they agree with Grima et al., who recommend introducing an oral component in the Advanced level examination due to the importance of speaking skills for tertiary study. The

lecturers pointed out that speaking skills form part of the Intermediate level English examination and hence it is ridiculous that such skills are not tested at a higher level. However, six interviewees pointed out that even though the testing of speaking skills is highly desirable one needs to consider the logistical problems that such an exercise would create. Given the timeframe and manpower available it will be highly problematic to adequately prepare students for an oral test. Moreover, if speaking skills are to be tested then this needs to be done appropriately and not by imitating the inauthentic way in which these skills are being tested at Intermediate level, that is, by asking candidates to read aloud and to talk about a topic for a period of time without being interrupted.

The majority of lecturers agreed with the idea of assessing listening skills at Advanced level but once again they mentioned the logistical problems that this would create. One particular lecturer maintained that assessing listening skills is not a top priority for her because there are far more important components to include in the syllabus and ultimately students are practising their listening skills all of the time during the course even though these are not actually being assessed.

When the interviewees were asked to express their opinion in relation to the syllabus' set texts only three of them claimed that they were on the whole quite happy with the current texts. All of the lecturers affirmed that they do not have any problem with the presence of a Shakespearean tragedy in the syllabus and all those who mentioned Wilfred Owen's poetry concurred with the choice of this text as well. As regards the novels the majority of interviewees declared that the syllabus panel needs to pay better attention to the choice of texts because such novels as Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* are not really appropriate for A-level students. In fact, most lecturers mentioned that texts need to be selected in accordance with certain prescribed criteria and the syllabus panel needs to take into account the age and cognitive level of sixteen- to eighteen-year-old students.

Three lecturers mentioned that finding an appropriate language textbook for A-level students has been problematic and even though the department has come up with its own resources one of the interviewees still feels that it should work harder in order to find a better textbook. Half of the interviewees once again maintained that the linguistics texts need to be replaced since one of them contains certain incongruities while the other is too heavily dependent on statistics.

Closely akin to the previous question, the interviewees were asked whether they believe that the choice of set texts has any bearing on the students' success rate in the examination. Most lecturers declared that they do believe so because if a set text is too difficult for the students to understand or if it is not relevant and interesting for them then they are not going to find the incentive to work very hard and their essays are going to pay the price for that. However, one particular lecturer affirmed that even though this might be true the amount of effort that lecturers and students make is much more important than the choice of set texts. This view was echoed by a

lecturer who believes that the choice of set texts has no bearing on students' performance. Another interviewee affirmed that if the department makes the right choice from what is available in the syllabus the students will do well in their examination because both lecturers and students will enjoy the text in question. A few lecturers mentioned Owen's poetry as an example of a text that the students manage to relate to and hence write good essays on whereas some others mentioned the linguistics textbooks as examples of texts that the students consider to be irrelevant and overly difficult.

Spiro suggests that 'where students are failing to meet standards in a test, the test items rather than the students need to be re-evaluated' (56). She recommends including test items that should preferably be 'guided or controlled, rather than wholly open-ended' (Spiro 56). This study shows that lecturers at Junior College are of the same opinion, especially in relation to the literary criticism components. Spiro also recommends providing linguistic support 'where linguistic difficulties may conflict with the literary skills being tested' (Spiro 57). For the first time ever the literary criticism component forming part of the May 2009 end-of-year test paper contains such linguistic support and it surmised that the Department of English at Junior College would like to see such a practice being adopted by MATSEC when creating the Advanced level examination paper.

Given that in the MC English examination candidates are expected to write a total of eight essays, the interviewees were asked whether they agree that this should be the only form of assessment used. All of the lecturers maintained that the essay should continue being the main form of assessment, especially to test students' knowledge of set literature texts. They feel that the essay is the best way by means of which to assess students' ability to argue critically about a text. Nonetheless, some lecturers claimed that they wish to see the incorporation of a different method of assessing students when it comes to literary criticism. They recommend a series of questions based on an unseen text because these act as a guide for the students. However, two lecturers in particular expressed their doubts about whether this is entirely effective and one of them claimed that an essay based on an unseen text is the best litmus test for a student's ability to argue in a cogent manner since no memory work is at play. As regards linguistics some lecturers feel that short answer questions are the best means of assessing this particular component.

One lecturer mentioned that discrete item and gobbet questions should also be considered when it comes to testing literature while another interviewee affirmed that coursework, as a means of complementing examination essay questions, should be taken into consideration. Parkinson and Reid Thomas feel that when assessing literature 'There should be a mixture of in-class work with time limits, like traditional examinations, and out-of-class assignments' (150) and Micallef and Galea are of the opinion that by means of coursework 'more students would be encouraged to take an interest in the subject' (159). Baldacchino maintains that coursework 'will help reduce the

current emphasis on examinations and enhance activity-based learning, motivating students towards increased participation' (110).

The interviewees were asked for their opinion in relation to the examiners' interpretation of the syllabus' aims and objectives and whether the examiners' expectations match their own. Spiro underscores the importance of clarity on the part of the syllabus since its absence might lead to 'a communication breakdown between the three participants in the test: examiner, teacher and examinee' (54). Such an incongruity is exemplified by an unfortunate occurrence in the May 2009 paper, in which students were assigned a letter-writing task when this is not one of the text types specified explicitly by the syllabus. Spiro also points out that the 'uneasy relationship' (54) between the goals of the examiners and the performance of examinees on the one hand and between the stated goals of the examiners and their actual goals when marking on the other, might prove to be particularly deleterious for the candidates. Nearly all the lecturers concurred that they are distraught by the fact that the examiners' interpretation of the syllabus' aims and objectives is not very clear because the latter are themselves quite vague and because the examiners' reports tend to be too general, inconsistent and conflicting. Hence even though they are aware of the fact that the standard has gone up they are not exactly sure about what the examiners expect from the candidates. One interviewee claimed that a detailed examination manual is needed and in this he agrees with McNamara, Linn and Miller, and Hughes, who claim that it is difficult to guarantee a positive backwash effect if students and teachers are not fully informed of what the test expects of them. Three lecturers mentioned that over the past five years standards were raised too high and too suddenly and this was highly unfair on both students and lecturers. No consultation with the teaching staff at the various postsecondary institutions was carried out and the interviewees complained that whatever changes they effected in an effort to meet the examiners' expectations these never bore fruit because candidates' performance failed to improve and the percentage of low grades remained constant. One interviewee explained how after a number of years in which students seemed to be doing fairly well in the examination there came a sudden dip in performance that was highly frustrating for students and lecturers alike. The only interviewee to explicitly answer the question in the affirmative gestured with her hand to indicate that she wanted to quickly move on to another question.

When the lecturers were asked to make a number of suggestions on the changes that can be made at Junior College so that the students' performance in their examination is improved, the majority replied that smaller classes would definitely be of benefit. However, one of these lecturers pointed out that even though this is desirable ultimately the number of students per class is a political decision that is difficult for Junior College lecturers to alter. One interviewee stated that given the number of hours of tuition there is very little that can be done on a departmental level,

however, on a personal level each lecturer can try to maximise his performance. Other suggestions put forward by lecturers were the following:

- there should be wider consensus amongst lecturers on the teaching of literary criticism and writing and on what to expect from students' essays;
- students should be provided with increased support when it comes to literary criticism given that this component is perhaps the most crucial one in the entire examination;
- tutorials should be restructured so that more attention is paid to the planning of essays;
- lecturers should make better use of media;
- a writing programme should be set up;
- the teaching of specific texts should not be divided over two years;
- only students with a high grade at SEC level should be allowed to enrol on the MC English course.

The interviewees were also asked to make a number of suggestions in relation to the examination. Only one lecturer claimed that it is entirely satisfactory as it is with the others mostly agreeing on the need to change the content and textbooks of the linguistics component and the way this is presently being assessed. Other suggestions were also made:

- one of the two literary criticism components in the examination should assess students by means of short answer questions that actually guide candidates in how to tackle the unseen text;
- oral and listening components should be introduced in the examination;
- marking needs to be much more flexible since students who were expected to obtain a particular grade actually obtained a much lower grade that does not really reflect their level of proficiency;
- the examination should test what can realistically be achieved after going through two years of postsecondary schooling and not presenting candidates with hurdles that are way too high for them to leap over;
- examination questions should be worded unambiguously;
- the report should be introduced as an assessable text type;
- candidates should be provided with language essay titles that require them to write definite text types rather than with titles that provide them with a huge amount of freedom;

- the syllabus panel should take into consideration the students' cognitive level when selecting set texts;
- a poetry anthology should be introduced to replace Owen's poetry;
- the practice of having two three-hour examinations sessions in one day should be discontinued as this is too taxing on the candidates.

4.3.2 Literature Teaching Methodology

Interviewees were asked to describe the approach they use when teaching set literary texts. The majority of lecturers claimed that the approach varies according to what kind of text they are dealing with but in general they prefer using an approach in which they first introduce the historical and literary context to the text in question and then after immersing their students in the background they divide the text into manageable chunks and analyse each one in the light of plot, themes, characters, stylistic devices and literary techniques so that the students are able to understand the text more fully. Each section is related to the whole and at the end the main issues are revised and students are assisted with structuring essays based on the text in question. Only a few lecturers mentioned that they tend to emphasise lecturing but nearly all of them mentioned the fact that they tend to make the text as relevant as possible to the students' interests and that they elicit from the students as frequently as possible. Most lecturers claimed that they expect their students to have read the text on their own before attending the series of lectures and they find it frustrating that students sometimes do not bother to do so. Some lecturers mentioned that they actually read short texts like *Of Mice and Men* in class and in this way engage in a close analysis of the novel and involve the students more fully. One lecturer said that she prefers a top down approach whereas one of her colleagues affirmed that he switches between this approach and a bottom up approach depending on the exigencies of the text and the aims of the lesson. Another interviewee claimed that she uses an interface approach in which she pays an equal amount of attention to the language used in the text and its literary aspect. She tends to guide the students' reading of the text by means of ready-prepared questions and while this taxing method was also used by another lecturer for a number of years she ultimately gave it up when she realised that the students were ignoring the questions. A lecturer mentioned that he uses filmed versions of a text in order to help the students understand the text better while another lecturer claimed that she does not provide the students with notes prior to the lectures so that they make a conscious effort to participate actively during lectures.

When asked to mention which other approach to the teaching of set literary texts they would use if they could, only three of the interviewees claimed that they are completely happy with the

one they use. The other lecturers mentioned a number of activities that current time constraints and class sizes make impracticable:

- more media-based activities;
- student presentations as a means of fully engaging the students with a text;
- more hands-on activities.

The interviewees were asked to describe the approach they use when teaching practical criticism and the nine lecturers who do actually teach the subject concurred with the fact that since the students are rather new to the discipline they tend to introduce them to it by initially going over the main literary terms and stylistic devices that they will need to be familiar with. Then students are shown how to adopt a top down or bottom up approach when faced with an unseen text and after being provided with a lot of practice in literary criticism skills students are gradually shown how to structure a literary appreciation essay. Whereas at SEC level students were merely expected to identify literary devices, at MC level they are expected to react to them and comment critically on their effect within a passage or poem. The first year of the course is mostly devoted to introducing the discipline and providing students with examples of the different terms and devices they are expected to know. Students are also engaged in the task of analysing a text and lecturers elicit frequently so that all the students actually involve themselves in a discipline that maximises the importance of skills rather than knowledge. The second year is more exam-oriented and hence students are provided with further practice and assigned a higher proportion of essays. A few lecturers mentioned that they emphasise the importance of language when teaching practical criticism while some others stated that this subject allows them to use a variety of classroom activities given the fact that it is based on individual prose passages and poems.

Interviewees were also asked to describe any other approach that they would use to teach practical criticism if they could and they concurred with the fact that the approach they currently use is the one that works best for them and their students. However, three lecturers admitted to being open to any other approach that would continue to heighten students' appreciation of literature and further shape their understanding of why an author/poet uses a particular literary device. The lecturers mentioned a number of different techniques that they would adopt if they had more time and smaller classes:

- making students aware of the risks of over- and under-interpretation;
- being able to engage the students in supplementary writing activities;
- allowing the students to practise creative writing;
- using activities that maximise student talk-time.

Lazar explains that there exist three main approaches to the teaching of literature: the language-based approach, the content-based approach, and the personal enrichment approach. Interviewees were asked to point out the approach that they focus on mostly when teaching literature and they all agree with Lazar's idea that when teaching literature 'a combination of the three approaches' should be used in order to 'ensur[e] that students become enjoyably involved in using literature in the classroom' (43). However, seven interviewees did confess that the examination emphasises most forcefully the importance of language and content and hence these are somewhat given priority. Nonetheless, all the lecturers conceded that they prefer a holistic mode of teaching and hence the personal enrichment approach is undeniably part of their teaching given the fact that they are constantly trying to forge connections between the text in question and the students' lives and interests. When asked to specify which of the three approaches they consider to be the most important for sixth form students, the interviewees concurred that all three are equally important. However, three lecturers mentioned that content should be given priority whereas two lecturers claimed that language should be emphasised most in a postsecondary environment. Two other lecturers declared that the personal enrichment approach is what should predominate.

4.3.3 Language and Linguistics Teaching Methodology

The interviewees were asked to describe the approach they use when teaching language and to mention the reason for which they use this approach. Eight lecturers affirmed that during language seminars they mostly emphasise the teaching of reading and writing skills due to the fact that these are the only two skills assessed in the MC English examination. When teaching students how to write essays they tend to focus on the different stages leading to the final product and to show students how to tackle the different text types they are expected to master. This shows that most of the lecturers are aware of the different stages forming part of such a process writing model as that proposed by White and Arndt. When working on reading comprehensions with their students, lecturers tend to point out how to deal with the different question types that repeatedly appear in the examination. They are aware that this might not be the ideal thing to do but ultimately the examination's backwash is too hard to ignore. Some lecturers mentioned that they also use reading comprehensions as a means of addressing students' difficulties when it comes to vocabulary, tenses, sentence structure, and other skills. They do so because texts can be used for a variety of purposes besides that of teaching reading skills. Both Richards and Yu and Ren mention this idea of skills integration. Four other lecturers claimed that even though it might be considered traditional they do focus on language basics because they feel that their students need to be made aware of how language works and hence an adequate amount of weight needs to be given to discrete items. Three of these interviewees stated that they try to blend this 'traditional' method with the communicative

approach because by means of such a combination they are catering for their students' different needs. Another lecturer who focuses almost entirely on the communicative approach declared that he uses it because he does not believe that language teaching happens in a vacuum. That is why he uses authentic resources and tries to include a variety of language activities in his language seminars. Harmer considers such variety typical of communicative activities while Nunan and Brumfit and Finocchiaro mention the use of authentic resources as one of the main characteristics of CLT.

The interviewees were asked for their opinion on Communicative Language Teaching and whether they use it in the classroom. The majority expressed positive views in relation to this approach and mentioned that they do put its principles into practice during the language seminars, even if combined with other methods. However, seven lecturers lamented the fact that the communicative approach cannot be used as effectively as possible due to the large size of the classes and the course being too exam-oriented. The fact that students only attend a one-hour language seminar per week is not sufficient for them to boost their confidence and develop the necessary fluency. The situation is aggravated by the fact that speaking and listening are not tested in the MC English examination. Savignon points out that CLT is not concerned exclusively with oral communication and hence the fact that most lecturers still strive to use a communicative approach despite the examination's disregard of the importance of speaking and listening skills is commendable.

Given that writing skills are considered of utmost importance for candidates sitting for the examination, the interviewees were asked for their opinion in relation to students' writing skills when they start their MC course. The majority pointed out that they teach mixed ability groups and that amongst their students one finds a small percentage with above average writing skills and a bigger percentage of students who are of average ability. However, the biggest group of students is that constituted by those whose writing skills are somewhat poor and hence not up to the standards of the Advanced level examination. The lecturers maintained that most students enrol at Junior College with a satisfactory level of ability when it comes to the writing of narrative and descriptive essays. The problems are manifested when students are assigned discursive/argumentative essays and essays based on unseen texts and set literature texts. One lecturer in particular affirmed that even though most students enrol with Grades 1 to 3 in their SEC English Language examination, they are not sufficiently trained for the kind of writing they are expected to engage in the MC English examination. Another lecturer concurred with this idea and claimed that the leap students need to make between what is expected of them at O-level and what is expected of them at A-level is actually much bigger than that between postsecondary and tertiary education.

In relation to the interviewees' statements it must be pointed out that prior to 2009 there existed a situation that could have played a major role in candidates' poor performance in the MC English examination in the years under investigation. A new clause inserted into the 'SEC English Language Syllabus 2009' and all subsequent versions states that 'In order to obtain a Grade 3 or higher, candidates must also satisfy the examiners in the Writing component in Paper 2' (6). Basically, this clause is a crucial one because it is rectifying a loophole that existed in previous syllabi and by means of which candidates could be awarded a Grade 3 even if they do not perform in a satisfactory manner in the writing component of the examination. The situation in which candidates could perform reasonably well in the other components but fail to do so in the writing component and still be awarded a Grade 3 or higher was particularly detrimental for those students who enrolled for the MC English course prior to the insertion of this new clause given that the A-level English examination is almost entirely based on a candidate's writing ability. This study has shown that a high percentage of students who enrolled at Junior College in the period between 2002-2006 did so with Grades 1 to 3 in SEC English Language. Although it is not actually known how many of these students managed to obtain a Grade 3 or higher by not performing adequately well in the writing component of the SEC English Language examination, based on the results of the student survey and the semi-structured interviews it is fair to assume that a large number of them enrolled with major difficulties in writing English.

The interviewees were asked to put forward ideas on how students can improve their writing, however, most of them started with the premise that unless the process starts fairly early in the students' school life then it will be highly difficult to reach the required standard in the two years they spend at Junior College. Some of these lecturers complained that the current system does not allot enough time for the teaching of writing and that lecturers cannot be expected to drastically improve students' writing in just a weekly tutorial and language seminar. These are the suggestions lecturers came up with:

- students need to be exposed to English via reading and listening;
- students need a lot of practice and this needs to take the form of a series of stages, starting with the writing of basic paragraphs and moving on to essays, initially being guided as much as possible and then provided with a larger degree of freedom;
- writing workshops or a full-fledged writing programme need to be set up whose aim would be that of assisting students to make the leap from an O-level standard of writing to an A-level one and which would primarily focus on the essay types that students were not able to adequately master in secondary school.

Lecturers feel that a writing programme is needed because currently it is not exactly clear whose responsibility it is to teach writing skills and hence there exists some inconsistency within the department.

The lecturers were then asked to describe how they approach the teaching of writing skills and six of them asserted that they provide their students with good models of the different essay types they are expected to write in the examination and after guiding them through a number of activities that are meant to gradually aid the students to master a particular essay type they provide them with the freedom to tackle a task on their own. These lecturers view writing as a process that involves a continuum stretching from guided writing to free writing and incorporating a number of steps. The other four lecturers claimed that they assign essays on a regular basis and after each attempt they provide their students with feedback in relation to their main difficulties. Here we see that these interviewees use a product approach to the teaching of writing skills. In fact, when asked to point out whether they prefer a product or a process approach these four lectures claimed that they prefer a product approach and two of them affirmed that even though the process approach is the ideal one they cannot use it because of time constraints. One of these lecturers mentioned that a good writing programme would combine both approaches. Some of those lecturers who use the process approach stated that this is as equally important as the product approach and one of them confessed that even though he uses a process approach he does struggle with the issue of insufficient time.

The last question related to writing enquired about the ways in which the teaching of writing skills at Junior College can be improved. The interviewees made a number of suggestions:

- the need for smaller numbers in class since this gives the lecturer more time to devote to each student;
- the need for more time to focus on the process of writing and hence the allowance to assign supplementary writing tasks;
- the need for a series of writing workshops or a writing programme that would be set up after a thorough needs analysis.

A few lecturers indicated that the materials created recently by the department to standardise the teaching of writing is a step forward, however, they need to be complemented with something even more substantial.

The interviewees were asked to describe how they approach the teaching of reading skills and whereas only one lecturer claimed that he is not convinced that you can teach reading and that students should enrol on the course with well-honed reading skills, the majority of interviewees claimed that they use an integrated approach composed of an eclectic set of strategies and activities meant at developing different reading skills. Most lecturers adopt the four roles mentioned by

Harmer and their methods show that they agree with Nuttall's idea that a teacher's main goal when teaching reading skills is to allow students to develop into independent readers. However, some lecturers claimed that they focus almost exclusively on the reading skills that are targeted by the reading comprehension questions in the examination. They lamented the fact that their teaching is governed by a situation in which the reading comprehension component in the examination is always composed of the same kind of questions. Hence the backwash of this situation is that lecturers do their utmost to help students answer these kinds of questions. One interviewee in particular affirmed that his teaching method would only change if the testing of reading skills in the examination becomes more varied. Two lecturers declared that when teaching reading skills they analyse the reading comprehension passage together with their students and show them how to find evidence in the text for the answers they come up with in response to the questions. Another lecturer mentioned that she focuses mostly on the structure of the passage while a colleague of hers said that he tries to select reading comprehension passages that the students consider interesting and which encourage extensive reading via intensive reading.

This study has shown that the majority of Advanced level English students feel that the linguistics component in the examination needs to be substantially revised. The interviewees were asked for their opinion in relation to this component and to describe the approach they adopt when teaching it. After a lengthy pause only one lecturer claimed that the linguistics component is valid and when asked to describe how she teaches it she quickly stated that she does not currently do so. The rest of the interviewees concurred with the need to change the current content and replace it with a general kind of linguistics. They feel that as it stands it is somewhat counterproductive since it is putting students off linguistics altogether. They believe that general linguistics would assist the students with their handling of the other components and make them more enthusiastic about the subject. One lecturer even mentioned that it is not only the content that needs to change but even the methods of assessment. When asked to describe the way they teach linguistics, the majority said that since the content is made up of factual knowledge they mostly use presentations and in the process they try to contextualise the information and relate it to the students' own lives and background. However, four of them maintained that they find it hard to teach the subject and they consider themselves somewhat unsuccessful since most students are still not convinced of its usefulness by the end of the course. One lecturer declared that she tries to engage the students with the subject by asking them to research a topic and deliver a presentation to their classmates, however, her efforts are frustrated by the fact that students' presentation and oral skills are rather poor.

4.3.4 Activities and Resources

The final question posed to the interviewees concerned their opinion in relation to the effectiveness and feasibility of a list of activities and resources. Brumfit and Finocchiaro claim that student collaboration is an important tenet of CLT and that students should be encouraged to learn via their interaction with one another. When asked about group work the majority of lecturers commented on the fact that this kind of activity is beneficial because students learn from each other and feel safe enough to participate. The majority of lecturers use it regularly especially during language seminars and only one interviewee claimed not to make use of it. Most of the lecturers remarked on the need for constant monitoring when engaging students in group work during a lesson especially because of class management problems created by the fact that they teach big classes. Pair work is considered rewarding for the same reasons as group work and lecturers also feel that this activity works best in the context of small classes due to the noise created when used with big groups. The fact that lecturers value group work and pair work shows that they agree with Richards' idea that in the classroom community 'learners learn through collaboration and sharing' (20).

Students' presentations are considered feasible by the interviewees in so far as they are not used as an excuse to avoid preparing a session. Four lecturers openly declared that they do not make use of this activity and the others claimed that even though they are beneficial there is the issue of lack of time to consider and the fact that most students are rather reluctant to speak in English in front of their classmates. One lecturer in particular affirmed that she enjoys using them because they allow the students to go through different learning processes and to very strongly engage with the subject. As part of their research she encourages them to make use of web-based resources. Another lecturer mentioned that students' presentations would be optimal if the examination had to include a speaking component.

Lectures are considered to be the *sine qua non* of teaching English at this level and the interviewees tend to use this activity most when teaching literature. They claimed that even though lectures are highly effective for delivery of content they need to be well-structured and lecturers need to make use of eliciting techniques and to pay attention to the students' seating arrangement. Lectures via PowerPoint presentation are considered helpful but some lecturers are wary of using them because they might affect non-verbal communication, they require a lot of preparation and there is the risk that they might make students lazy and passive. One interviewee mentioned that she does not know how to use PowerPoint and half of the interviewees find it frustrating that there is a dearth of facilities at Junior College and that in order to use multimedia technology one needs to book well in advance.

All the interviewees claimed that they value handouts as a supplementary form of material and as a means of guiding the students to revise the issues discussed during the lectures. Lecturers

use handouts either to provide students with extra information or else as worksheets. Not all the interviewees are in favour of resource packs and in fact four lecturers claimed that they do not use them because they are afraid of encouraging the students to substitute the lectures and to avoid taking notes. The majority of those who do use resource packs refrain from making them available before the series of lectures so that students do their utmost to participate as much as possible. When creating handouts and resource packs most lecturers use not only printed media but online material as well and students are supplied with further reading lists that most often consist of web-based resources.

4.4 Semi-structured Interview with the Chairperson of the MC English Examination

In order to fully explore the assessment practices currently in place as part of the MC English examination an interview was held with the chairperson of the examination board. The interviewee held this post in the period between 2001 and 2008. The interview guide (Appendix 16) was divided into five parts: Matriculation Certificate English syllabus, marking, paper setting, relationship between SEC and MC, recommendations. The following sections report and discuss the chairperson's response during the interview.

4.4.1 Matriculation Certificate English Syllabus

The first five questions put forward to the chairperson were aimed at understanding her views on the content and structure of the examination given that the MC English examination adopts a syllabus content approach.

Hughes is of the opinion that one of the initial stages of test development is the creation of a set of specifications that include information on such elements as content, test structure, criterial levels of performance and scoring procedures. The first question posed to the chairperson sought to probe her views in relation to the inclusion of a list of such test specifications in the MC English syllabus.

When asked to comment on whether the syllabus would benefit from more development in content, the chairperson claimed that literature alone is not sufficient. Language and linguistics are important and they should play a bigger role in the syllabus otherwise students would no longer be marketable. The MC English examination is too biased in favour of literature. The chairperson believes that the linguistics texts that form part of the current syllabus are the best possible for students since in her experience candidates fare well when presented with sociolinguistics but perform poorly when assessed on their knowledge of general linguistics. Moreover, she mentioned that those candidates who attempted questions on *Living Languages in Malta* actually did better than those who answered questions on David Crystal's *English as a Global Language*. Here it is

evident that the chairperson's views on the linguistics component go counter to those of Junior College lecturers and students. The former would like to replace the current textbooks with some form of general linguistics whereas the latter claim that this component is much too challenging and it needs to be substantially modified.

In the chairperson's opinion the syllabus would benefit from changes in the test structure. The examination's current bias needs to be amended and language and linguistics need to be given a larger share of the paper. It is due to the examination's strong literary bias that the Education Division felt the need to create an alternative examination in order to test the proficiency of prospective EFL teachers. In terms of the types of questions set, she feels that these do not require any changes and as a chairperson she always ensured that the questions were very clear. A number of lecturers differ on this and they would like to see literary criticism and linguistics being assessed differently. Moreover, some lecturers claimed that some of the questions set in past examination papers were rather ambiguous. Hughes points out that by writing unambiguous items paper setters can increase a test's reliability.

Linn and Miller affirm that criterion-referenced testing helps achieve beneficial backwash while Parkinson and Reid Thomas are of the opinion that 'all students should be compared with outside criteria' (150). According to Hughes a complex description of criterial levels of performance is fundamental when testing writing. When asked about criterial levels the chairperson affirmed that these are not really necessary since every year is not the same and the percentage representing each grade changes from year to year.

In terms of scoring procedures she attested that as a chairperson she introduced analytic marking for both the literature and language components in the examination when prior to her appointment impressionistic marking was used. There is no mention of analytic marking schemes in the literature on assessing essays based on literary texts. In the chairperson's opinion candidates' performance grew worse because markers were asked to use analytic marking schemes and this procedure penalised the candidates' poor writing skills. According to Hughes analytic marking schemes 'make the scoring more reliable' (102), however, it is highly time consuming. If on average more than 700 candidates sit for the MC English examination each year, the marking process must be quite laborious if markers are expected to use an analytic marking scheme for all the eight components involving essay writing.

When asked about the inclusion of advice on studying for the test and exemplars of candidates' scripts, the chairperson declared that a test manual is a good thing but in order for this to be created MATSEC needs to remunerate the examiners much more adequately. McNamara believes that a test manual is a direct product of a test developer's accountability and Linn and

Miller, Hughes, and Parkinson and Reid Thomas are of the opinion that candidates and teachers should always be presented with as much information as possible about the test via a manual.

The chairperson is of the opinion that the components which present candidates with the most challenges in the MC English examination are those constituting Paper 1, that is, Drama and Poetry. Paper 1 always registers the lowest marks and mostly this is due to poetry and literary criticism. This claim confirms what students and lecturers feel in relation to the challenging nature of literary criticism. For the chairperson, students' writing skills are their weakest point. In the literature components some candidates tend to regurgitate notes and others sit for the examination after having memorised a number of essays. Nonetheless, since the examination tests not only knowledge of content but language proficiency as well, those candidates with a lack of linguistic competence do very badly. According to the chairperson the language and linguistics paper is the one in which students always fare better. However, even though in the survey students claimed that they are satisfied with their performance when tackling the language essay and reading comprehension they complained about the linguistics component and indicated it as being too hard for them.

Just like the majority of lecturers, the chairperson agrees with Grima et al. on the importance of testing speaking and listening skills as part of the examination, however, she feels that candidates should first be presented with an appropriate model such as RP if the testing of these skills is to be done properly.

In the chairperson's opinion the term 'MC English examination' is a misnomer since the current examination primarily tests literature. People want the path of least resistance, that is, teaching only literature. Teaching language is much more challenging since one needs a thorough knowledge of linguistics in order to do a good job. She thinks that combining the testing of language and literature in one examination is problematic and that it would be an excellent idea if MATSEC decided to create two separate examinations, one testing language, the other testing literature. Confirming some of the results of the present study, the chairperson feels that this is crucial since not all those who sit for the MC English examination intend to take up the B.A. English course at university. Hence what is needed is an examination that addresses the needs of students wishing to pursue careers that require a strong linguistic background rather than a literary one.

4.4.2 Marking

The chairperson was asked a number of questions on the marking procedures currently in place in an attempt to understand whether they have any bearing on candidates' performance in the examination.

McNamara maintains that by asking markers to follow ongoing training one 'improve[s] the quality of rater-mediated assessment schemes' (44). When asked about the kind of training that MATSEC provides A-level markers with, the chairperson declared that she is the one responsible for training markers and not MATSEC. She emphasised the fact that whenever decisions are taken there is broad consultation and a consensus is always sought. She claimed that she organises moderation meetings even though each marker is responsible for marking an entire component. Nonetheless she refrained from supplying further details about the actual training that markers receive.

In relation to the kind of rating scale used for the language essay component, she affirmed that markers are provided with an analytical rating scale with a range of criteria and that the same procedure is adopted for the literature components but the scale consists of different criteria. Being a believer in a methodical and scientific approach to marking, she feels that this is necessary in order to minimise subjectivity and enhance standardisation. Language competence and writing skills feature in all rating scales and they are assigned a substantial amount of the overall mark. Hughes claims that in order to ensure validity in marking it is important to keep in mind what the test is meant to assess primarily. If too much emphasis is placed on spelling, punctuation and sentence structure during the marking of an essay based on a literary text this can 'invalidate the scoring' (Hughes 33).

Linn and Miller affirm that markers should have an idea of the expected answer before they mark written work and they should be aware of how to handle irrelevant items. Popham is of the same opinion and maintains that markers should be provided with 'a tentative scoring key in advance of judging a students' responses' (163). By providing the marker with a sketch of the expected answer or a scoring key for each examination question, the paper setter is increasing the test's reliability. When describing the marking procedures used during the MC English examination, the chairperson made no reference to scoring keys or expected answer outlines.

For Hughes double marking is a crucial means of ensuring 'high accuracy' (105) and in Linn and Miller's opinion it is important 'to obtain two or more independent ratings' (247). According to the chairperson double marking is not practised in the MC English examination because she always finds it very difficult to engage markers. She complained about the low remuneration these are given by MATSEC and claimed that if she had to introduce double marking this would halve markers' income.

4.4.3 Paper Setting

The chairperson was asked a number of questions on paper setting in an attempt to understand whether the paper setters' practices are in line with those recommended by the literature on

assessment. Even though the latter recommends restricting candidates' choice in order to achieve comparability of performance, the chairperson claimed that giving candidates a choice of two or more titles for each component is much more humane. In her opinion comparability between the two or more questions is ensured by the fact that the paper setters are experts in their field.

When asked to comment on the criteria used by paper setters for the selection of the unseen texts that form part of the literary criticism component, the chairperson underscored the need for consensus and consultation. She affirmed that the paper setters discuss a number of poems and prose passages and then decide on the ones to be incorporated in the examination paper. Nevertheless, no further elaboration was provided on the actual selection criteria.

The claim that a group of paper setters are collectively responsible for drawing up the examination paper does not exclude mistakes and points towards the need to have quality assurance measures in place. These need to be followed so that the checking of examination papers is carried out rigorously. This would prevent such unfortunate occurrences as that evidenced in the May 2009 session where examination material that had appeared in a previous session of the examination was re-used almost identically. A prose passage intended for criticism was virtually identical to the one that had appeared in the May 2006 session.

4.4.4 Relationship between SEC and MC

Given that this study is intent on exploring the reasons for candidates' performance in the MC English examination, it was fundamental to pose a number of questions in connection with the relationship between SEC English Language/Literature and the Advanced level English examination.

The present study was partly prompted by Farrugia and Ventura's findings and in relation to this the chairperson was asked to indicate the factors responsible for the low correlation between the SEC English Language/SEC English Literature and MC English examinations. In her opinion the SEC English Language examination is not really comparable in terms of level to the Ordinary level English examination offered by most British examination boards. She feels that the standard is much lower and hence the gap between the SEC and MC English examinations is much too large for students to bridge in just two years. Another factor that could be contributing to candidates' poor performance in the Advanced level English examination is that most students who enrol on the MC English course do so without a pass in the SEC English Literature examination. However, this has been disproved by the present study, which has shown that on average 81.6% of those students who enrol on the MC English course at Junior College actually do have a pass, 40.8% of them enrolling with Grades 1 to 3.

The chairperson of the MC English examination board feels irked about the fact that in all her years at the helm her anonymity was never guaranteed. Condemning the letter of complaint written by teachers of English at the two largest sixth forms in Malta, she also objected to being constantly harassed and intimidated because of the high standards she imposed over the past few years. In relation to this she was asked to explain the reasons for which candidates in the May 2008 session managed to perform much better than candidates in the previous sessions. She affirmed that the mistakes pointed out by examiners in the preceding years were not as rampant in 2008. According to her this leap in quality shows that lecturers and students seem to have finally read the examiners' reports.

When asked for her opinion in relation to the fact that students currently need a Grade 5 in SEC English Language in order to study English at MC level at Junior College, the chairperson affirmed that this is insufficient and that Grades 1 and 2 are the most suitable entry requirements. The same applies for a Grade 5 in the SEC English Literature examination. This is insufficient for students wishing to complete the MC English course successfully and hence the entry requirements need to be more stringent. The MC English examination exacts a very high standard from candidates, not only in terms of knowledge of content but most importantly in terms of language proficiency and hence only students with the very best grades at SEC level should be allowed to enrol on the course.

4.4.5 Recommendations

Given her many years of experience and hence the corresponding insight into the state of English at Advanced level, the last question fielded to the chairperson asked for her recommendations in relation to the MC English examination. She declared that over the years she has noticed a steady decline in English proficiency and this is evident from the fact that even at university level there exist remedial English courses. She feels that most candidates do not have the necessary standard and that it would be a mistake to lower the level to improve candidates' performance.

The large number of students in class affects the quality of the teaching and makes it impossible for a lecturer to provide students with individual attention. Here she agrees with one of the most common complaints made by Junior College lecturers. However, she also feels that lectures have the tendency to over-mark and this gives students the wrong impression. Since during the MC English course students are not sufficiently compelled to prove their ability to cope well with a demanding situation, once the examination results are issued they are shocked to discover what their abilities truly amount to.

4.5 MC English Examination Paper

In this section an analysis of the examination paper and its question types follows. The types of questions set could have a major bearing on candidates' performance in the examination and therefore it was felt necessary to analyse the format and structure of the examination paper in the light of what the literature on assessment recommends.

In the 2004-2008 set of examination papers candidates were expected to complete eight essays, one on the set linguistics textbooks, one on a choice of language essay titles, four of on the set literary texts, and the remaining two on unseen texts consisting of a prose passage and a poem. In the reading comprehension component candidates needed to answer a set of questions based on a passage, one of them being a summary-type question.

4.5.1 Literature Components

The six literature components in the examination exhibit the balance between a "knowledge about literature" orientation and a "skills for literature" (19) orientation mentioned by Spiro. Since the MC English examination consists of two literary criticism components, candidates are not being merely tested on their factual knowledge about a given text but also on their ability to apply the literary criticism skills they developed during the course to an unseen text and this is why Parkinson and Reid Thomas maintain that a balance between factual knowledge and practical criticism is to be aimed at (146).

In order to 'Elicit a valid sample of writing ability' one needs to 'Test only writing ability, and nothing else' (Hughes 89-90). This is obviously not entirely possible in the MC English examination since the students are not merely being tested on their proficiency in writing but on their ability to use writing in order to 'produce informed, independent opinions and judgements' ('AM Syllabus English' 2) based on the texts they have read during their course or the texts they read during the examination. Hughes maintains that 'Another ability that at times interferes with the accurate measurement of writing ability is that of reading' (90) but once again we find that the MC English syllabus considers writing about and reading literature as being strongly intertwined. Hence we see that for an essay to be considered a manifestation of above average 'Maturity' the candidate needs to show 'Knowledge and understanding of text combined with wider awareness that leads to a balanced sensitive response' ('AM Syllabus English' 4).

As can be seen in the 2008 examination paper (Appendix 17), the questions that form part of the four literature components based on set literary texts usually require candidates to either evaluate and present an argument or else to discuss a statement or aspect of the text. These two question types are highly demanding not only in terms of the ability to evaluate and discuss a text but also in terms of the linguistic abilities needed to coherently and persuasively present an

argument. This is why Spiro affirms that 'Here language abilities may become confused with literary abilities: the former are needed, to do justice to the latter' (Spiro 48). The two remaining literature components consist of critical appreciation questions and even though these are crucial as a means of determining a candidate's ability to 'apply his/her skills and respond independently to unfamiliar texts' (50) there exists the risk that the candidate might find the text 'linguistically inaccessible, even if its concepts are not' (Spiro 50).

As confirmed by this study language competence and writing skills play a major role in the markers' consideration of what grade to assign to a particular examination script. Hence some candidates might have the required level of literary ability but if their linguistic proficiency is weak then they are bound to perform very poorly. This perhaps calls for a re-evaluation of the degree of importance given to the process of developing students' language proficiency during the MC English course. Students might actually require more intensive training in language and writing skills so that they may adequately deal with the substantial amount of literary content in the syllabus. Moreover, a syllabus that balances literature and language more appropriately might actually help improve candidates' performance.

Popham asserts that when creating an essay title it is imperative to 'Convey to the students a clear idea regarding the extensiveness of the response desire' (159). However, in the MC English examination, essay titles forming part of the two literature components based on set prose texts do not specify a word limit and this leads to a number of questions in relation to comparability of performance.

This study has shown that for the majority of students the literary criticism components are the most challenging out of all nine components. Furthermore, most lecturers are unhappy with the fact that in the MC English examination candidates are expected to tackle two similar literary criticism tasks. The rubrics for the literary criticism components forming part of the 2008 examination paper are the same ones that have appeared in previous examination papers and lecturers feel that these rubrics are somewhat too open and afford the students too much freedom and hence allow them to experience too many pitfalls. They would prefer it if one of the tasks was given more structure by means of a series of questions that guide the candidates' critical appreciation of the text.

4.5.2 Language and Linguistics Components

The language essay component presents candidates with a selection of titles and they are expected to write an essay of not less than 500 words. The syllabus specifies that candidates might be presented with titles requiring them to write argumentative, discursive, narrative or descriptive essays. Linn and Miller point out that it is extremely important for paper setters to make clear which

skill or conceptual understanding candidates are expected to demonstrate or utilize (236). Hughes is of the opinion that candidates should be restricted by means of 'well defined' writing tasks that stop them from 'go[ing] too far astray' (93) and Popham advises paper setters to 'Construct items so that the student's task is explicitly described' (159). However, in the MC English examination some language essay titles lack the necessary details for the candidate to adequately handle the task in question and satisfactorily match the examiners' expectations. Over the past few years there was also the practice of assigning candidates one-word essay titles that obviously give the candidate the freedom to determine what kind of text type to write and the approach to use; this can lead to a lack of reliability in the marking process. In the 2008 examination paper, for example, students were presented with a choice of seven titles and asked to write an essay on such titles as 'Rumours', 'Blind Faith', and 'Commitment'. The literature on assessing writing also urges paper setters to 'Avoid the use of optional questions' (Linn and Miller 238) since by imposing a number of restrictions on candidates 'the more directly comparable will be the performances of different candidates' (Hughes 94). In the language essay component candidates are usually supplied with a choice of six or seven titles to choose from and this obviously undermines the issue of comparability of performance.

In line with the literature's recommendations on the testing of reading skills, the MC English examination uses only authentic texts as part of the reading comprehension component. Hughes recommends choosing texts of an appropriate length and ones that allow the testing of a variety of reading skills (142). However, some lecturers complained about the fact that the reading comprehension passage in the examination is too long and accompanied by just a few questions that year in year out test the same skills. Something else disregarded by the MC English examination but recommended by the literature on assessing reading skills is that of 'Hav[ing] a number of texts presented within each test, in order to provide variety and to avoid having a single content that favours certain test takers over others' (Lynch 48). Moreover, despite the fact that Hughes claims that testing writing when scoring reading 'makes the measurement of reading ability less valid' (155), one perennial task that features in the MC English examination is the summary question: 'Summary skills will be tested in questions requiring the selection of appropriate material from the given passage and its adaptation for a given purpose' ('AM Syllabus English' 4). In the May 2009 examination paper this was not exactly the case since students were asked to write a summary of the entire reading comprehension passage not of a particular aspect of it.

Candidates' knowledge of linguistics is tested by means of a selection of three essay titles from which candidates must choose one and write an essay that does not exceed 400 words. Candidates are expected to discuss a topic found in one of the two set texts. Despite the chairperson's assertion that this component is the one in which candidates fare best, both lecturers

and students disagree and indicate it as one of the most challenging. Given that one of the textbooks in particular is a sociolinguistics study replete with statistical figures, lecturers and students take issue with the fact that the examiners' reports make it clear that in candidates' essays 'the related percentages should have been cited and quoted' (*Examiners' Report 2007 8*). Lecturers are not satisfied with the fact that the essay-type question is used in this particular component since students find it extremely difficult to match examiners' expectations.

4.5.3 Validity

In Hughes' opinion content validity is crucial because 'the greater a test's content validity, the more likely is it to be an accurate measure of what it is supposed to measure, i.e. to have construct validity' (27). Linn and Miller affirm that 'Whenever we wish to interpret assessment results in terms of some individual characteristic...we are concerned with a construct' (78). As pointed out by the chairperson of the MC English examination the combined testing of language and literature in one examination is not particularly beneficial for candidates. A test's results need to 'provide a measure of the construct that is little influenced by extraneous factors' (Linn and Miller 78-79) and this leads one to question whether the MC English examination possesses construct validity due to the fact that it currently combines the testing of language and literature. In order for this examination to truly possess construct validity MATSEC might need to split the present examination into two so that the interpretation of test results is not muddled by a multiplicity of constructs. Moreover, as part of a test manual MATSEC also needs to publish details of the examination's validation since 'Tests for which validity information is not available should be treated with caution' (Hughes 34).

4.6 MC English Syllabus

In this section an analysis of the syllabus follows. The syllabus determines the examination's content and structure and hence it could have a major influence on candidates' performance in the examination. Therefore it was felt necessary to analyse it in the light of what the literature on syllabus design and assessment recommends.

4.6.1 Syllabus-content Approach

The MC English examination adopts a syllabus-content approach and according to Hughes this approach is not the most suitable one. On the other hand, a test based on a course-objective approach militates 'against the perpetuation of poor teaching' (Hughes 13). If test content is based on course objectives 'it will provide more accurate information about individual and group achievement' (Hughes 12-13) and generates beneficial backwash on teaching. Hughes claims that a

syllabus-content approach is 'based directly on a detailed course syllabus' (13), however, the majority of lecturers forming part of the Department of English at Junior College complained that the MC English syllabus is not sufficiently detailed and that its aims and objectives are rather vague. A number of lecturers lamented the fact that their methodology is constrained by the content of the examination, which in turn is based on a syllabus lambasted as being rather woolly in terms of details and objectives. Lecturers rely on the aims specified by the syllabus since currently the examination is not governed by a detailed set of course objectives agreed upon by all the relevant stakeholders. Lecturers demand that the syllabus panel or MATSEC write a comprehensive test manual as a substitute for the three printed pages that make up the present syllabus. Such a manual should include all the elements that are missing from the syllabus: the test's rationale, details on how the test was developed and validated, test specifications, sample items, advice on studying for the test, information on test scores, training materials, and details of test administration (Hughes 66).

Even though a test that adopts a syllabus-content approach is one that 'only contains what it is thought that the students have actually encountered', the main problem associated with such an approach is that a badly designed syllabus consisting of badly chosen textbooks make the results of the test 'very misleading' (Hughes 13). The results of the present study show that certain textbooks in the MC English syllabus are highly unpopular with both students and lecturers and it is due to these textbooks that students consider the linguistics component to be one of the most challenging.

Abety is of the opinion that a syllabus like the one for MC English 'is either not understood or just ignored' because the course content is 'vaguely stated in the general objectives' (94). Such vague statements are 'too imprecise to be of any use' (Abety 94) and this is what emerged from the semi-structured interviews with lecturing staff at Junior College. Abety recommends the creation of a notional syllabus that would cover in detail all the aspects of the subject being tested and would thus be beneficial for both test users and paper setters. Such a syllabus would ensure that 'the test will measure what it aims to measure, and not a hidden agenda personal to each examiner and mysterious to both teachers and learners' (Spiro 22). If such a syllabus or test manual were to be created for the MC English examination then lecturers would not have to complain of 'a communication breakdown between the three participants in the test: examiner, teacher and examinee' (Spiro 54).

4.6.2 Test Specifications

One of the most important stages of test development is the creation of a set of test specifications that are included in a manual that teachers and students can consult while preparing for the test. Test specifications 'include information on: content, test structure, timing, medium/channel, techniques

to be used, criterial levels of performance, and scoring procedures' (Hughes 59). Given that in the MC English examination candidates are expected to write a total of eight essays and a summary, the inclusion of test specifications in the syllabus is even more significant given that they facilitate the paper setter's job: 'When a table of specifications is used in planning for the assessment, it is simply a matter of structuring the questions in accordance with the specifications' (Linn and Miller 232). Test specifications provide test users with a clear picture of what needs to be achieved and 'with what degree of success' (Hughes 55), however, the results of the present study confirm that such specifications are at best quite scant and hence make it very difficult for teachers and students to form an exact idea of what is expected of the examination candidate. For example, despite the fact that the information on 'content should be as fully specified as possible' (Hughes 60), in the MC English syllabus the information on what is expected of candidates when answering questions on the set literary texts merely consists of the titles and names of the authors of the set texts. In addition those components that require candidates to fully employ their critical skills also suffer from a dearth of information in the syllabus. This study has shown that students consider the literary criticism components to be the most challenging ones. However, in relation to the Unseen Poem component the syllabus states merely that

Candidates should be prepared for Section C through the practice of close textual analysis of poetry in the classroom. Students should be able to discuss tone, diction, figures of speech, sound, rhythm, form and symbolism. Essays should be no less than 400 words ('AM Syllabus English' 3).

Teachers and students are not informed of what the examiners consider a satisfactory literary criticism to be like and they must guess at what is expected of candidates. The lack of such information undermines the examination's content validity and fails to produce beneficial backwash.

The absence of criterial levels of performance in the MC English syllabus shows that the examination uses norm-referencing and despite its merits such a test might be 'inappropriately competitive, and discouraging' (McNamara 64). Parkinson and Reid Thomas are of the opinion that 'all students should be compared with outside criteria' (150) while Hughes claims that the main advantages of making testing criterion-referenced are those of increasing beneficial backwash and assuring the students that 'if they do perform the tasks at the criterial level, then they will be successful on the test, regardless of how other students perform' (55). Linn and Miller point out that by making 'norm-referenced tests more descriptive' test publishers can 'capitalize on the best features' (39) of both norm-referenced and criterion-referenced measurements.

4.6.3 Outcomes

According to Berns language is 'a social tool that speakers use to make meaning; speakers communicate about something to someone for some purpose, either orally or in writing' (104). Richards emphasises the importance of integrating all four skills during a course of study since these occur simultaneously in the real world. Grima et al. report that 'there are widespread complaints at University that students lack the necessary communication skills' (17) and recommend the testing of listening and speaking skills as part of the MC English examination. The absence of such skills from the syllabus shows that currently the MC English examination is flouting one of the most fundamental tenets of the communicative approach, this being that students should be trained for the real communicative needs of the world outside the classroom. Moreover, as confirmed by this study, it is generating a harmful backwash effect on teachers and students, who in their majority demand the inclusion of listening and speaking skills in the syllabus even though they cannot at present formally practise them.

Parkinson and Reid Thomas' 'typology of potentially assessable outcomes' (142) contains elements that are disregarded by the MC English syllabus in its narrow focus on knowledge of facts about a given text and practical criticism skills. Affective outcomes and language competencies broaden the scope of the study of literature, especially if combined with the assessment of all four skills via a literature test. Such an integrated test would 'have greater authenticity and real-world validity than single-skill tests' (Parkinson and Reid Thomas 151).

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has presented and discussed the findings resulting from the different methods of data collection used in this study, namely correlational research, the student survey and the semi-structured interviews with Junior College lecturers and the chairperson of the MC English examination. In this chapter the examination paper and syllabus were also analysed and the findings of the different data gathering tools were discussed in the light of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

The results of the present study testify to the fact that the degree of relationship between SEC English Language/SEC English Literature and MC English is rather low and hence vindicates the need for an investigation of the possible reasons contributing to such a disparity. Such an investigation was carried out via a survey and semi-structured interviews with the different stakeholders. The examination paper was also analysed for the same purpose.

The results of the student survey show that the majority of Advanced level English students at Junior College choose the subject with definite academic and professional objectives in mind and they do not regard it as an easy alternative to much more demanding subjects. Most of them are

aware of its demands and of their own shortcomings, especially when it comes to writing skills and certain components of the examination. They invest a substantial amount of effort while preparing for their examination and their attitude towards English is motivated by both an integrative and an instrumental orientation. Even though for a substantial number of students studying English is a means of attaining targets that are not related to the subject per se, the majority claimed that they chose to study the subject because they love reading and appreciate literature. Lastly, the majority of students are satisfied with the MC English course but they are also aware of those areas that require further development.

The results of the semi-structured interviews with Junior College lecturers show that they believe that the students' lack of writing proficiency and the examiners' high expectations are responsible for candidates' poor performance in the MC English examination. To a large extent lecturers share similar views on how to boost their students' academic development and with the exception of a preponderance of teacher talk the methodology they use is on the whole in accordance with the recommendations of the literature on pedagogy. Whilst being aware of the necessary changes that need to be effected within the MC English course at Junior College, they also concede that it is equally *de rigueur* to institute changes within the MC English examination itself.

The semi-structured interview with the chairperson of the MC English examination board shows that the latter in certain respects follows the recommendations of the literature on assessment, however, further development is called for in certain areas. This interview has thrown light on assessment practices that need to be re-evaluated and it has validated a finding that emerged in both the student survey and the semi-structured interviews with lecturers, that is, the fact that students' writing skills are a serious threat to their success in the MC English examination. Most importantly this interview has confirmed the need for a revision of the examination's current content and structure, a finding yielded by other elements in this study.

The analysis of the MC English examination paper shows that even though the paper setters to some extent follow the recommendations of the literature on assessment there are a series of problematic issues that could pose a disadvantage to examination candidates.

The analysis of the MC English syllabus shows that it is not sufficiently detailed and that there exist a number of omissions that contravene the recommendations of the literature on assessment and syllabus design. These omissions negatively affect the structure and content of the examination, generate harmful backwash and hamper the communication between the relevant stakeholders.

The next chapter presents an overview of this study's main results and the conclusions reached. It explains how these help answer the research questions and also puts forward a number of recommendations.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter summarises the main findings yielded by each one of the research tools used in this study and explains how these help answer the research questions. The conclusions reached in relation to the factors responsible for candidates' poor performance in the MC English examination are accompanied by a number of recommendations whose principal aim is that of indicating how the problematic areas identified by this study may be addressed.

5.1 Correlational Research

Given that an earlier study established that the predictive validity of SEC English Language/SEC English Literature is relatively low when compared to other subjects at SEC level, this study sought to verify whether this was also the case for Junior College students who sit for the MC English examination. Moreover, whereas Farrugia and Ventura's study focused solely on the 2006 cohort this study examined the grades of the 2004 to 2008 cohorts. Correlational research was also conducted in order to confirm that a problem with candidates' performance truly exists.

Farrugia and Ventura showed that the predictive validity of English examinations at SEC level for the MC English examination is relatively lower than that of other subjects. This study found that in the case of Junior College students it is even lower and the results warranted the need to carry out further research in order to establish the factors responsible for such a low correlation.

This study shows that overall the correlation between SEC English Literature and MC English is much lower than that between SEC English Language and MC English and hence the relationship between the latter two examinations seems to be relatively stronger even though not strong enough to support with certitude predictions about a candidate's performance in the MC English examination. One of the most interesting findings made by this aspect of the study is that an examination that is heavily biased towards literature correlates more strongly with a language examination than with a literature examination at a lower level.

5.2 Student Survey

The student survey was conducted in order to establish whether the students' motivation and attitude towards English and the examination play a role in affecting candidates' performance.

Even though for the vast majority of students English is their second language and despite the fact that their oral proficiency is not formally assessed, more than 90% of the respondents claimed that they speak English 'sometimes' or even more frequently. Around three quarters claimed that they study the subject at home for three to ten hours per week while a fifth of the respondents do so between one and two hours per week.

Novels, magazines and websites were ranked in that order as the preferred reading material in English and more than 90% of the respondents claimed that they read more than three books in English per year. Nearly a third of the respondents read between five and ten books and a slightly higher percentage read more than ten books and this shows that the students enjoy reading in English. Even though less than half the respondents write just one essay in English per week, the rest write two or more essays. Narrative and descriptive essays were the types of essays students prefer writing most while literary criticism essays and essays based on literature texts were identified as the most challenging to write. The students at Junior College consider themselves to be most good at writing the language essay and answering the reading comprehension and summary writing respectively. Once again, the two literary criticism components were reported as the most challenging components of the examination paper and this corroborates the lecturers' and chairperson's concern with students' performance in these particular components.

Speaking, reading, writing and fluency registered the highest percentages when the respondents were asked to list elements that they believe constitute proficiency in a language. When asked to rank the four skills in terms of which skill they consider themselves to be most good at, 43.6% placed reading skills at the top, while a third felt that they are least good at speaking English. The latter fact underlines the need for the introduction of the assessment of speaking skills in the MC English examination.

Even though around 87% of the respondents are largely satisfied with the MC English course at Junior College they would like to see certain specific changes taking place. A substantial number of students wish to see further developments in the teaching of the subject, more than a third suggested changes to the syllabus, and nearly a quarter of the respondents made suggestions in relation to the teaching and learning of writing skills. Since over two thirds of the respondents made suggestions in relation to the linguistics component, it seems that the majority of the students wish this particular component to undergo revision. In this regard, the students' opinion is supported by that of the lecturers.

Dörnyei affirms that instrumental goals are highly significant in encouraging a student to learn English but in order for students to achieve a high degree of proficiency, integrative goals are of fundamental importance too. This study shows that a combination of instrumental and integrative reasons form part of the students' motivation to study English at Advanced level at Junior College

and hence their poor performance in the MC English examination cannot be attributed to issues of motivation.

The results show that the students who choose to study English at MC level do so for a variety of academic and professional reasons and not because they wish to continue their studies specifically in the subject or because they wish to pursue a career that is closely bound to the subject. Once they receive their Matriculation Certificate, 82.2% of the respondents intend to continue their studies at university and 43.1% intend to teach English as a foreign language. Whereas more than a quarter of the respondents intend to read for a Bachelor of Education degree, 21% intend to read for a Bachelor of Law degree. Law, English and Psychology registered the highest percentages when the respondents were asked to mention the subjects they wish to study at university. While one third of the respondents indicated that they intend to take up teaching as a career, 18.3% wish to become lawyers and 9.2% wish to become psychologists. These findings underscore the need for a re-evaluation of the syllabus and the structure of the MC English examination so that the needs of all the students who choose to study the subject at Advanced level are fully addressed.

Contradicting the opinion of some lecturers in relation to the students' attitude towards the subject, the results of the student survey show that on the whole the students who choose to study English at Advanced level at Junior College do so with a clear set of academic and professional objectives in mind and not because they consider it to be a soft option. The vast majority are aware of the challenges that the MC English examination entails and they do invest adequate amounts of time and effort in preparation for it. Their attitude towards the subject is one governed by both an integrative and an instrumental orientation and even though for a substantial number of students English is a means of achieving goals that are not directly connected to the subject the majority of students affirmed that their choice to study English was inspired by their love of reading and appreciation of literature.

The students are amply aware of those areas that they consider to be their strengths as well as of those areas that they require further support in, especially linguistics and the writing of discursive/argumentative essays and essays based on unseen texts and set literature texts. Both the Junior College lecturers and the chairperson of MC English examination board are of the opinion that students' writing skills are a considerable cause for concern. Hence on the whole the results show that even though Advanced level English students experience major difficulties when faced with certain examination components and even though they require considerable support with the development of their writing skills, the motivation and attitude of those students who choose to study English at Advanced level at Junior College are not factors contributing to candidates' poor performance in the MC English examination.

5.3 Semi-structured Interviews with Lecturers

Semi-structured interviews with the lecturers of English at Junior College were conducted in order to garner information about what they consider to be the possible causes for the problem and to determine whether the methodology they employ to teach the subject has a bearing on the candidates' performance in the examination.

This study shows that the lecturers are not satisfied with their students' performance in the MC English examination, especially students' performance over the past five years. This coincides with this study's analysis of the slump in performance recorded between 2004 and 2008. While the lecturers do concede that their students might not be doing their utmost to obtain a satisfactory grade they also believe that the examination itself could be at fault. In their opinion one of the main factors for candidates' poor performance is the students' attitude towards the subject and their linguistic limitations. However, another important factor that could be hampering students from obtaining the grades that they actually deserve is the very high standard imposed by examiners over the past five years. This study's findings indicate that the lecturers are right to identify the examination, the examiners' standards and the students' limitations as possible causes for poor performance, but negate the idea that the students' attitude is to blame.

In the interviewees' opinion those students who choose to study English at MC level can be broadly divided into three categories: those who choose the subject because they truly love it, those who choose the subject because of practical goals and reasons, and those who choose to do so without fully knowing what they are letting themselves in for. The majority of lecturers have reservations about the entry requirement set at Grade 5 in SEC English Language and most of them would prefer students to possess a minimum Grade 3 or 4. Although half of the interviewees expressed a preference for a higher grade than 5 in SEC English Literature on the basis that this is not sufficient to allow the students to follow the course with profit, the other half feel that at least having a Grade 5 is already beneficial given the fact that currently students are not required to have a pass in this subject in order to enrol on the course. However, besides showing that most students enrol on the MC course with Grades 1 to 3 in both language and literature, this study has also found that a lower correlation exists between SEC English Literature and MC English than between the latter and SEC English Language.

The majority of interviewees expressed satisfaction with the way the different components are tested in the examination, however, six out of the ten lecturers mentioned linguistics as a component that requires a substantial amount of revision. As regards the syllabus' set texts the majority of lecturers feel unhappy with the current selection and most of them would like to see the linguistics textbooks in particular being changed. Lecturers believe that the choice of set texts has a bearing on the students' success rate in the examination because if a set text is too difficult or

uninteresting then the students are not going to find the necessary incentive. All ten lecturers maintained that the essay should continue being the main form of assessment, however, a number of interviewees would like to see different methods of assessment being introduced for the testing of linguistics and literary criticism. The majority of lecturers feel that having smaller classes is an important change that can be made at Junior College in order to help improve students' performance in the examination and in terms of changes in the examination they recommend revising the content and assessment methods of the linguistics component. What emerges most prominently from all this is that the lecturers are as dismayed as the students with this particular component and their opinion goes counter to that of the chairperson who repeatedly maintained that there is nothing wrong with the linguistics textbooks and the way the subject is being assessed.

Agreeing with both the students and the chairperson, nearly all the interviewees would like to see speaking and listening skills being tested in the MC English examination. However, they are concerned with the logistical problems that such an exercise would create.

Nearly all the interviewees concur with the idea that the examiners' interpretation of the syllabus' aims and objectives is not very clear because the latter are themselves quite vague and because the examiners' reports tend to be too general, inconsistent and conflicting. Hence the examiners' expectations do not really match those of the lecturers and the resulting 'communication breakdown' (Spiro 54) obviously affects candidates' performance.

Both Spiro and Parkinson and Reid Thomas favour an approach to the teaching of literature which seeks a balance between the assimilation of factual knowledge and the development of the necessary skills to effect a 'genuine and detailed engagement with literary texts, and ability to explain his or her response' (Parkinson and Reid Thomas 145). Lecturers at Junior College seem to follow this approach and they teach literature mostly by first introducing the text's background and then dividing the text into manageable chunks and analysing each one in the light of plot, themes, characters, stylistic devices and literary techniques so that the students are able to understand the text more fully. Most lecturers would use more media and hands-on activities if they had to change the way they teach literature, however, they claim that they are restricted by time constraints and class sizes. When it comes to teaching practical criticism lecturers first introduce the students to the discipline by going over the main literary terms and stylistic devices that they need to be familiar with. Then students are shown how to adopt a top down or bottom up approach, provided with sufficient practice and taught how to structure a literary appreciation essay. The majority of interviewees are happy with this approach and would not consider changing it. In accordance with Lazar's recommendation, when teaching literature they seek to employ a holistic approach that takes into account content, language and the students' personal enrichment and they concur with the fact that all three are important for sixth form students.

The interviewees tend to emphasise the importance of reading and writing skills when teaching language and they are aware of the fact that they do this because of the examination's backwash. When asked to comment on Communicative Language Teaching the majority of lecturers pointed out that they are in favour of it and that they do put it into practice, however, they also complained about the fact that they cannot use it as effectively as they would like to given the size of their classes and the fact that they only have a weekly one-hour language seminar at their disposal. This indicates the need for a reappraisal of the role that language and linguistics play in the MC English examination and syllabus.

When describing students' writing ability, the lecturers claimed that some students need to work very hard in order to improve their writing skills and meet the standards of the Advanced level examination and in this they agree with the chairperson's views. Confirming the findings of the student survey, lecturers feel that students are quite able to write narrative and descriptive essays but flounder somewhat when assigned discursive/argumentative essays and essays based on unseen texts and set literature texts. According to the lecturers, students can improve their writing by receiving plenty of exposure to English and by practising their skills in stages. A writing programme would also be highly beneficial in addressing students' difficulties and developing their writing skills. When describing the way they teach writing the majority of lecturers pointed out that they employ a process approach whereas the others claimed that they employ a product approach. Half of the interviewees feel that the teaching of writing at Junior College can be improved if they teach classes with smaller numbers and if a writing programme is properly set up.

When teaching reading, lecturers at Junior College adopt the four roles mentioned by Harmer and they use an integrated approach composed of an eclectic set of strategies and activities meant to develop different reading skills. Their methodology is in line with Nuttall's idea that teachers' primary purpose when teaching reading skills is to allow students to develop into independent readers. Nonetheless, lecturers feel that the examination's backwash compels them to focus almost exclusively on the reading skills targeted by the MC English examination.

The majority of interviewees agree that the current content of the linguistics component needs to be replaced with a general kind of linguistics since they feel that as it stands it is somewhat counterproductive. They teach the subject mostly by means of presentations and the contextualisation of the texts' information. Even though they do try to relate the topics to the students' own lives and background, some lecturers still find it hard to teach the subject and convince students of its usefulness.

In terms of activities and resources this study found that the majority of lecturers use group work and pair work because they find that students learn from each other. Students' presentations do not seem to be too popular and this is primarily due to lack of time and large classes. While

lectures are considered highly feasible, the interviewees pointed out the need for well-structured delivery and the use of elicitation techniques. The interviewees are aware that lectures via PowerPoint presentation are beneficial but within the Junior College context they are not considered so practical because of lack of facilities and the risk of making students feel passive. While all the lecturers value handouts as a supplementary form of material not all the interviewees are in favour of resource packs since these might encourage the students to substitute the lectures and to avoid taking notes.

This study shows that lecturers at Junior College are aware of what might be causing their students to perform poorly in the MC English examination and whilst acknowledging that the students' attitude and lack of proficiency in writing English could partly be at fault, they also believe that the examiners must account for having exceedingly high expectations and not being sufficiently clear in terms of what is required of candidates sitting for this examination. Even though some lecturers were candid enough to point out that teaching methodology might also be an important factor behind candidates' poor performance, they add that if this were the case then one would need to trace this problem from the students' primary schooling up to postsecondary education. Certain difficulties that students encounter when writing English cannot be satisfactorily ironed out in a highly demanding two-year-course and this idea has the support of the chairperson. On the whole the lecturers at Junior College seem to share the same views on the best way to approach their students' academic development. Even though some lecturers need to curtail their predilection for teacher talk none of them are guilty of using methods that are completely blacklisted by the literature on pedagogy. Lecturers are of the opinion that a number of changes can surely be incorporated within the MC English course at Junior College in order to improve students' performance but unless changes are also made in the examination itself then it will all be to no avail.

5.4 Semi-structured Interview with the Chairperson of the MC English Examination

A semi-structured interview was conducted with the chairperson of the MC English examination in order to determine what she considers to be at the root of candidates' poor performance and to establish whether the assessment practices currently in place are actually to blame.

From the interview it transpires that even though the MC English examination board to a certain extent acts in line with the practices recommended by the literature on assessment, there exist a number of grey areas that require further development. The chairperson herself pointed out that the syllabus and examination would benefit from a redress of the current bias in favour of literary content and from a structure that balances literature and language. However, her insistence

on the benefits of continuing to assess candidates on their knowledge of the current two linguistics textbooks is unpalatable for lectures and students alike.

Another bone of contention is the issue of question types. The chairperson's claim that the types of questions set in the examination do not need modifying is questioned by a number of lecturers, who would like to see literary criticism and linguistics being assessed in a different manner, and the omission of ambiguous items. Her dismissal of criterial levels of performance is something that goes counter to what is recommended by the literature on assessment but her claim that analytical marking is used in the MC English examination is surely evidence of rigorous testing procedures, even though the use of such rating scales for essays based on literary texts is not mentioned in the literature. Moreover, just like a number of lecturers, the chairperson is in favour of test manuals and the inclusion of the testing of speaking and listening skills. The latter is particularly important given that this study has shown that the majority of students feel they are least proficient when speaking English.

The chairperson declared that students perform most poorly in the literary criticism components and that inadequate writing skills constitute the weakest point of most candidates. This corroborates some of the findings of the student survey and the semi-structured interviews with Junior College lecturers.

Given the varying purposes that students have for taking English at MC level, the chairperson thinks that it would be a good idea to stop combining the testing of language and literature in one examination in order to create two separate examinations, one testing language, the other testing literature. This study's findings corroborate the chairperson's opinion in this regard.

Without going into the details of what kind of training markers are provided with, the chairperson claimed that she does train her markers and that moderation exercises are carried out despite the fact that each marker is responsible for an entire component. Language competence and writing skills are given considerable weight in all the analytical rating scales used by markers. Even though the literature suggests double marking for essay type questions this is not practised in the MC English examination. Moreover, there emerged no indication that markers are supplied with a detailed scoring key or expected answer outline by paper setters.

With regard to paper setting, the literature recommends restricting candidates' choice especially when assigning essay titles. However, in the MC English examination candidates are always provided with two or more titles to choose from for each component. The issue of comparability between questions is at the discretion of the individual paper setter.

The chairperson is of the opinion that the factors responsible for the low correlation between the SEC English Language/SEC English Literature and MC English examinations are firstly the huge gap between the two levels and secondly the lack of a pass in the SEC English Literature

examination on the part of most students. This study has shown that the second factor indicated by the chairperson is not really contributing to the problem. The chairperson's explanation for candidates' relatively better performance during the May 2008 session is undermined by the lecturers' indictment of the examiners' reports published over the past few years.

The chairperson agreed with those lecturers who feel that a Grade 5 in SEC English Language/English Literature is not sufficient to complete the MC English course with profit, however, the recommendation that only those students with Grades 1 and 2 should be allowed to enrol is much more exclusive and unveils high expectations.

The chairperson is aware of the fact that lecturers face a number of difficulties when trying to cater for the individual needs of their students since they are compelled to teach big classes, however, she criticised their tendency to be too generous with marks. Further confirming the idea that examiners over the past few years have set standards that students found very hard to match, the chairperson recommended that her successors should resist the temptation to improve candidates' grades by lowering the level of the MC English examination.

This study has shown that the lecturers and the chairperson have the same concerns over the level, however, there is a difference in quantity – the chairperson's is higher. Even though it once again emerged that students' writing skills are hampering their performance, the results show that some of the assessment practices currently in place and the examiners' exceedingly high expectations are among the chief factors responsible for candidates' poor performance.

5.5 Analysis of the MC English Examination Paper

The MC English examination paper was analysed in order to explore whether the different components and the way they are being assessed are hindering candidates from performing in a satisfactory manner.

From the analysis of the MC English examination paper it became apparent that even though to some extent the paper is in line with the recommendations of the literature on assessment there exist a number of problematic issues that are clearly putting examination candidates at a disadvantage. The fact that the examination is largely made up of literature components creates a backwash effect on the MC English course of prioritising the teaching and learning of literary content rather than the development of a satisfactory level of language competence and writing proficiency. The literary criticism, language essay, reading comprehension and linguistics components need to be re-evaluated and brought in line with the recommendations of the literature on assessment and the difficulties pointed out by students and lecturers need to be effectively addressed.

5.6 Analysis of the MC English Syllabus

The MC English syllabus was analysed in order to explore whether there exist any deficiencies which are affecting the examination in a negative manner and in turn hampering candidates' performance.

The examination's syllabus-content approach is troubling due to the lack of details that exist in the present syllabus. The aims and objectives are not fully developed and students, teachers and examiners are not presented with sufficient information in relation to the examination's different components for everyone to agree on what is expected of candidates. The syllabus' omissions, especially as regards test specifications, contravene the recommendations of the literature on assessment and syllabus design. These shortcomings are leading to a harmful backwash effect and exerting a pernicious influence on the communication between the relevant stakeholders.

5.7 Factors Responsible for Candidates' Poor Performance in the MC English Examination

The results indicate that the factors mainly responsible for candidates' poor performance in the MC English examination originate from two primary sources: the teaching and learning of the subject, and the syllabus and assessment. The students' deficient writing skills and the challenges they face when tackling specific essay types and certain examination components were pointed out repeatedly by the different stakeholders. The learning context at Junior College, with its big classes and lack of a writing programme, is not doing much to help students make the necessary leap from a secondary level of writing proficiency to a highly demanding postsecondary one. Some of the assessment practices currently in operation compounded with the examination's structure and part of its content are also proving deleterious for most candidates. The exceedingly high expectations of examiners and the fact that these do not always tally with those of lecturers and with the abilities of most candidates are also partly responsible for the latter's poor performance.

5.8 Recommendations for Practice

This study pinpoints the major causes for candidates' poor performance in the MC English examination. Based on its results what follow are a number of recommendations geared towards assisting all concerned stakeholders to adequately address the problem.

5.8.1 Teaching and Learning

The first set of recommendations help address a number of issues that are proving to be detrimental to the students' efforts to satisfactorily complete the MC English course:

- Students and lecturers should do their utmost so that the former adopt a more positive attitude towards the literary criticism components in the examination.
- Students should be provided with increased assistance in developing their writing skills, especially when it comes to writing literary criticism essays, discursive/argumentative essays and essays based on set literature texts.
- A comprehensive writing programme should be set up at Junior College and it should adopt a process writing approach.
- Students and lecturers should be allowed to benefit from the creation of smaller classes.
- Lecturers should seek to boost the amount of student talk in the classroom as this makes the learning experience more communicative and enriches the students' proficiency.
- Lecturers should make use of multimedia projectors and other ICT equipment in order to diversify their teaching methods and the learning activities that students are engaged in during a lesson.

5.8.2 Syllabus and Assessment

The next set of recommendations focus on the anomalies identified by this study within the syllabus and the examination and which are seriously jeopardising candidates' ability to succeed in the MC English examination:

- The syllabus' strong bias in favour of literary components should be adjusted and the examination's structure revised so that its content is equally balanced between literature and language components and reflects all the language skills through the inclusion of speaking and listening skills. Alternately MATSEC might actively consider creating two separate examinations and thus replacing the combined testing of literature and language in one examination.
- The syllabus should be substantially revised and a more detailed and informative version published. MATSEC and the syllabus panel might also wish to consider replacing or complementing the syllabus with a very detailed test manual that includes information on content, test structure, types of questions set, criterial levels of performance, scoring procedures, advice on studying for the test, and exemplars of candidates' scripts.
- The syllabus panel should devise a detailed set of criteria to help it with the selection of set texts and it should always take into consideration the age and cognitive level of the majority of the candidates.

- Examiners should as far as possible have realistic expectations that match those of the lecturers responsible for teaching the students. Examiners should be clear about what is expected of candidates in each component of the examination and this information should form part of a detailed syllabus or test manual.
- The examiners should seek to be as clear as possible when writing their reports, especially in connection with their interpretation of the syllabus aims and objectives.
- The testing of one of the literary criticism components should be revised and different assessment methods introduced.
- The introduction of coursework as a means of complementing the examination should be actively considered.
- The content and testing of the linguistics component should be substantially revised and the syllabus panel should seriously consider replacing the current set texts.
- The language essay and reading comprehension components should be revised and brought in line with the recommendations of the literature on assessment.
- MATSEC should consider providing the MC English examination board with the necessary funds in order for double marking to take place, and paper setters should provide markers with a detailed scoring key or expected answer outline for each examination question.
- The issue of comparability between the questions forming part of each component should be thoroughly examined and if need be candidates should be restricted to only one question for greater reliability.

5.9 Possible Limitations

Even though this study sought to identify the factors that are leading to the poor performance of most students in the MC English examination, by focusing solely on Junior College students it cannot expect to generalise its findings to all those candidates sitting for this examination, candidates who derive from different postsecondary institutions where different entry criteria might be requested, where different teaching methodologies might be employed and where different learning contexts are in place. Hence to fully understand the issue further research is required and the scope needs to be much broader. This study's hypothesis took into account three very important factors, namely teaching methodology and learning environment, student motivation, and assessment practices. However, other factors that could be equally important for the purposes of this study were not investigated due its limitations. These may consist of the students' home environment, the changes students undergo whilst following the MC English course and others. More detailed research methods like semi-structured interviews and focus groups with students

need to be employed in order to gauge the effect of such as yet unmeasured factors. Even though this study focused its correlational research on five different cohort groups attending Junior College, the same techniques need to be applied on a national level and take into account all the cohort groups there have been since the inception of MATSEC. This study was also unable to make any parallels between the situation in Malta and the situation in countries that accord English the status of a second language and in which it is studied at Advanced level. It is hoped that further research on the central concerns of the present study will help to shed further light on the problem and the means by which it can be effectively resolved.

5.10 Conclusion

This study has probed the factors responsible for candidates' poor performance in the MC English examination by means of a variety of research tools. The subsequent results indicate that in order for the problem to be successfully tackled, changes need to be effected both in the MC English course at Junior College and in the MC English syllabus and examination. The prevailing low success rate is not solely due to the candidates' proficiency but more importantly it is attributable to a number of lacunae that exist in the teaching and learning context and the assessment of English at MC level. Adequately addressing the problem is particularly pressing given the fact that the examination exerts a far-reaching influence on candidates' life chances by effectively acting as a gate-keeper to higher education.

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Appendix 1 – Grouping of Subjects Forming Part of the Matriculation Certificate and Points Assigned to each Grade

Those subjects forming part of the Matriculation Certificate are grouped into four categories: Group 1 (Languages), Group 2 (Humanities or Business subjects), Group 3 (Sciences), Group 4 (Art, Computing and other subjects). Students need to choose a subject from each one of the first three groups, any other two subjects from the four groups and Systems of Knowledge, which is a compulsory subject and rated as an Intermediate level. All subjects are graded from A to E. Candidates are awarded grade F if they fail an examination. Each grade is assigned a number of points and candidates need to obtain passes in one subject from each of Groups 1, 2 and 3, in Systems of Knowledge and obtain at least 44 grade points in order to be awarded the Matriculation Certificate. At Advanced level, Grade A is awarded 30 points, Grade B 24 points, Grade C 18 points, Grade D 12 points, and Grade E 6 points. At Intermediate level, Grade A is awarded 10 points, Grade B 8 points, Grade C 6 points, Grade D 4 points, and Grade E 2 points. Candidates sit for their examinations in May but they are allowed to re-sit a maximum of three subjects, one subject at Advanced level, one subject at Intermediate level, and Systems of Knowledge. The Certificate is awarded an overall grade (A, B or C) and this is determined from the sum of the grade points obtained in each subject: Grade A (80-100 points); Grade B (64-78 points); Grade C (44-62 points).

Appendix 2 – MC English Syllabus

AM Syllabus (2008-2010): English

AM SYLLABUS (2008-2010)

ENGLISH

AM 10

SYLLABUS

English AM 10 Syllabus	(Available in September) Paper I (3 hrs)+Paper II (3 hrs)+Paper III(3 hrs)
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Paper I (3hrs; 33.33%) + Paper II (3hrs; 33.33%) + Paper III (3hrs; 33.33%)

Aims

The syllabus assumes knowledge of English Language and English Literature at SEC level. A course based on this syllabus should enable the following to be achieved:

- an understanding of the way in which writers use form, structure and language to shape meanings;
- the development of critical sense, personal response and independent judgement;
- an understanding of the ways in which readers respond to, interpret and value texts;
- knowledge of various aspects of style, and the ability to apply this knowledge;
- the ability to respond to, describe, explain and comment on language;
- the ability to write accurately, clearly and effectively for different purposes and audiences;
- the ability to understand written English in terms of its ideas, expression and appropriateness;
- the enjoyment and appreciation in a disciplined and critical way of literary and non-literary texts.

Assessment Objectives

The examination will assess a candidate's ability to:

1. write lucidly, fluently and accurately on one of a number of subjects using appropriate vocabulary and style;
2. summarise or adapt material for a given purpose;
3. demonstrate understanding of the content and purpose of previously unseen material, drawn from a wide variety of sources;
4. respond with understanding to texts of different types and periods;
5. understand the ways in which writers' choices of form, structure and language express meaning, tone and attitude;
6. demonstrate knowledge of the contexts in which literary works are written and understood;
7. produce informed, independent opinions and judgements;
8. communicate clearly the knowledge, understanding and insight appropriate to literary studies;

Quality of Language

Candidates will also be assessed on their ability to organise and present information, ideas, descriptions and arguments clearly and logically, taking into account their use of grammar, punctuation and spelling. In all papers continuous prose answers are required and the marks awarded will take into account the quality of the language used by the candidate.

Subject Content*Paper I (33.3% of global mark)*

- (a) Shakespeare: Set texts
- (b) Poetry: (Set texts)
- (c) Literary Criticism: Poetry (unseen)

Paper II (33.3% of global mark)

- (a) Novels: Set Texts
- (b) Literary Criticism: Prose (unseen)

Paper III (33.3% of global mark)

- (a) Language Essay
- (b) Comprehension and Summary
- (c) Linguistics

Paper I

Section A: Shakespeare: *Julius Caesar*; *King Lear*

There will be two essay type questions on each of the Shakespeare plays. One question to be answered. Literary essays must not be less than 400 words.

Section B: Keats: *The Odes*; *Isabella*; *Lamia*; *The Eve of St. Agnes*; *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*; *Brighi Star! Would I Were Steadfast As Thou Art*; *When I Have Fears That I May Cease To Be*; *On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer*.

Wilfred Owen: *Anthem for Doomed Youth*; *Apologia pro Poemate Meo*; *Asleep: At a Calvary near the Ancre*; *A Terre*; *The Chances*; *Conscious*; *The Dead-Beat*; *Disabled*; *Dulce et Decorum Est*; *Exposure*; *Futility*; *Greater Love*; *Insensibility*; *Inspection*; *The Last Laugh*; *Le Christianisme*; *Mental Cases*; *Miners*; *The Next War*; *The Parable of the Old Man and the Young*; *The Send-Off*; *The Sentry*; *The Show*; *S.J.W.*; *Smile, Smile, Smile*; *Spring Offensive*; *Strange Meeting*.

Elizabeth Jennings: *Selected Poems* published by Carcanet Press, Manchester 1985.

There will be two essay type questions on each of the collections set. One question to be answered. Essays should be no less than 400 words.

Section C: Literary Criticism: Poetry (unseen)

Candidates should be prepared for Section C through the practice of close textual analysis of poetry in the classroom. Students should be able to discuss tone, diction, figures of speech, sound, rhythm, form and symbolism. Essays should be no less than 400 words. (33.3% of global mark)

Paper II

The paper is divided into two sections: **Section A:** prose texts and **Section B:** literary criticism (prose). In **Section A**, four prose texts are set. There will be two essay type questions on each and students will be required to answer on two different texts.

Anthony Trollope: *Last Chronicle of Barset*

Margaret Atwood: *The Handmaid's Tale*

John Fowles: *The French Lieutenant's Woman*

John Steinbeck: *Of Mice and Men*

Section B consists of **Literary Criticism: Prose (unseen)**. Candidates should be prepared for Section B through the practice of close textual analysis of prose passages in the classroom. Students should be able to discuss features of style. Essays should be no less than 400 words. (33.3% of global mark)

In this paper, candidates should concentrate on coherent arguments that directly relate to the subject in hand. Mere narration of the plot, prefabricated answers and irrelevance will be heavily penalised. Quotations must illustrate relevant points. References to other works may be made provided they are pertinent to the argument under discussion.

Paper III

Section A: Essay

This provides opportunities for candidates to write on a chosen topic employing an appropriate style. They can draw on their own experiences and ideas, showing awareness of different forms of written and spoken expression, and the demands of a particular purpose and audience. Thought and discussion about current and philosophical issues, evaluation of experience, and the exploration and practice of different kinds of creative writing will prepare candidates for this paper. Students will be expected to write an essay of not less than 500 words, the title being chosen from a list which may include examples of argumentative, discursive, narrative and descriptive essays.

Section B: Comprehension and Summary

This exercise provides candidates with the opportunity to demonstrate the ability to understand unseen non-literary material. Questions will test the ability to read for understanding, to deduce a writer's intentions, and to analyse the language and structures which are employed. Summary skills will be tested in questions requiring the selection of appropriate material from the given passage and its adaptation for a given purpose. Material for this exercise may originate from contemporary newspapers, periodicals or other non-literary sources.

Section C: Linguistics

Candidates should be prepared for Section C by reading two books: *English as a Global Language* by David Crystal (Topics: Why a global language? and Why English – The Cultural Legacy) and *Living Languages in Malta – A Sociolinguistic Perspective* by Lydia Scirha and Mario Vassallo (Topics: Code-switching; Bilingualism; Language Use in Different Domains and Language Ranking). There will be three essay type questions, from which candidates will be required to answer one. Essays should not exceed 400 words.

GRADE DESCRIPTIONS

EXCELLENT*	GOOD	AVERAGE
a. Relevance	Comprehensive. Notes subtleties, complexities and/or relevant divergencies. Argues cogently. Extremely relevant.	Answers full. Follows obvious line of argument. May present a stock answer reasonably adapted for the purpose.
b. Content	Full, relevant and incisive with sufficient and well-chosen examples, illustrations or cited authorities.	Moderately full. Still relevant but less controlled and less rigorous.
c. Structure	Well planned and well focused, following a logical sequence in argument. Clever paragraph linking.	Line of argument still evident but less controlled and less focused. Tendency to be too wordy and to labour valid points.
d. Style	Clear, correct and incisive. Elegant but not literary. Uses appropriate register.	Easily comprehensible. At times, ambiguous, drab or colourless. Technically correct, but lacks precision.
e. Maturity	Knowledge and understanding of text combined with wider awareness that leads to a balanced sensitive response. Ability to argue and analyse.	Less sensitive and aware of the wider implications in the text. Less able to relate the part to the whole.
EXCELLENT: Maintaining consistent excellent performance across paper and genre.		

Appendix 3 – Student Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to complete the following questionnaire. Rest assured that confidentiality is guaranteed and that the data will be used for research purposes only. Please note that all the instructions on how to answer the questions are in parentheses and italicised.

Group number: _____

First year/Second year *(Please delete as appropriate.)*

1. I chose to study English at Junior College because: <i>(Please tick only one option per answer.)</i>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a) it is easy.				
b) I want to continue studying the subject.				
c) I felt there was nothing else to choose.				
d) I got a good grade in my SEC English Language exam.				
e) I got a good grade in my SEC English Literature exam.				
f) I need a pass in English for the University course I intend to follow.				
g) it does not require a lot of studying.				
h) my friends influenced my decision to choose English.				
i) my parents influenced my decision to choose English.				
j) English is a global language.				
k) I want to teach English as a Foreign Language (TEFL).				
l) it provides me with a lot of free time.				
m) it is not a difficult subject.				
n) I want to become a teacher.				
o) I want to become a lawyer.				
p) I love literature.				
q) I want to continue studying English at postgraduate level.				
r) it is Malta's second language.				
s) I consider it to be my native language.				
t) I love reading in English.				
u) I felt that the other subjects were more difficult.				
v) I'm good at it.				
w) I'm not so good at sciences.				

2. Which is your native language? (Please tick only one option.)

- | |
|------------|
| a) Maltese |
| b) English |
| c) Other |

3. How often do you speak English? (Please tick only one option.)

- | |
|---------------------|
| a) Never |
| b) Rarely |
| c) Sometimes |
| d) Most of the time |
| e) All of the time |

4. How many hours do you spend studying English at home per week?
(Please tick only one option.)

- | |
|-----------------------|
| a) None |
| b) 1-2 hours |
| c) 3-5 hours |
| d) 5-10 hours |
| e) more than 10 hours |

5. What kind of material do you mostly read in English?
(Rank from 1 to 8. 1=read most; 8=read least.)

- | |
|----------------------|
| a) Magazines |
| b) Websites |
| c) Novels |
| d) Non-fiction books |
| e) Poetry |
| f) Drama |
| g) Newspapers |
| h) Comics |

6. How many books do you read in English per year? (Please tick only one option.)

- | |
|-----------------------|
| a) None |
| b) 1-2 books |
| c) 3-4 books |
| d) 5-10 books |
| e) more than 10 books |

7. How many essays do you write in English per week? (Please tick only one option.)

- | |
|-------------|
| a) None |
| b) 1 essay |
| c) 2 essays |
| d) 3 essays |

	e) more than 3
--	----------------

8. Which kind of essays do you prefer writing?

(Rank from 1 to 5. 1=prefer most; 5=prefer least.)

	a) Narrative essays
	b) Argumentative/Discursive essays
	c) Descriptive essays
	d) Literary Criticism essays
	e) Essays based on the set literature texts

9. Which essays do you find the most challenging to write?

(Rank from 1 to 5. 1=most challenging; 5=least challenging.)

	a) Narrative essays
	b) Argumentative/Discursive essays
	c) Descriptive essays
	d) Literary Criticism essays
	e) Essays based on the set literature texts

10. Which of the nine examination components do you consider yourself to be most good at?

(Rank from 1 to 9. 1=Most Good; 9=Least Good.)

	a) Shakespeare's <i>King Lear</i>
	b) Wilfred Owen's poetry
	c) Literary Criticism: poetry (unseen)
	d) Margaret Atwood's <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>
	e) John Steinbeck's <i>Of Mice and Men</i>
	f) Literary Criticism: prose (unseen)
	g) Language Essay
	h) Comprehension and Summary
	i) Linguistics

11. Which of the nine examination components do you consider to be the most challenging?

(Rank from 1 to 9. 1=Most Challenging; 9=Least Challenging.)

	a) Shakespeare's <i>King Lear</i>
	b) Wilfred Owen's poetry
	c) Literary Criticism: poetry (unseen)
	d) Margaret Atwood's <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>
	e) John Steinbeck's <i>Of Mice and Men</i>
	f) Literary Criticism: prose (unseen)
	g) Language Essay
	h) Comprehension and Summary
	i) Linguistics

12. In your opinion what constitutes proficiency in a language?

13. Which of these four skills do you consider yourself to be most good at?

(Rank from 1 to 4. 1=Most Good; 4=Least Good.)

<input type="checkbox"/>	a) Listening to English
<input type="checkbox"/>	b) Reading English
<input type="checkbox"/>	c) Speaking in English
<input type="checkbox"/>	d) Writing in English

14. How satisfied are you with the Matriculation English course at Junior College?

(Please tick only one option.)

<input type="checkbox"/>	a) Highly satisfied
<input type="checkbox"/>	b) Satisfied
<input type="checkbox"/>	c) Unsatisfied
<input type="checkbox"/>	d) Highly unsatisfied

15. What changes would you like to see being implemented in the Matriculation English course at Junior College?

16. Do you intend to continue your studies at university once you receive your Matriculation Certificate? (Please tick only one option.)

<input type="checkbox"/>	a) Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	b) No
<input type="checkbox"/>	c) Don't know

17. Do you intend to teach English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)?

(Please tick only one option.)

<input type="checkbox"/>	a) Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	b) No
<input type="checkbox"/>	c) Don't know

18. Which university course do you intend to follow once you finish your studies at Junior College?

19. Which subject do you intend to study at university once you finish your studies at Junior College?

20. Which career do you intend to pursue once you finish your studies?

Appendix 4 – Interview Guide: Semi-structured Interviews with Lecturers

MC English Examination

- 1) Are you satisfied with your students' performance in their Matriculation English examination? Why? Why not?
- 2) In your opinion, which are those factors responsible for your students' poor performance?
- 3) What's your opinion of those students who choose to study English at MC level?
- 4) Students currently need a Grade 5 in SEC English Language in order to study English at MC level at Junior College. What's your opinion of this?
- 5) Would a Grade 5 in the SEC English Literature examination be sufficient to complete the MC English course successfully?
- 6) Are you happy with the way the different components are tested in the MC English examination? What changes can you recommend?
- 7) Should oracy and listening skills be tested? Why? Why not?
- 8) What's your opinion of the syllabus' set texts?
- 9) In your experience does the choice of set texts have a bearing on students' success rate in the exam? Why?
- 10) Do you agree that in the exam students are assessed mainly by means of the essay type question? Why?
- 11) What's your opinion of the examiners' interpretation of the syllabus' aims and objectives? Do their expectations match your own?
- 12) What changes can be made at Junior College so that the students' performance in their exam is improved?
- 13) What changes would you like to see taking place in the examination?

Literature Teaching Methodology

- 14) Which approach do you use when teaching set literary texts?
- 15) Which other approach would you use if you could?
- 16) Which approach do you use when teaching practical criticism?

- 17) Which other approach would you use if you could?
- 18) When teaching literature what do you focus on mostly: the language, the content or personal enrichment?
- 19) Which of these three approaches do you consider to be the most important for sixth form students? Why?

Language and Linguistics Teaching Methodology

- 20) Which approach do you use when teaching language?
- 21) Why do you use this method?
- 22) What's your opinion of Communicative Language Teaching? Do you practise it in the classroom? Why? Why not?
- 23) What's your opinion of the students' writing skills when they start their MC course?
- 24) How can students improve their writing skills?
- 25) How do you approach the teaching of writing skills?
- 26) Do you prefer a product or a process approach to the teaching of writing skills? Why?
- 27) How can the teaching of writing at Junior College be improved?
- 28) How do you approach the teaching of reading skills?
- 29) What's your opinion of the linguistics component?
- 30) Which approach do you use when teaching linguistics?

Activities and Resources

- 31) What's your opinion of the following in terms of their effectiveness and feasibility as teaching techniques/resources at sixth form level:
 - group work
 - pair work
 - students' presentations
 - lectures
 - lectures via PowerPoint presentations
 - handouts
 - resource packs

Appendix 5 – Annotation System used for Transcribing Semi-structured Interviews with Lecturers

Nonverbal sounds and gestures: <<>>

Pause: *

Longer pause: **

Exclamation: !

Rising intonation (i.e. question): /

Appendix 6 – Interview 1: Lecturer A

INTERVIEWER: let us start by means of a number of questions related to the MC English examination * are you satisfied with your students' performance in their Matriculation English examination/

LECTURER A: well if I had to give a straight answer in general not really * because I feel that some students should have obtained a higher mark than the one they actually got and whereas others appear to have rather great difficulties in trying to reach the standard that we normally expect at this level they should still have passed

INTERVIEWER: in your opinion which are those factors responsible for your students' poor performance/

LECTURER A: okay * one main factor is the way the marking of essays in the exam is conducted probably over here there is a mismatch between what we consider to be the level which a number let's say okay I mean I'll give a rough estimate here * about 45% 50% of our students should achieve and what they actually achieve * therefore one major factor is the fact that probably the marking is a little bit * too rigid and the expectations of examiners are * a little bit unreasonable at this level * another factor could be the students' own difficulties * we know that there are students who are following a two-year course over here who unfortunately for some reason or other * are not able to reach even the standards that we as lecturers believe that they should achieve in order to get a pass mark over here * a third factor might be the way some questions on particular components of the exam are worded or the way they are presented * so basically these three factors * marking or scoring of performances * difficulties which students have * and sort of the types of tasks * essays * issues that students are meant to address in an examination

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of those students who choose to study English at MC level/

LECTURER A: okay at Advanced level * right * I mean again * I've tried to sort of compile information about the grades which the students that I teach at Advanced level groups have obtained in their SEC and then over the course of the first year for example I begin to notice that there is a sort of * an equivalence between the mark particularly if they get a 5 for example or a 4 which between the mark that they get and the difficulties that they have in following the syllabus over here * so there are yes a number of students who I think made a rather unfortunate choice in selecting to study * in choosing to study English at A-level * there are others who have a very good result at SEC level and who I think should proceed to get also a good grade at A-level * unfortunately again this doesn't work * sometimes we get students with a 1 at SEC level and they might get a C or even a D at Advanced level and since we get to know these students over a two-year period I believe that * okay they might not be good enough for an A * but a B would have been more consonant with their abilities

INTERVIEWER: students currently need a Grade 5 in SEC English Language in order to study English at MC level at Junior College * what's your opinion of this/

LECTURER A: okay as I've * this follows from the previous question * I think again this raises a number of difficulties because if there is a policy which is aimed at getting more students to follow courses up to tertiary level then sort of since that is a broader political * educational decision then you're going to say that there is very little I can do about that * but with a five at SEC level it is very difficult for students to even manage to get a pass mark after two years over here * that doesn't provide them with the sort of ** with the necessary competences and skills which will enable them to follow the more demanding more challenging work over here and therefore * it's as if they are on a very long agonising road to failure

INTERVIEWER: would a Grade 5 in the SEC English Literature examination be sufficient to complete the MC English course successfully/

LECTURER A: again * no I don't think so * I don't think so for the reasons I mentioned earlier because getting a Grade 5 * sort of * I've had experience of this since I was a marker at SEC level and generally you would find situations where * for example they are likely to do well in sort of reading comprehension skills * in use of English because they focus on a discrete grammatical point * but then when it comes to writing you get students who get a very poor mark in the writing exercise but because of the sort of weighting that there is on writing in relation to the other skills of the exam then they can easily get a Grade 5 or a Grade 4 and it shows that they have serious weaknesses in the way they express themselves in writing particularly in formal writing

INTERVIEWER: are you happy with the way the different components are tested in the MC English examination/ * what changes can you recommend/

LECTURER A: okay you're referring to the Advanced level over here * okay * am I happy with the way the various components are tested/ * not really * for example in those areas which refer to the practical criticism of an unseen text I think that rather than giving a general rubric where they are asked to write a critical commentary about this passage * or they should write a critical analysis * I think if students are given a little bit more guidance in the sense of a series of questions which indicate that students need to focus on certain aspects * that might be a kind of additional help to students * after all we're talking about something which they will have never been able to study fully * unlike what they do in the set text * okay we might say that they would have had a two-year period to develop those skills which are necessary for them to tackle the kind of text * obligatory text which they are likely to face * but we know that this is rather unrealistic * once again given the * level of English which our students have and particularly the level of exposure which they have to dealing with a sort of a disciplined and informed view of literary texts * so I would suggest for example in practical criticism rather than having a general statement about writing a critical appreciation they should have more guided questions leading to for example development of themes * the writer's choice words * use of imagery * structure and things like that

INTERVIEWER: should oracy and listening skills be tested/

LECTURER A: in an ideal world yes they should be tested * the problem is how are they going to be tested and also how can we prepare students for them to develop their oral and listening skills within the framework of our timetable over here * yes again ideally they should be tested because after all * oral communication is supposed to be part of their * of their proficiency * standard level in a language and therefore I think they should be tested * the problem is a logistical one * of how to actually include the practice of these skills within the timetable * another is how they are going to do it * I mean if they take the same example as the Intermediate level reading aloud and the presentation * maybe with the presentation on a topic I tend to agree that there is a genuine use of * authentic use of language but with the reading aloud after all it's a specific skill * okay people might say students at this level * at Advanced level are supposed to read aloud with fluency and the correct intonation but at the end of the day how many of these people are going to be presenters on television and that sort of thing * so ideally yes but I've got my doubts about how it can be done

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the syllabus' set texts/

LECTURER A: okay * set texts of the syllabus * well as regards * the play for example I still feel that a Shakespearean tragedy should be included so I've got no problem with that * as regards the novels * okay over here * as regards the novels I feel that the selection of novels should be decided on the basis of certain clearly defined aims * first of all the novel should not be so distant * so far away from the sort of collective general knowledge * okay we might complain about that * general knowledge abilities of students * so for example I know that it is sort of fashionable * trendy to select a postmodernist text and things like that but our students have great difficulties in even reading and understanding * on their own when they do the first reading of the text and therefore they require a lot of assistance * a lot of help from the lecturers before lecturers even begin to concentrate on certain issues * last year we had *The French Lieutenant's Woman* which really although * although it is interesting maybe for a person like me to actually read * work on and teach

* therefore I discover a number of things and I develop certain ideas about the teaching of literature
 * but for students it tends to be a little too difficult for them * so in the choice of novels there should be a little more attention paid to how manageable a certain type of novel is for students at this level * I believe that certain texts are more appropriate to be studied at university level rather than at postsecondary level * as regards linguistics for example * I mean again it's not a question of the text * it's a question of the areas which have been selected in linguistics because once you select the areas over there then the text actually reflects the areas * the idea of bilingualism * the idea of * sort of English as a global language * well other areas in linguistics should have been presented in the syllabus * for example morphology * semantics * which are likely to help students therefore in other areas or other components * therefore it would lead to further integration * if they're doing semantics it can help them in critical appreciation * if they're doing morphology at least it would help them in their vocabulary development * in their writing skills rather than something which seems to be sort of something apart from the other components of the syllabus * so yes again it's not just a question of books but also of the components * the areas which are selected

INTERVIEWER: in your experience does the choice of set texts have a bearing on students' success rate in the exam/

LECTURER A: yes obviously it does have a bearing because if they find a particular text difficult to understand * to assimilate then their writing is going to suffer * the more complex and difficult * for example a novel is * students' essays because after all they are assessed on the basis of their essays are likely to become more erratic in expression * in the way they express relevant ideas * for example I notice that when students write their essays on Owen they are likely to perform much better * why/ * because in Owen the themes and the issues which students need to master are sort of limited in range * the suffering of war * the suffering of the soldiers in war * the sort of criticism about * about those who propagate war as being honourable * so I mean the issues are limited over there * therefore students are able to comprehend what Owen's poetry is about * they might have difficulties in sort of writing about the stylistic features of Owen's poetry but as regards the themes and the issues they are able to understand those therefore their writing improves because they understand what they have to write about * when it comes to for example novels in particular like Atwood then over there because so many issues are involved as we know for example feminism * for example the idea of religious fundamentalism * environmental concerns the students are not really aware how all this fits in to give them a sort of first of all a broad understanding of the novel which would then help them to sift through these separate strands of interest which may enable them to write a decent essay so you start finding difficulties in expression * weaknesses in expression * sentences which are going nowhere * it doesn't really help them * on the other hand in Steinbeck * even in Steinbeck although there are a number of issues involved over there but students are generally able to write better essays in Steinbeck

INTERVIEWER: do you agree that in the exam students are assessed mainly by means of the essay type question/

LECTURER A: okay * as regards the set texts I agree with that * if they're going to be assessed on *King Lear* * on Wilfred Owen * on the novels * yes I agree with that * as regards critical appreciation I've already mentioned that there should be a series of questions not necessarily many but maybe four or five questions which are likely to provide the necessary guidance for those students who at least who work hard to prepare themselves and therefore they know what they are going to look for in a text * as regards linguistics once again I disagree with the essay format because in linguistics they should have specific tasks * for example I don't know * a passage * a short passage in which they have to identify particular examples of either * grammatical * syntactical * semantic usage and they would comment about it but they would have the text over there in front of them * they are able to read it closely * identify the specific tasks required and comment about them * I think that would be a better idea of assessing linguistics knowledge

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the examiners' interpretation of the syllabus' aims and objectives/ do their expectations match your own/

LECTURER A: no * I hinted at this earlier * I think that their expectations are a little bit * beyond the abilities of most of our students over here * over the past years we've had frequent * frequent occasions where * it wasn't just me * where members of staff over here complained about what exactly examiners expect in the way students answer certain * certain questions * no I think their expectations should match the kind of students in general * I'm not referring to the weaker ones * in general that we have over here

INTERVIEWER: what changes can be made at Junior College so that the students' performance in their exam is improved/

LECTURER A: okay * what changes/ * given the number of hours which students have over here therefore six hours including the tutorials * and we do allow for small groups for language seminars and for critical appreciation seminars * I mean not much can be done * I mean a lot can be done on the personal level * referring to the methods that the individual lecturer uses * okay over there is always room for improvement * but if this question refers to the sort of way hours are assigned to particular texts on a sort of departmental level I think very little can be done in that sense * we've always tried to change things * for example whereas in the past we used to have two hours for novels when we were doing three over here every week * over the last two or three years we've reduced that to one hour in order to give more time for lecturers to work on Shakespeare and in order to cover the increased amount of work which they had to do in linguistics * so I think at departmental level very little that can be done * on an individual level yes a lot can be done

INTERVIEWER: what changes would you like to see taking place in the examination/

LECTURER A: this probably links up with the previous question * the changes are basically related to the expectations of examiners and therefore the way that they mark essays * I think without sort of * losing track of the fact that standards need to be maintained but maybe there should be a certain flexibility in the way they assess students' work * I think I would penalise more incorrect * inaccurate use of language in essays rather than lack of depth in content * okay/ * as regards * as regards the other areas * as regards critical appreciation and linguistics the changes I would like to see possibly would relate to the fact that rather than assigning an essay I would move towards more focused tasks * more focused questions which are likely to allow students to sort of have more guidance in the way they should tackle such tasks

INTERVIEWER: now we're going to move on to a number of questions related to literature teaching methodology * which approach do you use when teaching set literary texts/

LECTURER A: okay * set literary texts * I teach novels * I do not teach Shakespeare or Owen but what I do is * the approach is that unfortunately even though we tell students that they have to read the text before we actually start to discuss the text * usually I deal with the sort of background in which both historical * literary and particular aspects related to that particular author's work * are relevant in their understanding * then I go through the text by dividing it into manageable sections related therefore * I pay attention to not just the plot over there but also introduce elements which have to do with character analysis and the themes which emerge * then after that we focus a number of sessions on character analysis even though we would have gone over it in the course of the various sections of the text and the themes * so the approach would be to actually help students even in their reading later on after the first reading to be able to identify those elements * those features of the work * character * theme * maybe very little on the use of language * narrative technique is important as well * which are likely to help students to understand the text more fully

INTERVIEWER: which other approach would you use if you could/

LECTURER A: okay * sometimes I leave this towards the end usually depending on whether we have sufficient time * at times I manage to do it * at times I do not do it * I'm talking about the fact that yes it's useful to show students at the end * some people say we can actually do it before we start on a text * I'm referring to either a filmed version of the text * the problem is one of time * whether we have sufficient time * if we had enough time yes you could show the filmed version * maybe even organise discussions on how much the filmed version departs from the text * in what elements are there similarities * how the filmed version has managed to reinforce or consolidate certain things which they would have studied but otherwise * I mean * it would be futile for me to

just watch rather than going over the text together with the whole group of forty students * it's better if I leave that to the students * students should read the text * understand the text and I will focus on just separate issues * elements and characters * I think that is something which is beyond the level of most of the students over here * it is something which may work out at university level but it doesn't work out over here * so I will never adopt that approach * I still feel I need to go through the text with the students * not reading the text but taking a number of chapters * sections at one go * explain what goes on and how what goes on affects * affects * has a particular effect on certain elements like themes * characters and so on

INTERVIEWER: which approach do you use when teaching practical criticism/

LECTURER A: okay now it's been a number of years since I've had practical criticism but generally what I tend to do is first of all in the initial lessons I would focus on what practical criticism involves * therefore the various areas of any literary text which require closer attention * then therefore it's a question of first method * therefore listen I've got a poem in front of me * what am I supposed to do first/ * first you need to read it and try to discover those few elements which * maybe * you are able to understand * once you've understood a number of elements then you need to move on to what I may call a higher level that those few elements which you've understood will help you to understand the other elements therefore moving from the known to the unknown * yes I do focus on a number of * sort of * the technical terms and their application for critical appreciation which they would need to use but then it's a question of practice so usually you present them with a text * you try to provide them with guidance about what they should look for and try to elicit from them certain responses * at times * at times you feel that students are able to understand what the poem in general is all about but then they have a number of difficulties in how they are going to write about it * how they're going to write more detailed accounts of a particular idea which they've understood * therefore that is where they need additional help in providing them also with models of how to write about literary texts

INTERVIEWER: which other approach would you use if you could/

LECTURER A: again * at the moment I can't answer this question because it's been a number of years since I last did practical criticism * well * another approach might actually be to sort of give students the necessary time and space to explore different interpretations of a particular text and why certain interpretations may be valid because they can be reinforced from the text while others cannot be considered as valid because it's as if students are moving beyond the text and sort of imagining things which may not be there * but I can't be very precise about this question because it's been a long time since I've taught practical criticism * that was the approach I used in the past but maybe if there are other approaches I'm quite open to them

INTERVIEWER: when teaching literature what do you focus on mostly/ * the language/ the content/ or personal enrichment/

LECTURER A: well definitely the content * the content * but even over here I think it's very difficult to sort of separate content from personal enrichment * why/ * because if they're reading a particular text * if they're studying a particular text where we have certain * we have certain issues related to for example oppression and that is part of the content of Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* I mean the next step is that you always try to relate it to their own experiences * general knowledge * personal baggage * how for example they can sort of acquire a certain insight * perception into how women have even historically been subjected to oppression in order for other people to maintain power * even the issue of dictatorship * the issue of fundamentalism * I mean content over here has a bearing on personal enrichment * the language * the language * again although * although I do not devote so much attention to the use of language but we are able to read a text because of the medium * the vehicle of language therefore it has to play a part over there

INTERVIEWER: which of these three approaches do you consider to be the most important for sixth form students/

LECTURER A: for sixth form students they should focus mostly on content * on their understanding of what the novel is about * of the various issues which emerge from the novel * on how certain characters are presented * I think that content rather than for example asking a question

about narrative techniques or style * I think content in terms of themes and characters should be given priority at this level although once again I repeat that yes we do include elements such as personal enrichment and language use within our sort of our discussion of the content of a particular text

INTERVIEWER: now we have a number of questions concerning language-teaching methodology * which approach do you use when teaching language/

LECTURER A: okay when teaching language * over here since during the language seminar we have to cater for the requirements of the examination I tend to focus mostly on reading comprehension * answering comprehension questions * summary writing and essay writing * I do at times find the time to include sort of certain exercises which focus students' attention to particular difficulties which they might have in their writing * for example fragmented sentences * run-on sentences * the use of subject verb and object or complement in their sentences to try to understand at least some basic things about their writing * but in general yes the focus is on reading comprehension * summary writing and essay writing * therefore the approach is to provide them with texts because using a text even helps * even if we are not concentrating on comprehension it helps to make them more aware of vocabulary * how they can develop the use of language themselves * develop vocabulary * look at sentence structure * the text is a sort of * is a kind of mine over there which presents them * which presents me as a teacher first of all with the possibilities of exploiting that text for various issues which I would like to do with the rest of the group * so the textual approach let's call it that way

INTERVIEWER: why do you use this method/

LECTURER A: again because within a text it's not just the meaning over there which is important but also the way language is used in order to express this meaning and therefore you can use a text in a variety of ways * you can use it as I've said for grammatical focus * vocabulary focus * for comprehension focus and also to sort of arrive at summarising paragraphs or particular parts of the text * so it's * the textual approach is maybe very helpful in this sense

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of Communicative Language Teaching/ * do you practise it in the classroom/

LECTURER A: right * this is an issue over which I've got very mixed views because it's been * the Communicative Approach has been something which goes back to late seventies and even eighties * well * from my experience it works when you've got small groups * groups of about ten * fifteen * not more than that * it works when you've got * an intensive kind of course * I'm referring to a typical EFL situation but when you're talking about examinations of this type * when you're * when you have * classrooms with certain numbers of students * when you've got * a timetable which allows you to see these students once a week then you have very little time in order to do practice because if you're going to give let's say * I don't know five minutes time for two people to actually * five minutes is not really too long * five minutes to involve themselves in a kind of short debate or conversation then you're leaving out the other students out of this situation * so it's more sort of the teacher fronting the classroom rather than allowing students the freedom to actually make mistakes in using language * experiment with language * I don't think it's likely to work at this level * we do try to include at times * when again * from the front the teacher elicits certain responses giving sufficient space for students to give personal response even not necessarily the only correct answer to a particular question * we do tend to use those elements of the communicative approach in the language seminar but otherwise you're not going to have the sort of the typical standard Communicative Approach * at least I find it difficult to adapt it to the situation over here

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the students' writing skills when they start their MC course/

LECTURER A: there are a number of students who take English at Advanced level whose writing skills leave much to be desired and you might have a number of them whose writing skills are so poor that you begin to see that it's going to be extremely difficult to get them to some kind of acceptable level over here * on the other hand there are students yes who might have a number of

weaknesses but we hope that over the course of two years we are able to leave some lasting effect on their writing skills * in general I would describe their writing skills as ranging from below average * to average * to slightly above average if sort of these terms make a lot of sense

INTERVIEWER: how can students improve their writing skills/

LECTURER A: basically through reading but over here I mean when we say through reading it's something which should go back to a number of years before they actually come here because over here then they have very little time because of their studies in order to actually read good magazines * quality newspapers * maybe even reading novels for their own personal enjoyment * then they have very little time in order for them to do this * there is also a very important role for us over here because we can help students to improve their writing skills by focusing on the more common weaknesses in their writing skills * sentence structure and word order are the first things which come to mind * during language seminars * so I mean I could express myself more on this but because of time we'll sort of * okay

INTERVIEWER: how do you approach the teaching of writing skills/

LECTURER A: well * again over here * the teaching of writing skills * the idea is to provide them with models of good writing skills * that's one element which I use * therefore by providing them with reading texts which we can exploit for reading comprehension they also have a good model of writing and therefore we can focus on that * another element is to actually allow students to see that writing is a process and therefore they need to think carefully about a topic * brainstorm ideas * then there should be the next stage * organise their ideas according to whether certain issues may be grouped together * therefore that they can have a paragraph structure for certain issues * how they can sort of move from for example ideas in favour of a topic then move to ideas against the topic * so basically provide them with models of how to write a narrative essay * of how to write a discursive essay * how to write a descriptive essay * how to write a summary * then look at the process * so both product and process are involved

INTERVIEWER: do you prefer a product or a process approach to the teaching of writing skills/

LECTURER A: I think both of them are equally * equally important * why/ * because as we mentioned earlier since many of our students * have weaknesses in their writing skills and since these weaknesses are the result of their lack of reading I think we should provide them with models * with the product of what they should write so that maybe some of the things that you explain in terms of topic sentences * how the topic sentence is developed in a paragraph * how we move from one paragraph to another * how to write an introduction * how to write a conclusion * that is helpful * then even the process approach * at least the way I see it * is also helpful * since we've got these stages even in the writing of a summary * read the question carefully * what is the topic which you are required to write about/ * understand it carefully * look at the text * find information * select information which is relevant to the topic * rewrite it in your own words * think about it * organise it well * then write it out * see the number of words * so this sort of process moving from one step to another and editing and correcting their own work is also useful * so I think both of them are valid

INTERVIEWER: how can the teaching of writing at Junior College be improved/

LECTURER A: how can it be improved/ * it can be improved through the * we're trying to do this in the setting up of sort of language packs and material for them * it depends again on the individual lecturer * maybe try to focus more on students' writing skills but again there are certain problems over there * it's very easy to say students need to write more and therefore lecturers need to correct more but we already know that we are overloaded with corrections * with the number of Intermediate students that we have and I believe for example at Intermediate level we are giving them a very * raw deal over there because of the current situation * at Advanced level they have at least an essay every week and therefore we are able to give them sufficient attention

INTERVIEWER: how do you approach the teaching of reading skills/

LECTURER A: I've already mentioned this * the idea * I tend if I can say this very briefly * I take an integrated approach to reading skills * the idea is that students are given a text * they are * I give them a little basic information to warm them up by looking at the title * what they expect to read

about * again time constraints sometimes cut this stage short and then focus on close reading of the text * therefore it's not just the general meaning * sort of the main ideas * but looking for details * trying to scan and see whether for example certain parts of the text are likely to give them a deeper understanding of what they're doing * so * and I use even reading to do vocabulary work * to do grammar work over there * so it's a sort of integrated approach

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the linguistics component/

LECTURER A: I think we've already mentioned this earlier * I think both content and methods of assessment need to change and I'll leave it at that

INTERVIEWER: which approach do you use when teaching linguistics/

LECTURER A: okay * once again * I haven't been teaching linguistics now for the last two or three years * but previously given the fact that I used to teach Crystal and the Sciriha and Vassallo thing * basically that is information which has to be presented therefore I deliver presentations * try to summarise the main points and students unfortunately need to study those basic elements * basic facts which are presented

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the following in terms of their effectiveness and feasibility as teaching techniques or resources at sixth form level/ * and I'm going to present you with a list

LECTURER A: okay * okay * okay * I'll start with the ones that I make quite a lot of use of * I mean handouts and resource packs over here * I like to group them into one * the idea that yes * when * when it comes to teaching a set text like a novel I believe that students should be presented beforehand with a pack of material which gives them not just what you intend to do during the lectures but also takes them a little bit beyond and into what you're doing * into for example * elements which provide sufficient background * the understanding of the text * so you should give them as many resources as possible but also focus on what you intend to do during lessons * so I tend to use handouts and resource packs quite a lot * as regards lectures via PowerPoint presentations yes I'm * I would be quite open to this * rather than PowerPoint presentations I frequently use the overhead projector with transparencies * the problem then is you know * if you happen to have again a logistical problem * if you happen to have three hours one after the other * having to come here take the * and put it back * and time is precious but I mean * I mean I would be very open to that * lectures * yes we have to do lecturing over here * sometimes with lectures the problem is that you might have a number of students who even as regards seating arrangement they tend to sit on the periphery of your general * sense of control of a classroom and whether they are paying attention or not you do not know * students' presentations * once again this is something which may be incorporated during tutorials but otherwise I see that we have very little time unless it happens to be in the seminars but in lectures it can't definitely be incorporated over there * group work and pair work yes * I mean yes * getting students to work in groups of four or in pairs during the language seminars particularly when they're dealing with specific questions maybe * yes they can share ideas * the problem over there is once again a question of control because we tend to have large groups but I think it's possible to use in the language seminars or in the critical appreciation seminars * when I used to teach practical criticism I used to do it in the critical appreciation seminars because I felt that because the task was so demanding in literary criticism * if you've got three students * if you've got four students working together they're likely to bounce ideas off each other and the end result is likely to be better

Appendix 7 – Interview 2: Lecturer B

INTERVIEWER: let us start by means of a number of questions related to the MC English examination * are you satisfied with your students' performance in their Matriculation English examination/

LECTURER B: can I say that in the past I wasn't satisfied at all but most recently I think that * the results seem to be reflecting the students' performances even here at college

INTERVIEWER: how recently however/

LECTURER B: we're talking about last year

INTERVIEWER: and in the past/

LECTURER B: in the past we're looking at four * five years

INTERVIEWER: in your opinion which are those factors responsible for your students' poor performance/

LECTURER B: <<frowns>> ** shall we say that I'm going to look at this year * I'm not going to look at the last four five years * from what I can see is that students seem to have a problem with organisation of ideas and writing coherently and in a mature way most of the time and in order to bridge the gap between O and A students are asked to put in a certain effort especially in being aware of their reading skills and their writing skills * because they seem to be fine with the content but they still find it difficult to put that content into words and present them in a coherent manner * now this doesn't go forward with students * we're looking at the average student * so * and I believe that there isn't enough oral involved in terms of speaking English and I also believe that they don't listen to English on a regular basis so it's like they are studying a foreign language

INTERVIEWER: are there any other factors that could be contributing to the problem/

LECTURER B: ** well there are several factors I think * the lack of reading and the quality of the books that they read * their awareness of how they should read and several other distractions coming also from the technological world which might be impinging on the style of writing as well

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of those students who choose to study English at MC level/

LECTURER B: I would say initially they are enthusiastic about the subject * I don't think they are overwhelmed by the content and with the exception of the few most of them make an effort whether by reading the novels or reading the texts that are prescribed or reading notes besides attending tutorials * so I can see an effort on their side on the whole

INTERVIEWER: students currently need a Grade 5 in SEC English Language in order to study English at MC level at Junior College * what's your opinion of this/

LECTURER B: it is hard to say whether the grade 5 is actually * actually reflects their proficiency in the language * in that case I don't think I can answer the question properly * you might get a grade 5 student who * has problems initially and then gradually they might * find it easier for them to manage * A-level * initially I thought there would be a correlation between a grade 5 and not doing well at A-level but I'm not sure about that * I mean I don't ask my students whether they got grade 1 2 3 4 or 5 when they came into Junior College * I try not to draw their attention to what grade they got in * either English Language or English Literature and so I start from there * so I really cannot answer the question properly

INTERVIEWER: would a Grade 5 in the SEC English Literature examination be sufficient to complete the MC English course successfully/

LECTURER B: <<shakes head>> *** okay a grade 5 in English Literature means that they have an awareness of some kind of literary competence * so * it's divided up into two sections * in two papers and it's hard to say whether they get on well in paper 1 or in paper 2 * paper 2 means that

they studied the set texts and they had points for the questions and they could manage the essay probably but Paper 1 is a bit more taxing and that's the part which tests their linguistic competence ** well it convinces me that these students have been exposed to literature in the past * they have written a literature essay and they have paid attention to certain literary devices so I guess it serves as a foundation for the syllabus as in the A-level syllabus is set

INTERVIEWER: but is it sufficient for them to complete the course successfully/

LECTURER B: well that I wouldn't know * I would have to check whether at the end when they get their C B A D and E * whether they would have got a 6 5 4 3 2 1

INTERVIEWER: are you happy with the way the different components are tested in the MC English examination/ * what changes can you recommend/

LECTURER B: they're tested in an essay form aren't they/ * so * I would say that it's quite fair as it is * my problem is not with asking students to prepare an essay on a set text that they have studied for a year or so * so * really I think that the question is not whether if there's anything wrong there * I think it's more with the content * the syllabus design really

INTERVIEWER: should oracy and listening skills be tested/

LECTURER B: I would say oracy yes * it will provide students with the opportunity to * maybe involve themselves more in debates and structured debates and then possibly translate that into writing tasks * therefore it will be a motivation * listening skills * well listening skills I'm not quite sure * not entirely convinced * at O-level I would say that it's a good thing that they have the listening skills there but I'm not sure whether it should be tested at A-level

INTERVIEWER: why not/

LECTURER B: probably at this point I'm looking at a number of other components to be included * so I would say if I had to choose between oracy and listening I would go for oracy definitely because I see that it can be combined to other parts of the syllabus * listening skills * I think most of that is already being done but it's not being tested

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the syllabus' set texts/

LECTURER B: the present set texts/ oh I'm not happy with the present set texts! * I mean half of the set texts are not exactly to my liking but the other half are fine but it hasn't always been like that so as it stands at present I would say there are two titles from the novel section which I would eliminate and replace possibly with a variety of writers in terms of * a British writer * a postcolonial writer and a balance between the two * contemporary and Victorian and the Moderns * as regards then the other set texts * Shakespeare I have no quarrel with that * *King Lear* is fine even Wilfred Owen * I do have a problem with the linguistics set text

INTERVIEWER: which one/

LECTURER B: shall we take both * although Crystal is more reader-friendly I feel there are incongruences in what Crystal presents in his discussion of English as a global language and so much more has been written about that subject matter even by looking at David Graddol and the kind of exposure that we've had * it changes some of his arguments * so I believe it shouldn't be a set text but it should be as a suggested reading * and then the other text * well I'm not too keen on it because its focus is only on one particular aspect of the discipline of linguistics and I don't think that it is helping to create an awareness of linguistics in our students as I believe should be done

INTERVIEWER: in your experience does the choice of set texts have a bearing on students' success rate in the exam/

LECTURER B: it does * there is some kind of element * an influence I'm sure * but when I correct some essays even if it is a text that might be slightly on the difficult side of the students when it comes to pitching their level and trying to present a content that is coherent they make an effort and in the end it seems that the results are the same * so it's more like * I wouldn't see that much of a correlation with their success grades * even with linguistics if they study the text * it's a matter of studying and knowing how you're going to develop your essay so it shouldn't be a problem * so it's not really the set texts which present them with the problem I believe * I think any text at that point can be dealt with and you can push the students to their limits which I think they can take if they're pushed

INTERVIEWER: do you agree that in the exam students are assessed mainly by means of the essay type question/

LECTURER B: yes * that's how they are assessed * there's no other form of assessment

INTERVIEWER: but do you agree with this/

LECTURER B: whether I agree or not ** well there are other ways and means to go about assessing them besides obviously presenting an essay * an essay can be limiting from one side and also allowing for space for creativity on the other side * we're not talking about * but creativity in the style of writing * I would say if anything has to change I would first see what needs to be changed and I think that the essay type of question should remain there * maybe not the whole * I mean not all of them are like that * we have comprehensions as well * so with regards literature * linguistics and criticism I have my doubts about giving them short questions to answer because sometimes those can be also quite difficult for the students to handle * they can be reductive * so I would choose * I would see whether you would change the syllabus * the whole structure of the * syllabus and then decide then which * well you have to see them both * the assessment and what is going to be included in the content and the format * but I would see them together * I would first consider what can be introduced * what can be eliminated and why you would do it and then decide on how to best assess

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the examiners' interpretation of the syllabus' aims and objectives/ do their expectations match your own/

LECTURER B: but they're very broad! * I believe they need to be broken down into sections and subsections * they need to be clearer because this creates a problem with the description of the aims and objectives * I think they are too broad

INTERVIEWER: what changes can be made at Junior College so that the students' performance in their exam is improved/

LECTURER B: smaller classes! * fewer students in class! * more opportunity to rope them in right from the very start * you don't allow them * allow their motivation to slowly dwindle away and diminish and I believe that the number and the lack of availability in terms of hours that we spend with every group * small group is very limited and I believe that that's where they get lost in the system * so yes smaller groups therefore * more lecturers and in that way I think we can also reshape the structure of the A-level here as we teach it at Junior College with the system that we have

INTERVIEWER: what changes would you like to see taking place in the examination/

LECTURER B: this is very tentative * because I really need to think hard about it * I need to see that what is happening * what is being presented in the paper whether it's right or wrong * whether it has its pros and cons * so any new component you introduce * any component you change is going to come with the pros and cons * I think * I think I would like to see some form of textual analysis * an awareness of the linguistics * a kind of brief overview because that will help them in my opinion look at the discrete items of the language and pay attention to them * so even when they are reading literature * you know reading a language they need to first understand the language and the function of certain discrete items within the language * that would be in combination with literature * but then again I don't know whether textual analysis would help * whether a list of discrete items would be practical * so you kind of need to discuss this * you need to see other peoples' opinion

INTERVIEWER: let us now move on to a number of questions related to literature teaching methodology * which approach do you use when teaching set literary texts/

LECTURER B: I like to choose the kind of interface approach * making them pay attention to the language in the text besides the literary aspect * so if possible if I am teaching a novel for example depends on the length of the novel * depends on the material that you need to cover throughout the year * if it's a short novel as we have * *Of Mice and Men* * I like to guide them with questions and then we discuss these questions in class and then we kind of fill in the gaps * well when that happens * when students relate to it and answer the questions it's ideal but however but because of the time constraint in relation to size then that is a problem you can't listen to every question * you

can't give time to every student * but when it did happen it worked very well * and therefore making them go through the novel step by step * then when you have a text which does not allow you to do that you highlight the salient points first * you highlight certain passages and you discuss those sometimes even when discussing literary crit so that they pay attention to the language and the style being used and then we look at it from * it depends whether it is a matter of chronology * presenting a text chronologically just for them not to get lost * it depends what the text is about really

INTERVIEWER: which other approach would you use if you could/

LECTURER B: I would * I would like them to * I would like to send them out there to research and come back and give presentations in class because when they are preparing for a presentation that means you send them out to read * they're being selective * which points to consider * they have a title that they need to follow and they need to adhere to * they need to learn it and then deliver it * so there are these five steps which I think would be very useful because they become engaged with the text * they might not be able to do it with every aspect of the text but even if they just focus on two of these it's already quite a lot because you're not dishing out information * you're not you know giving them input and knowledge but they're using their skills * their linguistics skills in order to present the subject matter * but then again you need smaller groups and more time

INTERVIEWER: which approach do you use when teaching practical criticism/

LECTURER B: right * when they're at the very beginning I try to bridge the gap between the SEC English Literature because that's the question I ask * how many of you have been exposed to the literature syllabus/ * that would mean that they have sat for * normally you get only two in a class who have never been exposed to literature and I make sure I take that in consideration and I explain things * it's revision for some * it's new for others * and I tell them that the questions that they used to be asked especially for Paper 1 not for Paper 2 were questions guiding them towards focusing on literary devices and that here at A-level they're expected to look for those * no not look for them but read * react to these devices and be able to comment on them freely and comment on their effect * so I try as much as possible to make them aware that they need the linguistic competence before they get the literary competence and I take two different approaches because I need to cater for two types of students * those students who take a top down approach * they get like an overall impression of the text and they start looking deeper into the different discrete items and then you've got those students who pay attention to these little devices gathered in the passage or the poem and make sense out of these * so the bottom up approach * so * I make them aware of what exactly we are doing and the reason why and I tell them that there's no right or wrong approach * it's you * your personality and your perspective * one time you look at a text in this way * another time another way * there are ways and means of engaging with a text and that is paying attention to language * even if it has to be the tenses * you start with what you know first and then you move out

INTERVIEWER: which other approach would you use if you could/

LECTURER B: that's answering a difficult question because I have in the past tried an approach that is very linguistics based * I make them aware of sounds * phonetics * where you look at * there's obviously the semantic aspect and they select diction pragmatics discourse the function of a text * so for me that is my checklist when I am discussing practical criticism * I don't think well * I'd say that I have tried various approaches and sometimes I do change my approach * so as regards a new approach I still have to find another approach to be honest * I don't think there is an ideal situation there * practical criticism * we're talking about very personal reading of the text and personal reading comes in the way and very often it is at comprehension level where they stumble and that is not practical criticism * that is understanding the language * I do * when it comes to poetry I do ask them to try to experiment with it * by writing the stanzas at sentence level and they can properly understand it because it's like the norm * with prose passages the length of the passage can be a bit taxing on them so it depends on the type of text you're presenting them with so I try to make them aware of the different approaches to the act of reading a text

INTERVIEWER: when teaching literature what do you focus on mostly/ * the language/ the content/ or personal enrichment/

LECTURER B: I think it's a balance really * I don't think that it's either one or the other * the balance of the three because I normally make them aware that the author is using language as his tool of communication and unless you pay attention to even the basic structures * the basic grammatical structures you can't see through * then there is obviously the * the content * well the content is very important isn't it/ * it's what they're being asked to do mainly however * unless they are linguistically capable to present content in such a way to make it coherent as possible * and in all this whenever you look at any literature text you're focusing on personal enrichment too * you're asking them to look inside their baggage * knowledge of the world * of themselves * you ask them to empathise * so put themselves in that situation * how would they react * they might be able to understand * so I think it's a balance of all three * I don't think it's one or the other

INTERVIEWER: which of these three approaches do you consider to be the most important for sixth form students/

LECTURER B: can I answer the question by all three because I think they're all important/ * I mean * when you * okay this is a literature context however if you go out there in the world and you meet people and they speak to you in metaphors and you don't know how to answer and understand the innuendos then you can't communicate and socialise * so I think it's all three definitely

INTERVIEWER: now we have a number of questions concerning language-teaching methodology * which approach do you use when teaching language/

LECTURER B: I try to balance between the communicative approach and also the more traditional * why the traditional/ * because sometimes they need to be made aware that there are parts of speech * there are content words and function words * there are elements that bring the sentences together and these are important for certain exercises and also with the aim in mind that this will also contribute to their understanding of literature when they are reading the texts on their own * then the communicative approach is important for some aspects * so if you are for example * we're dealing with students that have sat for their O-level * so they have a certain background * they have a certain knowledge of the language * it's the level of proficiency that varies so the communicative approach is going to hide obviously certain discrete items that you are trying to target * at the same time if you had to cover discrete items on their own then that would ruin the whole effect of knowing how to use them in context and we have to teach them most things in context * so if you look at the thematic approach for example you can present them with a comprehension activity * a comprehension task * a summary task and an essay so you're combining descriptions so the thematic approach in that case would help * however I can't leave behind those discrete items that I need to point attention to

INTERVIEWER: why do you use this method/

LECTURER B: I'm hoping that the teaching is more effective in that way * that you make them aware of what is happening when they are reading * what is happening when they are constructing their own ideas * if for example you're looking at rhetorical structure you have to make them aware of how their arguments * if they don't hold them together then they won't be effective in their communication skills at all

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of Communicative Language Teaching/

LECTURER B: as I've said I balance the communicative approach because sometimes I realise that they've probably been exposed to this approach for a number of years * probably from day one when they started school so they seem not to be aware of certain rules that are part of the language

INTERVIEWER: why do you use Communicative Language Teaching/

LECTURER B: because you can contextualise the situation for them

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the students' writing skills when they start their MC course/

LECTURER B: the department gives them two language essays * a narrative essay and then the next time it will be a descriptive essay which I believe they have been trained to write that type of

essay in secondary school so I don't see that much of a difficulty with that particular task * so probably some of their style * sorry I need to correct that I'm thinking of the writing skills at this point * some of the essays that I have seen don't seem to have problems with specific grammatical structures * so they might not be very coherent but the narrative approach and the descriptive approach helps them * guides them to write it in an organised fashion * they might not be extremely evocative in the images * yes but * but it's fine * it's when you push them further * it's when you push them into writing the literature essay * when you push them into writing an argumentative essay or a discursive essay where you start seeing the problems

INTERVIEWER: how can students improve their writing skills/

LECTURER B: besides practice I believe that they first need to understand the concept of writing and that they are writing to communicate effectively * most of the time they write without realising that they are not organising their ideas in a coherent manner * so * how can they improve their writing skills/ * there are several ways but it's hard to mention them all * but some of these ways may be * to start with writing tasks which target short paragraphs where they have set objectives for every paragraph * you make them aware that every paragraph should have a topic sentence so they make sure that they can summarise those ideas in the sentence and that they don't deviate from there as much as possible * controlled writing at first and then slowly * gradually you help them expand * you make them aware * I mean you make them aware of the rhetorical structure * you make them aware of the discrete referents that exist in the text in order to keep the text together

INTERVIEWER: how do you approach the teaching of writing skills/

LECTURER B: well I try to do all this that I have just mentioned with the previous question * they have * they look at models * they try to replicate some models * again I focus a lot on the paragraph writing first * they're not fully aware of how a paragraph is divided * until they are able to use their creative side * to go against the norm at least they have the basics and it is only by choice that they go against the norm to create a certain effect * to play around with the techniques of writing but initially you just need to help them * they need to be guided so they become more aware of what they are doing

INTERVIEWER: do you prefer a product or a process approach to the teaching of writing skills/

LECTURER B: the two go together * I can't separate the two * I'm very much interested in the process because that's where you get a lot of variety and processes * their own ideas and how they produce them creatively * the two are inseparable * I mean to me I cannot see a preference between the two

INTERVIEWER: how can the teaching of writing at Junior College be improved/

LECTURER B: there's the motivating factor * I believe we should motivate them into writing even creatively * now * how can the teaching of writing be improved at Junior College/ * I don't know how the others teach * what I know is that the pack that we were given this year contains several resources which could be reflecting how people teach writing * we need less * less students in the classroom * we need to guide them more * very much like tutorials but instead of a tutorial where you get students coming from different lecturers and different approaches possible * but you have a group for language * a group for literature and you can guide them more because you can see them more on a regular basis and you can see the process of development in their writing skills and I think you can target them better * I mean you have students who are proficient in writing English and who are presenting a very coherent piece of work and there are others who struggle at the paragraph level and even at the sentence level

INTERVIEWER: how do you approach the teaching of reading skills/

LECTURER B: right * first of all I like to them to hear themselves read out loud * why/ * because reading out loud * they need to understand first * so reading silently * understand it and then kind of dramatise it * you know reading with expression * so you make do these things when you want them to read out loud * they listen to themselves and they have an audience so they make an effort * now while doing that * while reading silently they are reading for a purpose * the main purpose is normally meaning but there are also different levels of meaning and besides meaning you've got focus on the style of the writer * you have focus on the innuendos and you've got focus on how that

is also an interpretation at the end of it all * so there are different levels that they need to reach * they've got the basic comprehension level done silently * then they've got to answer questions * then they've got the reading aloud in which they have to understand and give it their own twist and then you've got the other levels where you've got different interpretations * where you've got different readings of the same text * how do I go about teaching that/ * I make them aware of these different levels and I show them that they have reached this level so far * even while doing literary crit

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the linguistics component/

LECTURER B: I think I mentioned this before * I think the linguistics component should not disappear from the paper at all * I think that the set texts should change * I think that we should approach it differently because I strongly believe that students at this level especially going to university * if they wish to teach the language * if they wish to take it up as a B.A. to focus more strongly on the literature and linguistics they need the basic steps * even those who don't take it up * by presenting them with * by exposing them to the discipline of linguistics I think it would help them understand the language that they are using to read the other texts as well

INTERVIEWER: which approach do you use when teaching linguistics/

LECTURER B: so let's say with Crystal I tend to contextualise what he says * looking at the history of the language * how it came to be spread around the world * so * I expose them to the different diasporas * the first Diaspora * the second Diaspora * then I try to contextualise the different notions of English as a foreign language * English as a second language and I try to relate very much to their present situation * the context here locally * the other text * I try not to highlight too much the statistics included in the text * I try as much as possible to bring out the sociolinguistic perspective however unfortunately as much as I try on that part I am not always very successful * I must say I do fail in this

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the following in terms of their effectiveness and feasibility as teaching techniques or resources at sixth form level/ * and I'm going to present you with a list

LECTURER B: well * group work I think is a very effective technique and I use it regularly in class especially during seminars and in * the context of a lecture not entirely * students' presentations yes * as I said earlier I think that presentations are very important * why/ * because you make them go through different processes of learning and when they know they need to perform in front of an audience they make an effort and in the end that seems to remain with them because they've really engaged with the topic * pair work is on a regular basis * I think they do the pair work even if you don't ask them to * and pair work helps because there isn't the stress of a group * in a group you would try to find * you would try to combine different characters and different personalities * different abilities as much as possible because they are mixed ability classes that we're dealing with here * but in pair work there is less stress and they feel more comfortable * normally I ask them to pair up with the friends next to them because they feel more comfortable but that helps because they * especially in literature you see the different points of view that you might have for a text * lectures * well in terms of delivery of content I think lectures are useful however I would like it to be more than that * I would like to follow up certain content that has been delivered but I guess because we have the tutorials then that is being followed up during the tutorial * lectures via PowerPoint presentations * I could have a lecture via PowerPoint presentation so * a PowerPoint Presentation is very useful because * because like that they can * well it can make them rather lazy in taking down notes too however there are certain lectures that would really work out better if I had a PowerPoint presentation especially if it's an image that I need to show them or if it's * all I have to do is have a picture there * it's a resource that enhances the lecture * handouts * handouts are supplementary material that you have besides the resources * handouts can be tailor made for the class * for the situation * they are obviously a ready resource for them to be able to retrieve * as they go along and resource packs as long as they are not readymade notes * I use resource packs what I can't give by means of PowerPoint since at Junior College you have to book the media room for that * that's hard in itself * resource packs are the substitute most of the time and resource packs

I think should include both the approaches I told you about where you present them with questions to guide them how to read a text * then towards the end you could supply them with a selection of critical essays which you walk them through till they understand the style that is expected of them and how you can get diverging points of view and how you can back up with evidence and the background to the set texts even in terms of intertextuality * you have various elements that you can include in the resource pack and it serves as a reference for them

Appendix 8 – Interview 3: Lecturer C

INTERVIEWER: let us start by means of a number of questions related to the MC English examination * are you satisfied with your students' performance in their Matriculation English examination/

LECTURER C: not really * no * there are two reasons * one is that the mark that they get in some cases for some students doesn't tally with the mark I expect them to get and in the majority of cases then it's also the students' fault because they don't really work hard enough * I mean they could do better * they have the opportunity to do better but they don't work hard enough * I think in the case of literature it's normally because they seem to study around the text without knowing the text well * they seem to rely too much on notes and they don't really try to give their own input about the text * they don't really read it well enough * they should know the text more than anything else * they should know the text well * this is the impression I get * but there are also cases I've mentioned earlier where students who do well in tutorials * generally well * and then they get a low mark * a relatively low mark

INTERVIEWER: in your opinion which are those factors responsible for your students' poor performance/

LECTURER C: I think I included some of them already but there's another one which is very important I think * I think it's their inability to * rely on their own opinions rather than on others' * on what the teacher tells them * what the notes tell them * they're afraid of expressing their own opinion * they're afraid of analysing * of analysing themselves and the other thing is coherence too * I mean I find that * again the majority * let's say * let's give a percentage * seventy five per cent * this is of course an impression * it's not scientific * let's say seventy five per cent of them don't really put much effort into writing a coherent essay * a well-planned essay * they just start writing and rambling and that's it * I have something else but I will tell you when I remember * that's it

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of those students who choose to study English at MC level/

LECTURER C: well my opinion is that * I don't think half of them should be here <<laughs>> because their standard of English and their attitude to it is not the kind of attitude that students who should study English should have * first of all they should have some familiarity * some exposure to literature * most of them don't * they should also * if they're going to choose English * they should also love reading * there are many students who don't bother to read at all * I mean that's the Maltese malaise in general but in the case of our students I expect them to have a background of reading * they don't really read for fun * they don't really read for enjoyment and that's * so English becomes very mechanical for them and it cannot be mechanical * it's not something you can learn over two years * you can learn about a text over two years * you can learn how to adopt a critical attitude towards literature but you cannot really learn how to write * how to express yourself in two years * that is something you build up over the years

INTERVIEWER: students currently need a Grade 5 in SEC English Language in order to study English at MC level at Junior College * what's your opinion of this/

LECTURER C: my very very honest opinion is I don't really care about the grade as such but there are many students who come here * who have passed but sometimes they make very basic mistakes in grammar * I'm not talking about effect and affect which of course I mean * it's a question of verbs * third person without an s or vice versa * like basic mistakes you know like where and were * they recur frequently with some students.

INTERVIEWER: so what's your opinion of Grade 5/

LECTURER C: it's relative * I mean it's either the grade has to go up * alright/ * or the students' standards need to go up * but the standard is definitely not satisfactory * now whether it's the grade or the standard that the examiner sets * you know I don't know * it's it's * the standard is not satisfactory and it is also important * this is something that I have long been repeating but it hasn't been accepted * that students who choose English for A-level should have literature too * without a background of literature it's very difficult for them to to cope

INTERVIEWER: that takes us to the next question * would a Grade 5 in the SEC English Literature examination be sufficient to complete the MC English course successfully/

LECTURER C: a grade 5 is a pass * I think that should be sufficient at least * but at least they should have * at the moment they don't * no/

INTERVIEWER: no they are not required to

LECTURER C: I think they should have a grade 5 at least * minimum * in English Literature to be able to choose English as an A-level subject

INTERVIEWER: are you happy with the way the different components are tested in the MC English examination/ * what changes can you recommend/

LECTURER C: am I happy with the different components/ yes * well the * sometimes the choice of questions * the wording of the questions is not the ideal thing * sometimes it's ambiguous * I don't agree entirely with that * I think the question should be straightforward and simple * it should * they should test the students' ability to write rather than test them whether they can understand the question * on the whole especially these last two years * I think the questions have improved * on the whole it's ok * it's * I don't think there's any problem as such * I think the problem is more in the marking * I'm not sure

INTERVIEWER: should oracy and listening skills be tested/

LECTURER C: yes! * I think they should be tested * it's a question of logistics * I mean * because some students are very very capable of writing a good essay but then when it comes to speaking they find it difficult * basically because they don't have the practice * I think that for their own good they should practice * but how do you do this/ * I don't know because it's very difficult to fit in the very tight programme that we have already and I don't think that any of the topics should be forfeited

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the syllabus' set texts/

LECTURER C: I don't really have a problem as such with anything at the moment * it all depends * you know I mean in certain cases we had * novels which were not suitable * for example *Of Mice and Men* is a bit too light * a bit too simple for A-level students * something slightly more elaborate * not as elaborate as *The French Lieutenant's Woman* for example * that's a bit too much but there is a problem * this is the problem * it's not with the choice of books * it's a problem with out culture * I mean that our students * that's why they should be exposed to literature * I believe that our students should be able to tackle a book by Hardy or by Dickens relatively easily * maybe not Fowles * maybe not Lawrence but Dickens and Austen and Hardy * you know * but when we try to teach them these novels we find it rather difficult because they don't read * they don't have this kind of culture of the classical novel * so it is a problem * so I think the best way to go about it is to make a kind of a compromise * to make a compromise * so for example * I'm not teaching it * we have * what's its name/ * we have *The Handmaid's Tale* what I think is a very good combination * of sort of * a novel which is deep yet is not so * difficult for the students

INTERVIEWER: in your experience does the choice of set texts have a bearing on students' success rate in the exam/

LECTURER C: yes I think it has

INTERVIEWER: why/

LECTURER C: yes because * they have to be made to like it * in the case of *King Lear* because we do it in great detail * in the case of poetry it's not so much of a problem * as long as * I believe that if you're going to choose poetry for the students you should choose poetry that has an explanation * how can I explain this/ * there are poems that are based very much on language and interpretation and allusions * I think in the case of * we now have Wilfred Owen * I mean in the case of Wilfred

Owen it's very practical * it's down to earth and students who are sixteen to eighteen can understand the concept of war * the concept of dying * the inconsistencies between patriotism and Pacifism etcetera * in the case of Philip Larkin when we had Philip Larkin they were very down to earth poems * things that we actually experience in life * alright/ * but if we do T.S. Eliot for the students it might be a bit too much * so the choice is not bad * so we have to find books that don't have to be necessarily modern but that students can understand

INTERVIEWER: do you agree that in the exam students are assessed mainly by means of the essay type question/

LECTURER C: yes I think that's the best way to be honest

INTERVIEWER: why/

LECTURER C: because * the tutorial gives us an overview of the work they have done * the essay gives an overview * one of the knowledge of the text they have studied * two of the students' interpretation of the text and three their ability to write English coherently idiomatically etcetera * so I think that is the best way * if we were to judge them by short sentences or by multiple-choice questions * I don't think that's the case * I don't think that's absolutely the case

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the examiners' interpretation of the syllabus' aims and objectives/ do their expectations match your own/

LECTURER C: from what I've read * from what I can remember from the reports * the examiners seem to pick on the * trivial things rather than * I mean we do have this problem for example students who tend to narrate * but when you read the reports many times it's based on anecdotal evidence * it's based on particulars rather than the general idea * I think we have more of a * good general view of what the students' weaknesses are

INTERVIEWER: what changes can be made at Junior College so that the students' performance in their exam is improved/

LECTURER C: with the advanced level students * I don't think you can do much as such because * I don't think they can take more than six hours * we have the system of criticism and language seminars * I'm not very much involved in language but I am involved in crit and tutorials * I think the way it is * the way it is * the students have all the facilities if they want to to get a good mark * ok we can use media more * nowadays media are important * the use of PowerPoint presentations * the use of videos etcetera * the use of projections * they can be useful * they can be exploited more but our * our facilities here are extremely primitive * we still have a television set that is very old * we still have a DVD that is not equipped with a proper sound system * only one room * I mean these facilities * I mean like for Shakespeare seeing the play is definitely going to help them * then the size of the classes is slightly above what the limit should be * I think having forty is a bit too much for Shakespeare for example and the * the seminars twenty is a bit too much as well * I think they should go down

INTERVIEWER: what changes would you like to see taking place in the examination/

LECTURER C: I think it's not the examination as such. I think it's the way the questions are put and the way they are corrected. That's the impression I get because when you have a student who has consistently got good marks and then in the exam all of a sudden gets a very low mark then there's something wrong there

INTERVIEWER: let us now move on to a number of questions related to literature teaching methodology * which approach do you use when teaching set literary texts/

LECTURER C: it all depends again * it all depends * so for example with * let's take them one at a time * ideally in the case of novels * ideally you should introduce the novel * talk to them about it * give them a bit of background * maybe even some comparison with other works written by the author and some comparison with other literary works that have similar themes for example * then they read it on their own then you do lectures on it * in the past when I started I never read the book in class but then I realised eventually that you had to read some parts of it * I used to give them lectures * but when you have students who don't bother to read what can you do/ * so let's take them one at a time * Shakespeare * Shakespeare the way I do it * I introduce the text * I talk about the things that * I give them the plot * and then you talk about concepts like tragedy * like chain of

being * like the Machiavellian thing * like microcosm and macrocosm etcetera etcetera * certain things * sort of to help them to look for * look for before * and then we do the text * that's all we do * and then I start lecturing about the themes * about the style imagery symbolism * in the case of poetry basically the same thing * it all depends on who the poet is * in the case of Owen you cannot teach Owen without giving them a bit of his biography and a bit of his * the background to the war * the trenches * gas warfare * I mean you cannot really do the poetry isolated from the background * you have to give them the context first and then I try to link the poems

INTERVIEWER: which other approach would you use if you could/

LECTURER C: in the case of set literary texts I think it's the best * introduction background and close analysis of the text * the only thing perhaps I would add is as I've said media and also some comparative work * so * if you're doing Owen for example we should really have time to do some other poems that are related to Owen's

INTERVIEWER: which approach do you use when teaching practical criticism/

LECTURER C: I have a system that normally I present them with a poem the first time you know and I tell them to look out for two things * for what the poet is saying and how he is saying it * basically the theme and the techniques * we start from there and then we start analysing * so the first year we start analysing different techniques so we start with imagery in detail * clusters of images * extended metaphor * personification but * also not just the techniques but also how they should interpret the techniques because the techniques on their own they don't mean anything and then we move to diction you know * what to look for in diction because it's very important that they know the jargon * I mean if they're going to write about it they have to have the weapons to use so it's a combination of the techniques and a little bit of practice * in the second year I do mostly practice * so I give them a lot of unseen texts and I discuss them with them and then we do oral interpretations together but mostly in the first year it's theory * theory in the first year * I emphasise a lot the use of the techniques because I think it's important

INTERVIEWER: which other approach would you use if you could/

LECTURER C: I don't think I could use another approach * I mean this is the approach that I * I don't think that there is a better way * I mean I've been teaching here a long time and this is the best technique I've found * I've seen results * honestly I've seen results * I've seen students who were * who had given up almost * criticism is a stumbling block let's face it * it's the most personal and challenging of all especially for students who don't have the initiative * who don't have much confidence in themselves * so I think this approach helps them a lot * it all depends

INTERVIEWER: when teaching literature what do you focus on mostly/ * the language/ the content/ or personal enrichment/

LECTURER C: I don't think that there's * alright let's grade them * I would say one content * two language and three personal enrichment * personal enrichment is very hard to achieve with just one novel you know * so I mean they need to read more but I also believe that through literature they become more humanised * more humanistic * it's it's * any kind of art can enrich * not in the moral sense but it makes them understand human beings * makes them understand themselves * so I think the most important is the content itself * the plot the structure the psychology of the characters the relationships etcetera * the language is important of course but only in relation to the content and then enrichment yes * they should have enrichment

INTERVIEWER: so which of these three approaches do you consider to be the most important for sixth form students/

LECTURER C: content

INTERVIEWER: and why do you consider content to be the most important at sixth form level/

LECTURER C: because when I say content it's not just the plot * alright/ * it's it's the psychology behind it and language is involved * the author's use of language * language is secondary here but use of language is very important because let's face it we communicate through language * so if you're doing a novel you don't have gestures * you don't have pictures * you have the language * so language is almost as important

INTERVIEWER: let's move on to language-teaching methodology * which approach do you use when teaching language/

LECTURER C: I'm not teaching language at the moment but usually it's threefold * an oral element is important in the sense that through the oral element you can make them explore different directions and kind of stimulate them to think about topics in different ways * then the adoption of writing skills in short sort of spurts * in the case of crit I prefer essays while in the case of language I prefer * short paragraphs * essays are always important of course * and also * I'm a bit old fashioned in this respect * I also believe very much in language exercises * the traditional language exercises

INTERVIEWER: why do you use this method/

LECTURER C: because unfortunately our students are very limited and they need to enrich their vocabulary and they need to polish their use of tenses * they need to revise * you know * all this * from my experience I find that you have a large group of students who don't do well in these and they need to * of course it all depends on the students themselves * if the students do the exercise and after the lesson finishes they forget everything it's going to be useless

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of Communicative Language Teaching/

LECTURER C: communication is very important but I don't think you can teach it * it comes mostly through practice * I think the very important thing is to give the students enough confidence to make them speak but they find it very hard * it's not a question of not knowing * sometimes it's a question of confidence * they don't have the confidence * that's why we need to allow them to speak more

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the students' writing skills when they start their MC course/

LECTURER C: I would say there are three groups * there are students who are the small minority who qualify as relatively very well * they just need a bit of pushing and encouragement * there are students who when they come here they can write relatively good English but who are still a bit childish in their mentality and who have no idea of how to write an essay * you know good paragraphing * good transitions and things like that * and then there's a minority of students * they are a minority but they are a worrying minority of students * who are very very backward * very weak in their use of English grammar * weak grammatically idiomatically and stylistically

INTERVIEWER: how can students improve their writing skills/

LECTURER C: I'm an old fashioned person * reading mostly * but also if they listen to the advice that we give them they should improve * but sometimes they don't I'm afraid * they're young * they're kids and they have many distractions

INTERVIEWER: how do you approach the teaching of writing skills/

LECTURER C: I think the most important thing is to give them assignments and to go from there because you have to know what their abilities are before you improve and normally * normally it works on two levels I would say * the idiomatic part and the style is something which is very very difficult to teach them I find * it's something which they can achieve through practice and through reading * so mostly you can help them with trying to avoid the mistakes * as I've said like grammatical * sometimes you * you * not a crash course in grammar but to emphasise and point out the mistakes * then on the other hand there are * there is a structure for the essay which you know we can teach them and if they try to listen to our good advice then again it should work * but * it's * they don't always listen * it sort of goes above their heads

INTERVIEWER: do you prefer a product or a process approach to the teaching of writing skills/

LECTURER C: I don't really believe in the process approach * I believe in the product mostly

INTERVIEWER: why/

LECTURER C: because I think every student is an individual * you know * I mean we're not teaching robots here you know so * sometimes you find students who don't make an effort and they still manage to produce something really good * in that case it's useless really guiding them by the hand * maybe because when I was young that's the process we used * I used to read a lot you know

* I used to write essays * never really thought about it * and * I think the process approach may work in some cases but * I don't know

INTERVIEWER: how can the teaching of writing at Junior College be improved/

LECTURER C: how can it be improved/ * here I might be repeating myself * but one give them a chance to discuss their ideas and share their ideas * for example * one thing that they could do is take a topic and they can brainstorm about it * okay/ * and then perhaps write short paragraphs about their subject but it all depends on the time you have because if you have twenty and you have to see them all and comment about them * it depends on how receptive they are but I think the approach is a more or less a kind of * distant approach rather than meticulous and detailed because with language it's not in the details * it's an art form * it's the whole thing * I mean if you have a good word there and a good word there and you put them together and you make a mess of it * I mean it has to be a whole * so I think it is discussing and writing at length by means of paragraphs

INTERVIEWER: how do you approach the teaching of reading skills/

LECTURER C: I don't think you can teach it to be honest * I think they should come here already quite competent in that respect * I think they should be able to read * they think it's easy but it's not * they miss the wood for the trees sometimes * they don't understand what is being said * they misunderstand * in fact I hate teaching reading comprehensions to be honest but it's important * I feel it's important * I think what you should do is to try and read it yourself * let them read it on their own and try to do a summary perhaps before doing the comprehension * analyse it in parts and try to see what the author is trying to say and to find evidence for it

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the linguistics component/

LECTURER C: to be perfectly honest I'm not really that keen about it * I mean you have to understand my background * that * I'm an older person <<laughs>> when I was at university the linguistics component was introduced rather late * I did very well in it but it was kind of a rush and what we're doing here is not really linguistics but sociolinguistics * I mean it's interesting * the first part of it is interesting but the second part is not so interesting * to be perfectly honest * please don't quote me * the Maltese part * first of all it's not reliable * I mean the information there is not very * it's very erratic * and then it's useless * useless * because you have to see the social conditions we live in * I mean it's useless telling a person what language you use with your neighbour * I mean it's something natural * it's something we all do * that's how we are * and I don't think the statistics are very scientific to be perfectly honest with you

INTERVIEWER: which approach do you use when teaching linguistics/

LECTURER C: I'm afraid the approach that I use is very * clinical * very rigid because we have the text and you cannot go much beyond that because there's no time * so in the case of Crystal what I do is * perhaps I * mostly I don't read the book in class * I prepare a summary and I give them the summary as we go along and every now and then we read a paragraph to revise some points * I try to go a bit beyond sometimes especially when there are topics that are a bit interesting for me you know * for example if we're discussing dying languages I try to give them some of my experiences of travelling and languages * but you cannot go much beyond what is in the book * in the case of the other book * the * the * Maltese linguistic landscape or whatever it's called * in that case you cannot go much beyond it because it's full of statistics and you cannot invent statistics * I mean the statistics are there * you cannot invent them so I choose the most important ones and I work on those and then the rest they have to choose what they're going to study because it's impossible to remember everything * basically you can summarise what is there * a couple of sentences

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the following in terms of their effectiveness and feasibility as teaching techniques or resources at sixth form level/ * and I'm going to present you with a list

LECTURER C: many of these are very effective but they are not always practical in our circumstances * group work could be good but one we have large groups in many cases * two we don't have time and thirdly * when you ask them to do group work on their own and then bring it with them it's not going to work much because as I've said when they finish school they don't

really * do much work associated with * students' presentations * I've never tried it to be honest * I think it's a good thing but again for the same reasons 'it might be a bit difficult here * I don't see anything wrong with that * pair work * the same thing * I've had cases where students said that they're going to work together * why not/ * yes * if it's going to help them * yes * unless one person relies too much on the other * in class it's not very practical because they're mumbling and talking * lectures of course are always important * lectures via PowerPoint presentation I never give them because you need time * I'm a bit old fashioned so * I'm not that familiar with * PowerPoint * I can * I can do something but I still use the board * I think the board is more practical * the board is more flexible especially in our circumstances when we need to book the room * there are so many people using the room that it's not very practical * but if * if one were to use the PowerPoint * theoretically * I'm totally in favour * I think it's a very good thing * much better than the projector * even that is helpful but again you have to carry the projector * it's not practical * too much hassle * in theory these are good * handouts * yes * I do that * I give them handouts * yes in crit * in language * in literature too and resource packs yes * I always prepare resource packs * in the past I didn't use to do this * I came from a different kind of mentality where you give the lecture * the students take notes * they do their own research * but * it's not entirely the fault of the student * but nowadays research * has become easier but not so easy in the sense that they have a lot of resources and they don't know what to choose * so sometimes you have guide them * I use resource packs a lot and I find that they are helpful

Appendix 9 – Interview 4: Lecturer D

INTERVIEWER: let us start by means of a number of questions related to the MC English examination * are you satisfied with your students' performance in their Matriculation English examination/

LECTURER D: no I'm not ** for various reasons * some of which depend obviously on * the setup of the syllabus and the * expectations of the MATSEC board * some depends obviously on the students' limitations themselves * and obviously it may depend also on us * on our quality of teaching * but * I would say no I think we can raise the level * we should raise the level * because I feel that * over the years it has gone down * for a variety of reasons which I just mentioned ** it's a fact for instance that students nowadays read less and * obviously because they have more distractions than we used to have in our times * they read less and ** the quality of their understanding and writing and communicating in English has gone inevitably down * and I think we should address that * this reality that we live in a predominantly visual culture ** the so called MTV generation * and this has effected obviously not just their reading skills but * and their love of reading * but also their ability * their attention span their concentration on the written word especially ** I think we should encourage that somehow

INTERVIEWER: so * in your opinion which are those factors responsible for your students' poor performance/

LECTURER D: I've just mentioned one ** and I think it is * it should be given priority * how to encourage students to read more because * that's important * however as I said I would like I have wanted for some time to raise the standard and the performance of our students even in terms of exam results * and one reason I think is that * I think everybody wants this but how you go about it then is something else * I believe that in recent years especially * as regards English there was an effort to raise standards * which was in some ways counterproductive * for the simple reason that * you can't expect just by raising as I suspect was done benchmarks * you can't expect our students to * be transformed overnight into * expert users of English ** I have said repeatedly that expectations especially in the past five six years were * pitched too high and too quick for our students to actually * improve consistently their English * that's not the way to go about it * obviously even the syllabus had to be retouched because * we have been using this syllabus for some time now * it has its good points and its weak points but obviously I think greater attention should be given to a reworking of the syllabus

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of those students who choose to study English at MC level/

LECTURER D: ** I'd say that some were wise and some were unwise in choosing English * in the sense that abilities and proficiencies vary greatly * alright/ * you still get the exceptional student * male and female who * have a very very impressive grasp of English * both in terms of speaking and writing it * but I must admit these are exceptional * then you've got the average student * mostly girls * who are better than boys as a general rule in terms of verbal expression and even writing * but I * I think that many students choose English without being quite up to scratch * already to tackle it at this level

INTERVIEWER: students currently need a Grade 5 in SEC English Language in order to study English at MC level at Junior College * what's your opinion of this/

LECTURER D: no I disagree with this! * I think that students who scrape through the SEC with a 5 are not * I don't think he is or she is ready to * profit in any significant way from a two year course at Advanced level ** I think * as an entry requirement for sixth form it's alright but for the choice of English as a main subject that's a different story * in fact many students are * struggling because

obviously they came here * perhaps having the wrong impression that English is an easy option * and they find that their language skills are not up to the level and that creates a problem both for them and for us * because as I have been telling my colleagues repeatedly * I can't in two years with a limited number of hours a week * very limited * make up for what these students have not managed to gain * that is a really adequate * level of spoken and written English in five years of secondary schooling and more years of primary schooling * so the idea of having a student * of allowing a student with a Grade 5 in O-level to choose English for A-level * I don't think it's really productive

INTERVIEWER: would a Grade 5 in the SEC English Literature examination be sufficient to complete the MC English course successfully/

LECTURER D: in my opinion no! * because as * as I've just explained it's very difficult at this level with the limitations it involves * to teach someone again * tenses * work which should have been done in Form 3 of secondary school * and it is a drawback * and I think * greater efforts should be made * first of all obviously to improve the teaching of English at primary and secondary levels * alright/ * secondly I think at this * moment in time * I don't think students with a 5 should be given the option of choosing English at A-level because * the results speak for themselves * many of them don't manage to get a pass much less a good mark

INTERVIEWER: are you happy with the way the different components are tested in the MC English examination/ * what changes can you recommend/

LECTURER D: ** well * the * the format of the exam has been with us for some time * excluding certain changes * some of them not quite happy changes * I must say * especially the linguistics component * I think the components in general I have no quarrel with * in the sense that * setting a certain number of texts * obviously important texts * significant texts * literary texts * is good * it should be kept up * perhaps it should be complemented also by * other components that concentrate * on * on writing skills * task-based components * but not at the expense of the literature component * I think it would be disastrous if we * change the syllabus and the format * in such a way as to give the students the impression that * they can only benefit from the functional approach to language * many of them will perhaps read English as it is best used * that is literary English * for the last time perhaps in their lives during these two years * and to deprive them of that in order to introduce what I called the functional approach * I think that would be a mistake

INTERVIEWER: should oracy and listening skills be tested/

LECTURER D: I'm unsure about this * because * the oral test especially as it is being now practised at Intermediate level * alright/ * it's a question of a ten minute test * now I don't know <<laughs>> how much that reveals of the students' skills in reading and speaking * so there's a limit to that * that oral and * speaking skills should be somehow incorporated in the syllabus I agree but a ten minute test is not an adequate way of assessing the students' oral abilities * in speaking * in reading * in listening to English * so I think we have to rethink that

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the syllabus' set texts/

LECTURER D: ** yes * I think that since we are studying English language and obviously indirectly English culture * I think that the texts should reflect both the historical development of the English language and its culture * so I would retain the syllabus' kind of selection from different phases of English literature * I think that obviously Shakespeare is an inevitable choice and God forbid that he should ever be somehow removed * and then obviously you can give them texts which are adequate to their age and experience * this is very important because I'm sure we can find texts which speak to them * alright/ * not necessarily obviously * I'm not * I'm not suggesting that the texts should be strictly relevant to their concerns * I think their imagination and their capacities should always be stretched * but I think the choice of texts is very important * we have had recently some unhappy experiences in the selection of texts * for example the choice of Trollope * as a set text * the choice of Fowles * these were totally mistaken choices in my opinion * but surely I think we should also include at least as part of the course a component which should give the students some basic background of * literary history * since we're studying this language at Advanced level I think that they should be exposed to this kind of contextualised awareness of the

texts they are studying * so I think that should be catered for too * in terms of language it has been a problem * because to find texts which are adequate for our students is not easy * in fact we had to * construct as you well know our own language texts * alright/ * but I think there's more work in terms of determining what our students really need in terms of language component * to put it that way * so that we can I think improve our language sessions

INTERVIEWER: in your experience does the choice of set texts have a bearing on students' success rate in the exam/

LECTURER D: definitely! * most definitely! * a text which is absolutely beyond them let's say * or is simply not suited to their level of English and experience is disastrous ** I told you about Fowles' novel * which is a marvellous novel but it's simply beyond their present grasp and it's very difficult to teach a novel like that * so that that has to be * considered * also in terms of linguistics we have had a very I think painful experience in the choice of one particular linguistics text * which is simply not relevant to our students * it puts them off linguistics * full stop! * now I believe that they should be exposed to some kind of linguistic knowledge * not too advanced * not too technical * but to choose a text which is simply * a mass of statistics * and * tables * and other information which is totally irrelevant to their concerns and to their capacities * I think it has the effect of putting them off linguistics forever * I'm obviously referring to the Sciriha text * which whatever its merits and I don't question those * is simply * was simply a bad choice * for students at this level

INTERVIEWER: do you agree that in the exam students are assessed mainly by means of the essay type question/

LECTURER D: I think the essay type question is important and basic * and I dread the very idea of ever removing or anyway minimising its importance * because that's in my experience * that's where you can assess students' capacities to think * to write in the language you're teaching them * the essay is the supreme test and I think that should be preserved * however * you could obviously * there are other other assessment methods * which are important * I think comprehension * the traditional kind is still relevant * obviously with certain modifications * not too many multiple choice for example * for God's sake because that * is a kind of dilution of reading assessment * alright/ * and summary writing * again * perhaps what should be added is a capacity to read not just the traditional kind of comprehension passage but different registers * the kind of * English usages which our students at this moment come in contact with * I'm thinking of obviously * internet language * magazines obviously * newspapers * and perhaps * this kind of * reading material which they do read more perhaps than novels although they do read novels too * not many but they do * and I think we should teach them how to read these things too * and also above all English in terms of media * like television and the internet * I think we should increase their critical awareness of these forms of English * somehow

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the examiners' interpretation of the syllabus' aims and objectives/ do their expectations match your own/

LECTURER D: over recent years they have not matched my own * far from it * I think as I told you before * they tried to raise the standards too suddenly * too crudely * in my opinion * and too unfairly * because * it's * you don't raise the level of English by making it more difficult to pass the A-level * simply * and * it was unfair in many ways both on the students and on us because the expectations were too high * simply * and too sudden * I think before having taken this step they should have consulted us * who are in contact with the students at this level * and who perhaps can * can speak best about it * so that's the first thing * secondly * this kind of * excessive expectation which we have witnessed these last few years has had a * adverse effect of discouraging students from choosing English

INTERVIEWER: what changes can be made at Junior College so that the students' performance in their exam is improved/

LECTURER D: ** well * there's always room for improvement as you can imagine but I expect that * perhaps * I think we should give students more opportunities to * encounter English in various registers * up till now the three * the four components of * literature * language * criticism

and linguistics * have been a bit restrictive * so we need to widen the scope of the syllabus * I haven't said anything about the crit * component * I consider crit to be very important because it is the only point in the exam and in the preparation where students are asked to * exercise all their linguistic or language skills at once * faced by an unseen text * and I think that it's centrality should not be minimised in any way * because if we train the students to read critically * not necessarily only literary texts * which is still where I maintain the context where English is used best * but since they are exposed to many other kinds of texts not just the literary * I think we should train their critical judgement and their critical ability to read critically * intelligently and appreciate more what they're reading and * the ability to formulate both in speech and writing * their reactions to the text * I think that is central in any syllabus * that involves the study of English

INTERVIEWER: what changes would you like to see taking place in the examination/

LECTURER D: I'm not against introducing an oral component if it's a sensible thing as I said before * because * it does * bring out a student's capacity to think and speak in the language he's studying * however obviously the written exam should again have priority * as always * I would be more careful about the selection of the texts * both literary and language * I think the selection should be more thorough and rigorous * perhaps also ** I think we should have more space for the basics * we're getting students who are coming here with a 5 who can't formulate a complete written sentence * and that's a problem * now as long as this thing remains that they can choose English with a Grade 5 we have to help these students somehow * so we need to think about how to find space and time for some basics although as I said before this is * I consider to be a limited venture * it will not * it will not * perfect in any way their language but it may help * the best thing is to make sure that at least those who choose English should start with a Grade 4

INTERVIEWER: now we're going to move on to a number of questions related to literature teaching methodology * which approach do you use when teaching set literary texts/

LECTURER D: well * it's a varied approach * obviously I try to give them a * a kind of basic approach which is standard * it has been for some time * not just reading the novel obviously but situating it first of all within a context * historical literary and * and * you know making them aware that it is a product of both the author and its social and historical background * then obviously I concentrate on the traditional * methods of exploring the topics the themes * the major ideas in a work of art and the characters * the setting obviously * the narrative techniques etcetera etcetera * I complement this obviously with * filmed versions whenever possible because that * helps * if used judiciously * it can be a kind of help for them to understand the text * the point is the most important thing * you can teach even a fairly difficult text * if you make it as far as possible relevant to their present concerns

INTERVIEWER: which other approach would you use if you could/

LECTURER D: ** if I could I would give them * even a taste perhaps of modern literary theory but obviously at this stage * I do in fact introduce at times as preparation for those who are intending to take up English at undergraduate level * I do introduce certain modern theories * of literary and cultural theories * I think that is a form of enrichment but again the important thing is to make them attractive not to overwhelm our students * I also think * since film and music culture is staple for our students * I think they should be utilised more where possible and integrated within our * since most of the films and music we get are in English * I think we should find ways of integrating certain level of attention to these media within the syllabus

INTERVIEWER: which approach do you use when teaching practical criticism/

LECTURER D: * obviously it's a * I start with a very basic approach that criticism is reading slowly * in slow motion I tell them * and usually I sum up * criticism in three simple formulaic words * what/ how/ and why/ * and I start from that kind of very basic approach * the point is to make them aware * I try to as much as possible to make them aware of the subtleties of words and language * in the hands of expert users * that is * then there are obviously those usual critical terms which * the critical vocabulary which they have to grasp * but that that comes as a result of this * the point is to make them aware that you can read a text with greater attention and get out of it much more than appears at face value

INTERVIEWER: which other approach would you use if you could/

LECTURER D: basically I think * this approach * has what is necessary * I can't think of * any other ways with which you can ** you know improve it * the point is to make them aware * to give the students * a basic capacity to read with sensitivity * to be aware of the power and the beauty of the language * and once you've achieved that * that a poem is a * finer * rewarding nourishing use of language I think you've achieved your purpose in criticism

INTERVIEWER: when teaching literature what do you focus on mostly/ * the language/ the content/ or personal enrichment/

LECTURER D: well I suppose * all have their contribution to make * all those three aspects * I do focus mostly on literature as a form of self-discovery * that is * why are we studying this play/ * what does a play written four hundred years ago have to say to us who are living now here / * why for example study Shakespeare/ * this is the first lecture I start with * I never start with the text or with the background of Shakespeare * I start with the response to the text * and obviously the intention is to make them aware that this is not dead stuff that you only have to prepare for the exam * this is fire * this is living stuff * and if you give it the right amount of effort you will at the end of it be a * better person * in the sense that you will improve your mind your feelings your sensitivity * reading should be a transformative exercise

INTERVIEWER: which of these three approaches do you consider to be the most important for sixth form students/

LECTURER D: again as I told you they should be ideally integrated obviously but I keep saying that * when you study a play like *King Lear* for instance * I tell them immediately that the best way of getting good results is to start liking the play * concentrate on that * alright/ * see the literary text as an encounter with a new experience * new dimensions of living of feeling of thinking * alright/ * and once you get that you shouldn't bother about the results because * you will get good results but first first see what the text can give you

INTERVIEWER: now we have a number of questions concerning language-teaching methodology * which approach do you use when teaching language/

LECTURER D: okay * mostly I use the traditional approach because obviously * I am * I have to stick to the texts we have and the syllabus we have so * it involves mainly writing essays * different types of essays * discursive descriptive narrative essays * so the first * you obviously have to give them an idea of these different types and what they involve * obviously the art of writing an essay * they have to concentrate on that ** I also obviously use * comprehensions and summaries * and obviously the most important tool is the tutorial * where you get to actually concentrate on a student's capacities and limitations * and it does effectively improve a student's proficiency * the tutorial session * involving as it does a kind of individual attention to the writing capacity of the students and also obviously to their use of English to write about a subject or a text

INTERVIEWER: why do you use this method/

LECTURER D: I think as I told you before this concentration on the essay format is important * basically that's what I I * occasionally obviously I have to * given the level of English of our students * I have to go back to basics at times * even in terms of tenses basic tenses and other grammatical structures which unfortunately they keep getting wrong even at this level when they shouldn't

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of Communicative Language Teaching/ * do you practise it in the classroom/

LECTURER D: yes I mean * depends on the classroom obviously on the number of students in the classroom * with a classroom of forty five students * communication two way communication is obviously restricted but with smaller groups like seminars and tutorials you do have a chance of applying this method

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the students' writing skills when they start their MC course/

LECTURER D: ** in general it's below average * and the most * the best we can hope for is to make it at least average * you do get the occasionally exceptional student who can write good

English intelligently in a lively and interesting way * making little or no mistakes but as I told you this is the exceptional student

INTERVIEWER: how can students improve their writing skills/

LECTURER D: obviously by exercising them ** the weekly tutorial helps but I have my doubts whether it's enough * in the classroom as I told you can develop it you can develop it more if you have manageable groups but otherwise with a group of forty five fifty students in class it's very difficult to * in two sessions a week two hours a week * it's very difficult to * really substantially improve the writing skills of students

INTERVIEWER: how do you approach the teaching of writing skills/

LECTURER D: through various ways * we mentioned already traditional methods of the essay the comprehension the summary and other writing tasks like * report writing and article writing * letter writing * basically those are the main methods I use * what is problematic is the frequency of course because as I told you for logistical reasons * you can't you can't give them enough practice in these different forms of writing

INTERVIEWER: do you prefer a product or a process approach to the teaching of writing skills/

LECTURER D: if I had a choice I would choose a process approach * unfortunately the way things are * I mean logistically and syllabus-wise you cannot simply ignore or not give importance to the outcome because most students are interested in the outcome

INTERVIEWER: how can the teaching of writing at Junior College be improved/

LECTURER D: ** as I told you first of all you have to have ideally smaller numbers because you can't really teaching writing to huge numbers let's face it * you have smaller numbers * probably we also need more teachers for that which is * a very improbably prospect I would call it * but anyway that would certainly improve * now in terms of what can be done under present conditions I would say that if we devise new ways of exposing students to as much variety of writing as possible * and concentrate on the techniques involved it would be I think it would help * but it's a * under present conditions of large numbers I can't think of effective ways of really improving their writing skills more than we are doing now

INTERVIEWER: how do you approach the teaching of reading skills/

LECTURER D: well obviously there are * the set books * which always involve reading by the students and by the lecturer * sometimes if possible even in class * encouraging obviously extracurricular reading as much as possible * introducing students to texts which they may never have met before * I try to make the comprehension * component as interesting as possible by a careful selection of the passages * again ** more than that I can't think of

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the linguistics component/

LECTURER D: I think in recent years all my students have complained about this component * they unfortunately develop a distaste for it and it has been in recent years I repeat counterproductive

INTERVIEWER: which approach do you use when teaching linguistics/

LECTURER D: I try to make the subject as palatable as possible * because obviously confined as I am by the unfortunate choice of text and since its introduction it has been unfortunate the choice of text I must say I wasn't successful in making them in any way enthusiastic about linguistics

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the following in terms of their effectiveness and feasibility as teaching techniques or resources at sixth form level/ * and I'm going to present you with a list

LECTURER D: alright * group work * I don't use it much I must say * occasionally I do have recourse to it but not very frequently * I think partly because of the restrictions or the format of the present format of the syllabus * students' presentations* no I don't use much of those * I do occasionally invite students to present not formally very informally * a point of view but it's not an organised thing * pair work * yes I do allow in certain cases especially in language students to sometimes work in pairs and compare * the product of their work * lectures * lectures obviously are *sine qua non* at this level * certain texts are * best presented in lecture format * okay/ * lecture via PowerPoint presentation * I don't use that much at this level * partly because our facilities are abysmally lacking * and we don't have either the opportunity or the facility to actually increase this

this type of presentation * handouts * handouts I have my * how shall I say/ my reservations * because I found through experience that in terms of for example notes * students will assimilate better material if they have to write it down themselves rather than finding it ready made buying it as a pack usually and they simply * you know they have this ready made material which they can memorise and I found actually the discipline of writing lecture notes * and discussing as you write they assimilate the material much better than simply you know * getting to it through handouts * I think handouts discourage efforts * resource packs * same thing * I was speaking about packs actually because I do give handouts occasionally in terms of since * to complement * to supplement rather * supplement the books I do give handouts but packs as I told you I was thinking of packs more than anything in the previous point * I find them to be in some ways counterproductive

Appendix 10 – Interview 5: Lecturer E

INTERVIEWER: let us start by means of a number of questions related to the MC English examination * are you satisfied with your students' performance in their Matriculation English examination/

LECTURER E: ** to tell you the truth we don't always know how our students perform because * the year after we get to know their results so it's a hunch I have before that they will do well or they won't * as simple as that * because the year after there's too much to do to bother actually about the previous years * however when I look at the past five years I have to admit that I am not completely satisfied * we've made * we've complained about the situation in the exam * even signed a petition as you know * so not really * because statistically it doesn't show that MATSEC are happy with their level * with what they're doing

INTERVIEWER: in your opinion which are those factors responsible for your students' poor performance/

LECTURER E: ** examiners have their own view of this * I personally think that it has to do actually with the way things are nowadays * the general apathy towards learning for its own sake * they don't read they don't do * take up study with that love for study at least I experienced when I was young * it could be also * I can't just blame the students * I think another factor could be us as well * something to do with our teaching methods which could be in a rut * not necessarily over here * I also blame secondary school * I'm sure that when they do these courses * what do you call them/ * teachers' refresher courses or whatever they're called * they do them in July or perhaps in September but I'm not quite sure whether they put into practice * the teachers put into practice I mean new * any innovations in the methodology that they might hear about * personally I think they do need to * to * be kept on tiptoes throughout the year * even us but especially so with secondary school because here they only have two years * there they have a longer period * it's the building blocks that they're doing * here we are supposed to be consolidating and finishing off and to prepare the students for university after all

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of those students who choose to study English at MC level/

LECTURER E: first of all I think few choose English for its own sake * there are those who love the subject and choose it because they're good at English because they read a lot and they enjoy it * that's all * it gives them pleasure to to study * and read * but others of course have practical reasons like the university course they're going to choose * possibly the chance of teaching foreigners * they are also tempted towards that because they hear that they can make some money much better than doing other jobs and * there are some who might have chosen it also * who still choose it because they feel it's important in life and also it could help them in their own personality as regards their confidence * if they continue to show everyone they're good at English

INTERVIEWER: students currently need a Grade 5 in SEC English Language in order to study English at MC level at Junior College * what's your opinion of this/

LECTURER E: I don't quite agree with Grade 5 * I would say a Grade 4 * we need students who pull up their socks before actually coming here

INTERVIEWER: would a Grade 5 in the SEC English Literature examination be sufficient to complete the MC English course successfully/

LECTURER E: even here I think a 4 would help * although this question about English Literature * let's put it this way * if they're good in the language I don't see anything impeding them in becoming better * if they were not so good * when it comes to literature even if they * I won't say if they didn't sit for it but even if they got a low grade because they didn't give it importance * you

know students at SEC sometimes don't give it importance * so they might get poor grades if they don't * it doesn't mean this hampers them from taking English Literature here * so long as their language is okay and their writing skills are acceptable

INTERVIEWER: are you happy with the way the different components are tested in the MC English examination/ * what changes can you recommend/

LECTURER E: linguistics out! * well * there are some things I would change ** some of the components are of course acceptable and necessary like the critical component for example * the essay component because writing has to be there * but linguistics definitely needs to be changed

INTERVIEWER: should oracy and listening skills be tested/

LECTURER E: yes! * why not/ * yes it think students need them and they boost self-confidence * there's no point in saying I have an A-level in English and then I'm not able to speak fluently * the language * and anyway they do it at SEC * whether it's good or not * the way it's currently being done * whether it's enough or not * I question that * but I think oracy and listening should be tested

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the syllabus' set texts/

LECTURER E: ** I guess you're talking about literature here

INTERVIEWER: literature and linguistics

LECTURER E: linguistics I told you * I would think of something else as an alternative * not linguistics as we have it * we don't have just linguistics * we have sociolinguistics which is a speciality on its own so * if I were to include some linguistics it would be real theoretical basic linguistics * alright/ * as regards literature books I'm not against having a classical text * Dickens or something like that * a Hardy * as regards the novels * Shakespeare * I'm okay with Shakespeare even if they've been choosing the same tragedy * they've been circling round the tragedies for a number of years * I'm not against that because I am seeing what the students gain out of it * the experience gained out of it * so for us it would be good to change but for the students it's good to have the experience of a *King Lear* or * *Macbeth* or whatever * however I have my doubts about the way the texts are chosen by the syllabus board * we've heard anecdotes * well not anecdotes * they were true * certain texts were chosen but they were suggested by someone and they weren't even read * I remember once I met somebody from MATSEC who said ** and I remember him telling me that a parent * a Gozitan parent * told him * this was a few years back because it was when Atwood was included * saying how disgusting that we should have such a book * so pornographic etcetera * and of course he said he would check it and it wasn't that bad * I'm not saying we should comply with this * there's nothing wrong with choosing Atwood * I realise that it has its own value * but were the examiners aware when this was done * when this was chosen * I have my doubts * there should be a justification * he should have had a justification * at hand whenever * when the objection was raised

INTERVIEWER: in your experience does the choice of set texts have a bearing on students' success rate in the exam/

LECTURER E: ** so long as we prepare them to make the right choice * I mean so long as we as a school make the right choice of text * remember there are usually as regards novels * even in Shakespeare * there are usually other plays and other novels * if we make the right choice I think they can succeed because if we enjoy teaching what we've chosen it should have a bearing on them

INTERVIEWER: do you agree that in the exam students are assessed mainly by means of the essay type question/

LECTURER E: well yes at this level they are pre-university * I know there is * there are possible * another approach like discrete items or things like that * but we are supposed to be * a couple of steps before university * and I think we should be focusing not on the little items here but on the structure of things * I mean essays of course * as regards literature of course I would also consider whether they should have a gobbet question like the Intermediates at A-level that is but I'm not sure it's acceptable because it's * they already have crit prose * right/ * which is an unseen and it would be replicating perhaps the skills * so I'm not quite sure * although I still have my doubts about the way we test literature * there could be also * alright the discrete items idea not for language but for

literature could work because they test detailed knowledge of the text * I am in favour of them knowing the text very well not merely replicating notes

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the examiners' interpretation of the syllabus' aims and objectives/ do their expectations match your own/

LECTURER E: I've been through the aims on a couple of occasions * they seem okay * probably copied from some A-level examination in England as they did for SEC * except that there is * linguistics is not in the aims which goes to show how it came into the syllabus * and also there is one which I question a bit * I have it right here * let me see <<consults a copy of the syllabus>> the ability to write accurately clearly and effectively for different purposes and audiences * I don't think that's being catered for because the essays * I'm talking of the language essay here * the titles chosen do not differentiate between audiences and purposes * we don't have a lot of different text types

INTERVIEWER: what changes can be made at Junior College so that the students' performance in their exam is improved/

LECTURER E: we've already made one change for instance * we've we've * we're not allowing them a choice of texts * literature * we're doing it for them * before they used to have a choice and I think of course it impeded our teaching because students are likely to choose the first book chosen and they don't bother about the next one being covered the year later * I think we could make some changes yes * I'm not sure whether we're all together in this * about the way the students are addressing the essay questions given * literature and language * I'm not sure whether we're all together there * the focus on structuring an essay * some changes also * this could be done in tutorials perhaps * I was also thinking of the possibility of discussing a tutorial * in view of the fact that students are * you know the levels that they come with not up to what we would like it to be * perhaps I was thinking of sometimes students during tutorials * spread over two weeks * in the first week we discuss it * not they write it and then we go through it but we discuss it plan * and you know an oral discussion * they take points and they come up with their own plan and it must be hands on not just talking * and then they go and write it and then the next week there's the usual tutorial as we know it * we see what they've given us * another change that we could do here is literature * especially for literature but not in the first year * perhaps later on * giving them open book tests * literature questions with the book the text only * so long as they don't get those blasted notes from which they copy * I think that is something we could introduce to emphasise the fact that the text is the main thing they have to think of analyse digest * whatever

INTERVIEWER: what changes would you like to see taking place in the examination/

LECTURER E: instead of linguistics or sociolinguistics as it is something like language awareness * I remember a time when there used to be a little component * it was very short brief * but awareness of aspects of language like colloquialisms slang Americanisms * formal and informal styles of writing * but actual practical ideas and examples * such things as that * different kinds English * a general knowledge of these things there could be a set list which we could prepare them for * and then I'm not quite sure how they would be tested * either in a practical way or writing something and coming with examples themselves * as regards poetry I think an anthology might be a change * I'm not sure how it will work out * we've tried short stories and they weren't that bad in reality but with poetry we've always * sometimes a poet is there for a good number of years * I'm not against just one poet mind you but we want to send students out there with an open mind and our aim in the choice of texts should be the value of these texts in the students' life later on * and an access to different poets I think should help * as regards essays * well in SEC they do it * I don't see why we don't over here * there is always that shorter kind of essay the report kind of essay * it's out here at A-level * possibly because the exam relies on literature a lot * but a directed short essay * not necessarily as directed as in SEC has its value in life * summary is another thing * I know we have it but I'm not quite sure whether we are giving it enough importance * note-taking is another skill that students need at university and hence the exam should cater for it * it's not being exploited here at this level * note-taking

INTERVIEWER: let's move on to a number of questions about literature teaching methodology * which approach do you use when teaching set literary texts/

LECTURER E: I've been teaching here for quite some time * I used to assume that the students have read the text * and I used to give lectures and that's it * but now we can't assume that * the students don't come prepared * they wouldn't have read the text so of course I tackle it the text chapter by chapter and in a short novel as in Steinbeck I actually read it in class * it's interesting because you go into details * you show them how you yourself are discovering details even as you're reading in front of them sometimes and you're also showing them the pleasure of reading and enjoying literature * so I feel I'm giving them something there * even when reading in class ** another method that I used to use that I still use sometimes * I used to prepare something to look up for in a chapter * give them the handout early in the year and tell them to prepare chapters one two and three for instance * what to look out for like quotations to prove a point * and I remember doing it for Jane Austen for Hardy * it used to work but there was a time * perhaps I'm giving up myself as well * it needs a lot of preparation * but I had to change because students didn't bother to look up details or read the handouts sometimes * so I changed * it's easier now of course * so I prepare the chapters and I go in and deliver a lecture * I know they don't know so I have an advantage over them which makes me feel of course really <<laughs>> powerful

INTERVIEWER: which other approach would you use if you could/

LECTURER E: this approach * this approach that I used to use I feel that it was a success * I've met students of mine who are now teachers and who have told me about this approach and how it made them really go into * into the details of * the relevant details of the text * they had to pick out some things certain quotations * it made them look really carefully to try to find it * if they get the right one it was marked okay so we did it in class * they used to enjoy it * it derives from my own experience of studying actually

INTERVIEWER: which approach do you use when teaching practical criticism/

LECTURER E: in the first year I go over the theoretical aspects with practical examples of course * usually short poems and short extracts but to bring out the learning value * right now I'm doing diction so I'm looking at various passages and poems to bring out the aspects of diction that they should know about * like allusions like * even the grammar of a sentence * the syntax * themes and so on * I focus on certain aspects like imagery diction tone and so on * themes * also I go into the writing skills with first years * like writing an introduction and basically how to continue an essay

INTERVIEWER: and with second years/

LECTURER E: then in the second year it's more practical * that is we have actual things * I usually also use the unseen method approach of the exam like giving them a test first and then discussing it later * because I find that either it's my nature I talk a lot or it's the students who shut up * I give them a passage to prepare * only a few prepare it and putting them in a circle * I've had a couple of successful years where the students co-operated and we had lovely discussions in a circle * but I remember two or three years at most out of all the years I've been here where I had at least one group who enjoyed discussing the text

INTERVIEWER: which other approach would you use if you could/

LECTURER E: I'm quite happy with my approach but of course I wish the students participated more * perhaps if I can find a fault in myself * this teacher talking time * I am aware of it * I don't know whether to blame myself or whether to blame the students' silence * they know they can put up their hands if they really want to interrupt me and I'll give them a chance to talk but they never do

INTERVIEWER: when teaching literature what do you focus on mostly/ * the language/ the content/ or personal enrichment/

LECTURER E: you're personally enriched if you look at the content and the characters in action * okay/ * but since we're teaching language I tend to value the use of particular words instead of others and the ways of putting the syntax * as part of the whole vehicle of what is being conveyed so * nowadays I find it useful * this is something that I learnt myself through the years * something perhaps I wasn't prepared for when I started teaching sixth form years back * the importance of

structure * the structure of the whole thing of the sections of the texts which has an ideology of an author behind it * I am emphasising that a lot now

INTERVIEWER: which of these three approaches do you consider to be the most important for sixth form students/

LECTURER E: I think all three of them are important * you can't really separate them * I find them all important along with what I've just said * what is the real meaning of the text/ * behind it behind the text * what is the author trying to show us in that text/

INTERVIEWER: let's move on to a number of questions about language-teaching methodology * which approach do you use when teaching language/

LECTURER E: we have a text right/ for language * we're referring to language seminars/

INTERVIEWER: Yes

LECTURER E: we use it because we make the students buy it and so we can't ignore it * I would come up with my own material rather than have a text * I try to stress skills especially * of course like * remember we have an exam in mind whether we like it or not this is the washback of the exam * we teach to the exam whether we like it or not * and of course I try to stress the skills * but I like to bring out the point of view of the examiner as far as possible even by looking at silly things like the marks * allotted to each question

INTERVIEWER: why do you use this method/

LECTURER E: I guess it's exam backwash as I've just explained * unfortunately I don't quite like it * with language I'd like to practise some things that we use with foreigners for instance to make it enjoyable * because it's not enjoyable * the students even if * mind you I do try sometimes like a warmer * a little task at the beginning * a brainstorm on a topic or something to do with language * I do do it * I wish I had more prepared * because I only have a few of those * I want to build up a kind of * I have it in mind * unfortunately the students are too exam-oriented but this would at least start off the lesson with something appealing * it does when I do it but they do fall into a rut again because we have to turn to the texts or comprehensions or summary or whatever

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of Communicative Language Teaching/ * do you practise it in the classroom/

LECTURER E: I'm in favour of it * we use it with foreigners in Malta but they come relaxed * they just want to develop their fluency vocabulary * it's part of life for them * our students see the exam not as a language which is useful for life * I'm generalising here but they see it as a language which is going to get them through MATSEC and then hopefully moving ahead * so yes I do practise it with my students now and then * using the ideas that I used to use in my TEFL days * I am interested in it a lot * however there's the stress also that we take of going out of the classroom and not having covered an amount of the syllabus * so obviously we do teach to the test a lot of the time

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the students' writing skills when they start their MC course/

LECTURER E: ** I have tried these past couple of years looking into the examiners' report of SEC to get an idea of first of all what * first of all * I don't mark so I'm not in touch with SEC * so if the examiners' report is available which is not in October so it's usually a year later * it does give me an indication of the skills they have * the first tutorials usually impress you because we give them a narrative and a descriptive essay and they're quite good at those * and then eventually you get to know them better and you start realising what are their mistakes * the tutorials have a really big value because you really get the individual approach * but in general I would say we have students choosing English with varied * it's a mixed ability group * as I said the purposes for choosing English vary and so do the levels of ability in writing

INTERVIEWER: how can students improve their writing skills/

LECTURER E: workshops would be a good idea * but as I said the language seminars are not enough for writing skills because we have comprehensions * we used to have linguistics as well in the language seminars which took part * which took the biggest part of the year * yes writing workshops * when I say writing workshops I mean getting them to write something not free writing but after discussing it * as I mentioned for the tutorial system * alright/ * something like that * they

could bring in for one session a passage they like and why they like it * this could be done for poetry as well * workshops which are more hands on for them than just handing in a piece of work they've done at home before they go to sleep or whatever * I want to see them correcting their own work which they don't do

INTERVIEWER: how do you approach the teaching of writing skills/

LECTURER E: ** I think I've mentioned quite a lot of ideas already but I do stress * I told you about for instance the importance of focusing on the rubric on the title ** reread your essay and correct it for errors * the organisation skills * I think here * which is why I think the spadework should have been done * I'm not saying we should have perfect students but I'm thinking of myself when I went to sixth form * basically I had problems * I'm sure I had problems * with vocabulary I sure had because * I had certain difficulties like not reading enough perhaps myself * but my grammar was okay I should say * some syntax problems I must have had as well * alright/ * but not * I was ready * I had the spadework done prior to entering sixth form * it was a question of self discovery in my case * doing research on my own which they don't do here

INTERVIEWER: do you prefer a product or a process approach to the teaching of writing skills/

LECTURER E: I start with the process but of course I have to lead to the product * alright/ * ideally as I said * ideally we should already be focusing on the product at this level but we have to do some work sometimes * this has to do even with the teaching of certain grammatical points * some people in here don't think it's the case that we should be teaching basics but a little revision always helps * so the process is necessary but of course it should ideally take a shorter time than it does sometimes because some students * I think we should be more in touch with what these students have been doing * we should sit back a bit at the start and try to negotiate with them * ask them what they've done * I do it * first lesson of language I do this * what they think of their past lessons their teachers and what they would like * what they think A-level is all about and the gap they envisage between O-level and A-level as regards language and what they'd like to see us doing together * this negotiating bit I do a lot * there's a scheme in my mind which I share with them * I tell them what I want to achieve by the end of each lesson

INTERVIEWER: how can the teaching of writing at Junior College be improved/

LECTURER E: you're talking of Junior College here * I'm going to include teachers of other subjects * I don't think we're being helped because the lecturers of other subjects * I'm not quite sure whether they check their English * I mentioned workshops earlier and this should apply to all of Junior College because writing skills form part of most aspects of university studies * right/ * perhaps I'm thinking a bit too far * perhaps this idea should be spread all over

INTERVIEWER: how do you approach the teaching of reading skills/

LECTURER E: of course you do reading through a passage usually * there are various pre-reading skills and * while reading skills and post-reading skills which usually I have no time for * but obviously again the exam is in mind and it doesn't allow you to enjoy reading as it should be * like discussing a topic before actually reading the passage * you know these pre-reading tasks there are * so usually that's made short like a little discussion * in fact the book does contain such activities * it helps you * introduces vocabulary before * but of course you do then turn to the kinds of questions that are asked in the exam * the skills that are expected of the students * whether they are evaluation identification you know the skills of questions * the question types in the exam

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the linguistics component/

LECTURER E: poor! * except that I'm not against linguistics per se * a little knowledge of linguistics but not sociolinguistics with a heavy accent on statistics

INTERVIEWER: which approach do you use when teaching linguistics/

LECTURER E: we used to do it in the language classes * that's my experience because now I don't do it ** I guess the general approach here because we tend to be like that and we * we use this approach for everything is the lecturing but I used when I had language seminars the presentation approach * group presentations * I used to divide the book * Crystal I managed it for both chapters not with the Maltese thing ** and I used to give them a section to prepare * they had to meet and they had to come out with the points * we discussed them and usually I would correct them and

sometimes I would give notes at the end because the others wouldn't have read the section * sometimes it took us two sessions to do this * the presentation * unfortunately our students are very poor when it comes to presentation skills * first of all they wouldn't want to come out in front of the others * secondly they used to read not present a number of points * so unfortunately the presentation technique in Malta is still backwards * it might have to do with oracy skills as we said which shouldn't be tested only at SEC but every year * alright/ * if we want to test them we should also do so in class because there are still students who insist on speaking to you in Maltese in class even during the language seminars * especially in first year * then I think they realise that I don't want that

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the following in terms of their effectiveness and feasibility as teaching techniques or resources at sixth form level/ * and I'm going to present you with a list

LECTURER E: yes * I put group work and pair work together * in the sense that it depends on the task in hand * sometimes we need a group * of course group work has an advantage * I do use it sometimes especially when discussing an essay subject * sometimes you start with pair work and move to group work because they work together well * yes I have tried it especially with essay discussions not with comprehensions * I'm talking of language here * I intend to do a lot of group work and pair work next year * group work has a lot of value if we manage to finish a text halfway through the year because then you have sufficient time to use it * a lot of possibilities for group work * student presentations I just spoke about * I think our students tend to be reluctant * lectures they are good but I believe that lectures have to be well structured * I believe as I told you in negotiating with them * okay/ * I think I should insist on their note-taking * PowerPoint presentations * visuals help but they need a lot of preparation and possibly to be reused * okay/ * handouts * handouts yes and resource packs * they're convenient * I use them * of course it should shorten teaching time * teacher's talking time and leave more time for tasks but unfortunately most students take notes as something to take home for revision * so nowadays I'm giving notes either short notes * as much as possible * usually I go through them in class not line by line but pointing out what the intention of the notes is * I'm also using interactive notes * in the sense that I give them notes but I insert questions in brackets

Appendix 11 – Interview 6: Lecturer F

INTERVIEWER: let us start by means of a number of questions related to the MC English examination * are you satisfied with your students' performance in their Matriculation English examination/

LECTURER F: I'm happier now than I was two or three years ago * but still I am not fully satisfied with the results because I feel that while * while the students who deserve a C or above * are now more likely to get that C than they were two or three years ago I still believe that there isn't enough clear differentiation between As Bs and Cs * basically I believe that too many students are given C and too few are given B * I believe that from my experience there are too many students who are * who deserve something better than C who are actually getting C so I'm not fully satisfied with that * however there has been an improvement quite recently over what there was three or four years ago

INTERVIEWER: in your opinion which are those factors responsible for your students' poor performance/

LECTURER F: well there are a number of factors * I believe that one of the factors actually is the level of some students * I do believe that some students do not understand the requirements of doing English at A-level when they actually choose the subject * however I also believe that a lot has to do also with the * actual teaching of the subject in the sense that * while in certain contexts it is possible to teach very well because of small groups for example in other contexts that possibility is not really there * so while tutorials are very useful and I think can be very effective in helping a student develop * teaching language to a group of twenty students is not ideal for their best performance * I do however feel that a large part of the responsibility lies in the examiners' hands because what they want is not very clear first of all * so it's very difficult to understand as a teacher what the examiners really want from the students * and I also feel that * that some students perhaps are better than the mark that they are given * so it's a number of factors and I do believe that it's a shared responsibility

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of those students who choose to study English at MC level/

LECTURER F: some of them choose the subject because they love it * usually these are the students who are going to perform better * there are also students who choose English because they want to go for law and therefore they have to get a good grade and therefore they work really hard * a few other students think wrongly that English being a language is an easy subject and therefore they go for that * I do believe that perhaps English is not as prestigious as it used to be ten years ago * the importance being given to sciences and to other humanities is making it quite difficult for quality students to choose English * there are still some very good students who do so but in general I feel that the better students are going for sciences or computing

INTERVIEWER: students currently need a Grade 5 in SEC English Language in order to study English at MC level at Junior College * what's your opinion of this/

LECTURER F: well it is not enough! * it's too low! * from what I see * from the students I see in front of me * those who get a grade 5 who therefore have scraped through their language examination often find it extremely hard to get anything better than an E in the A-level * and I do believe that a grade 5 as an entry requirement is not strict enough especially because the A-level is basically based on writing * and the O-level you can get through the O-level even if your writing is not very strong * the accuracy of language is not as central in the O-level as it is in the A-level * so I do believe really that a grade 5 * getting a grade 5 * is not a good platform for doing well in the A-level * absolutely! * so I would ask for something higher than that * at least a 4 preferably a 3

INTERVIEWER: would a Grade 5 in the SEC English Literature examination be sufficient to complete the MC English course successfully/

LECTURER F: it would help and I do believe that if the A-level English remains as it is * heavily based on literature then I do believe that literature should be a requirement * now whether having grade 5 in the literature examination would then be enough to actually do very well no I would say no * but I would say that it would definitely help because a number of students find it extremely difficult * at least at first * to cope with English A-level because of their lack of experience in literature * so I would definitely make English literature a requirement for English A-level if the English A-level examination remains as it is heavily based on literature

INTERVIEWER: are you happy with the way the different components are tested in the MC English examination/ * what changes can you recommend/

LECTURER F: I'm partially happy with how the different components are tested but not fully so definitely * I do believe for example that * there can be a greater variety of tasks given * the exam is basically essay based except for reading comprehension and I do believe that in certain areas * for example like practical criticism * possibly a combination of essay writing and questions where students answer the questions would actually be better in showing their ability * I am not happy at all with the linguistics component in the examination because I feel that it is too specific and it is not really related to the major issues which can contribute to a development of the students' awareness of language * so I would definitely if I could do that definitely change the linguistics component and I would think of ways of introducing a greater variety in the assessment of crit * there are two questions out of nine which are crit * why do they have to be both essays/ * there could be a combination I think there * as for the other components * the literature components I think that that's the best way to assess them * the essay is the best way to assess these components * so in terms of how the novels are tested * in terms of how the poems are tested I'm happy with that

INTERVIEWER: should oracy and listening skills be tested/

LECTURER F: yes they should! * I do not believe that they should carry a very good percentage of the examination but I do believe that they should be involved in * that they should be part of the actual mark given * basically because in class when you're actually teaching you realise that a large majority of the students feel very uncomfortable speaking in English * expressing their opinions in English * I would not simply however assess pronunciation or * but I would perhaps go for an assessment of the ability of the students to express themselves clearly cogently in a way which is accurate in English * not just reading aloud for example * I don't believe that they should be asked to read aloud in an examination * what should be tested is their ability to argue convincingly in the language * to have a conversation in the language * so it should be introduced * oracy should be introduced only if introduced in an appropriate format * not simply reading aloud or having an unnatural conversation like talking for five minutes without being interrupted which is I think an unnatural situation * as regards listening I also feel that that is important and I do believe that actually a language should assess the four components * so not simply writing but writing reading listening and speaking * I do believe however that considering that English is such an important language in their educational development the majority of the marks should be based on writing * however I do believe that other factors should also be factored in

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the syllabus' set texts/

LECTURER F: well I do believe that * there could be better texts which are chosen * for example I do not believe that Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* is a text which should have been in the A-level syllabus for so many years * it is a novel which while liked by the students is not the best example of American literature that can be chosen particularly because of its use of language which * is basically * based on American slang so I do believe that a better choice could be made there * as regards Shakespeare obviously there's the difficulty there of choosing a play which is not being done at O-level and which is appropriate for students * I do believe that *King Lear* is an appropriate text although I do believe that there other texts which could be chosen * as regards poetry I do believe that Owen is a poet that students love and Wilfred Owen therefore is definitely a poet whom

I would keep in the syllabus * so I would say that I'm generally happy but I would definitely change Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* * now the reason for this is that when students write about this novel because of the perceptively simple style of the novel students often end up simplifying when writing about Steinbeck * so I think that a better choice of text should be made there

INTERVIEWER: in your experience does the choice of set texts have a bearing on students' success rate in the exam/

LECTURER F: yes I do believe that! the set texts for the linguistics component are a clear example of how the choice of text does influence the students * because if the students find that a text is completely irrelevant to what he is doing or that's what he feels then he is not going to be approaching that particular subject with as much interest as he would be approaching another text * yes I do believe that texts have to be chosen also keeping the students' interests in mind * so in linguistics for example I do believe that a greater variety of linguistics aspects should be discussed rather than simply sociolinguistics of a very specific kind * so I think that the texts in that component but also in others do have bearing on the performance of the students definitely

INTERVIEWER: do you agree that in the exam students are assessed mainly by means of the essay type question/

LECTURER F: mainly yes * only no * so I do believe that the essay should be the main kind of question that they should be getting but not the only one * perhaps the introduction of * ten percent component for speaking I think would be good and perhaps a greater variety in assessing literature criticism would also be good * possibly also the introduction of a component for listening * which I think would also be useful * so it's a yes * I would keep the essays as the major form also because in their educational development they are going to have to write a lot of assignments which are basically an extension of the discursive essay * so the writing practice that they are getting there is fundamental for their development * if they want to continue their studying then that training would have been very useful I think

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the examiners' interpretation of the syllabus' aims and objectives/ do their expectations match your own/

LECTURER F: the problem is knowing exactly their interpretation of the syllabus' aims and objectives * I do believe that their interpretation can be gleaned from only from the examiners' reports because there aren't any other sources from which it can be gleaned * what was disappointing over the last few years was the lack of consistency across the examiners' reports * a case in point being in one year having the examiners complaining about the excessive summarising when it comes to practical criticism and the lack of structure when it comes to writing essays which I perfectly agree with * that's something which shouldn't be encouraged * but then in a recent examiners' report having a comment saying that essays are becoming formulaic * that they are too rigid in structure * so I wonder whether students are expected to work according to a specific structure when writing * for example a crit essay * or whether they are expected to simply spontaneously decide there and then which structure they're going to be using * perhaps if these issues were clearer it would be better * I also feel that there are some grey areas in terms of what is necessary for students * for example it's not very clear what exactly examiners want with respect to use of quotations * use of critics in the essays * or the use of statistics when it comes to linguistics * so it's not very clear what exactly the examiners want * so I cannot say how they are interpreting the syllabus because it is not very clear what they want * however lecturers have to work on the basis of what they think the examiners want * if the examiners could make themselves clearer then we could teach the students better

INTERVIEWER: what changes can be made at Junior College so that the students' performance in their exam is improved/

LECTURER F: in terms of the A-level I do feel that perhaps that the best change there could be is smaller classes * smaller groups * although I do believe that due to the tutorial system the situation with the A-level is much better than with the Intermediate students * the seminar system also allows for closer * the ability of the lecturer to actually be closer to his students in an hour though I believe that in certain areas such as language in particular a group of eighteen is still too big if we really

want to make a leap in quality * a tutorial group of nine is too big * if you really want quality then you need to have smaller classes * I don't really it makes any difference if you have thirty or thirty five in a lecture if you're not expected to have students writing in a particular session though I do believe that a tutorial group for example should not be a group of nine * I mean I don't manage to ever * actually * in the tutorial session analyse the work of nine students * you can do three four * so I don't believe that there should be more than five or six in a tutorial group and if the language groups could actually be smaller * well obviously I know that there are financial issues here but a language group which is actually smaller would help in the development of the students * so that's what the Junior College if it had the resources could do * having smaller classes

INTERVIEWER: what changes would you like to see taking place in the examination/

LECTURER F: first of all I would like to see the change of the linguistics component * linguistics should be there because I think it is a fundamental aspect of language but it should not be there in that form * I do believe that it should be an overview of some of the major aspects of language studying * so an introduction to semantics * an introduction to syntax * an introduction to morphology * to phonology * because that actually could also help the development of the students in their use of English * possibly I would also change the essay part in the examination * the language essay part in the examination because there I feel is the same kind of question repeated over and over again * what I mean is that the most typical kind of question that they get there is the one word title or the phrase title where they can often discuss topics which are not perhaps of so much interest for the students * perhaps the examiners should have a clear division of the kinds of tasks that students are expected to write * for example I would have a definite descriptive essay at least * a definite narrative essay * and various kinds of discursive essays and not simply the one word titles expecting the students to approach the passage in any way whatsoever * because if the students do not know exactly what is being asked of them they do not know exactly what kind of style they can use * if on the other hand the examiners are clear and say listen * a title can be approached in any way students want as long as this is done coherently then fine * but it's not very clear what they want exactly * crit * I do believe that crit should remain and that it is a very important part of the examination * I do not believe that there should be two identical crit questions * there should be I think one which is essay based and one which is question based * I'm reasonably happy however with the distribution of literature and language that there is now so I wouldn't change that

INTERVIEWER: now we're going to move on to a number of questions related to literature teaching methodology * which approach do you use when teaching set literary texts/

LECTURER F: the approach is often the following * what I do is in the first two or three hours I introduce the text by introducing the literary context to which it belongs * I also bring in other aspects of context which are going to be useful later * issues which have to do with literary techniques which are fundamental * after that I do go through a text in detail * now obviously this depends on the length of the text * some short texts like *Of Mice and Men* allow you to almost read the whole novel in class and you are actually conducting a close analysis of the language the themes the characterisation the imagery as you go along * some other texts like Atwood's *A Handmaid's Tale* will only allow you to actually analyse in class parts of the text * the system that I often use is a close analysis of the text with constant references to the whole * at the end of the teaching of the novel or of the passage or of the text I usually have two or three sessions * this is where I often feel I do not have enough time for the students there * I often use two or three sessions to actually go over the general issues once again and look at the text as a whole so discussing possible essay questions * how they could structure essays if they're going to answer these particular essays * so that's how I often teach it in class

INTERVIEWER: which other approach would you use if you could/

LECTURER F: if I could * if I had more time or a different kind of situation and students I would perhaps allow more time for a general discussion of the novel rather than simply an in detail discussion of the novel page by page * so I would like to have more time for example once you have already discussed the novel to go back through it discussing for example in terms of imagery

or certain thematic motifs which are recurrent * the amount of time that we have * for these sessions coupled with the level of the students particularly in first year does not allow us to put too much emphasis on the general because we have to first of all cover almost page by page the novel * I do not believe that the majority of the students would be able to cope with analysing big chunks of a novel on their own * they are often not prepared for that leap in quality which there is between the O-level and the A-level * that's why I believe as a minimum they should have a pass in literature if they are choosing English * so I would like to have more time at the end for general discussions

INTERVIEWER: which approach do you use when teaching practical criticism/

LECTURER F: well I do believe first of all that you need to understand the language or the words of a language that you're speaking so the first few sessions * five or six sessions are simply meant to teach the students the technical terms which they have to use in their discussion of criticism * so basically through various examples you explain what a metaphor is, what a simile is and so on * once they get that I do move first of all to the analysis of a text * so how to approach a text * which questions can you ask when you are analysing a text which you have never seen before * what aspects to look for * so basically what do I do if I am in an examination and I see a text which I have never seen before/ * what questions can I ask/ * after the analysis training we go to writing training * on the basis of the knowledge that I have how do I put what I know in writing/ * so I work usually through the whole process * so how to actually plan the essay and then how to write an introduction * how to write a paragraph about the structure of the text * how to write about language * how to write about style * how to write about tone * obviously eventually bringing all of this together to arrive to the idea of an essay * of a practical criticism essay * I do believe in practice so the more they practise the better * so I focus on the analysis of an unseen text but also on the writing about an unseen text

INTERVIEWER: which other approach would you use if you could/

LECTURER F: well if I had smaller groups they would be writing much more frequently obviously * as you know in our system students are expected to write in their tutorials an essay every week although many of us actually also give them essays in their practical criticism classes and in their language seminars * however due to the number of students in a class it is impossible to give an essay every week and I do really believe that in crit they would require more hours of training * if there were smaller classes more writing training * but I would not really change the system I use when teaching crit because I feel that it works * so I wouldn't change the system * I would just give more writing training if I could

INTERVIEWER: when teaching literature what do you focus on mostly/ * the language/ the content/ or personal enrichment/

LECTURER F: well I do believe that a holistic approach is fundamental * literature is not simply about personal enrichment although obviously that's important but you know you could approach personal enrichment through other subjects like religion or philosophy * so there must be something in literature which goes beyond personal enrichment * the language is fundamental but the content is what they are often asked to write about so that even is fundamental * I do believe in an approach which is holistic so I do try to discuss in many ways the language of the text the themes of the text but also try to bring in * not by moralising or preaching * I try to bring in to the lessons the kinds of questions that literature makes us ask * as a teacher I don't think I should be telling my students how to live their lives * but I think it's my duty to make students ask about how they are living their lives * about how they relate to others * and literature helps us to do that * although that is not the major aim I think

INTERVIEWER: which of these three approaches do you consider to be the most important for sixth form students/

LECTURER F: ** okay * for sixth form students/ * well really I couldn't rank them really in the sense that I really do believe in a holistic approach * however definitely not the content because you know the content * why teach it through literature * if you're simply teaching about politics through literature then why not do politics straight away * personal enrichment again * so if I had to rank them I would say language * obviously the one which goes at the top * I'm not saying that content

is not important or that personal enrichment is not important but the major focus should be on language and on how language is used to convey the content and how language can be used to make students reflect about their personal development * so I would say that language is the most important

INTERVIEWER: let's move on to a number of questions concerning language-teaching methodology * which approach do you use when teaching language/

LECTURER F: well first of all it depends on the requirements of the examination * in the case of the A-level students are asked in the language section to write an essay * to work on a reading comprehension and obviously they're going to be using the language in the other components * so there's nothing based on listening and there's nothing based on speaking which is I believe a lack in the actual exam * so teaching language * so with reading I do believe that students have to be frequent readers for them to be good readers so the issue of practice and * frequent practice is fundamental * however I do try to teach different ways of reading a text * so reading for general ideas * reading for specific information * reading for the structure of the passage * bringing out the essential in the text obviously reflecting different kinds of questions that they have in the reading comprehension * as regards writing what I do with the essay is to actually discuss each particular kind of essay that they might be asked to write and going into the actual process involved in writing that particular essay * I do really emphasise a lot on planning because I do believe that planning is essential in the writing of a good essay but I do try in class to practically go over all the steps in writing * going through the process of writing with the students in class * I would like the examination to cater for other areas which would allow us to go into speaking more * listening more etcetera etcetera

INTERVIEWER: why do you use this method/

LECTURER F: well because I do believe that it's the best method for the kinds of questions that they are asked * not necessarily because it's the best method * so if it were possible for me * although now the fact that we have removed the linguistics component from the language sessions would give me more time to use more of a TEFL approach to language * in the sense that I do believe that some of the students we get here really need to work on the basics * so tenses for example or sentence structure * so I would place more emphasis on the actual language accuracy * focusing on different aspects of language * and the last time I taught language there was no time for that because we had to cover both linguistics and language during the seminars * now I think if I were to teach language there would be more time for this

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of Communicative Language Teaching/ * do you practise it in the classroom/

LECTURER F: yeah I do really believe in it * I taught English as a foreign language for seven or eight years and it really works * I mean I do believe that eliciting is fundamental * I do use it not simply in the actual teaching of language but also in the teaching of literature * I do really believe that the best way for the students to learn is to learn rather than be taught * so eliciting * asking questions * making the students use the language structure which they have just learnt is the best way of doing it * a problem that we find here is this * if the students are not expected to * are not going to be assessed on their speaking skills not all of them feel the need to actually speak when asked to do so in a language session * if that component were actually assessed then perhaps they would realise it's important for them to be able to actually speak and use the language that they are learning * I really do believe in Communicative Language Teaching and I do try to practise it in the classroom * if however speaking skills were actually tested in the examination I do believe it would be more effective in the classroom

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the students' writing skills when they start their MC course/

LECTURER F: obviously you cannot generalise * you cannot compare a student who has a 1 in language a 1 in literature with a student who has 5 in language and a U in literature * they both could be in the same class * so you find students who are already extremely good and what they need to do however is to refine their ability to write about literature especially * the construction of

an argument * that is they could have accurate language but they might tend to summarise a little bit too much and not be able to write convincingly at a certain level * however they are students who often do well * however I would say that if I were to look at the great majority of students I do believe that their level in writing is too low * very often their starting level is nowhere as good as is required in the A-level so there is a big leap that they have to make between O-level and A-level * actually almost greater than the leap that they have to make between A-level and undergraduate level * I think that the leap between O-level and A-level is immense and most of the students we get * a good eighty percent I would say * are not prepared for the level that is required

INTERVIEWER: how can students improve their writing skills/

LECTURER F: well practice is fundamental so I do believe that writing a minimum of one essay a week is fundamental * we have a system that caters for that * a problem with this is that some students still manage to miss the weekly tutorial * though I do believe that perhaps that we do need in our department a more * structured clearly structured approach to the teaching of writing * in the sense that it is not clear who is actually in charge of teaching the students how they should write * who is in charge of teaching the students how they should write * is it the tutorial lecturer/ * is it the language lecturer/ * is the one teaching literature/ * so I really do believe that the department should * have a definite and obvious writing programme for students which caters for the different aspects of the writing tasks that students might have to face * so I think that there is a little bit of inconsistency * in the sense that some students get their writing practice from their tutorial teacher * others from the language teacher * others don't get it from anyone * so we have to you know standardise this a little bit

INTERVIEWER: how do you approach the teaching of writing skills/

LECTURER F: well * again * we could talk about writing about language or writing about literature * usually what I do in tutorials and I use the feedback and consolidation sessions that I have every four weeks * and what I do is over the course of two years where students have seven or eight feedback and consolidation sessions I go over the process of writing with them in the tutorial sessions * the first couple of feedback and consolidation sessions are devoted to actually planning and deciding what is actually going to go into the essay * then I go into the actual writing * so I work with them in the tutorial on the actual construction of a paragraph * the use of quotations * the use of a topic sentence * the expansion of the argument * the concluding sentence etcetera etcetera * later on when there is more time we go into other phases of the writing process * that is something I manage to do during the tutorials * I also manage to do some kind of teaching related to writing about literature in my Shakespeare classes because there is time for that there * the problem there is that you can speak about general issues to a class of forty but you can't really coach them in writing if you've got a class of forty * that's why I really do believe that we need a more structured programme to teach writing to students

INTERVIEWER: do you prefer a product or a process approach to the teaching of writing skills/

LECTURER F: I think a process approach because I do believe that students have to be aware of the various steps that are required in getting to a certain end result * if you don't know the steps that will take you to the final product you can't get to that final product * so I really do believe in making students aware of the various levels and steps in writing a good essay * so I really do believe that first before they actually start writing they need to be able to choose the information they are going to include * I really do believe that they need to be able to construct a paragraph before they can construct an essay * so I would definitely say the process approach

INTERVIEWER: how can the teaching of writing at Junior College be improved/

LECTURER F: generally I would say that we need I think two things * one * smaller classes which would allow us to have more frequent * students write more frequent essays * number two * having a clearer and more * a standardised teaching programme * I know that the department is working towards this and I think that it is a very good idea * it should not be simply left to the discretion of the lecturer what writing students should have * I think this should be a department decision which would allow all students to get the same service in this respect

INTERVIEWER: how do you approach the teaching of reading skills/

LECTURER F: well reading again * what I try to do with reading is this * if you look at the examination questions * all they have usually are four or five questions and the questions that they are asked are often a vocabulary question * a summary question * one question about strategies used in the text * one question about content of the text * so what I do is to try to teach students to answer these different kinds of questions * I do believe that that is not satisfactory at all because I do believe that there are many more aspects of reading that can be analysed * I do believe that the reading comprehension text is too long and the questions are too limited * you've got five questions about a text which is two pages long * why not have a shorter text and more questions with less marks for each one/ * this could assess a greater range of reading skills * the way I teach reading is tailor-made to the examination * for me to change the way I teach reading the examination will have to change * I can't simply send them unprepared * if the A-level is putting a lot of pressure on students passing then I have to think of the examination first * so I would like to change the way I teach reading but the examination would have to change accordingly

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the linguistics component/

LECTURER F: well it has to be changed okay/ * it has to remain * it is important but it has to be changed completely * the texts students have had for the past four or five years are for many of the students irrelevant * I do believe in a clearer and more relevant linguistics syllabus such as for example basic introduction to semantics phonology syntax etcetera etcetera * it has worked in the past * there is no reason why it should not work now * it would actually strengthen the linguistic abilities of students in other components of the examination * so linguistics has to remain but it has to change in content

INTERVIEWER: which approach do you use when teaching linguistics/

LECTURER F: well actually this is one of the hardest parts of my job because I do believe that linguistics can really give students a lot but it's extremely hard to convince students that learning statistics can be useful for their development * what I try to do obviously is to explain the importance of a scientific awareness of language to students and I actually discuss the issues which are actually discussed in the books * I do try to highlight the relevance of the studies for the Maltese situation * I try to explain to students how to actually write about linguistics * how to insert statistics in their writing but I really would like to have a different text because that would allow me I think to make students appreciate the beauty of linguistics in a much better way * at the moment the feedback that I get from students is that most of them really don't see the need for linguistics and that's a pity because linguistics is definitely a crucial component

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the following in terms of their effectiveness and feasibility as teaching techniques or resources at sixth form level/ * and I'm going to present you with a list

LECTURER F: okay group work * group work is I think very effective in the context of a seminar not in the context of a lecture * during a lecture group work is not really effective because the teacher can in no way have control over ten groups of four * in the context of a seminar it can be done * I've used this in seminars and it can work * it really works in seminars but not in lectures * students' presentations * this should not be an excuse for not preparing a session * so students' presentations yes as long as it's useful * for example if the speaking component were tested then obviously students' presentations would be highly effective but in the context of a literature lecture where you're already limited with the amount of time you have students' presentations are counterproductive because that would mean wasting half the time that you have for a novel for students' presentations which defeats the purpose * students' presentations I do not often use them * I actually never use them * they could be useful if a speaking component were inserted in the examination * as regards pair work I again think it's quite similar to group work * you've got to know the dynamics of your class * I do use pair work not too frequently however because * again many of the tasks that students have to actually face in the examination * are very individualistic so to speak * in the sense that they are very much focused on the accuracy of language and pair work can be useful but considering the amount of time that we have it's not a priority * I would say that I would give pair work and group work equal importance but I also think that these two systems can

work only in the context of small classes * I mean we've got big classes and asking students to work together can help the weaker students but it almost makes it impossible for the teacher to have and kind of control over what is going on in class * as regards lectures well * lectures well * we call what we do lectures * three of the six sessions at least * however at this level I do not believe that at this level the lecturer can go in and start speaking for an hour without ever having the students talking in class * so I do believe that although we're giving lectures and therefore it's basically teacher talk time eliciting is fundamental * I mean they are sixteen year olds * you do prepare them for university but it's fundamental that they are actually trained in expressing their opinion * in actually not being passive receivers of some stream of information * so I do believe that lectures are relevant and very useful when it comes to teaching literature for example but I don't believe that the lecturer should simply lecture without in any way asking for students' intervention * lectures via PowerPoint presentation I'm not a fan of them * for a simple reason * if the PowerPoint presentation is done to help the lecture but I often believe that the PowerPoint presentation might in the context of certain situations take away from the lecture by not allowing the lecturer to make the best use of nonverbal communication * if the students are focusing on the screen behind the lecturer then eye contact is minimised * however with certain topics when you have a mass of information such as in linguistics for example this would be ideal but here at Junior College you can't do PowerPoint presentations because of lack of resources * handouts * they are useful I think * again you should not be giving handouts out and students reading from handouts * as a supplementary aid yes but I don't believe in simply reading from handouts * I actually think that handouts can be useful if they are practical * if they contain exercises of various kinds * but not simply reading aloud from a PowerPoint presentation or from a handout * resource packs are very important * students should be encouraged to take notes during the lecture but they should also be helped with resource packs * I'm not saying that we should be giving them every little detail that they need in a resource pack but they do need to be given the backbone of the subject in these resource packs so yes I do believe that they should be given information and ideally they should also be referred to texts or to books which they might out of their own free will consult on their own

Appendix 12 – Interview 7: Lecturer G

INTERVIEWER: let us start by means of a number of questions related to the MC English examination * are you satisfied with your students' performance in their Matriculation English examination/

LECTURER G: okay let me * look at this from three different points of view * if your students here means the actual students that I teach and their specific performance in the A-level exam * unfortunately there is no channel to see that * in other words I don't know whether students X Y Z manage to maintain their performance under examination conditions according to the abilities or the proficiencies that they show throughout the course * so there have never been a channel through which we can monitor at least * which would be interesting * a number of students and see whether our students are actually failing us under examination conditions * that's one * if you're speaking about the general performance of our students vis-à-vis what the examiners think their performance is * in other words the results * again I have two points to make here * one of them is that at least according to the statistics of last year the Junior College students were from Grade A to Grade C slightly above the national average * we're speaking about like four percent * if you look at the passes from Grade A to Grade D then we are about ten percent over the national average * is that good/ * well it's not bad * if you're speaking about whether as an educator I believe that there should be a situation in which there are a number of students who are being prepared through an educational process * by people who are able to do that teaching stroke learning programme * and whether there should in any language or in any educational programme a thirty percent failure rate no I don't * I don't * I don't believe that any educational system should have such a failure rate because somehow that should be an indication that something somewhere along the line is going wrong

INTERVIEWER: you've mentioned students' performance last year * what about the past five years/

LECTURER G: in the past five years * again I don't know all the facts or maybe I can suspect some of the facts * but there has been a fluctuation of the pass rate which which in my opinion has to be the result of changes within the team of examiners or something like that because I believe that * our teaching was constant * I believe that the quality of the students cannot change that much from one year to the other * so a change from a pass rate of sixteen percent to a pass rate of thirty five percent needs to be investigated

INTERVIEWER: in your opinion which are those factors responsible for your students' poor performance/

LECTURER G: ** I would believe this is the result of many factors * for example * it is possible that that the way lectures happen here * the way * the whole system is prepared here is actually not helping students to maximise the proficiency they come with from their secondary * it is possible for example that things like co-education * big numbers in classes * the fact that for example in arts subjects my feeling is that students take it a bit more lazily as an approach * I think all these factors contribute to a poor performance * obviously there could be things that have to do with our teaching * things that have to do with the A-level study programme per se * there could be things that have to do with the marking scheme * there could also be things that have to do with for example whether the O-level is actually assessing things that we need at A-level * for example * if a student passes through his secondary always writing narrative * if a student is assessed in his O-level comprehension without being penalised for spelling and grammatical mistakes and suddenly this

idea of assessing language changes at A-level then it is possible that what is considered as enough to start a course at O-level may not actually be the kind of platform that one needs for these students * in fact ** we do see situations where in the first tutorial * like in the first three essays when students are writing narrative essays their performance is of a certain quality and suddenly when they come to write argumentative essays that have to do with literature there is a collapse in their coherence and whatever * so there could be also a case of timing where the students are not given enough time to move from a secondary or end of secondary school proficiency in English to acquire the kind of momentum that they need for A-level

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of those students who choose to study English at MC level/

LECTURER G: they have a right to study English <<laughs>> I can't really say why they choose to study English * we have not really carried out this kind of study so that we'd have an idea as to why they choose English per se * I think we should remember that ultimately we get something like six classes of A-level students which isn't a lot in the sense that we might be a very big department of over two thousand students but in reality the number of students taking English is not made up of a lot of students who barely manage to pass their O-level and have assumed that they can do A-level English * in fact a very high percentage of the students taking English actually do with a Grade 1 2 or 3 in English Language which theoretically should be * enough * enough * so I don't think * I think there is a very small percentage of students * we're speaking about A-level who are doing A-level and who from the start have a proficiency that is basically impossible to push to A-level standard within a two year period * most of them I think have a good claim to actually start on this programme * at least the proportion of students who start English with a Grade 1 2 and 3 is much bigger than the proportion of students who fail the exam

INTERVIEWER: students currently need a Grade 5 in SEC English Language in order to study English at MC level at Junior College * what's your opinion of this/

LECTURER G: okay we've touched slightly on this in the previous question * obviously if all our students were Grade 1 students it would probably be a better thing however I once looked at the performance * because of another think I was involved in * of twenty two of our students who had a Grade 1 in English Language and a Grade 1 in English Literature * unfortunately their average at A-level was a C * so you know while it is probably simplistic or very easy to say listen somebody with a Grade 5 is probably not the kind of candidate that one would like in an A-level course but had that been our only problem it would be an easy problem * the problem is should students who have a Grade 3 be doing A-level English/ * my answer to that is yes * are these generally having a problem/ * my answer to that is yes and that's where the problem is

INTERVIEWER: would a Grade 5 in the SEC English Literature examination be sufficient to complete the MC English course successfully/

LECTURER G: ** okay * as things stand * as things stand * I believe * and * I hope we can work on this * I believe that most students opting for A-level English do not have an idea of the literature bias in the exam * in fact we have students who still believe that it is simply an upgrade of the same kind of tasks * at least when they choose the subject that they have in O-level but pitched at a different level and I am sure that some of them are suddenly overwhelmed by the volume of literature in the examination * given the emphasis on literature I would say that the problem here is not a Grade 5 but most probably students taking English at A-level should have English Literature * the problem is that we may have students who do not have English Literature so at least a Grade 5 is * it's probably a low grade * but again as with language I don't think this is a case of * it sounds stupid not to say that a Grade 1 is better than a Grade 5 * but while that is an easy distinction my problem would be towards the middle grades when one believes that a Grade 3 is a good grade and maybe it's not enough * so obviously a Grade 5 is not as good as a Grade 3 or a Grade 1

INTERVIEWER: are you happy with the way the different components are tested in the MC English examination/ * what changes can you recommend/

LECTURER G: okay * let me pick on a couple of components * we have a component that is tested twice in the exam * I'm speaking about the literary crit * one can argue that there shouldn't be a double testing of this component and maybe one of those tasks could be changed into something

else * it is also highly possible in this particular component that actually expecting students to read a poem * understand it and write a coherent good literary crit essay under examinations conditions in an hour without any kind of help * especially in the prose passages since these are out of context and students are unsure about background and things like that * we could have a situation here where for example they would answer three questions at length * or maybe we could give some kind of paraphrase of the situation and eliminate some of the unnecessary fear and actually test their ability to write literary crit * okay/ * or possibly we need to ensure that for example the passages or the poetry that is given is not so difficult that it never reaches a point where students are actually tested on their ability to write * obviously when it comes to a component like linguistics even there we can have a series of questions * I mean I believe that for example in linguistics we should have something like for example a unit like morphology and we could easily have an exercise of breaking down words into morphemes * that could be part of the exam * it does not necessarily have to be an essay * does the language essay have to be an essay/ * yes it has * do I feel that the literature books should be tested through an essay/ * I believe they should

INTERVIEWER: should oracy and listening skills be tested/

LECTURER G: yes! * and I don't know whether you are aware of it but currently discussions are taking place and the * great possibility is * even because of the Common European Language Framework * that there will be the introduction of oral in the A-level examination * so the understanding between the people in the committee that is discussing it is that it should be there and I believe it should be there

INTERVIEWER: what about listening skills/

LECTURER G: possibly we can have that as well * one needs to see I think * also * probably the difference between what one believes in and the logistics of all this * currently even in the discussion concerning the introduction of an oral component we are understanding that this will be a problem * as you are aware we just struggle to give our Intermediate groups just one experience of an oral one-to-one experience * I don't believe that if we introduce oral at A-level it should be done in this amateurish way * I believe that at least a student who is really being prepared for an oral examination should have three four five instances of a situation that is similar to that he will be finding or she will be finding in the exam and therefore this will be a logistics problem * the idea in this committee is that at this point we put the logistics aside and proceed with the philosophy and the belief that it should be there * I agree with that but I also agree that we should give students a fair deal * in other words if there is going to be an oral component then it should be catered for in their study programme

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the syllabus' set texts/

LECTURER G: ** the set texts need to be gauged properly * if I can pick on two texts just to show what I mean * last year we had *Of Mice and Men* and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* * there's a big difference in these texts and and I believe that whenever texts are chosen they need to consider the age of the students that are reading these texts * the level and degree of ideology they can understand and eventually be able to write about * some years back we used to do psycholinguistics and while students enjoyed hearing about Chomsky's idea of how children acquire language and they actually enjoyed it in class * whenever we expected them to write about it they found it very very difficult because ultimately these students are going to write about these ideologies so obviously there have been instances of wrong texts * wrong texts and this should be avoided * this should be avoided

INTERVIEWER: so in your experience does the choice of set texts have a bearing on students' success rate in the exam/

LECTURER G: I think it does * I believe it does * if a student is finding it difficult to go home read a book on his own and understand it then you're going to have part of the work that we need * that is the students reading the novel at home not done * if we're going to find a situation where lecturers are constantly struggling with ideology and having to make a class of forty students understand this ideology with all the losses of understanding in a context like that it's obviously going to have its impact on the students' performance

INTERVIEWER: do you agree that in the exam students are assessed mainly by means of the essay type question/

LECTURER G: we touched on this already * I mean there are parts of the syllabus * first of all they are not assessed * I mean the comprehension is not an exercise where they are assessed through the essay but we have touched on this already in the sense that something like linguistics or literary crit may be assessed not through the essay in the way we are doing it today

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the examiners' interpretation of the syllabus' aims and objectives/ do their expectations match your own/

LECTURER G: this is a terrible headache * first of all * I don't really know how or in what way the examiners are interpreting the syllabus * the examiners' reports are not enough to indicate how the examiners are interpreting the syllabus * in fact * in fact * we had a problem with the reports * the problem was that as people who are depending on these reports to understand what is being expected and what might be improved in the teaching learning context we found that these reports were not providing the kind of information that we needed * and we had a problem with this and wrote to MATSEC about this and this was signed by a number of lecturers involved in the teaching of the subject * so if my only path to understanding the interpretation of the syllabus is the examiners report then at this point in time I cannot say that this is enough * also * also * again within the current discussions going on in the A-level there is an agreement that as the aims and objectives of the examination stand today they are too vague for everyone * for the examiners * for the students * for the * people involved in the teaching * and the agreement is that besides that syllabus there should be a more detailed * addition that would break down more specifically what is expected in each component of the exam * a manual * it has to be a manual * it has to be a more detailed * for example we need to know exactly what they syllabus means or expects in the literary crit * it needs to be specified * there needs to be a beginning and an end

INTERVIEWER: what changes can be made at Junior College so that the students' performance in their exam is improved/

LECTURER G: if I had a very clear answer to that and I'm not doing it that would be criminal * I think there is a lot of information missing at this point to actually decide what is * wrong and therefore determine what needs to be done * we are trying to do a few things * for example on a personal note I believe that there have been practices at the Junior College where there hasn't been a clear agreement as to what needs to be done again in literary crit or we've been using different language books each time feeling that each book does not really give us what we want * so I think one of the first things that we need to do is * first of all I believe that if there is something wrong with the system there are three points that need to be checked * we need to look at the O-level * we need to look at the A-level course and we need to look at the A-level assessment procedures * and I believe that today these three components are not working together * okay/ * so at best what one can do is that within one's own capacity one tries to see what may be done * in that sense I believe that for example that there should be a clear writing programme * we need to know exactly in the first year what students are doing in their writing programme and what will be done in first year and in second year * we need to know exactly for example what kind of comprehension questions we are targeting and we need to know exactly whether these are in line with what they will eventually be asked in the exam * this kind of agreement does not exist and therefore it's a case of sometimes playing a bit by ear which shouldn't be * the size of the classes is a political decision and I believe that one of the reasons why the Junior College was founded at the very beginning was to bypass an expectation that in government schools beyond form three classes should be no bigger than twenty five and therefore because the Junior College belongs to the university they can go up to forty and even though it does not have to do directly with the A-level currently we're doing language with Intermediate classes of thirty eight forty which simply doesn't work or it might work in one session but fail in three sessions * so there is no doubt * there is a provision for this in the sense that we have seminars where the lecture groups are divided into smaller groups for the A-level but most probably this is not enough * we don't really have a system where we monitor the students with the kind of attention that they need to make the leap from O-level to A-level

INTERVIEWER: what changes would you like to see taking place in the examination/

LECTURER G: ** I think there should be a clear indication in the exam that the exam tests or assesses what can be realistically be done within two years at College given the situation * given the amount of work that students can do * my feeling is that today the two are separate * there's an examination * these are levels of the examination * try and catch me if you can * I don't believe that any assessment process in education should be of that type

INTERVIEWER: let's move on to a number of questions related to literature teaching methodology * which approach do you use when teaching set literary texts/

LECTURER G: ** I don't use one singular approach * I think first of all it depends on the text per se * for example there's a difference in the way one teaches a novel * even because it's something that is going to be spread over a number of months * and one teaches literature in the sense of a poem for literary crit purposes * I think that or rather my approach to the text is one that uses a number of approaches * there are situations where I lecture in the sense that I explain to them the cultural context that the novel is set in and there are instances where we go into the text and elicit from the text information and build around it * basically in a rough sense we're speaking about a top down or bottom up approach

INTERVIEWER: which other approach would you use if you could/

LECTURER G: *** definitely! * I would use any approach that would give as broad an experience to students studying literature as possible * in other words I am * I am definitely open to anything that has to do with media * with actually acting things out * if somehow the syllabus and the time and the space provide this then I'm in favour that it should be done in the sense that I'm not simply in favour of simply lecturing to the students

INTERVIEWER: which approach do you use when teaching practical criticism/

LECTURER G: ** again we're going back to the idea of a top down or bottom up approach here * sometimes I give them the opportunity to work in groups * to see how much they can understand from it * at times I get involved as little as possible * at other times I feel that a particular text needs or requests that I am involved to a greater degree but I have also found that practical criticism provides * because of the group size and because very often you're doing self-contained bits * that you can alter your techniques much more than you can change your techniques when you're teaching a novel over five six months * so sometimes a poem itself invites you to use a certain technique or a certain approach * while very often the style of a text and the spread over the months seem to bog you down into a particular style or a limited number of styles * but when you're doing self-contained one or two hours on a piece or work then they can permit you a range of activities that you can do

INTERVIEWER: which other approach would you use if you could/

LECTURER G: no other approach * no * not really * for example in my practical crit I use photographs * I use posters * I use songs * you know this is an exercise where they need to make the change in my opinion from the O-level mentality of simply understanding what the author or poet is saying to a critical mind of why the author is using devices * so I would say that anything outside poetry or prose per se that can somehow shape their understanding of this specific focus * well it's a gain for me if it works

INTERVIEWER: when teaching literature what do you focus on mostly/ * the language/ the content/ or personal enrichment/

LECTURER G: * my answer to that would be that I find it next to impossible to separate those items or separate those aspects * probably if I was forced to into distinguishing between one and the other I might group language and content together and maybe make a comment on personal enrichment separately but then again personal enrichment is a very strange thing in literature * for example does personal enrichment mean their exposure to another text/ * if we're doing the text that is happening * does personal enrichment mean maybe showing them a sense of universality from a text that was written three hundred years ago/ * maybe it happens * it could also be a situation where somebody does not understand part of a text due to his lack of proficiency in the language but maybe you know even without my knowing or whatever he might start reading * that is also

personal enrichment * so for me it's very very difficult to contain * I cannot know what kind of personal enrichment is actually happening in class through doing a text * separating language and content is very difficult for me

INTERVIEWER: which of these three approaches do you consider to be the most important for sixth form students/

LECTURER G: as I've said I don't think I can separate content and language and we do try to * definitely * to * give a broader meaning and a broader implication to the texts that we are doing * but again if that is the meaning of personal enrichment in a narrow academic sense that's not what I understand by personal enrichment but I believe that every time we're doing literature there might be personal enrichment happening

INTERVIEWER: now let's move on to a set of questions concerning language-teaching methodology * which approach do you use when teaching language/

LECTURER G: okay * definitely not the grammar translation method * definitely not Lazanov's Suggestopedia * I tend to come from a functional approach * and that seems to be what colours my approach to language * probably in a broader sense it would fall under the Communicative Language Teaching approach * so I would say that my tendency is towards that kind of approach

INTERVIEWER: why do you use this method/

LECTURER G: I'm sure I have been influenced by my own training but I think it also makes sense to me to not teach language in a vacuum * and I try to draw as much as possible examples from authentic language to exemplify what I'm doing in language * so that I think that is where my roots in language teaching lie

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of Communicative Language Teaching/

LECTURER G: I believe it should be * it should be the way we teach language * I think there should be an understanding towards presentation practise and product * I think we shouldn't teach language for the sake of teaching language * in fact I'm also in favour that any component in linguistics that we are doing should be a component that somehow links to this * and therefore I would re-evaluate the linguistics syllabus precisely because it doesn't fit within this idea

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the students' writing skills when they start their MC course/

LECTURER G: * most of them would come here with a Grade 1 2 or 3 in English so very often they they give us an indication that they write well * I think that they do not come with enough training for the kind of writing that will dominate their writing here which is basically argumentative writing * and the example is a very simple one * it's like having a garage full of tools but not having the tool for the job * and I think that most essays here do not fail * okay some students have very poor expression * we might have also a number who are very poor in spelling but I think most of the essays fail because they are not coherent * because students are wading through the material * and I have also noticed a difference in their writing skills depending on the book * for example strangely enough I tend to find essays on *Lear* less coherent for example than essays on Owen * so one might also need to see why that happens * it's not just a case of saying a difference between narrative and argumentative because even when they are writing argumentative essays there seems to be a difference between when they are producing some kind of argumentative essay and some kind of other argumentative essay * for example in spite of the difficulty of *The Handmaid's Tale* I tend to find that the essays on this book are even more coherent than an essay on a book that should be easier * *Of Mice and Men* * and I cannot explain that

INTERVIEWER: how can students improve their writing skills/

LECTURER G: by having a good writing programme * which we don't * a writing programme that is agreed upon * that examines the kind of writing skills that students have before they start the course * in other words you have students who can actually go through secondary and through an O-level and get a good mark always answering in the exam a narrative essay title * we need to see what kind of volume of argumentative essays these students are writing * we need to understand that unless we change things most of the writing here * the product has to be an argumentative essay * and we need to see whether we are giving the students the space to change from the kind of

writing skills that are enough for an O-level to the kind of writing skills that are requested at this level * I believe that some of the students are failing along the way and not managing to in some way go beyond that hurdle * now maybe some of these students will never go over the hurdle but maybe the system is not easing that hurdle for these students * I don't know * this study has never been done

INTERVIEWER: how do you approach the teaching of writing skills/

LECTURER G: ** I tend to be a believer in the product approach and my * particularly in the argumentative essay and the literature essay * I think I make a distinction between argumentative essay writing and narrative and descriptive writing * my tendency in narrative and descriptive * I think I would be more open to a process approach there * I think given the time and the few essays that students have to produce on a particular book * we need to remember that students are doing for example four essays on Owen here * so in four essays they need to be able to write the kind of essay that examiners expect * then in that kind of situation I tend to prefer a product approach * I don't think that process and product are necessarily contradictory so if a good writing programme had to be implemented I think it would merge the two approaches * but finally at the end there has to be a product * so if we had to create a writing programme and we have the time and the space and we can find if this will work * if you had to ask me I would be ready to suspend all kind of teaching and for the first two months students are given as broad and as rich an experience as possible in writing

INTERVIEWER: do you prefer a product or a process approach to the teaching of writing skills/

LECTURER G: as I've said I tend to prefer a product approach given the time constraints but by means of a good writing programme the two can be combined

INTERVIEWER: how can the teaching of writing at Junior College be improved/

LECTURER G: I think we need a good writing programme * currently what we've done is * we have brought the writing skills to a few definite tasks or text types and we are trying to make sure that the students would have done this text type this text type and this particular text type within that time because it was a bit of a laissez-faire thing earlier on * is it enough/ * definitely not! * because we're not really working on a writing programme that is based on learners' needs * we're assuming a level and we're building on that assumption when I think that any writing programme should start by analysing the learners' abilities and skills

INTERVIEWER: how do you approach the teaching of reading skills/

LECTURER G: ** okay the teaching of reading skills * I approach the teaching of reading skills by employing various skills * things like summarising skills * things like inference * exercises that have to do with key concept reading or tasks that have to do with identifying the rhetorical structure of a text * again again I believe that teaching should be eclectic and that different texts or well-chosen texts will lend themselves to different approaches * I try to mix these approaches both within a session and across sessions

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the linguistics component/

LECTURER G: I think that the linguistics component in the exam * number one the linguistics component has been in and out of the exam for a many times and so I don't think we are clear as to whether we believe that students should be doing linguistics or not at this level * let me say that I do not have a serious objection to some kind of linguistics at this level * I definitely do not believe that the current linguistics syllabus is what students should be doing * if anything I would rather touch on things like * or make them at least aware of things like dialects * register * formal informal * than percentages of the number of people speaking German in Malta

INTERVIEWER: how do you approach the teaching of linguistics/

LECTURER G: okay let me give you examples from the two units I have done so far with this group as regards Crystal * one of the chapters * chapter four * is in my opinion a very easy chapter loaded with millions of examples * and and I don't think that students had any problem with understanding that the media had an important role to play in the spread of English * so my role there was definitely not to explain these concepts but rather to give them a clear path through the hundreds of examples in the text * so I feel that that particular unit required a particular approach *

in contrast chapter one is concerned with things like linguistic death or linguistic complacency * these required an explanation because these are concepts that the students probably did not know or were not aware of all of them * and therefore in that case my role was different * one was basically a role where I sort out the information for them and I could have probably explained the basic concepts in one hour * the other * chapter one * that introduced concepts to them that were new required a much slower approach and a different kind of explanation through examples * but definitely the different chapters demanded a different approach

INTERVIEWER: what about *Living Languages in Malta*?

LECTURER G: I think that Sciriha's book first of all needs to be introduced to them as a study because these students do not have an idea of the different components of a study in the sense that you need to understand the context * you need to understand the methodology * you need to understand the findings and the results * so again that is a particular component that requires of anybody teaching this to make it clear to them * do I feel that students at this level should be bothered with so many tables/ * no * no * do I feel that I have a problem teaching the book/ * yes

INTERVIEWER: why/

LECTURER G: because if there is anything that is probably not helping me to make them like linguistics * it's a book full of tables

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the following in terms of their effectiveness and feasibility as teaching techniques or resources at sixth form level/ * and I'm going to present you with a list

LECTURER G: alright again * I think it has come out clear in this interview that I do not believe that there is one method that is better than the other methods so I cannot choose group work over lectures or pair work over students' presentations * I believe that a good teaching stroke learning situation is or requires an assessment of what needs to be taught * the psychology of the students and the possibility of finding the best way of getting that across * so in some situations it might be group work and it would be wrong to maybe approach that through a lecture * in other situations a lecture would probably keep them focused * or let's say ten minutes of lecturing * would keep them more focused and that group work would for a particular thing not be the right thing to do * so I cannot * I cannot really choose one technique over the other * I think the worst thing that any teacher can do is to believe that one method or one technique has the answer over another technique or method * that's my opinion of the list

Appendix 13 – Interview 8: Lecturer H

INTERVIEWER: let us start by means of a number of questions related to the MC English examination * are you satisfied with your students' performance in their Matriculation English examination/

LECTURER H: well overall I must say that no I'm not satisfied with the students' performance * in the sense that I expect much more from them * some of them I feel choose English because they believe it's an easy option that is a soft option and they think that just because they can speak you know * English they feel that they are able to write * which is completely different * the other factor is the fact that they don't apply themselves so much in the sense that even in tutorials and in corrections you point out certain mistakes then u still find that these mistakes are still repeated * the first thing that they look at when you give them something corrected is the mark and ultimately if that mark is not satisfactory then they kind of come up and tell you you know why did I get that mark/ * if they come up and tell you that * so overall I expect more from them

INTERVIEWER: so * in your opinion which are those factors responsible for your students' poor performance/

LECTURER H: okay I think that * to answer that question we have to go back * no/ * there are certain basics like at this stage I would feel that you know verb complement * certain basic * petty spelling mistakes which they should have learnt even at primary level * I feel they have not consolidated and I feel they have not their own * and you still find basic mistakes that you wouldn't expect at this level * and I find sometimes that the * fault does not necessarily lie with the students themselves * it is also probably the fault of the education system as it is * it is so exam oriented that I feel teachers are under pressure to perform within a short space of time * so many times teachers find themselves in difficulty to give individual attention and so ultimately you find that these students slip between the cracks and ultimately they end up here and in two years' time it's impossible to fix what has been going on for such a number of years

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of those students who choose to study English at MC level/

LECTURER H: alright there's a handful of them who really are in love with the subject * so if you give them a piece of work they're going to go beyond what's done over here * you realise you know from their writing * from their expression * from the material that they bring to their essays that they've worked above what we've done in class * so they apply themselves and they do it because they love the subject and ultimately they go on to study English at university some of them * some of them don't but they still at the end of the year they come up to you and they tell you thank you for what you've done because we now appreciate English Language * because we now appreciate English literature * the majority however do not realise what they come in for when they choose English * I think that they find that the syllabus is vast * right/ * they have a lot of work to do * I'm talking about the Advanced level * there's something else I haven't mentioned * the leap between secondary school and * what is expected of them at secondary and what is expected of them in an A-level exam is so different that some of them are not prepared * some of them choose English when they haven't even sat for their English Literature exam * and I find that unacceptable * how can you follow an A-level course of study when you haven't even sat for your O-level exam in English Literature/ * right/ * and obviously then you know they start foundering * what I find is that there is a mixture * the majority of them they would not have researched the choice of subject you know * sometimes it's peer pressure I think and sometimes they think English is okay * we can pass easily

INTERVIEWER: students currently need a Grade 5 in SEC English Language in order to study English at MC level at Junior College * what's your opinion of this/

LECTURER H: it's unacceptable! * I mean in other schools at this level you would not be allowed to choose a subject at A-level unless you have a B in your O-level * and although it might be discriminatory I think that that should be the level * if we want students who are ready to apply themselves once they are studying over here I think we have to choose the ones who really want the subject * right/ * and students who really want the subject are those students who get the good grades in that subject * how can you have students studying English when they get a 5 in their O-level/ * some of them are allowed to come in here after having passed Paper B * I mean if we take for example the English Literature exam something what is happening at that level is for example that grammar mistakes * spelling mistakes are not taken into consideration * isn't it the same/ * aren't you expressing yourself in English/ * why should grammatical mistakes * spelling mistakes be left to go by kind of/ * no I think that the level should be * the standard should be raised

INTERVIEWER: would a Grade 5 in the SEC English Literature examination be sufficient to complete the MC English course successfully/

LECTURER H: as I said before if students in this exam answer the question directly without bothering about spelling and grammar that is enough for them to get a good grade * alright/ * the way it is it doesn't matter how you answer * what is important is that you keep the focus of the essay in mind * give good examples but obviously if then you have other pitfalls then those are kind of negligible * so I find that a 5 in English Literature doesn't really say very much * what it says is that yes you've read the book * you've memorised the book kind of * but there isn't the expectancy of analysis for example you know * what is expected of you is memory work not that you reason things out * not that you have an opinion about something * so the leap * the gap is huge * so once again more than a 5 is necessary

INTERVIEWER: are you happy with the way the different components are tested in the MC English examination/ * what changes can you recommend/

LECTURER H: okay * I personally find the linguistics component is the weakest component of the paper as it is right now * how linguistics is being presented to the students is not as something exciting which makes them want to learn more * it's more memory work * I mean even the approach to the teaching of linguistics it cannot be otherwise you know * because the books that we have * one of them especially * it relies so heavily on statistics that students founder in trying to grasp how they should approach that book in itself

INTERVIEWER: should oracy and listening skills be tested/

LECTURER H: definitely! * definitely! * what is ironic is that at Intermediate level there is the oral component but at A-level there isn't * which is which is ridiculous * I mean the Advanced level is expected to be of a higher standard * even your approach when teaching the subject * but when ultimately you have skills like listening and speaking missing from such an exam but present at a lower level it is ridiculous * I think that for someone to be competent they shouldn't be judged merely on their writing skills * that is a very important component * but if you want to be sort of * I hate to use the word but labelled as being competent I believe that you should be even examined on your fluency * on your capability of comprehension * I mean sometimes you find students who leave Junior College and you meet them in restaurants for example and the way that they deal with tourists * they're not even able to understand or even to hold a conversation * so I believe that yes it should be a very important component of the exam * I think that it should be given more importance than it is right now

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the syllabus' set texts/

LECTURER H: okay * the ones that we have this year I believe that there is * a good enough choice I would say * there were times for example last year we were teaching Fowles which is in itself a very good book * okay/ * but I believe it was too difficult for the students at this level so the choice * I don't know how the choice was made * I think it was the lesser of two evils because the other textbook which was available was Trollope and that is quite hard to plough through * this year we have quite a good combination although I must say that certain textbooks now the time has

come for them to be changed because they've been quite a long time on the syllabus and I think you know a change is always good even for us as lecturers * as teachers * as educators * the fact that we have a fresh textbook it gives us a fresh perspective in the way that you approach the textbook because each textbook lends itself to a different approach * when it comes to non-literary textbooks we've always felt the need to try to put together certain manuals I might call them for students * like for example comprehension texts * like for example exercises * but you know there was always this need because the books that are available are aimed at English as a foreign language which is okay because I do believe that for us English is still a foreign language * alright/ * but the kind of exercises that are available I think that the students find a bit too easy and sometimes they are a bit too culture bound so students don't identify with certain comprehension passages you know * so there has always been a need but somehow we have never managed to get together and do something * although this year I must admit that there was a good attempt at trying to create such a manual

INTERVIEWER: in your experience does the choice of set texts have a bearing on students' success rate in the exam/

LECTURER H: now that is an interesting question because I personally do believe a lot that if the students don't find the textbook interesting then they are not going to have the incentive of trying to know more * the moment you make a text relevant to their experience students will get interested and will apply themselves more * yes definitely it helps students

INTERVIEWER: do you agree that in the exam students are assessed mainly by means of the essay type question/

LECTURER H: I'm trying to think of alternatives to the essay * in the past we used to have grammar exercises as part of the exam but I find that they are specifically too focused and like essays give the chance for more creative writing * alright/ * especially English being a language * and I think that it's very hard to come by an alternative to essay writing * somehow I find that essays allow the freedom for students and that is where the true test lies * it's when there is the freedom * especially in language essays because sometimes literature essays when students come to answer that sometimes they base a lot on memory * I'm also thinking of continuous assessment but the question is specifically in the exam * because a complement to the exam could be in the form of continuous assessment * it gives students the chance that if on the day of the exam they don't fare well because a million things can happen * this assessment could help in the long run

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the examiners' interpretation of the syllabus' aims and objectives/ do their expectations match your own/

LECTURER H: ** are there objectives/ * are there expectations/ * because in the last five years I feel that whatever I have personally been doing in class doesn't seem to comply with examiners' expectations * sometimes I question whether they do have an aim * whether they really have an objective * what are they looking for/ * because all of a sudden after a number of years in which students were doing fairly well and there was a number of them who were doing very well * then all of a sudden everything changed * and you do try different approaches because you say alright what I've been doing up to now wasn't what was expected of me but each time as lecturers we tried to pinpoint and even approach people to hold discussions * but either there was an absence of people during the meetings or else we were given evasive answers * even if you take a look at the reports you see the same things over and over again * and it's like okay I've addressed this issue * so why is it cropping up again you know * I don't know * sometimes I feel that there are no clear objectives * I feel something is being lost in communication somewhere

INTERVIEWER: what changes can be made at Junior College so that the students' performance in their exam is improved/

LECTURER H: I think for example the number of students in class * it should be reduced especially for language classes * we used to have a system where we used to minimise the group * part of the group used to come one week and the other part the following week * but apparently there was one complaint about this system from outside and I think in a panic the system was kind of put aside * ultimately there was a misunderstanding * I think that the person thought that the

lecturers were following this pattern in order to avoid having so many students in class so therefore do less work but the aim was to obviously have more individual attention * can you imagine having individual attention with a class of twenty/ * so less students in class would help a lot * I think also * it's not at Junior College only but at the level of the education system it's kind of the approach * it has to be different * I mean do we need to drown the students in so much work in order to be able to examine whether the students are competent or not * right/ * also at this moment in time how the syllabus is being divided * for example we start a novel this year and then we continue it the next year * I find that that is to the detriment of the students because in the beginning of the year you have to go back to what you have been doing in the last year because students over the summer months they kind of forget about everything * like even *Lear* is being split over two years * I used to teach *Lear* when we used to do it in one year * I used to manage and I used to have time for revision and a test at the end * now we are giving them a very fragmented kind of picture * so syllabus wise * group wise there might be some changes which could help us in the long run

INTERVIEWER: what changes would you like to see taking place in the examination/

LECTURER H: alright * once again I'm going to point out the linguistics * as it is either do away completely with the linguistics which I don't agree with because at university we've studied linguistics and we know that there are components which are very interesting * which could be introduced at this level * one of the current textbooks allows you to work better with the students because you can extrapolate information from the book but then apply it to the outside world and mention examples of things happening around them and concrete examples but the other book all the students have to do is study statistics which they find dry and boring * some students came up to me and told me sir could we do away with that book/ * could we not study it/ * I said in all fairness I can't tell you not to study that book because it is part of the syllabus and it will be unfair on you if I told you not to do it because you will be limiting yourself during the exam in your answer * but no I think there should be a rethink with regards the linguistics component * and I would introduce the oral and the listening component in the A-level

INTERVIEWER: let's move on to a number of questions in relation to literature teaching methodology * which approach do you use when teaching set literary texts/

LECTURER H: it depends * it depends on the text itself * for example one of the textbooks this year is relatively very short you know * so with that regards I can afford to even read passages from the book and discuss them with students in class * ask questions and for their opinion about it * about characters * about the plot * so sometimes I use the textbook to illustrate kind of where I'm going with the analysis * alright/ * sometimes I find when the textbook is voluminous I pick on certain shorter parts and then I go by themes and by characters * the thing that I expect of course is that the students would have come prepared with having read the book beforehand * something which they don't do * many of them don't * unfortunately they leave it till the very end * two weeks or three weeks before the exam * they will not have read the book and they are relying on the fact that you would have either read with them in class or you would have given them enough notes that they would not need to read the book

INTERVIEWER: which other approach would you use if you could/

LECTURER H: I am very much for the practical approach * for example when I used to teach in secondary school and therefore at a certain level I had much more freedom with regards the time frame I used to * let's take Shakespeare * I used to take scenes and I used to dramatise them * I used to pick some students and they would dramatise them in class * I used to ask a student to be one of the characters from the play while another student voices the thoughts of the character and the students would comment on the subtext * so I am very much in favour of the practical * these dramatised things maybe because I am a theatre person and therefore I am very much in favour of these practical approaches * even for example presentations * when I used to have the time over here like when we had Steinbeck only as a novel for one year * I used to have time for presentations * alright/ * in that way the students got to practise the way how to speak in class * how to speak to a group * practise speaking in English in that way * I am very much in favour of hands-on activities rather than just sitting there listening to a lecture and then just simply absorbing what I am saying *

and holding discussions * something that within the limited time frame available to us I find that it is very constricting

INTERVIEWER: which approach do you use when teaching practical criticism/

LECTURER H: alright * it depends on whether I am teaching first years or second years * if I am teaching first years first I go like into poetry and I look for literary terms first and that is the first thing that I do * we start with imagery then go on to other literary terms and figures of speech and then go slowly on to more technical details like metre * rhythm and things like that * ultimately sometimes what I also do when I have the time is use songs * alright/ * allow them to bring songs into class and we analyse the lyrics of the songs and we find figures of speech and we find other technical details * so something which is more down to their level * in the second year what I usually do is I kind of revise what I've done in the first year and then I give them a poem * allow them some minutes to look at the work and then we discuss it together * alright/ * sometimes I go in and I give them a poem and they have to write an essay there and then about it because that is what is expected of them in the exam * in the second year you have to be more exam oriented * so that's what I find myself doing a lot

INTERVIEWER: which other approach would you use if you could/

LECTURER H: alright * another approach is allowing them to write their own work for example you know * play around with words * play around with the sounds of words * play around with images * take them out for example and observe around them and come back and try to write something from that * try to allow them to realise that poets are not you know people who are hidden in an attic writing their work and they are distant from reality * poets are people like you and me who feel the urge to write * so it is good that the students get this idea of the process of writing poems * sometimes when I have the time I like giving them a word and tell alright what images can you bring to mind with this word/ * write them down and then get them to work in group work * alright/ * discuss * and that is something else * group work * I am very much for group work * monitored group work because if you allow the students to just work in groups they go off at a tangent * that's why we need smaller groups * so that we could give the students the opportunity to work in pairs and groups

INTERVIEWER: when teaching literature what do you focus on mostly/ * the language/ the content/ or personal enrichment/

LECTURER H: ** I personally end up focusing a lot because of the exam on the content and obviously on the techniques being used * on the plot * on themes * obviously certain texts allow you to go beyond * so when teaching Atwood I connect with experiences that happened to real people around the world * so in terms of personal enrichment what I try to look for is to try and further their enjoyment of literary texts * they enjoy literature and they kind of feel inclined to look either for more works by that author or to look at literature with a sense of enjoyment * but as I said the exam limits you * you have two years and so you are focused on the content * the techniques and so on

INTERVIEWER: which of these three approaches do you consider to be the most important for sixth form students/

LECTURER H: for sixth form students unfortunately it is content and language * a combination of both * because ultimately you are geared towards the exam * when push comes to shove that is what they have to do at the end of it * but hopefully through that I am also instilling in them a love for literature * a love for the text

INTERVIEWER: now we have a number of questions concerning language-teaching methodology * which approach do you use when teaching language/

LECTURER H: a combination of * discussions * alright/ * group work * exercises * even individual exercises * I do give them a lot of practical work * you know writing * sometimes writing and discussing what they've written with each other * sometimes discussing it with the rest of the class * working a lot on comprehension passages * summary writing * obviously even giving them the basic techniques of essay writing * the different types of essays that they have to write for the exam * summary techniques * a combination of all these

INTERVIEWER: why do you use this method/

LECTURER H: right * basically because ultimately at the end of the course there is the exam but also because I feel that a combination of different approaches is of benefit to the students because if I had to choose just one approach after a time it would become tedious * language in itself many students find tedious * alright/ * so I try to make language teaching as varied as possible

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of Communicative Language Teaching/ * do you practise it in the classroom/

LECTURER H: yes I do * I do * but I find a lot of difficulty because first of all the students are mixed in their ability of expressing themselves * some of them feel uncomfortable so they don't participate and you have to really really force them to participate * the classes are too big and you can't really focus on individual students and their participation * and so you end up with the same students being the ones who participate while the others pleasantly sit by * they enjoy the activities and discussion but they feel too uncomfortable to participate * I am all for it but I believe that we should have smaller numbers of students for it to be truly effective

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the students' writing skills when they start their MC course/

LECTURER H: it brings us back to the original questions like the questions in the beginning * at A-level there's a mixture * a small handful would really have a good grasp of writing styles and writing techniques * some of them have an innate ability for a narrative but overall at A-level they are still weak * they are weak

INTERVIEWER: how can students improve their writing skills/

LECTURER H: practice practice practice * and feedback * the more they apply themselves * the more work that they do * that they write and the more feedback that they get about that work * and then obviously choosing the common mistakes * alright/ * and using them in class to illustrate how they can correct those pitfalls is I believe the way that students can improve their writing skills and their writing techniques * and the more they expose themselves to different styles of writing * so reading * practice and feedback

INTERVIEWER: how do you approach the teaching of writing skills/

LECTURER H: alright * first of all I distinguish between the different styles of essay writing * the demands of the different essay style * I discuss it with the students * I tell them what a descriptive essay needs * what a narrative needs * what they should do * what they shouldn't do * and then what we do is we practise writing short paragraphs * alright/ * and I correct and I give them feedback about that * many times in the beginning I demand plans of essays in order for me to see how they are planning their work before they actually attempt to write their essay * sometimes for example I give them illustrations on the board of examples * there are different ways that I use to teach writing

INTERVIEWER: do you prefer a product or a process approach to the teaching of writing skills/

LECTURER H: I definitely * if we had more time more process * the process rather than the product * because yes the product is good because you can gauge where the student is at but then the process is necessary for you to improve on that product * because if you only use a product approach and you give them the feedback and they ignore it doesn't work * while on the other hand if while working in class you make them focus on certain pitfalls or certain things and how to follow certain stages then that's better * if we had more time more process

INTERVIEWER: how can the teaching of writing at Junior College be improved/

LECTURER H: alright * personally I find now that we're doing tutorial every week that is a benefit to the students * before we didn't use to have that * alright/ * it used to be either monthly or something like that * I don't remember the interval * but now that they're writing every week it's beneficial * but also having more chance of more tutorial like kind of work in class which brings us back to the number of students in class * which brings us back to the time component * to the syllabus and everything * because if I had to change something it would be more focus on individual work

INTERVIEWER: how do you approach the teaching of reading skills/

LECTURER H: at A-level really and truly what I do is I use the language lessons because a comprehension passage because of its brevity it is not so daunting for the students I find * while if they are reading a passage from literature I find that sometimes I don't have the time if I'm lecturing for them to read and for me to lecture so what I do is I usually do the reading * but in language I do it * I make them read * I make them read the comprehension passages and I ask different students to read and kind of * I give them feedback in relation to the vocabulary and the answers to the questions * we don't have much time for else * and then obviously I try to give them titles which they might find interesting you know of books which they could read but mainly that's basically what I do

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the linguistics component/

LECTURER H: I think I've already addressed this issue * I think it needs a rethink * we need to see kind of what is relevant to the students * alright/ * something which is interesting * something which will make them want to study the subject rather than focusing on the idea that this is merely a dry scientific component * but I still believe that linguistics is a very important component of language teaching especially * okay/ * but it needs a change

INTERVIEWER: how do you approach the teaching of linguistics/

LECTURER H: as I said before most of the time it is summarising the chapters that we have because basically that is what is expected of them * summarising the chapters that they have * giving them the information * making it relevant by giving them examples and trying to make them find examples from the outside world of the things that are relevant to the chapters * basically that's what I'm doing at this moment in time

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the following in terms of their effectiveness and feasibility as teaching techniques or resources at sixth form level/ * and I'm going to present you with a list

LECTURER H: group work * I find group work as being extremely beneficial * it is the time when students feel comfortable and safe to participate because I find that when they try to participate in a larger class they find it daunting so in a smaller group * when it is monitored * I find it is beneficial * group work * I am all for it * I use it * I use it in class

INTERVIEWER: pair work/

LECTURER H: ** pair work I find also very good but it is more difficult to monitor with such large groups that we have * but just like group work I find it beneficial * it is safer than group work for the students and therefore you do get a bit more participation * but I always urge for monitoring these kind of activities

INTERVIEWER: students' presentations/

LECTURER H: yes I used to do presentations when I had the time * what I find is you need to coach them into how to present because many times what I used to have is students reading from a piece of paper to the class which the class used to find boring and they used to switch off * so we need to have time to coach students how to present * that they don't need to read but to present * but yes definitely research * presentations * it's it's beneficial

INTERVIEWER: lectures via PowerPoint presentation/

LECTURER H: ** alright for those who are visually stimulated you know I think it helps * I've never used them to be honest but people who have used these kind of presentations they say that they work but at times I find that when you give students something from beforehand * they are less interested * alright/ * so if they think that they are going to get the notes from the PowerPoint then they are not going to participate as much as * or be attentive

INTERVIEWER: what about lectures/

LECTURER H: lectures the same thing * I always tell them what you're going to get from me is what you get from my lectures * I do prepare handouts but I don't usually tell them from beforehand about them * because I find that many times when you give them a resource pack from beforehand they come into class they have the resource pack in front of them and they switch off * so usually what I do I give it to them afterwards * I agree with handouts and resource packs but as a

supplement to what you do in the lecture but I don't find that they should be substitutes * alright/ *
they should complement what you're doing but not substitute what you're doing during the lecture

Appendix 14 – Interview 9: Lecturer I

INTERVIEWER: let us start by means of a number of questions related to the MC English examination * are you satisfied with your students' performance in their Matriculation English examination/

LECTURER I: well like everything else they could do better obviously * but considering that they're under examination conditions and * the actual structure of the course and the amount of work they have to cover I think I'm overall * I think they're doing the best they can really

INTERVIEWER: if you had to look at the grades students obtained over the past five years would you say you're satisfied with their performance/

LECTURER I: ** with some students yes with others no

INTERVIEWER: why/

LECTURER I: sometimes I have higher expectations of certain students and I meet them later and they tell me they've failed or just obtained a D and in that respect you know

INTERVIEWER: in your opinion which are those factors responsible for your students' poor performance/

LECTURER I: maybe * they're not doing so well * first of all I think it's stress of the examination * and the amount of work they have to cover * the three hours session * you know sometimes they have two three hour sessions in a day so I think that's very demanding on the students ** and having so much other work besides their A-level to be focused as much as they would like on their A-level

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of those students who choose to study English at MC level/

LECTURER I: ** I think they're quite able students

INTERVIEWER: students currently need a Grade 5 in SEC English Language in order to study English at MC level at Junior College * what's your opinion of this/

LECTURER I: ** I think there should be a grade sort of restriction * before opting for English A-level * and it could be a little bit higher than 5 yes * a 3

INTERVIEWER: would a Grade 5 in the SEC English Literature examination be sufficient to complete the MC English course successfully/

LECTURER I: no I think * again a higher grade would be better * for literature as well

INTERVIEWER: are you happy with the way the different components are tested in the MC English examination/ * what changes can you recommend/

LECTURER I: overall yes * perhaps the linguistics component might be assessed differently * tested differently * perhaps writing shorter paragraphs and having a graph or the table there present to help them * would be more helpful

INTERVIEWER: should oracy and listening skills be tested/

LECTURER I: yes! * because they are two other important components skills for you to be able to be proficient enough in a language * so yes

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the syllabus' set texts/

LECTURER I: ** on the whole * on the whole * literature-wise I'm quite happy with the selected texts * language we should work on choosing a better * language book

INTERVIEWER: in your experience does the choice of set texts have a bearing on students' success rate in the exam/

LECTURER I: no not really

INTERVIEWER: why not/

LECTURER I: if they are well prepared and they know the text well then I think it's fine * I think if the text is facilitated enough for the students * they should be able to cope with * you know with working on a question on the set text * I believe

INTERVIEWER: do you agree that in the exam students are assessed mainly by means of the essay type question/

LECTURER I: * as I said earlier the linguistics component could be assessed differently by perhaps having shorter paragraphs or requiring some sort of you know assessment but for the essay type of question * if you're after a critical analysis of or * a lengthier piece of writing then the essay will deliver what we're after

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the examiners' interpretation of the syllabus' aims and objectives/ do their expectations match your own/

LECTURER I: *** yes they match <<hand gesture asking for next question>>

INTERVIEWER: what changes can be made at Junior College so that the students' performance in their exam is improved/

LECTURER I: ** in the course structure I believe * having smaller classes so that they can get more attention and ideally having more lessons * and that's it

INTERVIEWER: what changes would you like to see taking place in the examination/

LECTURER I: ** perhaps having * perhaps not having two sessions in one day * I think six hours of continuous writing is a little bit too demanding on anyone really and * as I remarked earlier changes in the type of questions for linguistics perhaps * those could help * perhaps

INTERVIEWER: let's move on to a number of questions in relation to literature teaching methodology * which approach do you use when teaching set literary texts/

LECTURER I: I try to go for the thematic approach and * I try to approach the text by seeing it as a whole even though I might have to then focus on individual passages or * individual parts of the text so to speak

INTERVIEWER: which other approach would you use if you could/

LECTURER I: I'm happy with this

INTERVIEWER: which approach do you use when teaching practical criticism/

LECTURER I: at the moment * I don't teach crit and I haven't been teaching it for the past three years so * I mean I don't have anything to say

INTERVIEWER: when teaching literature what do you focus on mostly/ * the language/ the content/ or personal enrichment/

LECTURER I: in actual fact I focus on the three of them actually * I see what the students need most and I gear for their needs and sometimes it's more language sometimes it's content * but I do try to include you know * a personal sort of reaction to the text in that * I want them to enjoy and appreciate * that first and foremost

INTERVIEWER: which of these three approaches do you consider to be the most important for sixth form students/

LECTURER I: all three * all three * not necessarily in that order * but I mean all three are important

INTERVIEWER: In which order would you rank them?

LECTURER I: personal enrichment content language if we're talking about literature

INTERVIEWER: let's move on to a number of questions about language-teaching methodology * which approach do you use when teaching language/

LECTURER I: ** it's mostly process * I focus on the process of how to write better but I do keep in mind * that they have to come up with * you know a good sort of * a good product so * but mostly process

INTERVIEWER: why do you use this method/

LECTURER I: because like that I feel I'm giving them the tools to write better in other contexts

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of Communicative Language Teaching/ * do you practise it in the classroom/

LECTURER I: for the academic * for the A-level syllabus * for the A-level exam the Communicative Language Teaching ** might not * be quite adequate for our students * so I don't obviously practise it that much in the classroom

INTERVIEWER: Why don't you consider it to be so adequate/

LECTURER I: since obviously * speaking skills and listening skills are not targeted at all * so keeping the exam in mind obviously I focus more on writing and reading skills * seeing the type of questions they are asked obviously * I tend to bypass the Communicative Approach

INTERVIEWER: even when teaching reading and writing/

LECTURER I: yes yes * I would say

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the students' writing skills when they start their MC course/

LECTURER I: obviously not all students have * different * not all students write the same way * there would be room for improvement obviously * they can improve their writing skills

INTERVIEWER: how can students improve their writing skills/

LECTURER I: first of all by reading material that they should be * writing like you know * they should be * we should expose them * I expose them at least to the sort of reading that will influence their writing skills * so they can improve through reading skills * adequate material and practice

INTERVIEWER: how do you approach the teaching of writing skills/

LECTURER I: I start off with analysing what the students can write * and I work on improving that and I * target different writing skills * and we practise those

INTERVIEWER: do you prefer a product or a process approach to the teaching of writing skills/

LECTURER I: process * although I do keep the product in mind obviously * the product approach in mind * but if I had to choose between the two * process because I think I would be giving them the tools to write in other situations

INTERVIEWER: how can the teaching of writing at Junior College be improved/

LECTURER I: smaller classes * better textbooks ** and more hours on writing <<laughs>>

INTERVIEWER: how do you approach the teaching of reading skills/

LECTURER I: for language/

INTERVIEWER: for language at Advanced level

LECTURER I: for language not literature ** I try to help them get to the meaning of the text * by using * by employing * by tapping their knowledge of * structure of the text ** structure of the text mainly

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the linguistics component/

LECTURER I: *** valid ** it's valid

INTERVIEWER: and this applies to both set texts/

LECTURER I: ** yes * I quite enjoy having a picture of what is happening abroad on a global level and then hopefully I hope students get a better idea of what's happening locally in terms of * our language use

INTERVIEWER: which approach do you use when teaching linguistics/

LECTURER I: I don't teach linguistics

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the following in terms of their effectiveness and feasibility as teaching techniques or resources at sixth form level/ * and I'm going to present you with a list ** so group work

LECTURER I: yes useful * I mean students do learn from each other as well so ideally yes * we could use more group work

INTERVIEWER: what about students' presentations/

LECTURER I: useful yes because I mean * organisation skills and structuring skills for presentation can be transferred on to later writing or * yes useful

INTERVIEWER: pair work

LECTURER I: yes * as I've said students learn from each other and pair work you know you have a smaller number so I think that more give and take within a smaller group

INTERVIEWER: what about lectures/

LECTURER I: ** okay for literature not for the language seminars though

INTERVIEWER: lectures via PowerPoint presentation

LECTURER I: if possible better obviously

INTERVIEWER: do you use them/

LECTURER I: no

INTERVIEWER: why not/

LECTURER I: ** the difficulty of booking the room for the PowerPoint * technical problems shall we say/ <<laughs>> technical difficulties <<laughs>>

INTERVIEWER: handouts

LECTURER I: handouts of notes definitely not * but handouts as worksheets * or perhaps presenting them with a few guidelines then yes

INTERVIEWER: what about resource packs/

LECTURER I: useful * again * if compiled by the students themselves perhaps * but not given by the lecturer no

Appendix 15 – Interview 10: Lecturer J

INTERVIEWER: let us start by means of a number of questions related to the MC English examination * are you satisfied with your students' performance in their Matriculation English examination/

LECTURER J: well to be honest definitely not * but actually I don't even expect anything better * than what they're doing presently for the simple reason that * I think they're doing the best they can given the circumstances * it is not * they are not up to standard it's true but they are not up to standard basically not because they are not capable of not being up to standard but because the circumstances * the situation * the way they have been taught * the environment in which they are living not conducive to them being able to * achieve the standard we should be expecting of them at this level

INTERVIEWER: in your opinion which are those factors responsible for your students' poor performance/

LECTURER J: I think basically their background * their academic background * the way they have been taught not only in primary school but also * not just the school in the academic part but also as I said a few seconds ago the environment they're living in * their homes their exposure to the media which is * not contributing positively * in the sense they're exposed to a lot of ** how can I explain this * they're exposed to * the visual arts like TV programmes television video and they listen to music * they listen to English spoken English * but * they are not exposed so much * or as much as they should be * to the written aspect of the language * so I think this is having a negative effect on their written * on the written standard of English and that is what we're examining after all basically * not their spoken * not the speaking of the language which they don't know how to do well anyway

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of those students who choose to study English at MC level/

LECTURER J: the vast majority * do not have * the necessary qualifications to study English at this level * at least at the level we * the standard we require of them

INTERVIEWER: students currently need a Grade 5 in SEC English Language in order to study English at MC level at Junior College * what's your opinion of this/

LECTURER J: I feel that this is too low actually * I mean * I think that seeing from the standard of * of the students * the level that * their knowledge of the English language at this level I feel that 5 is extremely poor * I mean I don't think they should even be getting a 5 at this point * I think they shouldn't even have been given a pass mark

INTERVIEWER: would a Grade 5 in the SEC English Literature examination be sufficient to complete the MC English course successfully/

LECTURER J: definitely not! * definitely not! * for the same reasons I gave earlier

INTERVIEWER: are you happy with the way the different components are tested in the MC English examination/ * what changes can you recommend/

LECTURER J: well they seem to be * I think they're reasonable yes * I mean they * they are the right questions to ask and it is what we * during our lectures sort of * harp on * certain themes and ideas that come out in the text are dealt with in the questions asked

INTERVIEWER: should oracy and listening skills be tested/

LECTURER J: yes I think so * I think so for the simple reason that ** I don't think that writing English well is enough for students to * use their certificate later on when they need to use English because one can write well but not be articulate enough or not be able to * well they can be

articulate in the writing but what I'm trying to say is that * not being fluent enough when they speak * I think they're two different things

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the syllabus' set texts/

LECTURER J: well I haven't thought much about this * I'm told what I'm supposed to do and I just do it * however I do have my reservations about the linguistics text

INTERVIEWER: why/

LECTURER J: I don't think I have any problems with the literature texts however with linguistics yes * for the simple reason that one of the texts in particular * I find has too much * there are too many statistics * too many numbers which are quite daunting actually even to teach * let alone for those students who are expected to * you know digest * so many numbers * so many statistics you know in order to arrive at certain conclusions and they can't use them I think * you know they can't just say their opinion about or say what they think why is English now * sorry why Maltese now in present day Malta has a much higher standing than it had say in 1999 when the first survey was carried out * I mean they have to use figures not just you know * facts and words * and I think I don't know * I think it is a bit too too much for them to digest * I mean they could still learn about the situation of the Maltese and English languages in Malta without being exposed to so many numbers I think I don't know

INTERVIEWER: in your experience does the choice of set texts have a bearing on students' success rate in the exam/

LECTURER J: from my own personal experience * I'm doing Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* and Steinbeck * Steinbeck's text seems to be * more easy for the students to understand * whereas Bolt is a more complex and difficult text and in fact students * at Intermediate level not at Advanced level * who are normally maybe more * I don't know * I wouldn't say more academically prepared but they seem to be * there seems to be a great percentage in my Intermediate classes who are * better prepared academically than are A-level students * maybe it's because I don't know they are trained in the sciences and are more analytical and maybe more * focused on facts and what's important * you know they don't * they really concentrate on what it is that they have to pinpoint and analyse and * whereas my Advanced students I find * have more difficulty with more complex texts * I don't know

INTERVIEWER: why/

LECTURER J: because of this basic reason * I think that today students who do well at SEC especially those who do well in the sciences prefer to choose science subjects at A-level * at Advanced level rather than the Arts * maybe because of job prospects * job market * I don't know whatever * but I find that the dullest or less motivated students opt for what they believe to be the softer option

INTERVIEWER: do you agree that in the exam students are assessed mainly by means of the essay type question/

LECTURER J: if you're not including the comprehension bit and the summary or précis of whatever it is * then I think it should be a combination of both you know * I mean they should show their skills both in essay writing and in comprehension * if we take the crit essay for example * it is a different kind of essay to the Lear essay or the linguistics essay * for me the litmus test of a student's capabilities or competence is crit because there they are completely on their own you know * okay they have * we give them the tools * but if they are not able to use those tools * it is there where their insight their intelligence * basically their insight and intuition comes into help as well * they have to have that sort of acumen you know which which is necessary for for for crit * whereas in a Lear essay they have all the information * it's been fed to them * in fact they flounder most in crit * that's where they panic most

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the examiners' interpretation of the syllabus' aims and objectives/ do their expectations match your own/

LECTURER J: that I wouldn't know! * I mean I have no idea what * okay they write reports but sometimes they're so conflicting that you know you really understand what they're expecting

INTERVIEWER: what changes can be made at Junior College so that the students' performance in their exam is improved/

LECTURER J: I haven't thought about this actually * one the entrance requirements for people who want to choose English at A-level should be changed * I think as we said 5 is not really enough * it's too low a grade for them to qualify for English at A-level * that basically and considering the level of our students the situation in which the lecturer goes in and just delivers a lecture is not appropriate for the type of students we are getting * but I believe that at this level the classroom mentality should not exist * but obviously you have to adapt to your students but then if you're going to adapt * it means we are lowering our expectations and lowering our aims as well * you know and accepting the status quo * I don't know * but then if you don't what are you going to do/ * are you going to just let them fall by the wayside/ * you know * another change could be that of lecturers teaching the same students when it comes to the texts and tutorials so that there is continuity and there is more communication with the students * they feel more confident * they know me I know them * I get to know them better * and maybe that is one change that I would propose but you know as far as possible our contacts with our students during tutorials and seminars should be * we should be given those students we see for lectures * I mean you can't see all of them true * but at least if not in tutorials in seminar groups * because even the students themselves feel they can relate to me better when they see me regularly * they are more open to * they are more open with me * they come forward with suggestions and more questions * they establish a rapport * with the lecturer * and I think that would help

INTERVIEWER: what changes would you like to see taking place in the examination/

LECTURER J: I think it's * no I think it's fine

INTERVIEWER: let's move on to a number of questions in relation to literature teaching methodology * which approach do you use when teaching set literary texts/

LECTURER J: I probably use the wrong approach * I use the lecturing type of approach * I mean not a distant approach I don't just stand there and rattle off for one hour * I mean I have contact * eye contact * I stop and allow them to ask questions or to clarify certain points but I do believe yes that I am there to talk about what I have to talk about you know and then I believe the students * slowly slowly they catch up but if you spoon-feed or sort of dictate notes or give them notes or leave notes at the stationery or wherever for them * in fact the first thing they ask is are we going to have notes/ * are you going to give us notes for the lecture/ * and I really don't believe in that no * I believe that they have to be trained from now to be able to you know to sit and listen * and listen * and when I say listen I mean listen not just hear what I'm saying * and * trying to understand what it is that I'm trying to say and take down the points that I am making which they consider to be worth taking down * I don't believe in going there and they are sort of very distracted because I'm going to give them notes and then just copy them down for a tutorial essay

INTERVIEWER: which other approach would you use if you could/

LECTURER J: which other approach/ * no I think I * this is the way I've grown used to teaching and maybe I'm * to set in my ways I don't know * but I've been teaching for quite a number of years and * I feel that for me * that this is the way I get more at the end of it * maybe not at the beginning but eventually you know they get used to this method and I get a good response from the majority of students * I feel the feedback is good

INTERVIEWER: which approach do you use when teaching practical criticism/

LECTURER J: if it's a poem what I would normally do is I would read the poem out with them * I read it out loud and then I ask what they think that the poet is trying to say and after having discussed that we try to see how it fits into the poem by * normally what I do is a line by line analysis * you know we pick up imagery * we pick up the diction * and then after we do that we focus on the style and all the things that are * you know sort of the technical details that go into the making of the poem

INTERVIEWER: which other approach would you use if you could/

LECTURER J: it's the only approach I use and the only one I know * I feel confident in any way
<<laughs>>

INTERVIEWER: when teaching literature what do you focus on mostly/ * the language/ the content/ or personal enrichment/

LECTURER J: when teaching literature basically I think it's a bit of each * I would stress the content mainly and * the personal enrichment but in order to do this * the vehicle that is used in order to do this * you know to illustrate the theme or the content or the * it's the language * you cannot do it without the language * the use of words that are used in order to bring out the theme or main idea behind the text or the passage they are reading

INTERVIEWER: which of these three approaches do you consider to be the most important for sixth form students/

LECTURER J: I don't think I can separate * you know the three from one another * I don't think you can highlight one without * I don't know * emphasising the other two * you know/ * I mean no * I think it's a combination of all three * I can't exclude any of them * for example you have to create a bridge with the world outside which is personal enrichment so that when they are reading a text they can relate that text to everyday life * to the everyday life of the people around them * you know so that it's not sort of happening in a vacuum * and that is where the personal enrichment comes out I feel * you know/ * very very strongly

INTERVIEWER: let's move on to a number of questions about language-teaching methodology * which approach do you use when teaching language/

LECTURER J: I really enjoy * what I enjoy doing and I find very * rewarding is when I have a comprehension text * basically I like doing * I like exploring words * I like sort of insisting on the meaning of words and how a certain word can change * the nuances of a word rather than using another word can have an effect in a passage * I mean I really emphasise vocabulary you know words rather than the structure * and then I move on to the structure * you know how to construct a sentence in order * that it makes sense * that it can deliver the message that it is meant to deliver * but I emphasise vocabulary work

INTERVIEWER: why do you use this method/

LECTURER J: for the simple reason that I make them think about the words * about how important it is * in order to be able to know yourself to know others to understand people and yourself * how important it is to be able to express yourself well * if you have the words to express yourself well and to try to understand what is going on in your mind or in another person's mind * I think a word can make a difference to * you know the use of one word rather than another can make a great difference * the richer the vocabulary the better you are able to express yourself * the more articulate you become * I don't know * I really believe in that very very much

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of Communicative Language Teaching/ * do you practise it in the classroom/

LECTURER J: what we do is * say we have a comprehension or a passage or whatever and normally if we're using for example *Write to be Read* you know there are * passages which put forward certain ideas or which make the students think about certain topics * I give a lot of space to them voicing their opinion * we do a lot of verbal sort of communication in the sense of talking rather than writing in the lesson you know * there's a lot of interaction in the seminar groups which is possible because they are smaller groups you know * and it's more intimate * you know/ * it helps * same with tutorials where I find that's helpful as well * the smaller groups help in this case you know * that is why I like the system of a lecture on a text with a big group and then you get the feedback mainly when they're in smaller groups

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the students' writing skills when they start their MC course/

LECTURER J: ** it varies * but like in the majority of them * of the students I have I feel * I believe that their writing skills are rather poor * I mean they're not what one would expect from A-level students * you know the standard is definitely not * the one we expect from these students at this stage

INTERVIEWER: how can students improve their writing skills/

LECTURER J: ** at this stage/ * more exposure to reading * even listening * listening to English spoken well * it's already * I know I might sound rather pessimistic but I feel that at this stage it's already quite late * I mean if you don't acquire a language at a very young age * if you don't acquire the skills at a young age it's going to be very difficult later * I mean it's like learning a foreign language * you might study it well * you might know all the rules of grammar but you know that it doesn't sound well * you don't have that feel for it as you would a language that you've spoken from a very very early age * you know what I mean no/ *

INTERVIEWER: how do you approach the teaching of writing skills/

LECTURER J: how do I approach that/ * again I aim for as I said * I mean I'd ask them to write a passage and then I'd ask a few of them to read it aloud and then I explain how they could have expressed themselves better and we might discuss choice of words and syntax and so on * I mean a lot of the students even at A-level unfortunately think in Maltese before they think in English * they don't think in English so most of them are translating from Maltese into English so the structure of the sentences tends to be * not quite what it should be * I mean we get down to the basics * it's a hands on kind of thing * you know kind of approach * I don't know what it's called * you know they write and then I analyse what they've written * very practical I find * it's a more pragmatic approach not just theory

INTERVIEWER: do you prefer a product or a process approach to the teaching of writing skills/

LECTURER J: well initially on the process * basically I would * it's an argumentative essay or a discursive essay most of the time * that's what they're asked to write mostly * firstly I make it a point to tell them to think about what they are going to * what they think of the subject and sort of have it clear in their minds what it is that they want to say * then I would focus on how they would structure the essay you know * the usual thing * the introduction * what they would put in the introduction and then in the body of the essay * you know the certain points * you know the pros and the cons or whatever * so it's the sort of thing where we try and do it in a logical manner

INTERVIEWER: how can the teaching of writing at Junior College be improved/

LECTURER J: apart from changing the teachers/ <<laughs>> how can they be improved/ * I think what we do during our seminars should be enough * should help but I think basically most of the time we're starting from scratch * we're having to teach skills which should already be there * but we should have certain classes where there would be a lot of emphasis on the writing skills * I mean we already do this in the tutorials but I don't think one hour is enough * I think at this stage unfortunately * whereas in my day the A-level was completely focused on the literature now it has changed * there was no use to harp on the importance of being able to express yourself in English * nowadays unfortunately the A-level has been stripped of the literary element in order to give more time and emphasis to the language aspect you know * it's not Advanced level in the traditional sense * as I traditionally know it * it's completely different

INTERVIEWER: how do you approach the teaching of reading skills/

LECTURER J: if we have a passage for comprehension I do a line by line analysis to see what's going on in the writer's mind as he builds up the article or whatever it is * I emphasise the reading in between the lines too * and the writer's choice of words * why did he choose this word and not another/ * what does this word mean in this context/ * and how does this illustrate what the writer wants to say/ * I also focus on the way they express themselves * most students are able to grasp the content but when they come to express themselves * that is when writing their answers to the comprehension questions they struggle

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the linguistics component/

LECTURER J: as I've said earlier I don't feel that the linguistics we teach them is adequate for our students * it's not appropriate to their level and it bores them * at least the Maltese book does

INTERVIEWER: which approach do you use when teaching linguistics/

LECTURER J: ** the texts that we have/ * basically I read in class the whatever part of the book we've reached * I read and I translate * I paraphrase and * make sure that what we're reading is * understood you know * and I ask questions to see whether they are following the arguments or following the logic of the analysis that is being made etcetera * and then then * something I don't

do with literature I give them notes * I leave notes for them * sort of a summary of what is being said in the book * that's the only time I do it * I don't do it for the rest of the stuff unless I'm forced to

INTERVIEWER: what's your opinion of the following in terms of their effectiveness and feasibility as teaching techniques or resources at sixth form level/ * and I'm going to present you with a list

LECTURER J: group work * I think is very very important * I mean they listen to each other's arguments and ideas and suggestions and even * in a seminar discussing what they've written not just the content but the way they've written something * yes it helps because they listen to one another and hopefully learn from each other * what to do and what not to do as far as possible

INTERVIEWER: students' presentations/

LECTURER J: I've never done that * I have no idea * no * I wouldn't know * never done that before * I can't tell you anything about that because I don't use it * I don't think we have time either * anyway

INTERVIEWER: pairwork/

LECTURER J: we do that in class yes * especially in language seminars * well not especially * in language seminars * it helps because they discuss certain topics and exchange ideas and then sort of together they help each other to write out their ideas * no it does help

INTERVIEWER: lectures/

LECTURER J: obviously essential

INTERVIEWER: what about lectures via PowerPoint presentations/

LECTURER J: I wouldn't know how to use the thing so no * handouts * I do use with linguistics and in crit * I give my own handouts * I think they can be effective especially if you want them to revise something

INTERVIEWER: what about resource packs/

LECTURER J: normally I borrow them from other teachers you know <<laughs>> I only do so when specifically asked by students miss miss please help us you know * I either tell them go buy York Notes or whatever because they can find their resource packs there you know * or they can download them from the internet you know * no I don't believe in this

Appendix 16 – Interview Guide: Semi-structured Interview with the Chairperson of the Matriculation Certificate English Examination

Matriculation Certificate English Syllabus

1. Typically syllabi or test specifications 'are a recipe or blueprint for test construction' (McNamara 31). Do you feel that the syllabus would benefit from more development in the following areas?
 - content
 - test structure
 - types of questions set
 - criterial levels of performance
 - scoring procedures
 - advice on studying for the test
 - exemplars of candidates' scripts
2. In your view, which are the components that present candidates with the most challenges in the MC English examination?
3. Do you feel that the MC English syllabus should include the testing of listening and speaking skills? Why?/Why not?
4. Does the combined testing of language and literature present any problems in your opinion?
5. In your opinion would there be any advantages in having two separate examinations in the light of the varying purposes that students have for taking English at MC level?

Marking

6. What kind of training does MATSEC provide A-level markers with?
7. Are markers provided with a rating scale for the language essay component? If yes, what kind of rating scale is used and why?
8. For standardisation purposes are markers provided with a model answer in the form of a few points to guide them when marking the literature essays?
9. What measures are taken to enhance standardisation in marking?
10. When marking literature essays what weight is given to language proficiency?

11. If deemed necessary what procedures are adopted for carrying out a moderation exercise during the marking process?
12. Is double marking practised in any component of the MC English examination?

Paper Setting

- 13a. What is the rationale for giving candidates a choice of two questions on each set text?
- 13b. What are the implications of this in relation to ensuring comparability between the two questions?
14. Which criteria are used by paper setters for the selection of the unseen texts that form part of the literary criticism component?

Relationship between SEC and MC

15. When discussing the predictive validity of SEC English Language Farrugia and Ventura claim that 'The results show a rather low correlation between student performance at the two levels. Students tend to obtain low grades at Advanced level irrespective of the grades obtained at SEC level' (31). They also affirm that 'Unexpectedly, the correlation between the grades obtained in English Literature at SEC level and Advanced level English is lower than the correlation between English Language at SEC level and Advanced level English' (32). In your opinion which factors are responsible for the low correlation between the SEC English Language/SEC English Literature and MC English examinations?
16. Students currently need a Grade 5 in SEC English Language in order to study English at MC level at Junior College. What is your opinion of this?
17. Would a Grade 5 in the SEC English Literature examination be sufficient to complete the MC English course successfully?

Recommendations

18. Given your many years of experience and hence the corresponding insight into the state of English at this level, do you have any recommendations to make in relation to the MC English examination?

Appendix 17 – May 2008 MC English Examination Paper

AM 10/1.08m

MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS BOARD
UNIVERSITY OF MALTA, MSDA

MATRICULATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION
ADVANCED LEVEL
MAY 2008

SUBJECT:	ENGLISH
PAPER NUMBER:	1
DATE:	1 st May 2008
TIME:	9.00 a.m. to 12.00 noon

Each Section carries one-third of the total marks. Answer one question from each section.

Section A: Shakespeare Set Texts

1. Either

- (a) "Ay, every inch a king." Discuss the theme of kingship in *King Lear*.

Or

- (b) Discuss what you consider to be the main ingredients of tragedy in *King Lear*.

2. Either

- (a) "*Julius Caesar* raises many questions about the force of fate versus the capacity for free will." Discuss.

Or

- (b) "Brutus is the dramatic hero of *Julius Caesar*." Discuss.

Section B: Poetry Set Texts

3. Either

- (a) Discuss some of the recurring motifs in Keats's Odes.

Or

- (b) "Keats believed that the reality of beauty could never be truly experienced except in its relationship to suffering." Discuss.

AM 10/1.08m

4. *Either*

- (a) "Owen made war a poetic subject." Discuss.

Or

- (b) "One of Owen's marked characteristics as a poet is his inability to reconcile the interests of art and religion." Discuss.

5. *Either*

- (a) "Jennings's devotion to Roman Catholicism is a theme that pervades much of her poetry." Discuss.

Or

- (b) "Jennings writes simply and directly without academic pretence or heavy adornment." Discuss this statement in the light of the emotional intensity that characterises her work.

Section C: Literary Criticism

In not less than 400 words write a critical appreciation of the following poem paying particular attention to (a) theme, (b) imagery, (c) diction, (d) tone, (e) style, and (f) versification.

The Voice

Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me,
Saying that now you are not as you were
When you had changed from the one who was all to me,
But as at first, when our day was fair.

Can it be you that I hear? Let me view you, then,
Standing as when I drew near to the town
Where you would wait for me: yes, as I knew you then,
Even to the original air-blue gown!

Or is it only the breeze in its listlessness
Travelling across the wet mead to me here,
You being ever dissolved to wan listlessness,
Heard no more again far or near?

Thus I, faltering forward,
Leaves around me falling,
Wind dozing thin through the thorn from onward,
And the woman calling.

Thomas Hardy

AM 18/ILB9m

MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS BOARD
UNIVERSITY OF MALTA, MSIDA

MATRICULATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION
ADVANCED LEVEL
MAY 2008

SUBJECT:	ENGLISH
PAPER NUMBER:	II
DATE:	3 rd May 2008
TIME:	4.00 p.m. to 7.00 p.m.

Answer Question I (Section A: Literary Criticism) and two questions from Section B. Each question carries one third of the total marks.

Section A: Literary Criticism (Prose)

1. Write a critical commentary of approximately 400 words on the following passage. Pay particular attention to theme, imagery, and features of style.

Mrs Touchett was certainly a person of many oddities, of which her behaviour on returning to her husband's house after many months was a noticeable specimen. She had her own way of doing all that she did, and this is the simplest description of a character which, although by no means without liberal motions, rarely succeeded in giving an impression of suavity. Mrs Touchett might do a great deal of good, but she never pleased. This way of her own, of which she was so fond, was not intrinsically offensive—it was just unmistakably distinguished from the ways of others. The edges of her conduct were so very clear-cut that for susceptible persons it sometimes had a knife-like effect. That hard fineness came out in her deportment during the first hours of her return from America, under circumstances in which it might have seemed that her first act would have been to exchange greetings with her husband and son. Mrs Touchett, for reasons which she deemed excellent, always retired on such occasions into impenetrable seclusion, postponing the more sentimental ceremony until she had repaired the disorder of dress with a completeness which had the less reason to be of high importance as neither beauty nor vanity were concerned in it. She was a plain-faced old woman, without graces and without any great elegance, but with an extreme respect for her own motives. She was usually prepared to explain these—when the explanation was asked as a favour; and in such a case they proved totally different from those that had been attributed to her. She was virtually separated from her husband, but she appeared to perceive nothing irregular in the situation. It had become clear, at an early stage of their community, that they should never desire the same thing at the same moment, and this appearance had prompted her to rescue disagreement from the vulgar realm of accident. She did what she could to erect it into a law—a much more edifying aspect of it—by going to live in Florence, where she bought a house and established herself; and by leaving her husband to take care of the English branch of his bank. This arrangement greatly pleased her; it was so felicitously definite. It struck her husband in the same light, in a foggy square in London, where it was at times the most definite fact he discerned; but he would have preferred that such unnatural things should have a greater vagueness. To agree to disagree had cost him an effort; he was ready to agree to almost anything but that, and saw no reason why either assent or dissent should be so terribly consistent. Mrs Touchett indulged in no regrets nor speculations, and usually came once a year to

AM 10/11.08m

spend a month with her husband, a period during which she apparently took pains to convince him that she had adopted the right system. She was not fond of the English style of life, and had three or four reasons for it to which she currently alluded; they bore upon minor points of that ancient order, but for Mrs Touchett they amply justified non-residence. She detested bread-sauce, which, as she said, looked like a poultice and tasted like soap; she objected to the consumption of beer by her maid-servants; and she affirmed that the British laundress (Mrs Touchett was very particular about the appearance of her linen) was not a mistress of her art. At fixed intervals she paid a visit to her own country; but this last had been longer than any of its predecessors.

Section B

Answer Two questions from this Section.

2. Either

- (a) "We stand on the only perfect level... We are both gentlemen." Discuss Trollope's idea of being "a gentleman" as this emerges in *The Last Chronicle of Barset*.

Or

- (b) Discuss Trollope's presentation of female characters in *The Last Chronicle of Barset*.

3. Either

- (a) Discuss Fowles's treatment of social convention in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

Or

- (b) "I am not to be understood even by myself." Discuss Fowles's presentation of Sarah in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

4. Either

- (a) "Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody gets no land." Discuss Steinbeck's treatment of the American dream in the light of this quotation.

Or

- (b) Discuss Steinbeck's treatment of male strength in *Of Mice and Men*.

5. Either

- (a) Discuss rebellion and resistance in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Or

- (b) Discuss language as a tool power in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*.

AM 10/11/08m

MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS BOARD
UNIVERSITY OF MALTA, MSIDA
MATRICULATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION
ADVANCED LEVEL
MAY 2008

SUBJECT:	ENGLISH
PAPER NUMBER:	III
DATE:	9 th May 2008
TIME:	4.00 p.m. to 7.00 p.m.

Do all three sections. Each Section carries one-third of the total marks.

Section A: Essay

1. Write an essay of not less than 500 words on ONE of the following topics:

- a. Rumours
- b. Blind Faith
- c. Least said soonest mended
- d. 'Teachers open doors but you must enter by yourself.' Discuss.
- e. Commitment
- f. Promises are easy to make, but hard to deliver.
- g. The power of reading

Section B: Comprehension and Summary

2. Read the following passage and answer the questions set:

Oppressed people deal with their oppression in three characteristic ways. One way is acquiescence: the oppressed resign themselves to their doom. They tacitly adjust themselves to oppression, and thereby become conditioned to it. In every movement toward freedom some of the oppressed prefer to remain oppressed. Almost 2800 years ago Moses set out to lead the children of Israel from the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land. He soon discovered that slaves do not always welcome their deliverers. They become accustomed to being slaves. They would rather bear those ills they have, as Shakespeare pointed out, than flee to others that they know not of. They prefer the 'feshpots of Egypt' to the ordeals of emancipation.

There is such a thing as the freedom of exhaustion. Some people are so worn down by the yoke of oppression that they give up. A few years ago in the slum areas of Atlanta, a Negro guitarist used to sing almost daily: "Been down so long that now don't bother." This is the type of negative freedom and resignation that often engulfs the life of the oppressed.

But this is not the way out. To accept passively an unjust system is to cooperate with that system; thereby the oppressed become as evil as the oppressor. Non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. The oppressed must never allow the conscience of the oppressor to slumber. Religion reminds every man that he is his brother's keeper. To accept injustice or segregation passively is to

AM 18/11/08m

say to the oppressor that his actions are morally right. It is a way of allowing his conscience to fall asleep. At this moment the oppressed fails to be his brother's keeper. So acquiescence, while often the easier way is not the moral way. It is the way of the coward. The Negro cannot win the respect of his oppressor by acquiescing; he merely increases the oppressor's arrogance and contempt. Acquiescence is interpreted as proof of the Negro's inferiority. The Negro cannot win the respect of the white people of the south or the peoples of the world if he is willing to sell the future of his children for his personal and immediate comfort and safety.

A second way that oppressed people sometimes deal with oppression is to resort to physical violence and corroding hatred. Violence often brings about momentary results. Nations have frequently won their independence in battle. But in spite of temporary victories, violence never brings permanent peace. It solves no social problem; it merely creates new and more complicated ones.

Violence as a way of achieving racial justice is both impractical and immoral. It is impractical because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction for all. The old law of an eye for an eye leaves everybody blind. It is immoral because it seeks to humiliate the opponent rather than win his understanding; it seeks to annihilate rather than to convert. Violence is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather than love. It destroys community and makes brotherhood impossible. It leaves society in monologue rather than dialogue. Violence ends by defeating itself. It creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers. A voice echoes through time saying to every potential Peter, "Put up your sword." History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations that failed to follow this command.

If the American Negro and other victims of oppression succumb to the temptation of using violence in the struggle for freedom, future generations will be the recipients of a desolate night of bitterness, and our chief legacy to them will be an endless reign of meaningless chaos. Violence is not the way.

The third way open to oppressed people in their quest for freedom, is the way of non-violent resistance. Like the synthesis in Hegelian philosophy, the principle of non-violent resistance seeks to reconcile the truths of two opposites — the acquiescence and violence — while avoiding the extremes and immoralities of both. The non-violent resister agrees with the person who acquiesces that one should not be physically aggressive toward his opponent; but he balances the equation by agreeing with the person of violence that evil must be resisted. He avoids the non-resistance of the former and the violent resistance of the latter. With non-violent resistance, no individual or group need submit any wrong, nor need anyone resort to violence in order to right a wrong.

It seems to me that this is the method that must guide the actions of the Negro in the present crisis in race relations. Through non-violent resistance the Negro will be able to rise to the noble height of opposing the unjust system while loving the perpetrators of the system. The Negro must work passionately and unrelentingly for full stature as a citizen, but he must not use inferior methods to gain it. He must never come to terms with falsehood, malice, hate, or destruction.

AM 10/11.09m

Non-violent resistance makes it possible for the Negro to remain in the South and struggle for his rights. The Negro's problem will not be solved by running away. He cannot listen to the glib suggestion of those who would urge him to migrate en masse to other sections of the country. By grasping his great opportunity in the South he can make a lasting contribution to the moral strength of the nation and set a sublime example of courage for generations yet unborn.

By non-violent resistance, the Negro can also enlist all men of good will in his struggle for equality. The problem is not a purely racial one, with Negroes set against whites. In the end, it is not a struggle between people at all, but a tension between justice and injustice. Non-violent resistance is not aimed against oppressors but against oppression. Under its banner consciences, not racial groups, are enlisted.

Martin Luther King

- a. What does the author mean by the term "freedom of exhaustion" in the second paragraph? Why is he critical in his assessment of people who succumb to such a condition in response to oppression? (4 marks)
- b. According to the author, what is the role of religion in the battle against oppression? (4 marks)
- c. Why does the author advocate the avoidance of violence in fighting oppression, despite the short term success violence often achieves for the victors? How do such victories affect the future? (4 marks)
- d. According to the author, how does non-violent resistance transform a racial issue into one of conscience? (4 marks)
- e. Give the meaning of the underlined words in the context: acquiescence; emancipation; yoke; engulfs; contempt; annihilate; quest; unrelentingly. (8 marks)
- f. Summarise the passage in not more than 100 words. (9 marks)

Section C: Linguistics

3. Answer one question. The essay should not exceed 400 words.

- a. "English has come to be used as a means of controlling international transport operations especially on water and in the air." Discuss with reference to *English as a Global Language*.
- b. Discuss language ranking in Malta with reference to *Living Languages in Malta*.
- c. With reference to *Living Languages in Malta* discuss language use in two domains.



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