



Scholarship, 2007

Geography

Assessment Report

Geography, Scholarship, 2007

Commentary:

The Scholarship geography performance standard and examination require candidates to apply their geographic understanding and intellectual skills to a geographic situation (the context) that is not specific to the geography level 1 – 3 teaching programme (Forms 5 – 7 Geography syllabus). The context selected for the 2007 examination was *desertification*, with a range of resources supplied from global, regional, and local settings. The majority of candidates both completed the paper and answered at least two (and in most cases all three) of the questions with some success. It is clear that candidates are being well prepared for the Scholarship examination through their senior school / level 3 geographic studies at school, and in some instances a specific focus on preparation for Scholarship geography is evident.

The best candidates were the ones who gained an overview and understanding of the issue through the resource materials provided, and then selected relevant information to write a focused answer to each question in a lucid manner. The ability to incorporate geographic ideas, geographic terminology, and to generalize within answers was also a feature of the best answers.

There remain candidates who answer parts of the paper very well, but leave the exam early (according to exit times noted by supervisors on the exam paper) with the other parts of the paper not attempted.

The best performing candidates most commonly demonstrated the following skills and / or knowledge:

- answered all of each question, and focused answers on the topic of the question – this required careful question analysis before beginning to answer.
- understood the command words of each question (justify / discuss and analyse / consequences / critically evaluate) and the subject terminology associated with the questions (desertification / process / interactions / perspectives)
- used the question titles (in bold and capitalised for each question) and the quotations provided with each question (in italics) to help guide and shape answers.
- had familiarity with, and understanding of, the nature and scope of the discipline of geography, and applied this to support answers by the incorporation of relevant geographic ideas within each answer, and incorporating relevant case studies from beyond the resources supplied to support the answer to question 3.
- incorporated visuals into answers in a way that enhanced the answer, for example by adding new information or providing a summary in a visual format. Referring to the visual(s) within the written answer so that the visual became part of the total answer was also a feature of the answers of the best candidates.
- wrote in a concise and fluent manner that showed understanding of the question; incorporated geographic information and ideas throughout the answer; wrote answers that provided geographic generalizations and overviews as well as specifics.

Features of, and extracts from, successful answers to each question:

Question 1a (diagram): the best diagrams had important information and ideas selected and presented in a way where links between chosen events in the process of desertification were logical and supported by resource booklet information; included some complexity within the sequences shown: for example by the use of feedback arrows, interactions and inclusion of both natural and cultural factors within the process.

Question 1b (selection of most important factor in the process and justification of the choice of this factor): the best answers were ones where the selected factor was clearly stated and why it had been chosen was justified both in terms of the significance of this factor itself, and why it was considered to be more important than other factors including some brief discussion being made of these other factors to help explain why they were considered to be of lesser importance than the chosen factor. Justification in terms of the chosen factor being a “catalyst”, or one that “accelerated” the process of desertification were features of many of the best answers.

Quotations from scripts of candidates who answered question 1b very successfully:

“Population growth is a cultural factor which seems to be the most important one in the process because it seems to be the initiating factor for the chain of events which eventually leads to the long-term negative effects of desertification. It is the most important factor in the process of desertification as it is a catalyst for other factors like bad land management. With population growth comes the need for greater food production, which can result in land being overgrazed. An example of this took place at Machakos in Kenya, where both overgrazing and overcultivation of land led to a loss of soil fertility and hillside erosion so that the land became degraded to the point of becoming useless for farming.”

“While the process of desertification is complex and caused by a variety of both natural and cultural factors, poor land management is the most important factor in the process. Poor land management has the greatest influence on the process, both in terms of time and space. When topsoil becomes exposed through vegetation clearance for crop production and grazing animals, a cycle of erosion can set in. Wind begins blowing away topsoil, and heavy rain washes away good soil from hillsides, creating deep gullies in the bare earth”

Question 2: (The consequences of desertification – discuss and analyse the extent of desertification being more a human than an environmental tragedy; include a consideration of perspectives in the answer) Two features of successful answers stood out:

- answers where candidates confined the answer to consequences, as opposed to causes and solutions, of desertification
- the inclusion of perspectives where the views of people directly affected by desertification were discussed and compared to the views and attitude of national or international agencies and organisations.

Quotation from the script of a candidate who answered question 2 very successfully:

“Those who view the consequences of desertification as primarily a human tragedy derive this view from the fact that they seem to be personally affected by the process, whereas those who assert that it is primarily an environmental tragedy seem to have studied the process but have not been personally affected by it. Darren Wykes of the town of Bourke in NSW, Australia, expresses his viewpoint of the consequences as being a human tragedy by emphasising the disruption caused to his life and to that of his father who is ‘still on the farm and flogging himself to death’. People who view desertification as more of an environmental tragedy may derive this view from a values

framework in which the natural environment is very important. Environmental scientists for example like Jim Salinger and Cate Faehrmann both emphasise severe impact (of desertification) on water supply and river systems like the Murray-Darling in Australia”

Question 3: Dealing with the Problem, Looking for Solutions Critically evaluate this statement

The best candidates when answering this question decided on their point of view (about whether approaches and actions at national and international levels was / is more appropriate than relying local level initiatives and responses to deal with environmental problems) and argued their case in a convincing and concise way using information from the resources provided. Where candidates included material from other geographic studies (as they were invited to), those who chose specific and relevant information from other environment-related issues like global warming, deforestation in Amazonia and specific case studies like the Three Gorges Dam in China were the most successful.

Quotations come from scripts of candidates who answered question 3 very successfully:

“Asserting the primacy of either approach (to solving the desertification problem) reveals a misunderstanding of the issue. It is only by incorporating both approaches (National / international and local) into the effort to tackle the problem that substantial progress can be made. Both approaches have their strengths and weaknesses.....The value of the local grassroots approach is revealed at Machakos, Kenya where by working with the people a solution tailored to this specific area was adopted. This solution was successful because of the ‘intimate knowledge the Akamba had of the lands’ problems’.

“The resources show that the problem (desertification) is an international one affecting every continental area and as such needs to be tackled on a global scale. The results of scientific research into desertification can be shared across countries and local communities as they develop action plans to tackle the problem”

Candidates who did NOT achieve Scholarship lacked some or all of the skills and knowledge above and in addition they:

- misunderstood the term “desertification” and treated it as being the same as “desert formation”
- copied large sections of information from the resource booklet (especially within the diagram answer to Question 1a) rather than selecting and processing information for inclusion within an answer
- treated desertification as a problem confined to less developed and / or densely populated parts of the world
- included in depth prepared material (especially from Al Gore’s *An Inconvenient Truth* / Global Warming studies) non-selectively
- included Maori concepts and (geographic) perspectives referred to by the Scholarship Geography performance standard, included in answers in an indiscriminate way whether they were relevant or not. Doing this frequently detracted from the answer rather than enhancing it.