

## Chapter 14: English Language Arts (ELA) CRT

The English Language Arts CRT is administered every spring to students in Grades 3, 6 and 9. In Grades 3 and 6, the CRT assesses student performance in reading, writing, listening and speaking. To assess reading comprehension, students read a passage and answer questions to show their level of understanding. Listening skills are assessed in a similar fashion but students listen to a recording and then answer questions. In both the writing and speaking components, students are given a topic and asked to both write about it and develop a short presentation discussing it. Grade 9 students were assessed in two areas of English language arts – reading and writing.

### **Primary level (Grade 3)**

By the end of Grade 3, students are expected to have developed the foundational skills needed in language arts. They should be able to demonstrate a basic proficiency in speaking, listening, reading and writing. In general, students should be able to complete the following tasks:

- Describe, share, and discuss their thoughts, feelings and experiences, and consider other people's ideas;
- Choose reading material appropriate to their interests and learning needs; and,
- Experiment with a range of pre-writing, drafting, editing, proofreading and presentation strategies.

All Grade 3 students, except those who are either French immersion students or have a severe cognitive disability, are expected to complete the CRT (Department of Education, 2010, p.13). The CRT is administered to assess the degree primary students are able to demonstrate their ability in these tasks. The assessment is composed of two sections – constructed response and multiple choice. The first section will explore student performance on the constructed response section. This is followed by the multiple choice section.

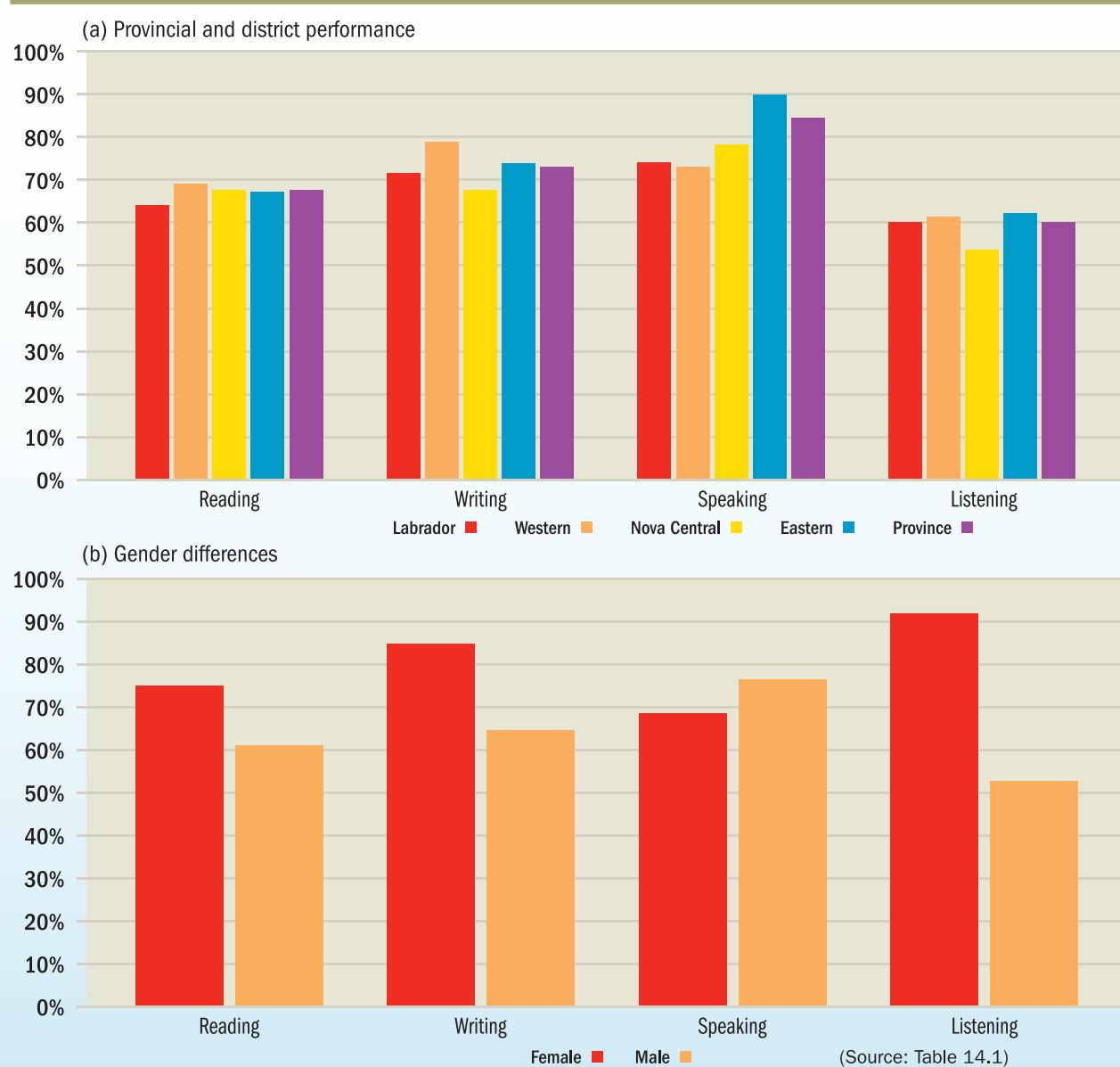
### **Student performance on the constructed response section (2009/10)**

Provincially, the majority of students demonstrated at least an appropriate understanding of the content area assessed in each of the language learning strands (i.e., reading, writing, listening and speaking). They performed at level 3 or above on the assessment items. Provincially, the highest percentage (83.2%) of students who achieved at least level 3 was on the speaking component. Primary students experienced the most difficulty on the listening component where 59.9% achieved a level 3 or above standing (see Figure 14.1a).

Overall, there was little difference in the percentage of students at or above level 3 on the reading component with only 1.5% separating the high and low scores. On the listening component, the percentage of students at or above level 3 was similar in three of the four districts with Nova Central approximately 7.0% lower. On the writing component, the highest percentages were found in the Western and Eastern school districts. The largest degree of variability was seen in the speaking component where the percentage of students at or above level 3 ranged from a high of 89.5% in the Eastern school district to a low of 72.7% in the Western district.

Along gender lines, girls have the advantage. With the exception of speaking, a higher percentage of girls achieved level 3 or above on each of the four components. The largest gender difference was found on the listening component, where 90.8% of girls were at level 3 or above compared to 52.0% of boys (see Figure 14.1b).

**Figure 14.1: Proficiency in ELA : Primary level (2009/10)**



## Student performance on the multiple choice section (2009/10)

There were two components assessed using multiple choice questions – reading and listening. Provincially, the majority of students answered these questions correctly. The average score on the reading questions was higher than the listening questions (92.1% and 80.9% respectively).

The reading and listening scores were similar across the four districts with less than 2.0% separating the high and low scores (see Figure 14.2a). Along gender lines, girls recorded a slightly higher average score than boys with less than 3.0% separating the scores.

**Figure 14.2: Performance on multiple choice questions: Primary level**



(Source: Table 14.2)

## Five year trends in student performance (2005/06-2009/10)

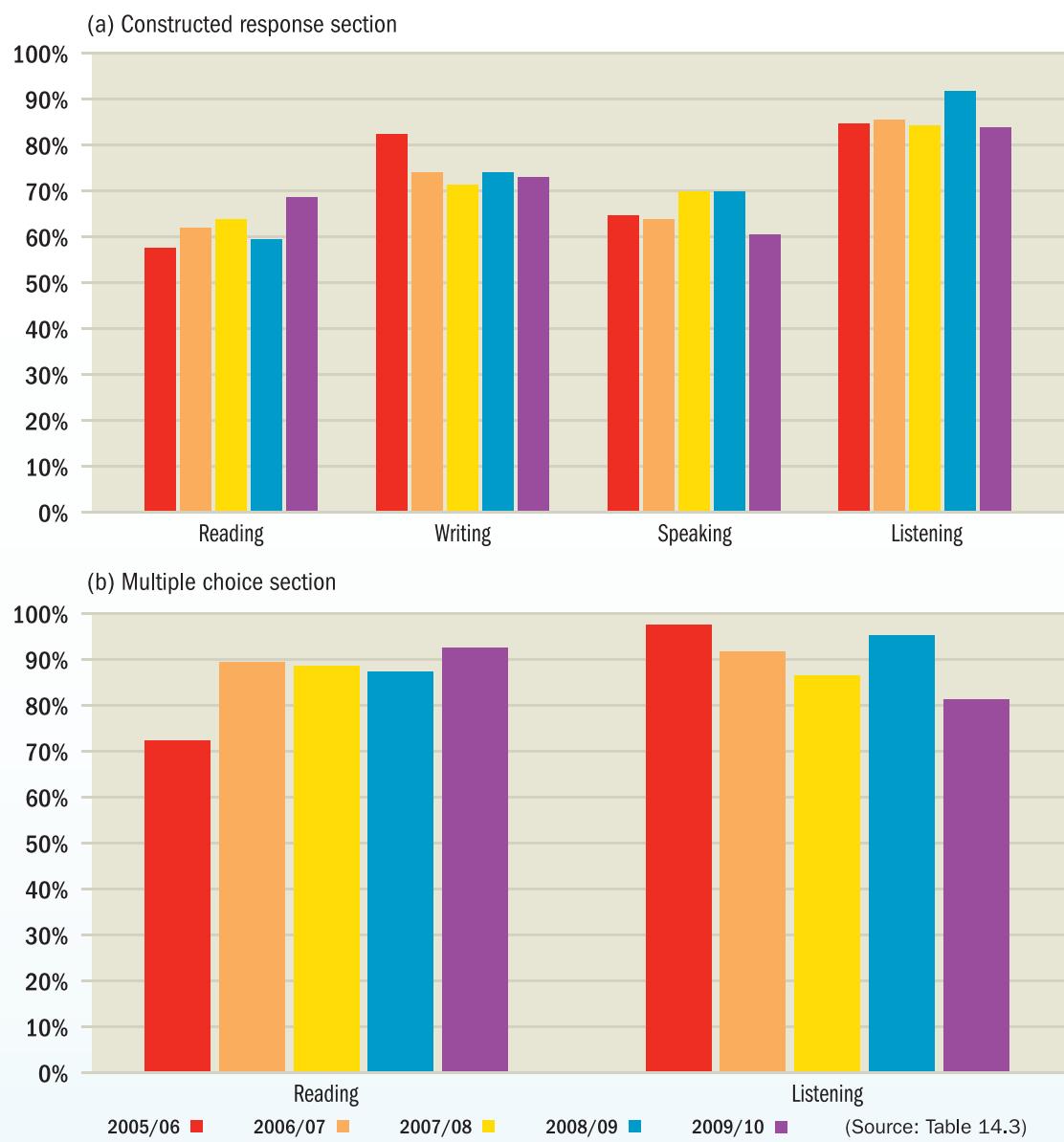
On the constructed response part of the assessment, students experienced the most success with the speaking component. The percentage of students who achieved level 3 or above ranged from 83.2% to 91.8% during this time. On the other hand, students had the most difficulty with the reading and listening components where the percentage of students at or above level 3 ranged from 56.8% and 70.4%.

With the exception of the reading component, the percentage of students at or above level 3 in 2009/10 declined from the previous year. On the writing component, the percentage of students at or above level 3 for the 2005/06 assessment was somewhat of an anomaly. It was approximately 8.0% higher than the other years. A similar anomaly occurred in the 2008/09 speaking assessment where the percentage of students at or above level 3 was 7.0% higher than the other years (see Figure 14.3a).

Provincially, trends in student performance on the multiple choice questions differed between the reading and listening components. On the reading section, students achieved higher scores in 2009/10 as compared to the previous years. Performance on the listening section showed a general downward trend. The highest average mark (97.7%) was achieved in the 2005/06 assessment and steadily decreased over the next two years. This was followed by an increase of 9.9% in 2008/09 but the scores dropped to 80.9% in 2009/10. This is the lowest point in the five year span (see Figure 14.3b).



**Figure 14.3: Provincial trends (2005/06-2009/10)**



## **Elementary level (Grade 6)**

During the elementary years, students build on and expand the foundational language skills learned during the primary years. By the end of Grade 6, students are expected to be able to:

- Contribute thoughts, ideas, and questions to the group discussion and have the ability to support their opinions with evidence;
- Independently choose books and reading material appropriate to their range of interests and learning needs;
- Develop effective pieces of writing by using a range of pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, proofreading, and presentation strategies; and,
- Use technology with increasing proficiency to create, revise, edit and publish texts.

The elementary CRT is constructed following a similar format as the primary CRT. It is composed of two sections – constructed response and multiple choice questions.

### **Student performance on the constructed response section (2009/10)**

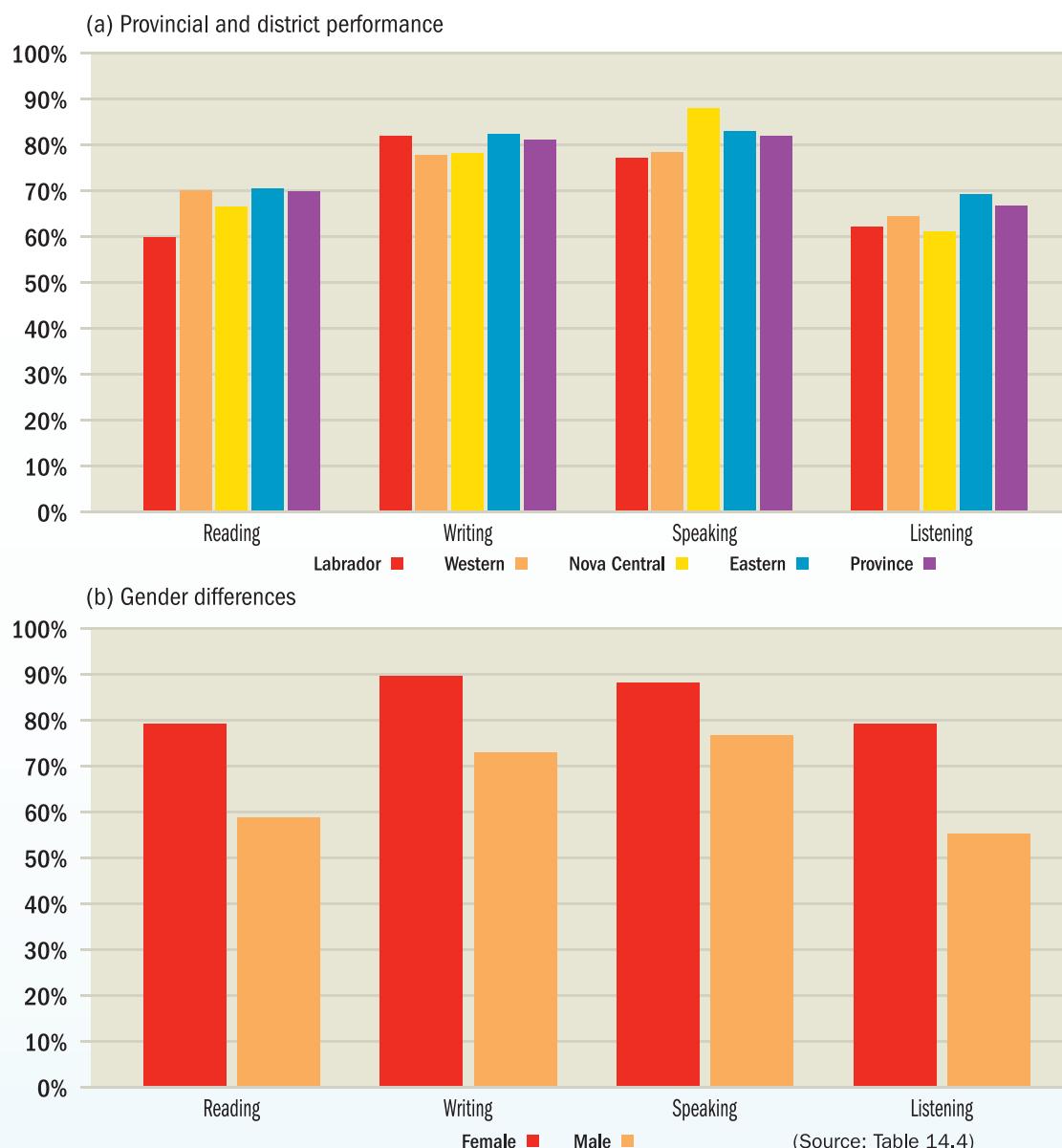
On the provincial level, students achieved greater success on the writing and speaking components of the assessment compared to the reading and listening components. As shown in Figure 14.4a, over 80% of students achieved at least a level 3 standing on the writing and speaking components compared to between 69.2% and 66.7%, respectively, on the reading and listening components.

Only slight differences were present across the districts for each of the components assessed. Overall, students tended to do slightly better on the writing and speaking components as compared to reading and listening.

Along gender lines, a higher percentage of girls than boys achieved at least level 3 on each of the four language components. As shown in Figure 14.4b, this gender difference ranged from a low of 10.8% on the speaking component to a high of 25.7% on the listening component.



**Figure 14.4: Proficiency in ELA: Elementary level (2009/10)**



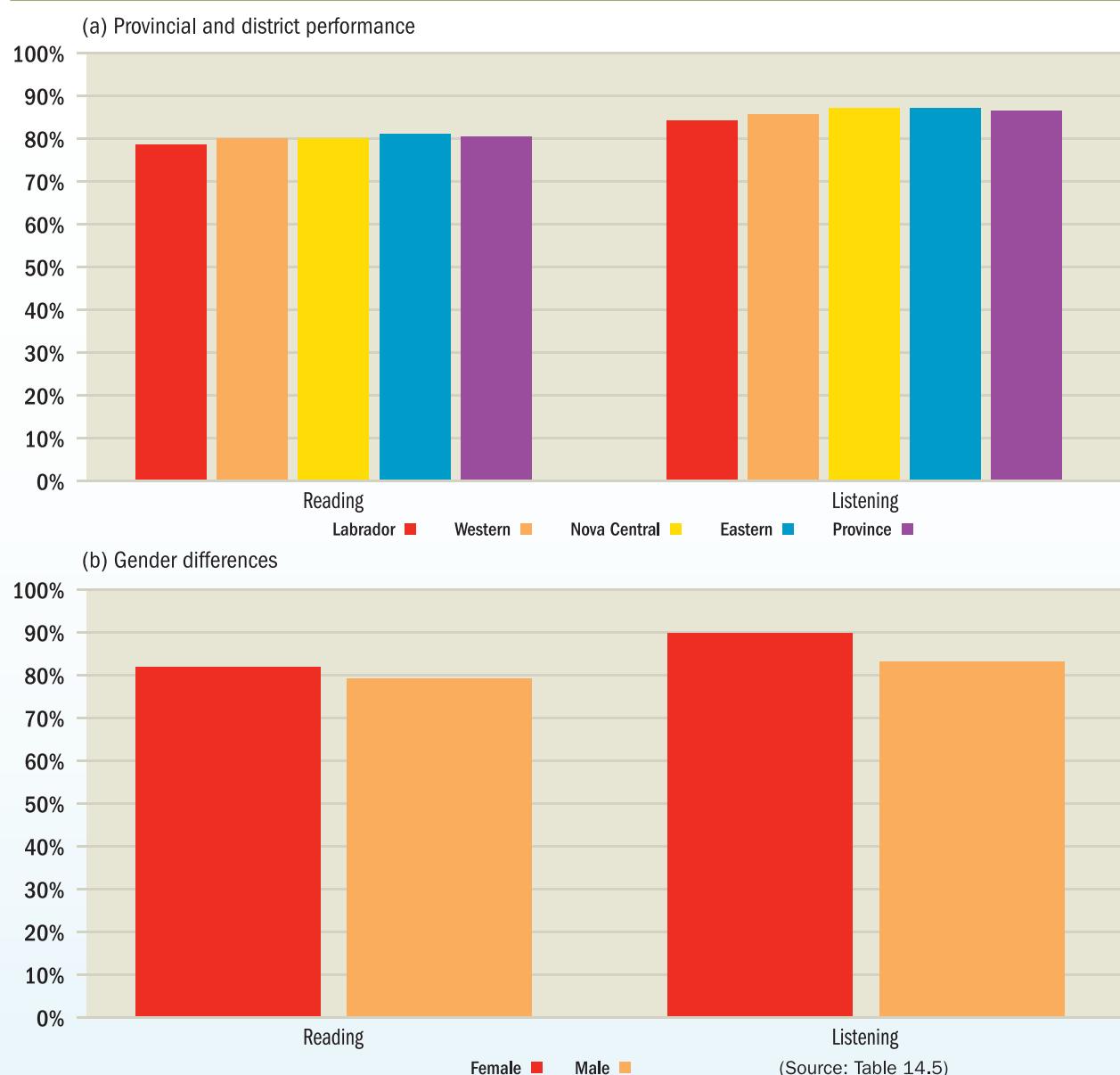
### Student performance on the multiple choice section (2009/10)

There were two components assessed using multiple choice questions – reading and listening. Provincially, the majority of students answered these questions correctly. Students performed better on the listening component than reading with average marks of 86.7% and 81.0% respectively.

At the district level, there was little difference in the average scores on both the reading and listening components with approximately 3.5% separating the high and low average scores on both components (see Figure 14.5a).

Girls performed better than boys on the multiple choice questions. However, this gender gap was not as considerable as was seen on the constructed response section. The average mark achieved by girls was 4.1% and 5.5% higher than boys on the reading and listening components respectively (see Figure 14.5b).

**Figure 14.5: Performance on multiple choice questions: Elementary level (2009/10)**



## Five year trends (2005/06-2009/10)

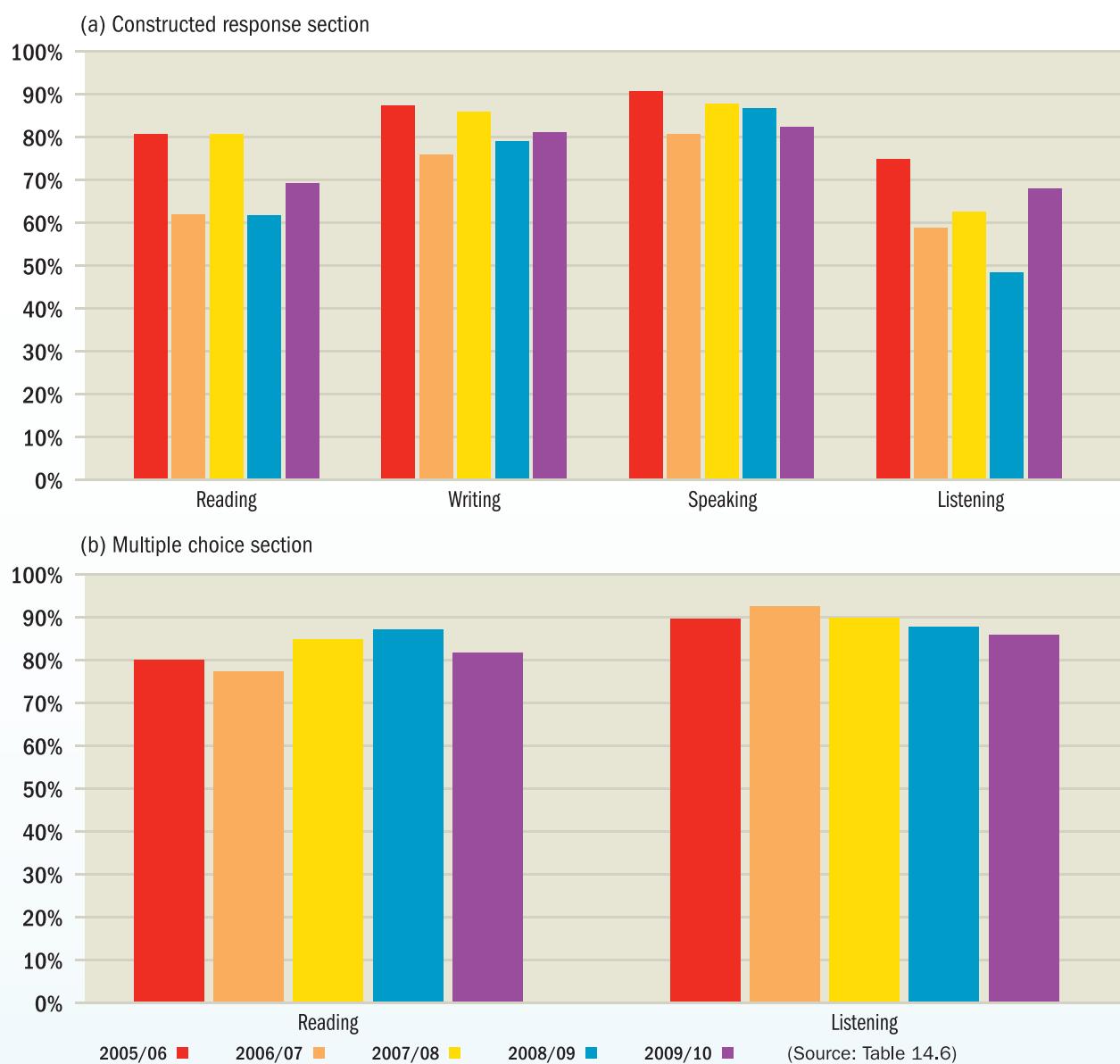
Overall, a similar pattern is seen in student performance on the constructed response section during the past five years. With the exception of the speaking component, the percentage of students at or above level 3 was lower in the 2006/07 and 2008/09 assessments. This percentage rebounded the following year.

Students had the most difficulty with the listening component. The percentage of students at or above level 3 was the lowest among the four components each year. On the other hand, students were the most proficient on the speaking component. The percentage of students at or above level 3 ranged from 83.2% to 91.8%. Finally, the percentage of students at or above level 3 increased in 2009/10 from the previous year on the reading, writing and listening components. However, these scores are lower than those seen in the 2005/06 assessment (see Figure 14.6a).

On the multiple choice section, students achieved higher average marks on the listening component than the reading component during this five year span. Focusing on the reading component, the highest average scores occurred during the 2007/08 and 2008/09 assessments. In 2009/10, the average score decreased by 6.1%. On the listening component, the average score peaked at 92.3% on the 2006/07 assessment and gradually declined over the following three years to 86.7% in 2009/10 (see Figure 14.6b).



**Figure 14.6: Provincial trends (2005/06-2009/10)**



## **Intermediate level (Grade 9)**

Students continue to build upon and deepen their skills in language arts as they progress through the intermediate grades. By this stage, students are expected to have developed a good understanding of the skills needed for effective communication in both the written word and verbally. At the end of Grade 9, students are expected to be able to:

- Examine other peoples' ideas and actively take part in small and large group discussions and debate;
- Demonstrate active listening and respect for the needs, rights, and feelings of others. Students must be able to go beyond simply listening to the words that are being said, to actually hearing and understanding the message being presented;
- Critically evaluate and question information;
- Adapt their writing style to meet the needs of specific audiences; and,
- Integrate information gathered from several sources to create and communicate meaning.

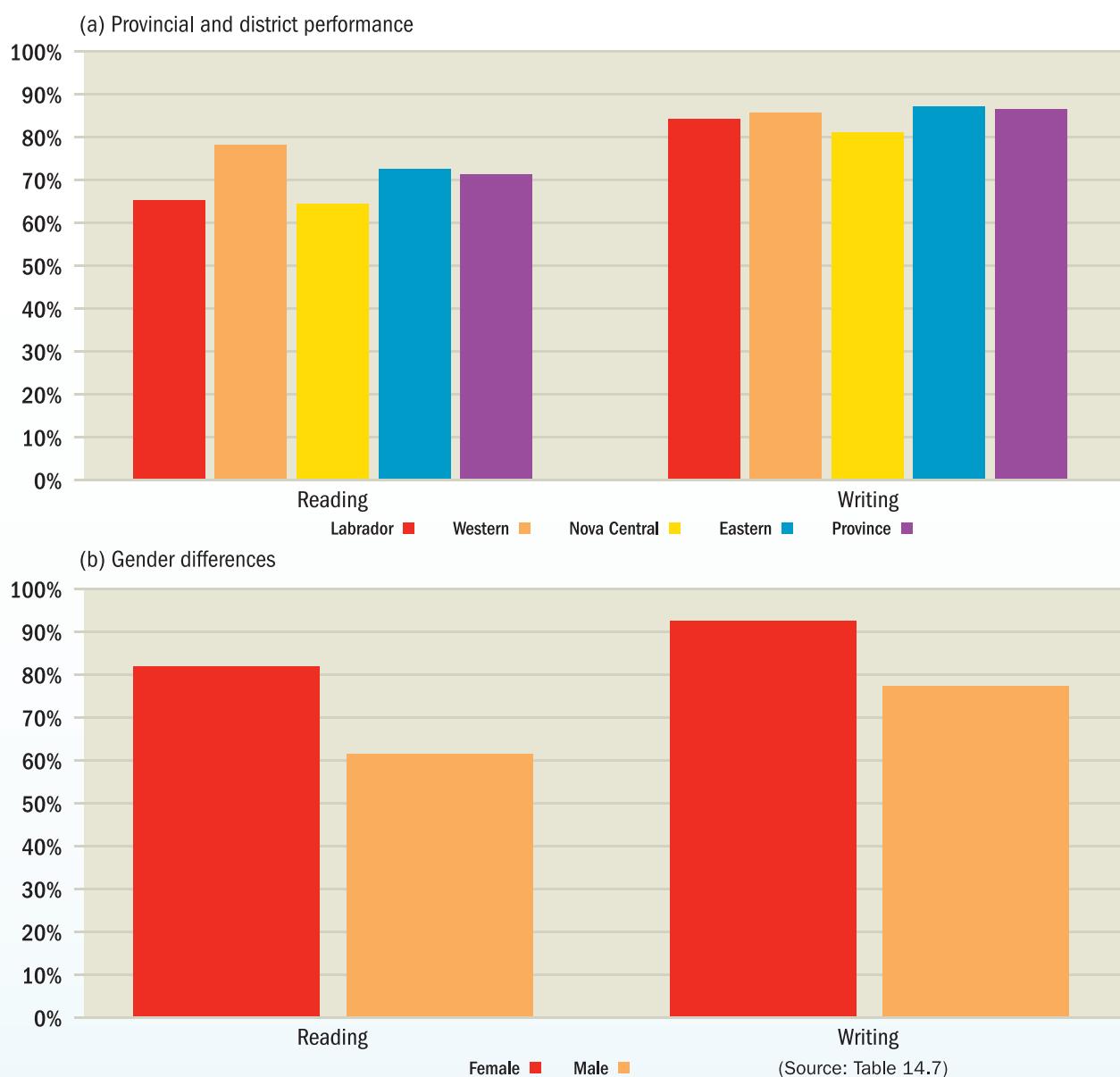
The intermediate CRT is composed of two sections. The constructed response section assesses student proficiency in reading and writing, and the multiple choice section assesses their informational and poetic reading skills.

### **Student performance on the constructed response questions (2009/10)**

Provincially, a higher percentage of students achieved at least level 3 on the writing component than the reading component (85.5% vs. 71.6% respectively). At the district level, students performed better on the writing component where the percentage of students at or above level 3 ranged from a low of 80.2% in Nova Central to a high of 86.7% in the Western district. On the reading component, students performed better in the Western and Eastern school districts where the percentage of students at or above level 3 was 78.8% and 72.3% respectively as compared to less than two thirds of students in the Labrador and Nova Central districts (see Figure 14.7a)

Figure 14.7b compares the differences between boys and girls on the constructed response items. As in the previous grades, girls once again have the advantage with a higher percentage achieving level 3 or above on both the reading and writing components than boys. The largest difference occurred on the reading component where the percentage of girls at or above level 3 was 20.1% higher than boys (81.6% and 61.5% respectively).

**Figure 14.7: Proficiency in ELA : Intermediate level (2009/10)**



## **Student performance on the multiple choice section (2009/10)**

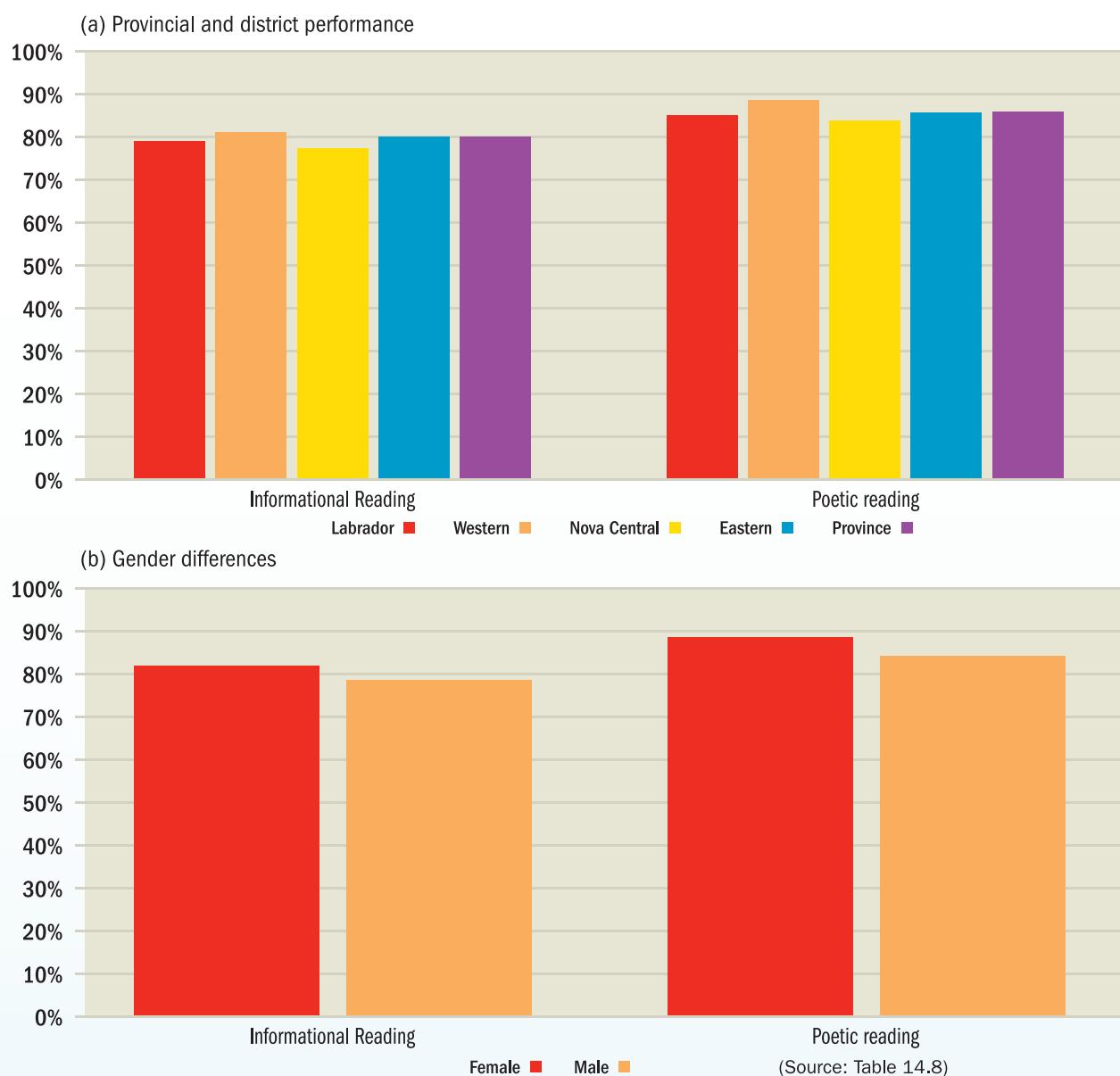
There were two components assessed with multiple choice questions – informational and poetic reading. The majority of students answered these questions correctly achieving average scores of 85.1% on the poetic reading section and 79.3% on informational reading.

At the district level, average scores were fairly consistent on both the informational and poetic reading components with 5.0% and 2.8% respectively separating the high and low scores (see Figure 14.8a).

Focusing on gender differences, girls had higher average scores on both the informational and poetic reading components compared to the boys. This difference was only marginal with approximately 3.0% separating their scores (see Figure 14.8b).



**Figure 14.8: Performance on multiple choice questions: Intermediate level (2009/10)**



## Five year trends (2005/06-2009/10)

On the constructed response section, the percentage of students at or above level 3 steadily increased from a low of 56.3% in 2005/06 to 77.5% in 2008/09. On the 2009/10 assessment, this percentage decreased by 5.9% to 71.6%. On the writing component, this percentage was somewhat stable ranging from 80.4% to 86.1% during this five year period (see Figure 14.9a).

Provincially, average scores were higher in 2009/10 on both the informational and poetic reading components as compared to 2005/06 (see Figure 14.9b). On the informational reading component, average scores gradually increased from 72.7% in 2005/06 to 83.1% in 2008/09, before decreasing by 3.8% in 2009/10 to 79.3%. On the poetic reading component, average scores increased from the 2005/06 to 2007/08 assessments but then gradually declined over the next three years. Scores rebounded on the 2009/10 assessment increasing by 14.1% from 71.0% in 2008/09 to 85.1% in 2009/10.



**Figure 14.9: Provincial trends on constructed response sections (2005/06-2009/10)**

