

EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL OF ESWATINI

JC

EXAMINATION REPORT

FOR

FRENCH

YEAR

2023

General Comments	Page 3
Breakdown of Papers	Page 4
Paper 1 Listening and Reading Comprehensions	Page 4
Paper 2 Continuous Writing	Page 6
Paper 3 Speaking	Page 9
C: Conclusion	Page 11

General comments

This is a report on the observations of the Examinations Council of Eswatini detailing the performance of candidates on French Language at Junior Secondary, in the school year 2023. This report will briefly highlight on the performance of centres, then dwell on the candidates' performances.

At the onset, it is worth appreciating the fact that the year 2023 has seen an increase, in terms of number of candidates who sat for the examination. This year, the number of candidates who sat for the examination rose to 204 candidates. This reflects an over 21% increase in candidature: a sizeable percentage in the context of French in the last 5-7 years. It is hoped that the upward trend will continue.

Centres

ECESWA notes with appreciation the re-appearance, in this examination, of some centres who had not had candidates in the last few years, as well as new centres that are not public, mission or community schools. This points to growth that should be sustained.

Centres are applauded for ensuring that candidates were prepared for the examination. However, it was observed that the majority of the new centres or the returning ones, did not produce good performances.

It is also noteworthy that centres continue to take due diligence in the handling of the examination materials as there were much fewer glitches regarding recorded materials, as well as the timeous availing of any back-up CDs. Indeed, this is commendable.

Breakdown of Papers

As usual, the examination consisted of three papers, namely **Paper 1: Listening and Reading Comprehensions**, **Paper 2: Writing** and **Paper 3: Speaking**.

Overall, in the 2024 examination, candidates did not perform as well as expected. Instead, there was a slight decline in candidate performance. This is a major cause for concern.

The observations on the papers were as follows:

202/01 Paper 1

This is a Listening and Reading Comprehensions paper worth 50 marks. It is the paper with the highest number of marks.

General comments on centres

This paper examines two competences out of 25 marks each: **Listening** and **Reading**. Candidates did not perform as well as expected in this paper. Listening was, slightly, the most challenging of the two sections. Better performances were observed for the reading part. Particular attention needs to be paid to the listening skill.

Out of 23 centres, candidates in only about 13 centres managed to get 50% or above in this paper. The rest had no candidate reaching the 50% threshold.

About 8 centres had some candidates getting over 70% (35/50). These centres are commended.

On the downside, 10 centres had a candidate get less than 15% (7/50 or less). Of urgent attention is the fact that some centres performed dismally, the lowest of which was 4% (2/50). Centres that did not perform well are implored to ensure a turn-around.

Candidate performances

Section 1: Listening Comprehensions [25 marks]

Candidates are commended for doing their best during the examination. It was evident that they were committed to amassing the maximum they could. However, it is ECESWA's observation that, generally, candidates' performance was slightly below average, (not taking anything away from the candidates who performed above average or even well, albeit the latter being a minority).

A disturbing number of candidates did not do well even with the basic questions. As examples, candidates struggled with:

- **Identifying proper nouns** (Les prénoms) Exercise 1 Question 1 (a) (i), 1 (a) (ii) and (b). Only 31% of candidates managed to amass all 3 points.
- **Answering complex questions** of type Q'u'est-ce qui.../Que (Exercise 2 Questions 2 (a) and 2 (b)). Only about 10% of candidates were able to garner all 3 points (40/404) expected answers).
- **Identifying colours** 'Rouge' (Exercise 3 Question 1 b) Less than half of the candidates managed to get the correct answer.
- **Identifying numbers** 'Deux mille/ 2000. (Exercise 3 Question 2 a). Less than half of the candidates successfully attempted this question.

These examples give an idea of the challenges candidates faced even on the basic types of questions. Educators are therefore implored to ensure that they traverse the entire syllabus terrain sufficiently with their learners, so that they can be better prepared for the examination. The failure to even identify SiSwati proper nouns points to a lack of practice in reading and listening. It is incumbent on centres that the candidates be sufficiently prepared for listening prior to the examination.

Section 2: Reading Comprehensions [25 marks]

By and large, Reading Comprehensions were as averagely done as the Listening Comprehensions. Candidates did struggle with basic syllabus expectations.

In an attempt to garner points at all costs, a lot of lifting of erroneous answers was witnessed here. This points to the frustration of learners whose commitment seemed to be overshadowed by ill-preparedness.

The candidates' persistent challenge of converting direct speech to indirect speech recurred and the candidates were unfortunately duly penalised. Nevertheless, above average performances were observed and indeed learners and teachers are applauded for such cases. However, there were glaring difficulties on the part of the candidates, especially in the following areas:

- **Numbers/Identifying numbers** – (Les chiffres) Exercice 1 Question 4 (a) and Exercice 4 Question 3. Slightly over half of candidates were able to identify or get the correct answer.
- **Identifying days and weeks** – (Les jours) Exercice 2 Question 1 (a) and Exercice 4 Question 3. Less than half of the candidature got correct answers.
- **Answering two-part questions** – starting with a vrai ou faux part and ending with a justification (each part carries a mark) Exercice 1 Question 3 and Exercice 3 Question 3. Out of a possible 2 marks in each question, 0/2 and 1/2 scores were common. Less than a third of candidates got 2/2.

202/02 Paper 2 Writing

This paper is out of 25 marks.

General comments

The negative trend, in terms of performances, in the Writing paper continued even in the year 2023. This paper was by far the most challenging to candidates. While the form-filling part saw a marginal improvement, the longer writing questions were done very poorly. Candidates ought to be trained that the longer questions are typically not of a description type.

It is worth mentioning that, save for a handful who did not comprehend the requirements of Question 2 of Section 2, a huge majority of candidates correctly identified the thematic subjects of both questions in this section, including the prompts. Teachers are commended for ensuring sufficient thematic coverage.

Challenges that candidates faced in this Writing paper, pointedly, Section 2, seemed to stem from the following aspects:

1. Inadequate linguistic competence

This refers to candidates failing to respect the grammatical arrangement of sentence construction (the S-V-O/A structure of the sentence). A good number of candidates resorted to starting sentences with the infinitive. Others correctly started with the subject but did not conjugate their verbs. This points to a gap in grammatical competence.

For Question 2 of Section 2 only less than a quarter of the candidates managed to attempt (successfully or not) the required past tenses (le passé composé and l'imparfait).

2. Insufficient preparation and practice

The majority of the candidates seemed to not have had sufficient prior preparation in this type of questions. Candidates seemed to have a recognition of the question but very limited competence in terms of how to go about expressing themselves in a systematic manner.

The details of the candidates' performances per question were as follows:

Section 1: Form-filling

As afore-mentioned, candidates' performance was better in this section compared to the longer pieces of writing. Candidates continued to do well in this section. Out of 10 marks, most performances ranged between 6-8 (more than 70%). About 20% scored between 9 and 10 marks. It is hoped that this trajectory continues.

One of the challenges that candidates had was in the distinction that the candidates had to make between 'ville' and 'domicile' often treating the two as the same thing, yet 'ville' is the town, and domicile is more localised, even going down to the local street.

The second glaring challenge relates to the purpose of the trip: 'raison du voyage', where the answer either would be a noun ('visite', 'vacances', etc.) or verb ('visiter/rendre visite'....', 'faire du tourisme', etc.).

Section 2: Continuous Writing

Section 2 gave candidates the most difficulty as earlier on mentioned. This section tests candidates' abilities to write longer sentences, to demonstrate linguistic (of syntax and grammar), semantical (relating to meaning) and lexical (relating to words and vocabulary) competences. Largely, candidates were found wanting in these areas.

The phenomenon of candidates copying and rewriting the question (in part or in whole) as part of the answer, was witnessed in this section, albeit minimally this time around, compared to previous years.

The performances per question were as follows:

Question 1

The theme of this piece of writing was hobbies or leisure activities. There was good to very good performance in less than half the centres, and by a certain measure, in about 30% of the candidature. These were candidates who garnered between 4 and 8 out a total of 8 marks. Centres and candidates who did well are commended. So are the teachers.

This question tested the candidates' abilities in the following areas:

- 1. Identifying and stating the hobby:** 'la guitare', 'le violon', ou 'le football', 'le tennis', etc.
- 2. Using the appropriate 'jouer' expression** 'jouer de/du' or 'jouer à/ jouer à'/u e.g. 'je joue de la guitare'/ 'je joue au rugby', etc.
- 3. Starting or adding a time referent** eg 'quand' (when) eg. '...quand je suis libre'/ 'le weekend...' etc.
- 4. Inserting or adding a spatial referent** e.g. 'Où (where) e.g. 'au stade', '
- 5. Using appropriate syntax, grammar etc.** e.g. ('je joue au ..., nous jouons au ...')
- 6. Using varied lexicon**, e.g. 'en jouant...', 'je passe mon temps libre...', 'je m'amuse en...', etc.
- 7. Using the correct register and sticking to the appropriate length** e.g. using 'je' or 'nous' and sticking to 35-40 words as well.

Question 2

Candidates did not do well in this question by a huge margin. Less than 20% of candidates scored above 50% of the total 7 marks in this question, proving it to be the most difficult of all.

Apart from candidates who read and/or saw (in the prompt) something else but a burglary or illegal or forced entry, most candidates who correctly spotted the context, were let down by a plethora of insufficiencies. The challenges candidates faced were as follows:

1. **Thematic:** To most candidates, the theme of theft or burglary or break-in requisite expression seemed difficult to grapple with. Candidates were required to have an idea on the theme of 'voler' or 'un cambriolage' or 'entrer illégalement'
2. **Lexical:** Candidates seemed to have a challenge with words and vocabulary. Expected words include: 'le voleur', 'l'étranger', 'cambrioler' 'prendre'/voler', 'porter', 'des vêtements noirs', 'allumer' 'une torche' etc.
3. **Syntactical:** One of the biggest challenges was the inadequate competence in the use of the past tenses (le passé composé and l'imparfait). Expected verbal phrases included 'a volé', 'est entré', 'allumait/a allumé', 'a pris', etc.

A phenomenon which seems to reflect candidates' frustrations was an attempt to write English words in French or just writing English where weaknesses were encountered. Multiple examples were encountered including: 'clothesé', 'stolé', 'j'ai shocké', 'la police arresté'.

Paper 3 202/03 Speaking

This paper is out of 25 marks.

General comments

The Speaking paper comprises of three tasks: **Guided Interview** (8 marks), **General Conversation** (8 marks) and **Role Play** (9 marks) and it is conducted by the teachers of French in the centres who then assume the role of Examiners. As usual, Examinations Council of Eswatini provided CDs on which to record the examination.

ECESWA notes that Examiners have done very well in adhering to the requirements of conducting the speaking examination, saving the recordings, and dispatching the CDs to ECESWA. The examiners are commended.

As a general comment, once again, candidates performed better in the first task, the Guided Interview. The next two tasks seemed to be more challenging. Of note is that there generally was a tendency by Examiners to be generous with awarding marks; in some cases, the generosity was glaring. Examiners are cautioned that awarding candidates unjustifiably high marks is not only unprofessional but may lead to serious penalty as well.

As a concluding general observation, challenges stem from the fact that the procedures outlined in the Examiner's Notes seemed to be contravened, or at worst, unread. It is for this reason that ECESWA strongly advises that **Examiners read and adhere to Examiner's Notes as required.**

Observations on the tasks

Guided Interview

This part of the examination continued to be done fairly well. Nonetheless, three (3) years into the syllabus, there continues to be procedural practices, albeit in a minority of cases, that go against expectations. Examiners are encouraged to read the Examiner's Notes every time before they conduct the examination. By so doing, Examiners will be aware of, or be reminded to ensure the avoidance of, the uncommon but still unacceptable challenges such as noise disturbances, choosing of cards and the do's and don'ts when conducting the examination. Some of the challenges include:

1. **Themes:** The unfortunate practice of Examiners drawing from more than one thematic area recurs. Another challenge related to the correct procedure of asking questions: 2 personal questions and 3 questions on ONE theme, asked chronologically.
2. **Questioning:** examiners are reminded that they are permitted to rephrase questions but not to change them nor to ask leading questions. As an example, the question 'D'où venez-vous?' is not the question 'Où habites-tu?'.

General Conversation

In this section, the roles are reversed with the Examiner expected to answer 5 stimuli-based questions posed by candidates. Candidates performed averagely. The common challenges related to:

1. **Candidates struggling to formulate questions in a varied manner.** Most candidates relied on the Interrogative 'Quel' and other variations (Où, Comment, Est-ce que, etc) featured extremely minimally.
2. In a handful of cases, candidates struggled to **formulate questions at all.**
3. In a couple of instances, candidates seemed to realise some success formulating questions albeit in a rugged and an English-pronunciation basis, which was puzzling in the context of the overall dismal performance. In the context of the afore-mentioned puzzle, Examiners are cautioned to ensure that candidates neither have access to the examination questions prior to the examination nor use dictionaries nor take notes while preparing their cards.
4. Another common but equally discouraged feature of this question and answer, candidate-teacher task, was the systematic attempt by the Examiners to cover for candidate inadequacies (in terms of formulating intelligible questions) by giving full answers to constructions that cannot be viewed as proper questions or even questions at all.

This latter behaviour by Examiners, evident in the Role Play task as well, may be construed as a deliberate ploy to offer illegal assistance to candidates. Any form of undue influence to the correct reflection of candidate performances may be viewed as misconduct. As such, Examiners are implored to desist from this type of conduct.

Role Play

The 'Role Play' task, where the candidate is expected to initiate and sustain a conversation in which s/he is buying a product or procuring services, was not done satisfactorily even in the year 2023 even though the products used for the task were all familiar – clothes (les vêtements), food (la nourriture), stationery (la papeterie) and books (les types de livres). Similarly, syntactic competence let the candidates down as they failed to exhibit requisite proficiency to carry out exchanges as expected. Useful expressions in the context of buying and selling (such as "Je voudrais", 'C'est combien?/ 'Ça coûte combien?', 'Y-a-t-il de la monnaie ?') were lacking.

Just as a reminder, candidates need to be able to engage in a conversation that has more or less the following traits (in initiation or in response to the Examiner's cues).

- Greetings
- Requesting/buying the product
- Asking for the price
- Responding if that would be all they needed or buying more
- Paying and asking for change
- Thanking the seller/bidding farewell

Conclusion

In conclusion, ECESWA wishes to highlight the following:

1. The growth of this syllabus is promising as there was an increment in the candidature.
2. New centres have emerged and those which taken a hiatus have reappeared.
3. Generally, despite some improvements, performance continued to remain below average.
4. While there were centres that excelled, it is apparent that a good performance could not be achieved due to a handful of centres that performed very poorly.
5. The Writing paper (Paper 2) continues to be the biggest challenge for candidates and the Speaking paper is still not done as well as expected.