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Silent Shifts: The Covert Promotion of English (L2) in Eswatini First Language (L1) Education Framework

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Rooted in game theory and the economics of language, this qualitative study examines the muted shift entrenched in the Eswatini language-in-education policy. The principal question the study addresses is: Do schools and classroom practices in Eswatini support the provisions of the national language-in-education policy? Data are drawn from archival document analysis, observations and interviews conducted with teachers and government officials randomly selected from the four administrative regions of Eswatini. The findings reveal that despite the theoretical objectives of the language-in-education policy, such as promoting additive bilingualism and cultural pride through siSwati, the actual implementation practices reflect a stark contradiction. SiSwati enjoys official status but is side-lined in practice in favour of English and other globally valued languages. This practice has resulted in English being the preferred language of all educational institutions – a preference that has created difficulties for content teachers in addressing students' language needs in the context of individual schools' domestic policy guidelines. From the findings, the study argues that despite the best intentions, language policies might, like other 'placed resources', become dysfunctional when the Ministry of Education and Training fails to provide consistent support, clear implementation guidelines and adequate teacher training aligned with the policy guidelines. The Ministry of Education and Training is aware of the inconsistency between policy and practice, but it is unable to take serious action to curtail this practice, as the policymakers themselves subvert the public good.

Keywords: additive bilingualism, classroom practice, elite bilingualism, English-siSwati divide, Eswatini, language-in-education policy

1 Introduction

Situated in Southern Africa, Eswatini is a small landlocked country marked by linguistic and cultural homogeneity (Chebane & Dlali, 2019), yet it is receptive to "diverse flows of people to and from its borders" (Lorente, 2017, p. 486). Even though she is home to diverse nationalities that have unique economic, social and linguistic backgrounds, Eswatini's languages remain the backbone of the nation's identity and policy framework.

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During the colonial era, the British administration in Eswatini adopted an exoglossic bilingual policy (Kamwangamalu, 2000) which reflected the vernacularization and internationalisation ideologies of language policy (Cobarrubias, 1983). Vernacularization aimed to restore and adopt an indigenous African language as an official language, while internationalisation preserved the role of a non-indigenous language (Kamwangamalu, 2013). Under this policy isiZulu [1], representing siSwati [2] as the national language, and English were accorded official status in the Eswatini socio-political and sociolinguistic landscapes (Mordaunt, 1990). After Eswatini attained independence in 1968, siSwati replaced isiZulu, and in 2005, it was formalised as the official national language alongside English (Constitution of the Kingdom of Swaziland, 2005). This meant that the two languages would play "equal" essential roles in business, education, media and general communication. SiSwati would be the foundation to the country's cultural identity, while English would facilitate Eswatini's connection to global communication and international network (Kamwangamalu, 2013).

The formalisation of siSwati as an official language ensured its use in all government operations making the country's language policy an inclusive one that balanced the preservation of the linguistic heritage with the global demands for English proficiency. However, English soon dominated the national discourse, while siSwati remained confined to informal and cultural events. For instance, formal public speeches by heads of state and other prominent figures were delivered in English, often during live broadcasts (Magongo, 2009; Dlamini, 2019).

In accordance with the constitutional mandate, Eswatini's language-in-education policy requires the use of both official languages in education. SiSwati is primarily used in elementary education, while English is the exclusive medium of instruction beyond this level. However, this policy reveals underlying tensions between two competing forces: decolonisation (a central category of national identity) and internationalism (a category of globalisation). Decolonisation framed through the lens of additive bilingualism advocates for siSwati as the medium of instruction in early education, positioning it as crucial for preserving national identity. Conversely, internationalisation, embedded in the forces of globalisation, implicitly promotes English as the dominant language of instruction and communication, positioning it as the key to further studies, access to global citizenship and the global economy. According to Kamwangamalu (2013, p. 326), globalisation is an extension of neo-colonialism perpetuated through the ideology of internationalisation which inherently fosters inequality among people. Internationalisation functions universally through the medium of one language, English.

The tension between decolonisation (nationalism) and internationalisation (globalisation) has produced a disjuncture and contradictions in Eswatini's language-in-education policy. On the one hand, it encourages first language (L1) instruction, but on the other, it practices subtractive bilingualism. Thus, while the Eswatini's language-in-education policy encourages L1 instruction, it operates through subtractive bilingualism.

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1 IsiZulu is one of the official South African indigenous languages that is mutually intelligible with siSwati. IsiZulu and siSwati share close linguistic ties, including similar phonological, grammatical, and syntactical structures

2 SiSwati did not have an orthography before independence (Mordaunt, 1990)

Anchored on game theory (Laitin, 1993), the language policy framework and the economics of language (Chiswick, 2008), this study exposes the rivalry of agendas masked in Eswatini's language-in-education policy. It contends that Eswatini's language-in-education policy is an interest-driven game. While it outwardly emphasizes L1 instruction, it subliminally encourages L2 English use. The actions or moves of the key players in the policy game publicly promote the language-in-education policy, but sabotage it privately. The study demonstrates that the clandestine choice of English as the medium of instruction is informed by the vested interest of the elite who, while encouraging the masses to hold onto siSwati (as a form of nationalism), are reaping the material payoffs that siSwati does not have in the linguistic marketplace (Kamwangamalu, 2013).

This study first traces Eswatini's language policy from colonial times to the present to demonstrate how stakeholders all plan to win and value the language-in-education policy's outcomes differently (Kamwangamalu, 2013, p. 328). It then provides a survey of language practices in selected schools and the control measures that the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) enforce to ensure practitioners' adherence to the language-in-education policy. The study concludes that while the MoET, the architect of the language-in-education policy mandates L1 instruction at the grassroots level of a learner's education, and is aware of the inconsistency between policy and practice, it is unable to take substantial action to curtail the entrenched use of English. This study is guided by the following research questions: (a) What are the principal assumptions or expectations of the Eswatini language-in-education policy? (b) What are the existing language practices in Eswatini classrooms? (c) Do classroom practices support the provisions of the national language-in-education policy? (d) What execution strategies and regulatory measures have the MoET adopted in order to enforce adherence to the language-in-education policy? Answers to these questions demonstrate the incongruities within the Eswatini language-in-education policy and how they influence implementation.

2 Theoretical framework

This study is informed by the language policy framework (Bamgbose, 2004; Kamwangamalu, 2000, 2013), the economics of language (Chiswick, 2008) and game theory (Benz, Jager & van Rooij, 2006; Laitin, 1993).

A language-in-education policy is a key component of language policy and planning - a government's deliberate effort to influence the acquisition, structure and function of language codes (Cooper, 1989). While language policy regulates the use of language within a country, language planning involves human intervention in the natural processes of language change, diffusion and erosion (Wardhaugh, 2006). LoBianco (2004) subdivides language planning into five types:

a) Status planning – alters the function of a language and assigns different statuses to languages.
b) Corpus planning – selects and develops the norms for a language codifies its grammar and spelling and develops its terminology.
c) Acquisition planning – implements language use in education, ensuring the learning of official and national/vernacular languages.
d) Usage planning – expands the use of language(s) into new domains enhancing its practicality
e) Prestige planning – enriches and expands the literature on the language.

The success of a language-in-education policy hinges on all the planning processes. The Constitution of Eswatini's elevation of siSwati to an official position alongside English links the language to all aspects of language planning. As an official language, SiSwati is involved in status planning, its norms are evolving (corpus planning), it is a language of grassroots education (acquisition planning); it is expanding into new domains (usage planning), and its literature is being developed (prestige planning).

In the economics of language framework, language and language skills are viewed as forms of human capital, essential for economic success (Chiswick, 2008). These skills are acquired through the investment of scarce resources – such as time and money – anticipating future benefits (Ibid.). Chiswick suggests that one's productivity in the labour market is heightened by one's expertise and effective use of the area's dominant language. Those who speak the dominant language face fewer barriers to employment than those who do not; whose social and informational networks are limited to their linguistic communities (Chiswick, 2008, p. 5). In Eswatini, English holds status dominance, has a high market value and thus functions as an economic asset. Since English is a global language, proficiency in it is critical for both educational and economic advancement, transnational employability and mobility. Therefore, in Eswatini, English has been prioritised to align with global economic systems.

Game theory analyses the behaviour of players in a game as they seek to optimize benefits (Benz, Jager & van Rooij, 2006; Laitin, 1993), and provides an insightful framework for understanding the dynamics at play in the Eswatini language-in-education policy. In this context the policy's siSwati/English dichotomy can be viewed as a game theoretic problem. The key players are the stakeholders – the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), teachers, parents and learners. These stakeholders are confronted with two competing pressures – nationalism and globalisation. While globalisation has elevated English as a tool for international communication, nationalism pressures individuals to preserve their indigenous languages, even if these languages lag behind in global technological and economic spheres (Laitin, 1993, p. 228). Through the enactment of Circular 21/73 and the Education sector policies of 2011 and 2018, the MoET has essentially provided a 'solution' to the globalisation versus nationalism dilemma, a binary choice between two options – the "cherry" of English (globalisation) and the "strawberry" of siSwati (nationalism). The stakeholders are required to choose between the relevance of siSwati based instruction and instruction in English which is widely perceived as the 'door opener' to national and global opportunities. In many African countries, people learn a European language to maximize their economic opportunities, as rewards for proficiency in these languages far outweigh those of indigenous languages (Scotton, 1982, p. 85, cited in Laitin, 1993, p. 232). The MoET is aware of the preferences influencing stakeholders' decisions and as the results would show, subtly reinforces the choice of English. English operates as a form of currency in linguistic markets (Bock & Mheta, 2014) where stakeholders invest in to secure greater socio-economic benefits. This study uses the language policy framework, game theory and the economics of language to explore the silent shifts reflected in Eswatini's language-in-education policies.

3 Methodology and data description

To explore the tension between language policy and practice in the education system of Eswatini, this study employed a qualitative research design. Qualitative research places emphasis on the way people make sense of their experiences, views and perceptions in order to understand the social reality (Mohajan, 2018). This approach helped the researcher gain a rich understanding of the subjects' beliefs and views on the siSwati/English dichotomy. It uncovered the implicit and explicit dynamics at play in the policy's implementation by focusing on the contradictions between the stated goals and actual practices in the schools.

3.1 Data Description

The data for this study included both qualitative text-based data from archival document analysis and responses to open-ended questionnaires. The archival documents consisted of official policy documents form the MoET, language policy statements, curriculum frameworks, and other formal documents that outline government's position on language education (Table 1). Classroom observations, open-ended questionnaire and interviews were also used as data collection tools. Analysing policy documents allowed the researcher to identify the ideological assumptions behind the language-in-education policy. Classroom observations provided first hand evidence of the languages used in the classrooms and the purposes behind their use. While interviews with teachers gave insights into teachers' experiences and the choices they made in language use, interviews with the inspectorate helped explain the mismatches between policy and practice, and how the incongruities caused contradictions or non-compliance to policy. The open-ended questionnaire responses provided insights into lived experiences of teachers and government officials, revealing how they interpreted and responded to language-in-education policy in practice.

3.2 Data Collection Method

Data were gathered through the analysis of archived documents, interviews, open-ended questionnaires and classroom observations.

3.2.1 Archival document analysis

Policy documents, World Bank educational reports, official language policy documents and other relevant government publications provided archival data. Through the analyses of these documents, the study identified the stated language policy goals, directives, and official justifications for the promotion of L1 and L2 in educational contexts. Table 1 below provides a list of the documents used as primary data.

Author	Year of Publication	Title of Document	Place of Publication
Government of Swaziland	1985	Reform through Dialogue Report of the National Education Review Commission	MoET, Mbabane
Ministry of Education and Training (MoET)	1986	Policy Document on Education	MoET, Mbabane
MoET	1998	National Policy Statement on Education	Mbabane, Eswatini
MoET	1999	National Policy Statement on Education	Mbabane, Eswatini
MoET	2005	International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) Consultative Document	MoET, Mbabane
The Government of Eswatini	2006	The Constitution of the Kingdom of Eswatini in English and SiSwati	Mbabane, Eswatini
MoET	2006	Language Education Policy Discussion Document	Mbabane, Eswatini
MoET	2009	Proposal for "Teaching – Language policy for 10 year Basic Education Programme and Beyond" Discussion paper	MoET, Mbabane
MoET	2011	The Swaziland education and Training Sector Policy	MoET, Mbabane
MoET	2013	National Education and Training improvement Programme (NETIP)	The government of the Kingdom of Swaziland
MoET	2018	The Swaziland education and Training Sector Policy	MoET, Mbabane
The World Bank	2021	Report No: AUS0002298 Eswatini Education Sector Analysis	Washington DC 20433, USA
Ministry of Economic Planning and Development	16 June, 2022	National Development Plan 2023/24 – 2027/28 (Final Draft)	Eswatini

Table 1. Documents used as primary data

3.2.2 Open-ended Questionnaires

In order to gather viewpoints from individuals directly involved in the education system, the study administered open-ended questionnaires to a purposive sample of teachers and government officials. Open-ended questionnaires have a low

probability of guesswork (Abdolreza Gharehbagh, Mansourzadeh, Montazeri Khadem & Saeidi, 2022); they allowed the respondents to express their views and opinions freely on the subject. The participants were selected from the four administrative regions of Eswatini to ensure a diversity of viewpoints and experiences. With permission from the head teachers, the researcher administered the questionnaires to participants who had consented to the study. The questionnaires were designed to explore participants' perceptions and experiences of the language-in-education policies.

3.2.3 Classroom observations

In order to assess the actual language practices in the classrooms, student engagement with the lessons or activities conducted in English and the student-teacher interaction during the lessons, the researcher observed how teachers and students actually used language in Grade 1, Grade 3 and Grade 7 classes each with about 60 learners. The researcher used descriptive notes to record her observation and what she heard, and reflective notes for the impressions she had. This included identifying the balance between siSwati and English instruction, how teachers mediated meaning and how students engaged with the lessons taught in English in English language and Social Studies classes.

3.2.4 Sampling strategy

Teachers and government officials were selected to ensure a representative range of experiences from both the grassroots (teachers) and policy-making (government officials) perspectives. The selection process aimed to include educators across different regions, school levels, and subjects.

3.3 Ethical considerations

Following ethical principles, the researcher first approached the head teachers and inspectorate to set up appointments with them and the teachers in each school. This was done in order to introduce the study and to seek the participants' involvement and informed consent (Yin, 2018). On the day of the interview and administering of the questionnaires, the study was explained to those who had volunteered to be participants and their rights were explained. Finally, they were assured that their identity would be protected and they would remain anonymous.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis – a method for analysing qualitative data that entails searching for recurring ideas (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2015, p. 33). This analysis comprises rational grouping of the data with related messages (Bailey, 2018). Using this method the researcher identified, analysed and reported recurring patterns or themes within the gathered data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Following the six phases involved in carrying out thematic analysis – familiarisation with data, producing codes, creating preliminary themes, reviewing the themes and writing the final report (ibid.) the researcher coded and categorised the themes emerging from the data. Archival documents were reviewed for key themes relating to the national language policy and language-

in-education policy, with a particular focus on discrepancies between policy goals and practices. Responses from open-ended questionnaires were coded to identify recurring themes and patterns related to language practices in schools, the role of government policies, and the challenges of implementing the policy. Thematic analysis enabled the researcher to identify common ideas across the archival documents, interviews and open ended questionnaires. It specifically allowed for an in-depth exploration of the contradictions present in the language policy and its implementation, as well as the perceptions and experiences of those responsible for its enforcement.

3.5 Limitations

Data were collected only through document analyses, interviews, questionnaires and classroom observations. These were sites where the researcher observed and measured the enactment of the language-in-education policy. Parental perspectives are not included in this study because they are not directly involved in the implementation of a school-based policy. Further, including parents would have required gaining consent from them and their approval for the school children. This would have required the approval of the Ministry of Education and Training. Since the study was time-bound, it would not have been feasible to focus on actors other than the school personnel.

4 Findings

This section presents the findings of the study based on the research methodology and the research questions.

4.1 The principal assumptions or expectations of the Eswatini language-in-education policy

Archival and policy document analysis revealed that the government of Eswatini, through the MoET, officially endorsed siSwati and English as the languages of education in Circular No. 21/73 and later reaffirmed this stance in the Education Sector (EDSEC) policy documents of 2011 and 2018. This endorsement was influenced by national and international frameworks, including the Kingdom of Eswatini's Constitution (2005), the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNESCO, 2003), and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children (African Union, 1990). These documents highlighted the dual role of language in both cognitive development and social justice, recognising the value of L1 instruction as a fundamental right (Hazik & Farik, 2016).

Both Circular No. 21/1973 and the EDSEC policies directed L1 instruction at the lower level of education, particularly in the formative years (Grades 1-4). The rationale behind this was grounded in the concept of additive bilingualism, where learners are encouraged to develop proficiency in both their L1 and L2. This approach, often referred to as “bridging bilingualism,” aims to foster socio-economic development, enhance L2 learning, promote social cohesion, and preserve cultural heritage (Kamwangamalu, 2013; Tiwari, 2024; Ferreira-Meyers & Horne, 2017).The policies also suggested that the use of English would become the medium of instruction after Grade 4, in alignment with global trends in education.

Circular No. 21/73 explicitly stated that both siSwati and English would be taught as subjects from the first grade, with siSwati serving as a medium of instruction up until Grade 4. The document recommended French as an additional language for learners - a reflection of the global orientation of the policy. Circular 21/73 also instructed the phased removal of languages other than siSwati and English from the curriculum after 1974, unless specific permission was granted by the Ministry of Education for inclusion as extra-curricular activities (Mordaunt, 1990).

The 2011 and 2018 EDSEC policies endorsed the pronouncement of Circular 21/73, and reiterated the importance of siSwati as a medium of instruction for the first four grades of a child's education. These policies explicitly outlined that English would transition to the medium of instruction after Grade 4, with English continuing to be taught as a subject up to Grade 4. The policies presented a balance between the promotion of a national identity through siSwati and the practical advantages of proficiency in English.

Research has proven that an education in the mother tongue yielded healthier educational results (Ball, 2011) and enhanced comprehension and cognitive development **(**Bamgbose, 2004; Batibo, 2014; Mazrui & Njogu, 2018 & Nkonde et al., 2018). By encouraging instruction in siSwati in early education, the language-in-education policies provided for the advantages and ease with which learners would confront an education while recognising and preserving their cultural identity in response to the demands of nationalism. Educators would integrate cultural teachings and in that way the culture of the Swati would be transmitted to future generations. This finding resonated with Kamwangamalu's (2013) observation that African indigenous languages as the medium of instruction in early education situate them as crucial for preserving national identity.

Further, by providing a framework for fostering additive bilingualism in lower education, the policies aimed to balance the linguistic needs of the community with the demands of global communication. Circular 21/73, and EDSEC policies (2011 & 2018) recognised cultural identity and the importance of English in global communication and in maximising economic opportunities. This approach mirrored similar educational language policies across other African countries, such as South Africa, Mozambique, Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Lesotho, which promote L1 instruction in early childhood education (Bamgbose, 2004; Batibo, 2014; Brock-Utne, 2005; MoET, 2011; Molosiwa, 2007; Mordaunt, 1990; Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture, 2003; Nhong, 2013; UNICEF, 2017; Mazrui & Njogu, 2018 & Nkonde et al., 2018). These policies aligned with UNESCO and UN's advocacy for the use of L1 in early childhood education for better educational outcomes (Ball, 2011).

As archival document and policy document analyses required that siSwati and English be the media of instruction and communication and staggered each language's use, it was thus expected that schools adhered to and implemented the policy pronouncements as the "creation and implementation of language education policy is a crucial tool for nations to realise their national cultural [and global] goals…[and a policy document] serves as the programmatic document that directs language education and the acquisition of linguistic superiority" (Wu, 2023, p.1). As the results would further show, the policies turned out to be critical enablers of the siSwati language devaluation and trivialisation.

4.2 The existing language practices in Eswatini classrooms

In determining the existing language practices in the classrooms, the researcher conducted classroom observations to gauge the alignment of school practices with the official policy. The findings reveal significant contradictions and inconsistencies in the use of the languages of instruction in the classrooms.

4.2.1 Exclusive use of English - Low class engagement

Classroom observations revealed that both siSwati and English were the languages of instruction in the schools. However, in all the Grades in English and Social Studies Classes of 60+ learners each, the learners exhibited low engagement when the teachers used English exclusively. When the teachers asked comprehension-check questions, many learners remained passive and responded with blank expressions. In a Grade 6 Social Studies class, a few showed minimal participation through gestures or verbal responses. However, in all the classes their attentiveness increased when the teachers alternated between English and siSwati or provided explanations in siSwati. At these moments, the students appeared to follow the lessons more closely. However, when they were asked questions in English after the siSwati explanations, their responses indicated linguistic difficulty as they stuttered while attempting to construct answers in English which were often grammatically incorrect. The learners' responses indicated that the English only approach hindered engagement and that the strategic use of L1 especially in the lower grades might support more effective outcomes. This observation suggested that while teachers forced an English monolingual instruction, many learners struggled to process and express ideas exclusively in English – a challenge Early and Norton (2014) found to be confronting content teachers in addressing their students' language needs in the context of contemporary policy guidelines.

4.2.2 Alternation between English and siSwati

The researcher also observed many teachers *stealthily* alternating between English and siSwati. While English dominated the lessons and instruction, when the learners showed signs of lack of comprehension, the teachers reverted to siSwati. The teachers explained that "*Labantfwana abasiva siNgisi*" ("these children do not understand English"). Alternating between English and siSwati was a response to the learners' limited proficiency in English. One teacher explained that although the school administrators had mandated English as the medium of instruction, the learners struggled to understand English without clarifications in siSwati. Teacher S added that "whenever you teach in English, most of the learners are not actively involved; they need you to translate to siSwati so that they grasp whatever you are talking about". These observations and teachers' remarks echoed Clegg and Simpson's (2016) observation that in African countries in which English is the medium of instruction, many learners in primary school and beyond did not have sufficient ability in English to achieve grade-appropriate subject knowledge. The learners' inability to understand and communicate in English restricted their access to effective classroom practice and by extension to the school curriculum. These observations highlighted the substantial gap in

language comprehension that necessitated the switch to L1 for better understanding.

Notably, the practice of language alternation was supported by the EDSEC (2011 & 2018) policies, which allowed teachers to mediate meaning in the local language, but it ran counter to the English-only policies that governed many schools. These English-only policies, while well-intentioned in promoting proficiency in the global lingua franca, created a conflict of intentions: they mandated English as the medium of instruction but failed to account for learners' actual language capabilities, leaving teachers to find pragmatic solutions. Worse still, as Teacher T pointed out, "no MoET official has visited my school to assess or address these challenges". This statement further illustrated the gap between policy design and its on-the-ground implementation.

Despite the significant language barriers, teachers continued to emphasize the importance of English, viewing it as crucial for academic advancement and social mobility. Teachers cited English as a prerequisite for higher education and employment opportunities, echoing Gibbons' (1987) assertion that English proficiency is linked to higher social status and economic benefits. Thus teachers felt compelled to adhere to institutional policies promoting English-only instruction from the outset of a student's education, viewing it as the key to success in an increasingly globalised world and siSwati as a '*curative device*'.

The prevailing strong preference for English in Eswatini reflects broader ideological forces that shape educational systems in post-colonial contexts. As Makoni (1999), noted, colonial linguistic engineering has long privileged colonial languages for governance and education. This historical legacy of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 2009) has continued to influence attitudes toward language choice, reinforcing the societal belief that English is the primary gateway to social and economic advancement. Therefore, the continued use of English amidst learners' comprehension challenges emphasised the focus on proficiency to facilitate their entry into the job market.

4.3 Classroom practices supporting the provisions of the national language-in-education policy.

To explore the extent to which schools or classroom practices aligned with the national language-in-education policy, school head teachers and teachers were asked about (a) their awareness of the country's language-in-education policy, (b) adherence to the policy, and (c) whether or not their schools had enacted institutional policies that supported the national language-in-education policy.

a) Awareness of the Eswatini language-in-education policy

The findings revealed mixed levels of awareness regarding the Eswatini language-in-education policies. While some school administrators and a few teachers mentioned that they were aware of the EDSEC 2011 and 2018 policies' existence, others alleged that they were not. Some teachers expressed their awareness of the policy's general direction, specifically regarding the use of siSwati and English as official languages of instruction. However, they indicated that despite this knowledge, the policy was not actively implemented in practice. For example, Teacher A mentioned, "*Yes, it [the policy] is siSwati and English, but we do not use it.*" Teacher B added, that "*the head teacher once talked about it, but he urged us to use*

English. Other teachers were either unfamiliar with the policy or confused about its specifics. For instance Teacher D stated, "*I do not know what a language-in-education policy is,*" and Teacher F confused the language-in-education policy with the national language policy. Teacher H, a head teacher decried the lack of induction or workshops from the MoET, stating that, "*NO ONE has ever inducted or work-shopped me on policy issues, and I do not even have the EDSEC policy document in my school*." These responses suggested that some teachers were not aware of the policy; and those that were, were not informed about how to operationalize it in the classroom. As Farrell (2022) noted, the lack of information about a policy and on operationalising it could lead to confusion in practice. As would be later revealed, the lack of proper guidance on operationalising Eswatini language-in-education policy had subjected it to different interpretations and led to varied practices in the schools that did not align with the intended goals.

Further, these responses reflected not only a common theme in top-down approaches to policy implementation, where educators felt disconnected from the policy's goals (Tiwari, 2024), but an ineffective communication of disseminating policy issues from the MoET. The absence of comprehensive induction and dissemination of policy documents by MoET had hindered policy awareness and understanding and suggested a gap between policy creation and its implementation at the school level. Consequently, if the frontline educators were not aware or even supported by the MoET, the policy had remained symbolic rather than functional.

b) Adherence to the language-in-education policy

The findings also revealed a significant gap between the policy goals and the practices observed in schools. While the policy directed the use of siSwati and English as media of instruction, many teachers reported that they did not observe the directive. Teacher V boldly stated that "*we do not use it.*" The key reason for this non-adherence was the perception that by the time learners started school, they were 'already *proficient* in English', making it thus unnecessary or even disadvantageous to use siSwati as the language of instruction. Teacher C mentioned that using siSwati would hinder the learners' proficiency development in English, a language perceived as more crucial for future academic and economic success. Although classroom observations revealed an alternation between English and siSwati, the English only sentiment mirrored the arguments made by proponents of English-medium instruction who suggested that the use of L1 in early education might impede proficiency in the global language (Tiwari, 2024). However, this view contradicted the principle of additive bilingualism, where L1 instruction was seen as the foundation for L2 acquisition and cognitive development. Therefore, the competition between these two linguistic directions – L1 (siSwati) and L2 (English) – reflected the broader linguistic market theory (Bourdieu, 1991), where English was seen as the dominant language that offered greater socio-economic mobility and access to global opportunities.

Teachers and school administrators expressed frustration with the policy's emphasis on L1 instruction, noting that educational materials were predominantly in English, and there was little institutional support for translating materials into siSwati. Teacher H's comments that "*If we were to teach in siSwati, we would need to translate all the material into siSwati, but no one is willing to do that*" underscored the practical challenges of implementing the policy when available resources did not support it.

These findings echoed broader trends observed across Africa, where English-medium instruction often prevailed despite official policies that advocated for the use of indigenous languages in education. Studies have highlighted the dominance of English in African educational systems and the struggle of national languages to gain traction in the curriculum (Brock-Utne, 2005; Kamwangamalu, 2013). The preference for English reflected the globalisation of English, where proficiency in it is seen as essential for economic and social advancement (Grin, 2019; Gimenez & Passoni, 2016).

The teachers' non-adherence to policy dictates and their focus on English as the preferred language for instruction aligned with the linguistic capital theory (Bourdieu, 1991) which suggests that English is perceived as a key resource for social and economic mobility in the globalized world. Additionally, the challenges reported by educators resonated with game theory (Laitin, 1993), which explored how the decisions of individuals (teachers, school administrators) were influenced by the perceived rewards of language proficiency, further reinforcing the primacy of English over siSwati in the education system.

The findings underscored significant barriers to the effective implementation of the Eswatini language-in-education policy. Although the policy's goals were aligned with the broader international frameworks, such as those promoted by UNESCO and the African Union, the lack of awareness, training and resources at the school level had hindered its successful execution. The reliance on English as the medium of instruction reflected a broader global linguistic hegemony, where the educational system was structured to prepare students for participation in the global economy rather than to foster cultural and linguistic diversity through the promotion of siSwati.

The discrepancy between policy intentions and actual practices pointed to the importance of policy feedback loops (Bovens et al., 2008), where the outcomes of policy implementation were closely monitored and adjusted to ensure that the original goals were achieved. In this case, a more structured approach to policy induction, resource allocation, and training was essential to bridge the gap between policy and practice.

c) Institutional policies supporting the national language in education policy

The findings revealed a striking discrepancy between national policy and institutional policies. Schools had institutional policies that did not support the national language-in-education policy. Most schools operated an English-only policy, where English served as the medium of instruction and communication, with siSwati used exclusively for teaching the siSwati language as a subject. This finding reflected the widespread belief that English enhanced students' educational and social opportunities, even though scholars like Smith and Roberts (2021) and Cook (2016) had argued that there was no substantial evidence to suggest that maximising L2 exposure universally benefited learners (Tiwari, 2024, p.14).

In some schools, teachers and head teachers reported that their schools had informal or even "tacit policies of monolingualism" (Turner & Wildsmith-Cromarty, 2014). These policies emphasized English-medium instruction for the entire duration of primary education. In one school, the head teacher emphasized that the medium of instruction was English from Grade 1 to Grade 7, with French taught as an additional language. The head teacher stressed that the learners were

only allowed to use siSwati or French during specific lessons or on culture days. This meant that students had limited contact with their L1, typically once a week, a practice which highlighted the marginalisation of the national language in daily school life. In this school, siSwati was largely trivialised and relegated to a cultural role – preserving heritage – but not a central medium for learning, leading to a situation where learners did not derive significant academic benefit from using their L1.

At another school, the head teacher echoed similar sentiments, emphasizing that English was the exclusive medium. The head teacher described the use of any language other than English as a *"crime,"* warning that using any other language would *"close out' some people*." This rigid adherence to English reflected the perception that speaking English was essential for academic and social cohesion within the school community. One teacher stressed that there was no need for a child to learn and use siSwati because by the time the children started school, they were already fluent in their L1. These 'emotional' responses underscored the societal preference for English, which, as (Prah, 2017) suggested, was seen as a tool for social integration and academic success, particularly in a multicultural and multilingual context.

The teachers' resistance to the language-in-education policy became evident when they expressed frustration at the prospect of teaching in siSwati. Several respondents viewed the requirement to use L1 instruction as an unnecessary obstacle. One teacher claimed that it was akin to *"making the child dance on one spot"* since the child was already proficient in siSwati. This sentiment mirrored the view that L1 instruction was unproductive, with teachers perceiving it as hindering students' transition to English-medium instruction, which they considered the more practical and economically advantageous language.

To prove that schools operate policies in direct contrast with the national policy goals, the researcher observed teachers predominantly using English during lessons, and in some cases struggling to communicate with the students during recess. These practices reflected the fact that many schools in Eswatini have institutional policies that deviated or were tangential to the national policy's intent. Such practices reflected linguistic and cultural assimilation (Johnson & Pratt, 2014; Mazrui & Njogu, 2018) and a broader belief that failing to prioritize English in education deprives learners of the opportunity to join "*the Western package of modernity*"., On the contrary, Prah (2015) viewed the preference for English in schools as reflecting a legacy of linguistic self-negation by African elites who seek to Anglicise the youth by reinforcing the status of English as a tool of modernisation.

The preference for English over siSwati ties into linguistic capital theory (Bourdieu, 1991) where languages are viewed as resources that offer economic advantages. As Kamwangamalu (2013, p. 157) noted, the economic value of a language – its role as a "commodity" in the marketplace of global languages – played a central role in the decision to prioritize English over indigenous languages like siSwati in educational settings.

The widespread prioritisation of English underscored the linguistic hierarchy in Eswatini's educational system, where English is viewed as a global language of power and opportunity, while siSwati is relegated to a secondary status despite its constitutional and cultural significance. It also reflected the challenges that the Eswatini language-in-education policy faced in being fully implemented across

the country, particularly in the face of ingrained social and institutional preferences for English.

4.4 The strategies and regulatory measures adopted by the MoET to enforce the national language-in-education policy

In exploring the control measures enforced by the MoET to ensure adherence to the language-in-education policy, the researcher conducted one on one interviews with the inspectorate. This section discusses the extent to which the Ministry of Education and Training in Eswatini had enacted strategies and control measures to ensure adherence to the language-in-education policy, as well as the role of various stakeholders in shaping the education system's language practices.

4.4.1 Quality assurance by school inspectors

The findings revealed that the MoET discharged the inspectorate to ensure quality assurance in the schools. The inspectorate visited the schools to directly observe classes and make judgements about the quality of the pedagogy based on the evidence they collected (Ngcamphalala, Nxumalo & Bhebhe, 2019, p. 320). One of their core mandates is to influence classroom practice, and in the context of the current study, by safeguarding full adherence to policy pronouncements in terms of language use in the schools. Shockingly, one inspector claimed not to know the Eswatini language-in-education policy. Even the three who claimed to know about it, pointed out that when they inspected the schools, their aim was to ensure that curriculum content was delivered appropriately. Even then, they

> disrupted teaching and learning as they came unannounced; …harassed, rudely reprimanded and disrespected the …teachers [.] Further, they… instilled fear on …them [as] they harshly criticized and …confused them as they gave different insights on how best to teach … [Not only did they] threaten the teachers with their jobs [and did not] respect [them, they did not even] provide [them with] constructive criticism (Ngcamphalala, Nxumalo & Bhebhe, 2019. p.316).

The responses from some of the inspectors during interviews and the practices and attitudes of the inspectorate during school visits highlighted limited and inconsistent support of the language-in-education policy. The policy advocated for siSwati medium at grassroots level but actual practices diverged from the guidelines. The inspectorate lacked policy responsiveness, and evaded their mandate regarding specific policy enforcement. This indicated a gap in effective monitoring and control. As Dlamini and Ferreira-Meyers (2023) noted, there was none to medium implementation of the policy in the classrooms. The inspectorate responses also indicated that there were no regular assessments and evaluations conducted to monitor the implementation of the policy. The harsh treatment, lack of constructive feedback (Ngcamphalala, Nxumalo & Bhebhe (2019) were evidence of lack of the regular assessment to identify challenges in siSwati language instruction, for instance, and provision of regular feedback to the schools because they too perceived siSwati as lacking symbolic value and they too supported the English monolingualism bias for educational advancement.

4.4.2 Development of Policy and discussion documents

The inspectorate revealed that the MoET had designed and published policies and discussion documents as reference guides in the operationalization of the language-in-education policy. Though disputed by the teachers, the inspectorate claimed that the MoET ensured that all learners received instruction in siSwati from Grade 1- 4 and transitioned to English in the higher grades. They, however, admitted that currently there was no "proper" language-in-education policy document. Circular 21/73 which was inherited from British rule and EDSEC (2011 & 2018) were discussion documents aimed to mandate L1 (siSwati) instruction at the lower grades. Despite their presence, their pronouncements were not fully implemented or enforced because as Inspector X alleged, *'parents wanted their children to be taught in the medium of English'*. This study expected that the inspectorate ensured that the policies' implementations were not hindered by 'parents' desires. The absence of a "proper" policy document coupled with the shift to honouring parents' wishes cast doubt on guiding implementation practices and demonstrated that the MoET circumvented strategies to ensure adherence to the language-in-education policy hence Anglicisation would still be the norm in educational institutions.

4.4.3 Development of teaching material

From the inspectorate interviews, it emerged that a key strategy that the MoET used to ensure adherence to the language-in-education policy was to develop a school curriculum that integrated both English and siSwati. SiSwati, just like English had been made a core subject in the curriculum and studied as either a L1 or L2. To support their teaching and learning, material such as textbooks were developed at the Eswatini National Curriculum Centre. However, although teaching material had been developed, there was no equity in the content, production of textbooks and assessment among the learners who studied siSwati as a L1 or L2 (Mkhonta-Khoza, Nxumalo & Mohammed, 2023). Learners who studied siSwati as L1 had access to textbooks and their content covered literature, grammar and culture. In terms of assessment, they were assessed on soft skills and critical thinking. For those who studied siSwati as L2, the approach was more practical and more into technology. Therefore, much as teaching materials were developed to cater for both languages, the differing approaches in teaching and assessment created disparities in the acquisition of the language – those studying it as a L1 conformed more to nationalism and those studying it as L2 undervalued it, inadvertently promoting a laid back insolence towards siSwati.

4.4.4 Engagement and collaboration with the ministry of sports and culture

The Eswatini government as the main stakeholder in language policy issues ensured adherence to the language policy by engaging the Ministry of Sports, Culture and Youth Affairs in driving language matters. The annual Ingwenyama Cup[3] that reflects a strong focus on cultural identity is the government's support

[3] Ingwenyama or King's cup is a yearly soccer and traditional dance tournament where the winning team(s) are awarded trophies by King Mswati 111

for the national language. The Ingwenyama Cup fosters a pro-siSwati mood in the nation and complements the fact that an indigenous language is important for community identity, history and culture. However, this approach does not seem to directly address or influence the language-in-education policy within schools, leaving the connection between language policy and educational practice disconnected.

From the interviews, observations and foregoing discussions, it was evident that the MoET lacked concrete strategies for ensuring policy adherence. The inspectorate's limited engagement with the language-in-education policy, along with the failure to develop a comprehensive policy document, demonstrated that there was no consistent mechanism for enforcing the intended language practices in schools.

4.5 Incongruities within the Eswatini language-in-education policy and how they influence implementation

The EDSEC (2011 & 2018) policy was aimed at promoting additive bilingualism but the clause that "teachers in the first four grades of school [could].... use siSwati as a medium of instruction *where learners have difficulties understanding what is taught*" (MoET, 2011, p. 27) implicitly supported an English monolingual bias where the use of a learner's L1 skills were not valued and maintained but were a support system. This policy pronouncement demonstrated competing interests in the language-in-education policy framed through game theory. Stakeholders in the education system were caught between two major pressures: the demands of globalisation and the preservation of national identity. Globalisation presented the need for English proficiency as a tool for international communication, education, and career advancement. Conversely, nationalism emphasised the preservation and promotion of siSwati as a symbol of cultural and national identity. The MoET's policies, which aimed for bilingualism, reflected these tensions by proposing a system where English was emphasized from Grade 5 onwards, while siSwati remained the medium of instruction at lower grades to promote cultural pride.

According to Kamwangamalu (2013, p. 156) language policy and planning in postcolonial Africa is a game in which elite stakeholders strategically advance their own interests. According to the game theory of language regimes, the elite enact policies that theoretically promote the language of the masses, but covertly resist them in practice (Laitin, 1993). In the context of the current study, game theory helped explain the substantial benefits of English over siSwati L1 instruction in the linguistic marketplace and the actions of stakeholders striving to optimize their individual benefits. As Laitin (1993) noted, the success or failure of a game depended on the player's movement. If their actions aligned with the game's goals, the policy was successful; if their actions diverged, the stakeholders might publicly support the policy while subverting it privately (Kamwangamalu 2013, p. 156). In Eswatini, the language-in-education policy aimed for additive bilingualism, while also presenting another option that allowed stakeholders to pursue payoff-driven outcomes.

A game requires a player to make decision between several actions, and the decision depends on the choices made by the other players, as well as the individual player's preferences regarding the final outcomes (Benz, Jager & van Rooij, 2006). For instance, if a person is offered two options - a strawberry (a_1) or

a cherry (a_2) - but can only choose one, the decision will depend on their personal desire. A decision will be made confidently when the decision maker understands the potential outcome of each action (Benz, Jager & van Rooij, 2006). In the case of Eswatini, the language-in-education policy presents a game theoretic challenge, where the Ministry of Education and Training and other stakeholders, such as parents, teachers and learners are players. These players are confronted with two competing pressures—globalisation (a cherry a_2) and nationalism (a strawberry a_1). While the policy dictates that learners should be taught in their L1(siSwati) in the early years to establish a strong foundation (the strawberry a_1) and later transition to English, (the cherry a_2) from Grade 4 onward, globalisation demands English proficiency for students to succeed as global citizens. Since English has become a tool for international communication, "people don't want to be left behind in the train of history, and will equip themselves with language repertoires [the cherry a_2] that meet current needs" (Laitin, 1993, p. 27).

The MoET is acting as the umpire in this game. She sets rules but allows the stakeholders to navigate the game towards their desired outcomes. In the lower grades, all the players are faced with the dilemma of choosing between two options: the strawberry^{a1} and the cherry^{a2}. The MoET observes the players' movements closely, watching how each decision aligns with the goal of the game. Despite knowing the official rule of L1 instruction, the MoET allows players to follow their own desired payoffs, never penalising those who break the rules. By failing to enforce the rules, she indirectly encourages the players to move toward outcomes that align with their material interests (Harsanyi, 1977).

5 Discussion of findings

The study found that the Eswatini government through policy and discussion documents authorised the country's official languages as languages of instruction at the different levels of a learner's educational trajectory. Circular 21/73 and the EDSEC policy documents of 2011 and 2018 were an affirmation of the MoET stance on language issues in education. An analysis of the policies demonstrated that they presented a framework for fostering additive bilingualism in lower education, which was aimed at matching the linguistic needs of the Eswatini community with the demands of global communication. This was an approach that reflected common educational language policies across sub-Saharan countries and aligned with UNESCO and UN's advocacy for the L1 usage in a child's formative years (Ball, 2011).

However, while these policies advocated the promotion of additive bilingualism, the findings suggested that their practical implementation did not fully reflect the intended vision. Despite the clear mandate for L1 instruction at the early grades, classroom language practices revealed a forced English monolingual instruction, wherein many learners struggled to process and express ideas entirely in English. The comprehension and proficiency challenges forced teachers to revert to siSwati - a language that supported more effective outcomes. Notably, the practice of language alternation was initially supported by Circular 21/73 and the EDSEC policies (2011 & 2018).

The study also established that classroom practices did not support the provisions of the national language-in-education policy. The overarching shift towards English as the primary medium of instruction after Grade 4 introduced tensions that undermined the principles of additive bilingualism. This

discrepancy between policy intensions and actual practices underscored a key contradiction in Eswatini's language-in-education policy, a tension explored within the framework of game theory (Laitin, 1993). By suggesting the use of siSwati as a curative device, the actions of the key stakeholders in the education system, particularly those in power, advocated a preference for English, which aligned with the globalising forces that drive language policy decisions (Benz, Jager & van Rooij, 2006; Kamwangamalu, 2013).

Further, the MoET discharged inspectors, developed policies and teaching material as execution strategies and regulatory measures to enforce adherence to the language-in-education policy. However, some teachers were not aware of them and the inspectorate did not provide any operationalising strategies. The lack of awareness and induction aligned with the theory of policy transfer (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000), which highlights how the success of policy implementation is influenced by the communication and transfer of knowledge from policymakers to practitioners. Furthermore, it reflected a power dynamics issue in language policy (Laitin, 1993); where top top-down mandates from the MoET did not effectively reach those responsible for on-the-ground policy enactment, thus undermining the intended outcomes of the policy.

In terms of the economics of language, these findings reflected incongruities within the Eswatini language-in-education policy and how they influenced implementation. They reflected the unequal language market where English, as a global language, offered greater economic and social rewards than siSwati (Chiswick, 2008). The policy emphasis on English, therefore, reflected the interests of the elite, who benefited from the dominance of English, despite the public endorsement of siSwati. This contradiction pointed to the subversive role of language policy in Eswatini education system, where the formal adoption of a bilingual policy masked the implicit prioritisation of English as the key medium for social and economic mobility. The prioritisation of English would assist a few learners to access the knowledge economy through the use of other languages, improve a few students' English competence and reproduce the elite, and create inequalities and increase students' self-worth.

While the EDSEC policy and Circular 21/73 sought to promote additive bilingualism, they also encouraged the use of other languages like French in schools, especially in urban areas. Circular No. 21/73 emphasised that languages other than siSwati could be included in the curriculum, provided they were approved by the MoET. As a result, French, regarded as an internationally desirable language, became a preferred option for schools seeking to align themselves with the global knowledge economy. And, the promotion of French over siSwati in some urban schools exemplified the subliminal support for foreign languages over indigenous languages in the education system. This practice aligned with linguistic imperialism, wherein indigenous languages were seen as less valuable for economic success, while languages with global prestige were privileged (Phillipson, 2009). As Ferreira-Meyers and Horne (2017) argued, languages like French were seen as tools for accessing international opportunities, and were thus positioned as desirable assets in a knowledge driven economy.

Ironically, while EDSEC (2011 &2018) intended that siSwati be the medium of instruction in lower grades, it remained marginalised, especially in urban schools where English and French were increasingly seen as more valuable for social and economic mobility. SiSwati as a subject and a language of instruction remained "de facto restricted to underprivileged schools located in the rural areas" (Beukes,

2009, p. 37). This shift toward foreign languages, despite the formal recognition of siSwati as the national language, illustrated the linguistic stratification within Eswatini's education system, where urban schools had greater access to global resources, further entrenching inequalities between rural and urban learners.

Further, the covert promotion of English was a strategy the MoET used to improve a few students' English competence and reproduce the elite. The same EDSEC (2011, 2018) policy explicitly acknowledged that learners had varying levels of English and permitted the use of siSwati as a remedial tool for students facing comprehension challenges. While this policy recognised the importance of ensuring understanding for all learners, it created an English-siSwati divide. Learners who were proficient in English continued to engage with the curriculum in English, while those struggling with the language were mediated through siSwati. The distinction between 'fluent' English learners and those who needed assistance through their L1 reinforced a system that prioritised English as the language of intellectual production. The use of siSwati was thus relegated to a remedial role, signalling that it was not a language of academic rigor but rather a tool for bridging comprehension gaps. This differentiated approach created a scenario where students with limited proficiency faced not only academic disadvantages but also potential stigmatisation.

In this system, those who mastered English were better positioned to succeed in higher education and in prestigious employment. As Magagula (2011) observed, graduates from English-medium preschools 'make it big in… society' – have a distinct advantage in Eswatini social structure, an advantage that reinforces the elite reproduction function of the education system. Conversely, students who struggle with English are disadvantaged, making it difficult for them to access the same opportunities for socio-economic mobility.

Also, the prioritisation of English is a strategy to create and entrench social inequalities and increase students' self-worth. The policy provisions allowing for the use of siSwati as a remedial tool for learners facing English comprehension challenges inadvertently reinforces a hierarchical system that elevates students proficient in English and marginalises those who are not. This divide perpetuates a cycle of disadvantage, where English proficiency becomes a marker of worth, both academically and socially.

While bilingual education models typically aim for a balance between L1 and L2, the Eswatini policy creates a situation where L1 is only allowed as a 'curative device' for comprehension difficulties, rather than being part of an equitable bilingual framework. This reinforces the idea that siSwati is not a language of intellectual engagement but rather a tool for 'catching up'. For students receiving instruction in siSwati, the stigma of failure is attached, as their inability to grasp English signals to both peers and educators that they are academically inferior. This negative self-perception often leads to low self-esteem and reduced academic motivation harming their long-term educational outcomes and excluding them from global opportunities.

The implementation of the language-in-education policy, while promoting bilingualism in theory, contributes to the creation of linguistic inequalities within the classroom, perpetuating neo-colonial dynamics where English remains the gateway to privilege and socio-economic mobility, while siSwati is relegated to a marginal role. From this discussion, it is evident that the language-in-education policy of Eswatini, although aimed at fostering bilingualism and preserving the national language, faces significant challenges in its implementation due to the

entrenched prioritisation of English. The lack of clear enforcement strategies and the competing interests of different social groups, driven by globalisation and nationalism has created a complex environment where policies are publicly supported but privately undermined. The result is a fragmented system where English continues to dominate, often at the expense of siSwati, a practice that perpetuates social and educational inequalities.

The study also found that the Eswatini language-in-education policy is deliberately inconsistent. The inconsistencies demonstrate the covert game at play between elite bilingualism versus the masses' bilingualism. Eswatini's language-in-education policies covertly favour elite bilingualism, where learners proficient in English (and additional languages like French) are better equipped for higher social and economic mobility. The policies provide two potential paths: additive and elite bilingualism. Additive bilingualism promotes siSwati at the early levels of education and offer linguistic and cultural empowerment. In that way, it benefits those who grow up immersed in siSwati-speaking environments. However, elite bilingualism promotes English instruction from an early age. This promotion leads to greater proficiency in a global language that opens doors to international opportunities and higher socio-economic status. In order to promote elite bilingualism, the policy permits elitist strategies in the classrooms. By not ensuring adherence to policy and not giving operationalization strategies, the elite stakeholders (policymakers) prioritize English to ensure future generations of elites have access to global opportunities. This focus on English and French languages helps perpetuate a divide, where those who are proficient in these languages gain advantages in education, employment, and social status, while siSwati, which is considered less valuable in global economic terms, remains marginalised. The hidden dynamic between elites and masses has led to a "two-tier" education system: one for the elites, where English and other global languages are prioritised, and one for the masses, where siSwati is the default but often seen as an obstacle to social mobility.

6 Conclusion

This study explored the silent shift within Eswatini's language-in-education policy, tracing its evolution from Circular 21/73 to the revised EDSEC policy of 2011 and 2018. While the policy officially positioned siSwati as the primary language of instruction at the grassroots level, in practice, it imperceptibly reinforced the dominance of English particularly in urban schools and elite educational contexts. The policy's endorsement of foreign languages, notably French, alongside the implicit permission for English use where learners face comprehension challenges, further entrenched a system that privileges elite bilingualism over vernacular language instruction.

The study revealed how this dual approach to language – promoting both vernacular and elite bilingualism – had created a paradox. On the one hand, siSwati enjoyed official status, but on the other, it was side-lined in practice in favour of English and other globally valued languages. This practice led to a situation where English along with French, provided privileged access to global knowledge economy, while siSwati remained confined to local contexts with limited educational and economic benefits. The subtle yet strategic reinforcement of English as a medium of instruction supported the reproduction of social

hierarchies, ensuring that those with access to English acquired advantages in terms of social mobility and economic opportunities.

Therefore, despite the theoretical objectives of the language-in-education policy, such as promoting additive bilingualism and cultural pride through siSwati, the actual implementation practices reflected a stark contradiction. Language policy proclamations were not complemented by implementation and continuous development of African languages to become attractive for acquisition and use (Siziba & Maseko, 2024). Policymakers had enacted policies that publicly endorsed both official languages, yet privately reinforced the primacy of English. Although school inspectors and educators were aware of this contradiction, they were unable to challenge it, thus leaving the policy goals unfulfilled in practice. Ultimately, this study concluded that the Eswatini's language-in-education policy, while advancing a theoretical ideal, operates in a manner that sustained entrenched inequalities, reflecting a broader tension between nationalism and globalisation, vernacular and elite bilingualism. This study recommends that for siSwati to accrue prestige, emaSwati themselves must create enabling conditions to foster their use.

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