Swaziland

2.17. Swaziland

2.17.1. Background information
The Kingdom of Swaziland, was a protectorate of South Africa from 1894, becoming a British protectorate in 1903. Swaziland regained independence in 1964. SiSwati and English are the country’s official languages.

Ethnologue lists five languages for Swaziland.

2.17.2. Current language policy
The Swaziland Education Sector and Training Policy articulates the current language-in-education policy of Swaziland:

“SiSwati and English are both regarded as official languages in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Swaziland... The Policy directive is that the mother tongue SiSwati shall be used officially as a medium of instruction for the first four grades of school, after which English shall be the medium of instruction. . . . This does not mean that teaching and learning materials in English shall be translated into siSwati, however; what it means is that teachers in the first four grades of school have the liberty and freedom to use siSwati as a medium of instruction where learners have difficulties in understanding what is taught.” (Ministry of Education and Training, Government of the Kingdom of Swaziland, 2011)

The idea is that, where it is determined that children understand English adequately, English will be used in the early primary grades as well as beginning in Grade 4. The policy also endorses the use of both English and siSwati in the classroom where needed, during the first four grades.

2.17.3. Educational policy and practice
Mazibuko (2013, p. 211) notes that Siswati is the language of instruction for the first three years of primary school, transitioning to English as the medium of instruction afterwards.

Considering that Swaziland has approximately 1.4 million citizens, of whom roughly 75 per cent speak siSwati and fewer than 10 per cent speak English (Lewis et al 2014), the meagre support for siSwati described above - and the lack of public protest about it - is puzzling. USAID’s 2012 education profile for Swaziland (USAID, 2012) makes no reference to language of instruction, an indication that the more extensive use of Swazi languages in the classroom is not seen as an issue. A 2005 description of community libraries in Swaziland similarly does not mention the language of the books, but implies that it is English.