



Lesotho

**The impact of language policy
and practice on children's learning:**
Evidence from Eastern and Southern Africa
2016

2.8. Lesotho

2.8.1. Background information

The evolution of Lesotho as a nation was influenced by internal politics as well as conflicts between Dutch and British colonists. Lesotho gained independence from Britain in 1966.

Ethnologue lists five languages for Lesotho.

2.8.2. Current language policy

Kamwangamalu (2013) states that Lesotho is essentially monolingual in Sotho (or SeSotho), although English and Sotho are both official languages (Constitution of Lesotho, Chapter 1, Section 3), and are both used in schools. English is widely seen as the language of prestige and economic opportunity. Kamwangamalu observes that parents in Lesotho do not want Sesotho used as the medium of instruction even in lower primary education, because Sesotho is not associated with economic value in the local linguistic marketplace: “English is associated with employment opportunities;... it is the language of government and administration and international communication; it is the language of power and status and the language of the elite” (Kamwangamalu, 2013, pp. 161-162).

2.8.3. Education policy and practice

Given that Lesotho is described as a

“monolingual nation” and that more than 99 per cent of its inhabitants are SeSotho speakers (Lekhotho, 2013), it is not surprising that SeSotho features in the education system as the medium of instruction for the first three years of primary school and as an examinable subject through secondary school. What is surprising, from a pedagogical standpoint, is that the medium of instruction switches to English in Grade 4 - despite the fact that approximately 75 per cent of the population of Lesotho do not speak English (Lewis, Simons and Fennig, 2014). In fact, as Kamwangamalu notes, parents object to the use of SeSotho even in the lower grades because they do not see it as having any economic value added for the learners (Kamwangamalu 2013, p. 161).

Lesotho’s strategic plan for education for 2005-2015 (Ministry of Education and Training, 2005) contains helpful indications of the state’s position on language and education. The plan mentions a baseline assessment of Grade 3 and Grade 6 students in 2003; the Grade 6 levels of achievement for SeSotho and English were 58 per cent and 45 per cent respectively. The plan also mentions children from “minority” language communities, indicated that “the Ministry shall produce and procure materials for children of minorities (e.g. Xhosa, Ndebele, Baphuthi, etc.) to enable them better access to existing knowledge using their main language of communication.”