

## **An Education system in contradiction?: Eswatini English Language non- passing or failing subject policy, Critical thinking skills and Thinking Disposition.**

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### **Abstract**

This study describes the implications of Eswatini English language subject non passing or failing policy of 2019 on students' development of critical thinking skills and thinking disposition through the lens of students' responses on the Junior Certificate history examination of 2018. Students' responses as data were analysed through content analysis. The findings indicated that the policy could increase inequalities in societies and exacerbates the existing problem of marketization in education. It could derail government's effort of helping students to transcend their disadvantages through education. It concluded that the policy has brought a culture of contradiction within the Eswatini education system.

**Key words: Contradiction, education, policy, teaching, learning.**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

*If we are going to close achievement gaps and develop students' critical thinking skills and oral and written language skills, we need to provide students with significant opportunities to speak and write (Kelly et al., 2010 p 10).* This notes that languages and metacognitive development skills are intertwined and language policy designs are expected to provide a window into the nature of the skills and concepts that students are expected to learn. Thus any English related policy needs to be sensitive to students' metacognitive development skills and its influence on quality education and sustainable national development imperatives.

This study intends to describe the implications of Eswatini English language subject non passing or failing policy of 2019 on students' development of critical thinking skills and thinking disposition through the lens of students' responses on the Eswatini JC history examination of 2018, (source paper 2).

In most countries of the world English is perceived as one of the popular international languages. It is also taught as a Second Language in most parts of the developing world, including Eswatini. In most countries, governments and individual citizens have invested more time and resources in an attempt to master the English Language (Hsieh Wu, and Marek, 2017). They claimed that once students in low grades are equipped with more knowledge of and about words, they may be geared for success in the schooling system, training institutions, and in the place of work. Thus, in most countries, English is considered a passing subject while in others it is not, because of different ideological reasons. Ideologies shape policies and policies also shape peoples' ideologies in education and society. This suggests that educational policies are not autonomous from the contexts and ideologies in which they emerge (see Figure 1). Thus, policies are complex and always underpinned with ideological assumptions and influenced by different peoples' perspectives such as their academic socialisation and study skills perspectives.

The government of Eswatini has crafted different educational policies to enhance teaching and learning and to achieve national imperatives and to respond to societal needs. This notes that crafting of educational policy has both macro-social and micro-social dimensions and takes place upon contested terrains and it is important to assess its implications on students teaching and learning (see Figure 1).

The state has a social responsibility of promoting quality education, preventing social exclusion and creation of an underclass in society through education or use of language. Harrison, (2009) noted that English Language has an influential position in classroom and outside the classroom, its power of inclusion and exclusion of people in their learning and its power in shaping the learning process itself. The state has to ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are helped to transcend their disadvantages, and not mentally harmed. In return, the state is entitled to ask and expect reciprocal responsibility from all citizens with officials enforcing the policies, teachers and parents implementing the policies. Policies are regarded as the embodiment of peoples' ideas and ideologies about the ever changing societal matters. When the peoples' ideas and societal

matters change, policy also changes. Thus, policies could be defined as a reflection of societal challenges and educational changes.

### **English non passing or failing subject policy 2019**

In 2019, the Eswatini state pronounced a policy which stated that English should no longer be a passing or failing subject in the schooling system of Eswatini. The policy had a number of different justifying rationales and supporting arguments in its favour, but it is not the one where dogmatic positioning is appropriate, but the one where pragmatism and a partnership compromise are possibly the best way forward.

More often, than not language policies are favoured because they have a direct impact on pedagogical discourses and other national imperatives. Thus, these are considered as crucial factors in the planning stages because policies should not only focus on the product (eg students failing because of English) but also on other national imperatives and students' thinking processes (critical thinking and thinking disposition) enhanced by the English policy. Critical thinking involves thinking within ideas and alternative worldviews hidden in the words of a subject or subjects. More often, than not, worldviews are easily expressed by someone in command of English literacy. This may include learners' capabilities to express ideas and supporting them with relevant examples.

When the English subject became a non-passing or failing subject for the schooling system in Eswatini it posed a serious challenge for academicians to unpack the complexities posed by the policy on students teaching and the learning, achievement of some of the national imperatives (critical thinking skills). By nature, policies as educational enablers offer particular ways of improving practice but also impose constraints on the users and state's aim of achieving quality education and sustainable development. This suggests that policies do not operate in the absence of users: students, teachers, policymakers and training institutions (see Figure 1).

The change of the English policy challenged the common belief that English is the most respected, recognised international language in the world (Hsieh, Wu and Marek, 2017), because of its critical role in enhancing professional communicative skills in the business world. The Eswatini English non passing or failing subject policy of 2019 broadens and deepens concerns for education as an equaliser in society because it has the potential of promoting greater social segregation in society. We know that inequalities between schools and people within societies are visible. Teachers' disciplined commitment to the subject may be undermined and they are less likely to put extra effort to ensure that they give the highest possible quality of teaching to all children. Such practice may reduce students' opportunities to enrol at the Universities where English is considered as one of the entry requirements. This policy has led to an education system which contradicts itself or education in contradiction.

The change of policy also raised some questions on the existing non-alignment between training institutions and the schooling system in Eswatini, where English is no longer a passing subject, while at training institutions (UNESWA) it remains as one of the entry requirements. The change of policy also raised a question on the suitability of existing training institutions in providing relevant training programmes. Kelly et al., (2010) noted that an effective teacher training programme provides teachers with experiences which could combine teaching content, teaching activities and using other relevant tools (technology) for authentic teaching purposes. These type of training programmes place more emphasis on developing students' different skills rather than on knowledge of the language (Nazikian and Park, 2016).

### **Teaching English for what purposes**

In Eswatini, as in other former British colonies and protectorates, there are still some unanswered questions such as: for what purposes are we teaching the English Language. Are we teaching English Language for communication or for multifaceted purposes such as the development of other skills of national imperatives? This study examines how English language deficiency affects students' critical thinking skills and thinking disposition. This question has some influence on the achievement of quality education and sustainable development. English language as a foreign language has a potential of promoting thinking or metacognition, the learners' knowledge of and control over his or her cognitive processes, which may include thinking about educational processes such as responding to exam items or classroom activities.

### **English lesson springboard for Critical Thinking Skills and thinking Disposition**

Effective teaching and learning involves teaching specific strategies for word learning, where students could be more constructive and pull words apart, dig deeply enough to find meaning, and helpful clues on subject matter (Kelly et al., 2010). This has a potential of enhancing students' thinking skills and thinking disposition and sets them for success in schools and beyond because the students will be able to think within a specific subject area and other subjects such as statistical inference which focuses on thinking and reasoning (Wild et al., 2010), and it concentrates on helping students to learn how decisions based on data are made and communicated to the public. Surez-Orozco, (2001) noted that industrialised nations which face rapid growth of

immigrants from other countries have seen the need to improve the schooling out comes of all students to achieve national imperatives. In addition, research activities were conducted on how English Language proficiency affects schooling performance (Duran, 2008). This suggests that English is considered as one of the existing tools for improving teaching and learning. Students in a country must attain proficiency in English reading and other subjects such as Mathematics and Science (Duran, 2008), for the achievement of different national imperatives.

An English lesson helps students to be familiar with a structured approach to writing assignments and to successfully respond to written prompts or text questions (Kelly et, al., 2010, p 12). This involves thinking, because writing is thinking in action. As students write they think about the matter, even after writing. Kelly et, al., (2010) noted that writing is about teaching thinking. Through reading texts and writing about them (or their concepts), when students deciding what issues matter on the texts, what constitutes as an answer or what concepts are evidence involves the development of critical thinking skills which minimise random and undisciplined thought. It also helps them to “reason their way” into the other school subjects, be more disciplined in their thinking and reasoning as they advance through the education system (Kelly et, al., 2010). In other subjects such as Educational Research students are expected to think about the source of error in research. For example, in observational research students have to think about different types of the source of errors, such as failure to acknowledge self, the influence of the observer on the setting being observed which may lead to a judgement being made in accordance with the observer’s expectations. Failure to account for the situation or context, may lead to incorrect conclusions or distort the conclusions.

Achieving Communicative Competency in English classes has been a key goal in contexts or countries where English is taught or learnt as a foreign language (EFL) (Ozverir et, al., 2017), and in countries whose population is increasingly multicultural and multilingual growth in their population (Surz-Orozco, 2001). It is claimed that the achievement of Communicative Competency is affected by students’ minimal opportunities to authentic use of the English Language and the form–focused language teaching method, which more often than not, results in learners gaining more knowledge about English language than the enhancement of different competencies such as critical thinking skills and thinking disposition (Ozverir et, al., 2017). The form-focused method deficiencies could be addressed through the meaning focused method which is anchored on question based, issue-based, case based , project-based, problem-based learning (Herrington et al., 2003). In this case, learning tasks aim at closing the gap between classroom and real world life. This depends on the use of English Language and classroom authentic activities, and direct and explicit teaching of words strategy. This promotes critical thinking skills and thinking disposition, because it supports the development of connected knowledge and rich conceptual understanding in different subjects. Connected knowledge enables students to enhance their capacity to transfer subject knowledge to unfamiliar but related contexts (Kelly et, al., 2010), and this involves critical thinking skills.

The role of language as a source of an analytical understanding of reasoning is recognised worldwide (Luk and Lin, 2015) and people should not underestimate the negative impact of deprivation of English development on learners’ academic success and life opportunities outside the classroom. Flammia, (2015) noted that composition studies an aspects of English Language focus more on writing for academic purposes, international audiences and crossing not just disciplinary boundaries but also national boundaries. This requires the application of critical thinking skills and thinking disposition.

The role of critical literacies and critical pedagogy were noted by Freire and Macedo, (1987) and in their argument which revealed that a pre-requisite to the development of a positive sense of self-worth p 151 is to have one’s voice, but the voice should not be restricted to the vernacular, and that policymakers should understand the value of mastering the standard dominant language of the wider society p 152. In the Eswatini context, even though Siswati is a powerful language for every day formal and informal communication, English remains the dominant code or form of communication for social success and upwards mobility. It is important for English as a second language (ESL) students to develop communicative resources in English to enable them to talk back or write back as a legitimate speaker in the international contexts (Luk and Lin, 2015 p 74), because learners’ failure to master the English literacy is more likely to result in a negative judgement on their overall cognitive abilities by others and this affects the quality of the education system. (see table 3). Thus, the Eswatini English non passing or failing subject policy at school level is not one where dogmatic positioning is appropriate, but is one where pragmatism and a partnership compromise are possibly the best way forward.

### **Direct and explicit teaching of words strategy and critical thinking skills**

Direct and explicit teaching of words strategy helps the students to be capable of summarizing what others have stated, make inferences, elaborate on concepts and ideas, relate knowledge, experience to the topic under discussion and give examples to clarify and support ideas and make connections between related concepts. It allows students to reason their way into different schools subjects, where they are encouraged to

develop a defensible perspective and points of view, assess sources and assess texts for honesty and fairness and avoid random and undisciplined thought. Milton, (2010) claimed that these depend on the different educational contexts, such as an institutional learning environment where learners at the foundation phase are provided with the necessary opportunities to learn and practice 2000 or 3000 words in English under the guidance of a competent person (Lin et, al., 2018; Hwangedwang, 2016; Lee and Anderson, 2013). These opportunities may include the use of meaning-focused methods which aim at helping students to understand how words and where words are used to support the development of learners' communicative competency (students' capability to make sense of both written and communicative or oral texts). Stachr, (2008 p 150) claimed that students learning and understanding of 2000 or 3000 words in English are of fundamental importance because if learners do not know the most frequently used words in English, they will have some difficulties in understanding most written and spoken texts and also find it more difficult to engage in written and spoken communication. These 2000 or 3000 words provide students with an extra advantage to develop different competencies (critical thinking skills) and construction of knowledge through the assistance of a competent person (Herrington et. al., 2003).

Students' learning and understanding of 2000 or 3000 words in English depends on direct and explicit teaching of words learning strategies regularly (Kelly et, al., 2010), and on choosing words that students may encounter across their academic subjects, such as effects, integrate, interpret, and analyse (Coxhead, 2000). Students' understanding of words promotes students' engagements on texts, which promotes literacy and encourage the use of English vocabulary, thinking skills and build students' confidence. Wengelin and Arfe, (2018) also claimed that supporting reading skills in lower grades influences written production among learners, which eventually influences their future academic practices. This requires not only the change of the English Policy but also change of classroom pedagogical discourses at both schooling system level and training institutions level. This is important in avoiding the problem of policy non-alignment, which usually makes it difficult for any state to bring together the education system parts or components (schooling system and training institutions) into proper coordination, to bring them into agreement, and close cooperation.

#### **Policy alignment and English passing or failing subject policy of 2019**

Alignment in educational policy and other pedagogical discourses could allow the state to systematically study the different components of the education system, compare their pedagogical discourses and make judgments about the how well they are in agreement. Once, the alignment exists and understood, subsequent changes can be made to improve quality teaching and learning and sustainable development (Martone and Sireci, 2001). Thus, policy change should be sensitive or not be done detached from its contexts and use (see Figure 1, Key contexts for Educational Policy initiative). Educational policies should be linked to the classroom pedagogical discourses and desired educational outcomes. Connecting educational policies, classroom pedagogical discourses and educational outcomes is part of national imperatives; it facilitates the achievement of sustainable development.

**Figure 1, Key contexts for Educational Policy initiative).**

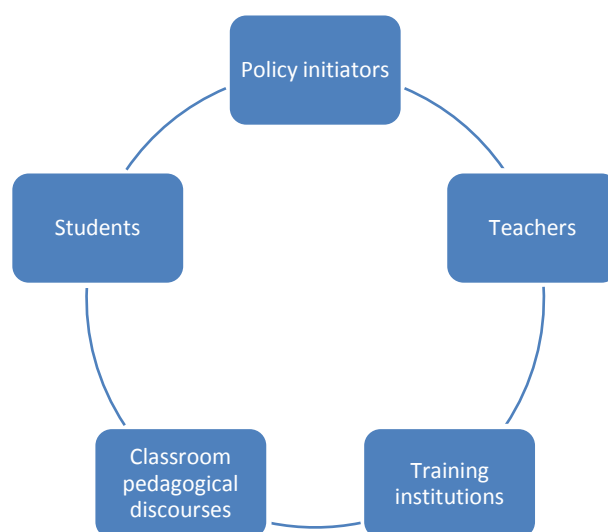


Figure 1 shows that there should be interaction between these policy contexts: Policy initiators, teachers, students, training institutions and classroom pedagogical discourses without deviation from national

imperatives, such as the development of critical thinking skills and thinking disposition. This may address the limitation of analysing policy from single perspective or policy only perspective without considering how the policy interacts with other key educational structures and other national imperatives. The policy non-alignment and interaction with other educational structures may lead to educational contradiction and stifling of the provision of quality teaching and learning and the achievement of key national imperatives such as the development of critical thinking skills and thinking disposition, and sustainable development. Success and failure to acquire academic literacy reside in the character of the educational policy contexts and classroom pedagogical discourses. The characters have policy costs implications.

### **English non passing or failing subject Policy costs**

Policy and any legislation come with costs and benefits. The benefits are usually visible in the short term. The costs are likely to be longer term, initially hidden, more often than not unknowingly by society or a large number of people. If the policies are not thought through their costs can greatly outweigh the benefits. For example, the Eswatini English non-passing subject policy at school level may rekindle and aggravate problems caused by poor teaching of English, which the Ministry of Education and Training, through the English Inspectorate Department attempted to overcome. This policy is likely to increase the differences between schools such that the poorest schools in teaching English and schooling in general will be provided for those children most in need and best for those that already have the most advantages. In addition, the culture of marketization in education could be exacerbated and further undermine the quality of education in public schools and increase inequalities and producing a two-tier system within the system. All these have financial and social cost implications.

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

The intent of the study was to describe the implications of Eswatini English non-passing or failing policy of 2019 on students' development of critical thinking skills and thinking disposition through the lens of students' responses on the Eswatini JC History Examination of 2018 (source paper 2). Displaying critical thinking skills and thinking disposition involves: their abilities to make inferences on history sources; elaborate concepts and ideas; relate their experiences to the exam item; give examples to clarify and support ideas. These helped in dictating or deducing students' capabilities to think critically and their willingness to apply effort in thinking.

### **Data**

Students' history scripts and their responses form part of the data and this was analysed through the use of content analysis.

### **Content analysis**

Content analysis was used to analyse and describe the students' responses on the Eswatini JC history examination of 2018 (source paper 2). Each student's response was analysed on its own merits, in displaying students' critical thinking skills and disposition. Students' abilities to display their thinking more often than not depend on understanding of words or a question and its requirements. Constructive academic arguments or responses to a question emanate from a clear understanding of the related English words (Kelly et al., 2010; Judd, 1981).

The content analysis grew from the formative review of the history exam scripts and other related discourses: the instructions of the paper, format of the examination paper, and students' responses to each exam item form part of the data. It was analysed along the two parameters: the criticality and the elaborateness. Attention was paid on how a particular student had provided reasons, for his or her position, illustrated that he or she supported the argument with relevant examples, described the matter and demonstrated capabilities of organising ideas.

Evidence of criticality was noticed and identified with reference to the descriptors of critical thinking for the History source paper, which pays attention on students' ability to make reasoned judgements, identify and infer hidden assumptions and beliefs on History sources. These processes depend on students' understanding of words and the examination instructions. In a History source paper words need to be pulled apart put together, dig deeply enough to find a helpful clue and explained in writing. This promotes students' engagement on the text and academic literacy.

The content analysis was facilitated by the Parkins and Murphy 2006 model for identifying engagement in critical thinking. This model is characterised by four different categories (Clarification, Assessment, inferences and strategies). However, in this study three of the four categories were used because of the expectations or nature of the exam items. The category of clarification helps in identifying students' capability in stating, clarifying and describing the issues as per the exam item requirement. The assessment

category helps in identifying students' engagement in critical thinking through their capabilities to make judgements and provides reasons to substantiate the point or evidence on the concepts under discussion. The inference category helps in identifying issues, displaying their capabilities in showing connections between and among ideas and concepts in each question and drawing appropriate and convincing conclusions as required by the question. This helped in assessing students' thinking skills and thinking disposition.

The application of the model involved reading the History Paper 2 exam paper's instructions, exam items and their arrangement, and students' responses in each question. These issues are important because students' capabilities to apply their critical thinking skills could be influenced by understanding the instructions and exam items arrangement. Paper 2 was used because it is a source based paper (where sources are used by students to respond to the questions), which challenges them to apply their critical thinking skills and show case or depict their thinking disposition (see the sources questions and below).

**Table 1** Sources for question 2, for Option B: Swaziland from King Sobhuza 1 to King Mswati 111.

<p><b>Source B</b> Missionaries used schools and hospitals to attack some aspects of Swazi society and its values and customs such as polygamy and divination. From a book published in 1981.</p> <p><b>Source C</b> Missionaries built schools and ran hospitals out of the spirit of a humanitarian service but also as an attack on the values of the Swazi society. The Medical mission was to destroy the use of traditional medicine, doctors and diviners. From a history book published in 1981.</p>
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**Source:** Examinations Council of Swaziland History paper 2, 2018

**Table 2** Instructions and Questions for Option B: Swaziland from King Sobhuza 1 to King Mswati 111.

Instructions: Study source B and C and respond to the question

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How far do these sources agree about the missionary work in Swaziland? Explain your answer using details of the sources</li></ul> |
|---|

**Source:** Examinations Council of Swaziland History paper 2, 2018

Option B of this paper was used because it was chosen by the majority of the students, perhaps because it covered issues familiar to them. Option B focuses on Swaziland from King Sobhuza 1 to King Mswati 111, while option A focused on the struggle for independence in Rhodesia.

All the students' transcripts were analysed in most schools, except in those schools which had more than 80 students who picked option B. In those schools, more than half of the chosen scripts were analysed using the Parkins and Murphy 2006 model (see table 3). The transcripts selected were coded. This aimed at examining students' capabilities to engage in critical thinking skills and thinking disposition and this helped in ascertaining the category or categories which were mostly used. The transcripts helped in ascertaining the students' capabilities to take a stand as required by the question, give examples to clarify their stand and support it and make inferences, connections between related and unrelated concepts and ideas from the sources, from their knowledge, experiences and then give defensible perspective and point of view.

Applying this model to students' scripts helped in revealing the critical thinking processes which were mostly used by the students. This is crucial information which teachers and other educators need in deciding which specific skills to encourage and in determining how successful their efforts were in supporting specific skills (Perkins and Murphy, 2006).

### **Target population and Sample**

28 schools were randomly sampled and the purposive stratified sampling was used to sample 579 students' History scripts. These scripts were from 25 schools because students from the other three schools did not choose Option B, yet the study focuses on students who chose option B. Question **one** and **two** of option B was used to examine students' capabilities to use their critical thinking skills and thinking disposition.

**Table 3:** Sampled schools and coding of students' application of the three categories (Clarification, Assessment and Inference), per school in question 1 and 2 of paper two

Schools	Number of students who chose Options A or B	Keys for the codes categories	Observations based on students' responses regarding the application of categories (see Plate 1,2,3 and 4)
1.FUN	A36, B58	.?31, -27	0 depicted lack of inference and contradictory statement
2. MHL	A12, B 7	*2, - 5	2 displayed good skills and others depicted lack of inference and contradictory statement
3.LB	A3, B21	*4, .?7, -10	4 displayed good use of skills others depicted lack of inference and contradictory statement
4. SIE	A 19, B37	*13, .?23, -1	13 displayed good skills and others depicted lack of inference and contradictory statement
5.GDS	A26 , B7	*4, .?2, -1	4 displayed good skills and others depicted lack of inference and contradictory statement
6.HLUC	A8 , B11	*5, .?2, - 4	5 displayed good skills and others depicted lack of inference and contradictory statement
7.STM	A3, B 21	*7, .?13, -1	6 displayed good skills and others depicted lack of inference and contradictory statement
8.LAM	A 12, B 34	*14 , .?16, -4	14 displayed good skill and others depicted lack of inference and contradictory statement
9. STA	A 12, B 30	*12, .?18,	12 displayed good skills and others depicted lack of inference and contradictory statement
10. PHUM	A 2, B 4	*2, -2	2 display the skill but Lack of inference
11.MZE	A 23, B 121 (64 of 121)	*31, .?15, -18	31 displayed good use of the skill others lack of inference and showed contradictory statement
12. BG	A 16, B 4	-4	Absence of clarity, inferences,
13. HRN	A0, B 18	* 12, .?6,	11 displayed use of skills, others lack of inference and contradictory statement
14. LG	A 4, B 21	*8, .?10,-3	8 displayed the skills others lack of inference and showed contradictory statement
15. BE	A7, B 80 (48of 80)	*27, .?14, -7	27 displayed the skills others lack of inference and showed contradictory statement
16.MK	A0, B8	*6, .?3, -0	6 displayed the skill, lack of inference and contradictory statement
17.MDL	A18, B5	*1, .?3, -1	1 displayed the skills, others lack of inference and showed contradictory statement
18. LUS	A 0, B 5	*2, .?3, -0	2 displayed the skills, lack of inference and contradictory statement
19.MSU	A 5, B 40	*7, .?29, -4	6 displayed the skills, others contradictory statements and lack of inference
20.KB	A 5, B23	*10, .?9, - 4	10 displayed good use thinking skills, contradictory and lack of inference
21.LC	A 15, B19	*5, .?9, -5	5 displayed the skills, others contradictory statements and lack of inference
22.CHR	A 22, B9	*3, .?5, -1	3 displayed the skills other had contradictory statement and lack of inference
23.MLB	A 27, B 17	*4, .?12, -1	4 good use of thinking skills, others contradictory statements, lack of inference
24.HLAC	A 7, B 20	*14, .?5, - 1	14 good use of the skills,
25. SNS	A 61, B58	*12, .?29, -17	12 displayed good use of the skills, others lack of connection of idea and contradictory statements.
26, 27 and 28. B not chose	-	-	
Total	<b>579 Scripts</b>		

**Key for codes expected categories:** \*Students who displayed critical thinking and thinking dispositions; .? Students find it hard to display their capabilities in using the assessment and inference categories.

Plate 1 Students' display their critical thinking skills and disposition

Question 2, Option B  
Write on both sides of the paper

Both sources agree that missionaries did not only build schools and hospitals to show humanity, but also desired to change the values and customs of people in Swaziland. In source B, missionaries provided schools and hospitals in Swaziland to attract values and customs of people in such as polygamy and divination which they missionaries considered to be wrong activities done by people in Swaziland. In source C, they provided schools and hospitals to destroy the use of traditional medicine, doctors and diviners, which meant that the missionaries wanted to convince people in Swaziland to stop doing what they had been doing for a lot time and it became their values and customs, by building this hospitals. This attests that the provision of schools and hospitals by missionaries to Swaziland was a way of slowly changing the minds of people in Swaziland about their values and customs but end up believing in values and customs of the missionaries. 4/5 (5/8) SV

Plate 2 Students' display their critical thinking skills and disposition

Question Option B Question 2  
Write on both sides of the paper

2. Source B and C both agree about the missionary work in Swaziland because they both give an evidence that somehow the missionaries were to give things that will benefit and destroy Swazis. Source B tells us that missionaries built schools and hospitals this shows us that it was going to benefit Swazis. But their main purpose was to destroy Swazis using this new buildings or using their offer. Also source C tells us that they used schools and hospitals which was a benefit to Swazis. But this things were to destroy Swazis because their medical mission was to destroy the use of traditional medicines, doctors and diviners. This shows us that their main purpose was to destroy Swazi culture and customs, but they only wanted their beliefs to be spreaded. They also wanted the land of Swazis because their buildings are in Swaziland and now they are owning the place where their buildings are. 4/11 (1/8) SV



Plate 3 Students' lack of critical thinking skills and disposition

Question .....  
Write on both sides of the paper

X Only source C agrees on missionary work in Swaziland. This is because Source C states that missionaries built schools and ran hospitals out of the spirit of humanitarian service. Doing it out of the spirit of humanitarian service shows that it was indeed missionary work. As Source B does not mention any work being done by missionaries on the basis of humanitarian service. L11

However, Both sources B and C disagree on missionary work in Swaziland. This is because source B states that the missionaries only used schools and hospitals to only attack some aspects of Swazi society, and its values and customs which included polygamy and divination. L11

On the same note, Source C disagrees on missionary work because they also attacked the values of the Swazi society. This is seen shown in Source C where it states that the medical mission was to destroy the use of traditional medicine, doctors, and diviners. This shows that both sources B and C disagree on missionary work. L11

1  
8 SV

Plate 4 Students' lack of critical thinking skills and thinking disposition

Question .....? .....  
Write on both sides of the paper

A

Source B and Source C do agree about the missionary work in Swaziland, because in both Source B and C do talk about building of schools and having hospital in Swaziland to help them

Source B and Source C <sup>Do agree</sup> do not agree about the missionary work in Swaziland, because in both sources B & C are using their work which are schools and hospitals to attack on the values of the Swazi Society which include breaking of customs such as polyamy and divination stated in Source B also in Source C Missionaries are using their work to attack on values of Swazi Society inverting hospitals was to break or stop Swazis from using traditional medicines, medical mission was to destroy the use of traditional medicines, doctors and diviners. LII

However Source C do agree on the missionary work in Swaziland. It is stated that missionaries built schools and ran hospitals out of the spirit of a humanitarian serves. Missionaries with their work they helped Swazis to learn in schools that they inverted and in hospital that they built Swazis would treat their sickness in order to feel better and stop dying when they gave them medicines and treatments from the western doctors. LII

1/8 SV SM

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion of the findings is guided by the themes which emerged from the data as presented in the tables and plates. The study findings revealed that most students had difficulties in making inferences and logic reasoning. More often than not, these are associated with students' poor command of English, which usually frustrates students' effort to display their disciplined thoughts and understanding of an exam item. Their responses were characterised by contradictory statements and, random and undisciplined thoughts which depicts lack of logic reasoning (see table 3). They had a challenge or were not familiar with a structured approach to

writing and responding to written sources, which requires students to pull words apart, dig deeply enough, find meaning from words and clues on history sources. This is about word analysis, a product of effective teaching and learning which involves teaching specific strategies for word leaning in aEnglish lesson. Kelly et., al., (2010) study finding indicated that effective teaching of vocabulary or words analysis enhances students thinking skills and helps them to think within ideas and messages hidden in words or history sources.

The implementation of the English non passing or failing subject policy may derail government's effort of helping students and citizens to transcend their disadvantages through education. Successful achievement in society requires people who are in command of the critical thinking skills and thinking disposition and who reflect on their practices and also think about their implications to wider societal issues such as the achievement of gender equality and sustainable development goals. To transcend their disadvantages, people should be equipped with listening, speaking and writing skills, and these are an integral part of teaching and learning, and products of language literacy.

The study finding indicated that 264 of the 579 or 46% of students from the 25 schools had challenges in displaying their critical thinking skills and thinking disposition (see table 3). The students' responses were characterised by the absence of their minds to assess and scrutinise the exam items before responding to them or they had the problem of being lazy and sloppy thinkers who may possess critical thinking skills but not inclined or willing to use them. They did not display the willingness to identify issues, recognise important relationships within and between the sources (source B and C) and make inferences and deduce conclusions (see plates 3 and 4). Lazy and sloppy thinkers who may possess critical thinking skills but not willing to use them may be a product of poor or absence of direct and explicit teaching of words strategy which enhances students capabilities to interrogate ideas, connect knowledge, which helps in transferring subject knowledge to unfamiliar but related contexts. This could be possible in a subject considered by government as a key subject. More often than not, key subjects such as English in a schooling system motivate teachers to put more effort in their professional work to ensure that learners enrol to higher training institutions.

The 46% of the students were only capable of stating the issues within the sources and making judgements but had challenges in clarifying or expressing clearly their understanding of the concepts on the exam items and making inference, showing connections among ideas, drawing appropriate conclusions by explaining the connections and non-connections among and between the sources. They had challenges in identifying the relevant and irrelevant elements or concepts and statements within source B. and C. For example, concepts such as missionaries built schools and ran hospitals out of the spirit of a humanitarian service but also an attack on the values of the Swazi society were misunderstood by some students. For example, one of the students responses revealed: *both sources agree about the missionary work in Swaziland this is because in source B its stated that missionaries build schools and hospitals to attack some aspects of society while in source C its stated that missionaries built schools and ran hospital out of the spirit of a humanitarian service. However, source B differ from source C this is because in source B its stated that missionaries used schools and hospitals to attack some Swazi aspects and values such as polygamy and divination while in source C its stated that the medical mission was to destroy the use of traditional medicine, doctors and diviners.* These responses depict the absence of the application of critical thinking skill and thinking disposition or lack of the ability to entertain different thoughts at once because both responses were in agreement, don't differ in content. These also depict that students had limited subject content and application of interdisciplinary content, which is necessary for critical thinking. Interdisciplinary content provides rich ground for critical thinking. The direct and explicit teaching of words strategy facilitates the teaching of interdisciplinary content which provides rich ground for critical thinking, students' learning and in enhancing their capabilities to respond to exam items and contribute to societal developmental projects.

The findings of the study indicated that 115 of the 579 or 20% of the students whose scripts were analysed were not able to state even the key issues within the sources and to express an understanding of the concepts on the exam items and making inference, showing connections among ideas, drawing appropriate conclusions by explaining the connections and non-connections among and between the sources (see table 3). For example, this student's transcript notes the absence of the participant's engagement in critical thinking and thinking disposition or logical reasoning: *in source B missionaries used schools and hospitals to attack some aspects of Swazi society; this was because missionaries did not believe all the cultures that were done by the Swazi people and customs including ancestors. Source B was also taken from a history book published in 1981. Also missionaries did not even like the part of acting a polygamy because they thought it was not a good thing. In source C missionaries built schools and ran hospitals out of the spirit of humanitarian service but also as an attack on the values of the Swazi society. This was because they did not like the use of the traditional medicine, they thought this was what destroyed humanity. Also source C was take in the history book of 1981. Missionaries built schools in order to teach about Christianity in schools. Both sources attacked by the missionaries by building schools and hospitals in order to destroy the medical mission that in Swaziland used.* A detailed analysis of this student's responses revealed that there was lack of logical reasoning because the key

aspects of the expected answers were mentioned but without disciplined thought. In addition, the aspects, which include stating his or her stand as per the question, clarifying or defining the issues being discussed, were overlooked. There was also lack of heightened awareness of multiple points of view on this particular student. The development of critical thinking skills application and thinking disposition put more emphasis on heightened awareness of multiple points of views. The absence of these on students' responses depicts poor development of metacognitive skills among the students.

At a school individual level, the study indicated that in all the schools their students had some challenges in displaying their critical thinking skills and thinking disposition in their responses (see table 3). Those students who displayed some capabilities were far less than half of those who attempted the exam item. This revealed the absence of students' capacity to think critically or show the presence of their mind in responding to the exam item. This has some implications on the achievement of inclusive education, where every student is expected to participate in the teaching and learning processes and on government's attempt to overcome barriers to the participation and learning of students.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

The study concludes that the change of the English policy (English becoming a non-passing or failing subject could negatively affect government's effort of producing critical thinkers through the education system and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS'). As the study revealed that even under the old policy, development and students' effort to use and display their critical thinking and thinking disposition were a challenge among the students. Only a few students with a good command of English displayed their critical thinking skills and thinking disposition (see plate 1 and 2) and this shows that effective teaching of English in schools directly or indirectly contributes to the development of critical thinking skills and thinking disposition. The English policy as a passing or failing subject in Eswatini may provide a rich ground for teacher demotivation thus limit students' opportunities to enrol at tertiary level, where English is used as an entry requirements or key subject. Prior this policy teachers were putting some effort in helping students to develop critical thinking skills and in enhancing students' capabilities to respond to exam items as expected in order to enrol at tertiary institutions.

The study also concluded that the majority of students were not fairly equipped with the skills of learning History from a text which contributes to the development of reading comprehension skills, inferential skills and communication skills as demonstrated in table, 3; plate 3 and 4, yet English teachers were indirectly motivated to work extra hours by the fact that English was a passing subject. The new English non passing subject policy could indirectly demotivate the English teachers and then the problem of students being lazy and sloppy thinkers as demonstrated in plate 3 and 4 may become worse because English teachers may avoid using challenging teaching strategies such as the direct and explicit teaching of words, where words need to be pulled apart, put together, defined informally, practiced in speech and explained in writing.

Based on the information on plate 3 and 4 it is concluded that schools and teacher training institutions have a problem in using sources and history texts to develop critical thinking skills and thinking disposition among the students because most of the students had difficulties in identifying relations among the elements in source B and C. Yet central to comprehension of and learning from History texts or sources is the identification of relations among the elements in the texts and between these elements and the students' prior knowledge and experience. Students were not supported enough to develop literacy in history, English and other subjects, which help them to grapple with ideas, share their ideas, thoughts and engage in the critical thinking that History Examinations and other subjects require. This has a huge implication for the achievement of quality Education and Sustainable Development goals (SDGS'). More often, than not, development of any subject literacy is facilitated by language literacy.

The new English non passing or failing subject policy may have negative implications on government's effort of ensuring that all children access quality education, transcend their disadvantages and are not mentally harmed. Students with lack or limited thinking skills may find it difficult to transcend their disadvantages, thus increasing inequalities in societies and exacerbating the existing problem of marketization in education which also directly and indirectly leads to a widening of educational inequalities and a two tier system of schools: private schools where English is invisibly a passing subject and in public schools where English is a non-passing or failing subject policy. It may also be concluded that the English Language non passing subject policy has brought a culture of contradiction within the Eswatini education system because at school level English Language is a non-passing subject, while at University level, it is considered a required subject. This further brings confusion on the role of the Ministry of Education and Training of finding out if the education expectations are in agreement to guide the education system towards the achievement of quality education.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Training of teachers on supporting students to develop English Language literacy and in other subjects should be improved to enhance students learning and critical thinking skills and thinking disposition. The key instructional and curricular features that may enhance and support students in developing literacy in the context of English and other subjects should be re-emphasised at Teacher training institutions and in schools. These may include teaching specific strategies for word learning where students could be more participative or involved in their learning processes, pull words apart, dig deeply enough to find meaning, and helpful clues on the subject matter. The knowledge acquired could be applicable to other subject settings and this may enhance students' critical thinking skills and thinking disposition.

The English non passing subject policy should not be used as a political tool which provides government with a response to critics on the matter of English as a passing subject but be reflected upon its capability to enhance quality teaching and learning, and assessment. This may prevent the situation where the policy is considered as a very limited vehicle for achieving quality education. Reflection on the policy may enhance teaching and learning and also redress the existing culture of contradictions within the education system (English as required subject at university level and non-passing or failing subject at school level).

The change of policy is recognised and appreciated but there should also be change of classroom pedagogical discourses at both schooling system level and training institutions. This is important in avoiding the problem of policy non-alignment, which usually makes it difficult for any state to bring together the education system parts or components (schooling system and training institutions) into proper coordination, to bring them into agreement, and close cooperation for the achievement of quality education, which embraces the development of critical thinking skills and thinking disposition.

There should be interaction between these policy contexts: Policy initiators, teachers, students, training institutions and classroom pedagogical discourses without deviation from national imperatives, such as the development of critical thinking skills and thinking disposition.

The state's higher learning institution and its curriculum should build and support what is learnt at the schooling system levels. This involves finding out if the education expectations are in agreement with one another to guide the system towards the achievement of quality education.

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