



Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium  
for Monitoring Educational Quality

## Quality of Primary School Inputs in Swaziland

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### Introduction

This paper highlights the quality of four primary school inputs in Swaziland in relation to the nation's defined benchmarks. The four inputs are: basic learning materials, mathematics textbooks, pupil-teacher ratios, and class size. These four indicators are described in the section titled Selected Indicators, where it is also shown how they are related to the quality of education. The data used in this paper were collected in 2007 from 4,030 Grade 6 pupils in 172 primary schools in all four regions in Swaziland. This was part of a major international study known as the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) III Project. The SACMEQ III Project sought to examine the quality of education provided in primary schools in Swaziland and 14 other African school systems.

The results in this paper cover Swaziland as a whole, and are then further disaggregated by region, school location (rural versus urban), and type of school (government versus private). The results from the SACMEQ II Project (2000) are also provided, to enable monitoring the general trend in the provision of the selected inputs in primary schools in Swaziland between 2000 and 2007.

### Background

In 2003, the Government of Swaziland introduced a number of programmes in an effort to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) of high quality. These included: (a) the provision of free textbooks to all primary school pupils; and (b) the introduction of a grant for orphaned and vulnerable children (known as the OVC Grant) to support the payment

of school fees and other levies for these children. The OVC Grant was only issued to children who had gone through the selection criteria and who had been approved as being OVCs. A sum of E350 (about fifty United States dollars) was provided for each orphan and vulnerable child under this grant.

In 2005, the Ministry of Education introduced free stationery for children at public primary schools. That same year, the government, with the support of local and international agencies, introduced free school meals in all primary schools. In 2007, another grant (known as the Capitation Grant) was introduced into primary schools in the country. The Capitation Grant provides funds for all enrolled children, including OVC. This grant provided E250 for each enrolled child and an additional E100 for each OVC. The arrangement was such that schools which received the OVC Grant did not receive the Capitation Grant. However schools under the Capitation Grant received slightly more money than schools under the OVC Grant, because the former were issued a grant even for fee-paying pupils, which increased the funds that the schools could utilize for other activities. The Capitation Grant began with 250 primary schools.

In 2010, the government introduced Free Primary Education (FPE) in Grades 1 and 2 in public schools. This meant that children in these primary school grades were no longer required to pay any school fees. For Grades 3 and above, the schools were allowed to charge fees. However, the FPE programme is being gradually extended to higher grades, and schools are being instructed to stop charging fees for the grades covered by the programme. If schools wish to charge additional fees in the grades covered by the FPE, they have to apply for approval from the education authorities.

To cater for the increased enrolment numbers following the introduction of FPE, the government also provided additional classrooms and teacher accommodation.

In Swaziland, all primary school pupils in public schools are provided with all the basic learning materials, all prescribed textbooks, desks, and chairs. In addition, the pupils are provided with at least one free meal a day during school. It is worth noting that, in Swaziland, the government provides all the material and human resources to those public and private schools that are fully registered.

The SACMEQ data are ideal for examining the quality of school inputs in Swaziland for at least two reasons. Firstly, the data were collected using modern scientific sampling techniques that are known to be reliable. Secondly, the data are available for two time points (2000 and 2007). This made it possible to monitor the quality of school inputs in Swaziland over time.

## Selected Indicators

The four indicators of the quality of school inputs are: (a) basic learning materials, (b) mathematics textbooks, (c) pupil-teacher ratios, and (d) class size. Table 1 below describes these four indicators and also provides the set benchmarks for Swaziland.

Basic learning materials (that is, possession of at least one exercise book, something to write with, and a ruler) are considered crucial to ensure that the pupils participate reasonably in learning activities in the classrooms. Therefore, it is desirable for all pupils

to have these materials. A ruler is especially important for mathematics and science lessons, particularly for the upper primary school classes (Grades four to eight). Likewise, it is desirable for each pupil to have sole use of a textbook (especially for the core subjects such as reading, mathematics, and science), because research evidence has shown that sole use of textbooks is essential for effective teaching and learning in the classroom. Sole use of textbooks is also preferable, because it enables pupils to undertake academic activities at home, such as doing homework and revising school work.

Concerning pupil-teacher ratios and class size, research evidence shows that lower values are desirable for better quality education. It is thought that, to a certain limit, lower values on these two indicators are associated with more interaction between teachers and pupils, resulting in better quality education. Pupil-teacher ratios and class size are also key indicators for checking if expansion in participation rates is accompanied by adequate provision of teachers and classrooms.

The recommended pupil-teacher ratios and class size for primary schools in Swaziland are 40 pupils per teacher and 45 pupils per class, respectively (Ministry of Education, 1984). This means that once a class reaches the mark of 45 pupils, the school is expected to create an additional stream. However, in recent years, this has not always been the case, because the government has been faced with the challenge of large financial outputs for teachers' salaries.

**Table 1: National Benchmarks for the Selected Indicators of the Quality of Education**

Selected Indicator	Description of the Indicator	National Benchmark
Basic learning materials	Pupil has at least one exercise book, a pencil or a pen, and a ruler	100%
Mathematics textbooks	Pupil has sole use of a mathematics textbook during mathematics lessons	100%
Pupil-teacher ratios	Total number of pupils in a school divided by number of teachers in the school	40:1
Grade 6 class size	Average number of Grade 6 pupils per class	45

SOURCE: Ministry of Education (1984).

## Key Findings

The data on the four inputs were analyzed and the results are presented in Figures 1 to 4.

### Basic Learning Materials

In 2007, 94 percent of the Grade 6 pupils had at least one exercise book, a pencil or a pen, and a ruler. In other words, only six percent of the pupils did not have all the three basic learning items that were considered necessary for effective participation in classroom activities. There were no major variations across the regions. In addition, there was little variation between pupils in rural schools (94%) and pupils in urban schools (93%). The percentages for government and private schools were the same (94%).

On average, 79 percent of the pupils in all the SACMEQ countries had basic learning materials. This implied that the situation in Swaziland was much better than the overall situation in SACMEQ countries. Between 2000 and 2007, the percentage for Swaziland went up by eight points, which meant that the situation had improved greatly.

### Mathematics Textbooks

When the Government of Swaziland introduced the free textbooks programme in 2003, the intension was to have a pupil-textbook ratio of 1:1 for all the core subjects. It is, therefore, pleasing that nearly all (99.8%) of the Grade 6 pupils in 2007 had sole use of mathematics textbooks. It is also pleasing that the numbers of pupils with textbooks have improved by about 25 percentage points since 2000, when the percentage of Grade 6 pupils with sole use of mathematics textbooks was 74.7 percent. Furthermore, the textbook situation in Swaziland was much better than the situation among SACMEQ countries in 2007 (41%).

These results indicated that Swaziland had managed to realize its goal of a 1:1 textbook-pupil ratio. Moreover, the results confirmed that the textbooks provision programme had been very

successful and, therefore, this programme needs to be sustained.

### Pupil-Teacher Ratios

In 2000, the mean pupil-teacher ratio among primary schools in Swaziland was 35. This mean was within the country's set benchmark, which is 40. In 2007, the mean was 34, thus also within the national benchmark. There was little variation across the regions. The results also indicated that there was very little variation between urban (35) and rural schools (34) and between government (35) and private schools (34). The overall mean for Swaziland was much lower (better) than that of SACMEQ (43).

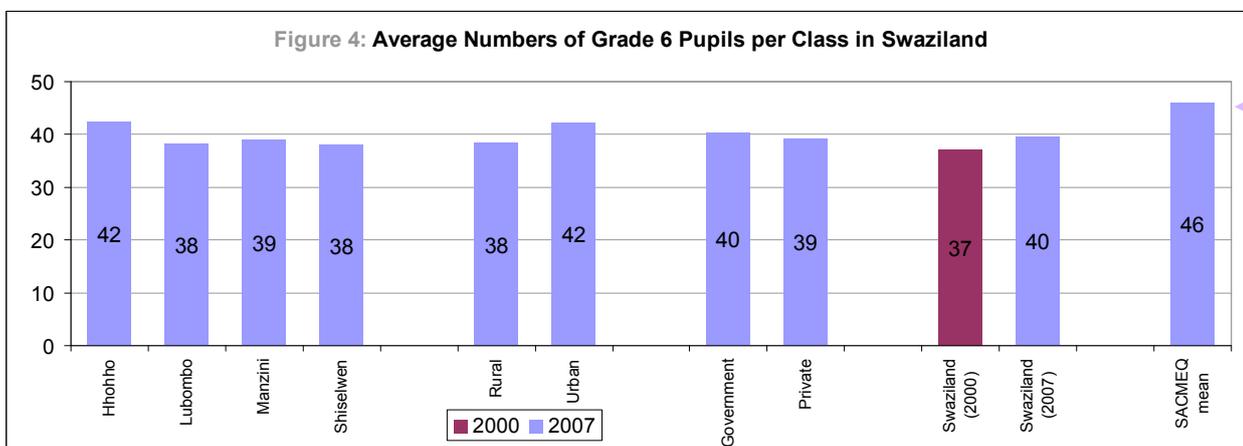
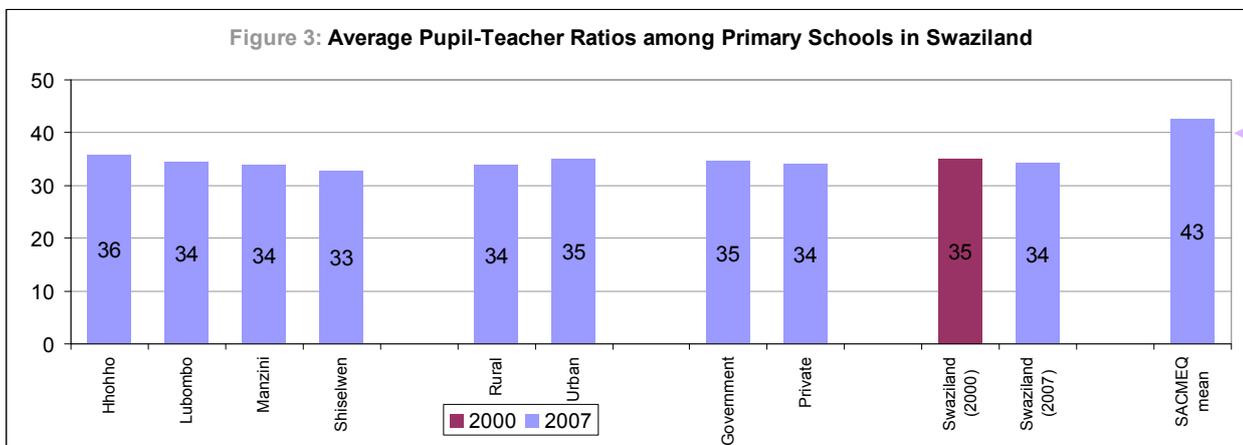
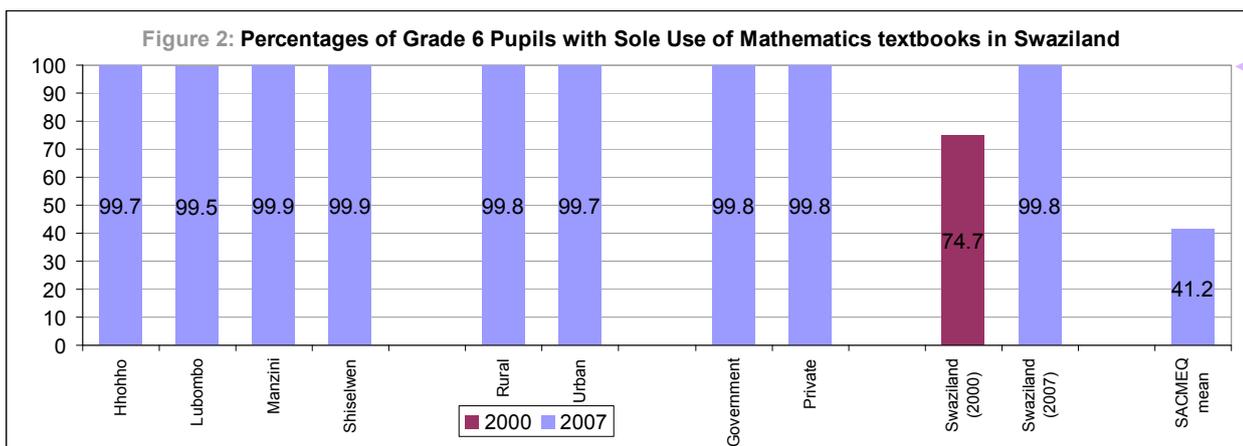
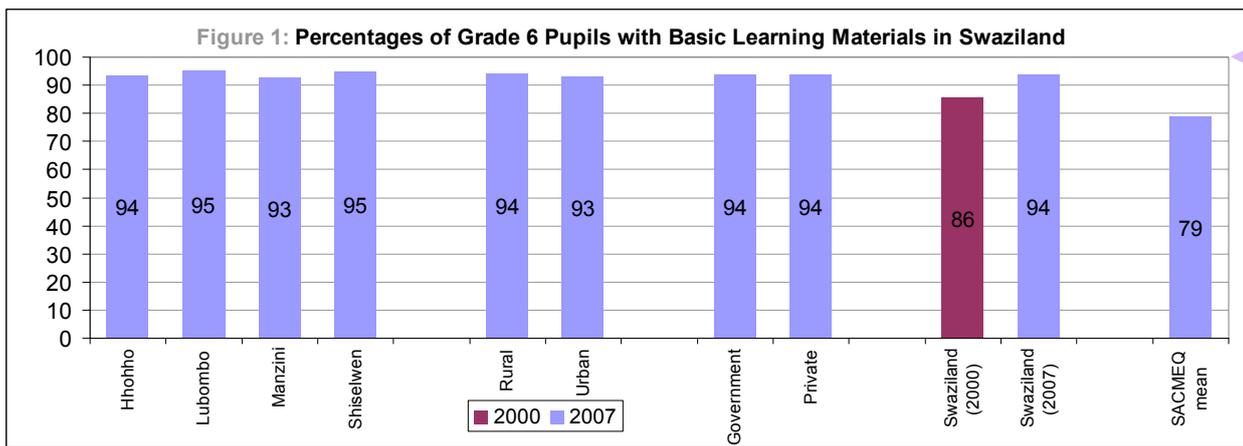
### Class Size

Although the mean number of Grade 6 pupils per class had risen from 37 in 2000 to 40 in 2007, the number was still within the set national benchmark of 45, hence better than the SACMEQ mean of 46 pupils per class in 2007. However, this did not mean that there were no classes that were larger than 45.

There were no large differences between the regions, neither was there a large difference between public and private schools. However, the average number of Grade 6 pupils per class in urban schools (42) was slightly higher than that of rural schools (38).

## Summary of Findings

- This study indicated that almost all Grade 6 pupils in Swaziland had an adequate supply of learning materials and textbooks. It also bore witness to the success of the Ministry of Education and Training's materials and textbook programme at the primary level.
- This study also revealed that the mean pupil-teacher ratio (34) was well within Swaziland's benchmark of 40 pupils per teacher. In addition, in all four regions, the average number of Grade 6 pupils per class was within the national benchmark of 45.



SOURCES of Figures 1 to 4: SACMEQ Data Archive.

## Suggestions

Regarding the need to sustain the high levels in the provision of basic learning materials and textbooks in Swaziland's primary schools, the following policy options could be considered.

1. The basic learning materials and textbooks should be provided free of charge to pupils in Swaziland. A strong monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategy could find out the reasons why some pupils (6%) do not have access to these resources. If it is an issue of management of these resources at school level, then the ministry should equip head teachers with the skills and know-how to manage them effectively. This should be done by the office of the Chief Inspector Primary.
2. The Ministry of Education may wish to put in place a mechanism to ensure that pupils have all the basic learning materials throughout the year by replacing lost or damaged items.
3. Concerning the need to sustain acceptable pupil-teacher ratios and class sizes in Swaziland's primary schools, the Teaching Service Commission should ensure that teachers who leave the service are replaced with qualified teachers in good time.
4. The Chief Inspector Training should ensure that the intake of teacher training colleges is increased to produce enough qualified teachers for the expected increase in pupil enrolments following the introduction of FPE.

## Conclusion

This policy brief highlighted the quality of primary school inputs in Swaziland using four indicators, namely: (a) basic learning materials, (b) mathematics textbooks, (c) pupil-teacher ratios, and

(d) class size. Against the country's own set benchmarks, Swaziland scored highly in the provision of basic learning materials, textbooks, and on pupil-teacher ratios and class size (which are signs of an adequate supply of teachers and classrooms, respectively). On average, the situation of all the four indicators was about the same across all the regions in Swaziland, in both rural and urban schools, and in the private and public schools.

Furthermore, concerning basic learning materials, mathematics textbooks, and pupil-teacher ratios, the results show that Swaziland improved between 2000 and 2007. This overall improvement in the quality of school inputs can be linked to the introduction of a number of major innovations at primary school level following recommendations from the SACMEQ II study.

Although the country fared well, there is a need to build strong monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure that the current gains are sustained, especially considering that the country's resources are diminishing and the economic outlook is not very encouraging.

## References

Ministry of Education (1984). *A guide to school rules and guidelines*. Mbabane, Swaziland: Government of Swaziland.

### Abbreviations and Acronyms

FPE	Free Primary Education
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
UPE	Universal Primary Education
USD	United States Dollar

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