E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (EHASS)
ISSN – Online 2720-7722 | Print 2821-8949
Volume 7 Issue 10 2026 pp 2950 - 2962
Available online at: https://noyam.org/journals/ehass/
DOI: https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20267103

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African Indigenous languages not enjoying parity at Higher Education Institutions: A case study of a South African University of Technology

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ABSTRACT

The background and purpose of this paper are centered upon the minimal or lack of usage of African Indigenous languages at Higher Education institutions in South Africa. It investigates why these African Indigenous Languages continue to lack parity with English and Afrikaans and examines the extent to which institutions are working to elevate their status. The study used a quantitative method (a questionnaire with closed-ended questions) in collect data. Sixty (60) students (20 Males and 40 Females). The study is underpinned by critical theory, with three criteria: (explanatory, practical, and normative). The South African Constitution (1996) affirms that all 12 official languages should be given their due and constitutional status. However, 31 years later, African indigenous languages remain far from equitable use in higher education. The findings revealed that English or Afrikaans still dominates most South African Higher Education Institutions. Achieving equality for African indigenous languages at South African Higher Education institutions is an ongoing process, transitioning from extensive discussions with little advancement to a situation in which, despite challenges, these languages are steadily, though slowly, attaining their rightful place in higher education. The paper recommends a dual medium of instruction, wherein one of the languages used could be a regional African Indigenous language. The Department of Higher Education should financially support Higher Education institutions to enhance, prioritize, and encourage multilingualism. The paper contributes to global scholarship by expanding the world's epistemological horizons, providing a novel conceptual framework, and preserving unique Indigenous Knowledge Systems. It offers novel perspectives in linguistics, philosophy, and beyond Eurocentric paradigms globally.

Keywords: Indigenous languages, parity, Higher Education institutions, South Africa, University of Technology.

INTRODUCTION

Language remains an obstacle to access and achievement for numerous students in South African higher education institutions. Even though they are recognized as official languages, indigenous languages have historically and currently not been given the necessary structural support to operate as academic and scientific languages. South African universities face the challenge of fostering a multilingual

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PUBLICATION HISTORY - Received: 16th April, 2026 | Accepted: 31st August, 2026 | Published: 9th November, 2026.
TO CITE THIS ARTICLE – Hlohlolo, Sephiri David. "African Indigenous languages not enjoying parity at Higher Education Institutions: A case study of a South African University of Technology."*E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 7, no.10 (2026): 2950 - 2962. https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20267103
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environment where all official languages, especially those historically marginalized, are given the opportunity to evolve as languages of scholarship, research, and education. The ongoing neglect and devaluation of indigenous languages should not be tolerated by public higher education institutions if they are to adequately address the varied linguistic requirements of their student body. Conditions must be established for the advancement and strengthening of indigenous languages as vehicles for substantial academic discussion and as sources of knowledge across various fields of higher education.

South African Constitution (1996) affirms that indigenous languages should be given their due and constitutional status. South Africa has twelve (12) languages as its official languages, which must be treated equally. This contribution aims to evaluate how universities contribute to the development of indigenous languages through education and to highlight the impact of the marginalization of South African indigenous languages on their overall development. The neglect of South African indigenous languages creates an obstacle to justice and results in a miscarriage of justice. This paper may discuss potential solutions to ensure the development of South African indigenous languages as academic disciplines, and to contribute to the ongoing debate engaging universities and various stakeholders in higher education. The contribution will address curriculum decolonization as a potential solution essential for the future growth and inclusivity of the diverse South African community.

So far, in the Republic of South Africa, various forums have addressed the topic of language usage in Higher Education Institutions. All these efforts have failed to ensure that African Indigenous Languages are on par with other languages. The Republic of South Africa recognizes twelve (12) official languages that must be treated equally. Languages, especially African languages, appear to be regarded as a low priority in the teaching and learning in HEIs, particularly by senior figures in South Africa. It is no surprise that political parties take precedence, whereas the constituency seems insignificant (only becoming important every five years when voters are expected to cast their ballots, at which point electorates become paramount). This concept unjustly elevates the status of "alleged" party-centred praise above the democracy rooted in constituencies. Despite Constitutional goals, HEIs have not succeeded in achieving the specified Constitutional purposes regarding the use of African Indigenous Languages. African Indigenous languages are taught merely as modules and are not used as the medium of instruction and learning. The truth of the matter is that conducting teaching and learning in students' African Indigenous Languages could enhance the academic performance of students in South Africa. This is because African students initially need to understand English prior to mastering the material.

This study aims to rectify or improve this unfortunate scenario in which the English language is perceived as more significant than the other official languages in the Republic of South Africa, particularly in education and learning within the HEIs in South Africa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

AILs face significant marginalization within HEIs, particularly in South Africa, where English and Afrikaans continue to dominate. While post-apartheid initiatives encouraging multilingualism are forward-thinking, research suggests that AILs do not receive equal acknowledgment and application as languages for teaching, investigation, and management. In a post-apartheid South Africa, English has been considered, and continues to be, preferable to Afrikaans for use as a medium of teaching. Nevertheless, choosing either language as the primary mode of instruction overlooks and hinders the development of native languages associated with black South Africans. The superiority of the English language indicates the stagnant state of indigenous languages, demoting these languages and many others to a subordinate position. The higher education system in South Africa is experiencing a profound structural and existential crisis.[1] The crisis is becoming progressively more severe due to the inability to adequately address the effects of imperialism and the prevailing neoliberal ideology, which Hlatshwayo asserts persists in shaping higher education within the country.[2]

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[1] Savo Heleta, " Decolonisation of Higher Education: Dilemmas and Contradictions," *South African Journal of Higher Education* 30 (5): (2016): 1–12; Siseko H Kumalo, "Resurrecting the Black Archive through the Decolonisation of Philosophy in South Africa," *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* 5, no. 1–2 (March 3, 2020): 19–36, https://doi.org/10.1080/23802014.2020.1798276; Tshepo Madlingozi, "Decolonising 'Decolonisation'with Mphahlele," *New Frame* 1 (2018).

[2] Mlamuli Nkosingphile Hlatshwayo, "The Rise of the Neoliberal University in South Africa: Some Implications for Curriculum Imagination(S)," *Education as Change* 26 (November 22, 2022), https://doi.org/10.25159/1947-9417/11421.

In South African tertiary education, the language matter is addressed through official policy frameworks and guidelines like the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the Higher Education Act of 1997, the National Strategy for Post-School Education and Training 2020, and the 2013 White Paper on Post-School Education and Training, among others. Everything mentioned highlights the significance of promoting and nurturing the development of the official indigenous languages for learning to improve student access to resources.[3]

Nevertheless, no enduring solution has been found for the problems related to linguistic domination in the diverse university environments of South Africa. As a result, the uncontested dominance of English in universities throughout South Africa negatively impacts students' comprehension and access to information, especially for those whose first language is not English. This takes place despite the newly established language policy for advanced education (LPHE) that supports the advancement of multilingualism and the advancement and utilization of South Africa's 10 official native languages.[4] This action would enhance the participation of university students and staff in various activities.[5]

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is governed by critical theory, which serves as an analytical framework that explores the connection between language, power, and social identity, emphasizing how language is influenced by and influences social hierarchies. This theory highlights that language serves not only as a mode of communication but also as a mechanism for upholding and contesting societal norms and frameworks. It prompts people to consider their own language usage and its effects in different situations. Romm noted that, based on critical theory, individuals examine the components involved in practicing sciences, including languages.[6] Individuals should also reflect on how the scientific method connects to broader initiatives aimed at improving human mistake management. As a result, critical theorists have cultivated a receptive stance toward philosophical traditions that offer prospects of human liberation via social critique.[7] Thompson suggested that critical theory seeks to elucidate and change all conditions that subjugate humans.[8] Additionally, Thompson argued that critical theory must fulfil three requirements to be sufficient, specifically, (1) Explanatory, meaning it should clarify what is problematic about the existing reality.[9] This study identifies the issue that Higher Education Institutions are presently not incorporating African Indigenous Languages into their programs. (2) Practical suggested that recognizing the participants to alter the circumstances is essential. The individuals to be recognized in this study are management officials at Higher Education Institutions who possess the authority to alter the language conditions within their organizations. (3) Normative suggested a commitment to establishing clear standards for critique and realizing practical objectives for societal change. The current state of HEIs has been influenced by factors such as politics, gender, religion, and culture that interconnect, originating from the previous system in South Africa. The aim of the researcher extends beyond merely explaining the situation; it is to change it for the benefit of those who cannot speak English, thus preventing them from voicing their opinions and contributing to enhancing their performance.

On the other hand, Bitzer and Constandins hinted at critical theory as an ideology or lens that is conditioned to evaluate reality.[10] Critical theory in language research examines how language shapes,

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[3] Department of Higher Education and Training., *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training: Building an Expanded, Effective and Integrated Post-School System* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 2013); Department of Higher Education and Training, *Post-School Education and Training (PSET) Information Policy* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 2020); Republic of South Africa (RSA), *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (Government Printers, 1996).

[4] Department of Higher Education and Training, *Post-School Education and Training (PSET) Information Policy*.

[5] Department of Higher Education and Training, *Post-School Education and Training (PSET) Information Policy*.

[6] N. Romm, *Critical Theory and Development: Development Theory, Policy and Practice* (London: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[7] John B Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013).

[8] Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication*.

[9] Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication*.

[10] Elmarie Costandius and Eli Bitzer, *Engaging Higher Education Curricula: A Critical Citizenship Perspective*, vol. 6 (African Sun Media, 2015).

upholds, and contests power dynamics, disparities, and societal standards. It transforms attention from simple description to revealing the ideologies within discourse, seeking to promote social justice and change, especially by examining how language perpetuates oppression. Critical theory highlights that language serves as a crucial instrument in forming social identities by mirroring and reinforcing cultural norms and values. It demonstrates how people use language to convey their identities while also managing social norms. The relationship between language and identity can influence people's experiences in different situations, exposing hidden power dynamics and prejudices in communication. The use of critical theory in education involves analysing how the language found in curricula, classroom communication, and evaluation methods impacts students from diverse backgrounds. It can uncover biases present in educational resources or teaching techniques that might disadvantage specific groups. This analysis motivates educators to foster more inclusive settings by acknowledging the language abilities of every student and adjusting methods to improve the variety of modes of expression.

METHODOLOGY

The quantitative approach, through the use of a questionnaire for this research, will be utilized to collect data for this research. Each phase (research design, research population, sample, research instruments, data collection, and data analysis) will be clarified and supported with justifications for the selected methods and materials. The quantitative method is considered suitable for this research and has been employed (the questionnaire incorporates both methods, featuring quantitative questions such as ‘Yes/No' and qualitative inquiries such as ‘a section for respondents to articulate their answers in their ownwords'). The study uses a questionnaire that contains both closed-ended responses, which are essential for researchers to obtain a clearer understanding, particularly in the field of human sciences.

Population and sample

Polit and Beck defined population as the entire set of instances that the researcher focuses on, where a population is not selected for generalizability, but instead to identify the types of individuals who are appropriate to participate in the research.[11] The study used probability sampling because it ensures that every member (participant) has an equal probability of being selected. Furthermore, probability sampling is essential because it is able to minimise bias and thus ensure that the findings are reliable. This sampling is appropriate and relevant for this study as it is ideal for a quantitative research approach because it seeks to make statistically valid and generalised claims. The study focused on a target group of sixty (60) students from the South African University of Technology. To justify the sample size, it should be noted that, for quantitative research, a size of sixty (60) participants is justified through statistical power analysis or precision-based estimation. The population size is acceptable for an adequate sample for a study designed to test feasibility and calculate variance for a larger future study. Polit and Beck describe sampling as the method of choosing a portion of the population to stand in for the entire population.[12] This research successfully distributed surveys to students.

Research instrument

Halperin and Heath posited that a research instrument is a device utilized to gather, quantify, and examine information about the topic.[13] Questionnaires with closed-ended questions were utilized to collect data, as they effectively offer direct information for the research. Questionnaires with closed-ended questions act as the physical or digital tool used to conduct a survey. They provide respondents with specific predetermined answers to choose from. It is easy to analyse statistically. Again, it is relevant for this study as it measures opinions, knowledge, behaviour, and preferences across a target population. Questionnaires with closed-ended questions provide standardised responses as the same questions are asked uniformly. Therefore, the collected data is regarded as highly reliable, making it

[11] D.F Polit and C.T Beck, *Nursing Research: Generating and Assessing Evidence for Nursing Practice*, 11th ed. (Philadelphia: Wolters Kluwer, 2020).
[12] Polit and Beck, *Nursing Research: Generating and Assessing Evidence for Nursing Practice*.
[13] Sandra Halperin and Oliver Heath, *Political Research*, 3rd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1093/hepl/9780198820628.001.0001.

straightforward to replicate studies (if needs arise). Consequently, the engagement between the researcher and participants produces concepts primarily of shared interest. Additionally, the questionnaire included items that allowed participants to share their opinions on the use of English in the teaching and learning processes at Higher Education Institutions in South Africa. In validating a questionnaire with closed-ended questions, there is an enhancement of the trustworthiness of the study findings because it ensures that it measures 'what it intends to measure (validity) and does so consistently(reliability). Furthermore, a questionnaire is used to ensure that the study produces accurate and trustworthy data because validity has been evaluated.

Data collection procedure

Stromberg believes data collection is the method by which the researcher gathers information.[14] Once more, Kumar suggested that data collection is viewed as the accurate, methodical accumulation of information pertinent to the research aim or objectives, inquiries, or hypotheses of a study.[15] For this research, surveys were given to the chosen participants. Questionnaires are used to gather information on opinions without the influence of other respondents; they provide ample time for answering questions; and they are beneficial as they clarify ambiguities and allow immediate follow-ups on incomplete responses.

Data analysis procedure

Kumar argued that data analysis is a procedure aimed at filtering, condensing, structuring, and assigning significant meaning to data, which aids in addressing research inquiries.[16] Additionally, Goertzen characterized data analysis as the transformation of collected raw data into valuable facts and ideas that can be interpreted quantitatively.[17] Walliman defined data analysis as the process in which the researcher outlines the aim and reasoning behind the analysis, clarifying how the collected data will explain differences in certain response qualities.[18] This research used descriptive data analysis to interpret and analyse empirical findings. Descriptive data analysis is relevant for this study as it systematically summarizes, organizes, and describes the fundamental features of the dataset without drawing conclusions beyond the tested sample. It therefore serves as the foundational first step in quantitative analysis, thereby allowing a researcher to identify patterns. It also describes how to effectively conduct, approach, and communicate quantitative descriptive analysis. To justify a data analysis approach, one must show that the selected techniques directly address the research questions and are standard in the discipline to be studied. To do this effectively, align data analysis with the overall research design, state exactly why the data analysis technique was chosen is superior to alternatives, and cite established academic precedents.

Reliability procedure

It is used to ensure that research findings are consistent, stable, and free from errors, as this helps evaluate and maintain consistency. To verify and establish reliability, the following are to be utilized:
(a) ***test-retest reliability*** by administering the same test to the same group at different times to measure score stability;
(b) ***Internal consistency*** by checking if multiple questions intended to measure the same construct yield similar findings;
(c) ***Parallel forms*** wherein two equivalent versions of a questionnaire are used to compare the responses (results);
(d) ***inter-rater reliability*** that ensures or evaluates consistent data scores when assessing the same subject (questionnaire).

[14] H. Stromberg, *Dewit's Medical and Surgical Nursing: Concepts and Practice* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2020).
[15] R Kumar, *Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners*, Core Textbook (SAGE Publications, 2018).
[16] Kumar, *Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners*.
[17] Melissa J Goertzen, "Introduction to Quantitative Research and Data," *Library Technology Reports* 53, no. 4 (2017): 12–18.
[18] Nicholas Walliman, *Research Methods: The Basics* (Routledge, 2021).

Trustworthiness procedure

Trustworthiness for this study validates findings, thus ensuring the results are believable, rigorous, and accurately reflect the data collected, thus underpinning the study's academic integrity. The reliability procedure is established through reliability and validity, wherein the employment of an instrument (questionnaire) is used to guarantee reliability, whilst ensuring rigor by controlling variables to maintain internal validity utilizing representative sampling for external validity, and employing validity, thus minimizing bias to maintain objectivity.

Informed consent procedures

The informed consent procedure is important for any research project. This procedure is the cornerstone of ethical research, as it ensures the following important disclosures are made, namely, the study's purpose, potential risks, and possible benefits (if any) before and after participation. As a result, informed consent empowers participants to make informed, voluntary decisions while legally protecting both the researcher and participants. Of importance, it must be made clear that participants are respected for autonomy, protection of vulnerable participants, risk mitigation and voluntary participation. Participants must know that they have a right to withdraw at any time if they feel compromised.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Of the sixty (60) questionnaires distributed, all were returned fully completed. The research included more females (66,6%) than males (33.4%). The reason for a higher number of female students is due to a higher number of females registered at the institution. The ages of most of these students ranged from 19 to 27 years. The largest proportion regarding home language distribution was Sesotho (Southern Sotho). A questionnaire revealed that English is still predominantly used in the higher education sector. The following results emanate from responses as provided by students:

- Obstacles to all official languages enjoying parity of esteem were caused by a lack of budget. Most, if not all, of the time, the government indicates that there is not enough budget to promote all official languages. The former government (Apartheid) did all it could to promote its languages (Afrikaans and English), but the current democratic government has failed in doing so.
- Lack of skilled personnel, such as authors in African Indigenous Languages. There is no skilled personnel because the current government does not provide finances to train people to become African Indigenous Languages specialists.
- The Department of Higher Education and Training to subsidize institutions of Higher learning to elevate, prioritize and promote official languages to become languages of record, teaching, research, science, and technology. There is no will or correct priorities in the Higher Education Department that will help in promoting African Indigenous Languages; hence, to date, only English and Afrikaans are still being used during teaching and learning in South African Higher Institutions.
- Tuition in Higher Education institutions is still provided in colonized languages (for South Africa, in English and Afrikaans). Students believe that South African Higher Institutions are still colonized, as only English and Afrikaans are still being preferred at the expense of African Indigenous Languages.
- There is no will on the part of the Government (the responsible department is Sports, Arts and Culture) to equally promote all twelve (12) official languages. The students maintained that the government is not doing enough to promote all twelve South African official languages. More needs to be done, implying that the government, through the department responsible, should provide resources (funding) to have all twelve languages developed and promoted equally.

The results of the questionnaire revealed that 78% of the respondents (47 respondents) indicated that English is still predominantly used at the expense of other languages. On the other hand, 22% of the respondents (13 respondents) indicated that a bit of a mixture of languages (English and one African

Language) is being used during communication. Below is the table that represents the home language/s of respondents on campus.

Table 1: Home language of respondents on campus

Home language	Number of speakers (%)
English	2 (3.3%)
Afrikaans	2 (3.3%)
Sign Language	0 (0%)
Sesotho	43 (71,6%)
isiZulu	1 (1,7%)
Setswana	3 (5,0%)
isiXhosa	6 (10%)
Xitsonga	0 (0%)
Tshivenda	0 (0%)
Siswati	0 (0%)
Sepedi	1 (1,7%)
isiNdebele	2 (3,3%)

DISCUSSION

Makalela posited that the language policies of several Higher Education Institutions in South Africa elevated English as the language of teaching and learning, as well as assessment, thereby disadvantaging students whose cognitive academic language proficiency in English is weak.[19] Moreover, whilst Higher Education Institutions have revised their language policies to include African indigenous languages, the exercise of inclusion should be accompanied by efforts directed towards their development and subsequent usage to enable students to choose to study in their mother tongue or any other indigenous African languages of their choice. Even though the language policy statement of most higher education institutions stipulates that English will serve as the primary language of instruction, concerted efforts are made to implement other regional official language/s within their regions. The table above shows Sesotho as the most spoken regional language. To date, higher education institutions are not allowing indigenous African languages to enjoy parity, thus promoting multilingual education. Often, there is a perception (myth) that university students have a negative view regarding the use of their mother tongue or African indigenous languages as mediums of instruction, which has fostered or supported the dominance (ascendancy) of English as the exclusive medium of instruction in higher education institutions in South Africa.

Consequently, this concept postpones the exercise of students' constitutional rights to receive education in their preferred language. Despite the efforts of the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (2002) (CRL Rights Commission) to support all official South African languages, indigenous languages continue to be sidelined in higher education institutions in South Africa.[20] The CRL Rights Commission is tasked with promoting all official languages in South Africa. Tertiary educational institutions have embraced two or three official languages, typically English and Afrikaans. The Official Language Act, 12 of 2012, governs and oversees the application of official languages within the South African government. It is utilized once more (Act) to encourage equal respect and fair treatment of South Africa's official languages. Additionally, the Act promotes fair access to services and information. This Act again encourages effective language management for efficient public service administration and to address the needs of the public (including university students). Establishing parity for African indigenous languages at South African universities is a continuous journey, moving from a situation of "much discussion, but minimal progress" to a reality where, despite obstacles, these languages are gradually, albeit slowly,

[19] Leketi Makalela, "Moving out of Linguistic Boxes: The Effects of Translanguaging Strategies for Multilingual Classrooms," *Language and Education* 29, no. 3 (2015): 200–217.

[20] Republic of South Africa, *Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religion and Linguistic Communities* (South Africa: Government Printers, 2002).

securing their appropriate role in higher education. Although the Constitution (1996) and multiple policies, such as the 2020 Language Policy Framework, promote the advancement and utilization of indigenous languages for equity, English remains prevalent, fostering an ongoing "neo-apartheid" gap in educational achievement. At present, every university in South Africa employs English as a medium of instruction and education. Nevertheless, some universities, particularly historically Afrikaans universities, also support Afrikaans and provide African languages in select programs. Despite the commendable efforts to have Indigenous African Languages used as a medium of instruction, English remains predominantly the language of instruction and education in South African Higher Education institutions. Students describe various reasons for this situation:

- African languages are often associated with backwardness, poverty and inferiority.[21]
- African communities have cultivated unfavourable views towards these languages.[22]
- There is a mistaken belief that African languages lack the grammatical structure necessary for teaching disciplines such as Natural Sciences and Mathematics.[23] In other words, there exists a notion that African languages lack the capacity to convey academic discussions efficiently and thus to serve as proper languages for education and instruction [due to their] conventional written forms often being outdated, restricted, context-specific, and disconnected from the contemporary scientific realm.[24]
- There exists a suspicion that the mother language is a ploy used by those in authority to maintain a constant state of marginalization, or the notion that their language hinders their advancement, which is subconsciously instilled in them by the negative portrayal of their language's worth by the dominant speakers.[25]

A similarity with other works is that Munyai posited that the South African government and Higher Education institutions are to develop and include African indigenous languages within their borders.[26] Munyai placed emphasis on the need to develop and include South African indigenous languages in the language policies of Higher Education institutions.[27] Furthermore, Munyai stated that the inclusion of African indigenous languages could facilitate social cohesion and affirm restorative justice efforts given the historical marginalisation of Black (African) people in language and education. On the other hand, Munyaradzi stated that the elevation of English as the primary language of teaching and learning in South African Higher Education institutions defies the South African constitutional and other statutory obligations and their aspirations to promote the development of African indigenous languages as intellectual languages for teaching and learning and research.[28] Furthermore, Munyaradzi problematised linguistic imperialism in South African Higher Education institutions and the hegemony of English over South African indigenous languages.[29]

Differences with other works, Aliakbari asserts that English was initially enforced upon various peripheral nations and has effectively supplanted or replaced some of the native languages of these

[21] Delina Nkwashu, Richard Ndwayamato Madadzhe, and Sikhetho Joe Jubayi, "The Use of Xitsonga at the University of Limpopo (Turfloop Campus)," *South African Journal of Higher Education* 29, no. 3 (January 2016), https://doi.org/10.20853/29-3-485.

[22] Thembeka Abraham Bura Makamu, "Students' Attitudes towards the Use of Source Languages in the Turfloop Campus, University of Limpopo: A Case Study." (2009).

[23] Neville Alexander, *Language Policy and National Unity in South Africa/Azania* (Buchu Books Cape Town, 1989); E. Annamalai, "Mother Tongue Education: Nonstandard Language," in *Encyclopedia of Language & Linguistics* (Elsevier, 2006), 342–45, https://doi.org/10.1016/B0-08-044854-2/00650-7; H E Wolff, "African Universities Should Use African Languages Not Just English, French and Portuguese," 2018.

[24] Andrew Foley, "Mother-Tongue Education in South Africa," *Teach English Today* 4, no. 1 (2010): 42–53.

[25] Annamalai, "Mother Tongue Education: Nonstandard Language."

[26] Anzanilufuno Munyai, "Language Conundrum in Higher Education Institutions in South Africa: One Step Forward or Two Steps Back?," *De Jure Law Journal* 57, no. 1 (2024): 177–95.

[27] Munyai, "Language Conundrum in Higher Education Institutions in South Africa: One Step Forward or Two Steps Back?"

[28] Julliet Munyaradzi, "Towards Breaking Linguistic Imperialism in Teaching and Learning in South African Universities: A Decolonial Perspective," *African Perspectives of Research in Teaching and Learning Journal Issue Special Issue*, no. 8 (2024).

[29] Munyaradzi, "Towards Breaking Linguistic Imperialism in Teaching and Learning in South African Universities: A Decolonial Perspective."

nations through intentional strategy.[30] From this standpoint, the author argues that the South African education system should implement strategic and deliberate methods to enhance the incorporation of previously marginalized languages as media of instruction and education. Indigenous African languages in South African higher education continue to be marginalised due to the prevalence of English, insufficient academic development, and shortcomings in the implementation of language policies within institutions. Although there are constitutional guarantees of equality, universities find it difficult to implement these languages as main tools for instruction, education, and research. Dockrat and Kaschula analyze and frame the mostly monolingual language policies of South African universities in the context of transformation, highlighting their potential for change.[31] In addition, they examine language matters in higher education institutions in South Africa by reviewing constitutional and legislative structures. In their research, they contend that the linguistic landscape requires transformation, as the Constitution acknowledges 12 official languages. Rakgogo posited that eleven (11) universities, constituting 42% of South African higher education institutions, have both an African Languages Department and a dedicated Language Unit or Centre.[32] Again, only one higher education institution, comprising 3,8%, lacks both an African Language Department and a dedicated Language Unit or Centre. This observation underscores the anomaly of such a situation within the South African higher education institution landscape. This prevailing circumstance could significantly impact language transformation efforts, as it indicates a complete absence of institutional support for the promotion and development of African Indigenous Languages.

According to the Language Policy for Higher Education, it is stated that South Africa is a country of many languages and tongues.[33] However, our languages have not always been 'working together'. In the past, the richness of our linguistic diversity was used as an instrument of control, oppression and exploitation. The existence of different languages was recognised and perversely celebrated to legitimise the policy of 'separate development' that formed the cornerstone of apartheid. However, in practice, none of our languages had the same status. The policy of 'separate development' resulted in the privileging of English and Afrikaans as the official languages of the apartheid state and the marginalisation and underdevelopment of African and other languages.

It is trendy, of course, to claim that African languages do not possess the necessary vocabulary to provide Science and Mathematics. This appears to be a tactic or excuse for procrastination. If this argument were accepted, then African languages would never reach a level sufficient to adequately teach the subjects mentioned above. The approach is to create programs in higher education that incorporate African languages as media of instruction and education. It is heartening to know that this initiative has begun in several programs at various universities in South Africa, thereby addressing both societal and student demands for the decolonisation of curricula in South African universities. In this context, decolonisation indicates that, in addition to revising the curricula to emphasize African topics, African languages should also be prioritized in higher education.[34]

Moreover, given that the dominance of English in global matters is an undeniable reality, it is also crucial to reassure the previously mentioned stakeholders that learning through Indigenous African languages does not imply that students will be unable to learn English.[35] English will continue to be taught as a subject, providing the additional benefit of enabling students to become proficient bilingual (additive bilingualism) learners, as suggested by Cummins, making them more attractive and fitting for

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[30] Mohammad Aliakbari, "Linguistic Imperialism, Linguistic Democracy and English Language Teaching," in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Information Technology and Universities in Asia. Chulalongkon University Press, Bangkok, Thailand*, 2003.

[31] Zakeera Docrat and Russell H. Kaschula, "Legal Translation and Court Interpreting in Africa," in *Research Handbook on Jurilinguistics* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023), 451–69, https://doi.org/10.4337/9781802207248.00040.

[32] Tebogo J. Rakgogo, "A Linguistic Evaluation of the South African Higher Education Sector: A Reflection on 30 Years of Democracy (1994–2024)," *Transformation in Higher Education* 9 (April 26, 2024), https://doi.org/10.4102/the.v9i0.342.

[33] Republic of South Africa, *Language Policy for Higher Education (LPHE). Government Information and Communication Systems* (South Africa: Government Printers, 2002), 2.

[34] Savo Heleta, "Decolonisation of Higher Education: Dismantling Epistemic Violence and Eurocentrism in South Africa," *Transformation in Higher Education* 1, no. 1 (2016): 1–8.

[35] Andrew Green et al., "English Spreads as Teaching Language in Universities Worldwide," *University World News* 229 (2012).

the present era.[36] Moreover, as Haynes points out, studying academic topics in their first language aids English Language Learners in acquiring English, and "learners with solid literacy abilities in their native tongue will pick up English more quickly."[37] This will help to address the problem of students who struggle with both English and their native languages (namely, African languages) since this approach would enhance their proficiency in both English and African languages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study proposes the following recommendations to be implemented to improve the use of South African indigenous languages at institutions of higher education:

- South African Higher Education institutions should delve into language policy and plans, examine the efficiency of language policies, promote linguistic diversity and inclusivity and address challenges in implementing multilingual language policies.
- They (South African Higher Education institutions) should provide insights into integrating South African indigenous languages into educational curricula to support mother tongue-based multilingual education, as well as providing strategies for incorporating Sign Language to promote inclusivity.
- They should represent a vital juncture in the ongoing journey of preserving and revitalizing African indigenous languages, thus fostering interdisciplinary dialogue, innovative approaches, and collaborative endeavors.
- National and Provincial governments are to make resources available to promote at least the official languages.
- Government and South African Higher Education institutions should adhere to Section 29 of the South African Constitution (1996), which stipulates that everyone has the right to receive education in the official language/s of his/her choice in public educational higher institutions, where such education is reasonably practicable. Regrettably, the reasonably practicable stipulation is often used as an excuse by many South African Higher Education institutions to focus on English only, since there is still a widespread lack of learning resources in indigenous African languages.
- South African universities will conduct research that will address the needs and challenges of using African indigenous languages within their curricula, whereby the important role that these languages play cannot be denied.
- South African government is urged by the Constitution (1996) to take practical and positive measures to elevate and advance the status of indigenous African languages. In light of this provision, the South African government has the responsibility to realize this constitutional provision.

Moreover, the dual model of teaching with both English and a preferred African indigenous language, as agreed by management and students, could be a near solution. Notes, assignments and tests could be written in both languages (in the anticipated dual model of teaching), and if translation is required, provision will be made by institutions of higher learning. This model could enable students to develop their full potential by drawing on their home language as a resource for cognitive development, for epistemological access, and for better access to English as a language of academic discourse. This study will contribute to the global scholarship by expanding the world's epistemological horizons, thus providing a novel conceptual framework. Therefore, it will preserve unique Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). Furthermore, this study offers novel perspectives in fields such as Languages, Linguistics and Philosophy, thereby moving academic discourse beyond Eurocentric paradigms.

[36] Jim Cummins, "Interdependence of First- and Second-Language Proficiency in Bilingual Children," in *Language Processing in Bilingual Children* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 70–89, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511620652.006.
[37] Judie Haynes, *Getting Started with English Language Learners: How Educators Can Meet the Challenge* (ASCD, 2007).

CONCLUSION

This research examined the lack of equality for African Indigenous Languages within Higher Education institutions in South Africa. This study examined the extent to which Indigenous Languages are used in Higher Education institutions to enhance their prominence and promote their use within these institutions. In terms of linguistic diversity, South Africa is a leader in the world. The updated Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions, Act No. 101 of 1997, revised in 2020, indicates that: "It is clear that minimal advancements have been achieved in investigating and utilizing African languages to enhance access and success within Higher education institutions." This acts as a condemnation of the whole Higher Education industry. Therefore, higher education institutions are responsible not only for producing, cultivating and implementing indigenous African language resources, but also for devising creative policies and strategies that actively promote multilingualism on their campuses. South Africa boasts a rich diversity of languages, each embodying its unique cultural heritage and importance. Nonetheless, safeguarding and advancing African native languages encounter many obstacles in today's world. Incorporating African indigenous languages into university curricula will promote diversity in both academic and social environments, encouraging a positive perspective on linguistic diversity and cultivating students' pride in their mother tongues. It is crucial that universities in South Africa re-intellectualize African indigenous languages to effectively contribute to the knowledge community. African indigenous languages are granted official language status, but they have evidently not been sufficiently developed or used as languages for academia and science. Languages evolve only when utilized, as they are dynamic and can adjust to new settings. This suggests that African Indigenous languages can broaden their vocabulary to fit any educational setting. Significantly, students are eager to learn in their native language (which is an African indigenous language/s for this research), provided these languages can offer the same global competencies and services as English. This paper emphasizes that Indigenous languages do not have equal status at higher education institutions but have become part of skill development and service provision, making them suitable for adaptation to meet the educational needs of university students in South Africa.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to acknowledge and sincerely thank the participants from whom data was collected.

Declaration of ownership

This article is my original work.

Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

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