



The Development of African Languages as the Medium of Instruction in Higher Education: From Policy to Practice

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ABSTRACT

This study, using the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) as a key case study, critically examined the integration of African languages, specifically isiZulu, in South Africa's higher education system. Employing a qualitative approach, the research conducted semi-structured interviews with lecturers and students while analysing relevant policies through a comprehensive examination of secondary data. The theoretical framework is grounded in sociolinguistics that focuses on diglossia—a linguistic phenomenon where two languages serve distinct functions in multilingual communities. The article engaged with the legacy of apartheid and colonialism, considering racial power differences that position African languages as inferior. The findings highlight the transformative role UKZN has embarked on of intellectualising isiZulu, challenging persistent misconceptions about the capacity of African languages to contribute to knowledge within higher education. The recommendations stressed the need for innovative teaching approaches, and robust support services for students engaging with academic content in African languages. This paper contributes to reshaping the narrative around African languages, recognising their vital role in higher education.

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INTRODUCTION

During South African colonialism and the era of apartheid, black South Africans were compelled to adopt languages such as English and Afrikaans which were imposed by discriminatory policies. The shift towards democracy demanded a reformation in the educational framework, particularly in the incorporation of African languages into the teaching and learning environments.¹ Aside from English, Afrikaans was the sole language utilised as a medium of instruction across all disciplines in the country's higher education system. In 2002 the Ministry of Education made the Language Policy for South African Higher Education assign eleven languages as official, nine of which are African languages, in addition to English, and Afrikaans. The Language Policy for Higher Education mandated that African languages be developed and advanced as "Languages of Learning and Teaching" (LoLTs) at the university level. Alexander, for instance, has contended that it is the post-apartheid state's democratic responsibility to guarantee that African languages are energised and sustained at all levels of the educational system. He referred to biocultural variety, economic advancement, political democracy, human nobility, and successful languages as critical reasons for multilingualism in South Africa overall.² While recalling Alexander's heritage, this article analyses how one African language is advanced at a South African university (consequently alluded to as the University of KwaZulu Natal, or UKZN).

¹ Stephanie Rudwick, "Language, Africanisation, and Identity Politics at a South African University," *Journal of Language, Identity & Education* 17, no. 4 (2018): 255–69.

² Neville Alexander, "The Politics of Language Planning in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Language Problems & Language Planning* 28, no. 2 (2004); Neville Alexander, *Thoughts on the New South Africa* (Jacana Media, 2013).

The underutilisation of African languages has led South Africans to harbour unfavourable feelings about employing them for academic pursuits.³ Less Africans are concentrating on their languages in school in view of the conviction that researchers concentrating on them are deemed backward.⁴ In South Africa, a noticeable trend toward prioritising English learning has emerged since the country's shift to democracy. Barkhuizen notes that students tend to favour English studies due to its perceived ease and more enjoyable learning experience compared to indigenous languages like isiXhosa.⁵ Moreover, the high dropout rates are due to the use of foreign languages for instruction.⁶ This highlights the significance of language in education. Correspondingly, the language policy and plan of the University of KwaZulu-Natal of 2006, amended in 2014 acknowledges the critical role of language in the process of teaching and learning. This recognition aims to address the challenges faced in education due to the language barrier, emphasizing the importance of linguistic inclusivity for academic success in South Africa.

UKZN has actively embarked on a journey to advance, modernise, and enrich isiZulu as a language for creating and disseminating information through its language strategy and plan. The language strategy of UKZN clearly outlines objectives to elevate isiZulu to the same institutional and academic standing as English. It aims to facilitate the use of isiZulu for learning, teaching, research, and administrative purposes.⁷ While embracing multilingualism, the institution officially recognises English and isiZulu as its two primary languages. It has been strongly advocated that for African languages to be effectively utilised in disciplines such as science, and mathematics, a deliberate and carefully designed process of intellectualizing these languages is essential. This method of intellectualising African languages directly challenges the belief that these languages are inadequate for conveying academic content. This article begins with a discussion of UKZN and its language policy and has a section that discusses African languages as media of instruction in higher education. It looks at the literature on how scholars have reflected on the topic, the next section looks at the theoretical framework (sociolinguistic theory) and how it is suitable for this study. The subsequent part of the study offers a discussion of the interview responses from staff and students of UKZN.

The Language Policy at the UKZN

The University of KwaZulu Natal's vision is to be a leading African university that draws locally by defeating disparities and historic disadvantages.⁸ With the advent of racial segregation in higher education, the university felt that everyone who met the requirements to enrol as a student should be admitted without regard to race. In post-apartheid where racially separated institutions are discouraged; there has also been an inflow of African students into these predominantly historically white universities, with UKZN being one among them.⁹ This inflow has been one of the underpinnings of the language policy that advocates for the inclusion of isiZulu in addition to English for teaching and learning. Through this policy, the university is determined to restructure the higher education system's institutional environment to overcome apartheid's fragmented disparities and inefficiencies.¹⁰ Black South Africans were educated at historically black universities that served as detention centres for black intellectuals.¹¹

In their article reviewing the policy and discussing the politics of dominance in and through language, scholars acknowledge that the UKZN language policy could be conceived as a tool for Africanisation and decolonisation.¹² Those who oppose the policy see isiZulu as a subtle weapon used to dominate other races. However, one cannot deny that the promotion of isiZulu at UKZN is justified by the University's vision and

³ Soyiso Khetoa and Sara Motsei, "An Evaluation of the Opinions of Students Enrolled in Sesotho Modules at the University of the Free State," *Perspectives in Education* 39, no. 2 (2021): 175–90.

⁴ Charles Owu-Ewie and Dora F Edu-Buandoh, "Living with Negative Attitudes towards the Study of L1 in Ghanaian Senior High Schools (SHS)," *Ghana Journal of Linguistics* 3, no. 2 (2014): 1–25.

⁵ Gary Barkhuizen, "Learners' Perceptions of the Teaching and Learning of Xhosa First Language in Eastern and Western Cape High Schools," 2001.

⁶ Rosalie Finlayson and Mbulungeni Madiba, "The Intellectualisation of the Indigenous Languages of South Africa: Challenges and Prospects," *Current Issues in Language Planning* 3, no. 1 (2002): 40–61., Rosalie, and Mbulungeni Madiba. "The intellectualisation of the indigenous languages of South Africa: Challenges and prospects (2002)

⁷ University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), "Language Policy of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Language Board" (Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2014).

⁸ University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), "Language Policy of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Language Board."

⁹ Finlayson and Madiba, "The Intellectualisation of the Indigenous Languages of South Africa: Challenges and Prospects."

¹⁰ "Language Policy Framework for South African Higher Education,"

<http://www.dhet.gov.za/HED%20Policies/Language%20Policy%20for%20Higher%20Education.pdf> , 2002.

¹¹ Mahmood Mamdani, "There Can Be No African Renaissance without an African Focused Intelligentsia," *Southern Africa Political & Economic Monthly* 12, no. 2 (1999): 51–54.

¹² Zama M Mthombeni and Olusola Ogunnubi, "An Appraisal of Bilingual Language Policy Implementation in South African Higher Education," *South African Journal of African Languages* 40, no. 2 (2020): 186–97.

mission, which is to be the leading institution for African scholarship. This goal cannot be attained without including an African language that serves a functional purpose, which is something that isiZulu does.¹³ The policy states that historically underprivileged African pupils would be entitled to study in their mother tongues.¹⁴

More specifically, the UKZN language policy prioritises the development and promotion of bilingual fluency in English and isiZulu, with English serving as the principal language of teaching. On the other hand, because the majority of UKZN students speak isiZulu, it is used for social cohesiveness.¹⁵ The language policy states that:

“All students registering for an undergraduate degree at UKZN from 2014 will be required to pass or obtain a credit for a prescribed isiZulu module before they can graduate. This rule, approved in principle by the university’s senate, gives tangible expression to UKZN’s language policy and plan, which is intended to promote and facilitate the use of isiZulu as a language of learning.”¹⁶

As the institution requires that students exhibit bilingualism to get their degrees, it implies that all new students must enrol in an IsiZulu course. UKZN has committed itself to developing curricula in both isiZulu and English while isiZulu is being established as an instructional language. Additionally, it promotes the study of isiZulu and African traditional knowledge systems.¹⁷ The ten-year policy implementation period has been split into two phases with the first starting in 2008 and ending in 2018, and the second starting in 2019 and ending in 2029.¹⁸ Although many academic disciplines at UKZN encourage students to develop their writing abilities in both English and isiZulu, the level of competence required for each degree programme will be established.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reshaping Higher Education: African Languages as Mediums of Instruction

The incorporation of African languages as Languages of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) within university settings has been a subject of increasing significance and scholarly attention. This pivotal shift toward embracing indigenous languages in higher education institutions represents a significant departure from historical norms, often characterised by the dominance of colonial languages, such as English and Afrikaans, in academic settings.¹⁹ The literature addressing the use of African languages as mediums of instruction at universities delves into multifaceted dimensions, exploring the challenges, opportunities, and potential impact of this paradigmatic change. Issues concerning the pedagogical efficacy, cultural relevance, and societal implications of integrating indigenous languages in tertiary education are at the forefront of these scholarly discussions.

Various studies and academic discourses have examined the implications of adopting African languages for instruction, analyzing the educational, social, and cognitive implications for both students and the broader academic community for instance it is believed that the use of African languages as languages of learning and teaching (LOLT) at universities is a chance to give them a new status.²⁰ A similar sentiment is echoed by scholars who assert that the non-use of a language creates a vicious cycle of non-development since a language develops when used.²¹ Studies have shown the value of high levels of bilingualism for cognitive flexibility and the advantages of educating kids in their mother tongue for as long as possible.²² The effectiveness of so-called immersion programmes aimed at enhancing children's language abilities has been demonstrated in many parts of the world. Education is not the most significant sociocultural institution that contributes to and is responsible

¹³ University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), *Institutional Intelligence Reports* (Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2017).

¹⁴ University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), *Institutional Intelligence Reports*.

¹⁵ University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), “Language Policy of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Language Board.”

¹⁶ UKZN, “Language Policy of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.” www.ukzn.ac.za, 2006, 1.

¹⁷ Andrea Parmegiani and Stephani Rudwick, “IsiZulu-English Bilingualisation at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: An Exploration of Students’ Attitudes,” *Multilingual Universities in South Africa: Reflecting Society in Higher Education*, 2014, 107–22.

¹⁸ University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), “Language Policy of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.”

¹⁹ Finex Ndhlovu, “Language and African Development: Theoretical Reflections on the Place of Languages in African Studies,” *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 17, no. 2 (2008): 15.

²⁰ Zama Mabel Mthombeni and Olusola Ogunnubi, “A Socio-Constructivist Analysis of the Bilingual Language Policy in South African Higher Education: Perspectives from the University of KwaZulu-Natal,” *Cogent Education* 8, no. 1 (2021): 1954465; Zama M. Mthombeni, “Towards an African Linguistic Renaissance: A Case Study of a South African University,” in *Social Justice and Education in the 21st Century: Research from South Africa and the United States*, ed. W. Jr., Pearson and V Reddy (Springer, 2021), 273-292.

²¹ Ayo Bamgbose, “The Language Factor in Development Goals,” *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 35, no. 7 (2014): 646–57.

²² Ellen Bialystok, “Cognitive Effects of Bilingualism: How Linguistic Experience Leads to Cognitive Change,” *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 10, no. 3 (2007): 210–23.

for language acquisition and maintenance; rather, it is just one among several. A rosy view of everything would be reckless. Offering education in a minority language does not ensure its survival. If the state or the school is expected to shoulder most of the maintenance or resurrection costs, no language campaign will ever be successful. The UKZN dual language policy is a direct reaction to the institutionalised injustice of the apartheid system, which prohibited the use of African languages as LoLTs in universities, depriving them of status. With the language issue at the forefront of their demands, university students have been calling for South African universities to decolonise their curricula.²³ A lack of clarity regarding the function of African languages as learning and teaching languages, the English language's hegemony, and the glacial pace at which South African universities have implemented multilingual policies are among the issues brought up by students.²⁴

Language, Development and Attitudes

The attitude that Africans have toward their indigenous languages, which they typically perceive as educational dead ends and of limited use in formal job markets, is one of the negative factors affecting the development of African languages.²⁵ Studies have shown that because English is so widely employed in the labour market, students at various South African universities perceive it as the language's currency.²⁶ On the other hand, opinions regarding African languages are influenced by social and political factors. To encourage multilingual learning, African languages would need to be utilised alongside English in higher education.²⁷ Studies show that not all isiZulu students always favour studying in their mother tongue.²⁸ The fact that students come from a high school system where English was the only official language of teaching must be considered when evaluating their concerns and mistrust. Despite extensive isiZulu usage and code flipping in the classrooms, English is still the "official" language in so many schools. Because of this, many young isiZulu students could not only associate formal education with English in general or "only," but they may also lack the self-assurance necessary to utilise isiZulu in a more rigorous academic setting.

The other factors to be considered about the shift away from African languages and toward English in addition to economic concerns, include the economic and global dominance of English, the perceived poor standing of indigenous African languages, the legacy of Bantu education during the apartheid era, the recent multilingual language policy, and the linguistic practices of language policymakers.²⁹ English is thought of as a language that is utilised to dominate other languages because of its position in business, production, and education. African languages are widely used in business, production, and education in South Africa, but they lack structural power.³⁰ African languages will therefore continue to be neglected in sectors like education and business as African languages continue to be compared and sought to be inadequate for them to accomplish everything that English can.³¹ Further, it is asserted that because these languages are underdeveloped and have a dearth of learning resources, African languages will never be able to replace or compete with English and Afrikaans.

²³ Nokhanyo Nomakhwezi Mayaba, Monwabisi K Ralarala, and Pineteh Angu, "Student Voice: Perspectives on Language and Critical Pedagogy in South African Higher Education," *Educational Research for Social Change* 7, no. 1 (2018): 1–12.

²⁴ Rosemary Wildsmith-Cromarty and Noleen Turner, "Bilingual Instruction at Tertiary Level in South Africa: What Are the Challenges?," *Current Issues in Language Planning* 19, no. 4 (2018): 416–33.

²⁵ Christopher Stroud, "African Mother-Tongue Programmes and the Politics of Language: Linguistic Citizenship versus Linguistic Human Rights," *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 22, no. 4 (2001): 339–55.

²⁶ Barbara Trudell, "Local Community Perspectives and Language of Education in Sub-Saharan African Communities," *International Journal of Educational Development* 27, no. 5 (2007): 552–63; Dianna Lynette Moodley, "Bilingualism Gridlocked at the University of KwaZulu-Natal," *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 18, no. 1 (2009): 51; Nicholas Henry, *Public Administration and Public Affairs* (Routledge, 2015).

²⁷ Liesel Hibbert and Christa van der Walt, "Biliteracy and Translanguaging Pedagogy in South Africa: An Overview," *Multilingual Universities in South Africa: Reflecting Society in Higher Education* 97 (2014): 1.

²⁸ Zinhle Primrose Nkosi, "Postgraduate Students' Experiences and Attitudes towards IsiZulu as a Medium of Instruction at the University of KwaZulu-Natal," *Current Issues in Language Planning* 15, no. 3 (2014): 245–64; Parmegiani and Rudwick, "IsiZulu-English Bilingualisation at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: An Exploration of Students' Attitudes"; Stephanie Rudwick and Andrea Parmegiani, "Divided Loyalties: Zulu Vis-à-Vis English at the University of KwaZulu-Natal," *Language Matters* 44, no.3(2013):89–107.

²⁹ Nkonko M. Kamwangamalu, "Globalization of English, and Language Maintenance and Shift in South Africa," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 164 (2003): 65–81.

³⁰ Richard N. Madadzhe and M. M Sepota, "The Status of African Languages in Higher Education in South Africa: Revitalization or Stagnation," in *African Languages in the 21st Century: The Main Challenges.*, ed. D. E Mutasa (Pretoria: Simba Guru Publishers, 2006), 126–49.

³¹ Solomon Gwerevende and Zama M Mthombeni, "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage: Exploring the Synergies in the Transmission of Indigenous Languages, Dance and Music Practices in Southern Africa," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 29, no. 5 (2023): 398–412.

These assertions about the inability of an African language policy to succeed due to the perceived inadequacy of an African language to match the capabilities of English deserve critical evaluation. Their claim assumes that the success of an African language policy hinges on the language's capacity to replicate all functions performed by English. However, the effectiveness of an African language policy should not necessarily be measured by its ability to entirely mirror English. Instead, it should be evaluated based on its relevance, inclusivity, and capability to serve the specific needs and contexts of its users. African languages often carry cultural significance and heritage. A successful language policy does not necessarily aim for direct parity with English but rather emphasizes the preservation and promotion of indigenous languages for cultural identity and inclusivity.³² While English might dominate in certain spheres such as global communication, business, and academia, an African language policy's success can be measured in its efficacy in local contexts, education, community engagement, and governance within the country. There's potential for the development and enrichment of African languages to suit modern needs. Proper investment in language development and technology could enhance the use of African languages in various domains.³³ The goal should not be to entirely replace English but to create an inclusive, multilingual environment where African languages are respected, preserved, and utilised in ways that benefit the community and country.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This article adopted a sociolinguistic theory which considers how society including social norms, presumptions, and context, affects language use as well as how society affects language. It is specific to language sociology, which focuses on how language affects society.³⁴ Due to the broad spectrum of study that sociolinguistics theory encompasses, the study will concentrate on diglossia because it is relevant to the topic of this article. The phrase domain and diglossia refers to how linguistic information is arranged in multilingual communities as well as the variables that affect speaker choices. Individual preferences may be institutionalised at the communal level where bilingualism is unavoidable.³⁵ A form of societal bilingualism known as diglossia occurs when two languages are functionally distinct from one another. The standard language is used for "high" purposes like giving lectures, reading, writing, or broadcasting, while the home variety is saved for "low" duties like chatting with friends at home, this is a segmented characteristic of language.³⁶

African languages have been reserved for low functions in the context of this study while English has been reserved for high functions. The high (H) and low (L) varieties differ from one another in areas of function, prestige, literary history, acquisition, standardisation, and stability in addition to grammar, phonology, and lexicon. L is frequently picked up as a mother tongue at home and is kept all of one's life. Its main application is in settings that are familiar and familial. H, on the other hand, is never learned at home; it is instead obtained through studying later in life. H is tied to and supported by institutions outside of the home. The distinct domains in which H and L are acquired give them distinct institutional support structures right away. Diglossia civilisations are characterised not only by a variety of compartmentalisation but also by access restrictions. Knowledge of H is required for entry into formal institutions such as schools and the government. The importance community members place on employing the right variety on the right occasion demonstrates the extent to which these functions are segregated.

Diglossia can be seen as the perfect illustration of linguistic variety, where the usage of H or L, is purely determined by social environment and not the speaker's social identity, as opposed to language acquisition.³⁷ In diglossia, use is governed by context rather than class or other group affiliation. Diglossia as a theoretical perspective has received much criticism often referred to as a toxic notion that has static, apolitical, mechanistic traits.³⁸ Critics of the theory often cite that the varieties called 'high' or 'low' have often been used without addressing power relations in the society where these varieties stem from.³⁹ In consideration of the critiques, the researcher has considered pursuing them in this study and has provided an overview of the conflict of the

³² Gwerevende and Mthombeni, "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage: Exploring the Synergies in the Transmission of Indigenous Languages, Dance and Music Practices in Southern Africa"; Bamgbose, "The Language Factor in Development Goals."

³³ Langa Khumalo, "Intellectualization Through Terminology Development," *Lexikos* 27, 2017.

³⁴ John J Gumperz and Jenny Cook-Gumperz, "Studying Language, Culture, and Society: Sociolinguistics or Linguistic Anthropology," *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 12, no. 4 (2008): 532–45.

³⁵ Suzanne Romaine, "Multilingualism," in *The Handbook of Linguistics*, ed. M. Aronoff and J. Rees-Miller, 2nd ed. (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2017).

³⁶ Joshua A Fishman, "Bilingualism with and without Diglossia; Diglossia with and without Bilingualism," in *The Bilingualism Reader* (Routledge, 2020), 47–54; François Grosjean, *Bilingual: Life and Reality*. (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2010).

³⁷ Alan Hudson, "Outline of a Theory of Diglossia," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 157 (2002): 1–48.

³⁸ Jürgen Jaspers, "Toxic or Topical? Diglossia Today," *Langage et Societe* 171, no. 3 (2020): 123–35.

³⁹ Anna De Fina and Sabina Perrino, "Introduction: Interviews vs. 'Natural' Contexts: A False Dilemma," *Language in Society* 40, no. 1 (2011): 1–11.

reviewed varieties. In diglossia studies, ignoring power differences as factual has been cited as a problem as to why the theory is often seen as static. The researcher has considered the racial power differences that affect the use of the African language in South Africa citing both apartheid and colonialism. Acknowledging that this study did not take a raciolinguistic perspective, this article does acknowledge that there are factors that have positioned black Africans in South Africa as inferior to the normative white people, hence African languages are positioned as inferior.

African languages in South Africa have been consigned to a position where it is generally believed that they are inadequate for high-level roles, particularly as languages of learning and teaching at the university level, because of this compartmentalisation of languages. Language conflicts are frequently said to be about inherent inequity between speakers of different languages rather than the language itself. Utilising diglossia as a theoretical framework to argue in support of developing African languages to be utilized in higher education in South Africa, is directly engaging with the legacy of apartheid and colonialism which continue to shape language policies and language use. Diglossia studies tend to lean towards advocacy and since this article has that advocacy element it is justifiable and suitable to use this as a framework.

METHODOLOGY

This article emanates from a thesis by the author where semi-structured interviews, secondary data from books, journals, policy frameworks, and pertinent online sources were used to collect the data for this study. This form of data collection enabled the researcher and participant to share their perspectives on current events using their own points of view.⁴⁰ Interviews were used because the researcher needed individual experiences of students and staff of UKZN regarding the bilingual policy. This study employed thematic narrative analysis, which is a method in which the researcher reviews what was said by the interviewee and restates it in context.⁴¹

An interview schedule was designed in relation to the research questions to be addressed by the study and where necessary probing was employed by the researcher. Interviews were transcribed utilising an audio-to-text converter, however, since other answers provided by participants were in isiZulu, those parts in isiZulu were omitted from audio to audio-to-text converter, which only recognises English text. Since the objective was to collect the participants' views about the role of African languages in higher education and their experience with the language policy, interviews proved to be suited for narrative analysis. Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) was used in organising and analysing the data. Transcripts were uploaded on the Atlas ti software, where the researcher read each script to break down data into relative themes and code them according to the emerging themes. Since it is not possible to present all the data collected this article only reflects on data regarding policy aims and language development, overall experience aspect of the policy.

In qualitative research methods, reflexivity has been used as a phenomenon to enable the researcher to identify his or her position in the research process.⁴² Being an African female who is isiZulu speaking and a former student and part-time staff of the university being studied provided the researcher with access to knowledge, access to recruiting certain participants of this study and to navigate the university structures better. Based on these attributes the researcher acted as an insider-researcher. The empirical challenge which the researcher does not believe was a challenge in this study that faces qualitative researchers results from conducting studies with participants with whom she identified. The shared circumstances the researcher had with a lot of participants were used to conduct the interviews comfortably, a lot of the students switched and answered questions in isiZulu. Being an isiZulu speaker allowed the researcher to comprehend and probe further which strengthened the interviewing process.

Participants of this study were all end users of the language policy. To gauge internal processes regarding policy progress and intellectualisation of the language the researcher made use of expert interviews with the UKZN language board members. Participants were invited by email to participate and given the proximity to the university (as a former staff and student) the researcher was allowed a moment before lectures took place to recruit participants from the lecturer hall. This study employed twenty-five (25) interviews with academic personnel from the School of Social Science's International and Public Affairs cluster, the School of Education, the School of Arts, one member of the UKZN language and planning committee, and UKZN students. Random sampling was the most effective method for removing sample bias in the participants' varied fields of expertise; the findings give a clear picture of their opinions and experiences on the UKZN language

⁴⁰ Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion, and Keith Morrison, *Research Methods in Education* (routledge, 2002).

⁴¹ De Fina and Perrino, "Introduction: Interviews vs. 'Natural' Contexts: A False Dilemma."

⁴² Kathryn Haynes, "Reflexivity in Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Organizational Research: Core Methods and Current Challenges* 26 (2012): 72–89.

policy. The interview questions were created to gather opinions on the language policy from UKZN students and staff, who are its primary end users. The study was deemed complying to ethical standards of research and ethical clearance was granted by the university protocol number: HSS/1981/016M.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perceptions and Hesitancies Surrounding Language Policy Implementation at UKZN

In pursuit of a comprehensive understanding of the overarching aim of the UKZN language policy, interviews and discussions were held with both students and staff. The primary goal was to gauge their comprehension and perceptions regarding the policy, recognizing its intended benefits for the entire academic community. The success of such a policy inherently relies on the collective buy-in from both students and staff. Upon analysis, the findings revealed a mixed reception, indicating a level of hesitancy among some members of the staff and student body. Specifically, there appear to be reservations and uncertainties concerning certain aspects of the policy, particularly regarding the incorporation and utilization of African languages within higher education institutions.

For instance, a student participant answering the question of whether they were aware of the aim of UKZN language policy stated that:

'No, I am not aware of the UKZN policy. Generally, I know that universities have language policies to accommodate African languages, but I do not know if such policies will create more problems than solutions. I am an African isiZulu speaker but I do not know about the practicality of African languages being used at universities. (Student A)

Another participant who is an academic staff member shared views regarding the policy and the awareness of it:

As much as I have an idea about the policy, the problem that is facing many African languages in South Africa is that they are regionally bound and only famous in certain provinces for instance isiZulu is famous in KwaZulu-Natal and isiXhosa in Eastern Cape. Therefore it is a headache to learn a language that confines you to a certain region in South Africa. Unfortunately, languages cannot receive equal treatment because to speak a language is to assimilate the culture of that language therefore languages cannot be spoken out of pity to the minority. Languages will be spoken based on their prestige. Private colleges can have the privilege to establish a policy that excludes. For instance, if UKZN is promoting a language 'isiZulu' in this instance it would mean an Afrikaner who does not speak isiZulu will be disadvantaged by the policy of learning in Zulu. (Academic Staff A)

The view by academic staff A shows that the phenomenon of language shift and its implications on the preservation of diverse linguistic identities stand as pivotal points of inquiry.

One of the student respondents echoed their concern about the language shift as there was no synonymous language practice in South African high schools and universities:

There is a mismatch between language policies in high schools and in higher education institutions that cause students to struggle with the monolingual norm of language use in varsity. Kids who grew up with their parents reading books to them before they sleep, grow up knowing reading is a natural thing. Mostly the black South Africans are disadvantaged because of the poor backgrounds they come from. Africans are more used to oral learning and do not get to practice reading. Therefore, English reading becomes a struggle. However, we cannot hide the fact that English will always be there because it is an international language. South Africa needs to have an identity personally; I empathize with the policy because it puts isiZulu on the map though it will not be easy. (Student D).

Contrary to this another student had a different sentiment to that of student D and stated:

The shift in language use is necessary. I am an African who is not a South African, but I have gained so much in being able to have at least basic competency in isiZulu. Besides that, I believe that multilingualism is really the way there are so many countries where they are not even fluent in English but they still manage to progress. Look at Russia, and Argentina where it's normal to struggle with English. I think it is backward for Africans to know every other language and battle with their own. (Student E).

This comment by student E relates to that in literature where monolingual thinking has made linguistic diversity problematic in a de facto multilingual environment. A scholar noted that: "There is a deep-seated and pervasive terror of bilingualism."⁴³ Additionally, there is a prevalent tendency to link the word "issues" with multilingualism, which is a connotation that is rarely used in discussions about unilingualism. However, there is no proof that multilingualism is essentially a bad organisational strategy, either for a society or a person. As a result, languages are frequently potent indicators of class, gender, ethnicity, and other forms of diversity, it is alluring to think that language is the cause of conflict in multilingual societies.

One academic staff showed a certain level of resistance towards the language shift at UKZN and sees monolingualism as more practical than bilingualism:

UKZN suggests that it does not intend to compel the academic staff to learn the isiZulu language. Only we are encouraged to volunteer to learn the language. However, the UKZN language plan clearly stipulates that staff should develop communicative competence in both English and isiZulu for academic interaction. For that to happen, we as staff members need to be competent in the isiZulu language to ensure that interaction takes place. If a staff member then cannot speak isiZulu, they are in a way going to need to learn the language and it will not be based on voluntarily wanting to. (Academic Staff D)

This comment from the staff highlights a concern regarding the practical planning of the policy, particularly when assessing the language competency of the staff. It suggests a potential gap between the policy's objectives and the skills required for its effective implementation. This concern is precisely why UKZN has introduced the intellectualization of isiZulu, aiming to address and mitigate the skill-related issues and enhance the language competence of the staff involved in policy implementation.

UKZN Language Programme Towards Intellectualisation of Isizulu: From Policy to Practice

While researchers contend that African language speakers as of now consider their languages to be instructive impasses and of minimal utility in academic spaces, there is little chance that non-primary language speakers will have confidence in them.⁴⁴ UKZN has stood firm against such perspectives through the University Language Planning and Development Office's (ULPDO) drive to intellectualise isiZulu so it can ultimately work comparable to English in all high-work spaces across the college.⁴⁵ In an interview with one of the board members from the UKZN University Language Planning and Development Office (ULPDO), he recommended:

It is very important to use the mother tongue at a higher educational level because every language carries knowledge, especially to the user of that language. Students who struggle to access knowledge based on their lack of comprehension of the English language should not be deprived of access to language in their own languages. Demographics at UKZN compel that isiZulu to be adapted to be used aside from the English language importantly because transformation is a national imperative the use of isiZulu fosters that transformation. The UKZN language policy therefore is important in terms of including students to equally participate in higher education and allows African languages to be seen as imperative in the higher education system. (Staff B)

The creation of terminology, coupled with corpus development and computer-assisted language tools, has been identified by UKZN as an essential component in achieving the goal of intellectualising isiZulu. The feedback encapsulates discontent with the notion that African languages are perceived as lacking the capacity to handle intellectual content. In alignment with this, the primary objective of the UKZN language programme, backed by the University Language Board, is to generate discipline-specific terminologies in isiZulu, along with establishing an isiZulu public repository and an innovative collection of written works. Consequently, scholars across various disciplines, are dedicated to the program's principles and recognise the importance of providing resources in isiZulu, and are also willing to engage in language enrichment parallel to the policy's initiatives.⁴⁶

⁴³ Beardsmore, H Baetens. Who's afraid of bilingualism? In J.-M. Dewaele, L. Wei, and A. Housen (eds), "Bilingualism: Beyond Basic Principles (2003)

⁴⁴ Stroud, "African Mother-Tongue Programmes and the Politics of Language: Linguistic Citizenship versus Linguistic Human Rights."

⁴⁵ Langa Khumalo, "African Languages in the Teaching and Learning Domain," *The UniZulu Workshop on Language Policy* (University of Zululand, 2017).

⁴⁶ Parmegiani and Rudwick, "IsiZulu-English Bilingualisation at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: An Exploration of Students' Attitudes."

Terminology creation, alongside corpus building, has been distinguished by UKZN as a vital part of achieving the objective of isiZulu intellectualisation.⁴⁷

Intellectualisation in the South African setting, is a careful interaction pointed toward cultivating the development and advancement of African dialects, upgrading their ability to connect with current turns of events, hypotheses, and concepts. The system requires the making of discipline-explicit jargon, which is frequently claimed as a reason for avoiding teaching and learning African languages. This has the effect of degrading these languages as superficial and inadequate. In this context, the term "intellectualisation" refers to a fundamental change in the potential and function of native African languages in disseminating and creating all types of knowledge, dispelling the myth that African languages cannot be used in academic settings. At UKZN, the development of isiZulu is being fuelled in large part by the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB), which was formed by statute. According to the KwaZulu-Natal common office of PanSALB's wording improvement strategy, the UKZN wording improvement process is divided into five stages: (1) harvesting terms currently in use; (2) portraying and interpreting phrases that have been gathered or created; (3) consulting and confirming proposed terminology with end-users; (4) authenticating and standardising through official national structures; and (5) listing terms on terminology databases for wider institutional and national usage.⁴⁸ The intellectualisation process of isiZulu at UKZN aims to address the issues highlighted by sociolinguistic theory on 'diglossia,' a prevalent form of cultural bilingualism where two language varieties are functionally compartmentalised. African languages according to the sociolinguistic theory are compartmentalized as languages of low proficiency for interaction within the home environment.

In as much as from the University perspective isiZulu is being developed, the policy is still faced with controversies. One student participant expressed themselves in this manner:

IsiZulu in my view, lacks academic value as it stands because acquiring a qualification in isiZulu confines me to KZN only and I personally have not seen the academic purpose for doing my qualification in isiZulu. (Student B)

One of the many arguments advanced in support of this decision was that students believed African languages were irrelevant to their professional goals. As a result, it became clear that students make linguistic decisions depending on their parents' inherited views and instructions.

My folks are Zulu, yet they have never sent me to a Zulu school since they accept that multiracial schools show preferred English over the Zulu schools. My mom additionally accepts that the better I comprehend my English, the more brilliant my vocation way looks. (Student C)

Parents instil the perception that mixed schools are superior to isiZulu-dominant schools and this results in a negative attitude toward isiZulu in general as demonstrated in this comment. Many students stated that mastering English is more important to them because it is considered the only route to succeed. On the other hand, one member of staff believes that the UKZN language policy is not taboo, and he voiced his opinion as follows:

When it comes to choosing a language in which you pursue your career it also depends on the setting and the message you are trying to get across using that language. For instance, there are colleagues of mine who did their PhDs in China and they had to take a module in Mandarin language, which is the main language in China, and their PhDs were written in Mandarin and not English. (Academic Staff C)

As much as popular belief labels this language policy as uncommon, the comment above shows that internationally it is quite a trend to adopt a local language for academic purposes. The message from the respondent is not that the success of any language depends on its environment, but rather that the success of isiZulu, as stated in the UKZN policy, depends on the language environment in South Africa. An experienced social scientist who works as a senior lecturer at UKZN was also interviewed and was able to express general concern about the university's staff members' apparent lack of readiness to instruct in a multilingual educational context.

There is a lot of development that needs to take place; namely, getting literature that is written in isiZulu, training staff who are not proficient in isiZulu and developing isiZulu as a language. The UKZN language policy is good on paper but I have doubts about its practicality. I personally have

⁴⁷ Finlayson and Madiba, "The Intellectualisation of the Indigenous Languages of South Africa: Challenges and Prospects."

⁴⁸ Barkhuizen, "Learners' Perceptions of the Teaching and Learning of Xhosa First Language in Eastern and Western Cape High Schools."

not seen many isiZulu-speaking academic staff in my department, which would mean the university, would have to employ those who can speak the language. In addition, we need to consider that learning a language really takes time so while we wait for our lecturers to learn isiZulu, we would still be required to communicate in English which we cannot escape. Therefore, it is better to be equipped in English because we already know our mother tongues. (Academic staff D)

The concerns aired by the above comment show the lack of confidence in African languages and how compartmentalisation of languages as the sociolinguistic theory puts has resulted in confining these languages for low function. Since resources historically have not been allocated to the development of African languages such concerns regarding the proposed high function of these languages are expected. The negative attitudes associated with African language usage in academia show how it becomes difficult to take languages out of the compartments they have been put in for years.

Summary of Discussion

The article has argued that the intellectualisation of isiZulu has been identified as being crucial to the language's development and the effective transition from policy to practice. A transition away from English as the primary language of instruction is essential for South Africa's democratic process. The nation of South Africa would be a fairer, socio-politically just and racially just place if everyone there could speak at least one African language. From this perspective, the promotion of African languages is a valuable privilege in post-apartheid education. However, second and third-language competence must be developed at the elementary and secondary school levels to guarantee the proper implementation of such programmes in any province across the nation. In South African education, linguistic variety needs to be seen as a resource and a tool for innovation and nation-building rather than as a cause of conflict. It further explored the intricate landscape of perceptions and apprehensions surrounding the implementation of the language policy at UKZN. Findings revealed a multifaceted reception among participants, uncovering a blend of doubts and uncertainties. Concerns were voiced regarding the practicality and potential challenges of integrating African languages into the academic sphere. Participants highlighted regional language constraints, casting doubts on the broader applicability of languages like isiZulu beyond specific geographic areas. This hesitancy illuminated underlying concerns about the feasibility and effectiveness of such language incorporation within the university setting.

Moreover, the study unearthed disparities between language policies in high schools and universities, shedding light on the struggles faced by students in adapting to a predominantly monolingual norm in higher education. The socio-economic disparities were pinpointed as influential factors affecting language proficiency and impeding effective learning, particularly in English, the dominant language. Amidst these concerns, diverse viewpoints surfaced regarding the adoption of African languages in academia. While some participants championed the necessity of African languages for personal and national identity, others raised doubts about their practicality for professional and career aspirations. Issues regarding staff competency and logistical challenges in adopting a multilingual approach were highlighted. These suggest a potential gap between the policy's objectives and the skills required for effective implementation. This highlights the need for comprehensive planning, resource allocation, and the development of language competencies to bridge the disparity between policy objectives and on-the-ground realities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings, several key recommendations emerge to facilitate the continued integration and development of African languages within higher education institutions. Firstly, there is a pressing need for advocacy efforts aimed at establishing more inclusive and comprehensive language policies. This involves garnering support from stakeholders, including university administrators, educators and policymakers to champion the expansion of linguistic diversity in academic settings. Furthermore, institutions should actively engage in dialogue with relevant communities to address concerns and foster a shared commitment to the incorporation of African languages.

Another critical recommendation involves the promotion of pedagogical creativity. To effectively implement African languages as mediums of instruction, educators should be encouraged to develop innovative teaching methods and resources that cater to diverse linguistic backgrounds. This may include the creation of language-specific instructional materials, the incorporation of local cultural contexts into curriculum design, and the exploration of technology-enhanced learning tools that support language acquisition.

Comprehensive support services form a third crucial recommendation. Acknowledging the potential challenges that students may face when navigating academic content in African languages, institutions should establish robust support systems. This includes language proficiency programs, mentorship initiatives, and

accessible resources designed to assist students in mastering the academic material. Additionally, providing platforms for collaborative learning and peer support can contribute significantly to creating an inclusive and empowering environment for students engaging with African languages in higher education.

CONCLUSION

The study has underscored the significance of addressing linguistic biases and the compartmentalization of languages to foster a more inclusive and effective academic environment. Overall, the study unveils a complex interplay of social, economic and historical factors that significantly impact perceptions of language utility and the practicality of policy implementation. UKZN is deeply embedded in this ideology, positioning itself as a vanguard of African scholarship. The university acknowledges that the realisation of this identity and the pursuit of African scholarship cannot be truly achieved without embracing an African language as an integral part of its academic discourse. For UKZN, adopting isiZulu is a step towards this grand vision. The integration of African languages stands not only as a step towards linguistic inclusivity but as a fundamental part of broader decolonisation efforts, reclaiming and celebrating the rich intellectual heritage these languages offer. Integrating African languages is thus a crucial step in transforming educational paradigms, and fostering a more inclusive, decolonised and intellectually vibrant academic environment.

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