

# **Indigenous African Languages as Agents of Change in the Transformation of Higher Education Institutions in South Africa: Unisa**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The promotion of multilingual education can be regarded as a force that is driving change in language teaching and learning. The existing literature refers to the positive impact of new discourses and interventions on non-English home-language speakers' efforts to learn English successfully as a subject in school. However, the effectiveness of English 2nd Language (EL<sub>2</sub>) teaching interventions remains a bone of contention. In this paper, I shall therefore investigate whether or not issues of mother-tongue and multilingual education have been placed at the centre of educational reform. The paper is based on a situation analysis of multilingual language policies in 18 institutions of higher learning in South Africa. Unisa (a national and international university) is perceived as a major force in achieving this goal in South Africa was found that students' perceptions of language matters are not reflected in Unisa's language policy planning. Narratives and document analysis are used as a method to collect data.

**Keywords:** *Multilingual Education (MLE); language policy and planning; educational reforms.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

Issues of education reforms feature in the current political agendas of many governments, with prominence given to the rationalistic principles of new public management and policies. These principles include: accountability, effectiveness, efficiency, productivity and cost-effectiveness. Higher Education Institutions (HEI) should understand the catalysts that are driving the necessary changes required in their organisations in order to design and implement an effective change management strategy, and these institutions should provide tools that support the initiation and implementation of change. These HEIs are now governed in accordance with the various aforementioned reforms which subscribe to cost-reduction, higher rate of social return, dependable and similar outcome assessment, and greater market control. Worldwide economic rationalism purports to be the primary force shaping the nature and spirit of educational reforms. As a result, in South Africa, we have seen the current regime placing some provincial governments under administration as an intervention

mechanism. In 2012, the Cabinet placed under administration provincial departments of education in provinces experiencing financial crises and fraught with problems caused by underperformance. The Minister of Basic Education stripped these provincial departments of education of their administrative functions by centralising these departments, and by ensuring that they would be managed, in future, at national level. According to the present South African Minister of Finance, Gordhan (2013), quality of education and training opportunities for a nation's citizens should be a priority for any government. These critical trajectories are determinants of long-term growth and equality of opportunity in any society. The critical issue for most governments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is access to education, and increasing human capital through educational reform. Other factors are equity of education policy directives and systemic education change (through alignment and mergers) during any process of democratic transition. However, it would seem that multilingualism in South Africa is currently pushing educational reforms and practices in new directions. Pinnock (2008) states that evaluating major imperatives influencing decision-makers, often termed 'drivers of change', can expose the reasons why decision-makers choose policies which seem to be at odds with good educational practice. A drivers of change perspective assists those who have vested interests in promoting change to gauge the totality of the forces which result in change actually being realised (Pinnock, 2008). Given this, this article wants to consider the way forward in mainstreaming mother-tongue based multilingual education, using indigenous African languages as the 'drivers of change'.

According to Joppke and Lukes (1999: 3), the conceptual framework of 'multiculturalism' and 'multilingualism' appeared first in Canada, Australia and United States in the early 1970s, thus making these countries the final arbiters on certain critical values and principles. While there is a growing tendency to "transplant" educational policies and practices from one national setting to another, some educationalists have shown that such transplantations often do not work simply because little attention has been paid to the cultural context into which these educational models are imported (Osborn 2005: 6). A discourse promoting the use of multiple languages in education can be seen as consisting of opposing forces: the rights of disadvantaged languages (in the case of South Africa) are placed at variance with the project of strengthening a fragile unity. Since the South African government is still in the process of becoming a fully-fledged democratic government, its major focus to date has been on reducing inequality in the country, given that South Africa is riddled with inequalities. Understandably, the current regime places economic growth and national unity at the centre of the debate. It therefore seems justifiable for both citizens and the government regime to place multilingual and mother-tongue education in a peripheral "diversity corner" rather than at the centre of educational reform. To reiterate: the state's major concern, at present, is to reduce inequality in the country and to fight the scourge of poverty.

The debate around the issue of the medium of instruction in South Africa has been going on since the country liberated itself from apartheid (in 1994). The renewed interest in mother-tongue education appears to derive from the findings, documented in several studies around the world, that pupils perform better at school when they are taught through the medium of their mother tongue rather than through the medium of a foreign language (Akinnaso, 1993; Webb 2002; Prah 2002). The South African education system is faced with complex challenges related to languages of limited diffusion; also, the system has to cope with the practicalities of limited resources, resources that are contingent on financial availability. The rationale behind the notion underpinning this article is that the use of indigenous languages as medium of instruction in schools will encourage the upliftment of these languages when used by South African society as a whole.

The National Education Policy Act, 27 of 1996, empowers the Minister of Education to determine a national policy for language in education. The Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP) was adopted in 1997 (cf. section 3(4)(m) of Language-In-Education), along with the Norms and Standards Regarding Language Policy (cf. Section 6(1) of the South African Schools Act, 1996). Although the objectives of these two policies and the Language Policy for Higher Education (which was published by the Ministry of Education in November 2002) differ, it is recommended that these policy documents be read together as one document since, in fact, these policies complement each other. Section 4.4 of the Language-in-Education Policy relates to the current situation, and the new curriculum was duly implemented in 1998 according to that policy (proclaimed under Act 27 of 1996).

This legal framework should encourage the use of all of South Africa's official languages, ensuring that they all thrive equally. Furthermore, South Africa's linguistic diversity should be supported and the government held to its commitment to multilingualism and the promotion of language rights in all spheres of public life. The fact is, however, that these principles are honoured in the breach rather than in the observance, and this is particularly true in education. As a result, the implementation of these positive government policies and strategies in South Africa seems to be a distant and fast-fading prospect.

In this article, I shall therefore start by exploring the theoretical implications of introducing and maintaining multilingual education. My first contention is that issues of mother-tongue and multilingual education should be placed at the centre of any movement towards nationwide education reform. I shall then go on to discuss whether or not there is congruency between language policy and language planning at Unisa. Here I shall compare Unisa's language policy with policies at other institutions of higher learning in South Africa. The article then considers whether any of South Africa's HEIs are prepared and able to formulate and establish a language policy on their own account within their institutional framework.

The article is premised on the principle of multilingual education, which refers to “first-language-first” education in the sense that schooling should begin in the mother-tongue and then there should be a transition to other languages. Studies demonstrate that learning is most effective when instruction is received in the language that the learner knows best. Most Afrikaans-speaking pupils, whose language as medium of teaching and learning (LoLT) is Afrikaans, seem to produce significant numbers of distinctions in their final matric examination when compared with pupils whose LoLT is their second or third language (this is a researcher’s observation). This unwavering truth extends from basic reading and writing skills in the first language to second-language acquisition. However, contrary to the above opinion some scholars dissent this widely held opinion that reports that the home language or mother tongue is hampered by deficiencies that curtail expression drastically in highly advanced academic discourse.

Prior to 1994, multilingual education (MLE) was the norm in South Africa. Learners began their schooling system in their mother tongue. Learners used their own language for learning in the early grades, while also learning the country’s official languages (English and Afrikaans) as classroom subjects. As learners gain competence in understanding, speaking, reading and writing the language of instruction, teachers begin to use it for that very purpose, namely, as a LoLT. This instructional bridge between the community language and the language of wider communication enables learners, children and adults to meet their broader multilingual goals while retaining their local language and culture. This is how the speech communities in South Africa were structured (mainly for the political purpose of preserving and supporting the *status quo*). The *status quo* in this case was segregation and the exclusion of the masses from education for the sole purpose of hiding information.

## 2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this article is twofold. Firstly, I shall start by comparing and critiquing how South Africa’s HEIs implement multilingual policies in their institutions, as expounded in their language policy documents. I shall then examine whether these institutions adhere to their own implementation plans, particularly in those cases where they have multilingual language policies. I shall then use Unisa’s language planning and policy as a case study by unpacking and interrogating this policy. Secondly, I shall identify and discuss gaps in Unisa’s language policy and implementation plan.

To this end, I shall analyse narratives produced as aids to a situational analysis based on different HEIs language policies and their implementation plans. Any notable achievements on the part of HEIs will be highlighted, analysed and discussed.

The article seeks to answer the following research questions:

- To what extent do South African HEIs implement their multilingual language policies?
- To what extent is Unisa's language policy and planning consistent with its students' perceptions and practices as far as language matters are concerned?

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The epistemology of the politics of language, as embedded in the language policy and planning paradigm, is inextricably bound up with the politics of the nation-state. While existing literature proclaims the positive impact of new discourses and interventions on non-English home language speakers' efforts to learn English successfully as a subject in school, the effectiveness of English 2nd Language (EL<sub>2</sub>) teaching interventions remain a bone of contention where other courses are still taught in English. Most EL<sub>2</sub> students are not exposed to mother-tongue speakers of English in their home environment and have been taught by teachers who are themselves L<sub>2</sub> English speakers. The theoretical framework set up in this article is significant, as pointed out by Cummins (2000) and Chamot and O'Malley (1987). Cummins (2000: 246), who has proposed and advocated the concept of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) and basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS), explains that, while many children develop native-speaker fluency within two years of immersion in the target language, it takes between five to seven years for a child to be able to work at the same level as a native speaker when dealing with relatively sophisticated academic discourse. Cummins (2000: 246) distinguishes between additive and subtractive bilingualism. In additive bilingualism, the first language continues to be developed and the first culture to be valued while the second language is added. In the case of subtractive bilingualism, the second language is added at the expense of the first language and culture, and the first language and culture is pushed into the cold, where it tends to shrivel. Cummins (1994) quotes research which suggests that students working in an additive bilingual environment tend to achieve better results than those whose first language and culture are devalued by their schools and by wider society. According to the *Africa Focus Bulletin (an independent electronic publication focusing on U.S. and international policies)*, this means that:

... an increase in access to learning and information, and to make teaching effective by lifting the language barrier, using the languages mastered by learners, using socioculturally relevant curricula, further developing African languages for academic use, training teachers in dealing with multilingualism and cultural diversity as well as language and literacy

development, and by providing appropriate teaching and learning materials. The combination of optimising language use and adopting relevant and high-quality curricula, teaching methods and materials will result in higher achievement, lower drop-out and repeater rates throughout the education system and lead to a system of education that services individual and social development in Africa.

According to the *Africa Focus Bulletin*, multilingualism will be perceived as a differentiated reality in South Africa. Cummins (2000: 246) maintains that, when educators encourage culturally diverse students to develop the language and culture they bring from home and to build on their prior experiences, they, “together with their students, challenge the disposition in the broader society that these attributes are inferior or worthless”. Although, in the case of Unisa, we are dealing with young adults rather than children, Cummins’ theory (2000: 246) seems to hold true for these learners also. This theory is also supported by sociocultural theory, which proceeds from the premise that language is first and foremost a tool for thought (Vygotsky 1978) and provides a theoretical underpinning which is comprehensible and educationally significant point of view regarding the relationship between language and learning at all levels of education.

Chamot and O’Malley (1987) are the reputed originators of the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA), and these authors contend that this approach is designed for students with limited English proficiency and who are being prepared to participate in mainstream content-area instruction. CALLA provides transitional instruction for upper elementary and secondary students at intermediate and advanced ESL (English as a Second Language) levels. This approach furthers academic language development in English through content-area instruction in Science, Mathematics and Social Studies. Students are taught to use learning strategies derived from a cognitive model of learning to help with their comprehension and retention of both language skills and concepts in the content areas. This article is not concerned with the intricacies embedded in CALP or the usage of CALLA. Instead, the purpose of this article is to spell out the problems faced by learners whose mother-tongue is not the language of instruction, but who are nonetheless expected to learn in this language of instruction.

Various theories have been advanced that underpin this issue of mother-tongue education (MLE). The issue of African languages as a medium of teaching and learning (or LoLT as they are known in South Africa) is hotly debated (Heugh 2002; Murray 2002; Wolff 2006a). Language-in-education matters in post-apartheid South Africa have been the subject of considerable public debate and scholarly scrutiny (Alexander 2000, 2003; Heugh 2002, 2007; Hill 2007; Kamwangamalu 2004; Webb 2004, 2006, 2008; Wolff 2006a, 2006b). Beukes (2009: 39) contends that the failure to implement the use of African languages is

the result of incongruence between the government's stated language policy, and "on-the-ground" language attitudes and practice (Beukes 2008; Du Plessis 2006; Verhoef 1998). Thorpe (2002: 1) refers to the latter situation as "a clash between ideology and reality ... a problem that will not be easy to resolve".

The *Africa Focus Bulletin* (2010) lists the benefits of multilingual education and states that Africa's multilingualism and cultural diversity is an asset that Africans should foster for practical reasons as well as for reasons of cultural pride. Multilingualism is the norm everywhere; as such, it is neither a threat nor a problem that might isolate the continent from knowledge and the emergence of knowledge-based economies, conveyed through international languages of wider communication. Subsequently, the choice of languages, their recognition and sequencing in the education system, the development of their expressive potential and their accessibility to a wider audience, should not follow an either-or principle. Instead, the approach adopted should be a gradual, concentric and all-inclusive approach. The *Bulletin* advocates that policy and practice in Africa should nurture multilingualism, primarily a mother-tongue based education with an appropriate and required space for international languages of wider communication.

Agnihotri (2007: 189) concurs with the notion that multilingualism is a norm everywhere and argues that, if being human is being multilingual, then:

Languages associated with power can no longer be allowed to exploit the speakers of languages that are spoken by the underprivileged [and] multilinguality will have to become a basis for all future curriculum, syllabi, textbooks, and classroom transaction planning, initiating the implementation of a sociopolitical vision that will be governed by the values of equity, justice, social sensitivity, peace, and collective responsibility in a more meaningful way than empty rhetoric.

The *Africa Focus Bulletin* (2010) agrees with the above notion, and states that it is important to ensure that colonial monolingualism is not replaced with African monolingualism. Fortunately, in South Africa, the government has effectively nipped this possibility 'in the bud'. South Africa remains a multilingual country, whose indigenous languages are still spoken in its villages (under the auspices of traditional chiefs). The people themselves are the custodians of South Africa's indigenous languages. The concern about the number of languages is not impossible to overcome. The *Bulletin* maintains that it is not true that the time spent learning African languages or learning in them is time lost from learning and mastering supposedly more productive and useful languages that enjoy superior status. It is not true that learning African languages or learning in them is delaying people's access to and mastery of science, technology and other global and universal disciplines. In fact, the higher status enjoyed by certain international languages is reinforced by unjust *de jure* power arrangements. It is not proper to compare local languages to international ones in absolute terms.

Instead, local and international languages complement each other, and both are indispensable for the harmonious and full development of individuals and society.

Multilingualism is delineated into the areas of language vitality, language status, language shift and language policies. Kamwangamalu (2004: 131) laments the current practice, in schools, of confining the use of African languages as the media of instruction to the first four years of primary education. This author claims that, instead, the use of these languages should be extended to students' entire educational career (primary, secondary and tertiary education). He wonders how one could promote African languages when these languages are stigmatised as inferior (in the aftermath of Bantu Education). However, he questions the direction which these languages are taking by asking how one prevents the emergence of a society in which, as Peirce (1992) warns, power is concentrated in a minority of the country's population who have had access to English-medium education.

It is worth pointing out that battles concerning issues of language teaching and learning at HEIs are not only waged in South Africa or, for that matter, Africa as a whole. The Berlin Declaration, issued at the 2011 Conference on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities, urged HEI delegates to heed requests to offer all undergraduates the opportunity to take credits in languages; create environment for independent language learning, exploiting the opportunities offered by ICT and e-learning; encourage cooperative learning of as many languages as possible; and offer degree programmes or portions of programmes in languages other than English. The requested member countries were also requested to "raise awareness among policy-makers and decision-makers of the responsibility of HEIs taking place in their countries for preparing students for life and work in an increasingly integrated Europe through targeted promotion of their multilingual and intercultural competence."

In order to address issues raised in this article, a set of qualitative methods (outlined in the paragraph below) are used.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The research design undertaken in this article is qualitative in nature and character. In a qualitative research design, narratives and document analyses are used to collect data. Narratives and document analysis are linguistically focused methods that often use existing documents and discourses as data. In this article, a documentary analysis is used to collect detailed data. This data is extracted from narratives presented by staff members from various HEIs in South Africa. The representative sample consisted of 23 members of staff from 18 South African universities. I shall start by exploring the applicability of narratives and document analysis as a form of research. I shall then present essential data which are the outcomes of the narratives and document analysis used in this research. In order

to extrapolate Unisa's language planning and policy situation, secondary data analysis is used in order to justify the language situation at Unisa and compare it with the progress made in other institutions. I shall then interpret and describe collected narratives. The issue of employing mother-tongue and multilingual education in HEIs in South Africa will be explored. A three-pronged approach to data collection was followed:

### 3.1 NARRATIVES PRESENTED BY MEMBERS OF SIGoM

A group of academics operating under the rubric of SIGoM (Special Interest Group on Multilingualism) and representing 18 universities throughout the country separately undertook a situation analysis on multilingual language policies in their HEIs and shared their findings with the SIGoM. Individual members represented their respective universities' findings separately in response to their brief, which was to:

- establish whether the institution concerned has a language policy at all;
- discuss the status of multilingualism at the institution concerned; and
- elaborate on issues of implementation.

The participants first had to establish if all Institutions represented at the meeting had drawn up and established language policies in their institutions. It was found that all HEIs represented at the meeting had language policies. The second step, therefore, was to establish to what extent these HEIs adhere to the requirements of with their language policy documents.

Each member was requested to answer the following question:

“To what extent do South African HEIs' implement their language policies?” In response to the question, narratives emanated from the brief presentations and these narratives were summarised. Notably, success stories and best practices emerging from the narratives were highlighted, compared with those of the other universities and noted for future reference. After each member gave his or her presentation, responses and discussions, as well as the analysis of the presentation, were captured. The data was then reduced into narratives, grouping them according to similar practices and statements and then reduced them into categories and themes. These were categorised as follows:

	No Language policy available	Availability of language policy documents	Practising Monolingualism	Practising ML/Bilingualism	Not implementing their own plans	Implementing their plans over and above.	TOTAL
No. of universities	1	14	9	5	9	6	
TOTALS	7	93	60	33	60	40	100
%							

**Table 1.** *Language Policy and planning situation at HEIs in South Africa (n =15).*

It is evident from Table 1 (cf. Appendix A), that a distinct majority (93%) of universities in South Africa have language policies at their disposal. Despite the fact that most of these institutions have established a strongly developed system of policies, plans, managerial capacity and support structures, a negligible percentage of 40% implement their policies. Only 33% of the universities adhere to the implementation of Multilingual Education as expected of them, while an overwhelming majority of 60% have unfortunately not as yet begun to implement their own policies. Another disturbing issue is that those institutions that practised bilingualism before 1994 have shifted towards a tendency to promote monolingualism.

### 3.2 ANALYSIS OF UNISA LANGUAGE POLICY AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

In the second approach, the researcher presents findings based on an exploratory document analysis, which is derived from unpacking and interrogating Unisa’s language policy and language planning processes and the implementation of this policy and planning. Gaps in the policy and in the implementation procedures are then identified and discussed.

In order to determine whether the language policy and language planning at Unisa is compatible with the practices and ideologies of the student body, secondary data collection was used.

### 3.3 UTILIZATION OF SECONDARY DATA

On 16 April 2010, the Senate Language Committee commissioned the Directorate of Institutional Analysis (DISA) to conduct a quantitative research project in order to determine students' language preference, and whether Unisa's language policy and planning are in line with the language practices and ideologies of the student body as a whole. In order to determine the preferred language of tuition, provisional course enrolments were analysed. The Directorate of Institutional Analysis (DISA) drew and analysed existing data such as the available existing registration form data from the student system and the Student Satisfaction Survey. Student registration forms require students to state their home language, their preferred language for receiving correspondence, and their preferred language for tuition. This data is captured on the student data system (which is a source of provisional data). However, this method was fraught with limitations. The data available on the student system is based on the fact that students are only given a choice between two languages: Afrikaans and English (when requested to state their preferred language for either correspondence or tuition). Other languages are excluded as choices. According to DISA (2010), this method was of value, because Unisa was able to establish which of the two languages given as choices (i.e. English and Afrikaans) is more popular amongst Unisa students for the purposes of correspondence and tuition. Unisa is an open distance learning (ODL) institution therefore students do not reside on campus. It might have been difficult for Unisa to obtain this information.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1 LANGUAGE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN HEIS

Situation analyses in the form of narratives on the implementation of multilingual language policies in South African HEIs were produced and the findings are as follows:

Good policies or policy statements are in place across the country but, in many institutions, the implementation of such policies falls short – for a variety of reasons. The following facts came to light from SIGoM members' presentations:

There are signs of multilingual language planning at most universities; in fact, it seems safe to say that most tertiary institutions have language policies. However,

not many have the necessary implementation plans or resources in place for effective implementation and management of such policies and plans.

In a few cases, language planning forms an integral part of the overall policy structure of the institutions concerned and is being managed at the highest level (Council, top management and faculty managements). For example, at the University of Johannesburg, there is a Language Committee that operates as a committee of Senate and that comprises specialists in language planning, language teaching, translation and interpreting, literacy development and other developmental activities. Under the Senate Language Committee there is a Language Unit which carries out the mandate of the Senate Language Committee. In some universities, these initiatives are in the hands of individuals or small groups of individuals who are not effectively supported by management.

The overall picture is that ML (multilingual language) planning is not taken as seriously as it should be. In many cases, institutions are content to let the current *status quo* prevail (which usually means that English and/or Afrikaans are the dominant language(s) in these institutions).

Only a few tertiary institutions have established a strongly developed system of policies, plans, managerial capacity and support structures that will ensure the effective implementation of policies. In this regard, North West University is at the forefront of all of South Africa's HEIs. In some classes at North West University, the lecturing staff facilitates teaching and learning in the language of tuition, while the tutor interprets the lesson in the language students understand best. This may seem cumbersome, but the fact remains that the university does not find this way of doing things at all difficult, and certainly not impossible. As it is, this way of proceeding means that staff is committed to the process and execute their task effortlessly even if, at times, it requires extra effort on their part.

From the reports of some of the SIGoM members it was extremely clear that, in some institutions, there is a lack of understanding concerning the importance of MLE in the institutional setting. I say this because, there was clearly no real commitment to MLE and there was a constant reference to lack of funds, or – disturbingly – a non-committal attitude which, presumably, is based on favouring an English-only approach. A clear understanding of the fundamental importance of language in the academic development of students is often lacking.

The University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) piloted the implementation of ML after being informed of the results of the South African Norwegian Tertiary Education Development SANTED multilingualism project. SANTED is a joint venture of the Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation (NORAD), the South African Department of Education, and several South African HEIs. When the UKZN wanted to apply the resolutions emanating from the project, it encountered resistance from some staff members. This reaction was to be expected, but if advocacy comes from the senior leadership of an institution, some problems in UKZN could be resolved at that level. Despite this setback, the

UKZN still has specific disciplines in which ML is practised, although some members of staff continue to resist these transformation efforts.

As far as other universities are concerned, it was observed that some of the historically bilingual institutions were now practising subtractive bilingualism, including Unisa. Unlike the other institutions, Unisa recognises and has declared mother-tongue education for all South African students studying at Unisa as its official language policy. While Unisa's stance is commendable, and remains the institutions ultimate goal, achieving such a goal will take several years. Realistic and practicable steps should be taken into consideration before embarking on this journey.

After an intensive discussion on multilingual language policies in HE institutions, the SIGoM group discovered that multilingual language planning issues at such institutions are complex, and that there are major differences in these institutions' levels of implementation. The group concluded that a general lack of implementation may well detract from the effectiveness of these institutions and their students' success; given this, the SIGoM committed itself to taking certain, important steps.

## 4.2. THE CURRENT SITUATION AT UNISA

Language policy and planning at Unisa began in 2006 in the context of the harmonised policies of Unisa and the former Technikon South Africa. The University pursues a policy of functional multilingualism in order to accommodate the linguistic diversity of both its staff and students. The policy contains certain guiding principles, and these guiding principles are based on the clause contained in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996, section 6(1)–(5)) and the PANSALB Act (Act 59 of 1995).

The following are some of these guiding principles:

- is premised on the constitutional provision pertaining to the right to receive education in the official language(s) of choice, taking into consideration equity, practicability and the need to redress the results of past racially discriminatory laws and practices, and
- respect for the founding values of human dignity, the achievement of equality, the advancement of human rights and freedom, non-racialism and non-sexism as proclaimed in the Constitution.

These guiding principles are, in themselves, based on the Bill of Rights and are commendable. However, Bamgbose (1991: 111) states that South Africa's language policy to a large extent displays the same weaknesses of "avoidance, vagueness, arbitrariness, fluctuation, and give(s) an impression of declaration

without implementation”. A lack of specificity, according to Bangbose (1991: 117), effectively gives governments “an alibi for non-implementation”.

Another guiding principle contained in the policy is the following: “Functional multilingualism” as referred to in the policy means that the choice of a specific language in a particular situation is determined by the context in which it is used, namely the function, the audience and the message it is intended to convey. The purpose and context of the communication, the availability of resources and the target audience determine the choice of languages.

#### 4.2.1 Language(s) of Tuition

The Policy provides that Unisa will make tuition available in the official languages on the basis of functional multilingualism (par 4.2.1). At undergraduate level, functional multilingualism requires steps to be taken to ensure that all programmes are offered in all official languages. To advance the goal of offering undergraduate programmes in all official languages, undergraduate modules must be provided with a glossary. The Department of Language Services is facilitating the compilation of these glossaries. The Senate Language Committee may consider applications to offer undergraduate modules in English only, provided that a glossary has been developed. In considering the application, the following must be taken into account:

- the number of students registered for the module
- students' preference for studying in other languages
- the availability of study material in other languages
- the ability of academic employees to offer the module in other languages

Where English and Afrikaans already have the capacity to operate as tertiary-level languages, the University proactively supports African languages with a view to elevating them by developing their capacity as media of expository prose at the highest tertiary level on a par with English and Afrikaans, without detracting from the existing capacity of these two languages (note that Afrikaans is the third most understood and spoken language in South Africa). In deciding whether a particular language should be used for teaching purposes, a mere percentage or absolute number should not be the determining factor. Teaching in any language will depend on the objectives set out in the implementation plan.

#### 4.2.2 Students' Preferred Language of Tuition

On 16 April 2010, the Senate Language Committee at Unisa commissioned the Directorate of Institutional Analysis (DISA) to conduct a research project at Unisa which focused on determining the language chosen by students as their preferred tuition medium, a choice that has highly significant implications for the

production of study materials. In this regard, provisional course enrolments were analysed to determine whether students preferred English or Afrikaans as the language of tuition (as mentioned earlier). Students' preferences are reflected in Table 2, which illustrates the course-enrolment patterns over the period from, from 2006 to 2010<sup>1</sup>.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
English	850 875	987751	1 099 582	1 105 102	964 133
	89.0%	90.2%	91.1%	91.6%	92.1%
Afrikaans	105 691	106 923	107 769	101 206	83 099
	11.1%	9.8%	8.9%	8.4%	7.9%
Total	956 566	1 094 674	1 207 351	1 207 308	1 047 232
	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

**Table 2.** Preferred language of tuition (by course count), 2006–10.

Table 2 indicates that, of the total number of course enrolments for each of the years under review, the vast majority of students indicated that English was their preferred language of tuition. Course enrolments with English as the preferred language of tuition increased in actual terms between 2006 and 2009, from 850 875 in 2006 to 1 105 102 in 2009. A proportional increase in course enrolments in English as the language of preference is also evident, up from 89.0% in 2006 to 91.6% in 2009 – representing a total increase of 2.6%. There is a corresponding proportional decline in course enrolments in Afrikaans between 2006 and 2009, from 11.1% to 8.4%, representing a total decline of 2.7%. While data for 2010 are incomplete at this point, it is unlikely that major shifts will be experienced.

According to DISA, it was necessary to establish which students chose English or Afrikaans as their preferred language of tuition, given their *home language status*. This analysis is summarised in Table 3 below, and includes years 2006–2010. Subsequently, this research was discontinued since the Senate Language Committee commissioned a task team comprising of academics to do a thorough survey on students' language choice. For now, the University has to

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<sup>1</sup> The course enrolment data for 2010 as reflected in Table 3 was extracted as at 27 May and therefore does not represent the full year.

rely on the above information. This survey is massive and is entitled, "A study into Survey of language attitudes and preferences of UNISA students towards Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT)' is underway".

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
English	456 664 99.99 %	544 825 99.99 %	629 743 99.98 %	652 070 99.99%	601 948 99.99%
Afrikaans	59 0.01%	74 0.01%	118 0.02%	83 0.01%	66 0.01%
Total	456 723 100%	544 899 100%	629 861 100%	652 153 100%	602 007 100%

**Table 3.** Preferred language for tuition where home language is an African language (by course count), 2006–10.

It is evident from Table 3 that nearly 100% of the course count of students with an African home language indicated that English was their preferred language of instruction. A negligible number and proportion of students indicated a preference for Afrikaans. African students who identify Afrikaans as their preferred language of instruction are likely to be from a region where Afrikaans is the predominant language. This finding was also apparent for the preferred language of correspondence. In absolute terms, the number of students who preferred English increased steadily from 456 664 in 2006 to 652 070 in 2009. The finding that African language speakers actually prefer to receive tuition in English is consistent with the observation of the Senate Language Committee and the 2011 census showing a decline in the use of the six African Languages and an increase in English language speakers – from 3.7million in 2001 to 4.9 million in 2011, which is a worrying factor. This decline in the use of African Languages is attributed by some scholars as the aftermath of not teaching pupils in their mother tongue in schools. When interviewed, one of the scholars reported that even though so many indigenous languages were spoken, children were not taught in them (Hosken, G., 31 October, 2012)

Subsequently, in 2010, different Colleges<sup>2</sup> at Unisa were invited to a workshop of the Vice-Principal: Academic and Research to discuss the writing

<sup>2</sup> Unisa is a Mega University comprising of bigger units, colleges, in their structure instead of faculties.

of study guides in African languages. The proposal was that at least two modules per College must be written in English, and one in a major African language.

Members representing Colleges reported that the above issue was discussed in the departments. The following comments were made:

- The major concern was that the departments lacked capacity in human resources – i.e. translators who could translate into African languages.
- The departments were concerned about the difficulty of translating the terminology or "language" of a particular subject. Subject specialists would therefore have to be contracted to do these translations.
- Students should be consulted to determine the percentage of those who would prefer to receive material in an African language rather than in English. In the past, some Afrikaans-speaking students indicated that they prefer to register in English since most prescribed books were in English. These students made it clear that, if they registered in Afrikaans, this meant that they had to do double learning (learning terminology in both English and Afrikaans).

## 5. LANGUAGE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AT UNISA

There is no implementation plan for Unisa's revised language policy as approved by Council on 19.11.2010. It therefore seems that the University's new policy means the implementation of the subtractive language education model. There are reports that increasing numbers of Afrikaans-speaking students are opting for English modules, although this seems to contradict complaints recently reported in the media. This kind of stance by universities has a tendency to steer even the best of the institutions off the course of some sort of workable bilingual model. According to the minutes of the meeting of Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) under the auspices of UNESCO (2005: 44), monolingual and subtractive bilingual models fail most students and exclude the masses because these models effectively block access to the knowledge and information needed for modern development. This is despite the fact that Unisa's previous language policy (1996) emphasised additive bilingualism. If the most prevalent local black language (i.e. Zulu) was added as a medium of instruction, the percentage of Unisa students who would be able to access learning in their primary language would increase dramatically to 67%. However, the University reports that it would be unrealistic to expect a major shift in the foreseeable future towards tuition in the medium of African languages. Moreover, given the demands of the local and global economy, a policy to teach everything through the medium of African languages is likely to be contrary to current student preferences. Indeed, doing this may even lead to feelings of hostility towards the University. Nevertheless, a middle route is both practical and viable. This route

would involve phasing in tuition over the longer term in some key subjects in selected African languages.

The successful introduction and implementation of multilingual policies depends on the employment of an incremental and phased approach which acknowledges the specific challenges and needs of individual students and staff members. In the short term, multilingualism could be enhanced through measures such as multilingual signage and branding and a multilingual website, as well as the provision of internal communiqués and, ultimately, the Unisa calendar in several languages. Staff development through the provision of short courses in official South African languages and South African Sign Language would also enhance multilingualism.

## 5.1 GAPS AND WEAKNESS IN THE POLICY

Unisa's revised language policy does not commit the institution to MLE, but acknowledges its existence in the national language policy. The policy reads as follows:

Multilingualism is also acknowledged as a powerful tool to promote social cohesion between diverse groups in our society.

The following clause attests to what was said above, and continues as follows:

The development of the diverse languages of our country will take time and resources and should be pursued in a phased way, as resources and developmental opportunities allow.

## 5.2 SUGGESTIONS

MLE is an integral part of our tertiary system and should be managed effectively, taking into account issues such as student access and academic success. Language planning in a MLE setting is a complex issue and should be managed effectively.

No ML planning system can be effective (given the different issues that need to be attended to) without relevant support structures and services such as language planning bodies, language directorates or language centres and language-planning management structures. These support structures must accommodate the full variety of services required for effective ML planning, including:

- language policy and planning measures
- the development of academic literacy
- language acquisition
- writing and reading support

- language services such as translation and interpreting
- plans and structures for the advancement of local (SA) black languages and Afrikaans

An ideal ML planning system should include the following essential components. One of these is an institutional language policy which clearly states a commitment to ML planning. In order for this policy to go beyond simply paying lip service to MLE, this has to be accompanied by an institutional language plan which provides policy implementation and management guidelines. These measures need to be backed by a language-planning management system at the higher echelons of University management. On that basis, language plans for faculties, management and support services can be developed and implemented with the assistance and monitoring of language support structures (e.g. directorates, centres, etc.).

## 7. CONCLUSION

Daunting challenges have to be overcome in using language policy to deliver the vision of multilingualism endorsed by the Constitution. This remains the case in 2013, despite the groundbreaking language policy formation of the LANGTAG project and the hopes embodied in PANSALB. It is clear that there are serious challenges that have to be met in coping with general education, higher education, research, and the mustering of political will to harness the languages of South Africa in the cause of social justice. Quality education and human capabilities are pillars in a transformative multilingual education that is geared for democracy. Coupled with this view is the idea that the end-goal of knowledge creation is greater freedom, which can be achieved when knowledge increases awareness of the hidden aspects of power relations within education and society in general, that is, when it deliberately diffuses and accords emancipatory knowledge to all people, irrespective of their social status.

The Global Monitoring Report on Education for All in 2005 (UNESCO, 2005) underlined the fact that, worldwide, the choice of a language of instruction and the formulation of language policy in schools are critical for effective learning. In a landmark study on the quality of education in Africa, carried out by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA, 2004), the language factor emerged strongly as one of the most important determinants of quality achieved in teaching and learning. Yet, more than 50 years since the first UNESCO statement, and despite a plethora of books, articles, numerous conventions, declarations and recommendations addressing this issue (including a range of conclusive experiments with the use of local languages in education and polity) most African countries continue to use the former colonial language

as the primary language of instruction and governance. Professor Edward Kembo-Sure from Moi University in Kenya stated that mother-tongue languages should be promoted and maintained in schools in order to retain language diversity worldwide (Kembo-Sure, 4 November 2010).

While a great deal of focus has been placed on the use of African languages in primary education, this paper has shown that this, in itself, is not sufficient. What may seem, at first sight, a rather counter-intuitive imposition (top-down), the inclusion of African languages at HEI level is exactly what is called for. I say this because this creates (in the future at least) the trigger and motivation for speakers of African languages to rely more confidently on these languages as, for example, languages of tuition.

I suggest that policy and practice in South Africa should nurture multilingualism; primarily a mother-tongue-based one with an appropriate and necessary space for international languages of wider communication. It is important to ensure that colonial monolingualism is not replaced with African monolingualism. Subsequently, the question that has to be answered is, are all the South African official languages equal? If so, can South Africans access information in their Indigenous African languages so that they can participate effectively in their own development and the development of their communities? It would seem that the existences of eleven official languages are contingent on practicality and expense. Besides that, it is overly evident that not all South African Indigenous languages enjoy equal prestige and resources. Language planners and Government agencies should ensure that the aforementioned indigenous languages are used for the functions assigned to them by allocating the necessary resources for the promotion of languages, and by providing capacity to facilitate the implementation of the functions. If this action is successful communities will realise that it is not true that the time spent learning African languages or learning in them is time lost from learning and mastering supposedly more productive and useful languages that enjoy greater status. Nor is it true that learning these languages or learning in them delays students' access to and mastery of science, technology and other global and universal disciplines. In fact, the greater status enjoyed by these international languages is reinforced by unjust power arrangements. It is not proper to compare local languages to international ones in absolute terms. They complement each other on different scales of value, and are indispensable for the harmonious and full development of individuals and society.

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- developing tools and instrument that will be used to assess language proficiency and competency in the African Languages programmes, since in South Africa there are no original instruments/tools in a form of tests (those currently in use are translated from English and Afrikaans).
- 2006 PHD thesis entitled feasibility of Northern Sotho as a language of commerce and industry in the Limpopo and Gauteng provinces.
- the notion that languages are tied to communities, and that communities may provide 'benefits' that are not easily reduced to quantifiable 'goods' with market-determined value, is not factored in most types of rational choice models.
- speakers of black indigenous African languages believe that their languages are inherently lacking in the capacity to serve as media of communication for higher learning purposes, economic activity, social mobility or any other serious public business. Their only use, they suggest, is as instruments of personal social interaction and cultural expression.

## APPENDIX A: LANGUAGE POLICY AND PLANNING SITUATION AT HEIS IN SOUTH AFRICA

<b>NAMES OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN HEIS</b>	<b>ACRONYM</b>	<b>AVAILABILITY OF INSTITUTIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY DOCUMENTS</b>	<b>PRACTISING ML</b>	<b>IMPLEMENTATION PLANS</b>
Cape Peninsula University of Technology	CPUT	Yes	Proclaims ML but LoLT English	Support- acquiring basic Indigenous language skill
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University	NMMU	Yes	Proclaims ML but LoLT English	No implementation
North West University	NWU	Yes	Bilingual LoLT; English and Afrikaans are used as primary languages of tuition.	To implement Setswana and Sesotho for teaching-learning purposes;
Tshwane University of Technology	TUT	Yes	Historically bilingual institutions now practising subtractive bilingualism.	Not sure
University of Cape Town	UCT	Yes	No historically an English university	Support- acquiring basic Indigenous language skill
University of Fort Hare	UFH	Yes	Advocate for ML but LoLT is English	No Implementation
University of Free State	UFS	Yes	Bilingual LoLT Acknowledges ML; historically an Afrikaans only university now Afrikaans and English are LoLT	No inclusion of an indigenous language.
University of Johannesburg	UJ	yes	No, historically an Afrikaans only university. Now practising bilingualism.	The University will adopt special and comprehensive short-, medium- and long-term measures

				to develop and use isiZulu and Sesotho sa Leboa progressively for academic, administrative, communication and marketing purposes.
University of Limpopo	UL	No	Historically an English university- practising monolingualism.	No
University of South Africa	UNISA	Yes	Historically bilingual institutions now practising subtractive bilingualism.	Has not begun
University of Pretoria	UP	Yes	Bilingual_ Afrikaans and English as LOLT.	Sepedi as a third language of communication.
University of Stellenbosch	US	Yes	Historically an Afrikaans only university. Now practising bilingualism.	Acknowledge English and isiXhosa, Dutch, German and French.
University of Western Cape	UWC	Yes	Promoting ML but LoLT is English only.	Acknowledging and supporting students acquiring , Afrikaans and basic Indigenous language skill
Rhodes	RU	Yes	No, historically an English university- practising monolingualism.	Acknowledging and supporting students acquiring basic Indigenous language skill
University of KwaZulu-Natal	UKZN	Yes	Promotion of multilingualism; historically an English LoLT only university- practising monolingualism.	isiZulu a compulsory subject for all first year students.