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**DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

NO. 147

23 FEBRUARY 2018

**CALL FOR COMMENTS ON THE REVISED LANGUAGE POLICY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION, 2017**

I, Hlengiwe Buhle Mkhize, Minister of Higher Education and Training, hereby publish the draft revised Language Policy for Higher Education for public comment, which policy I intend to promulgate under section 3 of the Higher Education Act, 1997, Act No. 101 of 1997. The draft revised Language Policy for Higher Education replaces the Language Policy for Higher Education (2002).

The policy is available on the website of the Department of Higher Education and Training, [www.dhet.gov.za](http://www.dhet.gov.za), and may also be obtained by contacting the University Policy and Development Support Directorate on 012 312 5253/5446.

All interested persons and organisations are invited to comment on the draft revised policy in writing and direct comments to:

The Director-General, Private Bag X174, Pretoria, 0001 for the attention of Mr Mahlubi Mabizela at [Mabizela.C@dhet.gov.za](mailto:Mabizela.C@dhet.gov.za) and should reach the Department within 21 days after publication of this notice.

Kindly provide the name, address, telephone and fax number and email address of the person or organisation submitting the comments.



**Prof HB Mkhize, MP**

**Minister of Higher Education and Training**

Date: 13/12/2017



# higher education & training

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Department:  
Higher Education and Training  
**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

DRAFT

**LANGUAGE POLICY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION**

**A DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING POLICY  
DEVELOPED IN TERMS OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT (ACT 103 OF 1997  
AS AMENDED)**

2017

## **PREAMBLE TO THE POLICY STATEMENT**

In 2002, the former Minister of the Department of Education developed and promulgated the Language Policy for Higher Education. The aim of the policy was to promote multilingualism in institutional policies and practices. The policy noted that the role of language and access to language skills is critical to ensure the right of individuals to realize their full potential to participate in and contribute to the social, cultural, intellectual, economic and political life of South African society. Enrolments in language programmes had declined over the years resulting in the closure of several language departments. Higher education had failed in establishing multilingualism in day-to-day institutional life especially in core academic activities. This failure hampered the creation of an inclusive institutional environment advancing tolerance and respect for diversity.

Various interventions have been made to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the Language Policy for Higher Education; with the recent one being the establishment of a Ministerial Advisory Panel on the Development of African Languages in Higher Education whose work resulted in a "Report on the Use of African Languages as Mediums of Instruction in Higher Education". From this report and others, it is apparent that since the promulgation of the Language Policy for Higher Education, there has been little progress made in exploring and exploiting the potential role of indigenous African languages in facilitating access and success as well as the intellectualization of these languages in higher education. Therefore this policy framework is a review of the 2002 Language Policy for Higher Education and thus seeks to address the challenge of underdevelopment and underutilisation of indigenous official South African languages in higher education and at the same time sustaining the standard and utilisation of languages that have already progressed.

Taking from the principles and ideals of the Constitution, and the relationship between language and cognition in the learning process, the Revised Language Policy Framework in Higher Education seeks to promote multilingualism as a strategy to facilitate meaningful access and participation by everyone in the various university activities and in cognitive and intellectual development. The aim of the revised policy framework is to enforce the use of all official South African languages

across all institutional functional domains: including scholarship; teaching and learning; and wider communication. Furthermore, the policy seeks to promote parity of esteem of indigenous official languages in the higher education system of South Africa.

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## **ACRONYMS**

**CHE: Council on Higher Education**

**DAC: Department of Arts and Culture**

**DBE: Department of Basic Education**

**DHET: Department of Higher Education and Training**

**DoE: Department of Education**

**HEMIS: Higher Education Management Information Systems**

**LPHE: Language Policy for Higher Education**

**MAPALHE: Ministerial Advisory Panel on African Languages in Higher Education**

**NPHE: National Plan for Higher Education**

**PanSALB: Pan South African Language Board**

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Academic language:** The language needed by students to do the work in schools. It includes, for example, discipline-specific vocabulary, grammar and punctuation, and applications of rhetorical conventions and devices that are typical for a content area (e.g., essays, lab reports, discussions of a controversial issue.).  
<https://www.csun.edu/science/ref/language/pact-academic-language.html>”

**Scientific Language:** Reasoning is an activity that requires putting together thoughts that combine evidence-based knowledge and logical arguments. Any thought is dependent on language; in other words, you need words and grammar to conceive and communicate what you are thinking and/or doing. Whatever language is used in the classroom conveys a view of the natures of science. The following examples of scientific language (for teachers and students) convey an accepted modern view of the nature of scientific knowledge and of the scientific reasoning. The language used by scientists to communicate their work reflects the nature of science.  
<http://www.crystaloutreach.ualberta.ca/en/ScienceReasoningText/ScientificLanguage.aspx>

**Access:** The ability, right, or permission for students or people to attend or enter an institution of higher learning, be it for work or studies.

**Collaborative partnerships:** The working together of two or more people or institutions in reaching a specific goal

**Development:** The process of changing and improving a plan or language to a more advanced level

**Epistemic access:** The successful process of knowledge acquisition and dissemination through enabling teaching and learning pedagogies.

**Funding:** Provision of money and or resources by government or by an organization for a particular purpose



**Multilingualism:** The effective use and promotion of multiple languages either by an individual speaker or by a community of speakers.

**Inclusivity:** An intention or policy of including people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those who are handicapped or learning-disabled, or racial and sexual minorities.

**Indigenous languages:** An indigenous language is a language that is native to a region or country and spoken by indigenous people.

**Indigenous South African languages:** Indigenous official African languages of South Africa as referred to by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (i.e., Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu)

**Official African Languages:** The official African languages of South Africa (i.e., Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu)

**Language of instruction:** A language or languages used to teach or instruct learners or students in an educational environment.

**Language of scholarship:** A language or languages used to practice the studying, writing and speaking about a certain field of study. This includes both academic and scientific language.

**Language of teaching and learning:** The Language that is used to teach and to learn at an educational institution.

**Policy framework:** A logical structure or procedure that is established to define a way something needs to be done and organized according to certain laid down principles and prescriptions

**Primary Language of instruction:** A language that is the majority language that is used for the learning and teaching at an educational institution where there is also other languages or a language used for instruction. Most of the time the Primary language of instruction is the language that is spoken or understood by the majority of people.

**Social cohesion:** The state of a society that is at peace with itself and each other that works together towards the wellbeing of all that fights the exclusion and marginalization of anyone and that creates a sense of belonging and that promotes trust.

**Social justice:** Justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society. Social justice is based on the concepts of human rights and equality, and can be defined as the way in which human rights are manifested in the everyday lives of people at every level of society.

**Success:** The process in which a student gets to be taught and he or she learns what is needed to be able to pass his or her studies and attain a qualification enrolled for.

**Undervaluing:** The process of rating a language lower in value and status and failing to appreciate it compared to another language

**Underutilisation:** The process of not using or not using to a prescribed level of a language or resources in a situation or educational institution

## **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

1. Language has been and continues to be a barrier to access and success in higher education, both from the perspective that indigenous official languages have structurally not been afforded the official space to function as academic and scientific languages.
2. The majority of students entering higher education are not fully proficient in the present dominant languages of teaching and learning in higher education and are not even skilled and proficient – to the required level - in the language they call their mother tongue or choose as their preferred language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT).
3. Moreover, since the inception of democracy, the South African higher education system has experienced an accelerated increase in linguistic and cultural diversity in terms of student population, and therefore gradually becoming multilingual. For this reason, the country's higher education system is confronted with a challenge of ensuring the simultaneous development of a multilingual environment in which all our official languages are used as languages of scholarship, research, teaching and learning while at the same time ensuring that the existing languages of offering do not serve as a barrier to student access and success.
4. Thus, mindful of the historically orchestrated underdevelopment and undervaluing of indigenous official languages prior to democracy, and the disinclination to empower these languages in the present dispensation, conditions must be created for the valuing of indigenous languages as languages of meaningful academic discourse, as well as sources of knowledge in the different disciplines of higher education.
5. In 2002, the Department of Education (DoE) developed and promulgated the Language Policy for Higher Education (LPHE). The aim of the policy was to

promote multilingualism in institutional policies and practices. The policy noted that “the role of language and access to language skills is critical to ensure the right of individuals to realise their full potential to participate in and contribute to the social, cultural, intellectual, economic, academic and political life of South African society”.

6. Following the promulgation of the Language Policy for Higher Education, there were a number of initiatives intended to assess effectiveness particularly with regard to the development and use of indigenous official Languages in higher education. In 2005, a Ministerial Committee, was appointed to investigate “the development of Indigenous African Languages as Mediums of Instruction in Higher Education”. The committee’s report which was published in the same year recommended that African languages be developed into languages of learning and teaching in tertiary institutions.
7. The development of African languages at universities was also highlighted strongly in the 2008 Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions. The Report notes “the continuation of challenges faced by students who are not English first language-speakers at universities. It also indicates that the implementation approach to the parallel-medium language policies that are in place in a number of historically Afrikaans medium institutions discriminated against black students”. Thus, the Committee recommended that the Minister initiates a broad review of obstacles facing the implementation of effective language policies and practices in higher education institutions, including a study of the application of equitable language policies found in countries with more or less similar social differences to those of South Africa.
8. In 2010, the Department of Higher Education and Training convened a roundtable discussion on the development of African Languages in higher education. The aim of the meeting was to provide a space for focused discussion on the state of African languages in higher education, and in particular, to come up with a clear set of recommendations on how to

strengthen African languages at universities. Subsequent to these deliberations, the Ministry established the Ministerial Advisory Panel on the Development of African Languages in higher Education (MAPALHE). After the term of the MAPALHE panel came to an end, a "Report on the Use of African Languages as Mediums of Instruction in Higher Education" was developed. One of the key recommendations of the report was the review of the current language policy for higher education for the purposes of intellectualising indigenous official Languages for use as academic languages.

The revised policy seeks to address the issues raised by the above stated investigations in relation to ensuring the development and strengthening of a multilingual environment in which all official languages are developed and used as languages of scholarship, research, teaching and learning. This policy framework therefore seeks to address these issues and it replaces the Language Policy for Higher Education (2002).

9. Generally, findings in all the investigations above alluded to the fact that there has been general apathy and sluggishness towards implementation, particularly the promotion of multilingualism that embraces indigenous languages, and their development thereof. It is apparent that since the promulgation of the Language Policy for Higher Education (LPHE), there has been little progress made in exploring and developing of the potential role of indigenous African languages in facilitating access and success as well as the intellectualization of these languages in higher education.
10. Some of the issues raised include the fact that current policies use clauses that have led to non-compliance by higher education institutions, and that the DHET has not been able to put systems in place to assess, monitor and evaluate policies and plans implemented at institutional level. One of the issues that cuts across all the reports is the fact that government (in the form of the DHET) has not allocated funding towards supporting universities to implement their language policies and plans.

11. Furthermore, the above-stated investigations allude to the fact that there has not been any effort made by the DBE and the DHET to develop partnerships that will ensure that multilingualism in higher education is supported by effective multilingual education at the basic education levels. Much more effort has to be put into the partnership between DBE and DHET to make sure that language skills are at a level needed at tertiary education. If this is not done universities will have to be supported with promoting language proficiency of students.
12. Finally, it was observed that over the past fifteen years, the development of indigenous official languages as languages of teaching and learning and scholarship in higher education has not been a collaborative effort and that this has been carried out haphazardly by institutions. Therefore, universities as centres of scholarship should play a critical role in development of indigenous African languages and as such, African language departments, as primary custodians of scholarship in these languages, should be supported in terms funding, infrastructure and personnel.

## **PURPOSE**

13. The purpose of the policy is to:
  - 13.1. guide higher education institutions to evolve relevant strategies, policies, implementation plans for strengthening indigenous official languages of South Africa as languages of teaching, learning, research, innovation and science;
  - 13.2. provide for the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of institutional language policies;
  - 13.3. ensure transformation in higher education through enhancing the status and roles of previously marginalised languages to foster institutional inclusivity and social cohesion.
14. The policy therefore seeks to address the following:

- 14.1. the language or languages of learning (medium or mediums of instruction) in higher education institutions, bearing in mind the fundamental right of persons to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions, where it is reasonably practicable to do so, and the duty of the state to ensure effective access to and implementation of this right (section 29(2) of the Constitution).
- 14.2. the language or languages of communication within higher education institutions
- 14.3. the role of higher education in promoting, and creating conditions for the development of, all South African languages, including the official languages, the Khoi, Nama and San languages, and Sign Language, and in elevating the status and advancing the use of the indigenous languages of our people.
- 14.4. the role of higher education in preparing sufficient language teachers, interpreters, translators and other language practitioners, to serve the needs of our multilingual society.

## **SCOPE OF THE POLICY**

15. The Policy has application to all public higher education institutions. However, private higher education institutions, in their teaching, learning and other education activities must ensure that they do so in a manner that is not inconsistent with the Constitution and this Policy.

## **POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT**

16. The development of this policy takes into account the imperatives outlined in the following legislations and policies: The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa; the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997 as amended); the National Plan for Higher Education (2001); the White Paper on Post-School Education

and Training; and the National Language Policy Framework (2003); Pan South African Language Board Act No. 59 of 1995 and the Use of Official Languages Act, 2012 (Act No.12 of 2012).

17. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa declares that the official languages of the Republic are Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu. It also states that, the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these [the indigenous] official languages and that all official languages must enjoy parity of esteem and must be treated equitably", (Section 6 (1), (2) and (4) of the Founding Provisions).
18. Section 29(2) of the Constitution states that everyone has the right to receive the education in the official language or languages of their choice in public institutions where that education is reasonably practicable. In order to ensure the effective access to, and implementation of, this right, all reasonable educational alternatives must be considered, taking into account equity and practicability.
19. In accordance with Section 27(2) of the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997 as amended), the Minister of Higher Education and Training must determine language policy for all universities. The Act provides that, subject to the development of policy by the Minister, the councils of public higher education institutions, with the concurrence of their senates, must determine the language policy of a higher education institution and must publish and make such policy available on request.
20. The National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) of 2001 states that important fields of study which impact on the development of a common sense of nationhood and that could play an important role in contributing to the development of the African renaissance continue to be marginalised in higher education institutions. These include, in particular, fields of study such as African languages and culture; African literature (and not only in its English form); indigenous knowledge systems and, more generally; the transformation



of curricula to reflect the location of knowledge and curricula in the context of the African continent.

21. The White Paper on Post-School Education and Training states that a cross-disciplinary approach to a renewed focus on developing African languages in universities is a necessary one that integrates African languages into the formal programmes of institutions. Targeted resources, materials and support must be provided. Of central importance to achieve all language-related goals is the targeted strengthening of African-language departments at universities in line with areas of regional strength. This will ensure that capacity is built to expand teaching of South African languages, as well as their development as languages of literature, science and academia. What is certain is that specialised, targeted support is essential to reverse the decline of African language departments and to recognise the importance of African languages to the work of universities.
22. The National Language Policy Framework (2003) states that all government structures (national, provincial and local government), as well as institutions exercising a public power or performing a public function in terms of legislation are bound by this Language Policy Framework.

## **VALUES**

23. This policy is guided by the following values which are foregrounded by constitutional and legislative imperatives:
  - a) parity of esteem and use of all official languages as determined in the Constitution;
  - b) a commitment to the promotion of language equity; equality and fairness;
  - c) a commitment to development and promotion of indigenous language to redress past injustices;
  - d) the nurturing of an environment where multilingualism is not seen as a problem but as a resource to facilitate cognitive development, epistemic access, inclusiveness, transformation, social cohesion and respect for all languages;

- e) the importance of language in promoting human dignity; and
- f) the creation of a receptive institutional culture

## **PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THE POLICY**

24. This policy is embedded within the following principles:
- a) the recognition of the linguistic and cultural diversity that exists in our universities;
  - b) the need for higher education to value all official languages as source of knowledge, to inform learning of the different disciplines in higher education;
  - c) a recognition that languages are critical resources in the transmission of knowledge, cognitive development and effective participation in the knowledge economy;
  - d) enhancing people-centeredness in addressing the interests, needs and aspirations of a wide range of language communities through ongoing dialogue and debate.
  - e) the value of collaborative partnerships to promote multilingualism; and
  - f) a stance against the use of any language for the purposes of exploitation, domination and discrimination.

## **POLICY FRAMEWORK**

25. This policy framework recognises the important role of higher education in the promotion of multilingualism for social, cultural, intellectual and economic development.
26. All institutions must develop strategies, policies and implementation plans for promoting multilingualism as defined by the policy framework.
27. This policy framework commits to the development and study of official South African languages and literature, including the Khoi, Nama and San languages. Targeted institutions will be required to develop and enhance these languages as centres of research excellence in these fields of study.

28. The policy framework recognises the need to develop competencies and capacity in the South African sign language consistent with the Use of Official Languages Act, 2012 (Act No.12 of 2012).
29. In relation to the study of foreign languages this policy framework enjoins institutions to include in their policies and strategies programmes that encourage the study of foreign languages, in particular those languages that are important for the promotion of the country's cultural, trade and diplomatic relations.
30. Higher education must assist in preparing sufficient language teachers, interpreters, translators and other language practitioners, to serve the needs of our multilingual society.

- **The domain uses of the languages**

31. *Language of instruction:* This policy recognises the linguistic diversity of the student make up of our higher education institutions and the value of language as a means of epistemic access. Universities must diversify the languages of instruction to include indigenous official languages.
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32. *Scholarship, Teaching and learning:* The promotion and use of all official languages must occur at both ends of the educational spectrum; i.e. basic and higher education. In addition to English, all official languages must be pronounced in institutional language policies as languages of scholarship, teaching and learning. Continuous broad research must be undertaken by the sector, to explore and document strategies for intellectualising African languages for use in higher education.

33. *Communication:* Institutions must translate all internal communication material into at least three other official languages, as a way of cultivating a culture of multilingualism on their campuses thus improving the Institutional experience by promoting change in the diversity of student and staff profiles, initiatives such as student support, mentorship and counselling, and the creation of a receptive institutional culture which embraces linguistic diversity which are crucial ways of

for promoting a climate where all people feel affirmed and empowered to realise their full potential.

- **Enablers**

34. *Institutional language policy and plans:* Universities must revise their language policies to accord greater importance to the use of African languages for scholarship; teaching and learning; and administrative purposes. They must set up implementation structures that can leverage the opportunities provided by the instruments of this policy. Higher education institutions must indicate in their language policies and plans, strategies they have put in place to promote multilingualism and transformation.

35. *Collaborative programmes:* Universities must foster trans-institutional and inter-institutional collaborations in the development and strengthening the use of official South African languages. The focus of such research should be on strategies that could be adopted in higher education to achieve quality education for all students, as well as to promote multilingualism.

- **Collaborations and partnerships**

36. The DHET must work in partnership with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in order to establish an all-inclusive and participatory exchange of ideas and rally support for meaningful multilingual education embracing indigenous African languages. Multilingual education should focus on proper vocational preparation of teachers for a multilingual environment, with emphasis on teaching in indigenous African languages.

37. The promotion of South African languages for use in scholarship in higher education will require, amongst others, the development of dictionaries and other teaching and learning materials. The Department must work in close collaboration with the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) in this regard.

38. The DAC, through the National Language Services, will be encouraged to create an open-source Multidisciplinary Terminology Bank for all official

African indigenous languages to be accessed and used as a teaching and learning resource by all universities.

39. The Pan South African Languages Board (PanSALB) will be encouraged to work closely with universities and the CHE to participate in development of all terminology and authentication processes in all disciplines, and deposit such authenticated terminology in the DAC's Multidisciplinary Terminology Bank.
40. Universities must establish or strengthen (if existing) centres for Language Development to undertake research required in the case of each of the official languages. These centres must be encouraged to enter into collaborative programmes with the DHET, the Department of Arts, Culture (DAC), the DBE the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB); and other relevant national language development bodies.
41. Universities must develop partnerships and collaborative language development programmes with other universities and language bodies to avoid working in silos. This will assist in sharing information and data relating to language and terminology development for various disciplines.

- **Policy Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation**

42. This policy requires that all universities develop and implement languages policies in line with this policy framework. The policies must be supported by implementation plans which must be reviewed annually in terms of the requirements of the DHET and submitted before the set deadline. These prescripts must also be responsive to the needs of developing competencies and capacity in languages which they use in the different domains. This is to ensure that language proficiency is not used as a means of excluding potential students from any university in South Africa.
43. University Vice-Chancellors are required to report annually to the DHET on progress made in implementing their language policies and language development plans. Resources and capacity to implement these policies and plans must be made available and supported. These include information

technology infrastructure relating to language development and preservation. Universities also have to provide means to promote access and success of students by providing quality supporting language services such as translation and interpreting services.

44. The DHET must develop and implement a detailed step-by-step long-term plan for developing and preserving all official languages as languages of scholarship in higher education and in education in general. The plan must ensure that each institution or a group institutions is charged with the task of the active and systematically planned development of a particular language. The development of the plan must be done in consultation with the DBE, DAC and PanSALB as they all have an important regulatory role to play in language development and use.
45. The DHET will establish and implement a funding model that will allow universities to access funds to be utilised towards language development and use. This model must require universities to submit language development plans for approval by the Department before funding could be accessed.
46. The DHET will monitor the impact of language policy in higher education, to establish whether or not policy implementation is on the right track or if it is realising its objectives. This must include the collection and analysis of the relevant data through the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS). The DHET will occasionally conduct impact assessment studies to evaluate if the policy is responding to the identified challenges.
47. The DHET will develop and implement an annual monitoring instrument, with indicators that will be assessed as part of the monitoring process. Institutional visits must also form part of the annual monitoring exercise to physically assess progress made, as well as challenges hampering implementation of short and long term language development programmes.
48. Policy evaluation would be conducted at reasonable intervals in order to monitor progress towards a fully multilingual higher education environment in South

Africa. Recommendations for amendments to the policy will be made where necessary.

- **Effective date of policy**

49. This policy will be effective from 1 January 2019.