

UNISA LANGUAGE POLICY

1. PREAMBLE

Section 6 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, provides the backdrop to this policy and lists the official languages of South Africa to be Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu. Section 6 of the Constitution endorses the notion of functional multilingualism. Section 6(2) provides that the state, and by extension public institutions, must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of indigenous languages. The language clauses of the Constitution are furthermore supported by the Bill of Rights, which recognizes language as a basic human right. In view of the fact that the Constitution requires all languages to enjoy parity of esteem and be treated equitably, UNISA should take cognizance of the provisions of the Use of Official Languages Act 12 of 2012 and align its Language Policy and practices with this Act.

Mother-tongue based multilingual education (MLE) to support all South African students studying at UNISA is an ideal that must be the ultimate goal, even if the time span to achieve that goal may only be for future generations. First practicable steps should, however, be taken now to start on this road. Mother-tongue based MLE is not simply an ideological goal, but is supported by research in educational linguistics, all over the world, as well as in African multilingual settings. Students learning in their own language are generally more successful in their studies than students studying in an additional language. UNISA's movement towards an ODeL model creates a window of opportunity for the cost-effective use of indigenous languages in education through the use of technology. MLE should put the student at the center of this initiative, and should thus focus on student support and success. Students, in turn, should be actively encouraged to participate in the development and use of all the official languages of South Africa in higher education.

2. AIM

This policy informs the use of language in all aspects of communication of the University, i.e. teaching and learning, research, public, internal and external communication.

3. DEFINITIONS

African languages refer to Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu;

Cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) is contrasted with Basic Interpersonal Language Skills (BICS) and is generally defined as "... those aspects of language proficiency which are closely related to the development of literacy skills..." (Cummins, J. 1980: 1772) and, the development of the higher-level cognitive and academic abilities that are crucial to academic success;

Digital Learning Object (DLO)	refers to a short, focused learning intervention which can be in digital video, audio or text format and which is intended to support students in their learning;
Functional multilingualism	means that the choice of a particular language in a particular situation is determined by the context in which it is used, i.e. the function, the audience and the message for which it is used. The purpose and context of the communication, the availability of resources and the target audience determine the choice of languages;
Glossary (multilingual glossary)	refers to a text which identifies all the relevant terms in a module or discipline, with translations of these terms, as well as definitions appropriate definitions for learning;
Languages of Learning and Teaching (LOLT)	refer to the languages that are used as media of instruction in learning environments;;
Language of record	refers to the language in which documents destined for record keeping will be recorded;
Multilingual education	refers to an education which emphasises the use of learners' primary languages in formal education while learning a second language;
Official languages	are the languages referred to in section 6 (1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996;
Own language	within the context of this Policy refers to the official South African language of choice of a student.

4. PRINCIPLES

4.1 The University

- 4.1.1 acknowledges that there are eleven official languages in South Africa and ensures that, together with South African Sign Language, they enjoy parity of esteem and equitable treatment.
- 4.1.2 respects 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.
- 4.1.3 recognises 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 racial discriminatory laws and practices.
- 4.1.4 recognises the educational value and benefits of teaching and learning in the student's own language.
- 4.1.5 realises that language is not only about communication, but also about identity and respect.

- 4.1.6 realises that as a national university, UNISA endeavors to support all the official languages of South Africa.
- 4.1.7 recognises that its graduates should have a high level of proficiency in English to be competitive both nationally and internationally.
- 4.1.8 recognises that African languages (as defined in this policy), both as media of communication and as languages of learning and teaching (LOLT), have been historically disadvantaged. The University systematically makes resources available for the development of the nine African languages for the benefit of the University and the country.
- 4.1.9 recognises that where English and Afrikaans already have the capacity to operate as higher education-level languages, the University pro-actively supports African languages with a view to them becoming languages of learning and teaching at higher education level.
- 4.1.10 acknowledges and actively promotes the use of all the official languages in learner support and to scaffold learning, particularly harnessing the affordances of digital technologies.
- 4.1.11 creates a dedicated language unit to oversee the implementation of the policy, and acknowledges that all academic departments have an important role to play in the achievement of multilingual education and the development of the African languages.
- 4.1.12 accepts that decisions by Council on recommendation of Senate regarding languages of learning and teaching are preceded by and based on a formal investigation into the tuition needs, attitudes and preferences of students, and
- 4.1.13 undertakes to support the Language Policy and its implementation in terms of finance, technology and human resources.

4.2 Language(s) of learning and teaching (LOLT)

- 4.2.1 The LoLT in all undergraduate courses will be English, with scaffolding in other official languages as outlined in 4.4.
- 4.2.2 All undergraduate language courses will be offered in the language in question. Only in introductory foreign language instruction may English be used as initial scaffolding.
- 4.2.3 Where there is capacity, a selected number of modules and programmes will progressively be offered in more than one official South African language in order to support relevant national policies.
- 4.2.4 The University sets in place an infrastructure for all students to receive the necessary assistance in improving their cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) in English, as well as in their own languages.

4.3 Language(s) of research and postgraduate teaching and supervision

- 4.3.1 The LoLT in all postgraduate courses will be English.
- 4.3.2 All postgraduate languages courses will be offered in the language in question.

- 4.3.3 Postgraduate research students are allowed to write their proposals, theses or dissertations in
- a) the language of the subject in which the proposal, thesis or dissertation is offered, or
 - b) any of South Africa's official languages, or
 - c) any other language as approved by the relevant College Higher Degrees Committee

provided that there is sufficient supervisory and examination capacity available for the estimated duration of the study. The student's choice of language has to be negotiated and agreed formally at the start of the study. Supervision in all official languages will be encouraged.

- 4.3.4 Every completed thesis or dissertation must have electronic abstracts available in the Institutional Repository in at least three official South African languages. The University will make resources available for the translation of abstracts after the examination has been completed.

4.4 Student support

- 4.4.1 All formal study material, formative and summative assessment, as well as other formal tuition activities will be in English only, whereas learner support activities may be in the language of the student.
- 4.4.2 UNISA actively strives to support its students in their own languages, by phasing in:
- a) compulsory multilingual glossaries in all eleven official languages;
 - b) translation support for basic study material in all eleven official languages;
 - c) learning objects in various languages as scaffolding and support;
 - d) tutorial support in all the official South African languages.
- 4.4.3 The University invests resources in improving the language proficiency, particularly the English skills, of all its students to enable students to access the library and other sources of information and enhance academic literacy in their fields of study. The University makes study material linguistically accessible through its instructional design and by devising strategies aimed at building language skills and academic literacy development into the study material.
- 4.4.4 The University provides special tuition aids required by students with sensory disabilities on request and where feasible, e.g. interpreters for South African Sign Language, Braille, tapes and other functional audio and video teaching means.
- 4.4.5 The University ensures that students with disabilities have access to their study material in order to enhance their formative and summative assessment through the use of Braille, tapes and other functional audio and video teaching means where these are needed.

4.5 Languages of public communication

4.5.1 Oral communication

- a) In oral communication with the public, employees should make every attempt to accommodate the language preference of the interlocutor.
- b) Employees refer telephone enquiries to other employees who are able to answer in the language chosen by the caller, where feasible.
- c) At all important service points (general information desks, student supervisory services, registration desks and the library) the University makes the means available to assist and advise students and employees in the language of their choice, including South African Sign Language to enhance a student-friendly ethos.

4.5.2 Written communication

- a) In its languages of public communication, in an effort to create an enabling environment, the University endeavors to use the languages of the region concerned.
- b) Addressees answer correspondence in the language in which it is addressed to the University.
- c) Official brochures and reports are written in accessible, reader-friendly language to accommodate the target audience and the language community for which a given document is intended.
- d) University publications consider their target readers and adhere to the institution's language policy. The use of various languages in these publications will be a visible sign of the University's commitment to multilingualism. Summaries are provided in other relevant languages.
- e) The University strives towards attaining the capacity to use all official languages without neglecting minority South African languages or South African Sign Language.
- f) In terms of the student communication and marketing strategy, all brochures may be produced in all eleven official languages of South Africa in digital format, where feasible.

4.5.3 Signage and branding

The University endeavors to do signage and branding in the languages of the region concerned.

4.5.4 Advertising

Advertising should be in the language of the target audience concerned. Where possible all eleven official languages should be used in at least one of the media channels used that is radio, television or newspapers.

4.6 Languages of internal communication

4.6.1 Oral communication

- a) All official meetings and proceedings are conducted in English.
- b) Oral communication takes place in languages understood by the parties concerned.

4.6.2 Written communication

- a) The language of record is English.
- b) Documents of general interest to employees that change infrequently, for example the Institutional Statute of the University, conditions of employment and rules, are available in as many official languages as possible.
- c) Documentation relating to meetings will be in English.
- d) Official written communication will be gender-neutral or gender-inclusive.

4.7 Communications with people of restricted sight or hearing

The University provides special communication aids required by students with sensory disabilities on request, e.g. interpreters for South African Sign Language, Braille, tapes and other functional means to promote communication.

4.8 Employee development and capacity building

- 4.8.1 The University provides facilities through the relevant department(s) or otherwise to advocate and encourage employees to learn an African language and South African Sign Language, and to increase their competence in any medium of instruction. These courses will be predominantly conversational in character, content and form to enable employees to communicate effectively.
- 4.8.2 Effective but affordable incentives that would encourage employees to use these facilities will be investigated on an ongoing basis.

4.9 Labour relations

- 4.9.1 All participants at employee disciplinary hearings and student hearings have the right to use any of the official South African languages and South African Sign Language.
- 4.9.2 A participant or employee at a disciplinary hearing must notify the University seven days prior to the commencement of the hearing that he/she will use a language other than English to enable the University to provide translation.
- 4.9.3 Where multilingual discussion has taken place, the University provides summaries of the proceedings in at least English for record purposes.

4.10 Social relations

Social events, just as any academic gathering within the University, are intended to further the educational mission of the University. The University respects the rights of its community members to participate in the academic and social events of the University in the language of their choice.

5. COMPLAINTS

The University will institute a complaints process through which complaints about language use and the implementation of this policy may be lodged. The complaints process will be objective and independent from the unit(s) where implementation of this policy takes place.

6. IMPLEMENTATION

- 6.1 The implementation of the policy will be the responsibility of a special language unit to be established in the University, with oversight by the Senate Language Committee (SLC) and ultimately the Senate of the University.
- 6.2 The policy will be made visible by its implementation, but also by its visible placement on the web, with summaries in offices of the University. The policy and its summary will be available in all eleven official languages of South Africa.
- 6.3 The implementation of this policy will take place in a phased-in approach, but with due regard to the urgency of making positive strides in the development of African Languages as languages of higher learning. It is acknowledged that there has been a gap between aspirational language policies and the implementation thereof, and the intent is to redress this situation.
- 6.4 Annual evaluation and reporting to the October Senate meeting on the implementation of the policy will take place, with a specific target date for re-evaluation in 2020.

