

## THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE IN SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigated the factors that prevent the use of Black languages as media of instruction and also proposed strategies for promoting black languages in Black universities. Black Africans constitute the majority in almost all the provinces of South Africa. They are followed by Coloured, Whites and Indians or Asians. Coloured people constitute the largest group in the Western Cape while Black African people constitute the largest group in all other provinces. In all the provinces where Blacks constitute majority they do not receive education through the media of their own mother languages. This is despite the fact that the Constitution adopted in 1994 recognises all the eleven languages in the country. The equality accorded to the eleven languages is just on paper and not in practice. English and Afrikaans are the only two languages used as media of instruction in all the 25 universities in the country. Black learners have revolted against the use of Afrikaans in 1976 as a medium of instruction and are again revolting against the same language in the 2016. This study revealed that there is a lack of transformational leadership on the side of politicians and policy makers to implement the requirements of the constitution. The study has also found that Black students do not understand the importance of language as a function of culture because instead of fighting for an African language to be a medium of instruction, they fight to replace Afrikaans with a colonial language, English. A study by Neethling has revealed that one of South African languages isiXhosa has the potential to develop as a medium of instruction. This study recommends that government should develop an agenda of transformation with time frames to force universities to introduce African languages as media of instruction. Universities should from time to time submit their reports to the Department of Education and be presented to parliament. Transforming councils will facilitate changes in the curriculum and medium of instruction. Government should mobilise resources to promote the wider use of indigenous languages throughout the country.

**Keywords:** Medium of instruction; Language and culture; South Africa; Colonialism and apartheid.