Language Policy

Type of Document:	Policy
Purpose:	To formulate a policy to guide the use of language at Stellenbosch University
Approved by:	SU Council
Date of Approval:	2016/06/22
Date of Implementation:	2017/01/01
Date of Next Revision:	2021 The Policy lapses after five years. The Policy must be reviewed during its fifth year of operation. It may be reviewed earlier, or more than once during its period of operation, if the owner of the Policy considers it necessary
Date of Previous Revision(s):	Date of Approval of Previous Policy: 22 November 2014
Policy Owner[1]:	Vice-Rector: Learning and Teaching
Policy Curator[2]:	Senior Director: Learning & Teaching Enhancement
Keywords:	institutional communication, language, languages of learning and teaching, language planning, multilingualism, policy
Validity:	In case of differences in interpretation the English version of this policy will be regarded as the valid version.

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[1] Policy Owner: Head(s) of Responsibility Centre(s) in which the policy functions.

[2] Policy Curator: Administrative head of the division responsible for the implementation and maintenance of the policy

The essence of the Policy

Stellenbosch University (SU) is committed to engagement with knowledge in a diverse society. The Language Policy aims to give effect to section 29(2) of the Constitution in relation to language usage in its academic, administrative, professional and social contexts. The Policy aims to increase equitable access to SU for all students and staff and to facilitate pedagogically sound teaching and learning. Since our campuses are situated in the Western Cape, we commit ourselves to multilingualism by using the province's three official languages, namely Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa.

1. Introduction

At SU our focus is on engagement with knowledge. As part of this engagement, SU takes into account the diversity of our society, including its linguistic diversity, and the intellectual wealth inherent in that diversity.

The South African Constitution grants official status to eleven languages and regards all these languages as assets that should be used as a means of developing human potential. The Constitution determines that no-one may be discriminated against unfairly on prohibited grounds. It further determines that everyone has the right to receive education at public education facilities in the official language or languages of their choice, taking into account equity, practicability and the need to redress the results of past racially discriminatory laws and practices.

The Language Policy aims to increase equitable access to SU for all students and staff, and to ensure that language practices facilitate pedagogically sound teaching and learning.

2. The multilingual context

SU follows a dynamic process to make the institution inclusive and diverse, including the use of more than one language. Therefore SU creates opportunities for the advancement of multilingualism.

SU is a national asset, and its students and staff represent most of the language groups in South Africa. Although we acknowledge that all South African languages function as resources for communication, we choose to focus our institutional commitment on the users of Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa, which are the three official languages of the Western Cape Province.

The contextual considerations for using these languages are as follows:

Afrikaans

Afrikaans has developed an academic repertoire over decades, to which SU has contributed significantly. Applying and enhancing the academic potential of Afrikaans is a means of empowering a large and diverse community in South Africa.

English

Speakers of the various South African languages use English to communicate with each other, and English has significant academic, business and international value.

Therefore, SU uses English routinely, but not exclusively, in its academic, administrative, professional and social contexts.

IsiXhosa

IsiXhosa is used by one of the largest language communities in South Africa. By means of specific initiatives, SU is contributing to the advancement of isiXhosa as a developing academic language in addition to expanding isiXhosa as an internal language of communication.

3. Application of the Policy

The Language Policy applies to all faculties, support services divisions, management bodies, staff and students of SU.

4. Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of the Language Policy is to guide language planning, language management and language use at SU.

5. Aims of the Policy

5.1 To give effect to section 29(2) (language in education) and 29(1)(b) (access to higher education) read with section 9 (equality and the prohibition against direct and indirect unfair discrimination) of the Constitution.

5.2 To contribute to achieving SU's Vision 2030, as contained in the University's Institutional Intent and Strategy (2013–2018), so as to enable inclusivity and equitable access to SU for all prospective and current students and staff in pursuit of excellence.

5.3 To facilitate effective learning and teaching, research, and service delivery at SU.

5.4 To promote multilingualism as an important differentiating characteristic of SU.

6. Policy principles

The Language Policy is based on the following two foundational normative principles, which must guide all aspects of the interpretation and implementation of this Policy:

6.1 Language at SU should promote access to and success in academic, administrative, professional and social contexts, and should not constitute a barrier to students or staff. This is particularly important given the constitutional imperatives to redress the results of past racial discrimination and to ensure no direct or indirect unfair discrimination against present or prospective SU staff and students.

6.2 All aspects of the Language Policy and the implementation thereof in teaching and learning should facilitate pedagogically sound teaching and learning.

The following principles must also be taken into account in interpreting and guiding the implementation of this Policy:

6.3 SU respects the languages used by students and staff and acknowledges their language preferences and levels of language proficiency.

6.4 SU acknowledges the complex role of language in general and our separate languages in particular in our society. All languages are regarded as resources for the effective construction of knowledge.

6.5 SU applies its chosen languages in such a way that it includes all students, staff and other stakeholders.

6.6 SU acknowledges that academic literacy and the use of academic language comprise sets of complex practices which are linked to how disciplines create knowledge. These practices are best developed within the contexts of academic disciplines and their fields of study.

6.7 SU establishes suitable language services and academic staff development services to support the implementation of the Language Policy.

6.8 The Language Policy and its implementation are informed by what is reasonably practicable in particular contexts. Relevant factors to be considered include, but are not limited to, the number of students who will benefit from a particular mode of implementation, the language proficiency of the students involved, the availability and language proficiency of staff members, timetable and venue constraints, as well as SU's available resources and the competing demands on those resources.

6.9 The Language Policy implementation adapts to the changing language demographics and language preferences of students and staff.

7. Policy provisions

The Policy principles above give rise to the following binding Policy provisions:

7.1 Learning and teaching

7.1.1 Afrikaans and English are SU's languages of learning and teaching. SU supports their academic use through a combination of facilitated learning opportunities for students, including lectures, tutorials and practicals, as well as learning support facilitated by means of information and communication technology (ICT).

7.1.2 Undergraduate modules are offered by any of the measures set out in 7.1.3, 7.1.4 and 7.1.5 below.

7.1.3 For undergraduate modules where it is reasonably practicable and pedagogically sound to have more than one class group:

7.1.3.1 There are separate lectures in Afrikaans and English.

7.1.3.2 Learning opportunities, such as group work, assignments, tutorials and practicals involving students from both language groups are utilised to promote integration within programmes.

7.1.3.3 Students are supported in Afrikaans and English during a combination of appropriate, facilitated learning opportunities (e.g. consultations during office hours or routinely scheduled tutorials and practicals).

7.1.4 For undergraduate modules where both Afrikaans and English are used in the same class group, the combination of facilitated learning opportunities is as follows:

7.1.4.1 During each lecture, all information is conveyed at least in English and summaries or emphasis on content are also given in Afrikaans. Questions in Afrikaans and English are, at the least, answered in the language of the question.

7.1.4.2 Students are supported in Afrikaans and English during a combination of appropriate, facilitated learning opportunities (e.g. consultations during office hours, or routinely scheduled tutorials and practicals).

7.1.4.3 For first-year modules, SU makes simultaneous interpreting available during each lecture. During the second and subsequent years of study, simultaneous interpreting is made available by SU upon request by a faculty, if the needs of the students warrant the service and SU has the resources to provide it. If two weeks have passed with no students making use of the interpreting service, it may be discontinued.

7.1.5 In the following instances, lectures will be offered in one language only:

7.1.5.1 Where the nature of the subject matter of the module justifies doing so, for example where the module is on the language itself.

7.1.5.2 Where the assigned lecturer is proficient to teach only in Afrikaans or English. For these modules additional support is provided:

(a) If the lectures are in Afrikaans, SU makes simultaneous interpreting available in English. If the lectures of the first-year modules are in English, SU makes simultaneous interpreting available in Afrikaans, and during the second and subsequent years of study, simultaneous interpreting is made available by SU upon request by a faculty, if the needs of the students warrant the service and SU has the resources to provide it. If two weeks have passed with no students making use of the interpreting service, it may be discontinued.

(b) In addition to lectures, there are appropriate, facilitated learning opportunities (e.g. consultations during office hours, or routinely scheduled tutorials and practicals) in Afrikaans and English.

7.1.5.3 Where all the students in the class group have been invited to vote by means of a secret ballot, and those students who have voted, unanimously agree to it, the module will be presented in Afrikaans only or English only, provided that the relevant lecturers and teaching assistants have the necessary language proficiency and agree to do so.

7.1.6 In addition to lectures, based on students' needs and practicability, SU provides a variety of ICT-enhanced learning strategies, including podcasts and vodcasts of lectures, which are made available to students in Afrikaans, English and, in some cases, isiXhosa for the further reinforcement of concepts and for revision purposes.

7.1.7 The learning materials for undergraduate modules are made available as follows:

7.1.7.1 All compulsory reading material is provided in English except where the module is about the language itself.

7.1.7.2 Compulsory reading material (excluding published material) is also provided in Afrikaans where reasonably practicable.

7.1.7.3 SU module frameworks and study guides are available in Afrikaans and English.

7.1.8 Question papers for tests, examinations and other summative assessments in undergraduate modules are available in Afrikaans and English. Students may answer all assessments and submit all written work in Afrikaans or English.

7.1.9 In postgraduate learning and teaching, including final year modules at NQF level 8, any language may be used provided all the relevant students are sufficiently proficient in that language.

7.1.10 The following measures are taken for persons with special learning needs/disabilities:

7.1.10.1 Where students or staff need alternative texts such as Braille or enlarged texts as a means to communicate and understand information and these are not available, the relevant member of staff should liaise with SU's Braille Office to arrange the timeous availability of the alternative texts.

7.1.10.2 As South African Sign Language is the primary means of communication for some Deaf people, a sign language interpreter and/or real-time captioning is available during lectures, tutorials and principal SU public events, where it is required and it is reasonably practicable to do so.

7.1.10.3 These provisions are subject to SU's Policy regarding Students with Special Learning Needs/Disabilities.

7.1.11 Faculties may deviate from the Policy provisions in Paragraph 7.1 in particular instances only if the deviation is:

7.1.11.1 Consistent with the principles of this Policy; and

7.1.11.2 Justified by the human and physical resources made available by the University, by pedagogical concerns or by faculty-specific considerations; and

7.1.11.3 Approved by the relevant faculty board, and reported with the justification to Senate and approved by Senate, or, when urgent, by its Executive Committee.

7.2 Internal institutional communication

7.2.1 Documentation of primary importance (e.g. policies and strategic Human Resources documents relating to service conditions) is made available in Afrikaans and English. The remainder of the documentation is made available in Afrikaans, English or isiXhosa depending on the languages of the target audience.

7.2.2 The language of written communication within faculties and divisions (e.g. agendas and hand-outs) and at meetings depends on the language needs of the readers or participants (including staff and students), provided that no one is excluded by the language of communication.

7.2.3 Oral or written enquiries and requests by students and staff are, where reasonably practicable, dealt with in the language of the enquiry or request.

7.2.4 Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa are used judiciously at official events, such as official meetings, ceremonial occasions and inaugural lectures.

7.2.5 In residences and other living environments, language is used in such a way that, where reasonably practicable, no stakeholder is excluded from participating in any formal activities in these environments.

7.2.6 The following provisions apply to information technology (IT) software system user interfaces, mobile applications and web content management systems:

7.2.6.1 Where multilingual operation is reasonably practicable (e.g. where SU is able to influence the development of the software products, or where the product supports it, or SU builds it), SU supports Afrikaans and English based on the user's language preference.

7.2.6.2 Where commercial off-the-shelf software applications that do not support multilingual operation are employed, the operation defaults to English.

7.2.6.3 Where the user's language preference is unknown, the default is English.

7.2.7 The following provisions apply to information system data:

7.2.7.1 Where reasonably practicable, information system data pertaining to an individual should be multilingual.

7.2.7.2 Where the data design accommodates multilingualism and where feasible, the associated user interfaces for capturing the data should support multilingual data capture.

      7.2.7.3   Where the data design only caters for a single language, English is used.

      7.2.7.4   For all other data, English is used.

7.3   External communication

7.3.1   Afrikaans and English and, where reasonably practicable, isiXhosa are SU's languages of external communication.

7.3.2   SU respects the language policies and preferences of its stakeholders, partners and external correspondents. This means that official communication and meetings with them are generally in their language of preference, or that the necessary language services (e.g. translation or interpreting services) are provided.

7.3.3   Where SU does not have the capacity to accede to the language preference, the medium of communication is English.

7.3.4   IT interfaces for stakeholders are treated as in Paragraph 7.2.6. Examples would be user interfaces for alumni, donors and parents or guardians.

7.4   Language planning

7.4.1   Annually, the Vice-Rector: Learning and Teaching agrees with the deans of the faculties the mechanisms to ensure accountability for the implementation of this Policy, which include at the least the annual report on the faculty's realisation of its Language Implementation Plan contemplated in paragraph 8.1, and the compliance report submitted after each semester contemplated in paragraph 8.3, with due regard to the Policy principles detailed in paragraph 6 and paragraphs 7.4.1.1 and 7.4.1.2 below. No later than the last meetings of Council and Senate of each year, the Vice-Rector: Learning and Teaching reports to Council, via the Rector's Management Team and Senate, on the accountability mechanisms agreed with the deans of the faculties for the next ensuing year.

      7.4.1.1 The English offering is revised upwards so as to achieve full accessibility to SU for academically deserving prospective and current students who prefer to study in English.

      7.4.1.2 The Afrikaans offering is managed so as to sustain access to SU for students who prefer to study in Afrikaans and to further develop Afrikaans as a language of tuition where reasonably practicable.

7.4.2   Each faculty and support services division describes its implementation of this Policy in its Language Implementation Plan.

7.4.3   Every faculty reviews its use of language for learning and teaching, and records the language arrangements in its Faculty Language Implementation Plan annually, at the least. This Plan is reported to Senate via the faculty board and Senate's Academic Planning Committee. Senate has the power either to accept the faculty's Language Implementation Plan or to refer it back to the faculty. Once accepted, the language arrangements for learning and teaching of a particular module are published in the relevant module frameworks.

7.4.4 Changes to the language arrangements in the faculty's Language Implementation Plan that fall outside the regular review process, but are necessitated by, for example, a specific student group's preferred language of tuition, pedagogical considerations or the unavailability of a lecturer with the necessary language proficiency, can be made by the relevant department head and dean after consultation with the faculty student committee. These changes are reported at the next faculty board and Senate meetings. The students of the specific modules are informed of the changes and the reasons for these changes as soon as practically possible.

7.4.5 Every support services division regularly reviews its use of language and records the language arrangements in the Language Implementation Plan for that particular division. These plans are approved by the relevant line managers and the Rector's Management Team.

7.5 Promotion of multilingualism

7.5.1 The Language Centre, the faculties, the language departments, support services and management bodies are co-responsible for the advancement of multilingualism at SU.

7.5.2 SU incentivises innovative multilingual practices by providing institutional funding for, for example, expanding teaching in more than one language in faculties; conducting research; sharing best multilingual practices; ICT-enhanced learning strategies; and discipline-specific academic literacy initiatives.

7.5.3 SU advances the academic potential of Afrikaans by means of, for example, teaching, conducting research, holding symposia, presenting short courses, supporting language teachers and hosting guest lecturers in Afrikaans; presenting Afrikaans language acquisition courses; developing academic and professional literacy in Afrikaans; supporting Afrikaans reading and writing development; providing language services that include translation into Afrikaans, and editing of and document design for Afrikaans texts; developing multilingual glossaries with Afrikaans as one of the languages; and promoting Afrikaans through popular-science publications in the general media.

7.5.4 IsiXhosa as an emerging formal academic language receives particular attention for the purpose of its incremental introduction into selected disciplinary domains, prioritised in accordance with student needs in a well-planned, well-organised and systematic manner. The academic role and leadership of the Department of African Languages, through its extensive experience in advanced-level teaching and research in language and linguistic fields will be harnessed to the full. In certain programmes, isiXhosa is already used with a view to facilitating effective learning and teaching, especially where the use of isiXhosa may be important for career purposes. SU is commited to increasing the use of isiXhosa, to the extent that this is reasonably practicable, for example through basic communication skills short courses for staff and students, career-specific communication, discipline-specific terminology guides (printed and mobile applications) and phrase books.

7.6 Support

The Language Centre provides language support services aimed at the effective implementation of the Language Policy, in collaboration with the faculties, support services divisions and management bodies, by providing, for example, reading and writing development support, language services that include translation, interpreting and editing services, modules in professional communication, academic literacy and language acquisition, and research. The faculties, support services divisions and management bodies may, after consultation with the Language Centre, also provide language support of their own.

8. Feedback, monitoring and conflict resolution

8.1 Each faculty, responsibility centre and the Student Representative Council submits a report to the Rector's Management Team once a year, by a date determined by the Vice-Rector: Learning and Teaching, detailing:

8.1.1 Any difficulties that it has experienced with implementing the Language Policy;

8.1.2 Any mechanisms, strategies or techniques that have improved the implementation of the Policy, or may better advance the goals of the Policy; and

8.1.3 Any suggestions for amendments to the Policy.

8.2 The Vice-Rector: Learning and Teaching prepares an annual report to the Senate and the Council taking into account the responses above. The aims of the report include addressing areas of concern and sharing knowledge within the University.

8.3 Each faculty reports in writing to the Vice-Rector: Learning and Teaching after the end of each semester on its compliance during that semester with its Language Implementation Plan. In each instance where there has been non-compliance, the report describes it and the reasons for it fully and the steps the faculty is or will be taking to avoid future deviations from the Language Implementation Plan.

8.4 Students who feel negatively affected by the implementation of the Language Policy should adhere to the following procedures:

8.4.1 In the case of implementation by faculties, complaints are lodged as prescribed by the relevant faculty's appeals/complaints procedure or, in the absence of such a procedure and in order of preference, with the relevant staff member, the relevant departmental chairperson or head, or the dean. If the complaints are not satisfactorily resolved at faculty level and the complaints are related to academic contexts, students can refer the complaints to the Academic Planning Committee (APC), via the Student Academic Affairs Council, and if not resolved at the APC, the APC refers the matter to the Senate, with a recommendation.

8.4.2 In the case of implementation by support services, complaints are lodged with the relevant hierarchy of line managers or, in the case of the broader

University, with the Rector's Management Team via the Student Representative Council's executive.

8.4.3 In the case of implementation in student living environments, complaints are lodged with the house committee or the relevant residential head. If the complaints are not satisfactorily resolved at university residence or private student ward level, students may refer the complaints to the Senior Director: Student Affairs.

8.4.4 In cases where the use of the mentioned structures is not suitable, complaints may be submitted to the SU ombud for settlement in consultation with the relevant structures.

8.5 Staff members who feel negatively affected by the implementation of the Language Policy should adhere to the following procedures:

8.5.1 In the case of implementation by faculties, complaints are lodged, in order of preference, with the relevant departmental chairperson or head, or the dean.

8.5.2 In the case of implementation by support services, complaints are lodged with the relevant hierarchy of line managers or, in the case of the broader University, with the Rector's Management Team via the Vice-Rector: Learning and Teaching.

8.5.3 In cases where the use of the mentioned structures is not suitable, complaints may be submitted to the SU ombud for settlement in consultation with the relevant structures.

9. Policy governance

The Language Policy is approved by Council with the consent of Senate and after consultation with the Institutional Forum.

The owner of the Policy is the Vice-Rector: Learning and Teaching. The Vice-Rector reports on an annual basis on matters concerning the Policy to Council via the Rector's Management Team, the Senate, and the Council's Language Committee.

The Vice-Rector may appoint a Language Planning and Management Project Team and assign tasks to it to perform. The curator of the Policy is the Senior Director: Learning and Teaching Enhancement, who supports the Vice-Rector.

10. Revision

Language policy-making and implementation are dynamic processes.

The Vice-Rector: Learning and Teaching:

10.1 Facilitates the testing of the Language Policy against changing circumstances through research on the implementation, monitoring and impact of the Policy;

10.2 Facilitates regular consultation with the broader SU community about matters concerning the Language Policy;

10.3 Publishes information gained from such research and consultations; and

10.4 Whenever he or she deems it necessary, initiates and oversees a review of the Language Policy with a view to its possible amendment or replacement.

The Language Policy lapses five years after the date of its implementation. Subject to (10.4) above, it must be reviewed during its fifth year of operation.

11. Disclosure

The Language Policy is a public document and is published on the University's website.

12. Repeal

The Language Policy repeals and replaces the Language Policy and Language Plan adopted by Council on 22 November 2014.

13. Reference documents

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996

Draft Language Policy of the Department of Higher Education and Training (2016)

Higher Education Act 101 of 1997

National Language Policy for Higher Education (2002)

Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000

SU's Policy regarding Students with Special Learning Needs/Disabilities

Use of Official Languages Act 12 of 2012