



science & innovation

Department:  
Science and Innovation  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



## INSIGHTS FROM THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE RESOURCES AUDIT

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*Are we ready to implement the Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions? Is multilingualism at universities a reality, or is it only wishful thinking?*

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Presentation and Audit Report – [sadilar.org/usaf\\_report\\_2023](https://sadilar.org/usaf_report_2023)

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# INTRODUCTIONS AND CONTEXT

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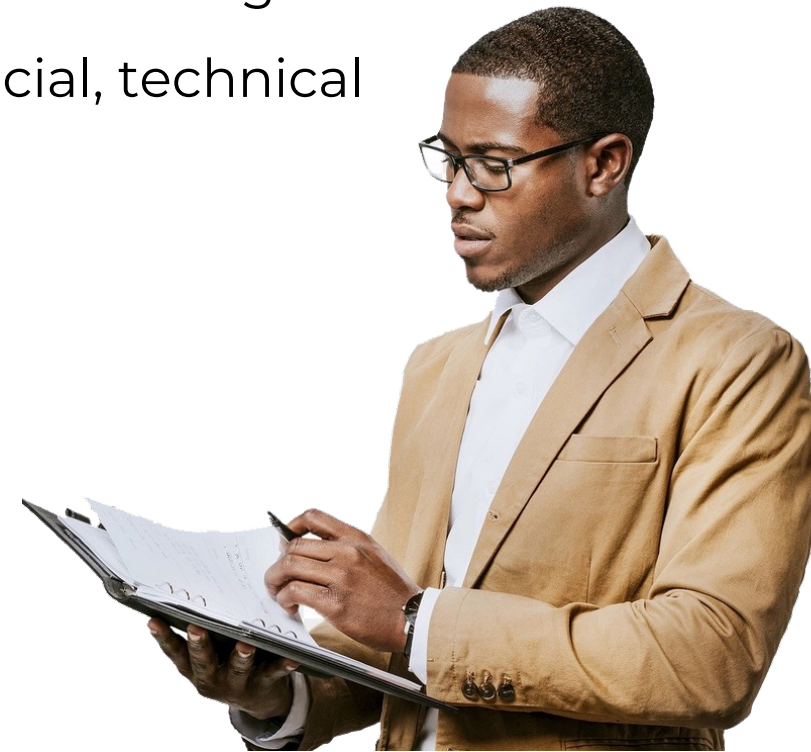
## *The problem at hand*

- **Absence of reference models for the successful implementation** of the National Language Policy Framework for Higher Education Institutions – results in a deficiency for purposes of optimisation
- **Limited examples illustrating** transparent, sustainable, affordable and accountable practices in terms of language planning and management



## *The problem at hand*

- **Hegemony of English**
- **Need for action** not just statements of intent / “window dressing”
- **Resources** including human capacity (expertise), financial, technical infrastructure
- **Top-down vs bottom-up** approaches
- **Inter-institutional collaboration**



## *Can the problem be addressed?*

- **Yes** - Expectations are high
- Clear **interest and commitment** by sector towards advancing multilingualism among staff and students
- **Next steps**
  - **National entity** → assumes function of a HUB, with the important role of providing guidance in language policy, planning and management

# *Can the problem be addressed?*

- **Next steps**

- **Entity to be independent, non-competing, and strategic** → harness, aggregate, and create a constellation of (digital) language resources that will be (technically) maintained and made accessible to all public higher education institutions
- **Steer an open, collaborative, and inclusive process to implement the Language Policy Framework** to support the DHET in the implementation of the Policy Framework → key stakeholders: PanSALB, DIRISA, CoPAL, and all public universities

# CONTEXT

## PURPOSE

- Development and **strengthening** of **indigenous languages** as languages of **scholarship, teaching and learning and communication** at South African public higher education institutions, in particular, universities (Government Gazette, No. 43860:3)

## UNIQUE

- Annual reporting – implementation, monitoring and evaluating
- English + two indigenous
- No escape clauses allowed

## IMPORTANT

- Language is a vehicle for teaching and learning (to structure, to contrast, to compare, to define, to describe, to argue, to evaluate, etc.)
- Language as a variable contributes significantly to study success - imperative is to improve epistemic access and address attrition

# AUDIT MANDATE

- **Derived from the 1<sup>st</sup> VC colloquium**
- **Language resources audit**

- 1 **Identify resources already available**
- 2 **Resources still required**
- 3 **Identify milestones and make recommendations**

# METHOD & SCOPE

- **Mixed methods approach**
- **Two questionnaires**
  - Staff (64 questions; 10 open-ended)
  - Students (43 questions; 20 open-ended)
- **Five sections in each questionnaire**  
(clauses from Framework):
  - Section 1: Institutional information
  - Section 2: Language services
  - Section 3: Teaching and learning (and scholarship)
  - Section 4: Language of communication and administration
  - Section 5: Student life / co-curricular activities
- **Semi-structured interviews**



# 1.

## INSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION



# INSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION

## To gather institutional information on the *status quo* in terms of

- language policies
- language policy implementation plans
- language monitoring
- regional languages
- official languages of universities in specific regions
- strengths and weaknesses
- priority areas that need to be addressed

This section articulates with Clauses 24, 25, as well as 41, 42, 44 and 45 of the Language Policy Framework.

## FINDINGS

- Alignment with **regional languages**
- **Buy-in of staff and students** the cause of advancing multilingualism
- **Top-down vs. bottom-up** approaches
- **Nurture conversational language ability** of staff – inclusive and welcoming atmosphere
- Effective and transparent **communication** (clear, concise, easily digestible)
- Introduce **improved monitoring mechanisms**
- **Targeted guidance to facilitate** language policy and plan development, as well as resource development
- **Scarcity of financial resources** – unified and shared model (e.g. national repository of resources, shared responsibility for resource development)

2.

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LANGUAGE  
SERVICES

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# LANGUAGE SERVICES

**The objective was to gain insight into language services already rendered by institutions and those urgently required.**



## FINDINGS

- **Language services** are indeed available: however, **to a select few only**.
- Staff and students are in general **not aware of language services** (perhaps insufficient communication).
- **Financial restraints** (perhaps not sufficient investment).
- Students seeking **accessible and effective language services** and resources, **particularly for non-English speaking students** to address learning barriers.
- **Resources and services must be integrated** into teaching and learning activities and **not** dealt with as **stand-alone** tools.

3.

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TEACHING,  
LEARNING &  
SCHOLARSHIP

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## TEACHING, LEARNING & SCHOLARSHIP

To gather information on the **readiness and (language) flexibility of institutions** to include, develop, nurture and encourage the use of indigenous languages in their teaching and learning endeavours, as well as to provide support to students for who English is not a home language.

- English is the *de facto* language used at higher education institutions.
- Highlighted: the use of other official languages to uphold Constitutional values like inclusivity, social cohesion and equity of access is of great importance.

## FINDINGS

- Both staff and students **envision a multilingual pedagogical landscape**
- Availability of **multilingual resources** recognised, but **few and far between**
- **Awareness raising** → resources, services and pedagogical planning
- **Financial constraints** and a **lack of expertise**
- Examples of **urgent matters** to attend to:  
**Terminology development, creation and maintenance** of resource banks, multilingual glossaries, multilingual exam papers, academic language ability development and support (in the LoLT) – **SADiLaR Model Proposal**
- **Preference** for class discussions to be in English, BUT with several allowances
- **Proper implementation** that also serves a pedagogical purpose to minimise the risk that language might be a barrier to study success
- **Recognition** of the manner in which Afrikaans developed to a fully-fledged academic language to **advance inclusivity and develop indigenous languages**

# 4.

## LANGUAGE OF COMMUNICATION & ADMINISTRATION

# LANGUAGE OF COMMUNICATION AND ADMINISTRATION

This section articulates with Clause 32 of the Framework, where it states that :

- “[a]ll **official internal institutional communication** must be conveyed in at least **two official languages other than English**,
- as a way of cultivating a **culture of multilingualism**. Institutions must consider all possible options to accentuate the use of indigenous African languages in official communication and ceremonies.”

## FINDINGS

- Language of communication and administration requires **alignment with the ethos of multilingualism**.
- **Multilingual approaches** to signage, marketing and general communication strongly encouraged.
- **Explore ways to incorporate languages other than** their official languages in institutional communication.
- **Predominant role of English in communication is acknowledged** while the value of the need for inclusivity was highlighted.
- **Communicate clearly**, concisely and in an easily digestible manner.

# 5.

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STUDENT LIFE /  
CO-CURRICULAR  
ACTIVITIES

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# STUDENT LIFE /CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

**The objective was to gain insight on how the co-curricular programme or activities contribute to:**

- Supporting the implementation of a language policy and the policy framework.
- Sustaining and growing a culture of multilingualism by improving the language capacity of both staff and students

## FINDINGS

- Being **multilingual is an asset and not a liability**
- Significance **of linguistic diversity emphasized**
  - communicating **clearly**
  - building **relationships**
  - enhancing **social interaction and cross-cultural connections**
  - broadening **perspectives**

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# CONCLUSION

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## TAKE HOME MESSAGE

- **Expertise and support required** in terms of on language policy planning and management, as well as resource management – lack of capacity and limited expertise (national entity)
- **Window dressing / ticking boxes**
- A top-down vs. a bottom-up approach (**co-ownership; co-responsibility**)
- **Internal communication** at universities is **not good** – managers vs. “normal” staff and students
- Staff need to become **multilingual** in the official languages of institutions, at least at **conversational level**
- A **collaborative approach for resource development** (internally between faculties and departments; and externally between institutions – nationally coordinated)

## TAKE HOME MESSAGE

- Both staff and students indicated that English was prioritised and that **other languages were not adequately accommodated**. Similarly, both staff and students also mentioned the **need for more language courses and resources** in other official South African languages.
- A **central (i.e. national) entity** should preferably be established so that universities can **access products and services, including resources and expertise**.
- A **central (i.e. national) entity** should preferably be established to **monitor and report to DHET** on matters like language policy implementation and planning. This will also **enhance benchmarking and create opportunities** for further support and guidance to different institutions.

## TAKE HOME MESSAGE

- **Funding is a big issue:**
  - Institutions should set aside a certain, or higher, percentage, of annual budgets for language development and advancement.
  - A further possibility is the **UCDP grants and/or international funding** (national entity).
  - Yet another possibility is **to work in a more accountable manner** (national entity).



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# TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

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# TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

## **The road ahead**

- SADIaR's contribution as non-competing RI
- Contribution of expertise and capacity to support and coordinate
  - Technical platform development
  - Language planning and management activities

## **Preliminary work on terminology matters**

- Open platform for terminology management and dissemination
- Open invitation to all universities to take part and combine forces

# TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

## **Need for national community of practice**

- SADIaR can play a role towards creating a non-aligned / non-competing CoP through
  - Supporting events to foster co-creation and co-responsibility
  - Develop membership model / partnerships
  - Instill our values of openness, sharing and collaboration

# TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

## **Envisioned impact**

- Collective sustainability and efficient use of resources
- Working from what is available

Enabling sustainable, transparent and accountable support towards the implementation of the Language Policy Framework



## Questions and Comments

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