

CoPAL Report on Language Activities

University of South Africa

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i. Teaching and Learning

The university has embarked on various multilingual support mechanisms to students through formal and informal channels. In line with the approved Tuition Procedure Manual, Primary Lecturers can apply various teaching strategies to engage with the students in their respective languages. Tutorials in some academic departments within the institution other than in the Department of African languages are provided in some African languages. The departments of Psychology and Sociology have led this initiative by developing modules at NQF 5 in isiZulu. This is against the backdrop of the knowledge gap of first year students relating to formal access which have been found to be at the heart of student's epistemic access in the higher education sector. These modules have been developed through the Framework Team Approach (FTA) steered by the Directorate Curriculum Development and Transformation which encapsulates the transformation principles as adopted by the university. As an ongoing initiative to optimise multilingualism in the teaching space, the university continues with multilingual pedagogy training workshops that are aimed at optimizing the implementation of multilingual language policy adopted by Council.

The University Tuition Committee has identified at-risk modules and programmes that will be offered in South African official languages. Two modules per college in selected departments will be offered in at least three African languages. These are DVA 1501 Introduction to Development Studies, DVA 1502 Development Problems and Institutions and PLC 2602 Politics and Public Policy. Assessments in some academic departments are conducted in African language where practicably possible in an endeavour to address both the pedagogical and epistemological dimensions of epistemic access and success. This initiative also addresses the at-risk modules and at-risk students and assist them in their academic journey. The online visibility by academics to support students in the different modules provides students with an opportunity to discuss complex concepts in their respective languages and share problem-solving strategies around the discipline. Consequently, multilingualism in such environment has become an asset that narrows the gap between abstract concepts and real-world application.

ii. Research related activities

The drive to conduct research in the indigenous languages continues to bear positive outcomes. The upward trajectory in the intake of M&D in the various African languages

bears testimony to the university's commitment to multilingualism and justice for all. Postgraduate students submit their research proposals in their indigenous languages and provide a summary in English. Whilst this initiative is not without challenges, alternative avenues to ensure that Ethics Applications in African languages are being explored. The university has made it mandatory that abstracts are made available in at least three official languages and are made available at the institutional repository. The university has been promoting multilingual policy socialization in the form of webinars. There are two events that were conducted in driving the initiative forward. There were online workshops with the College of Graduate Studies in June and July. The plan to develop a mini concept dictionary booklet of research terminologies for M&D studies and the term harvesting has begun.

iii. Terminology development

The translation of key concepts and difficult terminology for identified at-risk modules is underway. A state-of-the-art repository for the developed multilingual materials has been developed so that they are available, accessible and usable by Unisa staff and students. Currently, the College of Human Sciences is developing task plans for the appointment of more independent contractors to assist with the identification of concept and terminology for at-risk modules. A unit was written for Multilingual concepts in ENG1501, and it is awaiting translation. Ten (10) independent contractors have been interviewed and will be appointed soon to undertake the responsibility. Furthermore, a decision was taken to Translate a minimum of two tutorial letters of at least two at risk modules into 11 South African official languages. Consequently, the translation of Tutorial Letter 101 for at-risk modules has begun.

iv. Language related events hosted

On the 25th of July 2025, the College of Human Sciences hosted the 4th World Kiswahili Language Day celebration. This celebration, aligned with UNESCO's recognition of Kiswahili as a global language of unity and innovation and it was aimed at highlighting the role of Kiswahili in shaping Africa's educational and cultural landscape. The event featured academic and creative contributors who are advancing knowledge production and societal transformation through the Kiswahili language. The themed sessions included Curriculum and Development, Language Policy & Institutional Integration and Innovation, Trade, Tourism & Socio-Economic Integration.

The university also held a Language Management Week from 30 September to 04 October 2025. This was a festival of seminars by different speakers who were discussing various language matters. There was a line-up of interesting webinars on language and technology. The week concluded with the International Translation Day celebration.

v. Language projects

The Department of African Languages (DAL) at UNISA continues to be an ideal partner in language resource development. As SADiLaR's research node, it ties with various international collaborators in ensuring the advancement of the South African languages as a global area of interest. The Department of African Languages further envisions the continued growth of both subprojects and future expansions of these projects to form the foundation for advanced research in general and applied linguistics as well as in Digital Humanities. African Wordnet & Multilingual Linguistic Terminology are two-pronged and are about the development of language resources in the form of wordnets for a variety of African languages as well as the development of linguistics terminology for nine official South African languages.