

## Towards the Implementation of a Multilingual Language Policy at a Historically White University: The Case of the University of Cape Town

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### Abstract

This study examines the challenges and opportunities in implementing a multilingual language policy at the University of Cape Town (UCT), a historically white institution in South Africa. Despite post-apartheid constitutional mandates promoting linguistic diversity, UCT is still predominantly English-medium, currently grappling with inclusivity and epistemic justice for non-native English speakers. The purpose of this research is to gauge the university's readiness, stakeholder perceptions, and practical strategies for the recently adopted multilingual policy that accommodates languages such as isiXhosa, Afrikaans, and other South African languages alongside English. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study analyzes policy documents, conducts interviews with key stakeholders (students, faculty, and administrators), and surveys across the university community. Preliminary findings reveal significant support for multilingualism in principle, but also highlight logistical challenges, including resource constraints, resistance to de-centering English, and varying levels of proficiency in indigenous languages among staff and students. The implications of this research extend beyond UCT, offering insights into decolonizing higher education in post-colonial contexts. A successful multilingual policy could enhance student access, improve pedagogical outcomes, and foster a more inclusive academic culture. By addressing these barriers, UCT can serve as a model for other historically white universities navigating the tensions between global academic norms and local linguistic diversity.

### Keywords

Multilingualism, language policy, higher education, transformation, post-apartheid South Africa, diversity.