

Review Article

Exclusion of Sesotho Language Teaching in Eastern Cape Universities: A Need for Curriculum Restructuring in Initial Teacher Education

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Abstract

This article provides a critical overview of the linguistic neglect of the Southern Sesotho language and investigates the reasons for the exclusion of the Sesotho language in the Eastern Cape universities Faculty of Education programmes, which has resulted in a linguistically discriminatory curriculum. Eastern Cape universities do not cater to Sesotho in their curriculum, which is a cause for concern that seeks curriculum restructuring by Higher Education Institutions in the province. The Eastern Cape Department of Education comprises Sesotho learners in their system, but the Sesotho language is not offered in the universities in this province. This marginalizes the Sesotho language and its people in the province to a larger extent. Qualitative document analysis and interviews were used to review the curriculum of the four universities in the province. Interviews were conducted with four Executive Deans from the four universities in the province. The language policies of the four universities were analyzed. The results of this study revealed that Sesotho, as a previously marginalized language, is still marginalized even to date in Eastern Cape universities. The university curriculum must be restructured to accommodate all students.

Keywords

Linguistic Neglect, Discriminative Curriculum, Marginalization

1. Introduction

South Africa is a multilingual country, and Section 6 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa [25] grants official language status to 12 languages, namely Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, and South African Sign language. South African Sign Language (SASL) was recognized as the twelfth official language of South Africa by the National Assembly on May 3, 2023. Unofficial languages are protected under the Constitution of South Africa, although few are mentioned by name. The national and

provincial governments must regulate and monitor the use of official languages through legislative and other measures. Unofficial and marginalized languages include what are considered some of Southern Africa's oldest languages: Khoekhoegowab, !Orakobab, Xirikobab, Nuuki, !Xunthali, and Khwedam; and other African languages, such as SiPhuthi, isiHlubi, isiBhaca, isiLala, isiNhlanguwini (isiZansi), isiNrebele (SiSumayela), isiMpondo/isiMpondro, isiMpondomise/isiMpromse/isimpondomse, KheLobedu, SePulana, HiPai, SeKutswe, SeTlokwa, SeHananwa, SiThonga,

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SiLaNgomane, SheKgalagari, XiRhonga, SeKopa (Sekgaga), and others. Most South Africans can speak more than one language, and there is often diglossia between the official and unofficial language forms for speakers of the latter. The majority of South Africans speak a language from one of the two principal branches of the native Bantu languages that are represented in South Africa: the Sotho-Tswana branch (which includes Southern Sotho, Northern Sotho and Tswana languages officially), or the Nguni branch (which includes Zulu, Xhosa, Swati and Ndebele languages officially). For each of the two groups, the languages within that group are, for the most part, intelligible to a native speaker of any other language within that group.

Without detracting from the provisions of subsection (2), all official languages must enjoy parity of esteem and be treated equitably. The Eastern Cape Province is part of the South African government and is not excluded from implementing what is required and expected by the Constitution of the country. The province comprises isiXhosa [81%], Sesotho [2.4%], Afrikaans [9.6%], and English [4.8%] speakers [23]. It is also expected that the province must provide equal status to all the languages spoken in this province. Universities in the province should include Sesotho in their curriculum, as there are learners in the provincial education system who are studying Sesotho. The universities are Walter Sisulu University, University of Fort Hare, Rhodes University, and Nelson Mandela University. This may have assisted in the production of Sesotho teachers who could ultimately produce quality Sesotho learners in the future. Because of the reasons known to these universities, Sesotho has been excluded and marginalized, which has resulted in prospective university students being alienated from some bursaries dispatched by the department because of their language, and isiXhosa prospective university students having an advantage when applying for the bursaries mentioned before. This suggests that prospective students of Sesotho and isiXhosa are not treated equally as expected because of the language issue. In essence, the curriculum for universities in the Eastern Cape Province needs to be restructured to accommodate students from different linguistic backgrounds. South Africa is part of the global community; therefore, it must adhere to some of the resolutions that affect the world, such as the Sustainable Development Goals. Education serves as a catalyst for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and it is essential for education to keep pace with societal dynamics to achieve these goals. This article argues for the restructuring (recirculation) of initial teacher education in South Africa to promote an alternative, transformative, and sustainable pedagogy. The current teacher education programme has remained unchanged for many years, failing to adapt to the evolving educational landscape and instead adhering to traditional methods that were relevant in the past.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Background of the Sesotho Language

Sesotho serves as the home language for over 10 million individuals across South Africa, Lesotho, and Zimbabwe [13, 16, 28]. Like other Indigenous languages in the region, Sesotho underwent a development process, including written forms, which was primarily driven by Christian religious initiatives. Christian missionaries introduced writing and reading in Sesotho in the 1830s to assist them in carrying out their religious missions [10, 18]. In fact, Sesotho orthographies were determined during the translation of the Christian Bible [14]. Since then, like other official languages in Southern Africa, Sesotho has evolved into a language of instruction in educational settings in these countries. Some scholars recognize six variants of Sesotho: Sekgolokwe, Sekwena/Kwena, Sephuthi, Setaung, Setlokwa, and Serotse (Selozi). Today, Sesotho is one of South Africa's 12 official languages and is spoken by approximately five million people in Lesotho, Botswana, South Africa, Namibia, and Zambia. Sesotho was one of the first African languages to be written, and it has an extensive literature. Sesotho, which can also be called Southern Sesotho to help distinguish it from Northern Sesotho, is one of the two official languages of the independent Kingdom of Lesotho, where it is spoken by approximately 85% of the population. Approximately 7.8% of the population in South Africa are Sesotho first-language speakers [22]. The language is spoken by roughly eight percent of the population of South Africa and is widely used all over the country, but especially around Lesotho. Southern Sesotho is a Bantu language that originated in the Bantu-Nguni era. It is also known as Suto, Souto, Sisutho and Suthu. The dialects originate from Suto, Pedi, and Tswana, but these are all considered separate languages.

2.2. The Inclusion of Sesotho Within the University Curricula in the Eastern Cape Universities

The inclusion of Sesotho in university curricula in South Africa is important for several reasons, including the preservation of indigenous languages. Sesotho should be preserved and not allowed to die out. Furthermore, Sesotho can be used to promote social justice in all areas of the university, encouraging pride in native language. If Sesotho learners cannot learn Sesotho beyond grade 12, the Sesotho language will perish. The universities mentioned above provide Bachelor of Education (B. Ed.) teacher qualifications in the foundation, intermediate, senior phases, and Postgraduate Certificate in Education. There was no Sesotho provision in any of the qualifications. At Rhodes University, in-service B. Ed. programme, Sesotho teachers are taught isiXhosa, which is very frustrating for them because when they go back home, they teach their learners in Sesotho. In addition, some do not speak

or understand isiXhosa but are compelled to learn isiXhosa because of curriculum-related circumstances. The Sesotho teachers were given assessments in isiXhosa, including examinations. This is unfair to the Sesotho, while their isiXhosa counterparts are at an advantage. The entry requirements in all 4 universities for B. Ed. Degree programmes in the Foundation Phase, Senior Phase, Further Education and Training, and Postgraduate Certificate in Education include isiXhosa, English, and Afrikaans, but not Sesotho.

2.3. Strategies for Elevating the Use of Sesotho

Sesotho teachers must embark on various projects and programs to assist in formulating more Sesotho teaching and learning resources. In some instances, they can translate some isiXhosa teaching and learning resources to meet the needs of the Sesotho language. Furthermore, Sesotho language teachers must be prepared to further their studies to obtain master's and doctoral degrees. This will alleviate the shortage of Sesotho lecturers at universities. The Department of Education should provide bursaries to Sesotho language teachers to meet the supply and demand of Sesotho language teachers. [12] argue that despite efforts to elevate Sesotho to the status of an intellectual language, Sesotho continues to face marginalization, even in regions where it holds official language status. In the Free State province of South Africa, for instance, where Sesotho is both the official and home language for the majority of residents, English remains the primary language of communication [11, 12]. This situation persists despite the implementation of a language policy aimed at addressing the marginalization of Sesotho in the province [12].

It is essential to preserve indigenous African languages by teaching them as subjects in all universities and using them as languages of learning and teaching in a pilot study approach. Intergenerational transmission of languages through education is the most effective strategy and indeed the most far-reaching factor in their survival. [8, 19] posit that indigenous languages are still used in very few schools and mostly in rural areas. Consequently, this practice has led to the belief that these languages have deficient corpora to cope with communication demands in higher domains. For this reason, the South African government views translation as one of the necessary 'developmental tools' [2] to assist in elevating the status of and advancing the use of indigenous languages in the country's higher domains. This was demonstrated in 2003, when the government approved the National Language Policy Framework (NLPF). The NLPF charges all government structures to promote the use of the 12 official languages equitably. This policy framework emphasizes language facilitation methods, such as translation and interpretation, to fulfill this obligation [4].

3. Theoretical Framework

Social justice theory underpins the study on which this paper is based. Social justice is generally defined as the fair and equitable distribution of power, resources, and obligations in society to all people, regardless of race or ethnicity, age, gender, ability status, sexual orientation, or religious or spiritual background, [27]. The fundamental principles underlying this definition include the values of inclusion, collaboration, cooperation, equal access, and equal opportunity. Such values are also the foundation of a democratic and egalitarian society, [23]. Furthermore, Social justice theory in academic research is a way to study the fair distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges in society. It can also involve advocating for marginalized and oppressed people to be considered for equal opportunities in the workplace.

4. Methodology

I adopted a qualitative approach that included document analysis and interviews. Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents, both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material. Similar to other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge [3, 20]. Documents contain text (words) and images that are recorded without a researcher's intervention. [1] refer to documents as 'social facts', which are produced, shared, and used in socially organized ways (p. 47). This research involved analyzing and evaluating the language policies of universities. Semi-structured questions were dispatched to the four deans for the interviews.

4.1. Population of the Study

The population comprised four Executive Deans (Faculty of Education) from Rhodes University, Nelson Mandela University, University of Fort Hare, and Walter Sisulu University.

4.2. Data Collection Methods and Procedure

Data were collected through document analysis and semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were emailed to the participants, and their responses were sent back to me. The institutional statutes of all four universities were analyzed, as well as their language policy documents.

5. Discussion of Findings

According to the Institutional Statute of the University of Fort Hare, as informed by the Higher Education Act [7], Chapter 3 Language policy states that the language of tuition

of the University is English, except where a particular language is taught, in which event that language is also used. The languages of communication at the University are English and isiXhosa, depending on the nature of communication and practicability. The University is committed to promoting multilingualism and the academic development of the official languages of South Africa through its programmes. Although the university refers to multilingualism, in their multilingualism approach, there is an exclusion of Sesotho teaching in the Faculty of Education and its programmes.

The University of Fort Hare has been promoting language since its founding in 1916. The university adheres to the Use of Official Languages Act of [26] and the Draft Language Policy for Higher Education of [6]. The language of tuition of the University is English, except where a particular language is taught, in which event that language is also used. The languages of communication of the University are English and isiXhosa depending on the nature of communication and practicability. Walter Sisulu University (WSU) Institutional Statute has no indication of language policy, which means Sesotho exclusion is determined by discretion of those who are in authority. Nelson Mandela University Institutional Statute is silent about language policy but there is language policy which stands on its own. In its language policy it is stated that Nelson Mandela University (NMU) language policy aims to reflect the university's multilingual student and staff body. The policy includes:

English

The primary language of teaching and learning IsiXhosa

The university promotes the language and culture of isiXhosa Afrikaans

The university maintains and strengthens the Afrikaans language Multilingualism

The university aims to ensure that multilingualism is reflected in communication, especially in teaching and learning

While Nelson Mandela University is said to be committed to multilingualism, the language of learning and teaching at Nelson Mandela University is English.

Rhodes University is no different from WSU and NMU in relation to Institutional Statute as there is no indication of language policy. Albeit there is no inclusion of language policy in the Institutional Statute of Rhodes University, but there is clear university policy with the exclusion of Sesotho and promotion of isiXhosa and English of learning and teaching. In its policy declaration, Rhodes University [21] acknowledges English as its primary language of teaching and learning. Rhodes University policy objectives, the university commits itself to multilingualism and sensitivity to language use and choice and recognizes the academic viability and status of three official languages, namely Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa. In addition to these three languages, Rhodes University undertakes to promote and teach South African Sign Language. This policy was last revised in 2019. All 4 Deans that were interviewed could not provide valid reasons for the exclusion of Sesotho in the university curriculum

except to say they were still new in those positions, and they promised to go through the language policy of their universities. In all the 4 mentioned universities, there is no mentioning of Sesotho in their policies.

In accordance with Section 27 (2) of the Higher Education Act (No.101 of 1997 as amended), the Minister of Higher Education and Training must determine language policy for all universities. The Act provides that, subject to the development of policy by the Minister, the councils of public higher education institutions, with the concurrence of their senates, must determine the language policy of a higher education institution and must publish and make such policy to be available on request. That seeks to say the omission or exclusion of Sesotho teaching in the Eastern Cape universities is not by mistake, but it is determined by the senates as the legislation states. This is negating the principles of the Language Policy for Higher Education of 2017 in which it is embedded to. In section 24 (A and B) it is stated that there must be a recognition of the linguistic and cultural diversity that exists in our universities. There is a need for higher education to value all official language as a source of knowledge, to inform learning of the different disciplines in higher education.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This article will bring light to the importance of including all the official languages spoken in the Eastern Cape province and treat all students impartially. The 4 universities in the province must restructure (recirculation) their curricula and introduce an option of distance learning for Initial Teacher Education. Recirculation is the process of introducing new learning programs with significantly changed purposes, outcomes, or delivery methods. In South African universities, recirculation is a way to shape the curriculum to meet the needs of society. Universities South Africa (USAf) must see to it that all prospective students are given equal education opportunities by the universities in the province. Universities South Africa (USAf) is an umbrella body representative of the 26 public universities in SA. USAf endorses a comprehensive and equitable national higher education system that is responsive to the challenges facing South Africa. In addition, USAf promotes and facilitates an optimal environment conducive to universities to function effectively and efficiently.

The Education Deans' Forum (EDF) must intervene swiftly to address the language issue in the universities and provide guidance and leadership of what is expected in terms of policy implementation regarding treatment of languages used in the province. The EDF is one of 11 active communities of practice within Universities South Africa (USAf). This group fosters research in education towards continuous improvement of teacher education; it promotes South Africa's education interests by providing an outlet for deans to discuss matters of common concern in the delivery of teacher education, and, finally, the EDF brings to the attention of policy-makers, emerging issues on Education as a discipline. Sesotho

language academics must be engaged in resource development to assist in curriculum restructuring. If resources are not available, the Eastern Cape universities must have an obligation to contact other universities that are offering Sesotho. Lastly, I recommend that Pan South African language Board (PanSALB) intervene and advocate for the use of all the official languages of the Eastern Cape province to be given equal status by the universities in the province.

Abbreviations

SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
B. Ed	Bachelor of Education
USAf	Universities South Africa
EDF	Education Deans' Forum

Author Contributions

Jeremia Lepheana is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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