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UKZN PIONEERS THE INTRODUCTION OF ISIZULU IN UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES

The University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) is pioneering the introduction of isiZulu proficiency as a module in all undergraduate degree programmes.

All students registering for undergraduate degrees at UKZN from next year will – unless they get exemption - be required to pass or obtain a credit for a prescribed isiZulu module before they can graduate.

This rule, approved in principle by the University’s Senate today, gives tangible expression to UKZN’s language policy and plan which is intended to promote and facilitate the use of isiZulu as a language of learning, communication, instruction and administration. It also reflects UKZN’s commitment to the development of isiZulu as an academic language alongside English which at this stage remains the main language of learning and instruction. The approval of this principle marks a watershed for UKZN.

Currently students in the Health Sciences are required to undertake a module in isiZulu. The implementation of this module has been well received and the University has received requests from both staff and students to include the module in all degrees at the undergraduate level.

During the first phase of the implementation (up until 2018), students and staff will develop communicative competence in isiZulu and English sufficient for academic interaction. Appropriate credit-bearing and non-credit-bearing language courses will be made available by the University during this time.

In Phase 1 and Phase 2 (2019 – 2029) UKZN will encourage and facilitate all academic disciplines to assist students and staff to develop appropriate writing skills in English and isiZulu in their disciplines. Each degree programme will determine the appropriate level and type of proficiency. This is in line with the University Language Policy and Plan and our Transformation Charter which seeks to develop African languages as academic languages.

At a University where more than 60 percent of students are isiZulu-speaking, the institution has an obligation to ensure linguistic choices result in effective learning solutions. Additionally, in a country that continues to be divided on the basis on linguistic identities, language should serve to bring diverse learning communities together and promote social cohesion.

The belief that indigenous languages cannot be used for high level thinking and research is a myth. UKZN is systematically contributing to the development of isiZulu from terminology development in law to the development of isiZulu glossaries for
economics to translations of physics, chemistry and anatomy text books. isiZulu is evolving as a language of science and technology.

UKZN is proud that it is the first South African institution of higher learning to make bilingualism a compulsory requirement for undergraduates and thus contribute to providing the country’s young professionals with vital communication skills. The bilingualism requirement also emphasizes the importance of recognizing indigenous culture and language in South Africa as is common at places of higher learning in many other parts of the world.

English and isiZulu courses will continue to be offered to staff and UKZN Extended Learning will also provide short courses in the languages.

This is a significant milestone for UKZN, but much remains to be done, including the development and production of specialized glossaries and dictionaries. An immediate priority is to expand the opportunities for the development and provision of various levels of language proficiency for staff and students.

Fact File

In South Africa:
24% of South Africans speak isiZulu making it the most widely spoken language in the country 81% of people in KwaZulu-Natal speak isiZulu and 14% English

At the University of KwaZulu-Natal:

On average, 48% of new entrants for three and four-year degrees at UKZN between 2007 and 2012 indicated isiZulu was their home language while 42% said English was theirs. This represented a 76% increase for isiZulu and a 15% decrease for English over the six-year period Of the 6 124 new students who enrolled last year, 3592 (59%) studied isiZulu as a home language, a first additional or 2nd additional language in matric (ie three out of five students had some level of isiZulu).

In 2010, UKZN offered 56 modules in isiZulu with 6734 student registrations in these modules across a wide variety of programmes in the different Colleges.

isiZulu language proficiency is already a requirement in some degree programmes, eg health sciences.

Professor Renuka Vithal is available for interviews.

Issued by:

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