

Towards Promoting a Responsive and Inclusive Tertiary Education System in South Africa through Multilingualism

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KEYWORDS Bi/multilingualism. Medium of Instruction. Language of Wider Communication. Human Rights. Ecology of Language Metaphor

ABSTRACT The language question in post-democratic South Africa continues to take centre stage in the field of education. A recent announcement by the University of Natal (UKZN) that it would be mandatory for all first year students in 2014 to study isiZulu indicates a vision that could gradually usher in a tertiary education system that is bilingual in the Kwa-Zulu Natal Province in South Africa. A related development in the Ministry of Basic Education which makes it mandatory for all primary school children to study an African language as from 2014 is also supportive of bi/multilingual education. Notwithstanding the fact that in the South African context, English has greater currency than African languages, this paper makes a strong case for promoting regional bi/multilingualism in South African universities. Drawing on the Singaporean socio-linguistic situation, innovative national and international tertiary initiatives aimed at promoting 'epistemological access' through bi/multilingualism and the ecology of language metaphor, the paper argues that whereas language was used to create artificial divisions and boundaries in the apartheid era, it can be used to promote student success, economic prosperity, social cohesion and human rights in post-apartheid South Africa.