

Towards a Quest of Making Indigenous South African Languages Relevant in South African Classrooms

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ABSTRACT The role of language in education was clearly indicated in 1958 when UNESCO declared that 'it is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue'. However, African languages have suffered the indignity of playing second fiddle to European Languages in African classrooms. This paper discusses this issue in the context of South Africa, where a new language policy has been introduced, which constitutionally recognises eleven official languages. Language educationists are particularly involved in this controversy about language use in classrooms. The issue at stake is the status of the eleven languages in education. The constitution has provided a non-diminutive clause specifying that no language should be diminished, but equal language status should be achieved by upgrading African languages. But how will this clause be implemented in education where the established and recognized medium of education is English and Afrikaans? The position of this paper is that concerted efforts have to be made to show learners that African languages have an important role to play in their education. The researchers therefore advocate that 'code-mixing' and 'code-switching' which have hitherto been frowned upon by language purists should be actively encouraged in South African classrooms as an aid to the learning process and a communicative resource.