Multilingualism and Decoloniality in South Africa Education: French as a Gateway Language

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Abstract. This paper explores South Africa's linguistic environment, addressing the interplay between promoting indigenous languages, the dominance of English, and the evolving role of foreign languages. The study examines how educational policies, teaching practices, and student perspectives have shaped the positioning of French, a language with a longstanding presence in the country's schools and universities. The paper comprises three sections: an analysis of historical and policy frameworks influencing multilingual education, an exploration of student-led movements advocating decolonization, and an evaluation of French's role in contributing to decolonial objectives. The research draws on findings from in-class fieldwork and surveys conducted at the University of Cape Town from 2020 to 2024. The conclusion highlights practical strategies that contribute to reimagining language pedagogy, promoting greater inclusivity and equity in multilingual educational systems.

Keywords: South Africa education, language policy, decolonization, multilingualism, French as a foreign language.

Introduction

In recent years, the decolonization movement across the Global South has brought significant attention to the role of language in education. Languages historically tied to colonial powers are increasingly seen as less relevant or even in contradiction to the goals of decolonization, which aim to restore indigenous knowledge systems and cultural practices. On much of the African continent, educational systems continue to grapple with the tension between colonial linguistic legacies and the promotion of indigenous languages. South Africa, like other African nations, reflects these challenges as it strives to balance linguistic equity with socio-economic and educational reform.

Contemporary South Africa (1994) recognizes twelve official languages, including South African Sign Language as of 2023. While this inclusive policy seeks to redress historical inequities, the dominance of English in education and professional settings is often pointed out as undermining these efforts, perpetuating systemic barriers for speakers of indigenous languages. Within this context, student-led protests across the country (2015–2016) expressed the urgency of decolonizing higher education

throughout the transformation of curricula, languages of instruction, and institutional structures to reflect African epistemologies and lived realities.

Nevertheless, while the promotion of indigenous languages remains central to decolonization, the practical advantages of English, as an official language and a global *lingua franca*, cannot be overlooked. Similarly, the discipline of foreign language study and instruction should retain its place and continue to develop its role within a multilingual framework.

Aiming to contribute to the debate, this paper examines South Africa's evolving linguistic landscape, focusing on the challenges of promoting indigenous languages alongside the continued prevalence of English. The study also explores how language policy, teaching practices, and student perceptions shape the role of foreign languages, particularly that of French. In doing so, I reference outcomes from fieldwork and classroom surveys conducted at the University of Cape Town (2020–2024).

The work is structured as follows: The first section examines the historical and policy frameworks that have shaped South Africa's multilingual education system. The second section addresses the decolonization of higher education, foregrounding the student movements and institutional reforms that are redefining language policy and curriculum. The third section focuses on the role of French as a foreign language, tracing its historical trajectory in the country and evaluating its potential to align with decolonial initiatives. By integrating these discussions, the study highlights practical strategies for reimagining language pedagogy, fostering greater inclusivity, and promoting equity within multilingual educational systems.

Historical and Policy Frameworks Shaping South Africa's Multilingual Education System

As with many formerly colonized nations, South Africa's linguistic landscape is marked by immense diversity and complexity, shaped by its colonial history. During the apartheid era, linguistic policies prioritized Afrikaans and English, systematically marginalizing African languages spoken by the majority of the population. This approach entrenched linguistic inequities, aligning with broader socio-political dynamics that reinforced racial and cultural hierarchies.

As mentioned, the end of apartheid in 1994 brought about a transformative shift, with the introduction of a multilingual language policy that officially recognizes eleven languages[1] recently, South African Sign Language has been added as the twelfth official language (2023). This policy aims to promote linguistic inclusivity and equity, with specific provisions for mother-tongue instruction in early education (Grades 1–3), with learners transitioning to English as the primary medium of instruction thereafter (UNICEF, 2016).

The preference for English-medium education reflects broader socio-economic realities. Many parents perceive English as the key to better career prospects, often opting for English instruction over mother-tongue education. This transition, typically occurring in Grade 4, poses significant challenges for learners whose home language is not English, disrupting their educational progress. Students from English-speaking or Afrikaans-speaking homes tend to excel in this system, whereas those from Indigenous language backgrounds face persistent obstacles.

Faatar (2023) reminds us that the movement to decolonize education first emerged in Africa during the 1950s and 1960s in the context of anti-colonial struggles. He argues that this movement rejects colonial education, which, he notes, was *designed to shape the colonised into compliant subjects while depriving them of their full humanity and potential*. Faatar and Akinmolayan et al. (2024) emphasize that colonial educational models systematically promote Eurocentric values while suppressing African epistemologies. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) describes this suppression as "epistemicide", a process that has erased non-European knowledge from mainstream intellectual discourse (cited in Faatar, 2023, p. vi),

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[1] On this point, as stressed by, amongst others, Sefotho (2019), despite the "South African Constitution clearly stating that learners should be taught in an official language of their choice, in South African schools, the predominant languages are English and Afrikaans." According to Sefotho, "the system seems to ignore the fact that learners come to the classrooms with their different linguistic and social behaviours. Nonetheless, South Africa could capitalise on these differences for epistemic access [...] and avoid the high drop-out rates at schools" (Sefotho, 2019, p. 11).

resulting in the devaluation of African languages and cultures. Faatar notes that decolonizing education involves integrating indigenous knowledge into curricula, promoting African languages, and reshaping pedagogy to reflect African cultural values (p. vii).[2]

Research initiatives such as LOITASA (Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa; cf. Desai, 2010) and PRAESA (Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa[3]) strongly advocate mother tongue-based bilingual education. Findings from studies conducted within the framework of initiatives such as these demonstrate that extended use of home languages in early education enhances academic performance and facilitates improvement in English proficiency (cf. Brock-Utne et al., 2010).

On the other hand, also according to the UNICEF (2016) report, short-term mother-tongue instruction, as currently practiced in South Africa, often results in substandard literacy skills in both the home language and English. This evidence highlights the necessity of extending mother-tongue instruction beyond Grade 3 to foster linguistic competence and bridge educational gaps[4].

Heugh (2000) critiques the myths surrounding bilingual and multilingual education, such as the supposed costliness of implementing multilingual programs and parental preference for English-only instruction. Drawing on South African and international studies, Heugh argues that multilingual approaches yield more equitable and sustainable learning outcomes and debunks misconceptions that hinder policy implementation. Similarly, Sefotho's (2019) findings suggest that a well-designed multilingual policy could address systemic barriers that currently limit educational equity. She concludes that

> multilingualism in South African classrooms is not a challenge but has been made into a challenge because we have not embraced and made use of all the linguistic resources that learners bring to the classroom. A learner's knowledge or proficiency in one language becomes a resource in developing the knowledge of other languages. The findings from writing a summary, where the language of input differs from language of output, revealed that understanding of one language improved performance in the other language. For example, learners whose reading fluency was low in Sesotho improved and performed better when writing a summary in Sesotho from an English text, whereas those with a low reading fluency level in English, performed better when writing a summary in English from a Sesotho text. Proficiency in one language assisted learners to perform better in another language. (Sefotho, 2019, p. 9)

Based on such views, translingualism can be commended for its strong social justice orientation and potential to promote inclusivity. However, significant challenges hinder its practical implementation. Zhang-Wu (2019a), drawing on various works, highlights that translingualism, despite its potential, "poses unsettling questions for pedagogy" due to a disconnect between advocacy and practise. For instance, "most academic texts written by scholars promoting translingual approaches do not include codeswitching, and many plurilingual approaches only publish in English" (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 41; Kubota, 2020, p. 168). This disconnect makes it challenging for instructors to envision how to integrate translingualism into pedagogical practices. Furthermore, the literature remains predominantly theoretical, as conceptual investigations "far outpac[ing]" empirical research and definitional inconsistencies complicate its practical application (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 41; Matsuda, 2014; Gevers, 2018; Kubota, 2020). As Zhang-Wu (2021a) observes, these issues discourage instructors from adopting translingual writing in college classrooms, raising important questions about its feasibility as a pedagogical approach (p. 150).

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[2] As emphasized by numerous researchers, including Du Plessis (2021, p. 56), the transformation process must go beyond language policies to advocate for an education system that is *deracialized, demasculinized, and degendered.*
[3] Cf. https://www.praesa.org.za/
[4] On this point, nonetheless, Van Staden and McLeod Palane (2019) quote De Wet (2002) to the effect that "*teachers often lack the English proficiency necessary for the effective teaching of literacy skills across the curriculum.*" The authors then reference Probyn (2001)'s view, according to which "*the medium of instruction then becomes a barrier to effective learning and teaching, and particularly to the constructivist notion of teachers and learners collaborating in meaning-creation*" (Van Staden & McLeod Palane, 2019, p. 186).

Recent policy shifts, such as the Basic Education Laws Amendment Act (BELA[5]), signed into law in 2024, represent a step toward fostering greater linguistic inclusivity. This legislation grants the Department of Basic Education authority to implement multilingual instruction in schools, where feasible. However, the success of such initiatives depends on addressing entrenched monolingual ideological frameworks that continue to shape educational policies. For example, these frameworks often prioritize a single national or colonial language as the medium of instruction, overlooking other languages spoken by learners and reducing their opportunities for full educational engagement.[6]

Researchers have long critiqued the limitations of multilingual policies that fail to disrupt monolingual frameworks. Ndhlovu (2015), in *Ignored Lingualism: Another Resource for Overcoming the Monolingual Mindset in Language Education Policy*, advocates policies grounded in the concept of a "multilingual habitus." This concept emphasizes an ingrained mindset and practice that actively values and integrates the linguistic and cultural experiences learners bring into the classroom. By shifting the focus from merely acknowledging the presence of multiple languages to actively incorporating them into educational practices, Ndhlovu attempts to demonstrate how such an approach can dismantle the default reliance on a single dominant language.

Ndhlovu's position resonates with the principles of translanguaging—a pedagogical approach that leverages the full linguistic repertoire of multilingual individuals to enhance communication and learning. Translanguaging (Song, 2016, as cited in Omidire, 2019: 4) involves the strategic integration of multiple languages to scaffold language development and meaning-making. García (2009, 2017, as cited in Omidire, 2019: 3–4) conceptualizes translanguaging as a unitary system of meaning-making in which multilingual speakers employ diverse discursive practices to navigate and make sense of their bilingual world. Based on these cited works, it can be said that translanguaging enables students to use their full linguistic and semiotic repertoire to create inclusive and dynamic learning environments. It enables bilingual learners to make the most of their multilingualism, enhancing both language development and understanding. By combining multiple languages in a transformative way, translanguaging reshapes how languages are used across different contexts, underlining the importance of linguistic diversity. This approach aligns with the goal of establishing in education a *multilingual habitus* in which students' cultural and linguistic experiences are valued and incorporated into the learning process.

The 2016 UNICEF report recommends extending mother-tongue instruction and developing standardized curricula and teacher training programs to better support indigenous language instruction; Furthermore, public awareness campaigns could also help shift parental perceptions of the long-term benefits of mother-tongue education. The report is echoed in numerous studies, including Akinmolayan et al. (2024), who advocate embedding decolonization efforts at the primary level and underscore the critical role of culturally relevant teacher training in shaping transformative educational practices.

In the following section, I explore how the decolonization movement has extended beyond primary education across South African universities, with students expressing significant dissatisfaction with a system that, despite decades of democracy, remains largely untransformed.

Decolonization in Higher Education

As an introduction to the recent waves of student protests across the country, I reference a historical episode that provides a critical lens for understanding the dual role of universities as spaces of both compliance with and resistance to systems of oppression.

The 1968 protest at the University of Cape Town (UCT), known as the Mafeje affair, involved the university's withdrawal of an academic appointment that had been offered to Archie Mafeje, a

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[5] Cf. https://www.education.gov.za/
[6] Studies, including Muzata (2020) and Brock-Utne (2007), indicate that the use of a foreign language, particularly English, can negatively impact on the academic performance of non-native speakers; they highlight this phenomenon by documenting the underperformance of Tanzanian and South African students taught in English, advocating instead instruction in their native African languages (Muzata, 2020, p. 180).

distinguished Black South African anthropologist. This decision was made under pressure from the apartheid government, which objected to the appointment of a Black academic at a historically white institution (Plaut, 2010).

In response, UCT students staged a significant protest, including a sit-in at the university's Bremner Building, marking one of the first major acts of defiance of apartheid policies within South Africa's academic sphere. The protest illustrated the complicity of universities in sustaining apartheid structures and set a precedent for the use of campus activism to challenge systemic injustices. While the sit-in did not result in the immediate reversal of the decision, it represented an important moment in the broader struggle for academic and racial equity in South Africa.

The legacy of the 1968 Mafeje sit-in later resonated in the #Rhodes Must Fall (RMF, in 2015) and #Fees Must Fall (FMF, in 2015–2016) movements.

Drawing on Sartre and Fanon's perspectives, Daniel and Platzky Miller (2024) argue that movements like RMF and FMF exemplify the power of student-led initiatives to catalyze systemic change. At UCT, these movements encouraged students to imagine alternatives to entrenched oppressive structures, fostering broader dialogues on systemic reform. Among the central themes emerging from these movements were decolonization and intersectionality, with efforts aimed at dismantling overlapping systems of oppression to create a more equitable educational environment. However, internal challenges, such as *factionalism* and the prioritization of specific identities, underscored the complexity of achieving collective decolonial goals.

Heleta and Dilraj (2024) critique the limited progress achieved in transforming South Africa's higher education system. They argue that post-apartheid reforms have prioritized demographic representation while neglecting deeper issues such as institutional culture, knowledge politics, and epistemic decolonization. According to the authors, such a superficial approach, compounded by neoliberal agendas and "rainbow nation" rhetoric, has often led to commodification of education at the expense of intellectual freedom. The result has been persistent disparities in participation rates among racial groups and the *perpetuation of epistemic violence, social dislocation, and trauma for Black students* (p. 6).

Achille Mbembe's (2016) work provides a critical framework for understanding the entrenched colonial legacies within higher education. He distinguishes between *Africanization, often tied to nationalistic agendas, and decolonization, which seeks to dismantle deeper structures of epistemic coloniality* (p. 33). For Mbembe, a truly decolonized university must adopt a pluriversal model of education, one in which diverse epistemic traditions coexist and engage in dialogue. This approach emphasizes linguistic diversity, advocating the inclusion of African languages in knowledge production and academic discourse. Mbembe argues that multilingualism not only challenges the dominance of Eurocentric paradigms but also fosters epistemic inclusivity and equity.

Recent efforts to align higher education policies with these decolonial principles include UCT's 2023 commitment to multilingualism. Measures such as translation services, the development of an isiXhosa spellchecker, and annual language events aimed at inclusivity reflect tangible steps toward achieving linguistic equity. The university's revised language policy, which proposes isiXhosa, Afrikaans, and English as official languages alongside South African Sign Language, Khoekhoegowab, and Afrikaaps, underscores the importance of integrating linguistic diversity into academic spaces (Multilingualism Education Project, 2024[7]).

The decolonization of higher education in South Africa remains an ongoing struggle, deeply rooted in historical inequities and shaped by contemporary global and local ideologies. Nonetheless, languages, including foreign languages like French, occupy a distinct position within this decolonial context, offering both challenges and opportunities.

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[7] Cf. https://ched.uct.ac.za/multilingualism-education-project/about-multilingualism-education-project

The Evolving Role of French in South Africa's Educational Landscape

Having traced the historical and policy frameworks shaping South Africa's multilingual education system, along with its ongoing process of decolonizing higher education, I now turn to examine the evolving role of French within the country's educational landscape, analyzing its broader implications for language policy and the integration of foreign languages. While the revitalization of indigenous languages remains at the forefront of the decolonization agenda, English remains a dominant force, functioning both as an official language and a gateway to global interconnectedness. In such contexts, foreign languages, especially those with colonial origins, have often experienced a decline in relevance across the Global South, where they are perceived as conflicting with decolonial aspirations. Yet the French language occupies a distinct and nuanced role in South Africa. Building on insights from scholarly literature and classroom-based fieldwork, in this section I describe three key factors that have been identified that underpin its distinctive status.

First, it is noteworthy that, historical, French presence in the country dates back to the 17th century, when French Huguenots fleeing religious persecution settled in the Cape Colony.[8] In chapter 4 of *The French Refugees at the Cape*, Botha (1921) traces the gradual disappearance of the French language among the French refugees during the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Initially, he writes, the French were permitted to use their language in religious services and schools. However, Dutch colonial authorities aimed to integrate the refugees into Dutch society by dispersing them among Dutch settlers and discouraging the use of French. Policies mandated that ministers preach in Dutch and schools prioritize Dutch instruction. These measures led to tensions between the Huguenots and their Dutch neighbors, exacerbating cultural divisions.

Despite petitions from the French community to maintain their language in church services,[9] the Dutch authorities enforced restrictions, viewing the continued use of French as a potential threat to assimilation. Over time, as intermarriage and everyday interactions continued between the Dutch and French populations, use of the French language waned. By the early 18th century, French was largely confined to religious contexts, gradually disappearing from public use. By the mid-1700s, it was noted that few descendants of the original refugees could speak French, and only remnants of the language persisted in place names and family names, often modified to fit Dutch phonetics.[10]

However, while the French language faded, the Huguenot refugees' cultural and social influence endured, contributing to the formation of a unified Cape settler identity. This transformation also illustrates the broader colonial dynamics of linguistic and cultural assimilation.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, French re-emerged as an academic subject, becoming a staple in schools and universities across the country. In contrast to the situation in former French colonies, where French is often viewed as a symbol of cultural imposition, its trajectory in South Africa has been largely neutral, which has ensured a stable presence for the language within the educational system.

To illustrate the status of French as a foreign language (FFL), I reference the continuous fieldwork research at UCT's School of Languages and Literatures. The results presented here are part of a broader field research project. It comprises data collected from approximately 600 participants (an average of 150 students per year) over the past four years (2020–2024), encompassing all levels (undergraduate and postgraduate) and types of French training (language, literature, and Business French).

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[8] For further details on this topic, see Chapter 2 of *Marketing a Foreign Language: The Case of French in South Africa* (thesis) by Margerison (2005), which focuses on the Huguenots in the Western Cape (pp. 27–35).
[9] Margerison observes that "[…] languages owe certain aspects of their origin and preservation to religion," drawing on Boucher's work (*French Speakers at the Cape: The European Background*, UNISA, 1981) to highlight the religious influences that shaped the formation of the Calvinist Huguenots in South Africa; pp. 25–35
[10] Cf. On this point, see Lebon, J. C. (n.d.).

This extensive and ongoing engagement provided a robust basis for understanding the motivations, perspectives, and experiences of learners choosing French studies.

Grounded in an intercultural epistemology—a framework that emphasizes understanding others' perspectives within their cultural contexts—I adopted participant-observation as the principal research method. This approach proved instrumental in building mutual trust and enabling open communication, which directly enhanced the relevance of the research to the participants' experiences. While it requires a significant investment of time and continuous self-reflection to address potential biases and maintain objectivity, participant-observation proved to be the most effective methodology for achieving the study's objectives.

As a researcher and an active presence in the classroom, I closely observed student interactions in order to gain real-time insights into how learners engaged with the language and each other. To complement these observations, I conducted regular informal interviews centered on the question, *"Why French?"* This inquiry guided discussions and interviews, offering a focused framework for exploring students' motivations, challenges, and aspirations. Two primary factors, one utilitarian, the other personal, emerged as central in shaping students' motivations and relationships with FFL.

French plays a significant role in shaping students' engagement due to its practical advantages as an official language in 29 countries, spanning Francophone spaces, notably in Africa. These interconnected cultural and linguistic networks foster collaboration and a shared identity among French-speaking nations. While South Africa is not a Francophone country, French holds historical significance as a heritage language for certain communities, particularly those with ties to French refugees. For South African students, learning French creates opportunities to integrate into broader Francophone networks, strengthening the country's political and economic relationships with Francophone Africa and beyond. These connections support meaningful partnerships on both regional and global levels.

For students aspiring to careers in international organizations, diplomacy, and multinational corporations, French continues to be viewed as a valuable skill. The language's relevance extends to industries such as tourism, hospitality, and education, where multilingual professionals adept at cross-cultural communication are in high demand. In this context, French serves as a bridge to regional collaboration and global business opportunities.

South Africa's ties with France and the African continent, especially French-speaking countries, are reinforced through diverse political, economic, cultural, and defense collaborations. Bilateral agreements and regional partnerships promote trade, investment, and mutual development.[11]

South Africa and France engage in robust defense cooperation, exemplified by initiatives such as the biennial Exercise Oxide and French-language training for South African National Defence Force (SANDF) personnel. Exercise Oxide, conducted jointly by the SANDF and France's Forces Armées de la Zone Sud de l'Océan Indien, alternates between South African and French territories, including the island of La Réunion. This exercise enhances interoperability in areas such as intervention, surveillance, disaster relief, anti-pollution efforts, and search and rescue operations.[12]

Additionally, French language training is provided to SANDF soldiers to improve their effectiveness in peacekeeping missions in Francophone countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Proficiency in French facilitates better communication and coordination with local populations and allied forces during operations. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in the DRC also emphasizes interoperability by deploying a mission training team to conduct joint training with the Armed Forces of the DRC, aiming to enhance cooperation and operational efficiency[13].

[11] Cf. https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/south-africa/france-and-south-africa/?utm_source=chatgpt.com
[12] Cf. https://za.ambafrance.org/Defense-5665?utm_source=chatgpt.com
[13] Cf. https://www.sadc.int/latest-news/sadc-mission-drc-conducts-training-together-peace-drc?utm_source=chatgpt.com

These collaborative efforts underscore the commitment of South Africa and France to regional stability and effective peacekeeping operations in Francophone Africa.

Cultural exchange further strengthens these ties. Institutions like the French Institute of South Africa and 14 Alliance Française branches promote French language education and Francophone culture, enriching connections with French-speaking communities globally. Established in South Africa in 1936, the Alliance Française network continues to play a pivotal role in fostering cultural diversity and collaboration.[14] These multifaceted engagements, coupled with the Forum for Political Dialogue formalized between France and South Africa in 1997, exemplify the importance of regional and global partnerships that advance stability, security, education, and diplomacy.[15]

Beyond these practical considerations, the majority of students are drawn to French for deeply personal reasons. Its syntactic precision and melodic sounds often appeal to learners, reflecting the enduring influence of French linguistic ideology. This ideology, which emphasizes clarity and exactness, positions French as a language requiring intellectual rigor and discipline. For students, mastering French becomes a personal challenge that brings a profound sense of accomplishment. Rivarol's assertion that "what is not clear is not French" encapsulates the intellectual satisfaction learners associate with achieving proficiency in the language.

Interestingly, while few students explicitly mention their family's historical connection to French, this heritage often remains subtly present, as suggested by family names or ancestral ties. This subtle yet meaningful connection enriches their engagement with the language on an emotional level.

In summary, the two primary factors shaping students' motivations—utilitarian and personal—demonstrate the stability of French's dual status as both a practical and affective language. This duality ensures its enduring appeal among learners who are both career-driven and intellectually curious.

From a pedagogical perspective, teaching FFL in South Africa has evolved to align with contemporary educational frameworks. At UCT, for instance, French language studies are integrated with professional disciplines, and courses like Business French, a branch of French for Specific Goals are offered. These types of training balance local educational needs with global realities, equipping students with practical skills for multinational environments. They address the demand for cross-cultural communication in professional contexts while ensuring that language education serves broader purposes.

Another accelerated shift in pedagogical approaches has placed greater emphasis on integrating Francophone literature into FFL curricula. At UCT, Francophone literature broadly now accounts for 50% of the offerings, with the other half focused on canonical and contemporary works from the French metropole. By engaging with selected works by celebrated African authors,[16] students refine their language skills while exploring critical themes such as colonialism, identity, and resistance. Such works have a profound academic and personal impact on learners. Academically, their inclusion enhances linguistic proficiency by exposing students to diverse registers and styles, while encouraging critical thinking as they analyze dominant narratives and consider alternative perspectives. On a personal level, these texts cultivate empathy and inspire cultural pride, broadening students' understanding of global dynamics while highlighting the resilience and creativity of local and cultural communities.

Ultimately, by integrating professional applications with cultural and literary studies, FFL programs in South Africa, including those at UCT, exemplify the adaptability of language education to meet both local and global demands. These interdisciplinary approaches ensure that French language education not only

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[14] Cf. https://frenchinstitute.org.za/

[15] Cf. https://dirco.gov.za/

[16] In his 2006 paper, Kwofie examines the external and internal factors sustaining French in West Africa, showing how Francophone African writers transform its structure and content to reflect African contexts. He references figures such as Léopold Sédar Senghor, who extolled French for expressing African intellectual and emotional dimensions while recognizing its limitations in capturing African essence. Through their creative adaptations, these writers redefine French literature, blending African and European traditions.

prepares students for professional success but also nurtures critical thinking, cultural awareness, and intellectual curiosity.

Conclusion

The study of FFL in South Africa demonstrates how foreign languages can support a broader vision of decolonization and multilingualism. While the integration of Francophone literature and professionally oriented courses continues to develop, what stands out as genuinely new is the changing perception of multilingualism. Once seen as a challenge or limitation, multilingualism is now embraced as a strength, thanks to institutional efforts to elevate the status of indigenous languages. My research and fieldwork findings reveal that this shift has profoundly benefited students, who begin to view their native languages not as obstacles but as integral to their identity and to academic success.

This transformation highlights the power of inclusive language policies to reshape cultural attitudes and foster a sense of belonging within academic spaces. By encouraging the coexistence of indigenous and foreign languages, universities create environments where linguistic diversity is celebrated, not stigmatized. French's neutral historical position in South Africa, aided by a successful ideology and combined with its utility in connecting people to regional and global opportunities, reinforces its relevance in this multilingual framework. French as a foreign language education serves as a bridge between local identities and international aspirations, preparing students for dynamic futures while enable them to root themselves in their linguistic and cultural heritage.

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