On Tuesday, 15 March, the council at the University of the Free State took a unanimous decision to adopt a new language policy that will see Afrikaans phased out.

English will become the primary medium of instruction at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

This comes a few months after a similar policy was adopted at Stellenbosch University following months of protests by students opposed to Afrikaans being used as the main language of teaching.

In a poignant documentary titled Luister, black students at the university talk about the difficulties they experience on a daily basis.

These include having to sit through lectures taught in a language they can’t understand.

This cruel injustice was made even worse by the university management’s complete apathy in dealing with the students’ plight.

The airing of Luister brought about an important national conversation around the issue of language policies in our country’s historically Afrikaans universities.

For the past few months, students across historically Afrikaans-speaking institutions of higher learning in South Africa have been engaged in protests.

Using the protest language of the #RhodesMustFall movement, which began at the University of Cape Town two years ago, and which was aimed at the decolonisation of white universities, these students have been calling for the fall of Afrikaans, the language of instruction at a number of varsities.

I support this struggle not only because it’s just, but for personal reasons.

While in matric, I decided to do a Science degree at Stellenbosch University.

Part of the process of applying at the university is for prospective students to write language and numeracy tests.

Two language tests are written – one in English and another one in Afrikaans.

This was despite the fact that in my application, I had clearly indicated that I didn’t do Afrikaans at school, and would therefore attend English lectures.

The university decided to ignore that clear explanation, and informed me that the language tests were compulsory and would be used to ascertain whether or not a student would study at Stellenbosch University.

I knew then as a teenager what I know now as a young adult, and that’s fundamentally wrong with an institution that is inherently exclusionist through the use of a language.

A language that’s not only a symbol of the marginalisation of a majority, but one of power.

Contrary to the belief that Afrikaans is just a language and therefore this struggle is trivial. The reality of the situation is that Afrikaans represents to black students something more sinister than that.

It represents a language that is used to exclude and marginalise them.

It’s used to perpetuate the historical legacy of killing the potential of black students.

Not only through structural constructs, but by making black people feel inferior.

The media’s reporting on this struggle has been problematic and has led many ordinary people to believe the students are calling for the erasure of the history and heritage of the Afrikaans-speaking population of our country.

It’s this false narrative that should be challenged.

When black students took to the streets of Soweto on 16 June 1976, in protest against Afrikaans being used as a medium of instruction in black schools, pupils protested for something profound.

They were protesting for the abolition of a language that was used as a weapon of their marginalisation to be removed as a barrier to their academic progress.

This is exactly what young people in post-apartheid South Africa are fighting for: a chance to obtain their qualifications and to get an education, without a barrier aimed specifically at their marginalisation and exclusion.

This is what the #AfrikaansMustFall campaign is about.

It’s about rewriting ongoing historical injustice.

Afrikaans speakers should be allowed to preserve their culture and heritage – but not at our expense.

Not when that preservation is expressed through our exclusion.

When that happens, an injustice is being committed.

And injustice will be fought by students without compromise.