Varsities drop teaching in Afrikaans

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TWO former Afrikaans universities have conceded to students’ demands to do away with Afrikaans as a medium of instruction.

This week, the University of Pretoria (UP) announced its new language policy which will see English become the primary language of instruction.

This comes after student protests led by the EFF Student Command (EFFSC) at the institution which demanded that the university must do away with Afrikaans as a medium of instruction.

The university said in a statement that the goal of the new policy is to facilitate social cohesion and promote inclusivity.

“For students who are already registered, the use of Afrikaans as a language of instruction will be phased out gradually. The implementation date is subject to the process to be followed with the Department of Higher Education and Training in order to change the statute of the university.

“It was also decided that Afrikaans must be maintained as a language of scholarship, while the development of Pedi to a higher level of scientific discourse must be supported and adequately resourced. The council recommended that management prepare an implementation plan, staffing needs and budget to provide effective language support.”

However, UP EFFSC leader Amos Monageng said even though the party welcomed the decision by the university, it was not time to celebrate yet.

“This is one step closer to the decolonising we are still speaking about. We have not reached a stage where we can celebrate even though this is paramount,” he said.

“We will start celebrating when we have gotten rid of the employment culture that still excludes black people, the residence culture and the institutional culture where most important positions are still occupied by Afrikaner males. ... It is after succeeding in these challenges that we can say that UP has transformed.”

After publishing a draft of the new language policy in March, Stellenbosch University’s council also announced that it had approved the language policy that will promote access and multilingualism.

In a statement it said the institution’s council, the highest decision-making body, supported multilingualism without excluding students who are not proficient in either Afrikaans or English.

“The policy is based on the principles that the university’s languages of instruction must promote access and academic success, and that the institution’s language policy must serve its academic project. The policy explicitly makes provision for students who prefer to study in Afrikaans, while also improving access to education for students who are proficient in English only,” the university said.

Open Stellenbosch, a group of students, protested over the use of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction. Member Jodi Williams said because people were on June holidays, the movement has not sat down to discuss the new language policy.

University of Free State also announced earlier this year that English will be the medium of instruction.

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