

Ineffective Implementation of Language Policy in South African Higher Education: Mapping the Contribution of Family Language Policy

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Abstract—South Africa's language policy landscape has been lauded as a progressive model for many African countries, particularly due to its intentional drive to promote multilingualism and elevate historically marginalised indigenous African languages at various levels of education. However, language policy implementation has largely remained ineffective and symbolic. Within the South African higher education sector, inadequate government support for policy operationalisation and enduring colonial language ideologies that valorise and legitimise English as the language of social, educational, and economic advantage have been cited as militating against the realisation of a truly multilingual and transformed university. In this article, we draw on a framework that agitates for an approach that acknowledges interactions between top-down language policy directives and bottom-up community language ideologies. Through an analysis of language policy documents and secondary literature, we build on the adage that 'charity begins at home' to argue that resistance to top-down university language policies is very much a function of ideologies and dispositions towards indigenous languages that are shaped within the home, a dimension known as family language policy. We therefore propose an approach that reconciles national language policy objectives with bottom-up ideologies by placing families at the centre of the macro language policy wheel.

Index Terms—language policy in higher education, indigenous African languages, bottom-up language ideologies, family language policy, South African universities

I. INTRODUCTION

The language policy of South Africa is aligned with other national imperatives as spelt out in the Constitution of the Republic. Central to these constitutional pronouncements is the endeavour to transform the country into an inclusive and equitable society. This is a deliberate departure from the country's colonial and apartheid past, which was punctuated by segregation and an emphasis on separate and unequal treatment based on race (Drummond, 2016; Makalela & McCabe, 2013; Maseko & Siziba, 2023a). Since the triumph of democracy and the abolition of apartheid in 1994, the South African government has taken visible steps to redress colonial and apartheid-era injustices at various levels of South African society (Maseko & Siziba, 2023a). During the colonial and apartheid periods, access to university education was a privilege largely conferred on racial considerations. However, the 1996 National Constitution reduced the racial barrier, resulting in significant access to the university space by the previously excluded black African students (Drummond, 2016; Makalela & McCabe, 2013). However, studies have shown how 'access' to the university has remained physical than epistemological (Antia & Dyers, 2016). Physical access means that there are an increasing number of blacks in universities as compared to the colonial and apartheid eras. Although there has been an increase in the enrolment of black, African language-speaking learners into universities, the curriculum has remained largely untransformed (Antia & Dyers, 2016). It has continued to be packaged and delivered in English and Afrikaans as languages of instruction (Govender & Naidoo, 2023). Realising this, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) directed public universities to craft language policies that intentionally address the challenges of language as a barrier to access and success for the majority of students who speak African languages (DHET, 2020). To that end, all 26 public universities in South Africa were mandated to promote the use of African languages and indigenous multilingualism in teaching, learning, and other areas related to the university's business. This includes the promotion of multilingualism even in engagements between universities and their stakeholders. To date, all universities have some form of language policy in place, although there are still concerns regarding their effective implementation. Predictably, discourses on the preponderance of English and Afrikaans as legitimate languages of instruction dominate much literature on language policy in South African higher education institutions (Drummond, 2016; Dyers & Abongdia, 2015; Madadzhe, 2019; Maseko & Siziba, 2023b). Much literature has mostly highlighted the lack of institutional and government sincerity, support, and commitment to real transformation as being the main reason behind the lack of implementation (Antia & van der Merwe, 2019; Mutasa, 2014). In that regard, some literature shows how

the wording of the language policy provisions provides escape routes for authorities from being held accountable for non-implementation of these policies (Maseko & Siziba, 2023a). Notably, such research has not gone further than identifying these dynamics as culpable in the ineffectiveness of university language policies.

In this article, we attempt to explain the lack of effective university language policy implementation within the context of an inadequate understanding and appreciation of language ideologies circulating in lower levels of society. As constitutive of what is termed ‘bottom-up’ language planning, we seek to argue that understanding of language ideologies emanating from the grassroots can bear on how institutional language policies are received and accepted. In particular, we suggest that because the success of any language policy requires community and grassroots buy-in and consensus (Alimi, 2016; Hodges & Prys, 2019; Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2014), it is important for universities to understand and indeed consider bottom-up language ideologies as possible sources of resistance and ambivalence towards university language policies. In our argument, we seek to show how family language policies, that is, decisions about what languages are used and valued within families, may have a bearing on the dispositions of staff and students towards their institutional language policies, thus indirectly impacting implementation.

By drawing evidence from language policy documents and secondary literature on the potential impact of bottom-up language ideologies on top-down language policies, this paper interrogates the dialectics of policy and implementation, arguing that ineffective implementation of university language policies stems from a rudimentary understanding and neglect of family language policy as a site of ideological reproduction. The paper posits that to be effective, university language policies must resonate with the language attitudes, preferences and practices cultivated within the family domain. The study was guided by the following research questions:

- What is the contribution of bottom-up ideologies to the ineffective implementation of language policy in South African universities?
- How can family language ideologies be incorporated into a worthwhile language policy in higher education?

II. THE NEXUS OF TOP-DOWN AND BOTTOM-UP LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES

To understand what we conceptualise as the ‘missing link’ towards the effective implementation of language policy in South African higher education, we draw on an apparatus that establishes the nexus between top-down and bottom-up language planning. We proffer this missing link as an explanation for the evident disconnect between language policy and practice in South African universities (Maseko & Siziba, 2023b). In language policy studies, the concepts of top-down and bottom-up generally denote the direction of ‘planned change.’ Accordingly, ‘top-down’ language planning is associated with language policy directives and mandates that originate from, or are formulated by, governments or related institutions. These are then handed down to the populace for implementation, often with little or no consultation or input from the general population (Alimi, 2016; Chríst, 2006). Because top-down language planning often involves governmental directives and decisions that are likely to impact a country as a whole, it is also referred to as macro language planning in other literature (Hodges & Prys, 2019; Maseko & Siziba, 2024). On the other hand, language planning decisions that originate from lower grassroots levels of society constitute what is referred to as bottom-up language planning, also used as a synonym for micro language planning (Alimi, 2016; Baldauf, 2006; Hodges & Prys, 2019). Bottom-up actors in language planning may include individual language speakers, families, communities and voluntary community-based non-governmental organisations. Although much of language planning has historically been conceptualised as a macro governmental activity in which decisions about language status and use are orchestrated by the elite and implemented through institutional channels, often without due consideration of language ideologies circulating at lower levels of society (Chríst, 2006; Maseko & Siziba, 2024), there is increasing acknowledgement of the influence of non-state and non-governmental actors towards the success or failure of such state-centric language policies (Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2014; Maseko & Siziba, 2024).

The advent of the micro dimension of language planning thus represents a significant shift in language planning theory and practice (Ngulani & Maseko, 2026). Because it encapsulates initiatives and decisions embedded in community consensus and participation, often involving non-elites and ordinary members of society (Baldauf, 2006; Chríst, 2006; Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2014; Ngulani & Maseko, 2026), it is also known as ‘democratic language planning’ (Alexander, 2004). By considering ideologies that are shaped by community members’ lived experiences and socio-economic realities, micro language planning can potentially challenge the legitimacy of dominant societal languages by foregrounding marginalised languages (Alimi, 2016; Ngulani & Maseko, 2026). In this sense, it is considered truly organic, transformative and in synch with community aspirations (Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2014; Ngulani & Maseko, 2026). However, micro language planning can also be contested, consequently reproducing and perpetuating hegemonic linguistic relations (Maseko & Siziba, 2024; Ngulani & Maseko, 2026).

Drawing a contrast between these two dimensions of language planning usually paints the macro as undemocratic, while the latter is often framed as inclusive, as it is based on consensual community ideologies (Ngulani & Maseko, 2026; van der Merwe, 2022). Consequently, top-down language planning is viewed as an activity associated with “a team of disinterested planners who investigate the linguistic, social, political and educational requirements and made decisions that were in the best interests of the state” (Baldauf, 2006, p. 154). In this study, we deploy the concepts of micro and macro language planning to reveal that the interaction between these two dimensions of language planning is an important consideration in the success of language policy implementation in universities. In particular, we argue that

an appreciation of the dynamics of both bottom-up and top-down language planning is critical towards understanding the contradictions between university language policies and practice. The enduring ideologies which valorise English on the part of learners, thereby informing negative ideologies towards the use of indigenous African languages, do not necessarily begin and end within the education domain, but form part of a larger language socialisation process that also permeates the family level (Maseko, 2022; Maseko & Mlilo, 2022). Accordingly, the concept of family language policy as one dimension of bottom-up language planning is central to our argument.

Family language policy can be understood as the ‘explicit and overt’ (King & Fogle, 2013) as well as the ‘implicit and covert’ (Curdts-Christiansen, 2013b, 2016) planning among family members in various family configurations (Curdts-Christiansen & Palviainen, 2023; Palviainen & Räisä, 2023; Purkarthofer et al., 2022) regarding their language choices, use and literacy practices (Karpava et al., 2021). Family language policy is often influenced by prevailing extra-familial language ideologies that may reproduce the coloniality of language. The valorisation of English within family linguistic and literacy traditions as part of family language policy invariably shapes members’ attitudes towards African indigenous languages, consequently influencing their disposition towards the use of these languages in various education levels (Maseko, 2022; Maseko & Mlilo, 2022). Conversely, languages that are valued within education systems tend to permeate aspirational family language policy as languages of social, educational and economic advantage (Hua & Wei, 2016; Seals & Beliaeva, 2023). This interaction suggests that there is an important nexus between top-down and bottom-up language planning that has to be incorporated into our understanding of the disconnection between university language policies and their effective implementation. Towards that endeavour, recognising the family as a key site where language ideologies are formed is essential to bridging the gap between language policy intentions and the communities’ lived experiences and realities (Curdts-Christiansen, 2013a). This conceptual grounding thus facilitates our understanding of the centrality of micro language planning in catalysing social transformation (Makalela & McCabe, 2013). Ignoring the interaction between family language policy as a micro dimension and grassroots agency in any language planning endeavour renders it futile and disconnected from the very communities it seeks to serve (Ngulani & Maseko, 2026; Maseko & Siziba, 2024).

III. LANGUAGE POLICY AND PRACTICE DIALECTICS IN SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

The government of South Africa, through the DHET, has continued to agitate for the transformation of the linguistic landscape of higher education through various language policy proclamations. The Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions (LPPFHEI) (DHET, 2020) emphasises the promotion of indigenous African languages in academic and administrative spaces of the university. To that end, the policy framework directs universities to adopt multilingual approaches that not only recognise and foreground African languages in their language policies but also treat multilingualism as a resource that can “facilitate cognitive development, epistemic access, inclusiveness, transformation, social cohesion and respect for all languages” (DHET, 2020, p. 13). Notably, this proclamation is attuned to national values espoused in the national Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. It is aligned with the recognition of the rights of all citizens to use their languages in a manner that fosters “parity of esteem” and equitable treatment as provided for in Section 6 (RSA, 1996). The framework thus seeks to:

Promote multilingualism as a strategy to facilitate meaningful access and participation by university communities (students and staff) in various university activities, including cognitive and intellectual development. (DHET, 2020, p. 5)

In light of the historically disadvantaged position of indigenous African languages owing to the legacy of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa, the policy framework pledges to redress that predicament by elevating them to be languages of teaching and learning, research, and use in all aspects of the university.

While these directives have positively impacted language policy formulation in public universities in South Africa, implementation is a bane of most institutional language policies (Docrat & Kaschula, 2015; Dyers & Abongdia, 2015; Maseko & Siziba, 2024, 2023a). In their review of the original 2002 language policy directive culminating in the 2020 revision, the DHET concedes that “there has been little progress made in exploring and exploiting the potential of African languages in facilitating access and success in higher education institutions” (DHET, 2020, p. 5). The DHET also concedes that despite all previous efforts by the department and universities:

Language continues to be a barrier to access and success for many students at South African higher education institutions. Despite their status as official languages, indigenous languages have, in the past and at present, structurally not been afforded the official space to function as academic and scientific languages. (DHET, 2020, p. 9)

The above concession by the DHET speaks to the problematique of language policies and their ineffective implementation in South African universities. Notably, while different institutions purport to promote multilingualism and indigenous African languages in their language policies, in practice, the dominance of English continues largely unchallenged (Antia & van der Merwe, 2019; Makalela & McCabe, 2013; Maseko & Siziba, 2023b). Institutional commitments to use African languages in official communication, curriculum delivery, or scholarly publishing have remained rhetorical and more of a band-wagoning and window-dressing strategy than a lived reality in most institutions (Maseko & Siziba, 2023a). This policy-practice mismatch thus underscores the symbolic nature of multilingualism in many higher education institutions. It reflects enduring colonial vestiges that have been reproduced in the post-colonial

and post-apartheid epoch (Alexander, 2004; Makalela & McCabe, 2013; van der Merwe, 2022). Several scholars have shown that most university language policies are characterised by ‘rosy ideals’ that lack practical implementation. Chief among these is the observation that most language policies are awash with caveats and provisions that not only encourage discretionary implementation of language policies but also insulate university authorities from accountability (Maseko & Siziba, 2023a). In particular, most language policies contain escape clauses that can be used to justify non-implementation (Docrat & Kaschula, 2015; Maseko & Siziba, 2023a). There is a visible correlation between escape clauses in the wording of policy provisions and the DHET policy directive. The acknowledgement of the limitations of the language policy framework by the DHET animates this previous point:

[...] some of the limitations cited include lack of enforceable mechanisms built into the policy; lack of funding or incentives by government to support the implementation of the policy; as well as lack of clear directives within the policy on how multilingualism is to be realised within higher education institutions. (DHET, 2020, p. 10)

Most studies on language policy in South African higher education institutions have thus delved more into the mismatch between language policy and implementation in various university spaces. Besides the lack of incentives and limited government support for the implementation of university language policies, one frequently cited factor relates to language attitudes of students and staff towards English and indigenous African languages (Dyers & Abongdia, 2015; Madadzhe, 2019; Pillay & Yu, 2015; Prah, 2017; Siziba, 2024; Siziba & Nhongo, 2024). These studies suggest that in spite of government and institutional efforts to promote the use of African indigenous languages, globalisation processes, economic considerations and “negative attitudes towards African languages and a lack of will or confidence by both students and university officials to take the plunge in using African languages in teaching and learning” (Madadzhe, 2019, p. 205) militate against full and effective implementation of multilingualism. On the contrary, some studies demonstrate a continuous rise in the status of English and Afrikaans (Pillay & Yu, 2015). In some situations, Historically Black Universities (HBUs) are seen to be gravitating towards English monolingualism (Makalela & McCabe, 2013). For example, Pillay and Yu (2015) paint a somewhat grim picture regarding the number of students taking up courses in indigenous languages in South African universities. The negative perceptions about the value of indigenous African languages in contrast to English tend to result in most students opting to pursue non-African language degrees (Pillay & Yu, 2015), while the majority of students also prefer being taught in English rather than in indigenous African languages (Mutasa, 2014). This is despite the documented benefits of using one’s mother tongue in the learning process. Similarly, scholars such as Thamaga-Chitja and Mbatha (2012) have also shown that students’ perceptions of indigenous languages as terminologically and conceptually deficient often lead to a preference for English instruction. In addition to these inherited colonial era attitudes and ideologies, competence in English is desirable for its perceived economic opportunities and upward social mobility, a trait that indigenous African languages are thought to lack (Mutasa, 2014; Prah, 2017; Siziba & Maseko, 2024).

However, some studies have shown that despite the widely cited lack of policy implementation, all hope is not lost. Recent studies often cite the ‘success story’ of the implementation of isiZulu as an academic language at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) as the cases that demonstrate the potential of language policy in enabling the effective use of indigenous African languages as languages of learning, teaching and research scholarship (Kamwendo et al., 2014; Khumalo & Nkomo, 2022; Zungu, 2021). For instance, Kamwendo et al. (2014) observe that the successful implementation of isiZulu as an additional language of instruction at UKZN helped “deflate[s] the myth that indigenous African languages can only serve in lower levels of education (such as primary schools) and not higher education” (Kamwendo et al., 2014, p. 75). Additionally, the introduction of a university-wide compulsory isiZulu module for undergraduate students at UKZN is seen as an intentional commitment towards its use as an academic language and its intellectualisation (Kamwendo et al., 2014; Zungu, 2021). However, this has not been without some problems. For example, Rudwick (2018) suggests that while this move can be applauded as showing the UKZN’s commitment to turning policy into practice, some concerns regarding the choice of isiZulu as the only language to be promoted remain. In that regard, Rudwick (2018, p. 261) observes that disregarding the linguistic diversity of the staff and students risks restricting the university’s purported Africanisation agenda into one of ‘Zulufication’ of the institution. ‘Zulufication’ denotes the projection of isiZulu as the legitimate African language of the university. This potentially stifles the growth and promotion of other indigenous languages spoken by staff and students at the institution, as more resources and attention are given to isiZulu. However, this does not diminish the UKZN’s bold move towards the promotion of indigenous African languages. The North-West University has also been commended for its intentional drive to mainstream Sesotho and Setswana into teaching and learning, and the conduct of university business (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2012; Maseko & Siziba, 2023a; Siziba & Nhongo, 2024).

Despite these efforts, the effective implementation of language policy in universities remains largely symbolic and ineffective. Thus far, the paper has shown that there is a prevalent preference for English as a medium of instruction, thus revealing the enduring coloniality of language (Veronelli, 2015) in higher education. We argue that, in part, ideologies that privilege English ahead of the indigenous African languages among students are imported from the home into the education system and vice versa. In the following section, we unpack the nexus between family language policy and the ineffective implementation of university language policies as one dimension of micro-macro interaction

in language policy. We reveal how considerations of family-level language ideologies may be the important missing cog in university language policy implementation.

IV. INEFFECTIVE LANGUAGE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: WHAT HAS FAMILY LANGUAGE POLICY TO DO WITH IT?

Research on family language policy has shown that families and parents in particular play a crucial role in deciding what languages are used and valued within the families (Ahooja et al., 2022; Maseko & Mutasa, 2018; Schwartz & Verschik, 2013). Although parents' language ideologies often favour the use of family home languages for linguistic, cultural and identity preservation and continuity (Maseko & Mutasa, 2018), prevailing economic, sociopolitical and educational realities tend to influence parents' revision of their preferred family language policies and subsequent capitulation to wider societal language ideologies informed by aspirations for a better life (Hua & Wei, 2016; Seals & Beliaeva, 2023). Within the context of post-colonial South Africa, where English remains entrenched as a language of social and economic advantage, parents' aspirations for their children's success in schooling precipitate its intrusion into family language practices as a reproduction of the coloniality of language in the family (McKinney & Molate, 2022; Molate & McKinney, 2024). The valorisation of English within the family domain is thus part of children's language socialisation. Although some families have tried to resist the reproduction of coloniality within their family language practices (Molate & McKinney, 2024), the global dominance of English and its seemingly unassailable status in education systems across Southern Africa add to its valuation as the legitimate language of education, and the subsequent subservience and backgrounding of indigenous African languages in such high domain functions.

In light of the foregoing, we argue that the negative attitudes towards indigenous African languages, which likely result in the ineffective implementation of university language policies, are possibly nurtured within the family domain. As the adage goes, 'charity begins at home.' In the context of our paper, this implies that the embracing or shunning of indigenous African languages in higher education is to some degree a function of how the same languages are perceived and used in the homes of university staff and learners. As a dimension of family language policy, positive attitudes and embrace of indigenous languages at home will likely translate to their valuation in the education system. Additionally, if the education system embraces indigenous languages through fostering their use as academic languages, that will likely translate to their valorisation in the family space and beyond. This suggests that, rather than operating as distinct and contradictory notions, the bottom-up and top-down dimensions of language planning policy are in a state of constant interaction. On the other hand, if university language policies remain statements of intent that do not translate into recognisable practice (Docrat & Kaschula, 2015; Kaschula, 2016; Maseko & Siziba, 2023b; Siziba & Maseko, 2024), learners will likely not appreciate nor experience the actual value of indigenous languages, resulting in the 're-importation' of the dominant education language practices into the family sphere. Studies have thus shown that aspirational family language policies tend to overpower pro-home language family language policies (Maseko, 2022, 2024; Maseko & Mlilo, 2022; Seals & Beliaeva, 2023), as families often favour the language of social, educational and economic success and advancement.

The importance of the family institution in encouraging heritage language use, bonding and stabilisation has long been established in family language policy literature (Schwartz, 2010; Schwartz & Verschik, 2013). These studies are inspired by Fishman's observations that, for any language to survive intergenerational disruption, it has to be used by all three generations within the family as a language of everyday conversation (Fishman, 2001, 1991). On the contrary, if families abandon using their home languages in daily interactions, that often signals a negative forecast for the concerned languages in terms of their intergenerational transmission. Additionally, the intimacy and privacy of the family make it resistant to external influences "as it acts like a natural boundary, a bulwark against outside pressures" (Schwartz & Verschik, 2013, p. 2). In that regard, Romaine (2002) concurs that before languages can be introduced in education, they must first be embraced and valued by their speakers, and any effort for a top-down approach in revitalising indigenous languages may be futile if not supported by the speakers of the languages themselves, starting in the home:

Looking to schools and declarations of official status to assist endangered languages is much like looking for one's lost keys under the lamp post because that is where the most light appears to shine, rather than because that is where they have been lost. Just as it is easier to see under the lamp post, it is far easier to establish schools and declare a language official than to get families to speak a threatened language to their children. (Romaine, 2002, pp. 3-4)

This observation suggests that the family is the first and foremost battleground for the valorisation of heritage languages. In other words, bottom-up language policies play a fundamental role in how indigenous languages are perceived in macro national-level institutions. However, while the family has been thought to be immune to outside influences (Fishman, 1991), recent scholarship has shown that family language policy is not entirely insulated from dominant language ideologies circulating in extrafamilial domains such as the education system (Maseko, 2022, 2024; Maseko & Mlilo, 2022; Purkarthofer et al., 2022). In fact, emerging studies show that the private/public dichotomy is increasingly becoming blurred when it comes to language socialisation, and that what happens in the family is very much a function of public sociopolitical discourses (Maseko, 2024; Purkarthofer et al., 2022). The coloniality of language experienced in public institutions certainly infiltrates the family as children tend to import these language ideologies, resulting in children socialising their parents into new ways of using and thinking about language (Fogle &

King, 2013; Luykx, 2005; Maseko, 2022). In particular, parents' impact beliefs, that is, their perceptions of their ability to shape their children's language practices, can either galvanise their family language policies or result in parents' or caregivers' capitulation to children's use of the dominant societal language (Pérez Báez, 2013).

The foregoing demonstrates that family language policy may shape family members' attitudes and dispositions towards indigenous African languages in their later educational lives. As previous literature suggests, university students demonstrate a strong preference for English in academic circles in the place of indigenous African languages, thereby contradicting university language policies that seek to centre African languages (Madadzhe, 2019; Mutasa, 2014; Pillay & Yu, 2015; Prah, 2017). These attitudes are deeply entrenched and reflect broader societal ideologies shaped and sometimes nurtured within the family. In the absence of an engagement with language ideologies shaped within the family, top-down institutional decrees to promote African languages will likely continue being characterised by apathy or resistance, consequently reinforcing the perceived unimportance of African languages, resultantly undermining national language policy goals.

V. RECONCILING UNIVERSITY LANGUAGE POLICY GOALS WITH BOTTOM-UP IDEOLOGIES

Thus far, we have argued that the evident mismatch between university language policy goals as articulated in the DHET language policy directives and individual university language policies potentially lies in misalignment between top-down policy objectives and bottom-up language practices couched in family language policy. Attitudes that are exhibited by university learners towards indigenous African languages are potentially 'home-grown' and exported into the education system. Conversely, the persistent use of English as the legitimate language in all levels of education potentially influences language practices at home, as aspirations for educational success compel families to accommodate English within their family language policies. Inadvertently, this reproduces and perpetuates the coloniality of language within the family sphere (McKinney & Molate, 2022; Molate & McKinney, 2024). While top-down language policymakers envisage a multilingual university that celebrates linguistic diversity, some families may prioritise dominant languages for pragmatic reasons (Hua & Wei, 2016; Maseko, 2024; Seals & Beliaeva, 2023). Although the DHET's language policy framework is thin on the role of communities and bottom-up agency towards the successful implementation of multilingual language policies that centre indigenous African languages, it is worth noting that it provides for the interaction of top-down policy directives and community agency. Notably, it reiterates that as part of its underpinning principles, it commits to "enhancing people-centeredness in addressing the interests, needs and aspirations of a wide range of language communities through ongoing dialogue and debate" (DHET, 2020, p. 14). Sadly, this is as far as it goes in its acknowledgement of the centrality of communities to foster successful implementation. There is no further elaboration on how universities can mobilise community and grassroots agency to reshape and influence attitudes towards indigenous languages from the bottom up. Such an elaboration would particularly be useful to provide support for universities in their community engagement efforts and conscientising communities on how to challenge and resist coloniality within the micro-domains of the community, starting at the family level.

Placing family language policy at the centre of national language policy imperatives and interventions could partly alleviate the ineffective implementation that results from bottom-up imported language ideologies. This could involve government and universities making provisions not just for community participation in the crafting of institutional policies but also extending language planning and policy efforts beyond campuses by engaging families and communities. This can be done through outreach programs, language awareness campaigns, and other participatory policy development strategies. The LPPHEI should also be revised to explicitly spell out the role of communities in the crafting and implementation of multilingual language policies in universities. This is important in light of the observation that language planning endeavours that ignore or trivialise the dynamics of bottom-up agency risk futility and disconnection from the very communities it is intended to serve (Ngulani & Maseko, 2026). There is evidence to suggest that language policy initiatives rooted in community consensus and buy-in tend to face little resistance during implementation (Alimi, 2016; Baldauf, 2006; Hodges & Prys, 2019; Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2014). Our argument, therefore, is that language policy should not only be conceived in a narrow sense that only puts the macro dimension at the fore. Rather, there is a need to consider how the macro dimension of language policy interfaces with ideologies that originate from the community and are concretely enacted and realised in family language policy and practices. It is such ideologies and practices which tend to be reproduced within macro-level institutions through the lack of conformity to language policy directives. If there are no tangible economic and educational benefits in using indigenous African languages, families are likely to continue shunning them for the preference of English. At best, African languages will be confined to informal domains. This does a great disservice to the cause of the intellectualisation of African languages. This is because parental aspirations for their children's upward social mobility are very much a factor that influences language ideologies within families, and such ideologies may be reproduced in language attitudes in higher education.

VI. CONCLUSION

Ineffective language policy implementation in South African higher education institutions is not just a function of inadequate resource allocation and support from macro government institutions, but also a result of a lack of consideration of bottom-up language policy dynamics and ideologies at the community and family levels. In this article,

we have argued that worthwhile university language policies must reflect a deeper ideological interaction with family language practices, as these potentially inform attitudes and dispositions of learners towards indigenous African languages when they eventually reach university. In other words, valorisation of indigenous African languages must begin at home, where language ideologies are significantly shaped. By placing bottom-up language planning at the centre of language policy in higher education through fostering family and community involvement, there is a higher possibility for institutions to move towards language policies that are embraced as products of consensual community involvement. We submit that currently, the missing cog in the higher education language policy wheel is grassroots consultation and the critical role of families in shaping language attitudes. This conceptual study sought to understand how bottom-up language ideologies are potentially connected to the ineffective implementation of top-down language policy in South African higher education. An obvious limitation of this study is its lack of empirical data that speaks to how students and university staff experience the nexus of bottom-up language ideologies and the top-down university language policies. Future studies can thus include the voices of students and/or staff, and other stakeholders such as parents, to understand their experiences in navigating the use of indigenous African languages as mandated by macro-level policy proclamations and directives. An interesting angle could be to examine the perspectives of those who are themselves parents to understand how they reconcile their university language experiences with language use preferences for their children. This could further shed light on how lived experiences influence the language practices of university staff and students, and their positionings towards African languages in teaching and learning.

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