MAKING SA MULTILINGUAL

Learning outcomes will improve tomorrow as a result of action taken with African languages today

MANY recent research reports speak to the need to strengthen language teaching and in particular African languages in order to improve learning outcomes.

They show language and communication are two of the most important factors in the learning process, with home language playing a key role.

The Global Monitoring Report on Education for All in 2005 highlighted the fact that worldwide the choice of language of instruction and language policy in schools are critical for effective learning. In a landmark study on the quality of education in Africa, by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA 2004), the language factor emerged strongly as one of the most important determinants of quality.

We’ve done our homework particularly conscious of the importance of languages and communication in promoting social cohesion and nation-building. An investigation was conducted to determine how this should be done properly.

Our department received a report recommending that as from 2014 all public schools should introduce African languages from Grade R. The council of education ministers broadly supported the recommendation and resolved that provincial education departments would largely consider piloting the initiative in 2014. This will be in 10 schools per district, after which it will be implemented incrementally from Grade 1 in 2015 and continuing until 2026 with implementation in Grade 12.

The incremental introduction of African languages policy intends to promote and develop the previously marginalised languages.

We hope this will raise confidence of parents to choose their own languages as languages for learning and teaching.

We believe, also, that the policy will increase access to languages by all pupils, beyond English and Afrikaans.

The national curriculum statement requires pupils to offer two languages, one as a language of learning and teaching and the other as an additional language.

One of the two languages should be offered at home language level and the other at either home language or first additional language (FAL) level.

The FAL will require all pupils to offer three languages, one of which should be an African language. One of the three languages should be offered at home language (HL) level.

However, depending on the school context, pupils can offer two languages at home language level or first additional language level.

Effectively all pupils will therefore offer three languages.

The learning of three languages is not a new phenomenon. Pre 1994 it was standard practice for African schools to offer three languages in the curriculum.

Today there are still some schools that are offering three languages.

These schools are offering the third language
The instructional time will be extended from 27.5 to 32.5 hours per week, an extension by one hour per day.

The extension of time allocation has no implication for the conditions of service for teachers. Teachers are required to work for seven hours per day and the extension of the school day affects pupils and not teachers.

The IIAL pilot project is targeting the introduction of the previously marginalised African languages in schools wherein an African language is not offered.

Schools in collaboration with their school governing bodies will decide on the two languages that will be offered at FAL level, one of which must be an African language.

The successful implementation of the IIAL is heavily reliant on teacher availability.

DBE conducted an audit. Results show that provinces are at varying levels of teacher provision. Four provinces (Free State, Limpopo, Northern Cape and KZN) have provided African language teachers in all former model C schools; two provinces (Mpumalanga and Gauteng) have teachers in some schools.

Eastern Cape and North West have put plans in place to provide the teachers for African languages. In the Western Cape schools share an African language teacher.

DBE and provinces are working on a model to ensure incremental provision of African language teachers in grades that are implementing IIAL. This is to ensure that schools are provided with qualified African language teachers. The most ideal situation is to provide all schools with African language teachers.

Depending on school context, this might mean a provision of one or more African language teacher.

The department, as part of the consultative process, is meeting with all the relevant stakeholders that have vested interest in language matters.

This bold initiative will go a long way in making South Africa a multilingual country.

Angie Motshekga is the Minister of Basic Education.