

REPUBLIC OF RWANDA



**HIGHER EDUCATION COUNCIL
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**NATIONAL POLICY ON LANGUAGE TEACHING
IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Revised April, 2007

NATIONAL POLICY ON LANGUAGE TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Background and Rationale

In order to impart equal education to all Rwandans, bridge the Francophone-Anglophone divide and move towards a unified and reconciled nation, the Government of Rwanda established a bilingual policy as a way to build an incipient trilingual nation (Kinyarwanda – French - English) able to address the challenges of the globalizing world. Because all public-sector Rwandan HEIs teach in both French and English it is important that every student swiftly brings his or her grasp of these languages up to the level where they can participate in academic activities and learn from lectures. It is also important that graduates can be relied on to be at least competent at writing, reading and speaking both French and English when they take up employment. At the same time we do not wish to extend an already full timetable beyond what is needed for this purpose; it may be assumed that some students achieve this goal through language teaching in primary and secondary schools, so that their time would be better spent focusing on their academic subjects and developing their skills in language for academic and specific purposes during their degrees, rather than on language acquisition *per se*.

This policy lays down minimum national requirements for language teaching in the public-sector HEIs. It aims to ensure that students gain the language skills they need and that languages are taught in the context of the academic disciplines and in parallel with subject study. At the same time it aims to ensure that students' language proficiency level is not a barrier to their studies and to assist students who have a weak language base.

The policy is mandatory only for undergraduate students on day-time programmes; evening and distance students should be provided with facilities for improving their language, but HEIs are not required to implement the full provision below. Master's and doctoral students are expected to be proficient in whatever languages they need for their studies, and this may be made a requirement for admission.

HEIs are to organize a common national language centre for teaching, assessing and certifying language competency. This should be established by 2008. Institutions ready to implement the language policy earlier than in 2008 may do so, however.

Provision for Level 1 students

The objectives of this provision are

- To implement to the bilingual policy of the Government of Rwanda,
- To bring all students to a high level of proficiency in a relatively short period of time,
- To enhance students' ability to cope with their programme's lecture and other requirements, and
- To enable them to be more competitive in the labour market at home, in the region and beyond

The course outlined below aims to help students develop abilities in:

- The basic language structure, so as to enable them develop an understanding of spoken and written speech,
- The use of the language in a variety of situations inside and outside the classroom,
- The reading of simple, general and field-specific texts and the writing of assignments,
- The use of conventions in academic writing and related requirements, and
- Research skills, including paraphrasing, synthesizing, quoting, referencing and note-taking.

A national test of language competence shall be devised, and all potential students will be encouraged to take it before leaving school, as self-assessment, and to take steps to improve their language competence between school and entering higher education if the test indicates that they need to do so. On entering higher education all students will be tested again and assigned to one of three broad categories in each language:

- a. Beginners (scoring less than 60% and needing 8-10 hours per week of instruction)
- b. Intermediate (scoring 60-79% per cent and requiring 4-8 hours of instruction)
- c. Advanced (scoring 80% or more and not requiring further instruction)

An appropriate language course shall be provided for students judged to be ‘beginners’ or ‘intermediate’, in their weaker language, with students judged to be beginners in both languages being required to take courses in both languages. (Students who score in the intermediate category on both languages may choose which language they wish to improve.) Provision shall be made for ‘advanced’ students and those judged intermediate in their stronger language to improve their competence, but this need not be by means of formal course provision

This course will not carry credit, but students will be re-assessed in both languages at the end of Level 1 unless they have already tested out in the ‘advanced’ category. Students are required to pass this test (see below) but language examination results will not form part of the award, nor will they be used to calculate Grade Point Average (GPA) or the award of distinction. Institutions are encouraged to award a separate certificate of language proficiency to all students according to their individual level of proficiency.

Provision for Level 2 students

Students who do not achieve an ‘advanced’ rating at the end of Level 1 in both languages will be permitted to proceed to Level 2 but will be required to improve their language competence by the end of the Level, and they will be re-tested in languages where this level was not achieved. There will be no formal language courses in Level 2, but an *Effective Learning Service* (ELS) – see Student Support and Guidance Policy – will be provided. Lecturers will be scheduled to attend at regular intervals (at least fortnightly) to assist students with the necessary remedial practice and advise on sources of tuition. Remedial classes or materials may be provided, and a reasonable fee may be charged for such materials.

Those who have not reached at least an ‘advanced’ level by the end of Level 2 will not be permitted to progress to Level 3 until they have done so. They will be permitted to retake the Level 1 language courses as appropriate. Programmes may impose a level of language competency that is higher than the minimum both for admission and for progression beyond Level 2. Such requirements are to be indicated in the Programme Validation Documents and in the Student Handbooks.

Language assessment after Level 2

There will be no further formal teaching or assessment of languages after Level 2, but students will be required to demonstrate during the final year presentation of projects their ability to answer questions in both French and English. Institutions may choose to offer courses in communication skills and/or languages for academic purposes. All academic staff are responsible for assisting students in understanding and expressing themselves within their discipline in the language in which it is taught. Staff are prohibited from teaching in Kinyarwanda in HEIs (except on modules specifically teaching Kinyarwanda language or literature); the official teaching language in Rwandan HEIs is English.

Each HEI is to encourage bilingual teaching on each degree programme so that students are compelled to study in both languages, but a given module should normally be taught and assessed in a single language. Where this is not the case a validation process will have to occur in which the institution assures itself that internal and external moderation can be carried out in both languages. A change of language for a module shall require that it be revalidated.