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CHALLENGES OF MULTILINGUALISM AND IDENTITY IN SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION: A POST-1994 PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Since the advent of democracy in 1994, South Africa has pursued an ambitious multilingual education agenda aimed at redressing historical inequalities and affirming linguistic and cultural diversity. Despite progressive policy frameworks recognising eleven official languages, the education system—particularly at the level of basic education—continues to be dominated by English. This paper critically examines the challenges of multilingualism and identity in South African basic education from a post-1994 perspective. Drawing on language policy analysis, sociolinguistic theory, and postcolonial critiques, the study explores tensions between policy and practice, the dominance of English, teacher preparedness, curriculum and assessment constraints, and the implications for learner identity and epistemic justice. The paper argues that meaningful multilingual education requires a shift from symbolic policy commitment to systemic, pedagogical, and ideological transformation.