

MEDIA STATEMENT

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KEY TO GOOD EDUCATION - MOTHER TONGUE

On the International Day for Mother Tongue, the SAOU wants to stress the importance of mother language teaching.

During the State of the Nation Address the President again expressed the 2026 goal of strengthening the basics of education. The emphasis was based on building a strong foundation for language and literacy which is the key to improving educational outcomes in South Africa.

The foundations for learning in terms of language and literacy are best built in Foundation Phase classrooms where the language of instruction is the Mother Language.

The value of the focus on the mother language lies therein that linguistic and cultural diversity fosters multilingualism. This builds a society where there is acceptance for different cultures and languages. This promotes a system where every South African is respected.

According to UNESCO learners acquire knowledge faster when they have a mother language base.

UNESCO presented research (2022) which indicated that “there are about 7000 languages spoken around the world today. But linguistic diversity is increasingly threatened as more and more languages disappear at an alarming rate. And when a language disappears, it takes with it an entire cultural and intellectual heritage.

The SAOU supports the development of language and educational policies which will protect the South African languages. This will ensure that learners entering the system will be able to build cultural identities, but also self-worth in the acknowledgement of the mother language.

Therefore the 2026 theme for the International Day of Mother Tongue – “Youth voices on Multilingual Education”, should be a national focus, to ensure the firm establishment of the mother language and age-appropriate additive multilingualism. This will ensure that the youth is able to celebrate South African cultural and linguistic diversity.