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Fort Hare,
Alice, C.P.
8-6-44.

The Secretary for Education,
Union Education Department,
Union Buildings,
PRETORIA.

Dear Sir,

I am in receipt of your letter of the 29th ult. in which you ask for my views on certain points regarding the proposed institution by the Joint Matriculation Board of an examination on the higher grade in Xhosa, Zulu and Southern Sotho. I beg to submit the following observations on the points raised in your letter:-

1. Having regard to the steady growth of literature in Bantu languages, especially in the languages to which your letter refers, and in view of the increasing number of African graduates and others specialising in the study of Bantu languages I am of opinion that the time has arrived for the institution of a higher grade examination in these languages. I feel sure that the Bantu people would welcome this enhancement of the status of Bantu languages in this important public examination and that this step would encourage those candidates who have a mother-tongue foundation in these languages to make a wider and a deeper study of them. The necessary examiners and moderators are in my opinion not only available but are steadily increasing both in numbers and in quality.
2. On the ^{other} ~~other~~ hand if such an examination on the higher grade in these Bantu languages is instituted I doubt if the Native people would be prepared to accept in one of these languages in place of the compulsory pass in one of the official languages. The requirement of a pass at the Matriculation stage in one of the official languages is one which the Native people regard, rightly or wrongly, as an absolute minimum, and as one which, taking a long range view of the matter, is entirely in their own interest. They are fully aware that this requirement places the African candidate at a disadvantage compared with the European candidate in the same examination, but this is an extra burden which they ~~find~~ are willing to assume in view of the importance of the official languages in the general life of the country. Any relaxation of the requirement would, I have no doubt, be interpreted by them, not as a concession to the Bantu candidate, as might be supposed, but as an attempt to give them a kind of inferior 'Native' Matriculation. This attitude on the part of the Bantu does not arise out of any inclination to minimise the importance of their own languages, but is based on a conviction that their position as South African nationals demands that by the time they reach the Matriculation stage in their education they should have acquired higher grade proficiency in at least one of the official languages. I am aware of the arguments advanced by the Lestrade Committee on Bantu Languages in favour of permitting candidates who take a Bantu Language on the higher grade to take the official language on the lower grade (see pp. 7-9 of their Report) and I daresay on theoretical grounds their general argument is perhaps unassailable, but I do think that view would be endorsed by Native opinion.
3. As regards the third question I should say that if a higher grade examination is instituted in these languages, the lower grade examination should be retained. In this connection I should like to point out that during the last ten years the standard of the examination in Bantu languages has, in my opinion, risen considerably and that the so-called lower grade examination in Bantu languages is probably of a higher standard than the lower grade examination in non-Bantu languages. Further it should be borne in mind that, having regard to present social and cultural background of the majority of Bantu candidates and to the fact that they must study and write all other subjects through the medium of one of the official languages, to permit the Bantu candidate to take a Bantu language on the "lower" grade can hardly be described as giving him an undue advantage over other candidates in the examination or presenting him with an opportunity to take the line of least resistance. I submit that for the Bantu candidate there is no line of least resistance in the Matriculation. I am assuming, of course, that by lower grade examination in Bantu languages is meant the present standard of the examination.

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I might say in conclusion, that a requirement which I feel sure the Bantu people would regard as unnecessary stringent as far as they are concerned, is that of a pass on the higher ^{grade} in both the official languages in addition to a pass in a Bantu language in either the higher or the lower grade, but there is nothing in your letter to indicate that this step which would overload the curriculum of the Bantu candidate with languages is contemplated.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Yours respectfully,
3. K. Matthews

I take it that when a candidate takes both an official language and a Bantu language on the higher grade he would be given credit for this in his aggregate. This could be done by inserting on p. 20 of the 1944 Calendar Handbook of the Matriculation in the paragraph dealing with positions marks assigned to each subject after "German (Higher Grade)" "Afrikaans, Zulu or Southern Sotho (Higher Grade)". Enquiries would also have to be made in the paragraph dealing with the conditions on which Matriculation candidates are accepted on p. 20, para (ii).

The necessary examination and moderation are in my opinion not only available but are steadily increasing both in numbers and in quality. On the same day as an examination of the higher grade in these Bantu languages is indicated I doubt if the native people would be prepared to accept in one of these languages in place of the compulsory examination in one of the official languages. The requirement of a pass at the higher grade is an absolute minimum and as on native people regard it only or wrongly as an absolute minimum and as on which taking the range of the latter is entirely in their own interest. They are fully aware that this requirement places the African candidate at a disadvantage compared with the European candidate in the same examination but this is an extra burden which they bear and which to assume in view of the importance of the official languages in the general life of the country, my relaxation of the requirement would have no doubt be interpreted by them, not as a concession to his disadvantage might be suggested but as an attempt to give them a kind of inferiority. This attitude on the part of the native people does not arise out of any inclination to diminish the importance of their own languages but is based on a conviction that their position as South African nationals demands that by the time they reach the Matriculation stage in their education they should have acquired higher grade proficiency in at least one of the official languages. I am aware of the arguments advanced by the Language Committee on Bantu languages in favour of permitting candidates who take a Bantu language on the higher grade to take the official language on the lower grade (see pp. 7-9 of the report) and I earnestly commend their general argument as perhaps unassailable, but I do think that view would be endorsed by native opinion. As regards the third question I should say that if a higher grade examination is instituted in these languages, the lower grade examination should be retained in this connection I should like to point out that during the last few years the standard of the examination in Bantu languages has in my opinion, risen considerably and that the social lower grade examination in Bantu languages is probably of a higher standard than the lower grade examination in non-Bantu languages. Further it should be borne in mind that having regard to present social and cultural backwardness of the majority of Bantu candidates and to the fact that they must study and write all their subjects through the medium of one of the official languages, to permit the Bantu candidate to take a Bantu language on the "lower" grade can hardly be described as giving him an advantage over other candidates in the examination or placing him with an opportunity to take the time of least resistance in the Matriculation. The Bantu candidate there is no line of least resistance in the Matriculation. I am submitting of course, that of lower grade examination in Bantu languages is meant the present standard of the examination.