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Revisiting the Challenges of Teaching and Learning Indigenous South African Languages

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ABSTRACT

Whereas South Africa has made significant strides after the official end of colonialism and apartheid in 1994 concerning the advancement of indigenous South African languages, there are observable challenges that demonstrate endurance even in the post-colonial and post-apartheid contexts. In particular, there are enduring challenges in the teaching and learning of these languages within the basic and higher education system. With this view in mind, the aim herein is to explore and discuss four noteworthy challenges that obstruct the optimal teaching and learning of indigenous languages in the South African context. It must be noted that this article concentrates on indigenous South African languages in general, and not specific ones. The objective is to uncover and sensitize the language and education policymakers as well as affected stakeholders such as parents, learners, and students that challenges in the context of language in education exhibit determination, hence the necessity to scholarly revisit them in a bid to solicit reasonable solutions to the conundrum. The four noteworthy challenges, which are discussed in the body of this scholarly discourse, are recognized as a source of discussion. The findings and discussion underline that challenges within the language in education in the South African context are multifaceted. One of these challenges could be pinned on colonial and apartheid legacies that appraised oppressive languages to the detriment of indigenous South African languages and dialects. In fact, the Bantu Education Act of 1953 is implicated in this article as one of the principal drivers of the subjugation of these languages. In the same vein, this article implicates some post-colonial and post-apartheid perceptions towards the subjugation of these vernacular languages. The closing remarks highlight the necessity to recurrently debate challenges of indigenous languages within the

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educational system.

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1. Contextual background and introduction

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, henceforth) (2022), recognizes the noteworthiness of indigenous languages globally, including those in Africa. UNESCO's efforts are aligned with its mandate to promote linguistic heterogeneity,[1] cultural heritage and the rights of indigenous peoples. In 2019, UNESCO declared it the International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYIL) to raise consciousness about the endangered and undervalued status of many indigenous languages around the world, including in Africa. Some of these endangered and undervalued languages across the African continent include the Koisan, Ongota and Hadza (Diko, 2023). The IYIL aimed to advance effective actions and policies that could safeguard and revitalize these languages. In the same vein, UNESCO (2022) underlines the importance of providing education in a child's vernacular language. This approach helps to improve learning outcomes, preserve linguistic multiplicity and guarantee that indigenous knowledge that is profoundly interwoven in indigenous languages is passed down to younger generations. In the main, UNESCO (2022) advocates for multilingual education that values and includes indigenous languages alongside official languages. This approach helps to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps in education systems. On the grounds of these scholarly assertions, we argue that UNESCO's emphasis on indigenous languages not only advances linguistic diversity but also solidifies social inclusion, ensuring that underprivileged communities can fully participate in educational and cultural life. Similarly, by blending indigenous languages into formal education systems, UNESCO (2022) supports the preservation of traditional knowledge systems, which are fundamental for sustaining biodiversity, cultural heritage, and local innovations.

Whereas this is the case, the South African context is engulfed with several challenges regarding the teaching and learning of indigenous South African languages (Heugh, 2002; Ndebele, 2022). As a result of this challenge, it stands to reason that challenges concerning the teaching and learning of indigenous South African languages delay UNESCO's vision and aim which seeks to promote the recognition and appraisal of these languages within the basic and higher education systems. For instance, there is a rural community in South Africa popularly known as the community of amaMpondo—this is a sub-ethnic group of the amaXhosa main ethnic group. [2] This local population predominantly speaks an indigenous language known as isiMpondo. However, due to historical subjugation and challenges of language hegemony, limited resources, and a lack of trained teachers proficient in isiMpondo, the community's schools primarily conduct classes in the English language, which is not the mother tongue of the learners of this ethnic group (Sibanda, 2019). This is enough to indicate that, indeed, challenges with the teaching and learning of indigenous languages, including their dialects in South Africa are profoundly rooted in historical concerns and are multifaceted. Regarding the aforementioned example, many learners may struggle to grasp and comprehend complex concepts in a language they are not fully proficient in, leading to lower educational attainment and dropout rates (Sesan and Ibiyemi, 2023). Ultimately, this may propagate a cycle of disadvantage and contribute to educational disparities. In addition to these challenges, the marginalization of indigenous South African languages and dialects like isiMpondo, among others, also erodes cultural identity, as learners and students are distanced from the linguistic and cultural legacy that forms a vital component of their community's knowledge system. Above all, the lack of institutional support and effective policy implementation for indigenous language instruction intensifies linguistic imbalance, undermining concerted efforts to achieve inclusive

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[1]Heterogeneity refers to the quality or state of being diverse or composed of different elements, components or characteristics. It is the opposite of homogeneity, which implies uniformity or similarity. Heterogeneity in terms of language refers to the presence of significant variation within a particular language, context, ethnicity or language community.

[2]It is important to notice that amaXhosa are one of the main indigenous peoples in South Africa, while isiXhosa is the standard or official language of this ethnic group. Within this main ethnic group (amaXhosa), there are sub-ethnic groups, and amaMpondo are one of them. The language spoken by amaMpondo is an indigenous dialect called isiMpondo.

education that truly reflects South Africa's linguistic and cultural plurality.

It stands to reason, therefore, to further argue that by not fully and comprehensively using indigenous South African languages and their dialects as a medium of instruction, the South African education system inadvertently distances learners and students from their cultural roots, as indigenous languages carry with them cultural nuances, expressions and historical narratives that are typically lost in translation when foreign languages are considered (Christian and Sayed, 2023). By the same token, without formal education in indigenous South African languages, younger generations may not develop formidable language skills. This suggests that if there is no structured and organized system of education that teaches indigenous South African languages to younger generations, these young individuals may not become proficient or skilled in speaking, reading, writing, and understanding these languages. Subsequently, this threatens the survival of the very same languages, as fewer people are able to use and pass them on to future generations. Moreover, the exclusion of indigenous South African languages from the educational curriculum risks dismissing their academic and intellectual value, as learners and students may come to perceive them as irrelevant to formal education and modern knowledge production. This view means that, without institutional support for these languages, the development of critical and specialized vocabulary in fields like science, technology, and law is hindered, further marginalizing indigenous languages and limiting their ability to adapt and thrive in contemporary contexts.

With this contextual background in mind, it is clear that challenges with the teaching and learning of indigenous South African languages could be regarded as enormous, thus, there is a necessity for a continued scholarly discourse and revisit. On the grounds of this reality, the principal aim of this article is to comprehensively identify, examine, and provide insights into the multifaceted challenges regarding the teaching and learning of indigenous South African languages within the educational landscape, with the ultimate goal of informing targeted strategies and policies to enhance language education, cultural preservation and unprejudiced access to quality education for all. The significance of this scholarly discourse lies in the reality that indigenous South African languages are fundamental to the ethnological identity of South African communities. Considering this claim, by discoursing the challenges in teaching and learning these languages, reasonable and concerted efforts, in addition to the existing ones, could be made to preserve cultural pedigree, traditions, and knowledge systems that are passed down through language. Over and above this view, it is perceptive to bear in mind that South Africa has eleven spoken official languages as well as the South African Sign Language (SASL) (Dada et al., 2023). The spoken official languages, in no particular order, are isiZulu, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, isiXhosa, Siswati, Southern Sotho, Northern Sotho, Setswana, isiNdebele, English and Afrikaans. Nevertheless, the English and Afrikaans languages are hegemonic or dominant languages that continue to enjoy more educational stature because of their colonial and apartheid legacies that officialized them at the expense of the nine indigenous South African languages (Diko, 2023). Effectively, the continued romanticism of these two colonial and apartheid languages underlines the reality that the South African education system is still grappling with challenges of complete and successful veneration of vernacular languages. On account of this concern, the next section is concerned with the review of existing literature in an attempt to acknowledge the strides that have been made by other scholars, and later address an identified gap. This is presented in the next section.

2. Literature review: what has been done?

The teaching and learning of indigenous languages in South Africa hold significant cultural, social, and educational importance. Despite this reality, this endeavor is fraught with multifaceted challenges that obstruct effective language instruction. In this literature review, we aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges surrounding the teaching of indigenous South African languages, delving into historical, linguistic and pedagogical dimensions. South Africa's rich linguistic and cultural landscape comprises numerous indigenous languages as previously mentioned, each carrying centuries-old cultural and historical significance. The post-apartheid era has seen increased concerted efforts to promote and teach these languages (Zano and Mbirimi-Hungwe, 2023), yet persistent challenges continue to impede progress toward these efforts. For instance, the

post-apartheid government in South Africa has implemented language policies to promote linguistic diversity and multi-lingualism within education. This includes recognizing all official languages, offering language instruction in schools, and encouraging the use of indigenous languages as mediums of instruction in the early years of education (Ndhlovu, 2008). However, it is important to accept that these policies and concerted efforts frequently face practical limitations, such as insufficient teacher training, lack of appropriate teaching materials, and inadequate support for schools in effectively implementing indigenous language instruction. Over and above these claims, the hegemony of English and Afrikaans in higher education and the broader socio-economic sphere further sidelines indigenous languages, creating a tension between policy intentions and the realities on the ground.

In particular, Musengi (2023) claims that the linguistic multiplicity within indigenous South African languages presents intricate concerns for both learners and students as well as educators. This denotes that many indigenous South African languages are tonal and feature complex grammatical structures that differ significantly from Western and European languages such as German, French, and Spanish. These linguistic disparities recurrently result in difficulties in pronunciation, grammatical acquisition, and comprehension (Gwerevende and Mthombeni, 2023). Over and above this indication, the lack of standardized orthographies and resources obstructs consistent teaching and learning practices. That is the reason Pule and Theledi (2023) propose the necessity for tailored teaching strategies that consider these linguistic intricacies. Fundamentally, by acknowledging linguistic intricacies, educators potentially create teaching strategies that align with the language proficiency and cultural backgrounds of their learners and students, leading to improved comprehension and academic success (Yang, 2008). In contrast to this assertion, tailored teaching and learning strategies support the preservation of indigenous South African languages, which are essential components of cultural identity and heritage. They can help prevent language erasure and promote language revitalization efforts. Accordingly, by addressing the linguistic complexities inherent in indigenous South African languages, educators develop more effective, culturally responsive teaching strategies that bridge the gap between these languages and Western ones such as German, French, and Spanish. These tailored interventions not only

enhance learners' and students' understanding and academic success but also play a central role in preserving the linguistic and cultural plurality of South Africa, contributing to the broader goals of language revitalization and preventing the erosion of indigenous identities.

Furthermore, Mavuru and Ramnarain (2020) indicate that effective language teaching relies on appropriate pedagogical strategies. Having said this, the stringency of trained educators proficient in indigenous South African languages is a significant obstacle. In many cases, educators lack the necessary language skills to instruct in the languages they are assigned, resorting to code-switching or teaching in a hegemonic language such as the English medium of instruction (Maluleke, 2019). This then undermines the immersive learning experience crucial for language acquisition. In fact, the conventional teacher-centered approach continually fails to engage learners actively in language acquisition (Mavuru and Ramnarain, 2020). In parallel to this declaration, the use of code-switching under illogical circumstances may prove to be problematic as it undermines the goal of preserving and promoting indigenous South African languages, impairs the immersive language learning experience and normalizes the dominance of colonial languages, potentially propagating a cycle of language erasure and cultural assimilation. It is clear then that addressing the absence of trained educators proficient in indigenous South African languages is crucial to overcoming the reliance on code-switching and the dominance of hegemonic languages like English in classroom contexts. Without adequately trained educators and immersive teaching strategies, the goals of language intellectualization and promotion are compromised, further exacerbating the marginalization of indigenous languages and perpetuating a cycle of cultural assimilation and language erosion.

What is additionally significant to observe is that the challenges regarding the teaching of indigenous South African languages signify the decay in the education system. Reagan (2008) makes it clear that the challenges surrounding the teaching of indigenous languages in South Africa hold profound significance, reproducing not only the complexities of language education but also the broader socio-cultural and historical subtleties of the nation. This specifies that these challenges are emblematic of the intricate interplay between language, identity, education, and social nonpartisanship, ultimately shaping the trajectory of linguistic diversity and

cultural preservation within the country—South Africa. At its core, the struggle to effectively teach and learn indigenous South African languages signifies the enduring legacy of historical injustices, with special reference to colonialism and apartheid. For example, during the apartheid era, policies of linguistic assimilation and segregation subjugated these languages, establishing a linguistic hierarchy that positioned Western and European languages, particularly English and Afrikaans, as superior and relegating indigenous languages to inferior positions. The consequences of this historical oppression are far-reaching, contributing to the erosion of linguistic competence and cultural legacy. The challenges faced in language instruction are a direct manifestation of this legacy, mirroring the uphill battle to undo decades of exclusion. Therefore, the challenges surrounding the teaching and learning of indigenous South African languages are not merely educational concerns but mirror a broader systemic decay established in historical injustices. The continued oppression of these languages, a lingering effect of colonialism and apartheid, drives social inequalities and inhibits linguistic diversity and cultural preservation. Thus, the uphill battle to reverse decades of exclusion from mainstream education underscores the urgent demand to confront these intertwined socio-cultural, historical, and educational challenges to promote legitimate and reasonable linguistic inclusivity and cultural resurgence in South Africa.

In addition to these scholarly debates, Madima et al. (2023) underscore that during the apartheid era in South Africa, language policies were systematically employed by the national government to buttress racial segregation, oppress certain ethnic groups, and maintain political control. Specifically, Black ethnic groups were oppressed on the basis of racial segregation (Ngarava et al., 2022). One prominent language policy of the apartheid period in South Africa was the Bantu Education Act of 1953. This policy had profound and lasting effects on the education system and the linguistic setting of the country. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 was a bedrock of apartheid language policy, aiming to provide separate and disproportionate education for different racial groups, particularly targeting Black South Africans (Lin and Okyere, 2023). This particular act was designed to establish autonomous educational systems for various ethnic groups, each with its own curriculum and language of instruction (Beukes, 2009). The intention behind this policy

was to advance social hierarchies and prevent the rise of an educated Black population that could challenge the apartheid regime. For these reasons, we argue that the apartheid-era language policies were not merely educational frameworks but tools of systemic oppression designed to greatly entrench racial segregation and suppress Black ethnic groups. In other words, by enforcing separate and unequal education systems with distinct languages of instruction, these policies aimed to preserve the apartheid regime's social hierarchies and curtail the potential for an educated Black population to challenge the political status quo. The lasting effects of these policies continue to shape the educational and linguistic scenery in South Africa today, obstructing concerted efforts toward equality and linguistic revitalization.

Specifically, under the Bantu Education Act of 1953, schools for Black South Africans were severely underfunded compared to schools for White learners (Collins, 2017). This resulted in inadequate facilities, outdated resources, and overcrowded classrooms (Mills and Gale, 2007). Among other issues, teachers were recurrently underqualified and overworked. The curriculum for Black learners was deliberately designed to provide basic education and vocational training, rather than the academic education available to White learners. What is further important to observe is that this act mandated that instruction should also occur in the learners' and students' indigenous languages (Shepherd, 1955). However, while the policy might seem on the surface to promote the use of indigenous languages, it was implemented in a way that aimed to maintain the subservient position of Black South Africans and their ancestral languages. This means that although the Bantu Education Act of 1953 may have had certain objectives or policies that appeared to support the use of indigenous South African languages, the actual execution and application of the policy were done in a manner that had a different, often detrimental, effect. In this case, the implementation of the policy aimed to maintain the subservient or inferior status of Black South Africans, despite any surface-level claims or intentions that suggested otherwise. Essentially, the way the policy was put into practice and operation contradicted its stated goals.

In view of these scholarly pronouncements, the curriculum emphasized labor and practical skills rather than critical thinking and academic excellence, deterring the potential for social mobility and advancement for Black learners and

students. Over and above this fact, the policy contributed to the fragmentation of linguistic communities, as different ethnic groups were educated in different languages, obstructing cross-cultural understanding and collaboration (Phillips, 1999). Thus, the Bantu Education Act of 1953 faced significant resistance and criticism from the Black community, as well as from some White educators who recognized its detrimental impact (Khumalo, 2022). In the end, learners and educators protested against this policy in the 1976 Soweto Uprising, advocating for equal and quality education regardless of race. Despite this observation, these efforts were met with severe repression by the colonial and apartheid governments (Ndhlovu, 2008; Khumalo, 2022). Ultimately, the legacy of the Bantu Education Act of 1953 is still felt in South Africa. This is because of the unequal education system that contributed to social and economic disparities that persist in post-apartheid and post-colonial South Africa. The policy disrupted the transmission of indigenous languages and cultural knowledge, leading to language shifts and loss in some communities. On the grounds of these views, concerted efforts to address these challenges and promote educational equality remain ongoing. The next section concentrates on the data that underpins this scholarly discourse owing to the reality that there are challenges with the teaching and learning of indigenous South African languages in the post-colonial and post-apartheid contexts.

3. Data

This article uses only four concerns as its primary sources of data to discuss challenges concerning the teaching and learning of indigenous South African languages. It must be underlined that there is no empirical data associated with this scholarly discourse; thus, the four preferred concerns regarding the phenomenon of interest are used to advance the deliberations. Further to this, there is no experimental design herein for the very reason that there is no empirical data associated with this article. This suggests that the article is conceptual in nature, relying purely on qualitative inquiry and argumentative process. A qualitative inquiry is a qualitative research technique used to explore and understand complex phenomena, recurrently focusing on the depth and richness of human experiences (Meixner and Spitzner, 2023). This research technique involves gathering and examining non-numerical data, concepts, terms, interviews, observations, case studies, or textual materials, to uncover underlying meanings, patterns, and insights (Dube et al., 2023). Qualitative research inquiries underscore context, subjective interpretations, and the researcher's role in shaping the research process to gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon of interest.

The four challenges that are used as a source of data hereunder have been preferred as one among many contributing factors that adversely affect the teaching and learning of indigenous South African languages. The first one is socio-economic imbalance. The reason to consider this factor is that many indigenous languages are spoken in rural or economically underprivileged areas, where schools continue to lack basic infrastructure, qualified teachers, and access to technology (Opabola et al., 2023). The second one is globalization and urbanization. This is against the reality that as South Africa becomes more urbanized and connected to the global economy, there is a propensity for younger generations to prioritize learning languages with greater economic and global relevance, such as English. This can lead to a decline in interest and proficiency in indigenous South African languages such as isiXhosa, among others. The third challenge is that some parents tend to regard indigenous languages as having limited economic value and may prefer their children to be educated in global languages like English to amplify their job prospects. This can lead to a generational gap in language transmission. The fourth issue is language policy implementation. Whereas South Africa has a progressive language policy that recognizes the importance of indigenous languages, there are challenges in effectively implementing these policies at the regional and local levels. One example of a progressive language policy in South Africa is the promotion and recognition of South African Sign Language (SASL, henceforth) as one of the country's official languages. In 2018, South Africa officially declared SASL as its twelfth official language, alongside spoken languages. This recognition acknowledges the linguistic and cultural rights of the Deaf community in South Africa, promoting inclusivity and accessibility in various domains, including education and public services. It also represents a significant step towards recognizing and preserving the linguistic diversity of the country.

One example of a factor that has delayed effective lan-

guage policy implementation in South Africa is the complexity and multiplicity of the linguistic landscape in the country. South Africa recognizes twelve official languages, including the SASL, each with its own unique linguistic and cultural considerations, as previously mentioned. Coordinating language policies and resources to provide equitable access to education and services in all these languages is challenging, leading to delays and difficulties in implementation (Nomlomo, 2010). Additionally, historical inequalities and disparities in language proficiency and resources further complicate the process of effectively implementing language policies that cater to all linguistic communities. Inevitably, the complexity and multiplicity of South Africa's linguistic scenery, with twelve official languages including SASL, present significant challenges for the effective implementation of language policies. Unequivocally, coordinating resources and policies to guarantee equitable access to education and services across all these languages is inherently difficult, intensified by historical imbalances and disparities in language proficiency and resources, which further hinder the achievement of comprehensive and inclusive language policy implementation.

Using issues or topics such as the four preferred ones as a primary source of data is a qualitative research technique that comprises discussing and scrutinizing data directly related to the specific subject matter or concern (Ravn, 2023). As briefly outlined previously, this qualitative research technique is employed to gain perspectives into particular issues such as language in education. It encompasses discoursing various components of the subject matter or phenomenon to discern the nuances and patterns surrounding a given topic. Consequently, this technique provides a direct window into public discourse and perceptions around specific concerns, as in the case of indigenous South African languages versus education. Bearing the four concerns in mind and noting that they are subsumed under qualitative research technique, it is similarly important to be mindful that discussing issues of indigenous languages and education is crucial for preserving ancestral heritage, promoting linguistic variation, and ensuring impartial access to quality education for all. These discussions illuminate the challenges faced by indigenous communities in maintaining their languages within educational systems, buttressing intercultural understanding, and empowering oppressed groups. Addressing these concerns

could contribute to cultural revitalization, inclusive education, and the overall enrichment of societies through the recognition and appreciation of diverse linguistic and cultural traditional systems. With these scholarly debates in mind, the next section concentrates on the findings and discussion to shed light on the phenomenon of interest.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1 Socio-econimic imbalances

Socio-economic imbalances exert a significant influence on language education, particularly in the context of indigenous languages. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in South Africa, where numerous indigenous languages such as Xitsonga, isiZulu, and many more are spoken, recurrently in rural or economically disadvantaged areas. This includes indigenous languages that may not be known as one may recall that some indigenous languages exist somewhere, but there is nothing that is known about them. The impact of socio-economic inequalities on language education is far-reaching, affecting the availability of resources, teacher quality, and technological access, which collectively impede effective language instruction and prolong educational imbalances. In many rural or economically destitute areas of South Africa, schools continually lack the basic infrastructure necessary for quality education (Padayachee, 2017). For example, buildings may be poorly maintained, lacking proper ventilation, lighting, and sanitation facilities. This physical environment could directly affect the learning experience of learners, creating an unwelcoming atmosphere that hampers their engagement and motivation to learn. In addition to this score, incommensurable infrastructure could obstruct the implementation of effective language education strategies, as classrooms may not be equipped with the necessary materials for teaching and practicing indigenous languages. These materials could include language textbooks, workbooks, reading materials, audiovisual resources, and language-specific learning aids. Without access to these materials, educators potentially face challenges in delivering engaging and comprehensive language instruction, obstructing learners' language acquisition and comprehension (Barbarin and Aikens, 2015).

By the same token, qualified educators are essential for providing effective language instruction, but socio-economic

disparities recurrently lead to challenges in attracting and retaining skilled educators in rural and underprivileged areas in the South African context (Marishane, 2013). In these areas, educators face substandard working conditions, lower salaries, and limited professional development opportunities compared to their urban counterparts. As a result of this challenge, many qualified teachers may prefer to work in urban areas where they may enjoy better working conditions and higher compensation. Concerning this reality, it is further argued herein that this "brain drain" exacerbates the shortage of competent indigenous language teachers in the very same communities that need them most. Access to technology is another critical component of modern education, yet it is frequently incommensurate in rural and economically disadvantaged areas in South Africa (Kyobe, 2011). Bearing this assertion in mind, it is significant to discern that technology advances indigenous language learning through interactive tools, online resources, and digital content if and when integrated appropriately. Having said this, without access to computers, tablets, or the internet, learners and students in these areas are denied the benefits of technology-mediated language education. As a result of this shortcoming, we argue that this technology gap widens the educational divide between urban and rural learners and students, limiting the latter's exposure to effective language learning strategies. Therefore, it ought to be accepted that the socio-economic disparities that deter the attraction and retention of qualified educators, particularly in rural and underprivileged areas, significantly impact the quality of indigenous language instruction in South Africa.

Examples from South Africa vividly illustrate these challenges. In remote rural communities where indigenous languages like isiXhosa or siSwati are spoken, schools frequently struggle with dilapidated infrastructure and a lack of learning materials in these languages (Bush et al., 2010). On the one hand, trained teachers who are fluent in indigenous languages are continually scarce (Nicholls, 2005), leading to a lack of credence for non-native speakers to instruct in these languages. In addition to this view, the absence of technology in many rural schools hampers innovative language education approaches and denies learners and students access to language learning platforms and digital resources. In a nutshell, the impact of socio-economic imbalances on indigenous South African language education is profound and multifaceted. As aforementioned, the lack of adequate infrastructure, qualified educators, and access to technology in rural and economically underprivileged areas directly disempowers the effective teaching and learning of indigenous South African languages. To address this concern, comprehensive strategies are required that prioritize reasonable resource allocation, professional development for educators, and the integration of technology in language education. Only through targeted efforts to bridge these gaps could South Africa ensure that all learners and students, regardless of their socio-economic background, have the opportunity to learn and appreciate their ancestors' languages. It is evident, therefore, that driving equitable indigenous language education in South Africa requires a sustained commitment to addressing these structural imbalances, ensuring that no community or ethnic group is left behind in the intellectualization and revitalization of its linguistic and cultural legacy.

4.2 Globalization and urbanization

As South Africa sustains rapid urbanization and integration into the global economy, there is a discernible relocation in language preferences among younger generations (Nyati-Saleshando, 2016). English, as a language with substantial economic and global significance, has gained prominence in the South African context like elsewhere in the global village. Having said this, this relocation comes at a cost, potentially leading to a diminished interest in and proficiency with indigenous languages. This problematic phenomenon underscores the intricate interplay between economic opportunities, globalization, and the preservation of cultural and linguistic heritage. One would recall that urbanization brings with it increased access to educational and economic opportunities, which are habitually conjoined to proficiency in globally recognized languages such as English. Diko (2022) confirms this claim in that young people in urban areas of South Africa recognize that English proficiency amplifies their employability in sectors like business, technology, and international relations. On account of this reality, they prioritize learning English as a means to secure better career prospects and navigate a globalized job market. For example, in Johannesburg and Cape Town Cities of South Africa, major urban centers, the demand for English language skills is high due to the concentration of multinational corporations and international organizations. This then highlights

the compelling necessity for many young men and women to make significant strides to proficiently understand the English language. In essence, as South Africa experiences rapid urbanization and greater integration into the global economy, the prioritization of English among younger generations increasingly overshadows indigenous languages, reflecting a shift driven by economic pragmatism. While English proficiency undeniably enhances employability and access to global opportunities, this trend poses a threat to the preservation of South Africa's rich linguistic diversity, as the younger population places less emphasis on maintaining fluency in indigenous languages.

In contrast to the above score, indigenous South African languages may be perceived as having minimal economic utility, particularly in urban settings where English is the lingua franca of business and administration. Evidently, as young people align their educational and linguistic choices with economic ambitions, indigenous South African languages might be relegated to informal or familial contexts, leading to a decline in their usage and proficiency. For instance, in urban South African schools, English is continually the primary medium of instruction, inadvertently downplaying indigenous South African languages and contributing to a generational gap in language transmission. Over and above this view, the global connectivity facilitated by the internet and digital platforms further magnifies the allure of learning English. This is against the background that young people acknowledge that English proficiency opens doors to online information, resources, and networks, enriching their personal and professional lives. This trend is evident in the popularity of online courses and platforms that offer English language learning opportunities, creating a self-perpetuating cycle where English dominance is fortified in the South African millie (Xue and Zuo, 2013).

While economic and global factors drive the prioritization of colonial and apartheid languages in South Africa, the decline in interest and proficiency in indigenous South African languages has profound ethnological implications. Some of these implications include the loss of interest in specializing in indigenous languages at the postgraduate level of the university or college (Khawaja, 2021). Thus, indigenous South African languages encapsulate cultural heritage, traditions, and identity. They are vessels of exclusive philosophies, narratives, and local knowledge that contribute to the rich tapestry of South African society. In fact, the erosion of proficiency in indigenous languages accelerates intergenerational connections, undermines cultural understanding, and degrades the transmission of traditional wisdom. For instance, the indigenous Khoisan languages, which hold immense cultural value, are at risk of disappearing due to the limited number of speakers and the lack of formal educational opportunities (Brown and Deumert, 2017). It stands to reason, therefore, to argue that the deficit in the number of speakers of the indigenous Khoisan languages adversely affects the teaching and learning of these languages in the African education system, including that of South Africa. Other indigenous South African languages are no exception to this conundrum. Accordingly, the prioritization of colonial and apartheid languages over indigenous South African languages not only threatens linguistic variations but also erodes the cultural foundations upon which these languages are built. As indigenous languages lose prominence, the transmission of cultural knowledge, identity, and traditions diminishes, adversely impacting not only the speakers of Khoisan but also other indigenous languages across the nation. This decline in language proficiency at educational institutions further undermines the preservation of South Africa's unique heritage, signaling a demand for a renewed focus on the promotion and intellectualization of indigenous languages in both academic and social contexts.

Efforts to counteract this decline, bearing in mind the increasing urbanization as well as globalization, should involve finding a delicate balance between economic pursuits and cultural preservation. For example, policies that promote multilingual education could embolden young people to acquire both English proficiency and a strong foundation in their indigenous South African languages. For instance, the Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP) acknowledges the importance of multilingualism and seeks to promote it in the education system. It recognizes twelve official languages and encourages the development of teaching and learning materials in these languages. The policy supports the use of learners' home languages as a medium of instruction in the early years of education to facilitate better understanding (Mpanza, 2023). This is the reason it is further argued herein that communities, schools, and institutions of higher learning ought to work multicollaboratively to create engaging language programs that highlight the cultural and cognitive

merits of maintaining indigenous languages. In the same vein, cultural events, storytelling, and literature in indigenous languages could reignite interest and pride among the younger generations. Conclusively, the evolving linguistic landscape of South Africa, influenced by urbanization and globalization, underscores the necessity for comprehensive strategies. While the economic and global relevance of English and other foreign languages is undeniable, the potential paucity of interest and proficiency in indigenous languages poses a significant challenge to cultural preservation and intergenerational connectivity. This is the reason striking a balance between economic opportunities and cultural heritage is essential to guarantee that future generations embrace their linguistic multiplicity while navigating the demands of a globalized world.

4.3 Parental attitudes

The perception of indigenous South African languages as having limited economic value and the preference for children to be educated in languages like English to enhance job prospects are significant challenges with far-reaching consequences, particularly in the context of indigenous communities (Maake, 1991; Hermess, 2012). This phenomenon could lead to a generational gap in language transmission, impacting cultural identity, intergenerational communication, and the preservation of linguistic lineage. In many South African societies, language is intricately interwoven with economic opportunities. As a result of this fact, parents recurrently desire the best possible future for their children, which frequently involves access to quality education and stable employment. Nevertheless, this inclination collides with the preservation of indigenous South African languages. English, as a global lingua franca and often the language of education, business, and administration, is routinely regarded as a trajectory to better jobs, career advancement, and economic success. Consequently, certain parents tend to honor and celebrate English education over indigenous languages. Therefore, the perception that indigenous South African languages hold limited economic value, combined with the preference for English education, poses a significant threat to the intellectualization of these languages within indigenous contexts. While parents understandably seek better opportunities for their children through English proficiency,

this trend creates a generational disconnect, weakening the transmission of cultural identity and downplaying the linguistic heritage that is crucial to sustaining indigenous knowledge and traditions. However, it must be noted that the challenge lies in balancing the pursuit of economic success with the intellectualization of cultural and linguistic diversity.

For instance, consider a hypothetical indigenous community in a developing country like South Africa. The parents of a young child might decide to send their child to a school where the medium of instruction is English, assuming that it will provide them with access to broader economic opportunities beyond their local community. This decision is made with the intention of securing the child's economic future, given the perception that proficiency in English is a valuable skill in the job market. However, this mindset results in several inadvertent consequences, including the widening of the generational language gap. As children receive their education primarily in English or Afrikaans, they might become more proficient in the two languages than in their own inborn indigenous South African language.[3] This proficiency imbalance leads to difficulties in communicating with older generations who might not be as fluent in English or Afrikaans. Ultimately, traditional knowledge, cultural stories, and intergenerational conversations, often passed down through indigenous languages, may be distorted and erased.

In the same vein, the generational gap in language transmission could have broader societal impacts as well. Indigenous languages are carriers of unique cultural philosophies, values, and worldviews that are often lost in translation. This suggests that without a strong command of the indigenous language, younger generations might struggle to fully understand and appreciate their ethnological heritage, leading to a potential erosion of traditional mores and a disconnect from their roots. To address this challenge, a balanced approach is required. While accepting the importance of economic opportunities and proficiency in widely spoken or colonial languages, concerted efforts should also be made to integrate indigenous South African languages into education systems, that is, both basic and higher. Bilingual or multilingual education models, where learners and students are educated in their indigenous language and a dominant language like English, could help bridge the gap. This approach guarantees that learners and students maintain a strong connection to

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[3]It must be noted that Afrikaans language is referred to in this context as an additional language.

their cultural identity while also acquiring skills relevant to the modern world.

In essence, South Africa's linguistic diversity, with twelve official languages, does present a significant challenge in terms of education and language policy implementation. Incorporating non-official indigenous languages into the education system further complicates matters, particularly when it comes to resource allocation, curriculum development, and ensuring equitable access to quality education for all language communities. Balancing the promotion of linguistic diversity with practical considerations is a complex task that requires careful planning, investment, and ongoing efforts to address historical disparities in education. It spotlights the need for comprehensive and inclusive language policies that take into account the diverse linguistic landscape of the country while also addressing the practical challenges associated with implementation.

4.4 Language policy implementation

South Africa's progressive language policy, which acknowledges the significance of indigenous languages, mirrors the country's commitment to cultural diversity, inclusivity, and linguistic rights. However, translating these policy intentions into effective implementation at the regional and local levels is a complex endeavor with various challenges and nuances. One major challenge lies in the multiplicity of languages spoken across South Africa. With eleven spoken official languages and numerous dialects, the country's linguistic setting is intricate. This multiplicity makes it challenging to create standardized curricula, teaching materials, and assessment methodologies that cater to the demands of each linguistic group. For instance, a language policy that aims to provide education in indigenous South African languages must navigate the variations and preferences within these languages, requiring careful planning and adaptation.

Regional disparities in infrastructure and resources further complicate language implementation efforts. While urban areas might have better access to qualified educators, technological resources, and educational facilities, rural and economically underprivileged regions constantly lack these privileges. This disparity in resources negatively affects the quality of education in indigenous languages and could propagate educational disproportion. For example, a policy promoting mother-tongue education in rural communities

might face challenges in recruiting and retaining skilled educators. This is against the reality that most educators prefer urban areas (Boyd et al., 2005). Over and above this aspect, while the language policy may prioritize indigenous languages, societal attitudes, and perceptions may undermine its effectiveness. This may well align with the previously mentioned idea that many parents consider proficiency in English or other hegemonic languages as essential for their children's future economic prospects. This preference often stems from the perception that proficiency in indigenous languages offers limited professional opportunities. Consequently, indigenous languages might not be given the same level of emphasis and value, resulting in limited demand for education in these languages.

To illustrate this idea, consider a scenario where a language policy promotes the use of Xitsonga as the medium of instruction in primary schools. In urban areas, parents who aspire for their children to enter higher education or pursue prestigious careers may favor English-medium education, believing it offers better prospects. This societal preference for hegemonic languages could devalue the language policy's success, particularly in regions where indigenous languages are perceived as less economically advantageous. Conversely, effective language policy implementation necessitates a well-trained teaching workforce that is proficient in both the indigenous South African language(s) and the required teaching strategies. In any event, recruiting and training teachers who meet these criteria could be a substantial challenge. This is especially veritable when there is a dearth of standardized language curricula and training programs that address the unique linguistic and cultural contexts of each indigenous group. For instance, a policy that aims to train educators in a specific indigenous language might struggle to find sufficient resources and expertise. In essence, South Africa's progressive language policy that recognizes the importance of indigenous South African languages is a significant step towards preserving cultural heritage and promoting linguistic diversity. However, the challenges in effectively implementing these language policies at the regional and local levels are substantial. Thus, addressing these setbacks requires tailored approaches that consider linguistic diversity, resource disparities, societal attitudes, and teacher training. Overcoming these obstacles is crucial to realizing the policy's goals of providing equitable, culturally sensitive,

and quality education in indigenous languages. With these scholarly dialogues in mind, it is imperative to observe the concluding remarks, hence the next final section.

5. Conclusion

Challenges concerning the teaching and learning of indigenous South African languages mirror a critical and multifaceted challenge that touches upon ethnological preservation, education equity, linguistic multiplicity, social cohesion, and consciousness. The journey to address these challenges is intricate, but it is one that holds immense significance for the future of South Africa's cultural identity and inclusive development. The preservation of indigenous languages is not solely a linguistic concern; it is intricately interwoven with the preservation of cultural heritage and identity. Having said that, these languages serve as vessels for ancestral knowledge, traditional mores, and historical narratives that form the foundation of various communities. As these languages face the risk of being distorted, so too does the intricate web of cultural meanings and connections that they carry. Within this framework, by addressing the challenges of teaching and learning these languages, South Africa takes a vital step towards safeguarding the rich tapestry of its ancestry.

Over and above this view, the challenges in teaching and learning indigenous South African languages are inextricably linked to issues of equity in education. On account of this reality, every child has the right to an education that is culturally sensitive and empowers them to succeed. When indigenous South African languages are excluded from the education system, it perpetuates disparities in learning outcomes and contributes to subjugation. Thus, by effectively overcoming these challenges, South Africa could make significant parades towards achieving educational balance, enabling every learner and student to realize their full potential regardless of their linguistic background. Furthermore, linguistic variation is a wellspring of strength for any society. Indigenous languages such as isiXhosa, among others, embody unique perspectives, idiomatic expressions, and ways of understanding the world. They contribute to a pluralistic discourse that encourages intercultural understanding and collaboration. Nevertheless, the challenges faced in their teaching hinder the broader societal benefits of embracing this variegation. Addressing these challenges is, thus, a

step towards advancing unity amidst diversity, as individuals from different linguistic backgrounds could come together in meaningful ways to engage, learn, and share.

While the challenges are formidable, South Africa's commitment to addressing them is evident through initiatives aimed at enhancing teacher training, developing appropriate curricula, and increasing consciousness about the cultural and economic value of indigenous languages. Community involvement, technological innovations, and cross-sector collaborations are also contributing to the collective effort to surmount these obstacles. Therefore, by channeling resources and energies towards these potential solutions, South Africa cannot only ensure the survival of its linguistic and cultural heritage but also lay the groundwork for a more inclusive, knowledgeable, and harmonious future. In a nutshell, the challenges with the teaching and learning of indigenous South African languages encapsulate more than just linguistic struggles, rather, they encapsulate a profound quest for identity, equity, and unity. In this regard, by navigating through these challenges, South Africa not only uplifts its indigenous languages but also solidifies its foundation as a nation that celebrates its diversity while striving for a common future. As each challenge is met with determination and innovation, the path towards a brighter educational and cultural landscape for all becomes increasingly illuminated. Unlike this article, which has an ending, issues concerning language in education do not have an ending. They ought to be debated continuously. Author Contributions

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, Mlamli Diko; methodology, Mlamli Diko; software, Adelheid Bechtold Celliers; validation, Adelheid Bechtold Celliers; formal analysis, Mlamli Diko; investigation, Mlamli Diko; resources, Adelheid Bechtold Celliers and Mlamli Diko; data curation, Adelheid Bechtold Celliers; writing—original draft preparation, Mlamli Diko; writing—review and editing, Mlamli Diko; visualization, Adelheid Bechtold Celliers; supervision, Mlamli Diko; project administration, Mlamli Diko; funding acquisition, Adelheid Bechtold Celliers and Mlamli Diko. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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