

The Disappearance of South African Indigenous Languages

A Look at the South African Legal System and Workplace Model

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Received: 28 April 2025

Revised: 26 June 2025 & 21 July 2025

Approved: 19 September 2025

Summary

In an era of quick clicks and fast-paced artificial intelligence, it is easy to forget that before technology there were humans who shared stories and information through indigenous languages. Languages connect people but can constitute a barrier to society's understanding of one another. Nevertheless, languages are essential for communication. Salawu mentions that "[l]anguage is not only a necessary condition for culture, it is itself a culture".¹ Society has moved towards a culture of globalisation to keep up with international comparative standards, but we must remain mindful of our origins. In essence, the suit and tie or work uniform should not be used to reject indigenous languages from the workplace. They should rather be embraced. This article considers the use of indigenous languages in the South African legal system and workplace model compared to Nigeria, with modest reference to the literature and education systems.

* I am grateful and indebted to Prof Roxan Laubscher for her invaluable comments and encouragement.

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1 Salawu "Essentials of indigenous languages to journalism education in Nigeria" 2008 *Global Media Journal* 4.

Keywords: Indigenous languages; Official languages; Higher education; Reasonable practicability; Equality, Literature.

1. Introduction

Current societal observations show that South Africa's indigenous languages are becoming less prominent.² This is evident in the culture of globalisation, with English becoming the main language of communication.³ Indigenous languages are only used in private spaces and do not reach the workplace.⁴ Indigenous languages usually refer to languages that existed in a specific area for a long time before the arrival of other groups,⁵ however this article uses the terms "indigenous languages" and "official languages" interchangeably. South Africa has been coined the "rainbow nation" with one of its most recognised features being the twelve official languages.⁶ The debate raised is what the aim of recognising twelve official languages is if the state does not intend to make use of them when communicating with the public. This article discusses the constitutional framework for the protection of indigenous languages as well as how it has been interpreted by the courts. Consequently, the impact of language policy in tertiary education, the legal fraternity and literature, is considered together with a brief comparative study between South Africa and Nigeria's treatment of these languages.

2 Mphaphuli *et al* "Careers in Languages: Awareness by Grade 12 Tshivenda learners in Thembisa, Gauteng" 2024 *Journal of Literary Criticism, Comparative Linguistics and Literary Studies* 1.

3 Rao "The role of English as a global language" 2019 *Research Journal of English* 66.

4 Bauer *How the teaching of indigenous languages among disparate multicultural groups in a South African corporate setting affect cohesion* (2022 thesis SA) 66.

5 Lor "Preserving, developing and promoting indigenous languages: things South African librarians can do" 2012 *Journal of Appropriate Librarianship and Information Work in Southern Africa* 30.

6 Montle "Rethinking the rainbow nation as an exponent for nation-building in the post-apartheid era: a successful or failed project?" 2020 *Journal of Nation Building and Policy Studies* 8.

2. Historical background of indigenous languages

Previously, indigenous languages were not recognised under the apartheid system.⁷ While the Constitution never explicitly stated that Afrikaans and English were the official languages of the Republic, it is implied that Afrikaans and English were the only languages officially accepted by the National Party.⁸ This is also evident in the fact that the apartheid regime tried to implement Afrikaans as a medium of teaching in schools across the country, culminating in the 1976 Soweto Uprising.⁹ This event is significant and one of the most notable occurrences of bloodshed in an effort to fight against South Africa's oppressive regime. Even though the apartheid system was primarily bilingual, indigenous African languages were still spoken amongst black people, though severely marginalised from an academic point of view.¹⁰ These languages seemed to have earned their freedom in the 1996 Constitution.¹¹

3. The legal framework

3.1 *The Constitution*

The Constitution aimed to transform society by recognising a more diverse nation, as noted by the late Chief Justice Pius Langa. Langa famously penned that, “[t]he Constitution is located in a history which involves a transition from a society based on division, injustice and exclusion from the democratic process to one which respects the dignity of all citizens, and includes all in the process of governance”.¹² Section 6(2) of the Constitution provides that the

7 Bauer (n 4) 65.

8 Republic of South Africa Constitution Act 32 of 1961.

9 De Villiers “Media freedom: on the slippery slope to repression” 2011 *South African Family Practice* 256.

10 Nkosi *et al* “The use of a situational approach in teaching isiZulu language to non-mother tongue speakers” 2014 *Alternation* 276.

11 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (hereafter to as ‘the Constitution’); s 6(1) of the Constitution provides that: “The official languages of the Republic are Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu and South African Sign Language (SASL).”

12 *Investigating Directorate: Serious Economic Offences v Hyundai Motor Distributors (Pty) Ltd; in re Hyundai Motor Distributors (Pty) Ltd v Smit* NO 2001 1 SA 545 (CC) par 21.

state must take positive and practical measures to recognise and elevate the status of indigenous languages.¹³ The state has attempted this by establishing the Pan South African Language Board, which is mandated to monitor the use of official languages per section 6(5) (a) of the Constitution.¹⁴ Section 6(2) recognises that indigenous languages have been diminished historically and attempts to give languages a broad platform to shine, yet the reality is far from it.¹⁵

Many other languages such as Hindi, Arabic and Portuguese are not officially recognised although a considerable part of the population use these languages.¹⁶ Section 6(5)(b) of the Constitution merely provides that such languages must be respected.¹⁷ This is because such languages did not originate in South Africa, yet Afrikaans, having Dutch origins, and English were not initially indigenous languages because they were brought to South Africa by European settlers.

3.2 *Statutory provisions*

Section 4(3) of the Use of Official Languages Act provides that the state is meant to communicate with the public in at least three languages,¹⁸ which they are not adhering to. This is understandable, as it is impractical and ineffective for the national government to communicate and disseminate all information in all the official languages at a time. Nevertheless, this provision regrettably does not apply to provincial and local governments, who are closer to the people and are meant to act in the interests and well-being of their specific residents.¹⁹

3.3 *Judicial interpretations of language use including higher*

13 See s 6(2) of the Constitution.

14 See s 6(5)(a) of the Constitution.

15 *S v Mtsholotsholo* 2023 JOL 62632 (WCC) par 27 (hereafter *Mtsholotsholo* case).

16 Makalela *Not Eleven Languages: Translanguaging and South African Multilingualism in Concert* (2022) 6.

17 See s 6(5)(b) of the Constitution.

18 See s 4(3) of the Use of Official Languages Act 12 of 2012.

19 See s 6(1) of the Use of Official Languages Act 12 of 2012.

education

The legal position towards the use of official languages was changed after the *Lourens* cases before the court, which put its use in the spotlight.²⁰ Lourens took to the courts with the aim of compelling state organs, such as the office of the President and the Speaker of the National Assembly, to comply with their obligations to publish legislation in all the official languages and to distribute public communiqués in at least two official languages under section 6(3) (a) of the Constitution.²¹ These cases led to the enactment of the Act. Still, the state is not adhering to its provisions by publishing in three languages, bringing into question the effectiveness of the Act.²² Thus, the promulgation of this Act simply brought cosmetic changes, as no changes were adequately brought into practice.

The use of indigenous languages is also undermined by institutions of tertiary education. Tertiary education is primarily given in English and the move towards single-medium tuition is supported;²³ however, this seems contrary to the section 29(2) “right to be educated in a language of choice by simply removing the choice”.²⁴ This was questioned in the *University of the Free State* case and subsequent appeals.²⁵ The court ruled in favour of the University of Free State because the practical considerations of using all languages constituted a barrier to learning. It is highly impractical to teach a diverse student body in their preferred language. Rather than using one indigenous language and promoting its importance,

20 *Lourens v President of the Republic of South Africa* 2013 1 SA 499 (GNP); *Lourens v Speaker of the National Assembly* 2015 1 SA 618 (EqC).

21 See s 6(3)(a) of the Constitution.

22 Mohlahlo and Ditsele “Exploring multilingualism at the national department levels in South Africa post Use of Official Languages Act of 2012” 2022 *Journal of Literary Criticism, Comparative Linguistics and Literary Studies* 7.

23 Makhanya and Zibane “Student’s voices on how indigenous languages are disfavoured in South African Higher Education” 2020 *Language Matters: Studies in the Languages of Southern Africa* 23–24.

24 s 29(2) of the Constitution reads that “Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable.”

25 *AfriForum v Chairman of the Council of the University of the Free State* (A70/2016) [2016] ZAFSHC 130 (21 July 2016); *University of the Free State v AfriForum* 2017 4 SA 283 (SCA); *AfriForum v University of the Free State* 2018 2 SA 185 (CC).

the University favoured English as the largest commonality. It was, therefore, not unconstitutional to move from bilingual tuition to a single language.

The issue of “reasonable practicability” was again highlighted in *Studenteplein v Stellenbosch University*, after the institution had committed itself to multilingualism and then reneged on the policy since it was not practicable. The University emphasised that the competing language demands,²⁶ and limited resources, did not permit them to offer classes and other learning materials in different home languages. The institution developed a new policy after its 2016 monolingual policy was declared unconstitutional in the *Gelyke Kanse* case.²⁷ The University argued that the 2021 policy and commitment to multilingualism could not be fulfilled because of constraints placed on them by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.²⁸ The court had favoured the University and dismissed the application.²⁹

Contrastingly, conflicting case law is presented in the *Unisa* case,³⁰ where the court ruled that it was unconstitutional to move towards a single-medium tuition system. The court noted that this was because of the high demand for multiple teaching languages since the University caters to distance learners all over the country. The *Unisa* case seemed to focus more on multilingualism, but this approach is inefficient without meaningful steps.³¹ Neglecting multilingualism means acting contrary to the values of the nation and a democracy that is based on human dignity, equality and freedom.³²

26 *Studenteplein v Stellenbosch University* 2022 JOL 55314 (WCC) par 80 and 81.

27 *Gelyke Kanse v Chairperson of the Senate of the University of Stellenbosch* 2019 BCLR 1479 (CC).

28 *Studenteplein* (n 26) par 82.

29 *Studenteplein* (n 26) par 85.

30 *AfriForum v Chairman of the Council of the University of South Africa* (54450/2016) [2018] ZAGPPHC 295 (26 April 2018); *AfriForum NPC v Chairperson of the Council of the University of South Africa* (765/2018) [2020] ZASCA 79 (30 June 2020); *Chairperson of the Council of the University of South Africa v AfriForum NPC* 2022 2 SA 1 (CC) (hereafter the *UNISA* case).

31 Laubscher “Recognition of language rights in South Africa: Innovation or dismal failure?” 2022 *Gdańskie Studia Prawnicze* 63.

32 See s 39(1)(a) of the Constitution.

The move towards English as the global language means that on a global scale, populations that do not speak English could also be isolated.³³ This can affect economies in terms of trade and communications.³⁴ Although indigenous languages were never meant to permeate international borders,³⁵ they are becoming endangered within the borders of South Africa within the workplace and higher institutions of learning amongst other areas.³⁶ Consequently, there does not seem to be any meaning behind having official languages because neither institutions of higher education, nor the state at all levels, are adhering to the need for translation of public communiqués.

4. Indigenous languages in the age of technology

Technology has brought new ways of disseminating information that were not even dreamt of before. Social media has increased the amount of information, particularly in English, that people consume.³⁷

Technology promotes the use of indigenous languages because people from around the world have exposure to such languages. Now more than ever, people have access to new languages with language-learning applications (apps) like *Duolingo* and *Babbel*.³⁸ Yet, people are not willing to learn such languages because it is not believed to be useful.³⁹ Moreover, social media usually promotes the use of slang words from indigenous languages and thus, people are never fully exposed to the true pedagogy of the language.⁴⁰ Spelling, grammar and pronunciation have also been distorted through the use of social

33 Ralarala "A case study on the language and socio-cultural challenges experienced by international students studying at Cape Peninsula University of Technology" 2016 *South African Journal of Higher Education* 235.

34 Rao (n 3) 67.

35 Crystal *English as a Global Language* (2003) 4.

36 Lasagabaster and Van der Walt "Students' perceived language competence and attitudes towards multilingualism at a South African university" 2024 *Language Matters: Studies in the Languages of Southern Africa* 183.

37 Lasagabaster and Van der Walt (n 36) 183.

38 Sakalauksė and Leonavičiūtė "Strategic analysis of Duolingo language learning platform" 2022 *Science – Future of Lithuania* 2–3.

39 Lasagabaster and Van der Walt (n 36) 183.

40 Haque "The use of social media platforms in language learning: a critical study" 2023 *Journal of Global Research in Education and Social Science* 21.

media.⁴¹ Thus, the overall literacy and understanding of indigenous languages are never fully realised.⁴² Many argue that using specific languages isolates one from specific groups of people. For example, disseminating information in the media in isiZulu means excluding Afrikaans-speakers. Thus, English is the most promoted, as it is widely spoken.

Teaching and understanding a language without a holistic approach means that it is best that the language is not taught at all. Without understanding the language holistically, people will not be able to communicate properly in any setting, meaning harmful consequences for culture and the language itself.⁴³ Many do not see the need to learn an indigenous South African language because it does not increase the availability of employment opportunities, and learning such languages will limit its use to the borders of this country.⁴⁴ In contrast, learning foreign languages like French or Spanish is preferred as it increases job opportunities, which inevitably encourages learning a new culture.⁴⁵

Traditionally, corporate South Africa is structured around Western ideas such as hierarchal structures and valuing individual performance because of the influence of colonialism, but this poses a risk since the South African workforce is not heterogeneous.⁴⁶ There is a need to diversify the workplace model to account for the varying demographics and the lack of using indigenous languages does not assist its progress. South Africa is famous for having twelve official languages, but there is no meaning attached to this if those languages are not effectively utilised by the population.

41 Natsir *et al* "The impact of language changes caused by technology and social media" 2023 *Journal of Linguistics, Literary and Language Teaching* 116.

42 Natsir *et al* (n 41) 116.

43 Natsir *et al* (n 41) 116-117.

44 Lasagabaster and Van der Walt (n 36) 183.

45 Thomas "Bringing foreign language learning into the 21st century" 2003 *Journal for Language Teaching* 26.

46 Bechan and Visser "The influence of language and culture on a South African corporate: research article" 2005 *Communicare: Journal for Communication Studies in Africa* 68-69.

5. Treatment of indigenous languages: Nigeria

Studies have shown that Nigeria, much like South Africa, is moving away from using indigenous languages.⁴⁷ These languages include Yoruba, Igbo, Fula and Hausa.⁴⁸ This is because of their relentless pursuit of Western education in order to compete with the world powers.⁴⁹ The continuous neglect of indigenous languages in literature, by implication, means that those who do not understand English will never reap the full benefit of the South African education system.

Several authors like Salawu stress the importance of directing efforts towards rationalising language policies to avoid losing a significant part of culture.⁵⁰ The older generation in Nigeria, much like in South Africa, primarily use language to express themselves. Without striving to keep indigenous languages alive, communication between communities and generations will be hampered.⁵¹ Salawu contends that many people in Nigeria pride themselves for not understanding their own language.⁵² Furthermore, understanding of the English language is rewarded and sought after in terms of admission to tertiary institutions in Nigeria over and above any other language.⁵³

Recently, there have been calls in Nigeria, to focus on the development and preservation of indigenous languages as a medium of communication and learning.⁵⁴ This was because of a qualitative study concluded regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of the study indicate that people understood information better in their various indigenous languages and changed their perception

47 Salawu (n 1) 5-6.

48 Meshesha and Jawahar "Indigenous scripts of African languages" 2007 *Indilinga African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems* 133.

49 Salawu (n 1) 5-6.

50 Salawu (n 1) 5.

51 Salawu (n 1) 5.

52 Salawu (n 1) 5.

53 Salawu (n 1) 10.

54 Fadipe *et al* "Indigenous languages as predictors of understanding and accepting COVID-19 vaccines in Nigeria and South Africa" 2024 *Communicare: Journal for Communication Sciences in Southern Africa* 77.

of the information that they were receiving.⁵⁵ Consequently, as of 2025, Nigeria is placing more focus on publishing and disseminating information to the public in various languages. This is an initiative which has existed in South African jurisprudence for a long time but is simply not adhered to. Nigeria has already noted a similar problem regarding this shift in focus. The government's inability to disseminate information in this way because of a lack of resources and competent workers which create an aversion to using indigenous languages for effective communication.⁵⁶

Moreover, youth languages like Nigerian Pidgin are only beginning to gain traction in mainstream media.⁵⁷ The Nigerian youth, in place of the government, have assumed the responsibility of preserving and developing indigenous languages. The language contains various indigenous languages but finds its basis in English.⁵⁸ Even though the language is gaining traction through youth communities, the government shows apathy and hesitance to name it as an official language, particularly because English is valued over and above other languages.⁵⁹ Although spoken by the youth, the language also does not serve as a medium of instruction for students at tertiary level.⁶⁰ This is regrettable since students might be able to connect with their learning materials more effectively if the material was taught in a manner that they could better understand. All this, much like in a South African context, indicates the unwillingness of the government to stand up to the challenge of developing indigenous languages and preserving them.

55 Fadipe *et al* (n 54) 86.

56 Fadipe *et al* (n 54) 87.

57 Isiaka "A tale of many tongues: towards conceptualising Nigerian youth languages" 2020 *Language Matters: Studies in the Languages of Southern Africa* 69.

58 Isiaka (n 57) 71.

59 Isiaka (n 57) 69.

60 Isiaka (n 57) 73.

6. Indigenous languages in the legal fraternity

Writers, particularly in the legal field, emphasise the notion that the curriculum must be decolonised to suit a diverse group of students;⁶¹ however, decolonisation means including indigenous languages in curriculums, which is not being done. The LLB curriculum perpetuates unfair discrimination by not giving learners the ability to learn in the indigenous languages that they prefer.⁶² The legal field does not even make use of indigenous languages, evident in the fact that English is the only language of record.⁶³ Previously, English and Afrikaans were used by the courts until former Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng announced that English would be the only medium used in the courts.⁶⁴ The move from a bilingual system undoubtedly weakens the legal system and does not promote inclusivity.⁶⁵ The lack of multilingualism within the legal system conflicts with South Africa's language demographics.⁶⁶

This is especially problematic during court proceedings where translators are to be used. This was highlighted in the *Mthethwa* case, where the accused was charged with theft.⁶⁷ The accused was denied a trial in isiZulu after application to the court through his attorney in accordance with his section 35(3)(k) constitutional right to a fair trial conducted in a language the accused understands.⁶⁸ Not conducting the trial in a language which the accused understands constitutes a form of unfair discrimination.⁶⁹ Docrat comments that the court

61 Masiya and Mdluli "Critical legal education: A remedy for the legacy of colonial legal education?" 2020 *Pretoria Student Law Review* 71–72.

62 Dladla "Breaking the language barrier in legal education: A method for Africanising legal education" 2020 *Pretoria Student Law Review* 61.

63 *Mathebula v S* 2020 1 SACR 534 (ML) par 18.

64 Dladla (n 62) 62.

65 Dladla (n 62) 63.

66 Docrat "A review of linguistic qualifications and training for legal professionals and judicial officers: A call for linguistic equality in South Africa's legal profession" 2022 *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* 1711.

67 *Mthethwa v De Bruyn* 1998 3 BCLR 336 (N) (hereafter the *Mthethwa* case).

68 s 35(3) of the Constitution reads that "[e]very accused person has the right to a fair trial, which includes the right – (k) to be tried in a language that the accused person understands, or if that is not practicable, to have the proceedings interpreted in that language".

69 *Mtsholotsholo* (n 15) par 31.

believed that it was impractical to conduct the trial in isiZulu because the legal practitioners in the Vryheid jurisdiction were not proficient in the language.⁷⁰ Critics such as Dladla argue that the solution would be for all legal practitioners to receive training and certification in at least one African language to avoid circumstances such as these in the future.⁷¹ The aim of this training would be for legal practitioners to assist as best by being proficient in another language. Nonetheless, training and certification produces a problem in respect of what indigenous language to choose with the likes of isiZulu and isiXhosa being the most widely spoken.⁷² The inclusion of this training and certification may create a more inclusive legal system but will still emphasise the importance of certain languages over others.

The common link between most anglophone African countries lies in the English language brought and taught to them by colonisers. The lack of African languages in literature creates a barrier between South Africa and its neighbours and the same goes for Nigeria. This Eurocentric approach to literature only means that African nations are submitting themselves to the legacies of the past and creating literature that is merely an extension of English works.⁷³ Montle suggests that Africa's true independence and pride in indigenous languages will only be won if complex literature is written in African languages.⁷⁴ Indeed, the failure to reclaim these African languages may very well be the downfall of African society and culture.

7. The way forward

In order to produce a sound recommendation, the arguments for and against the promotion of indigenous languages must be considered.

Firstly, the promotion of indigenous languages increases valuable communication because the provincial government can

70 Docrat *The role of African languages in the South African legal system* (2017 Thesis SA) 249.

71 Dladla (n 62) 67.

72 Lasagabaster and Van der Walt (n 36) 167.

73 Montle "Rethinking the alienation of African indigenous languages to African literature: A post-colonial perspective" 2021 *Technium Social Sciences Journal* 825.

74 Montle (n 73) 827.

better understand the needs of the community and satisfactorily serve them. The use of these languages within communities will also endorse the need for literary works even if they only cater to a specific community. For example, a predominantly Venda-speaking community's needs can be better fulfilled if the officials in the community are proficient in the Venda language.

Secondly, the use of indigenous languages must be promoted to provide meaning to South Africa's "rainbow nation". Tourists are invited to visit South Africa because of its diversity,⁷⁵ but if the diversity in question is not practiced by the population, then the very notion of diversity is hollow. We should instead coin the term "rainbow advertising" if there is no substance and tolerance to support the notion of diversity.⁷⁶ Unfortunately, it is disheartening if the same state in all areas – including the executive, legislature and judiciary at all three national, provincial and local levels – that are meant to promote the use of these languages undermine their usage. The use of indigenous languages strengthens the bond between communities and promotes healthy kinship through shared ideals. Ngulube has noted that social interactions depend on language and are, therefore, an essential element for significant dialogue.⁷⁷ Significant change is only enacted if language does not constitute a barrier and promoting a greater understanding of indigenous languages is a step in the right direction towards change in South Africa.

Contrastingly, the reality of the 21st century is that the move towards English being the global language is attributable to the development of technology.⁷⁸ Many people do not consider it necessary to learn and promote indigenous language that does not

75 Du Plessis *et al* "Explore changes in the aspects fundamental to the competitiveness of South Africa as a preferred tourist destination" 2017 *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences* 1.

76 Maree and Jordaan "Rainbow nation, rainbow advertising? Racial diversity of female portrayals in South African television" 2016 *Gender and Behaviour* 6817.

77 Ngulube "Revitalising and preserving endangered indigenous languages in South Africa through writing and publishing" 2012 *South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science* 11.

78 De Jager *et al* "The innovative use of social media for teaching English as a second language" 2020 *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa* 1.

serve a purpose on an international scale.⁷⁹ The reality is that many people do not want to be connected to a particular tribal community like Nguni-speaking communities or Xhosa communities because large-scale migration has characterised the movement of people worldwide for economic reasons.⁸⁰

Several people view indigenous languages as archaic and remark that it has no place in the new South African system. This is only a bigger call for indigenous languages to be developed. Nevertheless, the push for globalisation is the very reason that indigenous languages are in danger and require preservation and development.⁸¹ Since language is the key to mobilising communities and making group decisions, its very demise signals the end of culture.⁸² This is cause for South Africans to preserve their heritage from extinction so that future generations can experience the magic of diversity, or else it will be a distant story told to younger generations.

The promotion of indigenous languages may imply that other non-indigenous languages should be overlooked. Municipalities will be faced with challenges when attempting to serve communities that are not proficient in any of the country's official languages. For example, a municipality cannot adequately satisfy the needs of a community that it does not understand because of a language barrier. The question is: where does that leave speakers of non-indigenous languages within South Africa and non-English speakers, such as Portuguese-speakers or Hindi-speakers, on a global scale? Non-indigenous speakers will have to become more proficient in one of the indigenous languages to survive and receive adequate municipal service. On a global scale, a lack of proficiency in English does not bode well for economies that seek to participate intercontinentally. Non-English-speakers will be cast aside from the global trade system because of globalisation.

79 Lasagabaster and Van der Walt (n 36) 171.

80 Khamidov "Nature of labour migration and characteristics of its emergence" 2022 *American Journal of Economics and Management* 87.

81 Meighan "Decolonising the digital landscape: the role of technology in Indigenous language revitalisation" 2021 *AlterNative* 397.

82 Ngulube (n 77) 12.

All arguments considered, there is a strong need for endangered indigenous languages to be preserved because it addresses the cultural inequalities, promotes tolerance in communities and facilitates full participation in all aspects of the economy.⁸³ Therefore, the best way for indigenous languages to be preserved is for the national government to take practical and positive measures. The standing of these measures rests on the state's obligation to respect the rights of linguistic communities.⁸⁴

The first measure would be for the national legislature to amend existing legislation, so that the provisions apply to provincial and local governments. This would encourage the use of indigenous languages because these levels of government are more accessible to the people of South Africa and can affect more meaningful change to the language demographics of the country. The second measure would be for the national government to allocate adequate funding to the provinces and local governments for the promotion of languages. This involves the supported training of officials in at least one African language to expand understanding and proficiency in these areas. These budgets will provide the lower levels of government with the platform to effect social media campaigns, school visits and increased awareness about indigenous languages prevalent in the area.

Social media campaigns will entice the younger generation to use indigenous languages more and spark their interest to participate in future campaigns in communities. School visits by organisations and committees that promote the use of these languages can be undertaken to make children aware of the use of indigenous languages. This is not to be misconstrued for carrying these languages over into the workplace but merely as a starting point for indigenous languages to enjoy some continuity and consistency. The languages promoted may be left to the discretion of the municipal and provincial governments, based on practical considerations such as the most widely spoken languages in the community.

83 Ngulube (n 77) 13.

84 See s 31 of the Constitution.

Furthermore, the state should look to develop a national terminology policy to enhance societal multilingualism.⁸⁵ This could be used particularly to intellectualise indigenous languages for different academic areas such as the legal space or literature.⁸⁶ This will facilitate accessibility to the workplace for individuals who are not proficient in English and offer better communication particularly in a diverse workplace where there are recurring language barriers.

The recommendations may seem far-reaching but are easily attainable with the correct leadership in place to take this country to greater heights. These are undoubtedly goals that South Africans can and should work towards to preserve the uniqueness of our nation.

8. Conclusion

Language is a crucial component of life that no one can escape. Through the prism of language, cultures are connected, individuals communicate, and societies revolutionise. Prioritising non-indigenous languages over indigenous languages not only perpetuates the idea the long-standing view that indigenous languages are not important, but it also risks endangering indigenous languages because of their minimal usage. South Africans should instead embrace the uniqueness of linguistic and cultural communities. Failure to do so may result in the disappearance of indigenous languages that our ancestors fought hard to preserve. There is a need to develop and promote the use of indigenous languages in various spaces like the workplace, learning institutions and literature. This can be achieved by amending existing legislation, allocating funding to provincial and local governments, social media campaigns promoting awareness and creating a national terminology policy.

85 Alberts "The need to develop a national terminology policy for South Africa" 2025 *Lexikos* 4.

86 Mabela and Ditsele "Exploring intellectualisation of South African indigenous languages for academic purposes" 2024 *Journal of Literary Criticism, Comparative Linguistics and Literary Studies* 1.