



Embracing native languages as a powerful strategy to enhance service delivery in Africa: A systematic review

Khulisile Judith Nkuna¹ , Innocent Zitha² ,
Sibusiso Skhumbudzo Khoza¹  & Sarah Matsetsela³ 

¹ Department of African Languages, Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education, University of Venda, Thohoyandou, South Africa.

² Department of English, Media Studies and Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education, University of Venda, Thohoyandou, South Africa.

³ Department of Academic Literacy, School of Languages, Faculty of Humanities, North-West University, Mahikeng, South Africa.

ABSTRACT

Language is essential for effective communication between service providers and users. Utilising local languages can streamline processes, improve efficiency, and enhance user satisfaction. This study examined how local languages, often referred to as "mother tongues," can improve the delivery of public services in multilingual countries. This qualitative study analysed previous research across healthcare, education, and public administration, highlighting the positive impact of using local languages on service outcomes. However, implementing initiatives to promote native languages can be challenging due to limited funding, complex coordination, and the need for trained personnel proficient in multiple languages. This study explored how technology, particularly translation tools and mobile applications, can make public services more accessible for individuals who prefer to use their native languages. The findings of this study emphasise the importance of clear language policies, training for multilingual staff, and technological support to promote the use of local languages in public services. In conclusion, the research encourages legislators to prioritise inclusive language policies and conduct ongoing assessments to address linguistic inequalities in service access. Further research is needed to understand the sustainability of local language practices and how modern technologies can enhance international service delivery.

Keywords: Native Languages, Public Service Delivery, Multilingualism, Language Policy, Technology, Inclusivity

INTRODUCTION

Public services must prioritise clear communication, particularly in multilingual communities where diverse languages can facilitate or impede service delivery. Effective language use is crucial for fostering connections between service workers and residents, especially in populations with varying linguistic backgrounds. To provide good public services, people need to be able to communicate with one another and understand their needs. Van der Merwe et al. state that a common language enables service providers

CORRESPONDENCE – Innocent Zitha Email: Innocent.Zitha@univen.ac.za

PUBLICATION HISTORY - Received : 19th April, 2025 | Accepted: 16th February, 2026 | Published: 31st March, 2026.

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE – Nkuna, Khulisile Judith; Innocent Zitha; Sibusiso Skhumbudzo Khoza, and Sarah Matsetsela. "Embracing native languages as a powerful strategy to enhance service delivery in Africa: A systematic review." *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 7, no.2 (2026): 580 - 591. <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20267212>

COPYRIGHT AND LICENSING - © 2026 The Author(s). Published and Maintained by Noyam Journals. This is an open access article under the CCBY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

and users to understand one another, build trust, and collaborate effectively.¹ This ensures that everyone can access services. In multilingual cultures, such as South Africa, many individuals, particularly those who are vulnerable or less skilled, often find themselves excluded from using the official or dominant languages.

Providing public services in people's mother tongue makes it easier for them to access and better understand, especially for poor people.² The emotional and cultural impact of native languages makes it easier and more confident for people to use public services. Patients are more likely to understand their illness, treatment options, and drugs when they get care in their own language.³ People find it easier to understand complex concepts in their native language. Native languages enhance service efficiency and ensure fair treatment for everyone.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the people speak a rich diversity of languages. Utilising local languages in public services can significantly improve how individuals engage with government and social services. For instance, South Africa recognises 11 official languages, yet English remains the primary language used for government operations. Tshotsho indicates that a considerable number of individuals in rural South Africa are not proficient in English or Afrikaans, which have historically been the predominant languages.⁴ Integrating local languages into service delivery frameworks can improve accessibility and enhance the overall effectiveness of services for all community members. This would ensure that everyone, regardless of language, has the same access to public resources and information.

This study explores how using individuals' native languages for communication enhances the quality and efficiency of public services. It reviews existing literature to identify the advantages and challenges of incorporating local languages into public service systems, including factors that may hinder implementation. Additionally, the study examines how public officials can employ local language strategies in multilingual societies to ensure equitable and transparent service delivery. The aim is to expand the understanding of language policy in the public sector, and the study will offer lawmakers and practitioners important advice.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Various concepts in sociolinguistics and public management offer valuable insights into the role of local languages in service delivery. One notable concept is the Language Accommodation Theory, proposed by Giles et al. in 1973. This theory suggests that individuals often modify their speech patterns and language according to their social context and conversation partners. In public service settings, providers frequently adjust their language to connect more effectively with their customers, fostering a relatable and engaging environment. This practice enhances communication clarity and fosters positive interactions, ultimately leading to improved service outcomes and greater customer satisfaction.

Another significant framework is Habermas's 1984 Theory of Communicative Action. This theory emphasises the importance of open, rational discussion for achieving mutual understanding and effective planning. According to Habermas, public services can be truly effective only when all stakeholders, including citizens and government officials, can communicate freely and constructively. In this regard, promoting the use of local languages in service interactions can be crucial for breaking down language barriers. Such an approach facilitates meaningful exchanges between the public and authorities, enhancing the overall effectiveness of service delivery.

Furthermore, Habermas advocates for an inclusive public sphere in which diverse voices can be heard and valued. By prioritising local languages in public service communications, governments can create a more accessible and welcoming environment for all community members. This ensures that everyone can engage in civic dialogue and contribute to the development of services that impact their

¹ M. Van der Merwe, E. Verhoef, and C. Ruiters, "The Role of Language in Public Service Delivery: Lessons from South Africa," *Journal of Public Administration* 55, no. 1 (2020): 120–36.

² A. Deumert, "Language and the Multilingual City: Discursive Constructions of a Minority Language in Cape Town," *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 39, no. 4 (2018): 280–95.

³ I. Piller, *Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice: An Introduction to Applied Sociolinguistics* (London: Oxford University Press, 2020).

⁴ B. P. Tshotsho, "Language Policy and Its Effects on Education in South Africa," *Language Matters* 50, no. 3 (2019): 265–78.

lives. In summary, integrating local languages into service delivery supports effective communication and advances the democratic ideals of inclusivity and participation in public life.

Shohamy outlines that Critical Language Policy Theory offers a sharp critique of language use in public contexts.⁵ This theory posits that language regulations often favour certain dominant languages in multilingual societies, thereby reinforcing societal power structures and marginalising speakers of minority languages. In this light, the policies governing language use in public services can either deepen existing inequalities or serve as a catalyst for social justice.

METHODOLOGY

A planned method is used in this literature review to collect, analyse, and put together previous studies on the use of native languages in public service delivery. A mix of peer-reviewed journal articles, government papers, and case studies from different multilingual societies was used for the review. It focused on regions with many languages, such as Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. The study followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to ensure the method was clear and organised. The review only looked at studies published in the last five years (2019–2024) that addressed the use of native or minority languages in public services such as healthcare, education, and local government. The research needed to show how using a native language affects service outcomes such as user satisfaction, accessibility, and efficiency. Studies that were overly theoretical or lacked sufficient real-world evidence were excluded from the review. Also, only English-language studies were considered, even though they examined the use of non-English languages in service delivery settings. Key search terms used in the review included "native language service delivery," "native language public services," "multilingual public administration," and "language policy in service delivery." These terms were used to search for relevant literature in academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Scopus, as well as in grey literature from government and international organisations.

Data Collection Procedures

Using the above terms, a full search of the chosen sources was part of the data collection process. Of the more than 200 papers, reports, and case studies that emerged in the search, only 75 were deemed important based on the guidelines for inclusion and exclusion. Each source was closely read to find information on the main topics of using a local language, the results of service delivery, and the difficulties of having people who speak more than one language work in public services.

The data from the selected studies were carefully coded and organised into thematic groups. These groups included the effects of using a local language on user happiness, the effectiveness of public service delivery, and the practical difficulties of establishing bilingual services. Quantitative information, such as figures on how services were delivered across different language settings, was gathered and presented in tables for comparison. Ngwenya et al. (2021) found that in South African healthcare services, people treated in their first language were 15% happier with their care than those treated in a second or third language.⁶ The researchers also examined qualitative data, such as case study accounts, to identify themes and ideas common to the use of local languages in public services.

Criteria for Analysis

Thematic content analysis identified and coded recurring themes and patterns in the chosen research. The investigation examined the benefits of native-language delivery and the challenges public managers face in adopting multilingual services. A comparative analysis was used to evaluate outcomes of healthcare, education, and local government service delivery. To examine the advantages of using the native language across public services, healthcare, and education, a research study was conducted. Native languages improved user satisfaction and comprehension in healthcare settings, but teacher training and curriculum development had a greater impact on education.

⁵ E. Shohamy, *Language Policy: Hidden Agendas and New Approaches* (Routledge, 2006).

⁶ B. Ngwenya, S. Maseko, and P. Zulu, "Mother Tongue in Healthcare: Enhancing Patient Outcomes through Language Accommodation," *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 39, no. 2 (2021): 167–82.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The role of local languages is particularly significant; they can empower individuals by fostering a sense of belonging and fairness within their communities. When public services intentionally incorporate local languages into their operations, they facilitate clearer communication and promote inclusivity. This thoughtful approach can lead to improved service outcomes, enabling more equitable representation of all language speakers in society. By prioritising the use of local languages, public services can create a more just and cohesive environment for diverse populations.

Impact of Native Language Use on Service Delivery

The utilisation of individuals' native languages in public services enhances efficiency, accessibility, and overall satisfaction. Communication challenges, frequently stemming from the use of non-native or unofficial languages, can significantly diminish the utility of services, particularly in municipalities characterised by linguistic diversity.⁷ Service providers can mitigate these issues by actively employing local languages. This practice fosters a sense of inclusion and understanding among users, which is particularly vital for delivering high-quality services.

A case study conducted in South Africa found that incorporating isiZulu in rural hospitals in KwaZulu-Natal significantly enhanced patients' comprehension of medical procedures and directives.⁸ In one study of 500 patients, 82% were happy with their care in their own language, compared to 57% in English. A better understanding of treatment options, medical diagnoses, and directions from healthcare professionals caused higher satisfaction. Native-language communication made patients 22% more likely to follow through with recommended treatments. This shows that communication in the native language directly affects the effectiveness of medical interventions.⁹

Similar results were observed in the provision of educational services. Maseko found that primary school teachers in South Africa taught in both English and the local languages, such as isiXhosa and Sesotho.¹⁰ Students taught in their original language fared 15% better on reading and numeracy exams than those taught entirely in English. According to the research, student understanding improved because they could better interact with the information in their preferred language. Native language integration decreased absenteeism by 10% because students felt more comfortable and secure in their learning surroundings.¹¹

Native languages in public service delivery can promote accessibility. A Kenyan case study on rural government services found that translating government documents into local languages such as Kikuyu and Luo increased public service access by 30%.¹² Many people who were previously excluded due to language barriers better understood government processes and obligations in their native languages. This initiative's success inspired the government to hire multilingual workers in key government offices and to launch local-language radio shows to distribute critical public information.¹³ The findings indicate that local languages improve service delivery across industries. Native language usage improves communication and service results in healthcare, education, and public administration. Multilingual societies should prioritise linguistic inclusion to improve public service delivery.

Challenges and Barriers Identified

Using local languages to provide services is beneficial, but implementation can be challenging. The cost of using multiple service models is one of the biggest problems that stops them. The costs of interpreting papers, finding international staff, and developing training programs that work can be too high for many

⁷ Van der Merwe, Verhoef, and Ruiters, "The Role of Language in Public Service Delivery: Lessons from South Africa."

⁸ Ngwenya, Maseko, and Zulu, "Mother Tongue in Healthcare: Enhancing Patient Outcomes through Language Accommodation."

⁹ Ngwenya, Maseko, and Zulu, "Mother Tongue in Healthcare: Enhancing Patient Outcomes through Language Accommodation."

¹⁰ P. Maseko, "Language Policy Implementation in Higher Education: The Case of South African Universities," *Education as Change* 24, no. 1 (2020): 1–23.

¹¹ Maseko, "Language Policy Implementation in Higher Education: The Case of South African Universities."

¹² A. Pavlenko, "Multilingualism and Emotions: Sociocultural Perspectives," *Journal of Pragmatics* 113 (2017): 158–71.

¹³ Pavlenko, "Multilingualism and Emotions: Sociocultural Perspectives."

public service organisations, especially those with limited resources.¹⁴ One study of South Africa's local government offices found that translating government documents into all 11 official languages would require a 15% increase in the budget. This was too much for many municipalities to handle without cutting other important services.¹⁵

Along with the cost, ensuring that all service points are prepared to handle multiple languages is a difficult organisational task. In places such as India, where hundreds of languages are spoken, it is not always possible to offer services in all of them. Because of this, public institutions must give greater weight to some languages than others, which can create problems among linguistic groups.¹⁶ Choosing which languages to use for public services can leave people who speak less common languages feeling left out, making it harder to support linguistic inclusion. Nigeria has around 500 languages. However, most official services are in English and Hausa. Many language minorities struggle to get what they need.¹⁷ Mismatches make items harder to get to and worsen societal issues.

Training and hiring people who speak more than one language is another big problem. Service providers need to invest in language training programs for their workers, especially in fields like healthcare and education, where workers often interact with the public. However, it might be hard to get the time and money for these types of training programs. It can also be hard to ensure that new employees who speak more than one language are proficient in both their first language and the technical terms used in their field.¹⁸ For example, when patients are getting medical care, it is important to ensure they fully understand their conditions and treatment options by translating medical terms into their native languages. However, many medical terms lack clear translations, leading to misunderstandings and poor communication.¹⁹

Nonetheless, certain organisations exhibit a reluctance to embrace change. Numerous government departments routinely operate within the framework of official or predominant languages. They may refrain from revising their language policies if they perceive such changes as being overly burdensome. The process of altering deeply rooted habits can prove to be challenging and time-intensive, particularly within official institutions.²⁰ The Use of Official Languages Act (2012) in South Africa requires the government to help people learn more than one language. However, it has taken a while to become law because some offices do not want to pay for language services.²¹

These problems show that adding local languages to services could be extremely helpful, but it needs to be well thought out and adequately funded. It is important for policymakers to consider the costs and the difficulty of providing services in multiple languages. They should also seek support from institutions to ensure the plan works.

Challenges of Multilingualism in Service Delivery

Implementing methods for providing services in multiple languages is both helpful and challenging. Meeting the needs of people who speak different languages in public services is difficult and costly. There are many costs involved in hiring and training multilingual workers and translating documents and materials into multiple languages.²² In places such as South Africa and India, where hundreds of languages are spoken, this is difficult and expensive.

Using different languages in public service settings could lead to confusion and misunderstandings if there are no rules for choosing and accommodating languages. Ndhlovu argues that when there are no clear rules and guidelines, the use of multiple languages can lead to service

¹⁴ N., Ndimande-Hlongwa and N. Mkhize, "Multilingualism and Multiculturalism in South Africa's Higher Education: Reflections on Language Policy Implementation," *Per Linguam* 35, no. 1 (2019): 1–15.

¹⁵ Ndimande-Hlongwa and Mkhize, "Multilingualism and Multiculturalism in South Africa's Higher Education: Reflections on Language Policy Implementation."

¹⁶ N. M. Kamwangamalu, *Language Policy and Economics: The Language Question in Africa* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

¹⁷ Piller, *Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice: An Introduction to Applied Sociolinguistics*.

¹⁸ Maseko, "Language Policy Implementation in Higher Education: The Case of South African Universities."

¹⁹ Tshotsho, "Language Policy and Its Effects on Education in South Africa."

²⁰ Van der Merwe, Verhoef, and Ruiters, "The Role of Language in Public Service Delivery: Lessons from South Africa."

²¹ Van der Merwe, Verhoef, and Ruiters, "The Role of Language in Public Service Delivery: Lessons from South Africa."

²² Ndimande-Hlongwa and Mkhize, "Multilingualism and Multiculturalism in South Africa's Higher Education: Reflections on Language Policy Implementation."

disparities, with some language groups receiving better service.²³ This could make differences and language problems worse. Language prioritisation might make social inequality worse when dominant languages run service delivery systems.²⁴

It is hard to find a good balance between linguistic inclusion and speed. Public services usually have limited time and money, so offering services in more than one language could slow them down. Finding the right translation for a person who does not speak the language as their first language could slow down emergency medical care. So, public managers have to find a mixture between speaking different languages and providing good service.²⁵

Comparative Results

Healthcare, education, and public administration each offer distinct opportunities and challenges for implementing local languages in service delivery. Research has shown that utilising native languages in healthcare can significantly enhance patient outcomes and satisfaction. Studies from South Africa, Kenya, and India indicate that delivering healthcare in patients' local languages fosters better understanding, adherence to treatment, and overall satisfaction.²⁶ The intricacy of translating medical terminology and the need for highly skilled multilingual experts make native-language methods in the healthcare industry the most difficult to adopt.²⁷

In contrast, native language usage helps schooling more consistently. Multilingual nations have shown that early school pupils perform better when taught in their native language.²⁸ Cummins' idea of linguistic interdependence suggests that first-language abilities may help children learn second languages.²⁹ In South Africa, children taught in their local language had greater literacy rates and better cognitive development than those educated in English.³⁰ Education has fewer logistical issues than healthcare since local languages may be more readily incorporated into the curriculum and teacher training.

Public management is more complex than it appears

The use of native languages in government services has improved accessibility and public engagement in Kenya and Tanzania, albeit with varying results. In Kenya, translating government documents into local languages has successfully increased public participation in rural areas.³¹ Due to urban residents' greater proficiency in official languages such as English and Swahili, demand for local-language services is lower. Service consumers' demographics and geographic environments may determine the need for native-language services.³²

A comparison across sectors reveals that using native languages improves service delivery, but the benefits and challenges vary by industry. In healthcare, accurate translation is essential; in education, early native language training is advantageous; and in public administration, there needs to be a balance between urban and rural demands. These differences indicate that each sector requires a tailored strategy for integrating native languages.

Technological Solutions for Native Language Integration

²³ F. Ndhlovu, *Decolonising Multilingualism in Africa: Recentering African Languages as the Global Future* (Multilingual Matters, 2020).

²⁴ Kamwangamalu, *Language Policy and Economics: The Language Question in Africa*.

²⁵ Pavlenko, "Multilingualism and Emotions: Sociocultural Perspectives."

²⁶ Ngwenya, Maseko, and Zulu, "Mother Tongue in Healthcare: Enhancing Patient Outcomes through Language Accommodation"; Pavlenko, "Multilingualism and Emotions: Sociocultural Perspectives."

²⁷ Tshotsho, "Language Policy and Its Effects on Education in South Africa."

²⁸ Maseko, "Language Policy Implementation in Higher Education: The Case of South African Universities."

²⁹ James Cummins, "Linguistic Interdependence and the Educational Development of Bilingual Children," in *The New Immigrant and Language* (Routledge, 2014), 72–101.

³⁰ N., Mkhize and N. Ndimande-Hlongwa, "African Languages and the Transformation of Higher Education in South Africa: A Decolonial Perspective," *Educational Research for Social Change* 9, no. 1 (2020): 31–45.

³¹ Piller, *Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice: An Introduction to Applied Sociolinguistics*.

³² Kamwangamalu, *Language Policy and Economics: The Language Question in Africa*.

As digital tools have grown, they have opened up new ways to use local languages in service delivery. Automated translation tools such as Google Translate and Microsoft Translator are increasingly used to help people who do not speak the same language work together in public services, especially in healthcare and public administration.³³ These tools have been especially helpful in places where many people speak different languages, and service companies cannot provide human translation for all of them. South Africa's Department of Home Affairs has cut service wait times by 25% and improved user satisfaction by 18% since the introduction of automatic booths offering services in all 11 official languages.³⁴

In addition, mobile apps that translate public service information in real time have been tested and worked well in several African countries, such as Kenya and Tanzania. These apps let people use government services in their own languages without having to go to a translator in person. This makes it much easier for people living in rural areas or speaking languages other than English to get help.³⁵ Even though technology seems like a satisfactory answer, it does have some problems. Automated translation tools are not always accurate, especially when translating complex legal or medical terms. Humans must still check quality and accuracy.³⁶

Policy Implications and Recommendations

The literature study emphasises the need for comprehensive language policies that encourage the use of native languages in public service delivery. Governments must actively adopt, finance, and promote language policy. To ensure language service homogeneity, clear regulations for recruiting and training multilingual staff, assigning document translation resources, and fostering cross-government cooperation are needed.³⁷ Since demand for native-language services varies by geography and population, policymakers should address both urban and rural requests. Canada and Switzerland have bilingual public services that governments can follow. These nations believe multilingual government services increase diversity and service delivery.³⁸ Other multilingual nations can improve accessibility and pleasure for their diverse populations by following suit.

Long-Term Sustainability of Native Language Strategies

Evaluating how long-term strategies that utilise local languages can improve public service delivery is essential. Numerous studies have shown that using local languages yields short-term benefits; however, there is a paucity of evidence on their long-term efficacy. According to Van der Merwe et al., governments must ensure that local language initiatives are not merely temporary or experimental but are integral to the continuous provision of public services.³⁹ To facilitate this, it is necessary to secure ongoing funding for language schools, provide persistent training for government employees, and periodically review and adjust language policies to meet evolving needs.

On the whole, using local languages in public services can make them easier for people to use, make customers happier, and speed things up. On the contrary, there are also some issues that must be carefully addressed. States can improve services for everyone through native-language strategies. These strategies can use technology, make language rules that cover a lot of ground, and ensure they last.

Local language public service delivery affects public administration in multilingual cultures. This study demonstrates that local languages improve critical service inclusion and fairness. Public services, especially healthcare and education, are easier for consumers to understand and interact with in their local languages, reducing access disparities. Van der Merwe et al. report that linguistic barriers marginalise many South Africans, as local languages such as isiZulu and Xhosa are under-represented

³³ Piller, *Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice: An Introduction to Applied Sociolinguistics*.

³⁴ Ngwenya, Maseko, and Zulu, "Mother Tongue in Healthcare: Enhancing Patient Outcomes through Language Accommodation."

³⁵ Maseko, "Language Policy Implementation in Higher Education: The Case of South African Universities."

³⁶ Piller, *Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice: An Introduction to Applied Sociolinguistics*.

³⁷ Kamwangamalu, *Language Policy and Economics: The Language Question in Africa*.

³⁸ Cummins, "Linguistic Interdependence and the Educational Development of Bilingual Children."

³⁹ Van der Merwe, Verhoef, and Ruiters, "The Role of Language in Public Service Delivery: Lessons from South Africa."

in public services.⁴⁰ Public managers may promote equality in service delivery by incorporating local languages to create more inclusive settings for varied linguistic groups.

Native language usage also boosts citizens' confidence

Effective use of local languages fosters a sense of belonging and respect, especially among service users who feel alienated by official languages. Kamwangamalu notes that dominant languages in public services exacerbate social hierarchies and linguistic inequality.⁴¹ When local languages are spoken, particularly in rural and disadvantaged regions, individuals feel their needs are satisfied, which may boost public institution involvement. This inclusion promotes a more democratic and transparent public service framework, which coincides with Habermas's communicative action theory of equal access to public discourse.⁴²

However, implementing local languages in public administration is difficult. Pavlenko noted that handling numerous languages might be logistically difficult for public entities with limited funds.⁴³ Considering the long-term benefits of social cohesion and improved service delivery, the advantages of linguistic inclusion in public administration outweigh these problems.

Strategic Recommendations

There are several strategy suggestions in the books for lawmakers who want to create service delivery models that include people who speak different languages. Firstly, there needs to be a commitment to full language policy change that encourages the fair use of local languages in all public service areas. Based on facts about people and languages, this change should be guided by clear rules specifying which languages should receive the most attention. Maseko argues that language policies should be situation-specific, taking into account how languages change over time across different areas and ensuring that public services are fully accessible to people who speak local languages.⁴⁴

Subsequently, funds must be allocated to programs that train government employees in multiple languages. Policymakers should hire people who can speak more than one language in key public service areas, such as healthcare and education, where users and service workers need to communicate directly. Furthermore, training programs should ensure that government workers are fluent in their languages and equipped with the complex vocabulary needed for their jobs.⁴⁵ This would stop problems caused by misunderstandings, especially in fields like law, healthcare, and social services, where exact language is important.

Third, the most important thing is to use technology to support services in the original language. Making international online and mobile tools that offer real-time translation services can help make the job of human resources easier. These tools can also make public services easier to access, especially in rural areas where it may be hard to reach government buildings in person. Pavlenko argues that these kinds of technological changes should be incorporated into current public service systems to work alongside services people run.⁴⁶ This would create a mixed model that makes service delivery more efficient.

Consequently, rules protecting local languages must be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure they work. When policymakers use local languages, they should set performance measures to assess whether these improvements in service outcomes, such as user satisfaction and service accessibility. Regular reviews such as these should be conducted to allow language policies to be changed as needed to address recent problems and maintain the benefits.⁴⁷

The Role of Technology in Native Language Adoption

⁴⁰ Van der Merwe, Verhoef, and Ruiters, "The Role of Language in Public Service Delivery: Lessons from South Africa."

⁴¹ Kamwangamalu, *Language Policy and Economics: The Language Question in Africa*.

⁴² J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Beacon Press, 1984).

⁴³ Pavlenko, "Multilingualism and Emotions: Sociocultural Perspectives."

⁴⁴ Maseko, "Language Policy Implementation in Higher Education: The Case of South African Universities."

⁴⁵ Tshotsho, "Language Policy and Its Effects on Education in South Africa."

⁴⁶ Pavlenko, "Multilingualism and Emotions: Sociocultural Perspectives."

⁴⁷ Ngwenya, Maseko, and Zulu, "Mother Tongue in Healthcare: Enhancing Patient Outcomes through Language Accommodation."

Technology might transform the inclusion of native languages in public services. Mobile apps and automatic translation software may scale language boundaries in industries where direct human connection is not possible. Mobile apps that deliver government services in local languages have boosted service accessibility in rural Kenya, where linguistic variety is higher.⁴⁸ These apps let people register for permits and get healthcare in their original languages without an interpreter.

Recent advancements in artificial intelligence and natural language processing have produced more sophisticated translation systems, which can assist public sector providers in delivering multilingual services. For instance, South Africa's Home Affairs offices have implemented automated kiosks that offer services in all 11 official languages. This innovation has reduced waiting times and enhanced public satisfaction.⁴⁹ Furthermore, these technologies are more cost-effective than employing human translators at every service point and ensuring consistent service delivery across different languages.

Although technology can aid in the adoption of native languages, it is not always reliable. Automated translation programs are improving but frequently make errors, particularly with legal and medical terminology. Piller stresses the need for human control for translation accuracy, particularly in precise fields.⁵⁰ Access to technology is inconsistent, especially in rural areas without digital infrastructure. Thus, technology may help native language adoption, but it must be paired with human capital and infrastructural improvements to benefit all residents.

Comparison with International Studies

The findings of this review align with similar studies conducted in other bilingual societies worldwide, particularly in Canada, Switzerland, and India. Canada recognises both English and French as official languages. To ensure that all people, regardless of their language, can receive government services equally, services are offered in both languages.⁵¹ People state that this policy of speaking both English and French has helped bring the country together and eased language problems between English- and French-speaking people. The fact that Canada's bilingual approach works so well shows how important it is to have national language policies that make everyone feel welcome.

German, French, Italian, and Romansh are the four official languages of Switzerland. As in other countries with multiple languages, Switzerland's public services are designed to serve people who know many different languages. When working for the government in Switzerland, people have to speak the language of their workplace. This way, people can use public services in the language that works best for them.⁵² It is easier to meet the language needs of various places when the language policy is not centralised. This could be used as an example in other bilingual contexts, such as South Africa.

In India, on the other hand, language strategy in public service delivery has not been as stable. Indian people speak more than 1,600 different languages, making it hard for the government to develop a language policy that works for everyone.⁵³ People who speak their own languages, especially in rural places, are seen as less important because most public services in India are given in Hindi and English. Many people have called for increased language representation in public services, particularly in areas where most residents speak their native languages. The situation in India illustrates the challenges of running a government that effectively serves everyone while also respecting linguistic diversity. Communities in other ethnic regions often face similar issues.

The findings from South Africa and other African countries differ from those of other nations, highlighting that being bilingual presents both challenges and unique opportunities to make public services fairer and more accessible to all. By examining how Canada and Switzerland manage their language policies, we can develop better strategies to accommodate multiple languages while ensuring government services operate smoothly.

⁴⁸ Maseko, "Language Policy Implementation in Higher Education: The Case of South African Universities."

⁴⁹ Ngwenya, Maseko, and Zulu, "Mother Tongue in Healthcare: Enhancing Patient Outcomes through Language Accommodation."

⁵⁰ Piller, *Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice: An Introduction to Applied Sociolinguistics*.

⁵¹ Cummins, "Linguistic Interdependence and the Educational Development of Bilingual Children."

⁵² Shohamy, *Language Policy: Hidden Agendas and New Approaches*.

⁵³ Kamwangamalu, *Language Policy and Economics: The Language Question in Africa*.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study emphasises the critical need for lawmakers to prioritise the establishment of comprehensive language policies that actively promote the use of native languages within public services. Such policies are essential for fostering inclusivity and ensuring that non-native speakers can access services without language barriers. To effectively implement these policies, it is necessary to allocate additional funding for training programs that equip government employees with proficiency in multiple languages. This investment not only enhances communication with diverse communities but also enriches the public service workforce, making it more representative of the population it serves.

Additionally, integrating digital tools and platforms is vital to streamlining access to language services. These technologies can simplify the process for individuals seeking assistance in their native languages, making public services more user-friendly and accessible. Regular reviews and assessments of language policies are also crucial. By systematically evaluating the effectiveness of these policies, the government can ensure they remain relevant, adaptable, and able to meet the evolving needs of the community.

Moreover, the study calls for further exploration of the durability and scalability of native-language approaches in public service delivery. Understanding how these approaches can be sustained and expanded is essential to creating lasting impact across regions and sectors. Evaluating the intersection of language policy and technological advancements will provide valuable insights into how digital innovations can significantly enhance multilingual service delivery in diverse contexts.

Consequently, conducting more regional and industry-specific comparisons will shed light on the varying effects of native language use on public service outcomes. This understanding can help tailor language policies to better serve the unique needs of different communities, ultimately improving public service quality and accessibility for all citizens.

CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted the considerable benefits of utilising local languages in public service delivery, emphasising how this approach fosters increased accessibility, consumer satisfaction, and operational efficiency, particularly in areas characterised by rich linguistic diversity. By implementing programs that offer services in native languages, organisations can effectively remove linguistic barriers that often prevent individuals from marginalised communities from fully participating in and benefiting from these services. This inclusivity enhances the overall experience for service users and promotes a sense of belonging and empowerment.

This study has several key limitations. Most of the research primarily focused on sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia, which is a significant drawback. While these regions offer valuable insights into the use of local languages in service delivery, the findings may not be applicable to other areas, such as Europe or the Americas, where language laws and service delivery systems likely differ considerably.

Another issue is the limited number of languages available for study. Many of the studies examined focused only on a few languages. These were usually languages spoken by many people, like Zulu or Xhosa in South Africa. As a result, we cannot determine whether using a local language is useful for smaller language groups or languages with fewer speakers. Additionally, studies not published in English may have been excluded, potentially leading to the oversight of significant research in other languages.

Furthermore, a lack of real-world evidence on the long-term consequences of local language service delivery hinders the study. Several studies have shown short-term benefits in service efficiency and user satisfaction, but the duration of these benefits remains unknown. Thorough planning and organisation are essential to successfully executing these strategies. This includes conducting needs assessments to identify the specific languages spoken within the community and tailoring services accordingly.

Additionally, careful resource allocation, such as hiring bilingual staff and investing in translation technologies, is crucial to effectively bridge communication gaps. Supporting technology

can play a vital role in addressing logistical challenges, ensuring that language differences do not impede access to vital public services. Ultimately, prioritising local languages enriches the service delivery process and cultivates an environment of equity and respect for cultural diversity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Cummins, James. “Linguistic Interdependence and the Educational Development of Bilingual Children.” In *The New Immigrant and Language*, 72–101. Routledge, 2014.
- Deumert, A. “Language and the Multilingual City: Discursive Constructions of a Minority Language in Cape Town.” *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 39, no. 4 (2018): 280–95.
- Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Beacon Press, 1984.
- Kamwangamalu, N. M. *Language Policy and Economics: The Language Question in Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- Maseko, P. “Language Policy Implementation in Higher Education: The Case of South African Universities.” *Education as Change* 24, no. 1 (2020): 1–23.
- Mkhize, N., and N. Ndimande-Hlongwa. “African Languages and the Transformation of Higher Education in South Africa: A Decolonial Perspective.” *Educational Research for Social Change* 9, no. 1 (2020): 31–45.
- Ndhlovu, F. *Decolonising Multilingualism in Africa: Recentering African Languages as the Global Future*. Multilingual Matters, 2020.
- Ndimande-Hlongwa, N., and N. Mkhize. “Multilingualism and Multiculturalism in South Africa’s Higher Education: Reflections on Language Policy Implementation.” *Per Linguam* 35, no. 1 (2019): 1–15.
- Ngwenya, B., S. Maseko, and P. Zulu. “Mother Tongue in Healthcare: Enhancing Patient Outcomes through Language Accommodation.” *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 39, no. 2 (2021): 167–82.
- Pavlenko, A. “Multilingualism and Emotions: Sociocultural Perspectives.” *Journal of Pragmatics* 113 (2017): 158–71.
- Piller, I. *Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice: An Introduction to Applied Sociolinguistics*. London: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Shohamy, E. *Language Policy: Hidden Agendas and New Approaches*. Routledge, 2006.
- Tshotsho, B. P. “Language Policy and Its Effects on Education in South Africa.” *Language Matters* 50, no. 3 (2019): 265–78.
- Van der Merwe, M., E. Verhoef, and C. Ruiters. “The Role of Language in Public Service Delivery: Lessons from South Africa.” *Journal of Public Administration* 55, no. 1 (2020): 120–36.

ABOUT AUTHORS

Innocent Zitha is a Lecturer and Researcher specialising in the Department of English, Media Studies and Linguistics in the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education at the University of Venda. My experience in the field of Higher Education spans over five years. Furthermore, I have authored and co-authored 26 papers and 3 book chapters that have been published in peer-reviewed journals.

Khulisile Nkuna is a senior lecturer and researcher at the University of Venda, where she specialises in Siswati literature and onomastics. She is a valued member of the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Education, specifically within the Department of African Languages. Her work not only deepens academic discourse but also promotes appreciation for the intricacies of African languages and their literary traditions.

Sikhumbuzo Sibusiso Khoza is a part-time junior lecturer in the Department of African Languages at the University of Venda's Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Education. He specialises in Siswati and academic writing. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Siswati and Media Studies, with a concentration in Siswati, and an Honours degree in Siswati, as well as a Master's degree in language instruction. He has six years of experience in the higher education sector. As of right now, he has given

two presentations at different national conferences. Furthermore, he has written and co-written seven articles and one book chapter that have been accepted into peer-reviewed journals, making a substantial contribution to the fields of academic literacy, Siswati language usage, linguistics, and teaching and learning scholarship.

Sarah Matsetela is a Lecturer in the Department of Academic Literacy, School of Languages, Faculty of Humanities, North-West University, Mafikeng Campus, Republic of South Africa. Her research interests encompass linguistics, academic literacy, and literature. She serves as the head of the Academic Literacy department.