Significance of libraries as a developmental and preservation institution for indigenous languages in South Africa

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There is a perpetual hypothesis whose inclination is to divorce the development of indigenous South African languages from the libraries. This then romanticises the intricate notion that these languages cannot be advanced within the arena and systems of libraries. Thus, this study aims to elucidate the significant role of libraries in developing and conserving indigenous languages in South Africa. The study utilised literature review to highlight the significance of libraries in the development and preservation of indigenous languages. The key findings indicate that although South African libraries have made significant parades to develop indigenous languages, there is a considerable number of tasks facing the national government and libraries in supporting the transformational endeavour. These include developing collection in indigenous languages, as well as libraries serving as spaces for storytelling. Ultimately, it is recommended that multi-collaborative efforts ought to be taken by stakeholders that are directly or indirectly affected in a bid to advance the stature of indigenous South African languages within libraries. The closing remarks indicate the necessity to continue to scholarly revisit issues concerning native languages, as well as libraries given that these are crucial components in human and social existence.

1 Introduction and background to the context

It cannot be invalidated that South Africa has been engulfed by a plethora of challenges concerning its indigenous languages and dialects. Such challenges range from colonial forces, as well as some post-colonial agents that pursue to erode indigenous South African languages while advancing the stature of colonial languages (Diko 2022a). This suggests that the legacy of colonialism continues to advance some of the neoliberalist perceptions that act contrary to the necessity to promote native South African languages. By the same token, it cannot be disowned that South Africa is currently grappling and struggling to elevate the stature of these indigenous languages; a stature that would see them as languages that are used and visible in controlling and semi-controlling domains such as education, administration, science and technology, law and legislation, commerce, and business (Clifton 2021). This is reasonably enough to indicate that, indeed, numerous challenges continue to delay and downplay the urgency to accelerate the promotion of indigenous South African languages.

Indigenous languages are a valuable resource for communication, national development, and human existence (Fox & Wu 2023). Effectively, there is no human activity that can be advanced meaningfully and successfully without the employment of language – whether verbally or non-verbally. For instance, humans use language to express and denote their identity, traditions and customs, feelings, and thoughts. During the practice of amaXhosa traditional customs, for example, certain words such as Camagu! (which means one recognises you and your ancestors/gods) are used as an appraisal and recognition of ancestors (Menye 2022). This then proves the validity that there cannot be any consequential human activity without the utilisation of language. Indigenous languages are no exception to this. In concurring, Olaifa (2014: 23) pens down that:

Language is the key to the heart of the people. If we lose the key, we lose the people. If we treasure the key and keep it safe, it will unlock the door to untold riches, riches that cannot be guessed from the other side of the door.

The above assertion is enough to underline that language, and in particular, indigenous languages, are a key to human existence and national development. This key - indigenous language - ought to be treasured for the very reason that it provides directives for entrance, possession, and control. In other words, when one has overall control of their language, they have the power to exercise democracy and participate in daily discourses such as politics and social cohesion. This is in addition to the fact that language is a deciding factor for people (Zulu 2023). That is the reason even in the Bible, language manipulation and bewilderment led to the halt of the building structure. The emergence of many languages in the Bible can be traced back to the story of the Tower of Babel, which is found in the book of Genesis, specifically in Genesis 11: 1-9.

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That being the case, the indigenous South African languages ought to be protected by any person, government and institution including South African libraries. This is because language is not only a vehicle through which a people's culture can be expressed but also a medium of one's thoughts, imaginations, creativity, aspirations, desires, emotions, and indeed the entire human need and capacity (Olaifa 2014, Clifton 2021). Ngoepe, Shaku and Letsoalo (2022) lament that indigenous languages are facing their greatest ever threat of extinction. And this is happening on our own doorstep in South Africa as languages such as N/uu are facing extinction with one native speaker left. It is the thesis of this paper that libraries can play a significant role in the development and preservation of indigenous languages.

Libraries, which include national, academic and research, presidential, law, community, and school libraries, among others, play a significant role in providing and generating information for contemporary and future usage (Lor 2012). This means that every South African citizen has the potential of playing an active role in the democratic state if and when these libraries at their unique levels recognise the visibility of indigenous languages. That is the reason Clifton (2021) reflects that the importance of libraries in language preservation, promotion and conservation should be seen as monumental. Having said that, this does not suggest that there are no challenges, as will be discussed later. The significance of South African libraries such as research and academic libraries, for example, is particularly greater against the backdrop that some indigenous South African languages were and are still marginalised by colonial and post-colonial forces, as previously mentioned. These languages include Xitsonga, Tshivenda, and isiNdebele, among many more (Ndebele 2022). It must also be indicated herein that dialects are also affected by this subjugation. This is further compounded by the reality that more than seven thousand languages across the world continue to face extinction (Lor 2012). As a result of that, while South African linguists and librarians are concerned with the preservation of indigenous languages such as documenting materials that are produced in these languages (Diko 2023a), more emphasis and attention should be channeled towards the role that South African libraries such as the National Library of South Africa (NLSA) can play to safeguard these languages.

In a nutshell, this study problematises, through a qualitative research approach, and in particular, conceptualisation, the significant role that libraries can play in a bid to protect indigenous South African languages. This is against the idea that the role of libraries in protecting native South African languages should not be confined to the arenas of writing and documenting only. It should extend to the practical levels. For instance, the researcher of this article is involved in the Funda Mzantsi Championship, which is driven and governed by the NLSA, the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) and the George Municipality in the Western Cape (WC). In this championship, the aim is to promote the culture of reading and writing in indigenous South African languages including colonial languages. University students, school learners, community members, inmates or offenders participate in this championship and prizes are won for the best performing contestants in the spelling bee, debate, book review and reading categories respectively. The researcher is one of the adjudicators of this championship – for the past six years. The NSLA is the founding institution of this project. The implications of this championship demonstrate that issues related to indigenous language advancement should not be theorised; instead, they should be contested at practical levels. For instance, in this championship, several inmates or prisoners have written books in their indigenous languages. This is the stance that the NLSA has taken to guarantee the visibility of local languages.

In a nutshell, this article problematises the continued underdevelopment of indigenous South African languages, and in which way South African libraries such as community, digital and school libraries, among many more, can play a constructive role in promoting these languages today and tomorrow. The aim is to evoke theoretical and practical responses from policymakers, and in particular, the national government, in blending and proactively supporting these two components – native languages and libraries, as previously mentioned. It must also be indicated that the overall objective of this article is to report on the extent and cruciality of the role of South African libraries in the advancement of indigenous South African languages. By the same token, it is to underline the essentiality of proactively preserving these languages. To advance the discourses of this article, it is important to observe the research methodology and theoretical framework, hence the section below.

2 Literature review
This section is bipartite. The first major component solicits three major scholars that made commentary on indigenous languages and their visibility within the arena of South African libraries. The second and last component synthesises scholarly views that are relevant to key terms in this article.

2.1 Reviewing framed literature review
It is prudent to appreciate that indigenous South African languages are important resources in human and social existence. For instance, Ngulube (2012) argues for the role of indigenous languages in respect of writers and publishers. Ngulube's (2012) conceptual article advocates for the recognition of literary material and its dissemination through library systems. This is against the reality that there is a reluctance of many indigenous language writers and publishers to allow

material that is produced in local languages (McIvor 2020). This means that there is a tendency of rejecting African material that is constructed and produced in indigenous languages. The reasons for this, according to Ngulube (2012), are pinned on a weak market. A material that is constructed and assembled in indigenous languages is not appreciated in terms of financial and market muscles. This then leads to the continued use and veneration of languages of power and colonialism – English and Afrikaans in the South African context.

On the other hand, Mahwasane (2017) argues that there is a challenge within the school libraries where Foundation Phase learners are taught using their mother tongue languages. Having said that, Mahwasane (2017: 41) asserts that most school libraries offer material that is written in the English language largely. In addition, Mahwasane (2017: 42) points to the fact that the most needed material for teaching and learning (tuition) within the Foundation Phase is in indigenous languages, and therefore, availing such material in the English language overthrows the purpose of the library as a hub of learning and knowledge generation. In the same vein, Mashige, Cekiso and Meyiwa (2019) argue that the use of library search engines does not advance research through indigenous languages. These scholarly views underline that search engines within most library systems do not recognise the search for information through indigenous languages. This then points to the reality that there is still a challenge within the practical component of South African libraries in ensuring that knowledge that is generated through indigenous languages is efficiently accessed. In fact, these scholarly views indicate the role of indigenous South African languages for adults and children.

Sibomana (2022) claims that indigenous South African languages play a central role for both adults and children in fostering cultural identity, preserving heritage, and promoting social cohesion. For adults, these languages are a means of preserving their cultural pedigree, passing down traditional knowledge and maintaining a strong connection to their communities and ancestors. They are vehicles for storytelling, rituals, and communication, allowing adults to express their thoughts, emotions, and experiences in the most authentic and meaningful way (Sibomana 2022: 1260). This suggests that using indigenous languages in various aspects of adult life, such as in work settings, community gatherings and interpersonal interactions, reinforces a sense of belonging and pride in their cultural roots (Mashige et al. 2019).

For children, indigenous South African languages are vital for identity formation and cultural integration (Little 2023). Learning and using their mother tongue from an early age provides a profound foundation for understanding their cultural heritage, values, and societal norms. Over and above this, indigenous South African languages serve as a bridge to intergenerational knowledge transfer, enabling children to learn traditional customs, folklore, and historical narratives directly from their elders. Ultimately, proficiency in indigenous languages enhances communication with family members, neighbours, and local communities, enabling children to actively participate in cultural events and ceremonies (Toyer & Peck 2023). Emphasizing, therefore, the importance of these languages in education ensures that children grow up with a sense of cultural appreciation and respect for their linguistic diversity, contributing to a more inclusive and harmonious society.

2.2 The importance of a library

Library or ithala leencwadi as it is known in the isiXhosa language (Diko 2020), umtapo wolwazi in the isiZulu language and bokgobapuku in the Northern Sotho, is a location where valuable and precious materials are kept for private and public use. A library is a collection of materials, books or media that are accessible for use and not just for display purposes (Van Melik & Merry 2023). A library provides physical or digital access to materials and may be a physical location or a virtual space, or both (Chen 2023). For instance, during the Covid-19 era, digital library usage has been widely used since most countries or regions were under heavy lockdown regulations. The University of South Africa's (UNISA) library has been one of the academic libraries that offer a range of study, research, and knowledge information online (Maluleke, Ngoepe & Marutha 2020). Other universities such as the University of the Western Cape (UWC), Nelson Mandela University (NMU) and University of Pretoria (UP) have also utilised digital tools to offer their library material. This denotes that the library's role remains important even in the midst of a pandemic given that knowledge creation has no boundaries and timeframes.

It is significant to also understand that a library has diverse meanings because it has several historical developments as a result of its changing functions and purposes, which are occasioned by the development of society (Lund & Wang 2023). For instance, Zhou (2022: 21) proclaims that libraries were originally developed to preserve written materials produced and evolved by humans. Olaifa (2014) maintains that a library is an agency through which sources of information of accumulated knowledge and experience are selected, acquired, organised, preserved, and disseminated. Huang (2022) asserts that a library is a learned institution equipped with treasures of knowledge maintained, organised, and managed by trained personnel to educate children, men, and women; and is aimed at continuously assisting in the self-improvement process through effective and prompt dissemination of information embodied in the resources. Khalid, Malik and Mahmood (2021) pen down that a library is a building or room containing collections of books, periodicals, and sometimes films and recorded music for use or borrowing by the public or the members of an institution.

Bearing the previous scholarly contributions in mind, it stands to reason that indigenous South African languages and South African libraries be viewed as important instruments that operate in a mutual relationship for the very reason that library materials should be produced in languages that can be understood by the speakers of indigenous languages. In the South African context, the relationship between indigenous languages and South African libraries is crucial since most speakers use indigenous languages for daily communication - excluding formal communication such as education, administration, and governance (Diko 2022a). In brief and based on the literature review above, the role of indigenous South African languages and South African libraries is intertwined in promoting cultural preservation, fostering inclusivity, and advancing education. Indigenous languages serve as vehicles for preserving and transmitting cultural heritage, traditions, and knowledge within South African communities, contributing to the preservation of diverse cultural identities. Likewise, South African libraries play a vital role in supporting access to literature, educational resources, and information in indigenous languages, ensuring that these languages are promoted, valued, and used as essential tools for learning and communication within the country's diverse linguistic landscape.

3 Challenges concerning indigenous languages in South Africa

Hereunder, challenges concerning the indigenous languages in South Africa will be presented. The first section will provide a general overview of such challenges only in the South African context. The second section will conceptualise challenges that relate to South African libraries. The reason to do this is to ensure a systemic discussion that aims to fulfill the aims of the article. One would recall that the aim is to systemically elucidate the role of South African library institutions in preserving and conserving indigenous languages in South Africa.

It cannot be disputed that South Africa has a pungent sting of colonial history that heavily engulfed the country's indigenous languages, among other issues (Makhanya & Zibane 2020; Saliwa-Mogale 2021; Diko 2022a; Mpako 2022). The indigenous South African languages were subjugated from controlling and semi-controlling domains. Controlling domains include education, administration, governance, science, and technology. Semi-controlling domains include medicine, law and legislation, business, and commerce (Maseko 2018). The subjugation of these languages led to the English and Afrikaans languages being elevated to a higher stature, leading to their dominance. For instance, the two colonial languages were and are still accepted as languages of business and trade, teaching and learning. In contrast, the exclusion of South African languages was witnessed through the rejection of written materials in indigenous languages (Diko 2020). Whereas it may well be the case that some African materials that were assembled in local languages were rejected based on protest against colonialism and political unsettling; such materials were further rejected with the intent of rejecting the languages themselves – that which mirrors South African cultural heritage, identity and pride.

As a result of marginalising indigenous languages, a student protest in 1976 ensued (Brooke 2021). In respect of this fact, several South African school learners protested against the use of the Afrikaans language as a language of teaching and learning, claiming that it excluded them from effectively accessing the education system. It was at this juncture that the South African government was placed under enormous pressure to review and revise its apartheid language policies within the South African education system (Kretzer 2022). As it stands, many South African educational institutions are mandated to develop language policies that enunciate the realities and the population of the students (Heleta & Chasi 2023). For example, UNISA allows post-graduate students in the Department of African Languages to construct and assemble their dissertations and theses in their respective indigenous languages.

Another issue that can be categorised as a challenge concerning indigenous South African languages is endangerment. Language endangerment does not necessarily mean that a language has few speakers; instead, it suggests that the current living speakers no longer pass the language on to the next generation (Childs 2020). For instance, the Nama language is suffering a great deal and possibility of extinction due to its fewer speakers (Job 2022). This language is only spoken in three countries, namely, South Africa, Namibia, and Botswana (Job 2022). In other words, this language suffers double challenges. First, it is facing challenges on the basis that there are fewer people who can speak the language. Last, it is facing challenges on the basis that it is spoken in only three countries in the world. Therefore, language endangerment is one of the challenges that threaten the existence of indigenous languages – as in the case of Nama. As a result of this, this article argues that it remains prudent for South African libraries such as academic and research libraries to document the indigenous South African languages. By the same token, it is argued hereunder that the importance of documenting indigenous South African languages lies in shielding ethnological lineage and linguistic multiplicity for future generations. In fact, documenting these languages helps safeguard traditional knowledge, stories and practices that may otherwise be lost over time. In addition to this, it facilitates research and academic discourses, enabling a deeper understanding of South Africa's rich linguistic and cultural landscape and contributing to the appreciation and respect for indigenous languages and their role in shaping the country's identity.

Despite the language policies that have been introduced, indigenous languages in South Africa still undergo major exclusion. For instance, very few academic journals accept research articles that are written in indigenous languages in the

South African context, when compared to those that accepted journal articles in the English language or other colonial languages. The tuition in higher education institutions is conducted using the English language with limitations in the indigenous languages (Bosire, Mendenhall, Norris & Goudge 2021). In this regard, it stands to reason to further argue that there can never be a meaningful society without the utilisation of indigenous. If any society will cherish the source of her existence, then such society should focus on her language documentation, and proper preservation and conservation within the library institutions, which will result in adequate and definite dissemination of the language to both the current and in-coming generations (Olaifa 2014).

Another continued challenge in South African societies in respect of indigenous languages is the barrier that classroom learners continue to face. If learners are taught in a language that they are not familiar with, they are justifiably to underperform for the very reason that they are unable to comprehend and synthesise the content or subject. This is because learners may struggle to understand the instructions, explanations and concepts presented in the classroom. This limited comprehension may adversely affect their ability to engage with the subject matter effectively. When learners feel unable to express themselves or contribute to discussions due to language barriers, they may become disengaged and less likely to actively participate in classroom activities. To this view, it is not just being able to use an effective communication medium in the teaching and learning situation that is at stake. A child's self-confidence and sense of self in society are undermined if the home language cannot be used for learning, and these are further undermined by the experience of repeated underachievement (Yang & Ogata 2023). This disadvantage has cognitive, psychological, social, and cultural aspects, all manifested in the ongoing failures of the education system (Bosire et al. 2021).

Just recently, major, and critical information concerning the Covid-19 pandemic and monkeypox was communicated using the English language (Sv & Ittamalla 2022). This posed a major threat to many indigenous communities, especially to people with no command of the English language (Rudwick, Sijadu & Turner 2021). Although there were strides to use indigenous languages - strides such as translating and interpreting Covid-19 information. Diko (2022) reports that such strides were not accurate as they mostly took time to reach the target audience. This may well be the case given that translation, for instance, is not always accurate and often requires prolonged lengths of time. With a few randomly selected and detailed challenges of local languages in South Africa, it must be stressed that several challenges inhibit the development and advancement of these languages. To name a few, for future scholarly discourse; politics, economies, human resource capacity and decaying will or interest to implement visible strategies into this just course, are some of the critical challenges that sabotage the acceleration of the indigenous languages in South Africa.

One of the major challenges in preserving the indigenous South African languages is the lack of funding (Masenya & Ngulube 2020). For instance, in the Funda Mzantsi Championship which is primarily driven by the NLSA, there was an indication by one of the NLSA officials that funding to run the championship is challenging. Aboyade and Adeyemo (2019) confirm this claim suggesting that most African libraries, generally, are lowly funded because they are given low priority by the national governments; and not regarded as a money-generating organisation for the continent. South African libraries, in their entirety, are no exception to this. This is in addition to the fact that most people in the rural disadvantaged communities in South Africa are illiterate (Mugwisi, Jiyane & Fombad 2018), and this is always a challenge because they do not get an opportunity to document and record inventions, discoveries, and ways of doing things (Aboyade & Adeyemo 2019: 41). For instance, indigenous and local communities in South Africa have fertile indigenous knowledge and experiences surrounding agricultural and medicinal activities; however, such information cannot be documented in the South African libraries such as community libraries since they are not equipped with the necessary skills of forming part of the process of documenting and recording such information within the library systems. The only instance such crucial information is uncovered is when it is orally shared with children so as to continue life when elderly persons are gone (Mathar, Hijrana, Haruddin, Akbar, Irawati & Satriani 2021; Ali, Habes, Youssef & Alodwan 2021). Alternatively, it is when such information is solicited through research or studies.

Another critical problem is the lack of appreciation of indigenous or traditional knowledge. Most people do not see the relevance of traditional knowledge in the development of the nation (Jessen, Ban, Claxton & Darimont 2022), and as a result of this, they prefer to channel their attention on the European and Western ways of living while neglecting their traditional knowledge. In fact, traditional knowledge involves using traditional medicine, traditions, and customs for general livelihoods (Jessen et al. 2022). For this reason, if such traditional knowledge is not honoured and flagged golden, it may lead to extinction and South African library systems will not be afforded an opportunity to document such precious knowledge. In explaining this challenge for South African libraries, Aboyade and Adeyemo (2019: 42) pen down as follows:

… there is the problem of lack of awareness of the need for indigenous information. Most people don't get to appreciate the value of indigenous knowledge. They prefer the western ways of doing things, from the western ways of dressing to western medicine and other foreign made food and products. Also, most people do not believe that

indigenous knowledge can be   a source of livelihood, provide sustainable development to communities and bring about national development for the nation at large.

Consequently, it is difficult to dispute that the distance between South African library structures and indigenous communities is the furthest. Major attention is on the documentation and preservation of written information in the form of books. However, there is less attention on how indigenous knowledge can be preserved in these libraries (Jessen et al. 2022). The issue of indigenous knowledge is mentioned here because there is a great correlation between language and indigenous knowledge. For instance, certain traditions and customs can be efficiently postulated through the use of indigenous languages. Indigenous languages and knowledge are in constant and direct contact and usage. Thus, one cannot divorce each of the two entities from each other owing to the fact that language and culture (indigenous knowledge is infused under culture) operate in a symbiotic relationship (Kaya & Seleti 2014). In essence, if South African libraries such as school libraries, digital libraries, and many more, neglect indigenous knowledge, they are synchronically neglecting indigenous languages.

4 The role of libraries in preserving indigenous languages

This article argues that it is the role of South African libraries such as national, community, private, school and university libraries to protect and provide greater support towards the development of indigenous South African languages. The responsibility to develop and acquire tools that can be used to preserve and conserve these languages rests with the libraries' determination and drive. Ngulube (2012) supports the idea that libraries should ensure that no indigenous language is erased or distorted by preserving the lexicon which is predominantly transmitted orally by documenting and organising it. As it may now be known that the Nama language is facing extinction, it is the responsibility of South African libraries such as digital libraries that the oral component of this language is digitised. This is in addition to the fact that it is the role of the library systems to preserve the culture of Nama, for instance. Preserving the culture of Nama, as well as other indigenous cultures, is a significant role of libraries in South Africa. Libraries serve as repositories of cultural heritage, where traditional knowledge, language, stories, and historical records can be documented and safeguarded for future generations. The preservation of Nama culture within libraries contributes to the broader efforts of cultural revitalisation and promotes the value of indigenous languages and traditions.

In the process, it is perceptive that this important component – the library - raises heightened awareness regarding the endangerment of indigenous languages. Ultimately, it cannot be that issues relating to language extinction are only raised at a scholarly level. South African libraries such as university libraries, should lead this discourse. Similarly, written materials in South African indigenous languages ought to be produced through local languages so much that they are easily accessible for public consumption, especially by indigenous language speakers. For instance, there are isiXhosa books and dictionaries that are out of print. These materials are not easily available for public use by the isiXhosa language users. For example, The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa is not available from the publisher (Diko 2020). Libraries such as university libraries that possess this dictionary have controlled and restricted availability and usage of it. This is not the case with many English dictionaries. This then suggests that attempts to develop the isiXhosa language, in addition to many indigenous South African languages, may be challenging as some terms are enclosed in the very same dictionary.

The approach to recognising the role of local languages requires libraries to recognise the role of language documentation (Olaifa 2014), which is the subfield of linguistics. This field is different from other branches of linguistics such as sociolinguistics, phonology and phonetics, description, and grammatical rules in the sense that it strictly focuses on the documentation of endangered languages. Preserving indigenous languages, will not only be redeeming such languages from erasure and distortion, but it will also be protecting the cultural diversity of such languages. The public library, for instance, plays a central role in a human's ability to record his thoughts, experience, history, culture, and heritage in his language and to make it available to others. Thus, one of the key functions of libraries is the preservation of knowledge. The thought, experience, history, culture, and heritage that are recorded using a language, are acquired by the library, which functions as an agent of the preservation of the records (Kaya & Seleti 2014). One would recall that libraries such as the NLSA, research and academic libraries, engage in several activities to ensure that human records survive time and age, and are preserved from generation to generation. These systems of preservation do not only acquire, preserve, and organise the records, but also help in disseminating information and knowledge from generation to generation. That is the reason it is important to note that any information or record kept in the library is not only assured of preservation but also for dissemination purposes (Olaifa 2014, Rao 2019, Saito 2020, Bangani 2021).

This article, ultimately, argues that the role of the South African libraries (national, community, school, research and academic, digital, archival, presidential, law, and mobile libraries) is not only to preserve written materials, but it is to serve as a language bank. All the materials that are documented in these libraries reflect a language. Even the artwork is a non-

verbal language that contains meaning when critically examined. Whether the materials are in print or non-print, they carry the language. For this reason, the two key components (indigenous languages and libraries) cannot be disjointed from one another. There is an intact relationship between the two. That is why this article additionally argues that where there is no library there is no language, and in the same vein, where there is no language there is no library. The principal role that the library has is to guarantee that indigenous South African languages are properly reflected and documented. It is the responsibility of the libraries to call out to the government to provide more support in a bid to ensure that indigenous languages are conserved. In the process, there should be continued research within the South African libraries that pursues to monitor the role and pace of preserving indigenous languages. In other words, in addition to the scope and aim of these exclusive libraries, a system that seeks to monitor the progress that relates to the preservation of indigenous languages ought to be developed.

5 Conclusion and recommendations

South African libraries need to operate in a multi-collaborative effort in a bid to advance and elevate the stature of indigenous South African languages. For example, academic and public libraries can repurpose their spaces to include storytelling and spelling bees in indigenous languages. To do this, more private and public support ought to be solicited. The South African government, in particular, must be sensitised about the challenges of indigenous languages and some of the challenges within the library sector. Certainly, the indigenous language and library boards must lead this process. Once this is considered, more reasonable solutions can be recruited to address what has been problematised in the genesis of this article. For example, it would be a step in the right direction to acknowledge the significant role of traditional knowledge in the arena of indigenous South African languages. By the same token, it would be perceptive for the South African government to provide more funding that can be used to capacitate South African libraries, including rural libraries, with qualified personnel. For instance, personnel with a Bachelor's Degree in Library and Information Science (or related qualification) ought to be considered librarians. This will then prove the validity that every qualification is relevant in South Africa.

Technologies such as podcasts, which are available in the library, may be used to preserve and conserve the spoken versions of indigenous languages while written documents and books are capable of preserving information about the literature and linguistics of languages. When these technological tools are considered, the culture of reading and writing in indigenous languages must be encouraged, particularly among young children. To do this, policymakers should ensure that every material in the South African library is available in indigenous South African languages. This means that translators should be employed as this will also contribute to the need to decrease unemployment rates in South Africa especially the young and disadvantaged individuals who have specialised in indigenous languages.

This article has argued that the relationship between indigenous South African languages and South African libraries is one of cultural preservation, linguistic inclusivity, and knowledge dissemination. South African libraries play a central role in recognising, documenting, and promoting the use of indigenous languages within their collections and services. They serve as custodians of cultural heritage, archiving materials in various indigenous languages to conserve traditional knowledge, stories, and histories for future generations. South African libraries also contribute to linguistic inclusivity by providing resources and services in indigenous languages, making information accessible to diverse language communities. While that is the case, it has been argued that certain challenges are prevailing, hence the need to continue to examine the phenomenon that has been discussed herein. For instance, it has been argued that issues pertaining to funding have the potential to delay efforts to conserve indigenous South African languages, therefore, it would be important for other scholars to continue this debate.

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