

# LANGUAGE

## AS A RESOURCE FOR SOCIAL COHESION: A CASE OF PAN-AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

### EL IDIOMA COMO RECURSO PARA LA COHESIÓN SOCIAL: EL CASO DE LAS UNIVERSIDADES PANAFRICANAS

Farai Chinangure <sup>1</sup>

E-mail: [dos@africau.edu.sz](mailto:dos@africau.edu.sz)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0818-410X>

Novuyo Nkomo <sup>2\*</sup>

E-mail: [nnkomo@uniswa.sz](mailto:nnkomo@uniswa.sz)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9851-2906>

Cynthia Nhleko <sup>2</sup>

E-mail: [cnhleko@uniswa.sz](mailto:cnhleko@uniswa.sz)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9348-1661>

Phumlile Anderson <sup>2</sup>

E-mail: [panderson@uniswa.sz](mailto:panderson@uniswa.sz)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-3727-4732>

<sup>1</sup>Africa University. South Africa.

<sup>2</sup>University of Eswatini. South Africa.

\*Corresponding author

Suggested citation (APA, seventh ed.)

Chinangure, F., Nkomo, N., Nhleko, C., & Anderson, P. (2025). Language as a Resource for Social Cohesion: A Case of Pan-African Universities. *Universidad y Sociedad*, 17(6). e5125.

#### ABSTRACT

Language plays an important role in ensuring people from diverse backgrounds are interconnected. As the world has become a global village, understanding and using various languages to promote social cohesion and unity among African communities is critical. This qualitative study explores the theme "Language as a Resource for Social Cohesion," focusing on how a Pan-African university can promote understanding and build a shared identity among students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Unstructured interviews with forty participants (20 males and 20 females) yielded data that were analysed thematically. Some of the themes that emerged included that; it is possible to develop a framework based on sociolinguistics, intercultural communication, and educational practices by examining the role of language policies, curriculum design, and language learning opportunities. Additionally, activities such as intercultural dialogue, and integrating indigenous languages in the facilitation of university programmes may enhance cohesion. This may also empower marginalized communities by incorporating their Indigenous languages into educational programmes as part of linguistic competence building. This linguistic competence in multiple languages equips future leaders with the ability to navigate complex social and political landscapes, engage in constructive dialogue, and find peaceful solutions to conflicts.

**Keywords:** Language, Social cohesion, Pan-African Universities, Language policy.

#### RESUMEN

La lengua desempeña un rol importante a la hora de garantizar la interconexión entre personas de orígenes diversos. Dado que el mundo se ha convertido en una aldea global, es fundamental comprender y utilizar diversas lenguas para promover la cohesión social y la unidad entre las comunidades africanas. Este estudio cualitativo explora el tema «El idioma como recurso para la cohesión social», centrándose en cómo una universidad panafricana puede promover el entendimiento y construir una identidad compartida entre estudiantes de diversos orígenes lingüísticos. Las entrevistas no estructuradas con cuarenta participantes (20 de sexo masculino y 20 de sexo femenino) produjeron datos

que se analizaron temáticamente. Algunos de los temas que surgieron fueron los siguientes: es posible desarrollar un marco basado en la sociolingüística, la comunicación intercultural y las prácticas educativas examinando el papel de las políticas lingüísticas, el diseño curricular y las oportunidades de aprendizaje de idiomas. Además, actividades como el diálogo intercultural y la integración de las lenguas indígenas en la facilitación de programas universitarios pueden mejorar la cohesión. Esto también puede empoderar a las comunidades marginadas mediante la incorporación de sus lenguas indígenas en los programas educativos como parte del desarrollo de la competencia lingüística. Esta competencia lingüística en múltiples lenguas dota a los futuros dirigentes de la capacidad de desenvolverse en entornos sociales y políticos complejos, entablar un diálogo constructivo y hallar soluciones pacíficas a los conflictos.

**Palabras clave:** Lengua, Cohesión social, Universidades panafricanas, Política lingüística.

## INTRODUCTION

The world is gradually becoming a global village where people appreciate and promote co-existence and diversity (Field & Kearney, 2021). As part of this transformation, language is increasingly becoming a resource for promoting social cohesion among diverse communities. However, this line of thinking has not been explored fully as the world was dominated by the imposition of official languages that relegated African languages to the periphery of education and development. While diverse African languages were used to create Bantustans, further dividing Africans based on tribal practices, there is limited research on whether Africans from different language backgrounds, if they were to live together, could have achieved significant progress in terms of integration, inclusion, and social cohesion.

Understanding and using various languages to promote social cohesion and unity among African communities is critical. Studies (Fonseca et al., 2019; Jing, 2023) have indicated that languages promote intercultural dialogue and integration of indigenous communities through common cultural values that are not projected vividly when people communicate in imposed official languages. The semantic load of any culture is transmitted through the native language of its speakers. Thus, Pan-African universities can foster social cohesion through institutional programmes and policies that promote diversity and cultural tolerance among their members. Fonseca et al. (2019) posit that institutions contribute to social cohesion by fostering well-being, belonging, and voluntary social participation,

thereby cultivating inclusive communities that value and respect diverse values and cultures. Against this backdrop, the current study explores whether African universities, by embracing diversity, promote well-being, belonging, social participation, tolerance, and equitable access to opportunities for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

The euro-centric view of social cohesion was propounded by the Council of Europe Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development ([OECD], 2012), which defines social cohesion as “the capacity of a society to ensure the well-being of all its members to minimise disparities and avoid marginalisation.” In the context of imposed official languages and language policies, it was not possible to eradicate inequalities and marginalisation (Fonseca et al., 2019). However, in Pan-African universities, the use of English was not imposed. Rather, it was by choice and there is no resentment among the students who use it to connect. Similarly, the OECD (2012) defines social cohesion as promoting the well-being of all members of society to eliminate exclusion and marginalisation, create a sense of belonging, promote trust, and offer all members the opportunity for upward mobility. This philosophy was used to promote white supremacy and dominance. For instance, in apartheid South Africa it was not possible because the country followed separatist education that divided people on racial grounds. Official languages promoted the values and cultures of the dominant groups. However, in today's interconnected and globalised world, focusing on promoting diversity, the necessity for building networks is high but the marginalised continue to be excluded.

Language has been used as a tool to control, manage, administrate, divide, and colonise the minority cultures of the world. This practice is evident in Africa where French, Portuguese, and English were introduced to promote white dominance and supremacy (Field & Kearney, 2021). However, these “official languages” also helped to connect people from different backgrounds and cultures to the extent that the call for social justice was expressed through these common languages that brought people together. The struggle for emancipation was fundamentally a pursuit of inclusion, integration, equality, and social justice within broader society. Through university education, knowledge became universal and served to sustain human existence. Nonetheless, official languages such as Afrikaans or English did not help to project different cultures, values, and attitudes that created the African identity that held Africans together.

Research indicates that frequent use of a native language promotes proficiency in learning and speaking other languages in the immediate society. When people master

other languages, they can network and share their beliefs and practices. Mutual understanding fosters appreciation and tolerance, leading to social cohesion as a natural outcome of such interactions. Based on the linguistic interdependence hypothesis, students with an opportunity to speak in and with high proficiency in the first language have greater chances of attaining high levels of speaking other languages. The ability to speak other languages promotes socialisation and the sharing of common issues that govern institutional culture. In most African universities, students can converse in at least three languages. The students develop a multilingual background that helps them to effectively participate in humanitarian work in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region or any other part of the continent of Africa.

Language inequality negatively affects social cohesion. Some Pan-African institutions have created an environment where a speaker of any language feels valued and accepted. Social cohesion can be fostered by building trust through equitable interaction among individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Conversely, some institutions perceive linguistic diversity as a threat to social cohesion. As a result, one language was imposed on diverse cultures by imposing only English French, or Afrikaans as official languages. The effect was far-reaching because the marginalised speakers of other languages were forced to adopt shared values from a single language. The marginalised groups had to abandon their values and beliefs to fit in with the imposed values of the speakers of official languages. Thus, imposing an official language over other languages threatens social cohesion and is a source of social inequality, which reduces opportunities for disadvantaged groups.

To promote social cohesion, Pan-African universities should facilitate participation in cultural activities, shared accommodation, and shared sporting activities for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Researchers argue that student participation fosters integration into diverse social groups, enabling the development of social relations and networks that strengthen trust, shared identity, and respect for linguistic diversity (Sturgis et al., 2017). However, there are claims that non-governmental organisations primarily drive social cohesion initiatives to advance social justice.

As a result of imposed colonial boundaries, the concept of social cohesion was not easy to promote in a context of conflict and tribal wars that left most African communities deeply divided. Research by Fonseca et al. (2019) shows that local languages preserve cultural diversity and foster social cohesion. This linguistic competence in multiple languages equips future leaders with the ability

to navigate complex social and political landscapes, engage in constructive dialogue, and have the capacity to resolve conflicts in the SADC region. Multilingualism empowers leaders to find peaceful conflict resolutions.

The role of language in social cohesion cannot be underestimated. The imposition of official languages was detrimental to social cohesion (Meier & Smala, 2021). There is evidence that multilingual nations such as Spain, Belgium, Sri Lanka, and Canada have progressed in promoting social cohesion through the co-existence of local languages (Meier & Smala, 2021). Had all Africans been educated in their preferred language, the same positive outcomes could likely have been observed across the continent. This perspective aligns with research suggesting that multilingualism itself is not detrimental to social cohesion; rather, divisive language policies surrounding multilingualism create detrimental effects (Meier & Smala, 2021).

Social cohesion is a set of collective attributes and behaviours characterised by positive social relations, a sense of identification or belonging, and an orientation toward the common good (Moustakas, 2023). From the definition given, it can be discerned that attributes such as language have the potential to connect people and create positive social relations, a sense of identity, and common understanding among people (Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017). Language is at the centre of human interaction, failure to give equal status to any language in any institution is an act of social injustice because it marginalises a group of people destroying the cohesive role of language.

Social cohesion is a construct whose conceptualisation has not reached a consensus due lack of a universally shared definition of social cohesion (Stead, 2017). While some studies have focused on elements, others focused on consequences (Fonseca et al., 2019). This study, however, attempts to focus on how language can be used as a resource to promote social cohesion among students of diverse cultures in a chosen Pan-African university. If social cohesion is promoted successfully at the institutional level, it means an end to social injustice and ethnic wars, and lack of solidarity among African countries. With a focus on producing transformative leaders, the promotion of local language as tools for integration and communication can build not only social relations among students from diverse cultures, but a common understanding of Africanness through identifying with the African continent, and orientation towards the common good for all Africans. This study argues that Africans continued to be divided through imposed official languages that did not promote shared values, beliefs, access to resources, and trust.

Social cohesion is measurable and assessable through student social relations, connectedness, and commitment to the common good. Language facilitates understanding in shared learning spaces, reflecting society (Moustakas, 2023). “Ubuntu”-driven Pan-African institutions foster tolerance and shared African identity across diverse linguistic backgrounds, valuing all languages and cultures equally. Language promotes social cohesion and positive emotional connectedness (Dragolov et al., 2016). Language aids social network formation, and bilingualism allows connection with cultural heritage and building social ties.

Language diversity fosters intercultural dialogue and promotes indigenous language use in research and knowledge generation (Dragolov et al., 2016). This accesses indigenous knowledge, including traditional medicine and cultural values. Integrating these languages into academia enriches global understanding, promotes collaboration, and facilitates student collaboration. Actively engaging diverse students allows Pan-African universities to build partnerships that foster mutual understanding and contribute to social cohesion by bridging divides and building positive intergroup relations (Dragolov et al., 2016).

Language contributes to social cohesion through resilient social relations and positive emotional connectedness (Dragolov et al., 2016), often fostered by student trips and sporting activities. Pan-African university events should reflect this ideal, with diverse teams and social groups representing the institution. Conversely, the imposition of official languages has historically divided Africans along tribal and linguistic lines, obscuring their shared identity. Therefore, allowing languages to coexist and thrive promotes social cohesion. This study explores how language can serve as a resource for achieving this goal.

Intercultural dialogue, facilitated by participation, builds understanding and trust. Integrating indigenous languages into university programs promotes community engagement and, when encouraged, improves student performance (Field & Kearney, 2021). This also empowers marginalised communities, addresses historical injustices, and fosters belonging among indigenous students, aligning with regional integration efforts.

Researchers argue that inequality negatively affects social cohesion (Manstead, 2018; Musterd et al., 2017). Manstead (2018) argues that income inequality diminishes social cohesion. As a result, students would not identify with their institution and its values if their language is not given equal status with other languages. Historically, language policies have often exacerbated social divisions and inequalities by favouring dominant groups. In contrast, today's interconnected world requires inclusive

language policies that promote diversity, social cohesion, and integration. South Africa's past language policies, privileging English and Afrikaans while marginalising indigenous languages, exemplify this divisive effect, contributing to social unrest like the Soweto Uprising and alienating indigenous language speakers. Embracing linguistic diversity is now essential. As a primary vehicle for cultural expression, multilingualism bridges cultural gaps and fosters understanding. Inclusive policies encourage intergroup interaction, reducing discrimination and fostering belonging. Allowing native language use cultivates environments that celebrate, rather than suppress, cultural differences.

Past language policies—often biased—reinforced divisions and dominant group supremacy. However, globalisation necessitates inclusive language policies promoting diversity, cohesion, and integration. The assumption that native language use perpetuates cultural divisions has led to discrimination and exclusion. South Africa's imposition of Afrikaans and English, at the expense of indigenous languages, triggered the Soweto Uprising, demonstrating the failure of excluding indigenous languages to promote cross-cultural understanding. Therefore, equity and social justice require promoting diversity and social cohesion. Instead of solely relying on official languages, Pan-African institutions should develop inclusive policies prioritising local languages alongside official ones. This could involve promoting multilingualism and using local languages in official documents, meetings, announcements, and services. Translating resources into local languages can further bridge communication gaps. This requires investment in translation projects and establishing language service departments, potentially working with external providers, to facilitate communication across diverse local languages.

Pan-African institutions can establish language resource centres offering training programs for students, staff, and officials to enhance local language proficiency, fostering intercultural understanding and communication. Diversity can increase perceived social cohesion (Sturgis et al., 2014), and multilingualism facilitates collaboration and participatory decision-making. Technology and digital tools can support local language use in diverse societies (Healy, 2018). Developing local language learning apps, online resources, and digital platforms can improve accessibility and practice, creating diverse communities with shared communication platforms. Finally, promoting cultural events and sports festivals can celebrate local languages and cultures, building social cohesion through mutual understanding (Dragolov et al., 2016).

Notably, most studies of social cohesion have focused on explaining the attributes of social cohesion without



pursuing deep qualitative insights into the understanding and experiences of individuals in a context where local languages were used as a resource for social cohesion (Aruqaj, 2023; Fonseca et al., 2019; Moustakas, 2024; Schiefer & Knoll, 2016). Therefore, the present study explores how language can be used as a resource for social cohesion in Pan-African universities.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This qualitative study used interviews to collect data to meet the ethnographic requirements. Interviews were conducted with 30 students from a Pan-African institution representing at least 28 African countries, and with 10 international staff members working at Pan-African universities as shown on Table 1. All interviews were recorded.

Table 1: Participants Demographic Data (n=40).

Group	Total	Gender	No. of participants	Age range
Students	30	Male	15	18-33
		Female	15	18-27
Workers	10	Male	5	38-55
		Female	5	32-59

Students were coded S1 – S30, workers were coded W1 – W10.

Source: own elaboration

The interview guide included questions on the participants' demographic information, their linguistic backgrounds, and experiences of linguistic diversity. This approach gave the researchers a direct insight into how indigenous languages used by the Pan-African institution directly or indirectly promoted social cohesion among the students.

The interviews were unstructured. This allowed for flexibility in that participants engaged in a more natural conversation while the researchers explored new ideas as they emerged from the conversations. Also, the informal flow of unstructured interviews made participants feel at ease and open, giving authentic responses. This allowed the researchers to capture more perspective on how language fosters social cohesion. Most participants were choir members and sang songs from almost every language from any country on the continent. Others were sports personalities whose teams were made up of players from diverse nationalities and some were members of social clubs from different countries on the African continent. Students who were intermarried from different countries were interviewed.

Data were analysed thematically. This type of analysis is generally suitable for understanding peoples' views, opinions, knowledge, experiences, or values. However, this approach was ideal for this qualitative study on the use of language as a resource for social cohesion because it enabled the researchers to identify and analyse patterns within the collected interview data that reflected the themes of language as a resource for social cohesion. The themes from the data provided a systematic way of uncovering how languages promote social cohesion and respect. It presented a means to understand deeper, how linguistic practices promote connectedness of students from various linguistic backgrounds. The thematic analysis further presented a framework for understanding the use of language in real-world contexts and an opportunity for how language policy in Pan-African Universities can be framed.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results from participants' perceptions and experiences were developed into key themes that show how language was a resource for promoting social cohesion. The first theme focused on participants' language experience at a Pan-African institution. Most of the participants were proficient in more than two indigenous languages due to the accommodation policy and accommodation arrangements found in the institution. To corroborate the above claim, Participant S3 submitted that "Sharing a room for four years naturally fostered connection. We were from different countries, spoke different languages, and even shared a single key." Sports events made communication easier, even across language barriers." Participant S14 added: "Familiarity with the university's many languages fostered camaraderie, belonging, and a celebration of shared identity at multilingual events."

Regarding the second theme, students were allowed to speak their traditional languages and code switch to basic English to aid those who did not understand. Thus, the equal status given to indigenous languages helped them

develop a feeling that they were proudly African and not inferior to any other culture. The students used their languages without being judged, which empowered them to display their cultural values. They developed a feeling of belonging and this gave them a Pan-African identity. The above was supported by Participant S9, who highlighted that "Reciting prayers in our respective languages led to teaching each other our languages and cultural values." Participant S21 reiterated: "The university's 'Culture Night,' requiring our diverse hostel wing to choose one cultural practice, fostered learning, shared values, and a familial bond."

The third theme illustrates how student trips and sporting activities promote positive emotional connectedness. Teams comprising different nationalities are instrumental in building the Pan-African identity as stated by Participant S18. "As players united by a shared identity and purpose, we socialised, connected, and shared experiences – becoming one team representing one institution." Participant S27 elaborated on the emotional connectedness as a team and shared that; "A three-day excursion fostered a strong, familial bond among us, as we looked out for each other in the wild, united despite our diverse languages."

The fourth theme emphasises identifying with culture and heritage as Africans. The students celebrate key national events such as the independence days of each country on the African continent. They could even invite their ambassadors to come and address all students. This created a sense of common African identity and shared values among African countries and students at the same institution. This was substantiated by Participant W5's sentiments that; "At the Pan-African University, I met my spouse from another African country. Our shared experiences and cultural understanding have strengthened our bond and created a unique family." Participant W6 also attested to the great relationships at Pan-African universities: "My time at the Pan-African University fostered a strong, transnational sense of belonging, uniting us through shared values and goals, enabling collaboration across diverse backgrounds."

On Theme Five, students celebrate key national events such as the independence days of each country on the African continent. They could even invite their ambassadors to come and address all students. This created a sense of common African identity and shared values among African countries and students at the same institution. Participant S1 stated; "My time at the institution inspired cross-African exploration of shared values, with student visits to various countries fostering African pride and discussions of shared challenges and solutions."

Theme Six emphasises how multilingualism and integration fostered social cohesion and a shared identity, which future African leaders can leverage to build peace, trade, and continental development. In support of the above, Participant S4 disclosed: "Communication was fostered through official languages, church functions, songs, multilingual prayers, and we were offered incentives for speaking multiple languages." Butressing the point, Participant S3 expressed: "I hope these interactions will broaden my linguistic skills and foster unity and mutual respect, enabling collaborative work within the community."

Finally, the findings indicate that staff members facilitated students' language development and social cohesion by crafting language policies and monitoring general interaction. They would oversee disciplinary processes in violation of rules and collaborative activities. They ensured that students fully participated by giving incentives and sanctions to encourage the African identity and "Ubuntu." They ensured that for each activity, different cultural groups and identities were fully represented. Participant W10 explained, "They (staff members) would assign multilingual collaborative projects, pairing students from different linguistic backgrounds to create documents, videos, or presentations, requiring translation of key concepts and an explanation of language's influence on understanding."

The findings reveal that the use of indigenous languages among students from different African countries is a process of building bridges that can connect the African people and their diverse cultures. The bridges symbolise more than physical structures because they represent the most important aspects of humanity such as mutual respect, mutual trust, mutual understanding, collaboration, and peaceful interaction. If indigenous languages are shared and understood among natives of different countries, they become pathways for promoting not only social cohesion, peace, and unity but economic growth of African people. For example, intercultural communication creates the ability to overcome cultural obstacles and promote economic cooperation and sharing of knowledge across African communities.

Humanity can thrive where there is collaboration, common identity, and mutual respect. Thus, by having students speak at least five indigenous languages, the African continent is assured of peace and economic growth. Based on using common indigenous languages, different countries can share and easily trade as their people would freely market and share resources. Thus, bringing together students from across Africa to one common institution that promotes the use of African languages is important in shaping a cohesive crop of future leaders for Africa. Thus, language helps people to be socially connected. The

more languages an individual speaks the more connections they can create and the more they can participate in activities of diverse communities (Field & Kearney, 2021).

The use and promotion of African languages is a process of promoting peace and social cohesion. Given the foregoing suggestions, when individuals understand each other through their own cultures and languages, they share a common identity. The current study aligns with Fonseca et al. (2019) and Jing (2023), who found that indigenous languages promote intercultural dialogue and integration of indigenous people. Pan-African institutions are mandated to help students from different language backgrounds form strong social relations, trust each other, and accept diversity. Previous studies have also highlighted that language has the potential to connect people and create positive social relations, a sense of identity, and common understanding (Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017). In a study of immigrants in New Zealand social cohesion between people from different cultures was enhanced through forming partnerships where two different individuals find themselves sharing different languages (Blake et al., 2017).

Similarly, Pan African institution in this study housed two or three students from different language backgrounds in one room. They had to find ways of communicating with each other while they learned a new common language. Naturally, these individuals ended up sharing their native language. Thus, indigenous languages lay a foundation for peace among African leaders as the ability to use each other's indigenous language underscores the importance of fostering interethnic and interreligious dialogues for co-existence. The use of official languages by colonisers was meant to racialize and divide African people, through selective treatment that set tribes against each other. For instance, the racialisation of Tutsis and Hutus by Belgians left a delible mark that led to genocide.

Evidence generated in the current study shows that Pan-African institutions had clear inclusive language policies that prioritised the use of indigenous languages alongside official languages. This supports Meier & Smala (2021) that multilingual nations such as Spain, Belgium, Sri Lanka, and Canada have progressed in promoting social cohesion by raising the status of all local languages. This approach is rare and not found in most institutions. The participants were testifying that the institution promoted and rewarded multilingualism. The participants were free to use their indigenous languages in official gatherings, meetings, public announcements, and church services. Social coherence was promoted through mastery of Pan-African languages. This finding is in line with Fonseca et al. (2019) that institutions play a major role in promoting

social cohesion by developing communities that tolerate and promote diversity and tolerate values and cultures of all their members.

The current study established those indigenous languages can be a tool for promoting social cohesion among different countries and communities in the African continent. Africans do not need a foreign language to interact with each other. These findings correspond with Mac Fadden et al. (2021) that African communities remained divided and existed in silos based on their former masters' values and cultures which were considered superior. The same communities were alienated from their languages and cultures which made it difficult for them to network and share experiences among themselves. Thus, the institution in the study took pride in their graduates speaking at least five languages. In their diversity, they can still connect through their indigenous languages.

The assumption is that the African continent has been facing economic development, conflicts, environmental sustainability, governance, and health-related challenges over time due to a lack of social cohesion (Mac Fadden et al., 2021). Through Pan-African institutions, formerly marginalized tribes, divided by colonial language policies (Dragolov et al., 2016), can find belonging within the African family, fostering social participation, tolerance, and access to equal opportunities. Promoting social cohesion fosters peace, and improved governance, which in turn, stimulates economic dialogue and interdependence, thereby reducing xenophobia and tribal conflicts through shared values and identity.

In response to the challenge affecting the use of indigenous languages to promote social cohesion, the study established those local languages are often given second status to the official languages by policymakers. The language of instruction is given prominence and failure to be articulate affects the speaker's esteem and is often viewed negatively by peers. The findings corroborate those of Ingrid (2020), who established multilingualism as a gateway to opportunities. Mastering diverse languages should be viewed as promoting equitable access to services and opportunities, leading to greater cohesion within communities that share meaning through common values and language. The current study's findings reveal that institutions must decolonize student mindsets that prioritize official languages. Denying students education in their preferred language disadvantages competent students more comfortable learning in indigenous languages.

While previous studies (Healy, 2018) highlight the role of technology in integrating diverse societies and supporting local languages, this study found some indigenous

languages lack orthography, and some students feel embarrassed to associate with their culture and language (Anthonissen, 2012). Students from elite families also distanced themselves from traditional languages, seeking status associated with Western values and the colonizer's language (Anthonissen, 2012).

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that promoting indigenous languages in Pan-African universities is crucial for fostering social cohesion, peace, collaboration, dialogue, and good governance. This requires inclusive language policies that grant indigenous languages equal status with official languages and allow students to learn in their preferred language, thereby overcoming elitist resistance. This addresses the study's finding that some students feel embarrassed to associate with their cultural heritage and that denying the students education in their preferred language disadvantages those more comfortable learning in indigenous languages. Establishing language resource centres is also recommended to promote local language use, addressing the study's finding that some indigenous languages lack orthography.

Importantly, a thorough analysis of institutional language policies and practices—including language of instruction, language support services, and the representation of indigenous languages in curriculum and university life—is needed to fully understand their impact on social cohesion. This analysis should also consider how policies and practices contribute to or mitigate the marginalisation of indigenous languages and cultures. The study also highlights the need for institutional efforts to actively promote positive attitudes towards indigenous languages and cultures, challenging the perception that they are inferior to official languages and addressing the finding that students from elite backgrounds sometimes distance themselves from their traditional languages.

Finally, while language plays a crucial role, social cohesion is a multifaceted process. Therefore, Pan-African universities should also consider other contributing factors, such as fostering intercultural dialogue, providing opportunities for shared activities and experiences, and addressing socioeconomic inequalities to create a truly inclusive and cohesive environment.

## REFERENCES

- Aruqaj, B. (2023). An integrated approach to the conceptualisation and measurement of social cohesion. *Social Indicators Research*, 168(1), 227-263. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-023-03110-z>
- Anthonissen, C. (2012). Bilingualism and Language Shift in Western Cape Communities. *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics Plus* 38 (May). <https://doi.org/10.5842/38-0-48>.
- Blake, H. L., L. B. Kneebone, and S. McLeod. 2017. the impact of oral English proficiency on humanitarian migrants' experiences of Settling in Australia. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 22 (6): 689–705. doi: 10.1080/13670050.2017.1294557
- Dragolov, G., Ignácz, Z. S., Lorenz, J., Delhey, J., Boehnke, K., & Unzicker, K. (2016). *Social cohesion in the Western world: What holds societies together: Insights from the social cohesion radar*. Springer. ISBN 978-3-319-32463-0.
- Field, J., and C. Kearney. (2021). "Partners in Resettlement and Adult Education: Former Refugees and Host Communities." In *Refugee Education across the Lifespan*, edited by Doris S. Warriner, 369–387. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Fonseca, X., Lukosch, S., & Brazier, F. (2019). Social cohesion revisited: a new definition and how to characterize it. *Innovation: The European journal of social science research*, 32(2), 231-253. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13511610.2018.1497480>
- Healy, M. (2018). Belonging, social cohesion, and fundamental British values. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 67(4), 423–438. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00071005.2018.1506091>
- Ingrid, P. (2020). Language and Social Justice. *International Encyclopedia of Linguistic Anthropology*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118786093.iela0416>
- Jing, H. (2023). Preparing Language Teachers for Intercultural/Global Citizenship Education. In: *Developing Global Awareness for Global Citizenship Education*, edited by Intercultural Communication and Language Education. Springer, Singapore.
- Mac Fadden, I., Santana, M., Vázquez-Cano, E., & López-Meneses, E. (2021). A science mapping analysis of 'marginality, stigmatization and social cohesion' in WoS (1963–2019). *Quality & Quantity*, 55(1), 275-293. <https://n9.cl/k6w9r>
- Manstead, A. S. (2018). The psychology of social class: How socioeconomic status impacts thought, feelings, and behaviour. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 57(2), 267-291. <https://bpspsychub.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/bjso.12251>
- Meier, G., & Smala, S. (2021). *Languages and social cohesion: A transdisciplinary literature review*. Routledge. DOI:10.4324/9781003120384.



- Moustakas, L. (2023). Social Cohesion: Definitions, Causes and Consequences. *Encyclopedia*, 3(3), 1028-1037.
- Moustakas, L. (2024). Sport for social cohesion: a conceptual framework linking common practices and theory. *Sport in Society*, 1-19. doi:10.1080/17430437.2024.2304231
- Musterd, S., Marcińczak, S., Van Ham, M., & Tammaru, T. (2017). Socioeconomic segregation in European capital cities. Increasing separation between poor and rich. *Urban geography*, 38(7), 1062-1083. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02723638.2016.1228371>
- Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development. 2012. *Perspectives on Global Development 2012: Social Cohesion in a Shifting World*. OECD: Paris, France. ISBN 9789264113145
- Schiefer, D., & Van der Noll, J. (2017). The essentials of social cohesion: A literature review. *Social Indicators Research*, 132, 579-603. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11205-016-1314-5>
- Stead, V. (2017). Doing 'social cohesion': Cultural policy and practice in outer metropolitan Melbourne. *Critical Social Policy*, 37, 405-424. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0261018316681283>
- Sturgis, P., Brunton-Smith, I., Kuha, J., & Jackson, J. (2017). Ethnic diversity, segregation and the social cohesion of neighbourhoods in London. In *Multiculturalism, Social Cohesion and Immigration* (pp. 22-45). Routledge. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315716121-3/ethnic-diversity-segregation-social-cohesion-neighbourhoods-london-patrick-sturgis-ian-brunton-smith-jouni-kuha-jonathan-jackson>