



## The Role of South African Community Radio Stations in Promoting South African Indigenous Languages: A Systematic Review

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### **Abstract**

The review for this paper investigates the role played by community radio stations in promoting South African indigenous languages. This study includes a survey of literature that highlights the promotion of South African indigenous languages by community radio stations. Thus, Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, ResearchGate, ScienceDirect, Scopus, Sabinet, and Taylor & Francis were used by the researchers to retrieve and analyse information from scholarly documents such as peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters and reports, amongst others (n = 16) published between 2006 and 2023. Based on the main research questions raised by the researchers, significant themes were discovered and critically explored the role played by community radio stations in promoting South African indigenous languages. The study found that community radio stations in South Africa can help to create, manage, share, and most importantly promote indigenous languages and culture. This study recommends that the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies (DCDT) in partnership with the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture (DSAC), Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) and Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) should establish a policy to promote programmes which broadcast full-time in the indigenous language.

**Keywords:** *Community Radio Stations; Indigenous Languages; Preservation; Promotion; South Africa*

### **Introduction and Scope of the Study**

Community radio didn't always exist in South Africa. It is one of the direct outcomes of the country's shift to multiracial democracy in 1994. By the end of 1999 there were already 65 community radio stations broadcasting in and to communities in rural, semi-urban and urban areas of the republic (Wabwire, 2013). According to Sewlal (2014), who conducted a study on the role and rise of community radio in the development of democracy in South Africa, community radio is the first tier of broadcasting (commercial broadcasting and public service broadcasting comprise the other two tiers) that has "opened the airwaves" in South Africa.

Section 6(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) recognises “the use and promotion of eleven official languages which are: Tshivenda, Sesotho, Sepedi, Setswana, Xitsonga, IsiZulu, siSwati, IsiNdebele, IsiXhosa, Afrikaans and English”. The Constitution’s Section 6(2) further states that “in recognising the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages of our people, the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages.” According to Ligidima and Makananise (2020), in South Africa radio is one of the platforms that have been at the forefront of advocating for the use and promotion of almost all previously disadvantaged and marginalised languages. Therefore, South African community radio stations are a good example of a governmental attempt to fulfil a mandate to preserve minority languages. In their study, Fombad and Jiyane (2019) focused on the role of community radios in information dissemination in South Africa and stated that community radio provides the most relevant, educational, local, and developmental information which educates, enlightens, and entertains the public in their language. The above-mentioned authors further pointed out that community radio stations reflect the culture, ideology and thoughts, norms, and values of a particular community.

Khan, Khan, Hassan, Ahmed and Haque (2017) defined community radio as “a medium of expressing and sharing views, thoughts, ideas, problems and prospects of rural, disadvantaged, vulnerable and hard-to-reach population with the mainstream population.” Khan et al. (2017) agreed with the above authors that community radio reflects the culture, ideology and thoughts, norms and values of a particular community. In addition to the definition provided by Khan et al. (2017), Tyali (2021) is of the view that community radio is an industry in the media sector whose mandate is “to be transparent, participatory, accessible, and developmental in its conduct so that the immediate and surrounding communities it serves benefit fully from its programmes.” On the other hand, Osborn (2006) defines indigenous languages as those African languages indigenous to the continent south of the Sahara, and for which there is no primary cultural centre in another region.

Although mutually understood language is important for effective communication, engagements in indigenous languages also enhances social cohesion. Language is important and central in all aspects of our lives, from face-to-face situations to communication through the mass media. For that reason, the use of indigenous languages to interact with the masses through the media, particularly in community radio, enhances the effectiveness of mass communication (Chikaipa & Gunde, 2021). The media is mandated to facilitate dialogue and provide relevant information to its citizens for them to gain better understanding of their society. Indigenous language radio broadcasting are effective channels of mass communication because they reach more marginal areas than other media platforms, and they are easily understood by the audience. Since the study of this nature is already done by other scholars, this study was conducted to investigate how radio, specifically community radio, could play a role in promoting and enhancing South African Indigenous languages and culture. Therefore, the rationale behind the notion underpinning this study is to encourage the continuous promotion of South African indigenous languages by using community radio stations. In addition to this, this study attempts to fill a gap by looking into the strategies being employed to promote indigenous languages in South Africa for the next generation.

### ***Research Questions***

To collate all relevant evidence for the study and understand different contexts for the promotion of South African indigenous languages by community radio stations, the researchers investigated the following research questions:

RQ1. What is the importance of the use of indigenous languages in community radio?

RQ2. What are the challenges faced by community radio in promoting and sustaining indigenous languages?

RQ3. What are the probable solutions to promote indigenous languages through local radio stations?

### ***Community Radio Stations in Contemporary South Africa***

Community radio in South Africa was developed to dismantle the apartheid system, empower the unprivileged and build a democracy that provides access to information for diverse groups, amongst which are rural cooperatives, and different religious bodies (Fombad & Jiyane, 2019). Apart from public service broadcasting, community radio has been crucial in the promotion of languages and culture of ethnic minorities in South Africa. Moyo (2010:9) notes that “some of these community radio stations allow for minimal use of other languages such as English”.

Fombad and Jiyane (2019), who conducted a study on the role of community radios in information dissemination, explained that community radios in South Africa contribute to improving access to information. According to Tyali (2017), community radio has also been used to strengthen the identities of a country's aboriginal or indigenous communities in various parts of the world. With special reference to South Africa, Tyali (2017) further explained that “community radio content was designed to reflect the identity of the indigenous and aboriginal communities”. Mbusi and Magade (2021) stated that the role played by community radio stations at the grassroots level through development programmes is significant.

According to Kapoor (2020), since their inception, “community radio stations have focused on empowering community participation in numerous development programmes, thereby enhancing the capacities of the local people to work together to tackle a range of social inequalities such as discrimination and marginalisation”. As for Shukla (2014), “community media, focusing on community radio particularly, provides a voice to the unfortunate and marginalised by being an influential tool that empowers the disempowered. It also facilitates the promotion of social justice, making the remote and marginalised communities aware of the government schemes and their entitlements, improving the delivery of public services and sharing and preserving indigenous as well as religious knowledge and best practices.”

### ***Methods***

The researchers used PRISMA to collate all relevant evidence for the study on the promotion of South African indigenous languages by community radio stations. PRISMA is an evidence-based minimum set of items for reporting in systematic reviews and meta-analyses (Moher, Shamseer, Clarke, Ghersi, Liberati, Petticrew, Shekelle & Stewart, 2015). The above-mentioned authors also indicated that “a systematic review attempts to collate all relevant evidence that fits pre-specified eligibility criteria to answer a specific research question.”

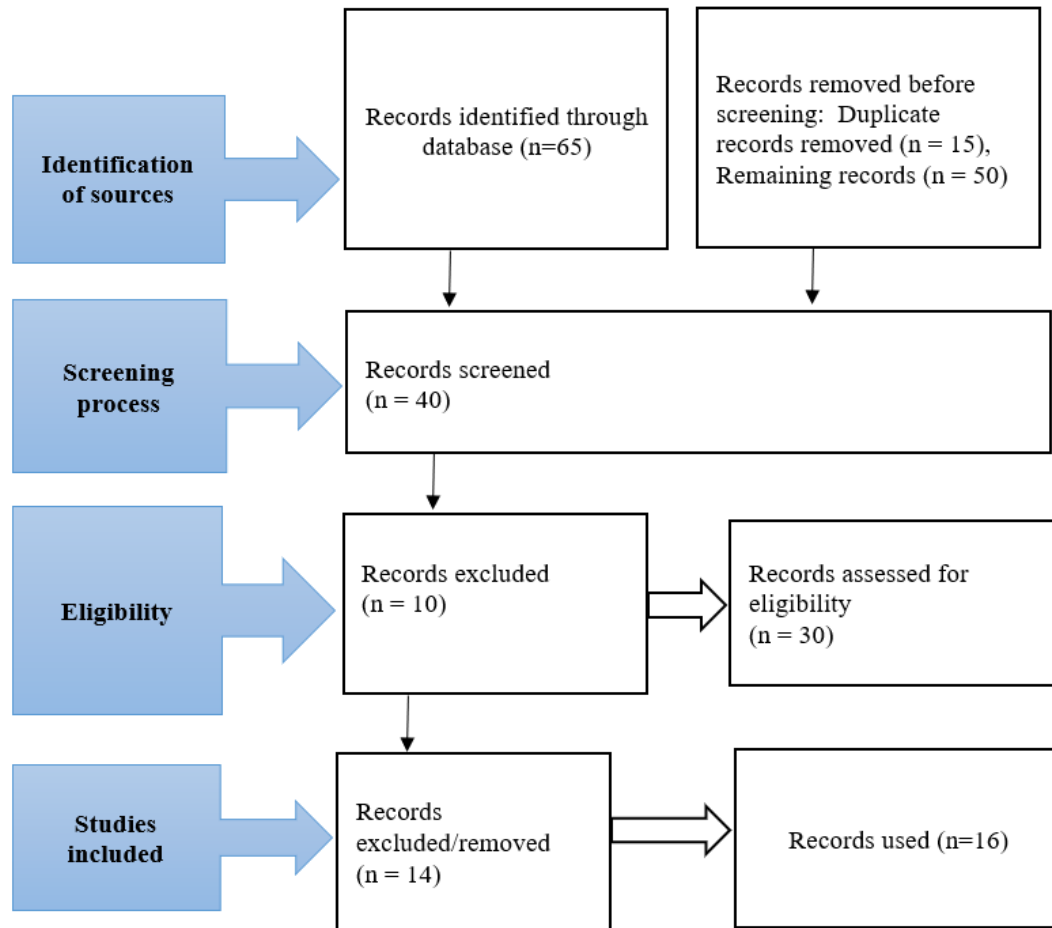
The researchers followed a full electronic search strategy covering 16 scholarly documents published between 2006 and 2023. In this regard, when the systematic review was done it involved terms such as ‘indigenous languages in community radio’ or ‘African languages in community radio’; ‘promotion of indigenous languages in community radio stations in South Africa’ or ‘promotion of African languages in community radio stations in South Africa’; ‘sustaining indigenous languages by community radio stations’ or ‘sustaining African languages by community radio stations’; ‘challenges of community radio in promoting indigenous languages’ or ‘challenges of community radio in promoting African languages’; ‘solutions to promoting indigenous languages by community radio stations’ or ‘solutions to promoting African languages by community radio stations’.

The researchers used the following seven databases to retrieve scholarly documents used in the systematic review: Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, ResearchGate, ScienceDirect, Scopus, Sabinet, and Taylor & Francis.

The researchers selected scholarly documents to answer the above-mentioned research questions. Figure 1 below depicts the various steps followed by the researchers during the process of searching for scholarly documents. The initial search yielded 60 records, with an additional five records for a total of 65 records. Due to information duplication or failure to meet the inclusion criteria, 15 records were excluded from this total. The remaining records numbered 50, of which 40 were screened further. As a result of the screening, 10 records were eliminated because they contained irrelevant information, leaving 30 records. The eligibility of the remaining 30 records was then determined. In addition, 14 scholarly documents were removed because they contained unwanted information about other countries. Finally, only 16 scholarly documents were used in this study.

**Figure 1**

*PRISMA flow diagram*



The researcher reviewed every article to determine if the inclusion and exclusion criteria were met. Table 1 below depicts the inclusion and exclusion criteria. This has been done to determine the relevant scholarly documents used in the systematic review.

**Table 1**

*Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scholarly documents in the English language.</li> <li>• Scholarly documents on the role played by community radio stations in promoting South African indigenous languages.</li> <li>• Global studies that covered variables of the study.</li> <li>• Scholarly documents published from 2006 to 2023.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scholarly documents not published in the English language.</li> <li>• Scholarly documents that did not focus on the role played by community radio stations in promoting South African indigenous languages.</li> <li>• Global studies did not cover the variable of the study.</li> <li>• Scholarly documents published before 2006.</li> </ul>

**Table 2**

*Summary of the Scholarly Documents used in the Review*

Sixteen scholarly documents published in various databases were used for a systematic review of this study. Therefore, table 2 below summarises scholarly documents used by the researchers.

Author(s), Year and Country of publication	Consulted Documents	Methods	Theoretical/Conceptual Framework(s)
Mathe & Motsaathebe (2023), United Kingdom	Journal article	Qualitative, phenomenological paradigm, Semi-structured interview guide	The political economy theory of the media
Mukwevho, Makananise & Madima (2022), United Kingdom	Journal article	Descriptive research design, Qualitative, Semi-structure interviews, Thematic analysis	Democratic participant theory of media press and freedom
Mashau (2019), South Africa	Masters' dissertation	Qualitative, Unstructured interviews, Qualitative content analysis	Ideology of language theory
Tyali (2017), South Africa	Doctoral thesis	Qualitative, Interviews, Partial Observation, content and document analysis	Coloniality of power, Coloniality of knowledge, Coloniality of being, Decolonial turn
Fombad & Jiyane (2019), United Kingdom	Journal article	Qualitative, Case study research approach, Interviews, Document	Democracy theories

		analysis	
Sewlal (2014), South Africa	Research report	Qualitative	N/A
Onyenankeya & Salawu (2019), United States of America	Journal article	Qualitative	Uses and gratification
Chikaipa & Gunde (2021), United State of America	Journal article	Qualitative, Surveys, Interviews, And Participant observation	Ethnolinguistic vitality theory
Mawokomayi & Osunkule (2019), United Kingdom	Journal article	Qualitative, Purposive and convenience sampling, Thematic analysis	UNESCO's (1970) approach to participatory development
Mawokomayi (2017), South Africa	Masters' dissertation	Qualitative, Quantitative convenience sampling, Thematic analysis	Magic bullet theory, Diffusion of innovation theory
Salawu (2006), United Kingdom	Journal article	Qualitative	N/A
Rathando (2022), South Africa	Masters' dissertation	Qualitative, Focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews, Non-probability sampling method, Document analysis	Social responsibility theory
Wabwire (2013), United Kingdom	Journal article	Qualitative,	N/A
Muswede (2015), South Africa	Journal article	Qualitative	Community development approach, Democratic participatory communication model
Ramakrishna & Arora (2015), India	Book	Qualitative	N/A
Tyali (2021), South Africa	Journal article	Qualitative, interview, Content analysis, Observation	Theory on the decoloniality of knowledge



### *Review of the Literature*

#### **Problematisation of South African Community Radio Stations in Promoting South African Indigenous Languages**

According to Mathe and Motsaathebe (2023), likewise, there have not been significant studies on minority indigenous languages due to their lack of exclusive media coverage. The above-mentioned authors further revealed that indigenous language radio stations face challenges centred on resource allocation, power and class functions concerning the demographic size of indigenous ethnolinguistic groups.

In the study conducted by Mukwevho, Makananise and Madima (2022) on youth perceptions of the use of African languages on South African community radio stations, it was revealed that “these indigenous African languages are largely eliminated and marginalised from use among the youth”.

According to Mashau (2019), when community radio station presenters of talk programmes such as current affairs, religious talk and indigenous knowledge code-switch to English, it distorts the message that is intended to be received by the listeners, particularly those that are not conversant in English. Furthermore, the above-mentioned author explained that when a presenter code-switches to English in a programme that is supposed to be broadcast in Tshivenda or Xitsonga, the message becomes selective, and at some point, excludes other listeners.

The study conducted by Tyali (2017) revealed that the stations say negotiating language compliance with ICASA is difficult. Therefore, station and programme managers speak about the challenge of balancing language and cultural differences. Furthermore, the above-mentioned author revealed that language quotas stipulated by ICASA create confusion in the production of content.

#### **Importance of the Using of Indigenous Languages in Community Radio**

The study conducted by Fombad and Jiyane (2019) revealed that community radio stations provide the most relevant, educational, local, and developmental information which educates, enlightens, and entertains the public in their language. In support of the statement by Fombad and Jiyane (2019), Sewlal (2014) revealed that community radio stations become the pride of the respective communities especially those which broadcast in a mother-tongue language.

Onyenankeya and Salawu (2019) view (indigenous) language as an important identifier that allows individuals a life experience that links them to a particular culture that is identified by the people of that group. Indigenous language use in community radio stations permits people of different backgrounds to engage in the same topics in languages they can express themselves. As a result of this, Chikaipa and Gunde (2021) state that the importance of indigenous language in community radio stations is to simplify the understanding of information and encourage the participation of citizens who might be otherwise excluded due to language difficulties. Furthermore, Chikaipa and Gunde (2021) note that minority language use on community radio has influenced people to use their languages when speaking, reading and writing.

Findings from a study conducted by Mawokomayi and Osunkule (2019), using one of Eastern Cape’s community radio stations (Forte FM), suggests that community radio stations play a critical role in communities. “Patterns observed from the listeners’ perceptions is that the station is an important pillar of the community as it broadcasts programmes that are aimed at improving people’s lives in Alice town”. Fombad and Jiyane (2019) underpin the importance of indigenous languages in community radio by asserting that by using local languages for their programmes, community radio creates a sense of belonging and ownership in communities, thus achieving wide coverage and reaching diverse listeners. In reference to this, Onyenankeya and Salawu (2019) note in their paper that a community radio station

provides access to alternative representations that can counter these negative images and stereotypes from mainstream media.

### **Challenges Faced by Community Radio in Promoting Indigenous Languages**

Findings from a study conducted by Fombad and Jiyane (2019) discovered that the challenges faced by community radio stations are those of limited resources in terms of finances, insufficient employees, limited time to collect data related to the communities for programmes, and outdated equipment for day-to-day station activities. Furthermore, Mawokomayi (2017) notes that “a survey of literature shows that community radio stations face a lot of challenges that hinder them from broadcasting programmes that promote development at the grassroots level”. These challenges include programming content, organisational development, equipment maintenance, and financial management.

The study conducted by Salawu (2006) revealed that by far the greatest problem militating against the survival of African languages is that of the attitude of most native speakers to their languages. On the other hand, Rathando (2022) revealed that on radio programming some languages are more marginalised than others (Xitsonga, Tshivenda, Siswati and isiNdebele), in part due to the number of speakers of these languages.

Mawokomayi (2017) also states that funding for the South African community radio sector depends on both local and international donors. This is funding for start-up budgets, training and purchasing of broadcasting equipment, and in return the station is required to promote health issues such as HIV/Aids prevention. Mawokomayi (2017) further argues that some of the challenges of community radio emanate from these expectations as the donors put conditions on their support. She notes that the programmes they are bounded to broadcast are not in line with the participatory principle of community radio which states that “programmes should be produced by the community”. Often community radio produces programmes that are not necessarily benefitting their communities because of the fear of offending donors.

### **Probable Solutions to Promote Indigenous Languages by Local Radio Stations**

Fombad and Jiyane (2019) are of the view that the issue of language is very important for information access and use. Thus, the above-mentioned authors indicated that community radios should bridge the language barrier by using local languages for their programmes, thus achieving wider coverage and reaching diverse listeners.

Wabwire (2013) asserts that community radio has proven to be a sustainable and interactive medium for poor and marginalised populations to be heard and informed, shape knowledge and opinions, learn the give and take of informed dialogue and become more decisive agents in their development.

According to Fombad and Jiyane (2019), communities are generally empowered by information broadcasted in a language they understand. Furthermore, the above-mentioned authors highlighted that it is also important to encourage and train more (female) presenters who are knowledgeable in the local language and who have expertise in particular subject areas. One could concur that training presenters to use their local languages could help to promote South African indigenous languages on radio stations.

Authors such as Muswede (2015) emphasised that the community radio station should be acceptable and accountable to its target market by catering for the listeners’ diverse needs and respecting the languages, traditions, beliefs and cultures of the respective communities. In addition to broadcasting in local languages (i.e. indigenous languages) and/or dialects, authors such as Ramakrishnan and Arora (2015) suggested that community radio should ensure that its programmes do not cover content that is contemptuous of any religious communities nor promote disharmony amongst groups or perpetuate hatred against any person or group on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, race, gender, sexual orientation or any form of disability.



Tyali (2021), who conducted a study regarding the evolving trends of the community radio industry of South Africa, revealed that community radio is a media platform that allows communities to participate as planners, producers, and performers of the broadcasting content. It is means of expression by the community rather than for the community. In this regard, Fombad and Jiyane (2019) also emphasised that community radio stations support community endeavours. These radio stations inform, guide, and entertain the people, providing a medium through which the most relevant educational, local, and developmental information is disseminated and aired.

### ***Study Limitations***

This study was mainly focusing on the role played by community radio stations in promoting South African indigenous languages. Thus, this study was unique to this specific context. During the inception of this study, the researchers found that there are a number of studies conducted in this context, however, the study on the promotion of South African indigenous languages can be investigated in future by looking at other types of media platforms. Furthermore, researchers from other African countries can partake in this kind of study to check if their community radio stations are playing a significant role when comes to the promotion of indigenous languages.

### ***Conclusion and Future Directions of the Study***

This study examined the role of South African community radio in promoting and sustaining indigenous languages and culture. It was found that radio is mostly viewed as a quick tool to disseminate information to the public. It becomes more effective when the information is disseminated in a language that people understand. Of utmost importance, the study also discovered that community members depend on their community radio for various broadcast needs. The community radios play an important role in promoting a language as all their programmes are broadcast in the geographical language of the stations. Therefore, to promote South African indigenous languages in community radio stations, the study recommends the following:

- DCDT in partnership with the DSAC, ICASA and the MDDA should partner to establish a policy that promotes programmes that broadcast full-time in the indigenous language. This could help to develop African cultures and indigenous knowledge as well.
- Radio programme managers, language experts, and researchers should implement strategies that could help to elevate the use of indigenous languages at community radio stations.
- MDDA should allocate more funding to community radio stations that are broadcasting in indigenous languages. This could help to promote the IK and African culture.
- To promote indigenous languages, community radio station managers should encourage and train presenters who are knowledgeable in the local language and who have expertise in particular subject areas as also emphasised by Fombad and Jiyane (2019).
- To promote indigenous languages in South Africa, there should be more community radio stations to cater for each ethnic group.

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