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OCCASIONAL PAPER 88



Spanish and Hispanism in South Africa: Challenges After 30 Years of Democracy

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December 2024

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Acknowledgments

The authors would like to express gratitude to Cathy Maree for her work in setting up the preliminary database and collecting the number of Spanish language learners.



Abstract

Spanish and Hispanic studies in South Africa have faced several challenges over the last thirty years of democracy in this linguistically, culturally and ethnically diverse country. Although the country has a diverse economy, social inequality permeates the gap between public and private educational institutions, affecting the quality of education and the learning of Spanish and other foreign languages. The following paper explores South Africans' interest in learning Spanish, the prevalence of Spanish language study, the legal and institutional mechanisms in place to promote it, and the barriers to gaining broader popularity. Although policies have been implemented in the secondary school curriculum to include the study of foreign languages, such as Spanish, teaching is limited by the obligation to study two local languages, insufficient government funding and the shortage of qualified teachers. Similarly, at tertiary education level, the lack of institutional and governmental support, along with language policies that hinder the growth of foreign languages of global relevance, has impacted on the learning of Spanish as a foreign language.

The presence of Spanish teaching centres is concentrated in large cities, but with few full-time teaching staff and low participation in certification exams such as the *Diplomas de Español como Lengua Extranjera* also known as Diplomas of Spanish as a Foreign Language (DELE) and *Servicio Internacional de Evaluación de la Lengua Española* (SIELE). Despite these challenges, interest in Spanish continues to grow modestly in South Africa, particularly in private schools and international schools, where there is an increase in the teaching of Spanish at primary and secondary levels. The motivation to learn Spanish is driven by personal and professional interest, although curricular limitations and the lack of daily use of the language often lead to its abandonment. Spanish-speaking associations, cultural institutions, research centres and Spanish speaking embassies play a key role in promoting Spanish and Hispanic cultures in South Africa. Through academic, cultural and commercial events, exchange and cooperation between South Africa and Spanish speaking countries is encouraged by the joint efforts of various institutions and stakeholders.



1. Introduction

South Africa is located in the southern region of the African continent and has a population of more than 62 million inhabitants, according to the latest census recorded in 2022 (South African Government, 2022). Recognized for the ethnic and linguistic diversity that coexists in its territory, the country exhibits a rich cultural heterogeneity, the result of European influences, African migrations and the presence of communities originating from India and Malaysia. The South African population is composed of approximately 81% black, 8.2% coloured, 7.3% white and only 2.7% of Indian and Asian descent (South African Government, 2022).

Known as the "rainbow nation", South Africa is home to a multilingual, multicultural and multiracial population. It has 11 official languages - following the promulgation of the constitution in 1996 - 20 indigenous languages, 11 non-indigenous languages and 5 more extinct languages (Ethnologue, n.d.). In 2023, Sign Language was included as the 12th official language. Although only 9.3% of the population speaks English as their first language (Ethnologue n.d.), it is the common language used in higher education, business, and politics. It's important to note that efforts to uplift the black population, which constitutes just over 80 percent of the country's population, and native languages, is driving significant changes in the country's language policies, but challenges persist in linguistic inequality and accessibility to higher education. Despite efforts to promote indigenous languages in primary and secondary education, English remains the language of instruction in most South African schools. Given the complex linguistic landscape and the need to incorporate South Africa's official languages in the primary, secondary and tertiary education curricula, the teaching of other foreign languages takes a back seat (Mpanza, 2023).

Spanish language learning in Africa is mostly centred in the North, West, Central and Maghreb regions, especially in countries where French is the official language (i.e., Ivory Coast, Benin, Senegal, Cameroon, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, Instituto Cervantes, 2023). According to the Instituto Cervantes (2023), there are approximately 1,824,000 learners of Spanish in these six countries. In the case of South Africa, the most recent census to determine the number of Spanish learners was in 2011. Gómez and Pérez (2014) reported 1,800 university students registered in 2011. However, as we will see below, this figure does not align with the numbers reported by individual universities, and it was doubled due to how the number of students per semester was calculated. Presently, Madagascar has the largest number of registered Spanish learners in Southern Africa, with 11,000 students (Rakotondrasolo, 2022). South Africa would potentially be the second country in the region with around 2674 students. However, to understand why a country promotes the learning



of a foreign language to a lesser or greater extent, as is the case of Spanish in South Africa, it is necessary to know its history, economic situation and current language policies.

2. The South African education system and foreign language learning

South Africa boasts one of the strongest economies on the continent; however, its low per capita income, high unemployment, and high levels of inequality permeate the education system, which has been the subject of constant controversy and criticism, particularly due to the glaring disparity between public and private institutions (De Clercq, 2020). The gap in test scores between the top 20% of schools and the other 80% is wider in South Africa than in any other country, placing it 75th out of 76 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, which translates into a profound disparity between the private and the public education sector. The educational elite is concentrated in a small number of private institutions, creating a marked imbalance relative to public schools (Engelbrecht et al., 2016; Taylor, 2019). The latter face inevitable challenges, such as lack of resources, school infrastructure and trained teachers (De Clercq, 2020). Although public schools are subsidized by the government, they are not entirely free and fees are excessively high compared to the South African minimum wage of 4780 R per month (South African Employment & Labor, 2024).

According to the South African Schools Act of 1996, primary education from grades 1 to 9 aims to provide learners with a solid and holistic educational foundation (South African Education, n.d). Grades 10 to 12 are considered further education and training. The purpose is to prepare learners for higher education or entry into the world of work. Students from Grades 10 to 12 select specific subjects based on their interests and future career plans, choosing between academic subjects or subjects that are more focused on practical skills and trades. After completing Grade 12, students may matriculate or receive the National Senior Certificate (NSC), also known as the Matric Certificate, which is essential for entry into higher education (South African Education, n.d.).

All South African educational institutions must obtain accreditation from the Quality Assurance Council for General and Further Education. Among the considerable number of schools, approximately 25,000, a small number of private schools have international curricula (22,600 public schools versus 2,300 independent schools, (Statista, 2022). Within these independent, or private, schools are elite and international schools that are attractive to South Africans because they create an international multicultural environment that allows students to learn several foreign languages (Bhaumik, 2024). These include the French lycée, the German, British and American school, but many other South African schools offer the option of a second foreign language.

At the tertiary level, the South African government recognizes three types of institutions: Traditional universities, polytechnic universities (technikons and universities of technology) and comprehensive universities. The first provide a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes; the second offer programmes in applied



areas; and the third are a hybrid of the first two. In 2023, 26 universities were registered as belonging to the three classifications described above (South African Education, n.d.).

In traditional universities, which have generally followed a curriculum structure reflecting the influence of the old British system of higher education (Recuenco and Mendoza, 2022), the model is characterized by the possibility of a three-year bachelor's degree, followed by honours, master's and doctoral studies. The degree is currently organized into major and minor subjects, allowing students to specialize in specific areas of study. In this context, the organisation of subjects in the first year of university is remarkably flexible. Students can take four different subjects, which can be completely unrelated to each other (Recuenco and Mendoza, 2022). This flexibility gives students the freedom to explore various fields of study, such as languages, before making more specialized choices in subsequent years.

2.1 Language learning in the South African education system

During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Dutch and English colonies influenced the use of English and Afrikaans as means of education, contributing to the complexity of multilingualism and multiculturalism in the South African context. The indigenous South African languages (originating from Bantu and Sotho) and their instruction were relegated during the racial segregation regime known as apartheid (Lapuerta, 1997). Afrikaans became the language of apartheid from 1948 until the advent of the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994 with the institutionalization of 11 official languages. During this time, public primary education was relegated to the learning of indigenous languages, not for the sake of revitalizing them, but to exclude the black population from access to English and thus limit their communication and participation in the political and higher educational sphere (Maree and Sanchez, 2001). Before South Africa's democracy and the recognition of multiple cultures and languages, it was referred to as a bilingual country, recognizing only English and Afrikaans (Maree and Sanchez, 2001). After democratization, the African National Congress (ANC) policy advocated for a multilingual country, especially in education (Mthombeni and Ogunnubi, 2020). It was also decided that the English would be used as the official medium of instruction, despite the fact that only just over 15 percent of the population spoke English as a mother tongue at the start of 2000 (Maree and Sanchez, 2001). Today that figure is less than ten percent of the population (Ethnologue. n.d.).

Parents and teachers preferred English as the medium of instruction, even in communities with a majority black population, although the mother tongue was widely used in verbal communication (Meyer, 1998, p.16). Unofficial languages were also identified (five Indic –Gujarati, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu – and six European), for historical reasons are related to migration of people to South Africa (Maree and Sanchez, 2001, p. 445). These unofficial languages are also learnt in South Africa, with the help of religious institutions, for creedal and cultural reasons; for example, Modern Arabic is learnt in Muslim communities, while Modern Hebrew is learnt in the



Jewish community. French, on the other hand is more popular because there are 29 French-speaking countries that make use of it as a mother tongue on the African continent (Rowe and Maree, 2005).

In 2003, "the South African Ministry of Education approved the incorporation of eleven foreign languages into the national curriculum at secondary level (Grades 8 to 12)" (Rowe and Maree, 2005, n.a.). Currently the list consists of 16 foreign languages and Spanish is one of them (South African Education, n.d.). The new curriculum (National Curriculum Statement) designed by the Department of Education in 2004 and implemented in 2006 in secondary education, advocates additive multilingualism (Rowe and Maree, 2005). Two official languages, one of which is English or Afrikaans, and one additional language, determined by the number of speakers in the region, and if economic resources are available. Today, according to the Basic Education statute, in addition to the benefits of additive bi- or multilingualism, learning a second additional language (such as Spanish), promotes the learner's holistic development and outlook for "communication within and outside South Africa; building international relations; widening trade links with other countries; and creating opportunities in travel and tourism" (South African Education, n.d.). According to the school, learners can take foreign languages, such as Spanish, in the last three years of secondary education (Grades 10 to 12), but it is suggested that they do so from Grade 8. However, this legislation has had little impact on foreign language teaching in South Africa due to the inequality in the education system, the reduction in state subsidies, and the need to prepare students for a constantly evolving world of work. This, along with other factors, has put into question the proper implementation of the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) conceived in 1997 (De Clerc, 2020; Mthombeni and Ogunnubi, 2020; Recuenco and Mendoza, 2022; Rowe and Maree, 2005).

Currently, primary and secondary schools generally choose to offer courses in English, with another official language; Afrikaans, Zulu and Xhosa are the most popular as a second language. However, international schools generally choose to include a third foreign language because the curriculum provides awareness of the educational and employment opportunities offered by a globalized world. While this multilingual approach is particularly encouraged in institutions frequented by the children of expatriates, much of the enrolment is made up of South Africans, who also see foreign languages as a future opportunity should their children wish to migrate from South Africa eventually (Childs, 2023). At university level, students may deepen their knowledge into specific areas of interest. The inclusion of an additional language, either an official South African or foreign language, as a major or minor subject, offers students the opportunity to develop strong language skills as well as a deeper understanding of the culture associated with the language.

Therefore, there is an interest to adopt officially recognized African languages at university. Some universities have recently implemented language policies that encourage the learning of indigenous languages before students learn foreign languages (Mthombeni and Ogunnubi, 2020; Mashishi, 2018; University of the Witwatersrand, 2014, n.d.). At the University of the Witwatersrand, for example, undergraduate Engineering and Arts students who wish to study a foreign language, must first take Isizulu, Sesotho or South African Sign Language (Recuenco and Mendoza, 2022). While acknowledging the importance of learning a South African



language of the region in which one lives; students, especially at tertiary level, should have the freedom to choose the language they wish to study based on their future personal, professional or educational prospects, given that these are elective courses.

3. Learning Spanish in South Africa

Given the intricate linguistic landscape of a country with 12 official languages (including sign language), the interest in learning a foreign language, such as Spanish, has been reduced. The lack of budget and government support to promote foreign language learning in primary and secondary education has led their exclusion from broader public-school programmes. It is therefore independent or private schools across the country that, aware of the importance of learning foreign languages on a global level, offer Spanish courses. At university level, the decision to establish a Spanish department is guided by institutional needs and is strongly shaped by current language policies. Given the multilingual complexity we face, Spanish is typically the third or fourth language a student learns.

3.1 Methodology and data collection

To estimate the number of Spanish learners in South Africa in the first half of 2023, members of the Association of Hispanists of Southern Africa put together a preliminary database, integrating information from 92 schools, three universities and 16 language centres. This database was assembled through phone calls, emails and WhatsApp messages. One researcher also conducted interviews with principals and teachers to explore the status and role of Spanish in their schools, as well as the reasons why primary and secondary school students choose to learn Spanish.

In the second half of 2023, the researchers conducted a more refined analysis, resulting in an expanded database consisting of 188 schools, four universities 20 and language centres. The researcher developed a Google Form, was sent via email, with follow-up through WhatsApp messages and personal communications with key stakeholders, including teachers and directors of Spanish departments and areas. This process aimed to explore the status and situation of Spanish, as well as the reasons why students learn Spanish in educational and governmental sectors. Additional information was gathered on private tutors, social networks and other entities that promoting Hispanic culture and activities in South Africa. The following data contains an overview of the status of Spanish in South Africa and traces its development over the nearly three decades of research, while also addressing inaccuracies of previous reports which have led to inflated and misleading accounts of Spanish learners in the past.

3.2 The Spanish language at primary and secondary level

Schools or independent students in the private sector that continue to teach or learn Spanish in primary or secondary education, as a second additional home language, can do so formally or informally. Formally, through school-based and group classes, private schools may choose to implement an international curriculum that allows them to teach Spanish as an additional language, or as schools that incorporate a South African curriculum and offer to teach Spanish as an additional second or third language (after learning two official South African languages). Informally, outside the school hours, the school leaves open the possibility for students who choose to learn Spanish to do so on their own through tutors usually hired by parents. This learning is generally independent (Rowe and Maree, 2005; Gómez and Pérez, 2014). Upon completing their Spanish studies in Grade 12 (whether through schooling or private tutoring), students sit for the official national, pre-university exam as independent candidates (Rowe and Maree, 2005).

Since its inception, 'the Spanish language programme has consisted of two parts: language learning following a communicative approach and the study and analysis of the culture and literature of the Hispanic world' (Rowe and Maree, 2005, n.a.). After three or five years of study, depending on the student's choice, the exam assesses the student's competence in Spanish language and literature through three tests: written and oral (for language) and written (for literature). The choice of materials is at the teacher's discretion and the examining board circulates a list of literary texts to be assessed during the biennium (Rowe and Maree, 2005).

In primary and secondary education, the first count of students in schools is documented in Maree and Sanchez (2001). As can be seen in Table 1, this number has increased dramatically over the last 30 years.

Table 1: Number of students in private schools

	1998*	2023
Schools	9	32
Students	12	2058

*Data provided by Maree and Sanchez (2001).

3.3 Teaching at university level

Of the 26 South African higher education institutions, Spanish has been taught in only six of them. The University of South Africa (UNISA), a distance learning university, is the largest institution nationally, with about 370,000 students located in the country and 109 other countries (UNISA, n.d.). UNISA opened its Spanish department in 1966, and the Department of Romance Languages incorporated Spanish as a subject in its Bachelor of Arts (Maree and Sanchez, 2001). Ten years later, in 1977, postgraduate studies (Bachelor of Arts Honours, Master of Arts, and Doctor of Philosophy) were included. The above demonstrates the early vision of the importance of Spanish, even during the height of apartheid, when South Africa was sanctioned and isolated from the rest of the world. Indeed, the rise and vision of Spanish at UNISA led to the teaching of other courses like Philology (history of the language), Translation, Spanish and Latin American Literature, and Spanish and Latin American Civilization (Maree and Sanchez, 2001, pp. 452-453). By the end of the twentieth century, the Spanish



department had three full-time professors and a lecturer from the Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo (AECID). UNISA closed its Spanish department in 2015 (Recuenco and Mendoza, 2022).

The University of Kwazulu-Natal (UKZN), formerly the University of Natal (UN) established its Spanish department in 1983. Unfortunately, the university closed the department in 1997 due to budgetary issues, as the university senate considered it a luxury that a developing country could not afford (Maree, 1998). Despite its short existence, it was the first South African university to offer face-to-face Spanish classes. The University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) opened its Spanish department in 2001 through the AECID-funded assistantship. It was not until 2017 that second-year courses were introduced, third-year courses followed in 2018, followed by honours courses in 2019 and a master's programme in 2020. However, the language policy implemented in 2019, aimed at promoting the learning of official African languages (Isizulu and Sesotho) and sign language has reduced the learning of Spanish to undergraduate level only, with enrolment becoming increasingly difficult (Recuenco and Mendoza, 2022, University of the Witwatersrand, n.d.). In 2023, for example, the second-year Spanish course was not offered.

The University of Cape Town (UCT) established its Spanish department in 2004, also through the AECID lecture programme. It began offering second-year courses and third-year courses in 2006. And UCT now offers postgraduate studies (honours and master's) and is the only university that offers the possibility of undertaking PhD studies in Spanish. The University of Pretoria received its first lecturer and opened its Spanish department in 2008 (Gómez and Pérez, 2014). Currently, this university offers curricular courses in Spanish at undergraduate, honours and master's level. The University of Stellenbosch recently started offering curricular Spanish courses in the Department of Modern Foreign Languages through an AECID-subsidized lectureship. Table 2 summarizes the year of creation or closure of the Spanish departments.

Table 2: Opening and closing year of Spanish programmes at university level

	Opening year	Closing year
UNISA	1966	2015
UKZN	1983	1997
WITS	2001	In force
UCT	2004	In force
UP	2008	In force
Stellenbosch	2024	In force

Source: Researchers' own elaboration

The number of Spanish language students at university level has fluctuated over the last three decades, but a significant decrease is expected in 2023, due to the reduced number of students in WITS. Table 3 shows the number of students registered at these universities. It should be noted that the data presented here reflect the



number of students registered exclusively during the first semester. In this regard, the data was revised and differs with what was reported by Gómez and Pérez (2014), as the authors included students registered in both semesters. However, the students registered in the second semester are the same (with exceptions, such as exchange students), which results in an inflated figure for total enrolment when both semesters are combined. This information here was carefully checked with the administrative support of the universities concerned.

Table 3: Number of students at university level

	1970*	1990*	1998*	2004*	2008*	2011*	2017	2023
UNISA	45	123	145	260	254	64	-	-
KZN University			-	-	-	-	-	-
WITS University	-		-	45	102	85	111	39
UCT	-		-	54	97	145	126	116
UP	-		-	-	108	169	123	162
Total	45	123	145	388	596	550	554	317

*Revised data provided by Maree and Sanchez (2001), Rowe and Maree (2005) and Gomez and Perez (2014).

Currently, the country has five permanent staff teachers teaching Spanish as part of its curriculum: two at UP, two at UCT and one at WITS. Additionally, the AECID-funded lectureship programme has been present in South Africa since the late 20th century, documented since 1995 by Lapuerta (1997). These lectureships were temporarily suspended in 2012 but were reactivated in 2014 at WITS and UCT (Gómez and Pérez, 2014). At present, the three universities that teach Spanish as part of their curricula have Spanish lecturers subsidized by AECID. The lecturers are also responsible for administering the DELE exams at UCT and UP, with support from the Spanish Embassy in South Africa. In 2024, however, an additional lecturer was added at the University of Stellenbosch as part of the Department of Modern Foreign Languages (Booyens, 2024).

3.4 Spanish in University Extension Centres, Language Centres and Private Tutors

Unlike the language centres offering courses in French (Alliance Française), German (Goethe Institute), Italian (Dante Alighieri), and Portuguese (Instituto Camões), South Africa does not have a Spanish Instituto Cervantes or other centres offering extra-curricular Spanish courses. Outside the educational context, there are very few language and university extension programmes where South Africans can learn Spanish. The language centres are generally private, while the university extension programmes are affiliated to a university. Given the limited options for studying Spanish, private classes with Spanish-speaking instructors are also popular but can be costly. The first record of Spanish language learning in continuing education or university extension programmes is documented in Maree and Sánchez (2001). The authors reported that classes were conducted in small groups of fewer than 15 students. In Rowe and Maree's (2005) study, they identified Spanish language classes in four



continuing education centres: UNISA, WITS, UCT and UND. These courses were non-curricular and open to the general adult public. Today, language courses in university extension or language centres follow a similar structure to those from 20 years ago; they are generally short (1 to 4 months), with most focusing on beginners levels. At present, only the University of Stellenbosch and WITS offer Spanish courses within their university extension centres. Table 4 summarizes the number of Spanish learners in these outreach centres.

Table 4. Language classes in university extension centres

	2008*	2011*	2023
Stellenbosch	32	50	10
WITS			9
UP	94	36	Does not provide
Total	126	86	19

*Data provided by Gómez and Pérez (2014).

Outside of the language centres, public schools teaching Spanish are mainly concentrated in the metropolitan cities of Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town and Durban. However, in the wake of the 2020 pandemic, some of these schools closed, while others continued to offer online classes. Most now provide face-to-face or blended classes, but some offer online-only courses. Table 5 shows the number of centres in 2005 and 2023, as well as the number of registered students in 2023. Unfortunately, more than half of the language centres refused to provide information on the number of students they serve, possibly out of concern that the data collected would be used to justify opening an Instituto Cervantes in the country, which could significantly reduce their already modest student numbers.

Given the limited supply of Spanish courses and demand for Spanish courses in extracurricular contexts, those interested in learning Spanish also tend to turn to private tutors. In compiling the refined database, the researchers identified 52 private tutors offering their services on various online platforms, mostly located in the provinces of Western Cape and Gauteng.

Table 5. Language Centres and Student Enrolment

	2005* centres	2023 centres	2023 Students
Johannesburg and Pretoria	4	5	200
Cape Town	7	8	No data provided
Durban	2	2	6
On-line at national level			52
Total	13	18	258

*Data provided by Rowe and Maree (2005).

3.5 Spanish in the International Relations and Cooperation Department

The Diplomatic Language School of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, now known as the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), was founded in 1987 (Gómez and Pérez, 2014). After the advent of South African nationhood, DIRCO fervently promoted foreign language learning in the late 1990s. Maree and Sánchez (2001) make reference to this school, as well as the Ministry of Defence's Military Language School which offered foreign languages (French, Spanish and German) to its diplomats and military attachés, from basic to intermediate levels. The department closed for a period of two years and in 2006 reopened its doors with two full-time staff, who among other functions, taught Spanish. Since 2007, it has provided instruction to DIRCO officials (both office staff and diplomats posted to the foreign service) and officials from other ministries and parastatals. The person who taught the classes retired in 2022; and in 2023, the services were outsourced in the absence of a core staff member. There are no records of the maximum number of Spanish students DIRCO ever enrolled, the currently the annual number is around 15-18 students per year (R. Geldenhuys, former teacher, by personal communication, 9 December 2023).

In 2016, only one person remained responsible for teaching Spanish. Unfortunately, the pandemic disrupted the face-to-face teaching of Spanish classes, which were suspended until August 2020, when classes resumed and were conducted via MS Teams. The Director of Training and Language Services at DIRCO's Diplomatic Academy said that the pandemic led to an increase in requests for online language training, as after 2020 the offer was extended to DIRCO officials, but also to other government officials and diplomats based in foreign missions. In 2023, two Spanish courses (level 1 and 2) of 100 hours were offered in classes held twice a week. The total number of students was 22 (C. Colarosi, personal communication, 19 January 2024).

The director of the Spanish language programme explained that Spanish is a popular language, globally, as well as an important language as it is used in the United Nations and the African Union. However, one of the greatest challenges that DIRCO has faced in offering language courses is that 'foreign language teachers are a scarce resource in South Africa, as they are generally not offered in schools, apart from French and Mandarin on a limited basis. Foreign language courses have also been limited in universities' (Colarosi, 2024). As a result, 'most civil servants arrive at the Department without knowing a foreign language and are therefore dependent on the Language Section to provide them with the necessary skills, albeit at a low level' (Colarosi, 2024). Another problem Colarosi (2024) referred to is the lack of budget to hire a new full-time trainer, so they must outsource language services on a fee basis. Finally, although there is interest among the personnel working in DIRCO and in various government departments in learning Spanish, the lack of budget and human resources make it difficult to teach Spanish in this sector (Colarosi, 2024).

In summary, teaching Spanish in South Africa faces challenges rooted in colonial history and the evolving language policies. Despite the presence of Spanish in certain institutions, discrepancies in enrolments and the need for further research highlight the importance of regularly reviewing and adapting curricula to meet the needs and motivations of students in a dynamic linguistic and educational environment.

3.6 Motivations for learning Spanish

There are many reasons why South Africans learn Spanish. However, little research has been conducted in South Africa in the context of primary and secondary education. In an interview with the vice-principal of one of the schools with the largest number of Spanish students in Cape Town, commented that it is rather the parents who decide that their children should learn Spanish because of the importance and projection they see in their future. The children, for their part, find the language attractive, beautiful and 'easy to learn' (Mesnage, 2023).

In tertiary education, these reasons are also diverse, but personal and professional reasons are more important than academic ones. In the quantitative study that Gómez and Pérez (2014) carried out with 280 higher education students (UCT, WITS and UP), they identified that the primary reasons for studying Spanish were: to obtain job opportunities (39.6%), having a passion for the Spanish language and culture (27.8%) and to travel (25.7%) (Gómez and Pérez, 2014: 524). Other less important reasons were for its musicality, communicating with other Spanish speakers, similarity to other languages, or curiosity about the language. As for the cultural elements that students identified with Hispanic cultures, the following stood out: gastronomy (28.5%), cinema (26.7%), flamenco (25.7%), Latin music (22.5%) and football (20%). Other aspects of lesser relevance were parties, politics, history and literature (Gómez and Pérez, 2014: 527).

In 2022, Recuenco and Mendoza (2021) conducted a similar study with 85 university students from the UCT and WITS. They found that the reasons for learning Spanish were personal, followed by professional and, lastly, academic motivations. In terms of personal interests, students choose to learn Spanish because they are drawn to the language, its global reach, and the opportunity to communicate with Spanish speakers. Additionally, some wish to connect with their cultural roots (as descendants of Spanish speakers) and see Spanish as a means to facilitate travel and foster international friendships. Professionally, students believe that learning Spanish broadens their career prospects, especially in fields like translation, teaching, and international relations. Some aspire to work or live in a Spanish-speaking country, seeing Spanish proficiency as a valuable asset in communicating with native speakers. In the academic realm, most students do not anticipate pursuing postgraduate studies in Spanish-speaking countries, as they perceive limited relevance within the English-speaking context in which they find themselves.

However, students also cited various reasons for discontinuing Spanish studies after the first year of university. These included the limited opportunities to use the language in daily life, the difficulty of achieving fluency, and the difficulty of learning Spanish solely as an extracurricular subject. Despite these difficulties, many students expressed a strong desire to continue studying Spanish to improve their language skills and deepen their understanding Hispanic cultures.

4. THE CERTIFICATION OF SPANISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Given the global importance of Spanish, certification is also a key component for language learners. There are exams administered nationally in each of the Spanish-speaking countries, but the most popular exams worldwide are the SIELE (*Servicio Internacional de Evaluación de la Lengua Española*) and the DELE (*Diplomas de Español como Lengua Extranjera*). Both examinations hold rigorous international standards for assessing Spanish proficiency in academic and professional contexts, but they differ in several aspects, as outlined below. Spanish certification in Africa is primarily conducted in the north of the continent through (DELE), in Sub-Saharan Africa it is administered by embassies and other institutions, though limited by a shortage of oral examiners (Gómez and Pérez, 2014). The DELE is a paper-based exam with levels ranging from A1 (basic) to C2 (superior), each adapted to the corresponding language skills ([Instituto Cervantes](#), n.d.). There is also an exam for secondary school students, called DELE escolar, available at levels A1 and A2 for candidates under 18. The DELE tests listening comprehension, reading comprehension, written expression and interaction, and oral expression and interaction. The correction and marking are carried out *on site* by a team of experts endorsed by the Instituto Cervantes.

4.1 DELE in South Africa

The first DELE certification centre was set up in 1999 by the Spanish Consulate General and a language school in Cape Town. Maree and Sanchez (2001) reported that around 20 candidates applied for this first call. In 2001, DELE exams began to be offered at UNISA, followed by the Consulate General of Spain in Cape Town in 2004. Subsequently, with the establishments of Spanish Department at UP, DELE exams were discontinued at UNISA and were further offered at UP in 2009. In 2008, they began to be offered at UCT (Gómez and Pérez, 2014). DELE is currently administered in South Africa at three sites: the University of Cape Town, a recently reactivated site in Pretoria as of 2023, and a private college. At the first two universities, the exam is administered by the lecturers through AECID and is held once a year (May at UP and November at UCT). In the case of the college, this exam is administered by a person certified in written and oral assessment of this exam. Table 6 shows a comparison of DELE administrations over 25 years.

Table 6: DELE examinations administered in South Africa

	1999*	2004*	2008*	2011*	2022	2023
Examinees	20	11	13	12	9	43

*Data provided by Gómez and Pérez (2014).



Although the registered students are few; this was recorded as the DELE exam centres reopened applications at UP and the recent introduction of applications at the private college Helpmekaar allowed for an increase in the offer in 2023, and with it, the demand, as can be seen in the increase in applicants in 2023.

4.2 SIELE in South Africa

The SIELE exam is a digital, pan-Hispanic language proficiency test developed through collaboration between Spain, Argentina and Mexico. The progressive exam assesses the four language skills – reading listening, writing, and speaking – and includes integrated tasks for written and oral interaction. Depending on the specific needs of the examinee, modular tests are available that allow for the assessment of two or more skills in up to five different combinations ([SIELE](#), n.d.). While reading comprehension and listening comprehension are grade automatically, the writing and speaking sections are sent online to the Instituto Cervantes for evaluation and scoring. In 2018, UNAM's CEM-South Africa opened the first SIELE certifying centre in Sub-Saharan Africa (Mendoza, 2021). Due to the exam's flexibility, the centre offered monthly sessions as well as additional sessions on demand for work or study reasons. Over the four years that the test centre was active, it administered 16 sessions across various SIELE modalities (Mendoza and Ruíz, 2023). Currently, there is only one SIELE test administration centre, located in Durban, which opened in 2019. In Table 7, we summarize the most significant figures reported in this section.

Table 7: Spanish and certification in South Africa in 2023.

Universities and Centres that teach Spanish courses at the curricular level	Students enrolled in 2023
UCT, UP, WITS, Stellenbosch	317
Private Schools that teach Spanish courses at primary and secondary level: 32	2058
University Extension Centres: WITS and Stellenbosch	19
Language centres located in main urban areas of the country: 18	258
DIRCO Diplomatic Academy	22
Total	2674
Certification DELE	43
Professors or private tutors	52

5. CULTURAL AND RESEARCH ASSOCIATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS

The following section highlights the contributions of the Association of Hispanists of South Africa, the Centre for Mexican Studies of the National Autonomous University of Mexico at the University of the Witwatersrand, and the Centre for Latin American and Caribbean Studies.



5.1 Association of Hispanists of Southern Africa

The Association of Hispanists of Southern Africa (AHSA) was founded in 2010 with the primary goal of promoting the Spanish language and cultures of the Spanish-speaking world in South Africa. It also supports Spanish language teaching and learning, and the dissemination of Spanish-speaking cultures. To fulfil this objective, the AHSA organizes recurring webinars on Spanish-related topics, teacher training courses for Spanish as a foreign language, and colloquia focused on Spanish language and cultural studies. The Spanish Embassy in South Africa sponsored the latter two events. The inaugural colloquia in 2010 helped consolidate the AHSA formation. Originally intended as a platform for exchanging ideas, practices and materials among teachers, these colloquia have since evolved to include representatives from the Hispanic diplomatic corps.

In 2020, the shift to online activities allowed for increased participation from Spanish language instructors in other parts of Southern Africa and beyond. annual colloquia are intended, practical constraints have sometimes prevented this; however, seven colloquia have been held at the Universities of Pretoria, Cape Town and Witwatersrand, and most recently the VII Colloquium of Hispanists of Southern Africa was held in November 2023, centring on the theme: The state of the Spanish language in South Africa. In addition to these events, the AHSA collaborates with Hispanic embassies in South Africa to carry out academic and cultural activities that reinforce Spanish language and literature, while showcasing Hispanic cultures and traditions in the South African community. At the same time, AHSA also seeks to foster international collaborations with other associations and institutions of higher education. Those interested in becoming members of the AHSA must pay an annual AHSA membership fee, which includes a few benefits, such as job offers, invitations to cultural events, scholarship alerts at Latin American universities.

5.2 Centre for Mexican Studies of the National Autonomous University of Mexico at the University of the Witwatersrand

In 2018, the National Autonomous University of Mexico opened a Centre for Mexican Studies (CEM) in the School of Literature, Languages and Media at WITS, with the purpose of promoting academic and cultural exchanges. This centre would serve as a focal point that strengthens cultural, educational and research links between UNAM and South African university, governmental and cultural institutions. Its vision was to become a prestigious cultural centre and promote Mexican culture and the teaching and certification of Spanish as a foreign language (Mendoza and Ruiz, 2019).

During almost five years of management, CEM developed numerous academic, cultural and artistic programmes. In the academic category, CEM has built bridges of intra- and inter- institutional collaboration with UNAM, WITS, UP, UNISA and UCT. Whereby it fostered academic exchange between students and teachers; organized three international colloquia; a permanent monthly webinar, *Diálogos Sur-Sur*; a literary seminar, *México y Sudáfrica*;



Escritores en conversación, Cápsulas Universitarias de Ciencia and Cultura y Arte; and numerous lectures and master classes (Mendoza and Ruiz, 2023). Regarding Spanish language instruction, contributions were made to teaching language, culture and literature in the Spanish Department at WITS. Additionally, conversation workshops, recreational and cultural activities were also implemented for the benefit of the student community. In the field of certification, CEM opened the first SIELE certification centre in sub-Saharan Africa. CEM also introduced immersion courses in English and South African culture for Mexican students, which included a cultural component through guided visits to sites of interest, museums and animal reserves (Mendoza and Ruiz, 2023). After the pandemic, in 2021, the course offerings expanded to include courses in South African English and culture, supported by conversation workshops and eTandem activities between South African and Mexican university students.

In the cultural and artistic sphere, the fruitful collaboration with the Spanish-speaking embassies of Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Spain, Panama, Peru and Uruguay led to initiatives like the *Diversitas* film festival and a *Hispanic Cultural Showcase* at the *Hispanic Fest* held at UCT (Mendoza and Ruiz, 2023). Unfortunately, UNAM decided to close its centre at the end of 2022, partly due to low student enrolment in the Spanish department at WITS.

5.2 The Centre for Latin American and Caribbean Studies

The Centre for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (UCLAS, n.d.) was part of the Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD) which was associated with the University of South Africa (UNISA). The IGD engages in research, publications and community engagement on political, economic, social and cultural dynamics of various regions, which has included the following research topics: Africa's relations with Latin America and the Caribbean, the role of Latin America and the Caribbean in global politics and role of the African diaspora. The centre also mentors young researchers and promotes academic exchange between researchers and similar centres around the world. Although the IGD continues to engage on these topics, the centre has since transformed into the Centre for the Global South, in 2023.

The Centre's history dates back to the 1980s, and it was subsequently revitalized and moved under the Think Tank called Institute for Global Dialogue associated with UNISA to better understand the region in the context of a changing Global South. Its goal was to be a key repository of knowledge on Latin America and the Caribbean and explore its relations with Africa. This encompassed values like striving for excellence in knowledge production and collaboration in research to cultural activities. Strategic objectives included improving academic knowledge of regional relations, establishing research networks, promoting interest in and knowledge of the region, and being a platform for cultural exchanges. In addition, the *Latin American Report* (LAR) accepted peer-reviewed contributions and constituted its main research portal. It is a central tool that provides a platform for critical dialogue on the Global South.



6. Cultural and economic relations between South Africa and Hispanic countries

The following section highlights official government-to-government initiatives that encourage the use of the Spanish language and cultures found in Hispanic countries.

6.1 Hispanic embassy efforts

The Spanish-speaking embassies in South Africa play a vital role in the promotion of the Spanish language, Hispanic literature, the dissemination of scholarships and study opportunities in their countries, and the enrichment of the Hispanic cultural scene in this Southern African country. South Africa has diplomatic representation from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Spain, Uruguay and Venezuela. On occasions, the embassies collaborate on joint cultural activities, such as the *Group of Latin American and Caribbean* (GRULAC). This is one of the five regional groups of the United Nations (UN), 33 countries of Central and South America, as well as surrounding islands such as Cuba and the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Surinam, Trinidad and Tobago (islands in the West Indies). Brazil is also part of this group. GRULAC member countries represent 17% of all UN membership.

The GRULAC Film Festival took place in 2017 in Pretoria with the screening of films representing the participating countries. This event was organized in collaboration with the Centre for Latin American and Caribbean Studies within the Institute for Global Dialogue associated with UNISA. The Diversitas Film Festival, meanwhile, was created in 2019 by the Centre for Mexican Studies, the Embassy of Chile and Mexico. The aim of this film festival is to promote the Spanish language and its cultures. This type of event allows the dissemination of culture and art through various events and initiatives that combine language and culture, bringing together Spanish-speaking communities and South Africans. GRULAC has also organized football sporting events with South African schools that supports South African youth development and strengthens sporting links between the two continents. In addition to joint actions, each country has its own strategic interests, which are described below:

The Embassy of Argentina carries out various cultural and human rights awareness events. In this sense, the embassy organizes film festivals, photographic exhibitions, tango events, sports diplomacy activities, and promotes the translation of works by Argentine authors into other languages, through Programa Sur (n.d.). The embassy also encourages the establishment and strengthening of links between institutions in both countries. Argentina has an active community that promotes sporting events, exhibitions, film festivals and the sale of imported products. Since 1979, it has had an Association of Argentineans who meet periodically and on Argentinian commemorative dates and sporting events. Its traditional Argentine asado (barbecue) serves as a



festive link for the community. The Argentine community consists of approximately 5,000 Argentines living in the country, making it the largest Spanish-speaking population in South Africa.

The Embassy of Colombia has established bilateral agreements that promote exchanges between young South African students and diplomats. Notable commercial initiatives include investments in the Colombian candy industry in South Africa and the expansion of South African avocado plantations in Colombia. The Embassy organizes cultural and foreign trade events, demonstrating a comprehensive approach that encompasses both cultural and economic issues. In recent bilateral agreements, Colombia has expanded its academic offerings by providing scholarships for South African students to pursue postgraduate studies in Colombia. The Embassy of Chile, in addition to the academic and cultural activities that organizes to disseminate its literature and bilateral relations with South Africa, offers the Nelson Mandela scholarship for master's degrees through AGCID, the Chilean Agency for International Cooperation and Development. This programme offers students benefits that include Spanish language courses, flight costs, tuition fees and monthly allowances. The Embassy of Ecuador seeks new markets for its products, such as coffee, textiles and chocolates. These actions reflect South-South cooperation and Ecuador's interest in satisfying a South African demand (Diplomatic Society, 2022).

Spain's foreign policy encourages the dissemination of Spanish as a foreign language. Through grants to associations such as the AHSA, the annual colloquia bring together experts and professors of Spanish from various South African universities. This reflects a significant commitment to the promotion of the Spanish language and culture in the region. It also hosts academic events, which disseminate research carried out by Spanish and Hispanic Americans in South Africa. The Embassy of Mexico is known for its organisation of academic and cultural events in favour of bi-lateral mutual exchanges that further strengthen relations. The audiovisual sector stands out as vehicles for the promotion of Mexican language, culture and traditions. These events are representative of national festivals that allow the dissemination of Mexico's cultural and artistic wealth in South Africa. Similarly, in the field of education, it is worth mentioning the scholarships that the Government of Mexico offers to South Africans to pursue postgraduate studies in Mexico. The scholarships include the Mexican Government Excellence Scholarships for Foreigners and the Mexican Government COIL Project Scholarships for Foreigners, both managed through the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation, also known as *Agencia Mexicana de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo*.

The Embassy of Peru stands out for organizing typical dances, music and events that highlight rich Peruvian culinary traditions by creating a multi-sensory experience for the community and those interested in culture. In addition, Peru has the Inca Garcilaso Cultural Centre in Lima, which extends its activities through virtual platforms and social networks.

6.2 Spanish Chamber of Commerce in South Africa and the Catalan Foreign Office in Johannesburg: Drivers of trade exchange

South Africa is currently the 12th largest destination for Spanish exports, and Spain is the 20th largest destination for South African exports. Both Spain and South Africa recognize the importance of the bilateral economic



relationship between the two countries, with a focus on sectors such as renewable energy, tourism, steel and agriculture (DIRCO, 2022). The Spanish Chamber of Commerce (ECC) in South Africa, a non-profit organisation, plays a key role in fostering commercial, economic and industrial relations between Spain and South Africa. With 80 Spanish companies in South Africa, it offers its members access to valuable resources and training programmes to enhance their business development (Sánchez, 2023).

Some notable benefits of the Chamber membership include representing collective business interests, lobbying at government level to advocate for members' legislative agendas, and enhancing local visibility and credibility. The Chamber also provides information on events, colloquia, and cultural activities, which strengthen connections between South Africa and Spain (Chamber of Commerce, n.d.). Among the services they offer, they include the following niche services that rely on knowledge of the Spanish language:

- Preparing agendas for Spanish companies visiting South Africa,
- Logistical support and use of the meeting room at the ECC office,
- Translation services,
- Organisation of events, exhibitions and workshops, and
- Market research.

The ECC demonstrates its commitment to economic development and prosperity by boosting its members' brands and strengthening trade relations between the two nations (Chamber of Commerce, 2024). The Foreign Trade and Investment Office of Catalonia in Johannesburg, founded in 1995, plays a key role in facilitating the access of Catalan companies to the markets of southern Africa, especially South Africa as it is the region's most diverse market. These services include:

- Clustering agricultural machinery and equipment,
- Transforming the mobility and automotive industry,
- Internationalizing products and business for export, and
- Searching for marketing channels, contact agendas and business missions.

The Foreign Office has been instrumental in more than two hundred projects in the chemical, energy and industrial systems sectors (ACCIO, n.d.). It has extensive experience in infrastructure development and offers services that generate great interest among Catalan companies, including the search for marketing channels, contact lists and trade missions. The Spanish Chamber of Commerce and the Foreign Office of Catalonia, play essential roles in strengthening commercial ties between Spain and South Africa, and foster economic exchange and business collaboration.

7. Spanish links to South African popular culture

The following section explores The Spanish-speaking influence on the cultural and artistic scene in South Africa and impact of Hispanic social networking groups.



7.1 The Spanish-speaking influence on the cultural and artistic scene in South Africa

The percentage of immigrants in South Africa is approximately 2.86 million (4.80% in 2020), It predominantly consists of Africans from Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Lesotho (Datos Macro, n.d.). Although it is difficult to identify the number of Hispanics living in South Africa, the cumulative figure for all Spanish-speaking countries is less than 10,000 people and belong to Argentinian, Chilean, Venezuelan, Cuban and Spanish nationalities. By comparison to other minority nationalities, it is less than the number of Polish, Greeks or Dutch in the country (Macro Data, n.d.). However, despite the small migrant population the strong presence of the Spanish language and Hispanic cultures is reflected in cultural and artistic events that are organised, in addition to the Hispanic embassies, and their resident communities in South Africa. They emphasise popular culture interests in football, music, dance and gastronomy offered by these countries. In terms of dance, the decade has seen a marked increase in the popularity of Latin American and Caribbean dance schools in South Africa. Numerous schools also offer Spanish dance classes in different regions of South Africa. The active presence of these schools, with just over 30 spreads throughout the country, reflects a growing interest and appreciation for Hispanic arts and culture in South African society. Beyond dance, the cultural richness of Hispanic influence is also evident in the Hispanic cuisine available in South Africa, with numerous restaurants delivering authenticity and vibrant flavours. Given South Africans' taste for spices, condiments and chilies, Mexican cuisine is particularly popular with many Mexican restaurants across the country (Business Tech, 2016). Spanish or Hispanic and Argentinian food is also available, but to a lesser extent.

7.2 Hispanic social networking groups

In the digital sphere, various Spanish-speaking communities in South Africa have found success on social networks. The presence of specific groups by nationality reflects the diversity of the Spanish-speaking community in South Africa; for example, Argentines in South Africa, Bolivians in South Africa, Colombians in South Africa, Chileans in South Africa, Cubans in South Africa, Spaniards in South Africa, Latinos in South Africa, Latinos Unidos in South Africa, Mexicans in South Africa, Peruvians in South Africa and Africa, and Venezuelans in Africa. Some of these groups, such as Argentines in South Africa, have more than 8,400 members, whereas Spaniards in South Africa have approximately 2,500 members. A wide range of cultural, artistic and gastronomic events are promoted on these platforms. In terms of language, the group "*Se habla español en Sudáfrica*", with around 550 members, and "Spanish in South Africa", with just over 300 members, help to publicize events, concerts, cultural activities and language learning exchanges. In addition, "*Viva Salsa*" stands out as a comprehensive guide to dance, music and cultural events in Johannesburg.



8. Discussion and final reflections

The aim of this article was to highlight the presence of the Spanish language and Hispanism in South Africa, as well as its evolution throughout history, particularly after thirty years of South African democracy. As we have seen, a multicultural, multilingual and multiracial country faces various obstacles in the recognition and inclusion of both its native and foreign languages. The implementation of Spanish language courses in South Africa faces several obstacles, reflecting the country's complex historical, economic and political reality. After 30 years of democracy, English - spoken by less than ten percent of the population - remains the lingua franca and the preferred language of instruction in most South African schools.

Language policies also pose significant obstacles to the learning of Spanish and other foreign languages. Although eleven foreign languages, including Spanish, were added to the secondary curriculum in 2003, their availability is limited by the requirement for students to study two local languages in addition to the language of instruction. Furthermore, public schools often lack government funding to support the teaching of any of these foreign languages.

At university level too, limited institutional and governmental funded, along with policies in favouring indigenous language learning, restricted students' freedom of choice of foreign languages, leading to a decline in enrolment in Spanish lessons and other foreign language courses. This lack of support is also evident in the shortage of full-time teaching staff dedicated to foreign languages at universities. University extension centres and language centres across South Africa are primarily concentrated in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Pretoria. Limited access to information on student enrolment, particularly for centres in Cape Town, makes it difficult to have a more accurate assess the level of interest among South Africans' interest in learning Spanish. Among the centres that provided data, only a few reported enrolling more than fifty students over the course of 2023. Regarding Spanish language certification, the low number of candidates and the limited number of centres administering the DELE and SIELE highlighted the need for greater flexibility in the administration of these exams, as offered by SIELE, to improve accessibility and promote wider participation. The high cost of certification exams also reduces candidate numbers. Undoubtedly, the opening of new certifying centres will make it possible to increase the number of students registering for these examinations.

Despite the modest number of Spanish learners, we highlight that Madagascar and South Africa have the highest number of Spanish learners in southern Africa, citing available figures. In the case of Madagascar, the number increased from 7,680 learners in 2014 to 11,000 in 2022 (Rakotondrasolo, 2022). In South Africa, the figure is currently estimated at around 3,000 students. There is a challenge in streamlining the exact number of students, but we have to be cautious in the way students are counted, especially in tertiary education where this number could be doubled if one considers both terms in one year with the same students.

In the study we presented that there is a growing audience for Spanish language learning in private international schools. In these schools, we observed a notable increase and interest in Spanish language teaching at primary and secondary levels. Given that this is the first time that data on students learning Spanish in such schools is



written about, it is difficult to show an effective comparison over time. However, it is estimated that this number is increasing as several schools that teach Spanish have more than 100 students registered in each school. In addition, the adoption of an international curricula encourages students to learn foreign languages, such as Spanish. The motivation to learn Spanish is influenced by a variety of factors, both at primary and secondary level and at university level. Parents play a crucial role in decision-making, especially in primary and secondary education. Spanish may be viewed as a tool for their children's future, whether to immigrate or to increase the access to job opportunities in South Africa, or globally.

At the university level, personal motivations, such as interest in the language and culture, and professional motivations, to work in Hispanic countries or to use the language in the country, are key drivers. However, reasons for discontinuing the study of the language include the lack of opportunities to use of Spanish in everyday contexts, difficulty in learning the language, and curricular limitations that prevent continued study pursuing degrees in Hispanic Studies or Modern Languages.

In terms of research, promotion and dissemination of Spanish and Hispanic cultures, associations, cultural and research centres play a crucial role. The AHSA, the CLAS and the former CEM UNAM-South Africa play and have played an important role in promoting the teaching and learning of Spanish, the organisation of academic and cultural events, as well as the collaborative work with Hispanic embassies. However, the recent closure of the CEM UNAM-South Africa is evidence of the fragility of these institutions, which are often left dependent on the demand for Spanish language learning to justify the allocation of scarce funds. The presence of the Spanish Chamber of Commerce and the Foreign Office of Catalonia in Johannesburg also shows the promotion of commercial exchanges, investments and economic opportunities between the two countries. Spanish-speaking embassies also play a key role in strengthening bilateral relations between South Africa and Spanish-speaking countries. The academic, cultural and artistic events they organize jointly and individually, as well as their offer of scholarships for postgraduate studies in Spanish-speaking countries, significantly strengthen cultural and academic ties between South Africa and the Spanish-speaking world. Despite the small Hispanic population in South Africa, there are various groups, associations and schools that organize sporting, cultural, artistic and gastronomic events.

In conclusion, the implementation of Spanish language courses in South Africa faces several multifaceted challenges, from historical and political obstacles to financial constraints and lack of government support. Despite this, the interest in the language and cultures of Hispanic countries persists modestly in the education sector, and in the South African community. The Spanish language teachers, associations, cultural institutions, research centres and trade promoters, Spanish-speaking embassies, and the Hispanic community play a key role in overcoming these challenges and fostering the learning of Spanish and the promotion of Hispanic cultures in South Africa.

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