

Research Article

Promoting Linguistic Diversity in Multicultural Workplaces: Enhancing HR Policies and Practices at the St. Augustine University of Tanzania

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Abstract

Linguistic diversity in higher education institutions plays a critical role in shaping organizational culture, communication, and productivity, yet it also presents unique challenges in fostering inclusivity. This study, therefore, investigated the role of linguistic diversity at the St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT) and its implications for human resource (HR) policies and practices. With Tanzania's rich multilingual landscape-featuring Swahili and English as official languages alongside over 120 indigenous languages-SAUT serves as a compelling case study on managing linguistic diversity in an academic workplace. The research aimed to (1) assess the current state of linguistic diversity at SAUT, (2) identify associated challenges and opportunities, (3) evaluate its impact on employee satisfaction and productivity, and (4) develop tailored HR strategies to promote inclusivity. Using a qualitative approach, data was collected through interviews with faculty, staff, and administrators, supplemented by document analysis. Findings reveal that while linguistic diversity enhances cultural exchange, creativity, and problem-solving, it also creates communication barriers and feelings of exclusion among non-dominant language speakers. Key challenges include difficulties in formal communication, unequal participation in meetings, and occasional misunderstandings. However, the study also highlights opportunities for leveraging this diversity to strengthen institutional cohesion and global competitiveness. To address these challenges, the study recommends implementing structured language training programs (e.g., Kiswahili for international staff and advanced English for non-native speakers), adopting multilingual signage and documentation, and fostering inclusive communication strategies such as translation services and code-switching accommodations. By proactively managing linguistic diversity, SAUT can enhance employee satisfaction, collaboration, and productivity while reinforcing its reputation as an inclusive academic institution. This research contributes to broader discussions on linguistic diversity in higher education and provides practical HR solutions for multicultural workplaces. The findings underscore the importance of intentional language policies in fostering inclusivity, offering valuable insights for universities and organizations operating in linguistically diverse environments.

Keywords

Linguistic Diversity, Higher Education, Inclusivity, Cultural Enrichment, Human Resources

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Context

The globalisation of economies and societies has dramatically transformed modern workplaces into complex, multicultural environments characterized by significant linguistic diversity [1, 9]. This transformation presents both opportunities and challenges for institutions operating in multilingual contexts. St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT) serves as a compelling case study of these dynamics, functioning as a microcosm of Tanzania's rich sociolinguistic landscape while simultaneously engaging with global academic networks [27, 21].

Tanzania's unique linguistic environment features Swahili as the national lingua franca and primary language of public life, while English maintains its position as the dominant language of higher education and formal administration [4, 26]. This bilingual framework exists alongside an extraordinary diversity of over 120 indigenous languages, each representing distinct cultural traditions and local identities [3, 16]. SAUT's institutional environment reflects this complexity, with daily interactions occurring across multiple linguistic registers and codes [25]. The university's linguistic diversity creates a dynamic environment that offers significant benefits. Research indicates that such multilingual settings can enhance creative problem-solving, foster intercultural competence, and provide access to diverse knowledge systems [8, 12]. However, these advantages are often accompanied by substantial challenges, including communication barriers, unequal participation in academic discourse, and subtle hierarchies based on language proficiency [17, 19, 22]. These issues are particularly acute in higher education institutions where language serves as both the medium of instruction and a key factor in professional advancement [6, 28].

Current scholarship on linguistic diversity in workplaces has identified several critical areas requiring attention. These include the development of inclusive language policies, implementation of effective multilingual communication strategies, and creation of equitable professional development opportunities [23, 13]. However, most existing research focuses on corporate environments in Western contexts, with limited attention to academic institutions in Africa [14, 31]. This gap in the literature is particularly significant given the unique linguistic ecologies found in many African universities, where multiple local languages interact with colonial and global languages in complex ways [18, 21].

This study addresses these research gaps through a comprehensive examination of linguistic diversity at SAUT. The investigation focuses on three key dimensions: (a) the current linguistic landscape and communication practices, (b) the impact of language diversity on academic and administrative functions, and (c) the development of practical HR strategies to optimize the benefits of multilingualism while mitigating

its challenges [15, 2]. By combining institutional analysis with comparative perspectives from international higher education, the study provides both context-specific recommendations for SAUT and broader insights applicable to similar institutions across Africa [10, 11].

1.2. Specific Objectives

This research study aimed to investigate the role of linguistic diversity in the St. Augustine University of Tanzania's multicultural workplace and its implications for HR policies and practices. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following objectives:

- I. Assess the current linguistic diversity in the workplace, including the representation of languages spoken by employees and students.
- II. Identify challenges and opportunities associated with linguistic diversity, focusing on its impact on communication, cultural exchange, and inclusivity.
- III. Evaluate the influence of linguistic diversity on employee and student satisfaction, productivity, and organisational performance.
- IV. Develop tailored HR policies and practices that promote linguistic diversity, fostering a harmonious and inclusive environment for all members of the university community.

1.3. Scope of the Study

This study focused on the role of linguistic diversity in the multicultural workplace at St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT). It examined the representation of languages spoken by employees and students, the challenges and opportunities arising from linguistic diversity, and its impact on communication, inclusivity, and organizational performance. The research was confined to SAUT's main campus, involving academic staff, administrative staff, and students as primary participants. The study evaluated current HR policies and practices related to linguistic diversity and proposes tailored strategies to enhance inclusivity and productivity. While the findings were specific to SAUT, they may offer insights applicable to other higher education institutions in linguistically diverse contexts. The study did not, however, extend to external stakeholders or other campuses of the university.

1.4. Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored in the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), a theoretical framework developed by Howard Giles in the 1970s. CAT examines the ways in which individuals adapt their communication behaviours—such as speech patterns, tone, and style—to either align

with or differentiate from the linguistic and communicative practices of others. The theory identified two primary forms of communication adjustment: convergence and divergence. Convergence occurs when individuals modify their communication styles to become more similar to those of their interlocutors, often to foster rapport, solidarity, and social cohesion. In contrast, divergence involved emphasizing differences in communication styles, which could serve to reinforce social, cultural, or group identities.

The application of CAT to the context of St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT) provides a robust framework for understanding the dynamics of linguistic diversity within its multicultural workplace. In an attempt to analyse how employees and students converge or diverge in their communication practices, this study sought to identify strategies that promote inclusivity, enhance collaboration, and mitigate potential barriers arising from linguistic differences. CAT offers valuable insights into how linguistic diversity can be managed to improve communication effectiveness and foster a more inclusive organizational culture.

Application to HR Policies and Practices

The principles of CAT can be strategically applied to inform the development of HR policies and practices that encourage positive linguistic accommodation. For instance, HR policies can be designed to foster an environment where individuals are motivated to converge in their communication styles, thereby promoting mutual understanding and cooperation. This can be achieved through initiatives that emphasize respect for linguistic diversity and encourage the use of inclusive communication practices. Additionally, HR strategies can address instances where divergence leads to social or cultural barriers by promoting awareness of the value of linguistic diversity and reducing perceptions of linguistic hierarchies.

Practical measures informed by CAT include the implementation of language training programs aimed at equipping employees and students with multilingual skills and cross-cultural communication competencies. Such programs can help bridge communication gaps, reduce misunderstandings, and foster a more inclusive environment. Furthermore, organizing intergroup collaboration activities can facilitate meaningful interactions between individuals from different linguistic backgrounds, fostering empathy, mutual appreciation, and a sense of belonging.

By integrating the principles of CAT into its HR policies and practices, SAUT can cultivate a workplace culture that not only values linguistic diversity but also leverages it as a strategic asset. This approach aligns with the university's mission to promote inclusivity and multiculturalism, while simultaneously enhancing communication effectiveness and organizational cohesion. The application of CAT provides a theoretical foundation for addressing the challenges and opportunities associated with linguistic diversity, ultimately contributing to a more harmonious, productive, and inclusive workplace environment.

2. Literature Review

The growing linguistic diversity in global workplaces has emerged as a critical area of organizational research, particularly in higher education institutions that serve multicultural populations. This review synthesizes current scholarship across four key dimensions relevant to St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT): the documentation of linguistic diversity, its associated workplace challenges and opportunities, impacts on organizational outcomes, and evidence-based HR policy responses. By examining these interconnected themes, the review establishes both the theoretical foundations and practical considerations necessary for developing effective language management strategies in Tanzania's unique higher education context.

2.1. Assessing Linguistic Diversity in Multicultural Workplaces

Contemporary research underscores language as a fundamental mediator of workplace communication and organizational culture. In their study [20], they present a comprehensive framework analysing how linguistic diversity shapes power dynamics, collaboration patterns, and conflict resolution mechanisms in professional settings. Their intercultural communication model reveals that language functions not merely as an information conduit but as a cultural marker that influences group formation and social hierarchies within organizations. Complementary research by Paulston et al. (2012) demonstrates how language proficiency affects identity negotiation and socialization processes, particularly in academic workplaces where multiple languages coexist. These studies collectively highlight the importance of systematically documenting linguistic diversity as a prerequisite for effective organizational management. While Tanzania's national linguistic landscape has been well-mapped [4, 24], significant gaps remain in institutional-level analyses, particularly regarding how SAUT's specific language demographics influence daily operations, teaching methodologies, and administrative processes. This study addresses this gap by providing empirical data on language distribution and usage patterns across SAUT's academic and administrative units.

2.2. Challenges and Opportunities of Workplace Multilingualism

The coexistence of multiple languages in professional environments presents both significant benefits and notable challenges that require strategic management. The longitudinal studies of multinational corporations demonstrate that multilingual workforces exhibit 23% higher innovation metrics compared to monolingual counterparts, attributable to enhanced cognitive flexibility and diverse problem-solving approaches [29]. However, Lasswell's (2017) organizational communication research identifies persistent challenges in-

cluding misinterpretation risks in multilingual teams and unequal participation patterns correlated with language proficiency levels. These dynamics are particularly pronounced in academic settings like SAUT where language mediates both formal instruction and informal professional interactions. The British Council's (2013) global audit of language skills in the workplace further highlights the economic value of multilingualism, though their findings primarily reflect corporate environments in developed economies. This underscores the need for context-specific research in African higher education institutions, where language hierarchies may reflect different historical and sociopolitical factors than those documented in Western contexts [15, 19].

2.3. Impact on Satisfaction and Performance Metrics

Emerging research establishes clear connections between linguistic environments and key organizational performance indicators. Liddell's (2003) mixed-methods study of service sector employees found that language-inclusive policies correlated with 18% higher job satisfaction scores and 12% lower turnover rates among multilingual staff. In academic contexts, Kezar's (2005) multi-institutional analysis demonstrates how linguistically diverse faculty teams produce more innovative research solutions, though the study notes significant variation based on institutional support structures. Despite these important findings, the long-term impacts of linguistic diversity on African university ecosystems remain understudied, particularly regarding student learning outcomes and faculty retention metrics. There is also limited empirical data comparing the cost-benefit ratios of different language support interventions in resource-constrained higher education settings. This represents a critical knowledge gap as African universities like SAUT seek to balance the benefits of multilingualism with practical operational constraints.

2.4. Developing Context-appropriate HR Policies

Effective management of linguistic diversity requires HR policies that address both operational needs and equity considerations. The global survey of language policies identifies three key components of effective frameworks: comprehensive language audits, targeted training programs, and inclusive communication protocols [30]. Their research demonstrates that organizations implementing all three components report 37% higher employee satisfaction with diversity initiatives. In their study [23], they further emphasize the importance of aligning language policies with broader organizational values, particularly in mission-driven institutions like universities. However, as Fong and Gibbs (1995) caution in their comparative study of Southeast Asian and African workplaces, policy transferability is limited without significant contextual adaptation. This is particularly relevant for

SAUT, where HR strategies must account for Tanzania's unique trilingual environment (Swahili, English, and local languages) and the university's specific operational realities. Current literature provides limited guidance on developing such context-specific solutions, highlighting the need for grounded research within African higher education institutions.

2.5. Critical Gaps in Current Research

This systematic review identifies four substantive gaps in existing literature that this study addresses. First, while macro-level linguistic surveys of Tanzania exist, there is paucity of institutional-level data documenting actual language use patterns in universities. Second, most workplace multilingualism research focuses on corporate settings, with limited attention to the unique dynamics of academic institutions. Third, longitudinal studies measuring the impact of language policies on organizational performance in African higher education are virtually absent from current scholarship. Finally, there is minimal research evaluating the effectiveness of different HR interventions in multilingual university settings, particularly in resource-constrained environments. These gaps collectively underscore the need for the present study's focused investigation of SAUT's linguistic ecosystem and its implications for HR policy development in Tanzanian higher education.

2.6. Contribution of the Study

This study aimed to address these gaps by exploring evidence-based HR strategies that effectively leverage linguistic diversity while addressing its challenges in a multicultural workplace setting. By focusing on SAUT, the study provides context-specific insights that can inform the development of tailored HR policies and practices. These include adapting recruitment processes, implementing language training programs, adopting inclusive communication strategies, and establishing conflict resolution mechanisms. The findings will contribute to the broader discourse on linguistic diversity in higher education and offer practical solutions for fostering inclusivity and productivity in multicultural workplace.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the linguistic diversity on HR policies and practices at the St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT). The methodology was carefully structured to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the multilingual dynamics within the institution while maintaining scientific rigor and ethical integrity. A case study design was adopted, as it allows for an in-depth examination of complex social phenomena within their real-world context [32]. This design was particularly suitable for investigating how linguistic diversity influences

workplace communication, collaboration, and inclusivity at SAUT.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews and document analysis to ensure methodological triangulation. A total of 32 interviews were conducted, with participants strategically selected to represent diverse linguistic backgrounds, professional roles, and academic departments. The sample included HR personnel (5%), academic staff (37.5%), administrative staff (25%), and students (32.5%), ensuring a balanced representation of perspectives. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and were conducted in either Swahili or English, depending on participant preference. The interview protocol explored four key themes: experiences with linguistic diversity, communication challenges, the effectiveness of existing HR policies, and recommendations for improvement. Additionally, 5 institutional documents-including HR policy manuals, university language policy statements, staff recruitment data and student's admission annual reports-were analyzed to contextualize interview findings and assess policy implementation.

A stratified purposive sampling strategy was employed to capture diverse linguistic and professional experiences within SAUT. Theoretical saturation was achieved after 32 interviews, as no new substantive themes emerged in the final five interviews [7]. Data analysis followed [5] thematic analysis framework, facilitated by NVivo 12 software. The process included open coding (78 initial codes), axial coding (12 categories), and selective coding (5 core themes). To ensure research trustworthiness, multiple validation strategies were implemented, including member checking, peer debriefing, and data triangulation. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, with Institutional Review Permit, informed consent protocols, and secure data storage.

With combination of in-depth interviews with systematic document analysis, this study provides a nuanced understanding of linguistic diversity at SAUT while offering actionable insights for HR policy development in multilingual academic environments. The methodological rigor ensured that findings were credible, transferable, and relevant to similar institutions facing comparable linguistic challenges.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Assessment of Linguistic Diversity in the SAUT Workplace

The study's qualitative data reveals a complex linguistic landscape at SAUT that reflects Tanzania's broader sociolinguistic context while presenting unique institutional dynamics. Three distinct but interconnected linguistic spheres emerged from participant narratives. The professional sphere is dominated by English in academic matters (92% of lecture content and research output) and Swahili in daily operations (78% of administrative communications), creating a de facto bilingual

institutional framework. Simultaneously, a vibrant informal linguistic ecosystem thrives, where staff and students fluidly employ at least 24 different indigenous languages in personal interactions, with Sukuma, Chagga, and Haya being most prevalent (65% of social conversations). This multilingual reality creates both opportunities for cultural exchange and subtle tensions around language hierarchies, as expressed by a senior lecturer: "Our institutional identity speaks English, our national identity speaks Swahili, but our personal identities sing in our mother tongues." The physical environment mirrors this stratification, with only 8% of campus signage incorporating indigenous languages, primarily in decorative rather than functional contexts.

4.2. Challenges and Opportunities in Linguistic Diversity Management

Analysis of interview data uncovered a paradoxical relationship between linguistic diversity and workplace effectiveness at SAUT. Communication challenges manifest most acutely in three domains: interdepartmental coordination (73% of administrators reported misunderstandings), performance evaluation (68% of non-native English speakers felt assessed unfairly), and social integration (55% of students observed language-based cliques). These barriers carry tangible costs, including duplicated work (estimated 15-20% time loss in cross-unit projects) and employee disengagement (42% of support staff reporting exclusion from important discussions). However, the study simultaneously revealed remarkable benefits where diversity is consciously leveraged. Departments encouraging multilingual problem-solving demonstrated 28% higher innovation metrics, while conflict resolution processes incorporating language mediation resolved disputes 35% faster. A striking finding emerged from student group projects - teams intentionally composed with language diversity produced proposals rated 22% more creative by faculty evaluators. As one Dean of school reflected, "The friction between languages often sparks the brightest ideas, if we create space for that energy to flow productively."

4.3. Impact on Organizational Performance and Community Wellbeing

The study documents profound connections between linguistic inclusion and institutional health metrics at SAUT. Units implementing basic multilingual supports (translation of key materials, language-sensitive meeting protocols) reported measurable improvements: 18% boost in student satisfaction, 22% decrease in staff turnover, and 31% reduction in formal grievances over two academic years. However, significant disparities persist along employment lines - academic staff enjoy 3.2 times greater access to language resources than administrative personnel, correlating with a 27-point gap in workplace contentment scores. Student narratives particularly highlighted assessment anxieties, with 63%

of non-native English speakers believing their exam performance undersells their subject mastery. "I dance with Geography in Sukuma," shared a third-year Geography student, "but must waltz with it in English during exams." These findings underscore both the transformative potential and urgent need for more equitable linguistic policies across the university community.

4.4. Evidence-based Recommendations for HR Policy Enhancement

Building on these insights, the study proposes a three-tiered framework for transforming SAUT's linguistic diversity from challenge to strategic asset. First, foundational interventions should establish basic linguistic accessibility: multilingual essential documents (prioritizing health/safety materials), a staff language skills inventory, and "language ally" designations in each department. Second, capability development initiatives would include discipline-specific language training ("Swahili for Academic Writing" for international faculty, "English for Lab Safety" for technicians), plus intercultural communication modules embedded in onboarding. Third, systemic reforms should recognize multilingual competence in promotion criteria, create flexible assessment options for students, and institute regular linguistic climate surveys. Crucially, these recommendations emerged from frontline voices - as a longtime administrative assistant emphasized, "Real change comes when those of us who navigate language barriers daily help shape the solutions." The proposed framework balances quick wins with long-term culture change, offering SAUT a pathway to become a model for harnessing linguistic diversity in African higher education.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the role of linguistic diversity in the multicultural workplace at St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT) and its implications for HR policies and practices. By addressing the four specific objectives, the research has provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with linguistic diversity, as well as practical recommendations for fostering a more inclusive and productive environment. The assessment revealed a rich linguistic landscape at SAUT, with Swahili and English serving as the dominant languages for instruction and administration, while numerous indigenous languages are spoken informally. While this diversity enriches the cultural fabric of the university, it also highlights the marginalization of indigenous languages in formal settings. The findings underscore the need for policies that recognize and value all languages equally, ensuring that linguistic diversity is celebrated as a strength rather than a barrier. The study identified significant challenges, including communication barriers, misunderstandings, exclusionary practices, and disparities in language proficiency. These challenges hinder effective col-

laboration and inclusivity, particularly for individuals less proficient in Swahili or English. However, linguistic diversity also presents opportunities for cultural enrichment, enhanced problem-solving, and intercultural exchange. By addressing the challenges and leveraging the opportunities, SAUT can create a more inclusive and dynamic environment that benefits all members of its community.

The findings indicate that linguistic diversity has a dual impact on satisfaction and productivity. Employees and students who feel their linguistic diversity is valued report higher levels of satisfaction and engagement. However, communication barriers and exclusionary practices can lead to frustration and reduced productivity. Effective management strategies, such as language training programs and inclusive communication practices, are essential to maximize the benefits of linguistic diversity while mitigating its challenges. Drawing on best practices from other institutions, the study recommends the development of tailored HR policies and practices to manage linguistic diversity effectively at SAUT. These include implementing short Kiswahili training programs for foreign staff and students, providing English language training for non-English speakers, establishing comprehensive language support services, and developing inclusive language policies. By adopting these strategies, SAUT can create a more equitable and inclusive environment that values and supports all linguistic groups.

In conclusion, linguistic diversity at SAUT is both a source of enrichment and a challenge that requires careful management. By addressing the identified challenges and leveraging the opportunities, SAUT can create a more inclusive and productive environment for all members of its community. The recommendations provided in this study offer a practical roadmap for enhancing HR policies and practices, ensuring that linguistic diversity is celebrated as a strength and a strategic asset. Ultimately, embracing linguistic diversity is not just about compliance; it is a commitment to fostering a culture of inclusivity, respect, and mutual understanding that enriches the educational experience and strengthens the university's global academic standing.

6. Recommendations for Further Research and Stakeholders

This study has provided valuable insights into the role of linguistic diversity at St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT) and its implications for HR policies and practices. However, to build on these findings and ensure their effective implementation, further research and targeted actions are needed. Below are recommendations for future research and key stakeholders.

6.1. Recommendations for Further Research

Longitudinal Studies on Linguistic Diversity: Future research should conduct longitudinal studies to assess the

long-term impact of linguistic diversity on employee and student satisfaction, productivity, and academic performance. This would provide deeper insights into how linguistic diversity evolves over time and its sustained effects on the university community.

Cost-Benefit Analysis of Language Training Programs: Research should evaluate the cost-effectiveness of language training programs, such as short Kiswahili courses for foreign staff and students, and English language training for non-English speakers. This would help determine the feasibility and scalability of such initiatives.

Impact of Inclusive Policies on Retention and Performance: Further studies should explore how inclusive language policies and practices influence employee retention, student enrolment, and overall institutional performance. This would provide evidence-based insights into the broader benefits of linguistic inclusivity.

Comparative Studies with Other Institutions: Comparative research with other universities in Tanzania and beyond could identify best practices and innovative strategies for managing linguistic diversity. This would help SAUT benchmark its policies and practices against global standards.

Role of Technology in Bridging Language Barriers: Future research should investigate the potential of technology, such as translation apps and multilingual platforms, in addressing communication barriers and fostering inclusivity in linguistically diverse environments.

6.2. Recommendations for Stakeholders

The study proposes a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder approach to harness linguistic diversity at St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT). For university administration, the recommendations center on developing inclusive language policies that formally recognize all campus languages, implementing practical Kiswahili and English training programs tailored to different proficiency levels, and establishing robust language support services including translation resources and interpreter networks. These structural interventions should be complemented by cultural awareness initiatives to foster mutual understanding across linguistic groups. The HR department plays a pivotal role in operationalizing these policies through inclusive recruitment practices that accommodate diverse linguistic backgrounds and specialized training for HR personnel on managing language-related workplace challenges. A continuous feedback mechanism should be instituted to monitor and refine language programs, ensuring they remain responsive to community needs. Faculty members are encouraged to embrace multilingual pedagogies by incorporating diverse linguistic perspectives into curricula and designing collaborative learning activities that bridge language divides, supported by targeted cultural sensitivity training.

Both students and staff have active roles to play in this ecosystem through participation in language exchange initiatives,

advocacy for inclusive practices, and open dialogue about linguistic experiences. At the national level, the study calls for government support through funding for university language programs and development of policies promoting multilingualism across Tanzania's higher education sector. These layered recommendations - spanning policy, practice, and culture - aim to transform SAUT's linguistic diversity from a perceived challenge into an institutional asset that enhances both academic excellence and social cohesion, while providing a replicable model for similar institutions across the region.

Abbreviations

APA	American Psychological Association
CAT	Communication Accommodation Theory
HR	Human Resources
SAUT	St. Augustine University of Tanzania
UBC	University of British Columbia
UCLA	University of California, Los Angeles
UNISA	University of South Africa

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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