# THE ROLE OF LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL AFFINITIES IN THE DYNAMICS OF ECOWAS AND THE AU

***AYENI QUEEN OLUBUKOLA***
*DEPARTMENT OF MODERN LANGUAGES & TRANSLATION STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR, NIGERIA,*
*qoayeni@unical.edu.ng, buckyayeni@gmail.com*

*Orcid ID: 0000-0002-8457-3214*

***ELLAH TIMOTHY OGBANG, PhD***
*DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR, CALABAR*
*Email: ellaogbang@unical.edu.ng; timwork4real@yahoo.co.uk*

**KEYWORDS**
Linguistic Affinities, Cultural Dynamics, Regional Integration, ECOWAS, African Union

**ABSTRACT**
*Linguistic and cultural connections are crucial to the functioning of regional organizations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU). The colonial history of Africa has resulted in a fragmented linguistic landscape, primarily influenced by English, French, and Portuguese, which serve as both unifying and divisive elements. While existing studies have focused on the effects of colonial linguistic legacies on governance, this research delves into how linguistic and cultural commonalities impact policy formulation, conflict resolution, and regional cooperation within ECOWAS and the AU. This study shifts from broad discussions of linguistic diversity to a focused analysis of how these affinities can be strategically utilized to strengthen regional integration. It recognizes both the unifying potential and the divisive aspects of linguistic and cultural factors. Using a qualitative methodology, the research examines official documents, treaties, and policy frameworks, supplemented by expert interviews for empirical insights. The findings indicate that while linguistic and cultural commonalities enhance intra-bloc solidarity, they also create institutional asymmetries that impede cross-bloc collaboration. The study identifies opportunities to leverage indigenous African languages as tools for regional unity, a perspective often neglected in previous research. By advocating for policy reforms that support multilingualism and foster intercultural dialogue, this study provides a fresh outlook on how ECOWAS and the AU can effectively navigate linguistic and cultural diversity to achieve sustainable integration and development.*

## Introduction

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) are two key regional organizations focused on promoting integration, peace, and socioeconomic development in Africa. Founded in 1975, ECOWAS consists of 15 member states in West Africa and is dedicated to achieving economic integration and political stability in the region. The AU, which replaced the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 2001, includes 55 member states and aims to foster unity, cooperation, and sustainable development across the continent. Both organizations play a crucial role in Africa's pursuit of self-determination, development, and a cohesive identity (Edozie, 2017). Despite their shared goals, the effectiveness of ECOWAS and the AU is shaped by the complex interplay of linguistic and cultural factors. Africa's colonial history has resulted in a fragmented linguistic landscape dominated by English, French, and Portuguese, which continues to impact governance, education, and diplomacy. These colonial legacies present both opportunities and challenges for regional integration. On one hand, linguistic and cultural similarities within specific blocs, such as Francophone or Anglophone countries, can promote solidarity and cooperation among members. On the other hand, these same similarities can deepen divisions, hindering collaboration across blocs and weakening collective action (Zormelo, 1995). The importance of ECOWAS and the AU goes beyond their immediate objectives, as they serve as vital mechanisms for addressing Africa's historical and structural challenges. Linguistic and cultural factors significantly influence the dynamics of these organizations, affecting everything from policy development to conflict resolution. Understanding the role of these affinities is essential to unlocking the potential of regional integration and addressing barriers to sustainable development. This study seeks to explore how linguistic and cultural affinities can be leveraged to enhance the operational dynamics of ECOWAS and the AU while mitigating their divisive effects. By interrogating the existing body of literature related to the subject, this research aims to identify gaps in the scholarship and establish the foundation upon which this inquiry is premised.

## Conceptualizing Linguistic and Cultural Affinities

Linguistic and cultural affinities refer to the shared languages, traditions, norms, and values that create bonds among individuals and groups. In regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU), these affinities have a multifaceted impact on interactions and collective decision-making. Africa's linguistic and cultural landscape is deeply influenced by its colonial history. The imposition of European languages, English, French, and Portuguese has resulted in the division of African countries into linguistic blocs (Mazrui, 1995). These colonial languages serve as official languages in many states and are often used as mediums of instruction and governance. Simultaneously, indigenous languages and cultural practices continue to shape identities and foster connections within and across borders (Bamgbose, 2011; Ayeni & Ohanyere, 2017). In ECOWAS, linguistic similarities are notably significant. The region is mainly categorized into Anglophone and Francophone nations, with Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, which are Portuguese-speaking, forming a smaller group. These linguistic divisions frequently shape alliances and affect the ease of communication and collaboration among member states. Similarly, the AU faces the challenge of managing linguistic diversity across the continent while promoting unity and integration. These affinities are integrated into the institutional frameworks of ECOWAS and the AU. For example, ECOWAS designates English, French, and Portuguese as its official languages, reflecting the linguistic diversity of its member states (ECOWAS, 1993). These languages are used for official communication, policy-making, and programme implementation. However, the dominance of these colonial languages often marginalizes indigenous languages and limits the inclusivity of regional initiatives (Bamgbose, 2011).

Culturally, both organizations leverage shared traditions and values to foster unity. ECOWAS promotes cultural exchange programmes and regional festivals to strengthen bonds among member states. The AU, through initiatives like the African Cultural Renaissance Campaign, seeks to celebrate and preserve Africa's rich cultural heritage while addressing the socio-political implications of cultural diversity (AU, 2006). On the positive side, they facilitate intra-group solidarity, enhance regional identity, and promote cooperation in areas like conflict resolution and economic integration (Edozie, 2017). For example, Francophone

countries within ECOWAS often exhibit stronger cohesion due to their shared language and legal systems. However, these affinities can also reinforce divisions and hinder cross-bloc collaboration. The linguistic divide between Anglophone and Francophone states has, at times, led to mistrust and policy misalignment. Cultural differences, while enriching, can complicate consensus-building and collective action at the continental level (Zormelo, 1995).

## Theoretical Framework

These theories provide insights into how shared languages and cultural ties influence cooperation, governance, and policy implementation within these regional organizations while also highlighting the structural challenges posed by linguistic and cultural diversity.

### *i. Constructivism and Regional Identity Formation*

Constructivists argue that international and regional relations are not merely driven by material interests but also by shared identities, norms, and cultural factors (Wendt, 1999). Studies have shown that shared language plays a crucial role in fostering trust and diplomatic cohesion in regional organizations (Checkel, 1998). Within ECOWAS and the AU, the presence of Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone blocs creates both opportunities for cooperation and challenges for policy alignment (Mazrui, 1995). Constructivism illustrates that linguistic and cultural ties can promote regional integration by fostering alignment on policy issues and strategic alliances among member states with similar cultural backgrounds. However, it also emphasizes that linguistic divisions can lead to fragmentation, complicating consensus-building and reducing institutional effectiveness. A glaring example is the ethnic and regional tensions between between nomadic and sedentary populations in the Sahel region which exacerbated the political marginalization of groups, such as the Tuareg and Fulani in the region (Ayeni & Ogbang, 2025)

### *ii. Neo-functionalism and the Spillover Effect*

Neo-functionalism, an important theory of regional integration, suggests that cooperation in economic, political, and social sectors can trigger a spillover effect, resulting in greater integration in additional areas (Haas, 1958). From this perspective, linguistic and cultural affinities can serve as catalysts for regional cooperation by facilitating cross-border trade, governance, and diplomacy. For instance, the common use of French among ECOWAS member states like Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso has fostered stronger economic and diplomatic relations (Zormelo, 1995). However, unlike classical neofunctionalist predictions, linguistic and cultural diversity in ECOWAS and the AU has not always resulted in seamless integration. Instead, linguistic barriers often hinder communication, policy implementation, and collective decision-making (Edozie, 2017).

### iii. *Postcolonial Theory and the Lingering Effects of Colonialism*

Scholars such as Fanon (1961) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) have argued that colonial linguistic policies created enduring divisions that continue to shape contemporary governance structures. The legacy of European colonization has left Africa with a linguistic landscape dominated by English, French, and Portuguese, often at the expense of indigenous languages and cultural cohesion (Chumbow, 2005).

These blocs frequently pursue different policy objectives, resulting in imbalanced power dynamics within these organizations.

## Historical Development of ECOWAS and the AU

ECOWAS was founded in 1975 by the Treaty of Lagos, primarily to promote economic integration and development in West Africa. The founding members (15 West African nations), sought to create a unified market that would enhance trade and investment while reducing the region's dependency on external actors (Asante, 1985). The organization's mandate has since broadened to encompass peace and security, as ongoing conflicts in member states underscored the interconnection between economic and political stability. The Revised Treaty of 1993 redefined ECOWAS's objectives to incorporate political cooperation and institutionalized mechanisms for conflict prevention, management, and resolution (ECOWAS, 1993). Initiatives such as the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and protocols on free movement and trade liberalization exemplify the organization's commitment to achieving its vision of regional integration. However, linguistic and cultural diversity among member states has posed challenges to consensus-building and implementation (Ojo, 1980).

The African Union (AU) was established in 2001 as the successor to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which was founded in 1963. The OAU primarily concentrated on decolonization and the elimination of apartheid, aligning with the political priorities of newly independent African nations. While the OAU achieved significant milestones, such as supporting liberation movements and promoting Pan-Africanism, it was criticized for its limited focus on economic development and governance reforms (Adetula, 2015). The transition to the AU marked a shift toward a more comprehensive agenda, encompassing economic integration, conflict resolution, and sustainable development. The Constitutive Act of the AU set forth ambitious goals, such as creating a unified African market, improving regional security measures, and fostering democratic governance (African Union, 2001). Since then, the AU has launched significant initiatives, including Agenda 2063, which seeks to expedite Africa's socioeconomic transformation (AU, 2015).

Both ECOWAS and the AU share a commitment to regional integration, yet they operate within different contexts and scales. ECOWAS focuses on sub-regional issues, while the AU addresses continental challenges. Despite their achievements, both organizations face obstacles rooted in Africa's colonial history, including linguistic and cultural divides and weak institutional capacity (Mazrui, 1995). These challenges highlight the need for innovative strategies to enhance cooperation and inclusivity. While ECOWAS focuses on regional economic integration and stability, the AU takes a continent-wide approach to addressing political, economic, and social challenges. Together, these organizations embody Africa's aspirations for unity and self-determination.

### Institutional Framework and Decision-Making Procedures

The institutional frameworks and decision-making procedures of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) offer valuable insights into how these organizations operate to promote regional integration and tackle challenges in Africa. While both share overarching goals of promoting economic growth, peace, and development, their structures and approaches to decision-making exhibit notable differences.

### Institutional Structure of ECOWAS

ECOWAS functions within a well-defined institutional framework designed to promote economic integration and ensure peace and security in West Africa. The key institutions include:

i. *The Authority of Heads of State and Government:* This is the supreme decision-making body of ECOWAS, consisting of the heads of state and government from member countries. It establishes policies and makes decisions that are binding for member states (ECOWAS Commission, 2022).

ii. *The Council of Ministers:* Made up of ministers from member states, this body is responsible for implementing the decisions of the Authority and managing the community's budget and programs.*The ECOWAS Commission:* Acting as the executive arm, the Commission ensures the implementation of decisions, coordinates community

policies, and promotes regional initiatives.

iii. *The ECOWAS Parliament and the Community Court of Justice:* The Parliament provides advisory opinions on policies, while the Court addresses legal disputes and ensures adherence to community laws.

## Institutional Structure of the AU

The African Union's institutional framework is more extensive, reflecting its pan-African mission. Key institutions include:

i. *The Assembly of the African Union:* This is the highest organ of the AU, composed of heads of state and government, and is responsible for establishing the union's agenda and priorities (AU, 2021).

ii. *The Executive Council:* Consisting of ministers from member states, this council prepares and implements the Assembly's decisions, particularly in areas such as trade, infrastructure, and health.

iii. *The African Union Commission (AUC)*: Similar to the ECOWAS Commission, the AUC serves as the AU's secretariat, facilitating programs, coordinating policies, and managing administrative tasks.

iv. *The Pan-African Parliament and the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights:* These institutions work to promote democratic governance, human rights, and the rule of law.

## Decision-Making Processes

Both ECOWAS and the AU utilize a consensus-driven approach to decision-making, though there are some differences:

*ECOWAS*: In ECOWAS, decisions are typically reached by consensus within the Authority of Heads of State and Government. If consensus cannot be achieved, decisions may be made by a two-thirds majority (ECOWAS Protocols, 2020). The organization also uses mediation and conflict resolution mechanisms to address disputes, often through its Mediation and Security Council.

*AU:* The AU Assembly operates similarly, prioritizing consensus. However, when consensus fails, decisions may be reached through a two-thirds majority vote. The AU also relies on subsidiary bodies like the Peace and Security Council to address urgent issues, employing mechanisms such as early warning systems and mediation teams.

While ECOWAS and the AU share similar governance structures, the scale of their operations differs significantly. ECOWAS focuses primarily on the West African sub-region, allowing for more targeted interventions. In contrast, the AU encompasses the entire continent, requiring broader and more complex coordination efforts. Additionally, ECOWAS has a more robust framework for economic integration, exemplified by its efforts to establish a single currency, while the AU places greater emphasis on continental unity and broader socio-political issues.

## Official Languages and Working Languages

The use of official and working languages in regional organizations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) is essential for facilitating communication, fostering inclusivity, and ensuring effective regional governance. Their language policies reflect both the historical context of colonialism and the multilingual realities of the regions they serve.

***ECOWAS:*** The official and working languages of ECOWAS are English, French, and Portuguese.These languages are used in formal communication, document publication, legal proceedings including meetings, communications, and the drafting of policies and resolutions. within the organization. While ECOWAS' language policy helps ensure communication across its member states, it also faces challenges. The reliance on these colonial languages often alienates populations who may not be proficient in these languages, thereby hindering full participation in ECOWAS programmes and initiatives (Adegbija, 2004). Moreover, the financial and logistical resources required to provide translations and

interpretations across these languages can strain ECOWAS' capacity.

***African Union:*** The AU recognizes six official languages: Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, and Kiswahili (African Union, 2021). These languages represent Africa's colonial past while also reflecting a commitment to promoting African languages. Arabic, due to its widespread use in North Africa, and Kiswahili, as a lingua franca in East Africa, are key to ensuring that the AU remains inclusive and representative of the continent's linguistic diversity.

The working languages of the AU are Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, and Kiswahili.While these languages are used for most AU communications and proceedings, Kiswahili's role has been particularly emphasized in recent years, with the AU adopting Kiswahili as a working language in 2022 (Ndlovu, 2022). This decision is part of the AU's broader effort to promote African languages, reflecting the growing importance of Kiswahili in Pan-African contexts. The AU's promotion of Kiswahili as a working language is a significant step towards decolonizing language policy on the continent. It also seeks to enhance the use of African languages in diplomacy, governance, and education (Kamwangamalu, 2016). The African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) was created to advance these objectives by promoting the standardization of African languages and their incorporation into the continent's development. However, despite the AU's initiatives, challenges persist in implementing this language policy. The vast number of African languages (over 2,000) complicates efforts to standardize and promote them throughout the continent. Additionally, resistance to abandoning colonial languages remains prevalent, particularly in diplomatic and political spheres where English, French, and Portuguese continue to dominate (Makoni & Meinhof, 2003).

Both ECOWAS and the AU recognize the importance of language in regional governance, yet their approaches differ based on their geographical scope and objectives. ECOWAS, being focused on West Africa, operates with a more straightforward linguistic framework, using only three colonial languages. In contrast, the AU must accommodate a much wider range of languages due to Africa's immense linguistic diversity. The AU's adoption of six official languages enables it to serve different regions, from North Africa to Sub-Saharan Africa. Both organizations continue to recognize colonial languages as official languages. However, the AU has made more considerable progress in promoting indigenous languages, especially Kiswahili, to encourage greater inclusivity. ECOWAS, while recognizing the cultural importance of indigenous languages, has not yet taken significant steps to institutionalize them at the same level. The AU's multilingual approach is a necessary compromise between practicality and inclusivity. It allows the AU to function effectively while recognizing the linguistic needs of its diverse member states. ECOWAS, however, faces the challenge of relying on just three colonial languages, potentially excluding a large portion of its population who may not speak these languages fluently.

## Cultural Exchange Programmes and Initiatives

Cultural exchange programs and initiatives within regional organizations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) play a vital role in promoting unity, mutual understanding, and development among diverse member states. These programmes address cultural diversity, promote integration, and strengthen social cohesion, ultimately contributing to sustainable development in the region.

ECOWAS recognizes that cultural diversity is one of West Africa's greatest assets. ECOWAS has established programmes to promote cultural exchange and the arts, often focusing on music, dance, and storytelling, which are deeply embedded in the region's traditions. One prominent initiative is the ECOWAS Music and Arts Festival (ECOFEST), which brings together artists and cultural practitioners from member states to celebrate shared heritage while showcasing individual national identities (ECOWAS Commission, 2021). This platform not only enhances regional identity but also provides economic opportunities for creative industries, contributing to the region's development. Another example is the ECOWAS Youth and Sports Development Centre (EYSDC), which incorporates cultural programmes alongside its sports and youth activities. These initiatives encourage youth from different member states to engage in cultural dialogue, strengthening regional solidarity (EYSDC, 2019).

Through its Agenda 2063, the African Union highlights the importance of culture in driving the continent's socioeconomic transformation. The AU's cultural initiatives often have a broader scope, aiming to integrate the diverse cultural practices across the continent while addressing contemporary issues such as migration, conflict resolution, and education. One significant initiative is the African Cultural Renaissance Campaign, which aims to promote the use of African languages, preserve traditional knowledge, and foster cultural industries (AU, 2015). This campaign underscores the AU's commitment to safeguarding African identity in the face of globalization. The AU has also established the Pan-African Cultural Congress (PACC), a biennial event that provides a forum for cultural practitioners, policymakers, and academics to discuss strategies for cultural development. The PACC facilitates the exchange of ideas and best practices across the continent, thereby contributing to cultural unity and innovation (AU Commission, 2020).

Despite the progress made, these cultural exchange programmes face challenges, including limited funding, political instability in some regions, and linguistic barriers among member states. However, technological advancements and increased cooperation among member states provide opportunities to overcome these hurdles. Digital platforms, for instance, can amplify the reach and impact of cultural exchange initiatives, ensuring broader participation and sustainability.

## The Impact of Linguistic and Cultural Affinities within ECOWAS and the AU

Linguistic affinities among member states with shared colonial histories have facilitated closer bilateral and multilateral cooperation. For instance, Anglophone countries like Nigeria and Ghana often collaborate on regional projects, while Francophone countries like Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire maintain strong cultural and political ties (ECOWAS Commission, 2020).

At the continental level, the AU acknowledges the linguistic diversity of Africa, which includes over 2,000 languages. This is so beecause it understands that language defines our the scope of our ideas, our values, and our behaviours (Ayeni & Okon, 2023). It advocates for multilingualism through initiatives such as the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN), which aims to harmonize African languages and promote their use in education, governance, and regional integration efforts (AU, 2021).Linguistic affinities among countries with shared indigenous languages, such as Swahili in East Africa, have strengthened cultural ties and facilitated cross-border interactions.

Cultural affinities, including shared traditions, values, and norms, are a unifying force within ECOWAS and the AU. West Africa, for instance, shares a rich cultural heritage, including music, dance, festivals, and traditional practices that transcend national boundaries. These cultural similarities foster social cohesion and solidarity, which are essential for regional integration.

ECOWAS leverages these affinities through cultural programmes like the ECOWAS Music and Arts Festival (ECOFEST), which promotes the region's cultural diversity and unity (ECOWAS Commission, 2020). Similarly, the AU's Agenda 2063 emphasizes the importance of cultural renaissance in uniting Africa and addressing challenges such as conflict and identity crises (AU, 2015).

## Challenges and Opportunities: Ethnic Diversity and National Interests

Ethnic diversity and conflicting national interests pose both challenges and opportunities for regional integration and cooperation within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU). Although Africa's cultural and ethnic diversity is a valuable asset, it also makes it more difficult to achieve unity, build consensus, and enhance regional stability. Similarly, national interests can either hinder or enhance collective decision-making and regional development initiatives.

### Challenges

i. Africa is home to over 2,000 ethnic groups, with many crossing national borders. This diversity often leads to ethnic fragmentation, which can exacerbate political tensions and conflicts. In some cases, governments prioritize the interests of dominant ethnic groups, sidelining minorities and undermining national unity. These internal dynamics can spill over into regional organisations like ECOWAS and

the AU, complicating collective decision-making (Adebajo, 2010).

ii. Member states often prioritize their national interests over regional objectives, creating obstacles to cooperation. For instance, disagreements over trade policies, resource allocation, or the hosting of regional headquarters can impede the progress of regional initiatives. Within ECOWAS, tensions have arisen over contributions to regional security operations, with some countries shouldering disproportionate burdens (Olowu, 2020). With Nigeria emerging as a key player in stabilizing the west African region (Ayeni & Brown, 2025). Similarly, in the AU, differing positions on issues such as the Western Sahara conflict have created divisions among member states (Murithi, 2015).

iii. Ethnic diversity and nationalistic tendencies hinder the development of a strong regional identity. Without a shared sense of belonging, public support for regional integration remains limited, reducing the effectiveness of ECOWAS and the AU in achieving their mandates (UNECA, 2021).

Ethnic diversity can fuel conflicts, particularly when linked to competition over resources or political power. These conflicts strain the capacities of ECOWAS and the AU to mediate and resolve disputes, often requiring significant resources and time (Adetula, 2015).

**Opportunities**

i. Ethnic diversity, when managed effectively, can serve as a foundation for cultural exchange and mutual understanding. For example, shared cultural traditions across West African countries, such as music, dance, and festivals, have been leveraged by ECOWAS to foster unity and promote regional identity (ECOWAS Commission, 2020). Similarly, the AU's Agenda 2063 recognizes the potential of cultural diversity in building a pan-African identity (AU, 2015).

ii. Diverse national interests can complement regional goals when aligned strategically. Countries with strong economies, such as Nigeria in ECOWAS or South Africa in the AU, can play leadership roles in advancing regional development projects. National expertise in areas such as agriculture, technology, and peacekeeping can be shared to benefit the broader region (Aning & Edu-Afful, 2016).

iii. Ethnic diversity can enhance economic integration by fostering cross-border trade and investment. Informal trade networks often thrive among communities with shared ethnic ties across borders, such as the Hausa in Nigeria, Niger, and Ghana. ECOWAS and the AU have opportunities to formalize and support these networks to boost regional economies (UNECA, 2021).

The diversity of member states and ethnic groups provides opportunities for inclusive conflict resolution mechanisms. ECOWAS and the AU can draw on indigenous conflict resolution practices and involve traditional leaders in peace-building processes. Such approaches enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of interventions (Adetula, 2015).

## Conclusion

Linguistic and cultural affinities are crucial in shaping the dynamics of regional organizations like ECOWAS and the AU. These affinities serve as both facilitators and barriers to regional integration, cooperation, and stability throughout Africa. This study has offered an in-depth analysis of how shared languages and cultural connections impact the effectiveness of these organizations while also highlighting the challenges posed by linguistic divisions and cultural diversity.

A significant conceptual implication of this research is that linguistic and cultural similarities provide a foundation for regional unity, promoting collaboration and enhancing institutional legitimacy. Common languages—such as English, French, and Portuguese—alongside indigenous lingua francas like Hausa and Swahili—have been instrumental in improving communication, trade, and diplomacy among member states. Additionally, cultural

affinities, reflected in shared traditions, values, and historical experiences, foster mutual understanding and a collective identity, thereby bolstering regional solidarity. These findings resonate with constructivist theories of regionalism, which stress the importance of shared identities in fostering cooperation. However, this study diverges from previous research by demonstrating that linguistic and cultural diversity can also present substantial structural challenges to regional integration. While scholars like Mazrui (1995) and Zormelo (1995) have acknowledged the effects of linguistic divisions, this research expands on their insights by illustrating how these divisions impact governance, decision-making, and policy implementation within ECOWAS and the AU. Linguistic divides, especially between Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone states, often obstruct coordination efforts, resulting in miscommunication, mistrust, and delays in executing regional policies. Furthermore, cultural diversity across Africa means that varying traditions, norms, and policy priorities can complicate consensus-building and conflict resolution. The theoretical implications of these findings suggest that while linguistic and cultural affinities can serve as unifying elements in regional governance, they also necessitate strategic management to mitigate their divisive effects. While it supports existing scholarship on the opportunities and challenges presented by Africa's linguistic diversity, it also provides a new perspective by emphasizing the need for targeted policies that leverage linguistic and cultural commonalities while addressing their fragmentary effects.

## Recommendations

In light of the study's findings, which reveal the dual nature of linguistic and cultural affinities as both unifying and divisive forces in the dynamics of ECOWAS and the AU, the following recommendations are put forward:

### i. Enhance Multilingual Communication Strategies

Given that linguistic divides—particularly between Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone states—hinder policy coordination and decision-making, ECOWAS and the AU should prioritize the adoption of inclusive multilingual policies because "the struggle for independence was not merely a political fight to free Africans from colonial rule but was also a struggle to preserve African identity, cultural integration, and self-affirmation (Ayeni, 2017). This can be achieved by:

- Expanding the use of indigenous lingua francas such as Hausa, Swahili, and Yoruba in regional communications to bridge linguistic gaps.
- Investing in professional translation and interpretation services to ensure seamless communication across member states.
- Promoting language training initiatives for policymakers and diplomats to enhance cross-bloc engagement and understanding.

### ii. Enhancing Institutional Frameworks for Inclusive Decision-Making

The study has shown that linguistic and cultural diversity can sometimes lead to miscommunication, mistrust, and policy fragmentation. To mitigate these challenges, ECOWAS and the AU should:

- Establish inclusive decision-making processes that consider the linguistic and cultural diversity of member states.
- Ensure equal representation of linguistic blocs in key leadership positions within these organization.

### iii. Develop conflict-resolution mechanisms that are sensitive to cultural differences and promote dialogue-driven approaches to dispute settlement.

### Addressing the Lingering Impact of Colonial Linguistic Legacies

This study has shown how colonial linguistic legacies continue to shape regional dynamics, sometimes reinforcing divisions. To address these challenges, ECOWAS and the AU should:

- Advocate for policies that promote linguistic inclusivity and reduce

colonial language dominance in regional affairs.

- Support initiatives aimed at revitalizing and institutionalizing indigenous African languages in governance and education.

- Encourage bilingual and multilingual education systems that equip citizens with the linguistic skills necessary for effective regional engagement.

**iv. Establishing a Linguistic and Cultural Integration Task Force**

To systematically address the challenges and opportunities presented by linguistic and cultural affinities, ECOWAS and the AU should:

- Create a task force dedicated to researching and recommending strategies for managing linguistic and cultural diversity in regional governance.

- Regularly assess the impact of linguistic and cultural factors on policy implementation and regional cooperation.

- Foster collaborations with academic institutions and research centres to generate data-driven solutions for enhancing linguistic and cultural integration.

## References


Adebajo, A. (2010). The Curse of Berlin: Africa After the Cold War. London: Hurst & Company.

Adegbija, E. (2004). Multilingualism: A Nigerian Case Study. Africa World Press.

Adetula, V. A. O. (2015). Ethnicity, Inequality, and the Challenges of Nation-Building in Africa. Journal of Social Development in Africa, 30(1), 79–100.

African Union (AU). (2001). Constitutive Act of the African Union. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union (AU). (2006). Charter for African Cultural Renaissance. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union. (2015). Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. Addis Ababa: African Union. Retrieved from https://au.int/agenda2063

African Union. (2021). African Academy of Languages (ACALAN): Promoting African Linguistic and Cultural Diversity. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union. (2021). Institutional structure of the African Union. Retrieved from https://au.int/en

African World Heritage Fund (AWHF). (2021). African World Heritage Fund Annual Report. Johannesburg: AWHF.

Aning, K., & Edu-Afful, F. (2016). ECOWAS and the African Union: Interfacing Peace Operations and Security Architectures. African Journal on Conflict Resolution, 16(2), 77–98.

Asante, S. K. B. (1985). ECOWAS and the Economic Integration of West Africa. London: Macmillan.

AU Commission. (2020). Report on the 5th Pan-African Cultural Congress. Addis Ababa: African Union.

Ayeni, Q. Olubukola & Onyiye L. Ohanyere . (2017). «La Politique de Diffusion des langues Europhones au sein de la CEDEAO». Degel Journal of the Faculty of Arts and Islamic Studies, UDUS SOKOTO (DEGELJOURNAL). Vol. 15, http://www.degeljournal.org, ISSN: 0794-9316.

Ayeni, Queen Olubukola & Brown, Pretty Chinwendu (2025). La Coopération Franco-nigériane: Vers la Création d'une Alliance Stratégique en Afrique. International Journal of Arts, Languages, Linguistics & Literary Studies (JOLLS), Vol. 14 (1), 84-92 ISSN: 2636-7149-6300, Http://www.jolls.com.ng/v2/

Ayeni, Queen Olubukola & Ellah Timothy Ogbang. (2025).Terrorism and Regional

Stability in the Sahel, 2015-2024. Humanus Discourse Journal, 5 (3), 1-15, ISSN: 2787-0308 (Online).

Ayeni, Queen Olubukola & Okon, Dorathy Effiom. (2023) Vers une Bilinguisme Fonctionnel et Interractionnel pour les Groupuscules de la sous-region de l'Afrique Occidentale. Northern Inter-University French Journal (NUFJOL), 10(1), 119-135.

Ayeni, Queen Olubukola. "L'Unification Linguistique au sein de la Sous Région CEDEAO" International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research Methods (IJIRM) vol. 4, no. 2, July 2017, pp.15-24. Print ISSN: 2398-712X, Online ISSN: 2398-7138.

Bamgbose, A. (2011). Language and the Nation: The Language Question in Sub-Saharan Africa. Edinburgh University Press.

Checkel, J. T. (1998). The constructivist turn in international relations theory. World Politics, 50(2), 324-348.

Chumbow, B. S. (2005). The language question and national development in Africa. International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 2005(173), 165-181.

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). (1993). Revised Treaty. Abuja: ECOWAS Secretariat.

ECOWAS Commission. (2020). ECOWAS at 45: Building a Community of Peoples. Abuja: ECOWAS Commission.

ECOWAS Commission. (2021). ECOWAS Music and Arts Festival (ECOFEST): Strengthening Regional Identity through Culture. Abuja: ECOWAS Commission. Retrieved from https://www.ecowas.int/culture

ECOWAS Commission. (2021). ECOWAS Music and Arts Festival (ECOFEST): Strengthening Regional Identity through Culture. Abuja: ECOWAS Commission. Retrieved from https://www.ecowas.int/culture

ECOWAS Protocols. (2020). Revised ECOWAS Treaty and Protocols. Retrieved from https://ecowas.int/en

Edozie, R. K. (2017). The African Union's Africa: New Pan-African Initiatives in Global Governance. Michigan State University Press.

EYSDC. (2019). ECOWAS Youth and Sports Development Centre Annual Report. Abuja: EYSDC.

Fanon, F. (1961). The wretched of the earth. Grove Press.

Haas, E. B. (1958). The uniting of Europe: Political, social, and economic forces 1950-1957. Stanford University Press.

International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). (2019). Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites. Paris: ICOMOS.

Kamwangamalu, N. M. (2016). Language policy in Africa: Towards sustainable development. Current Issues in Language Planning, 17(1), 1-16.

Makoni, S., & Meinhof, U. H. (2003). The language of African development: Colonialism and beyond. Multilingual Matters.

Mazrui, A. A. (1995). The African state as a political refugee: Institutional collapse and human displacement. International Journal of Refugee Law, 7(1), 21–36.

Murithi, T. (2015). The African Union: Pan-Africanism, Peacebuilding and Development. Abingdon: Routledge.

Ndlovu, M. (2022). Kiswahili as an official African Union language: Opportunities and challenges. African Studies Review, 65(3), 22-36.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. (1986). Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature. Heinemann.

Ojo, O. (1980). ECOWAS: Problems and prospects of regional integration in West

Africa. International Organisation, 34(4), 571–592.

Olowu, D. (2020). The Challenges of Regionalism in West Africa: Lessons from ECOWAS. African Journal of International Affairs, 19(1), 1–21.

UNESCO. (2001). Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. Paris: UNESCO. Retrieved from https://unesdoc.unesco.org

UNESCO. (2003). Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Paris: UNESCO. Retrieved from https://ich.unesco.org

UNESCO. (2020). UNESCO Creative Cities Network: Shaping the Future of Urban Development. Paris: UNESCO.

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). (2021). Harnessing Africa's Diversity for Regional Integration. Addis Ababa: UNECA.

Wendt, A. (1999). Social theory of international politics. Cambridge University Press.

World Bank. (2021). The African Continental Free Trade Area Economic and Distributional Effects. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Zormelo, D. (1995). Language, identity and political organisation in Africa: The case of West Africa. Journal of African Studies, 14(3), 45–57.