

Decolonising Indigenous Languages Offering in Part-Time Senior Secondary Teacher Education: A Case of the University of Namibia

Mohammed Ntshangase¹ | Lukas Matati Joshua¹ | Leader Hilongwa¹

¹University of Namibia

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Abstract:

Since the advent of Western education in Africa, there has been unchallenged epistemicide, linguicide, and the cult of indigenous language teaching in the African educational systems, and Namibia is no exception. The purpose of this paper was to highlight the contribution that distance teacher training has made to the preservation of indigenous languages. The paper is oriented towards the following objectives: to determine whether the University of Namibia contributes to the pedagogy of indigenous languages in the Namibian senior secondary school curriculum and to assess the effects of the relegation of indigenous languages to the periphery of other languages. In order to collect data, a critical reflection is carried out on the documents related to the enrollment of part-time learning for the indigenous language teachers for senior secondary school in the distance mode and the literature used. The article concluded that there is widespread alienation of African indigenous languages in the teacher education system. Therefore, it is recommended to reclaim indigenous languages from the periphery and move them towards the center in higher education so that these languages are preserved.

Keywords: Indigenous Languages; Linguicide; Language Dominance; Peripherisation; Eurocentric Epistemology.

Introduction:

The arrival of missionaries and colonists in Namibia marked the beginning of the westernisation of the country's education system (Josua et al., 2022). According to Shangula (2020), the first missionary regiment arrived in Namibia from Europe around 1805 and immediately began an educational program with the aim of converting, civilising, or modernising the indigenous people to Christianity. Civilisation and modernity are based on Eurocentric matrices and methods of thinking and being. This aspect of

modernity has never been particularly relevant to the living conditions of the indigenous peoples in Africa and Namibia. Despite this, the indigenous people have always had some forms of education, although not documented to the same extent as the education brought by the European settlers. Some scholars refer to indigenous education as "informal" (see Hailombe, 2011) despite the fact that the vast majority of people have always received their education in an informal setting. "Informal education equipped children with the skills, knowledge, and cultural heritage needed to sustain individual and community life as well as

the local economy” (Matengu, 2020, p. 22). Formal education was first introduced in Namibia by western missionaries (Hailombe, 2011; Iiping & Banda, 2020). This point seems to be premised on the cognition that peripherised indigenous knowledge systems by the western settlers (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Santos, 2014). It is for this reason that indigenous education has been praised for its success at passing on both knowledge and skills from one generation to the subsequent generations (Ellis, 1984).

Namibia has a population of approximately 2.5 million people and a land area of 824,295 square kilometers (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2011). With 1.5 persons per km², the country is one of the least densely populated in the world. In Namibia, there are approximately 26 languages spoken, with English being the official language (Iiping & De Galbert, 2023; Gribanovskaya, 2020). Indigenous languages are spoken by over 87% of the population, while the three imposed languages, English, Afrikaans, and German, are spoken by approximately 11% of the population. Despite the fact that all indigenous languages are classified as national languages (Fredericks, 2007), Afrikaans is the prevalent lingua franca, particularly in metropolitan regions of central Namibia, the south, and some parts of the north (Kirchner, 2015; Totemeyer, 2012). According to Fredericks (2007), this situation leaves a large number of Namibian African languages relegated to rural and family spheres.

After World War II, the Afrikaner Nationalist Party was elected to power in 1948 after winning white-only elections (Oliver & Oliver, 2017). They established apartheid (separation) and Afrikaner control over black people, and Afrikaans was declared an official language and medium of instruction in Namibia and South Africa. This sparked the 1976 political riots in Soweto, during which many black students were killed across South Africa and partly in Namibia for demanding the abolition of Afrikaans compulsory education in schools (Ferreira, 2005). These riots was a political project that arose when

Black students protested against Afrikaans that was imposed as a medium of instruction (Harlech Jones, 1990, cited in Stell, 2021). For more than seven decades, this was a systemic discriminatory strategy that alienated indigenous peoples in Namibia and South Africa. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to highlight the contribution that part-time mode teacher training has made to the preservation of indigenous languages in higher schools.

Objectives of the paper:

In order to achieve the purpose of the paper, the following objectives will be explored:

- 1) To determine whether the University of Namibia contributes to the pedagogy of indigenous languages in the Namibian senior secondary school curriculum,
- 2) To assess the effects of the relegation of indigenous languages to the periphery of other languages, and

Theoretical Framework:

In 1996, Boyer (1990) suggested that educators should continually use critical reflection to transform the process of teaching and learning. Donald Schon (1996) pointed out that critical reflective practice enables transformative learning. Boyer's theory was based on the idea that critical reflection is the analysis of one's thoughts and actions in order to improve understanding of one's actions. In addition, Shandomo (2010, p. 103) defined reflection as "a process of self-examination and self-evaluation" to enhance the learning of students. In critical reflective practice, systematic context analysis is examined as an alternative to the common-sense approach to learning in an educational environment. In the process of reflective practice, educators conduct either self- or contextual introspection to create a self-analysis to improve student learning (Stierer, 2008).

A new perspective on a phenomenon can be gained through introspection, both of which help combat complacency and stagnation. This article uses Schons' (1996) practical reflection to analyse

the peripheralisation of indigenous languages brought about by the training of high school teachers at the University of Namibia in the form of part-time learning. This programme will be delivered through a blended learning approach. In a contemporary era, UNAM, the distance mode is substituted by the mode that “includes vacation school sessions combined with distance education learning, self-study, seminars and online learning” (University of Namibia [UNAM], 2025). As university lecturers, we should continually reflect on the work we do in the environment in which we find ourselves, applying the three pillars that make up the science of teaching and learning: criticality, reflectiveness, and praxis (Stierer, 2008). According to Schon (1996), reflexive practice on the part of educators is necessary to bring about changes in the way universities operate. This learning must take place in the context of existing professional frameworks. By conducting a self-analysis, educators are able to develop solutions to overcome the identified problems that may be hindering students' ability to learn effectively.

Literature Review:

Evolution of indigenous languages in the Namibian context:

Namibia, like many colonised countries of the world, inherited an education system from its colonial masters. The 2015 South African university students' violent demonstrations signaled that students are not happy with the current state of education in their universities (Khanyile, 2020; Cini, 2019; Kujeke, 2016). In addition. The demonstrators demanded that universities put indigenous languages at the centre of epistemology. As alluded in several studies such as Costandius et al. (2023), Masenya (2021), and Mbhele (2020), the 2016 #FeesMustFall protest demanded decolonisation, or stressing the centralisation of African content in university curriculum, reforms of university curricula, as well as Africanising the content. They accused the system of being colored with epistemological

injustices, linguicide, and colonialism in many ways.

Fredericks (2007, p. 2) argues that “at the time of its independence in 1990, Namibia presented one of the most progressive constitutions in Africa”. The Constitution of Namibia acknowledges all of Namibia's indigenous languages and guarantees its speakers the freedom to use those languages in any and all social contexts. The right of native speakers to get an education in their mother tongue is recognised by the constitution as well. Home language, a local language, or English were given the status of medium of instruction from Grade 1 to Grade 3 under the language policy that was implemented in 1992 by the Ministry of Education in Namibia. Beginning with Grade 4, however, English was designated as the medium of instruction all the way up until Grade 12 (Chavez, 2016). Through the implementation of a structural proclamation known as the language policy, the utilisation of native languages has been demoted to a subordinate position.

In practice, however, this liberal dispensation has minimal impact because not all African languages in Namibia have been developed for use in schools and modern communication areas. According to Fredericks (2007) only the languages that interest missionary activities (Khoekhoegowab, Oshiwambo, Otjiherero, Silozi) have truly functional usage in their communities. Furthermore, Fredericks indicated that these languages were largely used in primary schools, with Afrikaans being used for secondary and higher education. This situation was unacceptable, and as a result, the liberation movement chose English as its official language, despite the fact that only about 2% of the population spoke English as their first language (Töttemeyer, 2012). According to Chavez (2016), English plays a critical role in the fulfilment of students' human rights, hence the decision; however, the question on our minds remains, “what are these rights that cannot be realised through indigenous languages?”

Although both English and Afrikaans are from European language families, the latter is primarily spoken on the African continent in Namibia, South Africa, Botswana, and Zimbabwe. The connection of Afrikaans to Indo-European languages such as English and German is confirmed by Harris (2021). We feel Afrikaans has received more prestige than indigenous languages spoken by more than 80% of Namibians. There appears to be no significant

effort to change the existing status quo, and as a result, we believe that this situation necessitates decolonisation.

Willemse (2019) uses the narrative of Alexander to argue that Afrikaans has roots in South East Asia, specifically Indonesia. Google's Translations of English, German, Dutch, and Afrikaans, on the other hand, portray a different picture (See **Table 1**).

Table 1: Google translation from English, German, Dutch, and Afrikaans

LANGUAGE	TRANSLATION
ENGLISH	<i>This school is reserved for children who speak English as a foreign or second language.</i>
GERMAN	<i>Diese Schule ist Kindern vorbehalten, die Englisch als Fremd- oder Zweitsprache sprechen.</i>
DUTCH	<i>Deze school is gereserveerd voor kinderen die Engels als vreemde of tweede taal spreken.</i>
AFRIKAANS	<i>Hierdie skool is gereserveer vir kinders wat Engels as vreemde of tweede taal praat.</i>

A closer look at the translation in **Table 1**, one can see the resemblance in these European language translations. This implies that Afrikaans identifies more with European languages than South East Asia, Indonesia as well as Africa.

A liberation political movement known as the South West Africa People Organization took up arms against the oppression of apartheid to put an end to unjust contract labour practices. Additionally, they demanded an end to white control in a variety of spheres of life. Following a lengthy and drawn-out conflict for liberation, the parties to the conflict finally reached a ceasefire agreement and signed it. The United Nations Resolution 435 was put into effect on April 1,

1989, and this was immediately followed by the first democratic elections in Namibia. This allowed Namibia to gain its independence. In the elections held at the end of 1989, the SWAPO party was victorious with a resounding landslide victory. On March 21, 1990, Namibia achieved independence from its former colonial master, South Africa. During the time of colonialism, the education of native people was handled by missionaries and state schools, both of which were divided along racial and ethnic lines (Amukugo, 1993; Auala, 1989; Ellis, 1984). After teaching in German, Afrikaans, and English for many years, Namibia decided to switch to only teaching in English. In contrast to other English colonies in

Africa, English was never used as a direct colonial language in Namibia (Totemeyer, 2012).

Discussions:

In this section, the key findings are highlighted and supported by related literature. Some strengths and limitations are identified. Furthermore, the paper provided the implications of findings in line with the basic education sector. The overall aim of the paper is to bring forth the contribution that part-time mode teacher training had made in preserving indigenous languages through senior secondary phase teacher education.

UNAM's contribution to indigenous languages at the senior secondary school phase:

The development of learners' cognitive abilities is aided by their use of their mother tongue (Kirchner, 2015). At the moment, the University of Namibia trains teachers on a full-time basis so that they can become qualified to teach indigenous languages at all levels of basic education. Students who wish to study to become teachers of indigenous languages at the senior secondary school level are required to select to take their studies on a full-time basis because English and Afrikaans are the only languages that can be studied through a part-time learning program. For these potential students, the only way to study indigenous languages on a full-time basis is they select to quit their teaching careers or move to Windhoek, the Capital City of Namibia, where they will be able to study indigenous languages through the fulltime mode of study.

The lack of indigenous languages on part-time mode for prospective secondary school teachers could be compared to one of the epistemic violence, which "ranges from the prohibition of the use of native languages in public spaces and the forcible adoption of Christian names to conversion and the destruction of ceremonial sites and symbols and to all forms of racial and cultural discrimination" (p. 194). Furthermore, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, p. 6) contends that maintaining indigenous language availability "is meant to deal with difficulties and repercussions of the

'metaphysical empire,' such as epistemicide, linguicide, cultural imperialism, and alienation." Offering indigenous languages as a part-time mode at a higher education institution could address the shortage of indigenous language teachers and raise the profile of indigenous languages among the community.

The University of Namibia provided a Bachelor of Education (Secondary) (Honours) on part-time mode, but there is no provision of indigenous languages on part-time mode. According to the University of Namibia (UNAM) (2021), the Center for Open, Distance and e-Learning (CODEL) prospectus states that the aim of the Bachelor of Education (Secondary) (Honours) is as follows:

"... to provide people the opportunity to further their studies in the field of education by means of distance education. This degree is currently aimed in particular at people who wish to teach at the secondary level. Unfortunately, not all school subjects are yet available on distance".

The unfortunate school subjects that are not yet available on part-time mode are indigenous languages. Since the introduction of distance education at the University of Namibia, there seems to be no attempts to change the status quo by subsequently push for inclusion of indigenous languages in secondary school teachers' education on a distance mode. However, it is noted that the University of Namibia, since its inception in 1993, through the Center for External Studies provided distance mode qualification that prepares indigenous language teachers through a Diploma in Education in African languages (DEAL). The unfortunate school subjects that are not yet available on distance or part-time mode are indigenous languages such as Otjiherero, Rumanyo, Rukwangari, Silozi, Khoekhoexoab, Oshindonga, and Oshikwanyama, among others. However, Afrikaans has been offered on distance mode and now on part-time mode in a Bachelor of Education (Secondary) with the following school

subject combination: Afrikaans and English, Afrikaans and Fashion and Fabrics, as well as Afrikaans and History (University of Namibia (UNAM), 2021). Furthermore, English is offered with the following school subject combinations: English and History, as well as English and Home Economics. This provides no hope for teachers who are aspiring to advance to the Head of Department position in languages. This exclusion of indigenous languages on distance mode and part-time mode, while English and Afrikaans are offered on distance mode, may be viewed as a promotion of the epistemology of the north/ west/ Eurocentric knowledge cannon, while miniaturising the epistemology of the south and promoting linguistic of indigenous languages.

The Ministry of Education's promotional criterion for a person to be a Head of Department (HOD) in languages at the secondary level is that they have a qualification to teach both local and indigenous languages and English. This has inspired a number of teachers to pursue indigenous language study via distance learning or part-time mode. However, this has not been easy because the University of Namibia, which trains secondary school teachers, has not been able to supply indigenous languages for secondary school on a distance or part-time basis. Teachers who desire to pursue their studies for promotion or professional development frequently do so through distance or part-time mode education for a variety of reasons, including the fact that they do not want to abandon their positions because they rely on them to support their families. Second, while study leave chances are available, there is no certainty that one will be granted such leave. As a result, studying via distance or part-time mode is the ideal alternative in this case. This structural decision not to offer indigenous languages on distance or part-time mode has made indigenous languages seem inferior to other languages and in a status of not being important to learners' cognitive development.

Although the government of Namibia has established the National Institute of Educational

Development (NIED), which is the one that looks into issues of implementation of the language policy. NIED only focuses on curriculum issues and lacks the capacity to address language research and development challenges. "There is no other linguistic body that focuses specifically on this issue of language development" (Fredericks, 2007, p. 2). As a result, no one checks to see if indigenous languages are taught at all levels of education, especially in higher institutions. At "NIED for instance, there are only subject officers for Oshiwambo, Otjiherero, Khoekhoegowab, and Silozi. Other languages are not represented. Additionally, "NIED officials are not themselves trained linguists, but educational specialists, so their interventions in language development are limited to curriculum issues" (Fredericks, 2007, p. 2).

According to Fredericks (2007, p. 4), the lack of a policy in Namibia that can guide language development and language promotion poses a significant obstacle for the development of languages with a low functional status, such as indigenous languages. This is because the country does not have a policy that can guide language development and language promotion. The policies in place during the colonial and post-independence eras have shown little regard for the preservation of these African languages. The current constitution of Namibia does not include any provisions for programs that can guarantee the growth of languages and give them the ability to participate in contemporary communication domains, both of which are necessary to improve the socioeconomic standing of the language's speakers. English was used to facilitate globalisation, yet such decisions result in the neglect of African languages. These languages continue to exist in the narrow social contexts imposed by colonialism, and their orthographies are still marked by the preferences of rival missionary societies.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, there is still a long way to go towards decolonising the curriculum and undoing

the epistemic dominance that is a result of the colonial project as an event. By making Afrikaans and English as the only languages offered through part-time mode teacher training for the senior secondary school phase at UNAM indicates that Namibia's native indigenous languages are marginalised, while Afrikaans, a lingua franca, a disputed language, has taken center stage. The paper has presented evidence that indigenous languages continue to be marginalised at UNAM and secondary schools. The lack of indigenous language that qualifies teachers to teach indigenous languages in secondary schools in Namibia is just another continuation of the linguicide of indigenous languages. Structures such as language policy continue to threaten indigenous languages and grant privileges to languages of the Global North and the West. Schools struggle to recruit indigenous language teachers due to inadequate teacher training. There does not appear to be an aggressive stance on the part of the university regarding the need for indigenous language teachers for the senior secondary school phase. The structural dilemma and attitude of parents to enroll their children in schools that offer English as the medium of instruction is a clear sign that indigenous languages are neither culturally nor structurally supported. Decolonisation is critical to the survival of indigenous languages. However, more needs to be done to break the slave mentality that children's cognitive development can only be achieved through the use of Western languages.

Implications:

Based on the conclusion, the article has made the following recommendations to impact the basic education phase. First, language policy should make teaching in indigenous languages compulsory from the primary to secondary school phase. Secondly, it is recommended that teaching of indigenous languages at the upper secondary level should be included in the distance and or part-time mode education teacher training courses, such as the Bachelor of Education (Secondary). Finally, the university should develop and be

involved in indigenous language capacity development for senior secondary school teachers.

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