



Republic of Namibia

Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture

Final Draft Language Policy for Schools in Namibia

Pre-primary, Grade 1-12

November 2016

Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture
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Namibia

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Language Policy for Schools in Namibia

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This document (Draft Language Policy for Schools in Namibia):

- is based on the Language Policy of November 1991, the Discussion Document of January 2003 and resolutions taken at the Language Policy Review Conference of June 2013.
- has been widely discussed before its finalisation and submission for approval.
- will become (once approved) the revised and final language policy for schools in Namibia, and should be made available in all local languages and distributed to regional education offices, schools, teacher resource centres, parents, communities and all other stakeholders in education.

Foreword

The government of the Republic of Namibia, through the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, developed a language policy for schools which addressed the phasing in of English as the medium of instruction. After a lengthy consultative process, the *Language Policy for Schools* was published in November 1991. The policy was aimed at establishing English as the official medium of education and promoting the equal development of the Namibian languages. The policy was also introduced to address the pedagogical needs of children through the availability of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction, especially in the formative years of schooling. It strived to encourage the multilingual nature of society rather than creating a monolingual society, and at the same time to contribute towards a society in which there is unity in diversity through the use of English as the official language.

At its introduction it was already envisaged that the language policy would be flexible and progressive. This implies that the policy will be continuously evaluated at all levels of implementation. Over the years it was realised that the language policy was not implemented the same everywhere due to misinterpretations. This resulted in the first attempt in January 2003 to revise the language policy to thrash out ambiguities, and in the publication of the *Discussion Document*.

This current revised edition is intended to make the policy and its intentions clear so that no one should feel that their mother tongue is threatened or its use is restricted in any way. The revision was furthermore based on purely pedagogical considerations, as well as the respect for the fundamental human rights of every citizen of this country to have access to mother tongue education.

Preface

Namibia is a multicultural and multilingual country, and the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture is committed to use the country's multicultural identity as a unifying and nation-building force. The government's policy on the freedom of cultural expression has to be translated into practical terms to create an awareness of the cultural diversity in Namibia and to promote a common national heritage among all Namibians.

According to existing literature on the role of language in education in multilingual countries, the two predominant issues are language and cognitive development, and language and the relevance of education to society. With regard to language and cognitive development, research has demonstrated the importance of mother tongue instruction in the early years of a learner's education. Experience in Africa and elsewhere show that cognitive development is achieved faster if the mother tongue, rather than the language of wider communication, is used as the language of instruction in primary education (Bamgbose 1984; Yates, 1995).

Language and the relevance of education to society is closely related to socio-economic concerns, and in this regard research underscores the importance of taking into account the people's attitude towards language. In a study carried out in South Africa in the Threshold Project, a transitional bilingual programme, the language of instruction shifted from the mother tongue to English in the third grade. The objective of the study was to test the cognitive development of children in that programme. According to Lockett (1994, p.5), "pupils could not explain in English what they already knew in their first languages; nor could they transfer into their first languages the new knowledge that they had learnt through English." The main conclusion of the study was that bilingual programmes will result in failure if the language of instruction is shifted from the mother tongue to a second language before children reach a certain age or level of cognitive academic language proficiency,

The issue of the mother tongue as language of instruction is not unique to Africa, but lessons can also be learned from countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States of America. These countries experience a large influx of immigrants from all over the world. To promote the immigrant children's learning of English, the principle of immersion for language learning was used, but the children still lagged behind academically. The University of Bradford in the United Kingdom studied the effects that a one-year bilingual programme had on 5-year-old Punjabi-speaking children. They found that the performance of the control group, for which the language of instruction was only English, was significantly lower than that of children who were taught by a bilingual teacher and received half of their instruction in English and half in Punjabi. The same results were obtained with Italian-speaking children. Linguists have shown that language and thought are inextricably interwoven, and that for cognitive development all children need a language in which to construct and develop their thoughts.

The Centre for Minority Education and Research of the University of California carried out a comprehensive longitudinal study in 51 schools where bilingual education programmes were implemented.

The objective of the study was to determine which approach would best enable Spanish-speaking learners with a limited proficiency in English to catch up with their English-speaking peers in basic skills such as English reading, language arts, and mathematics: if they were taught in a combination of English and Spanish, or if they were taught mostly in English. The study looked at three programmes, namely the English immersion programme (almost all instruction in English by bilingual teachers trained in English as a second language); the early-exit bilingual programme (instruction in the mother tongue limited to 40 minutes per day, and only for 2 or 3 years, by teachers with a bilingual qualification or with a qualification in English as a second language); and the late-exit bilingual programme (instruction in the mother tongue for 40% to 50% of the school day, until the fourth grade). The study found that the mother tongue is indeed the primary language of learning, as evidenced by the differences in the level of achievement among the 3 groups. Learners in the late-exit bilingual programme scored significantly higher in the three basic skills than the English immersion programmes. Early transition to English-only programmes does not work, as learners do not develop or maintain the linguistic and cognitive skills acquired in the first language. Additive bilingual or multilingual programmes, linked with an integrated approach to the curriculum, provide the best results in the acquisition of both knowledge and competencies in the second language (Ramirez, 1994).

There are also other factors that support the promotion of using the mother tongue as medium of instruction in the primary years. The weaker performance of learners who are instructed through the medium of English, and not through their mother tongue, cannot only be attributed to a lack of vocabulary, but can also be ascribed to the fact that the learners have to learn the language itself, and at the same time learn subject content in this unfamiliar language. Teaching through a medium other than the learner's mother tongue is also not consistent with the philosophy of learner-centred education, as no existing knowledge, skills, interests and understanding, derived from previous experience in and out of school, can be used in imparting learning content. Learners who are unable to comprehend the language of communication will also be unable to express themselves and can therefore not be active participants in the learning process. However, when the learner has a solid foundation in the mother tongue, this knowledge can provide a basis for the acquisition of a second language, as the learner will have a language in which he or she can construct thought.

It should be noted that the aim of the language policy is not to encourage ethnic fragmentation, but to support a sound pedagogical principle to facilitate better learning and acquisition of the official language in the movement towards a knowledge-based society.

For the successful implementation of the language policy, the creation of a favourable environment is a prerequisite. That would entail detailed and careful planning of the implementation activities and strategies. With regard to the status of a language or languages, decisions about the functions that these languages should perform in the country have to be made in order to strengthen the implementation of the language policy. Activities pertaining to language corpus will have to be meticulously planned to ensure that the language has the necessary structure, spelling, vocabulary, to be used as a language of instruction.

Another key element of successful implementation of the language policy is quality teacher training programmes in the mother tongue for the effective delivery of learning content in the mother tongue.

1. Introduction

Language and the relevance of education to society are closely related to the ideological and socioeconomic concerns of a country and its policymakers. Thus, the status accorded to languages will have a pertinent bearing on the formulation of a language policy and its implementation.

It is a widely accepted educational principle based on psychological and pedagogical grounds that the mother tongue or first language is the most appropriate medium for imparting the skills of reading and writing in the early stages of learning. The International Institute of African Languages and Cultures (1930) states that “a child should receive instruction both in and through his mother tongue and this privilege should not be withheld from the African Child.” This principle is confirmed in UNESCO’s report, *The use of vernacular languages in education* (1953).

This language policy draws inspiration from and is guided by various international and local human rights instruments such as the Cultural Charter for Africa Part I Article 1 (a) and (b), Part III Article 67 1(a) and 2(b), and Part V Articles 17 – 20; the Language Plan of Action for Africa 1985; and the Accra (1996) and Harare Declarations (1997) on *The Use of Local Languages in Education in Africa*. These documents assert that the adoption and practical promotion of African languages as the official languages of the state are certain to have great advantages over the use of non-indigenous languages in democratising the formal education and involvement of African populations in political, cultural and economic affairs of their countries. The above was also supported by the Heads of State and Government of the African Union meeting in Khartoum, Sudan (2005). This meeting declared 2006 as the Year of African Languages, and one of the major resolutions was for member states to show their full commitment towards adopting and implementing language policies which recognise the role of indigenous African languages as mediums of instruction in schools.

Article 19 of The Namibian Constitution states that “every person shall be entitled to enjoy, practise, profess, maintain and promote any culture, language, tradition or religion subject to the terms of the Constitution and further subject to the condition that the rights protected by this Article do not impinge upon the rights of others or the national interest”. The right to use any language as medium of instruction is stipulated in Article 3 of the Namibian Constitution. The Constitution of the Republic of Namibia, Article 3 (1990) states as follows: "The official language of Namibia shall be English. Nothing contained in this Constitution shall prohibit the use of any other language as a medium of instruction in private schools or in schools financed or subsidized by the State, subject to compliance with such requirements as may be imposed by law, to ensure proficiency in the official language, or for pedagogic reasons.

Nothing contained in Sub-Article (1) hereof shall preclude legislation by Parliament which permits the use of a language other than English for legislative, administrative and judicial purposes in regions or areas where such other language or languages are spoken by a substantial component of the population."

After independence the government undertook, through basic education, to promote functional literacy and language development to help learners to communicate effectively in speech and writing in English and in another language of Namibia, to provide instruction as far as possible through the medium of the mother tongue during the first three years of Basic Education, to provide for the further development of proficiency in the mother tongue, and to develop competence in English as the official language for the purposes of education and public life (MEC, 1993:52-56).

The goal of the first language policy was to foster the language identity of the children through the use of their mother tongue as the medium of instruction in the first three grades. This was to allow them to develop the basic skills of reading, writing and concept formation in their mother tongue. The mother tongues were also to be offered as subjects throughout formal education (MEC, 1993: 3-5).

In view of the international interventions and constitutional and legal provisions in Namibia, the government of Namibia demonstrated its obligation by a Cabinet Directive after the National Education Conference (June 2011) that the language policy be revisited. Following on these recommendations of the National Education Conference of June 2011, the language policy was revised, using the Discussion Document of 2003 as a basis. Based on well-documented evidence in literature, extended mother tongue instruction enables learners to better acquire irreversible literacy and numeracy; and to better master a second language. Therefore, this policy retains the mother tongue instruction in the first three years of formal education (Grades 1 to 3) and also strengthens the acquisition of the second language (English) in the formative years of schooling.

2 Preamble

All human beings are born with equal and inalienable rights and fundamental freedoms, and these basic tenets are respected and underscored by the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia. The language policy strives to have a language provision where ideally one has access to one's own language within education, but also in society in general.

3 Background

- 3.1 Shortly after independence in 1990, Namibia realised the need to introduce a new language policy for schools to promote the use of the mother tongue alongside English. A document called *The Language Policy for Schools: 1992 – 1996 and Beyond* was formulated and implemented shortly afterwards. However, it was not explicitly outlined how national languages (or mother tongues) should be used in schools. There were discrepancies in the implementation of the language policy from region to region due to misinterpretation and manipulation of the policy, and because teaching through English as medium of instruction rather than through the mother tongue in the Junior Primary phase was preferred. Formerly disadvantaged learners were further marginalised in this process, as non-English speaking teachers were expected to teach through the medium of English. Any teaching approach, including the learner-centred approach to teaching advocated by the then Ministry of Education and Culture, cannot be efficiently realised if teachers and learners lack the necessary language skills and proficiency.
- 3.2 The major goal the first policy was to ensure that English become the medium of instruction from grade 4 upwards. Although the policy stated that learners should be taught in their mother tongue in the early years of schooling, and that all languages should be treated equally, the implementation of the policy was not evenly applied across the country. Many learners did not have the opportunity to learn in their mother tongues, and many schools did not offer indigenous Namibian languages as subjects for study up to grade 12 level.
- 3.3 Proficiency in the mother tongue can help to ensure effective participation in society. One is considered an effective participant in society if one is able to communicate effectively in one's mother tongue, using all the functional tools in one's mother tongue to one's personal advantage and social benefit. The use of English as a language of wider communication will only further enhance increased participation in society.
- 3.4 In Namibia, bilingual education is important, because there are 16 languages used for educational purposes. The mother tongue and another language, in this case English, are promoted.

4 Rationale

- 4.1 Education in the mother tongue, especially in the first six years of schooling, is crucial for concept formation as well as for the attainment of literacy and numeracy. A language is able to survive only if its mother tongue speakers communicate in it, and in order to be functionally literate, one should not only speak, but also write and read well to communicate and understand others.
- 4.2 To be an individual in a multicultural society one must possess a cultural identity and traditional norms that one calls one's own. One's identity is shaped by the language and the culture one inherited from one's ancestors, and therefore a language should retain the cultural values embedded in it and the traditional ways of expression. Nevertheless, a language can only develop to its full potential if it is exposed to the influences of an ever-changing society and adapts these influences into its corpus. Mother tongues should be implemented and evenly furthered nationwide in order to obtain a higher status (through recognition and acceptance) within every sector of Namibia.
- 4.3 The policy prescribes the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the formative years of schooling (from Pre-primary to Grade 3), and that it be offered as a school subject in further education. The mother tongue undoubtedly plays a positive and crucial role in the acquisition of any second language. As English is the official language in Namibia, it will be used as a medium of instruction and assessment as from Grade 4 onwards throughout the education system in state schools.

5. Guiding principles

The language policy should facilitate:

- 5.1 the realisation of the substantive goals of education, namely access, equity, quality, democracy and life-long learning. Access refers, amongst others, to learning and acquiring knowledge through language, and in particular through the mother tongue. Equity has to do with fairness, including the fact that all learners should have access to mother tongue instruction to gain meaning from teaching and learning. Access and equity are both measures of quality education, as is equipping teachers to teach their subjects in the mother tongues and providing quality teaching material in all mother tongues.
- 5.2 the transferability of experience and knowledge from home to school through mother tongue education.
- 5.3 the meaningfulness of life-long learning built on the firm foundation of mother tongue instruction.
- 5.4 the equality of all national languages regardless of the number of speakers or the level of development of a particular language.

6 Goal

The overarching goal of the Language Policy for Schools in Namibia is to establish additive bilingual education by providing a sound foundation in the mother tongue which will enable the acquisition of irreversible literacy and numeracy and also enhance the acquisition of English as the official language.

7 Objectives

The objectives of the policy are to:

- 7.1 promote the acquisition of irreversible literacy and numeracy in the mother tongue and in English;
- 7.2 enhance the learning of English as the official language in reading, writing and speaking;
- 7.3 ensure the attainment of effective additive bilingualism through the maintenance of the mother tongue and the effective teaching and learning of English;
- 7.4 support the development of all languages used in education, including Namibian Sign Language, with respect to teacher training, material development and standardisation;
- 7.5 raise awareness of the importance of the mother tongue in education and engage stakeholders and communities;
- 7.6 make provision for learning languages for international trade and communication;
- 7.7 sustain cultural and linguistic identity through learning in the mother tongue;
- 7.8 promote an appreciation of diverse languages and cultures in our society;
- 7.9 affirm the constitutional and international provisions pertaining to human rights, individual language rights and culture;
- 7.10 make provision for the establishment of a regulatory, statutory language board to advise on and oversee language matters; and
- 7.11 make provision for the establishment of a language institute or centre to spearhead language research, development and documentation.

8. Policy statements

- 8.1 Pre-primary to Grade 3 shall be taught in the mother tongue. English as a medium of instruction shall only be offered from Grade 1 at government schools with the written approval of the Minister of Education, Arts and Culture. Requests to offer English as a medium of instruction from Pre-primary grade must be made in writing to the Minister of Education, Arts and Culture, providing sound pedagogical reasons and convictions for this request after a situational evaluation was done with regard to teacher competence at the school concerned. The teachers involved must be competent to teach through the medium of English, and the English First Language syllabus must be used when English is the medium of instruction in Grade 1 - 3. [Education Act (2001), Article 35]
- 8.2 Grade 4 shall be transitional year during which the change to English as medium of instruction will take place. The mother tongue may be used in a supportive role.
- 8.3 Grades 4 to 12 shall be taught through the medium of English, and the mother tongues shall be offered as subjects in these grades.
- 8.4 If English is not taught as a mother tongue, it should be offered as a subject, i.e. as a second language.

| Grades | Medium of instruction | Subject |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Pre-primary, Grades 1 – 3 | Mother tongue | All subjects shall be taught in the mother tongue |
| Grade 4 | Transition from mother tongue to English | All subjects, except languages |
| Grades 5 – 12 | English | All subjects, except languages |

- 8.5 All learners shall study at least two languages as subjects from grade 1 to grade 12, one of which must be English and the mother tongue as a requirement by the language policy and national curriculum, especially in Pre-primary to Grade 3.
- 8.6 The only exception to this two-language minimum is for learners who may be permitted to opt for a one-language curriculum where his or her mother tongue is not offered as a subject at First Language level in Namibia.
- 8.7 A learner may take English, a Namibian language and/or a foreign language provided that one of the languages is taken on First Language level.
- 8.8 Namibian languages should be offered on second or foreign/third language level.
- 8.9 All assessment shall be done in the language in which that specific subject is taught.
- 8.10 English is a compulsory subject, starting from Grade 1 and continuing to Grade 12.

- 8.11 Where learners from the same language group are in the minority in Grades 1 - 3, provision should be made for them to be taught in their mother tongue. If they are in the minority in Grades 4 - 12, provision should be made for them to study their mother tongue as a subject.
- 8.12 Where learners from the same language group are in the minority, provision should be made for them to study their mother tongue from Grade 1 to Grade 12.
- 8.13 In multilingual schools, classes in which the mother tongue is the medium of instruction will be constituted where there is a sufficient number of learners in that mother tongue. If the number of learners with the same mother tongue is too small to constitute a class, the medium of learning for those learners will be the predominant local language.
- 8.14 The language options available are:
- **First Languages**

| | |
|---------------|------------------------|
| Afrikaans | English |
| German | Ju 'hoansi |
| Khoekhoegowab | Namibian Sign Language |
| Oshikwanyama | Oshindonga |
| Otjiherero | Rukwangali |
| Rumanyo | Setswana |
| Silozi | Thimbukushu |
| Portuguese | |
 - **Second Languages**

| | |
|-----------|---------|
| Afrikaans | English |
|-----------|---------|

Other Namibian languages should gradually be introduced on second language level.
 - **Foreign/Third Languages**

| |
|------------|
| French |
| Portuguese |
| German |

Other Namibian languages should gradually be introduced on foreign/third language level.
- 8.15 All languages offered at First Language level will have the same weighting for promotional purposes.
- 8.16 Private schools may use a language other than English as a medium of instruction throughout the primary cycle (Grades 1 to 7), provided that they offer English and one other Namibian language as subjects.
- 8.17 Schools may organise co-curricular activities to promote any language and culture. Learners should be sensitised to appreciate the multicultural and multilingual character of Namibia.

Language and learners with hearing and speech impairment

- 8.18 The medium of instruction for deaf learners will be Namibian Sign Language. (*For blind and visually impaired learners see provisions in the Inclusive Education Policy.*)
- 8.19 For deaf learners only Written English is compulsory from grades 1-12.
- 8.20 Special provision should be made for deaf learners with regard to teaching.
- 8.21 Deaf learners will be assessed through Namibian Sign language in all subjects, and with the help of an interpreter.
- 8.22 Special provision should be made for hearing and speech impaired learners to gain meaningful knowledge from teaching and learning in all schools they attend.

9 Implementing the policy

- 9.1 The implementation of the revised Language Policy for Schools in Namibia puts strong emphasis on the mother tongue as medium of instruction up to Grade 3. Learners will only benefit from these changes if the necessary planning, the development of syllabuses and learning support materials, the development of subject terminology for the different school subjects and teacher training are carried out.
- 9.2 In-service training should be conducted and/or made available for teachers who will teach in the mother tongue up to grade 3. At the same time, teachers should also be trained in second language teaching methodology to make the acquisition of and transition to the second language possible. Programmes that will lead to the upgrading of teachers' qualifications with proper accreditation should be introduced.
- 9.3 To summarise, the revised language policy prescribes the following:
- Pre-primary to Grade 3 shall be taught and assessed in the mother tongue.
 - Grade 4 shall be transitional years to English as medium of instruction.
 - Grades 5 to 12 shall have English as medium of instruction.
 - All examinations, except for languages other than English, will be through the medium of English.
- 9.4 There will be continuous monitoring throughout Namibia of the implementation of the revised language policy after its approval.
- 9.5 In the transitional grade, namely Grade 4, the mother tongue may still play a supportive role to enable learners to understand difficult concepts during the primary cycle.

10. Teacher training

Tertiary teacher education programmes must offer a Namibian Language (mother tongue) as one of the major language areas of learning. Such programmes should also

make provision for learning through the mother tongue so that student teachers can acquire appropriate competency to teach in the mother tongue.

11. Learning support material development

The development of learning support material in the national languages is critical in the implementation of the language policy. Teachers shall be trained to teach in the mother tongue, as well as to be conversant with the subject terminology. The development of the terminology and learning support material must be done prior to the implementation.

12. Review of the language policy

The revision of the language policy will happen every five years.

13. Glossary of terms

Bilingualism: The state of being proficient in two languages.

Dialect: Variety of a language spoken in one part of a country. Dialects of the same language may differ in some aspects, for example grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary.

Early grade: The first grade(s) of formal schooling.

First language: A person's primary language in which the person's first specialisation takes place.
[Generally] a person's first language is the **mother tongue** which is acquired first. In multilingual communities, however, where a child may gradually shift from the main use of one language to the main use of another (for example because of the influence of a school language), the first language may refer to the language the child feels most comfortable using. Often this term is used synonymously with native language.

Foreign language: Language which is not originally spoken in a given speech community. A language which is not a native language in a country. A foreign language is usually studied either for communication with foreigners who speak the language, or for reading printed materials in the language.
In Namibian state schools, languages which can be studied as foreign languages are available from Grades 4 to 12 only.

Indigenous language: Local native language.

Junior primary: In Namibian schools, Grades 1 – 3 are considered as the Junior Primary phase.

- Language policy: Official decisions on the status, corpus and functions of the languages to be used in a society
- Language planning: Organised pursuits of solutions to language problems typically at the national level, including corpus and status planning.
- Language rights: Rights related to language issues. (These rights are part and parcel of the internationally approved human rights package.)
- Language as a subject: Language being an object of study, including linguistics and literature (oral or written).
- Local languages: Native or indigenous languages.
These are Namibian languages, which are spoken as first or second languages in multilingual communities. Some of these languages are used as the lingua franca in larger communities and could be termed as predominant local languages or languages of wider communication. They will thus become second languages for some of the learners in the community.
- Language standardisation: The process of making some aspects of language usage conform to a variety.
- Literacy: A person's ability to read and write meaningfully.
- Medium of instruction: It is the language in which a subject is taught.
- Minority language: Language which is not spoken by the biggest speech community of a country.
- Mother tongue: A person's native language or first language. Usually a first language acquired at home.
- Mother tongue instruction/education: A UNESCO-enshrined principle which advocates the use of mother tongue as media of teaching in the early years of a child's education.
- Mother tongue instruction: Mother tongue instruction with English as the second language, implying bilingual education
- Multilingualism: The state of being proficient in more than two languages.
- Namibian/Indigenous languages: It is also necessary to understand what is meant by *Namibian/Indigenous languages* and *national languages*. The languages spoken by Namibians belong to three different language families: Niger-Congo (or

Bantu languages as they are also known), Khoesan and Indo-European languages. While all the Indo-European languages had their origin outside Africa, they are not regarded as indigenous, or African or Namibian. Despite the fact that linguists hold different theories on the actual “origin” of Afrikaans, it cannot be denied that linguistically it belongs to the Indo-European family of languages. If *national language* is defined as languages spoken in Namibia as mother tongues by Namibian citizens, then languages such as English, Afrikaans and German could be regarded as national languages, but clearly not as Namibian languages. The latter term indicates languages of African linguistic origin, including languages in the Khoesan and Niger-Congo families. However, for the purposes of organising languages taught in schools as either an *official language* or a *Namibian language*, all the languages not being *official*, can be classified as *Namibian*.

National language: Language nominated as such by a law.

A *national language* is usually considered to be the main language of a nation. For example, German is the national language of Germany. Usually, the national language is also the official language; that is, the language used in government and courts of law, and for official business. However, in multilingual nations, there may be more than one official language, and in such cases the term “official language” is often used rather than “national language”.

In a multilingual country like Namibia, there is of course not only one “national language”. In the *Constitution of the Republic of Namibia* mention is made of the *national languages* of Namibia as being something different than the *official language* of Namibia.

In this policy document *national language* is used to indicate languages spoken in Namibia as mother tongues by Namibian citizens.

Official language: Language which is nominated by a law, a decree or the constitution to be the official language. This language becomes the obligatory medium of communication, justice, education, commerce and other domains of public life.

Article 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia clearly states: “The official language of Namibia shall be English”.

Official language in this document refers to the language used in government and for official business.

- Pre-primary: In Namibian schools the compulsory early childhood education phase of one year before entering school.
- Second language: A second language is understood as a language of which the learner has some knowledge and is exposed to regularly, because it is one of the major languages in the community. Because of practical realities in the Namibian community there is a growing need to offer most native languages on second language level in Namibian schools.
- Senior primary: In Namibian schools, Grades 4 – 7 are considered as the Senior Primary phase.
- Supportive role: refers in this context to the use of the first language or mother tongue during the process of transition to support/explain learning content.
- Transition: the changeover to another language of instruction.
- Vernacular: Indigenous autochthon language, which is not a trade language or lingua franca. In some contexts it has pejorative connotations, for example when indigenous languages in Africa are called ‘vernacular’.



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