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To cite this article: Kristof Iipinge, Felix Banda & Soili Norro (17 Jun 2025): Assessing the Relevance of the 1992 Namibian Language in Education Policy (NLI EP) Document, Language Matters, DOI: [10.1080/10228195.2025.2512370](https://doi.org/10.1080/10228195.2025.2512370)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10228195.2025.2512370>



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Published online: 17 Jun 2025.



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Assessing the Relevance of the 1992 Namibian Language in Education Policy (NLI EP) Document

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Abstract

The current Namibian Language in Education Policy (NLI EP) document was first introduced in 1991 immediately after the country gained its independence. Even though this document has been in existence for more than 30 years, it has never been formally assessed or modified despite the changing socio-economic and language practices. Using four criteria (authenticity, representativeness, meaning, and credibility) suggested to evaluate documents for relevance, the article seeks to establish the relevance of the current NLI EP document. The findings suggest that the NLI EP document is out of touch with the developing multilingual realities of Namibians and the current debates on multilingual pedagogies in postcolonial Africa and the Global South generally. The article concludes with a discussion of an ideal prospective language policy document for Namibian schools.

Keywords: Namibia; Language in Education Policy; multilingualism; language policy document; translanguaging

UNISA   Routledge
University of South Africa
Taylor & Francis Group

Language Matters
www.tandfonline.com/r/lms

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10228195.2025.2512370>
ISSN 1753-5395 (Online), ISSN 1022-8195 (Print)
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1. Introduction

Namibia gained its independence in March 1990. Before independence, Namibia was first colonised by Germany and later by South Africa. During this era, Germany and South Africa controlled education in Namibia differently. When Namibia was colonised by Germany from 1884 to 1919, German was introduced as an official language and hence a medium of instruction. Under the South African regime from 1920 to 1989, Afrikaans, German, and English were used as mediums of instruction (Ipinge and Banda 2020). It is worth noting that during the South African administration, Namibians were harshly oppressed through the apartheid system (Cluver 1992). As a result, a political party called South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) was established in 1960 to fight oppression and campaign for Namibia's independence (Steigertahl 2020). When Namibia gained its independence in 1990, one of SWAPO's immediate intentions was to replace Afrikaans, which was viewed as the oppressor's language, with English, which was viewed as a language of liberation (Ipinge and De Galbert 2024). This implies that English was endorsed as Namibia's sole official language and the primary medium of instruction from grade four to university level (Sukumane 1998). In actual fact, the NLiEP stipulates that a child's mother tongue should be used as the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) in the first three years of formal education (from grade one to grade three), while English is taught as a subject. It then requires that English be introduced as a medium of instruction in grade four while being taught as a subject (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b). It remains the medium of instruction up to grade twelve, with the home languages taught as curriculum subjects from grade four to grade twelve (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b). Finally, at the tertiary level, the policy requires that English be used as the sole medium of instruction. To implement the use of English as a medium of instruction in Namibian schools, a new language policy was needed, and this policy was documented in a formal government document which would be used by relevant stakeholders within the Ministry of Education and Culture. Even though this document has been in existence for more than 30 years, it has never been formally substituted. Consequently, through qualitative documentary analysis, this article seeks to establish whether the NLiEP document of 1992 is still relevant. However, it is important to note that the focus of this article is not on the content of the LiEP per se, but on the actual document that encompasses all the regulations, rules, and explanations pertaining to the language in education policy.

2. Language in Education Policy Formulation

The United Nations Institute for Namibia (UNIN), an educational body established in Lusaka in 1976 to prepare the country for independence, published a booklet in 1981 discussing the language policy for the future independent Namibia in which it strongly recommended English as the only official language. Consequently, "After independence in March 1990, the then ministry of education and culture began reviewing the language policy for schools" (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b, 1).

Furthermore, formulating a language policy is a daunting task because there is a need for national consensus (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b). Therefore, the Ministry of Education and Culture had to get the views of different language groups before it formulated the language policy in question (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b). As Angula (1992, 3) recommends, “In order to gain public support for a viable language policy formulation, evolution and implementation, policymakers must be conversant with the public mood.” Granted, in the process of formulating a language policy for an independent Namibia, the first task of the Ministry of Education and Culture was to produce a document called *Provisional Language Policy for Schools – Draft for Discussion* (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b). This document (together with some guidelines and background information about language choices and suggestions for possible policies) was sent to all regions of Namibia and relevant stakeholders in education were then required to complete and return an enclosed questionnaire (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b).

After all the relevant stakeholders in education had completed the questionnaire that accompanied the draft policy, their responses were processed and were used as the basis for a provisional language policy (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b). After that, all relevant representatives and stakeholders from all regional education offices assembled in Windhoek (the capital city of Namibia) for further consultation and after a roundtable discussion the new language policy for Namibian schools was finalised and announced (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993a). This policy, which was first published in November 1991, was titled *The Language Policy for Schools: 1992–1996 and Beyond* (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b).

It is worth noting that according to the NLiEP document, the language policy for schools that was introduced in 1991 was to be continuously evaluated at all stages of implementation (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b). However, this policy has never been formally evaluated since its inception. In 2003, for example, there was an attempt to revise the Namibian language policy for schools (Ipinge 2018). However, although some suggestions and recommendations that were put forward were included in the amended policy, they remained basically the same, especially regarding mother tongue instruction (Norro 2022). In other words, nothing came of it. Again, in 2016, there was another attempt to revise the NLiEP (Ipinge 2018), but the resultant suggestions and recommendations were never endorsed into an official document. Consequently, technically and in principle, the LiEP document that was adopted in 1991 remains the only legitimate and official policy for all government schools in Namibia. We argue, therefore, that more than 30 years after the NLiEP document was produced, there is a reasonable need for its relevance and applicability to be examined.

3. The Necessity of Assessing the Relevancy of the NLiEP Document

In this section, we justify why it is important to critique the relevancy of the NLiEP document. To begin with, according to the language policy of Stellenbosch University

(2021), a language policy is implemented within changing circumstances. Therefore, any language policy should be reviewed in accordance with emerging social and educational conditions. In this regard, it is important to emphasise that in the context of Namibia, the current language in education policy was introduced when Afrikaans was the country's lingua franca, whereas English has now become the new lingua franca (Ipinge 2018; Steigertahl 2020). Besides, the introduction of English as sole medium of instruction in Namibian secondary schools was to a certain extent necessitated by the introduction of the new curriculum and syllabuses leading to the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) and Higher International General Certificate of Secondary Education (HIGCSE) (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b). This curriculum has eventually been replaced by the Namibian Senior Secondary Certificate (NSSC) curriculum. Consequently, we argue that because of some of these critical changes that have taken place during the implementation of the current NLiEP, there is a need to review the policy and eventually to have a new language policy document in place.

Furthermore, as mentioned before, there were attempts to review the current NLiEP in 2003 and 2016. However, the end products of the suggestions and proposed recommendations were never turned into official documents. The 2003 document remains a discussion document, while the 2016 one remains a draft document. Both documents were concerned with the major role of English as the medium of instruction, at the expense of the Namibian languages. However, the measures they proposed—extending the mother tongue instruction to the senior primary level—were not accepted. The question of the medium of instruction remains a crucial issue in education. According to the current understanding, languages are considered social practices that are tied to language ideologies (Banda 2009; Ebongue and Hurst 2017; Heller 2007). Multilingual speakers' language practices are complex, and their linguistic repertoires include several languages and their various forms and simultaneous use (Banda and Mambwe 2024; McKinney 2016). Therefore, the notion of “mother tongue” instruction and what “mother tongue” constitutes in fluid heteroglossic multilingual African contexts have been challenged (Banda 2009, 2018), and the schools' language policy should consider the pupils' and teachers' multilingual language practices, which the current policy does not do.

As mentioned earlier, the proposals discussed within the preceding paragraphs remain discussion documents to date (2025) and therefore should not be regarded as legitimate language policy documents. Accordingly, in the current situation, relevant stakeholders in the Ministry of Education and Culture have three documents at their disposal: the official policy document that was introduced in 1991, a discussion document that was published in 2003, and another discussion document published in 2016. This situation is not encouraging because the language policy implementers might not know which document to follow. In any case, there are no guidelines as to how the three documents can be used together to offer education within Namibian schools (Ipinge 2018). Hence,

we contend that given the presence of the two discussion documents, it is important to examine the relevance of the current NLiEP document.

Before examining the relevance of the current NLiEP document it is important to mention that several researchers and scholars have written about the Namibian language policy in general. That is, they have contributed to the debate about English as Namibia's sole official language. For example, Frydman (2011) analysed Namibia's English language policy to make evident the crucial need for Namibia's language policy to be addressed as part of the country's development plan. Frydman concluded that because of the inability of English alone to serve the overwhelming majority of Namibia's people and many of its important purposes, as well as the way in which English as the exclusive official language has shown to greatly impede development in Namibia, it is truly time that the language policy be reconsidered and revised. Stell (2021) provided a socio-historical account of the English language in Namibia from early colonial times to the present by paying attention to the considerations that led to English becoming Namibia's only official language upon independence. His main finding was that English is developing distinctively local spoken varieties. Bruwer (2024) examined the development of Namibia's language policy and the implications that result from it and concluded that the decision to designate English as the sole official language impacts language development in the country. It is important to reiterate that the studies discussed here only focused on English as Namibia's sole official language; they did not pay attention to the language in education policy related issues. Next we look at some of the studies that have focused on the NLiEP.

First, Norro (2022) discussed the factors that affected the NLiEP and, drawing the timeline of its development, stated that it has remained the same through the years. Other studies have investigated the NLiEP's implementation. Ausiku (2010) evaluated how the NLiEP was being implemented in the upper primary schools in Oshana region and found that the majority of learners, teachers, and parents, for a range of ideological interpretations and other reasons, preferred using English as medium of instruction rather than mother tongue (Oshiwambo), despite learners' and teachers' poor English proficiency. However, Ausiku (2010) did not investigate how the language policy document itself contributes to the manner in which teachers, learners, and parents implement the policy. Ashikuti (2019) explored the enactment of Namibia's NLiEP in junior primary schools with particular attention to the differences between urban and rural contexts. Her study revealed that LiEP interpretation, appropriation, and enactment differed between urban and rural situations. Like Ausiku's (2010) study, Ashikuti's (2019) study did not engage the NLiEP document itself. Mostert et al. (2012) explored the views and preferences of parents, teachers, and principals on the implementation of the language policy in primary schools in Namibia. This study also excluded an examination of the language policy document itself. Norro (2021) conducted a similar study on Namibian teachers' beliefs about the medium of instruction and language policy implementation. This study found that teachers believed that the current language policy was problematic and its implementation was challenging. However, the study did

not engage the NLiEP document itself to assess how its nature contributes to the challenges that teachers encounter when implementing it. Finally, Ipinge and Banda (2020) explored the efficacy of using English as a medium of instruction among the Oshiwambo-speaking learners in the Omusati region of northern Namibia. Although this study was comprehensive in the sense that it drew data from English Second Language (ESL) teachers' interviews, classroom observations, and learners' interviews, the study did not engage the language policy document. It is sensible to conclude that many studies have been carried out around the issue of the NLiEP. However, it appears that there is a lack of studies that have investigated the actual language policy document itself to critique its relevance. For this reason, through documentary analysis, the current study builds on the work of the scholars mentioned earlier to address the existing gaps.

4. Methodology

The data for this article were obtained through document analysis. According to Bowen (2009: 27), "Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material ... to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge." Document analysis allows researchers to analyse and investigate existing documents (Denscombe 2007). As Bowen (2009) explains, to reinforce the understanding of research, document analysis can be used for different purposes. First, it allows researchers to use data obtained from documents to contextualise data obtained from other sources. Second, it offers supplementary research data because insight and information resulting from documents are perceived as valuable additions to the body of knowledge. On the other hand, Rose et al. (2020, 20) state that it is feasible to carry out a study with documents serving as the only means of data collection. To put it differently, documents can be used as an alternative source of data to questionnaires, interviews, and observation (Denscombe 2007). Therefore, because the main aim of this article was to establish the relevance of the NLiEP document that has been in existence for more than 30 years, we deemed it necessary to use document analysis as the sole data collection method. As outlined above, the study is designed towards document analysis. It should be noted that most document inventors do not create their documents with the goal of obtaining a platform to explain them later (Rose et al. 2020). To put it another way, these documents were not meant to spark the kinds of conversations that we have when we study them. Therefore, we have deepened the evaluation by analysing the document in the light of relevant literature. In this regard, we used four criteria to evaluate the relevance of the 1992 policy document, namely authenticity, representativeness, meaning, and credibility (Denscombe 2007).

5. Findings and Discussion

Denscombe (2014) suggests that apart from their literal contents, documents contain valuable information. That is why documents are perceived as sources of data that can disclose things that are not apparent (Denscombe 2014). Indeed, "rather than taking the

contents at face value there are things to be learnt from a deeper reading of the document” (Denscombe 2014, 225). Without a doubt, the relevancy of any given document is something that needs to be established. Consequently, to assess the relevancy of the NLiEP document, we analysed and evaluated this document in relation to the four criteria suggested by Scott (1990) and Denscombe (2014), namely authenticity, representativeness, meaning, and credibility.

5.1 Authenticity

Wellington (2015) suggests that “authenticity” has to do with the origin and composition of a document. To put it differently, verifying whether a document is authentic is about establishing if it is genuine; it is about questioning whether a document is what it is supposed to be (Denscombe 2007). Looking at the Namibian LiEP document, one can tell that it is authentic and is from a credible origin because it has a hard cover with a coloured Namibian coat of arms. Indeed, this aspect makes this document look official and professional. Furthermore, Ahmed (2010) suggests that determining the authenticity of a document takes into consideration its authorship. In other words, one needs to verify whether the name acknowledged on the document is that of the author. The NLiEP document was signed by the then minister of education and culture in 1993 on behalf of the Namibian government (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b). The signature of the then minister of education and culture certified that the document was indeed an official Namibian government document and that it had been endorsed and accepted by the government as its language policy for schools. All in all, the quality of the NLiEP document’s cover page and the signature of the minister of education and culture inscribed on this document confirm that it originated from a reliable source and therefore there is no doubt that this document is authentic.

5.2 Credibility

Credibility refers to “the extent to which a document is sincere and undistorted” (Wellington 2015, 214), “free from error and evasion” (Scott 1990, 7). According to Ahmed (2010), a document can be printed with errors. However, these errors can only be considered “genuine” if they are intentionally made to deceive the public. In other words, “genuine errors do not undermine the credibility of the sources, especially as they can be detected and corrected” (Ahmed 2010, 4).

Additionally, Denscombe (2007) advises that apart from being free from errors and evasion, the credibility of any given document will depend, among others, on the purpose of that specific document and on the “producer” of that specific document and their status. This assertion is supported by Bowen (2009) who underscores that document evaluation should comprise examining the original purpose of the document as well as information about its authorship. Consequently, looking at the NLiEP document, one can argue that to a certain extent, this document is credible because its purpose is clear. As indicated on the first page of this document, its purpose is to make the NLiEP clear and to explain some of its details more fully (Ministry of Education

and Culture 1993b). To clarify the purpose of the document further, the author provided the content of the policy document, that is, background to the policy, the policy itself, and its implementation strategy (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b).

Despite the fact that the purpose of the NLiEP document is clearly given, we argue that the credibility of this document is questionable because it does not reveal any information about its authorship. Brock-Utne and Holmarsdottir (2001, 305) remind us that the foundational Namibian discussion document, that is, the UNIN booklet from 1981, was written by British and American scholars, and financed by the Ford Foundation. The actual policy document from 1993, however, does not reveal any details or any information about its author. For this reason, one cannot tell whether the document was written by language experts, politicians, or certain scholars. As Denscombe (2007) argues, for a document to be credible, it should disclose who the author is, and whether they believe in a certain ideology that may have influenced the writing of that specific document.

Furthermore, the date on which a document was produced is another crucial factor to consider when evaluating its reliability (Denscombe 2007). The NLiEP document may not be regarded as credible in this regard because the policy was created in 1993 and has never been changed or evaluated (Ipinge and Banda 2020). As Denscombe (2007) argues, for a document to be credible, it needs to be up to date. It should be updated whenever necessary and the date of the last update should be made visible (Denscombe 2007). In the case of the NLiEP document, what one must understand is that it was produced immediately after Namibia gained its independence in 1990. Since then, the Namibian social and educational context has significantly changed. Because documents are socially produced and reflect elements of their socio-cultural environment, we agree with Rose et al. (2020) and contend that updating the NLiEP document is necessary to ensure its credibility.

5.3 Representativeness

Scott (1990) and Wellington (2015) recommend that when assessing the “representativeness” of a document, one should look at the typicality of that particular document compared with similar documents. Assessing the NLiEP document, one can argue that to a certain extent it is a typical language policy document because it provides important aspects which are likely to be found in any language policy document. To be specific, the NLiEP document has an introduction, the background to the policy, the goals of the policy, and what the policy means (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b). However, there are critical omissions to the document as evaluated below.

One critical element that is omitted in the NLiEP document has to do with “feedback and conflict resolution.” This was particularly true as a new language policy meant teachers needed to deal with different kinds of classroom interactions. Moreover, with independence from colonial powers, Namibians, including teachers, could criticise government policies without fear of reprisals. However, the document did not provide

avenues for criticism and feedback, whether positive or negative. The argument is that in the implementation process of the new NLiEP, relevant stakeholders, especially school principals, teachers, and school board members are likely to encounter many challenges. Interestingly, the Ministry of Education and Culture (1993b, 1) appears to be aware of the challenges when it notes: “Since the language policy document for school was first published, there have been a number of misunderstandings and misinterpretations.” Besides, some stakeholders might feel that they have been negatively affected by the policy, and some might have suggestions that they would want to submit to the authority in order for them (suggestions) to be considered when the policy is due for appraisal. However, the policy document does not offer any procedures to be followed by stakeholders when they want to give their complaints or when they want to submit relevant suggestions and feedback. As a result, we argue that in this regard, the “representativeness” of the NLiEP document is questionable.

According to the language policy document of Stellenbosch University (2021), a language policy is implemented within changing circumstances. Therefore, any language policy needs to be reviewed and revised accordingly. That is why the language policy document of Stellenbosch (2021, 14) stipulates that “the language policy must be reviewed during its fifth year of operation. It may be reviewed earlier, or more than once during its period of operation, if the owner of the policy considers it necessary.” The NLiEP document, however, does not say anything regarding how the policy will be reviewed and revised. Perhaps this is why this policy was never reviewed since its inception in 1991 because the policy document does not offer any guidelines for carrying out this exercise. Indeed, the omission of this vital aspect in the NLiEP document makes its quality (in terms of representativeness) debatable.

Apart from assessing the “typicality” of a document, another aspect that is worth looking at in order to determine the “representativeness” of a document is its completeness (Denscombe 2007). “It is important that the document be assessed for completeness, in the sense of being comprehensive (covering a topic completely) or selective (covering only some aspects of the topic)” (Bowen 2009, 33). After a careful analysis of the NLiEP document, we concluded that it is not comprehensive.

First, the policy document stipulates that the main aim of the language policy is to make Namibians proficient in English (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b). However, the policy document does not provide clarity as to how this proficiency would be achieved. Even though it highlights that the establishment of English as the official language would take place in the classroom and therefore all teachers and learners would have major roles to play in this task (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b), what teachers would do, for example, to help their learners achieve proficiency in English is not explained. Furthermore, it is worth noting that apart from the policy document being silent on how to achieve English proficiency among Namibians, it has been observed that the English-only policy appears to be related to poor learning outcomes (Harris 2011; Ipinge and Banda 2020; Totemeyer 2010). Consequently, the

current NLiEP should be revised to better help learners achieve the learning objectives of the curriculum.

Secondly, the policy document stipulates that grades one to three will be taught either through the home language, a local language, or English (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b). However, in this regard, one cannot make a clear or correct interpretation because these terms (local language and home language) are not defined in the Namibian context (Iipingge 2018). The final draft of the 2016 language policy for schools in Namibia, for example, has a glossary of key terms, which is commendable (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture 2016). However, the definitions given are not adequate. Besides, this document is still a draft and, therefore, cannot be regarded as an official document. Apart from the draft policy of 2016, the national curriculum for basic education published in the same year also includes a list of keywords. However, this list is not comprehensive, not to mention that the words are not defined in the Namibian context.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the policy document that is being critiqued in this article does not include the criteria to be used when deciding whether to use English or the mother language as the medium of instruction in grades one to three (Iipingge 2018). It is not surprising, therefore, that “there were discrepancies in the implementation of the language policy from region to region, as policy implementers, due to misinterpretation and manipulation, mainly preferred teaching through English rather than through the mother tongue” (Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture 2003, 2).

According to the NLiEP document, the language policy is supposed to be flexible and progressive (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b). Accordingly, as mentioned before, the NLiEP document stipulates that “the language policy will be continuously evaluated at all levels of implementation” (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b, 1). However, the policy does not disclose how the evaluation will be done. The only explanation given is that the Ministry’s guidelines and procedures for evaluating the policy have been already sent to regional education offices (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b). Hence, we believe that an explanation of how the language policy will be evaluated was supposed to be part of the NLiEP document.

Moreover, the NLiEP document stipulates that grades one to three should be taught either in the home language, local language, or English (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b). However, the policy document does not indicate which language will be used in cases where classes might have learners who speak different mother languages (Iipingge 2018). The probability of having classes with learners speaking different languages is very high because Namibia is a multilingual country (Iipingge and Banda 2020). It is the National Curriculum for Basic Education (NCBE 2010) that gives guidelines for the organisation of the classes in multilingual schools, and the school

boards have the power to decide on a school's language policy (Republic of Namibia 2018) within the national policy.

It is important to reiterate that the NLiEP requires that mother tongues be used as mediums of instruction from grades one to three, while English is used as a language of learning and teaching from grades four to twelve and beyond. Besides, the policy also demands that mother tongues be taught as school subjects from grades one to twelve. Apart from the two above-mentioned roles, the mother languages do not play any other roles within the Namibian education system (Iipinge and Banda 2020). The NLiEP document does not disclose any guidelines or explanations regarding how mother languages should be used in the classroom. The National Curriculum document only allows short instances of code-switching to ensure that the pupils understand the essential concepts (NCBE 2016, 29). This is not praiseworthy as there was no explanation or strategy about how the learners' mother tongues, code-switching, and English should be used in teaching and learning. Consequently, we argue that the NLiEP document was supposed to explain how different mother tongues will be used in the teaching of different school subjects, including English (Iipinge 2018). We further argue that the NLiEP document was supposed to include explanations on what teachers should do, for example, when they are giving explanations in English but learners are not grasping the subject content well because of problems related to English. As reported by Iipinge and Huddleston (2023), teachers in Namibia face several challenges in using English as LOLT. Therefore, it is not sensible that the NLiEP document does not say anything about important teaching and learning concepts such as "code-switching" and "translanguaging" (Iipinge 2018). Including these concepts would have made the NLiEP document more "representative" and therefore more meaningful.

To conclude this section, it is important to mention that although Namibia is a multilingual country, the current LiEP endorsed English as the sole medium of instruction from grades four to twelve and beyond. However, although the LiEP does not advocate for the use of indigenous languages in the teaching of school subjects beyond the fourth grade, multilingualism is used as an everyday teaching and learning practice. This is because, in schools, teachers often use translanguaging as a strategy for teaching and learning to ensure that all learners comprehend subject content well by drawing on the community's multilingual repertoires.

5.4 Meaning

Wellington (2015) suggests that scrutinising the "meaning" of a document is the most challenging aspect of document analysis because examining a document is about establishing whether the document is clear and intelligible (Denscombe 2007; Mogalakwe 2006; Wellington 2015). As Scott (1990, 28) contends, "The ultimate purpose of examining documents is to arrive at an understanding of the meaning and significance of what the document contains." Hence, examining the meaning of a document includes considering whether words used in a document are clear and unequivocal (Denscombe 2007). Furthermore, Punch (2011) recommends that

examining the meaning of a document should also include looking at the literal and deeper meanings of words, phrases, and explanations in a document. That is why when examining the meaning of a given document, it is important to ask the question: “Are there meanings which involve ‘what’ is left unsaid or reading between the lines?” (Denscombe 2007, 233).

Even though the policy document is written in plain English, we contend that there are some aspects of it which might not be conveying an explicit message to the readers. To begin with, on page 9, the policy document stipulates that in grades one to three the medium of instruction should be either the home language, local language, or English (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b). As mentioned before, this clause is not explicit because it is not clear what is regarded as “local and home language” in the Namibian context (Ipinge 2018). As Totemeyer (2010) observes, the wording in the clause in question has left the door open for schools to use English-only as the medium instruction from grade one onward. This is because the clause uses the terms “local language” or “home language” or “English” rather than “home language only” or “local language only” (Ipinge 2018). For this reason, Wolfaardt (2002, 73) laments that “this clause has created a general misconception that schools have the right to make decisions whether they wanted mother tongue or English as the medium of instruction from grade one onwards.” Unsurprisingly, many schools use English as the medium of instruction from grade one onwards and, to make matters worse, they do not even offer indigenous languages or African languages as school subjects (Totemeyer 2010).

Moreover, the NLiEP document discloses that one of the main goals of the policy is that “education should promote the language and cultural identity of learners through the use of home language medium at least in grades one to three, and the teaching of home language throughout formal education, provided the necessary resources are available” (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b, 4). Like the clause discussed in the preceding paragraph, this clause is also not clear because it does not disclose the kind of resources that need to be considered for home languages to be taught throughout formal education. Correspondingly, the same clause lacks clarity on how education can promote language and cultural identity through the learners’ mother tongue (Wolfaardt 2002).

It is also worth noting that one of the main goals of the NLiEP is that “ideally, schools should offer at least two languages as subjects” (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993b, 4). Again, this clause is vague because it does not specify what kind of languages should be offered by schools. Consequently, we argue that in this regard, the policy document was supposed to specify, for example, that the two languages should be the child’s mother language and a foreign language or a second language. Otherwise, as it is now, some schools might offer two languages as subjects but neither of them is a child’s mother language. Eventually, this situation means that some Namibian indigenous languages are neglected by the education system.

6. Conclusion

Considering that the current NLiEP policy document has never been formally modified since its inception in 1990, this study aimed to assess the relevancy of the NLiEP document in post-independence Namibia. The document was assessed and evaluated using four criteria suggested by Scott (1990) and Descobe (2014), namely authenticity, representativeness, meaning, and credibility. The findings show that although the NLiEP document is authentic and from a credible source, it is not credible. First, the document is not credible because it has been implemented within a changing social and educational context, where because of linguistic and other cultural flows, society and education tend to be more multilingual than monolingual. Additionally, it has never been formally reviewed, and thus it is not up to date with the mother tongue and translanguaging debates taking place in Africa and the Global South generally. The NLiEP document is also not credible because it does not disclose any information about its authorship.

Furthermore, our assessment of the NLiEP document revealed that it does not meet the criterion of “representativeness” because it lacks information on when and how to review the language policy. Besides, the document lacks avenues for criticism and feedback, whether positive or negative. Contemporary policy documents often give information on how and where to provide criticisms and feedback. Such information may be used to improve later versions of the documents. Finally, regarding the criterion of “meaning,” our analysis found that the document is questionable because it has several clauses that are not clear and it is not translated into different indigenous Namibian languages, which would to some extent alleviate the problem of clarity. This is because reading across languages, some points or phrases that are not clear in English may be clear or clarified in indigenous languages.

It is also important to emphasise that not all Namibian teachers are proficient in English. Moreover, to affirm the multilingual situation in Namibia, the NLiEP document should have been translated into all the official Namibian languages. This would have eased the problem for teachers who find the English text challenging to comprehend. Moreover, the document talks about using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the first three years and thereafter English taking over as the medium, suggesting that the policy is designed for the English medium of instruction. Banda (2010, 2018) has argued that many so-called multilingual education policies which pronounce teaching and learning using African languages in the first three to seven years are still transitional monolingual models working to the benefit of the English medium of instruction. This is because a monolingual education in the mother tongue (which is not necessarily a negative thing) is replaced with a monolingual English education. The subset argument is more problematic: learners and parents are inadvertently socialised to believe that education in African languages is only good enough for initial literacy and primary education and to prepare learners for ultimate education in English (Banda 2010, 2018). Thus, many parents opt for an immediate English medium of instruction, or as soon as

possible, because they do not see the pedagogical value of using an African language when eventually English will be the only medium of instruction.

All in all, although the NLiEP document can be said to meet the criterion of authenticity, it does not adequately meet the dictates of the other three criteria for document relevance. Accordingly, we conclude that this policy document is no longer relevant. For this reason, we implore the Namibian Ministry of Education to create and publish a new language policy document for schools. The prospective language policy document should provide information as to when and how the policy will be reviewed and revised. It should also provide avenues for criticism and feedback. In other words, it should offer procedures and guidelines to be followed by stakeholders when they want to give their complaints or when they want to submit relevant suggestions and feedback. Because mother tongues play an important role in education, it is recommended that the prospective language policy document should clearly and comprehensively indicate how different mother tongues will be used in schools. There is a need for the new policy to engage linguistic communication strategies that emerge from multilingual practices. Thus, translanguaging as a language education policy and practice needs to be considered. In this regard, the prospective LiEP document should clearly explain how teachers should use translanguaging as a strategic means of facilitating teaching and learning. Lastly, the prospective LiEP document must be translated into different Indigenous Namibian languages as a show of support for, and recognition and embrace of Namibia as a multilingual country.

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