

## The pedagogic relevance of Namibian literature in English

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### Abstract

*This article presents the pedagogic relevance of Namibian literature in English and describes the views of Namibian literature course facilitators and language students. Through in-depth interviews, the study team sensitised educators, curriculum designers at NIED and high school learners to the pedagogic relevance of Namibian literature in English. We advocate for the inclusion of many more Namibian literary texts in the English curriculum at all levels of the Namibian education system. We visited a total of 23 high schools and 2 public universities and collected 69 questionnaires, conducted 31 interviews with high school teachers and 32 with learners. The views of five university lecturers and two language experts at NIED were also included. A review of the Namibian high school curriculum (Grade 9-12) shows that only two Namibian literary texts: Sifiso Nyathi's "God of women" and a poem about Hendrik Witbooi were included in the new ESL syllabus. This team could not identify a single Namibian short story, novel, or an autobiography as part of the high school ESL syllabus. The Namibian high school ESL syllabus has given more focus on the descriptive, functional, and communicative grammar tasks, essay writing exercises and short piece composition activities. The imaginative writing and creative thinking part of language teaching has almost been neglected. On the contrary, at the tertiary level, it can be conspicuously observed that there exists a tremendous growth of research niche areas in the Namibian texts at UNAM and NUST. We concluded that Namibian literature in the Namibian high schools has not been taught to enhance the linguistic capabilities, the overall personalities, the literary competencies of high school learners and inculcate the diverse Namibian cultures, values, and traditions.*

**Keywords:** language pedagogy, Namibian literature, relevance, literature teaching, ESL

### Introduction

Namibia has been independent for over 33 years and literary works that have been produced after independence have only been studied in isolation. There has not been an in-depth analysis of the sociologically and pedagogically relevant issues raised in all the genres. According to Orford (1994 cited in Mbise & Vale, 2001), Namibian literature is the growing body of literature that expresses what it was and is to be Namibian. Chapman (1995) states that Namibia has colonial literature in German, Afrikaans, and English which leaves Haarhoff's study lacking inclusivity because it does not cover indigenous literature. This has resulted in Namibian learners reading literature for 'art's sake' instead of 'art for a purpose.' This study examined the pedagogic relevance of the post-independent Namibian literature in English. The study chiefly engaged the Namibian literature course coordinators of the two public universities, the current postgraduate students as well as those who currently hold teaching positions as English teachers through the medium of a questionnaire and interviews. This research sensitised both educators and

students to the pedagogic relevance of studying Namibian literature in English.

Although Namibians read different literary texts, not everybody goes into a bookshop or library to pick one of the four genres of literature. Thus, those who must read literature are usually tertiary level students who major in English and learners in some high schools. These students are exposed to commonwealth literature, African literature, Namibian literature, and world literatures. Namibian literature is studied to strike a balance in the literatures of the different regions that they study as well as for purposes of comparison. However, Namibian literature raises different sociologically and pedagogically relevant issues that could be used by those who go into the teaching profession in their classroom to promote moral values and help curb social evils. The reality, however, is that there are not many Namibian literature books in English. This lack of a broad spectrum of Namibian literature hampers graduates to select or even study Namibian literature in their classroom.

A study of the pedagogic relevance of

Namibian literature in English at tertiary and high school levels in Namibia has been neglected. Namibian literature is given less attention compared to Western canonical literature. Namibian students are not sufficiently exposed to the Namibian literature in English. The reading of Namibian literature is basically for entertainment. A review of the Namibian high school curriculum (2018, Grade 9-12) shows us that only two Namibian texts: Sifiso Nyathi's *God of women* and a poem about Hendrik Witbooi have been included in the new English Second Language (ESL) syllabus along with other canonical poems, plays and novels. And not even a single Namibian short story, novel, or an autobiography as part of the high school ESL syllabus was identified. The study teams assumed that these texts are excluded intentionally. The Namibian high school ESL syllabus has given more focus on the descriptive, functional, and communicative grammar tasks, essay writing exercises and short piece composition activities. The imaginative writing and creative thinking part of language teaching has almost been disused. On the contrary, at the tertiary level, it can be conspicuously observed that there exists a tremendous growth of research niche areas in the Namibian texts at University of Namibia (UNAM) and Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST). We documented the diversity of genres studied by the postgraduate Namibian students of language and literature departments of UNAM and NUST.

Experiences show that literature in Namibian high schools is not taught to enhance the linguistic capabilities, overall personalities, the literary competencies of high school learners and even to inculcate the diverse Namibian cultures, values, and traditions. Namibian short stories, novels or autobiographies are totally excluded from the high school curriculum. On what criteria should Namibian literary texts be selected for academic and research purposes? Are the teaching methodologies appropriate for teaching literature in the Namibian context? Are the teachers sufficiently trained to grapple with the complexities of literature teaching? What is the fundamental purpose of teaching literature in the Namibian context? With the overarching objective of examining the

pedagogic relevance of post-independent Namibian literature, investigating the texts selected for tertiary and high school studies, this article aims to evaluate the contemporary pedagogic relevance of Namibian literature in English, investigate the major challenges and prospects of teaching literature in high school contexts and select pedagogically relevant literary Namibian texts following text selection criteria.

This article will contribute to knowledge development and studying Namibian literature in English and inform the re-assessment of literature studies, advise comparative studies of the pedagogic relevance of Namibian literature with other countries. The study will enlighten the selection of literature texts at schools, create an appreciation for 'Art for Purpose' and not just 'Art for Art's Sake' and sensitize curriculum developers and policymakers towards the pedagogic relevance of Namibian works. The survey below shows the pedagogic relevance of Namibian literature in English. In this article, Namibian literature means any literary work written in English.

### Research methods

The study followed a mixed methods approach to investigate the pedagogic relevance of Namibian literature in English. Following descriptive and explorative designs, the article describes the views of Namibian literature course facilitators and language students of the two public universities in Windhoek and high school learners and teachers. Through in-depth interviews, the study team sensitised educators, curriculum designers at National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) and high school learners about the pedagogic relevance of Namibian literature in English. We visited a total of 23 high schools and two public universities and collected 69 questionnaires, conducted 31 interviews with high school teachers and 32 with learners. The views of five university lecturers and two language experts at NIED were also included.

### Major findings

#### *The demographic profile of the respondents*

As can be seen from Table 1, a total of 69 teachers, postgraduate candidates and lecturers took part in the questionnaire survey and the respondents' minimum age was 21 years.

**Table 1: Highest academic qualifications**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	No response	7	10.1	10.1	10.1
	Diploma	6	8.7	8.7	18.8
	Bachelor's degree	19	27.5	27.5	46.4
	Honour's degree	32	46.4	46.4	92.8
	MA degree	5	7.2	7.2	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Table 1 shows that 27.5 % (19), 46.4 % (32) and 7.2% (5) of the respondents held first, second and third degrees in the English language respectively. It is significant to note that the teachers were relatively well qualified though some lacked the right methodological experiences of teaching literature which will be discussed later.

### ***Basic thematic questions in the study of the pedagogic relevance of Namibian literature***

While conducting the interviews, focus groups and questionnaire survey, researchers raised the following major questions which thematically guided the analysis below:

1. Should Namibian literature be part of the Namibian curriculum at all levels?
2. Does the Namibian literature enhance the learners' understanding of the Namibian culture?
3. Can Namibian literature widen the literary competence of students?
4. Can a Namibian literary text enhance the language competence of the learner?
5. Can English teachers develop the overall personality of the learner/student?
6. What can be the potential reasons for including literature in the curriculum at all levels?

7. What are the main challenges of teaching Namibian literature in English?
8. How should we teach and interpret Namibian novels?
9. Do you think teaching Namibian poetry can be pedagogically relevant?
10. What must be done to deliver a pedagogically relevant Namibian autobiography in a learning environment?
11. Do you think teaching Namibian plays in English can be pedagogically relevant?

### ***Namibian literature in the curriculum at all levels***

A review of the primary level curriculum of Namibia and related literature shows that the Namibian literature in English is not an integral part of the Namibian primary school education system at all. At the secondary school level, few Namibian literary works have been included along with the European and African canonical texts. At the tertiary level, Namibian literature in English as a compulsory undergraduate course is offered to all English majors. Other university students are not expected to study English through Namibian literature. Should the Namibian literature be part of the curriculum at all levels?

**Table 2: Should the Namibian literature be part of the curriculum at all levels?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	No response	2	2.9	2.9	2.9
	Yes	61	88.4	88.4	91.3
	No	6	8.7	8.7	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

As Table 2 shows, 88.4% of Namibian English teachers and lecturers assumed that as the Namibian literature is still pedagogically relevant, it can be included in the curriculum at all levels of language education. Only 8.7% (6 teachers) of the respondents (see Table 2) agreed that it should not be included in the curriculum. From a total of 69 respondents, 61 believed that including Namibian literature in

the curriculum could broaden the cultural understanding of the Namibian students at various levels.

### ***The learners' understanding of the Namibian culture***

Does the Namibian literature enhance the learners' understanding of the Namibian culture? As Fig 1 shows, one major reason for

inclusion of Namibian literature in the curriculum is to develop the learners'

understanding of the local culture.

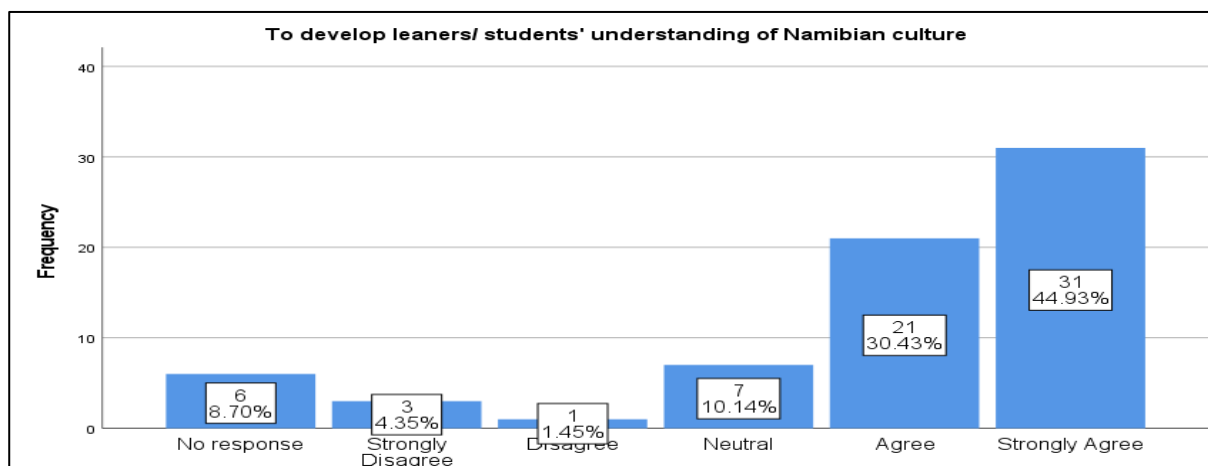


Figure 1: The learners' understanding of the Namibian culture

Namibian literature can widen the learner's knowledge of cultural history, enhance the Namibian identity positively and reduce cultural conflicts due to multicultural barriers. The inclusion of Namibian texts in the curriculum implies that while designing school or university curriculum including Namibian texts can be one of the selection criteria.

### *Developing the literary competence of Namibian students*

During the interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), some schoolteachers questioned the pedagogic relevance of literature and raised questions like: Can our students be our future poets? Can these students become playwrights in the future?

Can someone take up writing novels or short stories as a full-time occupation in Namibia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? Who is going to buy and read Namibian books in the presence of canonical works in the Age of Internet and mushrooming technology? These and other similar questions are being raised by the academic circle to question the artistic and pedagogic relevance of Namibian literature in general. These questions are often raised with the hidden intentions of belittling the pedagogic and artistic quality and relevance of Namibian literature in English. As indicated in Fig. 2, there were many teachers and students who agreed that Namibian literature could be offered to develop the literary competence of the Namibian child.

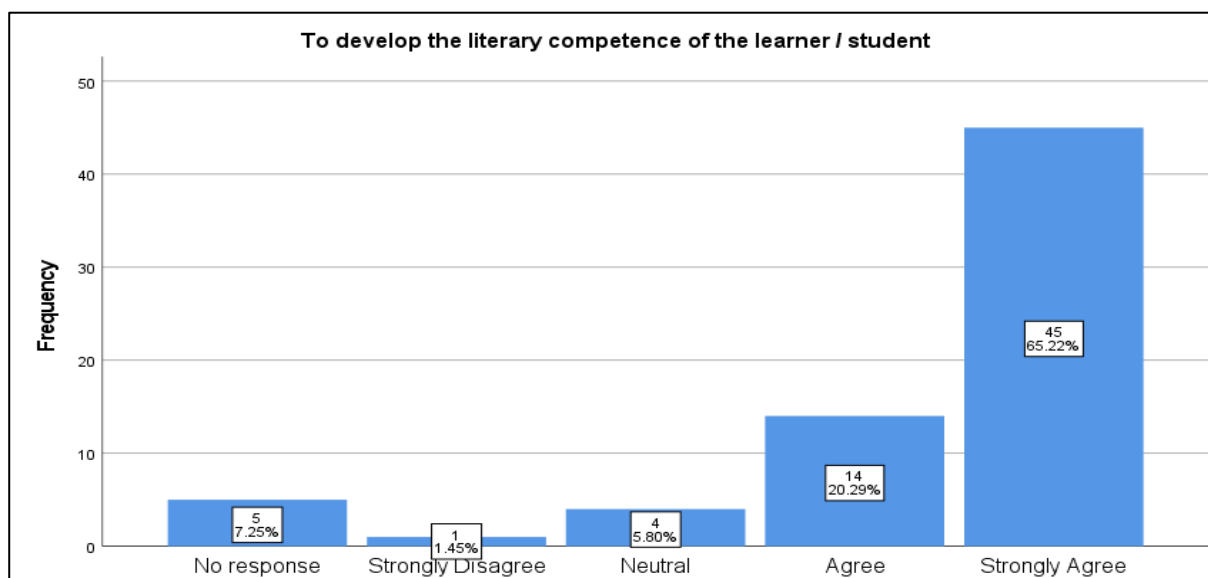


Figure 2: Developing the literary competence of the learners/students

Out of 69 respondents, 59 agreed that the

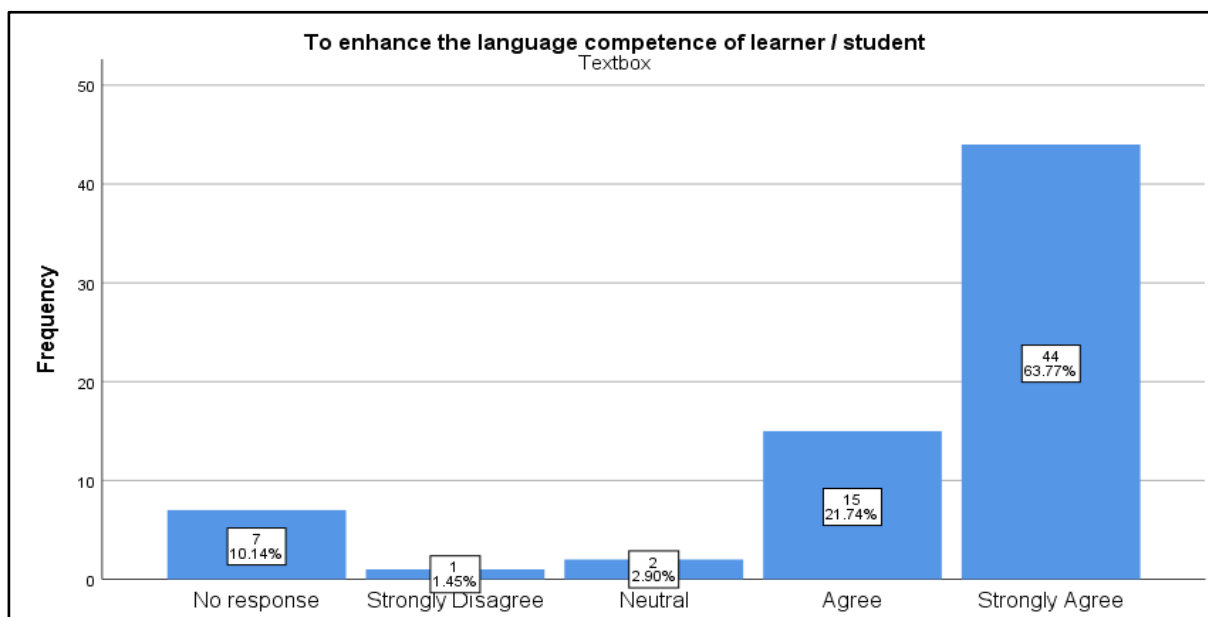
inclusion of Namibian texts in the school or

university curriculum could enhance the literary skills of the Namibian child and went against the popular belief which assumes that Namibian works do not meet established literary standards and lack many artistic and prosodic qualities.

### ***Enhancing the linguistic competence of Namibian students***

Contrary to the view that Namibian literature cannot be used to teach language skills, 85.5%

(59) of the respondents agreed that Namibian texts were fit for the teaching of both productive (writing and speaking competences) and receptive language (reading and listening) skills of the Namibian child at all levels. During the interviews and FGDs, however, respondents recommended that there should be proper literature selection criteria in place as some of the literary works are poorly composed.

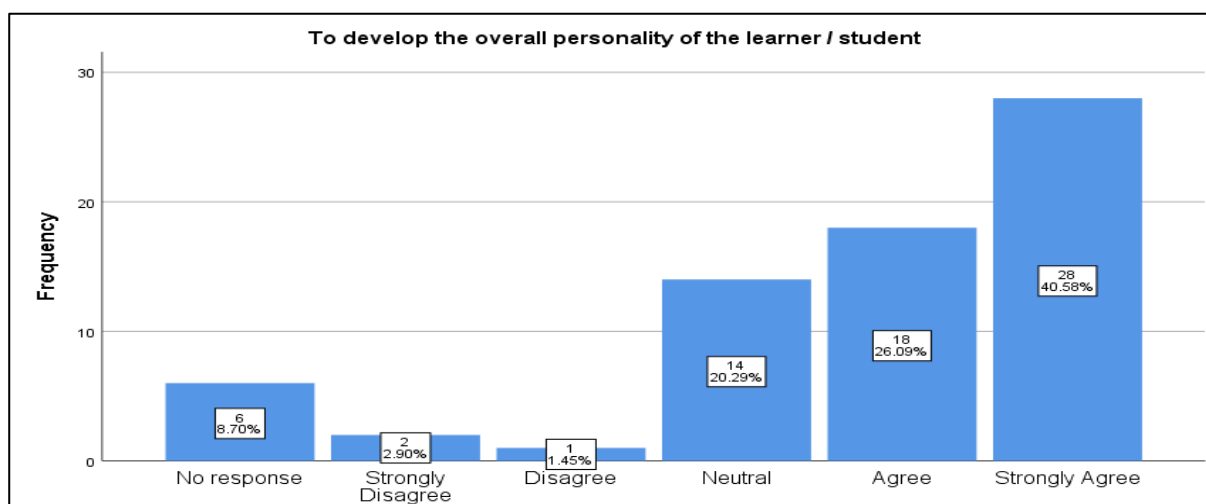


**Figure 3: Enhancing the linguistic competence of Namibian learners/students**

### ***Enhancing the overall personality of the learner/student***

Major books of psychology such as 'Thinking, Fast and Slow' by Daniel Kahneman and 'Emotional Intelligence' by Daniel Goleman quite often argue that overall personality includes major traits like introversion/extroversion, openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Can a course facilitator teach

a Namibian text to enhance these overall personalities of the student at all levels? Though post-independent Namibian literature generally documents and raises societal and psychological crises, as presented in Fig 4, a little more than 66% of the respondents accepted that Namibian literature could boost the personality of the students if delivered properly following proper methods.



**Figure 4: Can English teachers develop the overall personality of the learner/student?**

Consequently, developing the overall personality of the Namibian learner/student can be a linguistic approach to the teaching and learning of Namibian literature in the Namibian language learning environment.

#### ***Reasons for the inclusion of the literature in the curriculum at all levels***

As a follow-up question, respondents were asked to list the main reasons for including Namibian literature in English as part of English teaching curriculum. The following is the summary of the interviews, FGDs and questionnaires' responses about what Namibian literature might do:

- Boosts Namibian identity.
- Fosters patriotism and national identity.
- Cultivates the love and appreciation of literature at the grassroots level and can give Namibian learners a chance to learn from the Namibian experience.
- Develops a sense of identity in the Namibian students and can help learners understand issues of culture.
- Helps learn Namibian history and culture and enhances communicative language teaching.
- Facilitates the development of the four language skills.
- It can give a chance to study genuine Namibian texts. It's easier to learn about the literature that you can relate to and promote the Namibian writings.
- Helps students to improve their analytical skills. Improves language proficiency. Creates awareness of issues raised/addressed in literature.

- It broadens learners' understanding of their social and cultural environment.
- It stimulates critical thinking, creativity, and imagination. It exposes learners to the historical events like Nama-Herero Genocide and different colonial practices and subjugations.
- It makes learning a language easier. Improves vocabulary power. Improves creative thinking.
- Will provide better psychosocial understanding of learners as it relates to context and content.
- Learners can learn to appreciate other cultures and traditions.
- Learners need to be groomed from the lower level so that they will become used to the Namibian texts and understand it better as they grow academically. To improve learners' creative thinking and their vocabulary from the primary level.
- Learners to familiarise themselves with literature from lower grades. Develops and creates active learning process. Motivates and develops the love of reading literature.
- Can teach Namibia culture and history. Most learners are passive readers. Encourage the reading culture which is deteriorating currently in Namibia. Teaching Namibian literature can support Namibia writing.
- The power of literature is beyond our wildest imagination. Poetry can shape the writing skills.
- To be exposed to language from a Namibian viewpoint. It can facilitate the learning of the rich history and culture of Namibia. Encourages writing and publication.

- It can boost language usage, acquaint learners with literary devices and improve the learners' communicative competence.
- Literature helps learners to deal with their own psychosocial and personality problems. It can improve children's reading and thinking skills and builds relationship among children.
- Literature opens one's mind to a wonderful imaginary world. It has a general positive impact on learning the language. It helps learners identify themselves and their interests.
- Makes learners being aware of the Namibian cultural practices. Creates a sense of national pride.
- It can promote "my Namibia my pride motto".
- It can enhance knowledge of syntax, lexis, and morphology.
- Provides an in-depth view of literary sense and creativity and can assist the learner visualise scenes and ideas.
- It can enhance and preserve Namibian culture. The Namibian child needs to know the origin of their culture and the roots of their Namibian identity.
- Younger minds are easier to influence (example the reading culture can be developed easily).

### ***The major challenges of teaching Namibian literature in English***

Whenever we got a chance to interview high school English teachers, we often asked them to boldly state some of the challenges they face in teaching literature in general and Namibian literature in English in particular. Here is the summary of the major challenges:

- Learners' pre-existing knowledge in relation to the new content is poor.
- Children have no interest in reading. Namibian literature is not as adventurous as the western literature.
- Curriculum developers and other decision makers hardly recommend Namibian literature. There is little to no literature content in primary grades.
- Finding proper resources is challenging.
- Inability to teach literature as a subject. Not having access to literature materials that are Namibian. Lack of clear understanding of the linguistic and pedagogic relevance of Namibian literature in general.

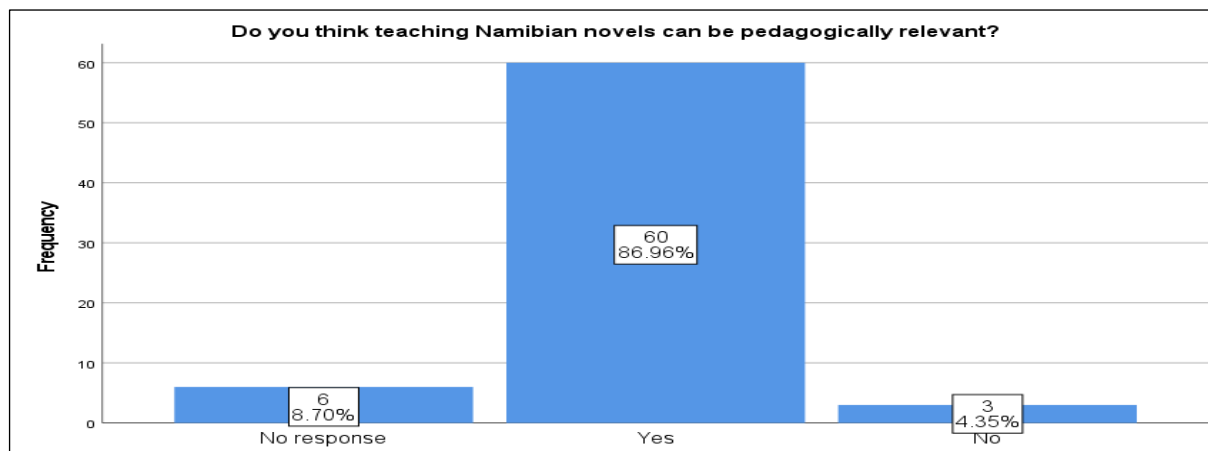
- Learners lack historical knowledge of their own country and lack of language competence.
- Lack of literary understanding and poor reading culture in general.
- Namibian literature work is not readily available. Many stories are not written but told orally.
- Teachers are not trained to teach Namibian literature, especially, Namibian poetry. Consequently, learners deem Namibian literature as boring. Poor backgrounds on literature teaching in English as a medium of instruction context.
- Lack of self-motivation amongst learners/ students.
- Due to language barriers, learners/ students experience difficulties in expressing themselves well in English.
- As learners have poor reading background, literature is not treated as a subject on its own, but it is combined with English language courses/ subjects. Hence literature is given limited study hours or periods.
- Learners struggle to figure out the message of stories / poems and don't understand the elements of literature therefore it's difficult for them to figure out the setting, themes, etc. Learners don't understand the poems, especially the figurative language used in poems.
- Many learners and teachers don't have a proper background and understanding of literature in general.
- Namibia does not have enough qualified teachers. Namibian curriculum developers have not included Namibian literature in the curriculum.
- Teachers are not exposed to literature teaching pedagogy. Lack of reading culture among learners. Not enough published works of literature.
- The disjuncture between the Namibian content and the hegemonic powers of western content in most of the examinations and assessments hinders literature teaching.

### ***The pedagogic relevance of teaching Namibian novels in English***

Language pedagogy includes the ability to communicate knowledge and skills in ways that Namibian students can understand, remember, and apply. Can literature teaching (novel for example) facilitate understanding, remembering, and applying new and existing knowledge? As many as 87% (60) of the

respondents agreed that including Namibian novels in English in the English language teaching curriculum can enhance the linguistic

and pedagogic competence of Namibian learners as presented in Fig. 5.



**Figure 5: Do you think teaching Namibian novels in English can be pedagogically relevant?**

Pending a study on the linguistic relevance of each novel below, the respondents suggested the following Namibian novels in English.

**Table 3: Namibian novels in English**

Title of the novel	Name of the novelist	Year of publication
Born of the Sun	Joseph Diescho with Celeste Wallin	1988
The Two Thousand Days of Haimbodi Ya Haufiku	Helmut Kangulohi Angula	1990
Troubled Waters	Joseph Diescho	1993
The Purple Violet of Oshaantu	Neshani Andreas	2001
Power is Sweet	John Makala Lilemba	2003
The Other Presence	Sifiso Nyathi	2008
By the Roadside	Helene de Kock	2009
The Hopeless Hopes	Salom Shilongo	2013
This is not a Flowerpot	Amy Schoeman	2013
Where the Lion Stalks	Erna Müller	2016
Patience	Festus Uugwanga Abiatar	2017
The Nightlife of Oshikango	Hermann Evenson	2019
Namgu's Escape Theory	Beauty Boois	2020

The review of Namibian literature in English shows an ongoing debate on the definition of Namibian literature in English. Few researchers assume that the literature long existed even before the Namibian independence and the introduction of the English language as missionaries and tourists wrote novels about their lived experiences and travels in the country. Should we call a travelogue written by a Dutch missionary Namibian literature? Is Mari Serebrov's *Mama Namibia* (2013) a Namibian novel? *Mama Namibia* is based on a compelling, true story of an innocent Herero girl whose life portrays the suffering, perseverance and resilience of the

Herero and Nama people of Namibia. Similarly, is Henno Martin's *The Sheltering Desert* (1921) which describes the intense physical and mental hardship, the challenge to survive in the vastness of the Namib Desert and the gradual adaptation to the Bushman lifestyle a Namibian novel? Leaving the on-going debate behind, we asked: Do you think teaching Namibian novels in English with Namibian themes can be linguistically relevant? As can be noted, the responses in Table 4, the "Yes" responses declined from 87% as in Namibian novels by Namibians to 68.1% for novels by foreigners about Namibian themes.



**Table 4: Do you think teaching novels with Namibian themes can be linguistically relevant?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	No response	9	13.0	13.0	13.0
	Yes	47	68.1	68.1	81.2
	No	13	18.8	18.8	100.0
	Total	69	100.0	100.0	

If curriculum designers are to include novels with Namibian themes, the following novels are recommended.

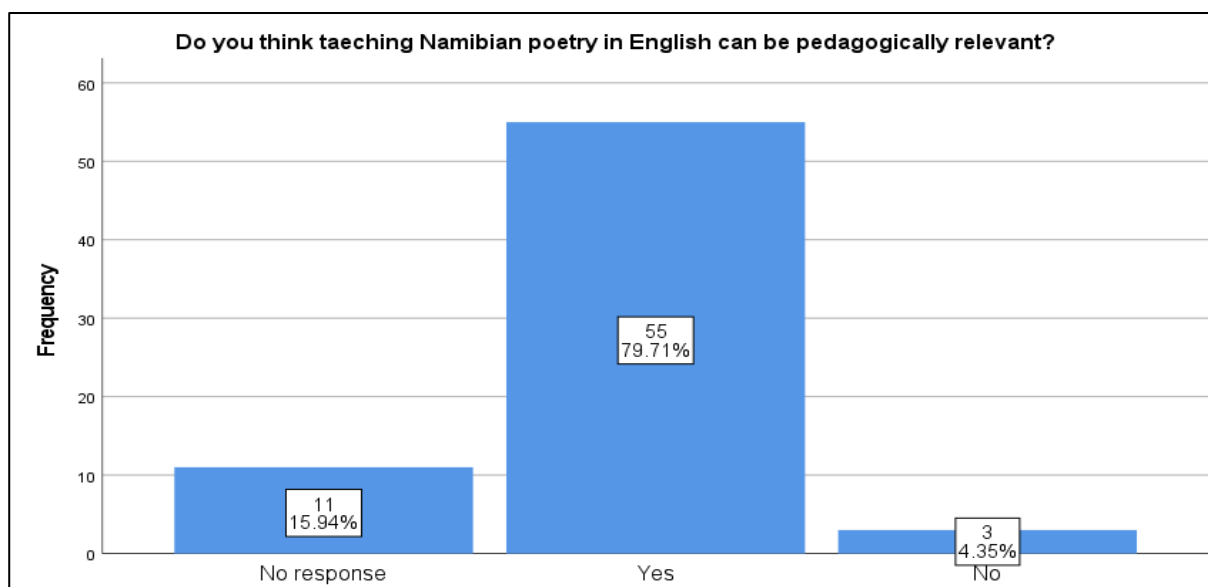
**Table 5: Novels with Namibian themes**

Author	Title of the novel with Namibian themes	Year of publication
Henno Martin	The Sheltering Desert	1923 and 2011
André Brink	The Other Side of Silence	2002
Peter Orner	The Second Coming of Mavala Shikongo	2007
David Gilman	The Devil's Breath	2007
Mari Serebrov	Mama Namibia	2013
Peter Midgley	Counting Teeth: A Namibian Story	2014
Jaspar David Utley	The Lie of the Land	2017

### ***The study of the Namibian poetry in English***

The post-independence Namibian poetry is highly influenced by the Namibian history, cultural practices, political economy, and colonialism, and with the current psychosocial crises. Therefore, taking the Namibian histories, colonial experiences, and cultural practices through poetry to the classroom contexts, research and academic scholarship indisputably can benefit and sharpen the linguistic competence of the Namibian child. To our bewilderment, during our school visits, we found that only one single poem about Hedrick Witbooi was taught throughout all Namibian high schools. Many of the sample poems taught currently were British or South

African or even Zimbabwean. None of the Namibian contemporary poets like Kavevangua Kahengua, Keamogetsi Molapong, Mvula ya Nangolo, Axaro W. Thaniseb, Hugh Ellis, and Julia S. S. N. Amukoshi have been included in the high school curriculum though NUST has included many of these poets. We asked our respondents (many of whom were schoolteachers) the following question: Do you think teaching Namibian poetry in English can be linguistically and pedagogically relevant? As Figure 6 shows, the feedback was inordinate though teachers had not made any individual effort to read Namibian poems in their literature classes.


**Figure 6: Do you think teaching Namibian poetry in English can be linguistically and**

## pedagogically relevant?

In our interactions with high school English teachers, we found that many teachers required additional course delivery training to help them deliver poetry to enhance the linguistic

competencies of the learners. Resources are very scarce. Jointly we suggest the following Namibian poetry texts to be part of the high school English reading list.

**Table 6: Recommending Namibian poetry texts**

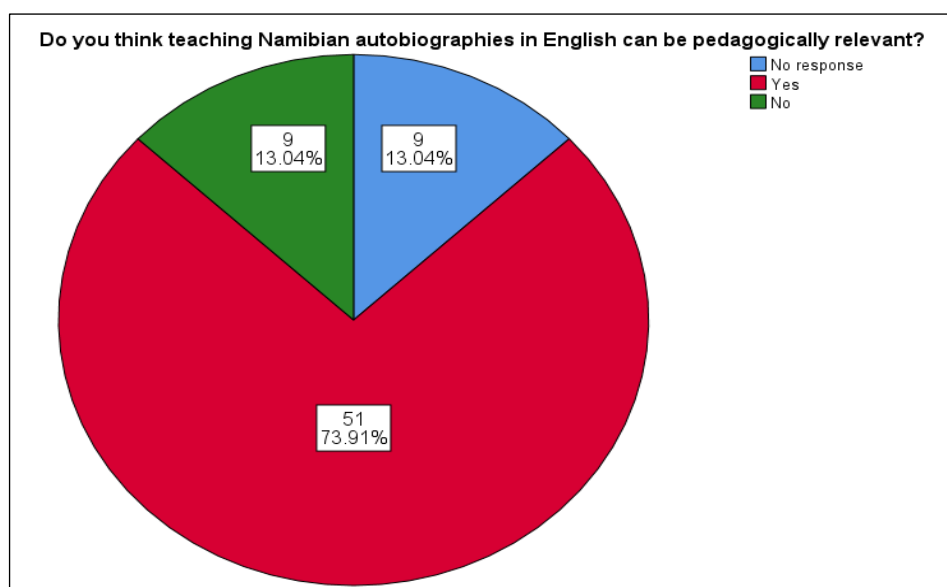
Name of the poet	Title of the anthology	Publisher and year
Mvula ya Nangolo	Thoughts from Exile	Longman Namibia (1991)
Perus Haakskeen	Profile of a Hero	Gamsberg Macmillan Publishers (Pty) Ltd (2000)
Andre du Pissani	Words: Private and Public	Solitaire Press, Windhoek (2000)
Keamogetsi J. Molapong	Come and Talk Your Heart	New Namibia Books (2005)
Axaro W. Thaniseb	Searching for the Rain: An Anthology of Verse	McMillan Education Namibia Publishers (2011)
Hugh Ellis	Hakahana: A Poetry Collection	Word Weaver Publishing House (2012)
Kavevangua Kahengua	Invoking Voices: An Anthology of Poems	McMillan Education Namibia (2012)
Francis Sifiso Nyathi	Ballads of Insomnia: Anthology of Poems	The African Publishers (2013)
Anneli Nghikembua	A True Me in Words: An Anthology of Poems	McMillan Education Namibia (2013)
Kavevangua Kahengua	Dreams	McMillan Education Namibia (2014)
Julia S.S.N. Amukoshi	Tales of the Rainbow	Township Productions (2014)
Keamogetsi J. Molapong	The Scars on my Skin	Township Productions (2014)

In line with the formalist stylistics approach to the study of poetry, Namibian poetic texts can be studied, and the learners can be assisted to discover “core formal features such as rhyme, assonance, alliteration, parallelism, lexis, syntax, deviation and defamiliarization” (Woldemariam, 2015a, p. 119). The learners’ phonological, grammatical, and organizational competencies can also be enhanced. Grammatical competence can be understood as “the knowledge and use of tense, parts of speech, syntactic structures, word order and choice, transitivity, and passivation choices. Contents included in the test were parts of speech, subject - verb agreement, tense and time, structure of sentences, word choice and sentence types” (Woldemariam, 2015b, p. 131).

### *A cognitive linguistic approach to the study of the Namibian autobiographies in English*

Compared to the other literary genres discussed above, the Namibian autobiographies have continued to proliferate capturing themes of Nama/Herero Genocide, exile/return and colonial trauma/resilience in the post-independent Namibian society. The

Namibian war veterans, the Namibian struggle kids and senior academics preferred writing autobiographies thinking, understanding, communicating, and remembering their lived colonial experiences which could best be studied through the methodology of cognitive linguistics (Burke, 2005) and cognitive stylistics (Woldemariam, 2014). Looking at the mushrooming number of autobiographies in Namibia, several questions can be raised. Is writing an autobiography a simple cognitive exercise? Why are many Namibians engaged in this task of remembering the past and writing about it? Is writing an autobiography a certificate for being a war veteran? Do these autobiographies raise various cognitive issues or present the same colonial and cognitive experiences from different perspectives? Should this culture of writing an autobiography continue in the near future at all? After raising these questions, we asked respondents: “Do you think Namibian autobiographies could be linguistically and pedagogically relevant?” Figure 7 summarizes the responses.



**Figure 7: Do you think Namibian autobiographies could be linguistically and pedagogically relevant?**

The research team identified the publication of more than 28 Namibian autobiographies and respondents suggested the following texts to be part of the English curriculum in Namibia in tertiary contexts.

**Table 7: Namibian autobiographies in English**

Author	Title of the autobiography	Year of publication
Vinnia Ndadi	Breaking contract: The story of Vinnia Ndadi (Life histories from the revolution: Namibia, SWAPO)	1974
Marcus Schivute	Go and Come Back Home: A Namibian's Journey into Exile and Back	1997
Ellen Ndeshi Namhila	The Price of Freedom	1997
John Ya Otto with Ole Gjerstad and Michael Meer	Battlefront Namibia: An Autobiography	1981
Helao Shityuwete	Never Follow the Wolf: The Autobiography of a Namibian Freedom Fighter	1987
Sam Nujoma	Where Others Wavered: The Autobiography of Sam Nujoma. My Life in SWAPO and My Participation in the Liberation Struggle of Namibia	2001
Keshii Pelao Nathanael	A Journey to Exile: The Story of a Namibian Freedom Fighter	2002
Beatrice Sandelowsky	Archaeologically Yours	2004
Lydia Shakatange	Walking the Boeing 707	2008
Jane Katjavivi	Undisciplined Heart	2010
Rachel Valentina Nghiwete	Valentina, The Exile Child: An Autobiography	2010
Libertina Amathila	Making a Difference	2012
Fousy Shinana-Kambombo	Southwest Africa to Namibia: My Personal Struggle	2014
Oiva Angula	SWAPO Captive: A Comrade's Experience of Betrayal and Torture	2018
Andrew Niikondo	Are you a Person or a Ghost?	2018
Samson Ndeikwila	Agony of Truth: Autobiography of Samson	2019

	Ndeikwila	
Kalumbi Shangula	Journey into the unknown	2020

This research team also observed the existence of huge research interest and niche areas in the Namibian autobiographies both from the cognitive linguistic/stylistics and literary perspectives at the postgraduate level both at UNAM and NUST.

### ***Developing the students' pragmatic competence through the Namibian play***

During our school visits, we observed two opposing views towards Sifiso Nyathi's "God of Women" which is the only Namibian play in the school curriculum. Many high school teachers assumed that the play is pragmatically and contextually inappropriate to a high school

context as it presents vulgar scenes and obscene dialogues. They often questioned the selection criteria followed. On the other hand, school learners considered it the best Namibian play as it helped them understand the multicultural nature of the Namibian society. Through the play, they could see the cultural complexities of the Namibian society, bigamy and other traditional cultural practices in Namibia. In line with the objectives of our research, we asked: "Do you think teaching Namibian plays in English can be linguistically and pragmatically relevant?" The responses are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8: Developing the students' pragmatic competence through the Namibian play**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	No response	18	26.1	26.1	26.1
	Yes	42	60.9	60.9	87.0
	No	9	13.0	13.0	100.0
	Total	69	100.0	100.0	

In the context of the multicultural and multilingual high school setting, including Namibian plays in the curriculum can develop the cultural and pragmatic competence of the

learners. As many Namibian plays are repositories of Namibian cultural practices and cherished values, respondents suggested the inclusion of the following Namibian plays.

**Table 9: Suggested Namibian plays in English**

Name of the playwright	Title of the play	Year of publication
Francis Sifiso Nyathi	The Oracle of Cidino	The African Publishers (2003)
Clarence Chaklas Kaurapua Kaakunga	Samuel Maharero: A Drama	Out of Africa Publishers (2001)
Vickson Tablah Hangula	The Show Isn't Over Until...	New Namibia Plays Vol 1, New Namibia Books (2000)
Petrus Haakskeen	Finders Keepers Losers Weepers	New Namibia Plays Vol 1, New Namibia Books (2000)
David Stone Ndjavera	The Bride and The Groom	New Namibia Plays Vol 1, New Namibia Books (2000)
Maria Amakali	Checkmate	New Namibia Plays Vol 1, New Namibia Books (2000)
Axaro W. Thaniseb	To Live A Better Life	New Namibia Plays Vol 2, New Namibia Books (2002)
Tony Fourie	One Night	New Namibia Plays Vol 2, New Namibia Books (2002)
Keamogetsi Joseph Molapong	The Woman and The Ogre	New Namibia Plays Vol 2, New Namibia Books (2002)
Aina Kaundu	Now That You Know	New Namibia Plays Vol 2, New Namibia Books (2002)
Martha Laurencia Skrywer-Afrikaner	Homecoming	New Namibia Plays Vol 2, New Namibia Books (2002)

Following a pragmatic linguistic approach and using Namibian plays, Namibian students can be assisted to study “language from the point of view of the users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication” (Crystal, 1997, p. 301).

### *Namibian short stories for the development of*

### *the functional competence of the learner*

Our review of the related literature and the school curriculum has shown that very little attention has been given to the Namibian short stories in English both at the high school and tertiary levels. Respondents suggested that the following short stories are worth including in the curriculum and studying at the postgraduate level in order to develop the functional competence of the learners/students.

**Table 10: Namibian short stories in English**

Author	Title of the short story	Year of publication
Sylvia Schlettwein with Isabella Morris	Bullies, Beasts and Beauties	2010
Jane Katjavivi	Uerietia (published in Coming on Strong edited by Margie Orford and Nepeti Nicanor)	1996
Kaleni Hiyalwa	The Baby's Body (published in Coming on Strong edited by Margie Orford and Nepeti Nicanor)	1996
Maria Kaakunga	Let this not be True (published in Coming on Strong edited by Margie Orford and Nepeti Nicanor)	1996
Kavevangua Kahengua	The Future Needs Education and Other Short Stories	2013

With the aim of enhancing the functional linguistic competence of the learner, using short stories above, the course facilitator can discuss the ideational function of language through the interpretation of coordination, apposition, and modification. Sample short stories can be presented to analyse logical subject, logical direct object, and logical indirect object. Examples can be substantiated to discuss the interpersonal function of language in the short story selected by analysing mood, person, attitude, comment, and tone. Using the short stories, learners can explain the functions of language, define theme, voice, deixis, conjunction, collocation, foregrounding, deviation, and cohesion, and interpret the message of the short story using the functionalist linguistic model as proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

### **General methodological approaches and challenges**

During our interviews and focused groups discussions with teachers, we raised the following questions:

- Do you think Namibian literature in English should be part of the curriculum at all levels?
- Do you think teaching Namibian autobiographies, novels, short stories, poetry or plays by Namibian writers can be linguistically relevant?
- What are the major challenges of teaching Namibian literature in English?
- Do you have any recommendations for the teaching of Namibian literature in English at all levels?

To the first question whether they thought Namibian literature in English should be part of the curriculum at all levels, the response from all the teachers was affirmative. The justifications provided were that it would improve the learners' cognitive skills and aid their interpretation and analytical skills. In addition, the teachers felt that it would help learners to understand our society better because they can relate to the content, and this might help learners with the correct moral behaviour. Some teachers were however of the opinion that the grade 11 and 12 learners were only exposed to literature from other countries like South Africa which they cannot relate to

whilst they could have been exposed to works such as the *Purple Violet of Oshaantu*. On the other hand, the Grade 9's study *God of Women* and find it easy to relate to the words and customs that are mentioned in the play. One of the teachers opined that "we are told to be vigilant not to give topics that are too sensitive to the learners because how will it be marked by Mr Cambridge e.g., topics such as relationships between teachers and learners, domestic violence, and abuse of Namibian women". This is what books such as *God of Women* deal with. Why can't "Mr Cambridge" be questioned and why should we adhere to what he says? Our Namibian child cannot relate to e.g., war but they can relate to violence. I enjoy *God of Women* and the learners also enjoy it, so Namibian writers should be given a chance.

The second question was whether the teachers thought teaching Namibian autobiographies, novels, short stories, poetry and plays by Namibian writers can be linguistically relevant. The answer to this question was also in the affirmative from all the teachers. Most teachers felt that all the genres can be incorporated because each genre highlights a specific aspect which strengthens the learners with interpretation and analysis skills. One of the teachers opined that since learners like to be practical, plays would be a good approach to get the learners to engage. During our focused group discussions and interviews, respondents assumed that Namibian literature:

- develops four language skills;
- sharpens attitude to life;
- develops literary competence;
- helps learn Namibian culture and history;
- improves vocabulary power;
- develops personal involvement;
- improves creative thinking and develops a sharp world outlook;
- makes language learning easier;
- supports active learning methods;
- enhances communicative language teaching;
- develops independent language learning,
- boosts Namibian identity;
- creates motivation; and
- makes literature learning more systematic.

The third question pertained to the major challenges faced by the teachers concerning teaching Namibian literature in English. The

greatest challenge mentioned was the shortage of teaching materials. In addition, the teachers were not confident to teach literature because some did not have literature training and they did not know how to analyse poetry which hampers the transfer of knowledge from teacher to learner. One of the teachers believed learners did not develop reading skills at an early age, and this became a challenge at high school. Another challenge mentioned was the fact that sometimes learners were required to read literature that was unfamiliar to them, especially the content of the novels or poetry. The last question sought to solicit recommendations for the teaching of Namibian literature in English at all levels. The following were the recommendations made:

- The teachers should be trained in Namibian literature.
- Namibian literature should be combined to provide a type of analysis so that the teachers know what interpretation to pursue.
- Namibian literature is now not just integrated like before but now it is being examined, which should also be done in primary schools. This will develop the children's interest in learning literature.
- Learners are limited to reading little thus, the reading books should be increased so that learners are exposed to the writing style and different authors.
- Literature should be delivered through pedagogical stylistics approaches to the learners.

### Conclusion

A review of the Namibian English teaching curriculum and related literature shows that Namibian literature in English is not an integral part of the Namibian primary school education system at all. At the secondary level, few Namibian literary works have been included along with the European and African canonical texts. At the tertiary level, Namibian literature in English as a compulsory undergraduate course is offered to all English majors. Other university students are not expected to study English through Namibian literature although 88.4% of Namibian English teachers and lecturers agreed that Namibian literature is still linguistically relevant at all levels of language education. Only 8.7% (6 teachers) of the respondents indicated that it should not be included in the curriculum.

From a total of 69 respondents, 52 believed that including Namibian literature in the curriculum could broaden the cultural understanding of the Namibian students at various levels of education. It could widen the learners' knowledge of their cultural history, enhance the Namibian identity positively and reduce cultural conflicts due to the multicultural nature of the country. It implies that while designing school or university curriculum including Namibian texts should be one of the selection criteria as the Namibian literature is linguistically relevant.

Contrary to the popular belief that Namibian literature can't be used to teach language skills, more than 84% (59) respondents agreed that Namibian texts were fit for teaching both productive and receptive language skills at all levels. During the interviews and FGDs, however, respondents recommended that there should be proper literature selection criteria in place as some of the literary works are poorly composed. As many as 87% (60) respondents agreed that including Namibian novels in the curriculum could enhance the linguistic competence of the learners.

Compared to the other literary forms, Namibian autobiographies have continued to proliferate capturing both colonial trauma and resilience in the post-independent Namibian society. Namibian war veterans and academics prefer writing an autobiography to capture their lived colonial experiences. Looking at the mushrooming of autobiographies in Namibia, several questions can be raised by researchers in the future.

During our school visits, we observed two opposing views towards Sifiso Nyathi's "God of Women" which is the only Namibian play in the school curriculum. Many high school teachers agreed that the play was inappropriate to a high school context as it presents vulgar scenes and obscene dialogues. They often questioned the selection criteria followed. On the other hand, school learners considered it the best Namibian play as it helped them understand the multicultural nature of the Namibian society. Through the play, they could see the cultural complexities of the Namibian society, bigamy, and other traditional cultural practices in Namibia.

The justifications provided were that it would improve the learners' cognitive skills and aid their interpretation and analytical skills. In addition, the teachers felt that it might help learners to understand the Namibian

society better because they might relate to the content, and this might help learners with the correct moral behaviour.

### Recommendations

The study recommends the following:

- to advocate the inclusion of many more Namibian literary texts in the English curriculum at all levels of the Namibian education system;
- to enhance the creative capabilities of Namibian students through the inclusions of Namibian literature in English;
- to advocate the culture enhancement model to advance the pedagogic relevance of Namibian literature; and
- to inculcate the reading and writing cultures in Namibia, Namibian children's literature in English should be introduced at the lower level.

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