

Published in:

Dorothy Pokua Agyepong / Mahamadou Famanta /
Cleopatra Kundai Gota / Katarzyna Lukas (Eds.)

Teaching Transformations: Trends in Sub-Saharan Africa

AISTHESIS VERLAG

Bielefeld 2025

Illustration on the cover:

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Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Publiziert von

Aisthesis Verlag Bielefeld 2023

Oberntorwall 21, D-33602 Bielefeld

Satz: Germano Wallmann, geisterwort.de

Open Access ISBN 978-3-8498-2087-9

Print ISBN 978-3-8498-2086-2

www.aisthesis.de



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Haileleul Zeleke Woldemariam

Namibia University of Science and Technology, Windhoek

A Study of the Level of Endangerment of !Kung as Spoken in Namibia

Abstract. This study investigated the level of endangerment of !Kung (San language variant) as spoken in Corridor 17, Aranos and Amenuis localities of Namibia. The aim of the study was to protect, preserve and promote !Kung as an indigenous Namibian language and the cultural practices of its users. The study team conducted in-depth interviews, focus groups and distributed questionnaires and collected and later digitized 39 cultural expressions at the Namibian University of Science and Technology (NUST) library. The study team managed to study 41 households in !Kung speaking settlement areas only. The study concluded that !Kung is vulnerable, meaning although most children speak the language, it has been restricted to home domains. Outside these localities, there are noticeable indicators that !Kung is endangered, meaning children no longer learn the language as a 'mother tongue' at school level and the number of its users has dwindled. In order to revitalise !Kung and the culture, this study recommends seven strategies: 1) revitalizing !Kung and the culture through teaching !Kung folklore, 2) training !Kung speaking research assistants and teachers to utilise the existing San research outcomes, 3) contextualising and teaching !Kung historical narratives in the context of primary instruction, 4) introducing and promoting !Kung indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and herbal life in !Kung classes; 5) organising !Kung story telling events at Chief Sofia Jakobs Primary School, 6) integrating !Kung folk art, folk songs, and traditional games in the !Kung instruction; 7) transforming !Kung endangered cultural practices into theatrical productions. In line with these linguistic and ethnographic strategies, the study also strongly recommends that the Namibian Ministry of Education introduce !Kung as a medium of primary instruction and as a subject in Corridor 17, 18, Amenuis and Aranos localities of Namibia. The language can be accorded with the status of endangered Namibian language which can be preserved, protected, promoted and revitalized.

Key words: language endangerment, cultural subjugation, cultural expressions, preserving, promoting, and protecting endangered languages/cultures and !Kung coming of age ritual

1. Background of the study

The various studies reviewed thus far have indicated that there are approximately 27,000 San people living in Namibia. The San have inhabited Southern Africa for at least 30,000 years; proof of this habitation is the wealth of rock art which can be found in numerous locations throughout these countries. Estimations might vary, but there are probably around 17,000 speakers of !Kung (San variety) in Southern Africa. Counting is a difficult task because speakers are scattered on farms, interspersed with speakers of other languages, but Brenzinger¹ counts 9,000 in Namibia, 2,000 in Botswana, 3,700 in South Africa and 1,000 in Angola. Immediately after the Namibian independence in 1990, elders in Namibia told us that nearly 3000 !Kung people left Namibia with the South African army as some were taken to be defectors, conspirators, and envoys locally. Brenzinger assumes that in Namibia, up to 400 of !Kung people live in resettlement schemes, i. e., Ekoka (185), Onamatadiva (132), Oshana-Shiwa (85) and Eendobe (62).² The P3ICL team conducted focused group discussions with the San elders in Tsumkwe in 2019 in which elders listed the places where !Kung speaking people are living currently, including Eastern Otjozondjupa, Eastern Kavango, Gobabis district, Grootfontein, Tsintsabis, Omatako, Okongo, Ekoka, Mangetti Dune, Rundu, Tsumkwe, Mpungo, around Etosha park, including settlement areas such as Corridor 15, 17 and 18, Amenues and Aranos. The current study aimed at assessing the status of !Kung as spoken in Corridor 17 and 18, Aranos and Amenues localities of Namibia. With the objective to contribute ideas to the revitalisation of both !Kung language and culture, this article recommends seven strategies.

1.1 Problem Statement

The focused group discussions with the San elders in Tsumkwe and the review of related literature thereafter show that several previous studies

1 Matthias Brenzinger. "The Twelve Modern Khoisan Languages". Khoisan languages and linguistics. Proceedings of the 3rd international symposium, July 6-10, 2008, Riezlern/Kleinwalsertal. Ed. Alena Witzlack-Makarevich/Martina Ernszt. Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe, 2013. P. 139-161.

2 Ibid.

focused on either San languages or modern Khoisan languages in general. In several empirical studies, these studies of the San languages of Namibia presented the languages as Khoisan families. The debate about the classification of San languages as San or Khoisan is still fresh and boiling amongst the European Khoisanists. Locally in Namibia, however, these languages are treated differently as San and clearly separated from Nama and Damara studies (Khoekhoegowab studies). The untimely separation and the divorce between San and Khoe languages appear to be clear and complete now in the Namibian primary mother tongue instruction contexts as Khoekhoegowab (KKG) is the medium of primary instruction in areas like Keetmanshoop, Karasburge and Mareintal. Some of the instructional materials approved for the education of KKG as a medium of instruction cannot be used for the education of San children in Omaheke, Hardap or Otjozondjupa regions as !Kung is a language of its own. In Tsumkwe area, elders told us that Jul'hoasi has been raised to the level of primary instruction in Tsumkwe only. We also noticed that the grouping of these San languages as dialects or language clusters has not yet ended. This current study acknowledges the contribution of the previous Khoisan linguists and assumes that these previous studies can open doors for the education of San children and the revitalisation of San languages in Namibia. The language debate should continue and remain vibrant. However, the San languages as spoken in Namibia have not been studied as distinct language groups.

San elders interviewed in Tsumkwe consider the speakers of !Kung (!Xun), Jul'hoasi and Taa (!Xoo) as pure San due to the hunting, foraging, and herding culturally shared practices although the speakers of these languages are not mutually intelligible. What is shared among these San languages in Namibia is the cultural similarity and the clicks. Though these languages are not mutually intelligible, some academic resources and teaching materials developed for other San variants such as Jul'hoasi in Tsumkwe can be adapted and translated into !Kung and introduce !Kung as the medium of instruction for !Kung speakers of Namibia.

In few observations, the current cultural practices of the !Kung people have been ignored and detached from the linguistic mapping and classification of Khoisan studies. Are the !Kung people of Namibia still hunters-gatherers-foragers or have they joined cattle herding and farming under the protection of the Namibian government, the Ovambo and Ovaherero ethnic groups? Do the !Kung people now live a hybrid and blended tribal lifestyle in Namibia? Our observations in Amenues, Aranos and some areas of Corridors 17, 15 and 18 show that the !Kung people have become

even commercial vegetable farmers and farm assistants working with the rich Ovaherero and Ovambo cattle herders. Consequently, language shift with the San community is clearly observable. Leaving behind !Kung, people in these areas started shifting to Ovaherero and Oshiwambo for survival reasons. Counting the speakers of !Kung is a cumbersome exercise in Namibia because speakers are scattered on farms, interspersed with speakers of Oshiwambo, Otjiherero and Afrikaans and other minority languages in Namibia resulting in cultural loss and language shift. !Kung children are exposed to these languages as mother tongue instructions at various levels of schooling.

Although the speakers of minority languages in Namibia have a deep attachment to their cultural identity, root and history embedded in their languages, researchers argue that these marginalised and endangered languages themselves have proved to be unmaintainable for economic, political, and academic reasons. Literacy may not be best achieved through a first three-four years in the mother tongue, say for example, !Kung as a medium of primary instruction in Corridor 17, 18 and Amenues and Aranos in Omaheke, Hardap and Otjozondjupa regions. The problems that haunt African mother tongue instruction programmes are about the nature of institutional structures that work to disempower their clients, by reinforcing tendencies to marginality of minority languages and speakers already prevalent in outside society.³ The low population density can lead to the death of languages.⁴ The language shift that takes place because of economic factors and political decisions in Namibia and the emphasis given to English, Oshiwambo, Afrikaans and Otjiherero will endanger and marginalise all other San languages⁵ and other minority languages. This current study problematises that both !Kung as a San variant and the cultural practices of the people have been vulnerable

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- 3 Christopher Stroud. "Mother-tongue Programmes and the Politics of Language: Linguistic Citizenship versus Linguistic Human Rights". *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 22 (4) (2001): p. 339-355. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434630108666440>.
 - 4 Niklaas Fredericks. "Language Shift or Maintenance: Accounting for the Linguistic Vitality of Khoekhoegowab". *NAWA Journal of Language and Communication* Vol. 9 (2) (2016): p. 77-94.
 - 5 James Suzman. *An Assessment of the Status of the San in Namibia (Regional Assessment of the Status of the San in Southern Africa. Report Series. Report No. 4 of 5)*. Windhoek: Legal Assistance Centre, 2001. <https://www.lac.org.na/projects/lead/Pdf/sannami.pdf>.

and marginalised and proposes linguistic and ethnographic strategies to revitalise both the culture and the language.

1.2 Objectives of !Kung P3ICL Research Project

This study aims at determining the level of endangerment of !Kung as spoken in Namibia. Therefore, the main objective is to ascertain both the level of endangerment of this variety and the ethnolinguistic vitality of the language and the culture. The study will also assist the preservation of the cultural expressions of the !Kung people by setting up a repository in the library with an open access for researchers and interested stakeholders, co-design contemporary theatrical productions and enhance policy awareness about the !Kung culture through the dissemination of information and advocacy with a view to promote cultural unity and diversity in Namibia. Therefore, in this study, the P3ICL refers to protecting, promoting and preserving !Kung culture and language in the Namibian context.

2.1 A Brief Review of Empirical Research and Policy Framework

UNESCO⁶ (2005) argues for the need to recognise linguistic diversity in society to promote cultural diversity, which is necessary for a full realisation of human rights and fundamental freedom. In this connection, Namibia adopted UNESCO's 2003 Convention⁷ for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. The Namibian Arts and Culture Policy is using these conventions as a framework for implementation. On the second note, it is worth mentioning that the Juba Language in Education Conference recommended three principles as follows:

- First, linguistic equity is needed so that all languages are protected, respected, and developed.
- Second, African languages to be used in partnership with international languages, and,

6 UNESCO. The 2005 Convention on The Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Paris, 20 October 2005. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000142919>.

7 UNESCO. Language Vitality and Endangerment. Paris, 10-12 March 2003. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000183699>.

- Finally, effective teaching with a socially and culturally relevant curriculum as the most important element of quality education and therefore it should be implemented in all African countries.⁸

Several empirical, ethnographic, and linguistic studies have confirmed that many of the Khoisan languages in the Southern Africa have not been protected, respected, raised and developed to the level of primary instructions. Some are critically endangered; others are either moribund or dead and few are vibrant. In line with this observation, Chebanne⁹ presents that Khoisan languages are underresearched, and the existing publications are divergent, and not accessible to the Khoisan communities as many of the speakers of these minority languages are not educated. While some anthropologists, linguists, and a few community organizations have contributed to the development of language resources, as yet these efforts have not had the desired effect. The reasons are that the publications used to implement impractical linguistic writing conventions or that no supportive programmes exist to encourage more focused and purposeful research and language promotion through literacy classes. Similarly, Hitchcock et al.¹⁰ testified that while many San people still experience injustice and cultural loss, this is tempered by success stories, examples of political mobilization, and a new spirit of community resistance.

More persuasively, Chebanne¹¹ argues that the Khoisan marginalisation is historical, resulting in the Khoisan languages not featuring in education and language development. Chebanne further argues that since the name San has the marginalized communities' approval, it could be used advisedly to obviate the historical prejudices associated with it or with some of the communities. The term 'Khoisan' is now generally accepted as a common reference for the combined Khoe (those speaking Khoekhoe languages) and

8 Hamish McIlwraith (Ed.). *Multilingual Education in Africa: Lessons from the Juba Language-in-Education Conference*. London: British Council, 2013. P. 7. https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/C413%20Juba%20Publication_FINAL_WEB%20ONLY%20v3.pdf.

9 Andy Chebanne. "The Role of Dictionaries in the Documentation and Codification of African Languages: The Case of Khoisan". *Lexikos* 20 (AFRILEX-reeks/series 20: 2010): p. 92-108. <https://doi.org/10.5788/20-0-134>.

10 Robert K. Hitchcock/Kazunobu Ikeya/Megan Biesele/Richard B. Lee. "Introduction: Updating the San, Image and Reality of an African People in the Twenty First Century". *Senri Ethnological Studies* Vol. 70 (2006): p. 1-42.

11 Chebanne. *The Role of Dictionaries* (as note 9). P. 92.

San (those speaking non-Khoekhoe languages).¹² As presented in the table 1 below, Heine and König¹³ show that !Kung is spoken in southern Angola, northern and north-eastern Namibia, and north-western Botswana. These researchers have persuasively justified that the speakers of the various dialects of !Kung at the extreme ends of the chain do not understand one another. They have identified between twelve and fifteen dialects. They have also argued that the !Xun speakers of central Angola do not understand !Xun speakers of eastern Namibia or north-western Botswana. Even the dialects presumed to be closely interrelated are not mutually intelligible. This argument has been substantiated with empirical data. These researchers reasoned that all !Xun varieties that have come to their notice thus far were linked by some chain of mutual intelligibility and they preferred to treat the various speech forms as a single, even if complex, language.¹⁴

Dialect label	Own name	Where spoken
N1	<i>!xuun</i> or <i>kúándò !xuun</i> ('Kwando !Xun')	Southeastern Angola
N2	<i>!o huj</i> ('Forest !Xun')	Eastern half of central Angola
W1	<i>!xúún</i> or <i>!áilè !xòán</i> ('Valley !Xun')	Ecnhana District, northern Namibia
W2	<i>!xúún</i> or <i>!ákhòè !xòán</i> ('Kwanyama !Xun')	Ecnhana District, northern Namibia
W3	<i>!xúún</i>	Tsintsabis, Tsumeb District, northern Namibia
K	<i>!xúún</i> ⁹⁾	Western Rundu District, northern Namibia, and adjacent areas of Angola
C1		Tsumeb District, northern Namibia
C2		Grootfontein District, northern Namibia
E1	<i>ju-/hoan(-si)</i>	Tsumkwc District, northeastern Namibia, and adjacent parts of Botswana
E2	<i>!xun, ju-/hoa(-si)</i>	Around Dikundu ⁹⁾ , western Caprivi Strip, northeastern Namibia
E3	<i>ju-/hoan(-si)</i> or <i>!xun</i> or <i>+x'áò-//àèn</i> ('northern people')	Gobabis District, eastern Namibia

Table 1. The Dialects of !Xun

12 Ibid. P. 93.

13 Bernd Heine/Christa König. The !Xun Language: A Dialect Grammar of Northern Khoisan. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe, 2015.

14 Ibid. P. 7.

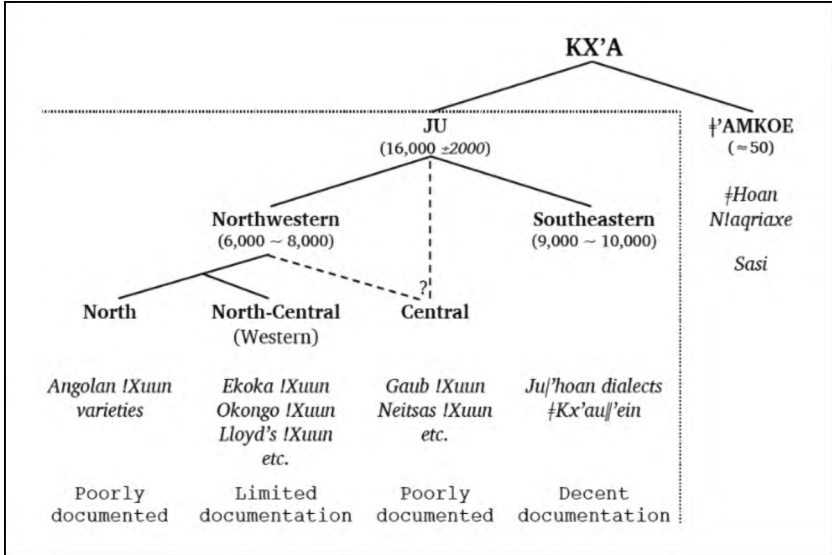


Fig 1: Cumulative Summary of the Number of Speakers¹⁵

In line with the empirical evidence as presented in the table and figures above, this study has also assumed that !Kung belongs to the Kxá family and is more related to the Jul’hoasi as spoken in Tsumkwe. As Jul’hoasi has reached the level of the medium of instruction in Tsumkwe localities, similar practices can be shared through translations and exchange of experts. All in all, the brief review of empirical studies above and policy frameworks, as well as the consultations with experts in the field revealed that !Kung language is vulnerable and marginalised in Namibia. This study also assumes that !Kung is not a dialect.

15 Bernd Heine/Henry Honken. “The Kx’a Family: A New Khoisan Genealogy”. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 79 (2010): p. 5-36. Here p. 8.

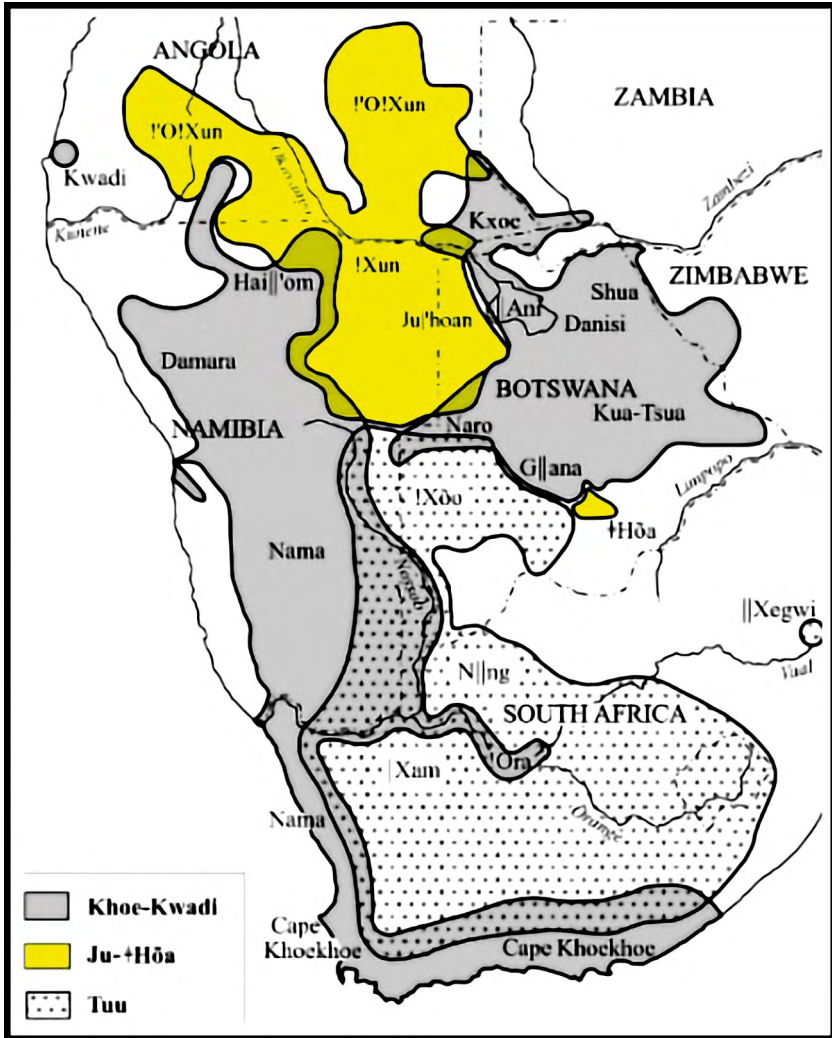


Fig 2. The Distribution of !Kung in SADC¹⁶

16 Ibid.

2.2 A Conceptual Framework

This current study followed UNESCO's Language Vitality and Endangerment Questionnaire (2003)¹⁷ as the main research instrument and assessed the level of the endangerment of !Kung. This task was very important. Secondly, in line with the Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT) of Giles, Bourhis and Taylor¹⁸, the study team consulted !Kung elders and proposed strategies of the revitalization of !Kung language and culture. EVT tenets which can be summarised as "perceived strength differential, intergroup distance, utilitarianism and intergroup discordance"¹⁹ can be followed to revitalise !Kung culture and language. Giles, Bourhis and Taylor²⁰ developed a three-level structural analysis to investigate the vitality of a variety and its speakers: status, demography, and institutional support. These three variables allow an ethnolinguistic group to survive and behave as an active, collective, and distinctive group in intergroup situations and ensure the survival of a variety.

Thirdly, the other focus of the study was not only meant to describe the level of endangerment but to come up with strategies of advocacy for the status and the inclusion of !Kung as the medium of instruction and as a subject at primary level in Namibia. Therefore, in addition to the Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory, this study also followed Linguistics Citizenship (LC) Theory in order to promote and protect !Kung language and culture in the Namibian context. LC guided the advocacy and inclusivity argument of the P3ICL project.

In line with Heine and Honken's classification²¹ of !Kung as a !Kxá language family, the current study has followed Linguistic Citizenship (LC) theoretical framework as the theory that offered the research team both the sociopolitical and theoretical rationales for an integrative view of language policy and planning in the context of education, combining an academic and social analysis of language political issues that can support a transformative approach to issues of language and democracy in the Namibian educational

17 <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/00120-EN.pdf>.

18 Howard Giles/Richard Y. Bourhis/D.M. Taylor. "Towards a Theory of Language in Ethnic Group Relations". *Language, Ethnicity, and Intergroup Relations*. Ed. Howard Giles. London: Academic Press, 1977. P. 307-348.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Heine/Honken. *The Kx'a Family* (as note 15).

context. Basically, the theory addresses the very real materiality of language in minority politics by attending to the fact that linguistic minorities suffer from both structural and valuational discrimination.²² LC has given us the following guiding principles:

- Marginal language communities participate in the design and the implementation of their own language provisions.
- The sociopolitical rights and obligations should in fact follow from, and be defined by, the representations, practices and ideologies of language and society that circumscribe communities of speakers in their everyday associational networks, or 'sites of mediation.'
- The legitimacy of main-stream, majority speaking, official-language society to delimit and characterize language practices solely in terms of formal and public spheres has been criticized.
- The notion of linguistic citizenship links language, subject position, and issues of redistribution by looking at language as a political and social concept firmly into discourses of welfare and equity.
- The term 'linguistic citizenship' captures the idea that representations of citizens as speakers and members of speech communities also carry political implications.
- Linguistic citizenship denotes the situation where speakers themselves exercise control over their language, deciding what languages are, and what they may mean, and where language issues (especially in educational sites) are discursively tied to a range of social issues – policy issues and questions of equity.²³

In line with these guiding tenets from the two theories, the research team designed the research tools and conducted the study. Following the tenets of the theories, the team assessed the living situation of !Kung speakers, evaluated their power and control over their language, investigated their roles in the preservation of their own language, and what !Kung may mean, and where language issues are. Both LT and ERT theories guided the research team to advocate the revitalization of !Kung as an endangered indigenous Namibian language and its inclusion in the primary school contexts of the Namibian schools.

22 Stroud. *Mother-tongue Programmes* (as note 3). P. 350.

23 *Ibid.* P. 339-355.

3. Research Methods and Procedures

Following a participatory research design below, the P3ICL team made the first trip to Tsumkwe San settlement area in Otjozondjupa region on 24 May 2019 and conducted focused group discussions (FGD). The aim of the first FGD conducted in Tsumkwe was to find out the most endangered San language and culture in Namibia. San elders who joined us for the FGD recommended !Kung as one of the less studied San languages and advised the team to visit !Kung homesteads in Corridor 17, 18, Amenues and Aranos. The second trip to Corridor 17 and 18 of the Omaheke Region of Namibia was made in the last week of May 2019. Accompanied by an EU delegation, the study team decided on a third trip to Amenuis and Aranos between 22-26 November 2019. The team conducted twelve FGDs and identified critically endangered cultural practice of the people: !Kung Ritual for Womanhood. During the same trip, the team followed UNESCO’s Language Vitality and Endangerment Questionnaire (UNESCO 2003) to determine the status of the language.

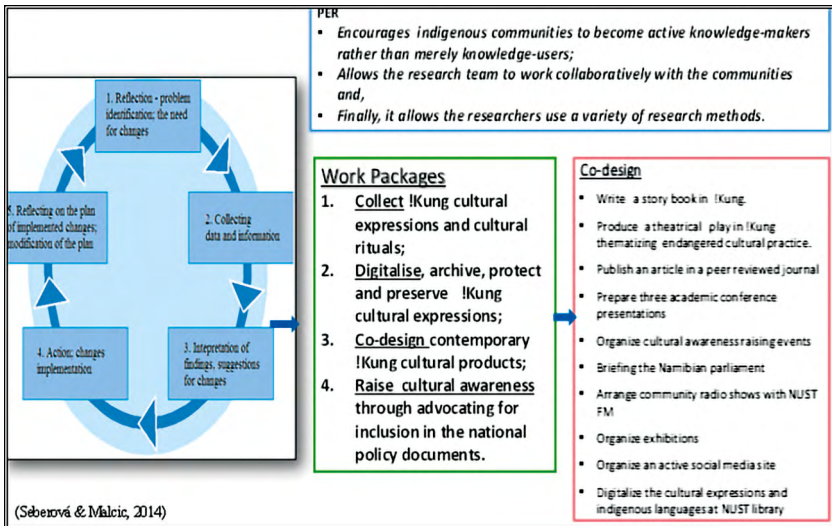


Fig 3: Participatory Ethnographic Research (PER) Design

Trip four was made on 26 March 2020 for the first theatrical production of !Kung ritual for womanhood. The team concluded the entire field work in July 2021. During these four trips and consultations, thereafter in 2022, the team managed to study 41 households and collected 37 cultural expressions such as folktales, proverbs, legends, fable, folk songs, jokes, myths, riddle, and stories of superstition following a participatory ethnographic research (PER) design²⁴ conceptualised in Fig. 3.

In line with a multi-method approach above, !Kung community members participated actively in storytelling events, identified the most endangered cultural practices, performed and recorded folk dances and took the lion's share in the production of the first theatrical play *Womanhood in !Kung Culture*. The team observed interactions, collected instructional materials, interviewed elders, and distributed questionnaire to find out the level of !Kung endangerment. !Kung elders were interviewed on the revitalisation strategies of their own language.

4. Major Findings and Discussions

4.1 Level of Endangerment

The P3ICL study team was tasked to determine the status of !Kung as spoken in corridors 17 and 18, Aranos and Amenues in Namibia. The team framed a few questions to guide the basic stream of the field work. Is !Kung endangered or vulnerable in the Namibian context? How should we revive the language if it is endangered or vulnerable? Which !Kung cultural practice is the most endangered in the country? How should we revive an endangered cultural practice? The team also considered UNESCO's classification system which shows how 'in trouble' the language is:

1. Vulnerable – most children speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains (e. g., home).
2. Definitely endangered – children no longer learn the language as a 'mother tongue' at home.
3. Severely endangered – the language is spoken by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may understand it, they do not speak it to children or among themselves.

24 Alena Seberová/Martin Malčík. "Information System 'Diagnostic' as a Tool of Action Research". *ICTE journal* 3 (1) (2014): p. 57-65. <https://periodicals.osu.eu/ictjournal/dokumenty/2014-01/ictjournal-2014-1-article-5.pdf>.

4. Critically endangered – the youngest speakers are grandparents and older, and they speak the language partially and infrequently.
5. Extinct – there are no speakers left.²⁵

In line with these guiding principles, it can be concluded that !Kung is in danger as its speakers might cease to use it. An observable language shift exists which requires further investigation. Several speakers of !Kung have been shifting to speaking Otjiherero, Oshiwambo, Afrikaans and English, even using these languages as their mother tongues and not just as medium of instruction. Due to extreme poverty and lack of access to native language instructions, !Kung people will continue to live marginalized. Within the context of Corridor 17 and 18, Amenues and Aranós localities of Namibia, !Kung is vulnerable²⁶ – most children speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains (e. g., home). Outside these localities, there are visible indications that the language is endangered which means children no longer learn the language as a ‘mother tongue’ at home. The P3CL team managed to study only 41 households in !Kung settlement areas. A large sample size might be needed to make a conclusive generalization. The !Kung people use their language in an increasingly reduced number of communicative domains and might cease to pass it on from one generation to the next though there are new speakers. The extinction of !Kung might result in loss of !Kung cultural identities, !Kung knowledge systems, and the variety of data needed to understand the structure of !Kung in the mind. More broadly, the intangible heritage of the !Kung community in Namibia might be diminished when the language disappears. Since language is closely linked to culture, loss of language almost always is accompanied by social and cultural disruptions. There exists negligible support from NGOs to upgrade !Kung language and cherish cultural practices as compared to other indigenous languages in Namibia. Children are not taught !Kung in schools, and many do not know how to write and read it. (As in 2019, there were only two Namibian teachers and one German linguist who could write in !Kung.) San people are not serious with the language and parents do not teach the children. !Kung people are highly scattered.

In the section below, data collected through the questionnaire have been summarised and presented.

25 <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2011/apr/15/language-extinct-endangered>.

26 The Guardian. (2021). Endangered Languages: the Full List <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2011/apr/15/language-extinct-endangered>.

4.1.2 Age, Gender and Qualification

As presented in the graphs below, 21 male and 19 female respondents completed the survey questionnaire and over 70% of the respondents aged above 40 years. Purposively, we targeted the elderly community members with the assumption that they were the repositories of the culture and language.

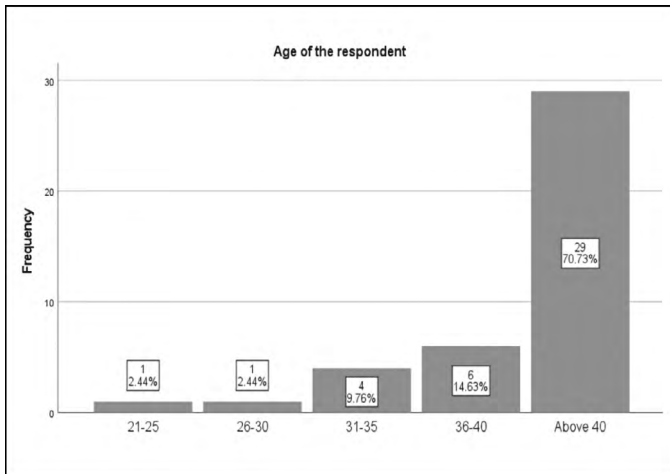


Fig 4: Age of the Respondents

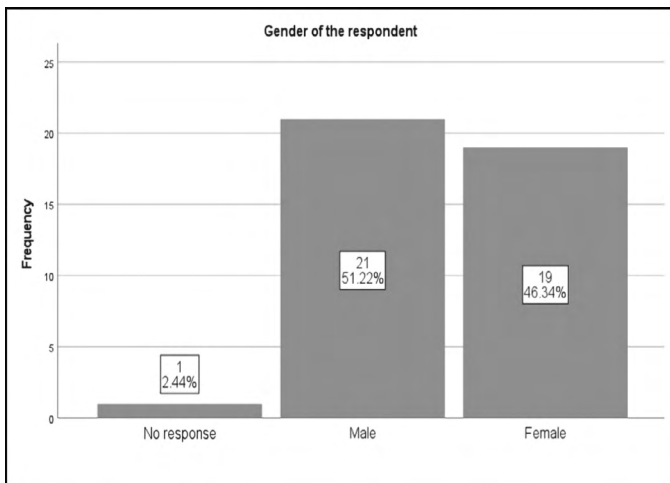


Fig 5: Gender Distribution

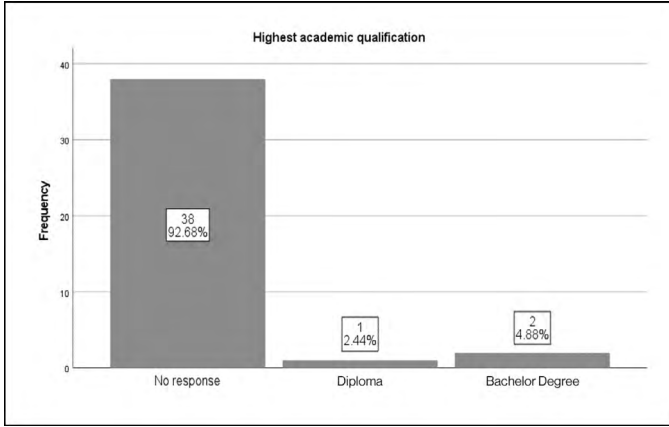


Fig 6: Academic Qualifications of Respondents

4.1.3 Level of Endangerment

As the figure 7 shows, !Kung elders assume that their own language is critically at huge risk. Specifically, 29.3% (twelve) of the respondents think that !Kung has already vanished, 7.3% (three) assume the language is critically endangered, 12.2% (five) severely endangered, 9.8% (four) definitely endangered, 17.1% (seven) unsafe, 17.1% (seven) safe and only 7.3% (three) remained silent.

4.1.4 Domestic Use of !Kung

Five !Kung speaking research assistants unpacked the status of the language at home level and translated the cultural expressions we collected from !Kung into English. The language is at home domains and for many functions, but the dominant languages including Oshiwambo, Otjiherero, Afrikaans and English begin to penetrate even home domains. As presented in the figure 8, 12.2% (five) !Kung speaking respondents assume that the language is highly limited to home use, 4.9% (two) formal domain, 9.8% (four) dwindling domain, 19.5% (eight) multilingual parity, 51.2% (twenty-one) universal use and 2.4% (one) gave no response to this question.

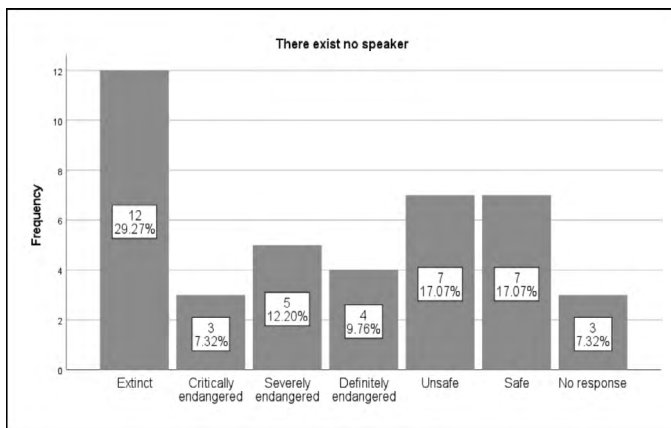


Fig 7: Endangerment

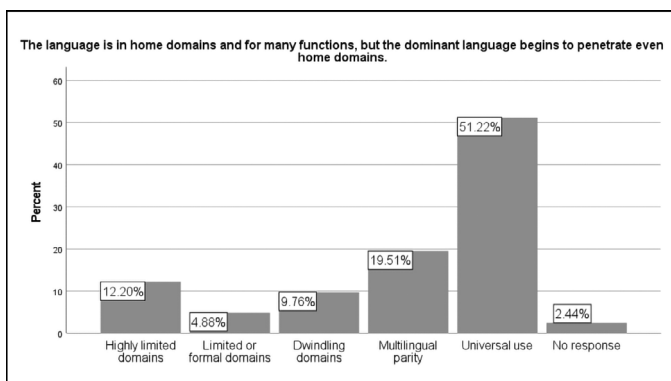


Fig 8: !Kung at Home Domains

4.1.5 !Kung Education at Primary School Level

The study team visited Chief Sofia Primary School in Corridor 17 of the Omaheke Region of Namibia and found out a total of 142 ethnically !Kung speaking learners who are exposed to either Oshiwambo or Otjiherero as the medium of instruction. With the assistance from a German professor of linguistics, the !Kung community managed to design a dictionary, mathematics and science teaching materials. However, the community does not have any

mandate to benefit from these materials yet. The dictionary is meant for business. Therefore, as the graph 9 briefly presents, literacy education in !Kung is not part of the school's primary curriculum yet. !Kung is not the medium of mother tongue instruction even where !Kung population is relatively high. In order to revitalise both the language and culture, formal institutional support is needed.

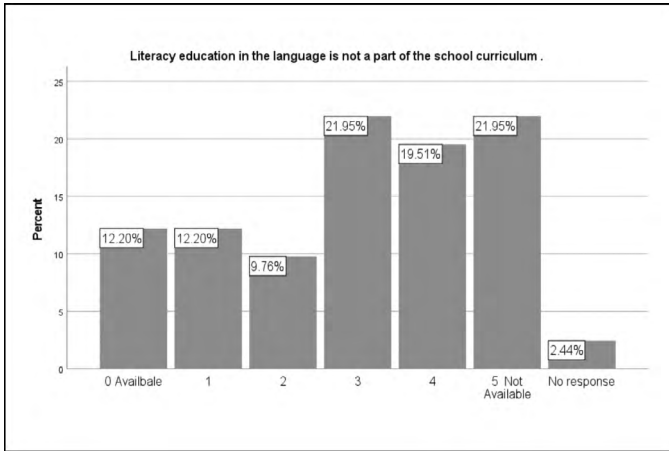


Fig 9: Literacy Education in !Kung

4.1.6 Orthography Accessible to !Kung Community

As indicated in the previous section, the German professor of linguistics developed a dictionary with a research support from five !Kung speaking teachers, three teaching materials exist in Corridor 17 and 18 areas of the Omaheke Region. With a formal support from the Government of Namibia and the Regional Council, the dictionary and teaching materials should be availed to the community. However, as expressed in the two charts below, many members of the community do not have access to the orthography yet.

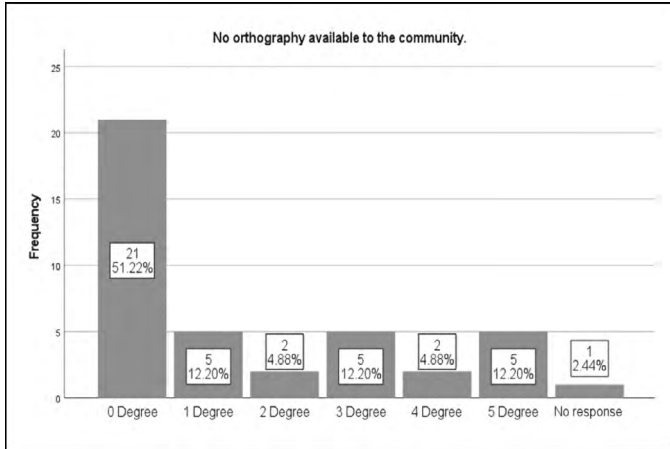


Fig 10: !Kung Orthography

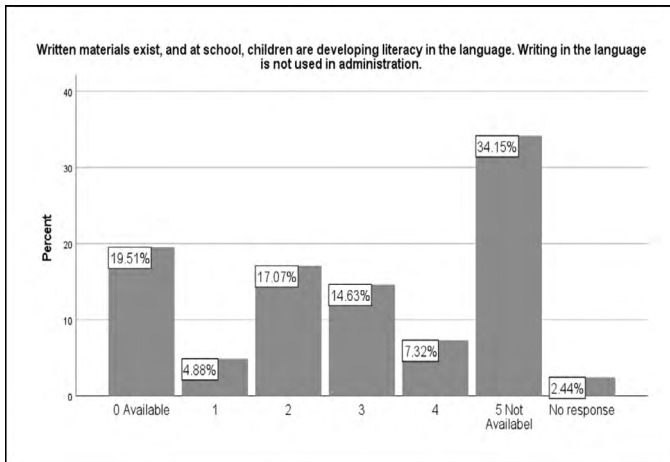


Fig 11: Written Material in !Kung

4.1.7 Challenges Facing !Kung in Namibia

When asked (through translators) to describe the challenges facing !Kung as a language, elders stated the following problems:

- We are afraid of losing our language, culture, and identity. The language has not been monitored and evaluated for its academic and official relevance yet.
- The relationship between each dialect/variety of the San languages has not been determined yet. Some San language practices are common and transferable for the purpose of teaching the San languages in Namibia. There is no support from NGOs to upgrade the language nor the tradition.
- Our children have not been taught in schools their own language and how to write and read it. You will find very few San students in the University these days. San people are not serious with the language and parents stopped teaching their kids.
- San people do not teach nor talk to their kids about their old tradition and culture. San people are copying other traditions due to survival reasons. Both the language and the people are highly scattered.
- There is no support to upgrade any language and tradition. That is why San languages are fast dying natural death. There are only two teachers who can write in !Kung. Almost all !Kung speaking people do not know how to write it.

4.2 Strategies to Revitalise !Kung Language and Culture

4.2.1 Teaching !Kung Folklore through Formal Institutional Support

The P3ICL research team collected 39 cultural expressions of the !Kung people and published a story book in July 2021 in !Kung with a strong plan to create opportunities for developing learning materials, for instance, enabling parents of !Kung speaking learners and/or schools to teach their children !Kung folktales from their traditional culture through story books, teach them proverbs and finally, introduce them to traditional songs and folk dance. Some of the cultural expressions narrated to us for recording and publishing in the story book include *how the !Xoo were created by God, the story of late legendary Chief Sofia, the elephant and jackal, the weak lion, the ostrich and the eland, the chameleon's story, hunting, healing, foraging, the past, burial*

ceremony, the first menstruation and giving birth. Some of these stories are endemic to the !Kung culture. During the study, elders were also asked to narrate other traditional folklore inclusive of proverbs, folktales, folk songs, jokes, legends, myths, riddles, and superstitions and other cultural expressions including their meanings. The cultural products and the expressions can be available in the community libraries and schools in the localities where !Kung is widely spoken. In some cases, focused group discussions were conducted to enhance attitudes, practices, policies, and structures concerning the protection, preservation, and promotion of the cultural expressions of the people. Reviving !Kung through teaching folklore can be one main strategy.

4.2.2 Training !Kung speaking research assistants to utilise the existing San research

With the plan to revitalise !Kung culture and language, the P3ICL team assessed the existing materials and research resources for !Kung education and literacy in Corridor 17 and 18 of the Omaheke region in May 2019. In many situations, the research publications or products are not accessible to the rural community and must have been shelved or sold somewhere. We raised two questions: Is there an established !Kung orthography, literacy tradition with grammar, dictionaries, texts, literature, and everyday media in these localities? Is writing in the language used in administration and education? We were informed that the dictionaries and textbooks in !Kung have not been made accessible to the community in these localities. Draft teaching materials were given to few teachers. The community established a Committee for Language Development (CLD) in Corridor 17. The committee submitted a proposal asking the Omaheke Regional Governor to sanction !Kung primary instruction in Corridor 17. The second method of reviving !Kung, therefore, can be exposing !Kung speaking research assistants and teachers to benefit from the existing San research and publication through government support.

4.2.3 Contextualising !Kung historical narratives in the primary instruction curriculum

During an interview with !Kung speaking chief in Corridor 15, our team raised the following questions: Within the !Kung community in Corridor 17/18/15, do social, political, and economic factors threaten the plurality of identities and cultural expressions? For !Kung people, are identities and cultural expressions strongly being reshaped by globalisation and the information and technology revolution? Do you think the impact of globalisation and information technologies could lead to the possible extinction or impairment to the cultural expressions of the !Kung people in these Corridors? Are there best practices to preserve, protect and promote the cultural expressions of your own people? How can we enhance the cultural awareness of !Kung in Namibia and Southern Africa? Are !Kung locally endangered or threatened? If yes, how? What kind of moral and economic support should be provided to individuals and institutions promoting !Kung folklore? How do we bring positive changes of knowledge and attitude of other Namibians towards !Kung cultural expressions and language? How do we increase institutional capacity on indigenous cultures and languages of the San people in general? Are you San or Khoi? Are you related to Namas and Damaras culturally? How do we ensure San cultures and languages are an integral part of the developmental agenda of the government of Namibia? What do you suggest protecting and promoting !Kung cultural expressions, identities and subsequently, human rights in Namibia adequately?

In many of his answers, the !Kung Chief argued that both the !Kung culture and language are marginalised and now endangered. Due to the hunting law in Namibia, they cannot hunt certain animals to feed their families. The only option for the !Kung people in these localities is to work as cattle herders for Ovaherero and Ovambo tribes. Many of his folks keep on foraging, and many survive on Government subsidies on seasonal basis. Historically, he argued that the !Kung people have been genetically linked to Naro, Nama and Haillom though they are not mutually intelligible. Due to the internal fights for greener pastures, fertile land and colonialism, they practice different cultures and speak different languages. Due to the fear of victimization and marginalization locally, many !Kung people followed the South African army in 1989 and migrated to SA. The most fertile land has always been grabbed and the people are pushed to the forests and the Kalahari deserts still today. Our research team suggests a further study of the !Kung culture and history to revive both the language and the culture.

4.2.4 Promoting !Kung indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and herbal life in !Kung classes

The traditional healers interviewed at Corridor 15 indicated that the !Kung people have been well known for curing sexual impotence, stomach-ache, malaria, coughs, diarrhoea, vomiting, snakebites, chest pains and flu.²⁷ There are also some 'success' stories of herbs for treating HIV/AIDS (yet to be proven) in this Corridor. Medicinal plants such as the devil's claw, buffalo thorn, zebra aloe, camelthorn, mangetti and leadwood can be collected or foraged by women from the bushes for treating various types of sicknesses/illnesses. These stories of plants and healing can be collected for language teaching and reviving the !Kung culture as part of !Kung Indigenous Knowledge System. The study team has recommended the incorporation, mainstreaming, validation, acknowledgement of !Kung IKS in higher education in the Faculty of Health Sciences and Medicines, Agriculture and Nutrition and Vet Science.

4.2.5 Organising !Kung storytelling events at Chief Sofia Jakobs Primary School

After visiting Chief Sofia School in Corrido 17, the team recommended supporting !Kung elders storytelling events at the school. Through assistance from media, local radio stations can play the stories in !Kung. Elders can be invited to recount !Kung stories.

4.2.6 Integrating !Kung folk art, folk songs, and traditional games in the !Kung curriculum

Ostrich mating dance implying courtship in ostriches is a spectacular affair in San culture and folk dance. The males acquire scarlet colorings on their beaks, foreheads, necks, and shins. They chase each other around frantically in competition and dance alluringly for the females to achieve dominance. Similarly, the !Kung people form circles and perform ostrich dance holding

27 Vicky Dan/Kingo Mchombu/Alfons Mosimane. "Indigenous Medicinal Knowledge of the San People: The Case of Farm Six, Northern Namibia". *Information Development* Vol. 26 Issue 2 (2010): p. 129-140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266666910367479>.

ostrich egg and passing over the egg to the next performer. The dance form and painting can be part of the primary school curriculum in the reminiscent of folk culture.

4.2.7 Transforming !Kung endangered cultural practices into theatrical productions

In the current literature, the !Kung people have been traditionally portrayed as interdependent, seminomadic, foraging and hunting bands always moving from place to place in search of water, game animals, medicinal plants and edible fruits. With the objective of introducing the people to modern life, the Government of Namibia has planned to switch them to modern farming, herding cattle and sheep, and the children to formal education. Due to extreme cases of poverty, some joined the rich farmers and cattle herders. As a result, folks lost the culture and language. In some cases, the children are also exposed to modern city lives and modern education systems elsewhere. Many dropped out of schools as the education system has not incorporated the !Kung ways of life. Due to various factors, the !Kung culture has been endangered. During the FGDs, we often tabled seemingly common questions: Why are your cultures endangered? Which cultural practice is more at the risk? Many reported the loss of many of their cultural practices which might require further research. Emerging as a thematic issue, the P3ICL team decided to deeply study the *!Kung Female Coming of Age Ritual*, more specially how the !Kung girls handle their first menstrual cycle. Then, a play was conceptualised and written by Keamoetsi Joseph Molapong about “The Last Dance at DUSK” in June 2021 as the first theatrical production in !Kung language. During her first menstrual period, the girl is kept away from the daily routines of the family in the nearby bush nearly for a month. The play is about a story of a young !Kung speaking girl who just experienced her first menstruation and the ritual for womanhood. The story talks of the events taking place around while the ritual is being observed. It deals with a suitor’s love and a promise made at the death bed of a mother. It’s a !Kung story filled with love, passion, confrontations and eventually ends happily ever after. For the education of !Kung children and the revival of the culture and language, more cultural practices can be studied and re-produced as theatrical productions in !Kung.

5. Brief Discussions

This study agrees with Chebanne²⁸ who argued that the Khoisan marginalisation is historical, resulting in the Khoisan languages not featuring in education and language development. Chebanne further argues that since the name San has the marginalised communities' approval, it could be used advisedly to obviate the historical prejudices associated with it or with some of the communities. However, this article does not agree with the assertion that the term Khoisan is now generally accepted as a common reference for the combined Khoe (those speaking Khoekhoe languages) and San (those speaking non-Khoekhoe languages).²⁹

The current study confirms the conclusions made by Heine and König³⁰ who presented that !Kung is spoken in southern Angola, northern and north-eastern Namibia, and north-western Botswana. These researchers have persuasively justified that the speakers of the various dialects of !Kung at the extreme ends of the chain do not understand one another. This current study agrees with the recommendations made by Brown and Haihambo: "It is of cardinal importance that San people are included in critical dialogue of educational design and development with the construction of knowledge that inclusively depicts Namibia as a country with good policies and democratic and inclusive value."³¹

In congruence with the strategies recommended by other researchers, this study agrees with the following strategies for reviving !Kung language and culture as spoken in Namibia:

A. !Kung Documentation: As strongly recommended by Austin and Sallabank, !Kung must be digitalised and can exist in writing and audio-visual forms: the recording of grammar, vocabulary, and oral traditions (e.g., stories, songs, religious texts). It entails producing descriptive grammars, writing textbooks and a dictionary of the language, and it requires the establishment of a secure archive where the material can be stored once it

28 Chebanne. *The Role of Dictionaries* (as note 9). P. 92.

29 *Ibid.* P. 93.

30 Heine/König. *The !Xun Language* (as note 13).

31 Anthony Brown/Cynthy K. Haihambo. "Developmental Issues Facing the San People of Namibia: Road to De-Marginalization in Formal Education". Kazhila C. Chinsebu/Ahmad Cheikhoussef/Davis Mumbengegwi/Martha Kanda-wa-Schulz/Choshi D. Kasanda/Lawrence Kazembe (Ed.). *Indigenous Knowledge of Namibia*. Windhoek: UNAM Press, 2015. P. 311-330. Here p. 327.

is produced so that it can be accessed by future generations of speakers or scientists.³²

- B. !Kung Revitalisation: It is the process by which !Kung community, through political and educational means, attempts to increase the number of active speakers of the language. This process is also sometimes referred to as language revival or reversing language shift. Vocabulary and courses in !Kung should be available online.³³
- C. !Kung Maintenance: In congruence with UNESCO's strategy for reviving endangered languages, this study agrees with the assumption that all government support must be availed to !Kung people for the survival to be protected from outsiders who can ultimately affect the number of speakers of a language. UNESCO strides towards preventing language extinction involves promoting and supporting the language in aspects such as education, culture, communication and information and science.³⁴

6. Conclusions

Within the context of Corridor 17 and 18, Amenues and Aranos in Namibia, !Kung is vulnerable though a small number of children speak the language at home, and it is restricted to home contexts. Outside these localities, there are obvious indicators that the language is definitely endangered as children no longer speak the language as a 'mother tongue' at home. The P3CL team managed to study 41 households in !Kung settlement areas only. A large sample size might be needed. !Kung is in danger as its speakers might cease to use it. An observable language shift exists which requires further investigation. The !Kung people use their language in an increasingly reduced number of communicative domains and might cease to pass it on from one generation to the next. The extinction of !Kung might result in loss of !Kung cultural identities, !Kung knowledge systems, and the variety of data needed to understand the structure of !Kung in the mind. More broadly, the intangible heritage of the !Kung community in Namibia might be diminished when the language disappears. Since language is closely linked to culture, loss of language almost always is accompanied by social and cultural disruptions.

32 Peter K. Austin/Julia Sallabank (Ed.). *The Cambridge Handbook of Endangered Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

33 *Ibid.*

34 United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation. 2017.

The study team observed some formal support from NGOs and the local Government to upgrade !Kung language and cherish cultural practices. However, children are not taught in !Kung at schools, and many do not know how to read and write it. (As in 2019, there were only two Namibian teachers and a German linguist who could write in !Kung.) San people are not serious with the language and parents do not teach the kids due to their dire economic context. !Kung people are highly scattered due to hunting, farming for others, gathering and in some cases scavenging purposes.

Funding

The researcher acknowledges the financial support from EU under the P3ICL project at NUST during 2018-2021. Without this funding, this field work would not have been completed within the time bound.