

AN INVESTIGATION INTO INTRODUCTION OF A *POST GRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH* IN NAMIBIA

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1.1 OVERVIEW

This paper proposes an online learning programme in English Language for professional development for education professionals particularly primary and secondary school teachers in Namibia. The paper is divided into two sections. The first section will deal with the context in which this course will be developed and offered, and the second section will discuss the pedagogic issues that surround the teaching and learning of an online programme particularly as related to the environment in which it will be offered.

2.1 BACKGROUND

Namibia won its independence twenty years ago and since then has implemented an education policy which clearly states that “teaching in higher education must be organised to cultivate and sustain a culture of disciplined thinking and inquiry and to nurture a commitment to academic achievement and excellent ... For higher education to be effective, it must be linked to research and knowledge creation” (*Investing in People, Developing a Country*: 29).

Article 3 (2) of the Namibian Constitution (Republic of Namibia 1990) states that the official language shall be English and the format of education that shall be followed is “Transitional Bilingualism” with equal emphasis being placed on English and the local indigenous languages. Transitional Bilingualism can be described as the “practice of using one language as a medium of instruction to prepare for the use of another language as the medium”(Harlech-Jones:2001:32). While the Language Policy is very clear on the need to study English, it has not been able to translate it into success at the ground level. The communicative approach to language teaching was in fashion up until recently and even now teachers are floundering about in the vast sea of teaching pedagogy and methodology. Sixteen years after independence at the tertiary level we still have students who have problems with English.

Three tertiary institutions were started more than a decade ago to provide quality education to Namibians who had to go to South Africa for their graduate Studies. These institutions were: the University of Namibia, the Polytechnic of Namibia and the Windhoek College of Education. The mission and vision of the Polytechnic was to provide post-secondary education, continuing education, applied research, equal opportunities to all ethnic groups. All instructional programmes at the Polytechnic are aimed at meeting the needs of the industry, understood as the driving force of the Namibian economy.

Notwithstanding its vision and mission, the Polytechnic must work assiduously to develop, implement and revise programmes that serve and are seen to serve, both national and individual interests. The Polytechnic through its Centre for Open and Lifelong Learning (COLL) is poised to offer an instructional programme for teachers specifically in the area of English Language Teaching on distance. Ever since its inception, COLL has expanded at a tremendous rate and now has centres in ten regions out of thirteen in the country. Following is the summary of the student enrollments at the COLL centres in Namibia:

**STUDENT STATISTICS PER COURSE
1ST SEMESTER 2009**

DI	GO	KE	KM	ON	OP	OT	RU	TS	WB	TOTAL
10758	116	282	204	1050	70	319	240	230	559	28344
109	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	218
35	0	4	8	6	0	1	8	2	1	65
10	0	3	0	7	0	0	18	0	2	40
6	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
10918	116	289	213	1063	70	320	266	232	562	28674

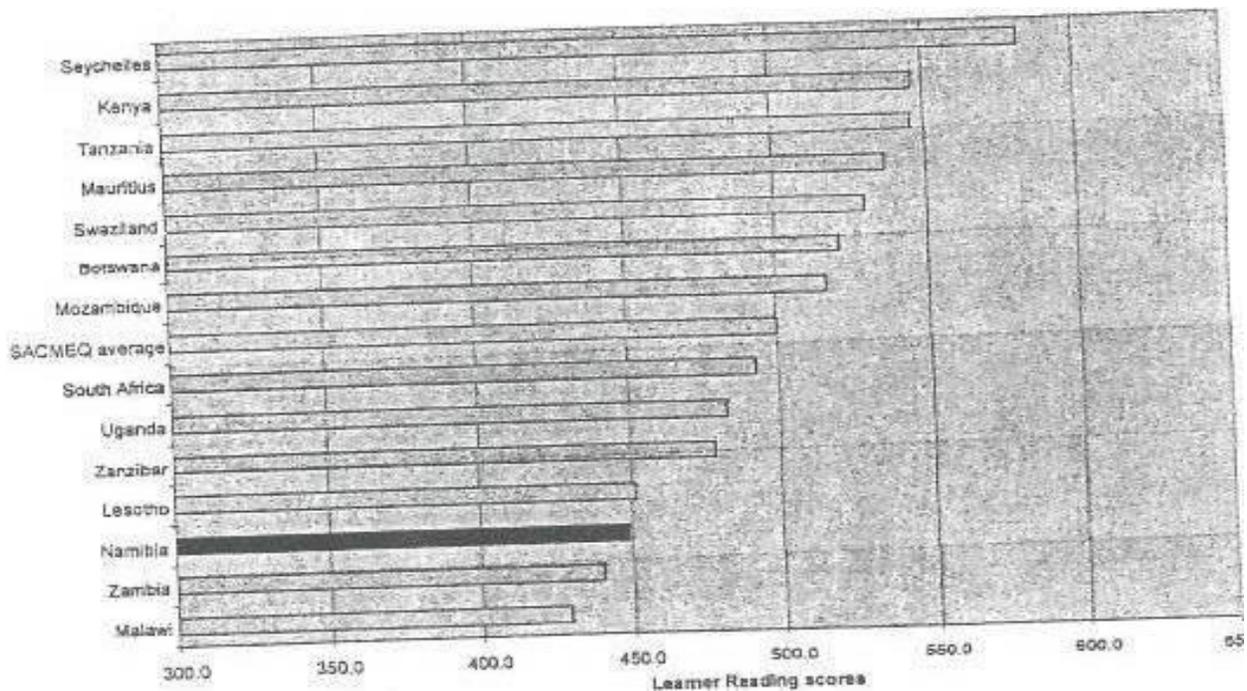
(Pl. note that the population of Namibia stands at about 1.85 million)

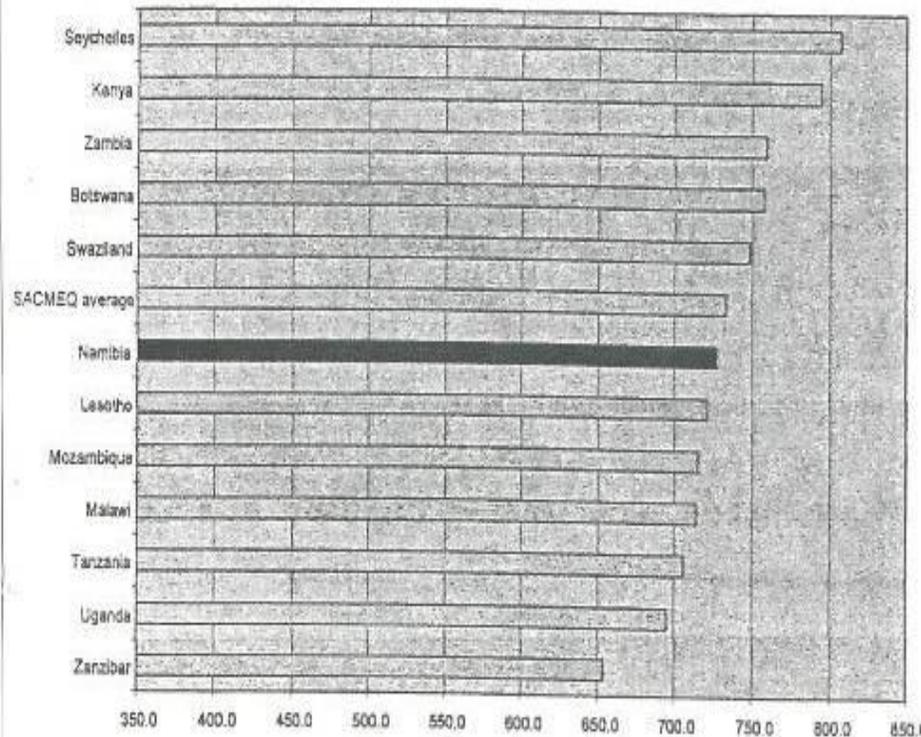
The Department of Communication can drive this programme through COLL. The department is already offering English Communication Modules 1 – 6 through distance. Modules 1 and 2 are basic English, Modules 3 and 4 deal with Academic English and in Modules 5 and 6 we teach Professional and Business Communication. At the moment

three teachers in the department offers a hybrid course in English at Module 6 level. There is sufficient depth and breadth of experience in innovative teaching pedagogy and methodology which warrants the introduction of a Post Graduate Certificate Course in the Teaching of English at the Polytechnic.

There are a number of reasons for introducing an online course as suggested above. They are:

2.1 Namibian teachers need training in both Maths and English. The SACMEQ (Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality) report which was published in 2004 after conducting extensive research on the quality of education offered in Namibia, clearly states “in reading, both Namibian learners and teachers scored below the SACMEQ means” (p: 29). It was found that only 13.6% of the teachers at Primary Level had training. In Junior Secondary Level only 9.2% of teachers had training. Senior Secondary Level the situation was better with 46.5% trained teachers. But at A levels only 17.8% of the teachers were trained.





7.2 Teacher Reading Scores by Country

2.2 Online learning can provide opportunities for professional learning at times and places convenient for the participants [for purposes of convenience and to distinguish teachers from learners, I would like to use the expression “participants” for teachers who will take up the online course]. For all the teachers, their job is the means of their livelihood and to expect them to give up the jobs for a year of full time study at Windhoek is an insurmountable problem. A distance learning programme on the other hand can offer flexibility and ample opportunity to participants to study at their own pace over a period of time. Furthermore, for many teachers the cost of this kind of a course can be spread over a longer period and therefore made more affordable as well.

2.3 The government as part of Vision 2030 has clearly stipulated goals regarding the introduction of ICT in the country. A study conducted by a Swedish Agency (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) in 2000 reveals the following:

- the ICT situation in Namibia is a very favourable one. The infrastructure has been tremendously improved in the twelve years after Independence, the number of fixed lines has doubled, the mobile network covers most of the population, the Internet can be accessed throughout the country, and 600 leased lines are in operation
- the majority of the population, however, live outside of the modern sector, and except for the (potential) access to mobile phones, they are not touched by the ICT revolution
- there are still a number of problems with Internet use in Namibia including high prices for bandwidth, and little competition to keep prices down
- Namibia needs with immediate effect a large addition to its international bandwidth. Telecom Namibia does have the financial means to effect this, but short-term profitability concerns stand in the way; more bandwidth would immediately translate into lower prices for fixed lines
- in anticipation of a competitive environment, a new organisation needs to be created with financial autonomy and necessary capacity
- ICT needs to be seen as a necessity - on par with health and education - in government budgets, and must not be viewed as a luxury.

2.4 A new e-learning centre called Namibian Open Learning Network Trust (NOLNET) has been established in Namibia recently (in the month of April) and in the SADC region to promote the usage of open and distance learning. NOLNET primarily focuses on establishing collaboration and sharing, and focuses on the development of skills, materials, support tools and mechanisms for all open and distance learning programmes to the benefit of the students enrolled with the stakeholder institutions. The stakeholder institutions include Polytechnic of Namibia, UNAM, NIED (National Institute of Education Development) and Ministries of Basic Education and Higher Education. Currently NOLNET has presence in all the 13 political regions of the country through its 49 affiliated learning centres. The e-learning platform that is available is KEWL.NextGen which is an e-learning system produced by the African Virtual Open Initiatives and Resources (AVOIR) project. KEWL.NextGen is an advanced e-learning system with features common to other proprietary systems. It has been developed and is offered by the University of Western Cape and other partner institutions. The distinct advantage of online learning is the opportunity that it offers to the participants to work collaboratively and to exchange ideas. The e-learning platform is ideal for conferencing encouraging participants to share ideas with each other and this will help them develop

Theory, Systemic-Functional Linguistics, Anthropology and others feed into it. The basic issue is one of nomenclature. Researchers have pointed out that the term “Computer Assisted Language Learning” has outlived its usefulness as a construct for teaching and research stating that

“The truly powerful technologies are so integrated as to be invisible. We have no “BALL” (book assisted language learning), no “PALL” (pen assisted language learning), and no “LALL” (library assisted language learning). When we have no “CALL”, computers will have taken their place as a national and powerful part of the language learning process (Warschauer, 1999a, n.p.).

Computers have been viewed differently by different groups of people. For some computers are only “tools” to be used in language learning where computers provide ready access to written, audio and visual materials. Further, it provides online dictionaries, grammar and style checks, and many other facilities. For others, the computer can act as a “tutor” providing instruction, feedback, and testing in grammar, vocabulary, writing, pronunciation and other dimensions of language and culture (Chappelle, 1998). As a “medium” computer technology provides sites for interpersonal communication, multimedia publication, distance learning, community participation and identity formation.

While on the one hand computers can be used as a tool, tutor or a medium, on the other hand it must be emphasised that computer mediated communication is not a single, uniform genre of language use but a combination of several genres with a degree of variance from the formal use of language such as business letters sent via e-mail, to chat room exchanges which have their own dialect reflecting the pressure to accommodate several members of divergent groups. This fact is further complicated by the additional dimension of sociocultural differences. Researchers have explained the need to ignore the accuracy, fluency and appropriateness of online and off line language in an effort to focus upon the acquisition of “metacommunicative ability to reflect broadly on signifying practices and specifically on textualization, considering language as one aspect of semiosis”(Nelson in Kern: 2006:200).

Another controversy is related to the use of technology in language teaching. Chappelle(1997) recommends that there should be a proper theoretical grounding for e-

learning pedagogy and that it should derive from second language acquisition (SLA) theories. She suggests an interactionist approach for generating a productive hypothesis. Others (Egbert and Petrie:2005) point out that it is necessary to have multiple theoretical perspectives because of the rapid expansion of technology and remarkable change in the social and cultural contexts in which technology is used as a result of which the goals, content and structure of language teaching and learning grow and evolve.

Pincas (2001) has pointed out that the main problem of this kind of an approach to education is that it brings about a contradiction between the ethnocentricism on the one hand and global interconnectedness on the other. While we expect a certain standard of English to be maintained, the term, "Standard English" itself, begs the question, "whose standard?" There are certain other linguists who protest at this notion calling it "Linguistic Imperialism" (Phillipson:1992) and stake a claim for "World Englishes" (Kachru:1983) or "English as Lingua Franca" (Jenkins:2003). At this point in time sufficient research has not been done in English Language used in Namibia to discuss the issue of standardization as it applies to us.

4.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

English Language Teaching Pedagogy has been conceptualised as a method which has brought into focus important issues in language teaching. Stern (1983) outlines five different methods in his book *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching* which he describes as "tentative" (453). They are the following:

- A. Grammar Translation Method: which emphasises the teaching of second Language grammar.
- B. Direct Method: which uses target language as a means of instruction.
- C. Reading Method: which restricts the goal of language teaching to reading comprehension
- D. Audio-lingual method: which concentrates on primacy of oral skills over written
- E. Audio-visual method: which focuses on presenting a visual to involve learners in meaningful utterances and contexts.

He concludes by stating that all the methods given above are analytical and that they have not explored the possibility of non-analytical, participatory or experiential ways of language learning.

For the purposes of our course, however, the language teaching methodology will incorporate precisely the non-analytical and participatory pedagogy and the methodology that will be used will be the one that is outlined by Pincas (2003) which looks at a teaching event as made up of three elements: Presentation, Practice and Performance. Further, this is based on a pedagogy that takes into consideration the sociological factors that make up the context. Needless to say that sociological factors are influenced by political, economic and other factors. There are three major contexts of learning, which are: formal classroom teaching and learning, apprenticeship and informal everyday learning. These contexts result in different kinds of learners: those learners who are largely dependant on their teacher for a learning intervention, a guided learner who imitates his teacher and thus learns from him and finally, the lone individual who has to fall back upon his own devices and has to develop his own initiatives for learning. All three possibilities exist when there is e-learning taking place. But for a teacher to be effective it is necessary to inculcate in the learner a certain degree of autonomy. It must be remembered that even under the best circumstances it would not be advisable to leave the learner un-monitored.

Pincas(ibid) defines what for her are the most important and essential elements in teaching. She calls these “teaching event” which are linked to “learning goals” which consist of : Presentation, Practice and Performance. The sequence of these three elements can be altered in different ways to produce different kinds of learning. Some examples are given below:

1. **Conventional:** Presentation → Practice → Performance
2. **Resource-based:** Practice → Presentation → Performance
3. **Discovery learning:** Practice → Performance → Presentation
4. **Problem-based:** Performance → Presentation → Practice

5.1 A Post Graduate Certificate Course in the Teaching of English

A Post Graduate Certificate Course in the Teaching of English will answer to the needs of the country at large and to the individual teachers working in the many schools across the country. Certain assumptions are made and will not form a part of the thesis that is being presented here. They are the following:

- A. Computer facilities are available in the school in all regions in Namibia.
- B The teachers will come to the Polytechnic of Namibia at Windhoek to attend a one day induction and orientation before the commencement of the course which will impart computer skills to them. (There are several short courses conducted at the Polytechnic which are precisely of this nature). Teachers can learn a few basic computer skills like Microsoft Word, Excel, Access, Powerpoint and how to surf the net.
- C. Internet connectivity will be reasonably fast with the introduction of Nolnet.
- D. It will be an economically viable programme both for the Polytechnic to run and for the individual teachers. I have not taken the costs into consideration for the time being.

The course itself will run over one year and will be offered over two semesters.

One	Linguistics	Phonetics and Phonology	Modern English Grammar and Usage
Two	Methods of Teaching English	Materials for Teaching English	Literature and Advanced Rhetoric

The methodology followed to teach the course will at all times encourage criticality. Pincas points out that criticality is fundamental for excellence. The course design will encourage online discussions and collaborative learning. Tasks will be set up to promote critical discourse and participants will be made to analyse, critique and question. We will make use of asynchronous and synchronous modes of teaching with the help of our regional centres that are fully equipped with computer facilities.

6.1 CONCLUSION

Through this course I would like to encourage the teachers in my country to engage in “critical reflection” which has been defined as “the process by which adults identify the

assumptions governing their actions, locate the historical and cultural origins of the assumptions, question the meanings of the assumptions, and develop alternative ways of acting”(Stein:2000). Teachers will have an opportunity to reflect on their own teaching and improve upon it. Furthermore, this course will inculcate a spirit of inquiry which is essential to the individual development of anyone in any profession. I firmly believe that for any country to record tremendous sustainable growth, it has to invest in its human resource. What is lacking in Namibia at the moment is interest in research and hopefully a teacher training programme will encourage teachers to research, experiment and develop materials for teaching which are relevant to the needs of our country.

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APPENDIX

AIM OF THE COURSE : To transfer knowledge of the English Language, Teaching English Language and the pedagogy and methodology of teaching English to participants for professional development.

Goals and objectives

Linguistics

At the end of the course the participants will be able to:

1. Explain what is language.
2. Describe language functions and language characteristics
3. Compare and contrast animal and human languages
4. Compare and contrast spoken and written languages
5. Distinguish between descriptive, prescriptive and teaching grammars

Modern English Grammar and Usage

At the end of the course the participants will be able to identify grammatical structures at the level of

1. Sentence
2. Clause
3. Phrase

4. Vocabulary

They should be able to describe notions of grammaticality, transformation and ambiguity.

Phonetics and Phonology

At the end of the course the participants will be able to

1. Identify the speech sounds of English
2. Describe the speech sounds in terms of the place of articulation
3. Describe the speech sounds in terms of the manner of articulation
4. Identify the phonemes and allophones of English
5. Describe the suprasegmental features of English.

Methods of Teaching English

At the end of the course the participants will be able to

1. Describe the different methodologies in the teaching of English
2. Evaluate the different approaches to the teaching of English
3. Critique the different language theories
4. Develop their own methodology for teaching English
5. Understand and evaluate Bilingual Education and Second Language Acquisition.

Materials for the Teaching of English

At the end of the course the participants will be able to

1. Understand and explain the principles of materials production
2. Evaluate the materials that are in use
3. Produce their own teaching and learning materials

Literature and Advanced Rhetoric

At the end of the course the participants will be able to

1. Identify the different genres of literature
2. Describe figures of speech
3. Compare and contrast literary and language devices
4. Develop critical thinking skills.

COURSE DESIGN AND DELIVERY

1. **Week One** Brief introduction to the course, expectations of the online tutor

(This could be posted as a message on the message board).

- Task Participants to introduce themselves to each other.
2. **Week Two** A video presentation on “what is language ?”(Asynchronous mode)
- Task Participants to go to any three web sites on Language and briefly summarise what they say about language in 250 words and comment on each others’ summaries.
3. **Week Three** A video presentation on Language function and characteristics
- Task Participants asked to research on the web about language function and characteristics of language. And comment on each other’s writing.
4. **Week Four** A Video presentation on Speech and writing.
- Task Participants are required to record their voices on audio tapes and send it to another participant for comments.
5. **Week Five** **They write a summary of the four weeks or a there is a quiz that they have to answer.**

The pattern that is followed in the beginning is conventional with the first step being Presentation, followed by Practice and then Performance. The mode of teaching is the asynchronous mode. The live video will be burnt into a cd for easy postage.

6. **Week Six** The participants go to websites(provided) to look for information regarding Vocabulary to answer the following questions: what is vocabulary ? lexical analysis, morphemes, and morphemic analysis. Here websites are given for them to access.
- There are questions for which they have to look up answers.
7. **Week Seven** The participants have to access web sites for phrases: noun phrase, verb phrase,. Exercises given to revise the phrases.
- Participants can check against a check list once they have completed their task. And write a summary of the rules
8. **Week Eight** The participants have to access web sites for phrases adjectival and adverbial phrase. Exercises given to revise the phrases
- Participants can check against a check list once they have

completed their task. And write a summary of the rules

9. Week Nine

The participants have to access web sites for clauses: noun clause, adjectival and adverbial clause. Exercises given to revise the clause

Participants can check against a check list once they have completed their task. And write a summary of the rules

10. Week Ten

The participants have to access web sites for sentence types. Exercises given to revise the sentence.

Participants can check against a check list once they have completed their task. And write a summary of the rules

Note: for the speaking and listening components of the course podcasts on education will be used. A general blog will be posted to invite informal comments from the participants.

