

COMMUNITY-BASED REVITALISATION OF NAMA IN THE NORTHERN CAPE

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ABSTRACT

This article explores community-based revitalisation efforts of the Nama language in the Northern Cape region of South Africa by applying UNESCO's (2003) nine factors of language vitality assessment. A realist approach is applied to understanding how these factors interact and gauge the progress of revitalisation efforts. The study uses UNESCO's factors, broadly categorised as major evaluative factors for vitality, language attitudes and policies, and urgency for documentation as its theoretical framework, and utilises Atlas.ti™ to build a comprehensive network of these factors' interactions. By integrating empirical data with UNESCO's factors and recent findings, such as those by Wiltshire et al. (2022), the study provides novel insights on Nama's maintenance, development, revitalisation, and perpetuation through dynamic community-based revitalisation efforts in a South African selected context. Results indicate that Nama communities in the Northern Cape are making notable progress in language awareness, revitalisation, and maintaining community control over language revitalisation endeavours. Recommendations for the improvement of revitalisation efforts are made based on the results where the study underscores the importance of gradual progress and adequate time for sustainable language revitalisation. Overall, the findings highlight the significant achievements of the Nama community in advancing their language revitalisation efforts.

Keywords: Nama, community-based revitalisation, UNESCO, vitality, identity, attitude, domain

INTRODUCTION

Language revitalisation

Language revitalisation is described as a “multi- inter- and transdisciplinary field” (Comajoan-Colomé & Coronel-Molina, 2021:897). Hinton and Hale (2001) explain that language revitalisation deals with languages that are no longer used in everyday communication and are reused in restricted contexts. Language revitalisation aims to restore and strengthen a particular language in a particular region where it previously prevailed before being replaced by other more prestigious languages (Comajoan-Colomé & Coronel-Molina, 2021). Such is the case of Nama¹ in South Africa, which is subsequently explored. Distinct differences in goals regarding language reversal, revitalisation, and revival, as expressed in Honberger and King (1996), Paulston et al. (2010), and most notably, Fishman (2001), should be observed. Fishman (2001) refers to reversing language shift, which can potentially occur when speech communities feel a real sense of pain when their language is dying. Language revitalisation and reversal of language shift aim to reinvigorate an existing language. The reversal of language shift relies on intergenerational transmission akin to the classical theory by Fishman (1991), but revitalisation “may seek other means in addition to intergenerational transmission” (Comajoan-Colomé & Coronel-Molina, 2021:897). The concept of *generations* in sociolinguistics has more recently shown how static notions of generations, as they have been present in sociolinguistic literature, fail to recognise the inherent dynamics and even the options to move between generations (see Suslak, 2009; Purkathofer, 2020). Wiltshire et al. (2022) observe that language revitalisation refers to reversing language shift by applying measures or strategies to strengthen the target language (see also Fitzgerald, 2021; Hinton, 2001). Essentially, there is an overlap in understanding the differences between language revitalisation, language revival and the reversal of language shift and for this article, language revitalisation is understood to be the efforts made to either maintain or reverse declining language use of the target language as proposed by Hinton et al. (2018b) and applied by Wiltshire et al. (2022). Understanding the factors contributing to language endangerment is crucial to contextualising these revitalisation efforts.

A UNESCO team of international experts on safeguarding endangered languages explain that external forces (such as military, economic, cultural or educational subjugation) and internal forces (e.g., a speech community's negative attitude towards their own language) result in language endangerment (UNESCO, 2003:2). In the case of the latter, Indigenous speech communities relinquish their language because of its perceived lacking value in linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991). Consequently, the loss of a language equates to an unsalvageable loss of

¹ The author acknowledges that *Khoekhoegowab* is the accurate, revived name (Haacke & Eiseb, 2002) for the languages spoken by the Nama, Damara, and Haiǂom people (Berzinger, 2003); however, since the participants of this study self-identify as Nama and refer to their language as Nama, the author will use *Nama* throughout the article to reflect participants' self-identification and lived experience. This approach respects the way the participants themselves frame their identity and linguistic affiliation.

original ethnic and cultural identity (Bernard 1992; Hale 1998 cited in UNESCO, 2003:2). Ultimately, there is “an urgent need in almost all countries for more reliable information about the situation of the minority languages as a basis for language support efforts at all levels” (UNESCO, 2003:3). In effort to offer more reliable information on endangered languages, UNESCO (2003) identified nine factors alluding to a language’s vitality and state of endangerment, assessing language attitudes, and evaluating the urgency for documentation (UNESCO, 2003:7). Each factor is introduced and embedded in the findings and discussion section of this article, but are briefly listed here for context: Factor 1: Intergenerational Language Transmission; Factor 2: Absolute number of Speakers; Factor 3: Proportion of speakers within the total population; Factor 4: Trends in existing language domains; Factor 5: Response to new domains and media; Factor 6: Materials for language education and literacy; Factor 7: Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official status and use; Factor 8: Community members attitudes toward their own language; Factor 9: Amount and quality of documentation. Although this article focuses on the dynamic community-based revitalisation efforts of Nama rather than assessing its vitality, the UNESCO factors provide a foundation for evaluating the effectiveness of these efforts. Based on the findings, recommendations can be made to support community initiatives further. In exploring the self-assessment of vitality by a speech community (obtained through interview questions discussed in the method section), “the first six [factors] are especially useful” (UNESCO, 2003:17); however, this article will consider all nine factors in an attempt to offer a more wholistic understanding of the current effectiveness of community-based revitalisation efforts and what can be done to improve these efforts to promote revitalisation.

More recently, the need for a more evolved conceptualisation of language revitalisation has become apparent (Wiltshire et al. 2022; Comajoan-Colome & Coronel-Molina 2021; Grenoble and Whaley 2021). To build an initial theory regarding the role of speech communities in language revitalisation – an important factor expressed by UNESCO (2003:4) –, Wiltshire et al. (2022) analyse a substantial amount of language revitalisation literature using a realist approach, culminating in a realist synthesis. Wiltshire et al. (2022) draw on the work of Pawson and Tilley (1997), Dalkin et al. (2015), and Luetsch, Rowett & Twigg (2021) to explain that a realist approach provides explanations in terms of how contextual factors trigger underlying mechanisms of cause within language revitalisation programmes in order to understand how those programs work. Such an understanding would then lead to a realist synthesis where an initial theory is iteratively constructed, which is then refined by analysing applicable literature to elicit a deeper understanding of how, in this case, language revitalisation programs achieve their outcomes. It is noteworthy that Wiltshire et al.’s (2022) study does not focus on a single program, but rather, their iterative theory building focuses on a broader understanding of language revitalisation efforts following the work of Pawson et al. (2005) and Wong et al. (2013). After constructing an initial model of elements related to language revitalisation programs, Wiltshire et al. (2022:4) “conducted, selected articles, extracted and organised data, and synthesised findings,” from which initial theories are proposed. The researcher acknowledges that Wiltshire et al.’s (2022) study takes place in an Australian context, with their literature database being based on research conducted primarily in Australia, Canada, the United States, and New Zealand. However, the aim of language revitalisation is universally understood (as described above) and by applying findings from a global context to a local context, a better understanding of community-based language revitalisation is built transcending landscapes, borders, and contexts. For this reason, Wiltshire et al.’s (2022) realist approach is applied in exploring the interaction of factors that shape community-based revitalisation efforts of a northern South African Indigenous language, Nama [Khoekhoegowab].

Nama [Khoekhoegowab]

Nama [Khoekhoegowab] is known to feature four primary click consonants: the dental click [ǀ], the palatal-alveolar click [ǃ], the post-alveolar click [ǂ], and the lateral alveolar click [ǁ] (Fredericks & Banda, 2023; Khoekhoegowab Orthography, 2003; Miller et al., 2007; Haacke & Eiseb, 2002). Moreover, Traill (2012) explains that Khoekhoe languages, a subgroup of the Khoe language family, are one of three varieties of the Southern African Khoekhoegowab languages, which is echoed by Haacke (2018:134) when he explains that “*Khoekhoegowab* is the sole surviving language of the *Khoekhoe* branch of the *Khoe* family”. Haacke (2018:135) further notes that “the Southern African Khoe (formerly Central Khoesan) family is today subdivided into two living branches”, which are depicted in Figure 1.

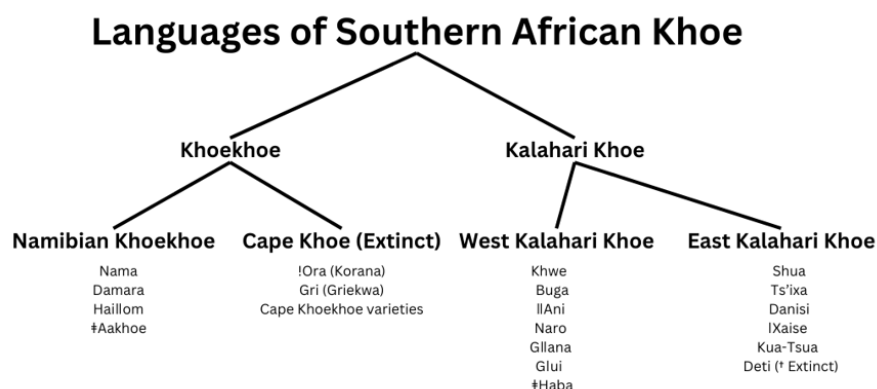


Figure 1: The languages of Southern African Khoe (adapted from Haacke, 2018:135)

South African Nama, though mutually intelligible with Nama dialects in neighbouring countries, is distinct (PanSALB, 2023). Around 10% of South African Nama words differ in pronunciation and spelling compared to Namibian Nama, similar to the differences between South African and American English (Sands & Jones, 2022). There are at least two dialects of South African Nama, although the total number remains unknown (Haacke, Eiseb & Namaseb, 1997). Historically, Nama speakers were spread across southern Africa, from the Cape to the Karoo and the Northern Cape. However, colonisation by Bantu and European groups displaced Nama communities, confining them to smaller, remote areas today “in the Northern Cape in towns or regions such as Riemvasmaak, Pella, Richtersveld, Steinkopf, Kuboes, Leliefontein, Komaggas, Concordia, Rietfontein and Andriesvale”. (PanSALB, 2023:139). In Klein Namaqualand, the language is considered moribund, as it is only spoken by the elderly, if at all and is no longer being learned by most children (Christie, 2023). In terms of numbers, Nama has the largest population of speakers in Namibia (Fredricks, 2013), and South Africa hosts the smallest Nama-speaking population, estimated at 2000 – 4000 fluent speakers, although that number may be smaller (PanSALB, 2023:138).

Despite Nama being an indigenous language, South Africa has 12 official languages, and none of those 12 is a Khoe language. Recognising Nama as an official language in South Africa can be justified by its cultural and historical significance, the principles of equity and inclusion in the Constitution, and the moral obligation to preserve endangered indigenous languages. It aligns with global commitments like the UN Declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples and could promote social justice while preserving the linguistic heritage of the Nama people. Recognising it could set a precedent for actively supporting languages at risk of being lost, reinforcing principles of reconciliation and restorative justice that are central to South Africa’s democracy. Berzborn (2003) explains that Nama is an endangered language in South Africa because of historic colonial suppression aggravated by the apartheid regime. Moreover, Khoe languages were not made to have any linguistic capital and do not offer many socio-economic opportunities (Fredricks, 2013) and Khoekhoegowab-speaking people themselves “rejected the use of Nama in favour of Afrikaans” (Berzborn, 2003:355). There has been a renewed interest in revitalising the language for at least 25 years. Identity is a central facet:

By speaking Nama, people establish their affiliation to the group and prove their authenticity as aboriginal inhabitants of South Africa. Identity is constructed primarily concerning language, and by being Nama, people can gain self-esteem and recognition in the state and access resources (Berzborn, 2003:356).

In restoring identity in a newly established political framework of post-apartheid South Africa, language rights are seen as human rights, echoing the work of Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) as she explains how she has always defined linguistic human rights as “Only language rights which are so fundamental that every individual has them because that individual is a human being, so inalienable that no state is allowed to violate them, and which are necessary for individuals and groups to live a dignified life, are LHRs” (Skutnabb-Kangas et al. 2023:16), which are to be entrenched in language policy. As with any multilingual state, language policy in South Africa has not and is still not without challenges (see Webb, 1999; Kamwangamalu, 2000; Kashoki, 2003; Ngcobo, 2012; Kerfoot, 2020).

Despite political and policy complexities, there has been an obvious revival of Indigenous Khoekhoegowab identities² in democratic South Africa (van Wyk, 2016). Berzborn's (2003) study is evidence of this revival where "many people in the Richtersveld have started to revitalise and promote Nama as part of a broader movement to stress their Nama identity and to regain esteem for their traditions and history" (Berzborn, 2003:356). Although set in a Namibian context, Fredericks (2020) observes that efforts to restore the Nama language should follow a grassroots, democratic approach driven by linguistic citizenship principles. Members of the Nama community, especially in close-knit settings, can significantly influence each other's language behaviours (Ager, 2001). Local interpretations of national policies developed through this grassroots process may have a greater impact than the policies themselves (Canagarajah, 2006).

Revitalisation at a grassroots level within the Nama community in the Northern Cape region in South Africa is evidenced through community-based revitalisation efforts beyond government institutions and national borders. For instance, Masson (2021) reports on the story of Dina Christiaan, also known as Queen Dina, who is dedicated to preserving the Nama language in South Africa's Northern Cape region. Despite limited support from the government, she teaches Nama through local radio and WhatsApp groups and translates news into Nama, using her car as a recording studio. Another story is that of Peter Semboya (see YouTube 2021), who aims to teach children in the community the language at his informal Nama school. The participants in this study also actively participate in community-based efforts to revitalise their language, as will be discussed in the relevant sections. Hence, this article explores the community-based revitalisation efforts of Nama-speaking people in the Northern Cape region of South Africa at a grassroots level in the spirit of linguistic citizenship, as Fredericks (2020) suggested. This approach will offer a novel contribution in that previous research on Nama (and variations such as Damara) primarily focused on micro-linguistic and grammatical aspects (see Tindall, 1857; Hagman, 1973; and Haacke, 1976). Traill's 2002 study touches upon Nama and Damara within the broader context of Khoisan languages. Christie (2019) examines lexical borrowing in Namaqualand Afrikaans, emphasising ethnobotany. Christie (2021) explores dialect variations and divergence of Nama spoken in the Namaqualand region from standardised Namibian Nama. Fredericks (2013) focuses on sociolinguistic features (language maintenance vs shift, language use in different contexts (domain-specific language use), language attitudes, bilingualism and code-switching, language and identity) and investigates language loss and maintenance among Nama speakers; more recently, Fredericks (2020) delves into linguistic participation and revitalisation of the Nama dialect; however, both studies take place within a Namibian context. Van Wyk (2016) explores modern Khoekhoegowab identities and language revival struggles. Notably, there is a research gap regarding more current sociolinguistic dimensions of Nama in South Africa.

The most comparable study examining Nama's sociolinguistic considerations in the South African context of the Richtersveld was conducted just over two decades ago. In this study, Berzborn (2003) explores:

The actions taken by different stakeholders to promote Khoisan languages in the broader framework of South Africa's constitutional provisions and actual language policy [...]. The knowledge and language choice of Nama and Afrikaans in the Richtersveld will be analysed, and the actions taken by the people to promote the 'ancient tongue' will be discussed (Berzborn, 2003:327).

Considering the need for a more recent exploration of Nama in South Africa, this article's research question asks: *How effective are ongoing community-based language revitalisation efforts when assessed through UNESCO's nine factors of language vitality, and how do these factors interact and influence revitalisation efforts?*

METHODOLOGY

This empirical study comprises qualitative telephonic³ interview data elicited from Nama-speaking participants. Ethical clearance for this study was acquired by first obtaining a recommendation for approval from the institution's Faculty of Law's Research and Innovation Committee, after which the Research Ethics Committee

² The concept of Khoekhoegowab identity must be critically assessed within the historical and sociolinguistic framework described by du Plessis (2022). As she argues, terms like "Khoi" and "San" have been shaped by colonial narratives and do not correspond directly to distinct language families, though they are often used as sociocultural identifiers. Similarly, the broader "Khoisan" category serves as a convenient umbrella for referring to the Khoe, Ju, and Tuu language families, despite unresolved questions of shared linguistic ancestry. Du Plessis cautions against racialised or essentialist interpretations of these identities, noting the importance of recognising their fluid and dynamic nature rather than perpetuating reductive or colonial views. For Khoekhoegowab identity, this means valuing the language's cultural and linguistic significance while rejecting notions of "ultra-indigeneity" or racial separateness, allowing for a reclamation rooted in historical and social reality (du Plessis, 2022).

³ Due to the remote locations of the participants in different parts of the Northern Cape Province and the limited resources available to the author for travel, telephonic interviews which were recorded, were the only feasible method for data collection.

granted clearance (ethics clearance number: NWU-00453-24-A3). The informed consent form, which provided comprehensive details about the study's objectives, voluntary participation, participant protections, and the dissemination and publication of results, was made available to participants in both English and Afrikaans. All participants in this study submitted their signed informed consent forms. At the time of recruitment, a specific geographic location, such as the Northern Cape region, was not an inclusion criterion. After receiving ethics clearance, participants were enlisted via referrals from the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB), following the researcher's formal request for information to facilitate research interviews. The author acknowledges that enlisting participants through referral from the PanSALB, while effective for recruiting in remote areas, may have introduced biases. Referrals often connect participants with shared characteristics to the referring body, potentially limiting the diversity of the prospective sample. Despite the limitations, the sample offers valuable insights from those accessible via this network, though future research could benefit from broader participant selection. Moreover, considering that Nama in South Africa is understudied, save works by, for example, Witzlack-Makarevich's (2006) MA thesis, this study offers updated insights that could be used in future studies. Subsequently, the researcher contacted each participant via WhatsApp, considering the potential challenges posed by limited cellular reception in the areas where most participants reside. Following initial contact with the participants, the researcher distributed informed consent forms approved by the ethics committee that were professionally translated from English into Afrikaans, the language used at home for most participants⁴. The researcher, being fluent in Afrikaans, experienced no difficulties conducting the interviews in Afrikaans⁵ (only two of the eight interviews were conducted in English). The Afrikaans interviews were transcribed by a professional language practitioner for the sake of written accuracy in aid of coding during the analysis phase. Readers can request anonymised transcribed interviews, questionnaires, informed consent, the ethics clearance certificate, and analyses from the researcher.

Data collection instrument

The questionnaire was developed using an emergent approach to data collection, which allowed for the identification of categories: *vitality*, *domain*, *identity*, and *attitude*⁶, the results of which were then applied to the nine UNESCO-endorsed factors of vitality. This process involved initial coding, where occurrences were compared to each other to reveal broad patterns, which would later inform categories. These patterns are critical to uncover as part of the study, as the relationships between codes are essential to understanding how the themes of community-based revitalisation methods for Nama occur.

Data analysis

The interview transcriptions were analysed using Atlas.ti24TM, a qualitative analysis software program. The transcriptions were analysed by attributing codes. Charmaz (2014:4) explains that “coding means that we attach labels to data segments that depict what each segment is about. Through coding, we raise analytic questions about our data from [...]. Coding distils data, sorts them, and gives us an analytic handle for making comparisons with other segments of data”. Codes capture the meaning within the data, serving as markers for specific occurrences. These markers function as classification devices, organising related information units to facilitate analysis (Atlas.ti24 Windows User Manual).

A codebook was developed with a colleague for member-checking purposes. A codebook is essential in qualitative research as it standardises the coding process by clearly referencing what each code represents. This is crucial because qualitative research involves subjective interpretations influenced by the researcher's background and theoretical perspective. By offering a concrete resource to clarify code meanings, a codebook helps ensure consistency and reliability in data analysis (Atlas.ti 2024). The researcher employed highly specific classification labels when coding the transcriptions, allowing for precise reference to the thematic focus of each question.

⁴ The participants in this study are primarily originally from Namibia and have Nama as their mother tongue. However, due to displacements to South Africa and marriages to Afrikaans-speaking spouses, the majority of participants now predominantly use Afrikaans in their homes.

⁵ Given that the original responses were in Afrikaans, the researcher has limited the number of direct quotes in this article to ensure accessibility for an international audience.

⁶ In this study, sociolinguistic elements such as vitality, identity, attitude, and domain are central to understanding Nama's revitalisation. Vitality refers to the language's continued use in home and community settings despite the dominance of Afrikaans. Identity links language use to cultural belonging, while positive attitudes towards Nama foster its maintenance across generations. Domain analysis reveals that Nama is primarily used in informal contexts, with Afrikaans dominating more formal domains, limiting its scope. These elements highlight the resilience of Nama and inform revitalisation efforts in the Northern Cape (Fishman, 1991; Giles & Johnson, 1987).

RESULTS/FINDINGS

This section aims to offer the analysis results based on the four main categories of the interview questions and report findings by embedding UNESCO's nine factors to answer the first part of this article's research question: *How effective are ongoing community-based language revitalisation efforts when assessed through UNESCO's nine factors of language vitality, and how do these factors interact and influence revitalisation efforts?* As mentioned, eight participants⁷ were interviewed for this study. Table 1 presents an overview of participants' biographic information.

Table 1 Participant biographical information

Participant	Gender	Age	Location	Children	Language at home
PL	Male	47	Northern Cape Province (Riemvasmaak)	Yes (3 under 18)	Nama speaker; Afrikaans in home
PG2	Female	63	Northern Cape Province (Kuboes)	Yes (3)	Nama speaker; Afrikaans in home
PL2	Female	46	Gauteng Province (Johannesburg)	No	Nama speaker; Afrikaans in home
PG	Male	73	Northern Cape Province (Kuboes)	Yes (over 18)	Nama speaker; Afrikaans in home
PW	Male	59	Northern Cape Province (Riemvasmaak)	No	Afrikaans, English, Nama
PT	Female	44	Gauteng Province (Johannesburg)	Yes (under 18)	English, Nama, Zulu
PP	Male	71	Northern Cape Province (Springbok/Concordia)	Yes (over 18)	Nama speaker; Afrikaans in home
PZ	Female	32	Northern Cape Province (Riemvasmaak/Kakamas)	Yes (under 18 & expecting)	Afrikaans, Nama

The participant cohort is evenly distributed in terms of gender and exhibits a range of ages, encompassing both middle-aged and elderly individuals. It is noteworthy to observe that there are no youth speakers under the age of 30, which reflects existing findings that Nama's vitality status is recorded as *b*-“The language is spoken by adults in their thirties and older but not by younger parents” (Krauss, 1997:26 in PanSALB, 2023:141). Most participants are residents of the Northern Cape region in South Africa, with two individuals currently residing in Gauteng. Nonetheless, both Gauteng-based participants actively engage in efforts to revitalise Nama in the Northern Cape region. The researcher sought to collect data regarding the participants' children, specifically the number of those under the age of 18, to assess the potential for intergenerational language transfer. Afrikaans is the predominant home language among the participants, except for two individuals.

Category 1: Vitality

As part of the *vitality* category of the questionnaire, nine questions were asked regarding acquisition, transfer, the importance of learning Nama, target speakers, emotional vitality, forms of language support, idealised support, the perceived onus of language vitality maintenance, and perceived threat to vitality. These elements relate to Factor 1: Intergenerational Language Transmission, Factor 2: Absolute number of speakers, and Factor 3: Proportion of speakers within the total population. Factor 1 deals with intergenerational language transmission, based on Fishman (1991), and can be ranked on a scale ranging from: Safe (5) where the language is spoken by all generations; Unsafe (4) where most but not all children or families speak their language as a first language; Definitely endangered (3) where the language is no longer being learned as the mother tongue by children at home; Severely endangered (2) where the language is spoken only by grandparents and older generations; Critically endangered (1) where the youngest speakers are in the great-grandparental generation. Factor 2

⁷ The author only managed to reach eight participants for this study, which is a limitation of the research. However, the findings are based on the patterns in frequencies that emerged from the data, and thus, there is still merit in the results of this qualitative study.

addresses the absolute number of speakers, although it is noted that “it is impossible to provide a valid interpretation of absolute numbers, but a small speech community is always at risk” (UNESCO, 2003:8). Factor 3 considers the proportion of speakers within the total population, and also makes use of a six-point scale to determine degrees of endangerment: Safe (5) where all speak the language; Unsafe (4) where nearly all speak the language; Definitely endangered (3) where a majority speak the language; Severely endangered (2) where a minority speak the language; Critically endangered (1) where very few speak the language; Extinct (0) where none speak the language. These three factors will be addressed using the results related to acquisition (Table 2), transfer (Table 3) and perceived threat to vitality (Table 4).

Table 2 Acquisition code frequencies

Code (Category: Vitality)	Grounded frequency
Vi1.1 Acquisition Parents	3
Vi1.1 Acquisition Grandparents	2
Vi1.1 Acquisition Nama community Namibia	2
Vi1.1 Acquisition Nama community South Africa	2
Vi1.1 Acquisition Mother	1
Vi1.1 Acquisition School (Namibia)	1

Based on participant responses, acquisition can be categorised into three broad categories: familial influence, community influence, and educational influence. Participants mention learning Nama from family members such as grandparents and parents as part of familial influence. One participant expresses a natural acquisition of the language, stating that it is something they were born with.

As part of the vitality category, *transfer* also yielded results broadly categorised into three sub-categories: community engagement, educational initiatives, and personal initiatives. Table 3 offers frequencies related to this section.

Table 3 Transfer code frequencies

Code (category: vitality)	Grounded frequency
Vi2.1 Transfer Yes	8
Vi2.2 Transfer School children	6
Vi2.2 Transfer Not own children	4
Vi2.2 Transfer Adults	3
Vi2.2 Transfer Own children	3
Vi2.1 Transfer No	1

The first question in this category asked if participants had ever taught anyone else to speak Nama. It is obvious that transfer does take place. However, it is noteworthy that the domain of transfer in South Africa is not in the household but rather takes place in the school environment. Some participants extend their efforts beyond their immediate communities, conducting classes and workshops for individuals who have “lost touch” with the language or are interested in learning it. This speaks to the notion of community engagement as part of transfer. Considering that only three participants use Nama in their homes (see Table 1) with the majority absence of household-based transmission, Nama’s intergenerational transfer is classified as severely endangered (Grade 2) according to UNESCO’s first factor. The absolute number of speakers of Nama in South Africa (Factor 2) is the smallest number: “The 2022 census also lists unofficial first languages spoken in South Africa. These are the Khoesan and Nama languages of the Northern Cape and Namibia (0.1%)” (Alexander, 2024) and in proportion of speakers within the total population (Factor 3), Nama would be classified as critically endangered (Grade 1) as very few speak the language in comparison to the other languages spoken in South Africa. Considering that home intergenerational transmission is not at the forefront of bolstering vitality, educational initiatives are the primary component of the transfer of Nama in South Africa. Some individuals have been formally appointed or volunteered to teach Nama language classes, but mainly in self-established contexts or contexts created by non-governmental organisations (SANDEVA – South African Nama Development Association). Only one participant mentioned a (primary) school where Nama is taught in the rural town of Riemvasmaak. As mentioned, personal initiatives to engage with transfer activities are noted, and some participants have participated in roadshows and workshops to teach Nama to broader community members, emphasising grassroots efforts to preserve and revitalise the language. Most of the time, it consists of personal initiatives that are informal, community-based teaching spaces.

With respect to UNESCO’s Factor 6, materials for language education and literacy refer to materials for language education and literacy which are linked with social and economic development. On the highest grade (5) there is an established orthography and writing in the language is used in both administration and education; on the 4th level, written materials exist, and children are developing literacy in the language; on the 3rd grade, written

materials also exist where children may be exposed to written forms; on the 2nd-grade level, written materials exist but are only useful to some members of the community, and for other hold a symbolic value – literacy is not part of the school curriculum; on the 1st level a practical orthography exists, and some material is written; and on the lowest grade (0) no orthography is available to the community. Participant T explains that they have translated a storybook for their own purpose: “I translated the storybook, children's storybook from English to Nama. My kids and myself were reading the book, and I was asking them what they understand, and stuff like that.” On a more formal level, Participant T has translated some material for public use, but on a minuscule level: “So, I see now since then, it was a wake-up call for government, because I know that I was also asked to translate documents from English to Nama so that it can be put on posters for COVID-19 and stuff like that”. Participant L explains⁸:

There is not yet an acceptable curriculum in South Africa. I am now working with PanSALB to look again at the possibility of funding so that we can put together a complete curriculum. To develop the curriculum, we will definitely have to work with the universities, because we didn't study to develop curricula and such. So, there is currently an agreement between the PAN's Afrikaans Language Council and the Sol Plaatjie University here in the Northern Cape. They are now going to open a Khoi and San epicentre.

Accessibility to written materials in Nama is assumed as being produced by those who teach the language themselves at informal Nama schools or lessons, which indicates that a practical orthography is known to the community and limited material is written, placing Nama on Grade 1 in terms of Factor 6's scale. However, it is promising to see that there are endeavours to potentially move Nama up the scale to Grade 2, with the ultimate aim of moving to Grade 4, where written materials exist, and at school, children develop literacy in the language.

The next set of questions regarding the vitality aspect of this study asked participants if they think it is important to learn Nama (Vi3.1) and why they say so (Vi3.2); participants were also asked who they think should learn Nama (Vi4.1) and why (Vi4.2); and finally, participants were asked if they think that Nama should be kept ‘alive’ (Vi5.1) and why (Vi5.2). Participants note that learning Nama (n=7) is important, citing the importance of preserving their heritage and the need for communication. This need for communication was mentioned again when participants were asked who should learn Nama. Two participants referenced medical contexts concerning the facilitation of communication: 1) The COVID-19 pandemic, specifically in terms of elucidating the situation to the Nama speakers; 2) Situations wherein a Nama speaker requires access to hospitals, police stations, or other essential services. However, it is noteworthy to observe that the Northern Cape population is not Nama-monolingual and is able to communicate in Afrikaans. Consequently, participants highlighted the significance of communication and ease of expression within the Nama community, noting that they can express themselves more effectively in their native language, which is not achievable in another language. One participant noted that children should learn Nama as they are the custodians and the future of the Nama culture. This ties directly into the responses to the question that asked why Nama should be kept alive.

Related to the preservation of traditions, participants noted the importance of preserving culture and the notion of preserving authentic Nama. Participant G emphasised the significance of going beyond merely teaching Nama as a language. Both Participant G and Participant L strongly believe in the crucial need to integrate the teaching of Nama history, particularly to children, into the school curriculum. They argue that incorporating historical and cultural education alongside language instruction is. There seem to be cases of language contact/mixing/variation (but these will require very specific investigation). Language contact (and cultural contact) is seemingly a possible concern/threat to the ‘pure’ form of Nama⁹. The need for the transfer of ‘true’ tradition is, to some extent, constructed (Berzborn, 2003) and was also critiqued 21 years ago by a participant in a study by Berzborn Kuboes:

⁸ Translated from the original Afrikaans: Daar is nog nie 'n aanvaarbare kurrikulum in Suid-Afrika nie. Ek is nou besig met PanSALB om weer te kyk na die moontlikheid van funding sodat ons 'n volledige kurrikulum kan bymekaar sit. Om die kurrikulum te ontwikkel sal ons definitief met die universiteite moet werk, want ons het mos nou nie gaan studeer om kurrikulums te ontwikkel en so nie. So daar is nou huidige 'n agreement tussen die PAN se Afrikaanse Taalraad en die Sol Plaatjie-Universiteit hier in die Noord-Kaap. Hulle gaan nou 'n Khoi en San epicentre oopmaak.

⁹ Translated from the original Afrikaans: If you, for example, go to Port-Nolloth and they present a traditional (Nama) dance, and then you go to Kuboes, and you see the young people's dance steps compared to the old people's dance steps, you would say no, the old people must rather just go to sleep (they must not dance). But that is the real one. When they bring in Kwaito, it is not necessarily the right one, but because that one is prettier, everyone is crazy about that one. That is why I always say, when I worked with tourists, “Tell the tourist what you are presenting them with” if you present a Nama dance, tell them that the steps have been ‘updated’ and the one danced by the old people is the right one (ware Jakob) because they do not incorporate Kwaito (Participant G).

I am not a Nama, and they aren't Nama either, there are no Namas anymore, these people who today say are Nama, they aren't, the great old Nama are extinct [...]. They don't want to live this old lifestyle. They just dance and wear these patchwork skirts, and then they think they are Nama, no man! (E.C., 8.6.1999 cited in Berzborn, 2003:355).

The penultimate set of questions asked participants if they were aware of any support structures or initiatives geared towards promoting the use of Nama (Vi6.1), if participants had any idealised forms of support, i.e., unrestricted by, for example, funds or other challenges (Vi7.1), and who participants felt were ultimately responsible for keeping Nama 'alive'. In this instance, UNESCO's Factor 7 is important to consider. Factor 7 is based on government and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official status and use. Equal support (5) reflects a context where all the country's languages are valued as assets and are all protected by law; Differentiated support (4) is characterised by non-dominant languages being protected by the government, and ethnolinguistic groups are encouraged to maintain and use their language, most often in private domains; Passive assimilation (3) refers to the dominant group's language being the *de facto* official language not explicitly set out in language policy and the non-dominant language does not enjoy high prestige; Active assimilation (2) refers to a context where the government actively encourages minority groups to abandon their language; Forced assimilation (1) refers to the government explicitly declaring the dominant group's languages the only official national language; and Prohibition (0) is where minority languages are prohibited in any domain.

Current support for language initiatives primarily stems from non-governmental organisations such as SANDEVA and various community-based projects, with the Pan South African Language Board being the main governmental entity involved¹⁰. However, the majority of support is provided outside of government structures. There is a clear call for increased government support, highlighting the need for more funding from government resources. The interviews reflect the socio-historical factors impacting the current status of Nama in South Africa. The political injustice associated with the Nama community has its origins in apartheid-era South Africa. During this period, Nama communities were systematically identified and subjected to education in Afrikaans. Participant L explains, "But because we grew up in a community where it was banned, we couldn't even teach our children". So, now we got independence in the country. And that's where I came in. I am an activist now for 30 years, my darling." (Participant L). The use of the Nama language was explicitly prohibited, leading to its perception as a "skindertaal" or gossip language—a stigma that persists today. Consequently, children in these communities were ridiculed for speaking Nama (see Participant G's account below), which has led some parents to pass on Afrikaans to their children as a means of avoiding such ridicule, even describing this as a privilege to escape linguistic discrimination¹¹:

My people, my mother's ancestors come from Namibia. Her grandmother, my great-grandmother, she was shot dead in Bethany. She was blind and she was made to smoke the gun as if it were a pipe because she smoked this stone pipe. They said it was the stone pipe, they put the pipe in her mouth and shot her dead. My great grandfather had to flee with the two boys. So I come from such a history and here at school we are not allowed to speak Nama on school grounds, because it is a humiliating language, we all gossip. While not gossiping people. So we must be helped to get our culture, our history uplifted so that we can get that human dignity, because my people also have, my grandchildren feel that when they speak that language they are inferior. Many of my people, people my age, don't want to speak the language between other people either, because it's a shame.

This phenomenon may also elucidate the recent trend of teaching Nama to grandchildren, as described by Participant G2, who did not teach their children Nama, but has started teaching their grandchildren, potentially signalling the beginning of de-stigmatisation:

¹⁰ The author acknowledges that the participants were recommended by the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB), which could introduce a bias, as those selected may hold particular views on Nama language revitalisation. Therefore, while this sample provides valuable insights, it may not fully represent the broader spectrum of opinions within the Nama-speaking community.

¹¹ Translated from the original Afrikaans: My mense, my ma se voorouers kom uit Namibië uit. Haar ouma, my oumagrootjie sy's in Bethanië doodgeskiet. Sy was blind en sy is die geweer gelat rook asof dit 'n pyp is omdat sy hierdie klippyp gerook het. Het hulle gesê dis die klippyp, hulle het die pyp in haar mond insteek en haar doodgeskiet. My oupagrootjie moes vlug met die twee seuns. So ek kom uit so 'n geskiedenis uit en hier op skool mag ons nie Nama gepraat het op skoolgrond nie, want dis 'n vernederende taal, ons skinder almal. Terwyl jy nie mense skinder nie. So ons moet gehelp word om ons kultuur, ons geskiedenis opgehef te kry sodat ons daai menswaardigheid kan kry, want my mense het ook, my kleinkinders voel dat wanneer hulle daai taal praat is hulle minderwaardig. Baie van my mense, my ouderdom mense wil ook nog nie die taal tussen ander mense praat nie, want dis 'n skande.

Researcher: I see and did ma'am teach Nama to ma'am's children?

Participant G2: No.

Researcher: Not?

Participant G2: In the beginning I taught them to count, the grandchildren.

Researcher: Ek sien en het mevrou, vir mevrou se kinders Nama geleer?

Participant G2: Nee.

Researcher: Nie?

Participant G2: Ek het in die begin vir hulle geleer tel, die kleinkinders.

In terms of Factor 7, then, Nama has its roots in prohibition (Grade 0), where Nama was prohibited from being used in any domain and may have been tolerated in private domains. Since then, Nama has climbed the scale to differentiated support (Grade 4);

where non-dominant languages are explicitly protected by the government, but there are clear differences in the contexts in which the dominant/official languages are used. The government encourages ethnolinguistic groups to maintain and use their languages, most often in private domains (as the home language) rather than in public domains (e.g. in schools). Some domains of non-dominant language use enjoy high prestige (e.g. at ceremonial occasions) (UNESCO, 2003:13).

Developing a formal curriculum also requires government involvement, as does providing expertise from the academic community. Although only one participant mentioned digital lessons as part of idealised support, it is an area of interest. The perceived responsibility for support underscores the call for government involvement, with five participants advocating solely for government support and another five for a combined effort, totalling ten. Additionally, eight participants favour a combined approach, with five supporting combined efforts and three advocating solely for Nama-based support.

The final question in the vitality section asked participants to offer any perceived threats to the vitality of Nama. Table 4 illustrates the frequencies of responses.

Table 4 Perceived threat to the vitality of Nama code frequencies

Code (category: vitality)	Grounded frequency
Vi9.1 Perceived threat to vitality Lack of speakers/use	5
Vi9.1 Perceived threat to vitality Tainting of the original	5
Vi9.1 Perceived threat to vitality_Negative attitude (government or people in general)	4
Vi9.1 Perceived threat to vitality Lack of funding	2
Vi9.1 Perceived threat to vitality Lack of community involvement	1

The findings confirm several previous observations. The lack of speakers and usage of the Nama language underscores the significant efforts to ensure its use within South African communities, which is evident in the establishment of informal Nama schools and the initiative to incorporate them into the Northern Cape school curriculum. An unexpected finding was the fear of "proper" Nama becoming tainted. Additionally, the lack of community involvement is linked to the need for the Nama community to take responsibility for revitalising their language and culture. The absence of government funding supports previous findings on the ideal support necessary for this cause. Moreover, the emergence of negative attitudes towards Nama, identified in the interviews, reveals a challenge linked to South Africa's socio-political history and linguistic stigma. Encouragingly, there is a shift towards destigmatisation. In relation to UNESCO's vitality factors, Factor 1 remains at Grade 2, underscoring the necessity of household transmission to improve its standing. Strengthening intergenerational transfer within the household could, in turn, enhance Factors 2 and 3, contributing to an overall increase in the speaker population and mitigating the language's critically endangered status. Additionally, improving Factor 6 by expanding the availability of written materials in Nama – not only to support formal education but also to provide reading resources for children at home – would further reinforce the first three factors. Notably, Factor 7 has shown substantial improvement, ranging from Grade 0 to Grade 4. Continued efforts are essential to maintain this progress and ensure long-term sustainability. Building on these findings, the next section examines the role of domain, where UNESCO Factors 4 and 5 become particularly relevant.

Category 2: Domain

In this section, UNESCO factors 4 and 5 are applicable. Factor 4 serves trends in existing language domains and considers "where, with whom, and the range of topics for which a language is used [to determine] whether or not it will be transmitted to the next generation" (UNESCO, 2003:9). Universal use (5) is where the language is actively used in all discourse domains; Multilingual parity (4) refers to a situation where the dominant language(s)

is not the language of the ethnolinguistic group but is used as an integral language in public domains i.e., in informal contexts; Dwindling domains (3) refers to the language of ethnolinguistic group becoming less prevalent at home where children are receptive bilinguals; Limited or formal domains (2) is where the non-dominant language is used only in highly formal domains such as rituals or used at community centres, festivals and ceremonial occasions; Highly limited domain (1) where the non-dominant language is used in restrictive contexts, usually by very few individuals in the community with some individuals being *rememberers* of the language; Extinct (0) is the instance where the language is not spoken at any place at any time. Participants were asked where (D1.1) and with whom (D1.2) they speak Nama and if there are any other domains where they feel Nama could be spoken (D2.1). Table 5 offers the domain code frequencies.

Table 5 Domain code frequencies

Code (category: domain)	Grounded frequency
D1.1 where school (as teacher = education)	7
D1.1 where community	3
D1.1 Where Traditional events	3
D1.2 who friends	2
D1.2 who neighbours in SA	2
D2.1 where church (religion)	1
D2.1 where family space Namibia (family)	1
D2.1 where family space SA (family)	1
D2.1 where work (employment)	0

The highest frequency of Nama language use is observed in the school domain, while it is moderately used in community settings. Like community settings, Nama language use is evident in traditional events, underscoring its significance in cultural practices and heritage preservation, as noted in the 'vitality' themed questions. Conversely, fewer instances of Nama language use among friends and neighbours suggest a narrower domain of language use within social circles. This limited use may contribute to the perceived threat regarding the lack of usage and the push for revitalisation efforts focused on transferring the language to the community. Notably, there are no instances of Nama language use in work or employment contexts. It seems that Nama is primarily used in limited or formal domains (Grade 2) as part of Factor 4. However, there is an indication that there is potential movement up the scale in terms of children being receptive bilinguals as part of Grade 3 (dwindling domains): "But regularly, the language is dying out, because even young ones only speak English. But luckily for my kids, they are fluent in the language, although they are shy to speak, at least 110% they can understand. And they are teenagers. So, I speak to them in my language, even though they respond in English" (Participant T), albeit not a significant shift.

Factor 5, as part of *domain*, explores the response to new domains and media; where such domains include "new work environments, new media, including broadcast media and the Internet" (UNESCO, 2003:11). Participant P¹² offers an instance where Nama is broadcast over a radio station: "Here in Namaqualand, if you come in here, then we have a radio station here, 98.1, you can pick him up there like that. Then you will see and hear on the radio stations that Nama is spoken a lot. Nama news is read, and the other nations also speak Nama; even the white people I grew up with, they speak too". Participant T highlights that there are still challenges regarding Factor 5:

People did not put emphasis on our languages. And when, because I remember like, I'm telling you, I was also in media industry, and I had that challenge myself, of getting my voice heard on TV, radio, whatsoever. But every time I was told, "Your language is not catered for, we are sorry, but we are looking only for isiZulu and other languages." Now when COVID came, they were running around, because now if they exclude the Nama community from dissemination of message, how will they be able to to the curb COVID-19. So, that's where they now started to see that "Wow! We need to try and include these languages. Because if we are faced with cases like this, like COVID-19, what are we gonna do?"

Accordingly, then, Factor 5 for Nama would reflect a minimal (Grade 1) level with the language being used in only a few new domains. This is highlighted by UNESCO (2003:11) where "an endangered language enjoys one new domain, broadcast media, including radio and television, but only for a half-hour a week". It is an area that could be explored in terms of improving limited exposure of Nama, through diversifying use in new domains. Participant G disclosed an initiative they are pursuing: "So it seems that she [anonymised] is also now willing to help with the digitalisation to digitise the language so that our people can also transfer it on the phone to the

¹² Translated from the original Afrikaans: "Hier in Namakwaland, as jy hier in kom, dan ons het 'n radiostasie hier, 98.1, julle kan hom daar opvang daarso. Dan sal jy sien en hoor op die radiostasies is daar baie dat daar Nama gepraat word. Nama-nuus word gelees en die ander nasies praat ook Nama, selfs die wit mense wat ek saam grootgeword het, hulle praat ook maar."

smartphone and then learn in this way for those who cannot do the classes, not attending, but who has a phone. These are the types of projects that we would really like to have supported as well, but also the classes.” The digitisation of Nama for use on smartphones is an example of how the grade could possibly improve to *coping* (Grade 2).

In sum, the use of Nama in different domains requires attention where intergenerational transmission once again plays a role, but the widespread use in more domains, possibly through new domain exposure, could aid in the revitalisation of Nama through community-based projects. Such efforts are, however, intimately tied to the speech community’s attitude as expressed by UNESCO (2003:14) that “Members of a speech community are not usually neutral towards their own language. They may see it as essential to their community and identity to promote it; they may use it without promoting it; they may be ashamed of it and, therefore, not promote it; or they may see it as a nuisance and actively avoid using it”. The next section explores the category of attitude in conjunction with UNESCO Factors 8 and 9.

Category 3: Attitude

In this article's context, attitude reflects Nama speakers’ perception of their language and UNESCO’s 8th factor is applicable here Factor 8 considers community members’ attitudes toward their own language. On the highest level (5), all members value their language and wish to see it promoted; on level (4), most members support language maintenance; on level (3) many members support language maintenance with others being indifferent and may even support language loss; on level (2), some members support language maintenance while others remain indifferent and may support language loss; on level (1), only a few members support maintenance with others remaining indifferent or support language loss; and the lowest level (0) indicates that no one cares if the language is lost; all prefer to use a dominant language.

Historically, the Khoekhoe and San cultures were synonymous with backwardness and something to be ashamed of in the apartheid state of then South Africa (van Wyk, 2016). Many people were ashamed to speak Nama then (Berzborn, 2003), which the participants in this current study also reported. It is essential to “foster a positive attitude in the community towards the language” (Berzborn, 2003:330); hence, gaining insight into current attitudes towards Nama is important. Participants were asked what Nama is (At1.1), and their responses were coded regarding how they portrayed Nama. i.e., positively or otherwise. Participants were then asked what Nama means (At2.1) to capture their personal language association attitude. Participants were also asked what other languages they speak (At3.1) and what each of those languages means to them (At4.1) in order to determine if there was a functional difference between the different languages in participants’ respective repertoires, which could then better inform understanding of bottom-up, community-based language revitalisation efforts. Table 6 shows the results of the responses to the questions regarding attitude.

Table 6: Attitude code frequencies

Code (Category: attitude)	Grounded frequency
At1.1 _Attitude _technical explanation of language	6
At1.1 _Attitude _negative	0
At1.1 _Attitude _neutral	2
At1.1 _Attitude _positive	6
At2.1 _Personal language association with identity	8
At3.1 _Repertoire _Other official South African languages	3
At3.1 _Repertoire _Afrikaans	8
At3.1 _Repertoire _English	6
At4.1 _Function _Communication (home) (Afrikaans)	1
At4.1 _Function _Communication (outside) (Afrikaans mostly & English)	4
At4.1 _Function _Economic/linguistic capital (English)	3
At4.1 _Function _Everyday language (Afrikaans)	2
At4.1 _Function _Lingua franca (English)	3
At4.1 _Function _Mothertongue (Afrikaans)	3

An unexpected observation was the technical explanation of Nama, where the participant noted the four distinct click sounds of the language, with an obvious positive attitude in describing their language. As seen in previous categories, a recurring theme among participants is that Nama is deeply ingrained in their group identity, culture, and heritage. English and Afrikaans are accounted for as languages of access and communication. Proficiency in the other official South African languages often exist only at the word level. Notably, none of the other languages hold the same significance or represent what Nama means to each speaker. UNESCO (2003:14) explains that:

Just as people value family traditions, festivals and community events, members of the community may see their language as a cultural core value, vital to their community and ethnic identity. If members view their language as hinderance to economic mobility and integration into mainstream society, they may develop negative attitudes toward their language.

From the data, participants expressed their positive attitude towards the language in various ways. For instance, Participant L explains: “Yes, Ma'am. I am, uhm, I while I was on the CRL roadshow, I was scatted by SANDEVA – it's an organisations. SANDEVA stands South Africa Nama Development Association. And the CEO approach me. And **because the love is for my language**, I joined, I became a member, and I'm also a practitioner in the organisation”. Despite participants' acknowledgement that English is the language of upward mobility, it is not reason for them to sever their deep cultural ties with Nama: “Look at them, far in the... Nama is the identity. He is now becoming the lingua franca here, everywhere it is English, so he gets you far. You can do certain things yourself in the outside world. Yes, it's another plus to be able to keep it busy. People also respect you if you speak to them in their languages, if you can even say a few things or chat with them¹³” (Participant W). Thus, in terms of Factor 8's scale, it is fair to deduce that most members support language maintenance (Grade 4) for cultural, heritage, and group identity reasons. In conjunction with *attitude*, it is important to consider *identity* because, “When members' attitudes towards their language are very positive, the language may be seen as a key symbol of group identity” (UNESCO 2003,14).

Category 4: Identity

Identity is a key component in language revitalisation since language often expresses the speaker's identity (Giles 1977; Kamwangamalu 2000; Kotze 2000; Berzborn 2003). Nama is no exception, as reported in Berzbon's (2003) study, “Ek is 'n Nama, want ek praat die taal”, which translates to, “I am Nama because I speak the language” (Berzborn 2003:327).

For this category, participants were asked if Nama forms part of their identity (Id1.1) and were asked to explain their answer in detail (Id1.2). Participants were also asked how they think people could identify them as Nama-speaking (Id2.1) to establish overt identity markers. Table 7 outlines the identity code frequencies.

Table 7 Identity code frequencies

Code (category: identity)	Grounded frequency
Id1.1 Identity Yes	12
Id1.2 Identity Nama culture as part of language/identity link	10
Id2.1 Identity signifiers identifiable	7
Id2.1 Identity signifiers physical features	6
Id2.1 Identity signifiers clothing	4
Id1.2 Identity Raised as Nama	3
Id2.1 Identity signifiers non-identifiable	2
Id1.1 Identity No	0

Participants felt that Nama is part of their identity, as illustrated by the grounded frequency (12) and confirmed by the null 'no' response. More specifically, participants emphasise the connection between Nama culture and the language-identity link: This code illustrates the relationship between being Nama, the language, and the cultural elements intertwined with tradition and its features. Participant G explains this connection to be his bone marrow. Translated from the original Afrikaans: If I could explain, I would say:

I think Nama, I eat Nama, I sleep Nama. This is something we all say because it is the first language that is engrained in us...There are people who speak Nama, who write Nama, but they do not know the

¹³ Translated from the original Afrikaans: Kyk hulle, ver in die... Nama is die identiteit. Hy word nou die lingua franca hierso, oral is dit Engels, so hy bring jou ver. Jy kan self in die buitewêreld ook dan sekere dinge doen. Ja, dis weer 'n pluspunt om dit te kan besig hou. Mense respekteer jou ook as jy hulle in hulle se tale as jy even twee goedjies kan sê of met hulle kan gesels.

language in the (bone)marrow. This is what I also tell people, I was breast-fed Nama. I did not learn Nama as an adult. From my baby days, I drink Nama (milk). I breast-fed Nama for 70 years – my mom had me when she was 31 and she died at 101, which means that for 70 years, I had that gift to drink from her breast and understand the language in its (bone)marrow. (Participant G)

Moreover, the majority of participants do believe that they are identifiable as Nama, particularly through their physical features and their clothing. Because of Nama's strong association with the group's identity, Grade 4 on UNESCO's Factor 8 scale is justified. Moreover, the interaction between language attitudes and policies is an intricate one, where "linguistic activism must be tailored to the particular sociolinguistic situation (UNESCO, 2003:15). Currently, it seems that Nama is in a state of language revival, with credit to the community-based revitalisation efforts, where the language is actively being reintroduced in the community and (new) domains as previously discussed. The next step for communities and activists is language fortification, where "increasing the presence of the non-dominant language to counterbalance a perceived linguistic threat of a dominant language" (UNESCO, 2003:15) becomes the goal. A few recommendations have already been made in terms of where Nama is placed on the previous 8 Factors of UNESCO's scale; the final factor is no exception in contributing towards the goal of Nama's fortification and revitalisation. Factor 9 addresses the amount and quality of documentation and ranges from superlative to undocumented. Superlative (5) reflects the existence of comprehensive grammar and dictionaries, extensive texts and a constant flow of language materials with an abundance of high-quality audio and video recordings; Good (4) would indicate one good grammar and a number of adequate grammars and literature with occasionally updated everyday media and adequate audio-visual recordings; Fair (3) indicates sufficient grammar and text with no everyday media; and audio-visual material exist in varying quality; Fragmentary (2) shows the existence of grammatical sketches and word lists with texts being useful for limited linguistic research – audio and visual material exists in varying quality; Inadequate (1) denotes few grammatical sketches, short word-lists and fragmentary text with audio-visual material being of unusable quality; and Undocumented (0) is where no material exists. The need for documentation of Nama became apparent when evaluating Factor 6 (Materials for language education and literacy); the same is true for Factor 9 with an added concern to ensure that these materials are indeed accurate, as expressed by Participant G: "Yes, it's about the culture too. Check the language too. There are people who can't write the language, they don't know it either, but they speak it and they know it to the core just like me. People who are older than me. They know exactly, they must want to **have this stuff verified**. To see, what Uncle [anonymised] says is the truth¹⁴". In search of existing Nama texts, and based on the interview data, it is apparent that Nama's amount and quality of documentation is fragmentary (Grade 2) and requires urgent attention in efforts of revitalisation.

In answering the first part of the research question, Nama's revitalisation in the Northern Cape of South Africa is a grassroots effort guided by community members exhibited in categories of vitality, domain, identity, and attitude. The vitality (currently *b-* as previously stated; and *6b* and *7* on the Extended Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (Lewis & Simons, 2010), reflecting a *threatened* and *shifting* status, respectively) of the Nama language is paramount for its survival and continued learning, emphasising engaging specific target speakers within Nama communities while remaining open to the broader South African population. The responsibility for revitalisation is perceived to rest with both the government and the Nama community, though the community disproportionately shoulders current support. There is a call for increased governmental involvement, including recognising Nama as an official language, fostering a positive attitude towards the language, and providing additional funding. The domain of Nama use is predominantly confined to community-based interactions among friends and neighbours in rural areas of the Northern Cape Province. Revitalisation efforts aim to strengthen the use of Nama within these communities and eventually extend its application nationally. Participants express a profound pride in their Nama heritage, language, and identity, highlighting the importance of preserving and transferring cultural norms, traditions, and history. Despite the existing stigma, which the communities are actively working to address, there is a strong positive attitude towards the language. Nama is deeply ingrained in the speakers' sense of identity and cultural belonging, reflecting its integral role in their communal and personal lives. In terms of UNESCO's evaluative scale, a summary is provided in Table 8.

¹⁴ Translated from the original Afrikaans: Ja, dit gaan oor die kultuur ook. Kyk even die taal ook. Daar is mense wat nie die taal kan skryf nie, hulle kan hom ook nie, maar hulle praat hom en hulle ken hom net soos ek tot in die murg. Mense wat ouer as ek is. Hulle weet presies, hulle moet hierdie goed wil laat verifieer. Om te kyk, dit wat oom [geanonimiseer] sê, is dit die waarheid.

Table 8: Nama's grading according to UNESCO's nine factors

Factor description	Grade level
Factor 1: Intergenerational language transmission	Grade 2 – severely endangered
Factor 2: Absolute number of speakers	Spoken by 0.1% of the population (Alexander, 2024)
Factor 3: Proportion of speakers within the total population	Grade 1 – critically endangered
Factor 4: Trends in existing language domains	Grade 2 – limited or formal domains; moving to Grade 3 – dwindling domains
Factor 5: Response to new domains and media	Grade 1 – minimal; with potential for Grade 2 – coping
Factor 6: Materials for language education and literacy	Grade 1 – Practical orthography known and some material being written
Factor 7: Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies including official status and use	Grade 4 – differentiated support
Factor 8: Community members' attitude towards their own language	Grade 4 – most members support language maintenance
Factor 9: Amount and quality of documentation	Grade 2 – fragmentary

Furthermore, the intricate nuances of the elements discussed in these findings interact in precise ways to support grassroots community-based revitalisation. This interaction is examined in detail in the discussion section, where the second part of the research question is addressed.

DISCUSSION

The focus of this discussion is to consider the four categories and their respectively related codes in the results section, which answered the first research question, and now apply those codes-as-elements to explore their interrelatedness. Atlas.ti™ has a network-building tool with a set of default relations, which is used to express relations between codes and the nature of the relation between those codes. Understanding what is connected and how it is connected offers important insights into further understanding community-based revitalisation efforts, contributing to ongoing efforts to develop successful programs and, in doing so, answer the second part of the research question: *How effective are ongoing community-based language revitalisation efforts when assessed through UNESCO's nine factors of language vitality, and how do these factors interact and influence revitalisation efforts?*

To further explain the two types of default relations, the Atlas.ti 23 Windows User Manual (2024) offers a guide. The first type of relation is symmetric, which is a bi-directional relationship illustrated with an arrow at both ends. This type includes the following relations: is-associated-with, contradicts, and no-name. The second type is asymmetric, a one-directional relation depicted by a single arrow at one end, defined by the relation is-a-property-of. In this study, the relations between codes comprise both symmetric (is-associated-with) and asymmetric (is-a-property-of and is-cause -of) relations between codes depicted in Figure 2.

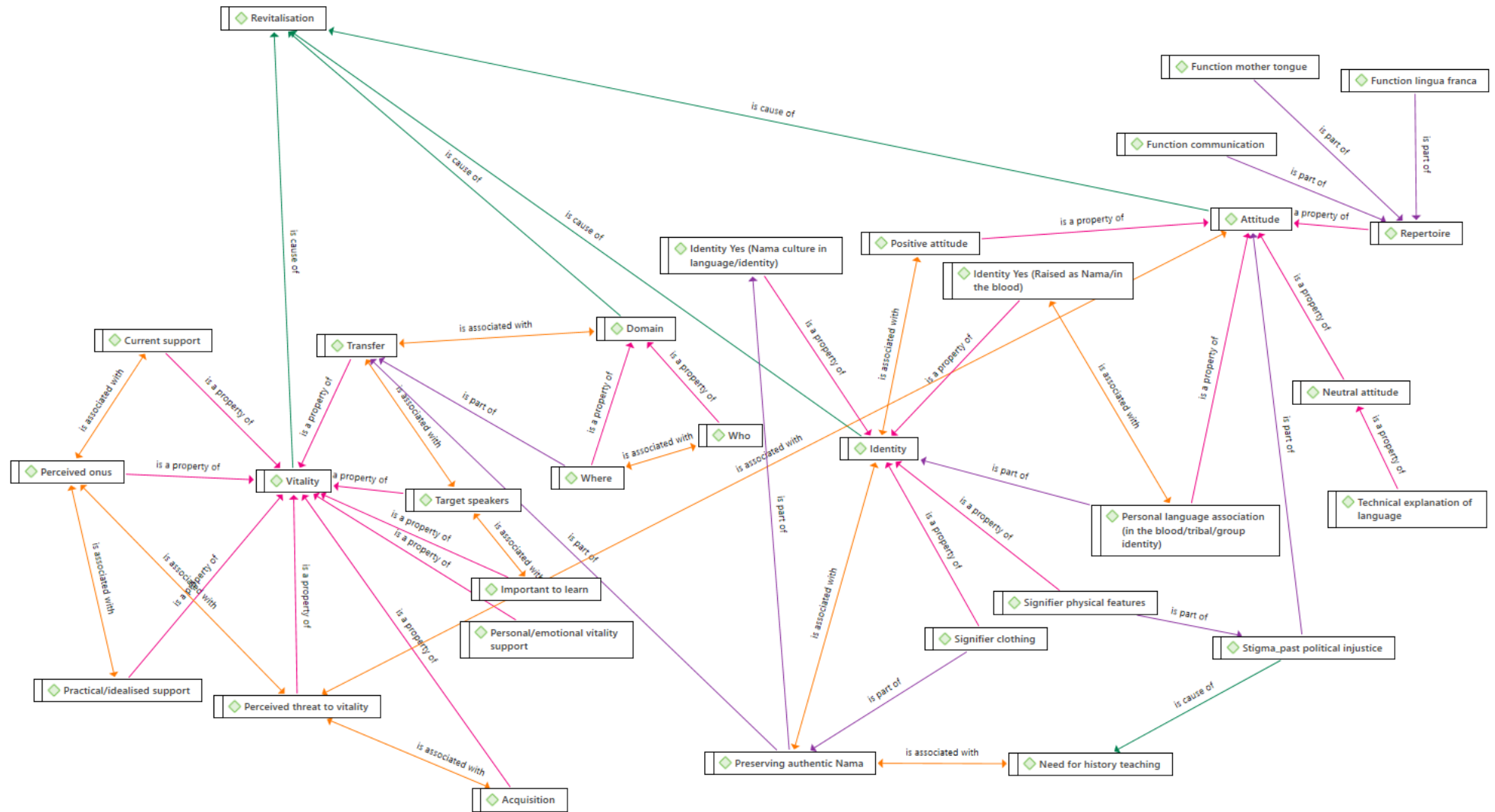


Figure 2: Network of community-based Nama revitalisation efforts

Revitalisation appears at the very top, left-hand corner since this is the overarching element that this article investigates. Each of the main elements explored in this study (vitality, domain, identity, and attitude) are depicted as asymmetric, one-directional elements that are the cause of Nama's community-based revitalisation efforts. Each of those elements has sub-elements that also depict an asymmetrical, one-directional relation, showing that they are a property of that main element. Vitality has nine sub-elements that are symmetric, bi-directional, and is-associated-with relations with each other. Vitality's nine sub-elements are current support, perceived onus, practical/idealised support, perceived threat to vitality, acquisition, personal/emotional vitality support, important to learn, target speakers, and transfer, as discussed in the results section. The interconnected relations between the sub-elements show that vitality is a multi-dimensional concept and how it operates within Nama's community-based revitalisation efforts. Current support (concerning formal organisations [government and non-government], international training of participants in Namibia, community-based lessons in school or informal 'Nama schools', and community-based media) is associated with the perceived onus in terms of whose responsibility it is to keep Nama alive – participants link the onus to both governmental and non-governmental organisations, as well as the Nama community themselves. The idea of speech communities themselves being part of language revitalisation initiatives is in line with Wiltshire et al.'s (2022) first IPT regarding language awareness, which notes that community awareness of language shift is key in motivating local agency (Wiltshire et al., 2022; Budrikis, 2021; Disbray et al., 2018), which is in line with what Fredericks (2020) suggests should be the case for Nama in Namibia through the agency of linguistic citizenship. The onus being on the community speaks to Wiltshire et al.'s (2022:9) tenth IPT is that of communities having control over language planning, which refers to the idea that if language planning is done at grassroots level within the community, revitalisation efforts are more sustainable since the community has ownership of the process. Moreover, this perceived onus is associated with idealised support as participants mention that the government needs to offer more support, especially in funding, to further community-based revitalisation efforts. Furthermore, a *perceived threat to vitality* is also associated with perceived onus, as the result indicates that participants' fears of the lack of use and government funding and support would negatively impact revitalisation efforts, again reinforcing Wiltshire et al.'s (2022) ideas that language awareness is an important consideration for revitalisation programs. This fear of the lack of use is, in turn, associated with acquisition, where participants note the importance of gaining more speakers. The perceived threat to vitality is also associated with another main element, *attitude*. Participants note their perception of the adverse impact negative attitudes (see Table 4) may have on the vitality of their language. Furthermore, *transfer*, as part of vitality, is associated with target speakers in that participants note where transfer efforts should be aimed. More specifically, target speakers are associated with reasons why transfer to certain target speakers is important to learn, such as children who are the custodians and the future of Nama. According to Wiltshire et al.'s (2022) eleventh IPT, fostering access to language, targeting acquisition, and promoting use, teaching, and speaking of the language inherently involves community autonomy. They also note a potential concern that if outgroup members learn to speak Nama, it may be perceived as cultural appropriation (Gale, 2011). However, this perspective partially aligns with reports from some participants in this study, which indicate that while everyone is welcome to learn Nama, the primary focus remains on the Nama people themselves. In understanding the dynamic between the sub-elements of vitality, a better understanding is offered regarding how vitality *is-cause-of* revitalisation.

Domain is based on Fishman's (1972c) concept of domains of use. Figure 1 illustrates that the domain has two sub-elements that are associated with each other: *where the language is spoken* and *whom* the language is spoken with. The results indicate that Nama is used mainly in an educational (formal) setting on the highest end of the spectrum and not in the work domain (see Table 5), specifically for these PanSALB selected participants. Since Nama is not used in all domains, it may be important to consider Wiltshire et al.'s (2022:11) eighth IPT that deals with language in use and explains that "If community members identify functions for the target language through selecting life crucial bodies of knowledge they would like to preserve, more people may be motivated to speak and learn the language because the community assigns more value to the language". Assigning value to Nama has been a historic issue that persists today. It offers an important consideration already noted: the need to remove the stigma of Nama as a gossip language and not having any economic value to boost acquisition. *Where* Nama is spoken shows an *is-part-of* relation to *transfer* as part of the vitality element in that Nama is spoken and taught in both formal (select primary schools in the Northern Cape Province) and informal educational settings, i.e., Nama schools, which is where transfer mainly takes place as seen in Table 3. The domains of use and with whom Nama is used and transferred to speak directly to the *is-cause-of* relation to this study's exploration of community-based revitalisation efforts.

In exploring *identity*, four sub-elements are apparent. All participants agreed that Nama is part of their identity, with specific references to it either involving the *Nama culture in the language* or that *Nama is in their blood*. Wiltshire et al.'s (2022:11) observation with their third IPT, sense of belonging, is applicable here as it describes that "language activities provide family-like atmospheres and promote a sense of belonging, where culture, tradition and language are shared, then participants may experience healing and pride because their identities are affirmed and strengthened". Notably, the emergent code, *preserving authentic Nama*, is associated with identity

and has an *is-part-of* relation to the *culture in the language/identity* sub-element. Preserving authentic Nama contradicts two of Wiltshire et al.'s IPTs, which allude to attitudes towards language varieties (IPT7) and feeling safe (IPT 9). Both IPTs accept language varieties that should be free of judgment to encourage language learning activities in a safe space. However, Participant G, as noted in the results section, cites a perceived threat to the preservation of not only the originality of the language but also cultural customs, such as the dance (known as the *Namastap*), which are encroached on. It is important to note that perhaps the revitalisation efforts of Nama should be more accepting of potential varieties in order to increase at least language interest, which speaks to IPT6, language ecology, in that not acknowledging the local language ecology, community participation may be discouraged (Wiltshire et al., 2022:12). Moreover, there are physical identifiers that are noted as being properties of identity with *clothing* also having an *is-part-of* relation with *preserving authentic Nama* where participants describe traditional dress codes. The strong association with Nama as part of participants' respective identities, whether intrinsic or external, tangible aspects, is demonstrative of the *is-cause-of* relation to community-based revitalisation efforts of Nama.

Attitude has an *is-cause-of* relation with revitalisation in the context of this study as a result of the interaction between *attitude's* four sub-elements. A clear positive attitude is observable in considering participant responses but more so, the *is-associated-with* relation to identity. Personal language association is closely related to the link between positive attitude and identity, where participants once again describe that the Nama language is embedded in their group identity (see Table 7). Berzborn (2003:344) experienced a similar positive attitude to Nama in the Richtersveld, where she encountered pride for and the expression of love for Nama, with many of her observations being that Nama speakers wanted to promote the language and keep it from dying out. It is also a dominant observation in this current study, where all participants express their affinity to Nama. An interesting observation was the participant's technical explanation of Nama in answering how they would explain what Nama is to an outgroup member. It is observable that Nama is distinct in its use of four unique clicks (as mentioned by participants – however, this is not unique to varieties of Khoekhoe). The technical explanation was classified as a neutral attitude, but it speaks to the uniqueness of the clicks being an aspect associated with their attitude towards Nama. Finally, *repertoire* is a property of attitude in that no other language in participants' repertoires represents what Nama means to them despite, for example, Afrikaans being the home language for the majority of the participants (see Table 1), where *communication*, *mother tongue*, and *lingua franca* are cited as functional aspects of language use with Nama holding a deep cultural and identity connection as reinforcing revitalisation.

Stigma, as an emergent code, is part of attitude as well, and participants describe Nama as being seen as a gossip language.¹⁵

When we moved out of Namibia in 95, we used the language as a gossip language, which came from what our ancestors told us. They first had to speak the language slyly, they first had to check if boss didn't arrive, because if he did, they weren't allowed to speak the language. Around '95 we used it as a gossip language and later we saw that we were doing ourselves an injustice. We now only speak the language if we want to gossip about someone, like for example at school when we were boarded to want to gossip about someone, but it didn't work out at all, and it also led to some of my generation also losing the language (Participant PL).

Previously, Berzborn (2003:344) cites Nama in the Richtersveld as being viewed negatively as backward and embarrassing and describes a general disinterest in acquiring the "old" language, which would have no educational benefit. Stigma has further connections with the sub-element of identity, *signifier physical features*, where speakers of Nama were persecuted based on their physical appearances. Participant L explains:

But, yes, especially in removing the two front teeth, people say in Cape Town, it's a fashion. It's not a fashion, my darling. In the olden days, the colonists took out the front teeth of the people because then they couldn't pronounce that click sound properly.

This type of anecdotal evidence lays the foundation for the *is-cause-of* relation with *the need for history teaching* in addition to mere language acquisition. Wiltshire et al. (2022:7) offer two applicable IPTs regarding the importance of sharing stories (IPT4), where indigenous knowledge systems can be shared. Elders are key (IPT5), where language activities will opportunities for elders to transfer their knowledge and "stories can strengthen

¹⁵ Toe ons 95 kom trek uit Namibië uit, het ons die taal gebruik as 'n skindertaal en dit het gekom van dit wat ons voorouers ons vertel. Hulle moes eers die taal skelmpies praat, hulle moes eers kyk of baas nie aankom nie, want as hy aankom mag hulle nie die taal praat nie. So 95 toe gebruik ons dit as 'n skindertaal en later het ons gesien ons is mos besig om 'n onreg aan onself, injustice, aan onself te doen. Ons praat nou net die taal as ons iemand wil skinder, soos byvoorbeeld by die skool toe ons geboord was om iemand te wil beskinder, maar dit het glad nie uitgewerk nie en dit het ook gelei dat van my generasie ook die taal verloor het.

community relationships, wellbeing, and connection to culture [which is IPT2]”. The need for history teaching *is associated with* preserving authentic Nama, as a coupled need for knowledge of accurate history and traditions would inform the discernment of authentic Nama and preserve those traditions and languages. In understanding the true history and cultural value of Nama, Participant G explains that it may also remove the stigma of Nama.

Overall, the relations that underpin elements of vitality, domain, identity, and attitude indicate a bottom-up process of community-based language revitalisation of Nama in the Northern Cape region of South Africa. Understanding these efforts is crucial for supporting such initiatives and offering insights into more updated concepts of language revitalisation.

LIMITATIONS

Although his study addresses a limitation noted by Wiltshire et al. (2022:13) in that “further work is needed to understand how language revitalisation works from the perspective of the speech community themselves”, the geographical area that has been explored is limited. Moreover, this study would have benefitted from more participants to establish a stronger data saturation point. Other perspectives that could have been interesting to explore, which fall outside the scope of this study, include those of government and other official organisations in aid of top-down revitalisation efforts of Nama, which could help explore ‘the missing middle’.

CONCLUSION

In assessing the successes of Nama’s community-based revitalisation efforts using nine UNESCO-endorsed factors, the results highlight severe endangerment, with critical intergenerational transmission issues (Grade 2) and an extremely low proportion of speakers (0.1%). Usage is largely confined to limited or formal domains, with documentation being fragmentary (Grade 2). However, community attitudes towards maintenance are generally supportive (Grade 4), and governmental policies provide differentiated support (Grade 4). Efforts in media engagement (Grade 1) and education material (Grade 1) are still minimal but show potential for improvement. Considering the relationship between the sub-elements and the Wiltshire et al.’s (2022) study, it is important to observe that the Nama communities of the Northern Cape region have made significant strides in fostering language awareness and revitalisation efforts (IPT1). Nama-speaking participants in this study also acknowledge the importance of sharing stories (IPT4), noting that elders are key to sharing those stories (IPT5) in order to establish a connection to the culture (IPT2). Furthermore, through community-based efforts, Nama speakers in the Northern Cape successfully maintain community control of language planning (IPT10), which positively influences access to language (IPT11) to be set to broader parameters than just community members. However, revitalisation efforts may benefit from adjusting attitudes towards language varieties (IPT7) by understanding the language ecology (IPT6) in order to create a safe space (IPT9). Finally, considering small steps (IPT12) and allowing sufficient time (IPT13) to engage with grassroots community-based Nama revitalisation efforts will allow for sustainable initiatives and growth over time. Undoubtedly, the Nama community in the Namaqualand region of the Northern Cape has made significant strides in promoting the Nama language and culture. Initiatives such as the Nama-San Language Curriculum in Upington aim to revitalise Nama by developing educational materials and glossaries in Nama, English, and Afrikaans. The annual Nama Cultural Festival, held in Namibia, brings together community members from Namibia, Botswana, and South Africa to celebrate and promote Nama heritage. Additionally, educational programs in areas like Riemvasmaak and Kuboes focus on the revitalisation of Nama through schooling initiatives, further strengthening the cultural identity of the community. Final recommendations highlight the importance of intergenerational transmission through language nests, family programmes, and early education. Expanding Nama’s domains of use in business and public spaces will enhance visibility. Developing multimodal education materials and integrating Nama into school curricula can improve literacy. Leveraging media and technology, such as community radio (more), social media, and digital learning tools, will engage younger generations. Strengthening documentation and research through archives and linguistic studies is crucial. Policy support should ensure institutional backing and funding, while community-driven initiatives, like festivals and mentorship programs, can foster pride and active use.

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