

Analysing EMIS data: The case of Afrikaans

Emma Kirchner*

Abstract

Since Independence Afrikaans lost its status as official language. However, it is still used as *lingua franca* in parts of the country. In some schools Afrikaans is used as medium of instruction and also offered as a subject from grade 1 to 12. The purpose of this presentation is to analyse enrolment data regarding Afrikaans as captured in the Education Management Information System of the Ministry of Education in Namibia. An attempt will be made to ascertain whether any patterns regarding the enrolment of Afrikaans first and second language can be found. In conclusion, some remarks on the future of Afrikaans as school subject, also set against the proposals for a revised language policy for schools, will be made. EMIS is a useful tool that could be used by researchers and educationalists to document and discuss developments in the education sector, e.g. enrolment, teacher qualifications and physical facilities.

Introduction

Extensive information regarding schools in Namibia is gathered annually by way of the 15th School Day Census as well as the Annual Education Census (for which data is gathered in September). These education statistics are published annually as the *Education Management Information System (EMIS) Education Statistics* by the Ministry of Education. This information was officially published since 1992.

The data includes: enrolment figures per region and school phase, gender, class size, enrolments per subject, home language and medium of instruction. Information from the Directorate of National Examinations and Assessment (DNEA) and Adult Basic Education is also included.

In this presentation an attempt is made to analyse some of the data relevant to the Afrikaans language. By using EMIS data from 2002 to 2012, any patterns as to the enrolments for Afrikaans First and Second Language are identified, and where possible, reasons for changes discussed. Some preliminary remarks as to the relationship between performance in language and enrolment patterns will be made.

During the pre-independence years Afrikaans was the main official language and the medium of instruction in most schools in Namibia. Afrikaans was developed as first and second language across most school phases. The Afrikaans language had the role of *lingua franca* and was one of – if not the most – widely used language in Namibia, especially in the central and southern part of Namibia.

Other Namibian languages were not equally developed and not offered in all school phases. After Independence, the status of Afrikaans changed from official language to national language – together with all other Namibian languages. English became the sole official language in Namibia.

***Emmentia Kirchner** is a Lecturer in the Department Education in Language, Humanities and Commerce and within the Faculty of Education at the University of Namibia. Her main research interests are Reading, Language Education and Literature. She has extensive experience in teacher training and currently holds the position of the Director of the Khomasdal Campus of the University of Namibia. As Vice-Chairperson of the Namibian Children's Book Forum (NCBF), she has been involved in children's literature and the promotion of a reading culture in Namibia for many years. E-mail: ekirchner@unam.na

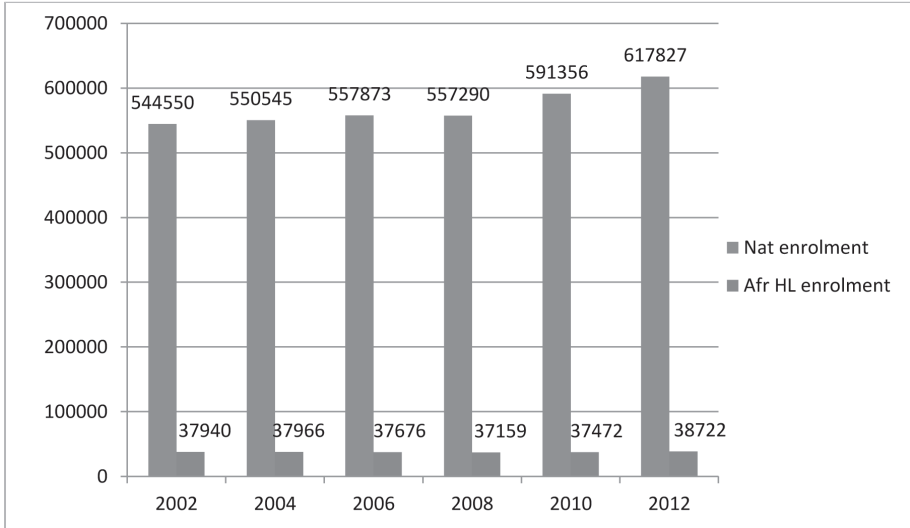
During the transition from the old educational system prior 1992, a new language policy – *The Language Policy for Schools – 1992 – 1996 and Beyond* (MEC, 1993) was implemented. English was phased in as a medium of instruction from Grade 4 onwards. In Grades 1 – 3 the medium of instruction should have been the home language of learners and Grade 4 was used as a phasing in year. However, whether this policy of home language instruction in the early years was ever fully implemented remains an open question. While a lot of effort was made to promote English in schools and to upgrade the language proficiency of teachers, some effort also went into the development of other Namibian languages as school subjects for all grades.

After 23 years of Independence, it is thus quite possible that the situation of Afrikaans in schools would have changed markedly. In the following sections, the EMIS data of 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012 will be analysed with the aim of identifying changes in the position of Afrikaans as school language. (Data from tables 7, 14, 15 and 16 were used.)

Enrolment by home language

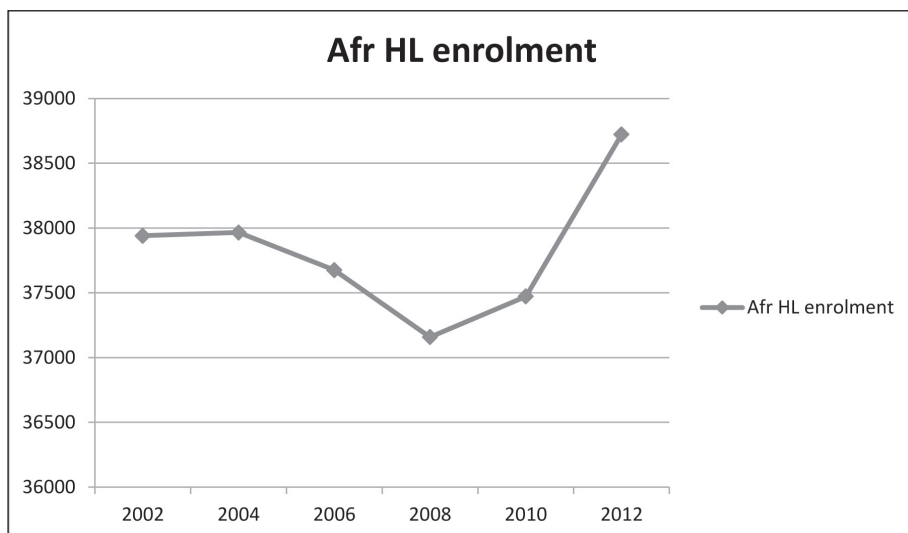
In 2002 there were 544550 learners in Namibia enrolled in state schools and private schools registered with the Ministry of Education. As can be seen from Figure 1 these numbers increased to 557290 in 2008. From 2010 pre-primary classes were once again included in the school system and these numbers will increase over the next years to the point where all children will attend one preprimary year before enrolling for grade 1. This has resulted in an increase in enrolment from 2010, and in 2012 the total learner enrolment has now increased to 617827.

Figure 1: Annual national learner numbers and Afrikaans home language learners enrolled over the past decade



In comparison, there has been a slight decrease in enrolment figure of Afrikaans home language learners during the same time – from 2006 to 2008. At this stage the reason for this is not clear, but it might be related to lower enrolments in grade one during the time – which was the result of fewer repeaters due to a change in the promotion policy of the Ministry of Education. From 2008 a steady increase occurred and numbers moved up from 37159 in 2008 to 38722 in 2012. Figure 2 shows the enrolment of Afrikaans home language learners only over the past decade.

Figure 2: Afrikaans home language enrolment

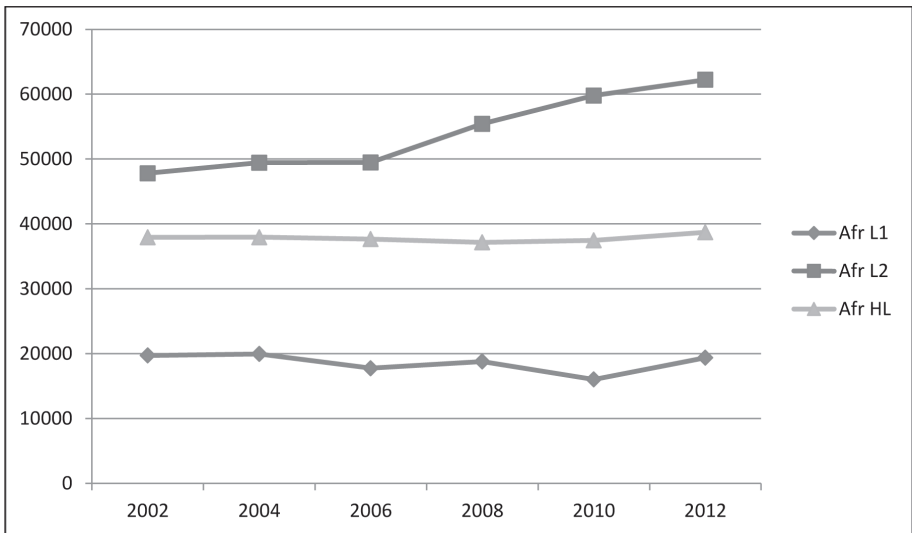


As indicated above, the increase in 2012 was caused by the rolling out of a preprimary grade in state schools and the capturing of preprimary learners enrolled with the Ministry of Education – similar to the national enrolment pattern. Afrikaans home language learners formed 6.97% of the population in 2002 and 6.27% in 2012. While it was at its lowest in 2008, compared to the national enrolment, it still formed 6.67% of the total population. The slight decrease in Afrikaans enrolment, can be attributed to a real decrease in the Afrikaans population, and also because some families, who considered themselves as Afrikaans in the past, now indicate another home language – e.g. English. According to the national census figures, Afrikaans households decreased from 11.4 % in 2001 to 10.4% in 2011. (*Namibia Population and Housing Census, 2001 and 2011*)

Enrolment in Afrikaans First and Second Language

Normally one would have expected that all of the above learners would take the subject Afrikaans on first language level. This is however not the case. When home language figures are compared to enrolment in Afrikaans first and second language, the following emerge:

Figure 3: Home language enrolment vs. Afrikaans First and Second Language enrolment



The green line shows Afrikaans home language learners and the blue line indicates enrolment in Afrikaans First Language, which is far below that. Many Afrikaans home language speakers thus do not all take their language on first language level: According to EMIS in 2012, e.g., 19374 of the 38722 Afrikaans home language learners were enrolled for Afrikaans First Language – that is only 50,03%.

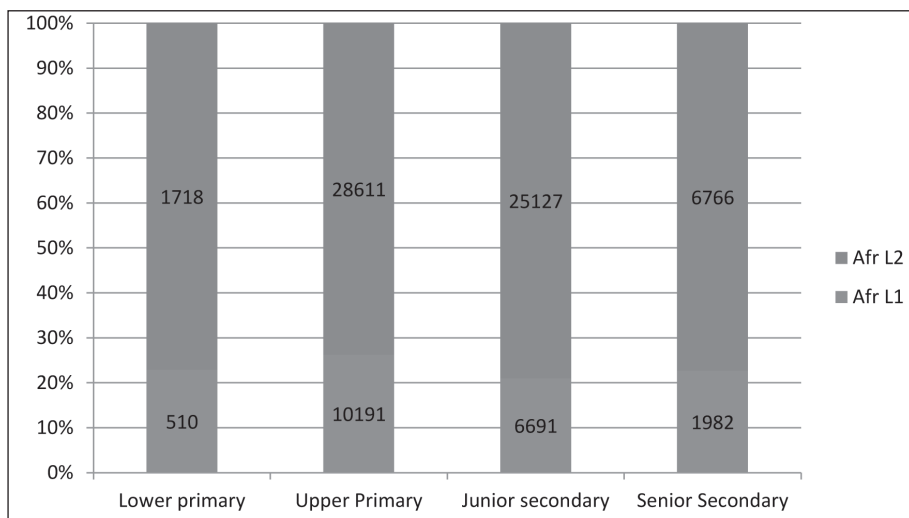
Afrikaans Second Language is taken by far more learners than Afrikaans First Language. Many Afrikaans First Language learners thus take Afrikaans on second language level than on first language level. Also, many speakers of other home languages take Afrikaans as second language. The enrolment in Afrikaans Second Language seems to have increased markedly over the last years (with the enrolment standing at 62222 in 2012).

During discussions with various schools in Khomas and Hardap regions principals and teachers alluded to the following reasons for this phenomenon:

- Afrikaans Second Language is perceived as easier to learn and to teach.
- There is easier access to Afrikaans Second Language because it is more readily offered in schools.
- Speakers of other languages find Afrikaans Second Language more useful than their own languages.
- Afrikaans First Language is perceived as difficult.
- Teachers find it challenging to teach Afrikaans First Language.
- Afrikaans First Language is not available at certain schools (due to various reasons, e.g. interest and number of first language speakers).
- Because of language diversity in a school, schools opt to offer Afrikaans Second Language, to cater for speakers of other home languages as well.

When speaking to principals, this last reason is given as major reason for the offering of Afrikaans on second language level. The fact is that most learners thus do take two languages, but for many learners both are offered on second language level. The current language policy is quite silent on this issue. The question arises whether this situation is not detrimental to language skills development of Afrikaans speaking learners (and also for Namibian learners in general).

Figure 4: 2012 Enrolment in Afrikaans First and Second Language

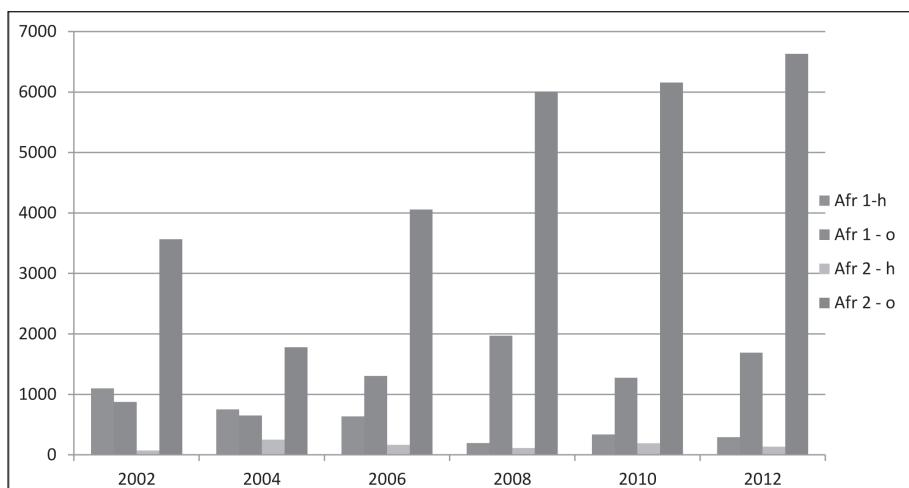


The 2012 information displayed in Figure 4 underlines the high enrolment in Afrikaans Second Language compared to enrolment in Afrikaans First Language

Enrolment in NSSC Afrikaans Higher and Ordinary Levels

In senior secondary, as part of the Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate (NSSC), both Afrikaans First Language and Second Language can be taken on higher or ordinary levels. (Afrikaans Second Language Ordinary level is further offered at Core and Extended levels and Afrikaans Second Language Higher level only in private schools up to 2012. However, from 2013 this subject will also be available in state schools.

Figure 5: NSSC Afrikaans enrolment - Higher and Ordinary Levels



From the above it is evident that both Afrikaans First and Second Language on higher levels seem to attract far less learners than the lower and ordinary levels.

Afrikaans Second Language ordinary level is by far the most popular of the 4 subjects shown above. This subject shows an increase in enrolment from 2006. Learners in these classes are made up of Afrikaans home language speakers who do not take their home language, but far more so, by speakers of other languages who cannot or do not want to take their home language for various reasons. The above may not be the result of choices only, but can also be the result of what is available to learners.

Concerns

This situation is a cause for concern on various levels: Can learners' language skills be developed effectively if learners take languages on lower (ordinary) levels, and, in the case of Afrikaans, if learners do not take any language on first language level? Languages presented on higher levels are far more appropriate for the cognitive development, e.g., through challenging comprehension exercises and the study of appropriate literature. With the current enrolment patterns, one cannot but argue that learners' language skills cannot be developed on all the levels needed for them to function as literate and critical members of society.

In 2010 and 2012 Standardised Achievement Tests were conducted amongst grade 5 and 7 learners to provide information about what learners know and are able to do in key learning competencies in English, Mathematics and Natural Science. Namibian learners performed lower in comprehension and application-based questions than in pure knowledge based questions (Ferdous, 2013). While there are many attributing factors to this situation, one can argue that the role of language instruction contributes to this situation. Namibian learners lack higher order thinking skills.

These skills are best developed in the language the learner is most comfortable in – the home language. Therefore it is encouraging that during the Language Policy Review Conference in June 2013, strong recommendations were made for the development and offering of all Namibian languages on higher levels in the senior secondary phase, and the availability of home languages for all learners throughout their school career. The fact that some African languages seem to have a very low status in the community was also widely discussed. Learners thus take Afrikaans because they feel that the language is more useful than their own home language.

We have not even looked into the whole issue of medium of instruction that of course also has a marked influence in language skills development. About one third of Afrikaans home language learners in the Lower Primary Phase receive instruction from grade 1 in English, and thus do not have the advantages of mother tongue instruction.

Another factor that influences learner achievement is the qualifications of teachers. While great strides in the general qualifications of Namibian teachers are made, many teachers are not qualified in the subjects they teach. In 2012, 155 out of a total of 477 teachers of Afrikaans first and second language in the primary school phase, had no tertiary qualification in the language. In the secondary phase the figure is 82 out of 314 (EMIS 2012:73). This means that more than a quarter of our Afrikaans teaching force is unqualified to teach these subjects. In such cases the possibility of developing high levels of critical thinking skills amongst learners is not good.

Concluding remarks

The following points emerged during the analysis of the EMIS data for Afrikaans:

- No major differences between enrolment patterns of Afrikaans home language speakers compared to national enrolment were found. There are slight decreases in enrolment figures of Afrikaans home language speakers. This seems to be in line with the national tendency in the country.
- Many first language speakers of Afrikaans and other languages seem to opt for, or are forced to, enroll for Afrikaans as a Second Language. Measured should be put in place to offer more Namibian languages on first language level and in more schools – and also to promote enrolments for these options.
- A large number of Afrikaans language teachers are unqualified.
- Afrikaans as a Second language attracts far higher numbers than Afrikaans First Language. Afrikaans offered on ordinary level is more popular than on higher levels. This does not bode well for language skills development of Afrikaans home language learners, and also not for speakers of other languages.
- These issues can be contributing to the fact that higher order thinking skills are lacking amongst Namibian learners. A careful analysis of language curricula, including those for teacher education, as well as further investigation might provide more answers for the low enrolments in higher levels of Afrikaans courses.

It is hoped that changes to the language policy for schools would take some of the above findings into account and facilitate the enrolment of as many as possible learners for at least one first language – preferably the mother tongue. This would have to go hand in hand with efforts to change the attitude towards language courses and Namibian languages in particular. While this might affect Afrikaans as Second Language, the benefits of giving access to learners to study their home languages should not be overlooked.

It is evident that similar and also comparative studies including more Namibian languages should be made before generalizations can be made that can be applied to the Namibian language landscape as a whole.

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