

# The Impact of a University's Language Policy on Its Library's Print Collections

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## Abstract

The aim of this study was to establish the impact of the North-West University's language policy on its library's print collections. It analyses the languages represented by books held by the North-West University Library and Information Services. The article further established the strategies used by the libraries to develop, preserve and promote African languages in support of the university's language policy. The paper employed bibliometrics and focus group interviews to gather data. The findings revealed that books in African languages that were recognised by the university were difficult to get on the market. As a result, the majority of books accessioned by the libraries were in English, followed by Afrikaans, and relatively few books in Setswana, and Sesotho. The study is the first of its kind focusing on language policy and academic libraries in South Africa. It is valuable to both policy makers and librarians in their endeavours to develop sizeable African language collections in support of the curricula and research. Among the recommendations is that African language departments at various universities should collaborate with libraries to start open access African language journals, and publish them through the institutional repositories.

**Keywords:** language policy; indigenous languages; African languages; indigenous knowledge; collection development; cataloguing



## Introduction

South Africa is a multilingual country which is characterised by a history of racial strife and oppression. At the centre of some of the major events and wars that characterise the history of the country is language. Among the causes of the Great Trek which ultimately led to the South African War (Anglo-Boer War) was language (Ransford 1972). The 1976 Soweto Uprisings which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of school children was triggered by dissatisfaction with a new school language policy (Boddy-Evans 2017). Language also featured in three major negotiations that determined the future of the country, the Treaty of Vereeniging in 1902, the National Convention for the Union of South Africa in 1908, and the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) in 1991 (Giliomee 2004). In order to arrest conflicts that come as a result of the marginalisation of certain languages, the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (also referred to as the Constitution in this study) recognises 11 official languages. These are Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, and isiZulu (Republic of South Africa 1996). The Constitution also recognises several minority and religious languages such as the Khoi, Nama and San languages, sign language, Arabic, German, Greek, Gujarati, Hebrew, Hindi, Portuguese, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telegu and Urdu. South African public universities are given some leeway to develop their own language policies in consultation with various stakeholders with the approval of the Department of Higher Education and Training and within the prescripts of the Constitution (CHE 2001). The North-West University (NWU) recognises four South African official languages as languages of the university (NWU 2018). These are Setswana, Afrikaans, Sesotho, and English.

However, the status of Afrikaans as a language of scholarship has been challenged (Macupe 2016). In 2015/16, students embarked on several protest actions demanding fee-free higher education and the decolonisation of the curriculum (Dube 2017). In the case of former Afrikaans universities, these protests also took an anti-Afrikaans posture with the hashtag #AfrikaansMustFall (Dube 2017). The students were demanding that Afrikaans as a language of teaching and learning must be dropped in favour of English (Dube 2017). Dube (2017) cites Prah (2016) as equating this to the demand for the changing of one colonial master in favour of another. In response to the students' demands, the universities of Pretoria, the Free State, and Stellenbosch decided to abandon Afrikaans as a language of teaching and learning in favour of English (Macupe 2016). This has not happened in the case of the North-West University. The status of African languages in higher education is even more precarious (Prah 2007). Although they (African languages) are regarded as official languages of many universities, their status has not been elevated to languages of the curricula and research. Knowledge in South African education continues to be produced almost exclusively in Afrikaans and English (Prah 2007). This may affect the ability of libraries to source materials in African languages as libraries cannot purchase what does not exist (Benson, Anyalebechi, and Ariole 2017). Despite these constraints, Darch and Nkhoma-Darch (2002) are of the view that the shortage of material in African languages does not preclude academic libraries like the NWU Library and Information Service (NWU

LIS) from playing a role in the development, preservation and promotion of African languages.

This study seeks to determine the impact of the North-West University's language policy on its library's print collections. It uses the library cataloguing data from 2013 to 2017 to establish trends, representation and usage of print books in relation to the university's official languages. Cataloguing is defined as a way of organising library materials for easy identification and retrieval by the library users (Adedibu, Akinboro, and Abdussalam 2012). The paper will add value to the role of libraries in the development of languages, generally, but specifically the indigenous languages in the African context. It will relay initiatives that can be taken by libraries to develop the official languages of the universities. The results of this paper can be used to inform library policies on collection development in relation to languages. It provides recommendations on how libraries can develop and promote indigenous languages. The study is also a response to the United Nations' call for 2019 to be the International Year of Indigenous Languages (UNESCO 2018). Through this call, the United Nations encourages urgent action to preserve, revitalise and promote indigenous languages (UNESCO 2018). This study uses indigenous languages and African languages interchangeably to refer to the nine official African languages of South Africa.

## **The Legal Framework in Respect of Language and Higher Education in South Africa**

Language in South Africa is well legislated (Mwaniki 2014). Section 6 of the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa is dedicated to languages. In addition to determining the official languages, the Constitution further recognises the need to promote the previously marginalised African languages. Section 6(5) calls for the formation of a Pan South African Language Board whose duties would include the promotion and development of all official languages, the sign language, and the Khoi, Nama and San languages. Other sections of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa that regulate language include Sections 29, 30 and 31. Section 29, for example, regulates the right for all South Africans in public education institutions to receive education in a language of their choice provided that this is reasonable and practical. Other legislation includes the Language Policy for Higher Education, the South African Languages Bill of 2000, the National Language Policy Framework of 2002, the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997, the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, and the Draft National Book Development Plan (Mkhize and Balfour 2017). The recurring themes in all these documents is to promote multilingualism in South Africa, develop the previously marginalised official indigenous languages, protect the languages that are at risk of extinction, and develop, promote and protect languages spoken by people that are significantly in the minority in the country.

## **The North-West University Language Policy**

Though isiZulu and isiXhosa are the most widely spoken languages in South Africa (Statistics South Africa 2011), the situation differs in the North West Province. Sixty-three per cent of the population of the North-West Province is Setswana speaking, followed by nine per cent that is Afrikaans speaking, and six per cent that is isiXhosa and Sesotho speaking respectively. In formulating its language policy, the NWU took into account the regional languages where the campuses are based (NWU 2012). The Institutional Statute of the North-West University regulates that the language policy of the university “must be flexible and functional, and must redress language imbalances of the past and promote multilingualism, access, integration and a sense of belonging” (Republic of South Africa 2017, 11). In consideration of this, the language policy of the university recognises four languages as pointed out in the introduction to this study. The university has four official languages, Setswana, Sesotho, Afrikaans and English (NWU 2018). While the NWU LIS is tasked with the development and promotion of indigenous languages through collection development and use of books, Nkondo et al. (2014) point to the general insufficiency of resources published in indigenous languages as a possible impediment for their development and promotion in libraries in South Africa. However, Darch and Nkhoma-Darch (2002), Lor (2012) and Ngulube (2012) argue that libraries can help develop African languages within those constraints.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This paper sets out to do the following:

- Establish the languages represented by books catalogued from 2013 to 2017 at the NWU LIS and the extent of that representation.
- Analyse the usage of the books held at the NWU LIS according to language.
- Establish the initiatives undertaken by NWU LIS to develop, preserve and promote African languages (Setswana and Sesotho).

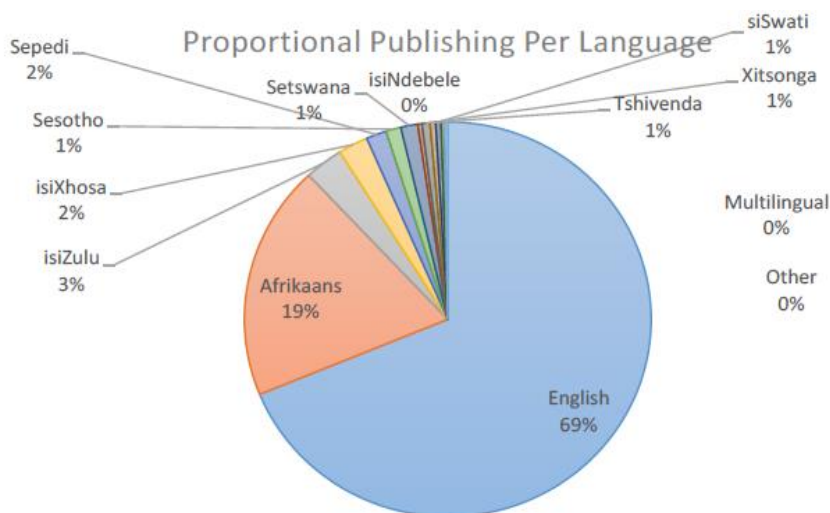
The three objectives will ultimately assist the researchers to determine if the NWU language policy has had any impact on the library’s print collections. Nassimbeni (1995) also used books added to the stock of the Cape Town Provincial Libraries to determine the impact of South Africa’s language policy on public libraries.

### **Literature Review**

This literature review touches on the role of publishers and libraries in the promotion of indigenous languages. This is followed by a discussion of literature on the representation and usage of books by language in libraries. Lastly it provides a review of studies on the representation of languages in library collections.

## The (Possible) Role of Publishers in the Promotion of Indigenous Languages

Evidence suggests that book publishers in South Africa have played a less than stellar role in the development of African languages (Möller and le Roux 2017). Using isiXhosa as a case study, Kaschula (2008) traces the challenges of African languages from the time of the missionaries through to apartheid and the current dispensation. Kaschula (2008, 117) is of the view that by designing different language boards, the apartheid system suffocated publishing in African languages as these boards were often “conservative, corrupt and oppressive.” As a result, they preferred to publish material that they deemed to be religious and politically correct to the regime. Most of the time these works were published by the members of the board for the school market. The corruption associated with the erstwhile boards caused many potential indigenous language writers to seek refuge with publishers of English language literature (Kaschula 2008). Ngulube (2012) asserts that there are very few books published in African languages in South Africa today as a result of this history. The Publishers’ Association of South Africa (PASA) publishes annual statistics on the state and trends of book publishing in South Africa. The 2016 PASA report is very blunt when it comes to publishing in African languages. It observes that there is very little published in the African languages in South Africa for the general reader (Le Roux and Cassells 2018). Figure 1, taken from the PASA report of 2015 (Le Roux and Cassells 2017), best demonstrates the dire state of African languages in South Africa.



**Figure 1:** The dire situation of African language publishing in South Africa (Le Roux and Cassells 2017)

Figure 1 shows that 88 per cent of all books published in South Africa in 2015 were in English and Afrikaans. The nine African languages could only share 12 per cent of the market among them. This proves Möller and le Roux’s (2017) assertions that publishing in South Africa is primarily in English and Afrikaans. Figure 1 is not isolated; it is a typical example of how commercial publishers have ignored publishing in African languages,

citing the lack of a market and multiplicity of those languages among other reasons. Nassimbeni (1995) reports a similar experience with regards to the book publishing industry in South Africa in 1992 and 1993. Due to the shortage of books published in indigenous languages, the South African Book Development Council (SABDC) started an Indigenous Languages Publishing Programme (ILPP) which funds independent publishers to the tune of 50 per cent of the cost of indigenous language books using funds from donors. This was in response to the Draft National Book Development Plan which sought to increase writing in indigenous languages (SABDC 2009). The aim of the programme is to encourage the growth and development of publishing and production of books in indigenous languages. Though the ILPP programme is commendable in its efforts to promote and assist publishing in indigenous languages, its impact has been minimal (Möller and le Roux 2017). Although it is generally accepted that the extent of investment made by publishers in a certain language affects the availability of books in that language in libraries, librarians have a responsibility and role to play in developing, promoting and preserving marginalised languages. Below is a discussion of what that role ought to be.

### **The (Possible) Role of Libraries in the Promotion of Indigenous Languages**

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA 2018) asserts that libraries play a critical role in the development of indigenous languages by providing access to material written in those languages as well as supporting the collection of such material. The American Library Association (2007) supports the collection of material for ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups. Continentally, the African Library and Information Associations and Institutions (AfLIA) partnered with Worldreader to take digital content in indigenous languages to the children (AfLIA 2017). In South Africa, the role of public libraries in the promotion of indigenous languages is more pronounced in the South African Public Library and Information Services Bill (Republic of South Africa 2012). The Bill encourages public libraries and librarians to consider the languages of their immediate and potential users in their collection development. The libraries are further encouraged to collect material written in indigenous languages. This role, however, is not only limited to public libraries (Darch and Nkhoma-Darch 2002). Darch and Nkhoma-Darch (2002) encourage academic libraries to take a stronger interest in developing, preserving and promoting African languages. Olaiya (2014) concurs that as “language banks” libraries ought to be at the forefront in the development of indigenous languages in Africa. Darch and Nkhoma-Darch (2002), Lor (2012) and Ngulube (2012) went to the extent of identifying the roles that librarians of all sectors could play in developing, promoting, and preserving African languages.

Though seldom reported in academic literature, libraries in South Africa such as the National Library of South Africa (NLSA) are involved in various initiatives and activities that seek to promote the indigenous African languages. The NLSA has been involved in reprinting and distributing classic books in African languages since 2008 (NLSA 2012). The NLSA’s Centre for the Book also has a programme that has provided grants to aspiring

self-publishers since 2001 (Shaw 2012). As of 2012, the grant had resulted in 46 titles published in African languages.

### **The Representation of Languages in Library Collections**

Studies on the representation of languages have focused on public libraries. This is possibly because of the South African public library policy that explicitly seeks to promote African language material (Republic of South Africa 2012). Generally, these studies agree that the collections of public libraries in South Africa are not representative of diversity. Nassimbeni (1995) researched the responsiveness of collection development in public libraries to the language policy of South Africa. Nassimbeni (1995) found that only 12.75 per cent of book titles in the Cape Provincial Library Services (CPLS) were in African languages. More than 49 per cent of the titles were in English while more than 38 per cent were in Afrikaans. The situation seemed to be worsening as considerably more English and Afrikaans titles were added to the collection than all African languages combined. Close to 83 per cent of all titles added to the collection were in English, followed by 14.69 per cent in Afrikaans, while only 2.42 per cent of the titles were in all African languages combined. The circulation of books in African languages was also considered to be poor, with only 0.29 per cent of isiXhosa titles and 0.08 per cent of Sesotho titles circulating. The circulation rate for English was 37.83 per cent and 61.79 per cent for Afrikaans. The poor representation of African languages in library collections in the Western Cape Province was further exposed by Fredericks and Mvunelo (2003). The authors found that the majority of libraries in this province estimated their African languages collection to make up less than one per cent of their collections. In the case of the City of Johannesburg Library and Information Services' Region 8, Rodrigues (2006) determined that 85 per cent of books were in English followed by nine per cent in Afrikaans, three per cent in all indigenous languages, and three per cent in foreign languages (Dutch, German, French and Portuguese). This is despite the fact that the vast majority (73.5%) of this region's population speak an African language. The circulation statistics of material in African languages in July 2005, the period covered by Rodrigues (2006), were also pitiful, with a combined 0.6 per cent circulation of all books in African languages. During this period, 87 per cent of books that circulated were in English followed by Afrikaans at 11 per cent. Similarly, Magudulela (2014) found that at the Murray Park Library in Johannesburg most books were in English or Afrikaans, and material in indigenous languages made up less than one per cent of the collection. Adriaanse (2015) would also find that due to the City of Cape Town's collection development plan that emphasises the prioritisation of the three Western Cape languages (English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa) a number of libraries were struggling to cater for the needs of French-speaking foreign nationals. This study will be able to determine whether the findings in public libraries above are similar or better than those of academic libraries.

## Methodology

This paper employed bibliometrics and focus group interviews. Bibliometrics is the use of mathematical and statistical methods to study documents and patterns of publications (Feather and Sturges 2003), which means they are quantitative methods of research. Focus group interviews, on the other hand, are a form of group interviews in which there are several participants in addition to the researcher or moderator; there is an emphasis in the questioning on a particular fairly tightly defined topic, and the emphasis is upon interaction within the group and the joint construction of meaning (Bryman 2016). According to Bryman (2016), focus group interviews can be effective means to collect qualitative data. A request was made to the library's information technology section to provide data of all titles catalogued from 2013 to 2017 and the extent of their usage. The year 2013 was selected because the North-West University policy came into effect in 2012 (NWU 2012). The data were then uploaded on an Excel spreadsheet according to the following columns: title, cataloguing date, total checkouts, language, second language, third language, fourth language, and other languages. The results were then presented in the form of a table and graph. The qualitative results were obtained through focus group interviews conducted on 17 September 2018 by the study leader. The three librarians who have a responsibility for an African language/s as part of their job description and a senior acquisition librarian formed part of the interviews. The following three open-ended questions were asked:

- What are some of the strategies that NWU LIS has employed to develop, promote and preserve African languages?
- What are some of the successes that can be attributed to those strategies?
- What are some of the challenges faced in trying to develop, promote and preserve the African languages?

Notes were taken during the interviews and analysed using a simple narrative analysis approach. Narrative analysis entails making sense of the interview respondents' insights (Bryman 2016). No in-depth systematic analysis was required as the study targeted a small group of librarians.

## Findings and Discussions

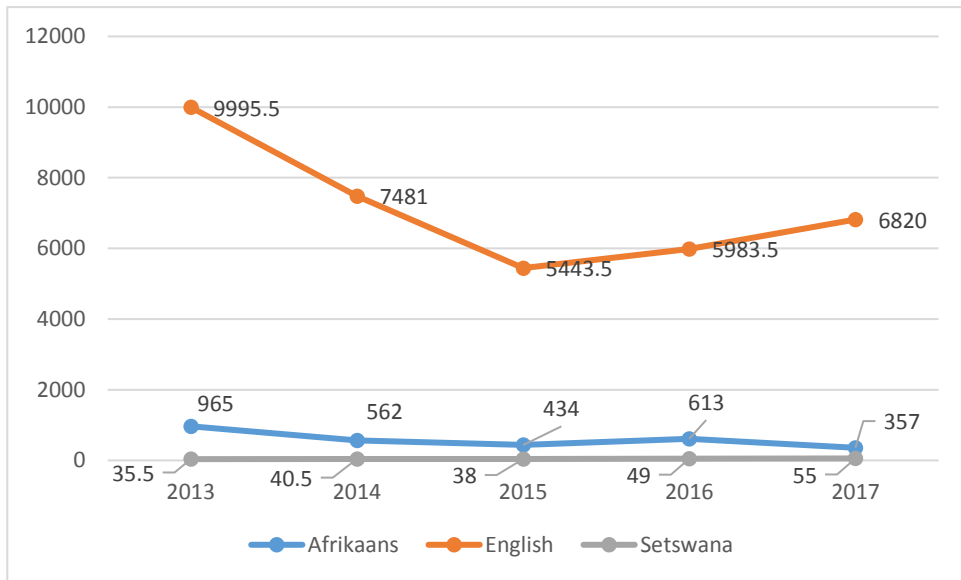
The findings and discussions are laid out according to the objectives indicated in the fourth section of the study. During this period (2013 to 2017), there were 39378 titles ordered. To determine the representation of languages some normalisation was required in the case of multilingual and bilingual books. Each multilingual and bilingual book was divided according to the number of languages represented. Thus, the figure for an English-Afrikaans-Xhosa-Zulu dictionary would be one (book) divided by four (languages) which equals 0.25 for each language. Table 1 shows the languages represented by the printed books catalogued from 2013 to 2017 at the NWU LIS and the extent of that representation in actual number of books. Following directly after Table 1 is Figure 2 which depicts trends of books catalogued in this period in terms of NWU's official languages.

**Table 1:** Languages represented by books catalogued (from 2013 to 2017) at NWU, the extent of the representation, and usage

<i>Language</i>	<i>Total number of books</i>	<i>Total checkouts</i>	<i>Average checkouts per book</i>
<b>Books in official South African languages</b>			
Afrikaans	2931	16108	5.5
English	35723.5	228914	6.4
Venda	4	10	2.5
isiXhosa	17.75	8	0.5
isiZulu	17.75	4	0.2
Sepedi	4	17	4.3
Sesotho	6.5	0	0
Setswana	218	931	4.3
Xitsonga	1	1	1
<b>Books in non-official languages in South Africa</b>			
Dutch	49	73	1.5
Finnish	0.5	0	0
French	173	206	1.2
Frisian	2	0	0
German*	139	127	0.9
Greek*	1.5	0	0
Hausa	0.5	0	0
Hindi*	3	1	0.3
Hungarian	0.5	0	0
Icelandic	1	0	0
Indonesian	0.5	0	0
Italian	19.5	23	1.2
Japanese	4.5	0	0
Latin	13	4	0.3
Lithuanian	0.5	0	0
Luxembourgish	1.5	0	0
Marathi	0.5	0	0
Malay	1	0	0

Maltese	1	0	0
Mandarin	7	0	0
Norwegian	1.5	0	0
Nyanja	0.5	0	0
Polish	1.5	0	0
Portuguese*	8.5	22	2.6
Russian	6	7	1.2
Spanish	12.5	10	0.8
Swahili	1	0	0
Swedish	3.5	0	0
Turkish	1	0	0

\*Identified as a minority language that should be promoted and respected in Section 5(b)(i; ii) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996)



**Figure 2:** Trends of books catalogued according to NWU's official languages (2013–2017)

Table 1 shows that the books purchased during this period represented 38 languages of which nine are South African official languages (Republic of South Africa 1996). All four languages of NWU (NWU 2018) are represented in the list of books purchased during this period. Close to 99 per cent of all books catalogued were in the South African official languages. However, close to 91 per cent of all books catalogued during this period were in English, followed by Afrikaans with more than 7.4 per cent. Setswana is represented by

more than 0.5 per cent of printed books while Sesotho is represented by 0.017 per cent of books in the collection. Eight non-official languages in South Africa, Dutch (0.124%), French (0.439%), German (0.352%), Italian (0.05%), Latin (0.033%), Mandarin (0.019%), Portuguese (0.022%) and Spanish (0.032%), outperformed Sesotho. The results of this study show an even worse pattern for African languages than what Nassimbeni found in the CPLS in 1995. Nassimbeni (1995) determined that 12.75 per cent of titles held by the CPLS were in African languages. However, these numbers were set to decrease if CPLS continued with the purchasing trends noticed by Nassimbeni (1995). The results of this study show a close resemblance with previous studies. Rodrigues (2006) found that 85 per cent of all books in the City of Johannesburg Library and Information Services' Region 8 were in English, followed by nine per cent in Afrikaans and three per cent each in all indigenous languages and foreign languages. Fredericks and Mvunelo (2003) determined the representation of indigenous languages to be less than one per cent in the City of Cape Town Libraries. In this study the seven African languages were represented by 0.68 per cent (269) of all titles catalogued while foreign languages were represented by 1.16 per cent (455.5). Likewise, Magudulela (2014) found that books in African languages make up less than one per cent of the collections at Johannesburg's Murray Park Library. The results of this study confirm that the poor representation of indigenous languages in books in public libraries can also be found at the North-West University library. The extent of this representation is more or less similar despite public libraries having an overt policy that requires them to develop African language collections (Republic of South Africa 2012).

The circulation figures of all the books in all languages catalogued at NWU from 2013 to 2017 were impressive. The 39378 titles circulated 246466 times at an average circulation rate of 6.26 per title. There were 1347 (45.96%) of 2931 Afrikaans titles that never circulated. The figure of uncirculated items in English is 12704 (35.56%), and 105 (48.17%) for Setswana. These figures include dictionaries, special collections, and reference collection titles that are not available for circulation. The NWU circulation rate for Setswana was commendable when compared to Nassimbeni's (1995) findings, possibly because NWU has a Setswana department. Nassimbeni (1995) determined that only 0.29 per cent of isiXhosa titles circulated the CPLS in 1992/93. However, the circulation share of African languages was 0.39 per cent (971) of all total checkouts (246466). The figure for English was 92.88 per cent (228914 out of 246466), and 6.64 per cent (16108 out of 246466) for Afrikaans. These results show somewhat similar trends to Rodrigues's (2006) findings. Rodrigues (2006) found that books in African languages comprised 0.6 per cent of the number of books that circulated in the City of Johannesburg Library and Information Services' Region 8, while English made up 87 per cent and Afrikaans made up 11 per cent.

Figure 2 shows that the annual trends of books catalogued according to NWU's official languages were inconsistent. Setswana language titles have increased marginally from 35.5 titles in 2013 to 55 titles in 2017. The 0.5 is as a result of titles that deal with two or more languages including the Setswana language. Titles in English on the other hand had a sharp

dip from 2013 to 2015 and started to increase steadily thereafter. Afrikaans material has consistently dipped except in 2016 when the titles increased marginally.

A few reasons can be advanced for these results. There are only a few books in South Africa published in African languages (Möller and le Roux 2017). Libraries, therefore, cannot purchase what is not available (Benson, Anyalebechi, and Ariole 2017). Internationalisation and lack of government incentives could also be cited as other possible reasons why works in African languages and to a certain extent Afrikaans are in decline (Mwaniki 2014). Another possible reason could be as a result of a lax attitude by librarians themselves in developing, promoting and preserving the African languages. The last reason however will either be confirmed or rebutted when discussing the initiatives of NWU LIS to develop, preserve, and promote African languages below.

## **Initiatives of NWU LIS to Develop, Preserve and Promote African Languages**

It has been pointed out in the methodology section that focus group interviews were conducted with a group of librarians that are tasked with the development of African languages. Further, the librarian at the Potchefstroom Campus that is tasked with languages was also interviewed via e-mail. Below is a summary of what has been elicited from the librarians as the strategies that the library has employed to develop, promote and preserve the indigenous languages.

### **Strategies for the Development of African Languages by NWU LIS**

The North-West University LIS employed the following strategies to develop the African languages:

- Adopted the university's language policy and held the university to it;
- Embarked on benchmarking exercises with the University of Botswana and Sol Plaatjie University;
- Contacted several well-known Setswana authors, including Professors Setshedi and Malope, Mr Motlhanke and Mrs Mokoma, to donate their manuscripts and sell published books to the library;
- Identified small Setswana publishers and encouraged them to register on the university database;
- Requested and received a donation of African language classics from the National Library of South Africa;
- Purchased material from self-published authors;
- Digitised Setswana documents in the university's institutional repository (IR); and

- Proposed a Setswana journal to be hosted in the IR of the Department of Setswana.

### **Strategies for the Promotion of African Languages by NWU LIS**

The librarians indicated that they have employed several strategies to promote the African languages at the North-West University. These included the following:

- Starting a Setswana LibGuide with a list of Setswana books;
- Setting up library books and online displays during NWU Language Awareness Week, Heritage Day and Africa Day;
- Conducting presentations about the plight of the NWU languages during NWU Language Awareness Week; and
- Using social media to promote African languages.

### **Strategies for the Preservation of African Languages by NWU LIS**

In conducting collection development, librarians should be aware that they do not just purchase material that is relevant for use today but also material that is of stewardship value (Feather and Sturges 2003). This is particularly important for African languages as demonstrated by the loss of the first isiXhosa novel and quite possibly the first African language novel in South Africa, *USamson* written by S. E. K. Mqhayi in 1907 (Opland 2007). The novel was last seen at the University of Fort Hare but no one seems to currently have it (Opland 2007). The loss of this important historical artefact has left a gaping hole in the history of literature in the country but more specifically in the history of African languages. In order to limit the chances of this ever repeating itself, the NWU LIS does the following:

- Purchases at least two copies of each NWU African language title and keeps one copy in its special collections while one or other copies can circulate; and
- Digitises African language material.

According to Lwoga, Ngulube, and Stilwell (2011), there is a strong link between the preservation of indigenous knowledge and that of languages. When a language dies so do some of the indigenous practices associated with that language. By preserving these languages, therefore, the NWU LIS is also preserving the indigenous knowledge and history associated with them.

### **Successes and Challenges**

Like all activities, attempts at developing, promoting and preserving African language material at NWU LIS have had successes and challenges.

## **Successes**

- Through the benchmarking initiatives, a number of book titles have been added to the collection.
- NWU LIS was able to source several titles including the African languages classics.
- The library has been able to build networks and relationships with various stakeholders that assisted with the sharing of knowledge.
- The initiatives have strengthened the relationship between the library and the languages departments.
- The strategies have also raised awareness of the plight of African languages at the university.
- The library has received some publicity on university platforms such as social media and online publications (NWU Libraries 2017).
- The stature of the library in the university has been greatly enhanced as many people even at senior levels now realise that the library is an important player and partner in the development of African languages.

## **Challenges**

The challenges identified by the librarians in this study mirror those of Benson, Anyalebechi, and Ariole (2017). Some of the challenges experienced by librarians at the NWU are outlined below.

- Lots of books that are ordered or recommended by the Department of Setswana at the university are out of print and therefore not available to be purchased. To compound matters for them, very few books are currently being published in African languages (Le Roux and Cassells 2018), which means the challenge is set to continue in the future.
- Most African language books are not durable, are thin and in small print. This makes them susceptible to loss, wear and tear.
- The librarians also identified access to self-published authors as a challenge.
- Another challenge identified was the university's procurement policies, which make it hard for the library to purchase material from small and self-published authors.

## **Limitations of This Study**

The biggest limitation of this study was that no similar studies have been conducted in academic libraries in South Africa to allow for a comparison of results—hence the reliance on studies focusing on public libraries. Due to limited time, and similar to studies in public

libraries, this study could not differentiate the collections by type such as prescribed, short loan, fiction, course reserves, reference, and special collections.

## **Conclusion, Implications and Recommendations**

This study sought to establish the languages represented by books catalogued at the NWU LIS (2013–2017), analyse the usage of the books held at the NWU LIS by language, establish the initiatives undertaken by NWU LIS to develop, preserve and promote African languages (Setswana and Sesotho), and determine the impact of NWU's language policy on its library's print collections. It can be concluded that all four languages of the university are represented in the print collections, though Setswana and Sesotho are poorly represented. Generally, the books in the collection in all languages are well used, though there is room for improvement. The initiatives of the librarians to develop, preserve and promote African languages have had some successes and challenges. Therefore, the language policy of the university has assisted the library in its endeavours to develop, promote and preserve African languages. Its impact on the overall print collections of the library, however, has been minimal. The language policy served to create a sense of awareness and responsibility among librarians to come up with strategies to try and develop, promote and preserve the languages of the university. The policy also serves as an enabler for the library when it requires deviation from the normal university procurement procedures and processes. In order to succeed in ensuring a linguistically diverse collection, the library will need other stakeholders such as publishers, writers, the African language departments, and the procurement office to also come to the party (Ngulube 2012).

These results are a reminder of how dire the situation is for African languages at universities in South Africa. Given the link between indigenous knowledge and indigenous languages (Lwoga, Ngulube, and Stilwell 2011), these results should also be a worrying sign for those concerned with the future of indigenous knowledge systems in South Africa. These results bring new information on how policies only serve to create conditions for the languages to prosper. Policies are not by themselves the final outcomes. It is only through concerted practical action from the government, writers, universities, African language departments, publishers, and librarians that African languages can finally dominate libraries in South Africa. These results also point to the gradual diminishing value of Afrikaans as a language of scholarship (Giliomee 2004). English is fast becoming the only language of scholarship in South Africa. Further, this study brings a new perspective to the strategies that have been used by an academic library to develop, preserve and promote African languages.

A full national library of works in African languages to be located within the NLSA is recommended. In addition, African language departments at various universities should work closely with the libraries to start open access African language journals, and publish them through the institutional repositories. The government of South Africa should start a full African languages publishing house linked to the Departments of Arts and Culture,

Basic and Higher Education and Training as a demonstration of its seriousness about and commitment to African languages.

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