

Language Politics in Schools in German Southwest Africa (1911)

Abstract

This report on German Southwest Africa (today Namibia) emphasized the significance of missionary activity and schools in disseminating German culture and thereby helping to secure German colonization, especially against the efforts of other colonial powers. It criticizes the fact that in German Southwest Africa, the German language was mixed with other languages—not only the languages of the Nama and Herero, but also Boer. State control over German schools, the report notes, needed to be strengthened in order to prevent “foreigners” (Boers) from expanding their influence in the German colony.

Source

Church and School

In the early days of the colony, *pastoral care* among the white population lay in the hands of missionaries. The consolidation of settlers into parishes only started in 1895. At that time, the parish of Windhoek was founded under the direction of the Rhenish Mission. In 1900, this parish then joined with the Prussian state church, and that same year the Prussian church administration sent Pastor Anz to Windhoek [...]. The parish of Swakopmund followed the example of Windhoek in 1907. Windhoek now has a handsome Protestant church. In Swakopmund as in other communities that have formed since that time, including Karibib, Omaruru, Usakos, Lüderitz Bay, and others, religious services are held in the schools. But in Swakopmund and Lüderitz Bay, plans have been made for the construction of churches.

Catholic pastoral care is carried out by the mission stations of the Oblate Sisters of the Blessed Virgin.

The *school system* is in the process of lively development. The first school for whites was founded in 1894 in Windhoek. Today there are 19 schools in the colony, with around 550 pupils; Windhoek, Swakopmund, and Lüderitz Bay even have one secondary school each. These schools will soon have the right to distribute certificates for the one-year voluntary service. The other schools in the country are primary schools.

The organization of primary schools varies greatly according to local conditions, which are still developing. A unified curriculum adapted to the needs of the country has not yet been drafted. In several years, when the individual municipalities have become more established, there will be some catching up to do in this respect.

However, the school system was only put on legal footing in the colony in 1906. At that time, the governor issued a decree introducing mandatory schooling for children of the white population from ages six to fourteen. The mandate to attend school extends to all children residing in a location where a school exists or where there is one within a four-kilometer radius. In areas without established villages, it has recently been suggested to found so-called “farm schools,” so that several farmers may hire a teacher, with governmental assistance when needed. Some first steps have already been taken in this direction.

It will be necessary for the state to reserve for itself the management of the school system. As willing as many localities are to take responsibility for schools, the government must be ensured a sufficient influence upon the design of instruction. In a number of districts where foreigners (Boers) comprise a larger percentage of

inhabitants, the influence of the population stands to endanger the German character of the schools. This fear is not unfounded, as can be seen by the fact that in 1903, the Boers attempted to acquire from the government the right to found their own schools that would not be subject to the German authorities. In light of this attempt, special attention must be paid so that the German character will be retained in whatever farm schools are founded.

One of the main tasks of the schools in the Southwest must be, deliberately and methodically to educate youth in German thinking and sensibility and thus, to the extent that is possible, to Germanize children of foreign nationalities. But to this end, it is necessary that the Southwest African school system be purely German and not make concessions to foreign character in any respect. Over time, the German language there has been corrupted through the heedless adoption of all manner of expressions from the languages of the Boers, Hottentots, and Herero. This debased element must vanish again from the German language with which these peoples intercommunicate. And the achievement of this must be one of the primary, foundational tasks of the German schools in the Southwest.

Source: *Eine Reise durch die deutschen Kolonien*, Vol. IV: *Deutsch-Südwestafrika*. Commissioned by the illustrated magazine *Kolonie und Heimat*, edited by Rudolf Wagner with the assistance of Dr. E. Buchmann. With two maps and 213 illustrations; second, revised edition. Berlin: "Kolonie und Heimat" Verlagsgesellschaft m.b.H., 1913, p. 54.

Translation: Elizabeth Tucker

Recommended Citation: Language Politics in Schools in German Southwest Africa (1911), published in: German History Intersections, <<https://germanhistory-intersections.org/en/germanness/ghis:document-223>> [July 08, 2025].