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AFRICAN INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES FOR REINFORCING MORAL EDUCATION AMONG THE LESOTHO SECONDARY SCHOOL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary world faces a moral crisis affecting various spheres of life, such as the community, the family and the school. In light of this view, it is noted that the secondary school learners in Lesotho are not immune from the escalating immorality. The study, therefore, sought to explore the indigenous strategies that could reinforce moral education among the learners. The study departed from an African indigenous perspective and solicited teachers' views regarding the indigenous strategies that may reinforce moral education among secondary school learners. The Botho/Ubuntu philosophy was thus applied as the over-arching theoretical framework. A qualitative research method was adopted, and data were gathered through an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Twenty-eight purposively selected Lesotho secondary school teachers took part in the study. The findings suggested that community-based, school-based, lifestyle-changing strategies such as abstinence from immoral urges, e.g. sexual intercourse can reinforce moral education among Lesotho secondary school learners.

Keywords: *Botho/Ubuntu* philosophy, humaneness, ethics, learner morality, moral education, African indigenous education.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of modernisation and industrialisation has negatively impacted moral education worldwide (Chowdhury, 2016; Tican and Denzin, 2018). In Africa, the problem was compounded by a decontextualised education (Kumalo, 2018). The notion of decontextualised education indicates how Eurocentric values were advanced in Africa at the expense of the African indigenous (Zembylas, 2018). African indigenous knowledge was considered irrelevant, unscientific and obsolete (Abah, Mashebe and Denuga, 2015; Khumalo, 2018). A limited attempt was made to incorporate African indigenous knowledge into formal education regardless of its potential to solve some contemporary problems. The recipients of this decontextualised education are thus prone to inadequate preparation for context-specific challenges in their African communities (Khumalo, 2018). Consequently, the Western approach to African education has proven insufficient as it overlooked some traditional moral education approaches. The African moral fibre was in the past nested in the intactness of the African indigenous communities and extended family structures (Wolhuter and Van der Walt, 2020). Moral education was the responsibility of all adult members of the community.

Life in the contemporary world is fast-paced and quickly evolving (Tican and Denzin, 2018). However, a dilemma remains whether there is a place for ethical or moral education in the changing times. Chowdhury (2016) indicates that secular ideologies are becoming predominant in modern societies, and questions are being raised from different interest groups about the legitimacy and relevance of moral education. Sharma (2020) observes that modern education significantly differs from traditional education. Character development no longer has as much value as it used to have in the traditional education systems (Sharma, 2020). The collapse of the traditional family and society is correlated with the moral crisis in the schools (Khathi, Govender and Ajani, 2021; Navraez, 2020, 2021; Wolhuter and Van der Walt, 2020).

Moral and character education should help learners become ethically mature adults capable of moral thought and action (Bello, 2022). However, this educational component is often not formally included in the curriculum. Instead, aspects of moral education form part of the hidden curriculum/co-curricular activities and are implicitly infused into other subjects, such as Social and Religious Studies (Mokotso, 2019; Owusu, 2022). In addition, not all the Lesotho secondary schools offer subjects such as Social and Religious Studies, meaning that moral education is usually not an explicit and compulsory component in the Lesotho school system.

Reports of the learners' misconduct and socially unacceptable behaviour are escalating in Lesotho (Dungey and Ansell, 2020; Mosia, 2019). Other scholars such as Jacobs, De Wet and Ferreira (2013), Matheolane (2016), as well as Rakolobe and Tlali (2022), have suggested mitigation strategies that involve punishment to address the learners' misconduct. The groundwork laid by the research mentioned above is acknowledged, however, the position held in the present study is that while there may not be instant solutions to the contemporary moral crisis, strengthening ethical and moral education may contribute to curbing the learners' misconduct in secondary schools. In this study, we therefore sought an African indigenous perspective in exploring how to reinforce moral education among the Lesotho secondary school learners. This approach is underscored by Fataar (2018), who postulates that in the face of the world moral crisis, there is a need for embedding African moral education within the African indigenous epistemologies.

RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

From the teachers' viewpoint, this study sought to explore an African indigenous approach to reinforcing ethical and moral behaviour among Lesotho secondary school learners. In line with this aim, the objectives of this study are:

- to highlight the forms of learner misconduct prevalent in Lesotho secondary schools; and
- to suggest African indigenous strategies that may curb the learners' misconduct.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: *BOTHO/UBUNTU*

Adjei (2019) illustrates that an African perspective of morality needs to be understood alongside the African definition of personhood since that forms the basis for African moral thinking. African indigenous communities embraced communalism, which is the principle that emphasises the common good of a group; this means that the upbringing of children was also a communal responsibility (Letseka, 2013a; 2013b). The humanness philosophy was central to communal values (which means *Botho* in Sesotho and *Ubuntu* in Zulu). Humaneness (*Botho/Ubuntu*) is thus seen as a foundation for morality in the African context since individuals are expected to perceive and understand their humaneness regarding having humane relations with others (Adjei, 2019; Mahlatsi, 2017). It can be agreed with Vink and Sefotho (2023) that the principle of '*Botho/Ubuntu*' authenticates what it means to be human and how to appreciate humanness. In this study, *Botho/Ubuntu* serves as a foundation for anchoring strategies for reinforcing moral education among Lesotho secondary school learners.

Botho/Ubuntu is enshrined within the principle of African humanism, which advances unity, care for humanity, expression of compassion, dignity, harmonious co-existence, interdependence and interconnectedness among human beings (Mahlatsi, 2017; Mosia, 2019). Drawing on the broader humanism theory, *Botho/Ubuntu* represents warmth towards other humans. It also esteems human life and gives it a premier value (Roux and Dasoo, 2020). Through the application of the *Botho/Ubuntu* philosophy, the individual's humanity is affirmed by the recognition of the humanity of others and an enduring sense of communal interdependence (Letseka, 2013b; Adjei, 2019; Mahlatsi, 2017). Thus, this philosophy affords human beings the respect and courtesy that any dignified individual is worthy of (Vink and Sefotho, 2023).

Khathi *et al.* (2021) indicate that moral education is an important aspect of African philosophy. Against this background, the African indigenous *Botho/Ubuntu* philosophy is construed as an authentic framework for anchoring African learners' educational and moral growth (Lephoto, 2021). This philosophy can be summed up in a moral law that says an action is good as long as it promotes the well-being of people and that, contrarily, an action is bad as long as it produces pain or suffering in others (Ilongo and Mahlatsi, 2019; Mahlatsi, 2017). The preceding African indigenous perspective is a justifiable move for laying a foundation upon which African moral education can be founded. Hence, the African indigenous philosophy of *Botho/Ubuntu* has been adopted as an overarching theoretical framework for this study. This philosophical perspective serves as a foundation for identifying humane indigenous strategies such as having humility, concern and compassion for the next human being. This could contribute to the attainment of moral restoration in Africa. In support of this standpoint, Narvraez (2020: 2) also argues that "moral education approaches should restore the non-civilised, ancient practices of raising good children". Against this theoretical framework, the following section focuses on the literature review.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For this study, the literature is reviewed in three areas: the concept of ethics and morality, African indigenous moral education and the role of the contemporary school in promoting moral behaviour among the learners.

The concepts of 'ethics' and 'moral education'

The concept of ethics signifies the moral principles of an individual or a particular group. Its etymology can be traced to Greek (Chowdhury, 2016). It is described as a sub-discipline of philosophy that focuses on the nature of morality (Chowdhury, 2016) and is concerned with the prescription of the norms and standards for human conduct (Tlali, 2021). As an academic subject, ethics seeks to probe the reasoning behind human morality (Sharma, 2020; Tlali, 2021). Moral education can also be linked to the ancient philosophical ideas of Aristotle, who outlined human admirable character as one of the aims of education.

Aristotelian moral education is still relevant today as it underscores character formation and self-discipline (Koenane and Mangena, 2017). Aristotle further defined human morality in terms of how one's behaviour affects the common good of society. The gist of his argument is captured in an extract from one of his books, *The Politics*, which states that: "he who is unable to live in society or is sufficient in himself, must either be a beast or a god..." (Koenane and Mangena, 2017: 62). This resonates with the African sense of morality which is also rooted in and validated by the community (Adjei, 2019; Navraez, 2020).

African indigenous moral philosophy and education

The proponents of African traditional education observe that, before colonisation, African education was community-based and aimed at solving context-based moral, political and economic challenges (Khumalo, 2018). This form of education was based on preparationism, functionalism and participation (Asare-Danso, 2019). African indigenous religion had a prominent influence on society, and moral values were an inherent part of religion and education. This view is supported by Mokotso (2019), who highlights that African people had an informal education system embedded in various social practices, rituals and laws.

African indigenous education introduced children to real-life situations to solve their individual and social problems (Mahlatsi, 2017). While it can be acknowledged that African indigenous moral education was not perfect in the absolutist sense, it did have its strengths. For instance, it ensured that the learners became morally well-adjusted members of society and helped them to live resourceful lives in their given environments (Khumalo, 2018). Basotho indigenous education specifically "sought to instruct the young people on '*makhabane*' (virtues) such as hard work, respect, humility, perseverance, service to the nation and patriotism" (Letseka, 2013a: 337). Thus, it was deemed important that everyone was treated fairly and with justice. The aim was also to raise and educate the youth to become good citizens (Letseka, 2013a).

African indigenous education utilised theoretical and practical methods of acquiring knowledge, skills and moral competencies through participation, observation and repetition of specific activities (Tlali, 2018). In addition, teaching and learning were conducted through demonstration, riddles, songs, storytelling, proverbs and folktales (Asare-Danso, 2019). Girls were taught and ushered into womanhood by their mothers and other elderly women, while boys were taught manhood by their fathers and other adult males. The rites of passage were also advanced through initiation schools. Moral values such as self-control and emotional intelligence were at the core of African indigenous education (Ilongo, 2021).

The elders were resourceful and played a crucial role in passing moral education from generation to generation. Hence, one's relationship with elders and respect for that relationship was the foundation for moral education (Tlali, 2018). Moreover, interpersonal relations were essential for human development because what the other person had to offer in terms of experiences, knowledge and advice benefited the African indigenous learners (Khumalo, 2018). Therefore, respect and humanness principles can be seen as imperative for restoring the broken moral fibre in the contemporary Basotho communities. In support of the above position, it can be highlighted that the central tenet of *Botho/Ubuntu* was inseparable from the Basotho African indigenous education and it advanced values such as responsibility, accountability, integrity, motivation, commitment, emotional maturity, honesty, love, tolerance, loyalty and caring. This tenet was vital in the establishment of authentic human relations (Letseka, 2013; Ilongo and Mahlatsi, 2019).

The role of the contemporary school in moral education

The literature clarifies that moral competence is not purely an individual quest but is achieved in association with and validated by one's community (Dungey and Ansell, 2020; Narvaez, 2020). The school is one such community that can help the learners to attain moral maturity. Khathi *et al.* (2021: 401) concur that "the school is a social institution which is meant to complement the family in teaching acceptable societal norms and values". In light of this, it needs to be acknowledged that ethical and moral issues permeate all aspects of school life.

The complexity of the school environment requires teachers to make countless spontaneous moral judgments in all their activities (McPherson, Forster and Buchanan, 2019). Creating an environment that nurtures positive learning hinges on ensuring harmonious co-existence among the various stakeholders, namely the learners, teachers, parents and educational authorities (Bello, 2022). It is, therefore, crucial to cultivate morality as a cornerstone for providing a respectful, safe, warm and friendly school environment (Gelmez-Burakgazi, Can and Coskun, 2020).

The school can contribute to societal moral regeneration (Roux and Dasoo, 2020). Thus, teachers must always be mindful that teaching is a moral profession (Rissanen, Kuusisto, Hanhimäki and Tirrib, 2018). Moral education can be taught through both formal curricular and co-curricular activities.

Consistent with communal experiences and the *Botho/Ubuntu* philosophy, "...teachers can emphasise communal imagination and a sense of global citizenship, which value 'us and us' instead of 'us-against-them'" (Narvaez, 2020: 5).

RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN

A qualitative research method was considered suitable for analysing the meanings ascribed to ethical behaviour and moral education to address the research question guiding this study. This study, therefore, utilised a qualitative research method anchored within the interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism is usually used to examine the meaning or definitions the participants have constructed about a particular phenomenon and is deemed a suitable philosophical lens to anchor qualitative studies (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018; Nieuwenhuis, 2016a). A qualitative research method also enables the process of meaning-making, which is reflexive in nature; therefore, it compels the participants to reflectively interrogate and redefine their perceptions about a particular phenomenon (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015; Cohen *et al.*, 2018). A case study design was utilised to enable a deeper exploration of indigenous approaches that can reinforce morality and ethical behaviour among the youth and secondary school learners in the context of Lesotho.

Data collection and analysis

An open-ended qualitative questionnaire was used to generate data (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). The qualitative questionnaire was emailed to the participants with a stipulated return date. This helped collect data in a convenient and less intimidating setup since the researchers did not have to be physically there to administer the questionnaire (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). The participants were requested to send back the filled-in questionnaires. However, this data collection method did not allow probing; hence, the follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with different participants to investigate specific issues that emerged in the questionnaire responses (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a). Another reason for following up on the questionnaire with semi-structured interviews was to supplement the data and to ensure the crystallisation of the data collection methods.

Participants

The participants were purposively selected to ensure that only those with a minimum teaching experience of five years participated (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a). Eighteen (18) participants responded to the open-ended questionnaire, and ten (10) were individually interviewed through semi-structured interviews. Ultimately, twenty-eight (28) participants from the various districts and geographical locations of Lesotho took part in the study.

Data analysis

Data from the qualitative questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews was transcribed verbatim into data transcripts. Then, thematic data analysis was conducted per Braun, Clarke and Weate's (2016) approach, which consists of six phases. Firstly, the researchers immersed themselves in the data by reading and re-reading it. Data was read repeatedly to identify nuances and trends. Secondly, this was followed by generating codes from the data (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015; Braun *et al.*, 2016). Thirdly, data was accordingly categorised into themes and sub-themes. Fourthly, the potential themes were reviewed and refined. Fifthly, the themes were defined and named. Lastly, the research report was produced based on the data, linking the themes' presentation with the interview transcripts (Merriam, 2014; Braun *et al.*, 2016).

Ethical considerations

Ethical issues were ensured by obtaining informed consent from the participants before the data collection process commenced. It was also clear to the participants that they could opt out at any point. Confidentiality and anonymity were observed by ensuring that none of the presented findings could be linked to any participants (Jansen, 2016). The participants were allocated pseudo-codes to disguise their identity. For instance, the participants were labelled Teacher One (T1) to Teacher Twenty-eight (T28).

FINDINGS

The findings from the open-ended questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews are integrated into this section due to the overlapping themes identified from both data sets. The first theme entails (1) examples of the learners' misconduct, and it has three sub-themes, namely (1.1) examination malpractice, (1.2) disruptive behaviour and (1.3) substance abuse. The second theme (2) consists of African indigenous strategies for reinforcing learner morality. This theme is further broken down into three sub-themes: (2.1) community-based (communal parenting or guardianship, and re-enacting '*thakaneng*'¹); (2.2) school-based strategies (elevating the Sesotho proverbs in the curriculum and learning from folklore and storytelling); and (2.3) lifestyle strategy(eis) (such as sexual abstinence).

Theme 1: Examples of Learners' misconduct

Teachers had a lot to say when asked to outline the types of learner misconduct prevalent in their schools. It needs to be clarified upfront that this theme is not exhaustive; instead, it highlights examples of learner misconduct just as evidence of misconduct prevalence. With this background in mind, the forms of

1 An African indigenous adult-supervised, gender-differentiated communal sleeping place for the youth.

misconduct that emerged from the data are presented under the following sub-themes: examination malpractice, disruptive behaviour and substance abuse.

Examination malpractice

Examination malpractice is cited as one of the predominant offences in many schools; learners are caught communicating answers with each other during a test or an examination. Some participants expressed their worry about the integrity of school assessments since examination malpractice was becoming rampant. As explained by T2, "some learners do not give themselves time to do their work, and they cheat or copy during the examination in order for them to pass". In addition, T7 pointed out that sometimes "learners bring unauthorised notes to the exam room, and it becomes sad when they are caught out and disqualified."

As emerged from these findings, academic cheating tarnishes the offending individuals' image and jeopardises the integrity of the assessment activities.

Disruptive behaviour

The participants also disclosed that cases of learner-disruptive behaviour are becoming common. In the participants' own words, T1 said, "some learners exhibit disruptive behaviour in the classrooms, and they do not do what is expected of them in their school work." A similar view was reiterated by T8, who added that "some learners display violent behaviour such as bullying others and disrespecting teachers." More views point out that sometimes the learners "use vulgar language in the school premises" (T14); "they also vandalise school property" (T19) or "steal from others" (T20). Participants showed that the situation is getting more problematic as gangsterism also makes inroads into the schools. As reported by T27, "Some learners are involved in gang fights, and this has a negative effect on the school environment".

Drug use

The participants voiced concern about the learners who use and abuse drugs at school. According to T12, "a number of students have been charged for being under the influence of alcohol or drugs during school hours". Even more worrisome, some learners are "more preoccupied with smoking dagga even on the school premises" (T17). The adverse effects of the aforementioned forms of misconduct on the school atmosphere cannot be over-emphasised. Some of these cases of misconduct end up in poor academic performance. They also render the schools uncondusive to effective teaching and learning, ultimately contributing to the learners' drop-out rate. These indicate that the various forms of learner misconduct are prevalent in Lesotho secondary schools.

Theme 2: Strategies for reinforcing learner morality

When asked to propose strategies for mitigating some of the outlined forms of learner misconduct, the participants suggested that integrating African

indigenous approaches and disciplinary methods could help restore morality among the youth. Further analysis of this theme revealed several strategies that may be applied at home and school and lifestyle strategies that may reinforce moral education among the youth.

Community-based strategies

The findings elucidated that moral education starts in the communities and extends into the schools. As such, the community needs to be involved by identifying and implementing the following community-based strategies:

Communal parenting and guardianship

According to the participants, Basotho must re-enact communal parenting, where "someone's child is everybody's child" (T3). The participants added that when parenting is every adult's responsibility, "children can be disciplined by any adult in the society" (T10). As proposed by T16, "some adults are more gifted than others in giving counsel and guidance to the children." The participants also envisaged that if national resources were to be channelled towards communal parenting, "this could also eradicate the barrier line between the poor and the rich. For example, the children from poor families will no longer steal for survival when there is instituted sharing and caring" (T24). The advantage of communal parenting may be that adults complement each other in raising children, which is also well aligned with the *Botho/Ubuntu* philosophy, which advances the spirit of care and concern for humanity.

Communal living also meant "Working together, caring and sharing; we should teach learners to work together and share everything as the African indigenous Basotho worked together and shared everything, including the parenting responsibility (T14)". Also, in line with the spirit of communal parenting, another African indigenous saying commonly used to encourage good behaviour among the children was "*ngoana ke oa sechaba*", which means "a child belongs to the nation" (T21). This saying implies that raising a child is not only a responsibility of their biological parents; the contribution that the entire community can make in raising children is recognised.

Re-enacting 'thakaneng'

As revealed in the above findings, Basotho practised communal parenting in the past. As part of this African indigenous parenting method, the youth of adolescence used to sleep at a common place under the supervision of an adult(s) who were officially tasked and entrusted with this responsibility. The sleeping areas were gender-differentiated because there was separate accommodation for boys and girls, respectively. The '*thakaneng*' can be construed as an indigenous institution where adolescent boys and girls, respectively, were taught the Sesotho gender-related morals and values such as abstinence and self-discipline. Hence, the educational importance of the '*thakaneng*' cannot be over-emphasised.

As explained by T1,

At '*Thakaneng*', virgin boys and girls slept under adult supervision and were taught about good behaviour and respect for every community member. As a result, this used to help the youth behave in a respectful manner, and they preserved the values that they were taught.

In support of the above view, T18 also stated that:

'Thakaneng' is a place where males and female adolescents, respectively, sleep with an elderly person. For example, a grown-up woman would be in charge of girls. This woman would teach the girls about good moral values, practices and attitudes.

According to the participants, the re-introduction of this African indigenous institution, such as '*Thakaneng*', could reinforce learner morality because "When children play together, live together and learn together a sense of brotherhood/sisterhood is instilled and they grow up loyal, caring and sharing" (T4). "They also learn how to handle different characters and can exercise emotional intelligence with each other" (T11). Also indicating how the idea of '*thakaneng*' can be emulated, T18 pointed out that:

If learners were to be assembled at a particular place/residence where they could be taught about family chores and societal values, this could curb the forms of anti-social behaviour which leads to teenage pregnancy; they could also learn how to deal with peer pressure.

The above findings suggest that the re-introduction of '*thakaneng*' could evoke the *Ubuntu/Botho* values of caring and having concern for others. This arrangement could also instil a sense of brotherhood/sisterhood among the youth. In contemporary times, this could be emulated in the form of community centres. Communal parenting would also address child-headed families and orphaned children who need adult guidance, promoting a strong sense of *Ubuntu/Botho* that can be replicated in the schools.

School-based strategies

The findings also revealed African indigenous knowledge resources that could be utilised in the schools to strengthen morality among the learners. It needs to be clarified that while these strategies are thematised as school-based, by being African indigenous, they originate from the community itself. While they can be integrated into the school curriculum, they can also be continuously applied back in the communities for a sustainable moral education.

Elevating the Sesotho proverbs in school curricula

The findings also suggested that proverbs should be used to teach good behaviour to learners. Proverbs communicate the values and philosophy of the African indigenous Basotho. In this regard, the participants provided several such proverbs and their meanings. As mentioned by T3, "the use of the Sesotho proverbs is an effective way to reinforce ethical behaviour and morality". T10 also concurred and added that "there is a Sesotho proverb that says '*ngoana ke seipone*

sa lelapa labo', which means that each child mirrors or represents the values that were taught by his/her family." As it is argued above when this proverb is understood and put into practice, the learners would improve their conduct because each would want to represent their family well.

T4 also illustrated the Sesotho proverb: '*Ha hona khomo ea boroko*' (This means that one cannot become prosperous by over-sleeping.) This proverb emphasises hard work as a doorway to success and may serve as a warning to the learners not to indulge in laziness, for they cannot achieve their aspirations. T13 explained that this proverb also "encourages hard work and responsibility and can help to improve the learners' motivation to study, and to decrease the chances of cheating during the exams as they would have adequately prepared themselves". The foregoing proverb can curb examination malpractices such as theft and other related offences such as murder because it represents the foundation for nurturing and sustaining work ethics. Another proverb the participants cited is '*Kopano ke matla*', which means unity is strength (T15). This proverb is essential for advancing cooperation and community building. It is essentially linked to the *Botho/Ubuntu* philosophy in the sense that it emphasises collaboration and teamwork for the success of both the individual and the group. As illustrated by T19, "this proverb should be applied and made an integral aspect of building a child-friendly school environment." As seen from the foregoing findings, Basotho proverbs are laced with *Botho/Ubuntu* philosophy and encompass the values of care and concern for others.

Learning from folklore and storytelling

As it emerged from the findings, oral traditions carry a lot of therapeutic and moral lessons that could benefit the learners. The learners should be taught through oral traditions such as music and tales because "these oral traditions contain advice for acceptable behaviour" (T2). In support of this position, T4 stated that through oral traditions, "the learners obtain knowledge regarding religious practices and spiritual rituals". As put by T7, "storytelling improves the learners' listening skills and could also improve their focus in the classroom." The learners could emulate good behaviour depicted in the stories and refrain from the misbehaviour they are warned about.

According to T17, "the learners can learn respect and adherence to instructions as some stories warn them about what to do and what not to do". Concurring with this view, T21 further observed that:

One African indigenous story that depicts the consequences of not taking the instructions or ignoring advice is that of a boy who was told not to drink a particular medicine but drank it anyway and ended up conceiving a baby.

Though the above story is mythological, it serves as a warning that ignoring instructions and the elders' advice could have devastating consequences. T24 said, "through a fairy tale such as the one above, children are taught not to take their parents' stuff without permission. It also helps them to refrain from stealing.

As noted from the preceding findings, oral traditions have valuable advice and warnings about the consequences of immoral and unethical behaviour. These oral traditions can be reinforced in teaching subjects such as the Sesotho language and literature to strengthen moral education.

Lifestyle changing strategies

While it can be admitted that one's societal group validates moral education, morality is also a personal responsibility and a lifestyle matter as it is expressed in how one conducts oneself (Dungey and Ansell, 2020; Narvaez, 2020). Lifestyle-changing strategies such as abstinence are thus seen as helpful in strengthening morality education.

Abstinence

As highlighted by the findings, one of the African indigenous education strategies was to encourage children to abstain from substances and practices designated for adults only. In Sesotho, this practice was known as '*ho ila*'. The notion of '*ho ila*' (refrain from/abstain from) was a tacit policy aimed at instilling the ability to refrain from getting involved in activities or indulging in activities preserved for 'adults only'. T3 indicated that "examples of stuff which the youth were expected to abstain from were sex before marriage, certain types of food, beverages and drugs. In addition, T9 specified that "according to the Sesotho culture, a girl was not allowed to eat eggs and certain animal organs since these were considered fertile food that would lead to sexual desire and teenage pregnancies". As emphasised by T25, "engaging in pre-marital sex and making babies out of wedlock was forbidden and was considered a symbol of disrespect for adults".

Based on the above findings, it can be noted that abstinence not only taught the youth self-discipline but also protected them from the urges or desires that could be harmful to them and others.

DISCUSSION

The findings highlight various examples of learner misbehaviour. These were categorised into three subthemes: examination malpractice, disruptive behaviour and drug use. These findings are a few examples of immoral behaviour displayed by learners in Lesotho secondary schools. These learner misbehaviours also demonstrate how learners also form part of the modern-day vicious moral circle (Navraez, 2020; 2021; Wolhuter and Van der Walt, 2020; Khathi *et al.*, 2021). These also illustrate how *Botho/Ubuntu* (humanness) has been lost, hence the need to restore this principle and apply it as a foundation for moral education in Lesotho secondary schools. The assumption is that when the learners have regard and concern for other human beings, it could become easy for them to exercise humility and self-control (Letseka, 2013a). Moreover, if *Botho/Ubuntu* could be made a foundation and goal of education, it could reinforce, among the learners, a need to be good citizens (Letseka, 2013a).

The findings have also confirmed that bringing up a child takes a wider community. Both community-based and school-based strategies and lifestyle-changing strategies were suggested to strengthen moral education among the learners. The strategies include communal parenting and re-enacting the '*thakaneng*', an indigenous communal parenting strategy. The findings endorse the observation that raising a child needs a concerted effort of not only the immediate parents but also of all the elderly people in a given community (Dungey and Ansell, 2020; Narvaez, 2020). This is a suitable mechanism for encouraging good behaviour among the learners and instilling a sense of social responsibility and communal concern in them.

The re-introduction of '*thakaneng*' could instil a sense of brotherhood/sisterhood and fill in for the absent parents, as in the case of orphans. This idea also symbolised the importance of communal parenting and joined adults' efforts in raising humane and good citizens. If extended into the schools, this sense of brotherhood/sisterhood could reinforce humanness (*Botho/Ubuntu*) and curb misconducts such as bullying, fighting, disrespect for others, gangsterism, cheating and stealing. This approach is also endorsed by the literature, which indicates that moral education approaches should restore the non-civilised, ancient practices of raising good children (Letseka, 2013a; Narvaez, 2020).

The findings further emphasise the significance of oral traditions such as storytelling and proverbs, rich in the *Botho/Ubuntu* philosophy. For example, proverbs advance the values of hard work, unity, care and concern for others (Asare-Danso, 2019). As the findings highlight, oral traditions are also rich in advice and warning about the consequences of immoral behaviour. The findings also advocate abstinence as a lifestyle-changing strategy that may promote self-control and self-discipline, which may curb immoral urges or desires. In this regard, it is noted that abstinence not only protects the individual but is also beneficial for others who could have been adversely affected by an immoral action. This practice is grounded in the *Botho/Ubuntu* philosophy as it promotes communal thinking and citizenship (Narvaez, 2020).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings indicate that reinforcing moral education among secondary school learners requires both community-based and school-based strategies, as well as worldview and lifestyle changes. Based on the findings, and as underscored by the literature (Letseka, 2013a; 2013b; Ilongo and Mahlatsi, 2019; Khathi *et al.*, 2021; Narvaez, 2020; Sefotho, 2023), this study recommends that such strategies should be anchored within *Botho/Ubuntu*, which is an African indigenous philosophy that seeks to advance humility, respect, care and concern for humanity.

The indigenous strategies recommended in this study include communal parenting or guardianship. This can supplement any parental gaps and deficiencies that lead to the youth immorality. Adults embracing their role in the upbringing of

the community's youth could ensure that no child is left behind. If the same principle is applied in the Lesotho secondary schools, teacher-learner relations would replicate those of parents/guardians-children and carrying out the moral guidance or moral education would come effortlessly.

As indicated earlier, during the indigenous times, adolescents were taught the Sesotho gender-related morals and values, including abstinence and self-discipline at '*thakaneng*'. The study thus recommends the revival of the '*thakaneng*' indigenous institution, which can serve as a valuable platform for providing moral guidance to the youth. When the values and conduct learned at '*thakaneng*' extend into the schools, this can help reinforce moral education among the learners.

The findings highlighted the importance of the Sesotho proverbs and folktales in the teaching and learning of good behaviours. Therefore, the study recommends emphasising the Sesotho proverbs and folktales in the Lesotho secondary schools' curricula. It is envisioned that when these are appreciated and used as daily guiding principles and references, they may have a positive impact on learners' conduct. The study also recommends lifestyle changes for the youth by opting for indigenous approaches such as abstinence. This is one of the approaches that could reinforce self-control and suppression of certain urges such as those that lead to bullying, pre-marital sex and drug abuse.

LIMITATIONS

This study only looked at the issue of moral education from the teachers' perspectives, which might constitute a limitation of the study. Learners' views could have also added valuable insights into learners' perceptions about moral education and the value of indigenous approaches. Future studies could add the learners' voices to the issue of indigenous approaches to moral education. Furthermore, it needs to be indicated that while other African communities may relate to the findings of this study, such cannot be generalised to those different contexts (Cohen *et al.*, 2018) since the findings are drawn explicitly from the Lesotho context.

CONCLUSION

The study explored an African indigenous perspective for reinforcing moral education among learners in Lesotho secondary schools. Previous research has pointed out that learners are not immune from immorality. The findings confirmed that learners are indeed involved in immoral activities that threaten and negatively affect the teaching and learning in the schools. The position held in this study is that this challenge requires the schools and the wider community to unite to find strategies for reinforcing moral education among the learners. An African indigenous perspective was adopted to solicit some teachers' views on the matter. The study concludes that moral education can be reinforced by anchoring it within the African philosophy of *Botho/Ubuntu*. This philosophy could

become an impetus for indigenous strategies such as communal parenting and guardianship, the revival of *'thakaneng'*, emphasis on the Basotho proverbs, folktales and abstinence. These strategies are likely to nurture humanness and moral consciousness among the Lesotho secondary school learners, and could create a harmonious and respectful school environment, which is conducive to teaching and learning.

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