

LESOTHO BICENTENNIAL CONFERENCE

**K'honference ea Ketekelo ea Lilemo tse Makholo-a-Mabeli
(1824 – 2024)**

BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS



**ADVANCING EPISTEMIC DIVERSITY AND PLURALISM
FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**Phahamiso ea Boleng ba Litsebo tsa Basotho, Ntšetsopeleng ea
Naha**

1 – 3 October 2024

Maseru / Roma, Lesotho

Hosted by:

Academic Forum for Development of Lesotho (AFDeL)

&

National University of Lesotho

Editors:

Tšepo Mokuku | Julia Chere-Masopha

=====

PUBLICATION DETAILS & COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Publication Title: Advancing Epistemic Diversity and Pluralism for Sustainable Development.

Publication Type: Book of Conference Proceedings.

Host Institutions: Academic Forum for Development of Lesotho (AFDeL) & National University of Lesotho (NUL)

Publication Year: 2024

ISBN: 978-99911-952-1-6

© 2024 Academic Forum for Development of Lesotho (AFDeL)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted, or distributed in any form or by any means - electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise - without prior written permission from the copyright holder, except for brief quotations used for academic, scholarly, educational, or non-commercial review purposes as permitted under applicable copyright laws.

Disclaimer:

The views and opinions expressed in the individual papers published in these conference proceedings are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Academic Forum for Development of Lesotho (AFDeL) or the National University of Lesotho (NUL).

Permission Requests and Enquiries:

Academic Forum for Development of Lesotho (AFDeL)

C/O National University of Lesotho

P.O. Roma 180, Lesotho

KETAPELE

Selemong sena sa 2024, re keteka lilemo tse 200 sechaba sa Basotho se thehiloe ka ho tsepamisa maikutlo a rona holim'a litsebo tsa setso. Re ela hloko hore Afrika e na le nalane a telele e manoni tlhahisong ea litsebo. Nalane ena e etellapele nako ea bokolone 'me e qholotsa mehopolo ea hore tsoelopele le mekhoea e hlophisitsoeng ea ho ithuta ha ea qala ka Balichaba ba Europo.

Mehlobo le merabe e fapaneng ea Ma-Afrika e ahile litsebo tse matla tse amanang le puso, temo, litlhare, linaleli, moaho, tsa semoea, le mekhoea ea phetisetso ea litsebo ka puo. Hape phetisetso ea litsebo e ne e etsoa le ka mabollo, meqoqo, le tsa bolumeli. Mekhoea ena e supa kamoo litsebo tsa Ma-Afrika li itšetlehileng ka bonngoe le tsela tsa ho phela. Bahlalefi ba *ikhoholo-bokhobeng*, ba bontša ha bokolone bo ile ba tsukutla le ho ferekenyana litsebo tsena, ka maikemisetso. Ba hlalosa ha bokolone bo ile ba atleha ho etsa sena ka ho nyatsa litsebo tsa Ma-Africa, ho li nyenyefatsa le ho petlennya tsa bona tseo ba neng ba lumela hore li nepahetse holima merabe e meng, bo li khothaletsa kahore li molemo ho lefatse kamoka.

Afrika ebile lehae la litsi tsa thuto e phahameng khale papisong le linaha kapa mafatse a mang. Mohlala ke Univesethi ea al-Qarawiyyin, e thiheloeng ka selemo sa 859 CE¹, sebakeng se bitsoang Morocco kajeno. Setsi se na se tsejoa e le setsi sa thuto tsa pele-pele tse kenyeletsang thuto-Molimo, lipalo, linaleli, litlhare, molao, le filosofi. Lithuto tsena li ile tsa hohela baithuti ho hlaha linaheng tse ling tsa Afrika, Bochabela-bo-Bohare, le Europo. Setsi se ntse se sebetsa le kajeno. Tse ling tsa litsi tsa thuto tsa nako e tsoanang li bile sebakeng sa Timbuktu me tse ling tsa tsona ke Sankore, Djinguereber, le Sidi Yahya. Tsona li ile tsa tuma haholo lemong tsa 1200 ho isa 1500, pusong ea Mali le Songhai. Litsi tsena li ile tsa boloka lingoloe, 'me tsa holisa litsebo mafapheng a molao, tsa-mahlale, lingoliloeng le filosofi. Litsi tsena li bontša kamoo Afrika e bapetseng karolo ea mantlha nalaneng ea mahlale a lefatse.

Molefi Asante, Cheikh Anta Diop, le ba bang ba boinahano bo tsoanang, ba bontša kamoo lilemong tsa **3100 BCE - 332 BCE** Ekhepeta, eo e neng e bitsoa Kemet, baahai ba eona e le batho ba Batšo ba neng ba ena le litsi tse matla tsa litsebo tsa se-Afrika, mafapheng

¹CE e bolela Common Era – e leng mokhoa oo e seng oa Sekreste oa hore **AD** (*Anno Domini*, Selatine se bolelang “*Year of the Lord*”)

a tsa mahlale, filosofi, puso, bophelo, lipalo, moaho, le tsa semoea. Litsi tsena li bile teng le pele litsebo tse tsoanang tsa Ma-Greece le Ma-Roma tsa mehleng ea khale li ka tsebahala.

Bahlalefi ba kang Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o le Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni bona ba bontša bohlokoa ba ho tsosolosa le ho tsitsisa litsebo tsa Mafrika, lipuo tsa rona, le mekhoea ea boinahano ka hare ho litsi tsa thuto e phahameng le tsa liphuputso.

Buka ena ke sehlahisoa sa Bicentennial Conference/*K'honferense ea Ketekelo ea Lilemo tse Makholo-a-Mabeli*, e eneng e keteka lilemo tse 200 sechaba sa Basotho se thehiloe ka 1824, ke Morena Moshoeshe I. Kopano ene e ne e hlophisitsoe le ho tsoaroa ke mokhatlo oa *Academic Forum for Development of Lesotho* (AFDeL), ka la 1-3 Mphalane, 2024. Sehlooho sa k'honferense e ne e le 'Advancing Epistemic Diversity and Pluralism for Sustainable Development' / *'Phahamiso ea Boleng ba Litsebo tsa Basotho, Ntsetso Peleng ea Naha'*. K'honferense ene e tsoeroe tšebelisanong 'moho le Sekolo se Seholo sa Sechaba/National University of Lesotho (NUL) le University of the Free State (UFS), e tšehelitsoe ke United Nations Development Programme. Ba bileng teng e bile litsebi tse ikemetseng, le tse hlahang mafapheng a lateleng: National University of Lesotho, Botho University Lesotho, University of the Free State, University of South Africa, Rhodes University, Suffron Conscious, Decolonial International Network, Ministry of Information, Communications, Science, Technology, and Innovation (*Government of Lesotho*), United Nations Development Programme, 'moho le moemeli oa likhoebo tse ikemetseng.

Selelekala sa buka ena se ahiloe ka lipampiri tse hlahang ho Dr. Souleman Bouker, Senior Economic Advisor ea United Nations Development Programme; Monghali Sandew Hira, Mongoli oa Decolonial International Network Foundation, The Hague; Profesa Olussola Isaac Fajana, Vaes-Chansela ea National University of Lesotho; le Pro-Vaes-Chansela ea National University of Lesotho, e leng Asoshieit-Profesa Kananelo Mosito KC.

Selelekela sena se lateloa ke lipampiri tse leshome-le-metso-e-'meli, tse hlahlobiloeng. Lipampiri tsena li manolla ka botebo sehlooho sa k'honferense ka tsela tse fapakaneng; tse ling li hlahloba kamoo litsebo tsa setso sa Basotho le tse ling tsa Se-Afrika, li ka bang molemo kajeno. Lipampiri tse ling tsona li manolla mekhoea e ka sebelisoang ho ikhoholla mekhoeng le litsebong tsa bokolone; e le ho ngatafatsa mefuta ea litsebo tsa mehlobo e meng, ntlafatsong ea maphelo le moruo. Ka kakaretso lingoliloeng tse bukeng ena,

li hlalloba ntlafatso ea maphelo le moruo mabapi le, mokhoa oa puso, thuto ea mathomo, thuto e phahameng, tse amanang le komporo, bohla-le-maiketsetso (*artificial intelligence*), meriana ea setso le pholiso, paballo ea tikoloho le matlafatso ea kelello ea motho.

Hira o hlahlolla thuto e phahameng (*Higher Education*) a sebelisa moralo oa seo a se bitsang *Decolonising the Mind (DTM)*. O bontša ka moo thuto e phahameng libakeng tse ka Leboea ho lefatse (*Global South*) li sebetsang ka litsebo tsa bokolone, le ka moo liteko tsa ho loantša boemo bona li hlokanang motheo o hlakileng. O re moralo oa DTM o ka fihlela tharollo ka ho lokisa likelello tsa ba amehang, mekhoe le toka; ea phahamisa litsebo tsa Ma-Afrika, ho kenyeletsa litsebo tse amangoang le Morena Moshoeshe I, 'me ea hlopha bocha boemo ba thuto e phahameng.

Mokuku, Kolobe le Leshota ba shebana le motheo oa unifesithi ea Lesotho, le ka moo e ka phahamisang le ho ntlafatsa *litsebo le kelello* tsa setso. Ba sebelisa mekhoe ea boinahano ea khoahollo ea litsebo le boinahano bokhobeng, le ho hlalloba kamoo li ka hlalosehang ka teng, le kamoo sekolo sena, seo e leng unifesithi e ng'oe feela ea sechaba, se ka tlatsatsang boiphihlelong ba tsoelopele e itsetlehileng ka setso. **Mothibe** o nyakurela mokhoa oa puso e nang le chebelo pele e tsoanang le Morena Moshoeshe I, e neng e tataisoa ke seo litsibi tsa kajeno li se bitsang *Se-Moshoeshe*, e ileng ea aha sechaba se matla sa Basotho. Mothibe o tsšhetsa nyakurelo ena ka lingoloe tse 'maloa ho bontša Semelo sa Se-Moshoeshe, le bohlokoa ba sona boetapeleng, le tharollong ea liqholotso tsa bophelo, moruo le polotiki tsa Lesotho.

Ndebele o sebelisa otho-baeokrafi (*auto-biography*) ho manolla tsa bophelo ba hae ba bophaphathehi Lesotho, a shebile liqholotso tse tisoang ke hoba kholehong. U sebelisa mokhoa oa bonono, o kenyeletsang liNgoma, Lithoko, le Litšomo ho fuputsa a hetla morao (*reflexively*), a bontša kamoo mokhoa ona o ka matlafatsang motho ea fetileng hara liqholotso tse tsoanang le tsa hae. **Lephoto** o hlalisa taba ea bohlokoa ea bophelo ba kelello, mabapi le *tsoelopele ea moshoelella* (Sustainable Development Goal 3). O hlalosa ha boemo ba bophelo ba kelello ba sechaba bo leng bohlokoa tsoelo-peleng e akaretsang ea motho, metse, le naha. O ahile boithuto ba hae ka ho fuputsa basebetsi ba unifesithi e le ho bontša kamoo boetapele bo itsetlehileng ka filosofi ea *Botho*, bo leng bohlokoa bophelong bo botle ba basebetsi, le bophelong ba unifesithi ka boeona.

Pampiri ea **Seleteng-Kose**, e shebile haholo limela, e manolla bohlokoa le liketsahala mabapi le litlhare tsa Basotho. Seleteng-Kose o khothaletsa paballo le tšireletso ka molao tšebeliso ea limela tlhahisong ea meriana. **Silindane** o qholotsa phahamiso le bohlokoa bo fuoang litsebo tsa mahlale (*science*) ka ho khesa tse ling. O sebelisa mokhoa oa otho-baeokrafi (*auto-biography*) ho bontša bohlokoa ba litsebo tsa sentso tsa pholiso. O susumelletsa khaho ea melao e lumellang mefuta e fapakaneng ea litsebo sechabeng.

Sengoloeng sa bona sa *rifleksifithi* (*reflexivity*), se hlaloba ka moo maemo a bophelo a leng ka teng, kapa ho tlleng hore a be teng, ka morero oa ho chorisa chebelo-pele le likhato, **Rakolobe le Sepiriti**, ba hlaloba nalane ea Lesotho, ho supa kamoo Basotho ba tlohileng mokhoeng oa tsamaiso oa Moshoeshe I, o neng aha khotso le nala. Ba khothaletsa thuto ho lohanya litšia tsa *Botho* ho rarolla liqholotso tsamaisong, maphelong, le moruong tsa sehaba. Boithuto ba **Mohafa le Mokuku** bo fatisisa taba ea *toka-litsebong* (*epistemic justice*) ka ho fuputsa kamoo matichere a tsa-mahlale (*science*) a bonang le ho tseba ka tšebeliso ea puo ea barutoana ea letsoele lihlopheng. **Matee le Thamae** ba fuputsa ka kenyeletso ea matsema thutong ea mathomo. Mosebetsi oa bona o manolla melao ea thuto, le liphetoho tse ncha thutong, me ba hlaloba ka moo thuto ea mathomo e ka ahang litšia tsa matsema le *Botho*.

Ka mokhoa o tsoanang, **Thamae, Matee le Iliško** ba hlaloba ba bile ba bontša hore na litšomo li ka sebelisoa joang koetlisong ea matichere unifesithing mabapi le tšebeliso e nepahetseng ea *Bohlale-maiketsetso* (*Artificial intelligence*). **Mokhosi** o fuputsa tšebeliso ea kenyeletso ea mantsoe a Sesotho (*Sesotho-Word-Embedding*), kapa tšebeliso ea ho ngola Sesotho sa Lesotho, ka komporo.

EDITORIAL NOTE

As we celebrate the 200 years of Basotho's existence as a nation, with a focus on centering Indigenous Knowledge Systems for development, we recognise, from a decolonial perspective, that Africa has a long and rich history of knowledge production that predates colonialism and challenges Eurocentric assumptions that civilisation and formal learning originated exclusively in Europe. Indigenous African societies developed sophisticated systems of knowledge in governance, agriculture, medicine, astronomy, architecture, spirituality, and oral traditions. Knowledge was transmitted through communities, elders, initiation schools, storytelling, and spiritual institutions, reflecting African epistemologies rooted in communalism and lived experience. Decolonial scholars argue that colonialism disrupted and marginalised these systems through "epistemicide," where African ways of knowing were dismissed as inferior while Western knowledge systems were imposed as universal.

Africa was also home to some of the world's oldest centres of higher learning. The University of al-Qarawiyyin, founded in 859 CE², in present-day Morocco, is widely recognised as one of the oldest continually operating universities in the world. It became a major centre for studies in theology, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, law, and philosophy, attracting scholars from Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. Similarly, the scholarly centres of Timbuktu, especially Sankore, Djinguereber, and Sidi Yahya, flourished between the 13th and 16th centuries under the Mali and Songhai Empires. These institutions preserved manuscripts and advanced scholarship in law, science, literature, and philosophy, demonstrating Africa's central role in global intellectual history.

Molefi Asante, Cheikh Anta Diop, and other Afrocentric scholars³ further argue that ancient Egypt, which was then inhabited by black Africans, and called Kemet [during **3100 BCE to 332 BCE**], had institutions that made it a major centre of African intellectual

²CE means Common Era - the secular (non-religious) equivalent of **AD** (*Anno Domini*, Latin for "Year of the Lord")

³ Asante, M. K. (2007). *An Afrocentric manifesto: Toward an African renaissance*. Polity Press.

Diop, C. A. (1974). *The African origin of civilization: Myth or reality*. Lawrence Hill Books

achievement, scientific inquiry, philosophy, governance, medicine, mathematics, architecture, and spirituality long before the rise of classical Greece and Rome. On the other hand, decolonial thinkers such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni emphasise the need to recover and recentre African knowledge systems, languages, and intellectual traditions within contemporary universities and research institutions.

This book emerges from an international Bicentennial Conference/*K'honference ea Ketekelo ea Lilemo tse Makholo a Mabeli*, which celebrated 200 years since the founding of the Basotho nation in 1824 by Morena Moshoeshoe I. The conference was hosted by the *Academic Forum for Development of Lesotho* (AFDeL) in Lesotho on 1-3 October 2024, under the theme of 'Advancing Epistemic Diversity and Pluralism for Sustainable Development'/ '*Phahamiso ea Boleng ba Litsebo tsa Basotho, Ntšetso Peleng ea Naha*'. The conference was hosted in collaboration with the National University of Lesotho (NUL) and the University of the Free State (UFS) and sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Lesotho. Scholars, intellectuals, and participants came from a wide range of institutions and organisations namely; the National University of Lesotho, Botho University Lesotho, University of the Free State, University of South Africa, Rhodes University, Suffron Conscious, Decolonial International Network, Ministry of Information, Communications, Science, Technology and Innovation (Government of Lesotho), the United Nations Development Programme, as well as a representative of the private sector.

The **Introduction** to this book comprises papers presented by the United Nations Development Programme, Senior Economic Advisor, Dr Souleman Boukar, the National University of Lesotho Vice-Chancellor, Professor Olussola Isaac Fajana, and the Pro-Vice Chancellor of the National University of Lesotho, Associate Professor Kananelo Mosito KC.

The introduction is followed by a collection of twelve reviewed academic papers that interrogate the conference theme in various ways, including a focus on the contemporary application of Basotho indigenous and decolonial concepts and theories for epistemic diversity and socio-economic upliftment. Specifically, the works focus on socio-economic advancement in governance, basic education curriculum, university education, ICT, artificial intelligence, indigenous medicine and healing, environmental sustainability, and empowerment.

Hira examines the decolonisation of Higher Education (HE) through the proposed *Decolonising the Mind (DTM)* framework. He argues that HE in the Global South remains shaped by colonial epistemologies and that existing decoloniality approaches lack coherence and practical applicability. He presents DTM as a more comprehensive framework grounded in mental liberation, ethics, social justice, and community-centred knowledge systems, while highlighting the relevance of African intellectual traditions, particularly those associated with Morena Moshoeshoe I, in reconstructing higher education. **Mokuku, Kolobe, and Leshota** reflect on the origins of university education in Lesotho and its potential to leverage and valorise indigenous epistemologies and ontologies. Drawing on decolonial theory, they explore how the National University of Lesotho might be characterised, and how the only public university can contribute towards the development of *indigenous modernity*. **Mothibe** explores how Morena Moshoeshoe I's visionary and ethical leadership, guided by a body of knowledge scholars have termed 'Se-Moshoeshoe', consolidated a powerful kingdom for the Basotho nation. Drawing on various sources, Mothibe illustrates the nature of Se-Moshoeshoe and its relevance to leadership and to the resolution of Lesotho's myriad political and socio-economic challenges today.

Ndebele employs auto-ethnography to examine his experiences of exile in Lesotho and the complexities of displacement. Using a contemporary theatrical performance, he reflexively explores the restorative power of integrating indigenous concepts of liNgoma, Lithoko and Litšomo. **Lephoto** raises an important issue regarding mental health in relation to Sustainable Development Goal 3. She argues that citizens' mental health is key to holistic development across the individual, community, and national levels. Using the university staff as her case, Lephoto posits that leadership guided by the Botho philosophy is essential for staff well-being and institutional productivity. **Seleteng-Kose's** paper outlines the significance of and developments in Basotho traditional medicine, with particular emphasis on medicinal plants; she makes a case for the conservation and propagation of these plants, as well as their safeguarding through legislation. **Silindane** challenges the dominance of scientific epistemology and the value assigned to it, thereby excluding other viable ways of knowing. She uses autobiography to illustrate the value of an indigenous, non-scientific healing approach and argues for legislation that enables pluralistic knowledges in society.

In their reflexive thesis, ***Rakolobe and Sepiriti*** examine Lesotho's past and present and contend that Basotho have drifted away from the leadership values espoused by King Moshoeshoe I that fostered socio-economic prosperity. They argue for education that integrates the principles of Botho philosophy as a solution to Lesotho's leadership and socio-economic challenges. ***Mohafa and Mokuku*** examine issues of *epistemic justice* in their investigation of science teachers' perspectives and experiences regarding the use of learners' mother tongue in science classrooms. ***Matee and Thamae*** investigate the practice of matsema in relation to teaching and learning in the Lesotho basic education system, analysing basic education policies and reforms, and examining how the school curriculum reflects the tenets of matsema and Botho. In a similar vein, ***Thamae, Matee and Iliško*** explore the potential of folklore tales to instil ethical awareness in Artificial Intelligence among university pre-service teachers. ***Mokhosi*** explores the application of Word embeddings for Sesotho, with a focus on Lesotho's orthography and integrating Sesotho into ICT.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The publication of this *Book of Proceedings*, commemorating the Lesotho Bicentennial, is the culmination of the collective dedication, scholarly engagement, and invaluable contributions of numerous individuals and institutions.

We extend our sincere appreciation to the *Academic Forum for Development of Lesotho* (AFDeL) for its vision and leadership in convening this historic conference, held from 1–3 October 2024. The conference provided an important platform for critical reflection on two centuries of Basotho nationhood, while fostering meaningful dialogue on pathways towards an inclusive, pluralistic, and sustainable future.

Our profound gratitude goes to the National University of Lesotho (NUL) for hosting this significant gathering. We acknowledge the University Management, faculties, and support staff for their invaluable logistical assistance and for creating an environment conducive to rigorous academic engagement and intellectual exchange.

We also express our deepest appreciation to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for its generous sponsorship and unwavering support of the conference. In particular, we acknowledge the Resident Representative, Dr. Jacqueline Olweya, for her commitment to promoting dialogue on sustainable development, epistemic diversity, and inclusive knowledge systems in Lesotho. The participation and support of the wider United Nations family significantly enriched the scope and impact of this conference.

Special thanks are extended to the Keynote Speakers, Panelists, and Paper Presenters whose scholarly contributions form the intellectual foundation of this volume. Your research and reflections on valorisation of indigenous knowledge systems, epistemic diversity, and pluralism have provided critical insights that advance the conference theme, “*Advancing Epistemic Diversity and Pluralism for Sustainable Development*.”

Finally, we acknowledge with gratitude the dedication of the Organising Committee and Editorial Team, whose tireless efforts made the successful compilation and publication of these proceedings possible. Their professionalism, commitment, and collaborative spirit have been instrumental in bringing this *Book of Proceedings* to fruition.

ORGANISING COMMITTEE LIST

Conference Chair:	Professor Tšepo Mokuku
Conference Programme Chair:	Assoc. Professor Julia Chere-Masopha
Logistics Chair:	Dr Malephoto Lephoto
Conference Secretary:	Dr Nthama Matsie
Fundraising Chair:	Mr Tšepo Ntho
Conference Secretariat:	Ms Nyakallo Bereng
Conference Technical Assistant:	Mr Bokang Selialia
Conference Technical Assistant:	Mr Toka Moru
Conference Technical Assistant:	Ms Ntsebeng Moeketsi

Table of Contents

PUBLICATION DETAILS & COPYRIGHT NOTICE.....	ii
KETAPELE	iii
EDITORIAL NOTE.....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	xi
ORGANISING COMMITTEE LIST.....	xii
FOREWORD	xv
LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS	xvi
LIST OF PROCEEDINGS REVIEWERS.....	xvii
A. KEYNOTE SPEECHES: GENERAL TRENDS & POLICIES	1
1. Advancing Epistemic Diversity and Pluralism for Sustainable Development & UNSDCF 2024-2028 Priorities - Souleman Boukar - <i>UNDP</i> <i>Representative - Senior Economic Advisor</i>	2
2. Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Sustainable Development - Olusola Isaac Fajana - <i>Vice Chancellor, The National University of Lesotho</i>	4
3. Mainstreaming Indigenous Knowledge Systems - By Kananelo E. Mosito K.C. <i>Pro-Vice-Chancellor, The National University of Lesotho</i>	7
B. DECOLONISING HIGHER EDUCATION & GOVERNANCE	11
4. How to Decolonise Higher Education? - Sandew Hira, Secretary of the Decolonial International Network Foundation, The Hague	12
5. Decolonialising Higher Education in Lesotho to Advance Indigenous Modernity - <i>Tšepo Mokuku</i> ¹ . <i>Maboleba Kolobe</i> ² & <i>Paul Leshota</i> ³	29
6. Se-Moshoeshoe and Governance - Tefetso Mothibe, AFDeL/Independent Consultant.....	53
C. HEALTH AND HEALING	59

7.	Cantos of a Life in Exile: A Performance Auto-Ethnography of Healing and Belonging through Indigenous Epistemologies - <i>Makhaola Ndebele</i>	60
8.	Botho Leadership and Indigenous Protective Factor for Academic Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing in the Institutions of Higher Learning - <i>Malephoto Niko Ruth Lephoto</i>	66
9.	The Role of Indigenous Knowledge in Lesotho's Traditional Medicine - <i>Lerato Seleteng-Kose</i>	84
10.	Pluralistic Knowledge Systems: How Scientific and Non-Scientific Forms of Knowledge Can Birth Solutions to Challenges in our Daily Lives – <i>Motshedisi Silindane</i>	91
D.	EPISTEMIC JUSTICE IN THE CURRICULUM	103
11.	Towards the Recalibration of Future Lesotho Leaders: Infusion of Botho Philosophy in Basic Education to Promote Patriotism - <i>Kelello Alicia Rakolobe¹ and Sepiriti Sepiriti²</i>	104
12.	Language And Epistemic Justice: Exploring the Perceptions and Experiences of Lesotho Science Teachers on the Use of Indigenous Languages in Teaching and Learning – <i>Lereko G. Mohafa¹ and Tšepo Mokuku²</i>	118
13.	Infusing the Concept of Matsema Systems in The Lesotho Basic Education System - <i>Lihotetso Gloria Matee¹ And Lipolelo Thamae²</i>	142
E.	INDIGENISING TECHNOLOGY	152
14.	Folklore Tales: Promoting Ethical Use of AI among English Language Pre-Service Teachers - <i>Lipolelo Thamae¹, Lihotetso Gloria Matee² and Dzintra Iliško³</i>	153
15.	Generating Word Embeddings for Sesotho - <i>Refuoe Mokhosi¹ & Tumelo Pii²</i>	172

FOREWORD

It is with profound *honour* and a deep sense of historical responsibility that I introduce this Book of Proceedings, a scholarly landmark for the commemoration of the *Lesotho Bicentennial*. As we celebrate 200 years since the founding of the Basotho nation by *Morena Moshoeshoe I* in 1824, we find ourselves at a critical juncture of reflection and renewal.

The theme of this volume, “*Advancing Epistemic Diversity and Pluralism for Sustainable Development*,” serves as a clarion call to re-examine the foundations of our knowledge systems. This collection of papers advocates a decolonial approach in which indigenous wisdom and local modernities are integrated into the global pursuit of progress.

Critically, the research and dialogues contained herein are directly aligned with the *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*. By exploring the intersection of cultural heritage, education, and social justice, these proceedings contribute specifically to *SDG 4 (Quality Education)* by promoting a curriculum that respects diversity; *SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)* by empowering indigenous voices; and *SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions)* by reflecting on the governance and leadership values of the Basotho nation.

This publication is a testament to the power of collaboration between the *National University of Lesotho (NUL)*, the *Academic Forum for Development of Lesotho (AFDeL)*, and the *United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)*. The support of the UNDP has been instrumental in ensuring that our bicentennial reflections translate into actionable scholarly insights that contribute to the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

I invite you to engage with these pages as a roadmap for an inclusive, pluralistic future - one that respects our unique history while boldly contributing to the global community.

Professor Tefetso Mothibe (PhD)



Deputy President - AFDeL

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Dzintra Iliško – Centre of Sustainable Education, Daugavpils Universitāte, Latvia

Julia Chere-Masopha – National University of Lesotho

Kananelo E. Mosito KC – Pro-Vice-Chancellor, National University of Lesotho

Kelello Alicia Rakolobe – National University of Lesotho

Lerato Seleteng-Kose – National University of Lesotho

Lereko G. Mohafa – National University of Lesotho

Lihotetso Gloria Matee – National University of Lesotho

Lipolelo Thamae – National University of Lesotho

’Maboleba Kolobe – National University of Lesotho

Makhaola Ndebele – Rhodes University, South Africa

’Malephoto Niko Ruth Lephoto – National University of Lesotho

Motshedisi Silindane – Saffron Conscious, South Africa

Olusola Isaac Fajana – Vice Chancellor, National University of Lesotho

Paul Leshota – National University of Lesotho

Refuoe Mokhosi – Botho University, Lesotho Campus

Sandew Hira – Secretary of the Decolonial International Network Foundation, The Hague

Sepiriti Sepiriti – National University of Lesotho

Souleman Boukar – Senior Economic Advisor, UNDP

Tefetso Mothibe – National University of Lesotho

Tšepo Mokuku – National University of Lesotho

LIST OF PROCEEDINGS REVIEWERS

Julia Chere-Masopha

Munyaradzi Mushonga

Paul Leshota

Tšepo Mokuku

A. KEYNOTE SPEECHES: GENERAL TRENDS & POLICIES

Content:

1. UNDP Representative Remarks – *Boukar, Souleman*
 2. Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Sustainable Development – *Fajana, Olusola Isaac*
 3. Mainstreaming Indigenous Knowledge Systems – *Mosito, Kananelo E. K.C.*
-

***Advancing Epistemic Diversity and Pluralism for Sustainable Development &
UNSDCF 2024-2028 Priorities***

Souleman Boukar

UNDP Representative - Senior Economic Advisor

Remarks

- Director of Technology, Ministry of Information, Science, Technology and Innovation.
- Vice Chancellor, Professor Olusola Isaac Fajana, NUL.
- Professor Mothibe, Academic Forum for Development of Lesotho, Deputy President.
- Professor Mokuku, Academic Forum for Development of Lesotho, Secretary General.
- Distinguished Guest, Ladies and Gentlemen, All Protocols Observed.

It is a pleasure for me, and on behalf of Dr Jacqueline Olweya, UNDP Resident Representative, to be part of this important Conference on the Lesotho Bicentennial, hosted by the Academic Forum for Development of Lesotho.

The theme of this Conference, “Advancing Epistemic Diversity and Pluralism for Sustainable Development”, is particularly welcome to UNDP, as it aligns with our Country Development Programme (CPD) 2024-2028, our country cooperation framework with Lesotho.

UNDP CDP 2024-2028 is designed to support the Extended National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP II 2023/24-2027/28) implementation and to align it with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF 2024-2028) priorities, which integrate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the international community in 2015. The CPD 2024-2028 focuses on 3 programme areas, which are:

- Good governance, accountability, and improved service delivery.
- Climate action, disaster resilience, and environmental sustainability.
- Inclusive, green, resilient, and sustainable economic growth.

Globally, UNDP is supporting Lesotho at the strategic and operational levels:

- At the strategic level, UNDP interventions aim to strengthen national capacities for prospective planning, programming, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation of national policies, mainly the NSDP II and its declination into sectoral and local strategies, in order to achieve SDGs and promote human development.
- At the operational level, UNDP is implementing programmes through a portfolio approach, within the 3 focus areas already mentioned, in order to reduce poverty and inequalities, by creating economic opportunities, and focusing on vulnerable groups (youth, women, and persons with disabilities).

In line with the celebration of 200 years of the Lesotho Nation, UNDP is supporting the development of the national Long-Term Vision, Lesotho 2055, that will address the Basotho ambitions for the future, through a participatory and inclusive process based on an in-depth diagnosis of the country's situation, its strengths and weaknesses, and the opportunities to be seized.

I wish you a productive conference and reiterate UNDP's continued support for academic research aimed at improving the well-being of the Basotho.

Thank you so much.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Sustainable Development

Olusola Isaac Fajana

Vice Chancellor, National University of Lesotho

I pass my regards to the distinguished dignitaries here present, academicians, researchers, traditional knowledge holders, government officers, sponsors, and invited guests.

I am honoured to have this opportunity to address you at this significant event, where we celebrate academic excellence, indigenous knowledge, and, more importantly, the 200 years of Basotho nationhood.

It is important to discuss Indigenous Knowledge Systems, or, as many would call it, Traditional Knowledge, as we look back to the nation's origins. The celebration of the Basotho nation's 200th anniversary is a very important occasion. It is a time to reflect on drawbacks, milestones, and achievements, and to chart the way forward toward national self-sufficiency.

Homegrown solutions are best suited to local conditions and local knowledge. These solutions can be important contributors to economic and social development, as evidenced by nations that have advanced by developing local knowledge.

Over the years, Basotho have addressed food production and storage challenges by utilising traditional knowledge passed down from one generation to the next. Traditional medical practices that use local genetic resources have also helped heal livestock and people. Other areas of traditional practice that have been pillars of the nation's growth include arts, mining and tool-making.

Internationally, Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) are recognised as an important contributor to development. What is concerning is the lack of equitable benefit sharing. Therefore, international conventions require countries to implement legislative, administrative, or policy measures to ensure equitable sharing of benefits. One example is the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity. This convention was followed in 2010 by the Nagoya Protocol, which was intended to implement it.

The UNESCO Convention of 2003 safeguards intangible cultural heritage. In 2010, the African Intellectual Property Organisation (ARIPO) adopted the Swakopmund Protocol on the protection of traditional knowledge and the expression of folklore. The protocol protects traditional knowledge against any infringement of knowledge holders' rights.

These conventions and protocols, along with others not mentioned here, are evidence of the growing significance the world attaches to Indigenous Knowledge Systems.

Lesotho is a signatory to many conventions and protocols and therefore needs to actively adhere to them to drive the growth of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the social and economic benefits that accompany it.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of traditional medicine, as solutions from modern medicine emerged slowly. Promising research was conducted on local herbs and plants that have, over the years, provided relief to Basotho.

As climate change is beginning to affect the country negatively, the traditional agricultural practices of the Basotho are promising to help address food production challenges.

To mobilise and valorise Indigenous Knowledge Systems in the African context, Universities must take the lead. In this regard, the National University of Lesotho recognises the significance of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in its Strategic Plan and has an objective to "Create platforms for sharing research outputs and engagement impacting on local and indigenous knowledge" (NUL Strategic Plan, 2024-2029, p. 28).

As the country celebrates 200 years of the founding of the Basotho nation, it is prudent to look back and reflect. It is time to research further the homegrown traditional solutions that seem to work. Some of this knowledge can be used to deliver much-needed solutions to health, nutrition, and economic challenges.

As I conclude, let me once again thank the conference organisers for giving me the opportunity to make these remarks.

I thank the sponsors for their support of this important conference, particularly UNDP. I also thank the researchers and other presenters who have taken time out of their

schedules to contribute to the discussions. I thank all participants for attending; without you, the conference would not have been a success.

Congratulations to the country for reaching this milestone! I thank you.

Mainstreaming Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Kananelo E. Mosito K.C.

Pro-Vice-Chancellor, National University of Lesotho

Introduction

- Programme Director,
- Distinguished guests,
- Dear colleagues,
- Ladies and gentlemen.

As we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Basotho nation, we are reminded of the rich and diverse indigenous knowledge systems that have sustained our people. It is an honour and a privilege to stand before you today as we gather to reflect on the significance of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), particularly those of the Basotho people, and to draw connections to broader philosophies, including those of **Confucianism**. In doing so, I hope to shed light on the profound collaborations between local wisdom and global intellectual traditions while also aligning with the objectives of the National University of Lesotho's (NUL) Strategic Plan.

Preservation And Application of The Basotho Indigenous Knowledge Systems

The indigenous knowledge of the Basotho people is an invaluable repository of wisdom, nurtured over generations and inextricably tied to the land, culture, and community. This knowledge encompasses many practices - from traditional healing methods and agricultural techniques to social governance and environmental stewardship. For centuries, these systems have sustained our communities, providing solutions uniquely suited to the challenges of our environment.

However, like many Indigenous Knowledge Systems worldwide, Basotho IKS faces the risk of erosion, particularly amid globalisation, modernisation, and technological advancement. Yet we must recognise that far from being obsolete, these systems hold potential for innovative solutions to contemporary challenges such as climate change, food

security, and social cohesion. The Basotho practice of 'matsema,' a cooperative work ethic, teaches us the value of community solidarity, which resonates with the collaborative efforts required for sustainable development. This potential of IKS to address our pressing challenges should inspire hope and optimism in all of us.

The NUL Strategic Plan 2023-28, which prioritises innovation, research, and the preservation of our cultural heritage, is deeply intertwined with the future of IKS. As a university, we are committed to advancing knowledge that speaks not only to the global but also to the local. By integrating Indigenous Knowledge into our curricula and research, we strengthen the intellectual fabric of Lesotho and position ourselves as leaders in the global knowledge economy. The Basotho proverb 'Moetlo ha o lluo'—which translates to 'Tradition is not something to be mourned' is a powerful reminder that our heritage is not a relic of the past but a living foundation upon which we build our future. As the NUL community, we should take pride in our role in this preservation and support it wholeheartedly.

Parallels with Confucian Principles

Reflecting on these aspects of Indigenous Knowledge, it is also instructive to draw parallels with Confucianism. This philosophy has influenced East Asia's educational, social, and governance systems for millennia. Confucianism's emphasis on moral cultivation, social harmony, and learning aligns remarkably with certain aspects of the Basotho culture.

One of the most striking points of convergence is the value placed on education and wisdom. Confucius once said, 'Education breeds confidence. Confidence breeds hope. Hope breeds peace.' Similarly, among the Basotho, knowledge is regarded as the light illuminating the path to a better future. In our traditional communities, elders are respected for their wisdom and experience, much as Confucian tradition reveres the learned scholar. Both systems recognise that pursuing knowledge is not simply a personal endeavour but also one with social implications, in which the educated individual is expected to contribute to the collective well-being.

Moreover, Confucianism's principle of ren (仁)—which emphasises benevolence, humaneness, and compassion—mirrors the Basotho philosophy of motho ke motho ka batho

(a person's life is other people). Both philosophies underscore the interconnectedness of individuals within a society and the moral obligation to care for one another. In our efforts to mainstream IKS, this shared belief in collective responsibility can serve as a guiding light. Whether addressing social inequalities, promoting environmental sustainability, or fostering peace, the principles of *ren* and *motho ke motho ka batho* can inform a holistic approach to development that prioritises humanity over individual gain.

The National University of Lesotho's Role in Advancing IKS

The National University of Lesotho stands at the crossroads of tradition and modernity, local and global, Indigenous and universal knowledge systems. Our Strategic Plan articulates a vision to harness these intersections to benefit our society and beyond. Through research, community engagement, and partnerships, we are committed to elevating the status of IKS in academic and policy discourses. But perhaps more importantly, we are committed to demonstrating how Indigenous Knowledge can be applied to address pressing contemporary issues.

One example is our ongoing research on climate adaptation strategies. Many are turning to high-tech solutions as global temperatures rise, yet the Basotho people have long employed indigenous methods to conserve water, manage crops, and protect their ecosystems. These practices, refined over centuries, offer insights into sustainable living that resonate deeply with our current environmental challenges. Integrating these practices into modern scientific frameworks exemplifies NUL's leadership in creating knowledge systems rooted in tradition and innovation.

Looking to the Future

In closing, I invite us all to reflect on the inherent wisdom found in both Basotho Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the ancient tenets of Confucianism. These bodies of thought provide a blueprint for a more harmonious and sustainable future which faces environmental, social, and moral challenges. They remind us that while technological advancement is necessary, it must be guided by ethical considerations and respect for past wisdom.

As we move forward under the banner of the National University of Lesotho's Strategic Plan, let us commit to fostering an academic environment that values the richness of Indigenous Knowledge alongside global intellectual traditions. In doing so, we honour our past, enrich our present, and safeguard our future. Thank you.

B. DECOLONISING HIGHER EDUCATION & GOVERNANCE

Contents

1. How to Decolonise Higher Education? – Sandew, Hira
2. Decolonialising Higher Education in Lesotho to Advance Indigenous Modernity -
Mokuku, Kolobe, & Leshota
3. Se-Moshoeshoe and Governance – Tefetso Mothibe

How to Decolonise Higher Education?

Sandew Hira

Secretary of the Decolonial International Network Foundation, The Hague

Abstract

This paper examines the decolonisation of higher education through the proposed theoretical framework of Decolonising the Mind (DTM), which critiques Eurocentric knowledge production and advances an alternative pluriversal approach to knowledge. The paper argues that higher education in the Global South remains structurally and epistemologically rooted in colonial systems shaped by the European Enlightenment, particularly through Eurocentrism, racism, and universalism. It critiques decoloniality for lacking comprehensiveness, coherence, integrality, practical solutions, and organisational strategies. In response, the DTM framework is presented as a more comprehensive approach grounded in the concepts of mental slavery and civilisation. The paper further demonstrates how DTM can reconstruct disciplines such as philosophy, mathematics, biology, economics, politics, and cultural theory through alternative epistemologies centred on ethics, social justice, community, and pluriversality. Finally, the paper highlights the relevance of African intellectual traditions, particularly the ideas associated with Morena Moshoeshe I, in contributing to the reconstruction of knowledge systems and the broader project of decolonising higher education.

Keywords: Decolonisation, Eurocentric Knowledge, Epistemology, Indigenous Knowledge, Pluriversal Knowledge.

Remarks

A university is a centre of the production and dissemination of knowledge. The colonisation and decolonisation of knowledge happen in this institute. The knowledge it produces reaches society through education, the media, and the policies of governments and institutions. The question "How to decolonise higher education?" begins with "What is colonisation of higher education?"

The Colonisation of Knowledge

We live in a world civilisation that was created by colonialism. In the theoretical framework of Decolonising the Mind (DTM), I define colonialism as "a collection of global

systems of economic, political, social and cultural institutions that the Global North has created in order to rule the world in a colonial world civilisation *since 1492*." I define a civilisation as *"a collection of societies with economic, political, social and cultural institutions that have a common cultural base."* The current cultural base of the colonial world civilisation is the European Enlightenment. From 1492 to 1650, the cultural base was Christian theology, but after 1650, the European Enlightenment became the foundation for the colonial world's civilisation.

The Colonial Foundation of The Enlightenment Had Three Dimensions:

- Eurocentrism and exceptionalism.
- Racism.
- Universalism.

In the White Enlightenment, **Europe** is the centre of world history. Europe is unique and exceptional in world history. Here is where humankind achieved its peak. Here is where scientific knowledge arose. No place on the globe, and at no point in history, has humankind used reason to create the best possible society. Rationalism arose in Europe. Here is where people first began to think with their minds rather than with other parts of their bodies, as in non-Western civilisations.

Europe is not just a geographical location. It is a point of racial identification for white people, whether they live in Europe, the United States, Australia or South Africa. Scientific knowledge was produced by a white civilisation. Other civilisations lacked scientific knowledge. The Enlightenment is often called the Age of Reason because only then did humans produce scientific knowledge grounded in observation and reason. Europe is exceptional. Non-White civilisations did not use reason but relied on backward superstition. Not only was Europe unique, but its white race was unique and superior to other races (see chapter six on racism and knowledge production for a full exposé of this question).

An important element of the Enlightenment was its claim of universalism. The ideas developed during the Enlightenment were not only valid for Europe but for the whole world. Any modern society should look like a European society. Its university should be based on European universities. Its architecture should resemble European architecture. Its

socioeconomic foundation should be based on the European one. Its political foundation should resemble that of Europe.

Higher education in the Global South was modelled on higher education in the Global North. The quality of higher education in the Global South was defined by how closely it resembled that in the Global North in terms of structure and content.

The Decolonial Movement

A fundamental critique of Eurocentric knowledge production has emerged from the decolonial movement. I define the decolonial movement as a social movement that locates and connects the origins of the world's current problems to colonialism, while seeking solutions that transcend the colonial system by decolonising the world.

The internet is full of references to decolonising something, yet many of these concepts seem unrelated to the far more common notion of decolonisation: the political independence of European colonies. Decolonisation goes far beyond the question of political and economic independence of former colonies. It touches upon the cultural dimension of colonialism. It was captured with the term "decoloniality".

Decoloniality became part of liberation movements. Decolonising knowledge and power refer to the need to transform the centres of knowledge production (the universities) and to confront the political power that maintains them.

The Contributions of Decoloniality

The contributions of decoloniality can be summed up as the acknowledgement that:

- There is another side of modernity. Modernity is seen by the European Enlightenment as something good because it represents (European) progress and rationalism. The other side of modernity is the brutal colonial oppression and exploitation of the colonised world.
- Colonialism has a cultural dimension besides the economic and political dimensions. Decolonisation is not only about liberating the colonised people from the political and economic shackles, but also about liberating colonised people from an oppressive colonial culture.

- An important part of the cultural dimension is knowledge production. The European Enlightenment claims that the knowledge production of modernity is universal and objective. In the European tradition, postmodern theorists critiqued modernity. They question the grand narratives of modernity and its claims of universalism and objectivity, but they don't draw the connection to colonialism that decoloniality does. Decoloniality analyses the biases in Eurocentric knowledge production and locates them within the colonial system of domination. Furthermore, it offers a fundamental critique of Eurocentric knowledge production by pointing out that its epistemology (the theory of knowledge that underpins all knowledge production) is not objective and is influenced by the position from which the knowledge producer acts. Eurocentric scientists act from the position of defending Western colonialism.
- The importance of race and racism in social relations and the impact of colonialism on these relations, including in the field of identity formation.
- A critique of the nation-state as the centre for social analysis and the need to look at colonialism from a global perspective.

These are important contributions by decoloniality to our understanding of how the current world works. But we need to move towards a comprehensive, coherent, and integral theoretical framework. A comprehensive, coherent, and integral theoretical framework has the following characteristics:

- It is comprehensive because it has produced concepts on how to look at the most important dimensions of a society: a view on world history, economics, politics, social relations, including relations with nature (ecology), and culture. There are other important aspects of society, but these dimensions are essential to making the framework comprehensive.
- It is coherent because the concepts of the different dimensions don't contradict each other. They are consistent and logical.
- It is integral because the concepts of the different dimensions are not just lumped together but are related to each other from one or more basic concepts.

A comprehensive, coherent, and integral theoretical framework is not a closed system. It is open to innovation, new developments, and contributions, but, given its nature, it has a framework for assessing their value.

The Deficiencies of Decoloniality

I see five major problems with decoloniality.

- Decoloniality is not comprehensive. There is no decolonial economic or political theory. Many other disciplines lack decolonial theory.
- Decoloniality is not coherent. The many contributions can contradict one another. Some thinkers argue that Eurocentric theory is biased, yet they recommend economic theories that trace back to Marxism, a major school of the European Enlightenment. Some see feminism and intersectionality as part of decolonial theory, while others offer a decolonial critique of these concepts.
- Decoloniality is not integral. It is not clear what the foundational category for decolonial theory is from which to reconstruct a whole new (decolonial) knowledge system. In Liberalism, it is individualism. In Marxism, it is class. What is it in decoloniality?
- Decoloniality is mostly a critique, but in order to survive, it needs to move to the stage in which it provides practical answers to practical problems. The lack of practical solutions to current world problems is a major flaw of decoloniality.
- Decoloniality does not provide organisational concepts for social struggle. How do we organise for social struggle? Marxism prescribes the formation of political parties to lead socialist revolutions. What does decoloniality suggest?

The Next Step in The Decolonial Movement

I propose that we move towards a comprehensive, coherent, and integral decolonial theoretical framework. This enables us to overcome the defects of decoloniality. I have made a first attempt to develop such a framework under the label ‘Decolonising the Mind (DTM)’.

I base the DTM framework on the concepts of mental slavery and civilisation. The concept of mental slavery was introduced by Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) in 1938. I build on this concept to develop the DTM framework. I take the concept of civilisation to characterise the world system in which we live. I regard capitalism as part of colonialism and not vice versa. In my view, this enables us to overcome the defects of decoloniality. There are three dimensions in DTM:

- *The critique of Eurocentric knowledge production.* In this regard, it resembles decoloniality. But DTM goes further. While decoloniality remains stuck in general criticism, DTM shifts toward critiquing individual disciplines, including mathematics and the natural sciences.
- *The development of an alternative, comprehensive, coherent, and integral knowledge production.* DTM examines the knowledge produced by civilisations from the Global South (Chinese philosophy, Hinduism, Islam, Indigenous philosophies, etc.) and seeks useful concepts to integrate into a trajectory for decolonising the disciplines and reconstructing new knowledge within each discipline. Decoloniality does not go there.
- The translation of this new knowledge into viable policies to build a new pluriversal world civilisation. DTM tackles the problem of power. For example, how to reconstruct a new economic order? What are the practical implications of this reconstruction? What kind of economic institutions are needed, and how will they be built? How do we organise to transcend from the colonial world civilisation to a new world civilisation? Decoloniality does not go there.

Decolonising knowledge occurs at the level of individual disciplines. DTM is a long-term trajectory that requires the involvement of many specialists in different disciplines. There are five steps in decolonising a discipline.

- *The first step is questioning the purpose of a discipline.* For example, in Eurocentrism, the discipline of economics is about the study of how societies use scarce resources to produce valuable goods and services and distribute them among different individuals. Eurocentric economic theory is about scarcity and efficiency. Islamic economic theory, on the other hand, is about social justice and ethics: how to produce, finance, and distribute goods and services in a way that balances justice and ethics with a material and spiritual life. Decolonial economic theory is based on social justice.
- *The second step is isolating the basic concepts that are used in a discipline.* What are the core concepts on the basis of which the whole discipline is erected? How did colonialism impact these concepts? What concepts did other civilisations produce regarding the topics of the concept?

- The third step is to ask the question: What new concepts can we think of when we want to reconstruct the discipline? How do they relate to the old concepts? What are the policy implications of the new concepts compared to the old ones?
- *The fourth step is to outline the methodology of the discipline.* What methods do we use to further construct the discipline in different directions, given the basic concepts? What are the sources of knowledge that we use? How do we use these sources of knowledge in a systematic way? How is it different from the methods used in the Eurocentric approach?
- The last step is to set up research and teaching trajectories for the discipline that takes the first four steps into account.

The end results are new textbooks for reconstructing disciplines.

Theory of Racism as a Foundation Of DTM

The DTM theory of racism is a foundation of the theoretical framework. It differs from liberal theories, which are rooted in a common approach that centres the individual in the analysis of racism. In psychological theories, racism is about the perceptions and behaviour of individuals, mostly of the racist who is inhibited by prejudices. Studies on racism and the Holocaust focus on how personalities are formed in their psychological constitution. Theories of white privilege, everyday racism, intersectionality, and critical race take individual experiences as the basis for their analysis.

In DTM, we define racism as a global system of economic, political, social, and cultural institutions that organise the relationship between human beings on the basis of superiority and inferiority. The defining characteristic is not biological race, nor even an ethnic group, but the organisation of relationships between human beings on the basis of superiority and inferiority. The principle of this organisation can be race or ethnic group, but colonialism started with religion as the organising principle. Although the term racism contains “race” as the core concept, the system should not be limited to race. It is about superiority and inferiority linked to race, but not limited to race.

Racism has not always existed in human history, nor will it remain forever. Before Western colonialism, people were oppressed, exploited and dehumanised in brutal ways. Their oppressors and rulers have regarded and treated them as inferior people. The differences

between these forms of racism and the racism that has been established by Western colonialism are in economic, political, social, and cultural institutions and are justified by an elaborate system of knowledge production.

With colonialism, racism became a worldwide phenomenon and was institutionalised in economics, political structures, social relations, and cultural institutions on a global scale. While other systems of oppression, exploitation, and dehumanisation were regional or local, Western colonialism brought this to a global scale. This means that even in countries where there are no or hardly any people of colour, like Japan, ideas about the inferiority of people of colour can still exist because of the global impact of colonialism.

Another difference is the fact that racism became an integral part of knowledge production. The concept of superiority/inferiority has been and remains used to justify the colonial world system. It also created and institutionalised the mechanisms of the colonisation of the mind.

Three concepts of racism have emerged during colonialism. They are linked to the authority of knowledge production, and they are:

- *Theological racism*: the concept of superiority/inferiority is argued from theology and is linked to theologians as the authority of knowledge production.
- *Biological racism*: the concept of superiority/inferiority is argued from philosophy and the natural sciences, and is linked to philosophers and natural scientists as the authority of knowledge production. This coincides with the rise of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.
- *Cultural racism*: the concept of superiority/inferiority is argued from the social sciences and is linked to social scientists as the authority of knowledge production.

Racism was embedded in the different disciplines of knowledge production of the European Enlightenment.

Decolonising The Disciplines

World history

Many civilisations hold views on where the world is heading. The European Enlightenment has the concept of the end of history. It is an old concept that was put forward

almost two centuries ago by German philosopher George Hegel (1770-1831) in his notion that Europe is the pinnacle of human history, the end of history, or as Hegel puts it: “the last stage in History, our world, our own time.” History has come to an end with the rise of European modernity. Hegel wrote this in 1830. Since then, a lot has changed. Conservative American political theorist Francis Fukuyama repeated this claim in 1989, 160 years later, in his book *The End of History and the Last Man*. Since then, a lot has changed.

Marxism also foresees an end of history in which communism rules the planet forever: social classes are abolished, the planned economy provides goods and services in abundance for everybody, science governs culture, and the state has withered away.

If there is one single lesson that we can draw from history, it is the proposition that there is no end to history. We cannot know what the world will look like in 70,000 years to come. The last 7,000 years of the history of civilisations show that there is a wide variety of possible worlds. The colonial world's civilisation is only five hundred years old, and its dominant knowledge base, the European Enlightenment, is only 350 years old. Both philosophies have a unilinear view of the development of world history.

In DTM, we don't subscribe to the notion of the end of history. World history has not developed in a unilinear way, but as a spider web. Each civilisation has contributed to the growth of humankind from its own specific background. In the colonial world, we have reached a stage where humankind has become a global community with legacies from diverse civilisations.

Philosophy

I focus on one topic in philosophy: epistemology. Epistemology is the theory of knowledge: what is knowledge and how is it produced? The Eurocentric view (both the Liberal and Marxist) is that the purpose of knowledge production is the search for truth about the natural and social world. In DTM epistemology, it is not only about seeking the truth but also about exposing lies. In DTM, the notion of lies is inherent to Eurocentric epistemology. DTM epistemology has a specific method in detecting lies. The method is conceptual thinking. A concept is an idea that describes and explains certain aspects of the social and natural world. Knowledge is contained in concepts. The concept is the basic unit of knowledge. A concept consists of five elements: terminology (a term is a linguistic

expression of a concept), observation (a collection of facts about the object of knowledge production), analysis (a framing and a storyline with a certain logic that makes us understand reality), theory (a collection of interrelated concepts that provides a bigger picture of the natural and social reality) and ethics (knowledge is not only about true or false, but also about right and wrong).

DTM analyses the colonisation of the mind at the epistemological level, showing how these five elements are used to manipulate our view of reality. DTM epistemology differs from the Eurocentric epistemology in eight fundamental ways:

- The purpose of knowledge in Eurocentric epistemology is different from the purpose in DTM. Eurocentrism does not distinguish between knowledge. It only acknowledges a search for truth. It does not acknowledge the colonisation of the mind and the production of lies. Therefore, it does not recognise lies presented as knowledge.
- The object of knowledge in Eurocentric epistemology is the observable world. In DTM epistemology, it refers to the observable and the non-observable (spiritual) world. The non-observable world is the source of ethics, a component of knowledge in DTM epistemology. The answer to the question "Are we allowed to kill other human beings?" cannot be answered on the basis of observable facts but on the basis of ethics, rules about what is right or wrong. In some civilisations, these rules are derived from a belief in a spiritual world that provides ethical guidelines. Eurocentric epistemology is secular. So, how does it answer the question about killing other human beings? Simple: it does not and cannot provide an answer. Yet such questions are crucial to be answered in every civilisation. Knowledge producers need to provide answers.
- Eurocentric epistemology uses the same research methods for knowledge about human society and knowledge about the natural world, and thus, its epistemology is not able to grasp the essence of human relations. DTM argues that the epistemology of the natural sciences is fundamentally different from that of the social sciences because of the separation between the object of knowledge (what is being researched) and the subject of knowledge (who is the researcher?). In natural sciences, there is this separation. In social sciences, there is no such separation. The consequence is that subjective knowledge (ethics) is presented as objective knowledge.

- The role of ethics in knowledge production. Eurocentrism holds that ethics is not part of knowledge. DTM holds that ethics is an essential part of knowledge.
- Eurocentric epistemology is based on two sources of knowledge: observation and reasoning. DTM epistemology is based on six other sources of knowledge, in addition to observation and reasoning: innate knowledge, common sense, social interaction, creativity and imagination, and the particular location of observations.
- Eurocentric epistemology is based on two-value logic (true or false). This leads to a limited understanding of social and natural processes, as they are dynamic, whereas the two-value logic applies to static situations. DTM epistemology is grounded in seven-value logic and thus enables us to understand dynamic processes.
- Eurocentric epistemology is confined to understanding what has happened (the past) or what is going on (the present) and has a limited methodology of handling knowledge about the future (extrapolation). DTM epistemology has a source of knowledge production (imagination) that enables us to use knowledge to shape the future.
- The view on human beings. Eurocentrism views human beings as objects of study, much as a geologist views a rock. In DTM, human beings are not objects of study; rather, they are related to one another on the basis of ideological views, which then determine how they are viewed.

Mathematics

Eurocentric scholars might argue that, if any discipline cannot be decolonised, it is mathematics. In DTM, we distinguish six dimensions in decolonising this discipline.

- *A critique of the foundations of Euromathematics: the axiomatic approach.* Mathematics in other civilisations was grounded in empirical evidence. Euromathematics introduced the concept of an axiom, a proposition that does not require empirical proof. This can lead to a distortion of reality. The notion of axioms is also evident in the social sciences, where propositions are posited without empirical evidence. For example, the proposition that parliamentary democracy is the best political system is not based on empirical research; it is just an axiom.

- *A critique of the Western historiography of mathematics.* Euromathematics regards mathematics as a Greek invention and displays a racist history of math. DTM criticises this racism and the Greek invention of mathematics.
- *A critique of the use of Euromathematics in natural and social sciences.* Mathematics is used in the social sciences to demonstrate the objectivity of social theory. DTM demonstrates how mathematics distorts social reality within Eurocentric social theory.
- *A critique of the ethics of mathematics and hard sciences.* Should mathematics be used in developing nuclear bombs that can destroy the world? DTM poses these ethical questions. These questions are absent in Euromathematics.
- *The concept of reverse engineering in mathematics.* How did the Egyptians build their pyramids that needed precise mathematical calculation, although they did not have the instruments of modern mathematics? This is part of DTM research into mathematics.
- *A new educational system for mathematics.* The practical implications of decolonising mathematics are the development of a new system of education and research into mathematics.

Biology

Biology is based on the theory of natural selection and survival of the fittest by Charles Darwin (1809-1882). According to this theory, only individuals adapted to their natural environment survive. It sees competition for food and sex as the main drive for survival. In DTM, we observe liberalism's influence on biology through the concept of individualism. However, nature provides numerous examples of animal cooperation for survival. Biology is not an objective science. There are ethical considerations in the classification of life, the relationship between body and mind, the relationship between humans and ecology, and the separation of humans from nature. Alternative perspectives on the relationship between humans and nature lead to a more balanced understanding of current ecological problems and their solutions. That is the practical dimension of DTM and biology.

Physics

Much of physics is based on observations of natural phenomena and on experiments that test theories derived from these observations. What is there to be decolonised? A segment of physics uses observations to develop hypotheses. These fantasies are then based on

axiomatic mathematics. The most vivid example is the Big Bang theory. The Big Bang theory is based on the argument that, since the Hubble Telescope shows the universe is expanding in all directions and that looking back in time reveals a point at which the expansion began, there must have been a Big Bang. The instruments of physics cannot be used to prove this theory. There is observation of the expansion of the universe, but there is no observation of the beginning. It is impossible to make this observation because you cannot replicate the Big Bang, unlike in physics experiments. Furthermore, advocates of the Big Bang theory argue that the laws of physics don't apply to the Big Bang's beginning. How do they know that? This is an axiom, not a scientific proposition that can be tested. Finally, how do you explain that something came out of nothing? And what is nothing? Is it just the absence of something? This area of physics is characterised by contradictions. They are unable to answer the critical questions that DTM poses, yet they present the Big Bang theory as a scientific theory, even though it has become more of a secular theology. The practical implication of decolonising physics is to expel Eurocentric fantasies from scientific knowledge production.

Applied linguistics

Applied linguistics deals with the practical application of language studies. DTM examines how colonialism has affected language. There are five issues:

- The role of terminology in DTM conceptual thinking: the structure of knowledge ((de) colonising the mind) influences the use of terminology.
- The role of language in the type of knowledge production. In the Yoruba language, most names and all pronouns are ungendered. What is the impact on gender theory?
- Colonialism introduced inferiority and superiority in culture. Language is part of culture. Colonialism distinguished between inferior and superior languages.
- The study of mechanisms of colonising the mind and how language is used in these mechanisms to colonise the mind.
- How is the relationship between identity formation and language, and what role does colonialism play in this relationship?

Economic theory

DTM offers three critiques of liberal economic theory. First, a critique of the definition of economics as the study of how societies use scarce resources to produce valuable

goods and services and distribute them among different individuals. This definition contains hidden ethics. Scarcity and efficiency are ethical values, not objective truths.

Second, this definition purports to have universal value, but it does not. This particular definition is produced in the West and is based on Western ethics, not on a scientific study of economic processes across the history of all societies. In non-Western societies, discussions of economic problems are not framed in terms of scarcity and efficiency but in terms of social justice.

Third, this definition is an axiom. An axiom is a proposition that is accepted without empirical proof (see decolonising mathematics). It is not based on empirical evidence. No society - not even Western capitalist society - is organised on the basis of efficiently using scarce resources.

DTM economic theory concerns the design of economic institutions and structures that can develop a society's infrastructure and provide a decent standard of living for its people. It is also based on social justice. Each society will have its own ethics that define its concept of social justice. It is not universal.

The practical implications of DTM economic theory include rebuilding economies across societies and reorganising the global economy to serve people's needs.

Social theory

Liberal social theory is based on individualism. The individual is the cornerstone of society. Marxist social theory is based on class as the cornerstone of society. A class is a social group whose nature is determined by its relationship to the control of the means of production. DTM social theory is based on the concept of community. A community is a social group defined by a shared identity. The basis of this identity can be historical (a shared history), ideological (a shared belief system), cultural (a shared language and other cultural traits), or other characteristics that define a community's identity.

A major difference between DTM social theory and Eurocentrism is that, in Eurocentrism, humans are treated as social objects. The natural sciences study natural objects such as the Moon, rocks, and atoms. It studies the object's characteristics, such as its shape, composition, and function. In a similar way, Eurocentric social sciences study human beings

as objects. The concept of patriarchy studies gender as part of a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. In this concept, there is no room for love between men and women. Humans are studied as social objects characterised by domination, oppression, and exploitation. Yet, the same human beings can be seen in loving relationships as husband and wife, father and daughter, brother and sister. In order to understand both elements (oppression and love), we need another concept of human beings, not as social objects, but as ethical beings with the capacity to shape their lives (individually and socially) by interacting with the natural and technological environment and based on an ethical system that provides guidelines for norms and values. Once we take this approach, social theory cannot be universal or objective. Some communities, like the Yoruba in Africa, don't even have words for gender (father, mother, man and woman). Therefore, what would their social theory look like?

In DTM social theory, we acknowledge the role that colonialism has played in instituting racism in social relations. Racism is the articulation of superiority and inferiority among human beings based on theology, biology or culture. It plays an important part in the study of social relations.

The practical implication of DTM social theory is to develop policies that empower communities fighting injustice and to develop anti-racist policies that confront the foundations of institutions that drive racism. It constructs unity among relations between humans and nature and among communities with divergent ethical frameworks.

Political theory

Political theory studies the process of power, administration, control, and resistance. Eurocentric theories have the same universalist and objectivist approach as social theories. For example, the separation of religion from the state is regarded as a universal concept in both Liberalism and Marxism. In Liberalism, the state is neutral. In Marxism, the state is an instrument of the ruling class.

In DTM every state has an ethical foundation, be it implicit or explicit. Ethics determines how a community should run its society through the state. A Buddhist, Confucian, Muslim, or Hindu society is based on the ethics of its respective civilisation. That is as legitimate as a European society that wants to base its political structures on the European

Enlightenment. Human rights are not universal, contrary to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). They are based on a particular ethics. The UDHR is based on Liberalism. There are other possible concepts of human rights, such as those embedded in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (also known as the Banjul Charter). All the individual rights of the UDHR are also included in the Banjul Charter. But it acknowledges that an individual has not only rights, but also duties. It distinguishes between individual human rights and people's rights. It clearly looks at how colonialism has impacted individual and peoples' rights in the colonised world.

While Liberal political theory is primarily concerned with control, DTM theory is primarily concerned with resistance. DTM studies social movements and draws lessons from their successes and failures. That is the practical implication of DTM political theory.

Cultural Theory

I define culture as a system of production and dissemination of knowledge about nature and society, and the material and immaterial expression of this knowledge. The production of knowledge is not only about producing insights into nature and society. It is also about values, belief systems, communication, and the feelings and emotions of individuals and social groups regarding their identity, as well as the rules and rituals that express it. Furthermore, it is about the relationship between humans and nature. Culture is institutionalised in educational institutions that produce knowledge, in institutions for the dissemination of knowledge, and is expressed in material culture (clothing, food, housing, architecture, etc.) and immaterial culture (language, art, customs, rituals, etc.).

Cultural theories describe and explain the phenomenon of culture. Liberal theory examines culture through disciplines such as cultural and social anthropology. Anthropology is probably the most racist discipline in Western social sciences, because its subject is the study of "culture", but then immediately "culture" is defined in terms of "tribes", "primitive", and "civilised" cultures. The civilised culture is the culture of white Europeans, but they don't make the connection with race and colour, nor with power.

In Marxist culture, it is part of the superstructure of a class society and, as such, is heavily influenced by its base (the economic and technological foundation). Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) developed a Marxist cultural theory with the concept of

hegemony. The capitalist class maintains its rule not only by force and coercion, but also through cultural domination. Gramsci saw Europe as the basis for his theory. He did not study colonialism, which dominated much of the world. His narrow-mindedness prevented him from seeing how colonialism colonised the mind.

His contemporary from Jamaica, Marcus Garvey (1887-1940), had a much wider vision of culture and power. He developed the concept of mental slavery and the mechanism of how Western political domination was based on racism and the colonisation of the mind. The practical implication of DTM cultural theory is a broad range of policies to decolonise the mind.

DTM and Moshoeshoe I

When Morena Moshoeshoe I moved from Butha-Buthe to Thaba-Bosiu in 1824 to found the Basotho nation, he and his intellectual thinkers had to develop ideas for organising their economy, political institutions, social relations, and education. I don't refer to these ideas as an Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), because the concept of IKS is Eurocentric. All knowledge is indigenous: it is geographically and culturally located. The Western knowledge system is indigenous to Europe. Colonialism has made it universal through power, not through the quality of its knowledge. It would be Eurocentric to make a distinction between Western (non-indigenous) and non-Western (indigenous) knowledge systems.

DTM is about assessing the relevance of Moshoeshoe I's ideas and those of his team to Lesotho. We study these ideas, which might be transmitted orally or through other means, from a particular perspective: what concepts did they produce to organise society economically, socially, politically, culturally, and technologically? How can these concepts contribute to the reconstruction of the disciplines?

In this way, Lesotho can make important contributions to decolonising higher education and developing the DTM framework.

References

Hira, S. (2023). *Decolonizing the mind: A guide to decolonial theory and practice*. Amrit Publishers

Decolonialising Higher Education in Lesotho to Advance Indigenous Modernity

Tšepo Mokuku¹, Mabileba Kolobe² & Paul Leshota³

Science Education Department¹, National University of Lesotho

Email: tmmokuku@yahoo.com

English Department², National University of Lesotho

Department of Religious Studies³, National University of Lesotho

Abstract

The Basotho indigenous knowledge systems have existed informally alongside formalised and institutionalised Eurocentric knowledge systems since the nation's formation. This paper reflects on the origins of higher education in Lesotho and its potential to leverage and valorise indigenous epistemologies and ontologies. Drawing on decolonial theory, the following key questions are addressed: How can NUL be characterised from a decolonial perspective? How might NUL contribute to the development of indigenous modernity? It is argued that the public university, since its establishment in Lesotho, has advanced, albeit to a limited extent, scientific rationality and Eurocentric modernity, and set in motion 'epistemicide' in Basotho society. The key to restoring and valorising the Basotho knowledge systems is indigenous knowledge research, supported by transformed university systems and structures, to attain 'indigenous modernity' (tsosoloso). While NUL and some academic staff reflect decolonial intentions, government spending on public higher education indicates a limited commitment to developing this area. It is concluded that the country's sustainable development depends on investment in local public university education, rather than on reliance on higher education from other countries.

Keywords: Epistemology, Decoloniality, Indigenous Knowledge, University, Indigenous Modernity, University Funding.

Introduction

In its early medieval form, the university was intended to protect and conserve the "dominant Roman-Christian culture" and, gradually, to become an agent of societal change (Sousa-Santos, 2017, as cited in de Almeida-Filho, 2023, p. 48). At the dawn of the 20th century, European universities evolved and expanded to support the growth and transformation of industrial capitalism, and they, among other things, "represented a utopia

of academic freedom and autonomy that guaranteed the production of scientific truth in an atmosphere of solitude and freedom" (de Almeida-Filho, 2023, p. 50). It was perhaps with the societal-transformative intent of educating subjects capable of operating the developing capitalist nation-state in the British colony (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012, cited in de Almeida-Filho, 2023) that the colonial powers introduced university education in Lesotho.

The beginnings of a university education in Lesotho, introduced in 1916 by the United Free Church of Scotland as an interdenominational South African Native College, may be traced to Fort Hare University in South Africa (Ambrose, 2016). The founders of the university arranged for the Basotholand colonial government to contribute a grant to the University and to provide bursaries for Basotho students (Ambrose, 2016). In 1945, the Catholic authorities established Pius XII University College to bring university education closer to the Basotho. It produced its first graduates in 1947. Of the initial 17 students who graduated in 1958, six were in science. This suggested very limited scientific knowledge regarding the science- and technology-based economic advances Europe had achieved in this period. It is possible to assume that the knowledge on which Basotho communities depended and prospered was mainly indigenous. In these early days, Pius XII relied on the curriculum (courses and examinations) borrowed from the University of South Africa (Ambrose, 2016). Through many transformations, the Pius XII College later became the National University of Lesotho in 1975.

By importing curricula from South Africa and teaching them in the colonial language rather than translating them into the indigenous language, and by using research to valorise local knowledge systems in the modernisation of Lesotho, NUL took a ‘violent’ stance towards local knowledge systems at its early stage. Andriotti et al. (2024, p.30) assert that “Institutions of higher education have played a central role in perpetuating the violences of modernity”. In this regard, Etuk and Ibuot (2024, p. 6) also argue that:

Through the control of schools, churches, and other cultural institutions which served as channels for the naturalisation of the patterns of Western epistemic orientations and conceptual categories, the West was able to establish its standards as the universal and right standard in Africa.

The privileging of Western knowledge at NUL, however, was consistent with global colonial trends, partly driven by religious communities to promote the world's modern capitalist system (de Almeida-Filho, 2023). de Almeida-Filho (2023, p. 45) contends that, “During the colonial era, with the leading role of the Jesuits and other religious orders, the metropolises employed ideological and symbolic strategies in the educational systems and legal structures to privilege Western culture over all others”, while colonised people’s knowledge was regarded as “primitive, premodern, local, and pre-scientific belief systems”.

Recognising the foregoing arguments, the paper seeks to characterise the role of NUL in society, considering its significance as the only public university that has now existed for 80 years, as the Basotho nation celebrates 200 years of its existence. Today, there are three universities in Lesotho: NUL, the largest, and two private public universities. Although public funding for education as a percentage of GDP is comparable to that of other countries in the region and even developed nations, spending on tertiary education remains very low, accounting for only 0.5% of GDP compared to 0.9% in Eswatini and South Africa, and 1.7% in Finland (OACPS Secretariat, 2021). The limited investment in university education is evident in the decreasing subvention over the years, from an average of 14.2% of the NUL share of the MOET recurrent budget between 2002 and 2007, to 3.4% of the NUL share of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) recurrent budget in the current year (2024-2025) (National University of Lesotho, 2024a). It is therefore not surprising that Lesotho has not weaned itself from its colonial reliance on other countries for higher education.

After 58 years of independence from colonial administration, Lesotho has ironically expanded its regional dependence on universities in South Africa, Botswana, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe (See Table 1) without any apparent guiding policy framework for developing public university education. Over the last five years (2020-2024), Lesotho has spent M661.3 million in public funds on sponsorships for about 500 students in other countries, approximately six times the annual subvention for its sole public university.

Table 1. *Lesotho Government Expenditure and Enrolments of Basotho Students in SADC Higher Education Institutions (2018–2022).*

COUNTRY	2019-2020		2020-2021		2021-2022		2022-2023		2023-2024	
	Students	Amount Spent Millions (M)	Students	Amount Spent	Students	Amount Spent Millions	Students	Amount Spent Millions	Students	Amount Spent Millions
South Africa	1179	132.8	1191	152.4	902	119.0	892	108.6	694	111.6
Botswana	31	2.8	28	2.4	23	2.7	22	1.9	28	3.0
Tanzania	19	2.0	14	1.6	10	1.0	14	1.6	22	2.0
Zambia	28	3.7	29	5.0	22	3.4	3	0.5	2	0.3
Zimbabwe	9	1.2	4	0.6	3	0.5	4	0.5	0	0
TOTAL	1266	142.5	1266	162.0	960	126.6	935	113.1	746	116.9

Source: *National Manpower Development Secretariat, 2024*

The irony of the Lesotho Government's high expenditure on 'students export' is that the receiving countries do not reciprocate the sponsorship, and there has not been more than five students sponsored by the same countries in any given year between 2018 and 2022 (See Table 2). This phenomenon may be interpreted as reflecting two significant colonial tenets: 'self-doubt' and 'disorientation'. First, a nation filled with self-doubt about its ability to provide quality higher education, a hesitancy caused by decades of reliance on and reverence for external universities (Hountondji, 1990), would lack the willingness to invest in the development of its own local university. Second, colonialism appears to have not only isolated Africans into separate nation-states, but also disrupted Africans' ability to cooperate and conceptualise systems that are inclusive and mutually beneficial, locally and beyond. The ill-conceived relationship between Lesotho and its neighbours in respect of Higher Education tends to mirror the scientific epistemological relationship between the North and the South, typified by the South's dependence on Eurocentric knowledge systems (Hountondji, 1990).

Table 2: SADC nationals enrolled at NUL from countries where Basotho students also enrol for higher education.

COUNTRY	2018-2019		2019-2020		2020-2021		2021-2022		TOTAL
	Self-Sponsored	Government Sponsored	Self-Sponsored	Government Sponsored	Self-Sponsored	Government Sponsored	Self-Sponsored	Government Sponsored	
South Africa	2	2	7	0	6	2	9	3	31
Botswana	5	0	4	0	2	1	3	1	16
Tanzania	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Zambia	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Zimbabwe	17	3	17	0	23	1	23	1	85
TOTAL	5		9		31		35		

Source: National University of Lesotho, 2024b

An academically and developmentally sound relationship between countries and their universities in post-colonial Africa is one of equal partnership and mutual benefit, aimed at fostering internationalisation and African scholarship. In South Africa, where the Government sends most of the Basotho youth for university studies, recent years have seen volatility in universities, exemplified by the ‘#RhodesMustFall’ movement in 2015-2016, during which students and academics contested the types of knowledge that are still being valued, legitimated, taught, and institutionalised in the academy (Hlatshwayo, 2023: p.107).

The disinvestment in local public university education in Lesotho is evident in stunted infrastructure development, an inability to diversify programmes, and limited research output. The increasing number of students going abroad for studies, resulting in a negative net flow of 2,965 students in 2018 (OACPS Secretariat, 2021), mostly government-sponsored, can plausibly be explained as a tenacious colonial-rooted conviction that quality higher education can only be obtained abroad.

A university's mission and vision reflect its overall developmental orientation. It can be argued that NUL's mission creates an enabling framework for reorienting the university

to reflect the Basotho culture and produce unique knowledge systems, in its declaration, “(t)o advance human development and to respond to national and regional needs through **knowledge creation**, dissemination and **community engagement**, employing technologically innovative strategies”. Among the 13 Minimum Programme Accreditation Standards that the Council on Higher Education (CHE) considers for quality assurance processes in higher education institutions, none explicitly addresses either the decolonisation of the university or the mainstreaming of Basotho IKS, despite decades of the University's epistemicidal impact on Basotho society. However, the two standards, “Research and Innovation” and “Community/Industry engagement,” provide the basis for organising the University's priorities to mobilise and mainstream IKS.

We conclude this introduction by conceding our experienced cognitive dissonances, which may irritate some readers, yet hopefully not loosen our arguments:

- We may sound ‘We may sound hostile to the system that has, or appears to have, benefited us. This we attribute to the limitation of the ‘modern grammar’ that shapes our cognition, in our attempt to “take account of the unknown and unknowable that modernity has unsuccessfully tried to eliminate” (Andriotte et al., 2015, p.35);
- ungrateful and racist’ to some readers, in trying to affirm the long-subjugated Basotho culture and knowledge;
- We might convey a message that devalues the power of science and technology, which have advanced our lives in so many ways, in underscoring the value of indigenous epistemology;
- We may sound regressive in arguing for the significance of Basotho IKS in advancing ‘Indigenous Modernity’; the knowledges that presently have no clear disciplinary form and academic status, and that we know little about in the scholarly sphere.

The Problem

As the Basotho nation approaches its bicentenary in 2024, it is clear that its educational institutions, including the university, predominantly reflect knowledge rooted in Western epistemologies and ontologies. “A people’s ontology constitutes their fundamental worldview, which plays a crucial role in shaping how they perceive and interpret reality”

(Ituk & Ibut, 2024, p. 11). This concept is linked to their *asili* (Ani, 1994), which embodies the identity of a people, encompassing the essence, ideology, and cultural matrix. Epistemology, or *utamawazo* (Ani, 1994), organised into educational disciplines, represents the cognitive framework of a culture and serves as both a product and expression of the *asili*.

In the context of Lesotho, the spread of Eurocentric epistemologies is further complicated by a colonial scholarship culture that undermines indigenous languages. Despite this, indigenous knowledge has proven resilient, coexisting with formalised Western knowledge, particularly in medicine, culinary traditions, the arts, and music. It is noteworthy that this traditional cultural knowledge faces threats from established knowledge institutions, which often promote epistemicide—the mass elimination of diverse epistemologies—rather than mainstreaming and valuing indigenous knowledge. While this issue is not unique to Lesotho, it is emblematic of the ongoing modern/colonial system that necessitates the displacement, negation, and engulfment of alternative ways of knowing and being (Silva, 2009, as cited in Andriotti et al., 2015).

A nation that relies on knowledge devoid of cultural roots undermines its *utamaroho*—the vital energy that shapes its emotional character and fuels its members' collective behaviour. The societal fragmentation we witness today, characterised by self-serving leadership and various socio-economic and political challenges, can be traced to the disorientation resulting from the erosion of *utamaroho*. Consequently, universities in Africa often present a façade of cultural and epistemic relevance, despite their detrimental impact on local cultures and knowledge systems. The national bicentenary maxim, "tsoalo, boitekolo, tsosoloso," serves as a compelling framework for discussion regarding the nation's origins (tsoalo), a collective reflection on our current situation (boitekolo), and an exploration of our path to renewal (tsosoloso). This paper applies this framework to a public university in Lesotho, assessing its role in promoting indigenous modernity as articulated in the concepts of *asili*, *utamawazo*, and *utamaroho* among the Basotho.

Research Questions

The paper is guided by the following research questions:

- How can NUL be characterised from a Decolonial Perspective?
- How might NUL contribute towards the development of indigenous modernity?

Literature Review

Modernity and the University

We observe that the world, which was once characterised by a polycentric structure around the year 1500 - featuring a multitude of coexisting civilisations - has undergone a transformation under modernity, evolving into a unicentric world interconnected by a single economic framework: capitalism. This shift became increasingly evident by the early twenty-first century (Mignolo, 2011). Today, there is a burgeoning global awareness of the relationship between modernity and coloniality, which can be defined as the “colonial matrix (or order) of power.” This concept exposes coloniality as the hidden and darker aspect of modernity; in other words, “coloniality is constitutive of modernity” (Mignolo, 2011, p. 43).

The establishment of the National University of Lesotho occurred during an era of coloniality initiated by England, France, and Germany, spanning from 1750 to 1945 (Mignolo, 2011). This institution was designed to promote Eurocentric modernity and its associated ideologies. The concept of the university itself is a product of advanced capitalism (neoliberalism), representing a logical outcome of an imperial system that developed over time, thus creating the historical conditions necessary for its emergence (Andriotti et al., 2015).

Today, the role of the university can be viewed as sustaining modernity while simultaneously “fixing” its inherent issues, which often include youth unemployment, climate change, and other challenges linked to the capitalist system and the ontology of modernity (Mokuku, 2021). However, the sustainability of the ‘modern system’ itself, and its complicity in and support for violence in other areas, are rarely scrutinised (Andriotti et al., 2015). Within the African context, universities—as products of modernity—are confronted with numerous inquiries. A fundamental question arises from Le Grange's (2021,

p. 15) vision regarding his university in South Africa: ‘How can my university be an African university instead of merely a university in Africa?’”

In southern Africa, we have witnessed how the capitalist apartheid state engineered modern advances, nationally and beyond, that improved livelihoods, which were shadowed by myriad socio-economic ills, violence and other disorders. In relation to South Africa itself, Heleta (2016, p.1) affirms that “[w]hile the 1994 settlement has brought political change, it has not done much to tackle poverty and inequality, which is an all-too-common lived experience of the black majority”. Lesotho grapples with complex systemic and structural failures, evident in violent crimes, socio-economic disorientations, and abuses of the vulnerable and weak, accompanied by a harsh legislative framework (Mokuku, 2021). There are similar accounts of modernity’s violence in South America, North America, and Canada (Andriotti et al., 2015; Mignolo, 2011), as well as in many other regions worldwide. From this viewpoint, drawing on Mignolo (2011), the university and similar institutions, such as the media and museums, are but inventions intended to manage and control subjectivities in order to sustain modernity. As a social construct designed for a particular global Eurocentric project, the African university can be reconstituted in terms of its *asili* and *utamawazo*, and reoriented to cultivate and advance indigenous modernity.

University and Epistemology

Drawing on Castro-Gomez (2005), de Almeida-Filho (2023) argues that the universities worldwide have played a key function in reproducing the “coloniality of knowledge”. They further characterise coloniality as comprising

policies and strategies of classification and hierarchization of human knowledge, where only one type of knowledge appears as valid, authentic, and relevant, while others are expropriated, devalued, and silenced to the point of being considered as invalid and irrational knowledge. (2023, p. 47).

The prevailing knowledge in universities is predominantly scientific, rational, and consistently Eurocentric (de Almeida-Filho, 2023). Colonial administrations utilised the education system to promote Eurocentric worldviews and knowledge in non-European societies, often marginalising local knowledge systems (Heleta, 2016). This trend is also

apparent in African universities, where academics often engage in a reciprocal mimicry of Euro-American epistemologies (Mokuku, 2015; Mokuku, 2021). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2023, as cited in Etuk & Ubuot, 2024) refers to this phenomenon as “academic mimetism” or “intellectual mimicry” (p. 8). This epistemic mimicry is a global phenomenon, observed in post-colonial contexts in the Global South, such as Brazil, where the university system, since its establishment in the 19th century, has mirrored French culture, philosophical schools, and academic traditions. It has continued to evolve while retaining elements of its historical ties to the French educational model (de Almeida-Filho, 2023).

In postcolonial African contexts, such as Lesotho, university epistemologies are often regarded as natural, and the university is regarded as a beacon of modernity. For many in these environments, to use Andreotti et al. (2015) words, “Everything is awesome”, and decoloniality does not even register as a concern. However, there are incessant grumblings about the “relevance” of university courses and programmes, with more of the same ‘global’ knowledges (e.g., STEAM) viewed as a panacea for countries’ socio-economic ills.

The mainstreaming of indigenous epistemologies in the African university has the potential to capacitate us to “speak back” to modernity’s violence (Andreotti, 2015, p. 33) and explore sustainable ontologies and epistemologies that can initiate “Indigenous Modernities”. Yet, decades after the colonial rule, the coloniality of knowledge is still entrenched in the African university (Etuk & Ubuot, 2024; Heleta, 2016) despite the existence of progressive university policies in some contexts (Hetela, 2016). The Historical White Universities (HWU) in South Africa were well-founded with the strong support of the capitalist apartheid state, with the aim to entrench white minority power and Eurocentrism (Heleta, 2016; Hlatshwayo, 2023). These universities have attained supremacy and influence in advancing Western modernity, both nationally and beyond. Taking a cue from HWU’s development, an ‘African University’ cannot emerge from resource scarcity and underfunding. African governments must get their priorities right and fund higher education to help build a new decolonial African university; the university that advances new economic systems, founded on the African cultural value systems and epistemologies drawn from a wide spectrum of cultures. An institutional epistemic shift, however, is a complex process that requires collective effort (Hlatshwayo, 2023).

A joint whole university transformation venture, for Afrocentric epistemic shift is more than just an introduction of ‘African studies’ course, or similar add-on content, but involves reconceptualising the ‘content’ of the programmes and courses (Heleta, 2016) with the overall goal to “re-claim, re-centre, re-place and re-establish the importance of these *othered* intellectual traditions in our work” (Hlatshwayo, 2023, pp. 103-104). Such changes would transform universities to become centres of ‘ecology of knowledges’, a concept first used by Sousa-Santos (de Almeida-Filho, 2023); that are characterised by being distinct, different, local, reflective of ancestral traditions and the popular of the people (de Almeida-Filho, 2023). In this form, universities can functionally promote “epistemodiversity” (de Almeida-Filho, 2023, p. 57), which can be achieved only through well-funded higher education and appropriate IKS-focused research programmes. This is an orientation that Mignolo well described as “epistemic and political disobedience that consist of the appropriation of European modernity while dwelling in the house of coloniality” (2011, p.45). Le Grange (2021) further cautions that our decolonisation efforts may risk becoming colonising, and that to avoid this, we should engage in personal and epistemic reflexivity when researching, teaching, and writing.

Efforts to decolonise the university in other contexts have raised questions about the reform processes. Andriotti et al. (2015) allude to nuanced limitations of the reform where “the incorporation of multiple ways of knowing (grafted onto the same hegemonic ontological foundation that is left unexamined) through strategies of equity, access, voice, recognition, representation, or redistribution, does not change ontological dominance” (2015, p.27). The hope, however, lies in the apparent decline of modernity, driven by unsustainable violence. The logical role of the university, from this viewpoint, is to hospice the dying modernity, learning from the failures of modernity and exploring alternatives:

Hospicing embodies a willingness to learn enough from the (re)current mistakes of the current system to make different mistakes in caring for the arrival of something new. Going through the pains of this death and recognising that we have been both bewildered and enchanted by the mythology of the Enlightenment may be the only way we can really understand the depth of modernity’s limits (within us) and recognise its real gifts.... In practice, this means that experimenting with alternatives is perceived as important not for

generating predetermined solutions, but rather for learning from the successes and failures of the experimentation process. (Andriotti et al., 2015, p. 28)

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical lens used for writing this paper is decoloniality (Andriotti et al., 2015; Katundu, 2020; Le Grange, 2021; de Almeida-Filho, 2023). To understand decoloniality, we must first appreciate coloniality. Mignolo argues that coloniality is “one of the most ‘tragic ‘consequences of modernity’ and at the same time the most hopeful in that it has engendered the global march toward de-coloniality” (2011, p. 44). Drawing on Maldonado-Torres (2007), Andriotti et al. (2015) assert that,

[c]oloniality can be understood as a system that defines the organisation and dissemination of epistemic, material, and aesthetic resources in ways that reproduce modernity’s imperial project. In other words, coloniality represents the spatiality (expansionist control of lands), onto-epistemic racism (elimination and subjugation of difference) and geopolitics of knowledge production (epistemic violence) that are constitutive of modernity. (p. 23).

Of particular concern to the present study, which serves as the theoretical lens, are epistemic violence and onto-epistemic racism, which manifest in educational institutions by presenting Eurocentric epistemologies as universal while devaluing local knowledge forms and tacitly entrenching monocultures within universities. As an embodiment of culture, language is integral to cultural diversity, and the coloniality of the English language is a subject of inquiry. Le Grange (2021) contends that decoloniality is the questioning of coloniality, which extends beyond colonial administration, and that it entails a critical awareness of coloniality's workings.

Decoloniality is an analytic of coloniality. It involves a critical consciousness of the logic of coloniality, resists expressions of coloniality, and takes action to transcend it (Le Grange, 2020). In other words, decoloniality is more than the removal of colonial governance and entails the decolonisation of the interlocking domains of knowledge, power and being (Le Grange, 2021, p. 8).

Katundu (2020) views decoloniality as concerned with curricular ownership in the African context, reflecting citizens' own ideas, agendas, strategies, and plans. Regarding the university, de Almeida-Filho (2023) views decoloniality as a holistic and inclusive process that involves the authentic participation of society in epistemic changes and other layered institutional transformations. The ultimate goal of decoloniality in the university context is to establish “pluruversity” (Cohen & Grosfoguel, 2012, as cited in Andriotti et al., 2015). From a decolonial viewpoint, in recognition of the university’s historically complicit role in coloniality, it ought to transform to then “become an open, socially responsible, politically committed institution capable of promoting ecologies of knowledges, to trans-form subjects with a critical and politically engaged profile - very different from what has been done so far” (de Almeida-Filho, 2023, p. 57).

Approach to the Study

To address the two research questions, the paper employed a case study approach (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2018) to gain in-depth contextual knowledge of the National University of Lesotho from a decolonial perspective. As mentioned in the introduction, the selected institution is the only public university in Lesotho and was therefore self-selective. To answer the first research question, on the characterisation of NUL from a Decolonial Perspective, data were generated using the following approaches;

- Analysis of documents such as the institutional strategic plans and other related sources.
- An open-ended questionnaire was administered to 20 academics from different faculties in the University, and determined how the introduction of decoloniality in the University might be relevant for NUL. The question was asked following a two-day interactive workshop on decoloniality, facilitated by an experienced academic in the field.
- Determination of active academic decolonial networks.

The second question, concerning how NUL might contribute to the development of indigenous modernity, was answered theoretically, drawing on the reviewed literature and some findings from the first research question.

The generated data and findings were analysed qualitatively to determine patterns and trends, and further analysed using the analytical framework of Andriotti et al. (2015). The

framework provides four ‘spaces’ in which an institution may operate from a decolonial perspective, each reflecting a certain institutional understanding of decoloniality and related practices:

- *Everything is awesome* space: There is no recognition of decolonisation as a desirable project, and commensurate practices may be visible;
- *Soft-reform* space: There is no recognition of decolonisation as a desirable project, but there is recognition of socio-economic inequalities, and there is increased student access, and conditional inclusion into the mainstream.
- *Radical-reform* space: there is recognition of epistemological dominance, and the need for recognition of representation, redistribution, voice, reconciliation;
- *Beyond-reform* space: there is recognition of ontological and metaphysical enclosures: the institutional goal is to dismantle modernity’s systematic violences (capitalism, colonialism, racism, heteropatriarchy, nation-state formation).

Findings

This section presents and analyses the findings of the study, which sought to characterise the National University of Lesotho (NUL) from a decolonial perspective and to assess the institutional positioning of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) within its strategic, research, and epistemic frameworks. Drawing on documentary analysis of NUL strategic plans, a review of IKS-related scholarly outputs, and participants’ responses regarding the relevance of decoloniality, the findings illuminate both structural commitments and practical gaps in the university’s transformation trajectory. The findings reveal a discernible tension between rhetorical recognition of indigenous and local knowledge in institutional strategy documents and the limited evidence of systematic policy implementation or resourcing to support IKS mainstreaming. While individual scholars have produced substantive research in areas such as indigenous epistemology, Botho philosophy, biodiversity conservation, and ethnomedicine, these efforts remain largely fragmented. At the same time, staff responses underscore a growing aspiration for curriculum reform, epistemological diversification, language transformation, and structural change. Thus, indicating that decoloniality is increasingly perceived not merely as discourse, but as a potential pathway toward institutional renewal and indigenous modernity.

Characterisation of NUL from a decolonial perspective

NUL Strategic Plan

While the university continues to recognise the value of Basotho IKS in its operational strategy documents, there is no evidence of implementation in terms of IKS policy and supportive resources. The 2015 five-year NUL strategic plan, Goal 3, makes reference to “...ontologically relevant trans-disciplinary research niche areas grounded in the Nation’s history, culture, and unique physical endowments” (NUL Strategic plan, 2015:11 – Goal 3) as a priority. The subsequent current university strategy under Goal 2 cites a strategic objective as to “Create platforms for sharing research outputs and engagement impacting on local and indigenous knowledge” (NUL Strategic Plan, 2024-2029, p. 28). The 2015 strategic plan further stated the university's intention to develop a “community engagement policy” through consultation with a wide range of stakeholders (NUL Strategic Plan, 2015, p. 6). The policy was not developed, and the target is not reflected in the current strategy. Such a policy could help enhance research efforts to mobilise and valorise viable indigenous knowledge systems that many of our local communities still hold and apply.

NUL IKS Research

Further documents searched and reviewed are NUL IKS-based academic publications. A few significant publications by individual academics were identified and summarised in Table 3 below. These are small-scale studies focusing on epistemology, nature conservation, philosophy, medicinal plants, cosmetic plants, beverage plants, and craft plants.

Table 3: *NUL Research on IKS*

Research Document	Study Focal Area
Mapetja, M. M. (2023). <i>An investigation into the scientific nature of African cultural practices: The case of thobeha</i> [Doctoral dissertation, National University of Lesotho].	Indigenous medicinal procedure
Mokuku, T., & Mokuku, C. (2004). The role of Indigenous Knowledge in Biodiversity Conservation in the Lesotho	Biodiversity Conservation &

Highlands: Exploring Indigenous Epistemology. <i>Southern African Journal of Environmental Education</i> , Vol. 21, pp.37–49.	Indigenous rationality
Raselimo (2007), Promoting environmentally responsible behaviour through indigenous knowledge: A challenge for implementation of education for sustainable development in Lesotho.	Biodiversity Conservation & Indigenous rationality
Mokuku, T., & Taylor, J. (2015). Tlokoeng Valley Community's Conceptions of Wetlands: Prospects for More Sustainable Water Resources Management. <i>Journal of Education for Sustainable Development</i> , Vol. 9, no 2, 196–212.	Wetlands Conservation & Indigenous rationality
Mokuku, T. (2015, October 29). <i>Mobilising local knowledge systems through community engagement and research: A strategy to enhance relevance and Africanisation of University Curricula?</i> From Pius XII to National University of Lesotho: Seventy years of contribution to development, education, research, and political activism, 1945-2015, Roma.	Epistemology
Mokuku, T. (2016). The Connotations of <i>Botho Philosophy</i> and its Contribution towards Environmental Conservation: The Case of Tlokoeng Community in Lesotho. <i>Environmental Education Research</i> , DOI:10.1080/13504622.2016.1160274. http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13504622.2016.1160274	Nature Conservation & Botho
Lephoto, M. N. R. (2023). "Botho" African Philosophy as an Indigenous Resource for developing Resilience and Wellbeing Protective factors in schools: towards Psychosocial Learning Environments in Lesotho. <i>Journal of African Education</i> , 4(1), 355 – 375.	Psychosocial & Botho
Lephoto, M.N.R. & Adigan, O. T. (2023). Botho attitude towards people with disabilities. In O. Mutanga. <i>Ubuntu Philosophy and Disability in Sub-Saharan Africa</i> . Routledge.	Disability & Botho
Lerato Seleteng Kose ^a , Annah Moteetee ^a , Sandy Van Vuuren ^b . Ethnobotanical survey of medicinal plants used in the Maseru district	Indigenous Medicinal Plant

of Lesotho. Journal of Ethnopharmacology Volume 170, 21 July 2015, Pages 184-200	
Seleteng Kose, L. ^{ab} , Moteetee, A. ^a , Van Vuuren, J. ^c Ethnobotany, toxicity and antibacterial activity of medicinal plants used in the Maseru District of Lesotho for the treatment of selected infectious diseases. South African Journal of Botany Volume 143, December 2021, Pages 141-154	Indigenous Medicinal Plants
Seleteng-Kose L.E.M. (2017). Evaluation of community-used medicinal plants of Maseru district in Lesotho for their ethnobotanical uses, antimicrobial properties and phytochemical compositions. PhD Thesis. University of Johannesburg.	Indigenous Medicinal Plants
Motjotji, L., Moteetee, A. & Seleteng Kose, L. (2023). Medicinal plants of Lesotho: A review of ethnomedicinal, pharmacological and conservation studies. Ethnobotany Research and Applications, 25, 29. http://dx.doi.org/10.32859/era.25.29.1-1	Indigenous Medicinal Plants
Motjotji, L., Annah Moteetee, A., & Seleteng Kose, L. (2023). Medicinal plants of Lesotho: A review of ethnomedicinal, pharmacological and conservation studies. Ethnobotany Research and Applications 25:29 (2023) - http://dx.doi.org/10.32859/era.25.29.1-19	Indigenous Medicinal Plants
Lisebo Motjotji, L., Moteetee A., & Seleteng Kose, L. (2023). Plants of Commercial Importance in Lesotho: Ethnobotanical and Pharmacological Insights. <i>Cosmetics</i> , 10, 28. https://doi.org/10.3390/cosmetics10010028 .	Indigenous Commercial Plants (cosmetics, beverages, medicinal & crafts)
Seleteng-Kose, L. (2022). Commercial traditional herbal mixtures sold in the Maseru District of Lesotho. Journal of Herbal Medicine Volume 33, June 2022, 100560	Indigenous Medicinal Plants

Table 4 below presents the respondents' views on the relevance of decoloniality at NUL. The majority of them made reference to the 'curriculum changes' (17) that could be brought about by decoloniality discourse. The next frequent category that they thought would be influenced by such an initiative is 'epistemic change' (13), with many envisioning the promotion of the use of the indigenous Language (7), Sesotho, as the language of teaching

and learning; and some specifically mentioning IKS being introduced as a result of decoloniality. Other responses alluded to possible changes in the institution's structures, culture, and cognition.

Table 4: *Participants' Responses on the Relevance of Decoloniality for NUL*

What Decoloniality Can Achieve		
NO	Curriculum Changes	Frequency
1	Curriculum change/review	13
2	NUL will become more relevant	1
3	Introduction of decoloniality theory	2
4	Change in library books	1
	Epistemological Change	
5	Epistemological diversity	1
6	Promotion of Sesotho/indigenous languages as language(s) of instruction	7
7	Academic recognition of excellence in Sesotho	1
8	Introduction of IKS	4
	Structural Changes	
9	Policy change	2
10	Administrative changes	1
11	Establishment of Decolonial Institute/Centre	1
	Change of Institutional Culture	
12	Create decoloniality theory learning environment	2
13	Culturally inclusive learning environment	1
14	Relevant (decolonial) research & publications	4

15	Integration of NUL in academic global movements	1
16	Decoloniality journal	1
	Cognitive Changes	
17	Can promote critical thinking amongst learners	1
18	Can promote student African-centredness	1
19	Would promote the importance of Africa	1
20	Would instil Ubuntu significance	1
21	New generation of scholars & public servants	1
22	Academic activism	1
23	Mindset change	1

Decolonial Network Chapter

In terms of existing academic decolonial networks, an International Decolonial Network (DIN)-Chapter was established at the University on the 8th September 2023. This was subsequently followed by the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between NUL and DIN. This newly formed network has a provisional leadership structure comprised of representatives of all seven university faculties, student body, and civil society (AFDeL, comprising mainly NUL staff); but not all positions are filled at present. Not much activity led by the DIN Chapter has occurred to date, but there is a growing commitment and willingness to intensify activities and grow the network.

NUL's possible contribution towards the development of indigenous modernity

From a decolonial perspective, NUL, since its inception, was designed to promote a Eurocentric, capitalist, modernist state. By offering ready-made Eurocentric epistemologies, mediated by a European language, English, over the years, NUL has systematically subjugated and devalued Basotho indigenous knowledge systems. Individual academic staff IKS-based research initiatives show some evidence of viable Basotho IKS in the fields of nature conservation, philosophy, medicine, cosmetics, beverages and crafts. These bodies of

knowledge indicate that NUL has the potential to advance and mainstream Basotho IKS, which constitutes the foundation of indigenous modernity. The recognition by the majority of interviewed academic staff of the need to decolonise the curriculum at NUL and to consider the possible use of indigenous language(s) for teaching and learning suggests their willingness to engage in epistemological transformation, paving the way for indigenous modernity.

Analysis and Discussion

Within the analytical framework of Andriotti et al. (2015), NUL may be characterised as situated “partly in the Soft reform” space (See Table 5). While there is evidence of individual academics’ indigenous epistemology-based research, albeit limited, the institution’s policy and operational framework show a limited recognition of “epistemological dominance”.

Table 5: *Articulations of decoloniality*

Space	Meaning of Decolonisation	Practice (Adapted for Lesotho)	Location of NUL
Everything is awesome	No recognition of decolonisation as a desirable project	No decolonising practices required (Original)	
			NUL Operational Space
Soft-reform	(No recognition of decolonisation as a desirable project, but) increased access / conditional inclusion into mainstream	Providing additional resources to all students, particularly disadvantaged learners, for low-income backgrounds, so as to equip them with the knowledge, skills, and cultural capital to excel according to existing institutional standards	
Radical reform (recognition of epistemological	Recognition, representation, redistribution, voice,	Centre and empower low-income groups, and redistribute and reappropriate material resources	

dominance)	reconciliation		
Beyond-reform (recognition of ontological and metaphysical enclosures)	Dismantling of modernity's systematic violences (capitalism, colonialism, racism, heteropatriarchy, nation- state formation)	Subversive educational use of spaces and resources, hacking, hospicing	

The isolated individual IKS-based research; the IKS strategic objectives are not operationalised through policy formulation; and the MoU signed with DIN has not translated into action, reflecting a lack of institutional potency to mainstream IKS within the institution. Epistemological transformation ought to be guided by sound institutional policy frameworks, resources, and investment in higher education. Such university research should be underpinned by Ubuntu, place the global South at the centre, and promote and facilitate ontological and epistemic diversity (Hlatshwayo, 2023).

NUL academics, in collaboration with progressive bodies, ought to design decolonial programmes with a new Afrocentric orientation to transform both the university and society. In this critical outlook, Lesotho's reliance on regional universities, particularly the TWH in South Africa, must be critically examined to deepen decolonial consciousness among citizens, particularly the ruling class. Heleta similarly envisions a response to coloniality of knowledge, in the context of South African universities, as a collective initiative: "Decolonisation requires a large mass of people demanding change on the campuses and in society...Social and structural change seldom happens anywhere in the world without activism, advocacy, dissent, disruption and protest" (2016, p.7). Individual academics can also begin where they are, to decolonise the courses and programmes they are responsible for (Heleta, 2016; Le Grange, 2021), mindful of the exploratory and experimental nature of the initiative, and of knowledge as a process rather than a 'product'. With this orientation, decolonising university epistemology is a humble and courageous venture to valorise and 'disciplinarising' historically neglected Afrocentric knowledges and to draw on other non-Western ontologies and epistemologies.

Conclusion

As Basotho celebrate 200 years of their formation as a nation, with the aim of advancing the nation's well-being, guided by the maxim of 'Tsoalo, Boitekolo, Tsosoloso', the key to the ultimate goal of *tsosoloso* is the nation's *utamawazo* (indigenous knowledge systems), which spring from Basotho's unique *asili*. When the nation's *utamawazo* and *asili* are aligned, a driving energy develops that gives it its emotional tone and stimulates its collective behaviour (i.e., *utamaroho*). We contend that the university, the powerhouse of knowledge, is fundamental in this alignment. It is concluded that, in its current form, NUL is oblivious to 'Epistemological dominance', and, in terms of its policy and practice, NUL regards knowledge as neutral and European knowledge systems as 'natural' and universally relevant; in the process, the institution subjugates Basotho IKS and advances Eurocentric modernity. There is, however, evidence that NUL has the potential to reconfigure itself and become an 'African university' rather than a 'University in Africa' (Le Grange, 2021); it is in this form that NUL can initiate indigenous modernity, and the '*tsosoloso*' that the nation seeks. This, however, would only be possible with more investment in HE. Currently, the Lesotho government's spending on its only public university is meagre and stunts the institution's growth, while its heavy spending on universities abroad reflects an entrenched colonial mindset that HE is better sourced from abroad. Lesotho and other African countries can draw useful lessons from the European Union's Erasmus+ programme (<https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-programme-guide>) for a sound inter-university programmes that foster quality education, mobility and cultural exposure of students and staff, through university partnerships; within this programme, participating European Union (EU) countries' local universities are developed to enhance regional quality education and student mobility across EU universities and beyond.

References

Ambrose, D. (2016, October 29). *The rise and demise of Pius XII College*. From Pius XII to National University of Lesotho: Seventy years of contribution to development, education, research, and political activism, 1945-2015, Roma.

- Andreotti, V., Stein, S., Ahenakew, C., & Hunt, D. (2015). Mapping interpretations of decolonisation in the context of higher education. *Decolonisation: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 4(1), 21-40.
- Ani, M. (1994). *Yurugu: An African-critique of European cultural thought and behaviour*. African World Press Inc.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison (2018). *Research methods in education* (6th ed.). Routledge
- Etuk, A. R., & Ibuot, E. J. (2024). Coloniality of knowledge: repositioning Africa in knowledge production. *Ikenga International Journal of Institute of African Studies*, 25(1), 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.53836/ijia/2024/25/1/003>.
- de Almeida-Filho, N. (2023). Decolonizing Higher Education: Historical Myths, Official Discourses, and University Reforms in Brazil. *Encounters in Theory and History of Education*, 24, 41–64. DOI: 10.24908/encounters.v24i0.16592.
- Heleta, S. (2016). Decolonisation of higher education: Dismantling epistemic violence and Eurocentrism in South Africa. *Transformation in Higher Education*, 1(1), 1–8. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/the.v1i1.9>.
- Hlatshwayo, M. (2023). *Decolonising the South African university: First thoughts*. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 37(3), 100–112. <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9180-8803>.
- Hountondji, P. (1990). Scientific dependence in Africa today. *Research in African Literatures*, 21(3), 5–15. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/38193>.
- Katundu, M. (2020). Which road to decolonising the curricula? Interrogating African higher education futures. *Geoforum*, 115, 150–152. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2019.05.025>.
- Le Grange, L. (2021). (Individual) responsibility in decolonising the university curriculum. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 35(1), 4–20.
- Mignolo, W. (2011). *The darker side of western modernity: Global futures, decolonial options*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822394501>

- Mokuku, T. (2016, October 29). *Mobilising local knowledge systems through community engagement and research: A strategy to enhance relevance and Africanisation of University Curricula? From Pius XII to National University of Lesotho: Seventy years of contribution to development, education, research, and political activism, 1945-2015*, Roma.
- Mokuku, T. (2021). Sustainability Education for Ontological Re/Configuration: Covid-19 as a Pointer to the Ailing World Asili. *Journal of Black Studies*, DOI: 10.1177/00219347211022038 journals.sagepub.com/home/jbs.
- National Manpower Development Secretariat. (2024). *Loan bursary fund sponsored institutions and students' costs from 2019-2020 to 2023-2024*. Government of Lesotho.
- National University of Lesotho. (2024). *Strategic plan for the period 2024-2029: Recalibrating our institutional relevance, quality and visibility towards the octogenarian jubilee and beyond*. National University of Lesotho.
- National University of Lesotho. (2024a). *Subvention allocation trend over the years: 2002/2003 – 2024/2025*. National University of Lesotho.
- National University of Lesotho. (2024b). *National University of Lesotho: Foreign Students. 20218-19 – 2021-2022*. National University of Lesotho.

Se-Moshoeshoe and Governance

Tefetso Mothibe

AFDeL/Independent Consultant

Email: tefetsomothibe102@gmail.com

Abstract

Se-Moshoeshoe is a recognition of Morena Moshoeshoe's remarkable achievement in creating and consolidating a powerful kingdom from the turmoil of the *lifaqane* in the 1820s. It is an appreciation of *Morena* Moshoeshoe's rich legacy of National Unity, Peacebuilding, Ethical Leadership and Patriotism, in the hope that this legacy will guide and influence our individual and collective behaviour, our National Outlook and our National Character. It is also an appreciation of Basotho governance, which emphasises discussion, consent, and consensus over force and intimidation in nation-building. This paper argues that a peaceful and prosperous Lesotho of today and tomorrow can be realised through the adoption of Se-Moshoeshoe in our **governance**, a set of principles and values that can serve as a framework for producing lasting solutions to a myriad of our political, security, social, and economic problems.

Keywords: Moshoeshoe I, Se-Moshoeshoe, Governance, Peacebuilding, Ethical Leadership.

Introduction

This year, 2024, when the Basotho nation commemorates the 200 years since its founding by Morena Moshoeshoe in 1824 at Thaba-Bosiu, it marks not only a pivotal moment in the nation's history but more importantly, a celebration and an appreciation of the rich legacy that Morena Moshoeshoe has left for us for generations to come – Lesotho. Moshoeshoe's leadership was achieved through visionary and ethical leadership, the attributes which have been comprehensively analysed by Weisfelder (1972), Mofuoa (2015), and Mahao (2015), can be summarised as personal courage, which puts the public interest ahead of self or narrow personal interests, integrity and self-discipline, high ethical standards, political, social and economic sensitivity and inclusiveness.

Se-Moshoeshoe is a recognition of Morena Moshoeshoe's remarkable achievement in creating and consolidating a powerful kingdom from the turmoil of the *lifaqane* in the 1820s. It is, therefore, a commitment to uphold Morena Moshoeshoe's rich legacy of National

Unity, Peace building, Ethical Leadership and Patriotism, in the hope that this legacy will guide and influence our individual and collective behaviour, our National Outlook and our National Character. It is also a commitment to the values of Peace, Service and *Botho* on which he placed a premium as foundational stones for present and future generations.

This legacy first appealed to Basotho traditional as well as political leaders of post-independent Lesotho, who, in the mid-1960s, when Basotho negotiated their independence from Britain, all looked to Morena Moshoeshoe, and each wished to rule in accordance with Moshoeshoe I's wisdom, and in ways that Moshoeshoe I would have approved. These leaders devoted their time to study and write about Moshoeshoe I's wisdom, and his achievements; and both are credited with publications, "Moshoeshoeism" (Jonathan, 1976) and *Se-Moshoeshoe* (Mokhehle, 1976), in which they sought to articulate Moshoeshoe I's philosophy, which, they said, influenced their own thinking and approach to how Basotho should be ruled. We know that, even King Moshoeshoe II wanted independent Lesotho to be ruled as it had been "...in the days of our illustrious ancestor ", but **...adapting [Moshoeshoe I's] method of rule to modern conditions.**" (Basotholand National Council, 1961).

How did Moshoeshoe, who so impressed our post-independence rulers, rule or govern?

To answer this question, we need to first define governance. The concept of Governance has been debated and defined in many ways. I am more attracted to a more expansive and elaborate definition of governance given by United Nations Development Programme as "...the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority to manage [a] nation's affairs" (1997, p.9) as well as that given by Wohlmuth who defines governance as "The manner in which government exercise political power; governance is always related to institutions **and** structures that are used for exercising power; governance suggests also that all relevant public decision-making processes have to be considered; governance also implies that all the implementation capacity for government action in a country is of relevance; and governance encompasses also the relation between the government and the public." (1998, p.7).

Morena Moshoeshoe's governance

It was the 44 years (1824-1868) which were characterized by indigenous governance/popular governance and anchored on the participation of the people whereby *Morena* Moshoeshoe, although he was the one “on whom [Basotho] had conferred sovereignty and who, within the framework of commonly accepted traditional institutions and principles reserved the powers of life and death...” (Machobane, 1990, p.5) never governed either alone or by dictate. Together with his *matona*, territorial chiefs and allies, as well as his *maBotho*, he ran the country. **Basotho governance places emphasis on discussion, consent, and consensus, where possible, rather than on force and intimidation.** Smith is quite right when he remarks that “in all affairs, legislative, judicial or executive, (Moshoeshoe) acted by the advice and the consent of his Council. On occasions of great import, a Pitso “folk-moot”, or national assembly was called, at which the poorest and the meanest tribesmen had equal right with the proudest to say his say.” (1939, p.39).

It was at a *Pitso*, a public/popular assembly attended by all initiated adult males to discuss national matters, where major decisions were made. “It was an instrument of communication – both downward from the government to the people and upward from the people to the government.” (Thompson, 1975, pp. 63-64). A pitso was characterised by considerable freedom of speech, in which people freely and openly expressed their views on issues of national importance. Sesotho proverbs such as *moaa-khotla ha a tsekisoe*, freely translated to mean that to err while speaking on a public platform can never be a punishable offence and *moro-khotla ha o okoloe mafura*, freely translated to mean that while speaking from a public platform, the speaker must not beat the bush – a spade must be called a spade, are proof of this situation. Casalis attests to this when he says, “Anyone is at liberty to speak. The orators generally express themselves with the greatest freedom and plainness of speech. It is understood that on these occasions the chiefs must hear the most cutting remarks without a frown.” (1861, p. 163). It is perhaps Thompson who has best summarised the role of a pitso in fostering democratic culture and practice at that time: “The pitso was a socialising and nation-building institution. In the absence of a literacy culture, it was a vital forum for political communication and education. It ensured that every segment of the male population

understood the major issues affecting the national interest. And it promoted concerted action...” (1975, p. 210).

Underpinning this governance was what Mahao has described as an inclusive socio-economic order characterised by Botho – motho ke motho ka batho ba bang, a human being owes his social being to other human beings (Mahao, 2014). These were given substance by *matsema* (the practice of people coming together to work collectively in the fields) and *mafisa* (cattle loan system), to mention but a few. These systems were developed not only to mobilise collective energies and resources to support the well-being of all members of society but also to provide the framework of the social compact between ordinary citizens and governance institutions captured by the term Morena, signifying “...he who watches over public safety and welfare.” (Casalis, 1861, p. 214).

Post-independence Governance

The 58 years (1966-2024) of independence, we now know, have been characterised by what the *Lesotho Times newspaper* has rightly described as “the failure of governance in Lesotho and incessant instability and chaos largely attributable to the politicisation of key state institutions by successive governments to serve their narrow, parochial endeavours in place of national interests.” (2024, pp. 14-22). This has manifested itself in the refusal to accept election outcomes in 1966 and 1998; coup-d états in 1970, 1986 and 1998; military rule in 1986-1993; army mutinies in 1998 and 2015; formation of a government in parliament by a party which had not contested elections in 1997 and 2012; post- election violence, leading to SADC intervention in 1998, 2007 and 2014-2016; a collapse of the first three-party coalition government (accompanied by party-politically inspired mutinous conduct within the army in 2014); the formation of the second seven party coalition government (following the February 2015 snap election); the assassination of the former commanders of the Lesotho Defense Force (LDF) in 2015 and 2017; the arrest, torture and detention of some members of the LDF on allegations of mutiny; the fleeing of the leaders of opposition parties in 2015 and 2018 (as well as many Basotho from different walks of life) to South Africa; the formation of a four party coalitions in 2017-2020 and 2020-2022; and the formation of the current five party coalition government.

At the socio-economic level, the situation is no better. The Covid-19 pandemic laid bare Lesotho's fragility. Its economy is in dire straits, characterised by high unemployment, especially among youth, severe food insecurity, and negative growth. These harsh economic and social conditions have negatively impacted Basotho society to the core and have manifested themselves in increased gender-based violence, domestic violence, and increased murders, gangsterism, all of which leave many families in sorrow and despair. It looks like our beloved country is fast degenerating into an undesirable and frightening state of widespread moral decay.

It is in this context and at this time, as we commemorate 200 years as a nation, that we should critically look at where we come from, where we are today, and, most importantly, where we want to go over the next two hundred years. As we do so, we will begin to appreciate that the values that Morena Moshoeshoe espoused, of Peace, Respect for self and others, Unity and Reconciliation, Forgiveness, Generosity and Inclusiveness, are indeed timeless, and they are as relevant today as they were during his time. This is a clarion call to adopt Se-Moshoeshoe as a vehicle for a transformative journey that should anchor our next two hundred years.

It is also a clarion call to strengthen leadership and governance to foster national unity. One key aspect of promoting peace and unity among Basotho is strengthening national leadership and governance. This involves ensuring that all Basotho are represented and have a voice/say in decision-making processes. Inclusive governance allows diverse perspectives to be taken into account and helps to address the concerns and needs of different communities. By promoting equal representation and participation, Basotho can work together towards common goals and foster a sense of unity and belonging.

Conclusion

As we commemorate the 200 years and prepare for the next 200 years, it is imperative that the country adopt Se-Moshoeshoe as a framework for governance, to produce lasting solutions to the myriad political, security, social, and economic challenges that Lesotho faces today.

References

- Basutoland National Council. (1961). *Legislative Council Debates*. Third Meeting. First Session of Legislative Council, 11th -15th September, 1961.
- Casalis, E. (1861). *The Basutos*. London, J. Nisbert.
- Jonathan, L. (1976). *Moshoeshoeism*. Moshoeshoe I Memorial Lecture, 12 March 1976. Lesotho Government Printer, 1976.
- Lesotho Times. (2024, March 14–21). Poor governance and instability in Lesotho [Leader comment]. *Lesotho Times*.
- Machobane, L. B. B. J. (1990). *Government and change in Lesotho, 1800-1966*. Springer Nature.
- Mahao, N. L. (2015). The King Moshoeshoe I Memorial Lecture. *Lesotho Law Journal*, 22, 1–14.
- Mofuoa, K. (2015). The Ethical Leadership of King Moshoeshoe I of the Basotho of Lesotho in the Nineteenth Century Southern Africa. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, 5(3), 21–25.
- Mokhehle, N. (1976). *Moshoeshoe I Profile: Se-Moshoeshoe*. Mmoho Publishers.
- Smith E. W. (1939). *The Mabilles of Basutoland*. Hodder and Stoughton.
- Thompson, L. (1975). *Survival in two worlds*. Clarendon Press.
- UNDP. (1997). *Governance for Sustainable Human Development - A UNDP Policy Document*. Bureau of Policy and Programme Support.
- Wesfelder, R. (1972). *The Basotho Monarchy: A Spent Force or a Dynamic Political Factor?* Ohio University Centre for International Studies Africa Program.
- Wohlmuth, K. (1998). *Good Governance and Economic Development: New Foundations for Growth in Africa*. University of Bremen: Institute for World Economics and International Management.

C. HEALTH AND HEALING

Contents

- Cantos Of a Life in Exile: A Performance Auto-Ethnography of Healing and Belonging Through Indigenous Epistemologies – *Makhaola Ndebele*
- Botho Leadership: An Indigenous Protective Factor for Academic Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing in The Institutions of Higher Learning – *'Malephoto Niko Ruth Lepphoto*
- The Role of Indigenous Knowledge in Lesotho's Traditional Medicine – *Lerato Seleteng-Kose*
- Pluralistic Knowledge Systems: How Scientific and Non-Scientific Forms of Knowledge Can Birth Solutions to Challenges in Our Daily Lives – *Motshedisi Silindane*

Cantos of a Life in Exile: A Performance Auto-Ethnography of Healing and Belonging through Indigenous Epistemologies

Makhaola Ndebele

Faculty of Humanities, Rhodes University

Email: makhaola.ndebele@ru.ac.za

Abstract

This paper foregrounds the epistemic diversity of Basotho and demonstrates how indigenous knowledge can guide communities and individuals through displacement toward renewed belonging. Rooted in the lived experience of a second-generation exile, this performance auto-ethnography explores the restorative power of indigenous Southern African performance practices: *iiNgoma* (healing rituals), *Lithoko* (praise poetry), and *Litšomo* (storytelling). The performance work engages these practices to examine estrangement and belonging. The work brings them into conversation with contemporary theatrical spaces and contexts, creating a reflexive exploration of the complexities of displacement.

Keywords: Performance studies, Belonging, Estrangement, Auto-ethnography, Indigenous knowledge

Introduction

Two hundred years ago, Morena Moshoeshoe I led his people to Thaba-Bosiu, laying the foundations of the Basotho nation. His legacy transformed fractured communities into a cohesive society. This ethos is exemplified by the famous story of when cannibals killed his grandfather; rather than seeking revenge, Moshoeshoe chose generosity. This story demonstrates how he united divergent groups and viewpoints through imaginative and reconciliatory leadership.

Cantos of a Life in Exile (Ndebele, 2024) extends this lineage by enacting a performance auto-ethnography rooted in the lived reality of a second-generation exile. Rather than presenting autobiography as a linear narrative, the performance embodies and interweaves *Litšomo*, *Lithoko*, and *iiNgoma* to reflexively explore the question: How can indigenous Basotho performance practices function as living epistemologies that facilitate

healing, identity reclamation, and belonging for disconnected individuals and communities in contemporary contexts?

Literature Review

Auto-ethnography uses the self as an excavation site in order to make sense of cultural and social frameworks. Furthermore, the act of performing a personal narrative can be a form of emotional labour, catharsis, and communal witnessing that contributes to healing.

Zenani and Scheub (1992) produced oral narratives that weave moral instruction, historical memory, and imaginative vision, creating a dialogic space for intergenerational exchange. *iiNgoma* (Janzen, 1992) bring together song, dance, and rhythmic movement in communal contexts, often as a healing response to illness, misfortune, or social disharmony. *Lithoko* affirm lineage, and strengthen the awareness cultural identity. Damane and Sanders (1974), in their seminal text *Lithoko: Sotho Praise Poems*, demonstrate how these oral forms function as both historical record and epistemic archive, preserving genealogies and affirming communal values through performative utterance.

Together, these sources situate *Cantos of a Life in Exile* at the intersection of performance, indigenous epistemology, and cultural studies, demonstrating its relevance to contemporary scholarship

Theoretical Framework

This paper draws on performance autoethnography as both a methodology and a theoretical lens. Autoethnography interrogates cultural phenomena through reflexive, transformative personal narrative. It enables the seemingly subjective to speak to broader collective and epistemic concerns. Here, knowledge is co-created rather than individually possessed. *Cantos of a Life in Exile* enacts these principles; performance is simultaneously research, ritual, and testimony. Within this framework, the aforementioned Southern African indigenous performance practices are understood not as cultural remnants but as viable, contemporary epistemic resources with transformative potential in contexts of displacement.

Methodology

Cantos of a Life in Exile operates simultaneously as a method and a data source. Here, the paper reflects a performance auto-ethnographic study, with performance as the central text. Data is collected through:

- Performance – the embodied experience of engaging *Litšomo*, *Lithoko*, *iiNgoma*, and how the audience participates in the experience.
- Performance Script– the reading and analysis of the performance script.
- Audience feedback – this includes interactive moments during performance, like the call-and-response *Tšomo* framing “*Ba re e ne re*” / “*Qoi*,” which transform spectators into participants.

This approach honours performance not only as an object of study but as a living, epistemic practice that produces knowledge through enactment.

Findings

Litšomo: Rekindling of the imagination

Litšomo transform fragmented experiences into an epic narrative. In *Cantos of a Life in Exile*, memory and identity unfold through selected “Cantos,” connecting personal and collective stories. The performance's prologue immerses the audience in a traditional storytelling frame:

Were this encounter, between nna le lona, in the village of my birth; I would introduce this story in the following way: I would call, ‘Ba re e ne re’ You would respond, ‘Qoi’ (Ndebele, 2024, Prologue).

These opening grounds the performance in the imaginative world of *Litšomo*, where the impossible becomes possible—animals speak, boys get pregnant, and cows shatter like glass. This imaginative flexibility allows for the reframing of difficult subjects. The journey of exile and the search for home are experienced through a lens beyond raw trauma. They become part of a wondrous, storied universe. The *Litšomo* frame offers distance through the transformative world of imagination.

The performance concludes with an epilogue that brings the audience back from the imaginative realm to communal reflection:

Were this encounter, between you and I, in the village of my birth; I would conclude this story in the following way: I would call, 'Ke tšomo ka mathetho', You would respond, in the way you see fit (Ndebele, 2024, Epilogue).

This closing gesture dissolves the boundaries of the story, making it a shared experience owned not just by the performer but by the community gathered in that moment. Thus, *Litšomo* function as mirror and holder: reflecting memory back to the individual while containing memory into the river of cultural continuity.

Lithoko: Reclamation of Identity

Lithoko are powerful tools for affirming lineage and reclaiming identity. The central Mazankosi praise poem serves as a potent declaration of selfhood, as seen in the lines:

*Ke nna Makhaola
Ntata Sisekosethu Londile Makhosazana
Agomoditswe - Masele le Mazankosi
Mosuo maloma Mampelegeng
Linyane la Tefo Mosoeunyane
Ngoana mosoeu ha a je le batho
Hlapha o lule moo re o khaketse (Ndebele, 2025, Mazankosi).*

This act of self-naming directly counters the historical trauma of having one's identity denied. The memory of being told, “You are not a Mosotho, Ndebele. No Ndebele is a Mosotho. Sit down!” (Ndebele, 2024, Canto XVI) is a profound wound that the performance aims to heal. Through the recitation of *Lithoko*, the protagonist affirms his identity as an exile, moving beyond labels imposed by others and solidifying his place within his ancestral lineage.

In this context, names hold epistemic significance. They pave the way for reconciliation and provide a sense of direction for navigating personal exile. They serve not just as labels but as anchors, connecting the individual to their past and guiding them toward a future of self-acceptance.

iiNgoma: Healing through Ritual Rhythm

Throughout the piece, circular rhythmic song enacts a ritual journey toward spiritual homecoming. vocal transitions, such as the galloping horse and the flying bird, establish a trance-like rhythm, guiding both the audience and the performer toward catharsis. The final canto, “Clarity” (Canto XXV), depicts the moment of spiritual homecoming, as the protagonist proclaims:

I take another breath, and another, and in an instant, I feel whole, I feel present, there is no past, and there is no future. All is clear in this moment. [Silence] I am in sync with all of creation. [Silence] I am Home (Ndebele, 2024, Canto XXV).

Healing emerges through epistemic and ritual reconnection, culminating in wholeness.

Discussion

Cantos of a Life in Exile demonstrates that exile can be addressed epistemically and through performance. *Litšomo* structure fractured experience; *Lithoko* reclaim identity; *iiNgoma* enact spiritual renewal. The work illustrates dialogical engagement with audience and ancestors, bridging contemporary performance studies and African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (Odora Hoppers, 2002; Nyamnjoh, 2017).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Cantos of a Life in Exile affirms Moshoeshoe I’s legacy of weaving belonging through knowledge by presenting indigenous épistémologies as living systems with transformative potential. The wounds of disconnection are healed not by return alone but through remembering via *iiNgoma*, *Lithoko*, and *Litšomo*.

Recommendations

In light of the foregoing, the following are recommended,

- Integrate Indigenous Knowledge Systems into performance and pedagogy to support community healing;

- Explore performance auto-ethnography as a method for personal and community liberatory epistemic research;
- Develop participatory performance frameworks to engage audiences as co-creators of knowledge production.

References

- Damane, M., & Sanders, P. B. (Eds. & Trans.). (1974). *Lithoko: Sotho praise-poems* (The Oxford Library of African Literature). Clarendon Press.
- Janzen, J. M. (1992). *Ngoma: Discourses of healing in Central and Southern Africa*. University of California Press.
- Ndebele, M. (2024). *Cantos of a life in exile* [Unpublished performance script]. Makhanda, South Africa.
- Odora Hoppers, C. A. (2002). *Indigenous knowledge and the integration of knowledge systems: Towards a philosophy of articulation*. New Africa Books.
- Zenani, N. M., & Scheub, H. (1992). *The world and the word: Tales and observations from the Xhosa oral tradition*. University of Wisconsin Press.

Botho Leadership and Indigenous Protective Factor for Academic Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing in the Institutions of Higher Learning

'Malephoto Niko Ruth Lephoto

National University of Lesotho

Email: Lephotoniko35@gmail.com, mnrlephoto@nul.ls

Abstract

This paper explores how Botho Leadership (BL), grounded in Ubuntu/Botho African philosophy, can serve as a protective factor for academic staff mental health in universities. Academic staff mental wellbeing is increasingly recognised as essential for sustainable development, particularly in relation to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3. However, global evidence shows that academic staff face growing mental health challenges, often worsened by destructive leadership practices that create toxic work environments. In Lesotho, little research has examined this issue. Responding to the World Health Organisation's call for collective action on mental health, the study used a qualitative narrative-integrative review and narrative analysis approach. Relevant literature was gathered from databases such as ScienceDirect, PsycINFO, Google Scholar, PubMed, and ResearchGate. The findings reveal a strong relationship between leadership behaviour and staff mental health, highlighting Botho leadership as a culturally relevant protective factor that can enhance academic staff wellbeing and workplace sustainability.

Keywords: Botho leadership, indigenous, protective factor, mental health, institutions of higher learning

Introduction and Background

Academic staff mental health is increasingly becoming an issue of great concern at all levels of society. Evidence from the literature shows the high psychological hazards in the academe, as academic staff have to deal with the workload, lack of resources, and vast responsibility for their student's lives (International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO), 2021). While academic staff have always been subject to mental health and psychological disorders, events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and rising conflicts have exacerbated the issue (African Union, 2025). Thus, the World Health Organisation (2022b) calls to action for organisations to encourage mental wellness and ward off mental ill health as it is more economical compared to the cost of lack of productivity, absenteeism, and presenteeism

because of mental health issues. Academic staff mental health is an integral part of the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda, as outlined in United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3. It enables them to devote their aptitudes, adapt to various stressors, and gain a better understanding of their lives, thus supporting productivity.

Although Lesotho has committed to the universal agenda for the promotion and protection of mental health in society, evidence from literature shows that the country is confronted with escalating mental health problems. The Ministry of Health (2017) affirms that the country has taken some steps to address the mental health crisis. Hence, the National Health Strategic Plan 2018/19-2022/23 aims to ensure universal access to mental health services by all who need them. However, the Lesotho Ministry of Health (2025) shows that the limited data suggest rates of common mental disorders of around 20%, with a high rate of substance use, self-harm, and a suicide rate in the country, identifying suicide rate as one of the highest globally, at 74.4 per 100,000. Additionally, the Ministry points out that the lack of data on mental health and mental health systems and services prevents an understanding of the most prevalent illnesses, where challenges lie, and how to prioritise funding to improve care and promote wellbeing. According to the Ministry of Health (2025), the 36% poverty rate and an estimated 290,000 people living with HIV have been found to be associated with escalating poor mental health and substance misuse in the country. Although the Ministry of Health Assessment to Promote Mental Health Care and Well-being (2025) demonstrates the government's continual commitment to mental health, the assessment report is silent about the promotion of mental health in institutions of higher learning. Realising this gap, this paper aims to contribute to global debates on the promotion and protection of mental health in higher learning institutions in the absence of formal support structures for mental health care and services. The paper explores how Botho Leadership, as exemplified by Se-Moshoeshoe, can serve as a protective factor for mental health in African institutions of higher learning.

Situating the paper in universal declarations and protocols for the promotion and protection of mental health

This paper is underpinned by various universal declarations, conventions, and instruments for the protection of the mental health and well-being of all people, including academic staff. To start with, the United Nations, under the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights (1948) – Article 25 - has declared mental health a fundamental human right, essential to personal well-being, dignity, and participation in society, and a priority for global sustainable development. It underscores that everyone has the right to the highest attainable standard of mental health, without discrimination. Likewise, Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) stresses the right of everyone to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. UN (2015) emphasises that mental health is an integral component of health and well-being, underpinning our individual and collective abilities to thrive, build positive relationships, and shape the planet we live on. This suggests that the increasing prevalence of mental health problems in society is recognised as an impediment to the global agenda for sustainable development (WHO, 2011; De Silvia, 2025).

Regarding mental health at work, the United Nations System Mental Health and Well-being Strategy for 2024 aims to create a work environment that promotes good mental health and ensures that support is available. This strategy advocates for integrating mental health considerations into training programs for managers. Equally, the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2022) guidelines on mental health at work state that all working people deserve an inherent right to the highest attainable standard of mental health at work, regardless of their type of employment. Further, WHO (2022) asserts that governments and employers should support workers to fully and effectively participate in the workforce free from discrimination and abuse since safe, healthy and inclusive workplaces not only enhance mental and physical health, but also reduce absenteeism, improve work performance and productivity, as well as boost staff morale and motivation, minimising conflicts between colleagues.

Regarding mental health in institutions of higher learning, Principle 7 of the UNESCO (1997) recommendation concerning the status of higher education teaching personnel states that working conditions should be conducive to effective teaching, scholarship, and research, thereby indirectly promoting mental health. Similarly, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (1966) emphasises that authorities need to recognise improvements in the social and economic status of academic staff, as well as in their living and working conditions. The ILO (2022) policy brief calls for global action to address mental health at work, focusing on preventing psychosocial risks and protecting and promoting mental health so that people can participate and thrive in the world of work. The policy inspires organisations to prevent risks

to mental health at work, promote well-being and ensure support for personnel with mental health conditions.

In line with the UN's (2025) assertion that, without good mental health, progress in education, poverty reduction, and gender equality, peace is undermined, the Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030 calls for countries to promote safe, supportive, and decent working conditions for all. Essentially, the protection of academic staff mental in the context of this paper is inextricably linked to the United Nations (UN) (2015) sustainable development goals (SDG) 3, “Good health and Well-being” which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, as well as the SDG 4 - quality education, which among other things put the well-being of students and educators at the centre. UNESCO (2023) supports that high-quality teaching requires significant energy, concentration and psychological capacity.

Furthermore, the African Union, Continental Strategy for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for Teachers (CS-MHPSS) (2025) states that with the increasing stressors such as conflict, pandemics, displacement, and the systematic underinvestment in the work of teaching, the need to address the mental health of educators has never been more urgent. The CS-MHPSS underscores that the mental health and psychosocial well-being of teachers and teacher educators is crucial for the quality of education. Thus, the CS-MHPSS aims to provide a systematic and harmonised approach towards promoting the mental health and well-being of teachers and teacher educators.

As stated earlier, the topic of mental health in academia has not received the attention it deserves in Lesotho. Hence, the current study, which aligns with the above-presented protocols, seeks to explore how Botho leadership can serve as a protective factor for students' mental health in institutions of higher learning. In attempting to answer this question, the paper starts by presenting the problem of the escalating mental health problems in institutions of higher learning. Following, the paper discusses the risk and protective factors for mental health in academia. From there, the correlation between leadership and academic staff mental health is discussed. Lastly, the paper presents Botho leadership as a protective factor for the mental health of academic staff.

Literature Review

The problem of escalating mental health problems in society and institutions of higher learning

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2011), mental health is no longer the absence of mental health conditions, rather, it is a state of mental well-being that enables individuals to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn and work efficiently, to contribute to their community and socio-economic development. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2025) adds that mental health is a component of behavioural health, including a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being, which affects how they think, feel, and act. Lamentably, the World Health Organisation Mental Health Review (WHOMHR) of 2022 shows that mental health is “a growing crisis”, estimating 13% of the world population living with a mental disorder, with one billion people (more than 1 in 8 adults and adolescents) worldwide suffering from either depression or anxiety (WHO, 2022). Fernandez et al. (2024) note that in 2019, there was an estimated number of 970 million people with mental health and substance disorders globally, representing 48% increase from 1990.

Evidence from literature shows that in many universities across the globe, academic staff increasingly experience high levels of stress, anxiety, burnout and depression, and this has emerged as a critical concern across global educational systems (Shen & Slater, 2021; Halat et al., 2023; Kelvin-Iloafu & Iloka, 2023; Dlamini & Dlamini, 2024; Arena & Toks, 2025). Shen & Slater (2021) note that over a third of academics worldwide reported experiencing significant levels of job-related stress. It has been confirmed that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the experiences of mental health challenges, as reports of major depressive disorders and anxiety among academic staff are increasing since the pandemic outbreak (Kelvin-Iloafu & Iloka, 2023; WHO, 2023; Dlamini & Dlamini, 2024; Ministry of Health, 2025). It has been proven that mental health challenges among academic staff jeopardise their overall well-being, the cognitive capacity crucial to the quality of teaching, and their responsiveness to students' diverse needs (UNESCO, 2023; Dlamini & Dlamini, 2024).

Moreover, the ability to perform duties such as community engagement, policy advocacy, and outreach initiatives is affected by stunted creativity and difficulty thinking clearly, which require great effort (UNESCO, 2023). Also, academic staff mental health challenges can lead to an anxious and unhealthy learning environment as they may unintentionally model unhealthy coping mechanisms, and transmit an unhealthy state of mind in the classroom, demonstrating less tolerance, quick judgment, and fatigue (UNESCO, 2023). UNICEF (2022) supports the view that quality education is reflected not only in academic outcomes such as literacy and numeracy but also in indicators of students' psychosocial well-being. Therefore, mentally healthy staff receiving support naturally nurture psychosocial learning environments that support students' wellbeing.

Protective and risk factors for academic staff mental health

Several previous studies have identified both protective and risk factors for academic staff mental health and have categorised them as emotional, environmental, social, and economic factors (Heinsch et al., 2020; Arukwe et al., 2023; CDC, 2025). CDC (2025) posit that risk factors increase the possibility of experiencing poor mental health, while protective factors increase the possibility of experiencing positive mental health. Hence, Heinsch et al. (2020) state that there is a need for a better understanding of protective factors for mental well-being beyond the absence of disease. Heinsch et al. (2020) and Gustavson and Yaugher (2023) concur that those protective factors are characteristics or attributes that help to reduce the negative impact of risk factors, suggesting that enhancing protective factors can improve mental health even when risk factors are present. share the same view that, among others, mental health protective factors include strong social connections, hope for the future, positive goals, problem-solving skills, strong family relationships, a safe environment and availability of mental health services (Gustavson & Yauhger, 2023; CDC, 2025). According to CDC (2025), beyond the biological risk factors, factors such as interpersonal and institutional discrimination, interpersonal violence and social isolation can increase a person's risk for heart disease and stroke, type 2 diabetes, depression and anxiety, suicidality and self-harm (CDC (2025).

Research attests that the demanding work environment, the need to balance personal and professional duties, and the constant pressure to be productive while navigating multiple tasks of teaching, research, mentorship, professional development, and service can serve as

risk factors for poor mental health (Halat et al., 2023). Agreeing with Jayman et al. (2022), academic staff often face a hidden struggle with intense expectations, demanding workloads, teaching excellence, and administrative duties, which they sometimes struggle to manage well due to other stressors. Further, Jayman et al. (2022) opine that the pressure to secure a career path and navigate a highly competitive academic landscape can negatively impact academic staff's mental well-being, as academics cannot position themselves outside the performance culture and still be viewed as valued team members. On top of these, Dlamini and Dlamini (2024) note that a lack of resources, low salaries, weak recognition, an unsatisfactory work-life balance, and a lack of support from management lead to poor mental health and well-being.

In McKinsey Health Institute's (2022) study on employee burnout, employees cited the feeling of always being on call, low autonomy, lack of social support, toxic workplace behavior such as unfair treatment, deliberate exclusion, sabotage, toxic competition and abusive management as aspects of their jobs that undermine their mental and physical well-being. Equally, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2022) emphasise that violence and harassment at work, including bullying, violate human rights and undermine both mental and physical health. Unfortunately, many organisations pay a high price for failure to address workplace factors that strongly correlate with mental health challenges, such as toxic behaviour (ILO, 2022). Notably, compromised staff wellbeing not only leads to individual suffering but also to the wasteful loss of talented and skilled personnel to the sector (Brewster et al., 2021).

A closer look at the above-presented risk factors shows that while academic environments are often perceived as intellectually enriching, they are also sources of mental health problems, requiring proactive, mental health-conscious university leadership. In line with the CDC's (2025) statement about the need for safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and supportive work environments as protective factors for staff mental health, this paper, as mentioned earlier, intends to discuss the function of Botho leadership as the indigenous protective factor for academic staff mental health in African universities. Botho Leadership framework draws from the African philosophy of Ubuntu/Botho, which views positive mental health as dependent on strong connections and a supportive work environment, among other things (Ncube, 2010). In this paper, the Ubuntu/Botho aphorism "I am because we are"-

“motho ke motho ka batho” connotes the Basotho view of the protection of mental health and well-being as dependent on strong, positive relationships. This suggests that in Lesotho, where university-based professional counselling services for academic staff are lacking, strong relationships and a supportive work environment remain significant indigenous protective factors for mental health. The author views strong relationships and a supportive work environment as dependent on Basotho culturally oriented leadership – Botho leadership, rooted in principles of Botho (Ubuntu), a leadership style that emphasises persuasion over domination, team-building, and harmony and solidarity with all people.

The central argument about Botho leadership as a protective factor for mental health in Lesotho institutions of higher learning is a response to the current Basotho campaign and clarion call to “back to Se-Moshoeshoe”. This call signifies the Basotho consciousness of the value of Botho-oriented leadership styles in nurturing a healthy nation, towards sustainable development. The Basotho philosophy of Se-Moshoeshoe originates from Basotho indigenous values of recognition, respect for human dignity, compassion, harmony, unity, and support, as embodied in the lived leadership of King Moshoeshoe 1, the founder of the Basotho nation. Moshoeshoe 1's leadership demonstrated a deeper understanding of the Botho maxim “I am because We are”, exemplifying the spirit of leadership through humane acts of servant leadership, respect for human dignity, protection of the vulnerable, support and empowerment for all. Casalis in Thabane (2024) talks about how people viewed and felt about Moshoeshoe 1's leadership, in his words, “The imbeciles of the country almost all came to seek his protection; they felt instinctively that with him they would be guarded against all ill-treatment, and that he would not allow them to die of hunger”. In this statement, the essence of Botho's leadership principles of protection, safety, trust, survival, and welfare is validated. These principles are essential protective factors for positive mental health and well-being.

Methodology

This paper adopted a narrative-integrative review of literature as the research methodology. Whittemore and Knafl (2005) describe an integrative review as a method that summarises the empirical and theoretical literature to better understand a phenomenon. Sukhera (2022) adds that narrative reviews are a form of knowledge synthesis grounded in

‘interpretation and critique’ of social phenomena, which is a subjective assessment of existing knowledge. This methodology enabled the synthesis of various studies to assess Ubuntu/Botho leadership as a protective factor for academic staff's mental health. A flexible use of search terms and phrases such as Botho leadership, Ubuntu/Botho leadership, Ubuntu/Botho and protection of mental health, and Ubuntu leadership in institutions of higher learning was made to search for published journal articles and grey literature in five databases: PubMed, BASE, Google Scholar, ERIC, and ResearchGate. Keywords and synonyms were also used to maximise the discoverability of relevant literature (Dhollande et al., 2021). All published articles and grey literature addressing the topic under enquiry were included for the review. A narrative analysis was adopted

Findings

A narrative analysis of reviewed literature yielded five themes, namely: the correlation between leadership styles and staff mental health; destructive leadership styles as a risk factor for the academic staff mental health; Botho leadership is an ideal leadership model for African workplaces; Botho leadership is a protective factor for academic staff mental well-being; Botho leadership as constructive and transformative leadership for sustainability.

The correlation between leadership styles and staff mental health

A narrative analysis of data revealed that school leaders are pivotal in the school's priority to and effort in promoting and supporting academic staff mental well-being (Pace & Portelli, 2024) since workplace environment, leadership behaviour, and organisational support affect staff mental well-being (Kim & Cruz, 2022; Kelvin-Iloafu et al., 2023). Chetty and Price (2023), Muller et al. (2019), and Dlamini & Dlamini (2024) found that employees often have higher perceived well-being when their leaders are supportive, encourage creative thinking in problem-solving, communicate goals and visions clearly, and maintain positive leader–follower relationships. Kim and Cruz (2022:2) report “faculty members and academic staff teaching and working in higher educational institutions reported better quality of life when they thought their leaders provided them with motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration, and when leaders displayed idealised leadership attributes and

behaviours.” In addition, Kelvin-Iloafu et al.’s (2023) study on the influence of leadership styles on employees’ psychological health found that leadership influences employees’ psychological well-being. Kelvin-Iloafu et al. (2023) clarify that leadership style encompasses an individual’s attitudes, approaches and characteristics while leading others, such as teams or employees. Kim and Cruz’s (2022) study found that leadership behaviours that disregard employees’ concerns, avoid responsibility and accountability, and ignore open communication negatively affect employees’ mental health

Destructive leadership styles as a risk factor for academic staff mental health

The findings show that destructive leadership styles have been associated with a number of negative consequences for employees, including burnout and reduced job satisfaction, as well as for organisations, such as increased turnover, absenteeism, and reduced productivity (Tafvelin et al., 2021). There is a general consensus that both active and passive destructive behaviours are harmful for employees. According to Tafvelin et al. (2021), active destructive behaviours denote the extent to which leaders engage in hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviours. Such behaviours may include unrealistic demands, arrogance, abusive and bullying behaviour, public humiliation, nitpicking, isolation and exclusion, weaponising information, threats, and punishment (Tafvelin et al., 2021; Jayman et al., 2022). Passive destructive behaviours, on the other hand, usually include avoidant and messy behaviours, in which leaders fail to respond to their followers’ requests, lack empathy, are egotistical and self-serving, are inconsistent with rules, and are absent when needed (Tafvelin et al., 2021). Under such leadership, the work environment is characterised by fear, hatred and resentment - harmful to mental well-being.

In addition, Jayman et al. (2022) found that rigidity and imposed performativity have detrimental effects on academic staff’s mental well-being due to their results-driven regime of constant reporting and recording, while simultaneously isolating staff through individualisation. Wang et al. (2010) posit that destructive leadership behaviours are a consequence of failed self-regulation, characterised by unpredictability, controlling and negative scrutiny among other things. This approach deviates from Botho’s values of solidarity, support and empowerment.

Botho leadership is an ideal leadership model for African workplaces

The findings from previous studies suggest that institutions of higher learning should acknowledge and proactively address staff and student wellbeing issues by fostering a sustainable, effective academic environment through a whole-university approach. (Brewster et al., 2021). Botho leadership is ideal in this regard, as it nurtures a conducive work environment characterised by respect, inclusion, impartiality, and psychological safety. In fact, evidence shows that Botho leadership is increasingly being promoted as an appropriate leadership philosophy for African workplaces (Chetty & Price, 2023; Mutharasibo & Iken, 2019). Ncube (2010) claims that the concept of Ubuntu/Botho is an emerging indigenous and Afrocentric leadership philosophy offering a different approach to understanding leadership, hence recognised as a legitimate alternative to Western leadership philosophies that often ignore the cultural context of strong connections as a protective factor for mental health. However, the emergence of Ubuntu/Botho as a leadership philosophy is not meant to replace Western leadership philosophies, but to add to the diversity and richness of the discourse on leadership and mental health. As put by Cherry and Price (2023), Botho leadership is a well-known African philosophical approach demonstrating the significance of constructive leadership in followers' affect, cognition, and behaviors. Ncube (2010) note that Botho leadership encourages humanness, and recognises the sanctity of human life, declaring that no individual is more sacred than another. Several previous studies have explored the link between Ubuntu/Botho leadership and employees' psychological well-being (Muller et al., 2023; Chetty & Price, 2023).

Botho Leadership is a protective factor of academic staff mental health and well-being

Several of these studies concur that Botho leadership prioritises the well-being of all stakeholders and fosters a community of support and belonging (Mutharasibo & Iken, 2019; Adeleye et al., 2020). Adeleye et al. (2020) claim that Ubuntu/Botho-oriented leadership can create a more inclusive, empathetic, empowering and ethical workplace. Chetty and Price (2023) reiterate that a sense of community and belonging created by Botho leadership leads to job satisfaction and increased positive mental well-being. In Botho leadership, leaders positively influence their followers to participate in and accomplish shared goals by providing motivation, challenges, empowerment, support, and consideration, as well as

showing respect (Muller et al., 2023). In that way, Botho leadership positively changes followers' attitudes, confidence, values, and perceptions, ultimately leading to higher levels of job satisfaction, motivation, performance, and productivity, which in turn positively impact their psychological well-being (Kelvin-Iloafu et al., 2023). Chetty and Price (2024) note that Ubuntu/Botho is increasingly recognised as an appropriate leadership philosophy for South African workplaces, warranting further exploration of its application and outcomes. It nurtures strong social support networks that give individuals a deep sense of belonging, and act as shields against negative stress, anxiety and isolation (Chetty & Price, 2024).

Kelvin-Iloafu et al. (2023) state that psychological well-being centres on an individual's psychological state of mind, grounded in subjective experiences that encompass both positive and negative feelings. Thus, Botho leadership principles of interconnectedness, survival, compassion, spirit of solidarity, dignity and respect, care and support for all (Muller et al., 2019; Chetty & Price, 2023) place it as an indigenous protective factor for staff mental wellness. That is, leaders who exhibit the practical application of these values in their day-to-day interactions with their followers are perceived by followers as role models doing what is ethically right, and are thus regarded and rated highly (Kelvin-Iloafu et al., 2023). Such leaders ensure psychological safety by fostering a fair and trusting environment. In addition, they address conflicts constructively, preventing prolonged stress and workplace tension. Under such leadership, members of staff experience psychological safety, enabling them to express concerns without fear and thus enhancing their mental well-being.

Botho leadership as constructive and transformative leadership for sustainability

The constructive nature of Botho leadership denotes servant leadership and modelling by example, which can transform an extreme and competitive work environment towards collegiality, teamwork, and collaboration (Halat et al., 2023). Halat et al. (2023) maintain that a working environment in which gratitude is spread reassures growth, reduces negative emotions, buffers exhaustion, and generally renders the workplace more pleasant and productive. In fact, Botho leadership is recognised by many scholars as transformational, as it transforms organisational culture by centring humanity and relational values (Ncube, 2010). It uplifts and empowers others rather than controlling, thus fostering psychological

safety and emotional well-being. It strives to build better individuals and conducive workplaces through empathetic, ethical and purpose-driven leadership. Hu's (2020) study examined the connection between transformational leadership and mental well-being among frontline employees in Chinese commercial banks. The findings demonstrated a direct positive association between transformational leadership and the mental health of frontline employees. In another study by Kim and Cruz (2022), which established a positive influence of transformational leadership style on employees' psychological health, gender and sector differences were also noted, with male employees reporting higher perceived psychological health than their female counterparts.

Dlamini and Dlamini (2024) argue that university leaders must be responsive to human resource conditions to ensure the protection of the mental health, well-being, and productivity of their academic staff, since psychological problems, which leaders often ignore, have a greater impact on job performance and productivity. Arukwe et al. (2023) point out that organisations rely heavily on leaders' critical thinking and management skills to address demands, foster collaboration among team members, and enhance overall employee happiness. Botho's leadership style is characterised by a constructive leader-follower relationship, in which the leader mentors, guides, and motivates the follower to achieve organisational goals. It has the potential to transform destructive leadership styles, which are more common than previously thought, with prevalence estimates ranging from 36% to 61%, depending on the calculation method (Tafvelin et al., 2021).

Conclusion

The paper sought to explore how Botho leadership can function as a protective factor for academic staff mental health in institutions of higher learning. In line with findings from a narrative analysis of reviewed literature, the paper concludes that Botho leadership is an appropriate indigenous protective factor for academic staff mental. Botho leadership is constructive and provides a culturally relevant, community-focused model that offers academic institutions a holistic approach to supporting academic staff mental health. The tenets of Botho, such as empathy, shared responsibility, and interconnectedness, are fundamental to cultivating an environment that reduces mental health issues. These elements essentially foster leadership practices that can create a more sustainable and mentally healthy

work environment, transforming destructive leadership tendencies characterised by unfairness, exclusion and isolation.

By embracing a collaborative work culture, Botho leadership style discourages negative and arrogant competitive attitudes and behaviours that create stressful environments. Botho leadership promotes a culture of care and support in which staff members are more likely to develop empathy for one another and are willing to share resources, teaching strategies, and coping mechanisms, thereby reducing the individual burden of pressing academic demands. Leaders recognise the importance of balance between work and personal life, encouraging staff to seek help when needed without fear of judgment.

As higher education continues to advance in Africa and is expected to contribute to sustainable development, integrating indigenous approaches to leadership is crucial for addressing the mental health challenges faced by academic staff. Dlamini and Dlamini (2024) recommend that university leaders must be responsive to these risk factors to ensure the well-being and productivity of their academic staff. Likewise, WHO (2022) recommends training managers to support their workers' mental health, as this can improve their knowledge, attitudes and behaviours regarding mental health, and enhance workers' help-seeking behaviours. Botho's leadership tenets of connectedness, collaboration, recognition, care, and support are key to building strong, supportive relationships that boost morale, foster engagement, and contribute to a sense of accomplishment, regardless of how challenging the work may be. Pascha (2017) clearly states that stable relationships contribute to happiness and well-being, as strong relationships with significant people in one's life serve as a support system during challenging times that require resilience.

References

- African Union Commission. (2025). Continental Strategy on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for Teachers in Africa. Addis Ababa: African Union
- Adeleye, I., Luiz, J., Muthuri, J., & Amaeshi, K. (2020). Business ethics in Africa: The role of institutional context, social relevance, and development challenges. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 161, 717–729. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04338-x>

- Arena, F. & Toks, F. (2025). Mental Health in Academia: Challenges, Causes, and Systemic Responses. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/390874002>
- Arukwe, M. C., Ejike, J. I., Kelvin-Iloafu, L. E., Nwankwo, C. E., Nkwota, N. C. & Iloka, C. B. (2023). Influence of leadership styles on employees' psychological health: mediating role of mindfulness. *Journal of Data and Processing*, 38(4), DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.778218
- Plata, S. M. (2024). Policy Leadership for Faculty Members and Staff's Mental Health: Case Study of a Private University in the Philippines. *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review*, 24(2), <https://doi.org/10.59588/2350-8329.1535>
- Brewster, L., Jones, E., Michael M, M., Wilbraham, S. J., Spanner, L., & Hughes, G. (2022). 'Look after the staff, and they would look after the students' cultures of wellbeing and mental health in the university setting, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 46(4), pp. 548-560, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.1986473>
- Chetty, K. & Price, G. (2024). Ubuntu leadership as a predictor of employee engagement: A South African study. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 22(10) <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v22i0.246>
- Dlamini, N. G. & Dlamini. N. D. (2024). Understanding the well-being challenges confronting academic staff in South African universities: a narrative review. *Discover Education*, 3(9), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44217-024-00089-8>
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2025). *Mental Health*. <https://www.cdc.gov/mental-health/about/index.html>
- De Silva, M. J. (2025). Making mental health an integral part of sustainable development: the contribution of a social determinants framework. *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences*, 25(2), 100-106. doi:1017/S2045796015000049
- Fernandez, L. G., Grace H. Y., E. F., Ravi G., Sematle. M. P., Khomolishoele, M., Molulela, M., Bane, M., Tlahani, M., Tristan, T. Lee, I., Chammartin, F., Gerber, F., Lejone, T., Ayakaka, I., Niklaus Daniel Labhardt, N. D., Amstutz, A & Belus, J. B. (2024). Prevalence of Mental Health and Substance use Problems and Awareness of Need for

- Services in Lesotho: Results from a Population-Based Survey. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-024-01309-w>
- Gustavson, T. & Yaughner, A. (2023). Improving Mental Health by Increasing Protective Factors and Reducing Risk Factors, <https://extension.usu.edu>
- Halat H. D., Soltani, A., Dalli, R., Alsarraj, L. & Malki, A. (2023). Understanding and Fostering Mental Health and Well-Being among University Faculty: A Narrative Review. *J. Clin. Med*, 12, 4425, <https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm12134425>
- Heinsch, M., Wells, H., Sampson, D., Wootten, A., Cupples, M., Sutton, C. & Kay-Lambkin, F. (2020). Protective factors for mental and psychological well-being in Australian adults: A review. *Mental Health & Prevention*, 25(2022) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mhp.2020.200192>
- Jayman, M., Glazzard, J. & Rose, A. (2022). Tipping point: The staff wellbeing crisis in higher education. *Front. Educ.* 7, 929335, doi: 10.3389/feduc.2022.929335
- Kim, H. D. & Cruz, A. B. (2022). Transformational Leadership and Psychological Well-Being of Service-Oriented Staff: Hybrid Data Synthesis Technique. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19, 8189. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19138189>
- Lesotho Times. (2024, March 14–21). Poor governance and instability in Lesotho [Leader comment]. *Lesotho Times*.
- Ministry of Health. (2017). *National Health Policy*, Maseru, Lesotho
- Ministry of Health. (2025). *Assessment to promote health care and wellbeing in Lesotho*. Maseru, Lesotho
- Muller, R. J., Smith, E. E., & Lillah, R. (2023). Perceptions regarding the impact of Ubuntu and servant leadership on employee engagement in the workplace. *Journal of Contemporary Management*, 16, <https://doi.org/10.35683/jcm17104.0004>
- Mutwarasibo, F., & Iken, A. (2019). I am because we are: the contribution of the Ubuntu philosophy to intercultural management thinking. *Interculture Journal:Online-Zeitschrift für interkulturelle Studien*, 18(32), 15–3

- Ncube, L.B. (2010). Ubuntu: A Transformative Leadership Philosophy. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 4(3), Doi:10.1002/jls
- Pascha, M. (2017). Positive Psychology Studies, Sciences of Happiness <https://positivepsychology.com/permamodel>
- Pace, M. & Portelli, C. (2024). Mental Health and Wellbeing Promotion and Support: Education leaders' perceptions and experiences. *International Journal of Emotional Education*, 16(1), pp185-189, <https://doi.org/10.56300/UBYY8254>
- Samsudin, H. & Fitriana M. (2023). Leadership Styles and Employees' Mental Health: The Influential Factors in Organisational Behaviour,
- Shen, P. & Slater, P. (2021). Occupational Stress, Coping Strategies, Health and Well-being among University Academic Staff – An Integrative Review. *International Education Studies*, 14(12), 99-99, <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v14n12p99>
- Sukhera, J. (2022). Narrative reviews: Flexible, rigorous, and practical. *Journal of Graduate Medical Education*, 14(4), 414–417. <https://doi.org/10.4300/JGME-D-22-00480.1>
- Tafvelin, S., Lundmark, R., Schawarz, U. & Stengling, A. (2022). Why do leaders engage in destructive behaviours? The role of leaders' working environment and stress. *Journal of Occupational and Organisational Psychology*, 96,165-181. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.1213>
- Thabane, M. (2024). Moshoeshoe 1 In his own Words. Reach Publishers. Wandsbeck, South Africa
- United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (2023). UN System Workplace Mental Health and Well-being Strategy for 2024 and beyond (CEB/2023/HLCM/30).
- UNSECO IICBA. (2023). Strengthening Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for Pre- and in-service Teachers in Africa. Training Guide 2023-3. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- World Health Organisation & United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (2022). UNICEF and WHO joint programme on mental health and Psychosocial well-being and development of children and adolescents. World Health Organisation. <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/363339>

- Votruba N, Eaton J, Prince M, Thornicroft, G. (2014). The importance of global mental health for the Sustainable Development Goals. *Journal of Mental Health* 23, 283-286
- Votruba, N., & Thornicroft, G. J. (2016). Sustainable development goals and mental: learnings from the contribution of the FundaMentalSDG global initiative. *Global Mental Health*, 3, 1–6. Article 10.1017/gmh.20. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gmh.2016.20>
- Wang, M., Sinclair, R., & Deese, M. N. (2010). Understanding the causes of destructive leadership behaviour: A dual-process model. In B. Schyns & T. Hansbrough (Eds.), *When leadership goes wrong: Destructive leadership, Mistakes, and ethical failures* (p.73–97). IAP Information Age Publishing.
- Whittemore, R. & Knafl, R. (2005). The Integrative Review: Update Methodology. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 52(5), 540–53. DOI: 10.1111/j.1365=2648.2005.03621.x
- WHO World Mental Health Survey Consortium (2004). Prevalence, severity, and unmet need for treatment of mental disorders in the World Health Organisation World Mental Health Surveys. *JAMA* 291,2581-2590.
- WHO. (2011). Mental Health Atlas. http://www.who.int/about/licensing/copyright_form/en/index.html
- WHO. (2022). WHO guidelines of Mental Health at Work. Geneva. <http://apps.who.int/iris>
- WHO. (2023). Mental Health of College Students: Global Health Observation Data Report 2023. <https://www.who.int/data/gho>

The Role of Indigenous Knowledge in Lesotho's Traditional Medicine

Lerato Seleteng-Kose

Department of Biology, National University of Lesotho

E-mail: leratoseletengkose@gmail.com

Abstract

Since time immemorial, traditional medicine has been a cornerstone of healing in many Basotho communities. This healing system is more prominent in the rural communities where access to modern health facilities is limited. The Basotho's use of traditional medicine relies mainly on indigenous knowledge (IK), involving either self-medication or consultation of traditional healers or herbalists. The knowledge of traditional medicine, passed down orally from one generation to the next, was slowly disappearing. However, this has been counteracted by an increasing interest in documenting this knowledge. Contributions from research and innovation have also expanded this knowledge, leading to the popularity of traditional medicine. This is evidenced by a drastic increase in the number of commercial traditional medicine products dominating markets, streets, and pharmacies nationwide. Some of these traditional medicine commercial products have been screened to build scientific evidence validating their safety and effectiveness. Many of these products are derived from medicinal plants, which are sourced from their natural habitats, and their populations are reported to be declining due to overexploitation and destructive harvesting practices. Moreover, because of the absence of national quality control guidelines and standards, as well as the Indigenous Knowledge System Policy that regulates their production, the export of commercialised traditional medicinal products is prohibited. This paper recommends measures to ensure the sustainability of these plants through conservation and propagation, as well as the establishment of legal frameworks to safeguard the IK of traditional medicine in Lesotho.

Keywords: Commercial products, Indigenous knowledge, Medicinal plants, Safety, Traditional medicine.

Introduction

Approximately 60% of Lesotho is mountainous, and 77% of the population lives in remote areas, with limited access to health facilities. As a result, many communities in the country rely on traditional medicine (TM) as primary healthcare. Other reasons behind the use of TM in Lesotho include non-affordable antibiotics, which are also inaccessible in some cases. Moreover, a majority of disease-causing microorganisms are becoming resistant to antibiotics. Indeed, according to McGaw et al. (2000) and Omwenga & Paul (2012), the

reliance on traditional medicine in several countries has been attributed to a number of factors, including availability, accessibility and affordability of traditional medicine over Western medicine, undesirable side effects, as well as extensive indigenous knowledge (IK) and expertise within the local communities.

Traditional medicine in Lesotho depends mainly on medicinal plants, particularly because many wild animals have been hunted down to extinction. Of the approximately 2,076 plant species occurring in Lesotho, about 355 are used for medicinal purposes (Moteetee & van Wyk, 2011). The Basotho (people of Lesotho) use of traditional medicine relies mainly on indigenous knowledge (IK), involving either self-medication or consultation of traditional health practitioners (THPs). Even though Basotho IK holds the key to innovative solutions, it was slowly disappearing. This is because the knowledge has been passed down orally from one generation to the next. Consequently, the IK in Lesotho is being documented through research and innovation. Therefore, the aim of the current study is to provide an overview of past and current trends in Lesotho's traditional medicine and to profile the IK used in TM.

Methodology

The study relied on the literature, discussions with traditional health practitioners, and the author's experiences.

Findings and Discussion

There are different categories of THPs in Lesotho, based on the approach they use during consultation by patients, and they include: i) a Diviner (*Selaoli*)- throws bones (*litaola*), ii) Seer (*Senohe*) – uses prophetic skills, iii) a Shaman (*Lethuela*, *Mokoma/Leqhekha*) - liaises with the spiritual world/ancestors, iv) a Herbalist (*Ngaka-chitja*) – has general knowledge of healing herbs, v) an Apprentice (*Lehlahana*) – a trainee, vi) a Charlatan (*Ngakana-ka-hetla*) – a chancer or fake THP (Moteetee & van Wyk, 2011). These are the primary holders of indigenous knowledge in traditional medicine, and this has been the case since the times of Moshoeshoe 1 (around 1900), the founder of the Basotho Nation.

Past trends in Lesotho's traditional medicine

Moshoeshoe 1 was able to win several wars/battles (e.g., *Lifaqane*) under the guidance of Chief Mohlomi (Moshoeshoe 1's main TMP and advisor). Many of these battles were fought on top of Thaba-Bosiu Mountain, which later became the nation's mountain fortress. Indeed, the name Thaba-Bosiu translates into 'a mountain that grows at night' since enemies believed that they were losing the battles because the mountain grew at night. Moreover, IK has, and continues to, play an important role in initiation schools, strengthening and protecting initiates as they transition from childhood to adulthood (*phatsa*). Similarly, chiefs and diviners used traditional medicine (e.g., *Aloe ferox* – Bitter Aloe, *Lekhala-la-Quthing*) in their 'traditional horn' (*lenaka*) to be empowered and protected, Figure 1. The role of traditional medicine has also been evident in burials and cleansing, as well as in cultural ceremonies such as weddings. For example, *Aloe maculata* (spotted aloe, *lekhala-la-bafu*; Figure 1) was and continues to be used to cleanse mourners upon their return from the cemetery.



Figure 1: *Aloe ferox* (left) and *Aloe maculata* (right), some of the plants used in Lesotho's traditional medicine



Figure 2: Trade of medicinal plants (top left) in streets and top right pharmacies, as raw products, and as processed products (bottom)

Indigenous knowledge plays a crucial role in healing in Lesotho, particularly where healthcare facilities are not easily accessible. For example, pregnant women drink a concoction of herbs, known as '*pitsa*', to protect unborn babies and ease delivery. Moreover, newborn babies are protected with a string around their neck (known as *khoetsa*) made from wild animal skin. Traditional medicine is also applied to a baby's head for protection against harm or evil spirits (*ho thaleha*). In cases where a baby delays walking, his knees are activated to be strong by using a porcupine's quill (*lesiba-la-noko*, *tlhong*). On the other hand, indigenous knowledge has played an important role in agricultural production for protecting livestock from theft and promoting their fertility, as well as protecting crops from hail and promoting harvest.

Current trends in Lesotho's traditional medicine

The use of traditional medicine, particularly medicinal plants, has expanded and gained popularity in the country recently. These are currently sold in markets, on streets, and in pharmacies, either as raw materials or processed into commercial herbal products. Most of these products are beverages (herbal teas, juices) and cosmetics (Figure 2), and a

comprehensive review has been provided by Seleteng-Kose (2022). Some of these products have been produced with support from the National University of Lesotho (NUL) Innovation Hub. The institution also provides facilities for screening traditional medicine products for toxicity and issuing a certificate of analysis, which is required for a trader's license. Moreover, NUL has also developed the Research and Innovation Policy (2021), as well as the Intellectual Property Policy (2021).

A few books documenting Lesotho's medicinal plants and their uses do exist; however, they are outdated and limited in scope, coverage, and availability. These include Phillips (1917), Jacot Guillarmod (1971), Schmitz (1980), Maliehe (1997) and Pooley (1998; 2003). Consequently, a significant number of journal articles have been published documenting medicinal plants used in Lesotho's traditional medicine and their screening to build scientific evidence and validate their use. These publications cover a wide range of topics, including ethnomedicine, biological activity (e.g., antimicrobial, antioxidant, and anti-inflammatory properties), toxicity, and phytochemical content. A comprehensive review of publications on medicinal plants in Lesotho was provided by Motjotji et al. (2023).

Other developments in traditional medicine include the establishment of guiding legislation, viz the Lesotho Universal Medicinemen and Herbalists Council Act 1978, as well as the constitution for the Lesotho Traditional Medical Practitioners Council. However, the country still lacks an Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) policy and standards to ensure quality control of developed commercial products. As a result, Lesotho's commercial products cannot penetrate international markets. Other challenges surrounding traditional medicine in the country include uncontrolled/over-harvesting of medicinal plants, which may lead to their extinction. Moreover, there are limited facilities (e.g., laboratories) for screening commercial products, leading to over-pricing of screening services. Even though traditional medicine is widely used in Lesotho, it is still stigmatised, being associated with witchcraft/sorcery or regarded as un-Godly, non-modern, or backward. It is also taboo for women to handle traditional medicine in some parts of the country.

Conclusion and Recommendations

There is a wealth of indigenous knowledge among local communities in Lesotho, which has informed and shaped the country's traditional medicine. There has also been an increase in research and innovation on medicinal plants from Lesotho. This has led to the development of commercial medicinal and pharmaceutical products, although they are not yet exported due to a lack of standards. Therefore, it is recommended that the country develop standards and the IKS Policy. Indeed, the World Health Organisation recommends integration of Traditional Medicine into National Health Policies. Research and innovation can be enhanced by strengthening collaborations with other countries such as South Africa, which are more advanced in the field of product development. There is also a dire need to propagate and cultivate medicinal plants to ensure their sustainable use in traditional medicine. Sensitisation of the public on IKS and traditional medicine is also crucial, and these should also be included in the school curriculum.

References

- Jacot Guillarmod, A. (1971). *Flora of Lesotho*. Lehre, Germany: Cramer.
- Maliehe, E.B. (1997). *Medicinal plants and herbs of Lesotho*. Lesotho: Mafeteng Development Project.
- McGaw, L.J., Jäger, A.K., Van Staden, J. (2000). Antibacterial, anthelmintic, and anti-amoebic activity in South African medicinal plants. *Journal of ethnopharmacology* 72(1-2), 247–263.
- Moteetee, A., Van Wyk, B. E. (2011). The medical ethnobotany of Lesotho: A review. *Bothalia* 41(1), 209–228.
- Moffett, R. (2010). *Sesotho Plant and Animal Names and Plants Used by the Basotho*. Sun Press, Bloemfontein, South Africa.
- Motjotji, L., Moteetee, A., Seleteng-Kose, L. (2023). Medicinal plants of Lesotho: A review of ethnomedicinal, pharmacological and conservation studies. *Ethnobotany Research and Applications* 25,1-19.

- Omwenga, O.E., Paul, O.O. (2012). Antimicrobial evaluation of the methanol bark extracts of *Plumbago dawei* Rolfe, a local species used by the Samburu community, Wambu, Samburu district, Kenya, for the treatment of diarrheal ailments. *Malaysian Journal of Microbiology* 8(4), 248-252.
- Phillips, E.P. (1917). A contribution to the flora of the Leribe Plateau and environs. *Annals of the South African Museum* 16, 1–379.
- Pooley, E. (1998). *A Field Guide to Wild Flowers of KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Region*. Durban: Natal Flora Publications.
- Pooley, E. (2003). *Mountain Flowers*. Durban: The Flora Publications.
- Schmitz, M. (1982). *Wild Flowers of Lesotho*. Roma, Lesotho: ESSA.
- Seleteng-Kose, L. (2022). Commercial traditional herbal mixtures sold in the Maseru District of Lesotho. *Journal of Herbal Medicine* 33, 100560.
-

Pluralistic Knowledge Systems: How Scientific and Non-Scientific Forms of Knowledge Can Birth Solutions to Challenges in our Daily Lives

Motshedisi Silindane

Institution: Saffron Conscious

Email: mc@saffronconscious.co.za

Abstract

The world is constantly evolving. For a long time, we have relied on scientific methods and research to understand it. These essential tools have been instrumental in generating ideas, influencing new thought, and advancing our world across various technological domains. However, the non-scientific world and Indigenous knowledge systems have often been met with skepticism, distrust, and disdain. This paper explores pluralistic forms of knowledge and is guided by the question(s): How can Scientific and Non- Non-Scientific forms of knowledge birth solutions? We use an anthropological lens to provide a holistic understanding of the value of indigenous knowledge systems and illuminate how the non-scientific world can significantly contribute to our comprehension and advancement in solving world challenges. In addressing the key questions, the paper illustrates that other forms of indigenous knowledge, though they may seem scientifically irrational, can no longer be ignored as important contributors to solving the challenges we face in the world. It is concluded that knowledge pluralism is essential for incorporating non-scientific knowledge in addressing the challenges our world faces. This approach can help fill gaps in scientific knowledge.

Keywords: Culture, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Pluralistic Knowledge Systems, Scientific Knowledge.

Introduction

This paper draws upon anthropological principles to explore society and culture. Through ethnographic fieldwork, anthropology offers a distinct perspective on various knowledge systems and their interactions in addressing complex problems. The concept of pluralism in anthropology refers to "cultural pluralism," which is the coexistence of diverse cultural groups within a larger society, allowing them to maintain their unique identities, values, and practices (Haas, Michael, 2024). Cultural pluralism encourages tolerance, diversity, and mutual respect among different cultural groups in a society (Haas, Michael, 2024).

This paper explores the integration of scientific and non-scientific knowledge to develop innovative, culturally relevant solutions. Scientific knowledge is based on empirical observation and the scientific method, which promotes its universality and objectivity. In contrast, non-scientific knowledge, such as Indigenous practices, traditional healing, spiritual insights, and oral traditions, emerges from specific cultural contexts and lived experiences. This paper will illustrate the importance of combining different types of knowledge and demonstrate how this integration can effectively address a variety of challenges.

By using examples from fields such as environmental conservation, healthcare, and social development, the paper illustrates how indigenous and scientific knowledges can complement each other, leading to sustainable and inclusive solutions.

It is important to clarify the differences between scientific and non-scientific forms of knowledge. Scientific knowledge is characterised by its reliance on the scientific method, which involves observation, experimentation, hypothesis testing, and empirical validation. The goal of scientific inquiry is to uncover universal truths, predict phenomena, and provide objective solutions. This knowledge is often quantifiable, replicable, and predictive, making it valuable in fields such as engineering, medicine, and environmental science. Chalmers (2013)

Non-scientific forms of knowledge include indigenous knowledge, traditional ecological knowledge, religious beliefs, ethical wisdom, and cultural practices. This type of knowledge is often experiential, transmitted orally, and rooted in a community's specific history and environment. Unlike scientific knowledge, which seeks universal application, non-scientific knowledge is highly localised and often focuses on balance, harmony, and the sustainability of ecosystems and communities. Ahenakew (2014)

Asili and the Plurality of Knowledge

The concept of asili coined by Marimba Ani (1994) in her critique of the dominant world order, is described as the insignia of a culture or the developmental seed of a culture. It constitutes the essence, the ideology, and the matrix of a culture, which, when combined, give it an identity and make sense of the collective creation of its members. She argues that the Euro-American asili is typically a binary of the mind and body, while the African Asili is

a kaleidoscope of mind, body, soul, and spirit. The Eurocentric Asili tends to separate thoughts and emotions, man from nature.

Tobert (2022) notes that a central requirement in Medical Anthropology is to acknowledge the multiple narratives surrounding health and well-being. Inclusivity becomes crucial for understanding people from an ethnocentric standpoint. With this in mind, it becomes crucial to think critically about how we can foster inclusivity within our society while embracing the Afrocentric asili, given that the Euro-American asili, seems to form the foundation of many dominant philosophies in the world today.

One example that can provide insight into pluralistic forms of knowledge capable of producing solutions is environmental sustainability. Mokuku (2016) explores the idea that Botho philosophies could inform environmental conservation. Botho concerns a viewpoint that “my humanity is caught up and bound up inextricably with yours” I am because I belong (Tutu, 2011, as cited in Mokuku, 2016, p.12). Seppala (2014) asserts that “people who feel more connected to others have lower levels of anxiety and depression” ([Connectedness & Health: The Science of Social Connection - The Centre for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education](#)). This statement echoes the sentiments of Brown’s research on human connection. In her TED Talk on vulnerability, she says: “Connection is why we are here; it is what gives purpose and meaning to our lives.” She further says, “Connection is the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued (TEDx Talk:12 June 2010).

This notion of connection, interconnectedness, and collective well-being aligns with the Indian concept of Namaste in Sanskrit. This is a spiritual greeting that acknowledges the divinity within each of us and creates a connection between two souls. NAMA means bow, and TE means you. Therefore, Namaste means I bow to the divinity in you. Namaste is a way of showing respect, gratitude, and love towards oneself and others. (Prasad KVSN, 2023).

Botho philosophy is but one among many forms of indigenous knowledge in the African context. These knowledges are often expressed in stories, folklore, rituals, and songs. For some communities, indigenous knowledge can become a form of identity, while for others it can be both a personal and spiritual meaning (The World Bank 1998).

There are a multitude of writings and documents alluding to the fact that many indigenous communities around the world possess deep knowledge that is often passed down through generations in a variety of ways, such as folklore, stories, songs, and more. Other significant indigenous knowledge includes ecological knowledge, developed over generations through interactions with the environment. For instance, farming, sacred groves, water, and environmental conservation techniques and practices. (Berkes et al. 2000; Mokuku, 2016; Mzobe, 2022; Rhys, 2012; Petty, 2012).

Anthropologists play an important role in our society by connecting different knowledge systems. Their research serves as a valuable scientific tool that advocates for the inclusion of all voices, particularly those of Indigenous perspectives. This inclusion is essential not only in environmental policies but also in health and various other fields aimed at improving people's quality of life. By applying an anthropological lens, we can develop more holistic and effective sustainable policies.

Diversity of Medicine

Tobert (2022) notes that research in medical anthropology consistently explores plural perspectives. When we embrace plurality, we not only create space for marginalised voices and experiences but also affirm individuals' dignity by understanding them through their lived experiences. Tobert (2022) mentions that the benefits of Medical Anthropology are:

- Raising awareness of social inclusion.
- The discipline honours equality and diversity
- Presenting a range of cultural, religious, and spiritual beliefs without judgment or hierarchy.
- Illustrating multiple narratives shows that there isn't a single universal worldview, truth, or belief system. Instead, many socially and culturally contextualised worldviews and belief systems exist worldwide.
- It explains how culturally informed philosophical, metaphysical, and cosmological beliefs provide meaning, purpose, and a sense of identity in many people's lives, rather than defining identity in opposition or by Othering others.

- It discusses how Western medical and therapeutic approaches can be developed and adapted to be more inclusive of the needs of cultural minorities within society: colonised populations, or people who have moved or been moved from their country of origin. It acknowledges personal historical narratives.

Medical Anthropology acknowledges and celebrates the diversity of health practices, embracing multiple narratives and cultural explanations for well-being. This includes traditional healing methods such as herbal remedies, acupuncture, Reiki, and Ayurveda. All of these have been used for centuries to treat ailments across various cultures. Despite their historical and cultural significance, there remains a certain scepticism in mainstream medical circles regarding these practices, often due to their non-scientific foundations and their divergence from the biomedical model.

Barnes and Laired (2017) discuss these issues in their chapter, *Anthropologies of Medicine, Religion, and Spirituality and Their Application to Clinical Practice*. Their work highlights the challenges of integrating these practices into formal healthcare systems, which include regulatory hurdles, the necessity for more scientific research to validate their efficacy, and the deep-seated scepticism present within the Western medical community.

Integrative medicine, which combines conventional Western medicine with traditional practices, is gaining traction as a more holistic approach to healthcare (WHO, 2013). Indigenous healing practices often address both physical and spiritual aspects of health. For instance, traditional African medicine incorporates plant-based remedies and spiritual counselling, offering holistic solutions, whereas Western medicine may focus narrowly on symptoms. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recognises traditional medicine as a critical resource for global health, particularly in regions with limited access to biomedical care (WHO, 2013).

In a paper discussing the views of traditional and biomedical practitioners on collaboration, many agree that cooperation between the two sectors is important; however, it remains unclear how this collaboration will take shape (Solera-Deuchar et al., 2020). The article further reports that in 2008, the Ministry of Health in Zanzibar released the Zanzibar Traditional and Alternative Medicine Policy, which recognised the benefits of regulating the practices of traditional healers and enabling closer collaboration with mainstream

practitioners. While this is a step in the right direction, there was also a sense that while traditional healers respected and valued biomedical practitioners, they felt that respect was not reciprocated. This trend is inherent in Eurocentric systems that seek to demonise and nullify other knowledge systems. This aligns with the work of scholars such as Smith (1999), who critiques Eurocentric research methodologies in *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* and argues that these frameworks have historically marginalised Indigenous knowledge systems by framing them as inferior or non-scientific. Her work underscores the importance of decolonising knowledge production to validate and integrate alternative epistemologies into academic and global discourses. Similar critiques are echoed in the book *Eurocentrism, Racism and Knowledge*, edited by Araujo and Maeso (2015), which interrogates the systemic exclusion of diverse knowledge systems in shaping global narratives.

Integration of Traditional Herbal Medicine

The integration of traditional herbal medicine and Western medical practices in parts of Africa highlights a growing appreciation for the value of diverse healthcare systems (Solera-Deuchar et al, 2020). For example, studies have documented cases in which traditional healers and Western-trained doctors collaborate to provide comprehensive care, combining traditional remedies with modern pharmaceuticals (Solera-Deuchar et al., 2020). These efforts demonstrate the potential of bioactive compounds found in traditional medicines, some of which are now utilised in pharmaceuticals.

Some research has highlighted the medicinal properties of plants such as *Artemisia afra* and *Annona muricata*, which are widely used in African traditional medicine to treat various ailments, including respiratory conditions (Adeleye et al., 2021). The compounds derived from these plants have been studied for their antiviral and antimicrobial properties, showing promise in pharmaceutical applications with potential activity for the Prevention, treatment, and Management of Coronavirus Disease. Such collaborations and scientific validations of traditional medicine underscore the importance of integrating both scientific and non-scientific knowledge in healthcare.

The integration of traditional healers into modern healthcare systems has been documented in various regions of Africa, where collaborative efforts have improved access

to comprehensive care (Harik, 2021). For instance, traditional healers in several sub-Saharan countries have collaborated with biomedical health professionals to address diseases such as sleeping sickness. Programs that train traditional healers to identify and refer patients to clinics have demonstrated the potential for these collaborations to enhance disease detection and treatment, especially for communities that primarily rely on traditional medicine (Harik, 2021).

The Colonial Impact on Indigenous Health Practices

The criminalisation of traditional practices in the African context caused many people to see their cultural heritage as shameful or outdated. Healers, who were often respected members of their communities, had to operate in secrecy, leading to feelings of alienation and fear. This stigmatisation created a psychological divide between individuals' ancestral identities and the Western frameworks of legitimacy that were imposed on them. (Maseko & Kubeka, 2021). Labelling traditional healing and spiritual practices as illegal disrupted cultural continuity. Many individuals, particularly younger generations, were discouraged from learning about or practising their heritage. This disconnection from ancestral knowledge led to identity crises and feelings of rootlessness, as people struggled to reconcile their cultural traditions with the imposed legal and social norms (Guma & Mokgoatšana, 2020). The fear of prosecution caused significant anxiety among traditional healers and their communities. Many reported incidents of harassment or social ostracism, while some practitioners struggled with feelings of guilt or doubt regarding their spiritual callings. The suppression of rituals and the forced concealment of practices undermined the community's sense of safety and collective well-being (Maseko & Kubeka, 2021).

The Act deepened divisions within communities. Those who adopted Westernised health systems often found themselves in conflict with traditionalists, leading to feelings of mistrust and discord. This situation fractured communal bonds, leaving many individuals feeling isolated and unable to fully engage in either traditional or modern healthcare systems. (Guma & Mokgoatšana, 2020).

Generations of Indigenous people have inherited the trauma associated with the criminalisation of their spiritual practices. This trauma has led to mental health challenges

such as depression and low self-esteem, along with a hesitance to seek healing through traditional methods, even when these approaches are culturally appropriate. Furthermore, the stigma surrounding these practices continues to hinder the integration of traditional healers into modern healthcare systems, even though their role is legally recognised (Guma & Mokgoatšana, 2020; Maseko & Kubeka, 2021).

Another important aspect to consider is the spiritual impact of legislation and various other issues that influence us. This impact affects not just individuals but also extends into communities, society, and ultimately the world. This phenomenon is illustrated by the concept of

When the law is used to exterminate certain forms of knowledge, it leads to the suppression of individual rights and freedoms. It can marginalise or demonise particular groups, potentially causing significant psychological and spiritual harm. Ultimately, these effects undermine and erode social cohesion. On the other hand, the law can also be used to promote healing and encourage positive experiences with healers. In this paper, we advocate for recognising the positive effects of collaborating with diverse forms of knowledge. Ultimately, our mindset and willingness to embrace the new and unfamiliar will shape our ability to foster inclusiveness.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is essential to continue building connections between different knowledge systems, fostering respect, dialogue, and collaboration in African post-colonial environments, such as Lesotho, that incurred colonial organised destruction of their indigenous knowledges. Through these inclusive approaches, we can hope to develop solutions that are not only effective but also ethically sound, culturally relevant, and socially just.

Integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) with scientific methods offers a transformative approach to addressing complex challenges in a holistic and inclusive way. While science is adept at quantifying and analysing various phenomena, IKS offers nuanced insights rooted in intuition and storytelling. These elements can cultivate empathy and reveal underlying human needs that quantitative analysis may overlook. By recognising the

significance of cultural wisdom, environmental factors, and historical contexts, we can create a synergy that enhances our understanding of the world, encourages innovation, and supports sustainability.

Recognising the contributions of Indigenous and non-scientific knowledge not only addresses the limitations of Western scientific paradigms but also honours the lived experiences and wisdom of marginalised communities. To fully realise the potential of pluralistic knowledge systems, we need to forge a path that encourages dialogue, mutual respect, and collaboration between scientific and non-scientific communities. Policies that suppress non-scientific practices must be reviewed and reformed. A balanced approach that respects and validates diverse knowledge systems can help bridge the gap between scientific rigour, cultural relevance, and intuition.

References

- Ani, M. (1994). *Yurugu: An African-centred Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behaviour*. World Press.
- Adeleye, O. A., Femi-Oyewo, M. N., Bamiro, O. A., Bakre, L. G., Alabi, A., Ashidi, J. S., Balogun-Agbaje, O. A., Hassan, O. M. & Fakoya, G. (2021). Ethnomedicinal herbs in African Traditional Medicine with potential Activity for the prevention, treatment, and Management of coronavirus Disease 2019. *Future Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences*, 7 (72), 1–14. DOI: [10.1186/s43094-021-00223-5](https://doi.org/10.1186/s43094-021-00223-5)
- Ahenakew, C. (2014). Indigenous Epistemological Pluralism: Connecting Different Traditions of Knowledge Production. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 37(1), 148–164.
- Araujo, M. & Maeso, M., R. (2015). *Eurocentrism, Racism and Knowledge: Debates on History and Power in Europe and the Americas*. Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers.
- Barnes, L. D. L. (2017). *Spirituality and Religion Within the Culture of Medicine: From Evidence to Practice: Anthropologies of Medicine, Religion, and Spirituality and Their Application to Clinical Practice*. PP275-292. Oxford University Press.

- Barnes, L. L., & Sered, S. S. (2005). Anthropologies of Medicine, Religion, and Spirituality and Their Application to Clinical Practice. In L. L. Barnes & S. S. Sered (Eds.), *Religion and Healing in America* (pp. 1–38). Oxford University Press.
- Berkes, F., Colding, J., & Folke, C. (2000). *Rediscovery of traditional ecological knowledge as adaptive management. Ecological Applications*. Wiley Online Library.
- Brown, B. (2010). *The Power of Vulnerability*. https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_the_power_of_vulnerability?subtitle=en.
- Chalmers, A. F. (2013). *What Is This Thing Called Science?* Open University Press.
- Crawford, L. A., & Novak, K. B. (2018). *Individual and society: Sociological social psychology* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/curtin/detail.action?docID=5323290>
- Guma, P. M. & Mokgoatšana, S. (2020). The historical relationship between African Indigenous healing practices and Western-Oriented biomedicine in South Africa: a challenge to collaboration. *Theological Studies*, 76 (4). <https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/6104/16456>.
- Harik, C. (2021). Exploring the value of traditional healers in modern healthcare systems. *R&E Search for Evidence and FHI 360 Blog*: <https://researchforevidence.fhi360.org/exploring-the-value-of-traditional-healers-in-modern-health-care-systems>
- Laszlo, E. (2007). *Science and the Akashic Field: An Integral Theory of Everything*. Inner Traditions/Bear & Co.
- Maseko, V., & Kubeka, N. P. (2021). *Reflections on the Witchcraft Suppression Bill of 1957 in South Africa: A workshop*. <https://www.jungssouthernafrica.co.za/event/online-workshop-reflections-on-the-witchcraft-suppression-bill-of-1957-in-south-africa-by-vella-maseko-and-nompumelelo-p-kubeka/#>
- Mokuku, T. (2021). Sustainability for Ontological Re/Configuration: Covid-19 as a Pointer to the Ailing World Asili. *Journal of Black Studies*, 52 (7). DOI: 10.1177/00219347211022038.

- Mokuku, T. (2016). The connotation of Botho philosophy and its potential contribution towards environmental conservation: the case of the Tlokoeng community in Lesotho. *Environmental Education Research*.
- Mzobe, V. V. (2022). *An Exploration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Environmental Conservation*. Master's Dissertation, University of KwaZulu–Natal. <https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/server/api/core/bitstreams/a0ac23af-9c05-495c-a804->
- Petty, A. M. (2012). Fire-Stick Farming. *Fire Ecology*, 8(3), 1-2.
- Prasad, K. V. S. N. (2023). *The Significance of Namaste: The Spiritual Greeting That Connects Souls*. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/significance-namaste-spiritual-greeting-connects-souls-prasad-kvsn>.
- Radin, D. (2006). *Entangled Minds: Extrasensory Experiences in a Quantum Reality*. Paraview Pocket Books.
- Rhys, J. (2012). Fire-Stick Farming. *Fire Ecology*, 8(3):3-8.
- Seppala, E. (2014). *Connectedness and Health: The Science of Social. Centre of Compassion and Altruism Research and Education*. Stanford Medicine. <https://ccare.stanford.edu/uncategorized/connectedness-health-the-science-of-social-connection-infographic/>
- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. University of Otago Press.
- Solera-Deuchar, L., Mtaita, M., & Davies, P. (2020). Establishing views of traditional healers and biomedical practitioners on collaboration in mental health care in Zanzibar: A qualitative pilot study. *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*, 14(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13033-020-00368-4>
- The World Bank. (1998). *Indigenous Knowledge Definitions, Concepts, and Applications: Understanding how People and Societies acquire and use knowledge is Essential for improving People's Lives, especially the Lives of the poorest*. <https://chm.cbd.int/api/v2013/documents/4A27922D-31BC-EEFF-7940->

DB40D6DB706B/attachments/209070/Hoda%20Yacoub%20-%20IK%20Report%20(1).pdf.

Tobert, N. (2022). *Pluralistic Practice: A Medical Anthropology Perspective*.
<https://pluralisticpractice.com/main-blog/epistemology/pluralistic-practice-a-medical-anthropology-perspective/>

Turner, J. H. (2001). Positivism: Sociological. In N. Smelser & P. Baltes (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioural Sciences* (pp. 11827–11831). Elsevier.

World Health Organisation. (2013). *Traditional, Complementary, and Integrative Medicine*.
https://www.who.int/health-topics/traditional-complementary-and-integrative-medicine#tab=tab_1

D. EPISTEMIC JUSTICE IN THE CURRICULUM CONTENT

Contents

- Towards the Recalibration of Future Lesotho Leaders: Infusion of Botho Philosophy in Basic Education to Promote Patriotism - Rakolobe¹ & Sepiriti²
- Language and Epistemic Justice: Exploring the Perceptions and Experiences of Lesotho Science Teachers on the Use of Indigenous Languages in Teaching and Learning – Mohafa¹ & Mokuku²
- Infusing the Concept of Matsema Systems in the Lesotho Basic Education System - Matee¹& Thamae²

***Towards the Recalibration of Future Lesotho Leaders: Infusion of Botho
Philosophy in Basic Education to Promote Patriotism***

Kelello Alicia Rakolobe¹ and Sepiriti Sepiriti²

Department of Educational Foundations¹, National University of Lesotho

Email: Kelello33@gmail.com

Department of Educational Foundations², National University of Lesotho

Email: s.sepiriti@yahoo.com

Abstract

The motto associated with the Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho is that of “peace, rain and prosperity.” This phrase aligns with the historical connotation that King Moshoeshoe I, the founder of the Basotho nation, considered peace his sister. However, since Lesotho gained independence from the British in 1966, the Mountain Kingdom's peace has remained elusive. This is because Lesotho has faced several challenges, including incessant political instability. To this end, Lesotho has consistently remained on the Southern African Development Community (SADC) agenda over the years. Amongst the reasons for this persistent predicament is the country's poor leadership. Political leaders are accused of several atrocities, including corruption, nepotism, egoism, abuse of power and above all, lack of patriotism. The calibre of leaders reflects on the provision and relevance of Lesotho's education. This, therefore, calls for intervention strategies to address these challenges in the education sector. It is for this reason that this paper sought to study how the infusion of Botho philosophy in basic education could be used to recalibrate future leaders by instilling patriotism. Through this literature study, we argue that the inclusion of the principles of Botho philosophy in basic education can help Lesotho produce future leaders who are patriotic. The study concluded that when Botho philosophy is infused into education, the status quo of lack of patriotism, poor governance, and inadequate quality education can improve in Lesotho.

Keywords: Basic education, Botho philosophy, Future leaders, Patriotism, Political instability.

Introduction

Since her independence, Lesotho has experienced incessant political turmoil. The country's political instability has adversely affected the maintenance of order and peace. Due to recurring political instability, Lesotho remains on the Southern African Development Community (SADC) agenda to date (Phungula, 2020). These atrocities are a constant threat

to the economic development and general well-being of the Basotho. To this effect, Lesotho remains one of the least developed countries in the SADC region, surpassed by many including its peers Eswatini and Botswana. Amongst the reasons for this persistent predicament is the country's poor leadership. Political leaders are accused of several atrocities, including corruption, nepotism, egoism, abuse of power, and, above all, a lack of patriotism (Kali, 2020; Kapa, 2021; Mwangi, 2021; Pherudi, 2021; Pherudi, 2023). The calibre of leaders reflects on the provision and relevance of Lesotho's education. The current pandemonium in Lesotho leadership keeps on recurring despite the fundamental principles that founded the nation (Mlambo, 2021).

The foregoing challenges present a picture at odds with what the founder of the Basotho nation, King Moshoeshoe I, lived for and believed in. During King Moshoeshoe I's reign, despite many communities joining the bloodshed in nineteenth-century Southern Africa, which led to many being dislocated, he used diplomacy (Mofuoa, 2022). In an attempt to fortify the defence of his territory, King Moshoeshoe I welcomed communities who feared for their lives and relocated to Thaba-Bosiu. Through this strategy, many communities with different clans became unified and assumed a single identity: Basotho (Mokoena, 2024).

The current general individualism, dishonesty and moral decay evident amongst political leaders warrant the infusion of indigenous remedies to quash the leadership crisis confronting Lesotho. For this reason, this paper examines how infusing Botho's philosophical underpinnings into Lesotho's basic education can influence the recalibration of future leaders by instilling patriotism and social justice. Through this literature study, we argue that it is through the inclusion of the principles of Botho philosophy, such as unity, kindness, cooperation, care, respect and empathy in basic education, that Lesotho can produce future leaders who are patriotic and socially just. The need for social change is not only necessitated by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals but further by the Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy 2021 (hereafter LBECP 2021), which, amongst others, calls for learners to be provided with moral and spiritual foundation for nurturing of socially and culturally acceptable behaviours (Ministry of Education and Training, 2021).

Literature Review

Change of fortunes in the nineteenth century

Around 1800, there lived a young man named Lepoqo, the birth name of King Moshoeshoe I. Lepoqo was very ambitious but also overly aggressive and stubborn (du Preez, 2011; Ngale, 2021). Due to his aggression, it is reported that he killed five boys who disrespected him. The name Moshoeshoe, that the Basotho Africans and probably the entire globe now know, originated from a conflict. Upon returning from the initiation school (lebollo), Lepoqo and his other mates, assuming the name of Matlama, raided Chief Ramonaheng's territory and took with them so many cattle (Aerni-Flessner et al, 2024). Reports mention that Lepoqo praised himself for the triumph and said: "Ke 'na Moshoeshoe Moshashoaila oa ha Kali Lebeola le beotseng Ramonaheng Litelu" (Coplan, 1994, p. 32), which can be loosely translated as: "I am Moshoeshoe, the barber of Kali, the shaver that shaved the beard of Ramonaheng." This praise earned Lepoqo the affectionate name Moshoeshoe. For the purposes of this paper, King Moshoeshoe I will be referred to as Lepoqo. Despite the enormous triumph of the Matlama regiment, Mokhachane, who was Moshoeshoe's father, became worried. He feared that his son would not make a good leader when his time to lead the Ba Mokoteli arrived (du Preez, 2011). As a preparatory leadership program, King Moshoeshoe I was sent to receive further education and mentorship on chieftainship from Chief Mohlomi (Gosalia, 2021; Mofuoa, 2021).

At crossroads: Meeting Chief Mohlomi and building a nation from the ashes of Lifaqane unrests

Chief Mohlomi was born around 1720 at Fothane, near present-day Mashaeng (Fouriesburg) in the Free State Province of South Africa. Chief Mohlomi, besides being an exemplary leader (Mofuoa, 2021), was also a diviner, herbalist, and prophet, and a rainmaker who did not believe in witchcraft. Chief Mohlomi, being a wise man, sensed Moshoeshoe's alertness and gave him special attention. Chief Mohlomi, among others, taught King Moshoeshoe I to be empathetic and selfless (du Preez, 2011; Mofuoa, 2021). These teachings and interactions transformed the aggressive Moshoeshoe I into someone with a different perspective on life and on living in harmony with others. These transformative engagements

with Chief Mohlomi transformed King Moshoeshoe I from an aggressor to a protector, a diplomat, a strategist, and a nation builder, amongst others.

However, around 1823, just after King Moshoeshoe I began his chieftainship, the Lifaqane conflicts began. They caused unprecedented unrest throughout the Southern African region. Around the same time, Moshoeshoe's village was attacked by the Botlokoa under a great leader and a female warrior named 'Manthatsi. Instead of retaliating, King Moshoeshoe I decided not to take part in the bloodshed, but relocated to a natural mountain fortress, a virtually impenetrable flat-topped mountain, later to be referred to as Thaba Bosiu (du Preez, 2011; Prozesky, 2016). Unlike those terrorising each other, he built the Basotho nation we know today from the ashes of the *Lifaqane* wars. He welcomed refugees irrespective of their background (du Preez, 2011). Heeding the advice of Chief Mohlomi, he developed into a great king. King Moshoeshoe I founded his nation through persuasion, protection, prosperity, diplomacy, inclusiveness, forgiveness (an example of his forgiving spirit was seen when he forgave the cannibals that ate his grandfather, Peete), democracy (khotla and lipitso), empowerment (matsema and mafisa) and ethical leadership (Mofuoa, 2022; Prozesky, 2016). King Moshoeshoe I was helped by Chief Mohlomi to choose a different cause of action in his leadership journey. While many kings were fighting for power and dominance, King Mopshoeshoe I chose to fight for oneness, empowerment and prosperity of his nation.

What went wrong? The calibre of political leaders and lessons for future leaders

The legacy of Peace, Prosperity and Rain left for the Basotho nation by King Moshoeshoe I did not last long. This is because, during the dawn of politics among the Basotho, an array of problems associated with the conduct of politicians emerged. To this end, political instability in Lesotho dates back to the pre-colonial era. The first national assembly elections held in 1965 (a year prior to independence) already displayed signs of political turmoil and intolerance due to the hatred between the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP) and the Basutoland National Party (BNP) (Matlosa, 1997).

The 1970 national assembly elections were the first held in independent Lesotho. However, the ruling BNP was defeated by the opposition BCP (Khaketla, 1992).

Consequently, the BNP leader refused to relinquish power and instead declared a state of emergency (qomatsi) and suspended the constitution (Makoa, 2004).

The BNP-led government subsequently collapsed in 1986 through a military coup (Mahao, 1997). The 1986 military coup was allegedly to have been sponsored by the apartheid government of South Africa (Matlosa & Pule, 2001) for fear that Lesotho was becoming a military base for the banned African National Congress (ANC). Thus, Lesotho reverted to a democratic dispensation through the 1993 national assembly elections, which were won by the BCP in a clean sweep (Kapa, 2013).

However, the democratically elected BCP government was toppled in 1994 in what was referred to as a palace coup (Letshele, 2012). The name of the coup came about because it was orchestrated by King Letsie III because of the tensions between him and the incumbent government, caused by the government's failure to reinstate King Moshoeshoe II (King Letsie III's father) to the throne (Monyane, 2009) after he had been dethroned by the military junta in 1990.

Furthermore, the BCP government faced another major hurdle in 1997 when its leader and the then Prime Minister decided to cross the floor in Parliament and form a new political party, the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) (Sekatle, 1997). The formation of the LCD in parliament caused a lot of confusion amongst the Basotho. It was in this state of confusion that Lesotho held its second democratic polls in 1998. The 1998 elections were highly contested and the LCD won the 79 out of 80 constituencies (Rakhare, 2019). Conversely, the opposition parties did not accept the election results and carried out nationwide mass demonstrations, including rioting, looting, and burning of some towns in Lesotho to express their dissatisfaction (Matlosa, 1999; Weisfelder, 2015).

In a turn of events in 2002, Lesotho experienced a measure of serenity in the political space after many years of turmoil. For the first time, the democratic dispensation, national assembly elections were held under the mixed-member model instead of the first-past-the-post model that was said to cause problems (Makoa, 2005).

Conversely, in 2012, the mixed membership model brought a new challenge when no party garnered enough seats to rule alone. This then brought about a shift from a one-party

government to a coalition government. However, history was made Africa South of the Zambezi when the leader of DC voluntarily and peacefully handed over power to the new coalition government led by the All Basotho Convention (ABC) (Weisfelder, 2015):

Nonetheless, the seemingly peaceful handover of power from the DC to the ABC-led coalition proved to be a farce, as in 2015, Lesotho was back to elections again after its immature collapse. The downfall of the 2012 government was caused by unresolved conflicts between the Prime Minister and his deputy (Letsie, 2015).

Additionally, in 2015, a new coalition government, now led by the successor to the 2012 coalition, was formed (Weisfelder, 2015). Similar to the 2012 coalition, the 2015 coalition government did not last long because of a conflict that arose within the ranks of the DC in 2017. The conflict led to the formation of a splinter party, the Alliance of Democrats (AD), whose leader was the former deputy leader of DC (Likoti, 2021). The breakdown that led to the formation of AD also prompted parliamentarians to pass a motion of no confidence against the DC-led coalition government (Nongwazana, 2022). The motion was a success, but instead of handing over power in parliament, the then Prime Minister advised the king to dissolve parliament and call elections. Following the 2017 elections, a new coalition led by ABC was formed.

Conversely, in May 2020, the parliament of Lesotho outlawed and stripped the sitting prime minister of the power to dissolve parliament when a motion of no confidence had been passed against him/her. This resulted in the ninth amendment of the Constitution of Lesotho, 1993 (notoriously known as the Kotopo law) (Ntsonyane, 2024). Because of this amendment, the leader of ABC and the Prime Minister resigned in 2020, and Dr Moeketsi Majoro became the new Prime Minister (Likoti, 2021). Nonetheless, in 2023, when parliamentarians moved for a vote of no confidence against Prime Minister Ntsokoane Matekane, who assumed office after the October 2022 elections, a Member of Parliament for the Thaba Moea constituency filed an application in the Constitutional Court to challenge the constitutionality of the ninth amendment. The Constitutional Court declared the amendment unconstitutional. The opposition parties challenged the Constitutional Court's ruling in the Appeal Court and lost the case (Tsiane, 2023).

In a nutshell, the foregoing paragraphs detail the political context that influences even the development and implementation of education policies in the Lesotho education sector.

The political turmoil chronicled in the preceding presentation provides the context within which the Lesotho education system operates. Moreover, frequent changes in government are seen as promoting a culture of corruption. Senior government officials (including those in education) are appointed along party lines, making them susceptible to corruption (Rakolobe, 2019). Corruption and political instability are among the contextual factors that hinder the effective implementation of education policies in Lesotho (Rakolobe & Teise, 2024). The context also refers to the environment in which future leaders are moulded in Lesotho.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework in which this study is couched is that of the Botho Philosophy. We chose the Botho Philosophy for its principles and lessons that King Moshoeshoe I learned from Chief Mohlomi in his quest to build the Basotho nation.

The Botho philosophy

According to Mahlatsi (2017), the prefix ‘Bo’ and suffix ‘tho’ originated in the Sesotho language. Botho is a philosophical underpinning that aims to preserve indigenous knowledge systems that have informed the way of life in African communities over the years (Ketsitlile, 2012; Lephoto, 2023). Botho's philosophy is conceptualised as a framework that describes human dependence and interdependence (Mahlatsi, 2017). Botho philosophy is grounded in humanistic values and principles of unity, kindness, cooperation, care, respect and empathy (Lephoto, 2023; Tlali & Sepiriti, 2023). Botho Philosophy is a theoretical lens that advocates communal living over individualism (Tlali & Sepiriti, 2023). It further describes the interconnections between and among individuals (Resane, 2022). In simpler terms, Botho is conceptualised as ‘I am because you are’ (Mokuku, 2016). These are some of the basic principles that King Moshoeshoe I incorporated into his efforts to assemble the Basotho nation. These principles earned him the title of one of the most ethical and patriotic leaders of his time.

The Botho philosophy as a transformative pedagogy

With the Global Agenda on Sustainability, schools are expected to reinvent themselves as advocates of social change and accountability (Diko, 2023; Küfeoğlu, 2022).

Lesotho's commitment to the global agenda is reinforced by the newly enacted Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy 2021 (LBECP, 2021). Amongst others, the policy aims to equip learners with the ethical and spiritual foundation necessary for the acquisition and enhancement of socially and culturally acceptable conduct. The policy further aims to provide learners with opportunities to actively participate in various activities intended to promote democratic engagement, human rights, responsibilities, and other contemporary societal issues (Ministry of Education and Training, 2021). These aims advocate for social change. For the desired change to be realised, teachers, in particular, should play a leading role. Teachers are at the heart of the provision of education and their proximity undoubtedly nominates them as luminaries in influencing social change. This study advocates adopting more humanistic pedagogical approaches.

To this end, the Botho-inspired pedagogies are grounded in care, compassion, inclusiveness, forgiveness, and empathy (Lephoto, 2023; Tlali & Sepiriti, 2023). These virtues were exemplified by the leadership of King Moshoeshoe I during the trying times of Lifaqane in the nineteenth century. The premise is substantive in this study because it is believed that the manner in which learners are treated in schools is most likely to manifest later in their lives. The Botho philosophy will impart more than planned content but also further instil the spirit of community belonging, ethical engagement, and patriotism (Tlali & Sepiriti, 2023). Botho's philosophy is considered an indigenous remedy for the country's present leadership crisis. Schools as a system should influence leaders' conduct. To call to produce leaders who shall prioritise the needs of the Basotho nation should be spearheaded by the schools. The efforts to bring about change should begin in the classrooms. The pedagogies used should help learners develop competencies such as respect, teamwork, empathy, and care. As a consequence, teachers should infuse the principles of Botho as they interact with learners in their different subject areas. Botho-inspired teacher-learner interactions must culminate in the promotion of ethical leadership and patriotism amongst learners who are future leaders of the country. The argument raised in this paper is that daily school praxis should reform society and its priorities.

Conclusion

This paper discussed the legacy of Peace, Rain and Prosperity as envisaged by King Moshoeshoe I. The principles taught to King Moshoeshoe I by Chief Mohlomi serve as a basis for examining what the Basotho society should have been shaped like. We also interrogate the roles of political turmoil and politicians in the destruction of Moshoeshoe I's legacy. Recommendations are also made on how basic education can be used to recalibrate future leaders in Lesotho by infusing the Basotho philosophy to promote patriotism.

Limitations

This study is primarily a conceptual paper that does not engage in empirical research. This is a limitation, as obtaining the opinions of relevant stakeholders, particularly those with decision-making power in the education sector, would have broadened the scope of engagement.

References

- Aerni-Flessner, J., Fogelman, C. & Mokoena-Mokhali, N. (2024). *Historical Dictionary of Lesotho*. Third Edition. Rowman & Littlefield, <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781538187685/Historical-Dictionary-of-Lesotho-Third-Edition>
- Coplan, D.B. (1994). *In the time of cannibals: The word music of South Africa's Basotho migrants*. University of Chicago Press, <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/I/bo3641027.html>
- Diko, M. 2023. Harnessing the power of education for social change, *Social and Humanities* 5, 41-53.
- Du Preez, M. 2011. The Socrates of Africa and his students: A case study of pre-colonial *African leadership*. *Leadership*, 8(1), 7-15. Doi:10.1177/1742715011426955
- Gosalia, S. (2021). Basotho Tribe. *International Journal of Science and Research*, 10(2), 409413. DOI:10.21275/SR21205163819

- Kali, M. (2020). Political parties and politics of identity: digging up dirt on African leaders, *Journal for Creativity, Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship*, 4(2), 22–38, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361866198_Political_Parties_and_Ethnicity_in_African_Countries_An_Issue_of_Representation
- Kapa, M. (2013). *Lesotho: Political participation and democracy*. Open Society Foundation, <https://archive.ids.ac.uk/eldis/document/A70441.html>
- Kapa, M. (2021). Public participation exercise in Lesotho's parliamentary reform process: Of what value? In 'Nyane, H. & Kapa, M.A. (Eds.). *Coalition Politics in Lesotho: A Multi-Disciplinary Study of Coalitions and their Implications for Governance*, pp. 249–268, <https://ajie.atsis.uq.edu.au/ajie/article/download/86/27>
- Ketsitlile, L. (2012). An integrative review of the state of Botswana's indigenous literacy and formal schooling education. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 41(2), 218–228.
- Matlosa, K. & Pule, N.W. (2001). The military in Lesotho, *African Security Review*, 10(2), 62–74, DOI: 10.1080/10246029.2001.9627937
- Lephoto, M, N, R. (2023). Botho“ African Philosophy as an indigenous resource for developing resilience and wellbeing protective factors in schools: towards psychosocial learning environments in Lesotho. *Journal of African Education*, 4(1), 355–375. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31920/2633-2930/2023/v4n1a15>
- Letshele, L.M. (2012). *A critical analysis of the recurrence of coups in the Kingdom of Lesotho – 1970-2014* Master's Dissertation. Johannesburg: University of Johannesburg. Available from: <http://hdl.handle.net/102000/0002>
- Letsie, T.W. (2015). Lesotho's February 2015 snap elections: A prescription that never cured sickness. *Journal of African Elections*, 14(2), 81–110.
- Likoti, F. (2021). The impact of coalition politics on political parties' ideologies in Lesotho, 2012-2020. In 'Nyane, H. & Kapa, M.A. (Eds.). *Coalition politics in Lesotho: a multi-disciplinary study of coalitions and their implications for governance*, Africa Sun Media, pp.157-176

- Mahao, N. (1997). The 1993 election and the challenges for the development for constitutionalism in Lesotho, *Lesotho Social Science Review*, 3(2), 1–13, https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/articles/journal_contribution/The_1993_Election_and_the_Challenges_for_the_Development_of_Constitutionalism_in_Lesotho/26455549
- Mahlatsi, M. (2017). Botho/Ubuntu philosophy: Education from childhood to adulthood in Africa. *International Journal of Scientific and Technology Research*, 6(8), 94-98, <https://www.ijstr.org/final-print/aug2017/BothoUbuntu-Philosophy-Education-From-Childhood-To-Adulthood-In-Africa.pdf>
- Makoa, F. K. (2005). Lesotho. *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 12(1), 61-76, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10220460509556749>
- Matlosa, K. (1997). Political instability and elections: A case study of Lesotho. *Lesotho Social Science Review*, 3(2), 93-104, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/29179684.pdf>
- Matlosa, K. (1999). Conflict and conflict management: Lesotho's political crisis after the 1998 election. *Lesotho Social Science Review*, 5(1), 163-196.
- Ministry of Education and Training. (2021). *Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy 2021*. Government Printing.
- Mlambo, D. N. (2021). A kingdom with many internal facets: power, politics and instability in a post-colonial state. Ramifications for public stability. *Ramifications for public stability (November 30, 2021)*. *EUREKA: Social and Humanities*, (6), 79–90, <http://journal.eu-jr.eu/social/article/view/2161>
- Mofuoa, K & Khau, M. (2022). Rethinking constructions of difference: Lessons from Lesotho's Chief Mohlomi's activism against the gendering of witchcraft. *Educational Research for Social Change*, 11(1), 72–81. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2221-4070/2022/v11i1a6>.
- Mofuoa, K. (2022). A Mosotho model of ethical leadership. *The international Journal of Ethical Leadership*, 9(1), 64-81.
- Mofuoa, K. (2021). Chief Mohlomi: A Mosotho model of ethics and morality in public administration and governance. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, 11(1), 128-143, <https://ideas.repec.org/a/mth/jpag88/v11y2021i1p128-143.html>.

- Mofuoa, K. V. (2015). The exemplary ethical leadership of King Moshoeshoe of the Basotho of Lesotho in the nineteenth-century Southern Africa. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, 5(3), 21-35.
- Mokoena, N. (2024). *Thaba-Bosiu, the birthplace of the Basotho nation: a historical archaeological study*. Doctoral Thesis, University of Cape Town, <https://open.uct.ac.za/items/b253d06c-5e60-4684-b5f3-1b838455c14e>.
- Mokuku, T. (2016). The connotations of Botho Philosophy and its potential contributions towards environmental conservation: The case of the Tlokoeng community in Lesotho. *Environmental Education Research*, 1–20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2016.1160274>.
- Monyane, C. (2009). *The kingdom of Lesotho: An assessment of problems in democratic consolidation* (Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University), <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/37319062.pdf>
- Mwangi, O. G. (2021). Conceptual and theoretical approaches to coalitions in parliamentary democracies. In 'Nyane, H. & Kapa, M.A. (Eds.). *Coalition Politics in Lesotho: A Multi-Disciplinary Study of Coalitions and their Implications for Governance*, pp. 13-27.
- Ngale, I.F. (2021). King Moshoeshoe's autotelic personality leadership style: A conflict resolution model in a world in flux. *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies*. 8(4), 27-35. DOI:<https://doi.org/10.22259/2694-6296.0804003>.
- Ngozwana, N. (2022). Original Paper: The trajectory of contemporary governance in Lesotho: A transition towards coalition government. *Journal of Education, Teaching and Social Sciences*, 4(4), 35-50, <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/jetss.v4n4p35>.
- Pherudi, M. (2021). Tracing reasons for collapse of coalition governments in Lesotho, 2021-2020. In 'Nyane, H. & Kapa, M.A. (Eds.). *Coalition Politics in Lesotho: A Multi-Disciplinary Study of Coalitions and their Implications for Governance*, pp. 199-223.
- Pherudi, M. (2022). Political instability in Lesotho: Causes and possible remedies. *Pula: Botswana Journal of African Studies*, 34, 80–92, <https://journals.ub.bw/index.php/pula/article/view/2140>.

- Pherudi, M. (2023). The abuse of a motion of no confidence in Lesotho: Triggers and impact. *Conflict Trends*, 2023(3), 3-11, <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-abuse-of-a-motion-of-no-confidence-in-lesotho-triggers-and-impact/>.
- Phungula, N. P. (2020). *An assessment of the SADC conflict transformation capacity in the context of the recurring conflict in Lesotho 1998-2018: towards a conflict transformation model* (Doctoral dissertation), University of KwaZulu Natal, <https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/items/27ebb5f7-7246-42f0-a160-8a040b872f95>.
- Prozesky, M. (2016). Ethical leadership resources in Southern Africa's Sesotho speaking culture and King Moshoes I. *Journal of Global Ethics*, 12(1), 6–16. Doi:10.1080/17449626.2016.1146789.
- Rakhare, M. (2019). *Exploring the role of political parties and party systems on democracy in Lesotho* (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Free State), <https://scholar.ufs.ac.za/bitstreams/244fd06a-27bf-4863-ab9b-8a02ecb8fbe0/download>.
- Rakolobe, K.A. & Teise, K.L. (2024). Contextual factors obstructing the effective implementation of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy in the Lesotho education sector. *Research in Educational Policy and Management*, 6(1), 52-71, <https://repamjournal.org/index.php/REPAM/article/view/128>.
- Rakolobe, M. (2019). Politicised public service and the corruption in Lesotho. *The Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, 41(1), https://upjournals.up.ac.za/index.php/strategic_review/article/view/238.
- Resane, K.T. (2022). Theology and Botho/Ubuntu in dialogue towards South African social cohesion. *Theological Studies*, 78(4), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7677>.
- Sekatle, P. (1997). The establishment of Lesotho Congress for Democracy: Implications for the 1998 general election. *Lesotho Social Science Review*, 3(2), 69-92, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/29179691.pdf>.
- Tlali, T. & Sepiriti, S. (2023). African indigenous perspectives for reinforcing moral education among the Lesotho secondary school learners, *Indilinga-African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 22(2), 186-203.

Weisfelder, R. F. (2015). Free elections and political instability in Lesotho. *Journal of African elections*, 14(2), 50-80, <https://www.eisa.org/pdf/JAE14.2Weisfelder.pdf>.

***Language and Epistemic Justice: Exploring the Perceptions and Experiences
of Lesotho Science Teachers on the Use of Indigenous Languages in Teaching
and Learning***

Lereko G. Mohafa¹ and Tšepo Mokuku²

Department of Science Education¹, National University of Lesotho

Email: lgmohafa@gmail.com

Department of Science Education², National University of Lesotho

Email: tmokuku@yahoo.com

Abstract

As Lesotho engages in its bicentennial celebrations, we note that the low academic status given to the local languages, such as Sesotho, in classrooms, remains a tenacious epistemic justice concern. Yet, there is overwhelming evidence around the world, particularly in countries of East and parts of Europe, that science and technological advancements can be effectively attained in citizens' mother tongue. Through qualitative methods, this study sought to explore the perceptions and experiences of science teachers about the use of indigenous languages in teaching and learning. The primary research question guiding this study was: What are the perceptions and experiences of Lesotho secondary science teachers regarding the use of indigenous languages in science teaching and learning? Twelve science teachers conveniently sampled participated in the study. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaire and interviews. Thematic analysis revealed teachers' positive perceptions on the use of learners' first language for teaching and learning, but had minimal teaching experience with Sesotho, due to policies and resource constraints. This study concludes that science teachers' acknowledge potential value of indigenous languages although policies and resource constraints remain significant barriers. The recommendation is that policies should recognize indigenous languages and resources be made available and accessible.

Keywords: Science teachers' perceptions and experiences, indigenous languages, teaching and learning, epistemic justice, policy and practice.

Introduction

The indigenous languages, such as Sesotho, as an embodiment of knowledge and culture have been key to the formation and development of the nation over the now celebrated two centuries of its existence. With the dawn of the formalised system of education, epistemic

injustice set it (Babu et al., 2025; McKinley, 2005), as the colonial language, English, dominated and Sesotho and other indigenous languages devalued. Epistemic injustice in terms of knowledge and curriculum concerns issues of knowledge construction and production as a social practice underpinned by “democratic ideals of equality, equity, fairness, inclusivity, individual dignity, basic human rights” (Babu et al., 2025). The liberty to use ones’ own language for knowledge construction in learning environments, is fundamental to epistemic justice.

The use of indigenous languages in science for effective teaching and learning, in post-colonial environments, has been the subject of growing investigation in educational discourse, particularly within the context of decolonizing curricula (Etuk & Ibuot, 2024). “Broadly defined, an Indigenous language is any language that is “native” to a particular area” (Walsh, 2005, p.294). Language plays a crucial role in the transmission of knowledge and culture (Khan, 2014). In many postcolonial contexts, the dominance of Western languages in education perpetuates colonial hierarchies and delegitimizes indigenous languages (e.g. see Shizha, 2007; Rakolobe, 2024; Chebanne, & Kewagamang, 2020; Tlali, 2018; Mokuku, 2021). The decolonial scholars argue that language is not merely a tool for communication but also a means of constructing knowledge, a drive for developments anchored in culturally relevant practices and ensuring social interactions and cohesion (Khan, 2014). Language plays a crucial role in promotion, sharing and protection of cultural knowledge and practices. Moreover, it gives people a sense of belonging, pride and identity, self-worth and how they make meanings of the world (; Khan, 2014; McKinley; 2005). Cultural ontologies, epistemologies and heritage can be spared from hegemonic cultural erasure and cultural assimilation when indigenous languages are made part of schools’ curriculum (McKinley, 2005). McKinley (2005) asks a very critical rhetorical question,

‘What do we lose when a language is gone?’ The answer is everything. ... Culture cannot stand by itself and thrive, therefore the contexts used in science education classrooms without language will wither and petrify both the knowledge and the people it comes from. (p.234)

From McKinley’s assertions, the intertwined relationship of language and ways of producing knowledge within cultural contexts is evident. Therefore, science education faces a critical challenge to ensure sustainability and conservation of cultural knowledge and practices. It is against this background that decoloniality of knowledge, ways of knowing and

language calls among others the recognition and use of indigenous languages for the social practice of knowledge construction in teaching and learning (Etuk & Ibuot, 2024; Kamwangamalu, 2013). It is argued that with the use of the learners' first language, they will appreciate science and relate it more with their real-life experiences (Manyike & Shava, 2018) and that their academic performance potential is enhanced (Shizha, 2012; Nomlomo & Mbekwa, 2013). However, there are some critiques about the use of indigenous languages in science classrooms. Some indigenous languages lack extensive vocabulary for scientific terms (Mavuru & Ramnarain, 2020) and lack of resources (Msila, 2021) which pose challenges for students and teachers. Some studies point out to the fact that colonial languages have attained international recognition and standards, therefore, learners need to use them in order to participate in global knowledge economy (Shizha, 2007). As a result, some countries like Lesotho make some investments on foreign languages like French with a view that they are 'languages of economy and development' (Makumane & Ngcobo, 2018) and will therefore help to economically advance the country.

While these critiques about indigenous languages point to essential considerations, there are some cases where reliance on foreign languages promotes and sustains coloniality in education. Such practices unfairly exclude indigenous languages from the mainstream education, thus perpetuating a form of epistemic injustice, cultural erasure and cultural assimilation among others (McKinley, 2005). For instance, in the context of this study, Lesotho, the education system and frameworks of operation exemplify and uphold elements of the legacy of coloniality (e.g. see Tlali, 2018; Mokuku, 2021; Kolobe & Matsoso, 2021; Ngcobo et al., 2023; Rakolobe, 2024). Policy documents, the curriculum and assessment policy (CAP) of 2009 (Ministry of Education and Training, 2009) and the newly published Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy (LBECP) 2021 (Ministry of Education and Training, 2021) explicitly outline that English should be the medium of instruction from grade 4 upwards and mother tongue for lower grades. There is almost no visible provision for other languages, in these key policy documents, except to acknowledge that they are present. Similar to CAP (2009), LBECP (2021) makes no obvious change than to reinforce what was in the old policy. LBECP (2021) tries to elucidate the concept of "mother tongue," which had remained ambiguously defined in the previous policy. The updated interpretation specifies that "mother tongue" "...encompass all indigenous languages namely, Sesotho,

Sign language and Nguni languages (isi-Xhosa, isiPhuthi and isiNdebele)” (Ministry of Education and Training, p.16). In addition to highlighting existence of the mentioned indigenous languages, some plans such as the Education Sector Strategic Plan (2005-2015) were drafted by the Ministry of Education and Training where a proposal was made to “develop policy guidelines on inclusive education, focusing on how best to integrate learners with special needs, indigenous language minorities and religious minorities. The Guidelines shall serve as the point of reference to all interveners in the school system” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2005, p.49).

While these resolutions and initiatives may sound plausible and considered a breakthrough in the education system of a nation that has overcome political colonisation in the 1960s, they raise some epistemic concerns. For instance, teacher training institutions are currently preparing teachers for the teaching of one indigenous language, Sesotho. Secondly, the basis of emphasis on indigenous languages characterized as ‘minority’ is unclear given that Sesotho itself, the dominant indigenous language, is not recognised as an academic language, despite it being granted an official language status. Anecdotal evidence show that all education policies and syllabi (including Sesotho syllabus) are available in English language. Lesotho participated in several initiatives geared towards de-colonization of curriculum dating back to many decades. For instance, Lesotho was part of the Harare Declaration of 1997 where some African countries pledged to review their policies so that indigenous languages become recognized and used in classrooms (Chimhundu, 1997). But progress remains sluggish and is hindered by unresolved or indeterminate issues. Furthermore, research on science and indigenous languages in Lesotho context is very limited and it is unlikely that language related policies are well informed by empirical data. Therefore, this study aims to explore science teachers' perceptions and experiences about the use of indigenous languages in teaching and learning. It seeks to identify the challenges teachers face, the benefits they perceive, and how these perceptions influence their instructional practices. It is envisaged that the study provides some valuable insights for both policy and practice regarding teaching and learning of science through indigenous languages. The primary research question answered in this study is: What are the perceptions and experiences of Lesotho secondary science teachers regarding the use of indigenous languages in science teaching and learning?

Decolonial perspectives and Education

This study is informed by decoloniality conceptions and perspectives which unveil the adverse effects of colonialism, its legacies and advocate for a transformative change (Mignolo, 2011). Decolonial perspectives foregrounds advocacy to addresses the lingering effects of colonialism on knowledge production, power structures, and cultural identity (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2011). For instance, decoloniality unapologetically rejects '*coloniality of power*', '*coloniality of being*' (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 242), and the '*Geo-politics of knowledge*' (Mignolo, 2011). Decoloniality emphasizes acceptance and respect of human diversity in all aspects, and therefore, an "epistemological decolonization, as decoloniality, is needed to clear the way for new intercultural communication, for an interchange of experiences and meanings, as the basis of another rationality which may legitimately pretend to some universality" (Quijano, 2007, p. 177) among others. Coloniality of power promotes hierarchical classifications of people in terms of race, work and knowledge (Quijano, 2007). These classifications often regard colonizers and affiliates as superior, more entitled to make decisions at the expense of other groups (Quijano, 2000). Geo-politics of knowledge, like colonial power, recognizes Westernised knowledge as rational, scientific, and of international status to promote 'modernization', while non-Westernised knowledge is regarded as traditional and of less significance to global knowledge and modernity (Mignolo, 2002; Quijano, 2007). In some extreme cases, colonialism and its associated practices pushed an agenda to "dehumanize and exploit" other people such that their lived culture, identity, and race were regarded as inferior (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

Decoloniality provides a language to respond to the deleterious and dehumanizing effects of Eurocentric modernity. For instance, it argues for acknowledgement and respects that many world views exist, and none should have superior status at the expense of others (Quijano, 2007). In addition, there is a need to foster "...social liberation from all power organized as inequality, discrimination, exploitation, and as domination" (Quijano, 2007, p178). Scholars like Mignolo (2011) assert that all the different ways of knowing are as important as established western ways of knowing. Therefore, they have to be respected and accepted without reservations and that there is need for "... decolonizing knowledge and decolonial knowledge-making, delinking from the web of imperial/modern knowledge and

from the colonial matrix of power” (Mignolo, 2009, p.178). Since creation of knowledge has close relationship with language, it can be argued that de-colonisation of ways of knowing need to be coupled with decolonisation of languages used in creation of knowledge (Khan, 2014). When indigenous languages are used and recognised, citizens are empowered to showcase their creativity and innovations. As a result, promotion and conservation of indigenous knowledge practices can be made possible (Alexander, 1999).

Even though coloniality cuts across almost all spheres of life, this study is limited to knowledge construction, in relation to educators’ perceptions and experiences on the use of indigenous languages in science classrooms. The national language policies that guide the language used in science classrooms are essential, considering that language does not just serve as a means for communication but also a means of constructing knowledge and facilitating social interactions (Khan, 2014) and a “cultural way of expressing oneself” (Mavuru & Ramnarain, 2020, p.16). Additionally, all languages are important and their preservation has a close relationship with human culture and existence (Chebanne & Kewagamang, 2020). Moreover, Rosebery et al. (1992, p. 64) asserted that “Language (talk, reading, and writing) plays an equally crucial, mediating role in collaborative inquiry as a system both for thinking and talking scientifically and for communicating and sharing ideas”, and this is echoed by Mavuru and Ramnarain (2020). Furthermore, a philosophy such as constructivism and sociocultural theory demonstrate that active learning happens when learners participate in classroom activities where language enable interactions, construction of knowledge, meaning making and expression of the worldviews (Cakir, 2008). Yet the researchers have observed that the use of English in schools tends to inhibit the required communication for meaningful learning of science and mathematics. This study, therefore, aligns itself with the assumption that meaningful and relevant teaching and learning of science requires a decolonial perspectives, wherein learners are liberated from an epistemic injustice of a constraining and dehumanising learning environment of a second language.

Indigenous Languages in Science Education

Science education has traditionally been framed within the paradigms of Western science, which often ignores or devalues indigenous knowledge. Scholars have varying views about the use of indigenous languages in science classrooms. For instance, there are some studies which show that indigenous languages have a potential to bring some challenges in the teaching and learning of science (e.g. see Mavuru & Ramnarain, 2020). In the same dimension, some science teachers hold beliefs that historically colonial languages such as English have been well established to communicate scientific issues globally and therefore students should be taught in English (Shizha, 2007). Moreover, English has achieved an important status of being an international language, and therefore, using indigenous languages might deny students a chance to develop necessary proficiency in English (Shizha, 2007). As a result, indigenous languages may limit citizens from being economically productive on global stages (McKinley; 2005). Msimanga and Lelliott (2014) also acknowledge that English language is important to learners. Furthermore, some literature shows that some governments are sceptical to fully support the use of indigenous languages in science classrooms because of heavy money and resources investments they have to make (McKinley, 2005). But Shizha (2012) made a counter recommendation that, in order to ensure that students still participate in global issues where English is a medium of communication, they need to study English as a subject in schools. The challenges of using indigenous languages are compounded by lack of teaching and learning resources such as textbooks (Shizha, 2007).

On the contrary, advocates of decoloniality support the understanding that indigenous knowledges, language included, have many positive contributions to learning. For instance, “Indigenous languages capture and transmit the knowledge and wisdom of indigenous communities through stories, proverbs, folktales, myths, poetry and songs that convey meanings about individuals, society, culture and nature interactions” (Manyike & Shava, 2018, p. 37). Language plays a role in how people learn about their identities; culture and it also enables knowledge and cultural practices to be handed down from generation to generation. This is why it is important to preserve the multiple languages in the world (Ademowo, 2010; Shizha, 2012). People have variations in terms of creativity and innovative ideas which can be promoted when indigenous languages are used in classrooms (Manyike

& Shava, 2018) and beyond (Alevander, 1999). Taking advantage of people's diversity in what they are capable of doing, their indigenous practices and their languages, therefore, acknowledge inclusiveness in classrooms and establish relevance of education. Language creates an environment where students connect their practices and experiences to what they learn in schools (Manyike & Shava, 2018). Academic performance of learners improves when they master the language of instruction as they are able to engage in high cognitive processes (Ademowo, 2010; Nomlomo & Mbekwa, 2013). Inclusive learning, that recognises diversity of languages and cultures, goes beyond classroom context, to wider community where every citizen will be able to acquire scientific literacy in order to contribute to development and economy (Nomlomo & Mbekwa, 2013). In a similar dimension, some contemporary global challenges can be addressed through indigenous knowledge systems embedded in indigenous languages (Chiblow & Meighan, 2022).

Teachers' Perceptions and experiences with indigenous languages in science classrooms

Teachers play a central role in mediating the curriculum and shaping classroom practices. Their perceptions and experiences of the use of indigenous languages in science teaching are critical to understanding the possibilities and challenges of implementing a decolonial approaches that facilitate meaningful knowledge construction, in education. Studies have highlighted both affordances and constraints of indigenous languages in science classrooms (e.g. see Shizha, 2012; Mavuru & Ramnarain, 2020; Msila, 2021).

When learners are taught through their indigenous languages, they are able to establish connection between scientific concepts and their life-experiences. Moreover, learners become more actively engaged in classroom activities, collaborate with minimal language barriers (Nomlomo & Mbekwa, 2013; Msimanga & Lelliott, 2014; Msila, 2021) and develop deeper understanding of scientific concepts (Mavuru & Ramnarain, 2020). Some teachers have taken advantage of indigenous languages to shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered teaching and learning approaches (Msila, 2021) which have promoted productive interactions, critique, arguments and inquiry activities (Mavuru & Ramnarain, 2020). Multilingual classrooms contribute to inclusive education and ensure that the majority acquire scientific literacy (Nomlomo & Mbekwa, 2013; Msila, 2021). Indigenous languages enhance learners' self-efficacy, curiosity and appreciation of science as part of their lives

(Shizha, 2012). Moreover, positive attitudes of learners towards learning are also enhanced when learners are “...more relaxed, happier, have a better understanding of the subjects taught and therefore responds positively to the teachers’ questions” (Ademowo, 2010, p. 65).

Despite the obvious affordances of use of indigenous languages in science classrooms, scholars highlight essential points of caution. For instance, Msila (2021) study participants asserted that they felt less prepared to design and facilitate lessons through isixhoza. Lack of scientific and technology vocabulary registers make it challenging to fully take advantage of indigenous languages in science classrooms (Mavuru & Ramnarain, 2020). Challenges imposed by scarcity of resources tailored for use alongside indigenous languages remain significant (Msila, 2021). Nomlomo and Mbekwa (2013) study showed that sometimes lack of equivalent words for specialised scientific terminologies in indigenous languages pose challenges in classrooms such as misunderstandings and possibility of promoting misconceptions. Furthermore, regional differences in terms of how words meaning the same thing are pronounced add to the challenges. In some cases, one word means many different things (Nomlomo & Mbekwa, 2013). Teachers are aware of affordances of indigenous languages in science classrooms, but are left with limited options to adopt, such as translation (Msila, 2021), code-switching (Shizha, 2012; Mavuru & Ramnarain, 2020) etc. Teachers cannot fully embrace indigenous languages in science classrooms due to policies constraints, lack of support and political will from government officials which still maintain English and others as media of instruction and assessment (Shizha, 2012; Msila, 2021).

As a way to mitigate some of the challenges associated with indigenous languages, teacher formations and all stakeholders should work together to devise means to improve efficacy of indigenous languages in teaching and learning (Shizha, 2012; Msila, 2021). Development of scientific and technology vocabulary registers with help of experts can contribute to efficacy of indigenous languages in science classrooms (Nomlomo & Mbekwa, 2013). Alongside development of vocabulary, teaching and learning aids based on indigenous languages need to be developed (Shizha, 2012). Removal of policy constraints which promote post-colonial languages as a means of instruction and assessment can facilitate inclusion of indigenous languages in mainstream education practices (Msila, 2021). Equally important, teachers need to be prepared and supported through professional development

initiatives so that they acquire skills on adopting indigenous languages in science classrooms (Shizha, 2007; Nomlomo & Mbekwa, 2013).

Methodology

This study adopted qualitative methods for in-depth understanding of science teachers' perceptions and experiences about use of indigenous languages in the classroom. "Qualitative methods help provide rich descriptions of phenomena. They enhance understanding of the context of events as well as the events themselves" (Sofaer, 1999). For this study, indigenous language use teaching and learning was a central focus in the context of science. Therefore, qualitative methods were found most appropriate.

Sample

The sample of this study was 12 science teachers from different schools in Lesotho. Invitation to participate was shared through social media forums of science teachers. Teachers who granted their consent were then engaged in further communication about the aims of the study and how their views and experiences would be used. The sample was adequate and suitable for the achievement the objectives of the study since it was made up of teachers who are currently teaching sciences (Biology, Chemistry and Physics) in Lesotho secondary schools. The profile of the sample of the teachers is provided in Table 1. The teachers' real names have been substituted with reference codes (For instance T1 for teacher 1). All the twelve teachers mentioned that Sesotho was the only indigenous language they can write and talk fluently.

Table 1: Profile of secondary science teachers who participated in the study.

Teacher no.	Major subjects	Experience (years)
T1	Chemistry and Mathematics	9
T2	Biology and Chemistry	8
T3	Biology and Chemistry	16
T4	Biology and Chemistry	15
T5	Physics and Mathematics	25
T6	Chemistry and Mathematics	22
T7	Mathematics and Physics	7
T8	Biology and Chemistry	14
T9	Physics and mathematics	5
T10	Chemistry and mathematics	14
T11	Chemistry and Biology	3
T12	Biology and Chemistry	3

Even though the participating teachers have majored in specific subjects, they sometimes teach other science subjects outside of their specialization. For example, a chemistry and biology specialist may also teach physics. Therefore, a general word ‘science’ has been adopted in this study.

Instruments used and data collection procedures

Open-ended Google Doc questionnaires and structured interviews were used to collect data. The questionnaire was developed around issues related to teachers’ perceptions about the use of indigenous languages in science classrooms, the perceived benefits and challenges and any mitigations strategies for challenges. The questions were kept open-ended so that teachers could provide detailed responses without restrictions in relation to research questions (Bordens & Abbott, 2011). When teachers had completed the online questionnaires, follow-up interviews were carried out to source for clarifications on issues captured in the questionnaires and additional data where needed. Research questions provided a primary

guideline on the formulation of questions for both questionnaires and structured interviews as a way of maintaining content validity (Cohen et al., 2005).

Analysis of data

Data were then analysed through thematic analysis approach whereby data were coded through an iterative process and responses on the same issue were compared across the participants. Thematics analysis approach through iterative, coding and comparison of codes was adopted in order to capture salient meaning contained in the responses of teachers (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). A six-step analysis process was engaged following Braun and Clarke (2006) guidelines: (1) Familiarising oneself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. Excerpts from data have been embedded into the findings to provide illustrative meanings and support to the themes and interpretations (Merriam, 2002).

Findings

The findings of this study are presented in the next section and have been organized into themes, supported with data extracts from participants' responses.

Indigenous languages influence classroom experiences

Participants cited several issues to illustrate their position in relation to the importance of indigenous languages in science teaching and learning. Namely, improved students' engagement, enhanced understanding of scientific concepts as the concepts will be linked more to students' experiences. However, one teacher was sceptical about indigenous languages. The extracts below illustrate the views and experiences.

Students get to know concepts, organs and organisms in their own language, also they participate a lot in class hence promoting learner centered approach. T3

It makes students to clearly understand abstract concepts, promote better understanding and ignite the love of science. T5

In an interview on how teachers experience teaching some concepts through indigenous language, one teacher mentioned that:

In Biology I normally use indigenous language because I have realized that students are familiar with most concepts but turn to (sic) find it difficult when using English and biological terms but easier when using Sesotho. T12

Counter-arguments from another teacher who was not convinced that indigenous languages have a role to play in science asserted that:

Science is a highly specialized field, with its own terminology and ways on doing things...how are we going to cater for all these many languages? It can only cause confusion...its better that we stick to one language which is international. But may be in some cases they can be used together with English as long as quality of learning is maintained. T11

From the extracts above, not disregarding the opinion of the teacher who demonstrated some scepticism, teachers highlight how indigenous languages can create vibrant classroom environment which relate science to real-life experiences of students. Teachers sometimes take advantage of using Sesotho words to make clarifications of some concepts and make them more relatable.

Enhancement of cultural identity, protection and trust in science

Participants cited that when science is taught using indigenous languages, there is a possibility of linking science to own cultural practices so that they could be developed. Community members can also participate in science issues when language barriers are removed. Sharing of ideas in a culturally sensitive environment can contribute to preservation of people's cultural heritage:

By making it easy for students to grasp the concepts and also enhances application of concepts learned. Again, it helps students to relate what they have learned with everything they come across in their everyday life. T6

The main idea from the above extract is application of learned concepts to address real-life issues. This is essential because classroom experiences have to prepare citizens who are competent and can contribute to their communities. Connection of classroom learning to learner's home-experiences is captured in the except below:

For example, when I teach about catalysts, I introduce the topic by asking learners to describe how bread and beer are made at home. The concept of litomoso become useful...learners explain conditions like use of lukewarm water. A lot of scientific ideas become accessible to students like function of a catalyst, enzymes, optimum conditions, speed of chemical reactions...T10

From the above extract, cultural practices are incorporated in science classrooms to illustrate scientific concepts. This creates opportunities in classrooms to take advantage of indigenous knowledge systems which can be scientifically explained. Taping into students'

life experiences connects their culture to learning processes and creates some trust in science as mentioned in the excerpt below by one teacher.

Students relate well with concepts, they see that science is not only for English speaking people, but for of all people. We have many cultural practices such as curing diseases in our own way. Such practices can be studied further be part of our science curriculum...T8

Another respondent echoed similar sentiments to **T8** with some addition of another important issue of ownership of the knowledge and trust in Science. It follows that these sentiments point to the idea that learners will be better positioned to identify with scientific knowledge and practices because they will be related to most of students' prior knowledge and experiences.

For me, using indigenous languages can help students to build trust in science. When they learn in their own language, they feel a sense of ownership over the knowledge. They realize that science isn't just a foreign concept; it's something that can be understood and practiced in their own languages just like in English. T3

Overall, the teachers underscored the importance of linking classroom experiences with real-life experiences so that learners can apply their knowledge beyond classroom confinements. Taking advantage of indigenous practices embedded in indigenous languages establishes the relevance of science to students, so that they embrace the knowledge and its related practices.

Promotion of innovation and creativity

Participants pointed out that many people can demonstrate their creativity and innovation when scientific and technological knowledge is made accessible through indigenous languages. One participant highlighted:

You know there was one program on LTV where a lot of scientific innovations were shown by Basotho...Some of them were not even from schools but they had a lot of creative ideas and solutions to problems in their communities...if we can improve and one day teach in our languages, many people will contribute to solving many problems we face as the country. But currently in schools, everything is done in English and many students struggle. Scientific information is in English...I have not seen any Science textbook written in Sesotho....T9

The issue of language seems to play a vital role in knowledge acquisition and exhibition of unique talents of individuals. The above extract shows positive perception

towards indigenous languages as a medium for innovation and creativity innate to individual learners.

Some challenges in the use of indigenous languages and mitigation strategies

Teachers outlined some challenges which they experience and foresee in classes when they try to use indigenous languages like Sesotho: these challenges emanate from policy directives and constraints, lack of vocabulary, lack of teaching aids, unpreparedness to teach in indigenous languages and examination requirements.

The main challenge is the curriculum does not cater for learning of science using indigenous language, as well as the assessment. T2

Teaching and learning practices are guided by national policies and therefore, it is not surprising that the participants adhere to existing policies. However, the policies have some contribution which impact negatively on teaching and learning of science as shown in the extract below.

Some students were not aware that sulphur and mercury as sebabole and sekete, respectively, so they did not understand we were referring to substances they already know, especially where there are no laboratories. T5

The cited experience above, shows some level of disconnection between learners' home language and classrooms experiences. In addition to the disconnection, lack of vocabulary in indigenous languages creates another barrier in using indigenous languages in science classrooms. One participant mentioned that:

It is challenging to translate some scientific terms to Sesotho terms. But if that could be rectified there should not be a problem learning scientific concepts. Example being an atom, there is no Sesotho name. T1

Another participant made similar point in relation to vocabulary and made additional comments about their experience on lessons where some use of indigenous language happened.

I was teaching balancing of chemical equations. And I introduced the concept with an example of sea saw. Since we were talking in Sesotho learners participated in responding to questions and asking many questions. They also showed understanding of the concept taught. Lack of vocabulary and use of sensitive words are the challenges I experience sometimes. T7

Teachers are aware of the potential benefits of indigenous languages in the learning and teaching of science, despite existing challenges. They were asked to share their opinions on how these challenges can be mitigated. Teachers made reference to resources development, provision of professional development initiatives, trying out multi-lingual modes of instruction and assessment. The texts below provide some snippets from three teachers views:

It should be permitted to mix English and Sesotho as long as the context is not lost.
T1

Development of teaching and assessment syllabus using indigenous knowledges, also the textbooks should be in their own language. **T4**

There should be more material written or translated in indigenous (Sesotho) language and teachers should be trained or given workshops to teach using indigenous languages. **T12**

The above sentiments from participants call for multi-stakeholder participation to realize use of indigenous languages in science classrooms: For instance, policy makers, teacher training institutions need to collaboratively establish in-service professional development initiatives and resources development institutions to support the use of indigenous languages in science classrooms.

Discussion

The study focused on perceptions and experiences of science teachers on the use of indigenous languages in teaching and learning. The findings of this study show three major issues: namely, positive benefits which can be achieved in classrooms and society, possible challenges and mitigation strategies. Regarding, experience, participants show very limited initiatives to engage indigenous languages in science classrooms.

Participants provided pedagogically sound arguments to demonstrate the value and efficacy they place on indigenous languages in science classrooms. For instance, promoting meaningful participation in classes with minimal language barriers. This finding corroborates findings in other studies where learners were free and confident to express themselves in indigenous languages and engage in inquiry activities for the quest of knowledge (Mavuru & Ramnarain, 2020). When learners master the language of instruction, they are able to engage in critical thinking which is essential for good academic performance (Ademowo, 2010;

Shizha, 2012; Nomlomo & Mbekwa, 2013). Though the participants in this study did not raise any personal deficiencies in using English as a medium of instruction, some studies highlight that there are some teachers who face similar barriers to those encountered by learners when a second language is used as the medium of instruction (Msila, 2021). It follows that when language barriers are alleviated, meaningful learning and knowledge construction are achieved, thereby addressing epistemic injustice. As Msila (2021) illustrates, it is not only students who benefit from the use of indigenous languages in classrooms, but teachers as well. By incorporating these languages, teachers are able to design and facilitate student-centered lessons that draw on learners lived experiences and cultural knowledge (Shizha, 2012; Msila, 2021). Consequently, due to teachers rich and meaningful facilitation, students become actively involved in critiquing issues, making meanings of concepts without rote memorization.

The participating teachers in this study made assertions that, indigenous languages are a gateway into rich cultural heritage of Basotho. As noted by Phyak and De Costa (2021) participants in their study perceived that when indigenous languages were used in classrooms, they enabled development of cultural knowledge and preservation of other ways of knowing and practices. This further supports McKinley (2005) who asserted that when indigenous languages are part of school curriculum, there is a chance to prevent the hegemonic cultural erasure and cultural assimilation caused by coloniality. Some of the indigenous cultural knowledge and practices are also useful in demystifying some scientific concepts in science classrooms. For instance, one of the participants in this study, mentioned that he introduces the concepts of catalysis in chemistry through use of one local ingredient, *litomoso*. *Litomoso* is a Sesotho word referring to a mixture used as catalyst in preparation of bread, beer and other traditional beverages. Students are able to transit from what they are familiar with to the scientific concepts (Manyike & Shava, 2018; Mavuru & Ramnarain, 2020; Shizha, 2012). These observations, as some scholars maintain, provide some evidence that language not only facilitates communication, but also a way of making meaning (McKinley, 2005). It follows that when a language is lost, it goes together with most traces of cultural knowledge systems (McKinley (2005).

Despite the affordances teachers perceive and experience with the use of indigenous languages in science classrooms, there are challenges. The presence of challenges was

supported by minimal efforts teachers take to use indigenous languages in their lessons. Teacher's use of Sesotho in the science classroom was limited to translation of some words into Sesotho, code-switching and sometimes making explanations or emphasis of concepts. The most cited challenges were policy constraints and shortage of resources. These findings are similar to those recorded in other countries such as Zimbabwe (Shizha, 2012) and South Africa (Mavuru & Ramnarain, 2020; Msila, 2021). The issue of policy constraints, among others, is fuelled by the idea that some of the foreign languages, such as English, are 'languages of economy and development' (Makumane & Ngcobo, 2018) and have attained international status (Shizha, 2007). As a result, policy makers have a view that they are preparing citizens for global issues when foreign languages are used as medium of instruction (Shizha, 2007). Lack of political will in the support of indigenous languages in science education simply promotes marginalisation of many local languages (Rakolobe, 2024). Governments, in post-colonial environments, have a responsibility to formulate and implement evidence-based language and curriculum policies to offset epistemic injustice, cultural erasure and cultural assimilation (McKinley, 2005). In further support of the use of indigenous languages in classroom, some scholars argue that students can still be adequately prepared to participate in global issues by studying languages such as English as a subject other than being used as medium of instruction (Shizha, 2007). Another critical issue noted by participants in this study, is lack of resources like books, vocabulary in indigenous language (Mavuru & Ramnarain, 2020). This lack of resources weakens the potential of indigenous languages to facilitate science teaching and learning. Therefore, indigenous languages need to be supported with resources so that they can effectively be used as medium of instruction in science classrooms.

With reference to the realities in the science classrooms regarding indigenous languages, participants in this study make some plausible recommendations. They strongly urge policy makers to consider indigenous languages as medium of instruction and assessment beyond grade four. However, this proposition does not in any way suggest that English should be abolished, but to make arrangement for students who may opt to be taught and take examinations in their indigenous languages (Shizha, 2007). These views of participants recognize the importance of multilingual modes of teaching, learning and assessment. It may be argued that, when teaching and learning processes are provided in

multiple languages, some demands of inclusive education will be met (Nomlomo & Mbekwa, 2013; Msila, 2021). Introduction of indigenous languages will further allow for creation of employment opportunities to address the high unemployment rate in Lesotho. Teacher training institutions will also have to create new courses or programs to cater for diverse indigenous languages heritage in the country. Besides policy recommendations, lack of resources call for all stakeholders to consider options such as producing teaching and learning materials in indigenous languages. This will address, among others, lack of vocabulary for scientific terms (Nomlomo & Mbekwa, 2013). Finally, in a similar manner to participants in Shizha (2012), teachers in this study recognized the need for professional development initiatives to further equip teachers with skills and knowledge to handle teaching and learning activities through indigenous languages. This is essential considering that these teachers are products of institutions which train them to teach in English.

Conclusion and recommendations

As Basotho celebrate the 200 years of their existence as nation, they are faced with daunting developmental challenges, compounded by high levels of unskilled human resource and wastage in schools. Effective teaching and learning of science in schools, for the country's scientific and technological advancement, is key to the young nation's development. Yet science is perennially poorly performed at the basic-education level. Science teachers note the potential contributions of indigenous knowledge in science classrooms and the society as a whole. They make strong assertions that the Basotho heritage preservation is possible if arrangements can be made to incorporate indigenous languages in mainstream education. Several challenges hinder teachers from taking advantage of indigenous languages in their science classrooms. First issue points to the curriculum and assessment policy which still prioritizes English over the indigenous languages as medium of instruction and assessment in sciences. Moreover, the absence of science resources like books in indigenous languages adds to the challenges of using indigenous languages in classrooms.

This study makes the following recommendations: First, teacher training institutions have to make provisions for equipping science teachers with skills and competencies to teach in indigenous languages. Second, a multi-stakeholder participation in creation of science

resources in indigenous languages is urgent. Third and lastly, arrangements have to be made at all levels of education to incorporate indigenous languages in teaching, learning and assessment while English, is still taught as a subject. Keeping English core-existing with indigenous languages will ensure that learners are not deprived chances of accessing available opportunities in English and participating in global knowledge economy.

References

- Ademowo, A. J. (2010). Teaching science and technology: The employment of indigenous African languages. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 3(9), 50-63.
- Alexander, N. (1999). An African renaissance without African languages? *Social Dynamics*, 25(1), 1-12.
- Babu, Y., Mishra, P., Kumar, A., Pandey, C. S., Pandey, S. (2025). Epistemic injustice and the curriculum: Strategizing for justice. *Social Sciences & Human Open*, 11. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.101220>.
- Bordens, K. S. & Abbott, B. A., 2011. *A process approach: Research design and methods*. New York: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V., 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77-101.
- Cakir, M. (2008). Constructivist approaches to learning in science and their implications for science pedagogy: A literature review. *International journal of environmental and science education*, 3(4), 193-206.
- Chebanne, A., & Kewagamang, P. (2020). A model for introducing marginalized indigenous languages in the Botswana education system. *Mosenodi Journal*, 23(1), 4-23.
- Chiblow, S., & Meighan, P. J. (2022). Language is land, land is language: The importance of Indigenous languages. *Human Geography*, 15(2), 206-210.
- Chimhundu, H. (1997). Language policies in Africa. *Report*.

- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2005). *Research Methods in Education* (5th ed.). New York, USA: Routledge Falmer.
- Etuk, A. R., & Ibuot, E. J. (2024). Coloniality of knowledge: repositioning Africa in knowledge production. *Ikenga International Journal of Institute of African Studies*, 25(1), 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.53836/ijia/2024/25/1/003>.
- Kamwangamalu, N. M. (2013). Effects of policy on English-medium instruction in Africa. *World Englishes*, 32(3), 325-337.
- Khan, M. (2014). Indigenous languages and Africa's development dilemma. *Development in Practice*, 24(5-6), 764-776.
- Kolobe, M., & Matsoso, L. (2021). Minority Languages' exclusion in the Lesotho School Curriculum: perceptions of teachers and learners. *Journal for Language Teaching= Ijenali Yekufundzisa Lulwimi= Tydskrif vir Taalonderrig*, 55(1), 133-149.
- Kolobe, M., & Matsoso, L. (2021). Minority Languages' exclusion in the Lesotho School Curriculum: perceptions of teachers and learners. *Journal for Language Teaching*, 55(1), 133-149.
- Maguire, M. & Delahunt, B., 2017. Doing a thematic analysis: A practical, step-by-step guide for learning and teaching scholars. *All Ireland Journal of Higher Education*, 9(3).
- Makumane, M. A., & Ngcobo, S. (2018). The socio-economic value of French language education in Lesotho: The learners' voices. *South African Journal of African Languages*, 38(2), 167-175.
- Maldonado-Torres, N. (2007). On the coloniality of being: Contributions to the development of a concept. *Cultural studies*, 21(2-3), 240-270.
- Manyike, T. V., & Shava, S. (2018). The decolonial role of African indigenous languages and indigenous knowledges in formal education processes. *Indilinga African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 17(1), 36-52.

- Mavuru, L., & Ramnarain, U. D. (2020). Language affordances and pedagogical challenges in multilingual grade 9 natural sciences classrooms in South Africa. *International Journal of Science Education*, 42(14), 2472-2492.
- McKinley, E. (2005). Locating the global: Culture, language and science education for indigenous students. *International journal of science Education*, 27(2), 227-241.
- Merriam, S. B., 2002. Introduction to qualitative research. *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*, 1(1), pp. 1-17.
- Mignolo, W. (2011). Epistemic disobedience and the decolonial option: A manifesto. *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 1(2).
- Mignolo, W. D. (2002). The geopolitics of knowledge and the colonial difference. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101(1), 57-96.
- Mignolo, W. D. (2009). Epistemic disobedience, independent thought and decolonial freedom. *Theory, culture & society*, 26(7-8), 159-181.
- Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). (2005). Education Sector Strategic Plan 2005-2015. Maseru.
- Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). (2009). Curriculum and assessment policy: Education for Individual and Social Development. Government Printers.
- Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). (2021). Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy (LBECP). Government Printers.
- Mokuku, T. (2021). Sustainability education for ontological re/configuration: COVID-19 as a pointer to the ailing world Asili. *Journal of Black Studies*, 52(7), 768-788
- Msila, V. (2021, September). Using an indigenous language to teach natural sciences and technology: Opportunities and challenges in two primary schools. In *3rd World Conference on Teaching and Education, Prague, Czech Republic* (pp. 03-05).
- Msimanga, A., & Lelliott, A. (2014). Talking science in multilingual contexts in South Africa: Possibilities and challenges for engagement in learners' home languages in

- high school classrooms. *International Journal of Science Education*, 36(7), 1159-1183.
- Ngcobo, S., Makumane, M. A., & Masala, P. (2023). The linguistic reconstruction of post-colonial south Africa and Lesotho: English dominance dilemma. *Journal of Social Sciences*, (4), 90-101.
- Nomlomo, V., & Mbekwa, M. (2013). Voices from the classroom: Teacher and learner perceptions on the use of the learners' home language in the teaching and learning of school mathematics and science. *Education, dominance and identity*, 133-149.
- Phyak, P., & De Costa, P. I. (2021). Decolonial struggles in indigenous language education in neoliberal times: Identities, ideologies, and activism. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 20(5), 291-295.
- Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of power and Eurocentrism in Latin America. *International sociology*, 15(2), 215-232.
- Quijano, A. (2007). Coloniality and modernity/rationality. *Cultural studies*, 21(2-3), 168-178.
- Rakolobe, K. A. (2024). The Impact of the Lesotho Language Policies on Indigenous and Former Colonial Languages Usage in Public Domains in Lesotho. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Language Policies in Africa* (pp. 625-644). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Rosebery, A. S., Warren, B., & Conant, F. R. (1992). Appropriating scientific discourse: Findings from language minority classrooms. *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 2(1), 61-94.
- Shizha, E. (2007). Critical analysis of problems encountered in incorporating indigenous knowledge in science teaching by primary school teachers in Zimbabwe. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 53(3).
- Shizha, E. (2012). Reclaiming and re-visioning indigenous voices: The case of the language of instruction in science education in Zimbabwean primary schools. *Literacy Information and Computer Education Journal (LICEJ), Special Issue*, 1(1), 785-793.

Sofaer, S. (1999). Qualitative methods: what are they and why use them? *Health services research*, 34(5 Pt 2), 1101.

Tlali, T. V. (2018). Towards a local Philosophy of education: Embracing indigenous knowledge systems to enhance relevance in Lesotho education. *Education in Lesotho: Prospects and Challenges*, 33-46.

Walsh, M. (2005). Will indigenous languages survive? *Annu. Rev. Anthropol.*, 34(1), 293-315.

Infusing the Concept of Matsema Systems in The Lesotho Basic Education System

Lihotetso Gloria Matee¹ and Lipolelo Thamae²

Department of Language and Social¹, Faculty of Education, National University of Lesotho

Email: lqmatee78@gmail.com

Department of Language and Social², Faculty of Education, National University of Lesotho

Email: lipolelothamae977@gmail.com

Abstract

In an attempt to achieve educational goals for national development, several curriculum and assessment reforms have been implemented, but with little success in the Lesotho educational system. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAP) of 2009, which was revised in 2021 and resulted in the Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy (LBECP) of 2021, is one of the latest educational reforms introduced. CAP 2009 advocated for the implementation of an integrated curriculum. The Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy, the latest version of CAP 2009, LBECP of 2021, aims to provide learners with the knowledge, skills, ethics, values, and attitudes essential for survival. Matsema systems are one of the traditional practices and cultural aspects embedded in LBECP 2021. Resultantly, this study explored how the concept of *Matsema* Systems is integrated into teaching and learning in the Lesotho basic education system. Based on the qualitative paradigm and purposive sampling, this study generated data through document analysis. The key findings from the two documents reveal an alignment among the CAP 2009, the LBECP 2021, and the Integrated Curriculum (IC) currently implemented in Lesotho. The current study focused mainly on the learner-centredness, active participation, teachers as facilitators and collaboration principles of the integrated curriculum. The principles being explored were found to align with the concept of the Matsema systems and the *Ubuntu/Botho* philosophy, hence the existence of this study.

Keywords: Education Policy, Integrated curriculum, Basic education, *Matsema* Systems, Nation building, Indigenous knowledge systems.

Introduction

King Moshoeshoe I, the founder of the kingdom of Lesotho, was born in 1786 in northern Basutoland; now known as Lesotho. He died on the 11th of March 1870 at Thaba-Bosiu, the flat-topped fortress of the Basotho nation (Britannica, 2023). In 1820, King

Moshoeshoe I succeeded his father, King Mokhachane. Shortly afterwards, he departed Menkhoaneng and settled in Butha-Buthe, Lesotho (Ministry of Arts and Culture, 2024). He later took his people from Butha-Buthe to Thaba-Bosiu, where he built his stronghold (South African History Online (SAHO), 23 Aug, 2019).

Literature notes that the founder of the Basotho nation, King Moshoeshoe I, fought for the Basotho nation's oneness. Sepere (2021) reiterates this, noting that King Moshoeshoe I united several tribes without discriminating against them and even forgave the cannibals who ate his grandfather, Peete. Instead of punishing those cannibals, he lent them cattle so that they could change from their old habits of eating people. Mofuoa (2015) reiterates this point by showing that King Moshoeshoe I did not retaliate against Rakotsoana, the cannibal chief, and other cannibals who had wronged him. This act of not killing the cannibals revealed that he was indeed a true example of *Ubuntu*.

Further, Sepere (2021, p. 35) elaborates, “Africans generally subscribe to the principle of Ubuntu... The Basotho simply put it as 'motho ke motho ka batho', while the Amazulu put it as 'umtu ngumuntu ngabantu!' Both translate to 'a person is a person through other people.' With this said, Sepere (2021, p. 36) expresses that the concept of *Ubuntu* is not foreign to the Basotho as people, rather, it is the foundation of the Basotho nation. The foundation of the Basotho nation dates back to 1824 at Thaba-Bosiu, where Moshoeshoe I and his people, the Basotho of different clans and other Nguni tribes, found refuge. The legendary plateau became the citadel of the people. The year 2024 marked the establishment of the Kingdom of Lesotho's Ministry of Tourism, Sports, Arts and Culture (2024). The period from 1824 to 2024 spans 200 years of the nation's existence and is worth celebrating. This study explored the principles of the integrated curriculum, which seem to align with the concept of the Matsema systems that King Moshoeshoe I taught his nation. The study, as a result, reflected on integrating the concept of the Matsema systems into the basic education system in Lesotho, with the intention of enhancing learner-centredness, active participation, teachers as facilitators, and collaboration principles espoused by the integrated curriculum.

Literature Review

Lesotho, also nicknamed the Kingdom in the sky, is steeped in a rich cultural heritage and communal ethos. One of its most notable practices is the *Matsema* system, a traditional form of collective labour that has long been a cornerstone of the Basotho society. Mashinini et al. (2009) clarify that *Matsema* are referred to as communal labour. The authors further explicate that the essence of *Matsema* was to promote the philosophy of communalism and the sharing of resources. As per MoET (2023, p.16-17), “Moshoeshoe used work parties or *Matsema*. Moshoeshoe taught his people to work together... *Matsema* helped Basotho to finish work quickly. They also kept Basotho united.” As Lesotho celebrates 200 years of Basotho nation-building, there is a growing interest in reviving and reinterpreting traditional practices such as *Matsema* in modern contexts, including education.

The advent of the integrated curriculum as the latest curriculum reform in the context of Lesotho brought about a shift in pedagogy. MoET (2009, p. viii) stipulates “...the new trend should be a move from teaching to facilitating learning...” Further, MoET (2009, p. 15) clarifies, “This approach recognises that the learner is part of a community and that learning should take into account everyday experiences of learners. School life should be integrated with community life and that of the individual.” These statements reiterate the relevance of the current study, which seeks to infuse the concept of the *Matsema* systems into the basic education system in Lesotho. The concept, which King Moshoeshoe I introduced to the Basotho nation with the intention of encouraging his people to work together, help one another and display the Ubuntu concept, which is not new to the Basotho (Sepere, 2021). The learner-centredness and collaboration principles advocated by the integrated curriculum align with the concept of *Matsema* systems and the *Ubuntu* philosophy, hence the existence of this study.

In addition, Mokuoane (2018) highlights the role of educational institutions as custodians of cultural heritage. This perspective aligns with the objectives of the *Matsema* systems, which aim to instil a deep understanding of cultural identity among younger generations. The Lesotho basic education system is at a crossroads, facing challenges such as learners’ disengagement, limited community involvement, and the need for more culturally relevant curricula. By infusing the concept of *Matsema* into the basic education framework,

teachers could instil a sense of community, deepen the learners' cultural awareness and promote collaborative learning. Ways of promoting collaborative learning occur around the teacher and learners in that "The teacher facilitates lessons using a range of teaching strategies, including group work and discussions." (MoET, 2021, p. 28).

The concept of *Matsema* encourages unity and collaboration among members in the community. The community, in the context of the current study, refers to the teachers and learners in a school setting. Motsoane (2004) advocates a more thematic approach to education that facilitates a holistic understanding of Basotho culture and identity. This is relevant to today's educational system, as *Matsema* and/or collaboration play a vital role in the preservation and transmission of the Basotho heritage. Although the *Matsema* systems seem opportunistic, Letsela (2001) highlights a careful infusion, as this system underscores the cultural narratives and stereotypes that influence gender socialisation.

The foregoing, then, suggests a well-thought-out infusion that diverts from the perpetuation of gender inequalities to which female learners could be subjected. By extension, the call for active participation in cultural preservation, particularly through collaboration, resonates with the predominant learner-centredness principle of the integrated curriculum, as well as the goal of integrating the *Matsema* system into the educational framework. Against this backdrop, this study explored how the principles of *Matsema* could be systematically integrated into the Lesotho basic education curriculum to enhance both academic and socio-cultural development. Moreover, it examined how celebrating 200 years of Basotho nation-building provides an opportune moment to reflect on the value of indigenous knowledge systems in modern education. Through this exploration, the study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on decolonising education and on embedding local and indigenous knowledge systems within formal learning structures.

Theoretical Framework

The current study focused on the learner-centredness, active participation, teachers as facilitators, and collaboration principles of the integrated curriculum currently implemented in Lesotho. The principles being explored were found to align with the concept of the *Matsema* systems and the *Ubuntu/Botho* philosophy. The concept of *Matsema* systems espouses teamwork. As alluded to earlier, King Moshoeshoe I, the founder of the Basotho

nation, taught his people to collaborate through work parties, or *Matsema*, to help one another complete tasks quickly (MoET, 2023). This is corroborated by the *Ubuntu* philosophy.

The *Ubuntu/Botho* philosophy, as stated by Lephoto (2021), is an African philosophy of care and support concerned with maintaining well-being for all. It aims to cultivate a conducive, learner-friendly environment characterised by positive relationships (p. 97). To elaborate more, Lephoto (2023) considers *Botho* philosophy as a Basotho cultural way of human conduct that needs to be revitalised (p. 26). Bolden (2014, p. 1) concurs that the *Ubuntu* philosophy "...is best understood as a social philosophy based on principles of care and community, harmony and hospitality...that expresses the fundamental interconnectedness of human existence". Bolden (2014) further clarifies that the concept of *Ubuntu* is mostly translated into English as 'humanness'. In addition, the author explicates that the origins of *Ubuntu* as a concept can be traced to the Bantu peoples of southern Africa, although the philosophy is presently shared across much of the continent. Furthermore, Smith (1998) in Makhetha (2020, p.1) reiterates, "The people in Africa are used to working together, as expressed by the concept of *Ubuntu* to address their social, environmental, political and economic issues". In other words, *Ubuntu/Botho* philosophy encourages collaboration and oneness in African communities.

The principles of the *Matsema* concept are evident in the integrated curriculum currently implemented in Lesotho. The integrated curriculum espouses learner-centred pedagogy, activity-based methodology, and teachers assuming the roles of being facilitators. As Lesotho celebrates 200 years of Basotho nation-building, the authors found this framework worthy of use to anchor the current study. This study emphasises the importance of collaboration, active participation, and teachers as facilitators, as espoused by the current integrated curriculum implemented in Lesotho.

Methodology

Methodology is the set of devices, processes, and procedures for research that spans the steps from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research methodology was utilised for this study. This approach was deemed relevant to the study because it does not involve numbers. The study population was purposively selected. Cohen et al. (2018) define a sample as a smaller

group or a subset of the total population. The integrated curriculum, CAP 2009, and LBECP 2021 constituted the sample for this study. The CAP 2009 advocates an integrated curriculum. For this study, purposive sampling, a non-random sampling technique, was utilised. This technique was suitable for this study because it does not require a set number of participants (Etikan et al., 2016). For data generation, we utilised document analysis. Thematically, the qualitative data generated was analysed based on the themes that emerged, and interpretations and conclusions were drawn (Kaphe, 2017). Data analysis is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Themes established during data analysis*

Integrated Curriculum (IC)	Curriculum and Assessment policy (CAP, 2009)	Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy (LBECP, 2021)
Learner-centred	It envisages learner-centredness	Learner-centredness
Collaboration	Participatory methodologies	Inclusive environment
The teacher as a facilitator	The teacher as a facilitator	The teacher as a facilitator
Interactive and hands-on in their groups	Activity-based methodologies	Active involvement of learners; interactive

Findings

This section demonstrates the findings of this study. The study mainly focused on the two documents, namely CAP 2009 and LBECP 2021, which advocate for and embed an integrated curriculum. Based on the two documents, the study revealed alignment among the CAP 2009, the LBECP 2021, and the integrated curriculum. The principles singled out were also found to align well with the concept of the Matsema systems and the *Ubuntu/Botho* philosophy.

Learner centredness

The integrated curriculum envisages teamwork among learners (through pair work, group work and class work). This is the principle that King Moshoeshoe I taught his nation through the *Matsema* systems (collective labour, teamwork). In the context of the Basotho nation, this principle has always been there as displayed by the concept of *Matsema* systems. As alluded to earlier, the founder of the Basotho nation has taught the Basotho to work together.

Collaboration

This principle is rooted in the previous principle of learner-centredness, and also aligns with what has been mentioned earlier that King Moshoeshoe I united several tribes without discriminating against them. It is through this principle that King Moshoeshoe I demonstrated to his nation that “motho ke motho ka batho”, meaning that you are because I am.

Facilitator

Regarding the Basotho nation, King Moshoeshoe I can be regarded as the facilitator, as he taught the Basotho people the concept of the *Matsema* system. In the school setting, facilitators are teachers. Teachers are expected to guide and coach learners, as Moshoeshoe would, and to inculcate his principles, ethos, and values in his nation.

Activity-based methodologies

The findings on this principle revealed that, although the integrated curriculum does not single out traditional practices and cultural aspects, such as the concept of *Matsema* systems, they are reflected in the curriculum.

Conclusions

In conclusion, in an attempt to achieve educational goals for national development, several curriculum and assessment reforms have been implemented, but with little success in the Lesotho educational system. CAP 2009, which in 2021 was revised and resulted into

LBECF 2021, is one of the latest educational reforms introduced in Lesotho. CAP 2009 advocated for the implementation of an integrated curriculum, which advocated a move towards learner-centred pedagogies. The current study focused on the learner-centredness, active participation, teachers as facilitators, and collaboration principles of the integrated curriculum implemented in Lesotho. The principles being explored were found to align with the concept of the *Matsema* systems and the *Ubuntu/Botho* philosophy, hence the existence of this study.

Recommendations

For this study, the concept of *Matsema* systems is encouraged in the basic education system, as it seems to embody the principles outlined in this study: learner-centredness, collaboration, interaction, activity-based methodologies, and teachers as facilitators.

Matsema systems are one of the traditional practices and cultural aspects that the country may benefit from if training is provided for the teaching staff to use them across various subjects. This could also be used to instill the love of the Bosocho and the country at large.

The researchers, however, acknowledge that they did not review all official documents from the Ministry of Education and Training.

References

- Bolden, R. (2014). Ubuntu in David Coghlan and Mary Brydon Miller (Eds.). *Encyclopedia of Action Research*, Sage Publications.
- Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2023, March 7). Moshoeshoe. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Moshoeshoe>.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research Methods in Education* (8th ed.). Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*. SAGE.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A. & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1-4.

- Kaphe, G. K. (2017) Managing Curriculum Change: A Study of Six Secondary Schools in Maseru, Lesotho. University of South Africa.
- Lephoto, N. R. M. (2023). Preventing and Reducing Bullying in Lesotho Schools: Proposing Botho-Rational Emotive Behaviour Education Amalgamation. *African Journal of Sociological and Psychological Studies*, 3(1), 23-44.
- Lephoto, N. R. M. (2021). Application of Ubuntu Philosophy for the enhancement of Guidance and Counselling: An alternative for facilitating Inclusive Education in Lesotho. *African Perspectives of Research in Teaching and Learning (APORTAL)*, 5(1), 95-107.
- Letsela, M. L. (2001). Towards an inclusive language curriculum: re-orienting textbooks images and messages in respect of gender
- Makhetha, M. V. (2020). A Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis of two Community Partnerships in Lesotho. Durban University of Technology.
- Mashinini, V., Mokhothu, M. & Motlatsi, N. (2009). Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and sustainable agriculture: the case of sorghum production in Lesotho.
- Ministry of Tourism, Sports, Arts and Culture. (2024). Birth of a nation. Government of Lesotho.
- Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). (2023). Accelerated teaching & learning strategy: Grade 9 History revision booklet. NCDC
- Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). (2021). Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy (LBECP). MoET.
- Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). (2016). Education Sector Plan 2016-2026. Government of Lesotho.
- Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). (2009). Curriculum and Assessment Policy: Education for individual and social development. MoET.
- Mofuoa, K. V. (2015). The Exemplary Ethical Leadership of King Moshoeshoe of Basotho of Lesotho in the nineteenth Century Southern Africa. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, 5(3), 21-35
- Mokuoane, M.C.N. (2018). The reflection of language in culture and identity: A case of Basotho in the Free State Province and Lesotho

- Motsoane, M. P. (2004). The nature and extent of implementation of music education: a case study of Mohokare Primary School and Hoohlo Primary School in Maseru, Lesotho
- Sepere, K. C. (2021). The Impact of Western Culture on the Basotho Family Structure and Erosion of African Values in Lesotho. Green, C. M. & Kabata, F. (eds). Law, Religion and the Family in Africa. African Sun Media.
- South African History Online (SAHO). (2019, 23 August). King Moshoeshoe I. <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/king-moshoeshoe-i>
-

E. INDIGENISING TECHNOLOGY

Content

- Folklore Tales: Promoting Ethical Use of AI Among English Language Pre-Service Teachers - Thamae, Matee, & Iliško
- Generating Word Embeddings for Sesotho - Mokhosi

Folklore Tales: Promoting Ethical Use of AI among English Language Pre-Service Teachers

Lipolelo Thamae¹, Lihotetso Gloria Matee² and Dzintra Iliško³

Department of Languages and Social Education¹, National University of Lesotho

Email: lipolelothamae977@gmail.com

Department of Languages and Social Education², National University of Lesotho

Centre of Sustainable Education³, Daugavpils Universitāte, Latvia

Abstract

As Artificial Intelligence (AI) becomes more integrated into educational practices, ensuring its ethical use is not debatable. Grounded in indigenous knowledge systems, this study explored the potential of folklore tales, designed to instil moral uprightness, as a means of promoting ethical awareness in AI among the English Language pre-service teachers from one higher education institution in Lesotho. Underpinned by Indigenous Wholistic Theory and the Collective Fingers Theory, the research investigated how traditional stories serve as analogies for teaching AI ethics and developing a culturally resonant understanding of responsible AI use. A mixed-methods approach was employed, with quantitative data collected through a baseline test and qualitative data generated from interviews with 44 pre-service teachers. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings revealed that while the pre-service teachers initially exhibited limited understanding of AI ethics, their perspective shifted after participating in folklore-based discussions. These findings draw parallels between traditional moral lessons and the ethical use of AI technologies.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, Ethics, Folklore tales, Indigenous holistic theory, Collective fingers theory.

Introduction

Over the years, education has been carried out in a traditional way, including pedagogy. In the traditional way of learning, students relied on reading printed materials, such as books, to complete their assignments and other academic-related tasks (Larhmaid, 2018). According to Jockers (2013), dependence on reading printed materials has several shortfalls. For instance, seeking information from books is time-consuming (George et al., 2006). Similarly, Rodríguez-García et al. (2020) note that, among other reasons, AI was

introduced to make things easier for students. While Ghorayeb et al. (2021) define AI as smart technologies, Du-Harpur (2020, p. 424) relates it to “...the ability of a machine to communicate, reason and operate independently in both familiar and novel scenarios in a similar manner to a human”.

There are several AI generative tools that students seem to use in their daily teaching and learning. According to Baidoo-Anu and Ansah (2023), generative AI tools are a subset of artificial intelligence that can generate content based on the data on which they have been trained. These include ChatGPT, Gemini, and Aithor (Sand et al., 2023; Shukla et al., 2024). In this light, it appears that students capitalise on these AI technologies to complete their academic tasks. To accentuate, AI's Large Language Model (LLMs) such as ChatGPT not only generate texts (Kasneci et al., 2023), but “...are trained to understand context, tone and style, making them capable of generating text that closely mimics humanlike conversation.” (Owan et al., 2023, p. 5). While this may be regarded as an advantage, Halaweh (2023), highlights a concern that students are often tempted to copy and paste information from generative AI tools without truly engaging with it or giving proper credit to sources, which lead to plagiarism.

Thus, the rise of AI use in education seems likely to dehumanise educational experiences. As experience has shown that unguided and misguided use of AI in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) promotes academic dishonesty, which negatively affects academic integrity. Similarly, students using AI to generate content without proper attribution are essentially engaging in plagiarism (Binns, 2018). AI can facilitate academic dishonesty through tools that enable plagiarism, unauthorised data access, and other forms of misconduct. For example, Generative AI writing assistance tools can help students write essays without developing their own ideas, undermining the integrity of the educational process. Resultantly, this study investigated how traditional stories that are designed to instill morale and uprightness serve as analogies for teaching AI ethics and developing a culturally resonant understanding of responsible AI use.

The objectives of this study are threefold:

- To assess the baseline of the pre-service teachers' comprehension of AI ethics.
- To explore the benefits and challenges of using folklore tales as a pedagogical tool for teaching AI ethics.
- To examine how folklore tales improve the pre-service teachers' understanding of ethical AI use.

Literature Review

AI ethics in education

The significance of ethical use of AI in education cannot be overstated. Mouta et al. (2024) state that, at the centre of ethical AI use in education lies the principle of academic integrity. This encompasses a commitment to accountability, autonomy, honesty, fairness, and transparency (Adams et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2023) across all academic pursuits. To promote ethical AI use, it is important to foster a culture of academic integrity among students. This involves not only educating individuals about the ethical implications of AI tools but also integrating ethical considerations into pedagogy. In reiteration, the aforementioned threat posed by unethical use of AI tools in education appears to be prevalent in the Lesotho HEIs. In this context, cultural values and moral lessons embedded in indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) could serve as guiding principles. Obiero et al. (2023) and Frid et al. (2023) argue that IKS emphasises decency, interconnectedness, and synergistic practices. In this context, the Basotho traditional values, such as communal responsibility, respectfulness, and moral integrity, provide a strong foundation for ethical considerations in the use of AI.

Pedagogical tools for teaching ethics

The aforementioned approach (folklore tale) and its potential to integrate cultural values into ethical AI use in education align with Eruaga et al.'s (2024) argument for the need to develop culturally responsive approaches, which strike a balance between traditionality and modernity. In the context of this study, this suggests that incorporating folktales into teaching and learning processes could promote a sense of responsibility among students when

using AI. The Basotho traditional stories that impart ethical lessons can serve as analogies for understanding AI ethics by illustrating concepts of fairness, justice and respect for things and other people. Before the introduction of formalised education and advanced technologies, the Basotho people relied on traditional, community-based learning approaches. Education in this context was closely interwoven with cultural practices, moral values and social norms; all of which were transmitted from one generation to the next and labelled as non-formal (Letsie et al., 2023).

The role of folklore in education

In the pre-colonial era, central to the aforementioned traditional practices was the use of folklore, oral storytelling and communal gatherings, all of which **collectively** served as the backbone of education in Lesotho. Wu et al. (2023) articulate folklore tales as stories told in the oral tradition. Oral tradition, particularly folklore tales, have long been a foundation of education in Lesotho. Elders would gather young people to narrate folklore tales, proverbs, and sing songs that conveyed important lessons about life, morality and social values (M. Phohleli, personal communication, September 19, 2024). Through these stories, the Basotho children and young adults learned about communal responsibility, respect, and perseverance, among other virtues. According to G. Thamae (personal communication, July 31, 2024), these stories were not only a form of entertainment, but tools for imparting knowledge, values and principles that encouraged social cohesion. For instance, tales about bravery and humility, which were often symbolised by animal characters, taught lessons on leadership, resilience and respect. As these narratives are passed down orally, they carry the weight of tradition and create a sense of connection to ancestors (Nasution et al., 2023). Contextually, this appears to have instilled in the Basotho children the understanding that they were part of a larger continuum of knowledge. For this reason, folktales laid the foundation for a communal sense of identity, reminding individual Basotho children of their responsibilities to others and emphasising the importance of shared knowledge, cooperation and ethics.

Folklore tales and AI ethics

It can be argued that moral lessons drawn from folktales could be powerful tools for teaching ethical AI practices in this case. For instance, students may recognise that biased

information from AI tools can lead to false information (Floridi, 2019). For example, folktales that emphasise the importance of honesty and integrity could be used to illustrate the consequences of unethical behaviour in the context of AI use in HEIs. This is attested by Lekhetho (2018) and Tlali and Sepiriti (2023), who argue that initiation schools and ‘thakaneng’ reflect a form of education that emphasises moral instruction among others. Other than that, King Moshoeshoe I, as the founder of the Basotho nation (Mofuoa, 2015), whose morality and values were shaped by the folklore tales, exemplified ethical leadership (Prozesky, 2016). King Moshoeshoe I’s leadership style serves as a benchmark for moral and ethical conduct (Mofuoa, 2021; Mofuoa, 2022). To accentuate, King Moshoeshoe I’s leadership served as moral exemplars, reinforcing the importance of ethical behaviour (Leshota & Mushonga, 2023; Prozesky, 2016). His teachings and actions were often cited in narratives to guide young people in understanding their obligations to society. This suggests that the moral principles attributed to King Moshoeshoe I align closely with the ethical considerations relevant to contemporary deliberations on the use of technology, including AI. Despite this, when used in diverse classrooms, there is a risk that these tales may not resonate with all students or may inadvertently exclude certain groups such as expatriates (Crippen & Earl, 2007). For instance, in Lesotho, it may be challenging for an expatriate student to understand, practice and uphold ‘seMoshoeshoe’. This situation requires a teacher or a lecturer who is pedagogically equipped to include all students when teaching about the ethical use of AI. Since students are more likely to embrace ethical AI practices when they are exposed to well-structured, relatable learning experiences that integrate the practical and ethical dimensions of AI (Sandvig et al., 2021), the indigenous folklore tales could be transformed into well-organised content with clear learning objectives within AI lessons.

While literature provides compelling arguments of traditional methods of education, such as folklore tales, as effective in teaching moral principles, it can be argued that they were not designed to address the complex technological-related issues that are now emerging in various aspects of contemporary education. With the advent of AI, Collins and Halverson (2018) state that new educational needs have arisen that require ethical consideration of how these technologies impact not only the pedagogy but the society’s welfare as well. It is worth noting that the integration of AI in education presents challenges in ensuring that technological advancements align with ethical standards (Saxena et al., 2023). Equally

important, as noted by Ragan (2017), integrating storytelling into modern classrooms demands careful consideration of how narratives are framed to convey particular messages, a process that can be time-intensive. Similarly, according to van der Meulen (2014), curriculum design that includes non-traditional educational tools, such as folklore, requires extensive planning to ensure that the stories are not only engaging but also pedagogically sound. In this context, AI poses both opportunities and challenges. On the other hand, it offers potential to advance education and provide tools that enhance learning; on the other hand, it requires a strong ethical foundation to prevent misuse, bias, and unintended harm. This study, therefore, seeks to bridge the gap between traditional Basotho educational practices and contemporary AI ethics by exploring the potential of using folklore tales as a culturally resonant means of promoting ethical AI awareness among pre-service teachers.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Grounded in Indigenous Wholistic Theory (Absolon, 2019) and the Collective Fingers Theory (Mbigi, 1997), this study offers an innovative approach to AI ethics education that is both culturally resonant and educationally transformative in the 21st Century.

Indigenous wholistic theory (IWT)

Indigenous Wholistic Theory advocates for an educational approach that recognises and integrates cultural values, traditions and stories as integral to learning (Hart, 2010). By drawing on Lesotho's folklore traditions, IWT frames this study within a holistic cultural context, ensuring that the teaching of AI ethics aligns with the students' heritage and lived experiences. In the context of this study, IWT supports the idea that folklore, as a cultural artifact, can serve as a pedagogical tool to engage learners in ethical reasoning. The narratives within folklore not only convey moral lessons but also reinforce community-oriented values, which are essential for understanding and practising ethical AI use. Inasmuch as this theory may be regarded as fit to ground this research, it lacks the alliance aspect, which is important because this study involved collaboration among the pre-service teachers and their lecturers.

Collective fingers theory (CFT)

To supplement IWT, the Collective Fingers Theory (CFT) places emphasis on the power of collaboration and collective responsibility in achieving shared goals (Mitchell,

2018). In this theory, the metaphor of fingers working together symbolises the importance of unity and mutual support in addressing educational and social challenges. In this study, CFT underscores the collective effort needed among educators and learners (as a community), to develop ethical AI practices. In applying CFT, this study highlights the role of folklore tales as a communal activity that promotes shared understanding and collaboration. By engaging pre-service teachers in group discussions and reflections on folklore tales, the approach encourages cooperative learning and the collective construction of ethical principles related to AI.

While IWT ensures that the pedagogical approach is culturally relevant, CFT emphasises collaboration and shared responsibility in instilling ethical practices. Both theories align with the study's objectives by embedding cultural integrity and community-based learning into the teaching of AI ethics.

Methodology

The study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2013). The first phase involved administering a baseline test to measure the pre-service teachers' initial understanding of AI ethics, while the second phase included focus group discussions centred on selected folklore tales. This mixed-methods approach (Cohen, 2018) enabled a comprehensive exploration of how folklore stories may serve as analogies for ethical AI use, thereby fostering a culturally informed understanding of AI ethics among the participants in this study. Participants in this study were 44 English Language pre-service teachers from one higher education institution in Lesotho. This group was selected purposively to represent future teachers who may play a role in imparting ethical technological practices to secondary school learners during their teaching practice. By focusing on pre-service English Language teachers, the study aimed to explore the potential for cross-disciplinary integration of AI ethics into language education.

Data Generation Methods

The initial quantitative phase included a baseline test designed to assess participants' foundational knowledge of AI ethics. Questions focused on core ethical principles such as

fairness, transparency, accountability, and responsible use, providing insight into pre-service teachers' awareness of these issues before engaging with folklore. On the other hand, in the qualitative phase, participants participated in focus group discussions to explore the selected folklore tale and to draw connections between the moral lessons in these series and ethical AI principles. Through these discussions, participants reflected on how values such as respect, dignity and accountability from folklore can be applied to AI use in educational settings.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the baseline test were analysed using descriptive statistics, providing a broad view of participants' understanding of AI ethics. On the one hand, the qualitative data, derived from focus group discussions, were analysed thematically, revealing recurring themes and insights regarding the impact of folklore on ethical AI comprehension

Intervention

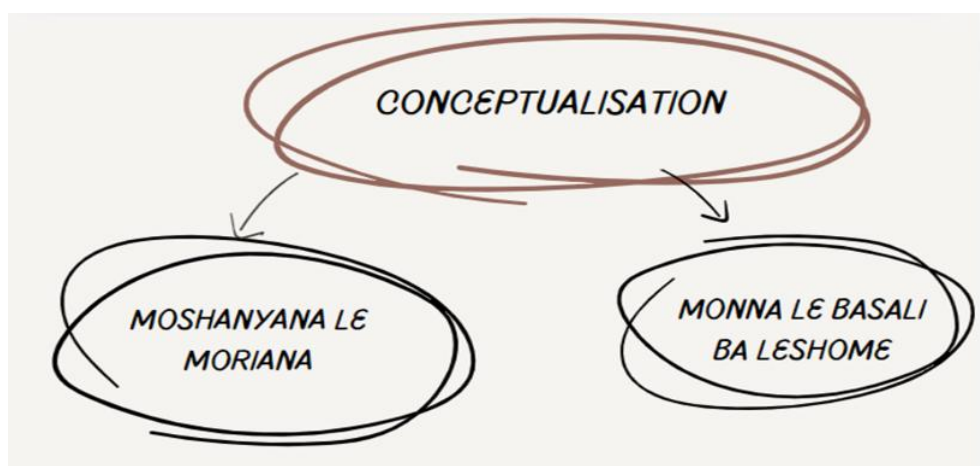


Figure 1. Folklore conceptualisation based on two traditional folklore tales

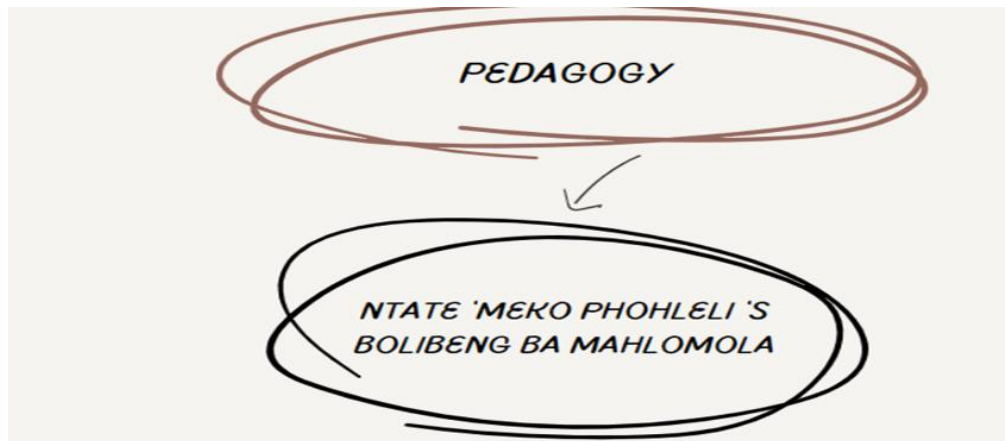


Figure 2. *Pedagogy informed by Bolibeng ba mahlomola*

As illustrated in Figures 1 and 2, the intervention was informed by the two Basotho folklore tales (litšomo): ‘moshanyana le moriana’ and ‘monna le basali ba leshome’.

Moshanyana le moriana

This tale is about a curious young boy who disobeys instructions and drinks *moriana*, a traditional medicine forbidden to him, meant for his mother. To his surprise, the medicine made him fall pregnant, which created shame and fear. The story carries deep moral lessons about the dangers of disobedience, of curiosity without caution, and of ignoring the wisdom of elders. According to M. Khumalo (personal communication, September 25, 2025), in Basotho culture, this tale was used as a cautionary tale to teach children respect for rules, the importance of self-discipline, and the potential consequences of disregarding taboos.

Monna le basali ba leshome

In the second tale, a man brought home meat that was meant to be eaten by him alone. His youngest wife secretly ate the meat but denied it when confronted. The man grew angry and accused all the wives until he discovered that the youngest wife was guilty. Out of rage, he killed her. Similar to the first, this tale carries strong moral and social lessons: the nine wives symbolise loyalty, restraint and discipline, as they resisted the temptation and upheld the trust of their husband. On the other hand, the youngest wife represents disobedience, greed and dishonesty, which ultimately led to her tragic downfall.

Contextual relevance of the Basotho folklore tales

Both tales served as powerful analogies for teaching the ethical use of AI among the pre-service teachers. In the first tale, the boy's decision to drink the forbidden medicine mirrors the risks of misusing AI tools; the students should understand that curiosity without guidance can lead to harmful consequences, such as plagiarism or misinformation. In the second tale, the youngest wife's greed and dishonesty highlight the dangers of using AI unethically, while the restraint of the nine wives symbolises responsible and disciplined use of technology. Both tales served as a base to develop ours, '*The Folklore Tale of "Thabo": The Boy Who Cheated His Way to Ruin*'. In the implementation phase, we adopted Ntate 'Meko Phohleli's *Bolibeng ba mahlomola* way of relating the developed tale. This was aired every Sunday evening on the national radio. The host used to tell scary tales in a creative way that kept listeners tuned to their radios. As he reached the peak of the tale, the story would grow scarier, and he would pause it, leaving the listeners in suspense. The curious and eager listeners would wait for the next Sunday for the tale to continue.

The folklore tale of "Thabo": The Boy who cheated his way to ruin

Thabo was a young boy born into an affluent family in the heart of Lesotho. Blessed with charm and intelligence, he quickly gained a reputation as one of the brightest students in his school. However, Thabo had a dark secret; he despised hard work and relied on cheating to maintain his top grades. His family's influence often shielded him from the consequences of his actions, making him believe he was untouchable. As technology advanced, Thabo discovered an AI tool that could complete his assignments in minutes. At first, he used it sparingly, but over time, he began relying on it for everything; essays, research projects and examinations. The AI tool produced flawless work, and Thabo's teachers, unaware of his misuse, lauded him as a prodigy. His peers envied him, and his family basked in his apparent brilliance. One day, Thabo faced a national essay competition that promised a prestigious scholarship to study abroad. Confident in his AI's abilities, he submitted an essay plagiarised from online sources. To his horror, the competition committee had implemented advanced AI detection tools to verify originality. Thabo's essay was flagged as plagiarised, and an investigation ensued. The revelation was catastrophic. Not only was Thabo disqualified, but his academic record was also scrutinised. The evidence of his long history of cheating

surfaced, and he was expelled from school. The scholarship, which his family had hoped would secure his future, was lost. His parents, despite their wealth and influence, could not repair the damage to his reputation. Thabo's life took a downward spiral. His dreams of success and prestige crumbled, and he became a cautionary tale in his community. His peers, who once envied him, now pitied him, and his name became synonymous with dishonesty and shame.

Lesson of the tale

Thabo's story serves as a stark reminder that short-term gains achieved through unethical means can lead to long-term devastation. The tale emphasises the values of integrity and accountability, and the importance of making ethical decisions, especially when using powerful tools such as AI. It illustrates that while technology can enhance our abilities, misusing it for dishonest purposes can have irreversible consequences. This folklore tale resonates deeply with pre-service teachers, as it reflects the consequences of unethical AI use. By contextualising AI ethics within a cultural narrative, the story encouraged students to reflect on their own practices and align their actions with the values of honesty and responsibility. Thabo's fall from grace served as a powerful deterrent against cheating and plagiarism, emphasising the need for ethical behaviour in both academic and professional settings.

Proposed pedagogy for teaching AI ethics through the folklore tale of Thabo

To create a lasting impact, this folklore tale was introduced as a suspenseful, ongoing narrative that unfolds over several lessons, drawing learners into its moral complexities. This pedagogy incorporated storytelling techniques, group activities and reflective discussions to engage learners deeply, emotionally, and intellectually. We divided the story into suspenseful episodes, each ending with a cliff-hanger. For example, on Day 1, Thabo was introduced as a bright student who secretly started cheating, and the session ended with him discovering an AI tool. In Day 2, his reliance on the AI grew, and he won accolades. Resultantly, the cliff-hanger, the cliff-hanger was that he submitted an essay for a prestigious competition. In day 3, his essay was flagged as plagiarised, but the exact consequences remained unrevealed until the next session. The chilling atmosphere was the use of a darkened classroom, dramatic

pauses, and sound effects to enhance the suspense. For instance, we created eerie tones during moments of tension, such as when Thabo’s secret began to unravel. We then transitioned into interactive questions whereby we paused during key moments to ask learners, “What would you do in Thabo’s place?” or “How do you think his story will end?” This kept the students engaged and encouraged ethical reflection. After each episode, students were presented with dilemmas inspired by the tale. For example, “What if Thabo had confessed to his teachers earlier?” Then, reflective journaling was encouraged; the students were asked to predict the next part of the story after each episode and reflect on the lessons learned so far.

Results

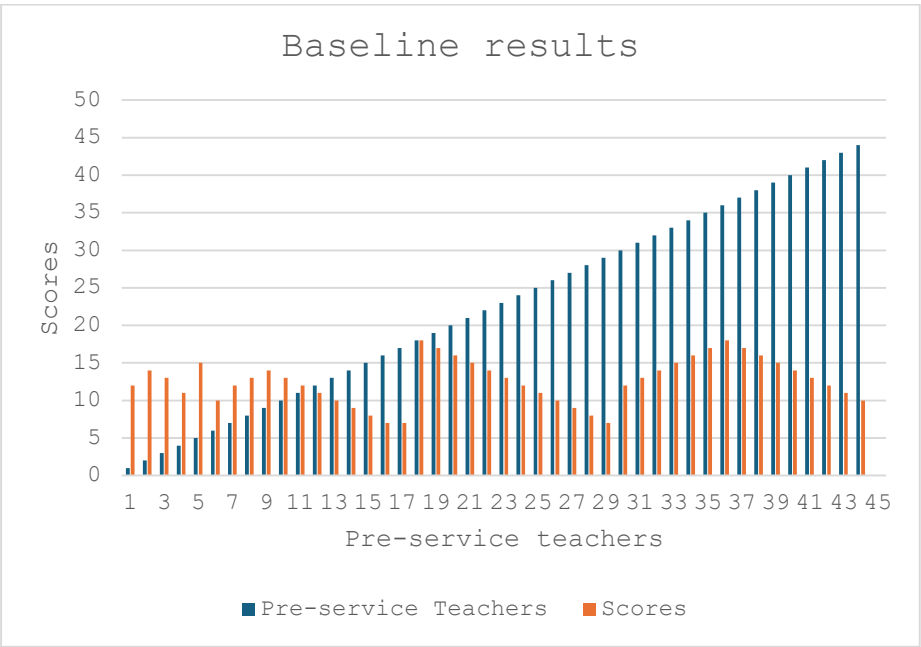


Figure 3. *Baseline results*

Figure. 3 illustrates the baseline results, indicating that six students performed below average; that is, they failed the given test, as they demonstrated a lack of knowledge regarding the ethical use of AI tools in their learning and teaching processes. On the other hand, 38 other students obtained above-average scores, suggesting that most pre-service teachers have a foundational awareness of ethical considerations when engaging with AI. However, the

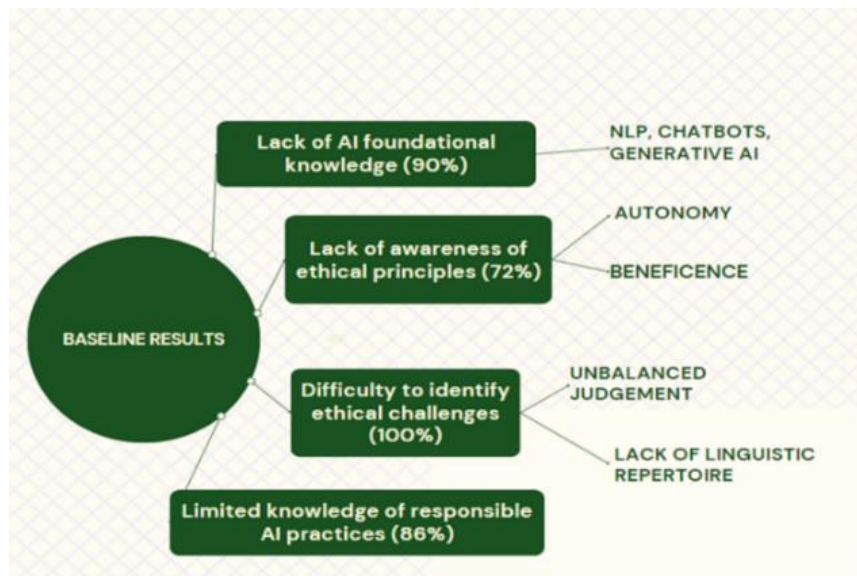
presence of students who failed highlighted an existing gap that required targeted intervention to ensure balanced competence across this cohort.

Table 1: *Descriptive statistics*

Stats	Count	M	Mdn	Mo	SD	Min	Max	R	Σ
V	44	12.72	13	13	2.872	7	18	11	560

The table above presents descriptive statistics, where V, M, Mdn, Mo, R, and Σ denote the value, mean, median, mode, range, and sum, respectively. Data was collected from 44 pre-service teachers. On average, the pre-service teachers scored 12.72 on the test, slightly above the midpoint of the possible range of 7–18. The middle score is 13; since it is very close to the mean, this suggests a fairly balanced distribution without extreme skewness.

Figure 4: *Themes derived from the baseline results*



Similarly, the most frequently observed score was 13, reinforcing the central tendency observed in the mean and median. The scores vary by about 2.87 points from the mean, indicating a moderate spread, as most students performed within a narrow range. The lowest score was 7, indicating that some students significantly underperformed, while the highest score (18) indicates that some pre-service teachers demonstrated strong knowledge of the ethics surrounding the use of AI. The difference between the highest and lowest scores is 11;

this illustrates noticeable performance disparities that collectively amount to a total score of 560.

The figure above indicates that the majority (90%) of pre-service teachers lack basic knowledge of AI concepts such as natural language processing (NLP), chatbots and generative AI technologies. Other than that, 72% of the pre-service teachers demonstrated a lack of awareness of AI ethical principles; again, all students (100%) had difficulty in identifying ethical challenges, while 86% of the pre-service teachers portrayed limited knowledge of responsible AI practices.

Discussion

This study revealed the benefits of integrating folklore tales into the teaching of AI ethics. A case in point, the aforementioned folklore tale series was found to be engaging. This resonates with Zipes's (2012) findings that by embedding these stories into teaching practices, students can share their encounters in their academia by relating to repercussions of dishonesty or the misuse of technology, which can serve as cautionary examples. From this viewpoint, they may be able to seek solutions to their unethical AI practices.

Challenges

On the other hand, two significant challenges emerged: the time-consuming nature of incorporating folklore into lessons and the potential for cultural insensitivity. Both challenges are critical to ensuring the effective and respectful use of folklore in the classroom. This buttresses the findings of Ragan (2017) and van der Meulen (2014), that the process of integrating folklore tales into a curriculum can be time-consuming due to the need to adapt the stories, analyse them for educational purposes, and ensure that they fit within the learning objectives. Additionally, the revelation that integrating folklore tales seems to be culturally insensitive resonates with that of Crippen and Earl (2007). According to Crippen and Earl (2007), a challenge that emerges when using folklore from cultures not directly represented in the classroom is cultural appropriation. This issue arises when elements of one culture are used without respect or understanding, leading to an oversimplification or commodification of the culture.

Impact on understanding ethical AI use

One of the findings suggests that students associate unethical uses of AI with plagiarism, which can help them understand the misuse of AI in academia and other professional settings. This aligns with Binns's (2018) findings that a student who is aware of AI technologies such as chatbots and automated writing tools is more likely to sustain academic honesty. In addition, the students were able to identify ethical issues related to AI use. In fact, Floridi (2019) states that the ability to identify ethical issues when using AI is foundational to the development of responsible AI literacy. In addition to these findings, the pre-service teachers demonstrated greater preparedness to learn about the ethical use of AI. Sandvign et al. (2021) concur that ethical preparedness in AI education can significantly enhance students' awareness and capacity to engage responsibly with the technology.

Conclusion

The authors concluded that the folklore tales instil and ignite morals. When students engage with AI ethics through methods such as folklore tales, they not only gain an understanding of potential harms, such as plagiarism, but also develop skills to identify ethical issues and prepare to navigate the complexities surrounding AI.

Limitations

One significant limitation of using folklore tales as a pedagogical tool is that it is time-consuming, given the approach's nature. Folklore tales often require extended periods to narrate, discuss and reflect on the tales, particularly when used as part of a broader curriculum. Unlike direct instruction methods that deliver information succinctly, folklore tales demand careful pacing to unfold the narrative's layers, maintain suspense, and allow students to process the moral or ethical lessons embedded within them.

Recommendations

By grounding ethical AI use in indigenous wisdom, appropriate knowledge and skills could be drawn on culturally relevant moral lessons that resonate with sustainable academic integrity. To promote academic integrity and ethical behaviour in AI use, it is recommended that folklore tales be integrated into pedagogical practices. These tales offer a compelling way to instil values such as honesty in learners. By weaving moral lessons into engaging and

memorable stories, folklore encourages students to critically reflect on their actions and their broader ethical implications.

References

- Baidoo-Anu, D., & Ansah, L. O. (2023). Education in the era of generative artificial intelligence (AI): Understanding the potential benefits of ChatGPT in promoting teaching and learning. *Journal of AI*, 7(1), 52–62.
- Binns, R. (2018). Artificial intelligence in higher education: Ethics and academic integrity. *Journal of Ethics and Information Technology*, 20(4), 267–282.
- Cohen, R. I. (2018). Lean methodology in health care. *Chest*, 154(6), 1448–1454.
- Collins, A., & Halverson, R. (2018). *Rethinking education in the age of technology: The digital Revolution and schooling in America*. Teachers College Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage.
- Crippen, K. J., & Earl, L. M. (2007). Building bridges in teaching: Creating opportunities for culturally responsive teaching. National Association for Multicultural Education. *Computers & Education*, 49(3), 809–821.
- Dergaa, I., Chamari, K., Zmijewski, P., & Saad, H. B. (2023). From human writing to artificial intelligence-generated text: Examining the prospects and potential threats of ChatGPT in academic writing. *Biology of Sport*, 40(2), 615–622. <https://doi.org/10.5114/biolsport.2023.125623>
- Du-Harpur, X., Watt, F. M., Luscombe, N. M., & Lynch, M. D. (2020). What is AI? Applications of artificial intelligence to dermatology. *British Journal of Dermatology*, 183(3), 423–430.
- Eruaga, M. A., Itua, E. O., & Bature, J. T. (2024). Exploring herbal medicine regulation in Nigeria: Balancing traditional practices with modern standards. *GSC Advanced Research and Reviews*, 18(3), 083-090.

- Floridi, L. (2019). Ethical issues in AI: The role of education and the philosophy of technology. *AI and Society*, 34(3), 499–511.
- Frid, A., Wilson, K. L., Walkus, J., Forrest, R. E., & Reid, M. (2023). Re-imagining the precautionary approach to make collaborative fisheries management inclusive of Indigenous Knowledge Systems. *Fish and Fisheries*, 24(6), 940–958.
- George, C., Bright, A., Hurlbert, T., Linke, E. C., St Clair, G., & Stein, J. (2006). Scholarly use of information: graduate students' information-seeking behaviour. *Information Research: An International Electronic Journal*, 11(4), 1–27.
- Ghorayeb, A., Comber, R., Gooberman-Hill, R. (2021). *Older adults' perspectives of smart home technology: Are we developing the technology that older people want?* Int. J. Hum. Comput. Stud. 147, 102571 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2020.102571>.
- Hart, M. A. (2010). Indigenous worldviews, knowledge, and research: The development of an Indigenous research paradigm. *Journal of Indigenous Social Development*, 1(1A).
- Jockers, M. L. (2013). *Macroanalysis: Digital methods and literary history*. University of Illinois Press.
- Larhmaid, M. (2018). The impact of print vs. digital resources on Moroccan University students' reading habits, uses, and preferences. In *SHS Web of Conferences* (Vol. 52, p. 02001). EDP Sciences.
- Lekhetho, M. (2018). Education in Lesotho: An overview. M. Lekhetho. Education in Lesotho: *Prospects and Challenges*, 1-11.
- Leshota, P., & Mushonga, M. (2023). Subverting the hegemony of Western 'theological' and cultural domination: King Moshoeshoe I and 'hidden transcripts' of resistance. *Critical African Studies*, 15(3), 325–341.
- Letsie, H., Nkhi, S. E., & Mncina, T. (2023). An investigation of the impact of non-formal education on sustainable development in Mafeteng, Lesotho. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Rural and Community Studies*, 5, 36–48.
- Mitchell, L. (2018). Civility and collective action: Soft speech, loud roars, and the politics of recognition. *Anthropological Theory*, 18(2-3), 217–247.

- Mofuoa, K. (2015). The exemplary ethical leadership of King Moshoeshoe of the Basotho of Lesotho in the nineteenth-century southern Africa. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, 5(3), 21–35.
- Mofuoa, K. (2021). Chief Mohlomi: A Mosotho Model of Ethics and Morality in Public Administration and Governance. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, 11(1), 128143–128143.
- Mofuoa, K. (2022). A Mosotho model of ethical leadership. *The International Journal of Ethical Leadership*, 9(1), 64–81.
- Morcom, L. A. (2017). Indigenous holistic education in philosophy and practice, with wampum as a case study. *Foro de Educación*, 15(23), 121–138.
- Mouta, A., Torrecilla-Sánchez, E. M., & Pinto-Llorente, A. M. (2024). Design of a future scenarios toolkit for an ethical implementation of artificial intelligence in education. *Education and Information Technologies*, 29(9), 10473–10498.
- Nasution, T., Herman, H., Resmi, R., Saragih, R., Sabata, Y. N., & Saputra, N. (2023). Character Values in the Oral Tradition of Folk Songs from Dairi. *Studies in Media and Communication*, 11(5), 10–17.
- Nguyen, A., Ngo, H. N., Hong, Y., Dang, B., & Nguyen, B. P. T. (2023). Ethical principles for artificial intelligence in education. *Education and Information Technologies*, 28(4), 4221–4241.
- Owan, V. J., Abang, K. B., Idika, D. O., Etta, E. O., & Bassey, B. A. (2023). Exploring the potential of artificial intelligence tools in educational measurement and assessment. *Eurasia Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education*, 19(8), em2307.
- Prozesky, M. (2016). Ethical leadership resources in southern Africa's Sesotho-speaking culture and in King Moshoeshoe I. *Journal of Global Ethics*, 12(1), 6–16.
- Ragan, J. L. (2017). *Integrating folklore and storytelling into the curriculum: Strategies for engaging students*. Routledge.
- Rodríguez-García, J. D., Moreno-León, J., Román-González, M., & Robles, G. (2020, October). Introducing artificial intelligence fundamentals with LearningML:

- Artificial intelligence made easy. In Eighth International Conference on Technological Ecosystems for Enhancing Multiculturality (pp. 18–20).
- Sandvig, C., Karaganis, J., & Hollander, J. (2021). *Ethical AI in education: How we prepare students for ethical decision-making in the age of artificial intelligence*. Cambridge Handbook of AI Ethics, 289–307.
- Sang, H., Jiang, R., Wang, Z., Zhou, Y., Lu, P., & He, B. (2023). Scene Augmentation Methods for Interactive Embodied AI Tasks. *IEEE Transactions on Instrumentation and Measurement*, 72, 1–11.
- Saxena, A. K., García, V., Amin, M. R., Salazar, J. M. R., & Dey, S. (2023). Structure, Objectives, and Operational Framework for Ethical Integration of Artificial Intelligence in Educational. *Sage Science Review of Educational Technology*, 6(1), 88–100.
- Shukla, M., Goyal, I., Gupta, B., & Sharma, J. (2024). A comparative study of ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity. *International Journal of Innovative Research in Computer Science & Technology*, 12(4), 10–15.
- Tlali, T., & Sepiriti, S. (2023). African indigenous perspectives for reinforcing moral education among the Lesotho secondary school learners. *Indilinga African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 22(2), 186-203.
- Van der Meulen, J. (2014). *Cultural narratives in the classroom: Applying folklore in a modern curriculum*. University of California Press.
- Wu, W., Wang, L., & Mihalcea, R. (2023, December). Cross-Cultural Analysis of Human Values, Morals, and Biases in Folk Tales. In *Proceedings of the 2023 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing* (pp. 5113–5125).
- Zipes, J. (2012). *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre*. Princeton University Press
-

Generating Word Embeddings for Sesotho

Refuoe Mokhosi¹ & Tumelo Pii²

Botho University¹

Email: refuoe.mokhosi@Bothouniversity.ac.bw

Botho University²

Email: tumelo.pii@Bothouniversity.ac.bw

Abstract

Word embeddings are crucial for capturing the semantic meanings of words in Natural Language Processing, yet little work has been done on African languages, which have rich morphology and tonal variation. This paper explores the application of Word2Vec, FastText, and GloVe embeddings for the Sesotho language, specifically Lesotho's orthography of Sesotho. The results demonstrate the effectiveness of GloVe embeddings in generalising word representations and in the Entity-Level Sentiment Analysis task, and highlight the need to further gather Sesotho subword information to improve FastText embeddings to better capture Sesotho's agglutinative nature.

Keywords: Indigenous Language Processing; Word Embeddings, Natural Language Processing (NLP), African Language Technologies.

Generating Word Embeddings for Sesotho

Natural Language Processing (NLP) has made significant strides in recent years, particularly in representing words through word embeddings, which capture the semantic relationships between words in a language (Mikolov et al., 2013; Pennington et al., 2014). However, these advancements have primarily focused on widely spoken languages with abundant resources, sidelining underrepresented languages, such as Sesotho, with limited computational resources and linguistic tools (Joshi et al., 2020). Sesotho, primarily spoken in Lesotho and parts of South Africa, presents unique linguistic challenges, including limited data availability and regional orthographic variations, which make NLP research for this language particularly challenging (Makutoane, 2023). Underrepresentation of such languages in mainstream NLP applications has broad socio-cultural and economic impacts, including

limited access to technology and information for native speakers (Joshi et al., 2020). These challenges align with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities), which emphasise equitable access to information and educational resources.

To address the challenges, this paper explores the generation of word embeddings using three popular algorithms: Word2Vec, FastText, and GloVe. These models provide ways to represent words in continuous vector spaces based on their contextual usage, making them powerful tools for capturing semantic relationships. Given the scarcity of large, annotated datasets, this research relies on a combination of publicly available data sources, including Bible texts, newspapers, and government publications. Although these sources are limited in volume, they provide diverse and representative linguistic data for training word embeddings.

The objectives of this study are:

- To gather a dataset and create a corpus of text in Lesotho's orthography of Sesotho
- To train and evaluate the prepared corpus on the Word2Vec, FastText, and GloVe algorithms
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the generated embeddings on the sentiment analysis task

Literature Review

Word embeddings resulted in a significant breakthrough in NLP, beginning with Word2Vec by Mikolov et al. (2013), GloVe by Pennington et al. (2014), and FastText by Bojanowski et al. (2017). Research in low-resource languages has consistently highlighted the challenges posed by data scarcity and orthographic diversity (Adams et al., 2020; Resnik et al., 1999; Berment, 2004). However, previous studies have demonstrated the promise of using word embeddings for underrepresented languages. The AfriVEC project (2020) explored word embeddings for African languages, such as Fon and Nobiin, using religious texts and formal documents to mitigate data scarcity challenges. Another study developed a word-embedding model trained on South African news data (AJIC, 2022).

The availability of multilingual online content underscores the need for sentiment analysis in African languages. Recent research focuses on languages such as Swahili, Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, and Nigerian Pidgin, using deep learning models such as Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM), Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), and Transformers to achieve promising results. However, fewer researchers focus on the Entity Level Sentiment Analysis (ELSA) task, which is more fine-grained and identifies the opinion towards each entity (person, organisation, or location) in a sentence. This paper contributes to the development of word embeddings for Sesotho, potentially setting the stage for further NLP applications in this underrepresented language.

Methodology

Dataset description

To reduce lag in African NLP, recent research focuses on creating embeddings that enable NLP models to understand and manipulate human language more effectively. This research creates such embeddings for Sesotho using data from three sources: the Lesotho Mounted Police Service (LMPS), the National Assembly Hansard, and the Sesotho Bible, covering the period from April 2007 to June 2024. The sentences from these sources were merged, resulting in a total of 10,645 sentences.

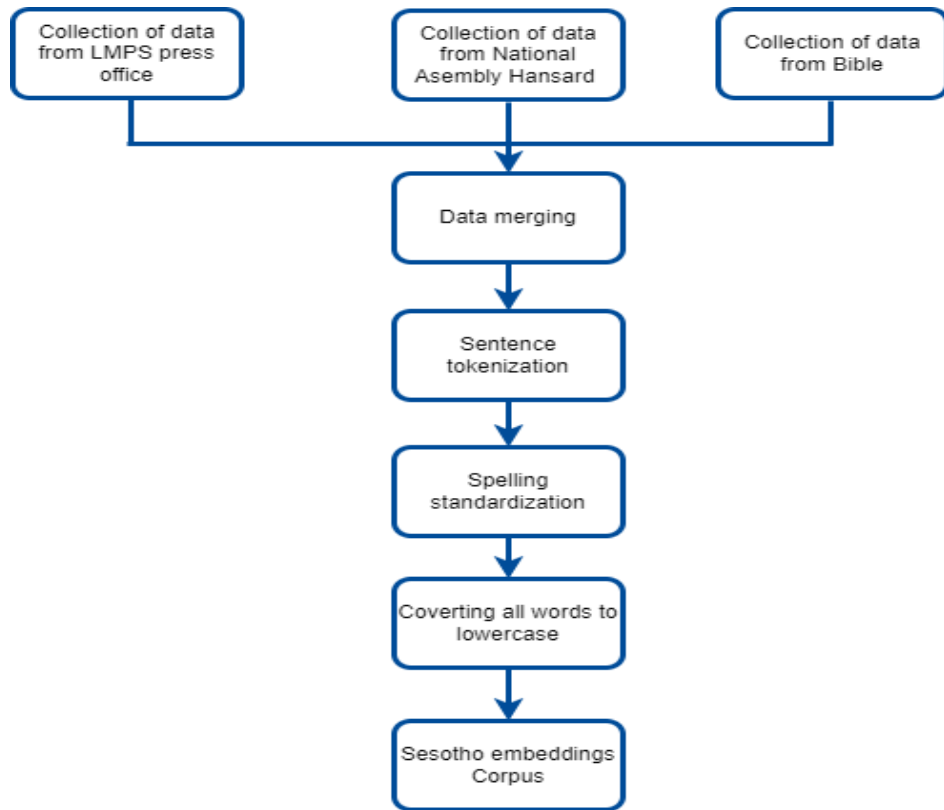


Figure 1: *Data preparation process*

The data preparation process, as shown in Figure 1, started with sentence tokenisation to enable semantic relationship representation at the sentence level, using punctuation marks (question marks, periods, exclamation points) as sentence boundaries. Then the spelling was standardised using the following rules: “d” was replaced with “l”, “tsh” was replaced with “tš”, “ts” was replaced with “tš”, “wa” was replaced with “oa”, “kg” was replaced with “kh” and “tjh” was replaced with “ch”. Stop words such as “o” (he/she), “u” (you), “le” (and), “ha” (when), “ka” (by, with, about) and “a” (he/she) were not removed following a recent trend especially when learning embeddings for sentiment classification problems (Mafunda, et al., 2022). Then all words were converted to lowercase to ensure uniformity, ultimately resulting in the Sesotho embeddings corpus.

Embeddings generation

This research uses the following three algorithms to generate Sesotho embeddings:

Word2Vec

Word2Vec uses the Continuous Bag-of-Words (CBOW) architecture, which predicts the target word based on the surrounding context words, and the Skip-Gram architecture, which predicts the surrounding context words in a specified window given a target word. This research uses the Skip-Gram architecture.

Fasttext

FastText is an extension of the Word2Vec model, designed to improve the quality of word embeddings by considering subword information. For example, the n-gram representations of the word “sefateng” with $n=6$ are shown in Figure 2; the model captures the relationship between the words “sefate” and “sefateng”.

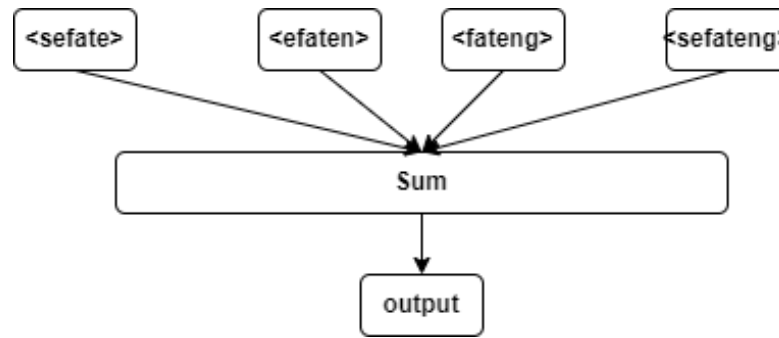


Figure 2: *FastText bigram representation for the word “sefateng”*

Glove

GloVe is an unsupervised learning model built on the intuition that the co-occurrence probability of related words is high. It uses global matrix factorisation and local context window mechanisms to capture global statistical information about words in a corpus, considering all occurrences rather than a fixed window.

Embedding’s evaluation

Intrinsic and extrinsic evaluations were performed to determine the effectiveness of the trained word embeddings. For intrinsic evaluation, the nearest neighbour search was performed to identify the closest words to a known word in the embedding space, where the most similar words have a high similarity score that ranges between 0 and 1. Extrinsic

evaluation was used to measure the effectiveness of the trained embeddings on real-world NLP tasks such as part-of-speech tagging, machine **translation** and entity-level and sentiment analysis; these experiments concentrated on the latter task.

Entity Level Sentiment Analysis

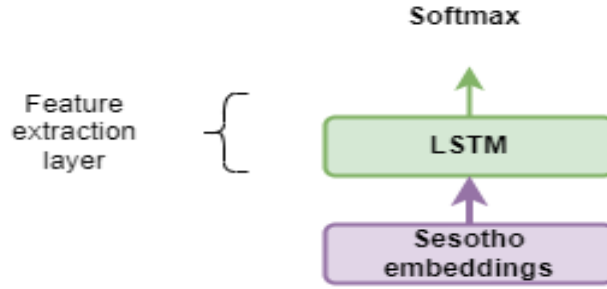


Figure 3: *Sesotho-ELSA model*

The Sesotho-ELSA model is shown in Figure 3. It takes the Sesotho embeddings as input to the feature extraction layer, which uses a linear layer for classification. In this ELSA task, let sentence $S = s_1, s_2 \dots s_N$ consisting of N words. Given the Sesotho embeddings P_n , The LSTM process can be formalised as:

$$Z = LSTM(P_n)$$

The LSTM output $Z \in R^{n \times d}$ which is later used as input to a linear classification layer can be represented as:

$$x = W_z^T z + b_z$$

$$y = softmax(x)$$

$$= \frac{\exp(x)}{\sum_{k=1}^C \exp(x)}$$

where C is the number of classes, $y \in R_C$ is the predicted sentiment polarity, $W_p \in R^{1 \times C}$ and $b_p \in R^C$ are learnable parameters. The model is trained in an end-to-end manner using back propagation, with cross-entropy loss with L_2 regularisation as the objective function:

$$loss = - \sum_{i=1}^C y_i \log(\widehat{y}_i) + \lambda_r \left(\sum_{\theta \in \Theta} \theta^2 \right)$$

where y is the target sentiment distribution, $\widehat{y}$ is the predicted sentiment distribution, λ_r is L_2 regularisation coefficient and Θ is the parameter set. The models are run using the PyTorch framework and evaluated using F1, Recall, Precision, and Accuracy metrics.

Findings

Neighbour search

The neighbour search for the words “monna” (man), “jeso” (jesus) and “leribe” (leribe is a district in Lesotho) was performed to identify the five most similar words using the trained Word2Vec, Fasttext and Glove embeddings. The results are shown in Table 1-3.

Table 1: *Neighbour search for the word “monna” (man)*

	Word 1	Word 2	Word 3	Word 4	Word 5
Word2Vec	Mosali (woman) 0.556	Mohlankana (young man) 0.499	Mosamaria (samaritan) 0.444	Moshanyana (boy) 0.444	mohlolohali (widow) 0.402
Fasttext	mosali (woman) 0.865	mosehlana (yellowish) 0.790	moshanyana (boy) 0.777	monna-moholo (old man) 0.767	moralī’ae (his daughter) 0.766
Glove	Mosali (woman) 0.986	ngoana (child) 0.952	moshanyana (boy) 0.918	mohlankana (young man) 0.915	nkhono (grandmother) 0.845

Table 2: *Neighbour search for the word “jeso” (jesus)*

	Word 1	Word 2	Word 3	Word 4	Word 5
Word2Vec	Johanne (john) 0.483	Petrose (peter) 0.451	Tsohile (risen) 0.392	Kreste (christ) 0.380	Silase (silas) 0.379
Fasttext	Paulose (paul) 0.880	Moratua (beloved) 0.8688	Johanne (john) 0.835	Moapostola (apostle) 0.829	Baapostola (apostles) 0.818
Glove	Kreste (christ) 0.968	saule (saul) 0.878	Tafita (david) 0.858	Morena (king) 0.838	Moshe (moses) 0.825

Table 3: *Neighbour search for the word “leribe” (leribe is a district in Lesotho)*

	Word 1	Word 2	Word 3	Word 4	Word 5
Word2Vec	Sekamaneng (a village in Lesotho) 0.530	Seterekeng (at/in a district) 0.517	berea (a district in Lesotho) 0.492	mafeteng (a district in Lesotho) 0.479	thabaneng (a village in Lesotho) 0.475
Fasttext	berea (a district in Lesotho) 0.880	qacha’s nek (a district in Lesotho) 0.861	Buthabuthe (a district in Lesotho) 0.839	quthing (a district in Lesotho) 0.834	tšifa-li-mali (a village in Lesotho) 0.829
Glove	Berea (a district in Lesotho) 0.967	thaba-tseka (a district in Lesotho) 0.937	Quthing (a district in Lesotho) 0.916	Maseru (a district in Lesotho) 0.857	Maputsoe (a town in Leribe) 0.856

Entity-level sentiment analysis

Table 4 presents the experimental results for the Sesotho ELSA task using the trained Word2Vec, FastText, and GloVe embeddings.

Table 4: *Model performance for the sentiment analysis task*

Embeddings	Accuracy (%)	Macro F1	Recall	Precision
Word2Vec embeddings	49.43	48.12	48.47	48.30
Fasttext embeddings	63.25	61.98	62.12	62.07
Glove embeddings	65.85	64.13	64.85	64.30

Discussion

The neighbour search results show that Word2Vec embeddings achieve the lowest similarity scores; for example, it has a similarity score of 0.444 between the words “monna” and “moshanyana”; FastText has a similarity score of 0.777; and GloVe has the highest similarity of 0.915, as shown in Table 1. This trend is visible in all the case studies and may

be due to Word2Vec not generalising very well when trained on a limited dataset. The Glove embeddings are more efficient for small datasets and are able to capture the distance proximity between districts in Lesotho, as shown in Table 3; Glove embeddings give the highest scores to Thaba-Tseka and Quthing as districts that share a border with Leribe, and also give a high score to a town called Maputsoe in Leribe. Fasttext embeddings also demonstrate the ability to capture out-of-vocabulary words, as shown in Table 2; these embeddings are able to capture the relationship between Jesus and the apostles by giving high similarity scores between words “jeso”, “moapostola” and “baapostola”. These embeddings use subword modelling to capture important relations in rich morphological languages like Sesotho. The extrinsic evaluation on the ELSA task achieves the best accuracy when using Glove embeddings, demonstrating that Glove generalises better to Sesotho word representations. However, precision is lower for all trained embeddings, which may be due to the imbalanced dataset, where the negative class is the majority and the neutral class is the minority.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper introduces Word2Vec, FastText, and Glove embeddings for the Sesotho language as a low-resource African language. It shows the effectiveness of Fasttext embeddings in capturing out-of-vocabulary words and subword information, while Glove embeddings capture generalised word representations. As a result, Glove embeddings achieve the highest performance in neighbour search and ELSA experiments. The results highlight the need to put more effort into collecting subword information for the Sesotho language, as this will improve the performance of Fasttext embeddings, which are more effective for agglutinative African languages.

References

- Adams, O., Cohn, T., & Bird, S. (2020). Improving Low-Resource Machine Translation Using Morphology. *Transactions of the Association for Computational Linguistics*, 8, 186–200.
- Alabi, J., Adeleke, D., & Emezue, C. (2020). AfriVEC: Word Embedding Models for African Languages. Case Study of Fon and Nobiin. *Proceedings of the 28th International Conference on Computational Linguistics*, 881–891.
- AJIC. (2022). A word embedding trained on South African news data. *AJIC Issue 30*.
- Berment, V. (2004). Lexical and Computational Considerations in the Development of NLP Resources for African Languages. *Journal of Language Resources and Evaluation*, 40(2), 121–134.
- Bojanowski, P., Grave, E., Joulin, A., & Mikolov, T. (2017). Enriching Word Vectors with Subword Information. *Transactions of the Association for Computational Linguistics*, 5, 135–146.
- Joshi, P., Santy, S., Budhiraja, A., Bali, K., & Choudhury, M. (2020). The State and Fate of Linguistic Diversity and Inclusion in the NLP World. *Proceedings of the 58th Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics*, 6282–6293.
- Makutoane, T. (2023). The people divided by a common language: The orthography of Sesotho in Lesotho, South Africa, and the implications for Bible translation. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 78(1), 1–9.
- Mikolov, T., Chen, K., Corrado, G., & Dean, J. (2013). Efficient Estimation of Word Representations in Vector Space. *arXiv preprint arXiv:1301.3781*.
- Mosebi, L. (2018). A Linguistic Analysis of Sesotho Orthography: Implications for Language Standardisation and Use. *African Linguistics Journal*, 16(2), 122–140.
- Pennington, J., Socher, R., & Manning, C. D. (2014). GloVe: Global Vectors for Word Representation. *Proceedings of the 2014 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing (EMNLP)*, 1532–1543.

Resnik, P., Olsen, M. B., & Diab, M. (1999). The Bible as a Parallel Corpus: Annotating the "Book of 2000 Tongues". *Computers and the Humanities*, 33(1-2), 129–153.

Statistics South Africa. (2022). *Census 2021: Language Data Release*. Available at: <https://www.statssa.gov.za/statistics/sesothos>.
