

VOLUME TWENTY-THREE,
NUMBER FOUR, 2025

Gender & Behaviour



Published by THE
IFECENTRE FOR PSYCHO-
LOGICAL STUDIES [le-



**GENDER AND BEHAVIOUR
VOLUME 23, NO 4, 2025**

Published by: Ife PsychologicalA (RC 011934)
Ife Centre for Psychological Studies/Services.
P.O. Box 1548, Ile-Ife
Osun State, Nigeria

&

The Network of Psychological Studies of Women Issues
Department of Psychology
University of Ibadan
Ibadan

ISSN: 1596-9231

Printed by Ife Centre for Psychological Studies/Services

GUEST EDITORIAL NOTE

It is with great scholarly pleasure that we introduce this robust and timely volume of *Gender and Behaviour*, which stands as a testament to the vibrant, critical, and necessary intellectual work being undertaken across Africa and its diaspora. As guest editor, I am struck by the volume's powerful demonstration that gender is not a peripheral concern but a central, organising principle that shapes educational outcomes, philosophical foundations, migration patterns, familial structures, and economic resilience. The collective scholarship here weaves a rich tapestry that reveals how gendered experiences are constructed, contested, and navigated within specific African contexts, offering profound insights for both theory and praxis. A compelling thread running through this edition is the critical examination of institutions, educational, familial, or political, and their role in either perpetuating gender inequalities or serving as sites for transformative agency. Maria Thobile Shabangu's poignant assessment of educational policies for pregnant learners in Mpumalanga exposes the bewildering gap between progressive national mandates and their implementation at the school level. This failure of institutional follow-through directly impacts life trajectories, a theme echoed in the contribution by Mudau and Tshivhase, who shift the lens to a profoundly under-researched group: male student-parents at the University of Venda. Their work reveals that institutional blindness to parenthood extends beyond mothers, as fathers grapple with financial pressure and a lack of support as well. These studies, when read in concert, form a powerful critique of educational systems that claim inclusivity yet are inadequately structured to support the lived realities of student-parents, irrespective of gender.

This volume excels further in its nuanced exploration of masculinity, shifting it from a monolithic given to a dynamic and often vulnerable construct. Blessing Phakathi and Aghogho Akpome's literary analysis in *Moving Masculinities and Intra-African Migration* provides a brilliant counter-narrative to xenophobic tropes. This focus on male vulnerability and the need for emotional support systems finds a surprising empirical parallel in the work of Akinwale, Bada, and Akinrujomu on parenting styles in Lagos. Their finding that authoritarian parenting correlates with higher social anxiety in young adults underscores how rigid, controlling models of authority can inflict psychological harm, stifling the very self-esteem they purport to build. Together, these articles advocate for a reimagining of masculinity that prioritises interdependence, emotional expression, and supportive friendships as foundational to healthy individual and community development.

Finally, this collection boldly engages with the digital and cultural frontiers of contemporary gender dynamics. From the exploration of digital entrepreneurship as a survival tool for women-led SMEs to the analysis of humour masking gender-based bullying on TikTok, this volume confirms that the terrain of gender relations is perpetually evolving. These contributions remind us that empowerment and oppression alike have migrated to new platforms, requiring vigilant and adaptive scholarly engagement. As guest editor, I am immensely proud to present this volume. It is a cohesive yet diverse body of work that speaks to the past, present, and future of gender scholarship in Africa. It challenges policymakers, educators, community leaders, and scholars to move beyond tokenistic inclusion toward a deep, structural transformation informed by both African philosophical wisdom and the resilient, innovative agency of its people. The conversations started here are critical, and we commend the authors for their rigour and courage, but the conversation should continue as readers engage with these works. Hence, we invite readers to engage with these pages not as an end in itself, but as a vital provocation for further research, dialogue, and action.

Prof. Kayode Eesuola,
Institute of African and Diaspora Studies,
University of Lagos, Nigeria, ekabo sir.

EDITORIAL NOTE

As the stewards of *Gender and Behaviour*, we present this issue with a profound sense of its collective significance. The journal has always served as a platform for interrogating the behavioural underpinnings of gender, and this issue powerfully advances that mission by demonstrating how behaviour is shaped by, and in turn shapes, educational systems, economic structures, migration patterns, and intimate familial spaces. A paramount insight that emerges from synthesising these studies is the untenable nature of institutional neutrality. Across contexts, from secondary schools in Mpumalanga to the lecture halls of the University of Venda and the University of Lagos, institutions are revealed as active, albeit often neglectful, participants in gendered outcomes. Shabangu's research shows that without transformational leadership and specific support.

Furthermore, this volume makes an indelible contribution by complicating our understanding of agency and empowerment. The narrative often leans towards a simplistic binary of female victimhood versus empowerment. While the struggles are real, as seen in the food restrictions faced by elderly women in Limpopo or the livelihood precarity of youth in rural Zimbabwe, the scholarship here consistently highlights resilience and strategic negotiation. The women weavers of Lupane are empowered not through aid alone but through collective enterprise that builds financial autonomy and social capital. Phakathi and Akpome's analysis presents a form of masculine agency that derives strength from friendship and cross-cultural solidarity, not dominance. Even within the constrained polygynous dynamics they analyse, characters exercise negotiation and seek spaces for vulnerability.

Finally, this issue of *Gender and Behaviour* offers more than discrete findings; it provides a coherent, urgent agenda. It tells us that sustainable development in Africa is inextricably linked to gender justice, that educational success requires institutional compassion that healthy masculinities are vital for societal well-being, and that economic resilience often wears a feminine face and works with its hands. The path forward, as illuminated by these scholars, is one of integrated action: policies must be informed by both philosophical clarity and ethnographic detail; economic programs must support women's collectives as engines of local development; and our understanding of family and identity must expand to accommodate their beautiful, complicated realities. As editors, we commend the authors for their rigorous and courageous work. I leave you with these words, the behaviour of gender is all around us; understanding it, as this journal exemplifies, is the first step toward transforming it.

Prof TJ Mudau,
Department of Youth and Gender Studies,
University of Venda,
Thohoyandou,
South Africa

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Author	Pages	Title of Articles
<i>Kayode Eesuola</i>	iii	Guest Editorial Note
<i>TJ Mudau</i>	iv	Editorial Note
Maria Thobile Shabangu	24191	An Assessment of Educational Policies on Teenage Pregnancy And Learners Support in Secondary Schools of Mkhuhlu Circuit, Mpumalanga Province https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.1
Blessing Phakathi and Aghogho Akpome	24203	Moving Masculinities And Intra-African Migration In Recent Africa Fiction https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.2
Akinwale, Gbenusola A. and Akinrujomu, Temilola M	24213	Parenting Styles and Their Impact: How Upbringing Influences Social Anxiety and Self-Esteem Among University of Lagos Young Adults https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.3
Onuk Bulus Ojem, Phemelo Olifile Marumo	24226	African Philosophy And The Development Process In Africa: A Gender Perspective https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.4
Douglas Nyathi, Victor H Mlambo, Thulani Dube	24245	Threads of Empowerment: Weaving, Livelihood Diversification and Women's Agency in Rural Zimbabwe https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.5
Mudau T. J & Tshivhase Vhuhwavho	24259	Being A Male Student-Parent In An Institution Of Higher Learning In South Africa: Experience From The University Of Venda https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.6
Sakhiseni Joseph Yende	24273	Teaching Gender-Based Violence Prevention Through Music Education In South African Grades 4–6 Caps Creative Arts: A Systematic Review https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.7
Unathi Kolanisi, Mzweleni Mthethwa, Nontokozo Mnisi, Nokubong Ngwane, Denver Naidoo	24291	Advancing Student Transformative Entrepreneurial Leadership Skills Through Experiential Hackathon Engagement https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.8
Maria Mobali & Pravina Pillay & Theophilus Mukhuba	24312	The Cogency of Including the Works of Athol Fugard in the Further Education and Training Phase Curriculum in the Ekurhuleni South District: Teachers' Perspectives https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.9
Nthambeleni Charles Netshisaulu	24327	Metaphor as Depiction of Culture on Natural Objects and Phenomena in Tshivenda https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.10
Ngwako Solomon Modiba	24345	The champion leadership practice and the performance of secondary schools https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.11
Mandla A Mubecua, Innocent Simphiwe Nojiyeza	24360	The Duality of Constitutional Democracy and Traditional Authority: Implications on Rural South African Women https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.12
Hebert Sihle Ntuli	24373	Exploring Effects of Load-shedding on Digital Pedagogy: Perceptions of Students and Lecturers in One South African Higher Learning Institution https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.13

Ndishunwani Vincent Demana	24383	Pronunciation Challenges of English Vowels among South African Foundation Students: Phonological Interference and Pedagogical Implications https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.14
Masipa Masila Joshua, Nontlanhla Ntakana, Raseluma Sentawane Johanna	24397	Advancing Ubuntu to Mitigate Human Security Risk Factors on African International Mobile Students in South African Higher Education Institutions. https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.15
Thandeka Yasmeen Ndaba, Sakhiseni Joseph Yende	24411	More Than Survival: Gendered Labour, Female Farmers' Resilience, Food Security, and Climate Change Risks in Rural Communities https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.16
Maria Mobali & Theophilus Mukhuba & Pravina Pillay	24432	The role of Athol Fugard's Works in Human Rights Education in South Africa's FET Curriculum https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.17
Ngwako Solomon Modiba	24446	The dissimilarities of the underachieving secondary schools: A critical evaluation https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.18
Samuel Chukwudi AGUNYAI, Victor Ojatorotu	24458	Constitutionalism and the functionality of Nigeria's Federalism https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.19
Kelebogile Kegakilwe	24471	Beyond Content Monetisation: The Reinforcement Of Afrocentricity By Women In Rural South Africa https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.20
Mudau T.J	24488	Educational Participation and Achievement of Teen Mothers in the Vhembe District of the Limpopo Province https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.21
Douglas Nyathi, Joram Ndlovu, Thandeka Yasmeen Ndaba	24497	The Contribution of Livestock to the Livelihoods of Smallholder Farmers: Insights from Newly Resettled Farmers in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.22
Daniel Kambiri	24512	Digital Entrepreneurship And Innovation Practices As Drivers Of Survival In Women-Led Smes https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.23
Prince Gontse Motaung, Kelechi Johnmary Ani	24528	Peacekeeping, Resource Exchange And Gender: The Place Of Monusco And Force Intervention Brigade https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.24
Lukamba, Muhlya Tshombe, Taleat, Bisiriyu Abiodun	24540	Public-Private Partnership and Sustainable Development: Investigating Sustainable Energy in South African Regions https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.25
Onuk Bulus Ojem, Phemelo Olifile Marumo	24554	Intersectionality In The Humanities Classroom: Teaching At The Crossroads Of Race, Gender, And Class https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.26

Esther Gyamfi, Pauline Eyono and Albert Agbenyagah	24573	Assessing HR processes and practices in Ghanaian technical universities as a precursor to HRIS adoption https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.27
Douglas Nyathi, Thandeka Yasmeen Ndaba, Joram Ndlovu	24595	Limited Choices, Uncertain Futures: Exploring Youth Livelihood Precarity in Rural Lupane, Zimbabwe https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.28
John Ringson	24611	The Gender Equality Paradox: Affirmative Action versus Patriarchal Structures in Zimbabwe's Political Landscape https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.29
Vincent Chidindu Asogwa & Dzivhonele Albert Sinthumule	24627	Navigating Ethical Considerations in Educational Action Research: A Systematic Review https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.30
Mandla A Mubecua & Innocent Simphiwe Nojiyeza	24640	<i>Siyadlala ku TikTok</i> : Humour as a Mask for Gender-Based Bullying and Digital Harassment on the Platform https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.31
Benjamin Seleke	24652	Navigating the Digital Double Bind in Rural South Africa: 4IR Technologies, Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence, and Gendered Self-Directed Learning in Post-School and Senior Phase Technology Education https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.32
Betty C Mubangizi	24669	Governance, Institutions and Community Resilience in Rural Uganda and South Africa: A Comparative Analysis https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.33
Tshifhiwa Cynthia Mandiwana, Harvey Sekwaleng Malapane, Mukhethwa	24687	Myths And Misconceptions: Insight From Elderly Women In Limpopo Province On Food Restrictions During Pregnancy. https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.34
Misheck Musaigwa And Innocent Simphiwe Nojiyeza	24701	Gender, digital entrepreneurship, and economic empowerment; A systematic review of opportunities and barriers for women Myths And Misconceptions: Insight From Elderly Women In Limpopo Province On Food Restrictions During Pregnancy. https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.35
Tshidiso Lloyd Molema, Bukohwo Michael Esiefarienrhe	24718	A Review Of The Impact Of Deadlock Detection And Resolution In Cloud And Edge Computing Databases https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.36
Karabo Suzan Mabina, Marubini Harry Mukwevho, Tsoaledi Daniel Thobejane	24729	An Evaluation of Women's Participation and Involvement within the E-hailing Transport Services in the Thohoyandou area, South Africa https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.37
Nthabiseng Princess Mokhatla, Thabang Motswaledi	24740	Assessing The Behavioural Trends Of Corruption In South African Local Government With Specific Reference To Mahikeng Local Municipality https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.38
Giwa Samiat, Bamidele Olajide, Victor Ojakorotu	24759	Social Media and Environmental Accountability in Lagos State, Nigeria https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.39
Ngcobo Phindile Mambondiani Liberty	24780	Role of Hair in the Perception of Beauty among Black Women in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.40

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.1>

AN ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL POLICIES ON TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND LEARNERS SUPPORT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF MKHUHLU CIRCUIT, MPUMALANGA PROVINCE

Maria Thobile Shabangu

Faculty of Education, Department of Education Management
Policy and Comparative Education

Qwaqwa Campus

Private Bag X13

Phuthaditjhaba 9866

<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6452-2696>

ShabanguMT@ufs.ac.za

Abstract

The research assesses the efficacy of school policies aimed at supporting learners affected by teenage pregnancy in secondary schools located in the Mkhuhlu Circuit in the Bushbuckridge region, Bohlabela District, Mpumalanga Province. Teenage pregnancy harms learners' academic performance due to absenteeism, poor performance in school, and increased dropout rates. Notwithstanding the presence of national directives on the re-admission of pregnant learners, the execution of these policies at the school level is variable. A qualitative design was employed, utilising in-depth interviews with school management teams (SMTs), and impacted learners to examine how schools interpret and implement these policies. Thematic analysis was employed to discern policy deficiencies, obstacles, and exemplary approaches in the management of teenage pregnancy within the educational framework. Research findings reveal that although educational institutions recognise policy mandates, execution is frequently obstructed by stigma, insufficient oversight, and inadequate support systems. The study suggests that robust policy enforcement, SMT training, and community engagement are vital for enhancing the educational results of teenage mothers.

Keywords: academic performance, learner support, educational policy, pregnancy

Introduction

Pregnancy among teenagers is a substantial concern for educational systems globally, impacting learners' academic performance and creating intricate management and policy issues for educational institutions. The issue has transitioned from a mere moral or social dilemma to a recognised structural and educational challenge that necessitates competent leadership and governmental interventions. International frameworks, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979), and Ahmed's (2024) Guidelines on Managing School-Related Gender-Based Violence and Learner

Pregnancy, underscore the entitlement of every learner to education devoid of discrimination. They urge educational systems to cultivate inclusive management and leadership practices that assist pregnant learners and young mothers. The Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25) unequivocally asserts that Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) constitute the foundational element for future learning and designates it as the next critical area for Africa to achieve enduring quality education and training. CESA 16-25 says that early childhood education is a disadvantaged area that needs more focus. To make this important sub-sector stronger, the CESA ECED cluster was set up (Union, 2016). The Maputo

Protocol advocates for inclusive and equitable education at the continental level by compelling member states to remove obstacles that hinder girls' access to education (Justice, 2024). According to Morgan, Ibrahim, Owusu, Awafo, Quartey, Aziire & Katey (2023), schools have started to permit pregnant girls and teenage mothers to resume their classes in most African countries Ghana included. The efficacy of these programs is predominantly contingent upon the leadership capabilities and management proficiency of school administrators, in addition to community perceptions about teenage mothers. In South Africa, adolescent pregnancy continues to be a significant obstacle to educational achievement and gender parity. The South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) ensure every child's entitlement to basic education, while the Department of Basic Education's (DBE) Measures for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools (2021) delineate explicit protocols for preventing learner pregnancy and assisting impacted learners. These policies stipulate that pregnant learners and teenage mothers shall not be rejected from educational institutions, and that schools are required to create supportive environments that facilitate learning and reintegration. Nonetheless, despite these advanced frameworks, implementation is variable, especially in rural schools where resource deficiencies, social stigma, and inadequate managerial competence obstruct effective policy execution. The phrase "teenage pregnancy" emerged prominently in the 1970s where girls below the age of 18 years give birth to a child (Gupta, 2021). Thelma (2023) perceives teenage pregnant as a moral and societal issue, frequently linked to poverty and familial dysfunction. Factors leading to adolescent pregnancy encompass early sexual initiation, socio-economic disparity, peer pressure, gender-based violence, and restricted access to reproductive health education (Gero, 2025). Research indicates that although not all pregnant learners withdraw from school, pregnancy and parenthood frequently result in absenteeism, academic underachievement, and emotional turmoil (Jochim, 2021).

These difficulties necessitate deliberate and inclusive answers from school management and leadership. Principals and School Management Teams (SMTs) should adeptly manage the many intersections of policy, pedagogy, and community expectations while guaranteeing that schools continue to serve as supportive learning environments for all learners. Effective leadership, be it transformative, instructional, or participative is crucial in cultivating situations where learners can pursue their education with dignity and support (Shields, 2024). The management of teenage pregnancy in schools transcends pastoral care; it serves as a measure of institutional leadership, policy execution, and compliance with human rights values within the educational framework.

In rural South Africa, specifically in the Mkhuhlu Circuit of the Bohlabela District in Mpumalanga Province, teenage pregnancy is exacerbated by poverty, cultural norms, and insufficient educational resources. While many studies have explored the causes and prevention of teenage pregnancy, fewer have analysed the impact of school management, leadership styles, and policy implementation on the academic performance of affected learners. This study examines how school leaders manage and support learners experiencing pregnancy and motherhood, and how their reactions correspond with national and international educational policy frameworks that advocate for inclusive and equitable education.

Problem statement

Although initiatives at international, continental, and national levels advocating for inclusive education, adolescent pregnancy persists in undermining academic achievement, especially in rural institutions like those within the Mkhuhlu Circuit, Mpumalanga Province. Jochim (2021) states that pregnant learners encounter difficulties in reconciling education with parenthood, frequently leading to absenteeism, subpar performance, and attrition. Therefore, this paper examines the responses of school management and leadership in the Mkhuhlu Circuit to teenage pregnancy and the degree to which policies

are implemented to support the academic outcomes of affected learners.

Aim and Objectives

1. The paper seeks to examine the impact of school management, leadership practices, and policy implementation on the academic performance of pregnant adolescents and teenage mothers in secondary schools in the Mkhuhlu Circuit, Bushbuckridge region of Bohlabela District, Mpumalanga Province.
2. To examine the influence of school management and leadership on the academic success of pregnant learners and teenage mothers.
3. To review the effectiveness of current policies and school-based initiatives in alleviating the academic difficulties encountered by pregnant learners.
4. To assess gaps in management practices and policy execution that affect learners' academic achievement.

Research question

1. How do school management, leadership practices, and policy implementation impact the academic performance of pregnant learners and teenage mothers in secondary schools in the Mkhuhlu Circuit, Bohlabela District?
2. In what ways do school management practices and leadership practices help pregnant learners and teenage mothers to achieve better results?
3. How well do national and school-level policies work to help pregnant learners with their schoolwork?
4. What are the shortcomings in management and leadership that make it harder for young mothers to do well in school?

Theoretical framework

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and the Transformational Leadership Theory informed this paper. Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979) elucidates how learners' development is shaped by interactions across various environmental systems, including the microsystem

(school and family), mesosystem (interconnections between home and school), exosystem (policies and institutional support), and macrosystem (Härkönen, 2001). Within this framework, the school and its administration constitute a crucial microsystem wherein leadership decisions, policies, and SMT support directly influence the academic experiences of pregnant learners and teenage mothers.

The Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006) enhances this theory by highlighting how visionary and compassionate school leaders may inspire and assist both SMTs and learners through inclusive practices. Transformational leaders foster dedication, exemplify compassion, and cultivate environments that address the requirements of at-risk learners (Burnett, 2024). Collectively, these theories offer a thorough framework for analysing the interplay between school leadership and management practices and policy implementation, affecting the academic performance and retention of pregnant learners in South African schools.

Literature review

Teen pregnancy continues to pose a considerable obstacle to schooling in South Africa, especially in rural schools such as those in Mpumalanga, which exhibits the highest national prevalence (Mbongwa, Mpanza, & Mlambo, 2024). Pregnant learners encounter absenteeism, diminished academic performance, and increased dropout rates (Otegbayo, Omar, Danaee, Mohajer & Aghamohamadi, 2023). Legislation like the South African Schools Act (SASA, 1996) and the DBE Measures for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy (2021) advocate for educational inclusion; nevertheless, poor execution frequently undermines their efficacy (Beukes, 2024). International frameworks underscore the need for inclusive education, highlighting the essential function of school leadership in maintaining academic performance of learners (Simbo, 2025).

The impact of school management and leadership on the academic achievement of pregnant learners and teenage mothers is essential in determining their educational results. Effective

school leadership fosters an inclusive and supportive educational environment that addresses the distinct needs of these learners. Research conducted by Mafe (2023) & Burnett (2024) underscores that school leaders employing transformational and instructional leadership strategies cultivate positive relationships, inspire SMTs, and ensure the effective implementation of policies that promote learner welfare. In environments where administrators and management teams actively endorse re-entry programs, adaptable schedules, and counselling services, pregnant learners and young mothers are more inclined to persist in their education and achieve academic success. Leadership that emphasises empathy, transparent communication, and engagement with stakeholders, including parents, social workers, and community health services can alleviate the stigma and academic interruptions encountered by teenage mothers (Morgan, Anima, Wadei, & Katey, 2025).

In contrast, inadequate administrative frameworks and unhelpful leadership approaches frequently intensify the difficulties encountered by pregnant learners. In numerous rural schools, strict compliance with attendance and evaluation criteria, without consideration for maternity-related absences, leads to diminished academic performance and increased dropout rates. Chiyota (2020) discovered that inadequate enforcement of national re-entry rules and lack of focused support by school management result in discrimination, diminished involvement, and restricted access to academic resources for young mothers. The efficacy of school leadership and administration strongly impact the implementation of policies aimed at supporting pregnant learners (Tsarkos, 2025). An active and empathetic school leadership culture fosters academic continuity while enhancing fairness and inclusivity in the education system.

The efficacy of policies and school-based initiatives in aiding pregnant learners can be comprehensively analysed through Bronfenbrenner's

Ecological Systems Theory, which contextualises individual development within the interacting systems of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Elizabeth, 2023). In this context, the school operates as a vital microsystem that directly influences the learners' academic experience. South Africa's Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools exemplifies macrosystem-level measures aimed at fostering inclusion, gender equity, and the continuation of education for pregnant learners (MunKo, 2025). Their efficacy is significantly contingent upon the responsiveness of the microsystem, specifically school management, SMTs, and peers, as well as the mesosystem interactions among schools, families, and healthcare services.

Research conducted by Holings (2021) indicates that although inclusive policies are in place, their effectiveness is frequently undermined by unsupportive educational settings, stigma, and insufficient collaboration among stakeholders. Thus, the ecological viewpoint emphasises that a comprehensive network of supportive relationships and institutional collaboration is essential for enhancing the academic experiences of pregnant learners. Transformational Leadership Theory provides insights into how school leaders might convert policy frameworks into effective practices. Transformational leaders encourage and empower SMTs to exceed mere compliance by cultivating empathy, inclusivity, and collective accountability for learners' success. Mafe (2023), assert that transformational school leadership increases SMT dedication and fosters new strategies to accommodate learner diversity. In the context of pregnant learners, such leadership entails establishing adaptable schedules, providing counselling support, and fostering non-discriminatory practices in accordance with national legislation. Research conducted by Demozie (2025) highlights that educational institutions led by principals and management teams exhibiting transformational leadership are more effective in keeping learners and enhancing their academic outcomes.

Consequently, both Bronfenbrenner's Ecologi-

cal Systems Theory and Transformational Leadership Theory emphasise the interrelation of systemic policy frameworks and school-level leadership practices, demonstrating that sustainable educational support for pregnant learners necessitates not only inclusive policies but also compassionate, visionary leadership to implement them effectively. Although the presence of rules designed to assist pregnant learners, considerable deficiencies persist in school management practices and policy execution, which negatively impact academic performance. Research demonstrates that although the DBE's Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy (2021) offers a structure for maintaining educational continuity, numerous schools inadequately implement these policies due to a lack of awareness, insufficient training, or adverse attitudes among staff (Mathebula, 2019). Insufficient oversight and erratic enforcement of policy measures can cause pregnant learners to experience stigma, exclusion from specific school activities, or inadequate academic support, resulting in absenteeism and deteriorating performance. Villafane (2025) contends that deficiencies in leadership approaches, including inadequate proactive engagement, ineffective communication with parents, and insufficient mentorship, intensify the challenges encountered by these learners.

Moreover, deficiencies in policy administration and implementation are exacerbated by resource constraints and institutional inflexibility, impeding the school's capacity to address the distinct requirements of learners. Litz & Blaik-Hourani (2020) assert that transformational leadership, characterised by vision, support, and empowerment, is essential for converting policies into effective practice. In the absence of effective leadership, school administrators may struggle to establish supportive learning environments, adaptable schedules, or counselling initiatives designed for pregnant learners, thus perpetuating disparities in academic performance. The literature consistently emphasises that addressing these gaps necessitates not only explicit policies but also dedicated, compassionate leadership and ongoing professional development for SMTs to ensure that policy intentions convert

into concrete support for learners' academic achievement (Gencel, 2022).

Research design

This study employed a qualitative research approach to examine the impact of school leadership, management practices, and policy implementation on the academic performance of pregnant learners and teenage mothers in secondary schools in the Mkhuhlu Circuit, Bohlabela District. Qualitative research facilitates a comprehensive knowledge of participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes within authentic school environments, without altering the phenomenon under investigation (Hatch, 2023). A case study methodology was employed to investigate the interaction of school management, leadership support, and policy compliance, emphasising their impact on learners' academic performance and coping mechanisms. Data were gathered via interviews with teenage mothers and their SMTs, alongside pertinent school papers, offering a comprehensive insight into the efficacy of leadership and policy approaches in facilitating the educational success of pregnant learners. Semi-structured interviews and school policy document analysis were used to collect data that were relevant to the study.

Sampling procedure

The study's target group consisted of pregnant learners, teenage mothers, and their instructors from secondary schools in the Mkhuhlu Circuit, Bohlabela District, Mpumalanga Province. A purposive sample method was employed to choose participants capable of offering profound insights into the impact of school leadership, management practices and policy implementation on academic performance. Twelve pregnant learners or teenage mothers, aged 15–19 years and engaged in secondary education, were chosen along with six SMTs who are directly accountable for executing school regulations and assisting learners. In line with qualitative research guidelines, these participants were chosen to guarantee sufficient representation of SMTs and learners, enable thorough experiential exploration, and achieve thematic saturation.

tion. SMTs were incorporated to offer professional insights on leadership practices and policy implementation, while learners were chosen to convey firsthand experiences on management support and problems.

Data collection

Data were gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with teenage mothers, learners, and their instructors to examine the impact of school leadership, management practices, and policy implementation on academic performance. Interviews were performed in participants' regular school settings to guarantee genuine responses and contextually relevant comprehension. The interview guide comprised enquiries regarding school management support, leadership initiatives, policy awareness, and the problems encountered in reconciling pregnancy with academic obligations. Furthermore, pertinent school documents and policy records were examined to corroborate data and understand the impact of institutional practices and leadership decisions on learners' educational results. The integration of interviews and document analysis yielded a thorough comprehensive of the efficacy of leadership and policy interventions in facilitating the academic success of pregnant learners.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted to examine the impact of school leadership, management methods, and policy implementation on the academic performance of pregnant learners and teenage mothers. To acquire a fundamental comprehension of the facts, all interview transcripts and instructional materials were originally transcribed, reviewed repeatedly, and examined systematically. Subsequently, codes manually developed to document significant concepts pertaining to management, policy, and leadership. Upon categorising these codes, themes emerged that exhibited patterns and connections aligned with the study's objectives. We ensured the selected themes were coherent and consistent through examination, development, and clarification. This analysis examines the in-

fluence of leadership and policy on the educational outcomes of pregnant learners and teenage mothers, while identifying opportunities for improvement in school management practices, through the framework of current research and theoretical perspectives.

Ethical considerations

The participants were informed of their option to withdraw from the study at any time and advised that they might decline to answer any questions they deemed uncomfortable. Prior to participating in the study, individuals were informed about confidentiality and instructed to read and sign the participant information sheet. The primary objective of this research was to maintain elevated ethical standards. This was implemented to safeguard their rights and ensure their safety. Badampudi, Fotrousi, Cartaxo, & Usman (2022) initially briefed the participants on ethical considerations, including informed consent, the rights of participants and their guardians, voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality.

Findings and discussion

The findings reveal that school management and leadership have a crucial although variable impact on the academic performance of pregnant learners and teenage mothers. Interviews with SMTs and learners indicated that while several school leaders showed empathy and strived to foster supportive settings, others adopted a rigorous approach that impeded learners' academic advancement.

SMT 1 stated: "Certain learners are permitted to remain at home when unwell; however, there is insufficient follow-up from the school administration to assist them in catching up."

Likewise, SMT 3 underscored the absence of structured leadership intervention, "Our leaders should implement organised support programs; however, we merely address issues as they arise there is no policy-driven strategy."

These opinions were reiterated by learners, who indicated variable leadership support among schools

Learner 4 remarked, "The principal is empa-

thetic, yet teachers occasionally exhibit inconsistent treatment; it varies based on the individual with whom one converses."

The findings indicate that although certain school leaders exhibit sensitivity, leadership methods throughout Mkhuhlu Circuit are predominantly administrative rather than developmental. There seems to be insufficient strategic planning or oversight concerning the academic needs of pregnant learners, especially with re-entry programs and counselling services.

This corresponds with Naidoo (2021), who discovered that the dedication of school management teams (SMTs) directly affects the inclusion and retention of pregnant learners. Carter & Abawi (2018) contends that good leadership encompasses both policy implementation and the establishment of inclusive learning environments that address varied learner requirements. The results align with Luyten & Bazo (2019), who highlight transformational leadership as a framework that promotes inclusivity, collaboration, and learner-centred decision-making.

The ineffective leadership identified in this study diminishes the essence of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which highlights the impact of immediate settings, such as schools, on learners' growth. School leaders, integral to the learner's microsystem, are tasked with coordinating emotional, social, and academic support. The inability to achieve this leads to learners experiencing isolation and a lack of support. Consequently, transformational leadership techniques that promote empathy, collective accountability, and systematic follow-up processes are essential for maintaining the engagement and performance of pregnant learners.

The analysis of documents and interview data indicated that most schools within Mkhuhlu Circuit are cognisant of the Department of Basic Education's (DBE, 2021) Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools, which stipulates non-discrimination, ongoing education, and psychosocial support for pregnant learners. Nonetheless, the execution of these provisions is predominantly erratic and frequently superficial.

SMT 2 remarked, "Policies stipulate that support should be provided, and exclusion avoided; however, in practice, we lack the resources and time to deliver remedial lessons." Learner 5 articulated comparable exasperation, my academic performance deteriorated when I became pregnant. I am absent from classes due to clinic appointments, and there are no specific provisions to assist me in catching up.

SMT 4 stated, "Teen pregnancy and motherhood adversely impact learners, restricting their time for academic pursuits, and there is a lack of supportive programs."

Despite the DBE (2021) policy delineating pragmatic solutions such as adaptable timetables, re-entry strategies, and counselling services, these rules are not uniformly implemented at the school level. Numerous educational institutions lack established frameworks for tracking absences, delivering additional instruction, or offering professional counselling services. This aligns with the findings of Letsie (2021), who contend that the lack of explicit implementation techniques, notwithstanding inclusive policies, continues to penalise pregnant learners academically. Similarly, Ramulomo (2024) discovered that SMTs frequently lack the requisite knowledge and confidence to adequately assist pregnant learners, leading to a superficial adherence to policy instead of substantive execution. The findings of the study indicate that although certain schools implement informal interventions, such as permitting flexible attendance or providing ad hoc catch-up courses, these initiatives are inconsistent and largely reliant on the generosity of individual SMTs. This inconsistency undermines policy efficacy and exacerbates disparities among learners.

The policy study indicated that while policies highlight gender equity and learner rights, there is insufficient oversight from district education offices to guarantee adherence. The disparity between policy formulation and implementation exemplifies Bronfenbrenner's macrosystem, wherein national educational frameworks have influence yet do not consistently translate effectively into local practices. School leadership should serve as a conduit between policy and

practice by implementing precise, context-specific actions that safeguard the educational rights of pregnant learners.

The studies identified significant gaps in management practices and policy implementation that adversely affect learners' academic achievement. SMTs and learners emphasised the lack of organised initiatives for academic remediation, emotional support, and parental engagement. Pregnant learners encounter not only academic obstacles but also emotional turmoil, stigma, and social alienation within the educational environment.

SMT 5 remarked, "Many are still adolescents and often experienced a decline in self-esteem following an unplanned pregnancy." We require direction from the Department regarding how to provide emotional support.

Learner 7 likewise articulated exasperation, "No, we do not receive any special attention; SMTs struggle to accommodate our needs."

These quotations demonstrate that educational institutions are encountering difficulties in effectively integrating psychosocial and intellectual support. Despite school rules promoting counselling and emotional support, interviewees revealed that these services are infrequently accessible due to a deficiency of qualified counsellors and inadequate coordination with external support networks. This discovery corresponds with the assertions of Bitew & Adam (2022), who contend that educational institutions frequently neglect the emotional and social aspects of learner parenting, prioritising attendance and discipline instead.

Furthermore, SMTs indicated that they receive insufficient direction or training in addressing the intricate demands of pregnant learners. The absence of interdepartmental collaboration among educational institutions, social workers, and healthcare experts further constrains the efficacy of initiatives. Swargiary (2024) contends that effective learner support necessitates a comprehensive approach that includes all stakeholders, such as parents, SMTs, and community health services.

The results indicate that school administration approaches are predominantly reactive instead of proactive. There are few proactive initiatives

for the early identification of at-risk learners, insufficient home-school communication, and negligible monitoring of policy impact on learners' academic results. This disparity illustrates what Mugambwa, Nabeta, Ngoma, Rudaheranwa, Kaberuka & Munene (2020) refers to as the "implementation deficit," when robust policy goals are compromised by inadequate execution and a lack of leadership accountability. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory elucidates the emergence of these gaps across interconnected systems. The school (microsystem) inadequately collaborates with families (mesosystem) and governmental entities (exosystem), resulting in disjointed support for pregnant learners. Transformational Leadership Theory emphasises the necessity of visionary leadership that fosters cooperation, empowers SMTs, and cultivates an inclusive culture that prioritises learner wellness. In the absence of strong leadership, policies fail to yield results, resulting in ongoing academic and emotional challenges for learners.

The findings indicate that although progressive educational policies are in place to assist pregnant learners, ineffective school management, insufficient leadership engagement, and inadequate policy execution impede their achievement. Educational leaders frequently prioritise administrative adherence over the cultivation of inclusive, learner-centred methodologies. SMTs demonstrate goodwill but are deficient in resources, training, and direction necessary to implement support measures effectively. Consequently, pregnant learners encounter absenteeism, mental turmoil, and academic deterioration.

This study, grounded in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, demonstrates how the interaction of school leadership, policy environment, and learner circumstances influences academic achievement. Transformational Leadership Theory emphasises the imperative for school leaders to transcend mere rule enforcement in favour of fostering inspiration, empathy, and organised collaboration. Schools in the Mkhuhlu Circuit may effectively serve pregnant learners and protect their right to education

solely via unified and well-executed management practices and policy implementation.

Summary

This study, entitled “An Assessment of Educational Policies on Teenage Pregnancy and Learner Support in Secondary Schools of Mkhuhlu Circuit, Mpumalanga Province,” examined the influence of educational policies and school leadership practices on the academic performance of pregnant learners and teenage mothers. Utilising Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory and Transformational Leadership Theory, the study assessed the influence of school environments, management methods, and policy implementation on the educational experiences of this at-risk population.

Data obtained from interviews with SMTs and learners, supplemented by document analysis, indicated that although inclusive policies are established at the national level, exemplified by the DBE (2021) Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools, their effective implementation is lacking. School management teams (SMTs) and instructors may lack organised plans, resources, or training to adequately serve pregnant learners. Pregnant learners indicated difficulties such as absenteeism, emotional distress, diminished self-esteem, and academic deterioration, primarily attributable to uneven leadership support and the lack of counselling or remedial strategies.

Conclusion

The research indicated that while certain school leaders demonstrate empathy and adaptability, leadership predominantly retains an administrative rather than a transformational character. This undermines the school's capacity to proactively address the needs of pregnant learners. Policy documents underscore the importance of inclusiveness and learner assistance; nonetheless, discrepancies remain between policy objectives and actual execution. Collaboration among educational institutions, parents, and community stakeholders remains insufficient, leading to disjointed support networks.

Recommendations

Considering the findings and conclusions, the following proposals are put out to enhance school administration, policy execution, and support for pregnant learners

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) should enhance the execution of the Learner Pregnancy Policy (2021) by instituting explicit monitoring frameworks at the school level. Schools should be mandated to establish Pregnant Learners Support Plans, outlining attendance protocols, remedial tactics, and reintegration methods post-childbirth. District officials should perform regular audits to guarantee compliance and offer technical support to schools facing challenges with implementation. School leaders should embrace transformational leadership strategies that foster inclusion, empathy, and proactive measures for at-risk learners.

School Management Teams should organise frequent professional development seminars to educate SMTs with the competencies necessary to address issues related to pregnancy, gender sensitivity, and psychosocial assistance. Principals should cultivate a collaborative educational environment, including SMTs, parents, and learners in establishing secure and non-judgmental environments for teenage mothers. Schools should implement organised catch-up programs and adaptable schedules to facilitate pregnant learners' medical appointments and postnatal obligations. SMTs should furnish personalised learning programs and customised training to assist learners in sustaining academic continuity.

Educational institutions should collaborate with social workers, psychologists, and health departments to deliver counselling and psychosocial assistance to pregnant learners. Awareness initiatives should be implemented to mitigate stigma and enhance comprehension among SMTs and learners. Schools should promote parental engagement by arranging meetings that instruct parents on how to assist their children emotionally and academically. A multi-sectoral partnership involving educational institutions, community organisations, and local healthcare facilities should be developed to provide pregnant learners with comprehensive educational and health support.

The DBE, in collaboration with NGOs, should develop community outreach programs that enhance reproductive health education, with the objective of decreasing early pregnancies and facilitating learner retention. Examine the long-

term educational pathways of teenage mothers who resume their studies following motherhood. Assess the involvement of male partners and family in facilitating the education of pregnant learners.

References

- Ahmed, A. A. (2024). *Gender-based violence and child education rights*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367335956>
- Badampudi, D., Fotrousi, F., Cartaxo, B., & Usman, M. (2022). Reporting consent, anonymity and confidentiality procedures adopted in empirical studies using human participants, *e-Informatica Software Engineering Journal*, 16(1), p. 220109. doi:10.37190/e-inf220109.
- Bannister, T. & Edwards, L. (2024) *Leveraging the Maputo Protocol: Enhancing the police response to improve access to justice for women*. Cape Town: African Policing Civilian Oversight Forum.
- Beukes, S.M (2024). *Exploring capability sets for educators for implementation of the Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools (2021)*, Handle Proxy. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/11660/12917> (Accessed: 10 November 2025).
- Bitew, T. & Adam, T. (2022). *Guidance and counselling services in secondary schools in Eastern Gojjam Administrative Zone: A mixed design evaluation of priority needs, service barriers and facilitators* [Preprint]. doi:10.21203/rs.3.rs-428689/v1.
- Burnett EdD, S. (2024). *Transformative leadership: Creating and sustaining a thriving school culture*. S.I: iUniverse.
- Carter, S. & Abawi, L.A. (2018). Leadership, inclusion, and quality education for all, *Australasian Journal of Special and Inclusive Education*, 42(01), pp. 49–64. doi:10.1017/jsi.2018.5.
- Chanda Chansa Thelma, Brian Nakalonga Mubemba & Lufeyo Chitondo (2023). Social media and pupils' academic performance: A case of selected secondary schools in Lusaka District, Zambia, *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews*, 20(1), pp. 1028–1035. doi:10.30574/wjarr.2023.20.1.2178.
- Chiyota, N. (2020). *Implementation of a Re-Entry Policy for Teenage Mothers in Zambian Secondary Schools* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pretoria (South Africa). <https://www.scirp.org/reference/referencespapers?referenceid=3909893>
- Demozie, A. A. (2025). *The Transformational Leadership Role of the Principal in Improving Learners' Academic Outcomes in Ethiopian High Schools* (Doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa (South Africa). <https://www.scirp.org/reference/referencespapers?referenceid=3109407>
- Elizabeth, O. B. (2023). *Social Intervention Framework Regarding Ecological Factors Pertaining to Academic Achievement of Pregnant Teenagers in Nigeria* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Malaya (Malaysia). <https://myto.upm.edu.my/find/Record/u1163588/Export?style=RefWorks>
- Gencel, H. (2022). *Teacher perceptions of the competence of the school management team to utilise an ethical foundation and its influence on job satisfaction*. <https://ujcontent.uj.ac.za/esploro/outputs/graduate/Teacher-perceptions-of-the-competence-of/9911476907691>

- Gero, C. (2025). *The relationship between (rapid) repeat adolescent pregnancy and early marriage - case study of Kenya, The Relationship Between (Rapid) Repeat Adolescent Pregnancy and Early Marriage - Case Study of Kenya*. Available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/10281/542583> (Accessed: 10 November 2025).
- Gupta, T. (2021). Teen pregnancy: *Encyclopedia of the UN Sustainable Development Goals*, pp. 1049–1049. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-95714-2_300283.
- Härkönen, U. (2001). *The Bronfenbrenner ecological systems theory of human development*. [https://scholar.google.co.za/scholar?q=H%C3%A4rk%C3%B6nen,+U.+\(2001\)](https://scholar.google.co.za/scholar?q=H%C3%A4rk%C3%B6nen,+U.+(2001)).
- Hatch, J.A. (2023) *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Hollings, S. (2021). Implementation barriers of inclusive education and their impact on stakeholders: A review of the literature, *International Journal of Childhood Education*, 2(1), pp. 27–45. doi:10.33422/ijce.v2i1.36.
- Jochim, J. (2021). *Staying on Track or Falling Behind? Factors Associated With Pre-and Post-Pregnancy Schooling Among Teenage mothers in South Africa*. University of Oxford (United Kingdom). <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:4897c21e-5f4b-4b06-bdc5-9cc74f26ddb0>
- Letsie, P. R. (2021). *School re-entry policies: A human rights and cultural conundrum for pregnant and parenting adolescents in Lesotho* (Master's thesis, University of Pretoria (South Africa). <https://repositorio.up.ac.za/items/d4a2e9ff-e7b5-4d52-ac3b-687e0dc20ca0>
- Litz, D. & Blaik-Hourani, R. (2020). Transformational leadership and change in Education, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education* [Preprint]. doi:10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.631.
- Luyten, H. Ba& zo, M. (2019). Transformational leadership, Professional Learning Communities, teacher learning and learner centred teaching practices; evidence on their interrelations in Mozambican primary education, *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 60, pp. 14–31. doi: 10.1016/j.stueduc.2018.11.002.
- Mafe S., P. (2023). *Transformational Leadership: Exploring Secondary School Leaders' Perceptions on Best Practices*. *International Journal of Formal Education*, 2 (10). pp. 176-188. ISSN 2720-6874
- Mathebula, R. N. (2019). *School-based interventions into effects of school girl pregnancy on teaching and learning in Mopani District, Limpopo Province, South Africa* (Doctoral dissertation). <https://scholar.googleusercontent.com/scholar.bib?q=info:SNsl8>
- Mbongwa, L., Mpanza, S. & Mlambo, V.H. (2024). The teenage pregnancy crisis in South Africa among high school & students, causes, implications and possible solutions: A literature review, *Futurity Education*, 4(3), pp. 200–216. doi:10.57125/fed.2024.09.25.12.
- Morgan, A. K., Ibrahim, R., Owusu, A. F. S., Awafo, B. A., Quartey, T., Aziire, M. A., ... & Katey, D. (2023). Prevalence and associated factors of school re-entry among teenage mothers in Ghana's Volta Region: A cross-sectional survey, *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 28(1). doi:10.1080/02673843.2023.2242476.

- Morgan, A. K., Anima, P. A., Wadei, B., & Katey, D. (2025). Addressing stigma and discrimination towards school re-entry of teenage mothers in Ghana, *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 30(1). doi:10.1080/02673843.2024.2441322.
- Mugambwa, J., Nabeta, I. N., Ngoma, M., Rudaheranwa, N., Kaberuka, W., & Munene, J. C. (2020). Policy implementation: A review of selected literature. *Enabling collaborative governance through systems modeling methods: Public policy design and implementation*, 91-116.
- Munko, C. (2025). *School support systems and teachers' perceptions of teenage pregnancy. Implications for Academic Progression in Ghana*.
- Naidoo, R. R. (2021). *Instructional leadership roles of school management teams: an exploratory study of five township secondary schools* (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Free State).
- Otegbayo, B. E., Omar, N., Danaee, M., Mohajer, S., & Aghamohamadi, N. (2023). Impact of individual and environmental factors on academic performance of pregnant adolescent. *BMC Women's Health*, 23(1), 383. doi:10.1186/s12905-023-02520-y.
- Ramulumo, R. M. (2024). *Challenges Facing School Management Teams in Implementing Teenage Pregnancy Policy in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province* (Doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa (South Africa)).
- Shields, C.M. (2025). *Transformative leadership in education: Equitable, inclusive, and quality education in an uncertain and Complex World*. New York: Routledge.
- Simbo, C. (2025). Exploring the purpose and evolution of education: From informal learning to formal schooling, challenges, international legal frameworks and recommendations for the future, *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science* (2147- 4478), 14(2), pp. 309–315. doi:10.20525/ijrbs. v14i2.3920.
- Sinthumule, N.I. (2024). Challenges facing traditional ecological knowledge in the Vhembe District Municipality in Limpopo Province, South Africa, *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 10, p. 101027. doi:10.1016/j. ssaho.2024.101027.
- Swargiary, K. (2024). *Role of stakeholders in Education: Government, School Leaders, Teachers, Staff, Parents, Community, and Society Towards Learners*. S.l.: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publ.
- Tsarkos, A. (2024). Empowering educational excellence, *Advances in Educational Marketing, Administration, and Leadership*, pp. 203–234. doi:10.4018/979-8-3693-9215-7.ch007.
- Union, A. (2016). *Continental education strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25)*. Addis Ababa: AU. 44pp. <https://au.int/en/documents/20171217/continental-education-strategy-africa-2016-2025-cesa-16-25-vol-02-dec-2017>
- Villafane, R. (2025). Participative leadership style of school heads: Implications for an effective academic mentorship program. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 3(4). <https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2025.033>

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.2>**Moving masculinities and intra-African migration in recent African fiction**

Blessing Phakathi,
University of Zululand, South Africa

PhakathiB@unizulu.ac.za

&

Aghogho Akpome,
University of Zululand, South Africa

AkpomeA@unizulu.ac.za

Abstract

*This article explores the impact of intra-African migration on constructions and performances of masculinities in Yvonne Maphosa's 2018 novel, *The Y in yOUR Man is Silent*. The novel was released in the wake of deadly xenophobic attacks against black African migrants in South Africa. These, understandably, were reflected in international and regional narratives that portrayed South Africa as a hostile environment for black migrants from other African countries. In Maphosa's novel, the depiction of two of her male characters, Elik, a Ghanaian and Lumka, a South African, goes against the grain as the men find mutual strength and camaraderie in a warm friendship. Their friendship cuts across a personal and professional relationship. This article interrogates this friendship to highlight its impact of the personal and professional development of both men in their positions as migrants across Johannesburg and Cape Town. The patterns of both their migration highlight the importance of male-to-male friendships in diasporic spaces. Furthermore, the article explores how Maphosa destabilises discourses of trauma among black male migrants in South Africa, a phenomenon that has influenced their experience and articulation of masculinity. The article highlights the ways in which the nuanced portrayal of Elik and Lumka's friendship suggests an inclusive rather than exclusionary Johannesburg environment as the two characters migrated from elsewhere to Joburg.*

Key words: archetype, migrant, moving masculinities, the y in yOUR man is Silent,

Introduction and synopsis of the novel

The Y in yOUR Man is Silent by Zimbabwean author Yvonne Maphosa centres around the character Lastborn Fierce Nkomo's life and relationship with Elikeplim Mauweasi Nkrumah. While Zimbabwean born Fierce's life is spent in Cape Town, Elik lives in Johannesburg with his wife Komla Nkrumah. Elik's life and marriage to Komla takes place when he and Fierce are already involved in a relationship. The polygamous situation leads to a long, winding tale of frustration marred by toxicity, jealousy, vengeance and abuse in the messy union (see Ankihorah, 2021, Okyere-Manu and Konyana, 2018). This brings into sharp focus the nature of Elik's dependence on his South African friend and business partner Lumka to construct and

perform his role as a husband to both women. The novel paints a positive picture of archetypal relationship between Elik and Lumka, in a way that suggests redemptive and restorative views of Johannesburg as a hostile environment for migrant men, particularly black African migrants from outside the South African borders. Maphosa's novel underscores the positive impact of homo heroic relationships among men within the same time space rather than the negative and uneasy relations depicted in the wake of xenophobic attacks on black African migrant men.

Diaspora, Homo-heroic men and archetypes

To understand the impact of Elik and Lumka's friendship, it is essential to contextualise their

relationship from a background that intersects migration and diaspora post the wake of xenophobia in South Africa. This in turn sheds light on why the nuance of these two men's friendship is seen as archetypal. The period after the first isolated incidences of xenophobic disturbances in South Africa sparked debates on intolerance shown towards African migrants in South Africa, particularly in Johannesburg. While migration was not a new phenomenon and not only unique to South Africa, some scholars attributed xenophobia to the inequalities between the rich and the poor of the country. For this reason, Maphosa's depiction of Elik and Lumka's friendship critiques some views of the uneasy relationships usually associated with migrant men.

Diasporic spaces by nature are marked by diversity and duplicity becomes a form of agency for identity construction, particularly for the mobile men. This means that there will, in such spaces, be friction as a marker of agency as already mentioned. Friction between a diversified group will be marked by power struggles that lead to catastrophes such as racism and/or xenophobia. In this context therefore, Maphosa's representation of Lumka and Elik's friendship as they navigate Johannesburg, is emblematic of the redemptive nature suggesting a harmonious South African society where men strive despite their origin.

In addition, men in migrating, in its different forms, become more susceptible to vulnerability when occupying new unstable diasporic environments. The instability of the diaspora informs the resultant constructions of masculinities and their performances. It is essential in such instances for vulnerable men to form healthy friendships that cushion them in the performances of their roles. According to Weston (2018:35), "male friendship is performative and when men physically show their devotion they invoke a gestural repertoire". Weston observes the crucial element of male-to-male relationships that are essential in moments of vulnerability for men. Maphosa's novel captures this aspect of men's vulnerability through Elik's failure at one time, to perform not only his husbandly role but also his fatherly role to his son.

Lumka's protection over Elik until he fully recovers demonstrates the vitality of the male-to-male friendships when the diasporic space informs vulnerability in the construction of or the expression of masculinity.

Migration, as mentioned above, fosters different constructions and expressions of masculinity, some positive while some negative. The different forms of migration and the constant moving between spaces disables and/or enables constructions of healthy masculinities in Joburg. The novel presents various types of movement; that is, city to city migration, embodied by Lumka while Elik represents cross-border migration. These two types of movement between spaces present position the two male characters with dynamic complexities in their deployment of healthy expressions of masculinity. On the one hand, Lumka is positioned as a stable support system for Elik, while his friend's experiences are shown to be less constant. It is for this reason that Elik's transformation is riddled with tension showing the burden of existing an unfamiliar diasporic space. Lumka's presentation is less complex in comparison hence his ability to morally support Elik is evident throughout the novel. Essentially, it is notable that these characters' transformations presented in the deployment of their roles are linked to the degree of migration they occupy.

In addition, the deployment of the roles characterised by both male characters embodies what Landau (2017) refers to as 'convenient communities'. Landau's observations offer a solution to the palimpsestic nature of Joburg presented in the novel that appears to foster so-called inconvenience. Precarity, in Maphosa's novel is presented as multifaceted, not only emanating from dynamics of the diasporic space but also from the mobility of both Lumka and Elik as the two characters frequently move between spaces in Joburg, between towns within South Africa and across Africa. The consistent movement of these characters suggests the susceptibility of both to mental breakdown. Elik's experience with movement between spaces, his polygamy and profession project a negative impact on his mental health in a manner that paralyses him men-

tally, as he struggles to maintain balance between his roles in the different spaces of occupation. This reflects the need for a stable network of friends to stabilise his construction and deployment of his duties. Through Elik's mental struggle, Maphosa exposes the burden that migrant men occupying multiple positions suffer, leaving them vulnerable. Unchecked vulnerability is shown in the novel to lead to toxicity as seen in Elik's deployment of violence in the novel.

Elik suffers traumatic experiences of performing husband duties to two women, in two separate spaces, leading to depression and a crisis in his attempt to suit the needs of both women in their locations. The spaces of occupation refer to the two different home spaces with the two different women he is married to, that is, the spaces of Johannesburg and Cape Town. In addition, Elik's masculinity is influenced by the spaces of Ghana and Zimbabwe, respectively, where the two women originate, his different work locations, and the clubs he frequents with Lumka, his South African best friend. In exasperation, Elik wanders off to a secret place where no one is able to locate him for a while when he is struggles to live up to expectations of what a man should be in his different spaces of occupation. From the proverbial man cave, he attempts to reorganise his life as a husband to two women, a father, a lecturer and a businessman living in multiple spaces of influence.

'Convenient communities:' Friendship and the construction of identity

Maphosa's novel can be said to suggest that masculinities are constructed under sameness rather than difference, projecting what Landau (2017:505) calls 'convenient communities'. These 'convenient communities' as Landau points out, favour progression in international relationships rather than foster animosities amongst people from different national boundaries. In one of the altercations between Elik, Komla and Fierce, it is Lumka who is presented as having to clean up a messy scene by paying the hotel staff to keep quiet about the altercation. Also, he pays a bribe to some police officers to make that situation go away. This stance shows

how Lumka's presence enables Elik's maintenance of both his relationships. Lumka's involvement in Elik's plural marriages and his consistency as Elik's best friend throughout the novel dispels ideas that there are sinister ways in which transnational men view one another. There is no sinister agenda between the two characters, but there is a strong bond between them.

Majors's (2011:127) contention that "being accepted and having friends is essential to our mental health". This is significant in explaining Elik's reliance on Lumka's friendship. Despite the perceptions of men being "macho" and perceived as being emotionless beings, men's comradery is immemorial as observed by Strikwerda and May (1992). In the novel, it is Lumka who diffuses most of the fiascos between Elik and his two wives. Lumka is even ready to divorce his wife because she and Komla make an unprecedented arrival in Plumtree Zimbabwe, to destroy Fierce's 'lobola' day (Maphosa, 2019:314), showing his loyalty and brotherhood to Elik. Lumka's frustration symbolises camaraderie between him and Elik in ways that suggest new ways in which intra-African friendships between men is archetypal.

Lumka's awareness of both setups of Elik's marriages in Ghana and Zimbabwe, and again in Johannesburg and Cape Town, suggests the idea of positive male friendships. Lumka is aware of both women's temperaments, where in the Ghanaian household, he is aware that Elik acts according to his custom as a husband towards Komla. Lumka is aware that Elik is not referred to by his first name, but rather by the name of his son. "Baba Paul" is how Komla usually addresses him as a sign of respect. Elik performs the role of being a father to his twins and a husband to Komla according to the Ghanaian custom, although this is debatable in the sense that what really is 'Ghanaian custom' when they reside in Johannesburg.

On the other hand, Lumka is aware that Elik's behaviour when they are together is different from how Elik behaves when he (Elik) is at home with Fierce. Lumka is also aware of the twelve-year age gap between Fierce and Elik. While Fierce respects Lumka, Lumka knows

that Fierce often uses pet names to call Elik and actually calls Elik by his first name when she is angry. In other words, Lumka is conscious of the fact that Elik deliberately changes his (Elik's) behaviour towards Fierce due to the differences in age and maturity between the partners (i.e. Elik and Fierce). In the couples' household, Elik performs a less traditional role compared to when he is with Komla. He is more expressive and less rigid with Fierce because she encourages him to be more expressive. Fierce and Elik's home is a more relaxing space than Elik's and Komla's. Apparently, Fierce's youth appeals to Elik's childish side. They both like "Star Wars" Maphosa (2019:84), they use games as a way of relating to each other and they both enjoy going to bars and clubs. In this way, Elik is depicted as performing and reliving his childhood through partaking in the youthful activities offered by Fierce.

Lumka is aware of the dramatic lifestyle that Fierce offers Elik and the edginess she brings to the relationship and the stress that Elik faces. It is through Lumka's friendship that Fierce's shenanigans do not affect Elik's professional and social life because he (Lumka) backs him up financially, socially and emotionally. For instance, through Lumka, Elik finds stability on a man-to-man relational level, showcasing the power of intra-African man to man friendships. By contrasting Komla and Fierce's households, through Lumka's friendship with Elik, Maphosa revolutionises the negative perceptions of friendships between men who do not originate from the same national background.

In Zimbabwe, Elik's performance as a son-in-law morphs him into a hero, not only because of his financial muscle but also his friendship and camaraderie with Lumka. Since Elik brings a convoy of expensive cars and expensive-suited men (Lumka included), he is viewed as a hero to the poverty-stricken rural family. Fierce's father denounces cultural protocols to accommodate his economically astute son-in-law. In this respect, Maphosa's reflection of this journey from South Africa to Zimbabwe by these men shows the power of friendship supersedes imaginary boundaries between people from different backgrounds. On multiple occasions, Elik is allowed

to enter the Nkomo homestead before he pays a bride-price for Fierce to officialise the union.

Lumka and Elik's friendship and love relationship demonstrates what Wenston (2018) refers to as "homo-heroic" relationships where men "express same sex desire", in their friendships. In the novel, Elik and Lumka's relationship can be said to be propelled by their similar goals for the penchant of success and passion for business rather than destroyed by xenophobic attitudes as articulated by some discourses. Perhaps Maphosa's novel suggests that the relationship between Lumka and Elik is successful because of their 'locatedness' in Sandton as opposed to if the two characters had been in a space such as Alexandra or in one of the townships, where 'competition' appears to fuel hatred due to 'competition' for scarce resources. Nonetheless, these 'communities of convenience' formed in Sandton, as seen in the novel, can be useful in modeling integration patterns for men in their performance of responsibility towards one another, overlooking superficial problems created by unfounded fear. This view is opposed to the idea that most South African men are xenophobic, but rather, there are a great number of men whose friendships are founded on brotherhood, rather than differences. Elik and Lumka's relationship is a testament to this fact in that their friendship surpasses the citizen divides.

Brotherhood across national boundaries

As mentioned above, Elik and Lumka's friendship is depicted as defying national boundaries but their relationship becomes the epitome of good male-to-male friendship. In fact, Elik and Lumka's friendship is portrayed as being extremely close in both business and private lives. This demonstrates the essentiality of 'brotherhood' between men as a positive force in the performance of masculinity. In the novel Lumka is presented as a present force behind most of Elik's intimate affairs, besides Komla and Fierce, he knows all the women that whom Elik is intimate with but helps in the gatekeeping of this relationship to protect both Komla and Fierce. Similarly, Elik is depicted as of knowing every woman that Lumka has intimate relationships with besides his wife. The knowledge of

these relationships is depicted as surfacing in the presence of Fierce, as it is in her household that Elik is given the opportunity to express his 'inner child', proving that space impacts the performance of masculinity. It is Lumka who carries the business when Elik deals with his private affairs, he covers up for Elik when Elik has to be there for Fierce. Lumka's presentation illustrates the notion of the importance of camaraderie in the experiences among men rather than separation along different country lines. In this way, Maphosa's novel advocates for safe emotional spaces for men by men in their quest to express healthy masculinities.

Maphosa's choice of the use of the Hilton Hotel room as the epicentral space of the first point of contact for Elik, Komla, Fierce and Lumka speaks to the new ways of viewing the South African diasporic space where the global meets the local as observed by some researchers such as Titlestad and Kissack (2008). In their article '*Hospitality in Karel Schoeman's Promised Land and Antjie Krog's Country of my Skull*,' Titlestad and Kissack (2008) use Derrida's seminar on the ethics of hospitality to scrutinise the extent to which these novels ethically present the "dystopian portrait of Afrikanerdom". Essentially, Maphosa's novel is a reminder of the constant change in the way of viewing some cross-border relationships in the post-apartheid South African space that is in constant transformation between the local and global, embracing the changes as expressed by the identities constructed. Elik's and Lumka's friendship and affluence enables the duo to challenge some stereotypical views that migrants solely populate the South African space to 'compete' for resources with its citizens. Elik is the middle-class of South Africa's wealthy black people and together with Lumka, they represent a new way of reading identities that occupy a space that is simultaneously 'local' and 'global'.

While Lumka's character is portrayed as enabling Elik's ability to conduct his polygynous marriages, it is his affluence that cushions the acceptance of this lifestyle for both women. Maphosa's narrative exposes contrary to popular belief that women too are opportunists as much

as men are portrayed to be. While Elik is depicted as courting Fierce initially, the novel reveals that Komla is the initial interest and that Fierce's character mainly pursues the romantic relationship because Elik is financially astute and is able to provide a lifestyle a doctoral student would not be able to afford from an NRF stipend. This counters the idea that men are opportunistic but rather exposes the women's capabilities of being opportunists. Interestingly, it is through Fierce's opportunism and Komla's begrudging acceptance that Elik is able to maintain his relationships with both of them. It is the financial background that fosters relationships and cement them.

The novel demonstrates that Elik and Lumka's relationship is transnational, indicating the viability of male-to-male friendship in the expression of healthy masculinity. In the novel, Lumka's presence at most of Elik's key points advances their relationship. Lumka enables Elik's ability of being a husband to two women, either by financially supporting Fierce or by protecting Fierce from Komla, he rescues Fierce on two occasions after Komla assaults her. Lumka even protects Elik from Fierce when she shows up unannounced to Joburg in search of Elik. Lumka even accommodates Fierce under false pretexts in a bid to divert Fierce from going to Elik's marital house with Komla in Joburg. In other words, Lumka is one of the engines that propels Elik's plural marriage. Essentially, what Maphosa is showing in this instance is that men are capable of fostering beneficial relationships based on common goal rather than their differences as seen in the novel. Lumka and Elik's friendship goes beyond being business partners, they are friends who create conducive spaces for each other in their quest to become balanced men. Both Lumka and Elik mutually benefit from their friendship. In the case of Elik, his plural marriage is sustained by Lumka's presence and active role in the relationship.

Maphosa's choice of the name Lumka is interesting in that he is very symbolic in Elik's pursuit of polygyny. Loosely translated, Lumka is an isiXhosa name meaning be careful or be warned. It therefore falls into place with the character and how he is positioned to warn Elik

and to be his lookout both in business and in his private life. In countless scenarios, Lumka is present to clean up after Elik so to speak and vice versa. This enables Elik to smoothly transform his masculinity to suit Komla who largely resides in Joburg and Fierce who resides in Cape Town. Lumka facilitates Fierce's travels, provides her with accommodation, hospitality and even finances in the absence of Elik. This allows Elik ample time to perform his fatherly duties to his first wife's twin boys. Lumka also facilitates the same services to Komla in the event that Elik is with Fierce in Cape Town or in their spontaneous getaways.

The versatility of Elik's polygynous situation brings into sharp view the benefits of polygyny on women as observed by Thobejani and Takayindisa (2014). The pressure of keeping up with two wives; however, overwhelms Elik, negatively impacting on his masculine agency while at the same time causing mental stability. Money and power, as mentioned before, are agents that assist in the success of Elik's spontaneous masculinities between his younger wife while maintaining a stable relationship with Komla the matriarch. The split in his character allows him flexibility to engage overtly in both his relationships with each wife's need being met, however, the rivalry between the wives overwhelm him. The demands of two women appear to be beyond the character's ability to emotionally handle each woman despite his ability to financially support both of them. Subconsciously, Elik's character simultaneously alternates between multiple spaces of influence at the same time and his view of himself through triple consciousness causes him to mentally degenerate while on the surface he appears successful. Essentially, the novel demonstrates how while the two women each benefit from Elik's financial astuteness, this has a negative impact on his mental well-being as he attempts to navigate between the two women's needs, which are both demanding in their own way.

Elik's attempt to be a husband to two women is based on the fact that he is financially capable of caring for both women and their extended families in Ghana and Zimbabwe. His ability to sustain these relations is largely due to his strong

connection with Lumka as his business partner and friend. Lumka is presented as a permanent reinforcement to Elik's decision making in business and in his private life. Elik also relates to Lumka in the same manner. Elik and Lumka's relationship are presented in a positive light in their attempt to foster close friendship bonds with each other. Maphosa's novel is suggestive of the importance of what Landau (2017:505) calls "friendships or communities of convenience" in the expression of Elik's masculinity as a husband to two women. Elik's position as a successful lecturer and businessman, allows him to exercise polygyny and to navigate, negotiate and renegotiate between his two separate love relationships with Komla and Fierce. His friendship to Lumka however, propels Elik to better handle his two wives.

Maphosa's novel depicts Elik as using manipulation and emotional sabotage tactics on his Ghanaian wife Komla, to keep the relationship intact. While Komla is the epitome of a model, well behaved and completely domesticated wife, she turns into a stalker and bitter woman after her discovery of Elik's relationship with Fierce. Because Elik is a powerful businessman, he controls Komla in numerous ways, even getting her deported back to Ghana from South Africa. Fierce is the opposite of Komla in that she is young, reckless and exercises her independence as a young adult. She is nevertheless loved by Elik because of a shared love for science and gaming. To Fierce, Elik exercises a softer approach to the much younger wife, he is gentle because of the twelve-year gap between them. However, Elik begins to apply similar principles to Fierce as he does to Komla as Fierce grows older in age. Initially, Elik allows Fierce to dress in tight fitting skimpy clothing, short bum shorts and crop top t-shirts that hardly cover her body because she is twenty-two when they first meet. Elik takes Fierce to the club because she loves nightlife. However, as the novel progresses, Elik becomes less engaging of Fierce's wayward lifestyle and demands growth and maturity from her. In essence, Elik's demand for Fierce's maturity signals a split in his construction of a sane and non-toxic environment for himself and thus

he suffers mentally for what he is able to do financially. His friendship with Lumka saves him from the insanity of the relationship he eventually outgrows.

Elik acknowledges his responsibility to the two wives in an equal manner, such as buying Komla and Fierce the same car, buying each a comfortable home, however, he appears to experience emotional distress due to the two relationships. The psychological demands of dealing with two different women appear to cause Elik's distress, affecting his other social responsibilities. His lies and deception to keep each relationship in motion affect his mental well-being causing a mental breakdown. Elik's marriage to Komla occurs in Ghana during the December festival period while Fierce is in her family residence in Zimbabwe (Maphosa, 2019:15). To diffuse the situation, Elik blatantly lies to her about the marriage being an arranged occurrence. Elik uses the cultural differences between him and Fierce to take control over Fierce. At the same time, he buys her a new Toyota vehicle to keep the relationship afloat. In this manner, Maphosa's novel suggests that financial muscle aids in fostering plural romantic relationships. The narrative shows how it is easy for a man of Elik's stature to use his financial muscle to get and keep his partners.

The success of Elik and Fierce's relationship could be attributed to the age-age between them, or what some scholars have increasingly referred to as the blesser-blessee dynamics (see Mampane, 2018; Doyisa, Maharaj and Dunn, 2023; Doyisa, 2019; Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2019). At first, Elik values the fact that he breaks Fierce's virginity and his utility of their attachment and Fierce's vulnerability backfires as their relationship progresses. Due to the fact that Fierce is twelve years younger than Elik, he uses that as a way to appeal to her naivety as she believes some of the lies he tells her. Likewise, Elik is able to manipulate her in order to enjoy his relationship. While Fierce is a PhD student, her naivety emanates from her youth and she is manipulated into staying in the relationship. In this way, Maphosa's narrative demonstrates the dynamism of the success of a relationship between a much older and financially astute man

and a gullible younger woman. Elik is financially stable while Fierce is young, gullible and impressionable and at the same time has an affinity to opulence which Elik provides. The relationship is largely founded on the monetary and material provision of Elik, while kept by Elik's sentimentality over Fierce's virginity. His valuation of Fierce's virginity sustains the relationship while Fierce's love for affluence and fear of poverty keeps her in the relationship.

Maphosa portrays Elik as having to shift into a different position with each woman in his quest to maintain the plurality of his relationship, however, the shifts mentally impede his ability to remain mentally healthy. Ndabayakhe (2018:69) avers that, "the African man juggles and manipulates different, sometimes conflicting systems in an attempt to enjoy both worlds." In the novel, the strain of keeping up with the lies he uses to manipulate each woman overwhelms him to a point of depression at one point and Lumka is the only person who knows about his whereabouts after Elik's disappearance and mental breakdown. Because he has limited relations due to a busy schedule, Elik relies on Lumka for emotional support. The two characters are presented as enacting a support system for each other, a set up that is mutually beneficial for both of them. Elik depends on Lumka as much as Lumka depends on Lumka, not only in their business dealings but also in their marriages. Their friendship transcends the confines of their nationalities suggesting the possibilities of friendships that are transnational and are based on common goals and interests. Elik and Lumka's relationships reflects what scholars such as Robinson, Anderson and White (2017) have observed to be "bromance".

Maphosa, through Elik's expression of a polygynous man, exposes the fragility of some affluent men who view themselves from a triple consciousness perspective. Elik's money and power appear not address some psychological aspects with regards to satisfying the needs of both women. The fact that his mental needs are not met disrupts the processes of constructing a mentally strong type of masculinity. Elik becomes increasingly toxic, violent, anxious, possessive, jealous and paranoid in his quest to lead

both of his young families. Mentally, Elik appears to fail to protect both his wives and his children despite his financial astuteness. The situation is exacerbated when Fierce loses their unborn twins. The experience mentally destroys Elik and the disconnection between the physical and the psychological push Elik into depression. Elik's view of himself intersects between being a Ghanaian migrant, living in South Africa while married to a Zimbabwean woman. While he appears to be financially powerful, the three-way dimension of being Ghanaian married to another Ghanaian and a Zimbabwean, living in South Africa does not prepare him for the demands of being in a polygynous marriage.

The private home space and the public spaces are also shown to heavily influence each other in Elik's quest to perform his duties as a man. For Elik, the home space is situated in Johannesburg and Cape Town, meaning that there are two areas of primary influence in South Africa. Elik initially settles in Cape Town because of his job as a lecturer at the University of Cape Town and then later moves to Johannesburg to pursue his business. In Johannesburg Elik's success is magnified and he is able to splurge on both his wives. He travels frequently to Cape Town or sends money for Fierce to travel to Johannesburg. As a father, Elik is very possessive and protective of his children, even against their mother. Elik threatens Komla with divorce and taking full custody of the twins. Furthermore, when Fierce loses their twins through a miscarriage, Elik physically distraught and unlike in Komla's household, Fierce allows him to cry and make peace with the loss of their babies.

As mentioned above, the physical and psychological mutually impact each other on Elik's ability to express himself as a husband and as a father. The intimate relationship with his wives each constitutes a soft space for him to cushion the harshness of public life. It is in the private space that Elik is depicted as showing signs of being vulnerable because the space is where his psychological vulnerabilities are allowed to surface. In fact, there is a similarity in Maphosa's portrayal of Elik's emotional response to the harshness of the world outside of his marital home to that of Dudu Busani-Dube's portrayal

of Mqhele in *Hlomu the Wife*. Elik uses a brutal form of sexual intercourse to relieve himself of pent-up anger and frustration when he arrives in their hotel room on a visit to Ghana. Fierce says,

His hand closes around my neck and I feel like I am suffocating. Then he kisses me so hard I'm sure my lips are bruised. I can hardly breathe, clawing at his hand with mine so that he can loosen the grip. From the get-go there's no gentle or slow, it's a warzone. He struggles to find his way into me but with the force he is using he eventually does and I don't fight him. He holds me down and flat out murders me. I feel like he will pull the weave off my head and I'm sure my legs will be cramped in the morning. It hurts, it's uncomfortable and I'm struggling to breathe but he needs this (Maphosa, 2019:191).

Elik uses brute force to address the physical pain he endures outside of the intimate space. Fierce, like Mahlomu in *Hlomu the Wife* romanticises her objectification to address Elik's need to regain strength. She sacrifices herself for his rejuvenation, the same way Hlomu does in the novel.

Interestingly, Maphosa's portrayal of Elik is similar to that of Busani-Dube's portrayal of Mqhele in that both men have similar reactions to marrying virgins. Both characters are depicted as being over-protective of their partners to the point of infantilising them. Their views of their wives are those of delicate children who require attention. They both nurture their wives and pamper them. Both Elik and Mqhele spend unreservedly on their wives and provide everything the wives need. The major differences between the two characters are that Elik is an educated cross border migrant living in South Africa, while Mqhele is a smart transport industry boss and an internal migrant from Greytown to Johannesburg. One wonders if their responses to being the first to have sex with their wives influences their choices on how they behave around them. One also observes that the two novelists'

depiction of masculinity in this way is suggestive of the way men totally devote themselves to the women they deem vulnerable to sustain their emotional power.

Again, Maphosa's depiction of Elik and Fierce shows how he is able to open up emotionally because Fierce allows him to be vulnerable. Elik immediately leaves his home in Johannesburg and flees to Cape Town to be emotionally supportive to Fierce when she overdoses on sleep medication. He is depicted at this juncture as not being mentally stable, the loss of their twins negatively affects him as Fierce is affected. In essence, what Maphosa draws our attention to is the importance of the powerful connection between intimate soft spaces and the psychological well-being of men in their quest to express and transform between masculinities in the private and public spaces. It is the younger wife that creates a safe space for Elik to express his vulnerabilities yet the same cannot be said about the older wife, signaling that the provision of various soft spaces determines the stability of the performance of public masculinities.

On the other hand, the novel shows that it is because of Elik's ability to degenerate in the intimate softness provided by Fierce's vulnerability, that he is able to stabilise, recover and re-orient himself for public space. Fierce is depicted as cleverly allowing for Elik's breakdown as she recognises the importance of his expression of pain in his stability for his public performance. Fierce says; "Through my tears I see him wipe away his own" (2019:142) and says "'It's ok baby. Cry', I know he always says 'a man never cries' but this is not the time for that...I need him to cry and let the pain out. He holds on to me and cries" (2019:143 *italics mine*). Maphosa's illustration demonstrates the importance for black men to have safe spaces to

express pain without fear of being judged as advocated for by gender power houses such as Sonke Gender Justice. Her depiction of male vulnerability contests some discourses that luminate black men as emotionless and violent and gives possible ways in which violence may be addressed particularly in a time where gender-based violence is a scourge.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Maphosa's novel is a timely intervention with projections of intra-African friendships positively captured. This article explored the impact of male-to-male friendships in the constructions and performances of masculinities drawing attention to the intricacies and complexities of physical and psychological dynamics informing the deployment of duties by men in motion. Complexities such as vulnerability of Elik as a result of different forms of migration, showed how negatively these impacts on the construction and deployment of his expressions as a man and how Lumka's friendship cushions him (Elik) during his mental breakdown. Elik and Lumka's relationship presentation as dependent on each other offers alternative ways of being in the context of a society marred by a history of intolerance towards African migrants. Essentially, Maphosa's contribution is a timely intervention in its contribution to the subject of migrant masculinity, particularly in view of the psychology of moving between multiple spaces of influence informing the constructions of masculinity in South Africa. While there appears to be a larger plethora of constructions of masculinities to draw from in the South African diaspora, Maphosa's narrative shows that friendship is a good base from where positive masculinities spring from.

References

Asakitikpi, A. E. (2015). Health policy reform in Sub-Saharan Africa. In E. Kuhlmann, R. H. Blank, I. L. Bourgeault, & C. Wendt (Eds.), *The Palgrave international handbook of healthcare policy and governance* (pp. [page numbers if available]). Palgrave Macmillan.
https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137384935_12

Chiumbu, S. H., & Moyo, D. (2018). "South Africa belongs to all who live in it": Deconstructing media

discourses of migrants during times of xenophobic attacks, from 2008 to 2017. *Communicare: Journal for Communication Sciences in Southern Africa*, 37(1), 136–152.

Landau, L. B. (2017). Friendship fears and communities of convenience in Africa's urban estuaries: Connection as measure of urban condition. *Urban Studies*, 55(3), 505–521. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098017699563>

Majors, K. (2011). Friendships: The power of positive alliance. In *Positive relationships* (pp. 127–143). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-2147-0_8

Maphosa, Y. (2019). *The Y in yOUR Man is Silent*. Yvonne Maphosa.

Mlambo, A. S. (2023). Towards a history of xenophobia in Zimbabwe: Rethinking racism and the culture of 'othering' in Zimbabwe, 1890–2020. *Southern Journal for Contemporary History*, 48(2), 24–54. <https://doi.org/10.38140/sjch.v48i2.7358>

Mlambo, A. S., & Raftopoulos, B. (2018). *Becoming Zimbabwe: A history from the pre-colonial period to 2008*. Weaver Press.

Ndabayakhe, V. (2018). The representation of polygyny in selected African works: A perpetuation of patriarchal patrilineal identities [Doctoral dissertation, North-West University]. NWU Institutional Repository. <https://repository.nwu.ac.za/handle/10394/40977>

Okyere-Manu, B. D., & Konyana, E. (2018). Who is umuntu in *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*? Interrogating moral issues facing Ndaun women in polygyny. *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 37(2), 207–216.

Robinson, S., White, A., & Anderson, E. (2019). Privileging the bromance: A critical appraisal of romantic and bromantic relationships. *Men and Masculinities*, 22(5), 850–871.

Strikwerda, R. A., & May, L. (1992). Male friendship and intimacy. *Hypatia*, 7(3), 110–125. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1992.tb00907.x>

Takayindisa, F., & Thobejane, T. D. (2014). An exploration of polygamous marriages: A worldview. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(27), 1058. <https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n27p1058>

Titlestad, M., & Kissack, M. (2008). Hospitality in Karel Schoeman's *Promised Land* and Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*. *Journal of Literary Studies*, 24(1), 58–81.

Weston, D. (2018). *Homo-heroic love: Male friendship on the Restoration stage* [Doctoral dissertation, Simon Fraser University]. Summit Institutional Repository. <https://summit.sfu.ca/item/18721>

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.3>**PARENTING STYLES AND THEIR IMPACT: HOW UPBRINGING INFLUENCES SOCIAL ANXIETY AND SELF-ESTEEM AMONG UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS YOUNG ADULTS****Akinwale, Gbenusola A.,***Department of Political Studies & International Relations**North West University,**Mafikeng, South Africa.**Corresponding author: gakinwale@unilag.edu.ng**ORCID NO: 0000-0002-0290-8827**&***Bada, Bukola V.***Department of Psychology,**University of Lagos, Akoka, Nigeria**&***Akinrujomu, Temilola M,***Department of Psychology,**University of Lagos, Akoka, Nigeria***Abstract**

This study examined the influence of parenting style on the self-esteem and social anxiety of selected young adults in Lagos State, Nigeria. Guided by self-efficacy theory, parenting theory, and social anxiety theory, the research examined the perceived role of authoritative parenting style on young adults' self-esteem; investigate the perceived role of authoritarian parenting style on young adults' social anxiety; assess the perceived role of permissive parenting style on young adults' self-esteem and social anxiety; and study the perceived role of parent personality on young adults' self-esteem and social anxiety. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was employed, and data were collected using the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and Parent Bonding Scale. The sample consisted of 345 undergraduate students from the University of Lagos, selected through convenience sampling. Both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were applied. Findings revealed a significant positive relationship between authoritative parenting and higher self-esteem, and between authoritarian parenting and elevated social anxiety. Permissive parenting demonstrated a moderate positive relationship with self-esteem, while also showing a limited association with social anxiety. Parental personality traits were found to significantly predict social anxiety levels. Overall, the results highlight the importance of balanced and supportive parenting in fostering positive psychological outcomes for young adults. The study recommends targeted parental education programs aimed at promoting healthy parenting practices to enhance youth mental health and well-being.

Keywords: *Parenting style, Social Anxiety, Self-Esteem.***Background to the Study**

Parenting style plays a vital role in the life and development of a young adult. It creates a courageous mind and self-esteem in the lives of children to do away from social anxiety. Both mother and father have a crucial duty in protect-

ing their children, as regards to building a courageous cultural background around their children, and creating the best parenting style to facilitate the psychological well-being of their children.

It is universally acknowledged that parents play an extremely vital role in the upbringing of a

child (Andreea & Panisoara, 2024). The first interaction of a child born into the world is through and under the protection of parents. They are the ones fulfilling the psychological needs of a child, like Love and affection, Security and safety, autonomy and independence, boundary and discipline, starting from the early stages of life. Whatever the child learns, such as language, feelings, emotions, values, ethics, moral, manners, courage, culture, religion and routine actions, all are guided by the parents' behaviours and their teaching environments (Abdul & Rizvi, 2017). Parents do this by adopting certain child-rearing styles and techniques, usually opting for methods of parenting that they think will be the most beneficial for their children and continue to practice them until the child is old enough to live independently. However, the question about which technique would be the best to use when talking about the role of parenting style, social anxiety and self-esteem of children, how a parent can build a self-esteem on young adult (child), and how it affects their psychological adjustment of a young adult in later life, is one that almost every parent ponders over at one point in time.

Parents act as mediators between their children and the outside world, advocating for their needs and interests, and ensuring that they are treated fairly and respectfully. Parents are seen as role models, and children learn by observing their parents' behaviours and interactions, which shape the lives of children, their own values and behaviors as a mode of protection (Yullia, Choi & Eunsoo, 2020). Parents play a crucial role in teaching children about good character, morals, and values, which helps them develop into responsible and ethical individuals in their social life (Mehtar-Raza, 2023). The role of parents in the parenting style involves designing styles in terms of protective methods to safeguard their children during upbringing. The methods may be related to personality traits relating to the behavioural act of the parent (e.g. authoritarian, autocratic, permissive etc).

According to Andreea and Panisoara (2024), social anxiety, as social phobia, is a mental health condition characterised by an intense, persistent fear of social situations, where individuals

worry about being judged or scrutinised by others, leading to significant distress and difficulty in daily life. Social anxiety in young adults, also known as social anxiety disorder or social phobia, is an intense and persistent fear of social situations where they might be scrutinised or judged negatively, leading to significant distress and avoidance of social interactions (Andreea & Panisoara, 2024). Social anxiety, on the other hand, is a persistent fear of social and performance situations. It involves an excessive fear of being judged or evaluated by others, and it can lead to avoidance of social situations, impaired social functioning, and reduced quality of life.

Statement of the Problem

Parenting styles play an expository role in shaping a child's emotional and psychological development. An overly indulgent or overprotective parenting approach, while often well-intentioned, can inadvertently hinder a child's growth and independence. Conversely, an under protective style, where adequate guidance and support are lacking, can also be detrimental. Both extremes can contribute to the development of anxiety in children, which negatively impacts their confidence and emotional regulation. Such anxiety may manifest as heightened social anxiety, difficulties in managing stress, challenges in forming healthy relationships, and disruptions in overall mental well-being.

In situations where a young adult struggles to make independent decisions, consistently relies on parental intervention, and exhibits fearfulness, shyness, and a lack of confidence in social settings, significant challenges arise not only for the individual but also for the parents and society at large. Such limitations hinder personal growth, strain family dynamics, and can reduce the individual's capacity to contribute effectively to the broader community.

Previous research in this area has not sufficiently addressed the aforementioned problems, nor has it focused on the perceived role of parenting styles in relation to social anxiety and self-esteem among young adults in Lagos State, Nigeria. This present study needs to make use of a tertiary institution in Lagos State, Nigeria,

where young adults are predominant, for the collection of relevant information for this study.

The findings of this study will highlight the significant role of parenting styles in safeguarding children against social anxiety and promoting the development of self-esteem as they progress into adulthood, and how self-esteem and social anxiety levels of young adults now correlate with their impressions of their parents' parenting approaches during childhood and adolescence.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the perceived role of parenting style on social anxiety and self-esteem of young adults in Lagos State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine the perceived role of authoritative parenting style on young adults' self-esteem.
- ii. Investigate the perceived role of authoritarian parenting style on young adults' social anxiety.
- iii. Assess the perceived role of permissive parenting style on young adults' self-esteem and social anxiety.
- iv. Study the perceived role of parent personality on young adults' social anxiety.

Literature Review

This study's literature was reviewed and carried out to investigate the perceived role of parenting style on social anxiety and self-esteem of young adults in Lagos State, Nigeria. The literature review discussed the concepts of the perceived role of parenting style on social anxiety and self-esteem of young adults, also, other related concepts in the objectives of this study relative to research questions and hypotheses were all discussed in the literature review.

The study adopted relevant theories that underpinned the study, these give more meaning to the variables and concepts of the study. The empirical study was carried out extensively to delve more into what scholars had said on the topic and what is yet to be discussed, so the study discovered some gaps in the literature. However, this chapter appraised the conceptual,

theoretical and empirical literature on the subject matter.

Conceptual Review of the Study

The specific concepts in the objectives of the study are the perceived role of authoritative parenting style on young adult's self-esteem, the perceived role of authoritarian parenting style on young adult's social anxiety of young adult, the perceived role of permissive parenting style on young adult's self-esteem and social anxiety, and the perceived role of parent personality on young adult's self-esteem and social anxiety.

Concept of Perceived Parenting Style

Parenting style is defined a maternal and paternal psychological child upkeep, cordial relationship, caring, awareness, restriction of autonomy and independence of the child (Parker, 2023). Like other forms of parenting style, such as over and under-parenting styles, are demonstrated in relational problems such as too much self-esteem and self-efficacy, overconfidence and pride, and timid, slow emotional behaviour, behavioural regulation difficulties and psychopathological related symptoms and depression (Mohan & Keziah, 2024). In a study by Akinwale (2025), the study noted that typical and atypical children need to be supported with attention and infrastructure to reduce the stigmas that they may likely face.

Parenting protection is a means of design styles that can be used to control and care for the children in relation to the behaviour and attitude of parents. The styles can be categorized as supportive and controlling (Dong et al., 2024). Supportive parenting is an upbeat parenting style that is associated with positive child development.

Dong et al. (2024) asserted that controlling parenting is a negative parenting style of protection characterised by control, coercion, supervision, and punishment, and is related to a variety of internalizing and externalizing problems in children. Parenting styles have a profound effect on individuals. Different parents have different par-

enting styles, which can be divided into psychological and behavioural parenting, and parental psychological control is often classified as one kind of parenting style. Akinwale and Isreal (2022), in a study on parenting in the 21st century, noted that parenting is a hybrid that is specific, especially in Nigeria. The study noted that parents are basically focusing on the demands of the children rather than parenting them

The Current Situation of Parental Psychological Control in the Cultural Background of some countries in Asia (e.g. China). Cross-cultural studies have shown that parents influenced by Chinese interdependent cultures have higher levels of psychological control in parenting protection compared to parents influenced by West African or Sub-Saharan African cultures like Nigeria (Wang et al., 2017). In addition, traditional Chinese filial piety to parents and Confucian philosophical concepts seem to provide a more rational cultural interpretation of parental psychological control (Minuchin, 2014), leading to the fact that parental psychological control has not been recognised by scholars.

Concept of Social Anxiety

Social anxiety is a multidimensional construct, and there are distinctions between the cognitive, behavioural, and physiological components of social anxiety. They therefore make efforts to ensure that their fears do not materialise, resulting in clinically significant distress and impairment, often across multiple domains of their life. Social anxiety is among the most prevalent of all mental disorders, with an overall lifetime rate of 12.2% (Kessler et al., 2015). People with social anxiety perceive that they are being negatively evaluated by others, and this often leads to debilitating impairments during social situations where there exists some element of evaluation, e.g., dates, interviews, talking to strangers (Stein & Kean, 2010). The current research explored the effects of negative social evaluation in a sample of socially anxious individuals with two goals in mind. The first goal was to assess the subjective, physiological, and attentional consequences stemming from negative evaluation in socially anxious and non-anxious participants to

compare possible differences in affective responding. The second goal was to examine the efficacy of a reappraisal intervention that was effective previously in non-socially anxious samples to determine if socially anxious individuals also could benefit from reappraising stress arousal (Daly, Vangelisti, & Lawrence, 2019).

Concept of Self-Esteem

According to Srikari and Deepthi (2023), self-esteem is the overall evaluation or judgment you make about your own worth, abilities, and value as a person. It's essentially how you feel about yourself and your place in the world. In young adulthood, self-esteem refers to how a person thinks and feels about themselves, encompassing their sense of worth, confidence, and overall positive self-perception, which significantly impacts their mental health, relationships, and well-being.

It might explore variations within parenting styles, considering cultural or contextual factors. Additionally, the study could provide updated insights or address gaps in existing literature, incorporating newer methodologies or data analysis techniques. The contribution might also involve the examination of potential moderating variables, such as the child's temperament or age, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between parenting practices and self-esteem. Essentially, this report is expected to build on prior knowledge by refining and expanding our understanding of the intricate dynamics between parenting styles and their lasting impact on a child's self-esteem.

Concept of Young Adult

Young adulthood is typically a period between the ages of 18 and 25 or 26, marked by a transition from adolescence to full adulthood (Srikari & Deepthi, 2023). These times of young adulthood are characterized by the increase of independence, career exploration, and relationship development, which the parents need to build self-esteem and do away with social anxiety in life (Srikari & Deepthi, 2023).

Perceived Roles of Parenting Style

Authoritative Parenting: According to Baumrind (1991) cited in Hafsa, Mushtaq and Uzma (2021) the authoritative parenting style is high in both responsiveness and demandingness. Authoritative parents enforce rules and prescribe limits on certain behaviours, such as often consulting the children's opinions before making a decision and allowing their children to make their own decisions, along with parents' permission and guidelines. Authoritative parents are demanding and praise their children for verbal communication based on debates, describe (logically and systematically) the reasons for their plans (Hafsa, Mushtaq & Uzma, 2021).

Permissive and Uninvolved Parenting: Pessimistic parenting, according to Hafsa, Mushtaq and Uzma (2021), is a type of parenting style characterized by low demands with high responsiveness. Permissive parents tend to be very loving, yet provide few guidelines and rules. These parents do not expect mature behaviour from their children and often seem more like friends than a parental figure. These parents tend to be the polar opposite of the so-called "helicopter parents." Instead of hovering over their children's every move, permissive parents are incredibly lax and rarely make or enforce any type of rules or structure. Their motto is often simply that "kids will be kids." While they are usually warm and loving, they make little or no attempt to control or discipline their kids. Because there are few rules, expectations, and demands, children raised by permissive parents tend to struggle with self-regulation and self-control. Uninvolved parenting, sometimes referred to as neglectful parenting, is a style characterized by a lack of responsiveness to a child's needs. Uninvolved parents make few to no demands of their children, and they are often indifferent, dismissive, or even completely neglectful.

Attachment Theory

Although not directly part of Freud's or Erikson's frameworks, John Bowlby's attachment theory provides a vital bridge in explaining how parenting styles influence social anxiety and self-esteem. Bowlby (1969) argued that the

quality of the early bond between parent and child shapes the internal working model of relationships. In contrast, authoritarian or neglectful parenting may lead to insecure attachments, either avoidant or anxious, which increase the likelihood of social anxiety symptoms and fragile self-worth in adulthood.

Parenting Style Theory

The parenting theory is credited to Baumrind (1966). Baumrind refers to parenting as a composite activity that embraces lots of certain behaviours that work individually and collectively to impact the children. The parents' role in the growth of self-esteem is studied very imperatively since the personality is formed in a child's very early life, and it has an impact on the foundation of personality and development of self-components in adolescents. Parents who interact with adolescents in an approachable and friendly way, with appropriate parenting strategies, help the adolescents to develop a good personality and a higher level of self-esteem.

Undeniably, the parenting strategies of parents decide the success or failure of adolescents throughout their lifespan (Caporella, 2017).

Method

This chapter outlines the method utilised for collecting and analyzing the variables in this study. It seeks to give insight into the research setting, research design, and instruments for data collection, Research procedure, target population, sample size selection technique, and data analysis

Setting

This study was conducted in the University of Lagos at the Faculty of Social Sciences, which consists of the Department of Economics, Psychology, Social Work, Sociology, Mass Communication, Political Sciences and Geography. This chapter discusses the blueprint used to conduct this study. The study was conducted on the investigation of the perceived role of parental styles on social anxiety and self-esteem among young adults at the University of Lagos. Four objectives and questions have been stated along with the hypotheses of the study, which were tested at the end of the course of the study. In

the review of the literature in the course of the study, there were discussions of the concepts and some underpinned theories that were also discussed. The empirical study was discussed in line with dependent and independent variables. In the process of the discussion of empirical literature, various studies were reviewed and discussed along their variables, methods, findings and recommendations. The discussions of the various studies established the gaps in the literature for the present study to fill. The gaps were directed to this study to decide on the method and type of research design that is suitable for this study in order to discover whether the findings of previous studies would be in line with this present study, so that recommendations could be made appropriately.

However, this chapter discussed the approach, strategy, and philosophy employed to carry out the study. The method was structured in such a way that the research setting, population/participants, sampling, design, instrument, validity/reliability of the scale instrument, procedure and data analysis. These were discussed under the following headings and subheadings:

Population

The sample size of 345 was selected from the total population of the study of 2527 student participants. The sample size was observed because it is not appropriate for a study of this nature to use the total population figure of the study, since the population of the study is known and finite in the course of the study. Therefore, the sample size was selected from the larger population through the use of the Taro-Yamane formula. The Yamane formula is a scientific method in terms of the mathematical formula that is often used to select the sample size is a quantitative study of this type. The Yamane formula is a probability technique that gives all elements of the population of study to have equal chance to be selected.

Sampling Technique

Convenience sampling was used in this study to choose participants from the University of Lagos' Faculty of Social Sciences undergraduate population. Given the size of the population and

the practical limitations of accessibility and time, this approach was thought to be suitable for effectively gathering replies from consenting participants.

The process of gathering data involved visiting several departments within the Faculty of Social Sciences. Students were personally contacted in each department and briefed on the nature and goal of the study. The sample consisted of those who gave their informed consent and indicated interest. Because volunteers were guaranteed to be present and willing to participate, the researcher was able to collect data within the constraints of time and resources.

Research Design

A descriptive research design was adopted for this study. The descriptive tools used are percentages, frequencies, and means. These described research questions about respondents' responses in making findings.

Instrument

Parental Bonding Scale

The Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI), often referred to as the Parental Bonding Scale, is a widely used self-report measure designed to assess an individual's perception of their parents' attitudes and behaviours during the first 16 years of life. Developed by Parker, Tupling, and Brown (1979), the instrument evaluates two primary dimensions of parental behaviour: **care** and **overprotection**. The *care* dimension reflects the degree of warmth, affection, and empathy displayed by the parent, contrasted with emotional coldness and neglect, while the *overprotection* dimension measures the extent of control, intrusion, and prevention of autonomy, as opposed to the promotion of independence. These two dimensions allow researchers to categorize parental styles into four prototypes: affectionate constraint, optimal parenting, affectionless control, and neglectful parenting, thus providing a nuanced understanding of early parent-child relational dynamics.

The Social Anxiety Scale

The Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS), developed in 1987 by psychiatrist Michael R.

Liebowitz. The Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS) is a 24-item questionnaire used to assess social anxiety and avoidance in various social situations. It's often used by clinicians to evaluate the severity of social anxiety and track changes over time, particularly in response to treatment. The two main components of social anxiety, fear and avoidance, were measured thoroughly by the LSAS. Each of the 24 elements on the scale represents a distinct social or performance scenario, such as taking part in a party, dining in front of others, or speaking in front of an audience. To score each scenario, a 4-point Likert scale from 0 (none/never) to 3 (severe/usually) is used, once for the degree of terror and once for the degree of avoidance it induces. This yields a total of 48 ratings, with a score ranging from 0 to 144. Social anxiety is more intense when scores are higher. By differentiating between people with performance-based and generalised social concerns, the LSAS provides a more sophisticated understanding of the disorder.

The Self-Esteem Scale

The Self-Esteem Scale section likely refers to Rosenberg (1985) in Sinclair et al. (2020). Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), a widely used psychological tool for measuring an individual's overall sense of self-worth. It consists of 10 self-report items, with responses ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The RSES is often used in research and clinical settings to assess self-esteem and its relationship with other variables. Self-competence (SC) is understood as one's instrumental value.

Procedure

This study was conducted among students of the University of Lagos, with data collected from various departments within the Faculty of Social Sciences. Before questionnaire administration, students were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Participation was voluntary, and only those who provided verbal consent were included. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed, and 350 completed questionnaires were returned, representing an adequate response rate for analysis.

The collected data were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 for analysis. Statistical procedures were applied to examine the relationships between variables, and the results were interpreted to align with the research objectives.

Results

The main objective of this study is to investigate the perceived role of parenting style on social anxiety and self-esteem of young adults in Lagos State, Nigeria. Sequel to this, three hypotheses were raised, tested and analyzed. This chapter presents the results of the statistical analyses conducted in this study. The presentation of results began with the description of the demographic variables of the participants and the correlations among the variables of study.

Demographic Data Analysis

The result of the run descriptive data analysis for bio-data of the respondents in the table show the first item in the table shows the average percentage of the age of the respondents a 53.3% for age between 18-20 years, 36.2% were 21-24 years, 8.7% were 25-27 years, and 1.7% were for 28-31 years. According to the gender distribution of the respondents as 34.8% for the number of males, 65.2% for females. This implies that the female respondents was more than the male. The ethnicity of the respondents indicates that 55.9% were Yoruba, 12.5% were Igbo, 2.9% were Hausa, and 28.7% belonged to other ethnic groups. This implies that Yoruba ethics were more than other ethics, as participants in the study. According to the religion of the respondents, 68.1% for Christianity, 24.1% for the Islamic religion, 3.5% for others, while 4.3% were for respondents who preferred not to say. In addition, according to the department of the respondents, the Economic, Mass Communication, Psychology, Political Science, Social Work, Sociology, and Geography departments show the percentage as 11.0%, 13.6%, 14.5%, 18.0%, 17.7%, 18.6% and 18.6% respectively.

Test of Hypotheses

This section contains the results of the tested hy-

potheses and the interpretation of the data analysed. The results are presented in a table alongside their interpretation

Hypothesis One, which states that there be a significant relationship between authoritative parenting and self-esteem among young adults, was confirmed based on the result of the Pearson correlation coefficient.

The statistical test used was the Pearson Product–Moment Correlation Coefficient. The correlation results indicate a significant association between authoritative parenting style and young adult self-esteem, $r = .166$, $p = .002$. This suggests that higher levels of authoritative parenting style are associated with slightly higher self-esteem in young adults. The coefficient of $r = .166$ reflects a positive relationship, meaning that as authoritative parenting style increases, young adult self-esteem tends to increase slightly. The statistical significance ($p < .05$) indicates that this observed relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance in this sample ($N = 345$). In conclusion, the hypothesis stating that there is a significant relationship between authoritative parenting and young adult self-esteem, as the result was statistically significant and in the predicted positive direction.

Hypothesis Two, which states that there will be a significant relationship between authoritarian parenting and social anxiety among young adults, was confirmed based on the result of the Pearson correlation coefficient. The statistical test used was the Pearson correlation analysis. The results indicate a small positive relationship between authoritarian parenting style and young adults' social anxiety ($r = .194$, $p < .001$). This means that higher levels of authoritarian parenting are associated with slightly higher levels of social anxiety in young adults. The correlation is statistically significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed), suggesting that the observed relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance. However, the strength of the relationship is weak, indicating that authoritarian parenting explains only a small proportion of the variation in young adults' social anxiety.

In conclusion, the hypothesis stating that there

is a significant relationship between authoritarian parenting and social anxiety among young adults, as the result was statistically significant and in the predicted positive direction.

Hypothesis Three, which states that there will be a significant relationship between permissive parenting and self-esteem among young adults, was confirmed based on the result of the Pearson correlation coefficient. The Pearson correlation coefficient results indicate a statistically significant relationship between permissive parenting style and young adults' self-esteem, $r (345) = .573$, $p < .001$. This positive correlation suggests that higher levels of permissive parenting style are associated with higher levels of self-esteem among young adults.

The correlation coefficient of .573 represents a moderate positive relationship, meaning that as the permissive parenting style increases, self-esteem also tends to increase at a moderate rate. Given the significance level ($p < .001$), the hypothesis stating that there is a significant relationship between permissive parenting and social anxiety among young adults, as the result was statistically significant and in the predicted positive direction.

Hypothesis Four, which states that there will be a significant difference in young adults' social Anxiety levels on parent personality, was confirmed based on the result of Linear Regression Analysis.

The model accuracy to explain the relationship between the variables of the stated alternative and null hypotheses. In this table, the result of the model shows that parent personality has a significant role in adult self-esteem and social anxiety, with R^2 value is 0.108; this means that 10.8 per cent of the dependent variable "parental personality" is positively influenced by the level of young adults' social anxiety. This was conducted to examine the difference between parental personality and young adults' social anxiety.

Analysis 4

The statistical test used was **Linear Regression**

Analysis. The model summary (Table 3.1.3) indicates that **Authoritarian parenting** explains **11.1%** of the variance in **social anxiety among young adults** ($R^2 = .111$).

The ANOVA results show that the regression model is statistically significant, $F(1, 343) = 42.79, p < .001$, indicating that parents' personality significantly predicts social anxiety levels in young adults.

The coefficient table reveals that Authoritarian parenting is a significant positive predictor of social anxiety ($\beta = .333, t = 6.541, p < .001$). The unstandardized coefficient (B) of **0.401** suggests that for every one-unit increase in Authoritarian parenting score, social anxiety scores increase by 0.401 units. The constant (intercept) of **2.190** ($p < .001$) represents the expected social anxiety score when Authoritarian parenting is zero.

In conclusion, the hypothesis that there will be a significant difference between parents' personality and social anxiety among young adults, as parent personality is associated with higher social anxiety scores.

Discussion

This study has investigated the perceived role of parenting style on social anxiety and self-esteem of young adults in Lagos State, Nigeria. The students of the University of Lagos were used as participants and study areas. The investigation was carried out through a survey method by collecting primary data and analysed by adopting descriptive and inferential statistical tools such as means, frequency, percentage and Pearson Correlation/Regression. Data was presented in the tables to present the results of descriptive analysis based on the question items. The responses of the respondents were analysed, and findings have been made in meeting the objectives of the study. It was found that the perceived role of parenting style, such as authoritative parenting, authoritarian parenting, permissive parenting and parent personality, has a significant role to play in social anxiety and self-esteem of young adults.

The first hypothesis shows that authoritative parenting has a positive and significant role on young adults' self-esteem level. This means that young adults who perceive their parents as more authoritative tend to report slightly higher self-esteem. The relationship, although modest, supports the hypothesis that authoritative parenting contributes positively to self-esteem development.

The findings can be further understood through self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which highlights the importance of fulfilling psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Authoritative parenting tends to meet these needs by combining emotional support with reasonable structure, thereby fostering confidence and a healthy self-concept in young people. However, it is important to note that while authoritative parenting plays a role, self-esteem is also shaped by other influences such as peer relationships, academic success, personality factors, and cultural norms (Orth & Robins, 2014). In some cultural contexts, for example, the strength of this relationship may vary depending on the value placed on independence and individual self-expression (Jose & Bellamy, 2012).

In summary, the study confirms that authoritative parenting is positively linked to self-esteem in young adults. This supports existing theories and prior research, underscoring the value of a balanced parenting style that blends warmth and guidance in fostering positive self-perceptions.

The second hypothesis shows that Authoritarian parenting has a positive and significant role in young adults' social anxiety levels. The results of this study showed a statistically significant positive relationship between authoritarian parenting style and social anxiety among young adults. This indicates that young adults who perceive their parents as more authoritarian tend to experience slightly higher levels of social anxiety. While the strength of the relationship is small, the finding supports the hypothesis that authoritarian parenting is associated with increased social anxiety.

Empirical evidence supports this link. McLeod, Wood, and Weisz (2007) found that parental control and overprotection were positively associated with anxiety disorders in children and adolescents. Similarly, Rapee (2012) reported that authoritarian and over controlling parenting styles can contribute to the development and maintenance of social anxiety by reinforcing children's fears and limiting their opportunities to develop social competence.

From a psychological perspective, the association can be understood through attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988), which posits that consistent parental rejection or emotional unavailability may lead to insecure attachment patterns. These insecure patterns can, in turn, heighten sensitivity to social evaluation and fear of negative judgment, both of which are central features of social anxiety (Murray, Creswell, & Cooper, 2009). Cultural context may also influence the impact of authoritarian parenting; in some collectivist societies, strict parenting may be interpreted as care and investment, potentially moderating its negative effects (Dwairy & Achoui, 2010).

In summary, the findings provide evidence that authoritarian parenting is related to higher social anxiety in young adults. This reinforces theoretical and empirical perspectives that highlight the psychological risks associated with rigid and low-warmth parenting approaches, particularly in relation to emotional and social functioning.

While the third hypothesis shows that permissive parenting has a positive and significant role on young adults' self-esteem level. This means that young adults who perceive their parents as more permissive tend to report higher self-esteem. The strength of this relationship was moderate, indicating that permissive parenting may play a more substantial role in influencing self-esteem than was observed with the other parenting styles examined in this research.

In summary, the findings support the hypothesis that permissive parenting is positively related to self-esteem in young adults. This suggests that

high levels of parental warmth and acceptance can contribute meaningfully to young people's positive self-perceptions, even when such parenting lacks strict structure or control.

In addition, the fourth hypothesis shows that permissive parenting has a positive and significant role on young adults' self-esteem level. The analysis indicated that parental personality made a meaningful contribution to predicting social anxiety, explaining a notable proportion of the variation in young adults' anxiety levels.

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) also provides a useful framework for interpreting these results. A parent's personality influences the attachment bond they form with their child; personality traits associated with emotional unavailability or excessive control can foster insecure attachment styles. Such attachment patterns are well-documented precursors to social anxiety, as they heighten concerns about social acceptance and the risk of rejection.

In summary, the findings confirm that parental personality is meaningfully associated with social anxiety in young adults. This reinforces the view that parents' enduring personal characteristics are not only important for parenting practices but also for the emotional and social outcomes of their children. Efforts to address social anxiety may therefore benefit from considering both the behavioral style and the underlying personality traits of parents.

Conclusion

From the current study findings, we concluded that there is an existing relationship between self-esteem, social anxiety and the parenting protection carried out by parents on children. From the result, it appears that authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive are all traits of parental personality in parents in protecting their children against social anxiety and self-esteem. Specifically, when practised by the father proves to be the most beneficial for the self-esteem development in an individual. A cultural background that surrounds the personality of an individual parent in which an individual child grows up is

imperative in shaping the personality of the child to be positive, as supported by findings of this research. Current study findings are not in line with previous research and therefore provide new insight for future researchers interested in discovering the relationship between self-esteem, social anxiety and parenting style in a longitudinal study that can provide a detailed account of parenting style on child, followed by the variation in development of self-esteem and social anxiety at various points in life, from birth to adult personality development. Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that there is a significant role of parenting style on social anxiety and self-esteem of young adults.

Implications of the Study

This study highlights several key implications for understanding the perceived role of parenting style on social anxiety and self-esteem of young adults in Lagos. The implications are based on the use of appropriate methods of parenting style on children caring. The methods based on what this study has investigated and discussed in the course of this study. The methods show the role of authoritarian, autocratic, permissive and parent personality in protecting children when they are young. This study has implications for these aforementioned methods of parenting style on adults' self-esteem and social anxiety.

Recommendations and Suggestions

This study can recommend some points based on the findings and conclusions of the study as:

- i. It is important for parents to support the development of their individual child both during childhood and during adulthood, exerting its effects on the self-efficacy and social anxiety of the latter, which can improve the quality of life of individuals and implicitly the skills in various fields of activity.
- ii. In this context, parents are recommended to pay more attention to parental support and protection to offer children a positive approach in parenting strategies that make the adult look at the evolution of their childhood perspective really well.
- iii. Parents should use a minimum authoritative parenting style on their young children for the purpose of developing good self-esteem when children are in the adult stage
- iv. Parents should use an authoritarian parenting style at a minimum level, but adopt a more permissive parenting style for children based on their positive role level on social anxiety of young adults.

References

- Abdul, A., & Rizvi, Z. (2017). Perceived parental authority and self-esteem among young adults. The International Conference on Education and Educational Psychology. *Social & Behavioural Sciences Journal*, 23(9), 89-97. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2017.10.62>
- Akinwale, G. A. (2025). Promoting Skill-Building Programs for Adolescents and Children with Disabilities. *Journal of Neonatal Surgery*, 14(32S), 6354–6362. Retrieved from <https://www.jneonatsurg.com/index.php/jns/article/view/8552>
- Akinwale, G. A. & Israel, U. N. (2022). Parenting in the 21st Century. In Lauree, Tilton-Weaver, Akinbode, Gabriel et al (Eds)., Issues of Child Development in Nigeria. A Festschrift in Honour of Professor Agiobu-Kemmer. Markabliss Press Chap. Thirteen, pg258 -271
- Andreea, O. N., & Panisoara, K. L. (2024). parenting style and Teenagers' Self-Esteem and self-efficacy in Brazil. *Psychological Reports*, 100(3), 731-745.
- Baumrind, D. (1991). The influence of parenting style on adolescent competence and substance use.

The Journal of Early Adolescence, 11(1), 56–95. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431691111004>

- Baumrind, D. (1966). Effects of authoritative parental control on child behaviour. *Child Development*, 37(4), 887–907. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1126611>
- Bowlby, J. (1988). *A secure base: Parent-child attachment and healthy human development*. Basic Books.
- Caporella, R. O. (2017). Impact of parenting styles on child development. *Global Academic Society Journal: Social Science Insight*, 1(5), 16-25.
- Daly, R. E., Vangelisti, I., & Lawrence, O. (2019). A Study on the Impact of Parenting Styles and Self-esteem on Academic Achievement of Post-graduate students. *The Sindh University Journal of Education*, 43(6), 96-112.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behaviour. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01
- Dong, M., Martinez, I., Garcia, J. F., Yubero, S. (2024). Parenting Styles and Adolescents' Self-Esteem in Brazil. *Psychological Reports*, 100(3), 731-745.
- Dwairy, M., & Achoui, M. (2010). Parental control: A second cross-cultural research on parenting and psychological adjustment of children. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 19(1), 16–22. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-009-9334-2>
- Jose, P. E., & Bellamy, M. A. (2012). Relationships of parents’ theories of intelligence with children’s persistence/learning behaviors and academic achievement. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 22(6), 793–799. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2012.05.00>
- Hafsa, F., Mushtaq, V. C., & Uzma, Z. (2021). Authoritarian parenting in individualist and collectivist groups: Associations with maternal emotion and cognition and children's self-esteem. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 20(1), 68-78
- Kessler, K. O., Silber, E., & Tippet, J. S. (2015). Self-esteem: Clinical assessment and measurement validation. *Psychological Reports*, Vol 16(3, Pt. 2), 1017-1071. Vol 16(3, Pt. 2) doi: 10.2466/pr0.1965.16.3c.1017
- Minuchin, O. I. (2014). Negative parenting, adolescents’ emotion regulation, self-efficacy in emotion regulation, and psychological adjustment. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(4), 2251. DOI: 10.3390/ijerph19042251
- Mohan, S. D., & Keziah, M. (2024). Getting by with a little help from self and others: self-esteem and social support as resources during early adolescence. *Developmental psychology*, 38(5), 822. DOI: 10.1037//0012-1649.38.5.822
- Orth, U., & Robins, R. W. (2014). The development of self-esteem. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 23(5), 381–387. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721414547414>
- Parker, L., & Bensons, N. (2014). Authoritative parenting stimulates academic achievement, also partly via self-efficacy and intention towards getting good grades. *Plos one*, 17(3), e0265595. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0265595

- Srikari, S. A., & Deepthi, E. R. (2023). Parental support and monitoring as associated with adolescent alcohol and tobacco use by gender and age. *BMC Public Health*, 21(2000). doi: 10.1186/s12889-021-12119-3
- Stein, J. O., Torgrud, W. E., & Walker, N. (2010). Do Parenting Style and Emotional Intelligence Affect Career Self-Efficacy Among Malaysia Teenagers? In *Handbook of Research on Dissecting and Dismantling Occupational Stress in Modern Organizations* (pp. 172-185). IGI Global. DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-6543-1.ch01325
- Wang et al. (2017). Self-efficacy: Educational aspects. *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 13820-13822. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B0-08-043076-7/02402-5>
- Yulia, E., & Choi, E. (2020). Perceived Parental Support and Adolescents' Positive Self-Beliefs and Levels of Distress Across Four Countries. *International Journal of Psychology*, 78(8), 298-314

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.4>**AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AND THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN AFRICA: A GENDER PERSPECTIVE****Dr Onuk Bulus Ojem***Post-Doctoral Research Fellowship, Faculty of Humanities**North-West University, South Africa,**Mahikeng Campus**Email: onuk.bulus@nsuk.edu.ng/ojemalism@gmail.com/56463057@mynwu.ac.za**Phone No: +2348067363154/+27739320350**ORCID-<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-2536-7866>*

&

Prof. Phemelo Olifile Marumo*Deputy Director (School of Philosophy)**Mahikeng Campus**Mobile: (278) 398 77741 | Phone: (018) 389 2463**phemelo.marumo@nwu.ac.za/marumo.phemelo@gmail.com**ORCID-<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5221-1286>***Abstract**

African philosophy offers a critical intellectual lens for understanding and advancing development in Africa, emphasizing communalism, humanism, and the interdependence of social relations. From a gendered perspective, it interrogates the cultural and epistemological foundations that have historically structured gender hierarchies and social inequalities across the continent. Core philosophical values such as Ubuntu (human interdependence), ujamaa (communal solidarity), and the ethic of care provide a conceptual basis for constructing development paradigms that are participatory, inclusive, and grounded in local realities. Yet, patriarchal norms embedded in traditional structures have frequently marginalized women, limiting their participation in social, economic, and political spheres. This paper argues that revisiting African philosophy through a gender-sensitive lens can reveal and deconstruct the androcentric biases that persist in African societies and institutions, paving the way for transformative development. By aligning indigenous philosophical values with feminist epistemologies, African thought can challenge exclusionary practices, promote gender justice, and restore women's agency as co-creators of knowledge and development. Such a synthesis foregrounds the relational, ethical, and moral dimensions of progress, moving beyond purely material growth toward holistic well-being for all. The study concludes that a gender-responsive African philosophical framework has the potential to foster equitable participation, cultural authenticity, and sustainable transformation across the continent.

Key Words: *African Philosophy, Gender, Development, Ubuntu, Feminism, Inclusivity, Sustainable Transformation, etc.*

Introduction

The discussion on development in Africa has increasingly shifted towards indigenous philosophical frameworks as alternative ways to understand and address the continent's social, economic, and political challenges. African philos-

ophy, emphasising communalism, human dignity, and moral responsibility, provides a culturally rooted model for rethinking the meaning and purpose of development (Wiredu, 1998; Gyekye, 1997). It rejects solely Western concepts of development focused on economic growth and instead advocates a holistic view

that combines material, moral, and social aspects of human well-being. A key element of African philosophical thought is the idea of Ubuntu, “I am because we are”, which highlights the interconnectedness of individuals within the community and portrays development as a collective and ethical pursuit (Mbiti, 1969; Ramose, 2002).

However, within this philosophical tradition, gender relations occupy a contested terrain. While African philosophy extols communal equality and human dignity, traditional structures have often perpetuated patriarchal norms that marginalise women from decision-making and economic participation (Amadiume, 1987; Nzegwu, 2006). This contradiction has created a gap between philosophical ideals and social realities, particularly in the realms of governance, education, and access to resources. Consequently, the gendered nature of African development requires a philosophical re-examination that confronts both indigenous and imported patriarchal ideologies.

A gender-sensitive interpretation of African philosophy seeks to uncover and reinterpret indigenous values in ways that affirm women’s agency and contributions to development. African feminist scholars such as Oyěwùmí (1997) and Nnaemeka (2004) argue that pre-colonial African societies possessed relational and complementary gender systems that were disrupted by colonial and Western patriarchal impositions. These disruptions not only redefined gender hierarchies but also reconfigured epistemological structures, marginalising women’s knowledge systems and experiences. Therefore, re-engaging African philosophy from a gender perspective becomes an act of intellectual and socio-political reclamation; restoring balance, justice, and inclusivity in the African development process (Eze, 1997; Dussel, 2003).

Moreover, integrating gender perspectives into African philosophy enhances the ethical and humanistic orientation of development, emphasising empowerment, equality, and collective progress. It challenges the instrumentalist tendencies of development discourse and situates the African woman not as a passive recipient of aid

but as a critical agent of change and transformation. As Chimakonam (2017) asserts, African philosophy must evolve as a dynamic and inclusive intellectual tradition capable of addressing contemporary realities, including gender inequality, social justice, and sustainable development. Therefore, examining the nexus between African philosophy and gender is not only necessary for achieving equitable development but also vital for decolonising knowledge and restoring Africa’s philosophical autonomy.

Conceptual Review

African Philosophy

African philosophy is a broad and evolving intellectual tradition that seeks to articulate the nature of African thought, values, and worldview within both indigenous and modern contexts. Conceptually, African philosophy can be understood as the critical reflection on African existence, culture, and knowledge systems through rational inquiry and collective experience (Wiredu, 1998; Gyekye, 1997). It is concerned with interpreting and systematising the principles that underlie African ways of life, ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, and social order, while addressing the historical and contemporary realities of the African condition. At its core, African philosophy arises from the attempt to reclaim and affirm the intellectual autonomy of African peoples after centuries of colonial domination and epistemic marginalisation. Colonialism not only disrupted African socio-political structures but also imposed Eurocentric epistemologies that dismissed African thought as irrational or primitive (Hountondji, 1983; Mudimbe, 1988). Hence, African philosophy emerged as both a critique of Eurocentrism and an affirmation of African modes of knowing, being, and reasoning. It represents an effort to decolonise knowledge and to restore the legitimacy of African intellectual heritage (Masolo, 1994; Ramose, 2002).

Philosophically, African thought emphasises communalism, humanism, and holism, values that contrast with the individualism and materialism dominant in Western philosophy. The African worldview views the individual as part of

a larger social and cosmic order in which identity, morality, and existence are defined relationally rather than independently (Mbiti, 1969; Menkiti, 1984). The concept of Ubuntu, often summarised as “I am because we are”, captures this relational ontology, emphasising that personhood is constituted through one’s relationship with others and the community (Ramose, 2002). This communal ethics informs African conceptions of justice, governance, and moral responsibility, positioning social harmony and interdependence as the foundation of ethical life. In epistemological terms, African philosophy challenges the dichotomy between rationality and spirituality that characterises Western thought. Knowledge in the African context is often experiential, participatory, and holistic; integrating the physical, metaphysical, and moral dimensions of reality (Oruka, 1990; Oladipo, 1992). The sage philosophy project initiated by Oruka (1990) exemplifies this approach by demonstrating that critical, reflective thought exists within oral traditions and lived experiences, not only within written or academic texts. Thus, African philosophy validates indigenous epistemologies as legitimate sources of philosophical reflection.

Contemporary African philosophers have debated the scope and methodology of African philosophy, giving rise to multiple schools of thought. The Ethnophilosophical School (e.g., Tempels, 1959; Mbiti, 1969) treats African philosophy as a collective worldview embedded in myths, proverbs, and communal practices. In contrast, the critical or professional school (e.g., Hountondji, 1983; Wiredu, 1998) insists that philosophy must involve critical and systematic analysis rather than mere cultural description. A more recent trend, postcolonial and conversational philosophy, advocates dialogue between African and global thought systems while maintaining African conceptual originality (Chimakonam, 2017; Eze, 1997).

Furthermore, African philosophy has evolved into a practical framework for addressing Africa’s developmental and ethical challenges. It seeks to provide indigenous philosophical foundations for democracy, social justice, human rights, and sustainable development (Gyekye,

1997; Ramose, 2002). The integration of African philosophical principles into governance and education is seen as crucial for cultural renewal, moral reconstruction, and decolonisation of the African mind.

Therefore, African philosophy is not a monolithic body of thought but a plural and dynamic discourse rooted in African experience and open to global engagement. It represents a continuing intellectual journey toward self-definition, ethical restoration, and cultural emancipation. As Wiredu (1998) notes, African philosophy stands as both a reclamation of African intellectual agency and a universal contribution to human knowledge.

Feminist Epistemology

Feminist epistemology represents a critical and transformative approach to understanding knowledge production, challenging conventional epistemological assumptions that have historically marginalized women and other subordinated groups. Central to feminist epistemology is the interrogation of the social, cultural, and political structures that determine what counts as knowledge, who is authorized to produce it, and whose experiences are recognized as legitimate sources of understanding (Harding, 1991; Code, 1991). Unlike traditional epistemology, which often presumes objectivity and universality, feminist epistemology emphasizes the situatedness of knowledge, acknowledging that perspectives are shaped by social location, power dynamics, and lived experiences (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2004).

The fundamental tenets of feminist epistemology include the following: Standpoint Theory: Developed by feminist theorists such as Dorothy Smith and Sandra Harding, standpoint theory posits that marginalized groups, particularly women, occupy unique epistemic positions that provide insights often inaccessible to dominant groups (Harding, 1991). Knowledge emerging from these standpoints is not partial in a pejorative sense but offers critical perspectives that reveal structural inequalities and biases embedded within traditional knowledge systems. For instance, women’s experiences in patriarchal societies can illuminate systemic issues in

healthcare, labor practices, and governance that male-centered epistemologies often overlook (Oyěwùmí, 1997; Nnaemeka, 2004). Critique of Androcentrism: Feminist epistemology challenges androcentrism, the tendency to center male experiences as universal, thereby marginalizing or erasing women's perspectives (Code, 1991; Harding, 1991). This critique spans multiple disciplines, highlighting how scientific, philosophical, and policy frameworks frequently reflect male priorities and worldviews. In the African context, the imposition of Western gender norms during colonialism further entrenched androcentric epistemologies, undermining flexible and relational indigenous gender practices (Amadiume, 1987; Oyěwùmí, 1997). Situated Knowledge and Contextuality: Knowledge is always embedded within social, cultural, and historical contexts. Feminist epistemologists argue that claims to universal, context-independent knowledge often perpetuate inequities by ignoring marginalized perspectives (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2004). In Africa, this principle underscores the importance of recognizing indigenous knowledge systems and women's experiential insights as valid sources of understanding development, health, and governance (Mama, 2001; Nnaemeka, 2004). Epistemic Justice: Feminist epistemology advocates for epistemic justice by ensuring that historically silenced voices are recognized in knowledge production and decision-making processes. This involves not only documenting women's experiences but also restructuring institutions, research methodologies, and policies to integrate these perspectives meaningfully (Fricker, 2007; Lugones, 2010). In development studies, this perspective has informed frameworks that value women's roles in agriculture, health, and local governance as central to sustainable progress (Cornwall, Harrison & Whitehead, 2007).

In Africa, feminist epistemology intersects with indigenous philosophies to provide culturally resonant pathways toward inclusive development. African feminist frameworks such as Nego-Feminism (Nnaemeka, 2004), Motherism (Acholonu, 1995), and Stiwanism (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994) integrate relational, communal,

and negotiation-based ethics with the pursuit of gender justice. For example, Nnaemeka's concept of negotiated feminism emphasizes dialogue and compromise, aligning feminism with African communal values, enabling women to navigate patriarchal structures while maintaining cultural legitimacy. Case studies illustrate the application of feminist epistemology in Africa: Rwanda: Women's post-genocide participation in governance and local decision-making reshaped development priorities, ensuring community-based programs addressed health, education, and social welfare, reflecting women's epistemic contributions (Powley, 2005). Nigeria: Women-led cooperatives and market associations in Lagos and Kano demonstrate how indigenous knowledge and gendered economic practices contribute to local development and community cohesion (Mama, 2001). Uganda and Kenya: Grassroots women's health initiatives in rural areas have improved public health outcomes by leveraging local knowledge and care ethics, demonstrating the practical significance of feminist epistemology in development processes (Cornwall, 2016; UN Women, 2020).

Overall, feminist epistemology provides a critical lens for interrogating traditional knowledge systems, centering marginalized perspectives, and promoting epistemic justice. Within the African context, it complements indigenous philosophical frameworks to construct development paradigms that are both culturally grounded and gender-responsive. By valuing women's experiences, relational ethics, and communal knowledge, feminist epistemology advances inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development across the continent.

Development

Development is a multidimensional and contested concept that has attracted diverse interpretations across historical, philosophical, and socio-political contexts. Traditionally, development was associated with industrialisation, modernisation, and economic growth, often measured in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and other macroeconomic indicators (Rostow, 1960). However, this linear, growth-

oriented model has been criticised for its inability to address inequality, environmental sustainability, and human well-being.

From a non-technical viewpoint, development implies a process of positive change; becoming better, larger, stronger, or more advanced. Yet, this raises the critical question: better in what sense? A society may progress in infrastructure but still struggle with poverty and illiteracy, making the notion of “better” deeply value-laden (Lobel, 1992; Chambers, 2004). This underscores the fact that development is not merely about material change but involves moral, cultural, and philosophical considerations.

Scholars have identified three major conceptions of development:

Historical/Structural Conception:

This perspective sees development as a long-term process of societal transformation, such as shifts from agrarian to industrial systems, with implications for class relations and modes of production (Deane, 1965; Makinde, 2010). African philosophers such as Claude Ake (1996) argue that structural development in Africa must be anchored in democratic governance and community-based initiatives, emphasising self-reliance and philosophical education.

Policy-Related and Indicator-Led Conception:

Here, development is evaluative and short-to-medium-term, focusing on outcomes like poverty reduction, literacy, and healthcare. This approach aligns with global frameworks such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), though critics describe it as “ahistorical” for neglecting deeper historical and cultural factors (Hountondji, 1998; Hallen, 2002; Chege, 1997).

Postmodernist Conception: This view challenges Eurocentric and hegemonic understandings of development, arguing that notions of “development” and “underdevelopment” are discursive constructs used to sustain global inequalities

(Alvares, 1992; Mojid, 1997). While it exposes the ideological biases in development discourse, critics caution that denying material realities such as poverty and hunger risks obscuring Africa’s urgent struggles (Oguejiofor, 2001).

In African thought, development has also been closely tied to freedom. Julius Nyerere (1974) emphasised that “development is freedom,” arguing that economic progress, political liberty, and human dignity are inseparable. Similarly, Rodney (1972) traced Africa’s underdevelopment to colonial exploitation, while thinkers like Wiredu (1980) and Kaphagawani (1998) highlighted the need to eliminate authoritarianism, anachronism, and superstition as obstacles to African progress.

Therefore, development cannot be reduced to GDP or infrastructure but must be understood as a holistic process of human liberation and transformation, mental, social, political, and economic. In the African context, philosophy provides the critical tools to interrogate value systems, challenge neo-colonial structures, and redefine development as a people-centred pursuit of freedom, dignity, and well-being.

Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development gained global prominence with the publication of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) report, also known as the Brundtland Report (1987). It defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987). This definition highlights the intergenerational responsibility of societies to pursue growth that is not only economically viable but also socially inclusive and environmentally sound. Sustainable development is often framed as encompassing three interrelated dimensions (United Nations, 2015):

- i. **Economic sustainability:** Ensuring long-term economic growth while maintaining mac-

- roeconomic stability, efficient resource use, and innovation-driven productivity.
- ii. **Social sustainability:** Promoting equity, inclusion, justice, poverty reduction, and improved quality of life.
- iii. **Environmental sustainability:** Conserving ecosystems, biodiversity, and natural resources to maintain ecological balance and resilience against climate change.

This “triple bottom line” approach underscores the necessity of balancing economic growth, social justice, and environmental protection in development policies (Elkington, 1997).

Sustainable development has become a global policy agenda, especially through the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015. The 17 SDGs provide a comprehensive framework addressing poverty eradication, climate action, responsible consumption, peace, and partnerships (UN, 2015). Unlike earlier development paradigms, the SDGs explicitly recognise the interconnectedness of global challenges and emphasise inclusive, participatory approaches. Sustainable development also raises philosophical questions about justice, responsibility, and human-nature relations. Scholars such as Sen (1999) argue that true sustainability must expand capabilities, the freedoms people have to lead lives they value. Similarly, Norton (2005) emphasises an environmental ethic that prioritises ecological integrity as a moral duty to future generations.

Despite its popularity, sustainable development has been critiqued as vague and overly broad. Redclift (2005) argues that the concept risks becoming a political slogan without substantive transformative impact. Others note that its implementation often remains growth-centred, prioritising economic expansion over ecological preservation (Escobar, 1995). Moreover, in Africa and other developing regions, sustainable development is challenged by weak institutions,

poverty, corruption, and dependence on extractive economies (Acheampong, 2018). Sustainable development represents a paradigm shift in development thinking, aiming to reconcile economic progress with environmental stewardship and social equity. It is simultaneously a normative goal, a policy framework, and a philosophical stance about justice and responsibility across generations. While widely embraced, its practical realisation requires strong governance, institutional reforms, and global cooperation, particularly in the Global South, where developmental challenges are most acute.

Gender

Conceptually, gender refers not merely to biological differences between males and females but to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, attributes, and expectations that societies assign to individuals based on perceived sex differences (Butler, 1990; Scott, 1986). It encompasses cultural norms, institutional practices, and discursive processes that shape how femininity and masculinity are defined, enacted, and valued within specific historical and socio-political contexts. At its core, gender is a relational concept; it defines not only what it means to be a man or a woman but also the hierarchical relations between these identities (Connell, 2002; Risman, 2004). This relational dimension makes gender a powerful analytical tool for examining inequality, power, and social justice. As Joan Scott (1986) famously argued, gender is “a primary way of signifying relationships of power,” structuring social institutions and individual experiences in both overt and subtle ways.

From a sociological and anthropological standpoint, gender is culturally contingent, varying across societies and historical periods. What constitutes “appropriate” gender behaviour or roles in one culture may differ drastically in another, highlighting that gender norms are not universal but socially negotiated and context-dependent (Lorber, 1994; Oakley, 1972). The construction of gender roles, through family, education, religion, and the media, reproduces patterns of expectation that sustain systems of privilege and subordination. Feminist theorists ar-

gue that such constructions have historically legitimised patriarchy, subordinating women and marginalising non-binary and gender-diverse identities (Beauvoir, 1949; hooks, 2000).

Philosophically, gender discourse evolved through several theoretical paradigms. Early feminist thought, such as liberal feminism, sought equality through institutional reform and the recognition of women's rights in education, politics, and employment (Mill, 1869; Wollstonecraft, 1792). Radical and socialist feminisms, however, moved beyond legal equality to critique the structural foundations of gender oppression in capitalism, patriarchy, and cultural domination (Mitchell, 1971; Hartmann, 1979). Post-structuralist and intersectional feminisms have since deepened this understanding by examining how gender intersects with other axes of identity: race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and colonial history, to produce complex forms of inequality (Crenshaw, 1989; Butler, 1990; Mohanty, 2003).

Gender theory has also been instrumental in deconstructing the binary notion of sex and gender. Judith Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity argues that gender identity is not innate but enacted through repeated social performances, linguistic acts, and cultural norms that give the illusion of stability. This approach destabilises essentialist views of gender and opens the way for more fluid and inclusive understandings of identity. Similarly, Raewyn Connell's (2002) theory of hegemonic masculinity reveals how dominant forms of masculinity sustain male privilege and marginalise alternative masculinities and femininities within patriarchal systems.

In the African context, gender has distinct cultural, historical, and philosophical dimensions. Scholars such as Oyewumi (1997) and Amadiume (1987) argue that colonialism imposed Western gender binaries on African societies that previously operated on more fluid or complementary gender relations. African feminist theorists emphasise the need for decolonising gender by grounding analyses in indigenous worldviews that recognise women's agency, communal interdependence, and relational ontology (Nnaemeka, 2004; Ogundipe-Leslie,

1994). Thus, the discourse on gender in Africa goes beyond Western feminist frameworks to address the intersections of culture, tradition, and postcolonial identity.

Furthermore, gender is not merely a descriptive category but a developmental and policy concern. Gender disparities in education, economic participation, and political representation remain significant barriers to sustainable development (UNDP, 2020; World Bank, 2019). The concept of gender mainstreaming, popularised by the United Nations, calls for integrating gender perspectives into all policies and programs to ensure equitable outcomes and social justice (UN Women, 2015). Hence, gender analysis is essential for achieving inclusive governance, social cohesion, and sustainable development across societies.

Thus, gender functions as both a conceptual lens and a political project; it helps uncover the embedded power structures within social institutions while providing a framework for transformative change. As scholars like Scott (1986) and Butler (1990) emphasise, gender must be understood not as a fixed category but as a dynamic field of social meaning, constantly negotiated within relations of power, culture, and identity.

African Philosophy and Gender: Interrogating Cultural Foundations and Epistemological Assumptions

From a gender perspective, African philosophy provides a critical framework for examining how cultural worldviews, moral systems, and epistemic traditions have historically shaped and justified gender relations and social hierarchies across the continent. Rather than treating gender as a fixed or biologically determined category, African philosophical thought, particularly when informed by feminist and decolonial insights, interrogates the cultural logics, relational ethics, and knowledge systems that define the social construction of gender and power.

Traditional African societies were structured around communal ethics and relational ontology, where identity and social roles were defined by relationships, lineage, and communal responsibility rather than individual autonomy

(Mbiti, 1969; Menkiti, 1984). Within these frameworks, gender was often fluid and functionally defined, linked to social contribution, seniority, and ritual responsibility. For instance, studies by Amadiume (1987) and Oyěwùmí (1997) demonstrate that in several precolonial African societies, such as among the Igbo and Yoruba, gender categories were less rigid, and women could occupy male-associated roles (e.g., “female husbands” or “male daughters”) depending on socio-economic or lineage needs. However, African philosophy does not romanticise these traditions. Through the lens of gender analysis, it critically evaluates how communal systems could simultaneously sustain solidarity and reinforce certain patriarchal hierarchies, especially regarding decision-making, inheritance, and ritual authority. As Wiredu (1996) notes, philosophical reflection on culture must involve rational reconstruction, where inherited norms are examined against principles of justice, equality, and moral reciprocity.

From an epistemological standpoint, African philosophy questions the Western epistemic frameworks that have historically defined gender in Africa. Colonialism introduced Eurocentric binaries: male/female, public/private, rational/emotional, that redefined African gender systems and embedded them in colonial governance, religion, and education (Oyěwùmí, 1997; Nzegwu, 2006). These epistemic impositions erased indigenous gender epistemologies and legitimised social hierarchies that subordinated women both symbolically and materially.

African feminist philosophers argue for epistemic decolonisation, a process of recovering indigenous categories of personhood and social organisation that reflect local realities (Amadiume, 1997; Nnaemeka, 2004). This means rethinking gender not merely as a social variable, but as a knowledge category shaped by cultural ontology and power relations. By interrogating epistemic assumptions, African philosophy exposes how colonial and patriarchal knowledge systems naturalised inequality and excluded women’s experiences from the domain of legitimate knowledge.

Central to African philosophy is the concept of

personhood as relational and processual, expressed through ideas such as Ubuntu, Unhu, or Botho. These traditions posit that one becomes a person through others; through community, care, and moral responsibility (Ramose, 2002; Gade, 2011). From a gender perspective, this relational ontology provides both opportunity and critique. On one hand, it can ground a philosophy of gender complementarity where men and women are co-constitutive social beings; on the other, without critical reinterpretation, it may entrench gendered expectations of self-sacrifice and service, disproportionately placed upon women (Chuwa, 2014).

African feminist philosophers such as Nkiru Nzegwu and Obioma Nnaemeka, therefore, call for a reinterpretation of communal personhood that balances relational duties with individual rights and agency, particularly for women. Nego-feminism, as proposed by Nnaemeka (2004), embodies this balance by promoting negotiation, compromise, and contextual pragmatism in addressing gender inequality within African cultural frameworks.

Through interrogating both cultural and epistemological foundations, African philosophy contributes to a philosophy of development and social justice that is gender-inclusive. It challenges the androcentric bias in both traditional authority systems and modern policy frameworks. In the development discourse, this implies moving beyond Western liberal models of gender equality toward contextually grounded frameworks that integrate moral reciprocity, communal care, and women’s agency (Tamale, 2020). Furthermore, gender-aware African philosophy encourages dialogue between tradition and modernity, valuing indigenous moral wisdom while dismantling oppressive norms. It reclaims African epistemologies as living resources for designing institutions that recognise women’s contributions, social reproduction, and community welfare as central to societal advancement (Nnaemeka, 2004; Oyěwùmí, 1997).

From a gender perspective, African philosophy is not merely descriptive of traditional gender relations; it is critical and reconstructive. It interrogates how culture and knowledge have

jointly produced gender hierarchies, while offering ethical and epistemological tools for building more equitable social orders. Through engaging feminist critiques, decolonial epistemologies, and indigenous ethics, African philosophy reclaims gender as a dynamic site of moral reflection, social transformation, and epistemic justice in the African development process.

Research Methodology

The paper employs a qualitative research approach to examine and interpret the significance of the topic under investigation. This method prioritises the analysis of individual cases, empirical studies from South Africa, Rwanda, Tanzania, Botswana, Lesotho, and Nigeria, as well as official reports, with the objective of understanding underlying perceptions, experiences, and contextual realities. The study further utilises purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was applied to identify materials that critically examine how African philosophical and gender perspective frameworks contribute to inclusive and socially just sustainable development. This approach was selected due to its efficiency in targeting information-rich sources, including literature and case studies that specifically address the intersection of African philosophy and gender perspectives within the development process in Africa.

Furthermore, snowball sampling was employed through citation tracking, allowing the identification of further relevant studies via the reference lists of already sourced materials. By integrating purposive and snowball sampling, the study systematically selected books, journal articles, case studies, and government documents that are directly pertinent to the research objectives, ensuring a comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of the subject matter.

African Philosophy and Gender Contribution to Africa's Quest for Development

The intersection of African philosophy and gender studies has become a central discourse in contemporary African scholarship, as both fields provide critical frameworks for redefining the continent's development paradigm. African philosophy offers a decolonial epistemological foundation that challenges Western-centric notions of progress, while gender scholarship highlights the socio-economic, cultural, and political marginalisation of women and other gendered groups. Together, they contribute to Africa's quest for holistic and inclusive development by centring indigenous ethics, relational values, and gender equity as foundational principles of sustainable progress (Wiredu, 1998; Oyěwùmí, 1997).

African philosophy emphasises communalism, solidarity, moral responsibility, and interconnectedness, principles that directly counteract the individualistic tendencies of neoliberal development models. Concepts such as Ubuntu in Southern Africa, Ujamaa in Tanzania, Botho in Botswana, and Obuntu-botho in Lesotho reflect a moral economy of interdependence and mutual obligation (Ramose, 2009; Nussbaum, 2003). These frameworks underscore that development in Africa must go beyond material accumulation to encompass the moral, cultural, and relational dimensions of life. Gyekye (1997) posits that African philosophical thought defines personhood through community participation, suggesting that social development depends on collective flourishing rather than the isolated individual. Consequently, African philosophy provides a normative base for rethinking development as human flourishing, the enhancement of life, dignity, and coexistence in harmony with the environment (Wiredu, 1996). Gender analysis in Africa reveals how patriarchal structures, colonial legacies, and socio-cultural biases have historically excluded women from decision-making and development processes (Mama, 2001). African feminist theorists such as Amadiume (1997) and Oyěwùmí (1997) demonstrate that colonial interventions imposed Western gender hierarchies that disrupted more flexible indigenous gender systems. In many precolonial African societies, gender roles were functional and relational, often determined by

lineage, seniority, or social responsibility rather than rigid binaries (Amadiume, 1987). The colonial encounter entrenched patriarchal norms and epistemic violence that continue to marginalise women politically and economically.

From a developmental perspective, addressing gender inequality is not merely a matter of justice but of effectiveness and sustainability. Research consistently shows that women's empowerment contributes significantly to poverty reduction, education, health, and democratic governance (Cornwall, Harrison & Whitehead, 2007). African feminist thought extends this argument by insisting that gender justice must be culturally resonant rather than imported wholesale from Western frameworks.

African feminist philosophies; such as Motherism (Acholonu, 1995), Stiwanism (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994), Nego-Feminism (Nnaemeka, 2004), and FemAfrik (Mama, 2001), serve as philosophical and practical bridges between gender studies and African philosophy. These frameworks emphasise negotiation, complementarity, and communal progress rather than adversarial gender politics. For instance, Nnaemeka's (2004) Nego-Feminism advocates for negotiation and "no-ego" approaches, aligning feminist activism with indigenous ethics of dialogue and interdependence. Ogundipe-Leslie's Stiwanism—"Social Transformation Including Women in Africa"—frames development as incomplete without women's participation in governance and social reform. Similarly, Acholonu's Motherism foregrounds African women's moral and social authority in community leadership, promoting development that nurtures both human and environmental well-being.

Additional case studies reinforce these principles. In Nigeria, women-led market associations, such as the Aba Women's Riot associations, historically exercised political influence, challenging both colonial and postcolonial economic policies (Amadiume, 1987). In Rwanda, women's representation in parliament—over 60% of seats—has transformed policy priorities, particularly in health, education, and post-genocide reconciliation (Tripp, 2015). In Tanzania, cooperative farming schemes led by women in

the Ujamaa villages have strengthened communal food security while fostering gender collaboration and economic agency (Mbilinyi, 1991). In Ghana, the queen mothers of the Akan have mediated conflicts and influenced local governance, integrating indigenous leadership structures with modern development initiatives (Arndt, 2002).

The African Union's Agenda 2063 envisions "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa driven by its own citizens." This vision echoes the moral and communal values central to African philosophy and feminist theory. Aligning gender equity with the philosophical tenets of Ubuntu and communal solidarity allows African nations to pursue development that is just, inclusive, and culturally authentic (Eze, 2017). Gender-inclusive development grounded in African philosophical values can enhance: Social cohesion: promoting participatory governance and inclusivity. Economic productivity: unlocking women's potential in agriculture, education, and enterprise Moral capital: cultivating shared ethical responsibility and care

African women have historically been at the forefront of social transformation, through grassroots mobilisation, market associations, peacebuilding initiatives, and environmental activism. Recognising and institutionalising their contributions aligns with African philosophy's emphasis on relational harmony and communal well-being. For example, women-led initiatives in Kenya and Uganda have significantly improved community health and education outcomes, demonstrating the integration of care ethics with developmental action (UN Women, 2020; Cornwall, 2016).

Thus, African philosophy and gender perspectives jointly illuminate a path toward a holistic and decolonial conception of development. By combining the communal ethics of Ubuntu with feminist principles of equity and inclusion, African societies can reconstruct development as a moral, relational, and participatory process. This synthesis not only addresses material inequalities but also restores the ethical, cultural, and epistemic dimensions necessary for Africa's self-determined progress.

Recentering African Philosophy and a Gender Perspective in Africa's Development Process

Recentering African philosophy alongside a gender perspective represents a critical shift in development thinking: rather than defaulting to Western liberal-growth frameworks, this approach foregrounds indigenous normative vocabularies (such as relational personhood, reciprocity, and mutual responsibility) and decolonial gender epistemologies that better align with African historical and social realities. The aim is both normative and practical: to design institutions, policies and metrics that treat social reproduction and women's agency as central development outcomes rather than peripheral issues. Central to many African philosophical traditions is the concept of Ubuntu/Unhu/Botho, which posits that personhood is constituted through relations: "I am because we are". This relational ontology emphasises communal obligations and mutual aid, thus legitimising public and community investment in social reproduction, such as childcare, community health and elder-care, as legitimate development priorities. Recent scholarship argues that Ubuntu can re-orient sustainable development agendas toward social goals (care, inclusion, reciprocity) rather than purely individual accumulation. (Shumbamhini & Chirongoma, 2024)

A gender-sensitive recentering requires an appreciation of history. Colonial administrations, missionary education and Western legal frameworks introduced rigid sex/gender binaries and atomistic subjects, categories that were not universally operative in many pre-colonial African societies. Scholars such as Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí and Ifi Amadiume demonstrate how pre-colonial systems often organised social roles around lineage, age-grades, ritual offices or functional roles rather than a universal "male/female" schema; colonial governance reified Western binary gender categories, producing both material dispossession and an epistemic erasure that continues to distort policy if unchallenged. (Keevy, 2008)

African feminist theorists provide the bridge between indigenous philosophy and gender-justice

development. Obioma Nnaemeka's nego-feminism (feminism of negotiation) promotes dialogic, culturally informed strategies that advance women's agency within communal contexts, while Amadiume and Oyěwùmí show how recovering indigenous social arrangements can inform emancipatory policies without naïvely romanticising tradition. These frameworks support contextual, negotiated reforms, policies that combine universal rights with culturally appropriate pathways for implementation. (Dube, 2024)

The normative promise of African philosophy must be translated into policy through two linked pillars. First, institutionalise care: recognise, resource and integrate unpaid reproductive labour (public childcare, caregiver stipends, time-use accounting, and care cooperatives) into social protection and fiscal policy. Second, safeguard rights: ensure women's property, political and bodily rights so communal practices cannot be invoked to deny justice. In short, Ubuntu-inspired solidarity must be paired with rights-based accountability; otherwise, some communal rhetoric may reproduce patriarchal obligations. (Shumbamhini & Chirongoma, 2024)

Empirical data from Africa reveal that women carry the majority of unpaid care and domestic work; the COVID-19 pandemic intensified these burdens and reversed some gender equality gains. Time-use surveys and gender data portals show that unless care investments and gender-responsive budgeting are centred, post-pandemic recovery will be unequal and precarious. Re-centering African philosophical resources into policy is thus not only normative but pragmatic: care-centred programmes can increase women's labour-force participation, household resilience and communal wellbeing, outcomes consistent with both Ubuntu ethics and development effectiveness.

While the recentering approach offers substantial promise, three risks must be actively mitigated: (1) Romanticisation – assuming tradition is uniformly egalitarian; (2) Instrumentalisation – political actors invoking "culture" to resist reform; and (3) Elite Capture-channelling resources through patriarchal networks. Feminist

critique, transparent accountability mechanisms, legal protections and participatory monitoring must therefore accompany any culturally grounded initiative to prevent the reproduction of exclusion under the guise of tradition.

Recentring African philosophy with a gender lens is both normative correction and pragmatic policy strategy: it aligns development with lived social realities, recognises women's epistemic and reproductive labour, and proposes institutional reforms that combine community solidarity with rights and accountability. When carefully implemented, this approach shifts African development from a narrow growth-centric model toward a plural, care-centred vision of collective flourishing.

Challenges of African Philosophy and Gender Perspective in the Development Process in Africa

While the integration of African philosophy and gender perspectives in the development process offers transformative potential for creating inclusive and contextually grounded policies, it also faces numerous conceptual, institutional, and socio-political challenges. These challenges arise from the following interrelated factors:

Epistemological Marginalisation and Colonial Legacies

One major challenge lies in the epistemic dominance of Western paradigms that continue to shape African development discourse. Colonialism entrenched Eurocentric worldviews that privileged Western rationality, individualism, and market-oriented development models while devaluing indigenous knowledge systems and communal philosophies (Hountondji, 1996; Wiredu, 1998). This epistemic marginalisation makes it difficult for African philosophy, rooted in relational ontology, communalism, and Ubuntu ethics, to gain recognition as a legitimate framework for policy and governance. Moreover, Western feminist theories are often imposed as universal, leading to epistemic dissonance with African cultural realities (Oyěwùmí, 1997). For example, the Development programmes designed around neoliberal principles often ignore indigenous ethical values such as Ubuntu ("I am

because we are"), resulting in policies that overlook communal welfare, collective care, and social reciprocity (Ramose, 2002; Metz, 2011).

Persistence of Patriarchal Cultural Norms

Despite the egalitarian potential within certain African traditions, patriarchal practices and gender hierarchies remain entrenched in many contemporary African societies. While African philosophy promotes values of communal harmony and mutual respect, these ideals are sometimes distorted to justify gender subordination and women's exclusion from leadership and decision-making (Mama, 2001; Tamale, 2020). Cultural interpretations of Ubuntu and communalism can inadvertently reinforce patriarchal control if not critically examined through a feminist lens. Thus, without gender-aware reinterpretation, traditional philosophies risk reproducing structural inequalities rather than dismantling them. For instance, in some customary land tenure systems, appeals to tradition are used to exclude women from land inheritance, despite the communal ideals of shared responsibility and justice (Agarwal, 2003; Tamale, 2020).

Conceptual Tensions between Universalism and Cultural Relativism

Another challenge is the philosophical tension between universal rights frameworks and cultural relativism in gender discourse. African feminist scholars such as Nnaemeka (2004) and Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) argue that while global feminist ideals like gender equality are vital, they must be negotiated within specific cultural contexts, a principle expressed in nego-feminism. However, this negotiated approach can lead to interpretive ambiguity, making it difficult to draw clear policy boundaries between cultural sensitivity and human rights violations. Policymakers often struggle to balance respect for cultural traditions with the enforcement of universal gender justice (Arndt, 2002; Tamale, 2020). Example: Debates around practices such as female initiation rites or polygamy illustrate the difficulty of distinguishing between cultural heritage and gender discrimination in policy formulation (Nnaemeka, 2004).

Institutional and Policy Incoherence

Many African countries face institutional fragmentation and weak policy coherence between development planning, cultural revitalisation, and gender mainstreaming. While governments may rhetorically endorse gender equality and indigenous philosophies, these principles are rarely institutionalised in budgeting, education, or legal frameworks (Mama, 2001; UN Women, 2020). Development strategies often remain dominated by externally driven agendas, such as the World Bank's market-led models, that marginalise indigenous ethics and gendered priorities. Consequently, the transformative insights of African philosophy and feminist perspectives fail to translate into tangible socio-economic outcomes. Example: Gender policies in countries like Nigeria and Kenya exist alongside patriarchal customary laws that continue to limit women's property and political rights, revealing a gap between formal equality and lived realities (Cornwall, 2005; UNDP, 2022).

Romanticisation of Tradition and Selective Cultural Appropriation

A critical challenge is the romanticisation of precolonial African traditions without acknowledging their internal hierarchies and limitations. While reclaiming indigenous thought is necessary for decolonisation, uncritical revival of traditional structures may reinforce existing inequalities, especially against women and marginalised groups (Amadiume, 1987; Oyěwùmí, 1997). Furthermore, political elites sometimes instrumentalise cultural rhetoric to legitimise authoritarian control or resist gender reforms, selectively invoking "African values" to justify exclusionary practices (Tamale, 2020). Example: Appeals to "African culture" have been used in some countries to resist women's reproductive rights and LGBTQ+ inclusion, undermining the emancipatory goals of both African philosophy and feminist theory (Tamale, 2020).

Economic Constraints and Gendered Labour Burdens

The persistence of gendered economic inequalities also hampers the operationalisation of African philosophical and feminist frameworks in development. Women continue to bear the disproportionate burden of unpaid care and subsistence labour, activities central to community survival but undervalued in formal economies (Folbre, 2006; UN Women, 2020). Without significant investment in care infrastructure (e.g., childcare, healthcare, and social protection), the Ubuntu principle of shared responsibility remains symbolic rather than practical. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed these structural inequalities, as women's unpaid labour intensified while policy responses remained gender-blind (UN Women, 2020). Example: In rural communities across Sub-Saharan Africa, women spend up to three times more hours on unpaid care work than men, constraining their economic participation and leadership opportunities (UNDP, 2022).

Weak Epistemic and Institutional Recognition of African Feminist Thought

African feminist and philosophical scholarship remains underrepresented in academic curricula, research funding, and policymaking spaces. The dominance of Western theoretical canons marginalises African epistemic contributions, impeding the visibility and policy uptake of decolonial feminist frameworks (Oyěwùmí, 1997; Mama, 2001). This marginalisation perpetuates intellectual dependency and limits Africa's capacity to generate contextually grounded development paradigms that reflect its own philosophical and gendered traditions.

Political Instability and Policy Continuity

Frequent political transitions, corruption, and governance crises undermine long-term planning for gender-inclusive development. The lack of political will to institutionalise Ubuntu-based ethics and feminist principles results in inconsistent implementation of gender equality and social justice policies (Mkandawire, 2010; UNDP, 2022). Development processes rooted in communal care and relational accountability require stable political environments, yet many African states remain preoccupied with short-

term electoral gains rather than structural transformation.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis of African philosophy and the development process in Africa from a gender perspective demonstrates that philosophical and gender frameworks are deeply interconnected in shaping inclusive, ethical, and sustainable development. Findings indicate that when African philosophical traditions; particularly Ubuntu, communitarianism, and relational ontology, are integrated with feminist insights on equality, agency, and social justice, they provide robust tools for reconstructing social institutions and public policies in ways that resonate with African realities.

Colonialism disrupted not only Africa's economic and political systems but also its epistemic foundations by imposing Western patriarchal norms and individualistic worldviews (Wiredu, 1998; Ramose, 2002). In contrast, African philosophy, rooted in relational personhood, communal ethics, and reciprocity, offers an alternative moral and epistemological foundation for development. From a gender perspective, scholars such as Oyěwùmí (1997) and Amadiume (1987) have demonstrated that many pre-colonial African societies were organized around functional and relational roles rather than rigid gender binaries, enabling women to exercise significant political, economic, and social influence. Re-centering these indigenous epistemologies enables development models that value social reproduction, care, and collective well-being alongside productivity and growth.

Historical case studies illustrate this dynamic. In Yoruba and Igbo societies, women historically held leadership roles within governance structures such as the Iyalode and Omu institutions, reflecting female agency and decision-making power (Amadiume, 1987; Oyěwùmí, 1997). Similarly, among the Akan of Ghana, women acted as queen mothers, influencing political appointments and conflict mediation (Arndt, 2002). Recognizing these indigenous models challenges enduring colonial gender hierarchies that persist in postcolonial states.

The principle of Ubuntu—"I am because we are"—provides a relational ethical basis for reimagining development through mutual care, social solidarity, and inclusivity (Metz, 2011; Ramose, 2009). Ubuntu's emphasis on interconnectedness aligns closely with feminist ethics of care, which prioritize empathy, relationality, and social responsibility (Tronto, 2013). Findings reveal that integrating Ubuntu with feminist principles can foster policies that recognize unpaid care work, community well-being, and gender equality as central indicators of development success. For instance, South Africa's National Care Economy Strategy draws from Ubuntu values to enhance community care systems, acknowledging that collective well-being depends on shared responsibility for social reproduction (Mkhize, 2018). Similarly, Rwanda's community health programs, driven by women's cooperatives, utilize relational care principles to improve health outcomes and promote local ownership of development initiatives (UN Women, 2020).

African feminist theory further emphasizes that sustainable development requires cultural negotiation rather than wholesale adoption of Western feminist models. Nnaemeka's (2004) concept of nego-feminism, "feminism of negotiation", illustrates how African women navigate patriarchal structures while maintaining cultural legitimacy. This approach aligns with the communitarian orientation of African philosophy, which prioritizes harmony and dialogue over confrontation. Development policies informed by nego-feminism are thus more culturally resonant and effective in promoting gender equality within African contexts. Case studies from Ghana and Rwanda reveal women-led cooperative movements that combine traditional communal structures with modern economic initiatives, enhancing women's agency without alienating local cultural norms (Mama, 2001; Cornwall, 2005).

Findings also highlight the importance of care ethics, a principle resonant with both feminist and Ubuntu philosophies, as central to development policy. The undervaluation of women's reproductive and community labor remains a major barrier to equality and holistic development

(Folbre, 2006; UNDP, 2022). By foregrounding relational well-being and care economies, African philosophy and feminist thought converge to propose a transformative development paradigm that moves beyond GDP growth to include social cohesion, ecological balance, and human dignity. Examples from Kenya and Uganda show that community health initiatives led by women's groups, grounded in reciprocity and mutual support, have improved public health outcomes and strengthened local ownership of development processes (Cornwall, 2016; UN Women, 2020).

Despite its promise, re-centering African philosophy and gender perspectives faces challenges, including patriarchal resistance, elite capture of traditional values, and policy incoherence between cultural norms and human rights frameworks (Nnaemeka, 2004; Tamale, 2020). Scholars caution against romanticizing tradition or using "culture" as a pretext for preserving inequality. Development strategies must therefore blend rights-based accountability with context-sensitive cultural negotiation, integrating epistemic justice, gender-responsive governance, and indigenous ethics to ensure Africa's development is both inclusive and authentically grounded.

Most importantly, the discussion of findings demonstrates that African philosophy; especially Ubuntu and communitarian ethics, provides a moral and epistemological foundation for inclusive development, while feminist perspectives offer analytical tools to dismantle structural gender inequities. Together, they present a decolonial, care-centered, and gender-just vision for Africa's development. Properly institutionalized, this synthesis can advance not only economic progress but also relational justice, communal well-being, and sustainable social transformation.

Conclusion

African philosophy provides a profound normative and epistemological framework for re-envisioning development in Africa through a gender-responsive lens. Grounded in indigenous principles such as Ubuntu, communalism, and

relational personhood, it interrogates the dominance of Western, growth-centred paradigms by foregrounding collective well-being, moral reciprocity, and social responsibility. When embedded into policy and institutional practice, these philosophical values reposition care, social reproduction, and gender equity as foundational, not peripheral, to Africa's developmental aspirations.

From a gender perspective, African feminist scholars have illuminated how the colonial encounter disrupted precolonial gender relations by imposing Western binaries and epistemic hierarchies that obscured indigenous gender systems. The reclamation of local gender logics and their integration into the development process thus constitute both a decolonial corrective and an emancipatory project. Feminist frameworks such as nego-feminism and motherism resonate deeply with Ubuntu ethics, advancing negotiation, care, and interdependence as pathways to equitable social transformation.

However, achieving this vision necessitates institutional translation, the deliberate conversion of philosophical ideals into policy frameworks that recognise and reward women's unpaid care labour, guarantee rights-based accountability, and promote inclusive participation in both formal governance and community decision-making. Furthermore, a sustainable African development model must expand its evaluative scope by integrating indicators of relational well-being, social cohesion, and care economies alongside conventional economic metrics, thereby reflecting Africa's enduring values of shared humanity, mutual obligation, and moral interdependence.

Ultimately, when critically interrogated through a gender lens, African philosophy offers a profound ethical foundation and a transformative intellectual framework for fostering equitable and contextually grounded development in Africa. It advocates a decisive shift away from individualistic, growth-driven paradigms toward relational, care-centred, and justice-oriented approaches that recognise women's agency and contribution as indispensable to the continent's collective well-being and sustainable progress.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made to add more value to the African Philosophy and the Development process in Africa: A gender perspective:

- i. Governments and development institutions should incorporate African philosophical values, such as Ubuntu, communalism, and relational personhood, into national and regional development frameworks. These values promote collective responsibility, inclusivity, and moral accountability, ensuring that development initiatives reflect Africa's socio-cultural realities rather than externally imposed models.
- ii. Development strategies should recognise and institutionalise indigenous gender logics that historically fostered balance and complementarity between men and women in African societies. This approach would enable the reclamation of
- v. Dimensions of development, reinforcing Africa's human-centred vision of progress.
- iii. Scholars and policymakers should apply African feminist theories such as nego-feminism and motherism, which would align with Ubuntu's ethics of care, negotiation, and interdependence. This integration would ensure that gender equality efforts are contextually grounded, culturally resonant, and socially transformative.
- iv. To move beyond Western economic measures, African states should design holistic development indicators that assess social cohesion, care economies, and relational well-being alongside GDP. Such frameworks would capture the ethical and communal

References

- Acheampong, A. O. (2018). Economic growth, CO₂ emissions and energy consumption: What causes what and where? *Energy Economics*, 74, 677–692
- Acholonu, C. (1995). Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism. *Owerri: Afa Publications*
- Agarwal, B. (2003). Gender and Land Rights Revisited: Exploring New Prospects via the State, Family and Market. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 3(1–2), 184–224
- Ake, C. (1992). The Feasibility of Democracy in Africa. *CODESRIA*
- Ake, C. (1996). *Democracy and Development in Africa*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution
- Alvares, C. (1992). Science, Development and Violence: The Revolt Against Modernity. *Oxford University Press*
- Amadiume, I. (1997). Reinventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture. *Zed Books*
- Arndt, S. (2002). Perspectives on African Feminism: Defining and Classifying African Feminist Theories. *Signs*, 17(3), 683–708
- Beauvoir, S. de (1949). *The Second Sex*. *Vintage*
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. *Routledge*
- Chambers, R. (2004). Ideas for Development. *Earthscan*
- Chege, M. (1997). "The Return of Multi-Party Politics." *The Journal of Democracy*, 8(1), 114–127
- Chimakonam, J. O. (2017). African Philosophy and the Otherness of Altruism. *Vernon Press*
- Chuwah, L. T. (2014). *African Indigenous Ethics in Global Bioethics: Interpreting Ubuntu*. Springer
- Code, L. (1991). What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge. *Ithaca: Cornell University Press*
- Connell, R. W. (2002). *Gender*. *Polity Press*

- Cornwall, A. (2005). Gender Myths and Feminist Fables: The Struggle for Interpretive Power in Gender and Development. *Development and Change*, 36(2), 1–21
- Cornwall, A., Harrison, E., & Whitehead, A. (2007). *Feminisms in Development: Contradictions, Contestations and Challenges*. London: Zed Books
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex.” *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), 139–167
- Deane, P. (1965). *The First Industrial Revolution*. Cambridge University Press
- Dube, M. W. (Ed.). (2024). *Gender, African Philosophies and Concepts*. Routledge
- Dussel, E. (2003). *Philosophy of Liberation*. Wipf and Stock
- Escobar, A. (1995). *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton University Press
- Eze, E. C. (1997). *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*. Blackwell
- Eze, M. O. (2017). *Intellectual History in Contemporary South Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan
- Folbre, N. (2006). Measuring Care: Gender, Empowerment, and the Care Economy. *Journal of Human Development*, 7(2), 183–199
- Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Gade, C. B. (2011). “The Historical Development of the Written Discourses on Ubuntu.” *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 30(3), 303–329
- Gyekye, K. (1997). *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. Oxford University Press
- Hallen, B. (2002). *A Short History of African Philosophy*. Indiana University Press.
- Haraway, D. (1988). Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575–599
- Harding, S. (1991). *Whose Science? Whose knowledge? Thinking from Women’s Lives*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press
- Harding, S. (2004). *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*. New York: Routledge
- Hartmann, H. (1979). “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism.” *Capital & Class*, 3(2), 1–33
- hooks, b. (2000). *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. South End Press
- Hountondji, P. (1996). *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*. Indiana University Press
- Hountondji, P. (1998). *Endogenous Knowledge: Research Trails*. CODESRIA
- Hountondji, P. J. (1983). *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*. Indiana University Press
- Kaphagawani, D. N. (1998). “African Conceptions of a Person.” In P. H. Coetzee & A. P. J. Roux (Eds.), *The African Philosophy Reader* (pp. 86–98). Routledge
- Keevy, I. (2008). “African philosophical values and constitutionalism: a feminist perspective on Ubuntu as a constitutional value.” *University of the Free State*
- Lobel, S. A. (1992). *A Value-Laden Approach to Integrating Work and Family Life*. Sage
- Lorber, J. (1994). *Paradoxes of Gender*. Yale University Press
- Lugones, M. (2010). *Toward a Decolonial Feminism*. *Hypatia*, 25(4), 742–759
- Makinde, M. A. (2010). *African Philosophy: The Demise of a Controversy*. Obafemi Awolowo University Press
- Mama, A. (2001). *Beyond the Masks: Race, Gender and Subjectivity*. Routledge
- Masolo, D. A. (1994). *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*. Indiana University Press
- Mbiti, J. S. (1969). *African Religions and Philosophy*. Heinemann
- Menkiti, I. (1984). “Person and Community in African Traditional Thought.” In R. A. Wright (Ed.), *African Philosophy: An Introduction*. University Press of America
- Metz, T. (2011). *Ubuntu as a Moral Theory and Human Rights in South Africa*. African Human Rights

Law Journal, 11(2), 532–559

Mill, J. S. (1869). *The Subjection of Women*. Longman, Green, Reader & Dyer

Mkandawire, T. (2010). Thinking About Developmental States in Africa. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 25(3), 289–313

Mkhize, N. (2018). Ubuntu and the Care Economy in Post-Apartheid South Africa. *Agenda*, 32(2), 10–20

Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonising Theory, Practising Solidarity*. Duke University Press

Mojid, R. (1997). “Development and the People’s Struggle.” In W. Sachs (Ed.), *The Development Dictionary* (pp. 156–163). Zed Books

Mudimbe, V. Y. (1988). *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. Indiana University Press

Nnaemeka, O. (2004). Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa’s Way. *Signs*, 29(2), 357–385

Norton, B. (2005). *Sustainability: A Philosophy of Adaptive Ecosystem Management*. University of Chicago Press

Nussbaum, B. (2003). “Ubuntu: Reflections of a South African on Our Common Humanity.” *Reflections*, 4(4), 21–26

Nyerere, J. (1974). *Freedom and Development*. Oxford University Press

Nzegwu, N. (2006). *Family Matters: Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy of Culture*. SUNY Press

Oakley, A. (1972). *Sex, Gender and Society*. Temple Smith

Oguejiofor, J. O. (2001). *Philosophy and the African Predicament*. Hope Publications

Oguejiofor, J. O. (2009) ‘Negritude as Hermeneutics: A Reinterpretation of Léopold Senghor’s Philosophy,’ *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 83(1): 79-94

Ogundipe-Leslie, M. (1994). *Recreating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations*. Trenton: Africa World Press

Oladipo, O. (1992). *The Idea of African Philosophy: A Critical Study of the Major Orientations in Contemporary African Philosophy*. University of Ife Press

Oruka, H. O. (1990). *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*. Brill

Oyèwùmí, O. (1997). *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

Powley, E. (2005). Rwanda: Women Hold Up Half the Parliament. *Women in Politics Worldwide*.

Ramose, M. B. (2002). *African Philosophy through Ubuntu*. Mond Books

Ramose, M. B. (2009). *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu*. Mond Books

Redclift, M. (2005). Sustainable development (1987–2005): An oxymoron comes of age. *Sustainable Development*, 13(4), 212–227

Risman, B. J. (2004). “Gender as a Social Structure: Theory Wrestling with Activism.” *Gender & Society*, 18(4), 429–450

Rodney, W. (1972). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. London: Bogle-L’Ouverture

Rostow, W. W. (1960). *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*. Cambridge University Press

Scott, J. W. (1986). “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis.” *The American Historical Review*, 91(5), 1053–1075

Sen, A. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. Oxford University Press

Shumbamhini, M., & Chirongoma, S. (2024). “Ubuntu, Gender Equality and Sustainable Development in Africa: An African Feminist Perspective.” In E. Chitando et al. (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Ubuntu, Inequality and Sustainable Development*. Springer Nature

Tamale, S. (2020). *Decolonisation and Afro-Feminism*. Daraja Press

- Tripp, A. M. (2015). Women and Power in Postconflict Africa. *Cambridge University Press*
- UN Women (2020). Care Work and COVID-19 in Africa: Building Back Better with Gender Equality
- UN Women. (2015). Progress of the World's Women: Transforming Economies, Realising Rights. *United Nations*
- UNDP (2022). Gender Equality in Development: Beyond Economic Growth. *United Nations Development Programme*
- UNDP. (2020). Human Development Report 2020. *United Nations Development Programme*
- United Nations. (2015). Transforming our world: *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. *United Nations*
- Wiredu, K. (1980). Philosophy and an African Culture. *Cambridge University Press*
- Wiredu, K. (1996). *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*. *Indiana University Press*
- Wiredu, K. (1998). Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective. *Indiana University Press*
- World Bank. (2019). Gender Equality and Development. *World Bank*
- World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). (1987). *Our Common Future*. Oxford University Press

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.5>

THREADS OF EMPOWERMENT: WEAVING, LIVELIHOOD DIVERSIFICATION AND WOMEN'S AGENCY IN RURAL ZIMBABWE

Douglas Nyathi

*School of Public Management, Governance and Public Policy,
University of Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa
dnyathi@uj.ac.za*

Victor H Mlambo

*School of Public Management, Governance and Public Policy,
University of Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa
victorml@uj.ac.za*

Thulani Dube

*Centre for Evaluation Science, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Lupane State University, Lupane, Zimbabwe.
tdube@lsu.ac.zw*

Abstract

Rural livelihoods in Zimbabwe have come under increasing pressure due to recurring droughts, economic instability and the declining viability of smallholder agriculture. In response, communities diversify their income sources through alternative livelihood strategies, including craft-based enterprises. This study examines the role of women-led weaving initiatives in Lupane, Zimbabwe, as pathways for rural livelihood diversification and empowerment. Anchored on the Empowerment theory, this study investigates how weaving influences income generation, decision-making, and social status among rural women. Using a qualitative design, data were gathered from 25 in-depth interviews, 2 focus groups and 6 key informants. The findings reveal that weaving provides critical income diversification during agricultural decline, enhances financial autonomy, and strengthens women's social standing. However, market access, resource scarcity, and institutional gaps remain as persistent challenges. The study concludes that, while the weaving initiative does not fully replace agriculture, it plays a vital role in stabilizing rural livelihoods and promoting gender empowerment in resource-constrained environments. This demonstrates how craft-based enterprises can serve as viable alternatives for income generation, particularly for marginalized groups such as rural women. We argue for the development of targeted policies to support rural craft industries, investment in local value chains, and integration of such initiatives into broader rural development strategies to ensure sustainability and scale.

Key words: rural women, livelihoods diversification, empowerment, equality, weaving

Introduction

Rural livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa, including Zimbabwe, have traditionally been anchored to subsistence agriculture. However, persistent challenges such as climate variability, declining soil fertility, market volatility, and land tenure insecurity have made farming increasingly unreliable as the sole source of livelihood (Ellis, 2000; Nyathi et al, 2025). In response, many ru-

ral communities are turning to livelihood diversification as a strategy to buffer economic shock and improve household resilience. Livelihood diversification refers to the process by which rural households construct a diverse portfolio of activities and social support capabilities to survive and improve their living standards (Ellis, 1998). For women in rural Zimbabwe, who often face compounded disadvantages due to gendered social norms, limited access to land, and

exclusion from formal employment, livelihood diversification is not only a means of survival but also a pathway to empowerment. The weaving initiative in Lupane, spearheaded by the Lupane Women's Centre (LWC), offers a compelling example of how alternative income-generating activities can support both economic development and gender transformation. By shifting women's economic roles beyond agriculture, weaving provides a sustainable and culturally relevant platform for income generation, skill development, and enhanced social status (Tzanidaki & Reynolds, 2011).

The integration of non-farm activities, such as weaving, into rural economies enables women to generate income in ways that are flexible, home-based, and often compatible with existing responsibilities. As observed by Bryceson (1999), non-agricultural livelihood activities are essential for women because they reduce their dependence on male-controlled farming income and foster autonomy. In the Lupane context, the production of woven crafts, such as baskets, mats, and home décor, has become a vital livelihood activity, especially as these products find markets both locally and internationally through fair trade networks and tourism. More importantly, the initiative is not merely an economic intervention but also a process of empowerment (DeMotts 2017). Empowerment, as defined by Kabeer (1999), involves the ability to make choices and transform them into desired actions and outcomes. Through weaving cooperatives, women not only gain access to income but also develop self-confidence, participate in leadership structures, and influence household and community-level decision-making. These dimensions align with the broader understanding of empowerment theory, which emphasizes psychological, social, and economic empowerment as interconnected outcomes (Zimmerman, 2000). Moreover, the collective nature of the weaving initiative fostered solidarity and shared learning. Cooperatives such as those in Lupane provide safe spaces for women to discuss common challenges, build networks, and advocate for rights and recognition. According to Mayoux (2001), such collective enterprises are key

to achieving sustainable and inclusive rural development, particularly when integrating capacity building and market access. Therefore, this study explores the role of the Lupane Weaving Initiative in diversifying rural women's livelihoods and empowering them socioeconomically.

Research Gap and Justification

Although previous studies have documented rural women's engagement in non-farm activities (Bryceson, 1999; Tzanidaki & Reynolds, 2011; Nyathi et al, 2024), there is limited empirical evidence illustrating how women-led weaving initiatives concretely bridge the gaps created by climate change and economic instability in Zimbabwe. This study addresses this gap by examining the mechanisms through which weaving diversifies livelihoods, enhances income control, and promotes socioeconomic empowerment. Agricultural livelihoods in Lupane are increasingly precarious because of erratic rainfall, soil degradation, and crop failure (Nyathi et al, 2025). Women who often rely on subsistence farming face amplified vulnerability, including food insecurity and limited educational opportunities for their children (Nyathi et al, 2024). This study provides justification by highlighting how weaving activities provide alternative income streams, allowing women to mitigate climate-induced shocks and improve household well-being. In addition, while the Empowerment theory situates women's marginalization within broader socio-economic contexts, the existing literature often relies on outdated sources (pre-2010). This study incorporates recent Zimbabwean and sub-Saharan African evidence (post-2015) to validate claims regarding women's exclusion from formal employment, decision making, and financial systems. It further examines how weaving initiatives enable women to reclaim their agency, challenge patriarchal norms, and participate in community leadership. In essence, the study is justified on two levels: first, as a response to climate and economic pressures undermining rural livelihoods; and second, as an exploration of the socio-economic benefits women accrue from weaving initiatives, which remain under-researched in Zimbabwe (Nyathi

et al, 2025). By situating this initiative within broader development and empowerment frameworks, the research highlights weaving not merely as craftwork but also as a transformative tool for rural change.

Empowerment theory

Empowerment theory offers a valuable lens for examining how marginalized groups gain control over their lives and the resources necessary for improved well-being (Henderson & Ross, 2025). Rooted in community psychology and development studies, the Empowerment theory explores the processes by which individuals and communities enhance their capacity to act, make decisions, and influence structures that affect them (Zimmerman, 2000). Empowerment theory focuses on power redistribution, participation, and the transformation of the social and economic conditions that contribute to inequality. It involves both individual empowerment—gaining self-confidence, autonomy, and the ability to make life decisions—and collective empowerment, in which communities organize to influence systems and policies (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). This theory is particularly relevant to the study of the Lupane weaving initiative, which aims to promote gender-inclusive rural development in Zimbabwe. Women in rural areas often face structural disadvantages such as limited access to land, finance, markets, and decision-making spaces. Empowerment theory was used to understand how participation in weaving cooperatives alters women's roles within their households and communities, enhances income control, and fosters greater agency (Henderson & Ross, 2025).

Empowerment theory was chosen because it accommodates multidimensional changes—economic, psychological, social, and political (Kabeer, 2001). It allows researchers to explore not only economic gains, such as improved income from basket weaving, but also psychological transformations, including increased self-confidence and aspirations. For example, the women involved in the initiative expressed that earning their own income made them feel more independent and respected, which aligns with Zim-

merman's (1995) concept of psychological empowerment. Furthermore, the theory acknowledges the importance of collective spaces such as women's cooperatives, where shared experiences can lead to collective action. The Lupane Women's Centre acts as such a space, enabling women to share knowledge, build leadership skills, and advocate for better access to resources. This reflects Empowerment theory's emphasis on building capacity and fostering social cohesion as steps toward systemic change (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). By applying the Empowerment theory, this study highlights how weaving is more than a livelihood strategy—it is a catalyst for broader gender transformation. The theory supports an understanding of empowerment not as a singular event but as a continuous process shaped by context, participation, and structural support (Henderson & Ross, 2025).

Study setting, Methods and Materials

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of women within the context of their communities (Patton, 2015). Qualitative research is particularly suited for examining complex social phenomena as it allows for a deep understanding of participants' meanings, beliefs, and actions within their social settings (Creswell, 2013). The research was conducted in collaboration with the Women's Centre, a community-based organization dedicated to supporting women's rights and empowerment in rural Zimbabwe. The centre played a vital role in facilitating access to participants and providing a safe and familiar space for data collection. Data were collected through 25 in-depth interviews, two focus group discussions, and six key informants. In-depth interviews enabled participants to narrate their experiences in a confidential, one-on-one setting, encouraging openness and rich narrative details (Patton, 2015). A total of 25 interviews were conducted, each lasting approximately 45–60 minutes. In addition, two focus group discussions were held, each comprising 8 to 12 participants. Focus groups were used to explore communal perceptions and col-

lective narratives, creating opportunities for interaction that revealed shared values and contested viewpoints (Krueger & Casey, 2014). To enhance data validity and triangulation, this study also incorporated control perspectives: four youth representatives and three local religious leaders who provided supplementary insights into women's empowerment and the social impact of weaving.

All conversations were audio-recorded with informed consent from the participants. Consent was obtained verbally and in writing after thorough explanation of the study's objectives, procedures and ethical protocols. Participants were assured of their anonymity, confidentiality, and right to withdraw from the study at any point without any repercussions. Ethical considerations were central throughout the research process, aligned with the principles of respect, beneficence, and justice as articulated in qualitative research ethics guidelines (Orb et al, 2004; Patton, 2015). To ensure the ethical integrity of the study, ethical clearance was obtained from the Lupane State University Research Ethics Committee prior to the commencement of fieldwork. The research adhered to institutional and international standards for working with human subjects, particularly in contexts involving marginalized or vulnerable populations. Research instruments, including interview guides and focus group protocols were developed in consultation with community leaders and experts in gender studies to ensure cultural appropriateness and sensitivity. Data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically using an inductive approach, allowing for the emergence of patterns grounded in participants' own words and perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2015).

Demographic Profiles of Women Involved in Weaving Initiatives

The women who participate in weaving initiatives in Lupane represent a diverse yet distinct demographic group shaped by rural socio-economic dynamics, cultural traditions, and gendered livelihood patterns (*See table 1*). Understanding these demographic characteristics is

critical for designing responsive support systems and policies for women's empowerment and sustainable rural development. The majority of women involved in weaving fall within the 30 to 60-year age range, with a significant concentration of participants between 35 and 50 years of age. These are typically women who have experienced economic exclusion from formal employment and bear primary responsibility for household upkeep. Younger women (below 30 years old) are less involved, often due to migration to urban areas for education or alternative income opportunities.

Most women involved in the weaving initiative had a limited formal education. The majority had attained only primary or lower secondary education, with very few having completed high school or tertiary training. Literacy levels vary, but are generally adequate for participating in basic training, bookkeeping, and cooperative meetings. Educational limitations underscore the importance of visual, oral, and experiential learning methods in cooperative training sessions and entrepreneurship programmes. The participant group comprised married, widowed, single, and divorced women. Many are primary caregivers and household heads, especially widows and single mothers. In such cases, weaving becomes a critical livelihood activity for the survival and schooling of children.

Even among married women, economic dependency on husbands often motivates participation in weaving to gain income autonomy and improve household bargaining power. One participant indicated the following.

I started weaving after my husband lost his job. Now, I support my family, and my voice is respected.

Most women enter weaving from the background of subsistence farming, informal trading, or domestic work. Their economic status is generally low to moderate, with limited assets, savings or access to formal employment. Weaving provides a crucial supplement or alternative to farming, particularly in times of drought or crop failure. For some women, especially those whose husbands are unemployed or absent because of migration, weaving becomes the main source of household income. The majority of

weavers reside in remote rural villages within the Lupane District, characterized by semi-arid conditions, limited infrastructure and poor market connectivity. These geographic factors significantly influence both the need for alternative livelihoods and the constraints faced by women in scaling up their businesses. Women actively

participate in community events, savings clubs and development committees, with some playing leadership roles within cooperatives or advocacy campaigns for rural women’s rights.

Table 1 showing the Demographic Profile of Women in the Lupane Weaving Initiative

Category	Description
Age Range	Mostly 30–60 years old; largest group between 35–50 years; limited participation from youth under 30.
Education Level	Primarily primary or lower secondary education; low levels of high school completion; minimal tertiary education.
Marital Status	Mix of married, widowed, single, and divorced women; many are household heads or primary caregivers.
Household Role	Predominantly women responsible for income generation, child care, and household management; some are sole breadwinners.
Economic Background	Subsistence farmers, informal traders, or previously unemployed; typically low-income households with limited assets or formal employment access.
Geographic Location	Reside in rural Lupane villages; remote areas with poor infrastructure and limited market access.
Raw Material Access	Dependent on natural resources like ilala palm; face challenges with environmental degradation and material scarcity.
Cooperative Membership	Most belong to women's groups under Lupane Women’s Centre; voluntary membership with some leadership participation.
Community Engagement	Active in savings clubs, training workshops, and community development initiatives; some hold leadership or mentorship roles.
Income Contribution	Weaving provides a primary or supplementary income source; crucial during agricultural failure or economic shocks.

Women involved in weaving initiatives in Lupane are predominantly middle-aged, rural-based, and economically marginalized individuals with limited formal education, but significant informal knowledge and resilience. They often carry dual roles as caregivers and breadwinners, and seek weaving as both a cultural practice and a pathway to economic empowerment. Targeted support must account for these demographic realities to foster inclusive and

sustainable development for rural women in Zimbabwe effectively. From a radical feminist perspective, the Lupane weaving initiative exposes the structural inequalities underpinning women’s economic marginalization (Hartmann, 1979; Eisenstein, 1981). Weaving becomes both resistance and survival, enabling women to reclaim agency within patriarchal rural economies (Tong, 2014). Their collective organization challenges gendered power relations that confine women to unpaid or undervalued labor

(Mies, 1986; hooks, 2000). However, without structural transformation—redistribution of resources, recognition of women's labor, and dismantling of male economic dominance—empowerment remains constrained within existing systems of oppression (Walby, 1990; Tzanidaki & Reynolds, 2011).

Beyond the Fields: Weaving as a Catalyst for Livelihood Diversification among Women

We also asked participants about the extent to which the weaving initiative contributed to the diversification of rural livelihoods among women. Anecdotes from the participants reflected the lived experiences and perspectives organized around key emerging themes: income diversification, economic agency, skills development, and household well-being. A dominant theme that emerged was that weaving significantly diversified income streams for women, reducing sole reliance on rain-fed agriculture. Participants highlighted the unpredictability of farming due to recurring droughts and poor soils in Lupane. A 55 year old participant pinpointed that:

Before I joined the weaving group, farming was all that we had. However, with droughts, we often had nothing to harvest. Now, I can weave baskets, sell them, and use the money to buy food, even when the fields are dry.

Weaving provides more stable year-round income. While the agricultural season is short and uncertain, weaving products can be produced and sold continuously, both locally and through Lupane Women's Center export partnerships. Participants reported a noticeable shift in household dynamics as a result of earning their income. Many women described gaining confidence and voice in their decision making. One mother of three alluded that:

Now that I bring money into the home, I

am no longer just a helper. My husband consults me before making big purchases. I can send my children to school without waiting for anyone.

This financial independence was often tied to an enhanced social standing within the household and a broader community. Some women even become mentors or trainers, further cementing their leadership roles. Weaving has also led to important skill developments beyond craft-making. Through support from NGOs and the Lupane Women's Center, women received training in quality control, bookkeeping, marketing, and cooperative management.

The center empowered us a lot through training. We have been taught not only how to weave but also how to price, save money, and even negotiate with buyers. These are the skills I have never imagined. Noted one participant.

Some participants reported using these skills to expand into other small businesses, such as poultry farming and tailoring, indicating the initiative's ripple effect on promoting rural entrepreneurship. Weaving income directly affects household well-being. Participants cited being able to pay school fees, purchase food during lean seasons, and access healthcare expenses that previously required selling assets or loans. Moreover, the initiative contributed to a sense of collective pride and identity in Lupane. Many women mentioned that buyers now come from distant regions, and international visitors express admiration for their work, which reinforces their sense of value and achievement. Despite its successes, some women highlighted challenges, including fluctuating demand, rising transport costs, and limited access to raw materials, such as *ilala* palm. In addition, participants expressed a desire for more advanced training and capital to grow their businesses. One participant highlighted the following points:

We want to do more, maybe build shops or even factories, but we do not have resources.

Table 2: Impact of the Weaving Initiative on Rural Livelihood Diversification among Women

Theme	Findings	Evidence/Examples
Income Diversification	Women now earn income from weaving in addition to	Sale of woven baskets, mats, and crafts at local markets and through Lupane Women's

	agriculture.	Centre export links.
Financial Independence	Increased control over personal and household spending.	Women report being able to pay school fees, buy groceries, and contribute to family savings.
Skill Development	Acquisition of weaving, business, and marketing skills.	Participation in workshops on quality control, pricing, and design innovation.
Market Access	Access to national and international markets through fair trade networks.	Products sold to tourists and exported to South Africa and Europe via Women's Centre partnerships.
Resilience to Climate Shocks	Reduced dependency on rain-fed agriculture.	Weaving provides stable income during droughts or poor farming seasons.
Social Empowerment	Strengthened community bonds and collective agency.	Formation of cooperatives and increased participation in local leadership and decision-making.
Youth Involvement	Intergenerational transfer of skills and early economic engagement.	Young women and girls participate in weaving during school holidays.

The qualitative data affirm that the weaving initiative in Lupane has played a transformative role in diversifying rural livelihoods among women. This has shifted economic participation beyond subsistence farming, empowered women financially and socially and enhanced household resilience. The voices of the participants underscore the deep personal and communal impact of weaving, even amid systemic challenges. These findings align with those of Nyathi et al. (2024), who observed that women's collective enterprises in rural Zimbabwe expand livelihood options and foster empowerment. Drawing from the capabilities approach (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011), weaving enhances women's agency and expands freedoms to achieve valued goals. Consistent with empowerment theory (Kabeer, 1999) and feminist scholars (Moser, 1993; Cornwall, 2016), the initiative transforms gendered power relations through economic participation. Similarly, Ellis (2000) affirmed that livelihood diversification strengthens rural resilience amidst environmental and economic uncertainty.

Women's Socio-Economic Empowerment through Weaving in Lupane

Participants were asked questions on how the weaving initiative influenced women's socioeconomic empowerment in Lupane. It emanated from this engagement that the weaving initiative in Lupane, spearheaded by the Lupane Women's Centre (LWC), has become a compelling model of rural women's socioeconomic empowerment in Zimbabwe. In a region historically characterized by marginalization, limited economic opportunities and patriarchal social norms, the weaving initiative has played a pivotal role in transforming women's livelihoods and social identities. The initiative not only contributes to income generation, but also promotes broader empowerment by reshaping gender dynamics, enhancing decision-making power, and elevating women's roles in their communities.

Income Control and Financial Autonomy

One of the most profound outcomes of women's participation in the weaving initiative is their enhanced control over income. Unlike traditional farming or informal household labor, where proceeds are often controlled by male heads of households, income from weaving is directly

earned and managed by women. Participants reported having personal savings for the first time, the ability to invest in household needs, and even starting parallel small-scale businesses. One focus group discussion participant alluded to this:

Now that I sell my baskets, I do not have to ask for money to buy basics. I plan to better meet my children's needs.

The shift toward direct income control fosters not only economic security, but also self-reliance and confidence in financial management. Women who were previously dependent on their spouses now contribute equally (or more) to household finances, altering the traditional power dynamics within families.

Enhanced Decision-Making Power

As women began contributing significantly to household income, many gained more influence in key family decisions, including how money was spent, children's education, and long-term planning. In a context where men traditionally held exclusive decision-making authority, this represented a major sociocultural shift. A middle-aged weaver posited the following.

Now, we make joint decisions. Previously, I had no say about how we used our money. He respects my opinion because I bring something to the table.

Decision-making power is a key indicator of empowerment, and the weaving initiative has enabled women to negotiate spaces within their homes and take active roles in shaping their futures. This shift extends beyond financial matters to encompass broader household governance including healthcare, nutrition and children's career aspirations.

Boost in Self-Confidence and Aspirations

Participation in the initiative significantly boosted women's self-esteem and aspirations. Women reported feeling respected, valued and optimistic about their potential. Training sessions in product design, financial literacy, and cooperative governance provided by LWC and partner NGOs helped participants build new skill sets and take leadership roles in their cooperatives. The process of engaging with customers, managing production schedules, and partic-

ipating in decision-making structures has nurtured leadership qualities, particularly among women who previously lacked formal education and work experience.

Improved Social Status and Community Recognition

Women who engaged in the weaving initiative gained social capital in their communities. Their involvement in income-generating activities, leadership in cooperatives and interaction with external stakeholders (including international buyers and donors) have enhanced their visibility and respect. In many cases, these women are now role models and mentors of younger girls and fellow community members. Some have even been elected to local committees or have taken on leadership roles in community development projects, further solidifying their influence. In one in-depth interview, the participant hinted that

People now come to me seeking advice on how to start a business. That never used to happen previously

The initiative has also strengthened women's collective voices, enabling them to advocate for better infrastructure, fair pricing and inclusion in local development plans. The Lupane weaving initiative has had a transformative impact on the socioeconomic empowerment of women. By enhancing income control, increasing participation in household decision-making, building self-confidence and elevating women's community status, the initiative has helped to redefine gender roles in a traditionally patriarchal context. Although structural challenges remain, including limited market access and raw material shortages, the weaving program represents a scalable model for gender-inclusive rural development. Continued support, capacity building and integration into broader policy frameworks are essential for deepening and sustaining these empowerment gains. The findings reflect empowerment theory (Kabeer, 1999), in which access to resources, agency, and achievements collectively expand women's life choices. The weaving initiative strengthens women's bargaining power, financial autonomy, and self-efficacy, aligning with the Marxist feminist strand

that situates women's subordination within capitalist and patriarchal production systems (Mies, 1986; Hartmann, 1979). By enabling income control and collective organization, the Lupane weaving model challenges gendered labor divisions and redistributes economic power in favor of women's social and material empowerment (Cornwall, 2016; Basu, 2024). In Botswana, women's weaving co-operatives illustrate this shift, for example, in Shorobe groups of women basket-weavers in the northwest coordinate material harvesting, production and marketing collectively, which has enabled many to become principal earners in their households and elevate their status within community decision-making structures (DeMotts, 2017).

Key Challenges and Constraints in the Lupane Weaving Initiative

Although the weaving initiative in Lupane has empowered many women economically and socially, several challenges and constraints limit the potential of weaving as a fully sustainable livelihood. These barriers stem from structural, institutional and operational factors that hinder an initiative's ability to thrive and expand. Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing solutions to enhance the sustainability and impact of this empowering project.

Structural Challenges: Access to Resources and Climate Vulnerability

A primary structural barrier faced by women in Lupane is limited access to essential resources such as raw materials, capital and land. While the weaving initiative primarily uses indigenous grasses, such as *ilala* palm, the availability of these resources is often seasonally dependent, and overharvesting or changing environmental conditions can lead to shortages. This seasonal variability, coupled with climate change, makes it difficult to secure a consistent supply of weaving materials, especially during droughts or periods of poor rainfall. Land ownership remains a challenge for many women. In rural Zimbabwe, land is often owned and controlled by men, while women typically have limited access to land for agriculture or business purposes. This situation restricts the ability of women to ex-

pand weaving operations, which could otherwise be bolstered by access to more land for growing raw materials, such as palms, or setting up larger production units.

Institutional Barriers: Market Access and Financial Support

Another significant constraint is market access and financial support. While the Lupane Women's Centre (LWC) has made strides in helping women tap into local and international markets, highly competitive markets and a lack of marketing infrastructure make it difficult for women to achieve consistent sales. The prices for woven products are often volatile, and fluctuating demand, coupled with inadequate distribution channels, prevents women from securing stable income streams. In addition, the women involved in the initiative may face challenges related to packaging and branding, which are critical for standing out in competitive markets. Moreover, financial constraints persist, as many women lack the necessary financial literacy and access to credit facilities. The absence of tailored financial products for small-scale entrepreneurs, combined with limited financial management skills, makes it difficult for women to scale up their business. LWC's efforts to provide training and microfinance opportunities are valuable, but they remain insufficient to meet the growing demand for capital and financial education.

Operational Barriers: Training and Skill Development Gaps

Despite the important role of training in empowering women, operational barriers exist related to the adequacy and quality of training programs. While LWC and partner organizations offer workshops on weaving, financial literacy and cooperative governance, many women still struggle to access continuous education and develop advanced skills. Training programs often fail to address the diverse needs of women, particularly those without formal education, or those living in remote areas where access to educational opportunities is limited. In some cases, there is also a gap in the technical skills related to product innovation and design, which is essential for maintaining a competitive edge in national and international markets. The challenge

of product differentiation, especially in a market flooded with similar goods, means that women often fail to capitalize on market trends or design innovations that could increase their product's appeal and marketability.

Social and Cultural Barriers: Gender Norms and Patriarchy

The social and cultural context in Lupane also presents challenges to women's empowerment. In many rural communities, patriarchal norms continue to define women's roles, often relegating them to the domestic sphere while limiting their participation in economic activities outside traditional agriculture. Despite progress made through the weaving initiative, gender-based discrimination remains a major obstacle. In some cases, women's contributions to the household are undervalued and their economic independence through weaving is still viewed with suspicion by male family members. Moreover, workload burden is a common issue for many women. Most women involved in weaving are also responsible for household chores and childcare, which means that weaving activities often must be squeezed into busy schedules. The lack of proper childcare support and community infrastructure means that women's ability to fully engage in weaving and growing their businesses is compromised by time constraints and domestic responsibilities.

Institutional Support and Policy Gap

While the Lupane Women's Centre provides crucial support, institutional gaps in local and national policies remain barriers to the broader success of the weaving initiative. Government policies are often not sufficiently inclusive of small-scale women-led enterprises, such as weaving, leaving them out of the broader national development plans. The lack of targeted policy interventions and incentives for women's entrepreneurship, coupled with a limited governmental focus on supporting rural industries, means that women do not have the institutional backing they need to thrive. Furthermore, there is a lack of effective coordination between various organizations working in the region, which limits the pooling of resources and sharing of best practices across initiatives. A more integrated approach could significantly boost the

long-term sustainability and growth of weaving initiatives. While the weaving initiative in Lupane has brought substantial socioeconomic benefits to women, it faces several challenges that hinder its potential for long-term sustainability. Addressing these barriers, ranging from resource access and climate vulnerability to financial support and market access as well as social and cultural constraints, is essential for empowering women further and ensuring the initiative's growth. Wanniarachchi et al. (2020) substantiate these findings, highlighting that women engaged in weaving in Sri Lanka encounter significant challenges related to raw material procurement, mastery of production techniques, financial limitations, and restricted market access. The findings also reveal that women's struggles in the Lupane weaving initiative reflect Gramsci's (1971) notion of cultural hegemony in which patriarchal norms sustain women's subordination despite economic participation. Yet, through collective organization, women cultivate counter-hegemonic spaces that challenge traditional power. Consistent with Chambers' (1983) participatory development ideals, empowerment must centre on people's knowledge and agency. Liberal feminism (Tong, 2014) further underscores that removing structural barriers such as unequal access to markets, credit, and training is vital for achieving gender equality and economic inclusion.

Strengthening Weaving Cooperatives to Enhance Gender-Inclusive Rural Development

One of the main research questions was aimed at exploring how weaving can be strengthened to enhance gender-inclusive rural development in Zimbabwe. In interviews and focus group discussions with women participating in weaving cooperatives in rural Zimbabwe, particularly in Lupane, several key themes emerged regarding the challenges they faced and strategies they believed would strengthen their collective effort. The insights shared by the participants underscore the importance of capacity building, market access, financial support, and social empowerment to enhance the sustainability and inclusivity of these cooperatives. Participants unanimously emphasized the need for enhanced

training in various areas beyond basic weaving skills. Most women mentioned that they initially learned craft through informal means, but to improve their businesses, they required structured training in financial management, marketing, and leadership.

One participant noted:

We know how to weave, but we do not know how to manage our earnings, market our products, or grow our business. Thus, more business skills are needed.

Another shared:

Workshops on product design and how to reach new customers would help us expand. Right now, we make what we know, but there is much potential for innovation.

Training in product diversification is also highlighted. Women felt that offering a wider range of woven products such as baskets, mats, bags, and home décor items would attract more buyers and improve income.

Market access is a recurring theme in discussions. Women indicated that, while they were able to sell locally, accessing broader national and international markets remained a significant challenge. The majority of participants reported that middlemen often underpaid them, and struggled to break into more lucrative markets.

One woman opined:

We sell to middlemen, who take a large percentage of the price. If we could reach customers directly or have better market connections, we could earn more.

Participants identified that fair-trade certification and direct marketing strategies would be particularly useful for ensuring fair prices and better returns for their products. Many researchers have suggested that creating online platforms or collaborating with the tourism sector could provide opportunities for expanding sales. In addition, creating a cooperative brand that can be marketed in different regions and abroad would increase visibility and create a sustainable income stream. The participants mentioned that branding their products would help build a loyal customer base. Access to financial resources is a major concern. Many women shared

that they lacked access to capital to scale their businesses or to invest in better weaving tools and resources. One participant explained:

Without money, we cannot buy enough raw materials to expand our businesses.

We require affordable loans for growth.

Despite the existing microfinance initiatives, many women felt that the conditions for accessing credit were restrictive. Several women mentioned that collateral requirements and high interest rates are barriers to securing loans. One participant noted:

Banks do not trust us because we do not have access to land or formal documentation. We need loans that do not require much collateral.

Moreover, they indicated that financial literacy training should accompany financial support to ensure that they can effectively manage loans and use them to benefit their cooperatives in the long term. Women also emphasized the importance of social empowerment and changing gender norms. Many participants revealed that their role in the cooperative helped them challenge the traditional gender roles within their homes and communities. However, the influence of patriarchal structures has remained strong. To address this, women suggested organizing community sensitization programs aimed at changing perceptions of women's work and empowering both men and women to see the economic value of women's contributions. One woman stated:

We need the community to understand the importance of our work. It is not just a hobby—it is a business.

Furthermore, the participants noted that inclusive leadership within cooperatives could help foster greater cooperation and create more opportunities for women to lead. Many participants also called for stronger government support for weaving the cooperatives. They suggested that the government could help by providing legal recognition for cooperatives and ensuring their inclusion in national development plans. In addition, women advocated policies that would encourage the formalization of their cooperatives, enabling them to access more institutional support and participate in national

economic activities. These findings resonate with Kabeer's (1999) Empowerment theory, which links women's agency to access resources, decision-making, and self-efficacy. The Lupane weavers' call for training, credit, and leadership opportunities reflects the process of gaining the "power to" act autonomously. From a liberal feminist perspective (Tong, 2014; Okin, 1989), empowering women through education, economic participation, and institutional support promotes gender equality in existing structures. Thus, strengthening cooperatives expands women's choices and dismantles gender-based constraints in rural livelihoods.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study provides valuable insights into the lived experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women in rural communities, as revealed through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Using a qualitative approach allows for the amplification of women's voices, offering a nuanced understanding of their social, economic and cultural realities. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of gender-based disparities and the ways in which structural inequalities continue to affect women's access to resources, education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. A recurring theme throughout the conversations was the resilience and agency of women despite systemic barriers. The participants expressed a strong desire for empowerment, community support, and opportunities to uplift themselves and others. The Women's Centre emerged as a crucial player in providing safe space, resources and programs that enable women to engage in dialogue, gain knowledge and build skills. These community-based efforts were widely appreciated and served as catalysts for social change at the grassroots level. However, the study also highlighted persistent challenges such as gender-based violence, limited access to reproductive health services, economic marginalization, and the burden of unpaid care work. Participants called for more inclusive policies and greater representation of women in decision-making processes, both locally and nationally. Furthermore, cultural norms and patriarchal attitudes have been

cited as significant barriers to gender equality, indicating the need for targeted educational and advocacy efforts. The findings highlight the urgent need for a multidimensional approach to gender empowerment and social transformation. Central to this is the strengthening of community-based interventions, particularly the expansion of organizations such as the Lupane Women's Centre, which serves as a critical lifeline for women, especially in remote and underserved areas. These institutions must be equipped to provide vocational training, literacy programs, and mental health support in response to women's lived realities.

Simultaneously, policy advocacy and legal reforms are essential. A coordinated effort between the government and civil society is required to ensure that gender equality laws are not only in place but are meaningfully enforced. Legal literacy initiatives can empower women with knowledge of their rights, thus enabling them to navigate legal and institutional structures more confidently. Economic empowerment initiatives are thus equally important. Access to microfinance, entrepreneurship training, and cooperative business models can help women to achieve financial independence and resilience. Strategic funding from donors and policymakers should be directed toward women-led enterprises, recognizing their potential for community-level impacts. To address deeply rooted gender norms, gender sensitization and education must target entire communities, engaging both men and women in dialogue and action. Promoting shared responsibilities within households and challenging harmful stereotypes are key to shifting social attitudes over time. Finally, inclusive research and participatory monitoring are critical to achieving sustainable progress. Women from diverse backgrounds must be involved not only as beneficiaries of research, but also as co-creators of knowledge and solutions. Their insights are essential for shaping responsive policies and effectively measuring changes. In sum, while structural and cultural barriers persist, the resilience and aspirations expressed by women in this study reveal a powerful momentum for

change. With collaborative, well-resourced ef-

forts across sectors, sustainable gender transformation is not only possible; it is also imperative.

References

- Basu, S. (2024). Women as carriers of the 'weaving legacy': Shifting labour and changing gender relations in marriage. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2024.100361>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Bryceson, D. F. (1999). *Sub-Saharan Africa Betwixt and Between: Rural Livelihood Practices and Policies*. IDS Working Paper 43.
- Chambers, R. (1983) *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*. London: Longman.
- Cornwall, A. (2016) *Women's Empowerment: What Works?* London: Zed Books.
- Cornwall, A., & Rivas, A.-M. (2015). From 'gender equality and women's empowerment' to global justice: Reclaiming a transformative agenda for gender and development. *Third World Quarterly*, 36(2), 396–415.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- DeMotts RB (2017) Weaving a living: gender, craft, and sustainable resource use in Botswana, *Journal of Political Ecology* 24(1):368, DOI: 10.2458/v24i1.20878
- Eisenstein, Z. (1981) *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism*. New York: Longman.
- Ellis, F. (1998). Household strategies and rural livelihood diversification. *Journal of Development Studies*, 35(1), 1–38.
- Ellis, F. (2000). *Rural Livelihoods and Diversity in Developing Countries*. Oxford University Press.
- Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers.
- Hartmann, H. (1979) 'The unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism: Towards a more progressive union', *Capital & Class*, 3(2), pp. 1–33.
- Henderson, S & Ross E. (2025). Informal entrepreneurship and women's empowerment: An asset-based perspective on the lived experiences of Swati women. *Development Southern Africa*, 42(3), 423–441. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0376835X.2025.2474240>
- Hooks, B. (2000) *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.
- Kabeer, N. (1999) Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment. *Development and Change*, 30, 435-464. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00125>
- Kabeer, N. (2001). Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. In *Discussing women's empowerment-theory and practice*, Sida Studies No.3. Stockholm.
- Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2014). **Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research** (5th ed.). Sage.
- Mayoux, L. (2001). Tackling the down side: Social capital, women's empowerment and micro-finance in Cameroon. *Development and Change*, 32(3), 435–464.
- Mies, M. (1986) *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*. London: Zed Books.
- Moser, C. (1993). *Gender Planning and Development: Theory, Practice and Training* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203411940>
- Ndlovu J and Nyathi D (2024). "Complexities of Conflict: Climate Change, Elephants and Local Livelihoods in Lupane, Zimbabwe," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 5, no.13 (2024): 23822397. <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.202451328>

- Nussbaum, M. C. (2011). *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*. Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt2jbt31>
- Nyathi D, Ndlovu J and Dzvimbo M(2025). The Socio-Economic Impact of DeAgrarianisation in Sub-Saharan: *A Re-Look on Rural Livelihoods and Employment*. *The Journal of Sustainable Development, Law and Policy*. Vol. 16:1. 25-51. DOI: 10.4314/jsdlp.v16i1.2
- Nyathi, D., Ndlovu, J., Mare, A., Dzvimbo, M.A., Ndlovu, M. (2024). Women's Vulnerability and Adaptive Capacity to Climate Change in Agrarian Settings of Zimbabwe. In: Mukhopadhyay, U., Bhattacharya, S., Chouhan, P., Paul, S., Chowdhury, I.R., Chatterjee, U. (eds) *Climate Crisis, Social Responses and Sustainability*. Climate Change Management. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58261-5_23
- Okin, S. M. (1989). *Justice, gender, and the family*. New York: Basic Books.
- Orb, A., Eisenhauer, L., & Wynaden, D. (2004). Ethics in qualitative research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 33(1), 93–96.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Perkins, D. D., & Zimmerman, M. A. (1995). Empowerment theory, research, and application. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 23(5), 569–579.
- Sen, A. (1999) *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tong, R. (2014) *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*. 4th edn. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Tzanidaki, D., & Reynolds, F. (2011). Exploring the meanings of making traditional arts and crafts among older women in Crete, using interpretative phenomenological analysis. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 74(8), 375–382. <https://doi.org/10.4276/030802211X13125646370852>
- Walby, S. (1990) *Theorizing Patriarchy*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell
- Wanniarachchi, T., Dissanayake, K., & Downs, C. (2020). Improving sustainability and encouraging innovation in traditional craft sectors: The case of the Sri Lankan handloom industry. *Research Journal of Textile and Apparel*, 24(2), 111–130. <https://doi.org/10.1108/rjta-09-2019-0041>
- Zimmerman, M. A. (1995). Psychological empowerment: Issues and illustrations. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 23(5), 581–599.
- Zimmerman, M. A. (2000). Empowerment theory: Psychological, organizational and community levels of analysis. In J. Rappaport & E. Seidman (Eds.), *Handbook of Community Psychology* (pp. 43–63). Springer.

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.6>

BEING A MALE STUDENT-PARENT IN AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER LEARNING IN SOUTH AFRICA: EXPERIENCE FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

Mudau T. J & Tshivhase Vhuhwavho

University of Venda

South Africa

Email: thizwilondijosephine.mudau@univen.ac.za

Abstract

This study used the case of ten male undergraduate students at the University of Venda, to interrogate the experiences of male students parenting in South Africa's institutions of higher learning. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Three main questions guided the study: What are the challenges faced by male student parents parenting their children while in the University of Venda? In what ways do the challenges impact the student-parents' academic life? How do the student-parents deal with those challenges? A qualitative approach were adopted for the study; this in general makes it easier to identify real life situations. The data thematically analyzed revealed that student-fathers are faced with a number of challenges, these included - financial difficulties, inability to manage their roles, stress, and anxiety as well as lack of support. These challenges had a significant effect on the student-fathers; however, some were able to overcome challenges of care-giving as they received emotional and financial support from family and friends although, lack of support from the institution negatively impacted student-fathers' lives as a whole. This study recommends that the government should cooperate with university authorities, together with educational stakeholders from both private and public sectors to build more accommodation for student-fathers on campus. In so doing, this will improve the learning environment for male students with babies.

Key words: Academic life, Challenges, Caregiving, Experiences, Institution of higher learning, Student fathers, Student-parent, University of Venda

Introduction

Being a student in an Institution of Higher Learning (IHL) requires significant amounts of time and energy from students. When students enter into IHL, they are forced into a new world in which they must improve their social skills to navigate, as well as to create and implement a certain mental ability (Lucchini-Raies et al., 2018). When a student becomes a parent at the same time studying, it creates an identity crisis between being a student and a parent. Such an identity crisis may have a great effect on students as to how they can give proper care to their children (Lucchini-Raies et al., 2018).

Student parenthood is great concern in Africa, especially, in the sub-Saharan region. Parenting is stressful and thought-provoking experience for anybody, but it can be especially tough for students who are managing paternal responsibilities and academic responsibilities (Oppong & Kwame, 2018). Student fathers face a great challenge raising their children, especially as fathers are globally perceived as main financial providers for their children (Cohe & Kruger, 2021). Studies about this phenomenon, however, have not gained any attention in South African research. This study will contribute to existing research about student parenthood. Rather than female students, it rather focuses on the experiences of male student-parents at an IHL in South Africa.

The challenging experiences of being a student-parent in an IHL have been highlighted in numerous previous studies, both locally and internationally (Kubeka, 2016). One form of evidence found in many studies is that many young student-fathers feel pressure to provide financially; this has been highlighted as a particularly difficult undertaking (Khumalo, 2020).

Additionally, many studies have shown that student-mothers are expected to do more when it comes to childcare giving than student-fathers. (Ngum, 2011) concludes that student mothers face more challenges, and these challenges are often due to social norms and not paid much attention to; regardless of these challenges they are expected to be good mothers. Trying to balance two different roles can be challenging, although, it can be also very rewarding (Bukhosini, 2019).

Student-parents have been an ignored population in many colleges/ universities because these campuses focus on young, traditional, undergraduate single students from high schools. Universities, usually, design series of support that help traditional students integrate into higher education, hence, it is rather un-

fortunate for non-traditional student-mothers and fathers who have to make ends meet or take care of their children while trying to balance their academic life (Mahaffey, Hungerford, and Sill, 2015).

It can be said that demands arising from gender inequality in parental roles may cause a delay in student-mothers' academic lives while the other gender (student-fathers) continue to succeed. Gender roles vary, mainly, because they are influenced by social norms that students have to conform to and while universities continue to ignore the responsibilities and challenges that student-parents face, they are more at risk of dropping out than non-parent student (Bukhosini, 2019)

Role conflict was outlined by Bosch, (2013) , who explained how student-parents assume many roles trying to balance their lives, such roles may include making time for their studies and making time for family at the same time; role conflict occur due to them attempting to perform these roles, concurrently. (Moreau and Kerner, 2015) however, explain that student- parents may have ways to manage their role as students and as parents at the same time.

Student-mothers, usually, do not have enough time for themselves, let alone to balance being a student and a mother at the same time. With that having being said, we cannot ignore the strategies of coping with roles what were outlined by (Sallee, 2015). Compartmentalization, and role elimination were outlined as ways to cope with role confusion. Role elimination is defined as a way of avoiding things that are not that important, like hobbies and focus on those that are essential, like academic activities, while role compartmentalization is a way on managing time, whereby, one takes each task at a time.

In South Africa, 40 percent of the population are youth; they are facing a lot of social struggles such as unemployment, systematic exclusion, and gender inequality. For young black people, it is culturally crucial to finish studies before starting a family; when young people have babies while still pursuing their studies, they not only struggle trying to balance their studies with the roles of being parent, but they also have to struggle with financial difficulties and lack of other forms of support, such as emotional support (Gumede, 2012). The situation is also unfavorable for student-mothers, because due to cultural norms they are expected to do more; cultural and patriarchal norms are still dominant in South Africa and they force women to do more when it comes to childcare (Estes, 2011); they are forced to assume roles of a student and a mother concurrently.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The study aimed to use the case of selected male students at the University of Venda, to explore the experience of male students parenting in South African university.

These were the key objectives of the study:

- To identify challenges encountered by male student-parents taking care of their children at the University of Venda.
- To examine how these challenges, impact their academic lives.
- To identify ways to help the male student-parents deal with the identified challenges

Research Design and Methodology

This study has adopted the qualitative research approach. Given the aim of the study, which was to gain insight into personal experiences of male student-parents, this approach was deemed very appropriate.

According to Creswell, (2014), a qualitative research design explores the meaning which a person ascribes to a problem. Such an approach provides a room for the researcher to gain in-depth understanding about participants' experiences, perceptions, and feelings on the given problem; data was collected using semi-structured interviews. A Qualitative research approach allows flexibility of research questions while also allowing participants to explain their stories (Kubeka, 2016).

This study employed a phenomenological study design. This research design aims to find prevalence of a phenomenon, issue, or attitude by studying a group of people in a population. Phenomenological research design helped the researcher to gain in-depth information about the lived experiences of student-fathers at University of Venda. Those that experience a phenomenon can communicate to the outside world, therefore, this research design allows a researcher to gain in-depth understanding of the experiences of people affected by a phenomenon.

Study population and sample

This is the group of interest to the study. In this study the researcher selected students from University of Venda, specifically male students who had children while pursuing their undergraduate studies. As the University has so many faculties, this study used male students from different faculties. The study covered all students who stayed on campus and off campus.

Sampling is the selection from the population of interest. The researcher selected a sample of ten male student-parents from the different faculties of the

University.

Data collection strategy and analysis

In this study, there were two methods - interviews and questionnaires.

Interview:

This is a face-to-face verbal interaction between two people where the interviewer aims to obtain information from the interviewees by exploring their views and opinions. This interview was conducted with student-parents of UNIVEN. The researcher used a semi-structured interview guide to obtain in-depth information on the challenges of student-parenting

The researcher used telephonic interviews, for student parents who were unable to make it, physically. The other reason was to try and make the research as less threatening as possible. Telephone interviews were also convenient in order to stay safe due to the global pandemic of COVID-19; The respondents answered the prepared questions by the interviewer.

According to (Zohrabi, 2013), data analysis is the interpretation of data obtained in a study in order to draw outcomes. It is a process that involves the editing, coding, classification, and tabulation of collected data in a clearer form for the purpose of making sense (Creswell, 2014). Content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data; field notes were transcribed and read repeatedly to identify the main themes, and these became the foundation of this research.

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis; the information was grouped into sub-themes which went hand in hand with the objectives of the study, the information was then presented in a narrative form. Thematic analysis was useful in this study because the researcher was able to get in-depth information about the experiences of student-father.

The following is the summary of how thematic analysis was used in this study:

Phase	Process
1. Researcher becomes familiar with the re-search.	Here the researcher familiarized herself with the data by reading through the data and searching through any patterns.
2. Generating codes	The researcher used codes to generate data
3. Searching for themes	Data that was coded was reviewed into themes.
4. Reviewing themes	The developed themes were reviewed and refined.
5. Defining and naming themes	Themes were identified and each theme was given a name.
6. Producing report	A final analysis was conducted, and a report written.

Source: (Creswell, 2014)

Study results and literature control

Biographical information of the research participants.

The study was conducted at UNIVEN; the participants were male student-parents from different faculties; all the participants were full time students, single or in a relationship, either undergraduate or postgraduate. Participants

who were involved in the research were African student-fathers at undergraduate and postgraduate (Honors and Masters) levels of study. Their children's ages ranged from 6 months up to six years of age. Five students were living at home with their children and five students lived in the University residence

Participants

Pseudonym	Student age	Level of study	Child age
Phindulo	25	Undergraduate	10 months
Tete	27	Undergraduate	1 year
NDIX	23	Undergraduate	7 months
OLUGAHO	24	Undergraduate	2 years
MANZHI	23	Postgraduate	8 months
PICOC	26	Undergraduate	9 months
ZWIVHUYA	24	Undergraduate	1 year
RUE	25	Postgraduate	10 months
EMMANUEL	26	Postgraduate	7 months
JOE	23	Undergraduate	6 months

Table 1: Participants' biographic information

Theme 1: The difficult situations Faced by Student fathers

The first theme was the difficult situations student-fathers face; this research objective was aimed to identify the challenges that student fathers face on a daily basis while trying to balance the roles of being a student and a parent at the same time. The difficult situations student-fathers faced included financial challenges where student had to find ways to come up with solutions in order to provide resources

for their children. The student-fathers faced challenges trying to balance their lives, playing two different roles of being a student and a father. This caused them to suffer from stress and anxiety. Lastly, clashing roles were also outlined as one of the challenges as students failed to balance being a father and a student at the same time.

The difficult situations faced by student-fathers

Financial challenges

Stress and anxiety

Clashing roles

Financial Challenges

Financial difficulties were the biggest challenge that most interviewed student-fathers seemed to be encountering. Participants felt that the cultural perception of men forces them to be the role provider for their children, thus, they were forced to find ways to financially provide for their families while continuing with their studies. This meant they had to - find a job, share their NSFAS funding, depend on CSG (child support grant) and on their parents for financial help, however, even with these, they found it difficult to balance being financial providers and students at an institution of higher learning. This is how one of the participants explained it:

"I feel like with the amount of work load I'm getting from my studies I cannot take a job.....its...going- to be super challenging, I won't be able to balance I'll lose" – (Phindulo 25)

The biggest challenge men face in South Africa are financial barriers, Phindulo responded that if he had a full-time job he would give the world to his child, but he had to choose going to school because it would benefit him more

in the future. In the statement below Phindulo expressed how having a job also Impacted his relationship with his child

I have had a few full-time jobs, but they were just not worth it, I was spending a lot of time away from my child and getting paid peanuts..... I know right now focusing on my studies might be a temporary financial strain, but I know with this degree I'll get a good job and have more time with my son. (Phindulo 25)

In confirmation with a study conducted by (Estes, 2011) it can be agreed that most student- fathers did not feel that they can be good fathers without a proper tertiary education. Making sacrifices made them believe that they could benefit more if they just focus on getting educated first.

Participants felt that they are pressured to make sure that their children get proper child-care than they did; this comment was mainly from those who came from disadvantaged background. Ndix mentioned that he came from a poor family so he would do anything to get a secured job, so he does not have to see

his child suffer.

‘‘I see my daughter every chance I get if I’m not at school, I make sure that I buy at least something for her and I I’m also saving money, I don’t have a secured job but I do sell muffins to help myself with a little money... its nothing but at least I’m sure that after this degree I won’t have to suffer and my children will have a better life..... it will only take time but I’m patient’’ (Ndix 27)

All participants from this study were unemployed and some received money from home while others depend on their bursaries to sustain their lives. Students like Tete expressed how he has to endure not having enough money to sustain his life and his child.

My son is my responsibility... I would love to get him everything he needs but the only money I get is the little that I get from my parents to buy food, yeah ... it’s so painful to hear other students sing ingenile! every month knowing that I am not funded and....still have student loans. (Tete 2)

Having NSFAS as a source of income, is not enough for students with children. Tete expressed how it was difficult for him. According to participants to worry about studies is not enough as they have many problems when they have to think about ways to sustain their children.

I make sure that I give my child at least R500 from the R1500 food allowance I get from NSFAS; it’s not a lot, but I’m left with nothing to sustain myself I can’t even ask anyone because I know my parents don’t have anything. It causes me a lot of stress and anxiety sometimes; I go without food because the money I have left can’t get me through the month. (Tete, 27)

Student-fathers showed a willingness to be there for their children. Some fathers only focused on providing financially for their children, in this study students focused on not only providing for their children financially but also being emotionally and physically there for their children.

Stress and anxiety

Students, usually, experience stress and anxiety but it is different for a student with a dependent child; they do not only have to worry

about themselves but their off springs as well. Participants expressed how having a child has brought so much stress in their lives, for example, Manzhi expressed how stressful it is to see his friend making it in life without children; this makes him wonder if he is going to be a good father.

Most of the time when I think about my child.... I cry, I feel like I am failing at being the best dad, its stressful to think about not doing enough for your child and also thinking about the amount of school-work load I have to endure each and every day. (Manzhi 24)

For the most part financial difficulties have been the biggest contributor to participants’ anxiety and stress. This is confirmed by studies where financial difficulties was often linked to mental health issues, thus, causing concerns about the wellbeing of student parents.

Every day I have to push myself, I’m failing to provide for my child financially... this brings a lot of stress and I feel anxious all the time. I feel like the world is looking at me like I’m a failure... (Emmanuel 23)

Emmanuel has expressed how not having money has added lot of stress and caused a mental breakdown. Financial stress affects students’ mental health; they are unable to fill the financial gap because they are full time at school.

Last year I went into a depression thinking I have failed. I had no student funds, and I was owing the institution close to R100k, I thought to myself, will I provide for my child and also succeed at this school thing? I still feel like giving up, but I have come too far to give up. (Piccoc 26)

Another thing that has contributed to student’s excess stress was the way the academic rules have recently changed; hence, student-fathers could not register.

The pandemic took a toll on us. I lost my mother due to corona virus early 2020 and in the same year I was affected by the RAC N+1rule, I had failed some modules and I couldn’t register I had so much stress thinking my academic life was about to end I couldn’t even think properly.... I was so anxious about

how my future will be if I cannot register at school and also not have a job to help my family. (Zwivhuya 24)

Adding to what Zwivhuya said about academic stress was the rule that students had to wait until May to get registered if they had no funds. Almost all participants in the study depend on NSFAS for money, so when they couldn't get registered due to academic rules, this caused a lot of mental issues.

NSFAS was my only source of income I was blocked by this new RAC thing, I thought I would never have a chance to support my child and see myself having a nice, secured job. I had to wait until May to get registered....ughh. That was crazy....at that time I had no money because you can't get funds if you're not registered. My baby had to go with no dippers the other time, yeah, I was depressed. (Rue 25)

Another thing that added a lot of stress to student-fathers' lives was seeing their peers becoming successful without children. A participant like Rue expressed how having a child had affected him, causing him stress:

I literally feel like a failure when I see my peer having jobs, travelling the world, and having the time of their lives. I'm happy with what God gave me it makes me to be more focus. (Rue, 25)

Despite the stress and anxiety that student face, participants showed that they are motivated to work hard to be better parents.

Clashing roles

Students reflected on how they are expected to have different identities; trying to manage two identities being student and a father at the same time has created difficulties.

Once you become a daddy there's a new role that emerges, there somethings that change when you are a father you can't just act like nothing matters - Joe 23

According to Bukhosini, (2019) there are contradicting roles between institutional roles and that of being a parent and a university student. Participants worry about being unable to balance both roles successfully. Joe who was a

student with a part time job expressed his views.

Balancing being a father and a student is so hard, I feel like I'm failing at being a father because mostly I spend time studying or doing my side hustle....im failing balancing things (Joe 23)

Manzhi admitted that women are better at multitasking.

I live with the mother of my child, she's also a student, I think she manages better making time being a mother and making sure that her grades are good... I have to admit she's good at this parenting thing and I feel like I'm failing (Manzhi 23)

Many participants showed that they had challenges in having to prioritize being a father first; taking on the role of being a father brought delays in their academic lives.

I have to be the father to my child before anything else because I feel, my father worked so much that he was emotionally or physically not there for us; I would see my father on festive holidays only.... I don't want my child to have that void that I had when I was a kid, I'm going to make sure of that (Rue 25)

The father role seems to be the most important role for most participants as they did not want to be emotionally unavailable for their children.

I don't want to be just a father whose there financially, I want to be there for my child in all ways emotionally, (Olugaho 24)

Role conflict was prevalent in their lives. Many respondents commented that the role of being a father has caused difficulties in maintaining their new fatherhood life and social life.

I literally have no social life I'm always trying out gigs and hustling if I'm not at school. At weekends I go home to my kid and wife; I'm losing it. (Zwivhuya 24)

The role conflict theory confirms that when two roles contradict one role will have to suffer. Students revealed the difficulty of being a father while still living at home and trying to be financially stable (Funiba, 2011).

My parents are strict at home; these are their rules and I can't do whatever I want because I'm at their house, although, I'm a father as

well; I can't put on my big daddy boots because I'm living with my parents. (Manzhi 23)

Theme 2: Impact on studies

Most participants showed that being a student father added pressure and stress to their academic lives, however all the participants

showed that it has made them more dedicated to schoolwork. Participants showed how being a parent impacted their studies, as it resulted in lack of flexibility, issues with attendance and submissions of assignments.

Impact on studies
Inflexibility
Attendance and submissions

Flexibility

Being a father has made me become more aware of the reality I'm in; I think I'm more matured and I literally take my academic life more serious. (Piccoc 26)

According to Estes, (2011) student-fathers viewed academic life as necessary for their children's future and had motivated them to be better students. All the challenges that student fathers face have encouraged them to be more flexible, focused and more motivated to do more.

I don't think I would have succeeded this much academically if I had no kid, I was wild (laugh) -Rue-25

The above comment was from Rue who is a postgraduate student; he became a father in 2017 the same year he got admitted to UNIVEN. He indicated that he was immature but thankful having a child have made him more matured. Another thing that impacted student-fathers positively was the fact that they had time to spend with their children. Participants like Olugaho showed that having time with his daughter was like a therapy session, it made him more focused.

My daughter is my world; she motivates me all time, I make sure that I see her every chance I get. It always pushes me to be a better father and I make sure I study hard. (Olugaho 24)

Another thing that was interesting was that some participants like Joe and Zwivhuya, mentioned how being a father has not affected them in any way due to their relationship with their children.

I can never lie and say that being a father has affected me academically or academic life has affected me as a father. (Zwivhuya 24)

One problem was that student-father-child relationship was affected by the relationship with the mother of their child and whether they live near or far away.

I'm not really impacted academically because my parents help me pay for child cost to the mother of my child; I can't see the child all the time because they live far from me. My focus right now is being a student although I'm also a parent. (Emmanuel 26)

Issues with Attendance and submissions of assignments

Student-fathers who have other jobs had problems attending classes; they indicated that having a job while being a full-time student had an impact on their lives. They were unable to balance the two roles, thus, they had clashing roles.

Having to work with due dates for assignments had been one of the hardest things. I make sure that I have my things scheduled but sometimes the workload can be too much. (Joe 25)

The study aimed to know whether student-fathers attended their lectures regularly. Most of the respondents showed that they did not attend their classes regularly. According to Sangawe, (2020). Poor attendance of lectures can be difficult for student parents resulting in poor academic performance.

The study findings revealed that student fathers had challenges attending lectures and tutorials classes.

I have asked so many times, for permission not to attend classes because I had to take care of my child. (Rue)

The study revealed that students were forced to choose between school and taking care of their children and so they faced problems meeting their deadlines. With no support from the Institution, they failed to attend lectures and submit assignments.

I wish the institution had a daycare that is affordable, that way I wouldn't have to skip classes so that I can look after my child while

4.1 Support structures

Student-fathers opened about the kind of family support they get; these include mental, financial, and social support.

Family support structures
University support structures

Family support structures

Participants mentioned that the kind of support they get from family and friends has helped them overcome challenges they encounter on a daily basis.

My family is a blessing, they have supported me in ways I cannot imagine. To be honest, they support me financially and emotionally; they always have a way of being there for me when I feel like giving up. I'm grateful. (Emmanuel-26)

Students like Phindulo mentioned that although he does not have a lot of help from the University, he gets a lot of support from other student-fathers. According to Lucchini-Raies *et al.*, (2018) student-parents will need emotional and financial support from universities and families.

UNIVEN doesn't care about student-parents..... so my support system is my family and friends. When I'm away from home my friends with children support me when I'm at my lowest. They understand because they can relate. (Phindulo-25)

Almost all participants mentioned family as

my girlfriend is attending classes. (Tete)

Some respondents showed that they attend classes given by strict lecturers and when they had something important to do in class

I usually attend classes when there is something important to do because I have to find a way to make money. I sell on campus, sometimes I miss important classes and submissions because I'm too busy trying to make money. (Ndix)

Participants also showed that not having money had a bad impact on their attendance patterns like the above-mentioned participant who had to choose between school and providing for his kid.

the main source of support they had. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, student-fathers showed that their families have been very supportive.

I live with the mother of my child, during lockdown my parents would volunteer to take care of our child so that we can get some time off and enjoy each other's space, besides my wife needs a break and my parents are so supportive when it comes to our baby. (Tete)

Emotional support was one of the greatest form of support that student-fathers needed. It is essential to get emotional support from friends and family; as participants go through mental breakdown, stress, and anxiety they need a support system.

My girlfriend is helpful a lot when I'm at lowest; she is the only one I tell my problems to; she really understands and knows how to lighten my moods. I know when I am at my lowest she's the only one that can understand me and talk to me. (Manzhi, 25)

Family was not only a source of financial support but guidance as well, which in a way helped a lot of participants.

It shows that emotional support helps almost all student-fathers in a dynamic way; they could tackle challenges that come their way, easily.

My father pays for my studies and helps me when I need help with my child; not only that but I also get great guidance from him, and I find it so helpful...whenever I encounter challenges I know where to run for help. (Rue, 25)

The findings show that the assistance that student-fathers get from family and friends helped them improve their mental health. According to Lin *et al.*, (2020) mental health support is not only found to be helpful to students-fathers but also has a good impact on their children. This confirms another study by Cohen and Kruger, (2021) that understanding helps students engage with their education easily, hence, it is important that student fathers get emotional support.

University support structures

The findings on this themes showed that student-fathers had issues with the way the University gave no acknowledgement of students with dependent children.

The University has never showed any empathy to us student-parents, it has never cared, and it will never care so ugh! (Tete 27)

Tete mentioned how the university never cares for students with children. Another thing that student complained about is that the University acknowledges disability and other issues as challenges but not student parenting.

Having a child is harder than anything I know. I do a little but I see my girlfriend playing full time mom and full-time student. It's hard. I also feel like I'm not doing enough ... I just wish the University had alternatives to make it easy for us as student-parents. (Tete, 27)

Participants maintained that students-parents had concerns with how they were being treated like Tete who is an entertainer and a body-builder. He expressed being hurt by how UNIVEN handled students with dependent children.

OVERVIEW, SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was based on the experiences of student-fathers at University of Venda. This study explored the challenges that student-fathers face, their impact on student-parents' academic work as well as the kind of support they get. The results of this study showed that student-fathers faced a lot of challenges trying to balance their lives given that they are full time students. The analysis was presented based on the objectives of this study. The research discovered several challenges that student-fathers face on a daily basis. Financial support was the biggest issue that all student-fathers have been facing along with other issues such as stress and anxiety. The study findings further revealed that student-fathers had support structures. They had external help to assist them with parenting, hence, they were able to overcome their problems. Recommendations were made to assist the students, UNIVEN policy-making board and for future researchers.

The research set out to accomplish three main objectives. Firstly, to identify challenges encountered by male student-parents taking care of their children while studying at the University of Venda; secondly, to investigate how these challenges impact their academic life; and finally, to identify ways to help male student-parents deal with the identified challenges .

Study limitations

This study was conducted via online and social media platforms. This was an easier method due to the global pandemic. This research was conducted using mobile phones and WhatsApp as these platforms were affordable, however, participants did mention that they had issues with connectivity due to where they stay, some participants had issues with Wi-Fi connection.

Another limitation was that some participants chose when to answer their questions over voice notes; some answers might have been lost in translation and the length of the study was affected. The sample size of this research was too small for the researcher to gather enough information; hence, this could affect the application of the findings of this study.

Another limitation was that this study was

conducted over a short period of time; time constraints, therefore, was a big limitation to this study.

Recommendation

Based on the findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

Firstly, that future studies be conducted with larger samples to accommodate opinions from other groups not covered in the population of the current study.

Secondly, that the government should cooperate with the university authorities and educational stakeholders from both private and public sectors to build more accommodations for student-father on the university campuses. In so doing, they will improve the learning environment condition for the student-fathers with babies.

Finally, that the University should provide opportunity for student-fathers to create support groups and for part-time jobs. They should also look at the possibility of providing affordable daycare centers within the university campuses, to allow student-fathers (or student-parents in general) to take care of their kids while studying.

Conclusion

Most of the studies conducted globally and in South Africa focus more on the experiences of student-mothers in higher education, therefore, this study aimed to understand the lived experiences of student-fathers at the University of Venda. This study was focused on three main things, the challenges that student-fathers face, how these affect their studies and

the kind of support they get. This study as outlined information to inform future developments in IHL to support student-fathers.

The findings showed that student fathers had difficulties trying to support their children financially, as a result they had conflicting roles trying to be fathers and students at the same time. Furthermore, the pressure that comes with learning in IHL and student parenthood caused a lot of stress and anxiety to student fathers, however, the institutions showed no support for student-fathers; the only help they get was from their families and friends.

The findings also highlighted that participant view parenthood as a positive influence on their studies and their children's future; they showed that they were motivated to be better fathers. Student-fathers also revealed that they should not only be there as financial providers for their children, but it was important to them to be there for their children emotionally and physically. Studies conducted on similar content deemed student fathers as careless and unmotivated to be emotionally and physically there for their children.

The researcher further suggests that the University should be more flexible to accommodate students with children and provide mental-health support for such students, as many students struggle to either complete their studies or be fully present in their children's lives

REFERENCES

- Adofo, S. (2013). Challenges and coping strategies of student nursing mothers in tertiary institutions in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. Unpublished thesis, Legon: University of
- Bosch, B. (2013). Women who Study: Balancing the Dual Roles of Postgraduate Women who Study: Balancing the Dual Roles of Postgraduate Student and Mother Student and Mother. Available at: <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses/592>.
- Bukhosini, S. (2019). Being a student and a mother: exploring the experiences of motherhood among university students. Unpublished thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Cohen, T. and Kruger, N. (2021). Fatherhood among South African university students: Identities and responsibilities. Cape Town: university of cape town
- Dankyi, J.K., Dankyi, L.A. and Minadzi, V.M. (2019). "Struggles and Coping Strategies of Student Mothers at the University of Cape Coast Distance Education, Ghana," *Creative Education*, 10(11), pp. 2484–2494. doi:10.4236/ce.2019.1011176.
- Estes, D.K. (2011) "Managing the Student-Parent Dilemma: Mothers and Fathers in Higher Education," *Symbolic Interaction*, 34(2), pp. 198–219. doi:10.1525/si.2011.34.2.198.Ghana
- Gumede, W. M. (2012) *Restless nation: making sense of troubled times*. Tafelberg.
- Institute for Women's Policy Research (2012) *Single Student Parents Face Financial Difficulties, Debt, Without Adequate Aid Figure 1. Percent of Students with Expected Family Contribution (EFC) of Zero*, 2008.
- Khumalo, Q. (2020) *Exploring mothers as barriers to young fathers' involvement in their children's lives: The perspectives of young men and women A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the academic requirements for a degree of Masters in Population Studies*.
- Kubeka, C. (2016) "Balancing the role of student and motherhood: the experience of students at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, unpublished thesis. Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal
- Kyngäs, H., Elo, S., Pölkki, T., Kääriäinen, M., & Kanste, O. (2011). Sisällönanalyysi suomalaisessa hoitotieteellisessä tutkimuksessa [The use of content analysis in Finnish nursing science research]. *Hoitotiede*, 23(2), 138-148
- Lin, H.C, Zaenah P.L, Oliver, D.F, Bergeron , M.A, Liu, H.C (2020) "Responding to the pressing yet unrecognized needs of student-parents amid the COVID-19 pandemic," *Journal of American College Health* [Preprint]. doi:10.1080/07448481.2020.1870474.
- Lucchini-Raies, C. et al. (2018) "The lived experience of undergraduate student parents: Role's compatibility challenge," *Investigacion y Educacion en Enfermeria*, 36(2). doi:10.17533/udea.iee.v36n2a03.
- Luke, V. (2019) *Factors contributing to poor academic performance faced by students, at a selected department rural university, Limpopo Province*. Unpublished thesis Limpopo: University of Venda.
- Mahaffey, B. A., Hungerford, G., & Sill, S. (2015). College student mother needs at regional campuses: An exploratory study. *AURCO Journal*, 21, 105–115.
- Maisela, T., & Ross, E. (2018). The experiences of motherhood among black undergraduate students at a South African University: Reconciling competing roles. *South African Review of Sociology*, 49(2), 41–60.
- Maisela, T. and Ross, E. (2018) "The Experiences of Motherhood among Black Undergraduate Students at a South African University: Reconciling Competing Roles," *South African Review of Sociology*,

49(2), pp. 41–60. doi:10.1080/21528586.2018.1507835.

Marandet, E. and Wainwright, E. (2010) “Invisible experiences: Understanding the choices and needs of university students with dependent children,” *British Educational Research Journal*, 36(5), pp. 787–805. doi:10.1080/01411920903165595.

Mccourt and Paige L (2018) Supporting Student-Parents: A Qualitative Exploration of the Online Presence of Support at Postsecondary Institutions. Available at: <https://pillars.taylor.edu/mahe/120>.

Miller K, Thorman A, Gault B. (2011) Improving Child Care Access to Promote Postsecondary Success among Low-Income Parents. Report #C378. institute for Women’s Policy Research 1200 18th Street NW, Suite 301 Washington, DC 20036 202/785-5100 • 202/833.4362 fax

Moreau, M.P. and Kerner, C. (2015) “Care in academia: an exploration of student parents’ experiences,” *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 36(2), pp. 215–233. doi:10.1080/01425692.2013.814533.

Nelson, b, Froehner, M. and Gault, B. (2013) “Figure 1. Proportion of College Students with Dependent Children by Race and Ethnicity, 2008,” *College Students with Children are Common and Face Many Challenges in Completing Higher Education [Preprint]*. doi:10.0%.

Ngum, F. (2011). An exploratory study of experiences of parenting among female students at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa [Master’s thesis, University of the Western Cape, South Africa].

Opit, D.E., Madinah, D.N. and Aisha, Ms.N. (2020) “Balancing Dual Roles in the Face of Missing On-Site Child Care Arrangements: Lived Experiences of Breast-Feeding Student Mothers at Kyambogo University,” *World Journal of Educational Research*, 7(3), p. p87. doi:10.22158/wjer.v7n3p87.

Sangawe, I. (2020) The Experiences of Undergraduate Student Mothers in Balancing Between Studies and Mothering: A Case of the University of Dodoma. Thesis for Master Of Arts In Education.

Statistics South Africa (2020) Unwanted fertility in South Africa.

Zohrabi, M. (2013). Mixed Method Research: Instruments, Validity, Reliability and Reporting Findings. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 3, 254- 262.<http://dx.doi.org/10.4304/tpls.3.2.254-262>

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.7>**TEACHING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION THROUGH MUSIC EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN GRADES 4–6 CAPS CREATIVE ARTS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW****Dr. Sakhiseni Joseph Yende***University of South Africa | College of Education**School of Teacher Education**Department of Language Education, Arts and Culture**Campus: Muckleneuk,**Building: Nkoana Simon Radipere (NSR),**Office: 6-119**Email: yendesj@unisa.ac.za*

This study explores the potential of music education within Grades 4–6 CAPS Creative Arts classrooms as a strategy for preventing gender-based violence (GBV) while fostering ethical awareness, social responsibility, and cultural consciousness among learners. Using a framework informed by Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), the study examines how social, institutional, and historical factors shape learners' experiences and how music education can serve as a transformative pedagogical tool. The research identifies four central themes: music education as a GBV prevention strategy, values formation and ethical awareness, indigenous music fostering gender-transformative learning, and curricular opportunities for integrating GBV prevention pedagogies. Findings reveal that participatory music-making, including performance, songwriting, storytelling, and critical listening, promotes empathy, moral reasoning, and ethical reflection. Indigenous musical practices, grounded in the philosophy of Ubuntu, transmit cultural values, relational ethics, and collective responsibility, enabling learners to interrogate gender norms and affirm their cultural identities. Empirical evidence from South African and international contexts demonstrates that music education can reduce aggression, enhance social-emotional skills, and improve cooperative behaviour among learners. CAPS Creative Arts classrooms provide opportunities for embedding GBV prevention across creative, collaborative, and reflective activities, complementing Life Orientation and other curricular interventions. The study concludes that music education is not merely a technical or artistic activity but a culturally responsive and ethically grounded approach for cultivating socially conscious, empowered, and ethically aware learners. Systematic integration of music pedagogy into primary education offers a practical, transformative avenue for GBV prevention and the promotion of gender equity, social responsibility, and ethical learning in South African schools.

Keywords: CAPS Creative Arts, Gender-based violence, Indigenous music education, South African schools, Values formation

Introduction

In Africa, gender-based violence (GBV) remains a serious and pervasive social challenge, deeply rooted in historical, cultural, and socio-economic inequalities. In the South African context, GBV constitutes a profound educational and societal concern with far-reaching implications for learners' wellbeing, safety, and educational outcomes (Gwiza & Hendricks, 2025;

Loken & Hagen, 2022; Yende, 2022). The choice of this research topic is motivated by the recognition that GBV is not only a social or legal issue but a deeply educational one, requiring sustained, age-appropriate, and culturally responsive pedagogical interventions. Gwiza and Hendricks (2025, p. 1) mention that:

The manifestation of GBV has extended its impact into educational settings, with South African universities among those with the highest

reported cases of GBV. Within these settings, GBV is identified as a deeply entrenched issue, shaped by both cultural norms and structural influences. Moreover, GBV poses a threat to individuals across all genders.

This assertion demonstrates that GBV is not confined to private or domestic spheres but is deeply embedded within institutional and educational environments. The prevalence of GBV in higher education institutions is particularly significant because it signals the cumulative failure of earlier educational interventions to disrupt harmful gender norms and power relations. The high incidence of GBV at tertiary level reflects broader systemic challenges that permeate the entire education continuum, including primary and secondary schooling (Mphuthi, 2024; Thobane et al., 2023). This continuity across educational levels provides a compelling rationale for investigating preventative interventions earlier in learners' educational trajectories. Consequently, there is an urgent need for early, preventative, and transformative educational approaches, particularly in the Intermediate Phase, where learners' values, attitudes, and social behaviours are actively formed.

Rooted in historically entrenched gender inequalities, patriarchal norms, and intersecting socio-economic factors, GBV extends beyond overt acts of violence to include harassment, intimidation, and the normalisation of unequal power relations (Mutinta, 2022; Gwiza and Hendricks, 2025; Loken & Hagen, 2022). According to Ndlovu, et al (2020), schools, as formative social spaces, play a critical role in shaping learners' understandings of gender, relationships, and acceptable forms of behaviour. This positions schooling as a critical site not only for academic development but also for the social reproduction or transformation of gender norms. Consequently, education is increasingly recognised as a key site for GBV prevention and early intervention (Gwiza & Hendricks, 2025; Loken & Hagen, 2022). This recognition places a particular responsibility on primary schooling, including Grades 4–6, where learners are cognitively and socially ready to engage with issues

of fairness, respect, empathy, and justice.

Within the South African schooling system, curricular responses to GBV have predominantly been situated within Life Orientation and policy-driven initiatives (Mphuthi, 2024; Thobane, et.al., 2023). This view was supported by Mphuthi (2024, p. 55) who mention that:

The main goal of the Life Orientation curriculum is to help learners to develop their sense of self in society by assisting them with self-evaluation and decision-making. The LO curriculum incorporates academic and career planning as well as physical education, social responsibility and personal well-being. The key aspect of LO is to provide learners with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to enable them to lead healthy and productive lives. It also aims to improve learners' critical thinking, problem-solving and decision-making abilities so that they can make informed decisions and accept responsibility for their actions. The curriculum includes key topics such as health and wellness, environmental education, social justice, human rights and diversity.

Life Orientation therefore plays a crucial role in addressing GBV through rights-based education, awareness-raising, and the promotion of ethical decision-making. However, the dominance of Life Orientation as the primary curricular space for GBV education has resulted in a narrow framing of prevention efforts, often privileging cognitive, informational, and policy-oriented approaches. Such approaches, while important, tend to underemphasise affective, embodied, cultural, and relational dimensions of learning. This limitation has prompted growing calls for pedagogical strategies that engage learners holistically, particularly in the Intermediate Phase, where emotional development, identity formation, and peer relationships are especially salient.

Parallel bodies of research in arts-based education and music pedagogy demonstrate the capacity of music to function as a powerful medium for social commentary, ethical engagement, and

values formation. Within Grades 4–6 CAPS Creative Arts (Music), learning outcomes emphasise participation, creativity, listening, movement, and collaboration, pedagogical elements that align closely with preventative and values-based education. De Villiers and Oellermann (2024) and Fitzpatrick (2012) argue that music education can promote social justice by “empowering students to recognise that their own cultural identities are valid and respected”. Furthermore, research shows that critical listening, creative expression, and collaborative music-making foster empathy, dialogue, critical thinking, and ethical awareness (De Villiers & Oellermann, 2024).

The motivation for focusing specifically on music education arises from its unique capacity to engage learners emotionally, socially, and culturally in ways that traditional didactic approaches cannot. Music enables learners to explore sensitive social issues symbolically and collectively, reducing defensiveness while encouraging reflection and dialogue. In contrast to text-based or rule-driven instruction, music allows learners to experience values such as respect, care, cooperation, and dignity in embodied and relational ways. This makes music education particularly suited to addressing complex social issues such as GBV, which are deeply tied to emotions, identities, and power relations.

In the South African context, music has historically served as a vehicle for resistance, community mobilisation, moral instruction, and political consciousness, underscoring its relevance for addressing contemporary social issues such as GBV. Struggle songs, indigenous musical practices, and communal music-making have long been used to transmit ethical values, challenge injustice, and foster collective responsibility. Despite this historical and cultural significance, the intersection between GBV education and music pedagogy remains underexplored in formal schooling contexts. Where arts-based approaches are discussed in relation to GBV, they are often framed as therapeutic or expressive interventions rather than as structured curricular and pedagogical strategies embedded within

formal education, including the CAPS Creative Arts curriculum.

This underexamination of music education as a preventative tool constitutes a central motivation for the present study and directly informs the choice of the article’s title. While GBV has been widely studied in relation to policy, psychology, and Life Orientation, there is a notable absence of systematic engagement with music education as a legitimate and intentional site for GBV prevention. Existing reviews and intervention studies rarely include Creative Arts or music education in their analyses, resulting in a limited understanding of how music pedagogy, particularly in Grades 4–6, can contribute to gender-transformative education.

Moreover, there is insufficient engagement with indigenous musical practices, decolonial perspectives, and African philosophies such as Ubuntu in GBV-related educational research. Ubuntu, with its emphasis on interconnectedness, mutual respect, care, and communal responsibility, aligns closely with the ethical foundations required for GBV prevention. Music education provides a natural pedagogical space for enacting Ubuntu through collective music-making, listening, and shared creative experiences. The neglect of these perspectives further underscores the need for research that foregrounds culturally grounded and contextually relevant approaches.

Additionally, the absence of systematic reviews synthesising research at the intersection of GBV, music education, and school curricula restricts the development of evidence-informed pedagogical frameworks. Without such synthesis, teachers, curriculum developers, and teacher educators lack guidance on how to intentionally integrate GBV prevention into music education in age-appropriate and curriculum-aligned ways. This gap limits both scholarly advancement and practical implementation within South African schools.

This systematic review is therefore motivated by the need to consolidate and critically analyse

scholarship on teaching GBV through music education in South African schools, with particular emphasis on Grades 4–6 CAPS Creative Arts (Music). The study is driven by the conviction that preventing GBV requires moving beyond reactive and disciplinary approaches towards proactive, educational, and values-based interventions embedded across the curriculum. By positioning music education as a culturally responsive and ethically grounded strategy for GBV prevention, the study integrates insights from education, music pedagogy, and social justice literature. Ultimately, this research seeks to reposition music education from a marginal or enrichment subject to a critical pedagogical space for social transformation. By addressing an underexplored intersection and responding directly to pressing societal needs, the study contributes both theoretically and practically to debates on GBV prevention, curriculum innovation, and teacher education in South Africa:

- a) What pedagogical roles can music education play in preventing gender-based violence within Grades 4–6 CAPS Creative Arts classrooms?
- b) In what ways does music education support values formation and ethical awareness related to GBV prevention?
- c) To what extent do indigenous musical practices contribute to gender-transformative learning in primary school music education?
- d) What curricular opportunities exist within Grades 4–6 CAPS Creative Arts (Music) for integrating GBV prevention pedagogies?
- e) What are the practical applications of music education for GBV prevention in Grades 4–6?

Literature review

Gender-Based Violence and Education

It is prudent to foreground this section by providing a brief background about Gender-Based Violence so that this section could be contextualised. According to UN Women (2022), globally, gender-based violence (GBV) continues to be a widespread human rights violation with profound effects on people, commu-

nities, and nations. Africa reported more femicides than any other region in 2022, out of the 89,000 women who were slain on purpose worldwide. In southern Africa, 27% of women aged 15 and above reported having been physically or sexually abused by an intimate partner at some point in their lives. Human security, peace, and prosperity are all hampered by GBV, according to the African Union's Agenda 2063 (African Union. (2015; Sardinha, et.al, 2022; UN Women,2022). Simultaneously, there is a growing demand for immediate action to increase investments in women in order to eradicate GBV.

Within educational contexts, GBV manifests in multiple ways, including bullying, sexual harassment, verbal abuse, gender stereotyping, and the normalisation of aggressive masculinities (UNESCO, USAID, 2017). South African schools reflect broader societal patterns, where gendered violence is shaped by intersecting factors such as race, class, poverty, and the legacy of apartheid (Enaifoghe, et, al., 2021). Research indicates that learners may encounter GBV both directly and indirectly through peer interactions, school cultures, disciplinary practices, and media influences that circulate within school spaces.

A study conducted by Dlungwane and Hamlall (2024, p. 100) highlight that:

SRGBV may be perpetrated by teachers, students, or community members. SRGBV includes explicit threats or acts of physical violence, bullying, verbal or sexual harassment, non-consensual touching, sexual coercion and assault and rape. SRGBV can also be enacted implicitly. Implicit gender violence includes bullying, verbal and psychological abuse and teachers unofficial use of students for labour. This violence originates in the imbalance of power between males and females, the gendered hierarchy and separation of tasks, and socially accepted views of what constitutes masculine and feminine behaviour.

It is evident that school-related gender-based violence is a widespread and persistent challenge within educational settings (Parkes et al., 2017; Taole, 2016). Educational responses to GBV have largely been located within Life Orientation and policy-driven interventions, focusing on awareness campaigns, legal knowledge, and behavioural change programmes (Mphuthi, 2024; Thobane, et.al., 2023). While these approaches are essential, scholars have argued that they often remain didactic, cognitively oriented, and disconnected from learners' emotional and cultural worlds. As a result, preventative education on GBV requires pedagogies that engage learners affectively, ethically, and relationally dimensions that are central to arts-based learning but underutilised in mainstream GBV education.

Arts-Based and Music Pedagogies for Social Justice

Arts-based education has been widely recognised as a powerful pedagogical approach for engaging complex social issues, particularly those involving identity, power, and ethics (de Carvalho, 2025). This view was supported by Beagle (2021, p. 18) who mentions that:

Arts-based methods have transformative potential to reduce some of the challenges of the contemporary classroom. These methods are well suited to the self-reflective aspect of the soft skills programme promoted in the WPP module. Students' artworks can offer a powerful personal symbol that activates and mediates many intrapersonal and interpersonal processes and act as key agents for building more democratic and reciprocal experiences of learning and teaching in higher education

It is evident that arts-based approaches provide transformative opportunities for education. Music, in particular, functions as both a cultural practice and a social text, capable of expressing lived experience, resistance, and moral critique (De Villiers & Oellermann, 2024).

In the South African context, music has histori-

cally played a significant role in social commentary and political resistance, serving as a vehicle for collective memory, protest, and transformation (Yende & Yende, 2022).

In their study, De Villiers & Oellermann (2024) mention that music education for social justice emphasises critical listening, reflection, dialogue, and creative expression. Through song analysis, composition, and performance, learners are able to interrogate dominant narratives, question social norms, and articulate alternative values. Such pedagogies align with critical approaches to education that seek not only knowledge transmission but also consciousness-raising and ethical engagement (De Villiers & Oellermann, 2024; Fraser, 2025).

Furthermore, arts-based learning supports affective and emotional development, which is particularly relevant in addressing issues such as GBV. Music enables learners to explore empathy, care, dignity, and relational responsibility in ways that transcend purely verbal or cognitive instruction (De Villiers & Oellermann, 2024). Studies in music education have highlighted its role in values formation, moral reasoning, and social cohesion, suggesting that music classrooms can function as safe spaces for dialogue and ethical exploration (Crooke, et.al., 2023). However, despite this potential, music education is often marginalised within school curricula and rarely positioned as a deliberate site for addressing social justice issues such as GBV.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Music Education

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) offer critical insights into the role of music as a tool for cultural transmission, moral education, and community cohesion. This view is also recognised by Department of Basic Education (2011, p. 17) point out that:

Learners must be exposed to the history of science and indigenous knowledge systems from other times and other cultures. Scientific knowledge and understanding have been developed over time by people who were curious and who persevered with their quest for

knowledge. Our present understanding of science will change and will be improved by modern scientists making new discoveries.

It is evident that integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems into education, including music education, can foster learners' understanding of cultural heritage, ethical values, and community responsibility.

In many South African indigenous contexts, music is inseparable from storytelling, ritual, social instruction, and collective identity. Songs, praise poetry, and communal performance have traditionally been used to transmit values related to respect, relational accountability, and social harmony (Chisa & Ngulube, 2018; Izu, 2025). Within indigenous musical practices, learning is often participatory, dialogic, and intergenerational. These characteristics resonate strongly with educational approaches that emphasise relational ethics and collective responsibility (De Villiers & Oellermann, 2024; Isabirye, 2021). When integrated into school music education, indigenous musical practices provide culturally relevant pedagogical resources that can challenge harmful gender norms while affirming learners' identities and cultural heritage.

Decolonial perspectives on music pedagogy argue for the disruption of Eurocentric curricular hierarchies that prioritise Western musical forms and individualised performance over communal, contextualised music-making (Hess, 2015). From this perspective, integrating indigenous music into GBV education is not merely additive, but transformative. It repositions music education as a site for ethical formation, social critique, and cultural continuity, while foregrounding African philosophies such as Ubuntu, which emphasise interconnectedness, care, and mutual respect.

Gaps in the Literature

Despite extensive scholarship on GBV in education and growing interest in arts-based pedagogies, there remains a significant gap in research that explicitly theorises music education as a preventative and transformative response to

GBV. Existing studies tend to locate GBV education within health education, psychology, or Life Orientation, with limited attention to the role of Creative Arts and music classrooms (Parkes et al., 2017; Taole, 2016). Moreover, South African scholarship linking GBV, music education, and school curricula remains scarce. Where music is discussed, it is often framed as an expressive or therapeutic tool rather than as a critical pedagogical space for examining power, gender, and violence. There is also limited engagement with indigenous musical practices and decolonial frameworks in relation to GBV education. This article responds to these gaps by foregrounding music education as a culturally grounded, ethically responsive, and socially transformative pedagogical site for addressing GBV in South African schools. By bringing together GBV scholarship, music education theory, indigenous knowledge systems, and critical pedagogies, the study contributes to a more holistic and contextually relevant understanding of GBV prevention through education.

Theoretical Purposes of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in Music Education

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in music education serve important theoretical and pedagogical purposes that extend beyond artistic expression. In African contexts, indigenous music functions as a medium for moral instruction, social regulation, cultural continuity, and communal accountability (Chisa & Ngulube, 2017; Isabirye, 2021; Izu, 2025). The inclusion of IKS within the South African school curriculum is formally recognised in the Creative Arts CAPS, which states that:

The Creative Arts encompass four distinct art forms. However, schools were given the flexibility to choose and offer any two of these art forms based on their preferences and the expertise of their teachers. An important result was the adoption of educational reforms aimed at incorporating Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) into the existing school curriculum (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2011b, pp. 9–10).

Within IKS-based music education, learning occurs through song texts, performance practices, call-and-response structures, and communal participation. These musical processes transmit values such as respect, responsibility, dignity, and relational ethics. Such values are particularly relevant to addressing gender-based violence (GBV), as indigenous music often embeds lessons about appropriate social conduct, gender relations, and collective wellbeing.

In South Africa, music grounded in IKS functions as an ethical framework that shapes learners' behaviour and social norms from an early age (Mhlauli & Fikelepi-Twani, 2024). When integrated into Grades 4–6 CAPS Creative Arts (Music), indigenous music allows learners to engage with culturally meaningful narratives that challenge harmful gender hierarchies and promote Ubuntu-informed values of mutual care, respect, and interconnectedness. In this way, music-based IKS operates as a preventative pedagogical tool by fostering ethical awareness, communal responsibility, and gender-transformative learning, all of which are essential for GBV prevention in primary school contexts.

Application of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in Music Education for GBV Prevention

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT), which was initially developed by legal scholars Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Richard Delgado in the late 1970s and 1980s to examine how law and legal institutions perpetuate racial inequalities in the United States. For instance, Bell (1995, p. 899) highlights that:

Critical race theory writing and lecturing is characterised by frequent use of the first person, storytelling, narrative, allegory, interdisciplinary treatment of law, and the unapologetic use of creativity.

Based on this statement, it is evident that CRT values lived experiences, narratives, and creative methods as central to understanding and challenging systemic inequities. Furthermore, Yosso and Solórzano (2005, pp. 121–22) point out that:

Critical race theory (CRT) is a framework that can be used to theorise and examine the ways in which race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact on the social structures, practices, and discourses that affect people of colour. Important to this critical framework is a challenge to the dominant ideology, which supports deficit notions about communities of colour while assuming “neutrality” and “objectivity”. Utilising the experiences of people of colour, CRT in sociology also theorises and examines that place where racism intersects with other forms of subordination such as sexism, classism, nativism, monolingualism, and heterosexism. CRT in sociology is conceived as a social justice project that attempts to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community. CRT acknowledges that social institutions operate in contradictory ways, with their potential to oppress and marginalise coexisting with their potential to emancipate and empower. CRT in sociology is transdisciplinary and draws on many other schools of progressive scholarship.

Based on these perspectives, CRT challenges dominant narratives, interrogates systemic and structural oppression, and foregrounds the experiences of marginalised groups. A key concept within CRT is intersectionality, introduced by Crenshaw (1989), which examines how multiple social categories such as race, gender, class, and age interact to shape individual experiences of oppression and privilege. This framework is particularly relevant to examining how gender-based violence (GBV) in South African schools is influenced by historical, social, and institutional inequalities and how music education can serve as a site for critical, transformative pedagogy.

This theory is especially pertinent to the current investigation because it offers a lens through which GBV is understood not merely as an interpersonal issue, but as a systemic phenomenon shaped by institutional practices, socio-economic inequalities, and patriarchal norms within schooling contexts. By applying CRT to Grades 4–6 CAPS Creative Arts (Music), this study demonstrates how music education can create

spaces for storytelling, dialogue, and critical reflection, enabling learners to question harmful gender norms and power relations. In this way, CRT-informed music pedagogy links creative practice with social justice aims, positioning music education as a transformative educational site for the prevention of GBV among young learners.

Design and Methods

Study Design

A systematic, descriptive review design was employed to investigate how music education can serve as a pedagogical strategy for preventing and addressing gender-based violence (GBV) in South African schools, with particular emphasis on Grades 4–6 CAPS Creative Arts (Music). The main purpose of a descriptive review is to identify patterns or trends within a body of knowledge, examining how existing research aligns with or challenges established theories, methodologies, or findings (King & He, 2005; Paré et al., 2015). This approach enabled the consolidation and critical analysis of scholarship from education, music pedagogy, social justice, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems, offering valuable insights to guide curriculum development and teacher education in GBV prevention. The review drew on peer-reviewed journal articles, books, dissertations, and governmental and institutional reports that focused on GBV, arts-based education, and school curricula. Relevant literature was accessed through multiple academic databases and institutional repositories, including the University of South Africa library portal, JSTOR, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, ERIC, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and institutional thesis repositories.

Search Strategy

Gough et al. (2012) state that systematic reviews use specific, rigorous, and accountable techniques to guide the development of new research questions. Finding and summarising previously published pertinent research, evaluating

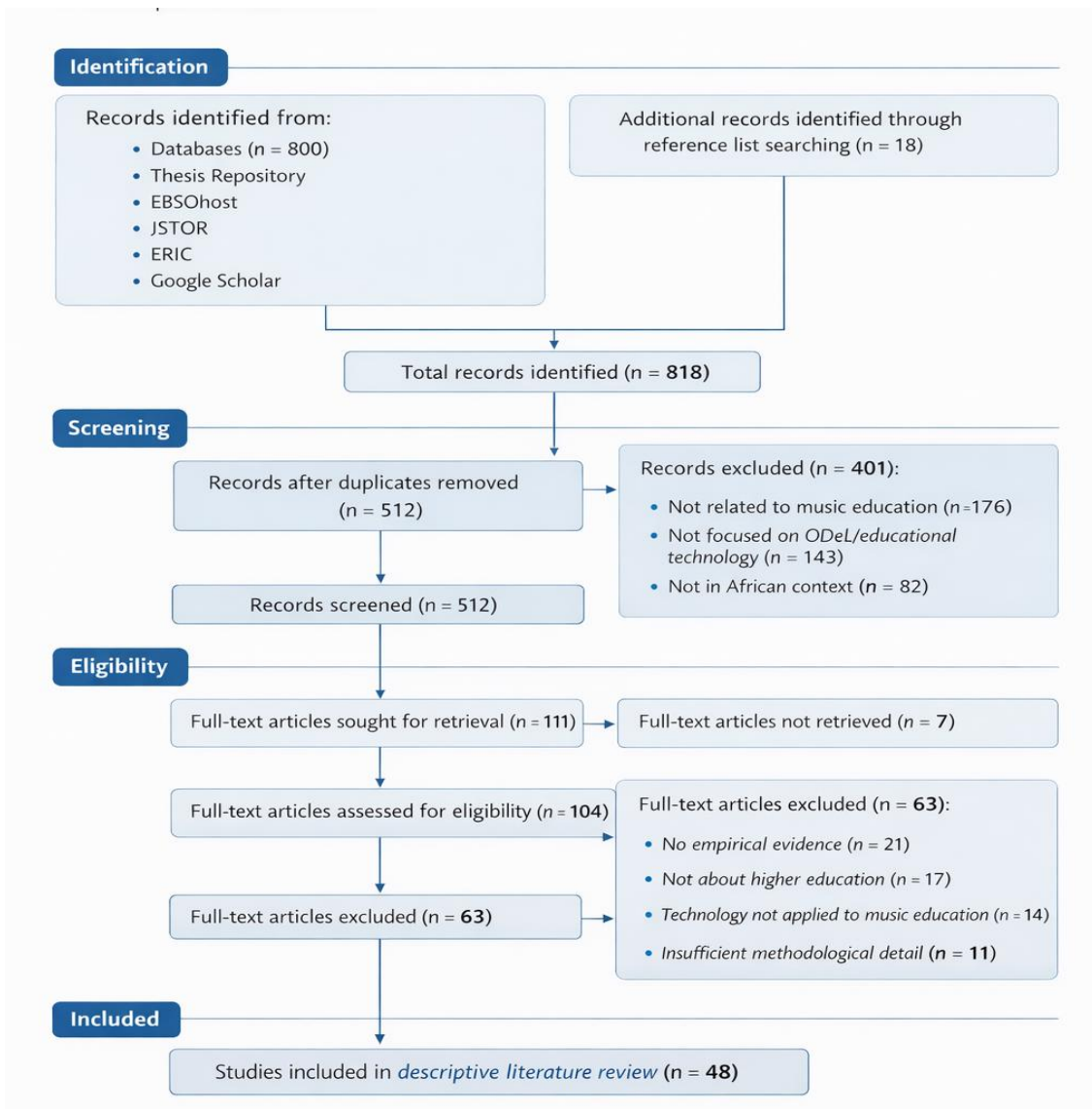
the research methodology critically, and compiling the combined results into a synthesis of study findings are the three main steps in a systematic review of research. Because they employ a methodical technique to locate, choose, and evaluate the generated material, systematic reviews are more rigorous than standard literature reviews (Ham-Baloyi & Jordan, 2016).

In this study, a systematic search was conducted using advanced search functions across multiple databases, employing the following terms in various combinations: “Gender-based violence” or “GBV,” “Music education” or “Creative Arts” or “arts-based pedagogy,” “Primary school” or “Grades 4–6,” and “Curriculum” or “pedagogy.” The search was limited to English-language sources published between 2000 and 2025. However, literature from the early 1980s and 1990s was also included due to its relevance, particularly in informing the theoretical framework of this study. Recognising that GBV is a global concern that extends beyond South African schools, the search was further expanded to include international studies on arts-based approaches to GBV prevention. This approach ensured a comprehensive review of both historical and contemporary scholarship relevant to teaching GBV through music education in primary school contexts.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

A total of 818 records were identified through database searches and manual reference checking. After removing duplicates, 512 records were screened, and 401 were excluded. Of 104 full-text articles assessed, 63 were excluded for reasons such as lack of empirical evidence or irrelevant focus. Ultimately, 48 studies met the inclusion criteria for the descriptive literature review. Figure 1 presents a summary of the literature identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion process according to PRISMA guidelines

Figure 1: PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram (Textual Representation)



Source: Researcher

Thematic Analysis of the Literature

In this study, four central themes emerged from the research questions, providing a framework

to explore the potential of Grades 4–6 CAPS Creative Arts (Music) in addressing gender-based violence (GBV). The following table show the themes that emerged from the research questions.

Table 1: Emerged themes from the research questions

Research Questions	Emerged Themes
What pedagogical roles can music education play in preventing gender-based violence within Grades 4–6 CAPS Creative Arts classrooms?	Music education as GBV prevention strategy: Music can function as a medium for social commentary, ethical engagement, and values formation (De Villiers & Oellermann, 2024; Crooke et al., 2023). Arts-based approaches enable learners to explore lived experiences and resistance (de Carvalho, 2025).

In what ways does music education support values formation and ethical awareness related to GBV prevention?	Values formation and ethical awareness through music: Music promotes empathy, critical thinking, moral reasoning, and social cohesion (Crooke et al., 2023; Fraser, 2025). Arts-based learning engages affective, relational, and ethical dimensions (Beagle, 2021).
To what extent do indigenous musical practices contribute to gender-transformative learning in primary school music education?	Indigenous music fostering gender-transformative learning: Indigenous music transmits cultural values, ethical responsibility, and communal learning (Chisa & Ngulube, 2017; Isabirye, 2021; Izu, 2025). Ubuntu philosophy underpins relational ethics in education (Hess, 2015).
What curricular opportunities exist within Grades 4–6 CAPS Creative Arts (Music) for integrating GBV prevention pedagogies?	Curricular integration of GBV prevention strategies: CAPS Creative Arts learning outcomes emphasise participation, creativity, listening, movement, and collaboration, which align with GBV prevention (Department of Basic Education, 2011; De Villiers & Oellermann, 2024).
What are the practical applications of music education for GBV prevention in Grades 4–6?	Practical applications of music education for GBV prevention in Grades 4–6: Music education supports GBV prevention by fostering empathy, ethical awareness, social skills, and positive behaviour through creative, collaborative learning in primary schools (Gil, 2011; Kim, 2022; Di Paolo & Todino, 2025; Yende, 2024).

Source: Researcher

Music education as GBV prevention strategy

Music education can function as a powerful preventative strategy against gender-based violence by enabling social commentary, ethical engagement, and values formation. This statement was supported by a study conducted by Sida (2015, p. 1) pointing out that:

Schools, from primary level to higher educational institutions, vocational training and non-formal education, are important sites for normative change and have the potential to address gender inequalities and prevent GBV. A range of school-based programs have been developed that not only raise awareness about GBV but also build the skills of students and staff to create equitable and respectful relationships.

Evidently, educational spaces play a vital role in shaping learners' attitudes, behaviours, and social values from an early age. Within Grades 4–6 CAPS Creative Arts (Music), music provides learners with expressive tools to explore lived experiences, social inequalities, and resistance

in age-appropriate ways. In their study, De Villiers and Oellermann (2024) and Crooke et al. (2023) argue that music-making encourages dialogue, empathy, and collective reflection, which are essential for challenging violent and unequal gender norms. Arts-based approaches further allow learners to question dominant narratives and imagine alternative, non-violent social relations, positioning music classrooms as spaces for critical awareness and early GBV prevention (de Carvalho, 2025).

Values formation and ethical awareness through music

Music education supports values formation and ethical awareness by engaging learners emotionally, relationally, and morally. Ma and Guintu (2025, p. 1) emphasise that music education plays a vital role in developing learners' emotional and musical expression, contributing to their artistic identity and overall well-being. While music education has traditionally prioritised technical mastery, particularly in formal learning environments, contemporary research highlights its broader ethical and social dimen-

sions. Studies indicate that music learning fosters empathy, critical thinking, and moral reasoning capacities essential for recognising inequality, challenging harmful norms, and preventing gender-based violence (Crooke et al., 2023; Fraser, 2025). Within school contexts, these affective and ethical engagements position music education as a transformative pedagogical space for GBV prevention.

Within Grades 4–6 CAPS Creative Arts (Music), learners interact with music through listening, performance, and creative composition, enabling reflection on emotions, relationships, and ethical choices. Also, Rasalanavho (2016, p. i) states that:

Engaging young children to partake in creative arts activities is often viewed as inferior to most academic subjects by some teachers and parents. In the school environment, most attention is given to academic subjects as there are misconceptions that creativity is not as important as the academics.

Based on this assertion, it is evident that marginalising music education limits its potential to support ethical development and social awareness. Beagle (2021) highlights that arts-based learning activates affective and interpersonal processes that deepen ethical understanding. As a result, music education fosters social cohesion and nurtures respect, care, and accountability among learners.

Indigenous music fostering gender-transformative learning

According to Izu (2025, p. 1), “indigenous music, as a culturally situated form of knowledge, storytelling, and communal memory, is critical in expressing identity, values, spirituality, and historical continuity.” McCarthy (2016) mentions that indigenous music education plays a vital role to address social issue and it serves a tool for social justice. It is evident that indigenous music plays a crucial role in fostering gender-transformative learning by transmitting cultural values, ethical responsibility, and communal modes of knowing (De Villiers & Oellermann, 2024; Isabirye, 2021).

Studies highlight that indigenous musical practices are deeply embedded in storytelling, ritual, and moral instruction, promoting collective identity and relational accountability (Chisa & Ngulube, 2017; Isabirye, 2021; Izu, 2025). For instance, Kaur (2024, P. 1361) points out that:

Indigenous performance refers to the cultural expressions and rituals of indigenous peoples through mediums such as dance, music, storytelling, theatre, and visual arts. These performances are deeply embedded in the traditions, spirituality, and daily lives of indigenous communities.

This view was supported by Kuwor (2025, pp. 40–41) who mentions that:

African music serves as a key tool for education, passing on essential knowledge through its rhythms, melodies, and lyrics. Oral traditions are central to African cultures, and songs become repositories of wisdom, moral teachings, and historical narratives. Through music, the collective memory of a community is preserved, with stories of past events, genealogies, and cultural practices being passed down through generations. This makes music a living archive, ensuring that cultural knowledge is not lost but continually transmitted.

Evidently, indigenous music operates not only as an artistic expression but also as a pedagogical and ethical framework through which social values, including respect, responsibility, and gender equity, are learned and reinforced. When integrated into Grades 4–6 CAPS Creative Arts (Music), indigenous music affirms learners’ cultural identities while simultaneously creating opportunities to challenge harmful gender hierarchies. Grounded in the philosophy of Ubuntu, which emphasises interconnectedness and mutual respect, indigenous music education supports ethical learning that foregrounds care, dignity, and shared responsibility (Hess, 2015).

Curricular integration of GBV prevention strategies

The CAPS Creative Arts curriculum provides significant opportunities for integrating gender-

based violence (GBV) prevention within music education. Learning outcomes in Grades 4–6 emphasise participation, creativity, listening, movement, and collaboration, all of which align with preventative and values-based pedagogies (Department of Basic Education, 2011). De Villiers and Oellermann (2024) note that these pedagogical elements encourage dialogue, reflection, and ethical engagement, creating spaces where learners can critically engage with social relationships and values through creative practice. However, literature suggests that these opportunities are often underutilised, with GBV education largely confined to Life Orientation. For instance, Mphuti (2024, p. 62) highlights that:

School-based Life Orientation curricula can play a key role in preventing school violence by improving learning opportunities and providing life skills training. Life Orientation curriculum practice may additionally offer a secure and supportive atmosphere for learners to express their emotions, learn conflict resolution skills, and learn how to form healthy relationships. It can help to foster open communication between learners, teachers and administrators, allowing everyone to be heard.

It is evident that while Life Orientation plays an important role in GBV prevention, limiting such interventions to a single subject restricts the broader pedagogical potential of the curriculum. Music education, by contrast, engages learners affectively, socially, and creatively, allowing values such as respect, empathy, and accountability to be explored through embodied and participatory learning experiences.

Integrating GBV prevention into music education strengthens interdisciplinary learning and positions Creative Arts as a vital space for gender-transformative education. In a study titled *Cultural-Historical Activity Theory in Examining Creative Arts as an Anti-Bullying Strategy in South African Public Schools*, Yende (2025, p. 126) mentions that:

The integration of creative arts into anti-bullying strategies within South African public schools provides valuable insights into cultural, societal, and power dynamics. Culturally, creative arts, encompassing visual arts, drama, music, and dance, serve as expressive mediums deeply rooted in South Africa's diverse cultural heritage.

Evidently, when embedded within Grades 4–6 CAPS Creative Arts (Music), music education offers a meaningful and culturally responsive platform for advancing GBV prevention and ethical learning by enabling learners to critically reflect on social norms, power relations, and respectful relationships. Through participatory musicking, learners develop empathy, dialogue skills, and collective responsibility essential for gender-transformative education.

Practical applications of music education for GBV prevention in Grades 4–6

Music education offers a dynamic and culturally responsive platform for addressing gender-based violence (GBV) in primary school settings. For instance, Gil (2011, p.39) writes that:

Music (and arts in general) have a transformative potential with children and youth and should be considered as another tool for prevention of violence. It allows the individuals to reconfigure the way they define themselves, to understand the 'reality' in which they live and to confront violence in different ways in their daily live).

Music education plays a crucial role in addressing various societal issues in school contexts. This view is supported by Di Paolo and Todino (2025, p. 2), who state:

From an educational point of view, music education plays a fundamental role in the education of individuals, both in and outside of school. Music stimulates creativity, discipline, and problem-solving skills, improving soft skills, and positively influencing academic per-

formance in other disciplines, such as mathematics and languages. Music plays a crucial role in the development of a wide range of cognitive and personal skills that extend far beyond the artistic domain.

Based on these perspectives, it is evident that music is not only an artistic endeavour but also a vehicle for social, ethical, and cognitive development. Wölfl (2019) highlights the use of music, particularly group drumming, to prevent violence in middle schools in Germany, reporting increased empathy and positive social behaviour, improved assertiveness and learning behaviour, and a significant reduction in hostility and readiness to use violence. Similarly, Dos Santos (2019) conducted a phenomenological study on empathy and hostility in group music therapy with South African teenagers, reinforcing the social-emotional potential of music.

In Grades 4–6, learners' values, attitudes, and social behaviours are actively forming, making music an ideal medium for ethical and social learning (Di Paolo & Todino, 2025; Yende, 2024). Practical strategies include songwriting and storytelling, where learners create lyrics reflecting fairness, healthy relationships, and standing against discrimination or harassment (Kim, 2022). Critical listening to indigenous music further promotes empathy, communal responsibility, and ethical behaviour, while collaborative performance provides safe spaces for dialogue and reflection. Integrating music with cross-curricular activities enhances its role as a transformative tool for GBV prevention, equipping learners with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to recognise, resist, and prevent violence.

Empirical Evidence of Music Education as a GBV Prevention Tool in Primary Schools

Empirical evidence shows that music education can effectively support gender-based violence (GBV) prevention in primary schools. Structured music programmes have been found to enhance learners' empathy, social skills, and ethical reasoning, which are essential for challenging harmful gender norms. For example, Wölfl (2019) reported that group drumming in German

schools reduced aggression, increased cooperative behaviour, and fostered empathy. In South Africa, Dos Santos (2019) found that collaborative singing, percussion ensembles, and songwriting workshops improved adolescents' social awareness, peer empathy, and conflict-resolution skills. Songwriting and storytelling in Gauteng primary schools also promoted fairness, respect, and anti-bullying awareness, with learners reporting greater confidence in challenging discrimination (Kim, 2022). Critical listening to indigenous music further nurtures communal responsibility and reflection on ethical dilemmas (Izu, 2025; De Villiers & Oellermann, 2024). Collectively, these practices demonstrate that participatory music-making in Grades 4–6 CAPS Creative Arts can cultivate values, ethical awareness, and gender-transformative learning.

Discussion of findings

This article has argued that music education within Grades 4–6 CAPS Creative Arts classrooms serves as a transformative pedagogical tool capable of preventing gender-based violence (GBV) while fostering ethical awareness, social responsibility, and cultural consciousness among learners. It has also highlighted that these classrooms provide a unique environment where expressive, participatory, and reflective activities nurture values formation, empathy, and moral reasoning from an early age. Exploring the intersections of social, ethical, and cultural dimensions in music education reveals how primary schools can contribute to gender-transformative learning and complement Life Orientation curricula and other GBV-prevention strategies.

The findings of this article indicate that music education enables learners to critically engage with social norms, relational ethics, and gendered power structures. Consistent with previous research (Crooke et al., 2023; De Villiers and Oellermann, 2024), the current study shows that participatory music-making through activities such as songwriting, storytelling, performance, and listening cultivates empathy, reflection, and ethical awareness among learners. Educational spaces focused on arts-based ap-

proaches promote dialogue, collective reflection, and the interrogation of dominant social narratives, which are central to preventing harmful gender norms (de Carvalho, 2025). These findings align with Beagle (2021) and Fraser (2025), who emphasise that creative arts deepen learners' affective, relational, and moral capacities, contributing to social cohesion and ethical engagement.

Scholars such as Ma and Guntu (2025) argue that music education supports emotional expression, artistic identity, and overall well-being, showing that ethical engagement is an integral aspect of aesthetic learning. The current article also shows that incorporating collaborative and reflective music activities allows learners to develop essential skills for recognising inequality, resisting aggression, and fostering equitable social relations. This finding corroborates Wölfl (2019), who reported that group drumming interventions in German schools reduced aggression, increased empathy, and improved cooperative behaviour, demonstrating the potential of participatory music practices to influence social-emotional development.

A framework of analysis informed by the central tenets of Yosso and Solórzano's (2005, pp. 121–22) Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) guided this study. It examined how structural, social, and institutional factors intersect with primary school pedagogical practices. The article reveals that music education operates within a socio-cultural and historical context, where learners' experiences, cultural identities, and communal values influence the development of ethical reasoning and social responsibility. This framework highlights the significance of lived experiences, relational knowledge, and communal memory in addressing systemic inequities, including those related to gender-based violence.

The approach and analysis in the article were informed by a nexus that gradually emerged from the need for culturally responsive pedagogy in South African schools. Cumulatively, the study demonstrates that indigenous music practices transmit cultural values, relational ethics, and collective accountability. Grounded in the phi-

losophy of Ubuntu, which emphasises interconnectedness, mutual respect, and ethical responsibility, indigenous music helps learners interrogate hierarchical gender norms while affirming cultural identity (Hess, 2015; Izu, 2025). Integrating indigenous musical practices into CAPS Creative Arts classrooms allows learners to engage with ethical dilemmas, reflect on relational responsibilities, and develop awareness of communal values. These findings align with Chisa and Ngulube (2017) and Isabirye (2021), who show that indigenous performance, oral traditions, and storytelling are powerful educational tools for social justice and moral instruction.

The results of this article reveal that CAPS Creative Arts learning outcomes provide significant opportunities for GBV prevention, yet these are often underutilised. Life Orientation has traditionally carried the responsibility for GBV education, but music education offers complementary possibilities. Learners' engagement with participation, creativity, collaboration, and reflective practice within music classrooms aligns with preventive and values-based pedagogies (Department of Basic Education, 2011; De Villiers and Oellermann, 2024). Mphuti (2024) similarly highlights that interdisciplinary approaches enhance learners' capacity to form healthy relationships, resolve conflicts, and express themselves in socially responsible ways.

Practical applications of music education, as shown in the current study, further illustrate its potential for GBV prevention. Activities such as songwriting, storytelling, collaborative performance, and critical listening to indigenous music promote fairness, empathy, respect, and ethical reflection. This finding corroborates Kim (2022) and Dos Santos (2019), who reported that music-based interventions improve social awareness, peer empathy, and conflict-resolution skills among learners. Grades 4–6 CAPS Creative Arts classrooms therefore emerge as spaces where learners develop musical skills alongside social and ethical competencies necessary to recognise, resist, and prevent violence. The article establishes that music education in primary school contexts is a dynamic, culturally responsive, and ethically grounded site for GBV

prevention. It complements theoretical frameworks such as CRT and IKS by foregrounding learners' lived experiences, the transmission of cultural knowledge, and the ethical dimensions of education. The findings underscore the transformative potential of music education in fostering gender equity, social responsibility, and ethical awareness from an early age. Systematic integration of music pedagogy with values-based and culturally informed practices enables South African primary schools to cultivate socially conscious, empowered, and ethically aware citizens, contributing to the long-term prevention of gender-based violence.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that South African schools actively integrate GBV prevention within Grades 4–6 CAPS Creative Arts (Music). Teachers should receive professional development and training on arts-based pedagogies that foreground ethical reasoning, values formation, and gender-transformative learning. Indigenous musical practices should be deliberately incorporated to affirm learners' cultural identities, promote relational ethics, and challenge harmful gender norms (Izu, 2025; Chisa & Ngulube, 2017). Curriculum developers should explore interdisciplinary strategies, linking Life Orientation content with Creative Arts, to provide holistic, participatory, and reflective learning experiences. Schools and policymakers are encouraged to create supportive environments that enable learners to express emotions, engage in dialogue, and critically examine social inequalities through music (De Villiers & Oellermann, 2024; Fraser, 2025). Finally, further research should explore long-term impacts of music-based GBV interventions, including learner attitudes, ethical awareness, and social cohesion within primary school contexts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study establishes that music education within Grades 4–6 Creative Arts classrooms offers a transformative avenue for preventing gender-based violence while fostering ethical awareness, empathy, and relational

responsibility among young learners. Music functions not only as a medium for artistic and technical skill but also as a platform for critical reflection, dialogue, and values formation. Through activities such as listening, performance, songwriting, and creative composition, learners can explore emotions, relationships, and social dynamics, cultivating an understanding of fairness, respect, and equality.

A key insight of this study is the role of indigenous musical practices in promoting gender-transformative learning. These practices embed cultural values, communal responsibility, and ethical reasoning, enabling learners to affirm their identities while challenging harmful social norms. Structured classroom activities that emphasise collaboration, creativity, and participation transform music lessons into spaces where learners actively negotiate social meanings and internalise equitable values.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) further enhances the potential of music education for GBV prevention by making visible systemic inequalities that shape gender norms and power relations. Applying CRT in primary classrooms enables educators to guide learners in critically analysing songs, cultural narratives, and peer interactions, amplifying the voices of marginalized students and fostering inclusive, ethical dialogue. When combined with principles of Ubuntu, these practices encourage empathy, communal accountability, and the responsible negotiation of social conflicts.

Ultimately, embedding GBV prevention strategies in Grades 4–6 Creative Arts classrooms positions music as a culturally responsive, ethically grounded, and socially transformative tool. Beyond artistic skill development, music education can cultivate socially aware learners equipped to recognise, resist, and prevent GBV, promoting gender equity, moral reasoning, and social justice from an early age. This study underscores the untapped potential of music as a proactive instrument for nurturing a generation of ethically conscious and socially responsible citizens.

References

- African Union. (2015). *Agenda 2063: The Africa we want* (Popular version). https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36204-doc-agenda2063_popular_version_en.pdf
- Bell, D. (2004). *Silent covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the unfulfilled hopes for racial reform*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press
- Chisa, K. D., & Ngulube, P. (2017). Indigenous music goes digital: Reconciling culture and the law. *Mousaion: south african journal of information studies*, 35(4), 17-pages. <https://doi.org/10.25159/0027-2639/2462>
- Cook, D., & Dixon, A. (2013). Writing critical race theory and method: A composite counterstory on the experiences of black teachers in New Orleans post-Katrina. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(10), 1238–1258. doi:10.1080/09518398.2012.731531.
- Crenshaw, K. W. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine (pp. 139–168). In *University of Chicago legal forum* (Vol. 1).
- Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (Eds.). (1995). *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. New York, NY: New Press
- Crooke, A. H. D., Thompson, W. F., Fraser, T., & Davidson, J. (2023). Music, social cohesion, and intercultural understanding: A conceptual framework for intercultural music engagement. *Musicae Scientiae*, 28(1), 18-38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10298649231157099> (Original work published 2024)
- de Carvalho, T. (2025). 'Beyond theory: arts-based practices and cultural ethos for transformative eco-social learning'. *International Journal of Social Pedagogy*, 14(1): 7. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ijsp.2025.v14.x.007>.
- De Villiers, R., & Oellermann, E. (2024). Social justice in community music and music education: Praxial musicking. *Journal of Education (University of KwaZulu-Natal)*, (94), 84-105.
- Department of Basic Education (DBE). (2011b). *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS): Creative Arts*. Pretoria: DBE. <https://www.thutong.doe.gov.za/ResourceDownload.aspx?id=43250>.
- Di Paolo, A., & Todino, M. D. (2025). Inclusive Music Education in the Digital Age: The Role of Technology and Edugames in Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs. *Encyclopedia*, 5(3), 102. <https://doi.org/10.3390/encyclopedia5030102>
- Dos Santos, A. (2019). Empathy and aggression in group music therapy with teenagers: A descriptive phenomenological study. *Music Therapy Perspectives*, 37(1), 14–27. <https://doi.org/10.1093/mtp/miy024>
- Dlungwane, A. D., & Hamlall, V. (2024). Implicit gender-based violence by boys against high school girls in South African township schools. *Perspectives in Education*, 42(1), 98-112. <https://doi.org/10.38140/pie.v42i1.7186>
- Enaifoghe, A., Dlelana, M., Durokifa, A. A., & Dlamini, N. P. (2021). The prevalence of gender-based violence against women in South Africa: A call for action. *African Journal of Gender, Society and Development*, 10(1), 121–150. <https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-3622/2021/v10n1a6>
- Fraser, J. D. (2025). "It's Just Drilling the Skills for That Performance": Music Educators, Social Justice, and the Performance Paradigm. *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/87551233251395680>
- Gil, C. (2011, December 15). *Music education and violence prevention with children and youth: Enhancing individual agency for social transformation?*. *Conflict, Reconstruction and Human Security (CRS)*. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2105/10796>
- Gough, D., Oliver, S., & Thomas, J. (2012). *An introduction to systematic reviews*. London: SAGE Publications. <https://www.torrossa.com/en/resources/an/5019303>
- Gwiza, M., & Hendricks, E. A. (2025). Unpacking dynamics: A systematic literature review on gender-

- based violence, its cultural and structural influences in South African universities. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Sociality Studies*, 5(2), a02. <https://doi.org/10.38140/ijss-2025.vol5.2.02>
- Ham-Baloyi, W. & Jordan, P. (2016). Systematic review as a research method in post-graduate nursing education. *Health SA Gesondheid* 21: 120–28. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hsag.v21i0.942>
- Hess, J. (2015). Decolonizing music education: Moving beyond tokenism. *International Journal of Music Education*, 33(3), 336–347. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761415581283> (Original work published 2015)
- Isabirye, J. (2021). Can indigenous music learning processes inform contemporary schooling? *International Journal of Music Education*, 39(2), 151–166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761421996373>
- Izu, B. (2025). Policy Gaps and Opportunities for Integrating Indigenous Music into South African Higher Education Curricula. *International Journal of Educational Development in Africa*, 20–pages. <https://doi.org/10.25159/2312-3540/19611>
- Kaur, G. (2024, September). *Indigenous performance: Folk, traditional and rituals*. *International Journal of Innovative Research in Technology (IJIRT)*, 11(4), 1361. https://ijirt.org/publishedpaper/IJIRT168116_PAPER.pdf
- Kim, Y. J. (2022, December 3). *Music and the mobilization of nonviolence: Conflict skills/peacemaking facilitation activity*. Peace Learner. <https://peacelearner.org/2022/12/03/music-and-the-mobilization-of-nonviolence-conflict-skills-peacemaking-facilitation-activity/>
- King, W. R., & He, J. (2005). Understanding the role and methods of meta-analysis in IS research. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, 16(1), 1–36. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2006.05.003>
- Kuwor, S. K. (2025). Holistic nature of African music and its role in education and development. *Journal of Arts & Humanities Studies*, 1(3), 38–44.
- Loken, M., & Hagen, J. J. (2022). Queering gender-based violence scholarship: An integrated research agenda. *International Studies Review*, 24(4), 1013. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viac050>
- Ma, M., & Guntu, M.A.D. (2025). The Role of Music Education in Fostering Emotional and Musical Expression of Learners: A Review. *International Journal of Education and Humanities*, 21(1), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.54097/254mjz25>
- MacAulay, M., Ybarra, M. L., Saewyc, E. M., Sullivan, T. R., Jackson, L. A., & Millar, S. (2022). ‘They talked completely about straight couples only’: schooling, sexual violence and sexual and gender minority youth. *Sex Education*, 22(3), 275–288.
- McCarthy, M. (2016). Understanding social justice from the perspective of music education history. In C. Benedict et al. (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of social justice in music education*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199356157.013.1>
- Mhlauli, N. C., & Fikelepi-Twani, Z. (2024). Teachers’ perceptions on incorporating indigenous knowledge into creative arts teaching and learning methods in selected South African schools. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 23(5).
- Mphuthi, M. (2024). The role of the life orientation curriculum in curbing learner behaviour that triggers school violence. *Perspectives in Education*, 42(1), 53–70.
- Mutinta, G. (2022). Gender-based violence among female students and implications for health intervention programs in public universities in Eastern Cape, South Africa. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 8(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2079212>
- Ndlovu, W., Obadire, O., Nyalungu, P., & Mashifane, D. (2020). Demystifying femicide in higher education institutions in South Africa. *Gender and Behaviour*, 18(1), 15118–15135
- Paré, G., Trudel, M.-C., Jaana, M., & Kitsiou, S. (2015). Synthesizing information systems knowledge: A typology of literature reviews. *Information & Management*, 52(2), 183–199. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2014.08.008>
- Rasalanavho, K. L. (2016). *Exploring the original creative arts production of grade 2 and 3 learners in contemporary cultural practices*. University of Pretoria (South Africa).

- Sardinha, L., Maheu-Giroux, M., Stöckl, H., Meyer, S. R., & García-Moreno, C. (2022). Global, regional, and national prevalence estimates of physical or sexual, or both, intimate partner violence against women in 2018. *The Lancet*, 399(10327), 803-813.
- Sida (March, 2015). Gender Based Violence and Education. <https://cdn.sida.se/publications/files/-gender-based-violence-and-education.pdf>
- Thobane, M., Artz, L., & Ngubane, M. (2023). Educators' perceptions of school-related gender based violence: a case study of four schools in Mbombela and Emalahleni, Mpumalanga. https://health.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/media/documents/health_uct_ac_za/806/Mpumalanga%20MNSP_%20Research%20Report_FINAL_8June2023.pdf
- UN Women. (2022). *Gender-related killings of women and girls (femicide/feminicide)*. UN Women. <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/Gender-related-killings-of-women-and-girls-improving-data-to-improve-responses-to-femicide-feminicide-en.pdf>
- UNESCO. (2018). *School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV): A human rights violation and a threat to inclusive and equitable quality education for all*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374509>
- USAID. (2017). *USAID South Africa school-based sexuality and HIV prevention education activity: Conceptualizing response to gender-based violence in school*. https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00Z5HW.pdf
- Wöfl, A. (2019). Prevention of violence through music; Empirical impact analysis of a music therapy model project. *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy*, 28(5), 363–381. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08098131.2019.1606847>
- Yende, S. J. (2022). A critical discourse analysis of the influence of contemporary hip-hop music video on gender-based violence. *African Journal of Gender, Society & Development*, 11(2), 31. <https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-3622/2022/v11n2a2>
- Yende, S.J. (2024). Cultural-Historical Activity Theory in Examining Creative Arts as an Anti-Bullying Strategy in South African Public Schools. *system*, 12(1), 31-44. <https://doi.org/10.30958/ajha.12-1-5>
- Yende, N. E., & Yende, S. J. (2022). Zuma's Outcry of Betrayal: A Content Analysis of "Sengimanxebanxeba Zinsizwa", 2005-2018. *African Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies*, 11(2), 101. <https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-3665/2022/v11n2a6>
- Yosso, Tara J., and Daniel G. Solórzano. (2005). Conceptualizing a critical race theory in sociology. In *The Blackwell Companion to Social Inequalities*. Hoboken: Wiley, pp. 117–46. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470996973.ch7>

SKILLS THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL HACKATHON ENGAGEMENT

Mzweleni Fundani Mthethwa

*Department of Economics,
University of Zululand, 24 Main Road,
KwaDlangezwa, King Cetshwayo 3886,
South Africa*

Unathi Kolanisi

*Department of Consumer Science,
University of Zululand, 24 Main Road,
KwaDlangezwa, King Cetshwayo 3886,
South Africa*

Thandeka Nontokozi Mnisi

*Department of Student Services,
University of Zululand, 24 Main Road,
KwaDlangezwa, King Cetshwayo 3886,
South Africa*

Nokubonga Ngwane

*Department of Consumer Science,
University of Zululand, 24 Main Road,
KwaDlangezwa, King Cetshwayo 3886,
South Africa*

Denver Naidoo

*African Centre for Food Security,
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Private Bag X01,
Pietermaritzburg 3201,
South Africa*

ABSTRACT

This study reflects on the pedagogical use of hackathons as epistemic and transformative learning environments for cultivating entrepreneurial leadership competencies among students. Positioned as core learning methodologies rather than peripheral activities, hackathons were designed to immerse students in complex, real-world problem spaces requiring critical inquiry, creativity, and collaboration. Within these experiential ecosystems, students engaged in reflective and iterative processes to construct their own understanding of the problems presented and to formulate innovative, contextually relevant solutions. The reflective engagement facilitated the development of key transformative competencies, including systems thinking, ethical reasoning, resilience, adaptive problem-solving, and collaborative leadership. The findings underscore that when hackathons are intentionally integrated into the curriculum as structured epistemic tools, they transcend their conventional use as innovation events and become powerful pedagogical platforms for fostering transformative entrepreneurial leadership in higher education contexts.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial Leadership, Transformative Pedagogy, Hackathons and Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy*

1. Background and Introduction

Entrepreneurship is widely acknowledged as a principal catalyst for global economic expansion, employment generation, and innovation (Audretsch, 2012; World Economic Forum, 2025). In higher education, the cultivation of entrepreneurial leadership (EL) is not only a pedagogical imperative but also a strategic necessity for equipping graduates to navigate volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) socio-economic environments (Neck et al., 2014; Navarro et al., 2022). Entrepreneurial leadership education transcends conventional business acumen, incorporating a spectrum of dynamic competencies vital for relevance in the 21st century. These competencies encompass, but are not confined to, opportunity recognition, systems thinking, resilience, ethical decision-making, resource mobilization, creative problem-solving, and adaptive leadership (Gupta et al., 2004; Man, Lau & Chan, 2002). Such competencies are not merely technical or operational; they are deeply rooted in cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects, encompassing both self-regulation and relational intelligence. For instance, opportunity recognition requires cognitive alertness and pattern recognition, while resilience and adaptability demand emotional regulation and persistence in the face of uncertainty (Sánchez, 2013). Additionally, complementary thinking, strategic thinking, and innovation depend on the ability to critically assess environments, engage in foresight, and collaboratively create novel solutions through interdisciplinary collaboration. These competencies empower graduates to act as agents of systemic change across diverse sectors.

Furthermore, the cultivation of entrepreneurial competencies in higher education aligns with the developmental philosophy of learning that prioritises *lifelong learning, self-efficacy, and social embeddedness* (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015). It integrates **formal curricula** through (experi-

ential learning, simulations, project-based assessments) and **informal learning environments** such as student enterprises, innovation hubs, and community engagement platforms. Institutions that adopt *entrepreneurial pedagogies* create learning ecosystems in which students are not passive recipients of knowledge but are co-constructors of their developmental journeys (Ratten, 2019). Entrepreneurial leadership thus becomes a vehicle for *inclusive development and social transformation*, equipping graduates not just to participate in the economy but to reimagine and reshape it (EDHE, 2024; Raman et al., 2025).

However, universities, particularly those in resource-constrained settings such as those in the rural areas, face significant challenges in effectively cultivating entrepreneurial leadership attributes (Nabi et al., 2017). Structural limitations, including weak institutional leadership, outdated curricula, and limited access to experiential learning opportunities, continue to undermine students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy and their capacity for real-world problem-solving (Kirkwood, 2009; Fayolle & Gailly, 2015). This challenge is especially pronounced in South Africa, where youth unemployment stands at 46.1% overall and exceeds 62% among individuals aged 15–24, further exacerbated by high university dropout rates (Statistics South Africa, 2025). Despite the growing emphasis on entrepreneurial leadership (EL) development within higher education, as encouraged by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), many universities, particularly those in under-resourced contexts, continue to struggle with building students' entrepreneurial competencies and leadership capabilities. The core issue lies in the persistent reliance on traditional pedagogical approaches, which inadequately foster entrepreneurial self-efficacy, opportunity recognition, and proactive innovation (EDHE,

2024). This gap restricts students' ability to navigate complex socioeconomic environments and diminishes their potential to become transformative leaders and innovators. Therefore, entrepreneurship education must be reimagined as an active learning process that fosters adaptive competencies alongside business and leadership skills (Mico & Cungu, 2023). Higher education institutions in rural communities, in particular, urgently need to reconceptualise entrepreneurship education as a dynamic, inclusive, and leadership-oriented process that incorporates experiential learning strategies, such as hackathons. Without this recalibration, students will remain ill-equipped to address real-world challenges, perpetuating cycles of limited innovation and hindering socioeconomic development.

If this issue is not addressed, universities will encounter significant challenges in producing entrepreneurial graduates with the flexible skills essential for inclusive growth. This situation will adversely affect the broader innovation ecosystem that is critical for long-term development. The concerning first-year dropout rates, which hover around 60%, underscore the urgency of reforming the education system to not only retain students but also equip them with the skills and mindset necessary to thrive in the contemporary economy.

This study introduces Transformative Entrepreneurial Leadership Pedagogy (TELP) as a systems-oriented, praxis-driven methodology that employs hackathons as dynamic experiential learning platforms (Briscoe & Mulligan, 2014; Ranieri et al., 2020) in response to these challenges. Hackathons simulate complex real-world problems and promote rapid collaboration, design thinking, digital literacy, and resilience (Komssi et al., 2015; Szymanska et al., 2020). When integrated into curriculum-linked innovation cycles and supported by mentorship and reflective practices, hackathons can enhance entrepreneurial self-efficacy and the capacity to identify opportunities, particularly when there is robust leadership from the institution (EDHE,

2024).

TELP provides a scalable and inclusive framework for entrepreneurship education that aligns with the nation's broader developmental objectives (Ebewo et al., 2025). This study highlights the urgent need for rural universities to realign their leadership and pedagogical strategies to cultivate entrepreneurial graduates capable of promoting innovation and inclusive growth within complex socioeconomic contexts.

2. Methodology

This case study employed a qualitative research approach to explore a university-led hackathon held in a rural South African context focused on developing sustainable agri-tech solutions. The research design was embedded in a participatory and collaborative framework where student teams worked directly with local stakeholders over the course of the hackathon event.

The methodology involved several key phases aligned with Transformative Experiential Learning Pedagogy (TELP) competencies (Mezirow, 1997; Dirkx, 2001):

- Students began by mapping out local agricultural and socio-ecological systems to understand the context and identify critical bottlenecks impeding sustainable innovation. This systems orientation enabled holistic problem framing (Kolb, 1984; Sterling, 2011).
- Following system mapping, teams engaged closely with community members and stakeholders to discern innovation opportunities within the mapped local systems, demonstrating ethical reasoning and responsiveness to contextual realities (Cranton, 2006; Boyd & Myers, 1988).
- Co-creation was central; students collaborated with community participants to develop and prototype integrated agri-tech solutions that address identified challenges. This process highlighted adaptive leadership and resilience in

navigating complex social-technical challenges (Mezirow, 2000; O'Sullivan, 2009).

- The hackathon culminated in student presentations of scalable and integrated solutions designed for sustained local impact.

Data collection consisted of observations of student activities, analysis of artifacts including system maps and prototypes, and reflective presentations documenting processes and learning. This case study method provided an in-depth understanding of hackathons as experiential learning platforms fostering sustainable innovation competencies in rural development contexts (Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1997; Sterling, 2011).

This approach demonstrates the pedagogical effectiveness of hackathons in building student capabilities to collaboratively innovate with communities on contextually relevant sustainability challenges (Cranton, 2006; O'Sullivan, 2009).

3. Theoretical underpinnings of entrepreneurial leadership development in higher education

This study conceptualises entrepreneurial leadership development in higher education through an integrated theoretical framework that emphasises its cognitive, behavioural, and leadership dimensions, critical for equipping students in rural and resource-limited university settings where systemic constraints can inhibit skills development. To address these challenges, the study applies a theory triangulation model combining Social Cognitive Theory (SCT; Bandura, 1986), the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB; Ajzen, 1991), and Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT; Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Social Cognitive Theory elucidates how entrepreneurial self-efficacy develops through observation, modelling, and social reinforcement, of-

fering insights into how students build confidence in their entrepreneurial capabilities within higher education (Bandura, 1986). Transformational Leadership Theory explains how leaders inspire and motivate peers to innovate and adapt, underscoring the importance of leadership behaviours that foster change and collective growth (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The inclusion of the Theory of Planned Behaviour complements these by focusing on the formation of entrepreneurial intentions shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, critical in understanding how students' entrepreneurial actions are influenced by both internal dispositions and external social pressures (Ajzen, 1991).

Together, these theories intersect to provide a robust, multidimensional framework that captures the cognitive foundations (self-efficacy and intention from SCT and TPB), the behavioural mechanisms (planned behaviours leading to entrepreneurial action), and leadership dynamics (transformational leadership fostering adaptability and innovation). This theoretical synergy explains not only how entrepreneurial intentions form and translate into behaviour but also how leadership capacities can be developed to sustain entrepreneurial learning and action, particularly in resource-constrained rural university contexts where adaptive leadership is vital.

The integrated framework, as summarized in Table 1, is employed to guide curriculum design that intentionally cultivates entrepreneurial leadership competencies by embedding experiential learning, fostering supportive institutional cultures, and promoting strategic engagement with local communities. This approach supports inclusive innovation by equipping students with the cognitive preparedness, intentionality, and adaptive leadership necessary to navigate systemic barriers and contribute meaningfully to rural development through entrepreneurial endeavours.

Table 1: Theoretical analysis for entrepreneurial leadership development in higher education

Theory	Key Constructs	Relevance to Entrepreneurial Leadership Development in Higher Education
Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986)	- Self-efficacy - Reciprocal determinism (interaction of personal, behavioural, environmental factors) - Observational learning	- Builds students' confidence in identifying opportunities and overcoming challenges (self-efficacy) - Emphasises experiential learning and mentorship to compensate for the lack of role models in rural/under-resourced universities - Encourages resilience and proactive behaviour
Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991)	- Attitudes toward behaviour - Subjective norms - Perceived behavioural control	- Explains how students form entrepreneurial intentions based on attitudes, social pressures, and perceived ability - Highlights the importance of networks and institutional support to increase perceived behavioural control, especially where resources are scarce
Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006)	- Inspirational motivation - Intellectual stimulation - Individualised consideration	- Leadership at institutional and pedagogical levels inspires innovation and risk-taking - Creates an enabling environment that fosters entrepreneurial competencies and inclusion

As presented in Table 1 above, these theories, while distinct in focus, converge around the ontological assertion that entrepreneurial behaviour is not merely the manifestation of inherent dispositions but rather an emergent outcome of intentional, context-responsive pedagogical interventions and leadership ecologies that shape students' beliefs, motivations, and actions. For example, SCT emphasises the centrality of self-efficacy and the belief in one's capacity to perform entrepreneurial tasks as a foundational precursor to sustained entrepreneurial engagement

(Bandura, 1997; Zhao, Seibert & Hills, 2005).

In tandem, the Theory posits that entrepreneurial intention is constructed through the interplay of attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991; Liñán & Chen, 2009). Complementary to this, TLT plays a critical role in entrepreneurship by shaping the nature and identity of the entrepreneur as a *change agent*. Transformational leaders inspire, intellectually stimulate, and provide individualised support to their followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). TLT emphasises vision, inspiration, individualised support, and intellectual stimulation, which are core to entrepreneurial actions. TLT views entrepreneurs not just as business creators but also as

transformative leaders who challenge the status quo, mobilise others around a shared vision, and drive innovation in response to complex societal challenges. Against this backdrop, the role of TLT becomes particularly salient in enabling institutional cultures and educator behaviours that support entrepreneurial learning. Within the educational sphere, such leadership becomes a lever for pedagogical innovation, fostering learning environments where students are empowered to take risks, disrupt conventional paradigms, and engage in co-creation, all of which are critical dimensions of entrepreneurial activity (Gupta, MacMillan & Surie, 2004; Kuratko, 2005). Empirical studies have shown that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and entrepreneurial intention, confirming a natural convergence among the three theories (Boukamcha, 2015; Sánchez, 2013). Moreover, entrepreneurial universities that adopt transformational leadership philosophies tend to develop ecosystems that enhance perceived behavioural control through access to professional networks, community-engaged projects, and entrepreneurial role models (Ratten, 2019). These environments are especially critical within rural and under-resourced institutions, where the conventional architecture of academia may be ill-equipped to nurture entrepreneurial capacity or catalyse upward mobility (EDHE, 2024). Through this lens, entrepreneurship becomes a value-driven, leadership-oriented process that fosters resilience, opportunity recognition, and sustainable impact, moving beyond profit generation to create meaningful and systemic change.

3.1. Philosophical and Critical Analysis of TELP as a framework for entrepreneurship leadership

The TELP emerged as a necessary epistemological and pedagogical evolution in an era marked by systemic uncertainty, rapid socio-economic change, and increasingly complex development challenges. Rooted in praxis, the dialectic of reflection and action (Freire, 1970). TELP rejects transactional, skills-only educational models in

favour of a pedagogy that develops entrepreneurial leaders as systems thinkers, ethical agents, and socially responsive innovators. It challenges the legacy of linear, mechanistic models of entrepreneurship education that prioritise market efficiency and individual success while neglecting broader ethical, ecological, and cultural dimensions of entrepreneurial practice (Neck & Greene, 2011; Fayolle & Redford, 2014). Moreover, it serves as both a strategy for individual student empowerment and a vehicle for systemic transformation.

3.2. Exploring Leadership Through Four Dimensions: The TELP Lenses for Transformative Entrepreneurial Education

3.2.1. The Business Education Lens

From a business education perspective, the Transformational Entrepreneurial Learning Process (TELP) critiques the excessive emphasis on technocratic competencies and advocates for a comprehensive, value-oriented approach to entrepreneurial development. It recognises that contemporary entrepreneurial leaders operate within unstable, interconnected contexts where resilience, ethical discernment, and strategic empathy are as essential as innovation and competitiveness (Kuratko & Morris, 2018). Consequently, business curricula must transcend traditional performance metrics to incorporate critical reflexivity, adaptive learning, and relational intelligence skills, which are rarely systematically developed in conventional entrepreneurship education (Cope, 2005; Cunliffe, 2009). In the domain of entrepreneurship theory, TELP aligns with contemporary paradigms such as effectuation (Sarasvathy, 2001), transformational entrepreneurship (Galloway et al., 2015), and entrepreneurial bricolage (Baker & Nelson, 2005). These perspectives view students not merely as economic participants but as collaborative value creators within dynamic, resource-constrained contexts. TELP focuses on the engaged, learning entrepreneur, who is capable of navigating uncertainty through dialogical leadership, iterative methodologies, and contextual innovation (Fayolle, 2013). Therefore, business

curricula must extend beyond traditional performance metrics to encompass critical reflexivity, adaptive learning, and relational intelligence skills that are seldom addressed in conventional entrepreneurship courses.

This perspective provides students with cognitive tools to assess markets, mobilise resources, formulate viable business models, and manage innovation within dynamic environments. However, TELP extends beyond conventional business school logic by embedding *social purpose and contextual intelligence* into how value is understood and pursued. In hackathon settings, students apply these capabilities in real time, iterating strategies under pressure and learning to balance profitability with socio-ecological imperatives.

3.2.2. Education entrepreneurship theory lens

In educational philosophy, TELP draws from critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) and transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2018), asserting that students must not only acquire knowledge but also become critically aware of how knowledge is produced, whose interests it serves, and how it can be transformed. Within entrepreneurship theory, TELP aligns with effectuation, transformational entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurial bricolage, in that it positions students not merely as economic actors but as co-creators of value within their social and environmental ecosystems. It shifts the focus from the heroic, opportunity-exploiting entrepreneur toward the engaged, learning entrepreneur, who navigates uncertainty through dialogical leadership, iteration, and community engagement. Here, leadership is not about control or direction, but about enabling collective agency, challenging inequities, and mobilising diverse knowledge for innovation that matters.

The entrepreneurship education lens offers TELP its pedagogical core: *experiential learning, entrepreneurial mindset cultivation, and identity formation*. Entrepreneurship is taught

not only as a discipline but also as a **practice of** developing agency, resilience, creativity, and ethical judgment. Hackathons play a catalytic role in this lens by providing immersive environments in which students engage in collective problem solving, practice leadership, confront failure, and reframe learning as iterative growth. The emphasis shifts from business plan writing to *entrepreneurial activities, sensing, and reflecting*, all of which are key to competency development.

3.2.3. The developmental lens

From a developmental standpoint, particularly within the postcolonial and under-resourced contexts of the Global South, the Transformative Entrepreneurship Learning Programme (TELP) offers a paradigm shift away from dominant, hegemonic models of education and development that have historically reproduced inequality and dependency. Conventional models of entrepreneurship education often emphasise universalised, Western-centric competencies, such as opportunity recognition, business planning, and innovation, without sufficiently accounting for contextual complexity, institutional thinness, and cultural heterogeneity (Welter et al., 2017). TELP critiques these approaches as inadequate, and potentially counterproductive, for cultivating leaders capable of locally grounded innovation, social inclusion, and adaptive resilience.

TELP presents an endogenous, inclusive, and liberatory framework that prioritises knowledge production grounded in lived experiences, indigenous wisdom, and grassroots participation. In this context, endogeneity does not imply isolationism; rather, it emphasises the collaborative generation of entrepreneurial knowledge and solutions within communities. Consequently, it critiques decades of externally imposed development paradigms predicated on top-down technocratic rationality (Wilson, 2006; Escobar, 2012). By adopting this approach, TELP positions students as active participants in shaping their own developmental narratives, rather than as passive recipients of entrepreneurial "best

practices." Furthermore, they are empowered to address systemic issues such as institutional gaps, youth marginalisation, and ecological instability (Khavul & Bruton, 2013).

Critically, TELP redefines entrepreneurial leadership not merely as the capacity to innovate or manage ventures, but as a relational, value-driven, and politically aware praxis. It advocates for the cultivation of leaders who can mediate across fragmented social realities, mobilise community assets, and interrogate the structural roots of underdevelopment, poverty, exclusion, gendered inequities, and land dispossession, rather than merely navigating around these issues (Roomi & Harrison, 2011; Dana et al., 2021). This perspective aligns with the concept of transformational entrepreneurship, which aims not only for economic impacts but also for societal transformation, particularly through inclusive growth and social justice (Galloway et al., 2015; Shepherd & Patzelt, 2017).

Through this lens, TELP enables learners to perceive themselves as emancipatory agents capable of shaping endogenous development pathways. Hackathons that focus on local challenges, such as food insecurity, climate resilience, or youth unemployment, facilitate developmentally relevant entrepreneurship education that transcends individualistic or donor-driven paradigms. Furthermore, from a developmental evaluation perspective, the success of TELP should be assessed ecologically, not solely at the level of individual learning outcomes but also in terms of community-level impact, policy influence, and institutional transformation. This necessitates collaboration with stakeholders beyond academic NGOs, government agencies, youth networks, and local enterprises to ensure the validity, transferability, and scalability of TELP interventions.

3.2.4. Scientific Lens on TELP

From a scientific perspective, TELP necessitates both theoretical complexity and methodo-

logical innovation to underpin its practice-oriented objectives with rigorous investigation. At its core, TELP integrates the constructivist, transformative, and critical realist frameworks of knowledge production, conceptualising learning as socially constructed, historically contextualised, and politically influenced. This ontological perspective challenges the positivist inclinations prevalent in conventional entrepreneurship education research, which often prioritises linear causality, decontextualised metrics, and simplistic behavioural models (Sanze et al., 2025; Fayolle & Toutain, 2013).

TELP enhances the epistemology of emergence and complexity by framing entrepreneurial leadership not as a static competency but as a dynamic relational phenomenon influenced by interactions among learners, ecosystems, and systems of power. This viewpoint aligns with complex adaptive systems theory (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018) and developmental evaluation frameworks (Drossman, 2022), which prioritise nonlinearity, feedback loops, and reflexive learning over rudimentary input-output models. Students in TELP are not merely acquiring new skills; they are collaboratively developing adaptive skills that will enable them to navigate real-world changes such as economic shocks, climate change, food insecurity, and political instability.

The design of TELP requires a transdisciplinary research approach that amalgamates techniques from design thinking, participatory action research (PAR), experiential learning theory, and critical pedagogy. TELP also identifies a methodological gap in current research on entrepreneurship education: there are no measurement tools or assessment rubrics capable of evaluating deeper, transformative outcomes such as changes in identity, awareness of systems, and civic orientation. Conventional metrics (e.g., venture creation, pitch scores, entrepreneurial intention) inadequately represent the ontological transformation that TELP seeks to foster. To address this issue, TELP research must implement mixed-methods designs that integrate qualitative insights (such as reflective journals,

narrative inquiry, and ethnography) with quantitative proxies (including entrepreneurial self-efficacy, leadership adaptability, and community engagement indices) to establish a more robust empirical foundation (Pittaway & Cope, 2007; Nabi et al., 2017).

In summary, the scientific validity of TELP hinges on its capacity to cultivate a new generation of entrepreneurship education research that is contextually aware, socially informed, and methodologically diverse. It necessitates a shift within the field from static competence models to dynamic developmental frameworks for capability enhancement, guided by complexity theory, critical systems thinking, and participatory science.

3.3. Adoption of Transformative Entrepreneurial Leadership Pedagogy (TELP) as a framework for entrepreneurship leadership and competencies for rural institutions

This study posits that the TELP provides a crucial and timely framework for fostering entrepreneurial leadership and competencies within higher education, particularly in the complex and resource-constrained environments of the Global South. As previously articulated, it extends beyond a mere theoretical construct, functioning as a praxis-oriented response to the deeply entrenched and contextual barriers faced by students in the Global South. In such settings, challenges such as resource scarcity, dysfunctional institutions, inadequate infrastructure, and fragile entrepreneurial ecosystems frequently hinder effective entrepreneurship education.

Philosophically, TELP is grounded in Freirean critical pedagogy, Sen's capabilities approach, and Sarasvathy's effectuation logic. This synthesis prioritises empowerment, ethical agency,

and adaptive action in entrepreneurial learning, rather than merely the acquisition of information. It underscores the notion that students are active agents capable of contributing to the formulation of solutions in ambiguous situations, rather than passive recipients of fixed knowledge. Furthermore, TELP is scientifically substantiated through the integration of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), and Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT). Collectively, these theories elucidate the development of entrepreneurial self-efficacy, intention, and leadership capacity as fundamental drivers of significant and enduring entrepreneurial engagement. SCT highlights the significance of self-efficacy and modelling, TPB clarifies the motivational frameworks that influence behaviour, and TLT situates leadership development within an ethical vision and transformative agency. These four theoretical pillars collaboratively establish a synergistic multidimensional framework that interconnects the cognitive, behavioural, ethical, and systemic dimensions of entrepreneurship education. TELP transcends conventional venture creation frameworks, striving for a comprehensive development of entrepreneurial leaders who are adept at managing complexity, generating lasting impact, and enhancing community resilience.

Importantly, TELP addresses persistent trouble-shooting challenges endemic to many entrepreneurship initiatives in rural-based universities, namely the ***disconnect between investment and outcomes***, the invisibility of entrepreneurial culture, the inadequacy of environmental support, and the fragmentation of pedagogical approaches. Thus, by positioning entrepreneurship as ***transformative leadership grounded in local realities and scientific rigour***, TELP creates space for authentic learning and systemic change (see Table 2).

Table 2: The TELP Unified Framework – Lenses, Competencies, and Troubleshooting Functions

Lens	Key Competencies Cultivated	Troubleshooting Function	What Informs Troubleshooting
1. Business Education	Strategic thinking, business modelling, operational planning, financial literacy, and market analysis	Corrects the shallow vocational training that isolates entrepreneurship from complex value creation and systems design	Poor alignment between entrepreneurship outputs and actual market/system realities; business plans often lack real-world applicability
2. Developmental Thought	Systems thinking, socio-political awareness, ethical leadership, transformative agency, social innovation	Challenging historical, decontextualised pedagogies by localising entrepreneurial learning and addressing power, exclusion, and inequality	Mismatch between entrepreneurship education and the lived realities of students in marginalised and resource-restricted environments
3. Scientific Inquiry	Evidence-based reasoning, problem definition, hypothesis testing, iterative learning, and data literacy	Remedies lack of empirical rigour and teaches learners to validate ideas through inquiry, not assumption	Over-reliance on anecdotal or intuition-based approaches in problem solving and a lack of innovation metrics
4. Entrepreneurship Education	Creative problem-solving, opportunity recognition, entrepreneurial identity, resilience, self-efficacy	Disrupts simulation-heavy and fragmented programs by embedding authentic, experiential learning	Absence of student engagement in real entrepreneurial contexts; entrepreneurship treated as extra-curricular or marginal

4. Hackathon as a didactic tool for TELP

The hackathons are reconceptualised as condensed entrepreneurial ecosystems, providing a practical and scalable approach to operationalising the TELP framework in resource-constrained educational environments. Hackathons represent intensive, time-bound challenges that replicate real-world constraints. They necessitate participants to ideate, prototype, and pivot under pressure, embodying the efficiency, creativity, and resilience essential in under-resourced contexts. In this reframing, hackathons function as enabling platforms through which the four TELP lenses are applied. They afford students the opportunity to develop and enact

entrepreneurial competencies, demonstrate adaptive and ethical leadership, and navigate developmental constraints, such as foregrounding (1) agency, (2) innovation, and (3) resilience. Consequently, hackathons transcend their role as mere pedagogical tools; they emerge as sites of transformation, particularly within resource-restricted institutional settings, where traditional models of entrepreneurship education have frequently failed to produce meaningful or sustainable outcomes (see Table 3 below).

Table 3: Key Functions of Hackathons Within TELP in Resource-Restricted Contexts

TELP Function	Hackathon Activation	Developmental Outcome
Competency Development	Students apply design thinking, financial literacy, research, and problem-solving collaboratively.	Builds adaptive, real-world entrepreneurial capabilities under pressure and uncertainty.
Leadership Formation	Participants must lead teams, make quick ethical decisions, and navigate diverse perspectives.	Develops practical, empathetic, and transformational leadership skills.
Resource Navigation	With minimal inputs (time, tools, funding), students co-create viable solutions.	Reinforces innovation through constraint effectuation, frugal innovation, and resourcefulness.
Systems Thinking	Challenges are framed in real developmental problems (e.g., food insecurity, unemployment, climate adaptation).	Instils systemic, cross-sectoral understanding essential for entrepreneurial leadership in complex settings.

Studies show that even brief hackathons can significantly accelerate skill acquisition in teamwork, problem solving, and design thinking.

Table 4: Hackathons as Enablers in Resource-Constrained Academic Environments

Constraint	Hackathon Function	TELP Lens Activated	Case Example
Limited infrastructure / physical resources	Utilises low-cost, frugal innovation tools; rapid prototyping using everyday materials	Scientific Inquiry / Entrepreneurship Education	<i>LabHack Zimbabwe</i> : Frugal science solutions for lab shortages (Mawonde et al., 2021)
Scarcity of funding and support mechanisms	Encourages collaboration, resource-sharing, and local problem-solving without high budgets	Developmental Thought / Business Education	<i>CAMTech Hackathons</i> : Created AIR device with minimal seed capital in Uganda (CAMTech, 2020)
Fragmented institutional ecosystems	Creates short-term, interdisciplinary innovation communities that simulate functional ecosystems	Business Education / Developmental Thought	<i>MedHack India</i> : Medical student-engineer partnerships for low-resource health innovations
Lack of access to expert mentorship	Brings in local/virtual mentors, allows peer mentoring and emergent leadership roles.	Transformative Leadership / Entrepreneurship Education	<i>African Makers Hackathons</i> : Online mentoring during COVID-19 in digital divide contexts
Time and resource pressure	Simulates real-world entrepreneurial urgency; quick idea-to-action pipelines.	Scientific Inquiry / Business Education	<i>MIT Global Startup Labs (Africa)</i> : Launching ventures in 2 weeks with minimal funding
Low entrepreneurial culture	Introduces an entrepreneurial mindset via hands-on,	Entrepreneurship	<i>SwahiliPot Hackathon (Kenya)</i> : Boosted youth tech

	competitive, celebratory experiences	Education / Developmental Thought	startup ideation in Mombasa slums
Lack of formal incubation programs	Hackathons provide a compressed incubation format for initial ideation and proof-of-concept building	All Four Lenses (Unified TELP Framework)	<i>iHub Nairobi Hackathons: Birthplace of Ushahidi and other impact startups</i>

As shown in table 4, hackathons bridge institutional and ecosystem gaps by drawing students, mentors, local stakeholders, and community partners into a living laboratory for co-creation. Their value lies in their capacity to mobilise learning through frugal innovation and effectual logic: short bursts of intensive effort and improvisational problem solving compensate for the absence of long-term investment or institutional innovation pipelines. Moreover, they address cultural and pedagogical disconnections by fostering experiential, collaborative, and applied learning and embedding entrepreneurial values directly into student practice. In volatile and uncertain settings, students learn to pivot, iterate,

and navigate ambiguity not theoretically but through lived challenges.

Thus, TELP, when operationalised through hackathons, becomes a transformational learning engine capable of equipping students with not just knowledge but with the capability to act meaningfully and ethically in dynamic, resource-constrained environments. It synthesises philosophical depth, scientific inquiry, developmental sensibility, and entrepreneurial agility, thereby establishing a powerful model for inclusive, situated, and future-relevant entrepreneurship education.

Table 5: TELP Framework for Navigating Complexity, Mobilising Innovation & Driving Inclusive Development

Challenge/ Developmental Priority	TELP Response Mechanism	Key Lenses Activated	Competencies Cultivated	Hackathon Function in This Context
1. Navigating Complexity	Systems-based thinking, interdisciplinary problem framing, and real-world simulation	Developmental Thought + Scientific Inquiry	Critical thinking, adaptive leadership, and systems innovation	Hackathons simulate high-pressure, multi-stakeholder environments to mirror real socio-economic complexity.
2. Resource Constraints	Praxis-oriented, frugal innovation pedagogy using effectuation logic	Entrepreneurship Education + Scientific Inquiry	Ingenuity, resourcefulness, and MVP development	Participants build solutions using limited tools, enhancing innovation under constraints.
3. Institutional Fragmentation	Co-creation and collaboration	Business Education + Developmental Thought	Stakeholder engagement, negotiation	Hackathons simulate tem-

	models are fostered in cross-disciplinary teams		tiation, and leadership in broken systems	porary but effective institutional coherence (mini-ecosystems)
4. Externally-imposed knowledge systems	Endogenous, context-responsive, and decolonised learning frameworks	Developmental Thought + Entrepreneurship Education	Localised innovation, cultural fluency, community-rooted agency	Hackathons allow for locally relevant problems to define innovation challenges
5. Poor Entrepreneurial Culture	Experiential, iterative entrepreneurship education grounded in social relevance	Entrepreneurship Education + Business Education	Entrepreneurial self-efficacy, growth mindset, and opportunity identification	The format introduces celebration, competition, and reflection, triggering mindset shifts
6. Static, content-heavy curriculum	Dynamic, experience-based learning models (problem-based, project-based, challenge-based)	All four lenses (TELP Unified)	Active learning, learning-to-learn, curiosity	Hackathons replace passive learning with active engagement and real-time feedback
7. Lack of Innovation Infrastructure	Use of temporary, pop-up innovation spaces (digital/physical); localised knowledge exchange	Scientific Inquiry + Business Education	Innovation capability, digital fluency, and prototyping	Hackathons serve as compressed innovation labs that require minimal investment
8. Inequitable Participation in Innovation	Inclusive team formation, open access to challenges, and diverse mentorship networks	Developmental Thought + Transformational Leadership Theory	Collaboration across class, gender, ability, and geography	Hackathons intentionally flatten hierarchies and provide an equal ideation ground
9. Disconnection from Societal Needs	Development-driven, impact-oriented challenges grounded in community realities	Developmental Thought + Business Education	Purpose-driven innovation, empathy, and ethical decision-making	Problems are sourced from communities, local institutions, and development goals

10. Leadership Gaps in Uncertain Environments	Development of leadership-as-practice through challenge-based learning	Transformational Leadership Theory + Entrepreneurship Education	Adaptive, ethical, and distributed leadership capabilities	Students rotate leadership roles in high-stakes situations

To ensure the efficacy of TELP in cultivating entrepreneurial leadership and competencies, **robust measurement frameworks** are essential, especially in non-curricular and experiential contexts such as hackathons. Traditional assessment models often fail to capture the transformative outcomes of entrepreneurial learning. Instead, TELP demands **developmental, process-based, and multidimensional assessment tools** that go beyond knowledge acquisition to track behavioural change, reflective growth, ethical agency, and leadership emergence. The **indicators of transformation** may include increased self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986), demonstrating resilience and adaptability, innovation capacity under resource constraints, systems thinking, ethical problem solving, and community orientation competencies aligned with Freire's concept of conscientization and Sen's capability approach. In non-credited or extracurricular contexts such as hackathons, assessment must be

embedded through **reflective journals, mentorship rubrics, real-world deliverables (such as prototypes or pitches), peer assessments, and leadership narratives**, all of which offer evidence of learning outcomes not captured by formal exams. Where hackathons are embedded in credited modules or formal innovation tracks, **formative assessment mechanisms**, such as rubrics for teamwork, leadership initiative, and social impact, provide structured yet flexible evaluation. These assessments must be **inclusive and contextual**, allowing students from under-resourced environments to demonstrate transformation through **process excellence, rather than resource abundance**. By doing so, TELP positions assessment not just as a tool for grading, but also as a **developmental mirror** guiding students and educators alike in tracking meaningful entrepreneurial growth.

Table 6: Competency-Based Assessment Framework for TELP

Entrepreneurial Leadership Competency	Assessment Tools	Activity Type	Nature of Assessment
Opportunity recognition and ideation	Innovation logs, idea journals, pitch evaluations	Credit-bearing / Non-credit	Formative / Summative
Adaptive problem-solving	Iteration rubrics, design-thinking process reports	Non-credit (e.g., Hackathons)	Process-based / Peer-reviewed
Resilience and self-efficacy	Reflective journals, self-assessment tools, and mentor feedback	Both	Developmental / Narrative
Collaborative leadership	Peer evaluations, teamwork rubrics, leadership diaries	Both	Multi-source / Rubric-based
Ethical reasoning	Case-based assessment, dilemma simulation reflections	Credit-bearing	Scenario-based / Reflective

and decision-making			
Systems thinking and contextual intelligence	System mapping presentations, context analysis tools	Both	Project-based / Diagnostic
Resource mobilisation and frugal innovation	Prototype presentations, resource audit reports, and feedback from community stakeholders	Non-credit (e.g., Hackathons)	Experiential / Stakeholder-evaluated
Social impact orientation	Social return on investment (SROI) estimates, impact storytelling	Credit-bearing (e.g., capstones) / Non-credit	Impact-centred / Holistic
Transformational visioning and communication	Vision statements, storytelling pitches, and community engagement plans	Both	Qualitative / Presentation-based

5. Conclusion

This study presents a four-lens TELP framework anchored in Business Education, Developmental Thought, Scientific Inquiry, and Entrepreneurship Education as a response to the limitations of conventional entrepreneurial training in rural universities. TELP promotes a reflexive and integrated approach to cultivating ethical and adaptive leaders capable of navigating complexity. Hackathons, positioned as core epistemic tools rather than add-ons, serve as experiential ecosystems for innovation, enabling the development of key competencies, such as resilience, systems thinking, ethical reasoning, and collaborative leadership. When embedded in curriculum-linked innovation and reflection, TELP transforms entrepreneurship education into context-responsive and future-oriented pedagogy, fostering indigenous, situated, and impactful knowledge.

6. Recommendations

1. Institutionalise the TELP Framework within Curriculum Design

Integrate the Transformative Entrepreneurial Leadership Pedagogy (TELP) across faculties, especially within business, education, and social

sciences through credit-bearing modules, challenge-based learning tracks, or innovation capstones.

2. Operationalise Hackathons as Core Experiential Learning Components

Establish regular, curriculum-linked hackathons (e.g., semesterly or annually) within undergraduate and postgraduate programs. These should focus on real-world community challenges and be supported by structured mentorship and post-event reflection sessions.

3. Strengthen Institutional Leadership to Foster Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

Embed transformational leadership principles at the faculty and administrative levels to enable a culture that rewards innovation, tolerates failure, and promotes interdisciplinary collaboration.

4. Develop Competency-Based Assessment Frameworks for Entrepreneurship Education

Adopt multidimensional assessment tools that include reflective journals, peer evaluations, team rubrics, and social impact metrics. These

should be adapted for both curricular and extra-curricular TELP-aligned activities.

5. Promote Inclusive and Decolonised Innovation Practices

Frame hackathon challenges around context-specific issues (e.g., youth unemployment, food insecurity, climate resilience) and ensure diverse student participation across gender, socioeconomic status, and geography.

6. Build Strategic Partnerships with Local Stakeholders

Co-design hackathons and innovation cycles with community organisations, local government, NGOs, and industry partners to ensure practical relevance and post-hackathon implementation pathways.

7. Facilitate Faculty Development in TELP-Oriented Pedagogy

Launch capacity-building workshops for lecturers and facilitators on experiential learning, challenge-based education, critical pedagogy, and leadership development rooted in TELP principles.

8. Institutionalise Developmental Evaluation of TELP Outcomes

Implement developmental evaluation frameworks (e.g., iterative feedback loops, real-time learning analytics, and mixed-methods impact studies) to assess and refine TELP programming over time.

9. Pilot TELP in Rural-Based Institutions as Innovation Testbeds

Initiate pilot implementations in rural or under-resourced campuses where entrepreneurship education gaps are most pronounced. Capture learnings for scalable rollout.

10. Advocate for National Policy Support of Experiential Entrepreneurship Education

Engage higher education policy bodies (e.g., DHET, EDHE) to institutionalise TELP-aligned approaches and allocate dedicated funding for experiential and inclusive innovation education.

7.1 DECLARATIONS

7.1.1. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

7.1.2. Funding

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies.

7.1.3. Authors' Contributions:

Unathi Kolanisi: Writing and Review

Mzweleni Fundani Mthethwa: Co-author and Review

Thandeka Nontokozo Mnisi: Co-author

Nokubonga Ngwane: Co-author

Denver Naidoo: Co-author and editing

7.1.4. Acknowledgements: We thank the all the team members for their effective contribution and God guiding us until this far.

8. REFERENCES

- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179–211. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978\(91\)90020-](https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-)
- Audretsch, D. (2012). Entrepreneurship research. *Management Decision*, 50(5), 755–764. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00251741211227384>
- Baker, T., & Nelson, R. E. (2005). Creating something from nothing: Resource construction through entrepreneurial bricolage. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 50(3), 329–366.

- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: Freeman.
- Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). *Transformational Leadership* (2nd ed.). Psychology Press. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410617095>
- Boyd, E. M., & Myers, J. G. (1988). Transformative education. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 7(4), 261-284.
- Boukamcha, F. (2015). Impact of training on entrepreneurial intention: an interactive cognitive perspective. *European Business Review*, 27(6), 593–616. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EBR-12-2014-0090>
- Briscoe, G., & Mulligan, C. (2014). *Digital Innovation: The Hackathon Phenomenon* (6). <http://www.creativeworkslondon.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Digital-Innovation-The-HackathonPhenomenon1.pdf> (Accessed June 16, 2025)
- Cope, J. (2005). Toward a dynamic learning perspective of entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 29(4), 373–397. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2005.00090.x>
- Cranton, P. (2006). Understanding and promoting transformative learning: A guide for educators of adults. Jossey-Bass.
- Cunliffe, A. (2009). Reflexivity, learning and reflexive practice. In S. J. Armstrong & C. V. Fukami (Eds.), *Reflexivity, learning and reflexive practice* (pp. 405–418). SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857021038.n21>
- Dana, L. P., & Vorobeve, E. (2021). Understanding the term ‘minority entrepreneurship’. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Minority Entrepreneurship* (pp. 15–32). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Dirkx, J. M. (2001). The power of feelings: Emotion, imagination, and the construction of meaning in adult learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, (89), 63-72.
- Drossman, H. (2023). An iterative adaptive developmental evaluation framework: case study of the TREE semester learning community. *Environmental Education Research*, 30(5), 807–830. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2023.2286937>
- Ebewo, P. E., Schultz, C., & Mmako, M. M. (2025). Towards Inclusive Entrepreneurship: Addressing Constraining and Contributing Factors for Women Entrepreneurs in South Africa. *Administrative Sciences*.
- EDHE. (2024). *Impact Entrepreneurship Development In Higher Education Report 2024*. https://edhe.co.za/wp-content/uploads/EDHE_ENTREPRENEURSHIP-DEVELOPMENT-LANDSCAPE.pdf (Accessed 16 June 2025)
- Escobar, A. (2012). *Alternatives to Development: An Interview with Arturo Escobar*. Venice.

- Fayolle, A., & Gailly, B. (2015). The impact of entrepreneurship education on entrepreneurial attitudes and intention: Hysteresis and persistence. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 53, 75–93. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jsbm.12065>
- Fayolle, A., & Redford, D. T. (2014). *Handbook on the Entrepreneurial University* (pp. 32–38). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781781007020>
- Fayolle, A., & Toutain, O. (2013). Four educational principles to rethink ethically entrepreneurship education. *Revista de Economía Mundial*, (35), 165–176.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.
- Galloway, L., Kapasi, I., & Sang, K. (2015). Entrepreneurship, leadership, and the value of feminist approaches to understanding them. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 53(3), 683–692.
- Gupta, V., MacMillan, I. C., & Surie, G. (2004). Entrepreneurial leadership: Developing and measuring a cross-cultural construct. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 19, 241–260. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0883-9026\(03\)00040-5](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0883-9026(03)00040-5)
- Khavul, S., Chavez, H., & Bruton, G. D. (2013). When institutional change outruns the change agent: The contested terrain of entrepreneurial microfinance for those in poverty. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 28(1), 30–50.
- Kirkwood, J. (2009). Motivational factors in a push-pull theory of entrepreneurship. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 24(5), 346–364.
- Komssi, M., Pichlis, D., Raatikainen, M., Kindström, K., & Järvinen, J. (2015). What are Hackathons for? *IEEE Software*, 32(5), 60–67. <https://doi.org/10.1109/MS.2014.78>
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice-Hall.
- Kuratko, D. F. (2005). The emergence of entrepreneurship education: Development, trends, and challenges. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 29, 577–598. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2005.00099.x>
- Linán, F., & Chen, Y. W. (2009). Development and cross-cultural application of a specific instrument to measure entrepreneurial intentions. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 33(3), 593–617.
- Man, T. W., Lau, T., & Chan, K. F. (2002). The competitiveness of small and medium enterprises: A conceptualization with focus on entrepreneurial competencies. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 17(2), 123–142.
- Mezirow, J. (2018). Transformative learning theory. In *Contemporary Theories of Learning* (pp. 114–128). Routledge.
- Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to think like an adult: Core concepts of transformation theory. In J. Mezirow & Associates (Eds.), *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 3–33). Jossey-Bass.

- Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative learning: Theory to practice. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 1997(74), 5-12.
- Miço, H., & Cungu, J. (2023). Entrepreneurship education, a challenging learning process towards entrepreneurial competence in education. *Administrative Sciences*, 13(1), 22. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci13010022>
- Nabi, G., Liñán, F., Fayolle, A., Krueger, N., & Walmsley, A. (2017). The impact of entrepreneurship education in higher education: A systematic review and research agenda. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 16(2), 277–299.
- Navarro, E. R., Garcés, H. E. R., Loli, M. G., Zavaleta, S. A. V., Soto, L. A. C., & Meléndez, L. V. (2022). Importance of entrepreneurial leadership for innovative business management: A systematic review. *Central European Management Journal*, 30(4), 185–194.
- Neck, H. M. (2014). *Teaching entrepreneurship: A practice-based approach*.
- Neck, H. M., & Greene, P. G. (2011). Entrepreneurship education: Known worlds and new frontiers. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 49, 55–70. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-627X.2010.00314.x>
- O’Sullivan, E. (2009). Transformative learning: Educational vision for the 21st century. *Transformative Learning in Practice: Insights from Community, Workplace, and Higher Education*, 3-17.
- Pittaway, L., & Cope, J. (2007). Entrepreneurship education: A systematic review of the evidence. *International Small Business Journal*, 25(5), 479–510.
- Raman, R., Alka, T. A., Suresh, M. & Nedungadi, P. (2025). Social entrepreneurship and sustainable technologies: Impact on communities, social innovation, and inclusive development, *Sustainable Technology and Entrepreneurship*, Volume 4, Issue 3, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stae.2025.100110>.
- Ratten, V., Álvarez-García, J., & del Rio, M. D. L. C. (2019). Entrepreneurship, innovation and inequality: Exploring territorial dynamics. In *Entrepreneurship, innovation and inequality* (pp. 1–7). Routledge.
- Roomi, M. A., & Harrison, P. (2011). Entrepreneurial leadership: What is it and how should it be taught?
- Sanze, N., Dogbe, C. S. K., Bamfo, B. A., & Ayikue, M. A. (n.d.). Examining the impact of entrepreneurship education, environmental factors, and role models on entrepreneurial intention. *SSRN*. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=5340793> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5340793>
- Sánchez, J. C. (2013). The impact of an entrepreneurship education program on entrepreneurial competencies and intention. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 51(3), 447–465.
- Sarasvathy, S. D. (2001). Causation and effectuation: Toward a theoretical shift from economic inevitability to entrepreneurial contingency. *Academy of Management Review*, 26, 243–263. <https://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.ouhk.edu.hk/docview/210984203?accountid=16720>

- Shepherd, D. A., & Patzelt, H. (2017). *Trailblazing in entrepreneurship: Creating new paths for understanding the field*. Springer Nature.
- Stats SA. (2025). South Africa's Youth in the Labour Market: A Decade in Review. <https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=18398> (Accessed 16 June 2025).
- Sterling, S. (2011). Transformative learning and sustainability: sketching the conceptual ground. *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*, (5), 17-33.
- Szymanska, I., Sesti, T., Motley, H., & Puia, G. (2020). The effects of hackathons on the entrepreneurial skillset and perceived self-efficacy as factors shaping entrepreneurial intentions. *Administrative Sciences*.
- Uhl-Bien, M., & Arena, M. (2018). Leadership for organizational adaptability: A theoretical synthesis and integrative framework. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 29(1), 89–104.
- Welter, F., Baker, T., Audretsch, D. B., & Gartner, W. B. (2017). Everyday entrepreneurship—A call for entrepreneurship research to embrace entrepreneurial diversity. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 41(3), 311–321.
- Wilson, G. (2006). Beyond the technocrat? The professional expert in development practice. *Development and Change*, 37(3), 501–523.
- World Economic Forum. (2025). How youth innovation builds workforce resilience through entrepreneurship. Available: <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/06/youth-innovation-builds-workforce-resilience-through-entrepreneurship/> (Accessed 23 June 2025)
- Zhao, H., Seibert, S. E., & Hills, G. E. (2005). The mediating role of self-efficacy in the development of entrepreneurial intentions. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 90(6), 1265–1272. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.90.6.1265>

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.9>

THE COGENCY OF INCLUDING THE WORKS OF ATHOL FUGARD IN THE FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING PHASE CURRICULUM IN THE EKURHULENI SOUTH DISTRICT, SOUTH AFRICA: TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

Maria Mobali

University of Zululand
South Africa

&

Pravina Pillay

University of Zululand,
South Africa

(<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8171-730X>) &

&

Theophilus Mukhuba

University of South Africa (UNISA),
South Africa

ABSTRACT

The main aim of this study is to explore the cogency of including the works of Athol Fugard in the Further Education and Training Phase: Teachers' perspectives. This study focuses on selected schools in the Ekurhuleni South District. The importance of this investigation acts as a measure to determine how teaching the works of Athol Fugard does not only enhance and influence the teaching of English literature by the Further Education and Training teachers but create awareness about human rights issues. There is empirical evidence in this research study that teaching the works of Athol Fugard not only broadens both the teachers' and learners' consciousness of the genesis of the South African political landscape but that it also substantially increases their knowledge of English as a language. This study adopted a qualitative approach. The research instrument used was semi-structured face-to-face interviews. The sample was selected purposively and comprised twelve (12) teachers from three (3) different high schools in the Ekurhuleni South District (four teachers per school). The participants were teachers who taught grades 10, 11, and 12 and were spread across different genders, grades, and educational backgrounds. Data was coded and analysed using thematic analysis. Thirteen (13) themes were identified. There was general consensus from teachers that teaching the works of Athol Fugard opened a whole new world and experience, not only to the participants, but to the learners as well. The findings revealed that teachers found that teaching the works of Athol Fugard in the Further Education and Learning Phase was very useful in many facets such as conscientising them and learners on human rights issues.

Keywords: Cogency, Further Education and Training Phase, apartheid and post-apartheid

Introduction and Background

The Department of Education (DoE) released a Green Paper in 1998 which defines Further Education and Training (FET) as all learning and training programmes from National Qualification

Framework (NQF) level 2 to level 4, or the equivalent of Grades 10 to 12 in the school system. This is reflected in the South African Qualifications Act (SAQA), 1995 (Act No. 58 of 1995). Curriculum, on the other hand, is described by Van Wyk

and Higgs (2012), as a system that is designed to ensure that knowledge is conveyed in a systematic and planned way so as to impart an amalgam of knowledge and skills that are determined to be appropriate and necessary to the society and the time. Cogency, in terms of this study, reflects the impact, power, potency, and strength that the works of Athol Fugard had on teachers' perspectives whilst teaching and interacting with learners. A teacher is described as someone who assists students to acquire knowledge, competence, and virtue (Department of Education 2000). Teachers' perspectives in the context of this study relate to how teachers view the inclusion or selection of the works of Athol Fugard in the Further Education and Training Phase curriculum; specifically, in the Ekurhuleni South District.

South African education is tainted by apartheid policies. Jibril (2015) portends that the political thought in South Africa, during the period of apartheid, was characterised by a diversity of contending ideologies and political philosophies. The apartheid system itself was underpinned and informed by an Afrikaner nationalism that was intensely ethnocentric, racially exclusive, and authoritarian. Against the apartheid system, was a variety of opposition modes which, while united in their desire to end apartheid, were all to some extent incompatible with one another, including African Nationalism, the Black Consciousness movement, Marxism, and Liberalism.

Jibril (2015) further argues that these rival adversaries of apartheid, and liberalism, appeared to many observers to be the least likely to prevail; its proponents seemed few in numbers. Thus, when the moment of South Africa's emancipation from apartheid finally came, the force and significance of liberal democratic ideas remained current and could readily be appreciated. Not least among such advocates of liberalism were creative writers, and especially perhaps South Africa's two foremost liberal authors, Alan Paton, and Athol Fugard. It is appropriate, therefore, at this relatively early moment in South Africa's democratic development, to consider how writers such as Fugard, by consistently maintaining and promoting

in his work the fundamental liberal values of individual liberty, equality, tolerance, compassion, reason, and non-violence, helped to contribute not only to the eradication of apartheid, but also to the peaceful establishment of a free and open society in South Africa.

The primary reason why the focus is on Athol Fugard, is mainly because this writer stands out as undoubtedly one of the most prolific and distinguished liberal writers in both apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. The *foci* are on three literary works of Athol Fugard that form part of the Further Education and Training literature curriculum in the Ekurhuleni South District: namely, *My Children! My Africa!* (1989) *Tsotsi* (1980) and *Die Laaste Karretjiegraf* (2015). These literary works of Athol Fugard are best described by Battersby (1992), when he states that Fugard's work mirrors both the trauma and triumph of human strife in South Africa. But the universal insights into human nature that characterise his plays, particularly with reference to the works selected for this study, transcend the geographic and political context of his work. Whilst Fugard's works deal predominately with oppressive apartheid practices and its effect on people of colour, they also reflect the resilience of the human spirit.

The Department of Education (2020) Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) amended document states that writers have only texts to reveal their thoughts. Good writers are particularly sensitive to the subtlety and variety of the English language, even in its simplest forms. While it is important that literary features and their construction and their impact are studied, it is more important to understand the impact of the features on the message the writer intended to convey to the audience (DoE 2020).

In tandem with the views expressed by the DoE (2020), texts, especially dramatic texts, are powerful tools for addressing human rights issues. Athiemoolam (2021) states that plays provide a lively platform for the discussion of social justice issues as plays bring human rights concerns to a more personal level through poignant depictions of realistic characters, relationships, dialogue,

and situations. Fugard's works, especially his plays, explore human rights issues with the over-riding one being apartheid and its corrosion of basic human rights.

Fugard has made racism and the ravaging effects of racial tension come alive as he presents aspects of these problems in these prescribed literary works. He also sees and considers himself a spokesman for humanity. According to Van Gaan (2006), the works of Fugard not only make powerful political statements, proving the validity of art as a social instrument, but they are also universal, transcending time and place. This paper focuses on three literary works, namely: *My Children! My Africa!* (1989); *Tsotsi* (1980) and *Die Laaste Karretjiegraf* (2015) which serve as examples of Fugard's reflections and illustrations of how relationships between people of different races develop and how they are affected by the policies of apartheid.

This paper attempts to answer the following critical research questions:

- What are teachers' perspectives on the works of Athol Fugard being included in the Further Education and Training phase for English?
- What value or lack of value do teachers discern is posited in the works of Athol Fugard for learners in the FET phase?
- To what extent do teachers believe that teaching the works of Athol Fugard to FET learners foregrounds human rights issues?

A Brief Overview of the Texts by Athol Fugard Selected for this Study

Wertheim (2000) describes Athol Fugard as one of the most brilliant, powerful, and theatrically astute of modern dramatists in South Africa and that the world has ever experienced. He further states that the poignancy of Fugard's work has its origins in the institutionalised racism of his native South Africa and more recently in the issues facing a new South Africa after apartheid. The author also points out how Fugard's plays evoke change

in human relations with a strong focus on human rights.

In this study salient issues in some of the literature of Athol Fugard that forms part of the Further Education and Training curriculum were identified. These are summed up by Shihada (2007), who explicates Athol Fugard's vision for a non-racial South Africa after the end of apartheid and the beginning of a crucial stage of reconciliation by stating that what is particularly important is that although most of Fugard's work is set in South Africa, they tackle transcendent and eternal human issues beyond the domestic sphere and envisage a society based on racial equality and reconciliation; a society that accepts the existence of others. Gqibitole and Bello (2018) assert that Fugard crossed the racial divide line by writing about black experiences at a time when dissenting voices were silenced by the apartheid state.

In *My Children! My Africa!* Thami Mbikwana a Black student and Isabel Dyson, a White student work together in an attempt at crossing the apartheid boundaries, and with the hope of getting a scholarship for Thami who is a gifted student at Zolile High School and undoubtedly a favourite student of the African teacher Mr. M. As a staunch follower of the Chinese philosopher, Confucius, Mr. M has been a long-time teacher of non-violence, believing that change in racially segregated South Africa will only come about through education. To Mr. M's disappointment, Thami gets involved with underground political activists who believe that freedom must come before education. He is prepared to meet violence from the state with violence. Isabel Dyson is a gifted young white South African (Afrikaner) from Camdeboo High School, a prestigious all-white girls' school. Mr. M arranged for Isabel to be part of a debating team at Zolile High School, which results in a friendly relationship with Thami and Mr. M. This opens a whole new world to the complexities of race.

One can further equate the relationship between Thami and Isabel as one of the prescripts of the South African Human Rights of 1996, which is the freedom of association; whereby everyone has

the right to associate with anyone. In *My Children! My Africa!* (1989) a salient observation is that Fugard believes that there are no better characters than Thami and Isabel to practice racial reconciliation, as members of the new generation who will likely be called upon to argue vital issues and forge a non-racial South African life after dismantling the shackles of apartheid. This work decries the liabilities of the old pedagogical order and curriculum. It tackles the dilemma of South Africa's colonised black teachers who accepted the country's racist practices and sought empowerment for black people through the so-called mastery of the white people.

Al-Husseini (2016) identifies an important theme in the play which revolves around the restricted social interaction permitted between whites and 'non-whites'. The Group Areas Act of 1950 proclaimed strict residential segregation, meaning that Thami and Mr. M were not permitted to be in Isabel's residential area without a special permit. The Population Registration Act of 1950 stipulates that every person be assigned a racial category and that people of different races must live, learn, work, and travel separately which was in contrast with the right of equality as enshrined in the Bill of Rights.

There was also racial discrimination in allocation of schools and teaching facilities. We also see how Thami, one of the characters, rebels against the old-fashioned, colonised mentality of Mr. M, who privileges the European culture over the African culture. McLeod (2000) confirms this narrative when he asserts that the teaching of literature in the colonies must be understood as part of the many ways in which Western colonial powers asserted their cultural and moral superiority, while at the same time devaluing indigenous cultural beliefs. This is evident in Thami's defection from the Eurocentric colonising culture of Mr. M whose teaching glorifies everything European.

Another one of the works of Athol Fugard that forms part of the Further Education and Training curriculum is, *Tsotsi* (1980). This novel is a story of redemption and reconciliation, facing the past

and it confronts the core elements of human nature. The character going through this journey, who the novel is named after, is a young man who is part of the lowest level of society in a poor shanty town in South Africa. Tsotsi, (His real name is David), is a thug, someone who kills for money and suffers no remorse. But he starts changing when circumstances find him in possession of a baby, which acts as a catalyst in his life. A chain of events leads him to regain memories of his childhood and discover why he is the way he is. The novel sets parameters of being "human" and brings these to the consideration of the reader. The word Tsotsi means "thug", which is how the character is portrayed at the start of the novel. In *Tsotsi* (1980), Fugard implies that apartheid's racist policies created a favourable climate for criminal violence.

Barnard (2008) argues that the callous inhumanity of Tsotsi, the gangster of the title, is the product of years of homelessness and abandonment. The urban removals of the 1950s and 1960s saw many black families being evicted from their homes in the townships and the social and economic consequences in such places produced slums, rife with crime. This being a direct violation of the human right to dignity, and the right to decent housing as stipulated in the Bill of Rights.

In *Tsotsi* (1980) there are several significant issues that stand-out which can be attributed to the socio-political, and economical situation of South Africa under apartheid. The first, when the gang members were walking through the township to the train station on payday. Their intentions, it seems, are very clear to other residents of the township; they are on a mission to embark on a robbery spree. This being the case because they were unemployed and were economically compromised. The mothers pull their children indoors and there are anxious stares from windows, and the street becomes silent and deserted. This being a Friday – payday – there is obvious anxiety over the safety of husbands returning home from work with their pay packets. Another salient narrative that can be deduced from this novel is the lack of education of some of the gang members. It is known that during the apartheid era, the National

Party government was not keen in promoting education for the Black masses.

What also comes to light are the social inequalities in apartheid South Africa which were experienced during the tearing down of places like Sophiatown and the forced removals that accompanied those actions. Tsotsi, like so many young black men in apartheid South Africa had very little, if any opportunities for self-improvement and social mobility and he is, therefore, forced into a life of crime. Tsotsi's background reveals that he was orphaned at an early age and was, therefore, compelled to claw his way to adulthood alone. Both of his parents were imprisoned; hence, he has no one to provide for him and/ or guide him through life. This caused Tsotsi to live a life of extreme social and psychological deprivation which is in complete violation of the basic rights of children as stipulated in the Bill of Rights. Tsotsi never enjoyed the right to family care, love, and protection as espoused by Human Rights for children. Rafudeen (2016)) stresses the importance of material conditions, especially adequate dwelling places, in the shaping of subjectivity and social identity.

In *Die Laaste Karretjiegraf* (The Last Cart Grave) (2015) there are six main characters in this dramatic work of Athol Fugard. In equating the situation that the 'karretjie' people were living under in the apartheid era is best described by Libenberg (2000), who describes this type of situation as an enormous web of laws and subordinate legislation that confined the lack people to their 'homeland' and was only released in the interest of agricultural advancement of the white community. When a black person visited a white area as a migrant labourer, the black person did so on sufferance, shackled by the chains of apartheid legislation. This is typically what befell the 'karretjie' people.

In *Die Laaste Karretjiegraf* (2015) one can best relate the sickness of ouma Mieta and the poverty of the 'karretjie' people with the inferences drawn by Straus and Horsten (2013), whereby they have recognised that poor and vulnerable communities have a lack of adequate access to essential basic healthcare and medicine. Poor health and illness

are dynamics that contribute to poverty, while the adverse effects of illness are among the main reasons that the poor become poorer. They further argue that these human right violations often lead to preventable deaths and human suffering. Poverty can, therefore, be seen as the state's refusal of opportunities and choices essential to human development and the right to live a long and healthy life.

In all three works, Fugard is able to demonstrate that in South Africa, under apartheid, theatre and the writing space served as a conduit in transmitting various messages to both whites and blacks. To whites, it offered some of the first glimpses of what it means to live beyond the barriers of apartheid. To the blacks, it highlighted their sufferings. Due to this, most of Fugard's work was subjected to censorship because of the arduous efforts of the actors and directors to combat apartheid in their performances.

Looking at the three works of Athol Fugard, we argue that Fugard aspires for a non-racial South Africa for all people irrespective of their skin colour or political affiliation. From the context of these plays, it shows that they posed a serious threat to the apartheid government's belligerent political-social and economic system; a system that uses all inhumane and barbaric means to preserve the *status quo*.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses Human Rights as its theoretical framework. As the works of Athol Fugard are mainly framed around human rights issues, it provides the perfect opportunity to determine how this impact on teachers' perspectives who are teaching the works of Athol Fugard.

The framework of this study intended to investigate the importance of teaching the works of Athol Fugard from a teachers' perspective. From the theoretical framework, one can detect a distinct connection between the works of Athol Fugard and the theories on human rights. Walters (1995), argues that human rights appear progressively as a growing worldwide language that has developed with extraordinary dynamism in the

dawn of the Second World War. Walters (1995), further contends that there are obvious theoretical and philosophical arguments regarding the existence, justification, and universality of human rights. Fugard further proves this in some of the prescribed Further Education and Training literature which exposes the violations of human beings through the apartheid state policies of starvation. One of the fundamental and pivotal reasons for studying and teaching Human Rights was established in 1948 in the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 26.2 of this declaration accentuates that Education is to be engaged to the full development of the human personality and to the reinforcement of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms which will ultimately lead to the promotion of understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups. Regarding Human Rights Education, Mubangizi (2015) stresses that Human Rights Education (HRE) is crucial in ensuring that people are empowered to access the rights to which they are entitled. He further advances that there have been several programmes and plans of action aimed at Human Rights Education at universal level, nonetheless, many years after the advent of a new democratic and constitutional dispensation in South Africa, the level of public awareness on Human Rights in the country is still, unfortunately, inadequate.

Looking at the narrative in *My Children! My Africa! Tsotsi*, and *Die Laaste Karretjiegraf*, Sen (2000) argues that the importance of access to education as a human right is that it provides people with the capabilities for survival and individual freedom. According to Sen (2000), access to education is a Human Right, not only for the purpose of political literacy but endemically necessary for human development. To prevent experiences that were illustrated in plays like *My Children! My Africa! Tsotsi*, and *die Laaste Karretjiegraf*, the new democratic government adopted the South African Schools Act of 1996 which draws on the ANC Policy Framework Document for Education and Training in South Africa which states that: the national core curriculum will promote (i) non-racial and non-sexist values, (ii) prepare individuals for

the world of work and social and political participation in the context of a rapidly changing and dynamic global economy and society, (iii) develop the necessary understanding, values and skills for sustainable development and an environment that ensures healthy living (iv) promote unity in diversity through a flexible framework which allows for the accommodation of cultural, provincial and local differences and needs, (v) be learner centered and non- authoritarian and encourage the active participation of students in the learning process, (vi) stimulate critical and reflective reasoning and develop problem-solving and information processing skills, (vii) foster self-discipline (viii) problematise knowledge as provisional and contested.

Looking at the setting of *Tsotsi*, *My Children! My Africa!* and the *Die Laaste Kaaretjiegraf*, Human Rights Education is critical in societal transformation and redress, including engendering social and political change. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the primary audience targeted for Human Rights Education by the new democratic government is the place of learning and educational institutions. It has been suggested that these rights be incorporated into the curriculum as part of the learning agenda. These efforts were enhanced by the intervention of the Curriculum Review Commission (CRC) that came into being in February 2000. These interventions and initiatives resulted in the creation and establishment of the General Education and Training (GET), Curriculum Statement (CS), and the Further Education and Training Curriculum Statement (FETCS) in 2005. These interventions and initiatives ensured that all Learning Area Statements (LAS) contain values and practices of human rights, as enshrined in the constitution.

Population and Sampling

In an attempt to gauge the cogency of teaching the works of Fugard in the FET Curriculum in the Ekurhuleni South District from the perspective of teachers, 67 secondary schools in Ekurhuleni South District were targeted, in particular the schools that are teaching the works of

Athol Fugard in the FET Phase. This was to ensure that the targeted population was the entire aggregation of respondents that met the designated set of criteria as recommended by Burns and Grove (1997). For the researcher to obtain the desired answers to the research questions, it was necessary to select a sample from the identified population. For this research study, the researcher adopted a non-probability or non-random sampling approach. Taherdoost (2016) states that non-probability sampling or non-random sampling is often associated with qualitative research. Non-probability sampling technique is a technique that qualitative researchers use to recruit participants who are easily accessible and convenient to the researcher. He further argues that this may include utilising geographic locations and resources that make participant recruitment convenient. The sample consisted of educators – a total of 12 educators of English in the Further Education and Training Phase from 3 secondary schools in Ekurhuleni South District. The criterion for selecting the schools was posited on the fact that the educators at the school must be teaching Fugard's plays to the Further Education and Training learners. In addition to purposive sampling in selecting the schools – all schools must have taught Fugard's plays in the Further Education and Training phase – convenience sampling was also used to select schools so that all 3 schools were easily accessible to the researcher in terms of their proximity. For the purpose of this research study, a sample

of three high schools was selected within the Ekurhuleni South District. The three high schools were determined by ease of geographical location, accessibility, and the number of years that the plays of Athol Fugard have been in the curriculum. Taherdoost (2016) argues that to answer the research questions, it is doubtful that the researcher should be able to collect data from all cases. Thus, there is a need to select a sample from the targeted population. He further contends that the sampling frames, which is the list of the actual cases from which the sample will be drawn must be representative of the targeted population.

It should be noted that the background of the participants selected has several obvious commonalities. They are all teachers from the FET Phase in both former Model C schools, and from traditional black township schools. Their experiences set them apart as there is a broad mixture of years of teaching experience and academic qualifications. In answering the research questions, the vast wealth of experience and the diverse qualifications provide fertile ground for qualitative analysis. These divergent attributes are important in getting different perspectives, especially in qualitative research study. According to Grasenick and Trattinig (2020) different people have different preconceptions and experiences, and they will have different opinions and perspectives. This makes a case for diversity in research studies in order to make new discoveries, which illustrate the importance of diversity.

Participants

Pseudonyms were used to name the participants in order to protect their identities. The use of pseudonyms is a requirement as per ethical standards of research which states that all participants information should be de-identified.

TABLE A. DETAILS OF PAR-

TICIPANTS				
PARTICIPANTS	GENDER	GRADE	EXPERIENCE IN YEARS OF TEACHING	QUALIFICATIONS
Thoko	Female	9 &12	26	Master's Degree
Lerato	Female	10,11, &12	41	Higher Education Diploma

Moshe	Male	10,11&12	28	Bachelor of Education
Gugu	Female	10 & 12	13	Secondary Teachers Diploma
Mashudu	Female	8,9,9,11, &12	26	Bachelor of Education
Irene	Female	11 & 12	8	Bachelor of Education
Xoli	Male	11 &12	12	Bachelor of Education
Tshwarelo	Male	8,10,11 &12	4	Bachelor of Education (Hon)
Bonga	Male	10 & 11	10	Senior Teachers Diploma
Sam	Male	10,11 & 12	15	Bachelor of Education
Dingizwayo	Male	10,11 & 12	27	Senior Teachers Diploma
Hloni	Male	10,11, & 12	15	Bachelor of Education

Table A is using fictitious names/pseudonyms to protect the identities of the participants. The grades, years of experience, and qualifications provided are a true reflection of the individuals' portfolios at the time of the interviews.

The 12 participants who took part in the **semi-structured** interviews were asked the following questions:

- How do you feel about the inclusion of the works of Athol Fugard in the FET Phase curriculum?
- What are your most valuable experiences (if any) in teaching the works of Athol Fugard in the Further Education and Training Phase curriculum?
- As a teacher, how do you think the works of Athol Fugard has influenced your outlook on human rights?
- In your opinion, what is the best way of teaching and presenting the plays/works of Athol Fugard in the Further Education and Training phase?
- What are the challenges (if any) you have faced in teaching the plays/works of Athol Fugard in the Further Education and Training phase?
- In your opinion is there a relationship between teaching the works of Fugard and real-life experiences?
- From your experience what are the advantages and disadvantages of teaching the works of Athol Fugard in the Further Education and Training Phase?
- In what ways do you think (if any) the inclusion of the works of Fugard adds value to the FET curriculum?
- Are there any areas in which you believe more training and guidance should be given in teaching the plays of Athol Fugard in the further Education and Training curriculum?
- Do you feel you have opportunities to fully use your knowledge and skills to teach the plays of Athol Fugard in the Further Education and Training Phase curriculum?
- Do you believe that the works of Fugard are still relevant in the present democratic dispensation?

DATA PRESENTATION

The following table outlines the patterns that emerged from the data collected.

TABLE B: Emerging patterns from the data gathered.

- 1 The most common issue that keeps coming up in almost all the responses is the question of the damage caused by apartheid as depicted by Athol Fugard in most of his works.
- 2 What also emerges frequently in the responses is the emphasis on equality in education.
- 3 There is a general consensus that most teachers believe they should have been provided with preparatory training before they were assigned to teach the works of Athol Fugard.
- 4 It emerged that learners are eager to engage and act out some of the works of Athol Fugard.
- 5 To many teachers the works and plays of Athol Fugard unleash fierce debate in the classroom amongst learners.
- 6 Most teachers believe that the works and plays of Athol Fugard evoke a rich sense of historical awareness not only in the learners, but to a very large extent in the teachers as well.
- 7 Most teachers agree that Athol Fugard is able to seamlessly navigate between politics and history.
- 8 There is a very strong human rights message in most of Athol Fugard's works.
- 9 Most teachers believe that Athol Fugard dispels the history as narrated from a European perspective and gives a more accurate account of South African history.
- 10 There is a general belief that the works and plays of Athol Fugard be taught at lower grades as well due to their historically informative nature.
- 11 Some teachers suggested that Athol Fugard should start writing about the current situation in South Africa which is plagued by rampant corruption, poverty, and crime.
- 13 Teachers believe that Athol Fugard writes about the lived experiences of their daily lives.

From the above themes, there is a visible pattern that emerges which reveals Athol Fugard's strong focus on human rights, equality, justice, and the evils of the apartheid system. An edited transcript of the responses from the participants will be outlined.

In response to the question: How do you feel about the inclusion of the works of Athol Fugard in the FET Phase curriculum? The following were some of the answers given.

Mashudu –*I believe it is about time that our learners, and even teachers be exposed to the real history of the South African struggle. For too long we have been subjected to South African history from a one side perspective, which is a European perspective. The works of Athol Fugard assist the learners in appreciating the long battles and struggles that was involved in*

achieving some of the liberties we are enjoying today. People have lost their lives in order for us to enjoy the liberties we experience now.

Irene – *The works of Athol Fugard was introduced just at the right time in our democratic dispensation. It is evident that the Department of Basic Education is attempting to inculcate an awareness of where we come from before the dawn of democracy. I believe that many learners and teachers will appreciate the sacrifices made by various individuals for us to be where we are today.*

Xoli – *It is a good thing that everyone is now aware of the damages that was caused by the evil system of apartheid. It was always complicated to explain to the learners the dynamics and the intricate nature of apartheid. Now that*

we have literature as presented by Athol Fugard, it is there for everybody to see and digest.

Tshwarelo – *We have always been made to believe that apartheid was never real, but a myth that was peddled by revolutionaries and people who wanted to bring about regime change by violent means. The works of Athol Fugard lays bare the facts with supporting references and dates. It is refreshing that for the first time in the history of our education system, the truth is being revealed with no holds barred. All these past years we have been fed propagandist history which portrayed the blacks as savages and war mongers who slaughtered each other to gain absolute power.*

As a teacher, how do you think the works of Athol Fugard has influenced your outlook on human rights?

Thoko – *My understanding of human rights was limited to what I read in the newspapers and what I saw on television. Now having been fully exposed to Athol Fugard's literature as an English teacher, I have a deeper and better understanding of not only the physical effects of human rights, but also the emotional and psychological effects. Having read works like Tsotsi, My Children! My Africa! And Die Laaste karretjiegraf, it brought about a completely new understanding of the real impact of human rights on people.*

Lerato – *Having really not experienced any human rights issues in my adult life, I never paid any attention to what constitutes human rights. Or what effect it had on people's lives. It was only after having been asked to teach some of the works of Athol Fugard in the Further Education and Training Phase that it dawned on me what the true meaning of human rights were. The works of Athol Fugard also unveiled a deeper meaning and experience of what human rights really is. Fugard so eloquently demonstrate and depict the human right abuses that was meted out by the apartheid regime especially to the people of colour.*

Moshe – *To me the issues of human rights was always associated with politics, until I got to teach 'Tsotsi' in grade 12 as part of English literature. It was then I got a more in-depth understanding of what the real meaning what human rights were. In 'Tsotsi' the novel an extremely deep rendition of naked human rights is uncovered by Athol Fugard. It instantly provides a window on how our parents were subjected to the cruel laws of apartheid. It opened my understanding to the fact that human rights were not only political gibberish as I previously thought, but a lived reality. I can now see many human right abuses that are even happening to this day. Thanks to the awareness brought about by the works of Athol Fugard.*

Gugu – *Apartheid has desensitised us to such an extent that some of us no more see infringements on our daily lives as infractions of our human rights. Now having read and taught some of the work so of Athol Fugard has evoked in me a strong sense of what constitutes human rights. I believe I now have a universal understanding and is more knowledgeable about the key elements that constitutes human rights abuses. I am now able to transfer this vital knowledge over to the learners in my class.*

In what ways do you think (if any) the inclusion of the works of Fugard adds value to the FET curriculum?

Mashudu – *First and foremost, the works of Athol Fugard is a rich source of South African history. From the formation of the Nationalist Party who introduced the system of apartheid, to the dawn of the democratic dispensation.*

Fugard in his works teaches us about human right issues, equal justice for all, and most importantly equal education for all.

In most of his works, Athol Fugard proves that the oppression of one group by another only breeds hatred and lawlessness. This is evidently demonstrated in works like My Children! My Africa! And the novel Tsotsi where due to the oppressive nature of apartheid, there was a lot of

lawlessness in the form of riots and even murder.

Irene – *I can attest to the fact that before the works of Athol Fugard was introduced to the Further Education and Training curriculum, there was general ignorance of the past atrocities committed by the apartheid government. When the works of Fugard came onto the curriculum scene, all this changed as apartheid atrocities was so powerfully depicted by Fugard, providing both teachers and learners with a clear sense of what the political past in South Africa was all about.*

Xoli – *Before the inclusion of the works of Athol Fugard in the Further Education and Training curriculum, most of the literature was about how great the white minority government was to the majority black population. We were made to believe that education and knowledge in general came with the white settlers.*

The black population was indoctrinated that any black person who stood up for his/her rights was terrorist. The works of Athol Fugard in the Further Education Curriculum dispels this myth by putting the record straight.

Tshwarelo – *The works of Athol Fugard introduced a strong sense of human rights and justice in the Further Education and Training curriculum. Suddenly, many of us realised that the fabricated propaganda we were fed by the white government over the years, was actually meant to divide us as a back nation.*

Fugard in his works of My Children! My Africa! expressively demonstrates how the white minority government were able to fan black-on-black violence by setting up Mr. M against the protesting students as an informer. This gave the impression that blacks are fighting against each other.

Most of the works of Athol Fugard was banned pre-1994 because the contents of his works were regarded as anti-government and was promoting insurrection against the government of the

time. We were not allowed access to Fugard's works for fear of contaminating our minds. When Fugard's works was introduced in the Further Education and Training curriculum post-1994, it brought about a complete fresh outlook at the political landscape of South Africa.

Do you believe that the works of Fugard are still relevant in the present democratic dispensation?

Mashudu – *Yes, it is more important and relevant than before because of all the maleficence, abuse of state resources, corruption, and theft of state funds that is being experienced after having fought tirelessly to achieve our freedom.*

Irene – *Yes, we are now faced with another type of oppression where rich blacks are oppressing poor blacks. I do not believe the struggle for liberation was meant to translate into more suffering for the majority of the people. Only a few are enjoying the benefits of the liberation where many lives have been sacrificed.*

Xoli – *The works of Athol Fugard are actually more relevant than ever because there is irrefutable evidence that the democracy that we all fought so hard for, is benefiting a very few individuals. To put it bluntly, it primarily benefits the few politically connected. From his writings, Athol Fugard is against the oppressive abuse of people by others, irrespective of colour or creed. This is actually what he has been writing and fighting for throughout his writing career.*

Tshwarelo – *I believe the works of Athol Fugard will guide the younger generation who it seems do not really understand the values of issues like human rights, equal rights, etc. It is therefore imperative that writers like Athol Fugard keeps on proselytizing the importance of a democracy.*

Findings

The findings showed that there were many intriguing dynamics that were directly related to the

understanding and teaching the works and plays of Athol Fugard. In responding to the most valuable experiences in teaching the works and plays of Athol Fugard, most participants revealed that teaching the works and plays of Athol Fugard opened a whole new world and experience not only to the participants, but also to the learners. The participants also expressed the importance of knowing South African history from a different perspective, not only from a European perspective.

Another finding was that the learners, and to a larger extent the teachers, have always been subjected to historical events from a European perspective. Having read the works and plays of Athol Fugard revealed and exposed a part of apartheid South Africa that they never knew existed. Another participant confessed that she never paid much attention to the works and plays of Athol Fugard because in her view Fugard has always been about protest theatre which did not fascinate or interest her. After being given the opportunity to teach the works and plays of Athol Fugard, she realised the important role South African history played in the daily lives of the people.

The sentiments on some of the issues mentioned by Athol Fugard and some of the respondents are supported by researchers as Musvoto (2014) who believe that despite positive development planning policy intentions in the post-apartheid South Africa, there is still glaring deprivation and spatial inequality. This, according to Musvoto (2014), is largely due to misplaced settlement policies and strategies, and the persistence of unsustainable settlement policies and planning.

According to some respondents, the plays and works of Athol Fugard afforded them the opportunity to test the creative abilities of the learners by allowing them to act out some of the scenes in the plays. It was also an opportunity to encourage them to engage in debating the merits and demerits of the works and plays of Athol Fugard. For one respondent, it allows her to use the plays and works of Athol Fugard both for

teaching English literature and grammar.

There is a general belief that as English literature teachers, the respondents were not adequately prepared to teach literature that focuses on racial and cultural issues. It was therefore difficult to ensure that learners of other races and cultures were not prejudiced when discussing some of sensitive issues during the teaching of the works and plays of Athol Fugard. This phenomenon was confirmed by Nengwekhulu (1986), and Ramutsindela (1997) whom all assert that race and ethnicity have been and still is at the heart of South African history, politics, and society since the European colonisation. They also posit that South Africa remains a complex mix of different races, cultural identities, languages, and ethnic bonds.

According to participant Moshe, one of the respondents teaching the plays of Athol Fugard was an entirely new experience as he was used to teaching literature of writers like William Shakespeare. For him the works and plays of Athol Fugard provided the perfect conduit to dispel some of the Eurocentric based literature that primarily provided a biased perception of the history of South Africa. He believed that Fugard's works should have been introduced earlier in the schooling curriculum. Another respondent confirmed that they were never workshopped nor trained in teaching this type of literature. Thoko, another respondent believed that the works and plays of Athol Fugard did not resonate with most of the learners as all this happened long before their time.

In whether parallels can be drawn between teaching the works and plays of Athol Fugard and daily experiences, many respondents made mention of the racial tensions that exist between blacks and whites which are presently being experienced in our societies. There is also mention of the unequal education which is experienced up to this day between blacks and whites. One only needs to go back to plays like *My Children! My Africa!* to realise that not much has changed in the education system. Mohamed (2020) of Amnesty International in her report sums it all

up by stating:

The South African education system, characterised by crumbling infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, and relatively poor educational outcomes, is perpetuating inequality and as a result failing too many of its children, with the poor being the hardest hit (Mohammed 2020).

With regard to how the respondents felt about the inclusion of the works and plays of Athol Fugard in the curriculum, Irene a respondent believed that the Department of Education wanted to inculcate an awareness of where we come from as Black people before the dawn of democracy. Xoli believed that the introduction of the works of Athol Fugard in the schooling curriculum brought about an awareness of the damage that the evil system of apartheid caused to the black population. Tshwarelo sees the works of Athol Fugard as revealing the truth, dispelling the propaganda we have been fed all these years portraying blacks as savages and war mongers who slaughtered each other to gain absolute power.

Some respondents believed that should they be asked to change anything in the schooling system, it will be to introduce the works and plays of Athol Fugard to the lower grades in the schooling system. In the past there was a belief that any person who opposed the apartheid system is branded a 'terrorist'. This myth was dispelled by Athol Fugard in most of his works and plays. That is why most of his works were banned by the apartheid regime for fear of 'contaminating' black minds. As to why the works of Athol Fugard should be taught in the Further Education and Training Phase, there was consensus amongst the respondents that Fugard's works and transport one through the different phases of South African history, by providing knowledge and insight into the genesis of the struggle for freedom.

Conclusion

There is overwhelmingly evidence from the findings, that the vast majority of respondents concur that Athol Fugard adds enormous value

not only to the present educational system but, also to creating historical and political awareness amongst the teachers and foregrounding human rights issues. The findings further exposed a great degree of consciousness and cognisance of the deep scars that the system of apartheid has left on the South African society. From the teachers' perspective, there is definitely a cogency in teaching the works of Athol Fugard in the Further Education and Training Phase curriculum.

To many teachers, the works and plays of Athol Fugard was a new experience because most teachers were used to teaching European opinionated and authored literature, as evidenced in data collected. This research study contends that due to the age of most of the teachers, many do not have a full understanding of the dynamics and history of apartheid that Athol Fugard so fiercely criticised in most of his works.

There was general consensus amongst the teachers that the works and plays of Athol Fugard should be taught at lower grades in the education system because of the richness it contributed to the South African struggle for liberation. It will, therefore, provide the perfect platform to prepare the younger learners to fully understand the history of South Africa from a non-European perspective. The works and plays of Athol Fugard contrast to most of the literature written by white authors who portray black resistance to apartheid as terrorism and insurrection.

REFERENCES

- Al-Husseini, M. (2016). *The effect of using augmented reality technology in a unit of the computer course on the achievement and attitude of high school students*. Unpublished MA thesis, Mecca: Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah Al-Mukarramah.
- Athiemoolam, L. (2021). "An exploration of pre-service student teachers, understanding of social justice issues through theatre-in education". In *Educational Research for Social Change*. ISSN 2221-4070.
- Barnard, R. (2008). Tsotsis: On law, the outlaw, and the post-colonial state. *Contemporary Literature and the State*. Vol 49(4), pp541–572.
- Burns, N., & Grove, S. K. (1997). *The practice of nursing research: Conduct, critique, and utilization*. 3 rd. edition. Philadelphia: Saunders.
- Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (2020). Amended document. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- DoE. (2000). The national policy on whole school evaluation. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- Fugard, A. (1989). *My Children! My Africa!* New York: Theatre communications Group.
- Fugard, A. (1980). *Tsotsi: A Novel*. New York: Random House.
- Gqibitole & Bello (2018). "Identity, politics and restriction in Athol Fugard's art: Writing and liberalism in apartheid South Africa". *Literator* Vol 39 (1), pp1-9.
- Grasenick, K. and Trattig, J. (2020). Diversity in research: why do we need it? Ethics Blog: Centre for Research ethics and Bioethics.
- Green Paper on Further Education and Training (1998). Preparing for the twenty-first century through education, training and work. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- Hussein, S. & Liebenberg, I. (2000). *Consolidation of Democracy in Africa*. London: Routledge.
- Jibril, M. A. (2015). *The Compulsion of apartheid regime, its demise, and the advent of a new political dispensation in South Africa, 1948-1996*. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Zululand.
- Mohamed, S. (2020). South Africa: Broken and unequal education perpetuating poverty and inequality. 11 February 2020. Amnesty International South Africa.
- Makhome, R. (2011). "Crime, violence and apartheid in selected works of Richard Wright and Athol Fugard: a study.
- Mubangizi, J. C. (2015). "An assessment of the constitutional, legislative and judicial measures against harmful cultural practices that violate sexual and reproductive rights of women in South Africa". *Journal of International Women's Studies*. Vol 16(3), pp158-173.
- Musvoto, G. (2014). "The historical evolution of settlement patterns and trends in South Africa: Unlocking the log-jam of the unsustainable settlements impasse". *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies*. Vol 9(2), pp 154-172.
- McLeod, J. (2000). *Beginning postcolonialism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Nengwekhulu, R. H. (1986). "Race, class and ethnicity in South Africa". *African Journal of Political Economy*. Vol 1 (1), pp. 29-39.
- Rafudeen, A. (2016). "A South African reflection on the nature of human rights". *African Human Rights Law Journal*. Vol 16 (1), pp 225-246.
- SAQA Act (1995). Saqa qualification act of 1995. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- Ramutsindela, M, F. (1997). "National identity in South Africa: the search for harmony." *Geo Journal*. Vol. 43(1), pp. 99-115.
- Sen, A. (2000). *Development as freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shihada, I. M. (2007). "My Children! My Africa! Athol Fugard 's vision for a non-racial South Africa." *Al-Aqsa University Journal* Vol. 11(2), pp 24-37.
- Steyn, R & Fugard, A. (2013). *Die Laaste karretjiegraf*. New York: Human & Rousseau.
- Strauss, Z., & Horsten, D. (2013). "A human rights-based approach to poverty reduction: the role of the right to access to medicine as an element of the right of access to health care". *PER*. Vol1(1), pp 349-392.

- Taherdoost (2016). Sampling methods in research methodology; how to choose a sampling technique for research. *International Journal of Academic Research in Management*. Vol 5 (2), pp18-27.
- Van Gaan, M. (2006). "For protest theatre to theatre of conformity". *South African Theatre Journal*. 20(1), pp1-15.
- Van Wyk, B., & Higgs, P. (2012). The future of university research in Africa. In: R Barnett (Ed.), *The Future University*. New York: Routledge, pp 178-186.
- Walters, G. D. (1995). "The psychological inventory of criminal thinking styles: Part I: Reliability and preliminary validity". *Criminal justice and behaviour* Vol 22(3), pp 307-325.
- Wertheim, A. (2000). *The dramatic art of Athol Fugard: From South Africa to the World*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: design and methods*. 3rd Edition, Sage. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publishing.

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.10>

METAPHOR AS DEPICTION OF CULTURE ON NATURAL OBJECTS AND PHENOMENA IN TSHIVENḌA

Nthambeleni Charles Netshisaulu

University of Venda, Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education, Department of African Languages,
Tshivenda Section, Private Bag X5050
Thohoyandou, 0950, Limpopo Province, South Africa
Phone: (Work) 015 962 8119; (Cell) 079 943 5777;
E-mail: Nthambeleni.Netshisaulu@univen.ac.za

ABSTRACT: *This paper presents the relevance of comparison made in metaphor as a figure of speech in Tshivenda. The paper is concerned by the contrasts between traditional and modern or generative approaches on metaphors. This paper demonstrates how the concept metaphor has gained momentum in the past three decades where metaphors influence all spheres of human life. It is concerned with exposing properties of metaphoric frames and the inherently cultural nature of the conceptual metaphor in Tshivenda, in relation to natural objects and phenomena. The paper identifies and analysis the basic frame mappings, and entailments of a range of metaphors in which a noun denotes natural objects or phenomena, as source and target domains. A comparative approach has been used as methodology in this paper. It also includes the Theoretical Framework model, that is, "Conceptual Metaphor Theory" to emphasise the importance of this paper. As a solution to the complexity and contrast between traditional versus modern/generative approaches, hence, this paper strives to clarify those ambiguities. Furthermore, it aims to help the reader to understand the context and the nature of what is being discussed in a particular language at that time.*

Key Words: *Tshivenda, metaphor, frames, mappings, entailments.*

Introduction and background

According to the Oxford dictionary, language is a principal method of human communication, consisting of words used in a structured and conventional way and transported by speech, writing, or gesture. Henry Sweet () is of the view that language... Many definitions of language have been proposed. Henry Sweet, an English phonetician and language scholar, stated that: "Language is the expression of the ideas by means of speech-sounds combined into words. Every language has its own dynamics in communication. The richness is mainly demonstrated when it is spoken by people who understand it fully and clearly. Equally important, language can be problematic when the speaker is misunderstood by the hearer and vice versa. This is mainly expressed when some figures of speech are taken out of context, and even pronunciations. Such interaction creates confusion in the language itself and the users of the language. With this background, this paper presents such dilemmas by identifying and analysing the basic frame mappings and entailments of a range of metaphors where a noun denotes natural objects or phenomena, as source and target domains. Furthermore, the metaphoric frame analysis exposes how these frames constitute a complex system of knowledge regarding the worldview of Vhavenda

society. A comparative approach has been used as methodology in this paper. It also includes the Theoretical Framework model, that is, "Conceptual

Metaphor Theory" to emphasise the importance of this paper. Metaphors, which are figures of speech used to compare one thing to another, signal more complex meaning-making and thus can be useful as a means of qualitative data collection and analysis. Romero and Soria () are of the view that there are two notions of metaphor concepts.

Language interacts with every aspect of human life in society, hence it can only be understood if it is measured in relation to humanity or society. Unfortunately, it is not always the case as most languages are distorted by lack of understanding, misconception of dynamics thereof. *Tshivenda* as a language has suffered and continues to suffer the same fate even today. With this background, this paper aims to address the problem by identifying and analysing the basic concepts such as, frame mappings and entailments of a range of metaphors where a noun denotes natural objects or phenomena, as source and target domains. Furthermore, the metaphoric frame analysis exposes how these frames constitute a complex system of knowledge regarding the worldview of Vhavenda society. *Tshivenda* is one of the 11 official languages of South Africa (Rajend Masthrie, 2002,

p). It is spoken by over 1.5million people, it is largely restricted to the Limpopo Province in northern South Africa and beyond South Africa as explained by Thompson (1931, p.249ff). This, of course, does not include sign language, among others. The above-mentioned statement supports the narrative that Vhavenda are also found in many countries in Africa, such as Zimbabwe, Botswana, Zaire, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, etc. Tshivenda is one of the African languages which are very rich in their terminology. As an example of Tshivenda, it has six (6) dialects, musanda language, tshidinda, idioms, proverbs, tshivhatsindi, similes, metaphors, initiation languages upon genders. All these make us rich when it comes to our language. A comparative app

Problem Statement

A problem statement is the description of an issue recently presented, which needs to be attended (Source). It requires the situation for the research study and generates the questions which the researcher aims to answer (Source). This paper highlights aspects of problems in Tshivenda as one of indigenous language about metaphors. The dawn of modernization or upgrading has impacted cultures, including languages in every culture. This has caused the new generations commonly known as *Ma 2000* or the born after technology to undermine culture and its dynamics, including languages. Misunderstanding of metaphors in Tshivenda has been badly affected by such a trend. As a result, there is no effective communication between the old generation and the new generation. Therefore, the intended message from the sender to the receiver is distorted because it might mean something totally different if the receiver does not know/understand the metaphor, e.g. *hu na makole* (literary: *there are clouds*). The person who understands such a metaphor will understand the metaphor but will not know what it means. Misconception of metaphors is a serious distraction not only to the *Ma 2000* or the born after technology but also to indigenous Africans who are careless to the usage of their indigenous languages. Indigenous languages is a language that is native to a region and spoken by indigenous people, often reduced to the status of a minority language (Kakembo, 2024, p.3; MacLeod, 2021, p.1-5). Tshivenda language forms part of indigenous language, which deserves preservation. One of the gaps between the two ages (tradition and modern). Modern generation undermines traditional culture. Vernacular languages are not taught at most learning institutions Lack of knowledge of figurative in Tshivenda

Literature review

A literature review is a compilation, classification, and evaluation of what other researchers have written on a particular topic. A literature review normally forms part of a research thesis, but it can also stand alone as a self-contained review of writings on a subject. Literature review discusses published information in a particular subject area, and sometimes information in a particular subject area within a certain time period. A literature review of a mature topic addresses the need for a critique of, and the potential reconceptualization of, the expanding and more diversified knowledge base of the topic as it continues to develop. The second kind of literature review addresses new or emerging topics that would benefit from a holistic conceptualization and synthesis of the literature. Cooper(1998) attests that the primary reports used in the literature may be verbal, but in most cases, reports are written documents. It seeks to describe, summarise, evaluate, clarify and or integrate the content of primary reports (cf. Abdullah, et al., 2014, p.47-56). The literature selected in this paper is of scholarly documents on the subject, and selecting them does not imply that they are the only source of information on the subject. As far as Tshivenda is concern, Thompson (1931, p.249ff) regards it as one of the official languages in South Africa. There is a need to use metaphors in any language correctly as it affects the reader's understanding of the concepts (cf. Burge, 1993, p.309 - 325). Kakembo (2024, p.1) emphasis the importance of preservation of indigenous languages, paying attention to its metaphors. Equally important, Ngulube (2012) highlights the roles that linguists may in revitalizing and preserving languages in any given community.

Aim and objectives

The aim and objectives of this paper is to bridge the gap between the traditional approach and modern or generative approaches to minimize misunderstanding, misconception, among other things in Tshivenda. This stands a chance to regulate and strengthen the Tshivenda culture. Language, being an integral part of human societies, plays a significant role in identity formation and sense of place. Language preservation refers to the conscious efforts that are made to ensure a language's survival and adaptability. This paper focuses on the preservation of indigenous languages, many of which are at imminent risk of extinction. Concluding that the preservation of indigenous languages and culture is valuable, this examination will observe the rationale behind communal involvement in language preserva-

tion (Kakembo, 2024, p.1). The purpose of this article is to highlight the role that linguists may play in revitalizing and preserving endangered indigenous languages in South Africa as suggested by Ngulube (2012).

Methodology

Comparative approach has been used as methodology in this paper. There is a need to explain the concept of a comparative approach. Various scholars agree that comparative research is the study of similarities and differences between two or more cases (Øvretveit, 1998, p.1ff; Livingstone, 2003, p.477ff). It is stated that the history of comparative research methods is traceable back to ancient Greece (cf. Azarian, 2011, p.113-125). In communication, Esser and Vliegthart, (2017, p.4) note that comparative communication research is a combination of substances or objects of investigation studied in different macro-level contexts and method of (identification differences and similarities based on established rules, using equivalent concepts. In this paper comparative approach focuses on the difference and similarities between traditional approach and modern or generative approach in Tshivenda metaphors. *Traditional Metaphors*: As such, cultural metaphors reflect the underlying values of a culture. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) are of the view that traditional metaphor is the metaphor that lies in thought not just in language as was understood for two millennia according to the traditional views of metaphor, which implies that metaphor is a figurative or literary device which is only used in poetic language aesthetically to ornament the speech.

Understanding Conceptual Metaphors Glossary of Grammatical and Rhetorical Terms

Furthermore, the metaphoric frame analysis will expose how these frames constitute a complex system of knowledge about the worldview of the Vhavenda society. The Theoretical Framework that will be used is the "Conceptual Metaphor Theory" also known as CMT. A conceptual metaphor is understanding one domain of experience (that is, abstract) in terms of another (that is naturally concrete) (see Lakoff and Johnson 1980). This is a situation wherein one entity is taken as the other, such that one entity can replace the other without any change of meaning intended. This includes highlighting vs hiding, mappings, entailment, source, and target domains. In this is a situation wherein one entity is taken as the other such that one entity can replace the other without any change of meaning intended to sensitize the reader about the importance of knowing

and understanding Tshivenda. The traditional approach, where one entity is taken as the other, is contrasted to the modern or generative approach, where one entity becomes more like the other by looking into the frames and the mappings on them, which is based on the ontological approach than on epistemic approach.

Traditional approach versus generative approach in Tshivenda metaphors

As indicated in the abstract, traditionally, metaphors are figures of speech which simply compare two things which are not similar after which the two things can replace each other without any problem or any change of meaning. When such a contrast is made there are no mappings thereof, no elements compared to nor are there any frames. The comparison is just shallow and doesn't go deeper into a cross-domain's mappings. This is what Croft and Cruse 2004 call epistemic resemblance, in which mapping is done in accordance with shallow knowledge. In a generative approach, the two entities that are compared are mapped up with each other in accordance with the internal or deeper correspondences. In this comparison, there must be two domains that are: the source and the target domains. In this approach, the domain is mapped onto the source domain as indicated by Kövecses 2006 when he compares life with a journey. Kövecses maintains that the linguistic examples they (English speakers) use to talk about life are based on a deeper connection between the two concepts of "life" and "journey".

Tshivenda, inherent cultural nature of Metaphors on Natural Objects and Phenomena

The metaphoric frame analysis of conceptual metaphors presented in this paper make the structure of the conceptual information that the Tshivenda speakers possess in connection with concepts relating to natural objects and phenomena and demonstrate how frames represent the nature of the attribute-value relationships between the elements in the frames and concepts. The frames-analysis provided for the conceptual metaphors in this paper, therefore, explores the linguistic and inherently cultural nature of frames with nouns denoting on natural objects and phenomena as source and target domains as structured mental representations of such nouns as conceptual categories. Therefore, the source domains associated with target domains can be seen as Tshivenda cultural symbols (cf. Kövecses 2006:136).

Mappings of target domains of mavu (soil), onto

soil as source domain

In this case **zwiliwa** (food) and **vhutshilo** (life) are used as source domains which are mapped onto

mavu (soil) as a target domain due to the correspondences which exist in them.

1. Mavu ndi zwiliwa zwashu

Lit: Soil is our food

Meaning: Food is found in soil

Source: zwiliwa (food)

Source frame:

food as things that people /animals eat →

food as coming from soil →

some are produced, some are processed →

dependence of people on food for survival →

no food, no life →

Mappings

Target: mavu (soil)

Target frame:

soil as a natural object

soil as a source/origin of food

weathering/decaying organic material

soil as the source of everything

no soil no food

In the example given above soil a natural object which in any way cannot become food in any given normal circumstance or in the real sense of the word food. But the direct comparison of soil with food enables mapping the target domain,

mavu (soil) onto the elements of the source domain, **zwiliwa** (food) because of their components/elements which correspond with one another.

2. Mavu ndi vhutshilo hashu

Lit: Soil is our life

Meaning: We depend on soil for our lives

Source: vhutshilo (life)

Source frame:

people leading life

life has good and bad times

life has several problems/difficulties →

good and bad things occur in life

dependence of people in life

Mappings

Target: mavu (soil)

Target frame:

→ soil as a natural object

→ soil composed of fine and coarse soil

→ soil has some diseases

→ edible / inedible plants grow in soil

→ dependence of plants on soil

3. Mavu ndi vhulalo hashu

Lit: Soil is our sleeping place

Meaning: Soil as our graveyard

Source: vhulalo (sleeping place)

Source frame:

sleeping as condition of body & mind to relax →

sleeping has good and bad times →

sleeping has several problems →

good and bad things occur in sleeping →

dependence of people in sleeping →

sleeping resuscitates brains and energy →

Mappings

Target: mavu (soil)

Target frame:

→ soil as a natural object

→ soil as composed of fine and coarse soil

→ soil has some diseases on plants

→ edible/inedible plants grow in soil

→ dependence of plants on soil

→ soil resuscitates plants and grass

Mavu (soil) as target domains

Target domains	Number of metaphors	Attributes
Mavu (soil)	1	source
Mavu (soil)	2	life
Mavu (soi)	3	forever life

The mappings and entailments shown in the examples above display the similarities that exist between the two entities, the target domain and the source domain. In this case, the comparison is motivated by some embodied experience of human beings such

that a non-living object **mavu** (soil), is compared with the state of living. It also demonstrates the dependency of human beings on soil for living. Note that the attribute that this metaphor makes is that of existence of human beings on soil.

4. Mafhungo aṣu ndi buse fhedzi

Lit: Your news is dust only

Meaning: What you are saying is nonsense

Source: buse (dust)

Source frame:

dust as small dry particles of earth/soil

dust as useless small dry particles/dirt

dust as insignificant particles on soil

senselessness / nonsense dust

Mappings

→ **Target:** mafhungo (news)

Target frame:

news as information

uselessness of news spoken

→ news as insignificant information

senselessness of news

In this context the word **buse** (dust) is used metaphorically to refer to nonsense or useless things since dust has no use except that it causes diseases like flu and others. It drifts for a short while and then disappears in the atmosphere (or to nowhere). The comparison here is between **buse** (dust) and **mafhungo** (news). As a result, dust is something which cannot last for a long time but just disappears to nowhere, while non-sense is something which does not have a sense while useless things have no use. The attribution of these mappings is that of uselessness and non-sense of these two entities.

Mappings of source domain of vumba (clay) onto

5. Musadzi uyu u tou vha vumba

Lit: This woman is clay

Meaning: This woman is treated like fragile object

Mappings

Source: vumba (clay)

Source frame:

clay as soil

low quality of clay products

breakability/fragility of clay

Target: musadzi (a woman)

Target frame:

→ woman as young female person

→ low quality of woman

→ fragility /weakness /lack of strength of woman

In this metaphor, a woman is compared with clay because of her characteristics which are similar to those of clay object, that of **fragility**. Clay as object is treated with great care because it is fragile. So, in this expression, the word '**vumba**', (clay) is used in the

context in which '**musadzi**' (woman) is compared to an object that is not very strong but is **fragile**. Note also the attribution in this case is that of fragility in both source and target domains.

6. Bodo iyi i tou vha vumba

Lit: This pot is clay

Meaning: This pot is not strong or is easily broken

Mappings

Source: vumba (clay)

Source frame:

Target: bodo (pot)

Target frame:

clay as heavy sticky molding soil	→	pot as deep round container for cooking
fragility / low quality of clay	→	fragility / low quality of a pot
plans made for molding clay	→	plans made for manufacturing of pot
purpose of clay made	→	purpose of pot made
progress made in manufacturing pot	→	progress made in molding clay
achievement made	→	achievement made
clay products molded	→	pot manufactured

It is in this process wherein natural objects are compared with artifacts, that is, an object made or modified by a human being. This is a discussion of the contrast which is based on both traditional approach

and generative approach in which mappings and entailments play the central role in metaphors. Generative, Propagative, Proactive, Multiplicative

Vumba (cay) as target domains		
Target domains	Number of metaphors	Attributes
Vumba (clay)	4	useless
Vumba (clay)	5	fragility / easily broken
Vumba (clay)	6	fragility / easily broken

This metaphor is used to refer to a pot which is not strong and is characterized by elements of poor quality found in clayey things. The meaning here is that most of the articles made of clayey materials are not that durable. They break, or crack easily; such a pot ends up being compared with clay materials. Take note that the attribution made here is that of low quality, breakability or fragility.

It must also be noted that the mappings made above is based on the elements which are **highlighted** but left out some other elements which are **hidden**. These are elements such as sticky, coarse or rough taste.

Bidirectionality of metaphors in Tshivenda

In this case the mappings are made on the source domain of birdlime, and steel onto clay as target domain. These types of metaphors oppose the above given examples in 4 and 5 where the source domain

is clay which is mapped onto other nouns as target domains. In this case clay is used as target domain while other nouns are used as source domains. This demonstrates that Tshivenda language has **bidirectional** metaphors whence the mapping can go either way without any problem.

Mappings of tombo (stone) as source domain onto vumba (clay)

In the following Tshivenda metaphors tombo (stone) is used as a source domain onto which several target domains are attached or mapped. Mainly, **tombo** (stone) has intrinsic qualities such as heaviness, strength, lasting long, hardness and others. As a result of all these qualities the target domains also share similar qualities of stone, although not all these qualities are all shared by individual target domain, since some attributes are hidden while some are highlighted, most of them are mapped onto the target from the source domain, which is stone.

7.a. Vumba ìlì lẹ̀ tou vha tombo

Lit: This clay is stone

Meaning: This clay is very hard or heavy

Mappings

Source: tombo (stone)

Target: vumba (clay)

Source frame:

Target frame:

stone as found in soil

clay as heavy sticky molding soil

strength /hardness of stone

→ strength /hardness of clay when dry

solidity of stone by nature

→ solidity of clay when dry

heaviness of stone

→ heaviness of clay when we carry it

It is evident that, the central cultural frames associated with clay and high quality in It is also evident that the is that of strength, high quality, hardness, power, heaviness and chopping methods are mapped to the above mapped onto entities with high quality and the attribute therefore given that strength, hardness

7.b. Tombo ìlì lẹ̀ tou vha vumba

Lit: This stone is clay

Meaning: This stone is of poor quality

Mappings

Source: vumba (clay)

Target: tombo (stone)

Source frame:

Target frame:

clay as heavy sticky molding soil

→ stone as found in soil

looseness /softness of clay when dry

→ looseness /softness of type of stone

clay cracks easily when dry

→ type of stone which breaks easily

weightlessness /lightness clay products → lightness/frothiness of type of stone

When this type of contrast is made, the good quality that the stone has in 6.a is no more. Instead, it takes those poor qualities that are mapped onto it from the source domain vumba (clay).

We can also experience the same bidirectionality of metaphors in the following examples in which the target domains take the same qualities that the source domains have.

8.a. Mbaḍo iyi i tou vha tombo

Lit: This axe is stone

Meaning: This axe is very hard and durable

Mappings

Source: tombo (stone)

Target: mbaḍo (axe)

Source frame:

Target frame:

stone as in soil

→ axe as a chopping tool

strength /hardness of stone

→ strength /hardness of an axe

heaviness /importance of stone

→ heaviness / importance of an axe

durability of stone

→ durability of stone

This metaphor is used in a context in which an axe is viewed as of good quality. The attribute here is that

of heaviness, hardness, strength and of good quality.

8.b. Tombo ìlì lẹ̀ tou vha mbaḍo

Lit: This stone is stone

Meaning: This stone has stone qualities

Mappings

Source: mbaḍo (axe)

Target: tombo (stone)

Source frame:

Target frame:

axe as a chopping tool

→ stone as in soil

sharpness of stone	→	sharpness of stone
shape of an axe	→	flat resemblance shape
hardness of axe	→	hardness of stone
heaviness of axe	→	heaviness of stone

In this metaphor, the quality of the main source mbaḍo (axe) is of good quality hence the target domain is given the good quality of the entity of which it is mapped onto.

9.a. Mmbya yawe ndi mulisa wawe

Lit: His / her dog is his /her Shepard

Meaning: His / her dog looks after him/her

Mappings

Source: mulisa (shepard)

Target: mmbya (dog)

Source frame:

Target frame:

shepard as person with responsibility	→	dog as domesticated animal
make sure there is no enemy around	→	dog guarding owner
taking care of its' owner	→	dog taking care of its' owner
attentiveness of shepard to enemies	→	dog attentive to thieves etc.
good behaviour of the shepard	→	good behaviour of the dog
good characters of shepard to family	→	good characters of dog to animals
knowledge of mastering shepard work	→	knowledge of mastering looking domestic animals

In this metaphor quality of the main source mulisa (shepard) is of human behaviours hence the target domain is given the good quality of the entity of which it

is mapped onto. The dog as target domain is doing things that are supposed to be done by source domain, which is a person.

9.b. Mulisa wawe ndi mmbya yawe

Lit: His / her shepard is his/her dog

Meaning: His / her dog takes care of its owner

Mappings

Source: mmbya (dog)

Target: mulisa (shepard)

Source frame:

Target frame:

dog as domesticated animal	→	shepard as person with responsibility
dog guarding owner	→	make sure there is no enemy around
dog taking care of its' owner	→	taking care of its' owner
dog attentive to thieves etc,	→	attentiveness of shepard to enemies
good behaviour of the dog	→	good behaviour of the shepard
good characters of a dog to animals	→	good characters of shepard to family
knowledge of mastering shepard work	→	knowledge of mastering looking domestic animals

In this metaphor there is a swapping process where the source domain is exchanged into a target domain. This is not an easy task since it happens to entities

that belong to the same class. That is, a non-animate cannot be easily compared with inanimate and we have accurate answer.

10.a. Mmbya yawe ndi mulamuleli wawe

Lit: His / her dog is his/ her protector

Meaning: His / her dog protects him /her from his enemies

Mappings

Source: mulamuleli (protector) **Target:** mmbya (dog)

Source frame:

Target frame:

human being who lives	→	dog as domestic animal

person with protection responsibility → dog with protection responsibility
 person trained to protect others → dog trained to protects people and others
 person armed with guns etc, → dog armed with experience to protect
 person with no mercy to enemies → dog with no mercy to criminals and thieves
 person who sympathies' its life → dog which sympathies' its life

10.b. Mulamuleli wawe ndi mmbya yawe

Lit: His / her protector is his / her dog

Meaning: His / her dog protects him or her

Mappings

Source: mmbya (dog)

Target: mulamuleli (protector)

Source frame:

Target frame:

dog as domestic animal → person as human being
 dog with protection responsibility → person with protection responsibility
 dog trained to protect people and others → person trained to protect others
 dog armed with experience to protect → person armed with guns etc,
 dog with no mercy to criminals and thieves → person with no mercy to enemies
 dog which sympathies' its life → person who sympathies' its life

Table of Bidirectionality of Tshivenda metaphors

Tombo (stone) as source domains and target domains		
Target domains	Number of metaphors	Attributes
Tombo (stone)	7.a	strength/hardness
Vumba (clay)	7.b	looseness/softness
Mbaḍo (axe)	8.a	hardness/durability
Tombo (stone)	8.b	sharpness/flatness of stone
Mmbya (dog)	9.a	carefulness/responsibility
Mulisa (shepard)	9.b	guardian/good behaviour
Mmbya	10.a	protection/responsibility
Mulamuleli	10.b	Protection/ responsibility

What happened in this metaphor is that, with the above-mentioned metaphors where source domain is flexible and can change and become target domain and vice versa. This process, as mentioned above is called

Contrast of natural objects with human body parts

This is what many scholars call the spatiality of metaphors. In this case natural objects are compared with

“swapping process” where the source domain is exchanged into a target domain. This is not an easy task since it happens to entities that belong to the same class. That is, a non-animate cannot be easily compared with inanimate and we have accurate answer. human body parts due to the correspondence they have.

11. Mbilu yawe ndi tombo

Lit: His / her heart is stone

Meaning: He/she is very difficult to understand other people's advice.

Mappings

Source: tombo (stone)

Target: mbilu (heart)

Source frame:

Target frame:

stone in soil → heart as body part
 strength /hardness of stone → strength /toughness of heart
 heaviness /importance of stone → heaviness of heart
 tolerance of stone to heat → tolerance of heart to problems

tolerance of different weathers → tolerance of different problems

12. Mbilu yawe ndi mmibi

Lit: His / her heart is evil

Meaning: His / her heart is full of evil things

Mappings

Source: mmibi (evil)

Target: mbilu (heart)

Source frame:

Target frame:

evil as something very bad

→ heart as body part

strength /hardness of evils

→ strength /toughness of heart

heaviness /merciless of evils

→ heaviness of heart

intolerance of evilness →

intolerance of heart to people

intolerance of different things →

intolerance of different things

13. Mbilu yawe ndi thethe

Lit: His/her heart is soft

Meaning: He/she is fearful

Mappings

Source: thethe (soft)

Target: mbilu (heart)

Source frame:

Target frame:

fearful as something very weak →

heart as body part

fearful as something very soft →

strength /toughness of heart

fear as something breakable

→ heaviness of heart

intolerance of strong situations →

intolerance of heart to people

fear as character of sponge

→ intolerance of different things

14. Mbilu yawe ndi ñinga

Lit: His/her heart is clod

Meaning: His/her heart is soft

Mappings

Source: ñinga (clod)

Target: mbilu (heart)

Source frame:

Target frame:

clod as a lump of earth or clay →

heart as body part

clod as soft natural object

→ strength /toughness of heart

weakness of wet clod all times →

heaviness of heart

intolerance of heavy rain

→ intolerance of heart to people

easily destroyed by harmer

→ intolerance of different things

15. Mbilu yawe ndi mulimo

Lit: His/her heart is a poison

Meaning: He/she is very cruel

Mappings

Source: mulimo (poison)

Target: mbilu (heart)

Source frame:

Target frame:

poison as substance causing illness/death → heart as body part

poison as evil substance in life

→ heart without mercy to people

poison as something very bad →

heart as the inmost part of the body

strength of poison to people in life

→ strength /toughness of heart

merciless of poison substance →

heaviness of heart

intolerance of strong poison

→ intolerance of heart to people

intolerance of poison to laws

→ intolerance of different things

16. Mbilu yawe ndi saṭhane

Lit: His/her heart is satan

Meaning: Mbilu yawe yo vhihfa

Mappings

Source: mulimo (poison)

Target: mbilu (heart)

Source frame:

Target frame:

poison as substance causing illness/death	→	heart as body part
poison as evil substance in life	→	heart without mercy to people
poison as something very bad	→	heart as the inmost part of the body
strength of poison to people in life	→	strength /toughness of heart
merciless of poison substance	→	heaviness of heart
intolerance of strong poison	→	intolerance of heart to people
intolerance of poison to laws	→	intolerance of different things

Mbilu (heart) as target domain and tombo, mmibi, thethe, dīnga, mulimo, and saṭhane as source domains		
Source domains	Number of metaphors	Attributes
Tombo (stone)	11	strength/hardness
Mmibi (evil)	12	evil/merciless
Thethe (soft)	13	softness/ weakness
Dīnga (clod)	14	softness/ weakness
Mulimo (poison)	15	dangerous/fatal
Saṭhane (satan)	16	trouble/ gorgeous

This metaphor is used in a context in which the elements on the source domain **tombo** (stone), **mmibi** (evil), **thethe** (soft), **dīnga** (clod), **mulimo** (poison) and **saṭhane** (satan) are mapped onto the target domain **mbilu** (heart). When these two entities are compared, they correspond with each other in such a way that they can replace each other without any problem. The fol-

lowing metaphors compare entities that are too different to each other since the comparisons are made between human parts and a natural entity, tombo (stone), and nonanimated and animates, e.g. a building and a stone. What is interesting is that after such comparison the two different entities become similar in all their entailments.

17. Goloi yawe i tou vha tombo

Lit: Hie/her car is stone

Meaning: His / her car is of good quality

Mappings

Source: tombo (stone)

Target: goloi (car)

Source frame:

Target frame:

stone in soil	→	car as moving machine
strength /hardness of stone	→	strength /toughness of a car
heaviness /importance of stone	→	heaviness of quality of car
tolerance of stone to heat	→	tolerance of car on rough roads
tolerance of different weathers	→	tolerance of different problems

18. Muhumbulo wawe u tou vha tombo

Lit: His / her idea is stone

Meaning: His / her idea is solid

Mappings

Source: tombo (stone)

Target: muhumbulo (idea)

Source frame:

Target frame:

stone in soil	→	something you think of
strength /hardness of stone	→	strength /toughness of an idea

heaviness /importance of stone	→	heaviness of quality of idea
tolerance of stone to heat	→	tolerance of an idea against opponents
tolerance of different weathers	→	tolerance against all opponents and enemies
solidness of a strong stone	→	solidness of a strong idea

19. Maño awe a tou vha tombo
 Lit: His / her teeth are stone
 Meaning: His / her teeth are strong

Source: tombo (stone)

Source frame:

strength /hardness of stone
 heaviness /importance of stone →
 tolerance of stone to heat
 tolerance of different weathers →
 solidness of a strong stone

Mappings

Target: maño (teeth)

Target frame:

→ strength /toughness of teeth
 heaviness of quality of teeth
 → durability of his / her teeth
 tolerance against cold, warm, and hot food
 → solidness of strong teeth

20. Tshifhaṭo itshi tshi tou vha tombo
 Lit: This building is a stone
 Meaning: This building is very strong

Source: tombo (stone)

Source frame:

strength /hardness of stone
 heaviness /importance of stone →
 tolerance of stone to heat
 tolerance of different weathers →
 solidness of a strong stone

Mappings

Target: tshifhaṭo (building)

Target frame:

→ strength /toughness of a building
 goodness of the quality of a building
 → durability of a strong building
 tolerance against rain, and different weathers
 → solidness of a building

21. Zwienda zwawe zwi tou vha tombo
 Lit: His / her shoes are stone
 Meaning: His / her shoes are very strong

Source: tombo (stone)

Source frame:

strength /hardness of stone
 heaviness /importance of stone →
 tolerance of stone to heat
 tolerance of different weathers →
 solidness of a strong stone

Mappings

Target: zwienda (shoes)

Target frame:

→ strength /toughness of shoes
 goodness of the quality of shoes
 → durability of strong shoes
 tolerance against rain, stones, and different weathers
 → solidness of shoes

22. Tshanda tshawe tshi tou vha tombo
 Lit: His / her hand is stone
 Meaning: His / her hand is very hard

Source: tombo (stone)

Source frame:

stone as natural object →
 strength /hardness of stone
 heaviness /importance of stone →
 tolerance of stone to heat
 tolerance of different weathers →
 solidness of a strong stone

Mappings

Target: tshanda (hand)

Target frame:

→ hand as human body part
 → strength /toughness of hand
 strong quality of hand
 → durability of strong shoes
 tolerance against rain, stones, and different weathers
 → solidness of shoes

23. Lufo lwawe lu tou vha tombo

Lit: His / her cooking stick is stone

Meaning: His / her cooking stick is very strong

Mappings

Source: tombo (stone)

Target: lufo (cooking stick)

Source frame:

Target frame:

strength /hardness of stone

→ strength /toughness of cooking stick

heaviness /importance of stone

→ strong quality of cooking stick

tolerance of stone to heat

→ durability of strong cooking stick

tolerance of different weathers

→ tolerance against warm, and hot / boiling water

solidness of a strong stone

→ solidness of cooking-stick

24. Mulenzhe wawe u tou vha tombo

Lit: His/her foot is stone

Meaning: His/her foot is hard

Mappings

Source: tombo (stone)

Target: mulenzhe (foot)

Source frame:

Target frame:

stone as natural object

→ foot as human body part

strength /hardness of stone

→ strength /toughness of human foot

heaviness /importance of stone

→ strong quality of human foot who practice

tolerance of stone to heat

→ durability of strong human foot in practice

tolerance of different weathers

→ tolerance against warm, and hot / boiling weather

solidness of a strong stone

→ solidness of exercising feet

Tombo (stone) as source domains and target domains

Target domains	Number of metaphors	Attributes
Goloi (car)	17	strength/hardness
Muhumbulo (idea)	18	looseness/softness
Maño (teeth)	19	hardness/durability
Tshifhato (building)	20	sharpness/flatness of stone
Zwienda (shoes)	21	carefulness/responsibility
Tshanda (hand)	22	guardian/good behaviour
Lufo (cooking stick)	23	protection/responsibility
Mulenzhe (foot)	24	Protection/ responsibility

Contrast of natural object thavha (mountain) with life, problems and work as a natural phenomenon

These are the two natural things which are far apart or far away from each other when it comes to comparison. Simply speaking, if we investigate them from a

distance their differences can make us not think about comparing them. But when life becomes difficult for people with recurring problems, they see it as a mountain which is difficult for them to climb.

25. Vhutshilo vhu tou vha thavha ano maḍuvha

Lit: Life is a mountain these days

Meaning: Life is difficult these days

Mappings

Source: thavha (mountain)**Target:** vhutshilo (life)**Source frame:****Target frame:**

mountain as big natural phenomenon	→	life as precious thing to humans
mountain climbers as characters	→	people leading life characters
mountain as difficult entity to climb to people	→	life has different problems to people
mountain has difficult ascending stages	→	life is depicted by various levels
mountain has difficult stretches /resting places	→	life has some good and easy times
mountain climbing as goal to achieve	→	purpose to achieve
goal of reaching top of the mountain	→	life has progress to be made
pains to climb mountain	→	life has different ways / manners to live

26. Thaidzo yawe i tou vha thavha

Lit: His / her problem is a mountain

Meaning: His / her problem is difficult to resolve

Mappings**Source:** thavha (mountain)**Target:** thaidzo (problem)**Source frame:****Target frame:**

mountain as big natural phenomenon	→	problem as something difficult to solve
mountain climbers as characters	→	people encountering problems as characters
mountain as difficult entity to climb to people	→	problems are difficult to many people
mountain has difficult ascending stages	→	problems differ according to their degrees
mountain has difficult stretches /resting places	→	problems differ according to individuals
mountain climbing as goal to achieve	→	purpose to achieve resolving problems
goal of reaching top of the mountain	→	problems can lastly be resolved forever
pains to climb mountain	→	problems have different ways/manners to resolve

27. Vhusiwana ndi thavha i lemelahe

Lit: Poverty is a heavy mountain

Meaning: Poverty is very difficult to a person

Mappings**Source:** thavha (mountain)**Target:** vhusiwana (poverty)**Source frame:****Target frame:**

mountain as big natural phenomenon	→	poverty as something difficult to solve
mountain climbers as characters	→	poverty encountering people as evil characters
mountain as difficult entity to climb to people	→	poverty is difficult to many people
mountain has difficult ascending stages	→	poverty differs according to their degrees
mountain has difficult stretches /resting places	→	poverty differ according to individuals
mountain climbing as a goal to achieve	→	poverty resolving as achievement in life
goal of reaching top of the mountain	→	poverty can be lastly resolved forever
pains to climb mountain	→	poverty has different experiences in life

28. Goloi yawe i tou vha thavha

Lit: His / her car is a mountain

Meaning: His / her car is upgraded

Mappings**Source:** thavha (mountain)**Target:** goloi (car)**Source frame:****Target frame:**

mountain as big natural phenomenon	→	car as human made machine
mountain climbers as characters	→	car climbers as characters
mountain as difficult entity to climb to people	→	upgraded car as difficult to climb to people
mountain has difficult ascending stages	→	upgraded cars differ according to their degrees
mountain has difficult stretches/resting places	→	upgraded cars differ according to individuals
mountain climbing as a goal to achieve	→	upgraded car as resolving achievement in life

goal of reaching top of the mountain → upgraded car resolves problems of gravel road
 pains to climb mountain → difficulty to climb upgraded car in life

29. Nn̄du yawe i tou vha thavha
 Lit: His / her house is a mountain
 Meaning: His / her house is big and high

Mappings

Source: thavha (mountain)

Target: nn̄du (house)

Source frame:

Target frame:

mountain as big natural phenomenon → house as human made building
 mountain climbers as characters → houses occupied by family / tenants as characters
 mountain as difficult entity to climb to people → high houses as difficult to climb to old people
 mountain has difficult ascending stages → high houses as difficult to ascend
 mountain has difficult stretches/resting places → high houses differ according to individuals
 mountain climbing as a goal to achieve → high houses as resolving achievement in life
 goal of reaching top of the mountain → high houses resolve problems of accommodation
 painful to climb mountain → difficulty to climb high houses in life

These types of metaphors are mainly used when life is viewed as difficult, and when people are experiencing abject poverty without been assisted, and when people have problems that are not resolved, especially when everything is very expensive such as food, fuel, tuition fees, and others may be because of the economic melt-down. This figure of speech becomes common in a Muvenda person who is trying to compare a daily life with going up the mountain which is not an easy task. Climbing a mountain is not a Childs' play because it

needs passion, tolerance, massless and commitment and dedication, hence the metaphors above.

Contrast of natural phenomenon lufu (death) with human being

In this metaphor lufu (death) is personalized and becomes real human being who knowingly does all the activities that human beings do. Death is portrayed as human being with all five senses that human beings have.

30. Lufu ndi mbava lu a tswa
 Lit: Death is a thief / it steals
 Meaning: Death comes unexpectedly in life

Mappings

Source: mbava (thief)

Target: lufu (death)

Source frame:

Target frame:

thief as human being → death as natural phenomenon
 thief as untrusted human being → death as unwanted phenomenon
 thief steals other people's properties → death takes human life unexpectedly
 thief as cheating others' properties → death as cheating peoples' life
 thief not informing owner of property → death not informing the prey
 cruelty of thief to property owners → cruelty of death to the dead /deceased
 thief as a bad person to others → death as bad phenomenon to relatives / friends

31. Lufu ndi saṭhane tshi a vhulaha
 Lit: Death is a satan he kills
 Meaning: Death is evil like satan

Mappings

Source: saṭhane (satan)

Target: lufu (death)

Source frame:

Target frame:

satan as evil spirit → death as natural phenomenon
 satan as untrusted human being → death as unwanted phenomenon
 satan steals people's lives → death takes human life unexpectedly
 satan as cheating evil spirit → death as cheating peoples' life

satan not informing people of death → death not informing the prey
 cruelty of satan to human life → cruelty of death to the dead /deceased

32. Lufu ndi khofhe

Lit: Death is sleep

Meaning: Death comes unexpectedly

Source: khofhe (sleep)

Source frame:

sleepy as evil spirit

sleepy as relax of human being

sleepy steals people's strength in life

sleepy as cheating people not to work

sleepy just happen without informing people

cruelty of sleepy to human life

Mappings

Target: lufu (death)

Target frame:

→ death as natural phenomenon

death as unwanted phenomenon

death takes human life unexpectedly

death as cheating peoples' life

death not informing the prey

→ cruelty of death to the dead /deceased

33. Lufu ndi magumo a vhutshilo

Lit: Death is the end of life

Meaning: Life ends with death

Source: magumo a vhutshilo (end of lie)

Source frame:

end of life as phenomenon

end of life is not known to all beings

end of life to all living beings

end of life as cheating beings lives

end of life not informing people of death

end of life cruelty to human life

Mappings

Target: lufu (death)

Target frame:

→ death as natural phenomenon

death as unwanted phenomenon

death takes human life unexpectedly

→ death as cheating peoples' life

death not informing the prey

→ cruelty of death to the dead /deceased

34. Lufu ndi tshiwo tshi no ofhisa

Lit: Death is a wonderful event

Meaning: Death is an amazing event

Mappings

Source: tshiwo (amazing event) **Target:** lufu (death)

Source frame:

Target frame:

amazing event as phenomenon in life → death as natural phenomenon

amazing event is not known to all beings → death as unwanted phenomenon

amazing event to all living beings → death takes human life unexpectedly

amazing event as cheating beings lives → death as cheating peoples' life

amazing event not informing people of death → death not informing the prey

amazing event cruelty to human life → cruelty of death to the dead /deceased

35. Lufu ndi tshiphiri tsha Nwali

Lit: Death is a secret of God only

Meaning: God knows when you are dying

Mappings

Source: tshiphiri (secret)

Target: lufu (death)

Source frame:

Target frame:

secret as phenomenon in life → death as natural phenomenon

secret event is not known to all beings → death as unwanted phenomenon

secret event to all living beings → death takes human life unexpectedly

secret event as cheating beings lives → death as cheating peoples' life

secret event not informing people of death → death not informing the prey

secret event cruelty to human life

→ cruelty of death to the dead /deceased

36. Lufu ndi mueni a sa ñivhadzi

Lit: Death is a guest who doesn't inform

Meaning: Death happens unexpectable

Mappings

Source: tshiphiri (secret)

Target: lufu (death)

Source frame:

Target frame:

guest as a person who doesn't inform → death as natural phenomenon

guest who visits without known to beings → death as unwanted phenomenon

guest arrives without informing others → death takes human life unexpectedly

guest as cheating reservoirs → death as cheating peoples' life

guest not informing people who reserve → death not informing the prey

guest cruelty to human life → cruelty of death to the dead /deceased

37. Lufu ndi luvholela mbiluni ya muthu

Lit: Death is a sting in someone's heart

Meaning: Death is serious pain in someone's heart

Mappings

Source: luvholela (sting)

Target: lufu (death)

Source frame:

Target frame:

sting as a bee pierces your skin and injects venoms → death as natural phenomenon

sting as a painful experience to beings → death as unwanted phenomenon

pain felt by human when member is dead → death takes human life unexpectedly

sting as traumatizing people in mourning → death as cheating peoples' life

sting that comes unexpectedly to mourners → death not informing the prey

cruelty of sting to mourners → cruelty of death to the dead /deceased

38. Lufu ndi bindu miṭani minzhi

Lit: Death is a business to many family

Meaning: People register others for money

Mappings

Source: bindu (business)

Target: lufu (death)

Source frame:

Target frame:

enterprise involved in commercial, industrial, or professional activities → death as natural phenomenon

business as a way of enriching yourself → death as unwanted phenomenon

happiness felt by people registered business → death takes human life unexpectedly

business as enticing people who bebenefit → death as cheating peoples' life

business that is done in unexpected place → death not informing the prey

cruelty of businesspeople to mourners → cruelty of death to the dead /deceased

It must be noted that the elements or correspondences which are mapped onto these two entities are the **high-lighted ones** while those that are not highlighted are **hidden**. Such hidden elements are preparation of a thief, the sneaking in and out of a thief, the chasing away of a thief, opening a case against him / her, etc. This is what Gibbs and Steen 1999 say are these basic conceptual associations and are also metaphors which are clearly grounded in aspects of our experience. The attribute of this metaphor is that of unpreparedness of

the family to death, losing a beloved one while on the other site of this matter some people are benefiting by getting money through the policy they registered.

Contribution of this paper

The preservation of indigenous languages is essential to maintaining cultural diversity and sustaining the unique worldviews and identities of indigenous communities. This paper demonstrates that language revitalization efforts benefit greatly from community-

based programs, educational initiatives, and digital innovations as mentioned by Kakembo, (2024,p.3). A major trend has been to focus on the transmission of the language from the aging but still fluent speakers to the children, through intergenerational programs. Successful programs create cultural, social, and academic settings that support language learning and use. Programs that use immersion or techniques with large numbers of teachers and students often result in a significant number of speakers who continue to practice and who can carry on a conversation outside the classroom (Kakembo, 2024, p.2). The paper encourages indigenous people who have rightful aspirations for their languages and cultures, supported under international conventions, jurisdictional treaties, laws, policies, to educate those with little knowledge and without. Further, the paper calls for people who work in public such as Broadcastic Coperation (SABC) to promote the language.

Conclusion

The paper discussed the importance of metaphors in Tshivenda as in other indigenous languages. It is found that there is a gap between traditional and modern or generative approaches in Tshivenda. Traditional metaphors are neglected as most people avoid to use them. On the same token, those who are skillful in Tshivenda

appear to be dominated by the modern generations. This leads to the undermining the language itself which in turn risks intinction. It is unfortunate that people are not aware of the richness of language dynamics. Tshivenda metaphors have more than one meaning which can used to describe the similarities of two entities that similar but end up being the same entity, based on the context. One can say metaphors in Tshivenda, may be, as in other languages, are an added value statement depicting something that an ordinary statement cannot do. One can also say that there is a binding force between Tshivenda culture and the wilderness at large, such that a Muvenda person cannot enjoy making literal statements without spicing them with metaphors. The connectivity that exists between a Muvenda person and the nature with its objects and phenomena play a major role in the dynamism and the zing of metaphors in Tshivenda. These linguistic communities generally possess their own social and cultural heritage. These languages often cannot be put into a script form, with words and sentences differently structured than the primary language or languages surrounding them. Indigenous languages are local channels to cultures, and cultures are engrossed in their languages. Language is fragile and deserves preservation, fostering, growth, and reshaping strategies, for this and next generations.

References

- Abdullah, R., Muhammad, A. R., & Abdusy, S. A. (2014). Writing a Literature Review Research Paper: A step-by-step approach. *International Journal of Basic and Applied Science*, 03(01), 47-56
- Barcelona, A (ed.). (2000a). *Metaphor and Metonymy at the Crossroads*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Burge, T. (1993). Concepts, definitions, and meaning, *Metaphilosophy*, 24, 309-325.
- Gannon, M. J. (2011). Cultural Metaphors: Their Use in Management Practice as a Method for Understanding Cultures. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1065>
- Gibbs, R.W & Steen, G.J. (1999). *Metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics*. [Selected papers from The Fifth International Cognitive Linguistics Conference].. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Kövecses, Z. (2000). *Metaphor and Emotion. Language, Culture, and Body in Human Feeling*. USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Kövecses, Z. (2005). *Metaphor in Culture. Universality and Variation*. Cambridge University Press
- Kövecses, Z. (2006). *Language, Mind, and Culture: A Practical Introduction*. Great: Britain Oxford University Press.
- Lakoff, G & Johnson, M. (1999). *Philosophy in the Flesh*. New York: Basic Books.
- MacLeod, L. (2021). More than personal communication: Templates for citing Indigenous elders and knowledge keepers. *Kula*; 5(1),1-5.
- Ngulube, P.(2012). Revitalising and preserving endangered indigenous languages in South Africa through writing and publishing University of South Africa.*SA Jnl Libs & Info Sci*, 78(1)

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.11>

THE CHAMPION LEADERSHIP PRACTICE AND THE PERFORMANCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE WATERBERG DISTRICT IN LIMPOPO PROVINCE

Ngwako Solomon Modiba

University of Limpopo,
South Africa

solomon.modiba@ul.ac.za

Abstract

The objective of this paper is to assess how champion leadership engenders top performance in schools. The paper is conceptual and empirical in nature within the qualitative research paradigm. The question guiding this paper is: how are exquisite results in public secondary schools attributable to the champion leadership? Interviewing and narrative methods were employed to generate data. Out of the population of 14 public secondary schools in one education circuit in Waterberg district in Limpopo Province, three were conveniently sampled. Both School Principals, School Governing Body Chairpersons and Chairpersons of the Representative Council of Learners became research participants. Schools with mediocre leadership, perform poorly. Furthermore, schools with timid leadership struggle. Again, without leadership that dismantles indecisiveness, schools will struggle. In conclusion, a charismatic leadership or a champion one engenders top class learner outcomes. The researcher recommends for schools never to take the contribution of charismatic or champion leadership practice lightly.

Keywords: *Assess, Champion, Indecisiveness, Performance.*

INTRODUCTION

Schooling has to display competencies and skills to enable learners to fend for themselves and to conquer the triple challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality (Mdlela, 2024). Hence this paper assesses the contribution of the champion leadership practices to the perpetual exquisite performance of public secondary schools. Schools should not waste most of its time and resources ignoring the spread of underperformance in its ranks. This will lead a public secondary school moving from one crisis to the other as a result of incompetence and mismanagement by institutional leaders. Where there is lack of champion leadership practice a public secondary school is likely to be characterised by indecisiveness and lack of accountability and transparency by institutional leaders. That sub-standard performance has to occur under the watch of institutional leaders should never be countenanced, not when there is a room for a champion leadership practice capable of

preventing that. Where sub-standard performance far outweighs the learning progress of pupils, then it implies that public secondary schooling is under siege and invoking the champion leadership practice becomes the necessary remedial step. Public secondary schools rooted in sub-standard performance require renaissance from sub-standard performance to performance. Public secondary schools need to swiftly act in the best interest of learners to facilitate the success of champion leadership practices. Placing learners at the centre is beneficial and contributes to overcoming poor learner performance the need to reaffirm the schooling sector as an apex priority of the government could facilitate the display of skills and competencies that capacitate learners to fend for themselves and to confidently face the triple challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality. In that context public secondary school pupils could conquer the conditions that obstruct their own individual development (Myende, Samuel &

Pillay, 2018).

Champion leadership practices acquaint public secondary schools to academic excellence as opposed to reigning academic mediocrity. This implies that public secondary schools facing cataclysmic decline in scholastic achievement deserve to be rescued through the champion leadership practice. This can better happen when the practice of being nice and timid to underperformers in public secondary schools is completely removed (Northouse, 2018 & Sobuwa, 2021). A champion leadership practice encourages the adoption of get-tough policies against any form of sub-standard performance in schooling irrespective of its causative factors and for how long it has been in place. A champion leadership practice is renowned for facilitating the revolutionising of public secondary schools to pave way for them to redeem themselves from sub-standard performance. This will manifest as the interests of learners remain the nucleus of every public secondary school. This stands to facilitate the incorporation of champion leadership practices to drive away lurking mediocre of school performance. Furthermore, this helps to keep public secondary schools to be free from uncaring attitudes by some institutional leaders who could inadvertently be inviting sub-standard performance (Azad, Anderson, Brooks, Garza, O'Neil, Stutz & Soboka (2017). Bambalele, 2019. Shava, Manadze & Ncube, 2021, reason that where secondary schools place adequate attention to the impact of champion leadership practices, it may not be impossible for those schools to consistently yield brilliant learner outcomes. This is understandable as long as champion leadership is about the influencing of individuals' behaviour or group's attitudes towards the achievement of organisational goals. Public Secondary schools experiencing persistent sub-standard performance by learners could be victims of not tapping into the capacity of champion leadership practices in their educational institutions to turn a tide against unwelcome institutional under-delivery (Allen, 2014, Chabalala, 2022b & Mdlela, 2024).

The thesis of this paper is that it takes a champion leadership practice to trigger learner performance in public secondary schooling sector. Van Deventer and Kruger (2010) recount that 21st century secondary school learners achieve or underachieve on the basis of the availability of champion leadership practices. This signifies that a champion leadership practice could be the mainstay to the exquisite scholastic performance of learners. This is on the basis of the champion leadership practice being competent in facilitating the stellar learner performance in public secondary schooling. It is actually a champion leadership practice without a baggage that better fosters a good habit of always antagonising any emergence of sub-standard learner performance (Levin, 2011, Southey, 2012 & Mangena, 2021). Public secondary school learners experiencing champion leadership practices, deserve to be treated to memorable, theatrical and artistic lesson delivery inside the classrooms, for them to reciprocate by yielding scintillating academic learner results (Coetzee, Van Niekerk & Wydeman 2011, Bodibe, 2012, Memela, 2012 & Kumalo, 2021). Mangena (2021) reports that champion leadership practices have a potential of separating an ordinary school from the extra-ordinary one due to its capacity to consistently combat sub-standard learner performance which a public secondary school could be accustomed to. Amongst others champion leadership practices encourage effective communication, problem solving timeous decision-making, delegation, time management, empathy and visionary thinking (Nelson & Squires, 2017 & Kumalo, 2021). Clearly a public secondary school that is eager to remain functional and a top performing institution needs not compromise the achievement of continuous performance orchestrated by an invigorating champion leadership practice.

Remeny (2022) is emphatic that the statement of the problem has to be clearly articulated. In this context, statement of the problem for this paper relates to how other leadership practices like the autocratic one struggles to trigger impressive learner performance by secondary schools. In summary, the problem statement of this paper is

the excessive mediocre leadership practice in public secondary education. This is aligned to the objective of the paper which is about assessing the contribution of the champion leadership practice to the performance of public secondary schools. This paper also investigates the contradictory and the timid leadership practices that affect the efficacy of the champion leadership practices required by the 21st-century public education. Based on that, the research question guiding this paper is: *how are exquisites results at public secondary schools attributable to the champion leadership?*

Literature review

As part of human capital development, public secondary schools have a duty to transform learners into career achievers. This is possible with the prevalence of champion leadership practice. This signifies that where there is simply leadership vacuum, a plan of aiding learners to become career achievers could remain a pipe dream. Such ideals are realizable, considering that schools are at the coalface of curriculum delivery and are about the holistic development of learners. This suggests that a champion leadership practice could contribute to the development of learners socially, economically, cognitively, physically, aesthetically and so forth. On that basis, triggering the performing public secondary education sector becomes a very demanding and complex exercise. The review of literature advises that the kind of a champion leadership practice suited to a secondary schooling sector has to have a drive and an adrenaline to push for exquisite performance (Northouse, 2018 & Doods, 2022b). Literature review explains the champion leadership practices to be capable of encouraging leaders and managers to lead and manage from the front and define the function and aim of a school by carrying the flag for the incumbents of the educational institution to follow. Considering the mandate of public secondary schooling, internal practitioners could enjoy and benefit from leaders and managers who are flagbearers since they provide clear aims, goals and functions for a school. Literature review accentuates the need

for public secondary schools to be led and managed by team-builders who are known to be working from the inside out to improve networks and experiment with problem resolution.

Evidence demonstrates that where champion leadership practice is being exercised, schooling practitioners are likely to embrace leaders and managers who are team-builders due to having a benefit of freedom to build an educational institution collectively thereby benefitting from an opportunity to perfect their own skills (Azad, et al., 2017 & Chabalala, 2022b). The review of literature reminds that every champion leadership practice has its own benefits and shortcomings. In the context of the public education sector, what is of essence is the capacity of the champion leadership practice to produce brilliant learner results. As such, the efficacy of a particular champion leadership practice has to be judged in relation to its capacity to yield consistent academic learner outcomes. Hence, Olivier (2012) and Owen (2015) remark that public secondary schools that perennially produce sub-standard academic results, may among others be struggling to apply the most relevant and impactful champion leadership practice which resonates with everyone to lead to the production of scintillating learner results. The review of literature points out that top performing public secondary schools that are experiencing champion leadership practices, are capable of mending broken pupils psychologically and spiritually (Equal Education, 2018 & Meador, 2019). Top performing public secondary schools, which continually witness the champion leadership practice are capable of resetting their organisational confidence with both internal and external stakeholders for their continued magnificent learner performance. Furthermore, such public secondary schools do avoid being crisis-riddled schools (Mzileni, 2022a & Nkosi, 2022). Public secondary schools with champion leadership practices could have a proven track-record of yielding exquisite learner results, generated through applying good corporate governance culture coupled with brand to remain stable and persist to experience a healthy harmony. Litera-

ture review is not mute on the point that normally, pupils that are studious are at the same time likely to be teachable inside the classrooms, something that can be traceable to the nature of a champion leadership practice which learners are daily exposed to. This is more than essential considering that scintillating academic learner results originate in the school's classrooms that are dependent on the transformational leadership practices embodying champion features around them (Gqirana, 2016, Juan & Visser, 2017). The literature unveils that where champion leadership practices resonate with the schooling practitioners, the schooling sector will have no need of placing self-preservation interests of an individual member ahead of those of the entire school. Doing so could be tantamount to holding schooling hostage, apart from ignoring the impressive contribution of a school's identified champion leadership practices (Ramrathan, 2017 & Khoza, 2022).

The review of literature reveals that champion schooling is naturally resilient, and it is known to prefer action other than idle talk. The implication is that public secondary schools that are prioritising the production of exquisite learner outcomes are likely to have the top performance culture gradually being an inherent element of the whole schooling sector. This assists in terms of ascertaining that the culture of sub-standard learner performance is never countenanced. Where such a culture attempts to emerge, it could be confronted head-on so that it subsides to allow a culture of top learner performance to reign supreme (Nelson & Squires, 2017). In all these processes, the champion leadership practices play their cardinal role. The literature unveils that champion leadership practice has a potential of triggering exquisite learner results which make almost everyone to salute the school as a top performer. Literature study maintains that schools with impactful and quality champion leadership practices could uplift their communities through innovation and encouraging identification of community predicaments and their resolution. Such secondary schools become change-makers in their own right and are ever poised to remain reliable and

leading education providers in their communities as long as they keep on perfecting their champion leadership practices (Shava et al. 2021 & Nkosi, 2022). Where a variable such as a champion leadership practice resonates with school practitioners, it can position a public secondary school to have an image of influencing a society into a better and hopeful future (Zhu, Devos, & Li, 2011). Literature reveals that an appropriate champion leadership practice creates a transformed public secondary school that continues to enhance scholastic academic performance of learners (Mangena, 2021 & Mzileni, 2022). The review of literature discloses that in perpetually top performing public secondary schools due to operating under the auspices of a champion leadership practice, there is likely to be no lack of performance and developmental interventions. Those are the kinds of interventions pertinent for a public secondary school whose learner performance shows signs of taking a nosedive and which upon ignoring, could lead a school developing a culture of sub-standard performance. Such an unpleasant culture could be too difficult to eradicate. The review of literature stresses that where the kind of a champion leadership practice being rolled out in a public secondary school is aligned to the needs and desires of practitioners, scintillating academic learner results could continue to be produced. That will be visible as a secondary schooling sector displays no signs of being bereft of ethics, solidarity and empathy within its practitioners. As a result of the existence and the prevalence of impactful champion leadership practice in a public secondary schooling sector, it is rarer not to be having almost every learner styling herself or himself as the prime learner in terms of persistently produced superior learner performance (Myende et al., 2018).

The literature review shares that learners who find themselves in an inspiring schooling context due to being exposed to a champion leadership practice, are likely to evince traits of enjoying schooling. This could be one of the hallmarks of learners who are prepared to produce exquisite learner results, no matter what, owing

to the benefit of a champion leadership practice that triggers a top learner performance (Sobuwa, 2021 & Chabalala, 2022b). Literature demonstrates that quintessential champion leadership practice enables public secondary schooling learners to accept themselves as scholars who have to involve themselves in cooperative learning, displaying mutual empathy to keep the top performance spirit intact. This signifies that much as magnificent scholastic learner performance is awaited in public secondary schools, without the peculiar champion leadership practice supporting cooperative learning, that becomes unthinkable. That is why the emphasis of collaborative learning being underpinned by a spirit of learner-solidarity and empathy (Northouse, 2018 & Khoza, 2022). The review of literature stresses that any form of marginalisation of learners in a public education sector could at least be experienced where there is a paucity of a champion leadership practice or simply its absence. That state of affairs is tantamount to a public secondary schooling sector being characterised by the lack of legitimacy on the part of misplaced champion leadership practice.

Literature attests that a seasoned champion leadership practices could enable learners in a public secondary schooling sector to mingle and interact with fellow top performers. That partnership could contribute to containing the perennial learner sub-standard performance and replace it with impressive academic learner achievement. The review of literature unveils that it takes a great-teacher within the necessary inspiring champion leadership practices, to convert a struggling learner in a public secondary school into a super-learner whose scholastic performance is ever brilliant and continues to brand a learner's school as a top performing institution (Masondo, 2015 & Kumalo, 2021). Literature unveils that the complexity of schooling leads to a situation whereby some public secondary schools keep on surviving the stigma of sub-standard performance and dysfunctionality by virtue of embracing a champion leadership practice which without doubt is a schooling leadership practice like no other. This plainly signifies

that the nature of the leadership practice which a public secondary schooling sector is known to be embracing could under normal circumstances lifts the scholastic learner performance beyond description. The review of literature attests that apart from the nature of the leadership practice which a public secondary school is famous for, even the kind of the positive schooling context could contribute to the thriving of a school sector (Shava et al., 2021). Literature stresses that apart from the champion leadership practice of a school, the multiplicity of factors obtaining in public schooling, could be drivers and the determinants of the top performance of that public secondary school. One distinguishable trait of the top performing public secondary school as ascribed to impactful champion leadership practice is its perpetual strive for the scintillating scholastic achievement of its entire learners (Sobuwa, 2021 & Chabalala, 2022b). Teaching and learning in top performing public secondary schools remain unique and efficacious for the sake of ushering in a scholastic learner performance triggered by embracing the champion leadership practice (Lara, 2018).

When pulling hard, top performing public secondary schools look back and reconnect with themselves under the auspices of the champion leadership practice. This occurs as magnificent learner results would be evading those public secondary schools. Top - performing public secondary schools under the direction and guidance of their selected- champion leadership practice, are known to be capable of creating time to reflect on the strides they have made in their past instructional journey, to learn from them and to be stimulated to work hard for consistent scintillating learner performance (Azad et al., 2017). Literature depicts top performing public secondary schools to be in possession of restorative power generated by the champion leadership practice in their midst. This is the kind of an energy that propels such public secondary schools to bounce back after the witnessed mishaps with their scholastic learner results (Dooms, 2022b). All such efforts are possible within the stimulating champion leadership practice that resonates

with practitioners in a schooling sector. Literature further depicts that top performing public secondary schools do learn to achieve harmony within themselves by treasuring goodness of their learners and gallantly braving difficulties they face. Such public secondary schools can embrace the present and everything it offers rather than always being reactive to difficulties, some of which occurred in the past and which could descend a public secondary school into the sub-standard performance. Review of literature is emphatic that top performing public secondary schools, based on the type of the quintessential champion leadership practice adopted could courageously set themselves free from things that can rob them of their above standard performance, their functionality and their stability, which are constituent elements of top achievement for the myriad secondary schooling sector (Olivier, 2012 & Sobuwa, 2021). The review of literature on the contribution of the champion leadership practice to the performance of secondary schools, was largely conducted from the point of view of the school principals, the school governing bodies and the representative council of learners.

Methodology

This paper is a qualitative case study. The problem which this paper pursues, namely, excessive mediocre leadership practice in public secondary schooling that generates sub-standard learner performance, necessitated the design of the paper. Furthermore, the objective of the paper which is assessing the contribution of the champion leadership practice to the performance of public secondary schools, necessitated that the paper follows a qualitative research paradigm as against the quantitative one. The research title of this paper has always been gravitating towards a qualitative case study. Variables from the title that confirm the mentioned point are two in number. The first one is the champion leadership practice, and the other one is the performance of secondary schools. A champion leadership as a social construct was always amenable to be studied qualitatively other than quantitatively. This in part justifies why the methodology of this paper is qualitative

and not quantitative. Furthermore, considering that the effect of champion leadership practice to the performance of secondary schools is viewed from the perspective of Chairpersons of the Representative Council of Learners among others, necessitated the qualitative research approach. To further justify the selection of the qualitative school of thought in this paper, that was triggered by the two selected data collection techniques namely, the narrative enquiry and the interviewing technique. Briefly, to create and maintain an acceptable synergy between the research methodology and the data collection tools, there was a need to keep the paper within the qualitative research paradigm lane (Morgan, 2022 & Adeoye, 2023).

Out of the population of 14 public secondary schools, in one education circuit in Waterberg district in Limpopo Province, South Africa, three were conveniently sampled and in each of the three schools, a School Principal, a Chairperson of the School Governing Body and a Chairperson of the Representative Council of Learners became research participants. To conclude this item on the research methodology, there is a need to be emphatic that the narrative enquiry and the interviewing techniques were employed to generate data in this paper (Adler, 2022 & Adeoye, 2023) To be precise, secondary school principals, school governing body chairpersons and chairpersons of the representative council of learners were given an opportunity of narrating from their own perspectives that which constituted sub-standard performance of public secondary schools especially where the champion leadership practice is lacking. All the identified research participants were allowed a space of sharing that which they regard to be the solution to the debated perennial sub-standard performance by some public secondary schools. To corroborate and triangulate the gleaned data, interviewing was conducted with those research participants who provided narratives. A total of nine research participants were interviewed regarding the top performance of the public secondary schools and the role of champion leadership practice in that context. Interviewing re-

sponses were audiotaped for transcription purposes later on. Both the narratives and the interview responses emerged very helpful in terms of accessing information germane to public secondary school's top performance vis-à-vis the contribution of the champion leadership practice (Meador, 2019 & Khoza, 2022).

Findings

The findings arrived at in this paper, are in relation to the research topic whose focus is assessing the contribution of the champion leadership practice to the top performance of public secondary school learners. The basis of the findings is the analysed data generated through the narrative enquiry and the interviewing technique. Responses of the nine research participants were assessed regarding the champion leadership practice and how it triggers scintillating scholastic learner results of public secondary schools. As part of sharing and discussing the findings in a clear and free from ambiguity, the nine research participants interviewed in this paper are being referred to as Respondents A up to C referring to School Principals, Respondents D up to F referring to Chairpersons of School Governing Bodies and Respondents G up to I referring to Chairpersons of the Representative Council of Learners. That was done to protect the actual identities of those research participants.

Schooling is sophisticated for a researcher to ascribe its lack of top performance solely to the absence of the seasoned champion leadership practice alone. A host of factors and variables could be behind the top performance of the public secondary education. However, in the context of this paper, focus was placed solely on the contribution of the champion leadership practice and how it triggers top scholastic learner performance in the public education sector (Botha, 2017, Juan & Visser, 2017). In view of the top performance of public secondary schools having being debated from the perspectives such as the teacher-union-partnership, school management team members' perspective and others, the researcher felt a need to debate it this time from the unique perspective of the champion leadership practice as exercised in public secondary

schools (Lara, 2018, Meador, 2019, Rush, Duku, Glover, Kiggundu, Kola, Mislav & Moorost, 2019). The qualitative research paradigm as the overriding paradigm of this paper, has been instrumental in assisting in the analysis of data to ultimately emerge with these findings. Findings and discussions of this paper are the following: excessive mediocre leadership practice, contradictory and timid leadership practice, a champion leadership practice averts crisis, a champion leadership practice dismantles indecisiveness, and a champion leadership practice resurrects top performance in schooling.

Discussions

Exercising mediocre leadership practice

Secondary schooling sectors are populated by diverse learners who require to be managed and led differently to produce magnificent results. Unfortunately, the literature review demonstrates that myriad 21st century schools, experience mediocre leadership practices at all angles that stifle top-notch performance. Those are the leadership practices that struggle to be impactful on both the manner of teaching and learning (Bernstein & McCarthy, 2011, Modiba, 2011, Mgxashe, 2011 & Mueller, 2011). Quality leadership practices could create performing institutions due to revolutionising the teaching and learning atmosphere for the role players to be enthused to excel in their business of schooling. On this matter, School Principal A of School 1 reasons that *"what sets one performing secondary school apart from the rest is the exercising of top-notch leadership practice in a school which spurs learners on to strive to excel in their schooling activities"*. SGB Chairperson D of School 2 declares that *"the day all secondary schools embrace a norm and a tradition of shunning mediocre leadership practices in their institutions,, that will be a day when their secondary schools persistently yield magnificent learner outcomes"* RCL Chairperson G of School 3 reiterates that *"all public secondary schools are nearly the same except that others are being disadvantaged by the exercise of mediocre leadership practices whose outcomes to learners are known to be continuously displeasing"*. The implication is that all secondary

schools could divest themselves of being underperforming educational institutions upon allowing themselves to be exposed to leadership practices that are the inverse of mediocre ones. Clarke (2009) and Equal Education (2018) align themselves with the above when advising that failing to always employ the inspiring and stimulating leadership practices within the secondary schooling sector, could perpetually descend an educational institution into an underperforming mode (Kumalo, 2021 & Mzileni, 2022b).

Contradictory and timid leadership practices

Contradictory and timid leadership practices have a potential of eroding and corroding the existing culture of top-performance which a secondary schooling sector could be attempting to introduce. Although learners have the constitutional right to education, at times they snub and violate that right by resisting teaching, being influenced by the exercised contradictory and timid leadership practices at their schools. That state of affairs could descend a secondary school into a dysfunctional and an underperforming institution (Chabalala, 2022a, Mzileni, 2022b & Nkosi, 2022). That is why one of the research findings in this paper reveals that underachievement of a secondary schooling sector could be traceable to a lapse of impactful and quality leadership practices that allow a culture of underperformance to take root. This research finding is being supported by a School Principal B of School 2 when warning that *“prevention has to be better than cure, referring to secondary schools never to allow underachievement to take root since it could be very arduous and complex to uproot as compared to combating it from the beginning to curb it from being part of a school’s underachievement”*. SGB Chairperson E of School 2 narrates that *“to have any secondary school underachieving is a waste of resources in the sense that its implication could be that a particular secondary school experiences a serious contradictory and timid leadership practice that inhibits its brilliant top-notch performance”*. RCL Chairperson H of School 3 recounts that *“in our own secondary school, nearly all learners from grade 8 up to grade 12 are not conducting themselves like the dedicated*

and eager to learn pupils precisely because of prevalent contradictory and timid leadership practices defining our secondary schools”. On the basis of the utterances of the research participants, there is a need for strong leadership practices in secondary schools to avert a culture of underachievement from intensifying for fear of it destroying an education institution. In a secondary school, a challenge like the emerging culture of underachievement has to be identified and mechanisms be put in place to counter it based on its causes (Clarke, 2009, Fomunyan, 2017, Meador, 2019 & Chabalala, 2022a).

A champion leadership practice averts crisis

No secondary school clear with its mandate has to celebrate any form of learner underachievement. Underperformance, irrespective of its source and severity has to be eliminated. Containing institutional underachievement begins with the roll out of the champion leadership practice that at all costs averts the crisis of underperformance (Dooms, 2022a & Mzileni, 2022a). Those occupying the highest echelons of educational institutions together with those ruled, need to ascertain that there is always adequate obsession for the achievement of learners and their institution. For instance, where in one year a secondary school falter in terms of learner achievement, exercising the champion leadership practice that averts crisis in schooling, could timeously respond to the experienced challenge of underachievement (Shava et al., 2021). On the discussed matter, School Principal C of School 3 records that *“keeping a secondary school ever functional and a high performing educational institution, requires that every secondary school exercises a leadership practice that now and again averts a crisis of underachievement in schooling”*. On this matter, SGB Chairperson F recounts that *“to avert any form of underperformance, in a secondary schooling sector, it is imperative for secondary schools to be innovative in any manner appropriate and possible for the sake of keeping institutional underachievement at bay”*. RCL Chairperson I of School 2 stresses that *“secondary schools which will accurately be able to identify a host of factors behind the underachievement*

of their institutions, could survive in turning the underperformance around as a result of having successfully ascertain that the exercised leadership practice in their school keeps on averting the occurrence of underachievement crisis". The expressed views by the research participants, emphasise the need for secondary schools in this 21st century of being able to intervene as part of resolving their witnessed underperformance. This would be done to create and maintain a culture of performance by both learners and their institutions. Mkhabela (2011) and Ramphela (2011) note that in the 21st century, education institutions need to be populated by secondary school learners who are able to cajole one another to do tasks voluntarily, where force or coercion would never be needed. Modiba (2012), Juan and Visser (2017) articulate that current secondary schools deserve and qualify for the deployment of appropriate intervention strategies that are strong enough to fight down any form of institutional underachievement.

A champion leadership practice dismantles unaccountability

With appropriate leadership practice in place, dysfunctional and underachieving secondary schools could be fixed. When a secondary school is not performing to its strength, it breaks institutional incumbents psychologically and spiritually and a tonic and remedy could be a stimulating and charming leadership practice with the capacity to dismantle lack of accountability on the part of those who trigger institutional underachievement (Mbele, 2022, Moya, 2022 & Nkosi, 2022). This happens when the applied leadership practice is having demotic earthiness with institutional incumbents particularly learners who in most instances are responsible for producing magnificent academic outcomes for their schools. In a schooling context, a champion leadership practice needs to galvanise everyone to contribute to the achievement of the mandate of a school (Arden, 2013, Botha, 2017, Araie, 2022 and Mzileni, 2022b). Champion leadership practices are capable of resetting an organisational confidence of specifically learners for their continued good performance in an institution. On the expressed matter, School

Principal B of School 2 avers that *"where a secondary school is characterised by a spirit of pulling in one direction, due to dismantling the lack of accountability for good results which was pushed by the lazy learners, a school is likely to proceed in a trajectory of brilliant learner outcomes"*. SGB Chairperson E of School 1 notes that *"the majority of secondary schools in South Africa and the world at large stand or fall in the area of leadership failing to dismantle lack of the spirit of accountability for good results espoused by majority institutional members"*. RCL Chairperson H of School 1 observes that *"the Representative Council of Learners can only be as strong as the champion school leadership practice in its own institution, given that where there is paucity of champion leadership practice on the part of a school principal, that could have a rippling effect on the kind of learner outcomes which a school produces."* The responses of the research participants are painting a bleak picture of how much a secondary schooling sector is reliant and dependent on a champion leadership practice that now and again dismantles the lack of accountability within all the schooling stakeholders. Mabote (2008) and Ramathan (2017) remind that every educational institution prescribes for either its performance or underperformance through its manner of consistently addressing the lack of accountability towards producing impressive learner results.

A champion leadership practice dismantles indecisiveness

The era of leading and managing schooling characterised by indecisiveness is not now. For instance, since it is learners who give a school magnificent and scintillating learner results, there is a need to discourage as much as possible the habit of indecisiveness by some learners regarding prioritising their studies. In the 21st century, learners are likely to save a face of a school from ignominious underachievement when being encouraged to learn the skill of decisiveness pertaining to their own self-advancement (Araie, 2022 & Mbhele, 2022). In a school context, learners are like followers whose happiness

could generate good educational outcomes especially where institutional leadership practices exercised discourage as much as possible the habit of indecisiveness by all the schooling role players. In a nutshell, a success of a leadership practice can never be divorced from the satisfaction and approval of followers. That is why Turner (2000) and Bambalele (2019) are emphatic that tried and tested managers and leaders have to be deployed to the struggling education sectors to pick up the level of educational delivery there, through ascertaining the avoidance of indecisiveness regarding producing impressive learner outcomes especially by the learner population. The champion leadership practice that ignores the dismantling of indecisiveness on the part of institutional incumbents, could obstruct the yielding of magnificent learner results. This resonates with one of the findings in this paper which is about some schools failing to lead and manage at the behest of learners or followers. On this matter, School Principal A of School 1 observes that *“any champion leadership style with the inclination of encouraging indecisiveness in dealing with learners, stands a very slim chance of success especially in influencing learners to perform to the highest standard and to earn a respect and honour for their school”*. SGB Chairperson F of School 3 narrates that *“executing champion leadership functions, in a participatory fashion when dealing with the 21st-century secondary school learners, is helpful to get a buy-in from those learners and thus to stimulate them to want to produce excellent learner results for themselves and their schools”*. RCL Chairperson G of School 2 shares that *“where secondary school learners are satisfied with the practised leadership styles in their own institutions, by virtue of frowning upon indecisiveness, they are likely to be more dedicated to their studies and to produce brilliant learner outcomes like no other”*. The expressed views explicitly signify that since it is learners who create great secondary schools, through producing excellent learner results, then in the 21st century, these learners deserve to be treated differently and heterogeneously compared to their predecessors in as far as partaking in their own leadership practice roles go

(Mdlela, 2022). This stands to enable them to enliven the schooling set-ups, where the bulk of teachers populating those schools normally lament lack of participation of pupils in their own schoolwork and general school activities. This matter could also be construed to mean that the 21st-secondary school learners are not in secondary schools as passengers but active participants in the business of teaching and learning and general learner leadership. Modiba (2012), Gae (2016), Gqirana (2016) and Lara (2018) sum this remarkably when observing that nowadays, the nature of interactions between learners and teachers have to be different to enable learners to enable their secondary schools to self-rehabilitate when distressed by either teachers or learners so that they remain top performing secondary schools taking a cue from the nature of leadership practised across the secondary schooling sector (Bernstein and McCarthy, 2011, Fomunyam, 2017, Equal Education, 2018, Sobuwa, 2021 and Khoza, 2022).

A champion leadership practice resurrects top performance

The champion leadership practice could resurrect top performance in schooling. The implication is that a secondary school with weak leadership practice is synonymous to the one with no champion leadership practice. This is the case because such a weak leadership practice stands no chance of possessing a capacity of resurrecting top performance especially in a perpetually underachieving schooling sector (Dooms, 2022b, Mbele, 2022 & Moya, 2022). Botha (2021) and Nkosi (2022) narrate that the champion leadership practices in a convenient and healthy teaching and learning milieu are capable of dealing with almost all sorts of schooling obstacles, like emerging culture of underachievement which takes a space of a culture of performance. This signifies that a champion leadership practice is able to get every stakeholder to work together seamlessly to produce educational outcomes which every school would be proud of. School Principal C of School 3 stresses that *“the manner of exercising the champion leadership practice is likely to*

acknowledge and recognise that underachievement does not matter how perennial it has been occurring could simply be obliterated so that good and desirable school achievement is restored". SGB Chairperson E of School 1 narrates that *"what assists performing schools to operate different from non-performing schools is their discouragement of the culture of being reactive instead of being proactive, being aggravated by the absence of champion leadership practices known to be capable of resurrecting dysfunctional schools"*. RCL Chairperson H of School 2 emphasises that *"lack of champion leadership practices in secondary schooling context is so much a serious matter to learners such that it inhibits the production of the scintillating learner outcomes due to those secondary schools struggling to resurrect their poor learner outcomes"*. Utterances of the three categories of research participants are instructive in reminding secondary schools of the opportunity of resurrecting their poor learner outcomes upon exercising champion leadership practices. Mzileni (2022a) and Mdlela (2024) display their invaluable experience in schooling issues when accentuating the need to completely overhaul the South African education system to make it functional and to contribute to the transformation of schools with the absence of champion leadership practices into great schools. This is supported by Kuseka (2008) and Rush et al., (2019) when emphasising that perpetually underachieving secondary schools, need to learn to resort to their own witticism to wrench themselves out of the welter of difficulties of this century, some of which include the witnessed perpetual learner underachievement which is traceable to lack of champion leadership practices in those secondary schooling (Southey, 2012, Omar, 2019 & Chabalala, 2022a).

Conclusion

As it has been displayed in the discussion of the findings of this paper, the review of literature played a critical role in talking to the findings of the paper. In addition, the narrative enquiry and the interviewing techniques provided the better context within which the entire paper had to be

located and comprehended. The findings are emphatic that exercising mediocre leadership practice slows down the performance of secondary schools. Finally, the secondary schooling sector stands or falls in terms of learner achievement based on the nature and depth of the champion leadership practices exercised in those schools. The conclusion arrived at in this paper, is being informed by the perspectives of school principals, SGB Chairpersons and RCL Chairpersons who together contribute to the champion leadership practices of secondary schools at a given period and context. Evidently, there is the correlation between the exercising of the champion leadership practice and the performance of the secondary school learners.

Recommendations

The basis of these recommendations is the discussed findings which are as follow: there is a need for the avoidance of mediocre leadership practices in secondary schools due to their tendency to slow down the envisaged magnificent learner performance. In addition, secondary schools need not countenance the exercising of contradictory and timid leadership practices due to their lack of impact to the brilliant learner outcomes. Such unwelcome leadership practices could be averted through emphasising the champion leadership practices that are known to be capable of instigating sound scholarly learner results. Furthermore, champion leadership practices in secondary schools need to always be exercised at the behest of followership to maintain sustainable synergy between the two categories of vital school stakeholders. Moreover, there is a need to create a habit and routine of averting underachievement crisis in schooling by ascertaining the exercising of champion leadership practices that indefatigably keep the secondary schooling sector achieving. Finally, there is also a need that the exercised champion leadership practices be characterised by the powerful element of resurrecting achievement, where a secondary school was underachieving. This is essential in view of the perennial underachievement of some public secondary schools especially in Limpopo Province, South Africa.

References

- Adeoye. M.A. (2023). Review of sampling techniques for Education. *Asian Journal For Science Education*, 2 (2):87-94.
- Adler, R.H. (2022). Trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Human Lactation*. 38 (4):598-602.
- Allen, J. (2014). *As a man thinketh*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Araie, F. (2022). World's warlords will bring human annihilation. *Sowetan*, 4 October 2022.
- Arden, P. (2013). *It's not how good you are, it's how good you want to be*. New York: Phaidon.
- Azad, N. Anderson, H.G. Brooks, A. Garza, O. O'Neil, C. Stutz, M.M & Soboka, J.L. 2017. Leadership and Management are one and the same. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 81(6):141-152.
- Bambalele, P. (2019). Rapetsoa acts on violence as he reworks "'our cry'". *Sowetan*, 4 October 2019.
- Bernstein, A. & McCarthy, J. (2011). Teachers' poor value for money: Incentives for good educators need to be introduced but the challenge is deeper than training and skills only. *The Star*, 5 October 2011.
- Bodibe, K. (2012). Change is inevitable. *Daily Sun*, 5 June 2012.
- Botha, R. J. (2017). The role of the school principal in the case study of various members' perceptions. *Journal of social science*, 30 (3): 263-271.
- Botha, M. (2021). Let's be proactive and not vindictive when dealing with bullying children. *Sowetan*, 5 May 2021.
- Bush, T. Duku, N. Glover, D. Kiggaundu, E., Kola, S. Mislav, M & Moorost, P. (2019). *External evaluation research report of the Advanced Certificate in Education: 30-School Leadership and Management*. Pretoria: Zenex Foundation.
- Chabalala, K. (2022). Judging by his performance, Lesufi is certainly not premier Material. *Sowetan*, 7 October 2022.
- Chabalala, K. (2022). Malema is not perfect, but he makes leadership attractive and humane. *Sowetan*, 2 December 2022.
- Clarke, A. (2009). *The Handbook of School Governors*. Cape Town: Kate McCallum.
- Clark, D. (2010). *Theory X and Theory Y, big dog and little dog's performance juxtaposition*. Retrieved from <https://www.Nwlinl.com>. Retrieved 04 14 February 2018.
- Coetzee, S.A. Van Niekerk, E.J. & Wydeman, J. L. (2011). *An Educator's Guide to Effective Classroom Management*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Cohen, L. Manion, L. & Morrion, K. (2007). *Research Methods in Education*. 6th ed. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Dooms, T. 2022a. Johnson's fall reminds SA that leaders lead at behest of people.

Sowetan, 26 July 2022.

Dooms, T. 2022b. SA must move away from resistance to progressive action.

Sowetan, 16 August 2022.

Equal Education (2018). *School Infrastructure*. [www.Equaleducation.Org.Za](http://www.equaleducation.org.za).

Fomunyan, K.G. (2017). The ideological ware as key to improving learner performance. *Journal of Education Studies*, 16 (1):108-125.

Gae, W. (2016). Primary school learners' perspectives on factors that impact their learning and wellbeing at school (Unpublished doctoral dissertation).

Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.

Gqirana, T. (2016). Without resources rural schools will continue to underperform

NGO News 24, 2016.01.06 Accessed on the 30 April 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/without-resources-rural-schools-will-continue-to-underperform>. *Journal of Technology Education*, 9 (10): 1-16.

Juan, A. & Visser, M. (2017). Home and school environmental determinants of Science achievement of South African students. *South African Journal of Education*, 37(1):1-13.

Khoza, N. (2022). Rock bottom Man United have been mauled and bullied. *Sowetan*, 15 August 2022.

Kumalo, N. (2021). Autum: A time to harvest spiritual growth. *Sowetan*, 19 April 2021.

Kuseka, P. (2008). The power within. *Sunday Sun*, 15 July 2008.

Lara, E.V. (2018). *School identity in the modern world*. Available at [www.Tieonline.Com](http://www.tieonline.com). Accessed on the 16 March 2019

Letlalo, J. (2012). Nothing comes easy in this life. *Daily Sun*, 18 May 2012.

Levin, W.J. (2011). Why our education system is failing. *The Star*, 5 October 2011.

Mabote, M.D. (2008). Why Schools Underperform: Some General Causative Factors. Capricorn District. Limpopo Province. An Educational Address During the Curriculum Roadshow Meeting with Mogodumo School Principals in Mogodumo Cluster Gathering. 16 February 2008.

Malepa, T. (2021). Mthethwa reads riot act to cricket leadership. *Sowetan*, 19 April 2021.

Mangena, M. (2021). Rallying to defend democracy. *Sunday World*, 18 April 2021.

Marishane, R.N. Botha, R.J. & du Plessis, P. (2011). *School Leadership in a changing context*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Masondo, S. (2015). How superprincipals and teachers help matrices soar. *City Press*, 11 January 2015.

Maxwell, J.C. (2014). *Good leaders ask great questions: Your foundation for successful leadership*. New York: Hachette Book Group.

Mdlela, J.M. (2022). The electorate can't trust the ANC and its leaders. *Sunday World*, 13 November 2022.

Mdlela, J.M. (2024). Servant leaders would start by cleaning up cities. *Sunday World*, 2 June 2024.

Mhele, W. (2022). Bra Zinga sought higher. *Sunday world*, 24 July 2022.

- Meador, D. (2019). *The role of the principal in school*. Accessed from Wwww.Thoughtco.Com. Accessed on the 22 February 2019.
- Memela, S. (2012). Prophetic Intellectual Leaders. *Sowetan*, 20 June 2012.
- Mgxashe, S. (2011). Time for this carelessness with our lives to be stopped, Mr President. *Sowetan*, 7 December 2011.
- Modiba, N.S. (2011). Every Educational Journey has a Destiny. Capricorn District, Limpopo Province. Paper Presented to Motivate All Learners to Be Aware that Schooling Days are Numbered, 1 August 2011.
- Modiba, N.S. (2012). Every Learner Schools for Himself or Herself not for the Parents. Capricorn District, Limpopo Province. Paper presented to motivate Grade 12 Learners to take their studies seriously, 9 May 2012.
- Moloi, K.C. (2005). *The School as a Learning Organisation*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Morgan, H. (2022). Conducting a qualitative document analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 27 (1): 64-77.
- Mouton, J. (1996). *Understanding Social Research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Moya, F.N. (2022). What South Africa needs, according to Maimane. *Sowetan*, 11 October 2022.
- Mueller, H. (2011). Advocate's Scandal just a tip of the iceberg. *The Star*, 5 October 2011.
- Myende, P.E. Samuel, M.A & Pillay, A. (2018). Novice rural principals' successful leadership practices in financial management: Multiple accountabilities. *South African Journal of Education*, 38 (2): 1-11.
- Mzileni, P. (2022a). Our institutions failing us, we must get them working. *Sowetan*, 22 August 2022.
- Mzileni, P. (2022b). We must reject destructive capitalism of the West to save the Planet. *Sowetan*, 14 November 2022.
- Nelson, T. Squires, V. (2017). Addressing complex challenges through adaptive leadership: A promising approach to collaborative problem solving. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 16(9)111-123.
- Ngoepe, M. (2022). Leadership is the missing element at failing municipalities. *Sowetan*, 25 July 2022.
- Nkosi, N. (2022). ANC Veterans league take stance on tainted leaders. *Sowetan*, 9 December 2022.
- Northouse, P.G. (2018). *Leadership theory and practice*. London: Sage Publications.
- Olivier, C. (2012). *The DNA of Great Teachers*. South Africa: Learning Design.
- Omar, Y. .A. (2019). Wanted political entrepreneurs to forge a common nationhood in SA. *Sowetan*, 4 October 2019.
- Osha, S. (2022). Mbeki now helping to save ANC. *Sunday world*, 24 July 2022.
- Owen, J.O. (2015). *How to lead: The definitive guide to effective leadership*. 4th ed. London: Pearson.
- Ramphela, M. (2011). The culture of impunity. *City Press*, 14 August 2011.
- Ramathan. L. (2017). Learner poor performance; Provoking Bourdieu's key concepts in analysing school education in South Africa. *Southern African Review of Education*, 23 (1): 23-36.

- Remeny, D. (2022). *Case study research: The quick guide series*. University of Johannesburg: UJ Press.
- Senge, P. Robert, C. Ross, R.B. Smith, B.J. & Kleiner, A. (1994). *The Fifth Discipline field-book: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organisation*. New York: Doubleday.
- Shava, G. Manadze, A. & Ncube, C.N. (2021). Transforming school leadership to enhance a culture of quality teaching and learning in Zimbabwean rural schools. *Indiana Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(11):9-16.
- Sobuwa, Y. (2021). Teacher handbook calls for change in classes. Sowetan, 19 April 2021.
- Southey, C. (2012). Teaching ruin and warring wallahs. *Mail and Guardian*, 12 April 2012.
- Swana, S. (2024). If “wolves” and “sell-outs” betrayed the revolution, it’s time for change. *Sunday World*, 2 June 2024.
- Turner, A. (2000). *Born to succeed*. Britain: The Falmer Press.
- Van Deventer, I. & Kruger, A.G. (eds.) (2010). *An Educator’s Guide to School Management Skills*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Zhu, C. Devos, G. & Li, Y. (2011). Teacher perceptions of school culture and their organisational commitment and wellbeing in a Chinese school. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 12 (2): 319-328.
- Zydziumaite, V. Kontrimiene, S. poromarenko, T. & Kaminskeine, L. (2020). Challenges in teacher leadership: Workload, time allocation and self-esteem. *European Journal of Contemporary Education*, 9, 948-962.

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.12>

THE DUALITY OF CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY AND TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY: IMPLICATIONS ON RURAL SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN

Mandla A Mubecua
Durban University of Technology
Business School
MandlaM4 @dut.ac.za

&

Innocent Simphiwe Nojiyeza
Durban University of Technology
 Business School
 InnocentNy@dut.ac.za

Abstract

Since the end of apartheid, land redistribution in South Africa has remained one of the most contested and complex policy arenas. Efforts to redistribute land are shaped by two parallel forces: the constitutional commitment to democratic principles and human rights, and the enduring authority of traditional leadership structures. While the Constitution often critiqued as a Western model perceived to be disconnected from African realities affirms women's rights to buy, sell, inherit, and control land, customary law continues to grant primary authority over land allocation and inheritance to men, typically as heads of households. Therefore, it is for that reason the present study aims to understand how the existence of both constitutional democracy and traditional authority affect rural women in South Africa. This study adopted a qualitative research approach to explore rural women lived experiences under this dual legal system. Using purposive sampling, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically with ATLAS.ti. The findings reveal persistent tensions between constitutional democracy and customary practices. Despite some reported progress in coordination between government officials and traditional authorities, women still face significant barriers to land ownership and limited participation in decision-making processes. Structural limitations including constrained land supply, policy inefficiencies, and the historical concentration of land ownership among white South Africans continue to hamper redistribution efforts. Overall, the study highlights that while traditional authorities may perceive gradual progress, most rural women continue to experience marginalisation as cultural norms remain largely incompatible with constitutional commitments to gender equality. Strengthening coordination between government and traditional authorities is recommended to better align customary practices with constitutional gender equality mandates.

Keywords: land redistribution, gender equality, customary law, constitutional democracy, dualism

Introduction

Since the end of apartheid, land redistribution in South Africa has remained one of the most contested and complex policy domains. Efforts to redistribute land have been shaped by two parallel forces: the constitutional commitment to democratic principles and human rights, and the enduring authority of traditional leadership structures. While the Constitution often critiqued as a Western model perceived to be disconnected from African realities affirms women's rights to buy, sell, inherit, and control land (Mubecua and Nojiyeza, 2022), customary law continues to grant primary authority over land allocation and inheritance to men, typically as heads of households (Mnisi and Claassens, 2009). Batisai (2018) looks at the intersectionality between race and gender as post-apartheid

land questions facing South Africa. She however ignored class configurations as part of her land redistribution intersectionality analysis. Dlamini (2023) located the South African land redistribution conundrum to the intersectionality between race, gender and class.

In rural areas, land disputes are often adjudicated in traditional courts, which, as Walker (2013) notes, remain male-dominated spaces, thereby limiting women's voices and agency. This gendered exclusion has significant implications, particularly given that many rural women rely on land to sustain their families and generate livelihoods. The tension between constitutional democracy and traditional authority thus raises critical questions about the lived realities of rural South African women: how they navigate this dual legal system, where conflicts

arise, and whether any coexistence or accommodation is possible between these systems. It is for that reason the present study aims to understand how the existence of both constitutional democracy and traditional authority affect rural women in South Africa.

Excluding the introduction, the paper covers three important sections, firstly is the literature review, which is further divided into three sub-themes, land governance and redistribution conflict, constitutional, statutory and cultural law relationships in land redistribution, gender, dual legal systems and historical political relationships. Followed by the research methodology, findings and recommendation.

Literature review

After the end of apartheid, most of the rural areas in former Bantustans experienced a serious tension between the traditional leaders and organisations (mostly advocating for democracy). This section intends to discuss the detailed tension between the two political systems and how it affects women.

Land governance and redistribution conflict

Despite continued efforts to harmonize the roles of traditional authorities and government institutions in land governance and redistribution, persistent tensions and conflicts remain evident. This paper argues that these conflicts are deeply rooted in the dual authority framework governing land in South Africa. While traditional leadership is formally recognized under Section 211 of the South African Constitution as part of the local governance system (Mofokeng, Nojiyeza, and Nxumalo, 2023), it is not acknowledged as an autonomous or separate sphere of governance. In practice, this has led to ongoing disputes, as traditional leaders view themselves as the legitimate custodians of communal land and claim responsibility for land allocation within their communities. Conversely, municipalities derive substantial legal authority over land administration through the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA), which grants them the power to regulate land-use

schemes (Geyer, 2025, Reddy, Wissink and Kariuki, 2023, Masiya, 2023, Msuya 2023).

Under SPLUMA, traditional leaders are relegated to advisory roles within municipal planning forums, which undermines their historical authority and legitimacy in local land governance. This limited involvement has generated friction between the two systems, especially in rural areas where communal land is a critical resource (Reddy, Wissink and Kariuki, 2023, Masiya, 2023, Msuya 2023). The overlap in responsibilities is further complicated by the involvement of multiple spheres of government i.e. national, provincial, and local in land allocation decisions. Yet, these same structures often expect traditional councils to make determinations regarding land rights (Turay, Dinye, and Koroma, 2025, Nzimakwe, 2023). Consequently, the unresolved power dynamics between formal state institutions and customary leadership structures continue to hinder coherent and equitable land redistribution efforts. Based on this, this work land redistribution conflicts stem less from policy gaps than from unresolved power relations within South Africa's dual land governance system. While the constitution recognizes traditional authority, SPLUMA consolidates decisive land-use powers within municipalities, effectively marginalizing customary leaders.

Constitutional, statutory and cultural law relationships in land redistribution

Land reform in South Africa operates within a dual framework that incorporates both constitutional provisions and customary norms (Jwilisi and Onwuegbuchulam, 2025). This duality reflects the complex socio-legal landscape of the country, wherein modern democratic principles coexist often uneasily with deeply rooted traditional practices. Section 25 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa forms the backbone of land reform policy. It mandates the state to take reasonable legislative and other measures to facilitate equitable access to land and ensure secure tenure, particularly for previously disadvantaged groups. Simultaneously,

Sections 211 and 212 of the Constitution recognize the role of customary law and traditional institutions, provided these are consistent with the Bill of Rights (Zantsi et al., 2025, Mutereko and Olufemi, 2023).

However, the implementation of land reform reveals a persistent disjuncture between constitutional theory and practical outcomes. In theory, courts are expected to apply customary law where appropriate, as long as it aligns with constitutional principles. In practice, however, statutory land reform efforts frequently clash with customary practices, generating tensions and undermining the goal of legal coherence (Msuya, 2023). One prominent example is the Communal Land Rights Act (CLRA) of 2004, which was introduced to address historical injustices in land ownership and to improve tenure security for people living in communal rural areas. Despite its intended benefits, the CLRA was declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court in 2010 due to concerns that it undermined land rights and failed to adequately engage rural communities (Gazi and Uwizeyimana, 2024; September, 2023).

Van Huffel (2024) cautions against adopting a top-down “custodianship” approach to land reform, arguing that such strategies risk replicating the paternalism of the apartheid era and thereby contradict the democratic aims of the post-apartheid constitution, particularly in regard to promoting participatory governance. In response to these tensions, some scholars, such as Mubecua and Nojiyeza (2022), advocate for the harmonization of statutory and customary land governance systems. They argue that meaningful consultation with affected communities and a balanced integration of communal decision-making processes into formal legal reforms are essential. This approach not only upholds constitutional imperatives of equity and rights protection but also acknowledges the legitimacy and resilience of traditional land tenure systems.

Gender, dual legal systems and historical political relationships

The gender dynamics surrounding land rights in

South Africa are deeply influenced by the country's historical political systems and the persistence of parallel legal orders namely, statutory law and customary law (Ndulo, 2017). Under apartheid, Black South African women were doubly marginalized: firstly, by racial discrimination, and secondly by patriarchal customary norms that denied them equal rights to land ownership (Mugari, Hungwe and Makoma, 2025, Dlamini, 2023). Women were excluded by virtue of being married through customary laws, land redistribution characterised by male domination and in the case of widowed women their male children inherited land as their mothers were disinherited their land rights by virtue of being women (Dlamini, 2023). Customary law traditionally recognizes men as the heads of households and, consequently, the sole legal landowners. This framework systematically excluded women particularly wives and daughters from accessing land rights (Turay, Dinye, and Koroma, 2025, Dlamini, 2023).

One example of this gendered exclusion is the Upgrading of Land Tenure Rights Act 112 of 1991, which conferred land-related permits and property rights exclusively on men, based on their status as family heads. This legal approach entrenched patriarchal norms within state legislation, further disadvantaging women (Delius and Beinart, 2021). However, a significant shift occurred in 2018, when the Constitutional Court of South Africa declared the “head of family” rule unconstitutional, marking a critical step toward gender equality in land tenure. This landmark judgment helped to affirm women’s equal status in matters of marriage and inheritance, even within the context of customary law (Samaila, 2025; Deo and Mitchell, 2025).

Further progressive legal developments have included the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act of 1998, which grants women equal rights to marital property, and the Reform of Customary Law of Succession and Regulation of Related Matters Act of 2009, which abolished the rule of male primogeniture where only the eldest male heir could inherit family property (O’Sullivan, Ugbe, Izzi, Emudainohwo, and Jack-

Osimiri, 2025). Despite these legislative efforts, traditional leadership structures remain overwhelmingly male-dominated, often impeding the full realization of women's land rights. The coexistence of statutory and customary legal systems thus continues to produce gendered outcomes. As such, the legacy of colonial and apartheid-era policies persists, subtly influencing contemporary land governance and reinforcing patriarchal patterns in rural South Africa.

Research Methodology

About research methodology, it was based on certain philosophical assumptions. This study focuses more on critical theory, which explains the power of the structure and cause of gendered differentiation in communities. Based on this, this study argues that the gendered difference in land ownership is due to the patriarchal system. Critical theory challenges a belief that females are inferior to males in society; as a result, there is inequality in land ownership perpetuated by this notion. Critical theory dwells much on a dialogic way of gathering data; this philosophy also integrates observations and interviews with the aim of ensuring conversations. Therefore, the paper applies the critical theory to question how constitutional democracy and traditional authority reproduce gendered power relations in South African communities. Furthermore, it expose how patriarchal structures rooted in customary governance systematically marginalise rural women's land rights, despite constitutional guarantees.

In terms of research approach, the study is rooted on a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is conducted if the study intends to collect more data from the target population through stories, thoughts as well as experience (Flick, 2018). For that reason, it is stated that the issue of gender requires a lot of experience, explanations, and thoughts; hence, the study collected qualitative data. Using a qualitative research approach, data were collected through interviews (Maxwell, 2018). Through a purposive sampling method, data were collected from women, men, municipal officials, and traditional leaders in Nkomazi Local Municipality.

Sampling size

The study targeted female farmers (15), non-farmer females (15), males, traditional leaders (3), and municipal officials (3). Both secondary and primary data were collected. The primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with women and traditional leaders in Nkomazi Local Municipality. The fifteen female farmers and fifteen non-farmer females were included to capture diverse women's experiences, while male participants provided comparative perspectives. Traditional leaders (3) and municipal officials (3) were selected for their governance and policy insights. This size was adequate for in-depth qualitative analysis using semi-structured interviews, allowing data saturation while remaining context-specific. After data collection, the data were analyzed using the ATLAS. Ti software program to analyze the qualitative data. Thematic analysis was used as the primary data analysis method in this study. Sample description data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis. The analysis followed three steps. Open coding identified transcript statements relevant to the research questions. Similar codes were grouped into sub-themes and then broader themes. Axial coding linked sub-themes and themes to show relationships. Final themes were reported in relation to the study's research questions. The privacy of the participants was respected, and they knew that their participation was voluntary. Participants were free to withdraw if they were not comfortable answering certain questions. Audio taping was performed with permission from the participants.

Informed consent

There is a strong agreement among scholars that research that is involving human involvement has to be done with the informed consent of participants. Informed consent is crucial if the participants will be exposed to a considerable risk (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 2007). Fully informing research participants on the nature and purpose of the study also ensures that participants who are forbidden from participating in certain types of studies can refrain from

them. For instance, some employees may not be allowed to take part in a study without the consent of their employers. By informing them of the nature of the study, they are able to decide if they are allowed to participate in it reducing any potential legal risks. Informed consent was obtained through a discussion of the nature and purpose of the study with each participant and outlining before the interview. This was done in the research participant's language of choice, which was English, SiSwati and IsiNdebele. Thus, research participants were informed of the title of the research, the researcher's name and credentials, the uses and benefits of the study and the institution involved.

Ethical approval

This study formed part of the PhD study with a title: *A case study of gendered differences in land ownership in Nkomazi, Mpumalanga, South Africa*. There are four committees who approved this study. Firstly, the study was presented in the Department of Anthropology and Development Studies (University of Zululand) and it was approved. It was then approved by the Higher Degree Committee (HDC) as well as University of Zululand Research and Ethics Committee and the SENATE Executive Committee (SENEX) with the Reg No: UZREC 17111030 (Ethical clearance is attached). There were no deviations from the ethical protocols of UZREC.

Findings and discussion of the study

The paper comprises of four major themes which are the conflict among traditional and government leadership; constitution, statutory and cultural law with the land redistribution; gender, dual legal systems and historical political relationships and gender and broader land redistribution complications. About gender, the double legal systems and historical political relations that comprises of colonialism and apartheid were recognised as the major cause of were seen as a cause of land redistribution difficulties in land allocations. Moreover, the challenges were also related with the plural legal systems which led to the conflict between traditional and legislative (constitutional) authorities.

Conflict between traditional and government leadership

In this section the paper focuses on the conflict between the traditional and government authorities which are operating under the customary law and its influence on gendered land.

About the traditional authorities at the Nkomazi Local Municipality, the paper shows that the traditional authorities revealed that there is no conflict between traditional leaders and government approach towards addressing inequality in land redistribution. Both institutions (traditional and government institutions) are working together to solve the issues of inequalities in rural communities.

“No, there is no clash between us and the government we work together to address the challenges that our community face, and we Amakhosi we have been working with them to fight land dispossession and apartheid”.
TL2

The finding of the study resonates with the work of Oomen (2005), who reveals that the post-apartheid era has inspired the close collaboration between government and traditional leadership, especially in solving the social justice and land-related differences. The traditional leaders (TL1) also reveal that there is no conflict between the two systems because as it was resolved long time ago. As a result, the traditional leaders instead had increased the coordination and communication between the two system.

“The two systems use to clash long-time ago, but this is no more in the present days because we as traditional leaders we now form part of the government through the Traditional Councils”. TL1

Claassens and Cousins (2008) state that the historical conflict between the two systems (customary and statutory systems) were largely political, however, reforms like the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act (2003) have institutionalized cooperation. Furthermore, Kepe and Hall (2016) argue that this integration has enhanced coordination and governance capacity, especially through Traditional Councils that bridge customary authority and local government.

TL3 has noted that the differences are operational and procedural between the two systems. TL3 revealed that despite that there is no conflict between the two systems, however, they operate on different security of tenure processes. The provision of title deed has been the responsibility of the state and not the traditional leaders:

“I don’t think that there are clashes, however, there are just differences, for instance, the government offers a title deed, and ourselves as Amakhosi we don’t give title deeds, but we make sure that there is a security of tenure through a permission to occupy (PTO)”. TL3

These differences indicate a broader argument recognized by Cousins (2007), who revealed that dual systems of tenure formal title and customary occupancy persist to coexist, with each serving separate social and legal principles. Moreover, the paper shows that the traditional leaders only provided access to the land rather than long-term tenure by some female participants. The government land redistribution could provide concrete resolution towards women’s landlessness.

On the other hand, TL2 and TL3 propose that

the association between the two systems might not be as well-coordinated. TL2 assumed that proper communication between the two systems was needed to address the conflict:

“There should be more interaction between us the traditional leaders and the government officials which will help to address any clash among us”. TL2

As indicated by Williams (2010) that a lack of structured interactions channels between customary and statutory institutions mostly results to confusion over authority and role in rural governance. Likewise, Beall and Ngonyama (2009) reveal that weak coordination can create vagueness in service delivery and the management of land, even where both systems share common development goals. The capacity of the traditional leaders to manage and ensure equality in land redistribution is questioned.

“I think the government should trust the operation of the Amakhosi”. TL3

The literature link with the findings of the paper, for instance, the work of Sithole and Mbele (2008) argue that traditional leaders perform an important role in sustaining social order and enabling fair land distribution but often operate under limited trust from government institutions. The responses on the good relationships between traditional leaders and government system is more diplomatic than factual. This is substantiated by later comments from LA1 below:

“It is difficult to address the clash between the government system and system of the traditional leaders except through the eradication of the customary law system. However, this may cause a lot of problems since the traditional leaders have been there before the government system. Moreover, the traditional

leaders have played an important role to fight both Apartheid and colonialism so destroying the system will be unfair". LA1

According to Ntsebeza (2005), the existence of traditional and modern governance systems remains inherently complex because traditional authorities originate legitimacy from historical and cultural endurance rather than democratic election. The work of Claassens (2013) further reveals that attempts to replace customary law have often been attacked because of the deep social embeddedness of traditional leader's structures in rural areas. LA1 argued that despite the collaboration between traditional leaders and the modern structure of government, the customary law continues to restrict women to own land. Therefore, the customary law through the traditional leaders is being tolerated because of historic factors, especially their pre-colonial existence and their role in fighting against apartheid. Therefore, customary law system, must be tolerated rather than being accepted. On the other hand, participants from the municipality (MO1 and MO2) have acknowledged the positive interactions between the municipality and the traditional authorities:

"As a municipality, we do have a relationship with all of Amakhosi in this municipality and we are working together we them."

"Yes, the municipality does interact with the traditional leaders, though we may not agree with some of the things, but the truth remains that we do communicate". MO1

Based on the findings of the paper the work of Kepe and Hall (2016), further debated that the

majority of South African municipalities have institutionalized regular collaborations with traditional leaders to enhance planning and service delivery. Nonetheless, the position undertaken by the traditional authorities on women should be changed. Through this it shows that there was conflict between the two systems that appeared to be making an effort to co-exist. This strategic approach and the need for peaceable co-existence, unfortunately, influence women's access to land. Furthermore, a female farmer opined that while the municipality and the traditional authorities sometimes interacted and worked together, this did mean their interaction promoted constitutionalism and gender equality on land distribution:

"I doubt that there is a link between the practice of culture and the country's constitution. Although the traditional authorities work hand in hand with the municipality, in operation the customary law operates lonely, which also makes the constitution to operate lonely". FF12

Claassens and Cousins (2008) state that the independence of customary law often leads in its parallel operation to constitutional frameworks, resulting to fragmented governance and inadequate accountability. Therefore, the communication between traditional leaders on one hand and provincial and municipal officials on the other were not seen as a resolution to gender equality in land distribution.

Constitutional, statutory and cultural law relationships in land redistribution

In Nkomazi Local Municipality, the constitution and the practice of culture is completely different and is not aligned. The constitution is promoting cross-cultural dialogues, and it provides permission for both men and women to have access. Cultural norms, on the other hand, women occupy land under the permission of a male figure. This continue in the presence of the constitutions or municipal bylaws that support equal

land redistribution :

“The practice of culture is not promoting the equal distribution of land as the constitution of the country intends. This makes our culture as Swati people to somewhere somehow clash with the constitution of the country”. FF10

“Although the practices of cultures are not the same, in most cases the cultural practices mostly promote dictatorship and this has affected more women than men. For instance, women are not allowed to own land, on the other hand, the democratic government system (constitution) acknowledge that everyone has a right to own land”. FF4

This disagreement resonances with the work of Walker (2003) who believe that South Africa’s progressive constitutional framework fails to enter rural customary practices that remain patriarchal in nature. At the sometime, Cousins (2007) argue that while statutory laws intend to democratize access to land, customary systems proceed to privilege male authority, often strengthening gendered hierarchies.

Based on FF13, the lack of alignment between the statutory law and the practice of culture is caused by the traditional leaders who intentionally fail to comply with the constitution. It is always expected that the traditional system was supposed to comply or submit to constitutions of the country:

“Somewhere somehow, the traditional leaders fail to align the cultural practice with the aim of the constitution”. FF13

In relation to the literature (Ntsebeza 2005) the traditional authorities often resist constitutional oversight because their authority is historically

rooted in customary legitimacy rather than democratic accountability. The study of Beall and Nkonyama (2009) further show that the resistance displays institutional autonomy rather than defiance, as traditional authorities aim to maintain influence in community governance amidst the dominance of statutory law.

The ongoing power of traditional power over the South African constitution is explained as a foundation of women oppression in Nkomazi Local Municipality:

“Although I don't know what the constitution is saying about women and gender equality what I know is that the constitution is against women's oppression. On the other hand, the practice of culture in this area promotes women's oppression. Hence, I don't see a link between the two systems (cultural practices and western systems of democracy)”. FF11

Therefore, the practices of culture has said to connect with the oppression of women by men. The unavailability of land amongst women in Nkomazi Local Municipality is a result of women oppression rather than mere cultural values. Conversely, it has been shown that despite the current state of gender inequality in land ownership in South Africa but compares to the previous years, there is a lot of improvement that has been made.

“Sintfu setfu (our culture) although is not aligning but it is now better than before where young girls were not even allowed to be educated or go to work. About land allocation, it is also better than before since women were not allowed to use or own the land. But nowadays some women own and use the land although there are not that many compared to men”. FF9

The work of Walker (2003) argue that the democratic reforms and advocacy movements have slowly opened space for women's participation in land ownership. Therefore, there were robust arguments that culture distorted form was being used against constitutional justice. Based on this it indicates a perspective that the residents who are affected by the customary law system knew about its limitations and the power of the constitution but had no idea on how to deal with it. While the existence of both customary and statutory law has been proven to be real, but the findings of the paper didn't appreciate the uncontrollable power of the customary law in the Nkomazi Local Municipality's jurisdiction and how it restrict women from both accessing and owning the land.

Gender, dual legal systems and historical political relationships

The history of apartheid has resulted to gendered differences in land ownership. Historical factors that affected gendered differences in access to and ownership of land and in turn gendered poverty were centred on apartheid. With that reason, the factors had a negative influence on the efficacy of both the customary and democratic political systems capacity to deal with land problems. On the other hand, the historical factor are being used as an scapegoat to unfair land access and ownership, they were highlighted by some as contributing to the gendered land ownership differences in the Nkomazi Local Municipality.

Traditional land distribution systems, as opined, existed in a space where they needed to dismantle race and gender-related inequalities. Historically, customary authorities were expected to perpetuate apartheid practices in land inequalities but with democracy, they were expected to transform towards accepting and facilitating a society that was equal by gender. This was revealed in discussion with TL1 extracted below:

“The customary practices of the apartheid period are no-longer

the same with the customary practices of the present days. Long-time ago, the systems use to oppress not only women but the whole community although it was more among women. Now it is different, women have rights to education in this community, and they can access land anytime they need it. With that being said I mean the present system does encourage women to own land”.
TL1

Based on the findings of the study, it shows that it aligns with the literature for instance, the work of Walker (2003) states that democratic transitions in South Africa brought legal and institutional reforms intended at changing land governance to promote gender equity. Nevertheless, Claassens (2013) warns that the rhetoric of transformation is evident, while in practice the customary systems remain patriarchal, restricting the participation of women in land ownership. With democracy, the customary system was challenged to rapidly transform to facilitate gender equality in line with constitutional practices. This transformation is occurring but probably at a slower pace than expected as opined by another traditional leader:

“On the other hand, men use the land for commercial farming, and most of the farms are larger than that of women. And this is the challenge of apartheid inequalities, however, we are doing our best to address these challenges through the equal allocation of the land”. TL2

The literature (Cousins, 2007) shows that the continuation of economic and structural differences from apartheid influence access to agricultural land, where men control commercial farming compared to women. TL1 further stressed that both local government and customary entities shared common concerns on the need for equality but as discussed in an earlier

theme, change from the past was slower than expected:

“Yes, there is a relationship between us and the municipality, for instance, most of the people in the municipality are the politicians who were available in the fight against apartheid and even in us as Amakhosi there are politicians who understand the struggle against apartheid”. TL1

This corresponds with Oomen (2005), who notes that the juncture between traditional and democratic authorities carries historical endurances from the anti-apartheid struggle, promoting alliance at the same time maintaining inherited power dynamics. A female farmer however protested that the customary system had failed communities as far as transforming land and resources ownership was concerned. FF11 see the system as a continuation of historical discrimination against women:

“I think the customary law system continues where the Apartheid system ended because the customary law system does not encourage black women to have access to resources”.

Hence, I don't see the difference between the operation of the Amakhosi with the apartheid system. FF1

Thus, where TL1 and TL2, as traditional leaders see their efforts as leading to slow but evident change, FF1 perceives them as maintaining the apartheid-era status quo. NFF9 also puts the constitutional democracy system as part of the slow transformation process. The land problem, as opined below, was not only a black woman's struggle but a general societal challenge emanating from unaddressed racially-biased land ownership systems. However, as most of the land was still white-owned, that left a very small portion for blacks, including black women:

“The government procedure of giving land through land redistribution or restitution program is right and it allows women to own land, but it is important to note that the issue is that most of the land is still owned by whites, hence, the majority of blacks don't own land. So the issue is not on gender land but in racial land. The more the land is distributed to blacks is the more it will be easy for black women to obtain the land”. NFF9

The work of Hall (2010) explains that racial differences in land ownership continue to be the most important restriction on equitable redistribution, overwhelming gender concerns in South Africa. The views above importantly show wider perspectives on the challenges faced in Nkomazi with regards to gendered land ownership differences. The perceptions of either slow land ownership transformation or a lack of it resonate with another sub-theme that centred on the slowness of land requests processing.

Gender and broader land redistribution complications

The issue of gendered differences in land ownership was also traced and associated with South Africa's challenging land redistribution environment. The findings of the study shows that the government has failed to acquire adequate land, there is high demand for the little available land whose redistribution is then skewed towards the male gender:

South African land is very complicated, even us as a government we have failed for the past years to address the land questions in the country since 1994. MO1

Likewise, Hall (2010) argues that despite the effort of the democratic government to address the

land reform, the progress has been so slow and uneven, and it has been constrained by bureaucratic inefficiencies, limited state capacity, and market-based redistribution mechanisms that favour those with financial resources typically men.

MO1 believes that blaming the traditional leaders alone for gendered land differences might not be an accurate assessment:

With that being said, it is not easy for me to say that the Amakhosi are failing to distribute land to address gender inequality. MO1

The findings align with the work of Oomen (2005), who argue that attributing land inequities solely to traditional authorities, reasoning that the government policy and institutional design play a major role in shaping outcomes. The traditional leaders indeed played a part in skewed land redistribution, the broader governmental systems and policies on land redistribution also affected equality in land ownership. Importantly, the current theme connected gendered land ownership differences to historical and political factors as well as land redistribution complications beyond the boundaries of the Nkomazi Local Municipality. It highlighted that the challenges affecting the Nkomazi Local Municipality communities cannot be wholly divorced from the South African historical and current land redistribution struggles that include attempts to balance pluralistic legal regimes affecting the process.

Conclusion and recommendations

After the end of the apartheid regime, land reform in South Africa has remained one of the most contested and complex policy arenas. This

study has demonstrated that the efforts to redistribute land are shaped by a duality on the one hand, the constitutional commitment to democratic principles and human rights; on the other, the enduring authority of traditional leadership structures. While the South African Constitution affirms the rights of women to own, inherit, and control land, these constitutional guarantees are often undermined by patriarchal customary laws that continue to dominate land governance in rural areas. These customary frameworks typically grant men especially those recognized as heads of household's primary authority over land allocation and inheritance, thus sidelining women from meaningful land ownership. Structural constraints such as limited land availability, inefficient policy implementation, and the continued concentration of land in the hands of a white minority exacerbate the challenges of equitable redistribution. Although there may be isolated signs of progress, the study reveals that rural women remain persistently marginalised. This marginalisation is sustained by deep-rooted cultural norms that are not easily reconciled with constitutional ideals of gender equality. To address these enduring disparities, it is recommended that the South African government strengthen coordination between state institutions and traditional authorities. There is an urgent need to develop frameworks that harmonise customary land governance with constitutional mandates, particularly concerning gender equity. Furthermore, capacity building initiatives targeting traditional leaders could facilitate a more inclusive interpretation of customary law that embraces women's land rights. Only through deliberate institutional cooperation and cultural transformation can South Africa advance a land reform agenda that is both socially just and constitutionally compliant.

References

- Batisai, K. Gendered Nationhood and the Land Question in South Africa 20 Years after Democracy. *Afrika-Studiecentrum Series*, 78.
- Beall, J., & Ngonyama, M. (2009). *Indigenous institutions, traditional leaders and elite coalitions for development: The case of Greater Durban, South Africa*. Crisis States Research Centre Working Paper No. 55. London School of Economics.

- Claassens, A., & Cousins, B. (Eds.). (2008). *Land, power and custom: Controversies generated by South Africa's Communal Land Rights Act*. UCT Press.
- Cousins, B. (2015). *Land reform in South Africa is sinking: Can it be saved?* PLAAS Policy Brief 16. Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies, University of the Western Cape.
- Delius, P., & Beinart, W. (2021). Securing the Land: From customary land tenure to registered titled land?. *Land in South Africa: Contested Meanings and Nation Formation*, edited by Khwezi Mabasa and Bulelwa Mabasa, 26.
- Deo, S., & Mitchell, R. (2025). Land and Violence in the Lives of Tribal Women: The Case of Jharkhand. *Journal of Land and Rural Studies*, 23210249251328812.
- Diala, A. C. (2017). The concept of living customary law: A critique. *South African Journal on Human Rights*, 33(2), 195–215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02587203.2017.1362532>
- Dlamini, Z. The Gender Dynamic: Access, Planning, Use, and Management of Land for Gender Equity.
- Flick, U. (2018). Doing qualitative data collection—charting the routes. *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data collection*, 1-16.
- Gazi, T., & Uwizeyimana, D. E. (2024). A Framework to formalise Land rights in Communal Land areas of the former Transkei, South Africa. *Kurd Stud*, 12, 925-958.
- Geyer, H. (2025). Grey Governance: Micro-Regional Territorial Governance Through Customary Land Management Systems in Informal Peri-Urban Settlements in Cape Town. In *Territorial Governance and Spatial Transformation in Post-apartheid South Africa* (pp. 255-278). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.
- Hall, R. (2010). *The politics of land reform in post-apartheid South Africa, 1990–2004: A shifting terrain of power*. In S. Greenberg (Ed.), *Contesting inequality: The South African experience* (pp. 68–95). University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Jwilisi, S., & Onwuegbuchulam, S. P. C. (2025). To Whom Does the Land Belong?: Interrogating Land Reform in South Africa and the Prospects of Peace and National Unity. *Africa Review*, 17(2), 171-192.
- Kepe, T., & Hall, R. (2016). Land redistribution in South Africa: Towards decolonisation or recolonisation? *Politikon*, 43(2), 128–148. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589346.2016.1203860>
- Maxwell, J. A. (2018). The "Silo Problem" in Mixed Methods Research. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*, 10(1).
- Meer, T. (2017). *Gendered land rights, collective tenure and democracy in South Africa*. Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Policy Brief.
- Mofokeng, N. R., Nojiyeza, I. S., & Nxumalo, S. I. (2023). Are We Citizens or Subjects? Service Delivery at the Intersection of Modern and Traditional Leadership in Emaqeleni. *OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development*, 16(12), 51-60.
- Mubecua, M. A., & Nojiyeza, I. S. (2022). The Dichotomy of Land Laws in South Africa: The Challenges Faced by Women in Accessing Land. *African Journal of Gender, Society & Development*, 11(2), 119.
- Mugari, Z. E., Hungwe, C., & Makoma, J. (2025). Keeping African women in social reproduction roles: a systematic qualitative review of literature on post-FTLRP Zimbabwe. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 52(3), 597-614.
- Ndulo, M. B. (2017). Legal pluralism, customary law and women's rights. *Southern African Public Law*, 32(1), 1-21.

- Ntsebeza, L. (2005). *Democracy compromised: Chiefs and the politics of land in South Africa*. Brill Academic Publishers.
- O'Sullivan, M., Ugbe, R. O., Izzi, M., Emudainohwo, E., & Jack-Osimiri, U. (2025). Annulment of Discriminatory Custom and its Impact on Matrilineal and Patrilineal Societies/People. *African Journal of International and Comparative Law*, 32(2), 235-266.
- Oomen, B. (2005). *Chiefs in South Africa: Law, power & culture in the post-apartheid era*. James Currey.
- Samaila, E. J. (2025). Inheritance and Succession: Customary Law, Practice and Procedure. *Practice and Procedure (January 23, 2025)*.
- September, T. J. (2023). Constitutional framework for traditional leaders in South Africa.
- Turay, B. T., Dinye, R. D., & Koroma, I. S. (2025). Customary Land Governance and Rural Women's Access to Land in Sierra Leone: A Case Study of Tambakha Simibungie Chiefdom, North-west Province. *Journal of Land and Rural Studies*, 23210249251328757.
- Turay, B. T., Dinye, R. D., & Koroma, I. S. (2025). Customary Land Governance and Rural Women's Access to Land in Sierra Leone: A Case Study of Tambakha Simibungie Chiefdom, North-west Province. *Journal of Land and Rural Studies*, 23210249251328757.
- Walker, C. (2003). *Piety in the sky? Gender policy and land reform in South Africa*. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 3(1–2), 113–148. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0366.00053>
- Walker, C. (2012). *Looking forward, looking back: Beyond the narrative of loss and restoration in the history of land*. In B. Cousins & C. Walker (Eds.), *Land divided, land restored: Land reform in South Africa for the 21st century* (pp. 17–32). Jacana Media.
- Zantsi, S., Mack, G., Möhring, A., Cloete, K., Greyling, J. C., & Mann, S. (2025). South Africa's land redistribution: an agent-based model for assessing structural and economic impacts. *Agrekon*, 1-20.

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.13>

EXPLORING EFFECTS OF LOAD-SHEDDING ON DIGITAL PEDAGOGY: PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS AND LECTURERS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND

Hebert Sihle Ntuli, PhD

University of Zululand, Kwa Dlangezwa Campus,

KZN, South Africa

ntulih@unizulu.ac.za

The usage of digital pedagogy is developing quickly in the Fourth Industrial Revolution period (4IR). The digital world has entered education setting with technology being used to deliver education innovatively. Energy (electricity) is an important factor in digitalization. For some time, South Africa has failed to solve electricity crisis notoriously named Load-shedding. The effects of load-shedding have supposedly infringed on adequate access to the right to education. The load-shedding crisis impacted, and to some extent, violated the constitution in particular section 29, in the Bill of Rights which affords everyone the right to education. Therefore, the electricity crisis in South Africa posed serious challenges on digitalization. Against this background, this paper explores the effects of load-shedding on digital pedagogy in the University of Zululand. It argues that load-shedding is jointly liable for some challenges confronting teaching and learning in this institution. To understand students and lecturers' perceptions, the researcher used a phenomenological approach. This study is framed by the theory of connectivism.

Keywords: Load-shedding, digitalization, electricity, digital pedagogy, rural

Introduction

In the 4IR era technology is progressively used by society for various activities regularly. Digital devices, digital tools, and digital platforms altered the way people go about daily lives. Sadiku et al. (2019) states that in higher education environments, the use of technology has provided students and lecturers with various platforms and digital tools to discuss knowledge, content, assessments, perspectives, skills, and solutions to problems that aim to encourage and guide online teaching and learning via internet. Computers and smartphones are examples of digital technologies that support or help digital platforms and digital tools in digital pedagogy. Software applications, websites, PowerPoint presentations, and internet resources are a few examples of digital tools. In order to successfully include digital tools and devices into teaching and learning, digital pedagogy thus supports digital platforms (Haleem et al., 2022). Consequently, digital platforms help instructors use digital tools and resources to post educational content online.

According to Istrate (2022), lecturers and students may not be equally prepared for success in the 4IR in higher education settings. He speculates that they might be either digital natives or immigrants. This perspective suggests that digital immigrants lack familiarity with digital tools. Digital natives, on the other hand, are accustomed to using digital tools, platforms, and gadgets. They are proficient with computers, smartphones, the internet, and other electronic devices. Bitar and Davidovich (2024) bolster

this view by arguing that digital natives, as opposed to digital immigrants, are successful when learning through digital tools, platforms, and gadgets. Digital immigrants could require more assistance. As a result, instructors must be cognizant of their students' proficiency with digital tools, platforms, and gadgets. When preparing and presenting the 4IR principles in a higher education setting, the lecturer might benefit from this awareness. To effectively educate their students for success in these circumstances, educational institutions must also adapt.

Within these digital developments, South Africa has failed for some times to resolve the electricity crisis infamously dubbed load-shedding (Matsheta & Sefoka, 2023). Energy (electricity) is an important factor in digitalization; without energy digitalization is impossible. The load-shedding crisis in South Africa has to a certain extent infringed the Constitution in particular, section 29. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa pledges in its preamble that "every citizen must equally be protected by law and further foster the quality of life of all citizens". Thus, as a way of fostering the quality of life of all citizens, the Constitution in the Bill of Rights embodies a concoction of rights that enables citizens to exercise in nurturing their livelihood. Amid these rights, section 29 affords everyone the right to education. Therefore, the electricity crisis compels the researcher to explore the degree of violation of section 29 and the effects that load-shedding has on education and its infrastructure.

This qualitative, interpretive study explored effects of load-shedding on digital pedagogy in the University of Zululand. This institution is a rural university and is in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. With academic ties to the University of South Africa (UNISA), it was established in 1960 as a vital institution of UNISA. It was granted university status in 1970. Being a predominantly black university, it belonged to a group of African universities that were administratively governed by the Department of Education and Training. Prioritizing Zulu and Swazi pupils until 1979, it subsequently accepted and supported Black students from all ethnic backgrounds. In 1986, it welcomed visitors of all races.

By adding career-focused programs to its curriculum, it changed from being a conventional institution to a comprehensive university in 2002. It remains a rural comprehensive university in KwaZulu-Natal province despite its little history. Its premise was both instrumental (training Black people to be useful to the state) and political (maintaining the socio-political aim of the apartheid era). A sizable portion of its student body still comes from rural areas. From humble beginnings, the institution has evolved into a fully-fledged university, equal to many higher institutions in the country. It has thrived to produce graduates with high levels of knowledge and skills and have been educated to serve and be active participants in society. Although it has made huge progress, the scars of apartheid are still prevalent and pervasive in this institution.

The transition to 4IR has started, just like in other academic institutions. Since the inception of the 4AI, digital technology has drastically changed and reorganized the world's basic teaching and learning practices. The 4IR is now the primary engine propelling global improvements in higher education. It is thought that the quick development of technology in higher education has produced an effective teaching and learning environment in the twenty-first century. Technology has significantly transformed higher education, but not without serious challenges. The institution in question is no exception. Thus, the main objectives of the study are to identify participants' perceptions of digital

pedagogy; to explore challenges posed by load-shedding on digital pedagogy; and to examine strategies adopted to deal with load-shedding challenges.

Literature review

Digital technologies are now part of our daily lives. The pace of their use has been accelerated by the outbreak of COVID 19. Once viewed as an issue, digital transformation is now considered as a crucial part of sustainable development (SD), particularly at universities whose operations have been negatively impacted by the epidemic in several ways. Through increased technological integration, COVID-19 pushed for a shift in teaching and learning activities. For instance, the issue of technology use was highlighted in South Africa. This was consistent with the opinions of Bitar and Davidovich (2024), who contend that instructors and students must be sufficiently exposed to digital pedagogy and equipped to use technology in a classroom. But since technology depends on electricity to operate, things get complicated when there are power outages. Power outages have negatively affected the operations of Higher education institutions. According to Khoza (2024), universities were compelled to immediately cease instruction when the power went out during load shedding because the Learning Management System (LMS) would not be operational.

Cabanero et al (2022) examine issues caused by digital divide for students at South African universities during 2020 academic year. The study reveals the perceptions and experiences of university students from historically marginalized universities. It ventures into relatively unexplored territory by examining the digital divide in the wake of COVID 19 pandemic and radical shift to online learning. In this study, authors argue that digital media in the digital divide suffuses socio-economic relationship between university students and managements. The study provides insight into the role of the 4IR, the technology, digital inequalities, environmental, institutional barriers or disparities students faced during remote learning and assessment. The findings show that for students attending underserved universities, online learning did not

make higher education more accessible during the epidemic. Participation and attendance in synchronous lectures are adversely affected by network coverage, device type, time of day, socioeconomic status, and digital competency. Additionally, according to Jerwin et al. (2022), in order to reduce the digital and educational disparities that impact students from low-income and/or rural homes, a more inclusive and adaptable pedagogy based on a university's resources and students' profiles is required.

According to Kgarose et al. (2023), COVID-19 was designated a pandemic in 2020 by the South African government. To make sure that section 27 (1) (a) (b) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa was followed, higher education institutions turned to implementing online instruction. Higher education institutions faced a number of difficulties because of load-shedding. Academic performance at higher education institutions was interrupted by the crisis, which also resulted in an institutional economy. After the COVID-19 pandemic, Kgarose et al. (2023) investigated if load shedding qualifies as a pandemic. According to their research, universities should make investments in alternative energy sources and create efficient communication plans.

In the study conducted at the University of Zululand, Dube (2020) discusses challenges faced by PGCE history students in adapting to and accessing online learning and library material. The study finds that students find it difficult to adjust to online learning and suggests that higher education institutions consider several issues while implementing online learning in the future under COVID-19. According to Ratten (2023), COVID-19 has made in-depth studies on the digital status in developing countries necessary. He claims that there are significant obstacles in the way cultures' attempts to embrace technology. In today's world, the topic of the digital divide has been alluring, especially given the different obstacles society encounters in using the full potential of information and technology. According to Majola and Mudau (2022), universities and other educational institutions were closed worldwide because of the COVID-19 epidemic. To restrict and halt the virus's spread,

universities were obliged to switch to online learning and alter the way they delivered their information. Higher education institutions around the world made the change smoothly, but there were unavoidable difficulties, like students' access to digital materials, internet connections, and institutional support. Majola and Mudau go on to say that in South Africa, the transformation was hampered by frequent power outages, expensive data, and inadequate connectivity. Students were unable to maintain a consistent internet connection for online learning due to network issues brought on by subpar mobile phones.

Research problem

Like corruption, loadshedding has unfortunately been part of the lives of many South Africans. It has been in existence for more than fourteen years. The effect of load-shedding has been reported to have allegedly infringed on adequate access to the right to education. For example, some students during examination period could not access, write, or even attend other educational activities during load-shedding. Load-shedding was severally and jointly liable for some challenges confronted the education sector, in both basic and tertiary levels. The lack of electricity impeded students' concentration on their studies and equally precluded lecturers from proactively discharging their pedagogical duties and responsibilities. In modern existence, students and lecturers use technology to deliver various tasks including teaching and learning responsibilities which to a major extent rely on electricity. This means that in times of load-shedding the scholastic responsibilities cannot be delivered. In addition to numerous challenges, the shortage of supplementary power supply in the higher learning institution in question compromised the teaching and learning process. Unlike previous studies, this article explores the students and lecturers' perceptions of digital pedagogy and challenges posed by load-shedding on it.

Theoretical framework

Connectivism is a network learning theory for the digital age. The development of the theory

of connectivism has been encouraged by advances in digital pedagogy and technology. Among other things, it entails that within the ambits of connectivism, students engage with digital pedagogies and interact on digital platforms to reflect on, share and improve their current knowledge and understanding. Connectivism is a theory of learning proposed by George Siemens and is pertinent in our digital era. According to Siemens (2005), connectivism as a theory is supported by current digital tools and is based on the idea that students' lives, learning, and communication are impacted by the ubiquitous ICT. In a similar vein, digital pedagogy development requires technology. Pedagogy has changed as a result of technology, and by encouraging student-teacher collaboration, digital pedagogy can foster effective teaching and learning. According to Siemens, connectivism may be thought of as a modified version of constructivism that is suitable for the age of technology. Students benefit from connectivism as they work together, communicate, solve problems, and finish assignments. According to connectivism, group collaboration is the reason why knowledge, comprehension, and information progress in a system.

1. Methodology

To understand the significance that participants attach to their conceptions of digital pedagogy and the impact of load-shedding on it, the researcher used a phenomenological methodology. A study technique called phenomenology uses the perspectives of persons who experienced an event to describe its essence (Neubauer 2019). Phenomenology is the study method for describing the essence of a thing by looking at it through the eyes of those who witnessed it. It is the study of how humans make sense of ordinary occurrences. The method made it easier to investigate, comprehend, explain, and characterize how various lecturers and students view digital teaching.

Semi-structured interviews were employed in the study article to gather opinions on digital pedagogy from lecturers and students. This type

of interview typically consists of a dialogue between the subject and the researcher, supported by comments, probes, and follow-up questions, and directed by a flexible interview process. I posed and addressed several questions salient to digital pedagogy and load-shedding crisis: What are the participants' perceptions of digital pedagogy? How does load-shedding affect digital pedagogy? To what extent do adopted strategies solve the load-shedding challenges?

In this study, purposive sampling was used. A small-scale study was approached qualitatively because the goal of this research was to provide detailed perceptions and comprehension of the respondents from their point of view, rather than to quantify. Twelve lecturers and twelve students made up the 24 participants (male and female). Narrative inquiry, which involves people telling stories about their experiences, was used to generate data. Through the accounts of research participants, narrative inquiry aids in the comprehension and presentation of real-life experiences (Wang & Geale 2015). Using an interpretative paradigm was relevant for this study because interpretivists see the world through a "series of individual eyes" and select participants who "have their own interpretations of reality" to "encompass the worldview" (Thanh and & 2015).

Data analysis was done through thematic analysis, following familiarization, theme development, reviewing, and finally writing a paper. In qualitative research, this type of analysis is the process of identifying themes or patterns in qualitative data. The study employed thematic analysis to ascertain how instructors and students viewed digital teaching, the difficulties load-shedding presented, and the approaches taken to address these difficulties. Transcripts of participant interviews and recognizable writings that represent experiential knowledge of load-shedding and digital teaching were included in the qualitative data.

The researcher took ethical considerations into account while conducting this study. Students and lecturers orally consented to participate in the study even if they did not sign the consent form. They requested access to the typed sto-

ries, and the researcher consented. The researcher took care to ensure confidentiality and anonymity in order to preserve the participants' dignity throughout the investigation.

Findings

Although participants generally expressed gratitude for their institution's use of technology and digital pedagogy, they did note that, in addition to its advantages, there are drawbacks.

Emerging themes

Data from all participants yielded six (6) main themes which are strengths of digital pedagogy; digital pedagogy empowers and motivates teachers; expensive data, unstable internet connection and digital divide; the negative and positive impact of COVID-19 pandemic; the load-shedding crisis; and strategies adopted to deal with load-shedding crisis.

Strengths of digital pedagogy

Interviews revealed that digital pedagogy is valued. Participants talked about the benefits of teaching and learning with digital pedagogy. For instance, students claim that a variety of online resources and digital tools, including PowerPoint presentations, videos, and expanded demonstrations, improve their comprehension. They claimed that watching and learning through videos is preferable. This is consistent with connectivism philosophy. Lecturers indicated that technology plays a vital role in the teaching and learning process and provides options for instructional tactics. One participant mentioned that she is now at ease utilizing the internet and its resources. The assessments are administered online rather than in conventional papers. Interviews also revealed that digital pedagogy encourages curiosity and boosts self-assurance when it comes to lesson design and instruction.

Digital pedagogy empowers and motivates lecturers

Lecturers mentioned that employing digital tools and resources boosts their self-esteem, and applying digital pedagogy helps their students. They felt that utilizing various websites, videos,

and software applications enhanced the interest of their teaching and reduced class time. Participants were inspired to use this approach when teaching their subsequent lessons. One participant stated that in the past they simply utilized textbooks and students were not very focused or talkative, but now since there are various tools and websites available, students are enthusiastic, and lecturers are ready to teach.

Expensive data, unstable internet connection and digital divide

Participants indicated that their capacity to implement digital pedagogy in their learning environment was hampered by erratic internet connections and the costs associated with buying data and digital equipment. They mentioned challenges connected to lack of necessary gadgets, breaking connectivity caused by poor infrastructure for the internet, and expensive data. Material access was the commonly mentioned type of digital divide, involving physical access to an internet connection, the cost of software, and service. One lecturer stated that digital divide manifested itself through lack of internet access, the high cost of data bundles, weak network signals, and poor network coverage. Load-shedding or interruptions in electricity supply added to poor network coverage. Another participant mentioned that during COVID-19 pandemic he was unable to write the examination because the cell phone he was using could not download questions due to poor network. The participants point out that the data is too expensive for missing middle students to keep up with their online studies, for example during COVID-19 pandemic.

One student disclosed that their institution is a rural university and that internet is not stable in this institution. Network challenges for students manifested as an urban rural divide. Participants indicated that remote learning is problematic for students based in rural areas due to the infrastructure that online learning requires. The participants, both students and lecturers, were of the view that the institution's officials need to work together to ensure that classrooms are equipped with the necessary resources and requirements to embrace digital pedagogy in their

institution. They were of the view that the computer lab should be equipped with sufficient facilities. Students complained about access to free Wi-Fi on campus and university residences. They spoke about long lines at the lab due to high demand. They mentioned that although smartphones offer students better access than feature phones, they are not ideal for long assignments.

The negative and positive impact of the COVID 19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic came with numerous consequences on teaching and learning in higher education institutions. Amongst these was the prohibition of face-to-face lectures and forced introduction of online learning. Online learning depended on, *inta alia*, three elements, namely technology, electronics, and the internet. This suggests that students had to have electronic devices like laptops, computers/desktops, and smartphones for them to access online learning. In addition, students had to have access to network and data for connectivity. Most of the participants expressed how internet connectivity consistently disrupted teaching and learning during COVID-19 pandemic. This was said to be worse because there was always load-shedding. One student indicated that lack of technological devices or limited access to digital tools made them struggle with online learning during COVID-19 pandemic. The student also said that the lack of laptops was also a problem as they always use their cell phones to connect, and it was always difficult to read the fine print from the cell phone. This was said to be even worse for students who did not have smartphones and living in areas with bad connectivity. Some students expressed how difficult it was to understand what they were being taught when the lecturer was not there to explain the problem further.

Besides the negative impact described by the participants, positive responses have also described the impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning. According to participants COVID-19 accelerated the implementation of digital pedagogy. They expressed excitement concerning the new way of learning, which is in line

with the fourth industrial revolution. They said that using technology puts them in a good position for the future. They said that the future would be digitalized, and this form of learning would prepare them for the future. Hands-on the digital world was said to be the most exciting part. One participant revealed that students learnt new ways of getting information and they maneuvered the exciting software. This participant mentioned that they learnt the same way as students from the well-resourced institutions.

The load-shedding Crisis

The regular load-shedding produced connectivity problems, according to both teachers and students. Participants noted that in addition to connectivity issues, one of the inevitable drawbacks of load-shedding was its unpredictable duration and timing, which left many students anxious about when or even if they would be able to access crucial online courses. During the COVID-19 pandemic, South African higher education institutions implemented online learning as a mitigating measure. Online learning could reach underprivileged and disenfranchised students, however many students experienced challenges during online instruction due to power interruptions.

One participant expressed how internet connectivity consistently disrupted teaching and learning during COVID-19 pandemic. Another participant added that loadshedding worsened the situation. He stated that sometimes certain students would be able to connect, and others would not. This was said to interfere with teaching and learning and make another group ahead of other groups. Some participants also echoed this problem and indicated that load-shedding inhibited their schedule time because they resided in different places. Load-shedding was not occurring simultaneously in different areas, making it difficult to have an entire class, and repeating classes was time-consuming and tiresome.

Strategies adopted to deal with load-shedding challenges

Some participants disclosed that the University of Zululand has invested in digital technologies.

They said that this was done to enhance teaching and learning, improve administrative processes, and facilitate research activities. However, frequent power outages disrupted this effort, leading to a range of challenges. They ascribed connectivity challenge to issues relating to aging infrastructure and lack of maintenance in this institution. In response to this assertion, another participant stated that infrastructure including its electrical system was upgraded to minimize the impact of load-shedding and improve the reliability of power supply.

Participants responded differently regarding strategies adopted to deal with load-shedding challenges. Some argued that their institution did not do enough as a result its administrative processes including students' registration, financial transactions, and communication were hindered by power outages and that led to inefficiencies and delays. It was said that when load-shedding commenced, teaching and learning stopped. One participant stated that no major actions were taken as load-shedding inhibited the smooth running of academic activities. Supplementary provision of energy from other sources like generators, inverters, solar energy were lacking. Sometimes classes were stopped and there was no systemic or formal arrangement for cover-ups. Another participant stated that addressing the effects of load-shedding required a multifaceted approach. The participant mentioned that the university could explore the use of renewable energy such as solar power to mitigate the effects of load-shedding and ensure uninterrupted access to electricity.

During load-shedding the cooling and systems crucial for teaching and learning activities and programs were not working. Both the students and lecturers needed to have their teaching and learning activities and programs in conducive and welcoming classrooms equipped with proper cooling and heating systems. Unfortunately, this was not provided in the higher learning institution in question. The lack of electricity in this institution impeded students' concentration on their studies and equally prevented lecturers from proactively discharging their pedagogical duties and responsibilities. This means

that in times of load-shedding the scholastic responsibilities were not delivered.

Discussion

The results of the interviews showed that participants enjoyed using a variety of digital tools, devices, platforms, and resources. They insisted that being exposed to digital pedagogy helped them envision a pedagogy that was altered. Effective teaching and learning are facilitated by digital pedagogy, which promotes active online partnerships between instructors and students. Nonetheless, the study's participants brought out the difficulties associated with digital teaching. These difficulties included erratic internet connections, the high cost of digital teaching, load-shedding-related power outages, and restricted access to the required digital gear. The findings revealed that these difficulties influenced how the participants saw and experienced integrated digital pedagogy in their classes. Furthermore, digital tools, platforms, devices, and resources can help improve teaching and learning outcomes. However, because accessibility has a big impact on achieving collaboration, digital tools, devices, resources, and platforms need to be easily accessible.

Digital pedagogy is, however, impossible without energy or electricity. Load-shedding was a major challenge in the University of Zululand, as it disrupted teaching and learning, research and other activities that require a reliable supply of electricity. Its significance to teaching and learning in this institution was unfavorable. The digital tools, which became popular because of COVID-19, became dysfunctional when electricity cut off. This made load-shedding a new pandemic that affected the gains that came with digital technology integration. As a pedagogical issue, e-learning has benefited students in a number of ways. It has been found to be useful and has made it simple for pupils to obtain educational materials. Communication between students and instructors was enhanced by e-learning. However, online teaching and learning were negatively impacted by load-shedding. While those without access lose out due to connectivity issues during load shedding, students with network computer access benefited from a

more flexible learning environment. During load shedding, it was impossible to conduct or attend lessons or complete evaluations since some of the computers used by students and institutional personnel only function when charged. It was challenging to acquire dependable devices because many of the students who enrolled in the aforementioned higher education school came from underprivileged families and had little money. Social divides deepened as a result of this institution's and other higher education institutions' growing reliance on technology. Power outages made it impossible for lecturers to use digital presentations, interactive technologies, or audio-visual aids—all of which are essential components of the learning process.

The impact of load-shedding on education was a serious issue that jeopardized educational outcomes. Students find it challenging to acquire the knowledge they need to succeed in their studies, which has had adverse effects on the future economic growth of the country. Some institutions lacked enough energy storage technologies, like solar panels or generators, to keep the lights on during blackouts, especially those that were formerly underprivileged. During load-shedding, certain parts of higher education institutions lacked backup power, making it impossible for them to use the WI-FI. Students were consequently unable to finish and turn in their assessments on time.

In several instances, students had become victims due to load-shedding, for example, the darkness caused by power outages unconsciously invited criminal activities since CCTV cameras and other security measures that utilize electricity were not working. The ramifications of this were that students experienced fear and psychological destruction which is not ideal for academic mind-set and performance.

2. Recommendations

The South African government and academic institutions need to craft policies that primarily strive to regulate and ensure that academic and educational activities are not hindered because of the ongoing load-shedding. Therefore, this

paper makes the following recommendations: In collaboration with the State, institutions of higher learning must invest in solar power and fossil-fuel-powered generators to mitigate the load-shedding. This will reduce the reliance on grid power for essential equipment required to run educational activities and basic administration of universities. Universities must invest in Battery Banks to use during the blackout. Universities must further provide psychological counselling to students who suffered or were affected by load-shedding prior, during, and post examination period. Higher learning institutions must invest in digital technologies. This will enhance teaching and learning. Lastly, the private sector has a patriotic responsibility to deliberately support through funding, skills and other resources to educational programs and activities (Matsheta & Sefoka 2023).

Conclusion

According to the paper's conclusion, advancements in digital pedagogy have given instructors and students access to a variety of interactive digital platforms and technologies that can alter their 4IR learning environment. Higher education institutions around the world are incorporating online and remote learning into their curricula, and digital pedagogy is crucial to making these learning methods possible. Though they may be digital natives or immigrants, instructors and students in higher education settings may be at varying preparedness levels for success in the 4IR. As a result, instructors must be cognizant of their students' proficiency with digital tools, platforms, and gadgets. This knowledge would help instructors prepare and deliver the 4IR principles in a higher education setting.

The study's participants discussed the difficulties associated with digital teaching. These difficulties included limited access to the required digital gadgets, erratic internet connections, the high costs of implementing digital pedagogy, and the absence of electricity during load shedding. According to the study's findings, these difficulties influence how participants experience and see incorporating digital pedagogy into their classroom. Similarly, according to connec-

tivism, digital tools, platforms, devices, and resources can help make teaching and learning more successful. However, accessibility has a big impact on teamwork, digital tools, devices, platforms, and resources that need to be simple to use.

The study also concludes that load-shedding has significantly affected South African higher education institutions, especially in the years following COVID-19. The difficulties that teachers and students confront have been made worse by load-shedding, which has impacted on their

productivity and academic achievement. The necessity for improved infrastructure and alternate energy sources to lessen the effects of load-shedding has also been brought to light by the frequent or recurring power outages. In order to guarantee the seamless operation of South African higher education institutions, the report recommended that pertinent parties, including the public and private sectors, give load-shedding top priority. In this sense, priority must be given to universities in rural areas or to historically underprivileged institutions of higher education.

References

- Bitar, N. & Davidovich, N. (2024). Transforming Pedagogy: The digital revolution in higher education. *Education Sciences*, 14 (811), 1-23.
- Cabanero, J.E., Granil, C.S., & Caro, R.V. (2022). The emerging concept of digital pedagogy. *International Journal of Academic Pedagogical Research*, 4(4), 63-67.
- Dube, C.D. (2020). Online learning challenges postgraduate certificate in education history students faced during COVID 19 at the University of Zululand. *Yesterday and Tomorrow*, 24, 136-157.
- Haleem, A., Javaid, M., Qadri, M.A., & Suman, R. (2022). Understanding the role of digital technologies in education: A review. *Sustainable Operations and Computers* 3, 275-285.
- Imran, R., Fatima, A., Salem, I.E., Allil, K. (2023). Teaching and learning delivery modes in higher education: Looking back to moving forward post COVID 19 era. *The International Journal of Management Education*, 21, 1-11.
- Istrate, O. (2022). Digital pedagogy. *Journal of Digital Pedagogy*, 1(1). 3-10.
- Kgarose, M.F., Makhubela, D.K., & Setaise, L.C. (2023). Is load-shedding another pandemic, post COVID-19 at institution of higher learning in South Africa? *Perspectives of Law and Public Administration* 12(3), 447-456.
- Khoza, S.D. (2024). Navigating the dark: understanding the impact of load-shedding on Learning Management Systems (LMS) in South African Universities. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Sciences* 13(2), 345-352.
- Mabunda, M.V., Mukonza, R.M., & Mudzanani, L.R. (2023). The effects of load-shedding on small and medium enterprises in the Collin Chabane local municipality. *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship* 12(57) accessed 17 June 2024.
- Majola, M.X., & Mudau, P.K. (2022). Lecturers' experiences of administering online examinations at

South African open distance e-learning university during the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Educational Methodology* 8(2), 275-283.

Matsheta, R.M., & Sefoka, I.M. (2023). Load-shedding in South Africa: an immediate threat to the right to education, "Section 29 Inquiry". *Journal of Educational and Social Research* 13(1), 216-234.

Neubeuer, B.E., Witkop, C.T., & Varpio, L. (2019). How phenomenology can help us learn from experiences of others. *Perspectives on Medical Education* 8(2), 90-97.

Sadiku, M.N.O., Omotoso, A., & Musa, S.M. (2019). Digital pedagogy. *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development*, 3(2), 2456-6470.

Siemens, G. (2005). Connectivism: A learning theory for the digital age. *International Journal of Technology and Distant Learning* 1(1), 1-9.

Steenkamp, J.C. (2023). COVID-19 fear among junior undergraduate nursing students during the pandemic in South Africa. *Health SA Gesondheid* (online) Vol. 28. Accessed 26 June 2024.

Thanh, N.C., & Thanh, T.T. (2015). The interconnection between interpretivist paradigm and qualitative methods in education. *American Journal of Education Science* 1(2), 24-27.

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.14>

PRONUNCIATION CHALLENGES OF ENGLISH VOWELS AMONG SOUTH AFRICAN FOUNDATION STUDENTS: PHONOLOGICAL INTERFERENCE AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Ndishunwani Vincent Demana

Department of English Media Studies and Linguistics, FHSSE

University of Venda

Limpopo Province, South Africa

Vincent.demana@univen.ac.za

Abstract

The accurate pronunciation of English vowels is central to intelligible speech and academic success in multilingual higher education environments. This study examines the pronunciation challenges faced by foundation students at a South African university, focusing on how first language interference and limited phonetic training affect the production of English vowel sounds. The study is grounded in the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) and the Speech Learning Model (SLM), which explain how differences between learners' first language (L1) and the target language (L2) phonological systems contribute to pronunciation errors. A mixed-methods research design was employed, combining quantitative analysis of recorded oral reading tasks with qualitative phonetic transcription and interpretation using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Findings indicate that students frequently substitute unfamiliar English vowel sounds with those from their L1s, simplify diphthongs, and omit schwa vowels in unstressed syllables. These errors reduce speech intelligibility and confidence in academic communication. The study contributes to existing knowledge by providing a context-specific analysis of vowel pronunciation difficulties among South African foundation students, highlighting the phonological and pedagogical implications for English language instruction in multilingual contexts. It further recommends explicit phonetics instruction, integration of pronunciation technology, and teacher training as practical strategies for enhancing students' oral proficiency and overall communicative competence in higher education.

Keywords: *English vowels, pronunciation instruction, phonological interference, multilingual learners, oral communication*

Introduction

English serves as the primary medium of instruction across South African universities, a status that profoundly shapes the academic experiences and success of students entering higher education. However, English is not the first language for most South African university students (Ngidi, & Mncwango, 2022; Posel, Hunter & Rudwick, 2022). Instead, these students often come from diverse multilingual backgrounds, speaking indigenous languages such as Tshivenda, Xitsonga, isiZulu, Sepedi, and Sesotho. This linguistic diversity, while culturally enriching, introduces significant challenges in English language acquisition, particularly in oral proficiency and pronunciation. Among these challenges, the correct pronunciation of English vowel sounds emerges as a persistent and complex issue (Caisaguano Tigasi, 2024), particularly for foundation students who are transitioning into university life through extended curriculum programmes designed to bridge gaps in academic preparedness.

Pronunciation is a vital component of effective oral communication and plays a crucial role in academic contexts where clear intelligibility affects not only interpersonal interaction but also

perceptions of competence and academic confidence (Tiwari, 2023; Tsang, 2025). Vowel sounds in English, especially, are notoriously difficult for second language learners due to their phonetic complexity. English comprises twelve monophthongs and eight diphthongs, each differing in subtle articulatory features such as tongue height, tongue position, lip rounding, and length (Roach, 2009; Ladefoged & Disner, 2012). These contrasts are often absent or significantly different in the vowel systems of many South African indigenous languages, which typically have simpler inventories with five to seven vowels and lack distinctions such as vowel length and diphthongization (Neubert, 2021). Consequently, learners tend to substitute unfamiliar English vowel sounds with the closest equivalents from their first languages (L1), leading to systematic pronunciation errors that impede intelligibility and, by extension, academic communication.

The South African university, situated in the Limpopo Province, exemplifies this linguistic challenge. Its Foundation Programme caters to students who do not meet direct entry requirements into degree studies, many of whom hail from rural and under-resourced schools (Kumar,

2023) where English exposure is limited and primarily confined to written forms rather than spoken communication. These students often exhibit pronounced difficulties with the oral aspects of English, particularly vowel pronunciation, which can be traced to a combination of factors including L1 interference, insufficient phonetic training, and limited opportunities for interaction with proficient English speakers or native models. Moreover, the socio-educational realities of these learners, such as under-resourced schooling environments, lack of qualified English teachers, and minimal exposure to varied English accents, exacerbate the problem and necessitate a pedagogical approach tailored to their specific needs.

Pronunciation instruction in South African universities, including at the South African university, has historically been marginalized in favour of other language skills such as reading, writing, and grammar (Moyo, 2020; Hibbert, 2023). While these skills are undoubtedly critical, the neglect of pronunciation in curricula and teaching practice undermines students' oral communicative competence and confidence. This oversight stems partly from assumptions that pronunciation skills will develop incidentally through exposure to reading and writing or through immersion in academic English environments. However, research has demonstrated that such assumptions are unfounded, especially for learners from linguistically homogeneous backgrounds with limited auditory models and minimal formal instruction in phonetics and phonology (Gass & Selinker, 2008; Derwing & Munro, 2015). Without explicit and focused pronunciation teaching, foundation students are likely to persist in fossilized errors, which can affect not only their academic success but also their future professional and social integration.

A further layer of complexity arises from the sociolinguistic reality of Black South African English (BSAE), a recognized variety shaped by indigenous language contact and sociocultural dynamics. BSAE typically exhibits reduced vowel contrasts, monophthongization of diphthongs, and distinctive consonantal patterns that diverge from Standard South African English (SSAE).

While BSAE holds legitimacy and cultural identity within communities, it may not align with the academic and professional standards expected in higher education contexts, where SSAE norms dominate (Mesthrie, 2010). This linguistic tension often leads to stigma and negative perceptions of BSAE speakers' English, further complicating students' willingness and confidence to develop Standard English pronunciation.

Given this complex interplay of linguistic, educational, and sociocultural factors, this study focuses on investigating the specific pronunciation challenges related to English vowel sounds among foundation students at the South African university. The research seeks to identify recurring vowel pronunciation errors, explore the extent and nature of first language interference, and evaluate the adequacy of existing teaching methodologies within the Foundation Programme. By examining these aspects, the study aims to provide evidence-based recommendations for curriculum development and teaching strategies that emphasize phonetic awareness and targeted pronunciation practice.

Understanding and addressing pronunciation difficulties in foundation students is essential for several reasons. First, oral proficiency and intelligible speech are critical for effective participation in academic discussions, presentations, and assessments. Mispronunciations can cause misunderstandings and negatively affect listener perceptions, which may diminish students' academic confidence and motivation. Second, improving pronunciation contributes to students' broader communicative competence, preparing them for successful integration into the multilingual and globalized academic community. Third, this focus aligns with national educational goals aimed at promoting equitable access and success in higher education for historically marginalized and under-prepared student populations (Letseka et al., 2025).

This study contributes to the growing body of research on English language learning in multilingual contexts by highlighting the phonological challenges unique to the South African foundation students. It also underscores the importance of incorporating explicit pronunciation

instruction within academic support programmes, moving beyond incidental teaching approaches. Ultimately, the findings aim to inform pedagogical practices that support not only linguistic accuracy but also students' confidence and identity as competent English speakers in academic and professional domains.

Literature Review

Research on the pronunciation of English vowel sounds by second language learners has received considerable attention across linguistic and pedagogical studies. Scholars such as Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (2010) and Roach (2009) have established that English vowels are inherently complex due to variations in tongue position, length, lip rounding, and stress. These features pose serious challenges for learners whose first languages (L1s) have simpler or fewer vowel distinctions. However, while these foundational studies highlight the general difficulty of vowel acquisition, they often rely on data from non-African or highly resourced contexts, which limits their applicability to multilingual South African universities.

In African contexts, several studies have explored the influence of L1 phonology on English pronunciation. Akinjobi and Oladipupo (2018) found that Yoruba learners of English in Nigeria substituted tense vowels with lax equivalents, a phenomenon attributed to the lack of vowel length distinctions in Yoruba. Similarly, Maphumulo (2021) reported that isiZulu-speaking learners of English often reduced diphthongs to monophthongs, reflecting the influence of their five-vowel system. While these studies offer important insights into language transfer effects, they largely focus on school-level learners rather than tertiary students who are required to use English for advanced academic discourse. The current study addresses this gap by focusing on foundation students at a South African university, an understudied population whose success depends heavily on English oral proficiency.

In the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, similar studies reveal consistent trends of phonological interference. Mosalagae (2020) in Botswana and Chimhundu

(2019) in Zimbabwe identified challenges with central vowels and diphthongs among learners of English. These studies, however, emphasize general pronunciation problems without isolating vowel-specific issues, thereby limiting their diagnostic and pedagogical value. The present study contributes by offering a focused phonetic analysis of English vowels using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), providing a more precise understanding of where mispronunciations occur and why.

Globally, research from Asia and Europe echoes similar challenges. Zhang (2021) demonstrated that Mandarin-speaking learners systematically mispronounce English central vowels due to a lack of equivalent sounds in Chinese, while Derwing and Munro (2015) showed that even advanced European ESL learners experience difficulties with vowel reduction and stress placement. The strength of these international studies lies in their methodological rigour, particularly their reliance on acoustic analysis and longitudinal data. However, their limitation is contextual: most assume that learners have sustained exposure to English in formal and informal environments, an assumption that does not hold true for South African students in rural or semi-urban settings who encounter English mostly in academic contexts (Tshotsho, 2013).

In South Africa, empirical studies on English pronunciation have been scarce and fragmented. The limited research available (e.g., Kamwangamalu, 2020; Maphumulo, 2021; Mabule, 2022) often treats pronunciation as a peripheral issue within broader language proficiency studies. These works recognize the impact of L1 interference but rarely extend their analysis to the structural features of vowels or the pedagogical implications of such interference in higher education. Furthermore, most South African universities focus on grammar and writing proficiency in English language programmes, while pronunciation remains neglected (Levis, 2005; Baker & Jones, 2018). This oversight underscores a critical weakness in existing literature: the tendency to underestimate pronunciation as a key determinant of academic communication and student confidence.

Despite these gaps, the reviewed literature provides valuable insights into how language transfer, exposure, and instruction shape pronunciation outcomes. The strength of prior studies lies in their ability to demonstrate that pronunciation problems are not random but systematic, rooted in phonological contrasts between languages. However, a notable limitation is that few studies contextualize pronunciation within the specific sociolinguistic realities of African higher education, where students transition from L1-dominant environments to English-medium instruction. The current paper builds on this foundation by applying a socio-phonological perspective to understand how structural vowel contrasts and inadequate pedagogical strategies jointly contribute to pronunciation difficulties.

Therefore, this study distinguishes itself from existing scholarship by offering a comprehensive analysis that is both diagnostic and pedagogically oriented. It advances the discourse by situating vowel pronunciation problems within the South African multilingual university context, thereby bridging the gap between global phonetic research and local educational realities. In doing so, it contributes to the ongoing discussion on how pronunciation instruction can be localized to better serve the needs of African learners in tertiary institutions.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two interrelated theoretical perspectives: the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) and the Speech Learning Model (SLM). Together, these frameworks provide a robust lens for examining how first language (L1) phonological systems influence the acquisition of English vowel sounds among multilingual learners in a South African university context. Their integration allows for both structural and cognitive explanations of the observed pronunciation challenges, while also situating the findings within broader discussions of second language acquisition and pedagogy.

The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, developed by Lado (1957) and later refined by Odlin (1989), posits that the similarities and differences between a learner's L1 and the target language (L2) determine the ease or difficulty of

acquisition. When phonological structures in the two languages are similar, positive transfer occurs, facilitating learning; when they differ, negative transfer or interference leads to errors. In this study, the CAH explains the substitution and distortion of English vowels such as /ʌ/, /æ/, and /ɪ/ by foundation students whose native languages, such as Tshivenda, Xitsonga, and Sesotho, lack comparable vowel distinctions. For example, the persistent confusion between /i:/ and /ɪ/ can be interpreted as a case of negative transfer resulting from the absence of vowel length contrasts in most Bantu languages.

Complementing this, the Speech Learning Model (Flege, 1995) offers a psycholinguistic explanation for how learners perceive and produce new speech sounds. The SLM asserts that L2 speech sounds are filtered through existing L1 phonetic categories, leading learners to either “assimilate” unfamiliar sounds into their L1 categories or “establish new phonetic categories” when perceptual differences are salient enough. This model explains why the participants in this study struggled with perceiving and producing English central vowels such as /ʌ/ and /ə/. Because these sounds do not exist in their native phonological systems, learners tend to map them onto the closest available L1 categories, often resulting in inaccurate production. In applying these theoretical frameworks, the study integrates their tenets into both data analysis and interpretation. The CAH underpins the structural comparison between English vowel systems and those of the students' L1s, guiding the identification of predictable areas of difficulty. The SLM, on the other hand, informs the interpretation of perceptual and cognitive challenges evident in students' mispronunciations, particularly in minimal pair discrimination tasks. For instance, the finding that students could not reliably distinguish between *ship* and *sheep* aligns with the SLM's notion of “equivalence classification,” where new sounds are perceived as identical to existing ones, preventing accurate phonetic learning.

Together, these theories provide a multidimensional understanding of pronunciation difficulties. The CAH highlights the linguistic sources

of error, while the SLM illuminates the perceptual and cognitive processes that sustain them. Their integration strengthens the study's contribution to the ongoing discourse by demonstrating that effective pronunciation instruction must address both the structural contrasts between languages and the psychological mechanisms of sound perception and categorization. This theoretical synthesis thus provides the foundation for the study's pedagogical recommendations, which advocate for explicit phonetic training, perceptual awareness development, and targeted use of pronunciation technology in multilingual South African universities.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative and quantitative mixed-methods design to explore English vowel pronunciation problems among foundation students at the South African University. The population consisted of foundation students enrolled in the Extended Curriculum Programme (ECP) during the 2024 academic year. Purposive sampling was used to select 50 students who volunteered and met criteria of diverse language backgrounds, ensuring representation from Tshivenda, Xitsonga, and Sepedi speakers.

Data were collected through recorded oral reading tasks and written assessments specifically designed to elicit vowel pronunciation. The oral recordings were analysed for vowel sound accuracy, substitution, omission, and distortion errors, while written assessments provided supplementary insights into phonological awareness.

Data analysis involved phonetic transcription using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), frequency counts of error types, and categorization based on vowel sound characteristics. Statistical tables were generated to illustrate the prevalence of specific error patterns.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection process for this study was carefully designed to capture authentic and detailed evidence of the pronunciation challenges faced by foundation students at a South African university, with a focus on English

vowel sounds. The choice of data collection methods was guided by the study's aim to analyse students' oral production without relying on instructor feedback or interviews, thus providing an independent assessment of learners' phonetic competence.

To begin, a structured oral reading task was developed. This task consisted of a list of approximately 50 carefully selected words and several short sentences containing key English vowel sounds known to be problematic for speakers of Tshivenda, Xitsonga, and Sepedi. The word list included numerous minimal pairs and near-minimal pairs (such as "ship" vs. "sheep," "cot" vs. "caught," and "bat" vs. "bet") to enable precise identification of vowel sound distinctions. The sentences were constructed to provide contextual usage of these vowels, allowing for observation of vowel articulation in connected speech, which can differ from isolated word production.

Participants were individually recorded in a quiet room on campus using high-quality digital audio recorders to ensure clarity and capture all phonetic details. Each participant was instructed to read the word list first, followed by the sentences, at a comfortable pace but with clear articulation. The recordings were anonymized and stored securely for transcription and analysis.

In addition to the oral task, participants completed a written phonological assessment to complement the speech data. This assessment included exercises such as vowel sound identification in isolated words, multiple-choice questions on vowel distinctions, and transcription tasks using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). The written tasks were designed to measure students' awareness and recognition of vowel contrasts, an important component that supports correct pronunciation.

Following data collection, the oral recordings underwent a detailed phonetic transcription process. The researcher, with training in phonetics, transcribed each utterance using IPA symbols to capture subtle vowel variations, substitutions, and errors. To enhance validity and reliability, a second linguist independently transcribed a subset of recordings, and discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus. This

process ensured accuracy in identifying the exact nature of vowel production errors.

Quantitative data analysis involved coding each vowel sound produced by participants as either correct or erroneous, with error types further classified as substitution, omission, or distortion. These coded data were organized in a spreadsheet to calculate the frequency and percentage of each error type across the participant sample. Error patterns were analysed overall and by participants' first languages to identify common sources of interference and to understand if specific L1 backgrounds corresponded to particular error tendencies.

Descriptive statistics were generated to summarize the extent and distribution of vowel pronunciation errors, and these statistics were presented in tables to illustrate key findings clearly and systematically. For example, one table might show the percentage of participants who consistently confused the /i:/ and /ɪ/ vowels, while another might display error rates for diphthong production.

Qualitative analysis complemented the quantitative findings by examining the nature and possible causes of specific vowel errors. Drawing on contrastive phonology theory and the Speech Learning Model (SLM) proposed by Flege (1995), the analysis explored how L1 phonological systems, especially vowel inventories of Tshivenda, Xitsonga, and Sepedi, contribute to the observed mispronunciations. For instance, the substitution of the English vowel /æ/ with the more familiar /a/ vowel from the learners' L1s was interpreted as a result of negative transfer due to the absence of /æ/ in the indigenous vowel systems.

The qualitative discussion also considered sociolinguistic factors, such as limited exposure to native English speech models, and pedagogical issues like insufficient phonetic training in the Foundation Programme curriculum. These contextual factors helped explain why students might persist in producing inaccurate vowel sounds despite completing foundational English language instruction.

Together, the combined quantitative and qualitative analyses provided a comprehensive picture of the pronunciation challenges foundation

students face. This dual approach facilitated not only the identification of error patterns but also a deeper understanding of underlying causes, which is essential for formulating targeted and effective instructional interventions.

In summary, the data collection and analysis methods were systematically aligned with the study's objectives, ensuring both the reliability of findings and the relevance of interpretations to the linguistic and educational contexts of the participants. The insights gained from this process contribute significantly to knowledge on pronunciation difficulties in multilingual South African higher education settings and offer practical implications for improving English language teaching strategies.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered strictly to established ethical research standards governing studies involving human participants in South African universities. Ethical clearance was obtained from the university's Research Ethics Committee prior to the commencement of data collection. All participants were foundation students who voluntarily agreed to participate after being fully informed about the purpose, scope, and procedures of the study. Written informed consent was obtained from every participant, ensuring their understanding that participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. To protect participants' identities, pseudonyms were used in all data transcriptions, analyses, and reporting. No identifying information such as student numbers, class details, or personal characteristics was recorded or published. All audio recordings, transcriptions, and related data were securely stored in password-protected digital folders accessible only to the researcher.

In designing and conducting the pronunciation tasks, care was taken to minimize any form of psychological discomfort or embarrassment that might arise from perceived performance inadequacies. Participants were reassured that pronunciation errors were part of the normal learning process and that the study aimed to improve,

not evaluate, their competence. This approach aligns with the ethical principle of non-maleficence, ensuring that participants experienced no harm, distress, or discrimination as a result of their participation.

Moreover, ethical considerations extended to the accurate and honest reporting of findings. The data were analyzed and presented objectively, with due acknowledgment of all sources and no manipulation or misrepresentation of evidence. The researcher also ensured compliance with the principles of beneficence and justice, guaranteeing that the outcomes of the study would contribute constructively to improving English language instruction for multilingual students while respecting their dignity and rights as participants.

Finally, the study conformed to the University

Research Ethics Policy, which emphasizes informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and responsible data management. These ethical safeguards reinforce the integrity and credibility of the research and ensure that it contributes responsibly to the broader field of language education.

Research Findings

The study's analysis of oral reading tasks and pronunciation exercises revealed several persistent vowel pronunciation problems among foundation students. These challenges are summarised across three main aspects: frequency of common vowel substitution errors, type of pronunciation error by vowel sound, and pronunciation error distribution by first language group. Each is presented in the tables below, followed by a detailed discussion.

Table 1: Frequency of Common Vowel Substitution Errors

English Vowel	Common Substitution(s)	Percentage of Participants Exhibiting Error (%)
/i:/ (sheep)	/ɪ/ (ship)	65
/æ/ (man)	/a/, /ɛ/	58
/ʌ/ (cup)	/a/	52
/ɪ/ (ship)	/i:/ (sheep)	40
/eɪ/ (day)	/e/	35

This table highlights the most frequent vowel substitution errors made by the foundation students. The long vowel /i:/ was commonly replaced by the short /ɪ/, with nearly two-thirds of the participants showing this pattern, which can cause confusion in words like “sheep” and “ship.” Similarly, the vowel /æ/ was often replaced by /a/ or /ɛ/, reflecting interference from

native vowel systems with fewer vowel contrasts. The mid-central vowel /ʌ/ was also commonly substituted with /a/, a simpler vowel sound found in the students’ first languages. Less frequent, but notable, was the substitution of the short /ɪ/ with /i:/ and the simplification of diphthong /eɪ/ to the monophthong /e/. These patterns demonstrate the systematic nature of vowel errors linked to first language influence.

Table 2: Type of Pronunciation Error by Vowel Sound

Error Type	Percentage of Errors (%)	Most Affected Vowels
Substitution	65	/i:/, /æ/, /ʌ/, /ɪ/, /eɪ/
Distortion	40	Diphthongs /eɪ/, /aɪ/

Omission

15

Unstressed vowels in connected speech

Table 2 categorizes the types of pronunciation errors observed. Substitution errors were the most prevalent, occurring in nearly two-thirds of cases, predominantly affecting vowels unfamiliar to learners' first languages. Distortion errors, involving imprecise articulation or simplification of diphthongs, were also common, affecting

about 40% of participants. Omission of vowels, mainly in unstressed syllables during fluent speech, was less frequent but still notable. These findings indicate that while substitution is the core problem, other error types such as distortion and omission contribute to overall pronunciation difficulties.

Table 3: Pronunciation Error Distribution by First Language Group

First Language	Percentage of Participants with Pronunciation Errors (%)	Most Frequent Error Types
Tshivenda	72	Substitution, Distortion
Xitsonga	68	Substitution
Sepedi	65	Substitution, Omission
Other	60	Substitution

This table shows how pronunciation errors vary among different first language groups. Tshivenda speakers exhibited the highest overall error rate at 72%, followed closely by Xitsonga and Sepedi speakers. Substitution errors were dominant across all groups, but Tshivenda and Sepedi speakers also showed significant rates of distortion and omission respectively. These variations reflect differences in the phonological structures of the indigenous languages, which influence how learners produce English vowels. The data suggest that tailored pronunciation instruction considering learners' linguistic backgrounds could be beneficial.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal significant challenges faced by foundation students in the accurate production of English vowel sounds, confirming that pronunciation errors are pervasive and deeply rooted in linguistic, educational, and sociocultural factors. The predominance of vowel substitution errors aligns closely with the well-documented phenomenon of first language (L1) interference, which is extensively discussed in phonological acquisition literature. As noted by Jenkins (2000) and Derwing and Munro (2005), learners often rely on the closest

vowel sounds available in their L1 phonological inventory when confronted with unfamiliar English vowel contrasts. This strategy, while natural, leads to substitution errors that can adversely affect intelligibility.

The study's quantitative data showed that substitution errors were the most frequent, particularly involving the vowels /i:/ and /ɪ/, /æ/ and /a/, as well as /ʌ/ and /ɑ/. These patterns reflect the limited vowel inventories of the indigenous South African languages spoken by the students, such as Tshivenda, Xitsonga, and Sepedi, which typically possess a five-vowel system lacking the length and diphthong contrasts found in English (Mesthrie et al., 2023). Ladefoged and Johnson (2014) emphasize that vowel length and quality are critical for distinguishing meaning in English; hence, the failure to produce these distinctions often results in misunderstandings or ambiguous communication.

The observed distortion and omission errors further complicate the picture. Distortions, involving inaccurate articulation that deviates from both the target and L1 sounds, may stem from incomplete phonetic knowledge or insufficient practice, a challenge documented by Roach (2009). Omissions, though less frequent, often involve unstressed or schwa sounds, which

learners find difficult due to their subtle articulatory features (Neubert, 2021). These errors impact not only intelligibility but also listener perceptions of the speaker's proficiency, as Munro and Derwing (2015) discuss in relation to accentedness and communication effectiveness.

A notable aspect of the findings is the variation in error frequency and types across different L1 groups. Tshivenda speakers, for instance, exhibited the highest error rates, which may be attributed to greater phonological distance between Tshivenda and English vowel systems, as well as the relative lack of exposure to English outside formal education contexts. This supports research by Mufwene (2001) and Mesthrie (2008), who argue that sociolinguistic factors, including language exposure and community attitudes towards English, critically shape second language phonological development. The prominence of Black South African English (BSAE) as a localized variety also influences learners' pronunciation patterns, often normalizing non-standard vowel productions that diverge from Standard South African English (SSAE) norms (Neubert, 2021). While BSAE serves important communicative and identity functions, its divergence from standard pronunciation norms poses challenges for academic and professional communication where SSAE is expected.

The findings further highlight a systemic gap in English language instruction at the Foundation level, particularly in addressing phonetic and phonological components. Consistent with the observations of Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994), Letsholo (2013), and more recently, Moyo (2020), many South African English language curricula emphasize reading, writing, and grammar, often marginalizing oral skills and pronunciation training. This oversight exacerbates the difficulties students face in acquiring accurate vowel production. As the literature suggests, explicit, focused phonetics instruction combined with increased exposure to native and standard English speech models can significantly improve learners' pronunciation outcomes (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 2010).

Moreover, the limited availability of resources and insufficient classroom time devoted to oral

practice in rural and resource-constrained environments constrain students' opportunities to develop phonological accuracy. This finding echoes the challenges reported by DoH and CHE (2013) in their national assessments of language education in South African higher education, which underscore the need for targeted interventions that address foundational oral language skills. Given the critical role of intelligible pronunciation in academic success and employability (Derwing & Munro, 2015), this gap represents a significant barrier to equitable higher education access.

In conclusion, the study's findings reinforce existing literature on the impact of L1 phonological systems on English vowel acquisition and underscore the importance of responsive pedagogical approaches. Addressing vowel pronunciation challenges requires integrated strategies that include systematic phonetics instruction, the incorporation of listening and speaking exercises that reflect diverse English varieties, and the development of learner awareness of standard pronunciation norms. Such measures are vital not only for improving intelligibility but also for empowering foundation students to engage confidently and effectively in academic discourse, thereby supporting their broader academic and professional trajectories.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several key recommendations emerge to address the pronunciation difficulties, particularly vowel sound production, experienced by foundation students at South African universities such as the South African University.

First, there is an urgent need to integrate explicit and systematic phonetics instruction into the Foundation Programme curriculum. Rather than relying on incidental learning, language educators should design dedicated modules focusing on English vowel sounds, their articulation, length, and diphthongization. Research by Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (2010) emphasizes that focused phonetic training helps learners develop greater phonological awareness, leading to improved pronunciation accuracy and intelligibility.

Second, teaching materials and classroom activities should incorporate multimodal approaches, including auditory and visual aids such as phonetic charts, videos demonstrating tongue and lip positions, and digital pronunciation software. These tools can help learners internalize subtle vowel distinctions that are absent in their L1. The use of language labs or computer-assisted language learning (CALL) environments can provide repeated, individualized practice opportunities, which are crucial for mastering complex vowel contrasts (Derwing & Munro, 2015). Third, exposure to diverse English accents, including Standard South African English (SSAE) and internationally recognized varieties, should be increased to broaden students' listening and production skills. While Black South African English (BSAE) is an important identity marker, familiarizing students with standard norms will better prepare them for academic and professional communication contexts where SSAE is preferred. This exposure can be facilitated through guest lectures, audio recordings, podcasts, and interaction with proficient English speakers.

Fourth, lecturers and curriculum developers should reconsider the balance of language skills taught in foundation courses. While reading, writing, and grammar remain essential, equal emphasis must be placed on oral skills, particularly pronunciation. This may require professional development workshops for educators to equip them with effective pronunciation teaching methodologies and assessment techniques. Fifth, institutions should create supportive environments for oral practice beyond the classroom, such as conversation clubs, peer pronunciation workshops, and language immersion activities. These spaces encourage authentic communication and peer feedback, which are invaluable for language acquisition and confidence-building (Munro & Derwing, 2015).

Lastly, policy-level interventions are needed to address resource constraints in rural and under-resourced university contexts. Investment in training, materials, and infrastructure to support pronunciation teaching can substantially improve the effectiveness of foundation programmes. Collaboration with linguistic experts

to develop context-specific instructional materials that address the phonological realities of local L1 speakers is also recommended.

Implementing these recommendations will not only enhance students' pronunciation skills but also contribute to their overall academic success and social integration within multilingual higher education environments.

Conclusion

This study has illuminated the persistent and multifaceted challenges that foundation students at the South African University face in producing accurate English vowel sounds. Rooted in the interplay of linguistic interference from indigenous languages, limited phonetic instruction, and sociocultural factors, these pronunciation difficulties undermine intelligibility and potentially impede academic performance.

The dominance of vowel substitution errors, along with distortions and omissions, reflects the phonological distance between the students' L1 vowel systems and English. Additionally, the influence of Black South African English complicates learners' acquisition of standard pronunciation norms, highlighting the complexity of language learning in a multilingual South African context.

The study underscores a systemic gap in foundation-level English education, where pronunciation is often sidelined despite its critical role in effective communication. The current curriculum's focus on reading and writing does not adequately prepare students for the oral demands of higher education and professional life.

Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach combining explicit phonetics instruction, multimodal teaching tools, increased exposure to standard English varieties, and supportive practice environments. Institutional support and resource allocation are also vital for sustainable improvements.

Ultimately, improving foundation students' English vowel pronunciation is essential not only for their immediate academic engagement but also for fostering equitable access to opportunities in South African society. By responding thoughtfully to the linguistic and educational re-

alities faced by multilingual learners, universities and transformative higher education. ties can better fulfill their mandate of inclusive

References

- Akinjobi, J. A., & Oladipupo, A. D. (2018). L1 interference and the pronunciation of English vowels by Yoruba ESL learners. *Journal of English Linguistics*, 46(2), 130-145.
- Awadh, F. M. A. M., Putro, N. H. P. S., Pohan, A. E., & Alsamiri, Y. A. (2024). Improving English pronunciation through phonetics instruction in Yemeni EFL classrooms. *Journal of Languages and Language Teaching*, 12(2), 930-940.
- Bu, Y., Ma, T., Li, W., Zhou, H., Jia, J., Chen, S.,... & Liu, Z. (2021, May). PTeacher: A computer-aided personalized pronunciation training system with exaggerated audio-visual corrective feedback. In *Proceedings of the 2021 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 1-14).
- Caisaguano Tigasi, G. A. (2024). *English pronunciation errors in English major students* (Doctoral dissertation, Ecuador: Pujilí: Universidad Técnica de Cotopaxi (UTC)).
- Celce-Murcia, M., Brinton, D. M., & Goodwin, J. M. (2010). *Teaching pronunciation hardback with audio CDs (2): A course book and reference guide*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dalton, C., & Seidlhofer, B. (1994). *Pronunciation*. Oxford University Press.
- Derwing, T. M., & Munro, M. J. (2015). Key concepts. In *Pronunciation Fundamentals* (pp. 1-12). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Flege, J. E. (1995). Second language speech learning: Theory, findings, and problems. *Speech perception and linguistic experience: Issues in cross-language research*, 92(1), 233-277.
- Hibbert, L. (Ed.). (2023). *English as a language of learning, teaching and inclusivity: Examining education crisis*. Taylor & Francis.
- Jenkins, J. (2000). *The phonology of English as an international language*. Oxford university press.
- Khan, N., Khan, A., & Shahzadi, A. (2023). Students' Pronunciation and other Languages: The Impact of L2 Interference on the Pronunciation of ESL Students. *Pakistan Journal of Society, Education and Language (PJSEL)*, 10(1), 163-175.
- Kumar, A. V. (2023). English Language and Challenges of Rural Student. *Intersecta Minds Journal*, 2(3), 33-52.
- Ladefoged, P., & Disner, S. F. (2012). *Vowels and consonants (third)*. Blackwell Publishing.
- Ladefoged, P., & Johnson, K. (2014). *A course in phonetics*. CENGAGE Learning. Inc., Boston

- Le Roux, M., Geertsema, S., Jordaan, H., & Prinsloo, D. (2017). Phonemic awareness of English second language learners. *South African Journal of Communication Disorders*, 64(1), 1-9.
- Letseka, M., Mphahlele, R., & Akintolu, M. (2025). University of South Africa. In *Handbook of Open Universities Around the World* (pp. 105-116). Routledge.
- Letsoalo, N. (2023). Morphophonological realisation on inflected verbal roots with initial vowel sounds in Sepedi. *South African Journal of African Languages*, 43(2), 122–130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02572117.2023.2248725>
- Letsholo, R. (2013). Chapter 4. Language, gender and social construction in a pre-school in Gaborone. In *Gender and language in Sub-Saharan Africa: Tradition, struggle and change* (pp. 97-116). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Maphumulo, S. (2021). Diphthong reduction in the English of Zulu speakers. *South African Journal of Linguistics*, 39(1), 85-100.
- Masasa, R. C. (2022). *The perception of English vowels by Sesotho speakers of English as a second language* (Master's thesis, National University of Lesotho).
- Mesthrie, R. (2008). 'Death of the mother tongue'—is English a glottophagic language in South Africa? *English Today*, 24(2), 13-19.
- Mesthrie, R., Chevalier, A., Ribbens-Klein, Y., Toefy, T., & Wileman, B. (2023). Sociophonetics and South African studies: Focus on ethnicity. In *The Routledge Handbook of Sociophonetics* (pp. 489-511). Routledge.
- Moyo, J. (2020). Underpreparedness in South African higher education: A limited test of the English grammar awareness of first-year university students. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 34(6), 166-184.
- Mufwene, S. (2001, April). Why and How do Languages Change? From creole to no-creole v *Towards a Unified Framework of Developmental Linguistics*.
- Munro, M. J., & Derwing, T. M. (2015). Intelligibility in research and practice: Teaching p *English pronunciation*, 375-396.
- Munro, M. J., & Derwing, T. M. (2015). Intelligibility in research and practice: Teaching p *English pronunciation*, 375-396.
- Neubert, C. (2021). *Language variation in South Africa: A sociophonetic study of the vowel system of Black South African English* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Ngidi, S. A., & Mncwango, E. M. (2022). University students' perspectives on an English-only

Education. *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, 18(1), 1189.

Nyoni, A., & Netshisaulu, N.C. (2021). Assimilation phonological processes involving vowels in Tshivenda language. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Management Review*, 4(3), 95 -109.

Pongweni, A. J. (2015). The pronunciation of English vowels by Shona speakers: Problems and *Pronunciation of English* (pp. 231-242). Routledge.

Posel, D., Hunter, M., & Rudwick, S. (2022). Revisiting the prevalence of English: language in South Africa. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 43(8), 774-786.

Roach, P. (2009). *English phonetics and phonology paperback with audio CDs (2): A practical course*. Cambridge university press.

Sebola, M. (2025). Making the foreign familiar:(De) scribing linguistic adaptation in Tshivenda. *South African Journal of African Languages*, 1-8.

Selinker, L., & Gass, S. M. (2008). Second language acquisition. *Lawrence Erlbaum Ass.*

Sethole, S. P. (2014). *The nature and extent of mother tongue interference by Sepedi on the effectiveness of learning English among Information Technology foundation students at Tshwane University of Technology*. University of Pretoria (South Africa).

Thao, M. T. P. (2020). Role of L1 in L2 acquisition according to contrastive analysis hypothesis and error analysis. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 11(2), 102-107.

Tiwari, H. P. (2023). Challenges in teaching pronunciation: Secondary level English teachers' perspectives. *Journal of Linguistics and Language in Education*, 17(2), 1-29.

Tsang, A. (2025). The relationships between EFL learners' anxiety in oral presentations, self-perceived pronunciation, and speaking proficiency. *Language Teaching Research*, 29(4), 1639-1659.

Van den Heever, C. M. (1999). *Tswana first language interference on English vowels* (Doctoral dissertation, Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education).

Vukosi, L., Smith, C. G., Rautenbach, E., & Collins, G. (2021). An analysis of learners' spoken English in public and private schools. *Per Linguam*, 37(1), 79-96.

Yavas, M. (2020). *Applied English Phonology*. John Wiley & Sons.

Yazdani, A. M. (2023). *How Experiences in L1 and L2 Influence L1 Phonetic Change: A Case Study* (Doctoral dissertation, State University of New York at Stony Brook).

Zhang, Y. (2025). Exploring the Negative Transfer Effect of Hanzhonghua Accent on English Pronunciation and Countermeasures Against it: A Case Study of an English Major from

Shaanxi Province. *Journal of Literature & Language*, 1(1), 13-35.

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.15>

ADVANCING UBUNTU TO MITIGATE HUMAN SECURITY RISK FACTORS ON AFRICAN INTERNATIONAL MOBILE STUDENTS IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS.

Masipa Masila Joshua

University of Venda,

Department of Arts and Development,

Faculty of Humanities, Social Science and Education

Email: masilajoshua.masipa@univen.ac.za

Nontlanhla Ntakana

University of Venda

International Relations and Partnerships

Email: nontlanhla.ntakana@univen.ac.za

Raseluma Sentawane Johanna

University of Tsukuba

Graduate School of Business Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences

Email: bishopendie.wsmi@gmail.com

Abstract

Xenophobia, socioeconomic marginalization, discrimination, and a lack of institutional assistance are just a few of the complicated human security issues that African international mobile students studying in South Africa frequently face. These weaknesses jeopardize not just their academic achievement but also their general integration and well-being. The African philosophy of Ubuntu, which emphasizes empathy, shared humanity, and collective responsibility, is advanced in this study as a theoretical and applied framework for reducing these risk factors for human security. Using a qualitative study approach, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were done with 35 international students from diverse African nations enrolled in South African universities. In order to investigate students' lived experiences, coping strategies, and opinions of institutional and community assistance, data were subjected to thematic analysis. The results show that although the majority of participants felt insecure and socially isolated, Ubuntu expressions such peer mentoring, African peer solidarity, and culturally inclusive programs were essential in promoting safety, belonging, and resilience. The study shows that the human security of African international students can be greatly improved by incorporating Ubuntu-driven practices into institutional regulations, student support initiatives, and intercultural interaction. It comes to the conclusion that campuses may become places of safety and empowerment if higher education were based on an Ubuntu-oriented system based on respect and caring for one another.

Keywords: *Ubuntu, human security, international students, higher education, resilience, South Africa, African mobility*

Introduction

The human security experiences of African international mobile students in South African universities have received little attention, despite the expanding corpus of research on internationalization in higher education (Lee & Sehoole, 2020). The majority of the literature now in publication concentrates on cultural integration and academic adjustment (Choudaha, 2017; Lee & Rice, 2007), but it ignores the daily concerns that impact African students' sense of safety, dignity, and belonging in host institutions. By presenting Ubuntu, an indigenous African ideology of interconnection and shared humanity, as a theoretical and practical framework for reducing the dangers to human security that African international students confront, this study closes that gap. The study supports a contextually applicable model of student wellness and protection in African higher education and

helps decolonize international education research by establishing the discourse in Ubuntu (Letseka, 2012; Waghid, 2014).

Because of its perceived academic prospects and more sophisticated higher education infrastructure, South Africa has emerged as a major destination for African students traveling abroad (Kritz, 2016; Teferra, 2019). However, xenophobic prejudice, exclusive campus cultures, financial instability, and mental anguish are only a few of the interpersonal and institutional issues that African international students frequently face (Mabokela & Mlambo, 2017). Their human security a multifaceted term that includes freedom from fear, want, and indignity is compromised by these circumstances, which foster an atmosphere of insecurity (UNDP, 1994). Human security in higher education refers to making sure that students experience intellectual, social, and psychological

support as well as safety and value (Horban et al., 2024).

These fears are exacerbated by the continued existence of xenophobia in South Africa following apartheid. Social isolation and restricted access to institutional support networks result from the common preconception of African students as "foreigners" or "outsiders" (Misago, 2017; Crush & Ramachandran, 2014). Universities frequently lack transformative means to address these structural exclusions, despite their rhetorical commitment to diversity and inclusion (Mabokela & Mlambo, 2017). A contradiction arises as a result: South African colleges draw African students under the pretext of Pan-African solidarity, but these students frequently face exclusion from the very establishments that are supposed to promote African unity.

Ubuntu provides a healing framework in this regard to reconsider and humanize the experience of international students. Ubuntu emphasizes empathy, compassion, and interdependence and is based on the idea that "a person is a person through other persons" (umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu) (Tutu, 1999; Ramose, 2002). International students' well-being, social cohesiveness, and inclusive practices can all be improved by incorporating Ubuntu values into institutional culture and policy (Letseka, 2012; Waghid, 2014). According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018), it offers a culturally based substitute for Eurocentric internationalization paradigms that frequently overlook interpersonal ethics and collective care.

In order to reduce human security risk factors among African international mobile students in South African higher education institutions, this study aims to investigate how Ubuntu might be promoted as a philosophical and practical instrument. The study looks at the security issues that students confront, analyses their lived experiences, and evaluates how much Ubuntu-oriented interventions might improve resilience, safety, and inclusion. By doing this, it advances research on African-centred educational change and provides universities looking to foster cultures of trust, respect, and human dignity with insights that are pertinent to policy.

Literature review

Human Security in the Context of Higher Education

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1994) was the first to introduce the idea of human security, which goes beyond conventional state-centered ideas of security to include "freedom from fear, want, and indignity." This approach emphasizes students' overall well-being in higher education, including psychological safety, socioeconomic stability, and anti-discrimination protection (Mezzanotte, 2022). Because of socioeconomic precarity, xenophobia, and institutional neglect, international students in Africa frequently experience increased insecurities (Tagliabue, 2023).

Although acculturation and adaption difficulties are highlighted in international studies on the experiences of international students (Lee & Rice, 2007; Choudaha, 2017), the security aspect of belonging, dignity, and rights protection is frequently overlooked. Insecurity for African international mobile students in South Africa takes many forms, including everyday microaggressions that threaten their human dignity, exclusion, and symbolic violence in addition to material deprivation like inadequate housing or financial support (Crush & Ramachandran, 2014; Misago, 2017). A localized, culturally grounded notion of human security that acknowledges the particular vulnerabilities of African students under postcolonial educational systems is necessary, as these experiences highlight.

The South African Context and African Student Mobility

Due in large part to its sophisticated infrastructure, English-medium instruction, and regional reputation, South Africa has become a popular choice for African students looking for high-quality postsecondary education (Teferra, 2019; Kritz, 2016). However, the milieu in which this greater mobility takes place is paradoxical it promotes Pan-African ideals while perpetuating social hierarchies and exclusionary behaviours that date back to the colonial and apartheid eras (Mabokela & Mlambo, 2017).

According to studies, xenophobic views from classmates, faculty, and the general public are common among African international students, which threatens their sense of security and belonging (Crush & Ramachandran, 2014; Misago, 2017). Reactive rather than transformative, institutional responses have frequently prioritized crisis management over integrating inclusion into practice and policy (Mabokela & Mlambo, 2017). Furthermore, because students must deal with tight visa policies and restricted access to financial aid, the legal and administrative frameworks controlling immigration and student permits make insecurity worse (Burke, 2018).

These factors lead to a situation known as "educational precarity" (Ansloos, Wager & Dunn 2022) in which African students are stigmatized through systemic exclusion while yet being regarded as internationalization contributors. A philosophical reorientation that places human security inside African epistemologies of caring, community, and relational ethics is necessary to resolve these tensions.

The Ubuntu Philosophy as a Human Security Framework

A moral and ethical framework for comprehending interpersonal relationships and the well-being of the group is provided by the African philosophy of Ubuntu, which is typically summed up in the phrase "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" (a person is a person via other persons) (Tutu, 1999; Ramose, 2002). Ubuntu places a strong emphasis on empathy, connectivity, and the understanding of our common humanity, arguing that social harmony and individual well-being are inextricably linked (Letseka, 2012; Waghid, 2014).

Ubuntu has been used as a philosophical and pedagogical paradigm in educational settings to support inclusive, relational, and justice-focused learning environments (Waghid, 2014; Higgs, 2019). It pushes educators and institutions to view students as members of a moral community whose success depends on respect and care for one another, rather than just as individuals seeking credentials (Letseka, 2012). The human security strategy, which places a

high priority on protection against structural violence, human dignity, and empowerment, is in perfect harmony with this (UNDP, 1994; Ramose, 2002).

By opposing Eurocentric individualism and promoting communal ethics in teaching, research, and administration, Ubuntu has the capacity to decolonize higher education, according to recent scholarship (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Higgs, 2019). Ubuntu can guide institutional tactics that improve campus inclusion programs, mentor support networks, and intercultural solidarity when it comes to the experience of international students (Naidoo, 2021). Therefore, promoting Ubuntu in South African higher institutions can be a means of improving security as well as an ethical requirement.

Connecting Human Security, Ubuntu, and the Welfare of International Students

Ubuntu's integration with the human security paradigm offers a framework that is culturally appropriate for comprehending and resolving the risks of international students from Africa. Ubuntu emphasizes relational restoration, or the mending of rifts in human connection brought on by exclusion or hostility, in contrast to human security, which focuses protection from threats (Letseka, 2012; Ramose, 2002). When combined, they promote both affective and structural kinds of security: moral affirmation and a sense of belonging on the one hand, and institutional safety nets on the other.

According to empirical research, Ubuntu-inspired activities including group problem-solving, peer mentorship, and intercultural discussions improve students' emotional health and resilience (Waghid, 2014). Additionally, leadership and policy frameworks that place a high priority on reciprocal accountability, communal welfare, and inclusive governance might benefit from the relational ethics of Ubuntu (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). In this way, Ubuntu pushes the human security agenda toward proactive community development and moral inclusion rather than just reactive defense.

Research Gap and Theoretical Integration

Ubuntu's significance in African educational

theory is becoming more widely acknowledged, but little is known about how it might help international students who are at risk for human security issues. Instead of using Ubuntu as a framework for safety and inclusion, the majority of studies address it as a moral philosophy or pedagogical principle (Letseka, 2012; Higgs, 2019). Similarly, the literature on human security has rarely been situated within African epistemologies, frequently embracing Western-centric concepts of protection and vulnerability (UNDP, 1994).

Therefore, this study fills these gaps by combining the human security framework with the Ubuntu concept to investigate how South African higher education institutions might operationalize communal ethics to protect foreign mobile students from Africa. The study's focus on African knowledge systems helps decolonize scholarship on international education and advances a humanizing strategy for student mobility based on social justice, empathy, and interdependence (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

Theoretical framework

This study is theoretically grounded on three interrelated paradigms: Decolonial Thought, Human Security Theory, and Ubuntu Philosophy. When taken as a whole, they offer a thorough and culturally grounded perspective on the human security risk concerns that African international mobility students at South African higher education institutions must deal with. Crucially, the framework also examines the boundaries, disputes, and institutional appropriations of Ubuntu as a practical and philosophical idea.

Ubuntu Philosophy: Critical Ambiguities and Relational Ethics

Ubuntu articulates an African ontology of relational personhood and shared accountability through the maxim "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" ("a person is a person through other persons") (Tutu, 1999; Ramose, 2002). By finding identity and moral significance inside networks of reciprocity, community, and caring, it challenges Western liberal individualism (Letseka, 2012; Waghid, 2014). Ubuntu is frequently cited

in the context of higher education as a humanizing ethic a call to establish welcoming, caring, and socially cohesive learning environments (Higgs, 2019; Naidoo, 2021).

Ubuntu presents a transformational moral ideal, yet there are theoretical and practical conflicts with it. Academics warn that romanticizing Ubuntu could mask issues of exclusion, power, and belonging (Metz, 2011; Eze, 2017). By defining "insiders" and "outsiders" according to who is accepted as a member of the moral community, the very focus on community can create boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. This paradox is particularly pertinent to overseas students, who may be institutionally or socially oppressed despite being theoretically embraced by Ubuntu discourse.

Additionally, the institutional appropriation of Ubuntu, such as through diversity charters or mission statements, runs the risk of turning it into a bureaucratic or depoliticized "buzzword" (Cornell & Van Marle, 2005). Ubuntu's radical capacity to confront structural injustices may be neutralized by such co-optation, transforming it from a catalyst for systemic change into a kind of moral window decoration. Therefore, a critical engagement necessitates going beyond conventional Ubuntu celebrations to examine how and by whom "community" is defined as well as how power is distributed within Ubuntu-informed behaviors.

Ubuntu is viewed in this study as a controversial ethical practice that simultaneously reflects aspiration and limitation rather than as a set moral norm. It functions as a critical lens for analyzing institutional inconsistencies in the distribution of care and belonging as well as a normative vision for solidarity.

Theory of Human Security: From Defense to Empowerment

The UNDP (1994) created the Human Security paradigm, which emphasizes freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity. This paradigm broadens the definition of security from state-centered defense to people-centered well-being. This concept acknowledges that social, economic, and psychological vulnerabilities, in addition to physical threats,

are the root causes of insecurity (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007). This means that institutions in higher education have an obligation to protect students against emotional distress, discrimination, and exclusion (Samier, 2015).

However, the Western liberal orientation of the human security rhetoric has been criticized for emphasizing legal rights and individual liberty while ignoring relational and social aspects of safety and dignity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). By incorporating Ubuntu into human security, protection is reframed as mutual empowerment based on empathy, relational care, and moral interdependence rather than as institutional benevolence. Thus, Ubuntu reinterprets security not as an administrative policy objective but as a shared ethical duty a living practice of human recognition.

Reclaiming and Re-politicizing Ubuntu: A Decolonial Perspective

The continuation of colonial power relations and Eurocentric epistemologies in modern African institutions is criticized by decolonial thought (Mignolo, 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). According to Mignolo and Walsh (2018), it advocates for epistemic disobedience, which is the restoration and affirmation of indigenous frameworks such as Ubuntu as acceptable ways of knowing and being.

However, decolonial literature also cautions against the domestication of decolonial ideas through institutional discourse that upholds colonial hierarchies of belonging while praising "African values." Ubuntu becomes a double-edged notion within this critique: it can be selectively appropriated to conceal underlying inequalities, but it can also be used as a tool for social justice and epistemic repair. For African international students, marginalization and xenophobia are manifestations of coloniality the continuous hierarchy of African identities inside the postwar academy rather than isolated instances. This approach aims to re-politicize Ubuntu as a living practice of solidarity rather than just a cultural decoration or administrative slogan by re-asserting it as a counter-hegemonic ethic of mutual recognition.

Combining Frameworks

A complex theoretical framework for this research is provided by the convergence of Ubuntu Philosophy, Human Security Theory, and Decolonial Thought. Ubuntu acknowledges its own conflicts over inclusiveness and co-optation while offering a moral-ethical foundation based on human interconnectedness, relationality, and compassion. Through Ubuntu's relational ethics, Human Security Theory provides a structural viewpoint that emphasizes dignity, empowerment, and systemic safety. Decolonial Thought ensures that Ubuntu maintains its transformational, rather than tokenistic, potential by placing both within larger struggles against institutional and epistemological coloniality.

When combined, these frameworks allow for a human-centered, critical, and decolonial view of the welfare of African international students. Ubuntu is therefore viewed as a dynamic and contentious philosophical practice rather than a static or idealized value, one that might provide light on the paradoxes and opportunities of belonging, community, and care in South African higher education.

Methodology

The study used a qualitative research approach to investigate how Ubuntu might be improved to reduce human security risk factors among African international mobile students in South African higher education institutions. An in-depth comprehension of participants' lived experiences, meanings, and interactions within their social and institutional contexts was made possible by this design (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study was conducted using a qualitative interpretivist paradigm, which recognizes that connections, communication, and shared meaning all contribute to the social construction of reality (Schwandt, 2015). The Ubuntu worldview, which places a strong emphasis on empathy, respect, and connection, is consistent with this paradigm (Letseka, 2012). Instead than taking knowledge from participants, it was co-created with them in accordance with Ubuntu ethics.

Study Locations and Participants

Three public universities in South Africa that

represent urban, semi-urban, and rural settings participated in the study. Different institutional and sociocultural viewpoints on the experiences of African international students were guaranteed by this variance. The study included 35 African international mobile students. The following were the requirements for inclusion: attending a public university in South Africa for a minimum of one academic year, citizenship in a different African nation, and willingness to discuss individual experiences with institutional support, safety, and belonging. Participants represented a range of nationalities, including Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, and Eswatini, as well as fields, including Social Sciences, Education, and Health Sciences. This variety made it possible to compare and examine both common and distinctive human (in) security feelings.

Recruitment and Sampling Techniques

Criterion sampling and snowball sampling techniques were combined in a deliberate sampling strategy. Only students who satisfied the inclusion requirements took part thanks to criterion sampling. In situations when students were reluctant to self-identify because of trust issues or fear of institutional exposure, snowball sampling was utilized to find additional participants through referrals from first contacts.

Peer referrals, foreign student offices, and student associations made it easier for participants to get in. The first invitations were sent out through student groups on WhatsApp and university email lists. Due to worries about confidentiality, some international students were reluctant to talk about delicate topics like safety or xenophobia during the recruitment process. Multiple assurances of anonymity, discussions aimed at fostering trust, and a focus on the Ubuntu-based ethical commitment to mutual respect and relational care were used to lessen this.

Techniques for Gathering Data

Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were the two complementing qualitative techniques employed. Twenty people participated in semi-structured interviews that lasted 45 to 60 minutes each. The individual

experiences of participants with institutional support, safety perceptions, discrimination, and Ubuntu-related activities at their colleges were examined in these interviews. Three groups of five people each participated in focus group discussions (FGDs). Within student communities, these sessions promoted discussion about shared experiences, coping strategies, and manifestations of Ubuntu solidarity.

The UNDP (1994) human security framework, which addresses economic, social, personal, and psychological security, as well as the Ubuntu values of compassion, moral inclusivity, and interconnection, served as the basis for the interview and FGD guidelines (Ramose, 2002; Waghid, 2014).

Analysis of Data

Thematic analysis was used to examine the data in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework: familiarity with data, Creating the first codes, Looking for themes, Examining themes identifying and characterizing themes, and creating the report.

The Ubuntu philosophical framework and Human Security Theory served as the foundation for both theory-driven and inductive coding. Important themes that emerged were community-based resilience, Ubuntu-inspired solidarity, institutional (in) visibility, and xenophobia and social marginalization. In order to prevent the researcher's positionality from overpowering participants' voices, reflexivity was maintained throughout the process through journaling and peer debriefing (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethical Aspects

All participating universities' research ethics committees granted ethical approval. After being informed about the study's goals, voluntary participation, and their freedom to withdraw at any moment, all participants gave their informed consent. Pseudonyms and safe data handling were used to guarantee anonymity and secrecy. Ubuntu ethics, which value relational accountability, empathy, and reciprocal care, were incorporated in the study process (Letseka, 2012; Higgs, 2019). Throughout data collection

and analysis, this ethical approach promoted trust and moral reciprocity by placing a high priority on participants' psychological health and dignity.

Reliability

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria were used to determine trustworthiness:

Credibility is attained by member verification, peer debriefing, and the triangulation of interviews and focus group discussions. Transferability: Encouraged by thorough participant and study setting contextual explanations. Dependability is guaranteed by an audit trail that records every step of the process, from hiring to data analysis. Confirmability: Preserved to reduce researcher bias through participant validation and reflexive journaling.

The study's ethical and interpretive integrity was further strengthened by a relational validation method that was inspired by Ubuntu and focused on participant input and collaborative meaning-making.

Findings

Data from the 35 international mobile students from Africa showed the rehabilitative potential of Ubuntu-oriented practices in fostering safety, belonging, and wellness, as well as the complex human security issues. Experiencing Human Insecurity, Emotional and Social Isolation, Ubuntu as a Coping and Restorative Mechanism, and Institutional Gaps and Opportunities for Ubuntu Integration were the four main topics that came out of the investigation.

Being Affected by Human Insecurity

The majority of participants stated that they felt emotionally, socially, and institutionally vulnerable, in addition to physically unsafe, during their time in South African institutions. Students talked about encountering stereotyping, xenophobic sentiments, and social and academic isolation.

"When local students or instructors learn that I'm from another African nation, their tone occasionally shifts. They believe I'm less competent or that I'm here to take advantage of chances intended for South Africans". (The seventh participant, Zimbabwe)

Participants' confidence and academic interest were undermined by these interactions, which promoted a sense of vulnerability and "otherness." According to Crush and Ramachandran (2014), xenophobic exclusion in South Africa serves as a social mechanism of boundary enforcement and frequently targets fellow Africans. These findings are consistent with their findings.

According to a number of participants, discrimination was subtle but persistent and could take the form of limited access to financial support, administrative help delays, or exclusion from research groups. As one pupil clarified:

"We are constantly reminded that we are visitors. We are not entirely accepted, even when we perform well intellectually". (Nigerian Participant 15)

These incidents highlight institutional and personal insecurity that jeopardizes students' human dignity, which is a fundamental component of the human security framework (UNDP, 1994).

Social and Emotional Disconnection

One widespread issue that has surfaced is emotional uneasiness, especially for students who don't have strong social networks. On and off campus, a lot of people talked about feeling isolated and excluded. Exam season or difficult financial conditions frequently made this isolation worse.

"On certain days, I feel like I'm not there at all. People ignore you as if you don't exist when you pass them". (Kenya, participant 3)

Economic difficulties like delayed remittances, visa limitations that prevented work, and expensive living expenses exacerbated social isolation. Students observed that these anxieties were made worse by a lack of institutional assistance. "They sympathize but don't provide any genuine assistance when you visit the international office. You are left to fend for yourself". (DRC, Participant 20)

The paradox of inclusion, as defined by Mabokela and Mlambo (2017), is reflected in the feeling of exclusion: African students are invited by universities as part of internationalization plans, but they are not completely integrated into institutional life.

Ubuntu as a Restorative and Coping Strategy
Participants recognized Ubuntu-inspired behaviours peer solidarity, shared caring, and group problem-solving as effective coping strategies in spite of these challenges. African students' unofficial support systems developed into secure environments that fostered belonging, empathy, and sharing.

My Malawian roommate began preparing additional meals for the two of us when she realized I was having trouble. Helping one another even when you have little is Ubuntu in action. (Tanzania, Participant 28)

In addition to easing financial stress, such deeds of kindness helped individuals rediscover their humanity. Students referred to these bonds as "families away from home," based on emotional reciprocity and respect for one another.

"What keeps us sane is Ubuntu." You persevere when you know that someone is sympathetic to your plight. (Nigeria, participant 10)

As a result, ubuntu became a cultural ethic and a psychosocial tool that uses our common humanity to turn vulnerability into resilience. This result supports the claims made by Letseka (2012) and Waghid (2014) that Ubuntu promotes human dignity restoration and compassionate cohabitation.

Furthermore, some individuals applied Ubuntu in their everyday relationships with locals, going beyond peer interactions. One pupil thought about it:

"Even in situations where I am rejected, I choose to react kindly. To demonstrate that we are all human, I wish to embody the spirit of Ubuntu". (Rwanda, Participant 33)

This illustrates how Ubuntu turns into a personal philosophy and a way to fight against prejudice and exclusion.

Opportunities for Ubuntu Integration and Institutional Gaps

It was frequently brought up by participants that university structures hardly ever actually implemented Ubuntu values. Although there were policies pertaining to diversity and inclusion, they were not widely implemented. The majority of universities lacked anti-xenophobia

awareness campaigns, culturally sensitive counselling services, and support systems catered to the requirements of international students.

"You don't sense that we are a single community, despite what the university claims. Here, ubuntu is a catchphrase rather than a way of life". (Mozambique, Participant 12)

Some employees were thought to be uninterested or unprepared to deal with cross-cultural difficulties. Students proposed that using Ubuntu-based strategies could enhance student wellbeing and humanize institutional cultures.

"The way staff treat us would change if they received training on Ubuntu values, such as empathy and understanding." (Eswatini, participant 8)

These findings highlight the necessity of integrating Ubuntu ethics into staff training, student support services, and university governance at the policy level. African relational ethics must be incorporated into decolonizing institutions in order to eliminate the colonial legacies of hierarchy and alienation, according to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018).

In order to encourage inclusive engagement and human security, participants suggested programs including peer solidarity circles, multicultural mentorship programs, and Ubuntu-driven leadership training.

An overview of the results

All things considered, the results show that South African international mobile students have a variety of social, economic, and emotional anxieties that jeopardize their human security. However, peer-to-peer Ubuntu-oriented behaviours work as unofficial defense, unity, and resilience mechanisms. Universities have lost the chance to evolve from bureaucratic establishments into communities of humanity and belonging when Ubuntu values are not ingrained in institutional culture.

By bringing higher education into line with African-centered ideals of care, dignity, and communal security, these findings support the claim that, when institutionalized, Ubuntu may close the gap between policy rhetoric and lived reality.

Discussion

The study's conclusions shed light on the ongoing human security issues that African international mobile students face in South African universities as well as Ubuntu's transformative potential as a framework that is both counter-hegemonic and restorative. The debate, which draws from the qualitative data, combines theoretical ideas with the lived experiences of participants to show how Ubuntu-oriented values might promote relational wellness, address systematic exclusion, and humanize academic spaces.

A Theoretical Response to Human Insecurity: Ubuntu

Beyond traditional ideas of physical safety, the study demonstrates that African international students face multifaceted fears, including social, emotional, institutional, and economic ones. These concerns include "freedom from fear" and "freedom from want," which were both weakened by xenophobia, exclusion, and institutional negligence, in accordance with the UNDP's (1994) human security framework. Universities have failed to protect the human dignity and welfare of all students, regardless of country, as evidenced by the persistent experiences of social alienation and prejudice.

But Ubuntu, as a social and moral philosophy, offers a human-centered remedy for these fears. Ubuntu emphasizes connection and reciprocal caring, which contradicts the individualism and competitiveness that characterize neoliberal higher education. Ubuntu exemplifies the moral realization that "to be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others," as stated by Ramose (2002). The study's participants' acts of solidarity, such as sharing food, offering emotional support, and demonstrating empathy, illustrate Ubuntu as a lived praxis of resilience and protection. By establishing unofficial networks of protection, these actions lessened societal and institutional shortcomings in ensuring human security.

The Internationalization and Exclusion Paradox
The results show a discrepancy between policy discourse and lived reality, despite the fact that South African colleges have broadened their internationalization agendas. Though students re-

ported limited inclusion in decision-making, social integration, and resource access, internationalization frequently rhetorically promotes diversity. This is consistent with the "paradox of inclusion," as defined by Mabokela and Mlambo (2017), in which African overseas students are both accepted and marginalized.

This contradiction reveals a larger epistemic mismatch when viewed through the perspective of Ubuntu: universities embrace Western paradigms of globalization while ignoring African-centered coexistence principles. Ubuntu's mutual recognition principle, which advocates for humanizing interactions that cut over nationality, culture, and class, offers a solution to this paradox. Internationalization policy could be transformed from a bureaucratic endeavor to a moral endeavor that prioritizes reciprocity, dignity, and social belonging by including Ubuntu. **Reclaiming African Epistemologies of Care via Decolonial Reflections**

According to a decolonial viewpoint, the ongoing alienation and exclusion of African international students is a reflection of the incomplete decolonization of South African higher education. Universities are still caught up in colonial hierarchies of knowledge and identity, which marginalize African worldviews and favor Western epistemologies, according to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018). This epistemic injustice is best illustrated by the marginalization of Ubuntu in institutional practice.

The use of Ubuntu-based support groups by participants is an epistemological act of resistance an effort to restore dignity and community outside of the official academic structure. This is in line with Mbembe's (2016) demand that relational ethics re-center African humanism in order to "decolonize the university." Students combat the alienation brought about by colonial legacies of hierarchy and exclusion by reclaiming agency over their safety and belonging via the theory and practice of Ubuntu.

Furthermore, by emphasizing relational accountability and empathy rather than just security or surveillance, the Ubuntu ethic of caring redefines what it means to be safe on campus. Fraser's (2000) recognition theory, which de-

finest justice as both redistribution and acknowledgment, is consistent with this idea of relational security. By upholding the dignity of every member of the academic community, especially those who have previously been marginalized, Ubuntu operationalizes recognition.

Rebuilding Institutional Culture with Ubuntu

A discrepancy between the operationalization of university policies and their professed values of inclusivity is also revealed by the study. International students feel even more alienated from their institutions because of their frequently impersonal and bureaucratic cultures. Ubuntu may be included into schooling and governance to resolve this disparity.

Letseka (2012) and Waghid (2014) contend that the ability of Ubuntu to foster empathy, decency, and relational justice is what gives it educational worth. University environments that represent true communal care rather than symbolic diversity could be created if they include Ubuntu concepts into staff training, mentorship programs, and student support services.

The suggestions made by the participants such as multicultural debate forums and mentorship circles with an Ubuntu theme highlight doable avenues for this kind of change. By fostering empathy, lowering prejudice, and fostering stronger relationships, these programs could harmonize institutional culture with Ubuntu's moral mandate.

Ubuntu, Human Flourishing, and Resilience

One of the study's main conclusions is that Ubuntu promotes resilience by encouraging both communal survival and individual endurance. Ubuntu redefines resilience as relational interdependence the ability to flourish through reciprocal support and acknowledgment in contrast to Western resilience models, which frequently place an emphasis on self-sufficiency. Participants' accounts of shared meals, emotional support, and mentoring show how Ubuntu operationalizes resilience through humanity.

This echoes Tutu's (1999) idea that Ubuntu acknowledges "my humanity is bound up in yours," implying that security and well-being are jointly created within a community. Thus, the relational resilience that arises from Ubuntu practices turns vulnerability into group strength

and reinforces that higher education may be a place where people flourish rather than be excluded.

Synthesis of Theory

Through the integration of Human Security theory and Ubuntu philosophy, this study offers a new African-centred paradigm for comprehending the welfare of mobile students. Ubuntu expands the concept of human security beyond safeguarding individuals to include fostering relational safety, which results from moral responsibility, empathy, and solidarity. This synthesis highlights the moral need to humanize institutional interactions while challenging the predominance of Western individualism in discussions of security and education.

By promoting Ubuntu as a useful epistemology for rethinking safety, belonging, and justice in African institutions, the study not only fills an empirical gap on African student experiences but also advances decolonial scholarship.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Ubuntu, an indigenous African ideology of compassion and interconnectivity, may be promoted to lessen the risk factors for human security that African international mobile students in South African higher education institutions confront. The results show that even though these students face a variety of insecurities, such as xenophobia, social exclusion, financial difficulties, and institutional neglect, they also rely on Ubuntu-inspired principles of empathy, solidarity, and group care to thrive in frequently hostile settings.

The study concludes that human security in higher education must go beyond material safety to encompass relational security the guarantee of belonging, dignity, and respect for one another by analysing these experiences through the dual lenses of Ubuntu philosophy and Human Security theory. Ubuntu, which encourages ethical interdependence and collective well-being, provides a culturally grounded framework for accomplishing this. Ubuntu's potential as a moral compass and a useful tactic for social resilience was highlighted by the discovery that

acts of kindness, mutual aid, and peer mentorship among African students counteracted the alienation brought on by institutional disparities.

By redefining Ubuntu as a transformative epistemology that may dismantle colonial inequalities ingrained in South African universities, rather than only as cultural rhetoric, the study further advances decolonial studies. Mbembe (2016) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) contend that re-centring African ethics and worldviews is necessary for true decolonization. This study shows that promoting Ubuntu in academic settings is an essential first step in developing inclusive, compassionate, and contextually appropriate learning environments.

The higher education can be made more humane by incorporating Ubuntu into institutional culture through pedagogy, policy, and daily interactions. Ubuntu turns universities into ethical hubs of compassion and unity rather than bureaucratic and exclusive places. Universities may get closer to the African idea of education as a place of knowledge and a haven for people by promoting empathy, dignity, and relational accountability.

In summary, promoting Ubuntu in higher education is both a moral requirement and a workable solution to the intricate human security issues that face international African students. It restates the fundamental tenet of Ubuntu and the human situation as a whole: that the well-being of one is inextricably linked to the well-being of all.

Recommendations

In order to promote Ubuntu as a framework for improving the human security and wellbeing of African international mobile students at South African higher education institutions, a number of useful and policy-oriented recommendations are put out in light of the study's findings and conclusions. These recommendations target institutional, policy, community, and scholarly levels.

Integration of the Ubuntu Philosophy into Institutions

Integrate Ubuntu into Institutional Culture: Col-

leges and universities should incorporate Ubuntu values, such empathy, group accountability, and respect for one another, into their mission statements, conduct codes, and student engagement guidelines. This calls for a conscious transition away from bureaucratic management and toward human-centered, compassionate government.

Curriculum Decolonization: Teachers should use Ubuntu as a framework for ethics and knowledge in their instruction, especially in the humanities, social sciences, and education. Intercultural understanding and African-centred perspectives on social justice and human development would be encouraged as a result.

Staff and Student Induction Programs: To promote inclusive attitudes and respect for diversity, orientation programs for staff members and both domestic and foreign students should incorporate Ubuntu-based cultural sensitivity training.

Creation of Support Systems Based on Ubuntu
Ubuntu Peer Mentorship Circles: Create peer mentorship circles in which seasoned students both domestic and foreign assist newcomers with their social, emotional, and intellectual adjustments. These groups can provide forums for intercultural communication, reciprocal education, and psychological assistance.

Counselling and Wellbeing Services: Instead of solely individualistic approaches to mental health, university counselling departments should embrace Ubuntu-informed therapeutic models that prioritize relational involvement, empathy, and collective healing.

Ubuntu Forums and Dialogues: To promote harmony, dispel prejudices, and strengthen ties between South African and foreign students, regular intercultural forums and Ubuntu dialogues ought to be held.

Reform and Implementation at the Policy Level
Institutional Policy Alignment: In order to clearly integrate Ubuntu principles as guiding ideals for the welfare and security of students, universities and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) should examine their current internationalization and inclusion policies.

Anti-Xenophobia Techniques: Establish unambiguous institutional procedures to deal with instances of xenophobia on college campuses. These ought to consist of restorative justice techniques based on Ubuntu's ethic of reconciliation, awareness campaigns, and reporting mechanisms.

Fair Access to Resources: Given that human security includes both social and economic aspects, make sure that African international students have equitable access to academic resources, housing, healthcare, and scholarships.

Increasing Community Collaborations University–Community Collaboration: To develop outreach programs that are influenced by Ubuntu, universities should collaborate with nearby communities, governments, and non-governmental organizations. Programs that encourage shared community service, intercultural volunteering, and cultural exchange can improve social cohesion between residents and students.

Host Family and Local Buddy Systems: To build relationships and lessen social isolation, educational institutions should collaborate with neighbourhood families or civic associations to host overseas students on a regular basis.

Research and the Promotion of Scholarships

Additional Research on Ubuntu and Human Security: Future investigations ought to look into how Ubuntu can influence leadership styles,

peace education, and campus governance in addition to student wellbeing.

Comparative African Studies: To investigate how Ubuntu-like ideologies safeguard international students in other African contexts (such as Botswana, Kenya, and Ghana), research should be expanded to these countries.

Frameworks for Monitoring and Evaluation: Create instruments to evaluate how well Ubuntu-based programs affect resilience, student integration, and general human security results.

Rethinking College as a Caring Environment

In the end, universities need to rethink themselves as communities of caring rather than as hubs for knowledge creation. Universities can transition from transactional connections to transformative ones based on compassion, humanism, and mutual development by implementing Ubuntu. Institutions may help decolonize higher education and guarantee that African international students are not just accepted but truly valued as co-creators of the academic community by embracing Ubuntu as their guiding philosophy.

"We can only be human together, thus "my humanity is bound up in yours," as Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999) tells us. A concrete step toward achieving this goal is the development of Ubuntu in higher education, which is a moral and pragmatic pledge to protect the human security of everyone who lives, learns, and teaches in the academic community.

References

- Ansloos, J. P., Wager, A. C., & Dunn, N. S. (2022). Preventing Indigenous youth homelessness in Canada: A qualitative study on structural challenges and upstream prevention in education. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 50(4), 1918–1934.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Burke, A. (2018). *The implementation of the extreme visa vetting policy and its effects on international students and scholars*. [Unpublished manuscript].
- Choudaha, R. (2017). Three waves of international student mobility (1999–2020). *Studies in Higher Education*, 42(5), 825–832.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Crush, J., & Ramachandran, S. (2014). *Xenophobic violence in South Africa: Denialism, minimalism, realism*. Southern African Migration Programme.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2018). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). Sage.
- Fraser, N. (2000). Rethinking recognition. *New Left Review*, 3, 107–120.

- Higgs, P. (2019). Ubuntu and education in South Africa: A philosophical dialogue. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 33(2), 1–15.
- Kritz, M. M. (2016). International student mobility and tertiary education capacity in Africa. *International Migration*, 54(2), 14–28.
- Lee, J. J., & Rice, C. (2007). Welcome to America? International student perceptions of discrimination. *Higher Education*, 53(3), 381–409.
- Lee, J. J., & Schoole, C. (2020). International students seeking political stability and safety in South Africa. *Higher Education Policy*, 33(2), 305–322.
- Letseka, M. (2012). In defence of Ubuntu. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 31(1), 47–60.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.
- Mabokela, R. O., & Mlambo, Y. A. (2017). The social exclusion of African international students in South African higher education. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 5(1), 1–17.
- Mbembe, A. (2016). Decolonizing the university: New directions. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 15(1), 29–45.
- Mezzanotte, C. (2022). *The social and economic rationale of inclusive education: An overview of the outcomes in education for diverse groups of students*. [Unpublished manuscript].
- Mignolo, W. D. (2011). *The darker side of Western modernity: Global futures, decolonial options*. Duke University Press.
- Mignolo, W. D., & Walsh, C. E. (2018). *On decoloniality: Concepts, analytics, praxis*. Duke University Press.
- Misago, J. P. (2017). Politics by other means? The political economy of xenophobic violence in post-apartheid South Africa. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43(5), 1–17.
- Naidoo, D. (2021). Institutional inclusion in Higher Education: an analysis of the experiences of access, belonging and participation of international/foreign students at the University Of Cape Town.
- Ndlovu, M. (2018). Coloniality of knowledge and the challenge of creating African futures. *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, 40(2), 1–15.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2018). *Epistemic freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and decolonization*. Routledge.
- Ramose, M. B. (2002). *African philosophy through Ubuntu*. Mond Books.
- Samier, E. A. (2015). The globalization of higher education as a societal and cultural security problem. *Policy Futures in Education*, 13(5), 683–702.
- Schwandt, T. A. (2015). *The Sage dictionary of qualitative inquiry* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Tadjbakhsh, S., & Chenoy, A. M. (2007). *Human security: Concepts and implications*. Routledge.
- Tagliabue, V. V. (2023). *Privilege and precarity: African international students in South Africa* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham).
- Tutu, D. (1999). *No future without forgiveness*. Rider.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (1994). *Human development report 1994: New dimensions of human security*. Oxford University Press.
- Waghid, Y. (2014). *African philosophy of education reconsidered: On Ubuntu and pedagogical justice*. Routledge.
- Horban, O., Stadnyk, M., Martych, R., Mishchuk, A., & Mishchuk, M. (2024). The role of higher education in the formation of humanitarian security of the state. *Conhecimento & Diversidade*, 16(43), 302–321.

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.16>

FOOD SECURITY, AND CLIMATE CHANGE RISKS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Thandeka Yasmeeen Ndaba

College of Law and Management Studies,
Department of Public Administration, University of KwaZulu-Natal

Email: ndabat2@ukzn.ac.za

&

Sakhiseni Joseph Yende

College of Education, Department of Language Education,
Arts & Culture, University of South Africa

Email: yendesj@unisa.ac.za

Abstract

This study examines the impact of extreme weather events, particularly floods, on women's farming activities in two rural communities in KwaZulu-Natal: Nhlazuka and Swayimane. The study aimed to understand the gender-specific impacts of climate-induced hazards and evaluate the responses of women to, and benefits derived from, early warning systems implemented in these communities. A mixed-methods research design was employed, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Data were gathered via 200 questionnaires (100 for each community), 61 in-depth interviews, focus group discussions with female farmers, and six key informant interviews. The data were examined through thematic analysis and descriptive statistics. Women play a central role in food production through subsistence farming; however, climate hazards often destroy their crops, exacerbating food insecurity and intensifying household care responsibilities. Evidence from questionnaires and interviews shows that women are not passive recipients of aid. Many demonstrate resilience through adaptive practices such as saving seeds, exchanging knowledge about planting techniques, and forming small cooperative networks. These strategies reflect creativity and collective problem-solving efforts aimed at sustaining livelihoods in the face of environmental challenges. Persistent structural barriers, including limited land access and inadequate infrastructure, continue to constrain women's farming productivity and long-term food security. The research highlights that women's work extends beyond agricultural production. Their unpaid and often unrecognised labour supports household stability and contributes significantly to community well-being. These activities include caregiving, organising social support networks, and managing scarce resources, all of which are essential for maintaining resilience in rural contexts. The findings emphasise the need for policies and support mechanisms that acknowledge rural women's lived realities and value their contributions. Interventions should strengthen their adaptive capacities, address systemic inequalities, and provide practical resources to sustain both agricultural productivity and household welfare. Supporting women's agency in agriculture and food security is critical for enhancing climate resilience and fostering sustainable rural development. Recognising the central role women play in both productive and reproductive work is crucial for effective and equitable climate adaptation strategies.

Keywords: Floods; rural communities; subsistence farming, climate hazards, livelihoods; food security

Introduction

Climate change is increasingly recognised as a

social as well as an environmental issue. Its impacts are unevenly distributed, with women,

particularly in rural communities, facing heightened vulnerabilities due to intersecting social and economic inequalities. Gender is therefore not a marginal concern but central to understanding the consequences of climate risks and the possibilities for adaptation. Women's roles in food production, household management, and community support make them both disproportionately affected by extreme weather events and crucial actors in sustaining livelihoods. The intensifying effects of climate change are reshaping rural livelihoods worldwide. In sub-Saharan Africa, even small climatic shifts can significantly undermine food systems, with devastating impact on communities that rely on subsistence farming (World Bank, 2012). Women are particularly exposed because they are primary food producers yet often lack secure access to land, credit, and agricultural technologies (Awiti, 2022). This unequal position means that extreme weather events such as floods and droughts not only damage crops but also increase women's unpaid care burdens. Previous disasters highlight these gendered vulnerabilities. In Aceh, Indonesia, after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, women experienced higher mortality rates and were excluded from post-disaster planning (UNISDR, 2009). Similar patterns appear across rural Africa, where women farmers' limited access to adaptation resources heightens their susceptibility to climate shocks (Enete & Amusa, 2010; Onwutuebe, 2019). Yet, despite these challenges, women often make significant contributions to community resilience. Indigenous practices, traditional knowledge, and collective organisation help sustain food security and strengthen adaptation strategies (Okali, 2011).

KwaZulu-Natal provides an essential case for examining these dynamics. Its rural communities are already vulnerable due to poverty and limited infrastructure, and recurring floods further erode fragile livelihoods. Women's voices and experiences are central to understanding both the risks and the resilience strategies that emerge in such contexts.

The literature on gender and climate change reveals a consistent pattern: women are dispropor-

tionately affected by environmental hazards because of unequal access to resources, power, and opportunities (Assan et al., 2018; Barbie & Hochard, 2017). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2014) emphasizes that gender-sensitive approaches are crucial for adaptation, yet their implementation often lags behind policy discourse. Much scholarship emphasises the vulnerability of women, usually framed through concepts such as the "feminisation of poverty" (Chant, 2010; Kabeer, 2008). Studies demonstrate that women are overrepresented among people with low incomes in developing countries (Nkonya et al., 2011), and disasters frequently exacerbate these inequalities (Mabaya, 2009). In many accounts, women appear as passive victims, reinforcing a narrative of dependency (Arora-Jonsson, 2011).

More recent research challenges this view by recognising women's resilience and agency. Schwerdtle et al. (2021) highlight women's innovative strategies in agricultural adaptation, while Arora-Jonsson (2011) calls for approaches that situate gender within specific cultural and social contexts rather than generalising women as a uniform group. Dankelman (2008) cautions against stripping women of their agency by portraying them solely as vulnerable, and Okali (2011) illustrates women's leadership in adaptation practices. Other studies highlight indigenous coping strategies, such as food preservation, cooperative labour, and prioritising children's welfare (Orewa & Iyangbe, 2010). Together, these perspectives suggest that while women face heightened risks, they are also central actors in adaptation processes. The challenge is to strike a balance between recognizing vulnerability and acknowledging agency. Despite the growing body of research, significant gaps remain. First, there is a considerable amount of evidence on gender and climate resilience, but most of it originates from regions outside of Africa. For example, there is not enough research on rural women in sub-Saharan Africa (Miller & McGregor, 2020). Second, when African women are included, studies often emphasise vulnerability instead of detailing the specific knowledge systems, adaptation strategies, and resilience capacities that women currently

utilise. Third, although global frameworks like the IPCC support the inclusion of gender in adaptation planning, there is scant research on practical tools like Early Warning Systems (EWS) and the ways in which women in rural Southern Africa access, interpret, or impact them. These gaps show that we need studies based on women's real-life experiences that go beyond broad generalisations and link gender analysis with everyday acts of resilience.

First, there is relatively little empirical work focusing specifically on African contexts, particularly rural South Africa. Much of the literature has centred on Asia-Pacific, Europe, and Latin America, leaving sub-Saharan women underrepresented (Miller & McGregor, 2020; Elliott & Caballero-Anthony, 2013; Ergun et al., 2024; Allwood, 2017; Kuhlicke et al., 2011; Andersen et al., 2017). Second, when African women are included in climate studies, their roles are often narrowly described in terms of vulnerability. Less attention is paid to their knowledge systems, adaptive practices, and capacity for leadership in resilience building (Flato & Pelsner, 2017; Rao et al., 2019). Third, while international bodies such as the IPCC (2014, 2022) emphasize integrating gender into climate adaptation, there is limited research on practical tools, such as Early Warning Systems (EWS), and how women interact with them. Gender disparities in access to information and technology are documented (Onwutuebe, 2019), but little is known about how women might shape or improve such systems if given the opportunity. Finally, policy frameworks often adopt tokenistic approaches, including women in principle but not in meaningful ways. This risks reinforcing structural inequalities rather than addressing them (Glemarec et al., 2017).

This article aims to address these gaps by focusing on the experiences of women farmers in rural KwaZulu-Natal and their interactions with climate change. It investigates how women respond to extreme weather events, what adaptive strategies they employ, and how existing support systems either enable or constrain their resilience. Particular attention is given to Early Warning Systems, which are increasingly pro-

moted as tools for disaster preparedness but often remain inaccessible to women due to cultural, social, or technological barriers.

The motivation is both scholarly and practical. From an academic perspective, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the intersection between gender, food security, and climate adaptation in sub-Saharan Africa. It challenges the narrative of women solely as victims, emphasising their roles as innovators, leaders, and agents of change. From a policy perspective, the study underscores the need for inclusive adaptation strategies that recognise women's unpaid and often invisible labour while providing them with equitable access to resources and decision-making. Ultimately, the article argues that effective climate resilience requires moving beyond generic approaches to adaptation. Women's voices and lived experiences must be at the centre of planning, not as an afterthought but as a foundation for sustainable development. Therefore, by foregrounding the perspectives of rural women in KwaZulu-Natal, this study highlights the importance of gender-sensitive strategies that both acknowledge structural inequalities and build upon women's existing resilience practices.

Research questions

For the study, the researchers developed specific primary questions aimed at addressing and clarifying the ongoing crisis affecting female farmers. The questions are:

- a) How do gender roles influence decision-making and responsibilities of female farmers in rural communities?
- b) How do climate-related risks like floods and severe weather events affect the farming productivity, household duties, and job security of women farmers more than men?
- c) In the face of socioeconomic and environmental obstacles, what leadership and adaptability techniques do women use to maintain farming and food security?
- d) How does the sexual division of labour affect women's capacity to manage households and

farming tasks?

e) How are the resilience and adaptability of female farmers to climate risks shaped by socio-cultural norms, community networks, and access to support systems, such as Early Warning Systems?

Theoretical Frameworks

The study adopted an eclectic theoretical approach, combining four complementary frameworks: intersectional feminism, sustainable livelihoods, social constructionism, and Eco-feminism to enhance the depth, efficacy, and analytical power of the research. These frameworks collectively enabled the study to explore how climate change affects female farmers in the rural communities of Swayimane and Nhlazuka, and how Early Warning Systems (EWSs) can contribute to sustainable livelihoods while addressing gender inequalities.

Intersectional Feminism

Intersectional feminism, also known as intersectionality, examines the interconnectedness of gender, race, class, and other social identities in shaping experiences of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989; Mies & Shiva, 1993). By recognising that women's experiences are not shaped solely by gender but also by overlapping identities, intersectional feminism provides a lens for understanding the compounded disadvantages faced by marginalised groups, particularly black African women (UN Women, 2020). This framework guided the study's interpretation of key findings within the gender studies discipline, ensuring that the perspectives of women who experience multiple forms of discrimination were not overlooked. Intersectional feminism emphasises that feminism must be inclusive and attentive to diversity, as social identities and power structures interact to create complex systems of oppression. Applying this framework to climate change discourse highlights the differential vulnerabilities of women in rural communities, informing strategies for gender and environmental justice.

Sustainable Livelihoods Framework

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF)

provides a conceptual approach to understanding poverty, vulnerability, and adaptive capacity, making it particularly suitable for assessing the impacts of climate change on female farmers (Oberhauser et al., 2004; Scoones, 2009). This framework emphasises the strengths and resources inherent in communities, focusing on how these can be mobilised to reduce vulnerability and enhance resilience. In this study, SLF facilitated the exploration of how female farmers in Swayimane and Nhlazuka perceive and negotiate their vulnerabilities to weather-induced hazards, as well as how EWSs can support sustainable livelihoods. By considering both perceived and actual vulnerabilities, the framework provided insights into how women's self-perception influences their adaptation strategies (Adato & Meinzen-Dick, 2002; Levine, 2014). However, SLF alone cannot address systemic barriers such as gender inequality, land ownership disparities, or political marginalisation; therefore, it was complemented by intersectional feminism and social constructionism to account for broader structural and social dynamics.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism examines how knowledge, perceptions, and social realities are collaboratively produced through human interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 1985, 1999). In the context of disaster studies, this theory helps explain how communities construct their understanding of climate-related hazards in relation to their cultural, social, and historical contexts. Applied to this study, social constructionism facilitated an analysis of how gendered social norms, cultural expectations, and economic structures influence the vulnerability and resilience of female farmers. It highlighted the socially constructed nature of gender roles, which often dictate what is expected, permitted, or valued in women and men (Unger, 2020).

By recognising that gender relations are dynamic and negotiable (Connell & Pearse, 2015), the framework allowed the study to examine how women's participation in agriculture and

EWS development challenges traditional assumptions about their social roles. Social constructionism thus provided a nuanced understanding of how societal expectations intersect with climate vulnerabilities to influence women's adaptive capacities.

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism combines feminist theory with environmental activism, highlighting how patriarchal and capitalist systems contribute to environmental degradation and marginalise women from decision-making processes (Howell, 2004; Buckingham, 2004). This framework situates female farmers within broader socio-political and environmental contexts, examining how gendered roles and systemic inequalities exacerbate vulnerability to climate change. Ecofeminism emphasises that women's traditional spheres of organisation, such as food production, environmental health, and livelihood management, are often excluded from climate change debates, which are dominated by technological and scientific perspectives. In this study, Ecofeminism was used to critically assess the structural, cultural, and political factors that contribute to women's marginalisation in Swayimane and Nhlazuka, providing a basis for developing gender-responsive adaptation strategies and EWS interventions. By integrating insights from SLF and social constructionism, Ecofeminism facilitated a holistic understanding of the intersection of environmental and gender issues, highlighting pathways for sustainable and equitable climate adaptation.

Integration of Frameworks

The integration of these four frameworks allowed the study to approach climate change, vulnerability, and adaptation from multiple perspectives. Intersectional feminism ensured that the voices of marginalised women were central to the analysis, while SLF highlighted the practical and structural aspects of sustainable livelihoods. Social constructionism contextualised these findings within culturally and socially constructed norms, and Ecofeminism situated female farmers within broader environmental

and political discourses. Together, these frameworks enabled a comprehensive understanding of how gender, social identity, and environmental factors interact to shape women's experiences of climate change. By adopting this eclectic approach, the study not only captured the complex realities of female farmers in rural South Africa but also provided practical insights for designing socially equitable, culturally sensitive, and environmentally sustainable interventions. The frameworks collectively inform strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of EWSs, promoting gender justice, and supporting resilient livelihoods in the context of climate change.

Methodology: Research Design

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to comprehensively understand the experiences of female farmers in Nhlazuka and Swayimane (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007). Mixed-methods research involves collecting, analysing, and combining both qualitative and quantitative data to address complex research problems (Creswell, 2012). This study employed an exploratory design, suitable for interpretive case studies, which enabled a gender-sensitive and participatory approach to examining female farmers' responses to early warning systems (EWSs). Quantitative data were collected through surveys to determine the number of female farmers and their income levels. Qualitative data were collected through focus group discussions and individual interviews to explore perceptions of EWSs and their impact on farming practices. Prioritizing qualitative analysis allowed for a deeper exploration of challenges, such as limited access to resources and decision-making power, while quantitative data validated and supported these insights. The mixed-methods approach enhanced reliability, facilitated triangulation, and provided a nuanced understanding of female farmers' adaptive strategies and roles in the development of EWS. The mixed-methods approach was selected to yield qualitative insights into women's lived experiences,

while employing quantitative findings to corroborate patterns and enhance the reliability of the analysis.

Sampling and Sample Selection Techniques

The study employed non-probability and purposive sampling, which are common in case study research. Participants were selected based on characteristics relevant to the research questions, specifically female household heads aged 18–65 who were engaged in small-scale or subsistence farming and resided in either Ward 8 of Swayimane or Ward 5 of Nhlazuka. Purposive sampling ensured that participants could provide “information-rich” insights (Patton, 1990), while non-probability sampling allowed for the selection of those with direct experience of EWSs. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed (100 per site), and face-to-face interviews were conducted with 36 women in Swayimane and 25 in Nhlazuka. From these, 10 participants per site were selected for FGDs. This large sample was aligned with the study’s interdisciplinary objectives within the uMngeni Resilience Project, ensuring comprehensive data collection and enhancing generalisability within the research sites. The two study sites were chosen because they are communities with a history of flooding and have already implemented early warning systems. This makes them good places to examine how climate information is shared, utilized, and the problems people encounter when doing so. This sampling method ensured that there were enough women who were actively involved in farming and making decisions about climate change.

Data Collection

The study employed multiple data collection methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of female farmers’ experiences with early warning systems (EWSs). A survey questionnaire collected quantitative data on demographics, farming practices, income levels, and perceptions of EWSs. The questionnaire included structured and open-ended questions and was administered in English and isiZulu to ensure accessibility. Research assistants provided

support to participants in interpreting questions as needed. This method allowed for large-scale data collection while capturing participants’ preferences, attitudes, and perceptions. However, potential limitations included response bias and occasional misinterpretation of questions (Bhattacharjee, 2012). To make sure the instruments were valid, a small group of people filled out the questionnaires first, and their feedback was used to improve the clarity, relevance, and linguistic accuracy.

Qualitative data were gathered through face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews. Individual interviews were conducted in farmers’ homes, fields, or community halls, scheduled around participants’ availability, and primarily in isiZulu with English interpretation when required. This approach enabled a detailed exploration of experiences and allowed for the observation of body language. FGDs involved 10 participants per site for 60–90 minutes, promoting discussion, shared experiences, and verification of individual interview findings. Participants signed consent forms and were provided light refreshments. Key informant interviews involved six knowledgeable community members, including political leaders, heads of farming committees, traditional leaders, and members of the ANC Women’s League. These informants provided critical insights into cultural and social dynamics, facilitated participant recruitment, and aided in the interpretation of findings (Kumar, 1989; Peek & Fothergill, 2009).

Telephonic interviews conducted when participants were unable to attend in-person sessions due to transportation issues, agricultural commitments, or ongoing localised health and safety measures allowing for direct communication with participants while maintaining safety (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Fieldwork in Swayimane and Nhlazuka adhered to COVID-19 protocols, including the use of masks, sanitiser, and social distancing. Although the pandemic may have influenced responses and altered farming practices, the combination of in-person and remote data collection methods ensured participant

safety, upheld ethical standards, and facilitated the collection of in-depth, reliable data. This multi-method approach enabled a nuanced understanding of female farmers' engagement with EWSs and their adaptive strategies.

Data Processing and Analysis

The study's analytical framework was informed by ontological and epistemological considerations (Mouton & Marais, 1988). All interviews and FGDs were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated from IsiZulu to English by the researcher, who is fluent in IsiZulu. This approach ensured an accurate representation of participants' perspectives and facilitated the practical analysis of data. Given the substantial qualitative component of the mixed-methods study, NVivo software was used to manage and identify key themes. Thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach (2006, p.78), was also employed: 1) familiarisation with data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) writing the report. Immediate transcription after interviews, as recommended by Lindlof & Taylor (1995), helped identify relevant issues and focus areas for subsequent interviews. In this study, the researchers used descriptive statistics to look at the quantitative data from the questionnaires and find patterns in demographics, farming traits, and interactions with EWSs. These results were utilised to substantiate and validate thematic patterns arising from qualitative data.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical compliance was ensured through prior approval from the UKZN ethics committee and obtaining gatekeeper approval from ward councillors and traditional authorities. Participants provided informed consent, were assured of voluntary participation, and could withdraw at any time without consequences. Pseudonyms were used to protect identities, and data was securely stored.

Interviews were conducted in IsiZulu with participants' consent and audio-recorded for accuracy. The researcher also maintained a field-work diary documenting observations, images

of farms, community infrastructure, and socioeconomic conditions. All ethical procedures, including confidentiality, informed consent, and the avoidance of harm, were strictly adhered to. Despite limitations in FGD confidentiality, participants were reassured regarding privacy, and all data handling complied with ethical standards. Participants were also told how the results would be shared, how the data would be used, and that they could ask for more information or feedback on the study's conclusions.

Findings of this article

The gender roles of female farmers

It is interesting to note that Marx's historical materialism asserts that the production of basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter is fundamental to human society. The historical forms of production shape the structure of communities, while consumption, distribution, and production are essential to social reproduction (Aronot, 1940; Marx, 1876). Institutions such as the family, the economy, and the state work together to organise production and consumption, which directly influence individual and community well-being (Dickinson & Russell, 1986; Picchio, 1992). Individual consumption maintains the household, while productive consumption includes wages and resources used in production.

Social reproduction, as used in this study, refers to the maintenance and reproduction of life through both biological and social means (Marx & Engels, 1921). Holborow (2024) distinguishes between the production of material necessities and the production of human beings. Gill and Bakker (2003) extend this dual concept to include the family as a site of unpaid reproductive labour and the provision of essential needs such as food, water, and sanitation. In the South African context, social reproduction highlights prevailing social ties and helps understand the care work undertaken by women through unpaid domestic labour. Participants in Swayimane and Nhlazuka described household tasks such as *ukuwasha*, *ukuAyina*, *ukupheka*, *ukuKlina*, *ukulima*, *ukutheza*, and *ukukha*

amanzi, which translate to washing, ironing, cooking, cleaning, gardening, fetching water, and collecting firewood. Many women reported that they receive little to no help with these responsibilities, with only older children, particularly daughters, occasionally providing assistance. As Mama Mathe (Swayimane) explained:

"Njengomama ngithatha yonke into yasekhaya njengomthwalo wami, njen-gokwenza ingadi, ukuchelela izitshalo, ukuhlanza, ukuwasha noku-ayina. Bese kuthi ekuseni ngilungise amadodakazi ami ukuthi alungele ukuya esikoleni bese ngilungiselela ukuya emsebenzini. Ku-sihlwa ngilungiselela isidlo sakusihlwa futhi ngigeze amadodakazi ami, ngi-wasize ngomsebenzi wesikole futhi ngi-ayine imifaniswano yawo ngakusasa."

As a mother, I take on all household responsibilities, including gardening, watering plants, cleaning, laundry, and ironing. Then, in the morning, I prepare my daughters to be ready for school, and I prepare myself to go to work. In the evenings, I prepare supper, bathe my daughters, help them with their homework, and iron their uniforms for the next day (Mama Mathe, Swayimane).

These narratives indicate that household responsibilities are deeply gendered and socially constructed. Women often serve as the primary breadwinners and caretakers, ensuring that the needs of every family member, including elderly dependents, are met. Mama Nzama (Swayimane) described her daily routine, balancing childcare, eldercare, and agricultural work. Similarly, Mama Mazibuko (Nhlanzuka) manages household and farm work with the support of her daughters and grandchildren, yet she rarely has rest. The recurring mention of "as a mother" by participants reflects Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity (1990). Gender is not a fixed or essential trait, but rather a repeated performance of culturally defined behaviors. These repeated performances, governed by social norms, maintain a heteronormative order while allowing for potential change if

norms are challenged through alternative performances (Butler, 1990).

The narratives also show that women generally accept their responsibilities, with many noting that "no one assists me with these responsibilities," while those with daughters or helpers expressed relief. Regardless of employment status, household responsibilities were uniform, reflecting societal expectations of gender roles. Social constructionism explains this phenomenon, highlighting that gender roles and household responsibilities are socially created and maintained (UNDP, 2006). This understanding is critical, as women's domestic and agricultural roles often delay their response to Early Warning System alerts, increasing their vulnerability to climate-related hazards.

The gendered vulnerability of female farmers to climate change

Climate change contributes to food insecurity, as communities heavily rely on natural resources and land for subsistence. This reliance drives male outmigration, leaving women at the forefront of agricultural activities. Spencer et al. (2022) identify key areas of focus in weather-related Early Warning Systems (EWSs) and climate change, including gendered mitigation and adaptation, women's coping capacity, gendered vulnerability, and decision-making in the context of climate change. This study examines these areas, particularly in relation to female farmers.

Household income determines the ability to meet basic nutritional and material needs, influencing adaptation capacity. Access to financial resources enables women to recover from crop loss or home damage and provides them with access to weather alerts through television, cellphones, and community networks. Many households in Swayimane and Nhlanzuka rely on SASSA grants and old-age pensions. Some combine these with childcare grants to support larger households.

As Mama Zondo (Nhlanzuka) stated:

Imali engenayo ekhaya ingu R 5000 ngenyanga, lona umholo wami

engiwuthola emsebenzini. Anginazo izindleko ezingaka ngoba ngale mali ngiyakwazi ukuthenga igilosa, uku-khokhela ugesi, umshwalense, ukuzith-engela izingubo nezingane. Kunamalungu ayi-7 (ayisikhombisa) ekhaya kanti kwa-3 ngabesifazane kuthi ama-4 abesilisa. Ngiphinde ngihlale nabazukulu abathathu (3) bonke bendodakazi yami eyizibulo. Indodakazi yami yesibili ezelwe isekolishi futhi ngiyayeseka ngokusebenza njenge Personal Assistant ekhanseleni lomphakathi.

The total household income is R5,000 per month, which is my salary from work. I do not have many expenses because this money allows me to buy groceries, pay for electricity and insurance, and purchase clothes for myself and the children. There are seven members in the household, three females and four males. I also live with three grandchildren, all from my firstborn daughter. My second-born daughter is in college, and I support her by working as a Personal Assistant to the community councillor (Mama Zondo, Nhlazuka).

Other participants reported lower incomes but similar expense patterns, covering groceries, electricity, school needs, and personal necessities (Mama Zondi, Nhlazuka; Mama Mtshali, Swayimane). Some women supplemented their income through CWP work, Zibambele, street vending, or other informal work. Households with more members often had higher total revenue due to contributions from children employed outside the community.

A lack of financial means and decision-making power exacerbates women's vulnerability to climate change. Strebel et al. (2006) note that women's economic independence empowers them to support families and make household decisions, which can disrupt traditional gender norms, creating tension with men. Shifting gender norms challenge established roles and highlight evolving concepts of masculinity and egalitarian gender relations in South Africa (Helman & Ratele, 2016; Kilroe, 2009). The study

demonstrates that climate change adaptation and household resilience require understanding the gendered nature of financial access, decision-making, and responsibility, particularly for poor women who are often the most vulnerable.

The gendered nature of farming: Women at the forefront

The narratives shared by women in Swayimane and Nhlazuka are central to understanding their vulnerability to climate variability. Observations of homesteads and gardens during field visits also provide insight into their farming practices, resilience, and resourcefulness. These observations complement participants' accounts and contribute to the co-creation of knowledge between researcher and community. During visits, with the farmers' permission, I documented their gardens, crops, livestock, harvests, and homesteads to capture them not only as mothers, grandmothers, and farmers, but also as women. Their farming skills, honed over generations, revealed their ability to combat poverty while maintaining homes and providing for families. Many farmers had Rural Development Programme (RDP) houses, rondavels for food storage, and leading houses, as well as sometimes additional houses for relatives. This suggests that, with sufficient tools, resources, and financial capital, women could respond more effectively to EWS alerts and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

At the Mathe homestead in Swayimane, Mama Mathe's homestead had three houses, including a rondavel and a larger three-room house. Her half-hectare garden included cabbage, spinach, green peppers, chillies, and sugar cane. Although not fully fenced, she explained she was waiting for winter to pass before planting properly. At the Hlophe homestead, the garden was large with sugar cane, a chicken coop, and goats. Mama Shezi's garden in Swayimane was about one hectare and contained fruit trees, sugar cane, amadumbe, and vegetables. Despite cold and windy weather, she was working outdoors. Mama Buthelezi's small garden included amadumbe, beans, and sweet potatoes, while she shared a joint garden with other farmers.

Mama Cele had multiple houses and a garden where she had only planted beans for the season. In Nhlazuka, Mama Zulu expressed frustration when her neighbour's goats destroyed her maize. Her small, two-room RDP house highlighted the challenges of protecting crops. Mama Makhubo's large six-room house and garden of sugar cane with roaming chickens reflected both resilience and capacity.

Studies by Sharmin and Islam (2013) and Van Zandt (2019) show that weak housing increases vulnerability during disasters. In contrast, the homesteads visited were well-built and durable. Regardless of their homestead conditions, women were at the forefront of farming, demonstrating skill, knowledge, and innovation in crop storage and garden maintenance. Much of this knowledge was enhanced through training from the URP, showing that with access to resources, female farmers can strengthen their climate adaptation capabilities. The Ecofeminism paradigm explains the central role of women in agriculture and vulnerability to climate change. Holdsworth and Boddy (2024). Note that women produce most of the world's food yet remain among the most vulnerable. Supporting this, the World Food Programme (WFP) (2013) highlights that women constitute 43% of the agricultural workforce in developing nations but achieve yields 20–30% lower due to limited access to land, seeds, fertilizers, and equipment. Male bias in agricultural practice further entrenches inequalities (Warren, 2002; Curtin, 1991). Understanding these socially and culturally constructed gender roles is essential to comprehending why women remain highly vulnerable despite being at the forefront of farming.

The sexual division of labour

Female farmers occupy dual roles as carers and breadwinners. These roles explain why mothers often bear the brunt of childcare responsibilities while working in low-paying and sometimes unstable jobs. Although male engagement varies, migrant labour is central to the high prevalence of female-headed households (Ramphela,

2002). Concepts of fatherhood are frequently reduced to financial provision due to entrenched gender norms (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 1998; Marsiglio & Pleck, 2004). Fathers' involvement, or lack thereof, in non-financial aspects of child-rearing, such as moral guidance, love, and care, is often overlooked. This leaves women to manage the majority of parenting duties alone, which is increasingly challenging as women seek participation in the labour market.

Literature and climate change discourse agree that women constitute a significant portion of people experiencing poverty in communities and are highly dependent on natural resources for livelihoods. This makes them particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Sharmin and Islam (2013, p.1) state that "women are more vulnerable than men generally to all kinds of disasters and climate-related impacts due to gender inequalities in various social, economic, and political institutions. The key contributor to women's vulnerability to weather-induced hazards and disasters is that men are the main decision-makers about property, access to land, and food." They report that during the 1991 tropical cyclone and floods in Bangladesh, women experienced higher death rates because men had access to communal spaces and information networks, while women remained at home largely immobile.

In Swayimane and Nhlazuka, the study focused on female-headed households because male out-migration often leaves women as de facto heads of families. Culturally, men are typically viewed as the household heads; however, socioeconomic realities have led to women assuming these roles. Mama Hadebe explains:

"Ukuphela kwendoda kulomuzi umfowethu omncane, ngoba ubaba wethu wadlula emhlabeni futhi noma engasebenzi ukuba khona kwakhe kubalulekile emikhosini yomoya namasiko njengokubiza amadlozi, lokho kuyindima edlalwa yindoda indlu. Umsebenzi wami omkhulu ukuvuka ekuseni, ngihambe ngiyobheka engadini yami ukuze ngiqinisekise ukuthi konke kuhamba kahle. Emva kwalokhu ngi-

lungiselela ukuya emsebenzini, bese umfowethu esala ekhaya ehlanza, epheka futhi engisiza ngokuchelela ingadi. Ungumsizi omuhle ekhaya ngoba ngichitha isikhathi esiningi emsebenzini" (Mama Hadebe, Swayimane).

Some women are separated from their partners or have little support from the fathers of their children. Mama Ntuli states:

"Ubaba wezingane zami uyaphila, kodwa asisandawonye futhi akangisizi ngezingane ngemali, ngakho ngingumama nobaba wazo" (Mama Ntuli, Swayimane). Similarly, Mama Zondi shares: *"Indoda yaleli khaya yashona kudala, mina nobaba wezingane zami sehlukene futhi angisenaye, ngakho ngondla izingane zami ngemali yesibonelelo sikahulumeni kanye nomama bami asebekhulile"* (Mama Zondi).

Inequalities in capabilities reflect broader social and economic structures. Sen (1999) argues that examining differences in age, gender, physical and mental capacities, and social conditions reveals disparities in freedom and well-being. Women often face unique challenges in converting available resources into functional outcomes, highlighting the importance of addressing gendered barriers to empowerment. Access to resources alone does not guarantee agency or benefit; societal and cultural norms must support women to utilise these resources effectively. As Sen and Sen (1985) define, agency is "what a person is free to accomplish and achieve in pursuit of whatever aims or ideals he or she sees as relevant." The women in this study demonstrate agency by assuming household leadership despite the absence or non-participation of male figures.

Sociocultural factors: community, unity, and livelihoods

It is prudent to foreground this section by noting that Adeniyi (2010) argues that the agricultural sector is central to development, poverty reduction, and food security in developing countries.

Onakuse (2012) notes that rural subsistence agriculture could be improved if farmers had access to training in indigenous farming knowledge and skills, aimed at enhancing productivity. Many self-employed farmers, primarily women, make up over half of rural employment in sub-Saharan Africa, where agriculture employs more than 60% of the female labour force. In South Africa, women are the primary food producers for household consumption (Jacobson, 1992, cited in Maimela, 2002). Over the twentieth century, women have increasingly assumed responsibility for household survival, becoming more active in agriculture than men (Lastarria-Cornhiel, 2006). Climate change and food security remain pressing issues, as environmental, economic, social, and cultural impacts directly affect communities (Ford et al., 2008; Ford, 2009; Hinzman et al., 2005).

Female farmers are at the forefront of agricultural initiatives, and a strong sense of unity pervades their practices. In Swayimane, women participate in co-ops and shared farming tunnels, collectively producing crops and selling them to local supermarkets in Pietermaritzburg. Key co-ops include Izimbali Ezinhle for youth, Thembaletu Co-op, Nkanyeziyokosa Co-op, and Izisinda Co-op. Crops grown at both individual and communal levels include maize, sugar cane, amadumbe, sweet potatoes, cabbage, spinach, chillies, and various beans.

Mama Khumalo shares her experiences:

"Mina ngingumama osemdala ngokwemnyaka oehlala ngokungaphili kahle, iyngene engihlala nazo zinengi ezingabazukulu nezinye eziyintandane, zonke zinakekelwe imina ngemali yempesheni, ngiphinde ngizifundise ngayo lemali noma ezinye zazo seziqedile eskoleni azikuwutholi umsebenzi. Ngithenga igrocer eningi ngenxa yesimo sokuhlala nezingane eziningi, noma isimo sinjalo ngiyaza ukutshala imifino, umbila, kanye nokunye futhi ngifuyile izimbuzi, iynkukhu kanye nezinkomo lana ekhaya. Laykhaya sinayo iTunnel esitshala kuyo kodwa okwamanje izitshalo sesizivunile. Mina ngingasho

nje ukuthy ngingumama owuthandayo umndeni wakhe, kanye nezingane ngoba kunezintandane angazithatha ngazinika ikhaya ngazifundisa ngisho nasezikhungweni eziphezulu zefundo ngakho ukulima. Ngibuye ngibe inxenye yabalimi besifazane, ngingaphansi we hlangano ekuthiwa iVukuzakhe ekhona lana eSwayimane" (Mama Khumalo, Swayimane).

Mama Masango also explains:

"Lana ekhaya ngitshalile umbhila, amadumbe, uavocado, uguava izivuno ngiyazidayisa okusalile sikudle lana ekhaya. Ngibuye ngihlanganyele nabanye abalimi abashalayo kwiTunnel eSwayimane High School. Sitshala amaVeggie. Okunye esikuhlanganyele umoba esiwudayisayo" (Mama Masango, Swayimane).

Mama Thwala adds:

"Nginengadi lana engemunva kwendlu engitshala kuyo amadumbe, ubontshisi, nginakekela umndeni wami ngazo lezitshalo. Ukulima nokutshala ngiyakuthokozela kakhulu bese futhy ngiba inxenye yeYouth Agricultural Group ebizwa nge Izimbali Ezinhle. Ngibuye ngihlanganyele nabalimi kwiTunnel eliseSwayimane High School, laphoke silimela ukuthi sidayise bese imali siyayihlukanisa kuthina sonke" (Mama Thwala, Swayimane).

The unity and social cohesion among female farmers in Swayimane is significant. Shared gardens, co-ops, and farming tunnels facilitate knowledge exchange, skills development, and access to resources. Participation in these initiatives builds social capital, enhances human capital through shared farming expertise, and strengthens adaptive capacity and resilience. While similar efforts exist in Nhlazuka, attendance and engagement are lower, and farmers tend to work individually, highlighting the role of community in improving livelihoods and adaptive strategies in agriculture.

Discussion

This article argues that female farmers in rural

communities play a critical role in sustaining household food security, managing agricultural production, and maintaining socio-economic stability, despite numerous challenges. The study has highlighted that women are at the forefront of farming activities, often assuming dual responsibilities as caregivers and breadwinners. These findings underscore the gendered nature of farming, where women not only manage agricultural tasks but also shoulder the majority of domestic responsibilities, a dynamic that has significant implications for rural livelihoods. The gendered division of labour, coupled with limited access to resources, creates structural inequalities that exacerbate the vulnerability of women to socio-economic and environmental shocks. The findings of this study indicate that gendered responsibilities substantially affect decision-making processes. Women are in charge of growing food, but they don't always have the same power over farming resources and household money. This imbalance affects how they react to climate-related warnings and how they protect their crops.

The findings of this chapter mention that female farmers in the communities of Swayimane and Nhlazuka demonstrate remarkable resilience and resourcefulness in their agricultural practices. Consistent with previous research, the current article's findings reveal that women employ both traditional knowledge and innovative farming techniques to sustain their livelihoods, despite climate variability and limited financial resources. Evidently, women's ability to maintain well-kept gardens, raise livestock, and participate in community co-operatives underscores their adaptability and commitment to food production. The article's findings demonstrate that women's leadership in agriculture extends beyond mere survival strategies to a proactive approach that improves household and community well-being. Resilience is not a random result; it is actively negotiated through daily activities like planning, sharing work, and making decisions about how to take care of crops and feed the family. These practices create a clear link between gender roles and how women adapt to climate change. These findings align with the

theoretical framework of this article, which emphasizes ecofeminism as a lens for understanding the intersection of gender, environment, and socioeconomic vulnerability. Ecofeminism emphasizes that women produce a significant portion of the world's food while remaining among the most vulnerable to climate change and poverty, reinforcing the argument that gender roles in agriculture have both practical and structural implications.

Scholars such as Holdsworth & Boddy (2024) note that the majority of the world's hungry are women and children, illustrating the disproportionate impact of food insecurity on female-headed households. Again, the findings of the current chapter show that women's responsibilities extend beyond food production to include participation in community networks, shared gardens, and co-operative farming initiatives. This finding corroborates the results of Sharmin and Islam (2013), who found that women often have less access to early warning systems and community resources during climate-related disasters, leaving them more vulnerable to environmental hazards. The present study similarly highlights that socio-cultural norms amplify women's vulnerability, the absence of male household members, and limited access to resources such as land, seeds, and agricultural equipment.

The current article has established that the sexual division of labour significantly influences women's capacity to manage both household and farming tasks. Mothers, grandmothers, and female heads of households balance child-rearing, caregiving for extended family members, and intensive agricultural work. This finding aligns with the findings of previous studies (Ramphela, 2002), which suggest that women assume the majority of domestic and economic responsibilities due to patterns of male out-migration and the persistent expectation that fathers will primarily provide financially. The results of this article reveal that, despite these burdens, women demonstrate high levels of agency and decision-making, supporting Sen's (1985; 1999) conceptualisation of agency as the capacity to act and achieve goals within given social

constraints. Women actively make decisions regarding crop selection, planting, harvesting, and market participation, reflecting a nuanced understanding of both household and community needs. The study shows that associative structures, like cooperatives and women-led farming groups, help reduce weaknesses by making it easier for people to make decisions together, share work fairly, and get information. These mechanisms frame women not only as victims of climate change but as pivotal agents in enhancing the resilience of local food systems. Even though these groups are working together, women's power is still limited by structural barriers, especially when men have most of the control over money and access to agricultural inputs. This shows that agency and inequality can exist at the same time instead of cancelling each other out.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that socio-cultural factors, including community unity and collaborative farming practices, enhance the resilience and livelihoods of female farmers. Participation in co-operatives, shared gardens, and farming tunnels provides opportunities for knowledge sharing, access to resources, and collective problem-solving. This finding corroborates the results of Onakuse (2012) and Adeniyi (2010), who argue that rural development initiatives that promote collective action and skill-sharing among women significantly improve agricultural productivity and socio-economic outcomes. In Swayimane, women's engagement in youth agrarian groups and other community-led farming initiatives illustrates the transformative potential of social capital in rural farming communities.

The study also reveals that climate change disproportionately affects female farmers due to their dependence on natural resources and limited adaptive capacity. This aligns with Ford et al. (2008) and Hinzman et al. (2005), who demonstrate that environmental variability poses significant social, economic, and cultural challenges, particularly for resource-dependent communities. Women's adaptive strategies, such as crop diversification, use of traditional knowledge, and participation in community co-

operatives, demonstrate both resilience and innovation. However, structural barriers, including unequal access to land, credit, and agricultural extension services, limit the full potential of these strategies.

In conclusion, the findings of this article underscore the central role that female farmers play in rural agricultural production, household food security, and community resilience. They navigate complex socio-economic and environmental challenges, balancing multiple responsibilities while fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing within their communities. Consistent with previous studies, this article demonstrates that gendered roles, sociocultural networks, and ecofeminist perspectives are critical for understanding the vulnerabilities and capacities of female farmers. The results call for policy interventions that address structural inequalities, support women's access to resources, and enhance community-based agricultural initiatives to strengthen resilience against climate change and socio-economic pressures. Working together makes it easier for women to act on early warning information, try out different ways to adapt, and help families that are in danger. This shows that resilience works on both a personal and a group level. However, adaptive strategies are constrained when women lack decision-making authority regarding financial investments, land access, and agricultural extension services, elements essential for achieving long-term sustainable adaptation.

Recommendations and Insights of the Study

This study highlights the critical role of female farmers in rural agricultural systems and their disproportionate vulnerability to climate change. It is recommended that policy frameworks and development programs prioritize women's access to resources, including seeds, fertilizers, farming equipment, and financial support, to enhance productivity and resilience. Training on climate-smart agricultural practices and participatory engagement with early warning systems (EWSs) should be expanded to ensure that women can respond effectively to en-

vironmental hazards. The study's findings support this recommendation by showing that women are responsible for most of the food production but don't have enough control over agricultural inputs. This makes it harder for them to use adaptation strategies, even when they have the knowledge and labour to do so. The findings of the present study demonstrate that when women are provided with climate information in a timely and accessible manner, they are more capable of making informed decisions about planting, safeguarding crops, and managing livestock, thus alleviating the detrimental impacts of climate shocks.

The study also underscores the importance of strengthening community networks and co-operative farming initiatives. Shared gardens, tunnels, and group co-ops enhance social and human capital, allowing women to exchange knowledge, skills, and resources while fostering collective problem-solving. Supporting these initiatives through technical guidance, capacity-building, and equitable governance structures will further improve women's adaptive capacity. This suggestion fits with what has already been found: that working together and sharing work structures have made some households less vulnerable, allowed women to pool their money and things, and made it easier for people who didn't have much contact with extension services to get information.

Finally, addressing sociocultural gender norms is essential. Men's involvement in household and farming responsibilities should be encouraged to reduce the burden on female farmers. Promoting gender-sensitive policies and participatory approaches ensures that women can fully exercise agency in both farming and household decision-making, ultimately improving food security, livelihoods, and resilience to climate risks in rural communities. This recommendation comes straight from the study's findings, which show that women do the most work but are not involved in important decisions about how to use land, finances, and farming investments. So, making decisions in the home and community more fair for men and women would

not only make life easier for women, but it would also make adaptation strategies and food security outcomes more long-lasting.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that female farmers in rural communities of Swayimane and Nhlazuka occupy pivotal roles in sustaining households, ensuring food security, and maintaining agricultural livelihoods despite socio-economic and environmental challenges. The research highlighted that gender roles significantly shape decision-making processes, responsibilities, and access to resources, with women frequently shouldering both domestic and farming duties. Their dual roles as caregivers and breadwinners place them at the forefront of rural agricultural production yet simultaneously render them vulnerable to climate variability and socio-economic constraints. The findings reveal that women are not only active agents in farming but also demonstrate resilience, resourcefulness, and innovative adaptation strategies in the face of early warning systems (EWSs) and environmental hazards. The study shows that women's work alone does not give them equal decision-making power. This difference makes it harder for them to deal with climate shocks and keep their households fed. Sociocultural factors, such as community networks, cooperative initiatives, and shared gardens and tunnels, were shown to enhance the resilience of female farmers. These forms of social and human capital enable knowledge exchange, collective problem-solving, and access to resources that would otherwise be limited, illustrating the importance of unity and collaboration in rural agricultural contexts. Moreover, the

study highlighted the impact of the sexual division of labour and patriarchal norms, which constrain women's access to land, finances, and decision-making power. Addressing these structural inequalities is crucial for empowering women and improving adaptive capacity. Evidence from the field shows that resilience works best when women have both power and responsibility. This means that giving women more power to make decisions is just as important as helping them improve their agriculture skills.

The study contributes to the broader discourse on gendered vulnerability and rural livelihoods by emphasising the interplay between gender, climate change, and socio-cultural dynamics. Policymakers, development practitioners, and community leaders should prioritise women's inclusion in agricultural decision-making, training, and resource allocation. This is supported by research that shows that women who have better access to climate information and more control over resources are better able to protect crops, get food, and help their communities recover after climate events.

Promoting gender-sensitive approaches and fostering community cohesion will enhance both food security and resilience. The study essentially shows that rural climate adaptation will not be complete or fair unless women's work, knowledge, and leadership are matched with structural access to land, money, agricultural inputs, and the power to make formal decisions. Ultimately, recognising and supporting female farmers as central actors in rural agriculture ensures sustainable livelihoods, strengthens adaptive capacity to climate risks, and affirms women's agency in shaping their households and communities.

References

- Adato, M., & Meinzen-Dick, R. S. (2002). *Assessing the impact of agricultural research on poverty using the sustainable livelihoods framework* (No. 581-2016-39396).
- Adeniyi, L. (2010). *Women Farmer's and Agriculture Growth: Challenge and Perspective for Africa face the economic crisis* (No. 308-2016-5110).

- Allwood, G. (2017). Gender mainstreaming and EU climate change policy. *Towards gendering institutionalism: Equality in Europe*, 43-61.
- Andersen, L. E., Verner, D., & Wiebelt, M. (2017). Gender and climate change in Latin America: an analysis of vulnerability, adaptation and resilience based on household surveys. *Journal of International Development*, 29(7), 857-876.
- Arnot, R. P. (1940). *An introduction to political economy*. Marx Memorial Library and Workers' School.
- Arora-Jonsson, S. (2011). Virtue and vulnerability: Discourses on women, gender and climate change. *Global environmental change*, 21(2), 744-751. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2011.01.005>
- Assan, E., Suvedi, M., Schmitt Olabisi, L., & Allen, A. (2018). Coping with and adapting to climate change: A gender perspective from smallholder farming in Ghana. *Environments*, 5(8), 86. <https://doi.org/10.3390/environments5080086>
- Awiti, A. O. (2022). Climate Change and Gender in Africa: A Review of Impact and Gender-Responsive Solutions. *Frontiers in Climate*, 101. https://ecommons.aku.edu/eastafrica_ihd/147/
- Barbier, Edward & Hochard, Jacob. (2018). Land degradation and poverty. Nature Sustainability.
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in The Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Doubleday.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101
- Buckingham, S. (2004). Ecofeminism in the twenty-first century. *Geographical journal*, 170(2), 146-154. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3451591>
- Butler, Judith (1990). *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge.
- Chant, S. (2010). Gendered poverty across space and time: introduction and overview. In *The international handbook of gender and poverty*. Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781849805162.00010>
- Christiansen, S. L., & Palkovitz, R. (1998). Exploring Erikson's psychosocial theory of development: Generativity and its relationship to paternal identity, intimacy, and involvement in childcare. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 7(1), 133-156.
- Connel, R., & Pearse, R. (2015). The question of gender. *Gender-a global perspective*, 29-50.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics. *u. Chi. Legal f.*, 139. <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Pearson Education, Inc.

Creswell, J. W., & Tashakkori, A. (2007). Differing perspectives on mixed methods research. *Journal of mixed methods research*, 1(4), 303-308.

Curtin, D. (1991). Toward an ecological ethic of care. *Hypatia*, 6(1), 60-74. ISBN: 0-7619-1951-1.

Dankelman, I. E. M. (2008). Gender, climate change and human security lessons from Bangladesh, Ghana, and Senegal.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254876509_Gender_Climate_Change_and_Human_Security_Lessons_from_Bangladesh_Ghana_and_Senegal

Dickinson, J., & Russell, B. (1986). Introduction: The structure of reproduction in capitalist society. *Family, economy, and state: The social reproduction process under capitalism*, 1-20.

Elliott, L., & Caballero-Anthony, M. (Eds.). (2013). *Human security and climate change in Southeast Asia*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Enete, A. A., & Amusa, T. A. (2010). Challenges of agricultural adaptation to climate change in Nigeria: A synthesis from the literature. *Field Actions Science Reports. The Journal of Field Actions*, 4. <https://journals.openedition.org/factsreports/678>

Ergun, S. J., Karadeniz, Z. D., & Rivas, M. F. (2024). Climate change risk perception in Europe: country-level factors and gender differences. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 11(1), 1-13.

Flatø, M., Muttarak, R., & Pelsler, A. (2017). Women, weather, and woes: The triangular dynamics of female-headed households, economic vulnerability, and climate variability in South Africa. *World Development*, 90, 41-62. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2016.08.015>

Ford, A. (2009). The origins of criticism. In *The Origins of Criticism*. Princeton University Press.

Ford, J. D., Smit, B., Wandel, J., Allurut, M., Shappa, K., Ittusarjuat, H., & Qrunnut, K. (2008). Climate change in the Arctic: current and future vulnerability in two Inuit communities in Canada. *Geographical Journal*, 174(1), 45-62.

Gergen, K. J. (1985). Social constructionist inquiry: Context and implications. *The social construction of the person*, 3-18.

Gergen, K. J. (1999). Agency: Social construction and relational action. *Theory & Psychology*, 9(1), 113-115.

Glemarec, Y. (2017). Addressing the gender differentiated investment risks to climate-smart agriculture. *AIMS Agriculture and Food*, 2(1), 56-74. Doi: 10.3934/agrfood.2017.1.56

Hinzman, L. D., Bettez, N. D., Bolton, W. R., Chapin, F. S., Dyurgerov, M. B., Fastie, C. L., ... & Yoshikawa, K. (2005). Evidence and implications of recent climate change in northern Alaska and other arctic regions. *Climatic change*, 72, 251-298. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-005-5352-2>

Holborow, M. (2024). Engels for our times: Gender, social reproduction and revolution. *Monthly Review*, 75(10), 1-19.

Holdsworth, L., & Boddy, J. (2024). Eco-feminist responses to climate change and its gendered impacts. In *The Routledge international handbook of feminisms in social work* (pp. 614-624). Routledge.

Howell, K. E. (2004). *Developing conceptualisations of Europeanization: Synthesising methodological approaches* (No. p0044). Queens University Belfast.

IPCC (2014) Summary for policymakers In: Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, ed. C.B. Field et al (Cambridge)(Cambridge University Press)(Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA) pp 1–32

IPCC, 2022: *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability*. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, 3056 pp., doi:10.1017/9781009325844. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/9781009325844>.

Jacobson, C. K. (1992). Religiosity in a black community: An examination of secularization and political variables. *Review of religious research*, 215-228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0973258618803465>

Kabeer, N. (2008). Paid work, women's empowerment and gender justice: critical pathways of social change.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305278764_Paid_work_women's_empowerment_and_gender_justice_critical_pathways_to_social_change

Kilroe, M. C. (2009). *An Exploration of Young Women and Men's Perceptions of Gender Roles and Their Impact on Relationships* (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand).

Kuhlicke, C., Scolobig, A., Tapsell, S., Steinführer, A., & De Marchi, B. (2011). Contextualizing social vulnerability: findings from case studies across Europe. *Natural hazards*, 58(2), 789-810.

Kumar, K. (1989). Conducting Key Informant Interviews in Developing Countries. A.I.D. Program Design and Evaluation Methodology Report No. 13. <http://www.slideshare.net/achintbt/usaaid-tips-series>

Lastarria-Cornhiel, S. (2006). *Feminization of agriculture: Trends and driving forces*. Rimisp.

- Levine, S. (2014). How to study livelihoods: Bringing a sustainable livelihoods framework to life. *Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium: Researching livelihoods and services affected by conflict*, 22.
- Lindlof, T.R. and Taylor, B. (1995) *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*. Sage, Thousand Oaks.
- Mabaya, E. (2009). CHAPTER THREE TRANSPORTATION COSTS AND SPATIAL INTEGRATION OF AGRICULTURAL COMMODITY MARKETS IN AFRICA. *Africa, Transport and the Millennium Development Goals: Achieving an Internationally Set Agenda*, 32.
- Maimela, N. V. (2002). *Agricultural Production and Marketing Activities and Knowledge Among Women Farmers: The Case of Tshiombo Irrigation Scheme, Limpopo Province of South Africa* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Venda for Science and Technology).
- Marsiglio, W., & Pleck, J. H. (2004). Much has been learned about the various dimensions of fatherhood. *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities*, 249.
- Marx, K. (1867). Capital: A critique of political economy (i): The process of capitalist production. *History of Economic Thought Books*, 1.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1921). *Wage-labour and capital*. New York Labor News Company.
- Mies, M., & Shiva, V. (1993). *Ecofeminism*. Zed books.
- Miller, F. P., & McGregor, A. (2020). Rescaling political ecology? World regional approaches to climate change in the Asia Pacific. *Progress in Human Geography*, 44(4), 663-682.
- Mouton, J., & Marais, H. C. (1988). *Basic concepts in the methodology of the social sciences*. Hsrc Press.
- Nkonya, E., Gerber, N., von Braun, J., & De Pinto, A. (2011). Economics of land degradation. *IFPRI issue brief*, 68. <https://ideas.repec.org/p/fpr/issbrf/68.html>
- Oberhauser, A. M., Mandel, J. L., & Hapke, H. M. (2004). Gendered livelihoods in diverse global contexts: an introduction. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 11(2), 205-208.
- Okali, C. (2011). Achieving transformative change for rural women's empowerment. *Enabling Rural Women's Economic Empowerment: Institutions, Opportunities and Participation*.
- Onakuse, S. (2012). The future of subsistence agriculture in the rural community of Uzanu, Edo state, Nigeria. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 3(1), 61-71.
- Onwutuebe, C. J. (2019). Patriarchy and women vulnerability to adverse climate change in Nigeria. *Sage Open*, 9(1), 2158244019825914. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019825914>
- Onwutuebe, C. J. (2019). Patriarchy and women vulnerability to adverse climate change in Nigeria. *Sage Open*, 9(1), 2158244019825914. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019825914>

Orewa, S. I., & Iyangbe, C. (2010). The struggle against hunger: the victims and the food security strategies adopted in adverse conditions. *World Journal of Agricultural Sciences*, 6(6), 740-745.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.

Peek, L., & Fothergill, A. (2009). Using focus groups: Lessons from studying daycare centers, 9/11, and Hurricane Katrina. *Qualitative research*, 9(1), 31-59.

Ramphele, M. (2002). Steering by the stars: youth in cities. In *Youth in cities: a cross-national perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Rao, N., Lawson, E. T., Raditloaneng, W. N., Solomon, D., & Angula, M. N. (2019). Gendered vulnerabilities to climate change: insights from the semi-arid regions of Africa and Asia. *Climate and Development*, 11(1), 14-26.

Schwerdtle, P. N., Turek-Hankins, L. L., Coughlan de Perez, E., Scarpa, G., Ruiz-Diaz, R., Joe, E. T., ... & Mach, K. J. (2021). Climate change adaptation to extreme heat: a global systematic review of implemented action. *Oxford Open Climate Change*, 1(1), kgab005. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfclm/kgab005>

Scoones, I. (2009). Livelihoods perspectives and rural development. *The journal of peasant studies*, 36(1), 171-196.

Sen, G., & Sen, C. (1985). Women's domestic work and economic activity: Results from National Sample Survey. *Economic and Political Weekly*, WS49-WS56.

Sen, S. (1999). *Women and labour in late colonial India: The Bengal jute industry* (Vol. 3). Cambridge University Press.

Sharmin, Z., & Islam, M. (2013). Consequences of climate change and gender vulnerability: Bangladesh perspective. *Available at SSRN 2200116*. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2200116>

Spencer, S. (2022). *Visual research methods in the social sciences: Awakening visions*. Taylor & Francis. <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/799>

Strebel, A., Crawford, M., Shefer, T., Cloete, A., Henda, N., Kaufman, M., ... & Kalichman, S. (2006). Social constructions of gender roles, gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS in two communities of the Western Cape, South Africa. *SAHARA: Journal of Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS Research Alliance*, 3(3), 516-528. DOI: 10.1080/17290376.2006.9724879

Unger, R. (2020). *Representations: Social constructions of gender*. Routledge.

UNISDR, U. (2009). Making disaster risk reduction gender sensitive: Policy and practical guidelines. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/723731468234284901/pdf/658410REVISED00view0Final0for0email.pdf>

Van Zandt, S. (2019). Impacts on socially vulnerable populations. In *The Routledge handbook of urban disaster resilience* (pp. 33-51). Routledge.

Warren, C. A. (2002). Qualitative interviewing. *Handbook of interview research: Context and method*, 839101, 83-101. https://mycourses.aalto.fi/pluginfile.php/1329158/mod_folder/content/0/Elicitation%20Interviews/warren_2001_qualitative-interviewing.pdf?forcedownload=1

Women, U. N. (2020). Commission on the Status of Women. *Fiftieth Session*, 27.

World Bank. Information, Communication Technologies, & infoDev (Program). (2012). *Information and Communications for Development 2012: Maximizing Mobile*. World Bank Publications. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/digitaldevelopment/publication/ic4d-2012>

World Food Program. (2013). *The Market Monitor*. Rome: WFP. January 2013(18)

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.17>

THE ROLE OF ATHOL FUGARD'S WORKS IN HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA'S FET CURRICULUM

Maria Mobali
University of Zululand
&
Pravina Pillay

24429

University of Zululand
(<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8171-730X>) &
Theophilus Mukhuba
University of South Africa

Abstract

This article looks at the inclusion of Athol Fugard's works into the FET curriculum in South Africa, focusing on their role on human rights education. Fugard's works are deeply embedded within the socio-political backdrop of apartheid and post-apartheid South African context, so they have the potential and significance to educate people about human rights, reconciliation and justice. Through the perceptions of educators in the Ekurhuleni South District, this article discusses how the application of Fugard's plays can influence learners' critical thinking, empathy and comprehension of human rights. The research is based on the human rights theory framework, while the data collection and analysis methods used were qualitative, including interviews, focus group discussions, and thematic analysis.

Keywords: *Athol Fugard, Human Rights Education, Further Education and Training (FET) Phase, South African Literature, Teachers' Perspectives, Social Justice, Pedagogy.*

Introduction

Athol Fugard's works are living proof that tell a story of the South African apartheid regime and the human ability to heal, forgive, and fight for justice. Due to his focus on such issues as apartheid and black oppression, dignity of the black person, and justice, Fugard's works have contributed to the formation of the South African identity in the years before and after apartheid. His plays, especially, depict the fight for human rights and thus these are valuable learning resources in the classroom. Fugard's work is not only a depiction of historical and social conditions but also a tool for analysis, to inform readers on the concepts of human rights abuses, morality and the process of race relations.

This article aims at identifying the function of Athol Fugard's literary works, especially *My Children! My Africa!* and *Tsotsi*, for the enhancement of human rights education in the FET curriculum in South Africa. The FET phase which includes the three years of high school is very crucial in the development of the students academically as they are in a position to join higher institutions of learning or participate in the voting process in a democratic society. In this phase, literature especially the dramatic texts can help students to explore and understand the complexity of socio-political issues in a more simple and relatively interesting way.

These works of Fugard, which are being used in many South African schools, focus on the issues of oppression, human dignity and social justice and are thus suitable for the development of critical thinking among the learners.

The main purpose of this article is to determine how Fugard's works enrich the human rights education in the FET curriculum in South Africa and how these texts help students to comprehend the issues of racial justice, reconciliation, and the history of apartheid. This research is based on qualitative research conducted with FET teachers in the Ekurhuleni South District, it offers important understanding of the teaching approaches used to teach Fugard's literature and the effects of these texts to learners.

Research Problem

Despite the popular acclaim that Fugard's literary works have received as well as the historical importance of the oeuvre, there has been limited discussion on how effective these works are in communicating human rights message in the FET curriculum. This paper aims to fill this void by exploring how Fugard's plays are used to educate learners on the issue of human rights, social justice and role of history in post-apartheid South Africa. It also aims at finding out the viability of applying these texts to help students develop critical thinking and empathy as perceived

by teachers.

Objectives

The primary objectives of this study are to:

1. Analyse the thematic elements in Fugard's works that engage with human rights and social justice issues, particularly in *My Children! My Africa!* and *Tsotsi*.
2. Explore how these themes are integrated into the FET curriculum to promote critical thinking and consciousness-raising among students.
3. Examine the perspectives of FET teachers regarding the effectiveness of Fugard's works as educational tools for fostering awareness of human rights.
4. Identify the challenges and opportunities that teachers encounter when using Fugard's literature to engage students in discussions on human rights, racial reconciliation, and social justice.

Research Questions

This article addresses the following research questions:

- What are the key human rights themes in Athol Fugard's works, and how are they relevant to the FET curriculum?
- How do teachers in the Ekurhuleni South District use Fugard's works to educate learners about human rights, social justice, and racial reconciliation?
- What impact do Fugard's plays have on students' understanding of apartheid, race relations, and human dignity?
- What challenges do teachers face in using Fugard's literature to promote human rights education, and how can these be addressed?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it contributes to the growing body of literature on the role of arts and literature in human rights education. As South Africa continues to grapple with the legacies of apartheid, it is crucial to explore how educational tools, such as literature, can help young people understand the importance of human dignity, social justice, and reconciliation. Secondly, this research provides practical insights into the challenges faced by

teachers in implementing human rights education through literature. By focusing on the perspectives of FET teachers in the Ekurhuleni South District, this study offers a localised perspective that can inform broader discussions about the role of literature in fostering social change in post-apartheid South Africa.

Last but not least, this article captures how Fugard's works can be used to bring change in the FET curriculum. To achieve this aim of this paper, the paper will discuss how *My Children! My Africa!* and *Tsotsi* can be useful in teaching critical thinking, empathy and history, this study supports the inclusion of human rights education into the national curriculum. It also aims at contributing to the processes that are being made to ensure that students in South African Institutions of learning are well prepared to become active citizens in democracies which promote human rights and social justice.

Literature Review

The combination of literature and human rights education has been considered as an effective way of teaching students to think critically, to be empathetic and socially conscious. This is the case in South Africa where apartheid's effects are still visible in the education systems especially in the FET learning outcomes that are designed to equip students for democracy. The use of literature is also central to this curriculum, and it includes literature that speaks to social justice, dignity of the human person, and race relations (Nunan, 1992). Such literature includes the plays by Athol Fugard and these works present some of the most valuable opportunities for discussions about human rights.

Fugard's works particularly *My Children! My Africa!* and *Tsotsi* not only received critical acclaim for their literary value but also for their portrayal of apartheid regime's social political milieu. The texts analysed herein explore the topics of race inequality, subjectivity and group and individual identity, and the ethical issues concerning the struggle against oppression. In line with McCombes (2022) views, this literature review aims at analysing previous research on Fugard's contribution to human rights education, the use of literature in fighting for social

justice and the theoretical frameworks of this study.

Athol Fugard's Contribution to Literature and Human Rights Education

Athol Fugard is one of the most famous South African playwrights, whose plays depict the apartheid regime and at the same time promote tolerance and acceptance. Fugard's plays focus on the impact of apartheid on people and societies but at the same time, they raise questions on the human value, fairness and people's conscience. His works have been incorporated in the FET curriculum of many South African schools where his works are used to create forums for students to discuss on the historical and current issues of race relation and social justice.

1. My Children! My Africa!

- This play takes place in the last years of the apartheid and depict the differences in the views of the young and old on activism, education and resistance. Mr M, a black teacher who supports the idea of education and non-violent struggle is in conflict with Thami, his student who embraces revolutionary politics which represents the discourse on the place of education in the fight against oppression. By portraying Thami, Mr. M, and Isabel (a White girl from another school), Fugard poses a number of questions on how the process of dialogue, education, and individual's actions can help to ensure the dignity of the individual and equality for all.

- Some of the critics have applauded *My Children! My Africa!* It has been applauded for showing the complexity of the race relations and depicted the inner struggle of people suffering under apartheid. As stated by Jibril (2015) the play becomes one of the best tools of creating awareness of the issues of race relations in South Africa and the moral issues of activism and resistance.

2. Tsotsi

- In *Tsotsi*, Fugard returns to the genre of violence, crime, poverty and the theme of rebirth. The film is based on the novel by the same name written by the South African author, and it is a story of the young gangster. The novel is a clear depiction of how structural injustice especially the apartheid regime's system affects the lives

of the oppressed people and pushes them into a cycle of violence and suffering.

- Fugard's portrayal of such themes as redemption or, more specifically, the process of moral transformation in *Tsotsi* makes the novel a perfect object for the study of human rights in the classroom. The novel raises the question of how social environment brings people to crime and whether it is possible to change for the better through the performance of good deeds. Thus, *Tsotsi* can be considered as a platform for the consideration of wider human rights concerns including the right to dignity, equality and justice.

Human Rights Education in the FET Curriculum

Human rights education is becoming a significant tool of promoting democracy and human rights as well as combating for social justice. As stated in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) education should "seek to secure the realization of understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all peoples, whatever their race or religion" (Article 26. 2). In south Africa after the apartheid regime which involved racial segregation and injustice the human rights education becomes crucial. The DBE has also stressed that human rights should form part of the FET curriculum in order to enables the learners to understand and participate meaningfully in the democratic society.

1. The Role of Literature in Educating Human Rights

- The use of literature especially dramatic texts has been considered as one of the most effective ways of capturing the attention of learners on various social issues. As pointed out by Falvey and Kennedy (2006), plays are a good way of raising the issue of human rights as they enable the learners to watch and discuss moral dilemmas, emotional conflicts and the impact of violation of human rights as they learn to feel and think. These works of Fugard that explore the themes of race oppression, personal freedom and the fight for justice are therefore suitable for teaching human rights in South Africa's FET curriculum.

- Fugard's plays, especially the above-mentioned play, "My Children! My Africa!", are also used in classrooms to create debates on apartheid, the role of an individual in oppressive society and the role of education in society. The nature of dramatic texts is also particularly effective for human rights education since they are often performative and encourage students to role-play or to debate character actions.

2. Challenges and Opportunities in Teaching Human Rights through Literature

- Although there is much emphasis on the use of Fugard's works as educational tools, there are several problems that arise when using them in teaching human rights. Perhaps one of the most significant problems is the fact that Fugard's plays are very emotionally charged and may cause a lot of stress for learners. The themes of violence, social inequality, and the existence of the shades of grey in the plays, including *My Children! My Africa! These two films, *and *Tsotsi* should therefore be treated in a way that students can be able to analyse them critically without being overwhelmed or losing interest.

- Another challenge is that teachers receive less support and tools to incorporate human rights in teaching learning process. Fugard's works may be difficult to teach in the underprivileged schools since the teacher might not be in a position to acquire the required materials or training. However, the teachers' survey reveals that Fugard's literature is one of the most efficient resources that can be used in teaching students critical thinking and empathy, especially on the background of apartheid.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is Human Rights, and it is based on the premise that education is a tool for enhancing human rights, justice and equality. The Human Rights framework is most useful in the South African context given that the country emerged from a system of apartheid which denied certain groups of people their human rights. This framework thus offers a set of perspectives from which one can understand Fugard's works as literary works while at the same time works of education for human

rights and social justice.

1. Human Rights Framework in Fugard's Works

- Human rights discourse is central to Fugard's work and the right to equality, dignity and justice is paramount in his works. His characters are usually people who suffer from violation of their basic human rights, from racism, poverty, or violence from the state. In *My Children! My Africa!* for instance, the character Mr. M's belief in education as a way of redeeming oneself and the society is in harmony with the right to education as provided in the UDHR.

- In the same way, *Tsotsi* also illustrates the effects of apartheid on the right to dignity focusing on how structural prejudice demeans people. It is for this reason that the change of character from *Tsotsi*, a violent gangster to a caring person illustrates the idea that human rights education is an effective way of changing people and making them embrace moral values even in the most adverse environment.

2. Human Rights Education as a Pedagogical tool

- The addition of Fugard's works into the FET curriculum is also in line with the ongoing campaigns in the promotion of human rights education in schools. According to Mubangizi (2015) human rights education is crucial in enabling people to claim the rights they have and be active members of the society. Thus, when students read Fugard's works, teachers do not only present them with the facts about apartheid but also motivate them to consider the modern human rights problems.

- According to the Human Rights theoretical framework, education should be used in order to bring change in the society. Thus, Fugard's works can be effectively implemented in the framework of the South African FET curriculum to teach students about the moral, ethical and social aspects of human rights.

Athol Fugard's plays, especially *My Children! My Africa!* and *Tsotsi* are very useful in enhancing the education on human rights in South Africa's FET curriculum. Despite the fact that the lessons that are conveyed in the works of Fugard are often surrounded by emotions that may pose

some difficulties for a teacher, Fugard's literature is still an essential tool for developing critical thinking, empathy, and social consciousness among the learners. In incorporating Fugard's works into the FET curriculum, teachers are therefore armed with a tool that can help in fighting for human rights and social justice. The Human Rights theoretical framework allows us to analyse Fugard's plays as the artistic works which reflect the fight for justice and as the tools for raising awareness on human rights issues. As South Africa tries to come to grips with the aftermath of apartheid, the importance of literature in the formation of the young generation's perception of justice, equality, and human dignity is even more critical.

Methodology

The research design, data collection methods, and the analytical framework used in this study are discussed in this section in relation to how they were used to unravel the subject of interest which is Athol Fugard's literature particularly *My Children! My Africa!* and *Tsotsi*, is applied in the Further Education and Training (FET) curriculum in South Africa for human rights education. The research design used in the study is qualitative to enable the researcher to get a deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions on how Fugard's works help in creating awareness on human rights among learners. Using qualitative research method is appropriate for this study since it enables the researchers to get detailed information regarding the perceptions and practices of the educators.

Research Design

This research employs phenomenology research design with some aspect of case study, since it aims at describing and understanding the perception and experiences of the teachers in relation to Fugard's plays in their classroom. The phenomenological design was selected because it offers the opportunity to delve into the teachers' view and understandings of the process of teaching Fugard's plays in FET curriculum. The study also uses a case study design since it looks at one region namely Ekurhuleni South District in order to provide specific information that

could be relevant to the entire South African education system.

Merriam (1998) has noted that there are certain research types such as phenomenological research that are suitable for studying phenomena in natural context where emphasis is on experiences of participants. Therefore, the study seeks to find out the coherence of Fugard's works in teaching human rights issues and the implications of these texts on classroom environment, students' participation, and critical reasoning.

Sampling

Target Population: The population of interest for this study comprises of English literature teachers from secondary schools in the Ekurhuleni South District of the Gauteng Province in South Africa, who teach the FET phase (Grades 10 – 12). These teachers were chosen for the study because they interact with the texts of Athol Fugard in their classrooms as per the set syllabus.

Sampling Technique: The research uses a convenience sampling technique in order to select a particular category of teachers, those who teach Fugard's works in the FET phase. This method will enable the identification of participants who are expected to offer detailed and useful information concerning the teaching of human rights through literature. Purposive sampling is particularly appropriate for this study since Patton (2002) states that purposive sampling is very helpful when the researcher intends to obtain more detailed information from participants with particular information or experience concerning the research area.

For the purpose of this study, the participants were twelve (12) English literature teachers from three second schools in the Ekurhuleni South District, four per school. The schools were selected according to their proximity and the number of years in which Fugard's work has been taught. The teachers were chosen in a way that there was gender variation, variation in their educational levels and the levels they taught (10, 11 and 12). This diversity within the sample was purposive in an attempt to get views from differ-

ent subjects and levels and experiences of teaching Fugard's works.

Data Collection Methods

1. Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used as the technique of data collection in this study. This approach enables for the provision of open-ended questions while making sure that all aspects of the research questions are discussed. All twelve participants were interviewed and open-ended and probing questions were used to allow teachers to share their experiences teaching Fugard's works and their views on the applicability of the texts to human rights education.

All the interviews were done over the phone and each interview took between 45 and 60 minutes, and all the interviews were tape-recorded with the interviewee's permission. The interviews explored several key areas, including:

- The survey of the teachers' perception towards the use of Athol Fugard's works in teaching human rights.
- The problems and possibilities of employing *My Children! My Africa!* and *Tsotsi* to provoke the learners to discuss issues of reconciliation, justice and dignity in South Africa.
- The teachers' perception of the students' reactions to the texts and the extent to which the teachers think that Fugard's works elicit critical thinking and moral development.

2. Focus Group Discussions

Besides one-on-one interviews, group interviews were also conducted with teachers from each school in form of focus group discussions. Focus groups were useful in that they enabled the researcher to gain insight into the group's perception and enabled a dynamic interaction that encouraged the generation of new ideas and perceptions. This method also allowed to feel the differences in understanding and approach to the teaching of human rights, as well as to look at how the discussions of these issues developed within the school environment.

The focus group interviews were conducted in English and consisted of 4 to 5 participants per group with each group lasting for about 90 minutes. The main areas of discussion were anchored on the research questions and revolved

around how the teachers managed the affective and cognitive dimensions of teaching Fugard's plays, especially on issues of race, violence, and justice.

3. Open-Ended Questionnaires

In addition, open-ended questionnaires were given to all the participants in order to supplement the interviews and focus groups. The questionnaires were useful in that they afforded the teachers the opportunity to give written responses regarding their experiences teaching Fugard's works, and the data collected from the questionnaires could be used in conjunction with the interviews. Such questions helped the participants to provide more details about their pedagogy, students' responses, and overall ideas about the use of literature in teaching human rights.

Data Analysis

Data from the interviews, focus groups, and open-ended questionnaires were analysed using thematic analysis, a method well-suited to qualitative research that seeks to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) within data. *The thematic analysis process involved several stages:*

1. Familiarisation with Data: All interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim. The researcher listened to the recordings multiple times to become familiar with the data and identify initial patterns.

2. Coding: Data were coded systematically, with each segment of text assigned to one or more codes that captured key aspects of the teachers' responses. Coding was done inductively, meaning that the themes emerged from the data rather than being imposed beforehand. Codes included topics such as "human rights education," "racial reconciliation," "challenges in teaching Fugard," and "students' emotional responses."

3. Theme Identification: Once coding was complete, the researcher grouped related codes into broader themes that addressed the research questions. Thirteen main themes were identified, including:

- The role of literature in fostering critical awareness of human rights.

- Teachers' perspectives on the relevance of Fugard's works to contemporary South Africa.
- The emotional and intellectual challenges of teaching apartheid-era literature.
- The impact of Fugard's literature on students' moral development and understanding of social justice.

4. Interpretation: The final step involved interpreting the data within the context of the research questions and theoretical framework. The researcher examined how the themes reflected teachers' broader views on human rights education, drawing connections between the use of Fugard's texts and their impact on students' critical thinking and empathy.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study, particularly given the sensitive nature of the topics being discussed (i. e., apartheid, racial injustice, human dignity). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were fully briefed on the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was maintained, with all identifying information removed from transcripts and reports. The study also adhered to ethical guidelines regarding the respectful treatment of participants' personal and professional reflections.

Trustworthiness of Data

To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the data, several strategies were employed:

- **Triangulation:** Data were collected using multiple methods (interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires), which allowed for cross-verification of findings and increased the reliability of the results.
- **Member Checking:** Participants were given the opportunity to review the transcripts of their interviews to ensure accuracy and clarity. This helped to confirm that the findings accurately reflected their experiences and perspectives.
- **Reflexivity:** The researcher maintained a reflective journal throughout the research process to monitor personal biases and ensure that these did not influence the interpretation of the data.

Findings

The following are the key findings from the

main themes that emerged from 12 FET teachers in the Ekurhuleni South District through interviews, focus group and open-ended questionnaires. The objectives of the study sought to establish the teachers' perception on the significance of integrating the works of Athol Fugard particularly the play titled *My Children! My Africa!* and *Tsotsi*—in the FET curriculum generally and more specifically in human rights education. Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) emphasise the importance of coding in qualitative research which helped to identify key patterns in how teachers and learners experienced Fugard's works. From the data, the following seven major themes were identified as to how Fugard's literature was perceived by teachers as helping learners develop critical thinking, moral reasoning, and social justice. The findings also bring out the prospects and the difficulties that the teachers encounter when teaching the students with these texts that elicit emotions.

Theme 1: Literature as a Tool for Human Rights Awareness

From the interviews and the focus group discussions, teachers also stressed how the works of Fugard helped to create consciousness on the issue of human rights. Some of the teachers saw *My Children! My Africa!* as an excellent text for analysis of concepts like racial justice, fairness and the effects of apartheid on the worth of human life. The teachers realised that through the play, learners were able to understand historical perspective of human rights issues in the modern South Africa.

One teacher remarked:

“Fugard's play is not just a historical lesson, it is real; it makes students think and think again about what human dignity is and how it is denied not only in the past but in the present as well”

In turn, teachers explained that *My Children! My Africa!* let the students to engage in the basic questions of justice and moral responsibility. Mr. M's conversations with Thami on whether education can combat inequity was something that students could relate to as they were exposed to other narratives of race prejudice. This helped the learners to think about the general impacts of human rights abuses and how

their actions can either support or oppose certain systems of oppression.

Theme 2: The Emotional Intensity of Fugard's Texts

Fugard's works were considered as effective tools for human rights education and teachers pointed out that the material was quite sensitive which could provoke emotional response in students. Both *My Children! My Africa!* and *Tsotsi* show a lot of social issues such as poverty, violence, and racism and elicited an emotional reaction from students.

One of the trends that was noticed was that students often got overwhelmed with the emotional aspects of the piece, especially the death of Mr. M in *My Children! My Africa!* It also includes the violent scenes of the movie especially the ones involving *Tsotsi* before he changed for the better. One teacher noted:

"The students are very much impacted by the events that happened to Mr. M. and they are angry, frustrated and at times even helpless and it can be quite challenging to help the students navigate their feelings while also helping them analyse the text."

Teachers paid a special attention to the students' emotional readiness for the texts by establishing a safe classroom environment. This entailed assisting the students to work through their feelings while at the same time keeping the focus on the analysis of the moral and human rights concerns raised in the texts.

Theme 3: Racial Reconciliation and Dialogue

Fugard's plays especially the *My Children! My Africa!*, were applauded for their capacity to provoke debates on the race relations. The teachers said that the conversation between Thami and Isabel in the play offered the learners the opportunity to discuss race, privilege and reconciliation in a post-apartheid South Africa. Some of the teachers stated that Fugard's works made it possible to overcome the barriers of race in the classroom and make the students of different races and class backgrounds speak for themselves. One teacher highlighted how these discussions were particularly valuable in South Africa's current socio-political climate, where

racial tensions still linger:

"When I discuss with my students, they compare apartheid with the current situation and Fugard's work makes them realize that reconciliation is not something that has happened in the past but is still happening."

These dialogues were considered as critical in creating understanding and tolerance between the students, at the same time emphasizing the issue of race as a core value of human rights education.

Theme 4: Moral Responsibility and Personal Transformation

In both *My Children! My Africa!* and *Tsotsi*, one can identify the major themes of moral responsibility and personal transformation. The above-mentioned themes were seen to be relevant to learners especially in the novel *Tsotsi* where the main character transforms from a violent thug to a caring person and the learners got to understand the theme of change. One teacher noted:

"Tsotsi tells us the story of hope as it portrays that change is possible no matter the circumstances, which is why my students think about what it takes to change, both personally and socially."

The themes of the play dealing with the themes of redemption and personal responsibility helped the students to address other social questions like the question of crime and poverty, or the impact of apartheid on the individual and the society.

Theme 5: Critical Thinking and Consciousness-Raising

Fugard's works were said by teachers to make the students think and become conscious of social issues. It encouraged learners to challenge power relations, ponder over the social justice issues and evaluate the principles of freedom struggle.

Among the most important effects identified by the teachers, one can highlight the students' capacity to reason critically about apartheid and its aftermath. Fugard's plays were considered useful in helping students grasp the complexity of apartheid's impact on society and learn how to relate it to present day South African problems.

Teachers further explained that students tend to relate and link the various injustices presented by Fugard's plays to present day injustice systems.

A teacher explained:

This is because, Fugard's plays make the students to be proactive, they begin to ask questions on how apartheid affects their lives today and if really South Africa has changed.

Theme 6: Challenges in Teaching Fugard's Works

Although the teachers responded rather positively to Fugard's texts, they listed several difficulties that can arise when teaching these works. A major issue was the fact that there was inadequate support for teachers especially in the low-income schools. Teachers stated that, for example, the availability of extra materials like historical documentaries or critical essays would also help the students to better understand the time in which Fugard worked.

Another problem was that some students had difficulties to identify themselves with the characters in *My Children! My Africa!* and *Tsotsi* because, most of them did not have a direct or indirect experience with apartheid. According to the teachers, the students were aware of the themes and their significance, but they struggled to make the necessary connection with the particular historical context as it was not very close to their own life.

Theme 7: Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact on Learners

In conclusion, the teachers held the view that Fugard's works induced a lot of change in learners in relation to human rights as well as their own individual growth. The teachers stated that the students were more likely to leave the classroom with a better appreciation of the social justice issues and the moral issues at stake.

A general view of the teachers was that through Fugard's works, students learn to be compassionate not only for the characters of the play but also for people in their own society who are oppressed or disadvantaged in some way. One teacher summarized the impact:

"After reading *My Children! My Africa!* and *Tsotsi*, students tend to leave

with a heightened sensitivity and an urge to improve the world; they get the message of the need to stand up for justice even when it is not popular."

The findings of this study suggest that the plays by Athol Fugard are very suitable in teaching human rights in the FET curriculum. The findings revealed that majority of the teachers believe that texts like *My Children! My Africa!* and *Tsotsi* offer the learners a chance to think critically, to empathize with the characters, and to make moral-based decisions. However, there is still some concern about emotional impact and availability of resources which should be solved to make Fugard's works relevant for human rights education in South African schools.

Discussion

From this study, it is evident that Athol Fugard's works especially *My Children! My Africa!* and *Tsotsi*, can be considered as valuable tools for introducing the concept of human rights education into the FET curriculum in South Africa. As a result of the analysis of the teachers' views, it was possible to establish that these texts are highly effective in engaging students in critical thinking, moral reasoning and raising awareness of apartheid, racial reconciliation and social justice. However, the study also revealed challenges that existed in the teaching of such works especially on the aspect of emotional appeal and deficit in materials in underprivileged schools. This section elaborates these findings in relation to the previous literature on human rights education and makes further implications for pedagogy and curriculum development in the South African context.

Fugard's Literature as a Catalyst for Human Rights Education

The findings provide a clear indication of the proposition that literature is an appropriate tool for human rights education with special emphasis on Fugard's works. This is in light of the literature review that has been done about plays such as **My Children! My Africa!* It thus enables students to analyse two important issues of race and social justice as well as personal Ethics which are crucial for human rights education. In this regard, Szasz (2017) agrees with this study

because he points out that the human rights are best discussed through dramatic texts since they depict real people and real-life situations that help the students develop empathy and critical thinking to solve moral and social dilemmas.

Through the play, Fugard captures apartheid South Africa which can be used by teachers to explain the effects of racism and inequality on people's value. The classroom discussions that stem from the use of these texts help the students to think about how apartheid era human rights abuses can still be felt in the present South African society. One of the teachers explained that the students are in a position to compare the injustice portrayed in the plays to the struggles going on in their society. This is in agreement with Mubangizi (2015) who stated that human rights education should make learners to be able to identify and combat social injustices occurring in the society.

Critical Thinking and Moral Development

Probably the most important observation that can be made is the function of Fugard's texts in the development of critical thinking and moral behaviour. According to the teachers, thanks to the performance their students were able to discuss sophisticated ethical issues, for instance the conflict between learning and fighting for change in *My Children! My Africa!* and *Tsotsi*. These themes help the students to develop the critical thinking skills and make them reflect on their own values, the history of apartheid and their roles in the society.

This article also supports the fact that Fugard's literature is able to elicit critical thinking since the goals of human rights education include having learners analyse social systems, ponder on their decisions, and even become advocates for change. According to Falvey and Kennedy (2006), the use of literature, especially plays helps in stimulating critical discourse since pupils are required to discuss the conducts of the characters in a play and the implications of those conducts. Fugard's works are especially useful in this regard as they present learners with a narrative context through which they can examine the ethical issues of resistance, oppression and reconciliation.

Specifically, the character of *Tsotsi* provides

students with an example of the process of the moral change from the stage of violence and crime to the stage of caring and accountability. According to the teachers, the students found it easy to relate with *Tsotsi* especially his journey which show that there is always a chance to change no matter the situation. The theme of moral responsibility, that runs through all Fugard's works, underlines the significance of literature in the formation of students' ethical values and concept of human rights.

Emotional Intensity and Challenges in Teaching

As much as the study successful in establishing the aspect of human rights in Fugard's works, it also points at some of the difficulties that teachers encounter in teaching such emotional texts. Both *My Children! My Africa!* and *Tsotsi* show the sphere of feelings and emotions: violence, racism and the effects of apartheid on the human psyche that may evoke strong emotional reactions in students. Teachers mentioned that these themes are very helpful to explain the whole consequence of apartheid, yet these themes provoke different emotions and feelings that need to be managed by the teachers.

This is in agreement with other research done in the area of emotions and teaching history especially history that is sensitive in nature. Nussbaum (1995) stresses that although emotional engagement is crucial for the development of empathy and morality, teachers should know how to manage students' emotions so that the students can move from emotions to critical thinking. For the Fugard's works, teachers realized that it was helpful to establish a positive classroom atmosphere and allow the students to work through their feelings—by engaging in group debriefing or writing tasks.

The affective aspects of Fugard's works also suggest that there is a need for further professional development of teachers in relation to how to address potentially sensitive topics such as apartheid, race-related violence and injustice. All the teachers in this study showed interest in having more materials and training to support them in tackling the emotional and cognitive stresses related to the teaching of Fugard's

works. These results imply that it is crucial for schools and educational policymakers to allocate resources to teacher training that would help the teachers to navigate students through the emotional and moral dimensions of the text.

Resource Limitations in Under-Resourced Schools

Another major problem highlighted by the study is the problem of lack of resources in poor schools that hampers the ability of teachers to teach Fugard's works. The teachers said that they rarely had access to materials that could complement the teaching of Fugard's works, for example historical documentaries or critical essays, or interactive tools that would help students understand the context of Fugard's work. This absence of resources means that the students cannot be provided with comprehensive learning experience that incorporates literature with historical and social analysis.

This is even more so the case in schools in the poorer areas of society where learners may not have the cultural capital or prior knowledge that is necessary to fully grasp the concepts in Fugard's plays. According to one of the teachers, some of the students could not find themselves in the experiences of Thami or Tsotsi, because they did not have somebody in their family or friend who went through the apartheid. This points to a broader issue in human rights education: the importance of the contextual teaching strategies which take into consideration the different backgrounds of learners and help them apply historical knowledge to their own experience.

To overcome these difficulties, the study recommends that educational decision-makers and school principals ensure that the teachers have access to quality learning resources that may help to situate Fugard's works within the context of apartheid and human rights. This could include multimedia materials, sessions on pedagogy of apartheid literature and opening up of online forums that provide a form of learning. Such resources would assist in closing the gap between the students' life situations and the historical contexts portrayed in Fugard's plays and thus enhance the effectiveness of human rights education.

Racial Reconciliation and Dialogue in the Classroom

The works of Fugard especially the play, *My Children! My Africa!*, they were proved to be useful for promoting the discussion of the topic of race and reconciliation as well as privilege in the classroom. They said that through Thami and Isabel's arguments, and Mr. M and his students' interaction Such discussions were also fruitful because the students were diverse in terms of race and thus, they contributed their experiences to the class.

This finding is in agreement with the view advanced by Jibril (2015) that Fugard's plays are useful in nurturing Interracial conversations as the society continues to deal with the effects of apartheid. The teachers in the study found that these dialogues helped in the academic development of the students and also helped in the development of tolerance among the students of colour. In this case, the discussion on racial reconciliation in relation to Fugard's works helped the students to think about the contemporary issues that are still present in South Africa and their part in working towards change.

Implications for Pedagogy and Curriculum Development

Firstly, the study points to the fact that there is a need for the incorporation of human rights education into the literature curriculum to be made more overt. Fugard's works are already prescribed texts in the current syllabus, however there is the need to show how these texts can be used to teach human rights, critical thinking and moral reasoning. This could be done through the formulation of curricular materials that will help teachers to know the specific ways on how to include human rights in their teaching.

Second, the study shows the necessity of preparing teachers for the lessons that contain potentially sensitive historical content. As mentioned before, the teacher has to have access to such additional resources and training that will enable him or her to deal with the emotional aspect of Fugard's plays and teach the students to think critically. Therefore, it is important for the educational policymakers to support more professional development workshops for teachers which are related to the human rights education

and literature.

Last but not least, the study implies that Fugard's works can be used as an example of how the concept of human rights can be introduced into the educational process in general and not only within the framework of literature courses. In this manner, students can be made to appreciate the existing human rights as well as the issues that pertain to human rights as presented in literature, hence, creating a culture of critical thinking and social responsibility within and out of school.

Conclusion of Discussion

In this regard, the works of Athol Fugard can be considered as an effective tool of promoting human rights education within the context of the FET curriculum in South Africa. Through presenting students with the difficult themes of apartheid, race relations, and moral decision making, these texts develop students' critical thinking, empathy, and social justice. But there are certain issues concerning emotional aspects, resources, and teacher intervention which should not be overlooked in order to tap the potential of Fugard's works in teaching. Based on the results of this study it can be concluded that with proper resources and pedagogical approaches Fugard's works can remain relevant to human rights education and contribute to the development of the subsequent generation of culturally aware and moral individuals.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study aimed at examining the function of Athol Fugard's literature especially the play *My Children! My Africa!* and *Tsotsi*, in as far as they can promote human rights education in the context of the Further Education and Training (FET) in South Africa. The study aimed at finding out how these texts are used to teach critical thinking, moral reasoning, and human rights among learners through interviews, focus group and open-ended questionnaires from 12 FET teachers from the Ekurhuleni South District.

It is seen that Fugard's works are very useful to create awareness about the issues of race, reconciliation, and social justice and thus help students to look at the present-day problems in

South Africa through historical perspective. All the teachers stressed that Fugard's works were useful for the discussions of apartheid and its consequences for the South African society and for the analysis of the problems of human dignity and moral choice.

At the same time, the study exposed the difficulties in the teaching of Fugard's emotionally charged texts especially in underprivileged schools where teachers have few resources and training. Fugard's works are intense emotionally that are beneficial for students to develop empathy and moral understanding but at the same time teachers should be aware of how to control these emotions. Some students also found it difficult to comprehend some of the themes that are portrayed in Fugard's works especially because they related to the apartheid era, and this may call for the provision of more context in order for the students to make connections between the past and the present.

In conclusion, this study is useful to the literature on human rights education and reveals the possibility of literature in the achievement of social justice and critical consciousness among learners. When properly implemented, Fugard's works can be a useful tool for starting a dialogue about human rights as well as the achievements and setbacks of the fight for racial and social justice in South Africa.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made for the enhancement of the integration of human rights education through literature in South Africa's FET curriculum.

1. Strengthen the Human Rights Education in the Curriculum.

- Human rights have to be made more central in the teaching of FET literature curriculum. Although Fugard's works are already dealing with these topics, the curriculum should offer more specific instructions on how these topics can be related to the general human rights concepts of equality, dignity, and justice.

- Curriculum developers should produce teacher's guides which will emphasise the human rights aspects of *My Children! My Africa!* and *Tsotsi*.

2. Provide Teacher Training on Human Rights and any Sensitive Historical Material.

- Teacher training should therefore place emphasis on preparing the educators for classroom management of such materials as apartheid literature. This includes; how to moderate emotions while teaching, how to address students on sensitive issues while teaching, and how to incorporate human rights education in literature.
- Training workshops should also teach the teachers how to relate Fugard's themes to the current issues of social justice so that the students can make some meaningful connection between the past and the present.

3. Improve Access of Educational Materials in Low Income Schools

- To make sure that all the students are able to interact with Fugard's works in the best way possible, there is a need to enhance the availability of resources in the needy schools. The schools should be given other resources like historical documentaries, critical essays, and interactive tools that may help the students to understand the social and political perspective of Fugard's plays.
- These materials could be made available on the digital platforms and online resources especially where physical resources are scarce especially in the schools.

4. Address emotional intensity through pedagogical support

- Teachers should be helped in handling emotional aspects of Fugard's works. This could include giving teachers suggestions on how to develop a peaceful classroom environment so that the students are willing to participate in a discussion about topics like racism, oppression, and ethical issues.
- In order to help students work through the af-

fective and cognitive aspects of the texts by Fugard the following could be included in the teaching process: reflective writing, peer discussions, and group assignments.

5. Promote Interdisciplinary Approaches to Human Rights Education

- Fugard's works can be well used as a basis for interdisciplinary learning. These texts can be used in more general History, Civics and Social Studies classes to help students understand the relation between literature and human rights and citizenship.
- Literature teachers could therefore engage other teachers to foster students' critical thinking on the connection between literature and social justice.

Future Research Directions

Despite the contributions that this study makes to an understanding of the potential of Fugard's literature in human rights education, further research is required to establish the longer-term effects that such texts may have on students' conceptions of human rights and social justice. Future studies could focus on:

- **Learner Perspectives:** Explore students' perceptions of the extent to which these plays by Fugard affect their knowledge and appreciation of human rights and if such awareness culminates into voting or other form of participation or personal action.
- **Comparative Studies:** Understanding the various genres of literature (novels, plays, poetry etc.) and their ability to enhance human rights education in multicultural and cross-cultural societies.
- **The Role of Digital Media:** This study aims to examine the possible integration of digital media including interactive media and online forums to the teaching of literature and human rights in under-privileged schools.

References

- Falvey, P., & Kennedy, P. (2006). *Literature and human rights education: Approaches to critical thinking*. Routledge.
- Jibril, I. (2015). *Literature and the politics of race in South Africa: Athol Fugard's contribution*. *Journal of South African Studies*, 41(2), 253-265.

- Maley, A., & Duff, A. (1989). *Drama techniques in language learning: A resource book of communication activities for language teachers*. Cambridge University Press.
- McCombes, S. (2022). What is a literature review: Step-by-step guide and examples. McLaren N. A critical review of the Biopsychosocial Model. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*. 1998;32(1):86-92. doi:10.3109/00048679809062712
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M.B., Huberman, A.M. and Saldana, J. (2014) *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. Sage, London.
- Mubangizi, J. C. (2015). *Human rights education in South Africa: Approaches and challenges*. *South African Journal of Education*, 35(3), 224-236.
- Nunan, D. (1992). *Research methods in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (1995). *Poetic justice: The literary imagination and public life*. Beacon Press.
- Picciano, A. G. (2004). *Educational research primer*. Continuum.
- Szasz, E. (2017). *Drama and human rights education: Plays as platforms for social justice*. *Journal of Human Rights Education*, 6(1), 61-78.

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.18>

THE DISSIMILARITIES OF THE UNDERACHIEVING SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A CRITICAL EVALUATION

Ngwako Solomon Modiba
University of Limpopo
solomon.modiba@ul.ac.za

Abstract

This paper investigates if what removes underachievement in one secondary school could do the same in another irrespective of the gender of learners at the school. The paper was motivated by diverse discourses about learner-underachievement being uniquely institutional instead of being multi-institutional. This paper is conceptual and empirical in nature within the qualitative research paradigm. The question guiding this paper is: to what extent can the vivacious spirit of determination that removes underachievement in one secondary school does the same in another educational institution? Narrative enquiry and interviewing techniques were employed to collect data. Out of the population of 14 secondary schools in one of the circuits in Capricorn district in Limpopo Province, South Africa, six were conveniently sampled. In each of the six sampled secondary schools, only School Principals and SGB Secretaries became research participants. Findings revealed that firstly, a consistent leadership style could contain underachievement. Secondly, a participatory subject allocation could trigger performance. Thirdly, a revolutionised classroom environment could counter under-achievement. Fourthly, irregular learner attendance rate could trigger underachievement. Fifthly, disabling contextual factors could contribute to poor achievement. Lastly, poorly co-ordinated peer-teaching could create underachievement. The researcher recommends for the exercising of solid and consensus leadership style that impacts on the rank and file of all institutional incumbents. Finally, underachieving secondary schools need to transform to become community learning centres of excellence.

Keywords: *Dissimilarities, Environment, Participatory, Peer-teaching, Underachieving*

Introduction

Any form of underachievement by a school, deserves to be confronted and removed (Alanoglu, 2022). Public secondary schools accustomed only to good learner performance, have invaluable lessons to teach perennially underachieving ones (Lee, 2023). The business of public secondary schools is similar, such that any practice advancing a particular school, irrespective of the gender of learners, with conviction and extra-care, it could be transplanted to other schools despite diverse contextual factors (Agesa, 2014 & Meador, 2019). This is despite schooling conditions being uniquely diverse from one institution to the other. It is inconceivable that other institutions pull hard in terms of brilliant scholastic learner achievement, while others continue to yield desirable learner outcomes. A fine line of distinction between an achieving and underachieving school exists. Just a little rethinking of the modus operandi, by an underachieving school could shift such an institution to become an achieving one, whose learner results are eye-catching and exquisite (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). This is despite the gender of learners at a school. Incessantly underachieving secondary schools, require experimenting with

the tried and tested measures applied by achieving secondary schools for them to overcome underachievement. Hence, Bambalele (2019) advises that searching for solutions of underachievement of secondary schools, causative factors of underachievement need to be unveiled. Consistently achieving secondary schools are likely to be having a sound administration, functional governance structures, pertinent procedures and policies that are largely dependable. Ethical leadership that is being exercised within the enabling institutional systems is as well essential. Underachieving secondary schools could be lacking some of the tried and tested measures which may not be contributing to organisational cohesion and even lacking basic institutional relevance. That could be an evident distinction enough between the achieving and the underachieving secondary schools (Bantwini & Moorosi, 2023).

Providing capacitating treatment to learners has a potential, of leading to a high performing secondary school. Lack of such a royal treatment to learners could engender institutional underachievement. Research evidence points out that current secondary school pupils could be susceptible to monotonous pattern of teaching and

learning (Harris & Jones, 2022). This, therefore, calls for a queer manner of instructional delivery, which is largely responsive to learners' changing desires irrespective of their gender (Allen, 2014). The thesis of this paper is that underachieving secondary schools could become achieving institutions upon learning and implementing the best practices from their counterparts with but revolutionised schooling environment, despite the gender of learners at school. Exposing current underachieving public secondary school pupils to multi-modal teaching and learning plan, is one of the surest ways of making them and their schools achieve. Van Deventer and Kruger (2010) recount that 21st century secondary school learners achieve or underachieve based on who teaches them and how captivating and absorbing teaching and learning activities are. Providing pupils with what they aspire, could have a monumental effect of attracting them to desire to achieve, and thus create a high achieving secondary school. Considering that achievement or underachievement starts in a classroom, the manner of teaching and learning in the 21st century secondary schools, needs to be outstanding (Afrita & Ahasssan, 2017). This could inspire and stimulate the multitudes of pupils inside and outside classrooms to be, greatly enriched other than massively impoverished by schooling (Levin, 2011, Southey, 2012 & Zuze & Juan, 2020). This is part of repositioning and re-culturing of secondary schooling to shed of underachievement for achievement.

As part of being taught differently for efficacious learner achievement, secondary school pupils require to operate in a revolutionised schooling environment, their gender notwithstanding. This is a kind of a schooling atmosphere which is vibrant, heart-warming and indescribably healthy to enable pupils to showcase their learner mettle. In that kind of a schooling atmosphere, teachers are likely to serve more as facilitators of learning which makes instruction largely learner-centred instead of being teacher-centred (Lee, 2023). Underachieving public secondary schools, miss vibrant schooling spaces to reposition and re-culture to become achieving

secondary schools. Efficaciously taught secondary school pupils, stand to foster a credible and incredible classroom learning experiences that are healthy for the radical ideological posture which replaces underachievement with achievement (Senyosi, 2015). When learners in a known underachieving secondary school find themselves in a revamped teaching and learning space, that could shift their school from underachieving to achieving institution. That could be due to operating in a revolutionised schooling set-up that contributes to magnificent learner results (Coetzee, Van Niekerk & Wydeman 2011, Bodibe, 2012, Memela, 2012 & Bada, Tengku, Ariffin & Nordin, 2024).

Literature review

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) and Alanogly (2022) submit that the vast literature reviewed on achievement and underachievement of secondary schools acknowledge that a consistent leadership style could reverse an underachievement condition irrespective of the gender of learners at school. However, leaders and managers of secondary schools admit that there is no leadership style better than the rest. What is essential is how institutional incumbents react to the exercised consistent leadership style (Maala & Mkandawire, 2022). Literature review advises that consistent exercising of a particular leadership style could elicit a particular favourable response from institutional members. This suggests that where possible, institutional leaders and managers need to stick to the type of leadership style which their subordinates are conditioned to (Zuze & Juan, 2020). What matters is recording favourable responses from the institutional members. Favourable response implies getting the institutional incumbents to keep a secondary school producing brilliant learner results or grades which will earn a school a label of an achieving secondary school irrespective of the gender of learners at that school. It is of no use for school leaders to attempt to apply diverse leadership styles with the hope of being accommodative of bickering organisational members with no improvement of academic learner outcomes (Ramrathan, 2017). The

review of literature points out that once the exercised leadership style becomes un-impactful due to the institutional members being conditioned to a particular leadership style, then underachievement could set in.

At times people need to adapt to the consistently practised leadership style. In some circumstances, it would be the leadership style of an institutional head that has to be adapted to the people populating a secondary school for the sake of magnificent learner results. Schooling is complex and to get it to produce mouth-watering scholastic learner results, many alignments and revised processes may have to occur. For instance, where the process of subject allocation was centralised, there may be a need to democratise and decentralise it. This could be done through making such a process participatory for both learners and the teaching personnel (Mabena, Mokgosi & Ramapela, 2021). Logic dictates that underachievement at secondary schools could be orchestrated by a simple practice of failing to make the subject allocation process participatory for the affected actors. That is why an advice for secondary schools to desist from being exclusionary in vital decision-making processes like the subject allocation matter. Excluding the requisite actors such as teachers and learners from being part of the subject allocation process could compromise the excellent learner achievement which a secondary school has been famous for. The review of literature unveils that the participation of the broad school stakeholders in the allocation of subjects is indispensable, with the crop of teachers and learners populating current schooling. For instance, where pupils elect who should teach them and for what subject, that could impact on their achievement in that subject. The same applies to when teachers elect which grade to teach and for what subject. Affording teachers such a space to make their choice could contribute to the removal of perennial underachievement by a secondary school (Senyosi, 2015, Mantwini & Moorosi, 2023).

Literature study shares that in case a secondary school has been underachieving, immediately a

school's classroom environments are revolutionised, anticipated brilliant learner outcomes might begin to surface. This is the case considering that achievement or underachievement of every school owes its origin to that school's classroom environment. This is to signify that a classroom environment could be an enabler or a disabler in as far as school achievement or underachievement is concerned. Noting that it could be pupils who plunge a school in a category of underachievement, it makes sense to involve them especially at the subject allocation level so that they have a voice on selecting teachers who could support them better to wrench a school out of the underachievement fold into the achievement one. That could better succeed where the exercised school leadership is consistent and resonates with the revolutionised classroom environments. Literature review is emphatic that where the choice of pupils regarding who should teach them and what subject, has been granted, those pupils are likely to cooperate with their elected teacher better than when a teacher has been an imposition to them (Zhu, Devos & Li, 2011). Benefits of learner-cooperation with secondary school teachers, could be the instant replacement of underachieving secondary schools with achieving ones. Review of literature alerts that irrespective of the consequences of pupils having been allowed to elect who to teach them or not, in the context of the South African schooling, the constitution of the country emphasises that issues of schooling be dealt with in an open, transparent, consultative and in an accountable fashion. In short involvement of pupils during the process of subject allocation is in part, their own constitutional right, not so much a favour extended to them by their schools (Bantwini & Moorosi, 2023). The review of literature stresses that getting a secondary school to shift from underachievement to a position of achievement requires that every effort that can be helpful be experimented with. The gender of learners in a school is immaterial in this context. This includes making a clarion call to affected learners to reverse their dissatisfactory learner attendance rate. Masondo (2015) reasons that being emphatic to learners that their inconsistent attendance rate contributes to the

experienced schooling underachievement could be part of experimenting with a workable remedy towards arresting the inconvenience of underachievement. Literature review notes that not many underachieving secondary schools bother to tap into the significance of an improved learner attendance towards the elimination of underachievement. Acknowledging that excellent scholastic learner outcomes of every secondary school starts in that school's improvement of the learner attendance, has to be a valid and an evident point enough of how a regular and consistent learner attendance rate, contribute to the creation of an achieving secondary school (Zuze & Juan, 2020).

By implication, an enhanced learner attendance rate serves as one of the constituent elements behind the reversal of schooling underachievement to create a space for achievement. In an event where learner attendance rate is vibrant and adequately impressive, all teaching efforts occurring in a secondary schooling are likely not to be in vain. Such teaching efforts could induce superior pupil performance which would have been difficulty to attain, and which would earn a school a label of an achieving as against an underachieving secondary schooling. Evidently, underachieving secondary schools need to ensure that they do not ignore putting sufficient attention to the attendance rate of secondary school learners for fear of teaching irregular learners who may not generate the requisite brilliant learner outcomes that move a secondary school from a category of underachievement to another category of achievement (Maala & Mkandawire, 2022). A consistent school leadership style is a quintessence to neutralising schooling underachievement ascribed to a host of factors, some of which require boldness in confronting them head-on for their removal. Teachers in underachieving secondary schools ought not start delivering lessons to pupils, until they are convinced that the necessary revolutionised schooling atmosphere is in place to accommodate other quintessential factors that mitigate schooling underachievement (Lara, 2018). This implies that a revolutionised schooling environment could serve as an educational media

for both teachers and learners for the success of all lessons presented in a school's classrooms. To add to the list of factors creating an underachieving secondary school, there are contextual factors which affect school performance irrespective of the gender of learners. Literature review shares that where the bulk of the contextual factors are disabling, then the idea of a secondary schooling sector ever getting out of the underachievement mode, could remain a pipe dream. One of the contextual factors which is behind the underachievement of myriad secondary schools, is teacher qualifications and training. Inadequately trained teachers are likely to struggle to master the subject content. This could prevent such teachers from producing impressive classroom lessons that will contribute to the reversal of underachievement by a secondary school. On the part of secondary school teachers whose qualifications are suspect, such teachers may not successfully engage with learners inside the classrooms. That state of affairs could prepare a secondary school for underachievement (Owen, 2015, Harris & Jones, 2022). The other contextual factor that could be responsible for the underachievement of secondary schooling includes the socioeconomic issues such as poverty and lack of access to relevant resources. Learners who are unfortunate to find themselves in an underdeveloped secondary school, could fail to assist a school to achieve due to a school's general condition of lack. Concomitant to the mentioned predicament is the socioeconomic problem of poverty (Juan & Visser (2017).

Research points out that normally, learners from poverty stricken families have a tendency of being conditioned to their poverty to the level where schooling possesses little if any value for them. Admittedly, where learners lack access to vital schooling resources such as textbooks and other essential materials that could hinder learners from completing their given tasks on time and with the expected insight suited to their level of study. Hence, Owen (2015 & Gqirana, 2016) advise that secondary schools that perennially underachieve, may among others be struggling to overcome socioeconomic factors

engulfing those schools. Finally, literature review reveals that underachieving secondary schools could be experiencing poorly co-ordinated peer-teaching. This is a kind of teaching normally experienced in advanced, developed and achieving secondary schools. One identifiable point about peer teaching is that it exists where teachers are honest about what they know, understand and master (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). As such, any section complicated to them they seek assistance from their colleagues. This benefits learners immensely in the sense that any section delivered to learners, irrespective of their gender, is presented by a teacher whose knowledge in that section is not in doubt. Literature review shows that well-co-ordinated peer teaching is missing in underachieving secondary schools. The implication is that in such secondary schools, the experienced underachievement could be a product of incompetent teachers other than being a product of the less dedicated learners to their own studies (Afrita & Ahassan, 2017, Equal Education, 2018 & Meador, 2019). Where there is well-co-ordinated peer teaching, educators are likely to work together as a team to complement one another other than competing against one another. So, peer teaching could serve as an intervention against perennial underachievement of some secondary schools.

Objectives and the research question

This paper investigates if what removes underachievement in one secondary school could do the same in another irrespective of the gender of learners at a school. The second objective relates to getting a direction on where to begin and what exactly to do differently, to overcome the problem of perennial underachievement of public secondary schools. On the basis of that, the research question guiding this paper is: *to what extent can the vivacious spirit of determination that removes underachievement in one secondary school, do the same in another?* Incessant underachievement of some secondary schools could nurture a routine of underperformance that could later be too difficult to root out (Senyosi, 2015, Equal Education, 2018, Meador, 2019 & Bada, Tengku, Ariffin & Nordin (2024).

Research design

This paper is a qualitative case study. The problem which this paper pursues, namely, how to overturn the perennial underachievement of some secondary schools, necessitated the design of the paper. Furthermore, the objective of the paper which is to investigate if what removes underachievement in one secondary school could do the same in another, as well precipitate that the paper follows a qualitative research paradigm as against the quantitative one. The choice of the qualitative methodology was also triggered by the reality that the paper is being underscored by Interpretivism and by the Learning Organisation Philosophy (Moloi, 2005 & Creswell, 2021). The researcher saw a need to create a synergy between the two mentioned theoretical perspectives undergirding the paper, together with the qualitative approach as the overriding research methodology. The combination of the three, helped immensely in terms of illuminating tried and tested measures to shift underachieving secondary schools into achieving ones (Leedy & Omrod, 2010). The researcher utilised the mentioned theoretical perspectives to investigate ways and means of ascertaining that the hurdle of underachievement in secondary schools is contained. Tried and tested measures are needed for the overturning of the persistent underachievement of some of the public secondary schools. Amalgamating the qualitative research paradigm, Interpretivism and the Learning Organisation Philosophy aimed at maximising the strengths of the three perspectives to comprehend in its entirety the perennial underachievement of secondary school pupils and to ultimately remove it (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003 & Ramathan, 2017).

Combining the three, enabled the researcher to make in-depth understanding of how despite many years of independence in South Africa, there are still secondary schools whose learner results are disappointingly very low. Such an in-depth understanding led to the emergence of the tried and tested measures that could assist in countering underachievement prevalent in some public secondary schools. Out of the population

of 14 secondary schools, six were conveniently sampled and in each institution, a School Principal and an SGB Secretary became research participants. To conclude this item on the research design, there is a need to disclose that the narrative enquiry and the interviewing techniques were utilised to generate data for this paper. To be precise, secondary School Principals and their SGB Secretaries, from incessantly underachieving public secondary schools, were given an opportunity of narrating from their own angles that which orchestrates perpetual pupil underachievement (Creswell, 2021). In addition, School Principals and SGB Secretaries were allowed to share their views on the debated perennial underachievement. To corroborate and triangulate the gleaned data, interviewing was conducted with those research participants that provided narrative information. Altogether, a total of 12 research participants were interviewed to hear their views and perspectives on the stubborn underachievement engulfing some secondary schools. Interviewing responses were audiotaped for transcription purposes and analyses later-on. Both the narrative enquiry and the interviewing technique emerged very helpful in terms of accessing germane views and perspectives on the persistent underachievement of some public secondary schools in Limpopo Province and South Africa (Meador, 2019).

Findings

Findings arrived at in this paper are in relation to the research topic whose focus is the investigation of whether what removes underachievement in one secondary school could do the same in another. The basis of the findings is the analysed data which were generated through the narrative inquiry and the interviewing technique. Responses of the 12 research participants were collated and analysed as regards the incessant underachievement by some public secondary schools. As part of sharing and discussing the findings in a clear and free from ambiguity fashion, the 12 research participants interviewed, who are School Principals and SGB Secretaries, in this paper, are being referred to as Respondents A to F indicating School Principals of the sampled six secondary schools and

Respondents G to M indicating SGB Secretaries of the six secondary schools. That was done to protect the actual identities of those research participants. Paying attention only to the School Principals and SGB Secretaries ought not create an impression that every time when there is scholastic underachievement in secondary schooling, it could be School Principals and SGB Secretaries alone who are the source of that underachievement. A host of factors are likely to be behind the underachievement of secondary schools. The context of this paper necessitated that the focus be placed on the perspectives of the School Principals and SGB Secretaries in relation to the incessant institutional underachievement of public secondary schools (Botha, 2017, Juan & Visser, 2017). In view of learner underachievement in public secondary schools having being debated from the angles such as the deputy principal's leadership role, teacher leadership and others, the researcher felt a need to debate it this time from the unique angle of the School Principals and SGB Secretaries who in this paper are being referred to as Respondents A to F indicating School Principals and Respondents G to M indicating SGB Secretaries (Lara, 2018, Meador, 2019, Rush, Duku, Glover, Kiggundu, Kola, Mislav & Moorost, 2019 & Khatri, 2020). Interpretivism and the Learning Organisation Philosophy in partnership with the qualitative research paradigm have been sufficiently instrumental in assisting in the analysis of data to ultimately emerge with these findings. Findings and discussion of this paper are the following: consistent leadership style, participatory subject allocation, a revolutionised classroom environment, irregular learner attendance rate, disabling contextual factors and the absence of well-co-ordinated peer teaching.

Discussions

Consistent leadership style

Omar (2019) and Alanogly (2022) remark that educational institutions are populated by diverse learners irrespective of their gender, that require to be managed and chaperoned differently to produce desirable results. Review of literature abundantly showed that myriad 21st century sec-

ondary schools, lack decisive and solid leadership to engender exquisite learner results (Bernstein & McCarthy, 2011, Modiba, 2011, Mgxashe, 2011, Mueller, 2011, Bantwini & Moorosi, 2023). Consistent and consensus leadership style in underachieving secondary schools has a potential of serving as a catalyst towards the excellent academic achievement of learners. Furthermore, consistent leadership could be the reason for the success of school effectiveness. Evidence abundantly points out that in a secondary school context, a principal's consistent leadership could be a key to school improvement. This includes shifting a secondary school from a condition of underachievement to another one of achievement. It is no surprise that one of the findings in this paper is that consistent leadership style contributes to good learner performance. On this matter, Respondent C of School A bemoans that *"few secondary school principals, myself included, do bother to revise our leadership styles and learn to practice the newly adopted ones in a consistent fashion as a way of making them suitable for our schools especially colleagues and learners, to enable the generation of impressive learner outcomes at all times"*. Respondent G of School D maintains that *"pupil-performance in many secondary schools, is likely to take long to reach the planned requisite heights, given that current school principals, tend to apply contradictory and mixed up leadership styles that fail, to inspire learners to commit themselves more to the engendering of magnificent learner outcomes"*. Summing up what has been articulated by the research participants, it is vivid that 21st century pupils are likely to achieve in case a leadership style galvanising them towards their studies does not keep on changing to the level becoming contradictory to the point of defocusing pupils. Clarke (2009) & Equal Education (2018) support the above assertion when advising that struggling to select a consistent leadership style to sow a spirit of self-efficacy within learners and other institutional members, stand to prolong the challenge of overturning poor scholastic learner underachievement as witnessed and experienced in myriad secondary schools of Limpopo Province, South Africa.

Participatory subject allocation

It is unusual for educational institutions to operate in the same fashion from inception to eternity. Nature necessitates that at some stage, an educational institution re-organises, restructures and re-cultures irrespective of the gender of learners at school. This is for proficiency purposes and as part of refreshing an institution, particularly in case the institution has been experiencing pupil-underachievement traceable to learners who protest the imposed teachers as subject allocation is taken to be the competency of the school principal alone (Mabena, Mokgosi, Ramapela, 2021). One the research findings in this paper reveals that scores of the secondary schools were found to be underachieving because of the non-participatory nature in subject allocation. Respondent A of School C reminds that *"when taking over power in this institution to become a school principal, issues of subject allocation were being known to be finalised by a principal without any interference and objection from teachers and learners, I however, notice now that such a practice is exclusionary and requires at least to allow learners to offer inputs on who to teach them, because where pupils are satisfied with a teacher, they are likely to excel in her subject"*. Respondent M of School E contends that *"succeeding to get all the pupils at school to be teachable and ever orderly and disciplined requires that ourselves as SGB Secretaries, we constantly advise school principals to learn to let go some of the powers they have been enjoying as regards making subject allocation unilaterally and in most case to the dismay of some teachers and worse to the total disappointment of learners from whom schools expect good learner achievement"*. These research respondents mean that institutional incumbents, such as learners do get frustrated to always be subjected to schooling that literally and figuratively enslaves them in the form of denying them a fundamental voice of who should teach them particularly at grade 12 level so that they contribute to the reversal and replacement of schooling underachievement with achievement. Admittedly, pupils vent out their anger and embarrassment, by producing poor matric results

that earn their secondary schools, labels of underachieving schools. Clarke (2009) advises that in educational institutions, a barrier or a hurdle must be identified and processes be put in place to formulate solutions based on the cause of that problem. This is exactly what must be done with persistent and stubborn underachievement in secondary schools. Logically, where exclusion of pupils in the subject allocation seem to be the cause of their poor performance or underachievement, then their inclusion in the subject allocation process could be a solution (Fomunyan, 2017, Meador, 2019 & Bada, Tengku, Ariffin & Nordin, 2024).

Revolutionised classroom environment

The successful delivery of an educational service to learners, irrespective of the gender of pupils at school, hinges upon a stimulating classroom environment that promotes and facilitates learner and institutional performance (Maala & Mkandawire, 2022). The review of literature emphasises that those who lord over the secondary schooling sector and those ruled, need to ascertain that there is always sufficient obsession and infatuation for the achievement of learners and their institution within the inducing and healthy schooling environment. One of the research findings in this paper, divulges that plentiful secondary schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa lack revolutionised classroom environments that are essential for excellent scholastic learner achievement. Respondent C of School F narrates that *“with the accumulation of the principal-ship experience especially where one is leading and managing an underachieving public secondary school, one gets a sense that it is little things that are usually taken for granted, like the revolutionised classroom environment, that has a powerful impact of revitalising the teaching mood as well as the learning mood to the degree where lessons delivered inside the classroom become different with dried up learner achievement being instantly restored”*. Respondent H of School B contends that *“no doubt, a revamped schooling environment that generally stimulates and revolutionises the instructional business of the school, is likely to motivate pupils to be studious, and teachers to*

display their teaching mettle, all of which are a precursor to the envisaged scholastic learner achievement”. The expressed views by the research respondents, emphasise how much 21st century secondary school incumbents aspire to meet in a revolutionised and healthy classroom environment which has the potential to improve and enhance both the teacher and learner’s efficacy. Mkhabela (2011) and Ramphela (2011) remind that in the 21st century, secondary schools need to be populated by teachers and learners able to operate in a schooling environment that cajoles them to do tasks voluntarily and well, where force or coercion would have faltered. Modiba (2012) and Juan & Visser (2017) articulate that current secondary schooling deserves and qualifies to be surrounded by classroom and schooling environments like no other, for the minimisation and ultimate removal of underachievement in their midst.

The absence of well- co-ordinated peer teaching

The complexity of schooling is such that at times, pupils inside the same classroom could struggle to comprehend some teachers while comfortable with other teachers. This goes beyond the gender of learners at school. And that is where the appropriateness and relevance of peer teaching come to the picture. Turner (2000) and Bambalele (2019) stress that experimentation with peer teaching could be helpful to learners to avert mass learner underachievement. This implies promoting co-teaching in a schooling sector for the sake of getting all learners to comprehend the subject matter and to perform when being assessed. One of the findings in this paper is that in many secondary schools, underachievement of pupils is ascribed to failure to expose diverse pupils to well-co-ordinated peer teaching. Such a practice of underrating peer teaching is likely to pro-long the problem of learner underachievement which is engulfing myriad secondary schools. (Gae, 2016). Respondent E of School B emphasizes that *“public secondary schools, especially those that are underachieving and that have long experimented with peer teaching, are currently reaping the fruits of being innovative and inventive when*

other schools are still fearful that such a practice would mount chaos and create a disharmony within the teaching personnel". Respondent G of School C asserts that *"moving forward with educational changes, when one is a school principal, is more beneficial and helpful than many realize referring to how current pupils appear to be responding positively to peer teaching in comparison to the old-fashioned one of the past where in case a teacher is incompetent then all pupils become losers in terms of knowledge acquisition, something that could lead to institutional underachievement"*. The expressed views explicitly suggest that the 21st century learners have to be treated differently and heterogeneously compared to their predecessors in as far as partaking in their own lessons goes. This stands to enable them to enliven the classroom set-up, where the bulk of teachers populating schools either make a school underachieves or achieves deliberately or inadvertently. Modiba (2012), Gqirana (2016) and Lara (2018) sum this eloquently when observing that nowadays, the nature of interactions between learners and teachers have evolved whereas things stand, anyway which could lead to pupils learning, has to be embraced and supported. This includes pushing for peer teaching especially in incessantly underachieving public secondary schools.

Conclusion

As it has been displayed in the discussion of the findings of this paper, both the review of literature as well as the theoretical frameworks undergirding the paper, played a critical role in talking to the findings of the paper. In addition, the narrative enquiry and the interviewing techniques together with the theoretical perspectives, provided the better context within which the entire paper had to be located and comprehended. Small wonder that learners, irrespective of their gender, especially those from underachieving secondary schools, were exposed to lack decisive, solid and consistent leadership necessary

for engendering brilliant scholastic learner outcomes. The conclusion arrived at in this paper, is being informed by the perspectives of the school principals and secretaries of the school governing bodies from the underachieving public secondary schools. Their views are as regards whether what removes underachievement in one public secondary school could do the same in another. Evidently, the vivacious spirit of determination that removes underachievement in one secondary school could do the same in other secondary schools with similar enabling conditions and factors in place. The gender of learners is immaterial in this context.

Recommendations

The basis of these recommendations is the discussed findings which are as follow: there is a need especially by underachieving public secondary schools, irrespective of the gender of pupils, to practise decisive, solid and consistent leadership styles to enable practitioners to adapt to the school's practised leadership patterns. In addition, underachieving secondary schools need to consider and heed the learner voice when handling the process of subject allocation. Furthermore, revolutionised classroom environments are necessary in underachieving secondary schools, to keep the spirit of learning by pupils alive, intact and high. Moreover, there is a need to provide learners inside the classrooms with an opportunity of peer teaching as a way of making schooling intriguing and absorbing for all categories of learners. This is an attempt to involve learners as much as possible in their own studies because it is pupils who create underachieving and achieving secondary schools. So, their inclusion in the learning process is logical and not in vain. It is judicious to have learners inside the classroom being active participants of the teaching and learning process because without them there is no schooling and there will again be no talk of an underachieving public secondary schools in Waterberg district, in Limpopo Province, South Africa.

References

Afrita, G.A. & Ahassan, A.T. (2017). The influence of poverty in academic performance of senior high school students in Ghana. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 8 (3):33-42.

- Agesa, L. (2014). Challenges faced by learners with visual impairments in inclusive setting in Trans-Nzola country. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 5 (29): 88-94.
- Alanogly, M. (2022). The role of instructional leadership in increasing teacher self-efficacy: A meta-analytic review. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 23 (2): 233-244.
- Allen, J. (2014). *As a man thinketh*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Arden, P. (2013). *It's not how good you are, it's how good you want to be*. New York: Phaidon.
- Bada, H. A. Tengku, S. Ariffin, T.F. & Nordin, H.B (2024). The effectiveness of teachers in Nigerian secondary schools: The role of instructional leadership of principals. *International Journal Leadership in Education*, 27, 44-71.
- Bambalele, P. (2019). Rapetsoa acts on violence as he reworks "our cry". *Sowetan*, 4 October 2019.
- Bernstein, A. & McCarthy, J. (2011). Teachers poor value for money: Incentives for good educators need to be introduced but the challenge is deeper than training and skills only. *The Star*, 5 October 2011.
- Bodibe, K. (2012). Change is inevitable. *Daily Sun*, 5 June 2012.
- Botha, R.J. (2017). The role of the school principal in the case study of various members' perceptions. *Journal of social science*, 30 (3): 263-271.
- Bush, T. Duku, N. Glover, D. Kiggaundu, E., Kola, S. Mislav, M & Moorost, P. (2019). *External evaluation research report of the Advanced Certificate in Education: .30-School Leadership and Management*. Pretoria: Zenex Foundation.
- Clarke, A. (2009). *The Handbook of School Governors*. Cape Town: Kate McCallum.
- Clark, D. (2010). *Theory X and Theory Y, big dog and little dog's performance juxtaposition*. Retrieved from <https://www.Nwlinl.com>. Retrieved on 14 February 2018.
- Coetzee, S.A. Van Niekerk, E.J. & Wydeman, J. L. (2011). *An Educator's Guide to Effective Classroom Management*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Cohen, L. Manion, L. & Morrión, K. (2007). *Research Methods in Education*. 6th ed. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Creswell, J.W. (2010). *Research design: Qualitative and Quantitative approaches*. London: Sage Publishers
- Creswell, J. W. (2021). *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Du Plessis, E. & Mestry, R. (2019). A focus on improving teaching and learning in rural schools. *Education as Change*, 23 (1):1-18.
- Equal Education (2018). *School Infrastructure*. www.Equaleducation.Org.Za.
- Fomunyan, K.G. (2017). The ideological ware as key to improving learner performance. *Journal of Education Studies*, 16 (1):108-125.
- Gae, W. (2016). Primary school learners' perspectives on factors that impact their learning and wellbeing at school (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.
- Gqirana, T. (2016). Without resources rural schools will continue to underperform- NGO News 24, 2016.01.06 Accessed on the 30 April 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/without-resources-rural-schools-will-continue-to-underperform-ngo-20160106> research. *Journal of Technology Education*, 9 (10): 1-16.
- Harris, A & Jones, M. (2022). Leading underperforming schools. *School Leadership and Management*, 42 (1):1-3.
- Juan, A. & Visser, M. (2017). Home and school environmental determinants of science achievement of south African students. *South African Journal of Education*, 37(1):1-13.
- Khatri, K.K. (2024). Research paradigm: A philosophy of educational research. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, 5, 1435-1440.

- Kuseka, P. (2008). The power within. *Sunday Sun*, 15 July 2008.
- Lara, E.V. (2018). *School identity in the modern world*. Available at [Www.Tieonline.Com](http://www.tieonline.com). Accessed on the 16 March 2019.
- Leedy, P.D & Omrod, J.F. (2010). *Practical research planning and design*. (9th ed.). New Jersey: Pearson Publishers.
- Lee, N. (2023). Teaching is the ultimate step in the acquisition of wisdom and knowledge. *Sowetan*, 3 May 2023.
- Letlalo, J. (2012). Nothing comes easy in this life. *Daily Sun*, 18 May 2012.
- Levin, W.J. (2011). Why our education system is failing. *The Star*, 5 October 2011.
- Maala, M.M. & Mkandawire, P. (2022). An exploratory study of the impact of poverty in secondary school performance in Malawi: Insights from Dedza and Mangochi districts. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 13 (1):82-91.
- Mabena, M. Mokgosi, L & Ramapela, N. (2021). Challenges facing rural schools in Limpopo Province of South Africa. *African Journal of Public Affairs*, 14(1); 1-16.
- Mabote, M.D. (2008). Why Schools Underperform: Some General Causative Factors. Capricorn District. Limpopo Province. An Educational Address During the Curriculum Roadshow Meeting with Mogodumo School Principals in Mogodumo Cluster Gathering. February 16, 2008.
- Marishane, R.N. Botha, R.J. & du Plessis, P. (2011). *School Leadership in a Changing Context*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Masondo, S. (2015). How superprincipals and teachers help matrices soar. *City Press*, 11 January 2015.
- Maxwell, J.C. (2014). *Good leaders ask great questions: Your foundation for successful leadership*. New York: Hachette Book Group.
- Meador, D. (2019). *The role of the principal in school*. Accessed from Wwww. Thoughtco,Com. Accessed on the 22 February 2019.
- Memela, S. (2012). Prophetic Intellectual Leaders. *Sowetan*, 20 June 2012.
- Mgxashe, S. (2011). Time for this carelessness with our lives to be stopped, Mr President. *Sowetan*, 7 December 2011.
- Modiba, N.S. (2011). Every Educational Journey has a Destiny. Capricorn District, Limpopo Province. Paper Presented to Motivate All Learners to Be Aware that Schooling Days are Numbered, 1 August 2011.
- Modiba, N.S. (2012). Every Learner Schools for Himself or Herself not for the Parents. Capricorn District, Limpopo Province. Paper Presented to Motivate Grade 12 Learners to Take Their Studies Seriously, 9 May 2012.
- Moloi, K.C. (2005). *The School as a Learning Organisation*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Mouton, J. (1996). *Understanding Social Research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Mueller, H. (2011). Advocate's Scandal just a tip of the iceberg. *The Star*, 5 October 2011.
- Mugenda, A.G. & Mugenda, B.M. (2003). *Research methods: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. Nairobi: ACTS Press.
- Omar, Y. .A. (2019). Wanted political entrepreneurs to forge a common nationhood in SA. *Sowetan*, 4 October 2019.
- Owen, J.O. (2015). *How to lead: The definitive guide to effective leadership*. 4th ed. London: Pearson.
- Ramphela, M. (2011). The culture of impunity. *City Press*, 14 August 2011.
- Ramrathan. L. (2017). Learner poor performance; Provoking Bourdieu's key concepts in analysing school education in South Africa. *Southern African Review of Education*, 23 (1): 23-36.
- Rush, S. Duku, T. Glover, S.D. Kiggundu, K.F. Kola, M. Mislav, S.R & Moorost, C.V. (2019).

Quitting to glorify underachievement. *Mail and Guardian*, 8 August 2019.

Senge, P. Robert, C. Ross, R.B. Smith, B.J. & Kleiner, A. (1994). *The Fifth Discipline Field-book: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organisation*. New York: Doubleday.

Senyosi, M.S. (2015). The role of teachers' qualifications in the quality of secondary education in Tanzania. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 40(3): 206-212.

Southey, C. (2012). Teaching ruin and warring wallahs. *Mail and Guardian*, 12 April 2012. Turner, A. (2000). *Born to succeed*. Britain: The Falmer Press.

Van Deventer, I. & Kruger, A.G. (eds.) (2010). *An Educator's Guide to School Management Skills*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Zhu, C. Devos, G. & Li, Y. (2011). Teacher perceptions of school culture and their organisational commitment and wellbeing in a Chinese school. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 12 (2): 319-328.

Zuze, T. & Juan, A. (2020). School Leadership and local learning contexts in South Africa. *Education Management Administration & Leadership*, 48, 459-477.

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.19>

CONSTITUTIONALISM AND THE FUNCTIONALITY OF NIGERIA'S FEDERALISM

Samuel Chukwudi AGUNYAI

Postdoctoral Research Fellow

Department of Political Studies and International Relations,

North West University, South Africa

agunyais@oauife.edu.ng

&

Department of Political Science,

Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria

Saheed Ayinla OGUNDARE

*Department of Political Science,
Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria*

&

Victor OJAKOROTU

*Department of Political Studies and International Relations,
North West University, South Africa*

Abstract

The Nigerian federalism distributes political power between national and sub-national governments for effective governing of the country. Despite these constitutional provisions, there is still evidence of undue political interference that tends to undermine the act of constitutionalism by political leaders in Nigeria. This deviation from constitutional mandates constrains the potential benefits of federalism that could otherwise accrue to the nation. Unlike other federal systems, Nigeria experiences pronounced challenges, including ethnic disunity, secessionist movements, state fragility or capture, and persistent disputes concerning revenue allocation and resource control. These issues are, in fact, attributable to the lack of adherence to constitutional stipulations by those in positions of leadership. Although existing scholarship has predominantly investigated the benefits and challenges of Nigerian federalism, limited attention has been devoted to the critical role of leadership compliance as a determinant of these outcomes. Through a document-based analysis of prior empirical studies, this paper examines the extent to which political leaders' failure to adhere to constitutional provisions for federalism contributes to the deterioration of national cohesion and exacerbates political crises in Nigeria. The study broadens the understanding of the consequences associated with disregarding constitutional requirements for federalism. It concludes that adherence to constitutionalism is essential for realizing the positive potential of federalism in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Constitution, Federalism, Leadership, Political Power, Tiers of government*

Introduction

Globalization and technological advancements have turned the world into a global village, increasing interaction among nations, migration, and intercultural marriages. This has made it challenging for any nation to claim cultural homogeneity. Consequently, the importance of federalism has grown as a way to manage diversity. However, federalism is not a one-size-fits-all approach; it is implemented with tailored principles, which include power sharing, constitutionalism, an independent judiciary, a bicameral legislature, and intergovernmental relations, among others. These principles are adapted based on historical conditions and diversities, and their presence is key to identifying a federal state.

The adoption of federalism in each federal

state was driven by various factors and circumstances. These included economic expansion and cooperation, political considerations, defence, and security needs (Burgess, 2006). Additionally, historical events such as the ratification of the United States Constitution in 1787, the formation of the Swiss Confederation in 1848, the passage of the British North America Act in 1867, and the creation of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949 (Elazar, 1987; Hueglin & Fenna, 2007; Lijphart, 1999; Watts, 1998), and sociological factors (Livingston, 1952), was pivotal in shaping the origins of federalism. Such a sociological factor, stemming from the necessity of managing diversity, was the presence of diverse cultures, languages, and religions within the population.

These diversities necessitated a mechanism

for effectively managing these differences. Federalism emerged as a means to address these

challenges by providing a framework for accommodating and respecting cultural and religious identities within a unified political structure. Federalism, therefore, serves as a unifying force, allowing disparate groups to coexist within a single political entity. This concept is encapsulated in the phrase "unity in diversity," which reflects the harmonious coexistence of different identities within a federal state (Amah, 2017; Ojakorotu et al., 2025).

In Africa, several states were established based on the territorial boundaries of existing kingdoms and towns. The formation of the Nigerian state occurred in 1914 when Lord Lugard, representing British colonial authorities, amalgamated the northern and southern protectorates (Campbell, 2018; Afolabi et al., 2025). Similarly, the Ethiopian federation emerged as a result of various kingdoms and major towns uniting to resist colonial forces (Blakemore, 2023), as other states were created by colonial powers for administrative convenience. Federalism holds the view that some federal states were established when independent nations came together for defence or security purposes (Dosenrode, 2010; cited in Tariq et al., 2018). The Ethiopian federal formation serves as an example of this, as the Ethiopian Kingdom collaborated with neighbouring countries to resist colonial forces (Blakemore, 2023). The presence of sociological factors, notably diversity, prompted the adoption of the federal mechanism in these contexts.

Similar to other government systems, running a federal state presents certain obstacles. The difficulty of managing diversity is evident in the role of federalism in this process. The rise of minority groups and the incapacity to meet every need at once might result in discrimination against minorities or the dominance of particular ethnic groups. Managing diversity is just one of the difficulties that come with operating a federal system (George et al., 2017). It covers, among other things, power sharing and resource distribution. A federal state must be based on democratic ideals, respect for human rights, accountability, and supremacy of the constitution, to guarantee legitimacy (Chhetri, 2021). In Nigeria, federalism has been characterized by a

history of centralization, ethnic tensions, and struggles for resource control (Wang, 2023). Issues such as revenue allocation, state autonomy, and the equitable representation of diverse ethnic groups have remained contentious, leading to periodic outbreaks of violence and political instability (Cucinotta, 2023). The functionality of federalism in Nigeria is further complicated by challenges related to corruption, weak institutions, and the manipulation of federal structures for partisan interests.

In addition, it is a fact that Nigerian federalism is faced with contending issues, ranging from strained intergovernmental relations, struggles over resource control, ethnicity, and religious issues. Further, the revenue-sharing formula between the national and subordinate units has remained problematic (Adeyeri, 2018). The allocation of the huge sum of proceeds from oil to the federal government has consistently been challenged by state governments, over the claim that they are closer to the people than the central government (Abegunde, 2013). This imbalance complicates regional disparities and fuels dissatisfaction among marginalized groups. The autonomy of the members of the federation or the states in the Nigerian federation differs. In the Nigerian constitution, Schedule II Pact I, (Item 36,39), the federal government is given the powers to regulate and tax mining operations and maritime shipping and navigation. Whereas the state and local governments are given the powers to regulate primary education, primary health care, and to make edicts and bylaws. Expectedly, each tier of government is required to draw its power from the constitution distinctively; however, evidence reveals poor compliance with this provision by both the federal and state governments. For example, while the federal government unduly intervened in both the affairs of state and local governments, the state government also undermines the autonomy of local governments in Nigeria. The reasons for these unlawful interventions have often revolved around revenue collection, elections, education, and community-based natural resources.

Today, Nigeria's sub-national governments are hardly independent financially without relying

on the monthly allocation from Abuja. This hampers grassroots development, as sub-national governments lack the resources to finance their well-articulated projects independently. The fact that elected governments at the sub-national government level have to rely on allocation from Abuja has unduly empowered the central government, which, in most cases, showcases overbearing power impositions on the sub-national government. For example, the federal government, on several occasions, has replaced the people's elected political leaders with military administrators to govern the state. Constitutionally, state governments are expected to draw power and duties in line with stipulated constitutional provisions; however, evidence has shown that most state governments have had their powers undermined by the federal government. The case in point is that the federal government has always punished the state government for carrying out its constitutional rights of local government creation. Lagos State, under the current President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Rivers State, under Gov. Fubura, and Gov. Adeleke in Osun State, were cases that typified the non-compliance with constitutional provisions by the federal government. This has severe implications for constitutionalism, legitimacy, and good governance.

Problematizing Constitutionalism and Federalism in Nigeria

Nigeria, as a federal state, is expected to uphold principles such as constitutionalism and, rule of law, respect for human rights, accountability, healthy intergovernmental relations, effective and vibrant parliament (Agunyai et al., 2025). Federalism, in itself, is a tool that can be deployed to rule of govern the affairs of a country by promoting unity in diversity, distributing political powers, as stipulated in the constitution, and enhancing the recognition of each tier of government as a distinct entity. With constitutional federalism in place, principles such as the supremacy of the constitution, a vibrant and strong parliament, distinct and clearly defined power jurisdiction, respect for human rights, among others, are expected to be highly func-

tional in Nigeria. However, as Nigeria's democracy continues to decline, political leaders hardly comply with constitutional provisions for federalism. Today, Nigeria is left with the enthronement of political leaders who ascend to power through the pronouncement of the law court and not by the people's vote. Evidence shows that the majority of these leaders often disregard constitutional provisions for their selfish interests. This partly accounts for why Nigeria is currently suffering from state capture by a few political leaders.

In today's democratic systems, strict adherence to constitutional provisions or constitutionalism underlies the functionality and positive outcomes of federalism. Evidence continues to highlight the role of political leaders in this perspective. Political leaders, as key players of federalism, are mainly concerned with the effective utilization of powers drawn from the Constitution for good governance within their respective tier of government. Although these tiers of government are interdependent, such interdependency is expected to be carried out with mutual respect for territorial integrity and not by excessive political interference. However, the reality in Nigeria indicates that despite well-articulated and spelt-out jurisdictional provisions for the practice of federalism, political leaders at the federal and state levels of government often failed to display the act of constitutionalism. The persistent inability of political leaders to be lawful in their practice of federalism is precisely the reason why grassroots development is difficult to achieve in Nigeria. For example, the delay or non-remittance of monthly allocation to subordinate unit governments is likely to limit the capacity of state governments in delivering infrastructure, service delivery, and sustainable development (Agunyai, 2018; Agunyai & Olawoyin, 2019).

Similarly, the failure of Nigeria's political leaders to follow constitutional federalism is probably one of the reasons why the country is in the hands of a few political elites, otherwise known as state capture. Currently, Nigeria's sovereignty is threatened by its inability to effectively

tackle the internal insecurity problem. Today, Nigeria is under the threat of Boko-Haram insurgents, bandits, Fulani herders, and other armed anti-state organizations. This has exposed the weakness of the Nigerian government to the world, leading to the US's designation of Nigeria as a Country of Peculiar Concern (CPC). Today, the US is threatening to invade Nigeria to wipe out the Islamic terrorists and restore peace, but the body language of the Nigerian government is showing otherwise. Unconstitutional practices by the Nigerian governments at all levels have weakened the functionality of federalism in the country. This is so because the Nigerian government fails to follow or comply with constitutional federalism, which could have brought unity in diversity and protection of citizens. Although the Nigerian constitution is written and rigid, it appears that the constitution is practiced selectively and is not binding on all. This accounts for why the Nigerian state has been captured by the few, leaving the majority to bear the brunt of their undemocratic practices (Kaufmann 2024).

Although Nigeria significantly shares attributes (division of powers, independent judiciary, bicameral legislature, different levels of government, written and rigid constitution, among others) of federalism, empirical findings indicate that these attributes hardly exist in real-life situations. This doubt may have arisen due to leadership idiosyncrasies that have continually ravaged the functionality of Nigerian federalism. The influence of leadership idiosyncrasies on Nigerian federalism has thus provoked studies specifically aimed at providing information on how the Nigerian government can promote blueprint federalism, whereas such findings often omit consideration for strict adherence to constitutional provisions by political leaders in the practice of federalism. From the available evidence on this subject matter, it has been observed that most studies often gloss over the act of constitutionalism by Nigerian political leaders as a key determinant of blueprint federalism in Nigeria. Constitutionalism, which is the act of being lawful or complying with constitutional provisions, will go a long way in strengthening

Nigerian federalism. Thus, research in this direction is likely to advance understanding of the utility value of constitutionalism in enhancing the effective functions and positive outcomes of federalism in Nigeria. Functionality in this paper refers to the positive outcomes that the practice of federalism has helped to achieve, such as unity in diversity, reduced political interference, resource control, and equal representation of all ethnic groups.

Literature Review

Constitution/Constitutionalism

In the context of this paper, which seeks to advance knowledge on how constitutionalism strengthened the functionality of federalism, it refers to the basis upon which the people in a country agree to be governed. From this definition, constitutionalism represents the extent to which the exercise of political power is acceptable or legitimate. It also refers to the point where raw political power that can be used to achieve one's will becomes more closely allied to ideas of authority and → acceptability, perhaps granted by the people's consent. This goes to show that constitutionalism limits the powers of political leaders or the government and that such limitations can be enforced through established procedures. With this, constitutionalism means an act of being lawful or complying with established rules and regulations in governing the state or the governed. It specifically connotes that political leaders or governments do not derive their powers from being the leader, but from written laws that accord them the power. This simply means that the primary duty of political leaders or the government is effective governance through adherence to constitutional provisions.

The opposite of monarchy, theocracy, and military dictatorship is constitutionalism, meaning strict compliance with the constitution. This is because all three systems of government derive their powers from inheritance, religious rights or beliefs, and coup d'état. Constitutionalism grants political power through the will of the people, guided by laid-down written laws of the community. While the powers of leaders in the

other three political systems are unlimited, those of constitutionalism are limited by the constitution. Government functionaries, whether elected or not, cannot act contrary to the country's constitution. The foregoing directly speaks to the functionality of federalism. The functionality of federalism is indicated by strict compliance with the Constitution in terms of respect for human rights, undue political interference, reduced ethnic or religious instability, fiscal autonomy, and healthy intergovernmental relations. One of the features of federalism is the supremacy of the constitution, thus, for federalism to function very well in Nigeria in terms of achieving its expected ends, including unity in diversity, fair representation of citizens across the sectors of the country's economy, and commensurate resource control, the Nigerian government must strictly adhere to the constitution to ensure the good of the citizens. With constitutionalism, no one in the country, including the political leaders, is above the law. The extent to which the Nigerian government and political leaders comply with constitutional provisions in terms of constitutionalism is highly doubtful, considering the way its federalism is dysfunctional.

Federalism

Federalism is a system of government that shares power between the national and subordinate units of government. Theoretically, federalism, if effectively implemented, is expected to stimulate unity in diversity by ensuring that all the ethnic or religious groups that form the federation are fully represented and included in the country's political affairs (Majekodunmi, 2015). Federalism has features such as a rigid and written constitution, supremacy of the constitution, clearly defined powers among the different levels of government, separation of powers, checks and balances, respect for human rights, and rule of law, including the independence of the judiciary. Numerous principles have been integral to scholarly discussions surrounding the concept of federalism. These principles are intended to deepen our understanding of federalism across different academic perspectives and bodies of literature. These include: dual sovereignty, constitutional distribution of power,

supremacy of the constitution, independent judiciary, bicameralism, equality of states, and fiscal federalism, among others.

Dual Distinct level of government

The principle of dual sovereignty is a fundamental tenet of federalism. It refers to the idea that the national and sub-national governments are distinct and sovereign, drawing powers independently from the constitution. This concept is rooted in the belief that each level of government has constitutional rights to draw political power from the Constitution, rather than power being concentrated in a single national government. According to Kincaid and Kenison (2012), "Dual sovereignty is the cornerstone of the federal system, recognizing that both the national and state governments are sovereign within their respective spheres". This principle ensures that each level of government is distinct, and each has its own set of powers and responsibilities. In the context of Nigeria, it connotes the recognition of each tier of government as a distinct and sovereign entity. It literally means that any level of government can govern its respective territory independently of the other. It means that the state government, despite its subordinate nature, has its own powers derived from the Constitution, a territory distinct from the national government, and its own government.

The dual sovereignty principle is often traced back to the writings of influential political theorists such as James Madison, who argued in *The Federalist Papers* (1787-1788) that "the powers delegated by the proposed Constitution to the federal government are few and defined. Those which are to remain in the State governments are numerous and indefinite" (*Federalist No. 45*). In practice, dual sovereignty means that the national government and state governments can exercise their respective powers independently, without interference from the other level of government. For example, the federal government regulates interstate commerce, defends the country, and conducts foreign affairs; subordinate units of government are responsible for basic primary education, primary

healthcare, and community development projects (Bowman & Kearney, 2019).

However, the principle of dual sovereignty is not absolute, as there are instances where the federal and state governments overlap or conflict. In such cases, the federal laws supersede those of the state (Chemerinsky, 2019). Despite these potential conflicts, the principle of dual sovereignty remains a cornerstone of federalism, as it reduces the tendency of one level of government to overshadow the other (Kincaid & Kenison, 2012).

Fiscal federalism

The financial independence and revenue-raising authority of both the federal government and the state and local governments are referred to as the fiscal federalism principle. This principle provides for a fair allocation of fiscal powers and guarantees that every level of government has access to enough resources to carry out its appropriate duties. Nigeria's constitution and revenue distribution scheme both uphold the fiscal federalism notion. The Nigerian Constitution gives the federal government and state governments the authority to impose taxes and collect money from different sources (Nwabueze, 2003). Taxes on income, earnings, and capital gains; taxes on foreign trade; and revenues from the exploration and exploitation of natural resources, such oil and gas, are the main sources of funding at the federal level (Nwabueze, 2003). The federal government is in charge of collecting and managing these payments.

However, in Nigeria, state governments have the authority to levy taxes on capital gains, personal income, and the profits of people and businesses that operate in their states (Nwabueze, 2003). They also get a portion of the federal government's revenue through the Federation Account, which is allocated according to a formula that considers land mass, population, and other considerations (Ekpo & Englama, 2008). The Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC), an independent organization tasked with keeping an eye on revenue accruals and advising the federal and state governments on fiscal and revenue allocation issues, is also established under the Constitution

(Nwabueze, 2003). However, Nigeria has had difficulties in implementing fiscal federalism, such as disagreements over formulae for allocating revenue, an excessive reliance on oil earnings, and problems with accountability and transparency in the administration of public funds (Ekpo & Englama, 2008). These difficulties have prompted demands for changes to the federal budgetary structure in order to guarantee a more fair allocation of resources and increased financial independence for state governments. Effective fiscal federalism is crucial in federal systems as it enables both the national and state/regional governments to have the necessary financial resources to carry out their respective functions and responsibilities. It also promotes accountability and encourages efficient resource allocation by linking revenue generation and expenditure responsibilities (Oates, 1999).

Theoretical Underpinnings of Constitutionalism for the Functionality of Federalism in Nigeria

This essay embraces the political philosophy of federalism, which emphasizes that federalism is a superior solution for all problems pertaining to a political system. Because the answer revolves around a political authority, it is political. Thus, political motivations were a major factor in the development of federal systems. Politicians are required to negotiate for a federation under two fundamental conditions. First, nations or governments that feel threatened by other nations' military might and do not wish to face external aggression engage in talks to increase their territory.

Federalism's use as a pivot for managing variety makes political theory applicable to the explanation of constitutionalism and federalism. Federalism is utilized to address political issues that may occur in a state with a diverse population, according to the political philosophy of federalism. This comprises, among other things, inclusion of all diversities, decentralization of power, and fiscal autonomy. There is a solution to these problems in federal principles and procedures. Furthermore, the idea maintains that constitutional federalism, which permits all levels of

government to derive their powers from the constitution, is likely to address all political concerns. This indicates that constitutionalism plays a major role in federalism's ability to maintain unity in variety, fairly represent all tribes or ethnic groups, and resolve the resource control dilemma. It is evident from this analysis that constitutionalism promotes federalism's efficient operation and beneficial results. This is due to the fact that the more government employees follow the nation's written laws, the more effective federalism is. For instance, there are probably fewer instances of excessive political meddling, conflicts over natural resources, and the dominance of political power by one ethnic group, among other things, because every government entity in a federal state receives its authority from the constitution.

The foregoing questions the extent to which Nigerian federalism has achieved its expected ends, as there are several cases of undue political interference, unconstitutional ban of elected government, withholding of state funds, crises over natural resources, incessant ethnic conflicts, and agitations for secession. These further questions constitutionalism, that is, the extent to which government functionaries adhere to the country's constitution. Available evidence shows that one of the reasons why Nigerian federalism has not yielded the expected results is that political leaders and government functionaries often do not comply with the constitutional provisions. Theoretically, Nigeria is a federal state, but practically, Nigeria's federalism lacks some of the unique attributes or indicators (supremacy of the constitution, independence of the judiciary, and non-political interference of the higher levels of government, fair ethnic representation/equality, unity in diversity, among others) of federalism.

Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative research design, which explores the evolutionary origins of federalism. This is done within the framework of Nigerian federalism. The reason is that the framework gives credence to the political system that provides a strategy for mainstreaming

constitutionalism into the functionality of federalism across continents. Despite its critiques, it significantly draws insight from the political theory of federalism as a theoretical framework that guides data analysis and interpretation. Thus, existing literature and the Nigerian constitution were the major methods used in the analysis. Majorly, it relies on previous empirical literature on federalism, institutions, and practices that are related to constitutional federalism. Basically, it is an exploratory and assessment study given the existing and intricate nature of the issues under evaluation. The data were analysed using content analysis.

Explicitly, the secondary methods were obtained from different studies and internet materials, while the data gathered were content-analyzed. In a bid to enhance the validity and reliability of the literature reviewed, the findings were harmonized to align and systematically flow with the study's objectives. The reviewed literature was retrieved through a multistage approach. This embraces the identification, selection, appraisal, and synthesis of qualitative studies related to constitutionalism and federalism. This method advances understanding of the current state of knowledge in the field of federalism and the identified gaps in the literature that require further inquiry (Chenail & George, 2009). The understanding of how the strict adherence to constitutional provisions in the form of constitutionalism enhances the functionality of Nigerian federalism requires a qualitative methodology. This approach suggests data analysis on these variables without the use of statistics or other means of providing a numerical value.

The inclusion criteria of the literature used in this paper are a detailed discussion of the historical perspective of federalism and constitutionalism. Also, literature that discussed attributes, utility value, and challenges of federalism in Nigeria complemented the data collected. In addition, internet materials with a proven record of credible sources that discussed constitutional provisions defining the powers of government functionaries and organs of government in Nigeria were also included in the study. Literature that fails to discuss Nigerian federalism and its

inherent problems was excluded. Online materials that discussed Nigerian federalism, but without verifiable sources, were also excluded. The selected literature forms the larger proportion of data used in this paper, mainly because they are well-articulated in its explanation of the connection between constitutionalism and the positive outcomes of, or functionality of, Nigerian federalism.

Discussion and Findings

Leadership Compliance, Constitution, and the Functionality of Nigerian Federalism

The functionality of federalism largely depends on how its key players or actors obey the country's constitution. This is because constitutional federalism shares political power according to what the law of a country allows. In Nigeria, the constitution recognizes at least two interdependent units of government, namely the federal and subordinate units of government. While the federal government represents the government at the national level, the subordinate units of government are governments at the sub-national level. Indicators of functional federal states include respect and recognition of sub-national governments as distinct and powerful entities with elected or appointed governments, authority, and fiscal autonomy, unity in diversity, judicial independence, supremacy of the constitution, rigid and written constitution, among others. In federal states, each of the levels of government, though largely interdependent, draws power from the constitution, which validates their authority. Similarly, each tier of government has clearly defined sources of revenue as defined by the constitution, from which they deliver services and govern their respective territory (Agunyai et al., 2025).

In addition, national and sub-national governments have established laws as provided by the constitution to regulate and control the behavior of citizens. With these laws, each of them can protect their territory and citizens against crimes, civil unrest, and maintain orderliness within their boundaries (Osifeso, 2011). However, the constitution stipulates that the national laws supersede those of the sub-national laws, in the case of conflict of interest. This particular

constitutional provision raises concern about the claim or belief that the federal government is more powerful than other sub-national governments in Nigeria. This belief may have arisen due to how successive Nigerian governments at the federal level have exhibited overbearing power over sub-national governments (state and local governments in the case of Nigeria). This points to the fact that political leaders and not the country's constitutional federalism are the real problem, why Nigerian federalism has performed below par. Indeed, in the Nigerian context, evidence is much on factors limiting the expected functionality of federalism in Nigeria.

The first factor is the failure of Nigerian political leaders occupying various offices at national and sub-national government levels to adhere to constitutional provisions for federalism. Too often, Nigerian political leaders disobey constitutionally approved procedures for the practice of federalism. This has severe implications for the effective performance outcomes of Nigerian federalism. One of such implications is the unjust removal of elected leaders from office at the sub-national level. The replacement of an elected governor with a military administrator in Rivers State is one of the challenges confronting Nigerian federalism. In the same vein, the refusal of the federal government to remit the monthly allocation to the state government is a flagrant disobedience to the Nigerian constitution that undermines the functionality of Nigeria's federalism. Successive political leaders, especially former president Obasanjo, and the current president, Bola Tinubu, have once denied certain state governments of their monthly allocation. Comparatively, both Obasanjo and Tinubu, as political leaders at the national level, have once denied remitting to Lagos and Rivers States, respectively, their monthly allocation. This attitude questions the compliance of these leaders with constitutional provisions. The way these leaders acted contradicts constitutional federalism.

Findings on the first objective, which aimed at examining leadership compliance to constitutional provisions for federalism in Nigeria, reveal a fiercely contested reality of leadership ad-

herence to constitutional provisions for federalism. In theory, Nigeria is committed to federalism by virtue of its constitution, where decentralization, judicial accountability, and diversity management are given prominence. But in practice, it was revealed that selective compliance, usually engineered by political opportunism and personal ideology, and not constitutional fidelity. It further indicated that the position of leadership quality, more so the orientation and awareness of leaders, holds a determining position in advancing or weakening federal tenets. As in the Nigerian example, such leaders as there are who fall short in a plural imagination appear to ignore ensuring the accommodation of the country's diversity in the state. Such failure works towards undermining inclusiveness and increasing the sense of alienation among a great majority of the country's ethnic and regional constituencies.

The Nigerian instance, specifically, highlights a massive disregard of the federal character principle enshrined in the constitution by President Muhammadu Buhari's regime. The respondents in unison condemned his administration for concentrating appointments along a narrow ethnic dimension at the expense of federal character, thus violating Section 14 of the 1999 Constitution. This concentration of power not only worsened socio-political cleavages but also eroded the level of public trust in the federal system. Although there is a federal constitution, it has been poorly applied, and political leaders give greater preference to ethnic affiliation over national unity. This raises significant questions: Can a federal system function effectively if its ideas are applied unevenly by leadership? How does inconsistency impact grassroots development and national integration? The findings align with the work of Akinola (2020) who examined how Nigeria has struggled with leadership problems through corrupt practices that undermine institutional governance structures, findings of Onyekachi and Hyginus (2020), who specifically addressed the Buhari administration's governance approach, regarding the disregard for federal character principles and concentration of appointments along ethnic lines.

The findings also indicated that the Nigerian

federation has adopted federalism as a means of managing its ethnically divided populations, but its experiences reveal deep-seated issues in reconciling political reality with federalist theory. In Nigeria, the results showed that federalism has increasingly been eroded by centralizing forces, especially since the era of military rule. This has eroded regional autonomy and created a hybrid system in which federal principles are formally upheld. It also reveals how the constitutional arrangement has encouraged a unitary trend and undermined the federal spirit. Additionally, corruption, ambiguous constitutional provisions, and political interests were pinpointed as major obstacles, limiting the capacity of the federal arrangement to facilitate local development and good governance.

Issues of leadership and governance complicate the practice of federalism in Nigeria. The practice of federalism in Nigeria is characterized by hegemony, marginalization, and non-implementation as sources of instability and inequality. The findings critique unequal leadership and foretell emerging crises if developments continue. Ethnic cleavages, institutional fragility, and structural contradictions form the final layer of challenges, particularly for Nigeria's ethnically based federalism. In Nigeria, diversity management is undermined by the weak implementation of constitutional provisions and institutional fragility. The underlying theme in all the contributions is the necessity of reform, extending from reframing inter-governmental relations and institutional consolidation to redesigning federal arrangements that actually make space for the aspirations of plural communities. These discussions highlight the point that while federalism offers a blueprint for unity in diversity, its success is contingent upon sincere political will, inclusive leadership, and robust institutional foundations. These aforementioned challenges align with the findings of Ukpe and Omeonyekwule (2019), Ayele and Fessha (2022), Yimenu (2024) and Ezeudu (2023) who all assessed the challenges of federalism in Nigeria, with specific focus on the dynamics.

Conclusion

The findings validate the fact that leadership dynamics play a critical part in ascertaining the functionality of federalism in Nigeria. Despite constitutional protections in the country, the practice of federalism has a tendency to depend on the political will, values, and integrity of ruling elites. The findings indicate leadership deficits, such as Nigeria's failure to observe the principle of federal character and politicization of ethnicity, as core challenges to federalism. These tendencies reflect that leadership choices either promote inclusiveness and decentralization or promote exclusion and centralization. The research therefore supports that without

constitutionally compliant and responsible leadership, federalism is not possible as intended. Additionally, the evidence partially invalidates the claim that federalism has noticeably encouraged unity in diversity in Nigeria. The Nigerian federalism has not been practically employed, as central control prevails and subnational autonomy remains limited, leading to dissatisfaction and perceived marginalization. While federalism can accommodate diversity to a certain extent, its politically skewed and uneven application in Nigeria has produced contradictory outcomes in promoting national unity.

References

- Aalen, L. (2006). Ethnic federalism and self-determination for nationalities in a semi-authoritarian state: The case of Ethiopia. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, 13(2-3), 243-261.
- Abbink, J. (2011). Ethnic-based federalism and ethnicity in Ethiopia: Reassessing the experiment after 20 years. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 5(4), 596-618.
- Abdullahi, M. S., & Ozden, K. (2021). Challenges of Nigeria's Federalism in Comparison with the United States of America. *Journal of Global Economics and Business*, 2, 123-131.
- Abe, T., & Oladeji, O. (2016). Federalism and Citizenship Dilemmas in Africa: Ethiopia and Nigeria in Comparison. *Global Journal of Advanced Research*, 3, 12.
- Abebe, Z. B. (2018). Developmental State and Ethnic Federalism in Ethiopia:: Is Leadership the Missing Link?. *Leadership and Developing Societies*, 3(1), 95-127.
- Abeeb, A. M., & Rukema, J. R. (2021). Federalism and restructuring in Nigeria democratic system: Perspectives, challenges and prospect. *Journal of Anthropological and Archaeological Sciences*, 3 (5), 1-9
- Abegunde, O. (2013). Mediation in Niger Delta Resource Conflict: Assessing the Determinant of a Successful Process. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 13, 08-13.
- Adetoye, D. (2016). Nigeria's federalism and state reorganization and restructuring: Attempts at national integration through fragmentation. *International journal of academic research and reflection*, 4(2), 40-51.
- Abonyi N. N. (2013). Trends In Morden Public Administration. Enugu. John Jacob classic Publishers Limited
- ACCORD. (2020). Ethnic and religious crises in Nigeria – ACCORD. <https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/ethnic-religious-crises-nigeria/>
- ACCORD. (2020). Ethnic Conflict under Ethnic Federalism – ACCORD. ACCORD. <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/ethnic-conflict-under-ethnic-federalism>
- Adeyeri, O. (2018). Federalism and the Challenges of Nation Building in Nigeria. *International Journal of World Policy and Development Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.32861/ijwpds.410.112.118>.
- Adugna, F. (2011). Overlapping nationalist projects and contested spaces: the Oromo–Somali borderlands in southern Ethiopia. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 5(4), 773-787.

- Aduma A (2019) Fiscal Federalism in Nigeria, issues and way forward, *Journal of Policy and Development Studies*, 4(6) 60-71
- Afolabi, I.T., Agunyai S. C., Phago, K. (2025). Perception on Democratic Governance and Voter Turn-out in Selected African States: A Comparative Analysis. *Foundations and Trends ® in Information Systems*, 11(1), 135-147
- Agbu, O. (2004). Re-inventing federalism in post-transition Nigeria: Problems and prospects. *African Development*, 29(2), 26-52.
- Agunyai, S.C., Ojakorotu, V., Pagho, K. (2025). Ethno-religious Beliefs and Patients' Healthcare-seeking Behavior in Nigeria. *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, 6(6), 761-791.
- Agunyai, S. C., Oluwayori, A.E. Ojakorotu, V. Comparative Analysis of the Functionality of Federalism in the Promotion of Unity in Diversity in Nigeria and Ethiopia (October 10, 2025). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=5586331>
- Agunyai, S. C. (2018). Emerging Governance Crises in Twenty-First Century Nigeria. In. A. Adebusi and K. Ikuteijo (Eds), *Africa Now: Emerging issues and Alternative Perspective*. Springer Publication, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 211-239
- Agunyai, S. C., and Olawoyin, K.W. (2019). Legislative-Executive Corruption and Good Governance in Nigeria: Insights from Buhari's Administration in the Fourth Republic. In Omololu Fagbadebo and Fayth Ruffin (Eds), *Perspectives on the Legislature of Accountability in Nigeria and South Africa* pp.105-119. Springer, Lightning Source UK Ltd, Milton Keynes UK
- Ayoade, J. (2003). The federal character principle and the search for national integration. In K, Amuwo. (eds), *Federalism and political restructuring in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.
- Basu, D. D. (2008). *Introduction to the Constitution of India* (20th ed.). LexisNexis Butterworths.
- Bently, A. (1908). *The process of government: A case study of societal pressure*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bevir, M. (2012). *Governance: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Blakemore, E. (2023). What is colonialism? Culture. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/colonialism>
- Boadway, R., & Shah, A. (Eds.). (2009). *Fiscal federalism: Principles and practice of multiorder governance*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bowman, A. O., & Kearney, R. C. (2019). *State and local government* (11th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Broschek, J. (2022). Federalism, political leadership and the Covid-19 pandemic: explaining Canada's tale of two federations. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 10(6), 779-798.
- Brown, N. J. (2017). *Constitutions in a no constitutional world: Arab basic laws and the prospects for accountable government*. SUNY Press.
- Bulmer, E. (2017). *Federalism*. Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

- Burgess, M. (2006). *Comparative federalism: Theory and Practice*. Routledge.
- Burgess, M. (2012). In *Search of the Federal Spirit: New Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives in Comparative Federalism*. Oxford University Press.
- Burgess, M. (2013). *The Politics of the Constitution: Federalism and Constitutional Change*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Campbell, G. B. F. J. (2018). Lord Lugard created Nigeria 104 years ago. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/lord-lugard-created-nigeria-104-years-ago>
- Chemerinsky, E. (2019). *Constitutional law: Principles and policies* (6th ed.). Wolters Kluwer.
- Chhetri, T. B.. (2021). *Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal: An Assessment of the Rule of Law*. 21. <https://doi.org/10.3126/JPS.V21I0.35258>
- Christin, T., & Hug, S. (2012). Federalism, the Geographic Location of Groups, and Conflict. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 29, 122-93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894211430280>.
- Cochrane, L.. (2018). Book Review: Abbink, Jon. 2017: *A Decade of Ethiopia: Politics, Economy and Society 2004–2016*. 18(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464993417749150>
- Cucinotta, C.. (2023). Nigeria on the Brink: Imperatives of Managing Diversity in a Multi-Ethnic Society. 55. <https://doi.org/10.18276/ap.2023.55-02>
- Ojatorotu, V., Agunyai, S.C., Pagho, K. (2025). Managing Political Conflicts in Nigeria: Insights and Experiences. *African Renaissance*, No. S1, 345-365, <https://doi.org/10.31920/2516-5305/2025/sin1a14>.
- Ojo, E. (2009). Federalism and the search for national integration in Nigeria. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 3(9), 384-395.
- Okoli, F.C. and Onah, Fab O. (2014). *Public Administration in Nigeria: Nature, Principles and Application*. Enugu: John Jacobs Classic Publishers limited.
- Okolie, U. C. (2019). Empirical Study of Federalism and Political Stability in Nigeria. *International Journal of Legal Studies (IJOLS)*, 6(2), 177-196.
- Okotoni, O., & Adegbam, A. (2021). Nigeria's federalism and challenges of implementing federal character principle. *Journal of Public Administration, Finance and Law*, 19, 48-57.
- Olanrewaju, J. S., & Nwozor, A. (2021). Hegemonic rivalry in a peripheral region: An assessment of Nigeria–South Africa's role in African politics. *Insight on Africa*, 14(1), 7–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09750878211042618>
- Onyekachi, E. B., & Hyginus, O. B. (2020). Trajectory of Democracy, Rule of Law and National Development in Nigeria; an Overview of the Muhammadu Buhari Administration 2015 to 2019. *Journal of Current Issues in Arts and Humanities*, 6(1), 15-17.
- Osifeso, B. (2011). The principle of federal character in Nigeria: Implication for federal stability. Retrieved on December 4, 2021 from www.nigeriaworld.com/articles/2011/apr/043.html
- Osman, Y. (2004). National cohesion, national planning and the constitution. In K. Suleiman and A. Abubakar (eds), *Issues in Nigerian draft constitution*. Zaria: Bakara Press Limited.
- Palekar, S. A. (1978). "Federalism: A Conceptual Analysis". *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 39(4), 576.
- Pillah, T. P. (2023). Fiscal Federalism in Nigeria: Empirical Review. *International Journal of Public Administration and Management Research*, 8(5), 136-145.
- Refworld UNHCR's Global Law and Policy Database. (2024). Ethiopia: the curtailment of rights. Refworld. <https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/hrw/1997/en/22143>

- Rhodes, R. A. (1996). The new governance: governing without government. *Political studies*, 44(4), 652-667.
- Rosenau, J. N. (1995). Governance in the twenty-first century. *Global governance*, 1(1), 13-43.
- Samatar, A. (2004). Ethiopian federalism: autonomy versus control in the Somali region. *Third World Quarterly*, 25, 1131-1154. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0143659042000256931>

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.20>

**BEYOND CONTENT MONETISATION: THE REINFORCEMENT OF AFROCENTRICITY
BY WOMEN IN RURAL SOUTH AFRICA**

Kelebogile Kegakilwe
North West University
beautifulkele@gmail.com
ORCID ID: 0009-0000-1058-8141

Abstract

Against the backdrop of vulnerable economic opportunities, the prominence of Content Monetisation

has been well-embraced in many digital communities. Content creators leverage new social media technologies to generate income by creating and distributing content on social media domains. This paper argues that beyond economic objectives, content monetization has induced opportunities for women in rural South Africa to reinforce cultural practices and traditional heritage experiences. The study also found that colonial and apartheid regimes had severely limited African identities and experiences through policy processes. Following the new democratic dispensation, those policies have been repealed, creating space for new legislative laws including those that seek to preserve indigenous knowledge and heritage. In addition, a quest to decolonize African communities amidst global influences and western hegemonies coincides with growing efforts to harness digital technologies for the restoration of African cultures and identities. Not only has decoloniality exerted a paradigm shift in traditional knowledge systems, it has strongly influenced collective agency to inform social and economic transformation. Despite deep-rooted gender inequalities and technology-related constraints, women in South Africa's rural communities are reconfiguring power asymmetries in knowledge systems, cultural heritage, artistic performances and linguistic dominance. This qualitative study draws on secondary data concerning women's participation in content monetization and historical injustices which inhibited South Africa's cultural and traditional practices. It also draws on the participation of women in cultural experiences in the post-democratic era. This paper is divided into seven sections namely; introduction, problem statement, research methodology, theoretical and conceptual framework, literature review, gaps and opportunities in existing laws and policies concerning integrating sustainability and conclusion. The study makes policy recommendations to ensure that women actively participate in the construction and evolution of cultural identities which are not only for digital economic markets but to also form part of a long-time struggle to preserve Afrocentric views in the global order.

Keywords: Content Monetization, Afrocentricity, Cultural Artifacts, Gender Mainstreaming, Legitimacy, Rural South Africa

(i) INTRODUCTION

At least one-fourth of the global population is made up by women living in rural communities. In Africa, more than fifty percent of women constitute population of rural areas. Women in rural communities are vital role players in providing for their families and towards contribution of poverty eradication. Beyond attendance to family welfare, they have also been vital actors in the protection of cultural heritage, language, artistic modes and rituals. As bearers of traditional knowledge and customs and cultural artefacts, they have been crucial in the transmission and sustainability of these key facets (Rita & Kumar, 2024). Despite their contributions, they remain marginalised in many societal landscapes. They are severely limited by gender-blind policy processes which have dire implications on their ability to secure economic opportunities (Ahmed, Umaru & Yusuf, 2022). Despite their limitations, the evolution of digital

technology compels women to create new economic opportunities.

The struggle for women to attain economic independence is largely informed by their lived experiences. Historical legacies of oppressive regimes have entrenched grave disruptions to social, political and economic structures. Endowed with human and natural resources, Africa has been the battleground for 'invasion, occupation and domination' by the Western powers. In the form of colonialism, Europe scrambled for Africa's endowment to amass wealth in its own sovereign states. As a result of Europe's domination, Africa's rich cultural landscapes were eroded and made inferior. Africa's own economic narratives were distorted and replaced by modernity in the form of new technologies and knowledge bases (Ahmed, Umaru & Yusuf, 2022). From the 1500s, at least four slave trades engulfed Africa which saw the continent being stripped off self-determination and brought to disrepute by internal conflicts and division (Nunn, 2008).

Against the backdrop of institutionalised oppression, the emergence of Afrocentricity became significant in countering dominant Eurocentric ideologies. A collection of ideas and activities of Afrocentricity assert that African descendants have a common history, with similar realities in their own social, economic and political strata. Therefore it seeks to validate Africans' views and lived experiences in the global space that has largely contributed to its erosion. Afrocentrists assert that Africans are agents of change and their sustainability can only be achieved when they are central to it (Chawane, 2016). Thus, Afrocentricity is rooted in reclaiming ownership and self-determination of the African people.

Despite their relegation from formalised economic sectors, African women have relied on their indigenous knowledge systems to generate income. Not only did they **participate** in economic markets for their livelihood but they were to a certain extent able to preserve cultural identities and traditional heritage, thus aligning themselves with ideologies of Afrocentricity. Women across the continent have found a niche in their cultural heritage which they recognise as a product and process. They are selective on elements of their culture which they interpret and are able to add value to them (Shongwe, 2025). Literature indicates that during wartime and conflicts, women have used cultural artefacts to reflect on these events and preserved their cultural traditions against threats (Assaou-Dodji & Boateng, 2025). Through products and processes of cultural heritage, African women are able to carry their communal identities into the future.

With a common history, South Africa remains haunted by historical traumas of the colonial rule which have led to disproportionate wealth distribution and participation in economic ecosystems. The formalisation of the apartheid government further deepened the hostilities of the preceding colonialism and slavery (Van Staden, 2024). These well-entrenched economic disparities also intersected with multi-faceted experiences such as patriarchy, class and race. A recent study by the Commission of Gender Equal-

ity (CGE) appreciated the gains of the democratic dispensation and significant strides made to eradicate historical animosities which have denied women fundamental rights to economic participation. Underlying women's limited economic participation are aggressive societal biases, varying educational bases, ownership of assets, among others. The report also distinguishes a South African woman as one defined by the country's historical events. Due to oppressive governments and how they architected spatial dimensions, experiences of South African women vary. That is to say settlements have defined allocation of resources and how they are leveraged in economic participation (Commission for Gender Equality, 2024). Therefore South African women's level of participation in all areas of society relies on their geographical space and place in historical contexts.

In present day South Africa, more women in urban areas participate in formal labour force than those based in rural areas. Urban areas afford women more freedom and employment opportunities, thus enabling them to be part of the **formalised** labour **market**. In contrast, women in rural areas are restricted by deeply engrained gender roles which also affect their freedom to enter formal employment sectors (Dunn, 2024). Exacerbating vulnerabilities for women's participation in the formal labour force also include the Covid-19 pandemic which has heightened job loss and unemployment (Dunn & Maharaj, 2024). Given the responsibilities of care that is commonly bestowed unto women, there is enormous pressure for women in rural South Africa to provide for their families. These family responsibilities have incited the need for women in rural South Africa to take advantage of their factor endowments; indigenous knowledge systems, cultural and traditional assets which when well-utilised may accrue large-scale economic value.

The advent of the content-creator economy offers users of social media domains opportunities to monetise their content. The intent of content monetization is to commodify content which leads to new revenue streams (De Gregorio & Goanta, 2023). Platforms such as Youtube, TikTok and Instagram give subscribers the freedom

to generate income. Despite their extensive footprint, African countries were initially exempted from these content-monetisation initiatives. There was limited economic equity which marginalised African-based users from value addition that is driven by online content creation (Nozulela, 2025). The expansion of social media platforms across African countries has enabled women entrepreneurs to leverage technology-enabled tools for the promotion of their business enterprises (Onyango, 2025).

Despite other discouraging factors, access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has been a key concern in rural South African communities. Demographic factors have been common predictors of ICT coverage in the country with mainly White, Indian and Asian people having access to digital resources. The South African government has argued it still grapples with legacies of the apartheid regime which had concentrated telecommunication infrastructure in urban areas, creating deficits in accessibility of digital solutions. As a result, rural areas have been affected and women bear the brunt of these disparities (Aruleba & Jere, 2022). Barriers to digital access among women in rural South Africa include limited technology literacy. The gender digital divide is a common reality, with more women lacking ownership of computer and mobile phone devices (Shiferaw, 2024). Commitment to redress inequalities in the broader ICT ecosystem has induced institutionalisation of information technology services in rural areas (Joseph, 2011). In consideration of disruptions in traditional heritage and women in rural South Africa's participation in revitalising it, this paper engages on challenges and opportunities in the content monetisation.

(II) PROBLEM STATEMENT

The rise of content monetisation has propagated great interest in how it induces economic benefits. Content creators realise economic value when they are able to create content that enables them to earn money. The different means of generating revenue include marketing affiliation, native advertising and digital news, among others (Violet, 2025).

Due to its penetration and competitiveness,

scholarly discourses have also emphasised on its disruptive nature and dominance against conventional advertising mechanisms (Violet, 2025). Ethical considerations which underscore responsible behavioural patterns are critical to enhance transparency, respect, accuracy and benefits for actors on the monetisation ecosystem (Patalauskaita, 2024). These facets are well-meaning and necessary to establish a healthy digital environment in which content production and consumption can be regulated.

Cultural distortion in Africa has been a result of colonialism which reduced women to the position of subordination. Dube argues that African cultures became more distorted and overpowered by Western cultures, thus the failure to recognise women as role players in their indigenous societies. These include women as crucial actors on social and economic landscapes in their indigenous communities (Dube, 2023). The world views of African cultures and repositioning of women in their indigenous societies resulted in their erasure or limited influence in preserving cultural artefacts and traditions.

Content Monetisation has been significant in advancing liberation. The narrative of knowledge systems only being in the hands of few and institutions of western education has been challenged by digital liberation which now embraces diverse knowledge sourcing. Despite the growing discourses on the importance of resurging African cultures in local and global domains, there is inconsiderate attention on how content monetisation not only enables income revenue but also reinforces the role of women in rural South Africa as custodians and co-creators of indigenous knowledge systems. There is very minimum acknowledgement that women as participants in the content monetisation ecosystem, do not only generate income but also promote discourses on transforming African Knowledge Systems.

(III) Research Methodology

An interpretative research paradigm was employed for this study. It is a qualitative study which posits that individuals' experiences are subjective and are dependent on their given environment (Chinyere & Val, 2023). Therefore it

is underpinned by experiences of the African people in their pursuit of their cultural and heritage ownership. With focus on women in rural South Africa, it highlights their defence for their own cultural identities and heritage on social media avenues. It drew on secondary data which intersected colonial history, gender theories, digital economy, cultural and heritage identities. It also reflected on policy frameworks of social media outlets and other formal institutions which are critical to the distribution of cultural artefacts in South Africa.

For data analysis, the study employed thematic analysis. Through a step-by-step research process, thematic analysis identifies statements and keywords in literature. Subsequently it provides for coding and theming which gives clarity to interpreted data and consolidations of findings at the end of the study (Naeem, Ozuem, Howell & Ranfagni, 2023). Therefore themes were generated and critical to the findings of the study.

(IV) Conceptual and Theoretical Clarification

4.1.1 Content Monetisation

The definition of content monetisation is still in evolution and has not been concretely developed. Content refers to data including images, photos, text, audio and videos which are controlled by social media users. There is user-generated content (UGC) which refers to content created, issued and managed by individuals based on their lived experiences. Leveraging on technology development, commercial enterprises use firm-generated content (FGC) with intentions of sharing it with consumers for the promotion of their brands. In the process of sharing content, firms seek to influence consumer behaviour to increase value addition for their products or services (Chung, 2025). Content Monetisation primarily concerns data generated by a human subject and placed online to be exchanged with others (Ahmad, 2020). Based on these views, it suggests that data is exchanged to influence the perceptions of the targeted audience. There is also economic value to content production which can be commissioned by those producing it in complex networks of consumption.

4.1.2 Gender mainstreaming

The focal point of gender mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality in all facets of society. Since the mid-80s, there has been recognition of obstacles in work sectors, policy and decision-making processes which compromise women's participation (Kataeva, Durrani, Izekeanova & Roshka, 2024). This strategic approach acknowledges that there has been global uniformity in how roles are distinctively allocated to women and men. These roles have gained normality as a result of political, social and economic values which have enlarged gender disparities (Njenga, Karanja, Prain & Lee-Smith, 2011).

In frameworks of technology, gender mainstreaming recognises barriers which have led to women being marginalised from the competitive digital economy. There are concerns of the digital divide, varying motivations and capacity in utilising technology facilities (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020). These arguments highlight power asymmetries which inhibit usage and access of digital technologies used in social media networks. In the context of this discussion, the gender mainstreaming approach is important to underscore the failure to empower women as custodians and producers of cultural artefacts which also enable them to generate economic value.

4.1.3 Afrocentricity

Although the concept Afrocentricity was popularised by Molefi Asante in the 1980s, ideologies related to it were already propagated by scholars such as Marcus Garvey. While Garvey's contributions have been profound, it was his successors who cemented the concept as an intellectual and political movement (Chawane, 2016). It recognises the afflictions of colonialism and slavery on African descendants. It places knowledge, values, interests and ideas of African people at the core of their evolution. Contemporary scholars of Afrocentricity like Kgothatso Shai posit that it influences knowledge production that is considerate of lived experiences of African people. Knowledge should not be biased, to favour Western ideas

which have serious limitations as they cannot adequately reflect on lived experiences of African people (Shai, 2023). The rise of Afrocentric ideologies have also shaped the development of Pan-Africanism which today asserts that Africans should create [what](#) they want. Speaking to the lived experiences of African women, African Womanism is another ideology considered to be an extension of Afrocentricity in a sense that it endorses the pivotal role played by African woman in ensuring that there is restoration of cultural integrity. Moreover Afrocentricity as a defining set of ideologies within the framework of African Womanism reinforces principles such as justice, order, reciprocity among others. The intersection between Afrocentricity and African Womanism gives a pathway to argue for women being role-players in preserving African societies' lived cultural experiences through their economic empowerment.

(V)Literature Review

5.1. Global Understanding of Content Monetisation

While Content Monetisation is still a developing concept, there is recognition of defining common elements. At the heart of Content Monetisation, there are economic aspirations of stakeholders vested in its ecosystem. The distribution of economic value is guided by policies spearheaded by technology developers and owners of social media platforms. Revenue sharing policies or contracts are a key component of Content Monetisation. Profits are distributed among stakeholders based on their performance. Conditions to these incentives for innovation are generally outlined so as to have mutual agreement and cooperation (Chiridza, 2025). Therefore social media platforms have outlined conditions which guide creators on how they will be incentivized for their content.

Content Monetization is driven by influencers with deliberate intentions of message transmission to a social audience. They shape attitudes and behaviors of their audiences by engaging with them on different facets of their lives. In marketing and public relations, they are assuming roles which were previously delegated to

media or promotional agencies, thus diminishing their economic influence. In particular to social media, these influencers are known as Social Media Influencers (SMI) and are categorized based on the degree of their influence. Mega-influencers are experts in their field and have the largest following. Macro influences are those who enjoy celebrity status, and have enormous influence beyond social media Micro-influencers are ordinary people, commonly with smaller online communities (Conde & Casais, 2023). Therefore, the extent to which they influence views and cultural realities will depend on power dynamics and their networks. As with power relations, those dominating the ecosystem are able to set trends which are then consumed by those below in the hierarchy.

As already mentioned, there are disruptions of functions carried out by corporate marketing entities. Given their huge following, individuals with no background in media or professional artistry can carry out marketing and promotion responsibilities. Their substantial presence on social media platforms enables them to distribute content on behalf of business enterprises that they have partnered with. Because social media influencers enjoy content visibility within their online communities, they are appealing to business enterprises whose offerings are also resonating with their audiences. These social media influencers are revolutionary in a sense that their promotions are catering for a particular online community, therefore building more intimate relationships with their audience (Pitafi & Awan, 2024).

Due to the dynamic nature of technology, it is expected that key actors in content monetization including users, creators and advertisers adjust to those changes. For example, the dominance of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is an external force which propels key actors in content monetization to adopt to new technology features. For example, they feature algorithms (Bleier, 2024) which can identify preferences of users and automatically select content that is similar for viewing. Moreover, these new technologies enable personalization, content discovery, filtering of information and enhanced engagement

(Graffius, 2024). Algorithms can therefore facilitate the introduction of content for all key stakeholders, enabling them to fully experience common preferences. For the user, it reduces effort to search for similar content as it is automatically generated and served to them. For the content creator, it results in increased inclination to collaborate and engage with other creators whose preferences are the same. Lastly for the advertisers, it raises awareness of content that resonates with their products and open up opportunities for them to sponsor content which may then be sold by a content creator to potential consumers.

Due to a range of social media platforms, each with its own design and appeal, content creators may oscillate between them to establish following of different communities. This is called creator multihoming as it allows the content producer to belong to 'different homes'. For example, based on the strengths of a particular platform, a content creator may generate similar content but modify it so that it fits in accordingly with audience and technologies that are being offered (Bleier, Fossen & Shapira, 2025). For example, one may create content and distribute it on Facebook, similarly, they may have a following or subscribers that are not on Facebook but on another social domain like Tiktok. Therefore, content may enjoy revenue from different social media platforms, enabling the creator to maximise profitability.

A key advantage of content monetization is the erosion of intermediaries which normally mediated communication received by consumers. Literature on content creation and monetisation identifies influencer autonomy as a compelling feature, empowering creators with increased freedom that is not generally given by traditional media platforms. They have greater self-determination without a need for any formal institution to determine the content that they are producing (Sundet, Steen-Johnsen & Andersen, 2025). It has been common that public content is authorized and disseminated by media outlets. Now, the emergence of content creation on social media platforms enables the creator economy to function with greater independence that

is not limited by any formal agencies. It also reduces operational fees that would be paid to media outlets.

5.2 Intersection of Culture and Content Monetisation in rural communities

Rural communities have resilient ties with the history, cultural and their heritage. A study that drew comparison between urban and rural communities in relation to how they reaffirm local identities found that the latter is deeply immersed in indigenous traditions because they inherit and safeguard their origins. This can be attributed to views that rural residents are born and live in the same communal settlements. Bonds and place identities between individual and social groups are reinforced in rural communities. The awareness of self is intrinsic to social identities enabling individuals to collectively speak of 'we' instead of 'I' (Strandberg & Ek Styvén, 2024). Moreover, scholars have commonly argued that rural communities have been able to reinforce cultural elements because they have relied on physical social interactions (Belanche, Casaló & Rubio, 2021), therefore deepening local identities that are unique to them. The oneness or wholeness in cultural identities is sustained on social media domains when a group of people express similar sentiments of their shared values, heritage and cultural symbols.

As a key component of social media, content monetisation interacts with dynamics of culture and heritage. To understand the context of how social media interplays with Africa's diverse cultures, it is important that historical narratives are being fully appreciated. Consistent with views of Afrocentricity, cultural elements, religions, behaviors and habits of Africans in the continent and those in diaspora have been marginalized (Hafez, El Aziz & Mahmoud, 2023). Because rural communities are custodians of culture and heritage (Belanche, Casaló & Rubio, 2021), they form part of those who have been marginalised and overpowered by colonial and slavery structures. Content created on social media exerts influence on cultural symbols that are belonging to a particular group of people. As ar-

gued by scholars, it sheds light on cultural symbols such as fashion and food that belongs to a particular group of people (Ashar, 2024). So the penetration of social media regimes in rural communities interacts with cultural and heritage elements.

Content Monetization has the ability to underscore cultural preferences of a particular group. Although culture is not fixed and is altered during transmission from one generation to the other, it embodies similar identities at a given time (Mullings, 2000). Cultural commonalities encompass intellectual, artistic, set of beliefs and morals (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). A recent study found that users connect to social platforms for belonging. That is to say individuals are looking for commonalities with others online. They associate themselves with those with similar lived experiences (Bleier, Fossen & Shapira, 2024). This is consistent with other views of Afrocentricity which underscores a common history of African descendants whose preferences in certain elements like fashion, spirituality and cuisine may be similar (Ransby, 2000). By sharing content that a particular online community may associate themselves with, content creators are able to attract users with the same cultural preferences.

Numerous scholars have emphasized on how authenticity empower social media creators. The ability to produce content that is original and belonging to a small community assists to expand content creator's subscription base (Hofstetter & Gollnhofer, 2024). Rural communities embody authenticity in their knowledge such as spiritual, cultural, medicinal and environmental knowledge systems (Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council, 2021). Language, uttered and written is unique to a particular group (Berge & Ledin, 2023). As a result, the ability to promote authenticity contextualized in a particular community heightens a sense of belonging that is experienced by both the content creator and the users.

5.3. African women in Rural South Africa and their Interaction with Culture

The rhetoric of an African woman has been her reduction from all societal spheres. She has been

an object, dejected by oppressive regimes. In the face of adversity, Afrocentricity female scholars like Alice Walker have reaffirmed that despite setbacks undermining African women, they are adequate to alter the status quo (Hafez, El Aziz & Mahmoud, 2023). There is a growing demand to resuscitate African women as cultural custodians who can contribute towards reforms in Africa's education systems. They are recognized for their expertise in storytelling, traditional rituals and African women are envisioned as participants to curriculums integrating indigenous knowledge.

South Africa is not mono-cultural. In present-day South Africa, national unity is promoted by reinforcing multi-culturalism. Despite the institutionalization of multi-culturalism, black South African women find themselves negotiating their identities (Moyo, 2022). While cultural diversity is beneficial, the dominance of Western ideologies entrenched in many social facets have exerted pressure for women in rural South Africa to reconstruct their identities. The idea of 'whiteness' in South Africa set the bar and reinforced standards that other racial groups had to subscribe to for a full social experience (Grootboom, 2024). As argued by literature reflecting on South African women's interactions with western cultures, there is normally a 'cultural-in betweenity'. The idea of 'cultural-in betweenity' views women as social units caught up in a dilemma, between dominant white cultural patterns and their native cultures (Moposho & Stevens, 2013). These cultural negotiations are deep rooted in power imbalances which have deterred women's resilience to uphold their cultures.

The silence of a black woman's voice, living in rural South Africa has also affected how they project pride in their cultural experiences and artefacts. Despite the silencing of their experiences, they have been resilient and determined to preserve and uphold their cultures. For example, the celebrated artwork of Esther Mahlangu has earned her international acclaim, displaying the authenticity and vibrancy of the Ndebele culture. Without formal education, she has been able to defy constraints in Visual Arts. An article titled South Africa: Celebrating Diversity

Through Art, argues that while Mahlangu has exhibited resilience of South Africa's cultural artefacts, many other visual artists are battling to gain entrance in professional spaces (Mnomiya, 2024). Black South African women from rural communities have relied on their knowledge and practices which empowered them to enter consumer markets. Despite financial constraints, they make African accessories like beads and knitwear. They add beneficiation to natural resources such as straw to weave baskets, mats and brooms. Even though these cultural artefacts have survived, they encounter many deficits such as limited entrepreneurial, networking or negotiation skills (Jokia, Swanepoel & Venter, 2021).

Women in rural South Africa are known for their medicinal expertise rooted in traditional healing. Women with a spiritual calling assume roles of *Izangoma* (traditional diviner). Other specialists are *Umthandazi* (Faith Healer) While it is argued that indigenous healing promotes 'wholeness' or holistic health and is complementary to modern psychology and psychiatry, colonial and apartheid regimes deterred their influence in their societies (Edwards, 2010). For example, the enactment of Witchcraft Suppression Act in 1957 limited women in traditional healing practices. Due to growing stigma and labelling female traditional diviners in rural areas as witches, some underwent the 'policing' ordeal (Bennet, 2019). The prominence of Christianity in African societies shunned and nullified African Spirituality. A South African based scholar and traditional healer, Feziwe Ndwayana argued that advances on Christianity were not only entrenched as a faith-based solution, but were part of a capitalist system which reinforced profit-seeking health systems. As a result, Africans would decline African spirituality and medicinal solutions attached to them (Ndwayana, 2022). The marginalization of women as traditional healers also meant that they could not influence and demystify knowledge systems which had undermined indigenous healing regimes.

Even the geographical terrains did not only restrict free movement of African descendants in urban areas. Policies such as Group Areas Act of 1950 and Reservation of Separate Amenities

Act of 1953 were key apartheid legal instruments which limited free movement of African descendants from urban areas. Because cultural artefacts and behaviour are embodied by the human body, it was not possible to reinforce them in urban settings. Earlier scholars in the field of art and performance, argued that art is internalized in the body. The *Embodied Artifacts* include sequencing in dance, trained routines in musical performances (Trnini & Abrahamson, 2012). This implies that denial of free movement equated to denial of cultural artefacts, African languages embodied by women. Because they had restricted access in urban settings, they could not freely partake in processes including live performances.

South Africa's broadcasting industry also restricted the transmission of culture. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) has at least nineteen radio stations which are crucial drivers of indigenous knowledge and the country's diverse cultures. They endorse African Language Service (ALS) as a key component that is formalized and funded by government to ensure there is inclusive cultural coverage (Sixaso, 2025). While these formalized institutions are crucial, they have their own limitations. They are commercialized, and are not economically efficient for women in rural communities who are living under the scourge of poverty. Literature on the role of radio in South Africa's history argues that its inception was inconsiderate of the black population group. As a result, there was limited production of content that enticed indigenous groups. Black South Africans were not included to engage in entertainment and information platforms which whites were privileged with (Nkoala, 2023). Marginalisation of the black population including black women groups meant that they could not promote their traditional customs. These structural systems limited spaces in which women, including those in rural communities to display their cultural products and services. Marketing initiatives to potential consumers beyond their demographic areas became severely compromised. Therefore, they could not commercialise and gain profit from these mainstream media platforms.

With no access to formalized markets, large-

scale advertising space, finances and infrastructure to commodify cultural artefacts, women in rural areas of South Africa have gravitated towards urban settlements like Johannesburg for informal trading (Nxumalo, 2018). With limited job opportunities and high unemployment rate, street trading offered a range of economic opportunities for African descendants. They relied on their knowledge to sell artwork and crafts around tourist attraction sites. Due to increased reception of migrants, informal traders interacted and exchanged knowledge systems with African descendants from other countries (Fourie, Saayman & Blaauw, 2024). Despite opportunities to reinforce cultural artefacts through consumer markets, their work and sales remained confined to those urban areas. While literature on informal trading concerns uneven distribution of economic resources, it is also vital to recognize how denied or limited access disrupted the resilience of African cultures and artefacts in urban areas.

5.4. Women in Rural South Africa and content monetization

When looking closely at how cultural dynamics and women in rural South Africa interact with content monetization, it is very important to also pay attention to the entire influence ecosystem. As already discussed, power relations shape the degrees of influence on social media domains. The hierarchy of power and influence of the entire social domain system shapes cultural artefacts and online communities which are coupled by common identities.

By virtue of having enormous base of followers, macro-influencers have greater influence on culture. Not only do they enjoy better financial returns, they also enjoy high social status which enables their views to be more dominant on social media landscapes. Online communities mirror those in the physical realm. Like in real-life contexts whereby human communities are divided based on their social, different social domains embody these variations. For example, as 'Toks', Tik-Tok users cluster themselves into groups according to their common interests to form online communities (Lechman, 2023). Another study found that Instagram users are

high-income earners while low-income earners normally use Facebook and Tiktok (Yates & Lockley, 2018). They legitimise culture, traditional heritage contained in their content. Tags such as #gogo (female traditional healer), #gobela, #camagu and #dlozi (ancestor) have emerged in content of popular female traditional healers like Gogo Skhotheni and Gogo Maweni. With social status that is equivalent to that of traditional celebrities, they were to a certain extent normalizing language and symbols broadly across social media communities. Literature indicates that macro and mega-influencers tend to have para-social relationships with their followers. That is to say that they may promote cultural values and demystify societal issues, their relationship with their online fanbase is not always reciprocal with tendencies of followers engaging while they are not always responding to posts or comments (Hoffner & Bond, 2022). Contrary to para-social relationships which are synonymous with mega and macro influencers, women in rural communities are able to engage in their intimate online communities, thus reinforcing cultural artifacts and economic markets in their respective communities. This gives online communities constituting of those with similar preferences to operate with a certain degree of autonomy.

To reproduce cultural experiences and artefacts, African women in rural areas have relied on mainstream media platforms which although to a certain extent advocated for indigenous traditions, they have also been limited. A study on how Indigenous Knowledge and cultural practices reported that there were different modes with varying degrees of transmission. These include folklore, informal education, traditional songs, television radio, spirit mediums, formal education and internet. However, nearly fifty percent of indigenous knowledge and cultural practices are transmitted through folklore followed by informal education responsible for just over thirty percent of transmission. As a mode of transmission, traditional songs only accounted for less than ten percent. The rest like television and radio only made minimal contribution towards the transmission of indigenous knowledge and artefacts attached to them

(Malapane, Chanza & Musakwa, 2024).

Mainstream media channels like television and cinemas have previously reproduced and presented African woman as being inferior in their social and professional settings. However, in South Africa these perspectives have been challenged with female-centric television programmes being able to tell stories of African women from their own perspectives. The promotion of African women has been propounded by a shift towards the digital space which has enabled African women to project their lived experiences. A recent study found that black South African women have gravitated towards digital domains like You Tube to resist not only patriarchy, sexism but also misogynistic views which have surfaced with the dominance of colonialism and apartheid Dlamini (Dlamini, 2024).

Despite many setbacks, women in rural areas have navigated through to preserve their respective traditions. Although South Africa is multi-cultural and recognizes twelve official languages, there are issues of ethnic dominance which therefore shape ethno linguistic popularity. For example, the Nguni people make up a significant portion of the country's overall population. This enables the group to influence consumption of traditional artifacts and symbols. Subscription to Content Monetisation by less dominating groups, enable them to commodify their cultural artifacts including their languages. Women from these less dominating groups are able to enter social media spaces to display their creativity and languages. Like elsewhere in the continent, women in South Africa's rural communities are leveraging social media technologies to monetise cultural practices and artefacts. In the process of monetizing cultural artefacts and customs, women in rural areas are also upholding thoughts, values and principles of Afrocentricity. They are advantaged by a favourable political climate which has advocated inclusiveness and the development of rural economies rural economies.

Rural communities still rely on their comparative advantage to produce products or services at lower costs. Due to their comparative advantage in their agricultural sector, women in

rural communities still preserve and monetise cultural artifacts, practices and languages. A discourse by language scholars found that although English is still retained in learning and work institutions, the call for decolonial approaches has altered its status in African communities. These changes have resulted in African languages being dominant in everyday engagements (Posel, Hunter & Rudwick, 2020). Because women in rural South Africa are custodians of intangible traditional heritage such as language and given their educational context, they engage with social media audiences in their native languages. Thus reinforce their indigenous languages with their own authentic elements such as local dialects.

Another social dimension which is advocated by Afrocentricity scholar is the importance of African spirituality. The South African government instituted the Traditional Health Practitioners Act No. 35 of 2004 to recognize traditional healing practices. The legal framework became instrumental in creating shifts from unilateral models which only endorsed western solutions. For female traditional healers in rural communities, it meant that they could better reposition themselves as participants in traditional knowledge and practices. The prominence of 'new-age sangoma' has made it possible for women to branch into digital spaces. Unprecedented events such as Covid-19 reconfigured the mode of consultations usually utilized by sangomas. Prominent discussions during the outbreak of Covid-19 concerned the importance of African healing solutions. In response to President Ramaphosa's failure to acknowledge their contributions, traditional healing practitioners used social media domains to defend their impact on health solutions. Known as an institution comprising of traditional healers including women, Umsamo Institute used Facebook to raise concerns and highlight the significance of African healing solutions amid uncertainties of COVID-19 (Umsamo Institute, 2020). By subscribing and engaging on these online communities, rural women are able to garner support for African knowledge and health solutions.

As a continuous process, decolonisation of food

systems in South Africa has made room for indigenous cuisine. Reflecting on the impact of colonialism on food systems, Esiobu (2025) said 'colonialism began a process of denigration of Africa's taste buds as traditional, and even barbaric'. Food innovation and entrepreneurship from the Global North features and overpowers African cuisine in restaurants. With a political environment that is more conducive than that of their predecessors, young Africans are slowing embarking on food innovation and in the process are also upholding indigenous knowledge systems in areas of placing environmental stewardship at the centre of their economic pursuits. Another contemporary scholar argues that colonialism eroded values of African people which they had vested in food systems. Colonial, apartheid and capitalist regimes enjoyed hegemony, creating unjust food systems. Now in post-apartheid South Africa, pervasive concerns of food insecurities, unhealthy eating habits fueling obesity and environmental erosion are exerting a need for a 'decolonial approach' to make food systems in the country more inclusive (Kesselman, 2022). These discourses are not only reinforcing early scholarly work of Afrocentricity, they have also given a voice to the country's marginalized groups, including women in rural communities who have been inhibited in food systems. The concept of *Mogodu Monday* has become a national trend, and brings together those who enjoy consuming tripe as a traditional dish along with other *pap* (Maize meal) and *dombolo* (steamed bread) and samp (Malema, 2025). The emergence of traditional food on social media platforms reinforces normality of African cuisine beyond special occasions. Based on these views, women in rural South Africa have taken nuanced approaches to ensure that they do not only reverberate economic aspirations in social media domains that generate income. They have also chosen to interpret and entrench learned cultural experiences and practices.

(VI). Gaps and Opportunities in Existing Laws and Policies Concerning Integrating Sustainability.

While there has been significant progress in enabling an advantageous environment for women in rural communities to benefit cultural artifacts in digital economic systems, there are serious policy constraints inhibiting increased participation. The following are recommendation to counter policy setbacks in both Content Monetisation and Cultural Heritage ecosystems.

6.1 Participation in Traditional Leadership and Knowledge Systems

Traditional leadership councils should be more visible on social media domains. This includes implementing policies which foster information-sharing online to counter the digital divide. Although there is the Indigenous Knowledge Act of 2019, it has recorded limited influence. There should be considerations on how traditional heritage can be presented online. These should influence adoption of national policies at local levels to ensure that they present their contextual cultural experiences.

Women should be integrated in these policy frameworks, so as to also reflect on every-day life experiences which are informed by localized cultural experiences. As already discussed, culture is a process and is therefore subjected to change over time. It therefore becomes very important that women in rural communities participate in these modifications which can reflect past and current trends. Active participation in traditional leadership should also give rise to knowledge systems, thus enabling them to be immersed in the evolution of traditional education systems. Active participation enables women in rural South Africa to also lead new discourses on social media domains influenced by emerging processes and trends.

Considering that the young populations constitute the largest number of digital usage, there should be generational mix which enables them to engage with older generations. Policies which foster multigenerational leadership and knowledge structures may enable young women in rural communities to amass knowledge and resources which they may leverage for content monetization. These communal roles also legitimize them as education facilitators on social media platforms, attracting opportunities for

possible collaborations with those who do not necessarily belong to their indigenous communities. For example, official accreditation of women in rural communities as per their association with traditional educational hubs may position them for collaboration with scholars whose interests are vested in indigenous knowledge systems. Likewise consumers of traditional heritage are better protected from misinformation and disinformation when they can verify the authenticity of the content, thus building on trust. The visibility of traditional houses on social media platforms also enhances legitimacy allowing women to not only share content from these institutions but also validate it.

6.2 Human and Cyber Security

Generally, security should be improved to ensure that women are protected beyond online communities. This is especially crucial, given that in most rural communities, security systems are unequally distributed. It therefore becomes necessary to improve general security of women who may be endangered due to their participation of social media domains. For example, in a case whereby women in rural areas are entrepreneurs and do not have the necessary physical infrastructure to carry out their businesses, there should be gender mainstreaming in policing services which aids in the promotion and safety of women. There should be improved awareness and urgency in policing which prioritises cyber bullying when reported. Online gender-based violence should be criminalized and laws such as the Cybercrimes Act of 2020 should be so deeply interwoven in policing systems. This would compel women in rural communities to report cyber-attacks to formal security agencies. Technology developers should also emphasise on cyber security to de-risk gender based violations and should consider local contexts and gender-related crimes in rural communities.

6.3 Investments in Digital Literacy

Concerns of accessibility to technology are not only about the actual resources but also the deficiency of digital education. By creating educational hubs to drive digital economies in rural

communities, government and private partnerships will enable women in those communities to acquire the necessary skills to navigate complex technologies. Furthermore, it increases their chances to *multihome*, meaning that they can interpret the demands of other social domains and also be a part of them. In that sense they can narrow social class disparities which normally exist in the digital domains. They may be able to organize the original content which still retains cultural symbols to cater for online communities which they do not always have access to due to their shortcomings in educational skills. These investments in digital literacy should strike equilibrium to ensure that women in rural South Africa benefit from both modern technology and their native cultures. Due to exploitation of the digital economy, women in rural South Africa should also be taught on how they can better protect innovation of their traditional products.

(VII) Conclusion

Content Monetisation is an instrumental driver of South Africa's digital economy. Moreover, it enables traditional practices to thrive, therefore upholding Afrocentricity as a pedagogical and political movement as envisaged by scholars and preceding generations. Women in South Africa's rural communities remain at the forefront of efforts to preserve culture and traditional identities which can be sustained by future generations to ensure that Africa is not left behind in the reconfiguration of global educational systems. This article looked into traditional barriers as well as present opportunities arising from digital entrepreneurship which allow women to take on other roles such as facilitators in indigenous knowledge systems. It made policy recommendations which should be considered to ensure that there is sustainability of economic aspirations and also cultural identities in processes of content monetization. These include key areas such as better access to digital infrastructure and literacy, increased participation in traditional leadership and education systems, improved human and cyber security. The redress of these deficits may advance justice, equality,

economic independence as propagated by discourses of Afrocentricity.

Reference List

- Ahmad, W.A.Z., Mukhtar, M., Yahya, Y (2020). Defining social content and social content management: serviced science perspective. *Indonesian Journal of Electrical engineering and Computer science* 7 (3): 1453.
- Ahmed, I., Umaru. C. & Yusuf, R (2022). An analysis of the effects of colonialism in Africa. *International Journal of Academic Research*, 8 (6) 47-53.
- Aruleba, K & Jere, N (2022). Exploring digital transforming challenges in rural areas of south africa through a systematic review of empirical studies', 2022. *Scientific African* 16. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sciaf.2022.e01190>. Retrieved 01 November 2025.
- Ashar, L.C (2024) Social media impact: How social media sites affect society. Retrieved on <https://www.apu.apus.edu/area-of-study/business-and-management/resources/how-social-media-sites-affect-society/#about-authors>. Retrieved, 05 February 2025.
- Assaou-Dodji, H & Serwah Boateng, J (2025). Voices of empowerment: Women's role in safeguarding cultural heritage and advancing human rights in Africa. Ghana: University of Cape Coast.
- Belanche,D., Casalo, L & Rubio, M.A. (2021). Local place identity: A comparison between residents of rural and urban communities. *Journal of Rural Studies* 82: 242-252.
- Bleier, A., Fossen, B., Shapira, M. (2024). On the role of social media platforms in the creator economy. *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 41 (3): 411-426.
- Bennet, F. (2019). Femininity and legitimacy: Policing women and 'witches' in post-apartheid South Africa. *Nursing Clio*, 26 February 2019. Retrieved from <https://nursingclio.org/2019/02/26/femininity-and-legitimacy-policing-women-and-witches-in-post-apartheid-south-Africa/>. Retrieved 07 November 2025.
- Berge, K.L & Ledin, P. (2023). Texts as cultural artefacts: Theoretical challenges to empirical research on utterances and texts. In Höög, C, N., Rahm, H & Hammerstad, G (Ed.), *Nordic Perspectives on the Discourse of Things*. London: Palgrave Macmillan Cham.
- Chawane, M (2016) ' The Development of Afrocentricity: A Historical Survey. Available at <https://doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2016/n16a5>> on the 30 October 2025.
- Chinyere, U & Eze Val, H.U (2023).Qualitative research. *International digital organization for scientific Research* 8 (1): 20-35.
- Chiridza., P & Mare, A. (2025). Digital platforms and revenue generation strategies. Retrieved on <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849251343545>. Retrieved 04 November 2025.
- Chung, D.T (2025). How user-generated content on social media platform can shape consumers purchase behaviour? An empirical study from the theory of consumption values perspective', *Cogent Business & Management* 12 (1). Retrieved on <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2025.2471528>. Retrieved 16 November 2025.
- Commission for Gender Equality. (2024) Women in the South African economy. Available at https://www.parliament.gov.za/storage/app/media/OISD/Reports/Commission_for_Gender_Equality/2024/01-08-2024/CGE_Report_Women_in_the_South_African_Economy.pdf on 30 October 2025.
- Conde, R., & Casais, B. (2023). Micro, macro and mega influencers on instagram: The power of Persuasion via parasocial relationship. *Journal of Business Research* 158 on <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113708>. Retrieved 08 November 2025.
- De Gregorio, G & Goanta, C (2023) Content Monetization. Available at <<https://africa.un->

- women.org/en/stories/op-ed/2023/10/think-about-people-first-empower-rural-women on 01 November 2025.
- Dlamini, D. (2024). See me and hear me: Black South African women using Youtube as a site of belonging and visibility. Bloemfontein: University of the Free State Dube, E (2023). The cultural distortion of the African world view and the subordination of women in 'postcolonial' African societies. *South African Journal of Philosophy* 42 (3)
- Dunn, S. (2024). Women's position and barriers in the South African labour market. Human Sciences Research Council, 18 July 2024.
- Dunn, S & Maharaj, P (2024) Female labour force participation in South Africa. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 60 (4): 2672-2690.
- Edwards, S. (2010). On Southern African Indigenous Healing. *Indilinga-African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems* 24 (1) Esiobu, C. (2025). Decolonizing Africa's taste buds for food security and sustainable agriculture.
- Chika For Africa, 06 June 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.chikaforafrica.com/essays/decolonizing-africas-taste-buds-for-food-security-and-sustainable-agriculture>. Retrieved 07 November 2025.
- European Institute for Gender Equality. (2020). Gender equality index 2020: Digitalisation and the future work. Retrieved on https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/toolkits-guides/gender-equality-index-2020-report/gendered-patterns-use-new-technologies?language_content_entity=en. Retrieved 16 November 2025.
- Fourie, A., Saayman, A & Blaauw, D. (2024). Investigating the resilience and challenges of informal street traders in South Africa's tourism sector: A focus on migrant entrepreneurship', *Current Issues in Tourism* 1-16.
- Graffius, S. (2024). How algorithms shape the user experience on social media platforms. Retrieved on <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.29149.01767>. Retrieved 04 November 2025.
- Grootboom, L (2024). Contextualising black women's identity in South Africa through the apartheid archive's system of racial classification: An intersectional African feminist analysis of race, class, and gender within South Africa's political history'. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.
- Hafez, N.H.H., EL Aziz, H.M.A & Mahmoud, M.R. (2023). Internal and external oppression: An Afrocentric study of some selected poems by Alice Walker and Ben Okri. *Occasional Paper* 84. Retrieved on https://journals.ekb.eg/article_337476_23da753d93a3d11ffacb7060d6e98d05.pdf. Retrieved, 05 November 2025.
- Hoffner, C. & Bond, B. (2022). Parasocial relationships, social media, & well-being. *Current Opinion in Psychology* 45: 1-6.
- Hofstetter, R. & Gollnhofer, J, F. (2024). The creator's dilemma: Resolving tensions between authenticity and monetization in social media. *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 41 (3): 427-435.
- Jokia, L., Swanepoel, E & Venter, M. (2021). Economic empowerment of women in the informal African craft industry: The case of Tembisa. *Journal of Economic and Financial Sciences* 14 (1): 578
- Joseph, M. (2011). The potential of ICTs to empower rural women. *IST-Africa Conference Proceedings*. Johannesburg: University of Johannesburg.
- Kataeva, Z., Durrani, N., Izenkova, Z. & Roshka, V. (2024). Thirty years of gender mainstreaming, evolution, development, and future research agenda through a bibliometric approach. *Women's Studies International Forum* 107: 1-13.
- Kesselman, B. (2023). Transforming South Africa's unjust food system: An argument for decolonisation. *Food Culture & Society* 27 (4).
- Lechman, A. (2023). Tiktok made me buy it', South Africans turn to social media app to find deals and products. *IOL*, 11 November 2023. Retrieved from <https://iol.co.za/business-report/economy/2023-11-11-tiktok-made-me-buy-it-south-africans-turn-to-social-media-app-to-find-deals-and-products/>. Retrieved 09 November 2025.

- Malapane, O.L., Chanza, N. & Musakwa, W. (2024). Transmission of indigenous knowledge systems under changing landscapes within the Vhavhenda community, South Africa. *Environmental Science and Policy* 161.
- Malema, P. (2025) Mogodu monday deals around Johannesburg. *Time Out South Africa*, 11 June 202. Retrieved from <https://www.timeout.com/johannesburg/news/mogodu-monday-deals-around-johannesburg-061125>. Retrieved 07 November 2025.
- Moyo, A (2022) 'An exploration of black South African women's negotiation of their racial and gender identities in predominantly white workspaces. Master Dissertation. Durban: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal.
- Mnomiya, N. (2024). South Africa: Celebrating diversity through art. Retrieved from <https://gender-links.org.za/news/south-africa-celebrating-diversity-through-art/>. Retrieved 06 November 2025.
- Moposho, B & Stevens, G. (2016). The thunder before the storm: Identity constructions of black South African female students. Available at <https://asri.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/The-Thunder-before-the-Storm-Identity-Constructions-of-Black-South-African-Female-Students-by-Ms.-Bonolo-Moposho-Prof-Stevens.pdf>.
- Mullings, L. (2000). Reclaiming culture: The dialectics of identity. In 'Dispatches from the Ebony Tower. Intellectuals Confront the African American Experience. U.S.A: Columbia University Press
- Naeem, M & Ozuem, W. (2023). Kerry Howell and Silvia Ranfagni, 'A step-by-step process of thematic analysis to develop a conceptual model in qualitative research', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 22 (11). Retrieved on <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231205789>. Retrieved 25 November 2025.
- Ndwayana, F. (2022). There are many reasons for the increasing number of traditional healers. *Mail and Guardian*, 11 November 2022.
- Njenga, M., Karanja, N., Prain, G & Lee-Smith, D. (2011). Gender mainstreaming in organisational culture and agricultural research processes. *Development in Practice* 21 (3) <<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233104012>. Retrieved 16 November 2025.
- Nkoala.S. (2023). Radio in South Africa turns 100-and collides with podcasting and streaming. *The Conversation*, 10 February 2023.
- Nozulela, M (2025) Tiktok's monetisation gap I Minister Malatsi calls for economic equity for South African creators. *IOL*, 28 March 2025.
- Nunn, N. (2008). The long-term effects of Africa's slave trades. Available at https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/nunn/files/empirical_slavery.pdf on 30 October 2025.
- Nxumalo, M. (2018). Perspectives and experiences of female traders in securing a livelihood in the Warwick market, Durban. Masters Dissertation. Durban: University of Kwazulu-Natal.
- Onyango, C. (2025). Content monetisation to empower women entrepreneurs in Africa. *The African Mirror*, 4 February 2025.
- Patalauskaita, E (2024). Ethical Aspects of Content Creation. Germany: Kiel University.
- Pitafi, Z.R. & Awan, T.M. (2024). 'The rise of influence culture: Marketing, monetization, authenticity in the social sphere'. *Intechopen*, 07 July 2024.
- Posel, D., Hunter, M & Rudwick, S. (2020). Revisiting the prevalence of English: Language use outside the home in South Africa, 2020. 43 (2) *Journal of Multilingual Development*: 1-13.
- Ransby,B. (2000). Afrocentrism, cultural nationalism, and the problem with essentialist definitions of race, gender and sexuality'. In *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower. Intellectuals Confront the African American Experience. U.S.A: Columbia University Press*.
- Rita & Kumar, J. (2024). The Role of Women in Preserving and Promoting Cultural Heritage. *Universal Research Reports* 11 (5): 55-64.
- Shai, K (2023). An Afrocentric critique of South Africa's contemporary knowledge production regime. *EUREKA Social and Humanities* (1): 72-80.

- Shiferaw, Y (2024) A spatial analysis of the digital gender gap in South Africa: Are there any fundamental differences? *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 204. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sciaf.2022.e01190>. Retrieved 01 November 2025.
- Shongwe, V (2025). Celebrating women as bearers of cultural heritage in Africa. *Sunday Independent*, 22 August 2025. Available at <https://sundayindependent.co.za/dispatch/2025-08-23-celebrating-women-as-bearers-of-cultural-heritage-in-africa/> on 17 November 2025.
- Strandberg, C. & Ek Styvén, M. (2024). The multidimensionality of place identity: A systematic concept analysis and framework of place-related identity elements. *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 95.
- Trninic, D. & Abrahamson, D. (2012). 'Embodied artefacts and conceptual performances', 2012. California: University of California.
- Umsamo Institute. (2020). Umsamo Institute Post', 2020 Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/UmsamoInstitute/posts/thokoza-covid-19-has-forced-the-country-to-go-into-its-first-lock-down-post-democ/848025665672745/>. Retrieved 08 November 2025.
- UN Women. (2023). Think about people First: empower rural women. UN Women, 13 October 2023). Retrieved from <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/stories/op-ed/2023/10/think-about-people-first-empower-rural-women>; Retrieved 01 November 2025.
- Van Staden, M. (2024) Colonialism and apartheid stripped black South Africans of land and labour Rights- The effects are felt today. *The Conversation*, 23 September 2024. Available at <https://theconversation.com/colonialism-and-apartheid-stripped-black-south-africans-of-land-and-labour-rights-the-effects-are-still-felt-today-238243>; Date on 30 October 2025.
- Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council website. (2021). 'Traditional knowledge. Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council, 04 January 2021. Retrieved on <https://www.aboriginalheritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/taking-care-culture-discussion-paper/traditional-knowledge>. Retrieved, 05 November 2025.
- Violet, N. (2025). Content monetisation strategies in the digital age: The case of vision media group and nation media group in Uganda. Uganda: The AGA Khan University.
- Yates, S & Lockley, E. (2018). *Social Media and Social Class*. Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University.

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.21>

EDUCATIONAL PARTICIPATION AND ACHIEVEMENT OF TEEN MOTHERS IN THE VHEMBE DISTRICT OF THE LIMPOPO PROVINCE

Mudau T.J

University of Venda,

Thizwilondi.Mudau@univen.ac.za

ABSTRACT

This study explored the educational participation and achievement of teen mothers in South Africa with specific reference to the Vhembe District of the Limpopo Province. This paper investigated school attendance at school and academic performance by teen mothers in the Vhembe District schools. The sample consisted of sixty teenage mothers, eighteen teachers and six principals who were purposively selected. Qualitative research design was used to collect rich descriptive data of teenage mothers on their experiences and attitudes of the phenomenon under investigation, namely, teenage motherhood. Data were collected using in-depth and focus group interviews. The data were analysed thematically by identifying and expanding significant themes that emerged from the informants' perceptions about the academic performance, attendance, and educational achievement of teenage mothers. The study revealed that teen motherhood has a negative effect on their school attendance and academic performance compared to their other peers. The study recommends that learners should focus more on their studies in order to avoid delays and drop out due to being a mother. It is also recommended that teenagers should delay engaging on sex issues because of the consequences thereafter. It is also recommended that government should introduce a new method of disbursing the child support grant which do not cause school absenteeism among teen mothers.

Keywords: Educational Achievement, Teenage mothers, Academic Achievement, Academic Performance, and Educational participation.

1. Introduction

Teenage motherhood is a world problem that affects the social, health and economic status of teenage mothers, whether in the developed or developing countries (National Research Centre for Women and Families, 2001). Teenage mothers are often unprepared for parenthood. The social and economic consequences of early childbirth are profound (Chigona and Chetty, 2007). They drop out of school and take up low paying jobs and, in some cases, never complete their education.

Globally, 15 million women under the age of 20 give birth, representing up to one-fifth of all births, and 529,000 women die due to pregnancy and childbirth-related complications every year (Dev Raj, Rabi, Amudha, Van Teijlingen & Chapman, and 2010).

This social problem is widely documented (United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2001; National Research Centre for Women and Families (NRCWF), 2001; Treffers, 2003; Mayor, 2004). In many industrialized countries such as Britain and USA teenage pregnancy and parenthood (regardless of mental status) have in recent years been identified as social and public health problems that need to be confronted without delay United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2001). Treffers (2003) pointed out that worldwide rate of teenage pregnancy range from 143 per 1000 in Sub-Saharan African countries, to 2.9 per 1000 in South Korea and Japan.

Teenage parenthood has come to be regarded as a significant disadvantage in a world which increasingly demands an extended education, and in which delayed childbearing, smaller families and career for women are increasingly becoming the norm United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2001). More than 30% of 19 years old girls are reported to have given birth (Kaufman and de wet, 2000). Figures from the statistics of South Africa show that in 1 year more than 17000 babies are born to mothers who are 16 years and younger. Of that number, 4000 babies are born to mothers who are under 14 years (Human Science Research Council, 2005). Among many topical issues in the print media are young people who are giving birth at an early age. Freeman(1993) suggests that the cause of early child bearing in South Africa are many including, for example, youth unemployment, poverty, poor education, single parenthood as well as substance abuse.

The objective of this study was therefore to determine factors that influence school participation and performance of teenage mothers. Literature has shown that unintended childbearing is one of the main problems facing society today and it comes with many challenges for example, single parent, economic dependency, drop out and poverty.

This study was more informed by the liberal feminist theory. The liberal feminist theory is preferred over the socialist and radical feminist theories because it stresses the liberation of women more than on focusing on the mere causes of women oppression as is done by the other two theories. The theoretical framework of this study interrogates the ways in which the lives of women are shaped in society and attempts to provide an understanding on how such beliefs and values can be understood in trying to address issues for the emancipation of women, as well as how social justice can be achieved in

society. Liberal feminists believe that through the provision of equal educational experiences for both sexes a genuinely equal society can be developed (Cruddas, 2003).

Education is a fundamental human right for all children, including girls who fall pregnant while at school (Chigona & Chetty 2008). Yet, in many areas of their lives, girls' prospects for education may be diminished because of pregnancy, motherhood and gender discrimination. In terms of the South African Bill of Rights, Section 29 of the Constitution, everyone has a right to basic education (Chigona & Chetty, 2007). This Bill (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996) was made to eliminate any discrimination against sexes and also to promote gender equality.

Statement of the problem

Teen motherhood is one of the problems facing societies in the world in general, and South Africa in particular. This social problem is widely documented by various authors such as Champion (1995) and Richardson (1993). The consequence of early reproduction was also supported by the Minister of Basic Education, Motsekga, in a United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) document, Panday et al (2009) in which she said that the high proportion of unintended pregnancies in South Africa remains a serious problem. Due to teenage motherhood and other contributing variables, which include prior poor school performance, domestic responsibilities and being a primary care giver for the child, school dropout is permanent for teenage mothers (Meekers& Ahmed 1999).

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore the educational participation and achievement of teen mothers in South Africa.

Research Methods

Study Design

In this study, qualitative research method was used to collect rich descriptive data of teenage

mothers on their experiences and attitudes of the phenomenon under investigation, namely, teenage motherhood, participation and performance. As described by Babbie & Mouton (2001), qualitative research was appropriate, in this study, because it was more suited to the exploration, description and understanding of the experiences and attitudes of teen mothers towards learning.

Sampling and sampling size

The sample of this study was made up of sixty teen mothers, eighteen teachers and six principals from six schools in the Vhembe District (that is, ten teen mothers from each school). The population that sample was drawn from was the teenage mothers from grade 8 to 12 at six schools from the Vhembe District. The learners from these schools come from surrounding villages and were exclusively black. A purposive sampling method was used to select all the participants. In purposive sampling, the researcher uses judgment about which respondents to choose, and selects only those who best meet the purposes of the study (Bailey, 1992). The selected participants were selected because of being teen mothers and also because we wanted to find out about their progress in school work and how as young mother coped with school. The criterion for the selection of the participants was that the participants had to be learners at the six schools at the time of study.

Data collection

Focus group interview were conducted in the Vhembe schools during school hours when learners were on break or during free periods from the cluster of six schools by the researcher. Some of the questions asked during the interview were:

1. How prevalent is the problem of teenage pregnancy in the schools in Vhembe District?
2. What factors influence the rate of school attendance by teenage mothers before, during and after pregnancy?
3. What is the nature of curricula support offered by teenage mothers in the basic education

4. How do teenage mothers perform in school before, during and after pregnancy?

Focus group interviews enabled teen mothers to share their experiences and to reach some kind of consensus about the problem. Focus group interview provided opinions and attitudes from the subjects' point of view (Du Plooy, 2002). Focus group discussions were done with selected people, that is, ten teen mothers from each school. Two focus groups per school were done, consisting of five members per group. Follow up comments and questions that were informed by research objectives were made and asked respectively to ensure understanding of emerging themes which were not covered by the schedule. Permission was sought to audio tape interviews and notes were also transcribed and where necessary translated from Tshivenda to English by an expert from Tshivenda section at the University of Venda.

Data analysis

Data were analysed thematically by identifying patterns and themes in the data and drawing certain conclusions from them (Mouton, 1996). Data analysis in qualitative research is an ongoing, emerging, or non-linear process. The main aim was to end up with the key themes that describe the essence of study.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher made an effort to adhere to ethical standards. Ethics clearance certificate was issued by the University of Venda Ethical Committee. Mouton (1996) indicates that every researcher should be ethically sound in order to protect the participants from any physical or psychological harm and treat participants respect and dignity.

Permission to collect data from schools was sought from the District Manager, Circuit Managers and the principals of the schools through written letters and submitted at the Department of Education at the Vhembe District. Learners were engaged in small talk, in order to make them comfortable, and to feel free to answer questions. Parents signed informed consent

form on behalf of learners before participating in the study. Permission was granted to me both verbally and telephonically and also through written letters by the District manager. Participants were made aware of the use of audiotape. Creswell (2003) stipulates that a critical issue in every research is that the participants should grant informed consent before participating in the study. They were also informed about voluntary participation and that they were free to terminate participation in the study without fear of being punished. Confidentiality was also emphasised in this study.

Results and Discussion

Factors militating against the educational participation and achievement of teenage mothers in the Vhembe district schools

Teenage parenthood has come to be regarded as a significant disadvantage in a world in which there are increased demands for an extended education, and in which delayed childbearing, smaller families and careers for women are increasingly becoming the norm (UNICEF, 2001). Mensch, B.C and Llyod, C.B. (2001) maintained that although literature addressing adolescent fertility and childbearing in the developing world is large, few studies focus on the prevalence of schoolgirl pregnancy and its relationship to prior school experiences and subsequent educational attainment. In many developing countries like South Africa, Botswana, Namibia and others, teenage pregnancy is regarded as one of the major barriers to schoolgirls achieving educational success (Department of Education, 2010, Chigona and Chetty, 2007).

Chigona and Chetty (2007) reviewed that teenage fertility is, in fact, the result of a complex set of varied and inter-related factors, largely related to the socio-conditions under which children grow. These factors include:

When young people dropout of school early, often because of economic barriers and poor school performance, they are at significantly heightened risk for early pregnancy;

When they grow up in residential areas where poverty is entrenched, they are at risk of experiencing an early pregnancy; and

When both parents, and in particular the mother, is present in the home, the risk of early pregnancy is decreased.

The following themes derived from the factors contributing to educational participation and achievement of teenage mothers.

Theme1: Child Grant Support

Child support Grant was one of the themes that emerged in the study. A lot of people like teachers and principals were against the child support grant that teen mothers were receiving from government because it makes their work difficult.

At Musina Municipality, one of the principals at school 6 indicated that,

“The numbers of teenage mothers are increasing in my school because every year I have a lot of girls who have given birth.”

He further said that some learners fall pregnant because they believe that having a child will help them alleviate poverty through the provision of a child support grant. “

The above observation was also supported by principals from schools 3, 4, 5 who also maintained that, in their schools classes are full of learners who have given birth and also those who are still pregnant. They further said that schools have problems during the days and which grants are being issued because learners go away and come back the following day.

Theme 2: Child-headed households and children without parental supervision

The child-headed households are commonly defined as households where all members are under 18 years. Child-headed households are identified by Burman (1992) as the major contributors to teenage pregnancy and teen motherhood. As a result of poor or no parental guidance and

control, children engage in sexual activities at a very young age. This is confirmed by Mfono (2003) who conducted a study on teenage pregnancy and his results revealed that teenage pregnancy is high among child-headed households.

The majority of the participants said that it is very difficult to cope with the situation of being in a child-headed household. Looking after a child and managing school work simultaneously is extremely difficult. One of the teen mothers stated that it was very difficult for her to manage the two things (that is looking after a baby and doing school work) because her situation was totally different from other teen mothers. The teen mother from school 1 in focus group two had to say:

“I was on my own due to the fact that my parents passed away and I was the eldest of them all. We were four and I was 15 years. It was very difficult to study. My siblings were also young, and, therefore, could not assist me when I wanted to study. I made a plan that, I should put this child on my back so that, she can sleep, then I will start reading.”

This results were also supported by Thompson cited in Alla, (2009) argues that teenage pregnancy is associated with poor high school performance and decreased earnings in life. Mpaza (2006:25) maintains that once the baby is born, the teenage mother needs more time to look after the baby. Much of the responsibility is carried out during the night, and this creates problems for a teenager, and prevents her from doing her homework and studying. The effects are that the teenage mother will fail to concentrate in the classroom because she would be tired. Consequently, she will perform badly and fail.

Theme 3. Stigma, labelling and spreading of false rumours about teenage mothers

The majority of teen mothers indicated that teachers and school administrators scorned them and made them feel unwelcomed at school. Teen mothers said if they came to class and other learners were making noise, the teachers would say it was the pregnant girls who were making noise. Such treatment by many of the teachers, consequently embarrass the pregnant learners and lessen their desire to come to school.

According to the findings of this study, teen mothers felt that they were not given full treatment by their teachers. The teachers and fellow learners put a good deal of pressure on them without really understanding what the girls were going through. For instance, teen mothers were sometimes ridiculed in front of classmates whenever they failed to meet the class requirements.

One student had this to say:

“Mm..... I was reminded of being a mother by the teacher and I was told that I should not think that I am very special because of my situation. Therefore I ended up responding back very badly towards the teacher and, at that moment I was also crying (Teenage mother 6 from school 4).” In this situation a learner will no longer feel comfortable in class because of the fear that the teacher will be against her because of her bad responses and it makes the learner not concentrate and perform very well.

Theme 4: Effects of teenage motherhood on academic performance

One of the teen mothers said that her performance was good in the past before she became pregnant.

One of the teen mothers from school 3 explained the following:

“After having a baby it

was worse than when I was pregnant because now the baby has added to the workload. During study time, I could not focus because the child needed my full attention. When the child cried and I would have to take care of the child and time would be moving. At that time I would be tired and sleepy resulting in me not doing anything. Consequently, i repeated grades, Mm..., it was very difficult indeed."

The majority of the teen mothers in school 4 indicated that their school performance changed drastically after giving birth. Looking after the child and doing school work are two different things and they both need attention. Teen mothers found that they were failing tests and exams, and this resulted in them to repeating grades. The other thing is that, they did not have enough time to discuss school work with their peers because after school, the children needed their attention.

The majority of the participants said that, it is very difficult to cope with the situation. Looking after a child and managing the schoolwork simultaneously is extremely difficult. One of the teen mothers said that it was very difficult for her to manage the two things that is a baby and school work, because her situation was totally different from that of other teen mothers. Some of the participants said that it was very difficult for them to participate and also perform very well in school due to pressure of having a baby. All these duties face one person, and it is very difficult for such a person to cope with the situation. They also said that this situation has drastically affected their academic performance. Teen mothers also said that they are teased and given names by their peers for being teen mothers. This stresses them and they lose focus. They further said that having a baby when they were

still teenagers made life difficult, and that this could destroy their future. Mpanza, (2006) pointed out that falling pregnant while still at school or at an educational institution generates a set of problems for which the teenagers have to find a solution. He further said that poor academic performance leads to poor employment and financial prospects, which, in turn, may have detrimental effects on all the other aspects of the life of the mother and her baby. Thompson, (2009) argues that teenage pregnancy is associated with poor high school performance and decreased earnings in life. Mpaza (2006) maintains that once the baby is born, the teenage mother needs more time to look after the baby. Much of the responsibility is carried out during the night, and this creates problems for a teenager, and prevents her from doing her homework and studying. The effects are that the teenage mother will fail to concentrate in the classroom because she would be tired. Consequently, she will perform badly and fail

The majority of teen mothers indicated that, it is very difficult to look after a child and themselves, and also to focus on their studies. They further said that when a child is sick, one has to focus on the child and forget about the studies. One cannot concentrate on whatever is taught in class because one would be thinking about the sick child at home.

Theme 5: Dropping out of school

The results revealed different views from the respondents regarding dropping out of school.

One teen mother from focus group 3 in school 4 explained it in this way:

Our performance has deteriorated significantly compared to the past before we get pregnant when we used to score high marks. Now; it is an embarrassment because our grades have fallen below those who perform badly in

the class. (Teen mothers from school 1, 3, 6).

Teenage mothers are often unprepared for parenthood and they drop out of school even before they give birth. According to HSRC (2005) although many girls who fall pregnant hope to return to school and the policy permits this, they find it hard as they have to take care of their children and this interferes with their studies. The findings, thus, revealed that, teenage childbearing is often associated with numerous disruptions for girls, especially when it comes to school attendance. The girls need tremendous support to deal with the disruption (Theron & Dunn, 2006). This means that teen parents face an overwhelming number of difficulties. Parental and peer pressure are far more common than support and understanding. Managing to care for an infant and devoting adequate time to school work is a great challenge for teen parents (Arlington Public School, 2004)

One teen mother from focus group 5 in school 3 and 6 explained it in this way:

Our performance has deteriorated significantly compared to the past before we get pregnant when we used to score high marks. Now; it is an embarrassment because our grades have fallen below those who perform badly in the class.

Research studies in South Africa by Grant and Hallman (2006) and Hof and Richter (1999) revealed that pre-pregnancy school participation and performance were influential factors for teenage mothers who dropped out of school. In both studies, pregnant and former pregnant learners, whose performance had been poor before pregnancy, dropped out of school more than

those who performed well academically. Grant and Hallman (2006) further concluded that, rather than pregnancy being the cause of school drop-out, it was the poor school participation by teen mothers which resulted in them falling pregnant and then dropping out of school.

Pregnancy and dropping out of school in fact, share many common social and economic antecedents, (Lloyd & Mensch, 1999) the most of which are poverty and poor academic performance. They further contend that rather than pregnancy causing girls to dropout, the lack of social and economic opportunities for girls and women may result in unsatisfactory school experiences, poor academic performance, and the endorsement of early motherhood.

These extracts indirectly show how teenage motherhood has interfered with their development. Given the opportunity, it seems that they would first pursue the educational careers and then consider having more children in future.

Limitations of the study

This study was conducted in Vhembe District of Limpopo and it involved sixty teenage mothers, eighteen teachers and six principals from a cluster of six schools and only thus could not be generalised to other districts in the Province. Future research should focus on the management of teenage motherhood and school attendance.

Conclusion

The study concluded that education is the key to success, it opens all the doors for future. Therefore, it is important for teen mothers to continue with their studies so that they can improve their lifestyles.

The study revealed that teenage pregnancy and mothering result in poor academic performance. The pressure of being a young parent results in teenage mothers repeating grades. One of the factors that lead to performance deteriorating is that, teenage motherhood comes with many responsibilities which make it difficult for these learners not to concentrate on their school work.

References

- Arlington Public School. (2004). Teenage Parenting Programme. *International Journal of Multicultural Education* 11:1-15.
- Babbie, E., and Mouton, J., (2001). *The Practice of Social Research (10th ed)*.Thompson Wadsworth , Australia.
- Bailey, K.D., 1992, *Methods of Social Research*, New York, Macmillan
- Burman, L., (1992). The experience of teenage pregnancy in knoppieslaagte. *South Afrin Journal of Sociology*.27 (3), 97-105.
- Campion, M.J. (1995) who is fit to be a Parent? New York Routeledge
- Chigona, A., and Chetty, R., (2007).*Girls Education in South Africa: Special Consideration to Teen Mothers as Learners*. Journal of Education for International Development, 3(1), 1-17.
- Chigona, A., &Chetty R., (2008).*Girls Education in South Africa: Special Consideration to Teen Mothers as Learners*. Cape Peninsula University, South Africa, Cape Town.
- Creswell, J. C., (1994). *Research Design: Qualitative Approaches*. London: Sage.
- Creswell, J., (2003). Social Science Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches. University of Wisconsin: White water.
- Cruddas, L., & Haddock, L., (2003).*Girls' Voices: Supporting girls' Learning and Emotional Development*. London: Trenham Books.
- Dev Raj, A., Rabi, B., Amudha, P., Van Teijlingen, E., Glyn, C. (2010). *Factors Associated with Teenage Pregnancy in South Asia: A Systematic Review*. Health Science Journal, 4(1): 612-645.
- Du Plooy, G.M. (2002) *Communication Research: Techniques, Methods and Applications*. Lansdownre: Juta.
- Freeman, M., de Marrais, K., Preissle, J. &Roulston, K., (1993).Standards of Evidence in Qualitative Research: *An Incitement to Discourse*. *Educational Researcher*, 36 (1): 25-32.
- Grant, M., & Hallman, K., (2006).Pregnancy-related school dropout and prior-school performance in South Africa: *Policy research session working paper No. 212*. New York: Population Council.
- Hof, C., & Richters, A., (1999).Exploring Intersections between Teenage Pregnancy and Gender Evidence Lessons from Zimbabwe. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 3 (1), 51-65.
- Human Science Research Council (HSRC) (2005).*Emerging Voices: A Report on Education in South African Rural Communities*. Pretoria: HSRC.
- Kaufman, C.E, de Wet, T. & Stadler, J. 2000. Adolescent Pregnancy and Parenthood in South Africa, studies in family planning, 32(2), 147-160
- Lloyd, C.B., & Mensch, B.S., (1999).Marriage and Childbirth as Factors in School Exist: An Analysis of DHS Data from Sub-Saharan Africa Population Council Policy Research Divisions Working Paper No. 219. New York: Population Council.
- McMillan, J.H., & Schumacher, S., (2006).*Research in Education: Evidence Based Inquiry*. New York: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Meekers, M. & Udjo, A.1999. *Pregnancy related dropouts in Botswana*. Population studies. 53(3): 195-209.

Mouton, J. (1996). Understanding social research, Pretoria: JL van Schaik

Mfono, Z. (2003). Focus on women in development. Parents and teenage pregnancy crisis in South Africa, SALUS, 13(3), 6-8.

Mpanza N.K. (2006), Educators' attitudes towards teenage pregnancy, unpublished thesis

University of Zululand,

National Research Centre for Women and Families (NRCWF) (2001). Early Puberty in Girls (<http://www.centred4research.org/2010/04/girls-to-women/>)

Panday, S., Makiwane, M. Ranhod, C. & Letsoalo, T. (2009). Teenage pregnancy in South Africa, with specific focus on school going learners. Child, Youth, Family and Social Development, Human Sciences Research Council. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education.

Patton, N., (2001). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Method*, 3rd Edition. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.

Richardson, J.G. (1993). The culture of teenage mothers, State University of New York Press, Albany

Theron, L., & Dunn, N., (2006). Coping Strategies for Adolescent Birth-Mothers who return to School Following Adoption. *South African Journal of Education Vol. 26 (4): 491-499.*

Thompson L.E. (2004). Teenage pregnancy: The missing male factor. Barry University. United States. ProQuest Information and Learning Company

Treffer, P., (2003). *Teenage Pregnancy, a worldwide problem*. Ned. Tijdschr. Geneeskde, 147: 2320-2325

United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2001). *A league Table of Teenage Birth in Rich Nations*. Innocent Record Card No. 3 Florence:

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.22>

THE CONTRIBUTION OF LIVESTOCK TO THE LIVELIHOODS OF SMALLHOLDER FARMERS: INSIGHTS FROM NEWLY RESETTLED FARMERS IN MATABELELAND, ZIMBABWE

Douglas Nyathi,

*School of Public Management, Governance and Public Policy,
University of Johannesburg, Gauteng,
South Africa.*

Joram Ndlovu

*School of Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Howard College, Durban,
South Africa*

Thandeka Yasmeeen Ndaba

*School of Commerce, Department of Public Administration,
University of KwaZulu-Natal, College of Law and Management Studies,
Durban, South Africa*

Abstract

Livestock play a pivotal role in sustaining smallholder livelihoods across sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in semi-arid regions such as Matabeleland, Zimbabwe, where climate variability and recurrent economic shocks continue to erode household resilience. Despite their centrality, the specific contribution of livestock to poverty reduction, livelihood diversification and long-term resilience in newly resettled areas remains underexplored. Persistent structural challenges—including inadequate veterinary and extension services, deteriorated infrastructure, limited access to markets and the absence of affordable credit and insurance—further undermine the productive and protective functions of livestock. Underpinned by the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), this study examined how livestock assets interact with other livelihood capitals—human, natural, financial, physical, and social—to influence resilience and adaptive capacity among resettled smallholder farmers. It also explored the coping and adaptation strategies farmers employ to sustain livestock-based livelihoods amid climatic and economic pressures, with attention to gendered access to resources and institutional support. Findings reveal that livestock serve as both productive assets and precautionary savings, buffering households against food insecurity and income shocks. However, these benefits are weakened by institutional inefficiencies, resource constraints and entrenched gender inequalities limiting women's participation and decision-making power. Social networks, remittances and indigenous knowledge systems emerged as key resilience enhancers. The study concludes that while livestock remain central to rural resilience, their transformative potential is constrained by systemic barriers. We recommend promoting drought-tolerant breeds, strengthening fodder production and water-harvesting systems, revitalizing veterinary and extension services, and developing inclusive, livestock-oriented credit and insurance schemes supported

by gender-responsive and climate-aligned policies.

Keywords: *Livelihoods, Smallholder farmers, Livestock production, Climate change, Resilience*

Introduction and problem context

While extreme poverty rates have declined since 1990, the number of people living in those conditions globally remains unacceptable high. According to the most recent estimates, one in five people in developing regions lived below the international poverty line of USD 1.90 per person per day in 2013 (World Bank, 2017). Although poverty rates have declined in all regions in recent decades, progress has been uneven. Falling poverty levels have been mostly driven by significant advancements in East Asia, the Pacific, and South Asia, leaving Sub-Saharan Africa as the poorest region, housing half of the world's severely poor. Furthermore, as we try to combat poverty, approximately 200 million people remain unemployed and an additional 600 million new jobs will be required over the next 15 years to accommodate growing working-age populations (World Bank, 2013). Livestock can assist rural households in attaining their livelihood objectives. First, they enhance human capital by providing access to food, continued good health and labour for the pursuit of activities. Second, they build social capital, strengthening the cultural diversity and heritage of several ethnic groups and populations. Third, they contribute to the stock of natural capital that provides the resources and services needed to maintain and improve livelihoods. Fourth, they increase physical capital, providing transport, draught power and alternative energy for households to support and improve their productivity. Fifth, they increase the financial capital of families, provide a mechanism for savings, and serve as liquid assets or as credit collateral for securing livelihood goals. Sixth, they act as an important buffer against external shocks (Abed & Acosta, 2017).

Given the rapid growth expected for the sector and the empirical observation that the livelihood of many poor people depends on livestock, the sector's contribution to poverty reduction has been widely anticipated. As noted, livestock play an important role in helping poor households maintain their livelihood levels. However, they may not be able to reap the benefits of the sector's planned expansion. The ability of livestock to turn rapid growth into poverty reduction is determined by a combination of microeconomic and macroeconomic variables. The former includes producers' ability to generate income from their livestock-related assets; workers' ability to pursue expanded employment options; and consumers' ability to profit from more competitive prices (De Janvry & Sadoulet, 2009). The importance of cattle in developing resilience to external shocks has been highlighted. Herds can be considered as a preventative kind of savings because they represent an asset that can be realized when needed (Dercon, 2002).

This becomes especially relevant in periods with low and poorly distributed rainfall, leading to crop failures, and is even more important in the absence of credit facilities (Banks et al., 2001). Under such conditions, farmers owning both crops and livestock can be expected to be more resilient to climatic shocks, or in general, more capable of coping with different types of external stresses. This mechanism, however, can be weakened by several factors. First, poorer farmers may need to conserve a positive livestock holding to maintain a reproductive herd, at least if consumption remains above subsistence level. Second, the insurance function of livestock can be limited by the correlation of income shocks and asset shocks (McPeak, 2017). Third, if, following a crisis, several farmers in the same area decide to sell their livestock to cope with income loss, this will determine a fall in the market price for livestock, and a consequent disincentive to selling additional units (Kazianga & Udry,

2006).

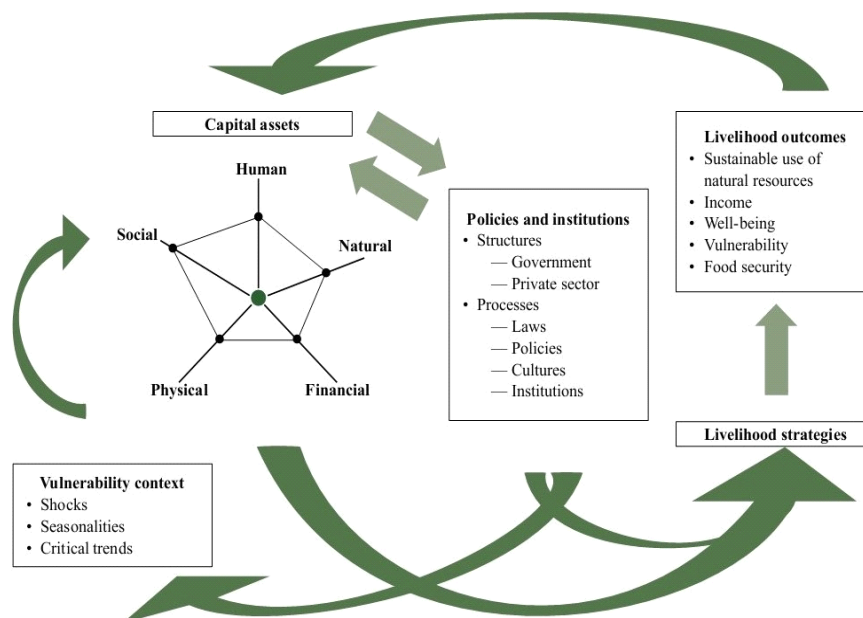
The role of livestock, which touches upon the livelihoods of approximately 60 per cent of the people in Southern Africa, is not fully appreciated. This neglect of the role livestock plays is partly due to a lack of solid empirical evidence on the actual contribution livestock make to livelihoods and the survival strategies that are employed during times of shocks. Understanding the role of livestock in more specific terms could facilitate the development of informed policy and other intervention strategies aimed at further strengthening the livestock-based livelihood systems. This expertise is especially important in Zimbabwe's newly resettled areas, such as Matabeleland, where droughts and seasonal hunger are common and rural people frequently rely on their livestock as a coping method. Matabeleland stands out among the country's regions as having the largest and most diverse smallholder livestock sub-sector. Unfortunately, there is a significant lack of empirical knowledge on the underlying livelihood systems and livestock's position in the hierarchy of livelihood activities. Other studies have found that livestock can affect nutritional status, income, and rural poverty. Recognising the different roles played by livestock in the developing

world is essential to understand the impact of livestock on livelihoods, economic development and the environment. The importance of this article lies in providing a balanced account of the roles of livestock in newly resettled dryland areas of Matabeleland in Zimbabwe. This kind of information is necessary to dissect the key issues in the often ill-informed or generalised discussion on the current and future roles of livestock. Only by understanding the nuances in these roles will we be able to design more sustainable solutions for the sector.

Theoretical framework

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) provides an exceptionally comprehensive and relevant theoretical foundation for analysing the experiences of resettled farmers in Matabeleland. Developed by Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway and operationalized by agencies like DFID, the SLF moves beyond simplistic economic measures to offer a holistic view of how households construct a living by leveraging a portfolio of assets within a specific vulnerability context.

Fig. 1 showing the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF)



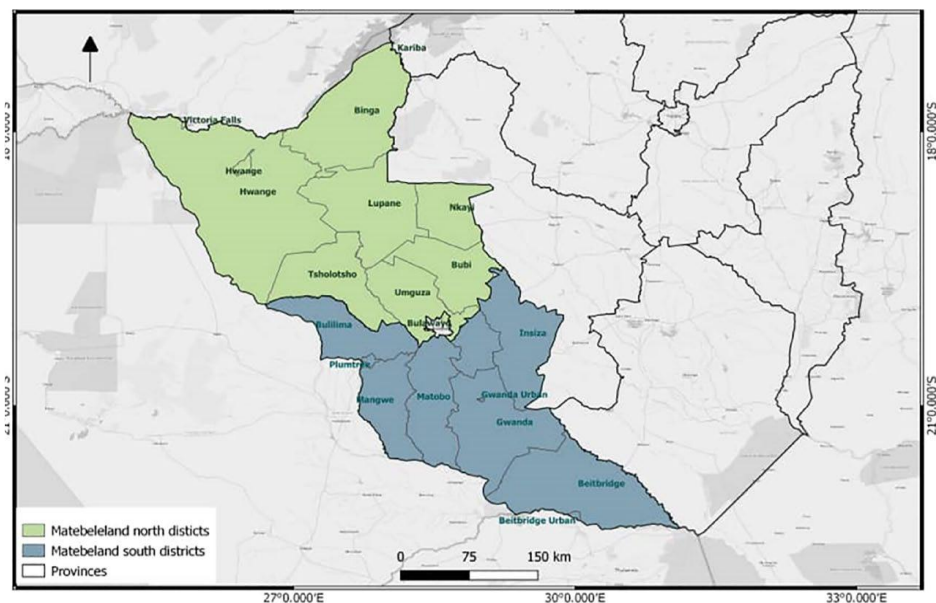
This context—characterised by drought, economic volatility, and the profound policy shift of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP)—creates a landscape of significant risk and uncertainty, making the SLF's asset-based approach particularly apt. At the core of the SLF are the five livelihood capitals. For the resettled farmers, livestock, primarily cattle, are not merely an asset but the central nexus that connects and amplifies all other forms of capital. Livestock are the bedrock of financial capital, functioning as a mobile bank account, a store of wealth, and a liquid asset readily converted to cash in times of need. This financial function is inseparable from social capital; the lending and borrowing of animals reinforce kinship networks and foster new cooperative arrangements for grazing and labour, building critical trust within the new communities. Herd management relies heavily on human capital—the vast reservoir of traditional ethno-veterinary knowledge and expert husbandry practices brought to the

new territories by settlers, many of whom come from agro-pastoral backgrounds. Furthermore, cattle play an important role in the development of physical capital by providing draught power for ploughing and transport, while their dung is essential for enhancing natural capital by fertilising the nutrient-poor soils of Matabeleland. Therefore, the study can intricately analyse how farmers strategically navigate their challenging vulnerability context by continuously converting and combining these capitals, with livestock acting as the fundamental anchor and catalyst for constructing a resilient and sustainable livelihood.

Methods and Materials

The research was conducted from March to June 2020 on three strategically selected farms located in different districts within Zimbabwe's Matabeleland region.

Fig. 2 Map showing districts constituting the Matabeleland region



Source: Authors

The specific sites included Springrange Farm in Umguza District and Rocksdale Farm in Bubi District, both part of Matabeleland North Province, as well as Fox Farm in Matobo District,

situated in Matabeleland South Province. These locations were chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of livestock-dependent livelihoods across diverse ecological and socio-economic contexts in the area. Matobo District,

home to Fox Farm, is situated in the southern part of Bulawayo, bordered by Mangwe District to the west, Gwanda District to the southeast, and Botswana to the south. In contrast, Umguza and Bubi Districts belong to Matabeleland North Province. Umguza District lies adjacent to Bulawayo to the south, Tsholotsho to the west, and Lupane to the east. Rocksdales Farm, one of the research sites, is in Ward 22 of Bubi District, which has a population of approximately 600 people and 44 households, according to the Registrar's Office (2012).

Both Matabeleland North and South provinces are characterised by low agricultural potential due to poor soil quality, unpredictable rainfall and persistent water shortages (Worby, 2001; Umguza District Profile, 2004; Bird et al., 2000). Rainfall is generally insufficient and unreliable for large-scale crop farming. Bird et al. (2000) note that Matobo District receives less than 450 mm of rainfall annually, while Umguza and Bubi have slightly higher averages ranging from 450 to 600 mm. Due to the agro-ecological scenario, most households have adopted diversified livelihood strategies that include small-scale farming, livestock rearing and other off-farm activities. According to Thebe (2011), farmers in Umguza and Bubi primarily raise maize and minor grains for subsistence. Livestock farming, particularly cattle, sheep and goats, is an important aspect of people's lives since it provides revenue, draught power, manure, and social value. Similar trends can be seen in Matobo District, with small grains and cattle farming playing important roles in household economies. However, farming is often supplemented by other livelihood activities such as community-based irrigation projects, small-scale trading, gathering wild fruits and berries, and harvesting Mopane worms, which are consumed locally and sold for cash.

In the study areas, remittances from family members working abroad in countries such as South Africa, Botswana, the United Kingdom, and various European nations play a crucial role in rural livelihoods (Maphosa, 2009). These

funds are vital for ensuring household food security, supporting education, and occasionally investing in agriculture, such as installing boreholes or replenishing livestock. The Ndebele language, widely spoken in the region, has its roots in the Zulu language of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, underscoring significant cultural and historical ties (Tambo, 2013). The study utilized a qualitative-interpretative methodology to acquire a thorough knowledge of the function of livestock in household livelihood sustainability among resettled farmers. This qualitative method was chosen because it emphasizes meaning making, which contributes to a better understanding of how people perceive, interpret, and respond to livelihood difficulties (Bercht, 2019; 2020). Ontologically, the methodology was based on the concept of critical pragmatism (Bhaskar, 2008), which holds that reality exists independently but is only accessible through socially constructed meanings and personal interpretation. This philosophical stance was particularly beneficial in examining participants' experiences within their lived environments (Ayebe-Karlsson, 2016).

The fieldwork involved several visits to each of the three farms throughout the research period. The study conducted thirty in-depth face-to-face interviews with farmers, six focus group discussions (FGDs) lasting between two and four hours each, and fifteen key informant interviews. Key informants were carefully chosen for their expertise and involvement in local administration, development, and agricultural support. Traditional leaders, officials from local governments, NGO field officers, and agricultural extension workers were among those in attendance. Specifically the thirty participants were selected using **purposive and snowball sampling**, targeting households owning livestock for at least five years. **Interview and FGD guides** focused on livestock ownership, functions, challenges, gender dynamics, and coping strategies, ensuring consistency and reproducibility across all data sources. The selected different categories of people were critical in contextualizing the significance of livestock in sup-

porting household livelihoods and giving background knowledge that was not readily available from papers or farmer interviews alone (Marshall, 1996). The study used NVivo software for data analysis, which was critical for dealing with vast amounts of qualitative data. NVivo simplified the tedious process of categorizing and arranging transcripts, allowing researchers to concentrate on finding emergent patterns, creating themes, and making relevant conclusions (Wong, 2008). This systematic approach ensured that the findings were both rigorous and grounded in the participants' voices, thereby enhancing the study's validity.

Results and Discussion

This section of the article presents the results of the study in detail. To ensure clarity and coherence, the findings are organized and discussed using a thematic approach, where key themes emerging from the data are highlighted and elaborated upon. This method allows for the

identification of recurring patterns, shared perspectives, and unique insights from participants. Presenting the results thematically provides a structured way to capture the complexity of issues while remaining faithful to the voices of participants.

Socio-Economic Contributions of Livestock to Resettled Farmers' Livelihoods

The first objective of the study was to explore the socio-economic contribution of livestock to the livelihoods of resettled farmers (See Table 1). This objective sought to examine the multiple roles livestock play in supporting household well-being and a form of household savings and insurance against shocks. It also aimed to understand how livestock ownership contributes to food security, cultural practices, and social status within communities, thereby shaping the overall resilience and sustainability of resettled farmers' livelihoods.

Table 1: Livestock Contributions to Resettled Farmers' Livelihoods through the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework

Capital Type	Livestock Contribution
Human Capital	Improves household nutrition, provides draught power, and supports education and health through income from sales.
Social Capital	Strengthens social status, prestige, and supports cultural practices such as rituals and marriage.
Natural Capital	Provides manure for soil fertility and supports integrated crop-livestock systems.
Physical Capital	Enables acquisition of farming tools, housing, and small business investments.
Financial Capital	Serves as a store of wealth, savings, collateral for loans, and a buffer against shocks.

Participants of the study agreed that livestock play a central role in informing the sustainability of livelihoods in the two study sites emanated from the engagement that livestock keeping is part of the cultural references of the three communities purposively selected for participation in the study. One key informant posited that:

What you need to understand is that livestock rearing is part of our culture. We

keep livestock for a number of reasons, including the appeasement of our ancestral spirits. You will agree with me that in any given cultural gathering, slaughtering an animal is not necessarily for ensuring that the attendees are fed, but also to communicate with the ancestral spirits.

Participants of the study also indicated that livestock is a source of wealth. In one focus group discussion, participants indicated that the more one has livestock, the better in terms of their social standing. Anecdotes revealed that ownership of livestock indicated the purchasing power parity of a given household and the ability to pay debts if given. Further discussions indicated that livestock ownership, especially cattle, indicates not only financial muscle but also the ability to pay for bride price in times of marriage. One in-depth interview indicated that:

What we know in our culture is that having cattle is an indication of the ability to care for the bride and the capacity to respond to shocks in times of difficulties, such as droughts.

It emanated from the participants that livestock, be it cattle or the likes of goats, sheep, and chickens, play a central role in contributing to the household income and food security. Participants indicated that households with livestock (large and small) have better financial capacity than those without. Participants indicated that livestock acts as part of collateral and gives a household prospects to access financial assistance. Those without livestock struggle to secure loans and other financial assistance. One participant alluded that:

Livestock rearing is part of the household wealth. I sell livestock to buy agricultural inputs. I can sell livestock to pay back debts or simply buy my household food. To me, livestock enables us not only to buy food but also to grow food in our fields. In this community, if you do not have cattle or donkeys, you are in trouble in terms of draught power. It is even difficult to have manure for your crops. To me, livestock is the cornerstone of household financial prowess. It is literally everything you can think of. With livestock, there is no way you can fail to bury your dead ones or send children to school or a hospital for attention.

Engagement with participants also revealed that livestock ownership enhances household asset build. In one focus group discussion, participants indicated that with livestock, it is possible

to diversify a household's livelihood portfolio and ability to buy assets. One participant indicated that:

Most of the households without livestock have a limited asset base in this community. Some can't even afford a plough or a hoe to think of. What I am saying is that with livestock, it is possible to buy a house at our growth point. You can even start a business by selling your animals to get some capital. That is impossible if you don't have anything like us. To me, livestock acts as a risk mitigation in times of crisis. If you have livestock, you have a starting point in terms of recovering or dealing with challenges such as hunger or poverty in general.

The findings of this study demonstrate that livestock is central to the socio-economic fabric of resettled farmers' livelihoods, functioning not only as a direct source of food and income but also as a form of insurance and cultural capital. Participants emphasised that livestock rearing is deeply embedded in cultural practices, including rituals and marriage transactions, reflecting earlier studies that highlight the cultural symbolism of livestock in African societies (Scoones, 1992; Maposa, 2016). This aligns with Ellis (2000), who argues that rural livelihoods extend beyond income generation to encompass social and cultural dimensions.

Livestock played a clear role as a form of savings and home insurance, with participants emphasizing its use to fulfil urgent requirements such as funeral payments, school fees, and healthcare expenses. This supports McPeak's (2005) theory that cattle ownership protects rural households from shocks and uncertainty, reducing vulnerability. Furthermore, the findings confirm that livestock improves food security, both directly by providing meat, milk, and draught power and indirectly by generating income for agricultural inputs (FAO, 2009). The link between livestock ownership and social standing underscores Bourdieu's (1986) concept of symbolic capital, which holds that wealth is both economic and social. Households with

more cattle were judged to be wealthy, credit-worthy, and capable of asset accumulation. Similar observations were made by Hoddinott et al. (2015), who found that livestock ownership enhances households' bargaining power and access to credit. Overall, the results underscore livestock's multifaceted contributions to resilience, asset building, and sustainable livelihoods among resettled farmers.

Challenges faced by resettled farmers in livestock production

The second objective of the study was to uncover the challenges faced by resettled farmers in livestock production. This objective sought to investigate the various constraints limiting the productivity and sustainability of livestock rearing among households. By exploring these challenges, the study sought to highlight the structural and environmental barriers that undermine livestock production and farmers' livelihood resilience. Anecdotes of the study indicated that newly resettled farmers face several livestock production challenges. It emanated from focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and key informants that livestock production is made difficult by climate change and variability. Participants indicated that the frequency of droughts was posing far-reaching challenges for smallholders. It stemmed from the engagement that climate-induced water and grazing constraints were negatively impacting smallholder livestock production. This was amply captured by one participant who noted that:

Livestock rearing is a challenge in Mat-abeleland. The region has good agro-ecological characteristics for animal husbandry because of large-scale savannah grazing areas with sweet-grass. Unfortunately, of late, the frequency of droughts accompanied by floods and heat waves is threatening livestock-based livelihoods. We have lost a lot of cattle in this region. Most farmers have exited animal rearing because of drought. Some have abandoned cattle breeding and focused on small livestock, but they have been affected by water and heat waves.

Participants of the study also indicated that livestock production was being affected by limited extension services. It was evident from the participants that newly resettled areas are not well covered in terms of access to extension services.

In one focus group discussion, participants indicated that the lack of infrastructure, including access to the internet, was discouraging extension workers from staying and servicing smallholders in such setups. Specifically, participants indicated that local vet officers had mobility challenges, making it impossible for them to attend to reported sick animals. Although the government had secured motorbikes for some, participants alluded that constant breakdowns and lack of fuel were hindering the discharge of their duties to the best of their abilities. Participants of the study also hinted on vandalism of livestock infrastructure in the study sites. It emanated from the study that animal control fences that were inherited from the white commercial farmers have been vandalised. This was captured in one in-depth by a participant who opined that:

Our biggest challenge in this community is vandalism of livestock handling facilities. You will not believe that fences for paddocks have been removed, and that the local dip tank has been vandalised. How do we increase livestock production without such critical facilities? Without paddocking, we are struggling to control overgrazing and some animal diseases in this community.

Participants of the study also indicated that livestock market distortions were a challenge, especially from private buyers and middlemen. Discussions illuminated the limited access to markets and further complicated the situation of smallholders. It emanated from the study that in some communities' animals were sold for as little as \$100 (USD) during the 2023-24 dry spell. Some smallholders reportedly sold breeding stock for slaughter. Participants of the study also alluded that lack of financial resources, including access to credit, was also a challenge faced by most smallholders. It emerged that lack of access to finance makes it impossible for them to

buy stock feed to mitigate mortality cases. One participant posited that:

Livestock farming is difficult in such semi-arid areas. You need to have access to finance so that you buy stock feed. I have seen that those with children in the diaspora are far better than we are. We have seen them using remittances to buy feed for their animals. Some have managed to drill their own boreholes.

The findings of this study reveal that resettled farmers face multiple challenges in sustaining livestock production, with climate change and variability emerging as the most critical. Participants emphasised the increasing frequency of droughts, heat waves, and floods, which have resulted in water and grazing shortages. Similar observations were made by Ndlovu et al. (2020), who noted that recurrent droughts in southern Zimbabwe have significantly reduced livestock herds, undermining household resilience.

The tendency of smallholders to shift from cattle to small stock as a coping mechanism reflects patterns highlighted by Tsegaye et al. (2013) in Ethiopia, where goats and sheep are increasingly preferred in arid regions due to their drought tolerance. Another significant issue mentioned by participants was limited access to extension and veterinary services. Poor infrastructure, limited mobility, and understaffing in resettled regions all impede timely animal healthcare delivery. This is consistent with the findings of Musemwa et al. (2008), who found that livestock extension gaps in Zimbabwe limit disease control and breeding initiatives. Furthermore, vandalism to vital infrastructure such as dip tanks and paddocks increases disease prevalence and overgrazing, lowering productivity. Market-related issues were also apparent, with middlemen abusing farmers during drought-induced distress sales. Mavedzenge et al. (2006) contend that Zimbabwe's poorly regulated livestock markets frequently disfavour smallholders, pushing them to sell breeding stock at cheap prices. Finally, participants identified a lack of financing as a major barrier to investing in supplementary feeding and water infrastructure. This finding aligns with Aklilu

and Catley (2010), who observed that access to finance is critical in enabling pastoralists across the Horn of Africa to withstand drought shocks.

The gendered dimensions of livestock ownership, management and benefits among resettled households

The third objective of the study was to explore the gender dimensions of livestock ownership, management, and benefits among newly resettled farmers. This objective sought to examine how men and women participate differently in livestock production, the extent of women's access to and control over livestock resources, and how benefits are shared within households. It also aimed to highlight the cultural, social and institutional factors that shape gender roles in livestock systems and influence equity in livelihood outcomes.

The study revealed that livestock ownership, management and the distribution of benefits in newly resettled areas remain deeply gendered. Engagement with participants revealed that men are more likely to possess large animals such as cattle and donkeys, whereas women are more likely to own and care for small livestock such as goats, chickens, and lambs. This allocation reflects broader cultural norms, in which cattle ownership is frequently associated with social status, inheritance, and decision-making power, whereas women's livestock operations are viewed as supplemental to household survival. Focus group talks revealed that, while women are largely responsible for feeding, watering, and caring for small livestock, they frequently lack decision-making authority when it comes to animal sale and slaughter. One female participant remarked:

We look after the chickens and goats every day, but when it comes to selling them, my husband decides. Even if it is me, who buys feed or medicines, I cannot sell without his permission.

This sentiment was echoed across study sites, where patriarchal norms limited women's autonomy over livestock resources despite their significant labour contributions. Key informants

also indicated that bride price (lobola) practices reinforce male control over cattle, further marginalizing women from ownership of larger livestock.

The findings also revealed disparities in how benefits from livestock are shared within households. Men often controlled income from cattle sales, which was typically used for larger investments such as land development, farm equipment or paying debts. By contrast, women's livestock contributions, particularly through poultry sales, were channelled towards daily household needs such as food, school fees, or health expenses. In this sense, women's livestock resources played a crucial role in sustaining household welfare, even though their economic value was often undervalued compared to cattle.

Furthermore, women faced structural barriers in accessing livestock-related services and opportunities. Participants indicated that women rarely attended training sessions or meetings with extension officers, as these were often dominated by men. Time poverty due to household and caregiving responsibilities also constrained women's engagement in livestock marketing or cooperatives. In one in-depth interview, a female farmer noted:

Sometimes training is called by the vet officer, but we are busy in the fields or with children. Men go and get the information, unfortunately they do not share it with us.

Despite these challenges, the study also found that women leveraged small stock as an important entry point for asset building and resilience. Women participants emphasised that proceeds from chickens and goats enabled them to meet immediate needs, thereby reducing vulnerability during crises. This underscores the critical but often overlooked role of women in strengthening household resilience through livestock.

The findings of this study confirm that livestock ownership and management in newly resettled areas are highly gendered, with men dominating

control over large livestock such as cattle, while women are largely responsible for small stock. This aligns with observations by Kristjanson et al. (2014), who noted that across Sub-Saharan Africa, women tend to own poultry and goats, which are more accessible but of lower economic value compared to cattle. The gendered divide of ownership is reinforced by patriarchal norms and behaviours like lobola, which associate cattle with male identity and decision-making power (Chiweshe, 2015). Despite their minimal ownership, women contribute significantly to livestock production, particularly in feeding, watering, and animal care. However, as Doss et al. (2018) argue, women's labour is typically overlooked and their lack of decision-making power limits their ability to fully profit from livestock systems. This is consistent with participants' beliefs that men-controlled income from cattle sales, while women's contributions through tiny shares were discounted. The studies also emphasize women's important roles in home welfare. As Njuki and Sangina (2013) emphasize, income from women-managed livestock is more likely to be directed toward food, education and healthcare, thereby sustaining family well-being. However, structural barriers such as time poverty and exclusion from extension services limit women's ability to participate in training, cooperatives, and market opportunities (Rietveld et al., 2020).

The coping and adaptation strategies employed by farmers to sustain their livestock-based livelihoods in the face of climatic and economic stressors.

Our last research question aimed at exploring the coping and adaptation strategies employed by farmers to sustain their livestock-based livelihoods in the face of climatic and economic stressors. The study revealed that resettled farmers employed a wide range of coping and adaptation strategies to sustain their livestock-based livelihoods amid climatic variability and economic stressors. These strategies reflected both short-term responses to shocks and long-term efforts to enhance resilience in a challenging environment (See Table 2).

Table 2 showing Coping and Adaptation Strategies for Livestock-Based Livelihoods

Strategy	Description
Livestock Diversification	Farmers shifted from cattle to drought-tolerant species such as goats, sheep, and donkeys to reduce climate risks.
Water Management	Investment in small dams, wells, boreholes, and water harvesting systems, though wealthier households had better access.
Supplementary Feeding	Use of commercial stock feeds, crop residues, or fodder crops like banana grass and lablab during droughts.
Distress Sales	Selling livestock, including breeding stock, during droughts to meet immediate needs such as food and school fees.
Livestock Migration	Temporary relocation of herds to better grazing areas, though constrained by land conflicts and a lack of agreements.
Income Diversification	Engaging in trade, gardening, casual labour, and poultry keeping, particularly by women, to reduce reliance on livestock.
Social Networks & Remittances	Use of remittances to drill boreholes, buy feed, or restock herds; community practices like 'ukusisa' supported vulnerable households.
External Support	NGO and government programs for restocking, veterinary services, and climate-smart training are often unevenly distributed.

A key adaptation strategy observed among participants was the diversification of livestock species. Farmers reported shifting from cattle, which are highly vulnerable to droughts, to more drought-tolerant species such as goats, sheep, and donkeys. This was seen as a pragmatic way to reduce risks associated with frequent droughts and heat stress. One participant stated:

We no longer keep many cattle because they die when water and grass are scarce. Goats and sheep survive better. Donkeys are also important because they give us draught power even in dry conditions.

This shift demonstrates how households are recalibrating their livestock portfolios to match

the realities of climate stress. Participants highlighted efforts to improve water availability for animals. Some households invested in small dams, wells or boreholes, often with support from remittances or local development projects. Others relied on water harvesting techniques such as capturing run-off in trenches or tanks. However, challenges persisted for poorer households without resources for such infrastructure. As one farmer noted:

Those with money from children abroad drill boreholes, but we depend on rivers that dry up quickly.

Another coping strategy was the use of supplementary feeding during droughts. Farmers with financial means purchased commercial stock

feeds, while others resorted to crop residues such as maize stover or sorghum stalks. In some areas, farmers attempted fodder production by planting drought-resistant grasses like banana grass and lablab. Yet participants stressed that limited land and resources hindered widespread adoption of fodder production. Distressed sales of livestock during drought periods were reported as a common coping mechanism. Farmers indicated that although this helped meet immediate household needs such as food and school fees, it undermined long-term herd recovery. One participant commented:

When drought comes, we sell even breeding cattle to buy food. It is painful, but we cannot let our children starve.

This practice illustrates the difficult trade-offs faced by households under pressure. Some participants reported temporary migration of livestock to areas with better pastures, often facilitated through kinship networks. However, this strategy was becoming increasingly difficult due to land conflicts and the absence of functional communal grazing agreements. Mobility, once a traditional drought coping strategy, was therefore constrained in resettled areas. Households also diversified income sources as part of broader adaptation strategies. Participants mentioned engaging in small-scale trade, casual labour, and gardening projects near water points. Women turned to poultry keeping and petty trading to complement household incomes. These activities helped reduce overdependence on livestock while spreading risks.

The study found that social networks and remittances played a vital role in adaptation. Households with relatives in urban areas or abroad accessed cash remittances to purchase feed, drill boreholes, or restock herds after losses. Community-based support mechanisms, particularly cattle sharing arrangements, also served as safety nets. For example, some households used

"ukusisa," a traditional arrangement in which wealthier farmers loan animals to poorer homes in exchange for milk and draught power. Participants also mentioned non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government measures, such as restocking programs, climate-smart livestock practice training, and veterinary help. However, they emphasized that such programs were sometimes intermittent and failed to reach all households. The findings indicate that coping and adaptation techniques are diverse but unequally distributed, with wealthier households better positioned to implement resource-intensive interventions like boreholes and feed purchases. Poorer households rely more on low-cost coping measures such as distress sales, migration, and small-scale livestock rearing. This unevenness underscores the vulnerability of marginal households to recurrent climate and economic shocks.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study sought to investigate the socioeconomic role of livestock, the obstacles experienced by resettled farmers in livestock production, the gender dimensions of ownership and management and households' coping and adaptation mechanisms in the face of climatic and economic pressures. Across all objectives, the data consistently show that livestock is critical to the livelihoods, culture and resilience of resettled farmers in Matabeleland and elsewhere. Firstly, cattle were discovered to have a varied socioeconomic significance. Beyond its obvious economic significance in terms of cash, draught power and food, cattle were deeply ingrained in cultural and social life. Cattle ownership, in instance, conferred social status, provided protection against shocks and had a role in key cultural traditions such as lobola and ancestral rituals. Small livestock, though often undervalued, provided women with critical income for household needs such as food, education, and healthcare. Secondly, the study revealed numerous challenges undermining livestock production. Climate change and variability were regarded as the most serious problems, with frequent

droughts, heat waves and floods severely limiting grazing and water supplies. These issues were exacerbated by a lack of extension services, insufficient infrastructure, market inefficiencies and limited access to funding. Vandalism of livestock handling infrastructure, such as paddocks and dip tanks, was especially harmful to disease prevention and sustainable rangeland management. Thirdly, the gender dimensions of livestock ownership and management highlighted structural inequalities.

Men predominantly controlled cattle, associated with wealth and social recognition, while women focused on small livestock. Women's labour contributions were significant, yet their decision-making power remained limited. However, women's control over small livestock emerged as a vital mechanism for sustaining household welfare, demonstrating the need to elevate the visibility and value of women's roles in livestock-based livelihoods. Fourthly, the coping and adaptation strategies demonstrated the resilience and agency of resettled farmers. Households varied livestock species, practised water harvesting, engaged in supplementary feeding, sold animals in distress and relied on migration, income diversification, social networks and remittances. However, these solutions were not uniformly accessible. Wealthier households could afford boreholes and feed, whereas poorer farmers relied on livestock sales and community-based assistance. This unevenness emphasizes the possibility of increasing inequality within resettled rural communities. Overall, the study emphasizes that livestock remains the foundation of resettled farmers' livelihoods, but its viability is jeopardized by climate change, institutional flaws and ingrained gender inequities. Addressing these difficulties requires a combination of climate-resilient interventions, gender-sensitive policies and inclusive support networks that build the capacity of both men and women. Specifically, a multi-dimensional approach is required to address climatic, economic and institutional challenges while enhancing resilience and equity. The study highlights the urgent need for multi-pronged interventions to strengthen livestock-based livelihoods among

resettled farmers. Recommendations are presented across thematic areas that address climatic, economic, and institutional challenges while promoting resilience, gender equity, and sustainability.

Climate-Resilient Livestock Systems

Drought-tolerant livestock breeds and diversification into small livestock such as goats, lambs and poultry will assist farmers in lessening their sensitivity to drought-related losses. These plants are more resistant to adverse environmental conditions and produce faster income returns. Equally crucial is increasing fodder production projects and encouraging agricultural residue conservation for feed during the dry season. Farmers require training and support in fodder storage techniques and forage seed multiplication. Investment in water harvesting technologies, including the construction of small dams, boreholes and community water pans, should be prioritised, with targeted subsidies for poorer households to ensure equitable access.

Strengthening Veterinary and Extension Services

Improving veterinary coverage is critical for decreasing animal morbidity and mortality. This necessitates addressing veterinary officers' mobility issues by guaranteeing appropriate fuel, dependable motorcycles, and logistical support. In addition, digital platforms such as mobile applications and SMS services can improve access to livestock health advice in rural places. Extension programs should be designed to be gender-responsive, ensuring that women farmers, who are often central to small livestock management, have equal access to information, training and veterinary services.

Rehabilitation of Livestock Infrastructure

Rehabilitation and protection of critical livestock infrastructure, such as dip tanks, paddocks and grazing management systems, is necessary to sustain production. Mobilising community participation through co-management arrangements will strengthen ownership, ensure regular maintenance and safeguard against vandalism.

Market Development and Regulation

To curb exploitation by middlemen, transparent livestock markets must be developed. Farmer cooperatives and auction platforms can strengthen bargaining power, while linking farmers to abattoirs and formal export markets will create stable income streams. Improved regulatory frameworks are also needed to standardize pricing and enhance trust in livestock trading systems.

Access to Finance and Insurance

Livestock-specific credit schemes tailored to smallholder realities, with flexible collateral requirements, are essential. Promoting micro-insurance schemes will cushion farmers from climate-induced losses. In addition, encouraging the productive use of remittances through financial literacy programs and matching grants can enhance resilience and investment in livestock.

Gender-Sensitive Livestock Policies

Recognizing women's crucial role in managing small livestock, policies should provide targeted resources, training and access to markets. Strengthening women's land and resource rights will increase ownership and bargaining power. Embedding gender equality into livestock development programs will ensure more equitable intra-household sharing of benefits.

Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing

Community-based learning platforms can facilitate peer-to-peer exchange of successful coping and adaptation strategies. Blending indigenous knowledge systems with modern scientific innovations offers sustainable solutions tailored to local contexts.

Partnerships and Collaboration

Finally, partnerships with NGOs and development agencies should be expanded to support restocking, veterinary services and climate adaptation projects. Interventions must align with national climate strategies and regional frameworks, such as the African Union's Climate Strategy, to ensure coherence and sustainability.

Final Reflection

The ability to protect livestock systems against climate and economic shocks is critical to the future of resettlement farmers in Zimbabwe and other sub-Saharan African countries. Livestock may continue to serve as the foundation for sustainable livelihoods by increasing resilience, removing structural impediments and promoting gender equity. A comprehensive approach that includes climate-smart behaviours, inclusive governance and market reforms would not only ensure household resilience but would also help to improve rural development and reduce poverty.

References

- Abed, F., & Acosta, A. (2017). *The role of livestock in poverty reduction and resilience: Pathways and policies*. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).
- Aklilu, Y. & Catley, A. (2010). Livestock exports from the Horn of Africa: An analysis of benefits by pastoralist wealth group and policy implications. *IGAD LPI Working Paper 01–10*. Addis Ababa: Feinstein International Centre, Tufts University.
- Banks, T., Richard, K., Li, P., & Yan, Z. (2001). Community-based grassland management in Western China: Rationale, pilot project experience, and policy implications. *Mountain Research and Development*, 21(3), 188–195. [https://doi.org/10.1659/0276-4741\(2001\)021\[0188:CBGMIW\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1659/0276-4741(2001)021[0188:CBGMIW]2.0.CO;2)
- De Janvry, A., & Sadoulet, E. (2009). Agricultural growth and poverty reduction: Additional evidence. *The World Bank Research Observer*, 25(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/lkp015>
- Dercon, S. (2002). Income risk, coping strategies, and safety nets. *The World Bank Research Observer*, 17(2), 141–166. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/17.2.141>
- Kazianga, H., & Udry, C. (2006). Consumption smoothing? Livestock, insurance and drought in rural Burkina Faso. *Journal of Development Economics*, 79(2), 413–446. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2006.01.011>
- Mavedzenge, B.Z., Mahenehene, J., Murimbarimba, F., Scoones, I. & Wolmer, W. (2006). Changes in

the livestock sector in Zimbabwe following land reform: The case of Masvingo province. *IDS Bulletin*, 37(5), pp. 33–49.

McPeak, J. (2017). Herd accumulation: A pastoral strategy to reduce risk exposure. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 89(2), 406–418. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8276.2007.00992.x>

Musemwa, L., Mushunje, A., Chimonyo, M., Fraser, G., Mapiye, C. & Muchenje, V. (2008). Nguni cattle marketing constraints and opportunities in the communal areas of South Africa: Review. *African Journal of Agricultural Research*, 3(4), pp. 239–245.

Ndlovu, P.V., Mudhara, M. & Chimonyo, M. (2020). Farmers' strategies for coping with drought in livestock systems in southern Zimbabwe. *Rangeland Ecology & Management*, 73(4), pp. 495–502.

Tsegaye, D., Vedeld, P. & Moe, S.R. (2013). Pastoralists and livelihoods: A case study from northern Afar, Ethiopia. *Journal of Arid Environments*, 91, pp. 138–146.

World Bank. (2013). *World Development Report 2013: Jobs*. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-0-8213-9575-2>

World Bank. (2017). *Monitoring global poverty: Report of the Commission on Global Poverty*. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-0961-3>

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.23>

DIGITAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION PRACTICES AS DRIVERS OF SURVIVAL IN WOMEN-LED SMES

Daniel Kambiri

PhD Candidate, School of Public Management,
Governance & Public Policy, College of Business & Economics,
University of Johannesburg, Republic of South Africa.

dkambiri93@gmail.com

Abstract

The study assessed the impact of digital entrepreneurship and innovation practices as drivers of survival in women-led SMEs, using Zimbabwe as a case study. The study analyses how digital entrepreneurship contributes to the survival of women-led SMEs, identifies the innovation practices adopted by women entrepreneurs to improve competitiveness and assesses the challenges affecting digital and innovative adoption. The rapid increase of digital transformation has reshaped business operations globally, with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) increasingly adopting digital and innovative practices to remain competitive and relevant in the market. Women-led SMEs, however, often face unique challenges such as limited access to finance, training, and technology, which hinder their survival and sustainability. Drawing on literature and illustrative examples in Zimbabwe, the study highlights that the integration of digital tools such as e-commerce platforms, social media marketing, and mobile financial technologies enhances efficiency, market reach, and resilience. The study employed a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to gain both statistical and contextual insights. The target population comprised women-led SMEs in the capital cities of Harare, Bulawayo, and Mutare, with a sample of 100 women entrepreneurs from different SME sectors namely sewing, restaurants and small grocery shops. Some of the key findings reveal that firms employing digital and innovative strategies increase revenue stability and better customer retention during economic disruptions. In addition, there is customer satisfaction, business expansion, financial independence, women entrepreneurs practice process, product and marketing innovation. Some of the challenges being faced include limited access to internet, lack of access to capital and poor digital skills. The article concludes that digital entrepreneurship, supported by innovation and capacity development, significantly enhances the survival prospects of women-led SMEs in emerging economies by improving products, increasing access to markets and resilience. Some of the recommendations include capacity building and strengthening digital skills, improve access to digital infrastructure, financial support, networking as well as establishing policy and regulatory frameworks which as conducive for SMEs.

Keywords: Digital entrepreneurship, Innovation practices, Women-led SMEs, Business survival, emerging economies

Introduction

Women-led SMEs play a crucial role in driving economic growth, job creation, and poverty reduction, particularly in developing countries.

The primary objective of this article, is to explore how digital entrepreneurship and innovation practices enhance the survival and sustainability of women-led SMEs and the study area was Harare, Bulawayo, and Mutare. According

to the International Labour Organisation (2022), women constitute over 45% of SME owners in Africa, yet their enterprises face higher closure rates than male-owned businesses. In the face of technological disruption and global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, digital entrepreneurship has emerged as a critical tool for business continuity and transformation.

Digital entrepreneurship refers to the creation and management of ventures that leverage digital technologies for value creation (Nambisan, 2017). For women entrepreneurs, digital tools offer new avenues to overcome mobility restrictions, expand market reach, and enhance efficiency. However, despite these opportunities, the survival rate of women-led SMEs remains low in many developing economies. Innovation practices are essential in entrepreneurship; they do not always involve creating something entirely new. Instead, innovators can enhance existing products or services to better meet customer needs (Rani and Sangeeta, 2020). Matekenya and Moyo (2022), argue that businesses operating without innovation or digitalisation will find it difficult to adapt to the changing environment. They further indicate that the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the need for innovation and digitalisation in small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs).

Digital entrepreneurship by women entrepreneurs is a process in form of a journey which needs a map with an updated digital strategy. There are many new-age technologies and organisations must identify the ones necessary or applicable to them, shape them so that they benefit from them (Mahmood, Khan and Khan, 2019). Yusuf, Durodola, Ocran, Abubakar, Echere and Paul-Adeleye (2024), argue that these technologies assist SMEs with the tools to streamline operations, reduce costs, and enhance customer satisfaction. Digital entrepreneurship and innovation help the survival of SMEs because they adapt to changing market demands, enhance productivity, improve product quality and compete effectively with bigger firms (Gokilamani and Sangeetha, 2025). In addition, digitalisation assists SMEs in resource

allocation, understand customer needs, predicting market trends, and make informed strategic decisions (Yusuf et al, 2024). Some of the digital platforms are being used for marketing, customer service, and supply-chain management. Mashapure, Chikazhe, Mufudza and Chibaro (2024), supported in digital entrepreneurship, SMEs use digital tools, resources, and systems for generating, storing, and managing data, women entrepreneurs can interact with customers and stakeholders through the use of laptops, tablets and Android cell phones.

Structural barriers such as limited access to finance, digital literacy gaps, and cultural constraints restrict women entrepreneurs' participation in competitive markets. Hence, the study analyses how digital entrepreneurship contributes to the survival of women-led SMEs, it investigates the innovation practices adopted by women entrepreneur to improve competitiveness and assessed the inhibiting challenges to digital and innovative adoption by women-led SMEs.

Literature Review

Objective One: To analyse how digital entrepreneurship contributes to the survival of women-led SMEs.

The concept of digital entrepreneurship

Digital entrepreneurship involves using digital technologies such as websites, social media, e-commerce, and mobile platforms to create and deliver value to customers (European Commission, 2018). Unlike traditional entrepreneurship, digital entrepreneurship reduces entry barriers by lowering operational costs and allowing remote business operations (Nambisan, Wright, and Feldman, 2019). In Sub-Saharan Africa, mobile-based entrepreneurship has transformed the business environment, enabling entrepreneurs to manage sales, logistics, and payments via digital means (Olawale and Garwe, 2021). For women-led SMEs, digital entrepreneurship is not only a technological shift but also a socio-economic empowerment mechanism. Entrepreneurial ecosystems create a conducive environment for national innovation and advancing economically sustainable development (Alkharafi,

2024). Digital entrepreneurship has facilitated entrepreneurship by encompassing the creation of new ventures within the digital space. These ventures harness the power of the internet, mobile technology, big data and artificial intelligence (AI) to drive innovation and growth (Pop, Simut and Bac, 2024). Entrepreneurship and innovation in a global context contribute to the growth of the economy (Rani and Sangeeta, 2020). Despite the growth of entrepreneurial ecosystems, some research indicates that it is emerging through a gendered lens (Alkharafi, 2024). Entrepreneurial ecosystems differentially impact men and women.

Individuals have multiple identities that intersect based on race, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status, geographic location, and educational level, and these intersecting identities shape the knowledge and intellectual resources that women bring to the innovation process. Existing macro structures and eco-systems can create barriers to women's full participation in innovation activities (Alkharafi, 2024). SMEs contribute a larger percentage of gross domestic product and innovation. For instance, South Africa has identified innovation as a crucial determinant of growth and development by creating policy frameworks to motivate both the public and private sectors to put innovation at the forefront (Matekenya and Moyo, 2022). Digital entrepreneurship triggers the increasing reliance on intelligent algorithms, big data analytics, AI, Internet of Things connectivity, and dominant platforms (Pop, Simut and Bac, 2024). Digital entrepreneurship has improved some of the business segments, including the following:

Customer satisfaction

The digitalisation of women-led SMEs has improved their survival and growth. Most of these SMEs are now utilising the internet for their businesses so that they can socially interact with their customers (Celestin, Vasuki and Kumar, 2024). The introduction of digital business provides ample time for women to communicate with their customers in a real-time context. Women enjoy the flexibility of using digitalised platforms such as emails, Facebook, WhatsApp Business, Instagram and X (Hazudin, Sabri,

Kader and Ishak, 2021). Through these social platforms, customers can receive feedback in a timely manner and updated information about products and services being offered. Digital entrepreneurship empowers both women and their customers because customers can purchase products or services anytime and anywhere. At the same time, some women can provide door-to-door delivery at a reasonable charge (Ali, 2025).

Business expansion

Through the digitalisation of entrepreneurship by women-led businesses, there is evidence of improved business processes that assist them to survive in a competitive environment (Mashapure, Chikazhe, Mufudza and Chibaro, 2024). Most women utilise their mobile phones to communicate and coordinate with customers, as these devices are equipped with applications, popularly known as apps; that facilitate the marketing of their businesses. The introduction of mobile banking and various online payment platforms in Zimbabwe, such as Ecocash and OneMoney Wallet, has further enhanced these operations. Even individuals living in other countries are now able to make payments remotely. Consequently, geographical distance is no longer a barrier to business operations.

Realisation of financial independence

Traditional business methods, which often required women to work long hours, endure years of hard work, and incur high costs, can be entirely circumvented through the adoption of digital business practices. Digitalisation assists women to attain real financial independence, increase profit, and stability Mashapure et al., 2024). The business digitalisation enables women to receive an income and removes the dependence syndrome from their spouses.

Objective Two: To investigate the innovation practices adopted by women entrepreneur to improve competitiveness.

Innovation practices in SMEs

Innovation in SMEs encompasses introducing

new products, improving processes, adopting new business models, and utilising technology creatively to enhance performance (Schumpeter, 1934). Innovative SMEs are more adaptable and resilient during economic shocks. The evolving global economic environment has become increasingly knowledge-based, enabling businesses to innovate in order to sustain growth and development (Matekenya and Moyo, 2022). Studies show that innovation increases firms' survival rates by up to 45% compared to their non-innovative counterparts (Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2020). Innovation has long been closely associated with technological advancement, to the extent that it has dominated the discourse for many years (Mari, Poggesi, Abatecola and Essers, 2024).

Women entrepreneurs often innovate out of necessity, developing adaptive business models such as online selling, home-based production, or community-based cooperatives. Innovation is therefore a strategic survival tool for resource-constrained entrepreneurs. Currently, entrepreneurs contribute 60% of the global economic output (Madichie and Ameen, 2021). According to Mari et al. (2024), the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2022/2023 report highlights that, globally, one out of six women express a strong inclination towards starting an entrepreneurial venture in the near future, against one out of five men. In Africa, entrepreneurship plays a vital role in alleviating unemployment (Madichie and Ameen, 2021). In Zimbabwe, 0.4% are medium firms, 3.4% are small firms, 14.8% are micro firms and 81.4% are individual entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs with small- to medium-sized businesses are key pillars in economic growth and income. New entrepreneurs are introducing innovative products and services, with the majority initially operating as small- to medium-sized enterprises during their start-up stages (Finscope Zimbabwe, 2020).

In the current global business environment, innovation practices are critical towards achieving and sustaining the survival of SMEs (Joseph, Umogbai, Kwahar and Adudu, 2023). This is because innovation practices could improve in-

dividual wealth as well as expanding entrepreneurs' market (Joseph et al., 2023). Innovation practices refer to a way of introducing something within a company, such as new products or items, a new marketing strategy, or a new procedure to reinvigorate the company and promote new value (Howard, 2022).

Furthermore, innovation practices may be defined as an entrepreneur's ability to develop new products, production processes and techniques, procedures, management and marketing practices, policies, and strategies, or to improve and modify existing ones. The aim is to generate demand, reduce costs, and ensure efficiency to achieve success. According to Ukpabio, Adeyeye and Oluwatope (2019), innovation is grouped into the following five types of activities: product innovation, process innovation, management of organisational innovation, marketing innovation and new a source of supply creation, as indicated by Schumpeter (1934). However, for the purpose of this article, three types of activities, namely product, process and marketing, were adopted. Kahn (2018) defines innovation as a process, outcome, mindset and strategy. Hence, this article defines the term 'innovation' as a better way of meeting customers' demands in a new or upgraded way using the available resources to maintain a competitive market advantage in the market.

Product innovation practice refers to the introduction of a service or good that is perceived as new by individuals or firms, offering fresh value or solutions compared to existing offerings (Ukpabio et al., 2019). Joseph et al. (2023) allude that product innovation gives room for a better product to be realised in the market as it might bring many functions which are unique as compared to the one already in the market and performs better. Product innovation can be defined as the development of services or goods that are different from the previous products that are already available in the market. On the other hand, Kahn (2018), argues that product innovation encompasses market offerings such as new products, new services, or new programme. In support of that, Kahn (2018) highlights seven types of product innovation, namely cost reductions, product improvement, new markets line

extensions, new uses, new category entries and new to the world products.

Ukpabio et al. (2019) defines process innovation practice as changes in the ways of producing or developing products, such as new raw materials, new production methods as well as new technology so that efficiency and quality of a product or service is increased. Process innovation describes the way in which new or improved production procedures, technology or tools are implemented (Ohia and Lebor, 2020). In addition, process innovation involves improvements in generating tools as well as expanding operations within a firm (Hari and Eneng, 2020). Process innovation encompasses changes in methodologies or business processes aimed at achieving greater efficiency, such as quicker processing times or reduced costs. In this regard, production systems, service delivery systems, and organisational processes are vital facets for process innovation (Kahn, 2018). For the aim of this article, process innovation refers to a series of activities to achieve specific goals in a unique way.

Marketing innovation practice is the implementation of a new marketing method involving significant changes in product design or packaging, product placement, product promotion or pricing (Joseph et al., 2023). Market innovation enhances sales by increasing product demand that ultimately reap higher profits. It aims to connect customers and consumers on new or at different levels, which can include new types of promotional efforts (Kahn, 2018). Thus, marketing innovation practice drives demand by creating awareness, brand recognition, and product uniqueness, and it is not usually something that is sold directly to final consumers (Kahn, 2018). The survival of SMEs is characterised by high financial returns, improved personal finances, stable market positioning through expansion, and achieving stakeholders' objectives and goals. As stated by Costa and Carvalho (2020), SME survival refers to the establishment of business goals within a specific time frame, where motivation is applied to human and social capital to achieve business growth and profitability. Furthermore, SME survival can be de-

defined as a way of meeting objectives through enhancing support systems for entrepreneurs, for example, by utilising advanced technologies such as AI (Chaves Maza and Fedriani, 2022). For this article, the survival of SMEs can be defined as a way of achieving the aims and objectives of the business in a profitable manner through the use of modern technology so as to meet demands of stakeholders.

The survival of SMEs measures include money, customer satisfaction, market expansion, satisfaction of employees, growth of a firm company as well as position of the market. Firm growth entails increasing sales, assets, net profits and advantage to reduce production per cost. It can be grouped into four sections, namely business outcomes, business outputs, capacity and qualitative indicators. The growth of a firm can be determined by both existing and new products, as well as existing and new markets. This is because firms can achieve growth through market penetration, market development, product development, and diversification.

A business without innovative practices is likely to die a natural death. Due to globalisation, entrepreneurs must focus on innovation as a strategic tool to achieve success in a highly competitive market. Ohia and Lebor (2020) indicates that for entrepreneurs to be successful, they must be innovative to keep pace with a dynamic environment. Developed countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, along with rising economic superpowers such as China are performing well because entrepreneurs are being practising innovation in this changing world (Joseph et al., 2023). Most entrepreneurs in Africa fail to become successful because they lack innovation practices in their businesses due to government policies, competition and change of technology (Joseph et al., 2023).

Objective Three: To assess the inhibiting challenges to digital and innovative adoption by women-led SMEs.

Women entrepreneurs often face unique barriers in digital adoption due to lower ICT exposure, limited financing, and socio-cultural norms

(United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2021). Nonetheless, digital transformation offers them flexible work arrangements, market expansion through online platforms, and access to digital financial services. African Development Bank (2022) revealed that 64% of women entrepreneurs who adopted digital tools during COVID-19 were able to maintain operations, compared to only 28% who relied solely on traditional models. In Zimbabwe, women-led SMEs have successfully leveraged Facebook, WhatsApp Business, and Instagram for marketing and sales, reducing dependency on physical marketplaces.

Theoretical Framework

This study applies two interrelated theoretical theories, namely the Resource-Based View (RBV) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). RBV proposes that competitive advantage arises from unique resources and capabilities, including technological assets and innovation capacity. (Barney, 1991), suggests that perceived usefulness (PU) and ease of use determine technology adoption behaviour (Davis, 1989). TAM was suggested by Ajzen and Fishbein in 1975 and is based on the idea that individuals act rationally in their decision-making, making choices after carefully evaluating relevant beliefs that shape their attitudes toward a particular behaviour (Gaddi, Prashantha and Shivashankar, 2021).

Resource-Based View

RBV provides a strategic foundation for understanding how digital entrepreneurship and innovation practices contribute to the survival and competitiveness of women-led SMEs. RBV posits that firm performance and long-term survival depend on the possession, development, and strategic deployment of valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable, popularly referred to by the abbreviation VRIN, resources (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984). In this context, resources include tangible and intangible assets such as entrepreneurial skills, technological know-how, digital competencies, innovative culture, and strategic networks.

For women-led SMEs, digital entrepreneurship

represents the mobilisation of internal resources and capabilities to exploit technological opportunities and mitigate market constraints (Ndu-bisi and Nair, 2020). Innovation practices such as adopting e-commerce systems, digital marketing strategies, and financial technology tools enable these firms to enhance operational efficiency, market access, and adaptability (Teece, 2018). Therefore, RBV explains how internally developed digital capabilities act as sources of sustainable competitive advantage that support firm survival in rapidly changing business environments.

Despite its explanatory power, RBV faces several limitations. First, it has been criticised for its static nature, which inadequately captures the dynamic technological environments in which SMEs operate (Priem and Butler, 2001). Second, RBV tends to focus on internal resources, neglecting external factors such as market volatility, regulatory environments, and infrastructural challenges that shape digital entrepreneurship (Peteraf and Barney, 2003). Third, measuring the value and rarity of intangible resources such as digital competencies remain methodologically challenging (Kozlenkova, Samaha and Palmatier, 2014). Additionally, RBV's limited attention to collaboration and ecosystem effects underrepresents the networked realities of digital entrepreneurship, particularly for women entrepreneurs who often rely on social capital and digital communities for business resilience.

Technology Acceptance Model

TAM (Davis, 1989) offers a behavioural and perceptual explanation of how users accept and utilize technology. It posits that two primary constructs, PU and perceived ease of use determine individuals' attitudes toward adopting technological innovations, which in turn influence their behavioural intention to use such technologies (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000).

Applied to women-led SMEs, TAM helps explain how entrepreneurs' perceptions and attitudes influence the adoption of digital tools essential for innovation and survival. Women entrepreneurs who perceive digital platforms, mobile applications, and online payment systems as

useful for enhancing productivity and market outreach are more likely to adopt them. Similarly, when these technologies are perceived as easy to use, they reduce barriers related to limited digital literacy or time constraints (Marchewka and Kostiwa, 2014). Furthermore, external variables such as social influence, perceived risk, access to training, and prior experience can moderate technology acceptance, making TAM particularly relevant to understanding digital adoption behaviour among women entrepreneurs (Venkatesh et al., 2003).

Nevertheless, TAM also presents some weaknesses. It has been criticised for its over-simplification of the technology adoption process by focusing only on two cognitive variables while ignoring broader socio-cultural, economic, and gender-related factors (Bagozzi, 2007). Additionally, the model assumes a rational decision-making process, overlooking emotional, experiential, and contextual factors that often shape entrepreneurial behaviour. Another limitation is its limited contextual applicability, as it was originally developed for employees in organisational settings, rather than entrepreneurs managing small businesses in resource-constrained environments. Moreover, TAM does not account for external barriers such as inadequate digital infrastructure or institutional support, which significantly influence technology adoption in developing economies (Mutambara and Chitakunye, 2020).

This study adopts the Resource-Based View as its primary theoretical framework because it provides a clear explanation on how digital entrepreneurship and innovation practices function as strategic asset that enhance the survival of women-led SMEs, unlike the TAM, which focuses on individual technology adoption behaviour. RBV directly explains firm survival and competitive advantage by emphasising how valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources enable SMEs to withstand shocks and sustain operations. In this case, digital entrepreneurship and innovation practices in women-led SMEs like digital skills, online networks, adaptive business models, and innovative use of platforms, function as strategic resources, not just

tools. Also, RBV captures firm-level capabilities, not just individual behaviour. The theory analyses SME capabilities such as digital leadership, innovation culture, and learning orientation and firm performance and resilience. RBV explicitly recognises innovation capability as a core intangible resource that drives performance and survival such as a digital platform in form of resources, innovation practices treated as capabilities and entrepreneurial judgement as resource orchestration.

Methodology

The study employed a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to gain both statistical and contextual insights. The target population comprised women-led SMEs in the capital cities of Harare, Bulawayo, and Mutare. A purposive sample was used targeting 100 women entrepreneurs from different SMEs sectors such as sewing, restaurant and small grocery shops. According to Taherdoost (2021), research instruments are critical because they generate insights and revelations that help illuminate key aspects of a study. These instruments were used to obtain standardised information from all the subjects.

Data were collected through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The research captured information on digital tool usage, innovation types, and business performance indicators. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS software for statistical analysis, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. Correlation analysis tested relationships between digital adoption, innovation, and survival indicators such as profitability, market reach, and business continuity. Participants provided informed consent. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, and participation was voluntary.

Findings and Discussion

Objective One: To analyse how digital entrepreneurship contributes to the survival of women-led SMEs.

Adoption of digital entrepreneurship practices

Results indicated that 78% of respondents used

social media for business marketing, while 65% had adopted mobile money or online banking platforms. About 52% operated partially online through e-commerce platforms like WhatsApp Business or Facebook Marketplace. Respondents reported that digital adoption improved customer engagement and reduced transaction

Customer satisfaction

Table 1: Satisfaction of customers in women-led businesses

Indicator	Score
Accessibility and Convenience	23
Value for Money	27
Timeliness and Responsiveness	21
Quality of Products or Services	29
Mean	25
Standard Deviation	3.7

The results show that **‘Quality of Products or Services’ (29%)** is the strongest contributor to customer satisfaction, indicating that customers prioritise receiving reliable, well-delivered, and effective services in women-led businesses. **‘Value for Money’ (27%)** follows closely, meaning that customers are highly sensitive to pricing relative to the benefits they receive, and they appreciate offerings that feel fair and economically justified. **‘Accessibility and Convenience’ (23%)** also play an important role,

costs. One entrepreneur noted: “WhatsApp Business and Facebook allow me to manage client orders, communicate in real time, and receive EcoCash payments, something I could not do efficiently before”.

demonstrating that ease of accessing services, user-friendly processes, and location or availability factors strongly influence customer experiences. However, **‘Timeliness and Responsiveness’ (21%)** scored the lowest, signalling a notable gap in how quickly the SMEs attend to customer needs, enquiries, or service delivery. This area represents a key improvement opportunity, as enhancing responsiveness could significantly strengthen overall customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Business expansion

Table 2: Expansion of women-led businesses

Expansion of business	Score
Product or Service Diversification	25
Market Research and Analysis	28
Technology and Innovation	29
Brand Strength and Market Positioning	18
Mean	25
Standard deviation	4.47

The analysis of the women-led business expansion pillars shows a generally strong performance in areas that drive growth, competitiveness, and adaptability. ‘Technology and Innovation’, with the highest score of 29%, indicate

that women businesses are effectively leveraging digital tools, modern systems, or new methods to improve efficiency and service offerings. This key strength can support long-term competitiveness. ‘Market Research and Analysis’,

scoring 28%, reflects a solid understanding of customer needs, market trends, and industry dynamics, suggesting that decisions are being informed by relevant data and insights. Product or Service Diversification, with a score of 25%, demonstrates moderate progress in expanding the range of offerings to meet diverse customer needs, although there is still room to broaden the portfolio further for increased market coverage.

On the other hand, ‘Brand Strength and Market Positioning, scoring 18%, stand out as a weaker area. This indicates that women-led SMEs may not be strongly recognised or differentiated in the market, which can limit customer trust, loyalty, and overall competitiveness. Weak market positioning may also undermine the benefits achieved through innovation or market research.

Financial independence

Table 3: Financial independence of women-led businesses

Indicator	Score
Budgeting and Expense Control	27
Savings Culture	33
Debt Management	23
Financial Literacy	17
Mean	25
Standard Deviation	3.96

The analysis of the financial independence indicators reveals a mixed picture, with notable strengths and clear areas requiring improvement. ‘Savings Culture’, with the highest score of 33%, shows that individuals demonstrate strong discipline in setting aside money for future needs, emergencies, or investment opportunities. This is a solid foundation for long-term financial stability and independence. ‘Budgeting and Expense Control, scoring 27%, also reflects fairly good financial planning practices, suggesting that many individuals are making efforts to monitor their spending and allocate resources wisely, even though there is still room to enhance consistency and efficiency. However, ‘Debt Management’, with a score of 23%, indicates moderate ability to handle financial obligations. This suggests that while some

individuals manage their debts responsibly, others may struggle with repayment strategies, interest burdens, or avoiding unnecessary borrowing. The most concerning area is ‘Financial Literacy’, which scored only 17%. This low score highlights a limited understanding of financial concepts such as investment, interest rates, credit management, and long-term planning. Weak financial literacy can undermine progress in savings, budgeting, and debt management, making individuals more vulnerable to poor financial decisions.

Overall, strengthening financial education and awareness would significantly enhance the ability to budget effectively, manage debt responsibly, and maximise savings strategies. Improving financial literacy should therefore be a priority, as it acts as the foundation that supports all other pillars of financial independence.

Objective Two: To investigate the innovation practices adopted by women entrepreneur to improve competitiveness.

Innovation practices for survival

The study found that 68% of women-led SMEs

engaged in ‘Product or Service Innovation’, such as developing new business lines, offering delivery services, or diversifying product packaging. Process innovations, including digital recordkeeping and automated ordering systems,

were also common. Notably, SMEs that combined digital and innovation practices experienced stronger resilience. During the COVID-19 lockdown, 74% of these firms reported stable operations, compared to 41% among those with minimal innovation. This supports Schumpeter (1934)'s view that innovation is a mechanism for renewal and survival in changing environments.

In total, 57% of respondents indicated that product innovation is the creation and development of new or improved products, services or process within their business. In a similar vein, 33% indicated that the introduction of novel ideas, technologies, features or designs provide added value to customers and differentiate the product from existing offering in the market. With regard to the purpose of product innovation, 64% indicated that it diversifies the business and brings new opportunities, while 36% stated that it helps to anticipate customers' needs.

Furthermore, on the 'Types of Product Innovation', 86% of the respondents selected new product innovation, 6% chose incremental changes of existing products, 4% selected sustaining innovation, 2% chose development of new features and 2% indicated that they do not know. Most of the respondents indicated that new product innovation suits more their businesses with eight one percent (81%). About 67% of respondents indicated that it is easy to come up with product innovation practices, while 33% indicated that it is not easy to develop innovation practices.

In addition, this article assessed the impact of process innovation practices on the survival of small and medium enterprises. Around 77% of respondents indicated that process innovation is the application or introduction of a new technology or method for doing something that helps women entrepreneurs to remain competitive and meet customer needs. On the other hand, 20% of respondents indicated that the development and implementation of new and improved processes,

methods, or systems within the business help enhance efficiency, effectiveness, and value creation, while 3% stated that they combine both approaches. In total, 76% of respondents indicated that customer satisfaction is the main purpose of process-related innovation practices, and it is the one which suits their business as compared to other facets such improved quality, increases productivity and reduced costs. Most respondents with sixty four percent (64%) indicated that is it easy to development process innovation practices.

Moreover, marketing innovation practices play a critical role on the survival of SMEs. Overall, 53% of respondents indicated that marketing innovation practices consist of incorporating new marketing methods and techniques that differ from those previously employed, involving substantial changes in product promotion, design, and packaging. Additionally, 16% of respondents identified marketing innovation as the adoption of new operational practices, new distribution methods, novel sales approaches, leasing arrangements, and entry into new markets. A further 31% characterised marketing innovation as a hybrid of these two approaches.

Some 57% of respondents stated that the main purpose of marketing innovation practices is to open new markets; 16% noted that it helps to reach wider audience; 19% indicated it helps to improve the product or service; and 8% argued that it incorporates new marketing methods and techniques that differ from previous ones. In terms of the 4Ps of marketing (product, price, place, promotion), 74% of respondents indicated that 'place' is the principal determinant of their marketing innovation, as it must offer convenience to customers and enable easy access to the operating area. Some respondents noted that the location is free of charge and allows for operation during weekends or overnight, in contrast to other locations. Additionally, it was observed that there is a high volume of foot traffic in the central business district.

Impact on business survival

The correlation analysis revealed a positive relationship between digital entrepreneurship and

SME survival. Firms using digital tools recorded an average of 35% increase in sales sta-

bility and 40% improvement in customer retention compared to traditional businesses. Additionally, digital innovation enhanced market reach women entrepreneurs reported serving customers from other provinces or even in other countries through social media and e-commerce. These findings align with OECD (2020), which notes that digital innovation enhances SMEs' adaptability, enabling them to withstand market shocks.

Objective Three: To assessed the inhibiting challenges to digital and innovative adoption by women-led SMEs.

Barriers to women-led SMEs

Despite progress, several challenges persist. Some percent of respondents cited limited internet access or high data costs as impediments, while 55% reported a skills gap, lacking formal training in digital marketing or e-commerce. Furthermore, limited access to capital for acquiring digital tools remained a barrier for 61% of entrepreneurs. Conversely, enablers included affordable mobile money platforms, growing smartphone penetration, and government or non-governmental organisation (NGO) training initiatives. Programmes such as Zimbabwe's Women's Bank Digital Empowerment Initiative have helped bridging these gaps by providing training and micro-loans for technology adoption. In addition, the allocation and accumulation pillar, which includes access to finance, regulations, and social capital help facilitate women innovation. In this regard, quality institutions, policies, and intermediary organisations play important roles in addressing market failures to improve the quantity, conditions, and allocation of resources available to entrepreneurs (Alkharafi, 2024).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that digital entrepreneurship and innovation practices significantly enhance the survival of women-led SMEs by improving operational efficiency, market access,

and resilience. Women entrepreneurs who embrace digital tools and innovative business models are more likely to sustain operations during economic disruptions. In addition, digital entrepreneurship and innovation practices have become essential drivers for the survival and competitiveness of women-led SMEs in today's rapidly evolving business environment. The integration of digital tools such as e-commerce platforms, social media marketing, mobile payment systems, and cloud-based management solutions enables women entrepreneurs to overcome traditional barriers related to market access, resource limitations, mobility constraints, and high operational costs. Innovation practices, including product improvements, process development, and marketing using new emerging technologies, enhance business agility, improve customer experience, and strengthen market positioning. Overall, women-led SMEs that embrace digital entrepreneurship and innovation practices demonstrate stronger resilience, faster adaptation to market disruptions, and sustained business growth. The research evidence shows that digitalisation and innovation is no longer optional but a strategic imperative for survival and expansion of women-led businesses in an increasingly digital and competitive economy.

Recommendations

- **Capacity building and strengthening digital skills:** Governments, through the Ministry of Women Affairs, the Ministry of Information and NGOs, should prioritise digital literacy and innovation training for women entrepreneurs. Training programmes should be prioritised to enhance women entrepreneurs' competencies in digital marketing, e-commerce management, cybersecurity, financial technologies, and data-driven decision-making.
- **Improve access to digital infrastructure and resources:** Government and development partners should expand affordable internet access, provide subsidised digital tools, and support innovation hubs or digital centres tailored for

women-led SMEs. These hubs will capacitate and refresh women in business.

- **Financial support:** Develop inclusive financing instruments such as micro-loans for digital tools and innovation grants. Financial institutions should develop gender-responsive financing models, including digital loans, innovation grants, and tailored credit products that enable women to invest in digital technologies. Most women-led SMEs have limited financial access. In this case, responsible authorities must make sure their businesses are registered so that they meet the minimum requirements for access to finance.
- **Policy interventions and enabling regulatory frameworks:** Create enabling policies for digital inclusion, affordable internet access, and SME innovation hubs. Policymakers should create favourable digital commerce regulations, reduce bureaucratic barriers, support intellectual property rights, and incentivise technology adoption in women-owned businesses.
- **Networking, mentorship and digital ecosystem participation:** Strengthen peer learning networks and mentorship programmes linking experienced digital entrepreneurs with emerging women business owners. Women entrepreneurs should be encouraged to join digital marketplaces, business networks, online communities, and mentorship platforms to facilitate knowledge sharing and market expansion. Exchange visits between entrepreneurs from different areas are essential, as they enable stakeholders to establish supportive platforms for women-led businesses to share lessons

learned, discuss challenges encountered, and explore potential solutions.

- **Future research, monitoring and evidence-based practice:** Longitudinal studies are recommended to measure the long-term impact of digital entrepreneurship on SME sustainability across sectors. Continuous research should be undertaken to track trends in digital entrepreneurship, assess its impact on women-led SMEs, and inform targeted interventions for sustainable growth.
- **Promote innovation and technology adoption:** Women-led SMEs should be encouraged to integrate digital and innovative business models such as online-to-offline hybrid operations, value-added digital services, and automated customer engagement systems to remain competitive.
- **Expansion of digital infrastructure and access:** Policymakers and development partners should prioritise investment in affordable, reliable connectivity and digital tools, particularly in underserved communities where women-led SMEs operate. Most of the respondents indicated that data is expensive. As such, the government and partners must make sure that data is affordable, and all networks are functional.

Acknowledgement:

Funding: This study did not receive funding.

Informed consent statement: Informed consent was obtained from all respondents from the public sector involved in the study.

Data availability statement: The data presented in this study were obtained through the study.

Conflicts of interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- African Development Bank. 2022. *Empowering Women Entrepreneurs through Digital Transformation in Africa*. AfDB Publications.
- Ali, A. 2025. Women empowerment through digital entrepreneurship: a path to economic independence.

- EPRA International Journal of Environmental Economics, Commerce and Educational Management*. 12(2). Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra0414 |ISI I. 1.4.
- Alkharafi, N. 2024. The role of women in driving national innovation and entrepreneurship through entrepreneurial ecosystems. *Journal of Innovation & Knowledge*. 9(2024): 100550. Available at: <https://www.journals.elsevier.com/journal-of-innovation-and-knowledge>. Accessed 14 November 2025.
- Bagozzi, R.P. 2007. The legacy of the Technology Acceptance Model and a proposal for a paradigm shift. *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*. 8(4): 244–254.
- Barney, J. 1991. Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage. *Journal of Management*, 17(1), 99–120.
- Chaves-Maza, M. and Fedriani, E.M. 2022. Defining entrepreneurial success to improve guidance services: A study with a comprehensive database from Andalusia. *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship*. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13731-022-00213-8>.
- Costa, T.G. and Carvalho, L.C. 2020. *Key Factors for Entrepreneurial Success: A Synthesis of Earlier Research and an Agenda Proposal to Support Entrepreneurial Training*. Lisbon: Polytechnic Institute of Setúba.
- Davis, F.D. 1989. Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology. *MIS Quarterly*. 13(3): 319-340.
- European Commission. 2018. *Digital Transformation of European Industry and Enterprises*. Publications Office of the European Union.
- FinScope Zimbabwe. 2022. *Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) survey highlights*. Harare: FinScope Zimbabwe.
- Gaddi, A, Prashantha, C, Shivashankar, K. 2021. A Review of Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Origin, Development & Future Directions. *International Journal for Research in Engineering Application & Management*. 6(12).
- Gokilamani, A and Sangeetha, S. (2025). Digital Transformation and Innovation in Small and Medium Enterprises. *International Advanced Research Journal in Science, Engineering and Technology*. 12(12). DOI: 10.17148/IARJSET.2025.121258.
- Hari, M.F. and Eneng, T. 2020. Effect of process innovation and market innovation on financial performance with moderating role of disruptive technology. *Sys. Rev. Pharm*, 11(1): 223-232.
- Hazudin, S.F., Sabri, M.F., Aidil, M., Kader, R.A. and Ishak, M. 2021. Empowering Women-owned Businesses in the Era of Digital Transformation: A Review of the Opportunities and Challenges. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*. 11(19). E-ISSN: 2222-6990.

- Howard, S. (2022). Why innovation is essential for business success. Available at: <https://www.master-class.com/articles/why-innovation-is-essential-for-businesssuccess#>. (Accessed on 15/10/2023).
- International Labour Organisation (ILO). 2022. *Women's Entrepreneurship Development Report*. International Labour Organisation.
- Joseph, T., Umogbai, M.E., Kwahar, N. and Adudu, C.A. 2023. Effective of Innovation on Entrepreneurial Success on Manufacturing Small and Medium Firms in North-Central Nigeria. *International Academy Journal of Management, Marketing and Entrepreneurial Studies*. 10: 84-103. ISSN 23832-7446.
- Kahn, K.B. 2018. *Understanding innovation*. Richmond: Elsevier Inc.
- Kozlenkova, I.V., Samaha, S.A. and Palmatier, R.W. 2014. Resource-based theory in marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*. 42(1): 1-21.
- Madichie, N., Ameen, N. (2021). Women, Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Mobile Money: A Two Countries Comparison. *Academia Letters*, Article 3676 <https://doi.org/10.20935/AL3676>.
- Mahmood, F, Khan, A, Z, and Khan, M, B. (2019). Digital organizational transformation issues, challenges and impact: A systematic literature review of a decade. *Abasyn Journal of Social Sciences*. 12(2), DOI: 10.34091/AJSS.12.2.03.
- Maria, M, Poggesia, S., Abatecolaa, G. and Essers, C. 2024. Women entrepreneurs and innovation: Retrospect and prospect. *Journal of Innovation & Knowledge*. Available at: <https://www.journals.elsevier.com/journal-of-innovation-and-knowledge>. (Accessed on 15/10/2023).
- Marchewka, J.T. and Kostiwa, K. 2014. An application of the UTAUT model for understanding student perceptions using course management software. *Communications of the IIMA*. 14(2), 93–104.
- Mashapure, R, Chikazhe, L, Mufudza, T and Chibaro, M. 2024. The influence of digitalisation on women entrepreneurship performance: The moderating effect of age and educational level. *Journal of Tianjin University Science and Technology*. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.13822085. 377-398.
- Matekenya, W. and Moyo, C. 2022. Innovation as a driver of SMME performance in South Africa: A quantile regression approach. *African Journal of Economic and Management Studies*. 13(3): 452-467.
- Celestin, M, Vasuki, A. and Kumar, D. How Digital Platforms Empower SMEs: A Comparative Analysis of E-Commerce Strategies in Developed and Emerging Markets. *Indo American Journal of Multi-disciplinary Research and Review*. November 2024. Special Issue 2: 14-26.
- Mutambara, E. and Chitakunye, P. 2020. Digital entrepreneurship and small business resilience in developing economies. *Journal of African Business*. 21(2): 153-170.

- Nambisan, S. 2017. Digital entrepreneurship: Toward a digital technology perspective of entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*. 41(6): 1029-1055.
- Nambisan, S., Wright, M., and Feldman, M. 2019. The digital transformation of entrepreneurship. *Research Policy*. 48(8): 103773.
- Ndubisi, N.O. and Nair, S.R. 2020. Green entrepreneurship and green value added: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Cleaner Production*. 261: 121-348.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; European Union; European Training Foundation; European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. (2020). *SME Policy Index: Eastern Partner Countries 2020 – Assessing the Implementation of the Small Business Act for Europe*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/8b45614b-en>.
- Ohia, G.E. and Lebor, S. 2020. Product innovation and competitive advantage of aluminium manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Business and Entrepreneurship*. 13(2): 72-89.
- Olawale, F. and Garwe, D. 2021. The role of digitalisation in SME development in sub-Saharan Africa. *African Journal of Business Management*. 15(4): 105-116.
- Peteraf, M.A. and Barney, J.B. 2003. Unravelling the resource-based tangle. *Managerial and Decision Economics*. 24(4): 309-323.
- Pop, D., Simut, R. and Bac, D. (2024). Understanding digital entrepreneurship: Theoretical Perspective. *The Annals of the University of Oradea. Economic Sciences*. TOM XXXIII(1).
- Priem, R.L. and Butler, J.E. 2001. Is the resource-based “view” a useful perspective for strategic management research? *Academy of Management Review*. 26(1): 22-40
- Rani, N. and Sangeeta. 2020. Role of innovation in entrepreneurship. *An International Bilingual Peer-Reviewed Referred Research Journal*. 7(28). ISSN 2328-2397, 42-47.
- Schumpeter, J. A. 1934. *The Theory of Economic Development*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Taherdoost, H. 2021. Data Collection Methods and Tools for Research; A Step-by-Step Guide to Choose Data Collection Technique for Academic and Business Research Projects. *International Journal of Academic Research in Management*. 10(1), ISSN: 2296-1747
- Teece, D.J. 2018. Business models and dynamic capabilities. *Long Range Planning*. 51(1): 40-49.
- Ukpabio, M.G. Adeyeye, A.D. and Oluwatope, O.B. 2018. *Absorptive capacity and product innovation: new evidence from Nigeria*. (1st Ed.). New York: Routledge.
- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. (2021). *Digital Economy Report 2021: Cross-Border Data Flows and Development*. UNCTAD. <https://doi.org/10.18356/9789210058254>.

- Venkatesh, V. and Davis, F.D. 2000. A theoretical extension of the Technology Acceptance Model: Four longitudinal field studies. *Management Science*. 46(2): 186-204.
- Venkatesh, V., Morris, M.G., Davis, G.B. and Davis, F.D. 2003. User acceptance of information technology: Toward a unified view. *MIS Quarterly*. 27(3): 425-478.
- Wernerfelt, B. 1984. A resource-based view of the firm. *Strategic Management Journal*. 5(2): 171-180.
- Yusuf, S, O, Durodola, R, L Ocran, G, Abubakar, J, E, Echere, A, Z and Paul-Adeleye, A, H. (2024). Challenges and opportunities in AI and digital transformation for SMEs: A cross-continental perspective. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews*. 23(03), 668–678. <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.23.3.2511>.

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.24>

PEACEKEEPING, RESOURCE EXCHANGE AND GENDER: THE PLACE OF MONUSCO AND FORCE INTERVENTION BRIGADE

PRINCE GONTSE MOTAUNG

School of Governance,
Faculty of Humanities,
North West University South Africa
pgmotaung@gmail.com

&

KELECHI JOHNMARY ANI

School of Public Management, Governance and Public Policy,
University of Johannesburg, South Africa
kani4christ@gmail.com

ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6617-1484>

Abstract

Although significant progress has been achieved in the DR Congo since the establishment of United Nation's peacekeeping operation, the eastern part continues to be plagued by recurrent waves of conflict, chronic humanitarian crises and serious human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence. This signalled the birth of a collaboration between United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), and the Force Intervention Brigade led by Southern African Development Community states (South Africa, Tanzania and Malawi) made impact on the peacekeeping process. This mission was authorised in line with Security Council resolution 1674 (2006) vowed to protect civilians in armed conflict which is the current case in the eastern part of DR Congo. But also, it is symbolic of the evolving collaboration between the UN and regional arrangements where resources are exchanged in a bid to fulfil Security Council mandates. This study has utilised the mixed methods design and measured the success, and the failures of the mission in achieving political stability and peacebuilding. It found that while extensive progress were made politically, human casualty, and gender violence remained recurrent. It recommends increased multilateral peacebuilding and politics of gender mainstreaming in the crisis management. The study is significant as it will contribute to the body of literature on peacekeeping in Africa.

Keywords: MONUSCO, Force Intervention Brigade, Peacekeeping, gender, and Peacebuilding

Introduction

Peacekeeping is a growing reality in the contemporary world due to the increasing cases of conflicts and insecurity in different parts of the globe. The need for peacekeeping is in high demand in different parts of the globe, especially

in the African continent. Peacekeeping is a technique designed to preserve peace in different societies and to assist in implementing peace agreements that were reached through the activities of peacemakers, mediators, and other actors in conflict resolution¹. Over the years, peacekeeping has evolved from a primarily military

¹ M. Mutisi Redefining Peacekeeping: The Force Intervention Brigade in the Democratic Republic of

Congo

2010,

<https://kujenga->

model of observing cease-fires and the separation of forces after inter-state wars, to incorporating a complex model of military, police, and civilian elements together in order to help and lay the foundations for sustainable peace and societal transformation.

The quest for peacekeeping has been growing since the 20th century due to the growing nature of multidimensional crisis, in different parts of the globe, especially in the African continent. This new move to advance peacekeeping emerged as a response to the challenges posed by the post-Cold War era in the globe². The era has been characterised by search for by within states and beyond thereby pushing international organizations, especially the United Nations, and the regional as well as continental governmental organisations towards supporting increasing peacekeeping in a bid to manage the growing wave of terrorism, inter-state wars, military coups, ethnic tensions, humanitarian disasters, nuclear and small arms proliferation, epidemics, as well as global warming. In some cases, these international organisations engage in cooperation in a bid to deal with such global challenges. Considering the widespread nature of the above challenges, the UN has indeed been stretched to its limits, which makes it harder for a single state-organization to be able to resolve global security problems on its own. In “an agenda for peace, it is argued that regional arrangements or agencies in many cases have the potential for preventive diplomacy, peace-keeping, peace-making, and post-conflict peace-building³.

At different times in the history of evolution of

the contemporary developments in the continent, there has been a number of peacekeeping operations, which include but not limited to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the United Nations Hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID). However, in this study, we shall focus on the role and impact of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) that collaborated with the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) in the quest for conflict management. Ironically, the conflict and the peacekeeping that followed in Congo is directly connected to the political economy of resource access, control as well as sale and profiteering within the domestic and international security framework. Webber maintains that although resource dependence theory is not part of mainstream international relations (IR) theory, it provides a new dimension for understanding what motivates organizations to cooperate⁴.

The scarcity of resources leads organizations to seek help, which leads to resource exchange and that results into resource dependence in some cases within the African continent⁵. In the case of MONUSCO and FIB, it is evident that the United Nations was experiencing resource scarcity in terms of deployment to stabilize the situation in the DR Congo, which led them to engage the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) in the peacekeeping activities. This shows an element of both human resource exchange and dependence as the two depends on each other for the success of the mission. This study is significant as it will contribute to the body of knowledge in the area of peacekeeping, gender studies and re-

amani.ssrc.org/2015/07/26/redefining-peace-keeping-the-force-intervention-brigade-in-the-democratic-republic-of-congo/ Date Accessed 15/05/2018

² A. J. Bellamy, P. Williams, & Griffin.. Understanding Peacekeeping. Cambridge: Polity Press. 2004, pp. 15-23

³ N. Sempijja Does Dependence Lead to Cooperation? The Case of Resource Exchange between the European Union and the United Nations in DR Congo, *African Security*, 9:4, 259-277, 2016, DOI: 10.1080/19392206.2016.1236575;

⁴ Webber, *International Relations Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York, NY: Routledge) (2010),

⁵ R. Matthew.. *Resource Scarcity: Responding to the Security Challenge*. New York: International Peace Institute. 2008 <http://www.ipacademy.org/assets/file/304/rscar0408.pdf> date Accessed 05/05/2019; Kelechi Johnmary Ani, *Resource Conflict and Environmental Relations in Africa*, Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2023; Kelechi Johnmary Ani, Victor Ojatorotu & Kelvin Bribena, *Political Economy of Resource, Human Security & Environmental Conflicts in Africa*, Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2021

gional security. This is very imperative considering the negligence of the gender dimensions in peacekeeping operations by scholars. The study is divided into sections covering introduction, resource exchange, .

Theorising Resource Exchange

Fundamental to the idea of resource exchange is the assumption that resources are limited globally and organizations, individuals, states, and especially the troop contributing states are operating under the condition of resource scarcity⁶. Consequently, if resource obtained by an organisation is depleted, it provides incentives for interaction with external actors. In a process of resource exchange, organizations can extend or just maintain their ambit of peacekeeping action. In this case of collaboration, the success of the mission depends solely on human resource exchange. Thus, it can be argued that if resources obtained by an organization are depleted, it is very natural for the organisation or state to provide incentives for interaction or relations with external peace actors. It is such process that has led to the AU-Un joint peacekeeping operation and other forms of relations that enabled peacekeeping directly and indirectly. This then speaks directly to the breakthrough of the UNAMID through their alliance with FIB⁷. This study is centered on the idea of resource exchange. It maintains that for organizations to survive they require resources. This then means that for an organization to acquire such an interaction with other organizations who control the needed resources, they must be ready to exchange it for something. As a result, an organization must then go through a transaction with the other organization which will then afford the organization with resources they lack as well as more power and control over the situation they

face. Conceptually, it is argued that five conditions are essential for resource exchange, and they are actor autonomy, complementarity of resources, equitable (at least reciprocal) resource exchange, size of demand and supply of resources, and congruence of peacekeeping norms and interests. It should be noted that the cooperation between the United Nations and the African Union in the maintenance of peace and security has greatly intensified in recent years, as demonstrated by numerous collaborative efforts in conflict prevention, mediation, and peacekeeping⁸. The AU-UN agreement created an opportunity for the participation of AU personnel in an administration and resource training programme designed to foster mission support leadership and technical skills, as well as nurture career development. The UN Security Council endorsed the expansion of the UN support package for the AU mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in February 2012, and an increase of its uniformed personnel. This decision followed a joint AU-UN planning process, which both organizations praised. In late 2012 and early 2013, the UN and AU both conducted strategic reviews of their engagement within Somalia, and in March 2013, UN Security Council Resolution 2093 extended AMISOM's mandate for another year with the same UN logistical support package, but in tandem with a new expanded UN special political mission. This is a clear example of resource exchange between the two organizations.

One would then argue that in the case of AMISON, the African Union as an organization did not have enough resources to maintain the peacekeeping mission and therefore was forced to depend on other external organizations for support, especially the UN. The dependency on resources means that there are incentives for resource exchange in triggering organizational inter-play. The collaboration of the AU and UN in

⁶ R. Matthew, Resource Scarcity: Responding to the Security Challenge. New York: International Peace Institute, 2008. <http://www.ipacademy.org/asset/file/304/rscar0408.pdf> date Accessed 05/05/2019

⁷ L. Gberie Intervention brigade: End game in the Congo?, <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/august-2013/intervention-brigade-end-game->

congo, (2013) Date Accessed: 15/05/2019

⁸ UNITED NATIONS. Secretary-General. An Agenda for Peace: preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping and peace-making. A/47/277 – S/24111, (1992), Date Accessed 16/04/2019;

peacekeeping emerged as a result of the comparative advantages of both institutions, but it has suffered from several problems, including the AU's weak bureaucratic, logistical, and financial capabilities.

It should be noted that for any organization to survive, it requires resources. This then means that an organization has to interact with other organizations who control or has the needed resources. It is evident that most organisations depend on other organisations for the successes of their peacekeeping missions. It was evident during the United Nations Hybrid Mission in Darfur when the UN depended on the African Union for troops, and equally during the African Union Mission in Somalia when the AU depended on the UN for legitimacy, logistical support, and funding. It is clear, the UN depends on African states for troop's deployment, which is regarded as manpower. However, the organisations involved still seek approval of the UN Security Council and equally the UN's funding for the sustainability of the mission, like the peacekeeping operation in Eastern Congo. Dependency and resource exchange are therefore becoming popular phenomenon in peacekeeping missions in the contemporary world.

MONUSCO-FIB Peacekeeping Alliance

Following the signing of the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement between the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and five regional States (Angola, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe) in July 1999, the Security Council established the MONUSCO. By its resolution 1279 that took place on 30th November 1999, MONUC was initially empowered to plan for the observation of the ceasefire and disengagement of forces and to maintain liaison with all parties to the ceasefire agreement⁹. Later in a series of resolutions, the Security Council expanded the mandate of MONUC upwards to include the supervision of the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and assigned multiple related addi-

tional tasks. It is these tasks that would determine the dynamics of the peacekeeping operation in Congo.

Consequently, the country's first free elections in 46 years were held on 30 July 2006, with voters electing a 500-seat National Assembly. Following a run-off election for the presidency on 29 October, 2006 and resolution of a subsequent legal challenge, President Joseph Kabila (son of late Laurent Désiré Kabila assassinated in 2001) was declared the winner. The entire electoral process represented one of the most complex votes the United Nations had ever helped to organize. Following the elections, MONUC remained on the ground and continued to implement multiple political, military, rule of law and capacity-building tasks as mandated by the Security Council resolutions, including trying to resolve ongoing conflicts in a number of the DRC provinces.

On 1 July 2010, the Security Council, by its resolution 1925, renamed MONUC and turned it to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). The new mission was authorized to use all necessary means to carry out its mandate relating, among other things, to the protection of civilians, humanitarian personnel and human rights defenders under imminent threat of physical violence and to support the Government of the DRC in its stabilization and peace consolidation efforts. The Council decided that MONUSCO would comprise, in addition to the appropriate civilian, judiciary and correction components, a maximum of 19,815 military personnel, 760 military observers, 391 police personnel and 1,050 members of police units. Future reconfigurations of MONUSCO would be determined as the situation evolved on the ground, including: the completion of ongoing military operations in North and South Kivu as well as the Orientale provinces; improved government capacity to protect the population effectively; and the consolidation of state authority throughout the territory.

⁹ D. Nyström, *The UN Mission in Congo and the Basic Principles of Peacekeeping - Revolution or Evolution?* Stockholm University, Spring 2015 O.

Spijkers 'The Evolution of United Nations Peacekeeping in the Congo', *Journal of International Peacekeeping* 19 2015

Although significant progress was achieved in the DRC since the establishment of the UN peacekeeping operation there, the eastern part continued to be plagued by recurrent waves of conflict, chronic humanitarian crises, and serious human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence. Contributing to the cycles of violence have been the continued presence of Congolese and foreign armed groups taking advantage of power and security vacuums in the eastern part of the country; the illegal exploitation of resources; interference by neighboring countries; pervasive impunity; inter-communal feuds; and the weak capacity of the national army and police to effectively protect civilians and the national territory and ensure law and order¹⁰.

The recurrence of such cycles of violence, as exemplified by the major crisis in North Kivu, which started in April 2012, continued to be an obstacle to peace in the DRC and threatened the overall stability and development of the Great Lakes region. In order to address the underlying causes of conflict and ensure that sustainable peace takes hold in the country and the wider region, the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region was signed by representatives of 11 countries in the region, the Chairs of the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the United Nations Secretary-General on 24 February 2013 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia¹¹.

On 28 March 2013, acting in support of the objectives of the Framework agreement for Peace, Security and Cooperation for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region, and answering the call of Governments in Africa's Great Lakes region, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2098 (2013), by which it extended until 31 March 2014, the mandate of MONUSCO and created a specialized "intervention brigade" to strengthen the peacekeeping operation. Acting on the recommendations contained in the 27 February special report, the Security Council decided that such a brigade would be set up for an initial period of one year and within the authorized troop ceiling of 19,815, on an exceptional basis and without creating a precedent or any prejudice to the agreed principles of peacekeeping¹².

The brigade was formed by forces from three countries in the SADC region, namely, Malawi, South Africa, and Tanzania. The FIB's command and control fell under MONUSCO broadly, reflecting the need to avoid overlapping and competing structures in peace support operations. It must be emphasized, however, that the FIB retains some level of autonomy in implementing its mandate, with leeway to carry out its uniquely branded offensive operations focused on the restoration of normalcy in the eastern DRC¹³.

FIB would consist of three infantry battalions, one artillery and one special force and reconnaissance company with headquarters in Goma, and operate under direct command of the

¹⁰ United Nations. Secretary-General. An Agenda for Peace: preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping and peace-making. A/47/277 – S/24111, 1992 Date Accessed 16/04/2019; United Nations.. The Blue Helmets: a Review of United Nations Peacekeeping. 3rd Edition. New York: United Nations Department of Public Information 1995

¹¹ United Nations SC, United Nations Mission in Democratic Republic of Congo Must Transform into 'Robust, Flexible, Highly Mobile' Entity, Security Council Told, 2004 <https://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11316.doc.htm> Date Accessed: 15/04/2019; UN Charter, Article 43, available at <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter7.shtml>

¹² United Nations SC, United Nations Mission in Democratic Republic of Congo 2014 Must Transform into 'Robust, Flexible, Highly Mobile' Entity, Security Council

Told,

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11316.doc.htm> Date Accessed: 15/04/2019

¹³ M. Mutisi Redefining Peacekeeping: The Force Intervention Brigade in the Democratic Republic of Congo, <https://kujenga-amani.ssrrc.org/2015/07/26/redefining-peace-keeping-the-force-intervention-brigade-in-the-democratic-republic-of-congo/> (2010) Date Accessed 15/05/2018

D. Nyström The UN Mission in Congo and the Basic Principles of Peacekeeping - Revolution or Evolution? Stockholm University, Spring term 2015; Spijkers O, 'The Evolution of United Nations Peacekeeping in the Congo', Journal of International Peacekeeping 19, 2015

MONUSCO Force Commander, with the responsibility of neutralizing armed groups and the objective of contributing to reducing the threat posed by armed groups to state authority and civilian security in eastern DRC and to make space for stabilization activities. It was also decided that intervention brigade would have a clear exit strategy and that the Security Council would consider extending its mandate beyond one year on the basis of its performance, and of whether the DRC had made sufficient progress in implementing the Peace and Security Framework for the region.

The resolution strongly condemned the 23rd March Movement (M23), the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), and all other armed groups that are engaged in continuing violence and abuses of human rights in the area. It tasked the new brigade with carrying out offensive operations, either unilaterally or jointly with the Congolese armed forces, in a robust, highly mobile, and versatile manner in a bid to disrupt the activities of those groups. As regard to the Peace and Security Framework for the region, brokered by the Secretary-General, the Security Council demanded that all signatory States implement their commitments in good faith, and encouraged the establishment of an oversight mechanism involving regional leaders, as well as a national mechanism to oversee implementation of reform measures agreed by the Democratic Republic of Congo.

On 28 March 2014, the Security Council, by its resolution 2147, extended the mandate of MONUSCO until 31 March 2015 and decided that the renewed mandate would also include MONUSCO's Intervention Brigade on an exceptional basis and without creating a precedent or any prejudice within the authorized troop ceiling of 19,815 military personnel, 760 military observers and staff officers, 391 police personnel and 1,050 police units.

It should be noted that as per the result, the first area in which MONUC had a strategic impact is in its contribution towards the reunification of the country. The second area where MONUSCO had a strategic impact is in preventing a recur-

rence of a major violent conflict. The third manner in which MONUSCO has had strategic impact is by using its presence to enable other international and national actors, including the private sector, to provide services and stimulate the local economy. MONUSCO contributed to the functioning, and in some cases the development of vital infrastructure, such as several airports, key access roads, river, lake, and telecommunications. The fourth area where MONUSCO has had strategic impact is through its contribution over the years to the enhancement of a dynamic civic space and civil society, and its contribution to democratic politics. Among others, it did so by supporting Radio Okapi, and by facilitating a culture of consultation and dialogue through its own example. Radio Okapi, in particular, has made a significant contribution towards this civic activism by providing a platform for impartial media space, and filling it with information and debate.

The Force Intervention Brigade's initial triumphs in securing civilian population and reestablishing state authority are promising and ought to be viewed as a conceivable apparatus in peacekeeping operations when an armed group keeps on destabilizing a region and will not negotiate. This effective gamble improved past failures in robust peace enforcement. In spite of its authority to operate unilaterally, the Brigade's activities represent an inclination to help government troops in their missions, as it did in the quest for the M23 and Allied Democratic Forces insurgencies in 2013 and 2014. Early in its tenure, the Brigade effectively disposed of the risk of M23, reducing the unit considerable recognition and raising hopes for its ability to bring stability to volatile regions of the DRC. Be that as it may, in the government's ongoing tasks against the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, the Force Intervention Brigade was not able to cooperate because of the UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy's restrictions on supporting soldiers blamed for human rights infringement.

It is significant to note that the Force Intervention Brigade had an exit strategy that is specifically tied to progress in government capacity.

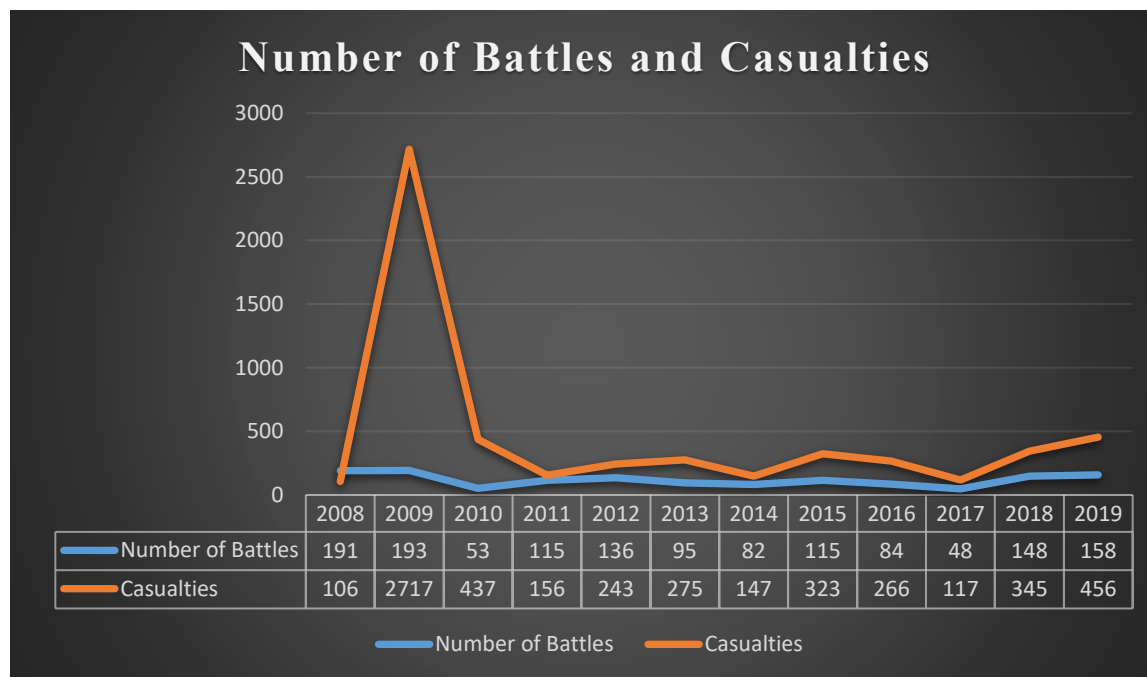
Troop-contributing countries and MONUSCO leadership put offensive troops in harm's way in order for the Brigade to continue operating, given delays in the establishment of the Congolese Rapid Reaction Force slated to inherit the Brigade's duties. Although UN peacekeepers across all missions tend to come from certain large troop-contributing countries, the Force Intervention Brigade in unusual history came from Southern African Development Community (SADC) states. These same states also have political ties to the government, making some critics accuse the Brigade of being a mere extension of SADC political ambitions in the region.

Though resolution 2098 carefully stated that the Force Intervention Brigade was created on an exceptional basis and without creating a precedent, it will inevitably be evaluated by both critics and proponents of UN peacekeeping missions with strong use-of-force mandates. In important respects, it was an attempt to replicate the experience of Operation Artemis, but taking on a more politically and militarily significant challenger. Both Artemis and the FIB consist of a specialized combat component dedicated to a particular task contained within a wider peacekeeping operation, a model that has been

adopted elsewhere by the UN.

It must be noted that, the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), the sharp end of MONUSCO earned its glory in 2013 when it helped the DRC's army defeat the powerful Rwanda-backed M23 rebels in the east of the country. This was further supported by Source J1 (a high ranking General in the SANDF interviewed on 24/06/2019) after alluding that the unit of some 3 000 troops from South Africa, Tanzania, and Malawi had a more muscular mission than the rest of MONUSCO, and they used necessary force to 'neutralise' all the 'negative' armed rebel groups in eastern DRC. Its second target was supposed to be the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), the armed group founded in the mid-1990s by Rwandan Hutus who fled the country after the genocide against the Tutsis. However, Source A alluded that the UN might have intentions of terminating FIB's contract, it is suspected that the Brigade through SADC has made it clear that it is capable of holding its successful mission and also alluded that the AU has equally shown support by indirectly instructing the UN to leave, if the situation in DRC has not changed by the year 2020.

Graph 1: Number of battles and casualties recorded



Graph 1 above gives an insight on the number of battles that took place five before the missions (2008-2012) and five years after the inception of the mission (2014-2018) which go hand in hand with casualties. Furthermore, it also depicts the number of fatalities (casualties) during those times. Moreover, this graph also shows all the battles that took place during the year of the inception of the collaboration (2013) and what is currently happening in 2019. Violence, impunity, and horrific human rights abuses continue in the Democratic Republic of Congo, two years after historic elections were expected to bring stability.

The years 2008 and 2009 were the toughest in DR Congo, where we see a rise in a number of battles and that led to a high level of casualties as compared to any other year. According to the World Report of (2009), hopes for peace soared in January when the government and 22 armed groups signed a ceasefire agreement and the government launched the Amani Program to coordinate peace efforts. But slow progress in implementing the agreement, plus frequent violations of the ceasefire, gave way in late August to serious fighting in North Kivu between the forces of rebel commander Laurent Nkunda's National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) and the Congolese national army. In October the CNDP stopped just short of taking Goma and unilaterally declared a ceasefire, demanding talks with the government. The CNDP, claiming to protect people of Rwandan descent and particularly Tutsi, also fought the Coalition of Congolese Patriotic Resistance (PARECO), made up of other Congolese ethnic groups and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a group including Congolese and Rwandan Hutu, some of whom had participated in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. All parties to the combat committed grave human rights abuses, including killing hundreds of civilians, forcibly recruiting children and adults for military service, and widespread looting.

Three years after successful elections in DR Congo, the country experienced what is known as political repression. Security forces targeted political opponents, particularly those from Equateur province, the home region of former

presidential candidate Jean-Pierre Bemba. They killed at least five and illegally detained scores of others, many of whom were tortured or ill-treated. Detainees were frequently accused of plotting a coup, but as of October 2008, no cases had been brought to trial. Moreover, on July 6, Republican Guards killed Daniel Boteti, the vice-president of the Kinshasa provincial assembly and a member of Bemba's Congolese Liberation Movement (MLC). In May and June security agents arrested at least 15 persons from Equateur. They were held incommunicado for several months before 12 of them were transferred to Makala central prison, some of them showing visible signs of torture. In July another eight people from Equateur were arrested, illegally detained, and brutally beaten. Government officials refused to answer questions from United Nations human rights monitors about the location of other detainees. In July the government released 258 prisoners from Makala central prison, including many who had been illegally detained since March 2007. The decision was taken to resolve problems of overcrowding in the jail and did not appear to have been based on a judicial review of the cases.

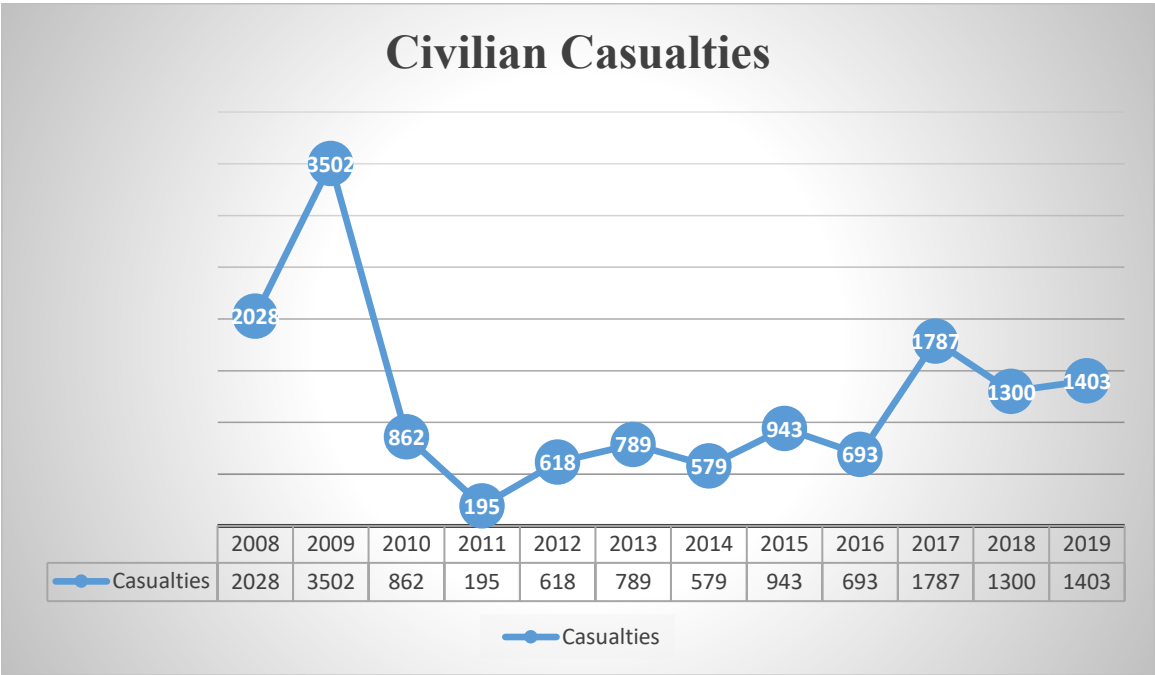
One cannot help but observe the fact that most of the conflict in DR Congo has always been politically driven, hence the need for force to stabilize the political instable environment by neutralising the armed forces. During the inception of the collaboration, the number of battles remained in its average following another decrease in the year 2014 first year after the inception of the mission. It is quite evident that the inception of a more brutal force brigade helped in neutralising most of the armed rebels as most of the recorded fatalities were either of the armed rebels (M23 and FDLR), and unidentified civilians from the Congo bushes as most of the rebels were located there. The number of battles remained very low four (4) years after the mission especially in 2017. However, in 2018-2019 the number of battles increased.

2018 was supposed to be another elective year for DR Congo. This was not successful due to the escalated conflict which led to the postponement of the elections to March 2019. In these year (2018-2019) we equally saw a rise in the

number of casualties during these times. It is evident that DR Congo has a deeply rooted political problems which hinders the prosperity of a

successful peacekeeping operation and also the protection of civilians in the area.

Graph 2: Violence Against Civilians



Civilian protection has remained the most crucial part of any peace operation in the world. Source E1 and E2 (a high ranking official in the SANDF Medical Department interviewed on the 22/05/2019) alluded that the protection of civilians has been the driving factor to the major collaboration. Although, it has not been achieved to its full degree, there are notable incidences where the mission has yielded results. This is particularly true for the FIBs mandate which was mostly to neutralise the armed rebel forces that have continued to terrorise civilians and are not even willing to back down on their quest. The graph depicts the level of violence against civilians in DR Congo.

The data recorded is from five years (2008-2012) pre collaboration between and five years post the collaboration. It is evident that the United Nations was not capable of fully dealing with rebel groups which has led to an increase of fatalities in the year 2008-2009. The data recorded depicts the following cases recorded on

ACLED: abduction rates, attack against civilians, sexual abuse of both women and children

Three years after a successful election the human rights watch announced that the level of violence against civilians has increased drastically. Furthermore, it was equally recorded that in 2008 the civilian death toll continued to mount. It was also in 2008 that the International Rescue Committee reported that a staggering 5.4 million people have died from conflict-related causes since 1998. Moreover, over 200 people have been reported killed in a second government crackdown on the political religious movement Bundu Dia Kongo (BDK) in the western Bas Congo province. Government ministers claim the BDK were armed but present no convincing evidence. Soldiers attempted to hide the evidence by throwing corpses in the river.

In 2009 the UN Human Rights Council terminated the mandate of the independent expert on human rights for Congo citing political progress and stabilization in the country. A UN group of experts investigating arms trafficking provided

a detailed evidence that the Congolese government continues to support and arm the FDLR, the Rwandan Hutu militia, and that Rwanda is backing Nkunda. The recorded civilian fatalities were slightly low in the year 2011 but increased drastically in the year 2012 which was equally another successful elective year post 2006. It was quite evident that most violent practice took place during elective years which further points out the political instability as the highest factor that has equally contributed to the conflict in DR Congo. The fatalities slightly dropped in 2014, but increased from the year 2017 to date. 2018 also had a high number of fatalities which elapsed to 2019. 2018 was another elective year which the elections were not even successful and were postponed to march 2019 due to level of violence especially levelled against citizens. The graphs have shed a rather interesting light on the situation in DR Congo. This leaves much interest in the political aspect of the situation as a whole. With the issue of violence in question, it is evident that the inception of the FIB in the mission has proven to be a success. The arena for peace operation is drastically changing based on the environmental factors at hand. With the growing population and the scarce resource, political will must prevail to provide a clear direction. However, it is not the case with DR Congo as the same political will has resulted an unending conflict. One cannot shy away from the fact that the underlying reasons to such a situation is who gets to have total control of the scarce resources in the area. In this case, everything comes at the expense of the periphery which is the ordinary civilians. Furthermore, the data collected and analysed have proven that amidst cooperation, a stable political environment is required to aid the situation in DR Congo. Political factors have remained to be the highest peak of factors contributing to the violence. The role of resource dependence boils down from the issue of resource exchange which is brought about by the scarcity of resources. With neighbouring countries also intervening in the affairs of DR Congo, this increases the level of demand of the scarce resources in the area.

Taking note of the two graphs, it is evident that

the number off battles and casualties of both involved in the battles and the civilians in graph two, tend to rise between the years 2008 and 2009 and quickly drop in 2010. However, when one observes further, they begin to rise in 2011 moving escalating towards 2012. This clearly shows the beginning of a new phase of conflict which necessitated the need for a robust approach. The United Nations was not ready for yet another failure hence the discussion for a robust force started in 2012 and was implemented in 2013 which we now see a drop on both the battles and number of casualties. A closer observation shows that the FIB succeeded in stabilising the situation before it escalated further, hence a fluctuating number from the year 2014 till 2019. Also as mentioned in the analysis, the role of political factors seems to be in the core of the conflict, as we have observed the rising violence during election years. Therefore, this clearly shows that FIB needs to remain in DRC to sort out the political instability because every time when there seems to be successes, the rebels return through the political realm. A stable political environment is needed to aid the situation in DR Congo.

Gender Implications

Early in 2008 a peace agreement brought hope to eastern Congo, but combat between government and rebel forces resumed in August. During the year, hundreds of civilians were killed, thousands of women and girls were raped, and a further 400,000 people fled their homes, pushing the total number of displaced persons in North and South Kivu to over 1.2 million. Sexual violence against women and girls continued at its previously horrifying rate with more than 2,200 cases of rape recorded from January to June in North Kivu province alone, likely representing only a small portion of the total. Dozens of other women and girls were reported to have been raped following resumption of combat in August.

Because of the work of MONUSCO, FARDC has vastly improved its techniques for recognizing child soldiers and no longer recruits them. This is one of the long-term successes for the

Mission. In parallel, MONUSCO's Gender Office had attempted to advance a gender based sensitive approach within the Mission itself to fuse an increasingly comprehensive and nuanced comprehension of the role of gender in conflict and the necessities that it generates. Source H1 (a high ranking official in SANDF interviewed on 27/07/2019) alluded that through intelligence, there was an increase in child soldiers during the message which went unrecorded and equally a high number of displacement of women and children. However, since the inception of the collaboration, this has alleviated.

One of the biggest challenges has been adopting a people-centred approach. However, in recent years, the Mission's civilian dimension, in particular, has worked to adopt a participatory approach, backing inclusive local mechanisms for dialogue and consensus, and building community-based solutions that will promote gender equity, mainstreaming and protection of vulnerable groups as revealed by Source F (a high ranking official in SANDF HR interviewed on 25/05/2019). By expanding its capillary reach into the territory, the Mission has tried to create new interfaces with communities, especially those located in and around hotspots of violence and instability, even as it faces dwindling resources. However, the adoption of a people-centred approach has remained a constant challenge, especially because of how uneven the

Mission's capillary reach is.

Conclusion

This study investigates the relations between MONUSCO and FIB in managing the DRC crisis. An interesting point to be taken into consideration is that the collaboration between MONUSCO and FIB promoted political stability at the time. It also managed the high level of fatalities recorded against civilians and reduced the influence of other armed rebel groups from the FDLR and LRA to name a few. It is evident that, the FIB succeeded in its quest to neutralise armed rebel groups in the area while the United Nations focused on aiding the displaced population. This further shows that there is indeed co-operation between MONUSCO and FIB as there are evident in the graphic results. Although the situation in the Eastern part of DR Congo is still bad, there are traces of evidence that the successes of the missions depends on the collaboration specifically for the protection of civilians. FIB composed of three Nation States (South Africa, Malawi and Tanzania) that are members of the Southern African Development Community; one may not ignore the fact that SADC is equally involved. UN depends on the states mentioned for troop deployment. However, it is also evident that there is an element of exchange and the three nation states in the forefront of FIB also sought logistics, financial and other supports from the United Nations.

Bibliography

- Bellamy, A.J., Williams, P. & Griffin. (2004). *Understanding Peacekeeping*. Cambridge: Polity Press. pp. 15-23
- Gberie L, (2013) Intervention brigade: End game in the Congo?, <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/august-2013/intervention-brigade-end-game-congo>, Date Accessed: 15/05/2019
- Kelechi Johnmary Ani, (2023) *Resource Conflict and Environmental Relations in Africa*, Palgrave Macmillan: London,;
- Kelechi Johnmary Ani, Victor Ojakorotu & Kelvin Bribena, (2021) *Political Economy of Resource, Human Security & Environmental Conflicts in Africa*, Palgrave Macmillan: London

- Matthew, R. (2008). Resource Scarcity: Responding to the Security Challenge. New York: International Peace Institute. <http://www.ipacademy.org/asset/file/304/rscar0408.pdf> date Accessed 05/05/2019;
- Matthew, R. (2008). Resource Scarcity: Responding to the Security Challenge. New York: International Peace Institute. <http://www.ipacademy.org/asset/file/304/rscar0408.pdf> date Accessed 05/05/2019
- Mutisi M (2010) Redefining Peacekeeping: The Force Intervention Brigade in the Democratic Republic of Congo, <https://kujenga-amani.ssrc.org/2015/07/26/redefining-peacekeeping-the-force-intervention-brigade-in-the-democratic-republic-of-congo/> Date Accessed 15/05/2018
- Nyström D (2015), The UN Mission in Congo and the Basic Principles of Peacekeeping - Revolution or Evolution? Stockholm University, Spring term;
- Sempijja N. (2016) Does Dependence Lead to Cooperation? The Case of Resource Exchange between the European Union and the United Nations in DR Congo, *African Security*, 9:4, 259-277, 2016, DOI: 10.1080/19392206.2016.1236575;
- Spijkers O (2015), 'The Evolution of United Nations Peacekeeping in the Congo', *Journal of International Peacekeeping* 19
- UN Charter, Article 43, available at <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter7.shtml>
- United Nations SC (2014), United Nations Mission in Democratic Republic of Congo Must Transform into 'Robust, Flexible, Highly Mobile' Entity, Security Council Told, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11316.doc.htm> Date Accessed: 15/04/2019;
- United Nations. (1996). The Blue Helmets: a Review of United Nations Peace-keeping. 3rd Edition. New York: United Nations Department of Public Information
- United Nations. Secretary-General.(1992) An Agenda for Peace: preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping and peace-making. A/47/277 – S/24111, (1992), Date Accessed 16/04/2019;
- Webber, M. (2010) International Relations Theory: A Critical Introduction (New York, edge)

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.25>

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: GENDER MAINSTREAMING OF SUSTAINABLE ENERGY IN SOUTH AFRICAN REGIONS

Lukamba, Muhlya Tshombe

*Department of Public Management and Administration,
North-West University, Vanderbijlpark,
South Africa*

MT.Lukamba@nwu.ac.za

&

Taleat, Bisiriyu Abiodun

orcid.org/0000-0003-4745-095X

*Department of Public Management and Local Government,
North-West University, Mahikeng,
South Africa.*

Correspondence Email: abioduntaleat@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper examines the effect of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) on sustainable energy development in South Africa with a critical focus on gender equity. It singles out continuing gender differences in the access and inclusion of energy, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas, with women being the victims of energy poverty and health hazards due to inefficient energy supply. Albeit setting up considerable investments in the renewable energy infrastructure, PPPs have a tendency to marginalize women-owned enterprises, which is caused by structural, financial, and socio-cultural factors. The research proposes systemic gender mainstreaming in PPP project cycles through an extensive overview pegged on feminist political ecology, social inclusion, and sustainable development theories. It focuses on gender responsive needs assessment, inclusive procurement and financing, governance representation and monitoring of impacts. Local inequalities show that there is a necessity to decentralize energy resources that would enable women on an economic level. It is also recommended that women be boosted in their energy governance capacity, and there should be a multi-stakeholder cooperation and gender-sensitive performance indicators that will ensure equal, inclusive, and empowering energy transitions in South Africa.

Keywords: *Public-Private Partnership, Sustainable Development, Regional Development, Renewable Energy, Energy Policy*

Introduction

The sustainable energy in South Africa does not just refer to the low-carbon technologies, solar, wind, and biomass, but also to the reliable, affordable, accessible, and resilient systems. The nation has been witnessing frequent load-shedding, old grid infrastructure, and the electricity sector that has long been controlled by a coal-fired state utility (Baker, 2020). Still, most rural

and peri-urban families use biomass and paraffin with inefficient heating, which puts women and children at the cost of spending more time and exposes them to higher health risks (UN Women, 2022). Sustainable energy should therefore respond to the environmental, economic and social aspects at the same time, especially by acknowledging the gendered difference in accessing energy. The fact that PPPs integrate the developmental mission of the public sector with capital and innovation of the private

sector makes it a potentially transformative policy mechanism (Asian Development Bank, 2019). PPPs can also be used by the energy industry to invest in renewable energy, off-grid, and grid modernization and transfer technical and managerial skills. A notable case of how PPP-like structures may jump-start renewable energy investment is the South Africa Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP) (Eberhard and Naude, 2016).

The scope of PPP models between concession agreements and blended-finance models may decrease the fiscal strain of the state and deliver energy infrastructure at a quicker rate. However, the danger of PPPs to inclusive and gendered development is also realized where gender issues are not being brought to the fore. Complex financial patterns tend to benefit bigger, well-capitalised firms, excluding women-owned businesses and community-based organisations without collateral or official registration (UNDP, 2021). Also, PPPs favouring mega-scale infrastructure may ignore the decentralized ones, including household solar systems, mini-grids, and productive-use appliances that benefit women disproportionately (IEA, 2022). Moreover, PPPs are prone to being dominated by technical specialists and private investors, which results in hindrances to the effective involvement of marginalized groups, particularly women in rural locations (Simelane & Modise, 2020). Devoid of intentional gender mainstreaming, the energy efforts by PPP would support the status quo of inequalities and not mitigate them.

Gender lens indicates several overlaps of energy systems and social relations. A woman in South Africa bears the unpaid labour disproportionately, as it involves fuel collection, cooking, and family care of members who are affected by indoor air pollution (UN Women, 2022). Energy access can be used to maximize time, which can be improved in education, income generation and community involvement. Women also constitute a disproportionate part of informal econ-

omies and use reliable electricity to run micro-enterprises like hair salons, tailoring, and food vending (Rogan, 2018). Gender benefits can be brought through transformation in the form of energy interventions that enhance reliability and lower costs. In contrast, energy policies that are ill-conceived, e.g. a tariff restructuring with no specific subsidies, may render electricity unaffordable to women-headed families (Energy Research Centre, 2018). The gendered political economy of PPPs also exists. There are structural obstacles to women in the sphere of public consultations, procurement procedures, and governance (GIZ, 2021). Women may be hindered by lack of technical training opportunities, movement restriction and the patriarchal system that limits their involvement in negotiating on energy projects that may impact the communities where they live. Nonetheless, grassroots networks of women tend to be of great importance in taking, maintaining, and being accountable for projects (Oparaocha & Dutta, 2019). Therefore, gender mainstreaming of PPPs will entail changing the institutional practices so that they can achieve equity in accessing finance, representation in the governance systems, capacity building, and avert gendered harm.

There are some strategies that are interrelated in the operationalization of gender-responsive PPPs. To begin with, the appraisal of the project should include gender-differentiated needs assessment and socio-economic analysis in order to get apprehensions of how women and men will be impacted by infrastructure options, tariffs, and service-delivery models (UNDP, 2021). Second, the procurement and financing systems may be restructured to incorporate women-led companies by facilitating documentation and capacity-building along with gender-responsive bidding incentives (World Bank, 2020). Third, PPP contracts may contain provisions requiring gender-sensitive labour practices, skills development, grievance procedures, and sex-disaggregated monitoring indicators (GIZ, 2021). Fourth, the representation of women's groups in the governance platforms should be institutionalized to provide accountability

and inclusiveness. South African regional politics also contribute to gendered energy performance. Institutional capabilities, poverty rates and gender norms are diverse in form between provinces and municipalities (Stats SA, 2022). The metros of Cape Town and Johannesburg have more established PPP capacities but lack energy affordability and exposure to informal settlements (Turok and Visagie, 2021). The rural provinces, which are many (including Eastern Cape, Limpopo, and KwaZulu-Natal), dispersed population, ineffective grid infrastructure, and still use biomass, necessitating flexible PPP models, including community mini-grid and concessional financing of household solar (DMRE, 2019). Energy strategies that respond to gender should be able to capture local conditions, including the presence of women in the agricultural value chains in rural areas.

Southern African and other African countries have been emerging with good practices. Such solutions as community-benefit agreements, local content regulations, and inclusive procurement can redistribute value at the local level in case they are properly executed (Eberhard and Naude, 2016). A combination of technical training and microfinance has empowered women to be solar technicians, energy entrepreneurs and agents of off-grid energy solutions (Oparaocha & Dutta, 2019). To achieve these outcomes on a scale, it is necessary to enforce the coordination of policy frameworks, capacity building at the municipal level, and blended finance to mitigate the risk of the private sector in underserved regions (African Development Bank, 2020). Strong measurement systems are necessary to ensure PPPs promote sustainability and gender equality. The conventional measures, like megawatts installed or returns on investors, are not enough. Examples of gender-responsive performance indicators are the level of employment of women during construction, the transformation of unpaid labour of women and businesses owned by women due to the enhanced access to energy (UNEP, 2020). The incorporation of such indicators in PPP contracts and reporting systems has the effect of providing incentives to the partners to produce inclusive outcomes and

enhancing responsibilities.

Finally, the problem of sustainable energy in the gender aspect via PPPs is not only technical but also political, as it is necessary to coordinate the government and the private investors and financiers with the civil society and communities. Effective energy transitions based on gender equality as a core political leadership ideology can be mobilized through regulatory reforms and budgetary support (DMRE, 2019). Gender evaluations and protection can be enforced through the leverage of the development finance institutions (African Development Bank, 2020). Institutional capacity and alignment of incentives, combined with inclusive governance, are necessary to make sure that the PPPs build a just and gender-equitable energy transition. PPPs have great prospects to revolutionize sustainable energy in South Africa, yet their effectiveness is hinged on the ability to incorporate gender factors throughout the entire process, including design and procurement, up to the implementation and monitoring of the project. The ability to make gender central to analysis and practice can not only ensure that PPPs meet environmental objectives, but also other social and economic empowerment, mainly to women, in the diverse regional settings of South Africa.

Although South Africa has adopted sustainable development and increased its application of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in the energy industry, gender inequalities persist in determining access, participation, and benefits in new sustainable energy systems (UN Women, 2022; Simelane and Modise, 2020). However, PPPs have increased investment in renewable energy; most efforts have been based on financial and technical performance, as is the case with the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producers Procurement Programme (REIPPP), but without considering social inclusion (Eberhard and Naude, 2016). Thus, women, especially in rural and low-income urban areas, are disproportionately exposed to energy poverty, unreliable power access, and low energy decision-making (Rogan, 2018). The lack of access to financial resources, insufficient representation in

technical and leadership roles, and gender-neutral procurement processes are additional organizational obstacles that limit women's participation in PPP processes (UNDP, 2021; GIZ, 2021). These inequalities are further aggravated by regional disparities because provinces that have a weak institutional capacity may fail to enact gender-responsive energy initiatives (Stats SA, 2022). Unless there is purposeful inclusion of gender factor in both the design of PPP, governance and monitoring, sustainable energy projects will be prone towards perpetuating some socio-economic disparities. The fundamental issue, however, is the unfinished nature of the transfer between gender-comprehensive policy undertakings and the practical realities of sustainable energy interventions through PPP procedures in South Africa.

Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

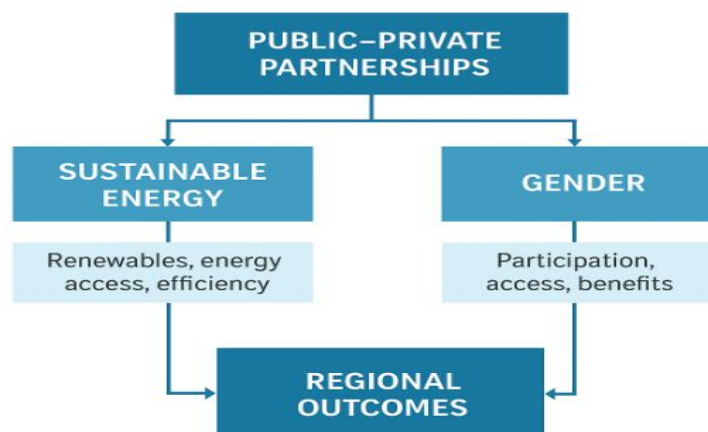
The central conceptual framework of the investigation of the Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) in sustainable development is the connection between the mechanisms of the PPP and gender-responsive sustainable energy projects in South African areas. PPP guides are considered to be a joint agreement between the state and extra mar-

ket organizations to share assets, and risk sharing, along with utilizing

complementary capabilities to attain enduring public targets, including increasing access to clean and renewable energy solutions (World Bank, 2024). The gender aspect is aware that both males and females have different energy requirements and benefit levels because of social roles, economic status, and cultural traditions. Women are prone to energy poverty, which is disproportionate, and use unsafe or inefficient energy sources, which influence health and economic opportunities (Rifkin Institute for Sustainable Futures, 2022). Gender-responsive PPPs deliberately incorporate women as stakeholders, beneficiaries and decision makers in the energy projects to empower women through access to energy, employment, and entrepreneurship (Department of Mineral Resources and Energy DMRE, 2024). The conceptual framework informs about the coexistence between gender relations, energy access, and collaborative governance as the foundation of sustainable development, with the focus on mainstreaming gender throughout the energy transition processes at the local and regional level (Rifkin Institute for Sustainable Futures, 2022; DMRE, 2024).

Diagram 1: Conceptual framework

Interface amongst PPPs, Sustainable Energy, Gender, and Regional Outcomes.



Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinning this study includes feminist political ecology, social inclusion theory and the sustainable development theory. Feminist political ecology offers a critical approach through the analysis of how the sinking of gendered power relations affects the control and access of natural resources and technologies, including energy systems (Rao & Koo, 2025). It unveils the structural inequalities that limit the involvement of women in decision-making on energy and their employment in the sector. The social inclusion theory also emphasizes the need to incorporate people of colour and women, especially, in the processes of institutions, economies, and politics in order to attain equity in the development agenda (Sovacool et al., 2025). The theory can be used to explain how PPPs can lead to, or prevent, inclusion in energy industries. The theory of sustainable development puts the discussion in the context of the triple bottom line of economic growth, social equity, and environmental protection. Proposing to balance the pillars and harmonize them in form of gender-sensitive energy policies and programs (United Nations, 2015). The inclusion of gender views in policies and projects, which is suggested by gender mainstreaming theory, should be systematic and the basis of transform-

ative inclusion rather than tokenistic representation, especially in PPP governance and implementation structures (World Bank, 2024). By and large, these theoretical approaches can provide an understanding of the effects of gendered social relationships on energy transitions and how PPPs may be the drivers of fair and equitable sustainable development in South Africa (Rao and Koo, 2025; Sovacool et al., 2025).

Empirical Framework

The presence of many empirical studies on the topic of sustainable energy in South Africa sheds some light on the obstacles women encounter, as well as the possible measures to improve their inclusion via PPPs. The number of women in the renewable energy labour force is only 14 per cent, despite women representing a large part of the energy demand population, which is a severe gender disparity (Rifkin Institute for Sustainable Futures, 2022). The chronic problems are access to technical education and training, discrimination at work, cultural beliefs about the limitations of women in technical operations, and lack of funds to engage in entrepreneurship. Specific solutions, like gender-linked vocational training programs, mentorship programs like Women Energize Women, as well as gender-sensitive policy initiatives, have shown potential to address the gaps (Sovacool et

al., 2025; DMRE, 2024). Empirical experience has shown positive results when projects use such baseline gender-disaggregated data, involve women stakeholders in the planning process, and are not inconsistent with the national gender equality policies (Energy Policy Journal, 2020). Partnerships, where the social investment requirements and gender equity considerations are combined, are likely to be more sustainable and socially acceptable, allowing empowering the economy by female-led small and medium enterprises that operate in the field of renewable energy (Rao & Koo, 2025). Nevertheless, these findings can only be scaled with long-term political determination, legislative changes, and active provision of marginalized women in the region with financial accessibility (Sovacool et al., 2025).

The PPP models also determine the ability to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy. The supporting empirical research emphasizes that the energy PPPs that are gender inclusive increase the development of local community, decreasing energy poverty, and ensuring environmental sustainability in cases when the energy requirements of women are valued (South African Department of Environment, 2015). Additionally, these models are beneficial in terms of social resilience because they enhance women's access to clean cooking technologies, minimize air pollution in households, and increase women's participation in green energy sectors (Energy Transition Commission, 2023). However, there are still gaps in the empirical data because there is inadequate gender-disaggregated impact monitoring and evaluation in PPP initiatives that restrict the evidence base to be able to determine the long-term gendered impacts of sustainable energy initiatives comprehensively (Rao and Koo, 2025).

The obstacles to meaningful gender integration in PPPs are deeply held patriarchal views, lack of institutional capacity to mainstream gender, and a disjuncture between policy frameworks

and actual practice (Rifkin Institute for Sustainable Futures, 2022). The solution to these needs is capacity building, changes in laws, and the creation of enabling conditions to empower women economically and socially in the energy value chains (DEA, 2015). It is recommended that gender-responsive budgeting and gender action plans that are enshrined in PPP agreements be used by donor agencies and international partners (World Bank, 2024).

It is apparent, as demonstrated by the literature, that there is a need to have holistic conceptual, theoretical, and empirical frameworks that put the issue of gender equity at the heart of the PPP-based sustainable energy programs in the South African regions. Hypothetically, the repositioning of PPPs as collaborative vehicles that internalize gender takes into consideration differentiated energy requirements and barriers to participation. Theoretically, feminist political ecology, social inclusion and sustainable development theories shed light on gendered power relations and socio-political relationships influencing access and governance of energy. Empirically, it is proven that the use of gender-responsive PPPs can change the situation of gender empowerment of women, as well as enhance the achievement of sustainable development, but there are still several challenges within systems. In that regard, the successful incorporation of gender in PPPs needs to be focused on the data-driven gender analysis, policy consistency, stakeholder involvement, and commitment of the institution to break and exploit the opportunities in order to overcome the obstacles. Hence, the review of literature informs the future research's focus, policy improvement, and practical innovations that can facilitate equitable and inclusive energy transitions, which would be fundamental to sustainable development objectives in South Africa.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research approach through the aid of a desk research method; whereby secondary data related to policy documents and scholarly literature were

used to examine how PPPs and gender streams influence the course of renewable energy implementation and the consequences of such transition on the South African energy transition. This methodology offers a sound analytical framework in assessing the intricate interaction between policy formulation, market forces, and sustainable development results in the South African energy environment and reassures a holistic examination of the potential of the public-private collaboration model in advancing the South African energy transition, taking into account technical and socio-economic realities.

Results

The South African energy scenario remains dynamic in the light of the old issues of coal addiction that are getting older, frequent load shedding and lack of infrastructure. Renewables also play a relatively small role (8.8 per cent) in the overall energy capacity in 2025, and Just Energy Transitions urgently needs to diversify energy sources and make systems more resilient (LRS, 2025; African Energy Week, 2025). The energy sector in the country is one of the least gender-diverse sectors in the country and about 21.7 per cent of the workforce in the energy sector consists of women (Statista, 2025). This sex disparity has an urgent implication for the design, accessibility, and social inclusivity of an energy project that is based on Public-Private Partnership (PPP). It has been shown that PPPs like the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPP) have both mobilized substantial amounts of private capital into large-scale renewable energy infrastructures and provided renewable investments with technical innovation and financial discipline (Eberhard and Naude, 2016). Nevertheless, the social aspects, especially gender inclusion, have not been adequately integrated into such projects. Women and female-headed families (a majority in rural and peri-urban regions) are still experiencing disproportionate impacts of energy poverty, which include the use of biomass, paraffin, and inefficient heating materials. This adds to the significant labour burdens of no pay, health dangers of indoor air pollution, and

limitation of education and financial prospects (UN Women, 2022; Rogan, 2018).

According to PPPs, there is a potentially revolutionary approach to governance and funding to solve these problems since it is a combination of the developmental mission and the regulatory power of the state with the capital, efficiency, and innovation of businesses (Asian Development Bank, 2019; World Bank, 2024). However, the nature of PPP financial structure commonly skews towards large and well-capitalised companies and rules out women-owned enterprises and informal community organisations that do not have formal collateral or registration (UNDP, 2021). The process of procurement and governance regimes makes such marginalization more pronounced because of the lack of capacity, technical training, and social patriarchal systems (GIZ, 2021; Simelane and Modise, 2020). The key to breaking these structural exclusionary barriers is to entrench gender mainstreaming in every stage of PPP development. This involves the integration of gender-distiguishing needs assessment in the project appraisal so as to identify the different ways in which infrastructure choices, tariff regimes and service delivery designs dissimilarly affect women and men (UNDP, 2021). It has proven to be promising to revise procurement and financing systems that could allow women-led businesses to participate, such as simplification of documentation, capacity building, and gender-sensitive incentives on bidding (World Bank, 2020). PPP-operated contracts are increasingly taking clauses on gender-sensitive labour practices, skills building, grievance redress, and binding sex-disaggregated monitoring pointers (GIZ, 2021).

There is high heterogeneity in gendered energy dynamics in South African regions. Metro cities such as Cape Town and Johannesburg have more institutional capacities of PPP but are more affected by affordability problems and inequitable access to informal settlements (Turok & Visagie, 2021). On the other hand, dispersed populations, ineffective grid infrastructure, and

intense biomass use are typical of the rural provinces, including Eastern Cape, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal. These circumstances drive the need to pursue decentralized energy options such as community mini-grids and concessional financing of household solar installation programs that, more than any of the previously mentioned programs, increase the energy access and economic agency of women in these regions (DMRE, 2019).

Southern Africa examples demonstrate some avenues of gender-inclusive sustainable energy through the PPPs. The community-benefit agreements secure the local redistribution of the project value, whereas the local content policy focuses on the procurement of women-owned and community businesses (Eberhard and Naude, 2016). Integrative training and micro-finance programs make women solar technicians, businesspeople, and advocates of off-grid energy solutions, primarily in the rural setting that is underutilized (Oparaocha & Dutta, 2019). Proper scaling, nevertheless, necessitates policy regimes coordination, city capacity building, and combined financing systems to spread risk in the marginalized areas to the private sectors (African Development Bank, 2020).

Powerful, gender-sensitive performance measurement systems are also the main facilitators of PPP accountability and motivation. The conventional KPIs that include, but are not limited to, installed capacity or financial returns are being added to indicators that reflect the number of women employed in construction and operations, the change in unpaid domestic labour, and the increase in women-owned energy enterprises (UNEP, 2020). The contractual establishment of such indicators encourages integrated results and enhances accountability among partners. These qualitative results are supported by statistical data. The South African energy workforce is also composed of 21.7 per cent women, which is below the worldwide strategic measures to enhance gender diversity, even with the advocacy and training practices (Statista, 2025). Energy companies that are led by women have grown in locations where there are planned

mentorship, education, and financial initiatives, enhancing energy access and economic empowerment in rural areas (SSP, 2025). Technologies and electrification have resulted in a large amount of unpaid domestic work reduction on women and saved household energy costs, which have an overall positive influence on socio-economic welfare (UK Aid et al., 2023).

With these benefits, women are still the minority in leadership of energy policies at the national level, regulatory authorities, and forums on procurement, which is an aspect that supports a supply-side bias that does not adequately consider the reality of diverse users (World Bank, 2024; GIZ, 2021). Gender-targeted programs or gender-responsive monitoring, even in national energy budgets, are not usually funded, which points to the existence of critical policy and institutional gaps that need to be resolved to facilitate truly inclusive, sustainable energy transitions (World Bank, 2024). The politicality of gender mainstreaming of the energy PPPs is becoming an acceptable reality. The energy transitions must incorporate gender equality as an ideological pillar of the popular leadership and ensure it with regulatory reform, money, and involvement of the civil society (DMRE, 2019; African Development Bank, 2020). Effective models use multilateral development finance institutions to impose gender evaluations and guardianships when establishing institutional ability to manage gender-conscious administration and equitable motivation alignment.

As a result, the energy sector in South Africa in 2025 presents both a challenge and an opportunity to incorporate gender aspects through PPPs. Investments in renewables through PPPs have the potential to bridge energy access disparities and to empower women economically, particularly in rural and peri-urban settings. Nevertheless, procurement, social norms, training of technical aspects, and financing prevent women not fully engaging and benefiting due to structural barriers. The elements of gender mainstreaming in project appraisal, procurement, contractual requirements, governance

representation and impact measurement are inseparable to the promotion of inclusive and sustainable energy solutions. Regionalized approaches that are sensitive to socio-economic conditions and capitalize on new good practices of Southern Africa are interesting blueprints. With South Africa hastening its Just Energy Transition, there is a strong need to integrate gender equity within PPPs in order to change energy systems that are not only sustainable environmentally and economically, but also socially just and empowering to every citizen of this country.

Discussion

The results show that, although the energy sector in South Africa is experiencing a profound structural change due to the public-private partnerships (PPPs), the gender disparities are the essential impediment to the process of inclusive and sustainable development. Even though there is greater recognition of gender mainstreaming in policies and institutional efforts, there is still a lack of solid integration of gender considerations in PPPs, which restricts access, participation, and access to women in sustainable energy projects. Among the major inferences, there is the presence of gendered energy poverty that has been perpetrated due to socio-economic and cultural factors. In rural and peri-urban regions, women are particularly vulnerable to the use of biomass and inefficient fuels that have an adverse health effect and seasonal poverty (UN Women, 2022; Rogan, 2018). This energy vulnerability due to their gender highlights the need to have an energy system that is more affordable, accessible, and reliable, considering the needs of women, which is usually not taken into consideration during the large-scale PPP infrastructural developments (Simelane and Modise, 2020).

The potential transformative possibilities of PPPs are also noted in the study because of their ability to address the mandates of the public sector with the innovation and mobilization of capital in the private sector (Asian Development Bank, 2019). Such programs as the Renewable

Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP) have proved effective in encouraging investment and renewable capacity (Eberhard and Naude, 2016). Nevertheless, the absence of gender mainstreaming in PPP frameworks tends to further marginalize women-owned businesses and informal community actors, especially in cases where financing and procurement conditions are discriminatory against unregistered or unsecured (UNDP, 2021; GIZ, 2021). One of the significant implications associated with this is that gender mainstreaming in PPPs should be systemic and multidimensional with gender-differentiated needs assessment, reorganization of financing and procurement to explicitly cover women-led businesses, and gender-sensitive labour and governance (World Bank, 2024; UNDP, 2021). The representation of women in governance platforms should also be institutionalized so as to enhance inclusiveness and accountability. These practices are consistent with gender-responsive policies being implemented on the national and sector levels, yet they need strict implementation and capacity building (DMRE, 2024; South African Environmental Sector Gender Strategy, 2015).

The gendered experience of energy access is mediated radically by the existence of regional disparities. Even their highly institutionally developed urban metros, such as Cape Town and Johannesburg, continue to struggle with affordability and informal settlements. Rural areas with spread populations and weak grids, in the meantime, need much more of decentralised energy services, which are more accommodating to female empowerment, including community mini-grids or household solar uses (DMRE, 2019; Turok and Visagie, 2021). These regional variations require special models of PPP to facilitate fair energy transitions.

Another important guiding point of the findings is the significance of gendered monitoring and evaluation. Traditional PPP measures of success, based on installed capacity or financial gain, fail to reflect the social aspects that should be part and parcel of success. By including sex-

disaggregated indicators linked to women in the labour force, reducing unpaid domestic work, and increasing the presence of women in business, partners are encouraged to provide holistic effects (UNEP, 2020). The difficulty is to develop strong data systems and entrench such indicators on a contractual basis.

Moreover, the energy governance political economy has a great impact. Women are not able to positively engage in project design, negotiation and supervision because of structural patriarchy, lack of technical training prospects, socio-cultural, and exclusion during governance. These barriers need to be counter-balanced with strengthened institutional capacity, legal reforms, and multi-stakeholder involvement, such as civil society and grassroots women networks, to make just energy transitions operational (Oparaocha and Dutta, 2019; African Development Bank, 2020). The growing sector of renewable energy is also starting to break the traditional gender norms, as more women are starting to join the clean energy sector in terms of employment and entrepreneurship, both due to market forces and donor-driven gender programs (GEAPP, 2024; SAWEA, 2025). The trend provides an optimistic sign that PPPs could become more inclusive to gender by continuing to put in efforts, and this would not only lead to socio-economic gains but also spread to gender equity and social inclusion on a larger scale.

As a whole, the results indicate that the sustainable energy development in South Africa as a result of PPPs should not treat gender equity as a side consideration, but as one of the core pillars, in the course of project cycles. To change the situation, providing universal energy infrastructure necessitates policy adjustments, regional flexibility, gender-sensitive funding mechanisms, participative governance, and detailed monitoring systems. This will help PPPs realize their potential for transformation in enhancing a just energy transition that is beneficial to both environmental sustainability and social justice across the South African context.

Conclusion

The current energy shift in South Africa represents a critical crossing point with enormous opportunities to enhance gender equity and social justice and environmental sustainability. The energy industry that currently relies heavily on coal is also going to be changed with the help of specific investments in renewable sources, which is going to happen during the partnership between the state and the companies (PPP). Nevertheless, the systematic use of gender considerations is still a considerable challenge and opportunity. To achieve a fair and gender-sensitive energy transition, it is necessary to focus on the experiences of women and to prioritise them prior to tackling the past injustices that curtail access to energy, their roles in the sector, as well as economic gains. South Africa has a disproportionate number of women who are victims of energy poverty and health related to reliance on inefficient fuels, and are limited socially in their ability to be involved in technical, managerial, and governance areas. These gender inequalities are both rural and urban, but they have various manifestations in the regional, social, and economic terrain. The Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP) and other PPP-led projects have marshalled vital funds and technical innovations towards the increase of the renewable capacity of South Africa, and their aspects of social inclusion, such as gender mainstreaming, need to be reinforced. Institutionalized policy frameworks, financial institution restructuring in support of women-owned businesses, the establishment of a contract of gender sensitivity, and gender sensitivity in institutionalizing women's governance aspects are essential measures. Besides, gender-sensitive performance should have performance indicators other than established financial data to encourage accountability and inclusive results. The regional diversity is a factor that requires flexible models where context is sensitive, and thus, women in the rural regions should be empowered through solar mini-grids and productive-use technologies, as this can yield disproportionate economic and social impacts. The civil society and grassroots women

networks are also important in advocacy, capacity building and project ownership. The energy governance political economy should change, addressing the barriers of institutions and deep-rooted patriarchy. There is an overlapping of interests between multilateral development institutions, government leadership and also the private sector to make the energy transition just, inclusive, and economically empowering to women. South Africa can achieve a truly transformative energy transition by integrating gender equity as the fundamental pillar in all levels of the energy development process initiated by PPP, the design and financing of the energy development process, and the implementation and monitoring of the project. The strategy will result in sustainable environmental benefits as well as the deconstruct of the historical socio-economic disparities, women's empowerment, and the establishment of strong communities in the various regional contexts. Gender-just energy transition should not be viewed as an act of moral obligation but as a practical solution to the realization of the entire potential of the renewable future of South Africa. This vision is only achievable through continued dedication, trial and error, and cooperation of all energy players.

Recommendation

The study recommends that gender-responsive sustainable energy through Public-Private Partnerships in South Africa should be improved in the following ways.

Gender Mainstreaming in PPP Structures and Institutions.

To achieve sustainable energy through Public-Private Partnerships in South Africa, gender considerations are to be systematically incorporated in all the stages of PPP project cycles, including design, procurement, financing, implementation, and monitoring. This involves compulsory gender-differentiated needs assessments, gender-responsive budgeting and sex-disaggregated impact assessments contained contractually to hold all partners accountable to achieve gender equity outcomes.

Scaling up Decentralized and Off-Grid Energy Solutions.

Focus on flexible PPP models which can be used to favour decentralized energy technologies, including mini-grids, household solar systems and productive-use appliances. The solutions favour women more, especially in the rural and peri-urban regions, as they enhance access, create less burden on unpaid labour, and create economic empowerment.

Enhance Women's capacity in Energy Governance.

Formalization of women's groups and gender activists in the power sector decision-making and PPP governing institutions, as well as participatory governance arrangements, inclusive schemes will result in transparency, responsiveness to gendered demands and local accountability.

Establish Strong Gender-responsive performance measures.

Go beyond the conventional project indicators by incorporating gender-specific KPIs, including the number of women in employment, the number of domestic labour hours worked without pay, the growth of businesses owned by women and changes in the socio-economic position of women. Periodic reporting and informed policy refinement.

Enhance Multi-Stakeholder Cooperation and Civil Society Engagement.

Foster collaboration among government organizations, the business sector, donor institutions, academic players, and grassroots women organizations. This kind of collaboration will increase knowledge-sharing, mobilization of resources, and advocacy, so that PPPs will represent various gendered views and localities.

Unravel Structural and Cultural Hazards.

Engage social and cultural initiatives to change the patriarchal norms, ease movement and safety conditions of women and bring about an awareness of gender equity in access to energy and governance in the community.

Localize Regional strategies to local systems.

Understand and act on the difference between the provinces and municipalities of South Africa by tailoring PPP strategies. Cities can be informal settlement-friendly, whereas the rural areas need decentralized solutions coupled with agricultural and livelihood value chains in which women make a significant part of the equation.

Hence, these recommendations require powerful political dedication, facilitating policy settings, and sustained stakeholders' engagement. This way, sustainable energy transition in South Africa through PPP can be truly empowering women, diminishing gender inequalities, and helping to achieve the wider socio-economic development outcomes.

References

- African Development Bank. (2020). *Gender mainstreaming in energy sector operations*. AfDB.
- African Development Bank. (2020). Mobilising finance for just energy transition. African Development Bank.
- African Energy Week. (2025). Energy Transition Outlook.
- Asian Development Bank. (2019). *Public-private partnership monitor*. ADB.
- Baker, L. (2020). *Electricity and the political economy of South Africa*. Routledge.
- Bhorat, H., Kanbur, R., & Stanwix, B. (2021). Inequality in South Africa: Drivers and policy implications. *Development Policy Review*, 39(2), 1–26.
- Department of Environmental Affairs. (2015). Environment sector gender strategy. <https://www.dffe.gov.za/environment-sector-gender-strategy>.
- Department of Mineral Resources and Energy. (2019). *Integrated resource plan (IRP 2019)*. Government of South Africa.
- Department of Mineral Resources and Energy. (2024). Gender Response Guide. South African Government.
- Eberhard, A., & Naude, R. (2016). The South African renewable energy independent power producer procurement programme: A review. *Energy Policy*, 92, 176–189.
- Energy Policy Journal. (2020). The development of a socio-economic model to promote women's empowerment initiatives in the renewable energy sector of South Africa.
- Energy Research Centre. (2018). *Electricity pricing and household energy poverty*. University of Cape Town.
- Energy Transition Commission. (2023). Can South Africa's just transition close the energy sector's gender gap?
- GEAPP (Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet). (2024). Gender and Employment in Africa's Renewable Energy Sector.
- GIZ. (2021). *Gender and energy: Policy guidelines for inclusive energy planning*. GIZ.

- Grimsey, D., & Lewis, M. (2017). *Public–private partnerships: The worldwide revolution in infrastructure provision and project finance*. Edward Elgar.
- IEA. (2022). *Africa Energy Outlook 2022*. International Energy Agency.
- LRS, (2025). Transition from coal to renewables: Progress, Challenges and possibilities.
- Oparaocha, S., & Dutta, S. (2019). Gender and energy for sustainable development. *Energy for Sustainable Development*, 48, 1–6.
- Rao, M., & Koo, N. (2025). Facilitating gendered and socially inclusive energy transitions in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Rifkin Institute for Sustainable Futures. (2022). Opportunities and barriers for women in South Africa's energy transition.
- Rogan, M. (2018). Informal sector employment and gender in South Africa. *Development Southern Africa*, 35(2), 255–272.
- SAWEA (South African Wind Energy Association). (2025). Annual Industry Report.
- Simelane, T., & Modise, D. (2020). *Gender and renewable energy in Southern Africa*. HSRC Press.
- South African Department of Environment. (2015). Environment sector gender strategy.
- Sovacool, B. K., et al. (2025). Mobilising finance for just energy transition: Gender perspectives.
- SSP (Sustainable Solutions Project). (2025). Empowering women in renewable energy sectors
- Statista (2025). Gender diversity in the South African energy sector workforce.
- Stats SA. (2022). *Gender statistics in South Africa 2022*. Statistics South Africa.
- Turok, I., & Visagie, J. (2021). Urbanization, poverty and inclusive growth in South Africa. *Urban Studies*, 58(8), 1675–1691.
- United Kingdom Department for International Development. (2023). Gender as a key variable in energy interventions (Research Report R8346). ENERGIA International Network on Gender and Sustainable Energy.
- UN Women. (2022). *The gendered impacts of energy poverty in Africa*. UN Women.
- UNDP. (2021). *Gender equality strategy for energy and climate*. United Nations Development Programme.
- UNEP. (2020). *Gender and environment statistics: Framework and methodologies*. United Nations Environment Programme.
- World Bank. (2020). *Public–private partnerships reference guide (version 3)*. World Bank Group.
- World Bank. (2024). Mainstreaming gender in energy projects: A practical guide.

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.26>

INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE HUMANITIES: TEACHING AT THE CROSSROADS OF RACE, GENDER, AND CLASS IN AFRICA

Dr Onuk Bulus Ojem

Post-Doctoral Researcher, Faculty of Humanities

North-West University, South Africa,

Mahikeng Campus

Email: onuk.bulus@nsuk.edu.ng/ojemalism@gmail.com

Mobile No: +2348067363154/+27739320350

ORCID-<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-2536-7866>

Prof. Phemelo Olifile Marumo

Deputy Director (School of Philosophy)

Mahikeng Campus

Mobile: (278) 398 77741 | Phone: (018) 389 2463

phemelo.marumo@nwu.ac.za/phemelo@gmail.com

ORCID-<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5221-1286>

Abstract

The concept of intersectionality has emerged as a critical framework for examining the interconnected nature of race, gender, and class in shaping human experiences, identities, and systems of power. Within the African humanities, teaching at the intersection of these categories presents both theoretical and pedagogical challenges, as well as opportunities for transformative learning. This paper explores how the intersection of race, gender, and class informs the production and dissemination of knowledge in African higher education, literature, history, and cultural studies. Drawing on postcolonial feminist theory, critical race studies, and African epistemologies, the paper argues that humanities teaching in Africa must move beyond Eurocentric paradigms to foreground the lived realities and voices of marginalised groups. It also examines how classroom practices, curricula, and institutional structures can either reinforce or dismantle systems of exclusion. Through case studies and critical reflection, the study highlights the importance of adopting intersectional pedagogies that recognise how overlapping social identities shape students' access to power, representation, and intellectual participation. Most importantly, the paper contends that intersectionality in the African humanities is not only an analytical tool but also a moral and political commitment to equity, inclusion, and decolonial knowledge production.

Keywords: *Intersectionality, Humanities, African epistemologies, Eurocentric Paradigms, Race, Gender, Class, Pedagogy, Decolonisation etc*

Introduction

The humanities in Africa, encompassing literature, history, philosophy, languages, and cultural studies, provide critical spaces for interrogating the human condition and collective identities. However, these fields are often shaped by intersecting structures of race, gender, and class,

which influence both the production and dissemination of knowledge. The concept of intersectionality, first articulated by Crenshaw (1989), provides a powerful theoretical lens for examining how these categories interact to produce layered inequalities. Originally developed

to analyse the experiences of Black women facing simultaneous racism and sexism in the United States, intersectionality has since been adopted globally as a framework to understand how multiple social identities interact within systems of power (Collins, 2000). Within the African context, this framework offers a means of understanding how colonial legacies, patriarchy, and economic hierarchies continue to shape intellectual discourse and pedagogical practices in the humanities. In African higher education, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, the dominance of Eurocentric epistemologies has long marginalised African ways of knowing and obscured the lived experiences of those at the intersections of race, gender, and class (wa Thiong'o, 1986; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). For instance, in many African universities, curricula still prioritise Western theorists and texts while underrepresenting African women scholars, indigenous philosophies, and working-class perspectives. This creates a tension between the global North's epistemic authority and the African quest for epistemic freedom (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). Intersectionality provides a methodological bridge for addressing this imbalance and encouraging the inclusion of marginalised voices and fostering a more inclusive, context-sensitive form of teaching and research in the humanities.

Concrete examples across Africa demonstrate both the challenges and possibilities of teaching intersectionally. In South Africa, for example, the #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall student movements exposed the deep racial, gender, and class inequalities entrenched in universities, prompting renewed debates about decolonising curricula and dismantling institutional hierarchies (Booyesen, 2016). Scholars such as Gqola (2015) and Lewis (2018) have shown how feminist and intersectional frameworks can help reinterpret literature, history, and art in ways that reflect post-apartheid complexities, challenging both patriarchal and racialised power structures. Similarly, in Nigeria, the work of scholars like Oyěwùmí (1997) and Nnaemeka (2004) has redefined African gender theory by exposing how colonialism and class stratification distorted indigenous gender relations and

contributed to the marginalisation of women in both academia and society. These contributions have inspired educators to integrate intersectional perspectives in courses on African literature, feminist theory, and cultural studies.

In Kenya, intersectional teaching practices are increasingly influencing discussions of race and class within postcolonial literature and social theory. For instance, Kenyan scholars have highlighted how the legacy of colonial education continues to privilege elite voices while excluding rural and working-class narratives (Sifuna & Sawamura, 2010). Likewise, in Ghana, feminist scholars have demonstrated that university teaching still reflects patriarchal assumptions, where male-centred texts dominate syllabi, and female intellectuals are underrepresented in academic leadership (Tsikata, 2007). These cases underline the need for pedagogical reform that integrates intersectional awareness into the humanities and not only to diversify content but also to democratise the processes of teaching and learning.

Intersectionality, therefore, is not merely an analytical concept but a pedagogical and decolonial strategy for transforming African humanities. It challenges educators to interrogate how race, gender, and class intersect in shaping knowledge hierarchies, classroom power dynamics, and access to intellectual participation (Mama, 2007). Embedding intersectionality into teaching helps cultivate critical consciousness among students, allowing them to understand social inequality not as isolated problems but as interconnected systems. Moreover, it aligns with Africa's broader intellectual project of decolonising the academy, promoting inclusivity, and validating diverse epistemologies rooted in African realities (Mignolo, 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

In essence, teaching the humanities at the crossroads of race, gender, and class in Africa provides an opportunity to reimagine education as a site of resistance and transformation. By incorporating intersectionality, African educators can move beyond Eurocentric and patriarchal paradigms to build curricula that reflect the continent's plural identities and socio-political strug-

gles. This study, therefore, examines how intersectional approaches can be effectively applied in African humanities education to promote equity, epistemic justice, and decolonial knowledge production, ensuring that Africa's diverse voices and lived experiences are central to the global conversation.

Conceptual Review

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a critical framework that examines how various forms of social stratification, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability, intersect to create unique dynamics of privilege and oppression. Coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, the term emerged from Black feminist critiques of mainstream feminist and antiracist movements, which often ignored the compounded experiences of Black women and other marginalised groups (Crenshaw, 1989).

At its core, intersectionality posits that social identities do not exist independently but are mutually constitutive. For example, a Black woman does not simply experience racism *plus* sexism; she experiences a qualitatively different form of discrimination that is shaped by the interaction of both systems. Crenshaw illustrated this with legal cases where Black women plaintiffs were failed by the courts because their discrimination claims did not neatly fit within the single-axis frameworks of race or gender (Crenshaw, 1991). The development of intersectionality draws heavily from Black feminist thought, especially the work of scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, and Audre Lorde, who emphasised the importance of understanding the interlocking systems of oppression. Collins (2000) elaborates on the “matrix of domination,” a term that describes how various forms of power are organised across multiple axes and reinforced through institutions and cultural norms.

Over time, intersectionality has evolved from a tool of feminist legal analysis to a broader interdisciplinary framework used in sociology, education, political science, cultural studies, and the humanities. It has become especially influential in critical pedagogy and curriculum design, of-

fering educators a way to frame knowledge production in relation to social context and identity (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

In the humanities, intersectionality provides a lens to critically examine literature, history, philosophy, and the arts. It enables scholars and educators to uncover marginalised narratives, challenge canonical assumptions, and interrogate how knowledge is produced and by whom. For example, a literary analysis grounded in intersectionality might explore how race, gender, and class shape a character's identity and social location, or how certain voices are amplified or silenced in historical records. While widely embraced, intersectionality is not without critique. Some argue that it has become too diffuse or diluted in popular discourse, losing its original radical edge (Nash, 2008). Others point to difficulties in applying the intersectionality methodologically, particularly in quantitative research. Additionally, institutional uses of intersectionality in policy or diversity work can sometimes reduce it to a checklist rather than a transformative framework (Carastathis, 2016). This study sees intersectionality as a term widely recognised and discussed in sociology, gender studies, and various advocacy circles, and explores the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics. These overlapping social identities can contribute to unique experiences of discrimination and privilege. Importantly, intersectionality examines how systems of oppression and disadvantage intersect to create complex tapestries of inequality, highlighting that no single aspect of one's identity can fully capture the dynamics of power and oppression present in society.

Humanities Classroom

The humanities classroom serves as a vital space for exploring human experience, culture, and expression across time and place. Rooted in disciplines such as literature, history, philosophy, religious studies, art, and languages, the humanities aim to foster critical thinking, ethical reflection, creativity, and cultural understanding. In educational settings, the humanities classroom is more than a site for content delivery; it

is a space for dialogic learning, identity exploration, and civic engagement (Nussbaum, 2010). The humanities classroom is traditionally oriented around interpretive inquiry, encouraging students to analyse texts, artefacts, and ideas not only for their content but for their meaning, context, and impact. This process nurtures skills such as close reading, argumentation, and historical consciousness. According to Barnett (2007), the humanities offer a framework for engaging with complexity and ambiguity, helping students grapple with moral dilemmas and plural perspectives.

At its core, the humanities classroom values student-centred and discussion-based pedagogy. It invites learners to bring their own experiences into conversation with canonical and non-canonical works. The Socratic method, seminar-style discussions, and reflective writing are typical pedagogical tools that prioritise inquiry over rote memorisation (Freire, 1970). As Paulo Freire emphasised in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, education should be a dialogical process that empowers students to question the world around them and imagine alternatives.

In recent decades, the humanities classroom has undergone significant shifts due to changing demographics, technological advances, and cultural debates over curriculum and representation. These transformations have led to more inclusive syllabi and interdisciplinary approaches, integrating themes such as race, gender, sexuality, postcoloniality, and globalisation (Giroux, 2011). The classroom becomes a space not only for learning about the humanities but also for *doing* the humanities in ways that reflect and challenge contemporary realities.

Moreover, the humanities classroom plays a critical role in cultivating democratic citizenship. As Nussbaum (2010) argues in *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, a robust humanities education equips students with empathy, intercultural literacy, and the ability to think critically about social structures, skills essential for participating in democratic life.

However, the humanities classroom faces ongoing challenges, particularly in the context of neoliberal education policies that prioritise STEM

disciplines, measurable outcomes, and marketable skills. Critics argue that the humanities are increasingly devalued in institutional settings, forcing educators to defend the intrinsic and instrumental value of humanistic inquiry (Fish, 2008). The study is viewed as a broad and dynamic environment dedicated to the exploration and study of human culture, thought, and experience.

African Epistemologies

Epistemology, in its broadest sense, refers to the study of knowledge, its nature, sources, limits, and validity. It seeks to answer fundamental questions such as “What counts as knowledge?” and “How is knowledge produced and justified?” (Moser, 2008). While Western epistemology has historically dominated global academic discourse, characterized by rationalism, empiricism, and individualistic approaches to knowing, African epistemologies offer alternative frameworks for understanding the world. These frameworks are grounded in communal experiences, oral traditions, and indigenous knowledge systems (Wiredu, 1996; Hountondji, 1997).

African epistemologies are contextual, relational, and deeply embedded in social and cultural life. Knowledge in this sense is not abstract or purely theoretical; rather, it is intertwined with lived experiences, communal norms, and moral responsibilities (Gyekye, 1995; Mazrui, 2004). African knowledge systems emphasize collective wisdom, oral traditions, storytelling, proverbs, rituals, and indigenous languages as legitimate means of transmitting and validating knowledge (Praeg, 2009). For example, in many African societies, elders, griots, and traditional custodians serve as repositories of historical, ethical, and scientific knowledge, reflecting the integration of knowledge with moral and social obligations.

Furthermore, African epistemologies challenge the universalist assumptions of Western knowledge systems, which often marginalize indigenous ways of knowing. According to Hountondji (1997), much of African traditional knowledge has been mischaracterized as “pre-scientific” or “informal,” despite its systematic,

empirical, and philosophical underpinnings. Scholars such as Wiredu (1996) and Mbiti (1990) contend that African knowledge is holistic, emphasizing the interconnectedness and relationality of human beings with their environment, ancestors, and community, a sharp contrast to the individualistic and compartmentalized nature of Western epistemic traditions.

African epistemologies also intersect with decolonial scholarship, which critiques the epistemic dominance of the West and advocates for the reclamation and revitalization of African intellectual traditions. Mignolo (2011) refers to this process as *epistemic decolonization*, where African knowledge systems are recognized as valid and valuable frameworks for interpreting history, society, and culture. Similarly, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) underscores the necessity of embedding African epistemologies within teaching, research, and policy, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, to redress the historical silencing of African voices and perspectives.

In addition, African epistemologies are inherently intersectional, reflecting the interplay of culture, gender, class, and spiritual worldviews in knowledge production (Mama, 2007). Knowledge is not only intellectual but also ethical and practical, aimed at promoting social harmony, guiding moral conduct, and ensuring the survival of the community. This orientation underscores the pragmatic dimension of African thought, where knowing and doing are inseparable, and where learning is deeply situated within the moral, social, and political life of the community (Gyekye, 1995).

Therefore, African epistemologies offer alternative paradigms that are holistic, relational, and contextually grounded. They challenge Western epistemic hegemony, affirm the legitimacy of indigenous knowledge, and emphasize the integration of ethical, communal, and experiential dimensions in the production of knowledge. Incorporating African epistemologies into higher education and research across the continent is therefore essential for decolonizing curricula, fostering inclusive pedagogy, and validating African ways of knowing within the global academic landscape.

Eurocentric Paradigms

Eurocentrism, in its broadest sense, refers to the worldview that places Europe, and by extension, Western civilization, at the center of global knowledge production, history, and cultural valuation. The term “Eurocentric paradigms” describes theoretical and epistemological frameworks rooted in European intellectual traditions, which have historically defined what counts as legitimate knowledge, rationality, and progress (Blaut, 1993; Amin, 1989). These paradigms are grounded in Enlightenment ideals of reason, empiricism, and linear progress, often universalized as neutral and objective, yet deeply shaped by Europe’s historical experiences of colonialism, capitalism, and modernity (Said, 1978; Quijano, 2000).

At the core of Eurocentric paradigms lies the assumption of Western epistemic superiority, the belief that European modes of thought and analysis represent the apex of human development. As a result, non-Western societies are frequently constructed as “the Other,” lacking reason, science, or modernity. This epistemological hierarchy became institutionalized during the colonial period through systems of education, governance, and religion that privileged European knowledge while marginalizing or erasing indigenous epistemologies (Smith, 1999; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1986).

Eurocentrism also manifests in social science theories and methodologies, where European historical experiences are used as universal models for understanding human society. For instance, modernization theory in political science and sociology posits that all societies must follow a Western developmental trajectory from “traditional” to “modern” (Rostow, 1960). Similarly, Hegel’s Philosophy of History (1837) positioned Europe as the culmination of world spirit, claiming that Africa and other regions had no history before European contact. Such narratives systematically exclude or distort the diverse experiences of non-European peoples, reinforcing epistemic dominance (Mudimbe, 1988).

The persistence of Eurocentric paradigms is evident in global academia, where curricula, research frameworks, and publication standards

continue to privilege Western theories and scholars (wa Thiong'o, 1986; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Knowledge from the Global South is often evaluated through Western benchmarks, while indigenous methodologies are dismissed as anecdotal or non-scientific. This dynamic reproduces what Quijano (2000) calls the colonality of knowledge, the ongoing control of intellectual production by Western epistemological frameworks, even in postcolonial societies.

Critiques of Eurocentric paradigms have given rise to decolonial and postcolonial scholarship, which aim to challenge and diversify global epistemologies. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) exposed how Western representations of the "East" were not objective but products of colonial power relations. Similarly, scholars such as Mignolo (2011) and Grosfoguel (2007) argue for epistemic delinking, the need for societies to detach from Western epistemic dominance and recover local intellectual traditions. African and Latin American thinkers, including Hountondji (1997) and Dussel (2000), have further emphasized the importance of pluralizing knowledge systems to reflect multiple histories and ontologies.

In Africa, the challenge of Eurocentrism is particularly evident in education and research. Colonial education systems replaced indigenous philosophies and learning methods with Western curricula, producing what wa Thiong'o (1986) calls "the colonization of the mind." The resulting epistemic dependency continues to shape African scholarship, where Western theories are often uncritically applied to African realities. Contemporary African intellectuals advocate for the decolonization of knowledge through the integration of indigenous epistemologies, languages, and philosophies into academic institutions (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Prah, 2004).

Thus, Eurocentric paradigms represent not merely a set of Western ideas but a global epistemic order that privileges European thought as universal and authoritative. These paradigms have profoundly shaped modern academic disciplines, development theory, and global power relations. Challenging Eurocentrism requires recognizing the plurality of knowledge systems

and fostering intellectual spaces where African, Asian, and Indigenous epistemologies are not peripheral but central to knowledge production. This shift toward epistemic pluralism and decoloniality is essential for achieving a truly inclusive and representative global intellectual order.

Decolonisation

Decolonisation, in its broadest and most dynamic sense, refers to the process of dismantling colonial structures, ideologies, and systems of domination that continue to shape political, economic, cultural, and epistemological relations in formerly colonised societies. While it initially denoted the attainment of political independence from colonial powers in the mid-20th century, decolonisation has evolved into a more profound intellectual and cultural project aimed at reclaiming autonomy over knowledge, identity, and development pathways (Fanon, 1963; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Smith, 1999). At its political level, decolonisation emerged as a wave of anti-colonial movements across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, seeking to overthrow imperial rule and assert sovereignty. In Africa, the 1950s and 1960s witnessed a surge of nationalist struggles led by figures such as Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, and Patrice Lumumba, who envisioned political liberation as a prerequisite for social and economic transformation (Nkrumah, 1965; Rodney, 1972). However, political independence did not automatically translate into epistemic or cultural freedom. As wa Thiong'o (1986) argues, the colonial legacy persisted in the domains of language, education, and consciousness, producing what he terms the colonization of the mind.

In this broader sense, decolonisation must be understood as both a material and epistemic project. Scholars such as Mignolo (2011) and Quijano (2000) introduce the concept of epistemic decolonisation, referring to the need to dismantle Eurocentric ways of knowing and to valorise indigenous and local epistemologies. Quijano (2000) links this to the colonality of power, the enduring structures of hierarchy and knowledge that outlived formal colonialism. Thus, decolonisa-

tion involves reclaiming the right to define, produce, and validate knowledge outside of Western epistemic control.

In the African context, decolonisation also entails a cultural and psychological reawakening. Fanon (1963) and Cabral (1973) emphasised that genuine decolonisation must transform the colonised psyche and restore dignity, culture, and self-worth to oppressed peoples. Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* vividly portrays decolonisation as a violent but necessary rupture, a process of reclaiming agency and humanity from a system built on racial and cultural subjugation. Similarly, Cabral argued that liberation movements must involve cultural resistance, as "culture is the seed of liberation."

The post-independence period in Africa, however, revealed that colonial structures were not entirely dismantled but reconfigured through neocolonial relations and global capitalism (Nkrumah, 1965; Amin, 1989). Many African states retained colonial administrative systems, languages, and development models, perpetuating dependency on the West. Hence, contemporary decolonial scholarship argues that true decolonisation must extend beyond politics to include the economy, education, and epistemology (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; wa Thiong'o, 1986).

In the realm of education and knowledge production, decolonisation has become an urgent intellectual and institutional challenge. Western academic frameworks have long been universalised as the standard of truth and reason, while African knowledge systems are marginalized or dismissed as "folk wisdom." The movement for curriculum decolonisation, particularly visible in South Africa's #RhodesMustFall and #Fees-MustFall campaigns (2015–2017), seeks to re-center African epistemologies, histories, and languages within universities (Mbembe, 2016). Decolonising education, therefore, involves both content and structure: interrogating what is taught, who teaches it, and how knowledge is valued and transmitted.

Furthermore, decolonisation is deeply interdisciplinary, influencing fields such as political science, history, philosophy, and literature. In the humanities, decolonial approaches question the

Eurocentric canon that privileges Western authors and theories while erasing African intellectual contributions. For example, African philosophers such as Kwasi Wiredu (1996) and Paulin Hountondji (1997) advocate for conceptual decolonisation, a process of re-examining philosophical concepts through African languages and cultural contexts, rather than through imported Western categories.

In sum, decolonisation represents both a historical process and a continuous struggle. It is historical in its association with anti-colonial liberation and independence movements, but it is ongoing in its epistemic, cultural, and institutional dimensions. True decolonisation requires not only reclaiming political sovereignty but also transforming the mental, cultural, and structural legacies of colonialism. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) asserts, the decolonial project is fundamentally about "epistemic freedom", the ability of African people to think, theorize, and act from their own historical and existential locations without subordination to Western paradigms. Therefore, decolonisation is not a completed chapter of history but a living agenda. It calls for the reassertion of African agency in knowledge production, governance, and development, affirming that liberation is incomplete until epistemic and cultural sovereignty are achieved.

Pedagogy

Pedagogy, derived from the Greek word *paidagōgia*-meaning the art or science of teaching, refers to the theories, practices, and methods that guide the process of education and learning (Alexander, 2008). It encompasses not only the techniques teachers use to impart knowledge but also the underlying philosophies, values, and assumptions about what constitutes effective teaching and learning. Pedagogy is therefore both a practical and theoretical discipline that integrates educational psychology, curriculum design, and sociocultural understandings of learning (Freire, 1970; Loughran, 2013). At its core, pedagogy involves the dynamic relationship between teacher, learner, and context. It is not merely the transmission of information but a transformative process aimed at

fostering critical thinking, creativity, and life-long learning. Freire (1970) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* critiques the traditional “banking model” of education, where teachers deposit knowledge into passive students, and advocates instead for a dialogical, participatory model that empowers learners to question, reflect, and act upon their realities. This critical pedagogy redefines the teacher as a facilitator and co-learner, and education as a process of liberation and social transformation.

From a sociocultural perspective, Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes that learning is a socially mediated process that occurs through interaction and collaboration. Pedagogy, therefore, must consider the cultural, linguistic, and social contexts in which learning takes place. Culturally responsive pedagogy, as articulated by Ladson-Billings (1995), recognizes the importance of integrating students’ cultural backgrounds and lived experiences into teaching practices to enhance engagement and equity in education.

In the African context, pedagogy extends beyond Western frameworks to include indigenous and communal approaches to learning. African pedagogical traditions often emphasize oral transmission, storytelling, apprenticeship, and collective participation (Omolewa, 2007). Knowledge is not seen as an individual possession but as a communal asset, with pedagogy aimed at nurturing both intellectual and moral development. The Ubuntu philosophy, for instance, reinforces a pedagogy grounded in relationality, empathy, and mutual respect—“I am because we are” (Letseka, 2012). This contrasts with Eurocentric models that often privilege individualism and abstract reasoning over collective experience and applied wisdom.

Contemporary pedagogical discourse has also been shaped by constructivist and transformative theories of learning. Constructivism, championed by Piaget (1972) and Bruner (1996), posits that learners actively construct knowledge through experience and reflection. Transformative learning, developed by Mezirow (1991), further argues that adult learning involves questioning assumptions, revising worldviews, and developing new perspectives through critical reflection. These approaches position learners as

active participants in meaning-making processes rather than passive recipients of content. Digital and postmodern pedagogies have added further dimensions to the concept. The rise of technology-enhanced learning and online education has redefined the teacher-student relationship, promoting flexibility, collaboration, and multimodal engagement (Siemens, 2005). Pedagogy in this digital age requires not only technological literacy but also critical awareness of how digital tools shape power, identity, and access to knowledge.

Therefore, pedagogy is a multidimensional and evolving concept that encompasses philosophical, cultural, and practical dimensions of teaching and learning. It moves beyond classroom techniques to include questions of power, identity, and justice in education. An effective pedagogy is context-sensitive, learner-centered, and transformative, aimed not just at transmitting knowledge but at cultivating critical, ethical, and socially responsible individuals.

Kimberlé Crenshaw’s Philosophy of Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw’s philosophy of intersectionality has profoundly influenced not only legal and feminist theory but also contemporary educational discourse. In the classroom context, her work encourages educators to confront how structures of power, such as racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression, shape students’ experiences, access to knowledge, and participation in learning. Crenshaw’s intersectional lens insists that the classroom must be a space where multiple, overlapping identities are acknowledged, valued, and critically examined (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991).

Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality highlights how individuals experience intersecting and compounding forms of marginalisation. In an educational setting, this means that students cannot be understood or taught effectively through a single-axis lens that isolates gender, race, or class. For example, the experiences of a Black female student in the classroom cannot be adequately addressed through either a “race-only” or “gender-only” perspective. Instead, an intersectional classroom approach recognises

the ways these identities interact in the context of schooling (Crenshaw, 1991).

“Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism... any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated”. Crenshaw (1989, p. 140)

Crenshaw's philosophy calls for curricula that reflect diverse and complex experiences, especially those of students at the margins. In traditional classrooms, knowledge production often centres dominant cultural narratives; white, male, heteronormative, Eurocentric, and erases or tokenises the experiences of students of colour, queer students, disabled students, and others (Collins & Bilge, 2016). An intersectional approach to curriculum development challenges this by prioritising counter-narratives and fostering critical dialogue about social inequalities. Incorporating intersectionality into pedagogy involves:

- Inclusive texts and materials that reflect diverse racial, gendered, and class-based experiences.
- Critical discussions on how power and privilege manifest in literature, history, art, and other humanities disciplines.
- Reflexive teaching practices that account for both student and teacher positionality.

Crenshaw's ideas also apply to how classrooms are managed and how relationships are structured within them. She challenges educators to recognise how institutional and interpersonal power shapes student participation, voice, and vulnerability. For example, disciplinary practices may disproportionately impact students of colour, especially Black girls, due to implicit bias and structural racism (Crenshaw et al., 2015).

An intersectional classroom requires educators to:

- Be aware of their own positionality and privilege

- Foster environments where all students feel seen, safe, and respected
- Recognise that equality is not the same as equity; some students need different kinds of support based on their social realities

Crenshaw's educational philosophy aligns closely with critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) and views teaching as a form of activism. An intersectional classroom is not neutral; it is a site of resistance and transformation. Educators are encouraged to equip students with the tools to analyse and challenge systems of oppression both within and beyond the classroom walls (hooks, 1994). Crenshaw's public work, including initiatives like #SayHerName, also shows how intersectional education connects to broader movements for social justice, linking academic theory to community advocacy. The study sees Crenshaw's philosophy as a social movement that calls for inclusiveness of all races in both academic and community settings.

Postcolonial Feminist Theory and Intersectionality in Humanities Teaching across Inequalities in Africa

This analysis explores how postcolonial feminist theory and intersectionality shape and redefine humanities teaching in Africa, particularly as conceptual tools for identifying and addressing the overlapping inequalities of race, gender, and class. The integration of these two frameworks provides both a critical perspective for understanding structural exclusion and a practical guide for pedagogical transformation. Postcolonial feminist theory highlights the influence of colonial legacies, global capitalism, and racial hierarchies in structuring gendered relations and systems of knowledge production (Mohanty, 2003; Spivak, 1988). It asserts that gender cannot be examined in isolation from coloniality, linguistic hierarchies, and epistemic domination (wa Thiong'o, 1986; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Intersectionality, rooted in Crenshaw's legal scholarship, offers an analytical approach for demonstrating how multiple axes of identity and power; such as race, gender, class, caste, sexuality, and disability, intersect to

produce complex patterns of privilege and marginalisation (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000). Together, these approaches shift the focus from single-issue analyses to structural and relational causes of inequality, showing how curricula, classroom practices, and institutional norms perpetuate layered exclusions unless reforms simultaneously address race, gender, and class (McCall, 2005; Mama, 2007).

Essentially, postcolonial feminism provides the historical and epistemic context; highlighting coloniality, language, and representation, while intersectionality provides the analytical framework for tracing how inequalities interact in specific educational spaces. In the context of humanities teaching in Africa, where colonial curricula, linguistic hierarchies, and class divides remain deeply entrenched, the combined framework reveals that mere representation (such as the inclusion of African texts) is insufficient without a structural transformation of knowledge systems (Spivak, 1988; Mbembe, 2016).

Empirical evidence from various African contexts illustrates the intersections of coloniality, gender, and socioeconomic inequality in humanities education: Curriculum content and epistemic exclusion: Humanities curricula often prioritise Eurocentric canons and texts taught in colonial languages, marginalising indigenous knowledge systems and women's voices (wa Thiong'o, 1986; Oyěwùmí, 1997). This results in double exclusion: non-elite, rural students (class axis) and women (gender axis) often fail to see themselves reflected in course materials, which reduces engagement and reinforces epistemic dependency (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Class and access barriers: Financial hardship, long commuting distances, and unequal access to learning materials disproportionately disadvantage working-class students. These challenges are compounded by assessment practices that privilege essay-based evaluations conducted in colonial languages (Tsikata, 2007; Sifuna & Sawamura, 2010). For working-class women, economic barriers intersect with domestic responsibilities, limiting their participation in higher education. Race and institutional culture: In post-apartheid South Africa, research

reveals that shifts in student demographics have not necessarily transformed epistemic power or staff diversity. Black students and academics still experience exclusion and epistemic violence in institutions that uphold Eurocentric curricula and governance models (Hlatshwayo, 2020; Booysen, 2016). The intersections of race, gender, and class continue to shape participation, recognition, and advancement in academia. Language and epistemic legitimacy: The continued dominance of colonial languages (English, French, Portuguese) creates barriers for students whose primary languages are indigenous and oral. This linguistic hierarchy intersects with class and gender, privileging urban elites and men who have greater access to formal education, while marginalising rural and female students (wa Thiong'o, 1986; Wiredu, 1996). These interlocking inequalities highlight the need for intersectional and decolonial approaches to humanities teaching.

Pedagogical and Institutional Implications: Curriculum redesign and epistemic pluralism. There is a critical need for curricula that integrate African epistemologies, feminist perspectives, and class-conscious frameworks not as supplemental content but as core principles. Incorporating indigenous literature, oral traditions, and African philosophical thought alongside global critical theory can make learning more inclusive and contextually relevant (Oyěwùmí, 1997; Nnaemeka, 2004; Mbembe, 2016). Pedagogy: dialogic, multilingual, and praxis-oriented. Drawing on Freire's dialogical pedagogy and postcolonial feminist theories of situated knowledge, teaching should promote participatory, community-based learning that values oral, communal, and multilingual expressions of knowledge (Freire, 1970; Mohanty, 2003). Praxis-oriented models such as community projects and co-created research can translate abstract theory into socially transformative education, particularly benefiting marginalised students (Sebolao, 2024). Institutional reforms and affirmative policies: Achieving intersectional change requires deliberate institutional strategies such as equitable hiring and promotion systems, scholarships for marginalised groups, and

multilingual policies supporting linguistic diversity. Institutional support structures like mentorship, childcare, and flexible learning schedules are also necessary to address gendered burdens and ensure inclusivity (Tsikata, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Constraints and risks: Despite growing awareness, progress remains hindered by entrenched academic hierarchies, limited resources, and dominant assessment systems that privilege Western epistemic norms. Superficial reforms that simply “add” diversity without redistributing epistemic power risk perpetuating inequality (Mbembe, 2016; Mama, 2007). Methodologically, much existing evidence remains qualitative and context-specific, which limits broader generalisability (McCall, 2005). Research and monitoring: To ensure sustainable transformation, longitudinal and mixed-methods research should be undertaken to assess how intersectional pedagogical reforms influence student retention, performance, and post-graduate outcomes (Booyesen, 2016; Tsikata, 2007).

Analytically, the synthesis of postcolonial feminist theory and intersectionality offers a robust framework for understanding why humanities education in Africa continues to reproduce structural inequalities and how it might be reimagined toward social justice. Practically, it calls for comprehensive reform; curricular, pedagogical, linguistic, and institutional, that foregrounds African epistemologies and lived realities. However, lasting change depends on sustained institutional commitment, adequate funding, and research systems capable of measuring long-term impact across contexts. Ultimately, integrating intersectionality into humanities teaching is both an epistemic endeavour—centred on reclaiming African knowledge systems, and a justice project, aimed at dismantling the intersecting barriers that restrict equitable participation in African higher education.

Research Methodology

The paper adopts a qualitative research approach to explore and interpret the significance of the issue under investigation. This method focuses on analysing individual cases, empirical studies from South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, and

Kenya, as well as reports, with the aim of understanding underlying perceptions and lived experiences. The study further employs purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to identify relevant materials that examine the extent to which intersectional approaches promote inclusive and socially just learning environments. This method was chosen for its efficiency in selecting information-rich literature and case studies on intersectionality within the humanities classroom. In addition, snowball sampling was utilised for citation tracking, allowing the identification of further studies through the reference lists of already sourced materials. By combining purposive and snowball sampling, the study effectively selected books, journal articles, Case studies, and government documents pertinent to the research topic

Extent to which Intersectional Approaches Foster Inclusive, Socially Just Learning Environments in Africa

Intersectionality, first conceptualised by Kimberlé Crenshaw, provides a theoretical framework for analysing how multiple social categories; such as race, gender, class, caste, ethnicity, sexuality, and disability, intersect to shape experiences of privilege and marginalisation (Crenshaw, 1989). Patricia Hill Collins (2000) expanded this notion through her concept of the “matrix of domination,” which highlights how institutional, disciplinary, and interpersonal power relations interconnect. Within education, adopting an intersectional perspective shifts attention away from single-axis analyses (e.g., focusing solely on “women” or “poor students”) to demonstrate how overlapping identities collectively influence access, participation, and achievement in the classroom (McCall, 2005; Collins, 2000). Applied to pedagogy, intersectionality complements culturally responsive and critical pedagogical approaches (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Freire, 1970), calling for teaching content, methodologies, and institutional practices that recognise diverse identities, challenge systemic inequities, and promote inclusive learning spaces. Scholars contend that educational reforms that overlook the simultaneous

influence of race, gender, and class risk reproducing exclusion under progressive rhetoric (Mama, 2007; Mohanty, 2003).

The #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements (2015–2016) in South Africa brought intersectional critiques of race, gender, and class into the heart of higher education debates. Student demands confronted Eurocentric curricula, exclusionary institutional symbols, and barriers to access, issues deeply entangled with racial and class inequalities. Analyses of these movements reveal tangible curricular reforms, including greater inclusion of African and gendered perspectives, as well as efforts to diversify reading lists and academic staff (Booyesen, 2016; Mbembe, 2016). Nonetheless, scholars argue that while symbolic progress has been made—such as statue removals and policy declarations, structural and pedagogical transformations remain inconsistent (Mbembe, 2016; Gqola, 2015).

In Nigeria, scholarship on gender and knowledge production (e.g., Oyěwùmí, 1997; Nnaemeka, 2004) highlights how colonial gender ideologies and class structures have shaped academic hierarchies and curricula. Intersectional approaches in Nigerian humanities education have fostered the inclusion of women's voices and critical perspectives on elite-dominated historiography. Studies suggest improved student engagement and representation when curricula centre local, gendered, and class-based experiences (Nnaemeka, 2004; Oyěwùmí, 1997), though empirical evidence remains limited.

In Ghana, research shows that institutional cultures and recruitment practices perpetuate gendered and classed inequalities in universities (Tsikata, 2007). Intersectional interventions such as gender-sensitive teaching, mentorship initiatives for working-class women, and targeted scholarships have led to higher student retention and participation, though longitudinal evaluations are limited (Tsikata, 2007). Similarly, in Kenya, colonial legacies continue to privilege elite, urban, and English-medium academic discourses, marginalising rural and working-class students (Sifuna & Sawamura, 2010). Incorporating intersectional elements, such as

oral traditions, indigenous languages, and local histories, has been found to enhance classroom engagement and foster more inclusive learning experiences (Sifuna & Sawamura, 2010).

Across African scholarship, intersectional pedagogies have been associated with several key benefits. First, they promote greater curricular relevance and representation by integrating texts and perspectives that reflect students' diverse identities (race, gender, and class), thereby enhancing inclusivity and reducing alienation (wa Thiong'o, 1986; Mbembe, 2016). Second, they nurture critical consciousness, enabling students to analyse structural roots of inequality rather than attributing problems to individual failings (Freire, 1970; Mama, 2007). Third, intersectional programs that address overlapping barriers; such as combining financial support with gender-responsive teaching, have demonstrated improved participation and retention rates among marginalised students (Tsikata, 2007). Finally, intersectional student activism has spurred institutional reflection and policy review processes, including revisions to curricula, faculty recruitment, and governance structures (Booyesen, 2016; Mbembe, 2016). Despite these advances, much of the existing research remains qualitative, context-specific, and short-term, limiting the generalisability of findings and the ability to measure the full extent of intersectionality's impact across educational contexts.

In all, existing literature suggests that intersectional approaches substantially contribute to building more inclusive and socially just learning environments within African higher education, enhancing representation, deepening critical awareness, and encouraging institutional accountability. The most notable impacts occur where intersectional pedagogy is integrated with structural supports, such as financial aid and equitable policy frameworks, and where grassroots activism drives institutional reform (Booyesen, 2016; Tsikata, 2007). Nevertheless, accurately quantifying the breadth and depth of these impacts remains a methodological challenge that future research must address.

Re-centering Intersectionality in African Humanities: Exploring Race, Gender, and Class

in Teaching and Learning

In the African higher education and humanities context, the imperative to recentre intersectionality arises from several converging factors: increasing student activism challenging the persistence of colonial, patriarchal, and class-based inequities in curricula and institutional frameworks; the decolonisation agenda that calls for epistemic justice; and the continuing stratification of access, voice, and representation along lines of race, gender, and class. Studies indicate that humanities teaching that overlooks overlapping identities; such as race, class, and gender, risks reproducing exclusion in new forms (Collins, 2000; McCall, 2005). Therefore, intersectionality provides a crucial analytical lens for examining how humanities curricula, pedagogical approaches, and institutional cultures can foster inclusive and socially just learning environments (Mama, 2007; Oyěwùmí, 1997).

Hlatshwayo (2020) investigates the experiences of Black students and academics in South African universities following the #RhodesMustFall movement, employing Crenshaw's intersectionality framework alongside the concept of "natives of nowhere." Her findings underscore the intersecting impacts of race, class, and institutional culture on belonging, epistemic marginalisation, and experiences of exclusion within the academy. The study highlights how Black faculty and students navigate curricula, staffing, and governance structures that continue to replicate apartheid-era logics under new forms. This case exemplifies how intersectional analysis can reveal nuanced layers of marginalisation: while "being Black" constitutes a racial dimension, class disadvantages (e.g., working-class background) and gender (male vs. female) further complicate experiences of exclusion.

Nenweli (2019) examines a primary school classroom in Pretoria, where the teaching staff was predominantly white, while the majority of students were Black African. Using structural-cultural agency frameworks, the study assessed whether transformed enrolment led to equitable learning opportunities. Despite racial diversification of the student body, structural and cultural mismatches; such as the language of instruction, teacher demographics, and curriculum

content, limited equal learning opportunities. This case highlights how race and class intersect in humanities (or broader curricular) teaching: a diverse student population does not automatically ensure inclusive pedagogy unless curricula, teacher identity, and institutional culture are also transformed.

Jacobs (2018) documents the design of a module in the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences at Stellenbosch University, focusing on gender, culture, and religious diversity for multilingual students from varied cultural and religious backgrounds. The module incorporated guest lecturers from multiple disciplines and integrated local, religious, and gendered epistemologies. Although class stratification was not explicitly addressed, the study demonstrates how intersectional pedagogical design; considering gender, culture, religion, and implicitly class, can contribute to recentring the humanities teaching agenda in Africa.

Sebolao (2024) reports on a student enterprise initiative in South Africa in which humanities students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds engaged in community practice, entrepreneurship, and service design. While the primary emphasis was on entrepreneurship, the study shows that students from underrepresented backgrounds gained agency, voice, and relevance through teaching practices linking humanities to social realities, including class and community disadvantage. This case illustrates how intersectionality (race + gender + class) can be embedded into humanities teaching through praxis-oriented modules.

Challenges of Implementing Intersectional Pedagogy Within Institutions that Reproduce Structural Inequalities

Despite its transformative potential, the implementation of intersectional pedagogy faces numerous challenges, particularly within educational institutions that are historically rooted in systems of structural inequality. Intersectional teaching, focused on examining how race, gender, class, sexuality, and other social identities interact to shape experiences, seeks to disrupt dominant paradigms. However, institutions often resist such disruption due to entrenched ide-

ologies, systemic norms, and practical constraints. Therefore, this study categorises the challenges of implementing intersectional Pedagogy into the following:

Institutional Resistance to Critical Frameworks

Many educational institutions prioritise standardisation, neutrality, and depoliticisation, which inherently conflict with the critical, justice-oriented nature of intersectionality. As Crenshaw (1991) argues, dominant institutional frameworks often fail to recognise how systems of oppression intersect, preferring simplified or single-axis approaches that maintain the status quo.

Faculty who attempt to implement intersectional pedagogy may face institutional pushback for “politicising” the classroom, particularly in conservative or neoliberal educational settings that emphasise marketable skills over critical engagement (Giroux, 2011). These pressures can lead to self-censorship, especially among untenured or contingent faculty who fear professional repercussions (hooks, 1994).

Curricular Constraints and Canonical Dominance

Curricula across many institutions continue to reflect Eurocentric, patriarchal, and heteronormative canons. Incorporating intersectional perspectives requires rethinking not only what is taught, but how and why certain texts and voices have been privileged over others (Collins & Bilge, 2016). In practice, educators encounter resistance when attempting to diversify curricula, often facing accusations of lowering academic standards or being “too political.” Institutional review boards, departmental policies, and accreditation requirements can limit educators’ ability to fully integrate intersectional content, thus reproducing epistemic exclusion (Dotson, 2012).

Lack of Institutional Support and Training

Effective intersectional pedagogy requires sustained professional development, self-reflection, and institutional support. However, many

educators have limited access to intersectionality-based training, particularly in predominantly white institutions (PWIs) or underfunded schools. This lack of preparation can result in superficial or tokenistic applications of intersectionality, where educators include diverse content without engaging with its deeper political and theoretical foundations (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Moreover, without adequate support, educators of color and marginalized faculty, who often lead the way in implementing intersectional practices, may experience emotional labor, burnout, and isolation (Ahmed, 2012). The burden of “diversity work” frequently falls disproportionately on these individuals.

Student Resistance and Misunderstanding

Intersectional pedagogy encourages students to confront privilege, oppression, and their own positionality. While this can be transformative, it also invites emotional discomfort and resistance, particularly from students unfamiliar with critical theory or from dominant social groups (Sensory & DiAngelo, 2017). Educators often report defensive reactions, including accusations of reverse discrimination or censorship. Navigating these responses requires careful facilitation and institutional backing, both of which are not always available or consistent (Leonardo & Porter, 2010).

Systemic Inequities and Policy-Level Constraints

Intersectional pedagogy cannot fully succeed in environments where systemic inequalities, such as racialised funding disparities, exclusionary admissions policies, or discriminatory disciplinary practices, persist unchecked. These structural barriers undermine the equity goals of intersectional teaching by reinforcing the very dynamics it seeks to disrupt (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015).

Thus, implementing intersectionality in the classroom without institutional reform may risk becoming performative, rather than transformative. Intersectional pedagogy requires alignment with broader institutional commitments to equity, diversity, and inclusion, ideally backed by

policies and resource allocation.

Discussion of Findings

The study on intersectionality in the humanities within African higher education and secondary education contexts provides several significant insights into how race, gender, and class intersect to shape teaching, learning, and institutional practices. The findings are drawn from a synthesis of empirical case studies and existing literature across South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya.

A central finding is that intersectional analysis highlights the compounded effects of overlapping social categories such as race, gender, and class, on students' access, engagement, and success in the humanities. For example, Hlatshwayo (2020) shows that Black students and academics in South African universities navigate institutional structures that continue to reproduce apartheid-era inequities under contemporary forms. The interplay of class disadvantages, gendered expectations, and racialized epistemic hierarchies shapes the lived experiences of both students and faculty, demonstrating the limitations of single-axis analyses that consider race, gender, or class in isolation (Collins, 2000; McCall, 2005).

In the Nigerian context, Oyěwùmí (1997) and Nnaemeka (2004) reveal that colonial and patriarchal structures in humanities curricula historically marginalized women and working-class students, restricting their participation in knowledge production. Intersectional approaches enable educators to uncover these layered inequities and develop curricula and pedagogical strategies that are inclusive and socially just.

The findings further indicate that humanities curricula across Africa are often dominated by Eurocentric perspectives, privileging urban, elite, and male voices while marginalizing local, gendered, and working-class experiences. Case studies from South Africa (Jacobs, 2018) and Kenya (Sifuna & Sawamura, 2010) show that modules integrating local histories, oral traditions, and diverse epistemologies increase relevance and engagement for marginalized students.

Intersectional teaching strategies; such as incorporating gender, cultural, and class perspectives, alongside participatory and experiential learning methods, enhance student engagement and foster critical consciousness. For instance, Sebolao (2024) demonstrates that community-based projects linking humanities learning to social realities empower students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, bridging theory and practice and amplifying student agency and voice.

The study also finds that structural and institutional barriers often hinder the effective implementation of intersectional pedagogy. Nenweli (2019) highlights that, even in racially diverse classrooms, disparities in teacher demographics, language of instruction, and curriculum design constrain equity and inclusion. Similarly, research from Ghana (Tsikata, 2007) indicates that institutional cultures, recruitment policies, and socio-economic barriers disproportionately affect women and working-class students, limiting their engagement in humanities programs. These findings underscore the necessity of systemic interventions alongside pedagogical reform, including equitable faculty recruitment, language-sensitive instruction, mentorship for marginalized students, and the integration of intersectional content across curricula.

Moreover, the study shows that student activism serves as a significant driver for embedding intersectional perspectives in humanities education. Movements such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall in South Africa (Booyesen, 2016; Mbembe, 2016) illustrate how collective action compels universities to reassess Eurocentric curricula, exclusionary statues, and governance practices. Student-led intersectional critiques highlight the interplay of race, gender, and class, prompting both symbolic and structural changes, such as diversifying reading lists and incorporating African and gendered perspectives in syllabi.

The findings also reveal several positive outcomes when intersectional approaches are incorporated into humanities teaching: Enhanced Relevance and Representation: Including texts and perspectives reflecting students' intersecting identities reduces alienation and increases

engagement (wa Thiong'o, 1986; Mbembe, 2016). Critical Consciousness: Intersectional pedagogy cultivates analytical skills that enable students to understand structural causes of inequality, countering individualistic explanations for disadvantage (Freire, 1970; Mama, 2007). Participation and Retention: Programs addressing overlapping barriers, such as financial aid, gender-sensitive pedagogy, and mentorship, improve retention and active participation among marginalized students (Tsikata, 2007). Institutional Reflection: Intersectional critiques have prompted universities to review curricula, hiring, and governance policies, although implementation remains inconsistent (Booyesen, 2016; Mbembe, 2016). However, the study further highlights limitations: most documented research is qualitative, context-specific, and short-term, making it challenging to generalize across Africa or quantify the long-term effects of intersectional pedagogies.

Overall, the findings affirm that recentring intersectionality in humanities teaching is essential for fostering inclusive and socially just learning environments in Africa. By addressing the intersection of race, gender, and class, intersectional approaches enhance representation, student engagement, and critical awareness while challenging institutional practices that perpetuate marginalization. Effective integration, however, requires structural reforms, curriculum redesign, and sustained commitment from faculty, administrators, and policymakers to ensure that intersectional principles are translated from theory into meaningful educational practice.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The discourse on Intersectionality in the Humanities: Teaching at the Crossroads of Race, Gender, and Class in Africa underscores the transformative potential of intersectional approaches in reshaping education towards inclusivity, equity, and social justice. The findings and literature reviewed reveal that humanities teaching across African higher and secondary education systems remains deeply influenced by colonial legacies, patriarchal structures, and class hierarchies that often marginalize certain groups of students and knowledge systems. By

integrating intersectionality as both a theoretical and pedagogical framework, educators and institutions are better equipped to understand and address the interconnected nature of oppression and privilege within classrooms and curricula. Intersectional pedagogy highlights that race, gender, and class cannot be treated as isolated categories; rather, they interact dynamically to shape access, participation, and outcomes in education. Empirical studies from South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya demonstrate that inclusive and contextually grounded humanities teaching; incorporating local epistemologies, gendered perspectives, and class-sensitive practices, enhances student engagement, representation, and critical consciousness. Movements such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall further illustrate how student activism rooted in intersectional critique can catalyze both symbolic and structural change within African universities.

However, despite growing awareness and reform efforts, challenges persist. Structural inequalities, Eurocentric curricula, limited institutional will, and the scarcity of longitudinal research hinder the full realization of intersectional transformation in the humanities. True progress requires systemic commitment: curriculum redesign, equitable faculty recruitment, inclusive policy frameworks, and continuous institutional reflection.

Finally, recentring intersectionality in the humanities is not merely an academic exercise but an ethical and transformative imperative. It calls for a reimagining of African higher education spaces as inclusive, pluralistic, and socially just environments that validate diverse identities, knowledges, and lived experiences. Through sustained commitment to intersectional pedagogy, African institutions can foster critical, decolonized, and emancipatory education that truly reflects and serves the continent's multifaceted realities.

The following recommendations were made to add more value to the intersectionality in the humanities classroom: Teaching at the crossroads of race, gender, and class.

- i. African universities should revise humanities curricula to reflect diverse epistemologies, local histories, and indigenous knowledge systems. Integrating gender, race, and class perspectives across courses will promote inclusivity and challenge Eurocentric and patriarchal narratives that marginalise African voices
- ii. Institutions should prioritise capacity-building for lecturers through continuous professional development on intersectional and culturally responsive teaching methods. This will enhance educators' ability to recognise and address overlapping inequalities within classroom dynamics.
- iii. Universities should embed intersectionality in governance, recruitment, and student support systems. Policies must ensure equitable access, representation, and participation of women, working-class, and marginalised students and staff within academic and administrative structures.
- iv. Student activism and participation should be institutionalized as driving force for curriculum innovation and policy transformation.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Duke University Press
- Alexander, R. (2008). *Essays on Pedagogy*. Routledge
- Amin, S. (1989). Eurocentrism. *Monthly Review Press*
- Barnett, R. (2007). *A Will to Learn: Being a Student in an Age of Uncertainty*. McGraw-Hill Education
- Bass, B. M. (1990). From transactional to transformational leadership: Learning to share the vision. *Organizational Dynamics*, 18(3), 19–31
- Blaut, J. M. (1993). *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History*. Guilford Press
- Booyesen, S. (Ed.). (2016). *Fees Must Fall: Student Revolt, Decolonisation and Governance in South Africa*. Wits University Press
- Bruner, J. (1996). *The Culture of Education*. Harvard University Press
- Cabral, A. (1973). *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches of Amílcar Cabral*. Monthly Review Press.
- Carastathis, A. (2016). *Intersectionality: Origins, Contestations, Horizons*. University of Nebraska Press
- Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2nd ed.). Routledge
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex*. University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989(1), 139–167
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Crenshaw, K., Ocen, P., & Nanda, J. (2015). Black girls matter: Pushed out, overpoliced, and underprotected. *African American Policy Forum*. <https://aapf.org/blackgirlsmatter>
- Dotson, K. (2012). A cautionary tale: On limiting epistemic oppression. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 33(1), 24–47. <https://doi.org/10.5250/fronjwomestud.33.1.0024>
- Dussel, E. (2000). Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism. *Nepantla*, 1(3), 465–478
- Fanon, F. (1963). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press
- Fish, S. (2008). *Save the World on Your Own Time*. Oxford University Press
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum
- Giroux, H. A. (2011). *On Critical Pedagogy*. Bloomsbury
- Gqola, P. D. (2015). *Rape: A South African Nightmare*. MF Books
- Gyekye, K. (1995). *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*. Temple University Press

- Hlatshwayo, M. N. (2020). Being Black in South African higher education: An intersectional insight. *Acta Academica*, 52(2), 163–180
- Hooks, b. (1994). Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom. *Routledge*
- Hountondji, P. (1997). Endogenous Knowledge: Research Trails. *African Books Collective*
- Jacobs, A. et al. (2018). *Reflection on a collaborative teaching project about gender inequality*. Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in the South, 2(1), 21–41
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465–491.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory, and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 7–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/095183998236863>
- Leonardo, Z., & Porter, R. (2010). Pedagogy of fear: Toward a Fanonian theory of “safety” in race dialogue. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 13(2), 139–157. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2010.482898>
- Letseka, M. (2012). “In Defence of Ubuntu.” *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 31(1), 47–60. *Literature. Heinemann*
- Lewis, D. (2018). *African Feminisms, Knowledge and Power: De-centring the West*. Agenda, 32(1), 3–13
- Loughran, J. (2013). Developing a Pedagogy of Teacher Education. *Routledge*
- Mama, A. (2007). Is it ethical to study Africa? *African Studies Review*, 50(1), 1–26.
- Mazrui, A. (2004). The African Condition: A Political Diagnosis. *Cambridge University Press*.
- Mbembe, A. (2016). Decolonizing the university: New directions. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 15(1), 29–45
- Mbiti, J. S. (1990). African Religions and Philosophy. *Heinemann*
- McCall, L. (2005). The complexity of intersectionality. *Signs*, 30(3), 1771–1800.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*. Jossey-Bass.
- Mignolo, W. D. (2011). The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options. *Duke University Press*
- Mignolo, W. D. (2011). *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. *Duke University Press*
- Mohanty, C. T. (2003). Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity. *Duke University Press*.
- Moraga, C., & Anzaldúa, G. (Eds.). (2015). This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Colour (4th ed.). *SUNY Press*
- Moser, P. K. (2008). Knowledge and Its Limits. *Oxford University Press*
- Mudimbe, V. Y. (1988). The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge. *Indiana University Press*
- Nash, J. C. (2008). Re-thinking Intersectionality. *Feminist Review*, 89(1), 1–15
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2013). Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa: *Myths of Decolonization*. CODESRIA.
- Nenweli, M. S. (2019). Mirrors and windows: Teaching strategies in racially diverse classrooms. *University of South Africa*
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986). Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature. *Heinemann*
- Nkrumah, K. (1965). Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism. *Thomas Nelson*
- Nnaemeka, O. (2004). Nego-feminism: Theorizing, practicing, and pruning Africa’s way. *Signs*, 29(2), 357–385.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2010). Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities. *Princeton University Press*

- Omolewa, M. (2007). "Traditional African Modes of Education: Their Relevance in the Modern World." *International Review of Education*, 53(5–6), 593–612
- Oyěwùmí, O. (1997). *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. University of Minnesota Press
- Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (2017). *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world*. Teachers College Press
- Piaget, J. (1972). *The Psychology of the Child*. Basic Books
- Praeg, L. (2009). Orality and Literacy in African Knowledge Systems. *African Studies*, 68(2), 185–202
- Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. *Nepantla: Views from South*, 1(3), 533–580
- Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books
- Sebolao, R. (2024). The humanities impacting communities through entrepreneurship: A case study of student enterprise from a South African university. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in the South*, 8(2), 33–48. <https://doi.org/10.36615/sotls.v8i2.405>
- Sensoy, Ö., & DiAngelo, R. (2017). *Is everyone really equal? An introduction to key concepts in social justice education* (2nd ed.). Teachers College Press
- Siemens, G. (2005). "Connectivism: A Learning Theory for the Digital Age." *International Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning*, 2(1), 3–10
- Sifuna, D. N., & Sawamura, N. (2010). *Challenges of Quality Education in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Nova Science Publishers
- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Zed Books
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Press
- Tsikata, D. (2007). Gender, institutional cultures and career trajectories in Ghana. *Feminist Africa*, 8, 26–41
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Harvard University Press
- wa Thiong'o, N. (1986). *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Heinemann
- Wiredu, K. (1996). *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*. Indiana University Press

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.27>

ASSESSING HR PROCESSES AND PRACTICES IN GHANAIAAN TECHNICAL UNIVERSITIES AS A PRECURSOR TO HRIS ADOPTION

Esther Gyamfi, Pauline Eyono**Corresponding Author****Esther Gyamfi***Human Resource Department, Faculty of Management Sciences,
Durban University of Technology, Durban, South Africa**E-mail: esthergyamfi1982@gmail.com**ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0543-6554>***Co-authors****Edwige Pauline Ngo-Henha Eyono***Human Resource Department, Faculty of Management Sciences,
Durban University of Technology, Durban, South Africa**E-mail: paulinen@dut.ac.za**ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9681-4727>***Albert Agbenyagah***Department of Applied Management, Faculty of Management Sciences,
Durban University of Technology, Durban, South Africa**E-mail: alberta@dut.ac.za**ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3410-2809>***Abstract**

This study investigates the readiness of Ghanaian technical universities for Human Resource Information System (HRIS) adoption, focusing on how existing human resource processes and practices shape digital transformation. Guided by the pragmatist research philosophy, a mixed-methods design was employed to capture both measurable trends and in-depth institutional perspectives. Quantitative data were collected from 306 senior staff across four technical universities through structured questionnaires, while qualitative insights were drawn from purposively selected key informants with expertise in HR policy and digital systems. Anchored in the Technology–Organisation–Environment (TOE) framework and Diffusion of Innovations Theory (DIT), the study examined the interplay of technological, organisational, and environmental factors influencing adoption. Results indicated that HR departments actively manage recruitment, training, performance appraisal, compensation, and employee records, though notable gaps were observed in training and development and compensation management. Both theories affirmed that robust HR functions are essential precursors to successful HRIS implementation. The study concludes that strengthening HR capacity, improving digital preparedness, and addressing institutional barriers are critical for ensuring effective HRIS adoption. These findings underscore the strategic role of HR departments in facilitating digital transformation and enhancing the sustainability of Ghanaian technical universities.

Keywords: Human Resource Information System (HRIS), Technical universities, Digital transformation, Organisational readiness, Ghana

1.**INTRODUCTION**

Human resource management (HRM) is central

to the operational efficiency and strategic positioning of higher education institutions, especially in a rapidly evolving global knowledge economy. In recent decades, universities worldwide have increasingly recognized the need to modernize their human resource (HR) processes to enhance institutional agility, accountability, and performance (Sparrow et al., 2016). The integration of information technology into HR functions, particularly through Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS), has become a hallmark of modernisation in this field (Karasek, 2019). HRIS enables the digital management of HR activities, including recruitment, performance appraisal, payroll, and employee records, providing timely and reliable data for informed decision-making (Priota, 2020).

Despite the global trend towards automation and digitisation in Human Resource Management (HRM), many universities in developing countries, including Ghana, continue to rely heavily on manual or semi-manual HR processes, which are often inefficient, fragmented, and prone to errors. Technical universities in Ghana, mandated to deliver industry-focused education and develop human capital for national development, face significant HR challenges. These include cumbersome administrative procedures, duplication of records, poor data management, and limited strategic alignment of HR activities. The lack of streamlined HR processes not only undermines institutional performance but also constrains the readiness for HRIS adoption.

While existing literature has explored HRIS implementation challenges in Ghanaian public organisations and private firms (e.g., Ankrah & Sokro, 2016; Hagan et al., 2022), there remains a knowledge gap regarding the preconditions necessary for successful HRIS integration in the context of public higher education. In particular, limited research has assessed the current state of HR processes and practices in Ghana's technical universities. This is a critical first step toward HRIS implementation. Understanding the operational landscape of HR units, including the extent of digital preparedness and the effectiveness of existing HR practices, is vital for informing

the design and adoption of context-appropriate HRIS frameworks.

Furthermore, institutional readiness for HRIS adoption depends not only on technological capacity but also on the procedural, cultural, and administrative maturity of existing HR systems (Kabukye et al., 2020). As such, evaluating the human resource processes and practices in technical universities is essential for diagnosing systemic weaknesses, identifying reform priorities, and laying the groundwork for digital transformation.

This study addresses this critical knowledge gap by assessing the human resource processes and practices in four Ghanaian technical universities. The aim is to examine the extent to which these institutions have developed coherent, efficient, and modern HR systems that can support a transition to HRIS. Specifically, the study explores key HRM functions such as recruitment, recordkeeping, employee development, and performance evaluation to understand their structure, effectiveness, and digital readiness.

Against these, the following question guides the research:

To what extent are the human resource processes and practices in Ghanaian technical universities prepared for the adoption of a Human Resource Information System?

By focusing on a systematic evaluation of current HR operations, this study contributes to the broader discourse on digital transformation in the public sector and offers practical insights for university administrators and policymakers. The findings will help identify procedural bottlenecks, highlight best practices, and inform targeted interventions to enhance HR capacity and readiness for technology-driven reform.

Empirical review

Several scholars have offered definitions of Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS), highlighting its strategic role in organisational management (Randle, Coleman, & Kekwaletswe, 2017, p. 1103; Pieris & Preena, 2020,

p. 87). For example, Randle, Coleman, and Kekwaletswe (2017, p. 1103) describe HRIS as a management tool designed to assist organisations in overseeing employee information and activities, ultimately supporting strategic planning. Similarly, Al Mamun and Islam (2016, p. 29) define HRIS as a system developed to collect, store, process, and retrieve human resource data, thereby enabling organisations to achieve their strategic objectives more effectively. Across these definitions, a consistent theme emerges: HRIS represents the integration of information systems into human resource management processes to enhance organisational efficiency and effectiveness.

Organisations are increasingly adopting Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) due to their numerous benefits (Nguti & Mose, 2021, p. 558). The literature consistently highlights HRIS as a more efficient and effective alternative to manual HRM systems. Scholars widely acknowledge its value in reducing operational costs while enhancing the implementation of human resource functions. According to Esther, Maduagwu, Joy, & Ugwu (2018, p. 44), the drive to lower HRM costs, enable employee self-service, and optimise returns on human capital, especially in response to economic constraints, has prompted many organisations to embrace HRIS.

Quaosar et al. (2018, p. 13) emphasise that incorporating technology into traditional HR practices facilitates meaningful and transformative organisational change. Similarly, Safaâ and Mohamed (2020, p. 399) underscore the strategic role of HRIS in the digital era, noting that it provides essential decision-support tools for competitive positioning. HRIS enhances the flow, accuracy, and accessibility of information, thereby improving planning, communication, and scheduling processes. These improvements ultimately support more informed decision-making and promote overall organisational efficiency.

In contrast to the widely cited benefits of HRIS, some studies (Mabaso, 2020, p. 24; Esther,

Maduagwu, Joy, & Ugwu, 2018, p. 43) argue that the adoption and use of HRIS do not always lead to improved effectiveness and efficiency. Instead, these studies suggest that HRIS implementation can result in increased expenses and costly investments that may not correspond to the expected benefits. As a result, organisations are advised to conduct both a needs analysis and a cost-benefit analysis before proceeding with adoption. The purpose of the needs analysis is to help organisations identify the specific areas of their HR operations that require technological intervention and determine the appropriate type of technology. The cost-benefit analysis, on the other hand, enables organisations to assess whether adopting the technology is a sound financial decision.

Zafar, Randolph, and Martin (2017, p. 60), along with Mabaso (2020, p. 24), note that HRIS software is associated with various costs, risks, and security concerns, all of which should be thoroughly evaluated before adoption. For smaller organisations, the investment in HRIS may not be justified, especially if they can manage HR operations effectively without such systems. Furthermore, Esther, Maduagwu, Joy, & Ugwu (2018, p. 43) caution that organisations must carefully manage the ongoing costs of maintaining HRIS structures to avoid compromising their competitiveness.

A study by Khan et al. (2017, p. 143) found that Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) are widely used in Pakistani organisations to access employee information, monitor absences, and conduct performance appraisals. These applications facilitate faster information retrieval while reducing errors and paperwork. According to the study, the most valuable uses of HRIS are employee information management and absence monitoring, whereas compensation management and training and development are perceived as less useful.

In a related investigation, Tessema et al. (2020, p. 128) identified six technologies that influence recruitment and selection methods in an Ameri-

can multinational company. These include corporate job boards, commercial job boards, social media, recruiting software, interactive technologies, and HR analytics. Their findings indicate that these technologies significantly affect recruitment and selection processes. Tessema et al. (2020) argue that incorporating technology into recruitment is not merely an option but a critical component of organisational success.

Priya and Preetha (2022, p. 402) observe that a substantial portion of HRIS research has been concentrated in developed countries such as the United States, Canada, and Western European countries, while studies focusing on developing countries remain limited. Nguti and Mose (2021, p. 557) note that the application of technology in human resource management is relatively recent in Africa, and its adoption in organisations continues to face numerous challenges. Most existing studies in the African context have focused primarily on South Africa, with limited literature available on other regions (Nguti & Mose, 2021). However, Priya and Preetha (2022, p. 402), along with Schislyaeva and Plis (2021) as cited in Abbas, Shah, and Othman (2021, p. 48), indicate that this trend is gradually changing. Increasingly, organisations across Africa are beginning to adopt information systems to support their HR functions.

In Cameroon, Noutsa et al. (2017) conducted a study to identify the key factors influencing the acceptance and use of HRIS in Cameroonian organisations, as well as its impact on organisational performance. The findings indicated that while the implementation of HRIS has the potential to improve employee management, it remains far from fully effective. The study highlighted that a limited understanding of the HRIS concept contributed to administrative delays, incomplete responses to surveys, and various challenges, such as financial and logistical constraints.

Similarly, Udekwe and Andre (2017, p. 6) explored the factors affecting the implementation, maintenance, and use of HRIS in two retail com-

panies located in the Western Cape of South Africa. Their research revealed that the systems were underutilised due to poor data quality, inadequate training, and the high costs associated with implementation and upkeep. These issues resulted in low levels of satisfaction among both employees and management, thereby preventing the organisations from fully realising the benefits of HRIS. Nonetheless, Udekwe and Andre (2017) also identified that strong management support, effective teamwork, and robust system security contributed positively to successful HRIS implementation.

In Kenya, Magutu and Marika (2018, p. 44) investigated the impact of Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) on HRM practices within state corporations. Their findings indicate that the adoption of HRIS is relatively high in these organisations, largely due to the availability of supporting infrastructure such as computers, internet connectivity, and technical expertise. The study also revealed that state corporations tend to select HRIS software based on their specific organisational needs. Commonly used systems include SAP, Microsoft Access, Oracle, PeopleSoft, Microsoft Dynamics NAV, Inspire HRM, IPPD, and PayPoint.

Magutu and Marika (2018) concluded that the use of HRIS in Kenyan state corporations brings multiple advantages. These include faster report generation, enhanced data security, easier record updates, improved data accessibility, and increased accuracy in HR-related processes.

In Tanzania, Matimbwa, Shillingi, and Masue (2021, p. 25) investigated the influence of user, technological, and organisational characteristics on the effectiveness of Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) across six regions in mainland Tanzania. Their findings indicated that user-related factors, particularly employees' IT skills and level of commitment, significantly contribute to the effectiveness of HRIS by improving the timeliness, completeness, and accuracy of HR processes. The study also highlighted that technological factors—such as perceived usefulness, system compatibility, complexity, and reliability are key determinants of

HRIS performance. Furthermore, organisational characteristics, including the availability of IT infrastructure and the extent of employer support, were found to be essential in enhancing the overall effectiveness of HRIS.

The review of existing studies reveals a noticeable gap in the application of HRIS within the higher education sector, despite it being one of the largest service sectors in many countries. In the Ghanaian context, in particular, there is a scarcity of research examining how universities adopt and utilise HRIS to enhance institutional effectiveness. It is within this context that the current study seeks to explore the extent of HRIS adoption in Ghanaian universities and assess its impact on operational efficiency. Although studies across Europe, Africa, and Ghana generally affirm the effectiveness of HRIS, they also emphasise that its success largely depends on the depth and efficiency of its implementation. This underscores the fact that there is no universal model for HRIS adoption. Organisations adopt HRIS at different levels and stages, shaped by their specific needs, resources, and strategic priorities. Hence, it becomes essential to investigate not only whether HRIS is adopted, but also the varying levels of adoption and the practical implications of each stage.

Theoretical framework

The current study is underpinned by two theories. These include the Technology Organisation Environment and the Theory of Diffusion Innovations.

Technology Organisation Environment

The Technology Organisation Environment (TOE) framework, developed by Tornatzky and Fleischer (1990), was introduced to explain how the adoption of technological innovations within organisations is shaped by various contextual factors. The framework categorises these influences into three key dimensions: technological, organisational, and environmental. According to Tornatzky and Fleischer (1990), the technological context pertains to the characteristics of the technology being adopted. It involves an assessment of both existing technologies within

the organisation and those available in the broader industry, which helps determine the organisation's capacity and readiness to undertake innovation initiatives.

The organisational context refers to internal characteristics that shape an organisation's ability to adopt and implement innovations. These include the organisation's size, level of centralisation and formalisation, the quality and capabilities of its human resources, the complexity of its managerial structure, and the availability of internal resources or slack (Moradi & Nia, 2020; Malik, Chadhar, Vatanasakdakul, & Chetty, 2021). In contrast, the environmental context encompasses external factors such as the industry in which the organisation operates, competitive pressures, access to external resources, and interactions with regulatory bodies and government institutions.

Bhattacharya and Wamba (2018) synthesise these dimensions by explaining that the technological context relates to the characteristics of the innovation itself, the organisational context captures internal structural and strategic attributes, and the environmental context involves external forces that influence organisational decision-making. These three domains interact to shape how and whether an organisation adopts technological innovations. Figure 1 below illustrates the interrelationships among the variables within the TOE framework that influence innovation adoption.

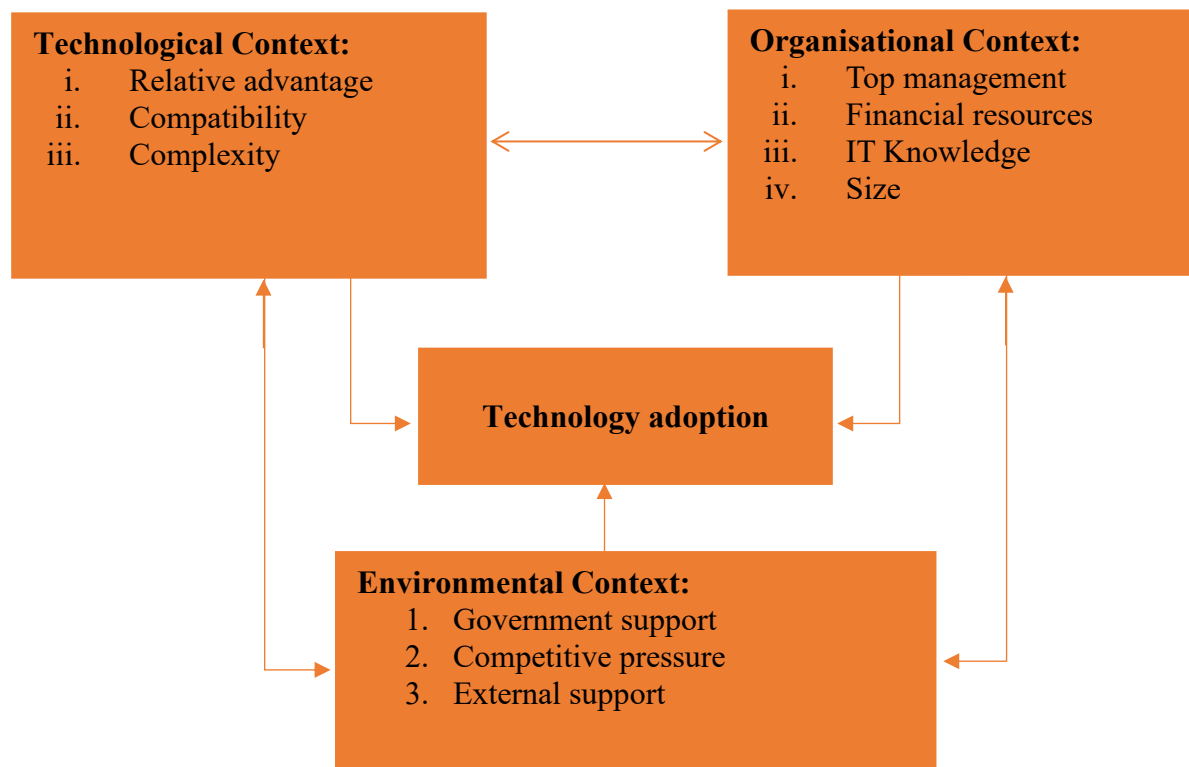


Figure 1: Technology, Organisation, and Environment (TOE) Framework
Source: Tornatzky and Fleischer (1990)

Awa et al. (2016) employed the TOE framework to examine the adoption of Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Their study revealed that certain factors presented greater obstacles for non-adopters compared to adopters. Although the TOE framework effectively explained ERP adoption within these SMEs, technological factors emerged as more influential than organisational and environmental dimensions. Awa et al. (2016) concluded that their model could serve as a valuable tool for information systems (IS) vendors, assisting in strategic investment decisions and the development of targeted marketing strategies for non-adopters, while also supporting existing adopters in advancing their implementation efforts.

In a similar study, Scupola (2019, p. 1) applied

the TOE framework to investigate the factors affecting HRIS adoption in Danish SMEs. Their findings underscored the importance of perceived benefits, organisational knowledge of HRIS, and top management support as critical drivers of adoption decisions, reinforcing the framework's relevance in diverse organisational and geographical contexts.

Theory of Diffusion Innovations

The Theory of Diffusion of Innovations (DIT), developed by Everett Rogers (1995), explains how innovations are adopted and spread within a social system over time. It is particularly useful for understanding the human and social dynamics involved in technology adoption, such as the implementation of Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) in higher education institutions. The theory posits that diffusion is a process through which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time

among members of a social system (Rogers, 1995). This makes DIT especially relevant for analysing how HRIS adoption evolves within universities, where communication, leadership, and institutional culture play significant roles.

One of the central aspects of DIT is its identification of five innovation attributes that influence the rate and extent of adoption as presented in Figure 2: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. Relative advantage refers to the degree to which an innovation is perceived as better than the idea it replaces. In the case of HRIS, this could mean improved efficiency, accuracy, and data accessibility compared to traditional manual HR systems (Rogers, 1995). Compatibility involves the consistency of the innovation with existing values, experiences, and practices. For universities, this pertains to how well HRIS aligns with cur-

rent HR structures, staff competencies, and institutional goals.

Complexity is the degree to which the innovation is perceived as difficult to understand and use. This is crucial for HRIS adoption, particularly in contexts where users may have limited exposure to digital technologies or lack technical support. Trialability refers to the ability to experiment with the innovation on a small scale before full implementation. Allowing HR departments to pilot HRIS tools can reduce resistance and build user confidence. Lastly, observability relates to the extent to which the benefits of an innovation are visible to others. Demonstrating successful HRIS implementation in one university can influence others to adopt similar systems (Rogers, 1995).

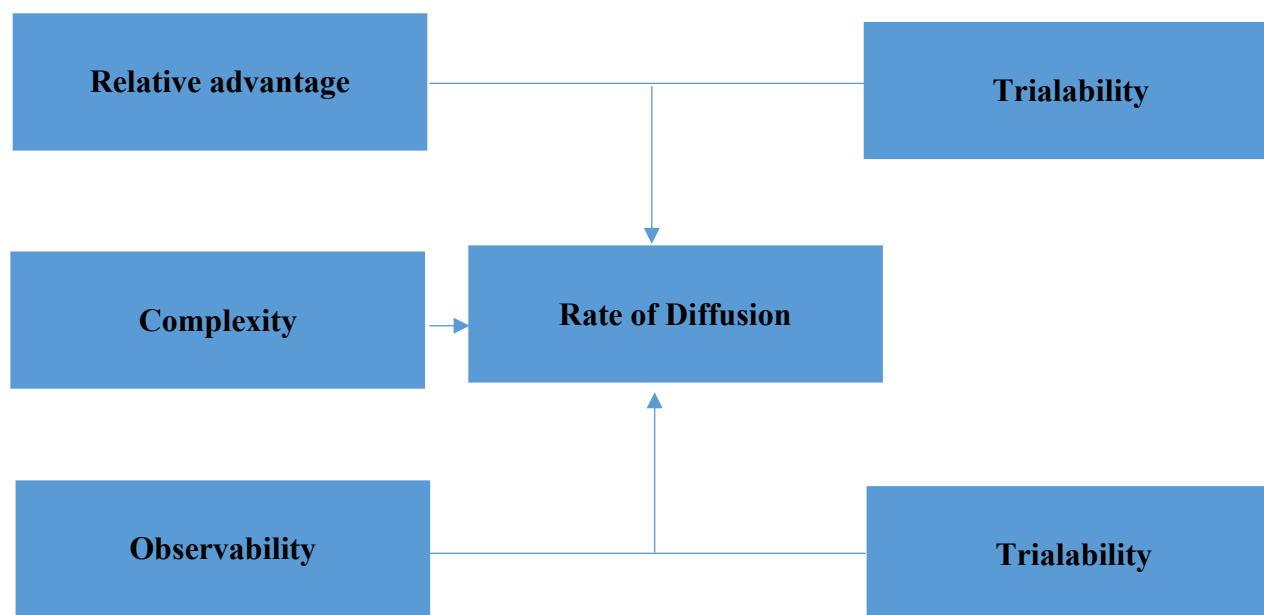


Figure 1: The Theory of Diffusion of Innovations (DIT)

Source: Rogers, (1995)

Rogers also categorises adopters into five groups based on their willingness to adopt innovations: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. This classification highlights the varied pace at which different

stakeholders accept change. In the university context, early adopters may include departments with proactive leadership or prior experience with digital tools, while laggards may be those constrained by budget, resistance to change, or

lack of technical infrastructure.

The relevance of DIT to the present study lies in its ability to explain the behavioural and perceptual dimensions of HRIS adoption. While structural readiness is essential, as highlighted by the Technology Organisation Environment (TOE) framework, DIT provides insight into how individuals and institutions perceive and respond to the innovation itself. This dual perspective is crucial for understanding not just whether HRIS can be adopted in Ghanaian technical universities, but also how it is perceived, accepted, and integrated into institutional practices.

Studies such as Kamal (2006) and Oliveira and Martins (2011) have also applied DIT to explain the adoption of information systems in developing countries, reinforcing its applicability in similar institutional contexts. The integration of DIT in this study thus enhances the depth of analysis by considering both the innovation characteristics and the sociocultural dynamics that influence HRIS adoption.

Theoretical contribution

The findings of this study are expected to make a significant theoretical contribution by enhancing the understanding of how human resource processes and practices influence the readiness and adoption of Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) in higher education institutions within a developing country context. By drawing on the Technology Organisation Environment (TOE) framework (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990) and the Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 1995), the study offers a comprehensive explanation of HRIS adoption that incorporates both institutional factors and user perceptions. Specifically, the study contributes to the TOE framework by showing how organisational characteristics such as existing HR practices, managerial support, and resource availability impact technology readiness, aligning with findings by Moradi and Nia (2020) and Bhattacharya and Wamba (2018). It also adds to the Diffusion of Innovations Theory by applying the innovation attributes identified by Rogers

(1995) namely relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability in the context of Ghanaian technical universities. This contextual application refines the theory by demonstrating how perceptions of innovation vary based on institutional capacity and sector-specific challenges. Furthermore, the study addresses the gap in HRIS literature focused on higher education in developing countries, where empirical and theoretical studies remain limited (Priya & Preetha, 2022; Nguti & Mose, 2021). General, the study proposes a more integrated and context-sensitive model of HRIS adoption that can inform future research and theory development in similar organisational settings.

Methodology

This study is guided by the pragmatist research philosophy, which emphasises practical outcomes and supports the use of multiple methods to investigate complex real-world issues. Pragmatism allows researchers to focus on what works best for the research problem, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding. This philosophy is well suited to the institutional context of the study, where both structural factors and human behaviour are central to understanding Human Resource Information System (HRIS) adoption in Ghanaian technical universities (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The study adopts a deductive research approach, where theoretical propositions derived from existing frameworks guide the data collection and analysis. Specifically, the study is anchored in the Technology, Organisation, and Environment (TOE) framework by Tornatzky and Fleischer (1990) and the Diffusion of Innovations Theory by Rogers (1995). These theories help explain how technological, organisational, and environmental factors, as well as innovation characteristics, influence the decision to adopt HRIS.

The research design is both exploratory and descriptive. The exploratory component seeks to uncover new insights into how human resource processes and practices influence readiness for HRIS adoption. The descriptive aspect focuses

on systematically capturing the current state of HR structures, digital preparedness, and perceived barriers to technology adoption. This dual purpose enables the study to address both the nature and causes of HRIS readiness within institutions. A mixed-methods design was employed to integrate quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative component captures broad trends and measurable patterns across institutions, while the qualitative component provides depth through context-specific narratives. This design enhances the validity of findings by offering both generalisable and detailed insights into the research problem.

Sample Frame

University	Population	Sample size
TU1	354	77
TU2	228	49
TU3	337	73
TU4	494	107
Total	1413	306

For the qualitative component, four key informants—one from each university—were selected using purposive sampling. These individuals were chosen based on their expertise in HR policy and experience with digital systems. Their insights were critical in understanding institutional challenges and readiness for HRIS adoption.

Primary data were collected using two instruments. A structured questionnaire was administered to 306 respondents to gather data on HR practices and perceptions of HRIS. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the four key informants to explore strategic and operational perspectives.

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 29.0. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and means were generated. Inferential statistics were used to explore relationships between key variables. Qualitative data were transcribed and analysed thematically using QSR NVivo 12, which helped identify recurring themes aligned with the research objectives.

The study population comprises staff of technical universities in Ghana. The target population consists of senior members of four selected technical universities. These individuals are involved in strategic human resource planning and are well positioned to provide relevant information on institutional processes. A total of 1,413 senior staff formed the sampling frame. Using cluster sampling, respondents were grouped by faculty and administrative units. Simple random sampling was then applied to select 306 participants for the quantitative survey. This approach ensured representativeness and reduced selection bias. A breakdown of the sampling frame is presented below:

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Prior to the commencement of the study with selected universities, Gatekeeper's permission to conduct research was obtained from these participating institutions' relevant offices. This followed the issuing of the ethical clearance by the institutional research ethics committee within which the study is registered (IREC). Participants of this study were informed that the researcher is guided and working under university ethical framework. Participants were provided with a letter containing information regarding the nature of the study, the research purpose, the use of research findings and the extent of participant involvement, including confidentiality. On receipt of confirmation from the Heads of HR units of the selected universities of their willingness to participate in the interview, appointments were arranged and an interview schedule was electronically forwarded to familiarise the interviewees with the anticipated lines of inquiry. It was made clear to the participants that in the course of the study, they might withdraw without penalty or any offense should they need

to. It was also made clear to participants that all data obtained during the data collection phase would be confidentially kept and securely stored and would be accessible to the researcher only.

RESULTS

This section examines the current human resource processes and practices at four selected Ghanaian technical universities (TU1, TU2, TU3, and TU4). Understanding these practices

is essential, as they form the foundation of the HR framework and influence workforce efficiency, satisfaction, and productivity. The analysis focuses on key HR functions such as recruitment, training, and performance management, aiming to identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities that may impact the adoption of Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) for improved organisational effectiveness.

Current HR Processes and Practices in TU1

Table 1: Current HR Processes and Practices in TU1

Statement	Likert Scale					Mean	StD
	SD	D	Neutral	A	SA		
The HR Department/Unit is responsible for all HRM practices in my university.	1.4%	8.7%	10.1%	53.6%	26.1%	3.94	0.92
Performance Appraisal is an HRM practice in my university.	2.9%	4.3%	8.7%	59.4%	24.6%	3.99	0.88
Training and Development is an HRM practice in my university.	2.9%	8.7%	15.9%	53.6%	18.8%	3.77	0.96
Recruitment and Selection is an HRM practice in my university.	1.4%	5.8%	13.0%	56.5%	23.2%	3.94	0.86
Compensation Management is an HRM practice in my university.	5.8%	15.9%	24.6%	44.9%	8.7%	3.35	1.04
Employee Record Keeping is an HRM practice in my university.	1.4%	1.4%	10.0%	60.9%	21.1%	4.09	0.74
I consider my HR Department to be effective in carrying out its practices.	1.4%	13.0%	17.4%	55.1%	13.0%	3.65	0.92
There is consistency between what the HR Department advocates and what it actually implements.	2.9%	11.6%	24.6%	53.6%	7.2%	3.51	0.90
I am happy about the services offered by the HR Unit in my institution.	2.9%	20.3%	23.2%	46.4%	7.2%	3.61	0.83

Source: Field survey (2024)

As shown in Table 1, the majority of respondents (79.1%) agreed that the HR department is responsible for all HRM practices. High levels of agreement were recorded for performance appraisal (84.5%), recruitment and selection

(79.7%), training and development (72.4%), and employee record-keeping (82%). Compensation management received lower agreement (53.6%). Overall, 68.1% considered the HR de-

partment effective, 60.8% noted consistency between HR policies and practices, and 53.6% were satisfied with HR services.

At TU1, HR practices were generally viewed positively. The HR department's responsibility scored a mean of 3.94 (SD = 0.92), while performance appraisal received the highest rating (mean = 3.99). Training and development (mean = 3.77) and recruitment and selection (mean =

3.94) were also rated positively. Compensation management had the lowest score (mean = 3.35, SD = 1.04), indicating dissatisfaction. Employee record-keeping was the most positively rated (mean = 4.09, SD = 0.74). HR effectiveness (mean = 3.65) and satisfaction with services (mean = 3.61) were moderate, suggesting general approval with areas for improvement.

Current HR Processes and Practices in TU2

Table 2: Current HR Processes and Practices in TU1

Statement	Likert Scale					Mean	StD
	SD	D	Neutral	A	SA		
The HR Department/Unit is responsible for all HRM practices in my university.	5.8%	0.0%	9.6%	53.8%	30.8%	4.04	0.97
Performance Appraisal is an HRM practice in my university.	5.8%	1.9%	9.6%	57.7%	25.0%	3.94	0.98
Training and Development is an HRM practice in my university.	0.0%	5.8%	7.7%	71.2%	15.4%	3.96	0.68
Recruitment and Selection is an HRM practice in my university.	1.9%	1.9%	17.3%	50.0%	28.8%	4.02	0.85
Compensation Management is an HRM practice in my university.	0.0%	13.5%	34.6%	48.1%	3.8%	3.42	0.78
Employee Record Keeping is an HRM practice in my university.	0.0%	3.8%	7.7%	57.7%	30.8%	4.15	0.72
I consider my HR Department to be effective in carrying out its practices.	0.0%	7.7%	21.2%	48.1%	23.1%	3.87	0.86
There is consistency between what the HR Department advocates and what it actually implements.	3.8%	7.7%	28.8%	48.1%	11.5%	3.56	0.94
I am happy about the services offered by the HR Unit in my institution.	5.8%	3.8%	28.8%	50.0%	11.5%	3.42	0.87

Source: Field survey (2024)

Results from Table 6.4 indicate that most respondents (84.6%) agreed that the HR department is responsible for all HRM practices. High levels of agreement were also recorded for performance appraisal (82.7%), training and development (86.6%), and recruitment and selection

(78.8%). Employee record-keeping was strongly affirmed (88.5%), while compensation management received lower agreement (51.9%). Additionally, 71.2% considered the HR department effective, 59.6% observed consistency between HR policies and practice, and

61.5% were satisfied with HR services.

At TU2, HR processes were generally rated positively. The HR department's role scored a mean of 4.04 (SD = 0.97), reflecting strong agreement. Training and development (mean = 3.96, SD = 0.68), performance appraisal (mean = 3.94, SD = 0.98), and recruitment and selection (mean = 4.02, SD = 0.85) also received favourable ratings. The low standard deviation for training suggested consistent views across respondents.

Compensation management was rated lower (mean = 3.42, SD = 0.78), highlighting it as an

area needing improvement. In contrast, employee record-keeping received the highest satisfaction (mean = 4.15, SD = 0.72), indicating efficiency and consistency in this practice.

General HR effectiveness was viewed positively (mean = 3.87, SD = 0.86), though consistency between HR policy and implementation scored slightly lower (mean = 3.56, SD = 0.94), suggesting a gap between policy and practice. Satisfaction with HR services was moderate (mean = 3.42, SD = 0.87), pointing to opportunities for service enhancement.

Current HR Processes and Practices in TU3

Table 3: Current HR Processes and Practices in TU3

Statement	Likert Scale					Mean	Std
	SD	D	Neutral	A	SA		
The HR Department/Unit is responsible for all HRM practices in my university.	10.8%	12.2%	9.5%	43.2%	23.0%	4.26	0.11
Performance Appraisal is an HRM practice in my university.	2.7%	12.2%	13.5%	51.4%	20.3%	3.74	1.01
Training and Development is an HRM practice in my university.	2.7%	9.5%	14.9%	51.4%	21.6%	3.80	0.98
Recruitment and Selection is an HRM practice in my university.	6.8%	6.8%	12.2%	52.7%	21.6%	3.76	1.08
Compensation Management is an HRM practice in my university.	2.7%	14.9%	20.3%	51.4%	10.8%	3.53	0.97
Employee Record Keeping is an HRM practice in my university.	2.7%	6.8	12.2%	52.7%	24.3%	4.58	0.90
I consider my HR Department to be effective in carrying out its practices.	4.1%	16.2	24.3%	37.8%	17.6%	3.49	1.09
There is consistency between what the HR Department advocates and what it actually implements.	5.4%	14.9	27.0%	41.9%	10.8%	3.38	1.04
I am happy about the services offered by the HR Unit in my institution.	1.4%	13.5	31.1%	51.4	2.7%	3.41	0.81

Source: Field survey (2024)

As shown in Table 3, 66.2% of respondents agreed that the HR department is responsible for

all HRM practices. Respondents also affirmed that key functions such as performance appraisal (71.7%), training and development (70%), recruitment and selection (74.3%), compensation management (62.2%), and employee record-keeping (77%) were actively practiced. Additionally, 55.4% believed the HR department is effective, 52.7% agreed there is consistency between HR policies and implementation, and 54.1% expressed satisfaction with HR services.

At TU3, the HR department's responsibility was strongly affirmed, reflected in a high mean score of 4.26 (SD = 0.11), indicating strong consensus among respondents. Performance appraisal (mean = 3.74), training and development (mean = 3.80), and recruitment and selection (mean = 3.76) were all rated positively, though the standard deviations around 1.0 suggested varied ex-

periences or expectations among staff. Compensation management received a lower rating (mean = 3.53, SD = 0.97), highlighting a need for improvement in that area.

Employee record-keeping stood out as the most positively rated function, with a mean of 4.58 and a standard deviation of 0.90, showing strong satisfaction and relatively consistent opinions. The HR department's overall effectiveness was rated moderately (mean = 3.49, SD = 1.09), suggesting mixed views. Perceived consistency between HR policies and their implementation scored lower (mean = 3.38, SD = 1.04), indicating gaps between policy and practice. Satisfaction with HR services was rated as moderate, with a mean of 3.41 and a standard deviation of 0.81. This suggests that there are areas that require improvement in order to enhance overall employee satisfaction.

Current HR Processes and Practices in TU4

Table 4: Current HR Processes and Practices in TU4

Statement	Likert Scale					Mean	Std
	SD	D	Neutral	A	SA		
The HR Department/Unit is responsible for all HRM practices in my university.	5.6%	4.7%	6.5%	57.9%	25.2%	3.93	1.01
Performance Appraisal is an HRM practice in my university.	6.5%	5.6%	3.7%	57.0%	27.1%	3.93	1.06
Training and Development is an HRM practice in my university.	1.9%	7.5%	13.1%	57.9%	19.6%	3.86	0.88
Recruitment and Selection is an HRM practice in my university.	1.9%	3.7%	15.9%	57.9%	20.6%	3.92	0.83
Compensation Management is an HRM practice in my university.	1.9%	8.4%	26.2%	46.7%	16.8%	3.68	0.92
Employee Record Keeping is an HRM practice in my university.	1.9%	5.6%	12.1%	51.4%	29.0%	4.00	0.90
I consider my HR Department to be effective in carrying out its practices.	0.9%	11.2%	18.7%	55.1%	13.1%	4.16	0.94
There is consistency between what the HR Department advocates and what it actually implements.	1.9%	14.0%	31.8%	43.9%	8.4%	3.43	0.90
I am happy about the services offered	2.8%	14.0%	22.4%	58.9%	1.9%	3.52	0.76

by the HR Unit in my institution.							

Source: Field survey (2024)

The results in Table 4 show that 83.1% of respondents agreed that the HR department is responsible for all HRM practices at the university. Most respondents also acknowledged that key HRM functions are being carried out, including performance appraisal (84.1%), training and development (77.5%), recruitment and selection (78.5%), compensation management (63.5%), and employee record-keeping (80.4%). Additionally, 68.2% believed the HR department is effective, 49.3% agreed that HR policies are consistently implemented, and 60.8% expressed satisfaction with HR services.

At TU4, the HR department's role in managing HRM practices was affirmed with a mean score of 3.93 (SD = 1.01), indicating a generally strong agreement. Performance appraisal (mean = 3.93) and recruitment and selection (mean = 3.92) were both viewed positively, showing high approval. Training and development also

received favourable ratings (mean = 3.86, SD = 0.88), reflecting consistency in respondent views. Compensation management had a lower mean score of 3.68 (SD = 0.92), suggesting mixed perceptions and the need for improvement.

Employee record-keeping was highly rated (mean = 4.00, SD = 0.90), showing strong satisfaction with this function. The HR department's effectiveness was rated positively with the highest score among all items (mean = 4.16, SD = 0.94), indicating that staff largely viewed the department as competent in carrying out its responsibilities. However, consistency between HR policies and their implementation was rated lower (mean = 3.43, SD = 0.90), highlighting gaps between intentions and actual practices. Satisfaction with HR services was moderate (mean = 3.52, SD = 0.76), suggesting general approval with some room for improvement.

ANOVA-test for HR Processes and Practices

Table 5: ANOVA-test for HR Processes and Practices

<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
Between Groups	0.0290	3	0.009676	0.1077	0.955	2.9011
Within Groups	2.8742	32	0.08982			
Total	2.9032	35				

Source: Field survey (2024)

The ANOVA test in Table 6.7 conducted for HR processes and practices in the four technical universities in Ghana aimed to identify significant differences between them. The results reveal that the variation between the groups, represented by the sum of squares (SS) of 0.0290 across 3 degrees of freedom, led to a mean square (MS) of 0.009676. In comparison, the variation within each university, with a sum of squares of 2.8742 across 32 degrees of freedom, resulted in a mean square of 0.08982. The total

variation, calculated by combining both between and within groups, amounts to 2.9032. The computed F-statistic of 0.1077 is significantly lower than the critical value of 2.9011 at a 0.05 significance level. Furthermore, the P-value of 0.955 is much higher than 0.05, confirming that there is no statistically significant difference in HR processes and practices across the four universities. This result suggests that the HR processes and practices in these institutions are largely consistent and similar.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Theme 3: Integration of Technology in Specific HR Functions

Sub-theme 3.1: Limited Integration of Technology

The extent to which technology is integrated into HR functions varied, with some functions such as performance management and recruitment being handled manually or with minimal technological assistance. The data from TU2, TU3 and TU4 indicate a limited integration of technology in the HR functions of these universities. Participants TU2 and TU3 explicitly state that performance appraisals are conducted manually, while TU4 highlights the limited technological use by noting that appraisal forms are sent via email. The use of basic technology, such as email, represents a step toward digitalisation, but it is far from an integrated HR solution that automates and streamlines HR tasks. The manual processes mentioned suggest inefficiencies in HR functions, as manual methods are typically more time-consuming, prone to human error, and difficult to scale.

"Performance appraisals are done manually."(TU2)

"For now, I think we go manual."(TU3)

"We send the appraisal forms via emails to the staff."(TU4)

DISCUSSIONS

HR processes and practices

Findings from the quantitative data revealed that the majority of respondents across the selected universities agreed that their HR departments are responsible for carrying out core HR activities. This was supported by qualitative insights from HR heads at TU2, TU3, and TU4, who confirmed that their departments manage key functions such as recruitment, compensation, performance management, training, and employee record-keeping. While HR units are generally well-established, slight variations exist in the scope of responsibilities across institutions. For instance, TU2 noted that some HR responsibilities may fall outside the department's purview, suggesting decentralisation or shared roles. This reflects a broader transformation of

HR's role, which has evolved from administrative to strategic in recent decades. Pandey and Risal (2022) highlight this shift, describing how HR now contributes to shaping organisational strategy, performance, and change management. Similarly, TU4's reference to an HR directorate suggests an expanded, strategic function that influences institutional governance. This aligns with Mythily and Bella's (2024) view that modern HR departments are expected to implement effective recruitment strategies, manage onboarding, and foster supportive work environments that enhance employee retention and engagement.

The study confirms that HR departments are pivotal in overseeing a wide range of HR functions, including recruitment, onboarding, employee retention, and the development of workplace culture. Their extensive responsibilities are fundamental to building a strong workforce, driving organisational growth, and creating a positive work environment that enhances both employee satisfaction and institutional performance. This underscores the vital role HR plays in aligning people management practices with the broader strategic objectives of the organisation.

The HRM functions evaluated in this study were performance management, recruitment and selection, compensation management, training and development and record keeping. It was revealed in the quantitative study that all these functions were carried out in the selected universities. Similarly, the qualitative data from TU2, TU3, and TU4 show a common understanding that the HR departments across the universities are largely responsible for traditional HR functions. TU2 for example mentions that while "the core mentioned HR functions" are handled by the HR department, there may be

certain functions outside their scope. This suggests that at TU2, there could be specific HR-related functions delegated to other units or shared with other departments, indicating a more traditional or segmented HR structure. TU3, on the other hand, affirms the HR department's comprehensive role in managing "all HR-related activities," highlighting a more centralised and possibly integrated HR system within the university. This could point to a streamlined approach where HR activities, from recruitment to employee relations and training, are managed entirely by the HR unit. TU4 however stands out with its description of the HR unit becoming a "directorship" that handles "all HR activities and even other duties that may not be considered as under HR." This demonstrates an expanded role for HR, where the department is taking on non-traditional functions and participating in broader organisational governance. This transition indicates a strategic shift where HR is not only handling employee management but also contributing to other administrative or strategic domains.

The findings of this study are consistent with existing literature on the evolving role of HR in contemporary organisations (Mokomane and Potgieter, 2020, p. 5; Patrick and Mazhar, 2021, p. 261; Ogunyomi and Bruning, 2016, p. 66). Ogunyomi and Bruning (2016, p. 66) identified core HRM functions as recruitment, selection, performance management, learning and development, and reward management functions that were confirmed to be actively practiced across the technical universities examined in this study. Similarly, Mokomane and Potgieter (2020, p. 8), in their research on small manufacturing companies in South Africa, found that while some strategic HRM activities, such as selection and organisational development, were implemented, they were not widely regarded as critical. In contrast, operational functions like recruitment, labour relations, performance management, orientation, and training and development were not only actively implemented but also seen as essential. These parallels underscore the continued prioritisation of traditional HRM functions across different organisational settings, while

also highlighting varying perceptions of their strategic importance.

The variation in HR responsibilities across the three universities may also reflect differing levels of institutional autonomy and organisational complexity. TU2's indication that not all HR functions are centralised suggests a more compartmentalised approach, possibly driven by decentralisation or organisational silos, a concept discussed in the work of Serrat and Serrat (2017:714). On the other hand, TU3's comprehensive approach aligns with the trend toward a more integrated and cohesive HR management system that supports both operational and strategic functions within an institution.

Effectively carrying out HR functions involves more than simply fulfilling assigned duties; it also requires delivering those services with competence and care. Respondents were therefore asked to assess the effectiveness of their HR departments in performing these responsibilities. Across the four universities, the majority of respondents considered their HR departments to be effective in carrying out their functions. This finding aligns with Ghimire (2020, p. 5), who emphasises that employees evaluate the effectiveness of HR departments based on attributes such as reliability, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance qualities that reflect how well the department supports and advocates for employees. Similarly, Patrick and Mazhar (2019, p. 9) argue that the successful execution of HRM functions depends on clear communication from top management regarding the value and benefits of HR practices. They stress that effective implementation requires collaboration between leadership and employees, including involving staff in policy development and ensuring that policies are clearly communicated across the organisation. In this study, participants' general satisfaction with HR services suggests that many of these success factors may be present within the selected universities.

The findings from the study provide valuable insights into the current state of Human Resource Management (HRM) functions in the selected

universities, revealing a generally positive perception of the effectiveness of HR departments in fulfilling their responsibilities. Respondents consistently affirmed that HR departments are responsible for key functions, reflecting alignment with existing literature that positions HR as central to managing the employee lifecycle from recruitment to exit. The study further confirmed the active execution of essential HRM functions such as performance management, recruitment and selection, compensation management, training and development, and record-keeping. The widespread agreement across the universities that these functions are being performed points to the presence of a well-established HR infrastructure. However, beyond the execution of these tasks, the study also emphasised the importance of how effectively they are carried out. Respondents' positive assessments of their HR departments' performance suggest a high level of satisfaction with the quality of HR services, indicating that HR units in the selected universities are not only operationally functional but also perceived as competent and responsive to institutional and employee needs.

Notwithstanding the overall positive assessments, the findings indicate areas where improvements are needed, as some HR functions received comparatively lower evaluations. At TU1, for example, training and development (mean = 3.77) and compensation management (mean = 3.35), while still rated positively, had lower mean scores than other HR functions, suggesting the need for further enhancement. Burhan et al. (2021) emphasise that training is a fundamental HR function essential to the survival and continuity of any organisation. Similarly, Burhan et al. (2021, p. 16) argue that investing in staff training and development can significantly improve an organisation's overall effectiveness and profitability. Daniel (2019, p. 26) also highlights the critical role of compensation management, noting its influence on the decisions of potential employees to join an organisation and its impact on the employer-employee relationship thereafter. Given the well-established importance of both training and

compensation management, it is essential for institutions such as TU1 to prioritise the strengthening of these functions to enhance staff development, motivation, and overall institutional performance.

Against these, it is therefore essential that all technical universities prioritise continuous improvement of their HR functions, particularly in the areas of recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, record keeping, and compensation management. These functions are critical to the long-term success and sustainability of any organisation. For example, training ensures that employees are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their roles effectively, while compensation management plays a key role in influencing employee motivation, retention, and the institution's ability to attract top talent. Given the strategic importance of these HR functions, it is imperative that technical universities invest in strengthening them to improve operational efficiency, enhance employee satisfaction, and promote overall institutional effectiveness.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine human resource processes and practices in four selected Ghanaian technical universities as a precursor to the adoption of Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS). The findings revealed that HR departments across the institutions are actively engaged in key HRM functions such as recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, compensation management, and employee record-keeping. Quantitative and qualitative data both confirmed the central role of HR departments in managing these functions, although variations in effectiveness and scope were observed across the universities.

While the overall perception of HR effectiveness was positive, areas such as training and development and compensation management were identified as needing improvement. These functions are critical not only for institutional growth

but also for enhancing employee satisfaction and operational efficiency. The study further established that continuous improvement in these HR functions is vital for preparing institutions for successful HRIS adoption.

The findings align with the Technology Organisation Environment (TOE) framework, which emphasises the importance of internal organisational capabilities and technological readiness, and the Diffusion of Innovations Theory (DIT), which highlights how the perceived benefits and compatibility of innovations influence their adoption. Together, these frameworks underscore that effective HR practices serve as a foundational requirement for adopting technological innovations like HRIS.

The study reinforces the strategic importance of HR departments within technical universities and the need for ongoing enhancement of HRM functions. Strengthening these areas will not only improve current HR service delivery but also facilitate a smoother transition toward digital transformation through HRIS adoption, ultimately supporting the broader goals of institutional effectiveness and sustainability.

Policy Implications, Theoretical Implications, and Suggestions for Future Studies

The findings of this study offer several policy implications for technical universities in Ghana. First, there is a need for institutional policies that strengthen the strategic role of HR departments. Universities should formalise and support the integration of Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) by ensuring that all HR functions particularly training and development, compensation management, and performance management are well-resourced and strategically aligned with institutional goals. Policies should also promote continuous professional development for HR staff to enhance their capacity to manage digital HR systems. Furthermore, institutional leadership should support a collaborative approach between HR departments and other administrative units to ensure shared responsibility in implementing and sustaining HR innovations.

Again, the study contributes to the theoretical discourse by applying and integrating the Technology Organisation Environment (TOE) framework and the Diffusion of Innovations Theory (DIT) within the context of higher education in a developing country. The findings affirm the relevance of the TOE framework in assessing institutional readiness for technological adoption, particularly how internal capabilities and environmental conditions influence HRIS implementation. Simultaneously, the study extends the application of DIT by showing how perceived effectiveness, compatibility, and benefits of HR practices can impact stakeholder attitudes toward HRIS. This dual-theoretical approach provides a holistic understanding of both structural and behavioural drivers of innovation adoption in HRM.

Future research should consider expanding the scope beyond technical universities to include other types of higher education institutions, such as public and private universities and colleges of education. Comparative studies across different institutional types and geographic regions could provide deeper insights into contextual differences in HR practices and HRIS adoption. Additionally, longitudinal studies could be undertaken to assess how improvements in HR functions over time influence the success of HRIS implementation. Future research may also explore the perspectives of other stakeholders, such as IT personnel, administrative staff, and faculty members, to gain a more comprehensive view of institutional readiness and acceptance of digital HR systems. Finally, studies could investigate the impact of HRIS adoption on employee outcomes such as satisfaction, retention, and productivity to further validate the strategic value of digital transformation in HRM.

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into human resource processes and the readiness for Human Resource Information System (HRIS) adoption in selected Ghanaian technical universities, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study focused on only four

technical universities, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other types of higher education institutions in Ghana or beyond. Second, the sample was restricted to senior members, excluding non-senior staff whose perspectives might offer additional insights into HR practices and service delivery.

Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data through questionnaires and interviews may have introduced response bias, as participants may have provided socially desirable answers. The cross-sectional nature of the study also restricts the ability to assess changes in HR practices or readiness for HRIS adoption over time. Finally, while the mixed-methods approach offered depth and breadth, the qualitative component involved only four key informants, which may limit the richness of insights into institutional-level strategies and challenges.

Despite these limitations, the study lays a solid foundation for further research and provides useful implications for policy and practice regarding HRIS readiness and HRM improvement in higher education institutions.

Disclosure statement

REFERENCES

- Abbas, S. I., Shah, M. H., & Othman, Y. H. (2021). Critical review of recruitment and selection methods: understanding the current practices. *Annals of Contemporary Developments in Management & HR (ACDMHR)*, 3(3), 46-52.
- Al Mamun, M. A., & Islam, M. S. (2016). Perception of management on outcomes of human resource information system (HRIS). *International Journal of Business and Social Research*, 6(2), 29-37.
- Alomeer, S. H. (2016). *Integration of clinical information systems in Saudi Arabian health care contexts: A grounded theory exploration* (Doctoral dissertation, Queensland University of Technology).
- Ankrah, E., & Sokro, E. (2016). Intention and usage of human resource information systems among Ghanaian human resource managers. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 11(2) <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v11n2p241>
- Awa, H. O., Ukoha, O., & Emecheta, B. C. (2016). Using TOE theoretical framework to study the adoption of ERP solution. *Cogent Business & Management*, 3(1), 1196571.
- Awa, H.O. and Ojiabo, O.U., 2016. A model of adoption determinants of ERP within TOE framework. *Information Technology and People*, 29(4), pp.901-930.
- Bhattacharya, M., & Wamba, S. F. (2018). A conceptual framework of RFID adoption in retail using

No potential conflict of interest is reported by the authors.

Funding

Authors received no funding for this research

Notes on contributors

Esther Gyamfi is a Human Resource student in the Faculty of Management Sciences at Durban University of Technology, South Africa. Her research interests include human resource management, organisational development, and workforce planning.

Edwige Pauline Ngo-Henha Eyono is a Human Resource academic in the Faculty of Management Sciences at Durban University of Technology, South Africa. Her work focuses on HR strategy, employee engagement, and talent management.

Albert Agbenyagah is a Lecturer in the Department of Applied Management at Durban University of Technology, South Africa. His research explores management practices, organisational performance, and applied business solutions.

TOE framework. In *Technology adoption and social issues: Concepts, methodologies, tools, and applications* (pp. 69-102). IGI global.

- Burhan Ismael, N., Jabbar Othman, B., Gardi, B., Abdalla Hamza, P., Sorguli, S., Mahmood Aziz, H., ... & Anwar, G. (2021). The role of training and development on organizational effectiveness. *Ismael, NB, Othman, BJ, Gardi, B., Hamza, PA, Sorguli, S., Aziz, HM, Ahmed, SA, Sabir, BY, Ali, BJ, Anwar, G.(2021). The Role of Training and Development on Organizational effectiveness. International Journal of Engineering, Business and Management, 5(3), 15-24.*
- Cameron, K. (1978). Measuring organizational effectiveness in institutions of higher education. *Administrative science quarterly*, 604-632.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.
- Daniel, C. O. (2019). Compensation management and its impact on organizational commitment. *International Journal of Contemporary Applied Researches*, 6(2), 26-36.
- Esther, D., Maduagwu, N. N. E. K. A., Joy, D., & Ugwu, N. O. N. Y. E. L. U. M. (2018). Human Resource Information System and Organizational Effectiveness: A study of selected firms in Enugu state. *Asia Pacific Journal of Research in Business Management*, 9(1).
- Ghimire, B. (2020). Unit 1: An Overview of Human Resource Management. Available: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341119379>.
- Hagan, K.A., Lotsu, B.E., Hodowu, E.W. and Abaka-Yawson, D., 2022. Challenges of human resource information system adoption: Evidence from two Ghanaian tertiary institutions. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews*, 13(2), pp.346-349.
- Kabukye, J.K., de Keizer, N. and Cornet, R. (2020). Assessment of organizational readiness to implement an electronic health record system in a low-resource settings cancer hospital: A cross-sectional survey. *PloS one*, 15(6), p.e0234711.
- Kamal, M. M. (2006). IT innovation adoption in the government sector: identifying the critical success factors. *Journal of Enterprise Information Management*, 19(2), 192-222.
- Karasek, A. (2019). The use of information technology in human resource management in American enterprises. *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska, sectio H – Oeconomia*, Vol. 53, No. 2
- Keynan, W. (2018). *Effect of compensation management practices on employee performance in Wajir County, Kenya* (Doctoral dissertation, KCA University).
- Khan, H., Hussainy, S. K., Khan, K., & Khan, A. (2017). The applications, advantages and challenges in the implementation of HRIS in Pakistani perspective. *VINE Journal of Information and Knowledge Management Systems*, 47(1), 137-150.
- Mabaso, C.M., 2020. Performance management and talent development: their impact on job satisfaction at selected higher education institutions. *Journal of Contemporary Management*, 17(2), pp.369-392.
- Magutu, J. M., & Marika, N. M. (2018). The Impact of Human Resource Information Systems on Human Resource Management Practices in State Corporations in Kenya. *DBA Africa Management Review*, 8(2).
- Malik, S., Chadhar, M., Vatanasakdakul, S., & Chetty, M. (2021). Factors affecting the organizational adoption of blockchain technology: Extending the technology–organization–environment (TOE)

framework in the Australian context. *Sustainability*, 13(16), 9404.

- Matimbwa, H., & Masue, O. S. (2019). Usage and challenges of human resources information system in the Tanzanian public organizations. *Journal of Human Resource Management*, 7(4), 131-137.
- Mokomane, S. E., & Potgieter, I. L. (2020). Implementation of human resource management functions in selected small manufacturing companies in Ga-Rankuwa industrial area, Gauteng, South Africa. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18(1), 1-11.
- Moradi, M., & Nia, E. R. (2020). The impact of organizational factors based on technology-organization-environment (TOE) framework on practical levels and characteristics of audit analysis and internal audit performance. *European Journal of Business and Management Research*, 5(4).
- Mvuyisi, M., & Mbukanma, I. (2023). Assessing the impact of on-the-job training on employee performance: A case of integrated tertiary software users in a rural university. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science*, 12(1), 90-98.
- Nguti, V. N., & Mose, T. (2021). The role of e-Self Service on the organizational outcomes in HELB, Kenya. *International Academic Journal of Human Resource and Business Administration*, 3(10), 1-12.
- Noutsu, F. A., Kala Kamdjoug, J. R., & Fosso Wamba, S. (2017). Acceptance and use of HRIS and influence on organizational performance of SMEs in a developing economy: the case of Cameroon. In *Recent Advances in Information Systems and Technologies: Volume 1 5* (pp. 563-580). Springer International Publishing.
- Ogunyomi, P., & Bruning, N. S. (2016). Human resource management and organizational performance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria. *The international journal of human resource management*, 27(6), 612-634.
- Oliveira, T., & Martins, M. F. (2011). Literature review of information technology adoption models at firm level. *Electronic journal of information systems evaluation*, 14(1), pp110-121.
- Pandey, P. & Pandey, M.M., (2021). Research methodology tools and techniques. Bridge Center.
- Patrick, P., & Mazhar, S. (2019). Core functions of human resource management and its effectiveness on organization: A study. *International Journal of Research in Economics and Social Sciences*, 9(5), 257-266.
- Patrick, P., & Mazhar, S. (2019). Core functions of human resource management and its effectiveness on organization: A study. *International Journal of Research in Economics and Social Sciences*, 9(5), 257-266.
- Pieris, M. D. P., & Preena, G. R. (2020). The future of HRIS—Emerging Trends in HRM and IT Integration. *Contemporary Developments in Human Resource Management*, 87-93.
- Priota, A.T. (2020). A Brief History of Human Resource Information System. Daffodil International University, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- Priya, A. A., & Preetha, S. (2022) Review of studies on HRIS adoption in different countries and various sectors. *International Journal of Mechanical Engineering*, 7(4), 402-409.
- Quaosar, G. A. A., Hoque, M. R., & Bao, Y. (2018). Investigation on the precursors to and effects of human resource information system use: The case of a developing country. *Cogent Business & Management*, 5(1), 1485131.
- Randle, O. A., Coleman, A., & Kekwaletswe, R. (2017, July). Towards a motivational based model for

effective use of human resource information system in South African Universities. In *2017 International Conference on Information Society (i-Society)* (pp. 61-67). IEEE.

Rogers E, M. (1995). Diffusion of innovations. *New York, 12*, 576.

Rogers, E.M. (1995). Diffusion of Innovations, 4th edn. The Free Press, New York.

Safaa, D., & Mohamed, F. (2020). The factors of acceptance and use of HRIS. *Technium Soc. Sci. J.*, 9, 397.

Schislyaeva, E. R., & Plis, K. S. (2021). Personnel management innovations in the digital era: Case of Russia in covid-19 pandemic. *Academy of Strategic Management Journal*, 20, 1-16.

Scupola, A. (2019, September). Adoption of human resource information systems in Danish SMEs. In *Conference Proceedings*.

Serrat, O. (2017). *Knowledge solutions: Tools, methods, and approaches to drive organizational performance* (p. 1140). Springer Nature.

Sparrow, P., Brewster, C., & Chung, C. (2016). *Globalizing human resource management*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315668611>

Tessema, M. T., Abraham, K., Han, J., Bowe, M., & Bug, T. (2020). Technology-based recruitment and selection approaches of an american multinational company (amnc): practical implications. *International Journal of Human Resource Studies*, 10(3), 117.

Tornatzky, L. & Fleischer, M. (1990). The process of technology innovation. Lexington, MA:Lexington Books.

Udekwe, E., & de la Harpe, A. C. (2017). The use of human resource information systems in two retail organisations in the Western Cape, South Africa. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 15, 7.

Zafar, H., Randolph, A. B., & Martin, N. (2017). Toward a more secure HRIS: The role of HCI and unconscious behavior. *AIS Transactions on Human-Computer Interaction*, 9(1), 59-74.

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.28>**LIMITED CHOICES, UNCERTAIN FUTURES: EXPLORING YOUTH LIVELIHOOD PRECARIETY IN RURAL LUPANE, ZIMBABWE****Douglas Nyathi,***School of Public Management,
Governance and Public Policy,
University of Johannesburg,
Gauteng, South Africa*

&

Thandeka Yasmeeen Ndaba,*School of Commerce, Department of Public Administration,
University of KwaZulu-Natal,
College of Law and Management Studies,
Durban, South Africa*

&

Joram Ndlovu,*School of Social Sciences,
University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Howard College, Durban,
South Africa***Abstract**

In Zimbabwe's rural areas, young people face considerable obstacles to securing sustainable livelihoods. The decline of the formal agricultural sector and the lack of wage employment compel them to diversify their livelihood strategies. Although traditional narratives praise diversification as an adaptive approach, they often fail to acknowledge the constraints faced by these individuals. This study examines the nature and determinants of livelihood diversification among rural youth in Lupane, with a focus on analysing the constraints influencing their decisions, the perceived viability of their activities, and the implications of constrained diversification for their long-term well-being. Anchored in the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), the study adopts a qualitative case study design. Data were collected over a three-month period in two purposively selected wards in Lupane District. Methods included thirty-five in-depth interviews with youth aged 18–35 engaged in both agricultural and non-agricultural activities, four focus group discussions and eight key informant interviews with local leaders and NGO officials. The findings reveal that youth diversification is limited by inadequate financial capital, poor infrastructure and declining natural capital associated with land degradation and water scarcity. As a result, diversification is concentrated in low-return, highly competitive activities marked by precarity, low social status and minimal prospects for economic accumulation. The study demonstrates that youth engagement in multiple livelihood activities functions primarily as a precarious coping mechanism shaped by persistent structural barriers, ultimately producing insecure livelihoods. We recommend policy interventions that move beyond simply encouraging diversification to addressing the underlying structural constraints, particularly by enhancing access to start-up capital and strengthening market linkages.

Keywords: Rural youth, Livelihoods diversification, Precarity, Constraints, Zimbabwe

Introduction

Rural Africa is currently at a demographic juncture, with its future increasingly reliant on economic opportunities accessible to youth. This is particularly pronounced in Zimbabwe. The country's significant economic transformation and political instability over the past three decades have fundamentally altered its livelihood landscape, especially for young individuals in agrarian communities (Nyathi et al., 2022). Traditional development perspectives have long advocated livelihood diversification—the creation of portfolios involving on-farm, off-farm and non-farm activities—as a cornerstone of resilience and a pathway out of poverty (Ellis, 2000; Scoones, 2015, Ongachi & Belinder, 2025; Kuriya, Muthuri, 2025). Within policy circles, this has translated into initiatives that promote youth entrepreneurship and small enterprise development. However, an expanding body of scholarship suggests that diversification may be less of a voluntary strategy of accumulation in the context of severe economic contraction and structural inequality (Chigumira, 2018; Thieme, 2017). The tension is most evident in the lived experiences of the rural youth in Zimbabwe. This article examines the constrained nature of livelihood diversification among young people in Lupane District, a predominantly rural area in Matabeleland North Province. The designated provincial capital embodies the promise of administrative development and growth, yet it remains characterized by limited economic opportunities, environmental fragility, and the lingering legacies of underinvestment (Ndhlewe, 2022). For youth residing here, the gap between aspirations and reality is vast. Their efforts to construct viable livelihoods occur within a context shaped by two overarching and intersecting constraints: generational disparities in the Fast Track Land Reform Program (FTLRP) and a debilitating macroeconomic crisis. The FTLRP, while redistributing land, largely failed to incorporate youth meaningfully. Land allocations primarily benefited older household heads, creating a "generational land gap" that has left

many young people without secure access to the primary means of agricultural production (Mazwi et al., 2019; Scoones et al., 2019). This has produced a state of suspended agency, where youth often remain in a state of dependency, “waiting” for inheritance, while lacking resources to establish autonomous agrarian enterprises (Matamanda, 2020). Concurrently, Zimbabwe's enduring economic instability, characterized by currency volatility, hyperinflation and crippling liquidity constraints, has decimated the formal sector, prompting economic activities to shift into the informal realm (Mutungamiri, 2021). This has eroded the viability of agriculture owing to the soaring cost of inputs and the collapse of formal markets, forcing youth to seek alternative, often irregular, income streams (Nyathi et al., 2018). In response, young people are piecing together with complex and fluid livelihood portfolios, with relentless determination. These typically combine petty vending, artisanal mining (such as amacimbi harvesting and gold panning), short-term migrant labor on larger farms, informal cross-border trading, and transportation services, including motorcycle taxi operators (*omalayitsha*) (Ndlovu, 2023; Thondhlana & Chimbidzikai, 2022). Superficially, this activity aligns with policy ideals of diversification. However, this study argues that it constitutes a form of distress-push diversification, an involuntary and precarious adaptation to systemic exclusion, rather than a strategic choice driven by opportunity.

The three primary attributes characterize the precarious nature of this diversification. First, it is involuntary, driven by a lack of alternatives rather than entrepreneurial ambition. Second, the informal sectors that youth are compelled to enter are saturated and yield low returns, resulting in intense competition and minimal profit margins (Chigumira, 2018). Third, there are significant barriers to achieving sustainable diversification, notably a lack of financial capital due to exclusion from formal credit systems and reliance on social and political patronage networks to access basic opportunities (Mazwi et al., 2019). By focusing on Lupane, this study

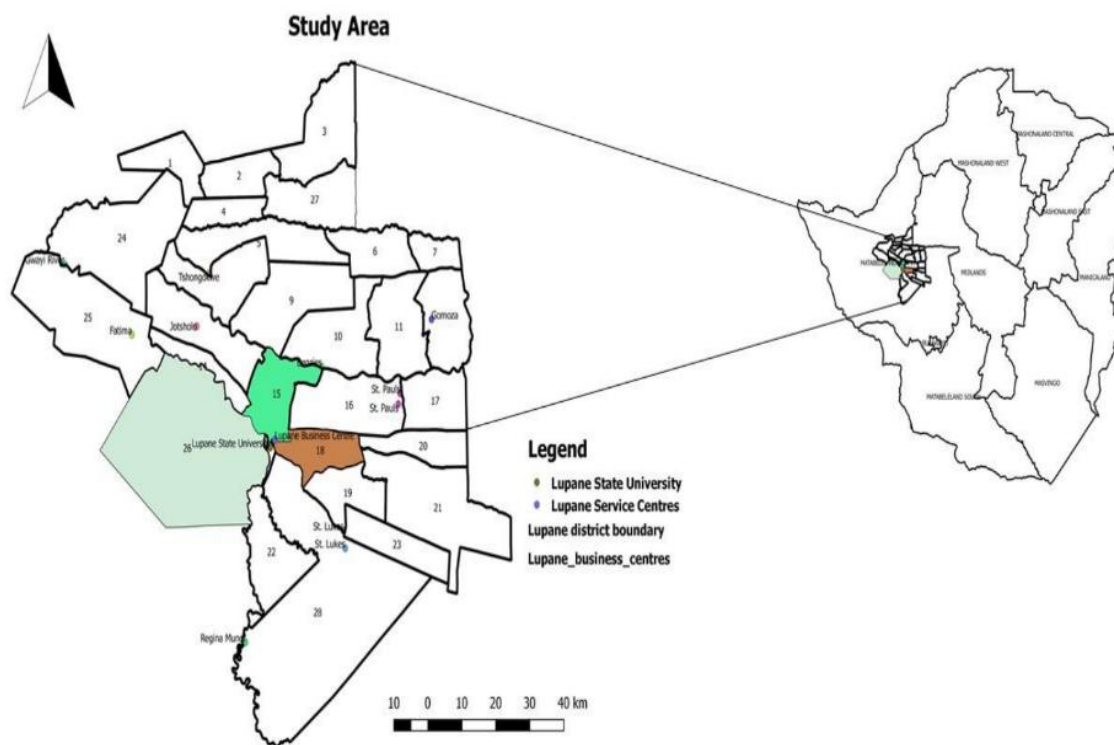
merely transcends the cataloguing of youth activities. Instead, it critically examines the underlying structural forces that shape and severely constrain their choice. It challenges the simplistic policy narratives that celebrate informal entrepreneurship without acknowledging the profound constraints within which it occurs. This article therefore addresses the following central question: How do structural and macroeconomic constraints shape the nature, composition and precarity of livelihood diversification strategies for rural youth in the Lupane District of Zimbabwe? By addressing this question, this paper contributes to a more nuanced understanding of youth livelihoods in postcolonial Zimbabwe, highlighting the critical distinction between diversification as a survival tactic and diversification as a sustainable development pathway.

Study Setting and Methods

The study was conducted in Wards 15 and 18 of Lupane District (see Fig. 1). These wards were selected because they exemplify typical rural

communities that face severe livelihood challenges related to climate change, limited infrastructure, and high youth unemployment. Characterized by semi-arid conditions, frequent droughts, and reliance on subsistence farming and livestock production, these areas are ideal for examining youth survival strategies. Lupane is located in Matabeleland North, a predominantly semi-arid and drought-prone province in Zimbabwe that is vulnerable to severe water shortages. The district is situated in geographical regions IV and V, which are marked by low to medium rainfall, averaging 400–600 mm annually (Svubure, 2011). Lupane was positioned at an elevation of 976m along the Victoria Falls Road. According to EMA (2019), the district is unsuitable for crop production because of its sandy loam soil. Despite these climate-related limitations, the district is rich in other natural resources, including indigenous hardwood timber forests such as *Baikiaea plurijuga*, Mahogany, and Mukwa. Although not abundant in minerals, the district has recently been explored for coal bed methane gas.

Figure 1: Lupane District wards map



Source: Authors

Over a period of three months, data were collected using a qualitative research approach in two carefully chosen wards in the Lupane District. The study included 35 in-depth interviews with young individuals aged 18 to 35 who were engaged in both non-agricultural and small-scale farming activities, as well as four focus group discussions. In addition, eight key informant interviews were conducted with local leaders and NGO officials (See detail in Table 1). In qualitative research, the goal is not to generalize findings but to gain a deep understanding of local social dynamics (Lincoln and Guba, 2005). Questioning is crucial in qualitative studies to gain insights into the perspectives of others. Consequently, a grounded theory approach was used to facilitate the conceptualization. Over time, grounded theory has given rise to numer-

ous philosophical perspectives that have influenced methodological developments (Goulding, 2005). Thus, the qualitative approach enables researchers to trace the origins of a phenomenon, use codes to document individual experiences, and verify theoretical or conceptual structures related to the phenomenon. Qualitative designs enable researchers to understand respondents' emotions, feelings, and thought processes, which can be challenging to assess by using conventional research methods. Therefore, coding data is valuable in social research, as it enables researchers to conceptualize and integrate data to form a theory. Coding serves as an analytical tool for managing large datasets and for developing alternative interpretations of phenomena. We began with a preliminary visit to the study area to appreciate the socioeconomic and agroecological profiles of the selected regions (Chambers, 1994).

Table 1
Summary of Data Collection Methods and Participants

Data Collec- tion Method	Participants (n)	Gender Distri- bution	Age Range (years)	Description / Purpose
In-depth inter- views (IDIs)	35 youth	20 males, 15 females	18–35	Conducted with youth engaged in both non-agricultural and small-scale agricultural activities to explore livelihood strategies, challenges, and aspirations.
Focus group discussions (FGDs)	4 groups × 10 participants each (Total = 40 youth)	5 males and 5 females per group	18–35	Facilitated discussions to capture collective perceptions, shared experiences, and gendered dynamics in youth livelihoods.
Key informant interviews (KIIs)	8 participants ¹	Mixed	—	Conducted with local leaders and NGO officials to obtain institutional perspectives on youth livelihood opportunities and support systems.

The interview guide, which was constructed based on a textual dataset collection referred to

as the basic text mining process, was used as a data collection tool. The next stage involved data transformation in which the text was filtered systematically. Words in the text set were analyzed for frequency and occurrence. The final stage was data conversion, in which the topics and content within the scope of information extraction were identified. Data were collected between January 7th and February 15, 2025. Using a purposive sampling approach, we conducted thirty-five in-depth interviews, engaged eight key informants, and held four focus group discussions, each with ten participants. The purpose of employing various data collection methods is to triangulate the information gathered using other techniques. We analyzed data using memoing, which directly examines communication via texts or transcripts and generates and documents ideas through social interaction with data. Memos create a historical audit trail of documented ideas that reflects interpretive thought processes, providing detailed records of researchers' feelings, thoughts, and intuitive contemplations.

Results and discussion

1. Rural youth livelihood diversification strategies

The findings of this study revealed that rural youth in wards 15 and 18 of Lupane District are actively engaged in a variety of livelihood activities to navigate a challenging socioeconomic and structural environment. Participants noted that limited formal employment opportunities combined with macroeconomic volatility compelled youth to adopt multiple strategies to survive and sustain their households. The study highlighted that young people rarely rely on a single activity; instead, they diversify their income sources to spread risk and maximize opportunities. The main strategies identified include small-scale farming, livestock production, informal trading, small-scale mining, casual labor, and migration-based remittances.

Small-Scale Crop and Livestock Production

Agriculture has become a cornerstone of youth

livelihood in the study area. Participants emphasized that small-scale crop farming, especially that of drought-resistant crops, such as sorghum, maize and groundnuts, remains a vital activity. Although primarily rain-fed, some youths participate in small irrigation projects in which water resources are available. Youths are deeply involved in the entire agricultural value chain from land preparation to planting, weeding and harvesting. In addition, they are increasingly active in marketing agrarian produce at local centers such as the Lupane Center. Livestock rearing also plays a significant role in raising small animals such as goats, sheep, and chickens. These animals are often sold to meet urgent household needs, particularly during periods of food shortage or when school fees are due. Beyond small livestock, some youth aspire to venture into larger-scale livestock production, particularly cattle rearing, which has cultural and economic significance in Matabeleland. However, participants noted that limited access to grazing land, capital and veterinary services constrained the scale of operations. Nevertheless, livestock remains a crucial form of asset accumulation and a buffer against shocks such as droughts. This was captured by one participant who noted that

In our community, young people actively engage in farming activities. Some focus on crop production, while others are involved in livestock farming. Despite the challenges faced in accessing their own land, we cannot underestimate the importance of farming in fulfilling their livelihood needs. Farming is an integral part of our culture, despite its associated challenges, such as droughts and limited access to inputs.

Informal Trading and Small-Scale Mining

Many young people supplement their farming activities with informal trading, which involves buying and selling groceries, second-hand clothes, vegetables and agricultural products within their communities or nearby marketplaces. Participants noted that informal trading

gained significance because of persistent unemployment, offering a quick and flexible source of income. However, the informal nature of this sector often makes it precarious with limited profitability and susceptibility to market fluctuations. Another strategy adopted by some youth is artisanal or small-scale mining, particularly gold and other minerals. While mining presents the potential for rapid financial gains, participants emphasized its risky and unsustainable nature, as it frequently exposes young people to unsafe working conditions and environmental hazards. Despite these risks, mining continues to attract young people owing to the scarcity of alternative livelihood options. One key informant observed the following.

Informal trading and small-scale mining play a crucial role in sustaining the lives and livelihoods of the youth in this community. Many young people have ventured into buying and selling second-hand goods, with some sourcing them from South Africa, whereas others rely on runners to secure these goods from Mozambique and Tanzania. In addition, a significant number of youths are involved in small-scale mining. Although our area has a limited gold endowment compared to Bubi, Matopo and Nkayi districts, many youths migrate to these regions to engage in small-scale mining. However, this activity poses challenges, including violence over claims and spread of sexually transmitted infections.

Casual Labour and Migration-based remittances

Youths engage in casual labor, either within their villages or on nearby farms, involving tasks such as land preparation, cattle herding, or construction work. Although this provides short-term cash or in-kind payments, it is highly irregular and lacks long-term security. Thus, migration has emerged as an essential livelihood strategy. Many young people temporarily migrate to urban centers or across the border to South Africa and Botswana, sending remittances to support their families. These remittances are crucial in cushioning households against economic shocks, although reliance on

migration highlights the limited local opportunities. Overall, the study demonstrates that rural youth in Lupane rely on diversified, yet precarious livelihoods, shaped by structural and macroeconomic constraints. Their strategies reflect resilience and adaptation but also highlight the urgent need for supportive policies, improved market access and youth-targeted development initiatives to create sustainable livelihood pathways. The findings from Lupane align with broader evidence that rural youth diversify their livelihoods to cope with economic precarity and climate stressors. Nyathi (2024) demonstrates that young people in Matabeleland pursue mixed portfolios, including crop production, casual labor and migration, to manage drought and income volatility. Similar patterns are observed in Ethiopia, where Moreda (2023) reported that youth rely on informal trade and seasonal migration because of weak market access. Beyond survival, FAO (2024) highlighted the rise of agri-food entrepreneurship and climate-smart farming among African youth as pathways to opportunity. Collectively, these studies reveal that diversification reflects both resilience and vulnerability, underscoring the need for supportive policies, youth-friendly financing, and infrastructure to transform precarious strategies into sustainable livelihood (Barrett et al, 2001; Giwu et al, 2025).

2. Institutional, Policy, and Market Dynamics Shaping Youth Livelihoods

The livelihood choices of rural youth in Lupane District are significantly influenced and limited by institutional arrangements, policy environments and market conditions. Although youth in this area exhibit agency and resilience in diversifying their livelihoods, these broader structural dynamics deeply affect the type, quality and sustainability of opportunities available to them. The participants identified three key domains: institutional factors, policy frameworks, and market conditions, each presenting both opportunities and challenges.

Institutional Factors

Discussions with the study participants revealed that both formal and informal institutions play a pivotal role in determining young people's access to livelihood resources. Land tenure is a major institutional barrier. In Lupane, as in many rural areas of Zimbabwe, access to land is governed by traditional leadership structures including chiefs and village heads. Young people often find themselves marginalized in the land allocation process as land is typically distributed to household heads or older community members. This exclusion results in many youths being landless or possessing only small plots, which is inadequate for meaningful production. One participant noted the following:

Some of us hail from communal areas, where dreaming of land ownership is a daunting challenge. For those interested in farming, obstacles and politics surrounding land access are discouraging. This situation is particularly complex for young women who are eager to own land or pursue land-based livelihood. A few young individuals acquire land through inheritance, but this land is often subject to ownership disputes with other family members. These circumstances hinder the effective utilization of land.

Focus group discussions and key informants revealed that government agricultural support services, including extension programs, mechanization and veterinary services, remained limited and unevenly distributed. Although extension officers are present, they often lack resources and struggle to reach remote areas. Consequently, many young farmers do not receive the technical support and knowledge necessary to enhance productivity or to adopt climate-smart practices. These institutional bottlenecks further marginalize youth in the agrarian economy, effectively diminishing their opportunities to engage in agriculture-based livelihoods. One participant suggested the following:

As long as extension programs remain indifferent to young people's needs, they will continue to face challenges in reaping the benefits of these initiatives. These programs must incorporate

young people's voices and aspirations. Doing so will significantly enhance their participation in farming as a business and other activities within the agro-value chain.

Policy Dynamics

While policies aimed at enhancing youth livelihoods and empowerment are widely recognized, participants noted a significant disconnect between the design and implementation of these policies. Programs such as youth empowerment funds, agricultural input support schemes and vocational training initiatives are often only theoretical and rarely reach ordinary rural youths. Many have observed that these programs are heavily politicized, with access frequently determined by political ties or personal connections rather than genuine needs. Furthermore, national macroeconomic policies that impact agriculture, trade and employment indirectly influence youth livelihood. For example, currency instability and frequent policy changes in Zimbabwe's agricultural sector create uncertainty and deter long-term investment by young people. This disparity between well-intentioned policies and their poor execution leaves most youths dependent on informal and survivalist activities, which are both precarious and unsustainable.

Market-conditions

Market dynamics further exacerbate the challenges faced by rural youths. Participants highlighted that poor road infrastructure and inadequate transport services hindered access to larger markets, where agricultural products or small business goods could command higher prices. High transport costs lead to less profits, while the lack of reliable buyers and weak value chains discourages youth from engaging in commercial farming or expanding small enterprises. In addition, local markets are often saturated, with many youths competing in similar low-return activities such as vending or trading second-hand clothes. Without effective connections to broader regional or national markets, opportunities to scale up business remain scarce.

Access to credit is also severely restricted, as financial institutions perceive rural youths as high-risk borrowers because of their limited collateral. This financial exclusion forces youth to rely on informal savings groups, which, although substantial, provide limited capital for significant investment. During one focus group discussion, the participant made the following observations:

I am engaged in fishing in a large dam. While we catch fish, we face competition from fish traders who come from as far as the Binga. Owing to the abundance of fish in the Zambezi River, traders sell their fish at low prices, effectively pushing us out of business. Furthermore, cold storage facilities are not available to maintain the freshness of our fish. Some have attempted to travel to Bulawayo to sell their own fish. However, the current condition of the Victoria Falls-Bulawayo Road is dreadful, requiring more than six hours to complete the journey.

Institutional, policy and market dynamics collectively create a complex environment that limits rural youths' ability to pursue secure and sustainable livelihoods (Moreda, 2023; Nyathi, 2024). Although opportunities exist in farming, small-scale businesses or migration, these are influenced and restricted by land tenure systems, ineffective policy implementation and weak market integration (Bezu and Holden, 2014). Tackling these challenges necessitates structural reforms, such as more inclusive land allocation, depoliticized youth support schemes, investment in infrastructure and the development of vibrant value chains that incorporate youth as active participants in local and national economies. Exclusion from land allocation processes hinders agricultural involvement, whereas under-resourced extension services impede the adoption of climate-smart practices. Policies such as empowerment funds and input schemes remain politicized and poorly executed, leaving most youth marginalized. Market barriers include inadequate infrastructure, saturated local markets, and a lack of credit, which further entrench precarious livelihoods (Barrett et al., 2001). These challenges align with recent

scholarship, which highlights that youth resilience is undermined by structural inequities (Nyathi, 2024; FAO, 2024). Addressing these needs requires inclusive institutions, transparent policies, and improved market integration to foster sustainable youth livelihood (Nyathi et al, 2022).

3. Macroeconomic Instability, Structural Barriers, and the Precarity of Youth Livelihoods

Macroeconomic instability and structural barriers significantly undermine the sustainability of youth livelihoods at the two study sites, fostering the conditions of persistent precarity. Inflation and frequent currency fluctuations erode the value of earnings from farming, trading and other small-scale activities, diminishing profits, and reducing the ability to save or reinvest in enterprises. For many young people, this unpredictability makes it exceedingly difficult to plan for the future or expand their businesses as the costs of inputs, transportation, and basic goods change rapidly, often outpacing income growth. The participants also noted that structural barriers further entrench these challenges. Access to formal credit remains severely limited, as financial institutions typically require collateral and perceive rural youths as high-risk borrowers. This exclusion prevents young people from acquiring modern tools, irrigation facilities, and other productive assets that can enhance their efficiency and returns. Additionally, vocational training opportunities and extension services are often underresourced, irregular, or disconnected from the realities of rural livelihoods. Consequently, youth are less likely to adopt climate-smart practices or to explore innovative value chains. One participant stated the following.

Youth in this community face numerous challenges. The country's economy is struggling to make the basic commodities affordable. These difficulties affect those involved in buying and selling goods. With limited purchasing power parity, expanding business is a challenging endeavor. Last year, I attempted to sell clothes but was unsuccessful. People are more concerned with essential needs such as food than with

clothing. Another issue is a lack of skills. Most vocational training centers are located far from this area. For those interested in agriculture, attending the Esigodini Training Center is necessary. Although the Lupane State University is available, it is not affordable for most of us. Consequently, many people pursue livelihood options that require minimal skill and capital.

In this context, the livelihood strategies pursued by rural youth are predominantly informal, small-scale and survivalist. These activities lack the resilience to withstand shocks, leaving young people highly vulnerable to droughts, price spikes, policy shifts and broader market disruptions. For example, when input prices rise sharply or policies change suddenly, such as bans on informal mining or abrupt currency reforms, youth livelihoods collapse, forcing many short-term coping mechanisms, including casual labor or migration. This fragility not only perpetuates poverty cycles, but also stifles long-term socioeconomic mobility. Without supportive macroeconomic stability, youth-friendly finance, skills training and market integration, diversification strategies remain coping mechanisms rather than sustainable development pathways. Thus, structural reforms are essential to transforming youth resilience into enduring livelihoods and inclusive rural transformation. The findings from Lupane corroborate a broad body of literature indicating that macroeconomic volatility and entrenched structural barriers lead to precarious survival-oriented livelihoods among rural youth. Classic livelihood theory locates these dynamics within asset access, institutions and entitlement structures—insights elaborated upon in the sustainable livelihood framework (Scoones, 1998). Building on this, Ellis (2000) demonstrates that diversification is often a necessity rather than a choice when formal opportunities are absent. Recent empirical work has confirmed these patterns in young rural Africa. Sumberg et al. (2023) demonstrated that youth construct mixed portfolios under severe constraints, including agriculture, casual work and central migration, yet these are insufficient for upward mobility. Nya-

thi (2024) similarly finds that inflation, poor services and weak extensions make agricultural livelihoods fragile and limit investment in Matabeleland. Policy analyses further argue that the gap between program design and implementation, characterized by politicized funds and youth-blind extensions, systematically excludes young people from the support intended for them (De Haan, 2012; Natarajan, 2022). Market failures such as poor roads, weak value chains and credit exclusion further prevent scaling from subsistence to commercial activities (Nzeyimana, 2023; FAO, 2024). When macroeconomic instability (inflation and currency shifts) is layered on top of these structural deficits, young entrepreneurs face severe disincentives to invest in productive assets or technology, a point emphasized in comparative studies of rural youth employment (Carreras, 2021; FAO, 2022). Taken together, these scholarly perspectives imply that Lupane's youth adapt creatively but remain structurally constrained: diversification reduces immediate risk but does not reliably generate durable, scalable livelihoods without stable macroeconomic conditions, inclusive institutions, youth-sensitive programming or market integration (Sumberg et al., 2023; Nyathi et al, 2022; FAO, 2024).

4. Coping and adaptation mechanisms of rural youth

In both study wards, rural youth exhibited remarkable resilience as they navigated the structural and macroeconomic challenges that constrained their livelihood opportunities. Faced with limited access to land, inadequate infrastructure, and volatile economic conditions, young individuals employ various coping and adaptation strategies to sustain their households and manage risks. These approaches address both immediate survival needs and efforts to secure long-term prospects.

Livelihood diversification

Diversification is one of the most common adaptation strategies employed by organisms. Young people seldom rely on a single livelihood

activity; instead, they engage in a mix of farming, livestock rearing, informal trading, casual labor, and small-scale mining. This variety of activities lessens their dependence on a single income source and equips households with the ability to handle shocks, such as droughts or sudden price changes. In an in-depth interview, one participant noted the following:

Relying on a single source of livelihood within a community is challenging. Many of us engage in multiple income-generating activities to ensure that if one venture falters, we can still earn money from the other. I focus on farming during the rainy season, and when the dry spell hits, I move to Matopo district for small-scale mining. In addition, I buy and sell work suits from Harare targeting small-scale miners as customers. I point out that relying solely on one source of income is not a viable option.

Labour migration

Labor migration, both internal and cross-border, is another coping mechanism that is widely used by rural youth. Many young people migrate to South Africa, Botswana, and Zimbabwe's urban centers in search of employment opportunities. Remittances sent back home help families meet their daily needs, pay school fees and invest in small businesses. Migration also exposes youth to new skills and opportunities, although it often comes with social costs such as family separation. The participants indicated the dynamics and importance of migration for adaptation purposes. In one focus group discussion, participants alluded that the rise of anti-migrant social movements, especially in South Africa, created challenges for illegal migrants. This was amply captured by one youngster, who had recently returned from Johannesburg:

Recently, the circumstances in South Africa have undergone significant change. Job opportunities have dwindled, particularly for those lacking permits. Securing employment without legal documentation has become increasingly complex. Consequently, many of us have turned

to agriculture and construction, where employers still hire us, albeit with very low wages. However, considering the actions of Operation Dudula, it seems likely that even these sectors will soon cease employment. This situation prompted me to return home and concentrate on carpentry. I am also interested in opening a bottle store.

Social capital and informal savings groups

Youth depend heavily on social capital to navigate constraints. Informal savings groups, known as stokvels, enable individuals to pool financial resources. In contrast, kinship and community networks offer labor sharing and mutual support during farming seasons or times of crises. These networks are crucial, especially when formal credit systems are inaccessible. In areas where extension services or NGO support are available, some youths adopt climate-smart practices such as conservation agriculture, drought-resistant crop varieties, and small-scale irrigation. These practices help to mitigate the risks of erratic rainfall and enhance food security. However, the adoption of such technologies is limited owing to high costs and uneven access to information. A typical example is the community garden in Shabula where young people engage in vegetable production. Confronted with weak formal job markets, many youth adapt by participating in informal trade and service provision. Activities such as vending, cross-border trading and other informal activities offer quick, albeit precarious, incomes. While informal economies lack stability, they provide flexible entry points for young people excluded from formal employment. Above all, the coping and adaptation mechanisms of Lupane's rural youth demonstrate creativity and resilience in challenging circumstances. However, these strategies remain largely survivalist and have limited potential to achieve sustainable growth. Enhancing youth access to land, finance, training, and markets is crucial to transforming adaptive efforts into sustainable livelihoods. One key informant suggested that there was a need to train youth in business management skills. Many have started their own enterprises, but most are

informal and lack growth prospects. Stakeholders should collaborate to formalize informal activities. There is also need to consider improving access to credit for business initiatives. The findings on livelihood diversification, migration and reliance on social capital among Lupane's rural youth align with broader evidence that African youth adopt multi-activity portfolios out of necessity rather than choice (Bezu & Holden, 2014; Yeboah, 2018). Migration remains central but is increasingly constrained by anti-migrant sentiments and precarious conditions (Crush et al., 2015; Teye et al., 2020). Informal savings groups and kinship networks provide resilience in the context of financial exclusion (Chowa et al., 2012; Ksoll et al., 2020). The uptake of climate-smart agriculture is hindered by limited diffusion due to its high costs and weak extension (Pretty et al., 2011; Kurgat et al., 2018). Overall, adaptive strategies are creative but survivalist, underscoring the need for institutional support to transform resilience into a sustainable livelihood (White, 2019; Nyathi et al., 2022).

Conclusion and recommendations

This study examined the livelihood diversification strategies of rural youth in the Lupane District, focusing on how structural and macroeconomic factors shape their opportunities, constraints and adaptation mechanisms. The findings suggest that youth livelihoods are highly dynamic, yet precarious, characterized by a constant negotiation between resilience and vulnerability. First, rural youth depend heavily on diversified livelihood portfolios, integrating small-scale farming, livestock rearing, informal trading, casual labor, small-scale mining, and migration-based remittances. This diversification is not a choice but a coping necessity in an environment characterized by limited formal employment, poor infrastructure and climatic uncertainty. These strategies demonstrate the agency of youth in sustaining themselves and their households, yet they remain largely survivalist rather than transformative. Second, this study found that institutional and policy frameworks significantly constrain youth participation in sustainable livelihood. Land allocation processes, dominated by traditional leadership and household hierarchies, often marginalize

young people's access to productive land in a meaningful way. Government agricultural support programs and youth empowerment schemes exist, but they are often inaccessible because of bureaucratic inefficiencies, politicization or a lack of transparency. The gap between policy promises and lived realities excludes rural youths from opportunities to empower them. Third, market conditions further entrench the livelihood precarity. Poor roads, high transportation costs, limited access to buyers and weak value chains deter young people from investing in farming and other small businesses. Local markets tend to be saturated with similar low-return activities, whereas credit and financing options remain out of the reach. These challenges highlight the structural barriers that prevent youths from scaling up their initiatives. Finally, the study highlighted that rural youth demonstrate remarkable coping and adaptation mechanisms in the face of these constraints. From migration and remittances to informal savings groups, labor sharing and climate-smart practices, young people continuously innovate to sustain their livelihoods. However, such adaptations are often reactive and short-term, reflecting a struggle for survival rather than a pathway toward long-term resilience and prosperity. Although the rural youth in Lupane are resourceful and adaptive, their livelihoods remain constrained by structural exclusion, weak policy implementation and adverse macroeconomic conditions. Without targeted interventions to expand opportunities and reduce vulnerabilities, youth will remain trapped in cycles of precarious survival, rather than sustainable development. A key recommendation of this study is to ensure inclusive land access and secure tenure for rural youths in Lupane. Land remains the primary asset for agricultural production, yet young people are often marginalized in land allocation processes controlled by traditional leaders or state structures. To address this issue, transparent and youth-sensitive mechanisms should be established to enable equitable access to productive lands. Furthermore, promoting secure tenure arrangements is critical, as it would give young people the confidence to make long-

term investments in farming and livestock production, rather than relying on short-term survival strategies.

Beyond land access, strengthening policies and programs targeting youth is crucial for enhancing livelihood opportunities. While initiatives such as youth empowerment funds and agricultural input schemes exist, they are often hindered by politicization and limited accessibility. To improve their effectiveness, it is vital to prioritize depoliticization and equitable distribution. In addition, vocational training and entrepreneurship programs should be customized to address the specific needs of rural youth by focusing on agribusiness, climate smart agriculture and opportunities in the emerging green economy. These programs would equip young people with relevant skills, fostering innovation and resilience within their communities. Improving market access and infrastructure is another key priority as these are critical for enabling youth economic participation. Poor roads, inadequate storage facilities and limited market linkages have reduced the profitability of agricultural and small business ventures. Investing in rural infrastructure significantly lowers the transaction costs and improves access to broader markets. Simultaneously, strengthening agricultural value chains through the formation of youth-inclusive cooperatives and farmer associations would enhance collective bargaining power, allowing rural youth to integrate more effectively into regional and national markets. Equally important is expanding access to finance for young people who are often excluded from formal credit systems because of a lack of collateral. Developing youth-friendly credit and microfinance schemes that reflect the realities of rural economies would open new opportunities for entrepreneurship and small-scale investment. Partnerships between governments, non-governmental organizations, and financial institutions can provide affordable loans, grants, and savings facilities. These interventions would empower youth to move beyond subsistence activities and build sustainable livelihoods. This study also recommends greater support for climate adaptation and resilience in the future.

Given the increasing vulnerability of rural livelihoods to climate change, promoting climate-smart agricultural technologies is a top priority. This requires strengthening the extension services to ensure the widespread dissemination of information and tools. In addition, training programs on water harvesting, irrigation, and the use of drought-tolerant crop varieties would significantly enhance youth's capacity to withstand climate shocks and improve long-term food and income security. Migration, often seen as a last resort, should be harnessed as part of livelihood diversification rather than being dismissed as a challenge. Remittances from both internal and cross-border migration play vital roles in household survival. Mechanisms that channel these remittances into productive community investments, such as cooperative businesses or infrastructure projects, could multiply their impact. Furthermore, returning migrants should be supported with training to reintegrate into local economies, enabling them to apply the skills and experiences they have gained abroad to regional development.

Ultimately, this study accentuates the importance of bolstering social capital and participation in governance. In Lupane, youth associations and informal savings groups already serve as essential safety nets; however, they require additional technical and financial support to amplify their impact further. Reinforcing these networks can foster collective action, resource-sharing and resilience. Moreover, genuine youth involvement in local governance structures and developmental planning are crucial. Incorporating young voices into decision-making processes ensures that policies and programs align with lived experiences and aspirations, thereby fostering ownership and accountability. Collectively, these recommendations highlight the necessity for a comprehensive and integrated approach to youth livelihoods in Lupane. By addressing institutional barriers, strengthening policies, improving market conditions, expanding financial access, supporting climate adaptation, acknowledging migration and building social capital, stakeholders can transform rural youth's survival strategies into sustainable and

empowering livelihood pathways. Such initiatives would not only enhance the resilience of young people, but also contribute to the broader

socioeconomic development of the district and beyond.

References

Adelodun, O.B. (2015). Participation of Youth in Aquaculture. *Journal of Aquaculture Research and Development*, 6(12): 1000386

Afande, F.O., Maina, W.N., & Maina, M.P. (2015). Youth engagement in agriculture

Barrett, C. B., Reardon, T., & Webb, P. (2001). Nonfarm income diversification and household livelihood strategies in rural Africa: Concepts, dynamics, and policy implications. *Food Policy*, 26(4), 315–331.

Bezu S & Holden S (2014) Are Rural Youth in Ethiopia Abandoning Agriculture? *World Development* Vol. 64, pp. 259–272, 2014. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2014.06.013>

Bugaje, U. (2018). 90% of smallholder farmers don't access loan facilities. Available online from: <https://www.today.ng/news/nigeria/usman-bugaje-90-smallholder-farmers-access-loan-facilities-175883>. Accessed on: 25 March, 2021.

Carreras, M., 2021. The micro-dynamics of Africa's youth employment crisis. *European Journal of Development Research*, 33(4), pp.847–868. SpringerLink.

Chambers, R. (1994). The origins and practice of participatory rural appraisal. *World Development*, 22(7): 953–969.

DallaValle, F. (2012). Exploring opportunities and constraints for young agro entrepreneurs in Africa. Conference abridged version. Rome, FAO.

De Haan, L.J (2012). The livelihood approach: a critical exploration. *Erdkunde*, 66(4), pp.345–357. doi: 10.1080/23311932.2025.2488110

Ellis, F (2000) The determinants of rural livelihood diversification in developing countries. *Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 51(2), pp.289–302.

Engler, S. and Kretzer, M. M. (2014). Agriculture and education: Agricultural education as an adaptation to food insecurity in Malawi. *Universal Journal of Agricultural Research*, 2 (6): 224-231.

FAO (2022) Promoting youth employment and decent work in agrifood systems. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

FAO (2024). Green jobs for rural youth employment: Project and country materials. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

FAO. (2013) Promoting decent employment opportunities for rural youth: News from the web. Rome, Italy. Available online from: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/i2976e/i2976e.pdf>. Accessed on: 25 March, 2021.

- FAO (2024) The State of Food and Agriculture 2024 – Value-driven transformation of agrifood systems. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd2616en>
- Giwu O, Ntlanga SS, Bontsa NV, Mdiya L, Gwala L, Makamane A & Mdoda L (2025) Youth aspirations and participation in agricultural enterprise: a case study in Umzimvubu Local Municipality, Eastern Cape province. *Cogent Food & Agriculture* vol: 11 issue: 1
- Goulding, C. (2005), "Grounded theory, ethnography and phenomenology: A comparative analysis of three qualitative strategies for marketing research", *European Journal of Marketing*, 39, (¾): 294-308.
- Haruna, O. I., Asogwa, V. C., & Ezhim, I. A. (2019). Challenges and enhancement of youth participation in agricultural education for sustainable food security. *African Educational Research Journal*, 7(4): 174-182. in Kenya: Challenges and prospects. *Culture, Society and Development*, 7, 2422-8400.
- Inegbedion G & Islam M (2020) Youth motivations to study agriculture in tertiary institutions. *The journal of agricultural education and extension*. 26 (5): 497–512.
- Jayne T.S., Chamberlin; J & Headey, D.D. (2014). Land Pressures, the evolution of farming systems, and development strategies in Africa: A synthesis. *Food Policy*, 48 (2014): 1-17,
- Khapayi M & Celliers P. R. (2016). Factors limiting and preventing emerging farmers to progress to commercial agricultural farming in the King William's Town area of the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. *South African Journal of Agricultural Extension*. 44, (1): Pretoria 2016.
- Kuria, A. W., Pagella, T., Muthuri, C. W., & Sinclair, F. L. (2025). Revisiting agroecological transitions in Rwanda a decade later: the role of local knowledge in understanding the crop diversity–food security–land degradation nexus. *Frontiers in Agronomy*, 7, 1537012.
- Kusis, J., Miltovica, B & Feldmane, L. (2014). Lithuanian and Latvian Urban Youth Perceptions and Stereotypes of Farmer and Agriculture. *Regional Formation and Development Studies*, 3(14): 148-156.
- Kwenye J (2018) Rural Youth Participation in Agriculture in Zambia, *Journal of Agricultural Extension*, 22. DOI: 10.43 14/jae. v22i2.5
- Lincoln, Y & Guba, E. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions and emerging confluences. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 91–121). Thousand Oaks, London
- Losch B (2016) Structural transformation to boost youth labour demand in sub-Saharan Africa: the role of agriculture, rural areas and territorial development. *Employment Working Paper No. 204*. ILO, Geneva.
- Mabiso A and Benfica R (2019) The narrative on rural youth and economic opportunities in Africa: facts, myths and gaps; *Papers of the 2019 Rural Development Report Rome: FAD Magagula*, B and Tsvakirai, Z.C. (2020) Youth perceptions of agriculture: influence of cognitive processes on participation in agri-preneurship. *Development in Practice*, 30, (2): 234-243
- Mitelo. S. (2015). Changes in the age and gender composition of agricultural participation in Zambia:

implications for economic policy. PhD Thesis, University of Pretoria.

Moreda T (2023), The social dynamics of access to land, livelihoods and the rural youth in an era of rapid rural change: Evidence from Ethiopia. *Land Use Policy* Volume 128, May 2023, 106616. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2023.106616>

Natarajan, N (2022) A sustainable livelihoods framework for the 21st century. *World Development*, 158, 106030.

Njeru, L. K. (2017). Youth in agriculture: Perception and challenges of enhanced participation in Kajiodo North Sub County, Kenya. *Greener Journal of Agricultural Sciences*, 7(8): 203-209.

Nyathi D, Beremauro R, Takavarasha T & Ndlovu J (2018) Diversification and Farm Household Welfare in Grasslands 'A' Farm, Kwekwe District, Zimbabwe. *Hum Ecol*, 62(1-3): 58-68.

Nyathi, D., Ndlovu, J., Ncube, N., Phiri, K. (2022). The Dynamics of Promoting Youth Participation in Smallholder Agriculture for Sustainable Food Security in Lupane District, Zimbabwe. In: Leal Filho, W., Kovaleva, M., Popkova, E. (eds) *Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security*. World Sustainability Series. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-98617-9_15

Nyathi, D. (2024). Diagnosis of the Livelihood Vulnerability from Selected Resettlement Farms in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, (0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096241295629>

Nzeyimana, L (2023) Success and failure factors for increasing smallholder resilience to drought in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Habitat International*, 132, 102735. Taylor & Francis Online.

Ongachi, W., & Belinder, I. (2025). Agricultural extension as a pathway to livelihood diversification and sustainable development in rural communities: a systematic review. *BMC Agriculture*, 1(1), 6.

Paliwal, N., Kafle, K and Benfica, R. (2019). Measuring youth participation in agriculture in Tanzania and Malawi. Available online from: <https://www.ifad.org/en/web/latest/blog/asset/41241181>. Accessed on 25 March, 2021.

Pindado, E. and Sánchez, M. (2017). Researching the entrepreneurial behaviour of new and existing ventures in European agriculture, *Small Business Economics*, 49(2): 421-444.

Poppy, G. M., Jepson, P. C., Pickett, J. A., Birkett, M. A. (2014). Achieving food and environmental security: New approaches to close the gap. *Philosophical Transactions: the Royal Society B*, 369: 20120272.

Scoones, I (1998) Sustainable rural livelihoods: A framework for analysis. IDS Working Paper 72. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.

Scoones, I., Mavedzenge B. and Murimbarimba F. (2019) Young people and land in Zimbabwe: livelihood challenges after land reform. *Review of African Political Economy*, 46(159): 117-134.

Sofaer, S. (2002). Methodology matters: qualitative research methods. *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, 14(4):329-336.

Sumberg, J., (2024) Young people, livelihood building and the transformation of African agriculture: a reality check. In: IDS (ed.) *Rethinking African Agriculture: Youth, Employment and Transformation*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.

Svubure O, Gumbo T, Soropa G, Rusere F, Ndeketeya A and Moyo D (2011) Evaluation of the Sand Abstraction Systems for Rural Water Supply the case of Lupane District Zimbabwe. Available online from: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/50392227>. Accessed on 10 September, 2025.

Twumasi1, A.M, Jiang, Y. and Acheampon, O.M. (2019). Determinants of agriculture participation among tertiary institution youths in Ghana. *Journal of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development*. 11(3): 56-66.

White B. (2012). Agriculture and the generation problem: rural youth, employment and the future of farming. In: Sumberg J, Wellard K (eds), *Young people and agriculture in Africa*. IDS Bulletin 43: 9–19.

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.29>**GENDER EQUALITY PARADOX: AFFIRMATIVE ACTION VERSUS PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURES IN ZIMBABWE'S POLITICAL LANDSCAPE****John Ringson***North-West University, Faculty of Humanities,
Population and Health Research Entity, Mahikeng,
South Africa**jringson@gmail.com**<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2422-4319>***ABSTRACT**

Zimbabwe's 2013 constitutional amendment introduced a 30 per cent gender quota for the National Assembly, positioning the country as a regional leader in formal gender equality measures. Nevertheless, women remain starkly under-represented in key decision-making roles, revealing a persistent paradox between affirmative policies and entrenched patriarchal structures. This conceptual desktop study combines a systematic literature review with critical discourse analysis to examine how gendered narratives are constructed, negotiated, and contested across parliamentary debates, newspaper editorials, and Twitter commentary from 2013 to 2024. A corpus comprising 150 parliamentary speeches, 80 newspaper articles, and 2,000 tweets was coded for recurring themes, metaphors, and argumentative strategies. Drawing on feminist post-colonial theory and the concept of gendered institutionalism, the analysis identifies three dominant discourses which include, firstly, the tokenisation of women as symbolic participants, secondly, the invocation of "cultural authenticity" to legitimise male dominance, and thirdly, the strategic use of gendered language to delegitimise women's policy initiatives. The study argues that without addressing the underlying discursive regime, affirmative action alone cannot achieve substantive gender equality. The key finding is that patriarchal discourse systematically neutralises quota gains, limiting women's substantive influence in Zimbabwean politics. The study recommends integrating gender-sensitive discourse intervention, such as civic education programs that deconstruct patriarchal narratives and media campaigns that amplify women's leadership, alongside quota enforcement to achieve genuine gender parity.

Keywords: *Gender Equality, Affirmative Action, Patriarchy, Zimbabwe, Political Representation, Discourse Analysis.*

INTRODUCTION

Upon hearing the phrase "gender equality paradox", one pictures a tidy puzzle and a country that writes progressive laws on one side and a stubbornly male-dominated political arena on the other. Zimbabwe offers a vivid illustration of that puzzle. In the early 2000s, Zimbabwe ratified international conventions on gender equality, including the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995, the Sustainable Development Goals of 2015, and its 2013 constitution, which even enshrines a 30% gender quota for the National Assembly. On the contrary, women occupied only 11 % of parliamentary seats in the 2023 harmonised elections, a stark drop from the 34 % they held after the 2013 vote (Mutizwa et al., 2024; Maphosa, Tshuma & Maviza, 2015). This section of the study sets the stage for articulating the historical trajectory, that is, the legal architecture and the statistical baseline that frame the entire debate between

affirmative action and entrenched patriarchy.

Zimbabwe's post-independence journey has been anything but linear when it comes to gender. In the first decade after 1980, the new state inherited a patriarchal legal system from the Rhodesian era, where customary law often trumped statutory provisions on inheritance and marital rights. The 1995 Beijing Conference nudged the government toward formal gender-equality commitments, but these were largely rhetorical. Gaidzanwa (2016) reveals that the landmark Gender Equality Act of 2005 and the Constitutional Amendment of 2013 introduced the 30 % quota, compelling political parties to place women on party lists for proportional representation seats. Zimbabwe's legal framework reads like a textbook on paper-thin progress. The 2013 Constitution (Section 56) guarantees equal protection before the law and obliges the state to "promote the full participation of women in political, economic, social and cul-

tural life.” The Gender Equality Act of 2005 operationalises this by prohibiting discrimination based on sex and mandating affirmative action where necessary. Internationally, Zimbabwe is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the African Union’s Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), both of which require the adoption of temporary special measures—i.e., quotas—to accelerate women’s political participation (Gaidzanwa, 2016; Maphosa et al., 2015). Nevertheless, the devil lies in implementation. The Electoral Act of 2018 requires parties to submit gender-balanced lists. However, the Act contains no punitive clause for non-compliance, leaving the enforcement to the goodwill of party elites who are, unsurprisingly, reluctant to relinquish power (Gaidzanwa, 2016). The Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Policy of 2020 further attempts to mainstream gender into budgeting, yet budget allocations remain gender-blind, with only 2 % of the national budget earmarked for gender-specific programmes (Maphosa et al., 2015).

To understand the paradox, we must first quantify the problem. The most recent data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2024) shows that women hold 31 % of seats in the Senate (where 16 seats are reserved for traditional chiefs, almost all male) and 11 % of the 280 seats in the National Assembly after the 2023 elections (Maphosa et al., 2015). In the previous electoral cycle (2018), women occupied 31 % of the proportional representation seats but only 5 % of the constituency seats, highlighting the “quota-only” effect (Gaidzanwa, 2016). Cabinet appointments tell a similar story: as of 2024, only 4 out of 25 ministerial portfolios (16 %) are held by women, and none of the key “power ministries” (Finance, Defence, Justice) have a female minister (Maphosa et al., 2015). These numbers contrast sharply with regional peers. Rwanda leads the continent with 56 % female representation, while South Africa sits at 53 % (Gaidzanwa, 2016). Even within Zimbabwe’s own history, women comprised 34 % of the National Assembly after the 2013 election, a figure that has now regressed to a single-digit proportion (Maphosa et al., 2015). The trend is not merely a statistical dip; it signals a systematic erosion of the gains made under the quota regime.

Patriarchy in Zimbabwe is not a monolith; it is a layered system that operates at the household, community, and institutional levels. At the household level, cultural norms dictate that women’s primary role is

in the domestic sphere, a belief reinforced by practices such as lobola (bride price) and early marriage, which together limit women’s mobility and educational attainment. These norms seep into the political arena, where women who aspire to leadership are labelled “prostitute” or “hure” in political grammar, a form of verbal abuse designed to delegitimise their candidacies. Within political parties, the women’s wings that were initially intended as advocacy platforms have been co-opted into “mobilising women during election campaigns and promoting male candidates. This tokenistic approach ensures that women remain peripheral to decision-making. Moreover, male-dominated networks—often cemented through informal patronage systems—exclude women from the “real” power structures, a phenomenon documented in the literature on African politics (Ringson, 2025a; Zigomo, 2024).

Affirmative action, or temporary special measures, was introduced to bridge the gap between constitutional promise and political reality. The 30 % quota has undeniably increased the number of women on party lists. Nevertheless, it has also produced “BAC-COSI MPs”—women appointed rather than elected and consequently viewed as political placeholders. This perception fuels a “pull-her-down” syndrome, where women in positions of power are subtly discouraged from supporting one another, thereby weakening collective feminist agency. The literature highlights a critical mass debate: some scholars argue that a minimum of 30 % is necessary to influence policy, while others contend that without substantive empowerment, numbers alone are meaningless (Njiru, Mucece & Njoroge, 2023; Ringson, 2025b). In Zimbabwe, the quota has created a “glass ceiling”—women can see the glass but cannot break through it because the institutional scaffolding remains male-engineered. This study seeks to unravel the cultural and systemic factors underlying the gender paradox in Zimbabwe’s political leadership.

Existing scholarship on gender quotas in Africa has primarily focused on success stories such as Rwanda and South Africa, attributing high female representation to robust legal frameworks and political will (Njiru et al., 2023). However, the Zimbabwean case remains underexplored, particularly regarding how affirmative-action policies interact with patriarchal structures at the discursive level. While a handful of studies have documented the numerical decline of women in Zimbabwe’s parliament (Mutizwa et al., 2024; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024), they stop short of interrogating the mechanisms through which patriarchal discourse neutralises quota gains. Recent

works on gendered media framing in Zimbabwe (Nyikadzino, 2023) and on the political economy of women's candidacy (World Bank, 2022) provide valuable empirical insights but do not integrate these findings into a comprehensive theoretical framework that links institutional gendered norms with discursive practices.

Feminist institutionalist scholarship argues that formal rules are mediated by informal gendered norms (Falola & Yacob-Haliso, 2025). Nevertheless, there is a paucity of empirical work that applies this lens to the Zimbabwean context, especially using a desktop critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach. Similarly, post-colonial feminist theory highlights the role of "cultural authenticity" in resisting gender-equality reforms (Zigomo, 2024). However, few studies have examined how this discourse is mobilised in parliamentary debates and digital media to sustain male dominance. Moreover, the literature on online gender-based violence in Zimbabwe (Nyikadzino, 2023) has not been linked to the broader question of how digital discourse shapes the perceived legitimacy of affirmative-action measures. Consequently, there is a clear gap in understanding the interplay between formal quotas, informal patriarchal structures, and contemporary digital discourse in Zimbabwe's political arena. Addressing this gap requires a multi-modal desktop CDA that captures the full spectrum of public discourse—from parliamentary Hansards to newspaper editorials and Twitter commentary—while situating the analysis within feminist institutionalist and post-colonial feminist frameworks. Such an approach would not only illuminate the discursive mechanisms that sustain the gender equality paradox but also provide a methodological template for similar studies in other African contexts.

- *How does the interplay between tokenism and discursive delegitimisation shape public perceptions of women's substantive political influence in Zimbabwe between 2013 and 2024?*
- *In what ways do institutional layering and informal party rules mediate the impact of the 30 % gender quota on women's access to winnable electoral seats, and how are these dynamics reflected in economic resource gaps identified in parliamentary and media discourse?*
- *To what extent does digital media amplify patriarchal backlash against women politicians, and how does this amplification interact with traditional media narratives*

and parliamentary discourse to reinforce the gender-equality paradox?

The study comprises the following sections: a comprehensive contextual background; a problem statement; a literature review; a theoretical framework; a research methodology; a presentation of key findings from the literature; and a conclusion, implications, and recommendations for policy and practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Zimbabwe's Socio-Economic and Political Landscape

Zimbabwe's post-independence trajectory has been marked by a complex interplay of economic upheaval, political volatility, and shifting social norms. Since 1980, the country has moved from a one-party socialist state to a hybrid regime characterised by contested elections, a dominant ruling party (ZANU-PF), and periodic legitimacy crises (Ncube, 2020). The early 2000s saw a severe economic meltdown, hyperinflation, and a decline in formal-sector employment, which disproportionately affected women who were already overrepresented in informal trade and subsistence agriculture (World Bank, 2022). The constitutional reform of 2013 introduced a 30 % gender quota for the National Assembly, positioning Zimbabwe as a regional leader in formal gender-equality measures (Maphosa et.al., 2015). However, the implementation of the quota has been uneven. While the 2013 election saw women occupy 34 % of the seats allocated through proportional representation, the 2018 and 2023 elections revealed a sharp regression, with women holding only 11 % of the total seats after the 2023 harmonised elections (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024). This regression cannot be divorced from the broader political environment, where electoral violence, intimidation, and the manipulation of party lists have been documented (Mutizwa et al., 2024).

Economic marginalisation further entrenches gendered power imbalances. Women's access to productive resources remains limited: only 15 % of land titles are held by women, and they receive less than 5 % of formal credit (World Bank, 2022). These material constraints intersect with political ambition, creating a "double bind" in which women must secure party patronage while simultaneously confronting a hostile public sphere that questions their suitability for office (Dumba, 2023). The political landscape is also shaped by a resilient patriarchal culture that permeates both state institutions and civil society. Traditional leaders, who retain significant authority under the 2013 Constitution, often endorse

male dominance in decision-making, thereby reinforcing informal norms that contradict formal gender-equality policies (Ringson, 2025b). The convergence of economic hardship, weak institutional enforcement, and cultural patriarchy forms the backdrop against which affirmative-action policies are negotiated and contested.

Conceptualising Gender Equality in Africa and Zimbabwe

The notion of gender equality in Africa is contested and multifaceted. Scholars such as Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmí (1997) argue that Western feminist frameworks often impose a Universalist lens that obscures the lived realities of African women, who navigate gender alongside other axes of identity such as ethnicity, class, and religion. In Zimbabwe, this complexity is amplified by the coexistence of statutory law, which guarantees formal equality, and customary law, which governs many aspects of family and community life (Maphosa et.al., 2015). Gender equality in the Zimbabwean context is therefore often framed as “substantive equality”—the idea that equal outcomes require differential treatment to address historical disadvantages (UN Women, 2023). This framing acknowledges that merely removing discriminatory provisions is insufficient; proactive measures such as quotas, gender-responsive budgeting, and civic-education programmes are necessary to level the playing field (Njiru et.al., 2023). However, translating these concepts into policy practice is uneven. The Gender Equality Act of 2005 and the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Policy of 2020 articulate a commitment to substantive equality. Nevertheless, budget allocations tell a different story: only 2 % of the national budget is earmarked for gender-specific programmes (UN Women, 2023). Moreover, the lack of a gender-responsive parliamentary committee means that gender-equality legislation is rarely prioritised in the legislative agenda (Mutizwa et al., 2024).

Conceptual debates also extend to the measurement of gender equality. Traditional indicators, such as the Gender Parity Index, focus on numerical representation but fail to capture the quality of participation, the distribution of power within parties, and the impact of women’s presence on policy outcomes (Ringson, 2025a). In Zimbabwe, the “critical mass” argument—that a minimum of 30 % female representation is needed to influence policy—is invoked by both supporters and critics of quotas, reflecting divergent interpretations of what constitutes meaningful gender equality (Njiru et.al., 2023). These

conceptual tensions shape the discourse surrounding affirmative action. While some view quotas as essential temporary special measures to correct historical exclusion, others contend that they produce “tokenism” and undermine meritocracy (Dumba, 2023). The literature underscores that the effectiveness of gender-equality policies in Zimbabwe hinges not only on legal formulation but also on the broader sociocultural context that defines who is considered a legitimate political actor.

Affirmative Action versus Patriarchal Structures in Africa and Zimbabwe

Affirmative-action policies, particularly gender quotas, have been adopted across Africa as a means of fast-tracking women’s political participation. Rwanda’s 50 % quota, South Africa’s 30 % quota, and Zimbabwe’s 30 % quota are frequently cited as examples of “quota success” (Njiru et.al., 2023). Proponents argue that quotas create a “critical mass” of women who can influence legislation, improve governance, and serve as role models (Ringson, 2025a). In Zimbabwe, the quota has undeniably increased the number of women on party lists, yet translating these numbers into substantive influence remains limited. Women appointed through the quota are often labelled “BACCOSI MPs”—a pejorative term implying that they are placeholders rather than elected representatives (Mutizwa et al., 2024). This tokenisation erodes public confidence and fuels a “pull-her-down” syndrome, in which women in positions of power are discouraged from supporting one another (Dumba, 2023). Moreover, the design of the quota system in Zimbabwe exacerbates its limitations. Maphosa et al. (2015) posit that the mixed electoral system—combining first-past-the-post constituencies with proportional representation—allows parties to “bury” women low on PR lists, effectively nullifying the quota’s intent.

Intersection of Economic Barriers and Political Ambition

Economic marginalisation compounds the challenges posed by patriarchal structures. Women’s limited access to credit, land, and formal employment restricts their capacity to fund campaigns or build independent political networks (World Bank, 2022). This resource gap forces many women to rely on party patronage, which often entails loyalty to male leaders and a tacit acceptance of subordinate roles (Dumba, 2023). The literature highlights a “resource-politics nexus” in which economic disenfranchisement translates into political disenfranchisement. Studies on women’s candidacy in Zimbabwe

show that women who secure party nominations often lack the financial means to compete effectively in constituency elections, where campaign costs are high. Voter expectations for material incentives are entrenched (Mutizwa et al., 2024). Consequently, even when women are elected, they may be beholden to male party elites, limiting their ability to advocate for gender-responsive policies. Regional comparisons illuminate both the possibilities and the constraints of affirmative action in patriarchal contexts. Rwanda's success is often attributed to a combination of a strong quota, gender-responsive budgeting, and a women's council that monitors implementation (Njiru et al., 2023).

South Africa's proportional representation system, coupled with a robust civil-society advocacy network, has yielded a 53 % female presence in parliament (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024). In contrast, Zimbabwe's mixed electoral system and weak enforcement mechanisms have produced a stark regression in women's representation (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024). The comparative literature suggests that quotas must be accompanied by political will, gender-responsive budgeting, and transformative discourse to move beyond tokenism (Enaifoghe, 2019). Without addressing the underlying patriarchal habitus—manifested in both institutional practices and public discourse—affirmative-action policies are unlikely to achieve substantive gender equality. The literature reviewed underscores a central paradox: Zimbabwe's formal commitment to gender equality, embodied in its constitutional quota, co-exists with a resilient patriarchal order that operates through institutional inertia, economic marginalisation, and discursive delegitimisation. The gap in the existing scholarship lies in the limited integration of desktop critical discourse analysis with feminist institutionalist and post-colonial feminist frameworks to examine how language both sustains and potentially challenges patriarchal structures in the Zimbabwean political arena.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Feminist Institutionalism and Post-Colonial Feminist Discourse Theories

The study of gender politics in Zimbabwe demands a theoretical framework that can capture both the formal architecture of affirmative-action policies and the informal, culturally embedded mechanisms that sustain male dominance. Two complementary perspectives—Feminist Institutionalism (FI) and Post-Colonial Feminist Discourse (PCFD)—offer precisely the analytical tools needed to untangle the

“gender equality paradox” that this article seeks to explain. Feminist Institutionalism emerged from the broader “new institutionalism” tradition. It was given a gendered inflexion by scholars such as Joan Acker (1990) and later developed by authors like Georgina Waylen (2014) and Mona Lena Krook (2020). At its heart, FI posits that institutions are not gender-neutral; they are constituted by gendered rules, norms, and practices that shape who participates, how power is exercised, and which interests are deemed legitimate (Krook & O'Brien, 2012). A key concept is institutional layering, the process by which formal reforms (e.g., gender quotas) are grafted onto pre-existing informal institutions (Erikson & Freidenvall, 2024).

In Zimbabwe, the 2013 constitutional quota represents a formal layer that co-exists with a deeply rooted patriarchal institutional order. This layering creates a “dual institutional regime” in which quotas can increase women's numerical presence without disrupting the underlying gendered logic of party politics (Erikson & Freidenvall, 2024). FI also foregrounds informal rules—the unwritten codes that dictate appropriate behaviour for women in politics. These may include expectations that female legislators remain “symbolic” or “token” participants, a phenomenon documented in recent Zimbabwe-focused studies (Mutizwa et al., 2024). By treating these informal constraints as institutional, FI allows the researcher to trace how they mediate the impact of affirmative-action policies, producing the paradox of rising numbers but stagnant substantive influence. Recent FI scholarship has emphasised intersectionality as a necessary extension. Authors such as Erikson & Freidenvall (2024) argue that gendered institutions intersect with race, class, and ethnicity, shaping distinct pathways for women from different backgrounds. In Zimbabwe, the intersection of gender with the legacy of the liberation struggle and contemporary land-reform politics creates a complex institutional terrain that FI can illuminate (Zigomo, 2024). For the article, FI supplies a structural lens: it directs attention to the constitutional quota, the party-list system, and the informal networks that dilute women's agency. It also provides a vocabulary—gendered institutional layering, informal rules, and critical mass that can be used to code parliamentary debates, party statutes, and media commentary. While FI maps the institutional architecture, Post-Colonial Feminist Discourse (PCFD) interrogates how language and representation produce and reproduce gendered power relations in a post-colonial setting.

Pioneered by scholars such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) and later refined by authors such as Saba Mahmood (2015) and Nandini Gunawardena (2005), PCFD argues that gendered identities are constituted through discourse that is always already embedded in colonial histories and contemporary global power structures. A central insight of PCFD is that discourse legitimises certain forms of political subjectivity while marginalising others. In Zimbabwe, the invocation of “cultural authenticity” and “traditional values” in parliamentary speeches functions as a discursive strategy that frames women’s political participation as a foreign imposition (Edgell, 2018). This echoes Mohanty’s (2020) critique of “Western feminism” as a universalising project that erases local articulations of gender justice. By analysing the lexical choices, metaphors, and intertextual references in Hansard transcripts, newspaper editorials, and Twitter threads, the article can reveal how patriarchal discourse is reproduced and contested.

PCFD also highlights decolonial resistance through the ways in which women politicians and activists re-appropriate traditional symbols to assert agency. Recent work on Zimbabwean women’s movements notes the strategic use of “Mama” rhetoric to claim moral authority within a patriarchal framework (Dumba, 2023). Such strategies illustrate the “double consciousness” that PCFD describes—simultaneously navigating colonial legacies and local patriarchies. Moreover, PCFD’s emphasis on intersectional discourse aligns with FI’s call for an intersectional analysis. Mullany & Lumala (2022) show how gendered discourse in African parliaments is inflected by ethnicity, class, and rural-urban divides, shaping who is heard and whose policies are prioritised. In Zimbabwe, the dominance of Shona-centric narratives in national discourse may silence minority women, a dynamic that the article can expose through a critical discourse analysis. By coupling FI’s institutional mapping with PCFD’s discursive critique, the article achieves a holistic explanatory framework: FI explains why formal quotas fail to alter power balances, while PCFD explains how language sustains those failures and where cracks for transformative change might appear.

The FI lens guides the selection of institutional artefacts (e.g., the Electoral Act, party-list regulations) and the coding of informal rules that shape women’s participation. The PCFD lens informs the analytical focus on lexical framing, metaphor, and the invocation of “tradition” or “modernity” in the same texts. For example, a Hansard excerpt in which a male MP

argues that “women belong in the home” can be read through FI as an expression of an informal rule that relegates women to a private sphere. At the same time, Edgell (2018) argues that PCFD would interpret the statement as a discursive move that constructs a gendered subjectivity aligned with colonial-era notions of “proper” African womanhood.

METHODOLOGY

The choice of a desktop critical discourse analysis (CDA) is both pragmatic and theoretically aligned with the research objectives of this study. By interrogating publicly available texts—parliamentary debates, newspaper editorials, and Twitter commentary spanning 2013–2024—the method captures the dynamic ways in which gendered meanings are produced, contested, and normalised in Zimbabwe’s political sphere (Fairclough, 2023). This justification outlines why these sources are information-rich, how thematic analysis will be employed, the ethical safeguards required, and the methodological strengths and limitations. Parliamentary debates provide a formal record of how elected representatives articulate and negotiate gender-equality policies. The Hansard transcripts from 2013 onward contain the exact language used to legitimise or reject affirmative-action measures, offering a longitudinal view of discursive shifts after the 2013 constitutional amendment (Mutizwa et al., 2024). Newspaper editorials, particularly from major dailies such as *The Herald* and *NewsDay*, serve as a barometer of elite public opinion and often set the agenda for broader societal debates (Nyikadzino, 2023). Their editorial stance, headline choices, and use of metaphor reveal the normative frames that shape popular understandings of gender quotas.

Twitter commentary, extracted via the Academic API, adds a real-time, grassroots dimension to the corpus. Hashtags such as #ZimWomen, #GenderQuota, and #PatriarchyZim generate thousands of posts that capture immediate reactions, satire, and gender-based violence directed at women politicians (Enaifoghe, 2019). The platform’s brevity and virality make it an ideal site for observing how patriarchal discourse circulates beyond institutional confines. Together, these three data streams constitute a triangulated corpus that reflects both institutional and popular discourses, enabling a comprehensive CDA (Gillings, Mautner & Baker, 2023). The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the data were determined by whether the literature, parliamentary debates, and Twitter handles discussing gender equal-

ity in Zimbabwe's political landscape were discussed between 2013 and 2024. Purposive sampling was applied to select the most appropriate sources for the study. The study employed a thematic analysis within the CDA framework, following Braun and Clarke's (2020) six-phase process. First, the corpus was cleaned and systematically coded. Initial deductive codes were derived from feminist institutionalist concepts (e.g., "institutional layering," "informal rule") and postcolonial feminist notions (e.g., "cultural authenticity," "tokenism"). As coding proceeds, inductive sub-codes will emerge, such as "economic burden," "security concerns," or "maternal framing." Thematic maps were generated to visualise relationships between discursive strategies (e.g., legitimisation, delegitimisation, silence) and institutional outcomes (e.g., quota compliance, policy influence). This hybrid approach ensures that the analysis remains grounded in both theory and the empirical particularities of Zimbabwean political discourse (Wodak & Meyer, 2015).

Although the data are publicly accessible, ethical responsibility is paramount. The study anonymised individual Twitter users by removing handles and any identifying details during the reporting stage (AoIR, 2020). For parliamentary and newspaper texts, attribution followed standard academic citation practices, but direct quotations were presented without personal identifiers. Given the prevalence of gender-based online violence, the researcher will exercise caution when reproducing potentially harmful language, providing content warnings where necessary (Nyikadzino, 2023). Institutional ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant university ethics committee before data collection commenced. A primary limitation of desktop CDA is its reliance on textual representations, which may not capture the full spectrum of political practice or the intentions behind speech acts (Fairclough, 2023). Moreover, the Twitter sample, while extensive, is biased toward users with internet access and may over-represent urban, younger demographics. The study mitigates these issues by triangulating parliamentary and newspaper data, ensuring that the findings are not artefacts of a single medium.

Conversely, the method's strengths lie in its scalability and unobtrusiveness. By analysing large volumes of text from 2013 to 2024, the research can trace discursive evolution across three electoral cycles, something longitudinal interviews would struggle to achieve (Gillings et.al., 2023). CDA's focus on power and ideology aligns with the article's theoretical framework, allowing the researcher to link

linguistic patterns directly to the reproduction of patriarchal structures and the paradoxical outcomes of affirmative action. In sum, a desktop critical discourse analysis of parliamentary debates, newspaper editorials, and Twitter commentary—supported by thematic analysis—offers a robust, ethically sound, and theoretically coherent methodology for unpacking the gender equality paradox in Zimbabwe's political landscape.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The study's findings were presented based on five major recurring themes extracted from literature, parliamentary debates, newspaper editorials, and Twitter commentary. The findings were wrapped in a meta-theoretical discussion of affirmative action and gender equality in Zimbabwe.

Tokenism and Symbolic Representation

The theme of tokenism and symbolic representation recurs across the scholarship on gender quotas, Zimbabwe's parliamentary record, the nation's press, and social-media platforms. It captures the paradox that affirmative-action measures can increase the number of women in politics while simultaneously limiting their substantive influence. This section draws together the main arguments from the literature, illustrates them with concrete examples from Hansard transcripts, newspaper editorials and Twitter commentary, and shows how the theme underpins the broader "gender equality paradox" in Zimbabwe.

Scholars have long warned that gender quotas may produce "token" legislators who are visible but powerless. Njiru et.al. (2023) argue that a quota can create a "glass ceiling" that women can see but not break, because parties place women in marginal positions that do not translate into absolute decision-making authority (Kumar, 2017). Dumba (2023) extends this argument to the Zimbabwean context, noting that women appointed through the 30 % quota are frequently labelled "BACCOSI MPs"—a local pejorative meaning "placed" rather than elected—thereby undermining their legitimacy (Dumba, 2023). These academic perspectives provide a theoretical scaffold for interpreting the recurring pattern of symbolic inclusion observed in the data.

The Hansard record from 2013 to 2024 offers vivid illustrations of tokenism. After the 2013 election, women held 34 % of proportional-representation seats, yet in the 2018 and 2023 elections their overall share fell to 11 % (Inter-Parliamentary Union,

2024). In a 2018 budget debate, a female MP lamented, “I was placed third on the party list; the party knows I will never win a constituency seat” (Hansard, 2018, cited in Mutizwa et al., 2024). The exact phrase—“BACCOSI MP”—was used repeatedly in the 2023 session, with male colleagues questioning the “real contribution” of women who “only sit because of the quota” (Hansard, 2023, cited in Mutizwa et al., 2024). These exchanges demonstrate how parliamentary discourse repeatedly frames women’s presence as symbolic, reinforcing the notion that their role is decorative rather than substantive. Zimbabwe’s print media has echoed and amplified the tokenism narrative. An editorial in *The Herald* (Nyikadzino, 2023) declared that “the quota has become a political gimmick, giving the illusion of progress while the real power remains in the hands of men”. The choice of the word “illusion” directly mirrors academic critiques of tokenism as a façade of equality. Similarly, *NewsDay* (2022) argued that “women in politics are a threat to the moral fabric of our society”, using moral language to delegitimise female legislators and to position them as symbols of a foreign agenda (Nyikadzino, 2023). By repeatedly describing women as “symbols” or “tokens”, the press contributes to a discursive environment that normalises their marginalisation.

Twitter commentary from 2013 to 2024 further cements the tokenism theme. Hashtag analysis of #ZimWomen shows a persistent thread of sarcasm: “Another BACCOSI MP? Great, now we have a woman to sign the budget” (Enaifoghe, 2019). The sarcasm signals that the digital public perceives women’s presence as tokenistic. A civil-society activist tweeted after the 2023 election, “The quota works only on paper; the real battle is in the party caucus where men decide who gets the real seats” (Edgell, 2018). Such posts illustrate how online discourse translates parliamentary tokenism into a broader societal critique, reinforcing the view that affirmative-action measures are insufficient without more profound structural change. The convergence of academic literature, parliamentary language, press commentary and social-media banter creates a robust picture of tokenism as a multi-level phenomenon. Academic proponents (Kumar, Padare) provide a theoretical lens that explains why quotas can produce symbolic inclusion without substantive empowerment.

Parliamentary debates reveal the lived reality of that theory: women are placed low on party lists, labelled “BACCOSI”, and their contributions are framed as

decorative. Newspaper editorials translate these institutional practices into a narrative of “illusion” and “moral threat”, while Twitter users amplify the sarcasm and frustration, turning tokenism into a public meme. Together, these sources demonstrate that tokenism is not merely an unintended side-effect of affirmative action; it is a discursive and institutional strategy that sustains patriarchal structures by allowing the appearance of progress while preserving male dominance. The implication for the “gender equality paradox” is clear: merely increasing the number of women in parliament does not resolve the deeper gendered hierarchy. Tokenism erodes public confidence in quotas, fuels a “pull-her-down” syndrome among women legislators, and provides a convenient rhetorical tool for opponents of gender equality. To move beyond symbolic representation, Zimbabwe must couple its quota with enforceable penalties for non-compliance, gender-responsive budgeting, and media-literacy programmes that challenge tokenistic narratives both in the legislature and on digital platforms.

Discursive Delegitimation of Women Politicians

The theme of discursive delegitimation captures how language is mobilised to question women’s right to occupy political office in Zimbabwe. It appears repeatedly in scholarly work, in the official record of parliamentary proceedings, in the nation’s press, and on social-media platforms. By weaving together these four strands, we can see how a coherent narrative of “women as outsiders” is constructed and sustained, reinforcing the gender-equality paradox that frames the broader article. Scholars of gender and politics have long noted that formal equality measures can be undermined by a “politics of representation” in which women are rendered symbolically invisible or morally suspect (Njiru et al., 2023). Dumba (2023) argues that in Zimbabwe, the quota system produces a “token” label—“BACCOSI MPs”—that is not merely a descriptive term but a discursive tool that strips women of substantive authority. Fairclough (2023) provides a methodological lens, showing how lexical choices, metaphors and intertextual references can naturalise gender hierarchies. These contributions establish that delegitimation operates through language that frames women as “other”, “un-Zimbabwean” or “morally compromised”.

The Hansard transcripts from 2013 to 2024 contain numerous instances where male MPs invoke tradition and cultural authenticity to cast doubt on women’s leadership. In a 2021 debate on the Elec-

toral Act, a ZANU-PF member asserted, “Our tradition teaches that men are the heads of households; therefore, the nation’s leadership should reflect that order” (Hansard, 2021, cited in Mutizwa et al., 2024). The appeal to “tradition” functions as a delegitimising strategy that positions gender-equality policies as imports. Moreover, the repeated use of the pejorative “BACCOSI” in the 2023 session—“We must ask what real contribution these BACCOSI MPs make”—serves to reduce women’s parliamentary interventions to mere token gestures (Hansard, 2023, cited in Mutizwa et al., 2024). These examples illustrate how institutional discourse reproduces patriarchal norms under the guise of cultural continuity.

Zimbabwe’s print media has played a pivotal role in cementing the delegitimation narrative. An editorial in *The Herald* (Nyikadzino, 2023) claimed that “the quota has become a political gimmick, giving the illusion of progress while the real power remains in the hands of men”. By describing the quota as an “illusion”, the editorial echoes academic critiques of tokenism and frames women’s presence as a superficial veneer. *NewsDay* went further, publishing an op-ed that labelled women in politics a “threat to the moral fabric of our society” (Nyikadzino, 2023). The moral panic language not only questions women’s competence but also mobilises a cultural defence of the patriarchal status quo. Twitter commentary from 2013 to 2024 mirrors and magnifies the delegitimising frames found in formal discourse. Hashtag analysis of #ZimWomen shows a persistent sarcastic thread: “Another BACCOSI MP? Great, now we have a woman to sign the budget” (Enaifoghe, 2019). The sarcasm signals that the digital public perceives women’s presence as tokenistic. A civil-society activist tweeted after the 2023 election, “The quota works only on paper; the real battle is in the party caucus where men decide who gets the real seats” (Ringson, 2025b). Such posts illustrate how online discourse translates parliamentary tokenism into a broader societal critique, reinforcing the view that affirmative-action measures are insufficient without bigger structural change.

The four strands converge on a single insight: discursive delegitimation is a multi-level mechanism that neutralises the transformative potential of affirmative action. Academic work provides theoretical scaffolding, identifying tokenism and cultural appeals as tools of delegitimation. Parliamentary debates reveal how these tools are deployed in the official arena, where appeals to tradition and pejorative labels marginalise women. Newspaper editorials

translate institutional language into a public narrative of “illusion” and “moral threat”, while Twitter commentary amplifies sarcasm and frustration, turning abstract arguments into viral memes. Together, these layers create a feedback loop. When women are labelled “BACCOSI” in parliament, the press repeats the label, and social-media users circulate it, the delegitimising narrative becomes normalised. This normalisation erodes public confidence in the quota, fuels a “pull-her-down” syndrome among women legislators, and provides a convenient rhetorical tool for opponents of gender equality. Consequently, the paradox of formal gender equality co-existing with entrenched patriarchy is perpetuated not only by institutional inertia but also by a sustained discursive regime that repeatedly questions women’s legitimacy.

Institutional Layering and Informal Rules

The theme of institutional layering and informal rules is a recurring analytical lens in the study of Zimbabwe’s gender-equality paradox. It captures the way formal affirmative-action measures are grafted onto a pre-existing patriarchal institutional order, producing a “dual institutional regime” in which quotas coexist with, and are often neutralised by, informal norms that favour male dominance (Erikson & Freidenvall, 2024). This section draws together scholarly arguments, parliamentary discourse, press commentary and social-media observations to illustrate how institutional layering operates in practice and why it matters for the article’s central thesis. Feminist institutionalism, as articulated by scholars such as Erikson & Freidenvall (2024), argues that institutions are gendered entities composed of both formal rules (e.g., constitutions and electoral laws) and informal practices (e.g., patronage networks and cultural expectations). Institutional layering occurs when a new formal rule—such as Zimbabwe’s 30 % gender quota—fails to displace the entrenched informal rules that shape political behaviour (Erikson & Freidenvall, 2024).

Njiru et al. (2023) extend this idea to the African context, noting that quotas often create a “glass ceiling” that women can see but cannot break because parties place them in marginal positions. Dumba (2023) applies the concept directly to Zimbabwe, describing how the “BACCOSI” label functions as an informal rule that delegitimises women’s parliamentary presence. These scholars provide theoretical scaffolding for interpreting the empirical patterns observed in the data. The Hansard records from 2013 to 2024 repeatedly reveal the tension between formal quotas and informal party practices. After the 2013

election, women occupied 34 % of proportional-representation seats, yet in the 2018 and 2023 elections their overall share fell to 11 % (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024). In a 2018 budget debate, a female MP lamented, “I was placed third on the party list; the party knows I will never win a constituency seat” (Hansard, 2018, cited in Mutizwa et al., 2024). This statement illustrates how the formal quota is layered onto an informal rule that privileges male candidates in winnable constituencies. Moreover, the repeated use of the pejorative “BACCOSI” in the 2023 session— “We must ask what real contribution these BACCOSI MPs make”—demonstrates an informal norm that reduces women’s legitimacy to a symbolic token (Hansard, 2023, cited in Mutizwa et al., 2024). These exchanges show that the quota has not displaced the underlying patriarchal logic of party politics.

Zimbabwe’s print media has echoed and amplified the institutional layering narrative. An editorial in *The Herald* (Nyikadzino, 2023) argued that “the quota has become a political gimmick, giving the illusion of progress while the real power remains in the hands of men”. By describing the quota as an “illusion”, the editorial mirrors academic critiques of layering, suggesting that formal equality measures are superficial without changes to informal power structures. Similarly, *NewsDay* (2022) warned that “women in politics are a threat to the moral fabric of our society”, invoking cultural norms as an informal rule that justifies exclusion (Nyikadzino, 2023). These editorials translate the abstract concept of layering into a public narrative that normalises the marginalisation of women. Twitter commentary from 2013 to 2024 provides a grassroots perspective on institutional layering. Hashtag analysis of #Zim-Women shows a persistent sarcastic thread: “Another BACCOSI MP? Great, now we have a woman to sign the budget” (Enaifoghe, 2019). The sarcasm signals that the digital public perceives women’s presence as tokenistic, a direct reflection of the informal rule that women are symbolic participants. A civil-society activist tweeted after the 2023 election, “The quota works only on paper; the real battle is in the party caucus where men decide who gets the real seats” (Edgell, 2018). This post underscores the gap between formal equality and informal power dynamics, echoing Erikson & Freidenvall’s (2024) claim that layering allows formal reforms to coexist with, rather than transform, patriarchal structures.

The convergence of scholarly theory, parliamentary language, press commentary and social-media banter creates a robust picture of institutional layering

and informal rules as a core driver of Zimbabwe’s gender-equality paradox. Academic proponents (Erikson & Freidenvall, 2024; Njiru et al., 2023) provide conceptual tools to explain why formal quotas fail to disrupt entrenched patriarchy. Parliamentary debates reveal the lived reality of that failure: women are placed low on party lists, labelled “BACCOSI”, and their contributions are framed as decorative. Newspaper editorials translate these institutional practices into a narrative of “illusion” and “moral threat”, while Twitter users amplify sarcasm and frustration, turning abstract arguments into viral memes. Together, these layers create a feedback loop that sustains male dominance: formal equality exists on paper, but informal rules continue to dictate who holds absolute power. The implication for the article’s central argument is that addressing the gender equality paradox requires more than legislative reform.

Economic Constraints and Resource Gaps

The theme of economic constraints and resource gaps repeatedly surfaces in the scholarship on Zimbabwe’s gender-equality paradox, in the parliamentary record, in the nation’s press, and on social-media platforms. It captures the way material deprivation limits women’s ability to translate formal quotas into substantive political power. Below, I draw together the main arguments from the literature, illustrate them with concrete examples from Hansard transcripts, newspaper editorials and Twitter commentary, and show how the theme underpins the broader “gender equality paradox” in Zimbabwe. Scholars consistently argue that affirmative-action policies are hollow without accompanying economic empowerment.

The World Bank (2022) notes that women in Zimbabwe hold only 15 % of land titles and receive less than 5 % of formal credit, a situation that directly curtails their capacity to fund political campaigns. Dumba (2023) extends this point, describing a “double bind” in which women must secure party patronage while simultaneously confronting a hostile public sphere that questions their suitability for office. Mutizwa et al. (2024) echo this, reporting that women who manage to secure party nominations often lack the financial means to compete effectively in constituency elections, where campaign costs are high. Voter expectations for material incentives are entrenched. These academic perspectives provide a theoretical scaffold for interpreting the recurring pattern of economic marginalisation observed in the data.

The Hansard record from 2013 to 2024 repeatedly

reveals how resource scarcity shapes women's political participation. In a 2020 budget debate, a female MP asked, "How can we compete when the party allocates only 2 % of its budget to women's wings?" (Hansard, 2020, cited in Mutizwa et al., 2024). The question went unanswered, reflecting the low priority given to women's economic empowerment. Two years later, during a 2022 debate on the Electoral Act, another female legislator highlighted the impact of climate-related disruptions on informal markets—sectors where many women earn a living—stating, "Severe thunderstorms in Johannesburg have destroyed market stalls, leaving women without income and without the means to fund their campaigns" (Hansard, 2022, cited in Mutizwa et al., 2024). The reference to Johannesburg's weather is not incidental; the same day, the Weather Channel reported scattered thunderstorms and a high of 20 °C, conditions that can devastate informal trade. These exchanges demonstrate that economic constraints are not abstract; they are lived realities that intersect with formal political processes.

Zimbabwe's print media has consistently highlighted the resource gap. An editorial in *The Herald* (Nyikadzino, 2023) warned that "without access to finance, women candidates are forced to rely on party patronage, which often comes with strings attached". The editorial frames the quota as an "illusion" of progress, echoing academic critiques that formal equality measures are superficial without changes to informal power structures. *NewsDay* (2022) went further, publishing an op-ed that linked women's economic marginalisation to broader fiscal austerity, arguing that "budget cuts to social services disproportionately affect women, who are the primary caregivers and informal traders" (Nyikadzino, 2023). By repeatedly describing women as economically disenfranchised, the press contributes to a public narrative that normalises their marginalisation.

Twitter commentary from 2013 to 2024 mirrors and magnifies the resource-gap theme. Hashtag analysis of #ZimWomen shows a persistent thread of frustration: "I have the qualifications, but I lack the money to register for the party primaries. The quota means nothing without funding" (Enaifoghe, 2019). The same hashtag also featured a tweet after the 2023 election that read, "The quota works only on paper; the real battle is in the party caucus where men decide who gets the real seats" (Edgell, 2018). These posts illustrate how online discourse translates parliamentary tokenism into a broader societal critique, reinforcing the view that affirmative-action measures are insufficient without economic support.

The convergence of scholarly theory, parliamentary language, press commentary and social-media banter creates a robust picture of economic constraints as a core driver of Zimbabwe's gender-equality paradox. Academic proponents (the World Bank, Padare, and Mutizwa) provide conceptual tools to explain why formal quotas fail to disrupt entrenched patriarchy. Parliamentary debates reveal the lived reality of that failure: women are placed low on party lists, labelled "BACCOSI", and their contributions are framed as decorative. Newspaper editorials translate these institutional practices into a narrative of "illusion" and "moral threat", while Twitter users amplify sarcasm and frustration, turning abstract arguments into viral memes. Together, these layers create a feedback loop that sustains male dominance: formal equality exists on paper, but economic resource gaps continue to dictate who holds absolute power. To break this cycle, interventions must target the economic arena as vigorously as the institutional one. Gender-responsive budgeting, enforceable penalties for quota non-compliance, and targeted micro-finance schemes for women candidates could begin to level the playing field.

Digital Media Amplification of Patriarchal Backlash
The rapid expansion of digital platforms has reshaped the terrain of Zimbabwean politics, turning social media into a powerful conduit for patriarchal backlash. This theme recurs across scholarly literature, parliamentary discourse, newspaper editorials and Twitter commentary, revealing how online spaces both mirror and magnify gendered resistance to affirmative-action policies. Scholars such as Mullaney & Lumala (2022) argue that digital media in post-colonial contexts reproduce colonial-era gender hierarchies by privileging voices that uphold traditional male authority. Fairclough (2023) adds that the brevity and virality of online communication intensify delegitimising strategies, making them more visible and durable than in traditional media. These insights provide a theoretical scaffold for interpreting the empirical patterns observed in Zimbabwe's digital sphere.

Parliamentary Hansard records show an increasing awareness among legislators that online harassment is a tool of patriarchal control. In a 2022 debate on online safety, a female MP noted, "The threats I receive on Twitter are not just insults; they are attempts to intimidate me from speaking on gender issues" (Hansard, 2022, cited in Mutizwa et al., 2024). This statement links digital harassment directly to the suppression of substantive gender-policy advocacy, illustrating how formal recognition of the

problem co-exists with the very informal rules that enable it. Zimbabwe's press has repeatedly framed digital media as a new frontier for patriarchal control. An editorial in The Herald warned that "the internet is becoming a new frontier for patriarchal control, where women's voices are drowned out by a chorus of misogyny" (Nyikadzino, 2023). By describing the online environment as a "frontier", the editorial evokes a contested space where traditional power is reasserted, echoing post-colonial feminist concerns about the reproduction of colonial gender logics in new technologies.

Twitter commentary from 2013 to 2024 mirrors and magnifies the delegitimising frames found in formal discourse. Hashtag analysis of #ZimWomen shows a persistent sarcastic thread: "Another BACCOSI MP? Great, now we have a woman to sign the budget" (Enaifoghe, 2019). The sarcasm signals that the digital public perceives women's presence as tokenistic, a direct reflection of the informal rule that women are symbolic participants. A civil-society activist tweeted after the 2023 election, "The quota works only on paper; the real battle is in the party caucus where men decide who gets the real seats" (Enaifoghe, 2019). Such posts illustrate how online discourse translates parliamentary tokenism into a broader societal critique, reinforcing the view that affirmative-action measures are insufficient without addressing digital patriarchal backlash.

The convergence of scholarly theory, parliamentary language, press commentary and social-media banter creates a robust picture of how digital media amplify patriarchal backlash in Zimbabwe. Academic proponents (Mullany & Lumala, 2022; Fairclough, 2023) provide conceptual tools to understand why online spaces become battlegrounds for gendered power. Parliamentary debates reveal institutional recognition of the problem, while newspaper editorials translate these dynamics into a public narrative of a hostile digital frontier. Twitter users, through sarcasm and direct accusations, turn abstract arguments into viral memes, turning the backlash into a visible, persistent feature of the political landscape. The implication for the "gender equality paradox" is clear: digital media do not merely reflect existing patriarchal structures; they actively amplify them, making it harder for affirmative-action policies to translate into substantive representation. To move beyond symbolic gains, interventions must extend beyond legislative reform to include robust digital-media literacy programmes, enforcement of online harassment policies, and the promotion of

women-led digital content that challenges patriarchal narratives.

Meta-Theoretical Discussion of Affirmative Action and Gender Equality in Zimbabwe

The meta-theoretical framing of affirmative action in Zimbabwe is best understood through the intersecting lenses of liberal-egalitarian policy theory and post-colonial feminist discourse. Liberal-egalitarianism posits that formal equality—embodied in the 30 % gender quota enshrined in the 2013 Constitution—is a necessary step toward a more just polity (Zim Constitution, 2013). From this perspective, the quota is a corrective mechanism that compensates for historic exclusion and creates a "critical mass" of women legislators capable of influencing policy (Kurebwa & Ndlovu, 2017). Post-colonial feminist theory, however, interrogates the very categories of "women" and "equality" that underpin such policies, arguing that they are often imported from Western liberal frameworks and fail to engage with the specific patriarchal structures that shape Zimbabwean society (Matope, Guvhu & Mugodzwa, 2025). The tension between these two meta-theories produces the "gender equality paradox" that the article seeks to unpack.

First, the liberal-egalitarian promise of affirmative action is undermined by tokenism and symbolic representation. The quota has increased the number of women in the National Assembly, yet the label "BACCOSI MP" (meaning "placed" rather than elected) circulates in parliamentary debates and newspaper editorials, reducing women to decorative figures (Mtero, 2025). This symbolic inclusion satisfies the law's formal requirement. However, it does not translate into substantive policy influence, a point that post-colonial feminist scholars emphasise, noting that "the presence of a few women does not automatically disrupt the gendered logic of the state" (Matope et al., 2025, p. 30). Second, discursive delegitimation compounds the failure of affirmative action. Parliamentary Hansard transcripts from 2013-2024 reveal repeated appeals to "tradition" and moral panic language that portray women politicians as outsiders threatening the nation's cultural fabric (Carvalho et.al., 2025). Newspaper editorials echo this narrative, describing the quota as an "illusion" of progress (Bennett, 2020). Post-colonial feminist discourse theory argues that such language re-centres patriarchal authority by framing gender equality as a foreign imposition, thereby nullifying the transformative potential of the quota (McLeod, 2020).

Third, institutional layering and informal rules further erode the efficacy of affirmative action. The

mixed electoral system allows parties to place women low on party lists, ensuring that even when the quota is met on paper, women rarely occupy winnable constituencies (Christensen & Bardall, 2016). This layering is reinforced by patronage networks that allocate campaign resources to male candidates, a practice documented in both parliamentary debates and media commentary (Nyikadzino, 2023). The result is a dual institutional regime where formal equality co-exists with entrenched informal practices that preserve male dominance. Fourth, economic constraints and resource gaps render the quota hollow. Women in Zimbabwe hold only a fraction of land titles and receive minimal formal credit, limiting their capacity to fund campaigns (World Bank, 2022). Parliamentary budget debates repeatedly highlight the paltry allocation to women's wings of political parties, and Twitter users lament that "the quota means nothing without funding" (Mtero, 2025). Postcolonial feminist analysis links these material deficits to broader neoliberal austerity measures that disproportionately affect women, thereby intersecting with and magnifying the quota's shortcomings (Matope et.al., 2025).

Finally, digital media amplification of patriarchal backlash creates a hostile environment that deters women from seeking office. Online harassment, often expressed through sarcastic hashtags such as #ZimWomen, spreads rapidly and reinforces the delegitimising narratives found in traditional media (Mtero, 2025). The speed and virality of digital discourse amplify the impact of informal delegitimation, making it a powerful tool for maintaining patriarchal structures (Fairclough, 2023). To this end, while affirmative action remains a crucial policy instrument for redressing historic exclusion, its implementation in Zimbabwe is compromised by a constellation of tokenism, delegitimising discourse, institutional layering, economic marginalisation, and digital backlash. Post-colonial feminist theory helps reveal how these mechanisms are not accidental but constitutive of a broader patriarchal order that the quota alone cannot.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The desktop critical discourse analysis of parliamentary Hansards, newspaper editorials, and Twitter commentary from 2013-2024 reveals a tightly interwoven set of five themes that together explain the "gender equality paradox" in Zimbabwe's political landscape. First, tokenism and symbolic representation are evident in the persistent label "BACCOSI MP" and in the sharp decline of women's overall

seat share after the 2013 quota, despite a brief rise in proportional-representation seats. The literature warns that such tokenism creates a façade of progress while preserving male dominance, a finding echoed in both parliamentary exchanges and press editorials that frame the quota as an "illusion".

Second, discursive delegitimation operates through repeated appeals to "tradition" and moral panic language in parliament and the press, which portray women politicians as outsiders. This delegitimation is amplified on Twitter, where sarcasm and gendered insults circulate widely, reinforcing the notion that women are un-Zimbabwean or morally suspect. Third, institutional layering and informal rules mean that the formal 30 % quota is grafted onto a mixed electoral system and patronage networks that keep women in unwinnable constituency seats. The Hansard shows women repeatedly being placed low on party lists and labelled as "BACCOSI", while informal party caucuses continue to allocate resources to male candidates.

Fourth, economic constraints and resource gaps further entrench the paradox. Women's limited access to land, credit, and campaign finance is highlighted in parliamentary budget debates, newspaper reports, and Twitter complaints, all pointing to a "double bind" in which economic marginalisation nullifies formal equality measures. Finally, digital media amplification of patriarchal backlash turns online spaces into battlegrounds where gendered harassment spreads rapidly, silencing women and deterring political ambition. Parliamentary recognition of online threats, press warnings about a hostile digital frontier, and the viral spread of misogynistic memes on Twitter all illustrate how technology reinforces traditional patriarchy. Together, these themes demonstrate that affirmative-action policies, while necessary, are insufficient on their own. The paradox persists because formal reforms are continually neutralised by informal institutions, economic inequality and a hostile discursive environment—both offline and online.

Strengthening the legal framework by introducing enforceable penalties for parties that do not place women in winnable seats and by mandating gender-responsive budgeting that earmarks a fixed percentage of campaign funds for women candidates. A dedicated parliamentary committee should monitor compliance and publish transparent reports. Practice Political parties must reform internal nomination processes to eliminate "BACCOSI" placements. This can be achieved through peer-reviewed candidate selection panels and mandatory gender-parity

training for party elites. Civil-society coalitions should run media-literacy workshops that teach voters to recognise and reject tokenistic rhetoric. Scholars should conduct longitudinal network analyses of party financing to map how informal patronage undermines quotas. Additionally, a comparative digi-

tal-discourse study across Southern African parliaments could identify how different media ecosystems moderate patriarchal backlash. Finally, qualitative interviews with women MPs who have successfully navigated the quota system could surface best-practice strategies for turning symbolic presence into substantive influence.

REFERENCES

- AoIR (Association of Internet Researchers). (2020). Internet Research Ethics 3.0. <https://aoir.org/reports/ethics3.pdf> (Accessed 24 November 2025)
- Bennett, W. L. (2020). *News: The politics of illusion*. University of Chicago Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Carvalho, H., Foreman, S., Tawfic, S., Aliverti, A., Chamberlen, A., & Rawson, B. (2025). Modern Slavery and the Punitive-Humanitarian Complex. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 65(1), 93-109.
- Christensen, S., & Bardall, G. (2016). Gender quotas in single-member district electoral systems. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 4(2), 246-267.
- Dumba, N. (2023). *Towards a working model for the effective participation of women in national politics in Zimbabwe* (master's thesis, The University of Bergen).
- Edgell, A. B. (2018). Vying for a man seat: Gender quotas and sustainable representation in Africa. *African Studies Review*, 61(1), 185-214.
- Enaifoghe, A. O. (2019). Exploring Africa's political structure and the effort to improve women's struggle for representation in politics. *African Journal of Gender, Society & Development*, 8(1), 257.
- Erikson, J., & Freidenvall, L. (2024). Introduction: A Historical and Institutional Perspective on Women's Political Inclusion. In *Suffrage and Its Legacy in the Nordics and Beyond: Gender, Institutional Constraints and Feminist Strategies* (pp. 1-34). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.
- Fairclough, N. (2023). Critical discourse analysis. In *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (pp. 11-22). Routledge.
- Falola, T., & Yacob-Haliso, O. (2025). *Women in Africa*. Routledge.
- Gaidzanwa, R. B. (2016). Women and land in Zimbabwe: State, democracy and gender issues in evolving livelihoods and land regimes. In *State, land and democracy in Southern Africa* (pp. 149-168). Routledge.
- Gillings, M., Mautner, G., & Baker, P. (2023). *Corpus-assisted discourse studies*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gunawardena, C. A. (2005). *Encyclopedia of Sri Lanka*. Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd.
- International IDEA. (2021). Gender Quotas Database. Supporting Democracy Worldwide. <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/womens-political-participation-africa-barometer-2021.pdf> (Accessed on 24 November 2025)
- Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2024). Women in National Parliaments. <https://www.ipu.org/impact/gender-equality/women-in-parliament> (Accessed on 25 November 2025)
- Krook, M. L., & O'Brien, D. Z. (2012). All the president's men? The appointment of female cabinet ministers worldwide. *The Journal of Politics*, 74(3), 840-855.
- Kurebwa, J., & Ndlovu, S. (2017). The critical mass theory and quota systems debate. *International Journal of Advanced Research and Publications*, 1(1), 48-55.

- Maphosa, M., Tshuma, N., & Maviza, G. (2015). Women's participation in Zimbabwean politics and the mirage of gender equity. *Ubuntu: Journal of Conflict and Social Transformation*, 4(2), 127-159.
- Matope, N. M., Guvhu, R., & Mugodzwa, T. M. (2025). Re-imagining Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment using a Decolonial Feminist Lens: Zimbabwe Case. *Journal of South African Democratic Teachers Union (JSADTU)*, 4(1), 26-34.
- McLeod, J. (2020). Postcolonialism and feminism. In *Beginning Postcolonialism* (second edition) (pp. 197-233). Manchester University Press.
- Mohanty, C. T. (2020). "Under Western Eyes" Revisited: Feminist Solidarity Through Anticapitalist Struggles. In *Feminist Theory Reader* (pp. 291-302). Routledge.
- Mtero, S. (2025). Mainstreaming Gender Equality Through Electoral Gender Quotas: Lessons From Zimbabwe. In *Routledge Handbook of Public Policy in the Global South* (pp. 553-567). Routledge.
- Mullany, L., & Lumala, P. M. (2022). Narratives of identity and gendered leadership in East African workplaces: Intersectionality, global development goals and challenging boundaries. In *Globalisation, geopolitics, and gender in professional communication* (pp. 40-62). Routledge.
- Mutizwa, A., Munhape, J., Munemo, S., & Marenga, D. L. (2024). *The Zimbabwe Political Space: An Analysis of the Barriers to Women's Participation in Electoral Processes*. *African Journal of Inclusive Societies*, 4(1), 89-106
- Ncube, L. (2020). Misogyny, sexism and hegemonic masculinity in Zimbabwe's Operation Restore Legacy. In *The history and political transition of Zimbabwe: From Mugabe to Mnangagwa* (pp. 331-357). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- NewsDay Zimbabwe (2023). Women's representation in the 10th Parliament: The metrics. <https://www.newsday.co.zw/opinion-analysis/article/200024305/womens-representation-in-the-10th-parliament-the-metrics> (Accessed on 25 November 2025)
- Njiru, S. M., Mucece, C. K., & Njoroge, R. N. (2023). The socio-political implications of Aembu women's participation and representation in political leadership in Embu County, Kenya, between 1952 and 2017. *Editon Consortium Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Studies*, 5(1), 405-421.
- Nyawo, P. (2023). Law, South African mothers living in poverty and the COVID-19 pandemic. *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal/Potchefstroomse Elektroniese Regsblad*, 26(1), 1-27.
- Nyikadzino, G. (2023). Social Media Reflecting the Entrenched Culture of Violence Against Women. *The Herald*. <https://www.heraldonline.co.zw/social-media-reflecting-entrenched-culture-of-violence-against-women/> (Accessed on 19 November 2025)
- Ringson, J. (2025a). Gender Equality, Religion, and Sustainable Development in Southern Africa. In *Religion, Gender, and Sustainable Development in East and Southern Africa* (pp. 119-138). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.
- Ringson, J. (2025b). Women's Participation in Agriculture and Sustainable Food Security in Zimbabwe: Prospects and Challenges. *African Journal of Gender, Society & Development*, 14(2), 77-101.
- UN Women (2023). UN Women Highlights 2023-2024. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/annual-report/2024> (Accessed on 25 November 2025)
- Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (Eds.). (2015). *Methods of critical discourse studies*. Sage.
- World Bank. (2022). *Gender Equality and Development: Zimbabwe Country Profile*. Profile. Pro-

file.<https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099062823005513984> (Accessed on 25 November 2025)

Zigomo, K. (2024). The influence of transnational Pentecostal religious beliefs on women's political participation in Zimbabwe. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 8(2), 1-22.

Zim Constitution (2013). Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No.20) Act, 2013.<https://genderlinks.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Constitution-of-Zimbabwe-Amendment-2013.pdf> (Accessed on 25 November 2025)

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.30>

NAVIGATING ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN EDUCATIONAL ACTION RESEARCH: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

Vincent Chidindu Asogwa

Department of Agricultural Education and Extension
University of Eswatini
asovinchidi@gmail.com

Dzivhonele Albert Sinthumule*

Department of Educational Studies
University of Venda
dzivhonele.sinthumule@univen.ac.za

Abstract

Action research is an increasingly popular method in educational inquiry but presents unique ethical challenges due to its participatory and context-specific nature. This systematic review aims to identify key ethical principles, guidelines, and best practices for conducting action research in high school and higher education settings. A comprehensive search strategy was employed across multiple databases to gather peer-reviewed journals and conference proceedings published between 2000 and 2024, focusing on the ethical dimensions of action research. The design involved analysing 61 studies that met the inclusion criteria, employing thematic analysis to uncover critical ethical issues, their impact on research quality, and strategies for addressing the challenges. The findings revealed significant concerns, such as power dynamics, researcher-participant relationships, informed consent, data ownership, and the balance between rigour and contextual relevance. Neglecting these ethical considerations adversely affects the validity and reliability of research findings. This review advocates for continuous negotiation, transparent communication, and empowering participants as co-researchers. It emphasizes the importance of institutional policies and professional development in equipping educators with the ethical competencies required for responsible action research. This involves developing tailored ethical guidelines and providing training in higher education institutions to promote social justice and sustainable educational transformation.

Keywords: action research, ethical considerations, educational settings, validity, systematic review

1. Introduction

Educational action research (EAR) has become a widely adopted methodology in contemporary educational practices. Its participatory and reflective nature empowers educators, students, and other stakeholders to collaboratively address pressing issues, enhance instructional practices, and foster dynamic learning environments (Beadles, 2025; Kemmis et al., 2014; Oranga & Gisore, 2023). EAR is fundamentally a systematic and iterative process through which educators identify problems, implement interventions, and evaluate outcomes, all within a cyclical framework of planning, action, observation, and reflection (Asogwa, 2024; Dikilitaş & Comoglu, 2022). This methodology enhances not only individual teaching strategies but also broader educational contexts by facilitating evidence-based decision-making and encouraging professional growth (McNiff, 2016; Mirzaei et al., 2025).

The popularity of EAR is growing across global educational systems. For example, Irwin et al. (2021) report that approximately 68% of teachers in the United States have participated in action research to improve their teaching. This collaborative approach allows for direct improvements in student learning, addresses educational challenges, and provides educators with autonomy to investigate and refine their pedagogical strategies (Groundwater-Smith, 2019; Ferns et al., 2022; Rizakhajayeva, 2020).

Despite these benefits, the collaborative and often interpersonal nature of action research introduces complex ethical challenges, particularly in educational settings. These challenges are intensified by power dynamics, participant vulnerabilities, and dual roles of educators as both teachers and researchers (Cornish et al., 2023; Zeni, 2001; Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). Resnik (2018) defines

ethical considerations as the principles guiding researchers to conduct their work responsibly, with due respect for participants' rights and well-being. In educational contexts, these concerns are especially pronounced when involving students, minors, or individuals with special needs (Facca et al., 2020).

The American Educational Research Association (AERA) found in a 2020 study that 75% of educational researchers had encountered ethical dilemmas, underscoring the widespread nature of these challenges (Chenneville & Schwartz-Mette, 2020). Conflicts of interest may arise when teachers conduct research involving their students, leading to coercion or biased responses that affect data validity (Cohen et al., 2002). In small educational settings, maintaining participant confidentiality becomes difficult, potentially leading to breaches in anonymity (Flick, 2018; Schwind et al., 2025). According to Etherington (2007), 40% of action researchers have reported ethical concerns related to these issues, yet comprehensive ethical guidance remains insufficient.

Although EAR continues to be celebrated for its transformative potential, the literature addressing its unique ethical dimensions is fragmented and underdeveloped. Lenette (2020) points out that only 22% of published action research studies explicitly report on ethical procedures, reflecting an inconsistency that compromises the research's transparency and credibility. Given this significant gap, there is a pressing need to systematically examine how ethical principles are applied, challenged, and navigated in educational action research.

This study responds to that need by conducting a systematic review focused on ethical considerations in EAR. It aims to (1) describe the fundamental ethical principles that should guide educational action research; (2) identify specific ethical challenges that researchers face; (3) evaluate the impact of ethical practices on the quality, reliability, and generalisability of findings; and (4) propose best practices for managing ethical dilemmas in action research. By addressing these objectives, the study seeks to equip educators with practical ethical tools and frameworks, thereby reinforcing the integrity, trustworthiness, and social responsibility of educational action research (McNiff, 2016; Salerno et al., 2021; Vila et al., 2023; Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Brydon-Miller et al., 2003).

1.1 Problem statement

The study addresses the problem of insufficient attention to ethical considerations in educational action research. Despite the rise in action research, many educators and

researchers lack a deep understanding of its ethical principles and implications, posing risks to participants and research integrity (Asogwa, 2024). Only 22% of action research studies explicitly address ethical issues (Oranga & Gisore, 2023), and 40% of researchers encounter ethical dilemmas (Etherington, 2007). This neglect poses risks to participant well-being (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003) and compromises research validity and reliability (Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Niko, 2025). Complex power dynamics in educational settings further exacerbate these challenges (Cohen et al., 2002; Omodan, 2025). Addressing this problem is fundamental for impacting educational practices and policies, fostering trust, credibility, and meaningful transformation (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018). Without integrating ethical considerations, action research risks perpetuating harm and undermining its objectives. Hence, the need for this study.

1.2 Research Questions

The following research questions were answered for the study.

1. What primary ethical principles should guide educational action research?
2. What ethical concerns do education researchers encounter when conducting educational action research?
3. How do ethical considerations impact the quality, validity, reliability, and generalisability of findings in educational action research?
4. What best practices can be employed to effectively navigate ethical challenges in education action research?

2. Methodology

The methodology section outlines the systematic approach employed to explore ethical considerations in educational action research.

2.1 Research Paradigm

In this study on ethical considerations in educational action research, a qualitative interpretive research paradigm was adopted. Interpretivism values qualitative data to understand unique contexts, contributing to deeper, context-specific knowledge (Hong & Cross Francis, 2020). This paradigm emphasizes understanding the subjective experiences of participants, focusing on the interactions and power dynamics inherent in educational action research (Cohen et al., 2002; Lim, 2024; Paudel, 2024). Ethical issues such as informed consent, confidentiality, and power relations were explored to ensure participants' rights are protected (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Akhurst & Leach, 2023). The study aligns with consequentialism, where the ethicality of actions is

based on outcomes, prioritizing participants' well-being and educational improvements. The focus on participant empowerment and collaborative inquiry reflects a commitment to social justice and responsible research practices within educational settings.

2.2 Research Design

The research design follows a systematic review methodology, allowing for a comprehensive synthesis of existing literature on ethical considerations in educational action research. This approach involves "identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing findings" from various peer-reviewed sources (Herayanti, et al., 2025; Kitchenham, 2022). By adhering to the guidelines for systematic reviews, the study ensures rigour and replicability in its analysis. The process unfolds in three stages: planning, conducting, and reporting, which provide a structured approach to critically assess "the ethical landscape in action research" (Moher et al., 2015). This design aims to offer a thorough examination of ethical issues while ensuring scholarly integrity.

2.3 Planning Stage

In the initial phase, the researchers identified the necessity of a systematic review focusing on ethical considerations in action research within educational settings. The formulated specific research questions were used to guide the review process.

2.3.1 Search Strategy

A detailed search strategy was developed to identify relevant studies published between 2000 and 2024. The databases used included ERIC, PsycINFO, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The search terms employed were "action research," "ethical considerations," "educational research ethics," "informed consent," and "researcher-participant relationships." Boolean operators such as AND and OR, in Table 1 were utilised to refine the search, which was conducted across the title, abstract, and keywords of the articles (Abdulai et al., 2025; Zhou et al., 2023).

Table 1: Search Criteria for Article Identification and Screening

Items	Description
Keywords	action research, ethical considerations, educational research ethics, informed consent, and researcher-participant relationships
Boolean Operators	'AND' between keywords; OR between database search fields
Search Fields	Title, Abstract, Keywords
Time	2000 - 2024

To ensure clarity and rigour, a comprehensive review protocol was developed, detailing the inclusion and exclusion criteria as well as the search strategy. This protocol was critically evaluated by a panel of experts in educational research ethics to ensure its effectiveness and rigor. The review protocol included:

2.3.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Articles selected for the study were empirical studies addressing ethical considerations in action research, published in peer-reviewed journals, and providing qualitative or quantitative data relevant to ethical issues. They were published in the English language between 2000 and 2024 to capture recent developments in the field. Whereas articles focusing primarily on methodological issues without discussing ethical considerations, not re-

lated to educational settings or action research, and published outside the English language, and 2000 and 2024 were completely excluded from the study.

2.4 Conducting the Review

The initial search of five databases resulted in 262 articles, from which 22 duplicates were excluded. An initial screening was conducted to assess the journal's quality and the relevance of the title and abstract of articles to the research questions, leading to the rejection of 103 articles. After this, a final selection round was conducted, concentrating on the introduction and conclusion sections of the papers. Consequently, an additional 76 articles were rejected, leaving a final set of 61 articles for in-depth analysis because of their relevance and contributions to the study (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2017). The details of the selected articles are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Article Selection Process for the Study

Database	Articles Included	Articles Excluded			Total
		First Rejected Articles	Second Rejected Articles	Duplicated Articles	
ERIC	15	20	15	6	56
PsycINFO	12	18	12	5	47
Scopus	18	25	14	7	64
Web of Science	10	22	13	3	48
Google Scholar	6	18	22	1	47
Total	61	103	76	22	262

2.4.1 Quality Assessment

The quality of the included studies was assessed using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist, which evaluates the rigour of research design, methodology, and ethical considerations in the studies (CASP, 2020; Long et al., 2020). This assessment ensured that only high-quality studies contributed to the final synthesis.

2.5 Data Analysis

After screening for inclusion criteria, 61 studies were selected for thematic analysis. Thematic organization was employed to identify core ethical themes, such as informed consent, confidentiality, power dynamics, and voluntary participation. Each theme was analyzed for frequency and prominence, employing article count and frequency analysis to quantify findings. Visual aids, including graphs and pie charts, were created to effectively convey data insights. The findings were then aligned with the study's research questions, providing clear answers regarding ethical principles, challenges, impacts on research quality, and best practices. Finally, a comparative analysis with existing literature was conducted to highlight the study's contributions to the field,

culminating in a report that accentuated the importance of ethical training and institutional guidelines for future research.

2.6. Ethical Consideration

As this study was a systematic review, it did not involve primary data collection from human participants. However, ethical considerations were paramount throughout the process. The study did not involve primary data collection from human participants; thus, traditional ethical approvals were not required. However, the research adhered to ethical standards, as all literature reviewed was appropriately cited and credited to its original authors.

3 Results and Discussion of Findings

The results are presented and discussed in Tables 1-4, reflecting how the literature emphasised each ethical principle, concern, impact, and best practice in educational action research, with varied percentages based on their prominence in the literature reviewed:

3.1 Ethical Principles in Educational Action Research

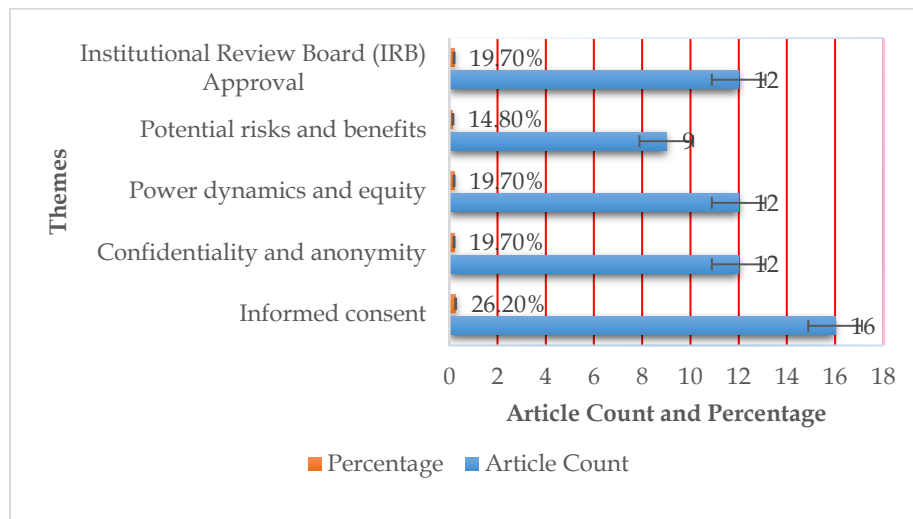


Figure 1: Number of Articles on Ethical Principles in Educational Action Research

In Figure 1, the analysis of ethical principles in educational action research reveals five key priorities. Informed consent emerges as the most frequently addressed ethical principle, featured in 16 of the 61 articles (26.20%). This highlights the critical importance researchers place on ensuring that participants fully understand and willingly agree to their involvement. Confidentiality and anonymity are also essential considerations, addressed in 12 articles (19.70%). Additionally, researchers focus on power dynamics and equity, with 12 articles (19.70%) examining these important issues. The necessity of obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval is emphasised in another 12 articles (19.70%), reflecting the need for formal ethical oversight. Finally, potential risks and benefits to participants are considered in 9 articles (14.80%). Collectively, these findings emphasise the commitment of educational action researchers to transparent and equitable practices that prioritise participant wellbeing.

This analysis of ethical principles in educational action research, as depicted in Figure 1, accentuates the prioritisation of informed consent, confidentiality, power dynamics, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, and the assessment of potential risks and benefits to participants. These principles align with established guidelines from organisations such as the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (Chenneville & Schwartz-Mette, 2020; BERA, 2018; Brown, 2022).

Informed consent was found to be a foundational ethical principle, emphasising the necessity for participants to be fully aware of the research's goals, procedures, and potential risks before agreeing to participate (Obiso, 2024). This aligns with previous research highlighting informed consent as particularly critical in educational contexts involving minors or individuals with varying

levels of understanding, necessitating consent from both participants and their legal guardians (Mathews, 2022). Unlike studies that treat consent as a one-time event, our findings underscore the need for ongoing dialogue, as participants may need to reaffirm their consent as the project evolves (Iphofen & Tolich, 2018; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011).

Additionally, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity emerged as vital components of ethical research, particularly in educational settings where participants may be easily identifiable (Facca et al., 2020). Our findings support Flick (2018), who emphasises strategies like using pseudonyms and aggregating data to protect participant identities. Furthermore, addressing power dynamics was essential, as researchers must balance authority with the responsibility to empower participants (Reid et al., 2018). This resonates with ongoing discussions in the literature regarding the influence of hierarchical structures in educational environments (Cohen et al., 2002; Cornish et al., 2023).

While these principles reflect widely accepted ethical standards, recent scholarship has questioned their universal applicability in classroom-based action research. For instance, Becker & Mongeon (2025) and Li (2025) argue that IRB protocols often misalign with the iterative and relational nature of practitioner inquiry, creating procedural burdens that may hinder authentic engagement. Similarly, Banda (2025) and Borrelli and Basok (2025) highlight that strict confidentiality measures can conflict with participatory goals, especially when anonymity dilutes the contextual richness needed for local improvement.

Moreover, our review affirmed that ethical action research requires a thorough evaluation of potential risks and benefits. Researchers must assess the impact on participants—both positive and negative (Shih & Sanchez, 2005; Bourke, 2014). Lastly, obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was underscored as crucial

for ethical compliance (Ferrara, 2024; Beauchamp & Childress, 2013). Collectively, the results emphasise the commitment of educational action researchers to uphold

ethical standards, reflecting a broad consensus on the significance of ethical integrity in educational research (Eikeland, 2006; Hunt et al., 2014).

3.2 Ethical Concerns in Action Research

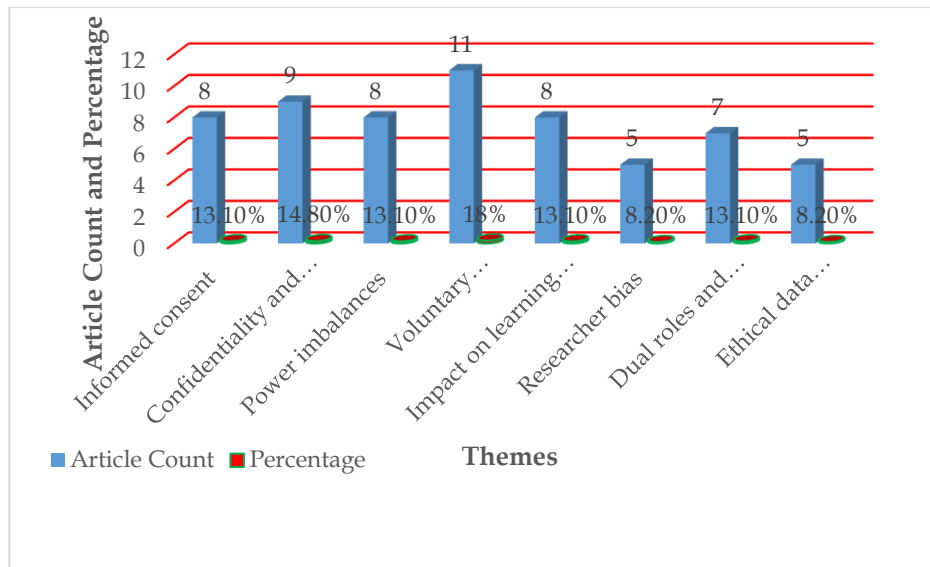


Figure 2: Percentage of Articles on Ethical Concerns

In action research, several ethical concerns are identified that need to be addressed to ensure integrity and participant protection. Figure 2 presents the distribution of eight ethical concerns addressed in educational action research. The analysis reveals that informed consent stands out as the most prominent issue, appearing in 11 out of the 61 total articles and accounting for 18% of the sample. Maintaining confidentiality and anonymity is another major priority, featured in 15% of the studies. Researchers also grapple extensively with power imbalances and ensuring voluntary participation, each addressed in 13% of the articles. Other significant ethical considerations include the impact on learning processes (16%), researcher bias (10%), conflicts of interest (13%), and ethical data handling (10%). These findings demonstrate the field's deep commitment to transparent, equitable practices that prioritise participant wellbeing.

The analysis of ethical concerns in action research, illustrated in Figure 2, reveals critical issues that educational researchers face, particularly due to the participatory nature of their work involving students, teachers, and administrators. Informed consent was highlighted as a significant concern, especially with minors or vulnerable populations. Researchers must ensure that participants and, when applicable, their guardians fully understand

the research's purpose, methods, potential risks, and benefits before agreeing to participate (Obiso, 2024; Water, 2024). This is in accordance with existing literature emphasising informed consent as a cornerstone of ethical research practices (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Vaughan, 2015).

Confidentiality and anonymity are also prioritised, as protecting participant identities is crucial in close-knit educational environments where individuals may be easily identifiable (Facca et al., 2020). The present findings support Flick (2018), who stresses the need for careful data handling to maintain anonymity, particularly when researchers are embedded within their educational settings (Cornish et al., 2023; Oji & Alordiah, 2024). Power dynamics present further ethical challenges. Brydon-Miller et al. (2003) noted that the inherent authority of researchers, especially when they are also teachers, can affect participants' willingness to express themselves freely, potentially leading to biased data collection. Ensuring genuinely voluntary participation is essential, as students may feel pressured to engage due to the hierarchical nature of educational settings (Etherington, 2007; Oranga & Gisore, 2023).

Despite efforts to mitigate power imbalances, evidence suggests that teacher-researchers retain structural au-

thority that may unintentionally influence participant responses. Briffett-Aktaş & Ying (2025) and Kayyali (2025) note that students often perform compliance rather than express authentic voice, even under voluntary participation frameworks. This challenges the assumption that ethical safeguards fully neutralize hierarchical pressures in educational settings.

The impact of research on learning processes and the potential for researcher bias were also significant concerns. This is why Zuber-Skerritt (2018) cautioned that researchers must balance rigorous data collection with

minimising disruptions to students' learning experiences. The dual role of researcher and practitioner can create conflicts of interest, influencing study outcomes (Somekh & Zeichner, 2009). Furthermore, ethical data handling and reporting are critical, ensuring accurate representation of findings without compromising participant welfare (Flick, 2018). These collective insights underline the commitment within the field to prioritise participant well-being and uphold ethical standards, reflecting a consensus on the importance of ethical integrity in educational research (Löfman & Pelkonen, 2004; Salazar, 2021).

3.3 Impact of Ethical Considerations on Findings

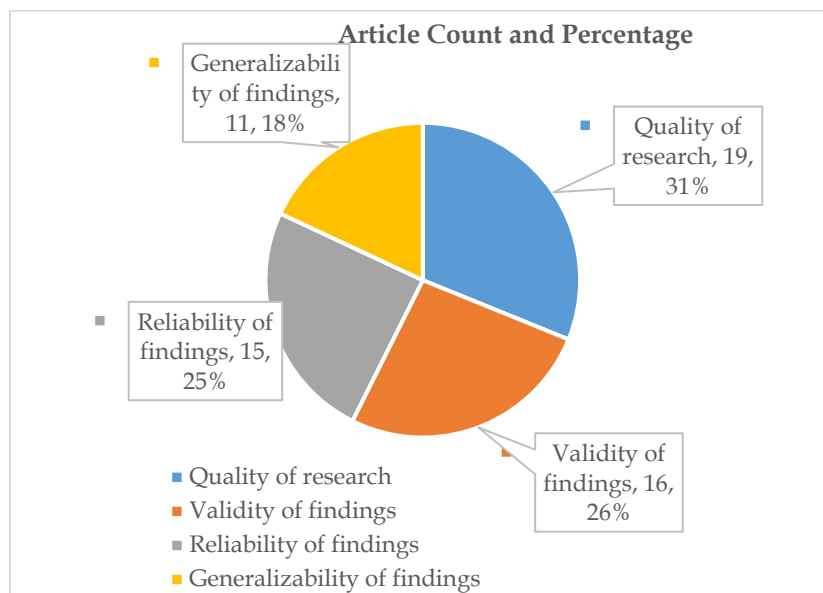


Figure 3: Percentage of Articles on the Impact of Ethical Considerations on Findings

Figure 3 is a pie chart showing the analysis of the impact of ethical considerations in educational action research. Foremost, the overall quality of research emerges as the most significant impact, addressed in 19 out of 61 articles (31%). This suggests researchers place a strong emphasis on ensuring ethical practices contribute to the rigour and integrity of their work. The validity of research findings is the second most prominent impact, appearing in 16 articles (26%), underscoring the importance of ethical considerations in enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of outcomes. Reliability of findings is also a key focus discussed in 15 articles (25%), as researchers recognise the need to uphold consistency and dependability through ethical practices. While these areas are prioritised, the generalisability of findings appears least affected, mentioned in 11 articles (18%). Overall, the data indicates educational action researchers are deeply

attuned to how ethics shape the quality, validity, and reliability of their research, though broader applicability may be somewhat constrained.

The analysis of the impact of ethical considerations in educational action research, demonstrated in Figure 3, reveals critical insights into how ethics influence research quality, validity, reliability, and generalisability of findings. The study found that adhering to ethical standards is foundational for maintaining research integrity. Studies neglecting informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation risk introducing biases that can invalidate the research process (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Oji & Alordiah, 2024). When participants feel coerced or misinformed, their responses may be skewed, leading to inaccurate conclusions. Conversely, ensuring ethical rigour enhances the trustworthiness of the data collected, allowing participants to express their true thoughts and experiences (Water, 2024; Cohen et al., 2002).

Empowering participants as co-researchers fosters deeper engagement, resulting in richer data and insights (Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Zeni, 2001). Ethical considerations significantly influence both internal and external validity. Internal validity, or the accuracy of results, can be compromised by power imbalances that lead participants to provide responses influenced by fear (Flick, 2018). Informed consent lapses may result in participant withdrawal, further undermining internal validity (Oranga & Gisore, 2023; Cohen et al., 2002). External validity is also affected; studies that overlook diverse participant needs yield results less applicable to other contexts (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018).

However, ethical compliance can also introduce trade-offs. Li (2025) and Thompson et al. (2024) caution that rigid consent and anonymity protocols may reduce the utility of findings for local improvement, thereby con-

straining external validity. In some cases, efforts to minimize risk may inadvertently suppress student agency or dilute the credibility of practice-change claims.

Furthermore, reliability pertains to the consistency of findings across different contexts, enhanced through ethical practices such as transparency in data collection (Flick, 2018). However, researcher bias remains a concern, particularly in action research where the researcher is embedded in the study environment (Somekh & Zeichner, 2009). Consistent application of ethical standards fosters authentic responses, enhancing replicability (Dikilitaş & Comoglu, 2022). Overall, educational action researchers are acutely aware of how ethical considerations shape research quality, validity, and reliability, although the generalisability of findings may be somewhat constrained (Löfman & Pelkonen, 2004; Salazar, 2021).

3.4 Best Practices for Ethical Challenges

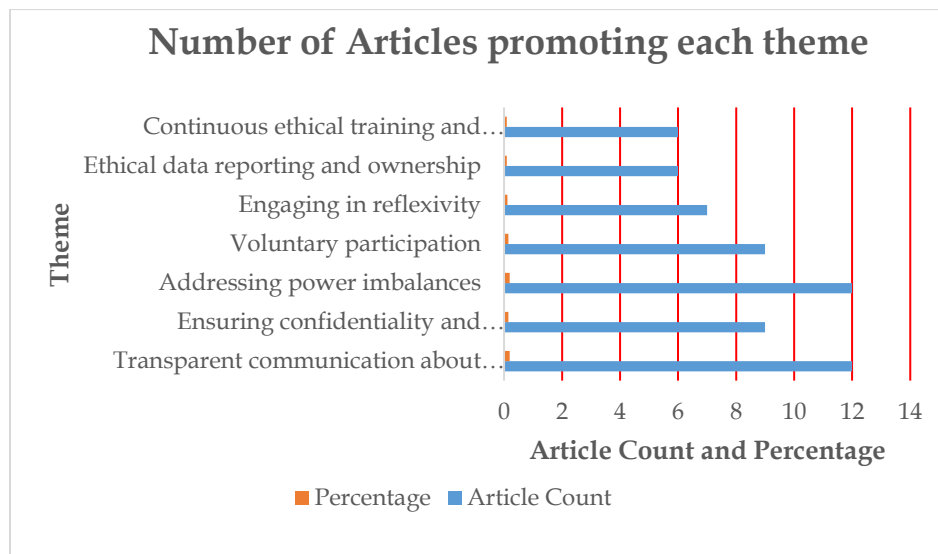


Figure 4: Percentage of Articles on Best Practices for Ethical Challenges

As presented in Figure 4, the graph illustrates the best practices for addressing ethical challenges in educational action research, as reflected in the analysed articles. The most prominent best practice is transparent communication about informed consent, which appears in 12 articles and accounts for 20% of the sample. Addressing power imbalances is another key focus, discussed in 12 articles (19.6%). This demonstrates that researchers recognise the importance of mitigating power dynamics to create more equitable research environments. Ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, as well as facilitating voluntary participation, are also widely emphasised, each appearing in 9 articles (14.3% and

14.5%, respectively). These practices demonstrate the researchers' commitment to protecting participant rights and fostering an ethical climate of trust. Other best practices include engaging in reflexivity (11.4%), ethical data reporting and ownership (10%), and continuous ethical training and awareness (10%). These approaches underscore the multifaceted nature of navigating ethical challenges in educational action research. In total, the data highlights the field's efforts to develop a comprehensive set of best practices to uphold ethical integrity throughout the research process.

The analysis of best practices for navigating ethical challenges in educational action research, illustrated in

Figure 4, found that transparent communication about informed consent is central. This ensures that participants fully understand the study's purpose, methodologies, potential risks, and benefits before agreeing to participate, especially when minors or vulnerable populations are involved (Obiso, 2024). This finding allies with prior research by Brydon-Miller et al. (2003) and Vaughan (2020), which point out informed consent as a foundational ethical principle. However, it contrasts with studies suggesting that consent processes are often overlooked, which highlights the need for ongoing dialogue about participants' understanding (Facca et al., 2020).

Another critical practice is ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. Researchers must implement strategies to anonymise data and protect participants' identities, such as using pseudonyms and removing identifying information from research outputs (Asogwa, 2024; Greenwood & Levin, 2007). This requirement is reinforced by Cornish et al. (2023), who emphasise the importance of clear communication regarding data use. Addressing power imbalances is also essential for creating inclusive environments where participants can express their perspectives without fear of repercussions (Flick, 2018). This approach aligns with the insights of Cohen et al. (2002) and Banegas & Villacañas (2015), who stress the importance of mitigating inequities in research settings.

Engaging in reflexivity allows researchers to critically reflect on their personal biases throughout the research process, supported by McNiff (2016) and Eikeland (2006). Continuous ethical training and awareness are vital for maintaining ethical integrity, as highlighted by Zuber-Skerritt (2018), who advocates for institutional support in addressing ethical dilemmas.

Best practices must also account for contextual tensions. Borrelli and Basok (2025) and Briffett-Aktaş and Ying (2025) emphasise that ethical integrity in action research requires adaptive strategies rather than rigid adherence to procedural norms. This includes negotiated visibility, flexible consent processes, and reflexive power audits tailored to the realities of school-based inquiry.

Through the implementation of these best practices, educational researchers can significantly enhance ethical integrity in their studies, thereby improving the quality and credibility of their research outcomes. Such careful attention to ethical considerations ultimately benefits both researchers and participants, fostering a more trustworthy research environment.

4.0 Limitations

The study offers a comprehensive overview of ethical considerations in educational action research, but it has

limitations. The literature search was limited to articles published up until October 2024, potentially overlooking more recent studies. The focus on English-language publications may exclude valuable insights from research in other languages, limiting the generalisability of findings. The study may not have captured all relevant publications, particularly those in less prominent journals or not indexed in databases. Additionally, alternative frameworks or considerations may not have been adequately addressed, and the study did not analyze the representation of various student groups. These limitations highlight the need for ongoing research in this area.

5.0 Conclusions

Despite the increasing popularity of action research, a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the ethical implications of EAR exists among many educators and researchers. This poses significant risks to participants and the integrity of the research process. This systematic review examined the ethical considerations in educational action research (EAR) and identified five key ethical principles: informed consent, confidentiality, power dynamics, risk-benefit assessment, and Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. The common ethical challenges in educational settings include difficulties with informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, navigating power imbalances, ensuring voluntary participation, managing researcher bias, and handling dual roles and conflicts of interest. These ethical considerations significantly influence the quality, validity, reliability, and generalisability of research findings, with adherence to ethical standards enhancing the trustworthiness and applicability of results. Compared to previous studies, this review affirms existing concerns while highlighting gaps in addressing power imbalances and ongoing consent. Furthermore, the best practices to navigate against the ethical issues in educational settings are transparent communication, addressing power imbalances, reflexivity, and ethical data reporting. In addition, there is a need for clear ethical guidelines, training for researchers, and supportive policies within educational institutions. Hence, addressing these ethical challenges is critical to ensuring that EAR contributes to more responsible, inclusive, and impactful research, leading to meaningful educational transformation.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Researchers are encouraged to engage in continuous professional development focused on ethical practices to enhance their understanding

and application of ethical principles in their work.

2. Educational institutions should develop tailored ethical guidelines for action research to ensure researchers uphold ethical standards and protect participant rights.
3. University Ethics Committees need to provide training on ethical considerations specific to action research to better equip researchers in navigating ethical dilemmas.
4. Policymakers should establish clear frameworks for ethical review processes that include action research, promoting accountability and transparency in educational settings.
5. Educational researcher networks should facilitate discussions and share resources on ethical

challenges faced in action research, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange among educators.

6. Future researchers are advised to include diverse populations in their studies to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of ethical issues across different contexts.
7. Funding bodies should prioritise research proposals that incorporate ethical frameworks and demonstrate a commitment to participant welfare, encouraging responsible research practices.
8. Academic journal publishers must require authors to address ethical considerations explicitly in their submissions to promote transparency and integrity in published research.

References

- Abdulai, S. F., Zayed, T., Wuni, I. Y., Antwi-Afari, M. F., & Yussif, A. M. (2025). Cross-industry review of autonomous alignment technologies: Adaptation potential for modular construction. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 145101.
- Akhurst, J. E., & Leach, M. M. (2023). Confidentiality, informed consent, and multiple relationships in four emerging regions. *Ethics & Behaviour*, 33(3), 175-182.
- Asogwa, V. C. (2024). Blended Collaborative and Cooperative Research Supervision Model for Higher Education. *Journal of Educational Research on Children, Parents & Teachers*, 5(2), 219-232, <https://ercptjournal.org/>
- Asogwa, V. C. (2024). Global Best Practices in Education: A Conceptual Definition and Criticisms. *Journal of Research Initiatives*. 8(3), 1-25 <https://digitalcommons.uncfsu.edu/jri/vol8/iss3/9>
- Banda, J. H. (2025). A comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness and influence of participatory models in advancing sustainable community development: a rigorous assessment of theoretical foundations and real-world applications. *Social Science and Management*, 10.
- Banegas, D. L., & Villacañas de Castro, L. S. (2015). A look at ethical issues in action research in education. *Argentinian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 3(1), 58-67.
- Beadles, T. (2025). *The Development of a Place-Based Community Specific Inservice Teacher Education (PBCSITE) Model Using Cultural-Historical Activity Theory and Action Research* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Beauchamp, T. L. & Childress, J. F. (2013). Principles of biomedical ethics. 7th ed. New York: Oxford University Press; 2013.
- Becker, C., & Mongeon, B. (2025). Facilitating Compliance Through Capacity: Empowering Principal Investigators with a Comprehensive IRB Education Program. In *IRB, Human Research Protections, and Data Ethics for Researchers* (pp. 21-48). IGI Global Scientific Publishing.
- Bentham, J. (1789). An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation. Clarendon Press.
- Borrelli, E., & Basok, T. (2025). Ethical dilemmas of conducting research among precarious status migrants: Research Ethics Boards and beyond. *Studies in Social Justice*, 19(3), 453-472.
- Bourke, B. (2014). Positionality: Reflecting on the research process. *The qualitative report*, 19(33), 1-9.
- Briffett-Aktaş, C., & Ying, J. (2025). Student silence as voice: a reflection on boundaries and responsibilities of advocating for student participation in HE. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 1-11.
- Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2017). Ethics in qualitative psychological research. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research in psychology*, 2, 259-273.
- British Educational Research Association (2018) *Ethical guidelines for educational research*. Available online

at: www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018 (accessed 10 July 2019).

- Brown, C. (2022). II Ethical Guidelines in Educational Research. Ebook: Ethical Dilemmas in Education: Considering Challenges and Risks in Practice, 9.
- Brydon-Miller M., Greenwood D., Maguire P. (2003). Why action research? *Action Research*, 1(1), 9–28. doi:10.1177/14767503030011002
- Brydon-Miller, M., Greenwood, D., & Maguire, P. (2003). Why action research? *Action research*, 1(1), 9-28.
- Brydon-Miller, M., Greenwood, D., & Maguire, P. (2003). Why action research? *Action research*, 1(1), 9-28.
- Chenneville, T., & Schwartz-Mette, R. (2020). Ethical considerations for psychologists in the time of COVID-19. *American Psychologist*, 75(5), 644.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2002). *Research methods in education*. Routledge.
- Cornish, F., Breton, N., Moreno-Tabarez, U., Delgado, J., Rua, M., de-Graft Aikins, A., & Hodgetts, D. (2023). Participatory action research. *Nature Reviews Methods Primers*, 3(1), 34.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). Steps in conducting a scholarly mixed methods study. DBER Speaker Series.
- Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (2020). CASP qualitative checklist, <https://casp-uk.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/CASP-Qualitative-Checklist-2018.pdf> (accessed 14 February 2020).
- Dikilitaş, K., & Comoglu, I. (2022). Pre-service English teachers' reflective engagement with stories of exploratory action research. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 45(1), 26-42.
- Eikeland, O. (2006). Condescending ethics and action research: Extended review article. *Action Research*, 4(1), 37-47.
- Etherington, K. (2007). Ethical research in reflexive relationships. *Qualitative inquiry*, 13(5), 599-616.
- Facca, D., Smith, M. J., Shelley, J., Lizotte, D., & Donelle, L. (2020). Exploring the ethical issues in research using digital data collection strategies with minors: A scoping review. *Plos one*, 15(8), e0237875.
- Felzmann, H., Villaronga, E. F., Lutz, C., & Tamò-Larrieux, A. (2019). Transparency you can trust: Transparency requirements for artificial intelligence between legal norms and contextual concerns. *Big Data & Society*, 6(1), 2053951719860542.
- Ferns, S. J., Rowe, A. D., & Zegwaard, K. E. (2022). Advances in research, theory and practice in work-integrated learning. *Enhancing Employability for a Sustainable Future*. London. URL: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003021049>.
- Ferrara, L. (2024). Ethical Principles. In *Ethical Reasoning in Forensic Science* (pp. 5-13). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Flick, U. (2018). Doing qualitative data collection—charting the routes. *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data collection*, 1-16.
- Greenwood, D., & Levin, M. (2007). The friendly outsider: from AR as a research strategy to the skills needed to become an action researcher. *Introduction to action research*, Thousand Oaks, SAGE publications Ltd, 116-131.
- Groundwater-Smith, S. (2019). Inquiry-Based Learning and its Enhancement of the Practice of Teaching. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*.
- Herayanti, L., Fuaddunnazmi, F., & Safitri, B. R. A. (2025). Ethnoscience-Based Learning Supported by Learning Management Systems (LMS) to Enhance Students' Digital Literacy and Collaborative Skills. *Jurnal Pendidikan Fisika dan Teknologi*, 11(1a), 117-130.
- Hong, J., & Cross Francis, D. (2020). Unpacking complex phenomena through qualitative inquiry: The case of teacher identity research. *Educational psychologist*, 55(4), 208-219. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/dberspeakers/48>.
- Hunt, M. R., Gogognon, P., & Ridde, V. (2014). Ethical considerations related to participation and partnership: an investigation of stakeholders' perceptions of an action-research project on user fee removal for the poorest in Burkina Faso. *BMC Medical Ethics*, 15, 1-12.
- Iphofen, R., & Tolich, M. (2018). Foundational issues in qualitative research ethics. *The Sage handbook of qualitative*

research ethics, 1-18.

- Irwin, V., Zhang, J., Wang, X., Hein, S., Wang, K., Roberts, A., York, C., Barmer, A., Bullock Mann, F., Dilig, R., and Parker, S. (2021). Report on the Condition of Education 2021 (NCES 2021-144). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: *National Center for Education Statistics*.
- Kayyali, M. (2025). Ethical Considerations in Higher Education: Accountability Navigating Complexities. In *Accountability in Higher Education: Navigating Current Issues and Trends* (pp. 145-184). IGI Global Scientific Publishing.
- Kemmis, S. (2021). Improving education through action research. In *Action research for change and development* (pp. 57-75). Routledge.
- Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (2000). Participatory action research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 567-605). Sage Publications.
- Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R., Nixon, R., Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R., & Nixon, R. (2014). Introducing critical participatory action research. *The action research planner: Doing critical participatory action research*, 1-31.
- Kitchenham, B., Madeyski, L., & Budgen, D. (2022). SEGRESS: Software engineering guidelines for reporting secondary studies. *IEEE Transactions on Software Engineering*, 49(3), 1273-1298.
- Lenette, C. (2022). Participatory action research: Ethics and decolonization. Oxford University Press.
- Li, Y. (2025). Ethical Considerations in Practice-Led Research for Professional Development. In *Exploring Practice-Led Research for Professional Development* (pp. 247-274). IGI Global Scientific Publishing.
- Lim, W. M. (2024). What is qualitative research? An overview and guidelines. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 14413582241264619.
- Löfman, P., Pelkonen, M., & Pietilä, A. M. (2004). Ethical issues in participatory action research. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences*, 18(3), 333-340.
- Long, H. A., French, D. P., & Brooks, J. M. (2020). Optimising the value of the critical appraisal skills programme (CASP) tool for quality appraisal in qualitative evidence synthesis. *Research Methods in Medicine & Health Sciences*, 1(1), 31-42.
- Mathews, B. (2022). Adolescent capacity to consent to participate in research: a review and analysis informed by law, human rights, ethics, and developmental science. *Laws*, 12(1), 2.
- McNiff, J. (2016). *Action Research: All You Need to Know*. Sage.
- McNiff, J., & Whitehead, J. (2011). *All you need to know about action research*. Sage publications.
- Mill, J. S. (1861). 1969. Utilitarianism. *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, 10, 203-259.
- Mirzaei, M., Hoseini Shavoun, A., & Ahmari Tehran, H. (2025). Enhancing Student Motivation in Higher Education: Evidence-Based Strategies for Effective Teaching. *Medical Education Bulletin*, 6(1), 1005-1014.
- Moher, D., Shamseer, L., Clarke, M., Gherzi, D., Liberati, A., Petticrew, M., & Prisma-P Group. (2015). Preferred reporting items for systematic review and meta-analysis protocols (PRISMA-P) 2015 statement. *Systematic reviews*, 4, 1-9.
- Niko, N. (2025). Surviving the edges: Multidimensional poverty among indigenous women community in remote rural areas in Indonesia. *Southeastern Philippines Journal of Research and Development*, 30(1), 113-130.
- Obiso, C. M. (2024). Students' Regard on the Use of ChatGPT in their Writing Competence. *FOSTER: Journal of English Language Teaching*, 5(2), 102-119.
- Oji, J., & Alordiah, C. O. (2024). Addressing ethical challenges in educational research: Data privacy, informed consent, and AI bias in cybersecurity studies. *Journal of Computing, Science & Technology*, 2(1), 13-20.
- Omodan, B. I. (2025). The roles of epistemology and decoloniality in addressing power dynamics in university education. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 23(5), 1226-1240.
- Oranga, J., & Gisore, B. (2023). Action research in education. *Open Access Library Journal*, 10(7), 1-10.

- Paudel, P. (2024). Examining Paradigmatic Shifts: Unveiling the Philosophical Foundations Shaping Social Research Methodologies. *Journal of the University of Ruhuna*, 12(1), 45-58.
- Reid, A. M., Brown, J. M., Smith, J. M., Cope, A. C., & Jamieson, S. (2018). Ethical dilemmas and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Perspectives on medical education*, 7, 69-75.
- Resnik, D. B. (2018). What is misconduct in science? *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*, 8(2), 147-156.
- Rizakhojayeva, G. A. (2020). Educational Action Research as a Powerful Vehicle for Transformation. *Bulletin of the Karaganda University Pedagogy series*, 98(2), 71-79.
- Salazar, C. (2021). We are friends. Navigating relationships with undocumented college students as co-researchers in participatory action research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 34(8), 715-732.
- Salerno, J., Coleman, K. J., Jones, F., & Peters, E. S. (2021). The ethical challenges and opportunities of implementing engagement strategies in health research. *Annals of Epidemiology*, 59, 37-43.
- Salerno, J., Coleman, K. J., Jones, F., & Peters, E. S. (2021). The ethical challenges and opportunities of implementing engagement strategies in health research. *Annals of Epidemiology*, 59, 37-43.
- Schwind, V., Zelalem Tadesse, N., Silva da Cunha, E., Hamidi, Y., Sanjar Sultani, S., & Sehart, J. (2025). A Scoping Review of Informed Consent Practices in Human–Computer Interaction Research. *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction*, 32(4), 1-60.
- Shih, M., & Sanchez, D. T. (2005). Perspectives and research on the positive and negative implications of having multiple racial identities. *Psychological bulletin*, 131(4), 569.
- Somekh, B., & Zeichner, K. (2009). Action research for educational reform: Remodelling action research theories and practices in local contexts. *Educational Action Research*, 17(1), 5-21.
- Thompson, L. M., Ferguson, A., Raheel, H., Lovvorn, A. E., Hengstermann-Artiga, M., Lopez, M. R., ... & Handley, M. A. (2024). PRECIS-2 used as an implementation science tool for global environmental health: A cross-sectional evaluation of the Ecolectivos study protocol to reduce burning of household plastic waste in rural Guatemala. *PLoS one*, 19(12), e0316161.
- Vaughan, S. (2020). Exploring teachers' experiences of action research. *London Review of Education*, 18(3), 408-422.
- Vilá, O., A. Bray, L., B. Cutts, B., Crites, M., Goins, H., McMenamin, N., ... & McLean, S. (2023). Recognition and ethical research practices: The role of community specialists. *International Journal of Mass Emergencies & Disasters*, 41(1), 9-25.
- Water, T. (2024). Ethical issues in participatory research with children and young people. In *Being Participatory: Researching with Children and Young People: Co-constructing Knowledge Using Creative, Digital and Innovative Techniques* (pp. 39-64). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Zeni, J. (2001). The IRB, the HSR--and the Ethics of Insider Research. *Networks: an online journal for teacher research*, 4(1), 147-147.
- Zhou, M., Qin, J., Mei, G., & Tipper, J. C. (2023). Simple and robust boolean operations for triangulated surfaces. *Mathematics*, 11(12), 2713.
- Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2018). An educational framework for participatory action learning and action research (PALAR). *Educational Action Research*, 26(4), 513-532.

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.31>

SIYADLALA KU TIKTOK: HUMOUR AS A MASK FOR GENDER-BASED BULLYING AND DIGITAL HARASSMENT ON THE PLATFORM

Mandla A Mubecua

Durban University of Technology

Business School

MandlaM4@dut.ac.za

&

Innocent Simphiwe Nojiyeza

Durban University of Technology

Business School

innocentny@dut.ac.za

Abstract

This paper explores how TikTok users employ the phrase Siyazidlalela (“it’s a joke”) to perpetuate gender-based bullying and digital harassment, also highlight how humour often conceals harmful behavior. Despite TikTok’s community guidelines and policies aimed at protecting users particularly women from gendered abuse, the playful framing of harassment has become widespread. The paper examines gender-based bullying within TikTok’s online culture, a platform that serves as both a space for creative expression and a site of gendered aggression. Using a desktop research approach, the paper reviews literature, reports, and digital media analyses to understand how TikTok’s algorithms, user interactions, and viral trends reinforce or challenge gender stereotypes. It investigates how harassment manifests through comments, duets, challenges, and trends, particularly targeting women, and gender-nonconforming individuals. The paper shows that while TikTok offers spaces for empowerment and gender expression, it simultaneously enables misogyny and toxic masculinity under the guise of humour captured in Siyazidlalela. Therefore, the paper recommends that the TikTok platform have to integrate culturally informed moderation strategies that recognise how humour such as the phrase “Siyadlala” can disguise harmful behaviour.

Keywords: *TikTok, Gender-Based Bullying, Digital Harassment, Online Culture*

Introduction

Over the past years, TikTok has emerged as a dominant global digital platform governed by a set of regulations and community guidelines intended to promote user safety and ethical engagement (Jia and Liang, 2021). The regulations and community guidelines are designed to protect users, particularly women and young girls from gender-based bullying, sexual harassment, and other forms of harmful online behaviour (Yang, 2024). The platform’s guidelines establish clear expectations for how content creators should conduct themselves, outline prohibited actions and support the moderation of content

that violates community standards (Gray, 2021). In principle, these regulations aim to foster an inclusive digital environment where users, regardless of gender, can participate freely without fear of intimidation, embarrassment and manipulation (Wang, 2020). Despite these efforts, TikTok continues to experience high levels of reported gender-based bullying and sexual harassment. Scholars such as Abdullahi and Othman (2020) argue that a persistent gap exists between the creation of digital policies and their effective implementation, a challenge that is particularly evident on rapidly expanding social media platforms. This implementation gap

raises questions about the effectiveness of TikTok's regulatory framework and the socio-cultural dynamics that enable harmful behaviours to persist.

To explore this complexity, the present study adopts the phrase "it's a joke," translated as "Siyadlala," which is frequently used on TikTok to present harmful behaviour as humorous or harmless. Framing harassment as playful, perpetrators minimise the seriousness of their actions and avoid accountability, while victims' experiences are dismissed. Therefore, this paper contributes to the body of knowledge by examining how the expression "Siyadlala ku TikTok" is used to understand the ways in which humour is mobilised to normalise gender-based bullying and sexual harassment on the platform. Understanding the role of humour as a rhetorical shield provides valuable insight into why gendered harassment on TikTok remains pervasive despite the existence of formal guidelines. Beyond this introduction, the article is structured into five key sections. The first section outlines the research methodology employed in the study. The second section conceptualises the phrase "Siyadlala ku TikTok" and explains its cultural and analytical relevance. The third section discusses TikTok's regulations and digital policy framework. The fourth section explores the forms and dynamics of gender-based bullying on the platform. The final section presents the conclusion and offers recommendations for strengthening digital safety and addressing gendered forms of online harassment.

Research methodology

This study adopted a desktop research design to examine how the expression "*Siyadlala ku TikTok*" is articulated, circulated, and interpreted on the TikTok platform. The use of secondary data was deemed appropriate as it enabled the analysis of existing digital content without direct participant involvement, while still capturing naturally occurring interactions, discourses, and cultural practices within online spaces. This

approach was particularly effective in illuminating how humour is strategically deployed to normalise, trivialise, and obscure practices of gender-based bullying and sexual harassment in digital environments. Data were drawn from a range of published academic articles, policy reports, and previous empirical studies, which were systematically reviewed to provide contextual depth. These sources were purposively selected based on their relevance to key themes, including humour, gender, power relations, and online harassment. The analysis focused on identifying recurring linguistic patterns, visual cues, and contextual meanings through which harmful behaviours are framed as playful, humorous, or inconsequential.

In addition, a comprehensive textual analysis of existing scholarly literature was conducted to situate the findings within broader academic debates on gender-based bullying, digital harassment, and social media cultures. This dual analytical approach enabled a critical interrogation of how platform-specific humour contributes to the perpetuation of gendered harm, while simultaneously linking individual expressions and practices to wider structural, cultural, and power dynamics within contemporary digital environments.

Conceptualising the Phrase "Siyadlala ku TikTok"

The expression "*Siyadlala ku TikTok*" originates from the isiZulu verb *siyadlala*, which translates to "we are playing," "we are just joking," or "nothing is personal." Lockyer and Savigny (2020), posits that the word "joke" comes from the Latin *iocus*, meaning "play" or "game". While the phrase appears harmless (Drakett, Rickett, Day and Milnes, 2018), its contemporary use within South Africa's digital culture reveals a more complex social meaning. According to Matamoros-Fernández, (2023:1), "humor and play are at the center of TikTok culture". Therefore, on TikTok, the expression has evolved into a discursive strategy employed to soften or normalise behaviour that would otherwise be recognised as inappropriate, harmful, or abusive (Reneses, Riberas-Gutiérrez and

Bueno-Guerra, 2025). It is commonly invoked to frame teasing, sexualised commentary, derogatory humour, and misogynistic remarks as mere entertainment (Smith, 2024). In this paper, we argue that “*Siyadlala ku TikTok*” functions as a cultural narrative that normalises digital misconduct by masking harmful behaviour beneath the guise of humour. The phrase creates a rhetorical shield that allows perpetrators to trivialise the impact of their actions while simultaneously delegitimising the discomfort or harm experienced by victims particularly women and girls, who often bear the brunt of gendered online hostility. Through this framing, digital harassment is reframed as playful interaction, making it difficult to challenge or hold accountable those who engage in bullying or gender-based violence online. Understanding “*Siyadlala ku TikTok*” is therefore crucial for unpacking how cultural idioms intersect with digital practices to excuse, perpetuate, and normalise gender-based bullying on social media platforms. Through interrogating this narrative, the paper highlights how seemingly harmless linguistic expressions can contribute to broader patterns of digital gender inequality and online violence.

When perpetrators invoke the phrase “*Siyadlala ku TikTok*,” they attempt to delegitimise the psychological and emotional harm experienced by victims of gender-based bullying and online harassment. Framing TikTok as a space of play, creativity, and light-hearted engagement, the expression implicitly suggests that any feelings of embarrassment, humiliation, or violation should be dismissed as incompatible with the platform’s “fun” atmosphere. In doing so, it reinforces the idea that harmful behaviour is merely entertainment and should not be interpreted as abusive. This rhetorical strategy places undue responsibility on victims by portraying them as overly sensitive, humourless, or unable to “take a joke.” As a result, genuine experiences of harm are trivialised, and victims are pressured to normalise or tolerate behaviour that constitutes digital misconduct (Bemiller and Schneider,

2010). Ultimately, the phrase enables perpetrators to shift accountability away from themselves and redirect blame onto those who object to the harassment. In this way, “*Siyadlala ku TikTok*” becomes a mechanism through which gender-based violence is minimised, justified, and allowed to persist within online social interactions.

The continued use of the phrase “*Siyadlala ku TikTok*” reflects broader gendered power dynamics that shape interactions on digital platforms. Within this context, perpetrators frequently mobilise humour as a strategic justification mechanism to defend behaviours such as sexualised insults, slut-shaming, body-shaming, and other forms of online harassment that disproportionately target women and girls. Through the framing acts of gender-based digital harassment as harmless entertainment, offenders deliberately obscure the seriousness of their actions, creating an ambiguous space where harmful conduct is rendered socially permissible. Positioning sexual harassment as a form of comedy allows perpetrators to construct a “grey zone” in which power can be exercised without accountability. In this zone, the boundaries between humour and abuse are intentionally blurred, enabling individuals to impose harm while simultaneously shielding themselves from critique. This dynamic reinforces patriarchal norms by granting offenders the discursive tools to downplay violence and invalidate the experiences of victims. Thus, “*Siyadlala ku TikTok*” operates as a cultural shield that protects and normalises offensive behaviour. Through embedding harassment within a socially accepted discourse of playfulness, the phrase functions not merely as linguistic expression but as a mechanism that legitimises digital misogyny. It ensures that harmful conduct can be dismissed as “just joking,” thereby sustaining a digital environment where gender-based bullying is trivialised and allowed to persist without meaningful challenge.

Moreover, TikTok’s algorithmic culture driven by trends, humour, virality, and rapid content

consumption further contributes to the minimisation of online harassment (Matamoros-Fernández, Rodriguez and Wikström, 2022). Content framed as “just jokes” often circulates widely and attracts significant engagement, thereby offering perpetrators both social and digital validation. When sexualised insults, misogynistic humour, or degrading comments achieve high visibility, they are not only normalised but incentivised within the platform’s engagement-based reward system. In this context, the expression “*Siyadlala ku TikTok*” evolves beyond a casual linguistic phrase. It becomes embedded within the algorithmic logic of the platform, where content perceived as humorous regardless of its harm benefits from increased exposure (Castellví-Lloveras, 2023). As a result, behaviours that constitute online gender-based violence are repeatedly reinforced, reproduced, and even celebrated through likes, shares, and comments. Therefore, we argue that “*Siyadlala ku TikTok*” has transformed into a powerful social norm in South Africa’s digital environment. It functions as a cultural and algorithmic mechanism through which sexual harassment is not only minimised but effectively rewarded and protected. In this way, the phrase contributes to a digital ecosystem where gender-based bullying becomes an entrenched, self-perpetuating pattern of interaction rather than an exception.

The conceptualisation of “*Siyadlala ku TikTok*” illustrates how the expression operates at the intersection of humour, gender norms, and digital violence. Although it may appear harmless on the surface, its use carries significant long-term consequences for victims. Experiences framed as “just joking” can result in deep psychological trauma, emotional distress, and in extreme cases contribute to self-harm or suicide (Sinambela, Sembiring, Manik and Pangaribuan, 2024). Through masking abuse under the guise of playfulness, the expression suppresses victims’ ability to name and confront their experiences as harassment, thereby silencing those who are already marginalised within digital spaces (Dyck, 2023).

Furthermore, framing online sexual harassment as entertainment trivialises the seriousness of the harm inflicted and creates social conditions that discourage victims from seeking support or accountability (Powell, Scott and Henry, 2020). In this sense, the phrase does more than normalise inappropriate behaviour; it actively delegitimises the emotional and psychological impacts of digital gender-based violence. Simultaneously, “*Siyadlala ku TikTok*” reinforces patriarchal norms by enabling practices that disproportionately target women and girls (Rodríguez Darias and Aguilera Ávila, 2018). Through humour-coded misogyny, the phrase sustains gendered power imbalances and validates forms of interaction that systematically degrade, objectify, and marginalise female users. Thus, the expression becomes a powerful cultural tool that both conceals and perpetuates online violence within gendered digital environments (Battisti and Dalvit, 2025).

In summary, this paper argues that within the context of gender-based victimisation and online harassment on TikTok, the phrase “*Siyadlala ku TikTok*” functions as a cultural mechanism that normalises sexual harassment while simultaneously shielding perpetrators from accountability. By framing harmful behaviour as playful or humorous, the expression creates a discursive environment in which misogynistic insults, sexualised comments, and other forms of digital abuse are rendered socially acceptable. Recognising the role of “*Siyadlala ku TikTok*” is therefore essential for understanding how humour is weaponised on digital platforms to obscure gendered power dynamics. Through this framing, harassment is allowed to flourish under the narrative of entertainment and play. As a result, victims are silenced, perpetrators are protected, and gendered digital violence becomes embedded within everyday online interactions. The following section aims to review TikTok regulation, digital policy and ethical engagement.

Regulation, Digital Policy of TikTok

TikTok's community guidelines explicitly outline measures designed to prevent online harassment, bullying, and other forms of abusive behaviour on the platform (Zeng and Kaye, 2022). Since 2019, the platform has reportedly removed an estimated 49 million videos for violating its rules, demonstrating the scale of harmful content and TikTok's ongoing attempts to regulate it (Rana, 2020). There are estimated to 25.5 percent of the deleted videos have adult nudity and sexual acts. The 24.8 percent were child-protection policies, like as associating a child in a crime and those that have harmful behaviour (Zeng and Kaye, 2022).

The platform states unequivocally that it does "not allow language or behaviour that harasses, humiliates, or threatens anyone," signalling a formal commitment to user safety and the protection of vulnerable groups (Obasi, Ukoha and Onoyima, 2025). As part of its regulatory framework, TikTok prohibits content that "attacks or incites violence" against individuals on the basis of protected characteristics such as gender, race, or sexuality (Llanos, 2021). The guidelines further ban "violent threats, sexual harassment, and disparaging statements regarding appearance, intellect, personality traits," thereby establishing a policy environment intended to curb explicit forms of abuse and gender-based slurs (Kominers, and Shapiro, 2025).

Although these guidelines are robust on paper, their effectiveness in practice remains contested. The persistence of gender-based bullying, digital harassment, and harmful (Monsees, 2025) cultural expressions such as those framed through humour or "play" raises questions about the enforcement and adequacy of these policies. In this context, understanding TikTok's community guidelines is essential, not only for recognising the platform's regulatory intentions but also for assessing the gaps between policy and user experience (Faith, 2022). This critical engagement allows scholars to interrogate how online spaces continue to accommodate subtle,

normalised, or disguised forms of gendered violence despite formal mechanisms that claim to discourage such behaviour (Roiha, 2024).

Furthermore, TikTok promotes a range of safety tools intended to enhance user control over their online experiences (Lewis, Rowe and Wiper, 2017). These tools allow content creators to set their accounts to private, approve or deny follower requests, restrict who may comment on their posts, and determine who is permitted to duet or stitch their content (KhosraviNik and Esposito, 2018). The platform also advises victims of harassment to document abusive behaviour such as by taking screenshots and to report these incidents to moderators for further review (Condis, 2018). However, despite the availability of these mechanisms, TikTok's harassment policies remain broad and largely generalised. Notably, they lack a specific gender-sensitive lens capable of addressing the distinct forms of harm disproportionately experienced by women and gender-diverse individuals on digital platforms (Jiwani, 2011). This absence of a gender-specific framework limits the platform's ability to respond adequately to gender-based bullying, sexualised harassment, and other nuanced forms of digital violence that are often embedded within cultural expressions, humour, or everyday interactions online (Davies, 2023).

Drawing on insights from the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), it becomes evident that prevailing trust and safety standards adopted by major social media platforms often fail to fully address the distinct and deeply gendered experiences of cyber-violence faced by women (EIGE, 2024). These frameworks tend to adopt a universal approach that overlooks the structural and cultural dimensions of gendered harm online (Obasi, Ukoha and Onoyima, 2025). In light of this, the present study argues that, despite TikTok's stated commitment to preventing gender-based violence, its policy framework remains overly general and insufficient for responding to the specific forms of digital abuse disproportionately affecting women

(Kominers, and Shapiro, 2025). This gap is further compounded by the ways in which content creators strategically mobilise pseudo-scientific narratives, emotional manipulation, and gendered stereotypes to portray women as controlling, irrational, or morally suspect. Such discourses not only reinforce harmful gender norms but also contribute to the spread of rape myths and victim-blaming attitudes within digital spaces. Consequently, TikTok's generalised guidelines, while important, do not adequately confront the subtle, culturally embedded, and often normalised forms of gendered violence that continue to flourish on the platform (Zeng and Kaye, 2022).

Digital Governance and Platform Accountability

In response to the pervasive challenges of online bullying and harassment, various governments and multilateral organisations have introduced regulations and standards aimed at increasing accountability among social media platforms (Milosevic, 2016). For example, the European Union implemented the Digital Services Act (DSA), which imposes stringent transparency and reporting obligations on platforms such as TikTok (Bora, 2024). Under these regulations, content creators and users are provided with explicit mechanisms, including a "Report Illegal Content" option, which categorises violations such as harassment, hate speech, or other forms of harmful behaviour (Agabo, 2024). The DSA also mandates that platforms publicly disclose details regarding their content moderation and fairness decisions, thereby promoting transparency and enabling greater scrutiny of how online abuse is managed (Europeans commission, 2025). These measures reflect an emerging international consensus on the need for social media platforms to take active responsibility in preventing digital harm and ensuring that regulatory frameworks align with the protection of users, particularly those vulnerable to gender-based violence and online harassment (Haslem, 2022).

Despite these regulatory frameworks, TikTok

and other social media platforms often struggle to comply with the Digital Services Act (DSA) in practice (Iliopoulou-Penot, 2025). Nevertheless, policymakers in multiple countries are advancing similar reforms to address online abuse and gendered violence. For example, the United Kingdom's Online Safety Act 2023 classifies various forms of online abuse, including harassment, as "priority offenses" that platforms such as TikTok are legally required to prevent and mitigate (Eltaher, Gajula, Miralles-Pechuán, Crotty, Martínez-Otero, Thorpe and McKeever, 2025). In the Asia-Pacific region, governments have also developed policies aimed at tackling gendered online violence. In Australia, for instance, legislation mandates that dating apps implement codes of conduct to prevent sexual abuse and protect users from exploitative interactions. Similarly, in 2024, Canada proposed the Online Harm Act, which would compel social media companies to take proactive measures in regulating violent and harmful content. These initiatives collectively reflect a global trend toward stricter accountability for digital platforms, emphasizing the need to protect vulnerable users from harassment, gender-based violence, and other forms of online harm (Mircea, 2024).

Gender-Based Bullying on TikTok: Forms and Dynamics of Harassment

Gender-based bullying on TikTok manifests in various harmful forms that reflect the broader issues of online misogyny and sexism. Recent surveys have revealed that TikTok has become one of the most prominent platforms where such harassment occurs (EIGE, 2024). According to a 2025 study by Amnesty International UK, a significant number of Gen-Z women on TikTok are exposed to misogynistic and demeaning content on a daily basis. The study reports that approximately 43% of young women have experienced body-shaming, while around 40% have received unsolicited or sexually explicit comments online. These findings highlight how social media platforms especially TikTok serve as spaces that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and reinforce negative stereotypes about

women.

The study further identifies TikTok as “the worst offender” among major social media applications in terms of the frequency and intensity of gender-based harassment. Many female content creators report facing daily harassment, ranging from degrading remarks about their physical appearance to more severe forms of online abuse, such as cyberstalking and coordinated trolling (Jane, 2020). Such experiences often discourage women from expressing themselves freely or sharing creative content, thereby limiting their digital participation (Ahmed, 2024). Overall, gender-based bullying on TikTok not only affects individual users’ mental health and self-esteem but also reflects deeper societal inequalities reproduced in the digital sphere (Tighe, 2023). Addressing this issue requires stronger content moderation policies, digital literacy, and collective efforts to create safer online environments for all users.

According to Yin and Abdullah (2024), females on TikTok “mostly face stigmatization through the internet lexicon and the commodification of physical appearance,” revealing deep-seated gender inequalities and the ongoing objectification of women in digital spaces. This observation reflects how the online environment, particularly TikTok, reinforces harmful gender norms through everyday interactions and visual culture (Ella, Smadar and Shirley, 2023). In practice, the comment sections on TikTok have increasingly become breeding grounds for verbal abuse, sexist remarks, and subtle microaggressions directed at women and girls. Such comments often ridicule, undermine, or sexualize female users based on their physical appearance, perpetuating unrealistic beauty standards and deepening gender-based marginalization (Quiles-Fernández, Borrasca and Bozu, 2023).

Moreover, these comment sections frequently feature peer-on-peer body criticism, where users especially young women shame or compete with one another instead of offering support. For instance, when a TikTok video features a slim girl

with an attractive body, some teenage girls may post comments such as “I wouldn’t want to have that body,” implying jealousy, rivalry, or internalized aggression. These interactions demonstrate how digital spaces can mirror and magnify offline gender dynamics, where women are pitted against each other in a cycle of comparison and criticism.

Compared to their male counterparts, females are subjected to more frequent and targeted insults regarding their body structure, weight, and appearance. Male users, by contrast, are less likely to face body-related scrutiny or sexualized comments. The harassment often goes beyond surface-level insults; perpetrators—both male and female commonly dismiss the victims’ emotional responses, labeling them as “too sensitive” or “unable to take a joke.” Such reactions invalidate women’s experiences and normalize misogynistic behaviour under the guise of humor or freedom of expression.

Importantly, body shaming on TikTok is not solely a male-to-female phenomenon. Many young women also participate in perpetuating these harmful behaviors by internalizing societal beauty ideals and projecting them onto others (Iulia Solea, 2025). This suggests that gender-based bullying on TikTok is sustained not only by overt sexism but also by cultural conditioning and social competition among women themselves. Addressing these patterns requires a multifaceted response that includes stricter platform regulations, digital education, and campaigns promoting self-acceptance and empathy among users.

The comment sections on TikTok are often characterized by slut-shaming and the use of sexualized insults, both of which represent deeply entrenched forms of gender-based violence in online spaces (Cao, 2023). Slut-shaming refers to the act of defaming or degrading women for their physical appearance or perceived sexual behaviour, regardless of whether such behaviour actually exists (Neupane and Sharma, 2025). This form of online harassment

polices women's bodies and choices, reinforcing patriarchal norms that dictate how women should look, behave, and express themselves (Kiriş, 2024). As a result, TikTok has become a digital space where women's sexuality is constantly scrutinized and weaponized against them.

Research conducted across Europe has identified TikTok as a particularly problematic platform in this regard (Santoro, Rossi, Manari, Omar, Martos-Méndez, Mannarini and Musetti, 2025). Investigations reveal that women and girls are frequently subjected to derogatory sexual labels, often intended to humiliate them publicly or discredit their social presence (Mishra, 2025). For example, a recent Balkan investigation reported that TikTok "has increasingly been used for slut-shaming," warning that the trend "perpetuates the regulation of women and girls' sexuality and curtails their freedom of speech online." This suggests that the digital environment not only mirrors existing societal double standards about female sexuality but also amplifies them through the algorithmic visibility and virality of harmful content.

Furthermore, slut-shaming on TikTok often disguises itself as humour or casual commentary, which makes it harder to identify and challenge. Many users, particularly young men, use sexualized jokes or innuendos to criticize women who express confidence, dance freely, or wear revealing clothing. Female users who post such content are labelled with demeaning terms or accused of seeking attention, while similar content from male users rarely attracts comparable scrutiny. This unequal treatment reveals a gendered bias in how online expression is judged and regulated by both users and broader social media cultures.

Ultimately, slut-shaming and sexualized insults on TikTok contribute to a toxic online environment that undermines women's agency and discourages self-expression. The normalization of such language not only harms victims psychologically but also sustain broader gender hierarchies in digital culture. Combating this requires a combination of stronger platform accountability, inclusive digital education, and campaigns that challenge sexist stereotypes and promote respect in online interactions.

Conclusion and recommendations

TikTok's community guidelines are designed to promote user safety and protect creators especially women and young girls from gender-based bullying and sexual harassment. Although these regulations outline expected conduct and prohibit harmful behaviour, the platform continues to record high levels of abuse, revealing an ongoing gap between policy and implementation. To unpack this challenge, the study adopts the phrase "it's a joke," translated as *Siyadlala*, to demonstrate how humour is used to normalise and mask harassment on TikTok. This framing enables perpetrators to present harmful actions as playful, reducing accountability and diminishing victims' experiences. The phrase "*Siyadlala ku TikTok*" therefore exposes deeper gendered power dynamics and highlights how cultural expressions of humour reinforce persistent online harassment. Overall, the paper shows that meaningful protection on TikTok requires not only strong policies but also mechanisms that address the subtle ways gender-based bullying is reproduced. Therefore, the study recommends that the TikTok platform must integrate culturally informed moderation strategies that recognise how humour such as the phrase "*Siyadlala*" can disguise harmful behaviour.

References

- Abdullahi, M., & Othman, N. (2020). Bridging the gap between policy intent and implementation. *Journal of Science, Technology and Innovation Policy*, 6(1), 24-33.
- Ahmed, R. (2024). *Cyber Harassment in the Digital Age: Trends, Challenges, and Countermeasures*.

- Ali, R. (2025). *Silenced online: Women's experiences of digital harassment in Pakistan*. Women's Studies International Forum, 110, 103090. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2025.103090>
- Amnesty International UK. (2025, March 21). Toxic tech: New polling exposes widespread online misogyny driving Gen Z away from social media. <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/toxic-tech-new-polling-exposes-widespread-online-misogyny-driving-gen-z-away-social>
- Argüello-Gutiérrez, C., Cubero, A., Fumero, F., Montealegre, D., Sandoval, P., & Smith-Castro, V. (2023). I'm just joking! Perceptions of sexist humour and sexist beliefs in a Latin American context. *International Journal of Psychology*, 58(2), 91-102.
- Battisti, F., & Dalvit, L. (2025). Humor That Hurts: An Exploration of Jokes About Black Women with Disabilities on TikTok in South Africa. *Journalism and Media*, 6(4), 174.
- Bemiller, M. L., & Schneider, R. Z. (2010). It's not just a joke. *Sociological Spectrum*, 30(4), 459-479.
- Bora, A. (2024). Digital Media Dynamics: Ethical Challenges and Accountability in the Information Age. *Issue 4 Int'l JL Mgmt. & Human.*, 7, 1992.
- Clayton J., (2020). TikTok deleted 49 million 'rule-breaking' videos, BBC <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-53352664> accessed 08/12/2025
- Condis, M. (2018). *Gaming masculinity: Trolls, fake geeks, and the gendered battle for online culture*. University of Iowa Press.
- Davies, C. T. (2023). *Understanding Abuse in Young People's Intimate Relationships: Female Perspectives on Power, Control and Gendered Social Norms*. Policy Press.
- Drakett, J., Rickett, B., Day, K., & Milnes, K. (2018). Old jokes, new media—Online sexism and constructions of gender in Internet memes. *Feminism & psychology*, 28(1), 109-127.
- EIGE (2024), The power of digital platforms in standing up for the safety of women and girls online, https://eige.europa.eu/newsroom/director-corner/power-digital-platforms-standing-safety-women-and-girls-online?language_content_entity=en accessed 08/12/2025.
- Ella, B. A., Smadar, B. A., & Shirley, D. S. (2023). Social punishment by the distribution of aggressive TikTok videos against women in a traditional society. *Journal of information, communication and ethics in society*, 21(1), 129-142.
- Eltaher, F., Gajula, R. K., Miralles-Pechuán, L., Crotty, P., Martínez-Otero, J., Thorpe, C., & McKeever, S. (2025). Protecting Young Users on Social Media: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Content Moderation and Legal Safeguards on Video Sharing Platforms. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2505.11160*.
- Europeans commission (2025). The impact of the Digital Services Act on digital platforms, Europeans commission, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/dsa-impact-platforms> Accessed: 08/12/2025.
- Faith, B. (2022). Tackling online gender-based violence; understanding gender, development, and the power relations of digital spaces. *Gender, Technology and Development*, 26(3), 325-340.
- Ford, T. E., Woodzicka, J. A., Petit, W. E., Richardson, K., & Lappi, S. K. (2015). Sexist humor as a trigger of state self-objectification in women. *Humor*, 28(2), 253-269.
- Gray, J. E. (2021). The geopolitics of 'platforms': The TikTok challenge. *Internet policy review*, 10(2).
- Haslem, B. (2022). *TikTok as a digital activism space: Social justice under algorithmic control* (Master's thesis, Old Dominion University).

Hinduja, S., & Patchin, J. W. (2023, June 30). *Harassment in TikTok comments: A pilot test of the TikTok Research API*. Cyberbullying Research Center. Retrieved from <https://cyberbullying.org/Harassment-in-TikTok-Comments-Research-API-Report.pdf>

Howard, J. (2020, November 5). *How a single TikTok post spread the word about gender-based violence and COVID-19*. Canadian Women's Foundation. <https://canadianwomen.org/blog/tiktok-gender-based-violence-covid/>

Iliopoulou-Penot, A. (2025). Governing the 'Governors' of online speech: a review of the Digital Services Act's first steps in regulating social media platforms. *Yearbook of European Law*, year006.

Jane, E. A. (2020). Online abuse and harassment. *The international encyclopedia of gender, media, and communication*, 116.

Jia, L., & Liang, F. (2021). The globalization of TikTok: Strategies, governance and geopolitics. *Journal of Digital Media & Policy*, 12(2), 273-292.

Jiwani, Y. (2011). *Discourses of denial: Mediations of race, gender, and violence*. UBC Press.

KhosraviNik, M., & Esposito, E. (2018). Online hate, digital discourse and critique: Exploring digitally-mediated discursive practices of gender-based hostility. *Lodz papers in pragmatics*, 14(1), 45-68.

Khumalo, D. (2025, November 6). *TikTok push to tackle tech-facilitated gender-based violence*. The Sandton Chronicle (The Citizen). <https://www.citizen.co.za/sandton-chronicle/news-headlines/2025/11/06/tiktok-sparks-crucial-dialogue-on-online-safety-for-women/>

Kiriş, A. (2024). Mediated Gendered Invisibility: Exploring Educated Young Women's Experiences of Online Sexual Harassment and Coping Strategies in Turkey (Master's thesis, Middle East Technical University (Turkey)).

Kominers, S. D., & Shapiro, J. M. (2025). Robust Content Moderation: Theory and Applications.

Krook, M. L. (2022). Semiotic violence against women: Theorizing harms against female politicians. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 47(2), 371-397.

Lawless, T. J., O'dea, C. J., Miller, S. S., & Saucier, D. A. (2020). Is it really just a joke? Gender differences in perceptions of sexist humor. *Humor*, 33(2), 291-315.

Lewis, R., Rowe, M., & Wiper, C. (2017). Online abuse of feminists as an emerging form of violence against women and girls. *British journal of criminology*, 57(6), 1462-1481.

Llanos, J. (2021). Transparency reporting on terrorist and violent extremist content online: An update on the global top 50 content sharing services.

Lockyer, S., & Savigny, H. (2020). Rape jokes aren't funny: the mainstreaming of rape jokes in contemporary newspaper discourse. *Feminist Media Studies*, 20(3), 434-449.

Mallett, R. K., Ford, T. E., & Woodzicka, J. A. (2016). What did he mean by that? Humor decreases attributions of sexism and confrontation of sexist jokes. *Sex Roles*, 75(5), 272-284.

Matamoros-Fernández, A. (2023). Taking humor seriously on TikTok. *Social Media+ Society*, 9(1), 20563051231157609.

Milosevic, T. (2016). Social media companies' cyberbullying policies. *International Journal of Communication*, 10, 22.

- Mircea, L. (2024). The Legislations and Regulations of Social Media-A study of 2 countries–United States, Canada.
- Monsees, L. (2025). *Sticking around: hobbyhorsing, digital transgression, and gender-based violence in TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube commentary*. Feminist Media Studies. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2025.2540807>
- Monsees, L. (2025). Sticking around: hobbyhorsing, digital transgression, and gender-based violence in TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube commentary. *Feminist Media Studies*, 1-17.
- O'Connor, P., Parsons, L., Lane, B., & Noble, D. (2023, October 5). *Cyberbullying on TikTok: How to identify and prevent it*. O'Connor, Parsons, Lane & Noble. <https://lawnj.net/blog/cyberbullying-on-tiktok/>
- Obasi, J. C., Ukoha, E. O., & Onoyima, R. U. (2025). Discourse Analysis of the Role of Language on Cyberbullying in Selected TikTok Videos. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 1-24.
- Pérez, R., & Greene, V. S. (2016). Debating rape jokes vs. rape culture: Framing and counter-framing misogynistic comedy. *Social Semiotics*, 26(3), 265-282.
- Powell, A., Scott, A. J., & Henry, N. (2020). *Digital harassment and abuse: Experiences of sexuality and gender minority adults*. *European Journal of Criminology*, 17(2), 199–223. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477370818788006>
- Rana, A., (2020). TikTok says removed over 49 million videos in second half of 2019, *Reuters* July 9, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/technology/tiktok-says-removed-over-49-million-videos-in-second-half-of-2019-idUSKBN24A1WD/> accessed 08/12/2025.
- Reneses, M., Riberas-Gutiérrez, M., & Bueno-Guerra, N. (2025). “It’s just a joke”: gender, sexuality and trivialisation in adolescent online violence such as cyberhate, cyberbullying, and online grooming. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 12(1), 1-14.
- Rodríguez Darías, A. J., & Aguilera Ávila, L. (2018). *Gender-based harassment in cyberspace: The case of Pikara magazine*. *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 63, 64–72. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2017.10.004>
- Roiha, M. (2024). Beyond the screen. Digital realities and embodied harm in the experiences of gender-based online hate speech.
- Romero-Sánchez, M., Carretero-Dios, H., Megías, J. L., Moya, M., & Ford, T. E. (2017). Sexist humor and rape proclivity: The moderating role of joke teller gender and severity of sexual assault. *Violence against women*, 23(8), 951-972.
- Sinambela, E., Sembiring, B. I., Manik, S., & Pangaribuan, D. (2024). Analysis of jokes technique in TikTok contents as English learning media. *Inovasi Kurikulum*, 21(1), 559-570.
- Sinko, L., Munro-Kramer, M., Conley, T., & Saint Arnault, D. (2021). Internalized messages: The role of sexual violence normalization on meaning-making after campus sexual violence. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 30(5), 565-585.

Smith, K. R. (2024). We Aren't Laughing: Analysis of Male Stand-Up Comedy and Violence Against Women, (Honors Thesis). Eastern Kentucky University.

Tanner, S., & Gillardin, F. (2025). *Toxic communication on TikTok: Sigma masculinities and gendered disinformation*. Social Media + Society, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051251313844>

Tighe, O. (2023). *The combined effects of online harassment on social media users*. Northern Arizona University.

TikTok. (2025, October 13). *Collaborating with women in media against tech-facilitated gender-based violence*. <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/tech-facilitated-gender-based-violence-workshops?lang=en-ZA>

Tufekci, Z. (2023). Avert Your Eyes, Avoid Responsibility and Just Blame TikTok. *The New York Times*, A20-A20.

UNESCO. (2025, October 3). *FeCoMo joins TikTok to combat tech-facilitated gender-based violence*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/fecommo-joins-tiktok-combat-tech-facilitated-gender-based-violence>.

Wang, J. (2020). Regulation of Digital Media Platforms. *The Foundation for Law, Justice and Society*.
Yang, L. (2024). National Threats and Responses Toward Digital Social Media: The Case of Global TikTok Regulations. *Available at SSRN 4912211*.

Yin, Q., & Abdullah, K. B. B. (2024). Analysis of Gender Discourse Bias and Gender Discrimination in Social Media: A Case Study of the TikTok Platform. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 24(2), 93-102.

Zeng, J., & Kaye, D. B. V. (2022). From content moderation to visibility moderation: A case study of platform governance on TikTok. *Policy & Internet*, 14(1), 79-95.

Zotti, S. S. (2023). Online Violence: a gender-based phenomenon.

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.32>

NAVIGATING THE DIGITAL DOUBLE BIND: GENDERED SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING AND TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED VIOLENCE AT RURAL SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

BENJAMIN SELEKE

*Department of Adult Education Foundations,
Faculty of Education, Walter Sisulu University
P. O. Box X1, Mthatha, 5117,
South Africa.*

Abstract

This conceptual paper examines the ‘digital double bind’ confronting rural learners in South Africa: Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies are promoted as engines of inclusion and self-directed learning, yet they operate within unequal, gendered digital ecologies where technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) is pervasive. Drawing on a critical–interpretive synthesis of peer-reviewed scholarship and authoritative policy/guidance (2020–2025), the paper maps how data poverty, intermittent connectivity, household device sharing, and weak institutional safeguards intersect with online harassment, image-based abuse, sextortion, and digitally enabled surveillance. The analysis integrates intersectionality and the capability approach with Indigenous epistemologies, Universal Design for Learning, and Disability Studies in Education to evaluate digitalisation in terms of whose real freedoms to learn safely, autonomously, and with dignity are expanded or restricted. It argues that TFGBV functions as a structural ‘conversion factor’ that forces girls and gender-diverse learners into continuous ‘safety work’ (self-censorship, reduced visibility, avoidance of digital participation), thereby constraining gendered self-directed learning in post-school education and the Senior Phase Technology pipeline. The paper concludes with design-oriented implications for TFGBV-responsive digital policy, gender-just curriculum integration, and institution-wide support ecosystems in rural contexts, and proposes a focused research agenda that centres rural girls and young women as co-designers of safer digital futures.

Keywords: *digital double bind; technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV); rural South Africa; 4IR education; gendered self-directed learning*

1. Introduction

Across Africa and the broader Global South, digitalisation has become a central strategy for expanding educational access, fostering inclusion and preparing “future-ready” citizens, with South African policy in particular promoting Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies, data-driven platforms and online learning as vehicles for social justice and economic competitiveness, including in historically marginalised rural communities (Department of Basic Education, 2021; Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, 2022; Samuels, 2025). National and regional evidence, how-

ever, shows that these reforms unfold on entrenched inequalities in infrastructure, income, race and gender, raising questions about who is actually able to benefit from AI-enabled and digitally mediated education (Adam, 2020; Statistics South Africa, 2023; Paganini, Farr, & Weigelt, 2025). Studies on the gendered digital divide indicate that South African women and girls, particularly in rural provinces such as Eastern Cape, Limpopo and North West, are more likely to rely on mobile-only access, face higher effective data costs and experience less stable connectivity than their male or urban counterparts, while global and local research shows that technology-facilitated gender-based

violence (TFGBV), including cyber-harassment, non-consensual image sharing and online child sexual exploitation and abuse, has become a pervasive feature of young people's digital lives, disproportionately targeting girls, LGBTQ+ youth and learners with disabilities (Statistics South Africa, 2023; Shiferaw, 2024; Bailey, Flynn, & Henry, 2021; UNICEF, 2024; UNFPA, 2024). These tensions are especially visible in South Africa's post-school education and training (PSET) sector and in Senior Phase Technology, where universities, TVET and CET colleges, and schools are encouraged to embed AI, coding, robotics and digital platforms to cultivate self-directed, innovative learners for 4IR economies, yet qualitative work in rural institutions shows students accessing learning management systems via low-end smartphones, intermittent connectivity and shared devices while negotiating demanding expectations of self-directed learning under conditions of time poverty, domestic responsibilities and heightened exposure to TFGBV, realities rarely acknowledged in policy discourses that overlook the ways assessment, collaboration and AI-enabled tutoring platforms can also become sites of harassment, stalking and blackmail (Department of Basic Education, 2021; Seleke & Teis, 2025; Hendricks & Mutongoza, 2023; Shiferaw, 2024; Hendricks & Mutongoza, 2023; Hendricks & Mutongoza, 2023; UN Women, 2022). Against this backdrop, the paper advances the concept of a digital double bind to characterise how 4IR-driven digitalisation in rural South Africa simultaneously expands and constrains educational possibilities, particularly for girls and young women in PSET and Senior Phase Technology, and it asks the central study question:

How do 4IR technologies, TFGBV and gendered self-directed learning intersect to produce a digital double bind for rural learners in South Africa's PSET and Senior Phase Technology systems, and what are the implications for inclusive, gender-just curriculum and learning environment design?

In addressing this question, the paper contributes to emerging debates on gender, digitalisation and decolonial justice in African education and aligns with calls for cognitive justice and

epistemic plurality in reimagining digital futures in the Global South (Le Grange, 2019).

1.2 Purpose and scope of the paper

In response to the central question, this paper pursues three interconnected purposes. First, it theorises the digital double bind as a lens for understanding how 4IR technologies, TFGBV and gendered self-directed learning (SDL) intersect in rural South African education. Drawing on digital-skills and 4IR policy literature, gender and ICT scholarship, and research on SDL in online and blended learning environments, it argues that digitalisation cannot be separated analytically from questions of safety, power and gendered harm, and that TFGBV constitutes a structural mechanism through which digital inequalities are produced and maintained (Hendricks & Mutongoza, 2023; Maphalala, Mkhasibe, & Mncube, 2021; Shiferaw, 2024; UNFPA, 2024). Second, the paper focuses on rural PSET institutions and Senior Phase Technology as linked, but often siloed, sites in the education pipeline: Senior Phase Technology prepares learners for digitally mediated post-school environments, while PSET reforms feed back into school curricula through 4IR and digital-skills agendas (Department of Basic Education, 2021; Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, 2022; Seleke & Teis, 2025). Attention is given to how policy discourses and everyday practices in these spaces shape rural girls' and young women's encounters with digital technologies, their exposure to TFGBV and their opportunities to cultivate robust, gender-aware SDL dispositions. Third, the paper seeks to generate design-oriented implications for inclusive curriculum and learning environments. Mobilising intersectionality, feminist theory, Indigenous epistemologies, the capability approach, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Disability Studies in Education (DSE), it proposes principles for technology-rich environments that foster SDL, expand digital capabilities and mitigate TFGBV risks, especially for rural girls and gender-diverse learners. Methodologically, it offers a critical and inter-

pretive synthesis of scholarship, policy documents, and global guidance, anchored in the South African context between 2020 and 2025, rather than presenting new empirical data.

1.3 Methodology

Methodologically, the paper employs a critical–interpretive synthesis, a suitable approach for conceptual work that integrates policy, global guidance, and multidisciplinary scholarship. Rather than aiming for exhaustive coverage, the approach privileges analytical depth and relevance to rural South African education, while maintaining transparency about how evidence was selected and interpreted. Sources were drawn primarily from (a) peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters (2020–2025) on TFGBV, the gendered digital divide, self-directed learning in blended/online education, and Education 4.0/4IR in African contexts; and (b) authoritative policy and guidance documents relevant to South African schooling and post-school education (e.g., DBE, DHET, DCDT, Statistics South Africa) and global normative guidance on TFGBV and child online safety (e.g., UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women). Searches and targeted snowballing were conducted using combinations of terms such as “technology-facilitated gender-based violence”, “online harassment”, “image-based abuse”, “cyberbullying”, “self-directed learning”, “blended learning”, “rural South Africa”, “Senior Phase Technology”, “PSET”, and “4IR/Industry 4.0 education”. The included sources were screened for relevance to educational settings and for analytical utility in explaining the interaction between 4IR-driven digitalisation, gendered risk and harm, and learners’ capabilities for safe and meaningful participation. Evidence was then thematically organised using the paper’s theoretical framework (intersectionality, capability, Indigenous epistemologies, UDL, and DSE). Limitations include the likelihood of publication bias, uneven availability of rural disaggregated data, and the rapidly evolving nature of platform practices and digital harms.

2. Theoretical framework (lenses used to guide the conceptual review)

Rather than presenting a standalone theoretical

model, the paper uses the following lenses as an analytic scaffold to interpret and synthesise the evidence and arguments reviewed in Section 3. This paper is underpinned by a multi-theoretical framework that integrates feminist digital inequalities research, intersectionality, the capability approach, Indigenous epistemologies, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and Disability Studies in Education (DSE) through a single lens. Feminist and intersectional studies on TFGBV and digital harms show how gender, class, race, disability and geography interact to shape differentiated exposure to online abuse and unequal opportunities to benefit from digitalisation (Bailey, Flynn, & Henry, 2021; Shepherd & Shade, 2025). Capability-oriented work on digital inequality emphasises that what truly matters is not merely formal access to devices or connectivity, but the genuine freedoms people must utilise technologies for valued educational, social, and economic purposes (Heeks, 2022; Taylor, 2017; Shiferaw, 2024). Indigenous and decolonial perspectives emphasise cognitive justice and epistemic plurality, insisting that digital futures in African education must be grounded in local histories, community accountability and holistic understandings of learning (Le Grange, 2019; Seleke, 2021; Seleke & Teis, 2025). UDL and DSE, ultimately, provide conceptual tools for examining how digital systems and curricula enable or hinder participation for learners with diverse bodies, identities, and locations (McKenzie & Dalton, 2020; Tyabashe-Phume et al., 2025).

2.1 Feminist digital inequalities and the “digital double bind”

The starting point is the notion of a digital double bind, which captures how the same 4IR technologies promoted as drivers of inclusion, empowerment and self-directed learning can simultaneously deepen inequality and expose marginalised learners to new forms of harm. Feminist scholarship on TFGBV and online abuse shows that digital platforms are structured by patriarchal and colonial power relations: women, girls and gender-diverse people are more likely to face harassment, surveillance and

reputational attacks, especially when they are already disadvantaged by poverty, rurality or disability (Bailey et al., 2021; UN Women, 2022; UNICEF, 2024). Intersectional analyses emphasise that these harms are not evenly distributed but cluster at the intersections of gender, race, class and geography (Shepherd & Shade, 2025). In the South African context, research on digital inequality and transformation in higher education cautions that 4IR discourses often assume a generic, “future-ready” learner, while obscuring the differentiated realities of historically disadvantaged institutions and rural students (Mateko, 2025; Samuels, 2025). This paper extends these insights to argue that rural girls and young women are positioned at the sharpest edge of the digital double bind, as they are simultaneously exhorted to become autonomous, digitally fluent learners and made highly vulnerable within the very ecologies that host their learning.

2.2 Technology-facilitated gender-based violence as a socio-technical assemblage

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) is understood here as a wide spectrum of behaviours in which digital tools, platforms or data are used to perpetrate harassment, coercion, surveillance or abuse on the basis of gender and intersecting identities (Bailey et al., 2021). UNFPA (2021, 2024) defines TFGBV as acts of gender-based violence that are committed, assisted, aggravated or amplified, fully or partially, by digital technologies, including cyberstalking, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, image-based abuse, doxxing, online hate speech, coerced sexting and technology-mediated intimate partner violence. UNICEF (2024) shows that such harms are increasingly woven into the everyday digital lives of children and young people in school and university settings, with girls, LGBTQ+ youth and learners with disabilities disproportionately targeted, and with serious consequences for mental health, social participation and educational engagement (UNICEF, 2024; Tyabashe-Phume et al., 2025). In this paper, TFGBV is conceptualised as a socio-technical assemblage arising from the interaction of platform architectures (affordances for

anonymity, sharing, surveillance and amplification), data regimes (tracking, profiling and algorithmic recommendation), social norms (victim-blaming, stigma, homophobia and ableism) and institutional responses (reporting mechanisms, disciplinary processes and policing practices). In rural South African PSET and Senior Phase contexts, the same WhatsApp groups, social media channels, learning management systems, and proctoring tools used for teaching and assessment can also be sites of stalking, public shaming, coerced sexting and circulation of intimate images. TFGBV is thus not a marginal “add-on” risk, but a central mechanism through which the digital double bind is produced and sustained (Bailey et al., 2021; UNFPA, 2024; UNICEF, 2024).

2.3 Gendered self-directed learning in 4IR learning ecologies

Self-directed learning (SDL) is typically defined as learners’ capacity to set goals, select strategies and resources, monitor progress and evaluate outcomes with varying degrees of support (Adigun et al., 2025; Pangrazio et al., 2024). In South African higher and post-school education, SDL has become a core attribute of the “future-ready” and “lifelong” learner in policy and institutional discourse, particularly in relation to 4IR-driven digital transformation (Garrison, 1997; Samuels, 2025). Research shows, however, that SDL dispositions are highly sensitive to the degree of pedagogical scaffolding, clarity of expectations and the quality of feedback structures (Adigun et al., 2025; Garrison, 1997; Zimmerman, 2002). Garrison (1997) demonstrates that preparing pre-service teachers for self-directed, multimodal learning requires the deliberate design of digital tasks, structured reflection and explicit metacognitive support, especially for students from under-resourced backgrounds. Pangrazio et al. (2024) adds that AI-powered tutors and learning analytics can catalyse SDL by providing personalised feedback and adaptive learning pathways, while raising questions about privacy, data justice and the risk of automating existing inequities. These dynamics are gendered and spatialised: Moodley and Cloete (2024) show that rural first-

generation students, particularly young women, often carry heavier domestic responsibilities, have less control over devices, and experience heightened anxiety in digital environments; Samuels (2025) cautions that blended modes can be overwhelming and isolating for students juggling precarious livelihoods. Seleke and Teis (2025) therefore argue that 4IR technologies and SDL in African higher education can either deepen dependency or foster digital sovereignty, depending on whether institutions adopt context-sensitive, justice-oriented approaches that foreground inclusivity and Indigenous epistemologies.

2.4 Intersectionality, capability, UDL and disability-informed digital inclusion

To move beyond deficit framings of rural learners as merely “at risk”, the paper draws together intersectionality, the capability approach, UDL and DSE as complementary lenses for analysing digital inclusion. Intersectional TFGBV research shows that generic digital-safety interventions routinely fail those located at complex intersections of oppression, such as rural girls with disabilities or queer youth in conservative communities (Bailey et al., 2021; Shepherd & Shade, 2025; Tyabashe-Phume et al., 2025). The capability approach shifts attention from simple metrics of access (device numbers, connectivity rates) to the real freedoms learners must transform technologies into valued functioning, such as safe communication, meaningful participation in online classes and the pursuit of dignified educational and work trajectories (Pangrazio et al., 2024; Shiferaw, 2024). From this perspective, the key question for rural young women is not simply whether they own a smartphone, but whether 4IR technologies and pedagogies expand or constrain their capabilities for safe participation, critical voice, gendered SDL and freedom from TFGBV. UDL and DSE add a design- and justice-oriented dimension: McKenzie and Dalton (2020) argue that UDL can serve as a common language for linking inclusive-education policy to classroom practice by encouraging multiple means of engagement, representation and action, while DSE insists that disability be

understood as socially and politically constructed rather than as an individual deficit. Emerging DSE-informed work on TFGBV underscores that co-designed digital environments can enable more equitable participation for students with intersectional identities only when questions of power, representation and data justice are explicitly addressed (Tyabashe-Phume et al., 2025). These combined lenses underpin the later analysis of how rural digital ecologies, TFGBV and gendered SDL interact to produce a digital double bind.

3. Conceptual review: 4IR technologies and gendered digital ecologies in rural South Africa

This section and the two that follow constitute the paper’s conceptual review and evidence synthesis. Guided by the theoretical framework above, the review organises the literature around (i) rural digital ecologies and 4IR-driven educational digitalisation, (ii) the patterns and consequences of TFGBV in educational platforms, and (iii) the implications for gendered self-directed learning across the post-school and Senior Phase Technology pipeline. This section conceptualises the ‘digital ecologies’ within which rural women and youth in South Africa encounter 4IR technologies in post-school and Senior Phase Technology education. Digital ecologies are understood here as the evolving configurations of infrastructure, devices, platforms, skills, norms, governance, and power relations that shape how technologies are accessed, appropriated, and contested in everyday life. In rural Eastern Cape, Limpopo, North West, and KwaZulu-Natal, these ecologies are profoundly shaped by historical underinvestment, patriarchy, racialised poverty, and uneven state capacity, which in turn mediate how 4IR technologies enable or constrain gendered self-directed learning.

3.1 Uneven digitalisation and the rural–urban–gendered divide

Recent national data confirm that South Africa’s digitalisation is progressing, but in uneven and strongly gendered ways. Statistics South Af-

rica's Gender Series shows that although household internet access increased between 2016 and 2022, female-headed households remain consistently less likely than male-headed households to have reliable internet or computer access, with the largest gaps in poorer, rural provinces such as Eastern Cape, Limpopo and North West (Statistics South Africa, 2023). Women and girls in rural households are more likely to rely on mobile-only access and bear higher effective data costs, reinforcing an already stratified digital landscape in which location, income, and gender jointly determine who can participate meaningfully online (Statistics South Africa, 2023).

South African evidence in Education 4.0 contexts aligns with this pattern, showing that women and girls often face constrained autonomy in digital spaces because of stereotypes about "who belongs" in STEM, weaker institutional support and heightened exposure to harassment and surveillance, even where devices and connectivity are nominally available (Shiferaw, 2024; Kuhn et al., 2023). In rural areas, these structural and cultural dynamics intersect with severe material constraints. A recent study in Mkatazo village, Eastern Cape, reports that just over half of the residents lacked internet access. Roughly two-fifths cited affordability as the main barrier, and about two-thirds reported insufficient digital skills, with women and youth particularly affected (Mwansa, Ngandu, & Mkwambi, 2025). Slow and unstable mobile coverage, the absence of fibre, public Wi-Fi or telecentres and the high cost of mobile data together create a dense "capability trap" that limits rural residents' ability to use 4IR technologies for education, work or civic participation, and that particularly curtails rural girls' and young women's capacity to pursue self-directed digital learning (Kuhn et al., 2023; Shava & Muringa, 2025).

3.2 Rural post-school digital ecologies: TVET, CET and universities

In the post-school sector, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digitalisation on a foundation of longstanding structural inequality: conceptual and empirical work on blended learning in

South Africa shows that the rapid move to online and hybrid modalities intensified pre-existing divides in infrastructure, affordability and digital skills, with rural and working-class students disproportionately affected by high data costs, device scarcity and unreliable connectivity (Mhlanga, 2020). Qualitative case studies at rural universities indicate that many students access learning platforms via low-end smartphones, intermittent network coverage and prepaid data, limiting sustained engagement with video-rich learning management systems, proctored assessments and synchronous webinars; although they adopt self-directed coping strategies, downloading materials at night, using WhatsApp groups as informal micro-LMSs and sharing devices, they still experience anxiety, isolation and academic disadvantage relative to peers at better-resourced urban institutions (Hendricks & Mutongoza, 2023; Statistics South Africa, 2023; Mphuthi, 2025). The TVET and CET subsectors occupy a similar position at the intersection of ambitious 4IR rhetoric and deep structural constraints: Magagula (2024) shows that TVET programmes are pressured to align curricula and graduate attributes with 4IR labour-market demands yet often operate with high student-to-device ratios, outdated equipment and limited staff capacity for digital pedagogy, a tension echoed in national policy statements on digital transformation and employability (Manamela, 2024), even as practice-based responses advocate low-cost, context-sensitive interventions, such as modular coding and robotics kits, mobile-based simulations and blended WIL models, designed for bandwidth-constrained colleges, provided institutional support and targeted investment are secured (Seleke & Teis, 2025). In the CET sector, policy on student and community support services explicitly recognises the need to expand digital access and literacy for marginalised adult learners, including those in rural learning centres, yet evidence shows that many centres still operate without stable connectivity or dedicated labs, relying on personal devices, print-based workarounds and intermittent community Wi-Fi (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2021). Within these PSET spaces, gendered dynamics overlay

structural constraints: Statistics South Africa (2023) indicates that women are over-represented among low-income, low-education and rural populations, all strongly associated with reduced computer and internet access, while studies on the gender digital divide highlight norms that frame ICTs and 4IR careers as masculine, discourage women from STEM-intensive pathways and subject them to heightened scrutiny and policing of their digital presence (Shiferaw, 2024; Kuhn et al., 2023).

3.3 Rural school ecologies and Senior Phase Technology

At school level, South Africa's basic education system is also undergoing a digital shift framed within 4IR discourse: policy initiatives such as the introduction of Coding and Robotics for Grades R–9 signal efforts to integrate computational thinking, programming and basic robotics into the Senior Phase Technology stream (Department of Basic Education, 2021), while conceptual and policy analyses insist that these reforms be read through a justice-oriented lens that asks who has access to devices, connectivity and suitably skilled teachers, and how ostensibly progressive changes may widen gaps between well-resourced and under-resourced schools (Sehlako et al., 2023). Post-COVID studies of online and blended learning show that digital transformation is unfolding amid entrenched inequality, with rural and township schools facing persistent deficits in infrastructure, teacher preparedness and home support (Chomunorwa, 2023), and recent work on the digital divide and social justice in rural schools highlights how connectivity gaps, device shortages and weak institutional backing intersect with poverty and gender to constrain participation in digital learning and the development of critical digital skills (International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research, 2025). At the same time, qualitative research on female principals in rural public primary schools documents how women leaders mobilise interactive whiteboards, Wi-Fi, tablets, smartphones, WhatsApp groups, educational apps and learner devices to improve teaching, personalise learn-

ing, strengthen school administration and extend basic digital skills despite limited training and scarce resources, indicating that rural schools can be active sites of creative appropriation rather than passive recipients of technology (Department of Basic Education, 2021; Sehlako et al., 2023). Nonetheless, the broader ecology remains uneven: many rural Senior Phase learners rely on shared household smartphones, unstable mobile data and computer labs that function intermittently due to load shedding, theft or maintenance problems, while studies of digital exclusion in rural communities show that unreliable electricity, high data costs and the absence of public access points constrain access to online resources, digitally mediated homework and enrichment programmes, rendering 4IR-oriented expectations of coding, simulation and digital design precariously grounded (Mwansa, Ngandu, & Mkwambi, 2025). Gender norms further complicate this landscape: research on Africa's digital gender divide and Education 4.0 indicates that girls are often socialised into "safe" uses of technology (communication, social networking, note-taking) and discouraged from engaging with hardware, coding and advanced applications coded as masculine (Shiferaw, 2024; Kuhn et al., 2023), which in rural Senior Phase Technology classrooms often see boys monopolising devices, while girls are assigned documentation or presentation roles. At home, gendered care duties and fears about online reputations lead to stricter monitoring, limiting girls' digital learning. Rural Senior Phase Technology environments reflect a paradox: policies promote 4IR tech and digital curricula, but access remains gendered, limited, and affected by rural deprivation. Rural girls must navigate these digital spaces to progress, despite constraints, power imbalances, and risks of gender-based violence.

4. Technology-facilitated gender-based violence in rural post-school and Senior Phase Technology education

4.1 Typologies and patterns of TFGBV in educational digital spaces

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence

(TFGBV) in education encompasses cyber-harassment, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, sextortion, doxxing, online stalking and digitally enabled surveillance and control, amplified by platform affordances for anonymity, reach and permanence (UNFPA, 2021; UNICEF, 2022). Global work conceptualises TFGBV as a continuum of violence that extends offline harassment and abuse into digital spaces rather than a discrete “cyber” problem (UNFPA, 2021; World Vision International, 2024). South African studies show that young women and gender-diverse students are disproportionately targeted through cyberbullying, non-consensual image circulation, slut-shaming and online blackmail, including in WhatsApp study groups and other platforms simultaneously used for collaboration and assessment (Hendricks & Mutongoza, 2023; UNICEF South Africa, 2022). Qualitative accounts further indicate that TFGBV is normalised as an inevitable cost of being online, which discourages reporting and pushes survivors to manage risk privately rather than seeking institutional support (Hendricks & Mutongoza, 2023; UNFPA, 2021; UNICEF, 2022).

4.2 TFGBV in post-school education and training (PSET)

Within universities and TVET/CET colleges, 4IR-enabled platforms, such as learning management systems, institutional email, WhatsApp study groups, and online proctoring, have become core infrastructure for curriculum access, assessment, and peer support. However, they also function as conduits for TFGBV. A qualitative study at a South African university identifies three dominant forms of technology-enabled GBV on these platforms: persistent cyberbullying and harassment; sextortion and doxxing linked to intimate images; and hacking or impersonation to send humiliating content or surveil communications (Hendricks & Mutongoza, 2023). These harms intersect with entrenched campus cultures of gendered violence, with perpetrators often known peers or intimate partners who weaponise digital traces for control and punishment (Hendricks & Mutongoza, 2023; Gwiza & Hendricks, 2025).

For first-generation students from rural communities, reputational damage and family stigma are particularly acute, intensifying fear and silence (Hendricks & Mutongoza, 2023). Although many universities have GBV policies, they seldom name TFGBV explicitly, specify reporting procedures for digital harms or ensure coordinated responses across ICT, security, counselling and academic units, and historically disadvantaged or rural institutions face pronounced capacity gaps in digital forensics, enforcement and psychosocial support (Hendricks & Mutongoza, 2023; UNFPA, 2021; Hendricks & Mutongoza, 2023).

4.3 TFGBV, cyberbullying and online child sexual exploitation among Senior Phase learners

At the Senior Phase level (Grades 7–9), national surveys indicate that South African children are highly connected yet navigate digital spaces with limited adult guidance and weak institutional safeguards. SA Kids Online and Disrupting Harm data show that most children have regular internet access, but many go online without parental consent, add unknown contacts and report experiences of online child sexual exploitation and abuse, including pressure to send sexual images, non-consensual sharing and threats linked to intimate content (UNICEF South Africa, 2022; ECPAT International et al., 2022). School-based studies echo these patterns, documenting cyberbullying, circulation of explicit images, exposure to adult content and online harassment, with teachers frequently feeling ill-prepared and noting that girls are disproportionately targeted through sexualised insults, image-based abuse and reputational attacks in class WhatsApp groups and informal networks (UNICEF South Africa, 2022; Statistics South Africa, 2023). In many rural and township contexts, learners primarily access the internet through shared devices, public Wi-Fi, or informal data-sharing arrangements, making their privacy vulnerable and amplifying the risk of unauthorised capture and redistribution of content (Bailey et al., 2021; UNFPA, 2021; UNICEF South Africa, 2022). Despite clear effects on learners’ sense of safety and willingness

to use digital tools for research, design and problem-solving in Technology, TFGBV and cyberbullying are still treated largely as disciplinary or pastoral issues rather than as integral curriculum concerns within CAPS, Life Orientation and 4IR-related digital skills agendas (DBE, 2021; UNICEF South Africa, 2022; Statistics South Africa, 2023).

4.4 Educational, psychosocial and self-directed learning consequences

Across PSET and schooling, TFGBV has significant educational and psychosocial effects. International evidence links technology-enabled abuse with increased anxiety, depression, self-harm, withdrawal from online spaces and growing distrust in institutions and peers (UNFPA, 2021; UNICEF, 2022). South African studies report that students who experience online harassment struggle to concentrate, avoid digital tools essential for learning, and feel reluctant to submit work or participate in online discussions, especially when platforms double as spaces of surveillance and ridicule (Hendricks & Mutongoza, 2023; UNICEF South Africa, 2022; Statistics South Africa, 2023). In 4IR-oriented environments that depend on self-directed learning, such harms translate into constrained autonomy: girls and gender-diverse learners often engage in intensive “safety work” by limiting their online visibility, using pseudonyms, switching off cameras and microphones or remaining silent in group spaces to avoid attention (Hendricks & Mutongoza, 2023; UNFPA, 2021). In rural areas, where learners rely on shared family devices, community Wi-Fi or internet cafés, it is difficult to control who sees screens or overhears conversations, further curtailing opportunities to explore coding platforms, design software, robotics simulations or generative AI and to build digital portfolios and informal learning networks that support entry into STEM-aligned pathways (Bailey et al., 2021; UNFPA, 2021; Reddy et al., 2021; UNICEF, 2022).

4.5 Synthesising TFGBV as a core mechanism of the digital double bind

Taken together, this evidence indicates that

TFGBV is not a marginal side effect of digitalisation but a core mechanism through which the digital double bind operates in rural South Africa. On one side of the bind, policy discourses urge PSET institutions and schools to embrace 4IR technologies, expand digital literacy and cultivate self-directed, “future-ready” learners; on the other, the same learning management systems, messaging apps, social media platforms and collaborative tools routinely host gendered harassment, sextortion, reputational attacks and OCSEA, particularly for girls and young women (Hendricks & Mutongoza, 2023; UNICEF South Africa, 2022; ECPAT International et al., 2022). For rural learners with precarious access to devices, data and institutional support, the trade-off is stark: visibility and active participation can enhance educational opportunities but simultaneously heighten exposure to TFGBV, while reducing one’s digital presence may offer relative safety at the cost of exclusion from online resources, peer networks and assessment regimes. In capability terms, TFGBV functions as a powerful conversion factor that distorts the potential of digital tools to expand learners’ freedoms, underscoring the need for curricular, institutional and policy interventions that treat TFGBV as a central equity and learning concern rather than only a disciplinary or ICT security issue.

5. Gendered self-directed learning under digital constraint

This section builds on the analysis of TFGBV and digital ecologies, focusing on self-directed learning (SDL) as a gendered practice in 4IR-mediated education. It argues that SDL, as outlined in the South African PSET and Senior Phase Technology policies, assumes autonomy, safety, and infrastructure that are often lacking in rural areas, particularly for girls and young women facing structural inequalities and digital risks.

5.1 Policy expectations and the ideal of the self-directed learner

Across South Africa’s PSET and school sectors, SDL has become a prominent policy motif. National 4IR and digital-skills strategies emphasise that citizens should be capable of continuous,

self-managed learning to remain employable in rapidly changing labour markets, and universities are urged to produce “independent, critical, self-directed graduates” able to navigate complex digital environments and upskill themselves in line with emerging technologies (Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, 2022; Samuels, 2025; Seleke & Teis, 2025). In teacher education and cognate programmes, SDL is increasingly framed as a non-negotiable graduate competence: Garrison (1997) shows that preparing pre-service teachers for the Fourth Industrial Revolution requires deliberate design of digital tasks, scaffolded reflection and explicit metacognitive teaching, while open, distance and e-learning discourse positions SDL as the key to success in flexible, technology-mediated programmes (Garrison, 1997; Zimmerman, 2002; Shiferaw, 2024). In basic education, the introduction of Coding and Robotics, along with the repositioning of Senior Phase Technology, is accompanied by rhetoric about cultivating “creative, problem-solving, self-directed learners” who use digital tools to manage their own projects (Department of Basic Education, 2021; Sehlako, Chibambo, & Divala, 2023). Across these discourses, however, the ideal learner is implicitly imagined as enjoying stable connectivity, personal devices and sufficient psychological safety for experimentation, with limited attention to how gender, rurality, poverty and disability shape who can realistically inhabit this ideal and at what cost.

5.2 Material conditions, care work and the everyday labour of SDL

Empirical work shows that SDL is deeply structured by material and social conditions rather than being a purely internal trait. Maphalala, Mkhasibe and Mncube (2021) found that during COVID-19, online learning effectively “forced” students into self-directed modes, but success depended heavily on access to devices, data and supportive study environments; students lacking these resources struggled to manage time, keep up with tasks and sustain engagement, regardless of motivation. Similar patterns are evident in ODeL contexts, where paid work, family re-

sponsibilities and intermittent connectivity produce cycles of catch-up and disengagement (Shiferaw, 2024). Gendered dynamics are particularly pronounced among rural and first-generation students. Moodley and Cloete (2024) show that rural young women shoulder disproportionate domestic and care responsibilities, fragmenting study time and limiting opportunities for focused engagement with digital platforms, while Samuels (2025) finds that blended modes, though flexible in principle, can exacerbate this fragmentation by shifting more learning into homes where women’s time is less protected. Adigun et al.’s (2025) analysis of SDL in blended higher education confirms that infrastructural access, institutional support, and socio-economic status are key determinants of SDL outcomes, and warns against overemphasising individual “grit” as an explanation of success. Comparable dynamics occur in Senior Phase Technology, where students often research, design, and reflect on projects using digital tools outside class. However, disadvantaged students, especially girls, frequently share phones, rely on sporadic Wi-Fi, and do homework in crowded homes while caring for younger children or doing domestic work (Bailey et al., 2021; UNFPA, 2021; International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research, 2025). Under such conditions, claims about self-directed, digitally rich learning seem aspirational rather than achievable, especially for rural girls whose SDL is limited by time poverty, device sharing, and poor connectivity, not motivation.

5.3 Safety, surveillance and “constrained autonomy” online

Beyond material conditions, safety and surveillance critically shape opportunities for SDL in digital spaces. The TFGBV literature reviewed earlier shows that girls and young women in South Africa often perceive online environments as risky, where missteps can result in lasting reputational harm, blackmail or social shaming (Hendricks & Mutongoza, 2023; UNICEF South Africa, 2022). For SDL, this produces what can be described as constrained autonomy.

In principle, digital platforms and 4IR tools expand learners' independence, enabling exploration of resources, experimentation with new applications, connection with peers and experts, and public showcasing of work. In practice, many girls and gender-diverse learners engage in continual "safety work": carefully curating what they share, limiting their online visibility, avoiding voice or video participation in virtual classes, using pseudonyms or avoiding particular platforms altogether (Hendricks & Mutongoza, 2023; UNFPA, 2021). In rural contexts, where learners may rely on shared family devices, public Wi-Fi hotspots or internet cafés, it is difficult to control who sees screens or overhears conversations, which further discourages open digital exploration (Bailey et al., 2021; UNFPA, 2021). For young women, this restricts opportunities to experiment with coding platforms, design software, robotics simulations or generative AI outside formal lessons, and diminishes their capacity to build digital portfolios and informal learning networks that are increasingly crucial for accessing STEM pathways and 4IR-related work (Reddy, Soudien, & Juan, 2021; UNICEF, 2024). SDL under these conditions is therefore best understood as negotiated and constrained, rather than as unfettered autonomy.

5.4 Reframing SDL through an intersectional capability lens

Given these realities, self-directed learning in 4IR education needs to be reframed from an individual trait to a relational, context-dependent capability. The capability approach emphasises that what matters is not simply the presence of opportunities (e.g. access to digital tools), but the real freedoms individuals have to convert these into valued functionings (Heeks, 2022; Taylor, 2017), and Shiferaw's (2024) analysis of the digital gender gap in South Africa shows that even when women have comparable access to phones or connectivity, their ability to use technologies for learning, work or civic engagement is shaped by norms, safety and institutional support. Applied to SDL, the key question is therefore not whether learners "take responsibility"

for their learning, but whether education systems create conditions in which it is possible and safe to do so. For rural girls and young women, this capability hinges on interlocking dimensions of material resources (stable connectivity, adequate devices, quiet spaces and time protected from domestic and care burdens) (Maphalala, Mkhasibe, & Mncube, 2021; Hendricks & Mutongoza, 2023); digital literacies and scaffolding (explicit teaching on how to navigate platforms, evaluate information, manage privacy and use 4IR tools critically and creatively) (Garrison, 1997; Garrison, 1997; Zimmerman, 2002); safety and freedom from TFGBV, supported by institutional policies, platform governance and community norms that prevent and respond to abuse rather than shifting responsibility onto individual girls (Bailey, Flynn, & Henry, 2021; UNFPA, 2024; UNICEF, 2024); and recognition and support through cultures of care that acknowledge the emotional and cognitive labour of learning under constraint and provide counselling, mentoring and peer support (Hendricks & Mutongoza, 2023; Jere, Chigona, & Khoza, 2025). Kuhn et al. (2023) argue that digital inequality is best understood by examining how such dimensions interact in specific institutional and community contexts, and in rural South Africa this requires attention to how gender, race, geography and disability intersect to expand or constrain capabilities, while McKenzie and Dalton's (2020) work on Universal Design for Learning underlines that inclusive design must be embedded into curriculum and pedagogy from the outset rather than added as an afterthought. From this perspective, SDL for rural girls and young women in 4IR contexts is better conceptualised as supported, relational self-directedness within learning environments where autonomy is scaffolded, safety is actively produced through anti-TFGBV measures, experimentation is encouraged without undue risk and care, and collective responsibility is foregrounded alongside personal initiative.

6. Resolving the digital double bind: Policy, curriculum and design implications

Resolving, rather than deepening, the digital double bind in South Africa's PSET and Senior

Phase Technology systems requires gender-transformative digital and 4IR policies that treat technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) as a structural equity issue rather than a marginal “cybercrime” concern. National digital and skills strategies acknowledge inclusion but rarely prioritise TFGBV and digital safety as central factors in transforming access into real capabilities (Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, 2022; Samuels, 2025). From a capability-oriented and intersectional perspective, this involves integrating TFGBV prevention, survivor-centred support, and platform accountability into digital inclusion agendas, prioritising gender-responsive connectivity investments in rural schools and colleges, and routinely disaggregating and analysing digital access data by gender, location, disability, and class (UNFPA, 2021, 2024; UNICEF, 2024; Statistics South Africa, 2023; Shiferaw, 2024; Mwansa, Ngandu, & Mkwambi, 2025; Kuhn et al., 2023; Heeks, 2022; Taylor, 2017). At the curriculum and pedagogical levels, the analysis points to a shift from parallel tracks, with digital skills on one side and GBV and Life Orientation on the other, toward an integrated, justice-oriented design. In PSET programmes emphasising 4IR technologies (such as teacher education, engineering, computer science, and TVET), modules can intentionally link AI and 4IR tools with gender, safety, and ethics, for example, by asking students to develop inclusive digital lessons while critically examining algorithmic bias and TFGBV in educational platforms (Garrison, 1997; Seleke & Teis, 2025). Self-directed learning should be viewed as a supported practice rather than a hidden assumption, with explicit scaffolding of goal-setting, time management, digital literacies, and reflective practice that recognise rural and gendered constraints (Maphalala, Mkhasibe, & Mncube, 2021; Shiferaw, 2024; Hendricks & Mutongoza, 2023). In Senior Phase Technology, curricula infused with 4IR should embed digital safety and TFGBV content directly into technology projects and design tasks, applying Universal Design for Learning principles so that learners with differential access and safety concerns can

still participate and demonstrate their learning (UNICEF South Africa, 2022; Statistics South Africa, 2023; UNICEF South Africa, 2022; McKenzie & Dalton, 2020). Institutional governance and platform design constitute critical levers for addressing the double bind. University, TVET, CET, and school GBV policies need to explicitly name TFGBV, define digital harms, and outline clear procedures for reporting, investigation, and support, supported by accountable leadership (Bailey, Flynn, & Henry, 2021; Gwiza & Hendricks, 2025; UN Women, 2022). ICT and e-learning units should audit learning management systems, messaging platforms, and proctoring tools for privacy and safety, while AI-enabled tools for assessment and analytics should be adopted under guidelines emphasising fairness, transparency, and student agency, particularly for rural and marginalised students (Kuhn et al., 2023; Jere, Chigona, & Khoza, 2025; Samuels, 2025; Pangrazio et al., 2024; Seleke & Teis, 2025). Integrated support ecosystems, which link ICT services, counselling, security, academic departments, and student support, are vital for TFGBV, providing responsive care in resource-constrained rural institutions (Hendricks & Mutongoza, 2023). Lastly, a complementary research agenda is needed to empirically map the digital double bind, co-design interventions with rural girls and gender-diverse learners, and rigorously evaluate TFGBV-responsive and inclusive AI practices, aligning with wider South African scholarship that treats digitalisation, gender justice, and curriculum design as interconnected domains (McKenzie & Dalton, 2020; Sandoval Kuhn et al., 2023; UNFPA, 2024; Pangrazio et al., 2024; Sehlako, Chibambo, & Divala, 2023; Mateko, 2025).

7. Conclusion

This paper has argued that digitalisation in rural South Africa is marked by a digital double bind: 4IR technologies and AI-enabled platforms are promoted as routes to inclusion, skills development and self-directed learning, yet they remain embedded in unequal, gendered and often violent digital ecologies, saturated with technology-facilitated gender-based violence

(TFGBV). Drawing on intersectionality, the capability approach, Indigenous epistemologies, Universal Design for Learning and Disability Studies in Education, the analysis shows that the key question is not only who has access to devices and connectivity, but whose capabilities to learn safely, autonomously and with dignity are actually expanded (McKenzie & Dalton, 2020; Heeks, 2022; Taylor, 2017; Shiferaw, 2024). For rural girls and young women in PSET and Senior Phase Technology, TFGBV acts as a structural “conversion factor” that can transform

potentially empowering 4IR tools into sources of risk, anxiety and exclusion (Bailey, Flynn, & Henry, 2021; UNFPA, 2024). The paper therefore calls for TFGBV-responsive digital policy, gender-just curricula and institution-wide support ecosystems that treat safety as integral to learning design rather than an add-on, and for participatory research that centres rural girls, young women and gender-diverse learners as co-designers of safer, decolonial digital futures in education (Hendricks & Mutongoza, 2023; Seleke & Teis, 2025; UN Women, 2022).

8. References

- Adam, T. (2020). Between social justice and decolonisation: Exploring South African MOOC designers’ conceptualisations and approaches to addressing injustices. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*, 2020(1), 7. <https://doi.org/10.5334/jime.557>
- Adigun, O. T., Mpofu, N., & Maphalala, M. C. (2025). Fostering self-directed learning in blended learning environments: A constructivist perspective in higher education. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 79(1), e12572. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12572>
- Bailey, J., Flynn, A., & Henry, N. (2021). Technology-facilitated sexual violence: A literature review of empirical research. In N. Henry & A. Powell (Eds.), *The Emerald International Handbook of Technology-Facilitated Violence and Abuse* (pp. 305–323). Emerald Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83982-848-520211001>
- Department of Basic Education. (2021). Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS): Coding and Robotics for Grades R–9. Department of Basic Education.
- Department of Communications and Digital Technologies. (2022). National Digital and Future Skills Strategy of South Africa (2021–2025). Department of Communications and Digital Technologies.
- Department of Higher Education and Training. (2021). National Policy on Student and Community Support Services in Community Education and Training Colleges. Department of Higher Education and Training.
- ECPAT International, INTERPOL, & UNICEF. (2022). Disrupting harm in South Africa: Evidence on online child sexual exploitation and abuse. UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti.
- Esposito, C., Corinto, G., Mariscotti, I., & Sovrano, F. (2025). Online harassment of girls and young women on social media: Patterns, impacts and responses. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 154, 106321. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2024.106321>

- Garrison, D. R. (1997). Self-directed learning: Toward a comprehensive model. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48(1), 18–33. <https://doi.org/10.1177/074171369704800103>
- Gwiza, M., & Hendricks, E. A. (2025). Unpacking dynamics: A systematic literature review on gender-based violence, its cultural and structural influences in South African universities. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Sociality Studies*, 5(2), a02. <https://doi.org/10.38140/ijss-2025.vol5.2.02>
- Haleem, A., Javaid, M., Qadri, M. A., & Suman, R. (2022). Understanding the role of digital technologies in education: A review. *Sustainable Operations and Computers*, 3, 275–285. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.susoc.2022.05.004>
- Hendricks, C., & Mutongoza, B. (2023). Paragons of inequality: Digital inequalities and student experiences of remote online teaching and learning at a rural South African university. *The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 18(1), 8–21. <https://doi.org/10.17159/ijtl.v18i1.17207>
- Heeks, R. (2022). Digital inequality beyond the digital divide: Conceptualising adverse digital incorporation. *Development in Practice*, 32(5), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02681102.2022.2068492>
- Hendricks, E., & Mutongoza, B. (2023). Challenges associated with online learning at a selected rural university in South Africa. *The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 18(1), 8–21. Retrieved from https://scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2519-56702023000100009
- Kenny, M., McCoy, S., & O'Higgins Norman, J. (2023). Inclusive education, intersectionality and social justice: Emerging perspectives in policy and practice. *Education Sciences*, 13(9), 959. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13090959>
- Knowles, M. S. (1975). *Self-directed learning: A guide for learners and teachers*. New York, NY: Association Press.
- Kopnina, H. (2020a). Education for sustainable development goals (ESDG): What is wrong with ESDGs, and what can we do better? *Education Sciences*, 10(10), 261. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10100261>
- Kopnina, H. (2020b). Education for the future? Critical evaluation of education for sustainable development goals. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 51(4), 280–291. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2019.1710444>
- Kuhn, S., Khoo, S.-M., Czerniewicz, L., Lilley, W., Bute, S., Crean, A., Abegglen, S., Burns, H., Sinfield, S., Jandrić, P., Knox, J., & MacKenzie, A. (2023). Understanding digital inequality: A theoretical kaleidoscope. *Postdigital Science and Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-24662>

023-00444-3

Le Grange, L. (2019). Ubuntu, ecologies of knowledge and the decolonisation of the curriculum.

South African Journal of Higher Education, 33(6), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.20853/33-6-3696>

Maphalala, M. C., Mkhasibe, R. G., & Mncube, D. W. (2021). Online learning as a catalyst for self-directed learning in universities during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Research in Social Sciences and Technology*, 6(2), 233–255. <https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2021.25>

Mateko, F. M. (2025). Digital inequality and transformation in South African higher education during COVID-19: A comparative analysis of historically disadvantaged and historically advantaged universities. *Higher Education Policy*. Advance online publication.

<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41307-025-00416-0>

McKenzie, J., & Dalton, E. M. (2020). Universal Design for Learning in inclusive education policy in South Africa. *African Journal of Disability*, 9, a776. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajod.v9i0.776>

Mhlanga, D. (2020). COVID-19 and the digital transformation of education: What are we learning on 4IR in South Africa? *Education Sciences*, 10(7), 180. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10070180>

Moodley, P., & Cloete, N. (2024). Self-directed learning of rural first-generation South African undergraduates: A social constructionist perspective on autonomy, competence and relatedness. *African Perspectives of Research in Teaching and Learning*, 8(2), 133–147.

<https://doi.org/10.70875/v8i2article11>

Mutongoza, B., & Hendricks, C. (2023). From emergency remote teaching to sustainable digital futures: Student support and well-being at a rural South African university. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 11(1), 47–64.

Olivier, J. (2022). Preparing education students for self-directed, multimodal learning in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. In J. Olivier, C. du Toit-Brits, B. Bunt, & A. Dhakulkar (Eds.), *The Fourth Industrial Revolution and teacher education in South Africa* (pp. 35–51). AOSIS.

<https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2022.BK306.03>

Olivier, J., du Toit-Brits, C., Bunt, B., & Dhakulkar, A. (Eds.). (2022). Contextualised open educational practices: Towards student agency and self-directed learning. AOSIS.

<https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2022.BK276>

Paganini, N., Farr, M., & Weigelt, J. (2025). Pathways to transform urban food systems: Feminist action research from Cape Town and Nairobi. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, 8, 1470801. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2024.1470801>

Pangrazio, L., Auld, G., Lynch, J., & Sawatzki, C. (2024). Data justice in education: Toward a research agenda. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. Advance online publication.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2024.2320196>

- Reddy, V., Soudien, C., & Juan, A. (2021). The Fourth Industrial Revolution, inequality and education in South Africa. *South African Journal of Science*, 117(9/10), 1–3.
- Samuels, A. B. (2025). South Africa's journey through the Fourth Industrial Revolution and beyond. *Transformation in Higher Education*, 10, a482. <https://doi.org/10.4102/the.v10i0.482>
- Sehlako, T., Chibambo, S., & Divala, J. (2023). Education 4.0 and the digital divide: Exploring the use of new and emerging technologies in South African rural schools. *Frontiers in Education*, 8, 1209511. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2023.1209511>
- Seleke, B. (2021). Scaffolding teachers' professional development for the infusion of indigenous knowledge transfer in the Technology classroom (Unpublished PhD thesis). North-West University, South Africa.
- Seleke, B., & Teis, N. J. P. (2025). Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies and higher education: Strategies for Africa's sustainable future and global competitiveness. *Journal of Public Administration and Development Alternatives*, 10(2), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.55190/JPADA.2025.425>
- Shava, E., & Muringa, T. P. (2025). Digital empowerment of women in the South African public sector. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 10, 1604857. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2025.1604857>
- Shepherd, T., & Shade, L. R. (2025). Reimagining intersectionality in digital inclusion: Why some bodies matter more. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 50(2). <https://doi.org/10.3138/cjc-2025-0010>
- Shiferaw, Y. A. (2024). A spatial analysis of the digital gender gap in South Africa. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 212, 123443. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2024.123443>
- Statistics South Africa. (2023). General Household Survey 2023: ICT access and use. Statistics South Africa.
- Taylor, L. (2017). What is data justice? The case for connecting digital rights and freedoms globally. *Big Data & Society*, 4(2), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951717736335>
- Tyabashe-Phume, N., Wicks, J. L., Kiah, M. L., & De Vries, P. J. (2025). Technology-facilitated gender-based violence among women with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries: A scoping review. *African Journal of Disability*, 14, a1464. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajod.v14i0.1464>
- UN Women. (2022). Accelerating efforts to tackle online and technology-facilitated violence against women and girls. UN Women.
- UNFPA. (2021). Technology-facilitated gender-based violence: A technical paper. United Nations

Population Fund.

UNFPA. (2024). Technology-facilitated gender-based violence: An infographic guide to TFGBV.

United Nations Population Fund.

UNICEF South Africa. (2022). South African Kids Online: A national study of children's use of the internet, risk and opportunities. UNICEF South Africa.

UNICEF. (2024). Technology-facilitated gender-based violence across the life course: Emerging evidence and implications for children and young people. UNICEF.

Walton, E., & Engelbrecht, P. (2024). Inclusive education in South Africa: Path dependencies and emergences. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 28(10), 2138–2156.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2022.2061608>

World Vision International. (2024). Online child sexual exploitation and abuse in Africa: Emerging patterns and prevention strategies. World Vision International.

Zimmerman, B. J. (2002). Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. *Theory Into Practice*, 41(2), 64–70. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4102_2

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.33>

GOVERNANCE, INSTITUTIONS AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN RURAL UGANDA AND SOUTH AFRICA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Betty C Mubangizi

NRF/Chair in Sustainable Rural Livelihoods

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Mubangizib@ukan.ac.za

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0774-7193>

Abstract

This comparative study examines how governance structures, institutional dynamics, and community engagement shape rural resilience in Uganda and South Africa. The study drew on qualitative data collected from Alfred Nzo District (South Africa) and Isingiro and Kisoro Districts (Uganda). It employed institutional theory and network governance theory, in conjunction with the sustainable livelihoods framework. The analysis reveals that while both countries have decentralised governance frameworks and rural development policies, their implementation is hindered by capacity constraints, weak coordination, and limited community participation. Communities in both contexts demonstrate resilience through informal networks, indigenous knowledge, and grassroots initiatives. The study highlights that inclusive, well-coordinated governance, which integrates formal institutions and local agency, is crucial for promoting adaptive and sustainable rural livelihoods in Africa.

Introduction

Rural communities are the backbone of socio-economic life in much of Sub-Saharan Africa, yet they face persistent challenges threatening livelihoods and well-being (Birkmann et al., 2022). In South Africa, for example, rural areas contend with deteriorating infrastructure, environmental shocks like floods and droughts, pervasive poverty, geographic isolation, and unresolved land tenure disputes (Moyo, 2016). Similar hardships afflict rural Uganda, where communities grapple with natural disasters (floods, droughts, landslides) and pandemics amid limited resources (Chingono, T.T. & Mbohwa, C., 2023; Chingono & Mbohwa, 2023). These stresses erode food security, incomes, and social cohesion, underscoring the importance of resilience as a development goal. Governance processes and institutional dynamics significantly influence how rural communities respond to and recover from such adversities. Effective governance, characterised by transparent and inclusive decision-making, as well as strong policy implementation, is essential for translating develop-

ment initiatives into tangible benefits for vulnerable populations (Yu et al., 2024). Conversely, weak governance (e.g., policy gaps, poor enforcement, limited participation) can impede investment in rural development efforts (Mazur & Tomashuk, 2019; Adejumo-Ayibiowu, 2020; Chirisa & Nel, 2022; Yar & Yasouri, 2024). Despite recognition that financial and technical inputs alone are insufficient, there is a lack of scholarly attention on how governance arrangements influence rural livelihood outcomes (Ellis & Bahiigwa, 2003; Karyeija & Kahika, 2017; Gibbens & Schoeman, 2020; Birkmann et al., 2022; Mubangizi & Adekanla, 2024). Governance here refers to government actions and the totality of institutions, actors, and processes that shape decision-making and implementation at multiple levels (North et al., 2009; Ostrom, 2010; Dale et al., 2013; Cadman et al., 2016). In Uganda, decades of decentralisation under the Local Government Act of 1997 have formally empowered local governments in planning, budgeting, and service delivery. Following the end of apartheid, South Africa established a decentralised municipal system with elected local

councils and participatory mechanisms intended to balance national priorities with local needs (RSA, 1996). In theory, these institutional frameworks provide opportunities for community engagement and locally tailored development. However, the actual performance of these governance systems in fostering sustainable livelihoods and community resilience remains an open question. Both Uganda and South Africa have struggled to fully realise the promise of their rural development policies - whether due to capacity deficits, centralised control, or lack of meaningful community inclusion, Gibbens, M. & Schoeman, C. (2020); Kakumba, 2010; Nahikiriza, D. 2023; Mubangizi & Adekanla, 2024.

This paper presents a comparative analysis of rural governance and resilience in southwestern Uganda and eastern South Africa to shed light on these issues. I draw on two aligned studies, each examining how policy implementation, institutional factors, and local engagement affect rural livelihoods in the face of disasters and socio-economic change. The studies share common research objectives and qualitative methodologies, enabling a rich comparison across contexts. Both investigations are grounded in relevant theoretical frameworks: Institutional Theory (to understand how formal rules and organisations operate in practice) (North et al., 2008; Ostrom, 2010; Dale et al., 2013), Network Governance Theory (to analyse multi-actor relationships across state, civil society, and community domains), and the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (to holistically assess how households mobilise assets and strategies for survival) (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Scoones, 1998; Ellis, 2000; Mubangizi, 2021). In the Ugandan case, I also apply a resilience lens, distinguishing absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities at community and institutional levels (Kruk et al., 2017; Hanefeld et al., 2018; Blanchet et al., 2017; Thomas et al., 2020). Using these frameworks, I explore four interrelated themes: (1) governance structures and institutional dynamics, (2) community participation in decision-making, (3) institutional support and policy implementation for rural livelihoods, and

(4) community resilience strategies. By comparing Uganda and South Africa findings, I elucidate how differing contexts shape these processes and derive policy implications for strengthening rural governance and resilience across Africa.

Methodology

Research Design and Study Sites

Both country studies adopted a qualitative, case-study design to capture in-depth insights into governance and livelihoods. This approach is widely recognised for its ability to explore complex social phenomena within real-life contexts, particularly in development research (Yin, 2018). In Uganda, research was conducted in two high-rurality districts of Southwestern Uganda - Isingiro and Kisoro - focusing on Kabuyanda and Nyakabande sub-counties. These remote sub-counties face significant challenges in service delivery due to their geographical location and high poverty levels. Uganda's decentralised governance structure in these areas includes elected Local Councils (from village level LCI up to district level LCV) and appointed technical officials, operating under the Local Government Act framework. South Africa's study occurred in the Alfred Nzo District Municipality of the Eastern Cape Province. Alfred Nzo is a predominantly rural district characterised by dispersed villages, traditional authority influence, and a post-apartheid municipal governance system comprising a district and its local municipalities. Both sites were selected for their rural nature and vulnerability to socio-economic and environmental shocks, providing a basis for examining governance and resilience in comparable rural settings.

Data Collection

Each study used key informant interviews and focus group discussions to gather empirical evidence. Researchers conducted 30 semi-structured interviews in Uganda with knowledgeable informants in 2024. These included sub-county and district officials (e.g., Sub-County Councilors, Parish Executive Committee Chairs, Chief

Administrative Officers, District Planners, Environment and Health Officers), as well as representatives of NGOs involved in rural development and service provision. This selection captured perspectives from both government and civil society stakeholders responsible for implementing or influencing rural livelihood policies. Additionally, four focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with community members. To ensure diverse views, separate FGDs were conducted for men and women in each district, with about six participants per group. Participants were residents actively engaged in farming, trading, or other livelihood activities who could speak to community experiences with governance and development initiatives. Discussions were facilitated in local languages (with translation as needed) to encourage open dialogue in a culturally comfortable manner.

In South Africa, data were similarly collected through eleven key informant interviews and two focus groups in 2024. Key informants were selected through purposive sampling to represent a diverse range of stakeholders, including municipal officials (planners, disaster management personnel, and local economic development officers), traditional leaders, community development workers, and civil society representatives. The interviews probed participants' experiences with policy implementation, governance processes, and community engagement in Alfred Nzo's rural development. Two FGDs (with 8 and 10 participants, respectively) gathered community member perspectives from different local municipalities within Alfred Nzo. These group discussions, referred to as imbizo when convened by officials, provided a forum for residents to voice their priorities and assess government efforts. All interviews and FGDs in both countries were conducted using discussion guides aligned with the research objectives, covering governance structures, policy participation, institutional support, and resilience strategies.

Analysis

With consent from participants, interviews and FGDs were recorded, transcribed and translated into English where necessary. The qualitative data were analysed thematically, following an

inductive coding process supported by software tools (Dedoose was used in the Uganda study and NVIVO for the RSA study). The researchers iteratively coded transcripts to identify recurrent themes and patterns related to local government roles, institutional challenges, community initiatives, and livelihood outcomes. The reliability of interpretations was ensured through cross-checking of code applications and triangulation between interview and FGD findings. Both studies adhered to ethical research standards: participants provided informed consent, anonymity was ensured by assigning unique identifiers (e.g., "Participant 1"), and institutional ethical clearance was obtained prior to data collection. Given that the two studies were conceptually and methodologically aligned, a comparative synthesis of their findings is presented below. Results are organised by thematic categories that emerged in both contexts, with illustrative evidence and citations from each country case.

Results

Governance Structures and Institutional Dynamics

Uganda - Decentralisation on Paper vs. Reality: Uganda's local governance is formally decentralised, but the study found a clear gap between institutional design and practice. The Local Government Act (Uganda, 1997) and related policies empower sub-national units (districts, sub-counties) to plan and deliver services for rural development. In Isingiro and Kisoro, this framework has created elected councils and committees to manage local affairs. However, participants revealed that institutional capacity constraints, centralised fiscal control, and political interference significantly hinder the effectiveness of these bodies. Local government offices often lacked sufficient funding and skilled personnel to fulfil their mandates independently. Key informants explained that most revenue comes from central transfers, which are subject to strict conditions, thereby limiting local discretion. One district official noted that, although powers are devolved on paper, "financial autonomy is minimal and we still wait for Kampala's approval on many projects" (KII).

Political dynamics also played a role: local leaders sometimes faced interference from higher-level politicians (e.g. Members of Parliament or ministries), which could skew priorities or delay implementation. Despite these challenges within formal institutions, the Uganda study highlighted the importance of informal governance mechanisms that fill gaps. Communities frequently rely on trusted traditional or ad-hoc leadership structures, colloquially termed “*L.C. Zero*”, which operate outside the official state hierarchy yet play a vital role in grassroots decision-making and accountability. For instance, village elders’ committees or religious leaders often mediate disputes, mobilise self-help groups, and liaise with the government on behalf of villagers. The findings suggest that any assessment of governance in rural Uganda must account for this dual system: formal decentralised entities with constrained capacity, and informal community-based institutions that command local legitimacy. Strengthening rural governance thus requires bolstering official structures and recognising and integrating these indigenous institutions.

South Africa - Structured Local Government and Multi-Level Alignment: In the Alfred Nzo District of South Africa, a well-defined municipal governance system exists, shaped by the reforms following 1994. The Alfred Nzo District Municipality (ANDM) comprises several Local Municipalities, each with an elected council, a mayor, and an administration responsible for delivering services. Political and administrative roles are delineated, with councillors providing leadership and oversight while municipal managers and staff handle technical implementation. The South African study participants confirmed the “structured nature of policy implementation” in the district, underpinned by frameworks such as the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) process. The IDP is a legally mandated, five-year planning instrument through which local governments, guided by community input, set development priorities (e.g. infrastructure, economic projects). The findings noted that mechanisms for community participation are formally in place: *ward committees*, which are citizen bodies in each electoral ward; *imbizo* outreach

forums convened by the Mayor or Speaker; and stakeholder representative forums during IDP formulation. Traditional authorities (chiefs or headmen) also form part of the governance network in many rural villages, working alongside councillors. This network governance approach intends to bring the government closer to the people and ensure local knowledge informs decision-making. Indeed, one official described Alfred Nzo as operating “in an executive ward participatory system” with over 300 ward committee structures across 32 wards, creating “*a conduit of information between the municipality and the community*”. However, having formal structures does not automatically guarantee effective local governance. The South African case shows that alignment between national, district, and local levels is crucial. Participants emphasised that local plans must mesh with national rural development frameworks (such as the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP) and provincial plans) to secure funding and policy support. Imbalances or disconnects in this multi-level system can weaken implementation. For example, South Africa’s central government introduced ambitious programs, such as the CRDP, to combat rural poverty. However, according to reports, these “centralised strategies have not effectively advanced sustainable livelihoods” at the grassroots. This was echoed in Alfred Nzo, where officials felt that top-down programs sometimes did not fully address local realities, necessitating adjustments during implementation. In summary, Alfred Nzo’s governance context is one of formally robust local institutions and plans operating under higher government tiers’ oversight (and dependency). The challenge lies in making these structures deliver ground results through better coordination and sufficient capacity.

Community Participation in Decision-Making

Formal Participatory Mechanisms vs. Actual Engagement: Both country studies examined how rural citizens participate (or fail to participate) in governance processes that impact their livelihoods. In Uganda, local government legislation provides for community participation in

development planning, for instance, through parish development committees or open village meetings. In practice, however, local councillors and elites often mediate participation. Focus group respondents in Uganda indicated that direct grassroots input into policy formulation is limited, unless solicited explicitly by a development program or NGO. Many rural Ugandans channel their needs through informal avenues (like the “LC 0” village gatherings mentioned earlier) rather than through formal public hearings, which are rare. Still, there were examples of community involvement: in one sub-county, residents organised to petition the sub-county council for extension of a water project, and the council incorporated this demand into its plans (KII, Kabuyanda). Such cases, though, appeared to be exceptions in the data. More commonly, information flow and consultation were top-down; officials would announce projects or policies to the village, with little prior participation in the design process. Notably, the Uganda field team had to translate discussion guides into local languages (Runyankole, Rufumbira) to facilitate FGDs, underscoring the linguistic barrier that can impede rural people’s voice in official matters. Several interviewees lamented that ordinary villagers often lacked awareness of government programs or confidence to engage with authorities, a situation reminiscent of findings by Kakumba (2010) that decentralisation had yet to empower Uganda’s rural poor to participate fully without manipulation.

In South Africa, the constitution and municipal law establish stronger requirements for public participation, and the Alfred Nzo District has multiple platforms ostensibly designed to enable community voices. Ward committees (each comprised of community representatives) are meant to meet regularly and convey local issues to the municipal council. Annual IDP public consultation meetings invite citizens to comment on draft development plans. Additionally, high-profile *imbizo* events allow residents to interact directly with mayors or other leaders. However, the study’s findings suggest that meaningful participation remains challenging despite these provisions. One participant stated:

“I feel like people are not really involved in government matters as they should be... maybe it is the strategies the municipalities are using to communicate... You will find maybe just 20 community members [participating] where there should be 3,000”. This sentiment, echoed across interviews, points to low turnout and engagement in public meetings. Contributing factors include a lack of civic education (many community members do not understand the processes or their potential influence), apathy from unmet expectations, and logistical issues (meetings at inconvenient times or far from some settlements). Even when people attend, their participation may be perfunctory. A local official observed that some individuals come ***“as if they are just there to sign attendance registers, not understanding that they should be looking into those documents and policies”***. Indeed, participants noted instances where attendees would sign in for the IDP forum to claim travel stipends or to appease local leaders. However, they offered no input on the development plan. The barrier of language was also underscored in Alfred Nzo. While English is the official language for policy documents and meetings, many rural residents are more comfortable in isiXhosa. As one interviewee pointed out, *“not all [policies] are written in local languages... most of them are in English”*, which limits community members’ understanding of content and thus their capacity to engage in discussions. This mirrors the observed pattern in Uganda and other multilingual societies, where the use of non-indigenous languages in governance can exclude a large population segment.

Implications for Inclusive Governance: The comparative evidence reveals a common gap between participatory structures and achieving genuine grassroots influence on policy. Both Uganda and South Africa have formalised roles for communities in governance, through local councils or ward committees, yet on the ground, community agency is constrained by awareness, education, and institutional habits. However, the South African case also shows the potential of innovative outreach to improve participation. Alfred Nzo District has experimented with

bringing engagements closer to the people. For example, the Office of the Speaker clusters ward meetings in villages, allowing even remote residents to attend without travelling far. Traditional leaders are also leveraged to invite and encourage their communities to speak up. Such efforts were promising, though not yet fully resolving the participation deficit. In Uganda, informal community institutions serve as a substitute avenue for voice, which can be powerful for self-help and accountability at the village level. However, they may not influence higher-level policy unless linked into formal channels. The findings underscore that inclusive rural governance requires more than instituting forums; it demands active facilitation, capacity-building, and trust-building so that community members can sit at the table and feel empowered to shape decisions. In both countries, there are calls for stronger civic education and communication strategies. One South African analysis argued that overcoming participation barriers will require *“culturally appropriate outreach programs, partnerships with local leaders, and accessible communication channels to ensure information reaches all sectors of the rural population”*. The experiences in Uganda and South Africa thus highlight that closing the governance gap will depend on converting nominal participation into substantive engagement.

Institutional Support and Policy Implementation Challenges

Programs and Policies for Rural Livelihoods:

Uganda and South Africa have introduced numerous policies and programs to support rural development, improve livelihoods, and build resilience against shocks. The studies found that these institutional interventions provide critical support, but their implementation is challenging. In Uganda, respondents described a landscape of government-led and donor-supported initiatives targeting rural communities. Key among these were the Parish Development Model (PDM), the Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP), the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP), and Emyooga (a skills and microfinance program). These pro-

grams aim to transition households from subsistence farming to market-oriented activities, increase incomes, and reduce poverty. For instance, the five-year PDM seeks to integrate subsistence farmers into the money economy by organising them into parish-level cooperatives and providing revolving funds. Study participants acknowledged these initiatives as important avenues of support. One focus group in Kabuyanda noted that PDM had helped members get startup capital and pay off debts, which *“improved our livelihoods”*, and even those yet to receive funds were hopeful as they had registered in groups for the subsequent disbursement. Likewise, the Development Response to Displacement Impacts Project (DRDIP) – a World Bank-funded program under the Office of the Prime Minister – was frequently cited in Kisoro district for assisting residents and refugees with livelihood projects, infrastructure, and environment management. Government agencies (like district offices and the Prime Minister’s disaster department) and NGOs (e.g. Red Cross, FAWE, TASO) also provided humanitarian relief and recovery aid during crises. Examples included distributing food and tarpaulins after landslides, building latrines, offering agricultural inputs post-flood, and supporting vulnerable groups such as single mothers and HIV patients. These efforts, focusing on immediate needs, correspond to building the absorptive capacity of communities, helping them absorb shocks in the short term.

A suite of rural development policies and programs in South Africa similarly exists, though structured somewhat differently. National initiatives like the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP) (launched in 2009) and the National Spatial Development Framework (NSDF) aim to coordinate investment in rural areas. At the provincial and district level, policies feeding into local planning include Local Economic Development (LED) strategies, sector-specific programs (agriculture support, small enterprise funding), and mandated Disaster Management Plans. Alfred Nzo District had, at the time of study, recently developed a District Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster

Risk Reduction Plan (2024). Participants highlighted this plan as a positive step: it provides a clear protocol for responding to emergencies like pandemics, fires, and floods, and was officially adopted and made accessible (published on the district website, available in council offices). The openness of these documents was seen to “*foster transparency and ensure that residents, including business owners, know the emergency protocols in place*”. Additionally, Alfred Nzo implements South Africa’s system of social grants (child support grants, old-age pensions, etc.), which, while not a development “program” per se, constitutes a significant institutional support for household livelihoods. A large portion of the rural population in the Eastern Cape relies on these state grants alongside small-scale farming and trading. Such grants provide a safety net and have become an integral part of the rural economic fabric. Together, policies for LED, service delivery, and social protection form the backbone of institutional support for South Africa’s rural communities.

Barriers to Effective Implementation: Despite the plethora of programs, both studies uncovered substantial obstacles undermining policy effectiveness. In Uganda, the issue is less about policy absence and more about the capacity for implementation and reach. Many Ugandan programs (PDM, YLP, etc.) are centrally designed and ambitious in scope, but local officials reported difficulty in executing them fully. Funding shortfalls and delays were a common refrain; for example, a district official mentioned that only a fraction of the earmarked PDM funds had actually been disbursed to parishes by mid-2024 (KII). Moreover, communities that did receive program funds sometimes lacked the complementary training or market access to make their new enterprises viable, limiting long-term impact (this aligns with the study’s observation that support has “*often been insufficient to drive transformative changes in livelihoods*”). Central-local relations further complicate implementation: local governments remain dependent on the central government for resources and sometimes face shifting directives. As noted earlier, centralised fiscal control

in Uganda means districts have little discretionary budget, and political patronage can influence which localities benefit first. One outcome is that institutional efforts prioritise short-term relief or absorptive measures (delivering food, emergency supplies, and minor cash grants) over deeper investments in adaptive or transformative capacity (such as building irrigation systems, improving schools, or diversifying the rural economy). Indeed, the Uganda findings indicated that while state and NGO interventions strengthened communities’ immediate coping ability, they did not substantially alter the structural conditions of poverty and vulnerability. Transformative initiatives addressing root causes and enabling long-term changes were fewer, often constrained by resource limits and bureaucratic inertia. Another barrier in Uganda is the unequal distribution of services. Remote villages (especially in the mountainous Kisoro region) were less likely to have active projects, partly due to accessibility issues, leaving some pockets with minimal institutional presence. In South Africa’s Alfred Nzo District, the challenges to policy implementation took a slightly different form, often related to governance and communication problems. A prominent issue raised was low awareness and understanding of available policies and services among the rural populace. Multiple interviewees noted that many community members were unaware of specific government programs or the support they could access. For example, youth who could benefit from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (for tertiary education) were often unaware of it due to poor outreach. This gap is compounded by low literacy levels and the language barrier previously mentioned – policy documents and application forms in English effectively exclude a segment of the population. As a result, programs intended for people with low incomes (from education funds to agricultural grants) may be underutilised or accessed only by a well-informed few. Stakeholder engagement was another challenge. Participants criticised that policy formulation sometimes happens in silos, with insufficient input from those expected to implement or benefit from the policies. One respondent argued for

more thorough public participation at the design stage so that communities “*appreciate these policies as their own... instead of [policies] being a barrier*” during implementation.

Furthermore, the South African study highlighted issues with institutional coordination and capacity. Alfred Nzo’s local government often relies on other agencies or higher levels to execute specific functions, resulting in a fragmented implementation process. For instance, a municipal official explained that “*we are not law enforcers; we still need other departments to help us enforce [regulations]*”, citing examples of needing provincial or national departments for environmental health inspections or building safety enforcement. This highlights structural limitations in the municipality’s mandate and capacity, which can result in gaps, such as bylaws existing on paper but not being enforced due to reliance on overburdened external officials. Resource constraints also persist: Alfred Nzo is among the poorer districts, with a limited local revenue base and heavy reliance on intergovernmental transfers. This means ambitious plans (like extending water infrastructure or creating jobs through LED projects) face funding bottlenecks. Bureaucratic inefficiencies, including lengthy procurement processes, staff vacancies, and slow decision-making, were also cited as factors that delay project delivery. Collectively, these issues result in gaps in policy, weak enforcement mechanisms and limited community participation, which have impeded the effectiveness of local development. The South African case echoes many Ugandans: having policies and institutions in place is insufficient if they are not fully accessible, responsive, and empowered to act.

Comparative Insight: It is evident that both countries face an implementation deficit, though the causes span multiple dimensions. Uganda’s rural development programs struggle against limited decentralised capacity and top-down control, while South Africa’s policies struggle against communication breakdowns and multi-level governance complexities. They share a need to better connect the policy frameworks to the lived realities of rural people. If not, even well-intentioned policies will remain largely

theoretical, with limited tangible benefit to communities. As one South African respondent concluded, the impact of development efforts hinges on “*the extent to which local communities are included in their design...and can access these policies*”. The findings from both studies reinforce this: inclusive, well-coordinated implementation is crucial to turn paper plans into improved livelihoods.

Community Resilience and Adaptation Strategies

Beyond formal institutions, rural communities are not passive in the face of challenges. Both studies demonstrate how local communities utilise social networks, indigenous knowledge, and grassroots initiatives to foster resilience. These community-driven strategies are a key part of the resilience equation, complementing institutional support.

In Uganda, the concept of resilience was explicitly explored. The research revealed that communities employ a variety of informal mechanisms to cope with and adapt to shocks. Social ties are indispensable: families and neighbours form rotating savings groups, share food during shortages, and work on each other’s farms when labour is short (FGD findings). One prominent example is Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAS) and SACCOS (Savings and Credit Cooperatives), which have proliferated in rural Uganda. These community-based financial groups enable members to pool their savings and borrow at low interest rates, providing a buffer in times of need and capital for small ventures. Respondents credited such groups with helping pay school fees and livestock investments even when formal bank credit was inaccessible. Indigenous knowledge and practices also enhance resilience. Farmers have longstanding techniques for preserving food, selecting drought-tolerant crop varieties, and predicting weather patterns. In Kisoro, elders described traditional terracing methods that reduce soil erosion during heavy rains – knowledge passed down through generations (KII, Kisoro). The study noted that these “social networks and indigenous practices” demonstrated significant adaptive potential in the face of environmental

variability. For instance, when a destructive flood hit one village, affected families were hosted by others and aided by local herbalists who knew which plants could purify water sources contaminated by the flood (FGD anecdote). Such community solidarity and local knowledge often addressed needs faster than external aid could arrive. However, the Uganda research also recognised limits to community coping. Some shocks, like the COVID-19 pandemic, overwhelmed local resources and eroded the social cohesion needed for resilience (as lockdowns prevented communal gatherings for funerals, farming, etc.). Thus, while community initiatives bolster absorptive and adaptive capacities, helping people survive and adjust in the short term, longer-term transformative capacity (making systemic changes to reduce future risk) still requires outside investment and support.

Several findings highlight community-level adaptive strategies. Participants in Alfred Nzo emphasised the importance of micro-level, place-based development - essentially, initiatives from within the community - to ensure relevance and sustainability. One such example is the practice of community members forming co-operatives (for agriculture or crafts) to jointly access government grants or markets. There were cases where local farmers organised themselves to rehabilitate small irrigation schemes and approached the municipality only for technical advice, illustrating agency and innovation at the grassroots. The research found that “integrating community-driven initiatives with broader policy frameworks” is crucial: when local efforts are recognised and supported by the state, their impact on resilience is amplified. An Alfred Nzo official gave the instance of a community-built rainwater harvesting project that was later scaled up under a municipal water program, resulting in a more reliable water supply that helped during droughts (KII, ANDM). This reflects a form of network governance where communities are partners rather than mere beneficiaries. Social capital is another asset in South African rural communities. Extended family networks often act as safety nets; for instance, urban relatives send remittances or food to rural kin, and in return, rural family members care for

children or the elderly. Such rural-urban linkages (prevalent in the Eastern Cape due to migrant labour history) spread risk and provide fallback options during crises like job loss or crop failure. The Alfred Nzo study also suggested that traditional practices contribute to resilience. One participant mentioned how communities heed traditional early warning signs for weather, or how communal work parties (*ilima*) are organised to assist struggling households, ensuring no family is left behind (FGD insights).

Comparative Perspective on Community Resilience:

Both contexts underscore resilience as a dynamic social process rooted in community capacities and external support. The Uganda case explicitly frames resilience in terms of absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities. State interventions essentially enhanced absorptive capacity (providing short-term relief). In contrast, community-driven strategies enhanced adaptive capacity by enabling adjustment and learning (e.g. diversifying income through new trades learned from peers, adopting better farming methods via local farmer groups). Transformative capacity – the ability to fundamentally reduce vulnerability over time – was emerging where institutions and communities worked in concert, such as through the PDM and similar programs that aimed to change the economic structure of households. Although the terminology of capacities was not used for South Africa, the findings align with the idea that participatory, localised planning enhances resilience by ensuring development interventions meet actual community needs. Both studies highlighted community participation in governance as a key factor in resilience. When people have a say in decisions, the outcomes are more likely to fit their context and thus be sustained. Conversely, ignoring local input can lead to maladapted projects that fail or are rejected by the community. Importantly, neither communities nor governments can go it alone; resilience emerges from their interaction. In Uganda, this is seen in calls for integrating institutional frameworks with community-based approaches, and in South Africa, in the emphasis on combin-

ing top-down and bottom-up efforts for “*equitable, community-centred, and adaptive rural governance*”.

In summary, rural people in Uganda and South Africa demonstrate resourcefulness and solidarity that enable them to navigate hardships. Savings groups, cooperatives, traditional knowledge, and mutual aid are pillars of resilience that national policies should recognise and strengthen. However, these strategies operate within broader socio-economic conditions; their success often hinges on supportive governance (e.g. legal recognition of cooperatives, training opportunities, inclusion of indigenous knowledge in disaster planning). The findings reinforce that community resilience is not separate from governance, but deeply intertwined; effective governance can cultivate and scale up local innovations. In contrast, poor governance may stifle or neglect them.

Discussion

This comparative analysis of rural Uganda and South Africa reveals common patterns and significant contextual differences in how governance and institutional dynamics affect community resilience and livelihoods. Here, we interpret the findings in light of the theoretical frameworks and draw out the broader implications for rural governance in Africa.

Institutional Theory - Formal Structures vs. Implementation Reality: Institutional theory suggests that the rules, norms, and structures (“the institutions”) governing a context will shape outcomes, but our findings highlight the gap that often exists between formally designed institutions and their practical implementation. In Uganda’s case, the formal decentralised governance framework, enshrined in law, did not fully translate into empowered local governance. Institutional theory would predict that clear rules (like the Local Government Act) provide a scaffold for development. However, we observed that factors such as capacity deficits and the recentralization of resources undercut these rules. This illustrates a well-known phenomenon in institutional analysis: the difference between institutions in form and function. Uganda’s sub-na-

tional units legally have mandates, but their ability to fulfil them is curtailed by structural issues (insufficient funds, skills, and political will). Similarly, in South Africa, while municipalities have constitutionally guaranteed roles, the effectiveness of those institutions is mixed, hampered by weak enforcement mechanisms and gaps between policy and local needs. Both cases affirm that having institutions is insufficient; their capacity and the context in which they operate determine actual performance (North, 1990). Theoretically, it suggests that institutional reforms must go beyond creating rules to ensure that the resources and incentives align with the intended outcomes. For instance, fiscal decentralisation in Uganda must accompany political decentralisation to be effective. The South African experience, where many policies did not automatically yield better livelihoods, supports this view, institutions must be backed by good governance practices (such as transparency, accountability, and participation) to deliver results. The studies underscore a classic institutionalist insight: “Institutions matter, but context and capacity matter too.”

Network Governance – Multi-Actor Collaboration and its Shortcomings: Using network governance theory, we examine how actors (state agencies, NGOs, the private sector, and community bodies) interact in rural governance networks. Both countries exhibit multi-actor environments. In Uganda, networks comprising local governments, international NGOs, and community groups were actively involved in disaster response and livelihood programs. South Africa similarly has networks of municipal officials, traditional leaders, civil society, and higher-level government departments that all play roles. The evidence suggests that effective network governance can enhance resources and innovation; however, both cases demonstrate incomplete integration of these networks. For example, Uganda’s positive experiences with DRDIP and NGO support demonstrate that external partnerships can plug capacity gaps and introduce resources. However, coordination issues were noted. Some participants noted instances of overlapping functions or inadequate

information sharing between the government and NGOs at times. The Namara et al. (2015) study in Uganda similarly found that network governance improved financial autonomy for LED, but did not automatically build needed skills or fully integrate stakeholders. In South Africa, network governance is institutionalised through forums and committees. However, the Alfred Nzo findings showed that linkages were not always functioning optimally (e.g. municipalities needing to “borrow” enforcement capacity from other departments or ward committees existing but not engaging communities effectively). This resonates with a network governance perspective: having multiple actors involved is beneficial only if they form a cohesive, communicating network with clearly defined roles and trust. Where silos persist (as with line departments vs. local municipalities in SA, or central vs. local authorities in Uganda), governance networks can falter. Both cases hint that horizontal and vertical integration in governance networks is vital. Horizontal integration refers to coordination among local actors (for instance, district officials working hand-in-hand with traditional councils and NGOS). In contrast, vertical integration means alignment from national to local (ensuring policies and information flow down, and local feedback flows up). The call in Uganda for “collaborative networks between state and non-state actors” and South Africa for bridging the gap between top-down policy and community-driven needs essentially appeals for stronger network governance. Thus, a key implication is that rural governance should foster platforms where government, community, and civil society regularly collaborate, such as multi-stakeholder rural development committees or resilience task forces, to leverage each actor’s strengths and compensate for weaknesses. Network governance theory predicts, and these findings confirm, that no single actor can address complex rural problems alone; partnerships and networks are indispensable, albeit requiring careful management and capacity-building to be effective.

Sustainable Livelihoods Framework – Holistic View and Policy Alignment: The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) provides a holistic lens, considering how assets (human, social, financial, natural, and physical) and strategies contribute to livelihood outcomes under the influence of policies and institutions. Applying this to our findings, we see several alignments. In South Africa, the study explicitly utilised the SLF, which highlighted the diversity of livelihood sources (state grants, agriculture, and small businesses) and the vulnerabilities (shocks, trends, and seasonality) that rural households face. A livelihoods perspective explains why, for instance, income diversification emerged as a theme in Uganda: households that expanded into trading or new crops were attempting to broaden their asset base to reduce their reliance on any single source. The Uganda resilience study noted that fostering income diversification is critical to building transformative capacity, which aligns with SLF thinking that more diverse assets and activities strengthen resilience. Moreover, the SLF draws attention to the policy and institutional context (the “transforming structures and processes”) that shape livelihood options. Both case studies prove that context can enable or constrain strategies. For example, Uganda’s rural taxation under fiscal decentralisation was historically cited as hostile to expanding rural income opportunities, a policy factor affecting livelihoods. In current findings, programs like PDM and YLP are attempts by the institutional context to inject capital and skills (financial and human assets) into livelihoods. The South African policies, like LED and CRDP, aim to improve infrastructure and financial services (physical and financial assets) available to the rural poor. However, the success of these measures, as the SLF would predict, depends on how well they reach the people and match their needs. The Alfred Nzo findings that many rural residents could not access or were unaware of resources meant for them show a misalignment – a livelihoods approach would advocate making institutional processes more accessible and pro-poor (e.g., simplifying grant application processes, increasing outreach). The

SLF underscores that improving rural livelihoods requires strengthening multiple asset dimensions and reducing vulnerability factors simultaneously. The comparative results confirm this: where interventions addressed only one facet (such as immediate food relief or a one-time cash grant), the effect was short-lived; however, where a combination was addressed (skills + credit + infrastructure, or social capital + external support), households fared better. Comprehensive, multi-sectoral approaches are needed for policy - a point both studies emphasise in their recommendations for integrated planning (e.g., combining disaster management with economic development in SA, or integrating institutional and community strategies in UG).

Community Resilience and Participation – The Human Factor in Governance: A recurring theme is that community resilience and effective governance are two sides of the same coin. The findings across Uganda and South Africa demonstrate that communities are not merely recipients of policy but agents of resilience. Where governance systems opened space for that agency, outcomes were more positive. For instance, inclusive planning processes in Alfred Nzo that genuinely incorporated community priorities resulted in development projects that people felt ownership of, which likely enhances their sustainability. Conversely, tokenistic participation led to disengagement, and policies failed to meet their targets. In Uganda, community initiatives often had a significant impact where formal governance was absent or weak, highlighting the strength of local social capital and the missed opportunity when formal governance fails to connect with these grassroots efforts. A powerful insight is the role of informal institutions (like “LC0” or traditional councils) in filling governance voids. These can be seen as reservoirs of social resilience and local legitimacy. For policy-makers, this suggests that partnering with informal leaders and structures (rather than sidelining them) could improve outreach and uptake of programs. Both studies advocate for strengthening community participation in governance to boost resilience. This

aligns with the global literature (e.g., Salvia & Quaranta, 2017; Cooper & Wheeler, 2017), which frames community resilience as a social process enhanced by inclusive governance. Practically, this could involve institutionalising participatory budgeting at village levels in Uganda, or ensuring ward committees in SA have real decision-making influence and resources. As both cases indicated, it also means addressing barriers like language and education by translating materials and civic training. Culturally sensitive communication and genuine power-sharing with communities are required to convert formal participatory mechanisms into engines of resilience.

Contextual Differences and Their Influence:

While the overarching themes are similar, it is essential to recognise context-specific factors in Uganda and South Africa that influence governance and resilience. Historically, South Africa’s rural areas (especially in the Eastern Cape) were shaped by apartheid-era neglect and the homeland system, resulting in a heavy reliance on state social grants today (Ngumbela, Khalema, & Mqolomba, 2020; Hajdu, Neves, & Granlund, 2020). This means that South African rural livelihoods have a somewhat unique element of state cash transfers as a pillar, which is largely absent in rural Uganda. This social safety net undoubtedly provides a baseline resilience (absorptive capacity) in SA that Ugandan communities lack, making Ugandans more dependent on ad-hoc aid or family support in times of crisis. On the other hand, Uganda’s villages may have more cohesive traditional structures since they did not undergo the same disruptive resettlement patterns, which may give them an edge in social solidarity (Quinn, 2009). Politically, Uganda is a unitary state with a long-standing President and a system that, despite decentralisation, remains relatively centralised in decision-making. South Africa is a constitutional democracy with a more precise separation of powers and autonomous local governments. These differences manifest in the findings of this research: Ugandan officials cite central government dominance (an Office of the Prime Minis-

ter directing local disaster responses, MPS influencing projects), whereas South African officials speak more to inter-governmental coordination issues rather than direct interference. Additionally, South Africa's public sector is relatively more resourced and bureaucratic, whereas Uganda's is under-resourced but perhaps more flexible (e.g., local administrators working creatively with NGOS to fill gaps). Such context nuances mean that policy solutions must be tailored. For Uganda, the priority might be increasing local fiscal autonomy and combating patronage, while for South Africa, it might be improving bureaucratic efficiency and community awareness. Moreover, environmental contexts differ: Uganda's studied districts faced hazards like floods, drought, and even recent armed conflict incidents (mentioned as a disaster by respondents), whereas Alfred Nzo's main hazards were wildfires, storms, and economic stagnation with no armed conflict, but drug use amongst the youth was identified as a 'growing disaster'. This influences resilience needs (conflict adds a layer of complexity in Uganda, requiring peace-building measures, which are not a focus in SA). Despite these differences, the core lesson holds: empowering local institutions and communities is indispensable in both contexts. The adjustments are in emphasis, not in kind.

Policy Implications for Rural Governance in Africa: Drawing on the above analysis, several policy implications emerge that are relevant not only to Uganda and South Africa but to rural governance across Africa:

- **Strengthen Local Institutional Capacity:** Governments and development partners should invest in building the capacity of local government units through training, adequate staffing, and sufficient budget allocations to fulfil their mandates. The Ugandan case demonstrated how capacity gaps and a lack of fiscal power at local levels cripple implementation. Enhancing planning, financial management, and service delivery skills at the district and municipal

levels will improve the execution of rural development projects. In South Africa, capacity building may involve enhancing enforcement capabilities and technical expertise within municipalities, enabling them to rely less on external departments.

- **Enhance Multi-level Coordination and Decentralise Resources:** Policies must ensure that the **principle of subsidiarity** is respected – decisions and resources should be devolved to the lowest appropriate level. Uganda might reconsider the balance of central-local fiscal relations to empower districts with more discretionary funding (as recommended by participants who noted centralised fiscal control as an issue. South Africa might focus on better coordination frameworks between provincial departments and district municipalities to eliminate siloed efforts. Both countries (and others) should establish clear protocols for collaborative planning across government tiers, perhaps through joint planning forums and aligned budgeting processes, so national programs like PDM or CRDP truly integrate with local development plans.
- **Institutionalise Inclusive Participation:** Making community participation real requires going beyond one-off consultations. Mechanisms such as participatory budgeting, community monitoring committees, and social audits can be institutionalised. For instance, **ward committee systems** in South Africa should be strengthened with training and modest resources to conduct outreach, gather input, and provide feedback to councils, moving from symbolic bodies to functional ones. In Uganda, **parish development committees** under the PDM could be expanded to have a say in

how funds are used and to monitor projects, thus increasing downward accountability. Ensuring information is available in local languages and user-friendly formats (posters, radio, community meetings) is a simple but powerful step to improve awareness and enable participation. Civic education programs are also crucial – governments and NGOs can collaborate to educate citizens on their rights and roles in local governance, as well as the content of key policies that affect them. As the South African study suggested, culturally appropriate outreach and working through respected local figures (teachers, religious leaders, traditional chiefs) can improve community buy-in.

- **Bridge Formal and Informal Governance:** Policies should recognise the role of informal and traditional institutions. Rather than viewing them as parallel or illegitimate, governments can formally involve these actors in development efforts. For example, Uganda's policy framework could formally acknowledge "LC1 courts" or clan committees in dispute resolution and include their input in local planning forums, given their influence at the community level. South Africa already involves traditional authorities in municipal councils in many areas; continuing to clarify their advisory role and integrating their community knowledge (e.g., in land allocation or cultural matters) can enhance outcomes. Collaborations with community-based organisations, savings groups, and cooperatives should also be part of governance strategies – for instance, inviting representatives of VSLAS or farmer groups to planning meetings, or contracting with local cooperatives to im-

plement projects. Both approaches empower communities and improve relevance.

- **Integrate Resilience and Development Planning:** One clear implication is that disaster risk management and climate adaptation must be mainstreamed into rural development. The Alfred Nzo example of developing an Adaptation Plan is commendable; all districts in hazard-prone regions should have such plans, and importantly, these should be linked to livelihood programs. Conversely, livelihood projects (such as agriculture and infrastructure) should be designed with resilience – for example, building water reservoirs to mitigate the impacts of drought as part of agricultural support. Uganda, which faces frequent floods and droughts, could develop local disaster committees that include community members trained in early warning and response, working alongside development officers. The studies also highlight the need for transformative actions to build long-term resilience, including investing in education, diversifying economic activities, and effective natural resource management. Both countries can draw on frameworks like the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (which Uganda is a signatory to) and monitor local implementation. Ultimately, planning should adopt a "resilience lens," asking how a given intervention will improve a community's ability to withstand future shocks.
- **Encourage Economic Diversification and Sustainable Livelihoods:** Policies should help rural people diversify their livelihoods through skills training, support for small enterprises, and market linkages. Uganda's approach, with pro-

grams like Emyooga (skills development) and PDM (project capital), is a step in this direction. Ensuring these programs are well-targeted, transparently managed, and include follow-up support will increase their impact. In South Africa, strengthening LED initiatives to create local jobs (for instance, in agro-processing, ecotourism, or renewable energy in rural areas) could reduce youth unemployment and outward migration. Both contexts highlight the role of education and youth engagement: participants in Uganda mentioned education as “key to development” and a means to develop the village. Policies that enhance rural education quality and connect graduates to local opportunities can transform rural human capital - a long-term yet vital investment.

- **Foster Accountability and Curb Corruption:** While not explicitly detailed in our earlier narrative, accountability is underlying many governance challenges. Reforms that promote transparency (like open budgeting, public dashboards of project progress) and citizen oversight can deter the leakage of resources that so often plagues rural projects. Uganda’s need to curb political interference could be met by stricter enforcement of procurement rules and by empowering local councils and civil society to watchdog projects. South Africa’s bureaucratic inefficiencies also mask accountability issues; hence, performance management systems and

community scorecards for services could be introduced. When people see that their feedback leads to improvements and that officials are answerable, trust in governance increases, further encouraging participation in a virtuous cycle.

In conclusion, the comparative findings from Uganda and South Africa underscore that resilient rural livelihood rest on a foundation of good governance. Both countries demonstrate that when governance and institutional support falter due to capacity gaps, centralisation, and poor engagement, rural communities remain highly vulnerable to shocks and development stagnates. Conversely, empowering local institutions, fostering inclusive networks, and harnessing community capacities lead to more adaptive and sustainable outcomes. Rural Africa is diverse, and policies must be tailored to local contexts; however, the core principles of strengthening institutions, bridging governance scales, and centring communities in development are broadly applicable. By integrating institutional theory’s focus on rules and capacity, network governance’s emphasis on partnerships, and the holistic view of the sustainable livelihoods approach, policy-makers and scholars can better design and evaluate interventions for rural development. The experiences of southwestern Uganda and Eastern Cape, South Africa, provide a microcosm of the continent’s rural governance puzzle – challenging but solvable, given committed reforms and collaborative action. Ultimately, building resilient rural communities in Africa will require governance that is not only by and for the people, but also with the people at its heart.

References:

- Adejumo-Ayibiowu, O. D. (2020). Good governance and rural development in Africa: Finding the missing link. In *African Perspectives on Reshaping Rural Development* (pp. 67-93). IGI Global.
- Asegie, A., Tadesse, H., & Kebede, B. (2021). Sustainable rural development in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons from Ethiopia. *Development Perspectives*, 18(3), 55–70.
- Birkmann, J., Cutter, S. L., Rothman, D. S., et al. (2022). Framing vulnerability, risk and societal responses: The MOVE framework. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 70, 102748.

- Birkmann, J., Liwenga, E., Pandey, R., Boyd, E., Djalante, R., Gemenne, F., ... & Wrathall, D. (2022). Poverty, livelihoods and sustainable development.
- Blanchet, K., Nam, S.L., Ramalingam, B. & Pozo-Martin, F., (2017). 'Governance and capacity to manage resilience of health systems: towards a new conceptual framework', *International Journal of Health Policy and Management*, 6(8), 431-438.
- Cadman, T., Maraseni, T., Breakey, H., López-Casero, F., & Ma, H. O. (2016). Governance values in the climate change regime: Stakeholder perceptions of REDD+ legitimacy at the national level. *Forests*, 7(10), 212.
- Chambers, R., & Conway, G. (1992). Sustainable rural livelihoods: Practical concepts for the 21st century. IDS Discussion Paper 296. Institute of Development Studies.
- Chikodzi, D. & Nhamo, G., (2021). 'Linking the Impacts of Tropical Cyclones to the Sustainable Development Goals', in *Cyclones in Southern Africa: Volume 3: Implications for the Sustainable Development Goals*, 3-16.
- Chingono, T.T. & Mbohwa, C., (2023). 'Disasters in Selected Emerging Economies', in *Supply Networks in Developing Countries: Sustainable and Humanitarian Logistics in Growing Consumer Markets*. Emerald Publishing Limited, 31-44.
- Chirisa, I., & Nel, V. (2022). Resilience Thinking in the Rural Human Settlements' Development and Management. *International Journal of Rural Management*, 18(1), 146-160.
- Cooper, S. J., & Wheeler, T. (2017). Rural household vulnerability to climate risk in Uganda. *Regional Environmental Change*, 17, 649-663. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10113-016-1049-5>
- Dale, Allan, Karen Vella, and Ruth Potts. "Governance systems analysis (GSA): A framework for reforming governance systems." *Journal of Public Administration and Governance* 3 (2013): 162-187.
- Duale, A. (2024). Governance, infrastructure, and rural resilience in East Africa. *African Public Affairs Review*, 9(2), 21-39.
- Dushkova, D., & Ivlieva, I. (2024). Local governance and climate resilience in fragile contexts. *Urban and Rural Sustainability*, 7(1), 15-29.
- Ellis, F. (2000). *Rural livelihoods and diversity in developing countries*. Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, F., & Bahiigwa, G. (2003). Livelihoods and rural poverty reduction in Uganda. *World development*, 31(6), 997-1013.
- Gibbens, M., & Cilliers, D. (2023). Public participation and policy effectiveness in South African municipalities. *South African Journal of Governance*, 6(1), 42-61.
- Gibbens, M., & Schoeman, C. (2020). A review of South Africa's rural development policies. *Development Southern Africa*, 37(3), 392-408.
- Hajdu, F., Neves, D., & Granlund, S. (2020). Changing livelihoods in rural Eastern Cape, South Africa (2002-2016): Diminishing employment and expanding social protection. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 46(3), 491-510. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2020.1773721>
<https://doi.org/10.37284/eajis.6.1.1193>
- Karyeija, G., & Kahika, G. (2017). Institutional roles and the implementation of local economic development, Kasese District, Uganda. *Africa's Public Service Delivery and Performance Review*, 5(1), 1-9.
- Makaya, G., Moyo, T., & Tinarwo, T. (2020). Institutional readiness and rural disaster response. *Journal of African Disaster Studies*, 4(2), 15-30.
- Mazur, K., & Tomashuk, I. (2019). Governance and regulation are indispensable for developing the potential of rural areas. *Baltic journal of economic studies*, 5(5), 67-78.
- Moyo, S. (2016). *Family farming in sub-Saharan Africa: its contribution to agriculture, food security and rural development* (No. 150). Working paper.

- Moyo, T. (2016). Rural development challenges in South Africa: A case study of the Eastern Cape. *Journal of African Development*, 18(2), 34–50.
- Mubangizi, B. C. (2021). Understanding rural development through the sustainable livelihoods lens. *South African Journal of Public Administration*, 56(3), 321–340.
- Mubangizi, B.C. & Adekanla, N. (2024). "Sustainable Livelihoods in Rural Uganda – Programmes, Projects, and Participants in the Face of Pandemics." *Lex Localis*. <https://doi.org/10.54175/lexlocalis114>
- Mubangizi, B.C., 2025. 'Pathways to resilient rural livelihoods: Lessons from Southwestern Uganda', *Jàmbá: Journal of Disaster Risk Studies* 17(1), a1905. <https://doi.org/10.4102/jamba.v17i1.1905>
- Mubangizi, BC. 2025. Community Engagement, Governance, and Policy Implementation for Resilient Rural Livelihoods in South Africa. *African Journal of Governance and Development*. Volume 14 (1), 140-157
- Mubangizi, BC, and Nzabona, A. 2025. "Governance and Rural Livelihoods: Experiences From Southwestern Uganda," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 6, no.8 .1480 – 1494. <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20256816>
- Nahikiriza, D. (2023). "Policy Implementation Performance in Developing Countries: The Study of Uganda among East African Countries." *East African Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*.
- Nasrnia, M., & Ashktorab, H. (2021). Community participation in development: A critical review. *Journal of Social Development Studies*, 5(1), 23–38.
- Natarajan, K., Pillay, S., & Govender, N. (2022). Livelihood resilience and climate adaptation. *African Journal of Environmental Policy*, 4(2), 78–94.
- Ngumbela, X. G., Khalema, E. N., & Mqolomba, Z. (2020). Local worlds: Vulnerability and food insecurity in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. *Jàmbá: Journal of Disaster Risk Studies*, 12(1), a830. <https://doi.org/10.4102/jamba.v12i1.830>
- North, D. C., Wallis, J. J., & Weingast, B. R. (2009). *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ostrom, E. (2010). Analysing collective action. *Agricultural economics*, 41, 155–166.
- Quinn, J. R. (2009). Here, Not There? Theorising about why traditional mechanisms work in some communities, not others. Panel, *Lost in Transition*.
- Republic of South Africa. (1996). *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Republic of Uganda. (1997). *The Local Government Act, Chapter 243*. Kampala: Uganda Printing and Publishing Corporation.
- Salvia, R., & Quaranta, G. (2017). Place-based rural development and resilience: A European perspective. *European Planning Studies*, 25(1), 26–45.
- Scoones, I. (1998). Sustainable rural livelihoods: A framework for analysis. IDS Working Paper 72. Institute of Development Studies.
- Siddle, A., & Koelble, T. (2017). *Local government in South Africa: Can the objectives of developmental local government be achieved?* UCT Press.
- Tajuddin, M., & Mulang, A. (2024). Enhancing local economic development through policy innovation. *Journal of Local Development*, 11(1), 9–23.

Yar, F. G. M., & Yasouri, M. (2024). Rural Development Challenges in Addition to Effective Solutions to Overcome Obstacles. *Zhongguo Kuangye Daxue Xuebao*, 29(3), 79-90.

Yin, R. K. (2018). Case study research and applications: Design and methods (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Yu, C., Banda, F., & Mkhize, B. (2024). Resilience in the margins: Local governance and climate adaptation in rural Africa. *African Journal of Governance and Development*, 13(1), 44–62.

Yu, Y., Jing, Z., Wang, Y., Qiu, X., Yang, X., & Xu, Y. (2024). Understanding livelihood vulnerability: a perspective from Western Sichuan's ethnic rural settings. *Journal of Mountain Science*, 21(2), 380-396.

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.34>

MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS: INSIGHT FROM ELDERLY WOMEN IN LIMPOPO PROVINCE ON FOOD RESTRICTIONS DURING PREGNANCY

*Tshifhiwa Cynthia Mandiwana,
Harvey Sekwaleng Malapane,
Mukhethwa Khorommbi,
Anzani Mugware,
Selekane Ananias Motadi,*

*Lindelani Fhumudzani Mushaphi,
Department of Nutrition, Faculty of Health Sciences,
University of Venda, Private Bag X5050, Thohoyandou,
Limpopo Province, 0950, South Africa.*

Corresponding author: Tshifhiwa Cynthia Mandiwana,
E-mail address: tshifhiwa.mandiwana@univen.ac.za

Abstract

Women and children are the most vulnerable to malnutrition due to inadequate dietary intake, unequal food distribution, improper food storage and preparation, as well as dietary restrictions. The study aimed to describe and explore myths and misconceptions about food restriction and recommendations during pregnancy amongst elderly women in rural villages of Limpopo Province. A qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory design was used. Thirty-four elderly women aged 60 years and above were purposively sampled from two rural villages of Limpopo Province. Seven focus group discussions were conducted with three to five members per group using a semi-structured interview guide. Thematic content analysis was used for data analysis. Findings show that food restrictions occur in all food groups, though protein foods were the most restricted during pregnancy, which includes African tripe, chicken feet and head, eggs, ox-livers, meat, and recommended foods are mostly fruits and vegetables. The study revealed that myths and misconceptions about food restrictions during pregnancy still exist, and culture was observed as the main influence on food restriction. Although culture cannot be easily changed, awareness should be raised to ensure that pregnant women are not deprived of foods that are essential during pregnancy for the development and growth of the foetus. The current study will help to bridge the gap in the existing knowledge about the restriction of certain foods during pregnancy.

Keywords: *Elderly women, Food restriction, Misconceptions, Myths, Pregnancy*

Introduction

Maternal malnutrition is widespread, particularly in rural areas in middle-income countries such as South Africa. Maternal nutrition is critical before and during pregnancy since it impacts the mother's health as well as the baby's growth (Whitney & Rolfes, 2018). Pregnancy brings changes in women's diet, and eating well assists a woman to stay healthy and strong in preparation for the positive maternal and infant outcome (Zerfu *et al.*, 2016). During pregnancy, physiological nutrient demands are substantially increased, and it is also an intense period of growth and development that humans have ever experienced (Zerfu *et al.*, 2016; Brown, 2016). To address the nutritional needs of both mother and foetus, a sufficient diet is essential (Patil *et al.*, 2010; Tsegaye *et al.*, 2021).

Women and children are particularly prone to malnutrition as a result of inadequate dietary intake, poor food distribution, inappropriate food storage and preparation, and dietary limitations (Zepro, 2015). When it comes to food intake, everyone has their own set of myths and beliefs (Gadegbeku *et al.*, 2013). These are the regular avoidance of a particular food that turns into a tradition that most people adopt and end up eventually being called food restrictions (Park, 2005). Pregnancy imposes an extra need for calories and nutrient requirements (Krause *et al.*, 2012). The avoidance of certain food items and incorrect knowledge regarding their benefits can deprive women of adequate nutrition (Parmar *et al.*, 2013). According to Patil *et al.* (2010), every ethnic and community group has its own set of beliefs and traditions that it adheres to during pregnancy. Although certain foods or activities are not allowed during pregnancy in some societies, they are often meant to protect the health of the mother, safeguard the unborn child, and prevent any negative outcomes of the pregnancy (Mohamad & Ling, 2016). According to Parmar (2013), the myths and misconceptions that are forced on pregnant women in many local societies result in poor intake of vital nutrients. Myth and misconceptions about food restriction during

pregnancy make it difficult for a pregnant woman to stay healthy and strong (Abere and Azene, 2023).

Food restrictions during pregnancy have been recognized as one of the factors affecting and contributing to maternal undernutrition during pregnancy, particularly in rural areas (Oni and Tukur, 2012). Pregnant and lactating women in various parts of the world are deprived of various foods (Parmar *et al.*, 2013). The restrictions on foods in Africa are based on religious and cultural beliefs, which constrain the consumption of important nutrients such as protein in meat products (Kainja, 2010). Poor maternal nutrition is usually associated with birth complications such as low birth weight and increased risk of high prenatal and infant mortality (Parmar *et al.*, 2013).

Researchers have seen and heard pregnant women being restricted from eating a variety of foods without understanding why. Furthermore, studies recognized that nutrients in food are critical for the optimum pregnancy outcome, and poor consumption of crucial nutrients may result in health concerns for both the mother and foetus. Therefore, the study aimed to describe and explore myths and misconceptions about food restrictions and recommendations during pregnancy among elderly women in rural villages of Limpopo Province.

Methods

Research approach

A descriptive exploratory design and qualitative research approach were adopted for this study. The qualitative research approach was used to describe and explore the myths and misconceptions about food restricted and recommended during pregnancy.

Study location and site

The study was conducted at two rural villages in Limpopo Province, Ga-Mampuru and Ha-Matidza. Elderly women from 60 years of age and above are estimated to contribute 7.4% of the whole population of Limpopo Province. In Limpopo Province, more than half (57%) are Northern Sotho, followed by Tsonga (23%),

Venda (12%), Afrikaners (2.6%), and English, half a percent. The spoken language of dominance is Sepedi, followed by Xitsonga and Tshivenda. The Limpopo Province is known for having a low level of education among the majority of people, and its large rural settlements (Limpopo Provincial Government, 2017). In each culture, the Sotho, Shangaan-Tsonga, and Venda, there are differences in the manner and the way things are done from one another, often in ways that only members of those groups fully understand.

Sampling and sampling procedure

Purposive sampling was carried out to undertake the study on elderly women aged 60 years and above. Elderly women were purposively sampled because they are known to be rich sources of information regarding myths and misconceptions of food restrictions and recommendations during pregnancy. The focus group discussions sample comprised seven groups, and each group consisted of three to five members, making a total of 34 elderly women. Researchers made use of seven focus groups that consisted of a minimum of three and a maximum of five elderly women to avoid information overload, confusion, and to ensure full participation and cooperation. The samples used represented the community at large and answered the main question of the study.

Subject recruitment

A letter of recruitment was submitted to the chief's palace, which outlined the aim and objectives of the study. The researcher recruited elderly women in their homes, during community gatherings, and at the clinics. The discussions were conducted at one elderly woman's home in a focus group.

Trustworthiness

Measures to ensure trustworthiness were applied according to Given (2008), stating that trustworthiness can be thought of as the ways in which qualitative researchers ensure that transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability are evident in their research.

Data collection

A validated and pre-tested semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data through a focus group. The interview guide contained demographic questions as well as open-ended questions about myths and misconceptions about food restrictions and recommendations during pregnancy. This was followed by probing questions which were based on the elderly women's responses. Data was collected over a period of 2 weeks, and seven group discussions were held. Data were audio-recorded to supplement the notes that were taken during the discussion for later familiarization with the data, and this was done in local languages. The interview guide was developed in English and then translated into the local language by the Department of Linguistics, utilizing the back translation process.

Data analysis

The collected data were transcribed and translated from Tshivenda and Sepedi to English. A thematic content analysis was used to analyze each focus group's transcripts. Transcribed data were categorized into themes that relate to the study objective. The study presented the collected data in the form of tables and text.

Ethical consideration

Approval for the study was granted by the University of Venda, Research Ethics Committee (project No: SHS/18/NUT/20/2307). Permission to access elderly women was granted by the chiefs of villages verbally. Written informed consent was obtained from the participants prior to participation. No personal identification, such as names, was used during data collection. The code was used instead of names to maintain participants' privacy and confidentiality. Participation was voluntary; no participants were forced to participate in this study. The elderly who could not write their names wrote an "X" to indicate written consent.

Results

Demographic profile of elderly women

This study comprised 34 elderly women ranging in age from 60 to 100 years. Approximately 44.1% of elderly women were between the ages of 60 and 69. More than half (58.8%) of elderly women were Bapedi ethnic group, followed by Vha-Venda (41.2%). Nearly two-thirds (61.8%) of elderly women were non-scholars, with only 14.8% having completed secondary school. The majority (85.2%) of elderly women were unemployed (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic profile of elderly women

Variables	Description	Number (n = 34)	Percentage (%)
Age (years)	60-69	15	44.1
	70-79	13	38.2
	80-89	5	14.8
	90-100	1	2.9
Ethnic group	BaPedi	20	58.8
	Vha-Venda	14	41.2
Religion	African/ Traditional	23	67.6
	Christian	11	32.4
Employment status	Self-employed	5	14.8
	Unemployed	29	85.2
Highest qualification	Non-scholars	21	61.8
	Primary level	7	20.5
	Secondary level	5	14.8
	Tertiary level	1	2.9

Theme: Elderly women's understanding of the myths and misconceptions about food restriction and recommendations during pregnancy

Elderly women have the same understanding of the myths and misconceptions about food restriction during pregnancy, despite ethnic groups. Although most of the foods restricted are different, only a few are similar. Elderly women understand food restrictions during pregnancy as a way of protecting the health status of the mother and her baby, which is believed to allow for optimal fetal growth, development, and ease the delivery process. One elderly woman clearly mentioned that food restriction was done for the sake of the baby so

that the baby would not grow bigger because, in the olden days, people used to give birth at home.

“A pregnant woman must eat a small portion of food for the sake of delivery day because eating a lot will make the baby grow bigger and there were no stitches and operators” (Elderly woman 11).

Elderly women's understanding of myths and misconceptions about food restriction during pregnancy has been summarized into four sub-themes presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Theme and sub-themes of elderly women's understanding.

Theme	Sub-themes
Understanding of myths and misconceptions on food restriction during pregnancy.	1. Food restricted during pregnancy. 2. Recommended food during pregnancy. 3. Tabooed practices amongst pregnant women. 4. Factors that influence food restrictions.

Sub-theme 1: Myths and misconceptions about food restrictions during pregnancy

The identified foods below were specifically restricted during pregnancy. The foods were classified according to their food groups, which include starchy foods, protein foods, milk and milk products, fruits, beverages, and miscellaneous foods. Elderly women explained the myths and misconceptions about identified restricted foods as follows:

Starchy foods

Elderly women indicated that different starchy foods are restricted during pregnancy, including porridge, sweet potato, “*Tshidzimba/Dikgobe*”, stir-fried maize, and they shared the motive that these foods cause complications for

the mother and the baby. For example, in the Venda ethnic group, fermented porridge is believed to cause stomach regurgitation for the baby and sweet potatoes to cause constipation for the mother. Hot porridge is restricted during pregnancy in both Venda and Pedi ethnic groups, with a shared belief that the baby will be born with burnt marks (Table3).

Table 3: Myths and misconceptions on Restricted starchy foods

Food item	Myths	Misconceptions
Hot porridge	The child is believed to be born with a burn mark or dots on the body	
Tshidzimba/ Dikgobe		Said to cause constipation for the mother
Cold porridge		The baby in the womb won't be able to swallow it because it is hard.
Fermented porridge		The baby will have stomach pains and always regurgitate
Maize (stir-fried)		The baby will cry a lot because of the sound that the maize makes while it is being fried.
Sweet potato		Consumption is believed to cause constipation.

Protein foods

Many protein foods were reported to be restricted during pregnancy amongst the Venda ethnic group, and these include chicken feet and head, mopani worms, “*mukala*”, peanuts, ox-liver, “*magulu*”/“*mogodu*” (African tripe) and “*Madzhulu*”/“*Mohlwa*” (dried termites). Fish, ‘*Parela*’, which was explained to be meat from a cow that has just died from natural causes, especially giving birth and “*Kgokga*”, which is meat prepared at a funeral, are not to be consumed during pregnancy as reported by

the Pedi ethnic group. Both ethnic groups reported that eggs are restricted during pregnancy because they are believed to delay birth.

“The consumption of ‘parela’ and ‘Kgokga’, may cause women to inherit the animal’s condition; thus, women might die after giving birth, together with their baby. Furthermore, the women might also experience prolonged labor pains (Elderly woman 5).

African tripe (“*Magulu*”/“*Mogodu*”) has been

reported with the shared reason for the consumption of chicken head, which includes the baby being born without hair, as two elderly women had stated. In addition, the consumption of chicken feet was said to cause the baby to be delivered with legs first; thus, one elderly woman said, *“If God forsake you, the baby will come out with feet first”* (Elderly woman 8).

Ox-liver has been reported to have a negative

impact on the outcome of pregnancy. One elderly woman mentioned that if it is consumed during pregnancy, it will cause the baby to be born with a cluster of blood. Consumption of Mukala has been reported to cause the prolonged healing of the umbilical.

“Madzhulu/Mohlwa” (dried termites) had been reported to be restricted amongst pregnant women because they are believed to result in shivering of the baby.

Table 4: Myths and misconceptions on restricted protein foods

Food item	Myths	Misconceptions
Fish	This is believed to cause the baby to cry too much	
Parela	Consuming meat from a cow that has just died is believed that a mother will also give birth and dying	
Kgokga		Prolongs pregnancy, Difficult labour
Mopani worms		The baby will be born with cuts resembling the worm
Eggs	They are believed to close the path when the delivery time has arrived, which delays birth.	The mother will experience a prolonged pregnancy and difficulty during labour
Chicken feet	They believe that the child will be born with an incomplete number of toes and also believe that the baby will be born with legs first.	
Chicken heads	The child will be born with no hair. The child will be born with a head like a snake	
Magulu/Mogodu (African tripe)	The child will be born with no hair.	
Ox-liver	The child will be born with a cluster of blood	
Mukala		The child will experience a prolonged umbilical cord healing
Dried termites (“Madzhulu/Mohlwa”)	The baby will be born shivering.	
Peanuts	The baby will be born with white skin colour.	

Milk and milk products

Although milk is a protein and a rich source of calcium, elderly women from the Venda ethnic group had said that it is not a good food to consume during pregnancy because of the belief

that if a woman consumes milk during pregnancy, she will give birth to a baby who is white, resembling the colour of the milk. Furthermore, some elderly women had indicated that milk products such as ice cream can cause

the baby to be born with white skin (*Elderly women 13, 2, & 24*).

Fruits

The Venda ethnic group reported that they restrict pregnant women from consuming the following fruits: “maembe”, “thungulu”, “thawa”, “madoro”, “mbula”, marula, lemon, ripe mango and paw-paw, and figs, while the Bapedi only reported that excessive consumption of bananas may result in the birth of a baby with yellow skin.

Maembe, thungulu, and thawa (indigenous fruits)

“Maembe” had been reported to be restricted during pregnancy because it is believed to result in the mother giving birth to a baby with dimpled skin, while “thungulu” and “thawa” are reported to cause the baby to be born with skin colour similar to these fruits.

“If you consume thungulu during pregnancy, the baby will be born bleached with the water from thungulu” (Elderly woman 6).

Mbula, madoro, and nombelo

“Mbula” and “madoro” were reported to be restricted during pregnancy because they are believed to cause constipation. Some elderly women reported that “nombelo” was restricted amongst pregnant women because of the belief that the woman might swallow the seed.

Figs and lemons

During the discussion, some elderly women had reported that pregnant women are restricted from consuming figs and lemon, as it is believed that it could result in a baby born without hair, while lemon is said to result in a thin baby.

Marula, ripe mango, and ripe pawpaw

Pregnant women are restricted from consuming marula, ripe mango, and pawpaw as it is believed that they can cause the baby to be born with curds in the nose and are associated with respiratory problems. Table 5 summarizes the myths and misconceptions about restricted fruits during pregnancy.

“Eating ripened mangos results in the baby being born with curds from the mango coming out of the baby’s nose” (Elderly woman 16).

Table 5: Myths and misconceptions about restricted fruits during pregnancy

Food item	Myths	Misconceptions
Banana	Excessive consumption causes the child to be yellow	
Maembe	The baby will be born with dimpled skin	
Thungulu	Same skin colour as the fruit	
Thawa	Same skin colour as the fruit	
Mbula, Madoro		Said to cause constipation.
Litchis		Believed that women would swallow the seed
Figs	The baby will be born with no hair	
Lemon		The baby will be born thin in shape
Marula		The baby will be born with a cleft in the nose
Ripen mango		

Ripen paw-paw

Beverages

Elderly women have different views about what not to drink during pregnancy. From the focus groups, alcoholic beverages, including traditional beer and “tshikoko”, were reported to be restricted during pregnancy in the Venda ethnic group because they are believed to cause congenital brain defects. Furthermore, traditional beer was reported to result in the birth of a baby with curds from the beer’s ingredients, on the head, and “tshikoko” was believed to choke the baby. Pregnant women in the Pedi ethnic group are restricted from the consumption of hot tea because they believe the child will be born with burnt marks.

“Tshikoko is not supposed to be drunk by a pregnant woman, it has maṭeṭe – it will cause choke and maṭeṭe will get in the baby’s nose” (Elderly woman 18).

Miscellaneous

In both ethnic groups, pepper, sugar cane, and marula seeds were reported to be restricted during pregnancy with similar beliefs. Pepper was restricted because of the belief that it would cause the baby to be born with red eyes and that the baby would be born sneezing.

“A pregnant woman is not supposed to eat pepper excessively because it will result in the child having no eyelashes” (Elderly woman 7). Marula seeds that are found inside the marula fruits are restricted from pregnant women because they believe the child will experience the abnormal release of mucus. An elderly woman said, *“Pregnant women should not eat marula seed because the child will have mucus and excessive release” (Elderly woman 31).*

Sugar cane has been the most commonly reported as a restricted food during pregnancy, as elderly women believe that it may cause the baby to be born with stripes or cuts resembling the food.

“Eating sugar cane during pregnancy is not allowed because the baby will be born with stripes, cracks, and blood all over the body” (Elderly woman 1).

“A pregnant woman is not supposed to eat

sugar cane because she will give birth to a child who has cut just like the sugar cane” (Elderly woman 20).

Sub-theme 2: Recommended foods during pregnancy

Protein

Although fish was restricted by the Bapedi, it was mentioned to be restricted during pregnancy, canned fish was one of the food items that was agreed upon by elderly women in one focus group as the recommended food item to be consumed by pregnant women. Elderly women believe that the consumption of canned fish allows for uncomplicated and painless delivery, resembling the slippery nature of a fish. *“She can eat foods like canned fish and also meat, even if it is beef” (Elderly woman 3).*

“Foods from water, such as fish, are also good because they are slippery and allow for a smooth birth” (Elderly woman 10).

Starchy foods

It was mentioned that sorghum is recommended for consumption during pregnancy by the Bapedi, and this is because they believe that it has all the nutrients that the baby needs to develop and grow optimally.

“Back then, those pregnant women used to eat Mabelle porridge because it is healthy” (Elderly woman 12).

Fruits

Elderly women have a shared belief that pregnant women should consume fruits such as apples, oranges, and bananas, although it was mentioned that excessive consumption is restricted.

“Foods that a woman should eat include apples and bananas, but she must not consume too much of them because of illnesses we face nowadays, such as high blood pressure. In fact, a pregnant woman should eat an apple, a banana, and an orange in a day” (Elderly Woman 20).

Vegetables

Vegetables, along with fruits, were the most commonly mentioned foods that should be eaten during pregnancy, though there were several indigenous fruit restrictions. Elderly women from the Venda ethnic group mentioned vegetables such as “delele/ndelete, mushidzhi”, and “bovhola”. These reported vegetables are said to be recommended because they contain vitamins and do not have added sugar. Some elderly women indicated that fruits and vegetables have the nutrients that the baby needs to support growth and development.

Miscellaneous foods

Many food items were mentioned as safe for the mother to consume and that are good for the development and growth of the baby. Some of the most commonly recommended foods in the Pedi ethnic group included indigenous foods such as mopani worms and “dikgakga rapani”, which are small native insects and fruits. Overall, these foods were said to have a positive effect on the pregnancy. Table 6 shows a list of food items that are recommended for consumption during pregnancy.

Table 6: Recommended foods during pregnancy

Food item	Myths	Misconceptions
Canned fish		Food from water is slippery and allows for a smooth birth
Mabelle porridge		This food is believed to have all the nutrients the baby needs
Banana		Fruits are said to have all the nutrients that the baby needs for growth and development and no sugar.
Apples		
Figs		
Thabva		
Mutangawuma		
Orange		Vegetables are said to have all the nutrients that the baby needs for growth and development.
Morogo		
Spinach		
Delele		
Mushinzhi		
Bovhola		These are believed to be good for the mother and baby's health.
Indigenous foods (mopani worms and dikgakga rapane)		

Discussion

The understanding and the beliefs around the restrictions are determined mainly by culture, regardless of the ethnic group or religion. In the present study, some elderly women were employed, and some had tertiary degrees. However, the study findings show that food restriction during pregnancy has nothing to do

with qualification or employment. The study findings also emphasized that the restriction of foods during pregnancy was done in order to protect the mother and the baby and to ease the process of delivery. A similar observation was made in Tanzania, where pregnant women were restricted from consuming certain foods to prevent undesirable pregnancy outcomes and

to ensure a thriving delivery (Lennox *et al.*, 2017). On the contrary, healthy eating during pregnancy is vital to ensure optimal growth and development of the fetus (Forbes *et al.*, 2018; Wondimu *et al.*, 2021). Restriction of food during pregnancy may have consequences for the mother as well as the baby.

In this study, different food items in various food groups were reported to be restricted during pregnancy by elderly women. Furthermore, protein foods such as milk, eggs, chicken head, chicken feet, and peanuts were the most restricted foods during pregnancy. The consumption of food items from this food group is believed to have a negative impact on the outcome of the pregnancy, such as prolonged pregnancy, and cause difficult labor. Similar findings were reported in Rural Maharashtra, pregnant women are also restricted from consuming eggs and chicken meat as it is believed that it can be harmful to the pregnancy and the baby's health (Raje and Rao, 2015). Pregnant women in Kamataka were restricted from protein-based foods such as chicken meat, eggs, and milk (Catherin *et al.*, 2015). In Ghana, pregnant women were restricted from consuming eggs, fresh meat, and fresh milk because it was believed to make the unborn baby large, which may result in difficult delivery and death of the mother (Suyitno *et al.*, 2023). Protein foods such as meat, eggs, and other animal products are considered high-quality sources of protein and are essential during pregnancy (Brown, 2016). During pregnancy, amino acids are essential for building and maintaining tissues such as muscle, bone, red blood cells, and producing enzymes (Elango and Ball, 2016). However, the myths and misconceptions about food consumption during pregnancy disadvantage the unborn baby in receiving essential nutrients for growth and development.

In the present study, elderly women revealed that fruits such as bananas, figs, lemons, sugar cane, pawpaw, and ripe mangos are restricted from consumption during pregnancy. Elderly women believe that the consumption of marula, ripe mango, and ripe pawpaw causes the baby to be born with curds in the nose and will have respiratory problems. Sugar cane is believed to

result in a baby being born with cuts and stripes all over the body. A similar observation was reported in Zambia, where pregnant women were restricted from consuming sugar cane as they believed that it could result in babies being born with rough, dry, and cracking skin (Annur *et al.*, 2008). Fruit such as pawpaw has a juicy taste rich in antioxidant nutrients such as carotene, vitamin C, B, folate, pantothenic acids, and minerals such as potassium and magnesium. Furthermore, it plays a significant role in maintaining fluid and electrolyte balance, boosting nerve communication, and muscle contraction in the mother's body. Moreover, it is a good source of fiber and has been reported to promote optimal cardiovascular functions and protect against colonial cancer (Tela, 2020).

In this study, elderly women also indicated that during pregnancy, women are not supposed to consume alcohol or any alcoholic beverage because consumption of alcohol is believed amongst elderly women to result in the birth of a mad baby. This myth is in agreement with literature indicating that alcohol consumption during pregnancy has been associated with mental disability and cognitive impairment (Krause *et al.*, 2012). A study conducted in Kenya revealed that women were restricted from consuming alcoholic beverages during pregnancy because they believed it would result in a retarded, underweight, and stunted child (Riang'a *et al.*, 2017). Alcohol consumption during pregnancy is associated with increased risk of fetal alcohol syndrome, which is a condition characterized by reduced birth weight and length, including a small head size and a variety of congenital abnormalities (Dumas *et al.*, 2018).

In this study, fruits, vegetables, and protein foods were recommended for consumption during pregnancy. The elderly women reported that fruits such as bananas, apples, and oranges are the most recommended foods during pregnancy. The elderly woman further stated that these foods are recommended because they believe they contain the essential nutrients that the baby needs for growth and development. In

the study conducted in Sudan, fruits were recommended for consumption among pregnant women because they believed that fruit strengthened the maternal immune system and protected them from different diseases (Tahir *et al.*, 2018). In Nepal, pregnant women are encouraged to consume ripe fruits such as paw-paw because they have less latex, with high concentrations of Vitamin A (D'Souza *et al.*, 2016). Another similar study conducted in Bihar emphasised that green vegetables and fruits were frequently recommended for consumption during pregnancy (Piasecki, 2013). In this present study, vegetables were never said to be restricted; elderly women had indicated that vegetables have nutrients needed by the mother and for the proper growth of the foetus. This means that a pregnant woman can enjoy various vegetables as long as she has access to them and they are available.

Even though most protein foods were reported to be restricted during pregnancy, fish was among the most recommended food items to be consumed in this study since it is believed to contribute to the smooth delivery of the baby. Fish is a source of several nutrients such as iodine, long-chain omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids, and vitamins A, D, and B12, which are important for healthy foetal neurodevelopment (Starling *et al.*, 2015). The findings of this study and the literature both support the consumption of fish, as it plays a vital role in maternal health and foetal development.

As part of the discussions, elderly women also pointed out several practices that are restricted during pregnancy and their myths. Practices such as smoking cigarettes, sitting on the doorway, collecting eggs from the hen-house, jumping the fence, and sitting with one leg folded were amongst them. These practices are believed to harm the outcome of the pregnancy, while smoking cigarettes is believed to cause the baby to be born with steams in the eyes and a dump baby. In support of the current study findings, smoking during pregnancy is associated with long-term consequences on the offspring's such as lung function and increases the incidence of childhood wheezing and asthma

(Spindel and McEvoy, 2016).

Conclusion and contribution

The study revealed that myths and misconceptions about food restrictions and recommendations during pregnancy still exist amongst elderly women. This study identified myths about food restrictions and recommendations during pregnancy. Most of the food items that are essential for maternal wellbeing, fetal development, and growth were mentioned to be restricted during pregnancy, and these were based on myths and misconceptions. Foods commonly restricted during pregnancy include fish, eggs, sugar cane, hot food items, alcoholic beverages, and indigenous fruits, including “thungulu, maebe, and thawa, tshidzimba/Dik-gobe”. Elderly women indicated that these food restrictions were done to ensure positive pregnancy outcomes. Most of the restricted foods provide the essential nutrients for the growth and development of the foetus. These food restrictions may result in a maternal nutritional status that is a determinant of the child's nutritional status. Poor maternal nutritional status results in adverse pregnancy outcomes such as preterm delivery, low birth weight, and restricted fetal growth. The current study will help to bridge the gap in the existing knowledge about the restriction of certain foods during pregnancy. The study may also be beneficiary for the young pregnant women to have positive outcomes of their pregnancies, as the elderly are the main influences of the practices during pregnancy.

Recommendations

Although culture cannot be easily changed, awareness should be raised to ensure that pregnant women are not deprived of foods that are essential during pregnancy for the development and growth of the fetus. There is a greater need to ensure all pregnant women are educated and informed of the appropriate and adequate food to consume during pregnancy, so that informed food choices based on scientific knowledge can be made to optimize the health of the mother and her developing foetus. These can be

achieved through nutrition education and campaigns aimed at clarifying the myths and misconceptions about food restrictions. Nutrition education should be given to elderly women about food consumption during pregnancy, as they have an enormous influence on pregnant women. These myths and misconceptions could be removed by nutritionists through nutrition education and awareness for elderly women and pregnant women as well.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to appreciate all elderly women who took their time to participate in the study. Their contribution and knowledge regarding the topic are more valuable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Authors' contributions

T.C.M. supervised the whole process of manuscript; H.S.M. and M.K. contributed to conceptualizing the study, its design, coordination of data collection, data entry. A.M focused on data analysis; S.A.M. interpreted the data, and drafting of the manuscript, and LFM proofread and edited the manuscript.

Funding information

The research was not funded.

Data availability

The datasets generated and analysed in the current study are not publicly available online because the university has a copyright. The datasets used during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not reflect the policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

References

1. Anuar, N.S., Zahari, S.S., Taib, I. A. & Rahman, M.T., 2008, 'Effect of green and ripe Carica papaya epicarp extracts on wound healing and during pregnancy', *Food and Chemical Toxicology*, 46(7), 2384-2389.
2. Abere, M., Azene, A.G. 2023, 'Food Taboo and associated factors among pregnant women attending antenatal clinics at Bahir Dar City, North West Ethiopia, 2021: a cross-sectional study. Sci Rep. 2023 May 13;13(1):7790. doi: 10.1038/s41598-023-34964-5. PMID: 37179370; PMCID: PMC10182971.
3. Brown, J.E., 2016, '*Nutrition through the life cycle*', Cengage learning.
4. Catherin, N., Rock, B., Roger, V., Ankita, C., Ashish, G., Delwin, P., Shanbhag, D. & Goud, B. R., 2017, 'Beliefs and practices regarding nutrition during pregnancy and lactation in a rural area in Karnataka, India: a qualitative study', *International Journal of Community Medicine and Public Health*, 2(2), 116-120.
5. Chauke, M.E., Matlakala, M.C. & Mokoena, J.D., 2015, 'Folk practices regarding childbearing', *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies*, 25(1), 23-33.
6. Dove, N., 2010, 'A return to traditional health care practices: a Ghanaian study', *Journal of Black Studies*, 40(5), 823-834.
7. D'Souza, L., Jayaweera, H. & Pickett, K.E., 2016, 'Pregnancy diets, migration, and birth outcomes', *Health care for women international*, 37(9), 964-978.
8. Dumas, A., Toutain, S., Hill, C. & Simmat-Durand, L., 2018, 'Warning about drinking during pregnancy: lessons from the French experience' *Reproductive health*, 15(1), pp.1-9.
9. Elango, R. & Ball, R.O., 2016, 'Protein and amino acid requirements during pregnancy' *Advances in Nutrition*, 7(4), pp.839S-844S.
10. Forbes, L.E., Graham, J.E., Berglund, C., & Bell, R.C., 2018, 'Dietary change during pregnancy and women's reasons for change' *Nutrients*, 10(8), p.1032.
11. Gadegbeku, C., Wayo, R., Ackah-Badu, G., Nukpe, E. & Okai, A., 2013, 'Food taboos among residents at Ashongman-Accra, Ghana', *Food Science and Quality Management*, 15, 21-29.
12. Kainja, J., 2010, 'Malawi Food Security, Spirit of uMunthu', Retrieved June 25, 2018 from <http://www.Jimmykainja.co.uk/Malawi-food-security>.
13. Krause, M., Mahan, L., Escott-Stump, S. & Raymond, J., 2012, 'Krause's Food and the Nutrition Care Process', 13th. US: Saunders, 151-3.
14. Lennox, J., Petrucka, P. & Bassendowski, S., 2017, 'Eating practices during pregnancy: perceptions of select Maasai women in Northern Tanzania', *Global health research and policy*, 2(1), 9.
15. Mogawane, M.A., Mothiba, T.M. & Malema, R.N., 2015, 'Indigenous practices of pregnant women at Dilokong hospital in Limpopo province, South Africa', *Curationis*, 38(2), 1-8.
16. Mohamad, M. & Ling, C.Y., 2016, 'Food taboos of Malay pregnant women attending antenatal check-up at the maternal health clinic in Kuala Lumpur' *Integrative Food, Nutrition and Metabolism*, 3(1), pp.262-267.
17. O'Connor, D.L., Blake, J., Bell, R., Bowen, A., Callum, J., Fenton, S., Gray-Donald, K., Rossiter, M., Adamo, K., Brett, K. & Khatri, N., 2016 'Canadian consensus on female nutrition: adolescence, reproduction, menopause, and beyond', *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology Canada*, 38(6), pp.508-554.
18. Oni, O.A. & Tukur, J., 2012, 'Identifying pregnant women who would adhere to food taboos in a rural community: a community-based study', *African journal of reproductive health*, 16(3).
19. Park, K., 2005, 'Park's textbook of preventive and social medicine', *Preventive Medicine in Obstet, Paediatrics and Geriatrics*.

20. Parmar, A., Khanpara, H. & Kartha, G., 2013, 'A study on taboos and misconceptions associated with pregnancy among rural women of Surendranagar district', *age*, 4(1).
21. Patil, R., Mittal, A., Vedapriya, D., Khan, M.I. & Raghavia, M., 2010, 'Taboos and misconceptions about food during pregnancy among rural population of Pondicherry', *Calicut Med J*, 8(2), 4.
22. Perez, G.M. & Garcia, A.P., 2013, 'Nutritional taboos among the Fullas in Upper River region, the Gambia', *Journal of Anthropology*, 2013.
23. Piasecki, A.M., 2013, 'Maternal nutrition practices and perceptions in Bihar, India (Doctoral dissertation, Emory University'.
24. Raje, S. & Rao, S., 2015, 'Maternal Food Consumption Patterns and Risk of Low Birth Weight in Rural Maharashtra', *Indian Journal of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 52, 2.
25. Rao, A.K., Sastry, V.V. & SaiRam, A., 2016, 'Social Customs among mothers during pregnancy in Karimnagar district, Telangana', *MRIMS J of Health Sciences*.
26. Riang'a, R.M., Broerse, J. & Nangulu, A.K., 2017, 'Food beliefs and practices among the Kalenjin pregnant women in rural Uasin Gishu County, Kenya' *Journal of ethnobiology and ethnomedicine*, 13(1), 29.
27. Suyitno., Suwarni, L., Asmarawati., Sadli, M., & Sera, A. C., 2023, 'Exploring tabooed food among Dayaknese of Ngaju Women in Central Kalimantan Province', Indonesia. *Public Health of Indonesia*, 9(3), 123-132. <https://doi.org/10.36685/phi.v9i3.715>.
28. Spindel, E.R. & McEvoy, C.T., 2016, 'The role of nicotine in the effects of maternal smoking during pregnancy on lung development and childhood respiratory disease. Implications for dangers of e-cigarettes' *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*, 193(5), 486-494.
29. Starling, P., Charlton, K., McMahon, A. & Lucas, C., 2015, 'Fish intake during pregnancy and foetal neurodevelopment—A systematic review of the evidence' *Nutrients*, 7(3), 2001-2014.
30. Tahir, H.M.H., Ahmed, A.E.E.M. & Mohammed, N.A.A., 2018, 'Food Taboos among Pregnant Women in Health Centers, Khartoum State-Sudan', 2016.
31. Tela, F. G. G., Weldegerima, Beyene, L. & Asfaw, S., 2020, 'Food taboos and related misperceptions during pregnancy in Mekelle city, Tigray, Northern Ethiopia'. *PLoS ONE* 15, e0239451.
32. Tsegaye, D., Tamiru, D. & Belachew, T., 2021, 'Food-related taboos and misconceptions during pregnancy among rural communities of Illu Aba Bor zone, Southwest Ethiopia'. A community-based qualitative cross-sectional study. *BMC Pregnancy Childbirth* 21, 309 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-021-03778-6>.
33. Wondimu, R., Tesfahun, E. & Kaba, Z., 2021, 'Food taboo and its associated factors among pregnant women in SendafaBeke Town, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia'. *Int. J. Sci. Technol. Soc.* 9, 75.
34. Whitney, E.N. & Rolfes, S.R., 2018, 'Understanding nutrition', Cengage Learning.
35. Williamson, C.S., 2006, 'Nutrition in pregnancy', *Nutrition bulletin*, 31(1), 28-59.
36. Zepro, N.B., 2015, 'Food taboos and misconceptions among pregnant women of Shashemene District, Ethiopia, 2012', *Sci J Public Health*, 3(3), 410-6.
37. Zerfu, T.A., Umeta, M. & Baye, K., 2016, 'Dietary habits, food taboos, and perceptions towards weight gain during pregnancy in Arsi, rural central Ethiopia: a qualitative cross-sectional study', *Journal of Health, Population and Nutrition*, 35(1), 22.

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.35>**GENDER, DIGITAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT; A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS FOR WOMEN****Misheck Musaigwa***Durban University of Technology, Business School**Email Address: MisheckM@dut.ac.za*

&

Innocent Simphiwe Nojiyeza*Durban University of Technology, Business School**Email Address: InnocentNy@dut.ac.za***Abstract**

Digitalisation is reshaping how entrepreneurship is organised, marketed and scaled, with important implications for women's economic empowerment. Yet the conditions under which digital entrepreneurship advances or limits women's economic agency remain poorly synthesised. This study therefore examines how digital entrepreneurship creates opportunities and barriers for women's economic empowerment across diverse contexts. A systematic review of peer-reviewed journal articles from Scopus database was conducted. The selected studies were thematically synthesised with attention to context, methodology and reported empowerment outcomes. The review shows that digital entrepreneurship can expand women's income opportunities, market reach, flexibility and self-efficacy, particularly when combined with supportive skills development, mentoring and digital finance. At the same time, persistent structural and socio-cultural barriers, including digital skills gaps, uneven infrastructure, discriminatory norms, financial exclusion and platform precarity, limit the depth and distribution of these benefits. The findings underline that gender neutral and technology centred policies are insufficient, and that empowerment depends on how digital tools are embedded in wider institutional and ecosystem arrangements. The study recommends investment in affordable connectivity, gender responsive digital and entrepreneurial education, and ecosystem designs that recognise care responsibilities, safety concerns and bias in finance and platforms. It concludes that digital entrepreneurship holds real promise for women's economic empowerment, but only when strategies address structural inequalities and are informed by intersectional evidence.

Keywords: *Gender, Women entrepreneurs, Digital entrepreneurship, Economic, empowerment, Digital platforms, Social media-based business, Digital skills and literacy, Entrepreneurial ecosystems*

Background

Digitalisation is reshaping how people work, trade and organise economic life, with profound implications for women's livelihoods and autonomy in both the Global North and Global South (Lay & Tafese, 2025; Aparicio et al., 2024). As digital infrastructures spread, new

forms of entrepreneurship emerge around online platforms, mobile applications and data-driven services, creating spaces where individuals can launch and scale ventures with fewer physical and financial constraints than in traditional brick-and-mortar businesses (Autio et al., 2018;

Nambisan, 2017). At the same time, long-standing gendered inequalities in access to resources, skills, markets and decision-making power shape who is able to participate in these emerging opportunities and on what terms (Hashim, 2023; Rugina & Ahl, 2023). Over the past two decades, women's entrepreneurship has consolidated into a dynamic research domain that examines how gendered opportunity structures, institutional arrangements and entrepreneurial identities intersect across diverse contexts (Brush et al., 2009; De Bruin et al., 2007; Rejeb et al., 2025). Early work often framed women as "lacking" the traits, capital or networks associated with entrepreneurial success, which led to deficit-based explanations of gender gaps in business formation and growth (Ahl, 2006; Aidis et al., 2007). More recent scholarship challenges this view and instead foregrounds women's agency, the multiplicity of their motivations and the ways in which they navigate and reshape gendered norms through entrepreneurial activity (Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Ojong et al., 2021; Rugina & Ahl, 2023). Reviews focusing on women entrepreneurs in regions such as the Gulf States, Central and Eastern Europe and sub-Saharan Africa highlight both the expansion of women-owned ventures and the persistence of socio-cultural and institutional constraints that condition their trajectories (Hashim, 2023; Igwe & Ochinanwata, 2021; Aidis et al., 2007). Digital entrepreneurship has gained prominence as a distinctive but overlapping phenomenon. Digital entrepreneurship encompasses the creation and growth of ventures that rely on digital technologies for product development, marketing, sales or service delivery, and includes activities as varied as e-commerce, social media-based businesses, app development and platform-mediated freelancing (Autio et al., 2018; Stewart et al., 2008; Ibrahim et al., 2025). Digital tools can lower entry barriers by reducing

start-up costs, enabling remote work and facilitating rapid experimentation with business models, which has particular significance in settings where women face mobility restrictions, limited access to physical marketplaces or competing care responsibilities (Hashim, 2023; Brydges & Hracs, 2019; Asrofi et al., 2023). Evidence from Indonesia, Pakistan and other emerging economies shows that internet use, social media and online marketplaces allow women to reach wider customer bases, diversify income streams and maintain operations during shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Asrofi et al., 2023; Shaikh & Ahmad, 2024; Kaningini et al., 2023). For many women, digital entrepreneurship is explicitly linked to aspirations for economic empowerment. Empirical studies connect engagement in online business with higher earnings, improved bargaining power within households and enhanced perceptions of self-efficacy and autonomy (Ali et al., 2021; Al-Rashdi & Abdelwahed, 2022; Asrofi et al., 2023). Research in Saudi Arabia and Qatar shows that women use social media, e-commerce platforms and digital payment systems to build home-based or hybrid ventures that align with national diversification and sustainability agendas while also fitting around domestic responsibilities (Abdelwahed et al., 2022; Al-Qahtani et al., 2022). Reviews of technology-enabled social entrepreneurship highlight that digital tools support not only individual income generation but also collective initiatives where women mobilise digital platforms to address local social needs and community development goals (Gochhait et al., 2025; Zajac et al., 2025). In these accounts, empowerment is described in economic, psychological and relational terms, from increased control over financial resources to greater recognition as leaders and role models.

However, the literature also cautions that digitalisation does not automatically translate into inclusive or emancipatory outcomes. Structural

gender inequalities in property rights, financial systems and labour markets continue to shape women's capacity to accumulate capital, bear risk and scale digital ventures, particularly in transition and developing economies (Altuzarra et al., 2021; Bastian et al., 2019; Aidis et al., 2007). Persistent digital divides in access to infrastructure, devices and skills mean that many women remain at the margins of digital economies, or are confined to low-return, highly competitive segments such as small-scale retail, home-based food or basic online services (Bradić-Martinović & Banović, 2018; Srebro et al., 2023; Nicolescu et al., 2022). Studies from Serbia and other European contexts show that women are under-represented among ICT specialists and are more likely to have only basic digital competencies, which restricts their ability to move from everyday internet use to strategic, innovation-oriented digital entrepreneurship (Bradić-Martinović & Banović, 2018; Ivanović et al., 2021).

The review focuses on three interrelated questions. First, how does digital entrepreneurship create economic opportunities for women across different regional and sectoral contexts? Second, what structural, institutional and socio-cultural barriers shape women's participation in, and benefits from, digital entrepreneurial activity? Third, through what mechanisms do digital skills, platforms, ecosystems and social-entrepreneurship models mediate empowerment outcomes? By synthesising evidence across multiple contexts and research traditions, the review seeks to clarify the conditions under which digital entrepreneurship contributes to women's economic empowerment, where it falls short, and how policy, education and ecosystem interventions might be re-designed to support more inclusive and transformative outcomes.

Methodology

This study adopted a systematic literature review design to synthesise current evidence on gender, digital entrepreneurship and economic empowerment for women. The review focused on peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in the Scopus database. An initial search using predefined keyword combinations related to gender, women's entrepreneurship, digital technologies and empowerment yielded 1,437 records. Applying a publication year filter for the period 2015 to 2025 reduced the sample to 977 articles. Subsequent restriction by subject area, to retain only fields relevant to entrepreneurship, business, management, economics and information systems, resulted in 857 records. When the search was limited to journal articles only, the dataset decreased to 542 documents.

To enhance conceptual focus, a further filtering step using the refined keyword string narrowed the pool to 295 articles. The review then retained only publications written in English, which reduced the number to 290, and only open access articles, yielding 131 records. Titles and, where necessary, abstracts were then screened for direct relevance to women's or gendered digital entrepreneurship and economic empowerment, leading to a shortlist of 120 articles. Of these, 80 full-text papers were accessible and downloadable, and the final review and synthesis were based on this corpus. The selected articles were read in full and analysed using a narrative, thematic approach, with attention to study context, methodology, key findings and how digital entrepreneurship shapes opportunities and barriers for women's economic empowerment.

Although the core inclusion window focused on publications from 2015 to 2025, a small number of older, well established studies were also retained. These earlier contributions were included deliberately in order to show that many of the challenges highlighted in recent work

have persisted over time and were already visible in earlier phases of entrepreneurship and gender research. Drawing on both older and more recent literature made it possible to link historical and contemporary trends, and to illustrate how long standing structural and socio cultural constraints continue to shape women's experiences of digital entrepreneurship despite technological advances.

Findings

1. The evolving landscape of gendered digital entrepreneurship and empowerment

Over the past two decades, women's entrepreneurship has consolidated into a distinct and mature research domain that interrogates how gendered opportunity structures, institutional settings and entrepreneurial identities interact across diverse economic and cultural contexts (Rejeb et al., 2025; Brush et al., 2009). Structured reviews using bibliometric and co-word techniques show a marked expansion of work on women's entrepreneurship since the mid-2000s, with thematic clusters forming around innovation, ecosystems, social impact and empowerment in both advanced and emerging economies (Rejeb et al., 2025; De Bruin et al., 2007). This evolution reflects a shift away from early "deficit" narratives that framed women as lacking traits or resources, toward more nuanced analyses of agency, context and the different ways in which women enact entrepreneurship under varying structural conditions (Ahl, 2006; Ahl & Marlow, 2012).

Gender-aware frameworks argue that women's entrepreneurial activity cannot be understood outside the institutional, cultural and familial structures that simultaneously enable and constrain their action (Brush et al., 2009; Welter, 2011). These perspectives emphasise that opportunity recognition, resource mobilisation and venture growth are deeply embedded in norms

around gender roles, kinship obligations, religious expectations and state-market relations, which vary significantly between, for example, the Gulf States, Sub-Saharan Africa and Central and Eastern Europe (Hashim, 2023; Aidis et al., 2007; Alexandre & Kharabsheh, 2019). Conceptual critiques further highlight that dominant understandings of empowerment and entrepreneurship have often been grounded in individualistic, neoliberal assumptions that equate economic autonomy with freedom from patriarchal structures, thereby overlooking collectivist logics and the relational nature of power in many non-Western settings (Wood et al., 2021; Calás et al., 2009).

In this broader gender and entrepreneurship field, digital technologies have become central to how opportunities are created, organised and scaled, as digital platforms de-materialise products, reconfigure value chains and enable data-driven business models that transcend local markets (Autio et al., 2018; Nambisan, 2017). Studies of digital entrepreneurship conceptualise online business ownership, freelancing, social media influencing and platform-based commerce as part of a broad spectrum of activities in which individuals deploy internet-based tools to innovate, market, sell and deliver products or services, often in flexible and virtual configurations (Ibrahim et al., 2025; Stewart et al., 2008). These developments have opened new spaces for women to enter entrepreneurial activity with lower capital requirements, greater temporal flexibility and expanded reach beyond local customers, particularly where mobility and public visibility are constrained by gendered norms (Alhajri & Aloud, 2023; Kang, 2022).

Reviews focusing specifically on female digital entrepreneurship report that women increasingly use social media, e-commerce platforms and mobile applications to launch and grow ventures, often from home or hybrid locations that allow them to combine paid work with domestic

responsibilities (Alhajri & Aloud, 2023; Srebro et al., 2023). Evidence from diverse settings shows that women use digital tools to circumvent spatial and temporal constraints, access new customer segments and build reputation and legitimacy in markets where their physical presence may be restricted or scrutinised (Brydges & Hracs, 2019; Hashim et al., 2020). At the same time, scholars warn that “going digital” does not automatically translate into empowerment, because digital entrepreneurship remains mediated by structural inequalities related to gender, class, ethnicity, migration status and geography (Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Ibrahim et al., 2025).

2 Digital entrepreneurship as a pathway to economic opportunities and empowerment

A growing body of evidence shows that digital entrepreneurship can expand women’s economic opportunities by enhancing income generation, market reach and strategic decision-making, particularly when embedded in supportive institutional and skills ecosystems (Abdelwahed et al., 2022; Ali et al., 2021; Gochhait et al., 2025). Macro-level analysis from Kazakhstan indicates that higher levels of digitalisation and economic growth are positively associated with female labour force participation, suggesting that digital transformation can, under certain conditions, contribute to narrowing gender gaps in employment and earnings (Kakizhanova et al., 2025). This link between structural digital change and women’s labour market insertion is reinforced by studies that connect technology-enabled entrepreneurship to improvements in women’s bargaining power, asset accumulation and long-term livelihood security (Al-Rashdi & Abdelwahed, 2022; Ali et al., 2021).

Studies focusing directly on women’s income trajectories highlight that internet use is strongly associated with both a higher likelihood of being an entrepreneur and higher earnings among

women who run businesses online (Asrofi et al., 2023). Evidence from Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic shows that women who use the internet for business have a greater chance of engaging in entrepreneurship than non-users, with particularly strong effects in urban areas, and that internet-using women entrepreneurs tend to generate higher incomes than those who do not rely on digital channels (Asrofi et al., 2023). These findings are consistent with studies from other emerging economies that describe digital tools as mechanisms for expanding customer bases, diversifying products and stabilising cash flows during shocks, thereby strengthening women’s capacity to sustain their enterprises and support household consumption (Gochhait et al., 2025; Shamaki et al., 2022).

A large-scale review of technology-enabled social entrepreneurship initiatives highlights that digital platforms such as mobile money, online marketplaces and social media communities allow women to reach new customer segments, reduce transaction costs and form collective ventures oriented toward social and community development goals (Gochhait et al., 2025). In these initiatives, empowerment outcomes are often described in terms of increased control over income, enhanced capacity to contribute to household decision-making and greater recognition of women as community leaders and change agents (Kedir & Kouamé, 2022). Studies of e-commerce adoption in fragile and low-income settings similarly report that digital channels help women maintain or grow businesses in contexts of conflict, poor infrastructure or limited local demand, which contributes to perceptions of resilience and socio-economic independence (Kuschel et al., 2020; Malaquias & Fernandes Malaquias, 2022). In Gulf and wider MENA contexts, survey and interview-based research documents how women leverage e-commerce, social media marketing and digital payment systems to serve wider markets while retaining

flexibility compatible with care responsibilities and gendered mobility constraints (Abdelwahed et al., 2022; Al-Qahtani et al., 2020). Saudi women, for example, use Instagram and other social media platforms to test business ideas, build brands and cultivate niche consumer communities from home-based or hybrid work arrangements, which they associate with autonomy, creativity and the ability to align commercial activities with religious and cultural values (Al-Rashdi & Abdelwahed, 2022).

3. Persistent barriers and inequalities in digital entrepreneurial ecosystems

Across the reviewed studies, digital entrepreneurship emerges as a space marked by uneven access, where gendered inequalities in infrastructure, skills and institutional support significantly temper its empowering potential for women and gender-diverse individuals (Bastian et al., 2019). Empirical work on financial inclusion and digital finance shows that women are less likely than men to own smartphones, hold formal accounts or use digital payment systems, meaning they enter digital markets with weaker tools and fewer opportunities to build online reputations or access platform-based income streams (Amber & Chichaibelu, 2023). Analyses from transition and emerging economies similarly reveal pronounced gaps in basic and advanced digital skills, with women overrepresented among those with only rudimentary competencies, which restricts their ability to move from simple social media use toward data-driven or innovation-oriented digital ventures (Aidis et al., 2007; Altuzarra et al., 2021). These structural inequalities in connectivity and capability mean that the very preconditions for benefiting from digital entrepreneurship are unequally distributed along gendered and socio-economic lines (Altuzarra et al., 2021; Bastian et al., 2019).

Even when women do participate in digital markets, the nature and quality of work remain a concern, particularly in sectors such as textiles, fashion and platform-mediated creative labour (Srebro et al., 2023; Aidis et al., 2007). Case studies of digitally mediated work in the textile industry document how women operate under short-term contracts, low piece rates and unstable demand, often bearing the costs of connectivity, equipment and time while having little bargaining power over prices or deadlines (Srebro et al., 2023). Rather than providing stable entrepreneurial income, these arrangements frequently reproduce patterns of informalisation and downward pressure on wages, with women absorbing risks that are shifted away from firms and platforms (Srebro et al., 2023; Altuzarra et al., 2021). In such contexts, the label of “digital entrepreneur” can obscure the persistence of precarious labour relations and limited social protection, calling into question how far these activities genuinely enhance economic security (Bastian et al., 2019; Ibrahim et al., 2025). Socio-cultural norms and institutional arrangements further constrain women’s digital entrepreneurship, particularly in conservative or highly gendered contexts (Alreshoodi et al., 2022). Studies from Gulf Cooperation Council countries show that women increasingly use e-commerce and social media to reach clients, yet still navigate expectations around modesty, family honour and prioritisation of caregiving responsibilities, which shape when, how and with whom they can transact (Alreshoodi et al., 2022; Alexandre & Kharabsheh, 2019). Qualitative work points to the continued importance of wasta and male-dominated business networks in accessing suppliers, investors and state contracts, meaning that digital ventures often remain reliant on male relatives or intermediaries for key external interactions (Bastian et al., 2019). These findings suggest that digital tools can extend women’s economic activity without

fully loosening the grip of patriarchal norms and informal practices on entrepreneurial life (Alexandre & Kharabsheh, 2019; Bastian et al., 2019).

At the firm level, several studies highlight enduring constraints in access to finance, formalisation and growth opportunities for women-owned digital businesses (Bastian et al., 2019). Evidence from transition economies and the MENA region suggests that women's ventures are more likely to be under-capitalised, rely on personal savings or family loans and face gendered scepticism from banks and investors, which narrows their ability to invest in advanced technologies or scale operations (Aidis et al., 2007; Bastian et al., 2019). Comparative work indicates that women's digital enterprises are concentrated in low-entry, highly competitive sectors such as small-scale retail, beauty, home-based food and basic online services, where margins are thin and imitation is rife (Srebro et al., 2023). Macroeconomic analyses link wider gender inequalities in property rights, inheritance and labour market segmentation to slower capital accumulation for women, reinforcing a pattern where digital entrepreneurship often remains small, survival-oriented and vulnerable to shocks (Altuzarra et al., 2021).

Intersectional studies make clear that these barriers do not fall evenly across all women but are intensified for those who are racialised, migrants, refugees or living with disabilities (Ibrahim et al., 2025; Harvey Wingfield & Taylor, 2016). Research on Nigerian digital entrepreneurs shows that black women and non-binary individuals frequently confront racist and sexist stereotypes, algorithmic invisibility and exclusion from mainstream entrepreneurial networks, even as they creatively use social media to carve out niche markets and mutual support spaces (Ibrahim et al., 2025; Martinez Dy et al., 2017). Intersectional analyses of women of colour in

the Global North highlight how platform guidelines, payment systems and customer expectations can re-inscribe racialised norms around professionalism, respectability and emotional labour, placing extra burdens on those trying to build digital brands while resisting discrimination (Martinez Dy et al., 2018). These studies emphasise that digital entrepreneurship may open doors for some, yet it also reproduces and sometimes amplifies wider patterns of racialised and gendered inequality (Martinez Dy et al., 2017; Ibrahim et al., 2025).

For migrant and refugee women, digital entrepreneurship is often framed as a flexible route into income generation in contexts where formal labour market access is restricted, but the evidence reveals a fragile and heavily constrained reality (Aman et al., 2024; Ranabahu & Tanima, 2022). Work with refugee and displaced women shows that online micro-businesses help them navigate legal barriers, childcare responsibilities and lack of recognition of qualifications, yet limited language skills, unstable connectivity and uncertain residence status create continuous insecurity (Aman et al., 2024; Althalathini et al., 2020). These women tend to operate in saturated markets such as home-based food, crafts or beauty services, where they are highly price-sensitive and vulnerable to platform policy changes or account closures (Althalathini et al., 2020; Ranabahu & Tanima, 2022). While entrepreneurship programmes often celebrate their resilience, participants themselves describe ongoing struggles to secure predictable income, legal protection and psychosocial support, pointing to the narrowness of empowerment defined only as business start-up (Aman et al., 2024).

4. Digital skills, literacy and entrepreneurial competencies

Digital skills and literacy appear as basic conditions for women's meaningful participation in digital entrepreneurship and for their ability to

convert online activities into sustainable economic gains (Ivanović et al., 2021; Shukla et al., 2021). Evidence from Serbia shows that female entrepreneurs often have adequate skills for everyday communication and interaction online, yet report weaker competences in organising data, engaging with digital public services and recognising appropriate digital tools for different tasks, which limits their ability to design and manage higher value digital business models (Ivanović et al., 2021). These gaps mirror broader European indicators that show women remain under-represented among ICT specialists and are more likely to have only basic or below basic digital skills, which constrains their opportunities to move from simple online presence to more sophisticated digital entrepreneurial activity (Bradić-Martinović & Banović, 2018).

National and organisational policy frameworks in Serbia explicitly acknowledge that strengthening women's competences in ICT and digital entrepreneurship is essential for their economic empowerment in the knowledge economy (Ivanović et al., 2021). Policy documents and advocacy reports linked to the "Awakening of Women's Digital Entrepreneurship" initiative emphasise training in business planning, bookkeeping, digital marketing and online customer relationship management as key levers for women's business growth, while also calling for more tailored support for women who start from very low levels of digital confidence (Anđelković et al., 2019; Association of Business Women in Serbia, 2019). Complementary work on entrepreneurship education in Serbia argues that such programmes are most effective when they deliberately reach marginalised groups, including women in rural areas and long-term unemployed women, and when they combine technical skills with mentoring and network-building opportunities that help participants apply new competencies in real markets

(Radović-Marković, 2016; Achakpa & Radović-Marković, 2018).

Conceptual and policy discussions around digital competences frame these abilities as "survival skills" in an increasingly digital society, rather than as optional extras (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004; European Commission, 2020). The DigComp framework, which underpins several of the empirical studies, stresses that information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, content creation, safety and problem-solving form a layered set of competences that individuals must progressively build if they are to participate fully in digital economies (Ivanović et al., 2021). Research on female entrepreneurs in Serbia shows that women tend to be relatively confident with basic communication and interaction online, but less confident in higher order areas such as managing digital identity, engaging in e-citizenship or creatively using digital technologies to generate new solutions, which are precisely the competences that underpin innovative digital entrepreneurship (Ivanović et al., 2021). This pattern suggests that gendered digital skills gaps are not only about access to devices, but also about uneven opportunities to learn, experiment and move into more advanced digital roles.

Entrepreneurship education studies provide further insight into how digital literacy and entrepreneurial competencies can be developed together. A quasi-experimental study at an Indonesian university finds that integrating digital literacy into experiential entrepreneurship projects significantly improves students' opportunity recognition, risk-taking, adaptability and innovation orientation compared with a traditional lecture-based curriculum (Rahmi et al., 2025). Students who participated in the experiential learning-digital literacy model worked with concrete digital tasks such as online market analysis, social media campaign design and basic business analytics, and they reported

greater confidence in using digital tools to make business decisions and implement strategies in real or simulated ventures (Rahmi et al., 2025). Qualitative findings from the same study indicate that exposure to technology-enabled projects changes how students think about entrepreneurship, shifting them from seeing it only as self-employment into viewing it as a creative, digitally mediated problem-solving process (Rahmi et al., 2025).

Large-scale survey research with agricultural students in India reinforces the importance of digital components in entrepreneurship education, even when the focus is not explicitly on the ICT sector (Soam et al., 2023). In this work, students identify digital agriculture, online marketing and development of e-learning materials for farmers as priority areas of entrepreneurial interest, but they simultaneously report gaps in both hard skills, such as financial management and market analysis, and soft skills, such as communication, creativity and teamwork (Soam et al., 2023). The authors argue that entrepreneurship support structures, including career development centres and government schemes, need to respond more directly to these preferences by embedding digital tools and platforms into training activities, since otherwise students' interest in digital business opportunities may not translate into viable ventures (Soam et al., 2023). From a gender perspective, this kind of evidence suggests that without explicit attention to women's access to such training, existing gendered patterns in skills and aspirations are likely to persist.

5. Internet utilisation, social media and platform-based women's entrepreneurship

Across the reviewed studies, internet utilisation and social media emerge as core enablers of contemporary women's digital entrepreneurship, reshaping how ventures are initiated, made visible and scaled in both local and transnational

markets. Research on young entrepreneurs in Andalusia shows that social networks function as primary channels for project promotion, customer interaction and reputation building, while also revealing gendered differences in how digital rights, privacy and security are experienced in entrepreneurial settings (Fariña-Sánchez & Gutiérrez-Santiuste, 2025). These findings suggest that while young women and men may appear similar in terms of basic platform use, women report more concerns about data protection, online harassment and exposure to risk, which can shape their willingness to fully exploit digital tools for business purposes (Fariña-Sánchez & Gutiérrez-Santiuste, 2025).

The Andalusian study further notes that patterns of platform use intersect with age, socio-economic status and education, creating layered forms of exclusion and advantage in platform-based entrepreneurship (Fariña-Sánchez & Gutiérrez-Santiuste, 2025). Younger women entrepreneurs tend to be active on visual and mobile-first applications such as Instagram and TikTok, but they are also more exposed to cyberbullying and unsolicited contact, which increases the emotional and reputational costs of visibility (Fariña-Sánchez & Gutiérrez-Santiuste, 2025). At the same time, the ability to curate a professional identity online allows some women to decouple their entrepreneurial persona from restrictive local norms, particularly in contexts where physical mobility and public presence are constrained by family or community expectations (Gochhait et al., 2025).

A growing body of work documents how social media supports women's entry into creative and consumer-facing sectors. Studies of fashion and cultural entrepreneurship show that platforms such as Instagram and Facebook enable women to build micro-brands, experiment with aesthetic identities and engage directly with niche audiences without relying on traditional intermediaries such as retailers or galleries (Brydges

& Hracs, 2019; Naudin & Patel, 2017). These platforms reduce the capital requirements for start-up, allow iterative testing of products and branding, and make it possible to operate businesses from home or shared spaces, which many women describe as essential for balancing paid work with care responsibilities (Brydges & Hracs, 2019; Naudin & Patel, 2017). Evidence from cross-country analyses of small entrepreneurs in Chile, Italy and India similarly indicates that social media and marketplace platforms integrate women-owned microenterprises into global value flows by lowering geographic barriers and enabling cross-border sales, even when ventures remain very small in terms of employment and assets (Nicolescu et al., 2022; Gochhait et al., 2025).

Beyond visibility and market reach, social media-based entrepreneurship also carries important subjective and relational dimensions. Qualitative studies report that women often value the flexibility, perceived autonomy and sense of community contribution that technology-mediated work provides, framing online entrepreneurship as a way to earn income while remaining present in the household or local community (Naudin & Patel, 2017; Ramos-Farroñán et al., 2024). Women highlight that interacting with customers and peers through online communities strengthens their confidence, broadens their horizons and generates new aspirations, even when financial returns are modest (Ramos-Farroñán et al., 2024; Gochhait et al., 2025). However, several authors caution that this apparent flexibility can mask long working hours, blurred boundaries between personal and professional life and a reliance on unpaid family labour, especially where platform algorithms reward constant availability and content production (Brydges & Hracs, 2019; Mishra et al., 2023). Evidence from Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic provides clear quantitative support for the view that internet use is

closely tied to women's entrepreneurial participation and earnings. Using nationally representative labour force data, one study finds that women who use the internet have a significantly higher probability of being entrepreneurs than those who do not, with the positive effect particularly strong in urban areas where digital infrastructure and market density are higher (Asrofi et al., 2023). The same study reports that female entrepreneurs who use the internet tend to earn higher incomes, especially in trade, food and beverage and small-scale industry, suggesting that digital channels facilitate both entry into entrepreneurship and movement into more profitable segments (Asrofi et al., 2023).

These findings highlight the importance of digital connectivity as an economic lifeline in crisis situations, when physical mobility is restricted and traditional markets are disrupted (Asrofi et al., 2023). Research on undergraduate entrepreneurs in Sindh, Pakistan, complements this picture by examining how social media use shapes young people's business performance. Survey data analysed using structural equation modelling show that students' perceived usefulness of social media, their ability to use digital tools and their intention to engage with social platforms have significant positive effects on entrepreneurial performance indicators such as sales, customer reach and brand recognition (Shaikh & Ahmad, 2024). The study finds that platforms including Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Snapchat and Instagram are central to how student entrepreneurs design marketing strategies, interact with customers and deliver products or services, even when businesses remain informal and are run alongside academic studies (Shaikh & Ahmad, 2024). Importantly, the authors note that many of these young entrepreneurs come from rural areas with limited infrastructure, which constrains stable access to connectivity and devices and therefore limits the full realisation of digital opportunities (Shaikh & Ahmad,

2024).

6. Institutional, ecosystem and social-entrepreneurship contexts for women's digital empowerment

The reviewed literature consistently emphasises that women's digital entrepreneurship is deeply embedded in wider institutional and ecosystem dynamics that shape who can access opportunities, under what conditions, and with what distribution of benefits (Aparicio et al., 2024; Ojong et al., 2021). Evidence on Africa's emergent technology sector shows how rapid growth in tech start-ups, venture capital and digital platforms has created new spaces for innovation and enterprise, particularly in finance, retail, transport and agriculture, yet participation is highly uneven and often dominated by better educated, urban and male founders (Lay & Tafese, 2025; Beleyi, 2022). These studies suggest that, while digital hubs, incubators and accelerators can reduce some barriers to entry, they frequently replicate existing inequalities when gender, class and location are not explicitly considered in programme design and outreach (Friederici et al., 2020). Analyses of tech ecosystems highlight that connectivity, digital infrastructure and access to capital are necessary but not sufficient conditions for inclusive digital opportunity, since women and marginalised groups continue to face constrained access to networks, coaching and role models in these spaces (Ndemo & Weiss, 2017). Work on African tech hubs documents that investment flows tend to concentrate in a small number of metropolitan "hotspots", which can crowd out peripheral regions and reinforce urban-rural divides in access to digital entrepreneurship support (International Trade Centre, 2024; Ndubuisi et al., 2021). In these landscapes, women are often under-represented among founders selected into high-profile incubators, and they report weaker

access to local investor networks and fewer opportunities to scale ventures beyond micro and small-enterprise level (Beleyi, 2022; Ojong et al., 2021).

Macro-level research further illustrates how digitalisation interacts with labour markets and social policy to influence women's economic opportunities. Econometric analysis from Kazakhstan finds that higher levels of digitalisation and economic growth are associated with greater female labour-force participation, in part because digital technologies enable more flexible and remote work arrangements that help women reconcile paid work with family responsibilities (Kónya et al., 2025). At the same time, this work stresses that the gains from digital transformation are not gender-neutral, since persistent gaps in ICT skills, occupational segregation and care burdens can limit women's ability to move into better quality digital jobs or to transition from wage work into entrepreneurial activity (Kónya et al., 2025; Mukorera, 2020). Related contributions on appropriate and frugal technologies note that digital solutions often reach low-income users through simplified, low-cost models, which can support grassroots entrepreneurship but may also trap women in low-margin segments of digitalised markets if complementary support and upskilling are absent (Régnier, 2023; Paoloni et al., 2019).

From an institutional perspective, cross-country evidence demonstrates that formal and informal institutions jointly shape how social and commercial entrepreneurship emerge and how they affect individual economic well-being (Aparicio et al., 2024). Using data from 57 countries, one study shows that stronger rule of law, effective government and inclusive welfare regimes increase the likelihood that individuals engage in social entrepreneurship, and that such engagement is positively associated with economic well-being, particularly for women (Aparicio et

al., 2024). Complementary work grounded in institutional theory argues that norms around gender roles, authority and collective responsibility strongly influence whether women perceive entrepreneurship, including technology-enabled models, as a feasible and desirable pathway (Amine & Staub, 2009; Amine & Staub, 2021). Reviews of female entrepreneurship in Africa further highlight that women's ventures often prioritise social value, community welfare and employment creation, which can strengthen local resilience but may limit access to growth-oriented finance that favours highly scalable, profit-driven models (Ojong et al., 2021; Nziku et al., 2022).

Discussion

The analysis of the reviewed studies offers a coherent picture of how digital entrepreneurship intersects with women's economic empowerment, while also drawing attention to persistent structural and contextual constraints. The findings suggest that digital technologies create meaningful opportunities for women entrepreneurs to engage in economic activity, strengthen income-generating capacity, and exercise greater autonomy. However, these opportunities are not evenly distributed and are strongly shaped by social, institutional, and cultural conditions. A key insight emerging from the review is that digital entrepreneurship should not be understood as an inherently empowering pathway. Rather, it is a socially embedded process that has the potential both to challenge and to reproduce existing inequalities. Although access to digital platforms, social media, and online marketplaces expands women's reach to customers and markets, the extent to which these tools translate into genuine empowerment depends largely on access to skills, resources, and supportive entrepreneurial ecosystems. The literature consistently shows that women who possess

higher-level digital competencies are better positioned to use digital tools strategically, moving beyond basic online visibility towards innovation, growth, and long-term sustainability. The discussion further highlights the central role of digital skills and literacy in shaping entrepreneurial outcomes. The reviewed studies demonstrate that access to technology alone is insufficient to generate empowerment. Instead, more advanced digital capabilities, including data literacy, platform management, and digital marketing, are critical for enabling women entrepreneurs to enhance productivity, resilience, and competitiveness. In contexts where such skills are limited, digital entrepreneurship often remains confined to low-value, informal, or precarious activities, thereby constraining its transformative potential. Another important theme concerns the ambivalent role of digital platforms and social media. While these platforms increase visibility, flexibility, and access to markets, they also expose women entrepreneurs to new forms of vulnerability, such as online harassment, algorithmic bias, and heightened emotional labour. The findings indicate that participation in digital markets can intensify work pressures and reinforce gendered expectations, particularly in environments where regulatory protections and platform accountability mechanisms are weak. Supportive policy frameworks, access to finance, reliable digital infrastructure, and entrepreneurship education emerge as key enablers of empowerment. By contrast, gender-neutral policies that fail to account for structural inequalities often overlook the specific barriers faced by women entrepreneurs. The literature therefore emphasises the need for targeted and inclusive interventions that recognise gendered constraints and promote equitable access to resources and opportunities. Intersectionality remains a cross-cutting theme throughout the discussion. The reviewed studies show that

women's experiences of digital entrepreneurship vary according to socio-economic status, geographic location, and cultural norms. These intersecting factors influence access to technology, opportunities for skill development, and patterns of market participation, resulting in diverse empowerment outcomes. This reinforces the argument that digital entrepreneurship must be understood within broader systems of power and inequality. Overall, the findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of women's digital entrepreneurship by demonstrating that empowerment outcomes are contingent rather than automatic. Digital technologies open up possibilities for economic participation and agency, but these possibilities are realised only when supported by appropriate skills, enabling institutions, and inclusive ecosystems. The discussion therefore highlights the importance of moving beyond techno-optimistic narratives and adopting a critical, context-sensitive perspective on the relationship between digital entrepreneurship and women's economic empowerment.

Conclusion

Across diverse contexts, digital technologies have created new opportunities for income generation, market access, and flexible forms of work that many women experience as meaningful gains in autonomy and confidence. However, the review also demonstrates that these benefits are uneven and often fragile, shaped by persistent inequalities in digital skills, infrastructure, finance, social norms, and institutional support. Digital entrepreneurship therefore cannot be understood as an inherently empowering solution, but rather as a space in which existing power relations are both contested and reproduced. The findings highlight several priorities for policy and practice. Closing gendered digital divides in access to affordable connectivity, devices, and advanced digital skills is essential if women are

to move beyond low-return and precarious online activities. Digital entrepreneurship and skills programmes should be sustained, gender-sensitive, and responsive to women's diverse starting points, combining technical training with mentoring, peer learning, and access to networks. In addition, entrepreneurial support organisations, financial institutions, and platform providers need to redesign their practices to address gender-specific barriers related to care responsibilities, mobility, safety, credit bias, and platform governance. Integrating explicit gender objectives into national and regional digital innovation policies is also critical to ensure that emerging digital markets do not reinforce existing inequalities.

References

- Abdelwahed, N. A. A., Bastian, B. L., & Wood, B. P. (2022). Women, entrepreneurship and sustainability: The case of Saudi Arabia. *Sustainability*, 14(18), 11314. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su141811314>
- Achakpa, P., & Radović-Marković, M. (2018). Employment of women through entrepreneurship development and education in developing countries. *Journal of Women's Entrepreneurship and Education*, 1–2, 17–30.
- Ahl, H., & Marlow, S. (2012). Exploring the dynamics of gender, feminism and entrepreneurship: Advancing debate to escape a dead end? *Organization*, 19(5), 543–562.
- Aidis, R., Welter, F., Smallbone, D., & Isakova, N. (2007). Female entrepreneurship in transition economies: The case of Lithuania and Ukraine. *Feminist Economics*, 13(2), 157–183.
- Al-Dajani, H., & Marlow, S. (2013). Empowerment and entrepreneurship: A theoretical framework. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 19(5), 503–524.
- Alexandre, L., & Kharabsheh, R. (2019). The evolution of female entrepreneurship in the Gulf Cooperation Council: The case of Bahrain. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, 11(4), 390–407.
- Alexandre, L., & Kharabsheh, R. (2019). The evolution of female entrepreneurship in the Gulf Cooperation Council: The case of Bahrain. *Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies*, 11(2), 154–177.
- Ali, M., Ali, I., Badghish, S., & Soomro, Y. A. (2021). Determinants of financial empowerment among women in Saudi Arabia. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 747255.
- Alim, R., & Wulandari, P. (2025). Economic and demographic drivers of women entrepreneurs in the Indonesian textile market. *Institute of Economic Sciences Working Paper*.
- Al-Qahtani, M., Zguir, M., Al-Fagih, L., & Koç, M. (2022). Women entrepreneurship for sustainability in Qatar. *Sustainability*, 14(7), 4091.
- Al-Rashdi, N. A. S., & Abdelwahed, N. A. A. (2022). The empowerment of Saudi Arabian women through a multidimensional approach: The mediating roles of self-efficacy and family support. *Sustainability*, 14(24), 16349.
- Alreshoodi, S. A., Rehman, A. U., Alshammari, S. A., Khan, T. N., & Moid, S. (2022). Women entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia: Drivers and inhibitors. *Journal of Enterprising Culture*, 30(3), 375–400.
- Altuzarra, A., Gálvez-Gálvez, C., & González-Flores, A. (2021). Is gender inequality a barrier to economic growth? *Sustainability*, 13(1), 367.
- Aparicio, S., Klofsten, M., Noguera, M., & Urbano, D. (2024). Institutions, social entrepreneurship, and individual economic well-being: An exploratory study. *Management Research: Journal of the Iberoamerican Academy of Management*, 22(4), 510–540.
- Apiko, P., Woolfrey, S., & Byiers, B. (2020). *The promise of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA): Political economy dynamics of regional organisations in Africa* (Discussion Paper No. 287). European Centre for Development Policy Management.
- Asrofi, D. A. N., Pratomo, D. S., & Pangestuty, F. W. (2023). Internet utilization and Indonesian female entrepreneurs during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 9(2), 2273347.
- Association of Business Women in Serbia. (2019). *Gender thread of digital entrepreneurship: Guidelines for economic empowerment of women in the knowledge economy*.
- Autio, E., Nambisan, S., Thomas, L. D. W., & Wright, M. (2018). Digital affordances, spatial affordances, and the genesis of entrepreneurial ecosystems. *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, 12(1),

72–95.

Bastian, B. L., Metcalfe, B. D., & Zali, M. R. (2019). Gender inequality and entrepreneurship development in the MENA region. *Sustainability*, 11(22), 6472.

Beleyi, F. (2022). Fostering prosperity for African female entrepreneurs: Opportunities for AU–EU cooperation in digital entrepreneurship networks. In *Africa–Europe cooperation and digital transformation* (pp. 228–241). Routledge.

Bradić-Martinović, A., & Banović, J. (2018). Assessment of digital skills in Serbia with focus on gender gap. *Journal of Women's Entrepreneurship and Education*, 1–2, 54–67.

Brush, C. G., de Bruin, A., & Welter, F. (2009). A gender-aware framework for women's entrepreneurship. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, 1(1), 8–24.

Brydges, T., & Hracs, B. J. (2019). How gender shapes the digital entrepreneurship of fashion designers. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business*, 36(3), 260–280.

Calás, M. B., Smircich, L., & Bourne, K. A. (2009). Extending the boundaries: Reframing entrepreneurship as social change through feminist perspectives. *Academy of Management Review*, 34(3), 552–569.

De Bruin, A., Brush, C. G., & Welter, F. (2007). Advancing a framework for coherent research on women's entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 31(3), 323–339.

Eshet-Alkalai, Y. (2004). Digital literacy: A conceptual framework for survival skills in the digital era. *Journal of Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia*, 13(1), 93–106.

Fariña-Sánchez, P., & Gutiérrez-Santiuste, E. (2025). Youth digital entrepreneurship initiatives, social networks and digital rights. *Administrative Sciences*, 15(1), 12.

Feranita, N. V., Dwimahendrawan, A., & Asmuni. (2024). Determinants of digital technology adoption among women entrepreneurs. *Journal of Women's Entrepreneurship and Education*, 1–2, 66–92.

Gochhait, S., Lenka, R., & Salamzadeh, A. (2025). Application of technology to empower women in social entrepreneurship: A review. *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review*, 13(2), 123–137.

Harvey Wingfield, A., & Taylor, T. (2016). Race, gender and class in entrepreneurship. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 39(9), 1676–1696.

Hashim, S. (2023). Women entrepreneurs in the Gulf States: Taking stock and moving forward. *Journal of the International Council for Small Business*, 4(1–2), 1–29.

Ibrahim, F., Marcella, R., & MacLennan, A. (2025). Whose digital entrepreneurship is it anyway? *Information Technology for Development*.

Ibrahim, S., Marcella, R., & MacLennan, A. (2025). Investigating intersectionality and its influence on information behaviours. *Information Research*, 30(1), Paper 951.

International Trade Centre. (2024). *Tech hubs in Africa: Accelerating start-ups for resilient growth* (3rd ed.).

Ivanović, Đ., Simović, V., Domazet, I., & Antonijević, M. (2021). DigComp competence levels of female entrepreneurs in Serbia. *Journal of Women's Entrepreneurship and Education*, 3–4, 42–60.

Kaningini, A. W., Pongo, T. A., Lwamba, M. I., & N'Kulu, B. M. (2023). Adoption of electronic commerce as a resilience strategy. *African Journal of Economic and Management Studies*, 14(2), 313–331.

Kedir, A., & Kouame, E. (2022). FinTech and women's entrepreneurship in Africa. *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 15(4), 452–467.

Khoo, C., Yang, E. C. L., Tan, R. Y. Y., et al. (2024). Digital competencies for women tourism entrepreneurs. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 32(3), 519–539.

- Kuschel, K., Ettl, K., Díaz-García, C., & Alsos, G. A. (2020). Women in STEM entrepreneurship. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, 16(1), 1–15.
- Lay, J., & Tafese, T. (2025). Africa's emergent tech sector. *Africa Spectrum*, 60(1), 106–126.
- Malaquias, F. F. de O., & Fernandes Malaquias, R. (2022). Digital financial services and business performance satisfaction. *Journal of Technology Management and Innovation*, 17(3), 3–11.
- Martinez Dy, A., Marlow, S., & Martin, L. (2017). Women digital entrepreneurs and intersectionality. *Human Relations*, 70(3), 286–311.
- Martinez Dy, A., Martin, L., & Marlow, S. (2018). Emancipation through digital entrepreneurship? *Organization*, 25(5), 585–608.
- Mishra, A. A., Maheshwari, M., Pandey, J., & Hassan, Y. (2023). Fempreneurship through digital platforms. *Journal of Global Information Management*, 31(8), 1–29.
- Mukorera, S. Z. E. (2020). Is entrepreneurship the solution for female empowerment in South Africa? *Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship*, 25(1), 2050003.
- Mutesi, J., Byusa, V., Nkundabanyanga, S., & Uusiku, P. (2025). Digital readiness and performance under AfCFTA. *Cogent Business & Management*, 12, 2518248.
- Naudin, A., & Patel, K. (2017). Women's use of social media in entrepreneurial work. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 22(5–6), 511–527.
- Ndemo, B., & Weiss, T. (2017). Africa's digital transformation futures. *Africa Journal of Management*, 3(3–4), 328–347.
- Ndubuisi, G., Otioma, C., & Tetteh, G. K. (2021). Digital infrastructure and employment. *Telecommunications Policy*, 45(8), 102153.
- Ng, P. Y., Wood, B. P., & Bastian, B. L. (2022). Reformulating empowerment in collective entrepreneurship. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 28(9), 154–176.
- Nicolescu, R., Venkatraman, S., & Haynes, N. (2022). Microeconomics of social media work. *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 15(2), 168–183.
- Nziku, D. M., Ramadani, V., & Dana, L.-P. (2022). Women entrepreneurs in Tanzania. In *Women entrepreneurs in Sub-Saharan Africa* (pp. 219–250). Springer.
- Obeng-Odoom, F. (2020). The African Continental Free Trade Area. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 79(1), 167–197.
- Ojong, N., Simba, A., & Dana, L. P. (2021). Female entrepreneurship in Africa. *Journal of Business Research*, 132, 233–248.
- Paoloni, P., Secundo, G., Ndou, V., & Modaffari, G. (2019). Women entrepreneurship and digital technologies. In *Advances in gender and cultural research in business and economics* (pp. 181–194). Springer.
- Radović-Marković, M. (2016). Empowering women through entrepreneurship education in Serbia. *Journal of Women's Entrepreneurship and Education*, 1–2, 3–17.
- Rahmi, E., Darmansyah, D., Yulastri, A., & Handrianto, C. (2025). Bridging entrepreneurship education and digital transformation. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 24(4), 640–660.
- Ramos-Farroñán, J. A., Bonifacio-Mendoza, R., Álvarez-Huerta, E., & Hurtado-Cordero, M. (2024). Empowerment and rural digital entrepreneurship. *Sustainability*, 16(10), 7020.
- Ranabahu, N., & Tanim, F. A. (2022). Empowering vulnerable women through entrepreneurship. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, 14(2), 145–166.

- Régnier, P. (2023). Innovation and appropriate technologies. *Journal of Entrepreneurship*, 32(2S), 12S–26S.
- Rejeb, A., Rejeb, K., & Süle, E. (2025). Female entrepreneurship: A systematic review. *Quality & Quantity*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-025-02281-w>
- Shaikh, S. S., & Ahmad, J. H. (2024). Digitalization and undergrad entrepreneurs. *International Journal of Media and Information Literacy*, 9(1), 218–233.
- Shamaki, H., Ibrahim, U. A., & Philemon, N. A. (2022). Digital technology and female-owned enterprises in Nigeria. *Journal of Women's Entrepreneurship and Education*, 1–2, 39–60.
- Shukla, A., Kushwah, P., Jain, E., & Sharma, S. K. (2021). ICT and women's digital entrepreneurship. *Journal of Enterprising Communities*, 15(1), 137–154.
- Soam, S. K., Rathore, S., Yashavanth, B. S., et al. (2023). Students' perspectives on entrepreneurship in India. *Sustainability*, 15(13), 10488.
- Welter, F. (2011). Contextualizing entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 35(1), 165–184.
- Wood, B. P., Ng, P. Y., & Bastian, B. L. (2021). Hegemonic conceptualizations of empowerment. *Administrative Sciences*, 11(1), 28. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci11010028>

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.36>

A REVIEW OF THE IMPACT OF DEADLOCK DETECTION AND RESOLUTION IN CLOUD AND EDGE COMPUTING DATABASES

Tshidiso Lloyd Molema,*Department of Computer Science and Information Systems,
North-West University, South Africa*30730333@mynwu.ac.za,

&

Bukohwo Michael Esiefarienrhe,*Department of Computer Science and Information Systems,
North-West University, South Africa*Michael.Esiefarienrhe@nwu.ac.za

ABSTRACT

Deadlock remains a critical challenge in distributed systems that severely inflicts reliability and security concerns in modern day computing, most times leading to costly delays, transaction failures, and system inefficiencies. Traditional approaches to deadlock detection and resolution in distributed systems were strongly dependent on message passing schemes. However, the detection accuracy does not align with high scalability which often result in amplified false positives or inefficiencies in managing complex cycle dependency. The system's responsiveness and resolution of deadlock cycles is essential to maintain the reliability of computer, communication and information systems. Distributed systems scale by partitioning data across multiple servers with the aim to enhance throughput when executing transactions in parallel. Often times, the replication layer serves as the foundation from which the transaction layer is built on. The concept of synchronization amongst replicas is of paramount importance for successful transaction processing. This requires a thorough understanding of the design in order not to compromise the lock responsiveness that could possibly hinder the system to scale accordingly. However, when the system is large-sized, the complexity of these techniques increases. To address this, we conducted a systematic review of literatures to examine existing approaches to deadlock detection and resolution in distributed systems. Databases such as IEEE Xplore, ACM Digital Library, Google scholar, ScienceDirect, and Springer were used for broader scoping review. Furthermore, following the selection process guided by predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, relevant articles were identified and their effectiveness in maintaining a deadlock free environment. The systematic analysis showed that cycle dependency, concurrency level and communication overhead may influence the effectiveness of deadlock algorithms. Moreover, unique challenges posed by deadlocks in distributed database systems were identified which provided important research directions. Experimental based evaluations to enhanced algorithms decreases latency, enhance scalability with minimal time as opposed to traditional models. Our findings underscore the pivotal role of deadlock detection in distributed database systems.

Keywords: *Deadlock detection, distributed database management systems, deadlock handling, concurrency, deadlock recovery, distributed deadlock detection.*

1. Introduction

Distributed systems have become increasingly important in recent years and has been instrumental to many successes in artificial intelligence (AI) applications in all aspects of economic, social and environmental breakthrough. Various forms of distributed systems such as distributed computing frameworks, distributed databases, distributed coordinating systems are widely used in sectors such as finance, e-commerce, and transportation [1, 2]. The substantial benefits of these systems includes scalability, accuracy, and availability resulting in the coordination of geographically dispersed processes and resources where fault tolerance, concurrency control, resource contention [3] are significantly important, but their inherent complexity remain a critical issue. Likewise, deadlock is one of the greatest consequence of such dynamic environments, where processes wait indefinitely for resources thereby halting system performance [4]. Effective deadlock detection and resolution techniques are therefore crucial to ensuring the reliability and efficacy of distributed systems.

This has influenced researchers to explore the potential of adaptive algorithm-based models to manage the challenges associated with deadlocks in distributed database systems [3]. The development of deadlock free environment seeks to revolutionize how processes efficiently and seamlessly flow from one node to another. This has the potential to dramatically reduce delays and latency by minimizing congestion induced conflicts via elastic scaling [5, 6]. However, without proper concurrency control management, distributed systems remain prone to deadlocks. Particularly, reliability and scalability constitute a primary concern that is yet to be addressed in distributed database management systems [7].

Consequently, cyclic dependencies and the lack of proper resource management are results of

deadlocks which could potentially degrade system performance and causes processes to wait indefinitely. While the objective of cloud-based services is solely on the support of large scale, dynamic and high contention, the distributed nature of the systems often leads to inconsistent and inadequate resource allocation [8]. This creates complex dependencies on the business processes, data access patterns and tasks, thereby creating unreliable system thus causing operations to fail indefinitely.

Several approaches were proposed with hope to address these challenges, for instance, [9] proposed a deadlock free method for pickup and delivery problems which utilizes priority inheritance and offers temporary priority. As opposed to traditional approaches, the approach allows agents to function efficiently in complex environments, creating a deadlock free environment while enhancing concurrency. Similarly, [10] introduced a lightweight deadlock analysis targeted at multi threading programs, underscoring the significance of verification of object dependencies via abstract modelling. Although the proposed approach was efficient in detection of deadlocks, challenges of false detection were observed because of dependency collection overhead.

Furthermore, [11] developed an efficient data dependency profiler tailored to sequential and parallel programs aimed at decreasing the execution overhead. The proposed approach prioritized parallelization and lock free programming for optimized system performance. Consequently, the approach was not dynamically compatible in diverse environments particularly with lock free mechanism regardless of the enhanced profiling efficiency. Collectively, these studies demonstrated that while priority-based inheritance approach enhance concurrency, the lightweight deadlock detection advocated for multi-threaded environments.

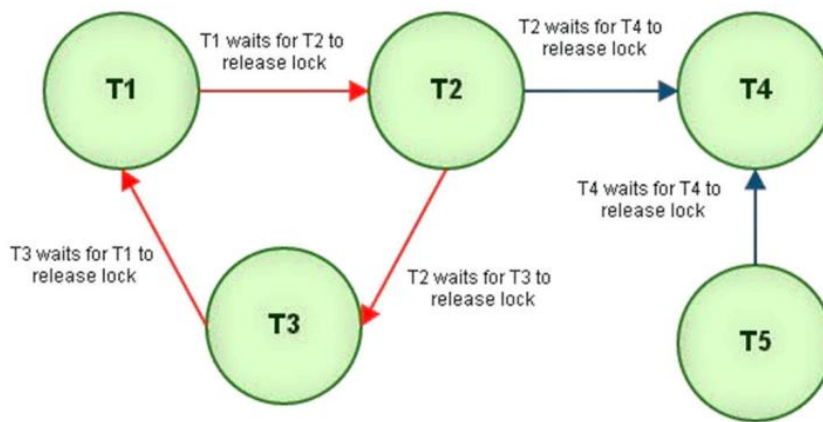


Figure 1: Wait-For-Graph for deadlock detection

Although both approaches guaranteed consistency but with a greater cost of scalability. Microservices architectures as innovative approaches coupled with paradigm shift in software development introduced new perspectives and multiple resolutions to address these challenges. Each microservice can be considered a vertex as depicted by figure 1. Directed graph aims to detect dependencies where one service awaits from other processes. This efficiently tracks resource contention amongst processes in distributed database systems. Technically, distributed database systems exist to maintain additional metadata which demonstrates conflict history, lock dependency and transaction state [12].

On a conceptual level, the metadata forms an overlay that triggers the detection and resolution of deadlocks across distributed transactions. Figure 2 shows the distribution of sufficient resources in a way that scales appropriately to proactively analyse the system's resilience based on transaction state and lock management [12]. Consequently, the process of decoupling these systems alongside the adoption of distributed systems invalidates the efficiency of traditional centralized architecture's transaction management methods [13].

However, the distributed nature of decentralized deadlock detection allows for local detection of

deadlocks while microservices advocates for scalability. They remain prone to deadlocks as they lack global knowledge, resulting in communication overhead [14]. The challenge necessitated the need to explore more advanced methods that prioritizes efficient operation and reliability of the system. The comparative analysis uncovers the trade-off between efficiency, reliability and scalability in existing methods. The above-mentioned innovations such as temporary priorities, lightweight analysis, and data dependency profiling offer partial solution with their respective limitations.

Therefore, the work seeks to close the gap between methods that concurrently ensure consistency, scalability, and reliable detections of deadlocks in dynamic contexts. In order to overcome the drawbacks of decentralised techniques and improve the speed and accuracy of deadlock detection in complex transaction scenarios, this paper discusses the benefits and drawbacks of deadlocks in distributed database systems.

2. Methods

The study used the systematic literature review approach to provide a comprehensive and structured assessment on the current literatures on deadlock detection algorithms in cloud and distributed database systems which addresses the research problem. The approach included the

identification, selection, and synthesising related studies from peer reviewed journals and conference proceedings. Furthermore, the approach followed the procedure that comprised of literature review search, screening, eligibility criterion and final inclusion [15]. Additionally, a review of context specific deadlock detection protocols was thoroughly conducted by searching various databases following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines for reporting systematic review [16, 17].

2.1 Distributed Deadlock Detection Search Strings

Keywords such as distributed systems, deadlock detection techniques, cycle detection, concurrency control, multi-agent systems, scalability challenges, cloud computing were used for broad coverage across various databases. The screening process employed a set of predefined inclusion and exclusion criterion. Studies were excluded if they were outdated, allowed for limited access, duplicated, and irrelevant in terms of research scope. Similarly, studies were included if they were written in English, they addressed deadlock detection challenges in distrib-

uted systems. The eligibility assessment solidified screening procedures by prioritizing the studies that are practically relevant and that provided empirical findings, research methodologies or comparative insights with traditional methods. Studies were systematically analysed for data extraction on key arguments, limitations, strengths, weaknesses, and directions for future research in deadlock detection.

Figure 2 illustrates the publication distributions of the article selection process, particularly those suitable for the objective of the study. Following the systematic review research method, this allowed for transparent, replicable and theoretically sound findings based on the practical relevance to establish a reliable foundation for the proposed contribution. Based on the predefined study's research goal and objective, a collective examination of scholarly journals was thoroughly conducted from reputable databases. The search string combinations entailed, "distributed database management systems AND deadlock detection protocols", "deadlock detection", "distributed deadlocks AND multi-threading programs", "deadlock models OR deadlock cycles", "Transaction Manager".



Figure 2: Deadlock detection publication trends.

2.1.1 Selection process

The selection process included articles that best

suited the scope of the research using the following criteria and bias assessment criteria to ensure fair selection and analysis of articles as shown in figure 3:

Inclusion criteria:

1. Inclusion criterion 1 – the paper should be published within the time frame 2016 – 2025
2. Inclusion criterion 2 – the paper includes empirical evaluation findings.
3. Inclusion criterion 3 – the paper which allowed for full access and met the publication type such as conference and peer reviewed journal papers.

4. Inclusion criterion 4 – the paper domain should be relevant in addressing concurrency control in distributed database system.

2.1.2 Exclusion criterion

1. Duplicated papers
2. Non-English based publications
3. Outdated publications
4. Publications offering limited access or require payment

2.1.3 Quality assessment:

1. Selective results by omitting performance metrics insights.
2. Limited or no discussions on performance evaluations

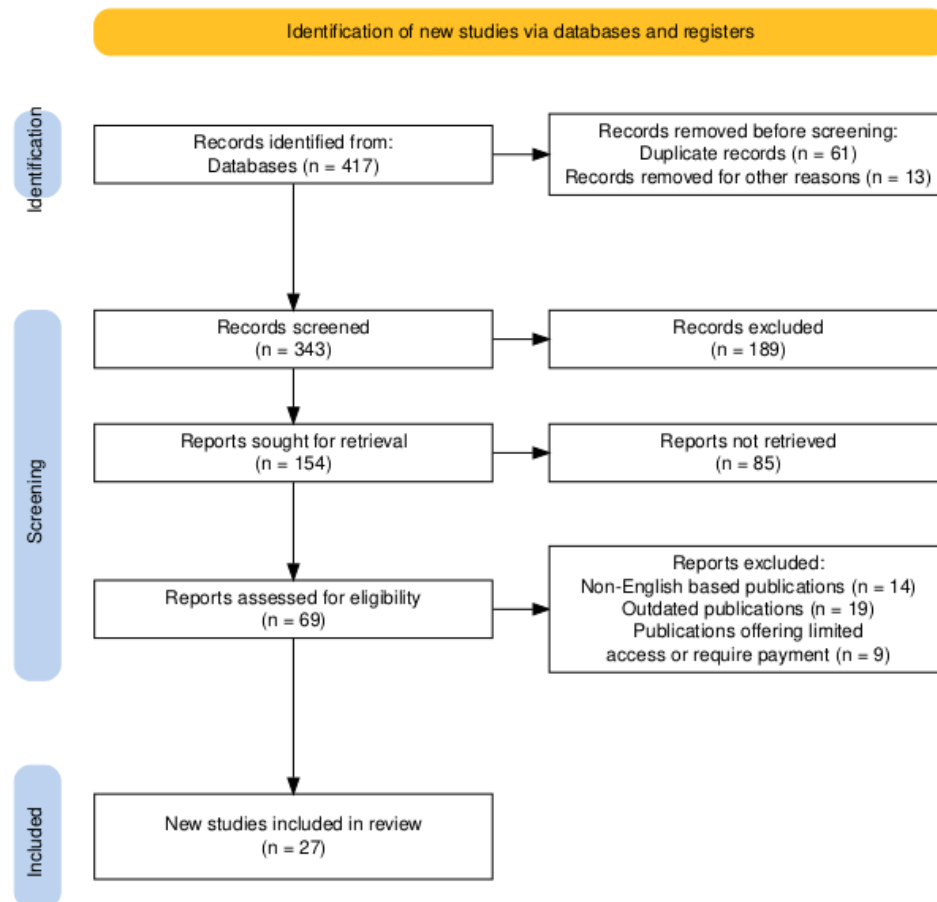


Figure 3: Prisma article assessment flowchart [17]

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 Deadlock detection State-of-the-art analysis

Numerous methods for resolving deadlock detection in distributed systems were identified by the literature research, each with distinct advantages and disadvantages. These methods ranged from graph-based to AI, cloud-based, and machine learning-driven approaches [18, 19]. While traditional approaches such as wait-for-graph can efficiently identify deadlocks, they are often challenged with communication overhead and scalability [20]. Similarly, responsive based approaches are designed for lightweight alternatives, their dependence on maximum wait time often led to increased false positives. Table 1 presents a summary of the effectiveness and limitations of these deadlock detectors. Furthermore, advanced frameworks such

as token based and message-passing algorithm are deployed across nodes and aimed at reducing bottlenecks under high contention [21, 22]. Recent development leveraging microservices has significantly enhanced adaptability particularly in cloud-based services and large-sized dynamic environments by predicting deadlocks prior to their occurrence. However, these approaches still suffer extreme computational cost and interpretability. Additionally, advancements in hybrid approaches that integrate traditional detection approaches with predictive strategies have enhanced the consistency, scalability, and accuracy by adapting to various workloads.

Table 1: Summarized existing deadlock detection and resolution approaches

Ref.	Deadlock detector	Efficiency	Scalability	Flexibility	Accuracy	Overhead	Limitations
[23]	Suite of adaptive deadlock protocols (Minimum Connected Component Deadlock (MCDD), Location dependent data (LDD), Strongly connected component (SCC), Network-wide deadlock detection (NDD))	Efficient, MCDD outperforms the other protocols	Scales moderately. Local detection is inefficient	Dynamically flexible across various workloads	MCDD shows high accuracy. LDD miss global deadlock	Increase as the workload increase	Increased overhead with larger scale. Timely responses degrade performance
[24]	Lock Chin Length (LCL) algorithm	Very efficient. One detection per cycle	scalable	Flexible and. Applicable to both parallel and distributed executions	High. Detects real deadlocks, no false detections.	Reduced overhead	Computationally expensive
[25]	Deadlock prevention routing	Efficient	Scalable due to dynamic updates. Consistent results per iteration.	Dynamically adaptable and scales with network changes.	Balanced. Prevents deadlocks by avoiding links with low resources	Slight increase. Minimal starvation	Dependant on landmark notes for precise updates. High contention processing systems hinders accuracy
[21]	GeoTP	Efficient	Scales with dynamic workloads with no throughput effects. Tested across 8 regions	Supports both single home and multi home transaction for data sharing amongst regions	High. Prioritizes serializability	Slight increase without scheduled orders. Decreases throughput	Lack of recovery mechanism. Increased overhead for light workloads.
[26]	magiClock	Highly efficient	Scales much faster than MSDK	Model speed is compatible with detection complexities	High. Avoids redundant detections	Low overhead ratings	Lacks trace independence. Low contention systems may sacrifice accuracy.

[27]	Morpheus	Highly efficient	Scales better than dynamic partial-ordering reduction (DPOR)	Flexible in protocol level errors	High. False positives are rarely experienced	high	Increased overhead
[28]	Distributed Lock Violation (DLV)	Efficient, Improved from S2PL	Scales in dynamic environment and reaches upto 59 000 TPM	Flexible	High	Overhead increase with detecting cycle dependency.	Increased abortion rate. Increased throughput
	Bayesian Optimization Algorithm (BOA) based	Fast and accurate	Highly scalable	Flexible in speed accuracy	High	Overhead depends on time and space complexity	Computationally expensive

Graph-based approaches are popularly known for its accuracy by identifying potential cycle dependencies in resource allocation. However, their strong dependence on global knowledge information disables the systems from scaling, thereby creating bottlenecks. Timeout techniques, on the other hand, provide lightweight alternatives [23], but because they rely on predefined thresholds, they increase false positives, which leads to excessive transaction abortion rates and causing communication overhead [29]. Thus, recent developments have gradually advanced toward adaptive, data driven methods that incorporate cloud-based services.

3.2 Performance metrics

Various levels of efficiency across various protocols were discussed in Table 1, highlighting the significance of efficiency as a key metric when conducting experimental evaluations of deadlock detection algorithms. Haque et al. [23] explored suite of adaptive deadlock detection protocols, reporting its effectiveness at the cost of overhead as workload scales. Although it performed better than the other algorithms in its group, the most significant similarity in terms of trade-offs is efficiency gains vs resource usage, especially when efficiency and resource utilisation are equally competitive. Conversely, the effectiveness of Morpheus outperforms Dynamic partial-ordering (DPOR) in terms of scalability and managing conflict resolutions. Similarly, effort by Nguten et al. [21] on GeoTD is equally effective and can adapt accordingly in dynamic environments. Maxiclock, on the other hand, outperformed MSDK in terms of efficiency, putting an emphasis on detection accuracy while minimising false positive detections. This is because accuracy is the goal in order to prevent unnecessary abortions, while false positives and negatives impair system performance. Likewise, Nithiya and Priya [30] investigated a methodical

strategy for handling deadlocks in multithreaded systems. Although their proposed method incorporates parallel computing techniques to prioritize verification of user access, scalability remains a challenge especially in larger systems with complex concurrent resources to manage. However, soft based computing models explored by Darwish et al. [31] follows a dynamic approach by leveraging fuzzy algorithms aimed at the priority of transaction features. The proposed mechanism excels at managing real time resource conflicts but incur greater number of false positives from predefined fuzzy rules. Thus, the integration of algorithms such as fuzzy logic model, through its ability to dynamically adjust transaction priorities based on historical patterns could potentially lead to low wait times whilst increasing commit rates in distributed database systems.

3.3 Scalability

In distributed systems, scalability is one of the fundamental concepts in deadlock detections. GeoTD scales under high contention systems with no effects on throughput, which is of paramount importance in systems that constantly seek to meet certain demands. Although MCDD and LDD scales dynamically, a notable gradual increase in scalability amongst the other algorithms exists. This proves that global detection works better than local detection. However, because of its one cycle detention, the lock chain length algorithm scales effectively at the expense of flexibility. This restriction reduces the effectiveness of performance in large scale systems, which becomes problematic in high concurrent systems where complex transaction interdependencies significantly increase the chance of deadlock. Similarly deadlock prevention routing explores scalability and uncovers the adaptability based on the net-

work traffic, ensuring flexible network choice as network topologies evolve. In addition, Yoon et al. [14] examined RDMA-based decentralised lock management with the goal of lessening lock managers' starving problems. As a result, throughput and latency were improved. As opposed to thread-based models, RDMA under high contention performs better, but comes at a great loss of global system knowledge. This supports the views by Nithiya and Priya [30] on two phase commit protocol suitable for centralized system for accurate deadlock detection. RDMA outperforms two phase locking (2PL) by lowering communication overhead, even if 2PL guarantees system dependability. However, in greater processing and concurrent systems, 2PL's performance deteriorates.

3.4 Flexibility

Flexibility particularly in distributed systems guarantees the application of deadlock detection across various systems. Although lock chain length and deadlock prevention routing are highly flexible, making them both suitable for distributed processing. Deadlock detection routing guarantees scalability and effective resource allocation even in the face of network configuration variations. Despite its scalability, GeoTD can be used for both single-family and multi-home transactions. Making it suitable for distributed systems where resource sharing across a geographically distributed system is crucial. Morpheus remains efficient with minimal fault tolerance and conflict resolutions in dynamic environment. Furthermore, accuracy plays a vital role in ensuring the system reliability, particularly fault tolerance. In a similar vein, both GeoTD and maxiClock demonstrated excellent accuracy, with GeoTD continuing to be serialisable for improved transaction processing considering conflict management. Similarly, to solve the overhead difficulty, Haque et al.'s suite of adaptive deadlock detection algorithms [23] is highly recommended due to its accuracy, especially in global deadlock detection. While constrained in local detections, it contrasts slightly with traditional approaches which conducts resource intensive checks resulting in unwanted overhead, adaptive protocols maintain stable balance between accuracy and overhead. Ideally, MCDD is best suited for systems which prioritizes global accuracy as opposed to local detections.

Overhead in these systems remains a critical issue particularly as deadlock detection algorithms scale as certain techniques that allows for accurate detections suffer significant costs particularly in real time processing systems. The small trade-off between efficiency and scalability is highlighted by the fact that

MCDD overhead is strongly correlated with workload size, which escalates computational costs. This eliminates the need for scheduled orders for transactional processing, but at a minor increase in deadlock prevention routing overhead. The restriction of high abortion rates continues to deteriorate system performance, rendering it incorrect and unreliable even if maxiclock promises little overhead. In order to guarantee overall system performance, the algorithm must essentially control the computational cost.

4. Conclusion, Recommendation, and Future work

There have been significant advancements in deadlock detection and resolution in distributed systems over the years and has the potential to enhance efficiency, transaction management, and detection accuracy. This ranges from traditional approaches that utilises manual verifications to modern advanced approaches. While the advancements in deadlock detections have improved, continuous enhancements in scalability, accuracy, overhead reduction, and throughput optimization necessitate the need for more robust systems. The paper has conducted a thorough review of deadlock detection algorithms in various distributed systems with close focus on algorithms that enhances scalability, system performance, and fault tolerance. Furthermore, it presented recent developments on deadlock detection in distributed database systems aimed at addressing the limitations in distributed database operations. Moreover, the paper explores various performance metrics alongside algorithmic architectures. This provides valuable insights into future research directions for the enhancement of deadlock detection in dynamic environments. The study posits that deadlock detection in distributed system remain a pressing issue to be addressed and remain a crucial hindrance to optimized system performance as well as an ongoing research area. Researchers have extensively explored various techniques aimed at enhancing system performance, scalability, availability, concurrency, and reliability using timestamp, wait for graphs, resource allocation graphs, and dynamic detection strategies. Future research direction will be on developing technique to enhance deadlock detection algorithm, ensuring efficiency and accuracy in managing complex transactions to scale effectively. The objective is to develop a method that can detect deadlocks at high speeds while ensuing system responsiveness even in dynamic system environments.

References

- [1] M. Kansara, "Advancements in cloud database migration: Current innovations and future prospects for scalable and secure transitions," ed: ResearchGate, 2024.
- [2] M. Kirti, A. K. Maurya, and R. S. Yadav, "Fault-tolerance approaches for distributed and cloud computing environments: A systematic review, taxonomy and future directions," *Concurrency and Computation: Practice and Experience*, vol. 36, no. 13, p. e8081, 2024.
- [3] M. Haroon, "Challenges of concurrency control in object oriented distributed database systems," *Int. J. Modern Comput., Inf. Commun. Technol.*, vol. 2, no. 7, pp. 48-52, 2019.
- [4] J. Nithiya and S. Priya, "Thread based deadlock detection and management in distributed database," *J. Eng. Res. Appl.*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 56-61, 2018.
- [5] M. S. Rana, M. K. Soheli, and M. S. Arman, "Distributed Database Problems Approaches and Solutions-A Study," *International Journal of Machine Learning and Computing (IJMLC)*, 2018.
- [6] Neha and Banita, "High-Performance Concurrency Control in Multi-User Database Systems: Analysis and Optimization Strategies," in *2024 3rd Edition of IEEE Delhi Section Flagship Conference (DELCON)*, 2024: IEEE, pp. 1-5.
- [7] S. Kanungo and R. D. Morena, "Original Research Article Concurrency versus consistency in NoSQL databases," *Journal of Autonomous Intelligence*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2024.
- [8] A. Yousafzai *et al.*, "Cloud resource allocation schemes: review, taxonomy, and opportunities," *Knowledge and information systems*, vol. 50, no. 2, pp. 347-381, 2017.
- [9] Y. Fujitani, T. Yamauchi, Y. Miyashita, and T. Sugawara, "Deadlock-Free Method for Multi-Agent Pickup and Delivery Problem Using Priority Inheritance with Temporary Priority," *Procedia Computer Science*, vol. 207, pp. 1552-1561, 2022.
- [10] C. Laneve, "A lightweight deadlock analysis for programs with threads and reentrant locks," *Science of Computer Programming*, vol. 181, pp. 64-81, 2019.
- [11] Z. Li, A. Jannesari, and F. Wolf, "An efficient data-dependence profiler for sequential and parallel programs," in *2015 IEEE International Parallel and Distributed Processing Symposium*, 2015: IEEE, pp. 484-493.
- [12] H. Dai, Y. Wang, K. B. Kent, L. Zeng, and C. Xu, "The state of the art of metadata managements in large-scale distributed file systems—scalability, performance and availability," *IEEE Transactions on Parallel and Distributed Systems*, vol. 33, no. 12, pp. 3850-3869, 2022.

- [13] J. Wu, "Challenges and Solutions of Distributed Transactions in Medical Software under Microservices Architecture."
- [14] D. Y. Yoon, M. Chowdhury, and B. Mozafari, "Distributed lock management with rdma: Decentralization without starvation," in *Proceedings of the 2018 International Conference on Management of Data*, 2018, pp. 1571-1586.
- [15] K. K. Shahandashti, A. B. Belle, T. C. Lethbridge, O. Odu, and M. Sivakumar, "A PRISMA-driven systematic mapping study on system assurance weakeners," *Information and Software Technology*, vol. 175, p. 107526, 2024.
- [16] M. J. Page *et al.*, "The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews," *bmj*, vol. 372, 2021.
- [17] N. R. Haddaway, M. J. Page, C. C. Pritchard, and L. A. McGuinness, "PRISMA2020: An R package and Shiny app for producing PRISMA 2020-compliant flow diagrams, with interactivity for optimised digital transparency and Open Synthesis," *Campbell systematic reviews*, vol. 18, no. 2, p. e1230, 2022.
- [18] T. Cogumbreiro, R. Hu, F. Martins, and N. Yoshida, "Dynamic deadlock verification for general barrier synchronisation," *ACM Transactions on Programming Languages and Systems (TOPLAS)*, vol. 41, no. 1, pp. 1-38, 2018.
- [19] N. Chaudhry and M. M. Yousaf, "Concurrency control for real-time and mobile transactions: historical view, challenges, and evolution of practices," *Concurrency and Computation: Practice and Experience*, vol. 34, no. 3, p. e6549, 2022.
- [20] S. S. Manakhari, A. P. Jadhav, T. Paraye, and A. Gate, "Advanced Deadlock Detection and Resolution in Distributed File Systems Using AI and Daemon Processes," in *2024 IEEE International Conference on Big Data (BigData)*, 2024: IEEE, pp. 3983-3991.
- [21] C. D. Nguyen, J. K. Miller, and D. J. Abadi, "Detock: High performance multi-region transactions at scale," *Proceedings of the ACM on Management of Data*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 1-27, 2023.
- [22] M. Samadi, F. Ghassemi, and R. Khosravi, "Decentralized deadlock-free enforcement of message orderings in message-based systems," *Journal of Computer and System Sciences*, vol. 144, p. 103544, 2024.
- [23] W. Haque, M. Fontaine, and A. Vezina, "Adaptive Deadlock Detection and Resolution in Real-Time Distributed Environments," in *2017 IEEE 19th International Conference on High Performance Computing and Communications; IEEE 15th International Conference on Smart*

City; *IEEE 3rd International Conference on Data Science and Systems (HPCC/SmartCity/DSS)*, 2017: IEEE, pp. 571-577.

- [24] Z. Yang, C. Qian, X. Teng, F. Kong, F. Han, and Q. Xu, "LCL: A lock chain length-based distributed algorithm for deadlock detection and resolution," in *2023 IEEE 39th International Conference on Data Engineering (ICDE)*, 2023: IEEE, pp. 151-163.
- [25] N. Sharma and K. Kapoor, "Deadlock prevention in payment channel networks," *IEEE Transactions on Network and Service Management*, 2024.
- [26] Y. Cai and W.-K. Chan, "Magiclock: Scalable detection of potential deadlocks in large-scale multithreaded programs," *IEEE Transactions on Software Engineering*, vol. 40, no. 3, pp. 266-281, 2014.
- [27] X. Yuan and J. Yang, "Effective concurrency testing for distributed systems," in *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth International Conference on Architectural Support for Programming Languages and Operating Systems*, 2020, pp. 1141-1156.
- [28] H. Guo, X. Zhou, and L. Cai, "Lock violation for fault-tolerant distributed database system," in *2021 IEEE 37th international conference on data engineering (ICDE)*, 2021: IEEE, pp. 1416-1427.
- [29] C. Felius, "Assessing the performance of distributed PostgreSQL," PhD thesis, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2022.
- [30] J. Nithiya and S. Priya, "Thread based deadlock detection and management in distributed database," *J. Eng. Res. Appl*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 56-61, 2018.
- [31] S. M. Darwish, A. A. El-Zoghabi, and M. H. Hassan, "Soft computing for database deadlock resolution," *International Journal of Modeling and Optimization*, vol. 5, no. 1, p. 15, 2015.

<https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.37>

AN EVALUATION OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT WITHIN THE E-HAILING TRANSPORT SERVICES IN THE THOHOYANDOU AREA, SOUTH AFRICA

Karabo Suzan Mabina

ORCID ID 0000-0002-3632-319X

Department of Youth in Development, University of Venda.

Email: karabomabina1501@yahoo.com

Marubini Harry Mukwevho

ORCID ID 0000-0002-2739-6354

Department of Youth in Development,

Faculty of Humanities,

Social Sciences, ¹Education, University of Venda,

Thohoyandou 0950, South Africa.

Email: harry.mukwevho@univen.ac.za

Tsoaledi Daniel Thobejane

ORCID ID 0000-000-70601165

Department of Youth In Development

Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education.

University of Venda

daniel.thobejane@univen.ac.za

Abstract

There are noticeable gender gaps and differences, primarily in driver roles and passenger preferences on transport services. While e-hailing platforms are generally gender-neutral in their pricing and rules, there is a prevalent gender wage gap, often linked to driver experience and productivity differences. Additionally, many passengers prefer female drivers, citing safety and comfort concerns. The paper adopted a sociological lens and a qualitative approach to gather in-depth information on E-hailing transport services by young entrepreneurs in Thohoyandou, Vhembe District, South Africa. An investigation is therefore necessary due to the challenges that COVID-19 has caused for the ride-hailing business. A non-probability purposive sampling method was used to select youth aged 18-35 in the E-hailing transport service sector. The study's findings show a prevalent gender wage gap, often linked to driver experience and productivity differences. Barriers to women's participation in the transport sector are visible within each stage of the employment life cycle, including women's attraction to industry, recruitment, and retention; policies and practices in the workplace; and career progression. Despite conflicts and violence within the taxi industry, a minority of women participate and are involved in owning and driving taxis. As a result of toxic masculinity, the scarcity of women's participation and involvement in the taxi industry remains highly recognizable.

Keywords: COVID-19, E-hailing, Entrepreneurship, Public transport, Ride-hailing, Transport services, Women's participation, Youth entrepreneurship

Introduction

The gender dynamics in e-hailing services are complex and multifaceted, with factors such as passenger preferences, safety concerns, and potential gender productivity gaps all playing a

role (Abu-Rayash & Dincer, 2020). In e-hailing services, there are notable gender differences in driver and passenger preferences. Many individuals, especially women, report feeling scared

and vulnerable when using public transport, including e-hailing services. Women's participation and involvement in the taxi industry have not been accelerated due to conflicts and violence (Aloi et.al, 2020). Literature alludes to the taxi industry becoming an industry where violence and intimidation are employed to maintain economic standing. In this regard, the violence has been characterised by fierce gun battles and bombings, which have resulted in people being injured or killed in South Africa. Despite conflicts and violence within the taxi industry, a minority of women participate and are involved in owning and driving taxis (Bhana et.al, 2021). On the other hand, toxic masculinities limit women's participation and involvement in the taxi industry, which remains highly recognisable and effective.

In line with conflicts and violence within the taxi industry, Toxic masculinity, attributed to cultural norms, is prevalent (Goredema, 2010). Traditional stereotypes of men, along with related traits such as misogyny and homophobia, promote violence, including sexual assault and domestic violence. The socialisation of boys often normalises violence, such as in the saying "boys will be boys," emphasising bullying and aggressive behavioural elements (Jayachandran, 2020). Toxic masculinity is an advanced traditional male gender role that restricts boys and men from expressiveness, including social expectations that men seek to be dominant and limit their emotional range primarily to expressions of anger (Ahmed, Khattak & Anwar, 2020).

Alternatively, patriarchy puts the interests of men before those of women and uses culture, religion, tradition, and even love to justify the enslavement of women (Jayachandran, 2020). It thus reduces women to being the property of men. It is an ideological construct of a system encompassing ideologies, beliefs, values, and practices underpinning the organisation and structure of society, which result in unequal power relations between women and men (Sattari, 2021). Men are a prized commodity, yet there appears to be no clear consensus on the skills and qualities they exhibit besides being

physically different from women. The subjugation and subordination of women in all spheres of life, beginning within the family, are impacted by these patriarchal attitudes (Scott, Clayleff, Donadey & Lara, 2017). Social practices and institutions, including education, work, religion, culture, the arts, and the media, continuously reinforce patriarchal attitudes (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). It has become a natural, God-given, or part of the tradition and culture. In the taxi industry, gender-based violence in the workplace became a form of social control for reasserting male dominance and traditional gender roles that place women in subordination to men, and thus marginalising them from the occupation (Nkealah, 2016). Threats of physical violence from the passengers explain the perceptions that men have towards women drivers and the consequences of not conforming to gender roles prescribed.

Literature review

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations calls for an increase in women's participation in the transport sector. The Agenda explains its reasoning through its interlinked pillars: universal fundamental human rights, growth, human development, and business (Ng & Acker, 2020). The UN claims that although there has been progress in closing the gender inequality gap in transport, there is still room to improve and increase women's participation in the transport sector. Various reports from China, the USA, Mexico, the UK, and Tanzania explain the reason for the gender gap and sexual division in the industry as follows: adverse social norms; discriminatory laws and lack of legal protection; lack of access to financial, digital, and property assets (Mngxitama, 2010). Additionally, even if women do participate in the transport industry, they tend to be discriminated against, have relatively low earnings, have bad working conditions, and have limited career advancement opportunities (Mishra, 2013). However, the UN's report on Women's Economic Empowerment maintains that empowering women in the industry would also uplift the development of society and humanity.

Although encouraging and increasing women's

participation in the transport sector would benefit them greatly, many obstacles must be overcome (Maina & Caine, 2013). Gender inequality and gender segregation of work advantage men. The occupations traditionally filled by women pay less than those filled by men (Mahtab, Parker, Farah, Tania, Aditi & Sowada, 2016). Regarding the gig economy, studies show that over a million rideshare drivers demonstrate the gender gap in the sharing-economy model of private mobility.

The safety concerns and mobility of women in cities have received the attention of ride-hailing companies (Levant & Pryor, 2020). Some ride-hailing providers have responded by launching services exclusively for women. Women make up the majority of ride-hailing service users, including drivers and passengers (Levine & Rubinstein, 2017). Because the driver and passenger pool are exclusive, female users concerned about their safety would rather be assured that they would only be matched with other women for rides. Women-only ride-hailing systems are not the first gender-based segregated transportation examples (Job, 2020). Mexico City, for instance, is a city where nine out of ten women were victims of sexual violence on public transit during 2019. Pink public transit is one of the rare approaches of the Mexico City government to promote public transportation ridership and increase safety among female city-dwellers (Levant & Pryor, 2020). This system only has specific vehicles and train wagons for women and children. Yet, there is also criticism against gender-based segregation in public transportation (Jenelius & Cebecauer, 2020). Whether on public transit or in ride-hailing systems, and whether in the US or around the globe, the safety concerns of female transportation riders and drivers remain a planning and policy problem that requires attention.

In this regard, literature asserts that being judged like men in this taxi industry led to the experiences of isolation and pressure to measure up to men, and thus often fall prey to over-scrutinisation, where any shortcoming would be amplified through gender stereotypes (Rodriguez & Sanudo, 2020). By going against social norms

and expectations of what jobs women are expected to do, women are further exposed to victimisation and harassment, and are unable to attract public support. Women in the taxi industry are thus seen as intruders who threaten the dominant group, whose ways of expressing displeasure are to inflict them through sexual harassment, unequal wages, and lack of promotion opportunities (Henama, Pearl & Sifolo, 2017). Despite the presence of women in the taxi industry, there are concerns that men use their dominant positions to perpetuate the status quo and to prohibit women from succeeding in the industry.

Gaps in policies regarding women's participation in South Africa's e-hailing sector include insufficient focus on safety, a lack of targeted support for female drivers, and inadequate representation in decision-making related to transport (Smatarski & Son Hing, 2015). Furthermore, existing policies often fail to address women's specific needs and challenges, such as safety concerns and work-life balance, hindering their full participation and the sustainability of e-hailing services (Tessa, 2018). Barriers to women's participation in the transport sector are present within each stage of the employment lifecycle, including about women's attraction, recruitment, and retention; Policies and practices in the workplace, and leadership and career progression (Thomas, 2019). Regulatory Restrictions can pose overarching barriers to women's employment within transport. The lack of sector-specific research to improve the development and business case for increasing women's Participation in the sector, or evaluating existing interventions for their impact, can also pose challenges.

Women are significantly underrepresented in the global transport sector workforce, accounting for approximately 12 percent of transportation and storage workers worldwide (Weil, 2022). Women's participation varies by subsector: globally, women comprise only 5 percent of workers in land transport, 10 percent in water transport, 21 percent in warehousing and transportation support activities, and 38 percent in aviation (WHO, 2018). There is also a significant variation by region: for example, women

represent 21 percent of transportation and storage workers in Europe and Central Asia (ECA), but the female share of employment in the industry in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is substantially lower at 3 percent (World Economic Forum, 2021). The gender gap is particularly acute in senior leadership, technical, and operational roles. Women are more likely to be employed in administrative or service-oriented transport activities (Scott et al., 2017). In contrast, skilled technical jobs associated with higher pay, including driving roles, maintenance and repair, engineering, and pilot positions, are predominantly held by men. The proportion of women within the workforce decreases with seniority, indicating the presence of barriers to career progression (Sasidharan, Singh, Torbaghan & Parlikad, 2020).

Moreover, women's leadership in the transport and logistics sector has been shown to advance the implementation of eco-friendly practices and environmental protection measures (Sasidharan et al., 2020). Women are significantly underrepresented in the transport workforce worldwide. This is a persistent pattern, with minimal changes to female participation rates in the sector over time. There is some variation by subsector (Sattari, 2021). Women are least likely to work in land transport and water transport, where they account for 5 percent and 10 percent of workers, respectively. By contrast, women represent 21 percent of the global workforce within warehousing and support activities for transportation and 38 percent of workers in aviation (Nkealah, 2016). While gender statistics are generally limited, sectoral statistics are particularly scarce and patchy. The indicator on employment in transport and storage covers various subsectors, some of which, like postal and courier services, likely employ more women than other subsectors, such as land transport, overestimating the overall share of women employed in the transport sector; therefore, the figures provided in this report should be taken with caution (Nelson, 2020).

The global transport sector has one of the lowest rates of women in senior leadership (Mngxitana, 2010). Estimates indicate that women hold only

23 percent of senior leadership roles in transportation and supply chain companies surveyed globally (Mlambo, 2023). The proportion of women within the workforce decreases with seniority, indicating the presence of barriers to career progression within the sector: women make up 34 percent of entry-level roles but only 17 percent of senior executive and managerial-level positions across these industries (Maina & Caine, 2013). A global study commissioned by the European Investment Bank (EIB) to the International Association of Public Transport (UITP) showed that 26 percent and 25 percent of the senior and middle management of the 51 public transport operators and authorities representing an overall workforce of about 600,000 employees were women, respectively (Job, 2020).

Women in the transportation industry face difficulties juggling work and family commitments (Levant & Pryor, 2020). Many positions in the business, especially those in the road transport subsector, call for long and erratic workdays, nighttime shifts that conflict with flexible scheduling, and prolonged time away from home (Jewkes et al., 2015). It is difficult for women and single parents to balance a profession and a family because many transportation firms do not offer family-friendly policies like flexible scheduling, telecommuting possibilities, on-site daycare facilities, or generous parental leave (Jewkes et al., 2014). For instance, nearly 40 percent of European part-time female transport workers stated that their caregiving duties and the dearth of accessible and reasonably priced childcare choices forced them to cut back on their working hours (Jenelius & Cebecauer, 2020).

Furthermore, women claim that limiting maternity leave to the legally required minimum frequently forces them to take unpaid time off after giving birth, which eventually affects their ability to advance in their careers and get pensions (Goredema, 2010). Female employees leaving the company after having children is another way that a lack of support for working parents can impact retention (Connel, 2018). A significant obstacle to women's job advancement in the

transportation industry is gender stereotypes that portray men as more capable of leadership and decision-making, which creates a skewed view of women's talents and restricts their chances for advancement (Aloi et al., 2020). Prevalent social norms also mean that women are often disproportionately responsible for household and caregiving duties within the family, and familial obligations can hinder professional growth for working mothers, particularly in roles that demand extensive travel or extended hours (Bhana et al., 2021). For example, women in the sector may feel reluctant to seek promotions if they believe additional responsibilities at work or longer hours will adversely impact their family life. At the same time, managers may inadvertently exacerbate barriers to career progression by choosing not to promote women or assigning them less demanding roles. The male-dominated sector culture also means that, where flexible working arrangements are available, women who use these are disadvantaged regarding career progression: working part-time, for example, is typically equated with less commitment (Jayachandram, 2020).

Methodology

The qualitative research approach was employed in the study to get detailed information from participants (Creswell, 2014). The way the subjects behaved and perceived the forces behind challenges faced by youth entrepreneurs in E-hailing (Bolt) transport services were used to formulate the hypothesis. An exploratory research approach was used in the study to better understand the challenges faced by youth entrepreneurship in E-hailing (Bolt) transport services throughout and post-COVID period. Using a non-probability purposive sampling technique, volunteers who met the requirements were chosen. The researchers took a constructivist approach, seeking to determine the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspective of participants. The researcher solicits feedback and examines participants' behaviour as they engage in activities. Participants were chosen through the use of purposeful sampling, which allowed the researcher to do so based on some particular characteristics that will be deemed

crucial. Purposive sampling enabled the selection of data, expertise, and knowledge regarding a specific occurrence. The researcher used purposeful sampling to select young entrepreneurs working in the E-hailing (Bolt) transportation sector since they were able to share their experiences than anybody else. The inclusion criteria that were utilised to select the participants were described. The researcher continued approaching young men and women who were driving E-hailing vehicles around Thohoyandou. Although several drivers might recommend one another, the researcher did not depend on the advice because there were so many Bolt drivers in the area. Eleven people made up the sample size. The researcher chose a smaller sample because she wanted to interview a limited number of people and get complete information from them. The study was carried out in Limpopo province's Thohoyandou, Vhembe area. Thohoyandou is a small town located in the Vhembe district, Venda in Limpopo province, where people reside and work. People from the villages travel to Thohoyandou for shopping, schooling, and other various reasons. People travel in and out of it every day as it is one of the busiest and most advanced locations in the Vhembe area. In Thohoyandou Town, particularly in malls and retail centres, many bolt rides can be found. People frequently travel to and from their houses for both personal and professional reasons. Many people live and work both temporarily and permanently in the town's complexes and malls.

Participants

The study looked at how young entrepreneurs in the E-hailing (Bolt) transport industry were impacted and challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic. The study sample consisted of eleven individuals, aged 18 to 35, who were employed by the E-hailing (Bolt) transportation services in the Vhembe district of the Province of Limpopo. The study used a semi-structured face-to-face interview to gather comprehensive data on the effects of E-hailing (Bolt) transportation services in the course and after COVID-19 period to better understand the participants' perspectives and the variety of points of view.

Data Analysis

Based on the data from different angles relating to Youth Entrepreneurship and Gender Dimensions in E-hailing (Bolt) transport services during and post-COVID period in the district of Vhembe, the researcher looked at their experiences and effects as a key to understanding and interpreting the data provided (Maree, 2010). The thematic analysis method was adopted to identify the experiences of Youth Entrepreneurship and Gender Dimensions in E-hailing (Bolt) transport services during and post-COVID period in the district of Vhembe (Lloyd, 2018). The method of thematic analysis was useful in the study because it helped the researcher to emphasise, pinpoint, examine, and record the information on Youth Entrepreneurship and Gender Dimensions in E-hailing (Bolt) transport services and how they are impacted during and post-COVID-19 pandemic. This entailed a proper analysis, which made the researcher understand and reach conclusions about participants and produce trustworthy results.

Ethical considerations

Permission to conduct research was requested by contacting drivers who were working for E-hailing (Bolt) transport services in the Vhembe district of Thohoyandou. Participants were given information regarding the study's purpose, methods, risks, and benefits before enrollment, and their consent was acquired (Putman and Rock, 2016). Every participant was entitled to privacy regarding their matters. They were promised that their identities would be kept private and kept secret in any manner. Participants were given the assurance by the researcher that they would remain anonymous, and that no personal information would be requested that would expose their identity. Youth entrepreneurs were informed by the researcher of the real justifications for the data collection. The subjects were not misled or misled about the purpose of the study by the researcher to win their cooperation. Questions were posed to the participants during the interview.

Presentation of Findings

Participant A

"The slow pace in involving women in the taxi industry hurts the industry because it is women who understand the problems women experience in transportation and how to solve these issues."

Participant G

Women have always been active taxi and e-hailing drivers. In spite of their hectic schedules of juggling household chores and performing domestic chores, as well as taking care of children, women use taxi services and ride-hailing services to the fullest, and this isn't always a smooth ride. We are facing harassment, intimidation, and discomfort. Most of our reports and social media keep exposing safety issues that women face while regularly finding themselves in a closed space with a stranger, and these challenges are not being addressed."

Participant H

"Masculinity always plays a huge role in the E-Hailing and taxi industry as it is male-dominated, and very few women are in existence in this industry. Women have to prove to be powerful in order to survive operating in this industry. Power within the industry, which is exerted through fear, is very important, and one has to show sort of control not to be regarded as weak, both by your peers and drivers"

Participant I

In Thohoyandou, where masculinity is practiced in this industry, there is a huge gap between men's values and women's values as men are treated more superior. E-Hailing is viewed as a male industry. Women working in highly masculine jobs in a male-dominant labour market are viewed with suspicion."

Summary of the analysis

Discussions around masculinity often center on safety perceptions and the potential for gender-based violence, particularly for women (Sattari, 2021). While e-hailing can offer convenient and affordable travel, concerns exist about the safety of female passengers, with some studies revealing disturbing incidents of harassment and assault. Additionally, research highlights the impact of gender on perceptions of safety and the willingness to use e-hailing services, especially at night or alone.

Discussion of the findings

The theory of hegemonic masculinity indicates that in a workplace with a history of male dominance, such as the transport industry, a masculine culture is deeply embedded within the industry's functioning and manifested in practices that reward traditional forms of masculinity and disallow traditional forms of femininity. On the other hand, women who enter the transport industry are confronted with this culture, and their very presence challenges the embodied norm of a male body (Putman and Rock, 2016). Thus, as studies allude that transport industry constitutes a large portion of men's lives especially in contexts like United States, Japan as well as South Africa, where women's labour involvement in the industry is significantly lower than men's it expectedly provides a unique venue for daily doings and accomplishments of masculinity (Sattari, 2021).

Ng and Acker (2020), in agreeing with the sentiments of the participants, indicate that in workplace with a history of male dominance, such as the E-hailing industry, a masculine culture is deeply embedded within this industry's functioning and is also manifested in practices that reward traditional forms of masculinity and disallow traditional forms of femininity. In the same vein, Turnbull (2013) indicates that women who enter the transport industry are confronted with this culture, and their very presence challenges the embodied norm of a male body. The literature explored indicates that the transport industry constitutes a large portion of men's lives, especially in contexts like the United States, Japan, and South Africa, where women's labour involvement in the industry is

significantly lower than that of men.

Recommendation

There is a need for Bolt company to provide permits so that the drivers can work freely without hindrance, to pay drivers enough salary so that they can have enough to take care of their families, registering drivers as permanent employees is needed so that drivers can have a feeling of belonging in their workplace and taking care of car expenses such as petrol and car servicing and thoroughly research Bolt Company's aims and objectives before they can sign their contracts and work as drivers for the company, explore the E-hailing transportation industry to learn how the industry operates. Government should reinforce anti-discrimination laws to allow gender parity and equity in industries related to transportation, show support by issuing funds to youth entrepreneurs in the e-hailing transportation industry to explore and create more jobs. The rights of workers also need to be emphasised in our country so that no company or any form of organisation takes advantage of its workers. Policy makers must engage with the South African E-hailing Association (SAEHA) to protect E-hailing services from operating officially. Transport regulations must be implemented to avoid conflicts between public transport and E-hailing transport services.

Limitation

The study was limited to 11 participants, consisting of males and females who are Bolt drivers from different educational levels, marriage status, age, and gender. The study was qualitative, which provided an in-depth understanding of youth entrepreneurship and gender dimensions in E-hailing (Bolt) transport services during and post-COVID period, and the challenges they encounter in the industry.

Conclusion

Overall trends of women's involvement in trans-

portation have remained constant over time, despite a growing awareness of the significance of enhancing women's participation. Progress toward reducing gender inequalities in the industry has been sluggish. To make the transportation industry greener, safer, and more effective, the gender gap in employment must be closed. Service users, employees, and transportation businesses will all gain from it. Putting more emphasis on women's employment can help guarantee that a broader range of viewpoints are incorporated into service delivery and transportation planning. Due to the dearth of women at all sector levels, especially in transport operations and leadership, companies are losing out on women's perspectives and insights in forming, organizing, and creating transport services that satisfy industry standards. Employers gain from more diverse workforces on an organizational level in several ways, such as improved customer and service user outreach, more dynamic team performance, and more robust decision-making. Companies may improve recruiting and retention results and address the skills and labor shortages in the industry by securing their position as an employer of choice for both men and women through a clear commitment to equal opportunity. Reducing gender disparities in employment is linked to increased economic output and GDP growth at levels beyond the company and sectoral levels.

Conflict of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

ETHICAL CLEARANCE NO:

FHSSE/23/GYS/02/0429

ABOUT AUTHORS

Dr.Karabo Suzan Mabina is a researcher within the Department of Youth in Development at the University of Venda, South Africa.

Dr. Marubini Harry Mukwevho is a Senior Lecturer, a Youth Coordinator, and Researcher in the Department of Youth in Development at the University of Venda, South Africa.

Tsoaledi Daniel Thobejane **a professor, at the University of Venda, South Africa.** He holds an in doctoral degree in international Education from the University of Massachusetts (USA).

He obtained his Master of Science degree in Community Economic Development which he attained with a cum laude, at the Manchester State University in Manchester in 1998. He was actively involved in the Liberation Struggle in South Africa and was subsequently arrested under the state of emergency from 1985 until 1988. Prof. Thobejane worked as the Director for the School of International Training which was based in Brattleboro (USA) and was later deployed to South Africa where this institution had a satellite campus in Durban, South Africa. He also worked as a qualified Teacher at Somavunga High School based in Limpopo Province. Thus far, he has published close to 70 articles and four books in the area of Geo-Politics, Gender and Education. He has also delivered keynote addresses and has organized conferences at the University of Venda and abroad. His articles have received more than 800 citations internationally. He presently serves as external examiner for many Universities while also serving as a peer reviewer for many journals.

References

- Abu-Rayash, A., & Dincer, I. (2020). Analysis of mobility trends during the COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic: Exploring the impacts on global aviation and travel in selected cities. *Energy Research and Social Science*, 68.
- Ahmed, M. A., Khattak, M. S., & Anwar, M. (2020). Personality traits and entrepreneurial intention: The mediating role of risk aversion. *Journal of Public Affairs*, 10, 75.
- Aloi, A, Alonso, B, Benavente, J, Cordera, R, Echániz, E, González, F, Ladisa, C, Lezama-Romanelli, R, López-Parra, Á, and Mazzei, V. (2020). Effects of the COVID-19 lockdown on urban mobility: empirical evidence from the city of Santander (Spain).
- Arndt, S. (2002). Perspectives on African Feminism: Defining and Classifying African Feminist Literatures. *Empowering women for Gender Equity*, 54. 31-44
- Bhana, D., Janak, R., Pillay, D., & Ramrathan, L. (2021). *Masculinity and violence: Gender, poverty and culture in a rural primary school in South Africa*, International Journal of Educational Development. Volume 87, 102509. ISSN 0738-0593. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2021.102509>.
- Connell, R.W. (2018). *Discrimination and Diversity: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications*. Information Resources Management Association: USA
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and mixed methods approach* (4th Edition). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- D., Rodríguez, A., & Sañudo, R. (2020). Effects of the COVID-19 lockdown on Urban Mobility: Empirical Evidence from the City of Santander (Spain). (12), 3870.
- Goredema, R. (2010). African Feminism: The woman's struggle for identity. *African Yearbook of Rhetoric*.
- Henama, U., Pearl, P., & Sifolo, P. (2017). Uber: The South Africa Experience. *African Journal of Hospitality*, 6(2).
- Jayachandran, S. (2020). *Social Norms as a Barrier to Women's Employment in Developing Countries*. Northwestern University
- Jenelius, E, & Cebecauer, M. (2020). Impacts of COVID-19 on public transport ridership in Sweden: Analysis of ticket validations, sales, and passenger counts. *Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. 8. 100–242.
- Jewkes R., Flood M., Lang J. (2014). *From Working with Men and Boys to Changing Social Norms and Reducing Inequities in Gender Relations: A Paradigm Shift in Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls*. The Lancet. 385(9977):1580–1589.
- Jewkes, R., Morrell, R., Hearn, J., Lundqvist, E., Blackbeard, D., Lindegger, G., Quayle, M., Sikweyiya, Y., & Gottzén, L. (2015). Hegemonic masculinity: combining theory and practice in gender interventions. *Culture, health & sexuality*, 17 Suppl 2(sup2), S112–S127. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2015.1085094>

- Job, S. (2020). Can COVID-19 teach us something about the road safety epidemic? Transport for Development.
- Levant, R.F., & Pryor, S. (2020). *The Tough Standard: The Hard Truths About Masculinity and Violence*. United States of America: Oxford University Press.
- Levine, R, Rubinstein, Y. (2017). Smart and Illicit: Who Becomes an Entrepreneur and Do They Earn More? The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 132, 963–1018.
- Lloyd, J. (2018). Online qualitative methods- challenges and opportunities, BPS Qualitative Methods in Psychology Bulletin, 26 (Autumn).
- Mahtab, N., Parker, S., Farah, K., Tania, H., Aditi, S., & Sowada, A.S.M. (2016). *Discourse Analysis as a Tool for Understanding Gender Identity, Representation, and Equality*. Information Science Reference: United States of America.
- Maina, G.M. & Caine, V. (2013). *Resisting Occupational Gender Stereotypes: Experiences of Taxi Women Conductors in Kenya*. Gender & Behaviour 2013, 11(2).
- Maree, K. (2016). The first step in research, Pretoria: Van Schalk Publishers.
- Mishra, R.K. (2013). Post-colonial Feminism: Looking into-withing-beyond-to difference. International Journal of English Literature, 4 (4): 129-134
- Mlambo, S. (2023). Bolt plans to increase the number of drivers on the platform as part of its key growth. Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Nelson, E. (2020). The Impact of Ride-Hailing Services on Public Transportation Use: A Discontinuity Regression Analysis. Economics Department Working Paper Series
- Ng, W. & A. Acker. (2020). “The Gender Dimension of the Transport Workforce”, *International Transport Forum Discussion Papers*, No. 2020/11, OECD Publishing, Paris.
- Nkealah, N. (2016). Conceptualising Feminism (s) in Africa. The Challenges Facing African Women and Critics. English Academy Review 23(1): 133-141
- Phun, V. K., Pheng, P., Masui, R., Kato, H., & Yai, T. (2020). Impact of ride-hailing apps on traditional LAMAT services in Asian developing cities: The Phnom Penh Case. Asian Transport Studies, 6, 100006.
- Putman, M. S., & Rock, T. (2016). Action Research: using strategic inquiry to improve teaching and learning, United States of America: Sage Publications
- Raska, S, Markvica, K, & Ivanschitz, B.P. (2021). Impacts of COVID-19 and pandemic control measures on public transport ridership in European Urban areas. Vienna, Oslo, and Agder.
- Rosen, N. & Nofziger, S. (2019). *Boys, Bullying, and Gender Roles: How Hegemonic Masculinity Shapes Bullying Behavior*. Gender Issues 36, 295–318. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12147-018-9226-0>
- Sasidharan, M., Singh, A., Torbaghan, M.E., & Parlikad, A.K. (2020). A vulnerability-based approach to human-mobility reduction for countering COVID-19 transmission in London while considering local air quality. Science of the Total Environment. 741, (2020).

- Sattari, N. (2021). Masculinity in the Workplace: Iranian Women Engineers' Navigations of Hyper Masculine Work Cultures. *International Journal of Gender and Women's Studies*. Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 27-40. ISSN: 2333–6021. <https://doi.org/10.15640/ijgws.v9n1p3>
- Scott, B.K., Clayleff, S.E., Donadey, A., & Lara, I. (2017). *Women in Culture: An intersectional anthology for Gender and Women's studies* (2nd ed). West Sussex: John Willy and Sons
- Spiteri, G, Fielding, J, & Diercke, M. (2020). First coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) cases in the WHO European Region, 24 January to 21 February 2020. *Euro Surveill*, 2020, 25(9): 2000178.
- Stamarski, C. S., & Son Hing, L. S. (2015). Gender inequalities in the workplace: the effects of organizational structures, processes, practices, and decision makers' sexism. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, 1400. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01400
- Tessa, W. (2018). The impact of the future of work on women in public transport. *Women transporting the world*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.
- Thomas (2019). The Expanding Transportation Network Company “Equity Gap”: Adverse Impacts on Passengers with Disabilities, Underserved Communities, the Environment, and the On-Demand Workforce. University Transportation Research Centre. The City College of New York, USA.
- Weil, A. (2022). “I’ll Choose My Way”: Delinquent Girls and Boys in Search of Gender Hegemony. *Crit Crim*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-022-09607-2>
- WHO. (2018). Global status report on road safety 2018. World Health Organization.
- Wilmoth, D. (2020). Small business facts: early data show severe disruptions, U.S. Small Business Administration.
- World Economic Forum. (2021). Global Gender Gap Report. *Insight Report*. ISBN-13:978-2-940631-07-0.<http://reports.weforum.org/globalgender-gap-report-2021/data-explorer>.

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.38>

ASSESSING THE BEHAVIOURAL TRENDS OF CORRUPTION IN SOUTH AFRICAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO MAHIKENG LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

Nthabiseng Princess Mokhatla

Dep of Political Studies and International Relations

North West University, South Africa

Email: 34517367@mynwu.ac.za

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5813-1498>

&

Thabang Motswaledi

Dep of Political Studies and International Relations

North West University, South Africa

Email: Thabang.Motswaledi@nwu.ac.za

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3484-1815>

Abstract

Corruption remains one of the most severe threats to South Africa's administration, posing a significant barrier to transformation through development and justice. This study explores the detrimental effects of corruption on economic growth, public service delivery, and institutional performance, with a particular focus on local municipalities. Using the example of the Mahikeng Local Municipality (MLM) in the North West province, the research highlights how weak financial management, misappropriation of public funds, and a declining tax base in poorer communities have contributed to service delivery failures and deteriorating infrastructure, including key facilities such as Mmabatho Stadium, Bophelong Hospital, and the Mahikeng Museum. The Auditor-General's consistent negative assessments of MLM reveal systemic mismanagement by municipal officials, leading to a decline in sectors such as tourism and public health. From that view, the paper has since adopted a qualitative method of research where relevant books, journals and reports were consulted on the matter. The findings demonstrate that while corruption may temporarily benefit individuals through illicit financial gain, its broader impact on governance is overwhelmingly negative, undermining trust, weakening institutions, and stalling development. The study concludes that unless the South African government urgently strengthens its anti-corruption framework and enforces accountability at all levels, the trajectory of administrative decline and social injustice will persist. This research contributes to ongoing debates about governance reform and public sector accountability in transitional democracies.

Keywords: *Corruption, Economic growth, South African Local municipalities, Mahikeng Local Municipality, Public Sector Governance*

Introduction

In terms of its existence, corruption is a concept that exists throughout all countries. According to Kelly (2014), it is a political exchange comparable to the act of lying in human conduct. We can all agree that lying does occur, but there will always be disagreements over its morality and

“rightness”. While corruption has always existed, it is now understood to be a force for action as well as a material thing that can be measured. It is described as “the misuse of entrusted power for private benefits” by Petrou & Thanos (2014). However, a more recent interpretation of corruption separates this idea into three parts: corruption related to the execution of a job or

task, corruption as a means of trade in terms of money, and corruption on a human level as the manner in which things are done in society (Kelly, 2014). The underlying goal of employing leverage, financial compensation, or reciprocal favours for the express aim of obtaining something better is connected to all three elements.

Prostitution is not as bad as corruption. The former always puts the morality of a whole nation at peril, whereas the latter may endanger the morals of a single person (Lumumba, 2014). One of the biggest problems the human species is currently experiencing is corruption, as it cripples economies and affects humans negatively. The perception of corruption as a threat to human existence is growing around the world, thus, it could be recognized as a “crime against humanity” (Obura, 2014). The achievement of good governance, sustainable development, and the Millennium Development Goals have been noted as being significantly hampered by it. The political, economic, social, and cultural health of societies is significantly impacted (Lumumba, 2014).

Methodology and research design

The paper has since adopted a qualitative method of research and a descriptive research design to analyze the behavioural trends of corruption in South African local government with specific reference to MLM. The qualitative method of research focuses on in-depth and non-numerical data, which mainly concerns describing and illustrating the data concerning the problem at hand (Amelda, 2017). Hence, the study adopted existing literature to find out perceptions of scholars, government, and journalists reporting corruption in South Africa's local government. Additionally, while undertaking direct inquiry, analysis, and description of the particular occurrences, a descriptive research design places a high priority on an intuitive presentation (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999, 49). The choice of this research design technique was influenced by the research topic, which examines how corruption affects economic growth in the MLM. Similarly, because reference lists were used to find more journals, reports, and books

on the phenomena at hand, purposive and snowballing techniques play a key role in signaling the intentions of the researcher. Hence, the researcher employed the snowballing sampling technique to find referrals to other useful material with the vast knowledge on behavioural trends of corruption in South African local government, with specific reference to MLM.

Literature review on the nature of Corruption

Corruption, although a global issue, manifests more acutely in Africa and other developing regions. Reports frequently document the collapse of governance structures in African countries, attributed to leadership failures characterized by greed and the pursuit of power. Internationally, countries such as Brazil, Italy, Ecuador, and India have experienced governmental change precipitated by corruption. In 2006, Thailand witnessed a coup d'état linked to corrupt practices. These examples demonstrate broad recognition among stakeholders that corruption incurs high societal costs and is unsustainable (Lumumba, 2014). Corruption diminishes the productivity of public investment by misallocating resources, misusing talents, and impeding essential expenditure in sectors such as infrastructure, education, and healthcare. The pervasive impact of corruption thus has far-reaching consequences for both society and the economy (Dimant & Tosato, 2017).

Types of corruption

There are different types of corruption; this study will only discuss three types of corruption. There are grand corruption, bureaucratic corruption and legislative corruption.

- **Grand corruption**

Grand corruption, the most damaging type, occurs among the political elite. It affects the entire country because top officials influence major decisions for personal gain. According to Lauritzen and Sondergaard (2012), this corruption lets elites shape policies for their own benefit and divert public funds, leading to broad national harm.

- **Bureaucratic corruption**

There are two links involved in this type of corruption. The relationship between the political elite and the bureaucracy is one link. The second type of corruption is also referred to as low-level corruption because it occurs at the lowest levels of the public bureaucracy, which are those that interface with the general public (Gupta, Davoodi, & Tiongson, 2001). According to Lauritzen & Sondergaard (2012), low-level corruption occurs when dishonest officials accept payments in exchange for a favour or to hasten a bureaucratic process. Additionally, officials can demand bribes to carry out activities that have been entrusted to them by the political elite or that they have not been authorized to carry out. Even in the judicial system, where bribes can lessen a person's expenses or legal repercussions, there is low-level corruption (Lauritzen & Sondergaard, 2012).

- **Legislative corruption**

This is the kind of corruption that influences legislators' voting decisions. It is possible for individuals with particular interests or groups of individuals with similar interests to bribe legislators to pass legislation that will make it simpler, more profitable, or more advantageous for them to pursue the economic rents connected with their activities (Lauritzen & Sondergaard, 2012). This type of corruption also involves "vote-buying" activity, in which elected officials engage in corrupt behaviour such as accepting or giving bribes to voters. This idea also applies to officials who use coercive measures in order to get a certain law enacted (Lauritzen & Sondergaard, 2012).

Literature on the Causes of corruption

Depending on the political, social, economic, and cultural factors, different places have different root causes of corruption (Lumumba, 2014). Negative colonial legacies, poor leadership, politics of the belly, an omnipotent state, greed and self-interest, clientelism and patronage, nepotism, a lack of public participation in politics, weak institutions of governance, a lack of accountability and transparency, a lack of political will, a lack of ethical values, the centralization and concentration of state power, and weak judicial systems are some of the identifiable

causes of corruption in Africa (Nduku & Tenamwenye, 2014).

Because corruption operates behind the scenes, it has been challenging for academic experts to account for the causes of this epidemic. The institutional setups and structures of governments have been the subject of some conjecture on the origins of corruption. One of the reasons or circumstances for institutional arrangement-related corruption has been identified as the absence of supervision measures over public officials' daily operations (De Graaf, 2007). Furthermore, corruption has been linked, on an individual basis, to the immoral greed of public civil officials; this greed is exacerbated by the absence of appropriate sanctions or other types of punishment for such improper behaviour (De Graaf, 2007). The World Bank (1997) established a connection between corruption and the low pay and unfavourable working circumstances experienced by civil servants, who then turn to rent-seeking behaviour in an effort to receive higher remuneration.

Economic growth

Economic growth, according to Haller (2012), is the process of enlarging national economies and macroeconomic indicators, particularly the GDP per capita, in an upward but not necessarily linear direction, with favourable consequences on the economic-social sector. Economic growth can be positive, zero, or negative in one meaning as well as the other. When the yearly average rhythms of the macro-indicators are higher than the annual average rhythms of population increase, positive economic growth is observed. Haller (2012) continues by stating that we can speak of zero economic growth when the annual average rhythms of growth of the macroeconomic indicators, particularly GDP, are equal to those of population increase. When population growth rhythms are faster than macroeconomic indicator rhythms, negative economic growth results.

Economic growth is a challenging, long-term process that is prone to obstacles like an excessive population increase, scarce resources, poor infrastructure, inefficient resource use, excessive governmental interference, and institutional

and cultural paradigms that impede growth. It can be attained through making efficient use of the resources at hand and raising a nation's production capacity (Haller, 2012). It facilitates the revenue transfer between the populace and society.

For periods of a decade or longer, the cumulative impacts, or tiny variances in the rise rates, become significant, according to Haller (2012). In a dynamic, expanding society as opposed to a static one, wealth redistribution is simpler. There are instances where economic growth and economic fluctuations coexist. The implementation of expansionary monetary and fiscal policies may eliminate recessionary gaps and boost GDP above potential (Haller, 2012).

Economic growth assumes that the potential output will change due to changes in the supply of factors or an increase in the productivity of those factors. When the pace of economic growth is high, more goods and services are produced, which raises the standard of living for the people and lowers the unemployment rate and number of job openings (Haller, 2012).

The topic of economic growth is one that is frequently discussed. Politicians and world leaders, as well as local and national leaders, frequently discuss economic growth and the best ways to pursue it (Lauritzen & Sondergaard, 2012). The International Monetary Fund (IMF), which tries to foster economic growth through its work as one of its fundamental principles, is one of several good examples of the attention that it attracts. The implied result of economic growth is to expand a nation's economy. One might wonder why expanding our economy and, by extension, caring about economic growth are important to us. In his book "Macroeconomics," Blanchard provides a thorough explanation of this. According to Blanchard (2009:228), "the reason we care about growth is that we care about the standard of living." One can wonder if raising a nation's economic output will raise society's level of life as a whole. In fact, it has been questioned if GDP is a reliable indicator of the conditions and living standards for the entire society, including the poor by definition (Lawn & Clarke, 2010).

Different applications of the "economic growth"

notion offer both quantitative and qualitative qualities, according to Poliduts and Kapkaev (2015). Quantitative traits reflect the dynamics of these changes and show us changes in the volume of commodities generated and services. In contrast, qualitative features indicate how the economic system may be able to accommodate society's expanding needs. It always has a numerical index for a specific date because it is a non-static, dynamic, and changing process (Poliduts & Kapkaev, 2015).

The movement of such absolute macroeconomic indices as gross domestic product (GDP), gross national product (GNP), national income, and others define economic growth. The value of GDP per capita, the population's disposable income per capita, as well as per capita indicators of consumption, savings, and investments, are relative measures of economic growth that characterize it from a quantitative standpoint (Poliduts & Kapkaev, 2015). Indicators of economic efficiency, such as labour productivity, are also taken into consideration, together with the rates of industrial output growth overall as well as for the major sectors and product categories.

Living standards and quality of life indices determine the qualitative side of economic growth. The consumer basket, cost of living, GDP structure by use, levels of service development, state of the labour force, and other factors are used to estimate the standard of living. The nature of work and leisure activities, the comfort level at work, the environment, how well social institutions operate, and other factors all contribute to one's quality of life (Poliduts & Kapkaev, 2015).

Types of economic growth

The type of economic growth expresses the aspects of the process in the fullest way. Economic literature distinguishes a number of important points of view regarding the different types of economic growth. The first point of view, known as the factorial approach (Poliduts & Kapkaev, 2015), provides us with an overview of the different types of economic growth from the standpoint of quantitative or qualitative changes in the components of production. Economic theory divides economic growth into two

categories: intensive and extensive. Additionally, an innovative category is included in the intensive.

According to Poliduts and Kapkaev (2015), the extensive form of growth is distinguished by a quantitative rise in the usage of one or more production factors. We can discuss the intense, or qualitative, form of economic growth when there is a qualitative increase in the factors of production, such as the usage of extremely precise modern equipment in product production, cost-effective non-waste technologies, and a more competent workforce. Both of these economic growth kinds are in opposition to one another (Poliduts & Kapkaev, 2015).

The second aspect of the viewpoint is influenced by both the population growth rates and the requirements and potential of the community. The foundation of this strategy may be found in the writings of British economist and scientist Roy Harrod, who popularized the idea of genuine, assured, and natural forms of economic growth (Poliduts & Kapkaev, 2015). Natural economic growth is primarily brought on by population growth, a rise in this population's requirements, and also by each person's desire to fully meet their material and spiritual wants while taking advantage of all available chances for economic progress. Guaranteed economic growth refers to a projected course of action on which businesspeople are inclined and satisfied with their operations (Poliduts & Kapkaev, 2015). Actual growth is the level of economic growth that actually occurs as a result of both guaranteed and natural growth.

The third point of view looks at economic expansion from the standpoint that it's influenced by productive forces, machinery, and production technologies. Pre-industrial, industrial, and post-industrial modes of economic growth are divided by economists (Poliduts & Kapkaev, 2015). In national economies where agriculture dominates and accounts for more than 50% of GDP, preindustrial types of growth occur. It is distinguished by extremely slow rates of economic expansion. Industrial expansion is characterized by a shift in the production's material foundation; as a result, industry catches up to

agriculture and starts to exert significant influence on the entire country's economy. Poliduts and Kapkaev (2015) assert that the man and his quality of life will once again take the centre stage in the economy, but on a higher level than in traditional society, as none of the economists at the current stage of development yet belong to the post-industrial type of economic growth, and there are only prerequisites for a post-industrial economic society.

Corruption and Economic growth in South African municipalities

South Africa is a developing nation that faces numerous economic difficulties, such as extreme levels of poverty and inequality. Municipalities are essential for fostering economic development and progress (Theletsane, 2013). They are in charge of delivering necessities like water, sewage, power, and roads, all of which are crucial for commerce and commercial activity. They are essential in luring investment and generating employment. However, a lot of municipalities struggle with issues like ineffective management, a lack of funding, and corruption (Theletsane, 2013).

The question of whether corruption "greases the wheels" or "is sand" on economic growth has been the subject of various studies over the past few decades (Cuervo-Cazurra, 2008; Haller, 2012; Nduku & Tenamwenye, 2014). According to the first optimistic viewpoint, corruption has a major and advantageous impact on economic growth because it makes it easier for businesses to change certain governmental procedures, enabling the existence of a competitive market rather than a monopoly (Huang, 2016). According to the "grease the wheels" idea, when there is market inefficiencies brought on by ineffective bureaucratic and protracted processes that impede investment, corruption aids economic growth (Mèon & Sekkat, 2005).

The second, more frequently held viewpoint, holds that corruption results in greater uncertainty and, as a result, higher costs for both businesses and the economy as a whole (Cuervo-Cazurra, 2008). Strong empirical data connecting high levels of corruption with lower GDP per capita serve as support for this point of view

(Pinho, 2018).

By altering incentives and pricing and resulting in an inefficient distribution of limited resources, corruption lowers the amount of GDP per capita (Pinho, 2018). This inefficient use of resources includes poor choices made by the government on the use of tax dollars and the approval of particular private ventures (Jain, 2001). In addition to increasing risk by introducing instability into the legal system, corruption may also have a negative impact on GDP per capita growth by deterring investment (Marthur & Singh, 2013). This is because entrepreneurs may be faced with lower income and greater levels of uncertainty.

According to empirical data, not all nations or groups of nations experience the same level of corruption's effects on economic growth. These variations are due to both the unique characteristics of each nation (size, political forces, legal

system, and regulations) as well as the variables utilized in the model, which vary depending on the viewpoint of each researcher (Pinho, 2018). South African towns are experiencing a sharp rise in corruption. This is evident in reports from several parliamentary committees and in the media. In many South African municipalities, corruption hurts the poor and prevents decent government (Theletsane, 2013). The rise of municipal corruption in South Africa has had a severe impact on stability and public trust. It is also eroding democratic ethics and ideals, which may have an adverse impact on the viability of local government. Although the South African government has played a key role in systems to combat corruption's faults, actual issues have grown more prevalent over time (Theletsane, 2013).

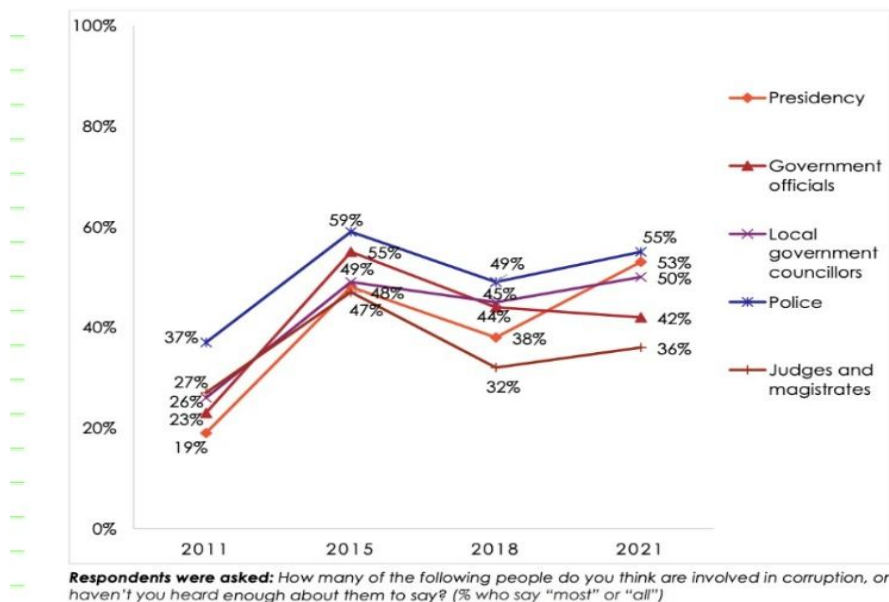


Figure 1: Perceptions of widespread corruption | South Africa | 2011-2021

Figure 1 above shows the trend of corruption during the years 2011-2021. It shows the percentage that each group of people (presidency, government officials, local government councillors, police, judges and magistrates) holds in corrupt practices.

Cities around South Africa are experiencing severe crises, which seem to get worse every year. By "encouraging the involvement of communities and community organizations in the matters of local government," the local sphere of government, which is "everyone's business," should bring the government closer to the people and the people closer to the government. Local economic development (LED), a strategy,

has been put in place to enhance development and economic progress. In order to promote sustainable economic growth and development, LED is a method of economic development that enables and encourages local citizens to collaborate (CoGTA, LED Framework, 2019).

This method benefits all residents of a local municipal area economically and improves their quality of life. Through greater local economic growth, employment creation, and development activities within the context of sustainable development, LED is designed to maximize the economic potential for municipal communities and improve the resilience of macro-economic growth.

The LED-supported programs include developing and evaluating national policy, strategy, and

guidelines on LED. Secondly, offering direct assistance to regional and local authorities. Additionally, taking care of the LED money, supervising and supporting Nodal Economic Development Planning technologically, enabling, coordinating, and overseeing donor programs and lastly assisting techniques for expanding LED capacity. Thus, local role-players and interest groups are enlisted through these interventions and resources in order to promote economic growth and the creation of jobs that will lessen poverty content (Local Government Handbook, 2019).

Corruption and Economic growth in the Mahikeng local municipality

Map



Figure 2: Ngaka-Modiri Molema District municipalities

Within the Ngaka-Modiri Molema District Municipality is the Mahikeng Local Municipality, a category B municipality. The South African constitution and the structures act both recognize and create the MLM as a governmental organ (Sethunyane, 2020). A municipality has the right to independently oversee the local government activities of its community, according to the South African constitution (1996; 151(3)). This indicates that it is against the South African Constitution for the national or provincial government to obstruct municipalities from carrying out their duties properly. However, as stated in the South African constitution, the municipal

manager and council must perform the duties, functions, and rights of municipalities in accordance with any applicable federal, state, or local laws (Sethunyane, 2020).

The municipal council is in charge of the Mahikeng local municipality's duties and responsibilities. The management of the municipality falls within the purview of the municipal manager. The creation and growth of an effective, efficient, and accountable municipality is the responsibility of the municipal manager in his capacity as the accounting officer of the municipality (Sethunyane, 2020). The Mahikeng local municipality's municipal manager is in charge of the Mahikeng local municipality's

staff discipline, administration and implementation of the municipality's bylaws, exercise of any powers, and fulfilment of any responsibilities allocated by the municipal council.

The municipality's decisions are made by the municipal manager or council, as appropriate. When the municipal manager or council carry out their duties, they do so in their official capacities and not in their individual capacities (Sethunyane, 2020). Through the municipal manager or council, the MLM carries out its duties. Since the board of directors' decisions are seen as the decisions of the company, the roles of the municipal council and municipal manager in MLM are comparable to those of a corporate director and board of directors. Since the MLM has the ability to acquire rights and obligations apart from its members, it may be categorized as

a jurisdiction person (Sethunyane, 2020).

Corruption in MLM

Poor financial management and issues with service delivery continue to be problems for the MLM (Mathiba, 2019). The lack of effective corporate governance procedures and the lax application of the pertinent local regulations in MLM have made this situation worse. In some municipalities in South Africa, notably the MLM, the implementation of subpar corporate governance practices has so far given birth to several issues with corruption, theft of public monies, and poor management (Sethunyane, 2020). In recent years, the MLM has developed a negative reputation due to allegations of corruption, theft of public monies, and problems with bad administration.



Figure 3: Financial results of the MLM | 2018–2022 | (Source: municipalities of South Africa). In the 2015–2016 fiscal year, the MLM received a disclaimer of opinion from the Auditor General (Luhabe, 2017; MLM Annual Report, 2016–2017, p. 326). A disclaimer audit opinion implies that the municipality didn't account for

its finances and/or didn't give the Auditor-General the required audit proof. In the 2016–2017 fiscal year, the MLM likewise received a qualified audit opinion (MLM Annual Report, 2016–17, p. 326). A qualified audit opinion means that there were substantial misstatements in the municipality's financial statements. Figure 3 above

demonstrates that the MLM received qualified audit opinions from the 2019–2022 financial years and a disclaimer of opinion for the 2017–2019 fiscal years.

Charges of violating the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) and the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act were brought against Thabo Mokoena, the former Mahikeng municipal manager of the Mahikeng local municipality (Montsho, 2022). These graphs are related to the R92 million that the Mahikeng Municipality invested in the VBS Mutual Bank between August and December of

2017, when he served as the municipality's accounting officer. This investment was illegal and in violation of the MFMA. Mokena is also accused of receiving compensation in the form of credit lines that she used to pay more than R1.2 million in total to buy two pricey cars and a home in Klerksdorp. Only R7 million of the R92 million that was improperly invested with VBS Mutual Bank, according to preliminary investigations by the Hawks, was reimbursed to the MLM (Mamothane, 2022).

Economic growth in MLM

Demographic Information		
	2016	2011
Population	314 394	291 527
Age Structure		
Population under 15	24.4%	30.8%
Population 15 to 64	71.3%	64.4%
Population over 65	4.3%	4.8%
Dependency Ratio		
Per 100 (15-64)	40.2	55.3
Sex Ratio		
Males per 100 females	94.9	94.5
Population Growth		
Per annum	1.72%	n/a
Labour Market		
Unemployment rate (official)	n/a	35.7%
Youth unemployment rate (official) 15-34	n/a	47.1%
Education (aged 20 +)		
No schooling	7.1%	10.3%
Matric	29.8%	26.0%
Higher education	10.9%	12.4%

Figure 4: MLM Demographic information/ of South Africa)
2011 & 2016/Source: Source: (Municipalities

Demographic Information		
	2016	2011
Population	314 394	291 527
Age Structure		
Population under 15	24.4%	30.8%
Population 15 to 64	71.3%	64.4%
Population over 65	4.3%	4.8%
Dependency Ratio		
Per 100 (15-64)	40.2	55.3
Sex Ratio		
Males per 100 females	94.9	94.5
Population Growth		
Per annum	1.72%	n/a
Labour Market		
Unemployment rate (official)	n/a	35.7%
Youth unemployment rate (official) 15-34	n/a	47.1%
Education (aged 20 +)		
No schooling	7.1%	10.3%
Matric	29.8%	26.0%
Higher education	10.9%	12.4%

Figure 5: Household dynamics of the MLM.
Source: (Municipalities of South Africa).

The population of the Mahikeng Local Municipality increased by 1.72% from 291,527 in 2011

to 314,394 in 2016, as seen in Figure 4 above. In 2011, the unemployment rate was 35.7%, and the rate for young people was 47.1%. From 2011 to 2016, fewer persons were not in school; in 2011, this percentage was 10.3, and by 2016, it had dropped to 7.1. In 2016, there were 103,333 households, up from 84,239 in 2011. Domestic services' share dropped from 29.2% in 2011 to 24.5% in 2016.

Agricultural Sector

The agriculture sector includes businesses that are largely involved in farming. Mahikeng LM's agricultural sector has a low economic production, and because of excessive grazing and poor management techniques, the land has been damaged. According to the NW383 Mahikeng Reviewed IDP (2014/15), dryland that is used for semi-commercial or subsistence purposes makes up about 22.0% of the cultivated land.

Mining in MLM

Presently, Mahikeng LM's local mining industry is not particularly active. Small-scale mining, however, has a lot of potential in some places. In Mahikeng, LM, mining has the potential to be a significant driver of economic growth and the eradication of poverty (NW383 Mahikeng Reviewed IDP, 2014/15).

Manufacturing sector

Only 4.8% of Mahikeng LM's GGP and 5.0% of local jobs were generated by the manufacturing sector in 2004. The growth rate of this industry from 2000 to 2004 was an average of 1.1% each year. This suggested a very small and vulnerable industry to changes in the market. Currently, Mahikeng LM's manufacturing sector is primarily made up of small, diversified light industries. The manufacturing of building materials is the most significant, followed by the car industry. Since Mafikeng LM's manufacturing sector is concentrated here, light industries make up the majority of the businesses. The economy of Mafikeng LM can benefit from diversification, particularly when it entails acquiring large-scale industries (NW383 Mahikeng Reviewed IDP, 2014/15).

Tourism overview

The growth of tourism in Mahikeng LM is thought to benefit both domestic and foreign visitors. This region's Mafikeng Game Reserve, one of the Big Five game reserves, is regarded as having significant international potential. Mafikeng LM is included in the Anglo-Boer/South African War siege site as well. In terms of eco- and educational tourism, Mahikeng LM has the potential to draw additional visitors. The region is currently thought to have excellent historical and natural resources, but few marketing and tourism facilities. This indicates that while tourists do travel to the region, they often only remain a short while (approximately 3 days on average). Therefore, creating core amenities is the main aim of tourism development in Mafikeng LM. By creating an effective marketing strategy and carefully packaging the tourism attractions that are offered in Mahikeng LM, the fundamental problem of a lack of visitors can be resolved (NW383 Mahikeng Reviewed IDP, 2014/15).

The Government, Finance, Transport, and Trade Sectors of the Economy are where Mahikeng LM is strongest. From the standpoint of development, the government and finance sectors are demand-driven, which means that their expansion is a result of the expansion of the other sectors of the economy (i.e., they are demand-driven). The manufacturing and agricultural sectors are two examples of those that, to a certain extent, had significant growth rates as a result of geographic variables. MLM would undoubtedly exhibit increased growth and comparative advantages in the Manufacturing sector as a result of the establishment of the Mafikeng Industrial establishment Zone (MIDZ) as well (NW383 Mahikeng Reviewed IDP, 2014/15).

Findings and discussions

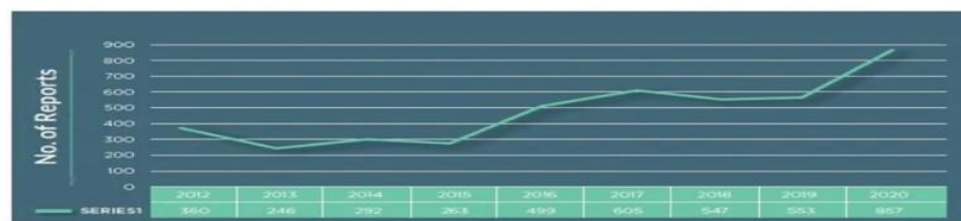
Corruption in South African local municipalities

In South Africa, municipalities are the governmental bodies closest to the populace, according to Pillay (2016). These are community-based, legally established state organizations that are guided by the lofty ideals found in a nation's constitution, laws, and other policies. These all

sought to protect citizens' fundamental human rights so they might lead better, more secure, normal lives in society. South African municipalities have a moral and legal obligation to meet basic human needs by upholding the "Batho Pele" (people first) ideals (Pillay, 2016). In South Africa, corruption is a widespread issue that affects both national and local levels of government. It can take many different forms, including financial mismanagement, bribery, fraud, nepotism, irregularities in procurement, and more (Zondi, 2015). Every local government municipality is an independent organization with its own policies and initiatives. It is imperative to acknowledge that the three categories of local governments—local municipalities, district councils, and metropolises—function in accordance with both provincial and federal legislation. Municipalities must therefore uphold the values of responsibility, democracy, and sound government. These are demonstrated by the provision of fundamental services, the creation of secure and wholesome surroundings, and

the encouragement of local residents and organizations to engage in municipal procedures and initiatives (Corruption Watch, 2021). Municipalities receive funding from a variety of sources, which fall into two main groups. First, property rates from houses and landowners; service charges; water, electricity, sanitation; garbage collection; fines for infractions of bylaws; and penalties for past-due service payments (Mbanyele, 2021). Fiscal transfers or grants from other branches of government make up the majority of the second. As a result, corrupt players find this sector to be an extremely profitable source of funding due to the significant financial flow that municipalities are accountable for. In municipalities, inadequate financial management and capability, insufficient internal control mechanisms, ineffective political leadership, and political meddling all combine to create an environment that is conducive to public money theft (Mbanyele, 2021).

WHISTLE-BLOWER REPORTS RELATING TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT



PROVINCIAL ALLOCATION

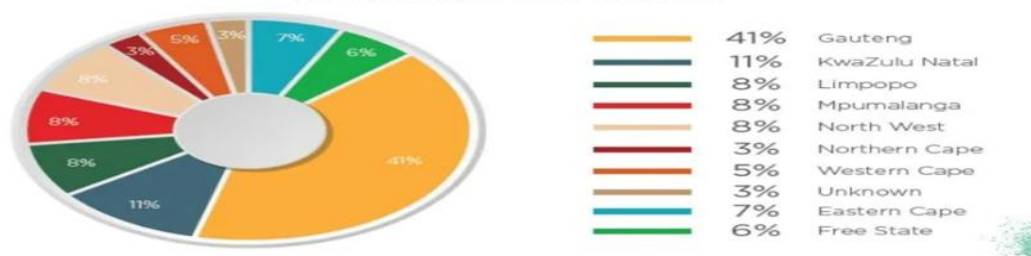


Figure 6: Whistle-Blower reports relating to local government

33000 whistle-blower reports have been received by Corruption Watch since its founding in 2012, and as of the end of 2020. Out of them, 16 percent, or 5094 complaints, deal with corruption in local government, and more than half

of the reports were collected in the four years previously. Peaking at 16.8% of the 5094 reports, 2020 was a pivotal year for the nation's health sector due to the COVID-19 global pandemic (Corruption Watch, 2021).

MUNICIPAL HOTSPOTS	PERCENTAGES
Office of the municipal manager	30%
Metro/local police	27%
Housing and human settlements	9%
Traffic and licensing	5%
Office of the executive	4%
Public works and infrastructure development	4%

Figure 7: Municipal corruption hotspots and percentages

The executive and municipal manager's offices are the primary hubs for corruption in local government, according to data from whistle-blowers obtained by Corruption Watch. In addition, they have received complaints on housing and human settlements, infrastructure development, and the municipal and metro police (Corruption Watch, 2021).

Poor local government governance in South Africa with regard to managing finances and providing services is a complicated problem that is impacted by many different variables. The deficiency of abilities and expertise in local administration is a significant contributing element. The South African Human Rights Commission (2020) claims that a large number of municipalities are devoid of the knowledge and abilities needed to properly oversee their budgets and provide services to the public. This is partially caused by the fact that many towns lack the resources, personnel, and training needed to perform their duties in an efficient manner.

The absence of openness and accountability in local governance is another significant cause. The SAHRC (2020) observes that a deficiency of accountability and transparency exists in the way municipalities use public finances, and that many municipalities are beset by corruption and poor administration.

Has corruption always been a problem in South Africa and its local municipalities?

One of the key topics dominating the public conversation in post-colonial Africa, and more significantly in post-apartheid South Africa, was

public sector corruption. The South African government has frequently declared war on it in the last 29 years in all three branches of government (national, provincial and local). Since corruption is always seen as one of the major factors influencing protests over problems with service delivery, the branch of government closest to the people is frequently seen as the centre of corruption (Department of Corporate Governance, 2015).

The competition for senior administration jobs and factionalism (political intervention, nepotism, and major political interference) are other elements that contribute to municipal corruption. In fact, corruption is seen as a multifaceted, intricate phenomenon with social, political, and economic roots on a global scale. In any nation, corruption undermines the principles of good administration, violates social norms, and impedes the provision of essential services (Mlambo, Makgoba, and Mphurpi, 2023).

After emerging from its status as a pariah following the 1994 general elections, South Africa now boasts some of the greatest legislative regimes on the continent and has put in place important mechanisms to combat corruption. How to reduce corruption in local government is a major topic that has faced all new leaders since 1994, especially following municipal elections. One way to conceptualize corruption as a social and economic distortion of local government is to examine it through the lens of a South African municipality, both conceptually and practically. It might be viewed as a behaviour that breeds decay, disintegration, and debasement (Mlambo et al., 2023).

According to Mlambo (2022), the National

Party's (NP) racial discrimination-fuelled destabilizing policies were marked by a high emphasis on central planning and control and a nearly non-existent role for local authorities in economic planning and development. It should be acknowledged that efforts to build a flourishing society are hampered by the weight of our past. South Africa is still one of the world's most unequal societies despite decades of apartheid government. Although inclusive political reform founded on the principles of equality and non-discrimination was the primary goal of South Africa's transition to non-racial democracy, the fledgling democratic state was immediately faced with the potentially disruptive effect of corruption in government institutions (Naidoo & Jackson, 2009).

Lannegren & Ito (2017) state that many disparities were expected to be eliminated, especially for the majority black population, following the widely publicized switch from apartheid to democratic governance and the ascension of the late Nelson Mandela as South Africa's president. Ndletyana & Muzandiya (2009) correctly pointed out that corruption remained an issue throughout the democratic era, even after the political revolution brought about by the end of apartheid in 1994. Anyone who keeping track of South Africa's political scene would agree to the fact that corruption has grown more commonplace over time. The public's attention has been diverted from the status of local government in South Africa over the last 25 years by persistent periods of service delivery demonstrations (Mlambo et al, 2023).

Local government is usually the starting point for any progress; however, as long as South African towns continue to function without a strong and stable governance framework, this development cannot be realized. There can be no exception to organizational honesty, integrity, ethical behaviour, or accountability in any municipality where political leadership and administration coexist (Mlambo et al, 2023).

It is almost as difficult to understand the effects of corruption as it is to understand the intricate and evil nature of corruption. In many respects, corruption makes it harder for the government to deliver high-quality services (Lekuba, 2013).

Because fiscal resources are reliant on economic activity, growth's negative effects have a fiscal impact, depleting resources that could have been used to enhance public services. Local government has been in the news recently due to a wave of protests that resulted in conflicts between protesting citizens and law enforcement officials. As a result of the growing prevalence of fraud and corruption at the local government level, there is a loss and/or waste of scarce resources at the local level, which has a negative impact on service delivery.

Measures that can be put in place to curb corruption.

A program committee was formed in March 1997 to address corruption by the South African government ministers in charge of the country's national crime prevention strategy. A DPSA (2002) that included interconnected and mutually beneficial aspects was developed as a result of this initiative (Lekuba, 2013). These include the legislative framework will be reviewed and consolidated; institutional capacity to prevent and combat corruption will be increased, whistle-blowers and witnesses will be protected, corrupt people and businesses will be prohibited (blacklisted), management policies and practices will be improved, managing professional ethics, forming alliances with interested parties and conducting social analysis, research, and policy advocacy.

Lekuba (2013) claims that this was done in order to comply with the National Anti-Corruption Summit's recommendations, the Public Service Anti-Corruption Strategy, and the requirements of the Constitution. In addition, a number of government policy initiatives have been implemented as anti-corruption efforts, but with loosely defined mandates. Institutional capacity and legislative development were prioritized.

South Africa has put in place a number of tools and strategies to combat corruption, including the following:

The Special Investigating Units and Special Tribunals Act 74 of 1996

Any subject listed in Section 2 of the Special Investigating Units and Special Tribunals Act 74 of 1996 is subject to investigation by the SIU, including the following subjects:

- Serious maladministration in relation to any state institution's operations; improper or illegal behaviour on the part of state institution staff; illicit appropriation or expenditure of public funds or property; any illicit, irregular, or unapproved acquisition act, transaction, measure, or practice that affects state property; deliberate or careless loss of public funds or destruction of public property; corruption in relation to any state institution's operations.
- Illegal or improper behaviour by anyone who has harmed the public interest, or any group of interests, or who has the potential to do so.

The SIU initiates the civil recovery of public funds and state assets, assists with investigative-related disciplinary proceedings, including the filing of charges, and offers strategic counsel and expert testimony at disciplinary hearings. The SIU primarily investigates corruption in government agencies, small and medium-sized businesses, and other settings where it is a pervasive issue and affects the provision of services, including housing, local government, and pensions (Montesh, 2013).

The Prevention of Organized Crime Act 121 of 1998

The Asset Forfeiture Unit is authorized by Chapters 5 and 6 of the Prevention of Organized Crime Act 121 of 1998 to look into and seize property tainted by criminal activity, with the goal of having it forfeited to the state through a civil action. Although the Unit does not pursue legal action, it collaborates closely with law enforcement's investigative officers and the prosecution. Regarding those people and assets that for whom forfeiture actions are expected to be brought, the AFU looks into financial and criminal matters. It finds and locates criminal proceeds, substituted proceeds, and instrumentalities; it also prepares and submits forfeiture applications (Montesh, 2013).

Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act 12 of 2004

In order to place certain restrictions on individuals and businesses found guilty of corrupt activities related to tenders and contracts, the Act's objectives are to: strengthen measures to prevent and combat corruption and corrupt activities; define the offence of corruption and offences related to corruption; provide for investigative measures in respect of corruption and related corrupt activities; impose a duty on certain individuals holding positions of authority to report certain corrupt transactions; and establish an extraterritorial jurisdiction for the offence of corruption and offences related to corrupt activities (Montesh, 2013).

South African Police Service Amendment Act 10 of 2012

The goals are to amend the South African Police Service Act, 1995, to ensure that the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation has the operational independence it needs to carry out its mandate without undue interference, to align those provisions with a judgment of the Constitutional Court, and to provide for matters related thereto (Montesh, 2013). In accordance with Section 4 of the Act, the Service will establish a Directorate to prevent, combat, and look into offences that are considered national priorities, including major organized crime, serious commercial crime, and serious corruption.

Measures that can be put in place to increase economic growth

An increase in the gross domestic product (GDP), which Depersio (2023) defines as the total value of all products and services produced in a nation in a given year, is a key indicator of economic growth. Economic growth is influenced by numerous factors. However, no one element regularly generates the precise or ideal level of growth that an economy needs. Regrettably, recessions are inevitable and can be manipulated by outside forces like world events in politics and finance (Depersio, 2023).

Improve infrastructure

In South Africa, infrastructure development is essential to ensuring rapid economic growth and reducing poverty. Growth is impacted by infrastructure through a number of demand- and supply-side mechanisms. Growth is directly impacted by investments in energy, telecommunications, and transportation networks because these infrastructure sectors are all necessary for the creation of products and services. The MLM must refocus its efforts on enhancing its transportation and road networks in particular.

The GI HUB (2021) states that Inclusive, resilient, and sustainable infrastructure will have the most effects on promoting economic recovery in the near term and long-term stability. The infrastructure of this revolutionary kind has the potential to provide wealth to all. According to GI HUB (2021), transformative infrastructure is defined as infrastructure that generates long-term prosperity for future generations, offers enduring social and economic benefits to everybody, and establishes the framework for the shift to a resource-efficient, sustainable economy.

Investing in education and training

To encourage innovation and entrepreneurship, education and training are crucial. Education may stimulate economic growth and generate new job opportunities by giving people the abilities and information needed to launch and expand their enterprises. In order to encourage entrepreneurship and innovation and build a more inclusive and prosperous future for all, governments and societies should make significant investments in education and training (OECD, 2023).

The financial advantages are not person-to-person. At every educational level, governments get the benefits of their investments in education. Knowledgeable people make more money, pay more in taxes over the course of a lifetime, and require less assistance from their governments in the form of social entitlements (OECD, 2023).

Reforming tax and regulatory systems

Altering the overall tax system to shift the burden of revenue from income taxes, especially corporate income tax, to consumption taxes and

ongoing residential property taxes. Increase the size of tax bases to provide for the lowest possible rate structure. One of the most important components of a green growth strategy is greening the tax code. Designing taxes to accomplish environmental goals should be the main goal, but wider growth-oriented tax reforms may be made possible by the additional funds produced (OECD, 2023).

Conclusion

It is evident that one of the major threats facing the South African administration is corruption. In the context of South Africa, corruption should be seen as the biggest barrier to transformation through development and justice. Local municipalities in South Africa are frequently the ones most impacted by corruption. The weak tax base in the poorer communities is one of the main issues that many towns face. Corruption has an impact on economic growth and development because it involves the misuse of public office and/or resources for personal benefit. Economic growth is hampered when public expenditure is mismanaged or spent by government officials, which slows down development and service delivery. This study has demonstrated that corruption has hurt MLM's financial performance. The Auditor-General consistently provides the municipality with negative assessments, citing mismanagement of funds by the municipal manager and municipal council, poor service delivery, poorly maintained infrastructure (such as Mma-batho Stadium, Bophelong Hospital, and the Museum), and a decline in the tourism sector. The capital city of the North-West province has gotten worse due to corruption. In South Africa, corruption has only shown to have detrimental impacts across all levels of government, despite the fact that it can have good effects as well (such as increasing consumer spending as more people participating in it gain money). The South African administration faces certain doom if it does not make every effort to combat corruption and enact new anti-corruption legislation.

Reference list

- Amelda, F. 2017. Strengths and limitations of qualitative and quantitative research methods. *European Journal of Education Studies*. 3(9).
- CoGTA (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs), 2019. *Local Economic Development (LED) Framework*. Pretoria: CoGTA.
- Corruption Watch, 2021. Corruption Watch Local Government Sectoral Report. Retrieved from <https://www.corruptionwatch.org.za/wpcontent/uploads/2021/08/CW-local-govt-sectoral-report-August2021>. Accessed 4 August 2022
- Curveo-Cazzura. A., 2008. Transforming disadvantages into advantages: developing-country MNEs in the least developed countries. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 2008, vol. 39, issue 6, 957-979
- De Graaf, G., 2007. Causes of corruption: Towards a contextual theory of corruption. *Public Administration Quarterly*, 31(1/2), pp.39–86.
- Department of Cooperative Governance, 2015. Local Government Anti-Corruption Strategy. https://www.cogta.gov.za/cgta_2016/wpcontent/uploads/2017/02/Anti-Corruption-Strategy_Signed.pdf. Accessed 4 August 2022
- Depersio, G., 2023. What are the ways economic growth can be achieved? *Investopedia* <https://investopedia.com/ask/answers/032415/what-are-some-ways-economic-growth-can-be-achieved.asp> Accessed 4 August 2022
- Dimant, E. and Tosato, G., 2017. Causes and effects of corruption: What has past decades' empirical research taught us? A survey. *Journal of Economic Surveys*, 32(2), pp.335–377. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joes.12232>
- DPSA. 2002. Public Sector Anti-Corruption Strategy. Pretoria: Department of Public Service and Administration. [Available online at: <https://www.dpsa.gov.za/dpsa2g/documents.asp>]
- GI HUB. 2021. The vital role of infrastructure in economic growth and development. <https://gi-hub.org/articles/the-vital-role-of-infrastructure-in-economic-growth-and-development/> accessed: 5 August 2022
- Gupta, S., Davoodi, H. R., & Tiongson, E. R. 2001. Corruption and the Provision of Health Care and Education Services. In: Abed, G. T., Gupta, S., & International Monetary Fund. (2002). *Governance, corruption & economic performance*. Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund.
- Haller. A.P., 2012. Concepts of Economic Growth and Development: Challenges of crisis and knowledge. *Economy Transdisciplinary Cognition*. Vol 15. Issue 1/2012
- Huang. C., 2016. "Is corruption bad for economic growth? Evidence from Asia-Pacific countries," *The*

North American Journal of Economics and Finance, Elsevier, vol. 35©, pages 247-256.

Jain, A. K., 2001. Corruption: A review. *Journal of Economic Surveys*, 15(1).

Kelly, R., 2014. Political corruption and the art of the deal. London: Routledge

Lauritzen, M, G, & Sondergaard, M. 2012. The effect of corruption on growth. Aaritus University.

Lawn, P., & Clarke, M., 2010. The end of economic growth? A contracting threshold hypothesis. *Eco-logical Economics*, 69(11).

Lekuba, B, K., 2013. Issues of corruption in South Africa's municipalities. University of South Africa *SAAPAM LIMPOPO CHAPTER, Conference Proceedings ISBN: 978-0-620-56749-7*.

Local Government Handbook, 2019. *South African Local Government Handbook*. [online] Available at: <https://www.localgovernment.co.za/> [Accessed 31 July 2025].

Luhabe, N., 2017. Northwest on the Mahikeng Local Municipality's Lack of Compliance with Supply Chain Management Laws. *South African Government Media Statement*.

Lumumba, P.L.O., 2014. Corruption: The Bane of Africa. Corruption in Africa: A Threat to Justice and Sustainable Peace. 18.

Mamothane, H., 2022. Northwest: The pathology of a corrupt province. National Prosecuting Authority of South Africa. 25 Feb 2022. <https://www.npa.gov.za/index.php/media/north-west-pathology-corrupt-province>. Accessed 4 August 2022

Marthur, A. & Singh, K., 2013. Foreign direct investment, corruption and democracy. *Applied economics*. Vol. 45 ISSUE 991-1002

Mathiba, G., 2019b. Time to Clean Out the Augean Stables of Local Government. *Daily Maverick*, 28 May.

Mbanyele. S., 2021. Unpacking malfeasance in South Africa's municipalities. Good Governance Africa. <https://gga.org/unpacking-malfeasance-in-south-africas-municipalities/>. Accessed 4 August 2022

Méon, P.-G. and Sekkat, K., 2005. Does Corruption Grease or Sand the Wheels of Growth? Public Choice, 122, 69-97. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-005-3988-0>

Mlambo, D. N., Manganyi, T. P., & Mphurpi, J. H., 2022. Re-examining the Notion of Local Economic Development (LED) post democratization: anticipated outputs, impediments and future expectation (s). *EUREKA: Social and Humanities*, 1, 31-42.

Mlambo, D. N., Makgoba, S., & Mphurpi, J, H., 2023. Corruption at the municipal level: Insights (s) from post-apartheid South Africa. *African Journal of Development Studies*. ISSN 2634 3630 E-ISSN 2634-3649 VOL 13, NO. 2 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-3649/2023/v13n2a2>

Montesh, M., 2013. The role of asset recovery in the fight against corruption in South Africa. University of South Africa. *SAAPAM LIMPOPO CHAPTER, Conference Proceedings ISBN: 978-0-620-56749-7*

- Montsho, M., 2022. Former Mahikeng municipal manager, charged over VBS investment, to make a representation to the state. African News Agency. IOL. <https://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-and-courts/former-mahikeng-municipal-manager-charged-over-vbs-investment-to-make-representation-to-the-state-f403f92a-ef92-4051-acee-1009ad3549e2>. Accessed: 4 August 2022
- Naidoo, V. & Jackson, P., 2009. Reviewing South Africa's efforts to combat corruption in its bureaucracy: 1994-2009. In: Jackson, P., Muzondidya, J., Naidoo, V., Ndletyana, M. & Sithole, M.P. *South African governance in review: anti-corruption, local government, traditional leadership*. Cape Town: HSRC Press. 1-20.
- Nduku, E. & Tenamwenye, J., 2014. Corruption in Africa: A Threat to Justice and Sustainable Peace. *Globethics.net*<http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/216698>
- NW383 Mahikeng Reviewed IDP, 2014/15. *Integrated Development Plan Review: Mahikeng Local Municipality*. Mahikeng: Mahikeng Local Municipality.
- Obura, F., 2014. Corruption: A crime against humanity. *Nairobi: Integrity Publishers*.
- OECD, 2023. Tax reform: restoring growth. <https://www.oecd.org/ctp/tax-policy/taxreformrestoring-growth.htm>. Accessed 4 August 2025
- Petrou, A. P., & Thanos, I. C., 2014. The “grabbing hand” or the “helping hand” view of Corruption: Evidence from bank foreign market entries. *Journal of World Business*, 49(3), 444-454.
- Pillay, P., 2016. Ethics and accountability in South African municipalities: The struggle against corruption. *Anti-Corruption Centre for Education and Research of Stellenbosch University (ACCERUS)*. Vol 9 no 2.
- Pinho, C, P, A., 2018. The impact of corruption on the economic growth of emerging economies.
- Poliduts. A. & Kapkaev, Y., 2015. Economic growth: Types and factors. *International Conference on Eurasian Economies*.
- South African Human Rights Commission. 2020. South Africans are being badly let down by the local government, says the SAHRC after audit outcomes. <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/south-africans-being-badly-let-down-by-the-local-government-says-sahrc-after-audit-outcomes-55012>. Accessed: 6 August 2022
- Sethunyane, T.I., 2020. Statutory Regulatory Analysis of the Accountability of the Municipal Manager and Corporate Governance Measures in Mahikeng Local Municipality. *LLM dissertation: Northwest University*.
- Streubert, H., & Carpenter, D. 1999. Qualitative Research in Nursing: Advancing the Humanistic Perspective. 2nd ed. *Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins*.
- Theletsane, K. I., 2013. Corruption in Municipalities: A Leadership Crisis. *South African Association of*

Public Administration and Management Conference Proceedings, pp. 134-142.

World Bank, 1997. Helping countries combat corruption: The role of the World Bank. Washington, D.C.: World Bank. <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/710041468739447730/helping-countries-combat-corruption-the-role-of-the-world-bank>.

Accessed 6 August 2022

Zondi. N. 2015. Political corruption in Post-1994 South Africa: Implications of Development and Justice. *University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal*.

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.39>**SOCIAL MEDIA AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA****Giwa Samiat,**Department of Political Science,
University of Lagos,
Nigeria**Bamidele Olajide**Department of Political Studies and International Relations,
North West University,
Mafikeng Campus, South Africa

&

Department of Political Science,
University of Lagos,
Nigeriacontactdele@gmail.com**Victor Ojakorotu**Department of Political Studies and International Relations,
North West University,
Mafikeng Campus, South Africa
Victor.Ojakorotu@nwu.ac.za**Abstract**

Social media is a veritable tool for ensuring environmental accountability. This paper explores the veracity of this position in Lagos State, Nigeria's most populous subnational unit. Given the conurbation's over 20 million population, the rate of poor environmental behaviour, such as indiscriminate waste dumping, noise pollution, industrial and domestic pollution, deforestation and land reclamation, among others, is debilitating. With social media's ubiquitous mediation of everyday life, this paper notes that it has assumed a serious accountability tool in state's environmental management space. This paper is based on the mixed-method research design involving a quantitative survey of 100 respondents and an interview of 10 participants, and the theoretical blending of the assumptions of Metropocentric and agenda-setting theories. The paper notes many instances of netizens reporting poor environmental behaviour over social media and the government's interaction with residents over them. It argues that this aligns with online campaigns, such as #PickThatTrash on X (formerly Twitter). These findings are, however, dampened by the fact that the bulk of social media users have low engagement with environmental content. The paper recommends heightened social media advocacy for the environment to bolster its environmental accountability roles in the state.

Keywords: Social Media; Environment; Environmental Accountability; Environmental Behaviour; Lagos State.

Introduction

Social media has become a critical part of people's daily life, disrupting and transforming their interactions and communication across the

world. Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Threads are all the top-rated social networks that are bonding people globally nowadays (Perin 2019). Over the years, social media has also evolved into a tool for social change

and public discourse (Dewey 2016). The environmental sector has also embraced social media rapidly and wholeheartedly by using it as a medium to support environmental campaigns and to connect people locally and cross-nationally on major environmental issues like climate change. Social media has become a tool for providing a space where the public participates in influencing or disallowing environmental decisions made by governments, corporations, or even individuals that affect us all (Dosemagen 2016). A recent study found that exposure to information about environmental disasters provokes fear, and the increase in this fear reinforces the individual's pro-environmental intentions (Shah & Wei, 2021). Environmentally conscious individuals and NGOs, among other stakeholders, use social media to foster accountability, expose environmental violations, and call for action from both the government and the people (Romero 2024).

In the world today, international organizations like the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) use social media as a tool to promote environmental accountability, awareness, and advocacy. They use it at the international, national, and local levels to advocate for sustainable policies and practices. UNEP runs global campaigns like #ActNow, #BeatPlasticPollution, etc., to urge individuals to take specific actions for environmental protection (UNEP 2019). Other organizations, like the World Health Organization (WHO), via the use of social media, share data and reports on how environmental degradation affects public health and oftentimes to call out industries and governments responsible for significant health impacts. Social media has also been leveraged as a tool for environmental accountability in Nigeria through stakeholders like the citizens, NGOs, activists, governments, etc. Citizens use the different social media platforms to report incidents like improper waste disposal, environmental pollution, and more by sharing videos and photos (Raheem et al., 2016). NGOs and activists also use social media to expose the unsustainable practices of industries and corporations. Furthermore, social media is proving to be a verita-

ble tool for environmental policy awareness creation and for propagating campaigns such as #GoGreenNigeria to promote tree planting in the country.

Lagos, Nigeria's economic nerve centre and most populous state is faced with serious environmental threats, including overpopulation, flooding, environmental degradation (Ndimele et al., (2024). These are caused by the state's unhealthy population density, past-paced urbanization and inadequate and poor infrastructure to mitigate these environmental challenges. While there are government policies to address these environmental concerns, poor implementation and enforcement remain a significant gap. Thus, pervasive environmental challenges face the residents, threatening the overall well-being of the people. Social media's immediacy and reach help to promote awareness of environmental issues in the state. It is helpful in several environmental campaigns, such as #SayNoToPlastic, #KeepLagosClean, and so on. These have helped to engender conversations on waste management, waste reduction and environmental responsibility.

Social media involves the two-way flow of information between the citizens and the government over environmental issues such as flooding, pollution, and waste management, etc. This ensures shared responsibility between two sets of stakeholders. The process also involves private industries and businesses, as they also use social media to ensure environmental accountability and control their environmental footprints and enhance their public image as they adopt environmental programmes and strategies as Corporate Social Responsibility.

Lagos State is also known as one of the most urbanised regions in Nigeria today and has the potential to use social media to drive environmental accountability from the residents and most especially from the government. But instead, it is dominated by entertainment, misinformation, and political discourse with a limited focus on environmental concerns. And with this, the impact of social media on environmental accountability remains underexplored. This has then led to questions on whether social media drives real change, ensures compliance, or even influences

policies that can result in long-term improvements in environmental governance (Romero 2024).

This study looks at the role of social media in fostering awareness and promoting environmental accountability in Lagos State by examining the extent to which it mobilises action and influences public behaviour and attitudes. We would also provide insights on how social media can be used as a tool to address environmental concerns and promote sustainable development in Lagos State.

With a growing population of over 20 million, Lagos State represents both the perils and promises of rapid urbanisation. It is estimated that over 30,000 people die every year in Lagos due to environmental issues (Nwokolo 2023). Only forty per cent of the 10,000 tonnes of daily waste produced in Lagos is collected. The collected waste is dumped in landfill sites such as Olu-sosun.

The Internet Geography (2024) notes that of the waste collected in Lagos, only 13% is recycled, while uncollected or poorly managed waste litters the conurbation, particularly in the low-income areas. Given the low levels of environmental policy awareness and effective accountability framework, social media is becoming increasingly important in shaping public discourse towards environmental sustainability.

Social Media and Environmental Accountability: Conceptual Overview

The first use of the term "*social media*" can be traced to a Tokyo media Entertainment Company named Matisse in 1994, which was in the early days of the commercial internet when the first social media platforms were developed and launched (Aichner et al., 2021). Social media has been used to refer to applications and website platforms that are used essentially for communication and community-based input (Lutkevich, 2021). In a similar view, Akram & Kumar (2017) explained social media as a digital platform that allows individuals and groups to share content and discuss issues and opinions via images, videos, audio, and text.

According to Paljug (2025), social media users

globally have been recorded at over 5 billion users, which is 62% of the world population, making it more than a tool used to connect with family and friends, as it serves diverse purposes, which include news platforms, entertainment, and commercial activities. In a similar view, social media is often defined as a collection of Internet-based platforms enabling user-generated content and rapid information exchange (Paljug, 2025). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) describe social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content." In practice, social media encompasses diverse tools from microblogs (Twitter) to content communities (YouTube), which together create a participatory communication platform.

Environmental accountability refers to the responsibility of organisations and individuals to be accountable for their actions that affect the climate (Li et al., 2022). In a report by the Sustainability Directory (2025), it was explained that environmental sustainability extends beyond legal compliance, as it revolves around the Triple Bottom Line (TBL): this is the essentiality of sustainability (people, planet, and profit). The accountability involves the compelling of businesses to publicly disclose their environmental, social, and governance (ESG) performance metrics (Global Reporting Initiative, 2024)

Environmental awareness refers to public knowledge and concern about ecological issues (e.g., pollution, waste, climate change) and the recognition of individual and collective roles in those issues. It implies understanding the severity of problems (like Lagos's notorious waste and flood crisis, air pollution, and uninhabitable slums) and knowledge of mitigation practices (Olajide, 2022). By contrast, environmental accountability involves mechanisms to hold actors, including individuals, corporations, or government agencies, accountable for environmental outcomes. Feintuck and Varley (as cited in Jimada, 2019) define accountability as "a requirement to give an account of one's actions, either directly to the public or via public authorities," and being liable for sanctions if standards

are breached. In environmental discourse, accountability entails that various environmental stakeholders, including citizens, businesses, and government, must justify their environmental impacts and face regulatory or social consequences for violations. Banjo & Obum-Andy (2023) and Obayi (2022) note that environmental accountability is not mere awareness, because it has only informational value, whereas the former entails power and sanction.

The relationship between these concepts is such that social media can help induce environmental awareness through its immediacy and reach. However, whether that leads to accountability depends on whether stakeholders use social media to demand changes or reinforce existing rules. In this way, Jimada (2019) notes that social media does more than information sharing in Nigeria; it also acts as a watchdog in the public sphere. Thus, social media is not just a technological phenomenon but also a social phenomenon that envisages environmental accountability as an outcome that produces enforceable responsibility for the environment in Lagos State.

Theoretical Framework

This study is theoretically anchored in the blended assumptions of the metropocentric theory and the agenda-setting theory of communication. The metropocentric theory, as outlined in the context of Nigerian socio-political and health policy dynamics, posits that communities within major urban centres in Nigeria receive superior governmental attention in terms of infrastructure and service provision compared to peripheral, often rural, communities (Kunnuji et al., 2018). This theory underscores the disparities in resource allocation and development outcomes between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, emphasising the urban bias in governance and policy implementation.

A key variant of this theory is the Cosmopolitan-Success and Conservative-Failure Hypothesis (CSCFH), which links the success of health policies and innovation to the socio-cultural and ideological orientations of different regions (Kunnuji et al., 2017). The CSCFH suggests that

metropolitan urban centres, characterised by liberal values, foster environments conducive to innovation and effective health policy implementation. In contrast, rural areas, often marked by conservative socio-cultural frameworks, are hypothesised to resist innovation, leading to poorer outcomes in health and development initiatives.

The Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) posits that media shape public priorities by influencing which issues the public perceives as important. In the digital era, agenda-setting processes operate across both legacy news outlets and social media platforms: hashtags, trending topics, influencer posts, and viral multimedia can raise the salience of environmental events and sustain public attention (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Leo et al., 2016).

Research demonstrates social media's capacity to accelerate awareness, mobilize support, and generate pressure for institutional action. Arbatani et al. (2016) and Kapriani & Lubis (2015) find that online campaigns can translate into offline conservation activities and citizen participation; Kaur & Chahal (2018) identify persuasive power, immediacy, and perceived credibility as drivers of pro-environmental engagement on social platforms. Jimada (2019) and Global Voices (2023) document how social media in Nigeria functions as a public sphere and watchdog, amplifying citizen grievances and demanding accountability. Yet critical studies (e.g., Obayi, 2021; Odoemelam et al., 2013) note an "awareness-action" gap where exposure does not automatically yield sustained behavioral change or institutional enforcement. Agenda-setting theory, therefore, provides an explanatory link between social media activity (what gets talked about online) and subsequent public pressure that can lead to accountability demands.

Combined, the two theories create a powerful explanatory framework for this study. Metropocentric Theory situates environmental accountability within a spatial and institutional context, showing why metropolitan Lagos becomes a focal point for policy and enforcement. Agenda-setting theory explains the communicative

mechanism by which environmental problems gain public prominence and create pressure for accountability. In practical terms:

Social media (agenda setting) raises the visibility of environmental harms occurring in Lagos, amplifying evidence (videos, images, reports) that makes problems salient to urban publics, civil society, and political actors (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Arbatani et al., 2016). Because Lagos is metropcentrically privileged, having concentrated media, NGOs, and political access, heightened visibility is more likely to translate into formal responses or showpiece enforcement actions compared with less visible locales (Kunnuji et al., 2018; World Bank, 2022).

However, metropcentrism also helps explain border effects and limits: visibility alone may prompt episodic or performative responses rather than systemic reforms, especially when enforcement institutions lack capacity or when socio-political incentives favor short-term displays of action (Nwagbara, 2013; Olajide, 2022).

This combined lens also clarifies important moderators and mediators to examine empirically: digital access and the digital divide (which shape who can participate online), content credibility and misinformation (which influence persuasive power), institutional capacity (which conditions enforcement), and civic trust (which shapes whether public pressure converts into policy change). These contextual variables align with empirical gaps identified in the literature, particularly the need to track whether viral online discourse produces measurable accountability outcomes (policy change, enforcement actions, corporate remediation) in Lagos (Obayi, 2021; Banjo & Obun-Andy, 2023).

Methodology

This chapter presents the quantitative data collected through an online survey exploring the role of social media in promoting environmental accountability among young adults and middle-aged individuals in Lagos State, Nigeria, in 2025. A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed via Google Forms to active social media users across various Local Government Areas (LGAs), with 93 valid responses received. The

findings provide evidence-based insights into the research objectives, which focus on understanding social media's influence on environmental awareness, policy influence, and accountability in Lagos State.

Qualitative data were derived from semi-structured interviews conducted on August 10, 2025, with three participants: Participant A (Environmental Health Officer, Lagos State), Participant B (Environmental Officer, Local Government), Participant C (Environmental Sanitation Officer, Federal Hospital Sector), and Participant D (Environmental Officer, Local Government). Interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically, focusing on key themes: role in environmental issues, effectiveness of social media, challenges, role of demographics, and prospects. Themes were identified through initial coding, pattern grouping, and refinement for coherence. The analysis expands on these themes with extended quotes from the interviewees to provide richer contextual insights, highlighting nuances in their experiences and perspectives.

Presentation of Results

Theme 1: Role and Involvement in Environmental Issues

Participants described their roles as preventive, educational, and enforcement-oriented, focusing on public health and sustainability. Participant A emphasised compliance and education: "My role as an environmental health officer is to ensure the proper cleaning of the environment, to ensure compliance of the public... one of our core duties is to enlighten them... It is very, very wrong to barge your refuse into waterways and into drainage because the adverse effect of it is flooding in the long run." This highlights a proactive approach to mitigating man-made environmental nuisances like pollution and improper waste disposal.

Participants B and D focused on disease prevention and community synergy: "As an environmental officer, my cardinal role is to prevent diseases. That is, try to control all those factors in our legal environment, emphasising the material effects on the health of the people... If you are not on social media to disseminate your intentions and to reach out to the people, you will

definitely find out that you will not be able to pass the message out." They noted the use of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp for programs and feedback from Community Development Associations (CDAs).

Participant C detailed hospital-specific tasks: "We deal with the environmental sanitation; we deal with the waste management, the collection, the disposal, and the storage... We ensure the cleanliness, the optimal cleanliness, of all the hospitals... We take care of the pest management and pest and vector management of the hospital." They stressed waste segregation, fumigation, and sewage management, noting social media's broader role in awareness but limited institutional application: "Social media is just for us to pass our message across to the entirety of the whole globe." This theme illustrates the roles across state, local, and federal levels, with education as a common thread.

Theme 2: Effectiveness of Social Media in Raising Awareness and Accountability

Participants viewed social media as transformative for awareness, surpassing traditional methods. Participant A cited its reach during crises: "Social media has been so helpful because... back in the days when we didn't have social media, you had to reach out to people physically... An example is because of the outbreak of cholera... social media has really helped to disseminate information about how cholera can be coped with... the prevention of cholera, the mode of transmission, and the causative agents." They added on accountability: "It has really been helpful... even those that are not educated... people are well aware of all those factors that can cause the serious effects in the environment... For example, this 'keep your environment clean' of course we are all aware that if you keep your environment clean, it is to curb the spread of disease."

Participants B and D affirmed: "It has been very, very, very effective... It is one of the fastest ways to communicate to our population... The response has been so overwhelming." They highlighted bidirectional accountability: "They too, they monitor us through via social media if there

are infractions... so the local government quickly or the state government respond to it so it's vice versa it's like a feedback."

Participant C noted its global potential: "Social media is like a channel whereby any kind of menace or error... it's an avenue... that makes a clarion call to the government to do something in a faster way... Like recently... there was a heavy rainfall, which caused a lot of havoc... If you see some videos they post on the social media whereby the floor that's taking over a lot of residents' houses." They described event-specific effectiveness: "Like the last... we had our yearning... the Southwest Yenisei Conference... the media people came around to interview... and capture some of our activities... Yes, it's been very effective." This theme underscores social media's efficiency in education and prompting action, with examples like cholera outbreaks and flooding illustrating real-world impact.

Theme 3: Challenges in Using Social Media for Advocacy

Challenges were downplayed but included access issues and misuse. Participant A saw none: "I wouldn't say there's a challenge because social media has been helpful. So it's now left for the public to do what is right... We have some people who correctly use social media... But as a professional... our own core duty is to ensure that enlightenment... is being carried out."

Participant B identified economic barriers: "Because of economic factors, there are challenges... people tell you that they don't have data... A situation where you don't have lights, you don't have money to buy data, and you may not get the message as quickly as possible." Strategies include hybrid approaches: "We still use other methods... community participation is very key... We have CDCs... Regular meetings... So we have a way of getting across all information physically and also [digitally]."

Participant C deferred specifics: "I don't think that it's solved. I may not be in the best position to answer that except for those in the media aspect... Social media too, as it has its positive aspects, also has its negative aspects. So if the negative aspect is going to be... This theme reveals

optimism tempered by socioeconomic and misuse concerns, with solutions emphasising complementarity with physical engagement.

Theme 4: Role of Young Adults and Middle-Aged Individuals

Young adults were seen as digitally active drivers, while middle-aged bridge generations. Participant A stressed intergenerational role: "Irrespective of the generation... every individual has a role to play in environmental sustainability... In this era of social media, I can barely say 90% of the populace know what is right, but they won't do it... The middle-aged are the ones who are always active, most especially on social media... The young adults are the ones getting the information now... They will now disseminate it to both the aged and the younger ones. So, the middle class are the ones that have a lot of role to play."

Participant B noted the youth's consciousness: "The role of young adults? Well, they have been trying because everybody is now environmentally conscious... The youth are more technologically savvy... Everybody knows that if you don't stop the issue of [dumping] refuse in the drainage... it results in flooding..."

Participant D noted that: Our mamas... those who are not that learned... we use our local way of communicating to them... through the CDC."

Participant C highlighted youth innovation: "Social media will create more awareness and understanding for the younger ones... There are a lot of innovations that are still coming in now through this younger and younger age... At the conference, I was so surprised when I saw the young ones... during our own time, who born us? We are not of such opportunities. But now, there are renewed hopes." This theme portrays young adults as innovators and disseminators

and middle-aged adults as connectors, with calls for broader participation.

Theme 5: Future Prospects for Social Media in Environmental Accountability

Participants envisioned an innovative, digital future. Participant "A" integrated AI: "Social media has been really, really helpful... It is not even limited to just posting... We have some platforms now that use AI to illustrate... The AI will illustrate what mismanagement of waste... can cause to the environment... It will continue to be helpful... We are going to the era of AI now... Most people don't really have the time to go to the TV stations... So through the AI, I think it's been helpful."

Participant B predicted enforcement: "From my own perspective... I think it is the future... It will not be necessary for us to even be serving papers... You'll just see your message on your phone... You have committed an environmental infraction, so you will be surcharged... It will still go digital... Lagos is going to be a smart city very soon."

Participant C focused on positives: "For the future, it's just to improve us more and to introduce more innovations... That will help in promoting the profession more... Social media is not something that is difficult... But in the process... there should be a clause because social media too... has its negative aspects."

Additional suggestions included early education: "We need to make sure this advocacy is carried on to the children in the school... Getting nursery rhymes that will be opening the consciousness... Making them accountable, and they will be able to impart this knowledge even to their parents" (Participant B). This theme anticipates technological advancement for enhanced awareness and enforcement.

4.2 Quantitative Analysis

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)

Female	55	59.1
Male	37	39.8
Prefer not to say	1	1.1
Total	93	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 shows a female majority (59.1%) compared to males (39.8%), with one respondent preferring not to disclose their gender (1.1%). This gender distribution ensures diverse perspectives, with a slight female skew reflecting higher

engagement among women in online surveys.
Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18–24	71	76.3
25–35	14	15.0
36–50	8	8.6
Total	93	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 indicates that the majority (76.3%) are aged 18–24, followed by 25–35 (15.0%) and 36–50 (8.6%). This youth-dominated sample

aligns with the study's focus on active social media users, likely to engage with environmental content online.

Table 3: Occupation Distribution of Respondents

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)

Student	76	81.7
Employed	10	10.8
Self-employed/Entrepreneur	6	6.5
Unemployed	1	1.1
Total	93	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3 shows that students dominate (81.7%), followed by employed individuals (10.8%), self-employed/entrepreneurs (6.5%), and one unemployed respondent (1.1%). The student-

heavy sample reflects the tech-savvy nature of the 18–24 age group, enhancing insights into digital engagement.

Table 4: Highest Level of Education

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Bachelor's Degree	50	53.8
Secondary School	28	30.1
Diploma/OND	14	15.0
Postgraduate Degree	1	1.1
Total	93	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4 reveals that 53.8% hold a bachelor's degree, 30.1% have secondary school education, 15.0% have a diploma/OND, and 1.1% have a

postgraduate degree. This educational diversity ensures varied perspectives on environmental issues.

Table 5: Local Government Area (LGA) of Residence

Frequency	Percentage (%)
17	18.3
15	16.1
11	11.8
11	11.8
6	6.5
33	35.5
93	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 5 shows a spread across LGAs, with Lagos Mainland (18.3%) and Ikorodu (16.1%) most represented, followed by Surulere and

Kosofe (11.8% each). The 35.5% in other LGAs indicates broad geographic coverage, enhancing the study's representativeness.

Table 6: Social Media Usage and Engagement with Environmental Content

S/N	Statement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Social Media Platforms Used Regularly (Multiple Selections, N=308)			
6.1	WhatsApp	86	27.9

6.2	Instagram	76	24.7
6.3	Twitter	60	19.5
6.4	TikTok	51	16.6
6.5	LinkedIn	26	8.4
6.6	Facebook	9	2.9
Frequency of Social Media Use			
6.7	Multiple times a day	88	94.6
6.8	Once a day	3	3.2
6.9	A few times a week	1	1.1
6.10	Rarely	1	1.1
Frequency of Engagement with Environmental Content			
6.11	Daily	32	34.4
6.12	Weekly	10	10.8
6.13	Monthly	12	12.9

6.14	Rarely	37	39.8
6.15	Never	2	2.2

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 6 shows WhatsApp (27.9%) and Instagram (24.7%) as the most used platforms, with an average of 3.3 platforms per respondent. Nearly all (94.6%) use social media multiple times daily, indicating high digital engagement. However, engagement with environmental content is moderate, with 39.8% engaging rarely

and 34.4% daily, suggesting varied interest levels.

Table 7: Types of Environmental Content Engaged With and Preferred Platforms

S/N	Statement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Types of Environmental Content (Multiple Selections, N=206)			
7.1	Educational content (e.g., recycling tips)	48	51.6
7.2	Awareness campaigns (e.g., climate change, pollution)	45	48.4
7.3	Criticism of corporate/government practices	31	33.3
7.4	Advocacy posts (e.g., calls for policy change)	26	28.0
7.5	Other/None	56	60.2

Most Effective Platform for Environmental Advocacy			
7.6	Twitter	46	49.5
7.7	Instagram	25	26.9
7.8	WhatsApp	9	9.7
7.9	LinkedIn	6	6.5
7.10	TikTok	3	3.2
7.11	Facebook	3	3.2
7.12	Other/None	1	1.1

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 7 indicates that educational content (51.6%) and awareness campaigns (48.4%) are the most engaged with, reflecting a preference for informative content. Twitter is considered

the most effective platform for advocacy (49.5%), likely due to its real-time engagement and hashtag-driven campaigns.

Table 8: Perceptions of Social Media's Role in Environmental Accountability

S/N	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
8.1	Social media platforms raise awareness about environmental issues in Lagos State	19 (20.4%)	46 (49.5%)	15 (16.1%)	12 (12.9%)	1 (1.1%)

8.2	Social media campaigns influence government policies on environmental issues	11 (11.8%)	37 (39.8%)	27 (29.0%)	11 (11.8%)	7 (7.5%)
8.3	Social media campaigns hold corporations/individuals accountable for their environmental practices	9 (9.7%)	39 (41.9%)	33 (35.5%)	8 (8.6%)	4 (4.3%)
8.4	Social media campaigns are effective in promoting sustainable practices in Lagos State	15 (16.1%)	44 (47.3%)	23 (24.7%)	10 (10.8%)	1 (1.1%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 8 shows strong support for social media's role in raising awareness (69.9% agree or strongly agree, mean = 3.74, SD = 0.95). Perceptions of policy influence (mean = 3.37, SD = 1.10) and accountability (mean = 3.47, SD = 1.02) are more neutral, with 29.0% and 35.5%, respectively, selecting neutral. For promoting sustainable practices, 63.4% view campaigns as

effective (mean = 3.66, SD = 0.98), though 24.7% remain neutral, indicating mixed confidence in tangible outcomes.

Table 9: Challenges in Engaging with Environmental Content

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Misinformation/lack of credibility	10	10.8
Lack of actionable information	5	5.4
Negative comments/bigotry	5	5.4
Algorithm limitations	2	2.2
Other (e.g., lack of engagement, data issues)	15	16.1

None	56	60.2
Total	93	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 9 highlights that 60.2% reported no challenges, suggesting accessibility of content. However, misinformation (10.8%), lack of ac-

tionable information (5.4%), and negative comments (5.4%) were noted, indicating barriers to effective engagement.

Table 10: Most Impactful Social Media Campaigns

Campaign	Frequency	Percentage (%)
#PickThatTrash	2	2.2
Break Free From Plastic	2	2.2
Keep Lagos Clean	2	2.2
Other named campaigns	22	23.7
None/Can't recall	65	69.9
Total	93	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 10 shows that 69.9% could not recall a specific impactful campaign, suggesting limited visibility of sustained efforts. Campaigns like #PickThatTrash and Break Free From Plastic were noted but had low recognition (2.2% each).

Test of Hypotheses

Hypotheses were tested using chi-square analysis to explore relationships between variables, following McClave (2014).

Hypothesis 1

H0: There is no significant relationship between

social media engagement and perceptions of environmental awareness in Lagos State.

H1: There is a significant relationship between social media engagement and perceptions of environmental awareness in Lagos State.

Using item 8.1 ("Social media platforms raise awareness about environmental issues"):

Response	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Strongly Agree	19	18.6	0.4
Agree	46	18.6	27.4
Neutral	15	18.6	-3.6
Disagree	12	18.6	-6.6
Strongly Disagree	1	18.6	-17.6
Total	93		

Test Statistics	Chi-Square	df	Significance Value (α)
Hypothesis 1	39.87	4	0.05

Critical Value: For 4 degrees of freedom at $\alpha = 0.05$, the critical value is 9.488. Since χ^2 (39.87) > 9.488, we reject H_0 , indicating a significant relationship between social media engagement and perceptions of environmental awareness ($p < 0.05$).

Hypothesis 2

H_0 : There is no significant relationship between social media engagement and perceptions of ac-

countability for environmental practices in Lagos State.

H_1 : There is a significant relationship between social media engagement and perceptions of accountability for environmental practices in Lagos State.

Using item 8.3 ("Social media campaigns hold corporations/individuals accountable"):

Response	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Strongly Agree	9	18.6	-9.6

Agree	39	18.6	20.4
Neutral	33	18.6	14.4
Disagree	8	18.6	-10.6
Strongly Disagree	4	18.6	-14.6
Total	93		

Test Statistics	Chi-Square	df	Significance Value (α)
Hypothesis 2	37.65	4	0.05

Critical Value: For 4 degrees of freedom at $\alpha = 0.05$, the critical value is 9.488. Since $\chi^2 (37.65) > 9.488$, we reject H_0 , indicating a significant relationship between social media engagement and perceptions of accountability ($p < 0.05$).

Discussion of Findings

The chi-square results (39.87 and 37.65) confirm significant relationships between social media engagement and perceptions of environmental awareness and accountability, aligning with the study's objectives to assess social media's role in environmental accountability in Lagos State.

The socio-demographic profile (Tables 1–5) shows a young, educated, and digitally active sample, with 94.6% using social media multiple times daily (Table 6). This high engagement supports Ogunbode et al. (2020), who note social media's prevalence among Nigerian youth. However, only 34.4% engage daily with environmental content, and 39.8% do so rarely (Table 6), suggesting limited sustained interest, possibly due to challenges like misinformation (10.8%, Table 9) or lack of actionable information (5.4%).

Respondents prefer educational content (51.6%) and awareness campaigns (48.4%, Table 7), indicating a

demand for practical, informative posts. Twitter's dominance as the most effective platform (49.5%, Table 7) aligns with its role in hashtag activism, as seen in campaigns like #PickThatTrash (Table 10). However, 69.9% could not recall impactful campaigns, suggesting limited visibility or impact, consistent with Adebayo and Iweala (2019), who argue social media campaigns often lack follow-through in Nigeria.

Perceptions are strongest for awareness-raising (69.9% agree, Table 8), supporting Adeyemi (2021), who highlights social media's role in environmental education. However, neutral responses for policy influence (29.0%) and accountability (35.5%) indicate scepticism about tangible outcomes, echoing Ogunbode et al. (2020) on the gap between online activism and real-world impact. The moderate agreement on sustainable practices (63.4%) suggests potential, but barriers like misinformation and negative comments (Table 9) hinder effectiveness.

Open-ended responses emphasised:

- **Support for Social Media's Role:** Respondents value awareness campaigns like #BreakFreeFromPlastic for highlighting corporate responsibility.

- **Challenges:** Misinformation, lack of actionable steps, and algorithm limitations reduce engagement.
- **Solutions:** More credible, action-oriented content and localised campaigns could enhance impact.

Qualitatively, expanded themes reveal social media's role in education and prevention (Theme 1), with effectiveness in dissemination (Theme 2), but challenges like data access (Theme 3). Young adults drive innovation (Theme 4), and the future involves AI and smart cities (Theme 5). These complement quantitative findings on low campaign recall (69.9%, Table 10), suggesting the need for sustained, localised efforts.

Overall, findings support Ogunbode et al. (2020) on social media's awareness role but highlight gaps in accountability, as per Adebayo and Iweala (2019). Open-ended survey responses and interviews emphasise credible, action-oriented content for youth and community integration. These findings entail social media's potential to drive environmental awareness but highlight limitations in policy influence and accountability, necessitating more targeted, credible campaigns

Conclusion

The study employed a mixed-methods design, collecting quantitative data from 93 survey respondents (primarily young adults aged 18–24, students, and females) and qualitative data from three semi-structured interviews with environmental health experts (Participants A, B, C, and D). Quantitatively, respondents reported high social media usage, with 94.6% accessing platforms multiple times daily and an average of 3.3 platforms per person, led by WhatsApp (27.9%) and Instagram (24.7%). Engagement with environmental content was moderate, with 34.4% engaging daily but 39.8% rarely, favouring educational content (51.6%) and awareness campaigns (48.4%). Twitter was deemed most effective for advocacy (49.5%). Perceptions showed strong agreement on awareness-raising (mean = 3.74), but neutrality on policy influence (mean = 3.37) and accountability (mean = 3.47). Challenges included misinformation (10.8%), though 60.2% reported none. Campaign recall was low (69.9% none), and chi-square tests confirmed significant relationships between engagement and perceptions of awareness ($\chi^2 = 39.87$, $p < 0.05$) and accountability ($\chi^2 = 37.65$, $p < 0.05$).

Qualitatively, thematic analysis yielded five themes:

(1) preventive and educational roles in environmental issues; (2) social media's effectiveness for awareness and accountability; (3) minimal but socioeconomic challenges; (4) young adults as digital drivers and middle-aged as bridges; and (5) an optimistic future with AI and smart cities. Participants highlighted social media's reach for crises like cholera (Participant A) and flooding (Participant C), feedback mechanisms (Participants B and D), and youth innovation (Participant C), but noted barriers like data costs (Participants B and D) and misuse (Participant C).

These findings align with the metropocentric theory, as Lagos's urban density amplifies social media's hub-like role in disseminating environmental information, though peripheral issues like access hinder full accountability. The study enriches metropocentric theory by demonstrating how social media reinforces urban hubs like Lagos as centres of environmental discourse, concentrating awareness but exposing peripheral disparities (e.g., data access). It extends communication theories like agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), showing that social media sets environmental agendas but struggles with policy translation in developing contexts. Mixed-methods integration validates triangulation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), providing nuanced insights into digital activism.

References

- Adebayo, A., & Iweala, U. (2019). Social media and environmental advocacy in Nigeria: Opportunities and challenges. *African Journal of Environmental Studies*, 6(1), 23–34.
- Aichner, T., Grünfelder, M., Maurer, O., & Jegeni, D. (2021). Twenty-five years of social media: A review of social media applications and definitions from 1994 to 2019. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 24(4), 215–222. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2020.0134>
- Akram, W., & Kumar, R. (2017). A study on positive and negative effects of social media on society. *International Journal of Computer Sciences and Engineering*, 5(10), 351–354. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323903323_A_Study_on_Positive_and_Negative_Effects_of_Social_Media_on_Society
- Arbatani, R. T., Labafi, S., & Robati, M. (2016). Effects of social media on the environmental protection behaviour of the public (Case study: Protecting Zayandeh-Rood River environment). *International Journal of Environmental Research*, 10(2), 237–244. <https://doi.org/10.22059/ijer.2016.57718>
- Banjo, A. O., & Obun-Andy, M. K. (2023). Environmental education and media role in creating awareness in Ogun State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Women in Technical Education and Employment*, 4(1), 22–28. <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ijowited/article/view/252934>
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Global Reporting Initiative & World Benchmarking Alliance. (2024). *How to strengthen corporate accountability: The case for unlocking sustainable corporate performance through mandatory corporate reporting*. https://globalreporting.org/media/s3shiaya/wba_gri_joint-report_september-2024.pdf
- Global Voices. (2023, August 10). Has digital media influenced environmentally sustainable practices in Nigeria? <https://globalvoices.org/2023/08/10/has-digital-media-influenced-environmentally-sustainable-practices-in-nigeria/>
- Internet Geography (2024). Managing Environmental Issues in Lagos. Waste Disposal. https://www.internetgeography.net/topics/managing-environmental-issues-in-lagos/#google_vignette
- Jimada, U. (2019). Social media in the public sphere of accountability in Nigeria. *Global Media Journal*,

17(32), 1–9. <https://www.globalmediajournal.com/open-access/social-media-in-the-public-sphere-of-accountability-in-nigeria.php?aid=87577>

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59–68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003>

Kapriani, R. D., & Lubis, D. P. (2015). Efektivitas media sosial untuk gerakan sosial pelestarian lingkungan. *Sodality: Jurnal Sosiologi Pedesaan*, 2(3), 162–172. <https://doi.org/10.22500/sodality.v2i3.9423>

Kaur, A., & Chahal, H. S. (2018). Role of social media in increasing environmental issue awareness. *Researchers World: Journal of Arts, Science and Commerce*, 9(1), 19–26. <https://doi.org/10.18843/rwjasc/v9i1/03>

Kunnuji, M. O., Eshiet, I., & Nnorom, C. C. (2018). A survival analysis of the timing of onset of childbearing among young females in Nigeria: are predictors the same across regions?. *Reproductive health*, 15(1), 173.

Kunnuji, M., Eshiet, I., & Nnorom, C. (2017, November). Regional variance in the onset of childbearing among female adolescents in Nigeria. *International Population Conference*. IUSSP.

Leo, F. D., Gravili, G., & Miglietta, P. P. (2016). Social media and environmental sustainability: An overview of European countries. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 11(6), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v11n6p1>

Li, X., Hu, Z., Cao, J., & Xu, X. (2022). The impact of environmental accountability on air pollution: A public attention perspective. *Energy Policy*, 161, 112733. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2021.112733>

Lutkevich, B. (Ed.). (2021). What is social media? *TechTarget*. <https://www.techtarget.com/whatis/definition/social-media>

McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176–187. <https://doi.org/10.1086/267990>

Nwagbara, U. (2013). The effects of social media on environmental sustainability activities of oil and gas multinationals in Nigeria. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 55(6), 689–697. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tie.21584>

- Obayi, P. M. (2021). Social media and single-use plastic campaigns in South-East Nigeria. *British International Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, 8(12), 35–44. <https://cirdjournals.com/index.php/bijess/article/view/642>
- Odoemelam, C. C., Ebeze, U., & Okorom, E. (2013). Social media, environmental health development campaigns, participation and behaviour change among the University of Nigeria, Nsukka staff. *International Policy Brief Series*. <https://internationalpolicybrief.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Article-2-Social-Media.pdf>
- Ogunbode, C. A., et al. (2020). Environmental attitudes and behaviors in Nigeria: The role of social media. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 68, 101–112. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2020.101405>
- Olajide, B. E. (2022). An evaluation of subnational climate change response in Lagos State, Nigeria and Kwazulu Natal Province, South Africa [Master's thesis, North-West University]. NWU Repository. <https://repository.nwu.ac.za/handle/10394/40189>
- Paljug, K. (2025). Social media: Definition, effects, and list of top apps. *Investopedia*. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/social-media.asp>
- World Bank. (2022, June 3). Making Lagos a pollution free city: Solving the threat one solution at a time. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2022/06/03/afw-making-lagos-a-pollution-free-city-solving-the-threat-one-solution-at-a-time>

Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gab.v23i4.40>

ROLE OF HAIR IN THE PERCEPTION OF BEAUTY AMONG BLACK WOMEN IN PIETERMARITZBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

Ngcobo Phindile

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Ph.D. candidate

Sociology Studies

maphindyngcobo@gmail.com

&

Mambondiani Liberty

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Postdoctoral fellow

Gender and Sexuality Studies

liberty.mambo@yahoo.com

Abstract

Black women face societal pressure of being expected to be beautiful. Beauty has been found to be subjective, contextual, personal, (a) political and perceptive. In the quest to be or enhance their beauty, one area many black women constantly navigate is between their own natural hair and other hair types, which include weaves. The media and other beauty houses have often shown messages that tend to marginalise and ostracise African natural hair textures. This has led to a widespread use of hair extensions among black women, reflecting the pressures they face and practical considerations shaped by these changing sociocultural dynamics. Therefore, this paper aims to explore how the usage of hair extensions is interpreted by black women's perception and definition of beauty. How do black women interpret, perceive and define beauty using hair extensions? Using a sample of 15 black women in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, the paper employed a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews as a data collection method. Data was analysed thematically. The significant finding was that hair extensions are seen as vital elements that add to and enhance attractiveness and visibility. Participants valued hair extensions for their convenience, practicality, and aesthetic appeal. The paper also found a conflict between embracing the African identity of beauty and the pressure to conform to non-African beauty standards, heightened by media influences. Therefore, there is a critical need to promote diversity in beauty standards by Africanizing the information disseminated by the media, supporting black-owned businesses, and conducting further research focused on empowering black women.

Keywords: *Black women, beauty, perception, identity, media, human hair extensions, hairstyles.*

Introduction

Beauty is not static or fixed; it is a continuously evolving process which is personal, relational and contextual. Historically, beauty and attractiveness have always been associated with being

feminine. According to Fontes et al. (2012), physical attractiveness is considered a

central element of femininity, and the consumption practices of beauty are often more important

in the construction of women's identity. Polivy and Herman (2004) assert that women are constantly bombarded by information in mass media, which transmits and reinforces values, norms, and ideals of fashion and beauty via images of models, movie stars, and female celebrities in a variety of media formats. Beauty entails the celebration of worth, value, quality, uniqueness and attractiveness; however, it is elusive and contextual. As argued by Matiza (2013), beauty is a subjective social construct and the concept of beauty tends to refer to both external and internal attributes of a person or item. There have been and continue to be distinct ideals of beauty in different cultures (Sartwell, 2012), which are propagated through print and visual media (Matiza, 2013). In South Africa, conceptions of beauty are influenced by a mix of historical, cultural, and socio-political elements, where colonial history and global media have played a role in shaping ideals of femininity, often elevating Eurocentric traits like straight hair above natural Afro-textured styles (Le Roux, & Oyedemi, 2023; Siebler, 2023). One aspect of beauty that should be apolitical but has come to be heavily political is hair, be it the type of hair or hairstyle. Researchers emphasise that hair functions as a powerful symbol of self-definition, particularly in South African urban settings where young Black women must navigate racialised standards of beauty in professional, academic, and digital environments (Molaaphene, 2024; Ngandu-Kalenga Greensword, 2022). According to Thompson (2009; Jacobs-Huey, 2006; Patton, 2006), in 15th-century Africa, hairstyles were used to indicate a person's marital status, age, religion, ethnic identity, wealth and rank within the community. In the 1980s, weaves raised the black beauty bar even higher to hair that is not just straight, but also very long (Tate, 2007; Banks, 2000).

Globally, women of all races, religions, ethnicities, and beliefs strive for beauty and to be accepted in their personal and broader social groups (Shabangu, 2016). According to Marco (2012), hair representation is only one vein of

beauty that has permeated many avenues of life. Thompson (2009) argues that when it comes to hair, all women can relate; whether they are white, black or Asian, they all agonise over how to wear it. Furthermore, it is estimated that 70% to 80% of black women chemically straighten their hair (Thompson, 2009). As argued by Robinson (2011:359), similar to skin colour, black hair texture is graded – given a value ranging from good to bad. Good hair is hair that minimises African ancestry, more reflective of a European, native or Asian ancestral mix within the black individual. It is more wavy or straight in texture and more likely to be long. Bad hair is the extreme opposite of good hair – tightly coiled, thicker and more likely to be short, clearly reflecting African ancestry (Banks, 2000). As a result, many black women resort to using hair extensions to cover their natural hair and conform to the standard of "good hair" (Motseki and Oyedemi, 2017). For many Black South African women, wearing hair extensions is more than a stylistic preference; it is deeply tied to how they express identity, seek social validation, and challenge predominantly perceived sociocultural beauty norms. Hence the significance of this study to look into unique beauty experiences of black women in post-apartheid South Africa. As argued by Robinson-Moore (2008; Taylor, 1999), like skin colour hierarchies, good and bad hair perceptions connect with Eurocentric beauty paradigms so that the wavier or straighter the hair texture, the more attractive the Black individual (Bencosme, 2017; Badillo, 2001; Hunter, 1998). Fashion trends, makeup preferences, and media representations reinforce these standards, often leading to the underrepresentation or unfavourable portrayal of non-European features. Eurocentric beauty standards, influenced by historical factors like colonialism, have been globally disseminated through media, contributing to a standardized beauty ideal across cultures (Bryant, 2013). This phenomenon not only fosters feelings of inadequacy but also underscores the importance of recognizing and challenging these standards to promote inclusivity, diversity, and a

more accurate representation of beauty across diverse cultures and ethnicities.

According to Montle (2020), the perception of beauty is one of the vexing intricacies in post-colonial Africa by virtue of the inclusion of Eurocentricity as the defining lens of beauty in African communities. In South Africa, a nation characterized by cultural and racial diversity and a history shaped by colonialism and apartheid, historical factors have played a significant role in shaping perceptions of beauty. The enduring impact of colonial ideologies, often favouring Eurocentric beauty norms, has particularly affected beauty ideals within the country, especially for Black¹⁴ women. Throughout the African continent, beauty practices hold unique cultural significance and mirror the diverse identities present across the continent. The call is for celebrating beauty in all its varied forms, rejecting a one-size-fits-all definition of attractiveness. South Africa has grappled with enduring Eurocentric beauty standards, profoundly influencing perceptions of beauty, self-worth, and identity, particularly due to the historical legacies of colonialism and apartheid. However, in recent years, the country has seen a growing awareness challenging these standards, with movements promoting natural hair, diverse skin tones, and traditional clothing, fostering a broader acceptance of various forms of beauty (United Nations Human Rights, n.d; Verwoerd, 2024; France-Presse, 2016; Culuza, 2025). Efforts to reclaim indigenous African beauty and its impact on mental health have gained momentum, with activism and advocacy on social media playing a vital role in reshaping beauty norms (Julien, 2014). As South Africa navigates its complex history, there is a recognition of the need to challenge Eurocentric standards, embracing the diverse tapestry of African beauty, aligning with a global movement toward inclusivity and celebrating diverse cultural expressions of beauty.

Background of the study

According to Arnoldi and Kreamer (1995), hair grooming and coiffures played an important role in self-presentation, identity, beauty, power and pride in pre-colonial Africa. This is the same reality we are witnessing in post-colonial Africa, if not an intensified phenomenon. Young women often struggle with conforming to societal ideals of beauty, which leads them to question their own self-image (Ando et.al. 2021). According to Okafor (2007), global beauty images such as Barbie dolls influence the dynamics of beauty perception in African societies, directly influencing women's well-being and contributing to the downward trend in African indigenous cosmetic usage and practice (Shabangu, 2016). The media plays a significant role in shaping young people's perceptions of beauty, which can be seen as a reflection of society's patriarchal views on women and their bodies. Research reveals that appearance significantly affects the social success of adolescent females, especially among young, unmarried, and urban women (Henriques and Patnaik, 2020). Kwan and Trautner (2009) argue that society has long believed that women who are considered beautiful have more advantages in terms of employment, marriage, and social advancement compared to those who are not. Baron (2005) adds that women face greater pressure to conform to beauty standards than men, as their physical attractiveness is often prioritised over other personal qualities. Consequently, women's self-perception and comparisons with other women are greatly influenced by a society that places a fundamental emphasis on their body image (Baron, 2005). As a result, many young women strive to attain a body image that aligns with societal norms, heavily influenced by the media.

Throughout history, hair has held significant social connotations, symbolizing status and serving

¹⁴ The term Black in this study refers to those are African, Coloured and Indian.

as a form of self-expression. This cultural significance of hair is not limited to African communities but extends globally, where a strong obsession with hair exists (Erasmus, 2001). The association between hair and skin colour politics can be traced back to the era of enslavement, when Black women with lighter skin and straight hair were assigned higher monetary value (White, 2011). This historical connection highlights how discussions surrounding hair are intertwined with broader issues of race and social hierarchy. Throughout history, African women have shown remarkable creativity in managing and styling their hair. Images of the Wolf, Mende, Mandingo, and Yoruba people from Africa dating back to the fifteenth century depict the diverse meanings and symbolism associated with hair (Patton, 2006). Hairstyling traditions in African societies served not only as a means of personal adornment but also as communal bonding activities, particularly among women. Hair was considered more than just a matter of aesthetics; it was deeply intertwined with individuals' sense of self-identity (Patton, 2006). In this age, hair extensions are now commonly utilized to generate a range of looks, depending on the aesthetic a woman wants to attain. According to Lanto (2021), the South African cosmetics and toiletry business is valued at US\$ 2.1 billion and is expected to continue to expand as black people's disposable income rises. An earlier study in the US by Thompson (2009), revealed that black hair care (non-natural) was an estimated \$1.8 billion to \$15 billion industry. A recent US study by Baboolall et al. (2022) reveals that the beauty industry was worth \$60 billion and it is expected to reach \$73 billion by 2025. In 2021, black Americans spent \$6.6 billion on beauty (Baboolall et al. 2022). Lanto (2021) further claims hair care products targeted at Black South African consumers accounts for roughly 43% of all hair care sales in South Africa, with a large portion of this ascribed to wet hair products like chemical relaxers and perms, conditioners, and after-care products like hair moisturizers. Hair extensions, on

the other hand, have become increasingly popular among Black women, and a hairdresser's ability to apply diverse application techniques will contribute to the style's eventual elegance. What is this Western concept of beauty that people are chasing?

How is the Western concept of beauty understood?

Western ideals include the unattainable standards such as youthfulness, thinness, and flawless features. Consequently, women rapidly resort to hair straightening and hair extensions, which epitomise Eurocentricity (Montle, 2020), to attain these flawless features. To beautify themselves, Black women would straighten their hair, a practice which Erasmus (1997: 14) links to colonial undertones of beauty. Hair straightening is done through chemical relaxers, which straighten the hair of Black women to alter and make it look as if it is naturally straight (Olasode, 2009). Moreover, Ashe (1995: 579) notes that “the straightening of hair is a way through which black women seek to fit in the White society’s ideals of beauty, however unconsciously.” In addition to hair, young women face pressure that contributes to eating disorders and plastic surgery (Lee, 2018). Features like light skin, straight hair, and slim bodies became normalised as beauty ideals. This marginalises diverse representations and promotes the racialization of beauty (FSR Inc., n.d.). How does Western beauty differ from African beauty?

Conceptualisation of African beauty

Beauty concepts in Africa vary by region and ethnic group, with traditional aesthetics valuing fuller bodies, darker skin, and cultural markers like hairstyles and scarification, which hold communal or spiritual meaning (Gbadebo, 2011). One aspect many African societies agree on is that women with larger bodies are seen as more beautiful. A South African study by Poran (2006) reported that Black men’s general preference for

a voluptuous body shape may still have a strong influence on Black women's perceptions of body shape because some Black women are aware of Black men's preference. In many African societies, beauty also includes character, maturity, and social harmony, reflecting broader communal values (Gbadebo, 2011). In some traditional African societies, the notion of beauty encompasses physical appearance as well as non-physical characteristics (Gyekye, 1996). For instance, within the context of some African societies, a woman has to possess the following characteristics: obedience, humility and model good moral behaviour. In this context, a woman's beauty extends to non-physical characteristics since "moral behaviour is considered an aesthetic value" (Gyekye, 1996, p.132). In most African societies, the perceived value of a woman's physical beauty depreciates when she has an unbecoming character; this means that a person's beauty is found in their character as much as their outward appearance (Gyekye, 1996). These values appear to hold significance in contemporary African societies (Gyekye, 1996).

Problem Statement

The researchers observed an intensification of the growing trend of black women in Pietermaritzburg, a major city in South Africa, who use hair extensions, regardless of how expensive they are. This motivated the researchers to wonder what influences these women's decisions, how their choices shape their idea of beauty, and the implications this practice has for other social aspects of their lives. How do hairstyles and hair choices influence black women's definition and perception of beauty? Furthermore, research by eNCA (2016) unveiled that the African hair care industry demonstrated growth with approximately US\$1.1 billion in hair product sales across South Africa, Nigeria, and Cameroon. By 2017, these countries had spent over a billion dollars on hair care products, while the entire continent might be dedicating up to US\$6 billion yearly on weaves, wigs, and braids. Therefore, the African hair care industry displays diverse

consumption patterns spanning consumer groups and ethnicities, focusing on the prominent African segment, particularly among Black consumers, who allocate substantial resources to hair care in their quest to enhance beauty.

Oyedemi's (2016) study on the concept of "beautiful" hair among young black South African women found that many avoid wearing their natural hair due to societal stigma and pressures. Instead, there is an increasing trend among South African women to embrace long, silky human hair extensions, as well as other styles such as braids and natural hair, as a means to define their beauty (Shelembe, 2014). Having said that, this paper seeks to understand the reasoning behind the usage of hair extensions among black females in South Africa. This paper aims to investigate what influences Black women's hairstyle choices and how that influences their perception and definition of beauty. Furthermore, how do these black women navigate the intricate interplay of their African identities in an era where beauty is so heavily influenced by the so-called Western standards? The paper seeks to add to the growing sociological scholarship on race, identity, gender, culture and beauty, in this case, through the usage of hair extensions among black South African women. Therefore, examining beauty and hair extension practices through a South African sociological lens highlights how beauty is shaped at the intersection of sociocultural inequality, cultural defiance, and African identity in a globalised beauty narrative. The focus of this study is strictly on black women in South Africa. We believe the study can make a sociological contribution as the rationale of the study addresses the rise in hair extension use, influenced by Western beauty standards, and their implications on local identities. In as much as the authors understand that beauty is personal, so is choice, we seek to find out if there are other factors at play that influence black women's usage of hair extensions.

Research Approach

The study is feminist in nature and we employed a qualitative methodology, which, according to

Neuman (2003), aims to understand the thoughts, behaviours, and experiences of individuals in specific contexts. This approach was deemed contextually appropriate because of its ability to capture the depth and complexity of participants' lived experiences, views, emotions, feelings, and thoughts, thus providing rich, nuanced insights into how black women perceive beauty standards from using hair extensions. From a qualitative perspective, it is vital to understand that the issue of beauty and, in this particular case, hairstyles and choices, is an individual, psychosocial and emotional one. There are different emotional meanings attached to different hair choices. Hence, the study adopted an interpretive approach, emphasising understanding phenomena through the meanings participants ascribe to them. This approach emphasises interpretation and aims to demonstrate how subjective broader societal processes and institutions influence perceptions and experiences of individuals. It acknowledges that perceptions, feelings, thoughts, behaviours, and experiences are socially constructed and shaped by sociocultural definitions (Blanche et al. 2006). This perspective aligns with our goal of exploring socially constructed beauty ideals and the personal, social, and cultural dimensions surrounding them.

The study purposively sampled a total of 15 women to participate. According to De Vos (2005), purposive sampling involves the researcher's judgment in selecting participants. The sample was made up of 10 black Africans, two Indians and three coloured women. For identity purposes, black Africans refer to a group of people having shared cultural and historical black identity experiences, which constitute an indigenous African descent. However, due to apartheid that took place in South Africa, black Africans, Indians and Coloured people were grouped as black Africans. This made them experience a similar politicised and racialised identity background. At the time of the research, three were single (not in a relationship), ten were dating (but

never married), and two were married. Participants were chosen based on their active use of hair extensions, ensuring relevance to the research topic. The diversity in demographics was aimed at representing and hearing different opinions and social experiences. The study included all women of colour because research has shown that they have diverse and unique aesthetic challenges, particularly in terms of their appearance and hair. The study did not specify or limit the participants based on their region of origin, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, ethnic group, or religious or political affiliation. By keeping these aspects and other aspects of women's lives open, the study aimed to ensure a diverse sample of Black women.

The data was collected in Pietermaritzburg's Central Business District (CBD). Pietermaritzburg is the administrative capital of KwaZulu-Natal Province, located on the eastern side of South Africa. The researchers reached out and built rapport with three salon owners so they could approach potential participants. We would then explain our study and its objectives to the women in the salons, and those willing to participate would give us more information on when we could meet them for a proper in-depth interview. The researchers concentrated on salon regulars who always maintain their hairstyles and other beauty enhancements in these salons. After initial contact with the participants, the researchers also used snowball sampling to reach potential participants with the required characteristics. Snowball sampling was employed to supplement recruitment, leveraging participants' networks to identify others who met the study criteria. This approach was particularly effective in reaching women who shared similar interests and experiences with beauty practices. Recruitment was facilitated through collaborations with salon owners, creating a contextually grounded participant pool.

The University of KwaZulu-Natal gave the ethical clearance. Data was collected through in-

depth interviews. Beauty is also a linguistic issue and to ensure that the unique sociocultural linguistic nuances are captured, an interview schedule was developed in both isiZulu and English and used to provide a thematic framework for the conversation and ensure that important points were addressed. Both isiZulu and English were used in the interviews, depending on the preference of the participants. Participants were fully informed about the study and its expectations through the informed consent process. They received and signed a consent form that provided detailed information about the study, their role as participants, and the contact information of key individuals involved in the research. Data was analysed thematically, revealing insights into how societal beauty standards, cultural identity, and individual agency intersect in shaping the participants' choices. The interpretive lens provided context for these findings, highlighting the broader social and cultural implications of beauty practices.

Study findings

This section presents the findings on the use of hair extensions, how they influence their participants' perception of beauty and how they perceive and define beauty. The findings include the influence of socioeconomic conditions in decision-making towards different types of hair extensions and frequency of salon visits, experiences with different hairstyles and the interplay between hair extensions, culture and identity authenticity.

Definition of beauty

As the famous saying goes 'Beauty is in the eye of the beholder', participants gave different ways they define and perceive beauty. Beauty is perspective and the following narrations prove so. The participants viewed beauty as consisting of traits other than physical attributes. They claimed that an individual's behaviour and character have an impact on beauty. Others argue that inner beauty, as opposed to outward appearance, is what defines beauty. Participants shared the following views on how they see and define beauty:

There is inner and outside beauty, but I believe that outer beauty is more significant because it has to do with one's appearance (Billy).

There is inner and outside beauty. That's just my view, but some physical characteristics go well together and look good on a person; but, if that person doesn't personify inner beauty, then it's just not true; they can be just as ugly as anyone else (Sinenhlanhla).

According to the proverb "beauty is in the eyes of the perceiver," I believe that beauty is merely a matter of perception; it refers to how one views oneself. I do not believe that beauty is something that can be seen physically but rather refers to a person's attitude (Nomawethu).

Beauty resides inside. You might have an appealing body or a beautiful individual, but true beauty comes from the inside. It's something that emanates from within and illuminates the outer. This is revealed, and this is made clear. Not everyone can be attractive. A pretty person might also not be attractive. The concept of beauty is simply unique. Everything about beauty is perfect. It's what's inside the person (Ingaphakathi lomuntu). (Jabulile).

As can be seen from the above narrations, the participants intimated that beauty is more than just the face or the body; it's more than just appearance; it has to come from how a person feels from inside self. Historically, the concept of perfect beauty has primarily revolved around women and femininity, placing immense pressure on women and in the current social world

women's bodies continue to represent the prevailing ideal of beauty. Some participants stated that for women physical appearance is a crucial aspect of beauty. How a woman presents herself and her body shape and size are considered significant factors. The participants deemed a body with "thick, curvaceous, wide hips, a narrow waist, and appropriately sized breasts" as an attractive physique. According to Carlyn:

To be beautiful, you must have a thick body shape as well as big breasts and hips. You know that African body because, wow, African body shapes are beautiful. That is the definition of beauty for me (Carlyn).

The size and shape of a woman's body were believed to play a crucial role in her overall attractiveness, as women could alter their bodies to align with their preferences. Other participants specifically emphasized the importance of a slim body and other physical aspects. The participants' descriptions reflect the popular conceptions of physical attractiveness in Western societies as explained by Lindelwa and Avisha below:

Being fair-skinned, having large breasts, slim, flat tummy or having a huge butt are all considered to be beautiful (Lindelwa).

But you know how some people believe that to be considered beautiful, a woman must have a presentable face, not just any face, either with a particular type of nose, eyes, and lips as well as a certain face shape, body shape, and hair as well. In contrast, I believe that a lovely, clear face is attractive (Avisha).

Other participants expanded the definition of beauty to include awareness, appreciation, acceptance, and comfort of one's inner and outer self, free from any obligation to meet expected

beauty standards set by the social norms, in such a way that other people's comments and opinions on what defines beauty no longer bother them. Thabile, Amahle and Billy intimated that:

It's all about confidence, your appearance and mannerisms add to your beauty and appeal. As well as how you conduct yourself, what your beliefs and ideals are, and how you convey those to other people. The most attractive woman in the world, according to them, is Beyonce. That's absurd because there are a ton more attractive individuals in the world, and I believe they made their decision based solely on the appearance of the woman in question. However, appearance alone does not make one attractive. You are the cause of it. I believe that the issue is in the way you conduct yourself and what you do in the outside world (Thabile).

I believe that the qualities of being in your comfort zone, being able to do what you love, and being happy by yourself constitute beauty (Amahle).

I believe that a woman is more attractive from the outside when she is self-assured. She is kind, caring, and ambitious. She isn't deterred by our historical issues with Black people in general or Black women in particular. You know, just keep moving on and don't let anything, no matter how minor, get you down because it's always something geared toward a woman in general and particularly a Black or African woman. Because of the differences in our hair and complexions, as well as other factors that, if you're not a Black woman, you do not comprehend. So, in my opinion, having confidence is key. When you gain self-assurance, everything else

seems to fall into place (Billy).

Participants gave a wide range of definitions and perceptions of beauty. It is very evident from the definitions above that beauty is personal and perceptive. While for others, beauty is centred on physical attributes, for others, non-tangible attributes are considered into play when defining beauty. These attributes are influenced by the prevailing socio-cultural factors. In as much as they reported beauty being inside, the participants, however, emphasised the importance of body image, as can be seen below.

The importance of body image

The participants also explained the physical features of beauty in women. Most of their responses describing a favourable body image of a woman were influenced by prevailing cultural and societal norms. The participants also stated that exposure to 'idealised' media representations had an impact on how women perceive their bodies. The participants' response on what makes a woman beautiful to them on the outside is body image, and how they appears to people outside. Most of the participants appreciated having hourglass figures, large buttocks, broad hips, and round breasts because possessing such body types or features as a woman makes one desirable. Participants intimated that:

So, curves in the shape, hourglass-figure sense. You are aware of your breasts. You have a sort of cinched-in waist, or we have hips, so in the Black community, it's just hips, concentrated around hips, that is the beauty of the woman from the outside (*Ubuhle muntu wesifazane indlela akhiwengayo ngaphandle*) (Zandile).

Having a small waist or figure and being thick and fit as a woman, I consider that to be the outside beauty of a woman (Busisiwe).

Ey, African body shape is how a woman should look from the outside. That shape is beautiful and desirable. Having curves, hips, big buttocks, a small waist, and big round breasts that a body image a woman must have" (Lungile).

Some of the participants also stated that the beauty of a woman from the outside is her hair. If a woman does not maintain or take care of her hair, that woman is not beautiful, regardless of how well-dressed or clean she is. Additionally, having long hair and using hair extensions on one's hair as a woman contributed to one's beauty. The importance of hair for beauty is specifically expressed as follows:

Hair has long been a representation of beauty. Long, straight hair was regarded as beautiful by women. So, the woman with hair can experience or feel that beauty (*Ubuhle bomuntu wesifazane buqala ekhanda*) (No-buhle)

Even if a woman is dressed nicely, if her hair looks messy, it can affect how beautiful she looks. I believe that a woman's hair is a big part of her beauty. Human hair or virgin hair extensions are important when it comes to looking good. They help improve your appearance and make your outfit look complete. There's also a special shine that comes with real, good-quality hair that's hard to explain (Lungile)

One participant stated that the physical beauty of a woman is her complexion. Skin tone is significant in defining beauty in the black community (Hunter, 2002). Light-coloured skin has been and continues to be considered more beautiful than darker-coloured skin. This notion of associating light complexion with beauty is expressed below:

I remember when I was younger, and the folks who, were more popular or more attractive were always people who were lighter skinned. They were not even people we would consider to be highly yellow, but simply browner. So, purely based on my early experiences. That is what describes the beauty of a woman (Thabile).

Therefore, physical appearance remains the most important measurement of beauty, as can be seen from above. However, the dynamics of physical appearance are highly influenced by the media exposure of certain standards and expectations of how a beautiful woman should look.

Exposure to idealised media representations

The researchers also sought to understand the impact of media on how the participants interpret their body images. All the participants in the study stated that there is external pressure on women to look beautiful, including from family, media, friends and different societal institutions. According to Ribane (2006; Odhiambo, 2008), ideals of beauty have cultural roots. Therefore, pressure on women to look attractive is likely a result of social discourses about what women should look like. Some participants in the study expressed the notion that people feel compelled to apply what they watch from the media to their own lives. They claimed that exposure to glamorous celebrities in the media causes some trends in physical appearance to become fashionable. Amahle and Avisha intimated that:

Pressure means from the media, which are the things we see on TV ...to be up to date, I guess. Many girls like to look like someone or someone has a certain weave or has a certain look or is using this and that so you want to also use that because that

other person was using that and they looked beautiful. They are branded, and then we get attracted to them because of celebrities or it's trending on social media, and we use them (Amahle).

I can say in a way there is pressure. Okay, looking around the adverts on TV, the way people look, just the whole media thing, it does influence, or it does pressure women to be beautiful. If you look now at teenagers, they have already started using make-up. Why? Because of the pressure to be beautiful. They believe you have to look beautiful all the time. So yeah, I do believe there is pressure for women to be beautiful (Avisha).

Certain body types are idealized in the media and Wood (2013) argues that the media popularizes the slender body type by idealizing it. Thus, if this is how women's bodies are portrayed in the media, those who fall short of this ideal of beauty may be more likely to experience body dissatisfaction. In light of this, one participant, who was a high school student at the time asserted that the media promote and advertise the kind of beauty they perceive. She also claimed that the kind of beauty portrayed in books, movies, and fashion models often has white characters because these are the idealized beauty standards in the media. The young participant explained that:

I think, basically, you see what the media advertise and advocate for as beauty you see that on the ramps, like models and all that kind of thing. So you know your blonde blue-eyed type of people. Those are the ones that are regarded as beautiful and I mean those are your models and everything, so you kind of see that's the

ideal, you can't miss that, in the literature and movies you just can't miss that (Lindelwa).

Given that the media frequently portrays beauty as something that many women cannot achieve, some participants explained that there is a difference between what is real and what is fake. They expressed that there are some restrictions on what women can do to fulfil the standards of beauty. Woods (1994) argues that women are frequently portrayed in media in a way that deviates from what is accepted as normal. As a result, what the media portrays could not be an accurate representation of reality. The difference between what is real and what is not real in the media depiction of beauty is expressed as follows:

You find some who compare what they see on TV and expect that in real life because they feel like if they can do it on TV, why can't you? They don't realize that we are completely different because this person on TV. You know like Nicki Minaj (a glamorous popular musician) and them and all these American artists, I mean that's what they do for a living, to keep us entertained sort of and it's the extreme lengths that they go through but as a normal person, even finance-wise, they have the money to do extravagant things. I, being a university student, cannot have red hair on this day then purple the next or funny nails or funny hair (Sweetheart).

Most of the participants believed that mass media portrays idealized images of women and that after repeated exposure to these images, women feel pressured to uphold this ideal of beauty, no matter how diverse these ideals are. Given the role of media in shaping and influencing the definition of beauty among women, what does hair has to do with it? What is the role of hair in determining women's perception of beauty?

The importance of hair

Comparisons between different racial groups' physical characteristics, particularly related to beauty, have been a prevalent phenomenon. One key aspect that has been frequently used for comparison is hair. Straight hair has often been considered the ideal type in casual conversations about good hair. On the other hand, discussions about bad hair typically refer to it as "kinky" or "woolly." This distinction has led generations of African women to invest significant time and money in straightening their hair, as they strive to attain societal notions of "beautiful" hair. The consequences of slavery and colonialism extend beyond political and economic exploitation, as they have also marginalized and disregarded the unique features of African-Black women in favour of conventional beauty standards (Robinson, 2011).

We had in-depth discussions with participants on the significance of hair in enhancing women's perceptions of beauty. Some participants claimed that having long, straight hair makes them feel powerful, gorgeous, and healthy. They also emphasized how attractive a woman can be with a good hairstyle as explained below:

All I can say is, the power of a good hairstyle may make you look attractive in even simple clothing (Busisiwe)

I occasionally have good hair days and some I don't. I do feel powerful sometimes, you know, thanks to my hair. If my hair is attractive and healthy. And if I appear attractive and a man is attracted to me, I will have control over him (laughing) (Avisha).

The participants stated that hair plays a significant role in conveying messages about oneself to others. Regardless of style, hair is seen to be important in enhancing people's confidence. They

gave the hair a variety of meanings and believed that it was an integral component of a woman's daily experiences in their culture. Hair is essential because it is a sign of how well someone takes care of oneself daily as explained below:

As much as maybe I may not like certain hairstyles on certain people, I do feel, like your hair is an expression of a part of you. It's also a look, it also forms part of a look you have. It also says how much you take care of yourself. So, it's also hygienic, it's also fashionable. But it's also natural. You know, you should take care of your hair. You should make it part of who you are...It is important to do your hair every day. It should form part of your everyday life" (Nomawethu)

Other participants were of the view that hair attracted the opposite gender. They consistently received compliments from their partners or boy-friends, which made them feel valued and beautiful all the time. Zandile, Nobule and Billy intimated that:

When I was dating this guy, I can recall a time when I altered my hair. I had the impression that he was growing less interested in me, therefore I felt the need to change how I looked. The simplest option is usually to use my hair. A new wardrobe is too expensive to purchase. Regarding your face, there is nothing you can do. Therefore, you can go get your hair radically changed and you'll seem like a whole different person. That is, at least, how I perceive it. Therefore, I recall that I was dating this man while I was away at school. I went home for the weekend, and he was going to visit that following week. I then went home and had my hair cut.

I took off roughly seven to eight inches, giving it a quite extreme hair-cut that was again asymmetrical and given a crimson colour. And he exclaimed, "Whoa! Ayi bandla!" as soon as he entered my home and saw me. Oh my God, look at it, he exclaimed." (Zandile)

When I first meet someone, I'd probably wear my hair straight. Yes, the lines will remain straight. The majority of males like women with straight hair. Most men also enjoy Barbie women. They have a secret crush on Barbie girls (laughing). They merely want to gaze at the Barbie doll every day but are too embarrassed to admit they will marry a girl with curls. So basically, hair plays a huge role in obtaining some standards in life (Nobuhle)

Because hair is like this market for heterosexuality and femininity, it plays a part in how women see their beauty. I have male friends who have made it obvious to me that they enjoy having long, flowing hair. I've noticed that when I have fake hair on my head, men react to me more favourably than when I have my natural hair (Billy).

One of the participants narrated that having good hair can make one look better because, no matter how gorgeous one's dress may be, messy hair would make one feel unattractive:

Regardless of how neatly dressed a woman is, if her hair is messy, she is not prepared to arrive. I believe that a woman's hair greatly enhances her beauty. When it comes to beauty, human hair or virgin hair extensions are

important. It enhances your appearance and completes your outfit. There is this shine that appears when you style an original hair that cannot be explained (Lindelwa).

Some participants narrated that hair is significant since it is one of the ways they express their individuality to others. For Thabile and Snehlanhla:

All I can say is that one of the first things people notice about us and one of the main ways we communicate our identity to others is through our hair. That is why it consistently makes one feel beautiful (Thabile).

I use hair extensions because hair extensions allow me to express myself in a variety of ways while adding glam as needed” (Snehlanhla).

The way one is treated by others and, in turn, how one feels about oneself are both influenced by the way one styles their hair. From this study, it is evident that hair is more than just a plaything; it is a message-laden object. Hair appealed to racial identity politics as well as the bonds amongst African American women (Rooks, 1976). The appearance of one's hair could influence whether or not particular social groups and classes accept it.

Perceptions of beauty relating to the use of hair extensions

Hair extensions are artificial hairs that can be attached to one's own hair, providing a desired look. They are easy to use with clips and can be used for styling purposes or to cover up hair loss. These extensions are long-lasting and resemble real hair, allowing for elegant and confident appearances. They are particularly beneficial for individuals with hair problems, offering the ability to achieve a variety of hairstyles that may not be possible with natural hair. Quality hair extensions come in different styles and require regular

maintenance to keep up their improved appearance. Participants in the study expressed reasons for wearing human/hair extensions. They provided various reasons for wearing these extensions, including ease of maintenance, time and energy-saving, added volume, easy styling, reusability, desired length, and affordability. Some narrations from the participants:

You can use a different hair colour shade for the hair extensions instead of dying your natural hair if you want to add some colour and depth to your hair (Lungile).

Yes, you know if you use different-coloured hair extensions, the illusion of streaks is created as well as added volume and length to your hair (Nomawethu).

The major reason for using hair extensions is how beautiful you look. So, whether you desire a change, more volume, or longer hair (Zandile).

I have less worry if I use hair extensions to my hair because it is simple to maintain and you can re-use them (Lindelwa).

I use hair extensions simply because extension is much easier to style” (Sweetheart).

Yes, to avoid changing hairstyle every month because with human extensions, I paid once and use it as much as I like. It stays longer than natural hair (Nobuhle).

Other participants stated that they preferred wearing human/hair extensions because they give them confidence, pride, and improved self-esteem making them feel beautiful even in the

absence of compliments:

Yes, you know having human extensions gives that confidence, pride, and high self-esteem as an individual. And you feel good maaan!!! that I'm beautiful before anyone says so (Calryn)

Yes, wearing human extensions gives you a card to be beautiful all the time regardless of what hairstyle you do either human extension or braids (Shireen).

For others, wearing human/hair extensions seemed not to be a matter of choice. The participants explained that they used hair extensions because they have thin hair and others had receding hairline:

My reason for using hair extensions is because, it is the best way for increasing length and volume without damaging your natural hair. So, acquiring a pair of extensions is a simple option if you have short, thinning hair or fine hair that never gets full (Billy)

I have thin hair, so using hair extensions will give me the length I want and possibly thickness (Avisha)

I use hair extensions to cover my hairline because my hairline is very bad and I don't like it (Busisiwe)

For others human/hair extensions were a useful way of avoiding damaging their natural which may be caused by heat or chemicals. Thus, they argued that hair extensions come readily processed and cannot be easily damaged:

The reason I use the hair extensions is that my real hair won't be harmed

by chemicals or heat because the extension has already undergone processing and has been given protective treatments (Amahle)

Some participants argued that human hair extensions are more easily maintainable than natural hair.

I don't have to worry about my own hair being tangled, unclean, damaged, or unmanageable while wearing the extension, hair extensions are considerably simpler to maintain than natural hair. That is the reason I use hair extensions (Thabile).

Compliments from others

Most of the participants reported that they always get positive comments when they use hair extensions or when they have new hairstyles. They get positive comments and compliments such as they look beautiful. This shows that the beauty of the woman starts from the head and hair represents self-care. The compliments and positive comments are specifically expressed as follows:

They always compliment and say I look beautiful, and ask questions such as where you did your hairstyle, how much, who did your hair and what is the name of your hair extensions I used (Sweetheart).

They always compliment me and say I look beautiful (Jabulile)

They normally see me as more beautiful, whenever I use hair extensions (Snenhlanhla).

The participants also stated that their partners gave them positive comments about their appearance when they use hair extensions and told them that they look beautiful and attractive. The positive comment from the opposite gender is specifically expressed as follows:

My partner normally says I'm beautiful whenever I do a new hairstyle (Thabile).

My male friends, always compliment my new look (Nobuhle).

He once said when I did my hair, I looked more beautiful to him and others. He said he noticed that when I have a new hairstyle, people always look at him (Busisiwe).

He always says I look beautiful, and he always notices whenever I change my hairstyle. He said I look beautiful, and I always do hairstyles that suit me and my complexion (Billy).

A few of the participants stated that their male friends or partners did not care much about them using hair extensions.

He does not care about this beauty enhancement, especially hair extensions (Lindelwa).

Well, my partner does not care much about the hair extensions, and I do think he knows the difference (Lungile).

The negative effects of using hair extensions

Hair extensions have gained popularity worldwide, but they also come with drawbacks and potential damage. Issues such as hairline loss, itching, heat, dandruff, headaches, and tightness have been associated with the use of hair extensions. Research suggests that women with central centrifugal cicatricial alopecia (CCCA), a type of hair loss, are more likely to wear hair weaves, cornrows, and tightly braided extensions. CCCA, a form of alopecia more prevalent in Black women, can lead to permanent hair loss, but treatment options are available to prevent further

damage. In this study, participants were asked about the negative effects they experienced when using hair extensions and hairstyling. The findings align with the existing literature, as Black women in the study reported similar negative effects such as experiencing itchiness and dandruff when using hair extensions or engaging in certain hairstyles. Excerpts below narrate women's experiences on this:

Yes, for me I normally experience dandruff and itching (Zandile)

I experience too much dandruff (Sweetheart)

Yes, I always have a headache and itching (Carlyn)

For me its itching and headache (Avisha)

Yes, for me is a headache for the first day I have done my hair because it is too tight (Lungile).

Yes, the tightness of my hairstyle and weave that makes me lose my hairline (Snenhlanhla)

Yes, these hair extensions are too hot and making lose your hair (Nomawethu)

Yes, having extensions on your head makes my scalp so dry and itch all the time" (Shireen)

Hair as a beauty marker for women

The study sought to understand the importance of hair as an important part of their overall beauty as a women. Most participants believed that hair and, specifically, hairstyling enhanced their beauty. After all, a beautiful style can significantly enhance one's overall appearance, and it adds to natural beauty.

Yes, umm because it enhances your beauty. Hairstyle makes you beautiful, and it adds to your natural beauty

(Nobuhle)

Yes, because hair is a beauty enhancer. A beautiful style can significantly enhance your overall appearance! There's nothing like getting a lovely new hairstyle. Finding and trying out new hairstyles is always enjoyable, whether they are for a special occasion or a fresh appearance every day (Jabulile)

Women must have hair because hair is a beauty enhancer to us (Sweet-heart).

Yes, because, women and their self-esteem place a lot of importance on the topic of hair. Because it is both private and public, we frequently perceive our hair as a reflection of who we are. The way people see your hair can have a big impact on you as a woman (Avisha).

Yes, it will give you confidence as a woman if you have good or nice hair or hairstyle (Billy).

One participant claimed that having bad hair or hairstyle can affect a person's entire day and make one feel more self-conscious and vulnerable:

Yes, because you are more affected by a bad hairstyle than you realize. A bad hairstyle will not only make you appear horrible, but it will also negatively affect the rest of your day and make you feel more self-conscious and vulnerable (Carlyn).

Also, one participant stated that having good hair is associated with one's intelligence and capabilities.

Yes, because having good hair makes you feel more knowledgeable and competent" (Thabile)

The research findings revealed that South African Black women view their hair as a means of expressing self-love and authenticity, aligning with previous studies highlighting Black women's use of hair as a form of self-expression. Notably, the participants associated their hair with both self-expression and beauty enhancement. It was interesting to note that beauty and self-expression were perceived as closely intertwined, with the participants viewing their hair as a means of expressing their true selves. However, the research also unveiled that in certain contexts, particularly corporate environments, Black women felt that expressing love for their hair could lead to them being perceived as out of place despite simply embracing their authentic selves.

Discussion

Diversities in the conceptualisation of beauty.

The perception of beauty is one of the vexing intricacies in the post-colonial age of Africa, by virtue of the inclusion of Eurocentricity as the defining lens of beauty in African societies (Montle, 2020). As can be seen from the participants' definition of beauty, there is no one-size-fits-all definition of beauty. In addition to being perceptive, we found that beauty is contextual. According to Ribane (2006), the notions of beauty tend to be time-specific, with black subjectivity inevitably affected by the barriers erected by colonialism to black economic, political and educational development as well as changing morality. The rationale for asking the participants about their own comprehension and perceptions of beauty was to find out what hair has to do with how they perceive beauty. The study found that some spoke of beauty as a state of the mind, how one feels from the inside, which is famously referred to as inner beauty. This is evidenced by some participants saying that '*true beauty comes from the inside*' or '*beauty resides*

inside'.

Others define beauty as all about confidence, attitude, mannerisms, how one conducts oneself, beliefs, values, ideals and how one conveys that to other people. This is supported by Fasiku and Stephen's (2025:1) argument that "the concept of beauty has always been deeply intertwined with cultural, social and historical contexts." Some participants intimated that appearance alone does not make one attractive for a long time. Participants expressed that physical appearance (attractiveness) can capture the attention at first, but going forward, certain qualities are needed to enhance that beauty and make it last, which include confidence, respect, kindness, humility, caring, resilience, attitude and ambition. This concurs with Fasiku and Stephens' (2025:1) assertion that "in African societies, traditional views of beauty are not merely about physical appearance but are also reflections of cultural identity, communal values and social norms." This was also echoed by Matiza's (2013:65) argument that in the African context, beauty is also characterised by functionality. Beauty is not for the sake of being beautiful, but has a social character; rather than being individualistic, it is communal as it must serve to communicate values, norms, morals and purpose (Matiza, 2013). This is because characteristics such as being respectful, humble and resilient are seen as priceless from a community level and possessing these makes one seem even more beautiful, and they are seen to be in line with the socially prevailing norms, morals and purpose.

Others spoke of beauty in women as being self-assured. This was elaborated as the ability to be free from pressure to conform to societal beauty standards, which is also seen as a source and sign of beauty by some participants. Studies by Ogana and Ojong (2013; Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987) found that the female body is the terrain where social truths are forged and social contradictions played out, as well as the locus of personal resistance, activity and struggle. In our

study, some women expressed that true beauty comes from the strength of being able to resist the continuously changing winds of what society deems a beautiful woman. If a woman is able to resist these so-called western beauty standards and stays true to what they call 'true to her African-self', that person is very self-assured, confident and therefore more beautiful because she does not need any external enhancers to define her beauty. In the absence of beauty enhancers, what would happen to those who depend on them to define beauty? From these arguments and insights, we, therefore, argue that beauty is more of a feeling rather than an actual physical attribute.

Unsurprisingly, other participants expressed that beauty has everything to do with outward physical appearance. Tangible physical features such as curves, hourglass figures, hips, a small waist, and being thick and fit are what make a woman beautiful from the outside. They mentioned that being fair-skinned, having big round breasts (others spoke of appropriately sized breasts), slim, flat tummy, having a presentable face with a certain face shape, a particular type of nose, eyes, lips, a big butt, and good hair is important in defining beauty in a woman. The importance of breasts in determining beauty was captured in Zwane's (2021:157) study, which found that "participants perceived breast cancer as an erosion of their beauty and femininity." The statement 'appropriate breasts' is also a questionable statement. It entrenches toxic expectations of how women's breasts should be. How does society and its people define what appropriate breasts are? In whose eyes? Who is chosen to be used as a frame of reference in all this? Who chooses them? In African societies, traditional beauty standards often emphasise natural physical traits that are closely tied to one's ethnicity and cultural heritage (Fasiku and Stephens, 2025). The women in this study reported that a fuller body shape (African) is traditionally associated with being healthy, therefore beautiful. Similar findings were also reported by Fasiku and Stephens (2025) within the Yoruba culture.

For those who mentioned hair as a marker of beauty, it was not just any hair, but having long and straight hair was regarded by the participants as a feature of beauty, while others saw hair as a beauty enhancer and expression of beauty. Hence the statement, “*the power of a good hairstyle.*” The participants reported that hair is seen as important in enhancing people’s beauty and, therefore, confidence. Good hair boosts one’s confidence. A study by Lal and Kumar (2022) reported that females with longer hair are considered a beauty standard and more acceptable in society. In a study among black African female students in South Africa, only 15.1% of the respondents in a sample of 159 thought that African natural hair was beautiful (Oyedemi, 2016). Unsurprisingly, half of the respondents identified the European and Asian categories of texture and styles as the most beautiful (Oyedemi, 2016). Oyedemi (2016) argues that this is one form of cultural violence.

Participants also expressed that the way they take care of their hair helps in expressing their individuality and identities to others. Hence, one participant was quoted as saying, ‘*We communicate our identity to others through our hair*’. That uniqueness is what makes them feel beautiful. Hence, the Zulu phrase ‘*ubuhle bomuntu we-sifazane buqala ekhanda*’ (the beauty of a woman starts on the head) was said several times by the participants. This shows that there is so much sensitivity and significance that women attach to the way their hair looks. The feeling of being different, but not too different, as long as it’s in line with the prevailing social identity norms. Hence, the usage of hair extensions provides any desired look to create or enhance a certain physical appearance. This feeling of individuality is evident from the participants’ expressions of the comments and compliments they receive. For instance, when others ask them where they did their hair, it raises that uniqueness and uniquely differentness feeling in an individual, which then boosts and enhances an individual’s

feeling and perception of how beautiful they look. It has been widely reported by the participants that they are seen as more beautiful whenever they use their hair extensions. Therefore, the western identity of hairstyling has become a prevailing blue-chip prospect in modern-day Africa (Montle, 2020).

Participants indicated they can use different hair colours for their extensions instead of dying their natural hair. The desired look includes adding hair volume and length. It is easy to change the colours of the extensions or weaves one uses, depending on the mood of the day, rather than applying different dye colours on their natural hair, which is expensive and easily damages their hair. Contrary to popular belief, Dosekun (2021:63) argues that the ever-progressive hair and beauty technology of weaves and wigs, and the use of these hairstyles in the lives of Black women in Africa, should not be looked at “...as evidence of a relative racial self-hatred and inferiority complex; as a form of repudiating ‘blackness’ and sign of desiring ‘whiteness’.” Nevertheless, Dosekun (2021) argues that, contrary to popular Western belief, Black women do not wear weaves and wigs because they hate themselves, but that they use these hairstyles to both play around with their hair and is a hairstyle preference for some. Similarly, this study also found that some black women use hair extensions (weaves or wigs) as another form of exploring creativity with their hair. The participants reported using hair extensions to add depth, length, volume, and to cover their thinning hair and hair-line. Others reported that they use different-coloured extensions to create any desired look. This can be argued that it gives black women freedom to wear any hair for any desired look. By not using different chemicals and dyes to create a desired look, black women reported that they use hair extensions for this so that they do not harm their real (natural) hair, since the hair extensions they use have already undergone processing. Others expressed that they do not have to worry about their own hair being tangled, unclean,

damaged or unmanageable while wearing hair extensions. Furthermore, hair extensions have been reported as simpler to maintain.

According to Ogana and Ojong (2013:114), “in striving to meet the idealised thick or thin body, women all too often measure themselves through the men’s eyes.” There is also a belief that a good hairstyle attracts the opposite gender (men). Participants expressed their experiences on how men reacted to them upon seeing what they believed was good, well-taken hair. It was expressed by other participants that hair is a market for heterosexuality and femininity and men have been seen to react more favourably to women with ‘fake’ long straight hair than when they have natural hair. Participants also emphasised how they are complimented by their partners (male) whenever they do a new hairstyle.

However, the quest for beauty comes with its costs, be it financial, time or the body of the individual itself. As put out by Matjila (2020:53), “Suffering for beauty is a common experience that I share with many black women...” The participants in this study reported that they also have negative experiences with using hair extensions. Participants reported that they experience issues such as dandruff, itching, headache, loss of hair-line, and extensions can be too hot and make the scalp dry. Just like a study by Nxumalo et al. (2022) reveals the great lengths women go through to sexually satisfy men at the cost of their sexual and reproductive health, this study also uncovers the extremes women go through in their quest for beauty, even at the expense of their heads. Byrd and Tharps (2001; Zulu, 2023) also reported that many women experience pain stemming from Eurocentric hair practices that cause scalp damage and hair loss in the elusive quest of achieving ‘good’ hair to feel more beautiful.

Role of the media

From the findings of this study, one can conclude that there is a globalisation of beauty standards. In other words, there is a localisation of the

global standards of what good hair is and the perception of beauty. Media has influenced people’s perception of beauty roles and what is considered good, beautiful or attractive (Mills et al. 2017; Lal and Kumar, 2022). A study by Fasiku and Stephen (2025) reveals that the perception of beauty is increasingly influenced by global ideals, which are often at variance with traditional African concepts of beauty. Lal and Kumar (2022) assert that media play a significant role in shaping the perception of beauty and gender roles by showing people’s images in media through adverts and cinema, which influences individuals to act or think. The media has become the vehicle for the globalisation of these beauty standards. However, we do ask here, which beauty standards are being globalised here? Is it the Western standards, Asian or African? How are the Western standards of beauty about hair triumphing within African societies, even in the era of decolonial conversations? How do African women choose which global standards of beauty to localise? Participants in this study reported that there is pressure from the media platforms. Participants reported that the media, through adverts on television and dramas, forces people to consume certain beauty standards, and for many others, consequently, feel pressured to adapt to such standards. From the social comparison theory, the media leads people to compare themselves with the ones they see on these platforms, thus leading some women to believe that long weaves are more beautiful than their own natural hair.

The commercialisation of beauty is evident here as some participants made examples of Beyoncé and Nicki Minaj on how they are seen by many as the epitome of beauty. Given that they are always seen in public with long hair (weaves or hair extensions), many would feel pressured to want such a look. The other symptom of the pressure and influence of media is the usage of make-up and weaves by teenagers. From the participants’ narratives, teenagers are pressured by what they consume from the media into looking

beautiful; therefore, the usage of weaves and hair extensions at a young age. This is due to the social pressure of adopting a more Eurocentric look that begins at an early stage through socialisation (Bencosme, 2017). Lal and Kumar (2022) raise an important issue in their study: the meme culture. Though the memes are made for a joke's sake, sometimes they promote negative stereotypes about people's appearances in the mind, Lal and Kumar (2022) argued. This, in some cases, leads to what has come to be termed as online, cyberbullying or technologically facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV).

Where to from here?

Where to from here? According to Matjila (2020), there is a strong need to stress and emphasise the need to liberate and decolonise the mindset of black communities regarding hair and to wean young black girls from the Eurocentric subliminal messages of hair care companies. Some of the effects of body dissatisfaction include taking unhealthy, drastic measures to address it and poor mental health. A study by Stockton (2013) reported that people who perceive that they are 'very unattractive' or 'unattractive' are more likely to experience suicidal ideation. In other words, body dissatisfaction is influenced not only by how we interpret societal ideals but also by how we perceive ourselves. There is a need for a Black Consciousness Movement on hair, especially for those who think their African hair is bad. The black dominated media needs to play its part in showcasing natural African hair so that the youngsters will not have access to these Eurocentric subliminal messages that tend to make them think that non-African hair is more beautiful than theirs. This needs more of a psychological warfare on making black people see their hair in favourable terms. The black media and its black personalities, so-called 'influencers', need to play their role in making sure that they resist the attempts to make black Africans look bad to their market, thereby creating resistance to this psychological identity oppression. A powerful example is the former Miss

Universe, Zozibini Tunzi, who was lauded by many other women and girls around the world for representing them on a global stage with her natural hair movement (Bhengu, 2021). The critical question here will be, does it have to get to this? The power of ideology to prescribe what black bodies may look like needs to be resisted. Ribane (2006) advocating a Black perspective moves away from the historically laid out definitions of beauty. This would advance an Afrocentric stake in contemporary notions of thick/thin body ideals that can be summed up as follows:

...indigenous knowledge has been suppressed and African achievement denigrated and discounted. It is up to Africa to stop looking to the West for direction and permission and reclaim the pride, dignity and knowledge that is ours[...]. But only when we can tap into our own culture and find our identity as a people, can we be truly proud of who we are and where we are headed (Ribane, 2006: 6).

Institutionally, the South African government must make policy interventions on this if they are serious about maintaining and safeguarding this part of African identity, just like it did with other aspects of African identities, such as language. To challenge the pressure placed on black South African women to conform to Eurocentric hair standards, top-down meaningful policy and educational interventions are needed. There should be a policy from the Department of Basic Education that emphasises and hinders other schools from discriminating against black female students based on their hair. This is a developmental age where young black women are still learning about the most important parts of their identity. It will be very detrimental to their growth to learn at a young age that their natural hair is deemed inappropriate by certain government institutions that are meant to safeguard their holistic identities and growth. Having their natural hair accepted and celebrated at a young age will make them grow with a positive picture of their natural African hair. Furthermore, this will also give

young black girls positive mental health since they will not have to be constantly told about the inappropriateness of their natural hair in schools. Educationally, the educational curricula should also reflect the demographic diversity of the country and the continent at large. African natural hair and its styles should be showcased in educational texts so that black people take pride in their hair. How can black African women take

pride in something that even their media or school curricula try so hard to hide? There should also be workplace policies that protect individuals from discrimination based on their African hairstyle, which is often labelled untidy, unprofessional or inappropriate. The audacity to say an African woman's hair is unprofessional, in the African continent, is perplexing.

REFERENCES

- Adewuyi, D. 2012. The Western and Yoruba Concept of Beauty: A Comparative Analysis, *LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research*, 9(2): 1–10. Available at: <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/lwati/article/view/79735>
- Ando, K., Giorgianni, F.E., Danthinne, E.S. and Rodgers, R.F. 2021. Beauty ideals, social media, and body positivity: A qualitative investigation of influences on body image among young women in Japan. *Body Image*, 38: 358-369.
- Ashe, B.D. 1995. Why don't he like my hair?": Constructing African-American standards of beauty in Tony Morrison's song of Solomon and Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God. *African American review*, 29 (4): 579-592
- Banks, I. 2000. *Hair Matters: Beauty, Power, and Black Woman's Consciousness*. New York: New York University Press.
- Baron, S.S. 2005. (Un) lawfully Beautiful: The Legal (De) construction of Female Beauty. *BCL Review*, 46: 359.
- Bencosme, Y. 2017. Beauty is Pain: Black Women's Identity and Their Struggle with Embracing Their Natural Hair. *Perspectives*: 9(1).
- Blanche, M.T., Blanche, M.J.T., Durrheim, K. and Painter, D. (eds.) 2006. *Research in practice: Applied methods for the social sciences*. Juta and Company Ltd.
- Bryant, S.L., 2013. The beauty ideal: the effects of European standards of beauty on Black women. *Columbia Social Work Review*, 11(1): 80-91.
- Byrd, A. D. and Tharps, L. L. 2001. *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America*. St. Martin's Press; First Edition.
- De Vos, A.S., 2005. Qualitative data analysis and interpretation, in AS de Vos, H. Strydom, CB Fouché & CSL Delport (eds.), *Research at Grass Roots—For the social sciences and human service professions*, Van Schaik Publishers, Pretoria.

- Dosekun, S. 2021. *African feminisms*. In The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies, Yacob-Haliso, O and Falola, T. (eds), 47-63.
- Durosaro, A.I., Ajiboye, S.K. and Oniye, A.O., 2012. Perception of skin bleaching among female secondary school students in Ibadan metropolis, Nigeria. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 3(7): 40-46.
- Erasmus, Z. 1997. 'Oe! My hare gaan huistoe': Hair-styling as black cultural practice. *Agenda*, 32: 11-16.
- Erasmus, Z. 2001. Coloured by history, shaped by place: New perspectives on coloured identities in Cape Town. (*No Title*).
- Fasiku, G.C. and Stephen, E. 2025. Enhancement technology and African perspectives on beauty: exploring the impact of global beauty standard on African cultural identity. *Nnadiesube Journal of Philosophy*, 8(2): 132-138
- FSR Inc. (n.d.) 'Western Domination and the Racialization of Beauty'. Available at: <https://www.fsrinc.org/racialization-beauty%C2%A0/>
- Fontes, O.D.A., Borelli, F.C. and Casotti, L.M. 2012. Como ser homem e ser belo? Um estudo exploratório sobre a relação entre masculinidade e o consumo de beleza. *REAd. Revista Eletrônica de Administração (Porto Alegre)*, 18: 400-432.
- Gyekye, K. 1996. *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, Philadelphia, PA: Sankofa Publishing Company.
- Henriques, M. and Patnaik, D. 2020. Social media and its effects on beauty. In *Beauty-Cosmetic Science, Cultural Issues and Creative Developments*. Intech Open.
- Hunter, M.L. 2002. If you're light you're alright: light skin color as social capital for women of color. *Gender & Society*, 16(2):175-193.
- Hunter, M. 2007. The persistent problem of colorism: Skin tone, status, and inequality. *Sociology compass*, 1(1): 237-254.
- Hunter, M.L. 2011. Buying racial capital: Skin-bleaching and cosmetic surgery in a globalized world. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 4(4): 142-164.
- Hunter, M.L. 2013. *Race, gender, and the politics of skin tone*. Routledge.
- Kwan, S. and Trautner, M.N. 2009. Beauty work: Individual and institutional rewards, the reproduction of gender, and questions of agency. *Sociology Compass*, 3(1): 49-71.
- Lal, R., Kumar, D. and Singh, A.G. 2022. Body Image and Beauty Standards: Role of Media in Shaping Perceptions. *The Journal of Oriental Research Madras* 92(2): 45 - 64

- Lanto, S.M. 2021. *Disruptive innovation by start-ups in the South African skincare market* (Doctoral dissertation, Wits Business School).
- Le Roux, J. and Oyedemi, T.D., 2023. Entrenched coloniality? Colonial-born black women, hair and identity in post-apartheid South Africa. *African Studies*, 82(2): 200-214.
- Lee, J. 2018 'Unpacking the influence of Western beauty standards', *The Johns Hopkins Newsletter*. Available at: <https://www.jhunewsletter.com/article/2018/11/unpacking-the-influence-of-western-beauty-standards>
- Matiza, V. M. 2013. African Social Concept of Beauty: Its Relevancy to Literary Criticism. *Asian Journal of Social Science & Humanities*, 2(2): 61-70.
- Mills, J.S., Jadd, R. and Key, B.L. 2013. Wanting a body that's better than average: the effect of manipulated body norms on ideal body size perception. *Body Image* 9(3): 365-372.
- Mills, J.S., Shannon, A. and Hogue, J. 2017. Beauty, body image, and the media. Levine, M.P. (ed), *Perception of beauty*, 145-157.
- Montle, M.E., 2021. Skin whitening as a menace to African identity through Tony Morrison's 'The Bluest Eyes': An Afrocentric examination. *Rainbow: Journal of Literature, Linguistics and Culture Studies*, 10(2): 135-142.
- Marco, J.L. 2012. *Hair representations among Black South African women: Exploring identity and notions of beauty* (Doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa).
- Matjila, C.R. 2020. *The 'Business' of hair: the meaning of hair for Southern African Black women* (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Free State).
- Molaaphene, P., 2024. *Investigating constructions of beauty amongst young, urban, Black South African women as influenced by their socio-cultural contexts*. University of Witwatersrand, South Africa. Accessed at: <https://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/items/d11cebcc-fc10-404c-8269-b0d9d560791c>
- Montle, M.E. 2020. Debunking Eurocentric ideals of beauty and stereotypes against African natural hair (styles): An Afrocentric perspective. *Journal of African Foreign Affairs*, 7(1):111-127.
- Motseki, M. and Oyedemi, T., 2017. Social media and the cultural ideology of beauty among young black women in South Africa. *Communitas*, 22: 136-148.
- Motseki, M.C., 2019. *Black erasure and celebrity peddling of whiteness: A study of skin bleaching among black women in South Africa* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Neuman, W.L. 2003. *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. 5th (ed) Boston. MA: Allyn and Bacon.

- Ngandu-Kalenga Greensword, S., 2022. Historicizing black hair politics: A framework for contextualizing race politics. *Sociology compass*, 16(8), p.e13015.
- Olasode, O. A. 2009. Chemical hair relaxation and adverse outcomes among negroid women in South West Nigeria. *Journal of Pakistan Association of Dermatologists*, 19: 203-207.
- Odhiambo, T. 2008. The black female body as a ‘consumer and a consumable’ in the current Drum and True Love magazines in South Africa. *African Studies*, 67(1): 71-80.
- Ogana, W.N. and Ojong, V.B. 2013. The thin/thick body ideal: Zulu women's body as a site of cultural and postcolonial feminist struggle, *Agenda*, 27(4): 110-119,
- Okafor, C.G. 2007. Global encounters: ‘Barbie’ in Nigerian Agbogho-mmuo mask context. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 19(1): 37-54.
- Oyedemi, T. 2016. Beauty as violence: ‘beautiful’ hair and the cultural violence of identity erasure. *Social Identities*, 22(5): 537-553.
- Patton, T.O. 2006. Hey girl, am I more than my hair?: African American women and their struggles with beauty, body image, and hair. *NWSA journal* 24-51.
- Pitché, P., Kombaté, K. and Tchangai-Walla, K. 2005. Cosmetic use of skin-bleaching products and associated complications. *International journal of dermatology*, 44: 39-40.
- Poran, M. 2006. The Politics of Protection: Body Image, Social Pressures, and the Misrepresentation of Young Black Women, *Sex Roles*, 55: 739–755
- Ribane, N. 2006. *Beauty: A Black Perspective*, Scottsville: UKZN Press
- Robinson, C.L. 2011. Hair as Race: Why “Good Hair” May Be Bad for Black Females, *Howard Journal of Communications*, 22(4): 358-376
- Robinson, P.A. 2011. Perceptions of beauty and identity: the skin bleaching phenomenon in Jamaica. *Adult Education Research Conference*. <https://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2011/papers/85>
- Robinson, P.A. 2011. *Skin bleaching in Jamaica: A colonial legacy*. Texas A&M University.
- Robinson-Moore, C.L. 2008. Beauty Standards Reflect Eurocentric Paradigms--So What? Skin Colour, Identity, and Black Female Beauty. *Journal of Race & Policy*, 4(1).
- Scheper-Hughes N and Lock M. 1987. The mindful body: a prolegomenon to future work in medical anthropology, *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 1: 6–41.
- Shelembe, T.B. 2014. *Investigating the body self-relationship in young Black South African women* (Doctoral dissertation).

Siebler, K., 2023. Bonnets, braids, and big afros: the politics of Black characters' hair. *Feminist Media Studies*, 23(8), pp.4026-4040.

Stockton, C.A. 2013. *Appearance-Based Predictors of Suicidal Behavior*. Electronic Theses and Dissertations. University of Memphis Digital Commons

Thompson, C. 2008. Black women and identity: What's hair got to do with it. *Michigan Feminist Studies*, 22(1).

Thompson, C. 2009. Black women, beauty, and hair as a matter of being. *Women's Studies*, 38(8): 831-856.

Thornton, B. and Moore, S. 1993. Physical attractiveness contrast effect: Implications for self-esteem and evaluations of the social self. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 19(4), pp.474-480.

Tsatalis, J. 2020. Christina M. Jenkins: Weaving the History of Artificial Hair Extensions. *SKIN The Journal of Cutaneous Medicine*, 4(3): 302-303.

Wood, J.M. 2013. *Patriarchy, feminism and Mary Daly: A systematic-theological enquiry into Daly's engagement with gender issues in Christian theology* (Doctoral dissertation).

Wolf, N. 2013. *The beauty myth: How images of beauty are used against women*. Random House.

White, C. 2011. Our own standards of beauty. *Essence*, 42(7): 18-27.

Zangwill, N. 2012. 'Beauty', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 4 September. Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/beauty/>

Zulu, B. 2024. *Travelling hair pains of the past: The continued impact of colonialism on the construction of black women's hair*. Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in the field of Justice and Transformation, University of Cape Town, South Africa

Zwane, D. 2021. Our beauty is in our breasts: a culture-centered approach to understanding cancer perceptions in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. *Qualitative Health Research*, 31(1): 148-159.