



The Value of Tshivenda Proverbs in the Upbringing of a Child in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

Proverbs have historically played an imperative role in the upbringing of Vhavenda children. Many African communities have used proverbs since time immemorial, and Vhavenda is no exception. Proverbs are defined as sayings that express a generally accepted truth or belief of the folk. It is one of the expressive genres in African literature that used to and continues to be transmitted from generation to generation through word of mouth. This article sought to collect and analyse some selected Tshivenda proverbs for their significance in the upbringing of children in the 21st century. Asserting to the focus of this article is a Tshivenda proverbial expression, *Funguvhu lo ri thilaiwi! la fhira muḍi lo kovhela* (The raven said none should advise her! and it flew past the village after sunset). This proverbial expression is applied by Vhavenda in their conversations with their children whenever their advice is scorned. The nature of the article dictated that a qualitative approach be employed. 16 theme-relevant Tshivenda proverbs were extracted from Tshikota using the content analysis method. This article's arguments were guided by conceptual metaphor theory, which was developed by Lakoff and Johnson in 1980. Advocates of the conceptual metaphor theory argue that metaphors influence our thinking and actions. Thus, the conceptual system is metaphorical. Textual data was analysed using the textual analysis method, where data was categorised in terms of commonalities in themes relevant to children and youth. The study revealed that Tshivenda proverbs, though old in terms of authorship, are still relevant in the upbringing of children in the 21st century. The study recommends that society should not shun away from applying proverbs in their communicative situations with children, as they play a pivotal role in their upbringing. The study contributes to linguistic research on African oral traditions and cultural preservation by highlighting the function of Tshivenda proverbs in preserving cultural values and guaranteeing their applicability in modern society.

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INTRODUCTION

South Africa is a multicultural society consisting of several ethnic groups, which are the following: the Tswana, the Swazi, the Tsonga, the Ndebele, the Xhosa, the Zulu, the Pedi, the Sotho and the Venda.¹ Each of the ethnic groups mentioned above is rich in oral tradition or folklore, which consists of legends, music, oral history, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs, fairy tales, stories, riddles, ceremonies and rituals.²

¹ T.D. Raphaelalani, *The Impact of the Customary Marriages Act (Act No 120 of 1998) on the Prevalence of Divorce among the Vhavenda in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province in South Africa* (Thohoyandou: University of Venda, 2015), 17.

² Andy Bennett, "Towards a Cultural Sociology of Popular Music," *Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 4 (2008): 419–32.

Though each of the above ethnic groups has a peculiar oral tradition handed down from one generation to the next by word of mouth, some practices cut across all these cultures. Such practices include the use of proverbs in their daily conversations. Of all the genres, Sone regards proverbs as universal in their occurrences, sources and characteristics.³ The Venda ethnic group, which is normally referred to as Vhavenda, speaks Tshivenda, which is one of the 11 South African official languages.⁴ The language Tshivenda, is primarily spoken in the Vhembe District of the Limpopo Province of South Africa. Thus, Vhavenda refers to the people of Venda, who speak the Tshivenda language, and they believe in the language of the proverbs.⁵

African society is experiencing a decline in the transmission of its culture from one generation to another through oral literature.⁶ In the 21st century, many societies seem to have lost interest in their folklore. One aspect of folklore which appears to be declining fast is the use of proverbs in Vhavenda communicative situations.⁷ The vanishing of this important folklore genre, proverbs, appears to negatively impact Vhavenda children's upbringing and society's general moral fibre. This article is centred on analysing identified Tshivenda proverbs and their significance in the upbringing of children in the 21st century. The article examines the significance of proverbs in the upbringing of children and youth in the 21st century by analysing some of the selected theme-relevant Tshivenda proverbs. This article focuses on identifying, selecting and analysing the potential value and significance of Tshivenda proverbs in the upbringing of children in the 21st century.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customs in many cultures, including the Vhavenda culture, are transmitted from one generation to another through informal ways, including oral tradition or folklore.⁸ Folklore is an expressive genre that consists, amongst many other things, of legends, music, oral history, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs, fairy tales, stories, riddles, ceremonies, and rituals. All the above-mentioned expressive genres are important in the transmission of the traditions and customs of the majority of African people.⁹ One expressive genre that cuts across multitudes of cultures and the language of the world is proverbs. This is alluded to by Yell who says "The usefulness of proverbs has crossed cultures and endured through centuries of oral literacy."¹⁰

There are various categories into which proverbs can be classified, which include, amongst others, classification in terms of theme, keywords, explicit content and implied allusion.¹¹ In terms of content, Mafela further classifies proverbs into the following categories: religion, kinship relations, hope and despair, caution, warning against belittling others, parts of the body, bad influences, warning against pretense, foresight and preparation, wisdom and foolishness, good fortune and fate, domestic animals, changes in times and seasons. From the above classification of proverbs, one can safely say that there is a proverb applicable to each imaginable context in life.¹²

In terms of potential value and significance, proverbs provide general wisdom that has been tested and stood the test of time. The wisdom that proverbs provide is distilled from human and social experiences.¹³ Besides providing wisdom, proverbs also provide truth, morals, and traditional views of life.¹⁴ In addition, Mandziuk indicates that proverbs encapsulate their potential value and

³ E.M. Sone, *Commonwealth Youth and Development*, 2nd ed., 10 (2012), 113.

⁴ Republic of South Africa (RSA), *Final Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996)* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 1996).

⁵ L.M. Mudimeli, *The Impact of Religious and Cultural Discourse on the Leadership Development of Women in the Ministry* (Pretoria: UNISA, 2011), 17.

⁶ M. J. Mafela, *Tshivenda Literature* (Pretoria: Khande Publishers, 2005).

⁷ Tshinets David Raphalalani, "The Significance and Appropriateness of Tshivenda Proverbs in New South Africa," *Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology* 8, no. 3 (2017): 98–105.

⁸ Raphalalani, "The Significance and Appropriateness of Tshivenda Proverbs in New South Africa."

⁹ Raphalalani, "The Significance and Appropriateness of Tshivenda Proverbs in New South Africa."

¹⁰ S.M. Yell, *Recognizing the Value of Teaching Proverbs: Multicultural Origins of Oral and Written Literacy* (USA: Florida International University, 2012).

¹¹ Mafela, *Tshivenda Literature*, 28.

¹² Mafela, *Tshivenda Literature*, 28.

¹³ Sone, *Commonwealth Youth and Development*.

¹⁴ W. Mieder, *Proverbs* (London: Greenwood Press, 2004), 3.

significance in a figurative manner.¹⁵ Regarding the figurative manner or language of proverbs, Raphalalani indicates that “Proverbs are metaphorical in that they do not mean what the words are saying. They are figurative and should not be interpreted literally. Their figurative mode abounds in metaphor.”¹⁶ This means that proverbs should not be taken literally since they don't mean what the words they are composed of mean. Thus, there is a need for one to establish the symbolic meaning of each proverb. On the issue of the hidden meaning of proverbs, Norrick alludes that the proverb is a traditional didactic genre with a figurative meaning.¹⁷

In addition to the potential value and significance of proverbs to society, Make, et.al., indicate that they teach moral principles to the young generation.¹⁸ The potential value and significance of proverbs referred to by Norrick is alluded to by Mieder who says proverbs “... hit people like a hard brick with their continuous claim of moral authority and didactic intent.”¹⁹

Proverbs are used by people of all ages in their daily conversions in any situation or aspect of life, including high-level discourses such as formal litigation, formal oratory, or bride-price settlement, as well as in advising, scolding, praising, and encouraging.²⁰

Regarding the usefulness of proverbs, Mafela indicates that people also use proverbs in various issues, including on matters related to religion, politics, kinship relations, warning, hope, and despair.²¹ In addition to what Lungstrum and Folarin have said regarding the usefulness of proverbs in human communicative situations.²² Generally, what the three authors above are agreeing to is that proverbs are practically applicable in all varieties of human communicative situations.

Mandziuk over and above all the deliberations about the proverbs, draws the following general importance identifiable in most proverbial expressions.²³ It is worth noting that all the above properties are applicable to Tshivenda proverbs. In this article 16 themes relevant to Tshivenda proverbs shall be identified, selected and analysed to establish their symbolic meaning and their relevancy in the upbringing of children in the 21st century.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This article's arguments were guided by conceptual metaphor theory, which was discovered by Lakoff and Johnson in 1980. Advocates of the conceptual metaphor theory argue that metaphors influence our thinking and actions. It means that the conceptual system is metaphorical. The conceptual theory is relevant to anchor this article because the Tshivenda proverbs discussed are metaphorical. They are figurative and should not be interpreted literally. Proverbs' figurative mode abounds in metaphor. According to Raphalalani, “Proverbs comment on human life and action through reference to non-human activity.”²⁴ In other words, generalisations can be made about animals or birds in a proverb, implying a comment on human affairs. For instance, the Tshivenda proverb *maanda a ngweṇa ndi maḍi* (the strength of the crocodile is the water). This proverb uses the crocodile (an animal) and the water (a non-animal) to comment on human affairs. The figurative interpretation of this proverb is as follows: one is strong when one is among their own people.

¹⁵ Justyna Mandziuk, “Why Money Cannot Buy Happiness. The Painful Truth about Traditional Proverbs and Their Modifications,” *New Horizons in English Studies* 2, no. 1 (2017): 6.

¹⁶ Raphalalani, “The Significance and Appropriateness of Tshivenda Proverbs in New South Africa,” 100.

¹⁷ N.R. Norrick, *How the Proverbs Mean* (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1984), 78.

¹⁸ M. Make, A. Kebede, and F. Alemayehu, “The Social Implications of Wolaita Proverbs: Functional Analysis,” *International Journal of Languages and Literatures* 2, no. 1 (March 2014): 225–46.

¹⁹ Mieder, *Proverbs*, 15.

²⁰ R.W. Lungstrum and A.Y. Folarin, “Kansas Working Papers in Linguistics,” 1985, 33.

²¹ Mafela, *Tshivenda Literature*, 28.

²² Lungstrum and Folarin, “Kansas Working Papers in Linguistics.”

²³ Mandziuk, “Why Money Cannot Buy Happiness. The Painful Truth about Traditional Proverbs and Their Modifications,” 6.

²⁴ Raphalalani, “The Significance and Appropriateness of Tshivenda Proverbs in New South Africa,” 100.

METHODOLOGY

It is required of every researcher to collect data using one or more approaches which Neuman categorises into two main groups quantitative and qualitative.²⁵ The choice of approach depends on what the researcher intends to investigate, and the type of data needed to achieve the set goal. The quantitative approach collects data in the form of numbers or statistics while the qualitative approach collects data in the form of words.²⁶ In this article, the researcher intended to identify, select and analyse Tshivenda proverbs to establish their symbolic meaning and their relevancy in the upbringing of children in the 21st century. A descriptive approach was used to collect and analyse qualitative data. A non-probability sampling approach called purposive sampling was utilised to identify and select Tshivenda proverbs that are relevant in the upbringing of Vhavenda children. The relevant Tshivenda proverbs were extracted from Tshikota using the content analysis method.²⁷

DISCUSSION

In terms of Vhavenda customary law, children's ill-disciplined conduct is blamed on the lack of parental guidance in their upbringing.²⁸ Thus, the primary teaching of morals starts within the family. In the family setup, the parents are responsible for educating and disciplining their children. Customary law further provides that each older person must be considered a parent, meaning that one can receive the same teaching and discipline from them.²⁹ Hence there is a saying that says *Mubebi wa munwe ndi mubebi wau* (one's parent is also your parent). It means that children could also receive the necessary teaching and discipline from any elderly member of society.

However, the accountability for the children's behaviour remains with the parents. The accountability of parents to their children is alluded to by Sone who says that 'A child takes after his parents, especially regarding their negative traits. That accountability is emphasised by the Tshivenda proverb that says *A si mafhi a kholomo a re na tshilavhi, tshilavhi tshi na mugwadel* (It is not the milk that has specks of dirt; these derive from the person keeping the calf away).³⁰ This proverb indicates that if children misbehave, the fault lies with the parents, for they failed in their upbringing. To avoid the blame by society for not having taught and disciplined their children, parents ensure right from birth that they guide and teach them right from wrong.³¹

Amongst other means of training and teaching children, Vhavenda infuses proverbs in their communicative situations. However, children are children and are likely to behave differently from what their parents and society expect of them. In such instances, parents in defense would utter the proverb *A ro ngo beba mbilu, ro beba muvhili* (We didn't give birth to the heart, but we gave birth to the body). The symbolic meaning of this proverb is that the parents are disappointed in their children's behavior. They had wished them a good life like the one they lead; however, the opposite is the case. As such, they can only account for his physic, not his character, as it does not resemble them.

It is relatively easier when children are still young to teach and guide them so that they can become responsible citizens. In Tshivenda, there is a saying *Thanda i kothololwa i tshe nnu, ya oma i ya vunḑea* (A stick is straightened while it is still wet/fresh, if it is dry it breaks). It means that when children are still young, it is an opportune time for them to learn better than when they are old.

²⁵ W.L. Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches: International Edition* (Canada: Pearson Education, Limited, 2000), 35.

²⁶ J.H. Macmillan and S. Schumacher, *Research in Education* (New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2006), 26.

²⁷ S.L. Tshikota, *Thalusamirero Ya Luambo Luthihi Ya Tshivenda* (Tshikota: Tshivenda National Lexicography Unit, 2010).

²⁸ Lekau Eleazar Mphasha, Khulisile Judith Nkuna, and Masoga Billy Sebata, "The Impact of English Language as Medium of Instruction versus South African Indigenous Languages Offered as Modules on Academic Progress of First Year Higher Education Students: A Case Study of the University of Venda, Limpopo Province, South Africa," *Gender and Behaviour* 20, no. 1 (2022): 19251–65.

²⁹ Mphasha, Nkuna, and Sebata, "The Impact of English Language as Medium of Instruction versus South African Indigenous Languages Offered as Modules on Academic Progress of First Year Higher Education Students: A Case Study of the University of Venda, Limpopo Province, South Africa."

³⁰ Sone, *Commonwealth Youth and Development*, 18.

³¹ Mphasha, Nkuna, and Sebata, "The Impact of English Language as Medium of Instruction versus South African Indigenous Languages Offered as Modules on Academic Progress of First Year Higher Education Students: A Case Study of the University of Venda, Limpopo Province, South Africa."

Similarly, the Bible (Prov.22:6), says: ‘Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it.’

The above Judaic proverb means that the community expects that whatever children are taught at their early stages will endure them throughout their lives. On the value of proverbs, Mmbi, Ramasunga and Phaswana assert that wherever and whenever proverbs are employed, they provide moral lessons.³²

In addition to the value of proverbs teaching children morals, Sotvaldieva indicates that they can also be used to teach, among others, speaking, writing, grammar and vocabulary.³³ The above assertion is further alluded to by Moon who says that proverbs are used in practical instances including teaching children abstract thinking.³⁴ Regarding the inclusive value of teaching proverbs to children, Mieder says that proverbs address human life in a comprehensive manner that shapes a child to be a social being since they deal with mind, wisdom, experience, learning, and authority.³⁵ They are indeed effective devices to communicate wisdom and knowledge about human nature and the world at large. This means that proverbs teaching to children has double value, which is to teach language-related matters and cultural moral values.

Analysis of selected Tshivenda proverbs and their significance in the Upbringing of Children

In this section, the identified Tshivenda proverbs, literal and symbolic interpretations of each, as well as a discussion of how each could contribute to the upbringing of children in the 21st century, is done.

- *Tsha kule tshi wanwa nga muhovhi* (What is out of reach is attained by the one who uses a hooked stick).

The verb expresses the idea that one needs to stretch their hand to reach good things in life. Thus, one must exert some effort to achieve that which they are determined to get. Else they won’t get it. This proverb can be equated to the English saying that says ‘No pain, no gain’, meaning that it is a worthwhile struggle to overcome a challenge to achieve something or live a normal life.

Similarly, there is another Tshivenda proverb *Tshi no ḁa wo lala ndi malanga* (What comes when sleeping is the crusty residue). This means that when one is sleeping, he does not get anything beneficial for his life. Unlike crusty residue that comes for free when one is sleeping, nothing else comes for free in life. The verb expresses the idea that one must be determined to work to achieve good things in life.

The society recently has people who are not determined. They live like people who do not have a purpose in life. Looking at some school children in their schoolwork, one can easily tell that they are not determined, they lack willpower. Their focus on their schoolwork is not sufficient. They appear to be attending school to please someone else, maybe their parents. The spirit of determination could be infused into children’s minds by including in communicative situations proverbs like the ones discussed above. One must be determined to work hard and sweat to achieve in life.

- *A hu na pfene ḽi no fa ḽi songo gonya luwa* (No baboon dies without having tried to climb up the precipice).

The verb expresses the idea that one should not grow weary of doing good, even amid trials, for in due season he will reap. Thus, if one perseveres in doing good then we will eventually be rewarded. Some of the youth today are easily demoralized, particularly when coming to commitment to their schoolwork. They usually give up whenever they come across a challenge. Some give up when

³² M.N. Mmbi, N.E. Ramasunga, and N.E. Phaswana, *Kha Ri ḁiḁongise* (Thohoyandou: Kalahari Productions and Booksellers, 2006), 98

³³ Hilola Musinovna Sotvaldieva, “Using Proverbs as A Lead-In Activity in Teaching English as A Foreign Language,” *Asian Journal of Multidimensional Research* 10, no. 11 (2021): 159–63.

³⁴ W.J. Moon, *African Proverbs Reveal Christianity in Culture* (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2009).

³⁵ Mieder, *Proverbs*.

they fail tests, assignments, or examinations. Such youth need to be inspired to work harder in their schoolwork and life in general and to never give up in life till they achieve the goals that they have set. Such inspiration could be instilled in them by infusing Tshivenda proverbs whenever one talks to them.

Similarly, there is a Tshivenda proverb *Munna ha wi nga thonga nthihi* (A man does not fall by just one stick). This verb expresses the idea that a person needs to endure the pain and fight back till victory is achieved. Some of the youth even go to the extent of committing suicide whenever they fail to get what they had expected to achieve or get in life. For instance, when they do not get employment while others, including their friends, are getting jobs.

Another Tshivenda proverb that could be infused in communication with the children is *U nembelela ha shamba a si u wa hafo* (The hanging of the fruit *shamba* does not mean it is falling). This proverb expresses the idea that one's health condition may not mean that one is likely to die. This proverb inspires one to hold on to life, rather than to lose hope and give up.

Some of the youth commit suicide when they realise that they have acquired dreaded diseases like AIDS. They think that the acquisition of such dreaded diseases to them means the end of life. When such happens, they need to get some inspiration from people talking to them including proverbial expressions such as the one above. All the above-discussed proverbs relate to expressing the idea of instilling the spirit of inspiration to the children.

Another Tshivenda proverb that could be used in communication with children to inspire them includes the following: *Nga zwiṭuku nga zwiṭuku, mulindi u do vhuya wa dala* (Just as one wants to fill up a hole, one step at a time, the whole will eventually be filled up). The proverb expresses the idea that by taking small, consistent steps toward one's goal, great results can be obtained. Thus, one step at a time, one can achieve great things by focusing on small, manageable steps. In other words, patience is key in this journey.

- *A dzimana u la malombe, mukosi a a phalalana* (Expert dancers cannot give one another food, but when there is a loud yelling, they come to assist one another).

The proverb expresses the idea that even though people who are relatives do not hit it off well with one another, if there is a misfortune they help one another. People may not all the time agree with each other. Thus, wherever there are people, there are conflicts. Regarding conflicts in people's life, Omisore and Oladosu say: 'Conflicts **are** inevitable in human life. It is also inevitable in organizations or even between nations. Conflict is an inseparable aspect of people's as well as organizations' life.'³⁶

Given the above, one can safely say that conflict is part of people's life. Even in such a situation of conflict, a need still arises for support from the people that one conflicts with. In terms of Tshivenda culture, support needs to be extended even to the people whom one may not be on good terms with. The said support can be infused into children's minds by including proverbial expressions such as the one discussed above, which encourage support, irrespective of the level of the relationship.

Similarly, there is a Tshivenda proverb *Maudu a khovhe ndi vhana vhayo* (The legs of the fish are its offspring). The proverb expresses the idea that parents need the support of their children. Some of our youths today, when they start working for a salary or wages, i.e. when they become financially independent, tend to ignore support, amongst others, even their parents who used to support them when they were growing up. Assisting one another or rendering support could be instilled in children by infusing proverbs in communicative situations, like the Tshivenda proverb cited above. Human beings are social beings. Supporting each other, irrespective of the relationship is crucial for social existence.

Another Tshivenda proverb which expresses the idea of teamwork is *Nanga nthihi a i lidzi tshikona* (One reed flute does not blow the performance of reed flutes). The proverb expresses the idea that no one can do better without a helper. We need each other to succeed in life. It stresses the point that there should be unity in all undertakings. It instils a sense of commonality in the society. In life, there are times when one can achieve much alone, and times when one needs the company of others

³⁶ Bernard Oladosu Omisore and Ashimi Rashidat Abiodun, "Organizational Conflicts: Causes, Effects and Remedies," *International Journal of Academic Reserach in Economics and Management Sciences* 3, no. 6 (2014), 119.

to achieve the same. In society, there are people who never want to work in collaboration with others. They like operating or working solo irrespective of the amount or type of work to be done. The spirit of teamwork could be infused in children's minds by infusing proverbial expressions in communicative situations like the one discussed above.

Similarly, there is a Tshivenda proverb, *Munwe muthihi a u tusi mathuthu* (One finger does not pick up mealies). Thus, a person with one finger will find it difficult to do the work; hence other fingers are needed to help. The proverb expresses the idea of teamwork. When one works alone, they might take longer to achieve the set goal. However, if one works in the company of others, one can achieve the set goal in a very short space of time. This proverb is essential still in the 21st century where time is of value like the value of money. Hence, the saying 'time is money.'

- *Vhana vha khotsi vha thukhukana thoho ya nzie* (Children of the same father share a locust's head).

The proverb expresses the idea of sharing. It stresses that people should share whatever they have irrespective of the amount or the size of that which is to be shared and the number of people who must share it. It instills the idea of sharing. This follows from the fact that customarily, Vhavenda practices polygamous marriage, and the primary purpose of marriage is procreation.³⁷ The father being the breadwinner and having to support all his children, seemingly might have necessitated the coinage of this proverb. Without sharing the little that the father can provide might result in other children starving. Thus, the focus of the Vhavenda is on the community and not on the individual.³⁸ They are a communal society which believes that they can live better together than they can alone. Thus, in a communal society, the norm is voluntary sharing. It is the welfare of the group which is considered more important than the comfort of the individual.

Mankind is living in times when some people are selfish. They don't want to share with others what they have. They claim that they have so little that may not be enough to be shared with someone else. However, for survival, Tshivenda customary law encourages people to share whatever they have, irrespective of the size. They infuse the spirit of sharing by including in their communicative situations the Tshivenda proverb as discussed above.

- *Fuyu litswuku a li kundwi tshivhungu* (A red fig does not lack a worm).

The proverb expresses the idea that a person must be cautious and guard against being deceived by physical appearance, since the inside of it may be different from what it looks like from the outside. Thus, people are warned to be cautious when they have to choose or to make a choice. They should guard against being deceived by merely looking at a thing. The world is in an era where many people get involved in things they were not supposed to have gone into. They are lured into things that later turn to haunt them for the rest of their lives. They don't give themselves time to first conduct an inspection to ascertain its reality. Some of these things seem to be too good to be true. Some of them get lured into drugs, while others get trafficked to other countries, all because of ignorance. However, this ignorance could be prevented if proverbial expressions such as the one discussed above are infused in communicative situations whenever one speaks to children.

Similarly, the Tshivenda proverb *Nyamuvhuya ha shayi thando, a sa vha mbava ndi muloi* (The good person doesn't lack some evil). The proverb expresses the idea that there is no one who is perfect in life. Thus, people are warned against considering anyone who appears too good, to be good indeed even in their hearts. There might be some evil hidden in that person, which is not physical, but spiritual, that you cannot see nor know about. Therefore, one needs to be cautious, and not take things at face value.

³⁷ Raphalalani, "The Significance and Appropriateness of Tshivenda Proverbs in New South Africa."138.

³⁸ D.R. Phaswana, *Communal Pastoral Counselling: Culturally Gifted Care-Giving in Times of Family Pain—A Vhavenda Perspective* (Pretoria: Unisa, 2008), 127.

- *Ngoma madzula wo vhambwa, musi wa nndwa a u dihw* (A drum should stay stretched, a time of battle is unknown).

The proverb expresses the idea that a person should always be prepared for any eventuality. Thus, one must not be caught unprepared by events. The world is in an era when some people do not see life at a distance. They live today for today, i.e., they live from hand to mouth, irrespective of their income. They don't plan anything including what they want their future to be shaped like. To avoid dependency on other people and government grants through the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), one needs to plan even their financial future. School children too, at times are found to be unprepared for tests, assignments, and examinations. All this unpreparedness, lead them to failure at the end of the academic year. To instil the spirit of preparedness in children, proverbs could be used in communicative situations with them. One of the Tshivenda proverbs that could be used to instil the spirit of preparedness is the one discussed above.

Similarly, the Tshivenda proverb *Mushavha mvula vhlula, u sa do shavha mvula yo no swika* (He who runs from the rain should do so hastily, not when the rain has come). The proverb expresses the idea that a person should not be overtaken by events, instead, he should prepare well in advance for any eventuality. Thus, one needs to prepare for everything well in advance, rather than starting to prepare when one is already facing the challenge. The above-discussed proverb encourages preparedness.

- *U sa pfa hu tunya mavhudzi* (Failure to listen wrenches off hair)

The proverb expresses the idea that one needs to take heed when advised to avoid falling into danger. Most people now seem to have lost direction in life. They find themselves immersed in trouble simply because they do not listen when guided or advised. Some misbehaviours are the result of peer pressure that children sometimes succumb to. According to Ramavhunga 'negative peer pressure occurs when children teach each other deviant behaviour such as smoking cigarettes and drug abuse.'³⁹ Some even engage in sexual activities. However, parents remain responsible to support and guide their children in a way that enables them to withstand peer group pressure. Some parents in their endeavour to guide their children, even go to the extent of choosing friends with good morals for their children. Parents could infuse in their communication with their children, proverbs such as the above to prevent or fight unethical children's behavior. Children need to be warned that engaging in unethical behaviour could lead them to trouble, and they would have to bear the consequences of their actions themselves.

Similarly, the proverb *Wa sa li pfa u vhudzwani u do li pfela vhlaloni* (If you do not hear it when you are told, you will hear it on the bed). The proverb expresses the idea failing to listen to elderly advice leads one to trouble. Advice is something that children or youths, much more than elders, need to cope with everyday life and face the future. Many have fallen into trouble by not heeding the advice from knowledgeable and experienced people like adults. Those that do not heed the advice, often regret their ignorance when they find themselves in the mud of life.

Discussion Summary

The research found that in the 21st century, many societies seem to have lost interest in their folklore, particularly the genre of proverbs. The loss of interest in the genre of proverbs negatively impacts Vhavenda children's upbringing and society's general moral fibre. The children are found wanting in terms of behaviour and conduct. Tshivenda proverbs promote faithfulness, enhance cooperation among people, promote mutual respect among people, encourage good deeds and discourage bad behaviours. In addition to the above, they are informative and useful linguistic signs of Vhavenda cultural values and thoughts.

³⁹ N.E. Ramavhunga, *Reflections on Practices of u Laya Nwana: Towards an Afro Sensed Approach* (Tshohoyandou: University of Venda, 2019), 26.

Old as they are, Tshivenda proverbs contain much educational wisdom and have not lost their usefulness in modern society. They continue serving to educate and discipline, particularly the children and the youth. Thus, they continue to be applicable even in modern societies in this technologically inclined world. The developments of new technologies and the appearance of new tendencies in society that affect peoples' ideologies and customs could be attributed to the loss of interest by Vhavenda to engage proverbs in their communication. In any case, Tshivenda proverbs are indeed alive and well, and as sapient nuggets, they continue to play a significant role in the upbringing of children in the 21st century.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discussion, Tshivenda proverbs teach moral values for an upright life and have been found to be still relevant in the upbringing of children in the 21st century, they should find a space in the South African National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement. They should be made part of the language curriculum at all levels of education in public schools where learners learn Tshivenda as a first language (Home language). They should form part of the teaching content of the two subjects, viz: Life Skills and Life Orientation. The two subjects are relevant to include the expressive genre of proverbs since, firstly, they are mandatory subjects for every learner in public schools, secondly, their focus is the development of self in society. They help learners set goals for themselves, solve problems and improve decision-making strategies. Educators can also incorporate proverbs in their teaching strategies, like when they teach aspects such as essay writing. They could emphasise the fact that a learner who can contribute traditional wisdom to the argument in the form of a proverb wins a number of points.

Parents and every elderly person should take their moral responsibilities more seriously, use Tshivenda proverbs in their daily lives and be good role models for their children.

To promote the frequent use of Tshivenda proverbs, it is recommended that

- Traditional leaders should initiate local competitions within their jurisdiction where children compete in giving the proverb and the associated figurative meaning.
- Community radios should run similar competitions to promote the use of these proverbs.
- Society should not shun away from applying proverbs in their communicative situations, as they play a pivotal role in the upbringing of children. Everyone should consider including a Tshivenda proverb in all adequate contexts of interaction with children.

CONCLUSION

Given the above discussion, it is evident that Tshivenda proverbs are as old as humankind. They have been used widely by society as didactic tools in child-rearing. They are indeed indispensable teaching tools that can be used to impart moral values and social skills to children and society. Old as they are, they contain much educational wisdom and have not lost their usefulness in modern society. They continue serving to educate and discipline, particularly the children and the youth. Thus, they continue to be applicable even in modern societies.

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