



The role of idioms in moral instruction: A comparative study of IsiZulu and IsiXhosa

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ABSTRACT

Idioms are a branch of Folklore. They are a figurative language found across all cultures, serving to educate and guide successive generations about the complexities of life. Idioms can be used to express different life complexities. In Zulu, they are often categorized according to their respective themes. This study presents a comparative analysis of the role that idioms play in instilling moral values and promoting humility within Zulu and Xhosa-speaking communities. As a rich component of figurative expression, idioms are deeply embedded in the cultural and communicative practices of the Zulu and Xhosa people, as well as many other African societies. They function as powerful tools for conveying meaning and reinforcing ethical principles. By exploring how idioms are used to nurture moral values from an early age, this research highlights their importance in the socialization process and their capacity to foster moral values. This study adopts Afrocentric theory as a grounding theoretical framework. The study reveals that idioms serve as essential pedagogical instruments through which African communities cultivate discipline and moral integrity in children. This study will contribute to the scholarship by illustrating how idioms foster moral behaviour in communities from one generation to the next.

Keywords: Idioms, Afrocentrism, Culture, Figurative Language, Folklore

INTRODUCTION

Idioms, as a fascinating aspect of language, are expressions used by speakers within a particular community. They carry rich cultural and historical significance, as noted by Earle, who defines idioms as forms of speech unique to certain languages and not translatable word-for-word into others.¹ These expressions reflect the distinct linguistic identity of each community. Sekotlong emphasizes that idioms arise from keen observations of people's behaviour and the characteristics of both living and non-living entities.² These language expressions are not easily deduced, making them particularly intriguing. Palmer highlights that idioms consist of sequences of words whose meanings cannot be predicted from the meanings of the individual words.³ This implies that the meaning of each word in an idiomatic

¹ John Earle, *English Prose: Its Elements, History, and Usage* (Smith, Elder & Company, 1890).

² M. S. Sekotlong, "Emergent Idioms in Northern Sotho" (University of Johannesburg., 1998), 8.

³ F. R. Palmer, "Grammar." (Penguin: Middlesex, 1982), 32.

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PUBLICATION HISTORY - Received : 4th September, 2025 | Accepted: 3rd March, 2026 | Published: 15th April, 2026.

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE –Mbathu, Onelisa Nomfundo. "The role of idioms in moral instruction: A comparative study of IsiZulu and IsiXhosa," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 7, no.3 (2026): 737 - 745. <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.2026737>

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expression differs when used in isolation compared to when used collectively. Idioms are more than mere communicative tools; they can also be used to promote moral values.

For instance, the Xhosa idiom *akanasasifuba* (he has no chest) refers to someone who cannot keep a secret. It serves as a warning to avoid confiding in untrustworthy individuals. This idiom highlights the importance of trust and confidentiality in social interactions. Chang supports this ideology by acknowledging the deeper meanings embedded in idiomatic expressions.⁴ Idioms are not only a reflection of linguistic diversity but also a means to convey cultural values and wisdom. They encapsulate observations about human behaviour and the environment, offering insights that transcend mere words. As such, idioms play a crucial role in enriching language and fostering a deeper understanding of the cultural contexts in which they are used.

Idioms serve as a linguistic mirror reflecting the deep-seated values of a society. As Chang (*Op. cit.*) asserts, idioms are not mere decorative language, but pivotal lexical resources employed to evaluate behaviours, embodying established sociocultural values. When a speaker uses an idiom, they invoke a particular ideology, embedding a concept within it, and appealing to its authority. This renders the evaluation not only more forceful but also significantly harder to contest. Consider the Zulu idiom *ukulala ngenxeba* (sleeping with a wound). Semantically, it implies making peace with an unpleasant or hurtful situation. This idiom teaches resilience and the importance of accepting circumstances beyond one's control. It encourages moving on, avoiding revenge, and beginning anew if necessary. This ethos of acceptance and renewal underscores the moral fabric of Zulu culture, promoting harmony and emotional healing. Similarly, proverbs like *ukubhonga emswanini* illustrate profound empathy within the community. This expression, describing crying after a story, is rooted in observed animal behaviour, particularly cattle that gather and make sounds as if mourning when one of their own has been slaughtered.

Mbatha notes that this idiom epitomizes the collective mourning and sympathy for those who have lost a relative, highlighting a shared sense of humanity and community support.⁵ Mbatha (*Op. cit.*) defines an idiom as a single word that makes a complete sense, or it can mean a group of words that have a complete sense, which usually has a subject and a predicate. In essence, idioms transcend their linguistic function to serve as cultural inspirations, guiding moral conduct and reinforcing societal values. They remind us of our shared humanity and the ethical principles that bind us, fostering a sense of collective identity and continuity. Through idioms, we not only articulate our thoughts but also connect with the deep-rooted ideologies that shape our cultural and moral landscape.

Idiomatic expressions hold a vital place in sociocultural discourses, embodying what Martin describes as the “institutionalization of feeling”.⁶ This concept extends beyond mere linguistic ornamentation, positioning idioms as intrinsic elements of societal frameworks. They act as informal yet potent regulatory mechanisms, shaping collective behaviour by implicitly defining what is deemed acceptable or unacceptable within a community. The persuasive power of idioms lies in their capacity to convey shared values and norms effortlessly. They can serve as subtle reminders of the moral compass guiding societal conduct, often invoking a sense of communal identity and shared history.

It is important to acknowledge that idioms function as more than linguistic curiosities, and they are pivotal in enforcing social cohesion. By embedding cultural and ethical guidelines within everyday language, idioms ensure that these principles are perpetuated across generations. Consequently, understanding and using idiomatic expressions is not merely a linguistic exercise but an engagement with the cultural essence of a society. Therefore, idioms are powerful tools for social regulation and cultural transmission. They summarise and preserve the core values of a community, precisely guiding behaviour and fostering a sense of belonging. Therefore, the study and appreciation of idiomatic expressions offer invaluable insights into the sociocultural fabric of any given society.

Several research studies have examined the role of idioms in language and culture. The role of idioms and proverbs in language and culture has garnered considerable scholarly attention, revealing

⁴ Chenguang Chang, “English Idioms and Interpersonal Meaning” (Guangzhou, Guangdong, China: Sun Yak-sen University Press, 2004).

⁵ M. O. Mbatha, *Isichazamazwi SesiZulu* (Pietermaritzburg: New Dawn Publishers, 2006), 73.

⁶ James R Martin, “Beyond Exchange: Appraisal Systems in English,” *Evaluation in Text*, 2000, 142–75.

their multifaceted utility in education, literature, media, and translation. Collectively, these studies argue for the indispensable value of idiomatic expressions as carriers of cultural identity, pedagogical tools, and creative linguistic devices.

Mvanyashe presents a compelling case for the integration of Xhosa proverbs and idioms into educational contexts, particularly for the cultural development of Xhosa children.⁷ Her findings underscore that idioms are not merely linguistic ornaments but repositories of indigenous knowledge that foster identity formation, pride, and moral guidance. This challenges the often-Eurocentric pedagogical models that overlook the epistemological richness embedded in African oral traditions.

In the realm of translation studies, Akbari critically examines the limitations of existing idiom translation strategies.⁸ While acknowledging the diversity of approaches proposed by scholars, Akbari argues that literal translation often results in semantic distortion, stripping idioms of their cultural nuance and pragmatic force. This reinforces the argument that idioms are deeply embedded in cultural contexts and require interpretive sensitivity rather than mechanical equivalence. Mbathu extends the discussion into literary analysis, exploring how Mkhize and Sibiyi deploy idioms and proverbs across various symbolic domains—human, animal, plant, and cosmic.⁹ Her study reveals that these expressions are not only stylistic embellishments but narrative techniques that elevate literary quality and reflect the authors' cultural fluency. This supports the broader claim that idioms serve as markers of linguistic authenticity and cultural resonance in African literature.

The pedagogical utility of idioms is further affirmed by Ntshangase and Zulu, who investigate their role in teaching humility to Zulu-speaking students.¹⁰ Their findings suggest that idioms function as moral instruments, shaping learners' character and social values. This aligns with Mvanyashe's assertion of idioms as tools for cultural transmission, reinforcing their relevance in value-based education. In media discourse, Msomi, Mhlungu, and Khumalo highlight the strategic use of figurative language by Ayanda Msweli during traffic updates on Ukhozi FM.¹¹ Their study illustrates how idioms and figures of speech enhance communicative efficiency, enabling journalists to convey complex information succinctly. This practical application of idioms in real-time broadcasting challenges the notion that idioms are confined to literary or traditional contexts.

Xaba builds on this by examining Msweli's linguistic creativity, particularly his talent for coining new idiomatic expressions and code-switching between isiZulu and English.¹² The study argues that such innovation not only enriches the isiZulu linguistic repertoire but also demonstrates the dynamic evolution of idioms in contemporary media. This positions idioms as living linguistic forms that adapt to modern communicative demands. Ramagoshi and Joubert explore idiom instruction in early childhood education, emphasizing the importance of teacher creativity.¹³ Their findings show that when educators employ imaginative strategies, learners not only grasp idioms more effectively but also retain them longer. This reinforces the pedagogical argument that idioms, when taught innovatively, can significantly enhance language acquisition and cognitive development.

Taken together, these studies advocate for a reevaluation of idioms as central to linguistic, cultural, and educational praxis. Whether in classrooms, literature, translation, or media, idioms emerge as powerful tools that encode cultural wisdom, facilitate expressive richness, and foster identity. The

⁷ Andiswa Mvanyashe, "IsiXhosa Proverbs and Idioms as a Reflection of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and an Education Tool," *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies* 29, no. 2 (2019): 1–14.

⁸ Monireh Akbari, "Strategies for Translating Idioms," *Journal of Academic and Applied Studies* 3, no. 8 (2013): 32–41.

⁹ Onelisa Nomfundo Mbathu, *Izaga Nezisho Emibhalweni Yababhali Ababili BesiZulu* (University of Johannesburg (South Africa), 2019).

¹⁰ Sicelo Ziphozonke Ntshangase and Sibonelo Edgar Zulu, "Ukusetshenziswa Kwezaga Nezisho Ukufundisa Ngobuntu Kubafundi Abenza IsiZulu ULimi LwaseKhaya.," *Journal for Language Teaching/Ijenali Yekufundzisa Lulwimi/Tydskrif Vir Taalonderrig* 58, no. 1 (2024).

¹¹ Melusi Ernest Msomi, Mpho Siphosenkosi Mhlungu, and Dumisani Khumalo, "Ukusetshenziswa Kwezimo Zokukhuluma: Kubhekwa Kabanzi Ingosi Yesiminyamina Emgwaqeni No-Ayanda Msweli WoKhozi FM," *South African Journal of African Languages* 45, no. 1 (2025): 36–44.

¹² Beryl B B Xaba, "Ukuhlaziywa Kolimi LwesiZulu Lokwethula Isimo Emigwaqweni Ngephimbo Lomethuli U-Ayanda Msweli WoKhozi FM Olucashunwe Ku YouTube," *South African Journal of African Languages* 44, no. 3 (2024): 278–87.

¹³ Refilwe Ramagoshi and Ina Joubert, "Preserving Cultural Heritage by Teaching Idioms to Young Learners as Part of Imaginative Language in Setswana," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 6, no. 1 (December 3, 2016): 10, <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v6i1.279>.

argument is clear. Idioms are not peripheral linguistic features but foundational elements of cultural literacy and communicative competence. The objective of this study is to examine the potential of idioms in Zulu and Xhosa as instruments for imparting moral values across generations. Specifically, the study seeks to evaluate the role of idioms in fostering positive societal values. This will be achieved by conducting a comparative analysis of idioms from both aforementioned languages, focusing on their intended meanings and educational aspects.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Mbathu cited Rimmon when stating that no research can be conducted without the utilization of theory.¹⁴ Theory plays a significant role in developing a framework for understanding serious situations within texts. It aids the reader in easily analyzing and interpreting the meaning contained in each text. Textual theories vary in their approaches to text analysis. Some theories focus on economic equality established post-independence, while others examine gender equality, social equality, and related aspects. Afrocentrism, as an intellectual and cultural movement, seeks to place Africa and its people at the center of all historical, cultural, and social narratives. This movement is designed to empower Africans by encouraging them to view their cultural and historical contributions as central to the global narrative. Asante defines Afrocentricity as a mode of thought and action that emphasizes African interests, values, and perspectives as the predominant paradigm.¹⁵ This approach offers a new historical viewpoint by contrasting traditional Eurocentric narratives with an Afrocentric perspective. In the context of this study, Afrocentricity's relevance is evident, particularly in its application to the teaching of African indigenous knowledge.

Idioms and proverbs, deeply rooted in African wisdom, are essential tools used to educate successive generations about the world. By viewing African knowledge and culture through an Afrocentric lens, this theory challenges Eurocentrism, advocating for the inclusion of African idiomatic expressions in educational curricula. These idioms and proverbs are believed to help learners connect with their cultural identity, fostering good social and ethical values within society. Moreover, they instil a sense of responsibility and accountability for one's actions, promoting a holistic understanding of African heritage and its significance. Thus, Afrocentrism not only reaffirms the importance of African knowledge systems but also highlights the need for teaching these cultural elements to preserve and celebrate African identity and values, which makes it relevant to this study.

METHODOLOGY

Researchers have various effective methods to conduct research. The research methodology guides the process, describing each step from data collection to completion. As Pam noted, the chosen methodology depends on the researcher's preferences and the type of information sought.¹⁶ This study uses a qualitative approach to explore perspectives and understand how Zulu and Xhosa idioms serve as educational tools to instil discipline and moral values. Ten idioms, four from Zulu and six from Xhosa, were selected for their themes and are compared in relation to moral instruction in the two languages. Secondary sources such as articles, books, and academic texts support the paper's claims. This study uses purposive sampling to choose a total of ten Zulu and Xhosa idioms. This method helps focus on idioms that offer deeper insights and represent different viewpoints as moral instructional tools.

Purposive sampling is chosen because it allows the researcher to select information that is meaningful and relevant to the Afrocentric context for instilling moral values. For analysing the data, a deductive thematic approach is applied. The selected idioms are not taken directly from any source but were chosen because they reflect African ways of instilling moral values from generation to generation. The examination of these idioms provides a methodologically appropriate and sufficient foundation for this study through their rich cultural and ideological layers embedded within each expression. This focused scope enables the researcher to unpack their social and cultural significance with specific reference to their cultural moral values.

¹⁴ Mbathu, *Izaga Nezisho Emibhalweni Yababhali Ababili BesiZulu*.

¹⁵ Molefi K Asante, *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change*, (Chicago: Peoples Publishing Group, 2009).

¹⁶ Q. Pam, "Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods" (London: Sage Publication Ltd, 2011), 23.

In addition, the selected idioms are timeless as they are applicable in contemporary society. This approach ensures a systematic interpretation of themes embedded in the Zulu and Xhosa idioms, offering insights into their cultural ways of instilling and promoting moral values. Creswell defines thematic analysis as a qualitative research method aimed at identifying, categorizing, analysing, and reporting patterns within data.¹⁷ Braun and Clarke further elaborate on thematic analysis as a structured analytical tool that systematically extracts meaningful themes from collected data.¹⁸ Therefore, qualitative and thematic approaches are relevant to this study to assist the researcher in attaining the research objectives.

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Idioms as cultural expressions

Idioms function as effective communicative tools, enabling individuals to convey complex ideas and emotions briefly. These linguistic aspects infuse language with vibrant, imaginative expressions, enhancing the overall impact of speech. By embedding rich cultural narratives into a few words, idioms not only adorn conversation but also demonstrate a profound grasp of the language.¹⁹ Mathenjwa and Maphumulo assert that idioms enhance linguistic richness by connecting language with daily experiences, fostering a deeper understanding of various phenomena.²⁰ These expressions serve as cultural bases, imparting cultural values and norms to younger generations, thereby preserving heritage and traditions. Thus, the study examines idioms as cultural expressions that instil and promote moral values through an Afrocentric approach. The following idioms are compared: *isanamadokunamathela*, *ukushaya ingede ngoju*, *ukunyathela emsileni*, *ukutsiba ilitye likaPhungela*, *ukuthatha ngozwane*, *uneminwe emide*, *ukufaka isandla*, *ukwaphula emlilweni*, *ukufaka izandla*, *ukusika emathunjini*.

Idioms are a form of oral art that presents a story concisely. Speech usually sounds good to people when idioms are used. This indicates an understanding of the language and cultural dynamics. Idioms are often used to make the presentation interesting and enrich the language.²¹ According to the Oxford Dictionary, an idiom is the “language of people or country,” or a “form of expression peculiar to a language”.²² This highlights that idioms vary significantly across different cultures. According to Guma, idioms could be defined as follows:

The characteristic indigenous expressions whose meaning cannot be ordinarily deduced or inferred from a knowledge of the individual words that make them up.²³

On the other hand, Ntsanwisi defines idioms as:

When people are striving to drive a certain point, they arrange words with such telling effect that the expression is at once accepted by the speech community and greatly used thereafter.²⁴

Newmark agrees with Guma when he says, “translating idiomatic into idiomatic language, it is particularly difficult to match equivalence of meaning with equivalence of frequency”.²⁵ He alludes that a translator's task is not grammatical but lexical, i.e. words, collocations, and fixed phrases or idioms. The above definitions imply that idiomatic expressions exist in every society. However, the words used as idioms do not convey the same meaning when used independently. Mathenjwa and Maphumulo

¹⁷ Creswell, John W., *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design. Choosing Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013).

¹⁸ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.

¹⁹ Mbathu, *Izaga Nezisho Emibhalweni Yababhali Ababili BesiZulu*, 55.

²⁰ L.F. Mathenjwa and A.M. Maphumulo, *Udondolo* (Cape Town: National Book Printers Goodwood, 1999), 3.

²¹ Mbathu, *Izaga Nezisho Emibhalweni Yababhali Ababili BesiZulu*, 55.

²² Chris Baldick, “The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms,” *International Journal of Lexicography* 7, no. 4 (1994): 352–54.

²³ S Guma, “Content and Technique of Traditional Literature in Southern Sotho” (Pretoria, 1967), 66.

²⁴ Hudson William Edison Ntsanwisi, *Tsonga Idioms: A Descriptive Study, (No Title)* (Johannesburg: Swiss Mission in South, 1968).

²⁵ Peter Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation*, vol. 66 (Prentice hall New York, 1988), 28; Guma, “Content and Technique of Traditional Literature in Southern Sotho.”

suggest that idioms often mirror the life experiences of people.²⁶ Consequently, understanding the meaning they convey within a relevant community is essential. Gumede implies that if the presenter uses proverbs and idioms in a speech, he knows that the listeners or audience of the speech will know the meaning, which may be obvious or hidden, of that proverb or that expression.²⁷ Thus, idioms should be universal to the targeted culture or society.

In African societies, morality stands as a cornerstone. The emphasis on possessing good moral values is deeply ingrained, and idioms play a crucial role in promoting and reinforcing this moral framework. They serve as tools to inculcate developmental values within individuals in a particular society. Idioms not only motivate the younger generation to aspire and work hard for a prosperous future but also discourage laziness. Furthermore, they are used to challenge attitudes and behaviours, ensuring that both the speaker and listener appreciate and honour the underlying truths conveyed through idiomatic expressions.

Makuliwe cites Nyembezi, emphasizing the importance of idioms in preserving and communicating cultural values and moral teachings:

Idioms are a useful means of studying people. They show how very observant the people are, for the habits of birds, animals and behaviour of nature generally do not go unobserved. They reveal what it is that people adore and despise. They reveal what the people's outlook in life is and will provide the students of human nature a peek into the character of a people.²⁸

As emphasized in the initial phases of this paper, morality is the cornerstone of every society, preserving social cohesion. Morality can be perceived as a repository of wisdom, encapsulated in proverbs, idioms, and other figurative expressions. Moral values represent principles, rules, and guidelines that inform human behavior in discerning right from wrong. These values function as pivotal instruments, shaping decision-making and actions in daily life. They are shaped by life experiences, culture, religion, and more.²⁹ Consequently, they foster attributes such as honesty, respect, empathy, and humility, all of which are deemed acceptable within society. They encourage virtuous behavior. For instance, the Xhosa idiom *isanama-ndokunamathela* advises against immoral behavior, though its meaning extends beyond this.

It depicts a situation where one is so attached to something that they find it challenging to abandon it, regardless of its negative impact.³⁰ Similarly, in Zulu, the idiom *ukushaya ingede ngoju* serves to admonish individuals for ingratitude, especially towards those who have assisted them. Another Zulu idiom, *ukunyathela emsileni*, translates to "stepping on the tail," signifying the act of inviting trouble. This idiom originates from the behavior of a snake when provoked. It reacts aggressively, assuming a declaration of war.³¹ On the other hand, in Xhosa, they say *ukutsiba ilitye likaPhungela*. Phungela was a swimming expert who used to help people cross the Kei River when overflowed its banks. He used a stone in the river as a mark to measure its depth. The idiom *Ukutsiba ilitye likaPhungela* is used to refer to someone who is very rude and unruly. At times, it can be used to warn that person to guard against his behaviour as he is inviting trouble into his life, which might result in punishable offences.

In both Zulu and Xhosa cultures, proverbs serve not only as linguistic expressions but also as powerful social tools that reflect shared values and ethics. For instance, the Zulu proverb *ukuthatha ngozwane* and the Xhosa proverb *uneminwe emide* both refer to someone who steals. These proverbs convey a strong moral stance against theft. They are commonly used to caution one another about

²⁶ Mathenjwa and Maphumulo, *Udondolo*, 3.

²⁷ Gumede M. A., "Izigiyo as Performed by Zulu Women in the KwaQwabe Community in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa" (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2009).

²⁸ Mpumelelo T A Makuliwe, *Inqokelela Entsha Yezaci Namaqhalo EsiXhosa* (Van Schaik, 1997), 5; C.L.S. Nyembezi, *Uhlelo LwesiZulu (Zulu Grammar)* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1956), xii.

²⁹ N. G. Biyela, "Selected Animal and Bird Proverbs as Reflectors of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Social Mores: A Study from Zulu Language and Culture" (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2003), 126.

³⁰ E. W. M., Mesatywa and A. C. Jordan, *Izaci Namaqhalo EsiXhosa* (Cape Town : Longman, 1971), 94.

³¹ Cyril Lincoln Sibusiso Nyembezi and Otty E H Mandla Nxumalo, *Inqolobane Yesizwe* (Shuter and Shooter, 1966), 208.

individuals who exhibit such behaviour.³² This cultural mechanism reinforces communal accountability and trust, highlighting the importance of honesty and integrity within the society. Furthermore, idioms in these languages underscore the significance of *ubuntu*, a philosophy centered on mutual care and humanity. In Zulu, phrases like *ukufaka isandla* and *ukwaphula emlilweni*, and in Xhosa, expressions such as *ukufaka izandla* and *ukusika emathunjini*, illustrate the ethos of assisting others in times of need.³³ These idioms do not only advocate for help but also embody the spirit of solidarity and interconnectedness that is intrinsic to the notion of *ubuntu*.

Thus, these proverbs and idioms collectively emphasize the paramount importance of community, consideration, and respect. Zuma and Dempster indicate that the native language of Zulu is intense and rich in figurative language, consisting proverbs, sayings and metaphors.³⁴ Nyembezi shares the same sentiments. He mentions that figurative language is a result of people's observations.³⁵ These observations are focused on looking closely at the occurrence of various things that affect people's social life, and then composing wise words based on what is happening. They serve as cultural anchors, reminding individuals to support and care for one another, reinforcing the idea that no person can exist in isolation. The communal fabric is strengthened through these shared linguistic tools, fostering a culture where love, compassion, and communal responsibility are paramount. Therefore, the study of idioms as cultural expressions reveals their crucial role in both linguistic proficiency and cultural education. They affirm that individual actions are meaningful only within the context of the community, and that moral behaviour reflects one's commitment to others. Therefore, by embedding ethical teachings in everyday language, Zulu and Xhosa idioms and proverbs serve as living expressions of Afrocentric values. They preserve ancestral wisdom, promote cultural continuity, and nurture a society rooted in respect, solidarity, and moral consciousness.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this study highlight the vital role that Zulu and Xhosa idioms play in instilling moral values within their respective communities. Rooted in Afrocentric theory, which centers African cultural knowledge systems, values, and worldviews, these idioms are not merely linguistic expressions but serve as cultural vessels that transmit indigenous wisdom and ethical teachings. They reflect an African-centered epistemology in which language is deeply intertwined with communal identity, ancestral heritage, and moral consciousness. The frequent use of idioms to warn, encourage, and promote virtuous behaviour highlights their function as tools for social regulation and cohesion. From an Afrocentric perspective, this reflects the African principle of *ubuntu*, the belief in shared humanity and collective responsibility, which is embedded in the moral messages conveyed through these idioms.

While the study reveals overlapping moral values between Zulu and Xhosa idioms, it also identifies distinct differences shaped by each group's historical experiences and cultural priorities. This diversity within unity exemplifies the Afrocentric emphasis on cultural specificity and the importance of honouring each community's unique voice within the broader African heritage. Therefore, idioms are more than words; they are instruments of cultural affirmation and moral instruction. They promote harmony, respect, and tolerance, aligning with Afrocentric ideals that prioritize community well-being, intergenerational continuity, and the preservation of indigenous knowledge. By embedding moral values in everyday language, Zulu and Xhosa idioms forms a cohesive society grounded in African ethics and worldview. The human element within these idioms bridges generations, ensuring that ancestral teachings remain relevant in contemporary life. Their continued use affirms the Afrocentric commitment to cultural continuity, self-definition, and the reclamation of African intellectual traditions. Thus, preserving and promoting Zulu and Xhosa idioms is not only essential for safeguarding cultural heritage but also for nurturing a society rooted in respect, unity, and moral integrity.

³² Mesatywa and Jordan, *Izaci Namaqhalo EsiXhosa*, 74.

³³ Nyembezi and Nxumalo, *Inqolobane Yesizwe*, 178.

³⁴ Sandile C Zuma and Edith R Dempster, "IsiZulu as a Language of Assessment in Science," *African Journal of Research in Mathematics, Science and Technology Education* 12, no. 2 (2008): 31–46.

³⁵ Nyembezi C., "Zulu Proverbs." (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter &Shooter (Pty) Ltd, 1990).

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