

Perceptions of the Vhavenda Youth Regarding *Murundu* and *Vhukomba* Initiation Schools: A Case Study in the Tshimbupfhe-Davhana Villages, Vhembe District

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Abstract

This study investigates the perceptions of Vhavenda youth regarding *murundu* (initiation schools for boys) and *vhukomba* (initiation schools for girls) in the Tshimbupfhe-Davhana villages in the Vhembe District, South Africa. From most African perspectives, traditional schools facilitate the transition from childhood to adulthood through rites of passage. These schools are rooted in the cultural and spiritual traditions of communities. They are designed to teach youth life skills, values, and cultural knowledge that prepare them for future adult responsibilities. The curriculum in traditional schools focuses on moral development, politeness, cultural practices, social responsibilities, and sometimes physical endurance. This study employed face-to-face semi-structured interviews to collect the data, focusing on a sample of 30 Tshivenda-speaking youths. The research is undergirded by the Sankofa theory as a framework for understanding the perceptions of the Vhavenda youth regarding the *murundu* and *vhukomba*. The findings revealed that these schools impart essential life lessons, including respect for elders, community engagement, and personal development, which are often absent in formal education systems. The study suggests that fostering a stronger connection between the youth and their language and cultural heritage will help sustain these traditions, ensuring their continued relevance and integration into the community's social fabric.

Keywords: traditional schools; Vhavenda; the youth; Sankofa; culture; *murundu*; *vhukomba*



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Introduction

This study investigates the perceptions of the Vhavenda youth regarding *murundu* and *vhukomba* initiation schools in the Tshimbupfhe-Davhana villages in the Vhembe district, in the Limpopo Province. According to Statistics South Africa (2022), the *youth* are defined as people aged between 15 and 34 years. Vhembe District, located in the northernmost part of the Limpopo Province, South Africa, is home to the Vhavenda people, who have maintained rich cultural traditions, including the *murundu* and *vhukomba* (Ladzani 2022; Mudau 2024). Focus on the Tshimbupfhe-Davhana villages in the Vhembe District is motivated by the area's deep-rooted cultural significance and rich history of traditional practices, including initiation schools. Tshimbupfhe-Davhana was chosen because one of the researchers is familiar with this practice, as he comes from that area. The Tshimbupfhe-Davhana villages in the Vhembe District offer a unique opportunity to explore the perceptions of the local youth, who are influenced by both modern pressures and traditional values. These villages have a high number of youths exposed to contemporary schooling and traditional practices, making them an ideal setting for examining evolving views on *murundu* and *vhukomba* initiation schools. Although the Customary Initiation Act 2 of 2021 (Republic of South Africa 2021) prohibits children under 16 from attending initiation schools, some boys as young as eight are still initiated (Mudau 2024). These initiation practices are critical rites of passage, marking the transition from childhood to adulthood and reinforcing cultural identity, as seen in the Vhavenda traditions (Vincent 2008). Initiation involves circumcision and other practices that symbolise the transition from boyhood to manhood, often isolating initiates from the female world and embedding social norms (Milubi 2000). The *murundu* and *vhukomba* schools play a crucial role in cultural education by promoting values such as respect, responsibility, and community cohesion. They are seen as vital tools for preserving the cultural heritage of Vhavenda (Mudau et al. 2024; Mohlaloka et al. 2016). However, the participation of the youth in these schools has declined due to modern education and globalisation, posing a risk to the continuity of Vhavenda traditions and their cultural identity (Mohlaloka et al. 2016).

If a study of this nature is not conducted, the Vhavenda community risks losing cultural heritage and identity, as initiation schools like *murundu* and *vhukomba* are vital for transmitting traditions, languages, and values (Ladzani 2014). Understanding youth disengagement is crucial to preventing these rites from fading, which could lead to their weakened cultural identity and social cohesion. Initiation schools play a significant role in moral and social education, teaching respect, responsibility, and community values. Without research, these educational aspects may be overlooked, potentially contributing to issues like youth delinquency and substance abuse (Ladzani 2014). Moreover, initiation schools have historically addressed public health concerns by teaching safe sexual practices and preventing sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS (Stinson 2008). Understanding youth perceptions is essential for assessing how well these schools meet current health needs and for integrating modern health education effectively. Additionally, policymakers and community leaders require evidence from

such studies to design effective interventions for cultural preservation, ensuring that efforts are both relevant and impactful (Van Rooyen et al. 2006).

While there is growing literature on traditional schools, there is a lack of empirical studies focused on the perceptions of the Vhavenḁa youth regarding *murundu* and *vhukomba* initiation schools in contemporary South Africa, especially in rural areas like Tshimbupfhe-Davhana villages, where cultural and linguistic dynamics are unique. Many existing studies focus on traditional schools as a means of preserving heritage languages (Mohlaloka et al. 2016; Ladzani 2014; Murovhi et al. 2018; Malisha 2005; Mudau 2024), or on strategies for revitalising endangered languages through educational programmes and digital tools (Hinton 2011; Krauss 2007). Additionally, some research highlights the importance of indigenous forms of address in preserving culture and respect (Letseka 2013; Maharasoia and Maharswa 2004; Mohlaloka et al. 2016). However, studies specifically investigating the Vhavenḁa youth's views on *murundu* and *vhukomba* are scarce, making this study essential for contributing to existing knowledge on the subject. Accordingly, the current research seeks to bridge this gap. To achieve this goal, the study sought to address the following research objectives:

- To explore the perceptions of the Vhavenḁa youth regarding the *murundu* and *vhukomba* initiation schools in the Tshimbupfhe-Davhana villages.
- To discover factors influencing the youth's perceptions of the Tshivendḁa traditional initiation schools in the Tshimbupfhe-Davhana villages.
- To examine the contributions made by Tshivendḁa traditional initiation schools towards the moral development in the Tshimbupfhe-Davhana villages.

Theoretical Framework

The Sankofa theory, originating from the Akan people of Ghana, emphasises the importance of reconnecting with one's cultural roots to reclaim and preserve valuable indigenous knowledge and practices that are in danger of being lost. The term "Sankofa" means "it is not taboo to go back and fetch what is at risk of being left behind," symbolised by a bird looking backwards while holding an egg in its mouth (Asante 1990). This theory is highly relevant to the study of the Vhavenḁa youth's perceptions of the *murundu* and *vhukomba* initiation schools. In this research, the Sankofa framework is applied to understand the decline in youth participation in these traditional rites of passage and explore how these cultural practices can be revitalised to remain relevant in the contemporary world. By utilising the Sankofa perspective, the study seeks to investigate how the Vhavenḁa community can reconnect with and preserve these traditions while adapting them to the current needs of today's youth.

The Sankofa theory not only promotes a reflective approach to cultural practices but also active engagement with those practices, adapting them to modern-day

requirements. Initiation schools like *murundu* and *vhukomba* have long been significant cultural institutions for Vhavenda, marking the transition from childhood to adulthood and imparting essential social and moral values. These values include respect for elders, responsibility within the community, discipline, and a deep understanding of cultural identity and heritage. Additionally, the traditional teachings often emphasise the importance of integrity, honesty, self-control, and the value of mutual support among community members. Through these practices, initiation schools help instil a sense of duty to both one's family and society, fostering social cohesion and promoting ethical behaviour. However, as modern influences, such as Western education and globalisation, continue to shape the attitudes and behaviours of the youth, these traditional institutions face challenges. Sankofa urges a deeper reflection on the value of these rites of passage, recognising their potential to address contemporary issues like youth delinquency, sexual health, and identity crises. Rather than allowing these cultural practices to fade into irrelevance, the theory calls for retrieving the wisdom embedded in them and adapting them for the future.

The Sankofa theory also plays a crucial role in addressing the disconnection younger generations may feel from their cultural heritage. It advocates for the revitalisation of indigenous practices, not as a rejection of progress but as a means of integrating cultural wisdom into modern contexts. This theory serves as a guide for individuals and communities striving to navigate through modernity while maintaining a deep connection to their roots. In African communities, where globalisation and urbanisation often lead to the erosion of traditional practices, Sankofa encourages the reclaiming of heritage and empowers future generations to preserve and adapt cultural practices in meaningful ways. Through this lens, communities can find ways to preserve cultural knowledge, ensuring that it remains relevant in a rapidly changing world.

The rationale for applying the Sankofa theory lies in its ability to illuminate the tension between tradition and modernity. The theory encourages a critical examination of the past, helping to understand how the perceptions of Vhavenda youth regarding *murundu* and *vhukomba* are shaped by both traditional practices and modern influences like formal education and globalisation. By using Sankofa, the study explores how youth's disconnection from cultural practices such as initiation schools may lead to a loss of cultural identity. Therefore, it provides a valuable framework for understanding how their cultural heritage can be preserved or transformed in response to the evolving needs and values of younger generations. It also offers the potential to bridge generational gaps, ensuring the continuation of cultural knowledge.

Literature Review

Mguzulwa and Gxubane (2019) discuss the decline of traditional initiation practices in South Africa, emphasising the generational shift in attitudes towards these rites. The study highlights how younger generations, influenced by modern education and global cultural trends, increasingly view traditional practices like initiation as outdated. While acknowledging the cultural importance of these rites, Mudau (2024) notes that many

youths are reluctant to engage in them, often perceiving them as irrelevant to their lives today. This decline, as Mguzulwa and Gxubane (2019) suggest, is also linked to the challenges posed by cultural assimilation, where the values of modernity often conflict with traditional practices. The study underscores the struggle of balancing cultural preservation with contemporary societal influences as youth navigate the complexities of modern identity formation.

Similarly, Mohlaloka (2014) offers a critical review of the pain and significance of traditional initiation practices, particularly focusing on the ritual of circumcision, a key element of many initiation ceremonies. Mohlaloka argues that while these practices are integral to the cultural rites of passage, they often come with significant physical and psychological challenges. The pain associated with circumcision and other initiation customs is identified as a barrier for many young people, particularly those who are more exposed to modern health practices and Western notions of well-being. The article further discusses how these painful rituals, despite their cultural significance, can be perceived as outdated or unnecessarily harsh, leading to debates about their relevance in contemporary society. Mohlaloka adds a layer of critique to the broader discourse on traditional initiation practices, questioning how their cultural preservation can be reconciled with concerns for the health and well-being of initiates.

Ntombana (2011) agrees with these views and examines the role of traditional initiation schools in the 21st century, focusing on youth perspectives. Importantly, the study reveals a complex relationship between tradition and modernity, with some youths viewing initiation schools as essential cultural experiences that promote values such as discipline, respect, and community cohesion. However, Ntombana also highlights a growing sense of disinterest among younger generations, who are increasingly influenced by modern educational systems and the globalised cultural landscape. This disinterest is attributed to the perception that traditional initiation is no longer necessary for social development, as contemporary society offers alternative pathways to adulthood. Ntombana's work contributes to the ongoing debate on how traditional practices can adapt to the changing needs and aspirations of youth while maintaining their cultural significance.

Furthermore, Mabena (1999) examines the role of traditional initiation schools in cultural preservation, focusing on how these rites shape personal and collective identity. Mabena argues that initiation schools are not merely about the physical transformation of individuals but also play a crucial role in transmitting cultural knowledge and values across generations. These schools, according to Mabena, serve as a vital space for reconnecting young people with their cultural heritage, fostering a sense of belonging, and reinforcing community bonds. Despite modern challenges, Mabena suggests that these initiation rites remain an essential mechanism for cultural continuity, providing the youth with a sense of identity and purpose. The study highlights how preserving these practices, while allowing them to evolve, is critical to maintaining the cultural fabric of many African communities in an increasingly globalised world.

Mudau (2024) conducted a qualitative study that explored the role of traditional schools in preserving the Tshivenda language and cultural heritage in Tshimbupfhe. The research found that traditional schools, including *murundu* and *vhukomba*, are pivotal in transmitting linguistic and cultural knowledge by integrating indigenous values and practices into their curricula. This integration fosters a sense of cultural continuity and identity among the youth. However, this study did not focus on the perceptions of the youth regarding these heritage schools. If their perceptions are negative, the schools may soon be discontinued. Therefore, it is important to determine their perceptions to design corrective measures before it is too late to intervene.

Ndou and Mavhandu (2022) examined the potential of Vhavana initiation schools to aid in HIV and AIDS management within Vhembe District. Their study revealed that these traditional institutions serve as centres for cultural education, imparting social norms, customs, and values that guide youth behaviour. Initiates are educated on matters of sexuality, courtship, marriage, and respect for others, contributing to health education and promoting responsible sexual behaviour among the youth.

Furthermore, Ramphabana and Rapholo (2025) explored the role of Vhavana indigenous systems in mitigating child sexual abuse. Their study highlighted that traditional initiation schools, such as *murundu* and *vhukomba*, play a significant role in training children to understand and uphold cultural values and traditions. By imparting knowledge about respect and humanity, these schools aim to produce well-behaved individuals who are less likely to engage in or tolerate abuse. According to Mudau (2025), traditional initiation schools represent a tribe's acknowledgement that a young man or woman has reached the age of responsibility, fertility, and community productivity. It is believed that these schools make an indelible impression on the participants and, as a result, are likely to influence their future behaviour. In addition, these schools educate young people, preparing them for their new roles in society.

Significantly, the literature reviewed highlights certain advantages associated with these traditional schools that outweigh their disadvantages. Hence, the authors saw it necessary to explore the perceptions of the youth from the Tshimbupfhe-Davhana villages. Lessons from the findings of this study may help other communities see the value in enculturating the youth regarding the importance and value of these traditional schools.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach, using a case study design to explore participants' experiences, focusing on their perspectives rather than on the researchers' viewpoints. A convenience sampling technique was applied, resulting in data being collected from 30 Tshivenda-L1 participants (14 males, 16 females, aged 18–34) from Tshimbupfhe and Davhana villages. Brynard et al. (2015) define qualitative research as a strategy linking conceptual research issues to empirical data, while Bless et al. (2006) describe a case study as a method used to explore relationships between variables.

Participants were selected based on clear criteria to ensure diverse representation, and thematic saturation was reached when no new significant themes emerged. Accordingly, semi-structured, open-ended, in-depth interviews were conducted. At the same time, the participants' anonymity was maintained through coding, and consent was obtained from all of them; this included verbal consent being obtained from illiterate participants (Wilkinson and Birmingham 2003; Williman 2011).

Data cleaning was carried out, involving several essential steps. First, the researchers reviewed all the collected data to ensure that they were complete and consistent, addressing any missing or conflicting information. To ensure accuracy, the transcripts were cross-checked with the original recordings to correct any transcription errors. The data were then standardised to ensure consistency in format and terminology, addressing any discrepancies by validating the data with supplementary sources. To ensure the validity of the data, responses from different participants regarding the same phenomenon were compared. Williman (2011) notes that semi-structured interviews are frequently used in research to corroborate data from other sources, which supports the rationale for this choice. The data collected were then analysed to derive conclusions that addressed the research objectives (Kumar 2005). Data analysis in qualitative research begins with defining and organising the analysis objectives, followed by identifying themes and categorising data into codes and themes for further discussion (Creswell 2007). The responses from the participants were recorded and transcribed, and the data were categorised into relevant themes (Creswell 2007). A thematic data analysis approach was employed, which, as Kumar (2005) explains, is a methodical process of identifying, organising, and interpreting patterns of meaning across the dataset. The findings, which only pertained to the Tshivenda speech community, cannot be generalised broadly due to the limited number of participants.

Findings and Discussion

Before examining the findings and engaging in the discussion of the study, it is crucial to establish a solid understanding of the research context and objectives. This study set out to investigate the perceptions of Vhavenda youth regarding the *murundu* and *vhukomba* initiation schools in the Tshimbupfhe-Davhana villages. By analysing data gathered from the Tshivenda-speaking communities in South Africa, specifically in these villages, the study aimed to shed light on local perspectives on this phenomenon. Following the presentation of the findings derived from this data, the discussion section links these results to the study's overarching objectives and relevant existing literature. This approach facilitates a thorough exploration of the research objectives while also providing insightful contributions to the academic field. Through the analysis, we saw the emergence of five key themes, offering a deeper understanding of the perceptions held by the youth of these villages.

Theme 1: Perceptions of Traditional Initiation Schools

The findings related to the perceptions of traditional initiation schools reveal a mix of respect and scepticism among the youth. While some participants view *murundu* and *vhukomba* as critical cultural practices that teach discipline, respect for elders, and a connection to ancestral roots, others feel that these schools are outdated and are no longer relevant in the modern world. The pain associated with certain customs, such as circumcision, was also highlighted as a deterrent, with some expressing doubts about the ability of these initiation schools to engage young people today, especially in the face of modern education. Despite these concerns, the role these traditions play in the transition from boyhood to manhood is still recognised.

YMP14 stated that: “I think *murundu* and *vhukomba* are important, but they feel outdated to me. I don’t see the relevance anymore.”

YMP5 shared a different story, noting that: “Initiation is a big part of our culture, and I respect it. It teaches us discipline and respect for elders.”

YFP22 illustrated that: “I feel like these schools are a way for us to remember our roots and connect to our ancestors.”

The perceptions of *murundu* and *vhukomba* among Vhavenda youth reflect a complex interplay of tradition and modernity. While some participants acknowledge their cultural significance in instilling discipline and connecting with their ancestral heritage, others question their relevance today, citing concerns over painful customs like circumcision and the influence of modern education. This diversity of views underscores the ongoing debate about preserving cultural traditions and adapting to contemporary values. These findings align with the existing literature, highlighting both respect for and scepticism about traditional initiation practices among younger generations. Despite challenges, traditional initiation schools continue to play a significant role in cultural transmission and community identity.

Theme 2: Factors Influencing Youth’s Participation

The findings regarding the factors influencing the decision to attend initiation schools reveal a complex mix of social, familial, and personal motivations. Peer pressure and family expectations are significant driving forces for some youth, with many feeling compelled to attend initiation schools either to meet parental or community demands or to fit in with their social group. At the same time, the practical demands of modern life, particularly the prioritisation of education, serve as barriers for others. Some participants expressed a desire to attend initiation schools only if they saw a clear value in the experience, particularly if it included practical life skills. These findings highlight the various pressures and considerations young people weigh up when deciding whether to participate in traditional initiation practices.

YMP3 elaborated that: “Some of my friends went to these schools because their parents expected them to this, so I would attend if I were sure it would bring me closer to my heritage.”

YMP6 stated that: “Peer pressure plays a big role. If your friends are going, you feel like you should go too.”

YFP18 illustrated that: “The main reason is family pressure; my parents believe it’s the right way to become an adult,” and: “Modern education takes priority now. The idea of going to the bush for a month doesn’t seem practical with my school commitments.”

Initiation schools like *murundu* and *vhukomba* play a vital role in instilling values such as respect, responsibility, and community involvement among Vhavenda youth. However, the demands of modern education present challenges, leading some to consider participation only if tangible benefits, such as acquiring practical life skills, are evident. These findings align with Mudau’s (2024) research on traditional schools’ role in preserving their cultural heritage, highlighting the impact of social and familial expectations. Additionally, participants’ desires for initiation schools to offer more practical, life skills-focused experiences reflect a broader cultural shift towards integrating practical knowledge into traditional practices, enhancing their relevance to contemporary youth. While supporting Mudau’s emphasis on cultural transmission, the findings also highlight the complexities modern youth face when balancing traditional customs with contemporary demands.

Theme 3: Moral Education through Initiation Schools

The findings related to moral development through initiation schools highlight a complex mix of positive and critical perspectives. While many participants recognise the role of initiation schools in teaching essential values such as respect, responsibility, and community interaction, there are concerns about the relevance of some aspects of the teachings, particularly those related to gender roles and outdated customs. Some youths feel that while initiation schools contribute to personal growth and moral education, specific practices and teachings, such as gender-specific expectations, do not align with contemporary values. These findings reflect the tension between the traditional moral lessons imparted by initiation schools and the evolving societal views on issues like gender equality and modern social norms.

IYFP24 elaborated that: “I’ve heard that these schools teach young men to respect women, but sometimes the songs they sing are degrading women.”

YMP6 concurred with the view expressed by YFP24: “*Murundu* taught me about respect for elders and how to act in a community.”

YFP13 responded by stating that: “The process of initiation is supposed to make you a better person. But I think it’s also important to adapt some of the teachings to today’s world.”

The study reveals that while initiation schools like *murundu* and *vhukomba* play a vital role in instilling values such as respect, responsibility, and community involvement among Vhavenda youth, there are concerns about the relevance of specific teachings, particularly those concerning gender roles and outdated customs. This reflects a broader tension between traditional moral education and evolving societal values, particularly concerning gender equality and changing social norms. The findings echo Ntombana’s (2011) observations on the challenges facing traditional initiation schools in the 21st century, highlighting the need for these practices to adapt to contemporary values while preserving their cultural significance.

Theme 4: Social Identity and Cultural Connection

The finding related to social identity and cultural connection emphasises the importance of initiation schools in helping the youth understand and affirm their cultural identity as Vhavenda. Many participants shared that going through the initiation process, particularly *murundu* and *vhukomba*, provides a sense of belonging and a stronger connection to their cultural roots. Initiation schools are viewed as essential in preserving a sense of tradition and community. However, some participants also noted the need for these practices to adapt to remain relevant for contemporary youth. Despite the value these schools provide in shaping identity and fostering a sense of community, there is concern that younger generations may be losing this connection, highlighting the tension between tradition and modern influences.

YFP19 illustrated that: “I feel like the initiation schools help us understand our identity as Vhavenda. It’s a way of knowing where we come from.”

YMP4 stated that: “Going through *murundu* made me feel more connected to my roots. It gave me a sense of belonging in my community.”

In addition, YFP23 opined that: “These schools help us stay true to who we are as Vhavenda, but they also need to evolve to attract today’s youth.”

Moreover, YMP7 mentioned that: “The community sees you differently once you’ve gone through the initiation. It’s like you’re finally seen as a man.”

The study emphasises the crucial role of *murundu* and *vhukomba* in fostering cultural identity and a sense of belonging among the Vhavenda youth, linking individuals to their cultural roots and community. However, there is recognition that, for these traditions to remain relevant, they may need to be adapted to resonate with the modern youth. While initiation schools play a key role in reinforcing cultural ties, concerns about younger generations losing this connection highlight the challenge of balancing

tradition with contemporary societal changes. These findings align with Mudau's (2025) view that initiation schools are vital rites of passage. Yet, they also reflect the ongoing challenge of how traditional practices can evolve, while maintaining their cultural significance in the face of modern influences.

Theme 5: Perceived Benefits of Participating in Initiation Schools

The finding related to the perceived benefits of participating in initiation schools highlights a range of positive aspects that the youth associate with these traditional practices. Many participants emphasised that *murundu* and *vhukomba* play a crucial role in fostering responsibility, a deeper understanding of adulthood, and the importance of cultural duties. In addition, initiation schools are seen as providing life lessons not found in modern education, such as how to navigate challenges and make important life decisions. The connection to heritage, culture, and the sense of community and brotherhood was also highlighted as a significant benefit. Many participants noted that these schools help instil discipline and respect for elders, qualities they feel are lacking in contemporary education systems. These findings underscore the value that initiation schools offer in shaping personal development and cultural identity.

YFP16 stated that: “*Murundu* and *vhukomba* help build a sense of responsibility and understanding of our cultural duties.”

YMP12 mentioned that: “The experience of *murundu* gives you a better understanding of adulthood and what it means to be a man.”

The findings of this study highlight the significant role initiation schools, such as *murundu* and *vhukomba*, play in the personal growth and cultural identity of the youth. The participants emphasised how these schools teach life lessons beyond modern education, fostering responsibility, a deeper understanding of adulthood, and cultural duties, while also reinforcing values like respect for elders and a sense of community. These benefits align with those mentioned in the existing literature, including Mabena's work, which stresses the importance of initiation schools in transmitting cultural knowledge and strengthening community bonds. Despite the challenges posed by modern education and societal changes, the study supports the continued relevance of initiation schools in shaping individuals grounded in their cultural heritage and identity.

The findings of this study align with the principles of the Sankofa theory, which emphasises the importance of looking to the past to inform the present and future. “Sankofa,” a concept from the Akan people of West Africa, means “return and fetch it” or “it is not taboo to go back and fetch what is at risk of being left behind.” The study highlights the role of traditional initiation schools, such as *murundu* and *vhukomba*, in preserving cultural continuity and ancestral knowledge. Many participants noted how these schools helped them reconnect with their roots by teaching values like respect for elders, responsibility, and the importance of community. Through these practices, the youth preserve their cultural heritage, using it as a foundation for personal growth and

moral development. This reflects Sankofa's idea that cultural practices from the past are vital for understanding our identity in the modern world. Sankofa also stresses the need for cultural practices to evolve in response to contemporary challenges while maintaining core values, which was evident in the study's findings. Some participants felt that although initiation schools provided a deeper understanding of adulthood and cultural responsibility, elements like rigid gender roles were outdated and misaligned with modern values. Sankofa supports this dynamic approach, recognising that traditions must evolve to remain relevant in shaping a strong cultural identity and preparing youth for the complexities of the modern world. Moreover, the study suggests that future success is rooted in a strong understanding of cultural heritage, with initiation schools offering life lessons not typically taught in modern education, such as navigating challenges, making decisions, and developing responsibility. These values align with the Sankofa philosophy of drawing strength from ancestral wisdom to address contemporary issues, highlighting that looking to the past is essential for shaping a better future.

Conclusion

Through the empirical data, the study accomplished its objective of exploring the perceptions of the Vhavenḁa youth towards the *murundu* and *vhukomba* initiation schools in the Tshimbupfhe-Davhana villages. In this regard, it investigated the factors influencing these perceptions and examined the contributions of these traditional schools to moral development. The findings of this study revealed that while some youths recognise the cultural significance of initiation schools, others question their relevance in the modern world. The influence of the family, peer pressure, and modern education was identified as a key factor shaping youth perceptions. Furthermore, initiation schools were found to contribute significantly to moral development by instilling values such as respect, responsibility, and community cohesion, although concerns about gender-specific teachings were raised. Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between tradition, modernity, and the evolving perceptions of the Vhavenḁa youth regarding initiation schools. To ensure the continued importance of initiation schools, it is recommended that they evolve by incorporating contemporary teachings, including practical life skills and adaptive approaches that resonate with today's youth. Additionally, promoting the use of indigenous languages like Tshivendḁa beyond the initiation context is crucial to preserving their cultural identity and strengthening the intergenerational bonds. Encouraging the younger generation to embrace their language and cultural heritage in their daily lives will contribute to the long-term sustainability of these traditions, ensuring that they remain a vital part of the community's social fabric.

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