

The Role Of Sepedi Proverbs In Developing People's Critical Thinking And Problem Solving Skills

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Abstract

A proverb is a short, and well-known pithy saying, stating a general truth or piece of an advice. Our great grandparents created proverbs to guide and to protect people. The purpose of this study is to create awareness of the importance of proverbs and enlighten people on how they can use them to develop their critical thinking and problem solving skills. The study adopted qualitative approach, purposive and convenient sampling method to sample ten old elders/senior citizens who are Sepedi speakers due to their experiences of life and knowledge of folklore analysis. Semi-structured interview and document analysis were used to collect data and thematic analysis approach was used to analyse data. The findings of the study indicated various factors in which proverbs can be used to solve problems and recommendations are made on how to develop proverb analysis skills.

Keywords: Sepedi proverb, Critical thinking, Problem solving, Culture and Norms

1. INTRODUCTION

Most countries have their proverbs and wise sayings. In Africa, African proverbs are the pride of the African culture. From time of immemorial, African proverbs have been used to convey messages during important conversations. It is believed that such sayings come from the wise and that only the wise understands it. In African languages, proverbs are used consciously to educate, guide and to persuade. Proverbs are a way in which society warns its members about the endangerments of life. African proverbs play an important part in African cultures across the continent. The Sepedi proverbs are formed many years ago with the intention of educating the youth about life and its complications. The Sepedi proverbs consist of the wisdom and the experience of life. These

proverbs teach young people about unity, respect, love, caring, support and trust. The themes of African proverbs include power, death, problem solving, wealth, foolishness, fate, and the importance of community. A particular culture's choice of proverbs tells something about that culture; with the Sepedi proverb, one can learn how to maintain a good behaviour. The proverb can teach a person to make good decisions in life, as well as knowing the repercussion of every decision made. Proverbs are linguistically unique because they are usually based on the traditions of its users. This implies that they are the cultural tools for transferring the traditions of a speech community in terms of their values, beliefs and collective knowledge from one generation to another. In the Sepedi speech community, proverbs are multifunctional and flexible instruments of language use for several aspects of the Sepedi societies in which they operate. Nokaneng (1991:72) agrees that a proverb is a concrete saying that expresses the truth on common sense or experience of life. It reveals the truth or education about the behavior of a person in a wise manner that no one could disagree.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Most young people especially learners at schools and students at tertiary levels do not take proverbs serious. They do not know if there is anything useful that one can learn from proverbs. They think that proverbs are just an old way of speaking used by our great-grandparents. The use of proverbs is gradually fading away. Most people lack problem-solving skills as they are lacking the knowledge of proverbs. Old people used proverbs during weddings to encourage the bride and the groom to have patience in their marriage, as they knew that there are challenges and difficulties in marriage, which will require the couple to solve them. When judging cases in the kingdom or in the community, African people used to rely on the use of proverbs to solve various problems.

Over the years, the use of proverbs has become associated with the wise, the elderly and the grey haired who pride themselves in the knowledge of the proverbs and use them to give advice to youth. In the Sepedi tradition, it is usually a typical for one to tell a proverb and still be the one to explain the meaning. Therefore, it is important for youth to learn the meaning of proverbs as well. Mphasha (2015) accentuates that:

Parents should continue to transmit proverbs, as part of oral art, from one generation to the next because their use is gradually fading out. Changing times and situations require forms of expressions that the traditional proverbs can no longer supply. This implies that new proverbs should be created to express and come to terms with contemporary issues and new technology.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study used cultural relativism, which is associated with a general tolerance and respect for difference. This theory refers to the idea that

cultural context is critical to an understanding of people's values, beliefs and practices. Cultural relativism refers to the idea that the values, knowledge, and behaviour of people must be understood within their own cultural context. This is one of the most fundamental concepts in sociology, as it recognises and affirms the connections between the greater social structure, trends and the everyday lives of individual people. No one understands the proverbs, functions and intentions better than the language speakers of those proverbs. Cultural relativism is the idea that a person's beliefs, values, and practices should be understood based on the person's own culture, rather than judged against the criteria of another.

Rosa (1996) indicates that the material and social world are mediated through our minds: that people's experience of the world is mediated through the knowledge and ideas they hold about the world. Consequently, this relative epistemology or cognitive relativism makes it difficult to identify universal experiences that hold true for everyone, because it is likely that one person's experience of an event or activity will not be the same as that of another person. Cognitive relativism, then, refers broadly to an intellectual stance that rejects the idea of an absolute viewpoint and the existence of objective criteria for making judgments about what is or is not real or true. Cultural relativism is associated with a general tolerance and respect for difference, which refers to the idea that cultural context is critical to an understanding of people's values, beliefs and practices. Therefore, cultural relativism is appropriate for this study because it shows that no one can understand the African proverbs better than African people because proverbs contain their culture and norms and therefore it cannot be easy for one to understand or analyse an intended proverb meaning of a certain proverb.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This qualitative study used exploratory research design by conducting interviews in order to get information. Qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena because it helps us to understand the social world in which we live and why things are the way they are (Creswell, 2003). In other words, it is concerned with the social aspects of our world and seeks to answer questions about why people behave the way they do, how opinions and attitudes are formed, how people are affected by the events that go on around them, how and why cultures and practices have developed in the way they have. The purposive sampling was used to select participants. Purposive sampling refers to selecting participants with particular criteria that will enable the researcher to answer their research question. Bernad (2002) and Mason (2002) indicate that the purposive sampling technique, also called judgment sampling, is the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses. In this study, participants were

selected because they have particular attributes that the researcher wants to study. The researchers interviewed 10 elders comprise of 5 males and 5 females.

4.2 DATA COLLECTION

Sapsford and Jupp (1996) and Howell (2013) define data collection as the systematic approach of gathering and measuring information from a variety of sources to get a complete and accurate picture of an area of interest. Data collection enables a person or an organization to answer relevant questions, evaluate outcomes and make predictions about future probabilities and trends. This study relied more on interviews, books, dissertations, thesis, articles, and other written products that are related to the topic of this study.

5. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

In this study, data is analysed using thematic content analysis. Thematic analysis is one of the most common forms of analysis in qualitative research. It emphasizes pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns or themes within data. Themes are patterns across data sets that are important to the description of a phenomenon and are associated to a specific research question. The themes become the categories for analysis. Thematic analysis is performed through the process of coding in six phases to create established, meaningful patterns which include familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report (Guest, 2012:11). The findings of this study were discussed and presented according to the following themes:

5.1 Proverb roles in problem solving

5.1.1 Patience

Endurance is an essential ingredient in problem solving. Problem solving is based on endurance. People should learn to face their problems no matter how big the problems are. Problems and conflicts will always be part of life, so people need to stay calm and resolve them patiently.

Mabothata ke tau ya mokgalabje (Problems are like an old lion)

An old lion is a lion that does not have energy and power, and therefore cannot fight back because it is no longer strong. If you are not facing an old lion, you will be terrified and run away by just hearing it roar; such a lion is only scary if you see it from a distance. When a person approaches a lion and realises that it is too old with no sharp teeth to bite, no power to fight and cannot even run to catch you, there is no way you can be afraid of such lion.

Participant 1, 4 and 7 agree that this proverb emphasizes that every problem in life is frightening, but if you try to solve it then you will realise that there is a solution. Problems are compared to an old lion, which is

scary yet unable to fight or fight back. This proverb encourages one to stand up for oneself and to deal with one's problems. When a person is in trouble, he or she should try his level best to fight the problem and not to ignore it or run away from it because no matter how difficult it may seem, the truth is that in the end it can be resolved. People should make use of this proverb to empower their patience in their problem and challenges without giving up as this proverb encourages the power of problem solving.

According to the participant 10, this proverb means that if you do not have the vision, patience, or the ability to think and solve your own problems, you will not be able to do the simple things in life. Marlin (2017) believes that running away from a problem only increases the distance from the solution. Problem solving needs a faith that there is always a better way, and a problem is a chance for you to do your best. Giving up is the most painful way of solving a problem therefore patience is a key. Compbell (2015) add by saying that "All problems become smaller when you confront them instead of dodging them."

Kgotlelelo e tswala katlego (Perseverance is the mother of success)

According to participant 2, 7 and 10, this proverb refers to the fact that a key to success is patience. Participant 7 emphasised that not everything may come easy in life and same applies to problem solving. Some problems may take minutes to be solved whereas other problems takes days. In order to be successful you need patience when it comes to solving problems or overcoming life challenges. Furthermore, you have to remain calm amid the big and small twists and turns that come with life. It is only through being patient that we can truly learn from the curveballs which are thrown in our path. Participant 6 says that impatience is a habit, and so is patience. When there is a lack of patience, there is an inability to delay gratification for more than the moment, which fills us with frustration. Frustration is the emotional energy that drives quitting.

When it comes to making good decisions, patience is the most formidable resource. Campbell (2015) believes that Patience develops excellence. Talent is long earned patience. At the core of every true success is an awareness of the difficulties inherent in any achievement and the confidence that by persisting and being patient, something worthwhile will be realised. In this way, genius is nothing but a greater propensity for patience.

5.1.2 Proverbs develop critical thinking skills

According to Ennis (2015:32), critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualising, applying, analysing, synthesising, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. Critical thinking has seven critical features: being inquisitive and curious, being open-minded to

different sides, being able to think systematically, being analytical, being persistent to truth, being confident about critical thinking itself, and lastly, being mature.

Ditlabonyane ke ditlaboima (Things may start easy but later become difficult)

Small problems have to be solved so that they do not grow into serious problems. When you encounter a small problem, you have to be alerted that a bigger one may be on the way. This proverb encourages critical thinking, as one should always try to solve problems no matter how small they are; even though the problem may look small or easy to solve, later it might grow and become difficult to solve. This proverb is often used when there is a serious problem that people begin to realize that it is going to grow or take the climax point after a minor problem has arisen. In this parable, people will be trying to discipline that a particular task should be taken care of because even though it has already created a small problem, there are signs that the problem is still in its infancy. Participant 3 & 8 explain that:

Although most people use this proverb when a problem appears, this proverb contains different messages that are not just about problems. The use of this proverb is very broad. One of the messages of this proverb is to warn people or to teach them that in life everything has its stages and that each process starts with a gentle stage. Nothing starts with the difficulty part or start at the problematic level. Even a baby should start by crawling, standing then later walk.

Mmutla laela segola, o bone nao la motsomi kgauswi (Rabbit leave the nest, you saw the hunter's footprint is near)

The above-mentioned proverb advises a person to have some critical thinking skills by analysing things that are happening around in order to be on the safe side. When you see a smoke, you should understand that there is fire that caused that smoke and stay away. A person should not force to go where there are signs of danger. It is important to stay far from things that can put you in danger, hence other Sepedi speakers say 'Mmutla laela segola, go tšwa ka madi ga go bose', by saying this they are providing a definition of this proverb which is choosing to be safe by all means every time. When a rabbit sees some footprints of predators or hunters near its warren it should run away. If the rabbit chooses to stay in that warren instead of running away to find another shelter, then hunters will find it and kill it. In this way, the rabbit chose to be in danger instead of safety because signs of danger were there.

Participant 4 add the definition of this proverb by saying that dangerous or risky actions often lead to pain and injury. If you play with fire, you will get burnt. Our great grandparents formed proverbs in order to solve problems and even to avoid the incoming ones. Sometimes avoiding problems it's also a solution hence the Sepedi speakers have a saying that

‘Thibela malwetši e phala kalafo’, which means prevention is better than cure.

6.1.3 Punishment as a source of problem solving.

The purpose of punishment is to stop people from committing crime under the fear of being punished and it might be reached through the well-developed criminal justice system, one of the main aims of punishment is to ensure that every wrongdoer is punished for the criminal acts. Murat (2019) explains that punishments are applied for various purposes, most generally, to encourage and enforce proper behaviour as defined by society or family. Fines, corporal punishment, punish criminals judicially or custodial sentences such as prison and detainees risk further punishments for breaches of internal rules. Children, and other trainees may be punished by their educators or instructors (mainly parents, guardians, or teachers, tutors and coaches).

Mafenya (2012:2) says that proverbs are used in traditional courts. When both the plaintiff and defendant plead their case, they often use proverbs to underscore their arguments. The judge in these courts, usually the chief of the tribe, often resorts to proverbs when giving judgement.

Legotlo le lefa ka setopo. (A rat pays with its life)

A mouse is a small animal that likes to steal food from people and collect food scraps at night while people are sleeping. A mouse do not only steal food, but also other items such as clothes. Because of its behavior, people tend to set a trap for the mouse, and killed it. A person who steals is not popular in the community because of his doings as he break people's hearts; they end up seeking for a revenge since he takes away what they have worked hard for.

Participant 3, 5 & 6 says that In South Africa, this proverb is often used in court cases. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa states that if a person has wronged or mistreated another person, he or she must face imprisonment where he will be severely punished according to the crime he committed. Going to prison to pay for your crimes is compared to the mouse that pays with its life for stealing. When you are imprisoned, you meet with troublesome people as you and therefore they teach you a lesson.

Participant 2 & 9 interpret this proverb by emphasising that a person who likes to harass people with what they own, whether it be stealing, killing or raping, should be punished. Punishment is the key to teach a person what is right from wrong, and it is a way to teach a person a lesson so that he will never do things that hurt others. In the past, if a person has stolen anything from others, he was taken to the royal court, where he will pay for his sin. He could pay with the goat or the bull depending on the crime he committed. Paying for your crime is not just a death sentence, but it is any punishment that can hurt a person physically or emotionally for the purpose of giving that person a life lesson.

OK Matsepe in his novels shows that he is in agreement with this proverb as he uses kings to judge and punish people accordingly when they committed crimes or disobeyed rules. This is evidenced in his novel *Megokgo ya bjoko* (1968: 24), when a man called Leilane was severely punished by being fined four cows at the royal court after beating his wife Mohlatsa and his mother-in-law.

Molato ga o bole. (A crime does not decay)

Participant 6 says that after committing a crime, a person may try to cover up for what he has done in order to escape punishment, but when he is found guilty, he will be punished. The participant 6 further gave example about the former president Jacob Zuma who is still facing some criminal charges for things that he allegedly did when he was still a president. Mashego (2018) on city press says that Zuma is expected to face 18 charges of corruption, money laundering and racketeering, originating from 783 questionable payments he received the time he was still a president.

Thoka (2012:243) explains the proverb by saying that even if it is found that a person committed a crime long time ago, that crime will remain a crime and the person has to be charged. Participant 8 explains that this proverb is often used when a criminal or a perpetrator who has long been suspected or wanted has been found guilty.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to create awareness of the importance of proverbs and enlighten people on how they can use them to develop their critical thinking and problem solving skills. This study found that proverbs are the key to life, as they encourage and help people to stay on the path to life because they solve problems and provide solution on how to prevent problems. The study also found that proverbs are the foundation of life because knowledge in the proverbs is based on experience; that is why they reveal a deeper knowledge of life in general. Thus, proverbs are about things that are happening to people all the time, and help them to deal with various challenges of life. The study recommends that youth need to be taught proverbs in order to understand them, so that they will be able to use them in solving their problems. Folklore should form part of tests and examinations in schools so that teachers and learners can start paying attention to them. Furthermore, CAPS document as a book that guides teachers on how to assign learners' tasks should include activities related to folklore. Folklore books should not only be additional textbooks in schools where learners should read them for themselves, but should also be considered as literature and form part of p2 question papers.

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