

Culture for Education: Influence of Initiation Rites on the Behaviour of Male Learners at Schools

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the effects of initiation rites and how they influence male students' behaviour at school is an essential component of education. It is consistent with the idea that understanding the impact of circumcision rites on male students may encourage contact between initiates and teachers at school. If the reason for the negative side of behavioural change is not identified, it may persist or worsen, harming teaching and learning. The article contributes to the extensive debates around initiation and how it socializes young male students. Furthermore, even though initiation is widely practised worldwide and in South Africa, limited research has been conducted to determine whether initiation affects the behaviour of male students at school. The study used qualitative interpretive phenomenology to establish the perspectives on the behaviour of male initiates at school. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve participants, learners, educators from one high school, and four traditional leaders in the Eastern Cape province. Findings revealed that educators observed undesirable behavioural changes in some initiates. This information suggests that traditional leaders should work with schools to address the challenge of initiates' behaviour.

KEYWORDS

Adolescent; behavioural change; culture; initiation; education, rites of passage.

INTRODUCTION

Male initiation, often involving circumcision, has been practised for various cultural, social, religious, or medical reasons (Setswe et al., 2015). Historical evidence traces circumcision back to 2345 BC in Egyptian tombs, making it one of the oldest medical procedures (El-Hout & Khauli, 2007). In Judaism and Islam, neonatal circumcision within the first two weeks is a religious ritual, while in the USA, it has been commonplace since the late 19th century (Morris et al., 2012; van Howe, 1997). Culturally, circumcision at puberty serves as a rite of passage into adulthood (Earp & Darby, 2017).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the initiation of boys includes circumcision, which is expected to bring about behavioural changes as they transition to manhood. However, this change has led to challenges, particularly in schools, where teachers in the Amatole area of South Africa report inappropriate behaviour from male initiates.

While many communities emphasize the importance of traditional rites of passage, unanswered questions remain. Various ethnic groups in South Africa, including the Sotho, Pedi, Xhosa, and Tswana, conduct these initiation ceremonies. Specifically, in Xhosa culture, the initiation of male teenagers is a respected custom, symbolising the transition to manhood and the acceptance of adult responsibilities. This practice helps preserve vital Xhosa values integral to honouring their ancestors (Nqeketho, 2008).

Research indicates that being circumcised may lead to a perceived lack of respect towards initiates from other cultures who have not undergone the procedure. Respect is vital in social interactions, as it reflects acceptance and acknowledges an individual's social standing, credibility, and sense of belonging (De Cremer & Tyler 2011; Tyler & De Cremer 2005). In society, respect implies equality, where no one is deemed inferior or superior to others (Simon, Lucken, & Stürmer, 2006).

Problem Statement

Educators at schools are faced with the mammoth task of providing education to learners indiscriminately. The provision of education in South African schools involves the complexity of interacting with learners from various religious and cultural backgrounds. Educators have been complaining about the behaviour of male students at schools after they had undergone initiation rites. Despite these concerns of the teacher, there is still great interest in the initiation of males of school-going age (Mohlaloka et al., 2016).

Limited information has sought to understand the concerns of educators in dealing with the unwanted behaviour of initiates at schools. Moreover, from the background, it is evident that if this challenge is not addressed, it can impede education provision. It is, therefore, essential to provide insights into teachers' views on the behaviour of initiated male students. The focus is on male students because they are perceived to be behaving untoward post-initiation, especially towards female teachers. This knowledge will help better our understanding of the importance of effective coexistence of the traditions of initiation and

education in ensuring that male learners complete their education, and teachers assist them without reservation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In reviewing the literature, this article focused on the initiation as a rite of passage and influence in education. These themes are discussed as follows:

The young male's concept of initiation

Early human societies have recorded initiation practices as integral to religion and culture (Sompane, 2021). Both Roman and Jewish communities used circumcision as a form of initiation for religious purposes, while ancient Egyptians similarly embraced circumcision (Sompane, 2021). In South Africa, the initiation of boys into manhood, often involving circumcision, is predominantly observed among the Venda, Tsonga, and Xhosa ethnic groups.

Ntombana (2011) characterises initiation as a rite of passage that signifies an individual's acceptance into a specific community or organisation. It also acts as a formal transition to adulthood within a group. Historically, these initiation practices have been recognised for their role in fostering the morality of boys (Ratele, 2010). For the amaXhosa people in the Eastern Province of South Africa, male initiation is regarded as a vital rite of passage, essential for the moral development of young men as they grow (Ratele, 2010). This process is critical in shaping initiates' moral and ethical frameworks as they move from boyhood to manhood within their cultural setting.

The tradition of initiation has deep historical significance, with comparable rituals found in various ancient cultures, often linked to religious and cultural beliefs. In South Africa, the initiation of young boys, including circumcision, holds particular importance for ethnic groups like the Venda, Tsonga, and Xhosa. These rites are crucial for the moral and ethical growth of initiates, marking their formal entry into adulthood within their communities.

Influence of initiation in education and on the students

The psychological impact of the male initiation tradition involves a notable change in the personalities of the newly graduated initiates (Papu & Verster, 2006). Mtuze (2004) describes boyhood as a period of freedom where youths are often seen as immature and not taken seriously. This character transformation means that initiated males are expected to act with greater maturity and responsibility, contrasting sharply with the anti-social and reckless behaviours that were more accepted before initiation.

The ritual of having a respected community member anoint the new initiates aims to transfer the anointer's positive traits to them (Mtuze, 2004). However, the newfound "freedom" associated with manhood can lead to negative outcomes, such as male initiates disrespecting female teachers and marginalizing those who have not been initiated.

Traditionally, the seclusion period for circumcision rituals lasted 3 to 6 months, but it has now been shortened to 2 to 3 weeks to accommodate the school calendar. This reduction is often insufficient for the complete healing of circumcision wounds.

Moreover, education has become the primary focus for young people, creating a conflict between traditional rituals and Western educational demands. In 2001, a Council of Education Ministers meeting aimed to address these issues by bringing together traditional leaders to reconcile the interests of initiation schools and formal education. The goal was to align their schedules to minimize youth participation and attention conflicts.

The research underscores the psychological changes male initiates face as they move from the carefree nature of boyhood to more responsible manhood. However, this shift can result in unintended behaviours, such as disobedience towards female teachers and discrimination against peers who have not been initiated. The difficulties in merging traditional initiation practices with formal education have spurred efforts to balance these crucial aspects of youth development.

Teachers' perspectives on the behaviour of the male student initiate

The research indicates a rise in incidents of negative behaviour among initiates at school. Kang'ethe and Mpateni (2023) observed this trend in their study, comparing past initiates' behaviours with those who recently completed the initiation process.

Teachers have noted several problematic behaviours in male initiates, including:

- A decreased focus on academics after achieving manhood.
- A tendency to belittle those who have not been initiated.
- A mix of immaturity and bullying.

instilling discipline is essential for guiding initiates toward improved behaviour, according to (Blasé et al., 2016) Teachers stressed the importance of reinforcement, ongoing mentoring, and establishing post-initiation counseling and disciplinary frameworks. These measures aim to help initiates adhere to the standards and expectations of traditional leaders overseeing the initiation process.

The general tendency for initiated male students to belittle those who are not initiated can manifest as bullying, potentially leading to violent behaviours in the future. Initiates are often trained to be courageous, but this bravery may sometimes be misapplied (Ratele, 2010). This can create negative social dynamics, where initiates perceive themselves as superior to uninitiated boys (De Cort, 2009; Mamatey, 2010; Mfecane, 2013). Such behaviours can lead to initiates becoming gender bullies, as initiation is primarily undertaken by boys transitioning into manhood.

The research underscores growing concerns about the behavioural changes that males initiate upon their return to school. Teachers have reported various problematic attitudes, including a lack of academic focus, bullying from uninitiated peers, and a blend of immaturity and aggression. Addressing these challenges through reinforcement, mentoring, and supportive structures, post-initiation is deemed essential by educators.

The shift of focus from schoolwork by initiate

Another concerning behaviour noted by teachers is the shift in focus from academic achievement to the newly acquired status of manhood. Initiation rituals often distract initiates from their education, as they prioritize the initiation experience over their studies. Research suggests that adjusting the age of initiation could help ensure that initiates complete certain educational levels, potentially reducing undesirable bullying behaviours towards those who have not been initiated (Gwata, 2009).

However, circumcision, a key component of initiation, typically occurs between the ages of 10 and 22 (Gwata, 2009), which can disrupt the focus of students. While circumcision has benefits such as cultural acceptance, enhanced sexual health, disease prevention, and improved hygiene (Venter, 2011; Westerkamp & Bailey, 2007;) it is crucial to ensure it occurs at an appropriate age. Teachers believe that society, including traditional leaders, should contribute to educating initiates about expected behaviours upon returning to school.

The literature indicates a potential conflict between the initiation process and the educational objectives of the initiates. The shift in focus from academic success to newfound manhood can hinder learning and result in negative behaviours like bullying. To tackle this issue, researchers propose reconsidering the timing of initiation rituals to better align with educational milestones. Additionally, educators view engaging the community, including traditional leaders, in educating initiates about appropriate conduct post-initiation as a viable solution.

The article responded to the following question:

What are the perspectives of teachers about the change in the behaviour of male learners at school after initiation rites?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework of this paper is grounded in Social Constructionism (SC). The research focuses on understanding the factors contributing to initiates' misbehaviour after their initiation, which may stem from social influences on culture and their personal lives. Social Constructionism posits that individuals play a crucial role in shaping cultures, politics, and histories, thereby reconfiguring cultural, social, and temporal psychological processes (Ntozini & Ngqangweni, 2017). This suggests that society can collaborate with schools to create programs to influence new initiates' behaviour positively.

Furthermore, Alatas (2014) highlights that social life differs based on cultural beliefs, class, race, and other factors, emphasizing the need to develop masculinity theories that reflect diverse experiences. Social Constructionism is particularly relevant to this study because it fosters a shared understanding of reality, which informs common beliefs about the world. This approach facilitates a more nuanced comprehension of the intricate social dynamics surrounding male initiation rituals and their effects on the behaviour and development of initiates.

By recognizing the influence of social, cultural, and contextual factors on individual and collective experiences, Social Constructionism offers a framework for examining the varied perspectives and challenges related to integrating traditional male initiation practices with formal education. This understanding can guide the creation of collaborative strategies and programs that meet the needs of both initiates and educational institutions.

The social constructionist view suggests that initiates' misbehaviour post-rituals may be influenced by broader social, cultural, and historical contexts that shape their experiences and concepts of masculinity. This framework enables an in-depth exploration of the complex relationships between the initiation process, the educational system, and societal expectations placed on young men, aiming to develop joint solutions that facilitate the successful integration of initiates into their communities and educational settings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a phenomenological design to explore educators' perspectives on the factors contributing to male learners' misbehaviour after their initiation. This design is more suitable for this research because, rather than theorising based on the participants' views and generating a theoretical model, phenomenologists aim to describe the ordinary experiences all participants share as they engage with a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2014).

The phenomenological approach allows the researchers to capture the lived experiences and perceptions of the educators, focusing on understanding the essence of the problem from their standpoint. By prioritizing the direct accounts and understandings of the educators, this design enables the study to gain a more nuanced and grounded insight into the causes of post-initiation misbehaviour among male learners.

Unlike approaches seeking to develop abstract theories, the phenomenological design emphasizes describing the shared experiences and meanings the educators ascribe to the phenomenon. This allows the researchers to explore the problem from the educators' perspective without imposing preconceived theoretical frameworks that might overlook important contextual factors.

Therefore, the choice of the phenomenological design reflects the researchers' intention to deeply understand the educators' lived experiences and perspectives on the causes of post-initiation misbehaviour, rather than generating a generalised theoretical model. This approach is well-suited to the study's exploratory nature and its focus on capturing the authentic voices and understandings of the key stakeholders involved.

Sampling

The research was conducted in the Amatole region, which has around 25 schools. However, only three high schools were selected for the study, focusing specifically on the perspectives of Grade 12 male learners. The four educators chosen taught Grades 11-12, as they were likely to interact more frequently with the male learners who had undergone initiation.

The researchers utilised a purposive sampling method to target a specific group expected to provide relevant information (Creswell, 2014). In this instance, the aim was to gather insights from educators teaching the relevant grades regarding the causes of male learner misbehaviour after initiation.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 12 educators (8 male and 4 female). Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes and took place within the school environment. An interview guide was employed to facilitate the data collection, allowing the interviewer to adjust the order and phrasing of questions as needed (Rubin & Babbie, 2016).

The semi-structured format was selected because it encouraged participants to discuss and reflect on issues they might not have previously considered (Boyce & Neal, 2014). The one-on-one nature of the interviews also enabled deeper questioning, allowing knowledgeable participants to provide detailed insights into the research topic (Harrel & Bradley, 2009).

To ensure participant anonymity, each educator was assigned a pseudonym, such as Educator 1, 2022, Educator 2, 2022, etc. In adherence to research ethics, permission was obtained from all relevant authorities, and participants signed consent forms indicating their voluntary participation without compensation.

Data presentation

The qualitative data analysis for this research involved collecting, combining, coding, separating into manageable units, organizing, and creating patterns from the data, as described by Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2017). This approach guided the codes that led to the development of themes.

The data was presented using pseudonyms to protect the participants' privacy, and the codes, categories, and emerging themes were examined thematically (Chiavacci, 2020). The data was systematically analysed according to the themes that arose, which were directly responsive to the research questions focusing on teachers' perceptions of the factors causing male initiates to misbehave upon returning to school.

The data analysis aimed to capture the different perspectives on the factors impacting the behaviour of male initiates at school. The key themes that emerged from the discussions included "initiates behaving well in communities," "cultural respect," and "focus on education for a better future." These themes served as a framework for organizing and engaging with the data, leading to the results presented in the article.

To enhance the confirmability of the findings, the researcher took several measures, including:

1. Avoiding interruptions with participants as much as possible during the interviews
2. Recording the interviews on a voice recorder and taking notes to ensure that key points were not missed.
3. Incorporating direct quotations from the participants to represent their opinions in their own words accurately.

The main limitation of the research is that it was confined to the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, even though the practice of initiation rites is also observed in other provinces.

Analysis of findings

The data analysis process led to several key themes, as illustrated in Figure 1.1 below. The discussion of these themes incorporates direct quotes from the participant responses, which aim to capture the authentic perspectives and experiences shared by the educators.

Educators' perspectives

The analysis also integrates relevant insights from the reviewed literature. By blending the participants' voices with the supporting literature, the analysis can provide a rich, multi-faceted understanding of the factors contributing to male learner misbehaviour following the initiation process.

The emerging themes serve as a framework for organizing and communicating the critical insights generated through the research. This approach allows the analysis to contextualize the findings within the broader academic discourse on the topic while highlighting the educators' perspectives and experiences.

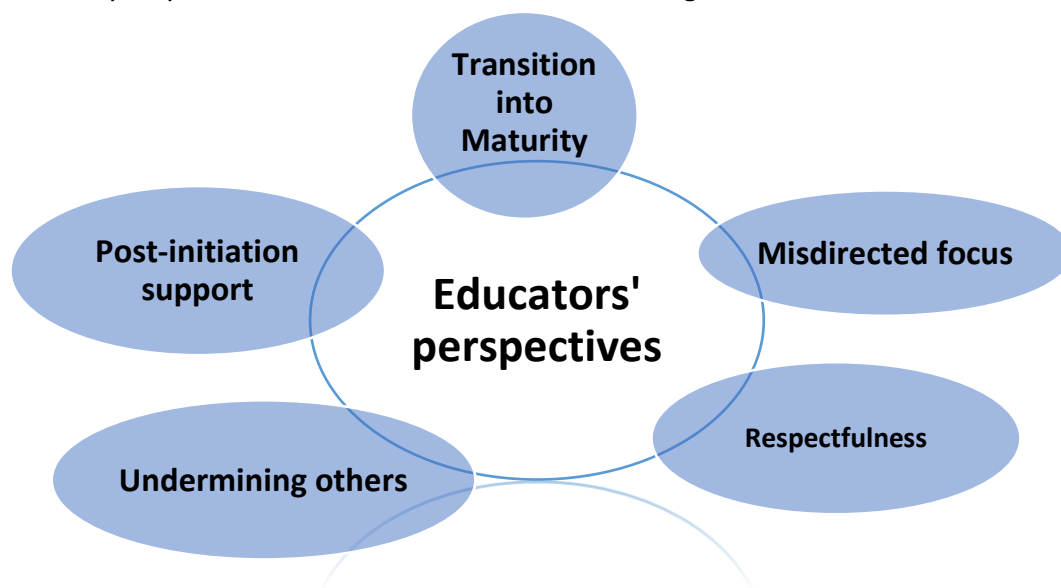
Overall, the thematic analysis draws on both the empirical data collected from the educators and the theoretical foundations established in the existing body of knowledge. This combination of the participants' direct accounts and the reviewed literature strengthens the credibility and depth of the research findings, providing a comprehensive understanding of the behavioural changes observed in male learners after the initiation rites.

By directly referencing the participants' own words and integrating relevant scholarly insights, the analysis aims to present a balanced and nuanced perspective on the topic, drawing on both the empirical data and the theoretical underpinnings to generate a rich and contextualized understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Figure 1.1 provides an overview of the educators' perspectives on the behavioural changes they expected to observe in male learners who have undergone the initiation rites. The visual representation summarizes the educators' primary expectations regarding the potential impact of the initiation process on the male learners' conduct upon their return to the school environment.

The educators anticipate a mix of desirable and undesirable behavioural shifts, and the subsequent sections expand on the details of the findings for each emergent theme. By highlighting the positive and negative behavioural changes the educators foresee, the figure sets the stage for a more comprehensive exploration of these themes in the following analysis sections.

The research aims to present a balanced and nuanced understanding of the educators' perspectives through this structured approach. The expanded discussion that follows allows for a deeper dive into the specific details and contextual factors underlying the educators' expectations, derived from their firsthand experiences and observations.

Figure 1.*Educators' perspectives on initiates' behavioural changes*

Overall, the layered presentation, beginning with the thematic overview in Figure 1.1 and then delving into the detailed findings, provides the reader with a clear and coherent understanding of the key insights generated through the research. This approach enables a comprehensive and contextual understanding of the educators' perspectives on the behavioural changes associated with the initiation rites.

Mis-directed focus

Concerning the educators' views on how learners' behaviour changes following the initiation ritual, there was a general agreement that initiates often shift their attention away from academic responsibilities to their newly attained status as men. This perspective is reflected in the following quotes from the educators, which illustrate their observations and concerns regarding this behavioural transition.

They noted that this shift can lead to a decline in academic performance and a greater emphasis on social status among peers. Educators expressed that after the initiation, some learners may prioritize their identity as men over their studies, disrupting their educational progress and affecting classroom dynamics. The quotes provided by the educators will shed light on their experiences and insights regarding this significant behavioural change among male learners following initiation.

"There is always a big change in behaviour after the ceremony as some initiated learners tend to demand respect from other learners' contrary, they don't respect even the teachers." (Educator 1, 2022)

"They focus much on being called "man" at the expense of their schoolwork. They abscond or bunk classes as they gather in their groups of initiates" (Educator 3, 2022).

“They also segregate other learners who have not yet undergone the same ceremony. Some are even bullies to other learners. They don’t listen or pay attention at school” (Educator 4, 2022).

This suggested that when these male learners are from the initiation stage, their level of focus on their studies is negatively affected. According to another educator, the outcomes observed among the initiates after completing the initiation rituals vary. Some initiates emerge from the initiation schools with a more focused and responsible mindset, while others exhibit a somewhat stubborn or resistant attitude.

This variation in outcomes is considered a normal result by the educator. The purpose of the initiation schools is to guide and orient the initiates into adulthood and responsibility, but the ultimate application of those lessons learned during the rituals remains an individual choice made by each initiate.

The educator recognises that the initiation process is designed to impart important cultural values, norms, and expectations to the boys as they transition into manhood. However, the extent to which the initiates internalize and apply these lessons in their subsequent behaviour is not uniform across all participants.

Some initiates may embrace the intended transformation and exhibit more mature, responsible behaviours, while others may resist or struggle to fully adopt the desired mindset and conduct. This diversity of outcomes is seen as a natural consequence of the initiation process, as the educators acknowledge that the initiates still have the autonomy to decide how to put the lessons into practice in their lives.

The educator’s perspective highlights the nuanced nature of the initiation rituals and their influence on the initiates. While the overarching goal is to guide the boys towards adulthood, the actual behavioural changes exhibited by the initiates after the rituals can vary, ultimately depending on each young man’s individual choices and commitment. One educator posits: *“The initiates who have done the ceremony at an early age tend to change negatively in behaviour. They become disobedient, unruly, and bullies. Some even venture into bad habits of drinking and smoking since they feel that they are men and can do anything they please.” [Educator 4,2022]*

Initiates undermining other students.

The educators observed that initiates tend to undermine those who have not completed the initiation process. As one educator noted, there is a tendency for newly initiated individuals to look down on or undermine those who have not yet undergone the initiation rite. This came out in the following quote:

“I do believe there is a teaching that is done wrongly at their centres of initiation, especially with the term MAN. The teaching comes with wrong interpretations as if a MAN is someone who must not respect, listen, and take orders or do anything that follows orders” (Educator 1, 2022).

While the educator holds the view that initiates tend to undermine those not yet initiated, this may not necessarily mean active undermining. It could simply reflect the distinct behaviours and vocabulary that initiates acquire during their time in the bush, which sets them apart from those who have not yet gone through the initiation process. The following quote confirms this position:

“The major reason is that they feel that the developmental stage is where they are getting into adulthood. As young adults, they are eager to taste new waters, e.g., Indulgence in drugs, alcohol etc. Everyone must identify them; that is why they isolate themselves. Again, as young adults now, they differ from their peers and should be given respect unlike in the past” (Educator 2, 2022).

From the educator’s perspective, the isolation of new initiates is not seen as arrogance or something out of the ordinary. Instead, it represents a manifestation of their new identity as they distance themselves from their childish past. This behaviour is viewed as a sign of self-respect and a deliberate separation from their former immature state. The third educator echoed the sentiments expressed by the first and second educators, stating the following:

“The notion that once you are circumcised, you are classified as a man, and therefore, anyone who has not undergone is not of the same status as the rite. It might negatively affect socialization processes in a school setup whereby initiates might view the uncircumcised as being inferior. The initiates sometimes demand respect from the uncircumcised, which results in conflicts among male learners” (Educator 3, 2022).

The educator’s remarks indicate that new initiates are often thrilled by their transition from childhood to adulthood. This excitement fuels their newfound confidence, which they begin expressing in everyday interactions. However, those who have not been initiated may misinterpret this display of confidence as a demand for respect.

This behaviour seems to be influenced more by the initiates’ backgrounds and experiences rather than being solely a product of the initiation school itself. Another educator supported this perspective, stating:

“For a young age, the information given to them ends up spoiling them because it’s not at their level, and therefore, they tend to prove that they are men negatively, thereby ending up messing. For the older age, the information suits them perfectly, and they can handle and use it positively without changing their behaviour negatively. However, if the initiate was already badly behaved before initiation, he is likely to maintain his bad behaviour or even become worse” (Educator 4, 2022).

Literature suggests that the high rate of interpersonal violence among young black men is related to the cultural depiction of an ideal male as one who can overlook pain, never shows fear, and is always ready to fight. This cultural construct provides men with common indicators to gain social status within their communities.

However, this cultural norm of emphasising fearlessness and readiness to fight can, unfortunately, raise the likelihood of these young men becoming victims of violence themselves.

The cultural value of this “tough masculinity” encourages behaviours that may lead to increased interpersonal violence. In essence, the cultural depiction of a good male as someone fearless creates a social environment where young men feel compelled to adhere to these norms to achieve social status and acceptance. This dynamic can perpetuate a cycle of violence as men try to prove their masculinity through aggressive and violent behaviours.

Literature highlights how these cultural expectations and the pursuit of social status can be a key contributing factor to the high rates of interpersonal violence observed among young black men. Addressing these deeply rooted cultural norms and providing alternative pathways for young men to gain respect and status may be necessary to break this cycle of violence.

Post-initiation support

The findings from the interviews highlight the necessity for ongoing mentoring to help initiates fully embrace and apply the principles they have learned during the initiation process. This continued support is crucial for reinforcing their understanding and encouraging positive behaviour. One of the educators emphasized this need, stating:

“Without proper follow-up, many initiates may struggle to maintain the values instilled in them, leading to potential misbehaviour and disconnect from their educational goals.” This underscores the importance of structured mentorship programs that can guide initiates as they navigate their new identities and responsibilities, ensuring they remain aligned with the values taught during their initiation. Educator 2 had the following to say in this regard:

“Regular meetings to be held where they discuss the importance of behaviour. These initiates might also be allowed to lead or share in these meetings” (Educator 2, 2022).

The educators’ responses suggest that the initiation process teaches and initiates good behaviour and responsibility and imparts leadership skills. A quote from the third educator further supports this perspective:

“Once initiates begin to portray themselves in a negative or bad light, reminding them by talking to them might also help them. Initiates must be encouraged to work hand in glove with other learners to pacify negative thoughts. Incorporate initiates in co-curricular activities that enable them to establish symbolic synergies with other learners who are yet to undergo the initiation rite” (Educator 3, 2022).

From the educators’ perspective, the primary purpose of the initiation rites among the amaXhosa is to transform boys into responsible and valuable men in society. The aim is to instil in initiates the morals, responsibilities, and values cherished by previous generations, effectively passing down cultural heritage, customs, beliefs, and a sense of duty to the next generation of men.

In this context, the current study investigates the impact of initiation rites on the behavioural changes observed in initiates. Educators acknowledge that the initiation process is meant to develop boys into men who can positively contribute to their communities.

To achieve this goal, the educators propose that ongoing mentoring may be essential. This is echoed by another educator's statement, emphasizing the need to ensure that initiates adhere to the principles and values learned during the rites.

The educators highlight the transformative nature of the initiation process, where boys are expected to emerge as culturally grounded and responsible men capable of fulfilling their societal roles. The study aims to assess the effectiveness of the initiation rites in achieving this transformation, as reflected in the behavioural changes seen in the initiates.

Ultimately, educators regard the initiation rites as vital for passing on cultural values, moral standards, and communal responsibilities to the next generation. They believe that successful implementation and long-term adherence to these principles, supported by mentoring and guidance, are crucial for realizing the intended outcomes of the initiation process. This sentiment was given by one respondent who said:

"In instances of negative change, parents of the negatively changed learner should contact the initiation school elders to help advise the initiator accordingly" (**Educator 4, 2022**).

This position reflects a collaborative effort between parents and the broader community to build a responsible society. Parents often involve the elders of the initiation school to provide guidance and advice to the initiates. This highlights the African perspective that children are raised by the community, with their culture and traditions serving as the foundation for their education.

The traditional mode of education is formally conveyed through the involvement of parents and elders during the initiation ceremonies. These rituals mark the transition of boys from adolescence to adulthood, often including circumcision as a key element. Initiations are thus an integral part of the ethnic philosophy, embodying the religious and moral values of the African continent.

The communal approach to raising and educating children, where parents and the wider community work together, is a distinguishing feature of this African tradition. The initiation ceremonies serve as a structured mechanism to impart cultural, moral, and societal values to the next generation, facilitating their smooth transition into adulthood and responsible community membership.

This collaborative effort between parents and the community underscores the importance placed on building a responsible society in Africa. The initiation rituals are seen as a crucial means of transmitting essential values, norms, and expectations to the young members of the community, ensuring their successful integration and contribution to the social fabric.

By involving elders and drawing on the community's collective wisdom, the initiation process becomes a comprehensive approach to shaping the character and behaviour of the initiates, preparing them to fulfil their roles and responsibilities as mature, accountable members of society. This collective investment in youth development reflects the African philosophy of "it takes a village to raise a child."

Transition into maturity.

Educators have observed that the behaviour of new initiates exhibits a mix of both mature and bullying aspects, as highlighted in the following quote from one of the educators:

“Make learners attend initiation when they are older, e.g., above 20 years. At this stage, they can understand and correctly handle the information given to them and uphold good behaviour” (Educator 4, 2022).

The transformation in the character of newly initiated men underscores the psychological importance of the male initiation tradition. Social norms often allow for youthful mischief, whereas boyhood is characterized by the freedom to act without being taken seriously due to perceived immaturity.

This indicates that societal expectations evolve as boys become initiated men. The change in character signifies that initiated men are anticipated to demonstrate more mature and responsible behaviour, contrasting with the anti-social and reckless actions that are often tolerated in boys.

The purpose of the initiation ceremony, during which a respected community member anoints the new initiate, is to impart positive traits from the anointer to the initiate. This process is intended to guide initiates toward greater maturity and responsibility, making it a transformative experience.

Thus, the initiation tradition aims to cultivate responsible, socially aware individuals who can contribute positively to society. The transition from boyhood to manhood is marked by the expectation of a more refined character and a heightened sense of duty to the community.

This emphasizes the significant psychological and social dimensions of male initiation rituals, which facilitate the shift from adolescence to adulthood. Ultimately, the goal is to produce mature, community-oriented men capable of fulfilling their roles and responsibilities within the social structure. This opinion was supported by another educator who had the following to say:

“Orientation must be done before the commencement of the program. After initiation counselling must continue the initiates. All initiation centres must be registered, and all the elders at all centres must be trained to teach good ethics. There must be a way to strip them of their so-called status in the event of bad behaviour” (Educator 1, 2022).

The findings reveal that behavioural attitudes are shaped by a combination of readily available assumptions regarding the potential outcomes of engaging in a specific behaviour. An individual's attitude toward a behaviour is influenced by their beliefs about the likely consequences of that behaviour.

In contrast, subjective norms refer to the perceived social pressure to either engage in or avoid the target behaviour. This encompasses an individual's perception of how significant people in their lives—such as friends, family, or community members—would view and react to the behaviour in question.

Behavioural intentions are defined as the perceived likelihood of an individual performing the target behaviour. This reflects the person's evaluation of the probability of conducting the behaviour.

However, the study identified that the ability to implement the desired behaviour can limit the transition from intentions to actual behaviour. This indicates that even if someone intends to act, their capacity to do so may serve as a constraint.

Additionally, the research examined how others interpret an individual's actions, considering subjective expectations about appropriate behaviour as predictors of behavioural intentions. This suggests that people consider social norms and expectations when forming their intentions to engage in specific behaviours.

The strongest predictor of actual behaviour was behavioural intentions, which incorporate the individual's attitudes, perceived social pressure, and ability to perform the target behaviour. Thus, the study concluded that behavioural attitudes, subjective norms, and behavioural intentions are critical factors in predicting an individual's behaviour, with intentions being the primary determinant.

Overall, the findings emphasize the intricate relationship between attitudes, social norms, and perceived capabilities that influence an individual's behavioural intentions and, consequently, their actual behaviours.

Educators' perspectives on learners' behaviour changes

From the educators' perspectives, their observations of the behavioural changes in initiates are objective and unbiased, focusing on a comparative analysis between the behaviours of initiated and non-initiated learners. The changes noted are primarily negative and include:

1. **Shift in Focus:** Initiates often redirect their attention from academic work to their newly acquired status as men. This prioritization suggests that initiation rituals may significantly distract from the learning process, as initiates tend to place greater value on their initiation than on their educational achievements.
2. **Bullying Behaviour:** There is a tendency among initiates to undermine those who have not yet been initiated, which can manifest as bullying (Ratele, 2010). This behaviour raises concerns, as it may lead to violent tendencies in the future, given that initiates are often encouraged to embody "bravery" during the rituals.
3. **Mixed Traits:** Educators have observed that initiates display a combination of mature characteristics alongside bullying and anti-social behaviours.

The data collected from educators highlight the necessity for reinforcement and ongoing mentoring for initiates and the implementation of post-initiation counselling and disciplinary frameworks. These structures aim to ensure that initiates adhere to the values and expectations set by traditional leaders overseeing the initiation process. This focus on reinforcement and guidance suggests that educators acknowledge the need to actively shape the behaviour of initiates, as the observed outcomes do not fully align with the intended objectives of the initiation rituals.

Educators primarily noted the undesirable behavioural consequences of the initiation rites. The tendency for initiates to belittle non-initiated learners is viewed as a form of bullying, which could foster violent tendencies later in life, given that initiates are trained to be “brave men” (Ratele, 2010). This dynamic can create social hierarchies where initiates perceive themselves as superior to uninitiated boys (Mfecane, 2013).

The literature reviewed indicates that the age of initiation may need to be reconsidered to ensure that initiates have achieved certain educational milestones before undergoing the process (Gwata, 2009). Adjusting the initiation age could help mitigate the negative bullying behaviours directed at non-initiated individuals. However, the literature also highlights the cultural, health, and social benefits associated with circumcision rites integral to initiation rituals (Venter, 2011; Westercamp & Bailey, 2007). This underscores the importance of finding a balance between preserving cultural traditions and ensuring that the timing of initiation minimizes disruptions to the educational journeys of the initiates.

Overall, the educators’ perspectives underline the complex and multi-faceted nature of the behavioural outcomes associated with the initiation rituals. While the rituals may hold cultural significance and potential benefits, the observed negative behaviours, such as bullying, lack of academic focus, and the display of both mature and immature traits, suggest the need for a more comprehensive approach to managing the initiation process and its impact on the initiates’ development and integration into the broader community.

Interventions for improving/upholding behavioural changes by male learners.

The data suggest that the behaviours and values acquired by initiates during the initiation rituals necessitate ongoing reinforcement and continuous mentoring to ensure they are upheld and integrated into their lives. Educators have emphasized this need, likely drawing from their understanding of educational philosophy, highlighting the importance of reiterating key concepts throughout the learning process.

This perspective aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior, which underscores the importance of an individual’s capacity to enact target behaviours (Stagner, 1942). Long-term behaviour change requires consistent reinforcement of the skills and values learned during initiation, particularly considering the reduced timeframes for initiation rituals. These have significantly shortened from as long as six months to approximately four weeks, largely due to pressures from school schedules (Nqeketo, 2008; Siswana, 2016). As a result, it becomes essential to re-train and re-orient initiates to ensure they internalize the intended behaviours.

Educators also advocate for a “carrot-and-stick” approach to maintain the attitudes and behaviours instilled in learners during initiation. They recognize the need for disciplinary mechanisms to manage the initiates’ conduct, particularly in response to reports of bullying directed at non-initiated peers. If these behaviours are not addressed, there is a risk that such actions could lead to more severe issues later in life, including violent tendencies and an exaggerated sense of masculinity. Therefore, it is crucial to closely monitor the initiates’ behaviour and establish clear boundaries. Any inappropriate or unwarranted behaviour should

be met with appropriate consequences to ensure that the values of respect and responsibility are upheld within the community.

Therefore, the integration of continuous mentoring and structured discipline is vital to reinforce the positive behaviours acquired through initiation. This approach not only fosters personal growth but also contributes to a healthier, more respectful community among learners.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article explores teachers' perspectives on the behaviours of male learners following initiation, addressing a gap in research regarding the influences of these rituals. The behaviour of some male learners post-initiation poses challenges in several schools and warrants attention due to its potential impact on their education and future.

The findings suggest that while initiation can instil respect in young males, some learners misinterpret it as a license to misbehave. The article emphasizes the need for regular reinforcement of the teachings from initiation to ensure lasting personality changes. This can be achieved through ongoing instruction, re-training, and reorientation of the essential aspects of the initiation process beyond circumcision. Additionally, implementing disciplinary measures is crucial to address inappropriate behaviour and help initiates become effective advocates for the values of the initiation methods. This will help ensure that initiates continue to be respectful learners and that the process of their education is not interrupted.

This study enhances our understanding of male initiation, its purpose, and how it can coexist with the education of young initiates still in school. However, a significant limitation is the limited number of schools that participated and the fact that the research was confined to the Eastern Cape province.

The initiation procedures should incorporate both traditional and medical practices, particularly concerning circumcision. Furthermore, the topics covered during the initiation phase should be comprehensive enough to address issues identified by educators.

To accommodate the educational responsibilities of the initiates, it is recommended that the initiation process be conducted in stages rather than rushed. Extending the duration of the initiation process would provide adequate time to teach all necessary skills and ensure that the rites do not detract from learners' academic pursuits. Ideally, the initiation should occur after the completion of basic education to minimize distractions and allow learners to focus on their studies.

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