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Uncovering the Influence of Taboos in African linguistic Tradition: An Ethnographic Study into their Role in Society

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ABSTRACT

Taboos are deeply ingrained in Indigenous knowledge systems and play a crucial role in shaping social behaviours. This study explored and evaluated Siswati taboos by examining their social, linguistic, religious, cultural, and psychological dimensions. Employing an ethnographic approach alongside qualitative research methods, the study investigates the roles and functions of Siswati taboos in contemporary society. The manifestations and perceptions of these taboos differ across various linguistic communities, influencing both written and oral communication. In many cultures, certain expressions are regarded as vulgar, obscene, or disruptive to social, religious, or ethical norms. The findings reveal that individuals frequently refrain from using such terminology in public contexts, acknowledging that specific actions may be either ethically sanctioned or condemned by deities. Furthermore, this study illustrates that taboos and superstitions are often viewed as essential components of traditional education. Unlike formal laws, which are documented in writing, taboos are transmitted through cultural traditions. Each civilisation cherishes its traditions,

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: 22 May 2025 | Revised: 23 June 2025 | Accepted: 14 August 2025 | Published Online: 20 October 2025
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i11.10139>

CITATION

Nkuna, K.J., Zitha, I., Khoza, S., et al., 2025. Uncovering the Influence of Taboos in African linguistic Tradition: An Ethnographic Study into their Role in Society. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*. 7(11): 411–421. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i11.10139>

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as their absence could undermine both traditional and formal education. The implications of this research suggest that the Swati people place a strong emphasis on traditional education due to its positive impact on societal growth, revitalisation, and development. Notably, the Swati community demonstrates a more pronounced use of taboos in spoken communication than in written expressions.

Keywords: Taboos; Religion; Respect; Human Family; Norms; Ill-mannered

1. Introduction

Language is the primary means of transmitting cultural knowledge as well as the primary portal via which we can potentially access other people's minds. Language is defined as an abstract system of rules that specify the connections between a sequence of sounds and a progression of meanings^[1]. One's social identity and the maintenance of the in-group split can both be reflected in the language one employs. Cassirer^[2] examines the taboos, euphemisms, superstitions, and omens associated with animals, such as the designation of disease, death, evil spirits, childbirth, and natural phenomena.

Complex social meanings are expressed through linguistic conduct. Language is used to symbolise our various social identities and in any given introduction to express, create, challenge, and subvert a range of social meanings, as many researchers have demonstrated in their current works. However, they draw on some established sociolinguistic norms in this respect^[3]. Through language, we assert system control, we indicate the different social groups with which we identify, the social roles we embrace, and sometimes conflicting values we espouse.

People have the freedom to use language as they choose. Nonetheless, societal norms occasionally impose specific restrictions on the public use of certain terms. For example, numerous languages encompass words that are seldom employed in public contexts due to their perception as offensive, obscene, or unsettling to some speakers^[4].

Hughes^[5] suggests that taboo, as a universal sociolinguistic concept, varies from one social community to another. The use of taboo terms in written or spoken discourse is normally governed by a lot of parameters related to social, cultural, religious, and psychological implications. It has been observed that the use of taboos is more frequently apparent in spoken Siswati than in written documents. The Swati people tend to use a lot of strategies to avoid the use of impolite expressions, which constitute

the core of taboos in language. However, speakers may resort to euphemisms, proverbs, metaphors, implicature, and synonyms to avert the use of bad language that violates the religious and social values of society. This paper sheds light on this issue, which has been relatively ignored by researchers because it is extremely sensitive and not appropriate for academic study. Taboo words are viewed as unacceptable manifestations of bad language used by speakers in certain contexts. They normally violate the social, cultural, and religious norms of society^[6]. This study aimed to explore and evaluate Siswati taboos by examining their social, linguistic, religious, cultural, and psychological dimensions.

Research Questions

- What purpose do taboos serve within a cultural context? How are these taboos outlined and categorised to ensure clarity and understanding among community members?
- Additionally, what is the significance of explaining and interpreting the meanings behind Siswati taboos, and how do they reflect the values and beliefs of the culture?

2. Literature Review

Any item, behaviour, or person that raises questions about safety for an individual or group of people should be avoided and considered taboo^[7]. According to Schapera^[8], in the historical setting, the word "taboo" was a sacred designation for a series of cultic or religious proscriptions imposed by conventional religious authority as a means of safeguarding the sanctity of their shrines and the welfare of their worshipping congregations. They require moral motivation, guidance, and objectivity. The phrase can also refer to any kind of restriction put in place by a community's leaders concerning specific times, locations, activities, gatherings, and individuals to control interactions in each situation, not just religious ones, for the good of the com-

munity^[4].

Taboo is defined by Possa and Khotso^[9] as a social or religious custom that forbids or restricts a specific item or person. According to Hughes^[5], taboos create a feeling of being unapproachable because people who break them believe they are taboo themselves. According to Nkuna^[10], the term “taboo” designates any act, both spoken and non-spoken, that is forbidden or should be avoided. “Any prohibitions which carry no penalties beyond the anxiety and embarrassment arising from a breach of strongly entrenched custom” is how Idowu^[11] defines it. Mphasha^[12] provides a thorough explanation of what is prohibited. It emphasises how religious or medical consequences are used to impose taboo prohibitions. Taboos combine two ideas: the holy and the unclean.

The working definition from Qanbar^[13] was used in this paper. “Taboo is any word or phrase or topic that if mentioned in public, causes embarrassment and feelings of shame or provokes a sense of shock, and it is offensive to the hearer’s sensibility or his beliefs”. According to Osei^[7], the word “taboo” is a Polynesian term that denotes something that is forbidden. They add that in some cultures, eating particular foods that are taboo is forbidden, and that there are days when it is improper to work, eat, drink, or engage in sexual activity. Death and related topics are also frequently taboo.

2.1. Significance of Siswati Taboos

Folklore, which includes taboos, superstitions, and myths, has influenced social behaviour across various tribes worldwide to some degree. Kesenene^[14], providing a credible response to a topic that needs to be answered but is outside the child’s comprehension, Swati parents will often refer to a taboo and then offer a mythical explanation or cite a superstitious belief.

On the other hand, some people disagree with teaching taboos as fact, especially to young people^[11]. They contend that imparting taboos to youngsters in this way does not promote their growth. Taboos are significant because they uphold the peace between God and spirits. Without tradition, moral order would control society. If tradition is upheld, it can force the world to continue operating and ensure a plentiful life for all people.

Maintaining peace is a human responsibility that

shapes one’s personality, affects the standard of living in a community, and has an impact on the cosmos itself. Schapera^[8] also thought of them as moral norms or a moral atmosphere that aims to bring harmony and order to the cosmos. Taboos delineate attitudes and behaviours that are considered unacceptable because they do not guarantee the continuation of life in its fullness, do not enhance the quality of life within the community, and do not uphold the social code of conduct.

2.2. Types of Taboos

Taboos have been a part of every culture and society since the start of time. These are firm social rules and norms that govern our behaviours and actions in particular circumstances^[15]. However, when it comes to taboos, there are a few types of taboos that are predominant in our society. Avoidance, linguistic, and superstition taboos. While both can have a meaningful influence on our lives. We will look deeper into these taboos and how they influence our daily lives.

2.2.1. Avoidance Taboos

Taboos refer to behaviours or words that are deemed unacceptable or forbidden within various cultures or social groups. People often avoid discussing taboo topics or using certain words to maintain social harmony or to demonstrate their communication skills. These taboos are deeply ingrained in our minds, dictating what is considered acceptable and what is not.

For instance, in some cultures, consuming specific foods such as pork or beef violates a sacred taboo^[5]. Similarly, in certain religions, premarital relations are viewed as taboo and are strictly prohibited. On the other hand, superstitions and taboos are based on beliefs and fears that lack logical explanations. These taboos often relate to concepts like bad luck, curses, and supernatural forces. For example, breaking a mirror is believed to bring calamity^[12]. Such taboos are typically passed down from generation to generation and are deeply rooted in our belief systems. While some taboos may seem harmless, they can significantly impact our lives. Avoidant taboos can create obstacles and limit our choices, making it difficult for individuals to express themselves freely.

2.2.2. Superstition Taboos

Superstition taboos can cause unnecessary fear and anxiety, leading to irrational beliefs and behaviours. These taboos can also limit our opportunities and prevent us from reaching our full potential. As a result, how can we overcome these taboos? Primarily, we need to educate ourselves and raise awareness about these taboos. By understanding the roots and reasons behind them, we can question their relevance and break free from their hold. It is essential to have an open mind and be willing to challenge traditional beliefs and norms^[12]. Communication can also play a leading role in breaking taboos. By having an open and honest conversation with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, we can gain a better understanding of their beliefs and values.

This, in turn, can help bridge the gap and break down barriers created by taboos. Moreover, it is essential to promote critical thinking and rationality. We need to teach and encourage individuals to question everything and not blindly follow age-old traditions and beliefs^[13]. By fostering a culture of curiosity and logical reasoning, we can break the chains of taboos and superstitions. Finally, it is crucial to create a safe and inclusive environment where people can freely express their thoughts and beliefs without fear of judgment or ridicule. By promoting acceptance and understanding, we can embrace diversity and limit the negative effects of taboos.

3. Theoretical Framework

Over the years, a multitude of methodologies have emerged to systematically explore the developmental challenges that individuals face throughout their lives. This investigation adopts a social cognitive framework, which posits that learning occurs within various social contexts when an individual interacts dynamically with their surrounding environment and effectively applies the lessons learned^[16]. This approach emphasises the intricate interplay between environmental factors, behaviour, and social interactions in shaping workplace dynamics and individual experiences. Specifically, the social cognitive framework integrates critical aspects of political science, sociology, and psychology, thereby allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how cognition and observational learning

function in predicting behaviours and learning outcomes^[17].

Despite the apparent clarity of verbal communication, individuals often evoke a range of reactions that are not solely determined by their spoken words or overt actions. These responses are shaped by a wide array of factors within their social environment as well as personal characteristics, including but not limited to size, age, cultural background, educational level, religious beliefs, gender identity, and physical attractiveness. As noted by Brown^[18], individuals provoke distinct social responses based on the roles and levels of prestige ascribed to them by societal norms. Furthermore, individuals acquire knowledge through the observation of others' behaviours and the resultant consequences, which can manifest as either positive reinforcement or negative repercussions. Consequently, it becomes imperative to educate children about societal taboos, as this knowledge serves as a protective measure against significant adverse outcomes. When breaches of these taboos occur, the importance of the resulting consequences is consistently underscored to reinforce learning^[19].

Moreover, storytelling and the referencing of cultural myths are powerful tools that can effectively illustrate the profound repercussions of transgressing taboos. As articulated by Saville-Troike^[20], storytellers do not merely offer moralistic sermons; instead, they delve into the fundamental moral dilemmas inherent to human nature, exploring the duality of good and evil. According to Struwing and Stead^[21], this narrative technique aims to engage the audience on an emotional level, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding and internalisation of moral and societal principles. The storyteller effectively establishes a connection between the contrasts observed among characters, drawing attention to specific incidents where individuals faced severe consequences due to non-compliant behaviours.

From a social cognitive perspective, it is important to recognise that individuals are not simply moulded or controlled by their environments, nor are they solely driven by internal factors. Rather, they exist within a complex network of mutually interactive influences that significantly contribute to their motivation, behaviours, and overall development. This understanding acknowledges the vitality of individual agency while also recognising the substantial impact of social contexts on personal growth and learning

trajectories. Hence, this comprehensive approach affords a nuanced perspective on the myriad factors that influence human behaviour and development across various life stages.

4. Methodology

This study investigates the roles and functions of Siswati taboos within contemporary society through the application of an ethnographic approach in conjunction with qualitative research methods. Ethnography, as defined by Erickson and Stull^[3], is the study of human culture and social organisation from the perspective of the people being studied. This qualitative research method involves observing individuals in their natural environments to gain insights into their experiences, beliefs, and practices^[22]. Ethnography aims to understand cultural phenomena from the viewpoint of the subjects involved^[23]. It also entails examining participants' behaviours in specific social situations and understanding how group members interpret those behaviours.

The current investigation is framed within a research method, focusing on the analytical examination of Siswati taboos. Cresswell^[24] defines the qualitative approach as one in which information is conveyed through words, photographs, drawings, paintings, and other media, rather than solely through numerical data. Qualitative research is characterised by its descriptive nature, yielding insights into people's written or spoken opinions and observed behaviours^[15]. The data have been gathered through a variety of methods, including systematic observations and interviews conducted with ten research participants.

In this article, interviews served as the principal method for data collection, providing a platform for in-depth qualitative insights. The researchers engaged with a diverse group of respected Swati elders, drawing on their rich life experiences and cultural wisdom to explore their perspectives on the lifestyles of the youth in their community. These conversations aimed to uncover the underlying factors shaping daily routines and the subsequent implications for both individual well-being and the cultural heritage of the Swati people.

Data were meticulously gathered from the Nkomazi region in the Mpumalanga Province of South Africa,

an area notably characterised by its predominantly Swati-speaking population. This region's unique socio-cultural dynamics played a significant role in shaping the insights shared by the elders, highlighting the intersection of tradition and contemporary youth experiences. During this visitation, various taboos were documented over several days, and the researchers subsequently categorised these taboos based on thematic similarities.

While analysing the information, the scholars used a sense of wonder to formulate ideas and theories^[25]. After familiarising themselves with the data, the researchers began to classify the information, identifying similarities and differences among the data points, as well as outlining the processes, functions, tensions, and contradictions present.

5. Ethical Considerations

The research project was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Venda to ensure compliance with ethical standards and to safeguard the rights of participants. An ethical certificate obtained from the University serves as a formal endorsement of adherence to these guidelines throughout the study^[14]. Prior to participation, all individuals were required to sign an informed consent form, which clearly outlined the purpose of the research, the procedures involved, and any potential risks^[19]. Participants were explicitly informed that their involvement in the study was entirely voluntary and that they reserved the right to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any negative consequences or repercussions. This process was designed to promote transparency and respect for the autonomy of all participants involved in the research.

6. Findings and Discussion

This section presents a detailed summary of the key findings from the study, highlighting the most significant results and trends observed. It also provides an in-depth discussion that interprets these results, exploring their broader implications and how they relate to existing research in the field. Through a comprehensive analysis of the data, this section seeks to elucidate the significance of the findings and their potential implications for future re-

search and practical applications.

6.1. Participants

The ten (10) women sampled from the province of Mpumalanga are united by the commitment to preserving and promoting Swati customs and culture. They were carefully selected for their profound expertise in various facets of Swati heritage, which encompasses a rich tapestry of cultural elements. This includes an intricate understanding of traditional taboos that shape community practices, the ability to recount engaging folktales that convey moral lessons and historical significance, and a lively appreciation for the music and games of childhood that reflect the vibrancy of Swati traditions. Their collective knowledge enriches the understanding of this unique cultural heritage, making them invaluable contributors to preserving and promoting Swati identity. This deep understanding of cultural traditions is not just beneficial but essential for nurturing children's development while honouring their unique identities. By drawing on their collective knowledge, these experts offer valuable insights that facilitate the seamless integration of cultural richness into children's everyday lives. This thoughtful approach not only fosters a sense of belonging but also instills important values and life skills, guiding the younger generation on their path of self-discovery and cultural appreciation.

6.2. Siswati Taboos, Structure, and Identifiable Categories

In accordance with the characteristics of all Nguni languages, Siswati taboos are articulated in a negative framework. Each Siswati taboo is prefixed with "unga-" (which translates to "do not"), thus highlighting the prohibitive essence of these cultural norms, as noted by Mills [26]. The term "kuyatila" serves to underscore that the action referenced should not be undertaken. To further reinforce the gravity of these taboos, statements are typically concluded with an exclamation point. Moreover, subsequent to the declaration of a taboo, there is often a profound warning detailing the severe repercussions that may ensue should the taboo be violated.

When polite inquiries are made about the reasons for specific social prohibitions, the response is straightfor-

ward: it is *kuyatila*, or taboo, and should not be questioned as such. According to elders, prohibited actions might lessen curses that would otherwise be irreversible^[16]. These communities hold the same level of credibility as those who believe in guardian angels or taboos and fallacies. Anything that is considered taboo is considered.

6.3. Taboos Concerning Tree Species and Medical Plants

Asijutjwa sihlahla semganu —You are not allowed to cut an amarula tree.

This tree is used to make marula beer (*buganu*). This taboo is used to prevent people from harvesting firewood. This tree is endangered.

Asijutjwa sihlahla semvangati—You are not allowed to cut the *pterocarpus angolensis* tree.

The *pterocarpus angolensis* tree should not be cut down. The more the trees are used for harvesting for firewood purposes, the fewer they become. The taboo is to protect valuable trees of this kind from extinction.

Asijutjwa sihlahla semncozi—You are not allowed to cut turkey-berry trees.

This cultural taboo is rooted in the belief that bringing a certain type of tree into one's home or living space can invite misfortune and negativity. Many people adhere to this belief as a means of respecting the natural world and its spiritual significance. The notion is that the essence of the tree, when removed from its natural environment, may carry an unfavourable energy that disrupts the harmony of the household. Consequently, individuals often choose to leave these trees in their natural settings to preserve both their beauty and the well-being of their living areas.

Asifotwa sihlahla semlahlabantfu—You are not allowed to fetch buffelsdoorm trees for firewood.

This particular type of tree is not suitable for firewood due to its sacred nature. It plays a significant role in various rituals and is deeply connected to ancestral spirits, symbolising a bond between the living and the deceased. When someone passes away, it is customary to place the branches of this tree on their grave as a sign of respect and remembrance, honouring their spirit and maintaining the

connection to their heritage. This practice not only reflects a reverence for the deceased but also emphasises the tree's importance in cultural traditions surrounding death and remembrance.

6.4. Taboos that Address Morality

Lijaha alikavumeleki kutsa intfombi emndenini walo—A man is not allowed to take a girlfriend into his family.

In Swati society, marriages between blood relatives are strictly prohibited. This prohibition stems from the community's effort to prevent close relatives, such as siblings and cousins, from marrying each other. The underlying belief is that such unions could lead to genetic issues, including the potential for the couple to have a disabled child. This taboo reflects society's commitment to promoting healthy family structures and ensuring the well-being of future generations. To reinforce this cultural norm, various social practices and beliefs have been established, further discouraging any romantic relationships between blood relatives.

Asigcokwa sigcoko endlini—You are not allowed to wear a hat inside the house.

This taboo is to make children respect the elderly. The taboo is to bring respect to society.

Akungenwa emtini webantfu ugcoke sigcoko—It is not allowed to enter someone's home wearing a hat.

In a specific family, males are not permitted to wear hats upon their arrival. This tradition serves as a cultural taboo designed to foster a sense of respect and reverence within the community. By adhering to this practice, individuals demonstrate their acknowledgement of the family's values and the importance of maintaining honour in social interactions. Such customs play a vital role in shaping community dynamics, as they create an environment that emphasises respect and consideration for others.

Umntfwana akavumeleki kutsatsa lutfo ngesandla sasencele emntfwini lomdzala—A child is not allowed to take something with the left hand from an elderly person.

6.5. Taboos that Avoid Accidents

Akugitjelwa esihlahleni kuna imvula—You are not allowed to climb the tree while it is raining.

This taboo prevents children from being struck by lightning during the rainy season.

Bantfwana abakavumeleki kudlala eceleni nemgwaco—Children are not allowed to play near the road.

This taboo is used to prevent accidents near the road. Parents will instruct their children not to play near the road.

Akugitjelwa esihlahleni sempopo—You are not allowed to climb the pawpaw tree.

The pawpaw tree is not strong enough for a human being to climb. It may break and cause serious body injuries, which may ultimately lead to death. The elders with the taboo to scare children; they would die if it happened, and they climbed a pawpaw tree.

Bantfwana abakavunyelwa kudlala eceleni nasemfuleni—Children are not allowed to play near the river.

This taboo is created to caution children not to play in the river.

6.6. Taboos on Respect for Elders

Umtfwana akavumeleki kukhukuma nemuntfu lomdzala amile—You are not allowed to talk to the elderly while standing.

A child must not talk to the elderly while standing; this shows that the child is afraid and has respect for the elderly. It is a culture of the Swati people. It is a sign of disrespect to talk to elderly people while standing.

Umtfwana akavumeleki kudlela esitjeni semuntfu lomdzala—A child is not allowed to eat on a plate used by an elderly person.

A child must not eat dishes used by the elderly to show that the child has respect for his/her parents.

Umtali akavumeleki kucondzisa umntfwana emabatsa phambi kwebantfu labadzala—It is not al-

lowed to discipline a child in front of old people.

Parents should not punish their children in front of older people. This behaviour makes parents look bad and shows a lack of proper training at home. It also disrespects older individuals.

Umntfwana akakavumeleki kubuka umuntfu lomdzala etinhlavini temehlo—A Child is not allowed to stare an old person in the eyes.

A child is not allowed to look at the elderly in the eye, to show that the child has respect and fear for the elderly. It is a symbol of disrespect for the child to look up and stare at the elder's face.

6.7. Taboos about Religion

Libhayibheli alilahlwa phansi — the bible must not be dropped on the ground.

The Bible is a sacred book for Christian people that must be handled with care to avoid being dropped on the ground. This taboo is to impart fear and respect to the young people to handle the book with care because it contains good news from God.

6.8. Taboos about Cleanliness

Awuvuki uhambe ushiye ungakagecebi—You are not allowed to get up and leave your bed unmade.

Akushanyelwa endlini kuhleti bantfu—It is not allowed to sweep the house when people are present.

Atihhulwa tinwele edladleni—You are not allowed to cut your hair in the kitchen.

Awutitfumi emfuleni—You are not allowed to defecate or urinate in the river.

To uphold the intricate fabric of social morality in Swati society, a carefully constructed system of taboos has been established over generations. These taboos arose from the collective awareness of community members who identified specific facets of divinity as either ethically permissible or impermissible, thus guiding behaviours and beliefs within society^[27]. Though these taboos are not formalised in written laws, they are preserved through deep-rooted customs and traditions, which collectively regard them as

essential components of the educational framework for young individuals.

The primary aim of the researchers conducting this study was to delve into and illuminate the various prohibitions that delineate what is considered unacceptable behaviours and consumption within this culturally rich context. Despite thorough investigations, the researcher encountered challenges in locating formal documentation or exhaustive lists outlining these taboos. Nevertheless, through methodical data collection and interviews, the researcher successfully identified distinct categories of restrictions concerning items and practices that children and adolescents should avoid. Such guidelines are not arbitrary; rather, they are thoughtfully designed to protect the youth from potential adverse consequences, both in the present and in their future lives.

Mothers play a crucial role in instructing their daughters about the importance of these taboos, as respondents noted that mothers provide extensive knowledge across all aspects of life. This educational process encompasses not only the explicit instructions regarding what is forbidden but also the underlying values and cultural narratives that inform these prohibitions. In contrast, male respondents underscored the critical importance of social connections for boys, asserting that whether they are engaged in formal education, herding livestock, working the fields, milking cows, or hunting, it is vital for them to remain in the company of older boys or adult men. This practice establishes a framework of mentorship and support, reinforcing traditional gender roles while fostering essential life skills and social competence within the community.

7. Conclusion

The study concludes that taboos play a crucial role within Indigenous knowledge systems, serving as a framework for understanding social order and community values. It highlights the initiative by the Department of Education to teach elementary school students about the importance of these taboos in maintaining societal harmony. While school education is beneficial, it emphasises the vital role of elders in passing down these cultural teachings at home, ensuring that children receive comprehensive guidance rooted in their heritage. The Swati civilisation,

known for its rich cultural tapestry, exhibits significant linguistic diversity, reflecting the complex interplay of various communities and their traditions. This diversity adds layers to the understanding of taboos, which can differ widely in meaning and application across distinct groups. From a social cognitive perspective, it is essential to acknowledge that individuals are not merely shaped or dominated by their external environments. Instead, they play an active role in their own development and behaviour, influenced by a dynamic interplay of both external and internal factors. This perspective emphasises that personal choices, beliefs, and cognitive processes significantly impact how individuals respond to their surroundings. Thus, understanding human behaviour requires considering both the social context in which a person operates and the internal motivations and thoughts that guide their actions.

It is essential to acknowledge that taboos should not be perceived purely as mechanisms for instilling fear in children. Instead, they function as “social leashes,” facilitating adherence to societal norms and values. These taboos address critical social issues, including public health and ethical behaviour, while simultaneously promoting environmental stewardship among youth.

In numerous Indigenous cultures, taboos are intricately linked to the community’s historical context and ecological environment, making them pivotal for preserving cultural identity. As modern society continues to evolve and increasingly diverges from traditional practices due to globalisation and technological advancements, it becomes imperative to either uphold these taboos or develop alternative methods that effectively communicate the core values of Indigenous cultures.

Such strategies not only contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage but also enable meaningful adaptation to contemporary challenges. It is, therefore, crucial to strike a balance between maintaining these significant cultural components and facilitating necessary adjustments, ensuring that future generations appreciate and uphold their cultural roots. This balance is vital for fostering a society that respects its diverse heritage while remaining responsive to the demands of modernity.

8. Recommendations

Many traditional Swati taboos serve vital functions

in promoting social progress and strengthening community bonds. These taboos are not simply arbitrary rules; they act as essential frameworks that help uphold social harmony and encourage positive behaviour within the community.

Parents and elderly people hold a key responsibility in nurturing children’s understanding of these traditions. By actively engaging with them, they can foster a deeper connection to their Swati heritage, helping children appreciate the stories, values, and lessons embedded in their culture.

Furthermore, it is crucial for adults to demonstrate the importance of social norms and cultural practices not just as dictates to be followed, but as valuable teachings that contribute positively to individual character and communal well-being. By approaching these lessons in a supportive and constructive manner, they can instill a sense of pride and belonging, ensuring the continuity of their cultural identity for future generations.

It is essential to recognise that, although some individuals may perceive taboos as mechanisms for instilling fear in children, their primary purpose encompasses much more than that. Taboos have been pivotal in the development of communities, significantly contributing to the cultivation of a sense of identity and belonging among individuals. Furthermore, these cultural prohibitions assist individuals in upholding moral standards that foster a peaceful and harmonious existence, both on a personal level and within the broader societal context.

Taboos are typically conveyed through prohibitive statements, often framed as “don’ts,” and they can sometimes appear vague or even contradictory. Despite their ambiguous nature, the primary function of taboos is to uphold a moral framework that fosters social order within a community. They act as guiding principles that emphasise the importance of ethical behaviour, encouraging individuals to align their actions with the shared values and beliefs of their society.

For example, in the Swati culture, certain taboos may discourage behaviours that are deemed disrespectful or harmful to the community’s integrity. By reinforcing these standards, taboos help maintain social cohesion and promote a sense of belonging among community members. When taboos are understood and applied thoughtfully, they can be a potent force for cultural preservation, safeguard-

ing unique traditions and practices that define the identity of a group. In this way, they contribute significantly to social stability, ensuring that individuals act in ways that support the collective well-being of the community. Overall, while taboos may sometimes seem restrictive, they play a crucial role in guiding behaviour and preserving the values that sustain a harmonious society.

Author Contributions

Conceptualisation, K.J.N. and S.K.; methodology, F.M.; software, I.Z.; validation, I.Z., K.J.N. and S.K.; formal analysis, I.Z.; investigation, I.Z.; resources, F.M.; data curation, I.Z.; writing—original draft preparation, I.Z.; writing—review and editing, I.Z.; visualisation, S.K.; supervision, I.Z.; project administration, K.J.N.; funding acquisition, I.Z. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding

This work received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

The data analysed for this study is available upon request.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to appreciate all the resourceful individuals who assisted with the cultural traditions archived.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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