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Editorial Note:

This latest issue of the Journal of Contemporary Society Education (JCSE) arrives at a moment when the boundaries between the academic, the social, and the urgently practical have never been more porous. A glance at the twenty-one articles in this forthcoming collection reveals a publication that understands its mandate: to serve not merely as a repository of scholarship, but as a sharp, coherent lens through which to examine the pressing complexities of contemporary society, with a firm grounding in education as a transformative force.

What distinguishes this issue is its refusal to settle for disciplinary comfort. The contributions, drawn from institutions across Africa, demonstrate a welcome intellectual restlessness. We see scholars interrogating the intimate, such as Mudau et al.'s exploration of language as a source of family conflict within Vhavenda families alongside those grappling with structural questions, such as Sikwela and Diedericks' critical look at performance management as "a mirror of inertia" in public administration. This range is not a sign of incoherence; it is a testament to the journal's understanding that societal education occurs in classrooms, in homes, in municipal water governance (as Zulu and Nojiyeza's work on Zululand shows), and in the very language we use to communicate.

Several pieces stand out for their conceptual bravery. Maungedzo's reframing of academic literacy through sociocultural theory for rural teacher development tackles a perennial challenge with fresh theoretical rigour. Similarly, Lubombo and Zethi's work on "linguistic justice" and the Disciplinary Literacies framework asks a question that South African higher education can no longer afford to postpone: how do we re-imagine instructional communication not as a barrier, but as an equitable foundation? These are not abstract debates; they are core pedagogical interventions.

The journal also demonstrates a commendable commitment to surfacing marginalised voices and experiences. Nkumane's exploration of intersectionality and the lived experiences of Black women scholars at UNISA, and Sibango's ethnographic look at how belonging is negotiated in Anthropology departments, remind us that the university itself is a site of intense social contestation. When Lekoa and Nojiyeza connect off-campus housing to "ecologies of distress" affecting student mental health, they do what good contemporary scholarship must: they trace the material conditions of life directly into the outcomes of education.

If there is a through-line to this collection, it is the insistence that no social phenomenon, whether climate governance under the AU (Yemisi and Ani), the antinomies of decolonisation in literature (Moopi), or the gendered nexus of marital status and poverty (Dunga), exists outside the purview of rigorous inquiry. The JCSE is building a platform where scholars can hold those complex phenomena up to the light.

This volume does not offer easy answers. It offers something more valuable: a coherent, sharply focused set of questions, pursued with methodological care and regional relevance. For a journal of contemporary society and education, that is precisely the work that matters.

Editor: Professor TJ Mudau
Institute of Gender and Youth Studies
University of Venda, South Africa
Thizwilondi.Mudau@univen.ac.za

TABLE OF CONTENT

1. Exploring the Influence of Language on Family Conflicts Among Vhavenda Families Mudau S.D., Raphalalani M.R., Tshikota S.L., & Mathabi Mashudu	6-22
2. Academic Literacy Reframed: Sociocultural Theory and Rural Teacher Development Robert Maungedzo	23-39
3. Analysis Of Omission Errors In The Academic Writing Of Level One Students At A South African University Ndishunwani Vincent Demana, Ernest Kwesi Klu, Mzamani Johannes Maluleke	40-57
4. The Perceptions of Students on Sexual Harassment at the Rural University Mudau Thizwilondi Josephine	58-88
5. Understanding how belonging and originality are negotiated in three South African Anthropology Departments Asemahle Sibango	89-101
6. Employee Retention and Talent Management In The Hospitality Sector. Does Employer Branding Matter? Costa Hofisi&Munyaradzi Chikove1, Lilliosah Dowo	102-129
7. African Union (AU) and Climate Change Governance in Africa, 2002-2022 Olawale Yemisi, Kelechi Johnmary Ani	130-149
8. A Gendered Analysis of the Nexus of Marital Status and Poverty Hannah Mayamiko Dunga	150-167
9. The Influence of Authenticity, Credibility and Cultural Relatability on Consumer Trust and Purchasing Behaviour Aphelele Hlengwa and Andrisha Beharry-Ramraj	168-188
10. Performance Management: A Mirror of Inertia and a Lens on Public Administration's Evolution and Progress in South Africa Shereen Sikwela, Melvin Diedericks	189-211
11. The Underrepresentation Of Women's Leadership In Water Governance: A Case Study Of Zululand District Municipality, South Africa Nomfundo Nomcebo Zulu, Innocent Simphiwe Nojiyeza	212-234

12. Intersectionality and Academic Marginalisation: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Black Women Scholars at the University of South Africa
Dr Khabonina Grace Nkumane

235-251
13. A Philosophical Appraisal Of René Girard’S Archetypal Scapegoat Hypothesis In The Light Of Nigerian Migrants In Germany
Stanley Ekwugha & Kingsley Ekene Amaechi

252-268
14. The Effect Of Flood Risk Management Control On Property Protection In Lagos State, Nigeria
Margaret N. Jinadu & Akinseye Olowu

268-285
15. Antinomies of Afro-radical and liberal democratic decolonization in Zimbabwe and South Africa in Sue Nyathi’s *The Gold-Diggers* (2018)
Peter Moopi

286-304
16. A Collaborative or Disputed Space? Teacher Unions and The Professionalization of School Leadership
Thembinkosi Zwane, David Matsepe, Mugwena Maluleke

305-325
17. Dialectics On Humanitarian Action: A Necessary Action To The Less Privilege And Nations In Crisis Anselm Oyon
Anselm Oyon, Kelechi Johnmary Ani

326-338
18. Music As A Pedagogical Tool And Epistemology Within A Multiliteracies Approach To University Education
Maricel Botha

339-353
19. Ecologies Of Distress: How Off-Campus Housing Affects Student Mental Health In Rural South Africa
Mammusa Rosinah Lekoa & Innocent Simphiwe Nojiyeza

354-370
20. Post-COVID-19 Challenges Faced by Enterprises in Richards Bay, KwaZulu-Natal
Selena Moodley, Beharry-Ramraj, A

371-388
21. Linguistic Justice And Higher Education Futures: Leveraging The Disciplinary Literacies Framework To Re-Imagine Instructional Communication In South African Higher Education
Musara Lubombo, Thato Zethi

389-408

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EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF LANGUAGE ON FAMILY CONFLICTS AMONG VHAVENḂA FAMILIES

Mudau S.D

University of Venda, South Africa
shumanimudaul4@gmail.com

Raphalalani M.R

University of Venda, South Africa
matodzi.raphalalani@univen.ac.za

Tshikota S.L

University of Venda, South Africa
stshikota@univen.ac.za,

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7734-3138>

Mathabi M

University of Venda, South Africa
Mashudu.Nthambeleni@univen.ac.za

Abstract

Domestic violence remains a persistent challenge to family stability and social cohesion, with significant implications for community well-being and educational development. While much research has focused on physical forms of abuse, limited attention has been given to the role of spoken language as a trigger of domestic conflict. This paper examines how communication patterns influence family conflict among Vhavenda households in Vhembe District, with particular attention to social and educational outcomes. Employing a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design, the paper utilised purposive and snowball sampling to engage twenty participants, including individuals with lived experience of domestic conflict and community members involved in anti-violence initiatives. Data were collected through semi-structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews conducted in Tshivenda to ensure cultural and linguistic relevance. Thematic analysis revealed that disrespectful, derogatory, and abusive language often precipitates conflict, with women and children disproportionately affected. Silence and ineffective communication exacerbate tensions, while patriarchal norms contribute to the suppression of women's voices. Importantly, exposure to hostile communication patterns negatively influences children's emotional well-being and academic performance. Guided by an Afrocentric theoretical framework, the paper highlights culturally grounded interventions, including community-based awareness programmes, school-based life-skills education, and family mediation. The findings underscore the centrality of language as a tool for either conflict escalation or social cohesion, offering practical and culturally sensitive strategies for reducing domestic conflict and supporting educational development.

Keywords: Domestic violence; Family conflict; Language and communication; Afrocentric theory; Vhavenda families; Social cohesion; Educational outcomes,

Introduction

Family conflict is a multifaceted social phenomenon shaped by emotional, economic, and communicative dynamics. Across the globe, families often experience disagreements over finances, gender roles, inheritance, or infidelity, yet fewer studies have explored the pivotal role that language plays in either preventing or provoking such conflicts (Snyder, 2019; Choi, Cheung & Cheung, 2021). Language is not merely a system of words; it conveys identity, authority, emotion, and cultural norms (Ostwald, 2019). Constructive language fosters understanding, trust, and cohesion, while misuse can inflict psychological and emotional harm, sometimes escalating to physical violence. In African contexts, including among the Vhavenda of Limpopo Province, language carries profound cultural, spiritual, and moral significance. It reflects respect, social hierarchy, and communal belonging. Oral traditions such as proverbs, praise poetry, and ritual speech guide interpersonal relationships and maintain harmony within communities. Yet modernisation, economic stressors, and shifts in cultural values have disrupted these practices, leading to communication patterns that may encourage disrespect, verbal aggression, or silence, which in turn contribute to domestic conflict (Mukanangana et al., 2014; Green, Gunn & Hill, 2018).

Research demonstrates that verbal aggression can erode self-esteem, reduce empathy, and escalate into physical violence (Preller, 2023; Pietrangelo, 2019). Patriarchal norms often normalise verbal abuse, particularly from men toward women or elders

toward younger family members, while cultural expectations of silence may prevent victims from seeking help or expressing dissent (Muche, Adekunle & Arowojolu, 2017; Ugowe, 2022). Consequently, family communication patterns are deeply intertwined with power dynamics, emotional well-being, and overall household stability. While extensive scholarship has examined physical forms of domestic violence, limited research has focused on how spoken language contributes to conflict, particularly in African cultural contexts. Understanding these dynamics is crucial because language can serve as both a source of tension and a tool for resolution. By examining tone, word choice, and communicative silence within Vhavenda families, this paper seeks to illuminate the complex relationship between language, culture, and family conflict, offering insights for culturally sensitive interventions. Moreover, the paper explores the educational implications of family communication. Children exposed to hostile communication often experience emotional distress, which can interfere with concentration, learning behaviour, and school performance. Schools, therefore, play an important role in teaching communication skills, conflict resolution, and emotional regulation through life-skills education. Integrating educational perspectives with family and community interventions offers a holistic approach to addressing domestic conflict. The main objectives of this paper are to explore how spoken language contributes to family conflict in Vhavenda households, examine the influence of gendered power dynamics and cultural norms on communication patterns, investigate the emotional and educational impacts of verbal conflict on

children, and propose culturally grounded interventions to promote responsible communication and strengthen family cohesion. This paper is guided by an Afrocentric theoretical framework, centring African values, communal responsibility, and ethical speech. The framework emphasises the importance of culturally grounded practices in promoting respectful communication, restoring family cohesion, and fostering community well-being.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is guided by **Afrocentric theory**, developed by Molefi Kete Asante, which places African cultural values, knowledge systems, and worldviews at the centre when analysing social issues in African communities. Afrocentricity stresses communal responsibility, mutual respect, ethical behaviour, and the strong connection between individuals and their communities. In this paper, the theory provides a culturally appropriate way of understanding how language and communication affect family relationships among Vhavenda households. Traditionally, communication in Vhavenda culture is guided by values such as *tshileme* (dignity and honour), respect for elders, and the use of proverbs and storytelling to maintain harmony in families and communities. However, social change and modern pressures have influenced communication patterns, sometimes leading to disrespectful or abusive language that contributes to family conflict. From an Afrocentric perspective, such communication reflects a shift away from indigenous values that promote harmony and

collective well-being. The framework, therefore, highlights the importance of restoring culturally grounded communication practices to strengthen family unity and reduce verbal conflict.

Literature Review

Family conflict is influenced by multiple social, cultural, and economic factors, with language playing a central but often underexplored role. This literature review critically examines prior research on domestic violence and family conflict, highlighting the influence of communication patterns, gendered power dynamics, cultural norms, and educational outcomes. It situates these issues within African, and specifically Vhavenda, cultural contexts, while introducing Afrocentricity as the guiding theoretical framework.

Poor Time Management and Family Conflict

One key factor contributing to domestic tension is poor time management within households. Adams and Karin (2011) argue that the inability to allocate sufficient quality time for family interactions can foster resentment and misunderstandings. Parents preoccupied with work, social obligations, or other commitments may inadvertently neglect emotional needs, guidance, and care, which are critical for stable relationships. The authors emphasise that “proper preparation prevents poor performance,” indicating that intentional time spent together strengthens familial bonds and reduces potential conflicts. Households in which members consistently prioritise work over family may experience increased emotional distance, leading to arguments over

trivial matters that escalate due to accumulated tension. In contrast, families that actively allocate time to shared activities, such as communal meals or recreational engagement, demonstrate lower levels of conflict and higher cohesion. Research further indicates that children in households characterised by parental absence or distraction may experience neglect or emotional insecurity, increase the likelihood of behavioural issues and reduce academic engagement (Snyder, 2019; Choi et al., 2021).

Polygamous Marriages, Jealousy, and Communication

Polygamous marital structures, which remain recognised in many African societies, have been associated with heightened family conflict. Green, Gunn, and Hill (2018) note that polygyny and lobola practices persist within certain communities, and while some women accept this arrangement, others experience feelings of competition and jealousy. Co-wife rivalry often manifests through verbal hostility, insults, or derogatory remarks, creating tension that can escalate into emotional or even physical abuse. In Vhavenda communities, the dynamics of polygamy are often compounded by patriarchal authority and traditional expectations of female subordination. Women may refrain from expressing dissatisfaction, either to preserve family unity or to adhere to social norms that discourage confrontation (Muche et al., 2017). Consequently, verbal conflicts may remain unresolved, perpetuating tension within the household. These findings illustrate that cultural practices such as polygamy interact with communication patterns to shape family

conflict. When coupled with disrespectful or abusive language, traditional family structures may inadvertently create environments conducive to domestic violence.

Socioeconomic Factors and Education

Socioeconomic conditions significantly influence domestic conflict and communication patterns. Coutinho, Lisboa, and Pereira (2015) observed that limited education and financial dependence increase vulnerability to domestic violence, as victims may struggle to assert rights or resolve disputes constructively. Low educational attainment can limit individuals' awareness of legal protections, conflict resolution strategies, and effective communication techniques, exacerbating misunderstandings and conflict escalation. Economic stressors, such as unemployment or poverty, further strain communication within families. When financial pressures dominate daily life, couples may engage in verbal altercations over resource allocation, leading to repeated patterns of disrespectful language. Conversely, education has been shown to enhance critical thinking, self-expression, and problem-solving, equipping family members with skills to manage conflict proactively. Promoting educational opportunities and communication literacy is therefore critical to reducing domestic disputes and fostering emotional resilience among family members (Ostwald, 2019; Preller, 2023).

Language and Communication in Family Conflict

Effective communication is fundamental to maintaining healthy family relationships. Ostwald (2019) defines language as a structured system of human communication using sounds or written symbols to convey meaning. Within households, language serves as the primary vehicle through which emotions, expectations, and conflicts are expressed. Positive and respectful communication fosters trust and understanding, while negative, hostile, or abusive language can trigger emotional harm and escalate disputes. Research indicates that verbal aggression is a significant precursor to both emotional and physical conflict. Pietrangelo (2019) highlights that repeated insults, derogatory remarks, and aggressive tones erode self-esteem and undermine relational stability. Preller (2023) further notes that verbal abuse can take subtle forms, such as sarcasm, condescension, or the silent treatment, all of which communicate dominance and control while causing psychological distress. The Vhavenda cultural context emphasises respectful communication as a moral and social imperative. The concept of *tshileme* (dignity and honour) underscores the need for decorum in speech, reinforcing communal values and ethical conduct. Deviations from these norms, particularly in modern households influenced by urbanisation and media exposure, have contributed to the prevalence of hostile communication.

Gendered Power Dynamics and Patriarchy

A substantial body of literature underscores the role of patriarchal norms in shaping communication within households. Dobash and Dobash (1979) contend that men's dominance in domestic decision-making often manifests through controlling and verbally abusive behaviour. Female voices may be marginalised or silenced, reinforcing power imbalances that perpetuate conflict. Similarly, Ugowe (2022) reports that women frequently refrain from addressing grievances openly, either due to fear of retribution or adherence to cultural expectations of subservience.

Choi et al. (2021) highlight that these gendered communication patterns not only sustain inequality but also exacerbate emotional harm for women and children. Husbands' use of derogatory language, dismissive responses, and public humiliation often compounds the effects of verbal abuse, creating long-lasting psychological trauma. These findings align with the Afrocentric perspective, which emphasises relational harmony, collective responsibility, and mutual respect, highlighting the discord between cultural ideals and contemporary patriarchal practices (Asante, 1980; 2020).

Impact on Children and Educational Outcomes

The repercussions of verbal conflict extend beyond adults, affecting children's emotional well-being and learning behaviour. Lucas-Thompson, Goldberg, and Prause (2017) demonstrate that exposure to marital conflict contributes to anxiety, depression, and behavioural problems in children. Children frequently internalise communication patterns observed at home, replicating verbal aggression in peer interactions. Family communication patterns also have significant educational implications. Children experiencing hostile communication often struggle to concentrate, retain information, and perform academically (Semahegn & Mengistie, 2015). Emotional distress resulting from domestic conflict impairs cognitive processing, reduces motivation, and can lead to school absenteeism. Schools, therefore, play a critical role in mitigating these effects by teaching communication skills, emotional regulation, and conflict-resolution strategies through life-skills education. By equipping learners with coping mechanisms, schools help break intergenerational cycles of conflict while fostering social and emotional competence (Oguche, Daniels & Zubair, 2022).

Verbal Abuse as Emotional Abuse

Verbal abuse is widely recognised as a form of emotional abuse with profound psychological consequences. Champagne (1999) notes that verbal abuse includes repeated insults, name-calling, and derogatory remarks that undermine self-esteem. Similarly,

Brennan (2020) highlights that consistent exposure to hostile language erodes trust and can escalate into physical violence. In the Vhavenda context, verbal abuse contradicts traditional moral codes emphasising respect, communal harmony, and responsible speech. When children witness parental arguments characterised by verbal aggression, they may perceive such behaviour as normative, reinforcing the intergenerational transmission of poor communication practices (Bandura, 1977).

Role of Alcohol and External Stressors

Alcohol consumption is frequently linked to the escalation of verbal conflict. Leonard and Quigley (2017) assert that alcohol impairs self-control, reduces empathy, and heightens aggression, contributing to hostile interactions. Participants in previous Vhavenda studies reported that partners under the influence of alcohol often employ language they would avoid when sober, further destabilising family relationships. Addressing alcohol misuse is therefore an important component of interventions aimed at reducing domestic verbal conflict.

Afrocentric Perspective on Family Communication

The Afrocentric theoretical framework provides a culturally relevant lens for understanding the dynamics of family conflict. Asante (1980; 2020) asserts that centring African cultural values, communal responsibility, and ethical speech is essential for analysing social issues. Within Vhavenda households,

traditional communication practices emphasising respect, empathy, and dialogue serve as protective mechanisms against conflict. Restoring these values in contemporary family life offers a pathway for mitigating verbal abuse and promoting social cohesion.

Methodology

This paper used a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design, combining in-depth exploration of participants lived experiences with a supplementary quantitative component to provide demographic context and summarise patterns of communication, verbal conflict, and gendered experiences (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Sileyew, 2019). Anchored in an Afrocentric theoretical framework, the research prioritised culturally sensitive methods, including data collection in Tshivenda, consideration of local customs in sampling and consent, and ethical engagement with community norms around family privacy and gender roles (Asante, 1980; 2020). The paper aimed to investigate how spoken language contributes to family conflict in Vhavenda households, examine the influence of gendered power dynamics and cultural norms on communication, assess the emotional and educational effects of verbal conflict on children, and propose culturally grounded interventions to foster responsible communication and strengthen family cohesion.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analysed using thematic coding guided by grounded theory techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in three stages: open coding,

where significant phrases, sentences, and incidents such as insults, derogatory remarks, silence, or expressions of fear were identified and labelled; axial coding, in which codes were grouped into categories including “verbal abuse,” “gendered communication,” and “impact on children”; and selective coding, which developed core themes linking categories to broader patterns, such as “abusive language as a trigger for conflict,” “silence exacerbating disputes,” and “educational implications for children.” The quantitative data were summarised using descriptive statistics, including counts, percentages, and basic cross-tabulations (Sileyew, 2019), providing context for the qualitative findings and illustrating trends such as the frequency of verbal conflicts, gendered communication patterns, and correlations between household conflict and children’s academic challenges.

Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of the paper, ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Venda’s Ethics Committee, ensuring adherence to key principles: participants provided written informed consent after being fully briefed on the paper’s purpose, procedures, and potential risks; confidentiality was maintained by removing personal identifiers and using pseudonyms in all transcripts and reports; participants retained the right to decline questions or withdraw at any stage without penalty; and those experiencing distress during interviews were offered information on local counselling and support services.

Trustworthiness and Validity

The paper ensured trustworthiness by adhering to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria, addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through member checking, allowing participants to review transcripts and interpretations for accuracy. Transferability was supported by providing rich, thick descriptions of participants, context, and cultural settings, enabling readers to judge the applicability of findings to similar contexts. Dependability was ensured through detailed documentation of research procedures and consistent coding strategies, while confirmability was strengthened via triangulation of interviews, questionnaires, and existing literature, thereby reducing researcher bias and enhancing the integrity of the data.

Limitations of the Methodology

While the paper provides valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. The small sample size (n=20) and qualitative-focused design may limit the generalisability of findings beyond the Vhavenda context. Participants may have underreported sensitive experiences due to fear, shame, or social desirability, and translating interviews from Tshivenda into English could have led to a minor loss of nuance. Despite these limitations, the methodology allowed for a culturally sensitive, in-depth exploration of how language shapes family conflict, affects children, and intersects with education. Furthermore, the integration of qualitative and quantitative data strengthened the analysis and provided a

solid foundation for the discussion and recommendations.

Findings and Discussion

Introduction to Findings

This section presents the findings of the paper on the role of language in family conflict among Vhavenda households in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province. The data are organised according to emerging themes from the qualitative interviews, supported by quantitative summaries from the questionnaires. The discussion integrates participants' experiences with existing scholarship, highlighting the socio-cultural and educational implications of family communication patterns. The Afrocentric framework provides a lens through which to interpret findings, emphasising African values, communal harmony, and respectful discourse (Asante, 1980; 2020).

Abusive Language as a Trigger for Family Conflict

A central finding was the prevalence of abusive, derogatory, and disrespectful language as a primary trigger of family disputes. Participants reported that arguments often escalated not because of major disagreements but due to the tone, choice of words, or mocking language. For example, one participant explained:

"Sometimes, the problem is small, but once words like 'lazy' or 'useless' are used, it becomes a fight. Nobody listens anymore."

Quantitative data supported this observation, with 75% of participants

indicating that verbal aggression frequently preceded physical or emotional conflict in their households.

These findings align with prior research identifying verbal abuse as a form of emotional violence capable of eroding trust and self-esteem (Champagne, 1999; Brennan, 2020; Pietrangelo, 2019). Abusive language was often linked to attempts to assert control and reinforce patriarchal authority, particularly in households with traditional gender roles. Male participants frequently acknowledged using harsh words to "put their spouse in her place," reflecting deeply embedded cultural norms around masculinity and household authority (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Muche, Adekunle & Arowojolu, 2017).

From an Afrocentric perspective, such practices contradict principles of communal responsibility, respect, and harmony. Traditional Vhavenda culture places high value on tshileme (dignity and honour), emphasising that speech should foster unity rather than conflict. Participants expressed a desire to return to these culturally grounded norms, recognising that respectful communication could prevent disputes and strengthen family cohesion.

Silence and Ineffective Communication

Another important theme was the role of silence and suppressed communication in exacerbating conflict. Many female participants reported remaining quiet to avoid arguments or protect family unity. While silence may temporarily prevent confrontation, it often leads to emotional

tension, which could erupt unpredictably.

One woman described her experience:

"I kept quiet for years, even when I felt hurt. Eventually, I felt like a bottle ready to explode, and one small issue caused a huge fight."

Quantitative responses indicated that 60% of participants reported unresolved issues accumulating due to fear or reluctance to express feelings openly. This supports Ugowe's (2022) argument that communication suppression contributes to latent conflict, which can intensify when triggered by minor disagreements.

The Afrocentric framework highlights that silence may reflect cultural norms that encourage women to maintain family unity, but it also demonstrates how rigid adherence to hierarchical communication can unintentionally perpetuate conflict. Promoting constructive expression and equitable participation in dialogue aligns with both conflict resolution theory (Deutsch, 1973) and traditional African values of collective responsibility.

Gendered Power Dynamics in Communication

The paper revealed that family communication patterns are strongly influenced by gender roles. Women frequently reported that their opinions were dismissed or ignored during disagreements. Common phrases such as "keep quiet" or "you talk too much" were cited as everyday reinforcements of male authority.

This finding is consistent with literature on patriarchal control and domestic violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Muche et al., 2017). Language becomes a tool for asserting power, shaping relational dynamics, and suppressing dissent. Male participants admitted that they sometimes used verbal aggression intentionally to assert dominance, reflecting the internalisation of patriarchal norms.

Afrocentricity offers an interpretive lens, emphasising that egalitarian communication and respect for all family members' voices are crucial to fostering harmony (Asante, 2020). Deviations from these norms, particularly through verbal abuse and silencing of women, represent both social and moral challenges within Vhavenda households.

Impact on Children and Intergenerational Transmission of Conflict

A significant theme was the impact of hostile communication on children. Participants observed that children exposed to frequent verbal disputes exhibited emotional distress, anxiety, and behavioural issues. Some children imitated the aggressive language of their parents, demonstrating the intergenerational transmission of conflict.

Quantitative data indicated that 70% of participants observed negative effects on children's emotional well-being, and 50% noted a correlation with poor school performance. This supports Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which posits that children model behaviour observed in their

environment. Lucas-Thompson, Goldberg, and Prause (2017) similarly found that exposure to marital conflict affects children's psychological adjustment and relational skills.

From an educational standpoint, family communication patterns have direct implications for children's learning behaviour. Emotional distress from verbal conflict can interfere with concentration, memory, and engagement in school tasks. Teachers in the paper reported that some learners from conflict-ridden households displayed reduced participation, difficulty completing assignments, and social withdrawal.

This highlights the importance of school-based interventions. Life skills education, teaching emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and respectful communication, can complement family-based strategies. Schools serve as critical spaces for mitigating the negative educational impact of domestic verbal conflict, equipping children with skills to manage emotions and interact positively with peers and family members.

Influence of Socioeconomic Factors and Alcohol

Participants also reported that external stressors, such as financial pressure and alcohol consumption, intensified verbal conflicts. Several women described situations where intoxication led to insults and aggressive language, even among partners who otherwise communicated respectfully.

Research supports this observation, indicating that alcohol can lower

inhibition, exacerbate aggression, and contribute to domestic disputes (Leonard & Quigley, 2017). Additionally, socioeconomic pressures such as unemployment or low income can create tension, which is then expressed through verbal aggression, highlighting the interconnectedness of structural and interpersonal factors (Coutinho, Lisboa & Pereira, 2015).

Positive Communication and Afrocentric Interpretation

Participants emphasised the value of respectful, culturally grounded communication as a preventive measure against family conflict. Proverbs, praise poetry, and traditional guidance on speech were cited as mechanisms that historically regulated interpersonal behaviour. For instance, the Vhavenda saying “*Ipfi li na masiamdaitwa a si avhuḏi*” (“Words have consequences”) reflects the enduring cultural understanding that language can either harm or heal relationships.

Afrocentricity reinforces this notion by situating African cultural values at the centre of conflict resolution, encouraging families to draw on indigenous knowledge, communal norms, and respect for all voices (Asante, 1980; 2020). Participants expressed that restoring these values could strengthen family cohesion, reduce conflict, and promote social harmony.

Educational Implications of Family Communication

Family communication patterns were found to have direct implications for children’s learning and school

performance. Children in households characterised by verbal conflict often experience:

- Emotional distress affecting concentration
- Difficulty completing homework or participating in class
- Social withdrawal or behavioural problems

These findings are consistent with Semahegn and Mengistie (2015), who note that exposure to domestic conflict can negatively influence children’s cognitive and emotional development.

Schools, therefore, have a critical role in teaching communication and conflict-resolution skills. Life skills education can provide children with strategies to:

- Regulate emotions in response to household conflict
- Resolve interpersonal disagreements constructively
- Develop respectful communication habits

By complementing family-based interventions, schools help prevent the intergenerational transmission of conflict, equipping children to participate in healthier relationships both within and beyond the household. The paper identified several interrelated themes:

- Abusive language as a trigger: Harsh words escalate conflict and can lead to emotional and physical harm.
- Silence and ineffective communication: Suppressed emotions intensify unresolved tension.

- Gendered power dynamics: Patriarchal norms reinforce male dominance through language.
- Impact on children: Emotional distress and imitation of conflict behaviours affect learning and development.
- External stressors: Alcohol and socioeconomic pressures exacerbate conflict.
- Afrocentric solutions: Respectful, culturally grounded communication fosters harmony.
- Educational implications: Life skills education equips children with emotional and conflict management tools.

These findings demonstrate that language is a central factor in family dynamics, influencing emotional well-being, social cohesion, and educational outcomes. Integrating Afrocentric perspectives ensures culturally relevant interventions that respect tradition while promoting equality and constructive communication.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The findings of this paper underscore the complex interplay between language, culture, gender, and social structures in shaping family conflict among Vhavenda households in Vhembe District. Abusive, disrespectful, and poorly managed communication patterns were identified as central contributors to emotional distress, strained relationships, and intergenerational transmission of conflict. Additionally, these patterns were shown to have educational consequences, affecting children's

concentration, behaviour, and overall school performance.

Based on these findings, this section provides evidence-based recommendations aligned with Afrocentric principles and contemporary social interventions. It also presents the conclusion, synthesising the paper's key insights and suggesting directions for future research and practice.

Community-Based Awareness and Education Programmes

One of the foremost recommendations is the establishment of community-driven awareness programmes to promote respectful communication and prevent domestic conflict. The paper revealed that many conflicts stem from verbal aggression, often normalised by patriarchal or cultural expectations. Community engagement is crucial to challenge these norms and create environments that support positive communication.

Key strategies include:

- Workshops and seminars for families on respectful dialogue, conflict management, and emotional literacy.
- Engagement with local leaders and elders, leveraging their authority to reinforce culturally grounded principles of respectful speech, such as tshileme (dignity and honour).
- Integration of local media campaigns, including radio, community newspapers, and social media platforms, to raise awareness about the harmful effects of verbal abuse and the

importance of positive communication.

Community-based programmes should adopt an Afrocentric framework, emphasising collective responsibility, respect for all family members, and the restoration of traditional communication practices that promote harmony (Asante, 1980; 2020).

Strengthening Family Counselling and Mediation Services

The paper highlighted that many conflicts escalate due to the absence of accessible family counselling and mediation platforms. Professional guidance can assist families in managing disputes constructively, rather than allowing negative communication patterns to persist.

Recommendations include:

- Training social workers and community mediators in culturally sensitive communication strategies.
- Integrating traditional dispute resolution mechanisms led by respected elders or community leaders, combining modern counselling with indigenous practices.
- Providing confidential
- counselling services for families, with a focus on both verbal and emotional abuse.

Culturally informed mediation can facilitate reconciliation, reinforce respect, and align conflict resolution strategies with Vhavenda social norms, while also promoting gender equality and inclusivity.

Educational Interventions in Schools

Given the study's finding that family communication patterns influence children's educational outcomes, schools have an essential role to play in teaching communication, emotional regulation, and conflict-resolution skills.

Proposed interventions include:

- Life skills programmes focusing on effective communication, empathy, and respectful interaction.
- Emotional literacy curricula that teach students how to recognise and manage feelings arising from household conflict.
- Conflict-resolution training, including role-playing, peer mediation, and problem-solving exercises, to equip children with practical strategies to navigate interpersonal disagreements.

By equipping children with these skills, schools can mitigate the negative effects of verbal conflict, prevent the intergenerational transmission of aggressive communication patterns, and promote long-term social and educational well-being (Semahegn & Mengistie, 2015; Lucas-Thompson et al., 2017).

Addressing Gendered Communication and Patriarchal Norms

A recurring theme in the paper was the gendered power imbalance in family communication, with women often experiencing silencing or verbal dismissal, reflecting entrenched patriarchal norms. Addressing these

patterns requires multi-level interventions, including gender-sensitivity training for families and communities to promote equitable communication and mutual respect, engaging men and boys as agents of change to encourage reflection on harmful norms and foster positive masculinity, and facilitating community dialogues that emphasise the value of women's voices, grounded in both Afrocentric principles and contemporary human rights standards. Such interventions aim to balance respect for cultural traditions with the promotion of gender equality, creating an environment where all family members can participate in dialogue without fear of retribution.

Policy and Governmental Interventions

The paper also suggests the need for broader policy-level support to address verbal and emotional abuse in households. While legislation often targets physical violence, verbal abuse, and its social consequences are frequently overlooked.

Recommendations include:

- Legislative recognition of verbal and emotional abuse as forms of domestic violence, with guidelines for intervention and support.
- Funding for community programmes and school-based life skills initiatives that promote conflict resolution and respectful communication.
- Collaboration between government, NGOs, and local authorities to implement

culturally sensitive interventions at scale.

- Monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the effectiveness of community-based and educational initiatives in reducing family conflict.

These policies ensure that interventions are sustainable, supported at multiple levels, and responsive to the specific cultural context of Vhavenda families.

Addressing Socioeconomic and External Stressors

Participants reported that financial stress and alcohol consumption often worsened verbal conflicts, suggesting that interventions should address these underlying structural factors. Economic empowerment programmes, particularly for women, could reduce household dependence and power imbalances, while community-based alcohol reduction initiatives including counselling, rehabilitation support, and awareness campaigns, could help mitigate substance-related tensions.

Incorporating stress-management strategies into counselling and educational programmes would also provide families with practical coping mechanisms to prevent verbal aggression. By tackling these structural contributors, families can better manage stress without resorting to abusive communication, thereby promoting social cohesion and emotional well-being.

Promoting Afrocentric Communication Practices

Afrocentricity emphasises respect, communal responsibility, and culturally grounded solutions, and participants expressed a strong desire to revive Vhavenda communication traditions such as proverbs, praise poetry, and guided speech. Recommended interventions include community workshops to restore indigenous storytelling and proverbs that promote positive communication, mentorship programmes pairing younger adults with elders to learn culturally appropriate ways of expressing disagreement and resolving conflict, and the integration of cultural principles into life skills education so that children and families appreciate the value of culturally guided speech and harmony. These approaches not only strengthen cultural identity but also reduce conflict and support intergenerational learning.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that language is a powerful determinant of family dynamics, capable of either fuelling conflict or promoting cohesion. Key findings include: Abusive and disrespectful language triggers emotional harm, deteriorates trust, and escalates disputes, Silence and suppressed communication intensify unresolved tensions, particularly among women, Gendered power dynamics reinforce patriarchal control, marginalising women's voices, Children are directly affected, experiencing emotional distress, impaired learning, and imitation of negative communication patterns, Socioeconomic pressures and alcohol

consumption exacerbate verbal conflicts. Applying an Afrocentric lens, the study highlights the potential of culturally grounded communication practices to restore harmony, strengthen family cohesion, and mitigate educational and social consequences. Recommendations emphasise multi-level interventions: community awareness campaigns, counselling and mediation services, school-based life skills education, gender-sensitive initiatives, and policy reforms. Collectively, these strategies promote respectful, equitable communication and support the social and emotional development of all family members. In conclusion, the paper asserts that language is not neutral: it shapes relationships, emotional well-being, and social stability. By fostering positive communication practices rooted in cultural values, supporting children through education, and addressing structural and gendered challenges, Vhavenda families and communities more broadly can reduce domestic conflict, protect children's educational outcomes, and promote social cohesion. This paper contributes to both academic and practical understandings of domestic conflict, highlighting the need for integrated, culturally sensitive interventions that address verbal, emotional, and structural dimensions of family life.

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