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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Impact of the Initiation Rite on the Teaching-Learning Process: The Case of the Northern Provinces of Mozambique

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## Abstract

This article focuses on the impact that the initiation rite has on the teaching-learning process in Mozambique. This research's main objective is to analyze the impact of initiation rites on education, with a special focus on the Northern provinces. It also seeks the principles transmitted by initiation rites, the way in which they are approached and analyzes their influence on the entry and continuation of students at school, finding that these have brought some obstacles to the adaptation and insertion of modern education in force in the country, since the way education is given to them in the initiation rite process is different from the way the teaching process is in recent education. The research study shows that in the northern provinces of Mozambique the transformation to adulthood is done through initiation rites. To carry it out, qualitative methodology was used and information was collected through documentary research. The research concluded that initiation rites influence the teaching-learning process, because sometimes students are forced to leave school to go to practices. The article suggests that improvements be made to the interconnection between those responsible for formal education and local authorities to change the current reality of education, characterized by a decline in student attendance.

## Introduction

This study addresses the impact of initiation rites on the teaching-learning process in the northern provinces, as this practice is more frequent in this region of the country, with the exception of a few provinces. This practice is not new, it dates back to ancient times, but today it may be creating obstacles in terms of the education process. Access to school and education are considered indicators of a country's development, and Mozambique is no exception. The initiation rite, in turn, also has the purpose of learning, but with regard to the transmission of traditional knowledge and values related to daily practices and experiences. These rites, when not in accordance with the education policies in force in the country, harm the teaching-learning process, as it is normal to value this practice over going to school. The main objective of this article is to analyze the impact of initiation rites on education, in the case of the northern provinces, since these practices are more common in those

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places. As a methodology, the work has a scientific bibliographic nature. As it is a bibliographic review article, it presents the summary, the introduction with introductory aspects, the literature review and finally the conclusion and recommendations of the study.

## Materials and Methods

As for the nature of the study, it is a qualitative bibliographic study, as there is generally no concern with the size of the sample or with the generalization of the results. It does not consider a single objective reality of reality; on the contrary, it is admitted that there are as many interpretations of reality as there are individuals (researchers) who seek to interpret them. It seeks to understand the problems in depth; it investigates what is behind certain behaviors, attitudes or beliefs.

Research is that which is carried out based on the available records, resulting from previous research, in printed documents, such as books, articles and theses. This will help to use data from theoretical categories already worked on by other researchers. Bibliographic research is that which seeks to solve a problem, based on theoretical references, already published. This type of research can be carried out as part of others, such as experimental or descriptive research. This type of research has been considered by many researchers to be an excellent means of study and training. It is one of the first and most important steps for any type of scientific research [1].

With this methodology it was possible to bring approaches to the subject, although at some point there was a shortage of information already documented when it came to studies carried out in some provinces of the North on this subject. The study focused on the provinces of the North of Mozambique, as these are the ones where these practices are most frequent and the same is still preserved.

## Results and Discussions

### Education

The Basic Curricular Plan [2], states that education is a process by which society prepares its members to ensure their development and continuity. It is a dynamic process that continually seeks the best ways to respond to the new challenges imposed by the continuity, transformation and development of society. Durkheim E. [3] states that education is what

adults do with children and adolescents. He defined education as the means by which society changes the conditions of its existence.

Education perpetuates and reinforces homogeneity, beginning by instilling in children the essential similarities necessary for social life. Mondlane E. [4], states that theorists normally divide education into two types: formal education and traditional education, and all societies always use both types to varying degrees and levels of education.

### Traditional education

Mondlane E. [4], states that traditional education generally transmits local knowledge and is carried out in the social environment of which the child is a part. Along the same lines of thought, it can be said that in traditional education, children are educated within the family, community and society in general, through motivation and gradual participation in the lives of adults. Traditional education has values and representations, but they come from spontaneous or natural processes. The person learns this process outside of schools, with private or older teachers, individual classes or even through personal experiences.

### Formal education

Mondlane E. [4], states that formal education occurs outside the family and is administered by specialized institutions, such as schools and their level of organization, and that these institutions often transmit universal knowledge, while formal education is carried out within the family, prioritizing local knowledge. Ponce A. [5], states that formal education is a new type of education that is distinct from traditional education in terms of strength and content. For this writer, the increasing complexity of civilizations has led to a variety of social roles and the need to prepare new generations to play these roles.

Formal education can also be understood as that education that is given in official schools whose curriculum is recognized and approved by the Ministry of Education and Human Development and proven by certificates registered by the Ministry.

### Initiation rites

Initiation rites are rituals that celebrate the passage of an individual to legal maturity, to the fraternity or reserved society, according to Silva R. [6]. Rodolpho A. [7], agrees with Silva and says that initiation rites

mark the transition from one social status to another over the course of life. According to Rivere C. [8], there are a variety of more or less expressive rites, including everyday rites. When giving an example of events that occur at school, the author distinguishes two types of ceremonies: the reception ceremony, in which students greet the teacher, and the ceremony of activities related to the curriculum, such as going to the board and taking assessments.

Initiation rites are a phase in life in which a person passes from one social status to another, and, according to Medeiros E. [9], these rites are part of the culture of the Mozambican people and are the main means by which the new generation transmits moral, civic and cultural values. Osório C, et al. [10], state that the main objective of the initiation rite is not only to create a custom, but also to provide classificatory schemes, classification principles, views and tastes of different social groups.

### **Rites and school: Intersections and differences in different patterns of education**

People of all sexes participate in initiation rites in various areas of the country, which is why Cipire F. [11], cited by Rodolpho A. [7], states that initiation is a simplified form of the rites of passage through which it operates. Initiation, on the other hand, is a rite of formation, not just a rite of transition. The participants or the circle of neophytes will be distinct from those outside and from the uninitiated. Male initiation rites carry out practices that exercise sexuality and promote virility, using plants that prolong sexual relations. The words used by the boys, such as “putte” and “pierar”, often symbolize the exercise of male power that cannot be questioned or denied.

On the other hand, among those from the North, initiation rites are seen as a method of social control over reproduction and as the only way to produce offspring according to the expectations of the community and family. For the population of the North, the uninitiated person is considered someone who is not prepared to be in society, since with death it is not possible to achieve the definitive state that one has always desired [12].

An interesting thing about the initiation rites for men is that they enter with one name and leave with another. For example, if you enroll in the rite with the name Rodrigues, you will receive a traditional name that you will use from then on. Gennep A. [13], states

that the ritual plays a significant role in societies because it represents the notion of transition from one state to another. The separation phase occurs when children are sent to the place of the rites, away from their families and their normal life. Initiation rites are also related to the aggregation phase, when children return to their families after acquiring the cultural and social knowledge necessary to move on to adulthood.

Martinez F. [12], states that in most regions, the initiation rites for girls are performed when they reach puberty. They may spend a month or two in the bush with women who may be healers or knowledge holders, depending on the community or culture. Once there, the girls learn cultural dances, how to care for the sick, maintain personal hygiene, care for their partner (in bed), have children and, in some cases, undergo circumcision, which cuts off part of the clitoris. They also learn how to behave in society, respecting their parents and elders, and are sometimes instructed to have sexual relationships.

A young woman who has undergone the ritual is ready to serve. This service includes domestic tasks related to the well-being of the man, such as cooking, preparing bath water and satisfying the partner, as well as asking the partner for permission to perform any activity. The girls learn that there is no other option.

The learning of sexuality clearly shows this way of thinking and living respect. Through songs, manipulation of objects (in the form of male sex) and mimicry of sexual relations, women know that the will of the man affects their destiny and their life. He is the owner and boss of the family because he is its head. The incitement rites allow parents to marry girls off before their time [12]. The rites are seen as a cultural form of growth for boys and girls, as they see and hear from older people who go through the rites, giving them a new status in the community.

### **Traditional education (initiation rite) versus formal education**

Traditional education is carried out in a social environment to which the child belongs and transmits local knowledge, according to Mondlane E. [4]. Pinto S. [14], states that in traditional education, children are educated in the family, community and society in general through the motivation and progressive participation of adults in the lives of their parents and other family members.

Traditional education is often responsible for providing education to citizens who do not have access to formal education. It provides a variety of diverse and useful knowledge to children and young people during their early years of life, which allows them to successfully overcome life's challenges without frustration.

In the past, formal education was considered insufficient because it was believed that the knowledge acquired in schools was not sufficient for social life and good coexistence, such as after marriage. In addition, it was considered that the child would need to spend a lot of money to go to school in the future and, therefore, would not respect their parents or future partners, especially girls. Formal education was designed to delay the onset of sexual activity and prevent pregnancy, while traditional education advocates procreation as soon as the girl's first menstruation appears and when the boy's voice deepens.

Rangel LH. [15], states that education reflects the way of life of the social groups that create and recreate it in the society in which they live. The different forms of education replicate the knowledge that comes from these same social groups, including their codes of conduct, work rules, art, religion, crafts and technology. This helps to explain to future generations the reason for the group's existence. Initiation rites teach young women the role they play in the community, including the reproductive role in marriage, domestic and agricultural obligations, respect for the parents and families of the future husband and taboos.

The main objective of initiation rites is to create a habit within the social group to which they belong, that is, principles that generate distinct and distinctive practices, but which are also classificatory schemes, classificatory principles, principles of vision and division and different tastes [16]. Boys acquire a sense of individuality by more strongly rejecting their attachment to their mother. This leads them to understand masculinity as something that is not feminine [17].

This clearly goes against the formal education that is acquired in socialization institutions. An example of this can be seen in school, where children are taught from an egalitarian perspective: everyone is equal and has the same abilities to grasp knowledge. However, this difference is only understood through the methods used in the teaching-learning process.

School is not only a place to study mathematics, physics and history, but also a place where people have the first opportunity to share what they know with others. Organizing tasks, fulfilling commitments and presenting results are things we learn at school.

School prepares us for the job market with reading and interpretation activities that help us to know and discuss our society and our own history. In addition, we acquire non-scientific knowledge, such as culture, traditions and citizenship. Students' learning is developed at school. The development of the verb to want and to learn in students at school requires a series of attitudes, including motivation, interest, attention, understanding, participation and expectation of learning to know, do, live together and be a person [1].

### **Complementarity or difference between formal education and traditional education (Initiation)**

Initiation in children or young people does not have uniform universal forms, depending on the customs of each people. This means that initiation rites are not the same in all cultures. Societies will change.

The concept of initiation rites is similar to educational action, according to Pereira R. [18] and Durkheim E. [19]. Thus, initiation rites generally symbolize education in practice. Modern education provides students with universal scientific and sociocultural knowledge, while initiation rites provide students with scientific and sociocultural knowledge of the society to which they belong.

According to Durkheim E. [19], education is what adult generations do with generations that are not ready for social life. The purpose of education is to stimulate or develop the physical and intellectual states necessary for society. Initiation limits the educational action of initiates to adults chosen by the community according to their skills and abilities. These instructors must have some degree of moral and ethical independence in relation to their respective communities. The two teaching methodologies mentioned by Mondlane E. [4], aim to achieve a specific level of physical and psychological development in the student or initiate.

The purpose of initiation, as well as of education, is to prepare the person for social, cultural and personal integration. Social integration enables the person to participate in the activities and life of the group to which he belongs, cultural integration

shapes the personality and personal integration enables the person to collect the various influences of his environment to integrate them into his thinking, behavior and conduct.

### Consequences of the practice of the initiation rite in the teaching-learning process

Gilda P. [1], states that in Mozambique, initiation rites are carried out according to the geographical space to which each person belongs, but they continue to play their public function and symbolic meaning. Initiation rites, as a cultural practice, play an important role in the moral education of young people, teaching them to behave in accordance with the good customs of society. However, initiation rites help a person to integrate into a group, community or society. They also shape the social relationships that he or she establishes with others.

Thus, it is clear that initiation rites also have negative aspects, which can harm the formal education of young people or prevent an inclusive and healthy social coexistence. Cultural traditions can hinder education. Initiation rites for boys and girls tend to have a negative impact on primary and secondary school attendance rates [20].

For example, northern Mozambique sometimes includes female circumcision when it comes to female initiation. The World Health Organization condemns this female circumcision, which consists of removing the clitoris of women, as genital mutilation. The World Health Organization report [21], states that this type of circumcision violates several human rights and the rights of the girl herself, such as non-discrimination on the basis of sex, as it deprives women of the ability to make independent decisions and they are often not informed about such interventions that have lasting impacts on their bodies, including the right to life when it results in death, and the right to freedom from torture.

The teachings of male initiation create relationships of domination, masculinity, authority and superiority, making the position of the girl (woman) in the social and organizational structure. Finally, the difference in the rites is the type of education that boys and girls receive. Marks on the body of the male initiate (circumcision or tattoos) are the physical signs of a transformation in the personality and status of the initiate.

Pinto S. [14], states that male initiation rites make

the personality a model, a standard for living and thinking. Thus, the person incorporates the cultural values that accompany their body and conforms to them in the way they behave and conduct themselves.

For a variety of reasons, initiation rites provide a mandate for the beginning of sexual life, not only because of what they learn, but also because of the pedagogy used in the transmission of knowledge and meanings that are conferred in the construction of the female adult. Participation in the rites does not mean that girls begin their sexual life earlier; rather, they do so because they arouse curiosity and provide reasons for early sexuality [15].

As a result, initiation rites have two faces. On the one hand, they improve the education and behavior of young people by transmitting cultural and social values. On the other hand, they harm the teaching-learning process and school attendance of initiated students, which leads to students dropping out of school.

### Initiation Rites and School Dropout

The study by Nilza AT, et al. [22], states that the rites, which are often performed at the end of the school year to prevent new students from missing classes, do not have a negative impact on access to education. The time needed to perform the initiation rites at the camp is one to two weeks (or more for boys if the circumcision healing takes more than fifteen days).

In some places, initiation ceremonies usually take place at the same time of the year. This is because they do not dedicate much time to the rites during school. The rites are usually performed at the end of the year, during the holidays, since it is not possible to return to school once you get there, because you have to stay there until you leave. The study by Nilza AT, et al. [22] also states that the period in which the rite is performed is the same as when school classes are held, since the initiation ceremony counselors are afraid of interfering with the classes.

However, in some places in these provinces, initiation rite ceremonies are performed individually. They usually take place during the school year and school holidays. The rites are performed during these periods due to the onset of the first menstruation, with the aim of preventing the students from missing classes. The girls attend counseling sessions at a different time to the school. The matrons, however,



believe that the girl will not go to school in the first days of her menstrual cycle because she does not yet know how to take care of her personal hygiene [22].

Although initiation rites do not have a negative impact on access to education, the situation is not the same in terms of students remaining in school. There are students in Mozambique who miss exams to participate in the rites, despite the government's attempts to harmonize the school calendar with the rites calendar [23]. Teachers believe that the local community believes that the end of classes means the end of the school year and, therefore, the holidays.

We held a meeting with parents and guardians to warn them that the end of classes is not the end of the course of study. Nevertheless, according to Nilza AT. et al [22], most students agree that, after the initiation ceremony, both boys and girls should continue studying to learn to read and write well and obtain academic and/or professional training.

Nilza AT, et al. [22], states that there are several reasons for dropout, according to their understanding of the initiation rite, which are:

- (i) **Motivation of students and families** – the fact that there are no women in these areas who have achieved successful careers based on formal education and who can serve as an example for young women.
- (ii) **Marriages** – represent an expected and reasonable stage in the lives of girls. The objective of their entire social formation is to prepare them to be wives capable of taking care of the family and the home. Marriage can be interpreted as a confirmation of the parents' ability to form socially useful and well-integrated members of the community, unlike school, whose objectives and application seem to be outside the girls' daily lives.
- (iii) **Pregnancy** – combined with marriage, it is a sign that the newly married couple is “normal”, confirming that they are adults, assuming responsibility for their own family and satisfying their parents' pride.
- (iv) **Work** – The family's expectations regarding the contribution of this initiated young person, who is now considered an adult, also change, making them feel pressured to look for work or help with other tasks related to income and household maintenance;

(v) **Financial resources** – often, both the parents of initiates and the initiated boys and girls do not have the means to meet their basic needs. Girls, in particular, need special and reinforced hygiene care to ensure that menstrual odors and stains do not embarrass them at school;

(vi) **Distance from home to school** – because these are EPCs, for some students the schools are located a considerable distance from their places of residence, so they often travel kilometers, using shortcuts and poor access roads to get to and from school; and

(vii) **Some teachings of the initiation rites that contrast with the attitude expected of the student in the classroom** – Girls learn not only to avoid looking at an adult, but also not to respond with words.

When applying these teachings in the classroom, the young woman may be surprised by some of the requirements imposed by academic tasks, such as looking at the teacher when answering a question or asking questions. When teachers use the registered name (when they already have a new name assigned during the rites), it is particularly difficult for boys to respond to the roll call.

Furthermore, the matrons agree that even after the initiation ceremony, children should not drop out of school. There is a belief that formal education and the teachings imparted in the initiation rites complement each other, so it is important to keep girls and boys in school. On the other hand, formal education is seen as one of the means of learning a profession. Furthermore, formal education could end illiteracy and contribute to the country's development [22].

The results of the observations by Nilza AT, et al. [22], show a correlation, albeit indirect, between the initiation rites, early marriages and early pregnancies. Taking into account that the majority of women and men who participate in the ceremonies are between the ages of 11 and 16, some of the teachings and guidance they receive include respect, hygiene and domestic techniques, as well as tips on how to behave appropriately at home.

For example, the girls are taught by the counselors how to make copulatory movements using their hips, waist and buttocks. After the demonstration, the initiates, accompanied by their godmothers, are invited to imitate the counselors or matrons.

Using the intimacy of the home, the women learn the procedures for cleaning the penis after sexual intercourse.

These procedures include holding the penis, positioning and moving the hands, using a handkerchief instead of the hands, where to place the semen removed during the cleaning, where to direct the gaze during the process and how to thank the husband [22]. After the ceremonies and back in their communities, reports show that some girls and boys try to apply some of the teachings, often motivated by curiosity and the desire to experiment with their sexuality. This is what one of the interviewees said when asked whether or not the initiation rites help girls and boys to get married before reaching the legal age of 18.

Teachers believe that one of the rituals that contributes to school dropout is the name change, in which people who have been initiated must assume a new name. As a result, students should not be addressed by their registered name after the ceremonies and when they return to school. Choosing a new name represents the transition from a stage of childhood to adulthood. According to Medeiros E. [9], the new name signals the state of social adulthood and, according to Alfane R. [24], it takes children out of the past, or from childhood, to instill in them a renewed personality, that of adults.

In addition, some people say that young people, especially girls, should not look at adults and respond to them, reflecting the idea of submission. Nilza AT, et al. [22], states that throughout childhood and during initiation rites, women are taught to submit to the will of men, and any oppositional attitude is socially condemned.

Sometimes girls may have low academic performance in school. This is due to the fact that they may not have the ability to ask questions or demonstrate the knowledge they have on a given subject. Osório C. [23], corroborates this idea, stating that the rites teach submission to adults without questioning the orders of older people or those with higher status.

## Conclusion

This study concluded that initiation rites do cause some problems, even if indirectly. However, there are several attempts to align the dates and periods in which these rites take place, so that they do not

clash with the current school calendar in the country. These rites serve as a transition from one phase to another, so they are seen as something imperative and that must be carried out because those who do not go through this process are not considered mature enough to be part of the community, even though attending this practice influences the suspension of classes in some cases.

Traditional education (initiation rites) and formal education can indeed go hand in hand in Mozambique, but only if the main stakeholders establish paths so that the two cannot collide, because if this happens, the teaching-learning process is what is harmed. The initiation rite does have something positive to offer formal education, just as formal education can offer and benefit from these teachings.

The other conclusion reached in this study is that there is indeed complementarity and difference between formal education and the initiation rite, since the difference between them is that formal education is systematized, following a structure, with a curriculum recognized and approved by the body that oversees it and is more concerned with scientific and proven knowledge, while the initiation rite is more focused on teaching local knowledge, where its focus is the transmission of culture, values, habits and customary practices according to everyday experiences.

The complementarity of the two lies in the fact that both are concerned with the transmission of knowledge and teachings, since both in this learning process prepare the student to respond to the demands of society, knowing how to be, how to behave and how to do. Regarding the consequences of the initiation rite practice in the teaching-learning process, the conclusion reached was that there are indeed some problems with student attendance and retention, but this is not caused solely by the initiation rite.

Going more to the rite side, it is worth mentioning that in some regions of these provinces this rite has started in September, the same period in which classes are still taking place, and in some places it starts in November, but this can clash with the teaching-learning process, depending on the school calendar in force in a calendar year. Corroborating some authors cited above, it is worth mentioning that initiation rites have an impact on students' access to and retention in school.

These rites impact the teaching-learning process



when they provide knowledge and transmit values that suggest that students are already old enough to get married, and they end up getting married prematurely, and some girls end up getting pregnant, which causes them to stop going to school. Even though the organizers of these processes wait until the holidays to carry them out, this can affect students' attendance at exams.

A concrete example of their impact on the teaching-learning process is that of girls, who after their first menstruation, regardless of the time of year or whether they are in school, must go through a brief rite lasting one to two weeks to learn how to clean themselves, which causes them to miss classes. The study did not find concrete evidence that shows that the initiation rite causes school dropout, because what happens is that the rite is associated with dropout, but it does not do so directly.

This is because what happens is that after the teachings and knowledge acquired in the initiation rite, boys and girls are driven by curiosity to put into practice what they learned there and some feel mature enough to form a family, and the consequence of this is premature pregnancy and premature unions, which in turn culminates in these students dropping out of school. The study concluded that the initiation rite does not cause students to drop out of school, and if it causes these consequences, it is indirectly.

## Suggestion

### Promote open and collaborative dialogue

Encourage regular meetings between community leaders, school authorities, and representatives from the Ministry of Education, creating a space for mutual listening and cooperation. These dialogues should aim to align school and community calendars so that participation in initiation rites does not harm students' attendance or academic performance.

### Value culture in the school curriculum

Integrate into formal education content that reflects traditional knowledge, cultural practices, and local history, showing students that academic and cultural knowledge are not opposites, but rather complementary.

Provide training that helps teachers understand the role and social significance of initiation rites. This will enable them to avoid stereotypes and apply

teaching methodologies that embrace and respect students' cultural diversity.

### Strengthen community awareness

Carry out campaigns within communities to encourage the organization of initiation rites in ways that do not disrupt learning. This ensures that cultural preservation goes hand in hand with continuous schooling.

### Monitor and evaluate together

Establish participatory monitoring systems where communities and schools jointly and continuously assess the impact of cultural practices on academic performance. This data should guide the adjustment of policies and actions according to local realities.

The suggestion that remains is that educational authorities should accept certain ritual practices and take advantage of those that can help keep students in school and not only that, they can bring new teachings and knowledge. The study also recommends that formal education should accompany traditional education (initiation rite), because both can help in social advancement and reinforce awareness-raising actions about the importance of school and learning. It is also suggested that the school calendar be harmonized with that of the initiation rite practice so that they do not clash. Culture must be valued and preserved so that there is no loss of identity.

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