

DANCE AS CULTURAL LEDGER: THE VALUE OF DOCUMENTING INDIGENOUS AFRICAN DANCES

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Received Date : 10-10-2023
Accepted Date : 21-11-2023
Published Date : 30-11-2023

ABSTRACT

This article explores the significance of documenting indigenous African dances, specifically focusing on the *Umxhentso* dance within the cultural context of Xhosa *amagqirha* in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Historically, Indigenous dances in African societies have served as crucial elements of communal ceremonies, embodying cultural traditions, spiritual beliefs, and social cohesion. However, colonialism and contemporary globalisation have threatened the preservation of these traditional dance forms. This paper employs a qualitative approach, incorporating interviews with participants and observations and extant literature and data analysis using thematic analysis. The findings underscore the multifaceted role of the *Umxhentso* dance, highlighting its function as a medium for connecting with ancestors, enhancing divination practices, and reinforcing spiritual potency within the community. Moreover, the article emphasises the value of documenting indigenous dances in combating stereotypes and misconceptions, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting intercultural understanding. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on the importance of safeguarding and revitalising indigenous African dances to preserve cultural diversity and identity.

Keywords: *Umxhentso* dance; Cultural heritage; documenting indigenous dances; African traditional dances; Xhosa culture; Indigenous dance.

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous dances have long played a vital role in the customs and cultures of African societies, serving as a means of expression, celebration, and community cohesion. These dances were traditionally transmitted and performed through communal ceremonies, embodying the essence of African heritage and identity. Sunday-Kanu (2013) states that indigenous dance forms manifest African cultural traditions. They are deeply intertwined with the cultural fabric of the people, reflecting their values, beliefs, and ways of life.

The advent of colonialism and the spread of Christianity brought about major transformations in the cultural fabric of Africa, profoundly influencing the practice and

significance of indigenous dances (Mabingo, 2020; Rani, 2018). Indigenous dances, such as the *Umxhentso* dance in Xhosa culture, on which this study is premised, reflect the community's beliefs, values, and lived experiences. They are seen as an aesthetic ledger commemorating and promoting the social lives of African people (Rani, 2018).

Before the colonial era, indigenous dances were deeply ingrained in the cultural ethos, with communities cherishing and preserving their unique dance forms (Blume, 2023). These dances were not merely artistic expressions but were integral to social, spiritual, and ritualistic practices (Okewola, 2021). According to Abakporo (2019), indigenous dance fulfils specific spiritual beliefs beyond mere body movements. It acts as a conduit for communication between the physical realm and the celestial hosts. As a result, communities employ indigenous dance to communicate with their deities (Nwafor, 2013). However, the advent of colonialism disrupted these practices, leading to unfavourable Western perceptions of indigenous African dances (Rani, 2018). These dances were often associated with paganism, resulting in the abolition of many African dances (Rani, 2018).

The spread of Christianity further influenced the practice of indigenous dances. While some Christian missionaries and communities incorporated elements of indigenous dances into their worship practices, others viewed these dances as antagonistic to the "true faith" and sought to suppress them (Hanna, 1973). This led to a significant transformation in the practice and perception of indigenous dances (Mabingo, 2020).

Despite these challenges, indigenous dances have remained a vital part of African societies, serving as a means of social communication, supplication, passionate, relational feelings, and marking transitional life stages (Okewola, 2021). They continue to play a crucial role in teaching moral values social etiquette, and helping people mature and celebrate members of the community while celebrating festivals and other occasions. Therefore, the documentation and preservation of these dances are of utmost importance in safeguarding the rich cultural heritage of African societies.

The historical shift in societal values, primarily influenced by colonial powers and the spread of Western ideals and religious doctrines, has had significant implications for indigenous dances. These external influences have gradually eroded the prominence and practice of indigenous dances, relegating them to the periphery of cultural importance (Rani, 2018; Izu and De Villiers, 2021). As a result, contemporary audiences often perceive these dances as antiquated, losing touch with their historical significance and the valuable insights they provide into African heritage (Gwerevende and Mthombeni,

2023).

The diminishing interest in indigenous dances threatens the preservation of Africa's rich cultural heritage. As global cultural influences gain prominence, indigenous dances face marginalisation and the risk of fading into obscurity (Mabingo, 2020). This underscores the pressing need to document and re-evaluate these dance forms for cultural preservation and reclamation (Izu and De Villiers 2021; Akas, 2014). By doing so, we can ensure that these integral aspects of cultural identity and historical heritage are not lost but rather are appreciated and understood in their full context. This re-evaluation and documentation process is about preserving and fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of these dances in contemporary society (Bhale, 2014; Akas, 2013). It is a step towards reclaiming and revitalising a significant aspect of cultural heritage that has been marginalised due to historical circumstances (Mabingo, 2020).

This article delves into the *Umxhentso* dance, a traditional dance performed by the Xhosa *amagqirha* (traditional healers) during ceremonial rites and rituals. The Xhosa people, an ethnic group residing in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, have a rich cultural tradition that includes various expressive art forms, including the *Umxhentso* dance. As Diko (2023) notes, the *Umxhentso* is a unique folk dance of the Xhosa people, a source of pride and cultural identity.

Historically, the *amagqirha* performed *Umxhentso* as a prelude to divination. The ecstatic dancing induces a mildly altered state of consciousness in both the dancers and the audience members, facilitating rituals and fostering communal bonds (Hirst, 2005; Izu and De Villiers, 2023). Cheney (1990) posits that facilitating rituals is one of the broadest benefits of indigenous dance in African communities. In this context, dance is not merely a form of entertainment but a symbolic component of the culture, providing a process of understanding and distinction for the people within that society (Mabingo, 2020).

Hence, the *Umxhentso* dance holds immense cultural significance within Xhosa communities, embodying their history, beliefs, and social structures. According to Izu and de Villiers (2021), an indigenous dance performance in African societies traditionally reflects people's communal values, social relationships, and indigenous knowledge. Despite the rich cultural significance of the *Umxhentso* dance, there is a lack of documentation efforts. This lack of documentation is a significant issue as it risks losing specific cultural, historical, or societal insights embedded in the dance. The urgency to address this problem is heightened by the current societal and cultural shifts that make preserving indigenous dances particularly relevant in African societies.

In line with UNESCO's policy on engaging with indigenous peoples and its Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2003), the organisation recognises that indigenous peoples are living manifestations of cultural diversity and essential partners in building knowledge societies and achieving the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. Therefore, preserving indigenous dances in African cultures, such as the *Umxhentso* dance, is particularly relevant. UNESCO is scaling up efforts to strengthen consultations with and engagement of Indigenous Peoples to enhance their contribution to the protection and promotion of cultural diversity and sustainable development.

This study aims to make a case for the importance of documenting indigenous dances in African societies, using the *Umxhentso* dance as an example. By advocating for the documentation of the *Umxhentso* dance, we underscore the importance of indigenous dances in preserving cultural heritage and fostering a deeper understanding of African societies (Mabingo, 2020; Gwervevde and Mthombeni, 2023). This study fills a gap in the existing literature and has the potential to make a significant contribution to the field of cultural studies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research approach, which is particularly effective for exploring complex phenomena and understanding specific contexts comprehensively (Creswell, 2013). The research design incorporated various data collection methods, including interviews, observation, and participant observation. This methodological triangulation strengthens the validity of the findings by allowing for data cross-verification (Flick, 2009).

The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility, enabling researchers to delve into interesting topics that arose during the conversation. Interviews were conducted with eight *amagqirha* (traditional healers) and 12 ceremony attendees, including six *amagqirha* in training. The interview questions were crafted to draw out detailed responses about the participants' experiences and perceptions of the *Umxhentso* dance and their opinions on the importance of documenting indigenous dances in African societies. The interviews provided direct, personal perspectives on the *Umxhentso* dance, complementing the observational data by providing context and personal narratives (Seidman, 2006).

The researchers also attended and observed several *amagqirha* ceremonies and initiation rites where the *Umxhentso* dance was performed between May 2021 and November 2021. They observed the dance performances and the interactions among the participants. Observational data provided a first-hand account of the dance performances and the social interactions during these events, offering a broader context for understanding the cultural significance of the *Umxhentso* dance (Angrosino, 2016). In some cases, the researchers also participated in the ceremonies to gain a first-hand experience of the phenomenon under study (Spradley, 1980). Participant observation allowed the researchers to immerse themselves in the cultural context, providing a deeper understanding of the *Umxhentso* dance and its significance within the community (De Walt and De Walt, 2011).

Following data collection, all gathered data from interviews, discussions, observations, and extant sources were thoroughly reviewed. This involved multiple readings to fully comprehend the depth and nuances of the data (Cassell and Bishop, 2019). The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This involved coding the data using Atlas.ti software to ensure reliability and validity in identifying patterns and grouping them into themes that capture the essence of *Umxhentso* dance, its cultural significance and the significance of documenting indigenous dances in African societies. The emergent themes were then linked back to existing literature. This step ensured that findings were grounded in previous research while contributing new knowledge. The major findings of this study are presented in the following section.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings gathered through interviews and observations underscore *Umxhentso* dance significance. Lulo (pseudonym), in a personal communication on June 16, 2021, emphasised that the *Umxhentso* dance is a primary element during *amagqirha* ceremonial rites. It aids in connecting with the ancestors to receive vision or guidance. This connection is not merely symbolic but holds great spiritual significance. It establishes a profound connection with the ancestors, embodying their collective memories, wisdom, and presence.

The dance also enhances the divination abilities of the practitioners. By engaging in the ritualised movements and rhythms of the *Umxhentso* dance, the *amagqirha* practitioners enter a heightened state of consciousness. This trance-like state enables

them to establish and sustain direct contact with their ancestors, facilitating effective communication and receiving guidance from the spiritual realm (Izu and De Villiers, 2023).

In addition to establishing connections and enhancing divination efficacy, the *Umxhentso* dance fortifies the overall spiritual potency of the *amagqirha* practitioners, as observed during fieldwork at Motherwell Eastern Cape on June 16, 2021, by the researchers. Through the dance, they channel energy, power, and ancestral blessings, enabling them to fulfil their sacred role as intermediaries between the living and the ancestral world.

The *Umxhentso* dance vividly represents African traditions, underscoring the profound respect, reverence, and spiritual interconnectedness between the living and their ancestors. As Nzewi (2010) posits, African musical art creation philosophy is closely tied to African life philosophy guided by specific beliefs and ideas that shape their daily activities. In line with this philosophy, Pusnik (2010) suggests that indigenous dances serve as a medium to communicate with different deities in a manner that resonates with people. This is echoed by Cheney (1990), who notes that among Shona and Ndebele people in Zimbabwe, Mhande and Izangoma indigenous dances are used to communicate with supernatural realms.

Documenting and preserving such indigenous dances are crucial for maintaining cultural diversity in the face of growing globalisation (Rincon and Rahmi, 2002). These dances, deeply woven into the fabric of social life, play a central role in binding together all community members. They are a form of artistic expression and a medium for participatory learning (Akas, 2013), transmitting stories, songs, and traditions from generation to generation. As such, they are an irreplaceable part of our cultural heritage (UNESCO, n.d.), a valuable factor for empowering local communities and enabling vulnerable groups to participate fully in social and cultural life (UNESCO, n.d.). Therefore, efforts should be made to safeguard these indigenous dances, as they are an integral part of our cultural heritage and a powerful resource for societal transformation (UNESCO, 2023).

Performance Elements and Ritual Significance of the *Umxhentso* Dance: A Cultural Expression.

The *Umxhentso* dance, renowned for its intricate rhythmic movements and dynamic footwork, is a significant cultural expression within the Xhosa community. The dance is performed in a circular formation, with participants engaging in synchronised

movements, rhythmic clapping, and traditional drumbeats, showcasing agility, coordination, and cultural symbolism through intricate footwork and expressive gestures (Ntuli, 2015). During ancestral veneration and initiation ceremonies, the *amagqirha* primarily perform the *Umxhentso* dance to invoke the presence of their ancestors, allowing the spirits to possess and guide them during the performance (Lulo, personal communication, June 16, 2021). Notably, the dance is characterised by diverse variations, including movements on the balls of the feet, vigorous shaking, and occasional performances on the knees, allowing for individual expression and improvisation within the established dance pattern.

A distinctive feature of the *Umxhentso* dance lies in its organic nature, devoid of a predetermined sequence. Instead, the dance is guided by the spiritual possession of the dancer by their ancestors during a trance. According to Lulo (pseudonym), in a personal communication on June 16, 2021, While the spiritual leader may teach basic steps, the actual performance unfolds dynamically as the spirit moves through the dancer's body, creating a profound sense of connection and shared presence between the dancer and the ancestral realm (Lulo, personal communication, June 16, 2021). This unique aspect of spiritual possession and embodiment underscores the ritual significance of the *Umxhentso* dance as a conduit for spiritual communion and ancestral guidance within the Xhosa cultural framework.

Furthermore, the immersive atmosphere of the *Umxhentso* dance performances is amplified by the participants' vibrant traditional attire, further enriched by the incorporation of incense and ornamentation. Drummers play a pivotal role in establishing the rhythmic foundation of the dance, skilfully synchronising complex polyrhythmic patterns with the dancers' movements, creating a captivating and harmonious performance (Ntuli, 2015). This synthesis of visual, olfactory, and auditory elements within the dance performance contributes to the overall sensory experience, reinforcing the communal bond and spiritual resonance embedded within the *Umxhentso* dance tradition.

The *Umxhentso* dance shares certain thematic elements with other indigenous African dances, reflecting the broader cultural significance of ritualistic performances within African communities. Similar to the *Umxhentso* dance, the Mhande and Izangoma indigenous dances among the Shona and Ndebele people in Zimbabwe serve as a medium for communicating with the supernatural realms, fostering a connection with ancestral spirits and invoking their blessings (Cheney, 1990). These dances, like the *Umxhentso*, emphasise the interplay between rhythmic movements, spiritual possession,

and communal participation, reinforcing the cultural importance of dance as a spiritual and social conduit within African societies.

Symbolic Representations in the Xhosa *Umxhentso* Dance

The *Umxhentso* dance is replete with symbolic representations that underscore the cultural reverence and spiritual connectivity with ancestral spirits among the Xhosa people. According to Dineo (pseudonym) in a personal communication on August 3, 2021, specific dance steps and gestures hold deep cultural significance, creating a sacred space for communion and communication with the ancestors. The circular formation adopted by the *amagqirha* during the *Umxhentso* dance is metaphorically aligned with the full moon, symbolising the unity, wholeness, and interconnectedness of community members, emphasising the communal strength and solidarity within the Xhosa culture (Dineo, personal communication, August 3, 2021).

Additionally, according to Dineo (pseudonym), in a personal communication on August 3, 2021, the ritual requirement of removing shoes before participating in the *Umxhentso* dance symbolises the profound reverence and acknowledgement of the sacredness of the dance space as a spiritual connection with the ancestral realm. The intricate symbolism embedded within the *amagqirha* dancers' regalia, encompassing the colours, costumes, and accessories, reflects various aspects of Xhosa culture and social hierarchy, signifying their roles as intermediaries between the community and ancestral spirits (Dineo, personal communication, August 3, 2021).

Furthermore, the hierarchical structure within the *amagqirha* practice, characterised by distinct levels of regalia, underscores the significance of rank and respect for the established order, highlighting the core values of loyalty and communal harmony within the Xhosa community (Dineo, personal communication, August 3, 2021). The *Umxhentso* dance serves as a gateway for *amagqirha* to transcend the physical realm and access supernatural powers through trance-like states, enhancing their spiritual practice and healing abilities, solidifying its pivotal role as a conduit for the manifestation of supernatural powers (Dineo, personal communication, August 3, 2021).

The symbolic depth and spiritual connectivity reflected within the *Umxhentso* dance find resonance in various indigenous African dances, such as the *Vimbuza* healing dance among the Tumbuka people in Northern Malawi (Gilman, 2015; Soko, 2014). The *Vimbuza* dance, performed during healing rituals, signifies the spiritual renewal of the individual, symbolising purification, ancestral homage, and personal reinvigoration, akin

to the spiritual connectivity and communal bonding observed in the *Umxhentso* dance. These shared thematic elements across diverse African indigenous dances emphasise the cultural persistence and spiritual interconnectedness woven into the fabric of African communal practices.

The Value of Documenting Indigenous Dances in African Societies

The imperative to document indigenous dances in African societies aligns seamlessly with the principles advocated by UNESCO regarding the preservation of cultural heritage. UNESCO recognises cultural heritage as a source of identity, a testament to human creativity, and a vital resource for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2003). The Value of Documenting Indigenous Dances in African Societies underscores the far-reaching significance of this practice, transcending the specific example of the *Umxhentso* dance in Xhosa culture.

Gonye and Moyo (2015) assert the profound importance of indigenous African dances within the framework of indigenous knowledge systems, challenging mainstream Eurocentric perceptions. In its policy framework on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, UNESCO emphasises the need to recognise, respect, and enhance the diverse ways of transmitting knowledge, skills, and practices. Documenting indigenous dances becomes crucial in actively preserving African cultural identities, countering the risks of cultural identity disappearance, and aligning with UNESCO's commitment to fostering cultural diversity.

In a personal communication on June 16, 2021, Marvellous (pseudonym) emphasised the pivotal role of documenting indigenous dances in safeguarding and transmitting cultural knowledge, ensuring the transmission of rich cultural heritage to future generations. This documentation holds significant value in terms of cultural preservation, identity formation, and the sustenance of cultural traditions (Zimu-Biyela, 2016). Similarly, Kazi (pseudonym), in a personal communication on August 3, 2021, underscores the importance of documenting African traditional dance in the postcolonial era to uphold cultural traditions and demonstrate respect for their cultural practices. Furthermore, Mobeni (pseudonym), in a personal communication on September 13, 2021, further stresses the role of documenting indigenous dance in ensuring tribal continuity and preventing the loss of cultural roots, especially in contemporary challenges that often diminish the significance of indigenous dances.

The assertions above from the research participants highlight the critical role of documenting indigenous dances in safeguarding and transmitting cultural knowledge. UNESCO recognises the role of education and awareness-raising in fostering a sense of ownership and active participation in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. Documentation becomes a bridge between generations, ensuring the transmission of rich cultural heritage to future generations and contributing to identity formation in harmony with UNESCO's vision of promoting intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding.

Therefore, without proper documentation, the originality and authenticity of these dances may vanish or become forgotten, particularly among younger generations, because documentation serves as a means to safeguard their true essence, ensuring that they are performed and transmitted in their intended ritual forms (Balogun, 2023). By capturing detailed records of indigenous dances through written accounts, photographs, videos, and audio recordings, their cultural significance can be preserved for posterity. This documentation becomes an invaluable resource for researchers, scholars, practitioners, and future generations, enabling them to understand, appreciate, and participate in these dances while respecting their cultural and historical contexts (Akas, 2013; Hanna, 1973; Gwervevde and Mthombeni, 2023).

However, Bakare (2006:67) highlights the pressing need for documenting indigenous dances, as the survival of these dances in African society is threatened by the intervention of modern dancers. Bakare argues that contemporary dancers often modify indigenous dances' originality, uniqueness, and authenticity by transforming ritual movements into sensual expressions and exploiting cult dances for social and aesthetic depictions. As a result, the sacred significance that these dances once held is diminished as they are performed in non-ritualistic settings. This alteration of indigenous dances risks their posterity (Abakporo, 2019).

The concerns raised by Bakare (2006:67) regarding the intervention of modern dancers and the potential alteration of indigenous dances find resonance in UNESCO's objective to ensure the continuity of living heritage practices. UNESCO encourages the involvement of communities in the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, and revitalisation of intangible cultural heritage. Thus, it is crucial to approach the documentation of indigenous dances with sensitivity and respect for their cultural context, ensuring that the benefits of documentation are equitably distributed among the communities involved while ensuring

the maintenance of their original essence and cultural significance (Balogun, 2023; Izu and De Villiers, 2021).

Moreover, UNESCO's emphasis on the equitable distribution of benefits aligns with the call for sensitivity and respect for the cultural context in documenting indigenous dances. UNESCO promotes the active involvement of communities and individuals in safeguarding their intangible cultural heritage. The concerns raised by Bakare (2006) and the imperative to maintain the original essence and cultural significance of these dances align with UNESCO's recognition of the importance of community participation.

In conclusion, as highlighted in this context, the value of documenting indigenous dances in African societies resonates with UNESCO's overarching mission to safeguard intangible cultural heritage. By recognising the significance of documenting cultural practices like indigenous dances per the principles set forth by UNESCO, we contribute to preserving and appreciating diverse cultural expressions, fostering a global environment that cherishes and celebrates the richness of cultural heritage.

Documenting Indigenous Dances as a Catalyst for Combating Stereotypes and Misconceptions

The documentation of indigenous dances is a crucial window into African societies' intricate social, historical, and spiritual dimensions. Each dance form, such as the *Umxhentso* dance in Xhosa culture, encapsulates profound meanings and symbolisms that reflect the community's beliefs, values and lived experiences. Barratt and Afadameh-Adeyemi (2011) emphasise the role of traditional African dance as an aesthetic ledger, documenting and celebrating the social lives of African people. Through meticulous documentation, researchers and scholars gain access to the layers of meaning embedded within the dance movements, attire, and accompanying rituals, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of African cultural diversity and the profound interconnections between dance, spirituality, and community life (Barratt and Afadameh-Adeyemi, 2011).

Given the complex cultural perceptions and misrepresentations surrounding indigenous African dances, the documentation process is critical in combating stereotypes and misconceptions, aligning with UNESCO's policy on the importance of documenting cultural heritage. Alero (pseudonym), in a personal communication on August 3, 2021, underscores the significance of bringing indigenous dances to the forefront to challenge negative stereotypes often associated with them. The historical context of Western

perceptions during the pre-colonial and colonial eras, as highlighted by Hanna (2019), points to unfavourable connotations linking indigenous African dances with paganism, leading to the prohibition of many African dance forms. These insights underscore the necessity of documentation in rectifying misperceptions and portraying indigenous dances' cultural richness and significance in their authentic forms.

Moreover, Alero (Pseudonym), in a personal communication on August 3, 2021, asserts that researching and documenting indigenous dances often involves real-time capturing of videos and photographs, effectively preserving the original essence of the dances during their performance. Alero's assertion emphasises the dynamic documentation approach, which captures the authenticity and essence of the dances, facilitating more nuanced analysis and interpretation by researchers (Bosch and Griesel 2020; Balogun, 2023). This method enables individuals from diverse backgrounds to not only appreciate the beauty and significance of indigenous African dances but also foster intercultural understanding, break down barriers and promote a profound appreciation for the cultural heritage of African societies (Akas, 2013).

However, it is essential to recognise that despite the efforts to combat stereotypes through documentation, some challenges persist in the portrayal and understanding indigenous dances. The selective representation of these dances in the documentation might inadvertently reinforce certain stereotypes or limit the description of the broader cultural context within which these dances originate (Mugovhani, 2015; Krystal, 2011). Also, the process of documentation may inadvertently lead to the commodification of indigenous dances, potentially stripping them of their cultural significance and reducing them to mere entertainment (Hanna, 1965).

Furthermore, the use of technology in the documentation process may not be accessible to all communities, potentially exacerbating inequalities (Balogun, 2023). Therefore, a more comprehensive and contextual approach to documentation that accounts for the multi-layered cultural significance of indigenous dances is crucial in challenging and dispelling stereotypes and misconceptions, fostering a more accurate and holistic understanding of African cultural heritage (Izu and de Villiers, 2021). Such an approach is essential to advancing a more precise knowledge and insight of African cultural heritage in line with UNESCO's principles. It is also essential to approach the documentation of indigenous dances with sensitivity and respect for the cultural context in which they exist and to ensure that the benefits of documentation are equitably distributed among the communities involved (Balogun, 2023).

Balancing the Impact of Technology and Heritage Documentation of Indigenous African Dances.

The impact of technology on the preservation of indigenous African dances and cultural history has become a topic of significant debate, with varying perspectives on its implications. Marvellous (pseudonym), in a personal communication on June 16, 2021, laments the fading significance of history due to the dominance of technology, asserting that "technology has taken over and history is slowly fading away". Abakporo (2015), although writing earlier, does not share this viewpoint but suggests that the fundamental issue lies in the dancers' ability to adapt to the changes brought about by technological advancements rather than technology itself. Abakporo's perspective underscores the need for a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics between technology and the preservation of indigenous African dances. This suggests that integrating technology and cultural preservation is possible and necessary for the survival and evolution of cultural practices in the modern world (Hunter, 2005).

The growing dominance of technology has reshaped the landscape of cultural practices, including preserving indigenous dances. Integrating modern tools and platforms for documentation, dissemination, and archival purposes has positive and negative implications for transmitting cultural heritage. On the one hand, digital platforms and multimedia tools have provided unprecedented opportunities for the widespread dissemination of indigenous dances, enabling a global audience to access and appreciate these cultural expressions (Barratt and Afadameh-Adeyemi, 2011). Additionally, digital technology has facilitated more nuanced documentation, preserving the intricate details and symbolism embedded within these dances, which might have been lost through traditional means (Barratt and Afadameh-Adeyemi, 2011).

On the other hand, the pervasive influence of digital media has also posed challenges to the authenticity and integrity of these dances. The commodification of cultural expressions through online platforms and social media has sometimes led to the misrepresentation and appropriation of indigenous dances, diluting their cultural significance and spiritual essence (Bakare, 2006). Moreover, the ease of digital manipulation and alteration of visual and audio content has raised concerns about the potential distortion of the original context and cultural meanings associated with these dances, leading to the propagation of inaccurate and superficial representations (Bakare, 2006).

Furthermore, the rapid evolution of technology has highlighted the need for indigenous dances to adapt and respond to the digital era, incorporating innovative approaches to preserve their cultural heritage. Incorporating technological tools into the documentation and transmission of indigenous dances can enhance their accessibility and visibility, enabling broader engagement and understanding among diverse audiences (Barratt and Afadameh-Adeyemi, 2011). This approach can foster a more dynamic and interactive experience, encouraging active participation and appreciation of these cultural expressions, thereby revitalising their cultural significance for present and future generations (Barratt and Afadameh-Adeyemi, 2011).

A comprehensive approach is required to address the challenges posed by technology's impact on preserving history and cultural heritage. This approach should integrate technological advancements with a deep commitment to preserving the authenticity and integrity of indigenous dances. Implementing rigorous ethical guidelines and cultural protocols for the digital representation and dissemination of indigenous dances is crucial to safeguarding their cultural significance and preventing misappropriation (Bakare, 2006). Moreover, fostering collaborations between cultural custodians, technology experts, and academic researchers can promote innovative strategies for the sustainable preservation and promotion of indigenous dances in the digital age (Barratt and Afadameh-Adeyemi, 2011).

While technology poses certain challenges to preserving cultural heritage, it also offers innovative solutions for documenting and sharing cultural expressions. By embracing technology and adapting to its changes, we can ensure the survival and evolution of indigenous African dances and other forms of cultural heritage. This requires a balanced approach that recognises the value of technology and cultural preservation and seeks to integrate them in a way that respects and promotes cultural diversity.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article has explored the significance of indigenous dances in African societies. The findings underscore the profound role of *Umxhentso* in embodying the cultural and spiritual identity of the Xhosa community. Moreover, the study highlights the need to document African indigenous dances in the face of cultural erosion and global influences. The documentation of indigenous dances has been identified as a crucial tool for preserving cultural heritage, combating stereotypes and misconceptions, and fostering a more accurate and holistic understanding of African cultural heritage. However, the article

calls for a balanced and sensitive approach to documenting indigenous dances that respect the cultural context in which they exist. With a deep commitment to cultural preservation, African societies can ensure the continued transmission of their rich cultural heritage. This research contributes to the ongoing dialogue on the revitalisation of indigenous African dances, underscoring their significance in preserving cultural diversity, promoting cultural resilience, and fostering a deeper appreciation for the diverse cultural expressions within the African continent through documentation.

Recommendations

- I. Develop digital platforms such as websites or mobile applications dedicated to indigenous dances. These platforms can serve as repositories for videos, photographs, and written descriptions of the dances. They can also provide interactive features such as virtual dance tutorials and discussion forums about the dances. This would not only make these dances accessible to a global audience but also provide a space for enthusiasts to learn, share, and discuss these rich cultural expressions. This could also open opportunities for virtual performances and competitions, further promoting interest and participation in these dances.
- II. Establish cultural exchange programs that focus on indigenous dances. These programs could involve exchanges between different regions within a country or between different countries. Participants in these programs would be able to learn about and experience different indigenous dances firsthand. This would foster a greater understanding and appreciation of the diversity of indigenous dances.
- III. Establish training and certification programs for individuals interested in learning indigenous dances. This can help ensure that these dances are accurately preserved and passed on to future generations. It can also provide a means of livelihood for individuals in local communities.

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