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# Education In Lesotho

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## Introduction

Education is the cornerstone of individual and national development, a powerful catalyst for social mobility, economic growth, and the cultivation of an informed citizenry. In the mountainous kingdom of Lesotho, a landlocked nation entirely encircled by South Africa, the pursuit of quality education has been a persistent endeavor, shaped by a unique blend of historical influences, cultural values, and contemporary challenges. This book, "Education In Lesotho: A Comprehensive Overview from Early Childhood to Higher Education," embarks on a detailed exploration of this vital sector, offering an in-depth analysis of its evolution, current landscape, and future trajectory. It aims to provide a holistic understanding of how education functions within the Basotho context, from the foundational stages of early childhood to the advanced echelons of higher learning, and its profound impact on the nation's progress.

Lesotho's educational journey is a compelling narrative, marked by significant strides and persistent hurdles. From the early missionary efforts that first introduced formal schooling to the post-independence drive for universal access, the system has continually adapted to the changing needs of its people and the broader global landscape. This book delves into the intricate structure and governance of the Basotho education system, examining the policies and frameworks that underpin its operations. It scrutinizes the critical issues of access, equity, and quality across all levels, recognizing that true educational progress demands not only enrollment but also meaningful learning outcomes for every child and student, regardless of their background or circumstances.

The scope of this comprehensive overview is deliberately broad, reflecting the interconnectedness of different educational stages and their collective contribution to human capital development. We begin by exploring Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), recognizing its pivotal role in laying the groundwork for future learning. The journey continues through primary and secondary education, analyzing curriculum, pedagogy, enrollment trends, and the ongoing quest for relevance and quality in a rapidly changing world. A dedicated focus on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) highlights its critical importance in equipping the Basotho workforce with practical skills vital for economic diversification and growth.

Higher education, as the apex of the learning continuum, receives extensive attention, with chapters dedicated to institutions, access, enrollment, completion rates, and the vital role of research and innovation in national development. Furthermore, the book examines the indispensable role of teacher education and professional development, acknowledging that the quality of an education system is intrinsically linked to the

caliber and support of its educators. Beyond the formal structures, we critically analyze the challenges facing the education sector, including funding mechanisms, the impact of international aid, and persistent inequalities in educational outcomes. Crucially, we explore how Lesotho is addressing the educational needs of learners with special needs and integrating technology to enhance learning experiences.

Ultimately, "Education In Lesotho" seeks to illuminate the multifaceted nature of education in the Mountain Kingdom, providing valuable insights for policymakers, educators, researchers, students, and anyone interested in the social and economic development of Lesotho. By examining the triumphs, tribulations, and ongoing reforms, this book not only offers a historical and contemporary snapshot but also looks towards future prospects, aligning Lesotho's educational aspirations with the Sustainable Development Goals and the imperative of producing graduates who are well-prepared for the demands of the modern labor market. It is an invitation to understand the profound commitment to learning that defines Lesotho and the continuous efforts to harness education as a powerful force for a brighter future.

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## CHAPTER ONE: Historical Foundations of Education in Lesotho

The story of education in Lesotho is as old as the Basotho nation itself, predating the arrival of European missionaries and colonial administrators. Before formal schooling, the Basotho people had their own sophisticated systems of imparting knowledge, skills, and cultural values. This indigenous education was deeply interwoven with daily life, ensuring the continuity of their traditions and the preparedness of each generation for their societal roles.

### Traditional Basotho Education

In pre-colonial Basotho society, education was a holistic and continuous process, largely informal, and deeply rooted in the community, home, and social interaction. Children were brought up by the community, with the responsibility for their education shared among all members of the extended family and village. The primary aim was to produce useful citizens, integrated into society with loyalty and skills for self-reliance.

The curriculum of this traditional education was rich and varied, encompassing oral traditions, legends, tales, and the knowledge associated with various rituals. These were passed down orally from generation to generation within each tribe, often through storytelling sessions by elders around a fire, which served as an educational tool to impart community values and warn about dangers. Language, music, and dance were also crucial in teaching community norms and history.

Practical skills were a cornerstone of indigenous education. Boys were groomed to become herd boys, taking responsibility for the community's cattle and sheep, a task considered a rite of passage into manhood. They learned endurance, courage, and skills necessary for farming, hunting, and eventually, leadership or warfare. Girls, on the other hand, were prepared for their future roles as wives and mothers, learning housecrafts, childcare, and agricultural practices relevant to their responsibilities within the household and community. This gender-based role preparation was a significant aspect of traditional schooling.

A more formalized aspect of traditional Basotho education was the initiation school, known as *lebollo*. These schools played a vital role in the lives of young adults, marking a coming of age for both males and females. Conducted in secluded areas, often referred to as "the bush" or "the mountain," initiation schools taught initiates about Basotho culture, adult life, and instilled values of respect, obedience, and social responsibility. For boys, *lebollo la banna* involved circumcision and a period of

intensive training in cultural and health issues, guided by elderly male teachers known as *basuwe*. While traditionally attended by males over 24 years, the age of initiation has shifted, with many now attending between 12 and 15, often during the break between primary and high school. These ceremonies, despite some criticism, continued to instill moral values and contribute to society by creating responsible, law-abiding citizens.

## **The Arrival of Missionary Education**

The educational landscape of Lesotho underwent a profound transformation with the arrival of Christian missionaries in the 19th century. These foreign evangelists brought with them a Western model of formal education, which gradually began to supplant or coexist with the existing indigenous systems. The introduction of Western schooling in Lesotho can be traced back to the 1830s.

The French missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS) were the first to establish formal Western education in Lesotho. They arrived in 1833, and a year later, the first formal school was founded by Constant Gosselin. King Moshoeshoe the Great, the founder of the Basotho nation, played a crucial role in facilitating the missionaries' work. He saw them as important partners in nation-building and provided the necessary support for their endeavors, even though he himself only converted to Christianity later in his life.

Initially, these missionary schools were few in number and had low enrollment. Their primary objective, beyond religious conversion, was to provide basic literacy and numeracy skills. Schools focused on teaching reading and writing at a very elementary level. They also introduced simple vocational skills for boys and housecrafts for girls, reflecting a blend of Western educational ideals and practical training. The early missionary efforts were largely driven by religious motivations, aiming to convert the Basotho to Christianity through both church preaching and formal education.

In the latter half of the 19th century, other missionary societies followed suit. Roman Catholic missionaries settled in Lesotho and opened their own schools in 1862, followed by the English Church (Anglican) Mission around 1875. The Roman Catholic Church's influence expanded significantly during the 1930s. By the mid-1980s, both the Roman Catholic Church and the Lesotho Evangelical Church (the successor to the PEMS) each enrolled approximately 40 percent of the country's primary school student population.

For more than a century, education in Lesotho was almost exclusively the domain of the missionaries. They were responsible for nearly all aspects of the education system, including school organization, curriculum development, teacher salaries, professional support for teachers, and providing facilities. Often, church halls served as classrooms, and learning even took place in the open air, though Lesotho's harsh winters were not

always conducive to such environments. This pervasive missionary influence meant that teacher training was also initially conducted in colleges governed by the missions. By 1947, there were four such colleges, increasing to seven by 1959.

## **Colonial Rule and Educational Development**

In 1868, Basutoland (as Lesotho was then known) became a British Protectorate, and in 1871, it was recognized as a colony. Despite this, the British colonial administration showed little real interest in the education of the Basotho people. Consequently, the missionaries continued to bear the primary responsibility for education until Lesotho gained independence in 1966.

Under colonial rule, access to Western-style education was severely restricted for the majority of the Basotho population. Schools were primarily established in urban areas, limiting access to a select few who were often considered loyal to the colonial regime. This created a significant divide between a privileged minority with formal schooling and the marginalized majority. The curriculum enforced during this era reflected the cultural biases and ambitions of the colonial powers. Indigenous languages and cultural traditions were often marginalized or suppressed in favor of British colonial ideals and values, resulting in a Eurocentric curriculum. This approach not only alienated Basotho students from their own heritage but also fostered feelings of inferiority and dependence on colonial authority.

Beyond academic instruction, the colonial education system also served as a tool for social control, reinforcing existing social hierarchies and divisions within Basotho society. Those who received a Western education often became complicit in the colonial administration or local governing structures, further solidifying systems of oppression. Despite these limitations, informal learning networks and indigenous knowledge systems continued to exist as alternative forms of education alongside the formal colonial system. These grassroots efforts were crucial in preserving cultural identity and laid the groundwork for future educational reforms aimed at decolonization.

Secondary education, a crucial rung on the educational ladder, was notably slow to develop under colonial rule. The first four secondary schools were only established in 1948, and of these, only one offered senior classes. This late development of secondary schooling further highlights the limited scope of educational provision during the protectorate era. Vocational training, however, did receive some attention from the missions, with "industrial schools" being founded to teach both boys and girls relevant skills. A significant development in this area was the establishment of the Lerotholi Technical Institute, which was funded through contributions from the Basotho people themselves, initiated by Paramount Chief Lerotholi.

Until the mid-1970s, Lesotho shared a common examinations board and a common

university with Botswana and Swaziland, reflecting a regional educational structure inherited from the British protectorate era. The final external exam for high school students, the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC), was set in England, underscoring the Eurocentric nature of the curriculum even in later stages of the colonial period. This emphasis on external examinations and a foreign curriculum would become a persistent challenge for the independent nation.

## **Post-Independence Educational Reforms**

Upon achieving independence in 1966, the newly formed government of Lesotho swiftly recognized the inherent flaws in the colonial education system and its inability to adequately address the needs of the nascent nation. There was a clear mismatch between the education provided and the employment opportunities available to school graduates. This realization sparked a series of educational reforms aimed at improving the quality and relevance of education and tackling the critical issue of graduate unemployment.

One of the earliest and most significant reforms was the 1978 National Educational Reform, which introduced practical subjects into schools. The intention behind this reform was to cultivate a spirit of self-reliance, patriotism, respect, self-discipline, and self-sacrifice among graduates. It also placed emphasis on health and religious issues, and aimed to positively influence learners' attitudes towards Mathematics and Science. This push for practical skills was further evidenced by the expansion of the Lerotholi Polytechnic during the 1970s and the introduction of vocational subjects into a number of high schools. Another reform, known as the "core curriculum," was implemented to enhance efficiency in education, prioritizing subjects like English, Sesotho, Science, and Mathematics.

The post-independence era also saw significant changes in teacher training. In 1975, the various small Teacher Training Colleges operated predominantly by churches were replaced by the National Teacher Training College. This centralization aimed to standardize and improve the quality of teacher education, moving away from the mission-governed model.

Despite these efforts, the journey towards a truly decolonized and relevant education system was, and continues to be, a complex one. The legacy of colonial education cast a long shadow, perpetuating inequalities long after the end of direct rule. Challenges such as disparities in learning outcomes, teacher shortages, inadequate resources, and limited technological access remained pressing issues. However, the government's commitment to education as a catalyst for nation-building led to advancements in access and infrastructure across all levels of education. The ongoing efforts to decolonize the curriculum and promote a more inclusive and culturally relevant education system offer hope for a fairer and more empowering future for Lesotho's learners.

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