

FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE TO SCIENTIFIC WRITING: PROPOSING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING STUDENTS' RESEARCH QUESTIONS IN MOZAMBICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

¹Pedro Jose Cossa, PhD

¹PhD in Education and Curriculum; Senior Lecturer of English as a Foreign Language

¹Faculty of Health Sciences

¹Wutivi University (Unitiva), Maputo, Mozambique

ABSTRACT: University students are frequently expected to produce essays, research reports, literature reviews, and scientific papers, yet they are not always taught how research topics emerge from meaningful questions. This conceptual and pedagogical article argues that students' lived experiences can provide productive starting points for scientific inquiry when they are deliberately transformed through problematisation, scholarly engagement, evidence gathering, analysis, reflexivity, and academic writing. The article takes the author's personal narrative, Angelina's Ten Loaves, as its pedagogical point of departure. The narrative recalls an episode from 1980s Mozambique in which Angelina Timana Cossa, the author's mother, obtained ten loaves of bread, cut them in half, dried them, and travelled from Magude to Namaacha to take food to her son, who was attending boarding school. Almost four decades later, bread reappeared in the family history through a bakery established by one of the author's children and his wife. The narrative raises questions about scarcity, family support, education, mobility, care, memory, adaptation, entrepreneurship, and intergenerational change.

The article develops the LIRAW framework - Lived experience, Inquiry, Research, Analysis, and Writing - as a conceptual model for helping students move from personal experience to researchable questions and evidence-based academic argument. The framework is situated within scholarship on academic literacies, funds of knowledge, narrative inquiry and auto-ethnography, critical pedagogy, epistemic agency, translanguaging, and decolonising approaches to knowledge production. Particular attention is given to African and Mozambican higher education, where questions of local knowledge, multilingualism, curriculum relevance, and epistemic agency are especially important. Four hypothetical transformations demonstrate how students in nursing, education, information technology, and business might develop research topics from lived experiences. The article also identifies ethical, epistemological, and pedagogical safeguards, including the need to distinguish experience from evidence, avoid romanticising hardship, protect privacy, resist overgeneralisation, and require engagement with scholarly literature. The article is explicitly conceptual rather than empirical. It concludes with a proposed agenda for a subsequent empirical study examining whether experience-based research writing influences students' engagement, research-question quality, academic argumentation, and epistemic agency.

Keywords: academic writing; academic literacies; lived experience; life stories; research writing; epistemic agency; higher education; Mozambique; Africa; funds of knowledge; decolonisation; student voice

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is one of the most persistent challenges faced by university students. Students are expected to write in ways that differ from everyday communication: they must define concepts, establish problems, engage with previous scholarship, use evidence, construct arguments, acknowledge sources, and position their claims within a disciplinary conversation. These requirements are legitimate features of university education. However, students are not always shown how the topics they investigate can emerge from the realities they already know.

A common pedagogical sequence begins with the teacher assigning a topic. Students then search for information, assemble quotations, organise paragraphs, and attempt to produce a formal paper. This sequence may teach important technical conventions, but it can also create a distance between students' lives and academic knowledge. A student may know a great deal about a phenomenon through family, community, work, school, or everyday experience, yet perceive that knowledge as irrelevant once entering the university.

This article proposes a different starting point. It argues that lived experience can function as a source of research questions. The claim is deliberately modest. Personal experience is not treated as scientific evidence simply because it is personal. Instead, an experience is treated as a potential encounter with a phenomenon that may deserve systematic investigation. The movement is therefore not from "my experience is true" to "my experience is science," but from "this happened to me" to "this experience raises a question that I can investigate."

The distinction is central. Scientific writing requires a transformation of experience through research. Experience can generate curiosity; research determines what can reasonably be claimed. The student therefore moves through a sequence such as:

experience → reflection → problematisation → research question → literature → evidence → analysis → scientific writing.

The pedagogical argument developed here emerged from the author's own text, Angelina's Ten Loaves. The narrative begins with an apparently ordinary family event: the author's mother, Angelina Timana Cossa, obtained ten loaves of bread, cut them in half, dried them, and travelled from Magude to Namaacha for her son, who was studying at boarding school. The narrative stresses that the significance of the event is not merely the bread but the distance, the circumstances, the mother's age, the historical context, and the later reappearance of bread through a family bakery. The story subsequently becomes a reflection on family support, scarcity, education, memory, care, adaptation, and intergenerational change.

This makes the narrative pedagogically useful. It demonstrates how a single life event can generate questions across several disciplines without claiming that the story itself answers those questions. A student could use an analogous experience to investigate family support for education, food preservation, healthcare decisions, digital inequality, entrepreneurship, or another phenomenon. The story is the seed; the research process is the cultivation.

The article has five purposes. First, it establishes a theoretical rationale for connecting lived experience and academic research writing. Second, it develops the relationship between this proposal and academic-literacies scholarship. Third, it introduces the LIRAW conceptual framework. Fourth, it demonstrates the framework through hypothetical student transformations. Fifth, it proposes a future empirical research agenda.

The article is conceptual and pedagogical. It does not report data from a classroom intervention and therefore makes no empirical claim that the proposed approach has already improved student writing. Its contribution is to formulate a theoretically grounded pedagogical model that can subsequently be tested.

2. ACADEMIC WRITING AS AN ACADEMIC-LITERACIES PRACTICE

Academic writing is often taught as though it were a general skill that students simply need to acquire. Such approaches emphasise grammar, vocabulary, paragraph structure, referencing, and essay organisation. These dimensions are necessary, but they do not fully explain the social nature of academic writing.

Lea and Street (1998)'s academic-literacies perspective is particularly important because it treats student writing as embedded in institutional practices, identities, authority relations, and contested expectations. Their work distinguishes an academic-literacies approach from narrower models that treat writing primarily as a transferable skill. Academic writing is therefore not merely a matter of producing grammatically correct sentences. It involves learning how particular communities construct and evaluate knowledge.

This insight has direct implications for the present proposal. Students do not simply need to learn how to write about topics selected by others. They also need to learn how researchers decide what is worth asking. Topic selection is itself an epistemic practice.

When students are given an externally imposed topic, they may experience research as information collection. When they begin with an experience that genuinely puzzles them, research can become inquiry. The pedagogical objective is not to privilege experience over scholarship but to create a bridge between them.

The distinction can be expressed as follows:

- Personal experience asks: What happened?
- Research asks: What does this phenomenon mean, how does it occur, under what conditions, and what evidence can support an explanation?
- Academic writing then asks: How can the answer be communicated as a defensible contribution to a scholarly conversation?

The LIRAW framework therefore operates within academic literacies rather than outside them. It adds a practical pathway from students' existing experiences into the formal processes of academic inquiry.

3. FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE AND STUDENTS' EXISTING RESOURCES

The concept of funds of knowledge provides another theoretical foundation. Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) demonstrate that households possess historically developed bodies of knowledge and skills that can become resources for teaching and learning. Their work challenges deficit-oriented assumptions about learners by drawing attention to knowledge embedded in family and community practices.

The concept is especially useful for higher education because university students arrive with experiences acquired outside formal schooling. A nursing student may have observed illness and caregiving within a family. An education student may have experienced different kinds of teachers. An information-technology student may have lived with limited internet access. A business student may have worked in a family shop. An agricultural student may have participated in farming. A student studying social sciences may have observed migration, community organisation, or family responsibilities.

These experiences are not automatically scientific knowledge. The distinction must remain explicit. A family practice may be culturally meaningful without being empirically validated. A personal observation may be accurate in one case but not generalizable. A memory may preserve an important event while omitting details.

The pedagogical proposition is therefore that students' experiences can be treated as resources for question generation. They provide possible entry points into research. Students can then be taught to test, contextualise, complicate, and sometimes reject their initial interpretations.

The shift is from deficit to inquiry. Instead of asking only what students do not know, the lecturer can ask what students have encountered that might lead to a researchable question.

4. NARRATIVE, AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY, AND THE SCHOLARLY USE OF EXPERIENCE

Narrative is a fundamental way through which people organise experience. Events become meaningful through sequence, memory, characters, places, relationships, conflict, and interpretation. Narrative inquiry and auto-ethnography have demonstrated that personal experience can be used as material for scholarly investigation.

Adams and Manning (2015), for example, discuss auto-ethnography as a method that foregrounds personal experience and can be particularly useful for studying families and everyday experiences. Their work also emphasises the need to recognise the strengths and limitations of the approach.

The present article does not argue that undergraduate students should automatically turn their research papers into auto-ethnographies. Rather, it makes a more limited pedagogical proposal: a personal story can be the starting point for identifying a broader research problem.

There is an important difference between writing about oneself and using one's experience to investigate a phenomenon.

"My boarding-school experience" is primarily autobiographical.

"How does living away from home affect students' relationships with family?" is a potential research question.

The first may generate the second.

Angelina's Ten Loaves demonstrates this transformation. The narrative remembers the author's boarding-school experience and the mother's journey, but it also asks broader questions about distance, family support, food scarcity, education, memory, and social change. The original narrative explicitly recognises that some details cannot be known with certainty. It asks why there were ten loaves but refuses to invent an answer. That refusal is methodologically valuable: uncertainty becomes a reason for inquiry rather than an invitation to fabricate.

5. CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND PROBLEM-POSING

Freire (1970)'s problem-posing pedagogy offers another important foundation. Rather than treating learners as passive recipients of knowledge, problem-posing education encourages them to examine reality critically and to ask questions about the conditions in which they live.

For academic writing, this suggests a move away from assignments that simply ask students to reproduce information. Instead, students can be encouraged to begin with situations that raise questions.

Suppose a student says, "My family has a small business." A conventional assignment might turn this into a descriptive essay. A problem-posing approach asks: Why has the business survived? What strategies are used? What challenges exist? How are customers retained? How are family and business finances managed?

The student may eventually formulate a research question about the sustainability of family-owned enterprises.

The lecturer's role is therefore not to provide every research topic. It is to teach students how to recognise a problem, narrow it, connect it with concepts, and investigate it.

This is especially important for students who believe that research means finding information about a topic that someone else has already defined. Research literacy includes learning how to formulate the problem itself.

6. EPISTEMIC AGENCY AND THE STUDENT AS RESEARCHER

The concept of epistemic agency strengthens this argument. Nieminen and Ketonen (2024) conceptualise students' epistemic agency as a connection between assessment, knowledge, and society. Their conceptual discussion moves attention beyond whether teaching is simply student-centred toward questions concerning students' relationships with knowledge and knowing.

Experience-based research writing can create opportunities for epistemic agency because students participate in defining what they want to understand. This does not mean unlimited freedom. Students remain accountable to disciplinary standards, ethical requirements, evidence, research methods, and scholarly literature.

Epistemic agency therefore should not be confused with personal opinion.

A student does not demonstrate epistemic agency by saying, "This is what I believe."

The student demonstrates a developing form of epistemic agency by saying, "This is a question I want to investigate; these are the sources and evidence I have considered; this is what they suggest; these are the limits of my claim."

The transition from experience to evidence is therefore also a transition in student identity: from recipient of information to emerging participant in knowledge production.

7. AFRICAN AND MOZAMBIKAN HIGHER EDUCATION

The argument has particular significance in African higher education, where questions about knowledge, curriculum, language, and epistemic authority are closely connected to the history of colonial education.

Mungwini (2026)'s recent discussion of knowledge decolonisation and African higher education examines the continuing influence of colonial histories on university knowledge systems and argues for greater recognition of other ways of knowing and being. Smith (2021)'s decolonising-methodologies tradition similarly challenges the assumption that research is a neutral activity detached from histories of power and representation.

The present article does not claim that using life stories automatically decolonises higher education. Such a claim would be too strong. Instead, the proposal is that experience-based research can create additional entry points through which local realities become objects of scholarly inquiry.

This distinction matters. The objective is not to replace academic knowledge with "local knowledge." Nor is it to suggest that everything experienced within a community is valid without examination. The objective is to create a productive relationship between students' local experiences and disciplinary scholarship.

Research on curriculum internationalisation at a Mozambican university by Ndaipa et al. (2023) highlights the challenge of incorporating local knowledge systems into higher education. This provides a particularly relevant national context for the present proposal. If local realities are to enter university knowledge production, students themselves can become important sources of research questions about those realities.

The Mozambican context also raises questions of language. Students may be able to describe complex experiences more easily in Portuguese, the country's official language inherited from Portugal, its former coloniser, or a combination of languages than in the language required for their final academic text. Translanguaging research in African higher education suggests that

multilingual practices can support academic literacy development. Batyi (2022), for example, reports on bilingual tutorials using English and isiXhosa to support academic literacies in an English-medium university. For the present framework, multilingual brainstorming can be understood as a bridge rather than a lowering of academic standards. Students may initially tell or map their stories in the language in which they can think most freely. They can then identify disciplinary concepts, develop academic terminology, and produce the final paper in the required academic language.

8. ANGELINA'S TEN LOAVES AS THE PEDAGOGICAL POINT OF DEPARTURE

Angelina's Ten Loaves is not presented as empirical evidence for the effectiveness of the LIRAW approach. It is a pedagogical demonstration of how an ordinary life event can generate researchable questions.

The story begins with ten loaves of bread. The author recalls that his mother obtained the bread, cut the loaves in half, dried them because refrigeration was unavailable, and travelled with them to the boarding school where her son was studying. The narrative emphasises that the meaning of the event extends beyond the food itself.

Several layers are visible.

First, there is scarcity: bread was not simply an ordinary commodity.

Second, there is preservation: drying was an everyday solution to a practical problem.

Third, there is mobility: a mother travelled a considerable distance of more than 200 kilometres.

Fourth, there is family support: the student's education was sustained by people outside the school.

Fifth, there is memory: the event remained significant decades later.

Sixth, there is intergenerational transformation: bread later reappeared in the family through a bakery.

The narrative itself insists that hardship should not be romanticised. Scarcity is described as a condition that limits choices, even though people develop practical abilities within difficult circumstances. This distinction is pedagogically valuable because students researching poverty or resilience can easily slip into romantic interpretations of suffering.

The story also demonstrates epistemic humility. The narrator asks, "Why ten?" but he does not invent an answer. Memory preserves fragments - numbers, images, gestures, places - but does not necessarily preserve complete explanations. The narrative therefore models a crucial research habit: knowing the difference between remembering, interpreting, and knowing.

9. THE LIRAW CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The central contribution of this article is the LIRAW framework:

L - Lived experience

I - Inquiry

R - Research

A - Analysis

W - Writing

The framework can be represented as:

LIVED EXPERIENCE

Event • memory • observation • family • community • work • study

↓

INQUIRY

What happened? Why is it significant? What is puzzling?

↓

RESEARCH

Question • literature • method • evidence • ethics

↓

ANALYSIS

Interpretation • comparison • reflexivity • alternative explanations

↓

WRITING

Argument • evidence-based claims • scholarly positioning • contribution

The framework is not a rigid linear procedure. Research is recursive. Literature may alter the question. Evidence may challenge the initial interpretation. Analysis may reveal that the researcher's assumptions were incomplete. Writing may expose weaknesses in the argument.

The five terms identify interconnected dimensions of the research-writing process.

9.1 Lived Experience

Students begin with something they have encountered. This may be a personal experience, observation, family story, community practice, workplace event, educational experience, or technological problem.

9.2 Inquiry

The student identifies what is puzzling, significant, surprising, or unexplained. The purpose is to move beyond description.

9.3 Research

The student converts the initial curiosity into a researchable problem and engages literature, methods, evidence, and ethics.

9.4 Analysis

The student interprets evidence, compares findings with previous scholarship, recognises alternative explanations, and reflects on their own position.

9.5 Writing

The student communicates the resulting argument in an academic genre, using appropriate evidence and disciplinary conventions.

10. THE QUESTION LADDER

Students need explicit scaffolding to move from experience to research.

A useful instrument is the Question Ladder.

Level 1: What happened?

Level 2: What did the experience mean?

Level 3: Why might it have happened?

Level 4: What social, economic, cultural, historical, institutional, technological, or environmental factors are involved?

Level 5: Do other people experience something similar?

Level 6: What does existing scholarship say?

Level 7: Does the evidence support or challenge my original interpretation?

Level 8: What can my research contribute?

The lecturer can require students to produce questions at each level. This makes problematisation visible rather than leaving it as an assumed skill.

11. FROM LIFE STORY TO RESEARCH TOPIC: FOUR HYPOTHETICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

11.1 Nursing

A first-year nursing student remembers that a grandmother preferred traditional remedies before seeking hospital treatment.

Initial story: "My grandmother preferred traditional medicine."

Possible questions include:

- Why did she prefer it? Did cost matter? Did distance matter? What role did family members play? What previous experiences influenced her decisions?

Possible research topic:

"Factors influencing healthcare-seeking decisions among older adults in a selected Mozambican community."

The grandmother's experience generates the question. It does not provide sufficient evidence for a general conclusion.

11.2 Education

An education student remembers a teacher who encouraged them when other teachers considered them academically weak.

Initial story: "My teacher helped me believe in myself."

Possible research topic:

"The role of teacher encouragement in students' academic motivation in secondary schools."

The student would then investigate teacher practices, student perceptions, classroom relationships, and relevant motivational concepts.

11.3 Information Technology

An ICT student remembers sharing one smartphone with siblings and experiencing unreliable internet access during secondary school.

Initial story: "We had problems accessing the internet."

Possible research topic:

"Digital inequality and access to online learning among university students in Mozambique."

The student could investigate device ownership, data costs, connectivity, study practices, and institutional support.

11.4 Business

A business student grew up in a family-owned shop.

Initial story: "My parents have had a shop for many years."

Possible research topic:

"Strategies for sustaining family-owned small enterprises in urban Mozambique."

The student could investigate customer retention, stock management, financial practices, digital payments, competition, and family labour.

These examples demonstrate that the pedagogical transformation is not from "story" to "essay." It is from "story" to "question," then from "question" to "research."

12. WHAT MAKES A LIFE STORY RESEARCHABLE?

Not every experience should become a research topic. Students therefore need a researchability test.

Relevance: Does the experience connect with a wider issue?

Researchability: Can the question realistically be investigated?

Evidence: Can suitable evidence be obtained?

Scope: Can the topic be narrowed?

Literature: Is there relevant scholarship?

Ethics: Can people and information be treated responsibly?

Contribution: Could the study add insight beyond the original story?

Reflexivity: Can the researcher identify assumptions and possible biases?

This test is essential because students may initially choose experiences that are too private, too broad, emotionally difficult, or impossible to investigate systematically.

13. EXPERIENCE IS NOT EVIDENCE

The most important safeguard in this approach is epistemological.

A personal experience can establish that something happened to the narrator. It cannot automatically establish how common the phenomenon is, what caused it, or what it means for a wider population.

Three distinctions should be taught explicitly:

- What I remember.
- What I believe.
- What I can demonstrate.

A fourth category is also important: What previous scholarship has established.

Scientific writing occurs through the relationship among these categories.

The student's experience can guide attention. Literature provides conceptual resources. Research methods provide procedures for evidence gathering. Analysis determines what can reasonably be inferred.

This prevents the approach from becoming relativistic.

14. MEMORY, REFLEXIVITY, AND POSITIONALITY

Memory is especially important when students work from life stories.

Angelina's Ten Loaves models a disciplined relationship with memory by acknowledging uncertainty. The author does not claim to know exactly what Angelina thought or why the number ten was chosen. This is a strength rather than a weakness.

Students should be encouraged to write reflexive notes such as:

- "I remember..."
- "I assume..."
- "I do not know..."
- "I later learned..."
- "Another person remembers this differently..."

This language helps distinguish memory from evidence.

Positionality is equally important. A student researching a family business may have emotional loyalty to the business. A nursing student may have strong beliefs about traditional medicine. An education student may idealise a former teacher.

The question is not whether the researcher can become completely detached. The question is whether the researcher can recognise how their position shapes the research.

15. ETHICS: WHOSE STORY IS IT?

Life-story research creates ethical challenges because personal experiences often involve other people.

A student may want to write about a parent, spouse, sibling, teacher, patient, or friend. The student's experience does not automatically give permission to reveal another person's private information.

Students should therefore be taught:

- informed consent;
- confidentiality;
- anonymity;
- respectful representation;
- data protection;
- ethical review where required;
- and the right to withdraw.

Students should also be allowed to choose non-sensitive experiences. No student should be pressured to disclose trauma or family secrets in order to demonstrate academic engagement.

16. AVOIDING THE ROMANTICISATION OF HARDSHIP

A second safeguard concerns the interpretation of difficult experiences.

Angelina's Ten Loaves explicitly states that poverty and scarcity are not virtues. This is important because resilience narratives can unintentionally turn structural disadvantage into a moral lesson.

A student researching resilience should therefore avoid claims such as "poor communities are strong because they suffer."

A more analytical question would be:

"What economic, institutional, social, and cultural conditions require communities to develop particular forms of adaptation?"

This moves the research from moral celebration toward explanation.

17. LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND SCHOLARLY RIGOUR

A similar caution applies to local knowledge.

Recognising students' experiences does not mean treating all local beliefs as scientifically established. A student researching traditional medicine, for example, must distinguish cultural significance from clinical effectiveness.

The academic task is to investigate:

- What is the practice?
- Who uses it?
- Why?
- Under what conditions?
- What evidence exists?
- What risks exist?
- What does previous research show?
- How does the practice interact with other systems?

This approach allows local experience to enter academic inquiry without abandoning disciplinary standards.

18. FOOD, OBJECTS, AND THE ORDINARY AS RESEARCH RESOURCES

Angelina's Ten Loaves demonstrates how an ordinary object can become analytically rich.

Bread can be considered biologically, socially, and emotionally. It nourishes, circulates among people, and can communicate affection.

This suggests a useful classroom activity. Students select an ordinary object:

- a mobile phone;
- a school uniform;
- a bus ticket;
- a cooking pot;
- a family photograph;
- a book;
- a bicycle.

They answer:

- What is this object?
- What does it do?
- Who uses it?
- What relationships surround it?
- What does it mean?
- What problem is associated with it?
- What could be researched?

The exercise helps students recognise that research topics can emerge from everyday life while still requiring systematic investigation.

19. FAMILY, EDUCATION, AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

The narrative also demonstrates how education can become a family project.

The student is the visible participant, but parents, siblings, relatives, and other community members may sustain the educational journey. In the narrative, the boarding-school arrangement creates distance between the student and family, while the mother's journey becomes a concrete expression of support.

Students can transform such experiences into research questions about:

- family investment in education;
- students living away from home;
- boarding-school experiences;
- social mobility;
- parental expectations;
- and the economic costs of education.

This perspective challenges an overly individualistic understanding of educational achievement. Academic success may be produced through networks of support that remain invisible in conventional accounts.

20. FROM SCARCITY TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The later appearance of the family bakery provides another possible research pathway.

The original narrative carefully avoids claiming a simple transition from poverty to wealth. Instead, it describes a change in the relationship with bread: in the 1980s the problem was obtaining it; in 2026 the challenge is producing and managing it.

This distinction is important for student research. A student should not simply claim that a family “became successful.” The research should investigate what changed, what resources were involved, what remained difficult, and how the enterprise operates.

Potential questions include:

- How do family businesses develop across generations?
- How does practical knowledge become entrepreneurial knowledge?
- How do small bakeries manage production and costs?
- How do family relationships influence business decisions?
- What forms of continuity exist between household adaptation and entrepreneurship?

21. THE LECTURER’S ROLE

The lecturer is central to the framework.

The teacher becomes a facilitator of inquiry, a methodological guide, a disciplinary expert, an ethics adviser, and a writing mentor.

Several questions are particularly useful:

- “What exactly is the phenomenon?”
- “What evidence would support that claim?”
- “What evidence could contradict your interpretation?”
- “What does the literature say?”
- “Is this a case or can you generalise?”
- “Who else has studied this?”
- “What is the smallest researchable version of your question?”

These questions help students move from narrative confidence to research discipline.

22. CLASSROOM IMPLEMENTATION

A practical implementation can occur in ten stages.

Stage 1: Experience inventory. Students list memorable experiences.

Stage 2: Story mapping. Students identify people, place, time, event, problem, response, and uncertainty.

Stage 3: Question generation. Students produce at least ten questions.

Stage 4: Question Ladder. Students classify questions by level.

Stage 5: Researchability test. Students assess scope, evidence, literature, and ethics.

Stage 6: Literature search. Students identify concepts and previous studies.

Stage 7: Question refinement. Students formulate a precise research question.

Stage 8: Evidence plan. Students identify methods and sources.

Stage 9: Analysis. Students compare experience, evidence, and scholarship.

Stage 10: Scientific writing. Students produce the final paper.

The process can be completed over several weeks and integrated into a research-methods, academic-writing, communication-skills, or disciplinary course.

23. ASSESSMENT

Assessment should reward the transformation of experience into research rather than the emotional power of the story.

Suggested criteria include:

- Research question: clarity and researchability.
- Literature: relevance, quality, and synthesis.
- Evidence: adequacy and appropriate interpretation.
- Analysis: critical engagement and alternative explanations.
- Argument: logical coherence and support.
- Reflexivity: recognition of assumptions and positionality.
- Ethics: responsible treatment of people and information.
- Academic writing: organisation, clarity, citation, and disciplinary conventions.
- Contribution: insight beyond the original experience.

A student should not receive a high mark simply because the life story is moving. The academic achievement lies in what the student does with it.

24. THE LIRAW FRAMEWORK AND EPISTEMIC DEVELOPMENT

The framework can also be understood as a sequence of epistemological development:

- “I experienced it.”
- “I wonder about it.”
- “I can formulate a question.”
- “I need evidence.”
- “I need scholarship.”
- “I can analyse evidence.”
- “I can make a bounded claim.”
- “I can participate in knowledge production.”

This movement captures the educational purpose of the approach. The student gradually learns that academic knowledge is not simply something stored in books. It is also produced through disciplined questioning, evidence, interpretation, and communication.

25. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

The framework makes a modest conceptual contribution to several bodies of literature.

To academic-literacies research, it adds an explicit pedagogical pathway connecting lived experience with disciplinary writing.

To funds-of-knowledge scholarship, it adds the question of how students’ existing resources can generate research problems.

To narrative and auto-ethnographic scholarship, it adds a pedagogical distinction between using experience as research material and treating experience as evidence.

To critical pedagogy, it provides a structured process through which students can problematize their realities.

To epistemic-agency scholarship, it provides a practical context in which students participate in defining objects of inquiry.

To decolonial higher-education debates, it proposes one classroom-level mechanism through which local experience can enter academic inquiry while remaining subject to scholarly scrutiny.

26. AFRICAN AND MOZAMBIKAN SIGNIFICANCE

The approach is particularly relevant to Mozambique because university students live within complex multilingual, cultural, historical, and socioeconomic environments. Research topics generated from these realities may be more locally meaningful than topics selected solely from external textbooks.

This does not mean that research should become exclusively local. Mozambican research can and should engage international scholarship. The proposed model is therefore dialogic:

local experience ↔ international scholarship.

The student asks a local question but enters a global scholarly conversation.

This may be one of the most productive interpretations of decolonisation: not rejecting external scholarship, but refusing to assume that important questions must always originate elsewhere.

27. PROPOSITIONS FOR FUTURE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The conceptual framework leads to several propositions.

Proposition 1: Experience-based research writing may increase students’ perceived relevance of academic writing.

Proposition 2: Students may generate more specific research questions when personal experiences are combined with explicit problematisation scaffolds.

Proposition 3: Experience-based assignments require stronger methodological instruction than ordinary topic-based assignments because students must learn to distinguish experience from evidence.

Proposition 4: The LIRAW process may contribute to epistemic agency by giving students a role in defining research problems.

Proposition 5: Multilingual brainstorming may facilitate the transition from lived experience to academic discourse in multilingual African university contexts.

Proposition 6: The approach may be particularly valuable for locally grounded research but may require careful safeguards against overgeneralisation and confirmation bias.

28. PROPOSED EMPIRICAL STUDY

The next stage should be an empirical study.

A mixed-methods design would allow comparison between conventional and experience-based research writing.

Phase 1: Students write a short research paper on a lecturer-assigned topic.

Phase 2: Students receive instruction in LIRAW.

Phase 3: Students develop research questions from lived experiences.

Phase 4: Students conduct literature searches and produce research papers.

Phase 5: The two sets of papers are analysed using criteria such as research-question quality, source use, synthesis, argumentation, evidence, analysis, and reflexivity.

Phase 6: Student interviews examine perceptions of ownership, relevance, difficulty, and researcher identity.

Phase 7: Lecturer interviews examine feasibility, workload, ethical issues, and perceived changes.

Possible research questions include:

- How do students experience the transformation of life stories into research questions?
- Does LIRAW improve the specificity of student research questions?
- Does it influence engagement with scholarly literature?
- Does it influence argumentation and evidence use?
- Does it affect students' perceptions of themselves as researchers?
- What barriers arise in implementation?

Such a study would convert the present conceptual argument into an empirically testable research programme.

28.1 BOUNDARIES OF THE CLAIM

The article makes a pedagogical plausibility claim, not an effectiveness claim. It proposes that lived experience can be a productive starting point for teaching research-question formation and scientific writing. It does not claim that students who use life stories will necessarily write better papers, become more engaged, or develop greater epistemic agency. Those propositions require empirical investigation. This distinction is important for maintaining conceptual clarity and avoiding the common problem of treating an illustrative narrative as proof of an educational intervention's success.

28.2 ANALYTICAL PROCEDURE

The conceptual development proceeded through four linked operations. First, the author identified pedagogically significant features in the life story: scarcity, family support, educational mobility, food preservation, memory, uncertainty, and later entrepreneurial transformation. Second, these features were translated into possible educational and disciplinary questions. Third, the questions were compared conceptually with relevant literature concerning how students enter academic knowledge practices and how local or lived knowledge can be connected to university learning. Fourth, the resulting relationships were synthesised into the LIRAW framework. The procedure is therefore interpretive and theory-building, not empirical validation.

28.3 METHODOLOGICAL POSITIONING OF THE CONCEPTUAL ARTICLE

This article adopts a conceptual-pedagogical research orientation. It does not report an intervention, a student sample, classroom observations, or statistical results. Its purpose is to construct and justify a pedagogical proposition from the intersection of established scholarship and an author-generated narrative. The narrative, Angelina's Ten Loaves, functions as a heuristic and pedagogical artefact rather than as empirical evidence for the effectiveness of the proposed approach. The conceptual argument is developed through analytical synthesis of literature on academic literacies, funds of knowledge, narrative approaches, critical pedagogy, epistemic agency, multilingual academic literacy, and African higher education.

Figure 1. LIRAW framework: transforming lived experience into scientific writing



Figure 1. LIRAW framework for transforming lived experience into scientific writing.

Theoretical perspective	Core insight	Contribution to LIRAW
Academic literacies	Writing is a situated social and epistemic practice involving identity, authority and disciplinary expectations.	Frames writing as participation in knowledge practices rather than grammar alone.
Funds of knowledge	Learners and households possess knowledge and skills that can be resources for learning.	Legitimises students' lived experiences as starting resources for inquiry.
Narrative / auto-ethnography	Personal experience can become material for systematic interpretation when reflexivity and methodological care are applied.	Provides the bridge from story to researchable phenomenon.

Critical pedagogy	Learners can interrogate realities through problem-posing rather than merely receive information.	Supports movement from event to critical question.
Epistemic agency	Students can develop more active relationships with knowledge, evidence and claims.	Positions the student as an emerging participant in knowledge production.
African/Mozambican higher education	Local knowledge, language and context remain important in curriculum and decolonisation debates.	Situates lived-experience inquiry within local and global scholarly dialogue.

Table 1. Theoretical foundations and their relationship to the LIRAW framework.

28.4 CONCEPTUAL CONTRIBUTION

The principal contribution of the article is not the claim that students have valuable experiences; that premise is already supported by several bodies of educational scholarship. The contribution lies in specifying a teachable sequence through which experience can become a disciplined research starting point. LIRAW makes the intermediate stages - especially inquiry and analysis - explicit. This is important because pedagogies that invite students to “write about their lives” can remain autobiographical unless students are taught to formulate a researchable problem, engage scholarship, gather evidence, and establish the limits of their claims. LIRAW therefore positions life stories as epistemic entry points while retaining the conventions and accountability of scientific writing.

29. LIMITATIONS

This article has several limitations.

First, it is conceptual rather than empirical.

Second, the primary narrative is one author’s family story and cannot support generalisations about Mozambican society.

Third, the LIRAW framework remains untested.

Fourth, some students may prefer not to use personal experience.

Fifth, sensitive stories raise ethical concerns.

Sixth, personal familiarity may increase bias.

Seventh, unequal access to academic databases and research resources may affect implementation.

These limitations define the agenda for future research.

30. CONCLUSION

This article has argued that university students can be encouraged to develop scientific papers from their own life stories when lived experience is treated as a starting point for inquiry rather than as proof.

The distinction is fundamental.

Experience generates questions.

Research generates evidence.

Analysis generates interpretation.

Writing communicates the argument.

Angelina’s Ten Loaves provides a concrete demonstration. What began as a family memory concerning ten loaves of bread can lead to questions about scarcity, food preservation, family care, education, mobility, memory, entrepreneurship, and intergenerational change. The original narrative itself recognises uncertainty and refuses to invent explanations where the author does not know them. This attitude provides a useful model for scientific inquiry.

The proposed LIRAW framework - Lived experience, Inquiry, Research, Analysis, and Writing - offers a practical structure for teaching this transformation.

The approach does not diminish the importance of scholarly literature. On the contrary, literature becomes more meaningful because students have a question they genuinely want to investigate.

Nor does the approach reject scientific rigour. It strengthens the need for rigour because students must learn to move from what they remember to what they can demonstrate.

For African and Mozambican higher education, the approach offers a modest but potentially significant pedagogical possibility. Students can bring local experiences into the classroom, not as unquestioned truths but as sources of researchable questions. Such a practice can complement broader discussions of academic literacies, funds of knowledge, multilingualism, epistemic agency, and decolonisation.

The central pedagogical principle can therefore be stated simply: A student’s life is not automatically a scientific paper. But a student’s life can contain the beginning of a scientific question.

The university’s role is to teach students how to find that question, test it, place it in conversation with existing knowledge, and communicate the resulting argument responsibly.

The next step is empirical. The LIRAW framework should be implemented, evaluated, challenged, and refined with actual university students. Only then can claims about its effects on academic writing, engagement, research-question quality, and epistemic agency be substantiated.

REFERENCES

- [1] Adams, Tony E., and Jimmie Manning (2015). "Auto-ethnography and Family Research." *Journal of Family Theory & Review* 7 (4): 350–366. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/285633953_Autoethnography_and_Family_Research/link
- [2] Batyi, Thoko (2022). "Enhancing the Quality of Students' Academic Literacies through Translanguaging." *Language, Culture and Curriculum* 35 (3): 303–316.
- [3] Freire, Paulo (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.
- [4] Lea, Mary R., and Brian V. Street (1998). "Student Writing in Higher Education: An Academic Literacies Approach." *Studies in Higher Education* 23 (2): 157–172. <https://philarchive.org/archive/APPR>
- [5] Moll, Luis C., Cathy Amanti, Deborah Neff, and Norma Gonzalez (1992). "Funds of Knowledge for Teaching: Using a Qualitative Approach to Connect Homes and Classrooms." *Theory into Practice* 31 (2): 132–141. <https://scispace.com/pdf/funds-of-knowledge-for-teaching-using-a-qualitative-approach-2vyhe8xzwq.pdf>
- [6] Mungwini, Pascash (2026). "Knowledge Decolonisation and African Higher Education: Re-Affirming Other Ways of Knowing and of Being in the World." *International Journal of Educational Research* 138: 103011.
- [7] Ndaipa, Charnaldo Jaime, Kristina Edström, Patrício V. Langa, and Lars Geschwind (2023). "Internationalisation of the Curriculum in Higher Education: A Case from a Mozambican University." *Cogent Education* 10 (1): 2188773.
- [8] Nieminen, Juuso Henrik, and Laura Ketonen (2024). "Epistemic Agency: A Link between Assessment, Knowledge and Society." *Higher Education* 88: 777–794.
- [9] Smith, Linda Tuhiwai (2021). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. 3rd ed. London: Bloomsbury Academic. <https://nycstandswithstandingrock.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/linda-tuhiwai-smith-decolonizing-methodologies-research-and-indigenous-peoples.pdf>

ANGELINA'S TEN LOAVES

A story of a mother, her son, hardship and transformation in Mozambique

FOREWORD

Some stories arise from major events.

Others arise from seemingly insignificant events.

This story belongs to the second category.

It began with ten loaves of bread.

When I tell people today that my mother bought ten loaves of bread, cut them in half, left them to dry and took them from Magude to Namaacha for her son who was at boarding school, those who hear or read this may be surprised.

But the surprise may not lie in the ten loaves of bread.

It may lie in the distance.

It may lie in my mother's age.

It may lie in the conditions under which the journey was made.

It may lie in the historical context.

Or it may lie in the fact that, almost forty years later, one of that student's children and his daughter-in-law became the owners of a bakery.

It is precisely this sequence of events that transforms a family anecdote into a story worth telling.

The original event was simple.

A mother had a son far from home.

Her son needed food.

It was difficult to get bread.

The mother managed to get hold of ten loaves of bread.

As she had no refrigeration to keep them fresh, the mother found another solution.

She cut the loaves in half and left them out to dry.

Then she set off.

The simplicity of the gesture does not mean it is without significance.

On the contrary.

Some of life's most important experiences are built on seemingly small gestures.

A mother prepares food for her son.

A father walks his daughter to school.

A brother helps another brother.

A grandmother keeps a photograph.

A family pools their money to pay for one of their members' education.

These are everyday gestures.

But it is these gestures that often underpin great human journeys.

My mother, Angelina Timana Cossa, probably never imagined that that journey would be remembered decades later.

She wasn't consciously taking part in a historic event.

She wasn't thinking that one day someone would write about her ten loaves of bread.

She was simply being a mother.

And perhaps that is precisely where the power of this story lies.

We don't need to achieve great feats to leave a lasting mark.

We can leave a mark through the things we do every day.

Angelina left one such mark on me.

For many years, the memory existed only as a recollection.

An image.
A journey.
Ten loaves of bread.
A mother.
A son.
But the passage of time has changed my understanding.
When we are young, we receive.
When we are adults, we begin to understand the effort of those who gave to us.
When we become parents ourselves, we can understand our own parents even better.
The experience of parenthood changes the way we view our own parents.
We begin to realise that many things we received for free came at a cost to someone else.
A meal was prepared by someone.
A trip was organised by someone.
A school meant someone supported us whilst we were studying.
An opportunity required someone to make a sacrifice.
It is in this sense that the ten loaves can be understood as a metaphor.
They represent what one generation passes on to the next.
It is not always money.
It is not always property.
It is not always businesses.
Sometimes it simply provides the means to carry on.
And those conditions can be enough to change a life.

INTRODUCTION

WHEN BREAD IS MORE THAN JUST BREAD

Bread is simple food.
But its simplicity is deceptive.
There is a whole chain of work involved in getting it onto the table.
Cereals must be grown.
The grain must be ground into flour.
The flour must be transported.
The dough must be prepared.
It needs to be baked.
It is necessary to distribute it.
It is necessary to sell it.
When we buy a loaf of bread, we only see the end product.
We do not necessarily see all the processes that went into making it.
In normal times, this supply chain remains invisible.
When there is a shortage, however, it becomes evident.
The lack of the product draws attention to its importance.
That is how bread became etched in my memory.
Not as a mundane foodstuff.
But as something that required effort.
In the 1980s, Mozambique was facing profound difficulties.
A reality that seems distant today was part of everyday life.
There were constraints.
There was uncertainty.
There were difficulties getting about.
There were supply problems.
And there was a need to adapt.
The family had to make do with what they had.
It was in this climate that my mother decided to take bread to her son.

The distance

There is a tendency to measure distance solely in kilometres.
But human distance is not merely geographical.
A mother and a son may be separated by just a few kilometres and yet feel a great distance between them.
Others may be separated by hundreds of kilometres and yet remain emotionally close.
In my case, the physical distance between Magude and Namaacha was great.
I was studying.
My mother was at home.
The school required me to live away from my family.
That was the nature of boarding school.
Pupils spent a significant part of their lives away from home.
The separation might have been necessary for their studies, but that didn't mean family needs were any less important.
The pupil was still a child.
The mother was still a mother.

And the worry remained.

It was in that space between distance and affection that the journey of the ten loaves began.

CHAPTER 1

MOZAMBIQUE IN THE 1980s

The story of the ten loaves cannot be separated from the history of Mozambique.

The country had gained independence in 1975.

The building of the new nation took place in an extremely complex environment.

Political independence did not automatically mean economic stability.

Institutions had to be built.

The economy had to be reorganised.

Services had to be provided.

It was necessary to address the needs of a population that had inherited deep-rooted inequalities.

At the same time, the country entered a period of armed conflict which exacerbated the difficulties.

People were forced to flee their homes.

Transport links were disrupted.

Agricultural production suffered.

The movement of goods faced obstacles.

All of this had an impact on everyday life.

History, when presented solely through political events, can seem distant.

But the true scale of a crisis can be grasped when we look at what happens within families.

The crisis becomes apparent when there is a shortage of food.

It becomes apparent when transport stops working.

It becomes apparent when a student needs help.

It emerges when a mother needs to find a solution.

That is why the story of the ten loaves is also a small window onto a wider reality.

1.1 Independence and expectations

Independence brought hope.

For many Mozambicans, it represented the possibility of building a different life.

Education played a key role in this endeavour.

Educating young people meant training professionals.

Training professionals meant building institutions.

For this reason, studying was more than just an individual choice.

It was also part of a broader social project.

I was a student within that context.

My presence at school was part of a transformation that went beyond my family.

But for my mother, the most important aspect was probably a personal one: her son needed to study.

It is interesting to observe how major historical projects come to fruition through family decisions.

A state may talk about education.

A school may open its doors.

But someone has to feed the pupil.

Someone has to buy the supplies.

Someone has to make the journey.

Someone needs to believe that the effort is worth it.

In my case, Angelina was part of that invisible support network.

1.2 War and everyday life

It would not be possible to fully understand the 1980s without recognising the impact of the armed conflict.

The war profoundly altered Mozambican society.

It affected communities.

It affected infrastructure.

It affected traffic.

It affected production.

It affected safety.

And, above all, it affected daily life.

But a national crisis is never experienced in exactly the same way by everyone.

Every family finds its own way of coping with the difficulties.

Some families move away.

Others seek support from family.

Others develop strategies to make ends meet.

Others cut back on consumption.

Others look for alternatives.

Angelina's story is part of this world of adaptation.

She couldn't solve the country's problems.

But she could solve one specific problem: how to put bread on the table for her son.

And sometimes, that is how people cope with major crises.

They don't solve the whole problem.
They solve that day's problem.

CHAPTER 2

THE ECONOMICS OF SCARCITY

Scarcity changes the relationship between people and objects.
An object that is abundant may be regarded as commonplace.
A scarce object acquires value.
Bread is a particularly interesting example because it belongs to the category of staple foods.
It is not a luxury item.
It is not a decorative object.
It is food.
When a staple food is in short supply, the impact is greater.
Shortages do not merely affect consumption.
It affects planning.
A family needs to think:
Where to buy it?
When to buy?
How much to buy?
How to transport it?
How to store it?
How should I portion it out?
How should it be shared?
Angelina's decision to dry the bread illustrates this very point.
She didn't just think about buying it.
She thought about preservation.

2.1 Preservation as a strategy

Today, food preservation is closely linked to technology.
Fridges.
Freezers.
Cold stores.
Packaging.
Refrigerated transport systems.
But households have not always had access to these technologies.
When a technology is not available, the need arises to find alternatives.
Drying food is one such alternative.
In the case of bread, drying altered its texture but allowed its shelf life to be extended.
Angelina's decision demonstrates practical knowledge.
She was aware of the limitations she faced.
And she sought a solution within those limitations.
This aspect is worth noting because there is a tendency to associate innovation solely with high technology.
But there is also everyday innovation.
A mother who finds a way to preserve food is solving a problem.
The solution may be simple.
But it works.

2.2 Scarcity and creativity

Scarcity can cause suffering.
But it can also stimulate creativity.
When resources are limited, people learn to make the most of what they have.
They reuse.
They conserve.
They share.
They adapt.
They substitute.
It is an economy based on need.
It is not necessarily an economy of abundance.
Creativity arises from constraint.
The story of the ten loaves illustrates this very clearly.
Angelina had bread.
But she also faced a huge distance.
She had a destination.
She had a problem with keeping the bread fresh.
She had a son waiting for her.
The solution was to dry the bread and transport it.

CHAPTER 3

MAGUDE, THE STARTING POINT OF THE JOURNEY

Magude holds a special place in this story.
It was the starting point.
But it was also a place of belonging.
Home is associated with security.
It is the place where one knows the way around.
Where they know the people.
He knows the rhythms.
You know the challenges.
Leaving home means entering a different space.
For Angelina, the journey meant precisely that.
She was leaving the familiar surroundings.
She was going to a place she didn't know.
And she was doing it for her son's sake.
This decision helps us understand the strength of family ties.
Family can turn a person into a traveller.
It can make someone overcome what they would normally avoid.

3.1 *The geography of the family*

The family does not exist solely within a home.
It can be spread across different places.
One member lives in Magude.
Another is studying in Namaacha.
Another lives in Maputo City.
Even so, the bonds remain.
The family creates its own geography.
This geography is shaped by their journeys.
One person travels to visit another.
Another travels to help.
Another travels to study.
Angelina's journey is part of this family geography.

CHAPTER 4

ANGELINA TIMANA COSSA

To speak of Angelina is to speak of my mother.
But it is also to speak of a generation.
A generation of women who lived through profound changes.
Angelina lived in an era when everyday life demanded physical effort and adaptability.
I do not wish to romanticise hardship.
Poverty and scarcity are not virtues.
They are conditions that limit choices.
But it is also true that people develop abilities within the circumstances in which they live.
Angelina developed hers.
One of those abilities was caring.
Caring for a child who was far away.
Caring meant finding food.
It meant preparing for the journey.
It meant finding company.
It meant facing the distance.

4.1 *The mother as an invisible source of support*

Often, when we tell the story of someone who studied and went on to a career, we focus our attention on that person.
We forget those who stood behind them.
The mother.
The father.
The siblings.
The uncles and aunts.
Her grandparents.
The neighbours.
But individual journeys are often collective.
The student may be the visible face.
Behind them lies a network.
Angelina was part of that network.
The ten loaves were a small part of her support.

CHAPTER 5

THE TEN LOAVES

The ten loaves are the central focus of this story.
Everything begins and ends with them.
But their significance has changed.
At the time of purchase, they were food.
During the journey, they were a responsibility.
On arrival, they were a source of comfort.
In our memories, they have become a symbol.
And today they can be interpreted as a representation of the relationship between generations.

5.1 *Why ten?*

The question remains.
Why ten?
I don't have the answer.
And I do not intend to make one up.
Perhaps this lack of an answer is significant.
Memory never retains everything.
It retains fragments.
We retain numbers.
Images.
Voices.
Places.
Gestures.
But we lose the details.
Memory is not a perfect archive.
It is a constant reconstruction.
Every time we recall an experience, we also interpret it.
What has changed is not necessarily the event itself.
We have changed.

5.2 *The dry loaf*

The image of bread cut in half and left to dry is one of the most powerful.
It is a domestic image.
But it has an economic dimension.
The bread had to last.
The journey had to be possible.
The food had to keep.
This simple domestic task reveals the relationship between time and food.
The bread didn't just have to arrive.
It had to arrive in a usable condition.

CHAPTER 6

THE JOURNEY TO NAMAACHA

The journey is perhaps the most cinematic part of the story.
A woman in her sixties.
A niece.
Ten dry loaves of bread.
A long journey.
An unknown destination.
And a son who didn't know his mother was on her way – the journey hadn't been announced.
It is possible to imagine the road, but it is important not to turn imagination into fact.
We do not know exactly what Angelina was thinking.
We do not know all the details of the journey.
We do not know all the difficulties she encountered.
We know what has remained in our memory.
And what we do know is significant enough.

6.1 *Ana: the importance of those who accompany us*

Ana appears in the story as a secondary character, but her presence is crucial.
She was the daughter of Angelina's eldest brother.
She lived in Maputo.
And she accompanied her aunt to Namaacha, a place she had never been to before either.
This shows that the journey was also a collective experience.
Family ties served as a support network.
When you don't know a place, you look for someone who does.

When you need company, you look for someone you can trust.
When there is uncertainty, family reduces the risk.

CHAPTER 7

THE BOARDING SCHOOL PUPIL

Being a boarding school pupil means living a sort of in-between life.
You're not quite at home.
But you are not entirely independent either.
School becomes your home.
Classmates become daily companions.
Teachers take on an important role.
Family life takes on a more distant role.
For a teenager, this experience can give rise to conflicting feelings.
There is freedom.
There is homesickness.
There is responsibility.
There is a desire to learn.
There is a need for support.
In that environment, the mother's arrival had a significance that went beyond bread.
She represented the link to family life.

7.1 Boarding school and personal development

The boarding school experience can be seen as part of one's upbringing.
One learns to manage one's time.
One learns to get on with others.
You learn to solve problems.
You learn to cope with absence.
But you also learn to recognise the value of family.
Distance can heighten one's awareness of the importance of those who are far away.
Perhaps that is why Angelina's journey has remained so deeply etched in my memory.

CHAPTER 8

BREAD AS FOOD, AFFECTION AND MEMORY

Bread can be analysed as a three-dimensional object.
Biological: it nourishes.
Social: it circulates amongst people.
Emotional: it conveys affection.
In the case of the ten loaves, all three of these dimensions were present.
The bread fed the student.
It was carried by the mother.
And it symbolised concern.
This combination makes the episode particularly significant.

8.1 Food as a form of communication

People say 'I love you' in many ways.
Some say it with words.
Others say it through gestures.
A mother might say: 'Eat.'
That word may seem trivial.
But it conveys care.
When someone prepares food for another person, they are meeting a basic need.
That is why food can be a form of communication.
Angelina spoke through the bread she had bought.
Her grandson and his wife spoke through the bread baked in their own bakery in July 2026.

CHAPTER 9

EDUCATION, SACRIFICE AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

Education lies at the heart of the story.
Without school, there would be no boarding school.
Without the boarding school, perhaps there would not have been the same distance.
Without that distance, the journey of the 1980s might never have taken place.
It is curious how an educational journey can lead to unexpected family events.
The decision to study created a need to move.
That move created a need for support.
That support led to Magude's journey to Maputo and then to Namaacha.
The journey gave rise to the memory.

Decades later, that memory became a story in 2026.

9.1 *The student as a family project*

A child's education is often a collective endeavour.

The family invests.

The student learns.

Society benefits.

This relationship can be seen as a form of social mobility.

One generation makes sacrifices so that the next may have opportunities that it itself did not have.

It is a dynamic that is very common in families.

Parents say: 'I want my children to have a better life.'

This phrase sums up one of the most powerful forces in education.

CHAPTER 10

ALMOST FORTY YEARS LATER

Time has changed everything.

The teenager has grown into an adult and started a family. And he has had children.

The mother of the then teenager grew old. Then she passed away.

The children of the former teenager and his wife grew up.

And one of those children and his wife have become the owners of a bakery.

This sequence allows us to think about time in a different way.

Forty years are not just a number.

It is a generation.

It is political change.

It represents economic changes.

It represents technological changes.

It is family change.

CHAPTER 11

FROM SCARCITY TO THE BAKERY

Bread reappears.

But it reappears with a different significance.

In the 1980s, the problem was getting hold of it.

In 2026, the challenge is to produce and manage it.

The bakery represents a shift in economic status.

This is not to say that the family has automatically moved from poverty to wealth.

That would be an over-simplified conclusion.

It is a matter of recognising a change in the relationship with the product.

Bread has gone from being a sought-after commodity to an economic activity.

11.1 *Entrepreneurship as a new reality*

A bakery requires organisation.

Raw materials must be sourced.

Costs must be controlled.

Manage staff.

Serving customers.

Ensure quality.

Organise production.

Dealing with competition.

This means that making bread still requires hard work.

The difference lies in the nature of the work.

Angelina worked to ensure that the bread reached her son.

The grandson and his wife work to ensure the bread reaches customers – and their parents.

The social role has changed.

The principle behind the work remains the same.

CHAPTER 12

THE LEGACY ACROSS GENERATIONS

A family can pass on a great deal without passing on wealth.

It can pass on stories.

It can pass on values.

It can pass on habits.

It can pass on examples.

It can pass on the importance of work.

It can convey the importance of education.

Angelina's legacy can be understood in this way.

Perhaps her greatest legacy was the example she set.
She showed that difficulties do not necessarily prevent one from taking action.
She found a solution.
She went on a journey – alone, because her husband (José Maboi Cossa) was working in the South African mines.
She arrived.
She delivered the bread.
And she returned.
This example stands the test of time.

CHAPTER 13

FAMILY MEMORY AND THE HISTORY OF MOZAMBIQUE

Family stories constitute a kind of social archive.
They preserve what official documents often fail to record.
A document may state that there was a shortage.
Memory says: ‘My mother brought me bread.’
A report may speak of transport difficulties.
Memory says: “She travelled over two hundred kilometres from Magude to Namaacha.”
A study may talk about education.
My memory says: “I lived in a boarding school.”
The broader history provides the context.
Personal history provides the experience.
We need both.

CONCLUSION

THE BREAD THAT SPANNED GENERATIONS

The story began with scarcity.
It ended with production.
It began with a mother and/or grandmother.
It reached a grandchild.
It began with ten loaves.
It reached a bakery.
But we shouldn’t view this sequence as a simple line of progress.
Life isn’t that simple.
Each generation faces its own challenges.
The 1980s had theirs.
The year 2026 has others.
What changes is the nature of the difficulties.
What remains is the need to find solutions.
Angelina found a solution to the problem of her time.
She sliced the bread. She didn’t transfer money via M-Pesa, Emola or Mkesh because these services did not exist then.
She put the bread out to dry. She had neither a freezer nor a fridge.
She travelled with the dried loaves to Namaacha.
Her grandson and his wife find solutions to the problems of their time through entrepreneurship.
There is a continuity between the grandmother and her grandchildren: the ability to make do with what is available.
That is perhaps the greatest message of this story.
It is not the story of bread.
It is the story of people.
The bread is merely the thread that binds them together.

EPILOGUE

THE LOAVES ARE GONE, BUT THE STORY LIVES ON

The ten loaves were eaten. But the journey continued.
Angelina left. But the memory remained.
The student grew up. But the memory remained.
The grandson and his wife became businesspeople. And bread returned to the family history.
Perhaps that is the fate of human experiences.
The event fades away.
The memory remains.
Then the memory becomes a story.
And the narrative can become a legacy.
That is why today I am writing about those ten loaves of bread from the 1980s.
Not because they were extraordinary.
But because they revealed something extraordinary: a mother’s ability to turn distance into closeness through a simple gesture.
A distance of over two hundred kilometres was not enough to stop Angelina.
The fact that she was over 63 years old was not enough to stop her.
Her unfamiliarity with Namaacha was not enough to stop her.

The difficulty of keeping the bread fresh was not enough to stop her.
She found a way.
And she made it to Namaacha.
Almost forty years later, the story continues.
Bread has taken on a new meaning.
But it has not lost its power.
The ten loaves of bread were consumed.
The journey came to an end.
My mother has passed away: she did not live to the age of 106 to see her grandchildren's bakery.
But the story of bread continues. The teenager from the 1980s now eats freshly-baked bread. He eats fresh bread in the company of his wife, children and grandchildren – and other customers.

Copyright & License:

© Authors retain the copyright of this article. This work is published under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), permitting unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.