

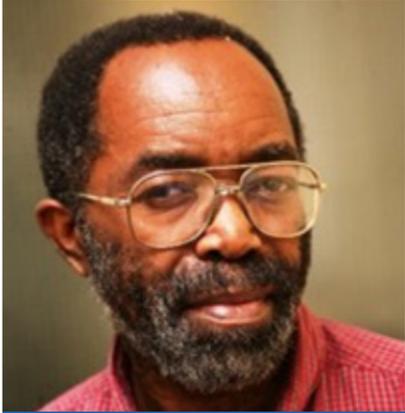


# University of Dar es Salaam

## Our November 2021 UDSM Alumnus

This is a “light corner” on the UDSM portal intended to feature for one month in turns two among many of the University’s graduates—alumni—since its foundation in 1961. The corner is designed to inform the public and the University itself, without prejudice in terms of historical precedence but guided only by professional information search, on the past graduates of the University, their whereabouts, their current position or engagement, what is remembered of them as past ‘boys’ and ‘girls’ of their time and, finally, on what is reckoned about their contribution to their Alma Mater, their nation, the Africa region and/or the wider world.

### Joseph L. MBELE



**Year of matriculation: 1973**

**Year of graduation: 1976**

**Award: BA (Hons) [in Literature, English & Education], The University of Dar es Salaam**

**More info:**

- **M.A. in DS/Literature (1978), University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania;**
- **M.A in African Languages and Literature (1982), University of Wisconsin–Madison, USA;**
- **PhD in African Languages and Literature (1986), University of Wisconsin–Madison, USA**

Joseph L. Mbele, currently a professor at St. Olaf College in Minnesota, USA, is a citizen of Tanzania, an alumnus of the University of Dar es Salaam and a past faculty member in the Department of Literature. He was born on 17 August 1951 in Litembo in Mbinga District, Ruvuma Region. He had his early formal education at Litembo Primary School from 1959 to 1962, after which he joined Hanga Seminary (1963-66) for both religious and secular instruction. From the seminary, he went to Likonde Seminary for ‘O-level’ secondary education (1967-70). On passing his examinations in 1970, he proceeded to Mkwawa High School in Iringa for ‘Advanced-level’ secondary (Forms 5 and 6) study from 1971 to 1972. He is said by his old fellows to have been a good, keen student, particularly in the languages. With high principal passes in the Form 6 final examinations, Joseph was admitted at the University of Dar es Salaam (in 1973) for a university degree study programme within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. His subjects of study for the degree included English, Literature and Education.

Among the most favourite subjects during Joseph’s undergraduate study was Literature, a subject that became handier in its combination with cultural and linguistic explorations of the English language, as well as in its applications in classroom teaching. Extensive reading and interpretation (e.g. of novels and episodes) was one of his effective marks of a reader and instructor – marks of a scholar in the English language and in the African literature theatre.

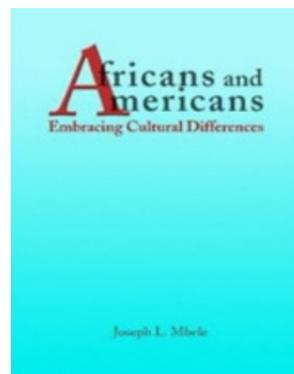
On account of an exemplary performance demonstrated by him, Joseph Mbele was retained by the Faculty for a staff-development position of Tutorial Assistant in the Department of Literature, pending advanced postgraduate training. He undertook a two-year master degree programme in Literature/Development Studies (1976-78). Two years later, in 1980, he was granted a graduate study scholarship tenable at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in Wisconsin, which earned him an M.A. degree in African Languages and Literature in 1982. This gave him a base for proceeding with a deeper PhD study in the same field of African Languages and Literature well up to 1986.

Dr. Mbele’s work as a teacher and researcher at the University of Dar es Salaam was one marked by dedication and results, with thorough linguistic and ethnographic investigations, both in classrooms and out within the wider community, not least his own Matengo society. He rose within the ranks from tutorial assistant, to assistant lecturer, lecturer and to senior categories of academic management. He left the University in 1991 to join St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota. He currently serves at the College there as Professor in the English Department, where he has been instrumental in the teaching and management of many academic and research programmes. The courses he has helped to develop and/or teach include “Introduction to Literature”, “Post-Colonial and Third World Literature,” “Folklore”, “The Hero and the Trickster,” as well as “Africa and the Americas.” Among these and others, he has nursed and developed intimate interest in ‘Folklore’ and community cultures. He has conducted systematic fieldwork in folklore in Tanzania, Kenya and the United States. Along with this, he has given lectures and conference papers on folklore in Canada, Finland, India, Israel, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and the US. One major research study in African folklore has focused on the traditional beliefs, customs and practices of a community as they are passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth, accompanied, in his case, by tape-recording and interpretation of the African heritage. Talking about his commitment to ‘classroom teaching,’ Joseph will insist on saying that he always wanted to be a teacher and that, “though there were many job options in his country,

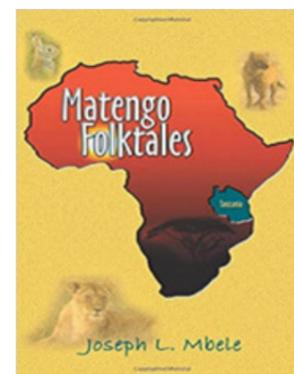
he never applied for anything other than teaching.” This, in other words, is Joseph’s life passion and vocational trade.

He has published widely in his areas of specialisation. His works include the following titles: ‘The Liongo Fumo Epic and the Scholars’, published in *Kiswahili*, Volume 53 (1986); *Looking at African Literature: ‘Things Fall Apart’ and ‘The African Child’* (Nyanza Publications, Dar es Salaam, 1988); *Notes on Achebe’s ‘Things Fall Apart’: A Study Guide* (1997); ‘The Significance of Deception in the Liongo Epic’ (in *Kiswahili*, Volume 60, 1997); *Africans and Americans: Embracing Cultural Differences* (Lulu.com., Morrisville, N.C., 2005); *Matengo Folktales* (Infinity Publishing, Conshohocken, Pennsylvania, 1999; and *Chickens in the Bus: More Thoughts on Cultural Differences* (Lulu.com., Morrisville, N.C., 2021).

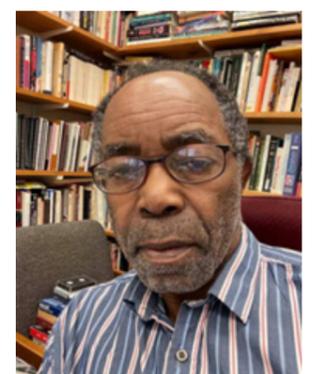
On the national and global development agenda in East Africa, Prof. Mbele has had his own modest contribution to cultural tourism for the region. He subscribes to the advocacy of a one-time vibrant British non-governmental organisation, ‘TourismConcern’ (1988-2018), which believed in commercial tourism as promotion of mutual understanding between people of different nations and cultures, as opposed to an anachronistic and stereotyped kind that tended to reproduce neo-colonial relations and prejudices. In the light of such a ‘progressive philosophy’, in 2007, he and a Colorado-based colleague William Davis designed a course to enable their college students to trace the steps of one of the great western writers, Ernest Hemingway, who, back in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (1933-1934 and 1953-1954), toured East Africa (Kenya and Tanganyika) and developed strong attachment to its peoples. In this particular case, Joseph and his students flew to East Africa to ‘live with Hemingway’s hosts of the past century’ so as to feel the experience of Hemingway’s safaris to and life in Kenya and Tanganyika. In course such as this, the students would read and discuss the writer’s works such as “The Green Hills of Africa (1935)” and “The Snows of Kilimanjaro (1936)”, based on the writer’s two East African safaris. In the case of the 2007 field tour of East Africa, Prof. Mbele’s twelve American students visited the *same towns* and met the *local people* Hemingway mentions in his ‘Green Hills of Africa’, such as the Maasai, the Iraqw and the Datooga. Also, the students viewed the same kind of *wildlife*, witnessed the same *land features* as well as ate the same kind of *meals* that had inspired the American writer of the past century. UDSM is appreciative of such creative ventures in internationalisation.



*Africans and Americans*  
Embracing Cultural Differences  
(Africonexion.com., 2005)



*Matengo Folktales* (Infinity  
Publishing, Conshohocken,  
Pennsylvania, 1999; 2012)



The author:  
Professor Joseph L. Mbele

**Joseph L. MBELE is Our November 2021 Alumnus,  
and his great stories begin here!**

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