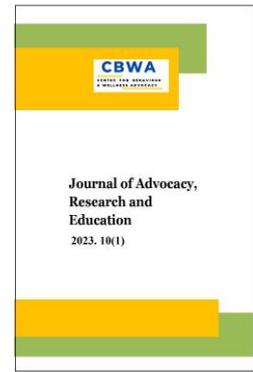




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## Decolonising Life Skills using Indigenous Games in the Foundation Phase: Exploring Rural Learning Theory and Ubuntu Philosophy

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### Abstract

This paper foregrounds values-based education, as linked to the inclusion of sustainable rural learning and knowledge in the form of indigenous games to decolonise school curricula. Certain curriculum challenges are unique to rural ecology and can only be addressed by experts and philosophers passionate about sustainable rural learning using ubuntu perspectives. This approach of using rural learning methodologies to teach school children is fertile ground for innovation in this study. Interpretivism, in the form of a phenomenological case study approach, was employed, using semi-structured interviews and classroom observation. Document analysis was also used to corroborate the findings. The findings reveal that indigenous games are implied in the curriculum, and teachers do their best to infuse local games in the Grade R, 1, and 2 Life Skills curricula. It was found that many indigenous games are a perfect strategy for infusing sustainable rural learning methods useful for teaching Life Skills in a decolonised approach. Teachers showed pedagogical content knowledge and skills for teaching Life Skills using indigenous games and Ubuntu philosophy. The results call for supportive in-service teacher programmes that can equip Foundation Phase teachers to improve their teaching strategies. In addition, resources should be earmarked to promote pedagogical content knowledge aligned with rural learning.

**Keywords:** indigenous knowledge, ubuntu philosophy, African child, indigenous games, rural education.

### 1. Introduction

This study engages with the argument that South Africans used to have strong faith in the spirit of Ubuntu linked to traditional systems to fix complex problems. The study conducted by Mabaso (2017) reiterates that the ideals enshrined in ubuntu philosophy are meant to transform the education system into a truly South African one, seeking to inspire African heritage, values, and knowledge in the education system to ignite rural learning approaches. Scholars predict that Ubuntu philosophy will soon run out of steam, and its applicability to the education system is being called into question; however, Ubuntu is here to stay (Alexander, Plyyamoli, 2014; Ngasike, 2019). There is no denying the firm traditional belief that ubuntu values are a unifying tapestry for a diverse country like South Africa (Padayachee et al., 2018).

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Statistics reveal that most rural children leave primary school with scant and incoherent knowledge about their history, heritage, pan-Africanism, integrity, morality, and ethnic values of Unhu (humanness) or Ubuntu (Biriescu, Babaita, 2014; Myende, 2018). The CAPS curriculum pronounces on ten values, including ubuntu philosophy, linked to African indigenous knowledge systems (AIKS). AIKS include oral traditions such as proverbs, maxims, poems and songs, indigenous games, and sociocultural structures (Mabaso, 2017). However, studies have shown that AIKS is portrayed as the ‘other’, and this perception perpetuates race and class divisions in society.

This study aimed to present an argument for the significance of the use of indigenous games and mother-tongue instruction in sustainable rural education as part of the decolonisation strategy in South Africa. I argue that rural schools can be used as centres of excellence, focusing on the Ubuntu philosophy. I begin by presenting background information on the history and culture of these schools, as well as their socioeconomic and educational marginalisation.

### **The philosophical underpinnings of Ubuntu**

The philosophical meaning of Ubuntu is understood as *motho ka batho*, which means “a human being is a human being because of other human beings”. This explanation resonates with the translation found in other African languages. Nussbaum (2003) sees Ubuntu as a social philosophy, a way of being, a code of ethics, and behaviour deeply embedded in African culture. The ideals of the concept should be stressed to learners, giving them an arsenal for the future. Interestingly, both Mabaso (2017) and Mbigi (1997) see this concept as both uniquely African and universal, as it is implicitly expressed elsewhere in the world. Ubuntu philosophy posits that common bonds or underpinnings exist between all human beings and other forms of creation (Alexander, Plyyamoli, 2014). In the school context, Ubuntu encapsulates humanness, fighting for each other, fairness, and playing games to stimulate competition, justice, and an African values system as the underlying fortress of African societies for millennia (Qobo, Nyathi, 2016).

## **2. The theoretical lens**

### **Rural learning ecologies**

The famous paper titled “Creating Sustainable Rural Learning Ecologies in South Africa” by Hlalele (2014) argues that education in rural ecologies has a responsibility to make its voice heard and contribute to the generation of knowledge and make it accessible to communities (Ngasike, 2019). The concept of sustainable rural learning was first developed by the Nelson Mandela Foundation (NMF) to bring the attention of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to the plight of rural communities (Ngasike, 2019). This study was critical of the curriculum identity and the quality of education in South African schools, with rural schools continuing to receive inferior education while their urban counterparts received a quality education.

### **Pedagogy and South African communities**

Traditionally, values-based pedagogies in South African communities were conveyed in the form of proverbs, poetry, songs, riddles, and folklore (Masote, 2016). This was done to shape young children for responsible citizenship. In traditional African society, music plays a major role from birth to death (Manganye, 2011). Several non-Tsonga music teachers taught indigenous Tsonga children’s games and songs at their primary schools (Manganye, 2011). Indigenous pedagogy is a tool for conveying these songs to learners as to how to dance with music rhythm. These songs talk about respecting elders and taking care of the body, especially for young girls. Indigenous pedagogy in traditional African culture manifests in young children’s physical, mental, social, and emotional development. Ogunyemi (2014) argues that traditional African pedagogy took on a variety of forms:

- Physical – running errands in the neighbourhood, wrestling, music, and dancing
- Social – movement in groups, copying the parents’ roles
- Free play – working with objects and materials within their environment to create images for their use
- Games with rules – taking turns and following the agreed procedure
- Adult-moderated play – moonlight storytelling, narrating family history, community festivals, and dances

### **Ubuntu philosophy as a foundation for sustainable rural learning**

Culture manifests through the spirit of Ubuntu. Shepherd and Mhlanga (2014) see it as an African philosophy centred on the concept of Unhu or Ubuntu. Schoeman (2006) concurs that

Ubuntu is a traditional African moral concept used pre-scientifically as a tool for transformation, affirmation, and pride. The International Association of Universities on the Ubuntu Declaration acknowledges that the goal of education in all its forms is to impart knowledge, skills, and values that empower people to bring about change (Webbstock, 2016).

A study by Maddock and Maroun (2018) reveals that schools in rural and semi-rural areas usually attract indigenous teachers and learners, which calls for education tailor-made for this setting. Similarly, Shepherd and Mhlanga (2014), in their study on the nature of philosophy for children, refer to indigenous pedagogy and how its qualities can help resuscitate the worldview of Ubuntu imbued in indigenous philosophy. Such education is characterised by indigenous education practices, including customs, norms, and traditions, as well as pedagogies in the form of songs, poems, stories, and games that are rooted in local languages. The geographical nature of South Africa and the spatial distribution of its citizens produce many ethnic groups that may differ from one locality to another, even among the same language speakers (Nxumalo, Mncube, 2019). As the custodians of education, policymakers have a huge responsibility to infuse indigenous education into the current system to address the inclusivity and heritage of the local people (Nxumalo, Mncube, 2019). Hence, stakeholders liken this education to indigenous teaching, requiring learning aids that are relevant and effective in promoting the best heritage of the people. This is particularly relevant in the quest to realise sustainable rural learning and knowledge while advocating quality education in South Africa. This resonates with the observation made by Maddock and Maroun (2018) that Ubuntu is a way of 'being' and characterised as the lived experiences that must be exemplified by all teachers in the learners' lives.

A paper presented by Ogunyemi (2014) at the UNICEF conference in 2016 underscores the role of sustainable rural education by highlighting the notion that every child belongs to the community. The community must deliberately channel this child through ubuntu philosophy to realise his or her full potential. In this important role of nurturing the child, everyone in the village contributes to the child's upbringing: *"It takes a village to raise a child"* (Seroto, 2011). Ogunyemi's (2014) paper aims to caution all key stakeholders about the significance of a learner's life in the process of curriculum enrichment (parents, school management, teachers, and indigenous knowledge holders). In addressing curriculum responsiveness, Ogunyemi (2014) describes the co-creation of an educational curriculum for early childhood education through a partnership with community members using a living curriculum framework called the Generative Curriculum Model.

### **Envisaged decolonised curriculum: Using games to decolonise the curriculum**

Le Grange's (2016) views testify to the fact that schools should embrace a curriculum founded on the philosophy of Ubuntu. He calls this moving away from the Descartes *cogito, ergo sum*, "I think therefore I am" to "I am because we are." Although many scholars appreciate the decolonisation discourse, others merely pay lip service to remain relevant as researchers and teachers (Webbstock, 2016). In shaping the ontological project that reasserts curriculum orientation processed in African philosophy. Ndofirepi (2017) argues that these tendencies can solve the complex paradox and confusion about the decolonising curriculum.

With their long history of colonial practices, research in countries like Canada and New Zealand acknowledges the need to decolonise curricula by embracing inclusive curricula linked to indigenous epistemologies. Cupples and Glynn (2014) caution policymakers and government that such a transformative agenda continues to pose risks to curriculum transformation. It has become clear from the literature that the notion of decolonisation needs more commitment than merely inserting new content and indigenous games (Nxumalo, Mncube, 2019). The CAPS curriculum is written by South Africans who understand the value of indigenous games, as one of the principles speaks of "valuing indigenous knowledge" (BDE, 2017). This principle represents heightened awareness of the need for curriculum change aligned with decolonisation. The articulation of such aspirations without a clear research agenda is meant to disrupt the old existing order by encouraging sympathetic and ethical practices that remain a myth (Smith, 2012).

In his article, Jansen (2017) proposes that African scholars should build capacity among teachers to work towards healing, reconciliation, and development, seeking to influence curricula directly by adopting user-friendly activities such as games and idioms. Therefore, this research is about decolonising the curriculum by offering alternative forms of activities such as games (Chilisa, 2012). Such games emphasise indigenous knowledge systems and clearly demonstrate the ubuntu philosophy

needed in society. Webbstock (2016) calls for integrating indigenous knowledge into the curriculum using methods familiar to teachers to contribute to the decolonisation of the curriculum.

### **3. Methodology**

A phenomenological case study approach was leveraged to better understand Foundation Phase teachers' experiences using indigenous games to teach Life Skills. The choice of this approach was motivated by the research problem and the characteristics of qualitative research that apply to this research. In order to better understand the participants' lived experiences of the concept or phenomenon, the study was located within a case study design (Yin, 2014). A case study focuses on one phenomenon selected by the researcher to understand holistically; in this case, indigenous games to teach Life Skills (McMillan, 2006). Semi-structured interviews, observation, and document analysis, were used to generate data that were later processed and analysed using data coding and then categorising such codes to generate themes that later became the findings of this study. The research comprised a qualitative case study, which lends itself to social and constructive methods. In essence, knowledge is socially constructed as the researcher and the researcher (teachers and learners) interact naturally. Teachers were interviewed to solicit their experiences in their respective schools, while learners were observed while engaged in indigenous games during Life Skills periods.

#### **Population and sampling**

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a population is defined as a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to specific criteria meant to generalise the outcome of an investigation. Foundation Phase teachers from uMzinyathi District in the Nqutu circuit were ideal participants, considering their knowledge of selected indigenous games used in schools. The sampling strategy identified five primary schools in one cluster as forming the case for the research. Sampling is the process of selecting units from a population of interest so that by studying them, the results may be generalised back to the population from which they were chosen. Purposive sampling was used; this involves the deliberate selection of a small number of information-rich cases from a larger population for in-depth study (Cresswell, 2005; Sarfo et al., 2022). From a population of 65 teachers in the cluster, five highly experienced Foundation Phase teachers (with more than ten years of teaching experience) and one subject advisor were selected.

#### **Instruments and procedures**

Data were collected on school premises. Letters detailing the purpose of the study were presented to the participants, who later gave their consent. Targeted observations were conducted in Grades R, 1, and 2. Semi-structured, face-to-face individual interviews were held with the teachers and the subject advisor to gather information about using indigenous games during the teaching of Life Skills in the Foundation Phase. These interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and were held during the teachers' free periods or after working hours until saturation (Sarfo et al., 2021). A digital recording device was used to record the interviews, and the transcripts were later coded for analysis.

#### **Ethical considerations**

Ethical issues and legal obligations were observed in this study to avoid unintended consequences. This involved disclosing the nature of the study to participants, informed consent, and avoiding exposing participants to risk. The researcher is obligated to protect the privacy of participants; as such, attention was paid to anonymity, confidentiality, and the storage of data (McMillan, 2006). All six participants were given pseudonyms to conceal their identities: Piet, Sabatha, Miriam, Olga, Yvonne, and the subject advisor, Thandwayo.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

This study investigated strategies used by five veteran Foundation Phase teachers and one subject advisor for using indigenous games to decolonise the Life Skills curriculum. Three methods of data generation were applied to navigate the complex process of data analysis. This study aligned the data analysis process with methods recommended by Ramrathan (2016), using triangulated data for quality results. A theoretical framework was used to align the results with the thematic approach, and the results were later conceptualised against the appropriate literature. The rigorous process of data analysis produced three main themes and three subthemes linked to the indigenous

games these schools use to teach Life Skills in the Foundation Phase. The learners play more than twenty indigenous games at the schools and the participants reflected on selected games to explore their significance in the teaching of Life Skills in the Foundation Phase. These games include ushumpu, umasgenda, inqabethu, umlabalaba, umngcwabo, arigogo, izimpisi, isango legolide, ingwenya, ikati negundane, phuma la, to mention just a few.

### **The relevance of indigenous Zulu games in the Foundation Phase**

The first theme to emerge from the data was the relevance of indigenous games in teaching Life Skills. These games are played by most learners in the community, and it was evident that most participants were familiar with these games and that learners play these games in class and during break time, as well as beyond, owing to their popularity. These were the sentiments shared by Sabatha and Piet about the relevance of indigenous games.

**Sabatha:** *“This is my community, I know the culture very well, and in my upbringing, I played some of these games the same way these young kids play today ... the whole excitement and the nostalgia bring back those good memories, and some of us used to be good at playing ... and later we became responsible individuals through values inherited from playing these games.”*

**Piet:** *“... now I am a big fan advocating for the integration of indigenous games into the curriculum, and they are more relevant than any of those famous ones ... our learners are weak and lazy because they are not playing these indigenous games ... and a lot of useful information is learnt and even the discipline as well.”*

Most of the games have their genesis in the local community, while others are generic in the Zulu people’s cultural orientation and heritage. Most of these games are named according to how they are played and what they seek to achieve. Participants were very excited to be reflecting on something they knew inside out, and all this invoked nostalgia. In terms of relevance, participants were convinced that these games add value when used for teaching purposes. Yvonne was not sure how the DBE wanted them to infuse these within the curriculum, but she endorsed the inclusion of indigenous games:

**Yvonne:** *“... my knowledge of these games is as fresh as yesterday, and learners even play outside during break time. Some of the learners are very fond of these games. Some even bring readymade material and natural material from home to use after the break when playing ... others like ‘ushumpu’ which is a ball made from rags and plastics, young learners throw this ball in the air and run to collect points; when one is touched its game over ... this is an incredible game to watch now as is then ... it teaches them to count and be engaged in physical education when running for cover.”*

**Olga:** *“... if I remember very well, most of these games are played to build a strong character and resilience in young learners ... knowing that you have to be tough and mentally strong to compete only leaves you with a feeling of winning mentality.”*

The participants stressed the need to use a variety of props such as old cloth, balls, shaped objects, and plastic in indigenous games. There was consensus that the games cover the creative arts and physical education. They require natural objects and artefacts readily available in the learners’ environment. In the case of *umasgenda*, learners need open space to place 12 to 16 small stones. Some of these materials are easier to obtain than others. Learners can use these resources during free play activities and structured activities, when they have finished a teacher-directed task, or simply when they need ‘time out’. The Foundation Phase curriculum highly supports various games played inside and outside the classroom. One of the highly enthusiastic participants was bubbling during the interview and used a very powerful principle of the CAPS to justify the need for indigenous games and decolonisation of the Life Skills curriculum.

**Mariam:** *“... one of the principles that pride our nation underpinned in this curriculum advocates for valuing indigenous knowledge systems, in this scenario I specifically refer to going back to our roots, which simply means ‘azibuyele emasisweni’... our heritage and rich history need to be harnessed by our kids, and us must know these things and lastly document these important treasures for the future generation.”*

**Yvonne:** *“... in my personal view, our education system should support local innovation and encourage those teachers who use indigenous knowledge to aid their teaching by supporting, appreciating, and funding their innovation.”*

The other justification supported by this study was in favour of infusing indigenous games into the Foundation Phase curriculum to promote the values of Ubuntu enshrined in the

Constitution. The values of Ubuntu, compassion, togetherness, love for one another and solidarity are the basis for indigenous games (Nxumalo, Mncube, 2019). All participants were aware that the Constitution, as the supreme law of the land, recognises and cherishes the importance of protecting values linked to Ubuntu.

**Sabatha:** “... my little understanding of the Constitution reminds me of the need to protect what belongs to our heritage, values like compassion, respect, fair competition, and other important ones that we have been practising for centuries.”

**Yvonne:** “... it’s nice to talk because talking is cheap, but we need to pride ourselves on this rich heritage and values of Ubuntu engraved in our upbringing ... founders of our Constitution and the Bill of Rights thought hard about these values were critical to being protected and cherished as they are clearly stated in the supreme book like Constitution ... values linked to Ubuntu... they are a man.”

The fact that our education addresses the values engraved in our Constitution was a very powerful statement from the participants. The disparities inherent in our society were calculated and orchestrated through a series of measures targeting the black majority, and now the power of the Constitution can work wonders by infusing education with much-loved indigenous games and play linked to our heritage. The next section focuses on how these indigenous games are used to decolonise Life Skills.

### **Using indigenous games to decolonise Life Skills in the Foundation Phase**

The second theme focused on the feasibility of decolonising Life Skills using indigenous games and promoting Ubuntu in the Foundation Phase in rural schools. Decolonisation is one of the popular terms used by slogans used by student formations across the country to advocate for change toward indigenous knowledge. Below, the participants describe this concept to clarify the need for a fresh and innovative approach to education. None of the participants claimed with certainty to understand the rationale for decolonisation in the grand scheme of things or indigenous games in the Foundation Phase context. Establishing a common understanding and ideas underpinning curriculum and decolonisation is crucial. Pinar (2012), an American theorist, explains a curriculum as the interdisciplinary study of the educational experience. It encompasses attitudes, values, dispositions, and worldviews learnt, un-learnt, re-learned, re-formed, deconstructed, and reconstructed while studying at school (Pinar, 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019).

Common responses from participants were that students from elite universities were calling for ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ and ‘Fees Must Fall’, which was confusing for rural teachers. To them, this meant gravitating towards an African philosophy of education and ubuntu values or philosophy in the education system. Their major concern was that this was a legitimate concern, but very little progress to date seems to have been made to the philosophy and sources of information. One of the pertinent questions to be answered is, do teachers in the Foundation Phase infuse indigenous knowledge, such as games, in the curriculum when teaching? It was interesting to note that none of the participants was willing to claim to be championing this new approach. They argued that it seemed that the government was cautious and not ready to commit fully to sweeping changes embracing decolonisation. They cited many reasons for this.

**Sabatha:** “... let me be the first to state that I understood the youth of 2016 when demanded radical changes to overhaul the entire education system ... but many multifaceted and complicated problems exist, such as funding, African scholarship, capacity, and quality. These are important issues with varying degrees of priority, for me, our government is caught up in the mix, the system is not capable and very weak at the moment and is not capacitated enough with the brave leaders from top to bottom ... that’s my opinion.”

**Olga:** “... we don’t have our written books, readers, website, online stores selling books written by African philosophers and scholars advocative ubuntu values and other sources written to reflect indigenous knowledge(s) and ubuntu philosophy to implement the so-called decolonisation in our schools ... it’s a very simple process, but our archives are full of western material, fabricated stories... what can we do, we have no legitimacy at all and the influence to our values as taught through indigenous games.”

Participants noted that the DBE needs to introduce well-theorised scholarship and a well-coordinated African-aligned epistemology underpinned by African local experience where indigenous games could be used as an experiment. The participants believed their expertise and wealth of knowledge in the Foundation Phase is their biggest asset in transforming the education

landscape. The rural context has its opportunities and challenges in implementing indigenous games. Teachers are 'transformative intellectuals', implying that their pedagogical competence elevated them to the top of the food chain when it comes to knowledge construction. We are aware that changes are happening faster than we predicted, and the new teaching philosophy is inevitable and will change the landscape of education. Using indigenous games during free play outside and inside remains their main priority, and participants are taking advantage of their environment, local culture, and rich heritage. Young learners are always keen to learn new games through trial and error, and the resolve is to empower them at this very early age. The perception of participants (Piet and Olga) in this section as 'revolutionising' ubuntu philosophy through indigenous games signifies a shift towards building awareness of the importance of indigenous games in a changing 21st-century pedagogy.

**Piet:** "... as a school, me and my team of Foundation Phase teachers are using indigenous games like *ushumpu*, *ikati negundane*, and *inqhabethu* just to name a few. These indigenous games require endurance and a lot of energy when playing."

**Olga:** "... in the Foundation Phase we decided to use possible games linked to local culture and Ubuntu values to teach Life Skills and Physical Education in our schools.

Teachers used these games during Life skills and Physical Education to develop physical and motor development as an integral component of the holistic development of learners. In their own words, participants believed that Life Skills linked to indigenous games make a significant contribution to learners' social, personal, and emotional development. According to the CAPS document for the Foundation Phase, play, movement, games, and sports contribute to developing positive attitudes and values. Most participants used this as the basis for championing indigenous games and ubuntu values in the Foundation Phase curriculum. Interestingly, the Foundation Phase focuses on games and some activities that form the basis of participating in sports later in life.

### **Teaching strategies used by Foundation Phase teachers to promote indigenous games**

The third theme that was worth interrogating focused on the strategies used by the schools and teachers to integrate indigenous games into the curriculum. An in-depth interrogation of data collected during the study revealed notable teaching strategies used by Foundation Phase teachers to promote indigenous games and ubuntu values. These strategies could be formalised and adopted by all schools in rural areas to strengthen the CAPS in its resolve to use indigenous games in the Physical Education curriculum.

**Yvonne:** "... my suggestion is that Foundation Phase uses cluster schools as one of the strategies where we can expose our learners to the beauty of indigenous games, games are better when learners compete. Learners learn to collaborate with others while playing games. The second strategy is to use rurality as a philosophy that will elevate this importance... by design, we teach in rural areas with endless possibilities when it comes to African values and Ubuntu values."

**Olga:** "... in my view, team teaching is one of the powerful strategies where talented learners are used in the schools to be champions of these indigenous games, while the other strategy involves using local community members on an ad hoc basis. These should be people who like indigenous games and excel in indigenous games."

The participants' reflections indicate the desire to change their behaviour to champion value-based indigenous games for their schools. Using indigenous games as a teaching strategy was an individual choice informed by local culture, values, and resources. Miriam teaches Grades R and 1, and the strategies of the indigenous game were based on the curriculum for these grades. Accordingly, learners play games that they know best match their developmental needs. These grades focus on themes like creative games and skills, sports and games, and locomotor development, where indigenous games like *ukucupa*, *ingwenya*, and *umasgenda* are used for teaching learners circles and squares and swimming. Grade 2 focuses on creative games and skills, as well as sports and games involving their chosen traditional games. Most schools encourage learners to play indigenous games close to a school or on the school grounds to be properly supervised. Watching them throw a ball in the air and run for cover brings excitement and joy, knowing they are engaged in physical exercise and intellectual processes. The in-depth analysis identified three main teaching strategies suggested for indigenous games linked to Ubuntu values and African philosophy.

### **Using team leaders as supervisors**

One of the teaching strategies that emerged from the participants was the need to have young champions lead in front when these indigenous games are played. It was clear from the participants that considering the age of the learners, these games can only be organised by young people from each grade who are passionate and have good relationships with other learners. In this regard, primary schools should adopt a community-wide approach where capable learners are appointed to assist teachers with organising and implementing indigenous games on the school premises. In many cases, learners feel more at ease being supervised by their peers than by their teachers.

**Sabatha:** *... in most cases, I identify one of the best learners in my class as a champion to lead my class ... I discuss first the type of game I want them to teach and lead my class during and outside of the class.*

Most participants were very happy with this strategy because it allows young learners to be leaders. During this period, these leaders coordinate meetings and discuss the indigenous game and how it should be played.

### **Organising local competitions during the fourth week of the month**

The second teaching strategy that resonated with participants was staging local competitions with neighbouring schools. Initially, some participants were not keen on talking about this teaching strategy for fear of reprisal from the school management team (SMT). It turns out that leaders and most SMT members were unanimous in their support for this strategy. Most schools in rural areas are close to others, and the common thread that links them perfectly is local culture and shared heritage. Most indigenous games are common to the entire region and exploring the introduction of competition remains the most innovative teaching strategy. Participants endorsed this idea because it encouraged the sharing of resources, working together and being able to solve problems together when they see their counterparts from other schools at the game's competition at no cost to schools or parents.

**Piet:** *... engaging learners in a competition is the most progressive strategy because even in our times, we used to compete with neighbouring schools and now I would resuscitate this strategy ... CAPS is organised very well and as we teach one theme in a term, we organised indigenous games that address that theme ... this will work in our favour".*

The use of competitions and meetings between schools promotes a spirit of sharing and solidarity among schools. In essence, schools in the area develop a strong centre where knowledge is shared, and learners begin to know the best in the area when it comes to these indigenous games. Finally, a spirit of unity and ubuntu values is created which is sacrosanct.

### **Using rural learning to promote indigenous games**

The third teaching strategy proposed by participants relates to using rural learning to promote indigenous games. Most participants sounded the alarm about the quality of the content and processes underpinning education for rural children. The main concern for participants relates to the body of academic knowledge learnt by all even though unrelated to the life experience of rural children. This observation often drives teachers to reject curriculum knowledge that neglects rural learning. The subject advisor (Thandwayo) raised this important innovation (the use of indigenous games), underscoring the value of using rurality and the rural character of the environment to teach the values of ubuntu philosophy.

**Thandwayo:** *"... our rurality is the powerful symbol of hope when it comes to indigenous knowledge and games are a source of inspiration to promote values and aspirations of rural learning."*

**Olga:** *"... taking rural education seriously serves the interest of the rural community. This education should empower people to understand that education is rooted in their values and culture and cannot be shaken."*

Indigenous games directly source a wealth of knowledge from the community and elevate them to the higher altitude of the epistemological platform. Policymakers fail to advocate for integration as the minimum learning needs of learners who grow up in rural areas in the curriculum. In this study, participants argue that curriculum design fails to address the basic needs of the local community, pointing to systemic challenges that can only be eliminated by infusing local Ubuntu values. These participants point out that rural schools in South Africa are the worst performers in all literacy and numeracy skills. Instead of blaming rural learning for poor

performance, the curriculum should look at indigenous knowledge in the form of games, among other interventions available for free in rural communities.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendation

I argue that the change envisioned by the use of rural learning requires sober professionals and administrators with a strong decolonial inclination in their DNA. In essence, the South African system of education has very few courageous teachers and administrators with the right attitude to walk this tightrope during a sensitive phase in our lifetime. It is surprising to be bombarded with information about rural education from people who benefited from mainstream apartheid and white domination. These advocates have enjoyed the white privilege, in turn, using the same platform to speak for rural education and the decolonisation of the curriculum. Local media should be used as the mainstream media because national and international conferences privilege people who benefited from colonial education and who now speak about Ubuntu and decolonisation. These institutions are obsessed with ratings, inviting students, teachers, and academics from schools and universities to be the ambassadors of rural education and decolonisation. There is a caveat here: Many privileged black academics and teachers, including administrators, were indoctrinated during apartheid but jumped on the bandwagon to be the voice of reason when it comes to advocating for rural education. The road to efficient rural education is a struggle that needs rural teachers and a new generation of teachers and administrators. The participants argued that these professionals should be representative of the country's demographics and, most importantly, should ascend to senior positions of authority in schools and the DBE.

## 6. Declarations

### Ethics approval and consent to participate

Ethics approval was granted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal South Africa, with informed consent from all participants (Ethical Clearance Number-HSS/0207/012D)

### Consent for publication

Not applicable.

### Availability of data and materials

Please contact the author for data and materials associated with this study. Data and other materials will be provided if required.

### Conflict of interest statement

The authors of the manuscript declare that there is no conflict of interest, and all reference materials were duly acknowledged.

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