

Child development through Ndebele taboos: Motivation to blend the indigenous and the exotic

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Abstract

In the context of this paper, child development is upbringing, incorporating the care, education and protection of children. The traditional Ndebele way of child upbringing ensures that the child develops responsibly and especially out of danger. This paper thus seeks to identify the gap between modernity and Ndebele taboos and suggests possible solutions to address the gap and apply taboos in modern societies such as urban settlements. The social, physical and environmental regulatory institutions of the Ndebele people have always relied on the supernatural for enforcement. This study seeks to demonstrate, using interviews and focus group discussions, how traditional Ndebele taboos need to be blended into the modern culture if they are to be relevant. The research is an interpretivist descriptive survey of Nkayi rural and Nkayi urban centre (in Zimbabwe) with the aim of getting parents and secondary school children's views on Ndebele taboos and child development. The study established that there are some traditional concepts used in some Ndebele taboos which are no longer popular and children do not know them. It also established that there are some Ndebele taboos that have been overtaken by human rights discourses, while some are no longer compatible with modern institutions such as formal schooling and science. There are new taboos built to counter ills of modern society. The modern environment has modern dangers and problems that require a re-visiting of Ndebele taboos so that more modern taboos can be developed. The study demonstrates that blending the indigenous and the exotic (cultures) in taboo formulation and application ensures that today's children benefit from taboos. The blending of indigenous and exotic cultures has already occurred in society and there is a need to align the modern culture to taboo tenets so that the taboos can be fully utilised for child development. The blending involves changing some metaphoric vehicles in some traditional Ndebele taboos to include concepts from modern culture, and in some cases there is a need to 'de-taboo' for child development. Conclusions of the study are important for policy makers in domains of child development and care such as pedagogy, social work, children's rights and the family. The findings also imply connections between taboos and legal theories on rights and these can be explored further.

Key words: Taboos, child development, Ndebele people (Zimbabwe), modernity, indigenous knowledge, Ndebele culture

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1. Introduction and background

Child development is the upbringing of children in a manner that protects and develops them into good citizens of a society (Ivanov 1998). The process of child development does not and cannot have a single defined method, because conditions differ and society changes. However, the aims of child upbringing are common across all human societies. Children learn a culture through the process of upbringing (Macionis and Marie 2011). Taboos are pointers to cultural norms children learn from (Colding and Folke, 2001); however, globalisation and modernity have changed many cultural landscapes, creating new taboos and taboo vehicles (Putnam 2006). The study focused on Nkayi urban centre and its surrounding rural areas. Nkayi centre is a sprawling urban centre servicing the surrounding rural areas; it has a high density settlement with all urban amenities of running water, electricity, sewer system (Hewitt 1989), and is close to both Bulawayo and Kwekwe, which are bigger towns. The centre also has a boarding school which has a high population of students from other big towns like Bulawayo. The surrounding rural areas are typical rural settlements without electricity or tarred roads, and the homes are communal settlements under traditional leaders; the lifestyle is still basically rural. Rural children are not very much exposed to television, busy streets, traffic lights and electrical appliances; they are accustomed to subsistence farming, herding domestic animals and living far from towns.

The aim of the study was to investigate the relevance of old Ndebele taboos in bringing up modern children and whether the taboos are being innovated to be compliant with modernity and its attendant rights and freedoms. The study was motivated by the fact that society has evolved and some elements regulated by Ndebele taboos are no longer taboo, yet some concepts used in older taboos are no longer as common and children are not familiar with them. The objectives of the study were to test for knowledge and familiarity of older Ndebele elements in taboos, and to collect newer taboos and check those taboos that today violate certain rights and freedoms. Data analysis is done thematically according to the research questions. These are the research questions:

1. Do children in both urban and rural settings know the traditional concepts used in Ndebele taboos? (Awareness)
2. Are there Ndebele taboos which discriminate against people or violate individual rights and freedoms?
3. What are the modern fears and challenges to the girl and the boy child, and do Ndebele taboos address these?

2. Literature review and theory

Taboos are part of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) used by human communities to regulate human behaviour and conserve natural resources; this makes them part of culture. This section reviews literature on child development, culture, taboos, IKS, urbanity, and Afrocentricity. These topics are important in the understanding of the taboo institution and its function in Ndebele and other African societies.

2.1 Child development

There are various methods of child upbringing in different societies. Blaga (2016) opines that there is no single formula, opinion, theory or truth to child upbringing. He further notes that the raising of children is a continuous challenge because of the constantly changing public perceptions, requirements and attitudes towards social phenomena. There is no singular and specific domain for child development and upbringing but several research domains converge on the topic and these include but are not limited to: pedagogy, psychology, sociology, law and religion. Ivanov (1998) avers that child upbringing is a process of influence determined by the strategies in content, contact and logic in the family and society. The school and other trend-

setting platforms such as television are party to the social contract on child upbringing. The state and society support and assist families in child development and the development involves raising, educating, supporting, guiding, protecting and safeguarding the child.

Taboos combine cultural knowledge, religion and psychology to protect and groom children. Howes *et al.* (1992:449) have noted that 'relationships between child care quality and children's social and cognitive development are well established'. In Ndebele culture, spirits are involved in bringing up children; this is a psychological emphasis in child development. Bjorklund and Pellegrini (2000:1688) concur, adding that 'evolutionary psychologists have proposed that psychological mechanisms are the missing link in the evolution of human behaviour'. Ndebele taboos are one such psychological mechanism that has been seen to be missing in Western methods of child and human development. Gwaravanda, Ndlovu and Ndlovu (2014:31) observe that girl child taboos in Ndebele and Shona cultures teach, groom and protect the girl child. African Indigenous Knowledge Systems may help the world create a better and holistic method of child development. However, some Ndebele taboos such as; *ungahamba nyovane unyoko uzangena esigxingini* (If you walk backwards your mother will get into a small traditional water container), are expressed using old concepts (*isigxingi*) and children do not know these, while some Ndebele taboos now violate modern norms such as human rights.

Child development is a matter of human rights to the Western way of thinking (Blaga 2016). However, the Ndebele have always placed it above rights issues on the spiritual obligations of adults to children. Nyathi (2001:04) avers that: 'It becomes very difficult, in fact, impossible, to isolate religion from other aspects of Ndebele culture. Child development in the African context is a spiritual process due to the centrality of children in perpetuating the African civilisation and existence. In Ndebele culture and indeed other African cultures, child development involves; protection, training, grooming, and the spiritual growth of children. Mangena and Ndlovu (2014:660) argue that, 'An exploration of proverbs in both Shona and Ndebele cultures demonstrates that these people had ways of recognising the importance of children and ways of ensuring that they are protected from various forms of abuse'.

2.2 Culture, modernity and the urban-rural dichotomy

Central to child upbringing is the concept of culture and its attendant norms and values, in which the taboo system operates. Velkley (2002) views culture as encompassing social behaviour and norms in human aggregates based on knowledge, beliefs, arts, law, customs, capabilities and habits. Cultural norms codify acceptable conduct in a society. Macionis and Marie (2011) describe culture as a range of phenomena transmitted through social learning in society. They further identify cultural universals present in all human societies such as expressive forms of culture, material and immaterial forms. Expressive culture includes a people's music, art, literature, philosophy, mythology, heritage and religion, while material culture includes clothing, tools, architecture, food and materials. Culture is constantly changing and the norms also shift according to changes in society. Taboos operate at the realm of social culture, employing religion and mythology to control society. Changes in society amount to changes in the taboo system. The effectiveness of the taboo system is based on the character of African cultures. There is an explicit culture which is also referred to as verbalised culture, and implicit culture which is inferable from behaviour. Taboos belong to both classes. Herskovitz (1955:153) alludes to these classes of culture when he argues that, 'culture may be thought of as a kind of psychological iceberg of whose totality only but a small portion appears above the level of consciousness'.

The nature of Ndebele culture made it possible for the taboo system to be implemented because religion was part of all aspects of life; however, the global nature of society today has tampered with African cultures, and Ndlovu and Mangena (2019:257) allude to the secularisation of African taboos in the modern age. Triandis (1994:2) argues that there is a unique way in which

people in different cultures view their social environment, and he introduces the concept of subjective culture. Triandis classifies the types of cultural attitudes that make societies culturally unique; among these are individualism and collectivism. Mbiti (1969:1) argues that in Africa; 'religion permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it'. African culture and religion are collectively practised and taboos are implemented in the context of religion. Curtin *et al.* (1995: 469) aver that, 'based on orality [...] religion, education, science, or ideology were all part and parcel of every type of activity', while Ndlovu *et al.* (1995:194-195) note that Ndebele taboos regulate health, sexuality and religion.

Modernity especially through colonialism created urban centres and urban culture in Zimbabwe. The urban environment has different cultural materials and a different cultural landscape which creates disharmony for some Ndebele taboos created based on a past rural lifestyle. Williams, Brunn and Darden (1983: 5) define urbanisation as a:

Process involving two phases or aspects: i) the movement of people from rural to urban places where they engage primarily in non-rural functions or occupations; and ii) the change in life style from rural to urban with its associated values, attitudes and behaviours. The important variables in the former are population density and economic functions; the important variables of the latter depend on social, psychological and behavioural factors. The two aspects are mutually supportive.

Suffice it to note that people also move from urban to rural environments and the movements are circular (Hurst 2017). Hewitt (1989) states that rural life is not a single category but a complex continuum. Rural life exists along a continuum which has ranges of *ruralness* from more rural to less rural, and varies extensively based on the following factors: 1) proximity to a central place, 2) community size, 3) population density, 4) total population, and 5) economic/socio-economic factors. The degrees of *urbanness* and *ruralness* are important concepts in this study, as they pose different conditions for Ndebele children.

2.3 Taboos

Taboos are implicit prohibitions on speech or behaviour based on the repulsiveness or sacredness of some elements. Taboos operate in all human societies to regulate human interactions and their interactions with the environment. Chigidi (2009:177) analyses taboos by arguing that, 'in its form, the avoidance rule is made up of two parts: the first part is a kind of prohibition –'thou shall not do this' – and the second part consists of a statement expressing the consequence of violating an interdiction. The statement expressing the consequence comes in the form of, at least to the one who gives the avoidance rule, a necessary lie.' Gutierrez and Giner-Sorolla (2007:857) use the term taboo to refer to norms whose violation has repercussions, and Bozongwana (1983:08) exemplifies the operation of totemic taboos in Ndebele culture to regulate incest and to conserve animals, as people do not marry within the same totem or eat their totem animal.

Colding and Folke (2001) classify taboos into different typologies using characteristics such as: who is prohibited, when and for how long? They identify segment taboos which are those that prohibit certain segments of society based on aspects such as sex, age and social status; temporal taboos whereby everyone in a society is denied access to a resource or practice for a stipulated time. They further identify methods taboos, those that prohibit certain methods of accessing resources, and life history taboos where society is prohibited from using certain vulnerable stages of a species, for example age, sex, size and reproductive status. Common taboos in most if not all human aggregates regulate people's dietary choices; these are dietary rules governing particular phases of human life and events (Meyer-Rochow, 2009). Child development taboos in Ndebele have similar characteristics and they emphasise the aspects of age and sex.

The prohibitions that aid child upbringing include prohibiting children access to some adult content and practices such as sex, some foodstuffs and exposure to strangers. Changes in society have ushered into Ndebele cosmology foreign and global trends; these have come with new challenges to child development. In some cases, rights discourses affect Ndebele taboos directly. Putnam (2006) asserts that contemporary Western multicultural society has new taboos against ethnocentrism and prejudice, where tribalism, nationalism, racism, sexism and religious extremism are taboo. These new trends have not spared Ndebele taboos, as the interaction between modernity and Ndebele taboos has created some dissonance which requires innovation on the part of Ndebele taboos.

2.4 Afrocentricity and Indigenous Knowledge Systems

The study is framed on Afrocentricity as a theory that seeks the African-centered approach to problem solving and development. Child development has been managed using scripts from the global centres of the West and the Americas. Dei (1994:4) avers that; 'there is a long history of Euro-American dominance of what constitutes valid knowledge and how such knowledge should be produced and disseminated internally and internationally'. However, there is a need to re-focus on the African systems by moving the centre back to Africa. In the words of Wa Thiongo (1993:2), Africans should assert their right to define themselves and their relationship to the universe from their own centres in Africa. The study also uses IKS as an African-centred sub-theory to discuss the relevance of Ndebele taboos in child development today.

Gakuru (1998:9) defines IKS as:

The sum total of the knowledge and skills which people in a particular geographic area possess and which enable them to get the most out of their environment. Most of this knowledge and these skills have been passed from earlier generations but individual men and women in each new generation adapt and add to this body of knowledge in a constant adjustment to changing circumstances and environmental conditions. They in turn pass on the body of knowledge intact to the next generation, in an effort to provide them with survival strategies.

The changing global cultures influence changes in Ndebele taboos, and such innovations are characteristic of all IKS. Battiste (2005:2) argues that, 'Indigenous scholars discovered that indigenous knowledge is far more than the binary opposite of Western knowledge. As a concept indigenous knowledge benchmarks the limitations of Eurocentric theory, its methodology, evidence, and conclusions re-conceptualises the resilience and self-reliance of indigenous peoples, and underscores the importance of their own philosophies, heritages, and educational processes'. Muyambo and Maposa (2014:26) demonstrate the value of IKS by showing how the Ndau people of Zimbabwe conserve water resources through taboos by making some pools sacred for bathing and fishing. Hens (2006:25) observes that, 'Maintenance of rules based on tradition is stronger and more community owned than government rules'. The Legal Resources Foundation (2014:5) notes that there are survival and development rights for children and that; 'under this cluster of rights, children have a right to the resources, skills and contributions necessary for their survival and full development'. The taboo system as an IKS contributes to the skills and resources necessary for child development.

Over reliance on the Western way of life in Africa was created through the colonial process which alienated Africans from their ways, including child development systems Asante (1988:08) says, 'If we have lost anything, it is our cultural centeredness; that is, we have been moved from our own platforms. This means that we cannot truly be ourselves or know our potential since we exist in a borrowed space'. In distorting African civilisations, colonialism developed some African technologies and culture outside African culture. Afrika (1993:21) says that, 'Ancient African holistic health science produced many healing instruments. These instruments required the usage of higher developed psychic and spiritual energy for their proper use. The names of the

instruments have been distorted and acculturated by Europeans'. After stripping Africa of its development potential, Western science became the standard for the world. Briggs (2005:102) avers that 'Western science is seen to be open, systematic and objective, dependent very much on being a detached centre of rationality and intelligence, whereas indigenous knowledge is seen to be closed, parochial, un-intellectual, primitive and emotional'. However, Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005:9) observe that, 'actions currently being taken by indigenous people in communities throughout the world clearly demonstrate that a significant "paradigm shift" is underway in which indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing are recognised as complex knowledge systems with an adaptive integrity of their own'.

It is imperative for African IKS including Ndebele taboos to adapt to the modern society so that they reclaim their lost space and time in the developmental agenda; this has happened and continues to happen, as Pfukwa (2001:29) points out that taboos in Zimbabwe were used to discipline soldiers during the war of liberation. Mapara (2009:140) argues that the use of proverbs, for example, is another case of ethno-knowledge that has been used in both judicial and governance matters today. Hens (2006:22) describes the contribution of IKS in biodiversity conservation and management in Ghana and identifies a taboo system operating across whole communities to regulate hunting, fishing, lumbering and excessive soil erosion. He further notes that coastal ethnic groups know they do not fish on Tuesdays and Fridays. Ndlovu and Hove (2015:103) demonstrate how Ndebele and Shona indigenous counselling have been adapted into modern counselling, while Ndlovu (2017:42) shows how Ndebele *joyina* or contract games are used today for child development and to protect children from danger and disease. To adapt to modern times Ndebele taboos have to incorporate the prevailing social environment and consider de-tabooing in some instances to comply with global trends.

3. Methodology

The research used the qualitative method (Holloway, 1997; Blanche and Durrheim, 1999) as it offers rich descriptive reports of the individuals' perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, views and feelings as well as the meanings and interpretations given to events and experiences. It was also grounded in the lived experiences of the participants in the study. The research also used Fraenkel and Wallen's (1990) content analysis to analyse taboos within the framework of Afrocentricity and IKS. It was undertaken under the World Vision IGATE programme research on culture and access to education by girl children.

The research is framed on the interpretive paradigm as it interrogates culture and its changes in society. Rehman and Alharthi (2016:55) have argued that in interpretive research, no single interpretation can be chosen to be correct and others wrong, but there is acceptance of different types of knowledge. Guba and Lincoln (2005:204) note that interpretivism 'refuses to adopt any permanent, unvarying standards by which truth can be universally known'. Interpretivists believe in socially constructed multiple realities to which Rehman and Alharthi (2016:55) argue that, 'truth and reality are created, not discovered. It is not possible to know reality as it is because it is always mediated by our senses. Interpretive epistemology is subjective'. Researchers bring their own worldviews and backgrounds to research. Grix (2004:83) notes that, 'researchers are inextricably part of the social reality being researched, i.e. they are not "detached" from the subject they are studying'. Blaikie (2000:120) advises that 'social researchers collect data from some point of view, and this point of view is influenced by their language, culture, discipline-based knowledge and past experiences'. The researcher in this case is part of Ndebele culture and has lived and studied Ndebele taboos and brings this intuition and knowledge into the research. However, the researcher understood taboos through the experiences of the participants as Cohen, Manion and Morisson (2007:21) posit that; 'interpretive methodology requires that social phenomena be understood through the eyes of the participants rather than of the researcher'. Rehman and Alharthi (2016:55) advise that 'the goal

of interpretive research is not to discover universal, context and value free knowledge and truth but to try to understand the interpretation of individuals about the social phenomena they interact with'.

The study adopted a descriptive survey as it seeks to identify characteristics, trends and categories in Ndebele taboos as they operate in a changed society. The research seeks to describe and answer the "what" questions on taboos, urbanity and rights. Borg and Gall (1989) posit that descriptive studies are aimed at finding out "what is"; as a result, observations and surveys are generally used to collect descriptive data. Descriptive research designs use both qualitative and quantitative data, and this research uses limited quantitative data as it is predominantly qualitative. The descriptive survey becomes normative as it relates taboos to the modern norm of new threats and rights. Characteristics of urban and rural populations are described as they relate to taboo phenomena. The research used focus group discussions and semi-structured open interviews. Rehman and Alharthi (2016:56) note that, 'interpretive researchers employ methods that generate qualitative data, and data collecting methods that yield qualitative data include open ended interviews in their various structures, observations, field notes documents and discussions'. The interview guides and discussion topics were guided by the research questions.

The research site was Nkayi district and the focus areas were secondary school students (form four level), parents and traditional leaders. Level four students at secondary school are in the age range that is mostly affected by social ills that affect children such as sexual, behavioural, and cultural concerns. Nkayi was chosen because it is an Ndebele monolingual society without much influence from other cultures in Zimbabwe apart from English. The research employed purposive sampling of students, parents and traditional leaders guided by the research questions and discussion topics. Three rural secondary schools were sampled; these are/were Mpumelelo, Tohwe and Mdengelele. Two secondary schools in Nkayi centre were chosen to represent the urban sample; these are Hlangabeza High School, where only boarders coming from Bulawayo city were sampled, and secondly Nkayi High school, where only students who resided in Nkayi centre were chosen. In each school a total of 10 students, 5 boys and 5 girls, were FGD discussants. This was a manageable group yet representative enough, and their age ranges were 16-18 years. Parent discussants were organised in 3 rural villages of Mathetshaneni (3 female and 2 male), Zinyangeni (3 female and 3 male) and Tohwe (3 female and 1 male). Urban parents were gathered from Bellevue suburb in Nkayi centre (4 female and 1 male); the age range for parents was 37-71 years. The rural samples are almost homogeneous with slight variations based on exposure to urbanity, hence the three groups. The urban sample is also quite homogeneous as far as the research was concerned, hence the sample of five suffices. One parent in each group was chosen for an open interview, and three more interviews were conducted with traditional leaders, being 1 Headman and 2 village heads. Only Ndebele mother-tongue speakers were identified for the research, and a grand total of 73 people made up the sample. All research instruments were in Ndebele.

4. Results

The results of the study are here presented thematically according to the research questions.

4.1 Quantitative findings on taboo vehicle familiarity in students

To answer the question on children's knowledge of traditional concepts, six traditional concepts were extracted from Ndebele taboos, and these were juxtaposed to modern equivalents in the urban environment. Students were requested to identify concepts they have seen/used to show they were familiar with the concepts. The six traditional concepts are; *iqhaga* (container made from dried melon-like crop with a hard outer shell), *inkezo* (elongated cup made from a long melon with a hard shell; the elongated part functions as the handle), *ingiga* (wooden mortar),

ithumba (boil), *iziko* (fire place for cooking, usually outside or in the traditional kitchen), *isiziba* (deep pool along a river). These were compared to the following modern concepts respectively; *ijeki* (jug), *isipunu* (spoon), *ibredibhini* (bread bin), *ikhensa* (cancer), *isitofu* (stove), *iswimingiphulu* (swimming pool). Table 1 below displays the familiarity results among school children, it represents scores.

Table 1 Student familiarity to traditional and modern concepts												
School	iqhaga	Jug	inkezo	Spoon	ingiga	bread bin	ithumba	cancer	Iziko	stove	isiziba	swimming pool
URBAN												
Hlangabeza	3	10	0	10	6	10	7	10	6	10	7	10
Nkayi High	5	10	2	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
RURAL												
Mdengelele	6	10	3	10	10	2	10	10	10	10	10	6
Tohwe	8	10	6	10	10	4	10	10	10	10	10	10
Mpumelelo	8	10	4	10	10	7	10	10	10	10	10	10
Schools are in the horizontal bar and concepts vertically (Y axis)												

4.2 Qualitative findings on taboos and rights, new taboos, social ills and repercussions

There are Ndebele taboos that violate girl child and boy child rights. The following were identified as new threats to child development: drug abuse, alcohol abuse, tobacco, sugar daddies/mummies, premarital sex, pornography, getting lifts from strangers, crossing red robots, not exercising, wearing revealing clothes and spending too much time on social media.

4.2.1 Findings on discrimination and violation of some rights in Ndebele taboos

Discussants and interviewees identified some taboos that cannot be fully enforced in the modern era. The following taboos were identified: it is taboo to talk about sex and sexuality, especially with children, homosexuality is taboo, cross dressing is taboo (this included women putting on trousers and track bottoms), it is taboo for men to witness childbirth, it is taboo for women to lead men, it is taboo for children to attend funerals, it is taboo for girls on their period to be in public, and it is taboo for children to eat eggs. Below are excerpts from data on views regarding the above taboos:

- d *Singekela ukubafundisa ngezocansi lezitho zensitha bebanthane bakhula beyizithutha bangelisizi ukuzivikela.* (If we do not teach children about sex and sexuality from an early age they will be easy targets for abusers) – parent Nkayi centre.

- Okwereproduction saqala ukukufunda kucontent eprimary vele.* (We started learning reproductive health in primary school) – student Mpumelelo.
- e *Ubunkotshane bubu kodwa abantwana kumele sibatshela ngobubi babo, kodwa nanko sizwa kuthiwa eGoli okusebenza khona ubaba uyabotshwa ungasola inkotshani.* (Homosexuality is bad, but we should tell children about its ills. However, we hear in South Africa where my husband works that you are arrested if you condemn homosexuality) – parent Zinyangeni.
- f *Khona kuyazila ukuthi umama agqoke ibhulugwe lapha emakhaya, abantu basuka bacabange ukuthi kawuziphathanga kodwa kuya kuphela ngoba abanye ngabamaspoti ngeke udlale ngerogwe.* (It is indeed taboo for a woman to put on a trouser in rural areas, people will think you are a woman of loose morals. However, the taboo is fading away since some women play sport and you cannot play in your skirts) – parent Tohwe.
- g *Mina nginje ngibeletshwe ngunurse ongubaba eNkayi khonapha. Njalo kuhle ukuthi obaba babone ubunzima bokubeletha ukuze bagcine abantwana labomama.* (My midwife was a man here in Nkayi Hospital. Men should know about the pain of giving birth so that they can take care of women and children) – parent Nkayi centre.
- h *Kwakunjalo kodwa sikhuluma nje silabosobhuku besifazana esiqintini sikababa uHeadman.* (Long back women could not lead men, but as we speak, today we have women village heads here in our Headman's area) – parent Mathetshaneni.
- i *Ngeke sihambe izimfa zemalayinini, kodwa nxa kungakithi kumele sivallalise isihlobo sethu. Ngokwakudala lokhuyana ukuthi siyasiswa emalayinini nxa kufiwe ngakithi.* (While we cannot attend funerals in other families we need to bid farewell to our relatives. The custom of taking us children to another home if there is a funeral at home is outdated) – student Mdengelele.
- j *Lokho akumelanga kuvimbele inkululeko lempilo yamankazana, kunjenje silama NGO apha amankazana amapads kakuzili lutho lokho.* (Periods should not stop girls' freedom and life, we now have NGOs which give sanitary ware to girls, it is not a taboo at all for girls to continue normally during their periods) – Headman.
- k *Ngakithi sidle sonke etafuleni labazali ngeke bangifihlele amaqanda.* (I eat at the same table with my parents and they cannot hide eggs from me) – student Hlangabeza.

4.2.2 Findings on new threats and taboos for the girl child

The modern environment poses new threats to the lives of girls. Interviews and discussions indicated that the new threats to girls include: rape, other sexual violations and kidnapping. Measures taken by the community to reduce these include taboos of looking at strangers, greeting strangers, walking alone, accepting food and favours from people and getting free rides in people's cars. The following excerpts from data indicate new taboos to address the new threats:

- a *Amankazana ayaretshwa ngobhinya kodwa lokhu okuseprimary ungathi lingahambilikhangela abantu lizaba yiziphofu kuyalalela.* (Girls are raped by criminals; however, those in primary school believe when you tell them that if they look strangers in the face they will get blind) – parent Tohwe.
- b *Amabele amiyo bayawathanda osisi kabafuni athintwe ngoba azakuwa.* (Girls love pointed breast and they do not want them to be touched as this will make them fall) – parent Zinyangeni.
- c *Njengoba ubona kuligusu ngeke amankazana ahambe wodwa, abancane siyazama ukuthi nxa befuna ukuphuhla bangahambi bodwa kodwa abesecodary vele*

sebehamba labafana labo. (As you can, see it is a thicket here and girls cannot walk alone from school. With young girls we tell them that if they walk alone they will not develop breasts, but the secondary school girls do not walk alone anymore because they walk with boys) – parent Mathetshaneni.

- d *Bekulisiko ukubingelela kodwa khathesi akumelanga bahambe bebingelela nje abantu sebegangile phandle lapha.* (It was our culture to greet people but now children should not greet, strangers/people are now evil) – village head Tohwe.
- e *Njengemota sibatshela ukuthi ingama libaleke ngoba sokulabosidzura.* (We tell them to run away when a car stops for them because there are kidnappers out there) – parent Zinyangeni.
- f *Umntwana udla ngakibo, angahamba esidla nje uyakhukhumala isisu vele.* (A child eats at home, if they get food from strangers their stomach will expand) – parent Nkayi centre.
- g *Impahla yangaphansi kayitshengiswa abafana iyanyamalala khonapho nje.* (Girls should not show their underwear to boys as it will disappear the moment they do that) – parent Mthetshaneni.

4.2.3 Findings on new threats and taboos for the boy child and men

Some taboos were identified as having deterrent effects on boys and men as far as abusing girls is concerned, and some are aimed at making sure boys take care of their sisters. Participants gave new taboos aimed at encouraging responsible boys and men and some of these views are represented below:

- a *Ungalala lesihlobo uzazala izilima.* (If you have sex with your relative you will have disabled children) – student Mpumelelo.
- b *Amadoda asekwazi ukuthi ukukhombisa iuniform nje lijele loba ungenzanga lutho.* (Men now know that proposing to a girl in school uniform means prison even if they do not go further than that) – parent Zinyangeni.
- c *Ungalunguza amankazana siyakubona ngeshowera.* (If you peep under girls' skirts we will see you by an abscess on your eyelids) – student Nkayi High.
- d *Mina umama wangitshela ukuthi ngingatshiya usisi emuva uzantshontshwa, njalo izigebenga zamakhombi ziyantshontsha abantu ziqume amakhanda ziyethengisa eGoli.* (My mother told me that if I leave my sister behind she will be stolen, and it is true these kombi people cut off people's heads and sell them in South Africa) – student Mdengelele.
- e *Sizwa kuthiwa singabamba amabele amankazana sizacina singasazali.* (We are told that if we touch girls' breasts we will end up infertile) – student Nkayi High.

4.2.4 Findings on modern children's general fears

The creation of taboo exploits fear and students were engaged in discussions on their modern fears. The main fears had to do with uncertainties of the future such as employment, expulsion from school and work, failure and poverty. They also highlighted the fear of sexually transmitted diseases, accidents, horror movies and ideas incorporating vampires and Satanism. Girls indicated that they were worried about physical deformities to their bodies due to aging or health problems. Below are some of the fears highlighted by students:

- a *Ukuswela umsebenzi sengidlalise isikhathi ngifunda ngingayi eGoli kuyethusa, kumbe ngiwuthole besengixotshwa. Ukudubeka lendlala kubuhlungu phela.* (It is scary not to get a job after all this time in school; imagine, I could have opted to go to South Africa! I also fear getting a job and then getting fired. I also think poverty and hunger are painful experiences) – student Mdengelele.
- b *Mina ngesaba ukuxotshwa eskolo lokufeyila ngoba ukuphinda kubuhlungu.* (I fear being expelled from school and failing because repeating is painful) – student Tohwe.

- c *Thina njengamankazana sihlezi sisesaba ukubayizidudla, amaspots ebusweni, amastretch marks, ukutshwabhana kanye lokuphela inwele ziqamuka kumbe ihair line.* (As girls we are always afraid of getting fat/obese, having facial spots, stretch marks, wrinkles, breaking hair and reclining hairline) – student Hlangabeza.
- d *Ukungazali lokungabilemizwa kubi emadodeni nxa ngibona.* (I think infertility and impotence are stressful in men) – student Nkayi High.
- e *Ama STI le HIV lezo keziyethusa ubusufaka lengozi zemota.* (STIs and HIV are really scary, I also fear car accidents) – student Mpumelelo.
- f *Mina ngethuswa ngama horror movies, Halloween, amavampire lamasatanist ngingakubona vele ngeke ngilale.* (I am scared of horror movies, Halloween, vampires and Satanists, if I watch these I cannot sleep) – student Hlangabeza.

5. Discussion

The discussion of findings is also themed according to the research questions. It starts by discussing taboo vehicles and the need to adapt urbanity in Ndebele taboo vehicles. It then moves on to discuss Ndebele taboos and their interaction with modern rights and freedoms. The last part discusses new Ndebele taboos and modern fears.

Adapting urbanity into Ndebele taboos

Ndebele taboos are laden with elements of the material and social culture; some of these belong to the past, before the advent of urbanisation and the modern environment. Vehicles used to formulate Ndebele taboos were taken from a pre-colonial Ndebele civilisation, yet today Ndebele culture has changed to embrace a more Western material culture. The elements from the past or rural life are fast becoming less popular compared to their urban equivalents; this is a motivation for Ndebele taboos to accommodate urbanity if they are to be effective in child development. It cannot be over-emphasised that Ndebele taboos develop a holistic child and groom the child to be a better citizen, but there is a need to use what the child understands for effective taboo communication.

Knowledge and memory are important in the performance of culture. McCarthy (1998:158) opines that, 'culture is to society what memory is to individuals'. Culture is the collective memory of a people and it is through it that they remember their identity. While identity can be shaped by cultural memory, there are individual elements of the culture that can be forgotten over time. Ndlovu (2010:78) avers that, 'It is obvious that the Ndebele way of life has changed; they do not use the same tools, utensils and weapons as did the Ndebele of earlier times. Their clothing, communication and work have changed'. The change in culture should amount to a change in concepts used to express taboo maxims. Some Ndebele taboos have concepts that are difficult to be understood by urban children, and as a result urban children are left out in the IKS of child development found in the Ndebele taboo system. Some of these taboos highlighted by parents for example are; '*ungahamba nyovane unyoko uzangena eqhageni* (If you walk backwards your mother will get into a calabash), *kuyazila ukudlela enkezweni* (It is taboo to eat from a traditional dishing spoon), *ungahlala phezu kwengiga uzafelwa ngumkakho* (If you sit on a mortar your spouse will die when you marry), *ungahlala endleleni uzamila amathumba* (If you sit on the road you will grow boils), *ungachamela eziko uzachama igazi* (If you urinate on the fireplace you will urinate blood), *ungachamela esizibeni uzachama igazi* (If you urinate into a pool of water you will urinate blood). Some of the vehicles used in the formulation of these taboos are from the past and many children do not know them and this creates the impression that taboos belong to the past, yet they are still applicable to child development today.

Traditional concepts were given their urban equivalents and both were tested on Nkayi urban and rural youth for familiarity. Table 2 below, an extract from Table 1, gives the familiarity

test results that were recorded between Hlangabeza High school representing urban children and Mdengelele Secondary school representing rural children.

Table 2 Traditional Ndebele taboo concepts and their urban equivalents: familiarity tests on Nkayi urban and rural youth

Traditional Ndebele concept	Urban related concept	Traditional concept familiarity – Mdengelele	Urban equivalent familiarity – Mdengelele	Traditional concept familiarity – Hlangabeza	Urban equivalent familiarity – Hlangabeza
iqhaga	Jug	6	10	3	10
inkezo	Spoon	3	10	0	10
ingiga	bread bin	10	2	6	10
ithumba	cancer	10	10	7	10
Iziko	stove	10	10	6	10
Isiziba	swimming pool	10	6	7	10

It is evident from the student respondents that some concepts are losing popularity even in rural areas, because people no longer use some of these traditional concepts. While the youth in both urban and rural Nkayi believed in the power of taboos in their development, some were not familiar with some concepts used in the taboos. Parents also concurred in section 4 that some of the traditional concepts in taboos were no longer used even in rural areas, and there is a need to revise some taboos to cater for urban youth so that there is effective child development in urban areas too through Ndebele taboos. Traditional concepts such as *iqhaga* and *inkezo* are not common anymore and there is a need to adapt to the modern social environment so that children can understand taboos and benefit from their child development potential. Bielawski (1990:8) avers that, 'Indigenous knowledge is not static, an unchanging artefact of a former life-way. It has been adapting to the contemporary world since contact with "others" began, and it will continue to change. Western science in the north is also beginning to change in response to contact with indigenous knowledge'. Ndebele people as represented by Nkayi youth and parents have started to appreciate the need to adapt Ndebele taboos to the modern times so that children of the modern times can benefit from Ndebele taboos. Urban utensils, tools and gadgets need to be included in Ndebele taboos in a way that does not do away with the traditional ones, creating urban equivalents for the benefit of urban and some rural children.

Motivation to de-taboo for contemporary child development

The taboo system has been subjected to criticism especially in the West as a system that employs fear in a world where people seek to be freed from fear. However, contrary to the claims that taboos are intimidating and instil fear, they are in fact a mechanism of controlling and developing human behaviour. Wrongs and dangerous behaviour have their punishments in law and even the dominant Christian religion in Africa has serious taboos that are punishable by future burning in some cases. It is important, however, to realise that the world has developed institutions and social concepts that conflict with some Ndebele taboos and there is a need for a system whereby Ndebele taboos accommodate these modern concepts in child development. This paper introduces the concept of de-tabooing (to remove the taboo associated with a topic) as part of an adaptation to modernity in the child development agenda. Society has changed and most of the change has been taking place while aspects of African tradition such as taboos were

sidelined by Western ways; they had no time to adjust to the modern environment. There is a need to blend them into the new social order.

There are some Ndebele taboos that need to be adapted by elimination to give way to conflicting concepts. The key conflicting concepts are education, health education, child abuse, human and gender equality discourses. Modern society has taken the character of the West and dangers to children have increased. Individualism also reduces the number of adults responsible for children in today's society. In modern society children are in more danger from humans than non-human things. The Legal Resources Foundation (2014:6) reveals that children have protection rights and have to be protected from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and cruelty. In the majority of cases children have to be protected from harm by human beings. One of the conflicting concepts is modern human rights. Garner (2011:361) defines human rights as; 'the freedoms, immunities, and benefits that, according to modern values all human beings should be able to claim as a matter of right in the society in which they live'. Modern values have created a rift between rights and some Ndebele taboos and there is need to de-taboo so that the system is in sync with modern values. Taboos as IKS should not be divorced from people's experiences. Agrawal (1995:4) has argued that 'if Western science is to be condemned for being non-responsive to local demands, and divorced from people's lives, then centralised storage and management of indigenous knowledge lays itself open to the same criticism'. Ndebele taboos cannot be managed outside other social movements and transformations. Table 3 below gives some Ndebele taboos from data that need to be de-tabooed so as to fit into modern transformations.

Table 3 Some Ndebele taboos that conflict modern social transformations in child development	
Ndebele taboo	Conflicting modern transformations
Children should not talk about sex	If children do not talk about sex they are prone to sexual abuse. They are taught about sex and sexuality at school or anywhere.
Homosexuality is taboo	It is now a matter of human rights; tabooing it is a form of segregation.
It is taboo to wear clothes of the opposite sex	In modern times women for example wear men's clothes for sports and other jobs. Men also wear dress-like gowns for tasks such as priesthood and graduation.
It is taboo for a man to witness childbirth	Today there are male midwives. Some couples prefer to be together during childbirth and modernity condones this.
It is taboo for a woman to lead men	Modern people believe in equal rights. Many women are today in leadership positions, in churches, organisations and even as presidents of states.
It is taboo for children to attend funerals.	It is the child's right to pay last respects to departed loved ones.
It is taboo for a girl in her monthly period to be in public.	Today there is sanitarywear that enables this. It is gender segregation to do so. They cannot be absent from school.
It is taboo for children to eat eggs	It violates children's rights and nutrition.

Society has transformed to include human rights, women's rights, children's rights, reproductive health education, and schooling. Some Ndebele taboos find themselves contradicting these modern transformations in society, and there is need to de-taboo them. Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005:9) argue that, 'Indigenous people throughout the world have sustained their unique worldviews and associated knowledge systems for millennia, even when undergoing major social upheavals as a result of transformative forces beyond their control'. Mangena and Ndlovu (2014:661) have averred that, 'in African culture, children are not normally viewed as autonomous beings'. However, children's rights advocates create situations that almost treat children as autonomous beings with rights and responsibilities. There is nothing wrong in encouraging children not to eat eggs as they have health risks for children and when children eat tasty foods like eggs they may not like to eat other foods that are good for their physical development. Chakona and Shackleton (2019) allude to the dangers of obesity from eating too much protein by children and pregnant women. Parents indicated in the data that many children tend to steal eggs, so if they do not know how eggs taste they cannot be tempted to steal them and they develop characterwise in the process. Homosexuality is a contested concept in Zimbabwe, but it has been identified as a matter of human rights in the world and to develop the social tolerance in children such a taboo is best de-tabooed.

Sex and sexuality are tabooed elements in Ndebele culture and children are expected to desist from engaging in sexual activity and sex talk. Terms for reproductive organs and processes are taboo words, yet modern society has created situations where these are unavoidable. Thody (1997:07) observes, 'Even on the British Broadcasting Corporation, it would be very difficult to find an 8-year-old child in the United States or in the United Kingdom who had not been exposed to discussions in the media about adultery, AIDS, contraception, homosexuality, lesbianism, menstruation, oral sex, the sexual abuse of children and venereal disease'. All these topics are taboo in Ndebele culture but there is a need to expose children to such topics, for developmental and education purposes. Children's rights are there to protect children just like taboos, but rights rely on the power of information. In the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child Part 1 Article 2 of September 2 1990, a child is entitled to special care and assistance, the child by reason of physical and mental immaturity needs special safeguards, and taboos offer these.

Gender equality is a modern value that should be included in child development. Taboos that discriminate between boys and girls need to be de-tabooed to allow equal social development. While discussants were of the opinion that it is taboo for boys to cook and girls to herd cattle in Ndebele culture, today for example, many chefs in restaurants are male. Boys need to be psychologically trained to accept this from an early stage. The information age demands that children be given information for their development and protection, and this includes information on sex and sexuality. Mangena and Ndlovu (2014:665) have explained that children have the right to know that which violates them and this includes their sexual rights. Education, advancements in technology and disease information demands that children be exposed to sex knowledge and sexual talk; taboos can regulate their exposure to sex information but they may not bar it altogether.

Motivation for new taboos to bridge the modern child development gap

Individualism, globalisation, rights, education and other social transformations in society today have complicated Ndebele life especially in urban centres. The transformations have created new and more dangers to child development than were regulated by traditional Ndebele taboos. There is a need to be innovative and transformative with Ndebele taboos; Ndebele society has done this as a response to social upheavals. The communal Ndebele society was a closed one that operated almost as a family unit; all adults in the community were entrusted with child

development and protection as a matter of religious duty. However, modern Ndebele society typifies Western individualism and children are left with few people to care for them. This increases the risk of physical and psychological danger. Data from interviews and discussions in Section 4.2 indicate that the Ndebele taboo system has already started to incorporate new problems and fears in formulating new taboos, a sign that IKS is not a static former life structure but a dependable science in modern child development.

While some elements of culture have been passed on from past Ndebele culture there are some concepts that belong to modernity; the taboo system has to moderate these as well. McCarthy (1998:156) avers that, 'culture may be defined in various ways, depending on the purpose of the analysis and the problem. The unifying interest of anthropology as a whole is in the transmission of social culture (institutions and ritual), material culture (artefacts and skills) and mental culture (mentifacts and conventions) from one generation to another.' Taboos are part of the mentifacts that have to be passed on in a manner that enables them to function in a transformed culture. Parents in Nkayi noted with concern that modern ways are not working in the ultimate character development of the child. They noted for example that children are told that to avoid sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy they can use condoms, but this encourages them to engage in sex prematurely. The parents identified modern problems that need new taboos for regulation as, among others: drug abuse, alcohol abuse, tobacco, sugar daddies/mummies, premarital sex, pornography, getting lifts from strangers, crossing red robots, not exercising, wearing revealing clothes and spending too much time on social media. Children today are in more danger from the identified social ills than from jumping fire and walking backwards. There is a need for new Ndebele taboos that prohibit such behaviour and have modern taboo repercussions for violating them. Parents also indicated in the data that rural children develop better than their urban counterparts due to the function of the taboo system, and they believe that if the social welfare department used taboos it could give better child care and development to children. Parents also use the withdrawal of privileges in cases of misbehaviour by children, for example telling a child that no toys will be bought if they misbehave. This is some form of modern taboo.

Taboos are a part of oral literature which has been changing over time, especially as affected and influenced by the colonial culture. Nyembezi (1963:1) notes a similar trend in Zulu proverbs, 'The proverbs in use are not confined, however, to the old expressions, because we may clearly discern some proverbs which must have come into the language in fairly recent times, for instance, the expression, *wahambis'okwejuba likaNoah* (he went like Noah's dove)'. Just like the new proverbs, there are new taboos that the researcher got from Nkayi parents and students that have been formulated to be compliant with modern demands of girl child development. Table 4 below gives some of the new taboos for girl child development from the data.

Table 4 New Ndebele taboos for girl child development	
No	New taboo for girl child development
1.	If you look at the face of a stranger you will become blind – this encourages girls to shun tempting situations with male strangers.
2.	If a man touches your breasts they will fall down – this helps girls to remain chaste and resist sexual advances.
3.	If you walk alone in the bush you will not grow breasts – this is to protect especially rural girls from abuse in the bushes.
4.	If you greet everyone on your way you will get lost – greeting creates a platform for dialogue that can lead to luring girls to abuse.

5.	If you get a lift from unknown people in cars you will be beheaded – this is to protect children from being kidnapped.
6.	If you eat food from strangers your stomach will grow big – food is commonly used as bait for young girls who are later abused.
7.	If you show your underpants to boys they will get torn – this grooms girls and keeps boys and men away from temptation.

In the new taboos girls are groomed to be ladies and respect their bodies and sexuality. They are also groomed to be responsible women who do not seek to expose themselves to danger or be a temptation to other people. There are some new taboos that seek to develop boy children that were given by the Nkayi community in the data and some of these are actually directed to adults who may want to exploit children. Table 5 below gives some of the new taboos for the development of boy children from the data.

Table 5 New Ndebele taboos for boy child development	
No	New Ndebele taboo for boy child development
1.	If you have sex with your relative your child will be crippled – this discourages boys from having sex with relatives, especially now that many families live with orphaned children.
2.	If you proposition a schoolgirl you will die in jail – this is a threat that is directed at adult men and it protects schoolgirls from sexual abuse.
3.	If you peep in a girl's skirt you will have sore eyes – this is to discourage boys from naughty behaviour that may motivate them to abuse girls.
4.	If you leave your sister behind she will be stolen – this encourages boys to take care of their sisters especially after school as girls are more vulnerable than boys.
5.	If you touch a girl's breasts you will be impotent – by discouraging boys in this way they are kept away from pre-marital sex.

Both boys and girls are supposed to be cared for in a way that makes them develop into good citizens for the good of society and Ndebele taboos create a platform for this development. While the West and its colonisation agenda created new problems for the Ndebele, they are adapting to the new social order by creating new taboos for the new dangers and social ills. Hansen and Van Fleet (2003:03) concur with the adaptive nature of IKS when they define it as, 'Information that people in a given community, based on experience and adaptation to a local culture and environment, have developed over time, and continue to develop. This knowledge is used to sustain the community and its culture and to maintain genetic resources necessary for the continued survival of the community'. The Ndebele community is already being sustained by the new Ndebele child development taboos, and other cultures the world over can benefit from this IKS.

The taboo system relies on the religious beliefs of the community. Most Ndebele communities are now into Christianity, which like Ndebele traditional religion, employs fear of the unknown to regulate society. As observed, the new taboos use new dangers and fears to deter children from engaging in behaviour that compromises their development. Society today has new fears which can be harnessed to create new taboos. The modern era has more fears that can be used to create new taboos for the benefit of especially urban children. Table 6 below gives lists of traditional fears in Ndebele taboos and modern fears indicated by Nkayi students. These modern fears can be utilised to produce a new set of taboos.

Table 6 Comparison of traditional fears and modern fears from Nkayi students	
Ndebele taboo repercussions	Possible modern repercussions
death, barrenness, death of spouse, death of loved ones, boils, cracked feet, urinating blood, lightning	Unemployment, expulsion from school/work, arrest, failure at school, repeating a year at school, poverty, stretch marks, facial spots, wrinkles, loss of hair, low libido, HIV/AIDS, road accidents, Halloween, vampires, devil

Physical and mental threats are used the world over to control human behaviour; the taboo system is built on these threats. In the olden days and in some rural areas today children are cared for and developed using physiological and supernatural threats which they adhere to and develop out of danger. The dangers have changed in modern society and it is prudent for Ndebele taboos to transform and incorporate these new threats and fears so that children can be regulated by what they know. Urban children for example will be aware of the danger of stretch marks more than the one of urinating blood or lightning and for that reason meaningful urban child development through Ndebele taboos should include new fears.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

African communities have always given special care to child development; institutions of educating and grooming children were sacred. The gods worked together with men to develop children in a way that pleased the community and the gods. The taboo system is one element of Ndebele IKS that was and continues to be used in child development, yet society has changed from one that was regulated by the old Ndebele taboos. It is the concern of IKS and the Afrocentric agenda to ensure that African IKS is brought to the centre of development and adapted to the new environment. Ndebele taboos are not a diabolic system that violates any rights; they are a demonised system, yet they can be of great use in child development today. Christianity itself employs the fear of the devil and hell as repercussions to moderate society, and this quality can be explored to create more Traditional African religion and Christianity-inclined Ndebele taboos. There are some taboos that contain older concepts, yet children are familiar with later developments. In such cases there is a need to incorporate the new developments in the script of Ndebele taboos to cater for urban children. There are some Ndebele taboos that have been overtaken by the Westernisation of society, such that they may be seen to contradict prevailing social values. In such cases there is a reason to de-taboo affected Ndebele taboos so that they are modernity compliant. The Nkayi community exhibited IKS transformation by coming up with new taboos for child protection and development. There are several modern fears that can be adapted into the Ndebele taboo system to regulate urbanites and develop children to be

better global citizens. The findings of the study are important for policy makers on child upbringing and care such as educators, social workers, psychologists, rights activists, parents and religious organisations. There is a need to situate taboos within modern discourses on child development and care so that they are aligned to modernity yet still retain their IKS value. The study established dissonance between Ndebele taboos and some modern rights, so there is a need for further research into the implications and effects of modern rights on African taboos. Realising that the majority of Africans, especially in Zimbabwe are now Christian, it is also recommended that research be done on African taboos and Christianity as the base religion.

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