

# The African Philosophy of “*Ubuntu*” and Correctional Education in South Africa: A case study

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## **Abstract**

The South African history and circumstances have resulted in many families in South Africa living on the edge of survival. Many young people who break the law have no basic education for employment and many have no source of livelihood and thus cannot make ends meet. While “*prison*” inmates have wronged other citizens through crimes, the African philosophy of “*Ubuntu*” (forgiveness and love) reflected in this article addresses the love and forgiveness values. The young and adult offenders are offered correctional education meant to equip them with knowledge and skills to show that, based on *Ubuntu*, they are forgiven and equipped with skills for livelihood. The article interrogates their perceptions on “*prison*” curriculum or correctional education offered in South African correctional centres, based on the African indigenisation principles. In establishing what curriculum issues are addressed through teaching and learning activities, the study used the qualitative research method to interview 9 inmates participating in formal, non-formal and informal correctional programmes offered in the three correctional facilities in Pretoria, South Africa. Underpinning the study is the “*Ubuntu*” ecological systems theory on the effectiveness of the indigenised curriculum practices for African and community-based needs. While the majority of offenders attach value to the correctional education offered, some believe the needs-based curriculum must emanate from their vocational and employment-based prerequisites. The study recommends that curriculum offered in correctional facilities in South Africa must promote the philosophy of “*Ubuntu*” to solve the African crime levels; thus, “*it takes the whole village to raise a child*”.

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### **Introduction**

In Africa, the rights and recourse for offenders pose a serious challenge due to developing economies that have limited resources. Issues discussed in this article embrace the African philosophy of “*Ubuntu*”, a concept used in many indigenous knowledge studies in Africa and beyond. This study is about nine offenders in three correctional facilities in South Africa. The study investigated their perceptions as offenders on the curriculum embedded in the formal, non-formal and informal forms of correctional education. The article uses a qualitative approach to research in which the nine offenders were selected and interviewed on their perceptions. Three correctional officials and three ex-offenders also participated in the study to share their views on the spirit of “*Ubuntu*” and how it can positively influence the curriculum issues and the perceptions of the offenders.

The African indigenous belief that “*it takes a whole village to raise a child*”, and in South Africa, that “*any child is my child*” came to prominence during the era of increasing political turmoil in South Africa prior to the dismantling of apartheid. Any deviant behaviour displayed by children in society is regarded as a social problem, not of an individual family or clan but of the whole community. In African contexts, communities traditionally collectively raised children, to uphold the values of *Ubuntu* or *botho*. Lately, individualism where people mind their own business without any regard for what happens with their neighbour has become more evident. For a long time now, the South African leadership in all structures has been appealing to communities to build social cohesion, revive *Ubuntu* and the spirit of the African renaissance. This call was made after the realisation that *Ubuntu* philosophy and values have become lip service in South African communities (Gumbo, 2014).

In the African context, family is the source of inspiration, socialisation and institution for moral and cultural beliefs. The absence of family units or dysfunctional families poses a challenge to normal, communal, collective spirit and crime-free indigenous societies (Indabawa & Mpofu, 2006). The *Ubuntu* philosophy and indigenisation are highly regarded as virtues, and their absence culminates in disorderly and crime-riddled societies. This section, amongst other issues, raises the argument of whether the time has come for revisiting the African philosophies and values of *Ubuntu* in Africa.

Ntseane (2011: 309) writes that the embodiment of the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* epitomises the collective worldview, cultural and spirituality, shared orientation, collective responsibility and collective empowerment: “*Motho ke motho ka batho*” (a person is a person by the people). The spirit of collectivism is what *Ubuntu* values are about. The African people have similar histories that were influenced by periods of colonialism, imperialism, social change and global capitalism, among others. These were experiences that made them fight for common cause and purpose. The high levels of crime in Africa are regarded as one of those social contemporary issues that make governments go back to the drawing board in curbing it. Policies and strategies are many and varied, and one of them that this article addresses is the spirit of *Ubuntu*. It is

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against this backdrop that this study interrogates the African philosophy and values of Ubuntu and how they can influence curriculum issues in correctional education.

This study uses the social theory on the effectiveness of the indigenised curriculum practices for Africa, with particular emphasis on correctional education. The study concludes that curriculum offered in correctional facilities in South Africa must promote the philosophy of “*Ubuntu*” to solve the African crime levels; thus, “*it takes the whole village to raise a child*”.

### **Background to the study**

Collective measures to alleviate poverty in Africa have been pronounced in many African forums, and measures against crime have been regarded as top of the agenda in forums like the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Development in Africa (NEPAD). In 2002, African countries converged in Burkina Faso. The plan of action for Africa, the Ouagadougou Declaration, formulated some priority areas related to (correctional) education and its contribution to the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders. The declaration considers that literacy and skills training should be linked to employment opportunities of offenders in incarceration and after; that correctional education should embrace civic and social cohesion; that rehabilitation should provide social and psychological support with adequate professionals including educationists; and innovative strategies for reintegration of offenders into their society and communities should be explored, (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, 2002).

While the declaration supports some holistic approaches, the African philosophy and values of Africanism, collectivism, Ubuntu and communalism are strongly embraced in this article. Studies by Dissel (2000) and Muntingh (2001) show that developed countries have advanced systems to provide necessary services for pre-release parolees and other ex-convicts who need such interventions. Recently, the US Department of Justice (2014) released a statement on federal halfway houses and how they are required to boost treatment services for inmates prior to release. The statement made reference to how the effective use of halfway houses has shown significant positive results in reducing recidivism in the US. This report shows, however, that even developed countries are still testing the effectiveness of these interventions despite the fact that they have been used for a long time. This paper argues that developing countries like South Africa can benefit from these best practices, while also revisiting their own indigenous African ethos and the *Ubuntu*.

### **Problem statement**

There are eligible offenders who participate in various adult education programmes at formal, non-formal and informal activity levels as offered by Correctional Services in three correctional centres in South Africa. The problem this research sought to investigate was whether and how curriculum in correctional educational addresses a philosophy that helps offenders to feel the values of love and forgiveness (the *Ubuntu* values), and whether such values expressed through curriculum help in reducing recidivism, while giving offenders a second chance in life. Much of

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the literature on correctional discourse focuses on other areas like juvenile delinquencies, penology and criminological aspects, and few have gone in-depth into the educational aspects as they affect adults in correctional environments. This study thus contributes to the knowledge on adult education.

### **Research Questions**

This study addressed the following two questions:

- What are the perceptions of offenders regarding the spirit of *Ubuntu* and its contribution in correctional education programmes offered in the three Correctional Centres in South Africa?
- How are the African values of forgiveness and love (*Ubuntu*) understood and practised through correctional education curriculum in the three facilities?

### **Literature Review**

*Ubuntu* is a concept and a philosophy that existed for centuries in South Africa, in particular, and Africa in general. Many researchers have written and investigated the concept and have agreed on the basic principle of the definition of *Ubuntu* as alluding to universality or universalism, humanness, collectivism and African communalism. While the concept is defined at different levels for different purposes, this article discusses *Ubuntu* in the context of correctional education in South Africa, as a philosophy anchored in love and forgiveness. Letseka (2009:47) premised *Ubuntu* as particularly important to South Africa as it explains the “philosophical basis for a unique African socio-political and economic democratic order”. In his article, he cited other authors who blamed apartheid as an instrument that prevented social cohesion, hindered development and which was immoral – all characteristics that are diametrically opposed to *Ubuntu*. Rather the spirit of *Ubuntu* symbolises non-racialism, non-sexism, non-discrimination, and respect for freedom, human rights promotion and dignity of people, inter-dependence and a deep-rootedness of a collective community. *Ubuntu* is symbolic to humanness, personhood and morality of the society (Letseka, 2009).

Another definition by Chaplin (2006) defines the concept as used in this article thus: *Ubuntu* regards humanity as an integral part of the eco-systems that lead to communal responsibility to sustain life. A person with *Ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirms and respects others, and does not feel threatened by others’ strengths or abilities; because he or she recognises that we all belong to a greater whole. While offenders must pay for their deviant behavior and for having wronged other law-abiding citizens, it is normal to say they should be punished, locked up and the keys thrown away, they should rot in jail and the like, this study opines that love and forgiveness epitomises the spirit of African *Ubuntu* and are the values to be shared with offenders through correctional education. After punishing them, they should be given a second chance because they make up part of the eco-system as Chaplin (2006) and Romm and Quan-Baffour (2015) confirm.

Romm and Quan-Baffour (2015) state that *Ubuntu* as a philosophy should inspire training of adult teachers as a route to generating community enterprises. They claim that literacy education can develop the potential for the “humanisation” within social and economic life. In their article,

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they write, “In the context of South Africa, we consider practices for nurturing a variant of humanism called *Ubuntu*, variously translated as ‘a human being is a human being through the otherness of other human beings’”.

### **The ecosystems theory and the *Ubuntu* philosophy**

The study examines the eco-systems theory and addresses the four different tiers or layers of the theory and how they constitute the South African society. The four layers are the individual, the micro system; the meso-system, the exo-system and the macro system. Correctional services fit into the exo-system layer, the fourth layer. The ecological system posits that a person is a product of the systems within the society in which they live. This study intimates that when a society understands the dynamics of the eco-system, it will be able to address correctional education measures and other interventions rationally in addressing crime levels, curriculum and correctional education programmes in general. The layers of the eco-systems theory include defining and understanding the cultures, level of literacy, socialisation processes, attitudes, perceptions and new trends in value systems of society. It is through understanding of the dynamics and inter-relatedness of the five layers that stakeholders in correctional education can remain informed, and be able to interpret the imperatives therein.

The theory of eco-systems dates as far back as the 1970s. The theory helps adult education researchers and other stakeholders to understand why there are criminals in our society and how societies can be transformed to reduce the levels of crime through appropriate educational programmes and curriculum interventions that are contextual and relevant. Espoused by Bronfenbrenner (1977), it has since evolved and been applied in various disciplines and studies including education in general. However, few of them have specifically related the ecological systems theory to adult education in general, or to correctional education discourse in particular.

### **Micro-systems and family values**

The second layer of the eco-system is the microsystem which emphasises family as a social institution and values embedded in it. The ecological theory explains a typical society where family households provide the main social structure. It defines the family as a social institution and how each human being learns and develops originally within a family. The functions of the family as a social institution described by Calhoun, Light and Keller (1997) are that the family provides the fundamental human needs which are:

- For love and emotional security;
- To protect the young and the old;
- To place people in the social order;
- To regulate sexual behaviour; and
- To produce new generations.

It is within the micro-system layer of the eco-systems theory that a pattern of activities, social roles and interpersonal relations experienced by an individual are first developed. So too are values, attitudes and perceptions. Families are therefore critical in the socialisation processes.

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Levels of resilience in children are sometimes a result of how they were brought up: as the saying goes '*children learn what they live*'. Every individual is a product of a family as a social institution. The presence of these important functions grounded in the family institution plays a critical role in moulding law-abiding citizens, and their absence can lead to consequences where children grow up with no direction, no proper role-models, no family values and lack of respect for other human beings. This, however, does not imply that all children brought up in families with so-called good morals and values end up as good children. Children are unique. Even those from good backgrounds or from affluent families can end up against-the-law. Coming from good families alone is not enough to produce good citizens.

According to the National Planning Commission (2011), in the South African society in the past, families were conventional because then the definition was confined to a unit where there was a father, a mother and/or child(ren), but the contemporary definition of a family has been broadened to include the following as envisaged by the National Development Plan (National Planning Commission, 2011: 462): Family can be defined as a social group related by blood, marriage, adoption or affiliation. This definition allows for all forms of families, including single-headed families, cohabitation, multigenerational family, single-sex families and the nuclear family.

The Department of Correctional Services (DCS, 2005:38) further recognised the importance of all the four-tier systems of the ecological theory, by acknowledging that correction is a societal responsibility, where:

- a family is regarded as the basic building block of any healthy and prosperous community and nation;
- other social institutions and individuals in society have a role to play;
- the role of the state is to provide, through its various government departments and communities, with all its social institutions for the development of a correcting environment for children and the youth, (including Correctional Services Department).

There are other factors such as poverty and lack of education or illiteracy that contribute significantly to how people live their lives. Individuals, who are not able to access amenities in their households and communities, are mostly people with no income or employment opportunities. The situation inhibits their potential to fend for their families, leading to increased poverty levels. In South Africa, this is visible with many young and old people in the streets in every town. They are mostly men and women who have missed out on educational opportunities. The DCS (2005) states that while offenders come from all sectors of the society, both the affluent and the marginalised, dysfunctional families and historical-political factors which range from poverty, hunger, unemployment, absent figures of authority and care, and a distorted value system to other general hardships, have largely contributed to criminality.

Due to historical, economic and structural poverty in South Africa, many children come from disenfranchised and dysfunctional families. Many children grow up without fathers and mothers. They grow up on their own or at best with grandparents and extended families who can only feed

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them, and sometimes have no shelter and no food. When the grandparents die, the children are left without anyone to care for them, and they become homeless and destitute. The advent of HIV and AIDS has compounded the problem to crisis levels. Even where there were both parents (father and mother), the scourge of the pandemic has sometimes wiped out families, households, villages and destroyed the whole fabric of the family institution. The increase in the numbers of street-children in any town and city in South Africa is overwhelming, to say the least. One way or the other, these children may end up committing crimes to survive and live. The South African government and other service providers, mostly the non-governmental organisations, provide shelter to accommodate homeless people especially children, but this is certainly is a temporary intervention at best.

Since the 1990s, South Africa has seen an increase in the phenomenon of teenage pregnancies. The problem is especially devastating at our schools where girls as young as 13 years become mothers. Some of these girls are orphans and vulnerable children who are also left behind by their parents who died from AIDS. These young teenage mothers are expected by society to raise these children. These are some of the factors in society that Bronfenbrenner (1977) referred to in his theory.

### **Values of forgiveness and love in *Ubuntu***

In Africa, the rights and recourse for offenders pose a serious challenge due to developing economies that have limited resources. The family institution and unit is a significant part of indigenous life and without that, South African society is in danger of losing its roots. However, efforts are made to ensure that offenders also get a share of their national benefits.

In the African context, family is the source of inspiration, socialisation and institution for moral and cultural beliefs. The absence of family units or dysfunctional families poses a challenge to normal, communal, collective spirit and crime-free indigenous societies (Indabawa & Mpofu, 2006). The *Ubuntu* philosophy and indigenisation are highly regarded as virtues, and their absence culminates in disorderly and crime-riddled societies. This article raises the issue on whether the time has come for revisiting the African philosophies and values of *Ubuntu* in Africa, where love and forgiveness reign, whilst upholding good moral, virtues, principles and etiquette. In the context of correctional education, the two values of forgiveness and love must be shown by community members in support of the offenders. The values must be shown by those around them during their incarceration and those preparing them for reintegration. The values must be embraced by all members of the societies.

### **“*Africanisation*” and Indigenisation of Correctional Curriculum**

Curriculum issues continue to spark debate in all countries, and more so in African countries. Africans have begun to interrogate how curriculum especially in institutions of higher education should contribute towards the Africanisation of development. Institutions such as the University of South Africa (UNISA), according to Prinsloo (2010), are repositioning themselves to meet

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this complex and challenging demand in re-evaluating their curricula. With reference to UNISA's 2007 Strategic Plan, Prinsloo (2010) highlighted four dimensions that the institution has embarked upon. This article focuses on the two of the four dimensions:

- The quest for an African identity and culture; and
- The development of African curricula.

The Department of Correctional Services offers non-formal and informal educational programmes to offenders where their identity as human beings, as Africans and as part of a broader society, is promoted through some of the main educational activities. It is envisaged that more could be done in this area to strengthen what has already been started and become more engrained in re-developing the cultural identity of offenders through correctional educational programmes. The context of African curriculum in institutions of higher education as echoed in Prinsloo (2010) and UNISA (2007) is fully supported by this research article. South African curriculum issues should address serious developmental and social agendas that were not considered when the country became democratic some 21 years ago. For example, xenophobia, as revealed in xenophobic attacks that occurred in 2008 and recurring in 2015 should be addressed as part of the broader curriculum component in every educational endeavour.

### **Curriculum issues in South African Correctional Education**

The SMR (UN, 1977) provides that so far as practicable, the education of prisoners should be integrated with the educational system of the country so that after their release, they may continue their education without difficulty (UN, 1977). As an implementation measure, one of the claims made by the South African DCS is to tailor educational opportunities to meet an individual inmate's level of education, by using a needs-based approach to teaching and learning, and a people-centred model of human development and correctional services sentencing plan (CSSP) or strategy. In practice, these good intentions can be challenging and not so clear-cut on their implementation. Inmates participating in educational programmes are placed within the correctional centre educational programmes through aptitude and customised tests to determine their different levels from which to start (DCS, 2005). This is also done to assess the type of curriculum the department should follow. The curriculum addresses inmates' rehabilitation, reintegration and survival and poverty alleviation strategies. Hence they are placed in formal, non-formal and informal programmes.

Dissel (2000:165) acknowledges that "South African legal framework and policies provide better learning opportunities for offenders than most African countries such as Namibia, Mozambique, Uganda and Zimbabwe". While the Department of Correctional Services in South Africa was commended in the report as having better structured correctional education programmes with clearly stated objectives than other countries, this article intimates that more can be done if the African value of *Ubuntu* were to form part of the legal and policy frameworks. The report, as observed by Dissel (2000), further notes that most South African correctional centres have better facilities in educational provision for offenders, an indicator of success and a good story to tell in terms of fulfilling an educational mandate for its citizens. This study, however, regards the

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achievements as a tip of an iceberg. The study proposes that correctional institutions could do better if they took the African basics of child-rearing, basically the *Ubuntu* philosophy, into account in the correctional curriculum, which should, in turn, lead to self-sufficiency and self-reliance of offenders. These factors should reinforce curriculum content and its influence in alleviating or reducing crime and criminality. The study posits that the customisation of curriculum as claimed by the correctional services is still too rigid and not as accommodating as it should be. It does not equip offenders with requisite education and skills that empower them to better their livelihoods, resulting in high recidivism. This is said in light of Correctional Services being obligated to follow similar curricula determined by the national departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training. The formal curriculum is from ABET levels 1 – 4 which is the equivalent of Grades 6 – 9 in the mainstream educational system. In correctional services, another form of education is referred to as vocational, occupational and handicraft. Informal curriculum includes sports, recreation, arts and cultural activities (SRAC), life-skills and library (DCS, 2012).

Quan-Baffour and Zawada (2012) questioned whether the benefits of prison education were being realised in South Africa. They concluded that education empowers ex-inmates with the skills for employment, social cohesion and a smooth re-integration based on personal needs. This study takes the debate further by unpacking different forms of correctional education programmes – the formal, non-formal and informal educational programmes.

### **Formal Curriculum**

Of the 162 000 inmates in South African prisons in 2013, only 32 400 were enrolled in formal qualifications in three categories, namely adult basic education (ABET), tertiary and vocational education, (Jules-Macquet, 2014). This translates only 20% of offenders in formal education. This study observes this figure as extremely low. However, a recent article by Masondo (2014) shows some achievements of those enrolled in formal education as remarkable, for example, an inmate serving 20 years in Sun City Prison had traded ‘guns for books and exams’. This story among many provides a ray of hope for those who are willing to take formal education to higher levels. Formal education forms part of the mainstream school and university education where learners and students have to complete a certain number of years in basic, post-primary or secondary, high school and/or university certificate, diploma and degrees curricula (Quan-Baffour, 2011). Formal education is described as the process of teaching and learning provided, regulated and controlled by governments. This therefore means offenders in formal educational programmes include those in lower levels namely, ABET levels 1 – 4, Grade 12 and tertiary education follow a standard set curriculum. While correctional education is said to be highly integrated with mainstream education, the high unemployment rate, particularly amongst the youth and school-leavers leaves a lot to be desired in terms of whether the education is responsive to society’s needs or whether there is a balance between demand and supply. Seemingly, this article opines that South Africa needs to revisit the whole education system, including the correctional education system.

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### **Non-Formal Correctional Education Curriculum**

With only 20% of prisoners in formal education, the 80% majority in non-formal and informal programmes and those not participating in any form of educational programmes should be clearly accounted for. Dissel (2000) observed that most African countries focus on vocational training, education and spiritual development rather than on the formal education and psychosocial aspects and behavioural aspects of rehabilitation. The provision of education in many respects depends on availability of professional staff. The lack of qualified educators is one of the impeding factors, not only in South Africa, but worldwide.

Many scholars define non-formal education according to its uses, modes of delivery and how it suits certain contexts and situations. Nafukho, Amutabi and Otunga (2005: 6) say vocational skills training is offered by means of non-formal education. This includes skills such as masonry, drafting, food services, welding, brickmaking and horticulture; special services programmes include conflict/anger management, community reintegration, and victim education to mention a few (Bruyns & Nieuwenhuizen, 2003). One can conclude from the various scholars that correctional education covers a broad spectrum of activities, particularly at non-formal and informal education levels, and many offenders are gaining skills for employability during their incarceration and post-release.

Recently, Fellows (2013) reported that inmates in Kenya were being trained as paralegals by one of the non-governmental organisations there (*Kituo Cha Sheria*). With the majority of people accused of committing crime and facing courts without legal representation, the NGO rose to the occasion and filled the gap.

### **Informal Correctional Education Curriculum**

Fighting against these harsh realities for correctional services needs not only the provision of formal and non-formal, vocational educational programmes alone. Other informal adult education programmes that are seen as interventions include social and life-skills training to keep idle minds busy. In South Africa, the DCS organises programmes in sports, recreation, arts and cultural (SRAC) activities for inmates. Informal correctional education programmes include life-skills activities that embrace re-socialisation where offenders are provided with skills that help them to do introspection of their lives. The DCS envisages life-skills as a core programme that all offenders should go through. Life-skills education is crucial because correctional centres are harbouring many criminals with anger issues. If offenders leave the facilities without proper rehabilitation and reintegration through informal learning activities, they will find it easier to survive in prison rather than to struggle outside, often re-offending simply to go back to prison (Anderson, 2012; Correctional Services Portfolio Committee, 2002). Some of the recreational or informal training facilities that are catered for include sports such as soccer, cricket, rugby, card games, table tennis, boxing, chess, pool, volley ball, as well as library, needlework and hairdressing.

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Informal educational activities are regarded as pertinent in adult education and as an important feature in lifelong learning (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). Some of the life-skills training activities that McKay (1997) regarded as interventions that DCS should provide, alone and in partnership with other stakeholders are listed as follows:

- Sexuality education and HIV and AIDS prevention – with high incidence rate of the pandemic in correctional facilities coupled with sexual abuse and homosexuality, this programme is highly pertinent.
- Substance and drug abuse – drug trafficking in correctional facilities poses a serious challenge to the country. The programme is meant to address and rehabilitate those addicted and affected.
- Building self-esteem, values, processing emotions (anger and depression management, assertiveness training). Many offenders suffer depression and have anger issues and other social problems contributing to their low self-esteem hence committing crimes, sometimes heinous ones. Through life-skills, they are able to address them and become better persons.
- Criminal/anti/social/self-destructive activities – This programme helps offenders to realise their mistakes and take responsibility for their actions without being destructive to themselves and to other members of the society.
- Conflict resolution, democracy and civic training – Human rights involve being a responsible citizen. Offenders are taught about their human rights while they should also respect others' rights.
- Street-law and legal education, life-skills training, career and educational counselling, evaluation of economic alternatives to crime – legal issues are important for them particularly to know when they are abused and victimised.
- Evaluation of progress, fostering of personal responsibility, active involvement in decision-making, taking responsibility for own progress, fostering of leadership and community involvement.

McKay (1997: 41 & Johnson 2015:51)

A prime example of successful informal skills training is that of Mackenzie who spent years in incarceration for fraud. His chronicles (Mackenzie, 2013) do not indicate any involvement in formal education, but he has become a renowned international and national role-model and ex-convict motivational speaker who has inspired many offenders with his motivational-speaking, a skill acquired through informal life-skills training.

## **Methodological approaches**

A qualitative inquiry, according to Savin-Baden and Major (2013), Leedy and Ormrod (2014) and Chilisa and Preece (2005), is a research design that assumes a holistic perspective where the research problem is investigated and reported considering complex and multiple contexts in which the phenomenon occurs in a natural setting, that is the real world. The phenomena of correctional education and the *Ubuntu* philosophy discussed in this article are concepts within a complex prison setting subjected to many challenges and restrictions, where, unlike in schools,

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inmates are conducting an educational enterprise instead of focusing only on their incapacitation and their limited freedom and confinement. The prison environment is a challenging context and has multiple challenges for teaching and learning to happen. A case study of three correctional centres in Pretoria, in Gauteng Province in South Africa was selected and nine serving offenders, three correctional officials conducting educational programmes and one ex-convict who participated in the programmes while in incarceration. A total sample of 13 participants was purposively selected, and individual semi-structured interviews were used to collect data in the three correctional centres. Thematic, narrative and document methods were used to analyse how the curriculum issues in correctional education can be influenced or influence the philosophy of *Ubuntu*, and vice versa.

## **Findings and discussion**

The researcher interviewed three correctional officials who were educationists deployed to facilitate teaching and learning activities in the three centres. One male and two female officials were purposively selected to speak on three educational types – formal, non-formal and informal educational programmes. The officials' views on the curriculum offered in South African correctional centres varied as they themselves were not highly specific about what was offered, as long as offenders received what they called “free education” that most of them could not afford outside the precincts of prison. One official said:

Correctional Services is a department amongst other departments, and therefore part of a broader country's governance structures. For that reason, the department follows curricula that are offered at different levels by different institutions. There isn't much to say because our curriculum is part of a national curriculum as determined by the ministries of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training. There is no specific formal curriculum offered under the auspices of the Correctional Education, except with informal and non-formal education programmes.

One official added:

South Africa experienced a painful apartheid era that segregated education and curriculum along racial lines. The democratic dispensation has one curriculum for its people as a form of unity. Correctional education follows same curriculum from the first Outcomes-Based (OBE), Curriculum and Assessment Performance Standards (CAPS) and the current National Curriculum Statements (NCS). Inmates complete Grade 12 and like anyone else obtain their National School Certificate; some of them get exemption and qualify for tertiary education like any South African, where such institutions determine their curriculum.

An interview with one ex-convict for this study on curriculum revealed the profound benefits he gained while studying during his incarceration:

People tend to have false ideas about the education that is offered by the DCS and that is not okay. Had it not been for the DCS and the education they offered me, I would not be doing my Master's degree now. Their education is just as good as

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what is offered in mainstream schools; it is relevant and also prepares learners for the challenges faced in life.

On the aspects of how the philosophy of *Ubuntu* can be considered in designing curriculum in correctional education, the varied views from officials and the ex-convicts support what Prinsloo (2010) and UNISA's mission statement (2007) say about African curriculum derived from Africans' problems offering solutions to contextual and indigenous African issues. At tertiary formal level, African curriculum is highly possible where institutions value the contribution of indigenous and contextual practices in solving social educational issues.

The interviews with nine female and male youth offenders reflected that all nine detainees appreciated the efforts that Correctional Services and the Government of South Africa were doing in ensuring that they get second chance in life. Of the nine offenders in incarceration at the time of the study, only two (22%) said they could afford school fees and for their families could. This shows that the majority of offenders (78%) come from disadvantaged families and could not afford education outside the correctional walls. Of the nine offenders interviewed from the three centres for males, females and the youth, three (33%) were in formal education pursuing their tertiary education while also providing teaching and learning services for other inmates, earning monthly stipends for their basic necessities. The figure shows that 67% of inmates were in non-formal and informal education programmes or perhaps not taking any programmes at all. Asked why they opted to do them, the inmates stated that through non-formal activities, they would be able to sustain their livelihoods after incarceration. From the list of activities as outlined by McKay (1997 and Johnson 2015), there is a wide range of courses providing psycho-social support for inmates – anger management, life orientation lessons and many more within the informal and non-formal curriculum system. This includes adult literacy activities, and these are attended by those inmates from disadvantaged backgrounds. Asked on the philosophy of *Ubuntu* and African values in their respective communities, the offenders strongly urged that correctional education should not be an agenda for offenders alone, but communities and society should also be part of the correctional curriculum, where African philosophical values should be taught and re-taught.

One offender mentioned that strategies that have been used in other countries like the halfway houses, for rehabilitation and reintegration programmes should be established in South Africa, but adapted and modified to meet the African context and demands. In addition, he said such avenues could alleviate the overcrowding problem. In support of his idea, O'Neill, Mackenzie and Bierie (2007) affirmed that, in the US, boot-camps were used as a strategy to reduce the influx into the traditional centres. Perhaps South Africa should think of introducing more options particularly for rehabilitated and studying inmates. The Kenyan NGO, *Kituo Cha Sheria* found that inmates expressed a need for paralegal training, and the programme yielded best results that can be used as best practice, as observed by Fellows (2013).

In conclusion, seven (78%) of the nine offenders still in incarceration noted that enrolments in formal education programmes were not as high as those in non-formal education skills

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development programmes. This they attributed to the curriculum in artisan skills that provided them with employability and sustainable opportunities. The three officials said the offenders were aware that artisans with non-formal experience stood better chances of employment than those with no experience

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Whereas many offenders are appreciative of the support provided by the correctional officials, other supporting service providers, agencies and institutions of higher education in South Africa, offenders participating in correctional education are of the view that more could be done. They suggested integrated, holistic, multi-disciplinary, mainstreaming and cross-cutting approaches and strategies for an integrated criminal justice system should be applied, where all stakeholders are involved in assisting them. This study echoed similar sentiments that the implementation of long-term programmes and targets as already set out and mapped out by the National Development Plan: Vision 2030 (NPC, 2011) must be supported by a highly integrated national system to support all stakeholders in the correctional services domain. Commitment and political will from all stakeholders must be well-coordinated to ensure the long-term 2030 vision is reached in terms of the criminal justice system, in reducing crime and recidivism, while addressing the socio-economic conditions by equipping offenders with requisite skills and training for the future. Thus networking, collaboration and partnerships must be strengthened to work holistically towards the common goal of being proactive in addressing crime levels, rather than being reactive to the problem. Implementing a mandatory requirement for education for all criminals can help. This study therefore recommends that the Minister of Correctional Services declaration on mandatory education for all offenders be implemented in all correctional centres, including detention centres.

The Department of Correctional Services should also be innovative and be more zealous than it currently is in introducing needs-based and relevant training needs. For these reasons, this study considered that more could be done in exploring more innovations in curriculum, especially with regard to non-formal and informal correctional education avenues.

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