

Experiences of high school learners regarding Ubuntu education and training in South Africa



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Ubuntu is an ancient concept and a way of life among most African cultures. It describes the fundamental principles of living for African communities and is rooted in the values of reciprocal sharing. Ubuntu encompasses the whole community in contrast to the Western ideology of individualism and hence the need to sustain and transmit these values from one generation to the next. The study focused on exploring the experiences of high school learners regarding Ubuntu education and training in South Africa. The study was conducted in two selected high schools in the Greater Giyani Municipality of the Limpopo Province. A qualitative research approach and an exploratory, descriptive design were applied. A purposive sampling method was used to identify 15 learners from the two selected high schools for the Boot Camp. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted as a data collection method among the grade 10 and 11 learners. Trustworthiness and ethical consideration were ensured. The findings from the study revealed that learners shared different experiences during the Boot Camp. One of the experiences shared by the learners is the knowledge gained on applying the concept of the theology of the body to Ubuntu values. Internalisation of Ubuntu values forms an essential landmark in the individual's life, significantly young people growing up within African communities rooted in African culture.

Contribution: This study's findings will help educate young people about Ubuntu's philosophies and encourage them to disseminate information regarding Ubuntu within their respective schools and communities.

Keywords: Boot Camp; experiences; high school learners; knowledge; Ubuntu.

Introduction

Knowledge acquisition is an important asset that increases efficiency and productivity, as stated by Nansubuga and Munene (2020). Knowledge acquisition needs to be rooted in a philosophy to drive how the acquired knowledge is applied. Within African cultures, the Ubuntu philosophy is central to how indigenous communities live, hence the importance of transmitting such knowledge from one generation to the next. Ubuntu is a way of life for African indigenous people. It is an ancient African worldview that is based on the values of humanness, caring, sharing, respect and compassion, which ensures a happy and qualitative human community life in the spirit of family and hence the importance of instilling such values from one generation to the next (Letsika 2013; Takyi-Amoko & Assie-Lumumba 2018).

Maphalala (2017) further stated that Ubuntu is a way of life among African people. Ubuntu focuses on human relations, attending to the moral and spiritual consciousness of what it means to be a human and how to relate with others. In addition, the value systems are held in high esteem by most cultures and shape cultural beliefs and experiences. These values include fairness and justice, humanness, compassion, respect, honesty, cooperation and charity, duties and rights, and respect for human dignity and well-being (Maphalala 2017; Swanson 2007). Furthermore, Broodryk (2006) and Muwanga-Zake (2009) confirm Ubuntu as a communal way of life, the belief that society must run for the sake of all and requires cooperation, sharing and charity. The studies further indicated that Ubuntu is all about harmonious personal relationships and highlights the importance of agreements and living in harmony.

Africa is fast becoming a continent of young people, with a projection that by the year 2030, 75% of Africa's population will be under the age of 35 years (Odari 2020). With this knowledge, if the Ubuntu philosophy that defines the values of the older generations is not passed down to the upcoming generation, the Ubuntu values will be extinct (Luvalo 2019). The signs that Ubuntu values are disappearing from African communities can be seen in the moral degeneration in most

secondary schools and universities. Letsika (2013) emphasises the need for Ubuntu philosophy education to be exposed to the youth in schools and communities in South Africa. In support of this idea, Masolo (2010) and Letsika (2013) argue that educating young people about Ubuntu entails equipping them with attributes and dispositions that can enable them to live lives anchored in communal understandings of personhood and humanness, as these will eventually address social and cultural challenges in South Africa and the continent. In addition, education is not just about schooling but also is a process of transmitting the culture of a particular society from one generation to the other, thus reflecting on education and morality in Africa. The researchers further indicated that educating young people should entail exposing them to other cultures.

The concept of family among African indigenous people is far broader than in Western societies. Family within the African culture includes the members of extended families and friends. All these people see themselves as one and look out for each other by supporting and complementing their different talents for the good of society (Metz & Gaie 2010; Wellman & Gulia 2018). Kinship, which is highly valued in African culture, must be preserved because it is threatened by Western influence as a result of excessive media exposure and urbanisation, according to Mukuni (2021). Western influence affects the youth more than any other age group, as they are at a stage of development characterised by transformation in both the body and brain, which can affect them positively or negatively (Hu et al. 2018). At this stage, they are malleable and more exposed to their peers and share much information, which often challenges the status quo. Most of the youth within the selected villages are indulging in unhealthy practices such as drinking alcohol, drug abuse, uncontrolled behaviour at schools and within communities, and disrespect for property and rules, which is an indication that their lives are not rooted in the values of Ubuntu (Hlungwani et al. 2020). Reviving and instilling the values of Ubuntu in the youth require persistent exposure to the teachings of Ubuntu values. The researchers in this study grouped the learners of Greater Giyani Municipality in Limpopo in an Ubuntu Boot Camp to teach them the values of Ubuntu for three days. Therefore, the goal was to impart Ubuntu principles to the learners and foster their willingness to serve as ambassadors. Hence, this study aimed to explore and describe the experiences and perceptions of the high school learners from Greater Giyani Municipality, Limpopo Province, regarding Ubuntu Boot Camp education. Even though previous studies have explored the experiences and perceptions of Ubuntu values among adults, there are no known studies conducted among learners regarding the experiences of Ubuntu Boot Camp education and training in Limpopo Province, South Africa.

Research methodology

The research methodology for the study was qualitative, explorative, descriptive and contextual in nature, which was applied in a 3-day education and training Boot Camp. The

Boot Camp was conducted by the University of Pretoria, South African Research Chair Albertina Sisulu in collaboration with the University of Venda. The aim of the South African research chair, Albertina Sisulu, is to revive the values and philosophy of Ubuntu in the African communities in South Africa. Thirty participants were selected from the two selected high schools in the selected communities within the Greater Giyani Municipality of the Limpopo Province. The purposive sampling technique was used based on the following criteria: the learner must be in grade 10 or 11 and be among the top 15 learners in their class. The goal of choosing the top achievers was to find learners who could quickly understand Ubuntu values and impart them to other learners. Also, this was done to ensure continuity, as the learners still have 2–3 years in the selected schools. The education of the learners on Ubuntu values was done throughout the three days in three sessions. The training was held at Tshipise Forever Resort in Limpopo Province.

The participants were given a booklet that contained the programme and educational resources needed for the training. The main objective of the Boot Camp was to teach Ubuntu values and instil in the participants the desire to be Ubuntu ambassadors.

Each of the sessions lasted for approximately 4 h. The participants were taught what Ubuntu values are and their relationship to everyday life and education. At the end of each session, participants had a breakaway session to discuss what they had learned, and thereafter, feedback was given to the whole group. To make the camp interesting to the participants, they participated in a talent show related to Ubuntu and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). That is where they demonstrated their understanding of Ubuntu and SDGs through songs, poems and games. Different facilitators led the different sessions from the University of Venda and the University of Pretoria.

Towards the end of the third day of the Boot Camp, focus group discussions (FGDs) of 5–8 participants were conducted. The study was guided by the following research questions: (1) Explain what you learned from Ubuntu Boot Camp. (2) Describe how, as Ubuntu ambassadors, you will put Ubuntu values into practice in your communities and schools. One of the authors facilitated the FGDs, the other one was recording the discussions using a voice recorder while the third one was taking field notes. Participants were seated comfortably in one of the rooms, and all the participants were arranged in circle; no one was seated behind the other, and everyone was visible. Privacy was maintained by putting a note on the door marked 'do not disturb'. The facilitator made opening remarks by reassuring the participants and introducing the topic. The facilitator encouraged all participants to participate in setting the ground rules which included the following: respecting each other's views and addressing each other with respect, giving each other a chance to speak, and active participation by all. Therefore, a safe atmosphere was established.

Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw from the interview at any time if they did not feel comfortable. Participants were advised to use pseudo names during the FGDs to ensure anonymity. The researcher asked questions as listed in the interview guides for both groups, and the interviewer paraphrased and made a follow-up to deepen the discussions. Field notes were taken, and observations were made. Field notes were used to record non-verbal cues during the process of the interview and participants were informed that notes will be taken. The researcher realised the repetition of issues with no additional information which resulted to a point of saturation. When saturation was reached, the researcher and the assistants stopped the discussion and thanked the participants for their active participation during the FGDs.

Data saturation was reached after the third FGD when there was no new information from the discussion. However, FGD continued to the fourth group to confirm the data saturation. Therefore, a total of four FGDs of 5–8 participants were conducted. Data were analysed through open coding. The following ethical principles were adhered to: confidentiality, informed consent and voluntary participation. Trustworthiness was ensured through the criterion of credibility, transferability, conformability and dependability (Creswell 2014; Potter et al. 2017).

Ethical considerations

Approval received from the University of Venda Research Ethics Committee. FHS/21/PH/19/1310.

Results

Demographic characteristics

A total of four focus groups which consisted of 30 participants from the two selected high schools were conducted. Table 1 indicates the demographic characteristics of the participants involved in the FGDs. Out of 30 participants, 16 were female and 14 were male. The focus groups lasted between 1 h 30 min and 1 h 45 min. Their ages ranged from 15 years to 17 years, as shown in Table 1.

Presentation of results

The results are presented according to the themes, subthemes and categories, as they emerged from data obtained from the four FGDs with the participants. Transcribed data were read to get a sense of the whole. The meanings that emerged were grouped according to similarities with abbreviated codes. Thereafter, themes, subthemes and categories were

TABLE 1: Demographic characteristics of youth in the focus groups.

Focus group number	Total number of participants	Males	Females	Age ranges (years)
FGD1	7	3	5	15–18
FGD2	7	5	4	15–18
FGD3	8	3	3	15–18
FGD4	8	3	4	15–18
Total	30	14	16	-

FGD, Focus group discussion (followed by a number).

developed. Results were compared with those compiled by an independent coder. Table 2 shows the themes, subthemes and categories that emerged from the data.

Theme 1: Participants' expression of what they have learned at the Boot Camp

Participants shared different expressions of what they experienced during the 3 days of Boot Camp. They explained how they were introduced to the concept of 'theology of the body', which was said to have given them valuable information about respecting themselves and having boundaries they must always observe. They felt that the talk was helpful as it cautioned them about continuing to do things that are not acceptable, like engaging in sex before marriage. Participants also described how they gained knowledge about Ubuntu from the presenters and the activities they were involved in. From this theme, the following subthemes emerged: learning about the theology of the body and learning about Ubuntu.

Subtheme 1.1: Learning about the theology of the body

Participants expressed their interest in the topic, which aligned their thinking to their bodies being divine and needs to be used with care based on God's principles. It was evident from their descriptions that they needed a deeper engagement on the subject as they attest that they needed to understand their bodies from the biblical point of view.

From this subtheme, the following categories emerged:

TABLE 2: Themes, subthemes and categories.

Theme	Subtheme	Categories
1. Participants' expressions of what they have learned at the Boot Camp	1.1. Learning about the theology of the body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everything starts with me. • Have and observe boundaries. • Help in building self-confidence.
	1.2. Learning about Ubuntu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ubuntu is about knowing where you come from. • Ubuntu is about sharing. • It is about living harmoniously with other people. • Displaying actions that are rooted in Ubuntu values.
2. Participants' description of their Boot Camp experiences	2.1. Participants' lived experiences during the Boot Camp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiences related to living with other people. • Experiences related to caring. • Experienced connection to other people. • Experienced sharing of skills. • Ubuntu generosity of the organisers.
3. Participants' description of how they can apply Ubuntu	3.1. Application of Ubuntu in schools and/or communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create Ubuntu groups in our classes and other classes. • Positive Ubuntu role modelling. • Being Ubuntu ambassadors. • Development of fundraising skills.

Everything starts with me. Have and observe boundaries and help in building self-confidence.

Everything starts with me: Participants related how the presenter approached the topic by explaining that everything they do should start with them as individuals. They expressed how they always thought starting with them was associated with selfishness. However, from the presentation, they said that they have learned to start with themselves, as it was said that it is difficult to do an act to someone when it is difficult to do it for themselves. This is what the participants said:

‘Caring for self will enable me to care for others, one needs to love and respect the self so that that can be easily transferred to other people and live better with them.’ (P7, FG1, Female 17 years)

Another participant said:

‘I always thought that looking at myself before others were selfish, but from this boot camp, I’ve learned that one needs to start from self, then one gets to extend the gesture to other people, like first loving yourself before loving the others ... (laugh).’ (P4, FG3, Female 15 years)

Have and observe boundaries: Participants explained how they have gained much knowledge regarding respecting boundaries. This was said to be very important as it will make them avoid making mistakes. It was noted with concern that learners attributed not observing boundaries to peer pressure and did not want to take responsibility for their mistakes. The discussion on observing boundaries helped learners to realise how important it is to respect other people. Most participants were quiet during this discussion which indicated the extent to which the topic made them evaluate their conscience. This is what one of the participants said:

‘I’ve learned to always be aware of boundaries and be sensitive to the space of others, choosing words carefully and not hurt other people ... aah (laugh) especially girls no-bullying.’ (P1, FG2, Male 17 years)

The same participant continued to say:

‘I’ve learned to respect my boundaries, for example, not to do bad things because others are doing it.’ (P1, FG2, Male 17 years)

Help in building self-confidence: Participants attested to the fact that knowledge about the theology of the body will boost their confidence. This was said to be influenced by the knowledge that they received. They indicated that they could defend themselves and stand for what they believe is right, especially with their peers and/or in their relationships when they refuse to do certain things like having sex. The knowledge received will help them give reasons for not wanting to participate in wrongdoing. This is what some of the participants said:

‘You know ma’am ... sometimes we as girls we think that we should have sex because we have no rights to refuse, but this information will help boost my self-esteem and I can say no on things that I’m not willing to do.’ (P5, FG4, Female 18 years)

She continued to say:

‘As I live positively with others and affirm them it builds my confidence and the confidence of other people that I live with or interact with.’ (P5, FG4, Male 18 years)

Subtheme 1.2: Learning about Ubuntu

Learners were excited to describe their different experiences learning about Ubuntu and highlighted the different sections that stood out. Participants said they were taken aback because issues like where they come from were never considered linked to Ubuntu. Sharing was described as critical because one can only share when they have a love for other human beings. It was evident that learners made a realisation that Ubuntu was a way of life that they are expected to live by.

The following categories emanate from this subtheme: Ubuntu is about knowing where you come from; Ubuntu is about sharing; and display actions that are rooted in Ubuntu value.

Ubuntu is about knowing where you come from:

Participants described how they learned that Ubuntu is about knowing where they come from. They indicated that learning about their clan names was something they had never thought of especially concerning Ubuntu. Most participants indicated that when they get home, they will ask their parents and grandparents to teach them how to recite praise poems about their clans, which is their pride. It was also indicated that the presenter made them aware that what they do reflects their families, schools and communities, and this made them realise that whatever they do has an impact on those around them. These were supported by the following extracts:

‘You know we were not aware of the consequences of our actions. When we do something outside our home, we think it’s ok if our parents don’t know about it. Yooh!!! I’ve learned that I should police myself.’ (P3, FG1, Male 16 years)

‘It was indicated that one needs to know where one comes from as this gives one the understanding of who you are and who you represent. It also gives an individual a sense of belonging.’ (P6, FG 3, Female 17 years)

Ubuntu is about sharing: Sharing was said to be of utmost importance, and most participants resonated with this statement. They understood that sharing, including themselves, is an important value of Ubuntu. They described how selfishness was anti-Ubuntu and how sharing should start from school, at home, and in the communities where they live:

‘The presenter said that one needs to share as a person with ubuntu is never selfish, this can be shown by sharing a meal and the rooms during boot camp, I found myself having been put in the room with somebody I did not know, but we became friends, and I had forgotten my beach tongs, and my roommate had two and lent me, it felt good) A Xitsonga proverb says *vana va munhu va tsemelana nhloko ya njiya*.’ (P4, FG 2, Female 15 years)

It is about living harmoniously with other people: The participants said that they have been taught that Ubuntu involves living harmoniously with other people. They expressed how this teaching will bring changes to how they conduct themselves in their daily life. It was said that this calls for them to forgive others and always strive to make peace with other people. This is what one participant said:

'When I live with other people, I must always strive to create peace and consider their needs. I should always treat all people equally and avoid humiliating other people, which often ends up as bullying... Vumunhu [ubuntu] is about living with other people peacefully.' (P2, FG 3, Male 18 years)

Another participant said:

'I should not discriminate other children because of their disabilities, race, ethnic group, age or creed.' (P5, FG1, Female 16 years)

Display actions that are rooted in Ubuntu values: The participants felt that the Boot Camp has made them realise that as people who went through the Boot Camp, they have a responsibility to be Ubuntu ambassadors and good role models within their families, schools and communities. They described the importance of portraying good Ubuntu values in their own lives. They indicated that most of the time, they should teach others through their actions. This is what one participant said:

'As Ubuntu ambassadors, we should be role models and always display ubuntu principles because we should always practice what we preach, have listening skills, and always pay attention.' (P3, FG 4, Male 17 years)

Theme 2: Participants' description of their Boot Camp experience

The experiences of participants in a Boot Camp varied with similarities. They expressed gratitude to the organisers for having exposed them to something that they had never thought of. Most participants had never been outside their villages and hence they were grateful for being part of the Boot Camp. They described their experiences of living with people they had never met. They were astonished at the level of connectedness with people they had never met.

The following subtheme emerged from this theme: participants' lived experiences during the Boot Camp emanated as the only subtheme from this theme.

Subtheme 2.1: Participants' lived experiences during the Boot Camp

Participants narrated how they had lived the experience of Ubuntu during the 3-day Boot Camp. It was revealed from the data that all participants had a positive experience and felt that it was said to be a fulfilling way of life.

The following categories emerged from this subtheme: experiences related to living with other people; experiences related to caring; experienced connection to other people;

experienced sharing of skills; and Ubuntu generosity of the organisers.

Experiences related to living with other people: Most participants expressed how the Boot Camp exposed them to people they had never met. It was also said that it opened their eyes regarding living with other people rather than their family members. One category emerged from this subtheme, which was sharing a room with people that we have not met before, and this is what was said:

'When we were allocated rooms, I was uneasy because I was given a roommate that I was seeing for the first time. However, we instantly became friends, borrowed each other things that the other needed, and we were inseparable and even talked all the time.' (P5, FG1, Female 17 years)

Another participant said:

'I was living with housemates whom I have never met, made a new friend, and it was awesome.' (P2, FG3, Male 19 years)

Experiences related to caring: Participants expressed how they have experienced caring at the Boot Camp, which was from every facilitators and fellow learners. This was evidenced by the stories they shared. It was also indicated that when the learners were allocated rooms, they were scared as they did not know what to expect from strangers. Sharing of rooms was also expressed as a confirmation of caring as their belongings were safe as nobody lost their belongings. This is what the participants said:

'When we were traveling to the boot camp, I had a toothache, and I did not have painkillers, but fellow learners assisted me and gave me medication to relieve my pain, and in the end, I enjoyed my stay. The other day I fell, and the white lady at the lodge ran to my assistance and ensured that I'm ok.' (P5, FG2, Male 15 years)

Another participant said:

'No one ever stole others' belonging, people respected others' property.' (P3, FG4, Female 15 years)

Experienced connection to other people: Participants described how the teaching and learning arrangements and allocation of rooms have pushed them outside their comfort zones and forced them to work with other people who were strangers. The experience of working through scenarios was said to be the more effective and made them learn how to work or interact in a group and to work with other people in a group. They also expressed how they learned how to present and give feedback on their group work which was said to be fulfilling in the end. One participant said:

'I used to isolate myself and had a problem making friends, but since I came here, I'm more open and mix very well with others without being ashamed, this boot camp instilled something in me that I cannot explain ... eish (laugh) even at home they will be surprised by this change in me.' (P3, FG1, Female 16 years)

Experienced sharing of skills: Sharing of skills by participants is one of the things they said they have gained from the Boot Camp. Participants indicated that they had realised that each

of them had skills in which they excelled, including reciting poems, drama and singing. The participants also indicated that when it was time to swim, there were learners who could not swim, but those who knew how to swim made it a point to teach them and by the second day, they could swim confidently. This is what one of the participants said:

'Since I came here, I realised that all of us have different skills and those were shared to the benefit of all of us, like when we went swimming I did not know how to swim but somebody from the group taught me and now I can swim.' (P7, FG1, Male 16 years)

Another participant said:

'I have learned to share knowledge with other learners from another school as we were working in groups, which I never did before, and I realized that it is helpful.' (P6, FG3, Female 17 years)

Ubuntu generosity of the organisers: Almost all participants expressed gratitude to the organisers for the free trip. They indicated that they had never received such experience and hospitality for free, as they are all from underprivileged (low socioeconomic) families. They also describe the generosity of organisers in terms of giving them all the attention, love and respect, which is something they said they would cherish for the rest of their lives. This is what one of the participants said:

'In my life, I've never come across a person who could pay something for me, we came here, we are eating sleeping, and enjoying ourselves and has never paid a cent.' (P3, FG1, Male 18 years)

Theme 3: Participants' description of how they can apply Ubuntu

Participants described different ways in which they are going to apply Ubuntu in their daily lives. As ambassadors, they said they will establish groups at school and in their communities where they will share the information received at the Boot Camp. Positive role modelling was said to be another important way of teaching as people will learn by observing them. The following subthemes emerged from this theme: application of Ubuntu in schools and communities.

Subtheme 3.1: Application of Ubuntu in schools/ community

Participants described how they would apply to Ubuntu at their respective schools. They were enthusiastic and showed readiness to impart shared knowledge. They described how they would create groups and share information about Ubuntu. They were confident that the strategies that they were going to employ would make their schools Ubuntu model schools. The following categories emerged from this subtheme: create Ubuntu groups in our classes and other classes; sharing positive Ubuntu role modelling; being Ubuntu ambassadors; and development of fundraising skills.

Create Ubuntu groups in our classes and other classes: Participants shared ways they thought they would apply to

Ubuntu in their different schools. The learners whom their teachers accompanied felt that they were fortunate as the teachers would assist them with whatever they needed to implement Ubuntu programmes. Almost all participants agreed that there is a need to form groups in different classes, including cultural groups. This is what some of the participants said:

'I think we can talk to the teachers and try to create Ubuntu groups in each class, during free or life orientation periods, we could teach about this concept I think it can assist in spreading information.' (P4, FG3, Female 16 years)

Another participant said:

'I will go and form cultural groups with other students of different ethnic groups, we should teach each other's culture and home language. We must push one another.' (P2, FG1, Female 15 years)

Positive Ubuntu role modelling: Being exemplary was said to be one of the tools that participants could employ when applying the Ubuntu principles. It was indicated that they see this as being crucial, because if one of them is a negative role model, it is going to confuse their peers. It was emphasised that it is important to apply positive role modelling as Ubuntu ambassadors. This is what some of the participants said:

'I must be exemplary, I should practice what I preach, respect everyone and elders who are teachers, always try to discourage bullying among learners.' (P6, FG 2, Female 17 years)

'I will organize my friends to assist the elderly who live alone in their households, we will clean their houses. We can do this during school holidays or Mandela day.' (P2, FG1, Female 18 years)

Being Ubuntu ambassadors: Participants felt that as ambassadors, they could be a source of influence and information for the communities. This was said that there is a need and commitment to developing persuasion skills to get more ambassadors so that they do not tire. This is what some of the participants said:

'I think as an ambassador, I should be a source of inspiration and influence within my community. Respect and trust the people I work with within the community and always be available to help, share and love.' (P7, FG 1, Female 16 years)

'I will also teach my peers to show respect for the elderly, for example, not sharing with friends anything negative for example, what they saw when cleaning, Joh! There was lots of dirt under the bed.' (P4, FG 4, Female 16 years)

Development of fundraising skills: Participants felt that to aid needy or child-headed families, they needed to develop their fundraising skills. This was said to be a viable strategy to deal with problems they may encounter, like buying pads for girls. This is what one of the participants said:

'I think to help other people in need, we should try to raise funds to assist them, we can organize an event like casual days and games to raise such funds.' (P3, FG 1, Male 17 years)

Discussions

The findings from the study revealed that learners shared different experiences during the Boot Camp. One of the experiences shared by the learners is the knowledge gained on applying the concept of the theology of the body to Ubuntu values. The concept theology of the body was used to explain that the practice of Ubuntu values starts with loving oneself. Most of them stated that it was their first exposure to the concept of theology of the body when they described how they had heard of it and learned about it. Learners were fascinated by the knowledge that their body is divine and should be used with care based on God's principle. Cassaniti and Luhrmann (2014) reported similar findings in their study about the cultural kindling of spiritual experiences. Scholars have often discussed the concept of Ubuntu more to others than to self. However, at the Boot Camp, the young people understood that to practise Ubuntu, there is a need to appreciate the self. This is in line with the findings of Ahrenfeldt et al. (2018), that people who are religious and understand that their body is divine are less likely to engage in harmful practices to themselves and others. Participants indicated that they did not know the value of starting with themselves, until they were taught about it at the Boot Camp. They thought it was selfish to start with yourself. This can be loosely translated to 'love and care for yourself before you can love others'. You cannot love and respect others if you do not love yourself, for one cannot give what one does not have. Participants in this study further explained that they have gained sufficient knowledge regarding observing their boundaries, as this will make them avoid making mistakes and respect other people's spaces. Learners indicated that they would choose their words carefully and avoid hurting others. Makoba (2016) confirmed when he indicated that Ubuntu is not all about teaching respect to other people, but respecting yourself as well, as the environment surrounding them. The study further mentioned that Ubuntu is not only viewed as related to people as individuals or groups, but also in terms of exercising sustainable development methods. Gumbo (2014) and Letseka and Matlabe (2018) attest that an individual should perceive oneself as part of a collective in a community and emphasise the phrase 'no man is an island'.

In this study, participants learned that Ubuntu could be described differently. One of the ways includes knowing your roots (origins). The participants never thought that their origins could be connected to Ubuntu. They, therefore, acknowledged that Ubuntu is about knowing where you come from. Muchanyerei (2020) agrees and states that the family line is preserved despite migration to other countries through the concept of Ubuntu. Participants indicated that if a person knows his or her roots, they will know the clan names and the culture that the names are rooted in. They indicated that they should use clan names to call each other as opposed to calling each other by their names. Therefore, it was agreed that using clan names shows respect. Mnyampala and Maddox (2015) reported that using clan names is a true indication that one knows his origin.

Furthermore, Ubuntu is a way of life in which people are expected to live. Participants expressed their views regarding staying and working harmoniously with others during the Boot Camp. The learners have expressed how the Boot Camp teachings had changed their outlook, as they can now forgive and make peace with others. Participants also added that learners should respect each other as individuals, and the feelings to be displayed all the time include showing empathy, especially when someone has lost a relative. Participants further described Ubuntu's values as being helpful and compassionate. One should help others without expecting monetary rewards. That indicated that learners understood the meaning of Ubuntu as intended by the Boot Camp. Mukuni (2021) shared similar sentiments in the Malawian study by indicating that family members are expected to care for and support one another. The author further states that children should be socialised according to the values of the community because children belong to the community. Nolte and Downing (2019) also indicated that the ideals of Ubuntu are kindness and compassion.

Respect is one of the core values of the Ubuntu philosophy. However, Makoba (2016) revealed that specific values, such as respect and Ubuntu, are no longer critical to young people because they are exposed to numerous influences, including urbanisation and modernisation. These outside influences have led young people to regard Ubuntu values as insignificant. Hence this exercise intends to reintroduce Ubuntu in communities by using learners and/or young people as ambassadors.

The findings in the current study showed that participants felt that caring for others is a prominent element of Ubuntu. Participants were observant of their actions and those around them. This entails thinking about the next person and standing with those around you. The participants indicated that as learners, they should take care of each other; for example, they should help if others are not feeling well. Learners further indicated that none of their belongings went missing during their stay at the Boot Camp. Participants shared food and other possessions they brought from home. There was a general sense that if you had more, you must share it with others. Learners were sharing, not necessarily because of a need, but as a practice towards humility and Ubuntu. In the studies, Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013) and Makoba (2016) reported that a neighbour would never go to bed on a hungry stomach. The authors further indicated that members of the community supported each other in case of bereavement. This means the burden of a family is shared among the group.

The Ubuntu philosophy includes connectedness among people (Ngubane-Mokiwa 2018). In this study, participants experienced connections among others by sharing rooms and working together as groups. They worked together and shared roles during activities without fear and judgement, even though they were from different schools. Although

they were not from the same school, they managed to connect and helped each other to grow to the best of their abilities during the Boot Camp. Learners who could perform unique skills such as reciting poems, acting in a play and singing used their skills during the camp to portray the Ubuntu core values. Others were taught how to swim by fellow learners, an indication that participants were able to share and empower each other. Almost three-quarters of the participants had never been on any school trip; such participants were grateful for the opportunity presented by their participation in Boot Camp as they considered it a free outing. They thanked the organisers of the Boot Camp for their generosity and for offering them the chance to participate. Learners felt that the organisers displayed the spirit of Ubuntu by deciding on their communities and schools as beneficiaries of the Boot Camp. Gumbo (2014) attested to similar findings in his study when he reported that people are appreciative when their friends and family support them during celebratory events because they know the celebration will not succeed without the presence of others.

This shows that there was no individualism when people were practising Ubuntu. Our study findings concur with the study findings reported by Gumbo (2014) that sharing a meal with friends is more important in the African context. The study further mentioned that not sharing resources makes people feel selfish and bad. This shows that not sharing is un-African. And sharing is rooted in the African culture and a testament to the spirit of Ubuntu (Personal discussion 2013; Gumbo 2014). Mabovula (2011) supported this by stating that individualism spoils Ubuntu as community members have developed an individualistic philosophy that tends to run counter to many traditional values.

From the experiences of participating in the Boot Camp, the participants were eager to apply learned values in their schools and communities. Participants shared how they plan to form various groups and share the information in their respective schools. Participants indicated that they would start to form groups under the Ubuntu banner to ensure that the knowledge is widely shared and promoted. Learners also indicated that they would form Maths and Science groups to assist other learners experiencing challenges with these subjects. This, they believed, would be made possible because of the presence of their teachers as part of the Boot Camp. They believe that, if you know, share it with others. The participants also emphasised positive role modelling, such as always portraying good manners and respecting others. They indicated that they would assist the elderly by doing house chores, especially for those staying alone.

As ambassadors, they agreed that they should be role models. Participants indicated that they would start addressing teenage pregnancies in their schools and conduct awareness campaigns about bullying and gender-based violence. Participants also added the importance of respecting their cultures to show the

positive value in their cultures, which is important for the communities. Participants also indicated they would raise funds to help learners encountering challenges like buying sanitary pads. The participants further indicated that they would share all the valuable information they learned during the Boot Camp with their fellow schoolmates. Participants further indicated that they would produce posters (some learners were good at art) and visit community radio stations, traditional local councils, churches and community gatherings to share the information learned from the Boot Camp. They mentioned that they would also do roleplays and dramas as a way of coaching and mentoring others with regard to Ubuntu values.

Makoba (2016) and Molefe (2014) attest to the importance of teaching and learning Ubuntu values within families and communities. The author further indicates the importance of Ubuntu in African communities, and how Ubuntu was being eroded by modernisation. Young people are exposed to modern and western ways of life, which goes against Ubuntu and the African way of life. However, the Bill of Rights seems to go against the Ubuntu values, as it elevates the rights of individuals and individualism. Whereas Ubuntu is more concerned and promotes an individual as a community member. As the saying goes, *a person is a person because of others* (Makoba 2016; McDonald 2010).

Limitations

The interviews only covered learners who were part of the Boot Camp and only from the selected two secondary schools and did not include other learners who did not participate in the Boot Camp.

Conclusion

The need to conduct this study and the choice of area of focus were explained. The question sought to be addressed was *Ubuntu Boot Camp: Experiences and perception of High School Learners from Greater Giyani Municipality, Limpopo Province*. It was revealed in the study findings that the internalisation of Ubuntu values forms an essential landmark in the individual's life, especially young people growing up within African communities rooted in African culture. The study revealed that learners experienced the Ubuntu values during the Boot Camp and are eager to apply them in their schools and communities post the Boot Camp.

Recommendations

It is suggested that more Boot Camps should be held for young people in various sections of the country, especially South Africa. This would motivate young people to spread knowledge about Ubuntu within their own schools, homes and communities and help restore the spirit of Ubuntu among them. Additionally, the influence of Ubuntu could help address modern-day social issues like drunkenness and sexual assault, among others, for the benefit of community members and the entire nation.

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Data availability

Derived data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author S.E.T. on request.

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