



SCAFFOLDING INDIGENOUS PLAY PEDAGOGY: TEACHER COMPETENCE IN RURAL KENYAN PRE-PRIMARY CLASSROOMS

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Abstract:

This study examined teachers' competence and knowledge in using indigenous play pedagogy (IPP) to foster creativity in rural pre-primary schools in Siaya County, Kenya. Framed within sociocultural perspectives and Indigenous Knowledge Systems, it a qualitative multi-case design using semi-structured interviews with 12 teachers and 7 education officers, and 2 community elders, non-participant classroom observations (one per teacher), and teachers' reflective journals across six schools. Data were analysed inductively using thematic analysis. Findings show a mixed competence profile. Teachers demonstrated attitudinal readiness and drew on local materials, mother-tongue cues, and movement to animate learning. However, formal preparation for IPP was limited, scaffolding for creativity was uneven, and reflective practice was weak. Creativity thrived where teachers intentionally sequenced activities, modelled in Dholuo, and applied culturally grounded storytelling and inquiry. Peer and community supports enhanced practice but remained ad hoc, producing inconsistent enactment across classrooms. Overall, teacher knowledge and pedagogical judgment, more than resource availability, determined whether indigenous play functioned as creativity-supportive learning. The study clarifies core competence domains (cultural repertoire, planning, facilitation, language mediation, and reflection) that shape IPP implementation in rural preschools, and recommends embedding IPP in teacher education, establishing cluster-based professional development, and formalising community-school partnerships.

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1. Introduction

A growing body of work shows that indigenous games are not merely recreational; they are culturally grounded tools that can be integrated into formal curricula to enhance preschool learning (Acharibasam & McVittie, 2020; Moloi *et al.*, 2021). Studies describe these games as effective vehicles for introducing and reinforcing key concepts among young learners, with their learning power derived from embedded cultural practices (Madondo & Tsikira, 2022). Within African early childhood contexts, traditional play is also framed as part of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and an under-documented heritage warranting purposeful pedagogical use (Mapira & Mazambara, 2013; Maunganidze, 2016).

Creativity is a foundational 21st-century competence, encompassing imaginative idea generation, experimentation, and reflective evaluation (Kampylis & Berki, 2014), with a strong case for prioritising it in early childhood. Modalities such as music, movement, drama, narrative play and storytelling can awaken curiosity and enable self-expression (Dzamesi & van Heerden, 2020). However, creativity does not “*happen by itself*” thus unclear teacher conceptions of creative learning and low instructional confidence lead to missed opportunities (Newton & Newton, 2014).

From a sociocultural stance, classroom learning is mediated by cultural tools and teacher guidance, positioning teachers as primary enablers of creative development through play (Vygotsky, 2020). In practice, competence means knowing what a play affords and how to scaffold it through modelling, open prompts, material cues, rule-tweaks, language choices, and brief reflective talk, so that play activity becomes learning. Where teachers lack clear strategies or confidence, play skews performative rather than exploratory, limiting creative outcomes (Madondo & Tsikira, 2022; Newton & Newton, 2014).

Modernisation has narrowed school notions of play toward Western sports or digital games, especially in urban settings (Madondo & Tsikira, 2022; Ogunyemi & Henning, 2020), yet traditional games remain linked to motivation, problem-solving and skills acquisition using low-cost local materials (Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2017). Kenyan scholarship cautions that sidelining indigenous ways of living and learning erodes social values and relevance (Odongo & Onderi, 2016) and argues for integrating local cultural conceptions within daily ECE experiences (Ng’asike, 2014). Indigenous motivational practices can also bridge home and school to support learners’ holistic development (Wadende, Oburu & Morara, 2016). The Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) identifies creativity as a cross-cutting competency from Early Years Education (KICD, 2017), yet evidence on how rural pre-primary teachers mobilise indigenous play to cultivate creativity and what knowledge and competences they deploy remains scarce.

This paper addresses that gap by focusing on teacher knowledge and competence for Indigenous Play Pedagogy (IPP) in rural Kenyan pre-primary schools. The paper also seeks to show clear play IP scaffolding strategies and the community-anchored supports that enable teachers to turn indigenous play into creativity-supportive learning within the CBC.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Play as a Pedagogical Tool in Early Childhood Education

In early childhood, pedagogy is the full range of teacher decisions and interactions that support and guide learning, not merely a toolkit of techniques (Hedges & Cooper, 2018). Playful learning is a relational process in a designed environment where professional judgment shapes planned and unplanned experiences (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016). Reducing pedagogy to technical “methods” obscures the complexity of moment-to-moment judgment, interaction and reflection, especially when integrating play (Bubikova-Moan *et al.*, 2019). Classic and contemporary work positions teachers as curators of environments that channel play toward intellectual and moral growth (Dewey, 1916; Saracho & Spodek, 1995), with advocacy reinforcing that resources alone are insufficient as adult participation and timely scaffolding drive literacy and broader learning (LEGO Foundation; Pyle *et al.*, 2018).

Within play-based approaches, guided play (child-initiated and child-directed activity within an adult-structured environment) consistently outperforms free play and didactic instruction for specific goals (Weisberg *et al.*, 2015). Brief, scaffolded exploratory play yields superior, rule-based concepts relative to alternatives (Fisher *et al.*, 2013). Guidance can be anticipatory (environmental design) and/or in-the-moment (open questions, subtle modelling/role assignment, strategic material substitutions) while preserving autonomy (Lillard, 2013). Nuanced cautions remain: play is not universally effective and can marginalise if poorly designed, underscoring the need for purposeful guidance and observation (Rogers, 2011; Altun, 2018). Overall, the literature accepts play’s educational potential while recognising context-sensitive risks. Arguably, teachers are the agents who convert play into learning through culturally responsive design and well-timed scaffolding.

2.2 Indigenous Play Pedagogy for Learning

Indigenous Play Pedagogy (IPP) is the deliberate use of culturally rooted play as a primary context of learning, with teachers co-planning, resourcing and joining play to steer it toward curricular aims (Abdulai, 2016). In practice, teachers set objectives, select suitable games and folktales, design hands-on tasks, provide materials, enter play at key moments, guide towards intended concepts, and remain open to learners’ contributions. Notably, adult presence also supports safety and well-being (Moloi, 2020). Traditional games are part of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and remain under-documented,

warranting intentional pedagogical integration (Madondo & Tsikira, 2022; Maunganidze, 2016; Smith, 2017).

African perspectives show that play, work and learning are entwined in daily life where children acquire skills, knowledge and values through community-embedded activities and natural ecologies (Gwanfogbe, 2011). Ethnographies illustrate routine responsibilities as learning, e.g. Kenyan pastoral children reading hoof marks, sand, water and river-bed exploration (Ng'asike, 2014), while classifications of play in Nigeria (physical, social, free, rule-based, adult-moderated) highlight repertoires teachers can harness with readily available materials (Ogunyemi & Henning, 2016).

When teacher-mediated, specific indigenous forms show clear learning affordances. For instance, Shona riddles build memory, logical and creative thinking, turn-taking, public speaking and cultural knowledge (Makaudze & Gudhlanga, 2011); Ghanaian *Anansi* stories enable teacher–learner dialogue that surfaces understanding and permits in-lesson adjustment (Agbenyega *et al.*, 2017); storytelling with practical tasks nurtures responsibility and honesty (Wadende *et al.*, 2016); social play supports empathy and confidence (Ogunyemi, 2015). Reviews link culturally familiar early play with emergent literacy and communicative competence, reinforcing teacher-led promotion of IP in resource-constrained rural contexts (Awopegba *et al.*, 2013; Matafwali & Mofu, 2023).

Critically, IPP is low-cost and locally resourced. As such, teachers can adapt grounds and everyday materials with minimal financial outlay (Bayeck, 2018). Benefits are context-dependent, so teacher competence in planning, scaffolding (modelling, open questions, material prompts, rule-tweaks), mother-tongue mediation, and reflective consolidation is decisive (Ebrahim, 2013; Matafwali & Mofu, 2023). Teachers can enact direct (joining play) or indirect (designing affordance-rich environments) guided play (Samuelsson, 2020). Mathematics work in South Africa shows indigenous games can anchor problem-solving without cultural or linguistic deficit when teachers draw on community cultural wealth (Moloi, 2015). Studies from Cameroon and elsewhere recommend that schools document, revive and integrate indigenous games through teacher-led design and reflection (Ejuu, 2019; Almonacid-Fierro, 2022).

At the same time, regional findings point to capacity and system constraints that limit effective IPP integration. In Zambia, Mwinsa and Dagada (2024) reported positive literacy/numeracy effects from indigenous games, but also limited teacher knowledge of game repertoires, weak skills for adapting games to instructional aims, and a lack of structured guidelines or assessment models—conditions that led teachers to treat indigenous games as supplementary rather than core pedagogy. They further noted perceptions that indigenous games are outdated, reinforcing the drift toward Westernised methods unless addressed through teacher capacity-building and policy recognition. Complementary evidence from Ghana indicates kindergarten teachers are ill-prepared for play-based pedagogy due to thin pre-service coverage and scarce in-service CPD (Sofu *et al.*, 2015; Tamanja, 2016).

Relatedly, creativity in specific subject areas depends on teachers' clarity about what counts as creative learning (Newton, 2012). When teachers separate "play" from "content," as observed in Lusaka classrooms, play becomes peripheral to instruction and recedes from practice (Nakawa, 2020). Conversely, integrating indigenous games within play-based pedagogy can streamline teaching by leveraging activities familiar to learners and teachers.

Based on this review, it can be argued that indigenous play becomes an effective, culturally authentic route to learning and creativity when teachers plan with cultural intent, scaffold in and through play, leverage mother tongue and local materials, and mobilise community knowledge. Consequently, where teacher competence and community links are weak, potential is under-realised.

3. Research Questions

While Kenya's early years policy recognises the value of play, practical guidance on how teachers can harness indigenous play to deliberately cultivate creativity in rural pre-primary classrooms remains limited. Against continued reliance on formal, more western-leaning pedagogies and the under-use of culturally grounded games in rural settings, this study centres the teacher capacity question in Siaya County, anchoring on the following research questions:

- 1) What knowledge and competencies do teachers draw on to implement IP?
- 2) Which scaffolding moves reliably turn IP into creativity-supportive learning?
- 3) How do peer and community supports (clusters, elders, parents) strengthen teacher competence?

4. Materials and Methods

4.1 Research Methods and Design

This study adopted a qualitative approach, which enabled the researchers to appreciate that truth and knowledge about IP is culturally and historically situated among the Luo natives (Ryan, 2018) as well as based on people's experiences and their understanding of them. A multiple case design was employed where one school from each of the 6 different cases (representing the sub-counties) was sampled (Creswell, 2016) so as to obtain an in-depth understanding of the use IP in its natural real context. According to Kenya Population and Housing Census (KPHC, 2019) report on the national population structure of Kenya, Siaya County has an urban population of 85,417 (8.6%) and a rural population of 907,766 (91.4%) as presented in Figure 1.

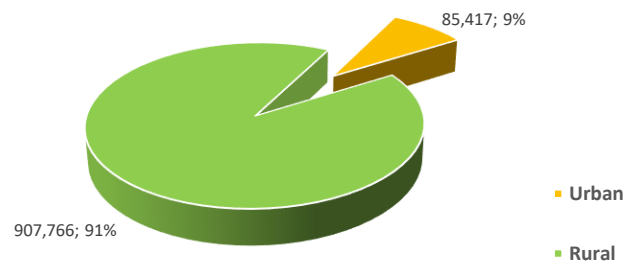


Figure 1: Population Structure of Siaya County

Given the large rural population, the county was found suitable, given the likely existence of a functioning indigenous knowledge system. Additionally, in this paper, we use ‘classroom’ inclusively to mean any organised learning space, indoors or outdoors, where teacher–learner interaction occurs.

4.2 Target Population and Sampling

Primarily, purposive sampling was used to select the study sites and participants. Initially, 7 education officers were sampled based on their jurisdictions. One of them was in charge of the whole county, while the remaining 6 officers (referred to as sub-county coordinators) represented the sub-counties in Siaya County. Progressively, a criterion-based sampling was employed where the Early Childhood and Development (ECD) sub-county coordinators (referred to as education officers in this paper) acted as key informants to identify rural pre-primary schools in Siaya County that met the study’s inclusion criteria. The total sample size included 12 female teachers from 6 ECD centres and 7 education officers. All the teachers were female because most schools have female teachers at the ECD level.

The selection of teachers involved 2 teachers handling PP1 and PP2 in each school. Two community elders (one male and one female) who were at least 70 years old were also sampled to learn about their cultural and historical views on traditional play in the community. Elders in this age group were believed to have deep and authentic knowledge regarding traditional games, their educational purposes, and the social values they embodied. The description of the teacher participants and the research site is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Information of Pre-Primary Teachers

School	Teacher	Gender	Qualification	Experience	Dholuo Proficiency
A	TA1	Female	Diploma	12 years	Native Speaker
	TA2	Female	Certificate	17 years	Native Speaker
B	TB1	Female	Diploma	18 years	Native Speaker
	TB2	Female	Certificate	22 years	Native Speaker
C	TC1	Female	Certificate	34 years	Native Speaker
	TC2	Female	Diploma	22 years	Acquired Speaker
D	TD1	Female	Diploma	13 years	Native Speaker
	TD2	Female	Diploma	10 years	Native Speaker
E	TE1	Female	Diploma	14 years	Native Speaker
	TE2	Female	Diploma	11 years	Acquired Speaker
F	TF1	Female	Diploma	28 years	Acquired Speaker
	TF2	Female	Diploma	17 years	Native Speaker

As shown in Table 1, most teachers held Diploma qualifications, with a few holding Certificates. Teaching experience was substantial (mean $\approx$ 18.2 years; median 17; range 10–34 years). Dholuo proficiency was predominantly native, with three acquired speakers.

4.3 Data Generation

Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations of indoor and outdoor classroom sessions, and teacher reflective journals. Interviews involved teachers, sub-county education officers, and community elders. Teachers and education officers each completed one baseline interview to elicit initial perspectives on Indigenous Play Pedagogy (IPP). Thereafter, officers primarily provided periodic progress updates. Teachers maintained guided reflective journals documenting games used, facilitation strategies, and evolving views on IPP. To elicit culturally grounded accounts from elders, teacher participants known to them facilitated the interviews. This was done after a brief training on the study purpose, ethics, and the interview guide. The sessions were conducted in Dholuo to enhance rapport and translation accuracy.

The researchers supervised all fieldwork, providing ongoing guidance, reviewing narratives, and ensuring adherence to ethical and methodological standards. Each participating teacher was observed once using a non-participant schedule. Before observations, a WhatsApp group was created to introduce participants and share examples of Luo indigenous games. During observations, the researchers assessed improvement and refinement in IPP implementation, and triangulated these notes with the reflective journals, which were collected two months later.

4.4 Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analysed using an inductive thematic analysis approach. Analysis proceeded iteratively alongside data generation (Creswell, 2014), beginning with verbatim transcription of interviews and organisation of observation notes and teacher journals. We first “winnowed” the dataset to retain material relevant to the research

question and eliminate peripheral data (Guest *et al.*, 2012), then undertook manual (hand) coding, foregoing software (e.g., NVivo, ATLAS.ti, MAXQDA) due to cost constraints. Guided by Braun and Clarke's six phases (familiarisation, initial coding, theme development, review, naming, and reporting) codes and themes were derived directly from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012; Lochmiller, 2021; Dube & Shawe, 2022).

To preserve confidentiality while maintaining traceability, pseudonyms were used. Teachers were assigned codes that combined their school and individual identifier, such as Teacher A1, Teacher A2, Teacher B1, and so forth. In this system, the letter denotes the school (e.g., School A, School B), while the number distinguishes individual teachers within that school. Eventually, the teachers were identified as TA1, TA2, TB1 and so on. Education officers were abbreviated as EO1, EO2, and so on, with no reference to their actual duty stations. Similarly, the observations conducted were coded as Observation A1, C4, F10, etc. The letter code denotes the School, and the number code denotes the cumulative appearance out of the total observations made. For instance, 'Observation C4' means the fourth observation out of the total observations which was made by the researcher in School C. In this paper, we have presented findings alongside verbatim quotations referenced using these codes.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Institutional clearance was obtained from Moi University, and access was negotiated with county officers and heads of institutions; individual participation proceeded only after informed consent was secured, with the study's purpose, procedures, potential publication, voluntariness, and right to withdraw clearly explained. Privacy and dignity were respected by keeping to agreed schedules and seeking permission for any unscheduled requests; no incentives were offered. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured through pseudonyms and secure data handling, with information used solely for research purposes. Cultural sensitivity and minimal intrusion guided all interactions. Participants signed a consent to participate and for their photographs to be used in the dissemination of the study.

5. Findings and Discussion

An initial inquiry into the types of play practised in the sampled rural pre-primary schools revealed a wide range of activities, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Types of Play Categorized with Mode and Setting

Play Activity	Category	Mode of Play	Play Setting
<i>Marobo</i>	Indigenous	Structured	Outdoor
<i>Owalo</i> dance	Indigenous	Structured	Both
<i>Ng'ielo ng'ielo</i>	Indigenous	Structured	Outdoor
<i>Ombulu</i>	Indigenous	Structured	Structured
<i>Atuom Rombo</i>	Indigenous	Structured	Outdoor
<i>Ajua</i>	Indigenous	Structured	Outdoor
<i>Dodo ero biro</i>	Indigenous	Structured	Both
<i>Kora</i>	Indigenous	Structured	Indoor
<i>Oyieyo paka dware</i>	Indigenous	Structured	Outdoor
<i>Ang'ad kae, aora opong</i>	Indigenous	Structured	Outdoor
<i>Oling liyo, Oling liyo</i>	Indigenous	Structured	Outdoor
<i>Ngero</i>	Indigenous	Structured	Indoor
<i>Sigana</i>	Indigenous	Structured	Indoor
<i>Brikicho</i>	Indigenous	Unstructured	Outdoor
Skipping rope	Indigenous	Structured	Outdoor
Kite making	Indigenous	Unstructured	Outdoor
Singing games	Indigenous	Mixed	Both
Tug of war	Indigenous	Structured	Outdoor
Tyre racing	Indigenous	Structured	Outdoor
Clay modelling	Indigenous	Unstructured	Both
Drawing on the ground	Indigenous	Unstructured	Both
Role playing	Indigenous	Unstructured	Both
Drama (e.g., fetching water)	Indigenous	Mixed	Both
Storytelling	Indigenous	Structured	Indoor
Digital songs (via phones)	Modern	Structured	Indoor
Western dance styles	Modern	Structured	Both
Musical chairs	Modern	Structured	Both
Bubble blowing	Modern	Unstructured	Outdoor

Grounded in teachers' voices, classroom observations, and feedback from education officers, the analysis yielded two overarching themes reflecting the current state of teacher competence in implementing indigenous play pedagogies. These themes are presented in Table 3 alongside five embedded sub-themes that capture the varied dimensions of teacher knowledge, training, peer support, and pedagogical practice.

Table 3: Emergent Themes on Teachers' Competence of IP Integration

Main Theme	Sub-Themes
Teacher knowledge and professional competence	- Teacher preparedness and training on play pedagogy - Knowledge of play-creativity linkages - Learning through community and peer support
Instructional practice and reflective pedagogy	- Classroom practices and scaffolding approaches - Intentionality and reflection in practice

These details of the sub-themes are presented in detail in the subsequent sections.

5.1 Teacher Preparedness and Training on Play Pedagogy

Indigenous play can make early learning lively and culturally meaningful, but only if teachers are prepared to use it. To begin with, teachers and education officers consistently indicated that pre-service and in-service programmes rarely showed how to use indigenous play, leaving new teachers without clear curricular guidance. This observation is consistent with prior studies (e.g., Sofo *et al.*, 2015; Tamanja, 2016). Consequently, education officers urged explicit integration of IP content in teacher-education curricula to establish a shared baseline of practice. One participant, TC1, for instance, said that;

“Onego bedni imedo puonjgi e college kocha (the indigenous games should be taught in college.” (TC1, pg. 42, line 23)

Building on this, education officers attempted grassroots Continuous Professional Development (CPD) through cluster meetings, ward forums, and hands-on demonstrations during the ‘material development day’. During the CPD sessions, they would source games with teachers and model classroom use. While these sessions partially built teachers’ confidence, they remained localised and dependent on individual officers rather than institutionalised provision. As such, school-level implementation of IPP stayed uneven. One education officer reported;

“We train them on how to do it... we sit and source the plays... we bring them up, train the teachers on them...” (EO2, pg. 15, line 14)

In parallel, teachers strengthened their competence informally via peer mentorship and locally organised activities. They borrowed techniques from colleagues and community practices. These ad hoc efforts were practical and showed positive intent; however, because they relied on individual initiative and not system support, they lacked reach and consistency. Even so, their indulgence, albeit ad hoc, portrayed a positive attitude towards providing an opportunity for IP to be integrated in the teaching and learning process in ECE. Some teachers said;

“As per now... we have a designated day called ‘material development day’... teachers who are good in making the drums, teachers who are good in making the owalos make them...” (TD1, pg. 53, line 18)

“Mmmh... gimawahinyo ga timo en mana ni ka nitie gimoro ma iloso...to oneno kaka ilose to omedo ng’eye... (what we mostly do is that when there are local products to be made, then a teacher observes how others do it and they learn...” (TB1, pg. 25, line 15)

Observations showed strong variation. Some teachers fluently led Dholuo and modelled local games while others defaulted to Western activities, hesitated with

language, or ran teacher-centred sessions. This pattern aligns with literature noting minimal emphasis on indigenous play in formal preparation and the positive effects of focused PD on uptake (Dzamesi & van Heerden, 2020), while also echoing findings that preference for Eurocentric materials often stems from limited knowledge and skills (Madondo & Tsikira, 2022; Nakawa, 2020). Overall, the evidence supports a qualified claim: interest is high, but systematic, curriculum-embedded CPD is needed to translate intent into confident, consistent practice. Some of the observations made include:

"She demonstrates good knowledge of the songs e.g., 'wang dede biro' and the circle game of 'achod kae, aora opong.'" (Observation C5, 12/05/2025)

"While indigenous plays remain suitable, the teacher heavily used the Western-based plays... the indigenous plays are hardly used in this setting." (Observation D6, 13/05/2025)

These findings therefore indicate a high interest in IPP among teachers in the rural areas, but their preparedness is shaped more by informal exposure and local supports than by structured training. As such, sustained, curriculum-embedded CPD is needed to convert intent into confident, consistent practice.

5.2 Knowledge of Play-creativity Linkages

Creativity takes shape when play meets what's at hand. Teachers increasingly framed creativity as adapting to what is locally available and helping learners "make do" in play. In practice, they guided children to use everyday objects such as cobs, stones and bottle tops to design patterns or construct play scenarios. This showed an applied understanding that indigenous play can cultivate flexible, real-world problem-solving.

"The last time was just this week... we used maize cobs... and stones... learners were guided to at least make patterns using the materials available." (TC2, pg. 45, line 23)

"Most learners preferred stones because they find it difficult to pick bottle tops very fast... so stones were liked by many learners." (Reflective Journal, Teacher 2, School E, 19/05/2025)

Moreover, imaginative and symbolic play elicits divergent thinking. Precisely, teachers linked creativity to imagination and symbolism, using songs, stories, and dramatized movement to animate play experiences and stimulate learners' imagination. In several instances, children were guided to imagine animals like snakes or to act out stories and games using symbolic gestures such as circling, sneaking, or mimicking physical reactions. When they cued learners to imagine scenarios and enact roles, children extended meaning through gesture, rhythm, and coordinated action. This was a practical way of understanding how culturally familiar play supports expressive and

divergent thinking among learners. One of the observations pointed to a real play scenario where learners showed creative dance moves when singing indigenous songs.

“Teacher asks learners to move in circles when singing ‘dayo luongo nyathine...’ and asks learners to dance while giving a response... some learners show their creative dance moves.” (Observation E8, 14/05/2025)

Despite these promising instances, findings revealed inconsistencies in how teachers deliberately connected play with creativity. In some cases, play activities were initiated without clear guidance on how learners could explore or express creative ideas. Teachers occasionally mentioned the names of plays without adapting them to the lesson context or missed opportunities to use play as a springboard for problem-solving or imagination. Observational evidence showed that while learners were sometimes prompted to sing or move, there was minimal scaffolding to deepen their creative engagement. Some teachers struggled to explain or contextualize the indigenous plays, resulting in play sessions that were more about performance than exploration. Additionally, several play sessions lacked local materials or meaningful prompts that could stimulate creativity, further indicating a disconnect between intention and execution. This is evident in the following observations;

“Teacher only initiates play where she tells learners about what they are going to play and not particularly what to do.” (Observation D6, 13/05/2025)

“No adapting is done... the plays the learners engage in do not also easily allow them to display creativity.” (Observation E9, 14/05/2025)

Just as argued by Newton (2012) in the literature regarding the teacher’s role in creative learning, these findings showed that unclear intentions and low scaffolding by teachers reduce the creative yield of play. Finally, where teachers actively sourced or improvised with local items (sisal ropes, tyres, buckets, stones), learners engaged in tangible making, testing, and re-purposing, embedding creativity in hands-on construction. Variability across classrooms, however, showed that material availability alone is insufficient; thus, meaningful integration depends on teacher initiative.

Across the findings, it emerges that while teachers recognised that indigenous play can drive creativity through resourcefulness, imagination, and hands-on making, consistent impact requires clearer intentions and stronger scaffolding. Where intentional prompts and local materials were used well, creativity flourished, while elsewhere, play remained performative.

5.3 Learning through Community and Peer Support

Arguably, indigenous play thrives where knowledge is shared. Teachers described a practical, ongoing habit of turning to colleagues when tunes, rules, or facilitation steps

slipped from memory. This support travelled beyond a single staff room, spilling into neighbouring schools and even upper primary, through quick consultations, listening to a colleague model a song, and co-teaching moments. In rural contexts where pre-service preparation for IPP was thin, these peer exchanges functioned as a first-line scaffold, restoring teachers' repertoires and easing performance anxiety so that play could run smoothly during learning. Some teachers said;

"Yes. You have to collaborate and go to your colleague and tell him, I don't know the tune of the song... and the teacher will sing as you listen." (TA1, pg. 10, line 26)

"Okay... you can consult either your colleague in the school, or even consult teachers from primary section. If it's something they know, they can help you." (TF1, pg. 71, line 3)

Parents and community members enrich authenticity and materials required to facilitate indigenous play. Teachers routinely drew on family knowledge to deepen play. Some would particularly invite parents' craft and story traditions into school, asking for help with items like *owalo*, and encouraging children to bring songs and *sigana* from home. These exchanges bridged school-home boundaries, kept cultural content accurate, and expanded the range of materials available, hence making indigenous play both more authentic and more resourced.

"The parents... you say, teacher you have that owalo—mama knows how to make that owalo... tell mama to make one." (TA1, pg. 11, line 21)

"Sometimes a grandmother gives a story (sigana)... the child can bring it, and you can teach the learners from that." (TF2, pg. 79, line 12)

When teachers were unsure about a tune or sequence, they sometimes leaned on children who had learned the play at home or in another class. Teachers combined groups so that knowledgeable pupils could demonstrate, turning learners into co-teachers and carriers of cultural repertoire. This reciprocal dynamic normalised shared expertise, strengthened continuity across classrooms, and kept the momentum of play even when adult knowledge lagged.

"Yes, we usually do... if there is something I cannot understand about the play... we just combine our learners and they show us how we are doing it." (TD1, pg. 53, line 26)

"He came to me because he knew it... so he showed me how that song goes; then I taught it." (TC1, pg. 42, line 3)

While community inputs, such as parents sharing materials and stories, and officers and local resource persons reviving traditional instruments, are active, links

remain ad hoc and personality-driven. Formalising elder involvement as custodians of indigenous play knowledge, defining roles for community experts, and linking these supports to school routines would make IPP less fragile and less dependent on individual initiative.

“Initially, people used leaves... as a wind instrument... but somebody has to give people the knowledge of how these things are supposed to be made.” (EO2, pg. 16, line 34)

“Jopuonje masani gima dapuonjgi en ni girangaranga jomawan kamae mawan joma oseol gi to wagoyonegi mabaka kaka nene tuke machon nitugo go kata kaka nitimoga to koro unbende upuonjo nyithindo gi.... koro umanywa wapuonju, kamano. (What I would urge present teachers to do is to look for the old people or community elders like myself and allow us to educate them on how plays were done in the past so that they can teach the children as well...” (Elder 2, pg. 7, line 2)

Given this evidence, teachers, parents, elders, and learners form a living support network that sustains indigenous play in schools. Where this network is mobilised, practice is richer and more confident, and where it is thin, implementation becomes unsteady.

5.4 Classroom Practices and Scaffolding Approaches

Guided indigenous play creates an opportunity to turn culture into curriculum. In this study, some teachers planned specific songs, cued movements, and used repetition and modelling so that children could grasp the flow and meaning of indigenous play. This structured guidance created shared reference points, reduced hesitation, and opened space for learner contributions (e.g. gestures, variations, brief reflections) without losing coherence. One participant said;

“Anto aneno kaka koro, amiyi example magwagi, onyalo biro iri to openji ni tugo makamae ni en nango, koro iexplain ne... nyithindo... gitimo timo kaka osewinje cha. Mae miyo enbe ong’eyogi. (if I give an example of our learners, they can approach you and inquire about the indigenous play then you explain...they later imitate what they saw, and as a result they will know the plays).” (TC1, pg. 41, line 7)

Teachers embedded *sigana* and story retellings to activate prior knowledge, link home and school, and prompt interpretation, questions, and moral reasoning. This is consistent with the work of Matafwali and Mofu (2023), who posit that integrating indigenous games can strengthen home-school linkages through active community engagement. In these sessions, narrative became both content and scaffold, energising imagination while nudging learners toward explanation and critical thinking. One participant said that:

"Mostly sigana and storytelling... we involve the learners... they ask different questions; then you see that development in their critical thinking." (TF2, pg. 74, line 10)

Evidence of teachers reading notes, sequencing activities, and aligning tasks showed forethought, while officers argued that timetables and curriculum need explicit room for play. Purposeful structuring helps interrelate activities toward outcomes (e.g., creativity) and prevents drift into unfocused free play. In one of the observations, we noted:

"Teacher seems to be reading from her notes about the type and order of doing the plays... indicating prior reflection at the planning stage." (Observation E8, 14/05/2025).

Although teachers set assignments and sequenced challenges (e.g., modelling letters), observations showed these tasks were seldom anchored in accessible indigenous knowledge. Cultural connections appeared as suggestions rather than structured prompts, and elder involvement surfaced as a possibility, not a built-in practice. By cautioning learners not to outsource products to grandparents without providing clear steps to draw on elders' practices, teachers preserved learner agency but left the cultural rationale underdeveloped. This pattern indicates limited pedagogical competence in translating indigenous perspectives into explicit classroom scaffolds, hence missed opportunities to enrich learning through IPP.

"...while giving the assignment to model other letters, the teacher cautions learners... the product is to be built by the learner... and they should tap elders' uses of mud to connect to indigenous craft." (Observation F10, 15/05/2025)

Classroom gains hinge on teacher knowledge. When teachers command the repertoire, plan coherent sequences, and embed IPP like *sigana* and local materials as explicit scaffolds, creativity flourishes. In contrast, where such knowledge is partial, play slips into performance, and cultural links stay optional.

5.5 Intentionality and Reflection in Practice

In rural classrooms, indigenous play works best when teachers plan and reflect on it. Some teachers approached indigenous play with clear advance planning, where they selected songs, sequenced activities, and gave precise instructions, while others relied on spontaneity. Where planning was intentional, teachers scaffolded groups, movements, and locally meaningful songs toward specific outcomes, and where it was improvised, coherence slipped. Some said;

"Ah ah, in kaka japuonj (as a teacher) you have to create the play you will use." (TF1, pg. 71, line 1)

"Teacher seems to be reading from her notes about the type and order of doing the plays. This indicates some prior reflection at the planning stage..." (Observation E8, 14/05/2025)

Observational records indicated weak reflective practice where teachers seldom evaluated the effectiveness of indigenous play or probed learner thinking. End-of-session checks are typically centred on which activity was "most enjoyable," with little follow-up on how or why the play supported learning or creativity. Reflective prompts about strategy, adaptation, or cultural meaning were largely absent, and there was scant evidence of notes or adjustments feeding into subsequent planning. Consequently, potential creative and cultural gains went unexamined and did not inform the next lessons.

Where sessions were spontaneous and dependent on recall or where IP wasn't used, teachers had little basis for reviewing or refining practice. Without planned IP tasks, reflective questions about fit, adaptation, or creativity could not take root. Some observations made were recorded in this account.

"...the games deployed seemed spontaneous and dependent on teacher memory... leaving little room for trying out new plays." (Observation 1A, 08/05/2025)

"Given the nature of the activities, there is no evidence that the teacher reflects... Actually, no such play activities were used during this session." (Observation F11, 15/05/2025)

The observed reluctance among teachers to plan for indigenous play reinforces the position taken by Phajane (2019), who argued that teachers who value play as learning tools are likely to spend time researching and planning play-based activities, ensuring that they are consistent with goals and standards of the curriculum.

Interest in indigenous play is growing, but consistent impact hinges on teacher competence in two linked ways, including: intentional planning (clear IP tasks, sequences, outcomes); and disciplined reflection (probing what worked and why). Strengthening these skills would convert sporadic, memory-based sessions into purposeful IP implementation with continuous improvement.

6. Recommendations

Following findings of thin formal preparation, uneven scaffolding for creativity, weak reflective practice, and ad hoc cultural repertoires, this paper recommends:

- 1) embedding IPP modules in pre-service training to close knowledge gaps;
- 2) running cluster-based, practice-centred CPD cycles to standardise scaffolding skills;
- 3) formalising elder-parent involvement as co-trainers to expand teachers' cultural repertoire;

- 4) developing a shared school IPP repertoire (songs/games, rules, materials, Dholuo cues) to reduce reliance on memory and stabilise classroom enactment; and
- 5) adopting a simple creativity reflection checklist with termly micro-evidence logs to build reflective judgement.

7. Conclusion

The study concludes that teacher competence and knowledge for implementing indigenous play in rural pre-primary schools are uneven. Some teachers, drawing on childhood experience and cultural familiarity, planned intentionally, aligned games with lesson goals, and supported learner agency. A majority of others, lacking structured preparation, showed uncertainty in planning and execution, so play use is inconsistent and often performative. There is evidence of professional willingness and emergent reflection through peer consultations and engagement with elders, but these practices are informal and vary widely. Ultimately, the effectiveness of indigenous play as a creativity-supportive pedagogy depends more on teacher knowledge, intentional planning, and reflective follow-through than on available resources.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

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