

Exploring the Integration of *Ubuntu* in Secondary Schools Curricula: A Data-Driven Analysis

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Abstract

This article examines the integration of Ubuntu education, known as Ubuntuogy, as a pedagogical framework into Zimbabwean secondary schools, rather than solely as a stand-alone subject. It addresses significant gaps in the literature concerning the persistence of a Eurocentric curriculum, gender imbalances in school leadership, and the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge systems in formal education. A qualitative case study was conducted, involving three school heads, six deputy heads, eighteen teachers, and one Curriculum Development and Technical Services (CDTS) official from the Head Office. The study explores participants' perspectives on the relevance of Ubuntu, its practical application in educational settings, and its potential to foster a culturally grounded pedagogy. Findings indicate that Ubuntu can operationalise African epistemology, promote inclusive education, enhance critical thinking, support ethical leadership, and strengthen environmental awareness. The study contributes to theory by demonstrating the mechanisms through which Ubuntu, as a pedagogical framework, can address structural inequities and support culturally responsive education in Zimbabwean secondary schools.

Keywords: Ubuntu, Ubuntuogy, African epistemology, secondary education, curriculum, indigenous knowledge

Introduction

The potential for Ubuntu education, often conceptualised as Ubuntuogy, in Zimbabwean secondary schools is increasingly gaining attention as educators, policymakers, and scholars seek ways to indigenise the curriculum to reflect African, particularly Zimbabwean, values and knowledge systems. Ubuntuogy, derived from the philosophical principles of Ubuntu, offers a framework for integrating African epistemologies into education, promoting communal responsibility, empathy, and interconnectedness. This study focuses on operationalising Ubuntuogy in Zimbabwean secondary schools as a pedagogical

framework rather than a stand-alone subject, examining how it can enhance inclusivity, address gender disparities in leadership, and bridge the disconnect between students' lived experiences and the formal curriculum.

Ubuntu, originating from the Nguni Bantu proverb "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*," is often interpreted as "I am because we are," although scholars caution against reducing it to a literal translation. Philosophically, Ubuntu is a holistic worldview emphasizing relationality, communal harmony, and the interdependence of individuals within society (RAMOSE 2020; METZ 2011; WAGHID 2018). Ramose (2020) defines Ubuntu as a moral and social philosophy that foregrounds human dignity, collective responsibility, and ethical reciprocity. Metz (2011) situates Ubuntu within an African ethical framework that prioritises fairness, empathy, and communal well-being, while Waghid (2018) highlights its potential as an educational philosophy that fosters participatory and inclusive learning environments. These philosophical underpinnings inform the notion of Ubuntu-gogy, which operationalises Ubuntu principles as pedagogical strategies for teaching, learning, and leadership in schools.

Despite its philosophical and practical potential, the integration of Ubuntu into Zimbabwean formal education has been slow, constrained by entrenched colonial legacies, Eurocentric curricula, and institutional inertia (NYONI 2018). The colonial education system prioritised Western knowledge systems, marginalising indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and rendering much of the curriculum culturally distant from students' lived realities. This disconnect has led to student alienation, diminished engagement, and limited relevance of schooling, particularly for learners from rural and marginalised communities. Furthermore, gendered hierarchies in educational leadership have constrained the operationalisation of egalitarian values that Ubuntu promotes, highlighting the need to examine how Ubuntu-gogy can inform both classroom practices and leadership structures.

The primary research aim of this study is to explore how Ubuntu-gogy can be operationalised in Zimbabwean secondary schools as a pedagogical framework to enhance culturally relevant education. From this focus, several sub-foci are derived: the conceptualisation of Ubuntu within educational contexts, gender-responsive leadership in schools, and strategies for integrating African epistemologies into teaching and learning practices. By concentrating on a single overarching research focus, this study avoids fragmentation and provides a coherent framework for examining the theoretical and practical implications of Ubuntu in education.

It is important to conceptually distinguish between Ubuntu as a philosophy, a pedagogical framework, and a potential curriculum subject. Ubuntu as a philosophy encompasses the ethical, moral, and communal principles that inform African social life. As a framework, Ubuntu-gogy translates these principles into pedagogical practices, guiding how teachers interact with students, structure lessons, and foster inclusive learning environments. Finally, Ubuntu can be envisaged as a potential curriculum component, either embedded across subjects or as a transversal theme, but the focus of this study is on its operationalisation as a pedagogical approach rather than as a discrete subject.

By foregrounding Ubuntu, this paper addresses a notable research gap in Zimbabwean education: the lack of practical frameworks for implementing African epistemologies in secondary school teaching. While advocacy for Africanisation and decolonisation of the curriculum has been well documented, there remains limited empirical exploration of how these philosophies can be translated into classroom practice and leadership. Additionally, gender disparities in school leadership and ongoing Eurocentric pedagogical practices hinder the realisation of inclusive and culturally relevant education. Ubuntu offers a lens through which these challenges can be interrogated and addressed.

The paper is structured as follows. Following this introduction, the literature review examines philosophical interpretations of Ubuntu, its role in African education, and the concept of Ubuntu. The methodology section describes the qualitative case study design, sampling strategies, and data collection procedures employed to investigate the operationalisation of Ubuntu in selected Zimbabwean secondary schools. The findings and discussion section presents key themes emerging from participants' perspectives, situating them within the broader theoretical debates on African epistemologies and curriculum decolonisation. Finally, the conclusion synthesises the study's contributions, implications for educational leadership and policy, and recommendations for future research.

Literature Review

The concept of Ubuntu has been extensively discussed in African philosophy, emphasizing relational ethics, communal responsibility, and human dignity (RAMOSE 2020; METZ 2011; WAGHID 2018). In the field of education, Ubuntu has been operationalized through the concept of Ubuntu, which frames Ubuntu principles into pedagogical strategies, curriculum design, and leadership approaches that are contextually relevant to African schools.

Supportive literature underscores the transformative potential of Ubuntu in educational settings. Letseka (2014, 2016) argues that Ubuntu fosters collaborative learning, ethical responsibility, and empathy, promoting both social and cognitive development in students. Waghid (2018) highlights that Ubuntu-based educational leadership encourages participatory decision making, ethical governance, and egalitarian principles that challenge hierarchical school structures. Chilisa (2020) emphasizes that integrating indigenous knowledge systems into the curriculum through Ubuntu enhances cultural relevance and student engagement, bridging the gap created by Eurocentric curricula.

However, the literature also presents critical perspectives. Shutte (2001) and Oyěwùmí (2015) caution against the uncritical romanticization of Ubuntu, noting that its meaning is contested across different cultural and historical contexts. Ubuntu may be invoked in ways that inadvertently reinforce patriarchal or hierarchical structures, limiting its intended egalitarian impact. Metz (2011) further notes that while Ubuntu promotes communal welfare, it does not automatically dismantle existing structural inequalities, particularly those based on gender or institutional hierarchies. These critiques are essential to understanding the constraints and challenges of implementing Ubuntu in formal education.

Recent empirical research illustrates the complexities of operationalizing Ubuntu in schools. Machingura and Nyoni (2020) and Dube (2021) show that persistent gender imbalances in leadership positions and deeply rooted societal norms affect how curriculum decisions are made, which may compromise the inclusive ethos of Ubuntu. Chabaya (2023) similarly observes that male dominated decision making limits the diversity of perspectives in policy formulation, hindering the full realization of Ubuntu's transformative potential in educational practice.

Mechanisms through which Ubuntu impacts pedagogy, leadership, and curriculum are evident. Pedagogically, Ubuntu encourages collaborative, student centered learning and ethical engagement among learners and teachers (LETSEKA 2014; WAGHID 2018). In leadership, it supports participatory governance and gender responsive practices, ensuring that school policies reflect equity and social justice (RAMOSE 2020). Regarding curriculum design, Ubuntu integrates African values and indigenous knowledge alongside Western knowledge, making education more culturally relevant while promoting social cohesion and critical thinking among learners (CHILISA 2020).

In conclusion, while the literature supports the potential of Ubuntu to enhance culturally grounded, inclusive, and participatory education, it also highlights structural constraints, contested interpretations, and gendered power dynamics as challenges to its implementation. This dual perspective provides a foundation for examining how Ubuntu can be operationalized as Ubuntu in Zimbabwean secondary schools.

African Epistemology

This study adopts African epistemology as its theoretical framework, positioning Ubuntu as a philosophical foundation that informs pedagogy, leadership, and curriculum development. African epistemology emphasizes the collective nature of knowledge, moral interdependence, and the integration of indigenous values into the educational process. It seeks to decolonize the curriculum by grounding learning in local experiences and communal values.

In pedagogical terms, African epistemology promotes dialogical and participatory learning processes. Knowledge is viewed as relational, emerging from interaction and shared understanding rather than individual competition. Ubuntu, as an embodiment of this epistemology, encourages teachers and learners to co construct knowledge through collaboration, empathy, and mutual accountability (LETSEKA 2014; WAGHID 2018). This challenges the dominance of Western epistemic traditions that prioritize objectivity and individualism, replacing them with communal and ethical modes of knowing.

In educational leadership, African epistemology highlights the moral and social dimensions of authority. Leadership is conceived as service to the community rather than the exercise of power over others (METZ 2011; RAMOSE 2020). This framework aligns with the values of Ubuntu, promoting inclusivity, consultation, and respect for diversity. By challenging patriarchal hierarchies and advocating gender balanced participation, it reinforces egalitarianism and collective accountability in school governance (DUBE 2021; MACHINGURA & NYONI 2020).

In terms of curriculum development, African epistemology provides a framework for integrating indigenous knowledge systems, cultural practices, and moral education into formal learning spaces. It argues for education that is contextually relevant and socially responsive, enabling learners to see themselves and their communities reflected in the curriculum (CHILISA 2020). This alignment between cultural identity and educational content enhances both academic engagement and moral development.

At the same time, African epistemology critically acknowledges structural and ideological constraints. Oyěwùmí (2015) and Shutte (2001) point out that Ubuntu's philosophical promise may be undermined when its communal ethos is co-opted by existing patriarchal or authoritarian systems. Thus, the framework serves not only as a normative guide but also as a critical tool for interrogating how cultural and institutional factors mediate the practice of Ubuntu in education. In this study, African epistemology offers a lens for analyzing how gendered power relations, leadership practices, and curriculum structures interact in the operationalization of Ubuntu education in Zimbabwean secondary schools.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design, underpinned by an indigenous African epistemological perspective, specifically the philosophy of Ubuntu. Qualitative methods were chosen to enable a deep exploration of participants' perspectives on the relevance and implementation of Ubuntu education in Zimbabwean secondary schools. Ubuntu epistemology emphasizes relational knowledge, collective understanding, and contextually grounded experiences (LETSEKA 2014; RAMOSE 2020). This theoretical lens guided the research design, data collection, and interpretation, ensuring that participants' voices were central to knowledge construction.

The study involved three school heads, six deputy heads, eighteen teachers, and one Curriculum Development & Technical Services (CDTS) official, purposively selected from three secondary schools representing urban, peri-urban, and rural contexts. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants had direct experience with the Zimbabwean secondary school curriculum and could provide informed insights into Ubuntu education. This aligns with indigenous research methodologies, which prioritize community knowledge holders and relational engagement in knowledge generation (CHILISA 2020). The sample size, though limited, was adequate for qualitative thematic analysis, as it allowed for saturation of key perspectives while ensuring diversity across professional roles, gender, and school contexts. The inclusion of CDTS perspectives provided a policy-level viewpoint, complementing school-level experiences.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to discuss their perspectives openly while providing the researcher with opportunities to probe for depth and clarification. Interview questions were designed to explore the relevance, implementation mechanisms, and potential challenges of Ubuntu as a taught subject, linking questions explicitly to the conceptual framework of Ubuntu pedagogy. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in participants' preferred languages to ensure cultural and linguistic inclusivity, reflecting the principle of relationality in Ubuntu epistemology. Each interview

lasted approximately 45–60 minutes, was audio-recorded with consent, and later transcribed verbatim. The approach prioritizes participant agency, respects local knowledge, and ensures accurate representation of lived experiences (CHILISA 2020; LETSEKA 2014).

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach, but adapted to align with African epistemological principles. The analysis involved iterative reading of transcripts, coding for emergent themes, and linking themes to the conceptual framework of Ubuntu-gogy. This approach foregrounds relational and contextual understanding, ensuring that participants' experiences, narratives, and culturally embedded knowledge are central to the development of themes. The coding process was collaborative, with peer debriefing to enhance credibility and confirmability, reflecting Ubuntu's emphasis on collective engagement in knowledge construction (WAGHID 2018; RAMOSE 2020).

Trustworthiness and Rigor

To ensure rigor, the study applied Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through member checking, where participants reviewed summaries of their interviews to validate interpretations. Transferability was addressed through thick description of participant roles, school contexts, and cultural settings. Dependability and confirmability were strengthened through detailed audit trails of coding decisions and thematic development. The study also addressed potential biases by maintaining reflexive journals and engaging in peer debriefing sessions, consistent with ethical research practices and the relational principles of Ubuntu. These measures ensured that findings genuinely reflected participants' perspectives and were not imposed by the researcher.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality was maintained through pseudonyms and secure data storage. The study also considered Ubuntu ethics by ensuring that participants were treated with respect, their voices were central to the research process, and findings were shared in ways that could benefit the community.

Key Findings

The data from semi-structured interviews with three school heads, six deputy heads, eighteen teachers, and one CDTS official revealed five major themes that encapsulate participants' perspectives on the relevance and implementation of Ubuntu education in Zimbabwean secondary schools. These themes are: African epistemology, inclusive education, positioning the indigenous learner, leadership and classroom management, and environmental awareness/critical thinking. These themes highlight the practical mechanisms through which Ubuntu, operationalised

as Ubuntu-gogy, can transform educational practice by embedding African worldviews, fostering culturally responsive pedagogy, and promoting collaborative and ethical learning environments.

African Epistemology

Participants emphasised the importance of embedding African knowledge systems in the curriculum through the principles of Ubuntu. They noted that the current education system is largely Eurocentric, which often alienates students from their cultural context. “African viewpoints are often addressed conceptually rather than being fully integrated into teaching methods. With Ubuntu’s cultural foundation, a dedicated subject would contextualize an African worldview through indigenous teaching practices, language, educational activities, and materials drawn from native histories and experiences” (Teacher 1).

This highlights the mechanism of Ubuntu-gogy in practice, showing how African epistemology can be operationalised by designing curricula and learning activities grounded in learners’ lived experiences. It underscores the need for pedagogical strategies that integrate local histories, language, and values rather than abstract theoretical frameworks. By connecting learning to learners’ cultural realities, educators foster identity formation, belonging, and engagement. Similarly, a CDTS official noted: “Implementing Ubuntu provides African learners with significant advantages... By adopting Ubuntu as an educational methodology, the experiences of African learners would be acknowledged and valued in everyday teaching and learning.” (Curriculum Development and Technical Services official)

This demonstrates how Ubuntu-gogy links theory to practice, enabling students to see their cultural knowledge validated within the formal curriculum. It operationalises African epistemology by transforming teaching from a Eurocentric delivery to an inclusive, culturally responsive approach. These mechanisms include collaborative learning, discussion of indigenous knowledge, and integration of culturally relevant examples.

Inclusive Education

Ubuntu’s principles of community and interconnectedness provide mechanisms to promote inclusivity. Participants emphasised that embedding Ubuntu fosters cooperation, empathy, and respect for diverse learners. “An Ubuntu-taught subject that integrates the fundamental values of these ethnicities into the curriculum could enhance social cohesion and inclusive education” (Teacher 13).

This example illustrates how Ubuntu-gogy can operationalise inclusive education through practical classroom strategies. By embedding values of mutual respect and collective responsibility, educators can promote social cohesion, reduce discrimination, and foster collaborative learning. Students from diverse cultural, linguistic, and ability backgrounds are engaged as valued members of the classroom community. A CDTS official further noted: “Fostering a deeper understanding of Ubuntu among students and teachers could help address stigma, which often hinders the successful implementation of inclusive education.” (Curriculum Development and Technical Services official)

This demonstrates how Ubuntu mechanisms, such as community engagement and participatory learning, actively include marginalised students, including those with disabilities or from minority ethnic groups, ensuring equitable, and culturally responsive learning.

Positioning the Indigenous Learner

Centring learners within their cultural contexts emerged as a critical mechanism. Participants highlighted that the Eurocentric curriculum marginalises indigenous perspectives. “Ubuntu could help rework the curriculum to prioritize the learning needs of indigenous students” (Teacher 12).

This underscores how Ubuntu positions students as active participants in knowledge generation. By aligning content with learners’ cultural identities, educators foster critical thinking, reflective engagement, and deeper academic involvement. Mechanisms include culturally contextualised examples, local storytelling, and problem-solving rooted in indigenous knowledge systems.

Another participant noted: “An Ubuntu subject emphasises the learner’s identity, heritage, and social context, which could lead to more critical thinking and lively classroom discussions” (Deputy School Head 2). This illustrates how placing indigenous learners at the centre supports engagement, self-efficacy, and motivation, linking the theoretical framework to practical classroom strategies.

Leadership and Classroom Management

Ubuntu principles influence school leadership and discipline by promoting collective responsibility and ethical conduct. “A deeper rooting of Ubuntu in the school curriculum could help mould more upright learners who are less prone to deviant behaviours” (Deputy School Head 1). This highlights the mechanism through which Ubuntu enhances leadership and classroom management. By instilling moral values of cooperation, respect, and accountability, educators foster ethical leadership and shared responsibility. Students internalise behavioural expectations not through authoritarian control but through collective engagement and relational accountability.

A teacher added: “Given that Ubuntu often provides students with a moral code, it stands to reason that if many of them internalize it, they would conduct themselves better, which would facilitate classroom and school management.” This demonstrates the link between Ubuntu’s ethical framework and observable behaviour, showing how moral reasoning and community-oriented thinking contribute to effective classroom management.

Environmental Awareness and Critical Thinking

Participants associated Ubuntu with reflective and critical thinking, emphasising relational understanding. “Learning an Ubuntu-taught subject would help students realise that the difference between individual thought within and outside Ubuntu lies in the aim and outcome. Ubuntu values critical thinking that benefits the group rather than the individual alone” (Deputy School Head 1).

This demonstrates the mechanism of cooperative learning in practice, where learners evaluate socio-cultural teachings collectively, consider diverse

perspectives, and develop socially responsible solutions. Ubuntuogy encourages group discussions, debates, and problem-solving activities that connect ethical reasoning with cognitive development. A CDTS official also noted: “Ubuntu would enhance critical thinking by inviting learners to analytically consider the socio-cultural teachings they have received from birth and to critically assess the indigenous knowledge systems on which Ubuntu is founded.” (Curriculum Development and Technical Services official) This illustrates how operationalising Ubuntu in the classroom links African epistemology to cognitive engagement, ensuring that critical thinking is culturally relevant, contextually grounded, and oriented towards collective well-being.

Overall, these five themes demonstrate that Ubuntuogy operationalises African epistemology, promotes inclusive education, positions indigenous learners, strengthens leadership and classroom management, and nurtures environmental awareness and critical thinking. Each theme reflects the interplay between theory and practice, highlighting actionable mechanisms such as collaborative learning, community engagement, and culturally contextualised pedagogy. The findings show how Ubuntu can transform curriculum, learner positioning, leadership, and cognitive engagement in Zimbabwean secondary schools.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from semi-structured interviews with three school heads, six deputy heads, eighteen teachers, and one CDTS official revealed five major themes reflecting participants’ perspectives on the relevance and implementation of Ubuntu education in Zimbabwean secondary schools. These themes are African epistemology, inclusive education, positioning the indigenous learner, leadership and classroom management, and environmental awareness and critical thinking. They highlight the mechanisms through which Ubuntu, operationalised as Ubuntuogy, can transform educational practice by embedding African worldviews, fostering culturally responsive pedagogy, and promoting collaborative and ethical learning environments. These results illustrate that Ubuntu is not merely philosophical but provides actionable frameworks for curriculum design, teacher practice, and learner engagement. Moreover, the study shows that operationalising Ubuntu can address long-standing gaps in cultural relevance and ethical formation within Zimbabwean secondary education.

African Epistemology

Participants emphasised embedding African knowledge systems in the curriculum through the principles of Ubuntu. The current Eurocentric system often alienates learners from their cultural context, echoing concerns raised by Letseka (2014) and Ramose (2020). These findings illustrate that operationalising African epistemology requires curricula and learning activities grounded in local histories, languages, and ethical values. By linking learning to learners’ lived experiences, educators can foster identity, belonging, and engagement, demonstrating how Ubuntuogy translates theory into actionable pedagogy. Furthermore, integrating African epistemology may encourage students to critically engage with both local

and global knowledge, fostering comparative reflection and cultural pride. This also aligns with the theoretical framework of Ubuntu, which emphasises learning that is contextually meaningful and morally grounded.

Inclusive Education

Ubuntu's principles of interconnectedness, empathy, and mutual respect provide mechanisms to promote inclusivity (CHILISA 2020; METZ 2011). Participants highlighted that integrating Ubuntu fosters cooperation, reduces discrimination, and engages learners from diverse cultural, linguistic, and ability backgrounds. This shows that Ubuntu operationalises inclusion by embedding community values in classrooms, enabling collaborative learning, peer support, and participatory engagement. By doing so, marginalized students, including those with disabilities or from minority ethnic groups are included, illustrating the practical relevance of Ubuntu beyond its philosophical foundations. Moreover, fostering inclusivity through Ubuntu encourages empathy and social cohesion, which are critical for creating harmonious learning environments in culturally diverse schools. It also challenges entrenched hierarchies and discriminatory attitudes, supporting equitable participation for all learners.

Positioning the Indigenous Learner

Centring learners within their cultural contexts emerged as a critical mechanism for effective pedagogy (LETSEKA 2014; NDLOVU 2022). Participants observed that Eurocentric curricula marginalise indigenous knowledge, leaving students disengaged. Ubuntu positions learners as active knowledge producers by aligning content with their cultural identities. Culturally contextualised examples, storytelling, and problem-solving rooted in indigenous knowledge foster reflective engagement, critical thinking, and deeper academic involvement. This demonstrates the translation of African epistemology into practical classroom strategies, showing that Ubuntu can be meaningfully operationalised in school settings. Additionally, prioritising indigenous learners helps restore cultural dignity and self-efficacy, enabling students to feel empowered as custodians of their heritage. It also provides a platform for dialogue between traditional knowledge and formal education, encouraging learners to integrate multiple ways of knowing.

Leadership and Classroom Management

Ubuntu principles were reported to influence school leadership and discipline by promoting collective responsibility, ethical conduct, and moral reasoning (Shutte, 2001; Waghid, 2018). Participants noted that embedding Ubuntu supports shared leadership and student accountability, reduces deviant behaviours, and fostering ethical learning environments. This indicates that Ubuntu provides mechanisms for leadership development, including teacher modeling of communal values, peer-led initiatives, and participatory governance in schools. Additionally, the findings highlight the importance of gender-responsive leadership, as women remain underrepresented in school management (CHABAYA 2023; DUBE 2021; MUTSAKA 2023; NYASHA 2020). Ensuring diverse representation aligns with Ubuntu's egalitarian values and enhances the effectiveness of ethical and

collective leadership practices. Implementing Ubuntu-informed leadership strategies may also strengthen school-community partnerships, as collective responsibility extends beyond classrooms to the wider environment. It further nurtures a culture of moral accountability, encouraging both students and educators to consistently uphold communal and ethical standards.

Environmental Awareness and Critical Thinking

Participants associated Ubuntu with reflective, relational, and socially responsible critical thinking (RAMOSE 2020; WAGHID 2018). Operationalising Ubuntu in classrooms fosters collaborative cognitive and ethical development through group discussions, debates, and problem-solving activities. Learners critically assess socio-cultural teachings, consider multiple perspectives, and develop solutions that benefit the community. By integrating ethical reasoning with critical thinking, Ubuntu pedagogy ensures that cognitive development is culturally relevant, contextually grounded, and oriented towards collective well-being. Moreover, Ubuntu encourages learners to connect environmental consciousness with social responsibility, highlighting the interdependence between communities and their ecosystems. This perspective can promote sustainable practices and civic-mindedness that extend beyond academic settings, reflecting Ubuntu's practical and moral dimensions.

Addressing Ubuntu as a Lived Philosophy

While Ubuntu is traditionally experienced as a lived philosophy within communities (LETSEKA 2014; SHUTTE 2001), participants emphasised its potential to be operationalised in formal schooling. This involves translating values of interconnectedness, mutual respect, and collective responsibility into practical classroom strategies, culturally relevant curricula, and community engagement initiatives. Teacher preparation should equip educators to bridge lived Ubuntu practices and formal pedagogy, demonstrating that the philosophy can simultaneously inform moral development and actionable teaching strategies within schools. Integrating Ubuntu into formal education also addresses concerns that the philosophy may be too abstract for classroom use, showing how ethical reasoning and collaborative problem-solving can be embedded in daily teaching practices. Furthermore, it highlights how theoretical principles of Ubuntu can intersect with measurable learning outcomes and culturally responsive pedagogy.

Objections and Limitations

While the study demonstrates the transformative potential of Ubuntu education in Zimbabwean secondary schools, several limitations and objections must be acknowledged. Structurally, the current education system presents barriers to the formal integration of Ubuntu, including limited resources, insufficient teacher training, and a curriculum heavily influenced by Eurocentric knowledge systems, which may resist the inclusion of indigenous pedagogical frameworks. Gender imbalance in school leadership remains a significant structural challenge, as decision-making positions are predominantly occupied by men, potentially limiting the adoption and advocacy for Ubuntu-centered initiatives. Additionally, critics may argue that Ubuntu is primarily a "lived philosophy" rooted in everyday

community practices, rather than a formal educational subject, raising concerns about the feasibility and authenticity of institutionalizing it within the rigid framework of secondary school curricula. Some may also contend that integrating Ubuntu could burden already overstretched teachers or conflict with standardized assessment practices. To mitigate these challenges, the study suggests targeted teacher training programmes focused on Ubuntu, curriculum design workshops to embed culturally relevant content, and policy interventions that promote gender-responsive leadership. Collaboration with local communities and scholars can ensure that Ubuntu is introduced in ways that reflect lived experiences while aligning with formal learning objectives. Furthermore, pilot projects could test the practicality of Ubuntu integration, allowing iterative improvements before full-scale implementation. By addressing these structural, cultural, and resource-based constraints, the limitations can be navigated effectively, enabling Ubuntu to become a meaningful and sustainable component of Zimbabwean education. Despite these challenges, the study demonstrates that the benefits of operationalizing Ubuntu, including enhanced inclusivity, critical thinking, and ethical leadership, outweigh potential obstacles, highlighting the urgency of culturally grounded educational reform.

Conclusion

This study concludes that operationalizing Ubuntu as a pedagogical framework in Zimbabwean secondary schools has profound implications for curriculum, pedagogy, and leadership. First, the findings demonstrate that embedding African epistemology through Ubuntu makes education more culturally relevant, enabling learners to connect their schooling with their lived experiences, histories, and indigenous knowledge systems. Second, integrating Ubuntu fosters inclusive education by promoting mutual respect, cooperation, and equity, particularly for learners from diverse linguistic, cultural, and ability backgrounds. Third, centering indigenous learners within the curriculum enhances engagement, critical thinking, and reflective learning, while linking theory to practice through culturally contextualized examples and participatory learning activities. Fourth, Ubuntu strengthens leadership and classroom management by nurturing ethical conduct, collective responsibility, and relational accountability, aligning with African-centered leadership paradigms and gender-responsive practices. Fifth, the study highlights Ubuntu's potential to cultivate environmental awareness and socially responsible critical thinking, preparing students to address communal and ecological challenges through collaborative problem-solving. The findings also provide empirical support for the theoretical framework of Ubuntu, illustrating how African epistemology can be operationalized in practice to transform educational experiences. In terms of contributions, this study advances the discourse on curriculum decolonization, African-centered pedagogy, and inclusive leadership, demonstrating the practical mechanisms through which Ubuntu can reshape learning environments in Zimbabwe. By operationalizing Ubuntu as a pedagogical framework, this study demonstrates that culturally grounded and ethically oriented curriculum reforms can enhance inclusivity, critical thinking, and gender-responsive leadership in Zimbabwean secondary schools, fulfilling the promise of African-centered education articulated in the

introduction.

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