



Fostering Ubuntu in Teacher Education for South African Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Ubuntu is a foundational philosophy rooted in South African culture that emphasises the importance of interconnectedness, community well-being, and our shared humanity. Its relevance in education, particularly teacher training, is increasingly recognised as essential to foster inclusive and socially responsible learning environments. This study explores the integration of Ubuntu principles into teacher education programs at institutions of higher learning in South Africa and proposes strategies for embedding Ubuntu into teacher training, thereby enhancing both the teaching approach and the societal impact on future educators. For this study, a systematic literature review (SLR) was adopted to consolidate existing research on Ubuntu in education for this study. The review follows the PRISMA guidelines and includes empirical studies published between 2014 and 2024. The literature search focused on prominent academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar, concentrating on peer-reviewed articles on Ubuntu, teacher education, and cultural pedagogy. The review identified 18 studies that met the inclusion criteria, revealing significant themes regarding applying Ubuntu in educational settings. These studies highlighted the necessity of curriculum integration, which involves incorporating Ubuntu principles into the design and delivery of the curriculum, inclusive teaching methods, experiential learning, community involvement, and advocacy for policy changes as critical strategies for incorporating Ubuntu principles into teacher education.

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INTRODUCTION

African philosophers and scholars have explored the concept of Ubuntu, noting that it is challenging to translate into English due to the absence of an exact equivalent in that language.¹ These scholars agree that translation often diminishes the essence of Ubuntu, a concept deeply rooted in African traditions. Although it originates in South African Nguni languages, it exists in Bantu languages in sub-Saharan Africa. As Maphalala explains, Ubuntu is a philosophical framework that emphasises

¹ Thaddeus Metz, “Just the Beginning for Ubuntu: Reply to Matolino and Kwindigwi,” *South African Journal of Philosophy* 33, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 65–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2014.892680>; Lovemore Mbigi, *Ubuntu: The African Dream in Management* (Knowledge Resources, 1997).

human interconnectedness, mutual respect, and collective responsibility.² It is embodied in the Nguni proverb, "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu," meaning "I am because you are; you are because I am." This highlights the intrinsic relationship between the individual and the community.

Ubuntu is dynamic and context-dependent, shaped by cultural practices and lived experiences.³ It emphasises that individual identity is realised through relationships within the community, fostering values such as solidarity, compassion, and communalism.⁴ In contrast to individualistic Western paradigms, Ubuntu, as Bhuda notes, promotes a collective "I/We" approach rather than the Eurocentric "I/You," thereby encouraging mutual interdependence.⁵ Its origins in pre-colonial African societies reflect principles of cooperation and shared responsibility.⁶ In the 1990s, Ubuntu was revived in South Africa as a moral and ethical foundation for justice and inclusivity, challenging individualism and prioritising community and interdependence.

Ubuntu provides a framework for inclusive, transformative, and socially responsible teaching in education. Bhuda emphasises that it encourages collaboration, equity, and mutual respect in learning environments.⁷ Ubuntu addresses historical inequalities in South African education by promoting empathy and inclusivity.⁸ It also fosters social cohesion, bridges cultural divides, and values diversity, preparing students to contribute to a just society.⁹ However, South Africa's education system faces challenges, including inequality, lack of integration of local cultural values, and overemphasis on academic achievement, often neglecting social and emotional development.¹⁰ The absence of cultural frameworks like Ubuntu leaves teachers unprepared for the multicultural realities of South African classrooms.¹¹ The focus on curriculum delivery and standardised testing further restricts efforts to foster empathy and social cohesion, resulting in a workforce less equipped to create inclusive and collaborative classroom environments.¹²

To address these gaps, an equitable distribution of resources, the incorporation of cultural values, and an emphasis on holistic education must be established. Integrating Ubuntu into teacher education is essential to develop a culturally responsive and socially responsible education system.¹³ Ubuntu promotes interconnectedness, mutual respect, compassion, and collective responsibility, which are crucial for tackling South Africa's historical social inequalities and educational challenges.¹⁴

Teachers trained in Ubuntu are better equipped to create inclusive classrooms and promote social justice, bridging the gaps between privileged and disadvantaged learners. Additionally, Ubuntu fosters understanding and reconciliation through dialogue about identity, history, and social justice, enhancing intercultural understanding and nation-building. It advocates holistic, learner-centred

² Mncedisi Christian Maphalala, "Embracing Ubuntu in Managing Effective Classrooms," *Gender and Behaviour* 15, no. 4 (2017): 10237–49.

³ Alois Maluleke, "Exploring Ubuntu-Based Research Methodologies in Southern African Bantu People's Embodied Movements: Ethical Considerations, Community-Based Strategies, and Philosophy," *Conversations Across the Field of Dance Studies* 43, no. 0 (September 12, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.3998/conversations.5950>.

⁴ Motsamai Molefe, "Ubuntu, Umuntu and Human Dignity," *Ubuntu: Interdisciplinary Conversations Across Continents*, 2024, 1.

⁵ Monica Thulisile Bhuda, "Decolonising and Indigenising African Indigenous Research: Why Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being and Living Matter in Research," in *Higher Education Transformation in Africa* (Routledge, 2024), 50–69.

⁶ Bukunmi Deborah Ajitoni, "Ubuntu and the Philosophy of Community in African Thought: An Exploration of Collective Identity and Social Harmony," *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development* 7, no. 3 (2024); Sechaba Mahlomaholo, "Creating Sustainable Teacher Education Ecologies: A People's Education for People's Power Reimagined," *Southern African Review of Education with Education with Production* 22, no. 1 (2016): 9–26.

⁷ Bhuda, "Decolonising and Indigenising African Indigenous Research: Why Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being and Living Matter in Research."

⁸ Maphalala, "Embracing Ubuntu in Managing Effective Classrooms."

⁹ Bhuda, "Decolonising and Indigenising African Indigenous Research: Why Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being and Living Matter in Research."

¹⁰ Jiayi Shi and Peter Sercombe, "Poverty and Inequality in Rural Education: Evidence from China," *Education as Change* 24, no. 1 (2020): 1–28.

¹¹ Maphalala, "Embracing Ubuntu in Managing Effective Classrooms."

¹² Lesley Le Grange, "The Philosophy of Ubuntu and Education in South Africa," in *Education and Humanism* (Rotterdam: SensePublishers, 2011), 67–78, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6091-577-2_5.

¹³ Kanyakumarie Padayachee et al., "Integral Education and Ubuntu: A Participatory Action Research Project in South Africa," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 13, no. 1 (2023): 1298.

¹⁴ Lungile Ennie Mtsweni, "The Role of Student-Related Community Engagement Structures in Mitigating Social Injustice in a Rural Based University in South Africa, Limpopo Province" (2022).

approaches focusing on emotional, social, and ethical development rather than solely on academic achievement.¹⁵ Ubuntu encourages culturally relevant education, allowing teaching strategies to adapt to the diverse needs of students.¹⁶

Research on integrating Ubuntu and similar indigenous knowledge systems into education emphasises combining traditional wisdom with contemporary methods to create inclusive, community-oriented learning environments.¹⁷ Ubuntu has emerged as a recognised framework for educational reform that promotes social, emotional, and moral development alongside academic achievement.¹⁸ In countries like South Africa, teacher education programs have incorporated Ubuntu to strengthen student-teacher relationships and foster empathy, respect for diversity, and collective responsibility. Similarly, indigenous knowledge systems in countries such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand encourage culturally relevant education through local knowledge and place-based learning.¹⁹

The intersection of critical pedagogy and Ubuntu promotes socially just education, addressing systemic inequalities while fostering self-awareness and social responsibility. These efforts show that educators who embrace Ubuntu develop empathy, cultural responsiveness, and a commitment to social justice.²⁰ Ubuntu helps educators create equitable classrooms where all students feel valued and supported, dismantling barriers such as prejudice and discrimination.

The impact of integrating Ubuntu into teacher education goes beyond the classroom to transform the educational system by promoting inclusive, compassionate, and community-focused practices. It challenges traditional educational models, prioritising individual achievement over collective well-being.²¹ On a societal level, Ubuntu has the potential to foster a more cohesive and just society by nurturing students who are empathetic, community-oriented, and capable of addressing societal challenges. Integrating Ubuntu into teacher education can reduce inequalities while promoting cooperation, respect, and collective well-being and ensure that all students succeed.

However, there is a gap in both the literature and practice, as Ubuntu has not been systematically incorporated into teacher education programs, particularly in South Africa.²² Despite its significance in broader social and cultural contexts, the integration of Ubuntu into teacher education remains inconsistent. Addressing this gap requires including Ubuntu in teacher preparation programs to equip educators to foster classrooms grounded in empathy, social justice, and cultural responsiveness, better meeting the diverse needs of students.

The absence of Ubuntu principles in the South African teacher education system hampers efforts to address historical inequalities and foster social cohesion. Ubuntu's emphasis on interconnectedness and community aligns to create inclusive, equitable educational practices. Without it, teachers may struggle to meet the diverse sociocultural needs of learners, which may perpetuate alienation among marginalised students.²³

¹⁵ Peter Raymond Sabelo et al., "Exploring Competency Development Among Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) Leaders and Tutors: A Comprehensive Investigation of Program Involvement," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, January 15, 2024, 1664–77, <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.202341323>.

¹⁶ Sulaimon Adewale, "Promoting Sustainable Development Goal 5 Through Ubuntu-Based South African Basic Education Curriculum," *Studies in Learning and Teaching* 4, no. 3 (2023): 432–43.

¹⁷ Sharon Attipoe-Dorcoo and Norma Martínez-Rubin, "The Inclusive, Manumit, Practice-Based, Accessible, Community-Focused and Timely Framework," *African Evaluation Journal* 12, no. 2 (June 20, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.4102/aej.v12i2.727>.

¹⁸ Mariëtte Koen, "Sustainable Future for Early Childhood: Applying the African Ubuntu Philosophy to Contribute to the Holistic Development of Young Children," *Sustainable Development in Africa: Fostering Sustainability in One of the World's Most Promising Continents*, 2021, 131–46.

¹⁹ Geoff Webber, "The Terrain of Place-Based Education: An Introduction for Teacher Education in Canada," *Brock Education Journal* 30, no. 1 (2021): 10; Carolyn M. Callahan and Amy Price Azano, "Place-Based Gifted Education in Rural Schools," in *Handbook of Giftedness and Talent Development in the Asia-Pacific* (Singapore: Springer, 2021), 535–54, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-3041-4_25.

²⁰ Asanda Boboyi, "Exploring Ubuntu Philosophy as a Foundation for Holistic School Social Work in South Africa," *Research in Social Sciences and Technology* 9, no. 1 (March 6, 2024): 253–64, <https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2024.14>.

²¹ Ajitoni, "Ubuntu and the Philosophy of Community in African Thought: An Exploration of Collective Identity and Social Harmony."

²² Kayode Babatunde Olawumi, Mzuyanda Percival Mavuso, and Ntombozuku Stunku Duku, "Situating Ubuntu Philosophy in Pre-Service Teacher Education," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 23, no.8(2024):605–23.

²³ Yusef Waghid et al., *Towards an Ubuntu University* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-06454-8>.

Integrating Ubuntu into teacher education is essential for equipping educators with the cultural and ethical competencies to support diverse learners, promote social justice, and advance the shared vision of an inclusive South African society.²⁴ This study highlights Professor Sechaba Mahlomaholo's contributions to the integration of Ubuntu into teacher education as a critical step in addressing these gaps. His work empowers educators to act as agents of social change, aligning with South Africa's goals of unity, equity, and reconciliation and fostering classrooms where diversity is viewed as a strength.²⁵

This study, therefore, sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the imperative of fostering Ubuntu philosophy within the context of teacher education in South African higher education institutions?
2. What strategies can universities leverage for integrating Ubuntu principles into teacher education programmes?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Indigenous knowledge, particularly Ubuntu, has been integral in shaping education and scholars like Maphalala have emphasised its influence on both educational systems and societal ways of life.²⁶ Ubuntu, as emphasised by Bhuda and Maluleke, is a key framework for bridging theory and practice in teacher education.²⁷ Mahlomaholo stresses that educators should not only focus on academic content but also embrace their role as social change agents, teaching values such as compassion and social justice.²⁸ This aligns with the Nguni proverb *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* ("I am because you are, you are because I am"), emphasising the relational nature of identity and well-being. Mahlomaholo critiques the lack of cultural relevance in South African teacher education, asserting that failing to integrate Ubuntu and indigenous knowledge systems leaves teachers unprepared for the multicultural realities of classrooms. He advocates for a holistic approach, combining academic, emotional, social, and ethical development to foster inclusive, supportive learning environments. Incorporating Ubuntu into teacher education is also seen as a solution to improve classroom management and create a positive learning atmosphere.²⁹

Ubuntu extends beyond education to the social and political spheres, where it supports values of human dignity, democracy, and inclusivity.³⁰ Nelson Mandela often invoked Ubuntu as a guide to creating a compassionate society, and has influenced global discussions on human rights and peace.³¹ As Mokhutso and Shambare note, contemporary challenges, including the pressures of modern parenting, necessitate a shift towards community-based programs that integrate Ubuntu principles to address the impact on children's self-identity and behavior in classrooms.³² Shambare introduces Ubuntu parenting, which encourages active community involvement in child-rearing, creating a supportive environment for self-determination.³³ This model transcends Africa, with global implications for raising socially conscious children. The principles of Ubuntu are further reinforced by

²⁴ Waghid et al., *Towards an Ubuntu University*.

²⁵ Maphalala, "Embracing Ubuntu in Managing Effective Classrooms"; Mbigi, *Ubuntu: The African Dream in Management*.

²⁶ Maphalala, "Embracing Ubuntu in Managing Effective Classrooms."

²⁷ Bhuda, "Decolonising and Indigenising African Indigenous Research: Why Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being and Living Matter in Research"; Maluleke, "Exploring Ubuntu-Based Research Methodologies in Southern African Bantu People's Embodied Movements: Ethical Considerations, Community-Based Strategies, and Philosophy."

²⁸ Mahlomaholo, "Creating Sustainable Teacher Education Ecologies: A People's Education for People's Power Reimagined."

²⁹ Bongani Innocent Nkambule, "Ubuntu-Inspired Principals' Leadership Styles: A Conduit for Effective and Ethical Knowledge Management Practices in under-Resourced South African Public Schools," *International Journal of Social Science Research and Review* 5, no. 12 (2022): 258–70.

³⁰ Ajitoni, "Ubuntu and the Philosophy of Community in African Thought: An Exploration of Collective Identity and Social Harmony."

³¹ Mzukisi Qobo and Nceku Nyathi, "Ubuntu, Public Policy Ethics and Tensions in South Africa's Foreign Policy," *South African Journal of International Affairs* 23, no. 4 (2016): 421–36.

³² Jacob Mokhutso, "Ubuntu: A Countermeasure for Challenges of Child-Rearing.," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 103, no. 1 (2022); Blessing Shambare, "The Ubuntu Parenting: Kairos Consideration for the 21st Century Dynamics and Globalization," in *Parenting - Challenges of Child Rearing in a Changing Society* (IntechOpen, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.100101>.

³³ Shambare, "The Ubuntu Parenting: Kairos Consideration for the 21st Century Dynamics and Globalization."

cultural practices like *ukunana*, where mutual support and reciprocity foster community cohesion, aligning with the values taught in schools.³⁴

In post-apartheid South Africa, the integration of Ubuntu into teacher education is seen as a response to historical inequities and an opportunity to promote inclusivity and collective responsibility.³⁵ Teacher education programs grounded in Ubuntu foster educators who prioritise interconnectedness, empathy, and social justice.³⁶ These educators play an essential role in transforming classrooms into spaces that reflect the values of Ubuntu, contributing to a just society. The relevance of Ubuntu extends to environmental conservation, where its moral framework links sustainability with social responsibility.³⁷ Teacher education must create environments where students are nurtured in a spirit of cooperation and mutual responsibility.³⁸ Collaboration between teachers and parents is essential to reinforce values from home to school.³⁹ Schools, as microcosms of society, reflect the community's values, and when guided by Ubuntu, they promote harmony, collaboration, and coexistence.⁴⁰ This underscores the importance of integrating Ubuntu within South African higher education institutions to equip educators with the tools to foster supportive and respectful learning environments.

The need for a comprehensive framework to incorporate Ubuntu into teacher education remains, with scholars such as Bhuda, Maphalala, and Mahlomaholo calling for structured strategies that blend curriculum integration, experiential learning, community engagement, research, and policy advocacy.⁴¹ Universities must reconsider rigid admission criteria and make education financially accessible, embodying Ubuntu values of kindness, compassion, and respect.⁴² A curriculum rooted in Ubuntu could address persistent social and cultural challenges in South Africa, offering a holistic approach that promotes student achievement by fostering a positive classroom climate.⁴³ In the 21st century, educators must address the negative experiences many students face, including abuse and societal challenges. Ubuntu's five core values survival, compassion, solidarity, respect, and dignity are essential in guiding teachers to create a classroom environment that nurtures these principles, empowering students to thrive in a harmonious and supportive community.⁴⁴ Hence, this study advocates the integration of Ubuntu in teacher education to transform South Africa's educational system into one that values inclusivity, empathy, and social responsibility, ensuring educators are equipped to meet the diverse needs of their students.

³⁴ Elizabeth Hull, "Supermarket Expansion, Informal Retail and Food Acquisition Strategies: An Example from Rural South Africa," 2016.

³⁵ L. Patel, Y. Sadie, and J. de Klerk, "Factors Determining Voter Choice in South Africa's 2024 National General Elections," Centre for Social Development in Africa, 2024, <https://news.uj.ac.za/news/uj-study-reveals-complex-dynamics-influencing-voter-choices-in-sas-national-election/>.

³⁶ Mahlomaholo, "Creating Sustainable Teacher Education Ecologies: A People's Education for People's Power Reimagined."

³⁷ Samuel Olusegun, "Addressing Fragmented Relationships and Dislocation in Environmental Thinking: Ubuntu Insights on Human and Nonhuman Wellbeing" (UNSW Sydney, 2021).

³⁸ Linda Sparks and Louri Louw, "Ubuntu in the Academic Literacy Class: Establishing a Sense of Community for Inclusivity and Effective Learning," *Perspectives in Education* 41, no. 3 (2023): 107–23.

³⁹ Rasmitadila Rasmitadila et al., "The Perceptions of Primary School Teachers of Online Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic Period," *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* 7, no. 2 (2020): 90–109.

⁴⁰ Una O'Connor et al., "It Is Changed beyond All Recognition: Exploring the Evolving Habitus of Assistants in Special Schools," *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* 21, no. 2 (2021): 146–55.

⁴¹ Bhuda, "Decolonising and Indigenising African Indigenous Research: Why Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being and Living Matter in Research"; Maphalala, "Embracing Ubuntu in Managing Effective Classrooms"; Mahlomaholo, "Creating Sustainable Teacher Education Ecologies: A People's Education for People's Power Reimagined."

⁴² Daryl G Smith, *Diversity's Promise for Higher Education: Making It Work* (Jhu Press, 2024); Vikki Boliver and Mandy Powell, "Fair Admission to Universities in England: Improving Policy and Practice," *Nuffield Foundation*, 2021.

⁴³ Leehu Zysberg and Nitza Schwabsky, "School Climate, Academic Self-Efficacy and Student Achievement," *Educational Psychology* 41, no. 4 (April 21, 2021): 467–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2020.1813690>.

⁴⁴ Thembisile Molose, Geoff Goldman, and Peta Thomas, "Towards a Collective-Values Framework of Ubuntu: Implications for Workplace Commitment.," *Entrepreneurial Business & Economics Review* 6, no. 3 (2018).

METHODOLOGY

This conceptual paper presents a comprehensive framework for integrating Ubuntu principles into teacher education programs at higher education institutions in South Africa. The focus is on theoretical development rather than empirical research, utilising a qualitative and conceptual methodology. The study is based on a thorough review of existing literature on Ubuntu philosophy, emphasising its cultural significance and potential applications in educational contexts. It also examines the connections between Ubuntu and various educational theories, including Critical Pedagogy, Social Constructivism, and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. A crucial aspect of the research involves evaluating the current state of teacher education in South Africa, which helps identify challenges and opportunities for incorporating Ubuntu principles into teacher training programs. The methodology primarily revolves around a systematic literature review (SLR) synthesising current research. This review aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how Ubuntu has been implemented in educational settings, particularly within South African higher education.

The systematic literature review (SLR) adheres to the PRISMA guidelines, which provide a structured and thorough method for the review process.⁴⁵ The goal is to uncover thematic patterns within the literature, underscore existing gaps in research, and suggest future research directions that may help integrate Ubuntu into teacher education. The literature search prioritised peer-reviewed studies that examined the cultural and philosophical dimensions of Ubuntu as they relate to teacher education. Databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar were accessed, using specific keywords and Boolean operators to enhance the relevance and accuracy of the search results. The review included articles published in English from 2014 to 2024 to ensure the most recent research findings were included.

The inclusion criteria for the studies evaluated in this review were as follows:

1. Empirical studies that address the application of Ubuntu or similar philosophies in educational settings.
2. Research papers investigating the incorporation of Ubuntu in teacher education or higher education in South Africa.
3. Studies published in peer-reviewed journals.
4. Articles that discuss Ubuntu's cultural, philosophical, or pedagogical aspects in education.

The exclusion criteria included:

1. Studies unrelated to education, teacher training, or higher education.
2. Theoretical or conceptual papers lacking empirical data.
3. Opinion pieces, editorials, and articles that were not peer-reviewed.

The initial search yielded 335 articles. After removing duplicates, 210 unique articles were evaluated based on their titles and abstracts. This process selected 150 articles for a comprehensive review, with 18 studies meeting all inclusion criteria.

The selected articles were thematically analysed to identify key findings and common themes. The thematic analysis focused on several main areas:

1. The cultural significance of Ubuntu and its importance in educational practices.
2. Strategies for incorporating Ubuntu into teacher education programs.
3. Challenges related to integrating Ubuntu principles in South African higher education.
4. Possible solutions and exemplary practices for promoting Ubuntu in teacher training.

The analysis aimed to reveal patterns and trends within the literature, highlighting Ubuntu's theoretical and practical implications in education. Although this review is theoretical and does not include direct empirical data collection, ethical considerations are central to its approach. Given

⁴⁵ Matthew J Page et al., "The PRISMA 2020 Statement: An Updated Guideline for Reporting Systematic Reviews," *Bmj* 372 (2021).

Ubuntu principles' cultural sensitivity, the study ensures that the discussion respects diverse cultural perspectives and adheres to ethical standards.

Table 1: Research Questions and generated themes

Research Questions	Themes
1. What is the imperative of fostering Ubuntu philosophy within the context of teacher education in South African higher education institutions?	Theme:1 Curriculum Integration Theme: 2: Inclusive Pedagogies
2. What strategies can universities leverage for integrating Ubuntu principles into teacher education programmes ?	Theme 3: Merging experiential learning with community engagement initiatives Theme: 4 Research and Innovation: Theme: 5: Policy Advocacy

RESULTS /FINDINGS

Fostering Ubuntu in teacher education in South African higher education requires a holistic approach that integrates Ubuntu philosophy into the curriculum, curriculum integration, merging experiential learning with community engagement initiatives, research promotion, and policy advocacy.

Theme:1 Curriculum Infusion

Higher education pedagogical practices in South Africa continue to draw from Western Eurocentric views, which undermine and dismiss indigenous philosophies such as Ubuntu as false assumptions and simply illegitimate African thinking.⁴⁶ Ndlovu-Gatsheni refers to this rejection of knowledge that African students bring to higher education as 'epistemic violence', which he considers as 'violence at the level of curriculum, including pedagogies, perpetrated by untransformed and alienating higher education landscape'.⁴⁷ Therefore, integrating Ubuntu principles into the teacher education curriculum will enhance the promotion of Ubuntu in teacher education in South African higher education. This could be achieved by developing courses or modules that explicitly teach about Ubuntu philosophy, its historical context, and its educational relevance. With a concise framework that stipulates the objectives of the content that focuses on the concept of Ubuntu and its values. The core tenets of the 1996 South African Constitution contribute to the promotion of equality and justice within the educational environment. It also reaffirms Ubuntu's philosophy as a conflict resolution tool and serves to combat issues like patriarchy, bullying, violence, the mistreatment of women and girls, discrimination, and inequality. In this manner, incorporating the concept of Ubuntu into higher education programmes promotes social justice and fosters a sense of shared empowerment. Furthermore, it establishes a common understanding of Ubuntu, which can be assessed through qualitative assessments of interpersonal skills, empathy, and community-building efforts. Ngubane & Makua argues that many years after democracy in South Africa, higher education has not transformed because pedagogical practices, by and large, still draw from Western philosophies and world views, despite most students in higher education being students from African cultures.⁴⁸ Therefore, teacher education can benefit by adopting a Ubuntu worldview in the curriculum, which can have a positive impact. This transformation will require a shift in teacher education, moving away from solely relying on Western teaching methodologies. The literature underscores that Ubuntu is built on three

⁴⁶ Nomlaungelo Ngubane and Manyane Makua, "Ubuntu Pedagogy–Transforming Educational Practices in South Africa through an African Philosophy: From Theory to Practice," *Inkanyiso: Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 13, no. 1 (2021): 1–12.

⁴⁷ Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization* (Routledge, 2018).

⁴⁸ Ngubane and Makua, "Ubuntu Pedagogy–Transforming Educational Practices in South Africa through an African Philosophy: From Theory to Practice."

fundamental pillars: interpersonal values, intrapersonal values, and environmental values.⁴⁹ Adopting an Ubuntu worldview in the teacher education curriculum can lead to more empathetic, compassionate, and culturally sensitive educators better equipped to create inclusive and supportive learning environments. This approach benefits pre-service teachers and positively impacts students, schools, and communities, ultimately contributing to a more just and harmonious society.

Theme: 2: Inclusive Pedagogies

Fostering Ubuntu within teacher education through the lens of inclusive pedagogy necessitates the creation of an educational milieu and instructional methodologies that harmonise with Ubuntu's fundamental principles, namely interconnectedness, compassion, and community well-being. This could be achieved by equipping preservice teachers with the tools and knowledge to embrace inclusive pedagogical practices, which, in essence, involve accommodating diverse learning styles and abilities among their future students. As Hogan and Sathy described, inclusive pedagogy encompasses wholeheartedly embracing the diversity of students and crafting educational experiences that resonate with each student.⁵⁰ This diversity extends beyond traditional demographics, encompassing elements such as race, ethnicity, gender, disability, socioeconomic background, ideology, and even individual personality traits like introversion. The core ethos of inclusive pedagogy lies in designing and executing courses that nurture the talents of all students, with a particular focus on those who have historically been marginalised within higher education.⁵¹

By instilling the principles of inclusive pedagogy within preservice teachers, we empower them to create classrooms that are not just inclusive but also aligned with Ubuntu values. Central to the concept of inclusive pedagogy is the notion of respecting one another. This element resonates with the Ubuntu principle of compassion, as it underscores the importance of recognising and appreciating each individual's inherent worth and uniqueness within the learning community. Preservice teachers, equipped with an understanding of inclusive pedagogy, are primed to foster an atmosphere of mutual respect and appreciation among their future students. Moreover, inclusive pedagogy encourages students to actively engage in classroom activities together. This resonates with Ubuntu's emphasis on solidarity, as it promotes the idea of students collaborating and supporting one another in their learning journeys. Preservice teachers, informed by the principles of inclusive pedagogy, can design and facilitate classroom experiences that promote teamwork, cooperation, and a sense of shared responsibility for the collective success of the learning community. Furthermore, inclusive pedagogy emphasises the value of assisting one another in the learning process. This aligns closely with Ubuntu's concept of care and love, as it underscores the importance of educators and students alike supporting one another's growth and development.

Preservice teachers who have been exposed to the principles of inclusive pedagogy are aptly prepared to create supportive and nurturing learning environments where students feel comfortable seeking assistance and offering help to their peers. Originally, inclusive education primarily addressed the needs of students who had been excluded from mainstream educational settings, particularly those with disabilities. However, the scope of inclusive education has evolved into a comprehensive rights-based concept, encompassing individuals who may face exclusion or limited access to the educational system within a country.⁵² In the South African context, this evolution is particularly pertinent as it aligns with the imperative of redressing historical inequalities and fostering a more equitable and inclusive educational landscape.⁵³ The essence of Ubuntu, encapsulated by the humanistic adage

⁴⁹ Maphalala, "Embracing Ubuntu in Managing Effective Classrooms"; Overson Shumba, "Commons Thinking, Ecological Intelligence and the Ethical and Moral Framework of Ubuntu: An Imperative for Sustainable Development," *Journal of Media and Communication Studies* 3, no. 3 (2011): 84–96.

⁵⁰ Kelly A Hogan and Viji Sathy, "8 Ways to Be More Inclusive in Your Zoom Teaching," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 17, 2020, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/8-ways-to-be-more-inclusive-in-your-zoom-teaching/>.

⁵¹ Hogan and Sathy, "8 Ways to Be More Inclusive in Your Zoom Teaching."

⁵² Lani Florian, Kristine Black-Hawkins, and Martyn Rouse, *Achievement and Inclusion in Schools* (New York: Routledge, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315750279>.

⁵³ Shakira Akabor and Nareadi Phasha, "Where Is Ubuntu in Competitive South African Schools? An Inclusive Education Perspective," *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, October 8, 2022, 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2022.2127491>.

"Umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu," highlights the importance of relationships among people, transcending individualism. By infusing teacher education with the principles of inclusive pedagogy, pre-services are equipped not only to accommodate diverse learning needs but also to cultivate classrooms rooted in Ubuntu values. In these classrooms, learning is a collaborative and mutually supportive endeavour, where students, guided by Ubuntu principles, construct knowledge, develop skills, and nurture values and attitudes collectively, taking shared responsibility for each other's academic success and overall well-being.⁵⁴

Theme 3: Merging experiential learning with community engagement initiatives

Incorporating experiential learning (EL) and community engagement (CE) initiatives into teacher education programmes within the context of Ubuntu principles offers a multifaceted approach to preparing pre-service teachers who are not only academically proficient but also profoundly attuned to the values of interconnectedness, compassion, and community well-being. This theme underscores the importance of merging experiential learning with community engagement initiatives to instill these vital Ubuntu values within teacher candidates. EL is a method of teaching that allows learners to learn while they do, reflect, think, and apply. Students take part in a tangible experience (Do), replicate that experience and other evidence (Reflect), cultivate theories in line with experiences and information (Think), and articulate an assumption or elucidate a problem (Apply).⁵⁵ It is a vital instrument for bringing about positive modifications in academic education, allowing learners to apply what they have learned in school to real-world problems.

Community involvement is evolving as a practice that academics, practitioners, and community stakeholders use to incorporate various efforts to connect local and civic initiatives. This emerging paradigm supports these initiatives in higher education by emphasising community-based learning opportunities and experiential approaches to engaged campuses. One meaningful way of fostering a civically and politically engaged and socially responsible undergraduate is through service learning and volunteerism opportunities that result in collaboration.⁵⁶ Similarly, Mahloholo described an ideal scholarship of engagement reflecting universities' mission and/or vision, with service-learning and/or community engagement being everyday threads to faculty-student interactions.⁵⁷ Therefore, engagement is an essential component of curricula, connecting students, faculty, and community together in a mutually beneficial learning process and providing an opportunity for all stakeholders.⁵⁸ Therefore, a pivotal strategy to foster Ubuntu values within teacher education involves creating opportunities for teacher candidates to engage in experiential learning and community engagement that resonates with the core principles of Ubuntu.⁵⁹ This experiential learning can take various forms, such as community service, internships in diverse settings, or collaborative projects with local communities. These activities bridge theoretical knowledge and practical application, allowing teacher candidates to witness first-hand how Ubuntu principles manifest in real-world contexts.

Moreover, these diverse and meaningful field experiences expose pre-service teachers to a kaleidoscope of South African communities, offering a rich tapestry of perspectives and practices rooted in Ubuntu. By immersing themselves in these communities, pre-service teachers gain a deeper understanding of how Ubuntu values are woven into the fabric of South African society. This exposure nurtures empathy, cultural sensitivity, and a profound appreciation for the diversity of experiences and

⁵⁴ Webber, "The Terrain of Place-Based Education: An Introduction for Teacher Education in Canada"; Callahan and Azano, "Place-Based Gifted Education in Rural Schools."

⁵⁵ Yangtao Kong, "The Role of Experiential Learning on Students' Motivation and Classroom Engagement," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (October 22, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.771272>.

⁵⁶ Bhuda, "Decolonising and Indigenising African Indigenous Research: Why Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being and Living Matter in Research."

⁵⁷ Mahloholo, "Creating Sustainable Teacher Education Ecologies: A People's Education for People's Power Reimagined."

⁵⁸ Jack Byrne, "From Policy to Practice," in *Innovations in Science Education and Technology*, vol. 7 (Boston, MA: Springer, 2000), 35–72, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4615-4277-3_4.

⁵⁹ Ngubane and Makua, "Ubuntu Pedagogy—Transforming Educational Practices in South Africa through an African Philosophy: From Theory to Practice."

traditions within the country. This exposure contributes to a more holistic understanding of how Ubuntu operates in diverse contexts and demographics, reinforcing the idea that Ubuntu is a universal concept that transcends boundaries. By actively engaging with communities and practicing Ubuntu principles within the classroom, future educators are prepared to impart knowledge and nurture inclusive, compassionate, and community-centred learning environments that reflect the essence of Ubuntu.

Theme: 4 Research and Innovation

Institutions in higher education, research and innovation are central to advancing societies and economies. Lakhotia argues that a university is a place where scholars and teachers participate in advancing, acquiring, and communicating knowledge in a liberal spirit and thus prepare students for their chosen professions and other aspects of life.⁶⁰ Besides disseminating knowledge, universities also 'create' new knowledge through research and, consequently, provide platforms for updated 'learning' based on existing as well as new knowledge 'created' through research. Today, universities are becoming more innovation-orientated, aiming not only to create new ideas but also to turn knowledge into practice.⁶¹ Research and Innovation within the context of fostering Ubuntu principles in teacher education highlights a multifaceted approach to advancing knowledge, awareness, and the practical application of Ubuntu principles in education. It underscores the importance of research and scholarly endeavours in furthering the understanding and integration of Ubuntu values within teacher education programmes.

One of the key strategies is to encourage teacher-educators and pre-service teachers to actively engage in research related to Ubuntu in education and publish their findings. This research serves as a crucial building block for the knowledge base surrounding Ubuntu principles in education. Through conducting research and disseminating their findings through publications, academics and pre-service teachers contribute to the academic discourse, raising awareness and providing valuable insights into the practical implications of Ubuntu within educational settings. Vefago et al., contend that the production of new knowledge through the practices of research and scholarship lies at the heart of the university's mission.⁶² However, without adequate and ongoing dissemination of knowledge, the efforts of researchers and scholars are wasted. Dissemination is thus a core responsibility of the university. The study recommends organising conferences and seminars to facilitate the dissemination of knowledge and promote scholarly engagement with Ubuntu principles. These academic gatherings serve as platforms for educators, teacher candidates, and researchers to actively participate in discussions, engage in relevant activities, and reflect on the practical applications of Ubuntu in various educational contexts. Research and Innovation underscore the significance of research and scholarly endeavours in advancing Ubuntu principles within teacher education, contributing to the knowledge base, raising awareness, and promoting the practical implementation of Ubuntu values in educational settings. These efforts collectively support the evolution of teacher education programs that nurture inclusive, compassionate, and community-centred educators who embody the essence of Ubuntu.

Theme: 5 Policy Advocacy

Advocate for educational policies that support integrating Ubuntu principles in South African higher education, emphasising inclusivity and community engagement. Advocacy is the outspoken support of a cause or group of people. Advocacy is any individual or organised effort to advance a course, expand the field's diversity, or increase public awareness and address problems/ concerns through

⁶⁰ S. C. Lakhotia, "Research and Innovation in Universities Why and How These Should Be Promoted," *Quality Mandate for Higher Education Institutions in India*, 2021, 89–114.

⁶¹ Magdalena Marczevska, Marzenna Anna Weresa, and Marek Lachowicz, "Towards Creativity and Innovation in Universities: Study on Central and Eastern Europe," *Journal of the Knowledge Economy* 15, no. 1 (2024): 1363–85.

⁶² Yuri Borba Vefago, Andréa Cristina Trierweiler, and Luciano Barcellos de Paula, "The Third Mission of Universities: The Entrepreneurial University," *Brazilian Journal of Operations & Production Management* 17, no. 4 (October 28, 2020): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.14488/BJOPM.2020.042>.

policy or legislative efforts.⁶³ Starting with the curriculum policy, which should be rooted in the theoretical framework of Ubuntu, the objective should be to cultivate globally competent teachers. This necessitates adopting a student-centered approach that respects individual thinking and decision-making capacity. Additionally, assessment policies should be implemented to define the criteria for expected levels of practice of Ubuntu values within the classroom. These policies should work collectively to establish a comprehensive framework for integrating Ubuntu principles into South African higher education, ultimately creating a more inclusive, values-driven, and globally competitive educational environment.

DISCUSSION

This research sheds light on the multifaceted nature of fostering Ubuntu principles in South African higher education, specifically within teacher education programs. The discussion synthesises the key themes that emerged from the study: Curriculum Infusion, Inclusive Pedagogies, Merging Experiential Learning with Community Engagement Initiatives, Research and Innovation, and Policy Advocacy. These themes provide a coherent understanding of the challenges and opportunities in promoting Ubuntu values within this context.

Curriculum Infusion emphasises the urgent need to move away from Western Eurocentric pedagogical practices that marginalise indigenous philosophies, such as Ubuntu. This marginalisation contributes to what Ndlovu-Gatsheni describes as "epistemic violence," obstructing the recognition of diverse knowledge systems and alienating African students in higher education. Integrating Ubuntu principles into the teacher education curriculum is essential to counter this issue. This can be achieved through explicit courses or modules focused on Ubuntu's philosophy, historical context, and educational significance. The curriculum should offer a framework that aligns with Ubuntu's core values and Metz's guidelines for fostering harmony and community. Furthermore, the South African Constitution supports Ubuntu as a conflict resolution tool, reinforcing the promotion of social justice and shared empowerment through education. By adopting an Ubuntu worldview, teacher education programs can cultivate empathetic, compassionate, and culturally sensitive teachers, ultimately contributing to a more just and harmonious society.

Inclusive Pedagogies highlight the importance of aligning educational practices with Ubuntu's interconnectedness, compassion, and community well-being values. Inclusive pedagogy involves accommodating diverse learning styles and abilities among students, reaching beyond traditional demographics.⁶⁴ It promotes respect, solidarity, and mutual support among students, reflecting Ubuntu's principles. By instilling these values in preservice teachers and teacher educators, classrooms can include diverse learners and embody Ubuntu principles. Inclusive pedagogy fosters a classroom environment that values each individual's worth and uniqueness, promoting a sense of collective responsibility for academic success and well-being. This approach aligns with the evolution of inclusive education in South Africa, which aims to address historical inequalities and create a more equitable educational landscape.

Merging Experiential Learning with Community Engagement Initiatives emphasises the importance of connecting academic knowledge with real-world experiences and community involvement. Experiential learning allows students to engage in a cycle of Doing, Reflecting, Thinking, and Applying, effectively bridging the gap between theory and practice. Community engagement initiatives enable pre-service teachers to immerse themselves in diverse South African communities, offering them a deeper understanding of Ubuntu values in various contexts. This exposure fosters empathy, cultural sensitivity, and a universal appreciation of the principles of Ubuntu, demonstrating that Ubuntu transcends boundaries and is a universal concept. By actively engaging with communities and practising Ubuntu principles, future educators are better equipped to create inclusive, compassionate, and community-centred learning environments that embody Ubuntu's essence.

⁶³ Jorge R Zaldivar and Elizabeth L DeVos, "Rationale for Advocacy Training in Undergraduate Medical Education," 2020.

⁶⁴ Attipoe-Dorcoo and Martínez-Rubin, "The Inclusive, Manumit, Practice-Based, Accessible, Community-Focused and Timely Framework."

Research and Innovation highlight the role of higher education institutions in advancing knowledge and transforming it into practical applications. Research related to Ubuntu in education enhances the understanding and integration of Ubuntu values within teacher education programs. Encouraging teacher-educators and pre-service teachers to engage in research and publish their findings promotes scholarly engagement with Ubuntu principles. Disseminating knowledge through conferences and seminars is essential for raising awareness and promoting the practical implementation of Ubuntu values across various educational contexts. Research and innovation in teacher education contribute to developing programs that nurture inclusive, compassionate, and community-centred educators who embody the essence of Ubuntu.

Policy advocacy stresses the importance of advocating for educational policies that support the integration of Ubuntu principles in South African higher education. Advocacy efforts should begin with curriculum policies grounded in the theoretical framework of Ubuntu, cultivating globally competent teachers who respect individual thinking and decision-making capacities. Assessment policies should establish criteria for practising Ubuntu values in the classroom. These policies create a comprehensive framework for integrating Ubuntu principles, fostering a more inclusive, values-driven, and globally competitive educational environment.

Fostering Ubuntu values in South African higher education requires a comprehensive and integrated approach, particularly in teacher education. By incorporating curriculum infusion, inclusive pedagogies, experiential learning, research and innovation, and policy advocacy, we can create a transformative educational environment that embodies the principles of Ubuntu. South African higher education institutions can prepare pre-service teachers who are academically proficient and deeply attuned to the values of interconnectedness, compassion, and community well-being, ultimately contributing to a more just and harmonious society by embracing these strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To foster the principles of Ubuntu in the South African higher education, particularly in teacher education programs, a comprehensive approach is required. This includes developing a curriculum that integrates Ubuntu philosophy and moves away from Eurocentric pedagogical practices, thereby promoting inclusivity and social justice. Inclusive pedagogies that respect diverse learning styles should be implemented to cultivate a classroom environment that reflects the Ubuntu values of interconnectedness, compassion, and community well-being. Experiential learning and community engagement initiatives should be enhanced to provide real-world learning experiences, fostering empathy and cultural sensitivity among pre-service teachers. Research and innovation focused on Ubuntu in education should be encouraged to promote scholarly engagement and practical application of these principles. Additionally, policy advocacy is necessary to support the integration of Ubuntu in educational frameworks, ensuring that curriculum and assessment policies align with Ubuntu values. Institutional support and collaboration among educational institutions are crucial to sharing best practices and fostering a unified approach. By adopting these strategies, higher education institutions can prepare future educators who are both academically proficient and deeply committed to Ubuntu's principles, contributing to a more just and harmonious society.

CONCLUSION

The findings reveal that the promotion of Ubuntu values within South African higher education, particularly teacher education, demands a holistic and integrated approach. Curriculum infusion, inclusive pedagogies, merging experiential learning and community engagement, research and innovation, and policy advocacy collectively create a transformative educational environment that embodies the principles of Ubuntu. South African higher education institutions can prepare pre-service teachers who are not only academically proficient but also profoundly attuned to the values of interconnectedness, compassion, and community well-being.

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