

Perspective of Student Teachers about the Integration of Ubuntu Philosophy into the Philosophy of Education Module

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Abstract

Decolonizing the education system in South Africa and, indeed, Africa through integrating the Ubuntu philosophy has been an ongoing debate. A closer look at the teacher education program in higher education in South Africa reveals that the philosophy of education modules contains Western and Eurocentric philosophies, thereby relegating the African indigenous philosophies, like the Ubuntu, to the background. This study was conceived to examine student teachers' views on integrating Ubuntu philosophies into the philosophy of education modules in higher education institutions in South Africa. B.Ed. Year four students were selected randomly and participated in the study. A one-on-one interview and document analysis were used to gather data for the study. Data collected were analysed to elicit the view of student teachers on integrating Ubuntu philosophy into the teacher education module. Findings from the data collected indicate that Ubuntu principles are not integrated into the philosophy of education module in South African higher education institutions. The study also reiterates the need to produce well-equipped student teachers to teach Ubuntu principles. Moreover, the study concludes that stakeholders in the education sector must set in motion a curriculum review process that will ensure the review of the teacher education curriculum to integrate Ubuntu principles. The process must be such that teachers who are the curriculum implementers must be involved as critical stakeholders, as a departure from the old system where teachers are only involved in the implementation stage.

Keywords: decolonization, ubuntu principles, student teachers, philosophy of education module, integration

1. Introduction

The need to integrate Ubuntu philosophy into the curriculum to decolonize education has been stressed (Masuku & Makhanya, 2023; Mkosi et al., 2023; Olawumi et al., 2024; Koopman & Koopman, 2023). This assertion becomes important because of the relevance of Ubuntu principles, not only in teaching and learning but in assisting society to inculcate relevant values that promote democratic living into the education system at higher education institutions. The South African constitution advocates the promotion of democratic living through participation and the promotion of democratic values like the Ubuntu principles. This assertion is in line with the views of experts and other critical stakeholders that the Ubuntu principles are integrated into the curriculum to produce teachers who are savvy and have the required skills to integrate Ubuntu into teaching and learning in the classroom (Olawumi et al., 2024; Olawumi, 2024). Integrating Ubuntu into teaching and learning would require strengthening the Bachelor of Education programs in South African universities, including Ubuntu Philosophy. Studies by Olawumi et al. (2024) indicate that the in-service teacher education program in South African Universities reflects the colonial Eurocentric education consciousness. This finding demonstrates that teachers who are drivers of implementing the curriculum lack the knowledge of Ubuntu principles because it was not part of their pre-service Teacher Education program (Olawumi 2024). This indicates that in South African universities, Western cultures and philosophies related to the culture of the former colonial masters are prevalent in the Philosophy of Education Modules, thereby relegating African philosophies, which are very rich in culture and values, to the background (Vandeyar 2020). This practice is detrimental to the call for decolonization of the curriculum in Africa. This study will address these gaps by collecting data to explore student teachers' views on integrating Ubuntu values into the Bachelor of Education program and the extent of inclusion of Ubuntu values into the Philosophy of Education Modules in South African Universities. The pre-service teachers are essential stakeholders in the integration of Ubuntu principles into the curriculum (Pule et al., 2025; Olawumi et al., 2024); hence, the Bachelor of Education program of universities in South Africa must be designed to accommodate

the Ubuntu principles. The findings from this study will assist in exploring the level of integration of Ubuntu principles into the Bachelor of Education program from the student teacher's perspective. The study will also investigate the level of integration of Ubuntu principles into the Philosophy of Education modules in South African Universities.

This study will specifically answer the following research questions:

- What are Year 4 Bachelor of Education students' views on integrating Ubuntu principles into the Bachelor of Education program in South African Universities?
- Which Ubuntu principles are taught in South African universities' philosophy of Education modules?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Ubuntu Philosophy and Higher Education

Ubuntu Philosophy has gained broader recognition in Africa and globally. The concept of Ubuntu is deeply rooted in indigenous African culture, so it isn't easy to render it in the European Westernized language (Waghid, 2020). Understanding the concept of Ubuntu better can only be attained depending on the context in which it is used and the language in which it is rendered (Matolino & Kwindigwi, 2013; Mkosi et al., 2023; Olawumi et al., 2024). The concept meaning can be attributed to the phrase 'a person is a person through other' meaning in the Xhosa language, *Ubuntu umgamntu ngabanye abantu*, and Zulu *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabaye' I am human because I belong, I participate, and I share* (Mutanga, 2024). The concept affirms the uniqueness of individuals within a community and the bond and attachment among African Indigenous people. From this simple definition of Ubuntu, there is an indication that humans are at liberty to share, participate, and belong.

Ubuntu originates from the indigenous African Bantu philosophy and knowledge, Bhuda and Marumo (2022), Naude (2019), Ngubane and Makua (2021), which presents spirituality as the foundation of human nature and reveals people's authentic selves to the rest of the world and God's creation. The Ubuntu concept emphasizes that all living things, including humans, have commonalities or understandings (Mubangizi & Kaya, 2015). Ubuntu values take cues from the African indigenous beliefs as its major ideology. The philosophy is a communal approach indigenous to African people. It is associated with the way of life of indigenous African people, dating back to the period before the coming of Western civilization in Africa. Its principles are grounded in the humanistic principles highly valued by African indigenous peoples. Principles like solidarity, kindness, cooperation, respect, and compassion are deeply rooted in the Ubuntu indigenous philosophy (Ngubane & Makua, 2021).

The Ubuntu philosophy is an African philosophy that emphasises showing love and empathy, tolerance, unity, communalism, and interconnectedness. Researchers Mkosi et al. (2023) and Olawumi et al. (2024) conceptualized Ubuntu as an African Philosophy that provides a foundation for indigenous education. This assertion indicates that the indigenous education system in Africa relies on the principles of Ubuntu to address the social ills that affect the community. However, since the Westernized education system we acquired from the colonial administration does not address African socioeconomic and political problems, it is important to address African problems from the Ubuntu Philosophical point of view that preaches love, unity, peace, progress, tolerance, etc.

2.2 Integrating Ubuntu Philosophy into the Pre-service Teacher Education Program

The Philosophy of Education module is one of the modules offered to students for the award of a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree at universities in South Africa (Pillay & Swanepoel, 2018). This module is available from the second to the fourth year, preparing students to learn, understand, and apply various theories of education in their future teaching after completing their teacher education program. Literature indicates that while African students must study the Philosophy of Education module as part of their teacher education curriculum, its content still reflects European theories and philosophies. This situation represents a continuation of colonial Western civilization, neglecting the rich values and practices of African Indigenous philosophies (Sathorar & Geduld, 2018; Maistry, 2023). Most of the theories are Western and Eurocentric in nature, which are deemed unsuitable for addressing African socioeconomic and educational issues.

The dominance of the education system in Africa with Western and colonial philosophies could be attributed to the concentration of Eurocentric philosophies in the curriculum at the detriment of the African indigenous philosophies like Ubuntu that advocate togetherness, love, sharing, tolerance, compassion, and so on (Mabofua 2020; Sathorar & Geduld 2018; Dalvit, 2024). However, stakeholders in the education sector in Africa and South Africa should consider integrating Ubuntu principles in the Bachelor of Education Program by ensuring that the Ubuntu principles are embedded in the Philosophy of Education Modules. The findings from most universities in South Africa show that the

Ubuntu principles are not taught or integrated into the Philosophy of Education Modules (Mkosi et al., 2023; Ngubane & Makua, 2021). This is a significant setback to the call for decolonization of the curriculum at the university level.

African history, like the indigenous stories that show the cultural heritage of indigenous people, should be integrated into the curriculum to reflect Africanism. The Western culture and philosophies could be replaced with African traditional storytelling, folklore, spirituality, healing systems, and indigenous practices to prevent the indigenous culture from extinction and decolonize the education system, both at the primary, secondary, and University levels of education. This call for decolonization of the curriculum can be achieved by ensuring that indigenous values and culture are integrated into the curriculum at all levels of education to decolonize education in Africa (Makokotlela & Gumbo, 2025; Mahabeer, 2018). Curriculum designers and all other relevant stakeholders in universities in South Africa must ensure the review of the Bachelor of Education program reflects the inclusion of Ubuntu principles, like togetherness, love, sharing, humanity, and inclusivity.

2.3 Relevance of Ubuntu in the Bachelor of Education Program

The Bachelor of Education degree program is a preparatory program for pre-service teachers. The philosophy of education module is an important module that students are required to take in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree award. This module is taught to skilled pre-service teachers on the need to promote educational philosophies that will assist them in teaching in the classroom. These philosophies are essential in understanding and addressing key challenges associated with teaching, learning, and other educational problems affecting Africans. In Africa, our belief systems are diverse and different from the European cultural heritage; hence, we must advocate for the inclusion of Indigenous philosophies like the Ubuntu principles to address educational problems (Masuku & Makhanya, 2023; Ngubane & Makua, 2021).

However, studies show that the philosophy of education modules taught in most universities in South Africa and other African countries are Eurocentric and Western, with no African touch (Gwaravanda & Ndofirepi, 2020). Solving African educational problems with foreign philosophies without regard for or affiliation with African cultures and beliefs is challenging. There should be a turning point where African problems are addressed using Indigenous African values and principles, like Ubuntu, that advocate addressing African educational problems from a humanistic approach (Ewuoso & Hall, 2019; Mkosi et al., 2023). Because of the relevance of Ubuntu to the Bachelor of Education program, adopting philosophies fundamental to humanity, cultural practices, and spirituality will support the decolonization of the education drive embarked on by African countries, including South Africa. This initiative will also assist in producing teachers with values like moral judgment, which coincide with the stipulation of the South African constitution.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Gilbert's Compassionate Care Model

This paper is premised on Gilbert's compassionate care model. Although Gilbert's compassionate care model is widely used in health care sciences, it is relevant for this paper in that it has compatibilities with Ubuntu philosophy, which advocates that I am because you are (Mutanga 2024). This model has five characteristics, which are motivating, sensitive, sympathetic and empathetic, distressing tolerance, empathy, and nonjudgmental (Cole-King & Gilbert, 2014).

The first step is motivation, which calls for being considerate, encouraging, and beneficial to others. In addition to operating at specific times, this 'commitment to try to do something about it' component of compassion also represents a set of values that specify how we would like to behave in our positions and as individuals. The essential element that influences compassion's other qualities is motivation. Better social interactions, fewer conflicts, and more well-being are all experienced by those driven to serve others rather than pursue ego-centered objectives (Cole-King & Gilbert, 2014). The second stage is sensitivity, which is the ability to pay close attention and be sensitive. It helps us perceive when others require assistance. The antithesis of "turning a blind eye" is this term. Our emotional reaction to distress is empathy. The capacity to be emotionally impacted by another person's suffering is a prerequisite for compassion. The third stage is sympathy and empathy. Empathy is the kind of emotional connectedness that occurs when a happy child stumbles and injures themselves while playing. We would all be familiar with the impromptu sensation of being moved to assist. Thus, empathy is associated with sensitivity and a desire to alleviate pain (Cole-King & Gilbert, 2014). When someone is timid or proud and doesn't want to ask for help, they may be left alone because they never "cause a fuss," even though they have critical needs they are hesitant to express. Empathy can help us comprehend someone else's needs even when they may be unaware or in denial.

Empathy enables us to recognize and value a patient's dignity despite a patient's body being rotting, malformed, ugly, or smelling bad. The nature of empathy and its significance in social connections are now well-founded in neurobiological research, which has demonstrated that it depends on unique networks within and between specific brain regions. (Baron-Cohen 2011; Gilbert and Liotti 2011). The fourth stage is distress tolerance, which involves our capacity to tolerate challenging emotions in others and ourselves. This is known as distress tolerance. People may turn away if they feel too overwhelmed by another person's suffering because they are psychologically incapable of handling it. Alternatively, people are forced to act as rescuers to quickly end the other person's suffering since it seems too upsetting. Making sense of another person's emotions is as important as identifying their motivations, objectives, and sentiments. For instance, when we observe someone crying, we notice this emotionally and attempt to comprehend that they might have gone through a loss (Cole-King & Gilbert, 2014). The last stage is non-judgment, which is accepting and validating another person's experience without criticizing their pain. Compassion also includes being nonjudgmental, which means not condemning. Our ability to empathize will be hindered if we cannot resolve and cope with the emotions of irritation (or wrath, fear, disgust, grief, and so on) that we may experience during some therapeutic interactions. Our empathy is undermined, our morale is lowered, and we become more prone to burnout when we are angry about things beyond our control or influence (Cole-King & Gilbert, 2014).

Every aspect of Gilbert's compassionate care model aligns with the tenets of Ubuntu, which support the idea that I am human because I share, participate, and belong. Ubuntu people are open and available to others, accepting of others, and do not feel threatened by others' ability and goodness because they have the right kind of self-assurance that comes from understanding that they are part of a larger whole and are diminished when others are degraded, humiliated, tortured, oppressed, or treated as though they were less than who they are (Waghid, 2020).

4. Methodology

This study adopted the qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is the methodical investigation of social phenomena in their natural environments. These phenomena may include, but are not restricted to, how people see certain facets of their lives, how people behave individually and in groups, how organizations operate, and how interactions shape relationships (Teherani et al., 2015; Mohajan, 2018). The authors adopted the one-on-one semi-structured interview and document analysis method as this study's main data collection instrument. The one-on-one semi-structured interview was adopted for this study because it assisted the author in eliciting an in-depth and essential response from the participants. The choice of a one-on-one semi-structured interview is to ensure that the researchers get in-depth information from the respondent. This procedure is helpful in that it allows for more probe questions to elicit the necessary information from the participants. Document analysis is the methodical process of reviewing or assessing printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) documents. To extract meaning, acquire comprehension, and generate empirical knowledge, document analysis necessitates examining and interpreting data, just as other analytical techniques in qualitative research (Bowen, 2009).

A sample of eight B.Ed Year Four students from one University in South Africa with the same characteristics as the population were purposively selected for the study. This indicates that participants for the study were selected in a non-randomized manner based on the availability of the B.Ed student and their willingness to be part of the study. Initially, we selected fifteen (15) students and two (2) Lecturers for the study. Seven (7) of the students selected later declined to be part of the study; hence, eight (8) students finally agreed to participate in the study. We selected B.Ed students from year four; year one to three students were not part of the participants. The selected participants comprised six B. Ed students and two philosophy of education lecturers in the faculty of education at the participating University. The participants' lecturers were coded LT 1 and LT2, while the participating students were coded ST1, ST2, ST3, ST4, ST5, and ST6, respectively. Before data collection, the authors obtained ethical clearance from the University's ethics committee. Also, the gatekeeper's permission from the participating University was obtained to facilitate participant data collection. The consent of participants was sought before recording the interview session, and they were informed of the purpose of the study, which is to investigate the perspective of student teachers about integrating Ubuntu Philosophy into the Philosophy of Education module. Participants were also informed that their participation was voluntary; they could opt out of the study freely at any time. The thematic approach of coding, sorting, and transcribing was used to analyse data collected from the participants selected for the study.

5. Findings

Data for this study were from one-on-one semi-structured interviews and documents. In line with the research question, data collected from participants were analysed in the following themes:

5.1 Ubuntu Philosophy and Teacher Education Programme

5.1.1 Ubuntu Principles Integrated into the Philosophy of Education Module

According to the student participants, they include the Ubuntu ideology in their instruction. They all concurred that the philosophy of education module incorporates values like tolerance, sharing, kindness, and respect. This claim demonstrates that pre-service teachers know the Ubuntu Principles and how they are integrated into the philosophy of education module. ST1 Noted that:

"... I learnt about the principle of sharing..."

This assertion is in line with the view of participant ST2, who noted that:

"... for us to unite as humanity, we are supposed to help because I cannot be without others..."

This demonstrates how student teachers believe that to decolonize education at South Africa University, Ubuntu values like humanism, kindness, unity, and cooperation must be incorporated into the philosophy of education modules. ST3 noted that:

"... Principles are integrated, I think first dignity, respect, and being able to share with others ..."

Participant ST4 noted that:

"... it's respect being kind and not being disrespectful"

ST5 has this to say:

"... from my understanding of Ubuntu, for me, means kindness being kind, respect also goes hand in hand with Ubuntu, so I am being kind to my colleagues, to my learners, it means they are going to be kind to me ..."

5.1.2 Quality of Teachers, Ubuntu Philosophy Envisages to Produce

Without a doubt, the teacher education program needs to be set up to generate educators who prioritize Ubuntu values. To contribute to the decolonization of education in South Africa and throughout Africa, student teachers referred to the need for teacher education to develop educators who embody and incorporate Ubuntu values into their teaching. ST1 noted that:

"... as a student teacher, you are not only to deliver content, but you also need to lead the class, you make sure that you emphasise and teach learners how to behave and how to solve problems ..."

ST2 noted that:

"... they should remember that this is not only about teaching and learning, they should also include learners from different backgrounds so they can also feel included ..."

This statement suggests that Ubuntu principles will encourage inclusivity, regardless of learners' socioeconomic background. ST4 noted that:

"... I have to be gentle to learners, sometimes I can be harsh, then I used to be friendly, and then deep kindness to one another ..."

These qualities, as expressed by ST4, are crucial and represent the core principles of Ubuntu philosophy. ST5 also supports the view expressed by ST4:

"... if you are working together ..."

ST6 also noted that:

"... whenever I am teaching, I am incorporating humility, I am building relationships with learners, and working together ..."

According to the opinions shared by all of the student teachers, Ubuntu instructors are known for their kindness, humanism, respect, inclusivity, and willingness to accept students from various socioeconomic backgrounds in their classes. Although they are not covered in the Ubuntu principles curriculum at South African universities, student teachers claim that these values are taught in the philosophy of education module. This shows that even if the tenets of Ubuntu are not explicitly included in the curriculum, they are implied in the instruction.

5.1.3 Integration of Ubuntu into the Philosophy of Education Module

Ubuntu's principles, such as respect, humanity, interrelatedness, cooperation, kindness, and communalism, are not integrated into the philosophy of education module. From the document analysis conducted by researchers, it is clear

that the Ubuntu philosophy and its principles are not integrated into the Philosophy of Education module. The document analysis contains the lecture notes and other lecture guides submitted by the lecturers teaching the philosophy of education modules. This shows that Eurocentric and Western philosophies are being taught at the expense of African philosophies like the Ubuntu in South African Universities. Student teachers indicated that Ubuntu Philosophies are only taught in passing and not integrated into the philosophy of education module.

5.1.4 How Ubuntu Principles Are Integrated into Teaching the Philosophy of Education Module

The Ubuntu concept can be included in the philosophy of education module in various ways. Regarding how their professors are incorporating the tenets of Ubuntu into the philosophy of education curriculum, student instructors voiced differing opinions. ST1 noted that:

"... as a student teacher, I emphasise love among learners and sharing among learners. We not only do that to learners, as colleagues we also talk about how we should treat each other and the community at large ...".

ST3 noted that:

"... as a student teacher, for me to teach respect to the learners, I must first respect them, the respect with the community that we must share, and I think it must start with me. A student teacher, I can go to the learners and teach them respect for others, so I must spread love and respect to learners, they will respond positively because they have seen it from me".

ST4 and ST5 also supported this view. ST 4 noted explicitly that:

"... everyone must respect each other and then have dignity, and then we have to come to humanity where everyone must be human to each other".

It is evident from the perspectives of ST3, ST4, and ST5 that to include the Ubuntu concept into the Education module, lecturers and student instructors must exhibit the qualities of Ubuntu, such as cooperation, humanity, respect, and love. Therefore, it would be necessary for student instructors to have the attributes of Ubuntu ideals for them to be successfully integrated.

5.2 Ubuntu Principles Taught in the Philosophy of Education Module

5.2.1 Topics Taught in the Philosophy of Education Module

Philosophy of education is an essential module taught as part of the teacher education program in higher education institutions in South Africa. After their training program, the module will equip student teachers with the necessary philosophical skills to enhance their capacity. Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) students must be competent in primary and secondary school teaching. To achieve this, Ubuntu-focused teachers must be produced in the teacher education program, hence integrating Ubuntu principles into the philosophy of education module. This supports the South African Government and the African government's effort to decolonize education programs to reflect indigenous cultural practices and African ways of life. This effort will significantly assist in replacing Western and Eurocentric philosophies with African philosophies like the Ubuntu philosophy, thereby showcasing the important values inherent in African culture. In South African higher education institutions, the philosophy of education and theories taught are Western and Eurocentric, relegating African philosophies like the Ubuntu philosophy to the background. Participating student teachers supported this view. ST1, ST2, ST3, ST4, and ST6 all alluded to the view that topics taught in the philosophy of education module are foreign theories/philosophies. ST6 specifically noted that:

"... there is critical rationalism, logical empiricism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and systems theory... "

This view shows that the topics taught in the philosophy of education module are Western and Eurocentric and do not reflect African cultural values and practices. Participants expressed their views on the topics they love the most and least. Most student teachers are interested in critical theory, logical empiricism, phenomenology, and systems theory. ST1, ST2, ST3, and ST5 noted that:

"... the most important topics I like so much are the one that deals with critical thinking and logical empiricism ...".

ST4 also noted that:

"... I say systems theory will be right because only on systems theory we want to hear how systems influence one another, like a student teacher, we have to have a team which will work together, not only one person must work alone, we have to share ideas".

ST6, on the other hand, noted that:

"... logical empiricism. It is focused on science, but I believe it's part and parcel of all subjects ..."

Student teachers view topics like phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical rationalism, and system theories as difficult, hence show little interest in learning them. Specifically, ST1 and ST4 are least like hermeneutics, ST2 is less like logical empiricism, critical theory, and phenomenology. At the same time, ST3 is less like critical rationalism, and ST5 is less like phenomenology and critical rationalism, while ST6 is least like phenomenology. The attitude of the student teachers to these philosophies/theories may be partly due to their foreign nature and the difficulties in interpreting them. For example, one of the student teachers believed that one must be Christian to be able to interpret hermeneutics.

5.3 Relevance of the Ubuntu Principle in Teacher Education Programs

5.3.1 Collaborative Learning

Promoting collaborative learning is an essential aspect of the philosophy of education module. ST1, ST2, ST3, and ST4 noted that their lecturer supports collaborative learning by giving them group assignments. According to them, the groups facilitate interactions and can solve problems as a group rather than as individuals. It therefore follows from student teachers' views that their lecturers promote collaborative learning in the philosophy of education module. The group encourages and promotes interaction, cooperation, and effective learning.

5.3.2 Principle of Tolerance

Student teachers alluded to the view that tolerance is not promoted in the philosophy of education module. They strongly recommend the integration of the principle of tolerance into the teacher education module. The principle of tolerance, peace, respect, humanity, communalism, interconnectedness, and interrelatedness forms an important aspect of the Ubuntu principle; hence, it must be integrated into the philosophy of education module.

6. Discussion of Findings

This study reveals that the Ubuntu philosophy was not integrated into the teacher education curriculum offered by higher education institutions in South Africa (Sathorar & Geduld, 2018; Maistry, 2023). Teacher education programmes offered by higher education institutions in South Africa are expected to produce trainee teachers capable of integrating Ubuntu into their teaching after their training programmes. The teacher education program must not be based on Western and Eurocentric philosophies, while indigenous philosophies like the Ubuntu are relegated to the background. However, this calls for urgent action to review the curriculum and integrate African indigenous philosophy into the teacher education programmes offered by higher education institutions. The findings also pointed to the need for incorporating principles like kindness, humanity, sharing, communalism, cooperation, and inclusivity within the framework of Ubuntu. This position is also supported by researchers like Mkosi et al. (2023) and Olawumi et al. (2024) and affirms the importance of reviewing the curriculum to reflect the indigenous philosophies and principles like the Ubuntu that showcase the need to integrate values like kindness, cooperation, selflessness, communalism, togetherness, etc. The study reiterates the need to review the teacher education programme to produce effective students capable of integrating the principle of Ubuntu into teaching at the end of their teacher education training programme. The study also suggests that the framework to be developed must take cognizance of the knowledge of content and pedagogy that will guide the implementation of the Ubuntu principle in the teacher education programme.

The tenets of Ubuntu that support the idea that I am because I share, participate, and belong align with Gilbert's compassionate care. Ubuntu people are open and available to others, accepting of others, and do not feel threatened by others' ability and goodness because they have the right kind of self-assurance that comes from understanding that they are part of a larger whole and are diminished when others are degraded, humiliated, tortured, oppressed, or treated as though they were less than who they are (Waghid, 2020). The Gilbert model has five characteristics: motivating, sensitive, sympathy and empathy, distressing tolerance, empathy, and nonjudgmental, which align with the Ubuntu principles (Cole-King & Gilbert, 2014).

The student teachers report poor integration of Ubuntu principles into the teacher education programme. Topics like critical theory, logical empiricism, phenomenology, and system theory were taught by lecturers teaching philosophy of education modules, and student teachers view them as difficult because of their foreign and Eurocentric nature. Document analysis also reveals that Ubuntu topics and other essentials are not integrated into the lecture guide, and other available materials reviewed by the researchers. This indicates that student teachers will only be well-versed in foreign philosophy without regard for African values and cultural practices. Africans must begin to tailor their

education system to reflect their cultural heritage, such that the teacher education programme will incorporate indigenous philosophies that are easy for student teachers to understand and implement in the classroom.

Moreover, curriculum reform is essential in this era of decolonization of education in Africa. This process is necessary because of the dynamic nature of the educational needs of African countries. Integrating Ubuntu into the teacher education curriculum will provide a framework for teaching indigenous philosophies like Ubuntu and the attainment of the decolonization of the educational system, not only in South Africa but in Africa as a whole. The findings also suggest that the review of the curriculum must be organized to ensure that all the stakeholders are involved, especially teachers who are curriculum implementers. This finding is in line with the view expressed by Makokotlela & Gumbo (2025) & Mahabeer (2018), who emphasize the need for decolonization of education. Decolonizing education will showcase the rich cultural heritage of African indigenous knowledge and its principles entrenched in the curriculum. This can be better achieved when teacher education programme in universities in South Africa and indeed Africa. Teachers must be seen as critical stakeholders in the curriculum review so that they can bring in their experiences from the classroom, especially in pedagogy and content knowledge. Studies show that teachers are often excluded from the curriculum review; they are only involved in the implementation. This will help correct the old practices in which teachers are left out of the process.

7. Conclusion

The study concludes that stakeholders in the education sector in South Africa should put measures in place to ensure the integration of the Ubuntu principle into the teacher education programme at the higher education institutions. This suggests that the curriculum review accommodate Ubuntu principles, especially in the philosophy of education module in the teacher education programme. However, to address the gaps identified from the data gathered from the student teachers, the study concludes that the curriculum review will serve a dual purpose of incorporating Ubuntu philosophy into the Curriculum and help decolonize the education system in South Africa and beyond. The curriculum reform process must be holistic and all-encompassing in that all the critical stakeholders, including the curriculum implementers, such as teachers, must be involved in the process. The idea that teachers are only involved in the implementation stage of the process must be discarded. Integrating Ubuntu principles can help encourage collaborative learning, promote tolerance, peace, respect, fairness, humility, interdependence, and other important values that form African cultural practices.

8. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This study is limited to one university in South Africa, which can limit the generalization of the findings. Also, only eight participants who are final year Bachelor of Education students and two lecturers from one university were involved in the study. It is suggested that the number of participants be increased in further studies. It is also suggested that the number of universities for further research be increased from one to three or more to further enhance the generalization of findings.

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Authors contributions

Prof MP Mavuso, Prof Duku N, and Dr KB Olawumi were responsible for Data collection, study design, and revision. Prof MP Mavuso, Prof Duku N, and Dr KB Olawumi were responsible for the revision of the manuscript. Prof MP Mavuso was responsible for drafting the proposal for the application for the SEED Grant. The three authors contributed equally to the study.

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