

Reimagining Service-Learning Frameworks through Ubuntu Philosophy: A Kenyan Perspective

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Thematic area: Contributions to the Definition of "Service-Learning"
and "Solidarity Service-Learning"

Introduction and context

- Service-learning integrates academic instruction with community engagement.
- Service-learning in Kenya widely adopts Western models.
- Emphasis on individual learning outcomes and time-bound projects.
- Students are framed as central agents of change within academic calendar constraints.
- Projects focus on measurable deliverables and personal reflection.
- Need to rethink service-learning to align with Kenyan and broader African worldviews.

An Overview of Ubuntu Philosophy

- Ubuntu means *"I am because we are."*
- It contrasts with the individualistic approach in current service-learning models.
- Focus is on interconnectedness, dignity, mutual care, communal responsibility, and collective success.
- Aligns naturally with service-learning goals of solidarity and reciprocity.

Methodology

- Approach- conceptual and theoretical analysis.
- Sources- African philosophy, decolonial thought, ethics, and experiential learning.
- Ubuntu used as a lens to critique and reframe service-learning paradigms.

Critique of Current Models

- Over-focus on individual achievement and isolated deliverables.
- Projects are structured primarily around academic timelines.
- Reflection centers mainly on personal skill acquisition.
- Risk of transactional relationships with communities.
- Limits the depth and sustainability of community engagement.
- Lack of alignment with African communal values.

Proposed Shift: Ubuntu-Informed Service Learning

- Move focus from individual to communal learning and transformation.
- Communities as co-educators, not passive recipients.
- Value collective success and shared accountability, beyond measurable outputs.
- Shift from charity-based to reciprocal partnerships.
- Emphasis on humility, dialogue, and structural awareness.

Case Example

- Tangaza University and the coastal fishing community.
- Students engage with elders and local knowledge.
- Co-create solutions for marine pollution.
- Blend academic and indigenous insights.

Key Elements of an Ubuntu-Inspired Framework

- Community-first mindset- projects begin with community input.
- Relational accountability-transparent, respectful partnerships.
- Indigenous knowledge inclusion- validates local wisdom.
- Collective impact assessment: measures communal well-being.

Implications for Educators and Institutions

- Curriculum redesign to embed Ubuntu principles.
- Promote long-term partnerships rather than short-term projects.
- Encourage reflection on communal narratives and shared learning experiences.
- Support decolonization of higher education.

Conclusion

- Ubuntu philosophy offers a transformative framework for service-learning in Africa.
- Potential to enhance mutual benefit and meaningful community engagement.
- Reframes success as collective impact.
- Advances culturally grounded and ethically responsive education.

References

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*The complete bibliographical references are reflected in the paper.

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