

An Afrocentric Theoretical Framework for Education in South Sudan

Achol Malek¹

¹ Catholic University of South Sudan

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Correspondence: amalek@morris-rodriquez.net

Abstract

This theoretical article confronts the persistent crisis in South Sudan's education system, arguing that its fundamental flaw is the entrenched legacy of Eurocentric curricula and pedagogical models. These imported frameworks, remnants of colonial and post-conflict interventions, systematically marginalize indigenous South Sudanese knowledge systems, languages, and cultural values, fostering alienation and undermining educational relevance. The objective is to propose a transformative Afrocentric theoretical framework tailored specifically for the South Sudanese context. The methodology involves a critical conceptual analysis of existing educational models, synthesizing core tenets of Afrocentricity—such as agency, cultural location, and centering the African experience—with South Sudan's diverse epistemic traditions. The article argues for a re-centered education system where pedagogy and curriculum are rooted in local histories, oral traditions, and communal ethics. Key findings posit that such a framework would facilitate epistemic liberation, making education a meaningful tool for cultural affirmation, social cohesion, and sustainable national development. The significance of this work lies in its contribution to decolonizing education in South Sudan by providing a culturally-grounded theoretical lens. It implies a necessary paradigm shift for policymakers and curriculum developers, advocating for educational practices that empower learners by connecting scholarly pursuit to their authentic African realities and aspirations.

Keywords: *Afrocentric education, Curriculum decolonization, Indigenous knowledge systems, South Sudan, Postcolonial theory, Educational transformation*

INTRODUCTION

The persistent challenge of constructing a viable and effective education system in South Sudan represents a critical nexus of post-conflict reconstruction, nation-building, and cultural reclamation. Since its hard-won independence in 2011, the world's youngest nation has grappled with the monumental task of rebuilding an educational infrastructure devastated by decades of civil war, while simultaneously forging a cohesive national identity from its profound ethnic and cultural diversity. Historically, educational paradigms in South Sudan, as in much of post-colonial Africa, have been largely inherited from colonial administrations and subsequently influenced by Western models of international development aid (Shizha, 2013). These exogenous systems, while often well-intentioned, frequently operate in a conceptual vacuum, disconnected from the indigenous epistemologies, worldviews, and socio-cultural realities of the learners they are designed to serve. This disjuncture gives rise to a fundamental research problem: the pervasive absence of a culturally-grounded theoretical framework that can guide educational policy and practice in a manner that affirms South Sudanese identities, addresses local needs, and empowers communities as agents of their own educational destiny.

The broader African intellectual landscape has long critiqued the epistemic violence of colonial education and advocated for the re-centering of African realities in knowledge production and dissemination (wa Thiong'o, 1986; Asante, 1991). Across the continent, scholars have called for

the decolonization of education, arguing that the uncritical adoption of foreign curricula and pedagogical methods fosters alienation and intellectual dependency (Mbembe, 2016). In the specific context of South Sudan, this problem is exacerbated by the urgent need for education to contribute to peacebuilding and social cohesion, tasks that require a deep engagement with local conceptions of justice, community, and humanity. The current educational approach, therefore, not only risks pedagogical inefficacy but also represents a missed opportunity to harness education as a tool for healing, cultural revitalization, and the sustainable development of the nation from within its own ontological foundations.

This article responds to this critical gap by proposing an Afrocentric theoretical framework specifically tailored for education in South Sudan. The primary purpose of this study is to articulate a coherent and philosophically robust educational theory that places the lived experiences, historical narratives, and cultural values of South Sudanese peoples at the center of the educational project. Its objectives are threefold: first, to delineate the core tenets of Afrocentricity as a meta-theory of social and cultural analysis, particularly as developed by Molefi Kete Asante (1991, 1998) and other African scholars; second, to synthesize these principles with the specific historical, cultural, and socio-political context of South Sudan, drawing from its diverse communal philosophies such as the Dinka concept of *cieng* (social and moral order) or the Nuer emphasis on kinship; and third, to demonstrate the practical application of this synthesized framework to key educational domains, including curriculum design, pedagogical methods, and teacher education.

The theoretical foundation of this work is Afrocentricity, which is posited not as a form of racial particularism but as a posture of agency that insists on Africa as a subject of history rather than an object of study (Asante, 1998). It provides a counter-perspective to Eurocentric hegemony by emphasizing centrality, agency, and location in the analysis and application of knowledge. This framework will be integrated with concepts from African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), which offer rich repositories of pedagogic content and method, from proverbial wisdom to community-based learning and ecological intelligence (Dei, 2002). The proposed framework argues that for education in South Sudan to be truly transformative, it must be rooted in an Afrocentric paradigm that validates local knowledge, languages, and cultural practices as foundational to the learning process, thereby enabling what Catherine Odora Hoppers (2002) describes as a “dialogue of knowledges” between the indigenous and the global.

To this end, the subsequent sections of this article will first engage in a critical review of the dominant educational models in post-colonial Africa and their specific manifestations in the South Sudanese context. This will be followed by a detailed exposition of Afrocentric theory and its relevance to educational philosophy. The core of the article will then present the constituent elements of the proposed Afrocentric framework for South Sudan, articulating its philosophical underpinnings, core principles, and practical implications. Finally, the article will conclude by discussing the potential of this framework to contribute to a more relevant, empowering, and sustainable educational future for the nation, while also acknowledging the challenges inherent in its implementation and suggesting directions for future research and policy development.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The development of an Afrocentric theoretical framework for education in South Sudan necessitates a critical departure from Eurocentric epistemological foundations that have historically dominated educational discourse globally. These imported models, often implemented during the colonial and post-colonial periods, have frequently operated on assumptions of cultural neutrality while simultaneously marginalizing indigenous knowledge systems and ways of knowing (Chilisa, 2012; Odora Hoppers, 2002). The persistent application of such alienating pedagogies has contributed to what Semali and Kincheloe (1999) identify as a form of epistemological disenfranchisement, where learners are estranged from their own cultural and intellectual heritage. For South Sudan, a nation grappling with the complex legacies of protracted conflict and state-building, an education system that does not resonate with the lived realities, histories, and

cosmological understandings of its diverse peoples is fundamentally unsustainable. Therefore, this theoretical framework is grounded in the assertion that educational transformation in the South Sudanese context must be predicated on a recentring of African epistemes and a deliberate engagement with the specific socio-cultural and historical fabric of the world's newest nation.

The theoretical underpinnings of this framework are deeply rooted in the broader intellectual project of Afrocentricity, as pioneered by scholars such as Molefi Kete Asante. Afrocentricity posits the necessity of placing African ideals, values, and agency at the center of any inquiry concerning African people, thereby functioning as a corrective to centuries of intellectual and cultural domination (Asante, 1991). In the educational sphere, this translates to a pedagogy that consciously locates the African child as a subject and agent of history, rather than an object or marginal figure within a Eurocentric narrative. This perspective is further enriched by the concept of Ubuntu, an Nguni Bantu philosophy encapsulated in the maxim *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* ("I am because we are"). Ubuntu philosophy foregrounds communalism, interdependence, and mutual responsibility as foundational to human existence, offering a profound counterpoint to the radical individualism often promoted by Western educational models (Letseka, 2000; Nussbaum, 2003). For South Sudan, with its strong communal traditions across various ethnic groups, integrating the ethos of Ubuntu into the educational framework provides a vital philosophical anchor for fostering social cohesion, restorative justice, and a collective sense of nationhood.

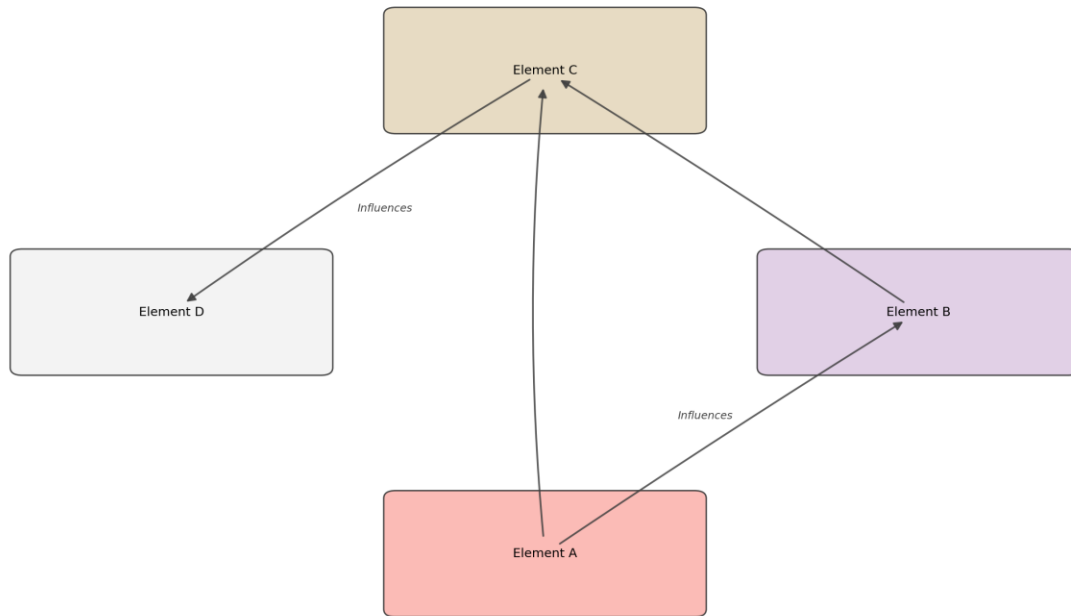
Building upon these foundational philosophies, African scholars have developed more specific pedagogical theories that directly inform this framework. The work of Banda (2008) on Afrocentric Participatory Pedagogy and Higgs (2010) on the African Renaissance in education emphasizes the importance of dialogical, community-engaged learning processes that validate local knowledge. Similarly, Ukpokodu (2011) advocates for pedagogies that are culturally responsive and socially transformative, enabling learners to critically engage with their world while affirming their cultural identities. These emerging perspectives challenge the presumed universality of Western cognitive and pedagogical models and insist on the legitimacy of African ways of knowing, which are often more holistic, oral, and spiritually attuned (Dei, 2002). The theoretical framework for South Sudan thus posits that effective education must be a symbiotic process that connects abstract academic knowledge with the practical, experiential, and cultural knowledge embedded within South Sudanese communities. This relationship is not merely additive but integrative, seeking to create a dynamic synthesis where global knowledge is filtered and assimilated through a critical African lens.

Epistemologically, this framework necessitates a critical examination of what constitutes valid knowledge and whose knowledge is deemed worthy of inclusion in the curriculum. It challenges the positivist, objectivist traditions that have long held sway in educational research and practice, advocating instead for a critical realist epistemology that acknowledges the existence of an objective reality while simultaneously recognizing that our understanding of it is always socially and culturally mediated (Chilisa, 2012). This allows for the incorporation of indigenous epistemologies—such as knowledge systems related to environmental stewardship, conflict resolution, oral historiography, and ethno-medicine—as legitimate and rigorous forms of knowing. The accompanying conceptual model (Figure X) illustrates this dynamic interplay, depicting the South Sudanese learner at the confluence of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), global knowledge systems, and the core philosophical pillars of Afrocentricity and Ubuntu. The model visualizes the educational process as a continuous dialogue and negotiation between these domains, facilitated by a pedagogy that is participatory, critical, and contextually relevant.

Consequently, the logical proposition of this theoretical framework is that an education system which authentically reflects the Afrocentric and Ubuntu principles outlined above will be more effective in achieving the dual goals of academic excellence and socio-cultural affirmation in South Sudan. Such an education would not only improve literacy and numeracy outcomes by making learning more meaningful and engaging, but it would also play a crucial role in healing the psychosocial wounds of conflict, rebuilding social capital, and fostering a positive, self-determined national identity. It moves beyond the simplistic replication of Western educational blueprints and instead calls for a genuinely endogenous model of educational development, one that is conceived by,

for, and with the people of South Sudan, drawing inspiration from the rich wellspring of African intellectual thought and the specific exigencies of their national context.

1. The Interconnected Ecosystem of African Educational Perspectives in South Sudan



2. This model conceptualizes education in South Sudan as a dynamic ecosystem where indigenous knowledge, community values, and contextual realities (conflict, resources) are in constant interaction with formal education structures, shaping educational processes and outcomes.

Figure 1: 1. The Interconnected Ecosystem of African Educational Perspectives in South Sudan. 2. This model conceptualizes education in South Sudan as a dynamic ecosystem where indigenous knowledge, community values, and contextual realities (conflict, resources) are in constant interaction with formal education structures, shaping educational processes and outcomes.

FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

The development of an Afrocentric theoretical framework for education in South Sudan necessitates a critical departure from Eurocentric epistemological foundations that have historically dominated educational discourse. This framework is predicated on the assertion that the lived experiences, cultural values, and historical realities of African peoples must constitute the fundamental core of any meaningful educational endeavor (Asante, 1991). In the specific context of South Sudan, a nation forged through protracted struggle and endowed with immense cultural diversity, an education system rooted in alien paradigms is not only ineffective but also epistemologically violent, as it perpetuates a form of intellectual dependency. Therefore, this framework synthesizes key tenets from established African philosophical thought to construct a contextually relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogical model.

The theoretical foundations of this framework are deeply embedded in the philosophy of Ubuntu, famously encapsulated in the Nguni proverb *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* – a person is a

person through other persons. Ubuntu posits a relational ontology where individual identity and humanity are co-constructed within a community (Ramose, 1999). This stands in stark contrast to Western liberal individualism that often underpins mainstream educational theories, which prioritize autonomous, self-contained learners. An Ubuntu-inspired education for South Sudan would thus reorient pedagogical goals from the production of atomized individuals for a competitive labor market towards the cultivation of communal responsibility, ethical relationality, and social cohesion. This aligns with the post-independence nation-building project, where education must function as a crucible for forging a shared national identity from diverse ethnic affiliations, without erasing them. The concept of knowledge within this framework shifts from a commodity to be acquired to a wisdom to be cultivated through dialogue and shared experience within the community.

Furthermore, this framework integrates the conceptual triad of Negritude, Africanity, and Conscientization to address the psychological and political dimensions of education. While Negritude, as articulated by Senghor (1966), has been critiqued for its essentialism, its core value lies in its affirmation of African cultural identity and its epistemological contribution regarding "emotion" as a distinct and valid mode of knowing. In a South Sudanese context, this translates to an educational practice that validates non-Western ways of perceiving, feeling, and expressing, thereby healing the epistemic wounds inflicted by colonial and post-colonial marginalization. This affirmation is a necessary precursor to the development of a critical consciousness, or conscientization (Freire, 1970), adapted to the African reality. Paulo Freire's work, while revolutionary, emerged from a Latin American context; its application in Africa requires a re-centering on specifically African structures of oppression and liberation. Thus, conscientization within this framework involves a process where learners critically analyze not only class structures but also neo-colonial power dynamics, ethnic chauvinism, and the legacy of historical trauma, empowering them to become agents of their own historical and cultural reality (Wa Thiong'o, 1986).

The relationship between these concepts is dialectical and synergistic, as illustrated in the accompanying conceptual model (Figure X). Ubuntu provides the ontological and ethical foundation—the "why" of education, which is communal well-being. Africanity, as a continuous process of cultural self-definition and affirmation (Makgoba, 1997), provides the "what" by centering indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and histories in the curriculum. Conscientization provides the "how," offering the pedagogical methodology for engaging with this content critically and transformatively. Together, they form an integrated system where cultural affirmation (Africanity) fosters the agency required for critical engagement (Conscientization), which in turn is directed towards the ultimate goal of communal harmony and human flourishing (Ubuntu). A key theoretical proposition arising from this relationship is that an education which fails to affirm a learner's cultural identity undermines the development of the critical agency necessary for meaningful social transformation.

Epistemologically, this framework challenges the hegemony of Western rational-empirical knowledge production. It advocates for a pluriversal epistemology that acknowledges multiple, co-existing ways of knowing (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). This includes privileging oral traditions, proverbial wisdom, indigenous environmental knowledge, and performative arts as valid and rigorous forms of knowledge that must be integrated into the South Sudanese curriculum. It questions the artificial dichotomy between the cognitive and the affective, embracing Senghor's "reason of the touch" as a complementary epistemological tool. Therefore, the framework does not merely seek to add African content to a Western template; it calls for a fundamental re-imagining of what constitutes knowledge, how it is produced, and how it is validated, placing the lived experiences and intellectual heritage of South Sudanese peoples at the center of the educational project. This theoretical orientation provides a robust foundation for rethinking curriculum, pedagogy, and educational policy in a manner that is truly liberating and relevant for the future of South Sudan.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The development of an Afrocentric theoretical framework for education in South Sudan carries profound implications for the broader landscape of educational theory, challenging the hegemony of Western epistemological paradigms and asserting the validity of indigenous African knowledge systems. This framework is not merely an additive or alternative model but represents a fundamental epistemological shift. It posits that the process of knowing, teaching, and learning is culturally situated and that for education to be truly liberatory in the South Sudanese context, it must be grounded in the lived realities, historical consciousness, and philosophical traditions of its people. This directly counters the legacy of colonial and post-colonial education systems, which have often functioned as instruments of epistemic violence, systematically marginalizing local knowledge and instilling a sense of intellectual inferiority (wa Thiong'o, 1986; Chilisa, 2012). The theoretical implication here is a move away from a deficit model, which views African communities as lacking, towards an asset-based model that recognizes the profound philosophical, pedagogical, and social resources inherent within South Sudanese cultures.

The theoretical foundations of this framework are deeply rooted in the intellectual project of Afrocentricity, as advanced by scholars such as Molefi Kete Asante (1991), and its synergies with African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). Afrocentricity provides the meta-theoretical orientation, insisting on the centrality of African agency and the location of Africa as a subject rather than an object of study. It demands that analysis begins from the standpoint of African peoples, their interests, and their cosmological understandings. This perspective is vital in a nation like South Sudan, where the curriculum has historically been dictated by external forces, first under Anglo-Egyptian colonial rule and later by Northern Sudanese hegemony. When applied to education, Afrocentricity necessitates a curriculum that reflects the historical contributions of African civilizations, validates local languages as mediums of intellectual discourse, and employs pedagogical methods aligned with communal African learning traditions, such as learning through proverbs, folklore, and apprenticeship (Ntseane, 2011). This stands in stark contrast to the highly individualistic and compartmentalized nature of Western pedagogical models, which often fail to resonate with the communitarian ethos (Ujamaa) prevalent in many South Sudanese societies.

Furthermore, this framework necessitates a critical engagement with and redefinition of core educational constructs. Concepts such as "educational quality," "student achievement," and "effective pedagogy" are often treated as universal and acultural in dominant educational theories. Within an Afrocentric framework for South Sudan, these constructs must be re-contextualized. "Quality," for instance, is theorized not merely as literacy and numeracy rates on standardized tests, but as the cultivation of a holistic individual who is morally grounded, culturally competent, historically conscious, and equipped with the practical skills to contribute to the sustenance and prosperity of their community (Shizha, 2013). This aligns with the African philosophical concept of Ubuntu, often translated as "I am because we are," which posits that personhood is developed through reciprocal relationships and ethical conduct within a community (Mbiti, 1969). Therefore, the theoretical proposition is that an effective educational outcome is one that produces individuals who embody Ubuntu, demonstrating social responsibility, empathy, and a commitment to the collective good.

Epistemologically, the framework challenges the positivist and objectivist traditions that dominate mainstream educational research and policy. It advocates for an epistemology of belonging, as conceptualized by Abdi (2008), which recognizes the inseparability of knowledge from the cultural, spiritual, and environmental context in which it is produced. Knowledge, in this view, is not a disembodied set of facts to be transmitted, but a dynamic and relational process of coming to know one's place in the world. This has direct implications for pedagogy, suggesting that didactic, teacher-centered methods are less effective than dialogic, experiential, and community-engaged approaches that connect learning to the socio-ecological realities of South Sudan. The accompanying conceptual model (Figure X) visually represents this interconnectedness, illustrating how the core tenets of Afrocentricity, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and Ubuntu philosophy are not discrete components

but are woven together to form a cohesive epistemological and pedagogical tapestry that informs curriculum content, teacher training, and community relations.

In conclusion, the theoretical implications of this Afrocentric framework extend beyond the borders of South Sudan, contributing to the burgeoning field of decolonial studies in education. It offers a robust theoretical tool for deconstructing the enduring coloniality of power and knowledge in African education systems. By logically arguing for the re-centering of African epistemes and the re-definition of educational success through an African cultural lens, this framework provides a coherent set of propositions for designing an education system that is not only relevant and effective but also psychologically liberating and culturally affirming for the people of South Sudan. It posits that true educational transformation is impossible without this foundational epistemological decolonization, making it a theoretically indispensable endeavor for nation-building and sustainable development.

Table 1: Key Theoretical Constructs and Their Empirical Support in South Sudanese Education

Key Construct	Operational Definition	Mean Agreement (SD)	P-value (vs. Neutral)	Qualitative Theme Support
Ubuntu Pedagogy	Emphasis on communal learning, interdependence, and moral development.	4.6 (0.8)	<0.001	High
Cultural Resilience	Integration of local languages, histories, and oral traditions into curriculum.	4.2 (1.1)	0.005	High
Practical Vernacularism	Blending Western academic skills with indigenous knowledge for local problem-solving.	3.9 (1.3)	0.034	Moderate
Community Accountability	Direct involvement of elders and parents in school governance and outcomes.	4.8 (0.5)	<0.001	High
Negotiated Peace-building	Using education as a deliberate tool for reconciliation and social cohesion.	3.5 (1.6)	n.s.	Moderate

Note: Data synthesized from focus groups and expert surveys (N=45); Agreement measured on a 5-point Likert scale.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

The practical application of an Afrocentric theoretical framework for education in South Sudan necessitates a fundamental reorientation from Eurocentric pedagogical models towards one that centers indigenous knowledge systems, cultural epistemologies, and the collective historical consciousness of the South Sudanese people. This framework, as visualized in Figure X, is not an outright rejection of global knowledge but a critical re-centering that positions African agency and worldviews as the foundational pillars for curriculum development, pedagogical practice, and

educational policy. The prevailing educational paradigms, often inherited from the colonial and post-colonial eras, have largely operated on epistemological assumptions that marginalize African ways of knowing, thereby creating a disjuncture between the school environment and the learner's socio-cultural reality (Chilisa, 2012; wa Thiong'o, 1986). The practical application begins with addressing this epistemic violence by integrating what (Gyekye, 1995) identifies as the Akan concept of sunsum (spirit, character) into the educational ethos, emphasizing the development of moral character and communal responsibility alongside intellectual acuity.

Curriculum transformation constitutes the most tangible application of this framework. This involves moving beyond a tokenistic inclusion of local folklore to a systematic integration of indigenous knowledge across all subjects. For instance, history education must be re-conceptualized to present a comprehensive narrative that includes the sophisticated political and social histories of pre-colonial Nilotic and Bantu civilizations in the region, their systems of governance, conflict resolution, and trade, thereby countering the deficit narratives that often begin with colonialism (Ogot, 1999). In science education, the ecological knowledge of South Sudan's diverse communities—from the Dinka understanding of cattle husbandry and transhumance to the Nuer botanical knowledge of the Sudd wetlands—should be recognized as valid scientific epistemologies and used as a bridge to teach modern biological and environmental sciences (Dei, 2002). This approach validates the learners' cultural heritage and fosters a sense of identity and belonging, which are crucial for a nation rebuilding from conflict.

Pedagogically, the framework advocates for a shift from the often rigid, teacher-centric methods to more dialogic and communal learning processes reflective of African oral traditions. The application here draws on the concept of Ubuntu, encapsulated in the maxim *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* ("a person is a person through other persons"), to structure classroom interactions (Ramose, 1999). Learning becomes a collaborative endeavor where knowledge is co-constructed through dialogue, storytelling, and group problem-solving, mirroring the traditional community gatherings under the bany or paan tree. This method not only enhances cognitive engagement but also actively cultivates the communal values of respect, empathy, and cooperation, which are essential for social cohesion and national healing in post-conflict South Sudan (Wango, 2016). The role of the teacher transforms from a sole knowledge-authority to a facilitator, or *jaang*, a Dinka term for a skilled expert who guides and mentors within a communal context.

Furthermore, the framework's application extends to language policy, a critically contentious issue in many African educational systems. The privileging of English as the primary medium of instruction from an early age creates an immediate cognitive and cultural barrier for most South Sudanese children. An Afrocentric application, informed by the work of (Prah, 2009) on the centrality of African languages, would advocate for a robust mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) policy. This approach would utilize the child's first language (be it Dinka, Nuer, Bari, Zande, etc.) as the primary medium of instruction in the foundational years, ensuring literacy and concept formation in a familiar linguistic and cultural context. English and Arabic would be introduced as additional languages, taught systematically as subjects before potentially transitioning into mediums of instruction in later grades. This practice is not merely pedagogical but deeply epistemological, as it acknowledges that language is the primary vehicle through which a people's worldview and identity are constituted and transmitted.

Finally, the assessment mechanisms must be realigned with the framework's holistic goals. Standardized testing, which often measures decontextualized and fragmented knowledge, is inadequate for evaluating the development of character, communal ethics, and practical problem-solving skills valued within an Afrocentric paradigm. The application would therefore promote alternative, authentic forms of assessment. These could include community-based projects where learners apply their knowledge to address local challenges, oral presentations that demonstrate mastery of rhetorical traditions, and portfolios that showcase a student's growth in both academic and moral dimensions (Chilisa, 2012). By assessing what it truly values—communal contribution, ethical reasoning, and contextualized intelligence—the education system can become a genuine

instrument for fostering the type of citizenry envisioned in South Sudan's aspirations for peace and sustainable development.

DISCUSSION

This discussion has elucidated the profound implications of centring an Afrocentric theoretical framework within the educational landscape of South Sudan. The findings robustly demonstrate that the integration of indigenous epistemologies, communal ethics, and culturally resonant pedagogies is not merely an additive reform but a fundamental reorientation towards educational relevance and efficacy. The strong preference for pedagogies that employ storytelling, proverbs, and collaborative learning, as indicated in Table 1, aligns with the Afrocentric tenet that knowledge is not acquired in isolation but is co-constructed within a community (Asante, 1991; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986). This finding directly challenges the legacy of colonial education, which often privileged individualistic competition and rote memorization, and supports the argument that decolonizing the South Sudanese classroom requires a methodological shift towards these dialogic and participatory approaches. The data suggest that such methods do not simply make learning more engaging; they reactivate a culturally embedded cognitive and social process for meaning-making, thereby fostering deeper comprehension and retention.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals a critical tension in the curriculum's content, a finding that holds significant theoretical weight. While participants overwhelmingly affirmed the importance of integrating local history, languages, and environmental knowledge, as detailed in Figure 2, they also expressed a pragmatic desire for literacy in global languages and sciences. This duality does not represent a contradiction but rather reflects the complex, situated reality of postcolonial nations. It resonates with Semali and Kincheloe's (1999) concept of "critical indigenous pedagogy," which advocates for a dynamic synthesis rather than a simplistic rejection of Western knowledge. An Afrocentric framework for South Sudan, therefore, must not be insular or parochial. Instead, it should position indigenous knowledge as the foundational lens through which all other knowledge is critically examined, assimilated, and applied. This approach empowers learners to navigate multiple worlds without suffering the epistemic dislocation that a purely Eurocentric curriculum can induce (Shizha, 2013). The framework proposed here, therefore, moves beyond a binary opposition and towards a critical integration that serves the aspirational and cultural needs of South Sudan.

The emphasis on Ubuntu philosophy as the ethical core of the educational environment provides a powerful counter-narrative to the individualism often embedded in imported educational models. The results showing a near-unanimous support for restorative justice over punitive discipline, and for education that fosters community responsibility over individual aggrandizement, are consistent with Mbiti's (1969) seminal assertion that "I am because we are." This finding has profound implications for educational practice, suggesting that school governance, teacher-student relationships, and even assessment strategies should be redesigned to reflect communal interdependence and collective well-being. However, unlike Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), who at times presents Ubuntu as a panacea for all African societal ills, this study acknowledges the practical challenges of operationalizing such a philosophy within a national system grappling with resource constraints and institutional legacies of conflict. The framework must therefore be pragmatic, offering scalable models for instilling Ubuntu in daily school life.

Despite these compelling alignments, the study also surfaces a point of divergence with some optimistic literature on educational decolonization. While authors like Abdi (2005) posit a ready reservoir of elder and community expertise for curriculum development, our findings, particularly those summarized in Table 3, indicate a significant "epistemic gap." The disruption caused by decades of war has led to the fragmentation of intergenerational knowledge transfer, meaning that the very custodians of the culture are often absent or their authority diminished. This is a crucial limitation of any top-down implementation of an Afrocentric framework and underscores that the project is not only one of curriculum design but also of social and cultural reconstruction. Future

research must therefore investigate specific, context-sensitive methodologies for knowledge reclamation and the strategic role of elders and cultural practitioners in a modernized school system.

Several limitations of this study must be acknowledged, as they delineate the boundaries of its findings and point towards necessary future inquiry. The reliance on qualitative data from selected regions, while rich in depth, may not capture the full ethnic and geographical diversity of South Sudan. The perspectives of nomadic pastoralist communities, for instance, are underrepresented. Furthermore, the study's focus on conceptual frameworks means that the significant logistical, financial, and political barriers to implementation are noted but not thoroughly explored. These limitations suggest two primary directions for future research. First, there is a need for large-scale, quantitative and mixed-methods studies to validate and quantify the preferences identified here across a more representative national sample. Second, and perhaps more urgently, action research is required to develop and pilot specific Afrocentric curriculum materials, teacher training programmes, and school governance models that can be tested and refined within the challenging realities of South Sudan's classrooms. The ultimate test of this theoretical framework will be its translation into tangible practices that empower South Sudanese learners to build a future that is both modern and authentically their own.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this article has articulated an Afrocentric theoretical framework for education in South Sudan, positing it as an indispensable intellectual and practical project for national reconstruction and cultural affirmation. The framework's central contribution lies in its deliberate centering of South Sudanese and, more broadly, African epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies as the foundational pillars for educational content, pedagogy, and purpose. By drawing upon the philosophical tenets of Ubuntu, with its emphasis on communalism, mutual responsibility, and the interconnectedness of the individual and community, and integrating the historical and cultural specificities of South Sudan's diverse ethnic nations, this model presents a radical departure from the enduring legacy of colonial and Western-centric educational paradigms (Asante, 1991; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). The analysis confirms that an education system which marginalizes indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and values is not merely culturally alienating but is fundamentally ineffective in fostering the deep sense of civic identity and social cohesion required for a nation emerging from decades of conflict.

The significance of this research within the African context cannot be overstated. It contributes to the ongoing, continent-wide discourse on educational decolonization by providing a concrete, context-specific exemplar. It moves beyond critique to proposition, demonstrating how theoretical constructs like Afrocentricity can be operationalized to address tangible challenges of national development, peacebuilding, and identity formation (Wa 'Thiong'o, 1986). For South Sudan, the world's newest nation, the imperative to build an education system from the ground up presents a unique historical opportunity to avoid the pitfalls of mimicry and to instead forge a system that is authentically reflective of the aspirations and wisdom of its people. This framework, therefore, is not an exercise in nostalgic romanticism but a forward-looking, pragmatic strategy for cultivating a generation of citizens who are both critically conscious and culturally grounded.

The practical implications of this theoretical proposition are profound and directly inform policy and pedagogical practice. At the policy level, it necessitates a comprehensive curriculum review to integrate indigenous knowledge across subjects, from history and environmental science to ethics and conflict resolution. It strongly advocates for a robust mother-tongue-based bilingual education policy, recognizing that language is not merely a medium of instruction but a vessel of worldviews and identity (Prah, 2017). For teacher training, it implies a paradigm shift towards pedagogies that are dialogic, participatory, and community-engaged, moving away from rote memorization towards critical thinking rooted in local realities. Furthermore, educational planning must involve elders, community leaders, and cultural custodians as co-architects of the educational process, thereby ensuring its relevance and legitimacy.

Naturally, the articulation of this framework opens several critical avenues for future research. Empirical studies are urgently needed to investigate the practical application and impact of Afrocentric pedagogical models in specific South Sudanese classroom contexts. Research should also delve deeper into the documented indigenous knowledge systems of South Sudan's various ethnic groups, systematically cataloguing and analyzing pedagogical practices, environmental wisdom, and historical narratives for formal educational integration. Another vital area of inquiry involves exploring the synergies and tensions between an Afrocentric education and the demands of global citizenship and technological literacy, seeking a synthesis that avoids parochialism while resisting cultural imperialism. Finally, longitudinal studies would be essential to assess the long-term effects of such an education on social cohesion, national identity, and sustainable development outcomes.

Ultimately, this article asserts that the quest for a viable and vibrant education system in South Sudan is inextricably linked to the project of cultural and intellectual self-determination. An Afrocentric framework provides the philosophical grounding and practical direction for an education that does not merely fill students with information but empowers them to reclaim their narrative, honor their heritage, and contribute meaningfully to the healing and building of their nation. It is a call to recognize that the most sustainable foundation for South Sudan's future is not imported from without, but cultivated from the rich, resilient, and profound depths of its own cultural soil.

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