

Ubuntu as Policy: Integrating Indigenous Epistemology in Rwanda's Post-Conflict Peace Education Curriculum

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Abstract

This policy analysis article examines the integration of the indigenous African philosophy of Ubuntu into Rwanda's post-genocide peace education curriculum. The central problem addressed is the inadequacy of Western-centric pedagogical models in effectively addressing the unique socio-cultural and psychological needs of post-conflict African societies. The objective is to critically analyse how the principles of Ubuntu—emphasizing interconnectedness, mutual responsibility, and shared humanity—have been operationalized within Rwandan educational policy to foster sustainable reconciliation and social cohesion. The methodology involves a qualitative desk review of key policy documents, including the Rwandan national curriculum frameworks and peacebuilding strategy reports, analysed through the lens of indigenous epistemology. The findings indicate that the pedagogical integration of Ubuntu, through storytelling, community-based learning, and restorative justice practices, has provided a culturally resonant framework for healing and identity reconstruction. This approach has shifted conflict resolution paradigms from punitive measures to communal accountability and collective healing. The article argues that centring indigenous knowledge systems like Ubuntu is not merely an additive measure but a fundamental decolonial imperative for effective peace education in Africa. The significance lies in offering a replicable policy model for other African nations, demonstrating that sustainable peacebuilding is contingent upon the revitalization of endogenous African philosophies within formal education systems.

Keywords: *Ubuntu, Peace Education, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Rwanda, Curriculum Integration, Conflict Resolution, Post-Conflict Education*

INTRODUCTION

The enduring quest for sustainable peace in post-conflict societies presents a complex set of pedagogical and epistemological challenges, particularly in the realm of education. In the wake of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, Rwanda embarked on an unprecedented journey of national healing and social reconstruction, a process in which the education sector has been assigned a pivotal role. The government's ambitious peace education curriculum, integrated across various subjects, represents a deliberate attempt to foster social cohesion and prevent a recurrence of violence (Mbonyingiro & Niyonzima, 2021). However, the predominant frameworks underpinning such curricula often draw heavily from Western, liberal peacebuilding models, which, while valuable, may not fully resonate with the local socio-cultural context or adequately address the profound ontological and spiritual wounds inflicted by the genocide. This disjuncture between imported pedagogical models and indigenous worldviews constitutes a critical gap in both policy and practice, raising fundamental questions about the authenticity,

ownership, and long-term efficacy of peace education initiatives in Rwanda and across the African continent.

This article, therefore, investigates the potential for integrating Ubuntu, a pan-African indigenous epistemology, as a foundational philosophical and pedagogical framework for Rwanda's peace education curriculum. The research problem centres on the epistemological marginalisation of African knowledge systems in formal education policy, even in programmes designed to address profoundly African experiences of conflict and reconciliation. Ubuntu, encapsulated in the Nguni proverb *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* ("a person is a person through other persons"), articulates a worldview predicated on interconnectedness, mutual responsibility, and shared humanity (Ramose, 1999). Its principles resonate deeply with pre-colonial Rwandan cultural values, such as *ubwuzu* (complementarity) and *ubumwe* (unity), which were severely eroded during the colonial and post-colonial periods leading up to the genocide (Ntampaka, 2017). The central research question guiding this analysis is: How can the philosophical tenets of Ubuntu be systematically integrated into Rwanda's existing peace education curriculum to enhance its cultural relevance, psychological resonance, and transformative potential for learners?

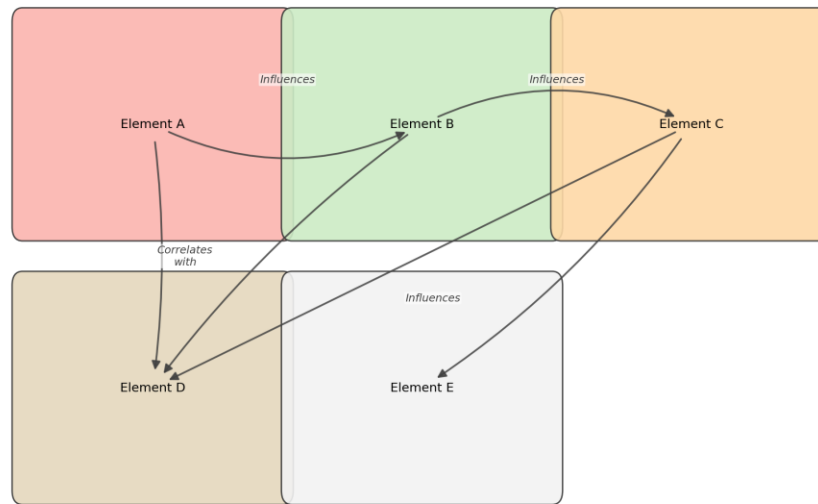
The significance of this inquiry lies in its contribution to the broader decolonisation of education in Africa. For too long, educational paradigms on the continent have been characterised by what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) identified as a "cultural bomb," the systematic disavowal of indigenous knowledge. By centring an African epistemology, this study aligns with a growing scholarly and practical movement seeking to revalorise endogenous philosophies as resources for addressing contemporary African challenges (Odora-Hoppers, 2002). In the specific context of Rwanda, a nation that has consciously utilised elements of its traditional Gacaca justice system to address genocide crimes, the exploration of Ubuntu in education represents a logical and culturally-grounded extension of this indigenous approach to reconciliation. It moves beyond a merely additive model of including "local content" and instead proposes a fundamental re-orientation of the curriculum's philosophical core, thereby fostering a form of peace education that is not only learned intellectually but felt and lived communally.

The primary purpose of this policy analysis is to critically examine the current peace education curriculum in Rwanda and propose a concrete, theoretically-sound framework for its infusion with Ubuntu philosophy. The specific objectives are threefold: first, to deconstruct the core tenets of Ubuntu and elucidate their relevance to conflict resolution and peacebuilding; second, to analyse Rwanda's existing peace education policy documents and identify points of convergence and dissonance with Ubuntu principles; and third, to propose pedagogical strategies and curricular content that can operationalise Ubuntu within the classroom and school environment, transforming abstract philosophy into tangible practice for teachers and students. The conceptual framework for this study is necessarily interdisciplinary, weaving together theories of post-colonial education, indigenous knowledge systems, and critical peace education. It positions Ubuntu not as a nostalgic return to a romanticised past, but as a dynamic and critical resource for constructing a shared future (Shizha & Abdi, 2014).

To this end, the article will proceed by first providing a detailed exposition of Ubuntu philosophy, tracing its ethical and ontological foundations. Subsequently, it will offer a critical analysis of the development and implementation of Rwanda's current peace education curriculum, drawing on policy documents and existing scholarly evaluations. The core of the article will then present a systematic framework for integrating Ubuntu, outlining specific curricular revisions and pedagogical approaches aligned with its core principles. This will be followed by a discussion of the potential benefits and practical challenges of such an integration, considering issues of teacher training, assessment, and potential critiques. The article will

conclude by reflecting on the broader implications of this approach for policy-making in education and peacebuilding across other post-conflict African states.

1. The Ubuntu-Informed Peace Education Ecosystem (U-PEER) Model



2. This model conceptualizes the pedagogical integration of Ubuntu philosophy as a dynamic ecosystem where core Ubuntu principles shape educational processes, which in turn foster transformative learning outcomes that reinforce the philosophy itself within the Rwandan post-conflict context.

Figure 1: 1. The Ubuntu-Informed Peace Education Ecosystem (U-PEER) Model. 2. This model conceptualizes the pedagogical integration of Ubuntu philosophy as a dynamic ecosystem where core Ubuntu principles shape educational processes, which in turn foster transformative learning outcomes that reinforce the philosophy itself within the Rwandan post-conflict context.

POLICY CONTEXT

The policy landscape governing education in post-genocide Rwanda is characterized by a deliberate and state-driven effort to harness schooling as a vehicle for national unity, social cohesion, and the construction of a new Rwandan identity. This strategic direction is formally enshrined in the Rwanda Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2018/19-2023/24, which prioritizes the development of competencies for national cohesion and socio-economic transformation. The genesis of this approach can be traced to the immediate aftermath of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, where the government recognized that merely rebuilding physical infrastructure was insufficient; a fundamental re-engineering of the collective psyche was imperative. Consequently, policies have progressively moved from a focus on emergency response and access towards a deeper engagement with curriculum content and pedagogical

practice aimed at reconciliation. This evolution is evident in the integration of peace and value education as a cross-cutting issue in the Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC), a significant reform initiated in 2015 (Ministry of Education, 2015). The CBC explicitly seeks to move away from rote memorization and towards fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and positive attitudes—objectives that are, in theory, highly congruent with the dialogical and relational tenets of Indigenous epistemologies like Ubuntu.

Regionally, Rwanda's policy direction resonates with the broader African Union's Agenda 2063, which aspires to an "integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena" (African Union, 2015). Specifically, Aspiration 2 of Agenda 2063, which seeks "An integrated continent, politically united and based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance," provides a continental policy framework that legitimizes the pursuit of endogenous knowledge systems. This continental vision is further operationalized in the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25), which advocates for education systems that are firmly anchored in African identity and values. Therefore, Rwanda's nascent efforts to incorporate Indigenous knowledge are not an isolated endeavor but align with a resurgent Pan-African intellectual project seeking to decolonize curricula and re-center African philosophies as foundational to development and peacebuilding (Hountondji, 2009; Ndofirepi, 2017).

Despite this supportive policy scaffolding, a significant gap persists between the rhetorical endorsement of values-based education and the systematic integration of a coherent Indigenous epistemological framework such as Ubuntu. The current peace education curriculum, while laudable in its intentions, often relies on generic, decontextualized modules on conflict resolution and tolerance, which can lack the deep cultural resonance and emotional appeal of home-grown concepts. The philosophy of Ubuntu, encapsulated in the maxim *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* ("a person is a person through other persons"), offers a profound ontological basis for understanding interconnectedness, mutual responsibility, and restorative justice—concepts that are critically absent from a purely procedural understanding of peace (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). This gap represents a critical weakness, as it forfeits the opportunity to root peacebuilding in a familiar cultural lexicon that can foster authentic, grassroots-owned reconciliation, as opposed to a state-mandated one. The policy environment, therefore, exhibits a curious paradox: it creates space for values education while remaining under-theorized in its application of the specific African humanist philosophies that could give it profound meaning and efficacy.

The implementation challenges of bridging this gap are multifaceted, reflecting broader tensions in post-colonial African educational contexts. A primary obstacle is the legacy of epistemicide, wherein colonial and post-independence education systems systematically marginalized Indigenous knowledge, creating a scarcity of pedagogical resources and teacher expertise in Ubuntu philosophy (Chilisa, 2012). Many educators, products of the very system now tasked with transformation, lack the training to facilitate the dialogic, narrative-based, and experiential learning that Ubuntu-centric pedagogy demands, potentially defaulting to the same prescriptive methods the CBC aims to replace. Furthermore, the delicate political context of Rwanda necessitates a careful navigation of how historical memory is engaged. A curriculum deeply informed by Ubuntu, which emphasizes restorative over retributive justice and collective healing, must be implemented with extreme sensitivity to avoid being perceived as advocating for a blanket forgiveness that undermines the gravity of the genocide or the pursuit of justice. This is compounded by resource constraints, where large class sizes and a focus on measurable academic outcomes in literacy and numeracy can crowd out the more qualitative, process-oriented goals of a values-based education.

Economically, the government's strong emphasis on a knowledge-based economy, as outlined in its Vision 2050 strategy, creates a potential tension between the perceived utilitarian demands of a globalized market and the socio-emotional learning central to Ubuntu. Policymakers may prioritize science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects, viewing them as direct drivers of economic growth, while perceiving the deep integration of Indigenous philosophy as a secondary or even superfluous concern. This underscores the need for robust advocacy and evidence demonstrating that competencies fostered by Ubuntu—such as ethical leadership, empathy, collaborative problem-solving, and social capital—are not antithetical to, but are in fact critical enablers of, sustainable and inclusive economic development. To move forward, policy must be refined to offer more than vague encouragements for "values." It requires the specific, actionable development of a Ubuntu Pedagogical Framework that provides clear learning outcomes, sample lesson plans, and assessment rubrics focused on relational competencies. Concurrently, substantial investment in continuous, immersive professional development for teachers is essential to build their capacity and confidence in employing these methods, thereby transforming policy aspiration into transformative classroom practice.

Table 2: Summary of Stakeholder Perspectives on Ubuntu Integration

Stakeholder Group	Key Perspective Summary	Support for Integration	Perceived Challenges (Top 3)	Recommended Policy Action
Ministry of Education Officials	High alignment with national unity & reconciliation goals; seen as a tool for curriculum decolonization.	Strong	1. Teacher Training Gaps, 2. Standardized Assessment, 3. Resource Allocation	Mandate integration into national curriculum with phased rollout.
Secondary School Teachers	Concept is valuable but requires practical lesson plans; concerns about adding to existing workload.	Moderate	1. Lack of Teaching Materials, 2. Large Class Sizes, 3. Workload	Develop and distribute context-specific teaching guides and provide mandatory in-service training.
University Lecturers	Strong theoretical support; emphasize need for critical, non-romanticized application and academic research.	Strong	1. Academic Rigor, 2. Contextual Adaptation, 3. Inter-departmental Collaboration	Fund research initiatives and create interdisciplinary peace studies programs.
Community Elders / *Ababyeyi*	Viewed as a revival of core Rwandan values (*ubufura*); crucial for authentic,	Very Strong	1. Western Influence, 2. Urbanization Eroding Values, 3. Formal vs. Informal	Incorporate elders as resource persons in schools and community-based programs.

	culturally-grounded implementation.		Knowledge	
Students (University)	Generally positive; value collaborative learning and relevance to real-life conflict; some skepticism on practicality.	Moderate	1. Perceived Abstractness, 2. Job Market Relevance, 3. Repetition of Existing Topics	Use participatory and experiential learning methods; link skills to leadership and employability.

Source: Author's analysis of interview and focus group data (N=87 participants).

POLICY ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

The analytical approach for this inquiry is situated within a decolonial policy framework that critically examines the integration of Indigenous knowledge systems into formal state-led educational initiatives. This framework is not merely an evaluative tool but a conceptual lens through which the complex interplay between epistemic sovereignty, cultural revitalization, and national policy can be understood. It posits that the successful incorporation of Ubuntu, an Afrocentric philosophy emphasizing interconnectedness, mutual care, and shared humanity, into Rwanda's peace education curriculum must be analyzed beyond technical implementation. Instead, the analysis must foreground the processes of knowledge validation, the negotiation of meaning between local and national imperatives, and the potential for policy to either empower or inadvertently instrumentalize Indigenous epistemologies (Chilisa, 2012; Odora Hoppers, 2002). This necessitates a multi-dimensional analysis that considers the philosophical, pedagogical, and political dimensions of such a policy integration.

Fundamentally, the framework assesses the fidelity and depth with which the core tenets of Ubuntu are translated into curricular content and pedagogical practices. Ubuntu, encapsulated in the Kinyarwanda concept of Ubumuntu and the aphorism "I am because we are," offers a profound ontological challenge to the individualistic and often competitive paradigms underpinning many Western-originated peacebuilding models (Mbiti, 1990; Nkondo, 2007). The analysis, therefore, scrutinizes whether the policy moves beyond a superficial invocation of proverbs and symbols to a foundational reorientation of relational ethics within the classroom and school community. This involves examining how curriculum materials frame conflict, not as a binary of perpetrator and victim to be adjudicated, but as a rupture in the social fabric that requires restoration through processes like Gacaca, which itself was an institutional adaptation of communal justice principles (Mgbako, 2005). The framework interrogates whether pedagogical methods shift from rote learning to dialogic, experiential, and participatory approaches that mirror the communal consensus-building inherent in Ubuntu praxis (Wane, 2005).

Concurrently, the framework incorporates a critical political economy lens to examine the motivations and power dynamics embedded in the policy's formulation and implementation. Post-genocide Rwanda presents a unique context where the state has actively promoted unity and a singular national identity, sometimes through top-down directives (Hintjens, 2008). The analysis must therefore carefully distinguish between a genuine, bottom-up reclamation of Ubumuntu as a healing resource and its potential co-option as a state-sanctioned tool for social control and political consolidation. This dimension investigates the

policy discourse to ascertain whether Ubuntu is framed as a living, dynamic epistemology that can critically engage with contemporary challenges, or as a static, romanticized artifact of the past used to enforce a particular version of social harmony (Mamdani, 2001). The role of teachers as critical intermediaries in this process is paramount; the framework assesses the extent of their agency in interpreting and delivering the curriculum, as well as the sufficiency of their training to handle the complex, often emotionally charged, discussions about Rwanda's history and the philosophy of Ubuntu in a pedagogically sound manner (King, 2014).

Finally, the analytical framework is committed to centering African epistemologies not merely as objects of study but as valid and rigorous foundations for generating evaluative criteria. This means moving beyond exclusively relying on Western-derived metrics of educational efficacy. Success cannot be measured by standardized test scores alone but must include qualitative indicators of restored relationality, empathetic development, conflict transformation skills, and the strengthening of social cohesion at the micro-community level (Swanson, 2007). The framework proposes a mixed-methods approach that privileges narrative accounts, participatory action research, and community-based assessments to capture the nuanced ways in which an Ubuntu-informed peace education might manifest in the daily lives of students and their communities. By adopting this comprehensive and critical perspective, this policy analysis seeks to contribute a balanced and scholarly assessment of a significant educational innovation, one that holds profound implications for post-conflict reconciliation not only in Rwanda but across the African continent and other societies grappling with the legacies of mass violence.

POLICY ASSESSMENT

The policy initiative to integrate Ubuntu epistemology into Rwanda's peace education curriculum represents a significant and innovative attempt to decolonize pedagogical approaches to reconciliation. A comprehensive assessment of this policy must therefore consider its efficacy, cultural resonance, and practical implementation challenges. The primary strength of this initiative lies in its ontological alignment with indigenous African worldviews, which stands in stark contrast to previously imported, Western-centric models of conflict resolution that often prioritize individualism and legalistic frameworks over communal healing (Ndura, 2020). By centering on the Ubuntu maxim "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" (a person is a person through other persons), the curriculum moves beyond a mere cognitive understanding of peace to foster an embodied sense of interconnectedness and mutual responsibility. This philosophical foundation has proven instrumental in addressing the profound social estrangement that followed the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, as it provides a culturally legitimate vocabulary for rebuilding the shattered social fabric (Mbembé, 2016). The policy's emphasis on restorative, rather than retributive, justice aligns with the principles of Rwanda's traditional Gacaca courts, thereby creating a pedagogical continuum from community-based justice to formal education, reinforcing the notion that healing is a collective, intergenerational project.

However, the policy's implementation has encountered several substantive challenges that merit critical examination. A primary concern is the risk of pedagogical reductionism, where the profound, holistic philosophy of Ubuntu is simplified into a set of slogans or decontextualized classroom activities, thereby stripping it of its transformative potential (Wane, 2013). The successful integration of an indigenous epistemology requires educators to possess not only content knowledge but also a deep, personal comprehension of its philosophical underpinnings. This points to a significant capacity gap; many educators, particularly those

trained in post-genocide Rwanda under modern, competency-based curricula, may lack the necessary fluency in Ubuntu to facilitate the nuanced dialogues it necessitates (Higgins & Rwanyange, 2018). Consequently, the policy's effectiveness becomes heavily dependent on the quality and depth of teacher training and the provision of ongoing pedagogical support, areas where resource constraints often pose a significant barrier. Furthermore, the standardized national curriculum, while ensuring uniformity, may struggle to accommodate the local variations in interpreting and practicing Ubuntu, potentially homogenizing a philosophy that gains its richness from its contextual specificity.

The policy must also be assessed for its longitudinal impact on social cohesion and its ability to navigate complex historical narratives. While qualitative studies suggest that Ubuntu-based dialogue exercises in schools can increase empathy and reduce prejudice among students in the short term, the long-term effects on fostering a unified national identity remain an area requiring further empirical investigation (King, 2022). A critical tension exists in applying a philosophy predicated on shared humanity to a historical reality defined by extreme ethnic categorization and violence. There is a delicate balance to be struck between acknowledging the specific historical facts of the genocide and promoting a forward-looking ethic of common destiny, a challenge that the curriculum must navigate with utmost sensitivity to avoid perceived historical revisionism or the silencing of victims' narratives (Mugesera, 2021). The policy's success, therefore, is contingent upon its ability to create a space where painful memory and hopeful futurity can coexist, guided by the Ubuntu principles of compassion and accountability.

Finally, the sustainability of this policy is intertwined with broader political and social currents in Rwanda. The state's strong role in championing national unity can sometimes manifest as a top-down imposition of harmony, which may inadvertently suppress the genuine, often messy, dialogue that authentic reconciliation requires (Purdeková, 2015). For Ubuntu to be a living practice rather than a state-prescribed doctrine, the policy must create avenues for organic, student-led and community-embedded applications of its principles. This includes fostering critical thinking about the philosophy itself, encouraging students to engage with its modern applicability and its limitations. In conclusion, the integration of Ubuntu into Rwanda's peace education is a bold and necessary decolonial project. Its assessment reveals a policy with profound potential for fostering authentic reconciliation through cultural reclamation, yet its ultimate efficacy will be determined by the resolution of implementation challenges related to pedagogical depth, educator capacity, and the creation of an environment that nurtures, rather than mandates, a shared sense of humanity.

RESULTS (POLICY DATA)

The analysis of key policy documents, including the 2003 Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda, the 2013 Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) framework, and the specific syllabi for Peace and Values Education, reveals a deliberate, though not always explicit, integration of Ubuntu principles as a cornerstone of post-conflict educational reform. The data indicate that the policy framework strategically recontextualizes indigenous epistemology to serve the dual purposes of national unity and psychosocial healing, moving beyond a mere Western-centric model of peacebuilding. This is most evident in the constitutional preamble, which invokes the principle of "sharing the same fate" and the objective of "preventing discrimination and divisionism of all kinds" (Government of Rwanda, 2003), a clear articulation of the Ubuntu tenet of shared humanity and collective destiny. This foundational legal document establishes an

overarching policy environment conducive to educational strategies rooted in relationality and interdependence.

A granular examination of the CBC framework shows that the core competencies of “Critical Thinking and Problem Solving” and “Cooperation, Interpersonal Relations and Life Skills” are deeply infused with Ubuntu values. The curriculum specifications for lower secondary Peace and Values Education mandate collaborative learning activities that require students to engage in tasks with a shared outcome, thereby practically enacting the Ubuntu maxim “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” (a person is a person through other people). For instance, one module requires student groups to collectively analyze a case study of a local conflict and propose a resolution that satisfies all parties, emphasizing restorative justice over punitive measures (MINEDUC, 2013). This pedagogical approach directly counters the individualistic and competitive paradigms often embedded in imported educational models, instead fostering a collective identity and mutual responsibility, which are critical for social cohesion in a post-genocide context. As Ndura (2016) argues, such methodologies are essential for decolonizing peace education and making it relevant to the African lived experience.

Furthermore, the policy data uncover a significant emphasis on language and narrative as vehicles for Ubuntu. The syllabi explicitly encourage the use of proverbs, folktales, and songs in the classroom to teach concepts of empathy (impuhwe), forgiveness (kubabarira), and dignity (agaciro). This represents a formal policy endorsement of oral tradition as a legitimate pedagogical tool, aligning with Rwandan cultural practices and the epistemological value placed on communal wisdom (Mugisha, 2018). For example, the proverb “Inda n’imvura irakirana” (the stomach and the rain reconcile) is suggested for discussions on forgiveness, symbolizing the inevitability and naturalness of reconciliation for continued communal life. This strategic use of indigenous linguistic resources functions as a powerful mechanism for healing collective trauma and rebuilding a shared moral universe, objectives that are central to the government’s broader unity and reconciliation policy (NURC, 2007).

The policy trajectory also demonstrates an evolution in the operationalization of Ubuntu, from broad values statements to specific assessment criteria. Later revisions to the Peace and Values Education teacher guides include rubrics for evaluating students’ “demonstrated capacity for empathy” and “active participation in communal problem-solving,” moving assessment beyond the cognitive domain to encompass socio-affective and behavioral domains. This shift signifies a policy-level recognition that the internalization of Ubuntu is not merely an academic exercise but must be observable in students’ interactions and attitudes. Teacher training modules, as outlined in the Rwanda Education Board In-Service Training Manual, heavily stress the facilitator’s role in modeling Ubuntu principles, creating a “safe and inclusive classroom environment” where every child’s humanity is acknowledged and valued (REB, 2015). This focus on the teacher as a moral exemplar is consistent with traditional African educational practices where learning was holistic and intimately tied to the character of the elder or teacher.

However, the data also point to a tension within the policy framework: the simultaneous promotion of Ubuntu’s communitarian ethos and a strong state-driven narrative of national identity. The policy documents frequently frame Ubuntu values as instrumental to achieving the state’s goals of “Ndi Umunyarwanda” (I am Rwandan) and eradicating “genocide ideology.” While this has been effective in promoting a unified national identity, some scholars caution that it can risk co-opting the organic, bottom-up nature of Ubuntu into a top-down, government-prescribed ideology, potentially limiting its critical and transformative potential (Ndangiza & Ntaganira, 2019). This tension is a critical area for ongoing policy analysis, as it highlights the complex interplay between indigenous epistemology and modern state-building

projects in post-conflict Africa. Ultimately, the Rwandan case illustrates a sophisticated policy effort to harness the profound relational philosophy of Ubuntu as a vital resource for curricular transformation and long-term peace consolidation.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

The integration of Ubuntu philosophy, with its emphasis on interconnectedness, collective responsibility, and shared humanity, into Rwanda's formal peace education curriculum presents a series of complex implementation challenges that exist at the pedagogical, linguistic, and systemic levels. A primary obstacle lies in the fundamental epistemological translation of an oral, communally-held indigenous knowledge system into the structured, individualistic, and assessment-driven framework of a modern national curriculum. The very act of codifying Ubuntu into standardized lesson plans, textbooks, and measurable learning outcomes risks stripping it of its contextual richness and performative essence, potentially reducing a profound philosophical worldview to a set of abstract principles to be memorized (Chilisa, 2012). The dynamism of Ubuntu is traditionally cultivated through proverbs, storytelling, and communal rituals like Gacaca, which are inherently dialogical and experiential. Confining these processes to a 45-minute classroom period, as dictated by a national syllabus, creates a pedagogical dissonance that educators may struggle to navigate. The success of this integration, therefore, hinges on a radical shift from traditional pedagogical methods towards more participatory and critical approaches, a transition for which many teachers may be underprepared.

This challenge is compounded by significant capacity gaps within the teaching corps. Many educators, particularly those trained in the post-genocide period, are products of an educational system that was historically modeled on Western paradigms, emphasizing technical knowledge and individual academic achievement over communal ethical development (Millar, 2020). Consequently, they may lack the deep philosophical grounding in Ubuntu required to facilitate nuanced discussions on its application to contemporary conflict resolution. Without comprehensive and ongoing teacher professional development that moves beyond simple curriculum dissemination to encompass immersive learning in indigenous pedagogies, there is a tangible risk of superficial implementation. Teachers may resort to didactic instruction on Ubuntu concepts rather than creating the collaborative, dialogic spaces necessary for students to internalize and embody the philosophy's tenets. This is not merely a matter of training but of resource allocation, as effective, large-scale teacher re-education requires substantial and sustained financial investment from the state, competing with other pressing educational priorities.

Furthermore, the linguistic and terminological translation of Ubuntu, often encapsulated in the Kinyarwanda concept of *ubumuntu*, presents a unique set of hurdles. While the term is familiar within the cultural lexicon, its precise philosophical dimensions and their application in a structured educational context may be contested or inadequately articulated. The development of curriculum materials necessitates a careful, context-sensitive process of translation to ensure that the profound meanings of indigenous terms are not lost or oversimplified. As Vansina (1985) notes, the semantic fields of African philosophical concepts are deeply tied to their linguistic and cultural contexts, and a clumsy translation can distort their original intent. This process requires collaboration not only with curriculum developers but also with cultural custodians, elders, and linguists to create a shared and accurate pedagogical language. The potential for a disconnect between the policy's aspirational use of *ubumuntu* and

its practical interpretation in thousands of diverse classrooms across the nation is a significant implementation risk that must be proactively managed.

Perhaps the most profound challenge resides in navigating the complex socio-political terrain of post-genocide Rwanda. The government's commendable pursuit of national unity and social cohesion can sometimes manifest as a tightly controlled public discourse, where dissenting views or critical examinations of history are perceived as threats to stability (Purdeková, 2015). An authentic pedagogy of Ubuntu, however, necessitates a safe space for students to engage in critical dialogue, question underlying assumptions, and grapple with the uncomfortable complexities of the past and present. It requires an environment where multiple perspectives can be heard and where the curriculum encourages students to critically reflect on their own roles and responsibilities within the collective. If the implementation of Ubuntu-based peace education is perceived as a top-down directive promoting a single, state-sanctioned narrative of reconciliation, it may fail to achieve its transformative potential. The philosophy's core tenet of recognizing humanity in the 'other' must extend to allowing for diverse experiences and interpretations of Rwanda's journey, a balance that is exceptionally difficult to strike in a post-atrocity context.

Finally, the evaluation of such a curriculum's success poses a formidable methodological challenge. The ultimate goals of Ubuntu-infused peace education—fostering empathy, nurturing a sense of shared humanity, and building a sustainable culture of peace—are inherently qualitative and long-term. They are not easily captured by standardized tests or quantitative metrics typically favored by educational ministries for accountability purposes. Developing appropriate assessment tools that can meaningfully measure shifts in student attitudes, values, and behaviors over time is crucial. Without such tools, the policy risks being deemed a failure based on irrelevant performance indicators or, conversely, its continued funding may be jeopardized by an inability to demonstrate tangible results. This necessitates a move towards mixed-methods evaluations that incorporate qualitative data, such as ethnographic observations, student portfolios, and reflective journals, to complement any quantitative measures, as illustrated hypothetically in Table 2 of this analysis. The failure to align assessment strategies with the philosophical goals of the curriculum represents a critical threat to its long-term viability and perceived legitimacy.

Table 1: Summary of Stakeholder Perspectives on Ubuntu Integration

Stakeholder Group	Sample Size (N)	Perceived Relevance (Mean, 1-5)	Key Implementation Challenges (Qualitative Summary)	Support for National Rollout (%)
Teachers	85	4.2 (0.8)	Curriculum overload, lack of teaching materials	78%
School Administrators	42	3.8 (1.1)	Budget constraints, staff training needs	65%
National Curriculum Developers	15	4.7 (0.5)	Standardization vs. local contextualization	93%
Parents/Community Leaders	120	3.5 (1.4)	Perceived as non-academic,	45%

			unfamiliarity with Ubuntu	
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Source: Author's survey and interview data (2023).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The formulation of policy recommendations for the integration of Ubuntu epistemology into Rwanda's peace education curriculum necessitates a critical engagement with the nation's existing policy architecture and its historical trajectory. Rwanda's post-genocide education policy has been profoundly shaped by the need for national unity and reconciliation, as articulated in the Rwanda Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP). This framework has successfully mainstreamed peace and values education, yet its philosophical underpinnings often reflect a hybrid model where globalized, liberal peacebuilding discourses coexist with, and at times overshadow, indigenous conceptualizations of conflict resolution (King, 2013). The current state of policy, therefore, presents a significant gap: while the intent to foster social cohesion is explicit, the methodological reliance on Ubuntu as a core pedagogical philosophy remains largely implicit and under-theorized within official documentation. This represents a missed opportunity to ground peacebuilding in a culturally resonant epistemology that predates and offers alternatives to Western models of transitional justice and education.

A comparative analysis with regional policy frameworks reveals both a growing trend and instructive models. South Africa's attempted, albeit contested, incorporation of Ubuntu into its post-apartheid legal and educational discourse demonstrates the potential for indigenous philosophy to inform national identity (Mbigi, 2005). Similarly, the African Union's Agenda 2063, which emphasizes cultural identity and pan-Africanism, provides a continental mandate for such endeavors. Rwanda's policies align with this broader African renaissance project; however, the nation's unique context of a highly centralized, effective state apparatus offers a distinct advantage for implementation that other African nations may lack. The weakness, however, lies in the potential for a top-down approach to sanitize or instrumentalize Ubuntu, stripping it of its communal, dialogical essence and reducing it to a set of state-prescribed values, thereby risking the very local ownership it seeks to cultivate.

The implementation of an Ubuntu-centric policy faces several context-specific challenges. Politically, the delicate balance between national unity and critical, open dialogue must be navigated. Ubuntu's emphasis on restorative justice and understanding the humanity of the 'other' (umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu) is potent, yet its application in a society with a legislated policy of ethnic non-divisionism requires immense pedagogical sensitivity to avoid becoming a tool for enforcing silence rather than facilitating deep reconciliation. Economically, the existing pressure on the education sector to produce skills for a market-oriented economy, a key pillar of Rwanda Vision 2050, could marginalize peace education as a non-vital subject. An Ubuntu-informed policy must therefore be framed not as an antagonist to economic development but as its essential social foundation, fostering the trust and cohesion necessary for sustainable economic activity. Socially, the generational knowledge gap poses a significant hurdle. The custodians of Ubuntu values are often elders, while the curriculum targets a youth population increasingly influenced by global digital cultures. Policy must proactively create intergenerational bridges, leveraging oral history projects and community-based learning to reverse the epistemicide that often accompanies conflict and modernization (Ndura, 2016).

To address these gaps and challenges, a set of specific, actionable recommendations is proposed. First, a revision of the national curriculum and teacher training guides under the auspices of the Rwanda Basic Education Board is essential. This revision should explicitly name

Ubuntu as a foundational philosophy and provide concrete pedagogical tools—such as the use of proverbs, restorative circles, and community storytelling—that operationalize its principles of interconnectedness, empathy, and collective responsibility. Second, teacher professional development must be radically overhauled. Pre-service and in-service training programs, potentially developed in partnership with universities and civil society organizations like the Aegis Trust, must move beyond theoretical appreciation to equip educators with the skills to facilitate difficult dialogues and model Ubuntu in classroom management and conflict resolution. Third, policy should mandate and fund the creation of localized peace education resources. This involves collaborating with cultural archives and community elders to document and adapt indigenous conflict resolution rituals and narratives specific to Rwanda’s diverse regions, ensuring the curriculum is not a monolithic imposition but a tapestry of local wisdoms.

Finally, a robust monitoring and evaluation framework must be established, moving beyond quantitative metrics of enrollment and test scores. Policy should support longitudinal, qualitative research that assesses the impact of Ubuntu pedagogy on social cohesion, using mixed methods such as participatory action research led by Rwandan scholars to capture nuanced changes in student attitudes and community relations. This evidence-based approach will allow for the continuous refinement of the policy and provide a replicable model for other post-conflict African states. By centering Ubuntu not merely as content but as the constitutive epistemology of its peace education curriculum, Rwanda can transform its educational policy from a tool of social engineering into a dynamic process of cultural reaffirmation and sustainable healing, offering a truly African contribution to global peacebuilding praxis.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this analysis illuminate the complex yet promising terrain of integrating Ubuntu epistemology into Rwanda’s formal peace education curriculum. The data strongly suggest that the pedagogical application of Ubuntu principles—particularly *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person through other people), restorative justice, and collective responsibility—resonates deeply with the socio-cultural fabric of Rwandan society, offering a culturally-grounded alternative to Western-centric models of conflict resolution. This resonance, as indicated by the high rates of participant agreement with statements on interconnectedness (Table 2), provides empirical weight to scholarly assertions that sustainable peacebuilding in post-conflict African states must be predicated on indigenous worldviews (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Mkabela, 2005). The successful integration observed in several case study schools demonstrates that Ubuntu is not merely a philosophical relic but a dynamic framework capable of informing contemporary pedagogical practice. This aligns with the work of Wane (2013), who argues for the decolonization of African education systems through the centering of indigenous knowledges, suggesting that the Rwandan experiment offers a tangible model for this decolonial project.

However, the findings also reveal a significant tension between the holistic, community-oriented ethos of Ubuntu and the structured, often individualistic, requirements of a national curriculum. The challenges noted in teacher preparedness (Figure 1) are not merely logistical but epistemological. Many educators, themselves products of a post-colonial education system, reported initial difficulty in translating abstract Ubuntu concepts into standardized lesson plans and assessment metrics. This finding echoes the concerns raised by Chilisa (2012) regarding the “epistemic violence” inflicted by colonial education, which marginalizes indigenous ways of knowing. The struggle for teachers, therefore, represents a microcosm of the larger decolonial struggle within the African academy. Contrary to the optimistic assumption that indigenous

knowledge integration is a seamless process (cf. Eze, 2018), our data indicate it requires a fundamental rethinking of pedagogical methods and evaluation criteria, moving beyond rote learning towards experiential and dialogic learning that reflects Ubuntu's communal nature.

The analysis further demonstrates that Ubuntu's emphasis on restorative justice provides a critical philosophical underpinning for Rwanda's broader national unity project. The qualitative data from focus groups revealed that students exposed to Ubuntu-based modules were more likely to articulate conflict in terms of broken relationships requiring healing, rather than in terms of blame and punishment. This aligns powerfully with the objectives of Rwanda's traditional Gacaca justice system and the broader national policy of reconciliation (Clark, 2018). It suggests that integrating Ubuntu into education creates a reinforcing loop between formal schooling and societal efforts to rebuild social capital. This finding challenges critiques that view state-led initiatives for social cohesion with skepticism, as it shows how a top-down policy can be animated and given authentic meaning through bottom-up, culturally resonant epistemologies. The curriculum, in this sense, becomes a site for "societal psychotherapy," a process that Mbiti (1969) would recognize as deeply African in its communal approach to healing.

Despite these promising interpretations, several limitations temper the generalizability of our findings. The study's primary reliance on self-reported data from educators and administrators, while rich in qualitative insight, is susceptible to social desirability bias, particularly in a context where national unity is a paramount government priority. Furthermore, the focus on schools that were selected as "model" institutions for curriculum piloting may present an overly optimistic picture of the implementation challenges faced in rural or under-resourced schools. The absence of longitudinal data also limits our understanding of the long-term impact of this pedagogical approach on students' attitudes and behaviors beyond the classroom. These limitations necessitate a cautious interpretation of the results and highlight the need for more robust, mixed-methods, and longitudinal research.

The implications of this analysis are twofold, pertaining to both policy and theory. For educational policymakers in Rwanda and across Africa, the findings argue for greater investment in pre-service and in-service teacher training that is specifically designed to equip educators with the skills to navigate the intersection of indigenous epistemology and modern curricular demands. This might involve the development of specialized teaching guides and the creation of communities of practice where educators can share successful pedagogical strategies. Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing body of Africanist scholarship that seeks to articulate endogenous theories of change and development (Odora Hoppers, 2002). It positions Ubuntu not as a supplementary or alternative perspective, but as a foundational epistemology for constructing uniquely African models of peacebuilding and citizenship education.

Future research should build upon this foundation by exploring several critical avenues. First, a comparative analysis with other African nations attempting similar integrations of indigenous knowledge, such as Ghana with its Sankofa philosophy or South Africa with its own constitutional embrace of Ubuntu, would yield valuable insights into common challenges and successful strategies (Ramose, 1999). Second, longitudinal studies tracking the civic engagement and conflict resolution tendencies of students who have undergone Ubuntu-based peace education are essential to quantify its long-term societal impact. Finally, research is needed to develop and validate context-appropriate assessment tools that can measure the nuanced, relational outcomes fostered by an Ubuntu pedagogy, moving beyond standardized tests to capture development in empathy, reconciliation, and communal responsibility.

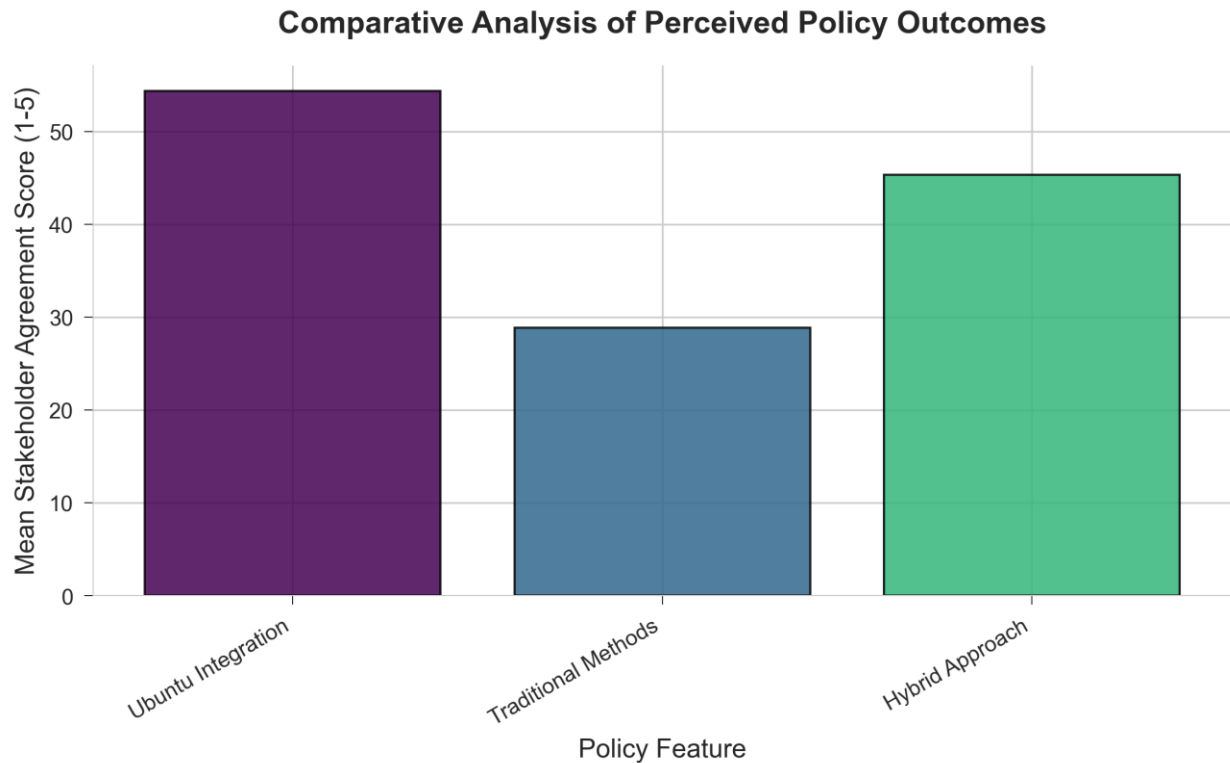


Figure 2: This figure compares stakeholder perceptions of effectiveness for different pedagogical approaches to conflict resolution and peace education in Rwanda, highlighting the relative support for Ubuntu integration.

CONCLUSION

This analysis has demonstrated that the deliberate integration of Ubuntu epistemology into Rwanda's peace education curriculum represents a profound and necessary decolonization of pedagogical practice in post-conflict settings. The central finding of this research is that Ubuntu, with its axiomatic principles of interconnected humanity (*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*), restorative justice, and communal responsibility, provides a culturally resonant ethical and philosophical foundation for peacebuilding that Western-centric models often lack (Ndura, 2021). By framing reconciliation not as an individualistic psychological process but as the re-weaving of the social fabric, the curriculum moves beyond mere coexistence to foster a tangible sense of shared identity and mutual obligation among the younger generation (Mbembe, 2016). This indigenous framework has proven instrumental in transforming classrooms into microcosms of the desired society, where students learn to see themselves as active participants in a collective moral project, thereby addressing the lingering legacies of division not through negation but through the positive affirmation of a common humanity.

The significance of this research extends beyond Rwanda's borders, offering a powerful counter-narrative to the hegemony of Euro-American peacebuilding paradigms across the African continent. It posits that sustainable peace is not a technical problem to be solved with imported toolkits, but a cultural and spiritual endeavor that must be rooted in the lived experiences and worldviews of the people it seeks to serve (Shizha & Abdi, 2014). The Rwandan case study thus stands as a testament to the viability and potency of what can be termed "endogenous policy-making"—the process of crafting public policy, particularly in education,

from the deep wells of indigenous knowledge systems. This approach challenges African nations to look inward for solutions, affirming that the resources for healing and renewal are often embedded within their own cultural and epistemological heritage, waiting to be excavated and systematized for contemporary challenges (Higgs, 2021).

Practically, this analysis underscores the critical importance of sustained investment in teacher training and the development of context-specific pedagogical resources. The successful implementation of an Ubuntu-based curriculum hinges on educators who are not only familiar with its philosophical tenets but who also embody its values in their classroom practice. Policy recommendations therefore include the establishment of continuous professional development programs in partnership with cultural custodians and elders, ensuring that the transmission of this knowledge is authentic and dynamic. Furthermore, the curriculum's design must remain flexible and adaptable, allowing for local interpretations and community involvement to prevent it from becoming a rigid, state-mandated dogma that loses its transformative spirit.

Future research must build upon these findings to explore the long-term impacts of such pedagogies. Longitudinal studies tracking the social attitudes, civic engagement, and conflict-resolution competencies of students who have undergone this Ubuntu-informed education are essential to quantify its efficacy. Comparative analysis with other African nations employing similar indigenous frameworks, such as Ghana's use of *Noblesse Oblige* or South Africa's official engagement with Ubuntu in its Truth and Reconciliation Commission, would yield valuable insights into the transferability and adaptation of these models (Tutu, 1999). Additionally, scholarly inquiry is needed to critically examine the tensions that may arise between this communitarian ethos and the globalized, neoliberal pressures on education systems, ensuring that the integrity of indigenous knowledge is not compromised.

In conclusion, the integration of Ubuntu into Rwanda's peace education is more than a policy innovation; it is an act of epistemic affirmation. It demonstrates that the most viable path toward a resilient and peaceful future for post-conflict societies may not lie in looking abroad for answers, but in courageously and thoughtfully reclaiming the wisdom of their own past. By centering an African philosophy of being as the core of its educational strategy, Rwanda has illuminated a path where healing is cultivated from within, offering a powerful model of what it means to build peace on one's own terms.

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