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Afrocentric Pedagogy: A Panacea to the Zimbabwean Democratic Values Culture Crisis

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Abstract

The paper was premised on the background of political events in Zimbabwe, which, in most cases, resulted in conflicts and violence during political elections. Conflicts in Zimbabwe are triggered by a myriad of reasons and the current education can be deemed as one of such. The current education system has a mixed package, besides the modern civilisation goal. It has a role thought to end the progress of the African traditional education, whose strengths are noted by Eurocentric and Afrocentric writers. Conflicts before colonialism were highly moderated by African traditional philosophy and pedagogy. The conceptual paper in this regard highlighted the power of Afrocentric pedagogy. The paper further highlighted how current education, despite the other modern civilisation benefits acts as a catalyst for the current Zimbabwean political instability. The paper also explored the proposal to revisit the Zimbabwean methodology in teaching democratic values culture. An analysis of the essence of democratic values to peace initiatives through Afrocentric pedagogy was articulated. Lastly, the proposed Afrocentric pedagogy framework and exit skills were provided.

Keywords: *African philosophy, Afrocentric pedagogy, current education, Democratic values, Panacea.*

Introduction

Zimbabwe is always in the spotlight during election time due to conflicts and violence. Current education can be attributed to having a hand in the current crisis. The current education system has a package of over-glorified benefits and punishments. The education system serves as a tool for employment for those who pursue it while those who do not are deemed sentenced to poverty. The current education system has vastly contributed to modern civilisation, although the lack of African values has resulted in more consequences than anticipated benefits. The current education in a real sense has a culture divorced from pre-colonial African culture where the sanctity of life was highly regarded. The culture has, to date, held down Zimbabwe retrogressively. This paper seeks to establish the reconstruction and sustenance of the African methodology in the teaching of democratic values in contemporary schools to check against the widespread political violence in Zimbabwe. The paper, therefore, highlights how current education could be viewed as a catalyst for African political and economic instability. The paper also briefly looks at the proposal to revisit the African methodology in the development of democratic values education in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, a background to Afrocentric pedagogy to be used in the teaching of democratic values in line with African philosophy is briefly presented. To help in the understanding of democratic values of justice, liberty, and equality which are core, a section has been set aside to define and elaborate their relevance to peace initiatives in Zimbabwe as driven by the ethos of African philosophy in education. Lastly, the proposed framework for the teaching of democratic values from Afrocentric pedagogy and the exit skills are provided.

Zimbabwean Education before Colonialism

With the dawn of the current education system and the abandonment of the pre-colonial Zimbabwean education system, the Africanism that existed within the Zimbabwean kingdoms was threatened. Indeed, pre-colonial Zimbabwe had internal conflicts based on how Zimbabweans shared power and resources, but they remained united, finding each other through African epistemology and pedagogy. Dzavo (2024:53) concurs that, before colonialism, people in Zimbabwe fought for resources such as land and chieftainship. Similarly, in the colonial era, conflicts were also for land and ethnic recognition. In the post-colonial

era, however, the focus of conflicts is on political hegemony. Likewise, historians trace conflicts and violence to early *Shona* states in Zimbabwe. The period can be traced to the 15th century when the *Torwa* dynasty engaged in taking resources from the subordinates in the country. The period coincided with the arrival of the Portuguese and the *Mfecane* tribe from the South. The years that followed this period were marked by raids and strife involving the royal dynasty and the *Mwari* (god) Cult. In the 1830s, the *Changamire* state was involved in internal conflicts spreading across the country. The desire for power and resources formed the core of the conflicts. Minerals, livestock, and grain were central to the contention. In addition to the afore-mentioned mobilisation of human capital for construction and security for the states, generated conflicts as the strongest states needed subjects (*Varanda*) to work for them for production and defence (Dzavo,2024).

In the 1890s, with the coming of European colonialists, the democratic values infringements shifted. The most powerful colonists ushered in an unjust expropriation of natives' resources like land. In 1894, the settlers adopted the first constitution of the country to justify the expropriation of the natives' resources (Beach, 1974). The period resulted in the abandonment of community ownership of resources to individualism or a competition-oriented approach to life. Although this brought about infrastructural and technological advancement, the stage ushered in a form of injustice as Africans lost control of their resources. The channel to resources would be possible through the new education system. The coming in of the settlers as highlighted in the preceding citation confirms how Western education largely contributed to the challenges affecting the Zimbabwean state today as individualism and ego-centrism took centre stage (Dzavo, 2024).

In pre-colonial education, a king or queen remained accountable to society (*Mambo ndi Mambo ne vanhu*); a king is a king because of the existence of other people; hence he remained accountable to the people. There were checks and balances, spiritual, social, physical, and natural that responded to the king or citizens' behaviour when it threatened peace and stability in African societies. Pests, natural disasters, diseases, and deaths of people were all punishments that were meted out to the kingdom when blood was shed unnecessarily and when self-centredness was observed in the kingdoms. This extols the *Unbu/Ubuntu* philosophy (Afrocentric pedagogy). *Unbu/Ubuntu* in education gives learners the primacy to humanness and adopts a more holistic view of learners instead of reducing their academic abilities or potential. The teacher in

the school that practises *Unhu/Ubuntu* should be competent, caring, and dedicated to providing equal and respective education to all learners no matter their backgrounds (Mahaye, 2018). The development of democratic values ensures the reduction or elimination of political violence in society by eliminating individualism or self-centredness associated with current education.

The traditional courts played a critical role in ensuring that order and peace prevailed in society whenever there was a threat of any sort. Every member of the kingdom was a watchperson for any wrongdoing of a member of the community if it had a possibility of changing the living patterns of the society. There were reporting structures and systems in communities that would ensure that a problem was brought to the attention of the community authorities for consideration. The environment itself had its natural checks and balances that would call for individual responsibilities. Any misbehaviour threatening the peace or sustenance of the community was debated by the community and solutions were found subsequently, offenders were punished, and communities lived in self-contained peace. This African historical fact was also noted by both Eurocentric and Afrocentric writers. The subsequent paragraphs dedicate the writers' submissions to the success of the African methodology as opposed to the current education system as far as social cohesion is concerned. Social cohesion is the bedrock for peace and respect for democratic values, which in turn promotes sustainable development. People plan, work, and invest in a peaceful environment, and this has long-term benefits for society (Dzavo, 2024).

Bamusi, Dzavo, and Phiri (2021) think the African methodology, through *Nhanga* (an Afrocentric education methodology for girls before marriage in the past), served a great purpose among the African communities in Zimbabwe. The pedagogy helped prevent a number of the problems society is facing today. It worked as a catalyst towards acceptable humanity among the family members and the community in general. This led to stability in the communities as it contributed to peace and social cohesion through the development of the girl child. Taboos like incest, which are now a common feature, were minimised due to the demands and set-up of the *Nhanga* programme. Fathers and brothers would address their daughters and sisters as mothers-in-law (*Ambuya*), clearly defining the distance that existed between them. The social cohesion among the *Shona* people of Zimbabwe was highly praised by researchers like Gelfand (1973). Gelfand (1973) and Okpalike (2014:180) ascribe this achievement to the systems of values he observed among the

African communities, that contributed to virtues of truthfulness, humility, love, compassion, self-control, forgiveness, mercifulness, sufficiency, trustworthiness, strength, courage, and industriousness among others. It is in line with this view that children were socialised along the lines of *hunbu* (ethics) so that the values would be carried forward. In this regard, the goal of morality was to improve '*munbu*' (a real person) informed by '*hunbu*' (virtue). It was believed that this would contribute towards the grand goal of self-realisation. Practically, '*munbu ane hunbu*' (a well-cultured person) was conceived as endowed with a disposition to act virtuously. A person would exhibit '*tsikadzakanaka*' (virtuous behaviour) (Chimuka, 2001). This is the core activity of the Afrocentric pedagogy as guided by the *Unhu/Ubuntu* philosophy that scholars observed as essential for sustainable social cohesion.

Gelfand (1973) further admires Africans as people worth living with. It is this kind of nurturing that would encourage a stranger to feel at home when persuaded to sleep over on a long journey. In line with this analysis, Bourdillon (1987) observes that the African people, when they met a stranger, would endeavour to find at least a line of lineage to make a stranger feel at home and build a true relationship that would help build a platform to avoid harm between the two clans in the new situation. Totems in this regard were used to ensure the stranger felt at home. Succinctly, in an African philosophy, no one was a stranger provided the basic requirements associated with a person were noted. This person, therefore, deserved protection and comfort in any African home, and it was the duty of every neighbour to guarantee that. This kind of nurturing or pedagogy should not face extinction but be promoted through inclusion in the modern school curriculum for the benefit of humanity in this time and space.

As observed by Gelfand (1973), the social cohesion among the African communities was not conducive to the purpose of colonialism. Descartes, a French philosopher, argued that, if one wanted to rebuild a city in the place where an old city existed, one had to destroy the old city and not build the new one on top of the old. Similarly, to establish colonial empires in Africa, Europe had to destroy existing African social structures sustained by African education, to make way for a new civilisation (Chimuka, 2001). The preceding facts show how African education was threatened. The subsequent section highlight show the current education system is seen as a hindrance and a challenge to the economic and political instability in Zimbabwe.

Current Education as a Catalyst to Zimbabwean Instability

The current education or civilisation became an internal problem to date in our modern societies including the political arena:

- a) The new approach to civilisation first targeted the sources of survival, that is, the economic base. The tools of colonialism targeted natural resources and farming patterns. They took over minerals and depopulated the livestock. This activity destroyed African independence and created a dependence on the new education demands for survival.

- b) The new approach to civilisation syndrome was sustained through an education system that mirrored most of the African epistemology as evil. The major target in this regard was language. Without a new foreign language, for example English, students were not considered to be educated. This problem has existed and continues to exist in African countries. Modern academics and political leaders have continued to reinforce it to date. In a country like Zimbabwe, for example, one cannot be considered to be educated unless one possesses an English pass at the Ordinary Level despite having, for example, 9 'As' passes in different science subjects including one's native language. In this case, therefore, one cannot be enrolled for a professional course, for example, if one does not possess this new approach subject requirement, even if one wants to study or major in a native language at a given institution. The bunching of the various languages into one, under the banner of dialects, further undermined African languages. The coverage of these languages in the curriculum meant a narrow depth and breadth of the content, thus slowly sentencing the languages to extinction. Colonialism on its part brought a curriculum that ignored the depth and breadth of these languages but only a blend that favoured one or two of the many separate languages, by so doing rendering the many languages to the death bed. This practice in many countries has threatened peace and sustenance as the so-called minority dialects suffer at the hands of the so-called major dialects as defined by Western scholars and reinforced by selfish African leaders whose languages are dominant in this arrangement and supported by some African scholars (Okpalike,2014; Sibani, 2018). Language remains one of the key pillars of development, and the moment a nation uses a borrowed

language, the chances are high that the country will lag in meaningful development.

Shoko (2016) and Bourdillon (1987), however, note urbanisation and the demands associated with it as contributing to the negative effects on the development of certain African methodologies. The communal life methodologies that bring kinships together were also affected by the new trends of modern employment and life sustenance. New civilisations brought in alternative programmes that bring in competition, in the process, negating social cohesion and the key values that promote humanness. This subsequently redefined humanity as a total bunch of strangers and was reinforced by a new school system with a new main language. The conclusion of this development meant that the community that used to play a major role in the development of an individual was side-lined, family ties where aunts (*vanatete*) and uncles (*vanasekuru*), who are the chief architects as the elderly mentors in certain villages, appear to have very little influence. It is in light of this description that *Unhu/Ubuntu*, which directed education, was hampered and the African virtues weakened to a near-death point. The thrust, therefore, is on how to bridge the difference through Afrocentric pedagogy. This paper presents a suggested *Unhu/Ubuntu* methodology for the teaching of democratic values in schools.

This preceding observation calls for intense contribution by public schools and the community to develop in learners the much-needed virtues if Zimbabwe is to experience the most needed political change. It is not sound to attend to a failing or an undemocratic adult through various legal instruments if the democratic culture is not part of the adult individuals, through the schools and the community as major socialising agents (Onyulo, 2017). Before presenting the Afrocentric pedagogy framework, it is good to create an understanding of the three democratic values and their relevance to issues of peace and sustainable development in Zimbabwe in the next section.

Democratic Values

The major democratic values that should be highly considered are justice, equality, and liberty. Many other values revolve around liberty, equality, and justice. Botha, Joubert, and Hugo (2016) define democratic values as the virtues expected for all to participate fairly in community activities. These values should allow justice to prevail as individuals consider each other as equals without any possible harm against each other. In

Unbu/Ubuntu, it is the realisation of the importance of every member of the society in contributing towards the well-being of each member in that society and beyond.

Justice

Alvaro and Vredevoogd (2001) and the Michigan Department of Education (2009) view justice as fairness as individuals accord each other opportunities to participate in community activities. The thrust of this view is the inclusion of all in the fundamentals of society. *Unbu/Ubuntu* has a world-view where all people regard the other person as equally important in community activities. In African societies, this was mainly manifested in community group activities like *Nhimbe/Lima (cooperative work)*, *Zunderambo/IsapalaseNkosi (Chief's granary)*, and *Dare/idale (traditional courts)*, where members in the community participated together for the common good of all. The result was the creation of happy and self-sustaining communities. Everything was integrated and applied to daily living at traditional functions and practices; it was part of life not for the future. This understanding, therefore, focuses on a consensus for all in diversity for sustenance. In summary, justice is equal consideration of all in participation and decision-making in community activities.

Liberty

Alvaro and Vredevoogd (2001) and Michigan Department of Education (2009) concur that liberty is the right to think, act, or behave without any interference. The definition translates to a free environment without restrictions as liberty. In teaching and learning environments, This implies a conducive space for stakeholders to participate freely in teaching and learning environments. The description highlights non-interference in lawful activities that bring happiness to the individuals participating in the activities of an organisation. Traditional African education allowed free experience in the environment and encouraged the use of gained knowledge to help fellow Africans in solving emerging social issues. Liberty was also extended to members of the community through music, dance, simulation, and drama during functions or rituals to communicate critical sensitive information or educate others. Society accepted this kind of knowledge dissemination without retribution or threat of punishment. This African liberty is adopted in the framework as

pedagogy to develop democratic values and help members of the community exercise their rights in decision-making activities in relevant institutions for sustainable development.

Equality

Equality refers to the sameness for the justification that all human beings are created equal (Alvaro & Vredevoogd, 2001; Post, 2006). Human origin in this regard justifies equality and, therefore, the need for all to be equal in society in general. Equality, therefore, levels all differences inconsistent with the moral equality of all citizens. In a school set-up, learners operate as citizens whose rights to participate in school activities are bound by their affiliation to the school. This should then be the case with the communities where learners come from. From an African perspective, equality is taken as a state of equal consideration in operations of institutions. This is usually symbolised by the circular formations during African activities and structures including storytelling times.

This current effort to suggest an Afrocentric pedagogy framework for development of the democratic values such as liberty, justice, and equality is based on the assumption that learning institutions in Zimbabwe experience similar conditions and are, therefore, expected to benefit from the proposed framework. This is in tandem with the observation by Tshabangu (2006) who posits that, in most Zimbabwean learning institutions, the learning space is highly controlled by the teachers. The teacher has ultimate authority concerning seating arrangements, movement, and sorts of interaction in the classroom. This kind of authority by the teacher in the classroom may perpetuate a lack of tolerance among learners. Gradually, learners are developed into passive, unquestioning citizens who are timid and worship authority. In this regard, schools can develop future dictators vicariously who will be bent on abusing democratic values in the communities they operate in. Yet, schools and communities should be promoting the teaching of democratic values to learners (Subba, 2014). It is in this regard that this framework is proposed from an Afrocentric perspective.

African Methodology to Development of Democratic Values Education in Zimbabwe

The paper proposes the Afrocentric pedagogy where everyone has a role in identifying a problem threatening the peace of the community spiritually, physically, socially, and economically. This should be brought to the fore through the tool of education to be sustained. The proposal props up a pedagogy that is inclusive in nature of all members of society to solve. This nature of social intervention swims quite well with the *Unhu/Ubuntu* principle of communalism as enunciated by Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2002). Thus, each member has to identify a problem in his /her society that threatens peace in various facets as already alluded to in this paper. This should mirror education in pre-colonial society where the school and community were not separated: the school was the community and the community was the school. Specifically, education was ever ongoing and functional. It was for all by the community for the community. The community was the major beneficiary of the ongoing education system. In this modern society, the community and the school should work together to build the most cherished ingredient, peace, for sustainable development. The subsequent sections provide the proposal.

Justification for the Afrocentric Pedagogy Proposed Framework

The framework can be one of the main approaches that can be used to bring the school and the community to identify, debate, discuss, dramatise, sing and dance, and reflect on real issues threatening peace and development in our societies. The communities' realities should be identified and presented in non-threatening methodologies as they used to be in African communities. Schools should respond to the community context and engage the communities for solutions. Critical issues that threaten who we are, our humanity, and our future can be easily dealt with, just like in the traditional education systems where events and special gatherings created platforms for the exchange of ideas and knowledge on critical social, spiritual, physical, and economic matters in a less offensive nature. This, indeed, propelled society forward in a peaceful and harmonious state, a heritage that the new education system destroyed (Sibani, 2018).

The Afrocentric pedagogy framework starts with the learner in the community, with or without the assistance of the members of society, identifying a social ill or a model behaviour to be discouraged or

emulated by society if society is to realise peace and development. The issue selected should be that which can threaten or act as a therapy to the challenges in society. The writer is writing with the understanding that Zimbabwean society has political and economic problems and that the solutions are in the community. The school and community, therefore, have a role to play. The school in this regard should not be isolated from the community but serve as an extension of the community. Both the school and the community have the social ammunition to mend and propel the current generation to respect and practise the democratic values necessary for sustainable development, peace, and harmony in Zimbabwean communities. The way young ones are brought up today shapes their adulthood behaviour and character; a person's character, to some extent, lies in the tradition in which he/she was brought up and the experiences the person has undergone. The patterns of thinking and acting that have been instilled in children are fundamental to the instinctive patterns of behaviour in adulthood (Bourdillon, 1987).

Afrocentric Pedagogy Framework

The framework is informed by an African philosophy known as *Unhu/Ubuntu* in Zimbabwe. In the Afrocentric approach, a community member brings an issue needing attention to various authorities. The community then converges to deliberate for a solution. The approach in this regard begins with learners bringing issues related to democratic values to the class and school for interrogation so that learners can be responsible for their studies at learning institutions and in the communities. Learners can design and make their open investigations in long-term community-based projects (Rogan & Grayson, 2003). The Afrocentric pedagogy framework is classified into three stages: class level, school level, and school-community partnership level. The levels mirror the traditional power structures in the communities, which move from the village herd to the chief. The framework is guided by the following objectives, which are to:

1. ensure learners build democratic competencies for them to participate actively as informed citizens;
2. assist learners to gain democratic values of liberty, equality, and justice and promote peaceful engagement as citizens at the school, district, and national levels now and in the future;

3. develop learners' appreciation of representative democracy through a constituency representation approach as informed by the *Unbu/Ubuntu* philosophy;
4. develop in learners, respect for others of a different race, colour, gender, language, political affiliation, or other views, with a realisation of own inherent prejudices and biases and commitment to overcome these; and
5. Develop critical thinkers, who are problem solvers and able to manage conflicts in their communities and beyond.

Levels:

1. **Class level (traditional village herd-court format):** Learners come up with topics for discussion with the class before the facilitator. A learner is coming to the classroom as a representative of the home, village, or community (constituencies). The topics for discussion should be varied; the following are some of the examples learners can bring: violence, bullying, substance abuse, physical environment, class rules conflict, welfare issues, life-threatening issues, risky behaviour, and good worthy emulating citizens in the communities in which they live. These presentations should be done at least twice a week.
2. **School level (traditional head-man-court format):** At the school level, various classes bring topics discussed at the class level. A representative(s) from each class (constituency) present(s) topics at the school level. Facilitators, for example, teachers or prefects, moderate the debates or discussions. Discussions at this level are expected to be deep and wide, bringing an aspect of appreciation of democratic values of equality, justice, and liberty. Such discussions at the school level should be held at least once a week.
3. **School-community partnership level (traditional chief or court format):** This level is based on the best-selected themes(topics) presented at the school level. The discussions at this level can either be done at school or in the community venues. Refinement of topics at this level is critical for quality presentations. Facilitators are, therefore, urged to assist learners with quality presentations.

Presentations for this level should be done monthly to generate desire in community members and for quality productions.

Implementation Matrix of the Afrocentric Pedagogy Framework

The implementation matrix of the Afrocentric pedagogy framework for the promotion of democratic values in Zimbabwe should be guided by *Unbu/Ubuntu* philosophy in schools and communities. Schools and communities need the Afrocentric pedagogy framework for the promotion of a democratic environment in Zimbabwe. A government policy on the teaching of democratic values is needed to guide implementation considering the sensitivity of democratic values to protect schools and members of the community. In Zimbabwean traditional society, community members themselves, in agreement with their village heads, headmen, and chiefs, guaranteed the security of the participants disseminating sensitive or critical information for the survival of the community. The implementation of democratic values is not an event but a process to kick-start most preferable in the guidance of a government policy on teaching democratic values. The government, through the Ministry of Education, is expected to adopt the Afrocentric pedagogy framework on the teaching of democratic values to help guide schools in their role of promoting democratic values in learners in schools. The adoption of the framework may not be adequate; there is a need for monitoring and developing teachers and community leaders using the suggested framework. The development comes in the form of workshops or training on the Afrocentric pedagogy framework. Monitoring can be done through various Ministry structures to ensure learning institutions play their role in promoting democratic values with the support of the communities.

Various resources, human, material, and financial, are needed for monitoring, development, and implementation to ensure that democratic values are promoted in schools and communities. The teacher-pupil ratio should be friendly to enable teachers to apply participatory methodologies to develop democratic values as highlighted in the Afrocentric pedagogy framework. Large classes are a challenge to manage for the participatory approaches to be implemented. Strong funding is key to supporting internal and external quality programmes that are well-resourced. This will ensure that the interests of the participants remain high in the promotion of democratic values. The administration of learning institutions should facilitate the availability of

resources and manage the use of these resources for the learning of democratic values to be realised. There should be a strong cordial interface between the school and the community in the promotion of democratic values. All this should be guided by government policy to ensure the teaching of democratic values from class, school to the school-community levels is done.

The researcher is cognisant of the fact that the backgrounds of learners are made of strengths and weaknesses, just like the communities, that may propel or delay the learning situation at the class level. Teachers should guide learners at this point to ensure progress. The democratic values are sensitive and therefore need participatory methods to accommodate participants and audiences at various levels. Readers of this framework should take note that the promotion of democratic values is context-specific and will play out differently in each school, just like they were in African traditional societies where humour, timing, context, and action played a critical role. Props and costumes added flavour, for example, where a close friend of the deceased would be clad in the clothing of the deceased and dramatise sensitive issues to be addressed by the community, including the members of the deceased's family.

Approaches of Presenting the Afrocentric Pedagogy Framework

Roleplay, puppetry, simulations, drama and poetry, music and dance, news reading (simulation of a real broadcasting media/press), story-telling, and simple oral narrations are some of the suggested approaches that can be used in the framework. Each presentation should then be followed by discussions focusing on the promotion of democratic values.

Illustrating the Use of Approaches of Presentations

Discussions on each presentation should focus on the aspects that promote the democratic values of liberty, justice, and equality in learners. At the community level, parents should also participate in discussions. Discussions after each presentation are critical because they help clear misconceptions about the presentations and bridge the gap in understanding the productions presented. Further, discussions reinforce key concepts, directing the understanding of democratic values. This can help in the teaching of democratic values and intervening in the democratic space in the community.

Exit Skills

1. The success of the project is assumed to develop the democratic values of liberty, justice, and equality in learners, and provide opportunities for learners to engage with the issues they would have identified after the programme.
2. The benefits of the programme should see spontaneous practice of the democratic values in society.
3. Appreciation of democracy and *Munhu/Umntu* (a tolerant human being) should be realised in Africa.

Conclusion

The paper highlighted how an education can bring both benefits and disadvantages to a state. Issues were raised on how the current education, despite the other modern civilisation benefits it has, acts as a catalyst for the current Zimbabwean political and economic instability. The paper then proposed a revisit to Methodology in developing democratic values/culture. A conclusion on the teaching of democratic values, using an afro-pedagogy, is viewed as a panacea to perennial problems the country faces. Lastly, the proposed Afrocentric pedagogy framework and exit skills are provided.

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