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Ubuntu-Inspired Experiential Assessment and Community Engagement: Transforming Teacher Identity and Fostering Innovation

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Abstract

This paper explores how Ubuntu-guided experiential assessment transforms student teachers' professional identity within Education 5.0. Beyond Education

3.0, Education 5.0 integrates innovation and industrialisation into teaching, research, and community service. Using action research, data from interviews, observations, and document analysis reveal that Ubuntu fosters ethical, reciprocal community engagement, enabling students to develop context-specific innovations such as nutrition gardens, herbal remedies, and eco-friendly construction. The study highlights professional reflexivity, social accountability, and curriculum decolonisation, recommending formalised community engagement, support for student innovations, and integration of Ubuntu ethics into teacher education.

Keywords: *Ubuntu, Education 5.0, Student Teachers, Community Engagement, Professional Identity, Experiential Assessment*

1. Introduction

Zimbabwe's educational landscape is undergoing a profound transformation through the implementation of Education 5.0, a policy framework championed by Professor Amon Murwira, former Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development. Education 5.0 marks a deliberate departure from the previous Education 3.0 model by expanding the educational pillars from three to five, specifically including innovation and industrialisation alongside the existing pillars of teaching, research, and community service (Murwira, 2021; Chikukwa & Nyikahadzo, 2023). This evolution reflects a national agenda that seeks to produce graduates who are not only knowledgeable but also actively engaged in creating goods and services that meet community and economic needs. Unlike Education 3.0, which largely emphasised academic research and service, Education 5.0 foregrounds entrepreneurial skills and industrial capabilities, positioning education as a key driver of socio-economic development. Globally, higher education systems are increasingly aligning with innovation ecosystems to enhance graduate employability and economic contributions, a shift mirrored in Zimbabwe's efforts to link education with local and national development imperatives (Marginson, 2018; Santos & Vieira, 2019).

Despite these promising policy shifts, traditional assessment methods in teacher education remain largely inadequate. Conventional models focus predominantly on theoretical mastery and classroom-based competencies, often failing to equip graduates with practical skills that address real-world community challenges or economic realities (Mwangi,

2018; Nyika & Olowu, 2022). This gap creates a disconnect between graduates' capabilities and the needs of the communities they serve, undermining the objectives of Education 5.0. Existing assessments do not sufficiently recognise or value experiential learning, community engagement, or entrepreneurial initiatives, which are vital in fostering graduates who can innovate and contribute to sustainable development. Internationally, similar concerns have been raised about the limitations of traditional pedagogical assessments, prompting a global rethinking of how professional identity and capabilities are cultivated in educational settings (Jenkins & Healey, 2018; Lave & Wenger, 2019). Thus, there is a pressing need to reform assessment approaches to include ethical, experiential, and community-centred dimensions that reflect Education 5.0's transformative agenda.

Community engagement serves as a critical pedagogical strategy within this educational reform, rooted in ethical imperatives and Afrocentric philosophies, notably Ubuntu. Ubuntu, encapsulated by the phrase "I am because we are," offers a framework that prioritises interconnectedness, reciprocity, and collective well-being (Gade, 2018; Mbigi & Maree, 2020). This philosophy positions community engagement not merely as service, but as an ethical act embedded in indigenous knowledge systems and cultural values. By integrating Ubuntu into teacher education, community engagement becomes a dynamic, problem-solving pedagogy that encourages students to collaborate meaningfully with communities, co-creating solutions that are sustainable and contextually relevant (Nzewi & Olagunju, 2019; Banda, 2020). This Afrocentric approach contrasts with Western individualistic educational models and promotes the development of professional identities grounded in social responsibility and communal solidarity. Such perspectives align with emerging global discourses on decolonising education and embedding ethics into professional practice (Akintunde & Akinleye, 2021; Smith, 2020).

This study is philosophically grounded in several key development frameworks. Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 articulates a roadmap for inclusive, sustainable socio-economic growth driven by innovation and community participation (Government of Zimbabwe, 2018). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to quality education (Goal 4), decent work (Goal 8), and innovation (Goal 9), provide a global context emphasising the role of education in sustainable development (United Nations, 2019). The indigenous Zimbabwean philosophy of *Nyika inovakwa nevene vayo*, meaning "the

country is built by its own people,” further anchors the study’s emphasis on grassroots participation and self-reliance (Mnangagwa, 2019). At the continental level, the African Union’s Agenda 2063 prioritises education as a vehicle for economic transformation and social cohesion (African Union Commission, 2019). Together, these frameworks validate the study’s focus on community engagement as an ethical, innovative, and practical response to education and development challenges facing Zimbabwe, Africa and the wider world.

1.1 Study Purpose and Research Questions

This research seeks to explore the transformative role of Ubuntu-inspired community engagement in reshaping student teachers’ professional identity through experiential assessment within Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). It investigates how such engagement fosters innovation, addresses community needs, and informs educational policy in Zimbabwe. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does Ubuntu guide ethical student teacher engagement with communities?
2. How does experiential assessment reshape professional identity during WIL?
3. What innovations emerge from community engagement, and how do these impact students, communities, and education policy?

1.2 Paper Layout

The paper begins with a review of literature focusing on Ubuntu philosophy, community engagement in teacher education, and professional identity formation. This is followed by a description of the participatory action research methodology employed. The findings section presents thematic analysis derived from document analysis, observations, and interviews. The discussion connects these findings with national, regional, and global educational imperatives. Finally, the paper concludes with recommendations for policy and practice that address both local and broader educational challenges.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Ubuntu Philosophy

Ubuntu is a profound African philosophy that centres on humanity, reciprocity, and an ethics of care rooted in relational existence (Gade, 2018). It underscores that individual identity is deeply connected to the community, as summarised by the phrase "I am because we are", which highlights the interdependence and collective wellbeing foundational to many African societies. This worldview shifts focus from individualism to a shared humanity, where mutual respect and responsibility are paramount. Ubuntu's knowledge systems are embedded in lived experiences, oral traditions, and community practices rather than abstract, detached reasoning (Mbigi & Maree, 2020). This epistemological stance challenges Western paradigms that privilege individual cognition, instead advocating for a holistic and situated understanding of knowledge.

Applying Ubuntu to teacher education transforms conceptions of professional identity and pedagogy by fostering relational accountability and ethical engagement with learners and communities (Letseka, 2019). Teachers become not just knowledge transmitters but co-participants in social transformation, embodying Ubuntu values in their interactions and curriculum design. This dual role as method and outcome of community engagement allows Ubuntu to serve as a guiding framework for ethical, participatory practices that promote collective flourishing (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Its relevance is particularly strong in contexts like Zimbabwe, where indigenous knowledge and communal values remain central to social organisation and education.

2.2 Education 5.0 as Transformational Framework

Education 3.0, which primarily emphasised teaching, research, and community service, has been critiqued for insufficiently preparing graduates to address pressing socio-economic challenges (Chikukwa & Nyikahadzoi, 2023). It tended to isolate academic learning from the realities of industrialisation and innovation that are necessary for economic development. Education 5.0, in contrast, broadens this framework by adding innovation and industrialisation as explicit pillars alongside teaching, research, and community service (Murwira, 2021). This expanded curriculum aligns education with national and continental

development goals, reflecting a deliberate move towards skills-based, problem-solving, and entrepreneurial education.

The reform of teacher education within Education 5.0 repositions student teachers as entrepreneurial civic agents rather than passive recipients of knowledge (Nyika & Olowu, 2022). Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) projects are designed to embed innovation and industrial practice in educational experiences, preparing graduates to be job creators who contribute tangibly to community economies. This shift resonates with global educational transformations that promote real-world problem-solving and active community participation, ensuring that education remains relevant and impactful (Marginson, 2018). By fostering direct engagement with industry and community needs, Education 5.0 represents a comprehensive response to the challenges of unemployment and socio-economic inequity faced by Zimbabwe and many African nations.

2.3 Professional Identity Formation

Professional identity is widely understood as a socially-constructed, reflexive, and evolving process that emerges through the interaction of personal values, social contexts, and professional practices (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2019). For student teachers, this identity formation is especially dynamic during experiential learning phases such as WIL, where theoretical knowledge is tested and reshaped in real-world contexts (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2021). Engagement with communities requires student teachers to negotiate their roles and responsibilities actively, fostering an identity grounded in ethical responsiveness and social justice.

Ubuntu's emphasis on relationality enriches this process by embedding identity formation within collective values and community interactions (Mbigi & Maree, 2020). This approach challenges the traditional view of teacher identity as fixed or purely individualistic, highlighting instead its ongoing reconstruction through praxis and reflection. Moreover, professional identity intersects with broader socio-cultural and policy contexts, necessitating flexible, context-aware teacher education programmes (Sachs, 2017). WIL provides an effective platform for such identity work by situating students in environments that demand ethical engagement, innovation, and community responsiveness, all critical to the goals of Education 5.0.

2.4 Experiential Assessment

Experiential assessment situates both learning and evaluation within authentic community participation, moving beyond conventional examinations or written tests (Langa & Maphalala, 2021). It foregrounds the importance of assessing not only knowledge acquisition, but also ethical engagement, practical skills, and community impact. Such assessment practices are inherently justice-oriented, ensuring that evaluation respects local values and contributes meaningfully to community development.

This approach recognises the community not just as a site for learning, but as an active co-assessor and beneficiary of student teachers' work (Banda, 2020). The ethics of experiential assessment align closely with Ubuntu principles, fostering reciprocal accountability and sustainability. In Zimbabwe, these assessment methods support Education 5.0's vision by integrating entrepreneurial and civic dimensions into professional readiness (Chikukwa & Nyikahadzo, 2023). Internationally, experiential assessment is increasingly valued for its capacity to enhance employability and promote equitable education outcomes (Jenkins & Healey, 2018). Its application in teacher education reflects a broader pedagogical shift towards authentic, socially-responsive learning and evaluation.

3. Methodology

This study employed the participatory action research design, which is well-suited for contexts aiming to foster transformative change through collaborative inquiry. Action research facilitates cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection, enabling participants to actively engage in both knowledge production and practice improvement (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2014). The iterative nature of this design aligns closely with the Ubuntu philosophy, which emphasises relationality, mutual respect, and collective empowerment (Mokomane, 2019). By involving student teachers, lecturers, and community members as co-researchers, the study embraced the ethical principle of reciprocity and fostered a shared commitment to social and educational transformation. This participatory approach also supports reflexive learning processes that are critical for professional identity formation, where participants continuously assess and adapt their actions in real-world contexts (Reason & Bradbury, 2017). In line with Ubuntu's ethic of care, the

research was conducted with heightened ethical sensitivity, respecting participants' dignity and ensuring their voices were authentically represented (Ndimande-Hlongwa & De Jager, 2020).

The research was situated within a primary school teacher education institution in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. The institution was deliberately anonymised to protect participant confidentiality. The choice of this setting is strategic, given its implementation of community engagement within Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), formerly called Teaching Practice, reflecting Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 framework (Murwira, 2022). This institution represents a critical site where student teachers' professional identities are shaped through direct interaction with community realities and practical challenges. Six student teachers were purposively selected for their active participation in community-driven projects, along with four lecturers supervising these students and two members of School Development Committees from Harare local schools. This sample size (N=12) is appropriate for qualitative research as it allows for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives, thereby ensuring rich, contextualised data, while also maintaining manageability for detailed analysis (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Palinkas et al., 2015). In qualitative designs like participatory action research, the focus is on depth rather than breadth, and data saturation, the point at which no new themes emerge, can be achieved with small, carefully-selected samples. Purposeful sampling was employed to ensure rich, relevant insights from individuals deeply involved in the integration of community engagement and professional learning (Palinkas et al., 2015). The inclusion of diverse participant perspectives enriched the study's understanding of how Ubuntu principles guide ethical engagement and innovation within teacher education.

Data collection was multifaceted, designed to capture the complexity of experiential assessment and community collaboration. Document analysis involved reviewing critical artefacts such as lecturers' assessments of student teachers' community engagement, reflective diaries, photographic evidence of project activities, and inventories of locally-developed products and innovations. Such documents provided objective records of learning trajectories and enabled verification of claims related to identity transformation and socio-economic impact (Bowen, 2009). Observations were conducted during field visits to student-led projects, including farming, herbal medicine production, school construction, and entrepreneurial ventures. These observations offered contextualised

insights into practical challenges, community participation, and the embodiment of Ubuntu values in action (Angrosino, 2007). Additionally, semi-structured interviews with student teachers, lecturers, and community members provided nuanced accounts of participants' lived experiences and perceptions of professional growth and ethical engagement. This combination of methods ensured triangulation, enhancing the study's validity by cross-verifying data from different sources (Flick, 2018).

Ethical considerations were integral to the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with confidentiality rigorously maintained. The study adhered to cultural protocols in community engagement, guided by Ubuntu's emphasis on respect, dignity, and reciprocity. This ethical orientation helped build trust and fostered genuine collaboration between the research team and participants, which is essential in action research contexts (Gade, 2019). The use of Ubuntu as an ethical lens also highlights the importance of relational accountability and communal well-being in educational research within African contexts (Nkondo, 2021).

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, a rigorous qualitative method that allows for both inductive and deductive coding. This approach facilitated the identification of key themes related to professional identity development, ethical community engagement, innovation, and local impact. Iterative coding cycles ensured that patterns emerging from the data were systematically refined and linked back to the conceptual framework of Ubuntu and Education 5.0, reinforcing the study's theoretical coherence (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This analytical process supported a deep understanding of how experiential assessment embedded in community engagement reshapes student teachers' professional identities while contributing to broader socio-economic development goals.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Participant Coding and Data Integration

In presenting the findings, participants are coded as follows to ensure clarity and confidentiality. Student teachers are coded as ST1 through ST6, lecturers as L1 through L4, and School Development Committee members as SDC1 and SDC2. These codes accompany verbatim quotes, which are italicised for emphasis and distinction. Data triangulation from

document analysis, observations, and interviews allowed for comprehensive validation or contrast of emerging themes. This methodological rigour ensures findings reflect diverse yet interconnected perspectives.

4.2 Ubuntu as an Ethical Guide for Community Engagement

Participants consistently described Ubuntu as the ethical foundation guiding their community engagement practices. Student teachers articulated a strong sense of reciprocity and duty, as captured by ST3:

Ubuntu taught me that I am because we are; I must serve with respect and dignity.” This aligns with lecturers’ reflections, with L2 observing, “Ubuntu is not just theory; it’s lived ethics that shape how students relate and respond to communities.

Community members corroborated this, with SDC1 affirming, “*When students act with Ubuntu, the community feels valued, not just as beneficiaries but partners.*” Document analysis of community engagement crits reflected these values, highlighting respect, empathy, and ethical responsibility as central assessment criteria. Photographic evidence and diaries illustrated students actively involving community members in decision-making, reinforcing relational accountability.

Observations revealed that students adapted projects to cultural sensitivities and local needs, embodying Ubuntu’s ethical spirit. However, these adaptations were sometimes constrained by resource limitations, as students had to negotiate what was feasible with the materials available without placing financial pressure on already resource-strained communities.

Some students also reported moments of tension where academic expectations for project outputs conflicted with community preferences, requiring careful dialogue to ensure that Ubuntu’s emphasis on mutual respect was upheld.

The findings affirm Banda’s (2020) argument that Ubuntu underpins an Afrocentric ethical framework that is essential for genuine community engagement. This ethical grounding counters transactional models of service learning, advancing an ethos of care and mutual respect (Akintunde & Akinleye, 2021). Yet, the data also show that sustaining this ethos requires continuous negotiation to manage power imbalances

between students' institutional obligations and community-defined priorities, ensuring ethical engagement remains more than aspirational.

The convergence of data sources reinforces Ubuntu as both a philosophical and practical compass in ethical student–community interactions.

4.3 Identity Transformation through Experiential Engagement

A marked evolution in student teachers' professional identity emerged through participation in community projects. Initially viewing themselves as passive trainees, students reported increased agency and leadership development.

ST5 reflected, *“At first, I felt unsure, but working directly with the community made me responsible and confident.”* This transformation was echoed by lecturers who noted a shift from theoretical knowledge to applied, situated learning: L3 remarked, *“Experiential assessment challenges students to own their learning and professional roles.”* However, lecturers also highlighted that this development was sometimes limited by resource availability and community expectations, requiring students to negotiate realistic project goals, while also maintaining professional standards.

Interview data from community members indicated recognition of this emerging professional identity. SDC2 stated, *“Students now come as problem-solvers, not just teachers; they listen and adapt.”* Nonetheless, moments of tension occasionally arose when student ideas conflicted with traditional community practices, necessitating dialogue to reconcile academic goals with cultural norms.

Reflective diaries revealed students grappling with vulnerability and resilience, fostering empathy and collaborative skills. Students often reflected on the challenge of working with limited materials and balancing the pressure to achieve assessment outcomes, while respecting community priorities. Observations of team meetings and community engagements underscored active participation, shared leadership, and a sense of belonging within both school and community spheres.

This identity work aligns with Beauchamp and Thomas's (2019) conceptualisation of teacher identity as dynamic and socially-constructed through practice. Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) provided a powerful context for reflexivity, supporting the transition from peripheral participation to full professional agency as theorised by Lave and Wenger (2019). The data indicates that while experiential engagement fosters authentic identity reconstruction, sustaining these gains depends on

continued support, adequate resources, and sensitive navigation of community power dynamics.

The harmony across instruments demonstrates that experiential engagement fosters authentic identity reconstruction, bridging personal growth with community responsiveness.

4.4 Innovation, Skills, and Economic Empowerment

The community engagement projects showcased significant innovation and skills acquisition directly linked to economic empowerment. Students developed diverse products such as herbal medicines, instant pumpkin porridge, and dishwashing liquids, with ST1 stating, *“Creating a product from local resources gave me business skills I never imagined.”*

Observations confirmed hands-on involvement in farming vegetable gardens and school construction projects, while diaries detailed budgeting, marketing strategies, and stakeholder relations. However, students frequently faced resource constraints, having to source raw materials from limited local supplies or rely on donations, which sometimes delayed project completion and required careful planning to avoid overburdening resource-poor communities.

Lecturers highlighted the entrepreneurial dimension, with L4 explaining, *“Our students are no longer just teachers but entrepreneurs and community leaders.”* Yet, lecturers also noted occasional tensions between academic assessment expectations and community priorities, requiring students to negotiate compromises to ensure that innovations were culturally-appropriate and ethically-sound.

Community members noted the practical impact, with SDC1 commenting, *“These initiatives have improved livelihoods and created jobs locally.”* Nevertheless, the sustainability of these projects often depended on ongoing student involvement or external support, highlighting the need for mechanisms such as seed funding or community capacity-building to maintain long-term benefits.

Documented evidence showed collaborations between students and local businesses, with some students launching start-ups that contribute to local economies, aligning with Zimbabwe’s Education 5.0 focus on innovation and industrialisation (Chikukwa & Nyikahadzo, 2023). While these initiatives demonstrate economic potential, the projects also reveal that careful monitoring and evaluation are required to balance entrepreneurial ambitions with community needs and to prevent power imbalances between students and local stakeholders.

These findings corroborate global and regional research emphasising the role of experiential learning in cultivating employability and entrepreneurial competencies (Jenkins & Healey, 2018; Santos & Vieira, 2019). The data from interviews, documents, and observations converge to illustrate how community engagement projects simultaneously address educational, economic, and social development goals, reinforcing Education 5.0's transformative agenda. At the same time, the evidence shows that for economic empowerment to be genuinely sustainable, programs must anticipate resource limitations, ethical tensions, and ongoing community collaboration.

4.5 Experiential Assessment as Community Accountability

Assessment practices emerged as deeply intertwined with community accountability rather than traditional grading metrics. Students and lecturers both stressed that assessment prioritised the tangible impact of projects and ethical engagement.

ST4 stated, *"It's not just about marks but how our work changes the community."*

Lecturers reinforced this, with L1 explaining, *"We assess relevance, teamwork, reflection, and ethics, guided by community feedback."* However, lecturers acknowledged that tensions occasionally arose when academic assessment criteria conflicted with community-defined needs, requiring students to navigate power imbalances and adapt their projects to align with local expectations.

Community members played active roles in the assessment process, offering critical insights and validating project outcomes. SDC2 noted, *"We help evaluate what works for our needs; this makes assessment fair and meaningful."* However, some community members expressed concerns about students' reliance on limited local resources, highlighting the need to ensure that projects do not strain already resource-poor communities or create dependency.

Document critiques consistently emphasised local relevance, with adjustments made to ensure innovations responded to specific community challenges, such as vegetable gardening in areas with scarcity. The participatory approach sometimes required negotiating between the urgency of project deadlines and the practical realities of resource availability, illustrating the complexity of balancing academic objectives with community priorities.

This participatory and skills-based evaluation reflects calls for assessment reform in African teacher education, which advocate for justice, contextual relevance, and learner-centred approaches (Mwangi, 2018; Langa & Maphalala, 2021). By incorporating community perspectives, experiential assessment promotes accountability, while simultaneously highlighting the limitations imposed by resource constraints and structural inequalities.

The alignment across data sources confirms that experiential assessment in this context is a dialogical process involving students, educators, and community stakeholders, thus embodying Ubuntu's communal ethos and promoting accountability. Overall, while the model demonstrates strong potential for fostering ethical and contextually relevant professional growth, its sustainability relies on continued institutional support, community engagement, and equitable access to resources.

5. Implications, Recommendations, and Impact

5.1 Implications and Integration

Together, these themes illuminate how Ubuntu, experiential learning, and Education 5.0's pillars coalesce to transform teacher education in Zimbabwe. The findings align with Vision 2030 and Agenda 2063 by promoting equity, innovation, and community-centred development (Government of Zimbabwe, 2018; African Union Commission, 2019). By embedding ethical engagement, identity transformation, and entrepreneurship within WIL, this approach reimagines professional identity-formation as a catalyst for broader social and economic change. However, it is important to note that the positive outcomes described must be considered alongside contextual limitations, including constraints on resources, occasional misalignment between academic expectations and community priorities, and the need for sustained institutional support to ensure long-term impact.

The harmonisation of qualitative data from diverse instruments strengthens the validity of the conclusions and highlights the replicability of this model in other African and global contexts facing similar challenges of graduate employability and community relevance (Marginson, 2018; Nyika & Olowu, 2022). However, successful replication requires careful consideration of local infrastructure, cultural dynamics, and the availability of materials necessary to support student-

led projects. This study advocates for educational policies and practices that foreground indigenous knowledge systems, ethics of care, and innovation-driven curricula to nurture job creators rather than job seekers.

5.2 Implications for Zimbabwe

Education 5.0 has emerged as a strategic response to persistent youth unemployment and underdevelopment in Zimbabwe. By integrating teaching, research, community service, innovation, and industrialisation, it seeks to reorient higher and tertiary education towards economic productivity and social transformation. Chikukwa and Nyikahadzoi (2023) argue that this shift disrupts the passive orientation of graduates who were traditionally confined to content mastery and certificate acquisition. Instead, it cultivates agency, positioning student teachers as co-creators of knowledge and practical solutions to local challenges.

Murwira (2021) affirms that the transition from Education 3.0 to 5.0 allows for the mobilisation of knowledge to serve communities in real time, thereby promoting national resilience. Nevertheless, in practice, students sometimes encounter limitations such as insufficient access to construction materials, seeds, or herbal medicine ingredients, which can hinder project continuity or place unintended strain on resource-poor communities.

This reflects the ethical imperative embedded in the Zimbabwean development mantra '*Nyika inovakwa nevene vayo*', a philosophy that sees education as a shared responsibility for nation-building rather than a mere route to employment. Community engagement under this model enables graduates to internalise citizenship values and activate self-reliance through direct service and innovation. However, navigating the tensions between academic assessment goals and community expectations requires ongoing mentorship and reflexive practice, as students negotiate cultural norms and power dynamics in collaborative projects.

Student teachers become producers of goods and services, from agricultural projects to traditional medicine, applying theoretical knowledge to lived realities. The Government of Zimbabwe (2018) emphasises that Vision 2030 depends on such innovation-driven human capital to transition from a consumer economy to one centred on production. The experiential work-integrated learning model in teacher

education thus repositions graduates not as job-seekers but as nation-builders who create local value and sustainable impact.

5.3 Implications for Africa

Across the continent, Ubuntu-centred pedagogy offers a culturally-grounded alternative to dominant Eurocentric frameworks that often disregard indigenous knowledge systems. Banda (2020) explains that Ubuntu reclaims African philosophies of education, placing emphasis on interdependence, human dignity, and collective participation. While highly promising, implementing Ubuntu-based experiential learning can be challenged by resource scarcity and institutional constraints, necessitating careful planning and equitable resource distribution.

This educational philosophy aligns with the African Union's Agenda 2063, which calls for a reimagined African future based on shared prosperity, local knowledge, and people-driven development. The application of Ubuntu in this study demonstrates how community-engaged teacher education can generate grassroots innovation that is both contextually-appropriate and socially-embedded.

Akintunde and Akinleye (2021) argue that pan-African pedagogies grounded in Ubuntu are highly adaptable and scalable across different African contexts, particularly where challenges of exclusion, poverty, and unemployment persist. Nonetheless, scaling these initiatives requires sustained support, ongoing community consultation, and mechanisms to address power imbalances among students, lecturers, and local stakeholders.

The success of student-led projects in this study, including waste recycling, food security initiatives, and indigenous medicine production, points to the broader relevance of this model across African education systems. The integration of structured mentorship, monitoring frameworks, and contingency planning can help mitigate challenges such as material shortages, cultural misunderstandings, and short-term project discontinuity.

This suggests that reorienting teacher education around Ubuntu values can contribute to the formation of ethically conscious educators committed to social transformation beyond the classroom. It also underscores the importance of embedding reflection and critical dialogue into the learning process to ensure ethical decision-making in the face of competing priorities.

5.4 Implications for the World

On a global scale, Ubuntu offers a timely ethical framework to reimagine community engagement in higher education. It challenges individualistic and neoliberal understandings of education by placing emphasis on mutual responsibility, relational ethics, and context-driven knowledge creation. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) contends that Ubuntu provides an ontological and epistemological grounding to rehumanise education in an era marked by commodification and fragmentation. At the same time, institutions seeking to adopt Ubuntu-guided experiential models globally must be mindful of differences in socio-economic and cultural contexts, ensuring that engagement is genuinely reciprocal and avoids imposing external priorities on communities.

The findings from this study extend current debates on teacher education by demonstrating that community-engaged assessment rooted in Ubuntu is applicable across diverse contexts. Jenkins and Healey (2018) highlight the effectiveness of experiential and place-based learning in cultivating student agency, but note the lack of ethical framing in much of the literature. Ubuntu fills this gap by providing a value-based orientation that guides respectful engagement and shared knowledge production.

Furthermore, this approach supports progress on Sustainable Development Goals such as SDG 4 on quality education, SDG 8 on decent work, SDG 9 on innovation, and SDG 11 on sustainable communities. Marginson (2018) argues that higher education must move beyond technical skills to become a site of equitable development and social solidarity. The Ubuntu-based experiential assessment model demonstrates that ethical, community-oriented education can simultaneously advance social, economic, and environmental objectives, provided institutions proactively address constraints and inequities in resource allocation.

5.5 Recommendations

To ensure sustainability, community engagement should be institutionalised as a formal domain of assessment in teacher education programmes. This requires policy frameworks that clearly define ethical engagement, resource responsibilities, and culturally appropriate assessment criteria.

Providing seed funding or micro-grants to support student-led innovations would promote continuity beyond the practicum and support the entrepreneurial spirit promoted by Education 5.0. These financial mechanisms also empower students to transform ideas into sustainable community enterprises. Additionally, fostering partnerships with local businesses, NGOs, and municipal authorities can mitigate resource constraints and enhance the practical impact of student projects.

It is equally important to establish monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track the long-term impact of graduates in their communities. Such data would be invaluable in shaping future teacher education reforms and informing national development strategies. The frameworks should incorporate community feedback loops and evaluation of social, economic, and ethical outcomes, thereby embedding accountability and adaptability into project design.

Lastly, Ubuntu ethics should be embedded into the curriculum and regulatory frameworks governing teacher training. Doing so would formally recognise African philosophical foundations in education while reinforcing the role of teachers as ethical, innovative leaders committed to inclusive development. Curricular integration must explicitly address potential conflicts between academic goals and community-defined needs, teaching students strategies to negotiate power dynamics and make decisions that balance educational outcomes with local priorities.

5.6 Limitations and Reflections

This study generated rich insights into the transformative potential of Ubuntu-guided community engagement. However, its scope was limited by the small sample size and the specificity of its localised context. Conducted within one teacher education institution and involving a limited number of participants, the findings are not statistically generalisable. The relatively small number of students and community members also limits the diversity of experiences represented, which may influence perceptions of sustainability and innovation.

A further limitation relates to the dynamic implementation of Education 5.0. Since institutional interpretations and operational capacities vary, the extent to which experiential assessment is embedded in practice differs, potentially influencing how student teacher identities evolve. Resource constraints, including limited funding, materials, and

infrastructure, affected some project outcomes, highlighting the need for institutional support to maintain continuity and fairness.

Additionally, while action research offers a powerful framework for change, its cyclical nature demands sustained engagement that is not always feasible in resource-limited settings. This constraint may affect the long-term continuity of student-led innovations and community partnerships. Power dynamics among students, lecturers, and community members occasionally required negotiation to resolve conflicts between project ambitions and cultural or practical realities.

Despite these limitations, the study prioritised ethical responsiveness and relational learning. The Ubuntu lens enhanced reflexivity and solidarity, positioning the research process as both transformative and collaborative. Future research should consider longitudinal approaches that trace graduate impact over time, examine institutional capacities for supporting community-engaged assessment, and explore mechanisms to balance academic, ethical, and resource considerations for sustainable community development.

6. Conclusion

This study has highlighted the transformative potential of Ubuntu-guided experiential assessment in reshaping teacher education within the Zimbabwean context. Community engagement emerged not as an ancillary activity, but as a central ethical and pedagogical practice that affirms indigenous knowledge, collective responsibility and human dignity. When student teachers immerse themselves in real-life challenges through locally grounded projects, they begin to enact a form of learning that is both emancipatory and contextually relevant. As demonstrated through their participation in innovation projects such as food production, indigenous medicine, and school infrastructure, student teachers redefined their professional identity. No longer passive recipients of content or examination-driven learners, they assumed new roles as ethical, entrepreneurial and socially responsible actors. This evolution in identity reflects a deeper integration of knowledge, values and community engagement, informed by Ubuntu's ethics of care and interdependence. It also challenges traditional notions of assessment by expanding it beyond individual performance to include social impact and relational accountability.

Education 5.0, as practised in this study, signals a fundamental shift in higher and teacher education. It offers a decolonial and justice-

oriented alternative to conventional models, embedding learning within community needs and national development priorities. By focusing on innovation, industrialisation, and civic engagement, it aligns education with the aspirations of Vision 2030 and the African Union Agenda 2063. For global education systems seeking to become more responsive to inequality, disconnection, and irrelevance, the Zimbabwean experience offers valuable lessons. Ubuntu-centred experiential assessment presents an adaptable framework for preparing teachers who are not only skilled professionals but also grounded citizens and co-creators of sustainable futures. This study calls on educators worldwide to reimagine assessment as a relational, ethical and community-rooted process that prepares graduates to build societies from within.

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