

Democratising the Music Curriculum: Integrating Ubuntu-gogy for the Africanisation of South African Higher Education

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been an ongoing debate about the need for redress in South African higher education which is largely informed by Western perspectives, and the music curriculum is no exception. Even though there is growing progress, music education continues to be dominated by the Western classical canon. Therefore, the purpose of this article was to provide a comprehensive investigation of how ubuntu-gogy can be successfully and effectively merged into the South African higher education music curriculum. The researcher used ubuntu-gogy as a theoretical framework to advocate for the integration of ubuntu-gogy—a teaching philosophy rooted in African values and communal learning—to democratise and Africanise the music curriculum in South African higher education. This article used a qualitative content analysis grounded in examining existing literature on a similar subject under the guidance of the research questions developed earlier. The findings of this study show that ubuntu-gogy provides an approach that can Africanise the curriculum and pedagogy by incorporating indigenous musical practices, oral traditions, and cultural values into the teaching and learning process. The results of this article revealed that applying ubuntu-gogy as a method of teaching and learning can help in preparing music education students to engage with the world from a culturally informed and empowered perspective. This article concludes by affirming that ubuntu-gogy as a method of teaching and learning provides a transformative framework for Africanising music education in South African higher education.

Keywords: Africanisation; decolonisation; music education; ubuntu-gogy; Western perspective



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Introduction

It is prudent to foreground this article by giving a brief background about South Africa's higher education landscape, so that the democratisation of the music curriculum within the institutions of higher learning under scrutiny can be contextualised. According to Yende and Yende (2022), the discussion of decolonisation and Africanisation has primarily taken place on the African continent in recent decades. In South African higher education, there has been an increasing push towards Africanisation and curriculum decolonisation (Yende and Pashkevitch 2022; Zeleza 2009). Zeleza (2009) mentions that decolonisation of the curriculum necessitates the reawakening of indigenous knowledge and the demolition of dominant Eurocentric epistemologies. Given the continued and unchallenged Western influence on many South African universities, Le Grange (2016) notes that the discussion about the Africanisation of education and the curriculum is long overdue. This view is shared by Yende and Pashkevitch (2022) who emphasise the importance of decolonisation in South African universities, especially in promoting African languages which are relevant in the cultural heritage of the previously marginalised populace. It is evident that South African higher education is undergoing a transformative shift towards decolonisation and Africanisation, aiming to form a curriculum that is reflective of the country's diverse cultural heritage.

It is essential to mention that several studies (Du Plessis 2021; Le Grange 2016; Mbembe 2016; Yende and Yende 2022; Zeleza 2009) have engaged with the quest for and importance of decolonisation in the South African context. For instance, Le Grange (2016) explores some issues related to the decolonisation of the university curriculum, Zeleza (2009) and Mbembe (2016) enlighten on the historical background of decolonisation of the curriculum in higher education, while Yende and Yende (2022) deal with the ongoing debate regarding the decolonisation of the higher education curriculum, and Africanisation forms a part of a larger discourse in general. It is crucial to acknowledge that even though these studies have been conducted in different contexts, they still provide a context in which the democratising of the music curriculum through the integration of ubuntu-gogy can be understood.

While most studies (Du Plessis 2021; Le Grange 2016; Mbembe 2016; Yende and Yende 2022; Zeleza 2009) concur that the decolonisation of South African higher education has received a fair amount of attention from researchers, Yende and Yende (2022) point out that the decolonisation of music education has not been given attention. These observations justify the current study which investigates democratising the music curriculum through integrating ubuntu-gogy for the Africanisation of South African higher education (Mofokeng 2002; Msila 2009). Second, empirical study on the effects of this kind of integration is crucial, especially with regard to student participation, academic achievement, and cultural identity. Finally, there is still a need for more research owing to the lack of understanding regarding the tactics and practical difficulties involved in applying ubuntu-gogy in higher education settings.

This article is motivated by the highlighted gaps and seeks to provide a comprehensive investigation of how ubuntu-gogy can be successfully and effectively merged into the South African higher education music curriculum. By doing so, the researcher aims to offer some useful insights into the benefits and challenges of this approach. This article also contributes to the broader and ongoing debate on the Africanisation and decolonisation of the music curriculum in South African higher education. The impetus for this article stems from the acknowledgement of the transformative prospective of ubuntu-gogy to generate a more inclusive, relevant, and empowering music educational experience for South African students. Therefore, this article aims to encourage relevant music scholars, policymakers, and other stakeholders to integrate ubuntu-gogy as a feasible and practical approach for enriching the music curriculum and promoting cultural sustainability in higher education. In the context of democratising the music curriculum, the integration of ubuntu-gogy was deemed as a fundamental tool for the Africanisation of South African higher education.

Research Questions

For the purpose of this article, the researcher developed the following research questions that seek answers that will clarify how ubuntu-gogy can be successfully merged into the South African higher education music curriculum:

- (1) How can ubuntu-gogy be integrated into South African higher education music curricula to promote Africanisation?
- (2) What are the effects of ubuntu-gogy on student engagement, cultural identity, and academic performance in music education?
- (3) What challenges and opportunities arise when implementing ubuntu-gogy in South African higher education music programs?
- (4) How does ubuntu-gogy contribute to preserving and promoting African musical traditions in higher education?

Historical Overview of South African Higher Education Before 1994

According to Heleta (2016), before 1994 the South African curriculum was mainly informed by Eurocentric perspective that created educational inequalities through overt racist policies. This is supported by Lumadi (2021) and Yende and Mthombeni (2023) who affirmed that the apartheid system created educational inequalities through the Bantu Education Act of 1952. During this period, the apartheid government developed a policy that prevented Blacks from receiving proper education and limited the educational opportunities of Black people (Gallo 2020). Gallo (2020, 3) mentions that “because of Bantu Education and its lasting legacy in South Africa, many black South Africans have historically and continue to be denied access to quality education,

depriving them of employment and other socioeconomic opportunities.” This view is shared by several other scholars such as Anderson (2003), Fleetwood (2012), and Heleta (2016) who mentioned that higher education was forcibly divided during apartheid at South African universities to benefit specific racial groups, and the effects of the segregation are still felt today.

But in 1976, Black students from Soweto began a nonviolent protest against a law requiring them to learn all subjects in Afrikaans (Gallo 2020; Ndlovu 2017). However, the police retaliated by shooting the young protestors, killing four and injuring 11 children (Gallo 2020). Owing to its violent and heinous nature, this demonstration gained international recognition as the Soweto Uprising. Subsequently, this demanded the formal termination of Bantu education, which was succeeded by the 1979 Education and Training Act (Rakometsi 2008; Wills 2011). However, since this act still enforced racial school segregation, the main components of Bantu education were not overturned until the passing of the South African Schools Act of 1996 (McKeever 2017; Wills 2011).

South African Higher Education Post-1994

Several studies (Badat and Sayed 2014; Heleta 2016; Thobejane 2005) have stated that since the end of apartheid in 1994, many policy changes have occurred within education to attempt to address educational inequalities; however, South African education continued to reflect Western elements and this remained untouched until 2015–2016 when South African higher education experienced a severe wave of student protests known as the #FeesMustFall movement which fought for Africanisation and curriculum decolonisation (Maringira and Gukurume 2016). Jordan (2021) reveals that Black Pain emerged as a metaphor that encapsulated the embodied reality of Black students regarding what was described as Eurocentric, racist, and colonial influences. As a result, according to Du Plessis (2021), student protests are nothing new in South Africa following apartheid. The #FeesMustFall movement was able to increase public awareness of the lack of finance for higher education through its rallies at South African campuses. The administration has pledged to increase financing for the student aid programme since the protests. Even though there are still concerns regarding the violent activities connected to the protests, they were an effective means of communication (Du Plessis 2021; Maringira and Gukurume 2016).

Theoretical Framework

Ubuntu was used in this study as a theory that seeks to provide a comprehensive argument about the quest for the Africanisation of music education in South African higher education. Ubuntu is a term that emerged from combining the word ubuntu which is an African philosophy and pedagogy which speaks about the approach of teaching. According to Moyo and Moyo (2021), ubuntu is a Zulu word which means “humanity” and is often encapsulated in the phrase “I am because we are” in Zulu,

“Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu.” This term emphasises the interconnectedness of people and the importance of community, mutual respect, and collective responsibility.

Ubuntu is “an African educational paradigm that transcends pedagogy, andragogy, ergonagy, and heutagogy,” according to the theory’s founding father Bangura (2005, 13). According to a more contemporary perspective, ubuntu is the science of teaching and learning that is taken from African ideologies like ubuntu by Bangura (2005). According to Omodan and Dube (2020), ubuntu is an Afrocentric pedagogy based on the ubuntu concept of Africanism. Therefore, it is clear that the tenets underlying the ubuntu philosophy and its behaviours inform ubuntu.

The researcher perceived the ubuntu theory as a necessary and crucial theory to discuss key themes that prove the importance of ubuntu in addressing the issue of the Africanisation of music education in South African higher education (Mthimkhulu 2024). In essence, ubuntu theory was adopted as this theory offers a powerful framework for transforming higher education, particularly through Africanisation. In South African higher education, traditional curricula have been largely informed by Eurocentric perspective, but incorporating ubuntu as an African perspectives has the potential to make music education more inclusive and relevant for diverse cultural backgrounds. This approach helps students connect more deeply with their heritage (Bangura 2005; Mthimkhulu 2024). Another justification for using ubuntu in this article is that this theory emphasises community and collaboration in learning, encouraging understanding and co-construction, and reflecting traditional African communal practices, especially in music education. It is evident that ubuntu is essential in challenging Eurocentric dominance in the music education curriculum. Ubuntu is crucial in promoting empathy and humanity as these are core values in African music. Therefore, the researcher believes that applying ubuntu as a theory in this article can help in preparing music education students to engage with the world from a culturally informed and empowered perspective.

Methodology

This article used a qualitative desktop analysis that was based on a review of the scientific literature in relation to the particular subject that arose in this article. This article’s main query is: How can ubuntu be effectively incorporated into the music curriculum of South African higher education? This question was significantly answered by the qualitative desktop analysis method. The researcher had to use this methodology in order to draw attention to some of the obstacles that impede the integration of African indigenous music into South African higher education, even though academics have made Africanisation and decolonisation of the Western curriculum a central theme. African music education is the subject of numerous literary works and themes that are examined using the qualitative desktop analysis method (Clyne et al. 2007).

This method involved gathering data from a wide range of textual and digital sources, such as books, journals, reports, databases, and publicly accessible materials, then thoroughly compiling and combining it (Guerin et al. 2018). There were no participant interviews or human subjects used in this investigation. Rather, non-numerical data from literary sources were the main focus of the analysis (Guerin et al. 2018). Throughout the research process, a careful examination of these sources was conducted to explain the importance of African music education in South Africa. This article aimed to provide a comprehensive exploration of ubuntu-gogy as a pragmatic approach for the Africanisation of music education, highlighting its potential to create a more inclusive, culturally relevant pedagogy that reflects the values, practices, and lived experiences of African students.

As previously stated, the primary sources of information used in the data-gathering procedure were archival materials as well as other secondary materials, such as books, book chapters, and published peer-reviewed journal articles. A range of platforms, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, ResearchGate, and university repositories were searched to guarantee a thorough examination of the resources that were accessible. This methodology's capacity to offer a thorough examination of the body of current literature justifies its application and facilitates a thorough comprehension of the research topic.

The "advanced search function" was used to perform a thorough search on the aforementioned databases. A range of search phrases was employed, such as "ubuntu," "Africanisation," "decolonisation," "music education," "South African higher education," and "ubuntu-gogy in education." The search parameters comprised English language publications and a date span of 2000 to the present. At first, the domain of music instruction was the exclusive focus of the search. But the dearth of writing that concentrated on ubuntu-gogy in music education led to a broadening of the investigation into other relevant domains.

Triangulation Approach

This article employed many internet repositories and websites, together with books, scientific publications, and university repositories to verify and validate particular facts through triangulation (Adami and Kiger 2005). By cross-referencing data from several sources and viewpoints, this triangulation technique was used to increase the validity of the research findings and lend credence to them.

Contextualising Ubuntu-gogy for the Africanisation of Music Education: A Pragmatic Approach

It is prudent to foreground this section by highlighting that in the African continent music education has become a vital tool for preserving cultural heritage, indigenous languages, and musical practices. Despite the importance of music education in the

African continent, the dominance of Western music educational models has often marginalised indigenous music with its African knowledge systems. However, there has recently been an increase in the recognition and acknowledgement of the need to decolonise Western music education and promote African-centred approaches that are rooted in the continent's cultural and philosophical frameworks. One such approach that has gained traction is "ubuntu-gogy," a concept that combines the African philosophy of ubuntu with pedagogy to create a framework for teaching and learning that is grounded in African values and ways of being.

Therefore, in the context of music education, ubuntu-gogy provides an approach that has the potential to Africanise the curriculum and pedagogy by incorporating indigenous musical practices, oral traditions, and cultural values into the teaching and learning process. This method not only enriches students' educational experiences but also helps to preserve and promote Africa's diverse musical heritage. The Africanisation of music education through ubuntu-gogy provides a transformative framework for reimagining education in Africa. As this approach centres African values, knowledge, and perspectives, this approach has the potential to not only decolonise music education but also contribute to the broader project of reclaiming and revitalising Africa's rich cultural heritage for future generations. The following themes were established based on the research questions developed earlier and were answered using existing literature.

Integration of Ubuntu-gogy into South African Higher Education Music Curricula

It is essential to foreground this section by stating that it has long been of major concern among various scholars that in South Africa indigenous music has not received the same attention as Western music in higher education (McConnachie 2016; Mkhombo 2019; Yende and Yende 2022). Yende (2023) mentioned that in post-apartheid South Africa, there has been a growing need to decolonise the Western music education perspective and promote an indigenous music education curriculum that is as valuable as Western music education, which is still dominant in South African music curricula. Yende and Yende (2022, 113) mentioned that South African higher education institutions along with the relevant parties have to be at the forefront in the promotion of the indigenous African music curriculum. The intervention of policymakers and stakeholders will foster the implementation of African indigenous music in higher education.

This involves the use of teaching methods that promote collaboration, community engagement, and oral traditions, reflecting ubuntu principles, as highlighted by Mthimkhulu (2024). This may involve group projects, community-based music-making, and incorporate oral learning methods. This was supported by Ngubane and Makua (2021) who stated that recently ubuntu-gogy has grown as a method of teaching and learning that emerged from the African theory and philosophy called ubuntu. There is a need to provide training and professional development opportunities for music faculty to familiarise them with ubuntu-gogy principles and how to integrate them into their teaching. Therefore, to realise this there is also a need to develop resources such

as textbooks, recordings, and digital materials that highlight African music and which can be used in teaching.

Effects of Ubuntuogy on Student Engagement in Music Education

Ubuntuogy scholars such as Omodan and Diko (2021) and Mthimkhulu (2024) believe that ubuntuogy in education is considered to be African cultural capital that provides indigenous knowledge which is actually important for integrating into our African conception of inclusion which in turn promotes inclusivity, equality, and social justice in our education system. Therefore, ubuntuogy has the potential to considerably improve student engagement, especially in music education by ensuring that the music education curriculum resonates with their cultural heritage. This was substantiated by Offorma (2016) who stated that by integrating components of their own cultural background into the learning process, students are more likely to feel a sense of belonging and connection to the material being taught. It is evident that ubuntuogy integrated into African music education can assist students to develop a stronger sense of cultural identity and connection to their cultural heritage through music (Yende 2023). This can lead to increased pride in one's culture and a deeper understanding of its importance. Ubuntuogy can also promote critical thinking and creativity, which are valuable skills in music education.

Challenges and Opportunities when Implementing Ubuntuogy Music Education

It is essential to consider the perception of those involved in the implementation of music education in South African higher education. Mkhombo (2019) mentioned that there is insufficient support for African indigenous music in higher education in South Africa and African indigenous music is not catered for as a core module in the existing music curriculum. This was supported by Mugovhani (2012) who noted that the general problem faced when including African indigenous music in higher education is that higher education institutions are dominated by Western cultural content. African indigenous music has long been neglected in higher education institutions in South Africa. Yende and Yende (2022) found that, in addition to providing a more comprehensive and well-rounded educational experience and aiding in the preservation and advancement of African musical traditions, African indigenous music education enhances cultural diversity and inclusivity in higher education.

Contribution to Preserving and Promoting African Musical Traditions

There are precise studies on the use of ubuntuogy in music education because ubuntuogy can be associated with the pedagogy of care as highlighted by Omodan and Diko (2021), Mthimkhulu (2024), and Yende (2023). It is evident that in music education ubuntuogy can help to ensure that African musical traditions are not only preserved but also integrated into mainstream music education, ensuring their continued relevance and recognition. This is because ubuntuogy advocates for caring and humanity which are core values of African music education (Mugovhani 2012). In this

case, ubuntu-gogy promotes the teaching of African musical traditions in higher education to a wider audience, both within and outside Africa.

As a result, ubuntu-gogy can encourage students to study and interact with African music more, which will encourage ongoing creativity and advancement within these traditions. The promotion of African indigenous music by ubuntu-gogy serves as a reminder that higher education in South Africa should take into account and support the nation's cultural, religious, and socio-political trends when it comes to musical arts education (Mugovhani 2012, 914). It is true that more people are becoming aware of ubuntu-gogy as an essential teaching and learning strategy from an African perspective (Mthimkhulu 2024; Omodan and Diko 2021). Ubuntu-gogy plays an essential role in promoting the teaching and learning of African indigenous music in higher education. Higher education should promote African indigenous arts programmes through curriculum Africanisation, incorporating aspects such as dance, theatre, storytelling, acting, and singing, among other arts (Yende and Yende 2022).

Discussion

The current study sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of how ubuntu-gogy can be successfully and effectively merged into the South African higher education music curriculum. This article has argued that integrating ubuntu-gogy into South African higher education music curricula can play a vital role in decolonising the Western music education perspective because ubuntu-gogy is considered a vital teaching and learning method that emerged from the African theory and philosophy called ubuntu as highlighted by Bangura (2005). It has also highlighted that in the African continent music education has become a vital tool for preserving cultural heritage, indigenous languages, and musical practices.

The findings of this study show that ubuntu-gogy provides an approach that has the potential to Africanise the curriculum and pedagogy by incorporating indigenous musical practices, oral traditions, and cultural values into the teaching and learning process. This is consistent with the previous research of Mugovhani (2012) and Yende and Yende (2022) who revealed that South African higher education along with the relevant parties have to be at the forefront in the promotion of the indigenous African music curriculum. The curricularisation of African indigenous music will confirm the legitimacy of decolonisation and Africanisation. The current curricular roots in the Western music curriculum are largely ignored. This is in line with ubuntu-gogy theory by Mthimkhulu (2024) who highlighted that this theory is essential in challenging Eurocentric dominance in the music education curriculum. The findings of this article have shown that ubuntu-gogy has the prospect of considerably improving student engagement, especially in music education, by making sure that the music education curriculum resonates with their cultural heritage. These findings are in line with ubuntu-gogy theory that promotes empathy and humanity as these are core values in African music.

Again, the findings of this article are based on the reviewed literature written by scholars such as Omodan and Diko (2021), Mthimkhulu (2024), and Yende (2023) who concurred that the Africanisation of music education centres African values, knowledge, and perspectives. This approach has the potential to not only decolonise music education but also contribute to the broader project of reclaiming and revitalising Africa's rich cultural heritage for future generations. This finding corroborates the results of Yende and Yende (2022) who found that despite decolonisation and Africanisation being at the forefront of South African higher education, music education in South African higher education has not been given the necessary attention. This is because South African higher education, especially music schools, are dominated by Western cultural content. This finding is congruent with the findings of previous studies by Omodan and Diko (2021) and Mthimkhulu (2024) who pointed out that ubuntu theory plays an essential role in promoting teaching and learning of African indigenous music in higher education. The results of this article revealed that applying ubuntu theory as a method of teaching and learning can help in preparing music education students to engage with the world from a culturally informed and empowered perspective.

Recommendations and Conclusion

This article explored and identified some merits in ubuntu theory that are essential in implementing effective African music education in the South African higher education curriculum. Specific focus was placed on the music education offered in South African higher education. This article looked broadly at fundamental principles of ubuntu theory and how it can be integrated into music education to promote traditional curricula that are largely informed by African perspectives. This article recognised that incorporating ubuntu theory as an African perspectives has the potential to make music education more inclusive and relevant for diverse cultural backgrounds. This article also pointed out that South African higher education must integrate ubuntu theory as a fundamental method of teaching and learning that promotes African music education.

Using a framework of analysis that was largely informed by the central tenets of Bangura's (2005) ubuntu theory, this article examined the importance of adopting ubuntu theory as a method of teaching and learning of African music education. This article has argued and revealed that by integrating ubuntu theory principles, music education can align more closely with African cultural contexts, thus enriching the educational experience and fostering a deeper connection to African heritage. This approach not only enhances the relevance of higher education but also empowers students and educators to engage with their cultural identity in a meaningful way. The approach and analysis in the article were informed by what the researcher views as a nexus that is gradually growing in South African higher education as a key method for effective African music education. In essence, ubuntu theory provides a transformative lens through which the Africanisation of music education can be

achieved, addressing the unique needs and aspirations of South African students while promoting a more inclusive and culturally responsive educational environment.

Based on these findings and reflecting on this article, the following recommendations are made:

First and foremost, ubuntuogy should be embraced by South African higher education institutions and pertinent stakeholders as the core philosophy guiding the teaching and learning of African music education. This will support effective and high-quality music education within the context of South Africa.

Secondly, research ought to be conducted in collaboration with different stakeholders involved in curriculum decolonisation and Africanisation, including curriculum developers, policymakers, and others.

Finally, in order to fully comprehend the significance of ubuntuogy as a foundational theory of teaching and learning in African music education, more comprehensive approaches like interviews are required.

The article concludes by affirming that ubuntuogy as a method of teaching and learning provides a transformative framework for Africanising music education in South African higher education. Evidently, by emphasising African values, it fosters a culturally responsive and inclusive educational environment, empowering students and enriching their academic experience.

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