

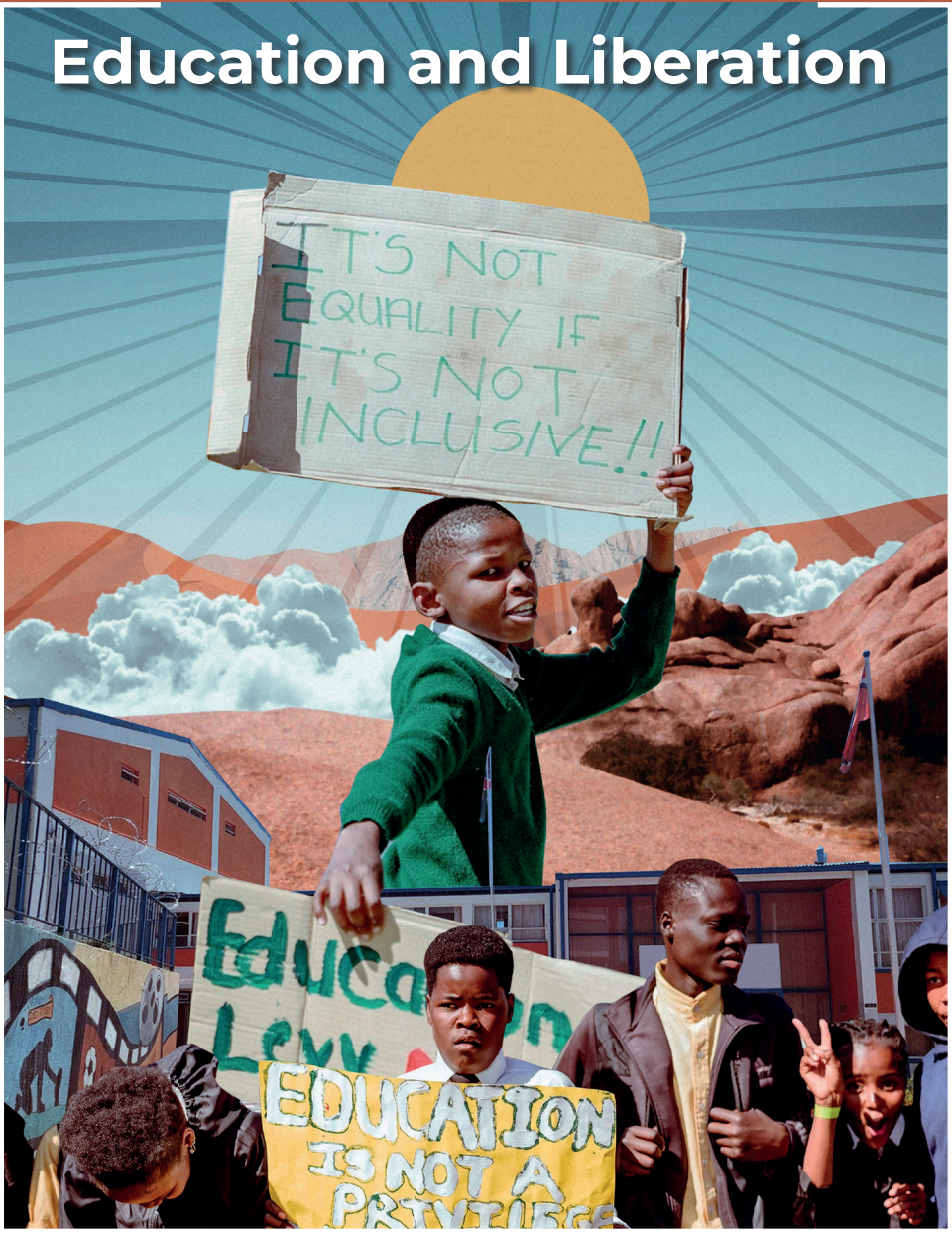
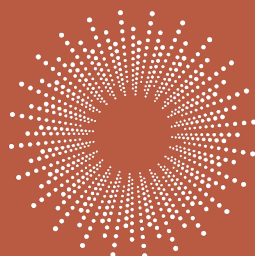


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Beyond Colonialities: Leveraging Ubuntu for Transformative Higher Education in Namibia

Bruno Venditto & Adalbertus Kamanzi

Abstract:

This article examines how the Southern African philosophy of Ubuntu, understood as part of a broader family of African relational-humanist philosophies, when framed through the lens of deep decoloniality, can serve as a transformative ethos for higher education in Namibia. While much of the decolonial turn has focused on dismantling Eurocentric curricula and hegemonic epistemologies, this study argues that transformation also requires confronting internal colonialities, elitist governance structures, exclusionary language policies, and neoliberal logics that persist within postcolonial institutions. Methodologically, the article employs qualitative document analysis of key national policies, curricular frameworks, and institutional prospectuses, complemented by a reflexive acknowledgement of the authors' positionality as lecturers and administrators within Namibian universities. The analysis was thematically guided by Ubuntu values of relational accountability, dignity, and communal flourishing, alongside decolonial critiques of knowledge hierarchies and neoliberal

instrumentalism. Findings reveal three persistent colonial residues in Namibian higher education: the privileging of Eurocentric and technocratic knowledge systems; the entrenchment of English as the gatekeeping language of academia; and the construction of graduates as market-oriented individuals rather



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than relational citizens. Despite rhetorical commitments to equity and transformation, policy and institutional documents show little evidence of Ubuntu as an epistemic or ethical framework. The article proposes a reorientation of higher education through Ubuntu and deep decoloniality as mutually reinforcing paradigms. This requires integrating indigenous epistemologies across curricula, advancing multilingual education, reforming assessment and pedagogy toward dialogical practices, and reframing graduate attributes around communal responsibility. By centring Ubuntu's ethic of interdependence and deep decoloniality's structural critique, Namibian higher education can move beyond symbolic reform toward substantive transformation. Ultimately, the article contributes to global debates on decolonisation by offering Ubuntu as both a normative ethos and a practical framework for achieving epistemic justice in African universities.

Keywords: Ubuntu, higher education, deep decoloniality, epistemic justice, Namibia, indigenous epistemologies

Introduction

Higher education in Namibia, like much of postcolonial Africa, continues to bear the deep structural, curricular, and epistemological imprints of colonialism and apartheid.

Universities in Namibia, like many postcolonial institutions across Africa, emerged from colonial and apartheid education systems that were explicitly designed to privilege Eurocentric knowledge systems, hierarchical governance structures, and linguistic exclusivity (Katjavivi, 1990; Amukugo, 1993). In the post-independence period, the continued dominance of these features has been less the result of deliberate intent than a structural inheritance, reinforced by the absence of fully codified and institutionally embedded African ontological and epistemological counter-frameworks capable of displacing colonial academic architectures. As a result, many post-independence reforms focused on expanding access and participation while leaving intact the underlying epistemic, linguistic, and governance architectures inherited from colonial rule, which then became normalised as neutral or universal academic standards. More than three decades after independence, these legacies remain entrenched in institutional cultures, with Western paradigms still dominating curricula and pedagogy at the expense of indigenous epistemologies. The persistence of these patterns has fuelled demands for decolonisation that go beyond symbolic inclusion of African content to call for a fundamental rethinking of the purposes, values, and processes of higher education (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Mbembe, 2016).

The urgency of this endeavour is underscored by the enduring coloniality of power and knowledge. Maldonado-Torres (2007) describes coloniality as the long-lasting structures of domination that persist after the end of formal colonial rule. In Namibia, this is evident in the continued dominance of Western epistemologies framed as universal, the privileging of English as the sole medium of academic engagement, and elitist governance practices that marginalise rural and indigenous students. These structures reproduce epistemic injustice, excluding local knowledges and voices from recognition within the academy (Fricker, 2007; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

Yet much of the global discourse on decolonisation has remained preoccupied with dismantling external legacies, removing Eurocentric canons or diversifying curricula, while paying insufficient attention to what may be called internal colonialities. These are the inequities, exclusions, and hierarchical practices sustained within postcolonial institutions themselves, (Bhambra et al., 2018; Smith, 2021).

The Namibian case offers a clear illustration, where internal colonialities are evident in governance structures that marginalise student and junior faculty voices, appointment procedures that privilege urban

elites, and linguistic standards that disadvantage non-English speakers (Brock-Utne, 2014; Zeeman, 2016). Such manifestations, however, are far from unique to Namibia; they constitute a widespread dimension of the decolonial struggle globally. The endurance of these endogenous power structures, whether observed as administrative rigidities, nepotistic networks, or reinvented social hierarchies, demonstrates how the transformative potential of education is frequently frustrated by localised systems of exclusion. Consequently, a substantive decolonial project must address this dual imperative: it requires the dismantling of enduring external imperial frameworks alongside the active transformation of internalised practices that perpetuate coloniality's exclusionary logic.

This article responds to these intersecting challenges by mobilising the African philosophy of Ubuntu as a normative and operational ethos for higher education transformation in Namibia. Ubuntu, grounded in communalism, dignity, and relational accountability, provides an onto-epistemological framework for reimagining education as a liberatory and inclusive process (Letseka, 2012; Metz, 2011).

The Ubuntu philosophy posits that human identity is fundamentally

formed through relationships with others (Venditto & Amupolo, 2025). This relational ontology contrasts with dominant liberal epistemic traditions that have historically prioritised the autonomous subject and individual ownership of knowledge, particularly within modern institutional and legal frameworks. This contrast, however, should not be overstated or essentialised. Practices of knowledge hoarding, secrecy, and the treatment of expertise as personal property have existed within African societies as well, sometimes leading to the loss of indigenous knowledge when it was not transmitted beyond individual custodians. Ubuntu is therefore not invoked here as a descriptive claim about all African knowledge practices, but as a normative ethical counter-framework, one that challenges both colonial and local traditions of epistemic enclosure by re-centring knowledge within relational responsibility, intergenerational transmission, and communal accountability. In this sense, Ubuntu functions not as a romanticised account of African epistemic practice, but as a critical ethical horizon against which both imported and locally reproduced forms of epistemic power can be interrogated, (Muxe Nkondo, 2007; Matahela, 2025).

When applied to higher education, this relational worldview necessitates a profound shift in perspective. It invites

an institutional culture and pedagogical practice grounded not exclusively in competition and individual achievement, but in principles of solidarity, mutual reciprocity, and restorative justice. This orientation should not be understood as uniquely African or as standing in opposition to all Western pedagogical traditions. Indeed, collaborative learning, cooperative knowledge production, and dialogical pedagogy have long been theorised and promoted within multiple educational traditions, including Nordic pedagogical frameworks that significantly influenced teacher education reforms in Namibia during the post-independence period. The distinctive contribution of Ubuntu, however, lies not in the novelty of collaboration as a pedagogical technique, but in its ethical and ontological grounding. Ubuntu situates collaboration within a moral framework of relational responsibility, communal accountability, and historical repair. In this sense, re-evaluating teaching methods toward collaborative knowledge production is not merely a didactic choice, but part of a broader institutional commitment to fostering learning environments where community well-being is central and where structures exist to address harm and historical inequities within the academic community.

Crucially, Ubuntu is here framed through the lens of *deep decoloniality* (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018), which insists

on moving beyond surface critiques of Eurocentrism to interrogate both external colonial legacies and internal institutional hierarchies. Deep decoloniality recognises that colonial residues persist not only in imported knowledge systems but also in local bureaucratic cultures, neoliberal reforms, and internalised exclusions. In the Namibian context, this perspective illuminates how universities simultaneously remain tethered to colonial logics and reproduce new forms of inequality through technocratic and market-driven reforms.

Taken together, Ubuntu and deep decoloniality offer a dual lens for educational transformation. Ubuntu contributes the ethical grounding of relational accountability and communal flourishing, while deep decoloniality provides the critical apparatus for dismantling epistemic hierarchies and neoliberal instrumentalism. Their intersection enables a vision of higher education that is both deconstructive and reconstructive: it dismantles colonial residues while proposing alternatives rooted in African philosophies of justice.

The significance of this intervention is threefold. First, it extends decolonial scholarship by explicitly connecting Ubuntu and deep decoloniality as mutually reinforcing paradigms for higher education transformation.

While Ubuntu has been widely discussed in ethics, governance, and development (Louw, 2010; Gade, 2012), its application to higher education remains underdeveloped. Second, the article contributes to scholarship on Namibian education, providing a critical analysis of policy and institutional documents that reveals the persistence of colonial residues despite rhetorical commitments to equity. Third, it offers practical pathways for embedding Ubuntu in curriculum design, pedagogy, and institutional governance, thereby linking theory to practice.

Methodologically the research has combined a critical-interpretivist orientation with document analysis and Ubuntu-inflected reflexivity. This design allows the study to interrogate how Namibian education policies and institutional frameworks articulate, omit, or distort the values of Ubuntu and the aspirations of deep decoloniality. By treating documents as contested sites of meaning rather than neutral instruments, the analysis illuminates how higher education can be simultaneously complicit in reproducing colonial residues and open to transformative reorientation. This approach aligns with the decolonial orientation of the study, treating documents not as neutral texts but as sites where power, identity, and epistemology are negotiated.

The analysis is complemented by reflexive positionality, with the authors recognising their dual roles as participants in and critics of Namibian higher education.

The argument proceeds as follows: the second section outlines the theoretical pillars of Ubuntu and deep decoloniality; the third details the methodological approach of document analysis and reflexivity; the fourth situates Namibian higher education in its historical and structural context; the fifth presents findings on curriculum, language, pedagogy, ethics, and graduate visions, highlighting the persistence of colonial residues; the sixth discusses practical pathways for embedding Ubuntu in higher education transformation; and the seventh concludes by reaffirming the potential of Ubuntu, framed through deep decoloniality, to reimagine higher education as a site of liberation, relational accountability, and epistemic justice.

Theoretical Framework

This study rests on two interrelated pillars: Ubuntu as an onto-epistemological framework, and deep decoloniality as a pathway to “education for liberation”. Together, they provide the ethical and analytical foundation for reimagining higher education in Namibia as relational, inclusive, and emancipatory.

Ubuntu locates human identity within relationships. The maxim “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*”, (“a person is a person through other persons”),¹ captures the essence of Ubuntu as both a social ethic and a way of knowing (Ramose, 2002, p. 41). Far from being a moral slogan, Ubuntu functions simultaneously as an ontology (a way of being) and an epistemology (a way of knowing). It shapes how individuals understand self, community, and the purposes of education.

It is important to clarify the philosophical scope of Ubuntu as used in this study. Ubuntu is historically and linguistically rooted in Southern Africa, particularly among Nguni-speaking communities, and should not be uncritically universalised as a pan-African philosophy. Rather than treating Ubuntu as representative of all African thought, this article positions it as a Southern African articulation of a wider African relational-humanist tradition. Comparable philosophies exist across the continent, including *Ujamaa* in East Africa, *Omolúàbí* among the Yoruba, *Maàt* in ancient Egyptian ethical thought, and deliberative traditions such as *palaver* in West and Central Africa, (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2022; Mthimkhulu, 2024).

1 Often translated as “I am because we are”.

These traditions share a common ethical grammar emphasising relational personhood, communal responsibility, dignity, and moral accountability, even though they emerge from distinct historical and cultural contexts (Jecker & Atuire, 2025).

Ubuntu is retained as the primary analytical anchor in this study for three reasons. First, the empirical focus is Namibia, where Ubuntu resonates historically, culturally, and normatively. Second, Ubuntu has been extensively theorised within contemporary African philosophy and applied scholarship, providing a coherent ethical and epistemological framework for institutional analysis. Third, anchoring the discussion in Ubuntu allows the article to advance a context-sensitive decolonial argument without collapsing Africa's philosophical diversity into a single homogenised tradition.

In educational contexts, Ubuntu challenges liberal traditions that frame knowledge as an individual possession and learning as a competitive pursuit, advocating instead for interdependence, mutual care, and restorative justice (Letseka, 2012; Metz, 2011). From this perspective, education is not merely credential acquisition, but the cultivation of persons committed to communal flourishing (Waghid & Smeyers, 2012). Ubuntu also disrupts

the assumption that knowledge is neutral or universally interpretable independent of context, emphasising its embeddedness within social, relational, and ecological contexts. From this perspective, epistemic authority is not grounded solely in formal abstraction but in the capacity of knowledge to remain accountable to the realities, relationships, and practices through which meaning is produced. This does not imply relativism, but rather epistemic humility: the recognition that reasoning gains validity through its attunement to context, not through detachment from it. Knowledge is relational, embedded in lived realities, and accountable to the community (Chilisa, 2012). In the Namibian context, this calls for centring indigenous epistemologies, such as oral traditions and communal problem-solving, as legitimate forms of knowledge production.

Pedagogically, Ubuntu reconfigures teacher-student relationships toward dialogical engagement and shared responsibility, creating a community of inquiry where knowledge is co-constructed (Letseka, 2012; Ramose, 2002). Studies show that it promotes participatory learning and communal accountability, transforming rather than abolishing teacher authority (Waghid & Smeyers, 2012), which is reconfigured as relational rather than hierarchical. Ubuntu also counters

neoliberal commodification of education, which is also evident in Namibia and frames students as clients and knowledge as a product (Cloete et al., 2018). It offers a counter-ethos by insisting that education should be inherently relational and moral, and oriented towards collective flourishing. This vision is particularly urgent in contexts where market-driven reforms risk deepening inequality. Finally, in postcolonial contexts, it advances justice by restoring dignity, relationships, and solidarity, demanding that higher education address epistemic injustice and embrace inclusive knowledge systems.

The second theoretical pillar is deep decoloniality. Building on the work of Quijano (2007), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015), and Mignolo and Walsh (2018), this perspective insists that coloniality endures not as an abstract historical residue, but as a structure of power actively reproduced through social relations, class formations, and struggles over privilege long after the end of formal colonial rule. Coloniality is sustained not only by former colonial elites, but also by postcolonial actors, including liberation movements, political leaders, technocrats, and institutional elites, who may inherit, normalise, and benefit from the very power arrangements they once opposed. Deep decoloniality therefore demands reflexivity: it asks not only

who holds power, but how power reshapes those who hold it, and how difficult it is, in practice, to relinquish the material, symbolic, and security privileges that accompany positions of authority. Within higher education, decoloniality is often framed as diversifying curricula or rejecting Eurocentrism. While necessary, such efforts risk being tokenistic if they leave untouched the deeper hierarchies embedded in local institutions. Deep decoloniality pushes further by interrogating both external colonial legacies and internalised exclusions, what Maldonado-Torres (2007) terms the coloniality of being and the coloniality of knowledge. In Namibia, deep decoloniality entails examining not only the historical legacies of German and South African domination but also contemporary practices, such as exclusive reliance on English as the academic medium, undervaluing of indigenous epistemologies, hierarchical governance that silences junior voices, and neoliberal framing of universities as market actors.

These practices reproduce epistemic injustice by privileging Eurocentric norms while marginalising local knowledges. At the core of it all, deep decoloniality seeks epistemic justice, the coexistence of multiple knowledge traditions without hierarchy (Dei, 2016). This vision resonates with Santos's (2014) ecology of knowledges,

which affirms scientific, indigenous, oral, and experiential knowledges as mutually enriching. Deep decoloniality also aligns with Freire's (1970/2007) call for education for liberation. Education should enable learners to critically “read the world” and act upon it.

For Namibia, this means creating spaces where students are not passive recipients of imported theories but active co-creators drawing on their languages, cultures, and lived realities. Ubuntu strengthens this by rooting liberation in African communal ethics, ensuring that transformation is collective rather than individualised. Practically, deep decoloniality requires systemic change: curricula must shift from Eurocentric dominance to pluriversal frameworks; pedagogies must move from top-down instruction to participatory practices; institutional cultures must democratise decision-making and challenge elitism; and policy frameworks must resist reducing education to economic utility. Thus, deep decoloniality provides the critical apparatus to dismantle oppressive structures while imagining alternatives.

While Ubuntu and deep decoloniality can be developed independently, this study treats them as mutually reinforcing. Ubuntu contributes an ethical orientation rooted in relational accountability, while deep decoloniality offers a structural critique of enduring

hierarchies. Their intersection creates a transformative praxis capable of both dismantling and rebuilding. This dual perspective is crucial for Namibia's higher education. Ubuntu alone risks being dismissed as cultural nostalgia, while decoloniality alone risks reproducing binaries of “Western” versus “African” knowledge. Taken together, they open a middle ground: Ubuntu ensures that transformation is constructive and community-oriented, while deep decoloniality ensures that it is critical and systemic. The resulting framework is both deconstructive and reconstructive. It deconstructs the colonial residues embedded in curricula, pedagogy, language, and institutional cultures. Simultaneously, it reconstructs education around relationality, inclusivity, and communal flourishing.

Applied to Namibia, this means reimagining higher education not simply as human capital production but as a moral and political project of building just, inclusive, and culturally grounded institutions. More broadly, it situates Namibia within continental debates on educational justice, positioning Ubuntu and deep decoloniality as contributions to pluriversal knowledge futures.

Methodology

The methodological orientation of this study is informed by a dual

commitment to a critical decolonial paradigm and the Ubuntu ethos as a normative research ethic. This choice is deliberate: any attempt to interrogate the colonialities embedded in Namibia's higher education system must simultaneously challenge the methodological orthodoxies that reproduce them. The study therefore rejects positivist claims of neutrality and objectivity, embracing instead an interpretive approach that treats knowledge as socially constructed, historically situated, and entangled with power (Schwandt, 1994). In this respect it aligns with decolonial scholarship that critiques the presumed universality of Western epistemologies (Smith, 2021), while Ubuntu functions as an ethical compass emphasising relational accountability, mutual recognition, and communal responsibility.

This orientation has concrete implications for how data were selected and interpreted. Documents were not approached as inert bureaucratic artefacts, but as discursive sites where struggles over knowledge, identity, and justice are negotiated. The analysis sought not only to describe what was written, but to examine how values of inclusivity, dignity, and interdependence were embodied, resisted, or silenced within these texts.

The study employed qualitative document analysis (Bowen, 2009),

focusing on texts that collectively shape Namibia's educational landscape. The selection followed a purposive sampling approach, specifically targeting documents with the greatest normative authority and practical influence on the design of curricula, pedagogy, and institutional culture. These texts were categorised into two critical groups that shape the educational landscape: i) national frameworks, which set the foundational orientation for education, and ii) university documents, which represent the operationalisation of these directives at the institutional level.

At the national level, core frameworks analysed included the 2015 National Curriculum for Basic Education (NCBE) (Republic of Namibia, 2016), which governs the pedagogical and curricular philosophy at school level, and Vision 2030 (Republic of Namibia, 2004), the long-term development blueprint that positions education at the centre of transformation. *Namibia's Sixth National Development Plan* (NDP6) was included for its articulation of strategies linking higher education to economic growth and youth empowerment, alongside supplementary frameworks such as the *Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme* (ETSIP) and the *Harambee Prosperity Plan I* (2016/17–2019/20) and *II* (2021–2025). At the institutional level, the analysis

focused on prospectuses from the University of Namibia (UNAM) and the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST), as they concretely set out curricular orientations and graduate attributes.

Taken together, these texts span foundational national visions and their operationalisation at the institutional level, offering a layered picture of how higher education is envisioned and regulated in Namibia.

Analysis unfolded in three iterative stages inspired by thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, an inductive reading identified recurrent concerns across documents, including curriculum design, language policy, pedagogical models, ethical frameworks, and graduate visions. Second, these concerns were refined into themes by aligning them with Ubuntu's emphasis on humanness, interdependence, and communal flourishing, and with decolonial critiques of Eurocentrism, neoliberalism, and exclusion. Finally, each theme was interpreted through an Ubuntu-inflected lens to assess how relational values were affirmed, contradicted, or silenced. This interpretive synthesis combined fidelity to the texts with a normative critique, highlighting both explicit articulations and systematic absences. Direct quotations were used not

only as empirical evidence but also as discursive artefacts that reveal underlying epistemic assumptions.

Ensuring rigour in a study of this nature required criteria distinct from conventional notions of validity or reliability. Following Lincoln and Guba (1985), three principles were emphasised: credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced by triangulating across institutional, sectoral, and national documents to identify systemic patterns rather than isolated claims. Dependability was supported by systematic documentation of analytic decisions and coding procedures. Confirmability was strengthened through reflexivity, which demanded continuous self-interrogation of how the researchers' positions shaped interpretation.

This reflexivity was particularly important given the authors' embeddedness in Namibian higher education as lecturers, researchers, and administrators. Such positionality offered insider knowledge of institutional dynamics but also carried the risk of bias. The challenge was to treat this embeddedness not as a liability but as a resource, while remaining vigilant against reproducing the very logics under critique. Reflexivity was enacted through iterative discussions, transparency in analytic decisions, and

explicit acknowledgement of the dual role of being both participants in and critics of the system.

Ethical considerations were equally central. Although the study relied on publicly available documents, Ubuntu's ethic of relational accountability shaped the interpretive stance. Documents were treated as products of collective negotiation embedded within Namibia's colonial and postcolonial trajectories. The purpose was not to disparage institutional efforts but to expose silences and propose pathways for transformation. In this sense, engagement with the texts was carried out in a spirit of contribution rather than extraction, consistent with Ubuntu's commitment to respect, dignity, and restorative practice.

Nonetheless, the study recognises its limitations. Document analysis cannot capture the lived experiences of students and faculty, which means the findings represent only one dimension of higher education's colonial residues. The focus on official texts may also overlook informal practices and micro-level negotiations that shape institutional culture. Finally, the authors' positionalities, while acknowledged, may still have influenced interpretations in ways not fully mitigated by reflexivity. Future studies would benefit from triangulating document analysis with interviews, ethnographic observation,

or participatory methods that foreground student and community voices.

Contextualising Namibian Higher Education

Historical and structural legacies

The trajectory of higher education in Namibia cannot be understood apart from the country's colonial and apartheid past. German colonial rule (1884–1915) and South African apartheid administration (1915–1990) both used education as an instrument of domination, embedding structures that privileged Eurocentric knowledge, restricted access for the majority, and reinforced racial hierarchies (Katjavivi, 1990; Amukugo, 1993). During the apartheid era, the education system was deliberately fragmented and underfunded for Black Namibians, producing a labour force confined to subordinate roles. Opportunities for higher learning within Namibia were severely limited for the majority.

Prior to independence, the main institution for tertiary education was the Academy for Tertiary Education, established in 1980 and affiliated with the University of South Africa (UNISA). This Academy, however, also became a significant site for student resistance against the apartheid regime. Following independence in 1990, the

Academy served as the direct precursor to the new national universities. Both UNAM, officially established in 1992, and NUST, which later evolved from the Polytechnic division, grew out of this Academy.

This historical exclusion and resistance meant that Namibia entered independence with a higher education infrastructure that was both a legacy of colonial control and a product of liberation struggles.

The post-independence higher and tertiary education system, anchored initially in the establishment of the University of Namibia, was thus burdened with a dual mandate: to function as an instrument of national reconstruction and social equity (Ministry of Education, 2005), while simultaneously redressing deep-seated epistemic injustices, including the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge and the denigration of African cultural identity. Yet, while structural expansion occurred, the epistemological foundations of higher education remained deeply shaped by colonial legacies. Curricula continued to rely on Euro-American theories, teaching was conducted almost exclusively in English, and institutional cultures replicated bureaucratic and hierarchical models inherited from colonial administrations.

As decolonial scholars argue, the end of colonialism did not automatically dismantle coloniality; the “coloniality of power” and “coloniality of knowledge” persist so long as institutions reproduce Eurocentric epistemologies as the norm (Quijano, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). Namibia’s universities, despite their developmental mandate, have remained tethered to such logics, creating a paradox of independence with expanded access to education but limited epistemic transformation.

Language is a particularly complex and revealing site of postcolonial tension. English, adopted as the official language at independence, replaced Afrikaans as the lingua franca of public life and academia. This decision was politically expedient and symbolically powerful, distancing the nation from apartheid and facilitating international engagement. At the same time, it entrenched English as the dominant medium of higher education. Importantly, the dominance of a single language is not unique to Namibia or to colonial modernity; throughout history, hegemonic languages have emerged through conquest, religion, trade, empire, science, and, in contemporary times, globalisation and the internet. English today functions as a global academic and technological tool rather than solely as a colonial imposition. The question of language justice, therefore,

does not lie in the mere existence of a dominant language, but in how access to that language is distributed and how linguistic difference is institutionally valued. In Namibia, students from urban and elite backgrounds tend to benefit from early and sustained exposure to English, while indigenous-language speakers, particularly those from rural areas, encounter structural disadvantages within English-medium higher education (Brock-Utne, 2022). This produces a paradox: a policy intended to unify the nation and expand opportunity simultaneously reproduces inequality when the linguistic tool of access is unevenly available. This paradox is further deepened by social practice. Even as educators and policymakers rightly affirm that learners acquire foundational understanding most effectively in their mother tongue, many privileged families actively seek English-medium education for their own children, recognising the symbolic and material capital attached to English proficiency. From a deep decolonial perspective, this contradiction illustrates how language functions as both a practical resource and a mechanism of power. Ubuntu reframes language justice not as the rejection of English, but as an ethical demand for equitable access, institutional multilingualism, and the recognition of indigenous languages as legitimate carriers of knowledge rather than preparatory or subordinate mediums.

Institutional culture further illustrates continuity with the old system; universities continue in fact, to operate with top-down decision-making structures and managerial models that prioritise compliance, efficiency, and hierarchy. Participation by students and junior faculty is often limited, reinforcing what Maldonado-Torres (2007) terms the “coloniality of being,” where institutional relations are marked more by alienation and exclusion than recognition and solidarity.

Contemporary challenges

The post-independence expansion of higher education has been significant, with enrolments growing and participation broadening across gender and regional lines. Yet inequalities remain pronounced. Students from rural and low-income backgrounds continue to face financial barriers and linguistic marginalisation, and are inadequately prepared due to weak schooling systems. These barriers—financial constraints, inadequate schooling preparation, and linguistic marginalisation—are widely recognised in education research as factors that negatively influence student persistence and completion, particularly for disadvantaged groups. While national longitudinal data on attrition and graduation disaggregated by background remain limited in Namibia,

existing studies suggest that students from rural, low-income, and non-English background contexts face systemic challenges that can impede progression and timely completion (Zeeman, 2016; Brock-Utne, 2022).

Additionally, curriculum design reveals a tension between global competitiveness and local relevance. Pressures to align with international standards have driven universities to emphasise employability, innovation, and market readiness. While these goals are valuable, they often privilege neoliberal values of efficiency, competition, and individual achievement, sidelining indigenous epistemologies and community engagement (Teferra, 2021). The result is an education system oriented toward preparing graduates for global labour markets rather than equipping them to address the social and developmental challenges of their communities.

National policy frameworks mirror this technocratic orientation. *Vision 2030*, the Harambee Prosperity Plans, and successive National Development Plans consistently frame higher education as an engine of economic growth. Universities are positioned as drivers of productivity and competitiveness, with less attention paid to their roles in cultural revitalisation, ethical formation, or critical citizenship. This reflects what Giroux (2014) describes as the

neo-liberalisation of higher education, in which universities are reimagined as market actors rather than public institutions serving justice and democracy.

This neo-liberal corporatisation, a global phenomenon, profoundly shapes curriculum development, subordinating academic priorities to the imperative of income generation. The logic of the market instigates a relentless scramble for student enrolments, which becomes the primary driver for creating new academic programmes. Consequently, there is systemic pressure to prioritise “market-responsive” degrees, typically in fields like business, technology, and applied sciences, that appeal to fee-paying students and align with narrow economic indicators. This creates a self-reinforcing cycle where curriculum design is dictated by revenue potential rather than intellectual coherence or societal need. As a result, disciplines fundamental to a critical and humane education, particularly the humanities, social sciences, and critical studies, are deemed “unviable” within this market paradigm and systematically marginalised and underfunded. This scramble does not render income generation and critical inquiry inherently incompatible. Rather, it restructures institutional priorities in ways that systematically privilege revenue-generating activities over forms of knowledge production whose value is not immediately quan-

tifiable. Under such conditions, critical inquiry, civic formation, and socially reflexive scholarship are not eliminated, but are increasingly marginalised, under-resourced, or required to justify themselves in market terms. Over time, this recalibration of incentives and institutional attention constrains the university's capacity to sustain autonomous critical inquiry and to cultivate engaged citizens as a central, rather than residual, academic purpose. As Giroux (2014) and Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) argue, the risk lies not in market engagement per se, but in the displacement of academic judgment by market logics as the primary organising principle of institutional life.

Leadership and governance structures reinforce these dynamics. Institutional decision-making remains hierarchical, often concentrating power at the top and limiting participatory inclusion. Such structures undermine the dialogical ethos necessary for decolonised education, replicating elitism and alienation within institutions meant to promote social equity.

Together, these challenges highlight the limitations of reform strategies that focus narrowly on access, efficiency, or human capital production.

While Namibia has made progress in widening participation and improving gender balance, deeper issues remain

unresolved. The persistent epistemic exclusion is evident in curricula that continue to privilege Western canons and methodologies while marginalising indigenous knowledge systems, oral histories, and locally generated epistemologies. Furthermore, there is a prevalent institutional culture that manifests in top-down governance that generally silences student and junior faculty voices, using pedagogical approaches that prioritise passive knowledge reception over critical co-creation, and a pervasive neoliberal ethos that frames students as clients. Critically, these institutions often remain deeply patriarchal, as evidenced by the underrepresentation of women in senior academic and leadership positions, and gendered biases in curriculum content. These unresolved issues ensure that the transformative potential of higher education remains largely unfulfilled, as the very structures of knowledge, power, and belonging continue to alienate those they are meant to serve.

Why Ubuntu matters in this context

These historical and contemporary dynamics illustrate why Ubuntu is often proposed as a compelling framework for higher education transformation in Namibia. By emphasising relationality, mutual recognition, and collective flourishing, Ubuntu offers a

philosophical and ethical counterpoint to technocratic and neoliberal reform logics. However, Ubuntu is not immune to the dynamics of power that have shaped postcolonial institutions. Like other emancipatory frameworks, it can be appropriated, instrumentalised, or reduced to symbolic rhetoric when embedded within hierarchical bureaucratic systems controlled by political, managerial, or academic elites. For this reason, Ubuntu cannot be treated as a moral guarantee or cultural essence. Its transformative potential depends on the conditions of its institutionalisation. When detached from participatory governance, material redistribution, and mechanisms of downward accountability, Ubuntu risks reproducing the very exclusions it seeks to overcome. It is precisely here that deep decoloniality becomes indispensable: by foregrounding reflexivity, power analysis, and the continuous interrogation of privilege, deep decoloniality functions as a safeguard against the elite capture of Ubuntu, insisting that relational ethics be translated into concrete institutional practices rather than managerial discourse.

When combined with deep decoloniality, Ubuntu becomes more than an ethic of care; it becomes a praxis of structural transformation. It challenges the persistence of coloniality in curricula, languages, and governance, while also proposing constructive

alternatives. In this sense, Namibia offers a critical site for exploring how African philosophies can reshape postcolonial universities—not only by dismantling external Eurocentric residues, but also by confronting the internal colonialities sustained by neoliberal and elitist institutional cultures.

Namibia's higher education sector thus stands at a crossroads. On the one hand, it has expanded and diversified since independence, offering new opportunities for learning and nation-building. On the other, it continues to reproduce colonial legacies and neoliberal exclusions, undermining its transformative potential. Understanding these tensions is essential for situating the findings that follow. The analysis of documents presented in Section 5 reveals how these historical legacies and contemporary pressures play out in curricular frameworks, language policies, pedagogical models, ethical orientations, and graduate visions. It also shows how Ubuntu, framed through deep decoloniality, offers a pathway for moving beyond symbolic reform toward substantive transformation.

Findings

The analysis of Namibia's education/policy documents reveals persistent colonial residues. These residues manifest in three domains: the privileging of Eurocentric and technocratic knowledge systems, the entrenchment of

English as the gatekeeping language of academia, and the dominance of neoliberal ethics in shaping graduate visions.

Curriculum and knowledge systems

Curriculum frameworks across schooling and higher education reveal an overriding concern with economic competitiveness and market readiness. The NCBE situates itself explicitly within Vision 2030's developmentalist agenda:

The National Curriculum for Basic Education ... ensures continuity of the foundation principles of the Namibian education system as described in Toward Education for All (1993). The goal, aims, competencies, core skills and key learning areas have been identified in relation to Namibia Vision 2030 and are presented as a curriculum for the future. (Republic of Namibia, 2016)

Here, "relevance" is tied to alignment with global change rather than to indigenous philosophies or Ubuntu's ethic of relationality. The document further explains that:

The knowledge, skills, values and attitudes which learners can acquire are infinite. The developers

have made a careful selection of the timeless and the new, in order to find a delicate balance to ensure that our curriculum remains relevant. (Republic of Namibia, 2016)

Although framed as balance, this selection is silent on African epistemologies, thereby perpetuating the coloniality of knowledge (Mignolo, 2011).

At the university level, NUST underscores its responsiveness to external market conditions:

Due to the rapidly changing external environment that many programmes operate in, and the University's desire to remain constantly relevant in its offerings, some programmes may be significantly amended after publication of this Prospectus. (NUST, 2024)

The programmes listed, such as Bachelor of Economics, Bachelor of Accounting, and Bachelor of Business Management, reinforce a technocratic orientation where employability and managerial competence are central, while there is no mention of African epistemologies.

UNAM, though broader in scope, reproduces a similar framing. The School of Humanities, Society & Development declares that its mission

is to “promote excellence in teaching and research; develop critical, analytical and conceptual capacities within inter-related fields of knowledge; offer consultancies in the areas of applied social sciences; [and] promote community service” (UNAM, 2025).

The mention of community service suggests a social role, yet the dominant emphasis is on excellence, consultancy, and professionalisation. This orientation is reinforced in programme objectives that seek to:

develop ... the skills and competencies necessary for meeting the professional needs of society, particularly those of teachers, health, media, information, language specialists, translators, managers, environmentalists, social workers, religious leaders and professionals in cultural expression and the arts”. (UNAM, 2025)

These formulations do not render technical expertise and relational citizenship inherently incompatible. Rather, they tend to privilege a narrowly technocratic conception of the graduate, emphasising professional functionality and sectoral service while marginalising the relational, ethical, and communal dimensions of higher education. As a result, graduates are primarily imagined as market-ready specialists, with commitments

to communal flourishing and social responsibility treated as being supplementary rather than integral to professional formation. From an Ubuntu perspective, technical competence and relational accountability are mutually reinforcing, but current institutional framings rarely integrate them as co-constitutive dimensions of graduate identity. National development plans confirm this utilitarian orientation. NDP6 defines education’s underlying strategy as “the diversification of the Namibian economy, natural resources beneficiation and youth empowerment” (Republic of Namibia, 2025).

Vision 2030 goes further, proclaiming that:

As required by this Vision, the country will operate a totally integrated, unified, flexible and high-quality education and training system, that prepares Namibian learners to take advantage of a rapidly changing global environment, including developments in science and technology. (Republic of Namibia, 2004)

Such framings cast education as an engine of modernisation, with little recognition of Ubuntu’s relational justice or indigenous knowledge systems. Namibia’s curricular landscape hence remains tied to Eurocentric and neoliberal paradigms, producing

technically skilled individuals for markets rather than relational beings rooted in communal responsibility.

Language policy and pedagogy

Language emerges as a key site of epistemic injustice. The NCBE acknowledges the importance of mother tongues: “The mother tongue is integral to one’s identity and culture, and must be promoted. Children learn best through the medium of the Mother Tongue. English as medium of instruction is phased in at Grade 4” (Republic of Namibia, 2016).

However, this acknowledgement is quickly qualified. The NCBE specifies that: “Grade 4 is a transitional year where the medium of learning changes from the Mother Tongue/predominant local language to English. In Grade 4 the Mother Tongue will only be used in a supportive role” (Republic of Namibia, 2016).

By Grade 6, English is firmly established: “English has a special role in the Namibian situation as the official language and the medium of instruction from Grade 6 upwards” (Republic of Namibia, 2016). This transition entrenches a hierarchy in which indigenous languages are tolerated in the early years but displaced by English as the legitimate medium of knowledge.

University-level documents reinforce this privileging of English. NUST requires that: “English for Academic Purposes ... is compulsory ... Professional Writing ... and Professional Communication ... are compulsory, subject to the requirements of the respective degree programmes” (NUST, 2024).

Additional foreign languages such as “French, German, Portuguese and Spanish” are offered, but Namibian languages are absent from systematic academic use.

UNAM’s School of Humanities, Society & Development prospectus demonstrates some recognition of linguistic diversity through modules in Oshiwambo, Otjiherero, and Namibian Sign Language. For instance, Oshiwambo Applied Language enables students to: “communicate without undue effort in a variety of formal and informal situations ... write formal documents ... and react appropriately in a variety of different social and cultural settings” (UNAM, 2025).

While commendable, such modules remain electives, and the compulsory course, English Communication and Study Skills, confirms the primacy of English and is designed to help students to “cope with studying in a new academic environment and in a language which may not be their first language” (UNAM, 2025).

National frameworks naturalise this hierarchy. Vision 2030 recalls: “After Independence the new Constitution adopted English as the official language of Namibia, without trying to diminish in status other Namibian languages” (Republic of Namibia, 2004).

Yet the structural reality is that indigenous languages have been diminished by exclusion from higher education. From an Ubuntu perspective, this regime undermines dignity and recognition, as language is central to relational identity. From a decolonial standpoint, the elevation of English reproduces colonial hierarchies of knowledge.

Ethics, assessment, and graduate vision

The third domain concerns ethics, pedagogy, and graduate aspirations. Documents consistently frame education in liberal-democratic and neoliberal terms, with little recognition of Ubuntu’s communitarian ethos.

The NCBE articulates values such as:

... to foster the highest moral and ethical values of reliability, co-operation, democracy, tolerance, mutual understanding, and service to others; to develop the learner’s social responsibility towards other individuals, family life, the

community and the nation as a whole ... (Republic of Namibia, 2016)

It also highlights “integrity, responsibility, equality and reverence for life”. While laudable, these values reflect liberal universalism rather than relational accountability. Pedagogy and assessment likewise reinforce individualism.

The NCBE specifies that assessment must reflect “the learner’s actual level of achievement ... and [is] not related to how well other learners are achieving” (Republic of Namibia, 2016). UNAM and NUST replicate this model: “Continuous assessment 60%; Examination 40% (1 x 3-hour examination paper)” (UNAM, 2025); “Students must achieve a minimum of 50% in each component of the assessment to pass a course” (NUST, 2024).

Such formulations quantify learning as individual attainment rather than communal knowledge construction, echoing Freire’s (1970/2007) critique of the “banking model.” Ubuntu, by contrast, conceives learning as dialogical and collective, making current assessment regimes a colonial holdover.

Graduate visions further reveal neoliberal orientations. UNAM highlights attributes such as:

“... [an] entrepreneurial mindset; decision-making skills; creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship; critical thinking skills; problem-solving skills ... managing a business start-up; growing an entrepreneurial venture; marketing skills; managing people; record keeping; networking skills; time management skills; change management skills”. (UNAM, 2025)

Similarly, NUST presents its graduates as workers for “a modern, competitive society” prepared for “labour market demands” (NUST, 2024). National frameworks confirm this utilitarian vision. NDP6 sets a quantitative goal: “By 2030, Namibia has a robust education system, with tertiary education attainment increasing to 50 from 20 percent of employed persons in the economy” (Republic of Namibia, 2025).

Vision 2030 echoes this in economic terms: “There is decent work for all who are willing and able ... the workforce has access to and effectively utilises modern technology in production, marketing and communication” (Republic of Namibia, 2004).

These framings construct the graduate as a competitive, market-ready subject rather than a relational being accountable to community. Across curricula, language policies, assessment practices, ethical frameworks, and graduate

visions, Namibia’s education system reflects enduring colonial residues. Documents privilege Eurocentric and technocratic knowledge, entrench English as the sole medium of legitimacy, and construct graduates in neoliberal terms of employability and entrepreneurship. While rhetorical commitments to inclusivity and equity exist, they are rarely translated into practice. From a decolonial perspective, these findings expose the persistence of epistemic injustice and the colonality of knowledge. From an Ubuntu perspective, they reveal a failure to embed relational accountability, dignity, and communal flourishing at the heart of education. Together, they point to the urgent need for a reorientation that dismantles both external and internal colonialities and reconstitutes education around Ubuntu’s ethic of interdependence.

Discussion

The Namibian findings resonate with global debates on epistemic injustice and higher education decolonisation. Fricker’s (2007) concept of epistemic injustice provides a starting point: her account of testimonial and hermeneutical exclusion illuminates how indigenous knowledges are structurally marginalised when only Eurocentric paradigms are recognised as legitimate. The Namibian curricula analysed here exemplify this injustice, offering at best token

gestures to African perspectives while entrenching Western-derived frameworks as universal. Yet the case also extends Fricker's account. While Fricker foregrounds recognition, Ubuntu reframes epistemic justice in relational terms: to silence indigenous epistemologies is not only to exclude voices but to rupture relational accountability. As Ramose (2002) insists, Ubuntu is an onto-epistemology in which knowledge exists only in relation to others. The Namibian evidence suggests that epistemic injustice in African higher education cannot be fully understood without this relational dimension.

The findings also speak back to Santos's (2014) call for an ecology of knowledges. Santos argues that cognitive justice requires the co-presence of diverse epistemic traditions without reducing them to a hierarchy. Namibian policy frameworks, however, reveal the opposite tendency: they articulate an economy of knowledge structured around global competitiveness, with indigenous epistemologies treated as supplementary. Ubuntu pushes this argument further. Whereas the "ecology of knowledges" is framed largely in epistemological terms, Ubuntu insists that such plurality must also be grounded in an ethic of relational dignity. In other words, pluriversality without Ubuntu risks becoming a technical arrangement rather than an ethical project of human

flourishing. Similarly, the Namibian case complicates Mbembe's (2016) influential call to decolonise the university by dismantling Eurocentrism and creating "a pluriversity".

Mbembe foregrounds the need to provincialise Europe; the present findings show that decolonisation must also confront internal colonialities, including the neoliberalisation of graduate visions, the entrenchment of English, and the bureaucratic reproduction of elitism. These are not only direct legacies of European colonial rule, but practices sustained through postcolonial institutional formations and political economies. Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2020) account of the "cognitive empire" captures this dynamic, and the Namibian case demonstrates its concrete manifestations: prospectuses that valorise entrepreneurship over solidarity, assessment models that individualise learning, and policies that privilege market efficiency over communal flourishing. Chilisa's (2012) work on indigenous research methodologies underscores the importance of epistemologies rooted in African worldviews. The absence of Ubuntu as a curricular framework in Namibia suggests that universities remain reluctant to take African philosophies seriously as foundations for knowledge production, reinforcing Chilisa's concern that decolonial rhetoric often fails to materialise in methodological or curricular practice.

Rather than offering additive curriculum adjustments, the findings point to four conceptual implications for theory and scholarship. First, curriculum decolonisation must move beyond additive models that merely insert African content into unchanged epistemic structures (Jansen, 2017). The Namibian evidence shows that rhetorical gestures toward African perspectives do little to challenge underlying hierarchies; curriculum transformation must therefore be reconceptualised as a structural reorientation toward pluriversality, ethically anchored in relational accountability. Second, language justice must be theorised as central to epistemic justice. The dominance of English is not simply technical; it is a profound site of epistemic exclusion. Deep decoloniality reveals its structural nature, while Ubuntu frames it as an ethical failure of recognition. Third, pedagogy and assessment must be understood as epistemic practices rather than neutral procedures. The persistence of grades-and-exams regimes reproduces competitive logics and isolation, echoing Freire's (1970/2007) critique of the banking model. Ubuntu reframes learning as dialogical and collective, while deep decoloniality situates assessment within relations of power. Fourth, graduate attributes and the telos of education must be rethought. Current employability discourse prioritises skills, innovation, and entrepreneurship

(Tomlinson, 2017); the Namibian prospectuses reflect this but neglect relational and ethical dimensions. Ubuntu reframes graduate formation around communal responsibility, while deep decoloniality critiques the neoliberalisation of higher education.

Although focused on Namibia, the findings carry broader implications. The reproduction of colonialities in postcolonial universities is a continental pattern, evident in South Africa's #RhodesMustFall movement, Kenya's struggles over language policy, and Ghana's curriculum reform debates. Underpinning these manifestations is a persistent economic structure of neo-colonial capitalism that frames educational priorities through market logic, valorising technical-managerial competence for its utility to the economy and disregarding education's intrinsic value for critical thought, ethical formation, and communal well-being. Namibia's case shows how internal colonialities, such as neoliberal graduate visions, are reinforced by external economic pressures that reduce education to a supplier of labour.

By foregrounding Ubuntu, however, Namibia's experience also offers a counter-narrative. It proposes a vision of education grounded not in market competitiveness but in relational flourishing, challenging the neo-colonial capitalist imperative.

This asserts the epistemic centrality of African philosophies in shaping pluriversal futures and disrupts the unidirectional flow of theory from the Global North by insisting that African philosophies can generate frameworks of global relevance. For this reason, the integration of Ubuntu and deep decoloniality constitutes more than an intellectual exercise; it is a transformative praxis. It is deconstructive in dismantling epistemic hierarchies, linguistic exclusions, and neoliberal logics, and reconstructive in building alternatives rooted in relational accountability, communal flourishing, and pluriversality. The remaining question, therefore, is how this praxis is operationalised at the level of institutional governance, ethics, and assessment.

Ubuntu as governance praxis

To move beyond critique, Ubuntu must be operationalised as an institutional governance praxis that reforms how decisions are made, who participates, and how accountability is structured. In hierarchical university systems, participation is often formal rather than substantive, with decision-making power concentrated in senior managerial tiers. An Ubuntu-inflected governance model begins from the premise that legitimacy is relational: leadership authority is ethically grounded in responsiveness to those

affected by decisions, especially students, early-career academics, professional staff, and historically marginalised communities. This shifts governance from compliance-based managerialism to relational accountability as an institutional norm.

Operationally, this reorientation can be instituted through three mechanisms. First, universities can establish deliberative structures that ensure meaningful representation and voice. This includes strengthening senate and faculty boards with protected seats for student representatives and junior academic staff, and creating deliberative forums where communities participate in defining institutional priorities, curriculum directions, and ethical codes. Such forums should not be advisory exercises but governance spaces with clear mandates, feedback loops, and binding procedural influence. Second, appointment and promotion procedures can be reformed to reduce elitist gatekeeping and network-based advantage. Ubuntu governance requires transparent criteria, publicly communicated selection processes, diverse appointment panels, and community-informed evaluation of leadership candidates, particularly for senior managerial positions. Third, accountability must be made downward as well as upward. Instead of relying exclusively on managerial

key performance indicators, Ubuntu governance supports accountability practices that include relational metrics such as responsiveness to student well-being; inclusivity in institutional culture and language access; and community engagement. These can be institutionalised through annual public accountability dialogues at faculty level, where leadership reports not only on outputs but also on relational responsibilities and redress.

These mechanisms are not administrative add-ons, but decolonial interventions into the coloniality of institutional power. They confront internal colonialities by democratising voice, reducing the reproduction of elitist hierarchies, and shifting the moral centre of institutional legitimacy toward dignity, inclusion, and communal flourishing.

Why liberal-universalist ethics are insufficient without Ubuntu

Policy and curriculum documents frequently articulate liberal-universalist values such as tolerance, democracy, equality, and integrity. While these values are ethically important, they can be structurally insufficient when framed primarily through individual rights and procedural fairness without relational accountability. The insufficiency arises because liberal ethics often presuppose

a subject whose moral obligations are grounded in autonomy, contract, and individual entitlement. In a neoliberalised higher education system, this ethical architecture can align with market rationalities: education becomes an individual investment, achievement becomes private capital, and “success” is measured through competitive distinction. In such settings, liberal values may remain rhetorical, while institutional practices reproduce exclusion through language hierarchies, technocratic governance, and merit regimes that ignore historical inequalities.

Ubuntu reframes ethics from the standpoint of relational obligation. Rather than asking only whether individuals have equal rights, Ubuntu asks whether institutional arrangements actively cultivate dignity, recognition, and belonging, and whether they repair historically produced harms. This is not a rejection of liberal values but a re-grounding of them: equality becomes relational recognition, democracy becomes participatory co-creation, and integrity becomes accountability to the communal consequences of institutional decisions. Deep decoloniality strengthens this move by revealing how apparently neutral ethical frameworks can become instruments of internal coloniality when they legitimise exclusionary standards in the name of universality. Ubuntu’s ethical contribution is therefore to

ensure that institutional ethics do not merely declare values but structurally organise relationships, responsibilities, and restorative commitments within the university.

Ubuntu-aligned pedagogy and assessment reform

A central finding of this study is that prevailing assessment regimes individualise learning and reproduce competitive achievement logics. Ubuntu-aligned reform requires more than rhetorical calls for student-centred learning; it requires pedagogy and assessment that institutionalise communal knowledge production and relational accountability. Such reform can be developed through three complementary innovations.

First, universities can integrate structured collaborative assessment that evaluates both knowledge outcomes and relational practices. Team-based inquiry projects can include explicit criteria for collective responsibility, dialogical participation, and the ethical handling of disagreement. To prevent free-riding and protect fairness, collaborative assessment can be paired with contribution logs, peer assessment protocols, and reflective accountability statements requiring students to narrate how knowledge was co-produced and how responsibilities were shared. Second, institutions can

adopt portfolio-based assessment that values learning as a developmental process rather than a single exam event. Portfolios can incorporate reflective writing, community-engaged outputs, iterative drafts, and evidence of responsiveness to feedback, aligning assessment with Ubuntu's ethic of growth-through-relation. Third, oral and dialogical assessment practices can be strengthened to recognise indigenous communicative traditions and reduce English-only epistemic gatekeeping. Dialogical examinations, viva-style conversations, and community panel assessments can legitimate oral reasoning, storytelling, and contextual knowledge as rigorous academic practice.

Pedagogically, these reforms imply a shift from transmissive instruction to dialogical co-creation. Ubuntu pedagogy treats the classroom as a relational community of inquiry where teaching authority is exercised through guidance and ethical responsibility rather than hierarchical domination. Deep decoloniality ensures that these reforms are pursued as structural alternatives that actively dismantle epistemic hierarchies. In combination, Ubuntu-aligned pedagogy and assessment can transform learning from an individualised credential process into a communal project of knowledge-making oriented toward shared flourishing.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that Namibia's education system, despite decades of independence and policy commitments to transformation, continues to reproduce colonial and neoliberal logics. Curricula privilege Eurocentric knowledge systems; English remains entrenched as the medium of legitimacy; assessment models individualise learning; ethical frameworks are cast in liberal-democratic and technocratic terms; and graduate visions are oriented toward employability and entrepreneurship. Together, these patterns confirm that coloniality operates not only through external legacies but also through internal reproductions of exclusion, elitism, and neoliberal rationalities.

Engaging these findings with existing scholarship sharpens their significance. Fricker's (2007) notion of epistemic injustice explains how indigenous knowledges are structurally excluded from recognition, yet the Namibian case shows that injustice is also relational, rupturing the dignity and accountability that Ubuntu demands. Santos's (2014) ecology of knowledges calls for plurality, but without Ubuntu's ethical grounding such plurality risks being technical rather than transformative. Mbembe's (2016) call to provincialise Europe captures the necessity of dismantling Eurocentrism, while the Namibian evidence shows

that internal colonialities, neoliberal graduate visions, linguistic hierarchies, and technocratic logics are equally in need of dismantling. Chilisa's (2012) emphasis on indigenous epistemologies underscores the urgency of embedding African philosophies such as Ubuntu at the centre of curricula, not at their margins.

This study integrates Ubuntu and decoloniality into a composite framework, moving beyond their separate treatment in higher education literature. Ubuntu provides a normative orientation centred on relational accountability and dignity, while deep decoloniality supplies critical tools to examine external and internal colonial legacies. Their combined praxis is both deconstructive and reconstructive. Deconstructively, it exposes how Namibia's curricula, language policies, and graduate ideals perpetuate colonial logic under the guise of modernity and global competition. Reconstructively, Ubuntu offers an ethical foundation for education rooted in humanness (*botho*), dignity restoration, and interdependence. This integration advances three theoretical contributions: reframing epistemic justice as both structural and relational; deepening pluriversality by grounding it in relational ethics; and reorienting higher education's purpose from producing employable individuals to cultivating relational citizens committed to communal flourishing.

From these contributions flow conceptual implications for scholarship. Curriculum reform must be theorised not as additive but as structural transformation toward pluriversality. Language must be recognised as central to epistemic justice, with linguistic hierarchies treated as forms of coloniality. Pedagogy and assessment should be analysed as epistemic and ethical practices that can reproduce or disrupt alienating logics. Graduate attributes must be re-theorised to emphasise relational accountability and communal responsibility alongside technical competence. These are conceptual directions for research and theorisation, grounded in the Namibian evidence yet carrying broader significance.

The proposed transformation can be summarised in three institutional shifts. First, governance must move from hierarchical managerialism to participatory decision-making, transparent appointments, and downward accountability. Second, ethical reconstruction is needed to re-ground liberal-universalist values in Ubuntu's relational accountability, structuring institutional ethics around dignity, recognition, and restorative responsibility. Third, pedagogy and assessment should institutionalise communal knowledge production through collaborative inquiry, portfolio-based learning, and dialogical

assessment that values diverse epistemic traditions. The conclusion, then, is both sobering and hopeful. Sobering, because the colonialities entrenched in Namibia's education system remain powerful. Hopeful, because the tools for transformation, Ubuntu and deep decoloniality, are already available, waiting to be mobilised. The work ahead lies in making these resources not only philosophical commitments, but practical and scholarly realities.

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