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The relationship between the philosophy of ubuntu and the principles of inclusive education

Abstract

This PRISMA scoping review identifies the emerging evidence on the relationship between the philosophy of ubuntu and the principles of inclusive education. The searches in this scoping review were conducted in AERD, Scopus, BASE EBSCO Host and Google Scholar to find the relationship between the philosophy of ubuntu as an African traditional knowledge system and the principles of inclusive education. Seven of the studies were included from a total of 134 articles published in Africa from January 2021 to December 2022 in English. Articles were excluded from review if they were published outside Africa, not in English, and from the period before January 2021. Data were thematically analysed following the thematic approach by Braun and Clarke (2021). Results organised by themes indicate that there is a very strong relationship between the philosophy of ubuntu and the principles of inclusive education. The thematic data analysis in this study indicated that both the philosophy of ubuntu and the principles of inclusive education are based on 1) equality, 2) unconditional acceptance, 3) enabling learning environment, and 4) respect for human diversity. The implication of this study is the recognition and adoption of the philosophy of ubuntu at inclusive education systems in Africa.

Keywords: *enabling learning environment, equality, human diversity, inclusive education, unconditional acceptance, ubuntu philosophy*

1. Introduction

Throughout the ages, human societies have developed indigenous philosophy-based systems for responding to their education-related needs and improving participation of all learners in its education system. Every region of the world has a form of indigenous philosophies – either formal or non-formal – that are used to facilitate learning of people in their communities (Mpofu, 2023). Traditional systems such as the African philosophy of *ubuntu* are locally developed, recognised and used by most of the inhabitants of Southern African communities and they are believed to incorporate it into their educational concepts and needs (Mpofu, 2023). There is an increased recognition of African indigenous knowledge systems towards education of learners of African

ancestry (Heto & Mino, 2023). In fact, the majority of the world's population use indigenous systems in their education. Africa needs to utilise its indigenous knowledge systems such as the philosophy of *ubuntu,* which are grounded in local culture, to respond to the educational needs of its communities (Heto & Mino, 2023). The philosophy of *ubuntu* is regarded as an African epitome of inclusion and has become a topical concept for addressing inequitable practices in today's educational institutions in Africa (Mpofu, 2023).

2.   Ubuntu philosophy

Ubuntu is a philosophical concept rooted in Southern African traditions that emphasises the interconnectedness and interdependence of all individuals within a community (Mupedziswa, Rankopo & Mwanza, 2019). The term itself comes from the Nguni phrase, "*Ubuntu ngumuntu ngabantu",* roughly translated as "I am because we are" (Zvomuya, 2020). In chiShona it is "*munhu munhu kuburikidza nevamwe vanhu",* meaning a person is a person through others (Zvomuya, 2020)*.* This ideology highlights the belief that humanity is defined by relationships with others and that people cannot exist in isolation. In the context of *ubuntu*, humanity towards others is central to the moral code that governs human interactions. It promotes compassion, empathy and a sense of responsibility towards one another. *Ubuntu* encourages individuals to treat one another with respect, dignity and kindness, recognising the inherent worth and value of every person. This philosophy rejects individualism and selfishness in favour of collective well-being and social harmony. The concept of *ubuntu* challenges individuals to see themselves reflected in others and to recognise their shared humanity (Ébalé, Benson & Mulemi. 2023). It emphasises the importance of community, cooperation and collaboration in fostering a sense of belonging and social cohesion (Ébalé *et al.*, 2023). When people embrace *ubuntu*, they acknowledge that their actions have ripple effects that not only has an impact on themselves, but also on those around them. By practising humanity towards others, people can create a more inclusive, compassionate and equitable society.

Research has shown that promoting *ubuntu* values can have a positive impact on various aspects of society, including education, healthcare and social justice. For example, Johnson and Johnson (2019) highlight the importance of collaboration in creating a supportive and inclusive environment in schools. They argue that when educators and students work together with a spirit of *ubuntu*, they can foster a sense of belonging and empowerment that leads to academic success and personal growth. Similarly, Van Mieghem *et al.*, (2020) emphasise the role of effective collaboration in promoting diversity and inclusion in schools. Brown and Lee (2021) suggest that by embracing *ubuntu* principles, educators can create a welcoming and respectful environment that celebrates the unique perspectives and experiences of all students. This, in turn, can lead to improved academic outcomes, an increased sense of belonging, and greater social cohesion within the school community.

3.   Inclusive education

Inclusive education is an approach to teaching and learning that aims to ensure that all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, cultural backgrounds, or socioeconomic status, have equal access to quality education (Ainscow, Slee & Best, 2019). Inclusive education goes beyond simply integrating students with special needs into regular classrooms; it encompasses a comprehensive and holistic approach to education that addresses the individual learning needs of all students (Van Mieghem *et al.*, 2020). Inclusive education recognises that each student has unique strengths, challenges and learning styles, and seeks

to provide the necessary support and accommodation to enable every student to succeed. Inclusive education emphasises the importance of modifying teaching methods, curriculum materials and learning environments to accommodate diverse learner profiles, ensuring that no student is excluded or left behind. (Hernández-Torrano, Somerton & Helmer, 2020). Inclusive education promotes the active involvement of families, communities and other relevant stakeholders in the educational process, with the understanding that collaboration and partnership are essential for creating an inclusive and empowering educational environment (Hernández-Torrano *et al.*, 2020). Inclusive education is guided by principles of social justice, human rights and respect for all individuals, aiming to create educational spaces that celebrate and embrace diversity (Hilt, 2017), nurture positive relationships, and prepare students for a globally interconnected and inclusive society (Van Mieghem *et al.*, 2020). By fostering inclusive practices in education, societies can strive towards ensuring that all individuals have equal opportunities to reach their full potential and contribute meaningfully to their communities (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018).

Most governments in Africa adopted inclusive education after the recognition of its potential to enhance social cohesion and equity within the education system (Mpofu & Molosiwa, 2017). By promoting inclusive practices, African governments aimed to dismantle barriers that have historically excluded students with disabilities from mainstream education. Research (e.g. Brandt, Kidron & Raviv, 2018; Van Mieghem *et al.*, 2020; Vanderstraeten, 2020) indicates that inclusive education creates an environment that fosters positive attitudes, improves social interactions and promotes diversity acceptance among students. Through inclusive education, most African governments seeks to build a society that values diversity and provides equal opportunities for all learners (Mpofu & Molosiwa, 2017). Another significant consideration for the adoption of inclusive education in Africa is the recognition of its potential to improve learning outcomes for students with disabilities (Mpofu & Molosiwa, 2021). Research (e.g. Westwood, 2018; Vanderstraeten, 2020; Szumski, Smogorzewska & Karwowsk, 2017) has consistently shown that inclusive education has a positive impact on academic achievement, social skills development, and the overall well-being of learners with disabilities. By integrating students with disabilities into regular classrooms, African governments aims to provide them with better access to quality education resources and specialised support, thereby facilitating optimal learning experiences.

The commitment to inclusive education by most African governments is also aligned with international commitments and obligations. Most governments in Africa are signatory to international conventions such as the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-CRPD), which emphasises the right to education for individuals with disabilities without discrimination (Mpofu & Molosiwa, 2017). Inclusive education is seen as a means to fulfil these obligations and promote the rights of learners with disabilities, ensuring their full and effective participation in society (Brandt *et al.*, 2018). To support the implementation of inclusive education policies, most African government have taken steps to build the capacity of teachers and educators to adapt their teaching strategies to cater to the diverse needs of learners (Mpofu & Serefete, 2021). Teacher training programmes in Africa now place a stronger emphasis on inclusive teaching practices. This investment in teacher professional development underscores Africa's commitment to making inclusive education a reality in the continent.

4. Theoretical framework

4.1 Afrocentricity theory

This paper assesses the relationship between the philosophy of *ubuntu* and the principles and beliefs of inclusive education using the Afrocentricity theory. Afrocentric theory is a critical framework that centres African perspectives, experiences and knowledge in the analysis of historical and contemporary issues. One of the major tenets of Afrocentric theory is the reclamation of African identity. Afrocentric theory emphasises the importance of reclaiming African identity and challenging Eurocentric narratives that have historically marginalised African voices. Afrocentric theory highlights the need for African people to define themselves on their own terms and celebrate their cultural heritage (Asante, 2016). Afrocentric theory also recognises the diversity of African cultures while also emphasising the underlying unity and interconnectedness of African peoples. As argued by Ébalé and Mulemi (2023), embracing African cultural unity empowers communities and fosters solidarity across diverse identities.

Scholars such as Zvomuya (2020) advocate liberation from the colonial mentality that continues to influence African societies. Afrocentric theory calls for a decolonisation of the mind and the rejection of Western ideals that perpetuate systems of oppression (Ramasela, 2022). Contemporary Afrocentric scholarship highlights the agency and resistance of African peoples in the face of colonialism, imperialism and other forms of oppression. Authors like Heto and Mino (2023) emphasise the importance of centring narratives of African resistance and resilience in shaping historical and political discourse.

The other tenet of Afrocentric theory is Afrofuturism and Innovation. This tenet explores speculative futures that centre African cultures, technologies and worldviews. Afrocentric theory acknowledges the potential for innovation and creativity within African societies and envisions a future that embraces African traditions and cosmologies (Gebremikael *et al*., 2022)

Afrocentric theory and the philosophy of *ubuntu* share common principles that can be used to promote inclusive education. Afrocentric theory emphasises the centrality of African perspectives and experiences, while *ubuntu* highlights the interconnectedness and interdependence of individuals within a community (Ébalé, & Mulemi. 2023). Afrocentric theory and *ubuntu* both underscore the importance of communal identity and collective well-being. In the context of inclusive education, this can manifest in collaborative learning environments that prioritise the needs of all students and foster a sense of belonging and mutual support (Adetayo , 2021). The philosophy of *ubuntu* emphasises the interconnectedness of all individuals and the value of respecting diversity within a community. This aligns with Afrocentric principles that celebrate the diversity of African cultures and perspectives. In the inclusive education setting, this can translate into creating a curriculum that reflects diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences, promoting tolerance, understanding and empathy among students (Heto & Mino, 2023).

Both Afrocentric theory and *ubuntu* promote a humanistic approach to education that values the holistic development of individuals. Inclusive education initiatives can draw from these frameworks to prioritise the social, emotional and cognitive needs of all learners, regardless of their background or abilities (Zvomuya, 2020). This can involve implementing culturally relevant pedagogies, promoting student voice and agency, and fostering a sense of community and belonging in the classroom. Afrocentric theory and *ubuntu* are rooted in principles of equity, social justice and liberation. Within the context of inclusive education, this

can involve advocating educational policies and practices that address systemic inequalities, promote access and participation for marginalised groups, and empower learners to reach their full potential. By centring Afrocentric and *ubuntu* principles in inclusive education efforts, educators can create more inclusive, equitable and empowering learning environments for all students (Heto & Mino, 2023).

4.2 The current study.

We performed a scoping review to identify the relationship between the philosophy of *ubuntu* as an African traditional knowledge system and the principles of inclusive The guiding research questions were:

1. What is the emerging evidence the issue of equality in the philosophy of *ubuntu* and the principles of inclusive education?

2. To what extent does the philosophy of *ubuntu* and the principles of inclusive education address the issue of teaching and learning?

3. What are the emerging evidence on the issue of human diversity in the philosophy of *ubuntu* and the principles of inclusive education?

5. Methods

5.1 Research design

This study implemented a scoping review (Howie, Troutman-Jordan & Newman, 2014) to aggregate the evidence on the relationship between the philosophy of *ubuntu* as an African traditional knowledge system and the principles of inclusive education. A scoping review provides exploratory evidence on an emerging body of evidence in an under-researched topic of study. This scoping review used the following five steps: 1) identifying the research questions; 2) finding related studies; 3) selecting appropriate studies; 4) charting the data; and 5) summarising and reporting the findings.

5.2 Search strategy

Study searches implemented in African Education Research Database (AERD) yielded 5 articles, Scopus resulted in 17 articles; Bielefeld Academic Search Engine (BASE) resulted in 18 articles; EBSCO Host resulted in 32 articles; and Google Scholar yielded 62 articles. The search terms used were "*Ubuntu* philosophy and inclusive education", "*Ubuntu* in educational settings", "comparative studies on *ubuntu* and education", "implications of *ubuntu* for inclusive education", and "*Ubuntu* philosophy in contemporary education" (see Table 1 for search terms).

5.3 Inclusion criteria

Based on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) framework (Freeman *et al.*, 2015), we included four review studies that focus on *ubuntu* and inclusive education in relation to 1) equality, 2) unconditional acceptance, 3) enabling learning environment, and 4) respect of human diversity. Also, we included for review empirical studies on the relationship between the philosophy of *ubuntu* as an African traditional knowledge system and the principles of inclusive education that were published in the English language in Africa from 2021–2022. The CRPD forms the heart of the international framework protecting children from education discrimination

5.4 Exclusion criteria

We excluded from the study articles on studies on relationships between the philosophy of *ubuntu* as an African traditional knowledge system and the principles of inclusive education that were not published in Africa from 2021–2022 and not published in the English language. Table 1 presents our inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Table 1:   Inclusion and exclusion criteria

| Concept	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Ubuntu philosophy AND Inclusive education	Describe the relationship between the Philosophy of Ubuntu and Inclusive education published in Africa between 2021-2022 and in English language	Describe relationship between the philosophy of Ubuntu and Inclusive education published not in Africa before 2021

5.5 Finding related studies

Our initial search was conducted in the AERD database for initial leads progressing our search and identifying productive search terms. We then extended the search strategy with other chosen databases that included Scopus, BASE, EBSCO and Google Scholar for the comprehensiveness of the search. Table 1 represents the final search strategy that was used in the searching procedure.

Table 2:   Final Search Strategy

Key concept	Search terms
Ubuntu Philosophy and Inclusive Education	"Ubuntu philosophy and inclusive education",
	"Ubuntu in educational Inclusive Education settings",
	"Comparative studies on Ubuntu and education",
	"Implications of Ubuntu for inclusive education",
	"Ubuntu philosphy in contemporary education"

5.6 Charting the data

After carefully sorting the articles based on inclusion criteria, we identified 134 studies for further screening. Among the 134 studies there were 11 duplicates, which we removed. In the next step of title screening, we deleted 38 articles, leaving 86 articles with appropriate titles. In the next screening phase, we did an abstract screening, excluding 42 articles. Applying inclusion criteria of studies published from 2021–2022 and that were published in the English language resulted in seven articles for the review (Yang & Stark, 2010; Knecht-Sabres *et al.*, 2020). Figure 1 is the PRISMA flow chart.
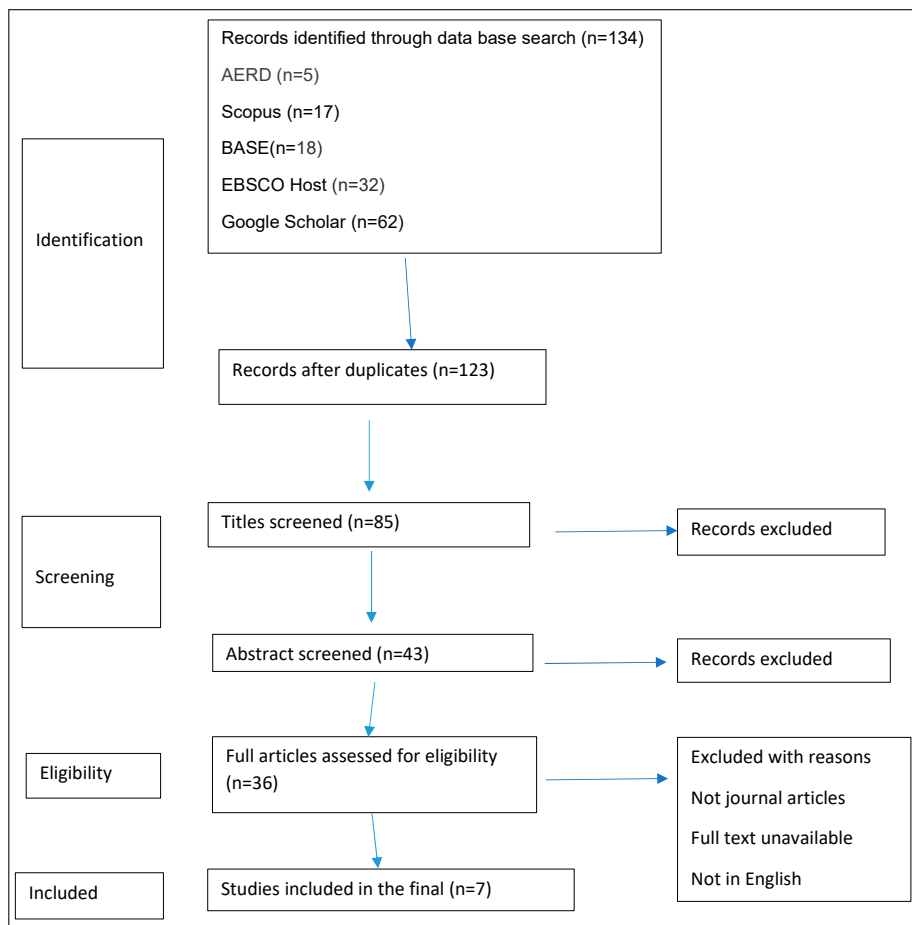
Figure 1: PRISMA flow chart

5.7 Data synthesis

We analysed the research evidence in two complementary ways: 1) A descriptive numerical summary highlighting the main characteristics of the studies (Braun & Clarke 2021); and 2) A qualitative thematic synthesis (Peters *et al*., 2020). The descriptive numerical summary informs the basic outcome of the selected studies, whereas the qualitative thematic synthesis unveils the themes associated with our included studies (Creswell, 2014). A descriptive numerical summary consists of the characteristics of included studies, the total number of studies included, types of study designs, years of publication and location where studies were conducted (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Thematic analysis as an independent, qualitative, descriptive approach is mainly described as a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Peters *et al*., 2020).

For the synthesis of findings, we plotted them against major principles of inclusive communities as obtained from the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The CRPD principles are 1) equality, 2) unconditional acceptance, 3) enabling learning environment, and 4) respect for human diversity.

6.　Results

Table 3:　Summary of the characteristics of the studies included in the final analysis of the relationship between the philosophy of ubuntu as an African traditional knowledge system and the principles of inclusive education

No	Source	Year	Location	Study Aim/S	Methods	Condition under Investigation	Main Findings
1.	Ngubane & Makua	2021b	South Africa	The study examined the extent to which the principles of *ubuntu* philosophy can cultivate and restore African indigenous values and cultures in diverse educational settings.	Qualitative research	Examined the viability of *ubuntu* pedagogy, which draws from the indigenous *ubuntu* philosophy, for the promotion of co-existence, social cohesion and inclusivity in education.	As a transformative approach, *ubuntu* pedagogy and inclusive education: Promotes human dignity. Has a potential for reconnecting students with their indigenous values, heritage and cultures. Cultivate social values of solidarity, co-existence, respect and cooperation among students. Social justice.
2	Odari	2020	Kenya	The study investigated how the institutionalisation of *ubuntu* and inclusive education philosophies can foster global citizens and realize a more humane Kenya.	Scoping review	Examined the importance of educators as agents of change, aiding students to become global citizens who work towards building a more humanistic society.	Inclusive education and the philosophy of *ubuntu* share the following perspectives: Humanistic approach. Interconnectedness of all lives. Building of harmonious relationships. Equality.

No	Source	Year	Location	Study Aim/S	Methods	Condition under Investigation	Main Findings
3	Ngubane & Makua	2021a	South Africa	The study investigated the surface possibilities of *ubuntu* pedagogy within a social justice framework.	Scoping review	Intersected Collective Fingers Theory and Social Justice Theory to propose the notion of *ubuntu* pedagogy and inclusive education, which draws from the African philosophy of *ubuntu*.	The study found that the intersection of *ubuntu* pedagogy and inclusive education promotes the following attributes: Social justice. Responsive education. Cultural competencies. Students are treated equally and with dignity and respect, regardless of their social backgrounds.
4	Chimbi & Jita	2022	Lesotho, South Africa, and Zimbabwe	The study investigated the implementation of the indigenous philosophy of *ubuntu* and inclusive education in post-colonial Southern Africa.	Scoping review	Critical discourse analysis of literature on the implementation of *ubuntu* and inclusive education as a reform policy in the school curriculum in Lesotho, Zimbabwe and South Africa.	The study revealed that the *ubuntu* philosophy and inclusion promotes Unconditional acceptance. Use of African epistemologies. Culture of mutual relations among students. Afrocentric learning environment. Enabling environment.

No	Source	Year	Location	Study Aim/S	Methods	Condition under Investigation	Main Findings
5	Vandeyor & Mohale	2022	South Africa	The study investigated how learners at Hope Saturday School evoked the principles of *ubuntu*/humanity and inclusive education as they collaborated during project-based learning	Qualitative study	Examined underperforming learners in an *ubuntu*/ inclusive learning activities at Hope Saturday school.	The study found that the use of principles of ubuntu/humanity and inclusive education as they collaborated during project-based learning promotes values like: Interdependence. Sharing, caring, teamwork. Solidarity, unity and helping one another. Collaborative learning.
6	Akabor & Pasha	2022	South Africa	The study investigates the correlation between the concept of *ubuntu* and collaborative values of an inclusive education in South Africa.	Scoping review	Examined the relationship between the concept of *ubuntu* and collaborative values of an inclusive education.	The study found that there is a correlation between the concept of *ubuntu* and collaborative values of an inclusive education in South Africa. The two promotes: Collaboration. Sense of togetherness.
7	Lephoto	2022	Lesotho	The paper considers the development of *ubuntu*-oriented Guidance and Counselling (GC) in Lesotho schools as another alternative for facilitating inclusive and equitable quality education.	Scoping review	Examined *ubuntu*-oriented guidance and counselling as a measure to promote inclusive education.	The study found that *ubuntu*-oriented guidance and counselling emphasises: 24 Solidarity. Interdependence. Humanity by recognising the humanity of others. Acknowledging diversity.

Table 4:   Summary of the findings of each theme based on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and coding system. The codes were obtained from Figures 1 to 26 from Table 3's results section.

Themes	Codes	Researchers
Theme 1 Equality	4, 3, 8,13,19, 13, 23, 24	Lephoto, 2022; Akabor & Pasha, 2022; Vandeyor & Mohale, 2022; Chimbi & Jita 2022; Ngubane & Makua, 2021b; Odari, 2020; Ngubane & Makua, 2021a
Theme 2 Unconditional acceptance	7, 6, 5, 18, 26, 24	Vandeyor & Mohale, 2022; Odari,2020
Theme 3 Enabling learning environment	10, 17, 14, 21, 19, 22, 25	Lephoto, 2022; Akabor & Pasha, 2022; Vandeyor & Mohale, 2022; Chimbi & Jita, 2022; Ngubane & Makua, 2021b
Theme 4 Respect of human diversity	1, 2, 5, 11, 26, 28, 27	Ngubane & Makua, 2021b; Odari, 2021; Ngubane & Makua, 2021a; Lephoto, 2022

The findings above show that five of the seven studies reviewed(Lephoto, 2022; Akabor & Pasha, 2022; Vandeyor & Mohale, 2022; Chimbi & Jita, 2022; Ngubane & Makua, 2021b; Odari,2020; Ngubane & Makua, 2021a) indicate that both the philosophy of *ubuntu* and the principles of inclusive education uphold the tenet of equality. Two of the reviewed studies (Vandeyor & Mohale, 2022; Odari, 2020) revealed that the two philosophies uphold the principle of unconditional acceptance and promote access and participation of all community members/community activities. Five of the seven reviewed studies revealed that both the philosophy of *ubuntu* and the principles of inclusive education support development of enabling learning environment (Lephoto, 2022; Akabor & Pasha, 2022; Vandeyor & Mohale, 2022; Chimbi & Jita, 2022; Ngubane & Makua, 2021a). Four of the seven reviewed studies also revealed that respect for human diversity was the cornerstone of the philosophy of *ubuntu* and inclusive education (Ngubane & Makua, 2021b; Odari, 2021; Ngubane & Makua, 2021a; Lephoto, 2022).

7.   Main findings and discussion

This study provides a discussion of the main findings of results following themes obtained from the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Theme 1: Equality

Results from the study indicated that both the philosophies of *ubuntu* and inclusive education view education as a basic human right. The philosophies view education as one of the best ways to remove the oppressive, discriminatory and disabling conditions in African. The reviews revealed that both the philosophies of *ubuntu* and inclusive education can directly be understood as taking into consideration the values and principles of social justice.

Research findings (e.g. Lephoto, 2022; Akabor & Pasha, 2022) have consistently shown that integrating the philosophy of *ubuntu* into educational practices can have a significant impact on promoting equality. One key aspect of *ubuntu* is the emphasis on recognising and respecting the inherent worth and dignity of every individual (Vandeyor & Mohale, 2022). Within the context of inclusive education, this translates to creating learning environments that

are inclusive, respectful and affirming of all students, regardless of their background, abilities or differences. By fostering a culture of respect and acceptance, *ubuntu* promotes a sense of belonging and value among all learners, contributing to a more equitable and just educational experience (Chimbi & Jita, 2022). Furthermore, the philosophy of *ubuntu* emphasises the idea of "I am because we are", highlighting the interconnectedness and interdependence of individuals within a community. This principle underscores the importance of collaboration, cooperation and collective responsibility in educational settings. Within the context of equality, this perspective challenges traditional notions of competition and individualism and instead promotes a more cooperative and supportive approach to learning (Ngubane & Makua, 2021a; Odari, 2020). By fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility, *ubuntu* encourages students to work together, support one another, and value one another's unique contributions, thus promoting a more egalitarian and inclusive educational experience (Ngubane & Makua, 2021a). Inclusive education, as informed by the philosophy of *ubuntu*, also places a strong emphasis on diversity and multiculturalism (Vandeyor & Mohale, 2022; Chimbi & Jita, 2022). *ububtu* celebrates the richness of human diversity and recognises the importance of cultural competence and sensitivity in educational settings. Research (e.g. Vandeyor & Mohale, 2022; Chimbi & Jita, 2022) has shown that incorporating diverse perspectives, experiences and cultural practices into the curriculum can have a transformative impact on promoting equality by challenging dominant narratives, expanding students' worldviews, and fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of difference. Moreover, *ubuntu* and inclusive education underscores the importance of empathy, compassion and solidarity in promoting equality and social justice. Inclusive education informed by *ubuntu* values emphasises the importance of caring for one another, standing in solidarity with marginalised groups, and advocating social change (Lephoto, 2022; Akabor & Pasha, 2022). By cultivating a sense of empathy and compassion among students, educators can foster a greater sense of social responsibility and a commitment to promoting equality and inclusivity both within and beyond the classroom (Odari, 2020).

Theme 2: Unconditional acceptance

The study also found that the philosophies of *ubuntu* and inclusive education encourage the unconditional acceptance of community members. They encourage humanness, good disposition towards others, moral nature, kindness, consideration and friendliness in relations between people. The scoping review also revealed that the two philosophies believe that no soul should be disregarded in the whole community, and the presence, participation and achievement of all learners from its community are of great concern.

Researchers on *ubuntu* and inclusive education such as Vandeyor and Mohale (2022) and Odari (2020) suggest that the two philosophies believe that society and its institutions are capable of removing the oppressive, discriminatory and disabling conditions to create unconditional acceptance for all. This means that *ubuntu* and inclusive education are normative in that they encapsulate moral norms and virtues such as kindness, generosity, compassion, benevolence, courtesy, and respect and concern for others (Odari, 2020). The tenet of respect, unconditional acceptance and concern for others in *ubuntu* and inclusive education is more profound and implies the inclusion of all, because even those who seem to experience some exclusion, are considered (Vandeyor & Mohale, 2022). The strengths of the philosophy of *ubuntu* and inclusive education are perceivable in the plurality of its voices, and that no soul should be disregarded in the whole community of engagement. It underlies the communalism that characterise the African community. The philosophy of *ubuntu* suggests

that there is an elevated judgement of the community in African thought and practice, which is greater than that of the individual, but that does not take place at the expense of overlooking the individuality of the person (Vandeyor & Mohale, 2022; Odari, 2020). A person is a person in the community, and his or her individuality is exercised through others in that community. This attests to a culture of mutual relations, of caring for one another and sharing community resources with one another. The underlying principle of *ubuntu* and inclusive education emphasises a community, which clearly exhibits an opportunity for inclusion; that is, one in which everyone is included in deliberation (Lephoto, 2022).

Theme 3: Enabling learning environment

The study also found that the philosophies of *ubuntu* and inclusive education call for an education system that is responsive to the needs of learners. The two philosophies encourage the use of indigenous knowledge, relevant skills, values, attitudes and culture of mutual relations among students. To achieve this, the two philosophies call for a learning environment that is the least restrictive and enables learning.

The above scoping results are consistent with other studies on *ubuntu* and inclusive education (e.g. Lephoto, 2022; Akabor & Pasha, 2022; Vandeyor & Mohale, 2022). Research by Lephoto (2022), Akabor and Paasha (2022) and Vandeyor and Mohale (2022) reveals that the philosophy of *ubuntu* and inclusive education encourages a collaborative learning environment where all individuals feel valued and included. In *ubuntu* philosophy, the concept of interconnectedness and interdependence is central to promoting harmony and prosperity within a community (Akabor & Pasha, 2022). This interconnectedness extends to the classroom setting, where teachers and students are encouraged to work together towards common goals and support one another on their learning journey. By fostering a sense of belonging and mutual respect, the *ubuntu* philosophy creates a foundation for inclusive practices that enables all learners to thrive and reach their full potential.

Inclusive education, on the other hand, is based on the principle that every individual has the right to access quality education and participate fully in the learning process, regardless of their background or abilities (Lephoto, 2022). Inclusive education aims to create a learning environment that is welcoming and supportive of diversity, where all students feel accepted and valued for whom they are (Akabor & Pasha, 2022). By embracing the values of inclusivity, teachers can promote collaboration and cooperation among students, enabling them to learn from one another's unique perspectives and experiences (Akabor & Pasha, 2022). In an inclusive classroom, differences are not only accepted, but celebrated, as they contribute to the richness and diversity of the learning environment.

Both *ubuntu* philosophy and inclusive education recognise the importance of building strong support systems and fostering collaboration among teachers, students and other stakeholders in the education system (Akabor & Pasha, 2022). Studies have shown that when teachers and students work together towards common goals and embrace the values of inclusivity, they can overcome challenges and achieve greater levels of prosperity and harmony in the classroom (Akabor & Pasha, 2022). By promoting a culture of respect, empathy and understanding, educators can create a safe and inclusive learning environment where all students feel empowered to participate actively in their own education (Chimbi & Jita, 2022; Ngubane & Makua, 2021a).

Theme 4: Respect of human diversity

The study also found that both philosophies, *ubuntu* and inclusive education, value human diversity. The scoping review revealed that the philosophies of *ubuntu* and inclusive education acknowledge that people are different and that diversity should be valued. They acknowledge the communalist individuality of the person. The two philosophies call for solidarity, oneness, dignity, kindness and mutual caring at all community institutions, including schools.

Various studies on the relationship between the philosophies of *ubuntu* and the principles of inclusive education, e.g. Ngubane and Makua (2021a), Odari (2021), Ngubane and Makua (2021b), Lephoto (2022) and Chizalema (2021) have revealed the importance of the acceptance of human diversity in the two philosophies. From the philosophies of *ubuntu* and inclusive education, the concept of diversity means a lot of different things to different people (Odari, 2021). For Odari, (2021) and Ngubane and Makua (2021b), human diversity is associated more with an 'ecological society', where minority minds are valued in light of, and helped to find, their niche. Ngubane and Makua (2021a) also believes that the philosophy of *ubuntu* and inclusive education's focus is the inclusion of all humanity. In line with the spirit of *ubuntu*, inclusive education shall be perceived as an all-inclusive system that provides lifelong education to all human beings in their diversity for all-inclusive development based on their context (Ngubane & Makua, 2021a ; Odari, 2021; Ngubane & Makua, 2021b). This includes learners with and without disabilities. Care and support of these groups of people are still considered an obligation and a morally good act. Those who, of their own volition, care and support others are said to possess "*botho/ubuntu*", meaning that they are human (Odari ,2021).

8. Limitations of the study

The use of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) framework for evidence synthesis is a strength for identifying the holistic themes on the relationship between the philosophy of *ubuntu* as an African traditional knowledge system and the principles of inclusive education. Moreover, the use of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities framework allows for a targeted search of studies on the concept and context axis, enhancing the yield for relevance. However, our study has some limitations. Firstly, the study yielded only seven articles for review, suggesting a need for further study, as there are more studies published on the relationship between the philosophy of *ubuntu* as an African traditional knowledge system and the principles of inclusive education. Future studies should apply other frameworks such as UNESCO's Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action for study selection and synthesis for more definitive findings. Future research may focus on 1) the understanding of *ubuntu* philosophy among teachers as an epistemology for inclusive education; 2) the applicability of the *ubuntu* philosophy in an inclusive education setting; and 3) identifying the challenges faced by African teachers in using *ubuntu* philosophy in inclusive education settings.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, this scoping review provided a platform to understand the relationship between the philosophy of *ubuntu* as an African traditional knowledge system and the principles of inclusive education. It is evident that there is a strong understand relationship between the philosophy of *ubuntu* as an African traditional knowledge system and the principles of inclusive education. Both philosophies hold the following tenets: 1) equality, 2) unconditional

acceptance; 3) enabling learning environment, and 4) respect for human diversity. Discussions of main findings have been edging towards the proposition that in order for Africans to provide education to all, combat low literacy, civil strife and underdevelopment, *ububtugogy* would add a distinctly African flavour and momentum to the endeavour. The concept of *ubuntu* gives a distinctly African meaning to, and a reason or motivation for a positive attitude towards the other. The philosophy of *ubuntu* is consistent with the philosophy of inclusive education; they both encourage inclusion, social cohesion, social connectedness and social justice towards persons with and without disabilities in an education setting.

Recommendations

Based on the discussions in this paper, the paper recommends the recognition and adoption of the philosophy of *ubuntu* across education systems in Southern Africa. For the successful implementation of inclusive education in the Southern African education system, Southern Africa countries must include the philosophy of *ubuntu* in their teacher education curriculum. Teachers who are already in the field must be in-serviced to use philosophies of *ubuntu* in their day-to-day service delivery. This will help to restructure the visions and goals of their schools to address the needs of learners of African ancestry, have leadership that is *ubuntu* oriented, teachers with *ububtugogy*, *ubuntu* culture schools, an *ubuntu* learning environment, Afrocentric Assessment on learner's abilities and intervention methods, an educational curriculum that is based on *ubuntu* principles, and good community engagement practices.

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