

Pedagogical Perspectives of Utu: Reclaiming Primacy of African Values for Moral-ethical for Youth Development in Tanzania

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Abstract

The decline of moral and ethics in Tanzania especially to the youth is associated by different factors among which is the decrease in abiding by traditional values centred in *utu* concept. This study examined the way in which, pedagogical perspectives of *utu* contribute greatly in reclaiming primacy of African values for moral-ethical development of the youth in Tanzania. This study has used a desktop research study method where by literature has been surveyed. The study argues that, pedagogical perspectives of *utu* should be embraced for reclaiming the primacy of African values for moral-ethical development of youth in Tanzania. This study reaffirms the fact that the *utu* concept can stand out as a paradigm for the holistic concept of the human person and world-view that sees the reality of life as an interrelated. The moral/ethical values practiced in the light of *utu* on the basis of unity and brotherhood within a human family can help the Tanzanian society to recuperate a sense of national identity. Therefore, Tanzanian society today needs to cultivate, transmit, and practice *utu* in daily life for holistic development. The study recommends that, the *utu* concept which advocates the value of human dignity and identity, reminds us of the necessity of clarifying and living what we mean by “values” in education today since not all aspects of life and practice attributed to culture contain educational values worth of human dignity.

Keywords: Moral-ethical pedagogical perspectives of *utu*, primacy of African values, youth development.

Introduction

In the age of scientific and technological civilization, contemporary human society faces an alarming debasement of values everywhere among people of all ages. However, this debasement is extremely prevalent to the young generation, which basically labels school boys and girls (Ntawigaya and Mwanisongole, 2021). There’s a tremendous prevalence of various violence, injustice, wars and human cruelty mostly involving youths. This prevalence exists because youths are suffering from pressures of seeking their self-identity making them choose wrong ways of doing things. Ntawigaya and Mwanisongole (2021), comment that as youth today struggle towards identity cohesion, they actively look for a way of self-esteem. They start this psychological endeavor to consolidate and understand their experience of self-trying to identify themselves in terms of familial, vocational, and societal roles. Swart

(2009) confirms that society must find ways to enhance its moral standards, especially in the settings where there has been a rise in immoral acts.

As in other countries, Tanzania isn't left behind of moral decaying situations among the young generation, especially young boys and girls in schools. For instance, recently, there was an unethical issue which occurred on 4th August, 2024 in Dodoma Region, where by a young lady was raped by four (4) young men. The act caused trauma and psychological torture where the young lady felt humiliated and not fit in the society. Furthermore, the young lady, encountered physical torture where she can face the problems when delivering, because her reproductive organs are affected (Mwananchi Newspaper, 4th August, 2024: 4).

Ethics and morals are important aspects in any society's wellbeing, and may be seen as complex concepts containing many facets. Ethics and morals also can be seen to be influenced by sorts of factors (Swart, 2009). The terms Ethics and morals are used interchangeably in this article to mean an equivalent idea of excellent behavior which ought to be done by the youths in Tanzania. Several definitions provided in different literatures, indicate that morals refer mainly to guiding principles on which a person's judgment of right and wrong are based. Morals are usually guided by social-cultural and religious norms; they can differ from society to society and from culture to culture. So, in a particular society, morals are accepted standards of behaviour that enable people to live cooperatively in groups as they provide guidelines for proper conduct (Nyoni, 2021).

On the other hand, ethics refer to specific rules and actions, or behaviours. That is, they are principles of right conduct in particular situations. They are more practical, conceived as shared principles promoting fairness in social and business interactions. Due to their practical aspect, ethics have been known as the science of morals-proper application of morals (Nyoni, 2021).

As a social variable, education is related to both the transmission of cultural patterns and the underlying values of society geared towards integral human development (Mhina, 2011). Education entails a process of transmitting knowledge of the values, aesthetics, spiritual beliefs, and all things that give a particular cultural orientation its uniqueness from one generation to the next. Education is necessarily connected to the global conception of human person, the universe and life, and, therefore, has to respect and take note of present and future perspectives of each individual person, as well as society in general in the process of human growth and development (Mhina, 2011). This conception of life should not overlook the actual educational needs of youth in relation to the local situation of a given people.

The current situation of youth education and development in Tanzania today indicates how the African youth education programmes today still lack a sense of local direction. This lack of local direction in youth education, contribute to an ever-increasing personal and cultural identity crisis which leads to moral decay. As a response to this situation of persistency of moral decay in our society of Tanzania today, this study presents the moral and ethical pedagogical perspectives of *utu* as a contribution of reclaiming primacy of African values for moral-ethical development of youth in Tanzania. In this study proposals of improving pedagogical systems in Bantu Africa, including Tanzania focus on the significance and implication of *utu*-centred pedagogy for youth education as a measure in alleviating the moral and ethical decay.

The proposal presented in this study deals with a pedagogy centering on *utu* vision of the human person and reality, or an *utu*-centred pedagogy. The *utu*-centred pedagogy is a pedagogical system that considers *utu* as a central cultural perspective in Bantu Africa for youth education and holistic human development (Mhina, 2011). Therefore, in this study the authors intended to present and advocate the

utu-centred pedagogy that is based on the significance and the attributes of the *utu*-centred anthropology. The *utu*-centred pedagogy in this study, entails considering *utu* as an essential cultural value, as well as a pedagogical paradigm that can help to prove why and how education has been and can be rightly transmitted to new generation for genuine integral human development in bantu Africa today (Moshia, 2000).

The *Utu* concept

Before presenting the social-relations and moral-ethical pedagogical perspectives of *utu*, it is preferably better to give a brief description of the concept of *utu*. According to TUKI a Swahili-English Dictionary, the word *utu* is defined as humanness, humanity, or human dignity (IKRUD, 1996). *Utu* is conceived as an attitude of mind and a way of living that corresponds to moral and ethical conducts which respect human dignity. Philosophically, in its ontological/metaphysical dimensions in Bantu Africa, the expression *utu* as being human, refers first of all to the very “being” of the human person, on which all its other dimensions or attributes are based (Mhina, 2011). In Bantu languages, the prefix *u-* is used in expressing the category of being or what exists and, in this case, the Swahili expression *u-tu* refers to the state, condition and quality of *mtu* as a human being or person (Mhina, 2011).

The concept of *Utu* in African philosophy, particularly within the Swahili culture, is closely related to the broader African philosophy of *Ubuntu*. Both concepts emphasize the interconnectedness of individuals within their communities and the importance of humanity and personhood. *Utu* can be understood as the essence of being human. It highlights the idea that a person is a person through other people, encapsulating the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity. This philosophy promotes values such as compassion, respect, and community, suggesting that one’s well-being is intrinsically linked to the well-being of others. In Swahili culture, *Utu* is reflected in various forms of expression, including poetry, prose, and everyday sayings. It is a concept that underscores the importance of community, family, and mutual support. The idea is that one’s identity and humanity are realized through relationships with others, and this interconnectedness is fundamental to the African way of life.

In the sense in which the term *utu* is used in this study, ‘being human’ here means more than just existing, being alive, and having the physical characteristics of the human person. It entails, above all, the quality and the capacity of conducting oneself in a manner that recognises, considers, respects and practices human values in daily life (Mbiti, 1969; Mhina, 2011).

Mhina, (2011) further contends that, as a holistic African vision of the human person, the *utu* concept expresses itself as *utu*-centred anthropology which entails an African Bantu way of being human, a way of learning to know, learning to be and learning to live with others, with respect to human dignity in the world. Consequently, *utu* expresses itself as a holistic concept of Bantu African thinking, which can represent one of the pillars of the African cultural values that addresses a sense of universal brotherhood in human relationships expressed in different aspects of daily life, such as in social, political, economic, moral and religious perspectives (Nkemkia, 1999).

In view of the development of African thinking and cultural practice, the concept of *utu* is not isolated since it is also related to other African concepts such as, *Conscientism*; *African Humanism*; *Ujamaa*; *African Socialism*; *Ubuntu*; *Muntu*; *Vitalogy* and *M’bangsuma*, and other concepts regarding the efforts towards redefining the human dignity and identity of the African person.

Methodology and Materials

This study has used a Desktop research study methodology, whereby, written literature has been surveyed. The researcher delved into available materials both online and offline, to gain insights that inform this study. The study is naturally qualitative. The data used in this study were collected basically from secondary sources. Secondary data has been collected from various sources including websites, various published books and articles about school readiness for primary schools. It is a qualitative research approach in which case and case-based themes are defined.

Moral-ethical Pedagogical perspective of *utu*

Utu stands for moral-ethical values to be transmitted and, at the same time, it expresses itself as a holistic approach or methodology and praxis that facilitates the transmission of these values of African philosophy and culture of younger generations. In actual fact, *utu* is a quality of being that entails and encourages good moral standing in the individual human person and in the community as a whole (Mhina, 2011). Therefore, our main purpose in this case is to encourage the transmission of the social-relational and moral virtues of *utu* and other human values found in this African Bantu cultural heritage in order to improve youth education and development in Tanzania.

Social Implications of Utu

The *utu* vision which the study proposes explicitly emphasizes the ‘relational dimension’ of the human person which is very characteristic of the African bantu anthropology. However, as a holistic African vision of the human person and reality, the *utu* concept does not limit itself to this “relational dimension” from individualistic point of view, but rather is concerned with the relationship of the individual to the community, and vice versa, as well as to the whole universe.

As a relational-communitarian concept of the person and reality, the Swahili expression *utu* in view of *Ujamaa* (extended family), verifies how by its very nature youth pastoral action, like education, should involve the whole community: young people and adults, parents and educators in a family atmosphere, so that it can become a living experience of communion (Mhina, 2011).

The Utu concept and the social nature of education

The *utu* concept, as expressed in traditional African society, education and formation of youth, especially through the rites of passage or initiation rites, is very central to the holistic growth and development of young people. Traditional African societies are organized and faction as source of strength in enhancing youth education as a social factor, having in mind its consequent implications for social dynamics in the wider society and extended family network (Mmbaga, 2003; Mhina, 2011). In African traditional society, education is associated with the socialization of the young, and this learning process continues in life by means of occasional songs, which help to communicate and perpetuate the traditional understanding of the world and people’s attitudes towards it (Shorter, 1987). Socialization can be defined as the process of learning rules and expected behaviour in relation to the one’s family and society and developing satisfactory relationships with other people. It is a process through which common values, norms, conducts and attitudes, are transmitted to a new member of a social group to facilitate the initiation of the individual into the cultural structure of the same group (Nanni, 1997). In this process a human person is transformed by the culture of his or her society from being a mere biological individual to a social individual, an individual with *utu*. This take place not in a hereditary or mechanical way, but through an intentional action of social subjects, presupposing an environment that brings a process of transmission of values and behaviours into action (Mhina, 2011).

According to Mhina (2011), early socialization instills a sense of belonging, beholding and obligation to the community and the individual. The enlargement of scope of this sense of communal belonging from lineage to civic bond is facilitated by exposure to a culture of neighbourhood mutual aid and voluntary public projects. *Utu* is essential in the socialization process as it calls for solidarity, a joint effort of all partners and the whole of society towards youth development in Tanzania and the rest of Africa today. As a daily life practice of ethical, moral and social values, the Bantu *utu* concept can give a better orientation of socialization towards holistic youth development in Tanzania today (Ishumi, 2004; Mhina, 2011).

The Role of African Family in Education today in View of *Utu*

Apart from the different social-economic and cultural changes and challenges of life in Tanzanian society in general, families still have a big role to play in the holistic education of youth. Most families today in Tanzania and elsewhere in Africa do not provide the conducive atmosphere to opportunity in youth development. There is frequent separation of parents and much divorce. Many young people, for these reasons, find themselves being brought up in a single parent atmosphere. Even where both parents still live together, in many instances there is lack of solidarity and unity in upbringing and education of youth. In the traditional African society, the family and the extended family have a central place in raising and educating a child. The truth remains that those who form the child have to work together, in passing on the fundamental virtues to the younger generation, and acting as role models for youth (Mosha, ...; Mhina, 2011).

In the Tanzanian society, as in many parts of Africa, the raising of children and the upbringing of youth from the African point of view is still considered as part of the broader family. Parents, teachers, students, school administrators and national officials of education are all part of the larger population bringing to their classrooms and offices every facet of local, national, and global culture. A school can have both formative and de-formative constituents of the surrounding culture. In proposing the *utu* vision, we intend to affirm the urgent need to let the parents, families, and local community actively participate in the educational process. Under the guidance of the implications of the *utu* vision of the human person, the Tanzania educational system can take this advantage and initiate massive campaigns to let families and communities realize that schools alone cannot adequately educate their youth (Mosha, 2000).

Primacy of African Values-Based education in the *Utu* concept

In the traditional African cultural perspectives, the aspect of education as pedagogy was never seen as separate from education as a transmission of the cultural values. The *utu* concept can help us to analyse better how the transmission of the cultural values of the African heritage should be at the heart of an African-centred pedagogy today, since without such values education loses its meaning for African people (Mhina, 2011). Primarily, the *utu* concept which advocates value of human dignity and identity, reminds us of the necessity of clarifying what we mean by ‘values’ in education today since not all aspects of life and practice attributed to culture contain educational values worth of human dignity.

From the point of view of the *utu* concept, we can affirm that the term ‘value’ refers to that which for the human being, and for matters of reasoning, counts and is important for a life that is worthy of human dignity. According to Mhina (2011), values are of different kinds of categories, For example, there are economic values, cultural values, social values, religious values and other many with respect to validities

of different values in human life. A culture of values is evidently transmitted through values education, the pedagogy of values or an education based on a true sense of values. This is where the *utu* concept, as a cultural value, comes in with its primacy on value education for the youth in Tanzania and the rest of Bantu Africa today. The *utu* concept stands out as a cultural criterion which explains why a culture of values and cultural values are necessary for youth education and development in Tanzania. All philosophical anthropology, like the *utu* concept, pedagogically broadly implies the centrality of life and the existential specifics of human life (Sankofa, 1996). In the current situation where Tanzania society is confronted by a major challenge in recognizing and choosing values and which suit the African youth for genuine integral human development, the study proposes the social-relations and moral-ethical values of the *utu* concept for the education and youth development. At the core of the *utu* concept, pedagogy implies values education that leads to integral human development, African identity, and dignity (Sankofa, 1996).

In considering the primacy of the human person in education for youth development in Bantu Africa today, it is important to have a holistic approach to human life, taking into consideration the different dimensional characteristics of human being. This kind of primacy has not been adequately addressed and still poses a big question mark to Tanzanian society and other parts of Sub-Sahara Africa, since economic development interests take the upper hand in the educational system (Mhina, 2011). In this perspective, the centrality of the human person that the *utu* concept advocates is vital for an ideal personhood that youth can aspire to in their process of learning, since it stands out as a point of reference and as a criterion for a successful educational actability and development (Muganda, 2002).

Pedagogical Perspectives of Utu-Centred

The different aspects which have been discussed before in relation to *utu*-concept, lead us to speak of an African Bantu pedagogy of *utu* or *utu*-centred pedagogy. In reference to Bantu initiation rites or rites of the passage and other forms of education for youth development in indigenous African society, we can affirm that at the core of the African Bantu pedagogical system the *utu* concept of the human person and world-view stands out. So it is logical to speak of African pedagogy based on Tanzanian *utu* concept, or *utu*-centred pedagogy, as a positive Bantu cultural heritage for youth in modern Africa.

As a social-relational concept of a person as introduced in this study, the *utu* concept views the education process as a unified whole based on the concrete social-cultural reality, holistic concept of life and world-view. In other words, the *utu* concept as a holistic African pedagogy entails the fact that when one speaks of an African-centred pedagogy, all aspects of knowledge, wisdom, ethics, spirituality, are *ipso facto* included (Sankofa, 1996; Mhina, 2011).

Reclaiming Moral/ Ethical Values of Traditional African Education.

The Tanzanian concept of *utu*, is highly characterised by the normative perspective of personhood. This refers to the fact that in this African Bantu philosophy and culture, the human person is viewed as a moral/ethical being, a normative self, that is, a self-according to the degree to which the individual abides by the rules or norms that are intelligible and acceptable to one's society. In the African pedagogical system, young people are normally exhorted to attain and cultivate this sense of *utu* as the idea/model of personhood and a sign of human maturity or adulthood (*utu uzima*) in the process of their education and formation. Indigenous African education insists much on moral integrity. This is a very

strong positive aspect in African pedagogy which is worth implementing in educating the youth for development in Africa today.

In presenting our pedagogical implications of the *utu* concept from the *utu* ethos point of view, we realise how moral integrity is essential in a genuine humanization process. There is an ongoing conscious realization expressed by many African philosophers, artists, and thinkers on the indispensability of moral integrity for a civilized human world, and, more importantly, to engage in an untiring struggle to live a moral spiritual life. African indigenous elders and sages involved in the education and formation of youth are normally keenly aware of the necessity for moral integrity in human societies and, thus, try the best they can to live a moral life above reproach. In so doing, they take up the responsibility of building morally responsible societies. Therefore, pedagogical implications of the *utu* concept for youth education today encourage us to reclaim, evaluate, and appropriate the moral/ethical and religious values of indigenous African society that can help to improve our pedagogical systems today for holistic youth development in modern Africa.

Conclusion

Educating youth for quality life in Africa calls for clear and right understanding of the sense of life and concept of human person and a world-view for which a given education process aims. In describing and considering the meaning and significance of the Tanzanian concept of *utu* with regard to the goal of education in Africa today, we find that *utu* becomes for us a guiding view, a holistic vision of the human person and the universe. The *utu* vision, as an African philosophical concept, views the reality of life as an interrelated whole without making dichotomies between the physical and the spiritual, religious faith and daily life, the sacred and profane, the visible and invisible world (Mhina, 2011). The expression of *utu*, as an attribute of being, is personified in the *mtu* or, simply the human person, in Kiswahili. This Bantu concept of an ethical, moral person expresses the fact that in the *utu* concept, one can only become truly human in a community, in the context of other human beings and in the world. *Utu* embraces all positive aspects of human life and so it carries with it many society values that are worthy transmitting to the African youth.

Both philosophically and pedagogically, *utu* stands out as a holistic concept of reality which also views education as an instruction of the person from holistic world-view or reality of life. Amidst great and strong influences of globalization, liberalization, multi-cultural values and religious pluralism, the question of stable moral formation gets more and more complicated and very challenging in educating the youth towards integral human development (Mhina, 2011).

This study reaffirms the fact that, the *utu* concept can stand out as a paradigm for the holistic concept of the human person and world-view that sees the reality of life as an interrelated. The moral/ethical values practiced in the light of *utu* on the basis of unity and brotherhood within a human family can help the Tanzanian society to recuperate a sense of national identity. Therefore, Tanzanian society today needs to cultivate, transmit, and practice *utu* in daily life for holistic development.

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