

# GLO-UBUNTU AS AN EXTENSION OF GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION: CULTIVATING THE NOTION OF AN AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

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## ABSTRACT

In previous work (Waghid et al. 2023) we offered an account of *ubuntu* and its implications for South African higher education. The main thrust of our argument is constituted by understanding that *ubuntu* involves interdependent-cum-autonomous human relations that impact university education in expansive ways: independent and collaborative with the possibility of being forward-looking. Yet, what we have not done hitherto, is to examine *ubuntu* in the realm of global citizenship education, considering the latter seems to intertwine with constitutive aspects of *ubuntu*. In this article, we reconsider *ubuntu* with global citizenship education (GCE) and its implications for higher education. Firstly, we proffer an understanding of GCE about pedagogical praxis; secondly, we show how *ubuntu* can advance GCE within higher education; and thirdly, we examine some of the implications of a *glo-ubuntu* for higher education in South Africa.

**Keywords:** Glo-ubuntu, global citizenship education, ubuntu, African university,

## TOWARDS AN EXPLICATION OF GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) aims to promote GCE as a counter-formative practice and response to the high levels of human rights violations, inequality, and poverty evident in the world today. Torres (2017, 3) explicates that meaningful GCE should be premised on three global commons, namely “that our planet is our only home”, that “global peace is an intangible cultural good of humanity”, and that people should “live together democratically in an ever more diverse world”. Therefore, GCE that aims to cultivate citizens who advance an activist stance towards societal living can be considered a defensible stance. In particular, GCE aimed to cultivate a world where human dignity and social

cohesion are restored and is intrinsically just whilst also becoming a way for restorative justice for those marginalised and abused in a neoliberal market-driven world.

Several critical scholars (see Freire 1998; Zembylas 2006; Soudien 2014) warn that the mere transfer of technical knowledge and skills at higher education institutions (HEIs) around the world, as dictated by a new-market economy, has resulted in the loss of one of the few places for human and social transformation. Similarly, several scholars (see Byker 2016; Wang and Hoffmann 2020; Bosio 2021) argue that a plausible concern of GCE is inherently rendered impotent in the higher educational landscape due to the seemingly prejudiced concept toward neoliberal ideologies. Davies, Evans and Reid (2005) cautioned early on, when the concept of “globalisation” reared its head, that the perception exists that if an educational programme incorporates material from an international perspective or implements particular learning activities, for instance, international internships, that the “global” in GCE has been achieved. The new-liberal approach to GCE diminishes GCE as the development of competencies and skills to ensure people are equipped to work globally to support the transnational mobility needs (Akkari and Maleq 2019). Another narrowed perspective of the neoliberal approach to GCE is to improve English proficiency to be appointable to work in the global market (Bosio 2021). The examples listed here of GCE in service of neoliberal globalised market needs seem to reduce and constrain the potential of education from a powerful transformational and societal tool to merely the initiation of students into a neoliberal hosting frame (Papastephanou 2019).

Such a neoliberal approach to GCE is far removed from the goal of GCE as envisioned by UNESCO (2016, 1), namely, “to empower learners to engage and assume active roles both locally and globally to face and resolve global challenges and ultimately to become proactive contributors to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world”. The neoliberal approach to GCE is glaringly void of the cultivation of the embodied humanness of students (citizens). When the focus of education shifts from performance, measured outcomes, and accumulation of knowledge and skills in service of the individual to that of the “quality of the being” (humanness) of the student (citizen), human dignity and peace; then the concept of *ubuntu* could be considered as a meaningful pathway to bridge the divide. This is so because *ubuntu* seems concerned with enacting dignified and humane human relations grounded in aspirations for peaceful co-existence and respectful engagement.

### **WHAT DOES GLO-UBUNTU OFFER A PLAUSIBLE NOTION OF GCE?**

For an analysis of the concept of *ubuntu*, we draw on the seminal work of Waghid. Waghid (2014; 2020) proffers that the notion of *ubuntu* is associated firstly with responsible actions; secondly, restorative justice for the perusal of new beginnings; and thirdly, acts of caring in a

dignified manner about communal matters. In this section, we apply such an interpretation of *ubuntu* to the notion of GCE to advance GCE beyond a narrow neoliberal approach. In transitioning from a neoliberal GCE approach towards a plausible notion of GCE that is premised on the global commons of planetary well-being, peace, and democratic living, we argue that the journey starts at the level of the “local”.

At least three dimensions of human action come to mind when they (humans) engage attentively. Engagements among attentive humans involve the collective and are aimed at attaining responsible actions constituted by *ubuntu*. Firstly, *ubuntu* as “responsible action” is constituted by a potential to both respond and be able to do so. To be able implies some connection with being in a position to do so, being capable of enacting what one envisages, and being attuned to serve in the interest of the self and others. And, responding to situations is usually associated with purposive action – that is, an action that announces individuals and the collective as activists in the quest to transform unjustifiable human actions. In this sense, responsible human action is commensurate with the potential of humans to act capably and purposively – a matter of acting with activism. Thus, humans can act with a sense of activism that exhibits the capability to change an undesirable act into something that can be of concern or interest to others. Put differently, their activist stance exemplifies a potential to be capable and purposeful, which is what *ubuntu* implies.

Secondly, when humans engage attentively, they do so with *ubuntu*; that is, to restore undesirable actions. Yet, they would not be able to do so if they do not act in the community because communal action allows them to act in solidarity to pursue desirable action. When humans exercise their solidarity, they do so with the recognition that skewed situations can be restored based on cultivating inclusive environments for themselves. Here, inclusion does not mean that humans act in the same ways but rather that their actions collectively point towards restoring what has been undermined and suppressed. For instance, when students are included in pedagogical encounters, teachers recognise them as possessing the potential to contribute to encounters and not merely for their physical presence to be there. Inclusion becomes a restorative pedagogical act when students are recognised for their potential to enhance the legitimacy of the encounter and not merely for their physical presence. Students can only be said to be present when they somehow alter the encounter on the grounds of having something to say that teachers equally recognise.

Thirdly, *ubuntu*'s concern with attentive human action is grounded in an understanding that human dignity is meant to hold people jointly and individually accountable for their actions. When humans provide an account of themselves, they justify their actions in terms of what is morally and politically just. If something is morally just, it implies that harm, insults, and shame

would not necessarily ensure that potentially undermine human action. When political action is constrained by a desire to act with dignity, it means that human action cannot violate plausible action that concerns the social interests of a community. Failing to act both morally and politically would invariably undermine just human action, and the manifestation of *ubuntu* might still be somewhat evasive.

Thus, what follows is that *ubuntu* constitutes attentive human action on the basis that responsible action is activist, restorative action is inclusive, and dignified action remains just. In this way, *ubuntu* seems commensurable with what makes GCE what it is: activist, inclusive, and just action. Consequently, it would not be indefensible to coin the term “*glo-ubuntu*”. Now that we have provided some explication of how *ubuntu* intertwines with GCE, we will examine why a focus on the local is so important to advance the concept.

### **ADVANCING LOCALISED PRACTICES WITHIN THE PARAMETERS OF GLO-UBUNTU**

On a local level, *glo-ubuntu* is particularly important for the African continent as transnational neoliberal organisations are known to dispossess the marginalised continent and its citizens of their rightful mineral resources in the name of development. Yet, what local communities are often left with after so-called investments by powerful nations and corporations, are greater inequality and poverty, diminished mineral resources, and irreparable environmental damages (Werner 2017). The voices of local African citizens embodying the lived realities and consequences of the carnage left behind after stripping the local earth of its valuable natural resources are an important addition to learning and teaching material of a plausible notion of GCE. A sustainable future is premised on the environmental protection of scarce resources, and often under the banner of development and corporate social responsibility, the dire consequences of transnational investments are overlooked.

The voices of African citizens are important for a balanced perspective on the consequences of transnational investments in Africa, especially regarding the consequences for the citizens of Africa and the world if and when the planet becomes uninhabitable because of a profit-above-all mindset. A neoliberal approach to GCE limited to an observation from the so-called developed West on what is constituted responsible action for and towards the Other (non-Western or so-called underdeveloped African continent) is subsequently enhanced to include the voice and lived reality of what the Other knows and experiences from within.

Sanctioning the local voice to have equal standing in the African university curriculum allows for the transformation – of the mind and the being – through the decoloniality of knowledge. Embodied knowledge that has often been “shaped by powerful relations” has been

“internalised into the body through active engagement with social-structure relation” and consequentially offers a rich perspective and insight into the consequences of market-driven decisions (Fataar 2018, 601). Decoloniality, a focus on the local African voice, “support[s] the practice of *ubuntu* and as such, embed the required conditions for human engagement” (Terblanche 2019, 229). In this way, the concept of *ubuntu* informs how the discussion towards responsible action for planetary well-being should be shaped.

Secondly, the path to peace often requires a process of reconciliation between parties with contested or opposing objectives or beliefs. It is impossible to begin a transformational process toward reconciliation unless individuals can identify and hold onto the shared humanity amongst opposing groups (Jansen 2008). The notion of *ubuntu*, meaning “a person is only a person through other people” (Ramphele 2001, 3), embodies the concept of shared humanity.

Therefore, education towards a world of peace requires opportunities where students can co-belong yet have the chance to express their different viewpoints and beliefs. If students (citizens) are offered such educational opportunities, they practice caring for others amid differences. Put differently by Waghid (2018a, 7), “the act of engaging with people and co-belonging with them in an atmosphere of deliberative action is to become situated in others’ presence through education”. Learning spaces that offer such an opportunity for critical inquiry concerning values, beliefs, and lived experiences leads to respect being shown to equal (opposing) humans. “Where there is an equitable exchange of ideas and recognised influences across different global cultures and societies on a platform of mutual respect and equality”, a notion of co-belonging is fostered (Waghid and Manthalu 2019, 60).

Following on from the basis of shared humanity, the opportunity towards restorative justice is created which can result in lasting peace. The world we live in today is marred by conflict, deep inequality, and poverty. South Africa, for instance, is one of the countries with the highest level of disparity in wealth and inequality, reminiscent of colonialism (The World Bank 2021). The drive towards education that mimics neoliberal market needs, has largely resulted in the perpetuation of structural inequality in post-Apartheid South Africa. GCE infused with pedagogy that creates a belonging to a community offers the opportunity for restorative justice – that is, deliberate action towards eradicating poverty and structural inequality. In this manner, social cohesion (peace) becomes a possibility. Pedagogy premised on the notion of *ubuntu* advances the narrow approach of GCE, that of mere employability in the global job market, to that of GCE towards peace through restorative justice as a result of co-belonging to a (worldwide) community. In this way, the focus shifts from my flourishing (my employability) to the flourishing of the most marginalised (restoration) for sustainable cohabitation.

And thirdly, the notion of *ubuntu* that amplifies caring and dignified communal action can advance the neoliberal approach of GCE to GCE that results in democratic living. Living democratically suggests citizens who can participate in their community with an understanding of their rights and associated responsibilities. The tension between rights and responsibilities mimics the tension between selfish individualism (e.g., a profit mindset in a capitalistic neoliberal world) and communal well-being (e.g., sustainable decisions that are just also towards the marginalised). Waghid (2018b, 60) argues, “an encounter framed through [*u*]ubuntu is a responsible action in the sense that people recognise one another’s vulnerabilities and do something about changing what people experience”.

The willingness to change the lived reality of those vulnerable and marginalised is the route from selfish rights to communal responsibilities. “Pedagogical encounters constituted by *ubuntu* care could evolve into imaginative openings and reopenings where university teachers and students can favourably think of rehumanising society” (Waghid 2019, 95). Such a re-imagination of a just and restored world implies caring with others rather than caring for others (Tronto 2013). Such a form of care is premised on recognising the interconnectedness (*ubuntu*) between all of humanity that leads to a deepened compassion to prompt just action. In this manner, *ubuntu* demands openness from both the self and the other – to be open to seeing and being differently through an encounter framed through compassionate care. Learning opportunities framed through *ubuntu* allow for the notice of difficulty that could spark compassion towards communal responsibility that in itself offers dignity through restorative justice.

The question is, how does a notion of *glo-ubuntu* advance the local? As has been expounded on earlier, *glo-ubuntu* is a form of human action that invokes a responsibility to restore and dignify. In turn, such an understanding of human action enhances activist, inclusive, and just human action. In this way, *glo-ubuntu* commensurates with human action that cultivates GCE because activism, inclusion, and justice are acts that constitute *glo-ubuntu*. What is important about an exposition of the local is that it represents the localised people’s scenery, language, values, and ways of doing. We refrain from using “indigenous” because the term deliberately disconnects from the global (universal). Instead, we contend that invoking the local and its concomitant practices recognises the influences of the global as well as the localised. So, when people act responsibly in their local spheres, their actions are not disconnected from the realities of the global and *vice versa*. What *glo-ubuntu* advocates is action that intertwines the local and global – that is, the glocal. In this way, *glo-ubuntu* advances the practice of glocalised action. And, when glocalised action ensues, such action invariably commensurates with activism, inclusion, and justice – all actions that can be realised within a

context of *glo-ubuntu*.

### **GLO-UBUNTU AS ANOTHER FORM OF COSMOPOLITAN EDUCATION?**

“Globalisation” as a concept is often associated with GCE and “cosmopolitanism”. A critic of this article could argue that *glo-ubuntu* is merely a different form of cosmopolitan education. Although “globalisation” and “cosmopolitanism” share a commonality – that of an ever-migrating workforce that will (or rather should) result in “strangers” that expect to be welcomed in a hospitable way by host nations through formal policies and structures – these concepts are significantly different to GCE. We will proffer two arguments based on GCE’s notion of “citizenship”.

Due to GCE, which is primarily premised on the concept of citizenship, it offers a unique interpretation that extends beyond the confinement inherent to cosmopolitanism. Firstly, as we indicated earlier, citizenship has to do with the local and the associated rights and responsibilities of individuals. Although the focus on individuality, rather than the often-opposing African collective stance, raises critique as it is more associated with a narrow new-market capitalistic ideology, it offers the opportunity for the expanded conceptualisation of citizenship. This asks, through the rights experienced, how can I be and act responsibly towards others so that they too might experience the rights we are all entitled to? Such an interpretation grounds citizenship – how individual local citizens should act when they notice inequalities and injustice towards fellow citizens, local or universal collective groups, or the planet. This grounding results in the local African context being prominent for the African university as the continent is marred by enough examples of local injustices, political instability, and poverty due to colonialism. Therefore, responsible local actions are not disconnected from the global; rather, they provide fertile ground for noticing global ills.

Secondly, following on from the concept of the local African context that demands prominence in GCE at the African university, another significant difference between GCE and cosmopolitanism comes to the fore – that of the local’s value within universalism. Cosmopolitanism, which is significantly influenced by a Euro-centric agenda, tolerates difference, is respectful of difference, yet does not actively promote or advance any particular cultural context or practice. Arguably, GCE is also significantly captured by Western ideologies, yet the attachment to citizenship grounded in the local and global, allows for meaningful expansion of education at the African university. Often, non-Western knowledge or ideologies, for example, African philosophies, knowledge, or ways of being, are excluded (or silenced) by mainstream (universal) market-driven mainstream education as they are deemed inferior by the dominant views from the Global North. GCE, and particularly the notion

of a *glo-ubuntu*, allows for the centring of African voices to be included in the curriculum and pedagogy.

Contrarily, the universalism of cosmopolitanism will perpetuate a pedagogy that is possibly violent through the act of exclusion. Education always offers humanity the promise of change, fairness, and equality, yet the reality is far removed from this deferred hope. Galtung (1969) argued that if there is a variance between the promise (change) and the outcome (realised hope), then it is evident of the presence of violence. One form of pedagogical violence is violence against the student's soul (Galtung 1969). In the African context, to exclude the African voice from the educational encounter is to commit violence against the students as their being is not respected or deemed equal for contribution. Universalism risks being violent towards those already marginalised. On the other hand, GCE offers the opportunity for foregrounding lived and embodied African knowledge in the educational encounter – an act that is just and responsible.

## **TOWARDS THE IDEA OF AN AFRICAN UNIVERSITY**

Waghid (2021) argues that an African philosophy of higher education is imperative for the re-imagination of an African university. A relevant re-imagined African university should be open to a continuous reformation through reflexivity, disrupt hegemonic forms of education and be a centre of connectedness (Waghid et al. 2023). In this section, using Waghid's (2021) defence of an African philosophy of higher education, we present how a *glo-ubuntu* notion contributes toward a re-imagined African university that allows for the opportunity for meaningful transformation.

Firstly, an African philosophy of higher education is premised on intellectual activist practices that “pursue deliberative iterations that can enhance human understanding of things in the world” (Waghid 2021, 2). We contend that through the grounding of the localised ills evident in the African content, as a point of departure for curriculum development in the African university, the opportunity is presented for greater insight into global challenges. *Glo-ubuntu*, therefore, offers rapturing intellectual opportunities and actions towards solving intertwined challenges. The grounding of the local knowledge, an act of validation and recognition in itself, advances greater insight and understanding into those difficulties impacting planetary well-being, e.g., climate change. In this way, *glo-ubuntu* positions the African university as an equal voice from the global South in the quest towards addressing those ills threatening humanity's existence.

Secondly, an African philosophy of higher education insists “that humans remain bound



together in a spirit of cooperative engagement and mutual respect” (Waghid 2021, 2). Such an educational philosophy advances the possibility of peaceful co-existence. *Glo-ubuntu* educational practices that allow for communal caring amid differences take humanity closer to sustainable cohabitation. Such practices are far removed compared to a neoliberal-orientated stance on living and the agenda of transnational corporations that advance the wealth of the inclusive individual, often at the cost of the local community.

Thirdly, an African philosophy of education requires “disruption in the sense that people are provoked to think with dissonance ... in an atmosphere of unease and controversy” (Waghid 2021, 3). Neoliberal knowledge and practices, presented by the global North as the only meaningful way (truth) for education to contribute towards the global development agenda needs, also captured the minds of those on the outside – that is to start believing that henceforth this dominant knowledge and ways of doing should also form the basis of the curriculum at the African university. *Glo-ubuntu* practices that promote inclusivity of non-Western forms of ideology and knowledge, meaning centring the values, truths and ways of doing of the local African communities, portray an active stance towards rupturing the dominant hegemonic status quo of neoliberal education. In this way, teachers and students are challenged to look anew at the dominant ways of doing and being, also those within themselves. *Glo-ubuntu* practices allow for such a provocation and scrutiny of dearly-held beliefs and thoughts in the quest for true transformation.

In this section, we showed how a notion of *glo-ubuntu* advances the quest towards a meaningful African university through an African philosophy of higher education enhancing human understanding of the world, has a communal orientation and disrupting a hegemonic neoliberal form of education.

## **SUMMARY**

In this article, we have argued for a concept of *glo-ubuntu*, more so how the notion of *ubuntu* can advance a plausible interpretation of GCE. We contend that the deliberate expression of the concept of *ubuntu* in pedagogy for an African university enhances the narrow neoliberal approach of GCE towards that of transformational GCE that could promote social cohesion and planetary well-being. We presented that the concept of *glo-ubuntu* offers an advanced, nuanced extension of GCE that uses the “local” (African) voice as the foundation.

Pedagogical opportunities that firstly embrace the embodied voices of non-Western individuals and communities; secondly, create the setting for recognition of co-belonging; and, thirdly, offer the opening for noticing and recognising the vulnerabilities of others are examples

**Table 1:** From neoliberal GCE towards transformational GCE through *ubuntu*: The concept of *glo-ubuntu*

Ubuntu premised on:	Advances the narrow neoliberal GCE through <i>glo-ubuntu</i> :	To GCE that are transformative to achieve:
Responsible actions	Towards	Planetary well-being
Restorative justice	Towards	Peace
Dignified caring on communal matters	Towards	Democratic living

of meaningful *glo-ubuntu* citizenship educational practices in defence of an African philosophy of higher education.

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