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Applying Ubuntugogy in Technology-Mediated Learning: Fostering Student Wellbeing, Resilience, and Inclusivity

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Abstract. Post-COVID disruptions in higher education have highlighted significant challenges in student wellbeing, resilience, and inclusivity, particularly in technology-mediated learning environments. In Zimbabwe, the Heritage-Based Education (HBE) 5.0 curriculum, founded on Ubuntu, integrates teaching, research, community service, innovation, and industrialisation, yet practical implementation of inclusivity and special needs education (SNE) remains inconsistent. This study examined how Ubuntu-informed teaching and learning approaches can foster student resilience, wellbeing, and inclusive learning experiences, using a single Zimbabwean university as an anonymized case. Employing a purposive sampling technique and a qualitative case study design with narrative inquiry, data were collected from four lecturers and three focus groups of six students each, representing postgraduate diploma, master's, and undergraduate cohorts. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis and narrative coding to identify patterns and generate interpretive insights. Findings revealed five key themes: relational presence in blended learning spaces, digital and material inequities, narratives of student resilience, pedagogic tensions between HBE pillars and inclusivity, and persistent gaps in SNE that affect social and academic engagement. Drawing on these insights, the study developed an Ubuntu-informed Resilience and Inclusivity Framework, offering culturally grounded strategies to enhance student wellbeing, bridge equity gaps, and guide inclusive, technology-mediated pedagogy. This framework provides practical implications for national policy, supports regional adaptation in Southern African universities, and contributes to international discourse on resilience and inclusive higher education.

Keywords: Ubuntugogy; heritage-based education; student wellbeing; blended learning; inclusivity

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted higher education worldwide, presenting challenges for student wellbeing, resilience, and

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continuity of learning. Universities were compelled to transition rapidly to online and blended learning, exposing disparities in digital access, engagement, and academic performance. In Zimbabwe, these disruptions were compounded by infrastructural limitations and uneven preparedness for technology-mediated instruction, which left many students struggling to participate meaningfully in learning communities (Dhawan, 2020). The Heritage-Based Education 5.0 curriculum, designed to replace Education 3.0, foregrounds five pillars: teaching, research, community service, innovation, and industrialisation, with Ubuntu philosophy as its foundation (Zhakata & Zireva, 2025). Ubuntu emphasizes relationality, care, and communal responsibility, promoting holistic approaches to education that value interconnectedness and collective growth (Chikomo, 2024). Despite these progressive intentions, the practical implementation of inclusivity and special needs education (SNE) is inconsistent. Many lecturers and students struggle to distinguish between challenge, impairment, and disorder, leading to stereotyping in language and technology use, which negatively affects social interaction, academic participation, and overall wellbeing (Dube & Zikhali, 2023; Ncube, 2023). Using one Zimbabwean university as an anonymized case allows for an in-depth exploration of these issues, generating insights that can inform broader higher education contexts while maintaining ethical standards (Mapfumo, 2024). The case provides a lens to examine how Ubuntu-informed pedagogy intersects with blended learning and inclusive practices, highlighting both successes and areas for improvement in policy implementation and daily teaching practice (Mushayikwa, 2021).

Although Ubuntugogy is recognized for its potential to foster relational learning, resilience, and student wellbeing, there is limited empirical evidence linking these principles to tangible outcomes in technology-mediated higher education, particularly regarding inclusivity and SNE (Tshuma & Moyo, 2023). Most existing studies emphasize philosophical perspectives without adequately capturing the lived experiences of students and lecturers or addressing practical challenges in implementing Ubuntu values within blended learning contexts (Makoni, 2022; Maringe & Gibbs, 2022). Employing a qualitative single-case study with narrative inquiry allows this research to generate rich, context-specific insights that are transferable to national, regional, and international higher education settings. The general objective of this study was to examine how Ubuntu-informed blended learning can foster student resilience, wellbeing, and inclusive learning experiences, providing actionable strategies to enhance teaching and learning in higher education. Focusing on this objective provides a coherent framework to explore the interplay between culturally grounded pedagogy, digital learning, and inclusive practices while producing actionable strategies that address both policy intentions and real-world challenges (Chikonde, 2024; Gumbo, 2023).

This study has significant implications at national, regional, and international levels. Nationally, it provides evidence to strengthen the implementation of HBE 5.0 in Zimbabwe, highlighting gaps between policy aspirations and practical outcomes, particularly in relation to inclusivity and SNE. The findings can inform lecturer development, infrastructure planning, and culturally responsive

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pedagogical approaches (Chikomo, 2024; Mapfumo, 2024). Regionally, the insights can guide Southern African universities seeking to integrate indigenous epistemologies and culturally grounded teaching within blended learning environments to promote student resilience, wellbeing, and equitable access to higher education (Dube, 2023; Tshuma, 2022). Internationally, the study contributes to debates on inclusive, culturally responsive, and technology-enhanced pedagogy, demonstrating how African philosophies such as Ubuntu can inform relational, resilient, and socially cohesive learning frameworks across diverse educational contexts (Gumbo, 2023; Ncube, 2023). Theoretically, the research advances the integration of Ubuntugogy, resilience, wellbeing, and SNE into an actionable framework that bridges philosophical ideals with practical outcomes. By foregrounding relationality, inclusivity, and culturally grounded pedagogy, the study provides a contribution with relevance across multiple educational settings, offering evidence-based strategies to enhance learning, social cohesion, and holistic student development.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Ubuntu and Ubuntugogy

Ubuntu, a foundational African philosophy, emphasizes communalism, care, and reciprocity, guiding human interactions and social cohesion. In higher education, Ubuntugogy translates these principles into pedagogical practices that foster relational learning, collaborative engagement, and holistic development (Chikomo, 2024). By foregrounding interconnectedness, Ubuntu challenges individualistic and competitive approaches that dominate conventional education models, encouraging inclusive learning environments that recognize diverse student experiences (Gumbo, 2023). Despite these strengths, operationalizing Ubuntugogy in technology-mediated contexts presents challenges. Digital platforms can limit the relational presence that Ubuntu requires, making it difficult to maintain communal bonds and sustained care in online interactions (Mushayikwa, 2021). Moreover, lecturers often lack training on how to integrate Ubuntu principles effectively into blended or hybrid curricula, which can lead to inconsistencies in application and gaps in inclusivity for students with special needs (Chikonde, 2024). This tension between philosophical ideals and practical implementation highlights the need for frameworks that align digital pedagogies with Ubuntu's relational ethos, ensuring equitable participation and fostering resilience among students.

2.2. Technology-Mediated Learning

Post-COVID higher education has witnessed a rapid expansion of blended and hybrid learning models, which offer opportunities to sustain community engagement, peer support, and student wellbeing (Dhawan, 2020). By integrating synchronous and asynchronous activities, technology-mediated learning can provide flexibility, continuous access to learning materials, and spaces for collaborative knowledge creation (Marignge & Gibbs, 2022). However, digital inequities persist, particularly in Zimbabwe and other African contexts, where students may lack access to devices, reliable internet, or suitable learning spaces, potentially excluding marginalized groups and widening educational disparities (Madziva & Nyoni, 2021). Students with special needs

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face additional barriers, such as inaccessible digital content or insufficient support for adaptive technologies, which undermines inclusivity and wellbeing (Dube & Zikhali, 2023). Furthermore, lecturers may struggle to balance pedagogical intentions with technological affordances, creating tension between content delivery and relational engagement (Tshuma & Moyo, 2023). These risks underscore the importance of aligning technology-mediated learning strategies with culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogies to ensure that digital platforms facilitate, rather than hinder, student resilience and holistic development.

2.3. Student Wellbeing and Resilience

Student wellbeing and resilience have become critical concerns in higher education, particularly in the wake of COVID-19 disruptions. Mental health challenges, including stress, anxiety, and social isolation, have been widely reported among students, often exacerbated by technology-mediated instruction b to reduced face-to-face interaction, digital fatigue, and challenges in navigating online learning platforms, which in turn affect academic performance and social integration (Ncube, 2023). Social networks, peer interactions, and relational support structures are central to sustaining wellbeing, aligning closely with Ubuntu's principles of care and community (Gumbo, 2023). Despite growing recognition of the importance of resilience in higher education, empirical research linking Ubuntu-informed pedagogy to concrete wellbeing outcomes remains limited (Mushayikwa, 2021). Special needs education intersects with these concerns, as students with disabilities or learning challenges often experience heightened vulnerability in blended learning environments. Without inclusive practices, these students may be excluded from critical learning experiences, which negatively impacts both resilience and holistic wellbeing (Chikonde, 2024). Investigating the role of Ubuntugogy in promoting resilience and wellbeing offers a novel approach to bridging these gaps, contributing to a better understanding of how relational, culturally grounded pedagogy can support mental health and academic success.

2.4. Inclusivity and Special Needs Education

Although policies in Zimbabwe and elsewhere formally recognize inclusivity and SNE, there is a significant gap between statutory provisions and practical implementation (Mapfumo, 2024). Many educators and students struggle to differentiate between challenge, impairment, and disorder, leading to inconsistent support, stereotyping, and exclusion in both physical and digital learning spaces (Dube & Zikhali, 2023). Language use and technological design often reinforce these stereotypes, unintentionally marginalizing students with specific needs and affecting their social participation and academic engagement (Tshuma & Moyo, 2023). These gaps have direct implications for student wellbeing, as marginalized learners may experience isolation, reduced confidence, and diminished resilience (Ncube, 2023). The goal of this research is to explore how Ubuntugogy can inform the design of curricula and digital learning strategies to promote inclusivity, enhance student resilience, and foster wellbeing. To assess the potential effectiveness of such approaches, the study examines how culturally grounded, Ubuntu-informed teaching practices influence learner engagement, social participation, and academic outcomes in

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technology-mediated environments. Addressing these challenges requires integrating inclusive principles into the design of curricula, teaching strategies, and digital learning tools, guided by culturally relevant frameworks such as Ubuntugogy, which foreground care, reciprocity, and relational accountability in learning interactions (Zhakata & Madikizela-Madiya, 2025).

2.5. Heritage-Based Education 5.0

The Heritage-Based Education (HBE) 5.0 framework in Zimbabwe emphasizes five pillars: teaching, research, community service, innovation, and industrialisation, integrating technology and indigenous epistemologies to foster holistic development (Wuta, 2025). HBE 5.0 seeks to create learning environments that combine heritage-based approaches with modern pedagogical tools, supporting student wellbeing and social cohesion. However, tensions arise when technology-mediated teaching challenges the relational and community-oriented ethos of Ubuntu, particularly in contexts where inclusivity and SNE are poorly understood or implemented (Mapfumo, 2024). Opportunities exist to leverage HBE 5.0 to enhance digital collaboration, innovation, and community engagement; however, practical constraints such as resource limitations, digital inequities, and inadequate faculty training must be addressed to realize these goals (Chikonde, 2024). Integrating Ubuntugogy within the HBE 5.0 pillars offers a promising pathway to reconcile technological affordances with culturally grounded, inclusive education that promotes resilience and wellbeing among diverse student populations (Wuta, 2025). Synthesizing the literature reveals interconnected themes of Ubuntu, HBE 5.0, blended learning, SNE, and student wellbeing. Ubuntu provides the philosophical foundation for relational and inclusive pedagogy, while HBE 5.0 offers a structured framework for implementing these principles alongside technology-mediated learning. Digital inequities, policy-practice gaps in inclusivity, and misunderstandings of SNE challenge effective implementation, impacting resilience and holistic wellbeing. These insights directly inform the empirical objectives of this study, guiding the investigation of how Ubuntu-informed blended learning approaches can enhance student wellbeing, foster resilience, and support inclusivity in an anonymized Zimbabwean university, contributing knowledge applicable nationally, regionally, and internationally.

3. Theoretical / Analytical Framework

This study was guided by a conceptual and analytical framework termed the Ubuntugogy Framework, which integrates Ubuntu-informed pedagogy with constructs of resilience, holistic wellbeing, and inclusivity in higher education. The framework provides an interpretive and practical lens for understanding how culturally grounded, technology-enhanced pedagogical practices can foster comprehensive student development, strengthen resilience, and address gaps in special needs education (SNE). By connecting Ubuntu principles with actionable teaching strategies, the framework situates student experiences within relational, communal, and digital contexts, offering a structured model to analyse the impact of blended and online learning environments on wellbeing, inclusivity, and academic engagement outcomes.

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3.1. Ubuntugogy

Ubuntugogy, derived from Ubuntu philosophy, emphasizes interconnectedness, reciprocity, shared responsibility, and care within social and educational communities (Chikomo, 2024; Gumbo, 2023). In higher education, Ubuntugogy serves as both a philosophical and pedagogical lens, guiding how teaching practices can cultivate collaboration, empathy, and mutual support among students and lecturers. Its relational and communal orientation aligns closely with resilience and wellbeing by promoting social cohesion, emotional support, and community-based learning, thereby creating environments where students feel valued, included, and empowered (Mushayikwa, 2021). Ubuntugogy also provides a conceptual basis for integrating SNE, encouraging lecturers to recognize and accommodate diverse learning needs while fostering equitable participation. Applying Ubuntugogy in technology-mediated contexts requires deliberate strategies to maintain relational presence, facilitate peer-to-peer engagement, and create inclusive digital spaces, ensuring that philosophical ideals translate into tangible outcomes for student wellbeing, resilience, and engagement (Chikonde, 2024).

3.2. Resilience, Wellbeing, and Inclusivity

Resilience is conceptualized as the capacity of students to adapt and thrive amid academic, social, and emotional challenges, while wellbeing encompasses mental, emotional, and social health within the learning environment (Ncube, 2023; Tshuma & Moyo, 2023). Inclusivity, particularly in relation to SNE, reflects equitable access, participation, and recognition of diverse abilities and learning needs. The Ubuntugogy Framework positions relational Ubuntu principles as mediators of technology-enhanced pedagogy, which, when strategically implemented, can enhance inclusive wellbeing, resilience, and academic engagement outcomes (Zhakata & Zireva, 2025). By integrating relational approaches, collaborative learning, and SNE considerations, the framework enables systematic analysis of how Ubuntu-informed blended learning practices contribute to holistic student development. The framework explicitly links cultural philosophy, pedagogical design, and technological affordances to measurable outcomes, offering a lens for both diagnosing current gaps and guiding the development of actionable strategies for inclusive, resilient, and culturally responsive higher education.

4. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative single-case study design complemented by narrative inquiry to explore how Ubuntu-informed blended learning fosters student wellbeing, resilience, and inclusivity in higher education. The selected Zimbabwean university is anonymized to ensure ethical compliance, while providing a focused context for generating in-depth insights. A single-case approach enables detailed examination of institutional practices, student experiences, and lecturer strategies, while producing findings that are potentially transferable to national, regional, and international higher education settings (Yin, 2018). The study sample included four educational foundations lecturers and eighteen students, organized into three focus groups of six members each, representing postgraduate diploma, master's, and

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undergraduate cohorts. Participants were purposively selected to ensure that they could provide rich, relevant insights on Ubuntu-informed pedagogy, blended learning, and experiences of inclusivity and special needs education (SNE) (Palinkas et al., 2015). The selection criteria included prior experience with technology-mediated learning, active engagement in HBE 5.0 courses, familiarity with inclusive teaching practices, willingness to participate in focus groups or interviews, and representation across postgraduate diploma, master's, and undergraduate cohorts. These criteria were applied to capture diverse perspectives on how Ubuntugogy informs teaching, learning, and student wellbeing. Each participant was assigned a coding identifier (e.g., L1–L4 for lecturers, FG1–FG3 for focus groups) to protect confidentiality and facilitate systematic data analysis.

Data were collected sequentially, starting with semi-structured interviews with lecturers, followed by focus group discussions with students. All interviews and focus group sessions were audio-recorded with participants' consent, and the recordings were fully transcribed verbatim to ensure accurate representation of responses. These methods allowed exploration of both lived experiences and institutional practices, with particular attention to inclusivity, SNE support, and relational aspects of blended learning. Reflexive thematic analysis and narrative coding were employed to identify patterns and generate interpretive insights across data sources (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Triangulation of interviews and focus groups ensured methodological rigor. Member checking and reflexive journaling were conducted to validate interpretations and enhance the credibility, dependability, and trustworthiness of findings. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how Ubuntu-informed technology-mediated pedagogy shapes resilience, wellbeing, and inclusive practices in higher education

5. Findings

Analysis of the collected data generated five major themes reflecting experiences of Ubuntu-informed blended learning, resilience, wellbeing, and inclusivity at the anonymized Zimbabwean university. These themes revealed relational, technological, pedagogical, and social dimensions of learning, highlighting both enablers and barriers to inclusive student engagement.

5.1. Relational Presence Promotes Resilience, Wellbeing and Inclusivity

Relational presence was central to fostering resilience, wellbeing, and inclusion in technology-mediated learning. Both students and lecturers highlighted that supportive interactions, peer collaboration, and lecturer engagement strengthened a sense of belonging and communal learning practices.

> *FG1: "When we check in with each other online, I feel part of the class; it makes the workload easier and less stressful."*

Students felt that daily peer check-ins and collaborative tasks enhanced their confidence and reduced feelings of isolation. Relational practices online created a supportive learning environment where they could share challenges and receive guidance.

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> *L1: "I make sure to reach out to students individually; these connections help them cope with challenges and feel valued in the learning process."*

Lecturers deliberately facilitated relational connections to monitor wellbeing and support learning. Both data sources corroborate strongly, reflecting alignment between students' lived experiences and lecturers' intentional pedagogical strategies. Relational presence significantly enhanced student engagement, emotional wellbeing, and coping strategies. The consistent perspectives across instruments confirm the centrality of relational practices in promoting inclusivity.

5.2. Digital And Material Inequities Mediate Inclusion and Wellbeing

Disparities in access to devices, internet connectivity, and learning resources were significant barriers to equitable participation. Both lecturers and students recognized that inequities limited engagement and affected social and academic inclusion.

> *FG2: "Sometimes I must share a laptop with my sibling, which can make it challenging to access it whenever I need. Additionally, when the internet fails, I end up missing important class discussions and fall behind on lessons."*

Students expressed frustration and stress caused by unreliable access to technology. These limitations directly influenced their ability to engage with online learning activities and collaborate with peers.

> *L2: "Some students cannot access our online activities because of unstable internet connections, which limits their participation. This situation negatively affects both their academic performance and their sense of belonging in the learning community."*

Lecturers observed the same challenges from a systemic perspective and attempted to mitigate them through asynchronous resources and flexible deadlines. Data from both instruments corroborate; students' personal experiences align with lecturers' observations of structural barriers. Digital and material inequities restricted participation and increased student stress. Addressing these inequities is necessary for promoting inclusive and equitable learning.

5.3. Narratives of Resilience: Ubuntu Community as Coping

Ubuntu-inspired communal support emerged as a critical coping mechanism for navigating academic and personal challenges. Peer networks, family support, and lecturer guidance collectively enhanced student resilience.

> *FG3: "My classmates help me understand difficult topics and explain concepts I find confusing. They also share notes with me, which makes it easier to stay on track with my studies."*

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Students relied on peer collaboration and mutual support to manage academic demands. Collective problem-solving strengthened coping strategies and maintained engagement during disruptions.

> *L3: "I noticed that when students mentor each other, they are better able to manage stress and cope with academic pressures. This peer support also helps them navigate challenges more effectively and feel more confident in their learning."*

Lecturers reinforced peer mentoring and communal support as part of the learning experience. Both instruments corroborated; focus groups highlighted lived experiences while interviews showed lecturer-facilitated structures supporting resilience. Resilience is relationally constructed and strengthened through Ubuntu-informed support. Peer and lecturer engagement contributes significantly to wellbeing outcomes.

5.4. Pedagogic Adaptations and Tensions: HBE Pillars Versus SNE Realities

While HBE 5.0 emphasizes innovation, industrialization, and community service, students with diverse learning needs faced challenges accessing equitable learning opportunities. Both lecturers and students discussed the tension between curriculum goals and SNE realities.

> *FG1: "Some group activities are challenging for me due to my learning difficulty, even though the curriculum expects full participation from all students. These challenges can make it harder for me to keep up and engage as actively as my peers."*

Students' experiences revealed difficulties balancing curriculum expectations with personal learning needs. Inadequate adaptation of tasks created stress and limited engagement.

> *L4: "Adapting lessons to accommodate all students while adhering to the HBE pillars can be challenging. At times, this requires us to find a balance between fostering innovation and ensuring inclusivity for every learner."*

Lecturers acknowledged structural and pedagogical constraints in implementing inclusive practices. Data corroborated across instruments, though emphasis differed: students focus on lived challenges, lecturers on systemic tensions. Pedagogic adaptations were inconsistently applied, highlighting gaps between policy and classroom reality. Flexibility and sensitivity to SNE are essential to support inclusive learning.

5.5 Inclusivity Gaps, Modern Stereotyping, and Impact on Social Life

Misunderstandings around challenge, impairment, and disorder contributed to stereotyping that negatively impacted social engagement. Both students and lecturers reported gaps between statutory policy and actual implementation.

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> *FG2: "Some classmates use words that make me feel different, which can be discouraging. This behaviour affects my confidence and makes me hesitant to participate in online forums."*

Students' confidence and participation were affected by language and behavioural stereotyping. Social interaction and peer engagement were limited by these experiences.

> *L2: "Even though policies promote inclusivity, some lecturers and students mislabel or misunderstand disabilities. This misunderstanding negatively impacts participation and limits opportunities for social engagement."*

Lecturers recognized misalignment between policy and practice, acknowledging gaps in knowledge and awareness. Both instruments corroborated, reflecting consistent recognition of inclusion challenges from multiple perspectives. Inclusivity gaps and stereotyping hinder student wellbeing, engagement, and social life. Awareness and training are necessary to bridge knowledge gaps and reduce discriminatory practices.

Across the five themes, relational presence, Ubuntu-informed community support, and responsive pedagogic adaptations emerged as enablers of resilience, wellbeing, and inclusivity, while digital inequities, SNE challenges, and modern stereotyping acted as barriers. These patterns collectively inform the proposed Ubuntu-informed Resilience and Inclusivity Framework, linking relational practices, technology-mediated pedagogy, curricular adaptations, and inclusivity strategies to actionable policy and practice recommendations at national, regional, and international levels.

6. Discussion

6.1. Theory Alignment: Ubuntu, Resilience, Wellbeing, and SNE in Blended Learning

The findings of this study underscored the centrality of Ubuntu principles of communalism, relationality, and reciprocity as an analytic lens for understanding resilience, wellbeing, and inclusive practices in higher education. Both lecturers and students highlighted that relational presence within the classroom and online spaces strengthened social bonds, facilitated coping mechanisms, and enhanced mental health outcomes. This aligns with Gumbo (2023), who emphasized that Ubuntu-informed learning communities foster adaptive resilience in technology-mediated contexts, particularly post-COVID. Similarly, Tshuma and Moyo (2023) argue that Ubuntugogy extends beyond moral philosophy to practical pedagogical interventions that nurture wellbeing and inclusion. Blended learning, while offering flexibility and continuity, exposes the nuanced interaction between Ubuntu principles and digital-mediated pedagogy. Dhawan (2020) notes that online learning, although critical during crises, often lacks relational depth, potentially compromising communal learning values. However, when intentionally designed with Ubuntu-informed strategies, technology-mediated spaces can sustain relational engagement and peer support. Chikonde (2024) reinforces this, highlighting that embedding

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Ubuntu in blended environments enhances social cohesion, supports special needs students, and mitigates the psychosocial impacts of learning disruptions. The study also reflected tensions in operationalizing Ubuntu in heterogeneous classrooms, particularly where special needs education (SNE) was inadequately understood. Dube and Zikhali (2023) report persistent policy–practice gaps in Zimbabwean universities, where the nuances of challenge, disorder, or impairment are frequently misinterpreted. The current findings indicated that relational, Ubuntu-based strategies can mediate these gaps by fostering inclusive pedagogical environments, although success depends on educators' awareness, digital literacy, and institutional support. Data corroboration from both interviews and focus groups reinforced that relational presence is a significant predictor of inclusive wellbeing outcomes.

6.2. National and Regional Implications: HBE 5.0 Implementation and Policy Guidance

Heritage-Based Education (HBE) 5.0 presents a nationally significant framework that prioritizes teaching, research, community engagement, innovation, and industrialization (Chikomo, 2024). This study illustrated that integrating Ubuntugogy into HBE 5.0 enhances inclusivity, student wellbeing, and resilience outcomes, offering empirical evidence for national policy refinement. Mapfumo (2024) argues that technology-mediated learning remains underutilized in supporting SNE students, highlighting critical gaps that Ubuntu-informed interventions can address. By linking HBE pillars with relational, communal learning approaches, universities can promote culturally grounded pedagogy that simultaneously advances innovation and inclusivity. At a regional level, Southern African universities face similar challenges, including post-COVID learning disruption, digital inequities, and underdeveloped SNE practices (Madziva & Nyoni, 2021). The present findings suggested that Ubuntugogy, when integrated with blended learning strategies, can enhance student engagement and wellbeing across diverse contexts. Mushayikwa (2021) highlights barriers to implementing Ubuntu-informed teaching, such as entrenched hierarchical teaching models and insufficient digital infrastructure. However, our study demonstrated that deliberate, context-specific adaptations supported by HBE principles enable effective relational engagement and resilience-building. This model provides actionable insights for universities seeking to align inclusive pedagogy with post-pandemic digital transformation agendas.

6.3. International Relevance: Culturally Grounded Inclusive Pedagogy and Transferable Model

Globally, higher education increasingly emphasizes culturally responsive pedagogy and mental health support in blended and online learning (Marignge & Gibbs, 2022; Ncube, 2023). The empirical evidence from this Zimbabwean case contributes to international debates by demonstrating how Ubuntu-informed pedagogy can operationalize culturally grounded, inclusive approaches in technology-mediated learning. Chikonde (2024) and Tshuma and Moyo (2023) both argue that the principles of relationality and communal support are transferable, allowing educators in diverse contexts to replicate resilience- and wellbeing-oriented strategies. Moreover, the study highlighted that effective

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implementation of inclusive, technology-mediated pedagogy requires attention to local epistemologies, structural inequities, and digital access disparities. Gumbo (2023) notes that without contextual adaptation, well-intentioned global models risk perpetuating exclusion. By explicitly integrating Ubuntu values into blended learning designs, this study offered a model that is both theoretically grounded and practically actionable, bridging policy, pedagogy, and technology. Narrative inquiry, as recommended by Makoni (2022), proves effective in capturing these complex interactions, emphasizing the lived experiences of students and lecturers as central to understanding and improving inclusive practices.

In conclusion, the discussion demonstrated that aligning Ubuntugogy with HBE 5.0 pillars and technology-mediated learning produces significant benefits for resilience, wellbeing, and SNE inclusion. Nationally, it provides guidance for policy implementation; regionally, it offers adaptable strategies for Southern African universities; and internationally, it contributes a culturally responsive framework that is transferable across diverse higher education contexts. The findings substantiate the proposed analytical framework, showing that relational, Ubuntu-based pedagogy is central to sustaining inclusive, resilient learning communities in post-pandemic higher education.

7. Contribution of the Study

7.1. Proposed Framework: Ubuntu-Informed Resilience and Inclusivity Framework

The proposed framework integrates Ubuntu principles as the foundation for promoting resilience, wellbeing, and inclusivity in technology-mediated higher education contexts. Ubuntu, emphasizing relationality, care, and reciprocity, serves as the core philosophical lens guiding pedagogical design and institutional interventions (Tshuma & Moyo, 2023 2024). These principles foreground collaborative learning, mutual support, and recognition of each student's unique challenges, including those related to special needs education (SNE).

7.2. Mediating Pedagogy

Blended learning environments act as the primary mediating pedagogy, providing flexibility and continuity in post-pandemic contexts while facilitating relational engagement. Peer support mechanisms, such as structured group work, digital discussion forums, and mentoring, operationalize Ubuntu values by promoting shared responsibility and community care. Heritage-based projects, aligned with HBE 5.0 pillars, further contextualize learning in students' sociocultural realities, fostering both academic engagement and a sense of belonging (Chikomo, 2024; Dhawan, 2020).

7.3. Institutional Supports

Institutional infrastructure, policy frameworks, and SNE capacity-building initiatives are critical enablers. Policy measures ensure inclusivity is embedded in course design, assessment, and campus practices, while digital infrastructure mitigates inequities in access. Professional development for lecturers in

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Ubuntugogy and inclusive teaching strengthens their capacity to support diverse learners effectively (Dube & Zikhali, 2023; Mushayikwa, 2021).

7.4. Outcomes

The framework targets four interrelated outcomes: enhanced student wellbeing, strengthened resilience, improved inclusivity, and reduction of academic and social gaps. By embedding Ubuntu values in both pedagogy and institutional practices, the framework fosters adaptive learning communities capable of responding to post-pandemic challenges while promoting holistic student development.

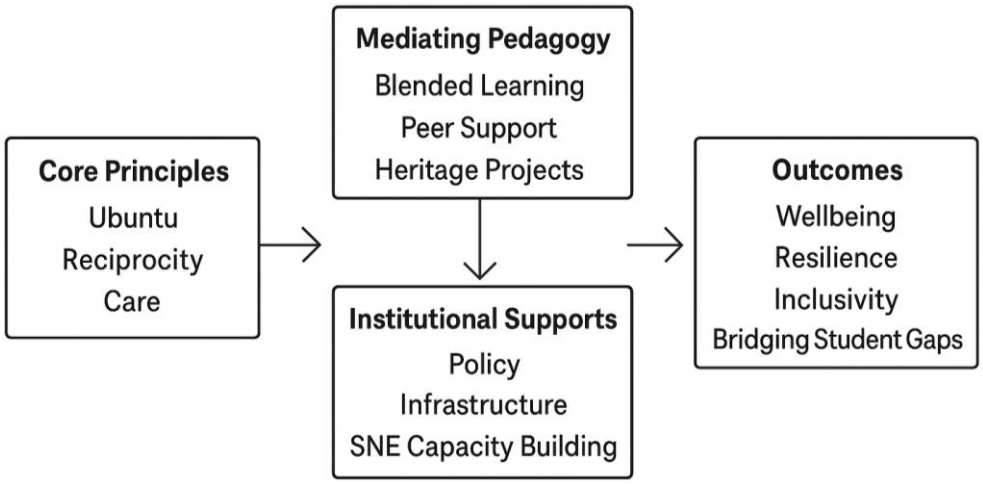

Figure 1: Ubuntu-Informed Resilience and Inclusivity Framework

A visual representation (Figure 1) illustrates the framework, depicting the flow from core principles (Ubuntu, reciprocity, care) → mediating pedagogy and institutional supports → anticipated outcomes (wellbeing, resilience, inclusivity, bridging student gaps). This figure highlights the dynamic interaction between philosophical, pedagogical, and structural dimensions in shaping inclusive higher education.

8. Conclusions

This research generated four main conclusions. First, integrating Ubuntu values into blended and technology-mediated learning spaces enhances student resilience, wellbeing, and inclusivity by fostering engagement, peer support, and emotional security. Second, digital and material inequities significantly mediate participation and learning outcomes, highlighting the need for equitable access to devices, connectivity, and SNE support. Third, while HBE 5.0 provides an enabling policy framework, actionable guidance is necessary to assist educators in embedding resilience and inclusivity within blended learning environments. Fourth, the Ubuntu-informed Resilience and Inclusivity Framework offer a transferable, testable model for culturally grounded, inclusive pedagogy, bridging theoretical principles with practical application. Theoretically, the study advances understanding of relational wellbeing and resilience by demonstrating how indigenous values can be operationalized in contemporary,

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technology-mediated education. Empirically, it contributes evidence supporting the framework's effectiveness and adaptability.

8.1. Limitations

This study was conducted within a single, anonymized university, which limits the diversity of contextual perspectives. The use of purposive sampling and reliance on self-reported data introduces potential bias, as participants' reflections were influenced by personal experiences. In addition, variations in digital access and knowledge of SNE among participants may have constrained engagement with technology-mediated learning. These factors limit the transferability of findings to other higher education settings, particularly outside Zimbabwe or Southern Africa. Future research should adopt multi-site designs, incorporate objective measures of wellbeing and resilience, and account for differences in digital infrastructure to enhance generalizability.

9. Recommendations and Implications

The findings of this study have significant implications for policy, practice, and research at national, regional, and international levels. At the national level, Zimbabwe's HBE 5.0 curriculum reforms provide an important platform for embedding culturally grounded pedagogies that foster student wellbeing and resilience. To operationalize these values, there is a need for explicit guidance that translates Ubuntu principles into technology-mediated learning practices. Professional development for teaching staff, particularly in SNE, should equip educators with inclusive pedagogical strategies alongside technological competencies. Addressing digital inequities is also critical, ensuring all students have access to devices, connectivity, and digital literacy support. Awareness initiatives can further reinforce the centrality of Ubuntu values, community, reciprocity, and care in promoting holistic student development. Regionally, Southern African universities can adapt the Ubuntu-informed Resilience and Inclusivity Framework to suit their unique socio-cultural and technological contexts. Cross-institutional collaboration through shared training programmes, joint research projects, and heritage-focused initiatives can strengthen inclusive, culturally responsive pedagogy across the region, supporting student engagement and resilience on a broader scale.

Internationally, the study provides a model for testing culturally grounded, resilience-inclusive pedagogies in technology-mediated learning environments. Global research can focus on developing measurable indicators for student wellbeing, inclusion, and resilience, while exploring how indigenous educational principles can inform broader inclusive higher education practices. By offering a framework that is both empirically grounded and adaptable, this study bridges the gap between culturally responsive educational theory and practical implementation across diverse contexts. Ubuntu-centred, technology-mediated learning that explicitly integrates inclusivity and SNE transforms abstract values into tangible wellbeing and resilience outcomes for all students, offering a practical, culturally grounded model for global higher education.

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