The Role of Value Creating Education and *Ubuntu* Philosophy in Fostering Humanism in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Soka (value creating) education is a Japanese concept propounded by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and further developed by Josei Toda and Daisaku Ikeda. This educational philosophy aims to foster individuals who can find meaning in their lives and contribute to the well-being of others to better society. Ubuntu, an African philosophy, espouses togetherness and collectivism. Like value creating education, Ubuntu promotes working for the good of all not solely the individual. Examining these two philosophies, this paper explored their role in promoting humanism. Focusing on the education system in Kenya, this paper investigated how the institutionalization of both philosophies can foster global citizens and realize a more humane Kenya. Furthermore, this paper illustrated the importance of educators as agents of change, aiding students to become global citizens who work towards building a more humanistic society. This paper concluded that integrating both value creating education and Ubuntu in the education system can serve as a tool to nurture individuals who will not only improve their quality of life but also contribute positively to promote a more just and prosperous world.
Keywords: humanism, Kenya, Makiguchi, Ikeda, value creating education, ubuntu philosophy

INTRODUCTION

According to the Population Reference Bureau (2019), 75 percent of the African population will be under 35 years old by 2030. A younger population presents a great opportunity to improve the situation in Africa. Many African countries, including Kenya, face countless challenges: poor leadership, corruption, poverty, climate change, and insecurity, which are

exacerbated by rapid development and modernization. Moreover, in place of the traditional African way of living together in harmony, a more egocentric and materialistic way of life is becoming the norm for many. The culture of togetherness, which promotes the "what can I do for my people" way of thinking, seems to have shifted to a culture that emphasizes "what can others do for me?" Consequently, most African societies have become, as the late Tanzanian President Mwalimu Julius Nyerere stated, a "man eat man" society; people are greedier, enriching themselves at the expense of others (Soyinka & Amin, 2016, p. 171). This way of life is contrary to the traditional African values of togetherness, compassion, and respect. The challenges of poor leadership and corruption have become major hindrances to the future of Kenya. Kenya can unlock its potential and prosper when the education system harnesses value-creating and Ubuntu philosophies to foster youth who are book smart and humane.

Within the education sector in Kenya, the egocentric societal ills of modern Kenya take the form of academic dishonesty, bullying, and the destruction of school property. Academic dishonesty is defined here as "cheating during tests, plagiarising, buying assignment papers, falsifying data, using dishonest excuses, getting others to take examinations, misusing resources, and manipulating academic staff" (Thomas and De Bruin, 2012, p. 14). In secondary schools, exam cheating is a serious and prevalent issue. According to the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC, 2020), they cancelled the result of 1,309 candidates who took the 2019 nationwide Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination because they cheated. The students caught cheating brought unauthorised notes to the examination center, used mobile phones to access information during the examination, and tried to have someone else take the examination for them (KNEC, 2020). The number of cheating cases was lower than 2018, when approximately 4,519 results were invalidated. The lower cases were in part due to the stringent measures KNEC and the Ministry of Education introduced to discourage cheating. Despite efforts to curb cheating, these malpractices continue to exist, proving to be a deeply rooted problem. The Cabinet Secretary and National Intelligence Service report that cheating not only involves candidates, but also parents, teachers and top examination officials of the KNEC (Wangui, 2020; Wanzala, 2018).

Examination malpratices are not limited to secondary schools. They infest institutions of higher learning as well. Siyat Shukri Ahmed's (2017) research to ascertain the methods used and the causes of examination cheating found high instances of cheating at the university level. Sampling 60 students from Umma University, a private university in Kenya, the study found that out of the 60 students he interviewed, 33 percent had cheated sometimes or rarely and 10 percent answered that they always cheat. Out of those who cheated, 26.8 percent used mobile phones and 40 percent relied

on written notes, while 10 percent adopted means of impersonification (Ahmed, 2017). In a study on examination malpractices at the Moi University's School of Engineering, a public Kenyan university, Starovoytova and Arimi (2017) found that 82 percent of the 95 students who responded to their questionnaire admitted cheating at some point during their academic life, while only 18 percent had nevercheated. The University of Nairobi (2020), a public Kenyan university, stipulates that those caught cheating in examinations and those who plagiarize or get others to write their dissertation papers and theses shall be expelled. Similarly, Kenyatta University (2018), also a public university, expels students who are found to have cheated on examinations. Despite cheating being widely condemned and strict punishment enforced in universities across the country, cases of examination cheating continue to prevail.

Similarly, the National Education Sector Strategic Plan for 2018 – 2022 notes that bullying is widespread in Kenyan schools (Ministry of Education, 2019). The report also asserts that Kenya has one of the highest rates of bullying incidents (Ministry of Education, 2019). The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines bullying as "any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths, who are not siblings or current dating partners that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated" (2019, para. 1). A study by the Ministry of Health, sponsored by the CDC and the World Health Organization, highlighted the extent of bullying in Kenyan secondary schools. The study surveyed 2,890 secondary school students between the ages of 13 and 15 and found that 57 percent of them were bullied on one or more days in a month (WHO, 2018). The study also showed that 2.1 percent (approximately 60 students) were bullied every day of the month (WHO, 2018). In this study, bullying took the form of being kicked, locked indoors and/or being made fun of because of their religion, race, color, or looks (WHO, 2018).

The disrespect for others has also extended to the disrespect for property. In Kenya, there has been an alarming number of unrest in schools. During these unrests, arson and property destruction occur. The National Crime Research Centre (NCRC), found that protesters burned over 130 schools, mostly public secondary schools, between May and August (during the second school term) of 2016 (NCRC, 2017). Top reasons for the unrest, included strict school rules, fear of exams, peer pressure, and strained teacher student relationships (NCRC, 2017).

Academic malpractice, bullying, and public property destruction are but a few examples of the destructive behaviours among youth in the Kenyan society. As these issues perpetuate, so does the inability to foster young Kenyan leaders who possess the power to become changemakers and create an altruistic society. How then can we nurture a society that respects

humanity? This paper first examines value-creating education and the *Ubuntu* philosophy to provide a better understanding of these concepts. The paper then discusses the institutionalization of value-creating education and the *Ubuntu* philosophy in the Kenyan educational curriculum to foster students with strong core humanistic values. This paper will also analyze the integration of these two philosophies into teacher training programs to redefine their role as agents of change.

VALUE CREATING EDUCATION

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi propounded the value creating education theory in the 1930s amid increasing militarism in Japan (Bethal, 1984). Makiguchi, a teacher, principal, and a Buddhist leader, opposed the nationalist education, which focused on indoctrinating children to support Japan's military state (Garrison et al, 2014). Toshiko Takagi's (1986) children book, titled *The Glass Rabbit*, illustrates the education system during the war. She states that they, the children, "were taught to make sacrifices by thinking of the soldiers at the [war] front" (Takagi, 1986, p. 11) and that "everyone just had to nod and accept things as they were" (Takagi, 1986, p. 13). Makiguchi rejected this ideology that brainwashed children towards nationalism that affirmed war and led many to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their nation. He was against education that solely exists for the sake of the nation. Makiguchi believed that a nation was made up of people, and thus, a nation's prosperity, enrichment, and health depended on whether the people were living happy and fulfilled lives (Makiguchi, 1993). Without focusing on the students' needs, education would not serve its intended purpose.

Makiguchi also rejected the hierarchical structure of the education system and the learning structure where children were crammed with information, making them feel uninterested with the subjects taught (Makiguchi, 1993). He proclaimed that happiness was the ultimate goal of human life, and that education should be the means by which to "acquire competence as creators of value and thereby find happiness in the process" (Bethel, 1984, p. 57). Makiguchi stressed that of prime importance was fostering children who can live happy lives as members of society. Influenced by his Buddhist faith and the idea of interconnectedness of all beings and the responsibility of each individual to respect every being on earth, Makiguchi envisioned education as the tool to nurture individuals who accept responsibility not only for their lives, but also for their society (Sharma, 2008, p. 55). In an effort to promote value creating education, Makiguchi, with Josei Toda, his mentee, published the first volume of his book *The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy*. This book was developed based on Makiguchi's 32-years experience as an educator and his hope for an education system that enabled children to live fulfilling lives (Kumagai,

2000, p. 35). Makiguchi believed that happiness was founded on the pursuit of value; beauty, benefit, and good. Expounding on this idea, Ikeda explains that:

> Through one's interactions with one's environment, people can bring ever more beauty, comfort, and justice into the world. The creation of value is, Makiguchi asserted, the outcome of one's active engagement with others. Any situation or circumstance presents both challenges and possibilities. The actualization of positive possibilities—including those that may be far from apparent—is the essence of value creation (cited in Sherman, 2016, p. 5).

Creating value translates to caring for others and working to have a just and inclusive society.

After Makiguchi's death in 1944, as a result of being imprisoned by the militarist government for his pacifist ideology, Toda continued his mentor's work to actualize value creating educational philosophy. Toda, who lived through the World War II, believed that respect for humanity would be realized if education fostered people with a "profound respect for [the] sanctity of life" (Ikeda, 2010, p. 110). Toda's mentee, Ikeda, further concretized the concept of value creating education as a means to cultivate human character that enables each student to live a more fulfilling and happier life. Ikeda (2010) explains the concept of value creation more simply as "the capacity to find meaning, to enhance one's own existence, and to contribute to the well-being of others" (p. 112). Thus, Ikeda stresses the importance of value creating education to foster global citizens who undertake the task of building a humane society. For Ikeda, global citizens carry three important traits: "the wisdom to perceive the interconnectedness of all life; the courage not to fear or deny difference but to respect and strive to understand people of different cultures and to grow from encounters with them; and the compassion to maintain an empathy that extends beyond one's immediate surroundings to those suffering in distance places" (2010, p. 112-113).

UBUNTU PHILOSOPHY

Similar to the principles of the value creating education philosophy, *Ubuntu* philosophy centers on humanity and human values. According to the *New World Encyclopedia* (2020), *Ubuntu* originates from the Bantu languages of Zulu and Xhosa, and can be translated to "humanity towards others, humanness, or being human." Christian Gade (2011) finds that the term *Ubuntu* has been used since the 1850s and can be defined as "humanity, humanness, human kindness" (pp.307-308). Fainos Mangena (2016) in *Hunhu/Ubuntu in the Traditional Thought of Southern Africa*, states that the term *Ubuntu* is expressed in the Nguni/Ndebele phrase "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu," meaning "a person is a person through other persons." Likewise, in the Bantu language of Swahili language, "utu" means humanness and

holds the idea that every action should be done for the benefit of the whole community. Jordan. K. Ngubane (as cited in Gade, 2011) in An African Explains Apartheidwrites:

> Supreme virtue lay in being humane, in accepting the human being as a part of yourself, with a right to be denied nothing that you possessed. It was inhuman to drive the hungry stranger from your door, for your neighbor's sorrow was yours. This code constituted a philosophy of life, and the great Sutu-nguni family (Bantu has political connotations that the Africans resent) called it, significantly, *ubuntu* or *botho* – pronounced *butu* – the practice of being humane (p. 309).

The above definitions highlight *Ubuntu*'s celebration of humanity and its lessons on the need to care for and respect each other. *Ubuntu* acknowledges that we are all connected and that what we do consciously or unconsciously impacts others.

Although *Ubuntu* as a term has appeared in various African sources from as early as the 19th century, it was Nelson Mandela who championed the spirit of *Ubuntu* during the transition from apartheid to democracy. During a 2006 interview, Mandela shared his understanding of *Ubuntu* by narrating the story of a traveler who, whenever he passed by a village, was offered food and water even without asking. For Mandela, the spirit of caring for the welfare of each other and the community at large is the spirit of *Ubuntu*. Mandela's story teaches us how the life of the other is as important as our own. "*Ubuntu*," therefore, is a relationship in which each person understands the other's pain, tries to care for them, and wants to contribute to their happiness.

In his book *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Desmond Tutu (1999) writes:

> 'A person is a person through other persons.' It is not, 'I think therefore I am.' 'I am human because I belong. I participate, I share.' A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are… Harmony, friendliness, community are great goods. Social harmony is for us the summum bonum—the greatest good. Anything that subverts, that undermines this sought-after good, is to be avoided like the plague (p. 29).

Tutu stresses that *Ubuntu* is about compassion and harmony, and it encompasses doing good for the world. *Ubuntu* is challenging ourselves to not only recognize and appreciate our similarities, but also welcome and respect our differences.

Michael Onyebuchi Eze highlights that the acknowledgement of the "other's" uniqueness and differences shows our humanity, which requires us to view the 'other' as a "mirror for [our] subjectivity" (cited in Mohamed Diarra, 2018, p.121). Understanding each other is important for humans to peacefully exist. Without social harmony, destructive and divisive disharmony thrives, separating people from people and people from nature (Tutu, 1999). Therefore, the appreciation of social harmony, interconnectedness, compassion, and respect for others are *Ubuntu* values that enable communities to thrive. These same values are also reflected in value creating educational philosophy. Education is a powerful medium in which we can nurture, translate, and transfer, these values to our current and future young leaders.

THE ROLE OF VALUE CREATING EDUCATION AND UBUNTU PHILOSOPHY IN EDUCATION

If we want to work towards achieving a peaceful and inclusive society, value creating education and *Ubuntu* are important philosophies that we must not only understand theoretically but put into practice. These two philosophies encompass three pivotal elements to promoting humanness: the acknowledgement of interconnectedness, the goal of harmonious coexistence as the center of our actions and behaviour, and the focus on the self in creating change. Integrating value creating education and *Ubuntu* into the Kenyan education system, from primary to university, is vital in re-envisioning education. There is a need to nurture these values in each individual, beyond conceptual discussion, to shape empowered future leaders who can create a more humanistic and sustainable society.

Ngogi Emmanuel Mahaye (2018) asserts in *The Philosophy of Ubuntu in Education*, that "Education must create a consciousness among both children and adults that will encourage and enable them to think positively in the reclaiming and reconstruction of their history, cultural heritage, identity and personhood" (p. 7). Mahaye (2018) further states that Ubuntu in education gives learners the primacy to humanness and an adoption of a more holistic view by the learners rather than reducing their abilities or potential. The purpose of education is "to free the minds of the oppressed in order to destroy social classes and create one human consciousness within the society" (p. 17). Similarly, Makiguchi and Ikeda believe that true education is about transforming students to be better human beings, who create value. Ikeda, founder of Soka University, which is grounded on value creating education, states in his acceptance speech in

1992 when receiving his honorary doctorate from the University of Nairobi, Kenya, "the rich humanism pulsing through the African culture would without fail become a wellspring of wisdom for the world in overcoming the deadlocks of modern civilization" (*Varsity Focus*, 1993, p. 8), and that "the African heart has the abundant wisdom that connects people with people, people with nature and people with eternity" (Nishiura, 2007, p.272). Ikeda's speech reveals his belief that Africa as a whole is a continent of great humanity and holds great promise in addressing the myriad challenges it faces.

How can we practically apply these philosophies to serve humanity? School is a community and an important space to start to teach these core values (Mahaye, 2018, p. 16). Students spend most of their time at school. It is at school that they interact with different people and engage with potential role models (teachers). Schools then are a critical place where students can be taught from an early age how to relate with one another, respect each other's differences, and learn that they all need each other to flourish. Education should focus on "teaching purpose of life and cultivate strong enriched minds and genuine humanity" (Ikeda, 2006, p. 279). With an education focused on each student's potential and the development of human values such as compassion, kindness, justice and respect, a culture of humanity can thrive. Thus, the school environment provides a productive space for children to learn about humanness and the role of self and interconnectedness.

Humanness is based on the idea of interconnectedness. In *Ubuntu*, "a person is a person through other persons." This view parallels the concept of "oneness of life and the environment" in Nichiren Buddhism, on which value creating education is based (Garrison, Hickman & Ikeda, 2014, p. 175). This principle ideates that one's life and his/her environment are inseparable like one's reflection in a mirror. To understand the 'we,' we must first comprehend the 'I' and 'I's' role in the larger 'we.' Part of applying these philosophies first involves ensuring that each member of society works towards improving their character, exuding the fundamental human qualities of kindness, respect, compassion, and gratitude. From his book *The Pedagogy of Value-Creating Education* (1930), Makiguchi believes that there is a need to transform the way people live their lives. He advocates for "a consciously interactive, independent mode of existence, a life of committed contribution" from a passive and dependent way of living (cited in Goulah, 2010, p. 270). Nzimakwe (2014) echoes Makiguchi's statement when he asserts that in *Ubuntu* "no idea or situation can be transformed into reality unless there is a totally transformed human being driving it" (p. 35). In essence, the responsibility of self in creating change should be realised. When one works to better oneself, they are in part improving the community at large.

Contributing to the welfare of others is essential in harnessing harmonious relationships. Thinking of others requires us to practice global citizenship that is "respect[ing] and to understand people of different cultures and to grow from [our] encounters with them" (Ikeda, 2010, p. 112). Working to understand others enables us to become more empathetic and develop appreciation for our commonalities and differences. Eze (2011) echoes this view in his paper "I am Because you are":

> ...a person's humanity flourishes through a process of relation and distance, of uniqueness and differences. A realization of the subjective gifts (of humanity) we bear to each other motivates an unconditional desire to view and harness other people's uniqueness and difference, not as a threat but as a complement to one's own humanity (p. 12).

As such, tolerance, respect, empathy, compassion and a sense of responsibility towards others become important to develop harmonious relationships.

At all levels of education, more focus is spent on cramming and passing national examinations. Little emphasis is placed on teaching life skills. Education, however, is dynamic and can be challenged and used to simultaneously hone values and career skills. Education should not only serve the nation or economic growth but should also develop students who can contribute positively to realising a just world. Acknowledging that there is a huge gap in resource distribution to schools, we cannot ignore the fact that the world is becoming more digitalised. This can create an opportunity for students to interact with others whether locally or internationally to learn more about other cultures, environment, views and thoughts. This interaction will build interpersonal skills and give students opportunities to learn about tolerance of diverse views. Combining cross-cultural interactions with homestay activities and community service such as volunteering in orphanages and aging homes can further nurture responsibility, compassion, and respect for each other.

Moreover, classes should incorporate literature texts not only from Kenyan authors but also from the broader African context and world. These global experiences through books will enable students to not only improve their communication skills but also learn and be exposed to different cultures, belief systems, and issues. This will help in encouraging empathy toward others who seem different from oneself. Students would also develop critical thinking skills that would challenge them to re-examine their thoughts, beliefs and perceptions about others and the world at large.

Exam-driven curricula and the scarcity of resources and teachers has made students irrationally competitive. They have also forced teachers to adopt teaching styles that provide no time to focus on the growth of each student's character. Educational institutions tend to be fixed on the school

and teachers' overall academic performance, which can contribute to some students' lack of integrity, respect and compassion. As noted earlier, arson was attributed to strained teacher-student relationships (NCRC, 2017, p. 24). Part of institutionalising value creating education and *Ubuntu* should entail in-service training for teachers. Teachers are key in promoting values these two philosophies define.

Students spend a majority of their time with their teachers. This relationship contributes in moulding the characters and personalities of the students. Therefore, to actualise the principles of value creating education and *Ubuntu*, teachers must play an active role as agents of change. Makiguchi (1983-1988) compared a teacher's role to that of "an aide, guide and midwife, empowering and assisting the activities of the learners themselves" (vol. 6, p. 54). Similarly, Ikeda (2008) emphasizes that "an educator dedicated to watching over and fostering students must be genuine and sincere" (p. 196) and must have "the compassion to devote oneself wholeheartedly to serving young people (p. 196). Mahaye (2018) also posits that *Ubuntu* begins from the Principal and teachers and that teachers who embrace *Ubuntu* treat all learners equally (p. 17). Teachers who practice *Ubuntu* in schools should be committed, caring and dedicated to their students in spite of the students' different backgrounds and circumstances. Educational goals of developing capable individuals cannot be achieved without teachers devoting themselves in guiding the students in their character building and instilling in them core values such as empathy, respect, compassion and justice.

For teachers to effectively act as agents of change, they themselves would have to internalise and practice the philosophies of value creating education and *Ubuntu*. According to Muthamba (2017), teachers are not trained on life skills and most rely on school counselors to deal with students' needs. Many teachers often substitute life skills with examinable subjects like physics and mathematics. Therefore, in addition to holding the credentials to teach, this paper recommends the inclusion of value creating education and *Ubuntu* philosophies in the syllabi for teachers training colleges and universities. Incorporating these two philosophies as mandatory subjects at the university level, will not only produce graduates grounded on the values of these two philosophies, but will also develop teachers who "practice and experience in their own lives the principles and techniques of learning that they [seek] to help their students understand and acquire" (Bethel, 1989, p. 179).

A significant paradigm shift is needed in the way we understand the true value and process of education, and the role of educators as agents of change. Learning value creating education and *Ubuntu* values can help create solutions to the challenges facing African societies such as xenophobia in South Africa, the civil unrest in Ethiopia and Somalia, tribal clashes, and the

refugee crisis brought about by poor leadership that is exacerbated by selfishness, greed and indifference. This paper proposes education curricula that focus on nurturing students and teachers with uphold compassion, wisdom and the courage to embrace others and their differences.

CONCLUSION

Though originating from two different countries, value creating education philosophy and *Ubuntu* share several similar perspectives on how a society can become more just and prosperous. Both philosophies demonstrate a humanistic-based approach centered on the understanding of the interconnectedness of all lives, the importance of building harmonious relationships and of possessing values such as respect, appreciation, compassion, and kindness as the way to attain happiness for everyone. Recognizing the paramount role these philosophies can play in creating a better society, this paper promotes their integration into educational curricula as a tool to foster young leaders who emulate core values that impede issues that continue to plague societies including racism, tribalism, corruption, and injustice. This paper suggests that institutionalizing value creating education and *Ubuntu* philosophies from Primary to University level education can be the first steps in shaping a more humane society in Kenya and the world at large.

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