

Social media age: Where is the spirit of Ubuntu in the educational system?

Joshua Chukwuere

Information Systems Department, North-West University, South Africa, joshchukwuere@gmail.com

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Abstract

Ubuntu promotes the caring spirit of humanity. In the presence of Ubuntu, the growing rate of teachers' absenteeism in their duty post is alarming across schools and subject lines. Social media platforms promote continuous presence and limiting physical presence. At the same time, Ubuntu promotes caring for one another irrespective of gender, age, race, status, background, and many more. Notwithstanding the benefits attached to African philosophy, Ubuntu, and social media, teachers' presence in schools keeps dropping physically and virtually. This study used secondary data in seeking to understand how African philosophy, Ubuntu, and social media can be applied in closing or eliminating the growing teacher absenteeism in schools in this social media age.

Keywords – *Ubuntu, African philosophy, social media, educational system, dimension of presence, absenteeism.*

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a growing number of teachers missing (absenteeism) each day in schools across disadvantaged communities (Mashaba & Maile, 2018). According to Mbiza and Jordaan (2019), teachers' absenteeism in South African schools is between 8% and 10% daily. The increase is becoming a concern for the education department, school management, parents, and learners globally. However, there are several reasons for teachers' absenteeism, such as health, family, financial matters, and lack of the spirit of Ubuntu. Mashaba and Maile (2018) and Mothibeli (2017) argued that instructional, social, personal, and economic, political, environmental, and school factors influence teachers' absenteeism in schools daily. Research shows that teacher's absenteeism leads to disruption in the academic programme and student's performance (Finlayson, 2009). This study applied African philosophy and social media in looking at the five dimensions of presence such as physical, temporal, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional presence in discussing and addressing teachers' daily absenteeism in schools. These dimensions of presence, according to Jansen (2018), are the dominant force that cultivates humanity and unites classroom communication in facilitating the teaching-learning process. However, teachers in South African schools have failed to cultivate these five dimensions of presence in schools and societies (Jansen, 2018).

2. LITERATURE SURVEY

2.1. Teachers absenteeism

Academic or school activities are mainly facilitated by teachers on a daily basis. School absenteeism can be regarded as staying-away from school and its activities without approval from the school management (Holloway, 2011). In this study, absenteeism in school is seen as a habitual behavior of not attending school without leave. In addition, the teacher's absence from school is on the increase. According to Mothibeli (2017), teacher's absenteeism in schools is a growing concern and having a negative impact on education and student's performance. The author further alludes that many countries in Africa, such as Ghana, Uganda, South Africa, Nigeria, and many others, are experiencing different forms of teacher's daily absenteeism in schools as a result of personal, family, health, and transport problems. A study by Obrador (2014) in the Houston area of the United States highlights that teacher's absenteeism can be attributed to job satisfaction, demographic factors, financial issues, organizational issues, and many more.

In the same vein, absenteeism in school is also seen among the students. According to Majeed, Hussain, Afzal, and Gilani (2019), student absenteeism is seen when students miss school days or over a period because of various

deficiencies. These studies show that absenteeism in schools is a serious issue and a concern for the education system. This pressing issue can be tackled or eliminated with the application of African philosophy, Ubuntu, and social media platforms.

2.2. Education theory: African philosophy

According to Oyeshile (2008), philosophy is the 'self-consciousness' of any discipline. It is a reflection, status, and purpose of discipline. Philosophy, as a self-consciousness informs what a discipline stands for, for example, its nature, expression, discussion, and intellectual underpinning (Oyeshile, 2008). African philosophy is a philosophy that is grounded in African history, heritage, culture, tradition, and intellectual capacity towards challenging Western oppression, orientation, and colonization (Oyeshile, 2008; Higgs & Smith, 2017). African philosophy focuses on challenging the dominance of Western ideology and its knowledge over that of the African people, while Olagoke (1995) suggests that African philosophy as an educational theory geared towards the transformation of the African mindset from the Western and Eurocentric ideology in different sectors of life. According to Higgs and Smith (2017) and Anthony (2014), African philosophy challenges and collapses the impacts and dominance of Western and Eurocentric ideas, knowledge, and skills. Over time, African people have been inferior in their mind-set, merely believing that everything from the Western world is true and must be trusted. African philosophy is geared towards the transformation of such kind of mind-set, consciousness, belief, and identity of an African. Furthermore, it underlies an understanding of the great potentials of Africans to make, innovate, and manage their destiny.

2.3. The dimension of presence and education theory

Ubuntu is an Nguni Bantu word, which means 'humanity' in caring for one another. According to Poovan, du Toit and Engelbrecht (2006) and Hlatshwayo (2016), the power of Ubuntu lies in 'African culture' for love, tolerance, reciprocity, humanity, dignity, compassion, caring, solidarity, and friendship for effective community building and maintenance.

The spirit of Ubuntu can be applied to the dimension of presence, such as physical, temporary, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional presence in communicating with learners in the classroom. The spirit of Ubuntu is the power of unity, care for humanity, and caring for others, which is enshrined in the principle of Africanism in connecting and caring for one another. According to Lefa (2015), Ubuntu is essential in the African pattern of life and ways of doing things. Teachers provide teaching and learning to learners. For teaching and learning to occur in this social media age, teachers (facilitators) must cultivate passion, love, kindness, solidarity, care, dedication, connection, and humanity (Ubuntu). These attributes gear towards cultivating humanity (Ubuntu) in classroom communication. Lack of dimension of presence is gradually increasing among teachers (facilitators) within and outside the classroom. Teachers' connection with learners assists in communicating the learning content and materials to the learners, towards building innovative and transformative learning. Lefa (2015) suggests that Ubuntu lacks in teachers and learners' relationship, attitude, and respect for each other. The lack of Ubuntu is connected to the teachers' perspective, educational, and social value decay (Ferreira & Schulze, 2014).

The integration of African philosophy in education will promote kindness, solidarity, courtesy, compassion, concern, and respect for others (Higgs & Smith, 2017). African philosophy is aimed at restoring and building the interconnection and Ubuntu among Africans, including teachers. Teachers should cultivate humanity in them while teaching learners across different backgrounds and social class with possible social and economic challenges. Teachers' presence matters in making teaching and learning a reality, but their presence is highly questionable due to the growing number of absenteeism in schools on a daily basis. According to Jansen (2018), physical presence is a part of the 'dimension of presence,' which argues for the physical presence in the classroom by the teacher. This means that, for the teaching and learning process to be effective, a teacher must be physically present in class to direct the teaching communication to learners and engage with them meaningfully. The physical presence builds connection, engagement, and signage among the teacher and learners. The involvement of African philosophy will ignite the teacher's physical presence in the classroom, which will provide identity recovery, Ubuntu, interconnection, knowledge sharing, and cooperation (cooperative learning). According to Lefa (2015), African philosophy aims towards African people's identity and image recovery. The high rate of teachers' absenteeism in schools limits the application of physical presence within the concept of African philosophy and Ubuntu. However, the application of social media platforms in the teaching and learning environment can assist in managing a genuine absence of physical presence due to some reasons beyond personal control in class. Teachers (facilitators) can facilitate and engage with their learners from anywhere at any time.

Teachers are showing a lack of presence in schools. African philosophy can be applied to the second dimension of presence in improving 'temporal presence'. Temporary presence argues for "the act of being there in the proverbial

moment-in-time" (Jansen, 2018). A teacher (facilitator) can be temporarily present in the classroom in a proverbial mode and moment. Through African philosophy, teachers can teach learners using the African proverbs in communicating lesson content to learners. In the event of temporary presence, teaching and learning tasks can be provided on the social media platform while the teacher (facilitator) deals with the cause of the temporary absence.

African philosophy provides the intellectual and mental transformation of an African child. Through the process of applying the African philosophy, learners' minds are reengineered and transformed in discovering self-image and their African identity. The intellectual presence of a teacher builds authoritative engagement among the learners. According to Jansen (2018), the presence of a teacher can be intellectually engaging with the subject or the content. Intellectual presence means authoritative engagement with the learners on the subject or content at hand. This content or subject brings transformation of the mind and intellectual well-being. African philosophy ensures that Africans are unified in mind and spirit. Through African philosophy, an intellectual presence that builds engagement and cooperation is restored between the teacher and learners towards effective and efficient learning. Hlatshwayo (2016) suggests that social media build cooperation, interconnectedness, communitarianism, and hospitality, which are enshrined on Ubuntu.

The African philosophy reinforces the spiritual connection and unity of Africans towards independence of the African race, from the Western and Eurocentric dominance. Before the Western and Eurocentric traditions, Africans had a spiritual connection with their deity, which allows them to provide educational solutions. Communication in teaching should be connected through spiritual presence. Spiritual presence deals with "human and transcendental connection" (Jansen, 2018). Teachers get connected to learners spiritually through their mind and in showing concern for their educational needs in order to deliver innovative and effective teaching and learning. Spiritual presence brings Africanism on board.

According to Jansen (2018), cultivating humanity in the 21st century involves emotional presence. Emotional presence focuses on sensitive learners' needs and concerns (Jansen, 2018). African philosophy works towards Ubuntu in caring for others through emotional and mental support. As a dimension of presence, emotional presence allows teachers to cultivate humanity in communicating effectively in a classroom. The better the ability of a teacher to connect to the needs and concerns of the learners, the better and more effective the teaching-learning process becomes. Learners in schools have many social and economic needs and concerns that can aid or break their learning progress. For effective and engaging teaching-learning to take place, teachers must be sensitive to all the learners' needs and concerns, which directly impact the learners' social and academic well-being. The emotional presence on the needs and concerns of the learners will assist in achieving great learning success.

2.4. Presence and social media

Building a presence on social media is becoming an essential part of humans. Ubuntu and the African spirit promotes the effective building of mutual presence with one another. According to Yaro and Asmar (2013), presence on social media is a marketing communication strategy in building and maintaining a relationship for businesses in developed and developing countries. At the same time, individuals use social media presence to build a strong relationship with peers, loved ones and colleagues. Having a presence on social media means an individual understanding of the benefits attached to the platform. Individuals absent from social media can be regarded as a society of social obsoletes (Ayeni, 2019). The growing quest for virtual presence makes social media platforms essential for users. For example, Ayeni (2019) found that social media addiction is causing social, mental health, physical, and sleeping pattern disruptions, which are seen by many as fear of missing out (FOMO) on trends and events on social media platforms. The author further found that 21% of the adults and 40% of youths use their social media platforms while inside the bathroom. This action is an indication of dependence on social media by users and a quest for presence. The growing user presence on social media platforms also shows the importance of presence in life.

According to Reyes, Marasigan, Gonzales, Hernandez, Medios and Cayubit (2018), FOMO is social anxiety caused by the need to not be updated by trends on social media that are geared towards fulfilling users' psychological desires. As teacher absenteeism keeps increasing, the application of social media platforms can be used to close the gap. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic made remote learning essential with the application of social media for the teaching and learning process a norm. The application of social media can eliminate physical, temporary, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional presence missing among teachers in this social media age in the educational system. In the same manner, teachers can use social media platforms to facilitate effective teaching and learning processes at any time and anywhere, which can assist in closing any lack of presence in the classroom and educational system at large.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study deployed secondary data by looking at existing literature covering social media, Ubuntu, African philosophy, and teacher's presence and absenteeism in the education system. The existing research involved scientific journals, conference papers, books, and many others. Ayeni (2019) suggests that secondary data gathers and analyzes scientific documents that cover the research topic and themes/headings under discussion. The study collected and analyzed scientific papers that involve how African philosophy, Ubuntu, and social media can be applied in closing or eliminating the growing teacher absenteeism in schools in the social media age.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The recommendations of this study were drawn from the literature above in contributing to the academic body of knowledge. Ubuntu is essential in promoting presence in classroom communication between teachers and learners. It also assists in harmonizing the practice of African philosophy in the education system. This study recommends the application of Ubuntu spirit by teachers in classrooms and other administrators in schools. The study also encourages the application of African philosophy and social media platforms in dealing with the missing dimensions of presence in schools.

Teachers' presence in schools is a matter of concern for all education stakeholders in South Africa and beyond. The application of social media platforms can assist in managing any lack of presence. Their presence physically and virtually brings connections to communicating and facilitating the teaching-learning process in schools. The five dimensions of presence, as mentioned by Jansen, as discussed in this study, provided the different levels of presence that can be cultivated by teachers in classrooms to help in building an effective and efficient learning environment that encourages innovative learning outcomes.

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