

Conceptualising Maslow's Self-Actualisation Concept for Application in Higher Education: An African Ubuntu Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study focused on the applicability of Maslow's self-actualisation concept in higher education institutions in Zimbabwe. An African perspective, guided by the African philosophy of Ubuntu, was used to inform the study. The study collected data from 30 participants comprising administrators in higher education institutions, lecturers and students and participants using in-depth interviews and observations. The participants were drawn from 5 participating higher education institutions in Zimbabwe. Data were analysed using thematic procedures and the results show that unlike its Eurocentric individualistic perspective, self-actualisation represents a more inclusive concept from an Afrocentric perspective which is collectivist. Its application in higher education can enhance the student's overall educational outcomes throughout their studies, enabling them to immediately contribute positively to the good of society and others within and outside their institutions of learning, with integrity, empathy and compassion, without the condition of first fulfilling their own individual lower-level needs as theorised by Maslow. The study recommended the development of higher education policies that are imbedded in the Ubuntu philosophy.

Keywords: Ubuntu philosophy, self-actualisation, developmental stage, hierarchy of needs, higher education.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of self-actualisation, as submitted by Abraham Maslow, is widely accepted as an essential framework for understanding human motivation and personal growth. This concept encompasses the realisation of one's full potential, the pursuit of intrinsic goals, and the achievement of inner fulfilment. However, the application of Maslow's self-actualisation concept in higher education settings, particularly within the African context, requires careful consideration and contextualisation. This paper explores and conceptualises the application of Maslow's self-actualisation concept in higher education from an African perspective, taking into account the unique cultural values, educational goals, and socio-economic realities of the African continent. Through the conceptualisation of Maslow's self-actualisation within an African framework, this study contributes to the development of a more culturally relevant and impactful educational approaches that promote holistic student development and address the specific needs and aspirations of African learners in higher education.

Background of the Study

In his landmark article titled "The Theory of Human Motivation," Maslow promulgated a structure of human needs, arranged in a pyramid-shaped hierarchy (Maslow, 1943). His initial hierarchy consisted of

five levels, starting from the basic human needs at the bottom and progressively elevating upwards to higher-level needs at the top. According to Maslow, these needs are fulfilled in a sequential order, starting from the bottom through to the top of the triangle as listed in his Needs Hierarchy (Maslow, 1943; 1954; 1970). The needs, in ascending order, include physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, self-esteem needs, and self-actualisation needs. He later revisited his original five-stage theory and expanded it to eight levels. The expanded hierarchy comprises physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, self-esteem needs, cognitive needs, aesthetic needs, self-actualisation and transcendence.

It is interesting to note that the concept of transcendence was introduced in Maslow's later writings and discussions, as a potential higher stage beyond self-actualisation. He perceived transcendence as characterised by acts of selflessness, altruism, and a desire to contribute to the well-being and advancement of others. Maslow suggested that once individuals have met their basic needs and achieved self-actualisation, they may seek to go beyond themselves and engage in activities that contribute to the betterment of society and humanity as a whole. His description of this higher stage aligns with the principles of Ubuntu philosophy, which is anchored on collectivism as a way of life. Maslow categorised the first four levels of the expanded hierarchy as deficiency-needs (D-Needs), while the top four levels are classified as growth or being-needs (B-Needs) (D'Souza, 2018; McLeod, 2018).

Maslow's concept of self-actualisation has become a mainstay of psychological analysis in many study disciplines and in business practice, where the pursuit of money and fame seemed to have eclipsed the interior aspirations of individuals, especially in the Western world, the context in which Maslow developed his self-actualisation concept. This paper taps into this mainstay and conceptualises self-actualisation in the context of higher education from an Afrocentric perspective. Through the lens of Ubuntu philosophy, this study highlights three potential weaknesses in Maslow's concept of self-actualisation. Firstly, this study contests Maslow's idea that self-actualisation is achieved at the pinnacle of human life after all the lower-level needs are fulfilled. Secondly, this study challenges Maslow's notion that only a few individuals self-actualise throughout their lifespans. Thirdly, while Abraham Maslow did not explicitly provide a comprehensive list of individuals whom he believed had self-actualised, the absence of African names in his list which includes Albert Einstein, Eleanor Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson, provides the rationale for criticism based on its Eurocentrism. From an Afrocentric perspective, hinged on the Ubuntu philosophy, this study further argues that self-actualisation can be realised by many rather than a few as Maslow posits. This study used the context of higher education to elucidate the three arguments that are central to this paper.

Theoretical Framework

This study used the African perspective based on the Ubuntu philosophy, to conceptualise Maslow's self-actualisation for application in higher education settings in Zimbabwe. Ubuntu is a traditional African philosophy and worldview that hinges on the interconnectedness and interdependence of individuals within a community (William, 2013). The term Ubuntu has its roots in the Bantu-Nguni languages of Southern Africa and is often translated as "humanity towards others" (Twikirize, 2021). The concept encompasses a set of values and principles that guide human conduct and relationships in both social and professional settings. As a philosophy of life, Ubuntu encompasses a set of values such as caring, empathy, community, harmony, hospitality, respect, and responsiveness (Sparks & Louw, 2023; Siraz Chowdhury et al., 2023; Twikirize, 2021). Such values make people good citizens of their communities, the same thinking advanced by Maslow's self-actualisation. However, the African conceptualisation of what Ubuntu represents cannot be fully captured in Western worldviews, a context in which Maslow coined the concept of 'self-actualisation.'

Ubuntu places high value on acts of compassion, reciprocity, and dignity, and highlights the interconnectedness of individuals in social settings. It views relationships with others as central to the

promotion of the sanctity of human life. At the core of this philosophy is the idea that one's humanity is affirmed by recognising the humanity of others (Shields, 2021). Hence, Ubuntu's typifying phrases such as "umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye" or "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu," which means "a person is a person through other persons." Another key Ubuntu phrase is, "I am, because we are," emphasising the affirmation of one's humanity through recognising the diverse humanity of others. Central to the Ubuntu philosophy is the belief that one's identity and well-being are intimately connected to the well-being of others who are physically and socially connected to them. This view is the basis of principles of empathy, compassion, and mutual respect that characterise African people. Ubuntu promotes the idea that individuals are not isolated beings but are part of a larger social fabric. It encourages people to recognise and affirm the humanity of others, fostering a sense of belonging, cooperation, and communal harmony. These high ideals of Ubuntu suggest that self-actualisation can be achieved within the framework of collectivism rather than individualism as argued by Maslow,

Ubuntu is characterised by principles such as caring for one another, sharing resources, practising hospitality, and promoting social responsibility. It elevates the idea that the welfare of the community is closely linked to the well-being of everyone within it (Ngubane & Manyane, 2021). Ubuntu also brings out the enduring African values of relationships, participation, and collective decision-making in community life (Shields, 2021). This philosophy has influenced various aspects of African culture, including social interactions, family dynamics, governance systems, and approaches to conflict resolution among other areas. Ubuntu prioritises the need for harmonious coexistence, and the enjoyment of human dignity, all based on shared responsibility for the welfare of the community at large (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013).

While Ubuntu has its roots in African cultures, its principles and values resonate with the global concept of interconnectedness and shared humanity, thus transcending cultural boundaries. Ubuntu serves as a reminder of the significance of compassion, empathy, and cooperation in fostering harmonious and inclusive societies. These broader ideals of Ubuntu philosophy are applied in the context of higher education, where institutions at this level of education are charged with the responsibility to prioritise the holistic development of students. The justification for using the lens of Ubuntu philosophy in this study is the need to provide higher education institutions with insights into the benefits that can be derived from integrating the concept of self-actualisation in their curriculum. The view is that by fostering a culture of self-actualisation within their contexts, as conceptualised from an African perspective through the lens of Ubuntu philosophy, higher education can nurture the values of empathy, compassion, and social responsibility among students. This would encourage students to value diverse perspectives, engage in meaningful community interactions, and work collectively towards common societal goals from their campus contexts extending to the larger community outside the walls of their institutions. Thus, the conceptualisation of self-actualisation through the lens of Ubuntu philosophy provides an inclusive and broader application of Maslow's initial concept, particularly in higher education contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is presented as pyramid, with the basic physiological needs of food, water, sleep, sex and oxygen being at the base. It is understood that the basic needs sustain life (Maslow, 1943) although this would be debatable when it comes to sex. Indeed, given the importance of physiological needs, it is conceivable to assume that it would be difficult for students to self-actualise in the classroom in the absence of these needs. The second level of the hierarchy of needs by Maslow addresses safety and security (Maslow, 1943; McLeod, 2018). Shelter, health, emotional security and financial security are some of the security needs that become salient once the physiological needs are satisfied. Third on the hierarchy are love and belonging needs. These needs are what makes the human being a social animal. This level also aligns with the Ubuntu values of belongingness as captured by the Ubuntu phrase "I am, because we are" (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). The view is that human beings feel the need to belong, to be wanted

and to be appreciated. It would be difficult for one to self-actualise without being an integral part of their community. These needs would also manifest in the classroom (Rotar, 2022). This level is followed by the esteem needs. McLeod (2018) advises that esteem needs are divided into two, with the first being esteem for oneself, which is made up of feelings of dignity, achievement, mastery and independence. The second is the desire for reputation and respect from others, and these manifest in the form of high social status and feelings of prestige (McLeod, 2018). Then follows self-actualisation.

Rather than focusing on psychopathology and what goes wrong with people as they seek personal growth, Maslow (1943) took a strength-based view of the human being. Accordingly, the focus of self-actualisation are those aspects that define what goes right when individuals have been able to meet lower-level needs and attain their best potential. The focus, therefore, is on human potential, and how such potential can be fulfilled (McLeod, 2018). As a result, self-actualisation occupies the summit of Maslow's original hierarchy of needs model of human motivation. Maslow believed that self-actualisation needs are activated by the fulfilment of lower-level needs (McLeod, 2018; Maslow, 1956). The hierarchy of needs explains how individuals strive to reach this optimal mental state of growth. Maslow's self-actualisation stage is a central concept in his hierarchy of needs theory, which suggests that individuals strive for personal growth and fulfilment, and that the effort to satisfy lower-level needs is based on a quest to reach the top, self-actualisation.

Various studies have explored and examined different aspects of self-actualisation, shedding light on its characteristics, ways to measure it and its implications for worker and student motivation. From such studies, scholars have amplified the attributes and behaviours that are indicative of self-actualised individuals. Qualities such as autonomy, authenticity, creativity, and a strong sense of purpose are some of the common attributes among self-actualised individuals (Bear, Choate & Lindstrom, 2022; Sarla, 2020; Omodan, 2022). These studies highlight the importance of personal growth, fulfilling one's potential, and aligning one's actions and values for self-actualisation. The measurement of self-actualisation has been another area of research interest. Researchers (Gopinath, 2020; D'Souza, 2018) have developed scales such as the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) and the Self-Actualisation Scale (SAS) to assess individuals' self-actualisation levels. These scales typically measure aspects such as self-acceptance, personal values, peak experiences, and the ability to form deep and meaningful relationships. For students, these attributes can also help them achieve their best while also helping others and the community of students to become a better place. When they show these attributes, it would also follow that they become good citizens of their communities, which resonates well with the Ubuntu principles of living together (Maushe, 2021).

Further studies have also explored the factors that contribute to hinder self-actualisation. Research has shown that autonomy, support, positive interpersonal relationships, and a supportive educational environment are associated with higher levels of self-actualisation among students (Lestari, Idrus & Sofyan, 2023; Gopinath, 2020). Conversely, factors such as pressure to conform, external rewards, and a focus on extrinsic goals have been identified as impediments to self-actualisation. Bulut (2018) found that for college students in Turkey, social rules, the lack of social support both at home and in school and inability of the education system to support students were some of the obstacles to self-actualisation. Negative teacher attitudes were also identified as some of the major challenges to self-actualisation in schools (Bulut, 2018). It can be deduced from the foregoing that the challenges to self-actualisation go against the expectations of Ubuntu where the education systems are expected to provide an enabling environment for the student to realise their potential.

Researchers have also examined the implications of self-actualisation for various domains, including education, counselling and work (Omodan, 2022; Sarla, 2020). Self-actualisation has been linked to higher levels of well-being, increased job satisfaction, and greater engagement in educational settings (Yashchenko, 2021; Ivztan, Gardner, Bernard, Sekhon & Hart, 2013). It has also been associated with

positive mental health outcomes and a sense of purpose and meaning in life, all of which would resonate well with the expectations of Ubuntu in educational settings.

In summary, the literature on Maslow's self-actualisation concept provides insights into the characteristics, measurement, factors influencing, and implications of self-actualisation. While these studies contribute to the understanding of personal growth, fulfilment, and the pursuit of one's potential, the concept suffers from many pitfalls. The first challenge is its limited contextual validity. Itai (2008) posits that Maslow developed this concept using data from the specific context of the Western world, hence, its applicability in different contexts is debatable. This observation is evidenced by the names listed by Maslow as having reached self-actualisation. Is self-actualisation just a preserve for people from Western cultures? Suffice to mention that the named individuals had their equals in other non-Western contexts, that Maslow overlooked or could have been unaware of their achievements in relation to his criteria of self-actualised individuals. Another pitfall in Maslow's self-actualisation concept relates to his claim that only a few individuals can reach self-actualisation during their lifetime (Maslow, 1956). His claim could have been influenced by the winner-take-all practices that characterise the competitive nature of individualistic cultures. In this regard, this study used the collectivist perspective, particularly the Ubuntu lens to explore the concept of Maslow's self-actualisation and its applicability in higher education. The study examined the broader application of the concept of self-actualisation, from the Afrocentric perspective which is overlooked in Maslow's conception of self-actualisation. Maslow's provided a Eurocentric view of how people are motivated. In contrast, this study provides an Afrocentric perspective of how the concept of self-actualisation can be applied in the context of higher education to promote the holistic development of students, enabling them to realise their full potential while contributing meaningfully to the well-being of their communities.

METHODOLOGY

This study was motivated by the researchers' extensive teaching practice spanning over 12 years, which provided invaluable insights into the experiences of students in both andragogy and pedagogy. To comprehensively explore the topic, a blended research methodology was adopted, combining field observations, desk research, interviews and personal experiences, all under qualitative research methods. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter by integrating theoretical perspectives with real-life experiences and observations (Jackson & Mazzei, 2022; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Dodgson, 2017). The researchers conducted an in-depth analysis of existing literature related to students' acquisition of competencies at different stages of their learning trajectories. The desk research phase involved thoroughly reviewing and synthesising relevant scholarly articles, books, and educational resources. The literature review served as a foundation, providing theoretical insights and a broader understanding of the studied subject (Flick, 2022; Carcary, 2020). To complement the desk research, the study incorporated field observations informed by the researchers' extensive teaching experience and their lived experiences gained from growing up in African communities that practise ubuntu as the way of living and growing up. The in-situ observations, accumulated over many years, offered a rich source of qualitative data. Furthermore, the researchers drew upon their first-hand experiences gained through teaching students at various educational levels, to gain practical insights into the complexities of self-actualisation in educational settings. The vast experiences provided valuable context-specific information, capturing the nuances and dynamics of students' experiences in real-world educational settings. Interviews were also administered to educators who possessed deep knowledge about the application of Ubuntu philosophy in educational settings.

The study employed thematic procedures to analyse and interpret the data that were drawn from the various sources discussed in the preceding paragraph. This involved a systematic and rigorous process of coding, categorising, and identifying themes and patterns within the data (Braun, et al., 2014). The qualitative analysis provided a deeper understanding of the African perspective of self-actualisation in higher

education, uncovering unique insights and perspectives that emerged from the data. The blended research methodology utilised in this study ensured a comprehensive exploration of the re-conceptualisation of Maslow's self-actualisation concept through an African lens. Methodological triangulation, combining field observations, desk research, interviews, and personal experiences, to ensure rigor and minimise bias. In addition to triangulation of data sources, the also employed member checking, peer review, audit trail, thick description and reflexivity, to mitigate potential biases and ensure rigor as elaborated by various scholars (Carcary, 2020; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Fusch et al., 2018; Dodgson, 2017).

The study adhered to robust ethical principles to establish trust and minimise participant risk. Prior to data collection, the study obtained informed consent from each participant. Institutional consent was also obtained from the 5 participating universities. Confidentiality of data was strictly maintained, with all identifying information anonymised and securely stored as recommended by scholars (Flick, 2022; Gray, 2014). During the interviews and field observations, privacy and integrity of participants were respected and maintained. Personal and sensitive information from the participants was treated with care and discretion. Together, these measures ensured that this study complied with all relevant data protection regulations and ethical considerations that apply in social science research studies (Carcary, 2020; Choy, 2014).

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Maslow's concept of self-actualisation focuses primarily on self-actualisation needs, with the individual as the unit of analysis or reference point. This view is Eurocentric and overlooks the realities of other non-Eurocentric perspectives on this concept. Few studies have focused on the application of the self-actualisation concept in higher education from an African perspective. To bridge this knowledge gap, this study analysed Maslow's self-actualisation concept using the lens of Ubuntu philosophy. The findings of this study provide insights into how the concept of self-actualisation can be implemented in higher education settings, in a way that aligns with the rich African cultural values of Ubuntu. The paragraphs that follow discusses two key themes that emerged from the data.

Theme 1: Self-Actualisation is Eurocentric

Maslow's concept of self-actualisation received both praise and criticism regarding its application in higher education settings in Zimbabwe. One outstanding theme is that research participants believed that Maslow's self-actualisation concept is overly Eurocentric, thus limiting its relevance and applicability in the African setting. Research participants felt that self-actualisation as elaborated by Maslow, reflects Western cultural values and ideals, especially the individualistic ideals, which is the opposite of the collectivist perspective of society in Africa. Findings from all the data sets in this study showed that although it is explicit in their courses, Maslow's self-actualisation concept is applied in higher education institutions in Zimbabwe through the promotion of personal achievement and the pursuit of individual goals and personal glory as opposed to the collective accomplishments which are idealised in the Ubuntu concept. In pursuit of their self-actualising goals, students may, therefore, engage in unproductive competition to outdo each other. This culture could also promote rote learning as learners focus on excelling in examinations rather than mastering concepts, skills and competencies for application in the real world of work. This pitfall raises concerns about the universality and applicability of Maslow's self-actualisation concept in diverse educational contexts outside the Western world. It is thus not surprising that Akabor and Phasha (2022) have lamented the lack of Ubuntu in competitive South African schools and called for a more collaborative and inclusive approach to education. Instead of competing, students in higher education, being Ubuntu conscious, would celebrate each individual's achievements based on autonomy, empowerment and emancipation of the individual within the broader collective social system. Similar sentiments have been expressed by Sparks and Louw (2023) who advocate for the improvement of teaching and learning through the establishment of classroom communities. Several other scholars hold the same view as well (Akabor & Phasha, 2022;

Ngubane & Manyane, 2021; Shields, 2021).

Theme 2: The Quest for Self-Actualisation Ignores the Holistic Human Being

Data shows that universities and colleges in Zimbabwe often aim to provide opportunities for students to explore academic programmes of interest, develop their skills, and prepare themselves for the competitive job market opportunities. Through this Eurocentric application, higher education institutions in Zimbabwe often produce intellectual giants who are morally dwarfed. This study found that by exclusively focusing on developing the student's cognitive domains, these institutions overlook the importance of other developmental domains such as psychological, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being, which are vital in the holistic development of students. This involves recognising and valuing diverse forms of self-actualisation that are shaped by cultural, social, and contextual factors while embracing all the principles of the Ubuntu philosophy. This finding has prompted this study to advocate for a more culturally inclusive conceptualisation and application of the concept of self-actualisation in higher education institutions. The starting point for higher education institutions is acknowledging that the Zimbabwean culture, like other African countries, values communalism, interconnectedness, and the well-being of the community. The attainment of collective goals and communal well-being takes precedence over individualistic pursuits, which are prioritised in Maslow's Eurocentric self-actualisation concept.

This study found that the application of the self-actualisation concept in higher education in its Eurocentric form as conceived by Maslow, tends to impose a one-size-fits-all model of students' motivation. This model is rooted in Western psychology and carries little value in the African context. This study argues that self-actualisation in higher education should be conceptualised within the framework of the Ubuntu philosophy, which glorifies the well-being of the collective while acknowledging that an individual's well-being is intimately tied to the well-being of others. This view is captured in the Ubuntu belief that *"I am what I am because of who we all are"* (Leymah Gbowee, n.d). This Ubuntu quote emphasises collectivism as a way of communal life, underscoring the idea that individual goals and aspirations are shaped and influenced by the larger social context in which they exist (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). Based on this Ubuntu idea, students in higher education could achieve more by complementing each other's educational effort in a communal way, rather than competing for the few spaces at the pinnacle of success as perceived by Maslow in his belief that self-actualisation is a preserve of the few.

This study found that from an African perspective, understanding and application of the concept of self-actualisation in higher education encompasses the interconnectedness and interdependence of individuals within campuses, which are communities of students. This tends to promote the students' holistic growth and societal well-being. This view aligns with the Ubuntu idea that an individual's full potential is realised through harmonious relationships with other members of the community. The harmonious relationships are also strengthened by each everyone's contributions towards the attainment of collective goals, which also align with the aspirations of individuals. Archbishop Desmond Tutu summarised this rich Ubuntu as follows, *"I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am"* (Shields, 2021). This quote points us to the idea that one's existence and identity are intertwined with others, and one's well-being is dependent on the well-being of the collective. This suggests that self-actualisation cannot be achieved in isolation but within the framework of the collective well-being of the community. Therefore, this study concludes that cultivating the values of interconnectedness, interdependence and harmony within the student body, can facilitate their self-actualisation.

This study further posits that students who are well integrated into their institutions can thrive through serving others within and outside their campuses. This fulfilling act is part of their self-actualisation, demonstrating that in the African context, self-actualisation is not confined to a specific stage at the summit of a hierarchy as elaborated by Maslow (McLeod, 2018; Maslow, 1943). In the African context, self-actualisation is not an event that unfolds at a specific age. Rather, it is a journey of life consisting of service

to others, as building blocks producing a well-integrated member of the community. Thus, self-actualisation can be experienced not just during a student's years in higher education but at other various stages of their development, without the pre-requisite to fulfilling the lower needs first. In the Ubuntu philosophy, a fulfilled life is characterised by virtuous service to others as part of one's contribution towards the communal good (Siraz et al., 2023; Twikirize, 2021). Hence, this study's view is that from an African perspective, self-actualisation is a progressive journey of growth and development, rather than a standalone level at the top of a pyramid as opined by Maslow and his disciples.

Implications

The Afrocentric perspective of self-actualisation, influenced by the philosophy of Ubuntu, offers valuable insights into enhancing educational outcomes, particularly in higher education settings. By incorporating the principles of Ubuntu into educational practices, both educators and students can foster an environment that promotes holistic growth, interconnectedness, and community well-being. In this regard, this study provides three key implications of the findings of this study.

First, the Afrocentric view of self-actualisation underscores the importance of promoting the value of interconnectedness among stakeholders in higher education, including administrators, educators, students, support staff, institutions and communities. With the limited resources that characterise African higher education institutions, including in Zimbabwe, fostering a sense of interconnectedness becomes crucial. By integrating the principles of Ubuntu, higher education institutions can promote collaboration, cooperation, and mutual support among all key stakeholders. Students can self-actualise through group projects, and cooperative learning activities, cultivating a sense of collective responsibility for each other's learning. Underlining the utility of interconnectedness of relationships can also help students to develop a sense of belonging and shared purpose, increased motivation, engagement, and positive educational outcomes, all leading to a deeper understanding of their roles in society. This Afrocentric conceptualisation of self-actualisation can contribute to the overall well-being and flourishing of students.

Secondly, the philosophy of Ubuntu broadens the view of Maslow's self-actualisation concept. This Afrocentric perspective places importance not only on the need to promote self-actualisation throughout a student's tenure in higher education but also on nurturing positive relationships within the confines of higher education settings and in society at large. Ubuntu places a strong emphasis on the quality of interpersonal relationships among all community members including students. In African higher education settings, where students face various challenges, cultivating positive relationships becomes even more critical in reducing cases of suicides, drug abuse and other emerging vices in higher education institutions. Higher education institutions can create a supportive and inclusive learning environment where students feel valued, respected, and understood, leading them to self-actualise as determined by their unique potentials. Fostering positive relationships can, therefore, enhance the creation of a safe and nurturing space for students to thrive academically, socially, emotionally and psychologically, leading to self-actualised members of society.

Thirdly, Ubuntu philosophy emphasises the importance of contributing to the betterment of society, which Maslow viewed as a characteristic of self-actualised individuals. Data shows that from an African perspective, students need not wait until they reach the pinnacle of life for them to reach self-actualisation as depicted by Maslow in his hierarchy of needs pyramid. This study found that students exhibit qualities of self-actualised individuals as elaborated by Maslow, while they are still in higher education. Higher education institutions can incorporate service-learning initiatives and community engagement in their programs to provide opportunities for students to constantly engage among themselves and with the community. This enhances their self-actualisation by providing them with opportunities to make a positive impact in their lives, the well-being of their society and institutions, fostering a sense of civic responsibility, empathy, and social consciousness. By connecting their educational activities with the community, students

can develop a deeper understanding of their roles as active citizens and become agents of positive change in their communities.

CONCLUSION

Viewed from the African perspective, especially the lens of Ubuntu, the concept of self-actualisation assumes a broader and more inclusive meaning. Applying its Afrocentric perspective can enhance educational outcomes in higher education and produce self-actualised students who are ready to serve their communities within the framework of Ubuntu. Cultivating Ubuntu philosophy's values of interconnectedness, and positive relationships through incorporating service-learning and community engagement, can facilitate the students' holistic development, creating an empowering and inclusive educational environment that shifts the focus from exclusive individualistic pursuits to collective growth and societal well-being. This approach not only promotes academic success but also fosters the growth and well-being of students, enabling them to self-actualise at various stages of their learning so that they immediately contribute positively to the good of society and others with integrity, empathy and compassion, even without first fulfilling their own individual lower level needs as theorised by Maslow.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the key findings of this study, it is recommended that:

- The government should integrate Ubuntu values into higher education policies to promote self-actualisation and foster the production of competent and skilled students who are ready to serve society with integrity, empathy and compassion.
- Higher education institutions should incorporate Ubuntu philosophy into their programs to enhance the students' cognitive, social, emotional, and spiritual domains, enabling them to self-actualise.
- Educators in higher education institutions should embrace the Ubuntu philosophy in their teaching practices to foster harmonious relationships and cooperation among students. They should encourage students to strive for self-actualisation by complementing each other's educational efforts and contributing towards the attainment of collective goals, creating a learning environment that values interconnectedness and interdependence.
- Students should embrace the values of Ubuntu philosophy such as virtuous service to others, that facilitate their self-actualisation. They should contribute positively towards the attainment of the community which is intimately linked to their individual needs and aspirations, recognising that self-actualisation is not confined to a specific stage or age but a continuous process of growth and development.

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study used the Afrocentric perspective to focus on the applicability of Maslow's self-actualisation concept in higher education institutions in Zimbabwe. Future studies should conduct a comparative study to analyse the applicability of Maslow's self-actualisation concept in higher education settings in other non-Western contexts.

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