
Towards a Comprehensive and Inclusive Definition of Ubuntu

Renier Steyn¹ and Pumela Msweli¹

¹Graduate School of Business Leadership, University of South Africa, Midrand, South Africa

Abstract: Ubuntu, often described as an African worldview, is central to the African social ethos. However, it appears in both academic literature and everyday discourse in many different forms, and this plurality can blur its conceptual boundaries, risking dilution and misuse. This research seeks to establish a comprehensive and inclusive definition of Ubuntu¹ by synthesising its diverse expressions into a unified framework. Inclusivity and comprehensiveness are essential to defining Ubuntu, preventing misuse of the word and enhancing its academic and practical utility. Using desktop research, the study analysed the 50 most cited articles on Ubuntu (via Harzing’s “publish or perish” tool), as well as additional key definitions from Google Scholar. A thematic analysis of these sources identified three distinct approaches to defining Ubuntu, which together form the basis for a comprehensive and inclusive definition. Ubuntu, rooted in the Nguni proverb “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” (“a person is a person through other persons”), embodies an exemplary Southern African way of life and philosophical orientation that places empathy, respect, community, generosity, and harmony at the centre of personal development and the shaping of societal thought among Africans. The study’s integration of definitional streams clarifies Ubuntu’s meaning, moving beyond its prior “catch-all” usage to delineate what is authentically African and conceptually specific. This research provides a multidimensional conceptualisation of Ubuntu, integrating existing perspectives to foster a nuanced understanding. It offers a foundation for unified scholarship and clearer applications, enhancing both theoretical and practical engagements with Ubuntu.

Keywords: African philosophy; conceptualisation; definition; literature review; Ubuntu

CORRESPONDENCE

Email: steynr@unisa.ac.za

EDITORIAL DATES

Received: 05 May 2025

Revised: 30 November 2025

Accepted: 05 December 2025

Published: 26 February 2026

Copyright:

© The Author(s) 2026.

Published by Azure Academic Publishers. This is an open access article distributed under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51415/ajims.v8i1.2828>

Introduction

The anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko (1978/ 2015) refers to Ubuntu as a “special contribution to the world in the field of human relations,” or a great gift of “giving the world a more human face.” Ubuntu is described by many as a distinctly African concept.

¹ Praeg (2014), a leading scholar in this field, also interested in the meaning of Ubuntu, argues that many debates about Ubuntu arise because people do not clearly distinguish between ubuntu (lowercase), the lived, pre-colonial, everyday way of being in community, and Ubuntu (uppercase), which is the modern, philosophical interpretation of that older way of life.

Mugumbate and Chereni (2020, p. vi), for example, describe Ubuntu as “a collection of values and practices that black people of Africa or of African origin” hold, and through which people become authentic human beings. Bennett (2011) writes that Ubuntu articulates a voice that is distinctively African. Seehawer (2023) is more specific, describing Ubuntu as an indigenous Southern African paradigm. Metz (2021) also mentions Ubuntu’s Southern African origins, and the word’s use in the Nguni linguistic group.

Overson (2011) contrasts Ubuntu to Western views, and argues that Ubuntu is “a moral and ethical framework that stresses collectively and collective agency that are relevant for behaviour management and character formation that may contribute to sustainable lifestyles”, contrasting with Western frameworks “that overly emphasise individualism and individuality especially the stress on the individual’s intellect, mental intelligence, and abstract thinking at the expense of individual and collective values necessary to realise sustainable lifestyles” (p. 84). Msengana (2006) endorses this view, stating that Ubuntu does not address challenges and excellence, but rather tends to preserve, stabilise and maintain the status quo. She further states that whilst a Western worldview actively promotes individualism, Ubuntu instead aims to encourage a team-oriented approach. Taken together, these distinctions echo the stance of Waghid et al. (2023), who similarly argue that Ubuntu offers a relational, community-centred alternative to Western models that prioritise individualism, autonomy, and market-driven rationality. Shutte (2001) provides a more nuanced perspective, suggesting that Western notions of individual freedom and Ubuntu can be integrated into an ethic that enriches our understanding of humanity and provides practical guidance for fostering a genuinely humane, multicultural South Africa.

Ubuntu is also seen as a praiseworthy construct from the past. Mabovula (2011), for example, writes about how traditional African values are neglected, and how these could be revived, and the possible usefulness of Ubuntu in present-day applicability. Letseka and Letseka (2021) engage Basotho community elders to understand the concept of Ubuntu, seeing them as custodians of Ubuntu, rather than seeking this information from a younger generation. Metz (2021) states that it is common for black people indigenous to the continent to believe that one’s basic aim in life should be to exhibit Ubuntu, which can be achieved by embracing communal relationships with other people. Matolino and Kwindiwi (2013) state that, since the advent of democracy in South Africa, there has been a concerted effort to revive the notion of Ubuntu, also reiterating the praiseworthy nature of Ubuntu. Murove (2012) sees Ubuntu as indispensable to the reconstruction of post-colonial African societies and explains that it is valued as the ideal for human conduct in all spheres of life. It is said that Ubuntu could provide meaningful principles that can support a strong and defensible approach to reform in Africa, and could be central to rethinking African institutions (Waghid, 2020).

Tutu (1999) illustrates how Ubuntu is recognised in everyday talk. In saying “Yu, u nobuntu”, translated as “Hey, so-and-so has ubuntu”, the term functions without further specification, as the meaning that the person is good or commendable is understood implicitly. However, some question the presence of Ubuntu in contemporary society, with Matolino and Kwindiwi (2013) discussing *The end of Ubuntu*. Letseka’s (2012) *In defence of Ubuntu* and Chimakonam’s (2016) *The end of ubuntu or its beginning in Matolino-Kwindiwi-Metz debate: An exercise in conversational philosophy* also reflect the concerns regarding the prevalence of Ubuntu in contemporary Africa. Mabovula (2011) talks about the erosion of African communal values, with Mawere and Van Stam (2016) critically reflecting on the abundance of Ubuntu in present-day sub-Saharan Africa. More recently, Diouf et al. (2023) state that there is a cavernous gulf between presenting Ubuntu as an ethic and “doing” Ubuntu. Who qualifies to define Ubuntu is a matter of some debate. Metz (2007) and Ramose (2015) have argued for a critical ethnophilosophical approach to define Ubuntu (Taylor, 2023). In some cases, definitions are solicited from South Africans of African descent (SAADs) (Gade, 2012). In other cases, white South African scholars, such as Broodryk (2002) and Louw (1998, 2007), and individuals from a Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) background (see Hailey, 2008; Outlaw & Jeffers, 2022; Seehawer, 2018; Swanson, 2007) are involved. Taylor (2023) goes one step further, arguing that white philosophy professors “start mining resources from African cultures” without learning the relevant languages the way they would learn Greek to study the Stoics in earnest. This aligns with a further problem, namely, conveying the concept of Ubuntu in a non-African language. Mokgoro (1998, p. 1) notes that “the concept of ubuntu, like many concepts, is not easily defined. Defining an African notion in a foreign language and from an abstract, as opposed to a concrete approach, defies the very essence of the African worldview and may also be particularly illusive”. Tutu (1999, p. 31) states that “Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language”.

Ubuntu is increasingly used as a “catch-all” term to characterise the norms and values that are inherent in many traditional African societies (Hailey, 2008). Also, the public, widespread and concerted “ubuntu-isation” and the

aggressive promotion of Ubuntu in post-apartheid South Africa (Matolino & Kwindigwi, 2013), contributed to the Ubuntu concept being presented and interpreted in a haphazard manner, which is detrimental to the development of a comprehensive body of knowledge (Babbie & Mouton, 2011; De Vos et al. 2011). Eliastam (2015) contests that the concept is vague and open to abuse. Ewuoso and Hall (2019, p. 93) describe literature on Ubuntu as “confusing, and characterised by several competing interpretations”. Diouf et al. (2023) identifies the need to clarify what Ubuntu truly means, showing how it is often misused, romanticised, or emptied of meaning. Mboti (2015), aligned with that notion, wrote an article called “May the real Ubuntu please stand up?”

While Ubuntu was credited for its applicability to solve everyday problems (Broodryk, 2002; Shutte, 2001), it remains a central concept within the research agenda in Southern Africa for the same reasons (Longweni & Mdaka, 2023; Waghid et al., 2023; Wood & Bischoff, 2022). It is seen as pivotal to organisational change management (Mangaliso et al., 2022), and, more specifically, to reshaping human resources management (Kahn & Louw, 2023) to fit the cultural context. Ubuntu relates to workplace ethics (Matolino, 2020; Sambala et al., 2020), of which human resources management is the custodian, and to employee engagement (Chetty & Price, 2024; Tauetsile, 2021), another objective of human resources management practices. Its relevance also lies in understanding African leadership (Elkington, 2020; Laloo, 2022); a matter of great interest for the human resources practitioner.”

Conceptual clarity and a standard definition of Ubuntu seem to be lacking. Without a standard or consensual definition (Babbie & Mouton, 2011; De Vos et al. (2011)) of Ubuntu, the debate on its applicability for managing or explaining phenomena in Africa, and the development of an integrable body of knowledge around the concept, would be difficult. The present research aims to address this matter by providing a comprehensive and inclusive definition of Ubuntu.

Literature Review

Ubuntu will not be discussed further in this literature review, as the topic was introduced in the introduction, and the primary focus of the results will be consolidating Ubuntu literature, specifically defining the concept. The need for a consensual definition and the nature of a good definition are, however, discussed in this section.

Science thrives on collaboration and is characterised by meticulous, in-depth, and methodical exploration (Babbie & Mouton, 2011). The scientific process is methodically organised, building on fundamental elements such as concepts, statements (definitions, hypotheses, propositions included), conceptual structures (encompassing typologies, models, theories), and overarching frameworks or paradigms (De Vos et al., 2011). Without clarity about the foundational elements, higher-order enquiry is not possible (Babbie & Mouton, 2011). This study narrows its scope beyond the most fundamental concepts and focuses on a specific statement and specific definitions. The concept of the word Ubuntu is well established, but what it entails, or its definition, is not clear. Statements of definition provide precise interpretations of terms like Ubuntu, fostering mutual comprehension among researchers. Such definitions not only specify the use of terms within specific contexts, as noted by Mouton (1996), but also facilitate clearer communication by delineating their meanings. A distinction is made between theoretical (connotative) and operational (denotative) definitions. Theoretical definitions articulate the relationship between a concept and related concepts within a theoretical framework, focusing on connotations. Operational definitions, in contrast, detail how a concept is operationalised, outlining how it will be observed and measured, therefore specifying conditions for its appropriate use (Mouton, 1996). In this research study, the focus will be on both theoretical and operational definitions.

From the aforementioned, the importance of a consensual definition in the development of the body of knowledge is clear. Kibin (2024) describes the elements of a good definition in terms of clarity (avoiding ambiguity or confusion), the essential meaning and sufficiency of definitions (it should not be overly broad, nor too narrow, excluding relevant aspects), precise wording (avoiding vague or overly general terms), non-circularity (meaning it does not define a term by using the same term within its definition) and applicability (where a good definition is applicable across contexts and situations). Pap (1964) simply states that definitions should enhance clarity, facilitate communication, and contribute to the progress of scientific understanding. These principles will be used when developing a definition of Ubuntu that is comprehensive and representative of all the aspects that should be included in a definition.

Alberts (2019) presents a list of 12 definition types, of which five should be avoided. This list serves as a guideline to identify and formulate acceptable definitions. In Table 1, an explanation of each definition type is presented.

Table 1. Types of definitions

| Type of definition | Description and example |
|---|---|
| 1 Genus-differentiae definitions | The genus and the differentiae are present in the definition. E.g. Ubuntu is a philosophy (genus) typically associated with Southern African thinking (differentiae). |
| 2 Definition-through-denotations | The elements of a concept are described. E.g. Ubuntu consists of four social values, namely group survival, solidarity, compassion and lastly respect and dignity. |
| 3 Contextual definitions | This involves describing the concept as it materialises. E.g. Ubuntu is present when individuals share the social values of group survival, solidarity, compassion as well as respect and dignity. |
| 4 Partial definitions | Such a definition involves listing the parts of the concept. E.g. Ubuntu is a philosophy, an ethic, or a worldview of African humanism. |
| 5 Paraphrase definitions | Here the concept is described in simpler language. E.g. Ubuntu does not pertain to four social values, namely group survival, solidarity, compassion, respect and dignity, but rather to humaneness. |
| 6 Definitions-through-synthesis | The concept describes the integration of a large body of knowledge. E.g. Ubuntu originates from Southern Africa and consists of four social values, namely group survival, solidarity, compassion and lastly respect and dignity. |
| 7 Ostensive definitions | A graphic representation is necessary and included in these definitions. E.g. given this Venn diagram, it is clear that solidarity is central to Ubuntu, whilst respect and dignity are of lesser prominence. |
| 8 Synonym definitions – to be avoided | The concept is described by a synonym. E.g. Ubuntu = humaneness. |
| 9 Incomplete definitions – to be avoided | Only the higher-level concept is described. E.g. Ubuntu is a philosophy. Yes, Ubuntu is a philosophy, but it is a Southern African philosophy, specific to that region. |
| 10 Severely limited definitions – to be avoided | A critical aspect of the concept is missing/not presented. E.g. Ubuntu is African. There are many other aspects which are also African, but not related to Ubuntu. |
| 11 Extremely broad definitions – to be avoided | The concept is described so broadly that a distinction from other concepts is impossible. E.g. Ubuntu is the African philosophy – excluding philosophies from other regions of Africa. |
| 12 Circle definitions – to be avoided | Here, the concept defined is repeated in its definition without providing clarity. This phenomenon is known as a tautology. E.g. Ubuntu is the association with Ubuntu values. |

From Table 1, it is clear that overlaps between the different types of definitions occur. However, Alberts’s (2019) typology provides the reader with a list of aspects to include in a comprehensive definition and also clearly indicates which elements should be avoided. Furthermore, it provides a guideline on how to evaluate the quality of definitions.

Method

The initial aim was to compile a long list of definitions of Ubuntu and to synthesise them to arrive at a comprehensive and inclusive definition of Ubuntu, aligned with Alberts’s (2019) “definitions-through-synthesis”. Harzing’s “publish or perish” was the first search engine used, as it provides the most cited outputs within the Google Scholar environment. The search was for “Ubuntu” in the title. A search was also conducted using Google Scholar, targeting research outputs with “Ubuntu” in the title, refined by the keyword terms “definition,” “define,” or “conceptualisation.” The following was the instruction: intitle:“Ubuntu” (definition OR define OR conceptualisation).

Though PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) provides a comprehensive checklist and a flow diagram to ensure clarity and transparency (Moher et al., 2009), as does the Cochrane Collaboration in their Handbook for Systematic Reviews (Higgins et al., 2023), this research followed a more open-ended approach, somewhat aligned with traditional narrative literature analyses (Cronin et al., 2008), where the researcher is less restricted by methodology and reporting processes, and focuses on

accumulating findings. This route was also followed for practical reasons, as systematic reviews are labour-intensive, complex (Stovold et al., 2014), and time-consuming (Andersen et al., 2020), beyond the capabilities of an individual researcher.

The results of both searches were combined, and a long list of Ubuntu articles was created. In all cases, the abstracts were first scrutinised to assess if the work was indeed about Ubuntu as an African concept. Noteworthy is that Ubuntu is also a “Linux distribution based on Debian and composed mostly of free and open-source software” and does not refer to any African way of living or philosophy. The selected articles were then read to find definitions of Ubuntu. The aim was to create a shorter list of 50 articles on Ubuntu, which could include information on defining the concept. Apart from Harzing’s and Google Scholar, as well as associated outputs found in the reference lists of these outputs, the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, a very reputable source of definitions, was used to ultimately define Ubuntu.

Once all the research outputs were assembled, the search for definitions was intensified. This short list of definitions was analysed and thematically grouped together. The grouping of the definitions was done by the first author and verified by the second author. Unbeknownst to the authors when planning this research, Gade’s (2012) conceptualisation of Ubuntu as either the moral quality of a person or as a phenomenon (for instance, a philosophy) was effective as a guide to categorising Ubuntu definitions. Additionally, in the analyses of the definitions, several synonym definitions (Alberts, 2019) were observed, which emerged as the third theme in defining Ubuntu. Following the thematic analysis, these themes were incorporated to provide a comprehensive and inclusive definition of Ubuntu. This was done by incorporating as many aspects and elements of Ubuntu as possible to ensure a comprehensive definition, while also making it inclusive by reflecting the wide range of existing approaches to defining Ubuntu. This synthesis was qualitative in nature, relying on the researcher’s interpretive skills in identifying patterns and themes in a flexible and iterative manner, sharing ideas and writing narratives with the co-author. Such a subjective approach to data analysis is well recognised as appropriate within the social sciences domain (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Findings

Harzing’s “publish or perish” search provided a list of publications, ranked from most cited to least cited. The 200 most cited articles were requested. The list of Ubuntu definitions is very long, as Google Scholar suggests that at least 5 620 outputs with Ubuntu in the title were published and listed on that search engine. The Google Scholar list was very long, when entering intitle: “Ubuntu” (definition OR define OR conceptualisation) – 1690 hits. The outputs presented by Harzing’s “publish or perish” phrase were very useful. After reading these outputs, 50 abstracts were identified and judged sufficient to define Ubuntu. Using these 50 outputs and the two definitions from the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, the process of identifying themes within the definitions began. Presented below are the three distinct categories of Ubuntu definitions identified in the literature, each of which is further articulated to show how it is typically specified or presented.

Synonym Definitions

A variety of synonym definitions is provided. Metz (2021) states that the word Ubuntu, from the Southern African Nguni linguistic group (including Zulu and Xhosa languages), literally means humanness.² Ramose (2015) echoes this interpretation of Ubuntu as referring to humanness. Sibanda (2014) refers to “Hunhu/Ubuntu” as an African conception of humanism. Ramose (2015) points to the importance of distinguishing between humanness and humanism, where the former suggests both a condition of being and the state of becoming, which is opposed to any-ism, including humanism, for this would indicate a condition of finality, a closedness or a type of absoluteness which is resistant to any further movement. Swanson (2007) provides only a few words to describe the concept, defining Ubuntu as “humble togetherness” (p. 54).

Moving beyond single-word synonyms (such as humanism or humaneness), other definitions remain similarly brief and fail to clarify the nature of Ubuntu, leaving readers to infer – or even construct – the concept for

² This is not Metz’s only description of Ubuntu; rather, it represents one example among several, as he also provides far more detailed accounts of the concept. The same pattern is evident among many authors who offer synonym-type definitions alongside more specific and elaborated formulations. Nevertheless, these concise synonym-based expressions cannot be dismissed. First, they appear in the literature as though they constitute legitimate definitions in their own right. Second, they reflect how Ubuntu is commonly invoked in public discourse, typically without further qualification. When individuals are asked to define Ubuntu, they often respond with phrases such as “I am because we are,” indicating how such shorthand expressions function as everyday, *de facto* definitions.

themselves. Sambala et al. (2020), for example, identify a group in their definition and explain Ubuntu as “because we are”. Mbiti (1969 / 1990) introduces a reciprocal element to the definition, and states that Ubuntu means “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am” (p. 106). Many authors (Follesdal, 2022; Gade, 2012; Letseka, 2013; Mboti, 2015; Ramose, 2002) use the phrase “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu”, where Ubuntu has the meaning that “a person is a person through other persons”. This contributes little to our understanding of the concept.

Differing from the popular definitions provided above, is the Radzik and Murphy (2023) translation of Ubuntu from Zulu, “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu”, which equates “a person depends on others to be a person”. The reference to depending on others seems to allocate a more active role to others in defining Ubuntu. Khomba and Kangaude-Ulaya (2013) refers to the isiZulu aphorism, “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu”, stating in a similar fashion that “a person is a person because of or through others”.

The findings above are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Ubuntu translations

| # | Author(s) | Ubuntu and indigenous language use of Ubuntu | English Translation |
|----|----------------------------------|--|--|
| 1 | Metz (2021) | Ubuntu | “humanness” |
| 2 | Ramose (2015) | Ubuntu | “humanness” |
| 3 | Sibanda (2014) | “Hunhu/Ubuntu” | African humanism |
| 4 | Swanson (2007) | Ubuntu | “humble togetherness” |
| 5 | Tutu (1999) | “Yu, u nobuntu” | “hey, so-and-so has ubuntu” |
| 6 | Sambala et al. (2020) | Ubuntu | “I am because we are” |
| 7 | Mbiti (1969 / 1990) | Ubuntu | “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am” |
| 8 | Letseka (2013) | “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” | “a person is a person through others” |
| 9 | Mboti (2015) | “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” | “persons are persons through other persons” |
| 10 | Gade (2012) | “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” | “a person is a person through other persons” |
| 11 | | “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” | “a person is a person through other persons” |
| 12 | Ramose (2002) | “umuntu ngumuntu nga bantu” (Nguni) “motho ke motho ka batho” (Sotho) | “a person is a person through other persons” |
| 13 | Mboti (2015) | “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” (Nguni), “motho ke motho ka batho” (Sotho) | “a person is a person through other persons” |
| 14 | Khomba and Kangaude-Ulaya (2013) | “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” (isiZulu) | “a person is a person because of or through others” |
| 15 | Radzik and Murphy (2023) | “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” (Zulu) | “a person depends on others to be a person” |

This table encapsulates the varied interpretations and translations of the Ubuntu concept as provided by different authors. Basically, the definition varies from humanness, and more so, to a person is a person through another person. However, (Mboti, 2015, pp. 126–127) said, following a review of 23 definitions of Ubuntu, that “the settled definition of choice that seems to always return, again and again” is “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” (in Nguni languages) and “motho ke motho ka batho” (in Sotho languages), which means “a person is a person through other persons” or “I am because we are”. This research came to the same conclusion regarding the literal meaning of the word.

Following Alberts’s (2019) typology (see Table 1), these definitions are “severely limited definitions”, as a critical aspect of the concept is missing or not presented. The definitions are vague and communicate very little about how a person becomes a person through or because of others. Worth noting is that “most authors today refer to the proverb ‘umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu’ when describing ubuntu, irrespective of whether they consider ubuntu to be a human quality, African humanism, a philosophy, an ethic, or a worldview” (Gade, 2011, p. 303).

As a Human Characteristic

Sibanda (2014) refers to “Hunhu/Ubuntu” as a traditional African philosophy which thrives on the vision of a perfect and virtuous individual. Mnyaka and Motlhabi (2005) write that a person is, in effect, a person through what one does. Such actions either make one *umntu onobuntu* (a humane person) or *umntu ongena buntu* (an inhumane person – one without Ubuntu). A humane person is understood as a person who possesses acceptable moral qualities and who puts them to good use. Mnyaka and Motlhabi (2005, p. 235) state that Ubuntu is a philosophy that “puts the person at the centre of all things”, and is “concerned with both the character and behaviour of a person”, which “becomes partially understood through human acts or the lack of relevant human acts”. “These acts are normally motivated by a good inner state or disposition”, and Ubuntu aims “to conserve, develop and perfect a human person. It is concerned with self-understanding, self-preservation and growth” (p. 235). Murove (2012) states that Ubuntu implies character qualities such as compassion, kindness, courtesy and respect for other persons. Metz (2021) claims that it is common among black people indigenous to the continent to believe that one’s basic aim in life should be to exhibit Ubuntu, which can be achieved by praising communal relationships with others. As stated earlier, Tutu (1999) individualised Ubuntu as a praiseworthy attribute, “*Yu, u nobuntu*”, which translates to “Hey, so-and-so has ubuntu”, implying that the person possesses commendable character. Seehawer (2018) emphasises the evolving nature of Ubuntu, which encompasses becoming human and being human. This evolution occurs through the acceptance of certain values and living in accordance with them. Mugumbate and Chereni (2020) claim that these Ubuntu values and practices make people authentic human beings. An authentic individual human being forms part of a larger and more significant relational, communal, societal, environmental and spiritual world.(p. vi). It is clear from the above that Ubuntu is unmistakably seen by some authors as a way of living.

As a Philosophy

Sambala et al. (2020) suggest that Ubuntu philosophy presents attractive alternative conventions of moral decision-making and a useful language for understanding moral reasoning and ethics. The outputs from the Harzing’s “publish or perish” search confirm its wide application. The following serves as evidence of the broad use of Ubuntu as a philosophy in various fields:

- Business and management (Igulu, 2023; Karsten & Illa, 2005; Khomba & Kangaude-Ulaya, 2013; Msengana, 2006; Sambala et al., 2020; Sigger et al., 2010; Taylor, 2014).
- Social change and rebuilding society (Mabovula, 2011; Mawere & Van Stam, 2016; Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005; Ogude, 2019; Tschaep, 2013).
- Law (Bennett, 2011; Himonga et al., 2013; Letseka, 2014; Louw, 2007).
- Education (Enslin & Horsthemke, 2004; Grange, 2012; Venter, 2004).
- Ecology (Etieyibo, 2017; Overson, 2011; Ramose, 2015).
- Theology and pastoral care (Cilliers, 2008; Chisale, 2018; Gathogo, 2008; Louw, 1998).
- Social work (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020; Mupedziswa et al., 2019; Van Breda, 2019), caring (Tolsma & Downing, 2016) and mental health (Wilson & Williams, 2013).

Many outputs refer to the understanding of Ubuntu as a philosophy (Chimakonam, 2016; Ehlers, 2017; Eliastam, 2015; Gade, 2011; Hailey, 2008; Mangena, 2016; Masango, 2006; Metz, 2021; Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005; Murove, 2012; Praeg, 2008; Sibanda, 2014; Shutte, 2009; Taylor, 2023; Van Niekerk, 2013), an ethic, or a worldview. Some leading authors and their seminal contributions were omitted from the list above. These include Ramose (1999), who treats Ubuntu as an onto-epistemology, an approach that intertwines being, knowing, and the production of knowledge, Murove’s (2009) interpretation of Ubuntu as relational relationality, and Molefe’s (2017, 2020) work on Ubuntu in relation to humanity, dignity, and personhood. These contributions are undoubtedly significant within the field of philosophy, yet they were not identified in the Harzing “publish or perish” search. Their omission may be due to the algorithms employed by the software or the specific Boolean parameters used in the search process. Nevertheless, although these excluded works have shaped African philosophical thought, they are not essential for defining the concept itself, which has evolved and attained a reach that extends beyond them.

As in the case where Ubuntu was considered as a human characteristic, it is clear from the above that Ubuntu is perceived as a philosophy, with widespread applications, already articulated in 1991 by Shutte. This presentation of Ubuntu as a philosophy is confirmed by the number of authors cited above.

From the findings, it can be stated that the word Ubuntu is derived from the Nguni³ proverb “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu”, which translates to “a person is a person through other persons”, referring to a way of being (a characteristic) and a phenomenon (a philosophy, an ethic, a worldview). Two further aspects could be incorporated, from the introductory part of the article, namely that Ubuntu is a traditionally Southern African concept (Metz, 2021; Seehawer, 2023) and secondly that the concept is seen as an ideal, something to aspire to (Mabovula, 2011; Matolino & Kwindigwi, 2013; Murove, 2012). However, a definition as sketched in the previous paragraph is not satisfactory. It is partly a synonym definition, an incomplete definition, or a severely limited definition. It can also be described as an extremely broad definition (see Table 1), and such definitions should be avoided when defining concepts (Alberts, 2019). However, by treating the available text above as the genus in a genus-differentiae definition and adding the differentiae, perhaps better framed as denotations, in what may be described as a definition-through-denotations approach (see Table 1), it becomes possible to construct an acceptable definition. The denotations associated with Ubuntu are presented next.

Denotations

Given a thorough review of the literature, a synthesis could be drawn of the main denotations of Ubuntu. The literature is quite extensive, overlapping, and difficult to integrate, but the use of the term “associated values” in Broodryk’s (2002, p. 13) definition of Ubuntu as humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion, and “associated values” is valuable, as many synonyms are used when defining Ubuntu. The outputs from the Harzing’s “publish or perish” search were used to specify the words associated with Ubuntu, as a human characteristic, and as a philosophy. The words associated with human characteristics and philosophy were presented in different formats, but as it turned out, their denotations were the same. What is presented in the following four paragraphs are distinct characteristics associated with living Ubuntu, as well as elements embedded within the broader philosophy. The frequency with which these expressions appear in the literature will inform a denotative account of Ubuntu.

Tutu (1999) claims that individuals displaying Ubuntu are generous, hospitable, friendly, caring, and compassionate, and that they share what they have. Murove (2012) argues that Ubuntu implies character qualities such as compassion, kindness, courtesy, and respect for other persons. Eliastam (2015) suggests that Ubuntu is generally defined as depicting hospitality, compassion, humaneness, sharing, and respect. Letseka and Letseka (2021) profess that Ubuntu encapsulates moral norms and virtues such as kindness, generosity, compassion, benevolence, courtesy, respect, and concern for others. Follesdal (2022) emphasises the harmonious relationships between persons as constitutive of the individual, underscoring compassion and commitment to one another’s growth. Mabovula (2011) provides a long list of the core humanistic attributes of Ubuntu, including caring, humble, thoughtful, considerate, understanding, wise, generous, hospitable, socially mature, socially sensitive, virtuous, and blessed: character attributes that veer away from confrontation towards conciliation. These denotations are largely related to the characteristics of Ubuntu.

In a similar vein, Mnyaka and Motlhabi (2005) write that Ubuntu aims to conserve, develop, and perfect a human being. It focuses on self-understanding, self-preservation, and growth. The community plays a crucial role in achieving this objective by aiding in the shaping and defining of an individual. Every person has rights that must be respected, including receiving help, protection, sustenance, and being shown compassion and love. These rights are granted without discrimination, for one qualifies simply by being human. Rather than viewing these rights as entitlements, they are seen as conferring responsibilities and obligations towards others. Seehawer (2018) declares that Ubuntu is realised through the lived experience of community and respectful, caring relationships with other living beings and the environment. Khomba and Kangaude-Ulaya (2013) describe Ubuntu as the ability to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity, and mutuality, aimed at building and maintaining communities characterised by justice and mutual care. Mutsonziwa (2020) highlights humanness, interconnectedness and compassion as core to the Ubuntu concept.

Focusing more on the philosophy behind the concept, Ewuoso and Hall (2019, p. 93) narrate that “Ubuntu is an essentially relational ethics, which prizes relationships of interdependence, fellowship, reconciliation, relationality, community friendliness, harmonious relationships, and other-regarding actions such as compassion and actions that are likely to be good for others, in which actions are morally right to the extent that they

³ Alternatively, ‘motho ke motho ka batho’ (in Sotho languages), but the Nguni languages constitute a larger pool of languages, and reference is more often made to the Nguni languages.

honour the capacity to relate communally, reduce discord or promote friendly relationships with others, and in which the physical world and the spiritual world are fundamentally united.” Bennett (2011), within the context of law, professes that Ubuntu adoption can lay the foundation for a cohesive, plural, South African legal culture, characterised by notions such as reconciliation, sharing, compassion, civility, responsibility, trust and harmony. Letseka (2013, p. 339) writes that “Ubuntu implies the capacity in African cultures to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony, and humanity.” Sambala et al. (2020) state that Ubuntu is based on and emphasises humanity, compassion, and social responsibility. According to Mawere and Van Stam (2016, p. 291), Ubuntu is associated with a range of positive attitudes that express respect for human life and passion for community, helpfulness, conviviality, sharing, caring, trust, and unselfishness.

Mnyaka and Motlhabi (2005) claim that Ubuntu aims to conserve, develop, and perfect a human person. It is concerned with self-understanding, self-preservation, and growth. The role of the community in accomplishing the aforementioned is to assist in shaping and defining a person. A person has rights to be respected, and is to be helped, protected, fed, and shown compassion and love. There is no discrimination when it comes to respecting these rights; one qualifies merely by being a human person. The rights one has are not perceived as statements of entitlement, but rather as responsibilities and obligations towards others. Seehawer (2018) declares that Ubuntu is realised through lived community and respectful, caring relations with other living beings and the environment. Khomba and Kangaude-Ulaya (2013) suggest that Ubuntu can be described as the capacity to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity, and mutuality in the interests of building and maintaining communities with justice and mutual caring. Mutsonziwa (2020) mentions humanness, interconnectedness, and compassion as central to Ubuntu. Karsten and Illa (2005, p. 607) state that “Ubuntu is seen as humaneness, a pervasive spirit of caring and community, harmony and hospitality, respect and responsiveness, that individuals display for one another.” According to Kamwangamalu (1999, p. 5), Ubuntu represents the core values of African ontologies, including respect for all humans, human dignity, sharing, obedience, humility, solidarity, caring, hospitality, interdependence, and communalism.

Given the set of denotations presented in the preceding four paragraphs, it was decided to use their frequency of occurrence as an indicator of the centrality of the identified denotations. Most frequently appearing in the text above is the term “compassion” (15 times), followed by “caring” (9 times), “respect” (7 times), “community” (6 times), “sharing” (5 times), “dignity” and “humanity” (4 times each), and “humanness”, “hospitality”, “growth”, “human”, “relationships”, “reciprocity”, and “harmony” (3 times in each case). The enumeration of these words reflects the pivotal themes around which the discussion is centred, emphasising the significance of compassion, mutual respect, communal living and the foundational values associated with Ubuntu. In the next step, similar denotations were grouped together; that is, synonyms and terms thematically associated were consolidated into broader thematic categories. The central theme, namely empathy, emphasises “compassion” (15 times) and “caring” (9 times), reflecting the text’s advocacy for empathy and proactive support towards others’ well-being. Next, respect, incorporating “respect” (7 times), “dignity” (4 times), and “humanity” (4 times each), along with “humanness” (3 times), underscores the narrative of recognising the intrinsic worth of every individual. Another significant theme is community, revolving around the terms “community” (6 times) and “reciprocity” (3 times), highlighting the vital role of mutual support and exchange in building strong, cohesive communities. Closely followed by generosity, encapsulating “sharing” (5 times) and “hospitality” (3 times), the text advocates for generosity and the idea of sharing resources. The final core theme, harmony, includes “relationships” (3 times) and “harmony” (3 times), underscoring the significance of fostering peaceful and cooperative interactions. The recurrent emphasis on specific aspects was taken as indicative of their conceptual centrality, permitting these elements to be identified as the principal denotative markers of Ubuntu..

Discussion

The outputs based on Harzing’s “publish or perish” phrase were used as the core data source for this study. Though reliance on Google Scholar suggests an incomplete database, it still constitutes a huge index. Some concern may be expressed regarding the reliance on Harzing’s “publish or perish” principle for citation metrics, as the guideline does not provide a qualitative assessment of the research impact of the publications’ substance. However, Harzing’s “publish or perish” concept was seen as a reliable tool to gather the most popular works on Ubuntu. The first 50 outputs generated by Harzing’s “publish or perish” method were used, and these texts provided rich data and strong leads to other influential literature on the topic.

The present research aimed to establish consensus on the meaning of Ubuntu through the amalgamation of the different uses of the word. An important step toward achieving the objective was the following passage from Gade (2011), regarding the history of the use of the word Ubuntu. He finds that the word has been in use since at least 1846, and that prior to 1950 Ubuntu was always defined as a human quality. During the 1990s, authors started defining Ubuntu more broadly as a philosophy, an ethic, and as a worldview. It was also during the 1990s that “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” (translated as a person is a person through other persons) was used for the first time to describe Ubuntu. Gade (2011, p. 303) states that “most authors today refer to the proverb when describing ubuntu, irrespective of whether they consider ubuntu to be a human quality, African humanism, a philosophy, an ethic, or a worldview”. Given this background, the aim was to identify commonalities in the proverb’s use as both a quality and a phenomenon.

From the outputs of the Harzing’s “publish or perish” search, only small differences in the interpretation of the word Ubuntu could be found, and it was therefore easy to follow Mboti’s (2015)¹ lead and to declare that general consensus exists regarding the translation or meaning of the word. It can be stated with confidence that Ubuntu stems from “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu”, translated as a person is a person through other persons. The Harzing’s “publish or perish” outputs also provided evidence of the different uses of the term. Some of the findings presented Ubuntu as a characteristic. It is clear that a large portion of the outputs refer to Ubuntu in this manner, describing it as a noble characteristic and a quality people should strive towards. Ubuntu is also presented as an overarching African worldview applied within the domain of education and human sciences, but also serving as a guide for social change. The majority of Ubuntu writers refer to it as philosophy. Gade’s (2011, 2012) general structure resulted in a definition which was not satisfactory. As reported above, Ubuntu was defined as “derived from the Nguni proverb ‘umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu’, which translates to ‘a person is a person through other persons’, which refers to a way of being (a characteristic) and a phenomenon (a philosophy, an ethic, a worldview)”. It was also stated that, deviating from Gade’s (2011, 2012) structure, two additional aspects could be incorporated into the definition, namely the fact that Ubuntu is a traditionally Southern African concept, and that this idea is seen as an ideal or a standard to aspire to. The result resembles a definition-through-synthesis (see Table 1), but is not deemed as satisfactory since it is partially a synonym definition, an incomplete definition, a severely limited definition, and an extremely broad definition (see Table 1); all unwanted qualities when defining a concept (Alberts, 2019).

It was therefore decided to use the Harzing’s “publish or perish” outputs to derive differentiae data, as the present definition could serve as the genus to a genus-differentiae definition. In effect, the intent was to create a definition-through-denotations (see Alberts, 2019; Table 1), and to add the result to the preliminary definition. The Harzing’s “publish or perish” outputs were rich in detail and were originally presented as both a characteristic and a philosophy. This finding was also reflected in the discussion above. Considering the number of times specific concepts appeared in the lists of denotations of Ubuntu, themes central to Ubuntu were extracted. Five denotative themes were identified, namely empathy, respect, community, generosity, and harmony. A pure definition-through-denotations would therefore conclude that Ubuntu focuses on five aspects, namely empathy, respect, community, generosity, and harmony.

The integration of all gathered information ultimately facilitated the development of a comprehensive and inclusive definition of Ubuntu.

Ubuntu, originating from the Nguni proverb ‘umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,’ which translates to ‘a person is a person through other persons,’ embodies an exemplary Southern African way of life and philosophical orientation that places empathy, respect, community, generosity, and harmony at the centre of personal development and the shaping of societal thought among Africans.

This amalgamation could be seen as a consensual definition of Ubuntu, necessary for advancing any body of knowledge (Babbie & Mouton, 2011; De Vos et al., 2011). Although this proposed definition includes aspects of undesirable definitions (Alberts, 2019), it is nevertheless considered adequate in its present form, as it captures the majority of Ubuntu’s core elements as presented in the existing literature. Moreover, it accommodates commonly used populist synonyms while still providing a clear specification of the concept’s meaning. The research aim of producing a comprehensive and inclusive definition of Ubuntu was therefore achieved.

A definition of this kind requires careful construction. Defining a phenomenon simultaneously as a way of life and as a philosophy is inherently problematic, because a definition should convey conceptual clarity (Kibin, 2024; Pap, 1964). The employment of the conjunction serves only to obscure the ontological and conceptual status of the phenomenon, thereby undermining definitional clarity. Praeg (2014) offers a conceptual solution to this dilemma. He distinguishes between ubuntu (lowercase), the lived, precolonial, everyday mode of being in community, and Ubuntu (uppercase), the modern, philosophical interpretation and reconstruction of that earlier way of life. This distinction provides conceptual clarity and resolves the ambiguity created by the “or.” It also highlights an important element embedded within the definition itself: the exemplificatory relationship between ubuntu and Ubuntu. In this sense, Ubuntu (uppercase) may represent a reflective, contemporary longing to recapture certain communal qualities believed to have characterised life before colonial disruption (Praeg, 2014).

Conclusion

The research provides, based on the work of the most cited researchers in the field of Ubuntu, an amalgamated definition of the term. This amalgamation could be presented as a consensual definition, which could contribute to building an integrated body of knowledge around the concept of Ubuntu. This research is constrained by the corpus of outputs it depended on, primarily the Harzing’s “publish or perish” tool. However, as discussed above, the limitation is not a deal-breaker, since the research focused on the most cited research studies. Focusing on a citation matrix also excludes more recent research from the study. It could be argued that if the study’s first author is neither a South African of African descent nor a Nguni or Sotho speaker, the research may be compromised. This limitation is partially mitigated by the fact that the second author is a South African of African descent and a native Nguni speaker. Nevertheless, this analysis of outputs has been undertaken by African scholars whose origins lie within South Africa. As noted in the introduction, many prominent authors writing on Ubuntu, including those whose work is widely cited and often regarded as authoritative, are white, and several of these were not born in Africa. This study, therefore, aligns with the broader scholarly landscape, where insights into Ubuntu arise from a diversity of positionalities, each contributing in its own way to the evolving academic discourse. The primary aim of this study was to influence future researchers to adopt the same concept of Ubuntu as they embark on their research journeys. The amalgamated definition of Ubuntu, provided above, should serve as the standard definition of Ubuntu. However, it is important to recognise that, although its origins are longstanding, the conceptualisation of Ubuntu has continued to evolve. Any definition offered here reflects the best possible synthesis at this point in time, and future developments in scholarship may further refine or extend its relevance.

Declarations

Interdisciplinary Scope: This study adopted an interdisciplinary framework, integrating insights from philosophy, African studies, and social science research to develop a comprehensive and inclusive definition of Ubuntu. Despite the differing epistemologies and ontologies underlying these disciplines, they offer complementary perspectives that enrich the conceptual depth and analytical scope of the study.

Author Contributions: Both authors contributed to the conceptualisation and design of the study. The first author was responsible for data collection, analysis, and drafting the initial version of the manuscript. The second author provided critical feedback and revisions to enhance the work. Both authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest: No potential competing interest was reported by the authors.

Funding: This research did not receive any sponsorship or funding.

Availability of Data: Data sharing not applicable. No new data generated.

References

Alberts, M. (2019). *Terminologie en terminografie: ‘n Handleiding* Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie Vir Wetenskap En Kuns.

- Andersen, M. Z., Gülen, S., Fonnes, S., Andresen, K., & Rosenberg, J. (2020). Half of Cochrane reviews were published more than 2 years after the protocol. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*, 124, 85–93. [10.1016/j.jclinepi.2020.05.011](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclinepi.2020.05.011)
- Babbie, E., & Mouton, J. (2011). *The practice of social research*. Oxford.
- Bennett, T. W. (2011). Ubuntu: An African equity. *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal/Potchefstroomse Elektroniese Regsblad*, 14(4), 30–61. <https://doi.org/10.4314/pelj.v14i4.2>
- Biko, S. (1978). *I write what I like: Selected Writings*. University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.5070/F783017356>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Broodryk, J. (2002). *Ubuntu: Life Lessons from Africa*. Ubuntu School of Philosophy.
- Chetty, K., & Price, G. (2024). Ubuntu leadership as a predictor of employee engagement: A South African study. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 22. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v22i0.2462>
- Chimakonam, J. O. (2016). The end of ubuntu or its beginning in Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate: An exercise in conversational philosophy. *South African Journal of Philosophy= Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Wysbegeerte*, 35(2), 224–234. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2016.1174921>
- Chisale, S. S. (2018). Ubuntu as care: Deconstructing the gendered Ubuntu. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 39(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v39i1.1790>
- Cilliers, J. (2008, July). In search of meaning between Ubuntu and into: Perspectives on preaching in post-apartheid South Africa. In *Eighth International Conference of Societas Homiletica*. Copenhagen.
- Cronin, P., Ryan, F., & Coughlan, M. (2008). Undertaking a literature review: A step-by-step approach. *British Journal of Nursing (Mark Allen Publishing)*, 17(1), 38–43. <https://doi.org/10.12968/bjon.2008.17.1.28059>
- De Vos, A. S., Strydom, H., Fouche, C. B., & Delport, C. S. L. (2011). Building a scientific base for the helping professions. In *Research at grass roots: For the social sciences and human services professions* (4th ed., pp. 507–513). Van Schaik.
- Diouf, E., Dyer, U., Ecclesiastes, A., & Gilbert, M. (2023). Our Ubuntu: A Black feminist turn. *Agenda*, 37(2), 32–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2023.2229572>
- Ehlers, P. (2017). *A comparison of the views of Augustine Shutte and Thaddeus Metz on African philosophy and ubuntu ethics* [Unpublished Thesis, University of the Western Cape]. <https://philarchive.org/archive/SHUUAT>
- Eliastam, J. L. (2015). Exploring ubuntu discourse in South Africa: Loss, liminality and hope. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 36(2), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v36i2.1427>
- Elkington, R. (2020). Ancient wisdom for ethical leadership: Ubuntu and the ethic of ecosophy. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 13(4), 48–52. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.21672>
- Enslin, P., & Horsthemke, K. (2004). Can Ubuntu provide a model for citizenship education in African democracies? *Comparative Education*, 40(4), 545–558. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305006042000284538>
- Etieyibo, E. (2017). Ubuntu and the environment. In *The Palgrave handbook of African philosophy* (pp. 633–657). Palgrave. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59291-0_41
- Ewuoso, C., & Hall, S. (2019). Core aspects of ubuntu: A systematic review. *South African Journal of Bioethics and Law*, 12(2), 93. <https://doi.org/10.7196/SAJBL.2019.v12i2.679>
- Follesdal, A. (2022). Federalism. In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. (Winter 2022 ed.). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2022/entries/federalism/>
- Gade, C. B. N. (2011). The historical development of the written discourses on Ubuntu. *South African Journal of Philosophy= Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Wysbegeerte*, 30(3), 303–329. <https://doi.org/10.4314/sajpem.v30i3.69578>
- Gade, C. B. N. (2012). What is Ubuntu ? Different interpretations among South Africans of African descent . *South African Journal of Philosophy= Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Wysbegeerte*, 31(3), 484–503. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2012.10751789>
- Gathogo, J. (2008). African philosophy as expressed in the concepts of hospitality and ubuntu. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 130, 39–53. https://www.academia.edu/download/64681780/African_Philosophy_as_Expressed_in_the_Concepts_of_Hospitality_and_Ubuntu.pdf

- Grange, L. L. (2012). Ubuntu, ukama, environment and moral education. *Journal of Moral Education*, 41(3), 329–340. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2012.691631>
- Hailey, J. (2008). *Ubuntu: A literature review*. Tutu Foundation. <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=5af48f144b75fd4662b36934e26b52bdf0629e97>
- Higgins, J. P. T., Thomas, J., Chandler, J., Cumpston, M., Li, T., Page, M. J., & Welch, V. A. (Eds.) (2023). *Cochrane handbook for systematic reviews of interventions* (Version 6.4). Cochrane. <https://training.cochrane.org/handbook>
- Himonga, C., Taylor, M., & Pope, A. (2013). Reflections on judicial views of ubuntu. *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal*, 16(5), 369–427. <https://doi.org/10.4314/pelj.v16i5.8>
- Igulu, G. (2023). *Leadership effectiveness of the executive directors of local government authorities in Tanzania*. University of Groningen. <https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.64554663>
- Kahn, S. B., & Louw, V. N. (2023). Decolonising human resource management in the South African Public service. *Journal of Public Administration*, 58(1), 133–148.
- Kamwangamalu, N. M. (1999). Ubuntu in South Africa: A sociolinguistic perspective to a Pan-African concept. *Critical Arts*, 13(2), 24–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560049985310111>
- Karsten, L., & Illa, H. (2005). Ubuntu as a key African management concept: Contextual background and practical insights for knowledge application. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 20(7), 607–620. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940510623416>
- Khomba, J. K., & Kangaude-Ulaya, E. C. (2013). Indigenisation of corporate strategies in Africa: Lessons from the African Ubuntu philosophy. *China-USA Business Review*, 12(7), 672–689. [https://www.academia.edu/download/32455573/7-China-USA_Business_Review_2013_12\(7\).pdf#page=41](https://www.academia.edu/download/32455573/7-China-USA_Business_Review_2013_12(7).pdf#page=41)
- Kibin. (2024). *The features of a good definition*. <http://www.kibin.com/essay-examples/the-features-of-a-good-definition-Dnmyg4Nl>
- Laloo, E. (2022). Ubuntu leadership – An explication of an Afrocentric leadership style. *The Journal of Values-Based Leadership*, 15(2), 209–219. <https://doi.org/10.22543/1948-0733.1383>
- Letseka, M. (2012). In defence of Ubuntu. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 31(1), 47–60. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-011-9267-2>
- Letseka, M. (2013). Educating for ubuntu/botho: Lessons from Basotho indigenous education. *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 3(2), 337–344.
- Letseka, M. (2014). Ubuntu and justice as fairness. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(9), 544–551. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263466044_Ubuntu_and_Justice_as_Fairness
- Letseka, M., & Letseka, M. M. (2021). Basotho community elders' views on Botho/Ubuntu as a moral concept. *Indilinga: African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 20(2), 141–153.
- Longweni, M., & Mdaka, L. E. (2023). Ubuntu's business edge: A systematic literature review and future directives. *Journal of the Academy of Business and Emerging Markets*, 3(2), 41–54.
- Louw, D. J. (1998). Ubuntu: An African assessment of the religious other. In *The paideia archive: Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy* (Vol. 23, pp. 34–42). <https://doi.org/10.5840/wcp20-paideia199823407>
- Louw, D. J. (2007). The African concept of ubuntu and restorative justice. In *Handbook of restorative justice* (pp. 161–171). Routledge. <https://api.taylorfrancis.com/content/chapters/edit/download?identifierName=doi&identifierValue=10.4324/9780203346822-12&type=chapterpdf>
- Mabovula, N. N. (2011). The erosion of African communal values: A reappraisal of the African Ubuntu philosophy. *Inkanyiso: Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(1), 38–47. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ijhss.v3i1.69506>
- Mangaliso, M. P., Mangaliso, N. A., Ndanga, L. Z. B., & Jean-Denis, H. (2022). Contextualizing organizational change management in Africa: Incorporating the core values of Ubuntu. *Journal of African Business*, 23(4), 1029–1048. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15228916.2021.1984817>
- Mangena, F. (2016). African ethics through Ubuntu: A postmodern exposition. *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 9(2), 66–80. <http://www.jpanafrican.org/docs/vol9no2/9.2-6-Fainos.pdf>
- Masango, M. J. S. (2006). African spirituality that shapes the concept of Ubuntu. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 27(3), 930–943. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v27i3.195>
- Matolino, B., & Kwindingwi, W. (2013). The end of ubuntu. *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 32(2), 197–205. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2013.817637>

- Matolino, B. (2020). Ubuntu: A traditional virtue ethics contribution to economic and social development in Southern Africa. In *African virtue ethics traditions for business and management* (pp. 12–29). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781789905960.00008>
- Mawere, M., & Van Stam, G. (2016). Ubuntu/Unhu as communal love: Critical reflections on the sociology of ubuntu and communal life in sub-Saharan Africa. In *Violence, politics and conflict management in Africa: Envisioning transformation, peace and unity in the twenty-first century* (pp. 287–304). Langaa. <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=sFMnDQAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA287&dq=ubuntu+definition%7Cdefine%7Cconceptualization&ots=crjIZ0UbvO&sig=2JMXgOJcmxqr2PTGNOyt8fOkanc>
- Mbiti, J. S. (1990). *African religions and philosophy*. (2nd ed.). Heineman. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1594869>
- Mboti, N. (2015). May the real *Ubuntu* please stand up? *Journal of Media Ethics*, 30(2), 125–147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23736992.2015.1020380>
- Metz, T. (2007). Toward an African moral theory. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 15(3), 321–341. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9760.2007.00280.x>
- Metz, T. (2021). Ubuntu: The good life. In *Encyclopedia of quality of life and well-being research*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69909-7_4029-2
- Mnyaka, M., & Motlhabi, M. (2005). The African concept of *Ubuntu/Botho* and its socio-moral significance. *Black Theology*, 3(2), 215–237. <https://doi.org/10.1558/blth.3.2.215.65725>
- Moher, D., Liberati, A., Tetzlaff, J., Altman, D. G., & PRISMA Group. (2009). Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: The PRISMA statement. *PLoS Medicine*, 6(7), e1000097. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000097>
- Mokgoro, Y. (1998). Ubuntu and the law in South Africa. *Buffalo Human Rights Law Review*, 15, 1–6.
- Molefe, M. (2017). Ubuntu and the modern world: A philosophical analysis. *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 36(3), 311–325. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2017.1269995>
- Molefe, M. (2020). An African conception of dignity in light of Ubuntu. *Theoria*, 67(163), 44–63.
- Mouton, J. (1996). *Understanding research*. Van Schaik.
- Msengana, N. W. (2006). *The significance of the concept “Ubuntu” for educational management and leadership during democratic transformation in South Africa* [Unpublished Thesis]. University of Stellenbosch. <https://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/1192>
- Mugumbate, J. R., & Chereni, A. (2020). Now, the theory of Ubuntu has its space in social work. *African Journal of Social Work*, 10(1), v–xvii. <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ajsw/article/view/195112>
- Mupedziswa, R., Rankopo, M., & Mwansa, L. K. (2019). Ubuntu as a pan-African philosophical framework for social work in Africa. In *Social work practice in Africa: Indigenous and innovative approaches* (pp. 21–38). Fountain Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2tp73vt.8>
- Murove, M. F. (2009). An African environmental ethic based on Ubuntu. In *African ethics: An anthology of comparative and applied ethics* (pp. 315–331). University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Murove, M. F. (2012). Ubuntu. *Diogenes*, 59(3–4), 36–47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192113493737>
- Mutsonziwa, I. (2020). *Ubuntu: Development and validation of a scale to measure African humanism* [Unpublished thesis]. University of Pretoria. <https://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/79761>
- Ogude, J. (Ed.) (2019). *Ubuntu and the reconstitution of community*. Indiana University Press. https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=xriXD-wAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=ubuntu+definition%7Cdefine%7Cconceptualization&ots=mhpPURd-zX&sig=f14mgrxKEg8fk0T52t_9IfdmTAE
- Outlaw Jr., L. T., & Jeffers, C. (2022). Africana philosophy. In *The stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*. (Fall 2022 ed.). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/africana/>
- Overson, S. (2011). Commons thinking, ecological intelligence and the ethical and moral framework of Ubuntu: An imperative for sustainable development. *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, 3(3), 84–96. https://academicjournals.org/article/article1380106358_Shumba.pdf
- Pap, A. (1964). Theory of definition. *Philosophy of Science*, 31(1), 49–54. <https://doi.org/10.1086/287977>
- Praeg, L. (2008). An answer to the question: What is Ubuntu? *South African Journal of Philosophy=Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif Vir Wysbegeerte*, 27(4), 367–385. <https://doi.org/10.4314/sajpem.v27i4.31525>

- Praeg, L. (2014). From ubuntu to Ubuntu. In *Curating the archive* (pp. 96–120). University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Radzik, L., & Murphy, C. (2023). Reconciliation. In *The stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*. (Fall 2023 ed.). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2023/entries/reconciliation/>
- Ramose, M. B. (1999). *African philosophy through Ubuntu*. Mond Books.
- Ramose, M. B. (2002). The philosophy of Ubuntu and Ubuntu as a philosophy. In *Philosophy from Africa: A text with readings* (pp. 230–237). Oxford University Press.
- Ramose, M. (2015). Ecology through Ubuntu. In *Emerging from cultures and religions of the ASEAN region* (pp. 69–76). https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Roman-Meinhold/publication/281995769_Meinhold_Roman_ed_ENVIRONMENTAL_VALUES_Emerging_from_Cultures_and_Religions_of_the_ASEAN_Region_GCRCAU_KAS_Bangkok_2015/links/5600cd6608ae07629e52b1f9/Meinhold-Roman-ed-ENVIRONMENTAL-VALUES-Emerging-from-Cultures-and-Religions-of-the-ASEAN-Region-GCRC-AU-KAS-Bangkok-2015.pdf#page=88
- Sambala, E. Z., Cooper, S., & Manderson, L. (2020). Ubuntu as a framework for ethical decision making in Africa: Responding to epidemics. *Ethics & Behavior*, 30(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10508422.2019.1583565>
- Seehawer, M. K. (2018). Decolonising research in a Sub-Saharan African context: Exploring Ubuntu as a foundation for research methodology, ethics and agenda. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 21(4), 453–466. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2018.1432404>
- Seehawer, M. (2023). Research Agendas in an Ubuntu Paradigm. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in the South*, 7(1), 41–61. <https://doi.org/10.36615/sotls.v7i1.351>
- Shutte, A. (2001). *Ubuntu: An ethic for a new South Africa*. Cluster Publications.
- Shutte, A. (2009). *Ubuntu as the African ethical vision* [Unpublished thesis]. University of the Western Cape. <https://philarchive.org/archive/SHUUAT>
- Sibanda, P. (2014). The dimensions of ‘Hunhu/Ubuntu’(Humanism in the African sense): The Zimbabwean conception. *Dimensions*, 4(1), 26–29. <https://doi.org/10.9790/3021-04142629>
- Sigger, D. S., Polak, B. M., & Pennink, B. J. W. (2010). Ubuntu’ or ‘humanness’ as a management concept. *Centre for Development Studies Research Paper*, 29, 1–46. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ev.344>
- Stovold, E., Beecher, D., Foxlee, R., & Noel-Storr, A. (2014). Study flow diagrams in Cochrane systematic review updates: An adapted PRISMA flow diagram. *Systematic Reviews*, 3, 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1186/2046-4053-3-54>
- Swanson, D. M. (2007). Ubuntu: An African contribution to (re)search for/with a ‘humble togetherness’. *Journal of contemporary issues in education*, 2(2), 53–67. <https://doi.org/10.20355/C5PP4X>
- Tauetsile, J. (2021). Employee engagement in non-Western contexts: The link between social resources Ubuntu and employee engagement. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, 21(2), 245–259. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14705958211007874>
- Taylor, D. F. P. (2014). Defining ubuntu for business ethics – a deontological approach. *South African Journal of Philosophy= Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Wysbegeerte*, 33(3), 331–345. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2014.948328>
- Taylor, P. C. (2023). Contemporary Africana philosophy. In *The stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*. (Spring 2023 ed.). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/africana-contemporary/>
- Tolsma, M.H., & Downing, C. (2016). An integrative review of Albertina Sisulu and Ubuntu: Relevance to caring and nursing. *Health SA Gesondheid*, 21(1), 214–227. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hsag.2016.04.002>
- Tschaeppe, M. (2013). A humanist ethic of Ubuntu: Understanding moral obligation and community. *Essays in the Philosophy of Humanism*, 21(2), 47–61. <https://doi.org/10.1558/eph.v21i2.47>
- Tutu, D. (1999). *No future without forgiveness*. Rider. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5842.1999.tb00012.x>
- Van Breda, A. D. (2019). Developing the notion of Ubuntu as African theory for social work practice. *Social Work*, 55(4), 439–450. <https://doi.org/10.15270/55-4-762>
- Van Niekerk, J. B. (2013). *Ubuntu and moral value* [Unpublished thesis]. University of the Witwatersrand. <https://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/server/api/core/bitstreams/755432f6-5b72-4e74-9af7-f6e1d815d1d2/content>

- Venter, E. (2004). The notion of Ubuntu and communalism in African educational discourse. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 23(2–3), 149–160. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:SPED.0000024428.29295.03>
- Waghid, Y. (2020). Towards an Ubuntu philosophy of higher education in Africa. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 39(3), 299–308. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-020-09709-w>
- Waghid, Y., Terblanche, J., Shawa, L. B., Hungwe, J. P., Waghid, F., & Waghid, Z. (2023). *Towards an Ubuntu university*. Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-06454-8>
- Wilson, D., & Williams, V. (2013). Ubuntu: Development and framework of a specific model of positive mental health. *Psychology Journal*, 10(2). https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Derek-Wilson/publication/261706211_Ubuntu_Development_and_Framework_of_a_Specific_Model_of_Positive_Mental_Health/links/00b7d53516e9378180000000/Ubuntu-Development-and-Framework-of-a-Specific-Model-of-Positive-Mental-Health.pdf
- Wood, G., & Bischoff, C. (2022). Human resource management in Africa: Current research and future directions – evidence from South Africa and across the continent. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 33(3), 444–471. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2019.1711443>