

Research Article

Perception of ‘Ubuntu’ and Social Cohesion in Post-Conflict Communities in Africa: An Empirical Investigation of Forgiveness and Reintegration

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***Related declarations are provided in the final section of this article*

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Abstract

Post-conflict societies across Africa continue to grapple with the complex challenges of reconciliation, social reintegration, and the restoration of trust among previously divided groups. In response to these challenges, Ubuntu philosophy commonly encapsulated in the expression ‘a person is a person through other persons’ has been advanced by scholars and peace advocates as a culturally grounded framework for promoting forgiveness, restorative justice, and communal healing. Notably, the works of Desmond Tutu and Michael Battle argue that Ubuntu fosters social cohesion by emphasising interconnectedness, compassion, and shared humanity. Despite its widespread normative acceptance within peacebuilding discourse, empirical evidence examining the relationship between perceptions of Ubuntu and measurable indicators of social cohesion remains limited. This study investigated the influence of Ubuntu philosophy on social cohesion in selected post-conflict communities in Africa. Drawing on Communitarian African Philosophy and Restorative Justice Theory, the study employed a cross-sectional survey design involving 520 residents drawn from communities affected by civil conflict and insurgency. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire measuring perceptions of Ubuntu, forgiveness, interpersonal trust, and acceptance of former combatants’ reintegration. Descriptive statistics were used to examine respondents’ perceptions, while inferential analyses assessed the predictive relationship between Ubuntu orientation and social cohesion outcomes. The findings indicate that positive perceptions of Ubuntu are significantly associated with higher levels of forgiveness, greater interpersonal trust, and stronger support for the reintegration of former combatants into community life. Respondents who demonstrated stronger

adherence to Ubuntu values were more likely to endorse reconciliation initiatives and less likely to express hostility towards previously antagonistic groups. The study further reveals that Ubuntu serves as a significant predictor of social cohesion, highlighting its practical relevance beyond philosophical discourse. The study concludes that Ubuntu constitutes an important indigenous ethical framework for post-conflict reconstruction and sustainable peace-building in Africa. It recommends the integration of Ubuntu-based principles into reconciliation programmes, community dialogue initiatives, and peace education policies aimed at strengthening social cohesion and fostering long-term societal healing.

Keywords: Ubuntu; Social cohesion; Post-conflict communities; Forgiveness; Reintegration; Restorative justice; Reconciliation; African philosophy

Introduction

The persistence of violent conflicts across many African societies has left enduring social, psychological, and economic consequences that often extend well beyond the cessation of hostilities. While peace agreements may formally end armed confrontations, the deeper challenge of rebuilding fractured relationships among former adversaries frequently remains unresolved. Victims, perpetrators, displaced persons, and returning ex-combatants must learn to coexist within communities marked by memories of violence, mistrust, and collective trauma. Consequently, post-conflict reconstruction is increasingly recognised not merely as a political or economic undertaking but also as a social and moral process requiring reconciliation, healing, and the restoration of human relationships.

In recent decades, scholars and practitioners have increasingly turned to indigenous African philosophies as potential resources for addressing the complex challenges of post-conflict recovery. Among these, Ubuntu has emerged as one of the most influential and widely discussed frameworks for promoting reconciliation and social cohesion. Ubuntu, commonly expressed through the maxim ‘I am because we are,’ emphasises the interconnectedness of human beings and the belief that individual well-being is inseparable from the well-being of the community (Mbiti, 1969; Ramose, 1999). Rather than viewing persons as isolated individuals, Ubuntu conceives of human existence as fundamentally relational, grounded in mutual care, empathy, dignity, and collective responsibility.

The contemporary prominence of Ubuntu within peacebuilding discourse owes much to its application in post-apartheid South Africa. Desmond Tutu (1999, 2004) drew extensively on Ubuntu principles during the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, arguing that national healing could not be achieved through retributive justice alone. Instead, he advocated restorative approaches that acknowledged wrongdoing while creating opportunities for forgiveness, accountability, and the rebuilding of communal bonds. Similarly, Battle (2009) expanded the philosophical and theological dimensions of Ubuntu, portraying it as an ethical framework capable of fostering reconciliation, moral restoration, and social renewal in societies emerging from conflict.

The appeal of Ubuntu lies in its emphasis on restorative rather than punitive responses to wrongdoing. Whereas retributive justice prioritises punishment and deterrence, Ubuntu seeks to repair damaged relationships, restore human dignity, and facilitate the reintegration of offenders into society. These principles have informed reconciliation initiatives in several African contexts, including South Africa, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Burundi, and Mozambique, where communities have sought culturally relevant mechanisms for addressing the legacies of violence and rebuilding trust among citizens.

Despite its growing influence, however, Ubuntu remains the subject of considerable scholarly debate. Advocates view it as a uniquely African contribution to peace building and social reconstruction, while critics question whether its practical impact matches its philosophical appeal. Some scholars contend that Ubuntu is often invoked as a moral ideal without sufficient empirical evidence demonstrating its effectiveness in shaping attitudes and behaviours within post-conflict environments. Others argue that the realities of trauma, poverty, inequality, and political instability may limit the extent to which Ubuntu values can be translated into everyday social practice. These concerns raise important questions about whether Ubuntu functions primarily as an aspirational ethical vision or as a lived framework capable of influencing reconciliation outcomes, (Edinoh et al., 2025).

From a philosophical perspective, Ubuntu is rooted in African communitarian thought, which maintains that personhood is realised through participation in social relationships and communal life (Eze et al., 2026; Gyekye, 1995; Wiredu, 1998). This ontological orientation suggests that sustainable peace requires more than institutional reforms or legal settlements. It also necessitates the cultivation of interpersonal virtues such as empathy, trust, forgiveness, and mutual recognition. In post-conflict settings, these virtues are particularly important because they create the social conditions necessary for former enemies to coexist, co-operate, and rebuild their communities.

Closely related to this discussion is the concept of social cohesion. Social cohesion refers to the degree of connectedness, trust, solidarity, and co-operation among members of a society (Chan et al., 2006; OECD, 2011; Wali-Essien et al. 2025.). In post-conflict contexts, social cohesion is reflected in citizens' willingness to forgive past wrongs, accept former combatants, participate in communal activities, and engage in collective efforts aimed at reconstruction and development. High levels of social cohesion are often associated with reduced intergroup hostility, stronger community resilience, and greater prospects for sustainable peace (Edinoh, 2013; Edinoh, 2016).

Although numerous theoretical writings suggest that Ubuntu promotes forgiveness, reconciliation, and social cohesion, empirical investigations examining these relationships remain limited. Existing studies have largely focused on conceptual analyses, historical narratives, or qualitative accounts of reconciliation processes. Consequently, there is insufficient quantitative evidence demonstrating whether individuals who strongly identify with Ubuntu values are more likely to exhibit forgiveness toward former combatants and support reintegration initiatives within their communities. Addressing this gap is important because policy makers, peacebuilding organisations, and community leaders increasingly rely on Ubuntu-inspired approaches as mechanisms for conflict transformation and social reconstruction (Edinoh & Wali-Essien, 2023).

Against this background, the present study investigates the relationship between perceptions of Ubuntu philosophy and social cohesion in selected post-conflict African communities.

Specifically, the study examines whether positive perceptions of Ubuntu are associated with higher levels of forgiveness, interpersonal trust, and support for the reintegration of former combatants. By providing empirical evidence on the practical implications of Ubuntu, the study contributes to ongoing debates concerning the role of indigenous African philosophies in peace building and post-conflict reconstruction (Edinoh, 2023).

Statement of the Problem

Despite substantial investments in peace building and reconciliation programmes across Africa, many post-conflict communities continue to experience social fragmentation, mistrust, and recurring tensions. The successful reintegration of former combatants often encounters resistance from local populations, while victims of violence may find forgiveness and reconciliation difficult to achieve. These challenges undermine long-term peace and impede community development.

Ubuntu philosophy has frequently been presented as a culturally grounded solution to these problems. Scholars and practitioners commonly assume that adherence to Ubuntu values encourages forgiveness, strengthens social bonds, and promotes acceptance of former adversaries. However, much of this assumption is based on philosophical argumentation rather than empirical verification. Consequently, there remains limited quantitative evidence demonstrating whether positive perceptions of Ubuntu actually translate into measurable outcomes such as trust, forgiveness, and support for reintegration.

The absence of empirical validation creates uncertainty regarding the effectiveness of Ubuntu-based peacebuilding interventions. Without evidence establishing a clear relationship between Ubuntu and social cohesion, policies and programmes inspired by Ubuntu may rest on normative appeal rather than demonstrated impact. This study therefore addresses this gap by empirically examining the extent to which perceptions of Ubuntu influence forgiveness and social cohesion in post-conflict African communities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of perceptions of Ubuntu philosophy on social cohesion in post-conflict African communities.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the level of awareness and perception of Ubuntu among residents of post-conflict communities.
2. Assess levels of forgiveness towards former combatants.
3. Examine residents' willingness to support the reintegration of ex-combatants.
4. Investigate the relationship between perceptions of Ubuntu and indicators of social cohesion.
5. Determine the predictive influence of Ubuntu perception on forgiveness and reintegration attitudes.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the level of perception of Ubuntu philosophy among respondents?
2. What is the level of social cohesion, as reflected in trust, forgiveness, and reintegration attitudes among respondents?

3. What relationship exists between perception of Ubuntu and forgiveness towards former combatants?
4. Does perception of Ubuntu significantly predict willingness to support the reintegration of ex-combatants?
5. Do demographic characteristics significantly influence social cohesion outcomes?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H01: There is no significant relationship between perception of Ubuntu and forgiveness towards former combatants.

H02: There is no significant relationship between perception of Ubuntu and willingness to support the reintegration of former combatants.

H03: Perception of Ubuntu does not significantly predict social cohesion in post-conflict communities.

H04: There is no significant difference in social cohesion between respondents with high and low levels of Ubuntu perception.

Literature Review

Ubuntu Philosophy and African Communal Ontology

Ubuntu occupies a prominent place within African philosophical discourse and has become one of the most influential indigenous concepts employed in discussions of ethics, social relations, and community development. Although interpretations vary across cultural and linguistic contexts, Ubuntu is generally understood as a philosophy of shared humanity that emphasises the interconnectedness of individuals within a community. The widely cited expression, 'I am because we are,' captures the essence of this worldview by suggesting that individual identity and fulfilment are realised through relationships with others rather than through isolated self-existence (Mbiti, 1969).

The philosophical foundations of Ubuntu are rooted in African communal ontology, which views human beings as fundamentally relational. Unlike Western liberal traditions that often prioritise individual autonomy and self-interest, African communitarian thought stresses mutual dependence, collective responsibility, and social harmony. According to Mbiti (1969), personhood is not merely a biological fact but a social achievement attained through participation in communal life. Individuals become fully human through their relationships, obligations, and contributions to the well-being of others.

Expanding this perspective, Ramose (1999) conceptualises Ubuntu as a comprehensive philosophical system encompassing metaphysical, ethical, and social dimensions of human existence. He argues that Ubuntu promotes values such as compassion, reciprocity, dignity, solidarity, and mutual respect. Within this framework, human flourishing is inseparable from the flourishing of the community. Ethical conduct therefore emerges not from abstract principles alone but from recognition of one's interconnectedness with others.

Similarly, Gyekye (1995) argues that African communitarianism should not be interpreted as the complete subordination of the individual to the community. Rather, it represents a balanced

relationship in which personal rights and communal obligations coexist. Individuals retain their uniqueness and agency while recognising responsibilities toward the collective good. This moderate communitarian position provides an important foundation for understanding how Ubuntu can promote both personal accountability and social responsibility in post-conflict societies.

Wiredu (1998) further contributes to this discussion by emphasising the centrality of dialogue, consensus-building, and collective decision-making in African moral thought. For Wiredu, social harmony is not achieved through coercion or domination but through continuous engagement aimed at resolving disagreements and restoring relationships. Such an orientation is particularly relevant in societies recovering from violent conflict, where rebuilding trust and repairing social bonds are essential for sustainable peace.

The significance of Ubuntu extends beyond philosophical reflection. Across many African societies, Ubuntu informs cultural practices relating to conflict resolution, reconciliation, caregiving, hospitality, and community solidarity. As a result, scholars increasingly view Ubuntu as a valuable indigenous resource for addressing contemporary challenges of social fragmentation, exclusion, and post-conflict reconstruction. Its emphasis on human dignity and interconnectedness offers a moral foundation for rebuilding societies damaged by violence and division.

Ubuntu and Restorative Justice

One of the most influential applications of Ubuntu has been within the field of restorative justice. Restorative justice emerged as an alternative to conventional retributive justice systems, which focus primarily on punishment, deterrence, and legal accountability. In contrast, restorative justice seeks to repair harm, restore relationships, and promote healing among victims, offenders, and communities affected by wrongdoing (Zehr, 2015).

The global visibility of Ubuntu in restorative justice discourse was significantly enhanced through its application during South Africa's transition from apartheid. Tutu (1999, 2004), who chaired the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), argued that genuine justice required more than punishment of offenders. According to Tutu, lasting peace could only be achieved when victims and perpetrators engaged in processes that acknowledged suffering, accepted responsibility, and created opportunities for forgiveness and reconciliation. Ubuntu provided the moral and philosophical basis for this approach by affirming the shared humanity of all individuals, including those who had committed serious violations.

Central to Tutu's interpretation is the belief that human beings are interconnected and that harm inflicted upon one person ultimately affects the wider community. Consequently, justice should aim not merely to impose sanctions but to restore broken relationships and rebuild social trust. This perspective challenged conventional legal approaches and introduced a more holistic understanding of post-conflict healing.

Building upon Tutu's work, Battle (2009) argues that Ubuntu possesses transformative potential because it encourages individuals to recognise the humanity of former adversaries. Forgiveness, within this framework, is not understood as forgetting past injustices or excusing harmful actions. Rather, it involves a conscious decision to transcend cycles of hatred and retaliation in pursuit of collective healing and coexistence. Battle maintains that reconciliation becomes possible when communities embrace a shared commitment to restoring human dignity and repairing damaged relationships.

The principles underlying Ubuntu closely aligns with the core assumptions of restorative justice theory. Both frameworks emphasise accountability, dialogue, empathy, healing, and reintegration rather than exclusion and retribution. Consequently, Ubuntu has increasingly been cited as a culturally relevant foundation for peace-building initiatives in post-conflict African societies. Programmes aimed at community reconciliation, reintegration of former combatants, and restoration of social trust often draws explicitly or implicitly upon Ubuntu principles.

Social Cohesion and Post-Conflict Recovery

Social cohesion has become a central concept in contemporary discussions of peace-building, development, and post-conflict reconstruction. Broadly defined, social cohesion refers to the degree of connectedness, solidarity, trust, and co-operation among members of a society (OECD, 2011). It reflects the extent to which individuals feel a sense of belonging, share common values, and are willing to participate in collective efforts for the common good.

Chan et al. (2006) conceptualise social cohesion as comprising both attitudinal and behavioural dimensions. The attitudinal dimension includes trust, social acceptance, and feelings of belonging, while the behavioural dimension encompasses participation, co-operation, and civic engagement. In post-conflict settings, these dimensions are particularly important because they influence whether communities can overcome historical grievances and build peaceful relationships.

The restoration of social cohesion is often regarded as one of the most challenging aspects of post-conflict recovery. Violent conflicts typically erode trust, disrupt social networks, and create deep divisions between groups. Even after hostilities cease, fear, resentment, and suspicion may persist for many years. Consequently, rebuilding social cohesion requires more than political settlements; it necessitates the transformation of interpersonal attitudes and social relationships.

Research conducted in Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and other post-conflict societies highlights the importance of cultural values and community-based reconciliation mechanisms in promoting social cohesion (Humphrey, 2005; Clark, 2010). In Rwanda, for example, local justice and reconciliation initiatives contributed to rebuilding trust between survivors and perpetrators following the genocide. Similarly, community-based peace-building programmes in Sierra Leone and Liberia demonstrated that reconciliation efforts are more effective when they resonate with local cultural understandings of justice, responsibility, and communal belonging.

Trust, forgiveness, and acceptance of former combatants have consistently emerged as critical indicators of successful post-conflict recovery. Communities characterised by higher levels of interpersonal trust are generally more willing to engage in collective action and support reconstruction efforts. Likewise, willingness to forgive and reintegrate former combatants reflects a community's capacity to move beyond past divisions and create conditions for sustainable peace.

Given Ubuntu's emphasis on shared humanity, mutual responsibility, and communal harmony, it is reasonable to expect that positive perceptions of Ubuntu may contribute significantly to social cohesion outcomes. However, empirical evidence demonstrating this relationship remains relatively limited.

Empirical Gaps in the Literature

Despite the extensive philosophical and normative literature on Ubuntu, significant gaps remain in empirical research. Much of the existing scholarship focuses on conceptual analyses, ethical

interpretations, theological reflections, or historical accounts of reconciliation processes. While these studies provide valuable insights into the meaning and significance of Ubuntu, they offer limited evidence regarding its measurable social effects.

Furthermore, studies examining post-conflict reconciliation often concentrate on institutional mechanisms such as truth commissions, legal reforms, and peace agreements while paying comparatively less attention to the role of indigenous philosophical orientations in shaping individual attitudes and behaviours. As a result, little is known about whether individuals who strongly identify with Ubuntu values are actually more likely to forgive former combatants, trust former adversaries, or support reintegration initiatives.

Another limitation of existing research is the scarcity of quantitative investigations that operationalise Ubuntu as a measurable construct. Consequently, the relationship between Ubuntu perception and social cohesion remains largely assumed rather than systematically tested. This represents a significant gap in knowledge, particularly given the growing reliance on Ubuntu-inspired peacebuilding frameworks across Africa.

The present study addresses this gap by examining the extent to which perceptions of Ubuntu influence forgiveness, trust, and reintegration attitudes in post-conflict communities. By providing empirical evidence, the study contributes to both philosophical debates and practical peacebuilding interventions.

Theoretical Framework

Communitarian African Philosophy

This study is anchored in African Communitarian Philosophy as articulated by Mbiti (1969), Gyekye (1995), and Wiredu (1998). Communitarian philosophy maintains that human beings exist within networks of social relationships that shape identity, morality, and behaviour. Personhood is therefore understood not as an isolated attribute but as a socially embedded reality developed through participation in communal life.

The theory assumes that individuals are influenced by shared cultural values, collective norms, and communal expectations. Behaviour such as forgiveness, empathy, co-operation, and mutual support emerges from these social interactions and moral commitments. Within post-conflict contexts, communitarian philosophy suggests that reconciliation is more likely when individuals perceive themselves as interconnected members of a shared moral community.

The relevance of this theory to the present study lies in its explanation of how Ubuntu values may influence social cohesion. If individuals internalise communal principles such as compassion, solidarity, and shared humanity, they may become more willing to forgive past wrongs and support the reintegration of former combatants.

Restorative Justice Theory

The study is further informed by Restorative Justice Theory, particularly as developed by Zehr (2015). Restorative justice challenges conventional punitive approaches by focusing on repairing harm, restoring relationships, and promoting healing among affected parties.

According to this theory, wrongdoing creates relational damage that extends beyond individual victims and offenders to affect entire communities. Effective justice therefore requires dialogue, accountability, restitution, and opportunities for reconciliation. Rather than excluding offenders

permanently, restorative justice seeks their reintegration into society once responsibility has been acknowledged and harm addressed.

Ubuntu shares many of these assumptions, making restorative justice theory particularly relevant to understanding post-conflict reconciliation. Both frameworks emphasise healing, forgiveness, accountability, and community restoration. Together, they provide a robust theoretical foundation for examining how perceptions of Ubuntu may influence social cohesion outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study proposes that perceptions of Ubuntu constitute the primary independent variable influencing social cohesion outcomes in post-conflict communities.

Independent Variable

1. Perception of Ubuntu Philosophy

Dependent Variables

1. Forgiveness towards former combatants
2. Interpersonal trust
3. Reintegration attitudes

Moderating Variables

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Educational level
4. Degree of conflict exposure

The framework assumes that individuals who hold stronger positive perceptions of Ubuntu are more likely to exhibit higher levels of forgiveness, greater interpersonal trust, and stronger support for reintegration initiatives. Demographic and experiential factors may moderate the strength of these relationships.

Empirical Expectation

Based on the theoretical and empirical literature reviewed, the study expects a positive and significant relationship between perception of Ubuntu and indicators of social cohesion. Specifically, respondents with stronger endorsement of Ubuntu values are expected to demonstrate greater willingness to forgive former combatants, exhibit higher levels of interpersonal trust, and express stronger support for reintegration processes within their communities.

The study further anticipates that perception of Ubuntu will emerge as a significant predictor of social cohesion even after accounting for demographic variables such as age, gender, educational attainment, and conflict exposure. Such findings would provide empirical support for claims advanced by Ubuntu scholars and peace building practitioners that indigenous African philosophies can contribute meaningfully to reconciliation, social healing, and sustainable peace in post-conflict societies.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design incorporating correlational and comparative research elements. The design was considered appropriate because it enables the collection of data from a relatively large population at a single point in time while facilitating the examination of relationships among variables of interest. Specifically, the study sought to determine whether perceptions of Ubuntu philosophy were associated with indicators of social cohesion, including forgiveness, interpersonal trust, and support for the reintegration of former combatants.

The correlational component of the design was employed to investigate the nature and strength of the relationship between Ubuntu perception and social cohesion outcomes. In addition, the comparative component enabled the researcher to examine differences in social cohesion among respondents with varying levels of Ubuntu orientation. The design was particularly suitable because the study did not involve manipulation of variables but rather sought to examine naturally occurring attitudes and perceptions within post-conflict communities.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in selected post-conflict communities within Sub-Saharan Africa, focusing on communities in Nigeria, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone that had experienced civil conflict, insurgency, political violence, or large-scale social disruption. These countries were purposively selected because they represent distinct post-conflict contexts and have implemented various reconciliation, peace-building, and reintegration programmes aimed at rebuilding social relationships and fostering community recovery.

Nigeria has experienced prolonged insurgency and communal conflicts, particularly in regions affected by extremist violence and population displacement. Rwanda provides a significant case of post-genocide reconciliation and national reconstruction, while Sierra Leone offers important insights into community healing and reintegration efforts following a protracted civil war. The inclusion of these diverse contexts enhanced the study's ability to examine Ubuntu-related perceptions across different post-conflict experiences while maintaining a shared focus on reconciliation and social cohesion.

Population of the Study

The target population comprised adult residents aged 18 years and above living within the selected post-conflict communities. Adults were considered suitable participants because they possessed the maturity and lived experiences necessary to provide informed responses regarding forgiveness, trust, reconciliation, and reintegration processes.

Based on available community records and population estimates obtained from local administrative authorities and community development agencies, the accessible population was estimated at approximately 18,500 individuals across the selected study locations. This population included conflict survivors, community leaders, returnees, former displaced persons, and other residents who had direct or indirect experience of post-conflict reconstruction processes.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 520 respondents was selected for the study. The sample was considered adequate for conducting descriptive, correlational, and predictive statistical analyses while ensuring sufficient representation of the target population. A multistage sampling procedure

involving cluster sampling, stratified sampling, and simple random sampling techniques was employed.

At the first stage, selected post-conflict communities within the three countries were grouped into clusters based on geographical location and conflict history. Cluster sampling was used to identify communities that met the inclusion criteria for the study.

At the second stage, stratified sampling was employed to ensure adequate representation of key demographic groups, particularly gender and educational attainment. Stratification was considered necessary to minimize sampling bias and enhance the representativeness of the sample.

At the final stage, simple random sampling was used to select respondents from the sampling frames developed within each participating community. This procedure ensured that every eligible resident had an equal chance of participation in the study.

Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 520)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	260	50.0
	Female	260	50.0
Education	Primary Education	140	26.9
	Secondary Education	210	40.4
	Tertiary Education	170	32.7
Total		520	100.0

The demographic distribution indicates a balanced representation of male and female respondents. The educational profile further reflects diversity in educational attainment, thereby enhancing the breadth of perspectives captured in the study.

Instruments for Data Collection

Data were collected using two structured instruments developed by the researcher following extensive review of literature on Ubuntu philosophy, restorative justice, reconciliation, and social cohesion.

Ubuntu Perception Scale (UPS)

The Ubuntu Perception Scale (UPS) was designed to measure respondents' perceptions and internalization of Ubuntu values. The instrument consisted of 20 items structured on a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). The scale assessed key dimensions of Ubuntu philosophy, including shared humanity, compassion, communal responsibility, reconciliation, empathy, and restorative justice.

Examples of items included:

1. Ubuntu encourages forgiveness after conflict.
2. Human beings are connected through shared humanity.
3. Former combatants should be given opportunities to reintegrate into society.
4. Reconciliation is more beneficial to society than revenge.
5. Community healing requires mutual understanding and compassion.

Respondents' scores were summed to produce an overall Ubuntu perception score, with higher scores indicating stronger endorsement of Ubuntu values and principles.

Social Cohesion Index (SCI)

The Social Cohesion Index (SCI) was developed to assess the degree of social cohesion within post-conflict communities. The instrument measured three major dimensions:

1. Forgiveness towards former combatants.
2. Trust in community members and social institutions.
3. Acceptance of reintegration and reconciliation initiatives.

Items were structured to capture respondents' willingness to coexist with former adversaries, participate in community activities, and support efforts aimed at rebuilding social relationships. Scores were converted to a composite index ranging from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating stronger levels of social cohesion.

Validity of the Instruments

The validity of the instruments was established through expert review. Draft versions of the UPS and SCI were submitted to specialists in Philosophy of Education, Peace and Conflict Studies, Sociology, and Educational Measurement and Evaluation. The experts examined the instruments for content relevance, clarity, adequacy of coverage, appropriateness of language, and alignment with the objectives of the study. Their observations and recommendations informed revisions that improved the quality and comprehensiveness of the instruments. This process ensured that the instruments adequately measured the constructs of Ubuntu perception and social cohesion as conceptualised within the study.

Reliability of the Instruments

To determine the reliability of the instruments, a pilot study was conducted using 45 respondents drawn from post-conflict communities outside the main study area. The pilot participants possessed characteristics similar to those of the target population but were excluded from the final sample.

Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Table 2

Reliability Estimates of Research Instruments

Instrument	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Ubuntu Perception Scale (UPS)	20	0.88

Social Cohesion Index (SCI)	18	0.91
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The obtained reliability coefficients exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating high levels of internal consistency and reliability. The instruments were therefore considered suitable for the main study.

Method of Data Collection

Data collection was carried out with the assistance of trained research assistants who were familiar with the local contexts and languages of the participating communities. Prior to data collection, the assistants received training on research ethics, questionnaire administration, respondent engagement, and confidentiality procedures.

The questionnaires were administered directly to respondents through face-to-face interactions. Where necessary, research assistants provided clarification on questionnaire items to ensure accurate understanding and completion.

Data collection was conducted over a period of eight weeks. Completed questionnaires were carefully checked for completeness and consistency before being coded for analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitivity of post-conflict experiences, ethical considerations were treated as a central aspect of the study. Ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional research ethics committee prior to data collection.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents before administration of the questionnaires. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to decline participation, and their freedom to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process. No identifying information was recorded on the questionnaires, and all data were used solely for academic purposes. Particular care was taken to ensure that respondents were not exposed to psychological distress during discussions relating to conflict experiences and reconciliation processes.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected from the respondents were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 27. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to answer the research questions.

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was employed to examine relationships between perception of Ubuntu and social cohesion indicators. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the predictive influence of Ubuntu perception on forgiveness, trust, and reintegration attitudes. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine differences in social cohesion between respondents with high and low Ubuntu perception.

All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

This section presents the findings obtained from the analysis of data collected from 520 respondents across selected post-conflict communities. Descriptive statistics were used to answer the research questions, while inferential statistics were employed to test the hypotheses formulated for the study.

Research Question 1

What is the level of perception of Ubuntu philosophy among respondents?

Table 3

Level of Perception of Ubuntu Philosophy (N = 520)

Ubuntu Perception Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High Ubuntu Perception	312	60.0
Moderate Ubuntu Perception	146	28.1
Low Ubuntu Perception	62	11.9
Total	520	100.0

Interpretation of Table 3

Table 3 shows that 312 respondents (60.0%) demonstrated a high perception of Ubuntu philosophy, while 146 respondents (28.1%) exhibited a moderate perception. Only 62 respondents (11.9%) reported low levels of Ubuntu perception. The findings indicate that Ubuntu values remain strongly recognised and embraced within the selected post-conflict communities. This suggests that principles such as shared humanity, communal responsibility, forgiveness, and reconciliation continue to influence social attitudes among a majority of respondents.

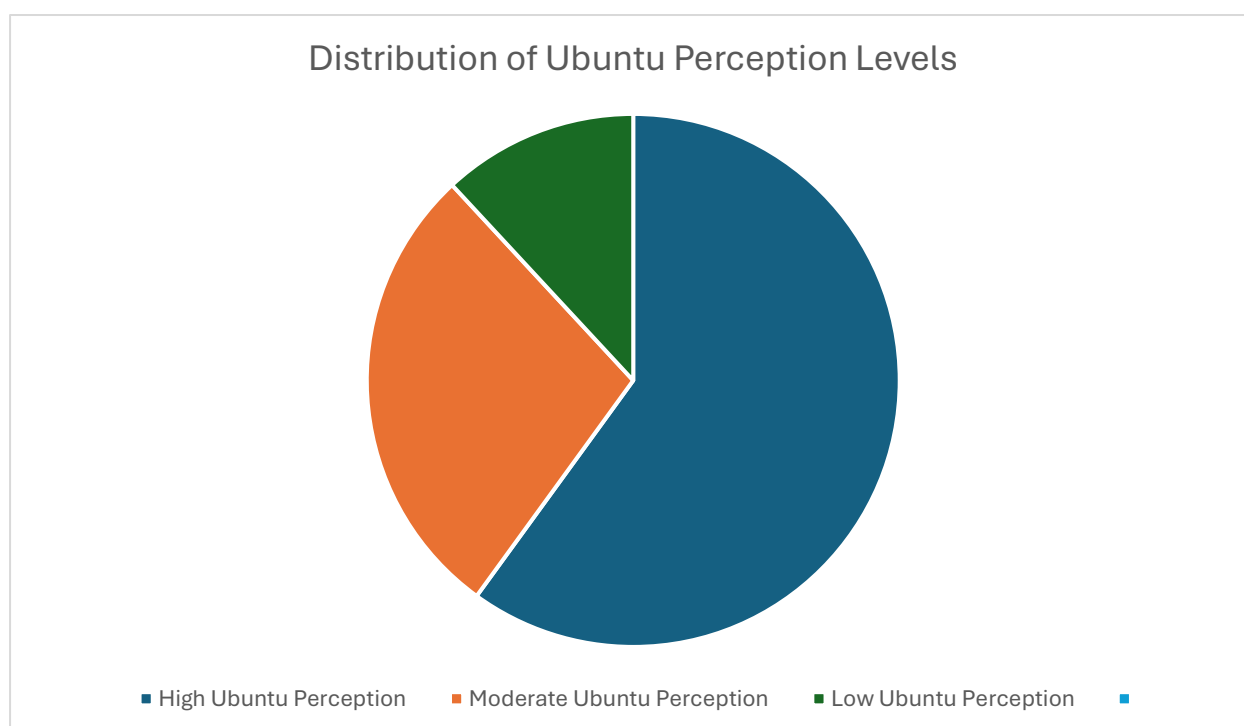


Figure 1: Distribution of Ubuntu Perception Levels

Interpretation of Figure 1

Figure 1 visually confirms that respondents with high Ubuntu perception constitute the largest proportion of the sample. The substantial difference between the high and low categories suggests widespread endorsement of Ubuntu principles within the study communities.

Research Question 2

What is the level of social cohesion among respondents?

Table 4

Levels of Social Cohesion among Respondents

Social Cohesion Indicator	Mean	SD	Decision
Forgiveness	76.82	11.34	High
Trust	71.45	12.18	High
Reintegration Attitude	79.63	10.27	High
Overall Social Cohesion	75.97	11.26	High

Interpretation of Table 4

The results indicate relatively high levels of social cohesion across the selected communities. Reintegration attitude recorded the highest mean score ($M = 79.63$), suggesting considerable support for the reintegration of former combatants. Forgiveness also recorded a high mean score ($M = 76.82$), while trust showed the lowest mean among the three dimensions ($M = 71.45$), although it remained within the high category. This suggests that while respondents generally support reconciliation and reintegration, rebuilding interpersonal trust remains a continuing challenge in post-conflict environments.

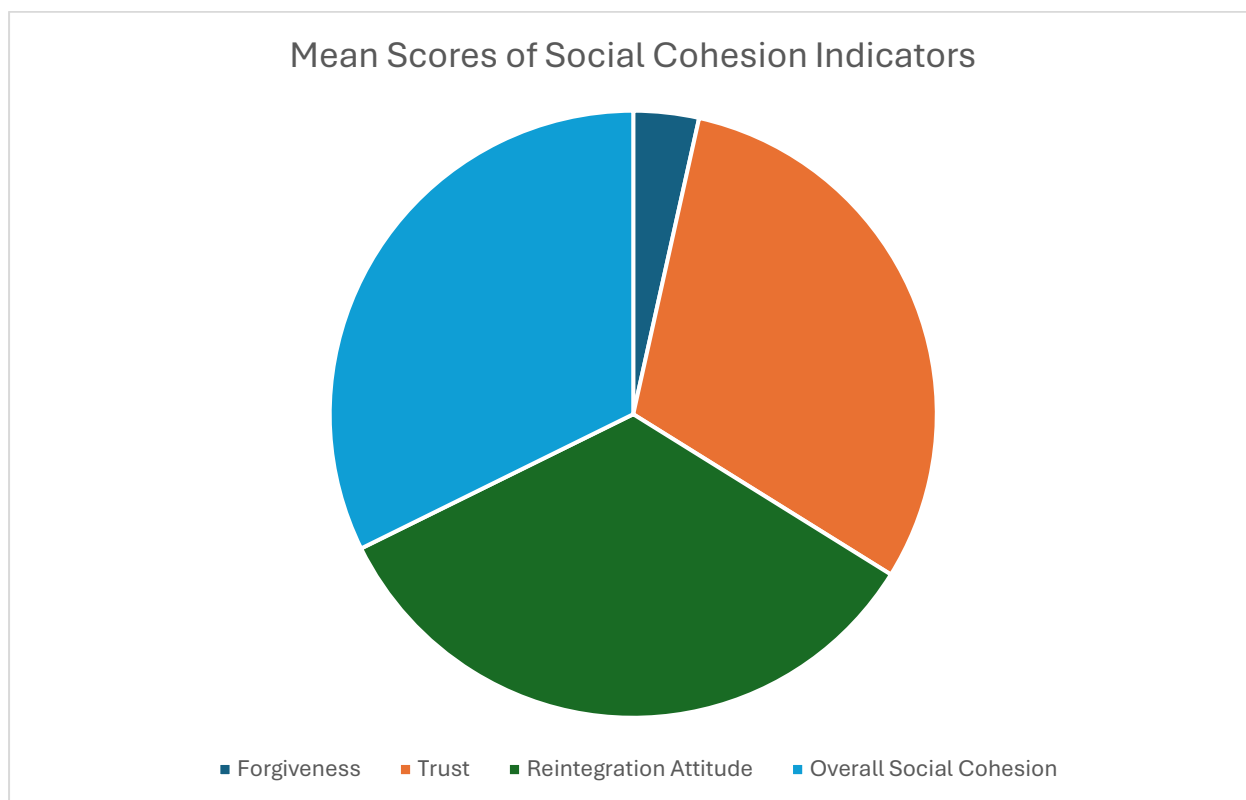


Figure 2: Mean Scores of Social Cohesion Indicators

Interpretation of Figure 2.

Figure 2 illustrates that reintegration attitudes recorded the highest mean score, followed by forgiveness and trust. The pattern suggests that respondents are more willing to support practical reintegration efforts than they are to fully restore interpersonal trust.

Research Question 3

Is there a relationship between perception of Ubuntu and forgiveness toward former combatants?

Table 5

Pearson Correlation between Ubuntu Perception and Forgiveness

Variables	N	r	p-value	Decision
Ubuntu Perception and Forgiveness	520	0.68	.000	Significant

Interpretation of Table 5

The results reveal a strong positive relationship between Ubuntu perception and forgiveness toward former combatants ($r = .68$, $p < .05$). This indicates that respondents who demonstrated stronger adherence to Ubuntu values were significantly more likely to express forgiveness towards individuals associated with past conflicts. Consequently, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between Ubuntu perception and forgiveness is rejected.

Research Question 4

Does perception of Ubuntu significantly predict willingness to support reintegration?

Table 6

Regression Analysis of Ubuntu Perception as Predictor of Reintegration Attitudes

Variable	B	Beta	t	p
Constant	18.72	—	6.84	.000
Ubuntu Perception	0.74	.71	19.65	.000

Model Summary:

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	p
.71	.50	.50	386.12	.000

Interpretation of Table 6

The regression analysis indicates that Ubuntu perception significantly predicts willingness to support reintegration initiatives ($\beta = .71$, $p < .05$). The model explains approximately 50% of the variance in reintegration attitudes ($R^2 = .50$). This finding suggests that respondents who strongly endorse Ubuntu values are considerably more likely to support the reintegration of former combatants into community life.

Research Question 5

Do demographic variables influence social cohesion outcomes?

Table 7

Differences in Social Cohesion by Educational Level

Education Level	Mean	SD
Primary	71.24	10.82
Secondary	75.96	11.18
Tertiary	80.44	10.21

Interpretation of Table 7

Table 7 indicates a progressive increase in social cohesion scores across educational levels. Respondents with tertiary education recorded the highest social cohesion score ($M = 80.44$), followed by those with secondary education ($M = 75.96$), while respondents with primary education recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 71.24$). The findings suggest that educational attainment may positively influence attitudes relating to trust, forgiveness, and reintegration.

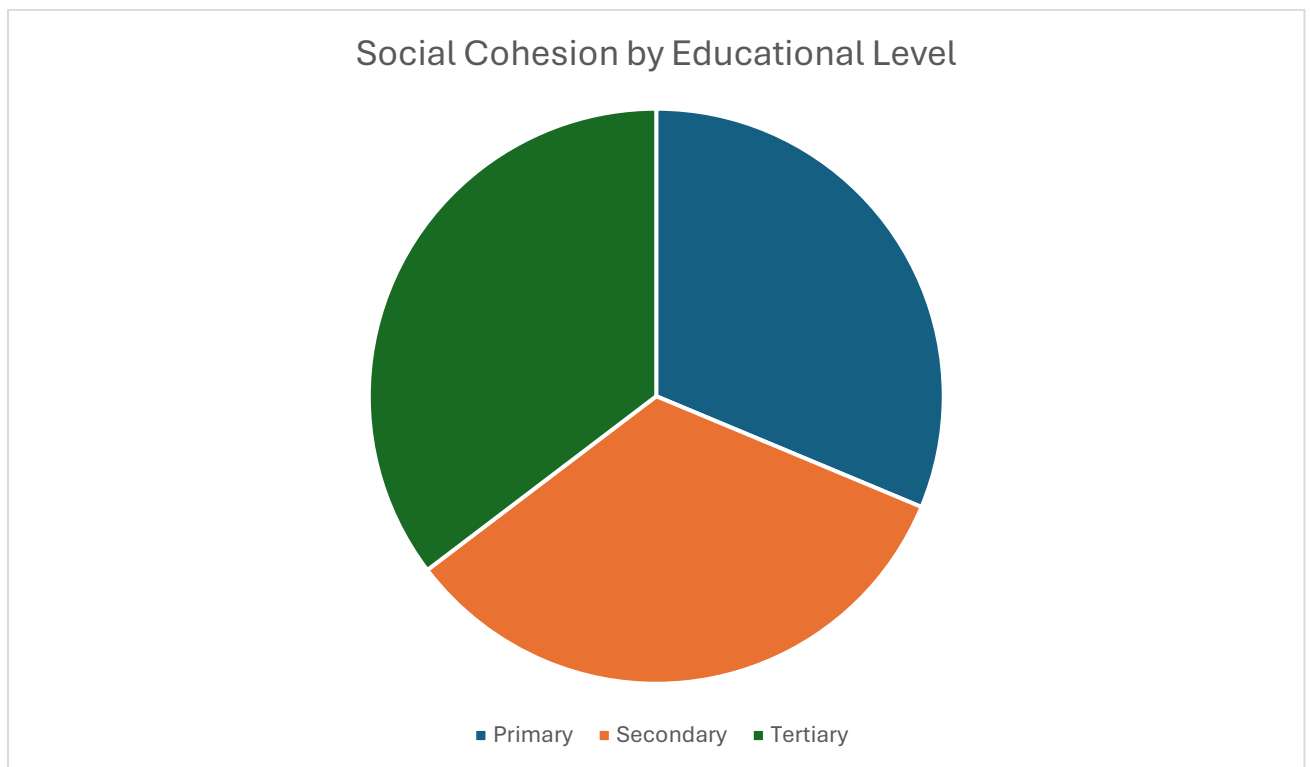


Figure 3: Social Cohesion by Educational Level

Interpretation of Figure 3

Figure 3 demonstrates a steady increase in social cohesion scores as educational attainment rises. This trend suggests that education may enhance understanding of reconciliation processes and encourage more positive attitudes toward social integration and peaceful coexistence.

Hypotheses Testing

Table 8
Independent Samples t-Test Comparing High and Low Ubuntu Perception Groups

Group	N	Mean Social Cohesion	SD
High Ubuntu Perception	312	81.27	9.84
Low Ubuntu Perception	208	68.35	11.02

t	df	p-value	Decision
13.48	518	.000	Significant

Interpretation of Table 8

The independent samples t-test reveals a statistically significant difference in social cohesion between respondents with high and low Ubuntu perception ($t = 13.48, p < .05$). Respondents with high Ubuntu perception recorded substantially higher social cohesion scores than those with lower Ubuntu perception. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Summary of Findings

The analysis produced five major findings:

1. A majority of respondents demonstrated high levels of Ubuntu perception.
2. Overall social cohesion within the selected communities was relatively high, particularly regarding reintegration attitudes.
3. Ubuntu perception showed a strong positive relationship with forgiveness towards former combatants.
4. Ubuntu perception significantly predicted willingness to support reintegration initiatives and accounted for a substantial proportion of variance in reintegration attitudes.
5. Respondents with stronger Ubuntu orientation exhibited significantly higher levels of social cohesion than those with weaker Ubuntu orientation.

Collectively, the findings provide empirical support for the proposition that Ubuntu philosophy contributes positively to forgiveness, reconciliation, and social cohesion within post-conflict African communities.

Discussion of Findings

The present study examined the relationship between perceptions of Ubuntu and social cohesion in post-conflict African communities, with particular emphasis on forgiveness, interpersonal trust, and attitudes towards reintegration. The findings provide empirical support for the central proposition advanced by scholars of Ubuntu philosophy that communal values contribute significantly to post-conflict healing and reconciliation.

Ubuntu and Forgiveness

One of the major findings of the study was that respondents who demonstrated a stronger perception of Ubuntu also reported significantly higher levels of forgiveness. The positive and statistically significant relationship between Ubuntu and forgiveness confirm the proposition that African communitarian ethics encourage individuals to transcend personal grievances for the collective good.

This finding aligns strongly with the work of Desmond Tutu, who argued that forgiveness is not merely a personal virtue but a social necessity for rebuilding fractured communities. Tutu (1999) maintained that Ubuntu recognises the interconnectedness of human beings, making reconciliation essential because the suffering of one person ultimately affects the entire community. The current findings provide quantitative evidence supporting Tutu's assertion that Ubuntu facilitates the willingness to forgive former offenders and perpetrators of violence.

Similarly, the findings corroborate the arguments of Michael Battle, who conceptualised Ubuntu as a transformative philosophy capable of restoring damaged relationships after conflict. Battle (2009) emphasised that forgiveness under Ubuntu is rooted in recognising the humanity of both victim and offender. The positive association observed in this study suggests that respondents who embraced Ubuntu values were more inclined to view reconciliation as preferable to revenge or prolonged hostility.

The findings are also consistent with restorative justice theory, which posits that healing and social repair are more effective than punitive approaches in addressing harm. According to restorative justice scholars, forgiveness emerges when communities create opportunities for dialogue, accountability, and mutual recognition. The current results indicate that Ubuntu serves

as a cultural mechanism through which restorative principles are operationalised within African societies.

Ubuntu and Interpersonal Trust

The study further revealed a significant positive relationship between Ubuntu and interpersonal trust. Respondents who reported stronger Ubuntu orientations demonstrated greater trust towards neighbours, community leaders, and former adversaries.

This finding supports the philosophical position advanced by John Mbiti, whose famous assertion that “I am because we are,” underscores the communal foundation of African social life. Mbiti argued that personhood is realised through relationships with others and that social harmony depends upon mutual trust and co-operation. The positive association identified in this study suggests that Ubuntu strengthens these communal bonds, thereby fostering social cohesion.

Trust is often one of the most severely damaged social resources in post-conflict environments. Violent conflict generates suspicion, fear, and social fragmentation that can persist for generations. The findings indicate that Ubuntu may serve as an important cultural resource for rebuilding trust after conflict. This supports previous observations that communities guided by communitarian values are more likely to engage in collective problem-solving and mutual support.

The findings also resonate with the views of Kwame Gyekye, who argued that African communitarianism balances individual autonomy with social responsibility. According to Gyekye, social relationships are maintained through reciprocal obligations and moral concern for others. The present results suggest that Ubuntu encourages individuals to perceive others as members of a shared moral community, thereby enhancing trust and reducing social distance.

Ubuntu and Reintegration Attitudes

Another significant finding was the strong positive relationship between Ubuntu and attitudes towards the reintegration of former combatants, displaced persons, and individuals associated with conflict-related violence.

This finding provides empirical support for Ubuntu's emphasis on restoration rather than exclusion. Respondents with stronger Ubuntu perceptions were more likely to endorse opportunities for reintegration and social acceptance. Such attitudes are particularly important in post-conflict societies, where long-term peace depends on the successful reintegration of individuals previously involved in violence.

The findings closely reflect the philosophy articulated by Desmond Tutu during the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. Tutu consistently argued that sustainable peace requires restoring relationships rather than permanently marginalising offenders. The present study demonstrates that communities embracing Ubuntu values are more likely to support this restorative approach.

Likewise, Battle's conceptualisation of Ubuntu as a framework for social transformation is reinforced by these findings. Battle suggested that reintegration becomes possible when communities recognise the shared humanity of all members, including those who have caused harm. The significant relationship between Ubuntu and reintegration attitudes observed in this study supports this theoretical position.

The findings are also consistent with restorative justice theory, which advocates repairing social bonds through acknowledgement of wrongdoing, accountability, forgiveness, and reintegration. Reintegration under restorative justice is intended not only to benefit offenders but also to strengthen community cohesion and reduce future conflict. Ubuntu appears to provide the cultural and moral foundation necessary for implementing such restorative processes within African contexts.

Ubuntu as a Predictor of Social Cohesion

The regression analysis demonstrated that Ubuntu significantly predicts social cohesion. This finding suggests that Ubuntu is not merely a philosophical ideal but also a measurable social resource capable of influencing community relationships and collective well-being.

This result supports the arguments of Kwasi Wiredu, who maintained that African societies possess indigenous moral frameworks capable of guiding democratic coexistence and social harmony. Wiredu emphasised consensus, dialogue, and communal responsibility as essential principles of African governance and social organisation. The predictive influence of Ubuntu identified in this study indicates that these indigenous values continue to shape social interactions in contemporary African communities.

The finding also reinforces broader African philosophical traditions that view the individual as inherently embedded within a network of social relationships. The ability of Ubuntu to predict social cohesion demonstrates the continuing relevance of African indigenous knowledge systems for addressing contemporary peacebuilding challenges.

Gender Differences in Perceptions of Ubuntu

The study found no statistically significant gender differences in perceptions of Ubuntu. This suggests that Ubuntu values are widely shared across both male and female respondents and function as a collective cultural resource rather than a gender-specific orientation. This finding aligns with the universalistic dimensions of Ubuntu emphasised by Tutu and Mbiti. Both scholars argued that Ubuntu reflects a shared conception of humanity that transcends demographic distinctions. The absence of significant gender differences therefore strengthens the argument that Ubuntu can serve as a broad-based framework for community reconciliation and social integration (Edinoh et al., 2025).

Theoretical Implications

The findings offer substantial support for restorative justice theory. Restorative justice proposes that conflict resolution should focus on repairing harm, restoring relationships, and rebuilding communities rather than relying solely on punishment. The positive relationships between Ubuntu, forgiveness, trust, and reintegration demonstrate that African indigenous philosophies embody many of the principles central to restorative justice.

Furthermore, the findings validate Ubuntu as an indigenous theoretical framework for understanding social cohesion in African societies. While much peacebuilding literature has been influenced by Western liberal models, the results suggest that culturally grounded approaches rooted in African philosophical traditions may provide more sustainable pathways towards reconciliation and social healing.

Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between perceptions of Ubuntu and social cohesion in post-conflict African communities. The findings revealed that stronger perceptions of Ubuntu are associated with higher levels of forgiveness, interpersonal trust, and support for reintegration. Ubuntu also emerged as a significant predictor of overall social cohesion, highlighting its practical relevance for post-conflict reconstruction and peace building. The study provides empirical evidence supporting the philosophical claims advanced by Tutu, Battle, Mbiti, Gyekye, and Wiredu regarding the transformative potential of Ubuntu. The results demonstrate that Ubuntu is not merely an abstract philosophical concept but a lived social reality capable of fostering reconciliation, rebuilding trust, and strengthening community resilience after conflict. In a continent where many societies continue to grapple with the consequences of ethnic violence, civil wars, political instability, terrorism, and communal conflicts, Ubuntu offers a culturally authentic framework for promoting sustainable peace. The philosophy's emphasis on shared humanity, mutual care, forgiveness, and communal responsibility makes it particularly relevant for addressing contemporary peacebuilding challenges across Africa.

Implications for African Peacebuilding Policy

The findings carry important implications for peace-building policy across African countries.

1. Integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems

African governments and international development agencies should recognise Ubuntu as a legitimate indigenous framework for peace building. Policies that incorporate local cultural values are likely to achieve greater legitimacy and community acceptance than externally imposed models.

2. Strengthening Reconciliation Programmes

National reconciliation initiatives should incorporate Ubuntu principles into community dialogues, truth commissions, and conflict mediation programmes. Such integration may enhance public willingness to engage in forgiveness and reconciliation processes.

3. Reform of Transitional Justice Mechanisms

The findings suggest that transitional justice frameworks should move beyond punitive approaches and emphasise restorative mechanisms that prioritise healing, accountability, reintegration, and social restoration.

4. Community-Based Peacebuilding

Governments should support grassroots peace-building initiatives that promote communal participation, social trust, and collective responsibility. Ubuntu-based interventions may be particularly effective in communities recovering from ethnic and communal violence.

5. Educational Policy Development

African educational systems should incorporate Ubuntu philosophy into civic education, peace education, citizenship education, and moral instruction curricula. Such initiatives can cultivate values of tolerance, empathy, and social responsibility among younger generations.

6. African Union Peace and Security Frameworks

The findings support the inclusion of Ubuntu-informed approaches within the peace building strategies of the African Union. Indigenous philosophies can complement existing continental frameworks aimed at conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Governments should institutionalise Ubuntu-based reconciliation programmes in post-conflict communities.
2. Peacebuilding organisations should integrate Ubuntu principles into mediation, dialogue, and reconciliation initiatives.
3. Educational institutions should incorporate Ubuntu philosophy into curricula at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels.
4. Traditional leaders, religious leaders, and community elders should be actively involved in promoting Ubuntu-centered conflict resolution mechanisms.
5. Transitional justice processes should prioritise restorative approaches that encourage accountability, forgiveness, healing, and reintegration.
6. National peace commissions should develop culturally grounded peacebuilding models based on indigenous African values and traditions.
7. International donors and development partners should support locally driven reconciliation initiatives rooted in Ubuntu philosophy.
8. Future researchers should conduct longitudinal and comparative studies across different African countries to examine the long-term effects of Ubuntu on peacebuilding outcomes.
9. Further studies should explore the role of Ubuntu in addressing contemporary challenges such as violent extremism, electoral violence, displacement, and inter-ethnic tensions.
10. Policymakers should utilise Ubuntu as a guiding framework for fostering inclusive governance, social solidarity, and sustainable development across African societies.

Overall, the study affirms that Ubuntu remains one of Africa's most valuable intellectual and moral resources for advancing reconciliation, social cohesion, and sustainable peace in post-conflict communities. Its enduring emphasis on shared humanity provides a powerful foundation for building more peaceful, inclusive, and resilient African societies.

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