



Decolonizing Counselling Psychology: An *Ubuntu*-Centred Framework for STEM Education and Economic Development in South Africa

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Abstract

This paper proposes a transformative framework for the practice of counselling psychology in Africa that moves beyond Western psychopathological emphases to embrace models drawn from indigenous African epistemologies for advancing STEM education and economic development. Drawing inspiration from Holdstock's critique of "psychology without a soul," this work addresses the urgent need for contextually and culturally grounded psychological practice. The framework integrates Ubuntu philosophy with contemporary counselling psychology to create culturally responsive interventions that support STEM learning among South African students. This approach essentially recognises the interconnectedness between individual psychological wellbeing, community development, and national economic advancement, positioning counselling psychologists as active contributors to societal transformation rather than merely treating individuals in distress and occasionally, community pathology. Through comparative analysis of successful psychological frameworks in other developing economies, this paper demonstrates how culturally grounded psychology can enhance STEM education outcomes. The proposed model emphasises collective healing, community-based interventions, and, in particular strength-based approaches that align with African worldviews. Key contributions include a theoretical framework that bridges indigenous knowledge systems with evidence-based psychological practice, practical guidelines for implementing Ubuntu-centred counselling in educational contexts, and policy recommendations for integrating culturally responsive psychology into national development strategies. This work challenges the profession to reclaim its true social justice mandate while contributing meaningfully to South Africa's economic transformation. The paper calls for a paradigm shift that positions counselling psychology as a catalyst for educational excellence and economic empowerment, offering a blueprint for African psychological practice that honours cultural heritage while addressing 21st-century developmental needs.

Keywords: *Decolonising Psychology; Ubuntu Philosophy; STEM Education; Counselling Psychology; South African Development*

Introduction

This paper proposes a transformative framework for counselling psychology that transcends Western psychopathological models by embracing indigenous African epistemologies—particularly *Ubuntu*—as a foundation for enhancing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education and driving inclusive economic development in South Africa. This is an approach whose time has come given that counselling psychology fundamentally represents a movement toward human flourishing. The American Psychological Association (APA) (2022) defines it as "a generalist health service specialty in professional psychology that uses a broad range of culturally-informed and culturally-sensitive practices to help people improve their well-being, prevent and alleviate distress and maladjustment, resolve crises, and increase their ability to function better in their lives." This definition emphasises both individual healing and systemic engagement, which, through its "particular expertise in work and career issues" (APA, 2022), positions counselling psychology as inherently concerned with the promotion of human flourishing and socio-economic development. However, more than thirty years after apartheid, South African counselling psychology remains trapped in a fundamental paradox. While it seeks to promote healing and human flourishing, it continues to rely heavily on Western theories of psychopathologies and interventions that often fail to resonate with local lived realities of the majority of the citizens. Such an approach extends what Holdstock (2000) critiqued as "psychology without a soul"—his reference to the systematic exclusion of spirituality and indigenous ways of knowing that communities naturally draw upon for healing and meaning-making can be extended to encompass the broader disconnect from local realities.

While others may conceive of this as directly related to continuing epistemic violence—the denial or lack of acknowledgement of local ways of knowing (Adams et al., 2018), the major concern is that this reliance perpetuates what Fish (2022) identifies as psychology's role as a biopolitical tool of control: a system preoccupied with managing pathology rather than fostering collective growth; and in that way, and despite its social justice mandate, sustain existing inequalities (Makgetlaneng, 2016). This critique is particularly urgent when considering the structural exclusion of vulnerable groups—especially girls and women, who remain significantly underrepresented in STEM fields (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 2017). In rural and underserved communities, this marginalisation is compounded by limited access to quality education, gendered expectations, and intergenerational poverty (Harriman et al., 2022; McCall, 2009). Promoting STEM engagement among girls is not only a matter of gender equity, but a critical developmental priority that counselling psychology must actively support. This requires contextually and culturally grounded interventions that address the psychological, cultural, and socio-economic barriers limiting girls' participation—particularly in rural and marginalised communities (Sutherland-Addy, 2008; UNESCO, 2017). Counselling psychologists must be positioned as key facilitators in this transformation, working alongside schools, families, and communities to cultivate environments that empower youth especially girls to pursue STEM pathways.

While positive psychology and community-based initiatives have made strong and commendable efforts, such often unfold within frameworks that claim social justice but remain largely performative, failing to confront the deeper structural conditions that sustain inequality (Fish, 2022; Makgetlaneng, 2013). The consequences of this disconnection are profound. Research demonstrates clear links between poverty, entrenched social hierarchies, and poor mental health outcomes in post-apartheid South Africa, where racialised disparities in housing, healthcare, and education continue to disproportionately affect the most vulnerable (Das-Munshi et al., 2016; Harriman et al., 2022). Structural violence from colonialism and apartheid continues relentlessly to marginalise populations, yet counselling psychology typically addresses individual struggles while overlooking their structural causes. As a result, the field largely serves a privileged minority while broader developmental needs—including the urgent challenges facing STEM education and economic development—remain unmet.

In Nwoye and Khumalo's (2025) comparative analysis of the development of counselling psychology over time across Tanzania, Nigeria, Kenya, and to some extent South Africa; shows that practice remains narrowly focused on vocational guidance—fitting individuals into existing structures rather than questioning or creating new ones. This creates an opportunity for a paradigmatic shift: moving from reactive student–environment matching toward proactive developmental approaches that nurture interest in STEM. Such transformation positions counselling psychology as an active agent of national human resource development, requiring strategic government involvement and community-based integration. Currently, the trajectory across Anglophone sub-Saharan Africa exemplifies emphasis on bio-behavioural management—helping populations adjust to constraints rather than helping them to transform and flourish.

This paper proposes the need to move away from this minimalist approach to psychological counselling practice to include a charge to transform this reality by centering *Ubuntu* as a decolonising framework. In a context where poverty runs rampant and STEM subjects are expected to drive development, psychology cannot remain on the side-lines away from economics and other disciplines. The multi-faceted nature of human flourishing shaping the practice of counselling psychology as defined by the APA (2022) demands collaboration (Church, 2012). Drawing from Sartre's (1948) understanding of human potential and the fundamental need to transcend limiting circumstances, we argue that counselling psychology in South Africa in particular and Africa in general must embrace its role in collective development, moving beyond the medical gaze (Foucault, 1976) to embrace approaches that honour both individual healing and flourishing, and structural transformation (O'Callaghan, 2022).

The purpose of the paper is to present *Ubuntu* as a transformative, decolonial praxis capable of reshaping and redefining the role of psychology in STEM-driven development contexts in Africa. This is a necessary undertaking as Africa faces persistent poverty and underdevelopment, that despite high expectations for STEM education, psychology remains siloed or isolated, with limited engagement in structural change. *Ubuntu*, as a locally grounded yet globally resonant framework (Hailey, 2008), offers an ethical and holistic model for collective development through interdisciplinary collaboration, particularly in psychology (also as STEM) and (other) STEM subjects including economics. Against this backdrop, this paper proposes a transformative framework for counselling psychology—one that transcends alignment with Western psychopathological models by centering *Ubuntu* as a decolonial praxis. This framework positions indigenous African epistemologies as critical to advancing STEM education and fostering inclusive economic development across the continent. Effort is made in the pages that follow to illustrate how this approach can be implemented in practice.

Methodological Note

This paper is conceptual and theoretical in nature, grounded in a critical integrative literature review and guided by a decolonial epistemological stance. It draws primarily on African philosophical traditions—particularly *Ubuntu*—and the existing body of work on counselling psychology, education policy, and STEM development across the Global South. The methodology is thus not empirical in the conventional sense, but rather interpretive and reflexive, aimed at synthesizing a diverse range of scholarly, policy, and theoretical contributions into a coherent, context-responsive framework. Our positionality as African scholars working within and across psychology and education in Africa informs the lens through which this synthesis is undertaken. We deliberately centre indigenous African epistemologies, particularly as they emerge in response to the enduring legacies of colonialism, structural inequality, and cultural marginalisation in South Africa and beyond. The analysis also adopts a comparative perspective, drawing on examples from other postcolonial and developing contexts—such as China, India, and Nigeria—not as models for emulation and replication, but as sites of alternative development trajectories that foreground the role of psychology, pedagogy, and national policy in shaping

educational transformation. It is hoped that this work offers a theoretical intervention grounded in both scholarly rigour and contextual urgency. It seeks to reframe counselling psychology as a tool of social transformation by recovering local wisdoms, confronting imported models, and proposing a decolonial praxis anchored in *Ubuntu* as a methodological, ethical, and political imperative.

***Ubuntu* as Theoretical Framework**

Ubuntu, often summarised through the Nguni proverb “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*”—a person is a person through other persons—is more than a philosophical construct or cultural idiom. It operates as a dynamic, contextual process underpinning a worldview rooted in relationality, promotion of human dignity, and collective flourishing. Metz (2011) distinguishes between *Ubuntu* as a moral theory and *Ubuntu* as lived practice, emphasizing its adaptability across diverse African contexts. This is evident in how *Ubuntu* manifests among different South African communities—Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, and Tswana—while maintaining a core ethic of interconnected humanity (Mokgoro, 1998; Ramose, 2004). *Ubuntu* is not a nostalgic appeal to tradition, but a living, evolving praxis—a philosophy of action rooted in African worldviews yet responsive to contemporary challenges. Its adaptability and relational depth make it an essential tool for designing decolonial curricula, shaping inclusive institutions, and transforming psychological practice in ways that honour both individual healing and collective flourishing. *Ubuntu*’s contextual flexibility is its strength. Letseka (2014) argues that its transformative power lies in its capacity to evolve with contemporary social realities, all while preserving ancestral wisdom. Murove (2005) and Waghid (2014) describe *Ubuntu* as a dynamic epistemology, one that emerges through communal dialogue and lived experience. This understanding resists essentialist or romanticised views and positions *Ubuntu* as a living praxis with relevance for modern psychological and educational interventions. It has been presented as a theory that can fuel and guide socio-economic and sustainable development (Church, 2012).

From Paulo Freire’s (2005) notion of praxis; the fusion of critical reflection and transformative action, offers a useful parallel. *Ubuntu* reinterprets this through an African lens: where Freire emphasised political consciousness, *Ubuntu* centres relational accountability and ethical responsiveness (Ngubane & Makua, 2021a, 2021b). As Ramose (2001), Metz (2011), and Letseka (2014) suggest, *Ubuntu* is a normative foundation for reimagining institutions grounded in justice, cooperation, and dignity. *Ubuntu* significantly challenges the individualistic assumptions of Western psychology. Rather than seeing people as autonomous units, *Ubuntu* frames human identity as interdependent, and psychological distress as a disruption in relational harmony (Nsamenang, 2011; Serpell et al., 1997). This paradigm shift redirects psychological assessment away from pathology toward relational wellbeing. Nwoye (2007) and Ratele (2017) propose that *Ubuntu*-centred frameworks evaluate how individuals contribute to community cohesion. From Koenane (2018), *Ubuntu*-inspired assessment asks: “*How well is this person contributing to community flourishing?*” rather than “*What is wrong with this person?*” Or in what way is this individual making him/herself a nuisance or unacceptable to the community?

This relational paradigm transforms the therapist-client relationship into a communal healing process. Mpofu et al. (2011) and Sodi et al. (2011) document approaches in which healing occurs through the involvement of extended family, elders, and peers. Mkhize (2004) shows that therapeutic goals shift toward restoring collective empowerment and community wellbeing; such that interventions such as healing circles (*indaba*), collective storytelling, and mentorship (Mpofu et al., 2011; Mweru, 2011) reinforce this communal ethos.

Chilisa (2020) provides methodological tools for integrating indigenous research into contemporary psychology. In one of those methodologies, *Ubuntu* is presented as more than a therapeutic lens; it is a counter-hegemonic epistemology (Biko, 1978; Ramose et al., 2007). It offers an African alternative to Euro-American psychological frameworks, asserting the legitimacy of indigenous systems

as valid scientific knowledge. Shizha (2013) and Dei (2011) encourage combining *philosophies*, advocating for a pan-African psychological model. However, critical engagement is essential. Mignolo (2011) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) caution against romanticising *Ubuntu* or treating it as a monolith, precisely because for Gyekye (1997) and Wiredu (1997), *Ubuntu* has evolved through historical trauma, colonial disruption, and internal contestation. Some critiques suggest that *Ubuntu* may suppress individuality (Bell, 2002; Poovan et al., 2006), but others argue that it enables the evolution of authentic selfhood through the membership of the community (Louw, 2009). Eze (2010) and van Binsbergen (2001) explore *Ubuntu*'s interface with human rights and social justice, while its resonance within broader global indigenous movements is also examined (Enslin & Horsthemke, 2004, 2016).

Psychology and STEM: A Missing Link

STEM education's potential in South Africa lies not only in its technical content but in its capacity to address developmental challenges through innovative, locally relevant problem-solving. Research highlights inadequate use of STEM education in underprivileged communities (Agai, 2024), showing that traditional approaches fail to demonstrate its relevance. While engineering thinking provides methodology, technology delivers solutions, without a psychological and economic dimension these remain incomplete. Recent studies report rising psychological issues, particularly anxiety, among STEM students (Nkopodi et al., 2024), underscoring the need for psychological support. Studies also show complex relationships between social, motivational, and instructional factors in STEM (Abe et al., 2019), emphasising the need for psychological insight to foster critical and creative thinking. The integration of *Ubuntu* into contemporary education and psychological practice is not an act of romantic return to tradition, but rather a strategic philosophical intervention. This position draws from Paulin Hountondji's (2009) seminal critique of how knowledge is adopted, appropriated, or imposed in postcolonial Africa. Hountondji advocates for what he terms an "active, lucid, and responsible appropriation" of knowledge—a process that moves beyond passive reception or uncritical reverence for either Western science or indigenous traditions. This approach provides a critical philosophical anchor for how *Ubuntu* is deployed in this paper: not as an essentialist tradition, but as part of a deliberate strategy for building autonomous, contextually grounded systems of knowledge. An approach, through which students are assisted by means of relevant counselling psychology practice to understand the value of effective STEM education in the economy of their lives and destiny.

Hountondji (1990, 2009) critiques centre on the distinction between endogenous knowledge and mythologised tradition. The former refers to knowledge systems that are empirically grounded, actively evolving, and responsive to social need—whether locally generated or adapted from elsewhere. The latter, the mythologised, in contrast, refers to traditional practices that are preserved merely for symbolic or cultural affirmation, often stripped of analytical vitality. For African societies to thrive intellectually and developmentally, Hountondji insists on the creation of an indigenous research tradition—rooted in African experience but also globally engaged, rigorously critical, and intellectually autonomous. This position speaks directly to the challenges facing STEM and psychology education in Africa today (Hountondji, 1990). Through effective psychological education African societies must be assisted to resist the wholesale importation of technocratic STEM models, many of which are abstracted from cultural contexts and driven by metrics, not meaning, and foreign to the culture and context of the African students. Similarly, there is an urgent need to rethink the psychologising of African experience through Western diagnostic lenses that ignore communal epistemologies, spiritual frameworks, and relational worldviews (Holdstock, 2000; Nsamenang, 2011).

Ubuntu, in the context of African psychological practice, functions as both a philosophical buffer and a methodological guide. It offers a means to preserve African ways of knowing—rooted in relationality, ethical community, and holistic well-being—while remaining open to adapting global knowledge that aligns with African realities. This is not a rejection of science or psychology, but a

selective and sovereign engagement. It is about cultivating epistemic self-determination, whereby African societies set the terms for what knowledge is valid, useful, and ethical in their contexts. Such a position also guards against epistemicide—the erasure or marginalisation of indigenous knowledge systems in the face of dominant Euro-American paradigms (de Sousa Santos, 2014). In both psychology and STEM, this has historically taken the form of curriculum designs, policy choices, and research agendas that marginalise African languages, cosmologies, and problem-solving traditions. Reclaiming and revitalising these systems—within a critical, evidence-driven framework—honours the spirit of Hountondji's proposal: to Africanise knowledge not by exclusion, but through discernment. This philosophical foundation compels educators, psychologists, and policymakers to:

- Embed culturally grounded methodologies in scientific and psychological training;
- Develop locally driven research agendas that address Africa's social and developmental priorities;
- Foster institutional autonomy, so that African universities and think tanks are not merely sites of knowledge consumption but centres of critical production.

In overall, Hountondji's insights affirm that the decolonisation of education is not about rejecting the global, but about reclaiming the local as a point of critical agency guided by the power of discernment to know the extent of the global to accept into the local. *Ubuntu* offers the ethical and ontological grounding for this work. Together, they form a framework that honours heritage, cultivates critical reflexivity, and charts a path toward intellectually sovereign futures open to the need to remain in conversation with the relevant elements of the global.

Culturally Grounded Methodologies

Integrating indigenous cultural knowledge with STEM concepts is necessary to foster effective student engagement in the STEM education process (Nkopodi et al., 2024). Including psychology in this framework ensures solutions are human-centred and culturally responsive, positioning South Africa as an innovator drawing from global knowledge while addressing local challenges (Hountondji, 1990). What must be lamented is what Nyathu (2005, as cited in Hailey, 2008) describes and presents as the error of *ignored psychology* in Southern Africa that should embrace the inherent “harmonic intelligence” embedded in their traditions, and that further links to an interrogation of possibilities as a core to human flourishing within *Ubuntu* philosophy. Drawing from Sartre's existential humanism, that we are “condemned to be free” resonates with *Ubuntu*'s communal implications, an obligation to the other (Nwoye, 2017), and consequently the other's welfare. From this perspective innovation in STEM becomes not just a product of economic necessity but of existential imperative. Engaging in STEM innovation embodies *Ubuntu*'s principle that personal development serves communal advancement. Embracing *Ubuntu*-centred counselling psychology affirms human dignity and potential, aligning individual agency with collective responsibility.

From this view, *Ubuntu* is not simply a moral code but a generative principle shaping how we live, learn, and build together. As Chaplin (2006) notes, *Ubuntu* calls us to serve, respect, and support one another. Magezi and Khlopa (2021) frame *Ubuntu* as a moral vision prioritising communal identity and inclusive hospitality. It anchors counselling psychology in a philosophy where individual flourishing is inseparable from collective advancement. *Ubuntu*-oriented counselling positions students to co-create new possibilities in STEM education, enabling the discipline to transcend narrow remedial roles and emphasises on rote learning to become a catalyst for innovation, equity, and renewal. Embedding *Ubuntu* in psychological practice shifts the focus from passive moral obligation to active co-construction, cultivating learners who are both resilient and committed to communal purpose.

South Africa's socio-economic future is inextricably linked to the strength of its STEM education. Despite this recognition, persistent challenges compromise the system's ability to deliver

transformative outcomes. National assessments and global indicators reveal troubling underperformance in mathematics and science, particularly in historically disadvantaged schools (Reddy et al., 2016; Spaul, 2013). These poor outcomes reflect deeper systemic issues: under-resourced schools, insufficient teacher training, and an enduring disconnect between curriculum content and the lived realities of learners (Ayeni & Aborisade, 2022). Many teachers lack both subject-specific expertise and pedagogical support (Maringe & Prew, 2014). Compounded by large class sizes and infrastructural deficiencies, the result is a system unable to prepare learners for a 21st-century knowledge economy. Furthermore, STEM education in South Africa often remains framed within a Eurocentric, content-heavy model, neglecting learners' cultural contexts and knowledge systems. This contextual irrelevance undermines student motivation and alienates communities that should be central to the learning process. Psychology is rarely integrated into this ecosystem, despite mounting evidence that educational success is profoundly shaped by motivation, identity, resilience, and relational support (Roeser et al., 2000). A system designed to produce individual achievement is ill-suited for a society where communal flourishing remains a moral and developmental imperative.

Locally Driven Research Agendas

The current paradigm also overlooks significant opportunities for innovation through indigenous knowledge systems and community-based pedagogies. For instance, ethnomathematics—the study of mathematics embedded in cultural practices—offers a way to make abstract concepts meaningful by grounding them in local contexts (d'Ambrosio, 1985). Calculating the area of a rondavel or tracking agricultural cycles integrates science with cultural relevance and problem-solving from everyday life. The issue here is of course that many students these days are from their cultural and agricultural roots that makes the exercise of STEM education to look foreign to the students. Similarly, culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2002) and strength-based approaches challenge the deficit model that often dominates educational discourse. Rather than focusing on what learners lack, these frameworks identify and celebrate talents, cultural assets, and local ingenuity. In the STEM classroom, this might involve collaborative community projects that draw on ancestral technologies or highlight learners' capacity for innovation. *Ubuntu*, as a relational ethic, reframes the learner not as an isolated subject but as a member of an interdependent web of knowledge, care, and responsibility (Bangura, 2017; Metz, 2011). Relational resilience, for example, can be fostered through healing circles where learners share struggles and aspirations, building collective accountability and mutual encouragement (Tutu, 1999). Restorative conversations can replace punitive disciplinary models, fostering dignity and responsibility (Braithwaite, 2002; Nwoye, 2009). Teachers, acting as cultural mediators, can draw from both ancestral wisdom and modern pedagogical tools to foster inclusive, high-performing learning environments—provided they receive appropriate training and community support to do so.

Comparative International Lessons

Globally, countries that have seen rapid technological and economic growth have invested systematically in STEM education and its psychological underpinnings and psychosocial foundations. In China, STEM transformation was driven by rigorous teacher recruitment, national competitions, and long-term policy alignment (Kai, 2014; Yao & Guo, 2018). Singapore's success involved linking curriculum to national development, professionalising teaching, and encouraging innovation at the school level (Lee, 2007; Tan & Abdul Hamid, 2014). India fostered aspirational STEM identities through national initiatives, mentorship, and the symbolic elevation of scientists, engineers and chess players (Government of India, 2015; Kumar, 2019; Subramanian, 2019). Across these cases, psychological scaffolding—promoting growth mindsets, self-efficacy, collaborative innovation, and cultural pride—was central to learner persistence and excellence. These nations did not simply teach science; they built ecosystems where motivation, identity, and purpose were cultivated alongside content.

South Africa can draw from these international models while grounding its reforms in *Ubuntu*-centred practice. Rather than replicating foreign systems wholesale, South Africa must integrate teacher development, cultural responsiveness, and community partnerships into its national STEM strategy. For instance, a third-year professional service model for trainee teachers and counselling psychologists could be piloted—focusing on youth empowerment, STEM readiness, and psychosocial development. Community-based interventions—such as mentorship schemes, *indaba*-style restorative circles, and school-linked research hubs—can serve as platforms for *Ubuntu*-based learning and innovation. Counselling psychologists can play a pivotal role in this matter by motivating learners, addressing trauma, and helping the nation to build identity-affirming environments. Their involvement in STEM education cannot be peripheral; since such a professional psychological practice is essential to cultivating the relational foundations on which to build effective learning, persistence, and success among students. *Ubuntu*'s relational ethic reminds us that excellence is not individual glory, but shared upliftment. Effective cooperative projects, efficient mentorship networks, and community-based learning environments can transform STEM from an isolating national policy pursuit into a collective endeavour, advancing not only academic success but social justice and national development.

Curriculum and Policy Interventions

The affirmation of *Ubuntu*—that “a person is a person through other persons”—as a guiding philosophy for counselling psychology necessitates more than conceptual endorsement. It calls for a structural reimagining of how counselling is taught, practiced, and embedded in systems that influence individuals, communities, and the broader societal fabric. The curriculum and policy proposals should envision a praxis-oriented, interdisciplinary, and culturally grounded transformation of counselling psychology, with *Ubuntu* as both method and goal. For Ayeni et al. (2024), incorporating the promotion of emotional intelligence and counselling technique early in professional training is a critical first step. Emotional competence enhances therapeutic alliance, especially in multicultural and diverse settings. Within an *Ubuntu*-centred curriculum, this would be complemented by the development of relational consciousness—training future practitioners to locate healing within webs of relationship rather than individual pathology. *Ubuntu* should be formally integrated into both STEM and psychology education. This requires co-developing curricula that valorise indigenous knowledge systems and local moral orders. For instance, ethics modules should foreground communal responsibility, interdependence, and the lived experiences of historically marginalised communities. Practical coursework might involve case-based learning grounded in African family and community systems, enabling students to grapple with real socio-cultural dilemmas (Ayeni & Aborisade, 2022).

Curriculum Implementation Framework

Crucially, such a curriculum would promote interdisciplinary co-teaching and co-research models. Within such a framework, psychology lecturers may need to be drafted to co-teach modules with engineers or public health professionals to model collaborative problem-solving grounded in community needs. These forms of pedagogy not only reflect *Ubuntu* in practice but also prepare students for work in transdisciplinary teams—essential for tackling South Africa's interlinked social and technological challenges. Science and psychology education must be infused with decolonial epistemologies. This includes drawing on African philosophy, oral history, and memory work, as well as exposing students to ethical inquiry that moves beyond Western individualism. Examples include using storytelling and moral reflection circles as formal pedagogical tools in class (Chilisa et al., 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

At the policy implementation level, the call is for collective and ecological models of practice. Counselling psychology must move out of isolated offices and into community-based labs or innovation hubs, where practitioners co-develop interventions with engineers, educators, and local leaders. These “community labs” would serve as spaces of knowledge co-production—where technology and healing

meet, and where solutions to mental distress are designed with, not for, communities. The development of these hubs should be supported through policy mandates that incentivise public–private partnerships and fund community-engaged psychological research. *Ubuntu*-based policies should also formalise the integration of traditional healers, teachers, and social workers into intervention design. These actors bring situated knowledge of their contexts and serve as frontline allies in identifying and responding to psychological distress.

In terms of research, African-centred methodologies must be institutionalised. Participatory Action Research (PAR) and indigenous storytelling are not simply data-gathering tools; they are ethical commitments to shared ownership, collective voice, and self-determined futures (Bojuwoye, 2013; Chilisa, 2020). Research councils and ethics boards must be capacitated to recognise these as valid and rigorous methodologies deserving of institutional support. This vision challenges dominant, individualistic, and pathologising models of mental health. *Ubuntu* invites a relational praxis—one in which healing is always collective, where knowledge is co-created, and where interventions are guided not only by empirical evidence but by values of care, dignity, and interconnectedness. Counselling psychology, under this framework and if grounded in *Ubuntu*, becomes a liberatory force—both for individuals and the communities in which they live and work.

Conclusion & Future Directions

This paper proposes a transformative framework for counselling psychology that transcends Western psychopathological models and their subtle extensions by embracing indigenous African epistemologies—particularly *Ubuntu*—as a foundation for enhancing STEM education and driving inclusive economic development in South Africa. Counselling psychology, at its core, represents a movement toward human flourishing, anchored in cultural authenticity, collective wellbeing, and social justice. The model grounding its philosophy and practice envisioned here—while already surfacing in organic and informal ways—requires intentional intervention and mobilisation. Galvanising this framework means adopting the activist–researcher–practitioner stance, one that functions at both micro and macro levels. This begins with refining – identifying priority and charting intervention programs—the tools of the craft within community hubs—“community labs,” that serve as multidisciplinary sites of transformation. These hubs should integrate allied professions such as social work, occupational therapy, and educational support, and must also include practical community-level engagement tools—such as motivational interviewing, psychoeducation, and participatory dialogue—to activate local agency and strengthen psychosocial ecosystems.

Importantly, counselling psychologists must take up and operationalise their social justice mandate—not only as healers, but also as systemic change agents. Their role must extend into economic and policy spheres, shaping agendas that embed psychological wellbeing within national development strategies. This paper therefore calls for a paradigm shift: an approach that positions counselling psychology as central to cultivating a generation that is not only technically skilled, but also deeply rooted in the African communal values that sustain inclusive and resilient societies.

Author Contributions

This paper is a continuation of a project initiated when the second author invited the first author to contribute to a paper chronicling developments in counselling psychology across Africa, with particular reference to Nigeria, Kenya, and Tanzania—countries where the second author has had extensive experience. That paper presented an overview of counselling psychology in sub-Saharan Africa. And the second author, however, felt that there was a need to contribute a perspective on the way forward. We agreed that this warranted a separate paper—one grounded in the environment the first author is familiar

with, shaped by training and orientation as a community-based counselling psychologist. In stepping up to formulate the trajectory of the discussion, this paper builds upon and expands the ideas introduced in that initial publication, and sets out a framework for future development in Africa. The second author curated the manuscript by ensuring the ideas expressed in the paper aligned with the ethos of the original work while at the same time offering some important inputs that help to extend the content of the paper where need be.

Ethical Consideration

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