

## **Service learning: A conduit for values inculcation in secondary school history education in Zimbabwe**

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**Abstract:** This conceptual paper draws on a doctoral study that investigated how Zimbabwean secondary school history education integrates values development. The paper aims to address a gap in the pedagogies that can be employed to foster values inculcation in secondary school history, with a specific focus on service learning. Using Ubuntu as a lens, this qualitative study reviewed literature on service learning and values education from credible academic databases. Data were analysed thematically. Findings reveal that service learning can promote values development through concretising and connecting taught values to social responsibilities. Service learning also enables learners to reflect on the values taught and offers culturally relevant learning experiences. To ensure meaningful use of service learning, we recommend that teachers and learners prepare adequately for the service. History educators should also provide necessary guidance during the execution of service learning and facilitate the provision of constructive feedback to learners to determine strengths and weaknesses.

**Keywords:** secondary school history curriculum, service learning, values inculcation, values, Zimbabwe

**Résumé :** Cet article conceptuel s'appuie sur une thèse de doctorat ayant examiné la manière dont l'enseignement de l'histoire dans les écoles secondaires du Zimbabwe intègre le développement des valeurs. L'étude vise à combler une lacune concernant les approches pédagogiques susceptibles de favoriser l'inculcation de valeurs dans le cadre de cet enseignement, en mettant particulièrement l'accent sur l'apprentissage par le service. En adoptant le prisme de la philosophie \*Ubuntu\*, cette étude qualitative a analysé la littérature scientifique disponible dans des bases de données universitaires fiables sur l'apprentissage par le service et l'éducation aux valeurs. Les données ont fait l'objet d'une analyse thématique. Les résultats révèlent que l'apprentissage par le service peut favoriser un développement efficace des valeurs en concrétisant ces dernières et en les reliant aux responsabilités sociales. Cette approche permet également aux élèves de réfléchir aux valeurs enseignées et leur offre des expériences d'apprentissage culturellement pertinentes. Pour garantir une mise en œuvre significative de l'apprentissage par le service, nous recommandons une préparation adéquate tant pour les enseignants que pour les élèves. Les enseignants d'histoire doivent par ailleurs fournir l'encadrement nécessaire durant la réalisation de l'activité et faciliter la formulation de retours constructifs afin d'identifier les points forts et les points faibles des élèves.

**Mots-clés :** programme d'histoire du secondaire, apprentissage par le service, inculcation de valeurs, valeurs, Zimbabwe

## Introduction and background

Zimbabwe, like many countries globally, acknowledges that teaching values in the school curriculum is a public good which can promote both individual and societal well-being. Consequently, the clarion call for the inclusion of values education in every school discipline, including secondary school history education, has gained momentum over the years in Zimbabwe. Ignorance of cultural identity and the spread of socially undesirable behaviour, such as drugs and substance abuse, violence and indiscipline amongst the young generation, has raised concerns about lack of sound values (National Curriculum Framework, 2015). As emphasised by Behera (2020), a rigorous integration of values education is considered by stakeholders in the education system and the government of Zimbabwe as a solution to restore a sense of morality amongst citizens (Behera, 2020). The potential of history as a school discipline in fostering the development of desired societal values has been established by various scholars, such as Thorp (2020), Yoon (2022) and Supriatna (2022) who argue that learners should be able to appreciate the meaning of responsive citizenship through the study of history. In the same vein, Kovac (2021) argues that addressing issues of morality in school history teaching is possible and an essential move for societies to progress to advanced stages of socio-political and economic development.

Teaching values through the school history curriculum is a priority in many countries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in order to promote the holistic development of learners who can positively contribute to their communities. In the United States of America, the school history curriculum among other things, focuses on instilling democratic values to promote responsible citizenship (Kober, 2020). Similarly, in Indonesia, secondary school history education is designed to ensure transmission of values that can foster the development of Indonesian society (Setiawan et al., 2020). The Zambian secondary history curriculum also intends to ensure the development of values to produce learners who have internalised skills and values that make them competitive at a global level (Kabombwe & Mulenga, 2020). In a bid to provide holistic quality education, Zimbabwe's secondary school history curriculum also pays attention to the development of values in learners as one of its core learning outcomes. The Zimbabwean secondary school history syllabus (2024, p.1) aims to "foster an understanding and appreciation of issues concerning human rights, democracy, empowerment, gender sensitivity, Unhu/Ubuntu/Vumunhu and instil patriotism leading to a change in learners' attitudes and behaviour". The integration of values inculcation in the school history curriculum as a national educational goal in Zimbabwe and other countries demonstrates its value in nurturing responsive citizenship. This is supported by Meilan et al. (2021, p. 132) who posit that history, as a school discipline that is anchored on human experiences holds an intrinsic value in developing learner "capabilities and shaping the character of a dignified citizen".

Integration of values in the secondary school history curriculum requires a systematic procedure to ensure its effective implementation (Ulusoy, 2021). One key element that informs effective practice in curriculum implementation is employing robust pedagogies. On the same note, a study by Khathi et al. (2022, p.110) on values education argues that the development of values as a learning process calls for pedagogical approaches that help learners to “understand why and how they need to behave or display certain behaviours or attitudes in the society”. Such teaching strategies should be grounded on the “explicit teaching of values by making values tangible and concrete” (Jones & Roux, 2021, p.1). This implies that teaching methods should enable learners to experience and apply values taught in real life situations (Kelum et al., 2021). Arguably, the implementation of value-based history education in Zimbabwe needs to be informed by empirical insights into pedagogical practices that are fit for this purpose. To advance knowledge on this standpoint, this paper focuses on service learning as one of the instructional methods that can create meaningful learning experiences to foster the development of values in the teaching and learning of secondary school history in Zimbabwe. Before we provide a conceptualisation of service learning, we provide an overview of ongoing debates on the approaches that underpin current trends in secondary school history education.

History is a complex discipline that has been conceptualised differently by various schools of thought. The overarching perspective that foregrounds the conceptualisation of history also influences how it is taught as a school subject. There are two main approaches that inform the chronicling of past narratives as well as curriculum and pedagogical issues in secondary school history. One approach views history as a body of knowledge and the other one regards history as a system of knowledge. The former is a traditional school of thought which holds that history is made up of absolute facts which should be transmitted to learners without any critical engagement with historical events (Supriatna, 2022). Thus, it is a conservative stance which limits the learners’ voice in analysing historical evidence to make their own informed conclusions about the past. The teacher and the textbooks are considered as the key sources of historical information (Dere & Gokcinar, 2020). In relation to values teaching, the traditional approach is more inclined to imposing values rather than interrogating their impact on human experiences (Yoon, 2022). Thus, values transmitted through the school history curriculum are given an immune status to critical analysis by history learners to ascertain their utility in the lived experiences of both the past and present communities. Therefore, we argue that grounding values education on the traditional approach weakens learners’ autonomy to critically engage with values that shape the experiences of societies.

The emergence of progressive perspectives in history education challenged the traditional approaches with a contrasting framework that views history as a system of knowledge. As a system of knowledge, history is “dynamic and open to contestation and discussion” (Thorpe & Persson, 2020, p. 899). Therefore, in history teaching and learning, students move from being mere recipients of historical facts to agents of social change. According to Ndomondo et al. (2022), this allows history students to draw from their own experiences in studying and

understanding history. This line of thinking has a direct impact on the teaching of values in the history curriculum and speaks to learning activities that provide learners with the opportunity to translate historical concepts into real-life experiences (Karn, 2023). This requires learners to apply historical reasoning in analysing and interpreting historical narratives. Consequently, we argue that the pedagogy for values inculcation anchored on the approach of history as a system of knowledge should situate values in the lived experiences of history learners so that they “not only recognise values but also habituate life with values” (Khathi et al., 2022, p. 11). This justifies the necessity of service learning as an instructional strategy in the secondary school curriculum so that history learning can be used as an experience that strengthens the moral ideals of learners (Fadli et al., 2021). The next section delineates service learning.

Service learning is regarded by Mutambara (2023) as a form of instruction that integrates academic experiences with community service. Resch and Schrittersser (2021) explain that community service, in this context, is a planned learning activity that is conducted to achieve curriculum outcomes and address the needs of the community. This suffices to say that the prime goal of service learning is to provide meaningful learning experiences that promote the application of academic concepts in real-life settings. For this reason, Preradovic (2015) emphasises that service learning goes beyond simple voluntary activity to organised and meaningful learning experiences. On the same note, a study by Pacho (2019, p. 232) highlights that service learning involves a fusion of “classroom learning and civic engagement,” whereby learners can learn social obligations. This happens through acquiring competences such as sensitivity to diversity issues, development of an ethic of care and increased compassion and willingness to serve others” (Mutambara, 2023, p. 68). We deduce from these features of service learning that it carries great potential to promote value-based learning experiences. Similarly, we argue that service learning can provide a conducive learning environment that enables engagement with historical concepts in authentic world settings to enhance the development of desired societal values in the teaching and learning of secondary school history. However, we note that there are limited studies that have explored the potential of service learning as a pedagogical method that is fit for the purpose of fostering and inculcating values in the implementation of the Zimbabwean secondary school history curriculum. The next section outlines the methodology employed in this study.

## **1. Methodology**

This study employed Ubuntu, a moral theory, in exploring how service learning can enhance the inculcation of values amongst learners in the teaching and learning of the secondary school history curriculum in Zimbabwe. Ubuntu is the foundation of the African way of life anchored on principles of interconnectedness of human beings, humanness, morality and communalism, which are meant to provide and promote the welfare of everyone in the society (Mahaye, 2018; Odari, 2020). Ubuntu upholds experience-based education where

the “contents that students learn should be relevant to students’ everyday life and be fitting to the values of their communities” (Ali, 2020, p. 2). Thus, grounding service learning on the principles of Ubuntu in secondary school history education can help to uphold the society’s culture and values, thereby instilling in history learners “sensitivity to their own background, cultural heritage, identity and personhood (Ali, 2020, p. 2). The Ubuntu-based line of thinking enables this paper to explore how service learning can be utilised to allow learners to engage with history both “cognitively and emotionally” (Thorp, 2020, p. 58) in order to address the development of values.

To collect data, a review of literature was conducted. The review was guided by a research question: How can service learning facilitate the development of values inculcation in secondary school history education? This research question reflects the central focus of this study and further informed the search strategy, inclusion and exclusion criteria, as well as the data extraction process. We targeted studies that explored service learning and its potential to promote the development of values within the secondary educational context conducted from 2015 to 2025 in order to get insights on contemporary views in this regard. To get a wide range of perspectives from credible academic databases, the articles for review were drawn from Google Scholar, Web of Science and Scopus. We used key words such as service learning, values, values education, and secondary school education to search for literature and ninety-seven articles were identified.

The next step involved title and abstract screening as well as full text screening, which led to the exclusion of articles published before 2015, those focusing on higher education and health, as well as those that explored voluntary work rather than service learning. Following this process, fifteen studies were selected and thematic analysis, which involves the identification of recurring themes was applied to analyse the data (Braun, & Clarke, 2006). We conducted a close reading of the studies, coded relevant concepts, created categories of similar codes, and developed themes which were reviewed and named according to the central idea portrayed. The themes discussed below were developed from the analysis and they are conceptualised to provide insights on how service learning can be instrumental as a vehicle for values inculcation in secondary school history education in Zimbabwe.

## **2. Opportunities of service learning in values inculcation in secondary school history teaching and learning**

### **2.1 Service learning concretises values**

Service learning can help to foster the development of values in history teaching because it concretises curricular concepts into real-world settings (Adediran & Ajiboye, 2020). This is possible because the service is designed to help learners to “link thought and action, enabling the development of capacities to construct, apply and transfer knowledge meaningfully by placing them in front of a problematic situation in their immediate environment” (Martin-Sanchez et al., 2023, p. 4). A study by Sahin (2019) commends the role of practical-oriented learning experiences in propelling learners to grasp and internalise

values in teaching and learning settings. Therefore, partaking in community service can demonstrate the significance of the target values and motivate history learners to apply them in real-life situations. For example, engaging secondary school history learners in providing human rights education to the community can open the eyes of learners to underlying values that anchor human rights in Zimbabwe. Human rights issues are a pertinent theme that is inextricably linked to both history curricula objectives and the needs of the community. Therefore, such an activity can provide history learners with an authentic space to engage the community in a way that promotes the development of values such as tolerance, empathy and respect, among others, which promote the upholding of human rights. This activity can be linked to the topic that focuses on the Constitution of Zimbabwe, which is found in the History syllabus and has a section that explores human rights (History Syllabus, 2024).

## **2.2. Service learning facilitates reflective practice on values**

Studies suggest that service learning also requires learners to engage in meaningful reflection as part of the learning process (Swarts, 2018; Filges et al., 2021). Reflection involves making a critical review of the service, paying attention to its impact on both the service providers (learners) and recipients of the service (community) (Valencia-Forrester et al., 2019). According to Pacho (2019), reflection is meant to provide the nexus between the service and the learning. Thus, reflection helps to determine the contribution of the service in addressing community needs as well as in achieving curriculum outcomes. By so doing, history learners are in a position to “gain further understanding of the course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility” (Preradovic, 2015, p.1). Drawing from a recommendation by Sahin (2020) that it is vital to allow learners to introspect when teaching values, reflection can strengthen the development of values amongst learners and also motivate them to challenge unfair value systems they can be exposed to in their communities. As observed by Swarts (2018), reflective practice can further promote an awareness of the values that bind the society amongst learners in secondary school history teaching. Examples of such values include communalism, interconnectedness and humanity, which are rooted in Ubuntu, the guiding moral philosophy that underpins the implementation of the history curriculum in Zimbabwe (Heritage-based National Curriculum Framework, 2024). Since history is a study of human experiences and interactions from diverse backgrounds (Karn, 2023), learners can engage in a cultural festival as a service to uphold values of tolerance and respect for different cultures in their community. Reflection in this case can position history learners to evaluate the status of cultural diversity, its significance in their communities and what needs to be done to promote it, drawing from both present and past experiences. This calls for high-level historical reasoning to enable an emotional engagement with both the historical event and the learning service for learners to appreciate the significance of values taught in secondary school history.

### **2.3. Service learning connects values with social responsibilities**

Furthermore, service learning can promote the development of values amongst secondary school history learners because it provides learning experiences that link with social obligations (Gregorova et al., 2024; Chola, 2016). Thus, service learning moves learners from being “unconcerned spectators” (Pacho, 2019, p. 23) in the study of history to active participants in identifying and addressing social issues affecting their immediate communities. Arguably, the community service stands to create a golden opportunity for secondary school history learners to “understand actual reality based on historical reality” (Nasution, 2022, p. 37). To Mutambara (2023, p. 71), community engagement in service learning cultivates “sensitivity to diverse issues, development of an ethic of care, increased compassion and concern and willingness to serve others”. The implementation of service requires history learners to work as a team in identifying, planning, execution and evaluation of the impact of the service against the targeted curriculum outcomes and community needs (Filges et al., 2021). In the same regard, these inherent features of service learning, if properly utilised, can go a long way in motivating learners to acquire and practice desirable social values and attitudes beyond history learning in their everyday life.

### **2.4 Service learning promotes culturally responsive learning**

The other strength of service learning in enhancing values inculcation in the teaching and learning of history lies in that it follows a culturally responsive approach (Mattix et al., 2018; Adediran & Ajiboye, 2020). This is so because the service should be tailored to suit the unique sociocultural circumstances of a particular community (Martin-Sanchez et al., 2022). According to Thorp and Persson (2020), it is beneficial to the affective domain for history education to allow learners to use historical information to engage with the cultural concerns in their context. It is not an overstatement that incorporating the lived experiences of history learners through community engagement can make values taught in the secondary school history curriculum practical and applicable in real life. In the same vein, Oktavia et al. (2023, p. 108) argue that linking historical events to present-day concerns can allow learners to make informed decisions on “inherited values and cultural past that need to be adjusted to the conditions that occur in the present”. Thus, adapting the service to the reality of the students’ cultural environment can create room for student agency to flourish, hence strengthening the role of history education as a tool for social change (Popa, 2021). For this to be achieved, learners should be encouraged to use higher-order historical thinking skills in order to reach a nuanced moral understanding and to make sense of the values embedded in historical concepts (Agai & Vangdip, 2025).

## **3. Limitations of service learning**

Scholarship points out some challenges that are associated with service learning that can pose as limitations hindering its pedagogical strengths in enhancing the development of values in secondary school history in Zimbabwean schools. One key fundamental principle of service learning is that it requires the implementation of learning activities that align

learning with both target curriculum outcomes and community needs, as discussed above. This is a complex exercise which requires collective efforts in community needs assessment, mutual school-community engagement, execution and reflection in the process (Gredley, 2015). Teachers have to play a pivotal role in facilitating that the learning activities address set objectives. Hence, the history teacher's understanding of the implementation of service learning as a teaching method is crucial. Findings from a study conducted in Zambia by Chola (2016) points out that a lack of teachers' competences on service learning compromised constructive learner engagement. In light of this, without a grounded understanding of the execution of service learning, its implementation can fail to facilitate the development as well as the translation of values in real life in the teaching and learning of secondary school history in Zimbabwe.

Furthermore, to ensure that service learning activities are enriching and engaging, adequate resources are required (Tiippana et al., 2022). Resources support both learning and addressing the identified community need. For example, access to internet is essential for learners to research the identified need and best ways to address it. Also, communication materials such as flyers and posters may be required to package and disseminate information to the community during service learning. Shortage of relevant resources can stand as a limiting factor in employing service learning in Zimbabwe, considering that resource constraints have been reported in some schools (Muzvondiwa & Gudyanga, 2024; Marongedza & Hlungwane, 2022; Tsekwende et al., 2026). Inadequate resources stand to limit the power of service learning activities to promote educational objectives together with a positive social impact on the communities.

Time constraints can also pose as a major challenge in the implementation of service learning in school environments where educators operate under substantial workloads (Dymond et al., 2013). As highlighted above, activities involved in the process of service learning, such as identification of the community need, formulating and executing the action plan as well as reflection to measure impact require considerable time. Studies conducted in Zimbabwe reveal that history teachers are overwhelmed by curriculum implementation demands, which include, huge teaching loads, long syllabus content and implementation of continuous assessment (Ngwenya, 2021; Mashayamombe & Berg, 2024). This signals that limited time is a potential barrier that may hinder and motivate teachers to refrain from adopting service learning in the implementation of the Zimbabwean secondary school history curriculum.

#### **4. Considerations for effective use of service learning**

Having discussed and juxtaposed how service learning can create enriching learning experiences for values inculcation, we recommend the following to be considered by history educators to maximise its potential in fostering the development of values in the teaching and learning of secondary school history:

#### **4.1 Planning and preparation**

Planning can enhance the effectiveness of service learning as a vehicle to facilitate the development of values in the teaching and learning of secondary school history (Chola, 2016). In fact, Khathi et al. (2022) recommend that for any effort aimed at values education in the school curriculum, planning is a prerequisite. With service learning, decisions have to be made on what service will be done, where and how. This should involve identifying the curricula concept(s), and values of focus, as well as defining the learning outcomes, which should be explicitly communicated to the history learners. Preradovic (2015) advises that as part of preparation for the service, a background check should be conducted with the community in order to identify a service that will be relevant to their needs. This highlights the importance of consulting the community and all involved stakeholders in order to engage them in the logistics of preparing the service so that they fully become part of it. Planning of the service can also help to determine the resources that will be required to conduct the activity so that arrangements are made to avail them. For example, posters can be required if the service is an awareness campaign. In addition, there is a need for setting timelines and clarification of roles to be played by individual learners for the success of the service.

Since the main thrust of service learning is to promote active learner participation in teaching and learning, it is good practice for history teachers to prioritise the voices of the learners in the selection of the service and only offer guidance so that the service speaks to the curriculum outcomes. For example, the history educator has to see to it that the service provides for the application of both substantive and procedural history knowledge to promote disciplinary reasoning in understanding the significance of values to both the past and the present society.

#### **4.2. Scaffolding**

Scaffolding involves the provision of the necessary assistance to enable learners to make progress in the learning process (Barringer et al., 2023). Therefore, it can be an essential support mechanism when service learning is employed as an instructional strategy to foster values inculcation in history lessons. Guidance from the teacher during the preparation, execution and evaluation of the service can go a long way in capacitating history learners to engage in the service in a meaningful way that enhances the development of values (Chola, 2016). This affirms the need for history educators to assume the role of facilitators and let the learners take responsibility in the learning process. Commenting on the role of scaffolding in educational settings, Ahmed et al. (2022) argue that it assists learners to overcome challenges they come across in the learning process. This can help to meet timelines and to fully prepare for the service so that it achieves its objectives. In the context of history education, guidance from the educator can ensure that learners are able to relate the substantive and procedural concepts to the service, as well as the targeted values. In this way, scaffolding can serve as a motivational factor to push history learners to be actively involved in the implementation of service learning to achieve curriculum goals.

#### **4.3 Provision of constructive feedback**

Feedback is recommended by various scholars, such as Losioki (2018) and Oteng et al. (2023), as a means to make learners aware of the progress they make in the teaching and learning process. On the same note, feedback is essential in service learning to communicate the outcome of the service in relation to the acquisition of values. The process of reflection, which is a core element in service learning, should be utilised to produce informative feedback. Pacho (2019) suggests that this can be done through group or class discussions on the impact of the service on the development of set learning outcomes. To ensure comprehensive feedback, we recommend individual learners, peers, teachers and the community to be involved in the evaluation of the service learning exercise. Based on Luo and Chan (2023) feedback, if properly given, can support student learning. Therefore, history learners and the community involved should be empowered with relevant competencies and knowledge to be in a position to provide valuable feedback. Resultantly, this can facilitate provision of feedback that give some insights on the strengths and weaknesses of learners in relation to grasping and application of all the learning objective inclusive of values development. When this happens, feedback can be used to inform decisions on future learning experiences to enhance the development of values amongst learners in the teaching and learning of secondary school history.

#### **5. Recommendation for future research**

We call upon future research to use the insights from this conceptual paper as a building block for empirical studies to explore the lived experiences of history teachers and learners on the pedagogical value of service learning in promoting inculcation of values. This will provide evidence which can validate or challenge the arguments raised in this discussion on the potential of service learning in driving meaningful learning experiences where learners can translate values into real life. Furthermore, follow-up studies will broaden knowledge on the role of service learning in the teaching of values in the implementation of the Zimbabwean secondary school history curriculum, which stands to promote informed practice.

#### **Conclusion**

This paper endeavoured to provide insights on the usefulness of service learning as a pedagogical tool to facilitate the development of values amongst learners in the teaching and learning of secondary school history. Service learning takes academic concepts to the real-world environment, which is ideal to cultivate and enforce the practice of desired values amongst secondary school history learners. This can help learners understand and at the same time, develop a consciousness of the importance of values taught in history in the present experiences of society. Service learning also accommodates the development and application of disciplinary competencies in the teaching and learning of history. Historical reasoning and understanding are of paramount importance in values inculcation to help

secondary school history learners to comprehend the nexus between substantive historical knowledge and real-life experiences. Strategic planning and thorough preparation are required for service learning to be fruitful through addressing both the intended curriculum outcome and community needs. It is also vital for the school and history educators to establish and maintain a healthy relationship with the community so that it provides the necessary support when required. Such a relationship can ensure that service learning is a constructive learning experience that supports the development of desired societal values in the teaching and learning of secondary school history. However, as highlighted by previous studies, the use of service learning in Zimbabwe can be stifled by time and resource constraints as well as a lack of teacher competence in its implementation. Notwithstanding these possible limitations, service learning serves to benefit both the learner and the community and addresses the affective domain to fulfil the quest for values inculcation in secondary school history education.

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