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Re-Imaging Educational Practices for More Effective Participation and Meaningful Interaction Towards Social Justice & Citizenship

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Abstract

In 2024, the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) introduced a compulsory, non-credit-bearing module, "Critical Social Justice and Citizenship", for all first-year UKZN students across disciplines, schools, and colleges. The module is designed to identify, challenge, and interrupt forms of prejudice and discrimination. The module employs a blended learning and teaching approach, comprising pre-recorded online lectures and in-person tutorials, and is underpinned by a theoretical framework based on education for liberation and critical pedagogy, which encourages active and empowered student participation. Ongoing participatory action research is used to monitor and assess the module's effectiveness. This article presents data generated from students who participated in tutorials facilitated by Hailey Fudu. Data were collected through class discussion groups and weekly feedback surveys. The article analyses the effective creation of space for meaningful interaction on sensitive topics in a way that encourages students to develop compassion for others and learn from personal experiences shared by the facilitator and each other, with the overall aim of interrupting prejudice and discrimination, and enabling them to become agents of positive change on campus and in their respective fields.

Keywords: diversity, inclusion, social justice, critical pedagogy, education for liberation, student participation, meaningful interaction

Introduction

South Africa's unique journey to democracy has been complex. It is clear that the exclusionary politics of the past have ended and that South Africa's social landscape needed transformation through the creation of radically inclusive and participatory social discourses that celebrate diversity, promote equality of opportunity, and create a society where informed citizens possess attitudes, forms of consciousness, and commitments conducive to a deep sense of the common good. While South Africa has progressive legislation and policies, these alone do not change the country's social landscape. The inequalities of the past have unfortunately not disappeared. Intergenerational traumas have continued to result in violence and prejudice, which require creative solutions to address these issues and build a healthier, more inclusive, and socially just society.

Education today, we argue, is responsible for nurturing a vision that takes the project of human liberation and social justice seriously – one that provides students with the means to transcend the divisions of the past and find an alternative framework for coexistence among diverse people. Universities, in particular, should be sites of struggle towards developing ethical, empathetic, and engaged students who will take their rightful place in a democratic, inclusive, and socially just society, and who will be able to contribute appropriately and meaningfully as citizens of such a society. In response to this need, UKZN launched a critical social justice and citizenship module in 2024, as a compulsory non-credit-bearing module for first-year students from all disciplines, schools, and colleges. Guided by a vision of human rights, inclusion, and social justice, it is designed to identify, challenge, and interrupt forms of prejudice and discrimination. The module aims to

lay the foundation to help students understand, reflect on, and explore how their own social positioning, interactions, and experiences are informed by the wider context in which they are embedded, and to challenge them to align their attitudes, values, and personal practices with a critical social justice perspective. It is specifically designed to challenge the definitions and labels that isolate, devalue, marginalise, and exclude certain individuals and groups; to provide alternative definitions, understandings, and insights into diversity, inclusion, and social justice; to equip students with a critical understanding of the forms and faces of prejudice, discrimination, othering, and violence; to offer them the conceptual and practical tools needed to think, work, study, and live in a diverse, multicultural society and communities; and to challenge students to forge new ways of seeing, knowing, and being in the world.

Module design and Theoretical framing

The Critical Social Justice and Citizenship module uses a blended learning and teaching approach, combining a series of pre-recorded online lectures with corresponding in-person small-group tutorials. The lectures and tutorials cover topics such as difference and otherness; power relations and privilege; race, racism and xenophobia; sex, gender and sexuality; gender-based violence, patriarchy, sexism and misogyny; other forms of oppression and otherness (including culturalism, ableism and sizeism); resistance and activism; and the importance of encouraging students to 'be the change they wish to see'.

As the module is aimed at first-year students, the language and delivery of the pre-recorded lectures are accessible and not overly academic or theoretical. We adopt a decolonial perspective and use an Afrocentric paradigm, featuring contextually relevant examples and local case studies wherever possible. From 2026, students will have the option to engage with either the English or isiZulu lecture recordings, as well as a sign language insert.

The module's conceptual approach to educating for social justice is grounded in the principle of full and equal participation in both the goals and the processes involved (Adams, Bell & Griffin, 1997). It is important to us that the praxis is democratic, participatory, and affirming of human agency and capacity to create change, as well as to work collaboratively and cooperatively. To that end, the small group in-person tutorials are carefully designed to encourage participation from our students. We value their experiences and input by foregrounding their voices and encouraging them to share their stories. We focus on informal and experiential learning through a variety of interactive discursive activities, visual prompts, and scenarios to promote participation, role play, and problem-solving.

The theoretical and conceptual framework underpinning every aspect of the module includes Education for Liberation (Freire 1975), which encourages student participation with the ultimate goal of developing their capacity for reflexivity and transformation. Educating for critical social justice recognises that meaning is produced through the construction of forms of power, experiences, and identities, and that these must be explored and engaged with in terms of their wider political and cultural significance. Educating for critical social justice also involves refusing to sustain the codes of the dominant culture and existing power relations, aiming to reverse the tradition of demonising the 'other' by affirming diversity. Giroux and Simon (1988, p. 10) argue for educational environments as sites of struggle and for pedagogy as a form of cultural politics, where education should expand human capacities to develop critical subjectivity, enabling individuals to "intervene in the formation of their own subjectivities" and "exercise power in the interest of transforming the ideological and material conditions of domination into social practices which promote social empowerment and demonstrate democratic possibilities". Building on Freire's notion of education for liberation, Giroux's (2020) critical pedagogy focuses on fostering social awareness and agency, empowering students to challenge discrimination, exclusion, and social injustice in their own thinking and within their communities.

Alternative teaching and learning practices, such as experiential learning and student participation in sharing their own experiences and

stories of otherness, have the potential to challenge the deep culture of traditional discourses and power relations in academia, which include forms of exclusion, non-participation, and authoritarianism. The participatory exercises that comprise the tutorials are designed to raise awareness and facilitate a shift in consciousness. Students are encouraged to reflect on how they are "born into a specific set of social identities", which predispose them to "unequal roles in the dynamic system of oppression" (Harro, 2000, p. 15); how they have been socialised by powerful sources in their worlds to play the roles prescribed by an inequitable social system (Hardiman and Jackson, 1997); and how they might be participating in maintaining inequality. Identifying, acknowledging, and critically examining the messages they have received throughout their lives and how these have shaped their beliefs about themselves and others can cause a dramatic and radical shift in individual perceptions and beliefs. These activities encourage students to examine critically how they have received systematic training in 'how to be' and how they might begin to question, interrupt, and challenge the status quo.

While acknowledging the role that socialisation plays in shaping our beliefs about ourselves and others, we draw on hooks' (1992) position that none of us are passive victims of socialisation, but that we can choose to adopt different attitudes and practices from those we were socialised to accept. This speaks directly to the agency of individuals over their identities and relationships. Working from the premise that all forms of prejudice, discrimination, and othering are learned behaviours, the module focuses on the potential for students to unlearn certain identities, attitudes, and practices, in order to learn new ways of being and engaging with the world. This module encourages students to develop into 'transformative intellectuals' – mobile subjects sensitive to the shifting contexts of contemporary social life and a deepening democracy (McLaren, 1995). Drawing on the belief that the self is not only created through background beliefs and cycles of socialisation, but that subjectivities can also be informed by individuals' self-consciousness, the module encourages students' critical thinking, agency, and empowerment, towards the realisation that they can act in ways other than those they have been socialised to (hooks, 1992). Adopting the notion of critical subjectivity allows students to consider 'what it is they have become, and what it is they no longer want to be' and enables them 'to recognize, and struggle for, possibilities not yet realized' (Giroux and Simon, 1988, p. 17). This offers students the potential to 'intervene in the formation of their own subjectivity' (Giroux and Simon, 1988, p. 10), and enables them to 'actively contest the devaluation of those who have been relegated as the "other" (McLaren, 1995, p. 29).

The design of the tutorials challenges traditional educational practices that rely heavily on receiving information, memorising, and repeating, and require students to be mainly passive recipients. At the heart of experiential learning is the argument that knowledge acquisition increases substantially through discussion, problem-solving, and application of what is learned (Dale, 1946), and that students better retain what they have learned through participatory teaching methods and experiential learning. Our understanding of alternative education is deeply influenced by Freire's vision and methods, including an emphasis on experiential learning and the concept of praxis (the ability to reflect directly on one's activity). Such a pedagogy develops a critical consciousness in students, enabling them to understand the world critically in order to change it.

Methodological approach

This study adopts a predominantly qualitative research approach, focusing on understanding the world from the perspective of the interacting individual. Qualitative research facilitates the investigation of students' experiences from their own perspectives, attending to the meanings they attach to these experiences and the ways they make sense of them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 1988; Schurink in De Vos, 1998). Using narratives as the primary strategy of inquiry, the study seeks to comprehend the subjective, context-specific, lived experiences of students engaging with the critical social justice and citizenship module, and to foreground their authentic voices.

This narrative approach draws on Indigenous Knowledge Systems, recognising stories as both research and teaching tools. Wilson (2008) describes this research method as a type of ceremony linked to indigenous data collection, explaining how stories allow listeners to draw their own conclusions and gain life lessons from personal perspectives. Stories contextualise participants, capturing the situated complexities of their realities and experiences while foregrounding authentic voices as a means of gaining insight into lived experience. Turner (2017) similarly acknowledges the value of preserving ancient methods of profound communication and connection used by the Khoi San, First Nation Tribes, and indigenous groups worldwide.

Purposive sampling was used to select 90 first-year students from several of Hailey Fudu's tutorial groups across the Westville and Medical School campuses of UKZN. Drawn from various undergraduate courses, these students are considered information-rich cases (Patton, 1990), having attended and participated in all eight in-person tutorials conducted in 2024. Each tutorial functioned as an informal focus group discussion, with open-ended questions posed during activities to generate rich narrative data. These discussions yielded personal life stories and reflections on processing lived experiences. In addition to student narratives, insights Mrs Fudu gained while facilitating tutorials with this cohort are presented.

To enhance the reliability of findings through triangulation, multiple data sources were collected: individual comments, personal stories, focus group discussion feedback, and survey responses. Beyond this qualitative data, 222 students completed a confidential online survey via Google Forms; these results are presented to capture broader impressions from a larger participant pool. Together, the narrative data from group discussions and open-ended survey responses, along with quantitative survey findings, were analysed to inform the study's conclusions.

While a commitment to the specificities of individual contexts cautions against generalising from one tutorial group to all students engaging with the module, these findings largely reflect the experiences of most students as they progress towards greater awareness of social justice issues. Ethical clearance was granted by the Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee in 2024, and students participated voluntarily with full knowledge that their contributions would be used for research purposes under pseudonyms.

Findings

This section presents findings related to the study's central research question: to what extent have the tutorials effectively created space for deep and meaningful interaction on sensitive topics, encouraged and empowered students to identify and interrupt exclusion and social injustice, and enabled them to become agents of positive change? The findings are organised thematically, drawing on narrative data from tutorial discussions, facilitator observations, and survey responses to illuminate students' experiences and growth.

Creating Space for Meaningful Interaction on Sensitive Topics

The tutorials successfully established conditions for deep personal sharing. Two students volunteered, "That was the first time I shared that," and "I had never told that to anyone but my mum." When students across the eight tutorial groups were asked whether they had shared something during the module that they had never shared before, roughly half in each group indicated they had. This suggests that the tutorial environment enabled a level of disclosure that students had not found elsewhere.

Although some students reported never having experienced prejudice and described supportive home environments, the narratives revealed that most of these 18- to 20-year-olds already carry some form of trauma. Students consistently identified a connection between suppressed trauma and negative outcomes, commonly observing that bottled-up experiences often result in gender-based violence, suicide, or depression. This finding underscores the value of creating regular opportunities for students to process difficult experiences rather than waiting until they manifest in harmful ways.

The data also revealed significant social isolation among first-year students. Three students

confided that they still did not know anyone or have any friends at university. One young woman, not registered for the module, joined a make-up tutorial session and revealed that she comes from a very poor home, that no one has talked to her or knows her at university, and that she feels judged because of her humble appearance. Such accounts illustrate how quickly circumstances can become conducive to depression, failure, and suicidal ideation, highlighting the essential role of supportive spaces in student wellbeing.

Empowering Students to Identify and Interrupt Exclusion and Social Injustice

Students' narratives revealed pervasive experiences of being "othered" across multiple dimensions of identity. The following accounts illustrate common themes:

Sbu, a young man from a semi-rural community and the first in his family to attend university, recounted being turned away from a high school chess tournament because, he was told, there were no black students in the competition. As he shared this story, listeners responded with visible empathy and distress.

Amahle described being stopped by security guards to have her bag checked while watching white and Indian customers leave a clothing store unsearched – an experience many black students recognised as familiar. The fact that black security guards were targeting black customers exemplified internalised and horizontal racism.

The facilitator's account of challenging the term "garden boy" when used by an employer prompted reflection on how seemingly minor language choices undermine dignity, and how those in positions of power bear responsibility for calling out such practices.

A significant finding was the healing potential of cross-racial acknowledgement. Students reported that hearing someone from a different racial background apologise for what they had experienced, and then discussing how to act as allies, proved meaningful for all participants. The process of sharing wounds inflicted on human dignity – and receiving empathy, attentive listening, and acknowledgement in return – initiated what students described as healing journeys.

Over time, students demonstrated increased comfort with vulnerability. Initial awkwardness in expressing affirmation to peers gave way to sincere engagement, with students spontaneously offering thanks, handshakes, and even hugs after deep exchanges. This evolution suggests that sustained, structured interaction can build the trust necessary for authentic engagement across difference.

Examining biases proved equally significant. When given space to voice societal stereotypes they had encountered, students moved from nervous laughter at absurd generalisations to serious reflection on which internalised judgements they needed to overcome. This progression from humour to critical self-examination emerged consistently across groups.

Empowering Students to Become Agents of Change

The findings reveal a clear progression from awareness to intended action. Students responded to peers' experiences of injustice by generating concrete intervention strategies, such as submitting formal complaints to organisers and reporting incidents to the Human Rights Commission. This shift from passive sympathy to active problem-solving indicates the development of agency and efficacy.

Students showed increased comfort with emotional expression and vulnerability. On several occasions, students' eyes filled with tears as they shared their stories, and the group responded with compassion rather than discomfort. Participants reflected that the ability to cry and share vulnerability is a strength, challenging societal norms – particularly for males – that equate emotional expression with weakness.

Individual testimonies illustrated profound personal transformation. Phindile shared her experience of being bullied and told she was "not really a girl" because of her thin frame: "I began to think, maybe I am a boy. Later I realised they were wrong and I began to feel more comfortable with myself and proud of who I am." As she spoke, her voice grew louder and more

confident. The class's applause became part of her healing process, demonstrating how peer support can facilitate recovery from trauma.

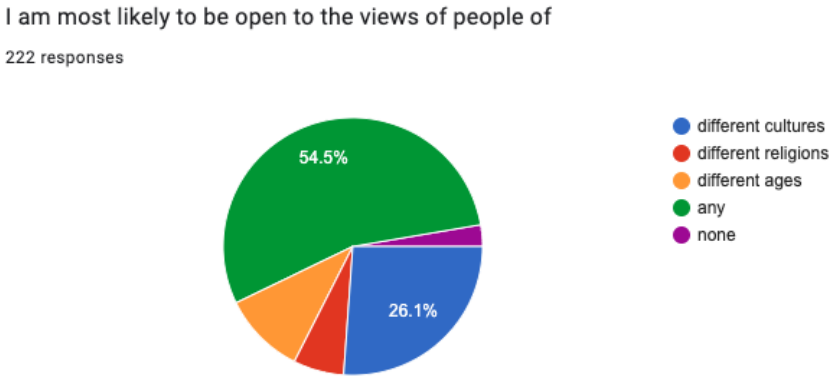
Anushka's account of being expected to serve male family members despite her university workload resonated with several black and Indian female students who reported similar experiences. The realisation that this problem transcends racial and cultural boundaries became a point of solidarity among the young women. Male students, hearing these accounts, expressed empathy and engaged in discussions about practical ways to support women in domestic settings.

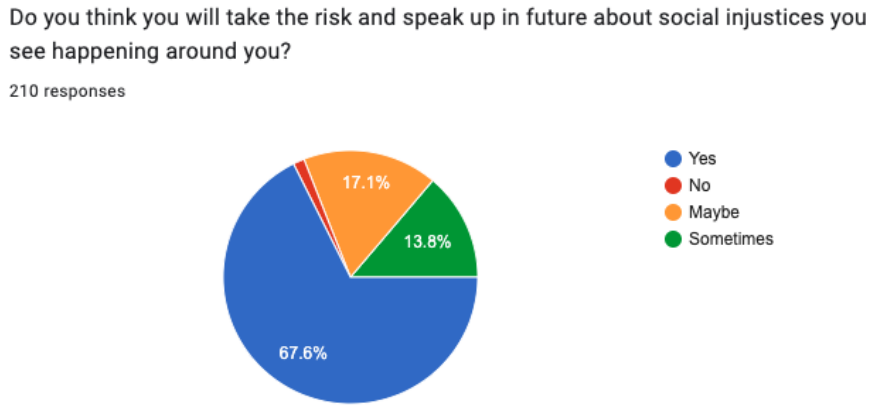
Notably, some students openly expressed patriarchal views, such as one young man's assertion that domestic work is "more suited to women." Rather than responding defensively, the group engaged in respectful dialogue that allowed these students to hear how their views affected women without feeling attacked. Hearing alternative perspectives – including examples of equitable household arrangements – created space for reconsideration without confrontation.

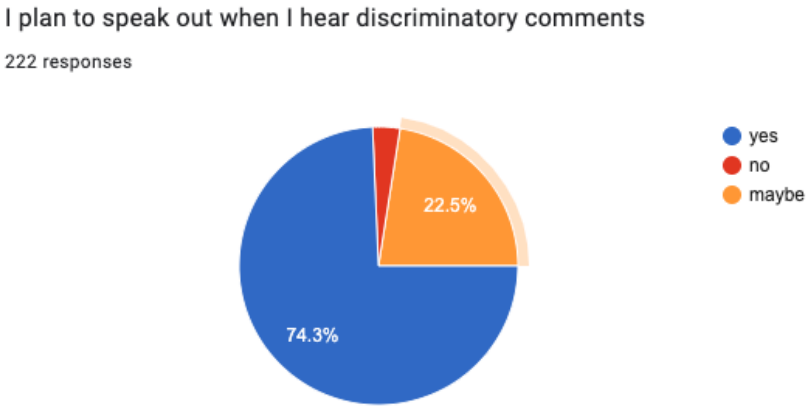
Discussion of feminist identity revealed nuanced positions. Some students embraced the label after reconsidering their preconceptions; others rejected it on the grounds that gender equality should not require special terminology. Despite these differences, consensus emerged that everyone should work to uplift women, girls, and vulnerable people.

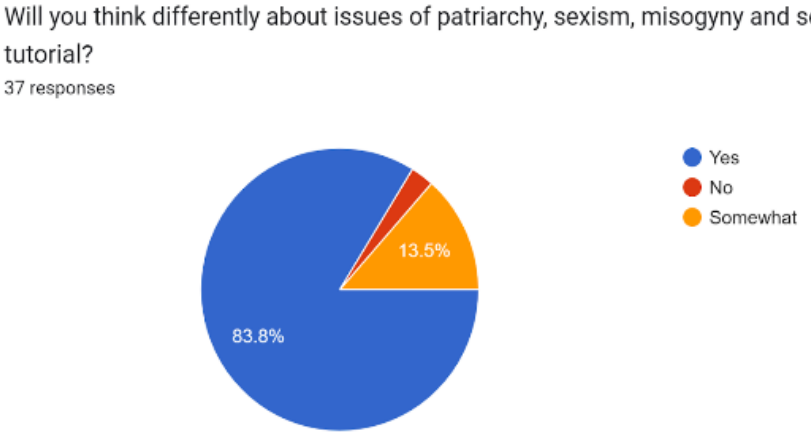
Survey Results: Growth as Potential Agents of Change

Quantitative data supported the qualitative findings.









More than two-thirds of students reported that their comfort levels were challenged during initial tutorial interactions – an indicator of the productive discomfort that often precedes growth. By the seventh session, significant shifts were evident:

- Over 67% felt empowered to speak out about social injustice around them; 17% said they might; 14% said they would sometimes.
- 74% plan to speak out when hearing discriminatory comments; 22.5% said they might.
- More than 95% reported openness to hearing others' views and considering different perspectives – whether religious, cultural, intergenerational, or otherwise.
- 83% confirmed they felt differently about patriarchy, sexism, misogyny, and sexual violence after engaging in tutorial discussions.

Student reflections captured the shift from awareness to intended action:

"Speaking up in these situations is important because by speaking up you will influence other people to do the same. People find it difficult to speak up because of their fear of being judged. I think if I start speaking about social injustice, people will initially be shocked, but after the initial shock some may adopt the same mindset and attitude."

"It is important to speak out to help others, and if you speak out, this will encourage others to do the same when they see something wrong. I also think that by speaking out it will not only help people who are being targeted, but also educate those who are unsure of what to do in these situations."

Student-Generated Recommendations for Institutional Change

A significant finding was students' translation of critical awareness into concrete proposals for institutional transformation. One hundred semester-two students developed recommendations for Student Support Services and the SRC to address patterns they had observed on campus: Students identified persistent racial segregation across campus spaces: friend groups remain largely within the same race; the cafeteria is divided by race; the third floor of the library is perceived as "for Indian students" and other floors "for black students"; the tuck shop is similarly segregated. Students reported feeling alienated, experiencing reinforced inferiority, and feeling devalued by these patterns. Only black students appear to stay in campus residences, limiting opportunities for diverse friendships to develop. Language barriers and mockery related to degree choices further inhibit cross-group connections.

In response, students proposed several initiatives to bridge racial, cultural, and language divisions, including Heritage Day clothing exchanges, concerts featuring mixed musical styles, sports days with randomly assigned teams, quiz competitions with diverse team membership, traditional food swaps and cultural showcases, social events with structured team-building activities, drama and dance performances addressing social justice themes, and compulsory cross-racial study groups. These recommendations demonstrate students' capacity to move from critique to constructive action.

Personal Growth and Transformation

Students' reflections revealed growth extending beyond social justice awareness to broader personal development:

"The first time I attended the critical justice tutorial, I couldn't even speak without stuttering. I knew I had perfect English in my head, but when it came to speaking to strangers, it would completely disappear. The more I attended tutorials, I realised that my speech was improving and that I wasn't shy to talk to my fellow mates. I know I couldn't have done this without you, and if it was without you, then it was going to be later in life."

"I have grown so much from the person that I was last semester, and it's all thanks to this module and the new campus family I've grown to love."

These testimonials suggest that the tutorials fostered not only critical consciousness but also confidence, communication skills, and a sense of belonging – outcomes with implications for student success and retention beyond the immediate aims of social justice education.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Critical Social Justice and Citizenship tutorials effectively achieved the three central aims under investigation, offering important insights for social justice pedagogy in higher education contexts.

The tutorials created meaningful spaces for interaction on sensitive topics, with approximately half of all students sharing experiences they had never previously disclosed. This finding aligns with hooks' (1994) assertion that the classroom can function as a site of possibility where students learn to transgress boundaries and create new visions of community. The safe spaces established through collaborative guideline-setting and Ubuntu-informed facilitation were essential for processing individual and collective trauma, building social connections, and supporting student wellbeing. This resonates with Zembylas and McGlynn's (2012) work on pedagogies of discomfort, which suggests that carefully structured educational spaces can enable students to confront difficult knowledge while feeling sufficiently supported to remain engaged.

The finding that many first-year students carry significant trauma and lack supportive social networks underscores the importance of what Swartz (2009) describes as the affective dimensions of social justice education. The tutorials functioned not only as spaces for intellectual engagement but also as sites of emotional processing and community building – a dual function that proved particularly significant for students from marginalised backgrounds. This

supports Waghid's (2018) argument that Ubuntu-oriented education must attend to the wholeness of persons, nurturing both cognitive and relational capacities.

The tutorials successfully empowered students to identify and interrupt exclusion and social injustice through narrative sharing, empathetic listening, and critical examination of biases and stereotypes. The process of sharing wounds inflicted on human dignity – and receiving acknowledgement, empathy, and allyship in return – initiated healing journeys for many participants. This finding extends Wilson's (2008) theorisation of Indigenous storytelling as ceremony, demonstrating that such approaches can foster transformative learning in diverse, post-colonial educational settings. The healing that occurred when students from different racial backgrounds acknowledged one another's pain and committed to allyship reflects what Mabovula (2011) identifies as the conciliatory potential of Ubuntu values in educational contexts.

The effectiveness of practices such as the affirmation ritual ("I honour you, thank you for sharing your story") in building trust and safety supports Freire's (1970) contention that dialogue grounded in love, humility, and faith in human beings creates conditions for critical consciousness to emerge. Furthermore, the tutorials' success in surfacing and examining stereotypes through humour before deeper critical analysis aligns with Adams et al.'s (2016) framework for sequencing social justice education activities from lower to higher risk engagement.

The tutorials equipped students to become agents of change, as evidenced by survey data showing that 67% felt empowered to speak out against injustice, 74% planned to challenge discriminatory comments, and 95% reported openness to diverse perspectives. These quantitative indicators of transformation are complemented by rich qualitative evidence of students developing what Freire (1970) terms conscientização (conscientization) – critical awareness combined with commitment to action. The practice-by-doing approach, including role-play and scenario creation, reflects experiential learning principles (Kolb, 1984) and supports students' movement from theoretical understanding to practical application.

Particularly significant is the finding that students not only developed critical consciousness but also translated this awareness into concrete recommendations for institutional transformation. Their proposals for cross-racial integration initiatives demonstrate what Biko (1978) envisioned when he argued that true liberation requires black people and their allies to actively construct new social arrangements rather than merely critique existing ones. The students' letter to Student Support Services and the SRC represents praxis, i.e., the integration of reflection and action that Freire (1970) identifies as essential to transformative education.

The trajectory evident in the findings – from initial discomfort to confident engagement, from isolation to community, and from passive observation to active citizenship – reflects the transformative learning process described by Mezirow (2000), in which disorienting dilemmas prompt critical reflection and ultimately lead to changed perspectives and behaviour. That more than two-thirds of students reported feeling challenged during initial tutorials, yet the majority emerged feeling empowered and committed to social justice action, suggests the tutorials achieved the delicate balance between productive discomfort and psychological safety necessary for transformative learning.

These findings make a valuable contribution to scholarship on social justice education in South African higher education, demonstrating that intentionally designed pedagogical spaces grounded in Ubuntu philosophy and participatory approaches can effectively foster both healing and agency among diverse student populations. The study adds to the growing body of knowledge regarding the conscientisation of students and suggests that modules such as Critical Social Justice and Citizenship offer promising pathways for addressing the ongoing challenges of social division, historical trauma, and inequality in post-apartheid educational contexts.

Conclusion

This study aimed to determine whether the Critical Social Justice and Citizenship tutorials effectively created space for meaningful interaction on sensitive topics, empowered students to identify and challenge exclusion and social injustice, and enabled them to become agents of positive change. The findings provide compelling evidence that, across all three dimensions, the tutorials achieved their objectives.

The greatest challenge for South Africa remains empowering individuals to think, study, work, and live effectively within a new frame of reference. If it is the habits and hearts of people that bring visions to life, then effective social justice education cannot rely solely on reason, logic, and cognitive processes. It must recognise that attitudes and emotions play an equally significant role in students' capacity to develop the habits necessary for living in a transformed society. To this end, the module sought to move beyond conventional academic offerings skewed towards the rational mind but neglectful of the heart. Engaging students' hearts, attitudes, and compassion; facilitating intersubjective awareness; and acknowledging the importance of emotion were central to the tutorials' effectiveness. This approach aligns with Giroux's (1997) Politics of Hope, which offers a holistic worldview for social progress and critical pedagogy – one that calls for embracing diversity to improve quality of life and transcend the physical, cultural, and social borders that have divided us for too long.

Among the most significant outcomes was the tangible enthusiasm students expressed for becoming better future leaders. The tutorials fostered connections that extended beyond the classroom: one group of 16 students continued spending time together after class, forming a diverse friendship group that, for some, represented their first experience of cross-racial community. Students reported that the tutorials nurtured meaningful conversations that naturally continued outside formal sessions. The fact that the majority of students in every group felt their comfort levels challenged reflects the productive discomfort that accompanies genuine growth. The overwhelmingly positive feedback regarding what students learned leads us to conclude that creating space for listening, sharing stories, and engaging in meaningful conversations around social justice issues was immensely beneficial.

Several challenges emerged that warrant attention in future iterations. Reducing group sizes to a maximum of 25 students would enhance opportunities for individual participation and deeper engagement. Tutors should be mindful of minimising their own talking time to create more space for student voices. Additionally, creating dynamic physical spaces that allow for flexible configurations – group work, pair discussions, and plenary sessions – would increase participation, enable rotation of partners, and better support participatory approaches to teaching. Addressing these practical considerations would further strengthen the module's capacity to create effective spaces for education as liberation.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that intentionally designed pedagogical spaces, grounded in Ubuntu philosophy and participatory approaches, can foster both healing and agency among diverse student populations. The findings suggest that modules like Critical Social Justice and Citizenship offer promising pathways for addressing the ongoing challenges of social division, historical trauma, and inequality in post-apartheid higher education. When students are given the opportunity to share their stories, to be heard with empathy, and to envision themselves as agents of change, they do not merely learn about social justice – they begin to embody it.

Disclosure

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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